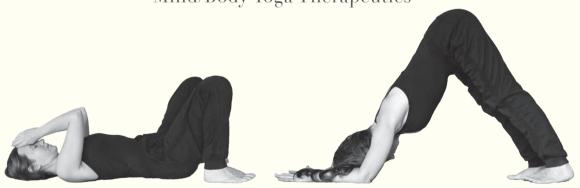


PRINCIPLES AND THEMES IN

YOGA THERAPY

An Introduction to Integrative Mind/Body Yoga Therapeutics



JAMES FOULKES

"This concise, considered and informative book makes a valuable contribution to the library of yoga therapists. James Foulkes provides ways of working with clients that draws attention to the responsibility and scope within the field of yoga therapy.

This book combines the fundamental principles of yoga therapeutics with insights gleaned from related practices and personal enquiry. Giving an intelligent approach to the practical side, it presents a constructive strategy in relation to a variety of common ailments and dysfunctions.

This book not only applies to yoga therapists. It also gives a timely reminder to all yoga teachers, of the power and efficacy of the processes at their disposal, and given the tools, highlights the potential for healing and transformation on all levels."

—John Stirk, yoga teacher, osteopath and author of The Original Body

"James has developed an understanding of yoga (from working with me) and combined this with his study in kung fu, qi gong and cranial sacral therapy. This book provides a fresh view all of his own. Certainly those who combine yoga with other therapeutic modalities will find this perspective refreshing."

> —Diane Long, author of Notes on Yoga: The Legacy of Vanda Scaravelli

"James provides a wonderful container of knowledge in which practitioner and client can explore how best to use the tools of yoga therapeutically. Touching on the physical, mental, emotional, energetic and spiritual layers of what it is to be human, he guides us on a journey towards greater self-discovery and self-care. Case studies bring to life how the inter-related approach of yoga therapy transforms us, alleviating pain and opening doorways into unexplored aspects of the self and ultimately into the experience of wholeness.

With great gentleness he highlights the individual process and the role practitioners have in welcoming every client's uniqueness. Offering practical guidance and inspiration throughout, we are reminded of how healing comes from within and how it is possible to live from a balanced state of being in the natural fluid ease of our bodies."

—Liz Warrington, yoga teacher and cranial sacral therapist

"In this book, James offers a different approach to therapeutic work with the emphasis on simply observing and allowing one to experience the connections throughout the body. As a psychiatrist, I have always focused on helping people through learning more about how they thought and felt. By exploring the yoga therapy process and integrating all parts of the experience, James' approach allows for a natural integration. This creates a calming for both body and mind, which is truly transformative for the individual."

—Larry Drell, MD, American Psychiatric Association/ American Medical Association and Founder & Medical Director of the Optimum Health Institute

"James Foulkes has written a very useful book in the fast-developing field of therapeutic yoga. He skilfully weaves his own astute insights into well-tried and tested methodology. James outlines the main themes and principles he feels are central to his work and throughout these chapters we are offered simple exercises that give us a flavor of the way he works, which in the main is sensorily and self-reflectively oriented. The book explicitly avoids getting bogged down in distracting details, rather staying with broader themes. Despite the 'stand back' perspective he takes, you never get the sense that this is 'yoga lite'. Case histories illustrate how he uses the themes he outlines and this gives weight to the approach. Through the client skills and the therapeutic relationship sections, both an essential part of any healing process, he moves easily through the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of illness/wellness leaving us in no doubt about his understanding of the complex nature of dis-ease. This book is a very timely contribution to therapeutic yoga, and I'm sure practitioners and lay people alike will gain much from reading it."

—Peter Blackaby, yoga teacher, osteopath and author of Intelligent Yoga: Re-educating Mind and Body

PRINCIPLES AND THEMES IN

YOGA THERAPY

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PRINCIPLES AND THEMES IN

YOGA THERAPY

An Introduction to Integrative Mind/Body Yoga Therapeutics

James Foulkes

Foreword by Mikhail Kogan, MD Images by Simon Barkworth Editorial assistance by Mary Maruca



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DISCLAIMER

Any kind of physical activity comes with a degree of risk. Working with people with a variety of medical conditions should only be explored by those individuals with the right training and acumen.

All of the exercises explored in this book should be done with care and at your own risk. Visit with your physician before beginning any kind of yoga therapy practice. The yoga therapist is not a physician and is not in a position to provide medical diagnosis.

FOREWORD

Yoga therapy is an exciting and dynamic field. The profession is attempting to organize itself more effectively by accrediting its members and differentiating itself from the Yoga Alliance, which provides a different level of training. The Yoga Alliance requires less experience and education to become certified and so it would seem natural that the IAYT (International Association of Yoga Therapists) should emerge to be more oriented toward supporting people with health concerns and physical impairment.

How "alternative" approaches to health can be used to support the aging population in the Western world and their growing healthcare needs is one of the key questions of our time. We have been utilizing yoga therapy for some time in our Integrative Health Center at the GW Hospital and it has become one of a number of modalities that forms an integral part of the treatment strategy we use with individuals.

With this book, I think that James Foulkes makes a meaningful contribution to the profession. Rather than being overly focused on problems and disease processes, he looks at aspects of the practice that generate wholeness, which if practiced regularly create deep and lasting change.

At our Center, we support the healing of the body in many ways, as it is ultimately the body that heals itself. If any healing art attempts to force itself into the Western medical paradigm, by identifying a problem and then fixing it, do we lose the essence of that art and continue to perpetuate the old paradigm?

James was recently made a yoga therapist in the first waves of certification by the IAYT, based on his experience. He has been involved in developing approaches to yoga therapeutics since we first met, when studying cranial sacral therapy (see the Appendix) nearly a decade ago.

This has given me a chance to get to know his views and who he is as a person. He exhibits the qualities that I would expect in a healing arts professional: kindness, compassion, patience, non-judgment, working with each client with love and a tenacity to get to the root of an issue.

The wisdom and practical spirituality at the heart of these practices is badly needed in these times of change. With higher and higher levels of stress creating more complex chains of physiological response, heavy reliance on technology and seismic shifts in society, the simple stability provided by ancient healing traditions is becoming more essential than ever. This book presents an approach to yoga that is inherently therapeutic and will be a great help to both yoga therapy professionals and yoga practitioners, and to those who wish to learn more.

Mikhail (Misha) Kogan, MD Medical Director GW Center for Integrative Medicine Associate Director, Geriatric Fellowship George Washington University

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To all of my students and clients.

To my other dear teachers and friends:

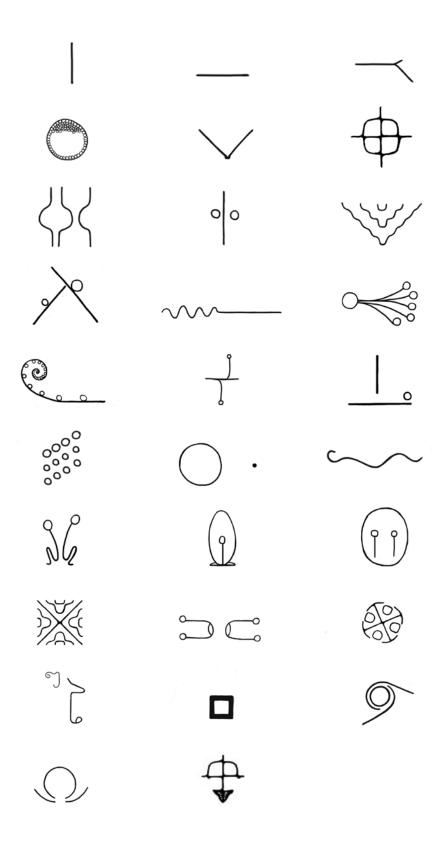
Jeph and Alexi, Martin, Cita, Mike, Shan and Nat, Lou, B, Nix and Rene, Sifu Ali Sina, Master Liu Xiao Ling and the Wu Dang Long Men, Master Zhongxian Wu and the Qi Family, Little Boss and the Flowhana, The vibrant DC Burner community, Jim and Leslie, Benny, Poj and the kids, Mike Duggan, Roger Gilchrist, Scott Zamarut, Hugh Milne, Heed, Elie and Ez, 2nd Son and Alice and the boys, the whole Manchester Crew, John Cas, Mr Wonk, Runa and The Roofers, Stephanie Abramson, Paige SeBour, Val Heart, Alex and Storm, Ads, Matt, Jackson and Leo and my loving parents.

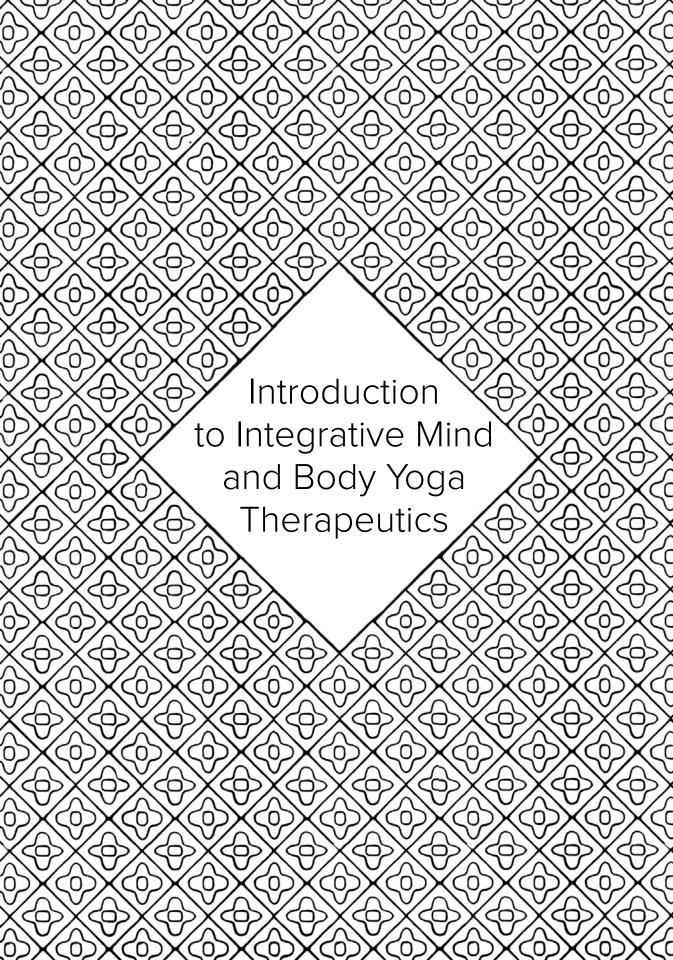
To Jessica and Singing Dragon for making this a possibility.

And to the Great Spirit/Pachamama/Dao that unfolds it all.

FROM EXPERIENCE TO REPRESENTATION

All aspects of yoga therapy are interwoven and inseparable. We develop creative language, not only to differentiate concepts in the therapeutic process for clarity, but also to acknowledge the multiple layers we observe, feel and perceive in relation to ourselves and others. Images and the imagination are an important part of connecting to the principles and themes of yoga therapy and they open up creative faculties within us that are needed to explore this work. The ideograms used throughout this book pictorially represent each chapter. Each one attempts to symbolize the topic under discussion in terms of experience, feelings, language and concepts, whilst retaining the simple language of a line drawing.





THE INTENTION OF THIS BOOK

The intention of this book is to share the themes and principles that have served me in my own yoga therapy journey and of my clients in theirs.

I have been blessed to have amazing teachers in all the disciplines I study. I thank them for their rich input and acknowledge that many of the themes and ideas presented here arose from my study with them. It has then been my pleasure to refine my own understanding and experience of the themes and embody that personally, so that I can identify what is most poignant in the work and share it with my clients and students and with you.

It is my intent at this stage to keep the different traditions that I study relatively independent of one another, and whilst information in this book draws on wisdom from other places, it is primarily a book about yoga therapy. I am a student of many fields and hope to continue to digest the experience of all the different teachings.

APPROACHES TO YOGA THERAPY

Some approaches to yoga therapy are based around postures, attempting to understand the benefits and effects of each in turn. This has value, but this is not a book solely about doing the postures "correctly." There are many basic training courses and books out there giving detailed instructions on this topic and illustrating the postures. It is helpful to understand broadly how to "do" a posture and how that may affect various body systems. And yet in yoga therapy perhaps it is

as important to observe that each person's body has differences and the same posture may have vastly different overall effects depending upon a wide range of factors.

Other yoga therapy books take this approach further and list conditions, ailments and syndromes of sicknesses and then create postural sequences with which to address them. This amounts to an allopathic approach to yoga therapy. The term "allopathic" is used to describe the approach to healthcare adopted by conventional medicine and means "going against the disease process." This is not incorrect and it can provide a helpful reference point for onlookers from the outside such as student practitioners, prospective clients and the scientific community, but there are other more holistic ways to approach the work.

It is beneficial to understand the high-level effects of bringing postures together. However, the unique differences within each individual cannot be overlooked. The yoga therapist must ultimately tailor everything to the individual as they appear in front of them on that day.

It is essential that we begin from wholeness and the "health" that an individual holds as that is what must grow if people are to recover, rediscover their own healing and bring balance back to their lives. Ultimately it is spirit that does all healing: not the therapist and not the client.

By presenting the themes that I have found to be valuable with my own clients, I aim to support yoga therapists and their clients in their therapeutic journey. The journey itself is non-linear and so a broad, flexible approach is essential.

Yoga therapy is currently in vogue. The yoga therapy profession is growing and maturing at a rapid rate. The IAYT is doing a good job of developing standards and keeping quality high. It is attempting to align itself carefully with Western medicine so that it is understood by a skeptical scientific community, without losing its essence. More and more doctors are recommending yoga and alternative approaches to healing to support conventional approaches. This marriage will continue to evolve during the next several hundred years, as the ancient and the modern learn to become comfortable in one another's company, with both having much to offer.

Yoga therapy has re-emerged at this time in response to the growing need of the general public to have practices that support their healing and self-development journeys. The yoga therapy profession is formalizing, growing and maturing as a way to differentiate itself from the shorter yoga training courses which enable people to teach yoga without the necessary background and experience to work with people with surgeries, complex conditions and injuries.

My objective within the profession is to support the growth of the community in developing its recognition from the establishment while also keeping our awareness on the less scientific, less measurable aspects of our work.

I have aimed to organize themes in a way which helps both new and experienced yoga therapists see the bigger, overarching picture. I hope to create a framework of themes for others to draw upon as they begin to support the clients in their practice. I believe these themes, which in my experience lead to wholeness and healing, can be used to support and bring benefit to any new individual who arrives in your office, regardless of their diagnosis.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOGA THERAPY

Yoga has been a way of life in India for thousands of years, seemingly beginning with the people of the Indus valley region. A portion of these people, known as the Rishis and later referred to as sages, were deeply committed to self-study. Over this time period, there were many interactions with neighboring cultures, such as the Chinese and Tibetans, and with the religions developing alongside such as Buddhism. Aspects of spiritual practice, philosophical belief and medicinal understanding were being shared, which invariably led to cultures influencing one another.

Yoga is considered to be one of the key branches of Ayurvedic medicine, a system of healthcare developed in the Indian subcontinent. Ayurvedic philosophy outlines approaches to many aspects of health through careful assessment of the individual. It includes mental, spiritual and physical practices, herbalism, diet, massage and cleansing practices to name a few. However, a comprehensive overview of this approach to medicine is outside the scope of this book.

In our modern era, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya has been a key influence on the development and practice of yoga therapy. In the early 1900s, as a young man Krishnamacharya travelled up high into the Himalayas and studied extensively with the yogis living there in isolation at that time.

When he returned, he was employed by the Maharaja of the Mysore palace, schooling youngsters in the finer points of the yoga tradition. It was here that he distilled the physical and philosophical teachings that he had been exposed to and developed the roots of many of today's

modern practices. Working alongside Gandhi as part of the resurgence of Indian culture, Krishnamacharya received an invitation to send out his senior students around the country to promote awareness of these art forms. These demonstrations were considered successful and the Mysore palace grew in stature as a place of yogic knowledge. Several of his students went on to develop their own approaches, based on his teachings. Later, they travelled to the West as adults to spread their teachings; most notable of these were Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar.

Many people came to the Mysore palace to learn about yoga and Krishnamacharya began to open up the yogic arts to people of all backgrounds and races. He was one of the first practitioners to openly encourage women to practice. He went as far as to say "women are the future of yoga." His prophecy is manifesting as truth, as evidenced by what we see globally in the yoga world today. As international awareness increased, Westerners such as Indra Devi and others gravitated toward this yoga sanctuary in Mysore. As he matured and news of his success as a practitioner of these arts grew, Krishnamacharya began doing more one-to-one sessions, to support people in poor health who were seeking a return to wellness.

His son, T.K.V. Desikachar, who had been observing his father teach and serve society over many decades, left his job in engineering and began to follow in his footsteps. Desikachar's approach to yoga he named Viniyoga, and it included many of the classical elements of what he saw his father teach. He recognized that his father always taught what was appropriate to each individual, and the practice was tailored to the purpose and capability of the individual. I believe that it is this premise which formed the basis of modern yoga therapy. This approach remains very important, and senior Viniyoga teacher Gary Kraftsow is a key figure in the inspiration and development of the yoga therapy organizational direction.

MY BRANCH OF THE YOGA TREE

Scope of Practice

Vanda Scaravelli, an Italian, who was able to work directly with both Iyengar and Desikachar, continued to build on the work of her teachers by tailoring yoga practices to the individuals who came to work with her. After her husband died, she discovered yoga through her friend the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti and was afforded the chance to study with these great teachers at her home. She worked on her practice diligently for many years and taught several young women the arts she had been gifted and then cultivated herself. One of these students was Diane Long, who studied with Vanda for 23 years. Diane is one of my teachers.

As these women began to spread Vanda's teaching, many people began to visit her in the later stages of her life. One of these was British yoga teacher and osteopath John Stirk, another of my teachers, on whom Vanda had a profound effect.

John returned to London and reassessed his practice, discovering new ways to innovate and explore. His previous practice, grounded in the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, began to transform. One of his students and fellow osteopath, Pete Blackaby, was inspired by the changes that John had made to his practice and became curious himself. Pete trained a set of teachers which included Gary Carter and Liz Warrington.

Gary Carter took his knowledge from cycling, body building, anatomy and body work practices and brought this together with the yoga, creating Natural Bodies, a center of excellence in this particular

approach to yoga. I began working with him in 2002. He produced several crops of teacher trainees in three-year programs, one of which I was privileged to be a part of (2004–2006). Gary's courses included extensive anatomy and teaching theory and introduced us to many different teachers who were influenced by Vanda's work. I have worked extensively with Diane Long and John Stirk over the last decade or so. I studied with Diane Long in India (2007), Italy (2010), America (2012–2016), Mexico (2014) and many times in England. I studied with John Stirk from 2002–2007 in England and then a dozen or so times in England and Italy since that period.

When I moved to America in 2007, I took with me the yoga practice I had cultivated with these excellent teachers over the years, leaving behind my engineering degree and developing IT career. After a period of arriving and settling, I began sharing the work I had learnt, teaching in a number of yoga centers and a local gym in Washington DC.

Many people who came to classes had serious injuries and physical impediments and asked if I could work with them individually to help them find a way to modify and tailor the practice. As I conducted these sessions, I was required to innovate and began to arrange the practice specifically for each individual. I realized I was perhaps being asked to employ the same open-minded approach that Vanda, Desikachar and Krishnamacharya had taken before me.

Over the course of several years of teaching in this way I began to realize that others were doing similar work. I became aware of the IAYT (International Association of Yoga Therapists) and joined the organization. In an increasingly expanding American yoga scene, filled with all sorts of different types of practice, it seemed like a logical next step to align myself with this careful, considerate approach to practice, whilst holding firm to the roots of the approach first shared by my teachers.

The discovery of yoga therapy led me to the excellent written works of Mukunda Stiles and his landmark book *Structural Yoga Therapy* (2000), and on to the writings of Gary Kraftsow and Doug Keller who were skillfully developing their own approaches to yoga therapeutics. I hope to also contribute something of value to the development of the yoga therapy community, as they have.



The tree of yoga continues to flourish as each generation of practitioner continues to develop their own approach whilst referring back to the roots.¹

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The IAYT Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists define "Yoga Therapy" as:

The appropriate application of [yoga] teachings and practices in a therapeutic context in order to support a consistent yoga practice that will increase self-awareness and engage the client/student's energy in the direction of desired goals.

It is not the role of the yoga therapist to diagnose. This responsibility lies with the medical profession. Yoga therapists gather information about the person through many different avenues, which helps to support the understanding of any information provided from the medical field. If at any point during the yoga therapy process there are doubts around health or an obviously changing diagnosis then the practitioner must refer the client to their medical physician.

The scope of the yoga therapist is to employ and adapt the full range of yogic practices, which they themselves have proven through their own practice, to support a client in agreed therapeutic and developmental objectives. The yoga therapist should not attempt to share or administer practices which they themselves have not practiced or are not experienced with.

Yoga therapy is a very powerful modality and can affect an individual on many levels: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and energetic. If at any point during the process the yoga therapist feels out of their depth, they can refer the person on to a professional in a more appropriate arena. It is not sensible to continue working with a client if together you have arrived at an impasse for which the yoga therapist does not have the necessary skill set. It is very important that a yoga therapist develop a network of trusted professionals that they can refer clients to, if necessary. A collaborative approach to the alternative healing arts can bring benefits to the individual and is being tried in many integrative healthcare centers around the USA and the rest of the world, including the Center for Integrative Medicine which forms part of the George Washington University Hospital in Washington DC.



INTEGRATIVE LIVING ANATOMY

This is not an anatomy book, yet it includes aspects of anatomy within it. Yoga is not anatomy and yet information from medicine and anatomical studies can inform our yoga therapy processes. It was my sense that it would be helpful to include some information on what is meant by anatomy in this context.

FROM CLASSICAL ANATOMY TO INTEGRATIVE LIVING ANATOMY

The primary method of learning about the body in many Western health professions, from medical schools to yoga teacher training programs, is to almost exclusively divide things up and reduce what is being observed into parts. This approach was natural at the time that the science of anatomy was being developed, as the pioneers learnt through the dissection of dead bodies.

These old anatomical models split the body up into parts, which creates a view of fragmentation. This is further supported by a view of health and disease which tends to view body systems as partitioned. The approach is based on a Cartesian/Newtonian approach, which can best be described as "reductionism."

FROM SEPARATION TO WHOLENESS

Today we are witnessing a change in paradigm. Anatomical pioneers are studying the anatomy of living beings, using careful observation

and sophisticated technology, and taking a much more systemic and inter-systemic approach. In order to really penetrate the surface of yoga's enormous healing potential we must find our way toward an integrated view of ourselves. This requires that we use the knowledge developed from centuries of division, and yet recognize that in the living being we cannot split the body inter- or intra-systemically. Any kind of split, be it body, mind or any other partitions of the system, is not an accurate representation of the living person.

The other major area we must address in terms of division is that the person cannot be split from their environment. We cannot hope to support an individual if we are attempting to view the person without their context and surroundings. We must seek to understand the part of the universe with which they relate and which continues to affect them throughout their lives.

The overall goal in a yoga therapy setting is to work with the whole person, encouraging them to experience a feeling of integration.



Imaging technology has changed the way we understand anatomy and has begun to reveal the dynamic nature of living tissues.²



This book is designed for yoga therapists, who wish to deepen their practice, and their clients, who are committed to a return to vibrant health.

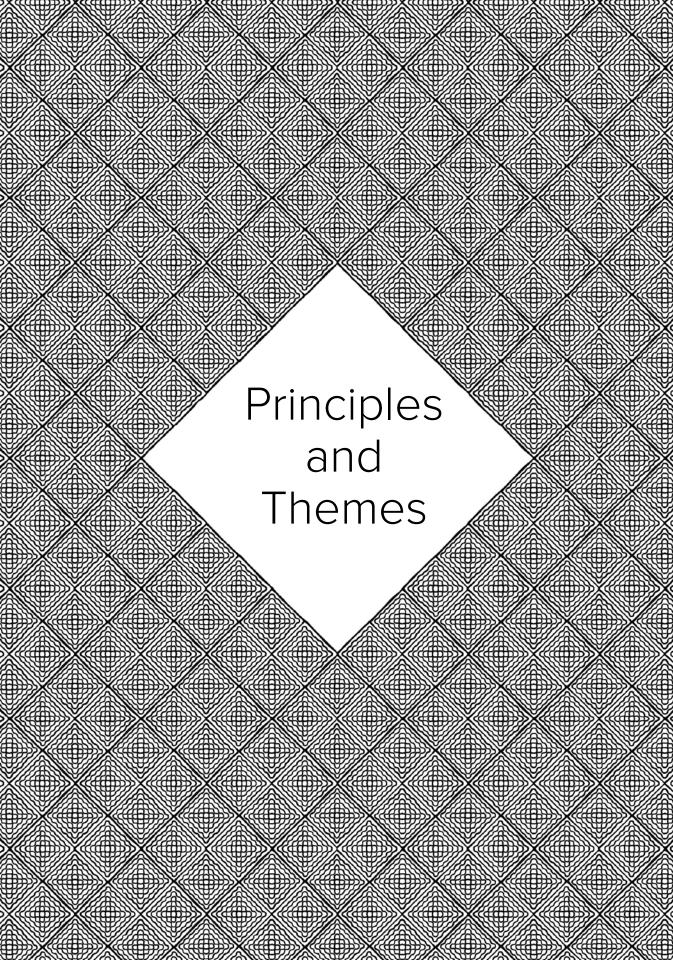
The book can be read cover to cover, but it will be most valuable to the reader if they can sit down and study each theme or topic one at a time.

There are different ways to assimilate and explore creative avenues. The reader can:

- let the topic rattle around for a while in their consciousness
- notice how it shows up in their world (life, work and personal practice)
- meditate on the theme, allowing the subconscious and other non-ordinary inputs to participate
- study details in more depth (such as any anatomical information)
- play extensively with the exercises—notice whether this principle or topic is easy to feel or difficult, and ask why
- begin to explore, including the theme or principle into their own self-practice and exploring what it brings in.

If the theme still proves to be elusive, seek out the author. An extensive training program is available, detailing the themes outlined here and other aspects of yoga therapy.

Once the theme is embodied within the yoga therapy practitioner, they can begin to bring it into work with clients. By taking time to let each theme blossom and watching the effects, practitioners will notice how it changes their clients' practice.





WHAT IS A PRINCIPLE OR THEME?

Principles are topics, themes or concepts that we explore in our yoga therapy practice. They give us a focus and help to orient us to the depth of occurrences happening in the moment and the inherently therapeutic process that yoga can initiate.

As we explore principles of practice at deeper and deeper levels they begin to integrate themselves more fully into who we are. Many principles are interwoven and have relationships with one another. In different postures or movements the principles feel different and can inform us about our bodies in new ways.

During a practice in which we begin with one theme, our experience of it may deepen and then another theme may arise and become clearly more apparent in that moment. This flexibility and fluidity in approach is important as we meet the different energies of different days.

It is important to stress that what follows is not a definitive list of principles. Principles are reshaped and remolded by each generation based on the needs of the time.

When working with clients it is important to keep individual sessions simple. Focusing on one or two priorities helps the client stay focused, without becoming overwhelmed. More concepts can be brought in and combined as the client's capacity develops. Many clients have very busy lives, managing multiple activities for most of their waking hours: yoga is a solace from this busyness, helping the client to reduce stress and find calmness at their own authentic pace.



Have you ever wondered where your breathing comes from? What is driving the breathing process? Is it initiated by the lungs or driven from the outside? Is it just a physiological process or is there something more?

These questions have been asked throughout human history and the answers are still not completely agreed upon. What we do know is that breathing is more than just a physiological process and is a central component of the yoga therapy process.

While the main physical purpose of breathing is to bring oxygen into the body to be distributed by the blood whilst releasing carbon dioxide as waste, breath has many other functions and roles. Breathing is one of several natural mechanisms in the body for tension release. The alveoli deep in the lungs make the gaseous exchange from oxygen to carbon dioxide. As this physiological process occurs we relax, detoxify ourselves and clear stress and tension from the body and mind.

The multi-dimensional nature of breath was well-known in older cultures where it was encoded into their language.

"Spiritus," the word for breath in Latin, is reflected in the English word "inspiration," which later became "inhalation." This use of the term spiritus reflects the knowledge of the spiritual underpinnings of the respiratory process. Similar knowledge appears in the naming of breath in other cultures.

Breathing is the first thing we do in this life and the last thing we do before the body dies. The ability to take in full, deep, comfortable, natural breaths is an essential part of wellness on every level. It is a precious gift, and each breath that enters the body empowers life. Yet most of the time we barely notice that we are breathing.



Every human being is breathing for their entire lives and yet most of the time this function is barely visible. The image shows how the breath is made visible in certain types of light.³

In this chapter we consider ways in which we can bring focus and attention to this most essential of functions and maximize its therapeutic effects, thus supporting our clients in their yoga therapy process.

THE ROLE OF THE BREATH

Breathing is one of the only processes in the body that can be either voluntary or involuntary, thus providing us with a doorway into internal processes and deeper relationships.

As we breathe, we exist in intimate relationship with our immediate environment and with Earth's biosphere—engaging in far more than a gas exchange between ourselves and Earth. Viewed from a spiritual perspective, our breath is one of the ways we bring universal energy into our physical system.

Within our yoga asana practice, breath helps us create space in the body. It enables us to gently penetrate into tight areas within ourselves and feel the nature of that natural resistance. As the breath moves in, revealing such resistance, we experience its ability to expand and open tight internal structures. We observe that, on the exhale, these areas soften, releasing tension and discomfort (see Chapter 11). Full deep breaths help ensure wellness on every level.

STAGES IN BREATH AWARENESS

Many wonderful and detailed books dedicated to the breath have been written. One such comprehensive exploration is Donna Farhi's book titled *The Breathing Book* (1996). Rather than repeat the exhaustive work of these yogic scholars and scientists, I intend to summarize and review some of the early stages of breath awareness most helpful in working with yoga therapy clients.

Breath awareness is neither linear nor can it be regarded as a hierarchy of actions. It is best explored slowly over many sessions, rather than being introduced all at once. Allowing small segments of information about breathing to penetrate slowly into the client's consciousness enables titrated learning and healing. This slower introduction of technique and information can be less destabilizing and more effective in the long run, helping to avoid emotional and psychological overwhelm for the client. Methods for total overwhelm via breathing were pioneered in the West by Stanislav Grof through his holotropic breathwork (see Grof 1989) and have been used in ancient cultures since time immemorial. In yoga therapy, we start at the opposite end of the spectrum.

We begin our work with breath by bringing awareness of his or her breath into the client's consciousness. How this is done will be described in more depth in the sections that follow. This will not be a process of describing how to breathe, as the body already does that automatically, but instead will bring aspects of the breath to light.

LANDMARKS WITHIN THE BREATHING PROCESS

Within the waveform of the breath, a number of phases act as landmarks for exploration. In addition to the inhalation and exhalation portions of the breath, awareness of the spaces or pauses at the top of the inhale and at the bottom of the exhale also provide opportunities for enquiry. Each phase has different features and characteristics.

Inhalation

As we inhale, the rib cage opens, the diaphragm draws down, and the lungs expand. We can learn to relax the overall breathing mechanism to allow a deeper, richer inhalation to occur. We can also observe the unique characteristics of each breath with curiosity. How are tensions being expressed? What does our breath connect us to? Is the inhale heavy or restricted or is it easy and light?

Internal muscular and structural relationships generate other body movements less directly associated with our breath:

- spinal movement or pelvic rocking
- abdominal expansion
- pelvic floor lifting in a way that mirror the movement of the diaphragm
- changes to the sacrum and lower back.

As we relax, these structures open and soften, and from this awareness we use micro-readjustments to encourage even deeper, more natural breathing.

Pause at the Top of the Inhale

The pause at the end of the inhale enables us to perceive the additional openness and space in the body. We can also sense the energetic exchange deeply taking place within the lungs, which gives a sense of feeling full and energized. If we relax as we maintain the inhale, we may also feel some lift and lightness, which can positively affect mood and enhance structural relationships. Waiting too long in the pause may cause the system to react and a sense of panic may ensue. Mild anxiety may arise because the sympathetic nervous system is activated

by holding the breath in. Not over-holding the in-breath will minimize this response.

Exhalation

During the exhalation, we observe the release of tension from deep inside, sometimes very specifically from the places previously mentioned when we discussed the process of inhaling. At other times the sense of release is more general. Our lungs begin to deflate, the rib cage narrows, and we simultaneously relate to the ground more fully while also becoming lighter. The exhalation also activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which creates a deeper sense of relaxing and shifting to a calmer state.

Pause at the End of the Exhalation

When we experience the pause at the end of the exhale, we notice a series of internal releases. There is a lengthening upward as the diaphragm releases its grip on the spine and the sense is that the body drops with gravity more fully. At this point of the breathing cycle, we feel empty, still and quiet. Waiting in this space can feel good, but dwelling in it too long may alter a person's mood, creating mild depression. So once again, only very short periods of retention should be applied to begin with. It is important that we recognize if our practice creates emotional effects. If it does, this feeling will be taken off the mat and out into the world. In examining these effects, we can use our understanding of our own emotional responses to inform our support of our clients.

FACTORS AFFECTING BREATH

The breath is affected by many factors, both inside and outside of the individual. These include:

- Posture and physiology: The way a person uses their body during their life has a deep effect on their breath. Whether and how they exercise, and what position they work in and rest in, all impact the breath and affect the structure.
- *Diet*: What a person eats and their approach to food can affect both their body and their breath. Breathing and digesting are related.

- Thoughts being maintained by the client: The way that an individual perceives the world and experiences stressors has a big effect on the breath.
- Emotional tendencies being held in place: The type of emotions most common in an individual's life affects their body and health and ultimately their breath. Healthy processing of emotions always involves the process of breathing at some level.
- *The individual's overall condition*: How the individual's life has unfolded is held in their body and in their respiratory patterns.

Awareness of breathing helps one to see more clearly what is happening within us from moment to moment, and recognize patterns that may be shaping our physical wellbeing. Developing breath awareness requires the client's gentle and sustained focus. The mind has a tendency to wander but can be trained to become more attentive over time.

As we strengthen our focusing abilities and do our inner work, we can sustain the attention required to follow our breathing with fewer distractions.

SPATIAL AWARENESS AND BREATH CAPACITY

Having turned our client's attention to the breath, we support their growth into the next phase by suggesting that they observe how they are breathing and which structures they are breathing into.

At the start of most people's respiratory awareness journey, the breath is shallow and primarily centered in the upper chest. By inviting the client to lengthen and extend the breath until it becomes long, slow, fine and deep, we encourage changes and openings throughout the respiratory system.

Clients may be encouraged to direct the breath into different parts of the body, expanding the belly, for example, or feeling the diaphragm move, which then in turn encourages the breath to expand the rib cavity. Through repeated explorations, there is an overall expansion in the breathing capacity. This approach to breath distribution also can be explored while engaged in exploring a range of different postures.

Generally, clients are encouraged not to force the breath, but rather to let it do its work to unravel the tensions present in those positions. As clients develop their own practice more deeply, they begin to feel body-wide responses to the breathing process.

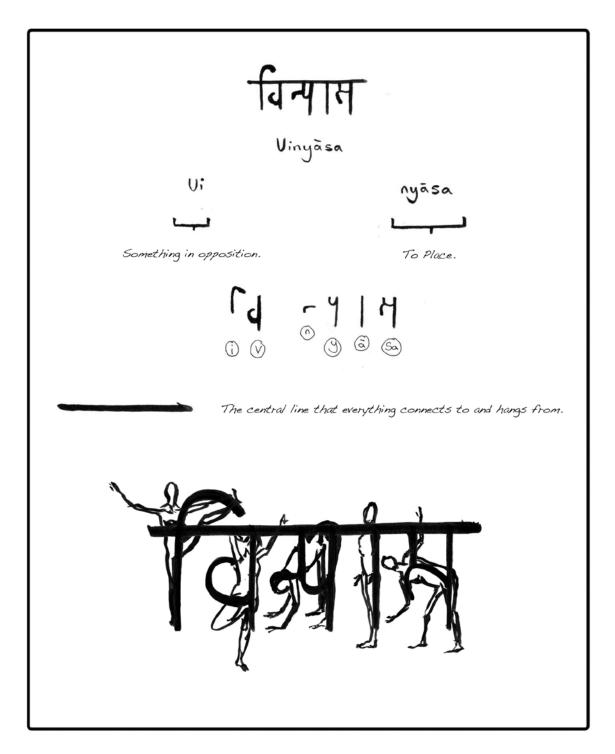
MOVING WITH THE BREATH

Many popular approaches to yoga practice include a component providing instruction on moving with the breath. This process is called Vinyasa, which in Sanskrit means "to observe how to place something down in a special way." The modern translation of this word is broadly given as a synchronization of movement and breath, and used as a descriptor for these flowing practices.

Beginning to establish this coordination can be extremely powerful. With practice, the yoga practitioner can improve the ease and effortlessness of the postural transitions. Sometimes these practices use a slow, considered transition (e.g., Vini Yoga developed by Desikachar), and sometimes the transitions used are quicker (e.g., Ashtanga developed by Pattabhi Jois).

Developing transitional skill takes time and patience, whilst practicing them helps to coordinate and deepen strong internal relationships and connections. We see this kind of development occur in other movement modalities, for example in the arenas of dance and martial arts.

Strong daily practice of transitions transforms the practitioner's body and mind, while greatly influencing both the body's structure and function.



The Sanskrit word Vinyasa describes "movement combined with breath." Studying Sanskrit gives another perspective in understanding the origin of the yoga and its terminology.⁴

ALLOWING THE BREATH

As the client's breath awareness practice deepens, the client transitions away from taking action to manipulate the breath, moving instead toward curiosity as to where the breath may go. In essence, this is a state of non-interference, which brings to light a dynamic state of relationship between intelligent body and intelligent breath.

Instead of making the breath *do* something, the practitioner receives the breath and allows it to lead. Each breath is different and, if observed closely, the breath becomes the force calling attention to tension release, physical readjustment, or even which asana to transition into. This change toward allowing requires deep listening and demonstrates continuous development of the client's embodiment process.

In this state, the client neither grasps nor holds the breath. When the breath is long and slow, the client slows down; when the breath is shorter, the client accepts that also. The body knows how to breathe. Breathing is a natural process that began at birth. We breathe unconsciously every night when we are sleeping. Instead of making the breath happen, we wait for the breath to lead and we surrender to its inherent wisdom.

THE BREATH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO INNER EXPERIENCE

By breathing more deeply into the body, we expand the overall capacity for breath, which in turn increases duration. This slowing down calms the nervous system and affects many other interrelated physical systems.

As we slow down, we begin to see our inner landscape more clearly. At this stage of the practice, we can observe how subtle patterns of thought and emotion impact the breath. As we meet these patterns and let them go, breathing changes.

As we practice, releasing judgment as to how we breathe becomes critical. Breathing patterns develop over the course of our lives as a result of all of our experiences, with many characteristics having been acquired from our parents or other people close to us. As we begin to undo unhealthy breathing patterns, it is essential that we accept where we are and where we have been, in order to move on.

GOING FURTHER

With continued refinement of the attention, breath awareness can become a feature of everyday life. This development of our breath awareness can be enhanced by exploring pranayama. Pranayamas, roughly translated as breath practices or breath control practices, are a range of traditional, powerful yogic breathing techniques. Pranayama features as one of the eight limbs of classical yoga as described by the author of the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali, and range in their objectives, intentions and difficulty.

There are dozens of pranayama techniques and a comprehensive description of these techniques is outside the scope of this book. They can support the yoga therapy process in some instances, but the more advanced techniques tend to require a deep practice and the guidance of an experienced teacher.

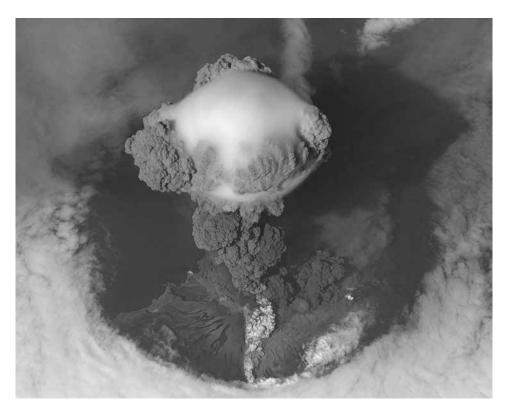
Renowned experienced yoga teacher, Donna Farhi, explains:

Most people begin yoga with so many pre-existing blocks and holding patterns that to introduce a controlled breathing regime right away further concretizes the blocks. I think it's extremely important to remove the blocks and holding patterns first, to reveal the natural breath that is our birthright. And then it can be very interesting to explore the subtle movement of prana through formal work. (Farhi 1996)

Over time, simple breathing practices can help increase breath capacity and encourage breath flexibility. Since breathing begins deeply within the body, we can clearly perceive multi-directional expansion as the in-breath enters the body. Our breath becomes fuller, deeper and more even. It requires less effort, bringing deep calmness to the mind.

When adding a new breathing pattern to our practice, it is equally important to put it down afterwards so that we don't get caught in a new pattern of breathing without realizing that we have taken it on. I have often encountered students who have extensively explored one breath technique and have unconsciously adopted it whenever they do yoga. This can be as limiting as the restricted patterns experienced as a novice.

By cultivating a breathing practice, we enhance awareness of our aliveness, notice our patterns and habits, and expand our capacity for change. All of these aspects occur as we improve the overall quality of the attention we place on our breathing. Flexibility in breathing could be considered the precursor to more flexibility in other areas of life and in this regard, the way we breathe becomes a metaphor for how we approach our lives more generally.



The Earth has her own breath and pressure release mechanisms. Volcanos act as a vehicle for the earth to release pressure from the inside. (Sarychev Volcano, Kuril Islands, northeast of Japan.)⁵

CASE STUDY

B is a young woman in her late twenties working in a stressful office environment. She attended classes at one of the yoga studios I taught at.

She arrived at our first session explaining that she was having major problems with breathing. The doctors had not given any specific diagnosis, except stress. As I spoke to her, it was clear she was suffering from some anxiety and I observed that her breathing was very high in her chest.

She described an experience that she often had where she felt like there was a tight band around her lower ribs. In fact, through basic examination and observation, it was obvious that the diaphragmatic attachments to the spine were very tight and it was pulling into her intercostals and her diaphragm.

We started with a focus on deep relaxation, which for many people can be difficult. From there, I suggested exploring some basic postures supine (stretching her legs and spine, exploring rotations) to help to free the spine and calm the nervous system. We then went through some simple breathing exercises to allow her to breathe into her whole respiratory cavity, particularly her belly.

We explored some simple asana (Dog pose, Cobra, Lunges) to allow her body to open gently and I ensured that we did nothing that would create additional stress. The gentleness we adopted was very important, and as a result these simple activities began to undo layers of holding that were affecting her breath and her ability to release tension. The work does not have to be advanced or complicated to be effective.

Office workers are under high stress and often are not able to move around freely for many hours at a time. B was applying for jobs because her boss was creating an even more stressful environment through intimidation and aggression. In addition, often women are under social pressure both in terms of their work and their appearance. There is a constant feeling that they need to have a flat belly, which often means that they become socially conditioned to be afraid to breathe into their abdomen. In reality, the belly is supposed to be rounded. If we observe toddlers as they first stand and begin to move they are comfortable breathing into their bellies, before they are socialized into other ideas.

Over the course of several sessions, B's physical tension lessened, her muscular restrictions around her ribs eased and breathing improved. She learnt to manage her body's response to stress and she learnt to breathe down into her belly in a relaxed way.

After five sessions, B was required to leave town as she had secured a new job in a neighboring city. She was extremely grateful for the freer breath she had developed and the lessening of anxiety and intended to continue her practice.

EXERCISE: Recognizing Changes in Breath Capacity

- Prepare the body for breath work by lying on the back.
- Relax the body, particularly the head, face and jaw.
- Place the hands on the chest to feel how the breath affects the ribs as it moves in and out.
- · Place the hands on the middle of the belly. Allow the breath to expand into the abdomen as the inhale comes in. Let the exhale happen and the belly drop back toward the ground.
- Place the hands on the lowest part of the belly just above the pubic bone. Can the breath penetrate all the way down into the lower part of the abdomen?
- Let the arms float up toward the ceiling, extending the fingers toward the sky.
- Breathe deeply, feeling how the change in the arms' position has changed the shape of the lungs and respiratory cavity, enabling the breath to access the back of the lungs.
- Come to a sitting position. Hold the side ribs gently with the hands so the thumbs are at the back and the fingers in front.
- Allow the inhale to come in.
- Feel the three-dimensional expansion of the ribs as they open up to the front, sides and back.
- Notice where the breath is initiated and how it leaves the body.

Observing Stages in the Breathing

 Going deeper into the breathing process, relax once again and let go of any trying.

- What does the inhale feel like? What structures are most clear in your awareness in this phase? What do you feel in your body? In your emotions?
- What does the exhale feel like? What structures are most clear in your awareness in this phase? What do you feel in your body? In your emotions?
- In these aspects, notice textures and qualities of the breath.
- Observe the pauses in the breath. Are they long or short? Pausing for a moment in the inhale or the exhale phase of the breath is called "kumbhaka." Give it a try and look around inside. Notice the timing, but never force the body.
- With this enhanced perception of breath, introduce several brief and gentle pauses during the inhale. This divides the inhale into pieces. See if you can make them equal. Once you have arrived at the top of the inhale, breathe normally on the exhale.
- Introduce several brief and gentle pauses during the exhale phase of the breath. Breathe normally on the inhale. This is called "viloma" or bamboo breathing.

Letting Go and Allowing

- Open the heart smile and connect to this incredible process we call breathing. This heart smile is a psychological and energetic state change. It feels like a widening in the chest and allows surrounding transverse structures to begin to relax and release, such as the area around the collar bones, known as the thoracic inlet region, and the respiratory diaphragm. (See "Lightness in the heart" in Chapter 15 for more details.)
- Relax onto the back, move into Savasana and let everything go.



CENTERING

One of the key themes of yoga therapy is centering—the finding of one's center. This very natural part of embodiment can often be overlooked in terms of its therapeutic power and so bringing awareness to it is important. Like many of the themes covered here, centering is a moment-to-moment activity that can be deepened with practice over time.

When we consider someone to be centered, we mean that they are balanced in their physical body, as well as in their inner world. This inner balance relates to mental, emotional and spiritual states. The result of such balance is the person's ability not to be thrown off and undone by the twists and turns of life. Through yoga, breath and deep inner acceptance, we have one way in which we can heal our deepest wounds and become less triggered by life's circumstances, leaving us more centered, calm and composed.

In yoga therapy, on a physical and experiential level, the process of exploring this theme involves both centering and ex-centering—being aware of a movement toward the gravitational center and then away from it. These opposites are a result of the polarization of forces occurring in three dimensions.

In this chapter I outline some key centers that help us to help clients sense into themselves and become attuned. Current trends in our lives cause us to live in our heads most of the time. Excessive thinking causes people to center almost exclusively in their thoughts. Yoga therapy invites clients to become aware of other possibilities.

CENTERS IN DIFFERENT LAYERS

Our bodies have many key physiological and energetic centers. In any given session, the center focused upon during the yoga therapy process depends upon a number of factors. When a client comes to us for work, the client shares information about his or her situation and the sensations and awareness which that situation is creating. As yoga therapists, we use our perception and intuition, based on observation and interpretation, to determine what might be happening for the client and what line of inquiry to explore. The options open to us depend upon the system or approach our education and training position us to call upon.

Yoga therapy acknowledges that the individual is composed of five interwoven frames of reference:

- physical
- mental
- emotional
- energetic
- spiritual.

Acknowledging that all of these layers have centers that are at play is key to yoga therapy's effectiveness.

Traditionally, yoga describes the energetic realm as having seven chakras, or wheels of energy, of which six are embodied. Many different cultures have provided us with systems of energetic understanding.

Honesty is important when it comes to energetic awareness and descriptions. It is essential, when this information is communicated by yoga therapists, that it comes from their own experience and has not simply been absorbed from books. Absence of authenticity in this aspect can lead to a reduction in the quality of teaching, which is not helpful.

SO WHICH CENTER ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

To keep things simple, let's refer to the classic Chinese model of three main energy centers or Dan Tiens. I find this model helpful as it is more easily perceivable:

- The head center (Upper Dan Tien) refers to our brain or our intentions; in more perceptive meditative states, it may be the third eye or pituitary gland center, which supports our visionary capabilities. This can be considered the *known*.
- *The heart center* (Middle Dan Tien) is sometimes called the center of centers. It relates to our ability to love and to connect, and can be thought of as the *unknown*.
- *The lower belly center* (Lower Dan Tien) is the center of gravity, crucial when exploring mind/body movement work. It relates to feelings, sexuality, creativity and storage of our life force. It can be considered *unknowable*.

In a therapeutic approach to yoga, becoming aware of different centers helps the individual to shift their attention, so as to generate insight and healing. Development takes place as attention is placed at each of these locations over time, which allows the gifts of that center to flower. Beginning to meditate on these centers and consciously perceive the forces flowing within the system allows them to reorganize. This also creates change in physical, subtle energetic and spiritual dynamics (see Chapter 20).

Briefly, the upper center becomes quiet and observant in a focused way during yoga therapy. The middle (heart) center stays open to perceive the feelings and emotions arising during the practice, while also dictating how we are practicing—whether relaxed, intense, strong or soft. The lower center becomes a fulcrum for balance and physical reorganization in the postural explorations, while storing energy that has begun to circulate and expand. By inviting the client to become aware of each center, we bring them back into themselves and their own processes. As they develop this awareness, clients begin to feel, sense and become perceptive as to what is happening in a particular location, rather than being caught in the mind's trappings, filled with stories of the past and expectations of the future. Exactly what the client perceives at each location will be unique and valid.



The upper, middle and lower Dan Tiens are energy centers within the body that derive from the Chinese model of healing and self-development.⁶

THE MIDLINE

Closely related to the perception of these three centers is the midline. The midline is the organizing principle around which the physical body takes shape, and is in a sense an extension of our center. Physically manifested as the spine, the midline vibrates into existence in the earliest days of life, as the first cells divide in the womb as the blueprint of the infant is formed on the embryonic plate. This midline function remains present throughout life as an organizing force.

The central midline axis of the physical body runs through the structures of the head, spine and sacrum. The sacrum is the triangular bone positioned between the two pelvic bones, each one of which is called an ilium. The name "sacrum" derives from the Latin word for "sacred," suggesting that the ancients were aware of the powerful nature of the base of the spine as the keystone of the human energy system.

As mentioned in Chapter 15, the spine itself is made up of 24 bones. The vertebrae at different levels of the spinal axis are shaped differently, based on their function either to support optimal weight-bearing or to provide ease in movement and rotation. Physically, the spine bears weight, supports movement and houses the central nervous system. Energetically, the spine carries spiritual energy through the midline up from the legs and pelvis toward the head and then brings it back down again.

The spine supports the skull, which is made up of many separate bones moving in relation to each other, in response to deep rhythms in the body. The head houses the brain, the upper part of the central nervous system, and many of our sense organs. The spatial position of the skull further impacts the spine because of its weight, making awareness of the spatial relationships between head and spine essential in yoga therapy. Culturally we have placed so much emphasis on the head as the center of our physical universe because of our face, our eyes, our brain and our thinking. In yoga therapy, however, we aim to bring a sense of equality into our view of the body, with all parts being regarded as equally important.

Although we don't fully understand how healing happens, body intelligence (processes and functions), as well as forces working to maintain health, seem to orient to the midline in order to mediate with other parts of the body. Partly this happens through the nervous system, but it also occurs through other layers of our mind/body system.

There are times when the midline becomes disconnected, fragmented, or changes position, shape or orientation as a result of chronic or acute stress or trauma. This in turn affects both the structure and function of the body.

In yoga therapy, we bring our attention back to the spine and the midline again and again. We allow it to emerge in our awareness, and we reposition ourselves so that we can feel its location and the various structures and centers that exist along it. With this continual referencing, the client's system becomes more organized to the midline and is quicker to reference the center in its automated processes.

VANDA'S CONTRIBUTION

One of Vanda Scaravelli's most important contributions to the yoga field was to share the sense of opening she perceived in the back of the waist as she practiced. She observed that without force, there was a division from the center. She recognized that everything below the center of gravity was dropping down and everything above the center of gravity was potentially lightening up. She cultivated this awareness extensively in her practice.

This is an example of the ex-centering process, of a movement away from the center, perceivable once the ability to relate to the center has been developed. This movement away from the center toward the edges is a movement from the spine (the axial skeleton) toward the limbs (the appendicular skeleton).

Gross (external) stretching of the body also accesses this same process, but this type of ex-centering is happening more through force and will power than in accordance with natural forces and the body's own inherent wisdom and timing. From a physical standpoint, a yoga therapist might describe this as the main difference between stretching and yoga, with stretching opting to place less emphasis on a reference to the internal. Gross stretching tends to use the limbs to pull on the spine, so the appendicular skeleton and associated musculature pulls on the axial skeleton. This in itself is not wrong, but may not reach the same level of depth into the system, and if applied extensively may cause damage over time.

The corresponding oppositional process to this ex-centering (moving away from the center) is the process of gathering back toward the center. This is where the practitioner feels the gathering of energy and matter back toward the middle of the body. Physically, this may be expressed as allowing limbs to feed back into their joint sockets. Often this whole centering and ex-centering process is taught together to clients as moving away from the center and then moving toward the center. The ability to feel and express both of these centering actions in the body is foundational in this approach to yoga therapy.

THE THERAPEUTIC RESPONSE TO CENTERING

Over time, adhering to the centering and ex-centering processes described, without forcing, helps keep the body safe from injury, educating it on what over-extension feels like. From a physiological perspective, the process builds rich connections within the body and enhances communication (see Chapter 12).

Centering regularly brings us back to a healthy balance. Often life and yoga require that we extend ourselves. This emphasis on re-centering

reduces stress, calming the fight or flight response and allowing the body to reprioritize healing and resting functions. In combination with the mental and emotional centering processes discussed later in this chapter, centering begins to create a much deeper sense of balance within the individual.



Many animals, such as this monkey, exhibit amazing natural balance in their movements.⁷

HOW THE BREATH PLAYS A ROLE

The breath also plays a role in the physical centering process. One of the natural mechanisms within the breathing process is the effect of the breath on the abdomen.

Our culture has many misconceptions about the abdomen. Our views on the perception of beauty, as well as what is a normal for the abdomen, has pervaded advertising and other media. The abdomen functions best when it is slightly rounded to support deep, free, easy breathing.

With some variation, and depending on its position in relationship to gravitational forces, the belly draws back toward the front on the spine on the exhalation. This brings the practitioner into a more direct connection with the lower center. The breath, therefore, acts as a natural force supporting the development of awareness of the centering process.

OTHER TYPES OF CENTERING

The previous descriptions focused on aspects of physical and energetic centering, and yet all five frames of reference have a center.

The center in the mental layer is not based on a knowledge of things or education, but rather on a healthy relationship with the thought world. When centering occurs in the mental realm, it can be described as a person finding a mind that is calm, not being pulled back and forth into the past and the future. Regarding the emotional realm, you might say that each person has emotional patterns and tendencies that arise most commonly within them. If they are centered emotionally, able to experience and express the full emotional spectrum, then this might indicate balance.

The term "being pulled off center" describes a situation when events and circumstances overwhelm or disturb us and when we may have trouble working out whatever we personally are thinking or feeling as separate from the collective mind. Not being centered in this way relates closely to stress and ill-health.

In the spiritual realm, the fulcrum is the way that clients relate to something bigger than themselves. This relationship may be achieved through a specific religion or community or through a personal inner spiritual sense. The client's approach to this realm may be either open and changeable or closed. This spiritual component acts as an underpinning to a client's life and drives all layers of perception and behavior, even affecting what viewpoints he or she may hold. Ultimately, this aspect of a client's life is very personal. Working with the unseen involves a degree of being comfortable with the unknown and the mysterious. A spiritually centered person might find an authentic position that matches his or her view, even if that position is an acknowledgement of not knowing.

Overall, the power of yoga therapy is the acknowledgement of the relationships between the layers. All the different dimensions of centering (physical, mental, emotional, energetic, spiritual) are tied together. Beginning to explore the physical aspect starts to impact centering in the other layers.

CASE STUDY

C is a woman in her late fifties whose husband worked in a large financial organization. I met both her and her husband through classes I was teaching there. She had been practicing yoga for several decades when we first met.

She came to me for one-to-one sessions and explained that her body was painful and she had hyper-mobility in many of her joints, which was partly genetic. From our work together she had observed that it was also partly related to how she'd practiced yoga through the years. She didn't want to give up her yoga practice as it was such an important part of her life.

During our sessions, we explored a variety of different positions (standing poses, sitting poses and many others) but instead of working to reach maximum extension we focused on engaging deeply into all of the structures and staying attentive to the spine. The focus in sessions was on engaging central awareness and gathering back toward the center and not over-stretching. We also focused on the transitions in and out of the postures as being as important as the postures themselves, as a way to explore the engagement required at each stage of the process.

Slowly her body began to respond and she began to realize that she was able to adapt her practice. Her mental perspective had to change to adhere to this very different approach to practice, which involved not pushing and pulling and going beyond her elastic limit.

After significant work and progress, she was able to find a way to begin to reconnect back to her center in the movements and in postures, which she reported "gave her a very different feeling" of her body.

This client became less focused on a solely muscular view of herself and began to see all the layers of her physicality as interrelated. Her experience of pain began to change and her attitude toward her practice was transformed.

After two years of sessions she returned to her home country, taking her revised approach back with her.

EXERCISE

- Although naturally occurring, physical centering processes take time to refine for most people. Initially, intention may be required to experience both poles of the centering action (centering and ex-centering). Over time, this practice gets more nuanced, and the practitioner can observe the phenomenon happening by itself, as the body relearns these natural actions.
- Start by lying down on the ground with the knees bent. Have the arms alongside the body with the palms face down. Gently press down through the feet and lift the pelvis to a comfortable height into Rolling Bridge posture. Explore rolling up and down through the spine in this way. This helps to orient us to the feeling of the spine and hence brings midline awareness.
- Roll around and come into standing. Adopt a variety of standing poses (Warrior II and III, Forward Bend, Side Angle pose, Half Moon). Be aware of the lower center (center of gravity) in each position. Balance postures particularly require orientation to the center. Can you feel the ex-centering and centering processes occurring within you?
- Place your hands on the navel whilst lying down. Feel how this draws attention to the area and the centering process begins to happen by itself. In time the feeling of gathering back to the center and moving away from the center becomes more and more tangible.
- Come onto all fours in preparation for Dog pose. Go up into the position when you are ready. Work to draw the belly back toward the front of the spine on the exhalation. What do you notice? Does it assist in the feeling of connecting to the center? Can you still feel centering and ex-centering happening?

- Adopt a variety of standing poses. Explore this very physical way of connecting to the center, through the breath, gently maintaining awareness of centering.
- Sit in a cross-legged position for 15 minutes and notice your centers in the other five frames of reference. What do you notice?



CREATING THE CONDITIONS

Creating the conditions is an idea emerging in many fields where practitioners are acknowledging that sound preparation and clear intent can steer the direction of complex events without the usual focus on producing certain fixed outcomes. This idea first appears in yoga in the yoga classics. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, Lord Krishna guides Arjuna to recognize that he can ponder outcomes ceaselessly but, in the end, he must ready himself and then act in the face of uncertainty. In the practice of yoga therapy, creating the conditions refers to the preparatory phase before an asana emerges.

Rather than assuming the posture and then looking for the yoga, having awareness that we can create the conditions helps us realize that principles and themes can be adopted and the sense of yoga can be found before the pose is explored. In this way, postures arise from the state of yoga, rather than as an attempt to find it. This fundamentally changes the way yoga has been taught in the West. Even our language—when we say we are going "to do" yoga—reinforces the old paradigm of looking for the yoga after we assume the pose rather than in our preparation for it.

Creating conditions implies a slower, more open-minded approach to practice, rather than a mechanistic, by-the-book approach. Preparing for postures in a mindful way helps to bring us into a heightened state of awareness, watching as our bodies prepare for the simple precision of spatial awareness and motion. Exploring the creating of conditions in advance of the posture creates more effortlessness than first assuming

the posture and then attempting to coax forth awareness from there. Modifying ourselves once we assume the posture is not at all wrong. What is being suggested here is that an exploration of mind/body awareness en route into the posture also has many things to teach us.



A practitioner preparing the body for yoga by going inwards and sensing deeply.8

The question may arise, "What are we creating the conditions for?" The answer lies in the principles and themes explored here:

- space
- lightness
- ease.

And ultimately:

- integration
- freedom
- love
- wholeness.

In this approach to yoga therapy, mindfully creating conditions brings us to a state of readiness that can be described as "tuning in." Yoga therapists invite their clients to drop all expectations. From there, they enter into a state of presence so as to be fully with their experiences, internally listening, and being with any aspects of the theme proposed by the therapist or arising from the practice that may previously have been concealed from them.



The right conditions must be present for yoga to emerge, similar to a particular set of elements coming together in a storm.⁹

Allowing the mind to settle and the client to become more attuned may initially require a lot of patience. This is particularly true in our culture since we tend to focus most of our attention outside of ourselves.

Each person arrives at the work with their own capacity for internal listening. Internal awareness can develop with time and practice, and the client has the opportunity to discover that waiting can be beautiful. Waiting involves patience and is an exploration of letting go of expectations to see what naturally arises from the moment and then engaging at the right time, perhaps similar to taking a nature photograph or watching a storm unfold over the landscape and then observing the right time to leave the house. Observing and attuning our awareness takes us out of the ambitious mind that wants to "do" yoga, or fix the postures or ourselves. The client begins to see that life is unfolding within them and that many things are already happening within the body and mind when we arrive on the mat. As the client

observes the diversity of internal events, the speed at which he or she wants to go, into the postures, may change.

We begin to observe that it takes time to allow the body and the breath to synchronize and that movement emerges most effortlessly from stillness. This way of looking at practice takes us away from a "right or wrong" approach, moving us toward acceptance and an understanding of things as they are. Accomplishing this requires us to release long-held patterns that include wanting and pushing away, doing and fixing.

RECOGNIZING AND CULTIVATING INNER STATES

Deeper aspects can arise from the practice of creating conditions, although they are difficult to put into words. Do not consider my comments here as exhaustive or comprehensive in any way. They are merely signposts for the client and yoga therapist to explore together.

First, love is the overarching state of being that we adopt in yoga therapy. Loving and accepting ourselves more fully each day, we find that we then can begin to love others more deeply. In our yoga therapy process, this involves being kind to our bodies—stopping if something begins to hurt and not forcing ourselves onwards. We are not in a battle with ourselves and our bodies. On the contrary, we should listen to our bodies as they slowly re-trust us and attempt to communicate their needs. We are not in a rush.

Integration is the coming together of something. In our yoga therapy process, we aim to bring our bodies back to full potential by allowing lost or disparate parts to reconnect. This coming together physically and energetically helps integrate the various aspects of ourselves, helping our component parts to work together more effectively as one.

Observing and recognizing wholeness begins to bring us toward acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all things. Total immersion into the senses helps us open ourselves to the wholeness of the moment. Tens of thousands of processes occur within the human body at any moment. These occur at physical, emotional, perceptual and psychological levels to name but a few. Can we learn to see this as all one?

Nothing is separate, and any attempt to separate a client into parts or from his or her environment is simply an illusion. As yoga therapists, we aim to view the wholeness of the human being, incorporating all layers and aspects of the environment.

SEEING THE HEALTH

Just as the yoga therapist needs to see the person as whole and encourage clients to see their own wholeness, the approach of the therapy also must focus on wholeness.

Focusing on the "health," the divine order of things, involves seeing all aspects of the individual that are in right relationship. For example, a pain in the knee may cause us to disregard the health of the shoulders, spine, and a thousand other aspects of the individual that exist in good working order. Returning the knee to health may result from re-forging a relationship with one of these healthy areas. Modern culture focuses on sickness, not the vibrant wellness that exists in most people. This focusing on what is wrong is a reflection of a partitioned reality.

In many regards, this life is a journey toward wholeness. We are not our sickness. We also are more than just our physical form, far more than our bones and fluids, muscles and nerves, organs and fascia. We are a whole being with life experiences—complex creatures composed of many internal and external relationships, as well as multiple layers of existence, much of which we are unable to perceive. The body is a warehouse of memories, storing information about a client's personal history in a way that is unique to each individual.

Understanding the health of a human being depends on the relational health of all aspects of a person and the health of his or her environment.



Timing requires great poise. Knowing when to stop and wait is important to allow the body to reveal new information. 10

CASE STUDY

D is a woman in her fifties working in a highly stressful office environment. She is working very hard on her health and healing journey and is attempting to understand how to work with her body effectively through the aging process and to meet and deal with the pain she experiences. As a young woman, D was capable of a lot physically and is learning to be with her body as it is now.

After an acute injury (broken elbow) and with ongoing lower back issues she turned to yoga therapy to help to support her healing process and manage her pain and stiffness.

During her initial intake, she described intense morning stiffness. She outlined that she had very tight shoulders and an extreme lower back curve, lumbar lordosis, both of which have a clear relationship when observing her movement.

This pattern would seem to be attributable to:

- stressful work environments with extended sitting
- · a history of lifting weights
- decades of running.

She also described problems with her toes and part of her foot, which limits movement, arising from an injury/trauma that occurred many years ago, which is still being unraveled physically and emotionally. The process of having to meet her body with care, patience and respect is new to her and is inviting her to reconsider the way she has approached her life so that she can sustain her health over the long term. The importance of moving away from the mentally driven, goal-oriented environment she has spent so many years functioning in, when exploring the yoga, is essential. Yoga therapy requires time and patience to be effective, and the absence of any specific goal orientation.

D and I developed a home practice for her consisting of basic postures, which included standing postures, movements from all fours and supine positions. The focus was on preparing for each posture to ensure that her yoga therapy process brought a sense of freedom and did not exacerbate pain. We also used movement and breath to free the body of its tension patterns. Early on we identified that backbends

generally, and particularly Rolling Bridge, were taking her further into lower back tension and generating pain, so we removed that from her practice plan. Each day she practices, she essentially re-creates the conditions by listening to her body on that day and being kind to what she finds, being aware not to move with a mindset that is rushed or ambitious. In the preparation for each pose, she focuses on creating the conditions for ease in that particular exploration so that she can relieve some of the pressures in her body and begin to derive the benefits, without needing to achieve in the postural process.

Over time she has developed a rich practice, working around her physical restrictions to help to calm and undo her mind/body. This has helped her develop a sense of responsibility for her own self-care and has enabled her to begin to heal her injuries and manage her own pain and stiffness.

EXERCISE

- Lie on the back. Bring both knees in toward the body and gently wrap the arms around the legs. Feel into the body. What areas of the body do you notice? Perhaps there are some areas that feel stiff, tired, painful or just not connected.
- Release the feet back down to the ground and relax.
 Attempt to perceive the whole.
- Roll around onto all fours. Settle the pelvis back toward the heels and observe what you can feel. Bring the body together as a whole unit in both your mind's eye and your felt sense.
- Deepen the breath and feel it begin to penetrate more deeply into the body, bringing awareness and a sense of integration into the moment.
- Allow Dog pose to unfold from this sense of the wholeness already present. Recognize that the conditions were created prior to exploring the posture.

- Come back down and rest onto the forearms with the toes tucked under
- Go through a similar process of relaxing, freeing the spine, sensing the wholeness of the body and beginning to sense the potential energy build as you sit back and then let Elbow Dog pose unfold from there. Notice how the posture feels as a result of the preparation.
- Explore both poses one more time and go slowly in the preparatory phase, being patient and seeing what arises each time.
- Come up to standing and free the shoulders, exploring instinctive movement to undo any tension.
- Lightly place the hands into reverse Namaste, behind the back, without overly forcing the structures involved.
 With feet parallel, take one step forward. Then, when you are ready, keep the qualities of freedom, space and integration present as you slowly begin to move forwards.
- From here, release your arms and, with a free, open spine, begin to rotate. Lift one arm up and drop one arm down to allow Trikonasana to be expressed while you maintain awareness of how your previous awareness created freedom for the position.
- Try the same two postural explorations on the other side.
 Remember to create the conditions before entering.
- Come back to Trikonasana on the first side, preparing by creating the conditions before entering, and then allow the back leg to come up so that the body finds its way into Half Moon. Engage both hands and feet strongly, without locking, aware of the integration and sensing how the preparation has been key to the felt sense of freedom and lightness.



EFFORTLESSNESS

Although Western principles and values can easily be applied to all of our activities, including our yoga, more often than not this application is not useful. For example, the Western cultural model's attention to detail and approach to logic has created a cascade of physiological understanding regarding the benefits of asanas. We may consider this a positive development because it helps us to broadly understand the effects of asanas and gives foundational evidence for skeptics from the scientific community. Nevertheless, ambition and an obsession with goals and goal-driven achievement, one of the cornerstones of Western culture, actually takes us further away from yogic principles and, ultimately, away from ourselves. In yogic practice in the West especially, a fine line exists between diligence, discipline and commitment on the one hand, and becoming overly ambitious and attempting to rush your process on the other.

If we allow this Western, goal-oriented approach to dissolve, acknowledging it as the result of a modern human cultural system, whose inhabitants are bombarded with messages encouraging them to continuously exist in a state of desire, then the process of free exploration emerges as an alternative. We cannot remove desire from our human experience, but we can refocus it and channel its energy into open inquiry and play.



Using a "slackline" engages us from the feet and ankles upwards.

This brings an awareness to the whole body that is
not normally present during regular walking. 11

Yoga helps to check the ambitious aspects of our character by encouraging us to use the optimal rather than the maximum amount of effort in our asana and movement practice. Such a practice helps us eliminate excessive force and let go of what is unnecessary, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual in nature.

This reduction in forcefulness is tremendously helpful therapeutically as it conserves energy and does not over-stimulate the central nervous system. The resultant benefit is that the parasympathetic nervous system has the chance to remain in charge, ensuring that relaxation, rest, digestion and restoration or healing stay prioritized.

Learning about the necessary and unnecessary tension we bring to postures takes time. John Stirk, in his book for yoga teachers *The Original Body* (2015), describes this as essential and non-essential tension. Investigating and exploring this helps us to identify where we may have used excessive force.



The Greek myth of Sisyphus describes a king who was punished by having to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, only to have the stone fall back down because of its own weight. Sometimes we tend to exhibit this same kind of endless overdoing.¹²

Developing effortless ways to move and explore postures in no way circumvents the need to continue to refine and "practice." On the contrary, daily exploration remains essential. Turning oneself to the task at hand on days when things seem more difficult is a key component of long-term cultivation. The practice becomes a process of learning to work smarter, not harder, to refine and integrate all that you are learning and becoming.

If a practitioner or client is ambitious, then yoga helps to temper that ambition. If a practitioner moves too fast or pulls too hard, then he or she will create strains. Yoga demands that you maintain a gentle pace over the long term to progress safely.



Using the right amount of tension is essential. We can think of the amount of tension as only that which is necessary. John Stirk, osteopath and yoga teacher, describes this as utilizing the essential tension.¹³

It is in the therapeutic interest of clients to develop effortlessness in their yoga practice, so that they can build the necessary resources to support their healing. Clients arrive at your office in all manner of conditions, in all sorts of states of heart and mind, often with a variety of unconscious compensations. These adaptations are ways that the body has made efforts to resolve issues that have limited its capacity to function easily, self-correct and optimally heal. These compensations may be postural, a modified body process, or some other internal relational change. Our yoga therapy process supports these changes and encourages the whole being to find ever greater harmony.

CASE STUDY

V is a gentleman in his sixties with a range of minor issues affecting many men his age. He has attended classes for more than six years and has been absorbing the principles of this approach to yoga therapy practice.

As well as working in a corporate environment, V is a musician and has trained very specific parts of his body for years to play his instruments. He has some arthritis in his hands as a result of his musical pursuits, and as with many amateur musicians, his gigs involve moving heavy equipment during set-up and break-down. His yoga therapy practice therefore ensures that he both have the strength to perform this responsibility and can maintain the dexterity in his hands to play his instrument.

V has worked extensively and consistently on his practice, developing good awareness and a positive attitude toward his yoga experience. The yoga therapy practice has been tailored to help him build integrated strength and awareness of whole body movement for the heavy lifting, focusing on things such as squats and awareness of arm to spine integration, and sensitive hand, arm and neck awareness for his musical work. Overall, the yoga therapy process has helped him to continue to enjoy his hobbies and mitigate some of the effects of V's sedentary working lifestyle.

One of the key insights that he relayed to me was how the attention to effort and the pursuit of effortlessness in the therapeutic yoga practice was making him realize how much excessive force he was using in playing the guitar. He used to finish gigs feeling exhausted, assuming it was a necessary part of the process. This change in awareness brought about by his yoga therapy practice now allows him to finish these evenings feeling more energized.

EXERCISE

- Start on all fours.
- Keep the eyes open and open the heart smile.
- Explore a Dog pose. Use strength, power and muscular force to hold yourself up.
- Come back down and relax.
- Explore a range of other postures (standing—Warriors, balances; and supine—leg stretches and twists).
- Return to Dog pose, bringing an attitude of effortlessness.
- Notice the difference in the way the posture feels. What if all postures had this level of ease?
- Translate this effortlessness into sitting positions from the pelvis up through the spine, once the muscles of the spine have relaxed enough to allow this sense of space to emerge.
- Place fingers on the floor on either side of the body to support the ability of the spine to elevate without getting jammed in the shoulder girdle.



ELASTICITY AND TENSION

The human body is an extraordinarily elastic, living system. It uses its inner tension to hold itself upright. To some degree, the balance between tension and flexibility is necessary in all life forms, whether it be humans, animals, trees or plants. This elastic tension holds structures together and maintains their inner space by holding them apart, allowing the system to adjust to pressures and changes in the environment.

FASCIA

Fascia or connective tissue is the material that binds the body together. It wraps every muscle, every muscle fiber, and every structure in the body, creating a total body sheath. The elastic tension in our bodies is maintained by the muscles and the connective tissue, together known as the myofascia. The elastic tension of these structures provides the internal environment for the living system to function in response to gravity and gives the system strength and flexibility.



When elasticity and tension are perfectly balanced, there is a sense that postures can be effortlessly suspended.¹⁴

The myofascial system is organized within the body based on our movement and our patterns of experience and can feel substantially different from one side to the other, affecting our perception of balance. Most of the fascia in the body runs vertically (from head to feet), except the diaphragms where connective tissue runs laterally.

When we hear the term diaphragm, we may commonly assume this to mean the respiratory diaphragm. In this context we are using the term to describe other places in the body where connective tissue runs transversely. The diaphragms of the body are sheets of skeletal muscle and fascia that run horizontally across the body and transversely bridge between boney structures at various levels, creating partitions between different regions of the body. These include:

- thoracic inlet—across the shoulders and collar bones
- pelvic diaphragm—across the pelvic floor
- jaw and mandibular structures
- neck, throat and hyoid bone
- tentorium running laterally across the inside of the skull
- tissues running across the hands and the feet.

When we look more closely, the connective tissues that form the joint capsules also have a component that runs laterally. So in reality every joint is effectively a transverse diaphragm.

Throughout the process of exploring yoga therapy with clients, we will see again and again how this myofascial web plays a central role in body structure, organization and posture. The client learns to engage with their own experience of the myofascia, by developing their awareness, to bring about change in the balance of their tissues.

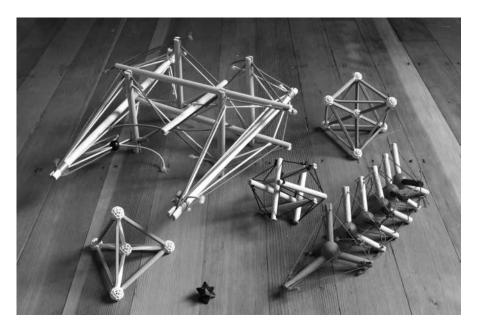


Muscles and connective tissues and other structures interweave to create a vast elastic matrix. The elastic nature of the body can be thought of as a web. 15

TENSEGRITY

When yoga first came to the West and began to be studied through the scientific lens of the time, the biomechanical model stated that areas of the body functioned independently and only certain muscles were involved in each posture. The development in our understanding of connective tissue dynamics has now made it clear that the entire structure is involved in every movement. When developing models of the human body as a dynamic tensional system, scientists borrowed ideas from other disciplines in an attempt to explain what was happening.

The idea of tensegrity was developed as a principle in architecture by Buckminster Fuller and describes an interconnected network of structures which use tension and pressure in order to move or retain their shape. Tensegrity structures are held apart by the tensional forces inherent in the system and demonstrate integrity in their ability to maintain their shape. Our body seems to have similar properties to that of a tensegrity system and this concept, known as biotensegrity, can help us to understand the forces at play in the living body.



Tensegrity describes structures that maintain their shape and integrity through the tension of the elastic structures. Similar processes occur throughout nature. The body can be thought of as a biotensegrity system. ¹⁶

Our physical yoga asana practice helps us to maintain our body's elasticity long into life. Responding to demands placed on it through diverse situations, the living mind/body system dynamically and intelligently changes. If we explore movement practices that open and balance the body's tensions, the body remodels around the requirements of these movements. If we are sedentary in our working and home lives, making relatively few movements, our bodies respond by tightening, contracting, essentially moving toward atrophy. In addition, if we fail to address other contributing lifestyle factors, such as diet and stress, tension and inelasticity may become debilitative, causing an avalanche of related problems. When not addressed, the body's diminished elasticity affects both structure and function.

The physical practice of yoga encourages opening up the body and releasing tension. Most clients that come for yoga therapy arrive with areas of tightness or weakness in the myofascial matrix that are creating some structural or functional issue.

As we begin to explore this tensional resistance in the body, we begin to realize that its source is not always only physical. Often it is affected by other layers of our being, particularly the mental realm. In yoga practice, the body reveals different kinds of tension, some of them essential and some non-essential, as explained by yoga teacher and osteopath John Stirk:

- Essential tension is the tension necessary to move into and maintain the yoga position.
- Non-essential tension is tension and forces that are excessive, not needed in the moment to maintain the posture.

As the yoga therapy process unfolds, non-essential tension begins to drop away so that only essential tension remains for the client. This creates moments of postural exploration where the various tensions of the body reach a balance point. In these brief moments, the client's body is essentially suspended in the myofascial tensional matrix, without having to apply as much effort.

In the early phases of the yoga therapy journey, experiencing tension can be challenging and uncomfortable and may invoke resistance in the client. Providing pain education is key in yoga therapy, while stressing the need to work gently with the body as it undoes many years of conditioning. The gentle, kind approach helps avoid injury and is of utmost importance in the early stages of practice. As clients go deeper into the practice, they can choose to meet the tension more directly in order to shift and accelerate change.

DIFFERENTIATING PAIN AND TENSION

Part of yoga therapy involves discovering our relationship to pain and tension. People mistakenly believe that yoga is about forcing the body to open up. We are not trying to force things upon the body and injure ourselves. On the contrary, our yoga practice wants to open us and support our body's ability to heal. (For more information on working with clients in pain, see Chapter 26.)

In the first phases of yoga's transition to the West, students were invited to meet pain head on and the terms "good pain" and "bad pain" were used. This led to some practitioners sustaining injuries. As the depth of understanding in the yoga therapy community grows, we begin to transcend this approach. A much more careful approach must be taken, particularly with clients just beginning their yoga journey.

Unless the client has developed a high degree of sensitivity then it may not be intuitive to stop with the range of essential tension, to avoid over-extension. It requires strong vigilance on the part of the yoga therapist to be able to see and communicate this subtlety to their clients. This awareness of limits is refined by a deep and regular personal practice.

We hope to educate the client that the tension arising from tissue change may feel like an opening occurring and the sense is that structures are being changed and transformed in a way that is sustainable and not damaging. If the exploration becomes painful and a movement or posture places too much strain on the body, we help the client to understand that this is the time to ease back from the full posture and perhaps explore more preparation or an alternative.

Differentiating between levels of discomfort becomes a personal journey for the client with the professional support of the yoga therapist. In the early stages, if the client does not have the depth of awareness to discern the difference, the practitioner helps support the growth of this perception in the client. Slow incremental improvements in elasticity are the most desirable for a sustainable

practice, and the yoga therapist may sometimes have to support the client in understanding where their ego and ambition is leading them toward potential injury.

WORKING WITH THE MIND

Working with tension involves working with the mind. As painful or tense areas are encountered, yoga therapy practitioners encourage clients to meet any discomfort with calmness and clarity. Through the yoga process, we practice quieting our minds and shift from ordinary modes of consciousness to a more sensitive perceptual space. We become more attentive to what is happening within us, without succumbing to fear and allowing the mind to wander and become distracted. This means that we meet the tension by facing it, without becoming confrontational.

Rather than allowing the mind to run from the experience of tension, staying with the discomfort as it happens and witnessing the process of change when it occurs allows the experience of the tension to transform itself. This does not mean the client loses their discernment. They must maintain their responsibility of recognizing how long to stay in a position or how far to extend safely into a posture or movement without creating pain. The client becomes adept at staying with the sensation at a comfortable level, and feeling it to the best of his or her ability allows something to shift and start to change and heal. The main journey in working with tension is to meet it, release and let go.

Staying with the sensation may bring up anger, frustration, sadness, despondency or a myriad of other emotions. In the massage therapy world, there is a saying: "The issues are in the tissues." The physical tissue field and the nervous system often store the emotions and energy from past experiences. It is the task of the client to meet what arises and accept the experience fully as it happens. Over time as the feelings are felt, the mind begins to calm down and there is a recognition by the client of the multi-dimensional nature of the experiences.

EXPLORING THE ELASTIC LIMIT

The elastic limit is the body's attempt to communicate a boundary to your consciousness. Working with the body's elastic limit and attempting to push into it releases endorphins and so can be both intense and addictive. Unless this process is explored carefully, we can overstretch and injure ourselves. Working in this way creates a fine balance, a razor's edge, so to speak. Staying slightly inside our elastic limit helps us to work more safely, without the body's intelligence initiating a defensive reaction.

The body's elastic limit changes each day and, in fact, sometimes from moment to moment. I find that the most effective way to work with the body's elastic limit is to persist gently and to explore the same posture multiple times during a single practice. Exploring something, then moving away from it, only to come back and explore it again changes the elastic tensional limitations considerably. Everyone has different levels of elasticity, based on inherent factors, lifestyle (e.g., diet, water intake, emotional patterns), movement background as a child, ways of thinking and even political opinions. Therefore, comparison between individuals is not helpful and ends up as ego conflict.

EXERCISE

- Lie on the back. Lift one leg up toward the sky. Keep the other leg bent with the foot placed firmly on the ground.
- Interlace the fingers behind the thigh and begin to explore the tension present without forcing. Breathe deeply. Explore both legs. Are they different from one side to the other?
- Explore a variety of standing postures. (For example, Warrior positions, balances and a widestride forward bend.)
- Return to lying on the back. This time catch the big toe
 with the index finger; keep the other leg bent and ground
 it gently through the contact points of the foot. Breathe
 deeply. Has the elasticity changed? Is it possible to catch
 the big toe and be comfortable as you do so? If not, go
 back to the original catch behind the thigh.
- Once again explore the tension present without forcing.

- Explore Downward Facing Dog pose and Cobra pose several times each, perhaps also introducing a number of lunges.
- Return to lying on the back. This time catch the big toe
 with the index finger and allow the other leg to extend
 away from you. Keep the ankles, feet and toes of both
 legs relatively relaxed.
- Once again explore the tension present, without using excessive force. Breathe deeply once again. Notice what happens each time you meet the tension of the hamstrings and the response through the spine. Can you reach an experience of balanced tension? How does this feel?

This exercise illustrates a dynamic potential for change in the body. Temporary states of tension can be met and accepted and balanced tension can be found and regularly explored. Our mind/body system seems to reset and undo itself during states of balanced tension, and this reset seems to impact it on different levels.



FEELING CONNECTIONS

Connection is a vital aspect of the human experience and is the foundation of yoga. The word "yoga" means "to yoke, to join together, to unify," which speaks to its ability to connect. The development of a perception of connection is essential to the physical work that underpins the yoga therapy process.

Connecting with self and others consciously is a foundational characteristic of being human. Many people feel alone in a city whilst being surrounded by millions of people. For people to be healthy, they must sense connection in their lives. In native cultures in South America, for example, this is well understood: the Mayan greeting "In Lac'ech" translates as "I am another you." This informs us about the move in awareness from separation to unity consciousness. In the Amazon and the Andes, tribal people call this "being Runa," or a fully awake human being.

This awakened awareness of self as part of community, where each individual human is inseparable from the environment, is very strong among tribal people. We need to facilitate the reawakening of such wisdom in our global family to address the many ways in which our disconnection (from ourselves, each other and from our planet) is leading us toward destruction.

In classical Chinese understanding, we human beings are connected to the Earth and the heavens. This heavenly connection is via a golden thread that connects us from the crown of the head to the sky and is physically manifested in humans at the fontanel. This physical and energetic openness is present in babies but slowly closes down as we spend more time on the Earth plane.

CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE BODY

The spirit of connection is critical to the physical aspect of yoga. The old approach of splitting the body into discrete pieces to understand biomechanics is beginning to change. This principle involves the development of connections throughout the body. When we consciously make a movement, be it familiar or unfamiliar, we can feel the pathway made through the various structures that are required to make that movement. We can describe this as a connection.

A strongly integrated, well-connected body is a healthy body. One of the roles of the yoga therapist is to support the development of connections within the client so that they can feel their body more deeply and more clearly. Over time the client begins to establish their own awareness of their sensory pathways.

ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTIONS

Development of connections within the client's body encourages rich internal communication; and with continued practice in making these connections, diverse and expansive integrative pathways form. This creates a foundation of health, based on wholeness.

This wholeness begins to be expressed on every level of the client's being, as all layers (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and energetic) are interwoven and therefore affected. The same kinds of interconnections are happening within the brain as we are exposed to new ideas, learn about new subjects, think new thoughts and create new neural pathways.

Over the course of a lifetime, parts of our body become physically and energetically separated from each other or fragmented through trauma, injury and other challenging life circumstances. This phenomenon of somatic disassociation is now well understood as a result of scientific and mind/body studies into trauma and its resolution.

The founder of cranial osteopathy, William Sutherland, described disconnected areas of the body as "withering fields," no longer able to receive energetic flow and physical nourishment, and unable to receive nutrients or remove waste products normally. Such conditions can serve as precursors to bodily dysfunction, pain and disease. The connections that we establish in our yoga therapy process can help to

revivify areas of the body that were disconnected from the whole and were therefore not able to function to their full potential.

PERCEIVING THE FULL PICTURE

The human body is more than just the sum of its parts. Body systems are interwoven in complex ways that we are only in the last few decades beginning to understand. Whilst a connection felt in yoga therapy can be reduced to a singular event for descriptive purposes and tracked anatomically, the overall response is body-wide and is far richer and more complex than can be described in a linear way.



The brain stem, at the top of the spinal cord, brings together and integrates information from all aspects of the living system.¹⁷

The body is essentially a-causal. This means that there is no linear cause and effect. Instead there are multiple causes and multiple effects. If we add the fact that every moment is different and the experience of connection changes in every exploration of the pose, we have an enormous array of complexity.

Observing the complexity of the body requires a combination of both focused perception and diffuse concentration, to tune in to the cascade of events happening in any one moment. Dozens of connections occur simultaneously, switching back and forth in our consciousness much like movements made in a magnetic field.

In yoga therapy, we work with clients to begin to develop this kind of concentrated attention so that they can track the connections that they feel in their own bodies, dropping any fear or overwhelm from feeling or sensing.

ANALOGIES IN NATURE

By observing other natural ecosystems, we can begin to get a sense of the complex interactions inside of us. Ron Milo, from the Weizmann Institute of Science, suggests that the average human body is made up of approximately 30 trillion cells (Sender, Fuchs and Milo 2016). This level of complexity in interactions is impossible for us to wrap our heads around and yet we can look at it and compare it to other complex systems to get a sense.

For example, the Earth's weather systems have a high degree of complexity, with local and regional weather patterns, interacting and changing over time. This is similarly a complex a-causal system. Whilst the scale is far different and the number of factors influencing change is different, the principle remains the same.

As previously discussed, one of the main conduits for connection in the human body is the fascial system, which is the web of connective tissue surrounding all structures in the body. As an example, a connection may be sensed from the big toe through the arch of the foot and up the inner thigh, through the pelvic floor and into the abdominal cavity, thanks in part to connective tissue relationships.

Since yogic teachings arrived in the West, teachers have tried to find ways to describe yoga's process and its effect on the living system. B.K.S. Iyengar was in large part responsible for bringing the yoga asanas over to the West and making them well-known. Along with the postures, he brought instructions on how to do them. In my opinion, Iyengar may well have taken his own personal perception of the connections that he felt in his own body as he explored the asanas and used that to teach from. These later became codified and used by his understudies as cues to teach the postures.

SUBTLE CONNECTIONS

The connections awakened and perceived through the yoga therapy process are communicated via all of the systems of the body. Much of the information we receive comes from the system of feeling—the nervous system—but this is not the whole story. Other systems in the body also mediate the connections and give us more subtle information that doesn't fall into the main five senses.

Body connections traverse across all systems and are underpinned by energetic connections. Our science tells us that this is first a world of energy and then a world of objects. In the yoga tradition, these energetic pathways, called nadis, underpin physical reality. Nadis, similar to meridians in Chinese Medicine, are energetic pathways that run around the body and affect the overall health of the human system. There are approximately 60,000 nadis in the body, many of which represent physical fluid pathways, like arteries, veins and nerves, whilst others represent non-physical pathways.

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS

In yoga therapy, the therapist helps clients develop their own sense of connection within their bodies. Indeed, this developing sense of connection may be more accurately described as an accumulation of connections, resulting from many sessions, that the subconscious then remembers. For this reason, this principle takes time to develop as a felt experience.

The therapist identifies and shares a connection from personal practice that he or she perceives to be relevant to a client's situation, and then they both explore making that connection through a variety of guidance methods, which could be compared to the client following in the footsteps of the therapist.



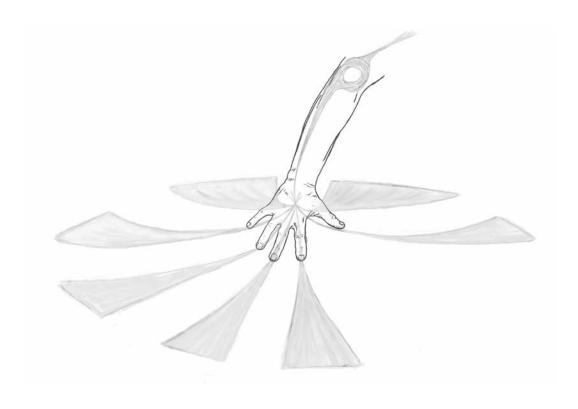
The author explores headstand, whilst his teacher uses hands-on adjustment to illustrate connections. 18

RELINQUISHING CONTROL

This aspect taps into another principle of body intelligence. Once an individual establishes a connection, then the body takes over from the therapist and begins to reorganize and make its own connections based on the recently introduced awareness. Essentially, the newly awakened area or pathway of awareness becomes a nodal point for an increasing number of strands of awareness and connection.

This means that the process, in that moment, involves letting the body teach you. The role of both the client and the therapist is to continue looking with fresh eyes at the newness of the connections emerging in consciousness. In essence, at this point we are viewing a self-organizing system.

Over time, these increased connections help to slowly integrate the mind/body. Although the goal-oriented mind wants to make each individual connection the goal, each connection turns out to be only a step on the bridge of that day's practice and the healing journey of the individual. The connections that begin to reveal themselves through the yoga therapy process are both pathways for integration and routes for letting go.





Similar to the foot, the hand has a series of arches that have the capacity to support weight from above. 19

Stretching the body brings us to an awareness of the most gross level of connection, although it can help to open the body and release tension. Smaller, more integrative movements and our refined tracking of these movements bring ever more subtle levels of unification into the consciousness:

"Connections keep getting renewed. The body can show us something new, only if we step aside." (Diane Long, student of Vanda Scaravelli)

Ultimately everything in the body is connected, and in fact the universe itself is all one. As we delve deeply into ourselves we sense an organizing intelligence that is being verified by modern visionary scientists such as Nassim Haramein who are bringing to light these deep connections through unified physics theories. The ancient ideas of unity and modern science are coming together.

CASE STUDY

A is a lady in her late thirties. She works exceptionally hard in a focused administrative job, is under a lot of stress and often works long hours, putting herself under a great deal of pressure before taking a break. She is Type A in her approach both to her work and her life, which essentially means that she derives meaning through mental understanding and thrives on structure.

She first arrived in my practice as a referral from the integrated medical center at the hospital. Through the initial intake, A talked of pain in her hip and spine, and of multiple stress-related responses. She also appeared to exhibit some anxiety.

We began the yoga therapy process by working through some simple yoga asanas that limited the pressure on her areas of discomfort. These explorations included all the main spinal movements (forward bending, backward bending, side bending and twists), as well as various kinds of freer movement, mostly supine, sitting and standing. Early on in her practice, A observed intense feelings of vibration in her body whilst exploring different postures.

I encouraged her to let these releases travel up and out toward her head, or down and out toward her feet, letting go through channels of connection that she did not attempt to define. A's example offers us, as yoga therapists, a different view of learning about the variety of internal connections people experience. Generally, people feel these connections as the perception of personal tension or connection or as less intense release processes.

At first this release process was scary and disturbing for A. As we worked with it over time, she has become more comfortable and familiar with the process and sensed the benefit afterwards.

During most sessions, A now experiences at least some of this energetic release whilst in a posture exploring a principle and creating a connection. Her attitude to self-care is strengthening, and she sees these connective explorations as an ideal opportunity for regular growth, release and understanding.

What has been cultivated within A are connections or routes for letting go. She has done an excellent job of working to develop her own understanding of these connections as a way to manage her experience.

Through her yoga therapy explorations, she has developed skill in releasing stress and a familiarity with this unusual and very personal form of release. Through her development of awareness as to how to work with these internal connections, she has discovered an approach which works for her that enables a deep and regular commitment to release and self-care.

EXERCISE

- Start on all fours.
- Without initiating any movement, notice what connections arise in your consciousness. For example, notice the way forces are transmitted through from the pelvis toward the knees or from the spine through the shoulders toward the hands.
- Identify a very specific connection that seems important at that moment and bring focus to it.
- Enter into Dog pose and maintain awareness of that connection.

- Open the heart smile.
- As the posture takes shape and the breath enters into the body, notice what other connections seem to be emerging from within the posture. Notice those that are both gross and subtle. Track them carefully with a broad view.
- Come back down to all fours.
- The web of connections continues as you return back down to rest. Can you still feel the original connection?
 What else do you notice?
- Explore a variety of postures while maintaining awareness of the first connection:
 - Tree pose
 - Triangle pose
 - King Pigeon pose
 - Sitting widestride forward bend
 - Sage twist.
- See how this first connection links to secondary and tertiary awarenesses of connection in these different positions.
- At the end of the session, adopt a Savasana and let any focus on specific connections cease, to enable reintegration.



GENERATING ALIVENESS

Aliveness is the recognition of being here, embodied on Earth, which ties in to our awareness. It relates to the ability to feel oneself as alive.

This sounds simple, but many people are literally not able to feel parts of themselves. Sometimes the parts of themselves they cannot feel are physical, other times they are at the emotional layer. Ultimately this deadening can happen in any of the five frames of reference.

When an area is not listened to, acknowledged and responded to, it slowly shuts down its communications. Over long periods of time, if messages are continuously ignored, areas of the body can begin to literally wall themselves off and atrophy and disease can begin to occur.

For example, a daily postural imbalance or collapse in sitting, which gives rise to an aching back, relates to thousands of ignored sensations over a long period of time. The individual with the back issue has grown accustomed to discomfort and the associated deadening of the nervous impulses of the region.



Nature is infinitely creative in its adaptation. This tree modifies its growth to its circumstances. Nature is relentless in finding ways to express its aliveness.²⁰

This process of tuning things out is not "wrong." Rather, it is one of the brilliant ways in which the mind/body system deals with the overwhelming amount of information flooding in from both the internal and external environments, in every moment.

Our work with clients is to support them as they begin the process of tuning back into their body. From a yoga therapy perspective, we are encouraging these forgotten parts to be brought back into the fold to be reconnected with.

When we begin our practice there are many parts of our body that we are not aware of, which can be considered as "dead zones." Using a farming analogy, if we consider a landscape in which certain parts of it are arid, they are no longer receiving nourishment from their essential resource (water) and are dying.



When the fluid systems of the body are not able to provide nourishment to an area, the cells cannot perform their functions as effectively.

Dr. Sutherland described these areas as withering fields.²¹

The same is true in the body. Each cell depends upon energy and fluid systems to perform its trophic functions, as these systems deliver and remove the necessary products so that each of the many billions of cells can stay healthy.

PRACTICING ALIVENESS

Beginning to sense aliveness is exciting and can reinvigorate the whole being. Things that we were unaware of, that we were tuning out, slowly begin to flood in.

As parts of the body are reawakened and reconnected they begin to communicate again. This may be felt as an area being uncomfortable, painful or overstimulated for a time but, as the body adjusts, this settles and becomes normal. Over time as we enliven our whole field (mind/body/energetics) and develop the ability to sense through the body, we get clearer on how to meet the subtle blocks and use aliveness to penetrate deeper.



Light piercing through the trees brings life to the forest. This is similar to awareness reaching deep into areas of the body that have been forgotten.²²

We refine new sensory skills and learn when to readjust, when to engage, when to relax and release, when to exaggerate the breath and so on. This creates dialogue between our consciousness and the system and allows the body to illustrate its dynamic intelligence and its self-healing potential.

Including this aspect within our practice begins to build an overall awareness of the body, from parts and regions through to the totality, even developing awareness to the point of including the whole sensorium moment to moment. At times we are quite literally feeling our body from head to toe.

We can consider this approach to practicing aliveness as "distributing aliveness or awareness."

When we start, we cannot feel things clearly and this can be difficult and humbling. Parts of the body feel isolated from each other in movements and postures and it takes time to allow feeling and sensing to re-emerge.

Some of the many ways we may support aliveness include:

- moving or feeling through a tense area with delicacy
- linking areas of the body together using the felt sense
- focusing our awareness on structures we know are there and seeing what, if any, sensations arise

- exploring innovative ways to enter into movement and asana
- looking at small sensations and larger sensations
- allowing analogies to arise linking the sensations in to the imagination and watching the body's response.

There is a difference between sensing and fidgeting. It is helpful if we talk to the client about patience early in the process. Being patient and feeling through the body consciously and regularly will help awareness to grow. In time we can use aliveness pre-emptively, feeling issues before they arise as problems. This allows us to work with clients to maintain an ongoing sense of vitality and health.

CASE STUDY

Y is a gentleman in his forties affected by serious stiffness and associated spinal issues. The primary diagnosis given by the medical establishment was muscle rigidity. I started work with Y in a small group setting consisting of two other similar aged gentlemen.

Y is deskbound much of the day through his work in the IT profession, which consolidates the physical and movement restrictions. He is an avid table tennis player and had visible muscular and fascial development to support the postures and movements required for this sport.

Through extensive work over several years, in weekly or bimonthly group yoga therapy sessions, the restrictions have begun to lessen. Y's body began to become looser, pain began to diminish and new movement has become possible.

Because of the intense movement restriction, the practice has centered on generating aliveness primarily through simple yoga asanas, awareness and breath practices and soft movement. The aim has been to re-awaken the nervous system and develop muscular and movement pathways through the body. This has involved gentle and careful work to unravel the years of tension and stiffness that have accumulated.

In this particular client relationship, extensive details of the client's personal life have not been discussed, with the exception of basic work, family and medical information. Part of this is cultural. This has made it difficult to get any sense of the root cause of the issue. It may

have hereditary origins or it may relate to some aspect of Y's lifestyle or personal history that has yet to be shared.

Within six months of work, most medications have been reduced to zero, as agreed between Y and his physician, and much higher levels of body mobility have been developed. With continued practice and regular self-care, he is hopeful that these improvements can be sustained.

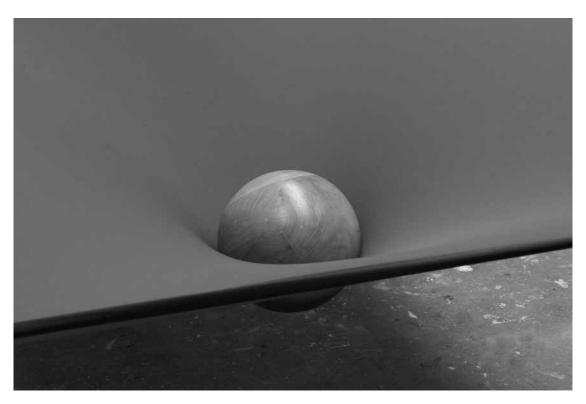
EXERCISE

- The first exploration will be to develop aliveness centrally.
- Start on the back of the body with the knees bent and tune in to the spine. Notice which part of it you can feel and which parts of it are cloaked from your awareness.
 Make a note of these.
- Explore several asanas of your choice and come back to lying on the ground. Has it changed? Are you now more aware of the parts of your spine you could not feel earlier?
- Bring your fingers and toes alive, through gentle movement feeling the nervous system pathways through which the information travels. Does this enlivening bring a change of awareness in the spine?
- Are there any areas of your body that you are having a challenging time feeling? Where are they? Place your hands on them and breathe. What happens?
- Do you know where your organs reside in your body? Tune in to your organs one by one. You can put your hands on them (heart, lungs, liver, stomach, intestines, kidneys). Can you feel them? What do you notice about how they feel? What are the sensations or analogies that arise from this exploration? How do their aliveness relate to inner body aliveness generally?



GROUND AND GRAVITY

Gravity is the pervasive force that holds the universe in place. It maintains the Earth's position in its orbit around the Sun and holds us and all other objects onto the planet.



Gravity has the powerful effect of shaping the space and structures that are affected by it. Our bodies are affected by gravity in each moment and yet with awareness we can work with gravity, rather than against it.²³

When we use the word "ground," we are referring to the Earth or surface supported by the Earth on which we stand. So often we fail to notice this surface on which we spend our lives.

As our culture creates ever more man-made surfaces on which to live, we easily lose contact with the energies of the Earth, the soils from which the plants grow and the stones that lie underneath. Even the reasons to retain such mindfulness of the Earth seem to have been forgotten.

The awareness of this element as part of yoga is very old. Originally the term "asana," now synonymous with posture, meant the seat or ground on which the yogi practiced. In yoga we bring our attention to the ground and our relationship to it.

In yoga therapy, bringing awareness to the ground means regularly returning our attention to the surface on which we are resting in order to cultivate our attentiveness to its impact.

GROUNDING

The term "grounding" has many meanings.

Grounding is required after a period of travel, when we have literally uprooted ourselves and find ourselves in a new place. Grounding becomes ever more important in our current culture where we can travel huge distances without touching the ground. In this instance, grounding is the process of arriving—of becoming fully conscious of our embodiment and aware of our new surroundings.

Being grounded can also be a condition or state of being. When we describe somebody as grounded, we mean that he or she is in touch with reality, capable of making good decisions while also remaining present to everyday conditions.

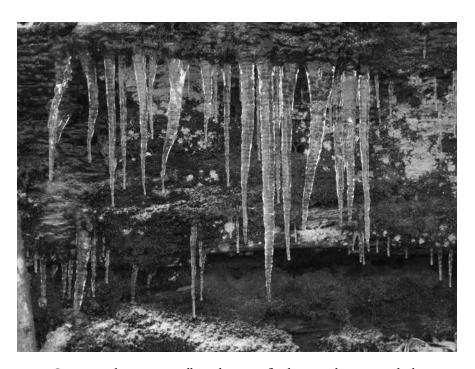
Grounding is also required when change dominates in our lives. In this sense, grounding is a way of integrating life changes in a healthy way. Grounding to integrate change takes us out of our mental processes, out of thought, and draws us down into the body, into our location and experience of ourselves in the moment. As this happens, we become aware of releasing our weight downward with the force of gravity.

It is this last aspect of grounding that may be most relevant to yoga therapy.

When clients arrive for a session, they require grounding if they:

- are highly mentally occupied with their jobs
- have gone through an overwhelming period of change
- have trouble with physical balance
- are stressed out mentally
- find themselves trapped in unhelpful stories or patterns.

In each of these situations, clients may become consumed by their circumstances and lose their body awareness. Grounding, in this instance, literally means the action of sending attention downwards through the body toward the Earth. The physical experience of feeling the weight drop down into the feet may feel like water falling downwards toward the Earth. Although everybody has heard of grounding, this type of tangible experience, in a yoga therapy setting, may be new and powerful.



Gravity works incrementally to draw any fluid system down towards the center of the Earth. In the body, gravity plays a role in the movement of fluid systems that do not have their own pump, such as the lymphatics.²⁴

Vanda Scaravelli would often talk to her students about growing roots down deep into the Earth to stabilize their bodies while standing and balancing. Grounding, as a physical action, can be done in any position, be it sitting, standing, lying down or even in inversions.

When we lie down on the hard ground, the solidness of the ground demands that the body soften. In the early stages of these supine explorations, clients are often unable to let go and retain their muscular tension. Over time, this rigidity begins to melt. The same kind of physical changes do not occur when we lie down in a soft bed. There may be rest and relaxation associated with becoming horizontal, but the body is not forced to soften in the same way because of the softer surface.



Structures in nature are constantly formed and eroded by the elements. These natural forces play a role in how the shapes emerge and change. Gravity has an interactive role in this change process, as it always impacting the elements, particularly the oceans and tides.²⁵

GRAVITY

"We cannot touch it or see it but it has guided the evolutionary design of every plant and animal species and dictated the size and shape of our organs and limbs." (Boslough 1989)

Gravity is the extraordinary force of attraction that holds things in place in the universe. It meets and shapes all creatures on the Earth from their moment of birth. For clients to find effortlessness in their body through their yoga therapy explorations, they must meet this force of gravity skillfully. By learning to release resistance to this gravitational force, they allow themselves to be drawn into the ground.

In practical terms, meeting gravity requires that yoga therapy clients relax their muscular holding patterns and release resistance. Relaxing is not synonymous with collapsing. On the contrary, relaxing downward brings a corresponding movement back up toward the sky. This response to the force of gravity is a natural arising that can be described as anti-gravity or lightness.

Many of the deeper structures in the body manifest this anti-gravity response. We have only to consider the arches of the feet, moving up through the deep core of the leg and the lift through the pelvic floor and into the spine. Some fluid systems that do not have a pumping mechanism—the lymph system, for example—depend on these gravitational forces to support the transportation of fluids around the body. Furthermore, gravity affects the body by organizing around a central axis or midline.

When the client is working well, this anti-gravity force results in a feeling of buoyancy. One of Vanda Scaravelli's key findings was that when we stand upright, aligning with gravity and the gravitational center in the lower abdomen, a sense of separation occurs in the spine. Feeling enters the back of the waist, allowing everything above the back of the waist (above lumbar vertebrae 4 and 5) to lift and everything below to drop.



When the practitioner goes inwards and finds the principles within her, the pose begins to flower open and express a profound lightness.²⁶

Exploring the ground and gravity in yoga therapy practice may sound simple, but the impacts are profound. Such exploration changes the experience, for the client, that arises from the practice.

CASE STUDY

X is a gentleman in his sixties affected by a variety of issues.

The primary diagnosis given by the medical establishment was Primary Lateral Sclerosis, a complex poorly understood condition that consists of diminishing motor skills, problems with balance, reduced coordination and extremely high levels of stiffness. This was later changed to Cerebella Ataxia, a condition where the cerebellum gets damaged or inflamed and affects gait and muscle coordination.

When I first started to work with X, he had a baclofen pump inserted under the skin releasing the drug baclofen into the spine in an attempt to reduce spasticity. This was subsequently deemed to be ineffective and was removed.

X is deskbound much of the day through his profession. This consolidates collapse, shortening of the spine and tension in the body generally. A mind-oriented job further exacerbated a disconnection from the body, which is evident in the posture held as normal.

Working with X over time has also involved working with mental conditioning. A number of mental factors that are also being addressed are:

- fear of falling due to several falls relating to the condition
- an injury experienced a decade ago, where a car hit him whilst walking, which never fully healed and is continuing to affect the nervous system.
- immersion in a working environment which looks at war and trauma
- an attitude of seeing the body as something "other" and talking of it as if it was separate and against him.

The approach to working with X was to develop a daily yoga practice that began to address general flexibility, by focusing awareness on breath, spine, gravity and the ground. Improving his understanding of ways to transmit tension and weight into the ground, particularly on the exhalation, has been an essential component.

Balance has been a central feature of the practice (both static and dynamic) and so walking outside has formed part of our sessions. Navigating the urban landscape, which most of us take for granted,

has been used extensively to improve confidence and to free up the body. This outdoor component has also helped integrate session work more deeply into the body.

Positive reinforcement and a reframing of internal dialogue has been crucial, to enable him to begin to work with the body rather than against it.

With extensive work, X has managed to develop a rigorous, daily yoga and movement practice which is slowing the diminishment of quality of life associated with the condition, whilst bringing a daily sense of embodiment.

EXERCISE

- Start by lying on the ground.
- Have the arms out wide at shoulder level and the knees bent with the feet flat on the floor.
- Feel the hardness of the ground and relax the body so that it receives gravity as fully as possible.
- If any part of the body does not feel relaxed, readjust.
 For example, if the shoulders are tight with the arms at shoulder level, lower the arms slightly to bring them closer to the sides of the body.
- Allow the spine to be drawn into the ground so that gravity affects the entire torso. If the spine doesn't drop down initially, bring one knee in at a time with the other leg extended to help the back of the waist lengthen.
 Feel the changing contact with the ground through each transition.
- Explore some other supine postures, such as Rolling Bridge and a supine twist. Bring attention to the ground and the feeling of gravity acting on the body, moment to moment.
- Flip over onto all fours. Alternate between the Downward Facing Dog pose and Upward Facing Dog pose or Cobra

pose. Work at your own speed. Bring attention to your hands and feet as they make contact with the ground and attempt to find the anti-gravity effect.

- Come to standing in Tadasana. Organize the feet so that they are evenly placed in relation to your midline and stand tall. Can you feel the division in the back of the waist?
- Explore a forward bend, allowing the spine to lengthen forward and then fold forward in the direction of the ground. Then return to standing. Can you feel the division in the back of the waist now?
- Explore several standing poses (e.g., Parsvottonasana and Trikonasana). Place the feet carefully so that they can be released fully into the ground. Attempt to find the anti-gravity effect travelling back up through the legs, into the spine and out through the arms.
- Explore several balancing postures, positioning the feet and focusing the eyes ahead of you at eye-level, maintaining a wide gaze. Stand tall and release your weight into the ground. Catch the top of the back foot and come into a balanced posture. Explore finding lightness through the balancing leg. Explore varying the balance by coming into Tree pose. Explore both sides.
- Explore Half Moon from a Triangle pose base. Let the contact with the ground be secure first. Experience the anti-gravity lift back up through the standing leg and then distribute the forces through the torso and remaining limbs.

LIGHTNESS

Cultivating lightness is a foundational principle in this approach to therapeutic yoga.

Lightness is a quality that relates to all levels of the human experience. It applies both personally in the body, mind and spirit and in our relationship to our environment. As we become reflective and self-aware we begin to notice how we are and how we perceive the world. As young adults, we have already developed a certain body type, attitude to life and we each have our own perspective. This perspective has been organized by our early experiences, and links to a general tendency toward optimism or pessimism. The yoga therapy process takes this one step further and begins to recognize that we have a degree of conscious choice in our personal illumination and in how we choose to meet what comes to us in this life.

As the yoga therapist explores this theme, by consciously working on themselves, lightness becomes embodied and can then be shared with clients. Through a creative and collaborative process, the inner fire of the yoga therapist may further ignite the client's enthusiasm for transformation.

As a result, lightness may arise from both directions, either insideout (if the client already has their own experience of lightness—be it physical or otherwise) or outside-in (if they are being introduced to conscious lightness from the outside). Ultimately, if the client is to sustain their own personal yoga therapy self-care practice, they will have to kindle their own fire and lightness. This chapter explores how and where this lightness originates and some of the aspects of this cultivation process.

LIGHTNESS IN THE BODY

The physical dimension of feeling light can bring enormous therapeutic benefits. As with many of the themes in this book it closely relates to and interweaves with many of the other principles. There is no way to "do" lightness in the yoga therapy process. Instead it involves becoming aware of whether we are being heavy or light in any particular moment. By catching oneself in the act of losing awareness, we can make a physical change and re-find the lift, elasticity and lightness, until it becomes a new pattern.



Lightness comes from inside of an individual. Martial artists develop a similar quality of freedom of movement and lightness as their practice is honed through intensive training.²⁷

Just notice right now whether you feel light or heavy in your body as you read. If you feel heavy in sitting, you can re-lengthen the spine without force and position the head over the center of the pelvis as you lift up. The lightness described here in sitting is linked to the weight of the head and its tendency to hang forwards. When the spine is well aligned and the head is supported, lightness emerges naturally.

LIGHTNESS IN THE SKELETON AND THE SPINE

The bones of the skeleton are the hardest and heaviest part of the body and form its central structural component. In yoga therapy, we acknowledge the support of the skeleton and the need to organize it well, and yet we also aim to transcend the perception of weight and cultivate lightness as we experience this aspect of our physical selves.

The skeletal framework is composed of the axial skeleton (the bones of the trunk and head) and the appendicular skeleton (the bones that form the appendages). In most humans, the spine is composed of 24 bones (5 lumbar vertebrae, 12 thoracics and 7 cervicals, not including the occiput or the sacrum). Spongy discs separate the boney vertebrae and act as cushions, which either expand to bring the lightness described above, or compress under heaviness if they have become dehydrated.

Yoga therapy acts as a rehydration process for the body, bringing a flexible, light and free quality to the spine. In ancient Chinese Medicine, there is the held wisdom that young things are vibrant and springy, whilst old things are stiff and brittle. Although this may be generally true, we can observe older people who are full of energy and life and stiff teenagers who are collapsed as they fail to exercise and choose not to get off the gaming machine. So stiffening does not necessarily relate to chronological age.

"You're only as old as your spine." (Joseph Pilates)

In yoga therapy, we aim to free the skeleton and the spine of its unhealthy patterns. Patterns of collapse and heaviness diminish internal space and generate a feeling of being pulled down. An individual with a healthy spine that is able to exhibit lightness may be able to mitigate these issues. This was a key part of Vanda Scaravelli's teaching, as illustrated by the title of her book *Awakening the Spine* (2011). As a client begins the physical aspect of the yoga therapy process, we invite them to organize their structure into various shapes in space, in relation to the ground. Many of these initial cues relate to positioning the skeleton. As they develop their physical awareness they begin to get a clearer sense of their skeletal organization. From here the client can feel the strength and support of their bones and the potential lightness that is available.



Balancing postures require deep rooting and strong engagement in order to find lightness and grace.²⁸

The act of feeling lightness in the body creates a feeling of space internally and an openness in the joints of both the appendicular and axial skeleton. It helps to soften and create a healthy tone in the abdominal tissue and organs and enhances the movement of structures, fluids and energy within the mind/body system.

The feeling of lightness also affects other non-physical aspects of our being which will be explored in the following sections of this chapter.

LIGHTNESS IN THE MIND

As well as developing a physical sense of lightness, lightness of mind may also be a key developmental area for a client in yoga therapy. In essence, this aspect of the work requires that we bring a kind of mindfulness meditation to what is happening.

Mindfulness is a process where we use our observer to notice the content of our thoughts so that we don't become overly attached to them. We encourage the client to be attentive to their own thoughts and we, as yoga therapists, create a non-judgmental environment for them to do so.

Sometimes we find ourselves working with a person with a very negative perspective or someone who has not previously noticed what their baseline mental state is. By supporting the client in allowing their own mind to lighten up, they can avoid grasping at ideas and thoughts, arriving more easily in the present moment by following the sensations. From this point forward the client can learn that, by observing steadily and consistently over a period of time, they can stop their mind from becoming fixated on what they perceive as negative aspects. These states can include pain, discomfort, worry or many other modes of mental activity.

As both client and yoga therapist lighten their minds, we develop a mental focus that is not gripped or bound, and therefore is able to freely shift to the next moment, to the next aspect of sensory information and the next phase of the unfolding collaborative journey.



When finding the freedom and lightness on land it is helpful to understand the connection to our fluid beginnings, whether evolutionary or embryological.²⁹

LIGHTNESS IN THE HEART

Lightheartedness is synonymous with feeling joyful. Cultivating a lightness of heart is a very important part of the yoga therapy process because the internal health of the body takes its cues from the person's attitude. To restate this in a different way, the internal emotional and spiritual state of an individual has an impact on their physiology. This can be very critical for the client who is struggling with a sense of depression or resignation that links to pain or discomfort in their body. By focusing on the health and wellbeing of the heart, we can touch the whole of the rest of the body.

There are chains of events that occur in the body which can have profound effects on health if practiced regularly through yoga therapy or meditation practice.

We can consciously begin the top-down process by directing wellbeing and a sense of love from the mind toward the heart. This can then echo onto the face, softening the eyes and bringing with it a soft smile. We do this in a very light way.



At the end of a fine stem a flower lightly extends out toward the sun.30

A soft smile helps to relax the mouth, jaw and deep throat structures. This in turn opens the brain stem and allows improved function of the autonomic aspects of the nervous system, which governs many aspects of the mind/body system.

When the respiratory diaphragm changes tone, it affects many other structures through the fascial network, which in turn changes pressures and tensions throughout the system.

Ultimately, lightness of heart requires a sense of humor in the folly and a finding of acceptance for where we are in our life and in our body. Wherever the client finds themselves, can they accept the moment with a sense of playful ease? The postural explorations of yoga therapy then arise from this more open state and bring a greater degree of physical lightness.

CASE STUDY

P is a gentleman in his sixties, who found my work online and arrived with no experience of yoga. When he first showed at the office, P was exhibiting stress, had low energy and wanted to use yoga to begin to manage his weight.

Our objectives were to use the yoga therapy process to explore the development of physical awareness and embodiment in relation to calming the system and bring a feeling of wellbeing and developing lightness. In addition, P included eating healthily and walking regularly as part of his change process.

We started the process gently by developing practice sessions that introduced P to the major principles and postures, and in each session I created a simple series of movements to explore. I drew from all the major spinal movement categories (forward bends, back bends, side bends and rotations). In the early stages, there were phases of discomfort in the feet, as major changes occurred through the limbs as the weight began to shed and the weight distribution and forces running through the structure began to change. We managed this by backing off anything that put pressure on the feet until the discomfort had settled. During this time we continued to work on developing awareness and organizing the structure internally and externally with a variety of postures.

P's body began to change considerably. His posture began to become more upright, his abdominal awareness shifted, his breathing improved and his body began to lose some of the weight. As a result, he is moving better and now exhibits a greater degree of lightness in how he carries himself. P is deskbound much of the day through his profession. This creates stiffness and poor digestion as a result of lack of movement. P is senior in his field and as a result faces large stressors. This further affects the autonomic nervous system, activating the sympathetic tone, further consolidating the poor digestion.

As P's body has begun to develop and he has a better understanding of the yoga therapy process, we have been able to increase the intensity of the work, making the practice more dynamic. As a result, we have begun to explore more complex postures and movements and we are slowly working toward inversions. To be done well, these postures require a high level of integration and the ability to find lightness. It will take more time to get P to the place where he is able to explore these postures comfortably, but each time we meet there are small improvements and incremental changes.

Through consistent work over time, P has developed much better overall awareness. He uses his own self-practice to reduce stress when he can and is much better at reading the signs as to when he needs to rest or engage in self-care. He has steadily reduced his weight through improved lifestyle choices. The yoga therapy process is supporting the overall reorganization, internal toning and rebalancing of the body, which is helpful when significant weight change occurs so that the change is sustainable.

EXERCISE

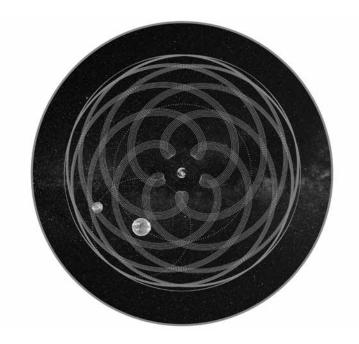
- Stand in Tadasana (Mountain pose).
- Carefully place the feet in a parallel position, hip-width apart.
- Let the mind relax. Relinquishing any other events that do not relate to this moment, lighten the mind.
- Fractionally soften the joints of the legs (ankles, knees, hips).
- Close the eyes and bring the heart to mind with a soft smile (creating the open heart smile). What effects do you feel through the system as you do this? Observe closely.
- Softly lengthen through the centre of the body, experiencing ease and lightness, from the legs upwards through the body without using hard force or effort.
- Take the feet to a wide position and explore a widestride forward bend. Begin by bringing the hands lightly to the shins as you fold forward without bearing weight through the arms so there is no sense of collapse. This way the body and spine have to maintain their lightness. Explore how this feels over the course of several breaths.
- Return to standing. Explore Tree pose. Bring the foot to the inner thigh or inner lower leg and extend the arms up and outwards, keeping the body light and free.
 Whilst in the position, let the mind gently focus and check back in to ensure an open heart smile. What does a balance feel like when lightness is included? Can you be both grounded and light?
- Explore a number of other standing postures. Begin with a
 Triangle pose variation and move on to Warrior positions.
 How is lightness experienced in these postures? What
 do you notice? Lightness is carried up through the body
 from moment to moment. If the body begins to tighten
 and feel heavy, then back off and return to Tadasana.

- This same process can be translated into sitting positions, bringing the lightness up from the pelvis through the spine and being vigilant of collapse. Explore in Cow pose and in Janu Sirsasana.
- Complete the practice by lying down supine and noticing what you are aware of in all aspects of your experience.



RHYTHM AND TIMING

One of the key elements in exploring this particular approach to yoga therapy is rhythm and timing. Cyclical rhythms happen at every level in our universe— from the cycles of planets circling through the solar system, to the way the Moon circles the Earth. Here on Earth, we go through the annual rhythm of seasonal change and can observe many other aspects of nature with similar cyclical occurrences.



Rhythm is everywhere in the universe. The pentagram of Venus or "Dance of Venus" shows the path Venus traces across Earth's sky during the period our Sun goes around the Earth eight times while Venus circles the Sun 13 times.

This image shows six full "Dance of Venus" cycles.³¹

Similarly, our bodies work in a rhythmical way with different processes aligning to their own inner timing. In a healthy human body, rhythms are interdependent and take cues from each other in order to change rate. Examples of internal rhythms include:

- heart rate
- cranial sacral rate
- breathing rhythm
- the mobility and motility of our internal organs.

These rhythms are central to our body's self-organization. They seem to be managed within the brain stem, which handles and coordinates, at least in part, the many strands of systemic integration and communication necessitated by the body.

From a yoga therapy perspective, we pay attention to rhythm and timing to help us to learn to synchronize with the natural aspects of ourselves, both internally and externally. This synchronization has a direct effect on our health and wellness. The pace of our culture and the excessive use of our will during practice can overrule the body's natural timing, leaving us caught up in frantic rhythms that we impose on our bodies.

When we slow down and our body's natural rhythms are attended to, yoga requires less force and effort. "Attending to" our body means that we observe the diversity of sensations that are happening as we explore the postures and notice what stands out. The conscious process of moment-to-moment observation of breath and sensation creates a level of internal synchronization that affects other body systems. These other structures and processes in turn begin to adapt their rhythms. When the body rhythms are optimized and integrated, for example when a slowing down of breathing affects heart rate, parasympathetic processes take center stage and healing is prioritized and accelerated.

As the client develops confidence and experience, through making the practice their own, they find themselves adhering to their own speed and meeting their body's own rhythms. They learn to find their own way to balance work and rest, through the practice, by establishing their rhythm of movement and stillness. Movement, stillness and release are all interwoven and the client's own journey will be determined by their pacing and timing.

Some internal rhythms, such as breathing, are accessible to the conscious mind and give us clear access into our internal landscape. Others are well beyond normal perception and require extensive training to be sensed, for example such rhythms as the visceral rhythms of mobility and motility.

Observing internal rhythms, as part of the therapeutic process, supports the body by providing it with a mirror in which to see itself. If enough energy and resources are available, this helps the sentient body decision-making processes, enabling it to consciously and clearly see its own pacing and timing and recalibrate as necessary. This recalibration helps the body to function better on every level.

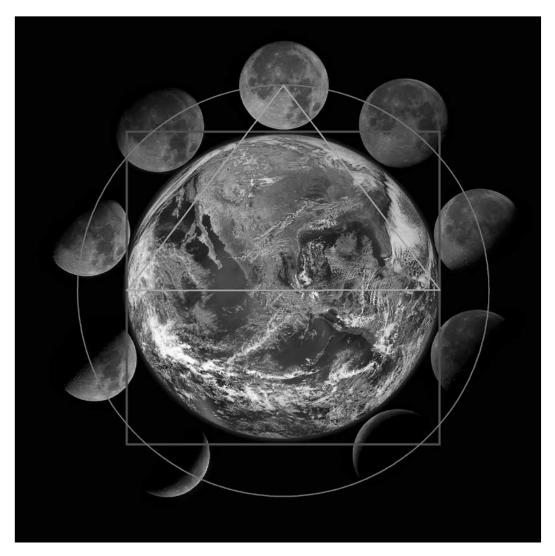
For example, the client may benefit from the nervous system assuming a slower rate, a more parasympathetic tone, changing the chemical release signature and enabling stress to reduce and drop away. The body may have assumed a sympathetic tone at an earlier moment, before the yoga therapy session, and is now unable to reset. The body tends to be better at activation under stress than deactivation after stress, and perhaps a full return to a more normal, less stressed condition was not able to be made. Through long, slow, deep, easy breathing, which helps to calm the heart, the nervous system moves into a more parasympathetic tone. This affects the entire system, allowing the internal rhythms to self-correct, re-establishing a new pattern closer to normal.

THE WAVE

One of the most powerful rhythms we can attend to in yoga therapeutics is the wave-like motion in the spine and the body. This rhythm helps to take us through our practice gently and easily, seeming to come from the outside and express in the body through the partnership of gravitational release, breath and deep spinal rhythms.

This is one of Vanda Scaravelli's major contributions to the world of yoga. Through observation, waiting and listening, and the space and silence she gave her practice, she began to sense a connection between her yoga engagement processes and the rhythms of the body. She recognized that these deeper rhythms of the spine were strengthened through observation, having a profound effect all the way through the body. By working with these continually changing and yet consistently

present rhythms, she noticed that they seemed to bring integration, healing and whole-body changes to life in subtle ways. Over time, with support from the yoga therapist, clients practice noticing their own unique experience of these inner rhythms and are asked to notice how they seem to link to their sense of health and wellbeing.



The Moon's phasic transitions are one of the ways in which we observe celestial rhythms and was the basis for our human lunar calendar.³²



Every molecule of water on earth is affected by the Moon's cycles. At high tide it is possible to feel the greatest effect of these lunar influences (Crozon, Brittany, France).³³

TIMING

Timing in yoga therapy relates to many different facets of the practice. The first component is how long the client stays in any one posture. This varies according to the individual and his or her felt sense, in that moment. It depends on their level of experience, level of strength and health, and the overall intent of their practice.

The question of timing also relates to movement—when we move and how quickly. Some clients will be more ready for a dynamic practice, whereas for some a more gentle, static practice will be needed at first.

And finally, the concept of timing relates to an individual's perception of their whole body movement dynamics and the integration of that movement. As the client enters into a posture or explores a movement, can they be aware of the inner timing and the wholeness of the movement—for example, the simultaneous opening and closing of the joints of their body. When this level of awareness develops, the skillful sensing of joint spaces, it enables transitions in and out of the postures to be coordinated at a unified speed. Feeling this integrated phenomenon is easier when the movement is slowed down.

WORKING WITH CLIENTS ON RHYTHM

For some people, rhythm is introduced at an early age and is part of their lives from childhood. For others, a sense of rhythm is never introduced during their youth. Bringing the idea of rhythm into practice is essential. The idea of yoga therapy as an inner musical process or dance helps the client visualize this rhythmical quality.



Dance is one of the ways in which humans can explore the rhythms of life in relation to another. In yoga therapy we explore our capacity to work with deep rhythms within ourselves.³⁴

Yoga has been described as inner music. In fact, Vanda Scaravelli would describe the body that works well as behaving "like an orchestra." Her observation gives us an insight into her perception of the rhythmical interrelationships within. In reality, we all experience rhythm in our lives, though perhaps we remain unaware of it. Rhythm occurs in many of the spheres of external human existence: in speech, movement, eating, gait, rest and, in fact, in many of our daily affairs. The same is true within the internal environment, as rhythmical activity is demonstrated by our bodies all the time.

The main objective for clients is to learn to witness themselves more deeply and establish a relationship with their own rhythms. This gives them a degree of personal power and control in their therapeutic process; honoring their own sense of timing helps them reconnect with their essence in a subtle way.

CASE STUDY

NT is a lady in her mid-forties. Through our initial intake and discussions, she determined that her major concerns were neck and shoulder tension, anxiety and feeling somewhat ungrounded and disconnected.

Before we began working together, she had only limited experience of yoga. She was going through changes in her marital situation and was feeling the stress of modern life, with three children and little in the way of secular spiritual support, which is often the case in our culture.

NT found the yoga therapy work at a time in her life where she was beginning to have more time for herself and had the inclination and desire to begin to unravel her physical patterns and her past hurts and move into a more feeling-based approach to embodiment.

In our bodies, processes happen rhythmically. The physical embodiment practices have strong rhythmical elements to them and all of this happens within the rhythm of regular yoga therapy sessions and the natural rhythms of nature and the seasons that surround us all. Rhythm is everywhere.

As NT began to attune to all of these rhythms, the practice created deep change and she started to open to joy and awareness in a new way.

Initially a large proportion of the processing was verbal as physical, mental, emotional and spiritual layers began to get peeled back

and she discovered the process of unravelling and finding freedom through being heard. I was careful to ensure that she had some qualified support for this and directed her toward a talk therapist.

As our work together progressed, we focused on movement and asana as a transformative process and she began to physically become freer and lighter and to savor the deep release that came from exploring the practice. I observed that, like many of us modern people, there was a tendency to go into the mind to figure it out, which pulled her out of her body. I designed the practice to provide a balanced rhythm of grounding and lightness. When fear and doubt and the associated story from her personal history arose I would bring her back down to ground and into her body and its sensations.

Her personal practice has flourished and she now uses the practice to support her own personal journey. The energy freed up through the yoga therapy process has also led her into pursuits that allow her to explore her creative potential and process her life experience, such as painting and working with horses. She is also intent on directing her energy in a positive direction and is working toward healing her marriage.

EXERCISE

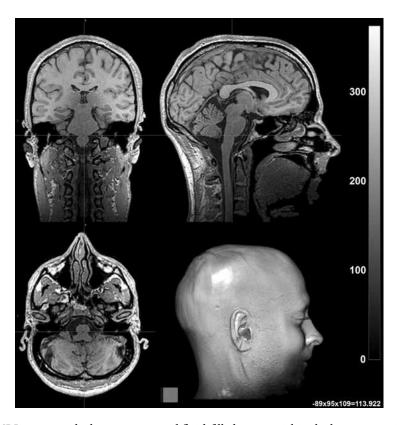
- Starting on all fours, move the weight slightly back toward the heels, taking pressure off the wrists.
- Begin the process of exploring Cat pose, waiting for your breath and allowing a sense of inner timing to guide the process. Each movement doesn't need to be perfectly in sync with the breath. Instead we want to find a feeling of rhythm and ease of movement.
- From all fours, begin to prepare for Dog pose, ascending into and descending from the pose at the same speed.
 Can you feel the joint system open and close as a unit?
- If it is possible, come forwards from Dog pose into a lunge. Notice the timing and pacing of this movement.
 Step back to Dog pose and try the other side. Is it the same on both sides?

- Explore several other poses (working through postural variations in standing or when lying on the back, make the movement into a twist or into plough pose) and work through them at your own pace. What timing and pacing do you prefer around movement?
- Explore the movement you've already explored a second time. As you move through the practice, does this change?

· SPACE

Space exists between things. Space in our physical reality makes things distinct or separate. In our culture, we are taught to experience the world through the separation between objects or things.

In the body, the perception of the presence of space diminishes the feeling of pressure, tightness and tension.



An MRI scan reveals the structures and fluid-filled spaces within the human cranium.³⁵

Developing spaciousness in the body takes time as it requires a reeducation of our awareness. Closely related to lightness as a principle, space is developed slowly and often experienced in several different aspects of ourselves simultaneously.

SPACE WITHIN THE BODY

We can explore different kinds of space from a physical standpoint. The most obvious internal spatial change that we can observe relates to the space created by the breathing process. (This has been discussed in Chapter 7.)

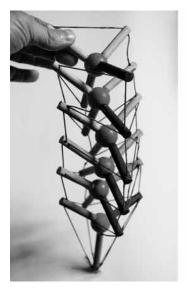
The space we will explore as the core of this principle is fluid space. We perceive it as space because it feels less dense than the more solid structures of bones and tissues.

The Joint Network

One of the ways in which fluid space can be perceived in our bodies is through developing perception of joint spaces, fluid-filled cavities where one boney structure meets another.

Consider the body's joint spaces to be like a network of interrelated openings. Space from one joint can be transmitted to its neighbors, both above and below. The experience of all the joint spaces being open creates a floating sense in the body and allows the practitioner to perceive space directly in the body.

The ancient Chinese describe the joints as "spiritual gates." Opening the joints allows energy to flow more freely, and therefore their opening gives us greater access to our sense of wholeness and our spiritual self.







This tensegrity model of the spine illustrates the balance between tension and space, within a structure, through a balance of compression and tensional forces. This organization seems to apply at both the cellular level and through the body as a whole.³⁶

Enhanced Abdominal Space

Another type of space emerges once joint spaces are being attended to, and this involves changes to the midsection of the body. As the skeleton becomes more open, organized and balanced, posture subsequently improves and provides more room for the fluid structures of the abdominal region.

This abdominal region of the body is dominated by the internal organs. Organs require space to function well. They take in nourishment, perform functions, produce waste, store substances and ultimately transmute what they receive into different forms, all of which require space to allow for ease of fluid flow. When organs are compressed for long periods of time, they begin to exhibit sluggishness (visualize yourself sitting on a 14-hour flight and then imagine its associated effect on digestion).

Adhesions between visceral components may also occur due to compression, which means that adjacent structures glide and change shape less easily. This can make it difficult for organs to perform their local functions and relate effectively to any neighboring structures.

Both of these different aspects of this principle—joint space and abdominal space—relate to one of the new paradigm concepts of health, Spatial Medicine. When the mind/body system is open, and when organs, joints and fluid passageways have space to function, then physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health can be maintained more easily.

SPACE OUTSIDE THE BODY

The other way in which we can perceive space in our practice is to notice the space outside of our physical selves.



It is only when we get above the clouds that we start to get a sense of the space that is earth's atmosphere. As our perspective shifts we can see that space and objects are part of the same continuum.³⁷

Many of us move through life at great speed, focusing on objects and tasks. Trapped by the ceaseless rush to do and produce, we miss the fact that we are surrounded by space.

As we begin to sense the space around us, our perception changes. Something within us relaxes deeply and begins to reorient.

This concept appears in Zen Buddhism where the practitioner is invited to notice space rather than objects. This teaching might ask us to perceive the space in a doorway or within a cup or bowl, rather than the object itself. Such a practice develops awareness of the space around us and within us, acting as a metaphor to open ourselves and become empty, in order to receive life in its fullness.

Science confirms that every atom within us is filled primarily with empty space.

SPACE IN THE MIND

From outer space, we move to inner space. As our practice deepens, our minds may relax and become clearer. We begin to notice pauses between our ever-shifting thoughts. As this happens, we are given the opportunity to experience space in the mind.

Patanjali, the ancient Indian yoga sage and scholar who first classified the eight limbs of yoga, stated that yoga's original intent is "...to calm the fluctuations of the mind." So this aspect of the practice is far from new.

Spaciousness of the mind relieves the incessant thinking that plagues most people. Many cultural and societal issues today are mental and thought-based in origin. These manifest as negative self-talk, worries about the future, concerns about the past and other stresses that nevertheless are not happening in the moment. At the right time, of course, these things should be dealt with. However, guilt, worry and other destructive mental states pull us further off center and create mental dis-ease.

As the space and silence penetrate deeper, the practitioner gets more comfortable. Mental settling allows us to see beyond our distractions and their associated stories, even if only for a moment.

Over time, pauses in thought grow longer and deeper. They develop characteristics and qualities that we become aware of, leading us to recognize differences in pause tone and texture. This can bring up fear, but if we trust what we experience it guides us into a different realm where the mind is quiet and calmness and peace reside. We find these pauses emerging from within the space and we see that they are a part of our essence. Indeed, they seem to be deep aspects of ourselves hidden from view, underneath the chatter of thought patterns.

Regularly meeting this mental spaciousness changes us. Our practice shifts to a deep level and our health changes as our energy and attention are no longer expended on internally battling ourselves.

CASE STUDY

R is a lady in her late forties. She was drawn to the practice with an intention of healing. She arrived with pain and stiffness in her body and a mild case of depression, much of which could be attributed to working in an intensive corporate environment for many years.

R is an active lady and enjoys hiking and climbing. When she first encountered the practice in a class setting, she enjoyed the strong yet intelligent approach to undoing of tension and the relaxation that accompanied completion of each session.

As we began to work with the yoga therapy process one to one, we focused on the principles in more depth. We used many of the primary postures (standing poses, supine postures, postures from all fours), explored freeing the shoulder girdle, and began using movement and breath to begin to release stagnation. This was effective in the early stages and she had much more awareness of the need to move and breathe to break up heavy energy patterns. Her shoulder girdle began to relax considerably and she became aware of the long-held patterns of raising the shoulders as a protective response.

Over the course of several years of yoga therapy practice, she shared with me that she had discovered some key things. The first was related to the mind and she realized that although she was an experienced meditator, she often occupied her head more than her heart and body and this meant she would get into loops of fear and doubt. By focusing upon embodiment as a practice, this helped to ease some of the unhelpful thought patterns. The second was that she learned she had compression throughout her body, particularly

through the joints. Some of this was postural but, tracking back further into the process of cause and effect, it was also linked to her response to her working environment and the attitude required to be successful within that sphere.

Over time, it made sense to adopt a practice that emphasized space, both in body and mind. As a result there was a substantial change in both the experience of openness in R's body and space in her mind, helping her step past her negative thought processes. This helped to positively impact her mood after each practice. The mind/body system always works as a unit and there can often be a link between joint compression and depression, particularly in key areas of the spine and skull such as the cranial base, the atlanto-occipital junction and at the base of the spine where it meets the sacrum.

EXERCISE

- Stand in Tadasana (Mountain pose).
- Keep the eyes open and open the heart smile.
- Spread the toes gently and visualize the space within each foot. Feel all the space in between the boney structures of the feet.
- Begin to transmit the space into the ankle joint by bending the knees slightly and loosening each foot in turn. Feel the ankle change as the quality of the space in the foot changes.
- Begin to transfer this space up into the joints of the legs in the same way, becoming aware of the potential buoyancy in each joint (knees and hips).
- Softly allow the pelvis to widen so that space can be felt with the joints of the pelvic bowl (including the sacroiliac joints).

- Allow the abdomen to lengthen. Feel the fluid structures change shape as the spine lengthens and observe as the joint spaces begin to function better.
- Carefully place the feet in position and explore a number of standing postures. Perhaps a forward bend, a balance posture, Triangle pose variations and the Warrior positions. Maintain this feeling of space.
- Like lightness, space is carried through the body from moment to moment. If the body begins to tighten and feel heavy, then back off and return to Tadasana.
- Explore a Dog pose and an Elbow Dog pose with a feeling of soft height. Stay aware of the space contained within the body and simultaneously remain aware of the space between the pelvis and the ground.
- The same spaciousness applies to positions lying on the back of the body (Rolling Bridge and lifting one leg up into the air, for example).
- You might also consider sitting positions, lifting from the pelvis up through the spine with the same sense of spaciousness in mind. Once the structure is well organized and muscles of the spine have relaxed enough, internal lift can happen to allow this sense of space to emerge. Fingers can be placed on the floor either side of the body to support the ability of the spine to elevate without becoming jammed in the shoulder girdle.
- As this sense of space becomes clearer through extended practice, allow deep breaths to come in and explore how the principles of breath and space are interwoven and relate to one another.

The Square is

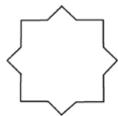


self-contained

When the square becomes conscious of what exists outside itself it is directed towards its center.

Inhalation

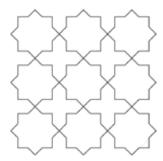




Exhalation

The center responds and re-directs the square back out.

Multiple breaths



are created from one.



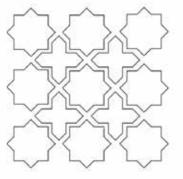
The cross, a symbol of surrender and sacrifice.

The eight-pointed star, a symbol of new beginnings.



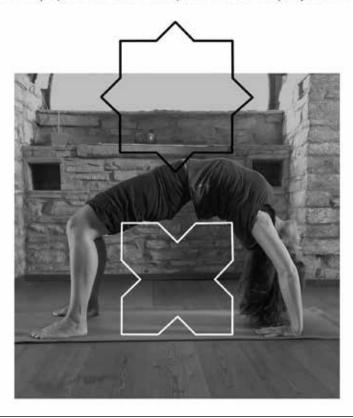
Breath of the compassionate

Between the breath



space expands.

Being attentive...a pause at the edges of the breath the possibility opens to move into space and the body expresses itself.



The "Breath of Compassion" has origins in Islam's non-representational focus on the divine. This visual description brings together pure forms, dynamic structures and balanced tensions. The study and application of geometry holds within it a reflection of the universe and insight into the workings of the inner self. In yoga, a focus on the breath brings us to a deep understanding of the energetic equilibrium of space inside and outside of the body.³⁸



OUR FLUID SELVES

When we arrive into physical form, as newborns, we are virtually entirely fluid. In the first days, weeks and years of life, our journey toward increased solidity begins and the skeleton begins to strengthen to enable our inquisitive nature to explore its new surroundings. As the body grows and develops through childhood, structures and their functions continue to evolve and change. Exploration, movement and play begin to refine the fluid body structure in new ways. This external fluidity and the associated internal movement of fluids within the body support the growth, health and development of the child. Without this movement of fluids, development and growth is impeded.



Young children stand quite naturally, unconcerned with any socially constructed ideas of what their abdomen "should" be doing. Their skeleton and soft tissue structures support their fluid mid-section and the abdomen is rounded.³⁹

As the individual moves through their educational process and begins to find their way in the world, in relation to their culture and society, new choices and challenges arise. Preferences about how, when and why to move are often developed unconsciously. Fluidity remains a crucial component in the lives of young adults as they maintain their health and work to be responsive and adaptable to change in their lives. As we approach the middle of our lives our movement patterns may reduce and our fluidity and associated health can begin to diminish. If our movement reduces, our quality of life is affected. But does this have to be the case?

Ideally, we remain fluid, adaptable and open to change throughout our lives. Our reliance on liquid intake continues unabated until our last breath and we remain dependent on clean water and other fluids for our health and wellbeing. If we can incorporate fluid movement into our lives as well, this can give us the opportunity to retain our fluid nature and remain mobile long into life.

RECONNECTING WITH MOVEMENT AND FLUIDITY

Yoga therapy can begin to reconnect us with ourselves as fluid beings as opposed to stiff, rigid creatures. By using our physical practice as a way to enhance our fluidity, we can have a profound impact on different aspects of both our physiology and our state of being. Restricted physical movement and lack of fluidity can adversely affect our psyche.

Research into our physical fluidity has been happening, outside of the realms of formal medical science, in many movement and healing disciplines. Notable examples include Emily Conrad's "Continuum" work, a modality deriving from dance which explores the possibility that we can return to this natural fluid state. In Asia, Tai Chi and Chinese internal martial arts which cultivate a fluid movement quality have reached similar insights. Meanwhile in America, osteopathic medicine recognizes the role of fluids in the health of our being on every level.

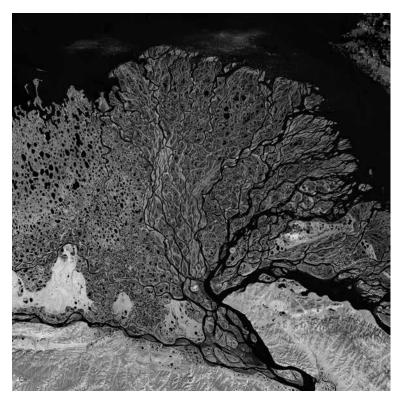
In our culture, movement is being lost as obesity levels rise. As a result of limited movement patterns becoming part of a "normal" lifestyle, a client's body can begin to exhibit inertia, with many parts becoming less able to move. In these times, driving and flying have become our main modes of transportation, rather than walking;

and as a result, problems of stress, heart health and digestive disorders are now more pervasive. Many of these illnesses could be mitigated by moving more and walking daily. One member of my extended family, who grew up in South America, told me of his seven-mile walk to school each day, just one generation ago. It would be highly unusual for a child in Western society to walk seven miles to school today.

As yoga therapists it is important to consider how this change in our movement patterns has affected our health.

A FLUID BODY

Fluid pathways are the main transportation system in the body, allowing nutrients and specific cell types to travel around the body and facilitate the essential removal of toxins and waste products. This is emulated in nature as rivers carry many things downstream.



Fluid systems provide intricate and complex nourishment and healing processes throughout the entire body. In nature, we can see how fluid systems nourish large areas of land and bring with them life and vitality, like in the case of this river watershed.⁴⁰

There are many different kinds of fluid in the body, some of which have their own pump and some of which depend on physical movement and gravity to enable transit. These fluids are all constantly being filtered and refined within the body, and kept at very specific chemical balances to enable the body to do its diversity of tasks. Without these fluid processes being performed well, the body gets sick very quickly.

Within a healthy body, all fluids act as a single, freely interchanging unit, undifferentiated and synchronized, similar to the way that all of the molecules of water on the planet are affected by the Moon. We can see the seas, lakes and oceans as separate but in reality they are all part of the Earth's water cycle and are working together. The same is true of the body. When fluid integration is normal and working well, we tend to be in a state of health.

The term "The Fluid Body," developed by osteopath James Jealous, describes the awareness of the holism of the fluid systems within our vessel.

FLUID INTELLIGENCE

The human body is a living system imbued with intelligence. Part of what seems to carry this intelligence is the fluid fields of the body.

There are tens of thousands of processes happening within a person and their body in every moment. These are occurring at physical levels, emotional levels, perceptual levels and psychological levels to name a few. Until relatively recently, the assumption had been that the nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves) was the great, intelligent command post in the body organizing all of these processes. Yet prior to the formation of the nervous system, the fluid systems in the embryo are organizing forces and making decisions, such as the appearance of the primal streak which later in development becomes the primitive spine. The suggestion, by embryologist Erich Blechschmidt (2004), is that perhaps the fluids themselves are imbued with a kind of intelligence.

Throughout life, the fluid systems are involved in healing processes throughout the body. Fluids seem to interact with the healing processes, which the body continuously uses to restore itself, making intelligent decisions around distribution and prioritization of healing resources.

Our yoga therapy practice can begin to support the integration of fluids, creating more holism on a systemic and inter-systemic level.

FLUID MOVEMENT

Fluid movement can be described as unbroken chains of movement connection. Like water, the body can find flow and this flowing movement is natural to the human being.

We see fluid movement in animals all the time, as they effortlessly undertake their tasks and play. As humans, we have lost some of this organic ease and it can take considerable work to re-find it. Nevertheless, we do see the flow of movement in sportsmen and women, in athletes and in practitioners of other movement disciplines, who have dedicated their lives to these pastimes.

Obvious illustrations of this flowing movement range from the fluid transitions between yoga postures to the graceful movements of dancers, from the powerful movements of martial artists to the playful flow of practitioners of the flow arts, with their props such as hoops and poi, which have become massively popular in youth culture.

The flow state is a state of body and a state of mind where the person is totally focused in the moment. When exhibited well, there is an art present and a harmonization observable in the external movement, which has a deep effect on internal physiological and mental processes.

DEVELOPING FLUIDITY

Over the course of the yoga therapy journey, one of the objectives is to support the client in developing their own capacity for moving fluidly to enhance their health. Ideally, this will enable all areas of the body to move with ease. When this happens, joints begin to move smoothly and the body becomes less bound up and more mobile. For the small proportion of people who are hypermobile in their joints, this idea does not apply in the same way and a deep strengthening and stabilizing of joint capsules and surrounding musculature is more important.

When developing fluidity, the client should be advised to not use excessive force. Gentle, soft, round movements are desirable, such as repetitive circles, arcs and spirals, all coordinated with the breath.

The fluidity of the spine is developed through gentle movements, spirals and undulations. With practice and patience, the spine can begin to re-exhibit its fluid origins at any age. Bone maintains its health through this dexterity and flexibility.

Vanda Scaravelli, who developed this particular approach to yoga, described a fluid wave-like motion in the spine that she felt was helping her to release tension and free the body. She was tapping into the same fluidity discussed throughout this chapter, harnessing the wave forms within the fluids to support her practice. When discussing the healing of an elbow injury with my teacher, John Stirk, she described how she felt that she had been able to support the healing of the joint by working with this fluid wave.

In yoga therapy we help the client build an awareness of their own fluid body so that they can perceive their own fluidity and from there the waveforms that Vanda found in her body. This involves developing a subtle balance between making the movements and activating the fluids so that they drive the movement.

CASE STUDY

AB is a gentleman in his late eighties. I was referred to him and his wife by their daughter, who is also a client of mine.

Both AB and his wife had major health constraints when I met them, but for the purposes of this particular case study, I will focus on observations and aspects about the changes that he has experienced through our work.

AB was a yoga novice when we first met, so there was some initial education required around the process, whilst his wife was already a seasoned yoga veteran.

The main aspects with which he initially presented were tensional and structural. These included major tension dynamics throughout the myofascial system, a well-progressed degree of postural collapse and major scoliosis through the spine resulting in frequent yet sporadic pains.

I started my work with him extremely gently to assess what he was capable of. At the beginning of the yoga therapy process, it is important to find postures that can be comfortably explored and a tempo that feels right which the client can begin to make their own.

Over the course of several sessions, AB became more comfortable with some of the basic postures and movements that we were employing. The level of tension in the body would often result in cramping in muscles that had not been activated to this level in some

time. We used a combination of postural explorations and movement, with the emphasis on beginning to sense a degree of fluidity in the body, particularly in the rib cage and spine. The objective is not to eliminate the scoliotic patterning but to bring ease to the individual and to work carefully with the body as it changes over time.

Despite the physical challenges he was facing, there was a lightness to his body and spirit that was present before we started work. I attribute his rapid experience of change to this quality of lightness. The structures that seemed immovable when we started began to become alive and he worked gently to undo the atrophy and create change. During the course of each session, AB's body would become more fluid and more able to mold to the variety of postures and movements being asked of it. I have particularly emphasized reiterating through small movements, combined with breath, enabling tight structures to begin to loosen and find a greater fluidic quality.

In between sessions there would generally be a reduction in freedom as normal patterns of movement, tension and thought were re-adopted unconsciously. This means that to some extent we are working with a two steps forward and one step back situation.

Over time AB's body has become increasingly free, there has been a decrease in the frequency that pain is experienced and the level of scoliosis has reduced slightly. I continue to support him and his wife in their healing journey.

EXERCISE

- Starting on all fours, take the weight back toward the heels slightly to take the pressure off the wrists.
- Begin the process of exploring Cat pose, noticing which areas are not participating in a fluid manner. Take your time. Use long, slow, deep breaths and let the body lead as much as possible rather than driving the movement.
- Explore a Downward Facing Dog pose. How does the spine feel? Is there more of a sense of fluidity?
- Soften the knees and walk the hands back toward the feet into forward bending and then transition back

- to standing. Let the movement be soft and see if you can find a degree of fluency in the movement.
- In standing, take the right hand and bring the fingertips and thumb tip together to make a hand purse. Place it on the shoulder's nest, where the shoulder girdle meets the chest in the upper pectoral region. Make gentle circles backwards with the elbow and explore the range of motion of the shoulder joint. How fluid is it? Work gently, particularly if there is discomfort in this area.
- From standing, roll back down into a forward bend and head back toward a Dog pose. Allow the movement to be free-flowing and comfortable.
- Come back down to the ground and lie on the back, bringing the knees into the chest with one hand on each knee. Roll gently from side to side, encouraging a softening and freeing of the lumbar spine. Is there a sense of increasing fluidity in the lower back?
- From the supine position, draw circles with the knees, moving the hips so that you bring the knees together and then taking them apart. Can the hip joints become more fluid? Remember to breathe fully and deeply. Explore creative movement with the limbs that allows a feeling of freedom in the body.
- Come back to standing when you are ready. Place the feet parallel, with the knees slightly bent. Let the body rotate from side to side, allowing the spine to spin and the arms to swing. Can this movement become more free?
- From here, explore more creative movements, identify restricted areas and slowly, gently and playfully unlock them with free movement. Keep breathing consciously. The breathing helps to clear stress and tension from the body and create space in the body, which further supports fluid movement.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SQUATTING AND KNEELING

Squatting and kneeling are natural positions adopted by humans, as well as other mammals with similar joint structures. Humans have utilized these positions for tens of thousands of years, using them for all manner of reasons.



Throughout India, it is common to see people squatting during their work activities, sometimes for many hours.⁴¹

Throughout Asia, you can still see people conducting their daily affairs in these postures. In China, groups of people squat down together to discuss the matters of the day. In India, working and cooking is often done at ground level. People who work in markets spread out their wares on the ground, which makes squatting the most functional position in which to conduct business. In Japan, people continue to eat and pray in a kneeling posture. In the Muslim world, daily prayers require kneeling and folding. And last but not least, going to the bathroom is often conducted in a squatting posture throughout Asia and the developing world. However, over the last few hundred years these postures have begun to disappear in certain segments of humanity.

In the West, it is now rare to see people adopting these positions. If we see someone kneeling, squatting or sitting on the floor in the street, we may assume they are homeless or have mental health issues. The bodies of many of us living in modern societies have changed to enable a reduced amount of physical positions, which excludes squatting. The advent of chairs and their use in almost every modern activity from driving to working and from eating to going to the bathroom has eliminated the need for people in modern societies to squat or kneel. As a result, the human body has adapted itself over the last several generations to restrict the structures that once easily supported these natural movements, causing them to change and ossify (skeletally reorganize). For example, the subtalar joint in the front of the ankle has gradually begun to ossify as squatting and kneeling have been lost.

As Eastern countries industrialize, sitting comfortably on the ground or squatting down to conduct business is also beginning to disappear. Young children of every culture rest easily and instinctively in squatting and kneeling positions in their early years, indicating that humans still have the potential for such postures, but our lifestyle choices are limiting our options. Future humans may not be able to rest in kneeling and squatting postures as our ancestors did. To maintain these powerful, important and useful postures, we might begin to include them in our lives in a different way.

In yoga therapy, we reintroduce these foundational positions as part of the healing process, to derive the many benefits that these positions bring. Eventually, these postures can begin to feel natural and comfortable once again.



The Indian foot maintains its ability to squat through regular practice. 42

REMEMBERING THE OLD WAYS

Finding our way back to these primal postures takes time and patience. The journey into these positions, in a way that is sustainable for the body, may be slow. It may take practice and persistence to make these positions as comfortable for us as they were for our ancestors. Many areas of the body will require reorganization and change for them to become available to us again. The positions will change the body as ligaments stretch, change and reassume "normal" capabilities.

The health of the foot and the ankle is deeply affected by these positions. It requires large amounts of space between the boney structures in order to squat or kneel and the many joints of the foot and ankle must open, becoming simultaneously less bound and more supportive.



The structures of the foot and ankle maintain their integrity and health through squatting. The tension required during the act of squatting engages the ligamentous structures in such a way that the bones are suspended with the connective tissues. 43

Supportive props can be used to help joints to open and to enable iterative development into these positions. Using support allows a gentler opening of knees and ankles. If people have serious injuries in these joints, they must be extremely careful when attempting to assume these positions. For some people with injuries or structural damages, attempting to squat and kneel will be harmful to their bodies. Each individual must decide where the limits are for their physical body, perhaps with guidance by a yoga therapist. As with many other things in life, this assessment requires a level of maturity and acceptance by the individual. We do not want to damage the joints. Having said that, we recognize that movement is essential for health. And so we begin...

For most people, having enough, well-positioned, props should help them find the first steps into the postures.

As these positions deepen and become better established for a client, the health of the pelvic floor and the lower back are also deeply affected. These postures help these structures to widen and lengthen in accommodation to the position. As the structures change, this positively impacts the functions of these areas.

One such positive impact is in digestion. The body's ability to digest is enhanced by kneeling because of the deep lengthening of the quadriceps. In classical Indian yoga, kneeling is called Rock pose, and the legend is that you could digest rocks if you stayed in the posture long enough. In traditional yogic ascetic practice, where long periods of fasting and stillness are explored with minimal bodily inputs (sunlight, air/prana, water and digesting of minerals), Rock pose may have been a very practical position. Myths aside, the power of kneeling to draw open the internal digestive tract is profound. Similarly, elimination is greatly enhanced by squatting. The length of the internal elimination structures is optimal whilst in the squat, which is why many cultures still use squatting as a primary method of defecating.

THE KWA

The Kwa is a concept that comes from the East and is woven into the Asian understanding of health and martial power, particularly throughout China and Southeast Asia. The Kwa is considered the entire area that extends from the knee all the way up to the respiratory diaphragm. It describes not only the physical, muscular structures but also the energies of this region of the body. In the West, we have no single word for this area of the body.

From a physiological standpoint, the Kwa includes the psoas, and the whole iliopsoas group, plus the adductors. It enables many of the key actions of the body such as walking, sitting, squatting and kneeling. In reality, these structures are the engine of the body, forming the foundation of movement and physical power in the human system, while having a deep relationship to health.

From both an energetic and a physical standpoint, the Kwa forms a bridge between the upper and lower body. It links the energies of the ground with the energies of the human being. In the Indian system, this links to the lower three chakras. These are:

- *The root chakra:* linking to safety and the function of grounding.
- The pelvic chakra: linking to sexuality and creativity.
- *The solar plexus chakra*: linking to will, fear and drive.

In the Chinese system, this area contains the lower Dan Tien, which is the center of gravity and the place where qi is stored.

These structures can have tremendous history held in them. It may be a common site of trauma from the first days of life, and is part of the startle reflex within the infant. It is involved in every step we've ever taken, as well as every good or bad situation we've walked into and walked out of. This area also may have been impacted by car accidents and postural habits, uncomfortable beds that we've slept in and many other aspects of our physical and emotional experience.

Healing the Kwa region and the relationship between the upper and lower body is an essential part of yoga therapy. It may involve identifying the wounding that has taken place in our lives, as well as accepting all that has happened to us. In our society, many people have experienced some form of sexual abuse, which may be held in the field of an individual, as well as at a physical level in the tissues and nervous system components located in this area. As we meet the energetics of the Kwa and stay present, we begin to unfold the story held within us, helping it to gradually be felt and to loosen its emotional grip.

EXERCISE

- With all of these positions, spend only a few seconds when you are starting out and then slowly build up to longer periods. Breathing deeply is an essential component to facilitate change.
- A nice place to begin is in Hare pose. With the lower body in a wide kneeling position (knees wide and big toes touching), lean forward and allow the arms to extend forward. The pelvis rests back toward the heels and the forehead may be either on or off the ground.
- If the ankles are stiff, a cushion may be placed between the ground and the ankles. You may then wish to come forward, tucking the toes under for a moment to allow the foot to gently stretch in the opposite direction.
- From here, if it is comfortable, come up into a kneeling position. The knees can be brought together at this point. This position may also require the same support under the ankles. If the knees are stiff or painful, add an additional cushion (or two) if needed between the heels and the pelvis. With enough cushions, most people will be able to find some degree of ease. If not, return to Hare pose. Move in and out of the position, moving forwards onto all fours as needed to take the pressure off the knees.
- Come into standing. One of the classical yoga postures to deepen the Kwa is Chair pose. In this position, have the feet and knees parallel, either together or at hip width. Drop the pelvis into a semi-squat. Meanwhile, at the other end of the body, lift the arms up overhead with

the palms facing each other. Keep the lower back long so the lumbar curve is not overly dominant. This position begins to bring awareness of the power of the legs and the depth and balance of the Kwa.

- By lowering down further, it may be possible to approach a squat. Keeping the heels down helps to lengthen the ankle structures. This should only be done for short periods of time so as not to create too much knee joint pressure. Then transition from the squat to a forward bend.
- During the squat, lift the heels if necessary, but the action of dropping the heel and keeping it down, while lengthening the foot, allows the ankle to open. Additional supportive lift under the heels may help. The client may place a block or blanket underneath the heels and note the impact. Those with serious knee injuries should progress very slowly and carefully with kneeling and squatting exercises, building capacity over weeks and months.
- In both squatting and kneeling practices, the spine should remain as tall as is comfortable.
- Another exploration of the Kwa is Horse Riding Stance, sometimes called Goddess pose. In this position, stand and take the feet wide, turning the front of the feet outwards so that toes are in line with the knees and then lower the pelvis to whatever level is comfortable. This provides a deep understanding of the Kwa and helps to broaden the deep pelvic structures while doing so.
- As the practice is deepened, spend longer periods of time in these positions, meditating, breathing and repositioning the structures as necessary to allow depth and length.
- Having completed the explorations, lie down on the front or on the back and draw the knees into the chest.
- Roll from side to side to further release the spine before extending the legs out into Savasana.



TIME, FOCUS AND ATTENTION

The yoga process allows us to take time away from the normal activities of life to connect with different aspects of ourselves. Drawing on a variety of techniques, these methods facilitate a deep level of change within us and restore balance to body, mind and spirit. So what makes the attention required in yoga different from that of normal life?

During study with my teacher, Diane Long, I have learned to develop a "quality of attention." When I first heard this, I had no reference points for the term and so felt confused by the emphasis given to this in our work. So what is this quality of attention and why is it important? This chapter brings together some of the components that make up the quality of attention and show how it has an intimate role to play in the practice of yoga therapy.

TIME

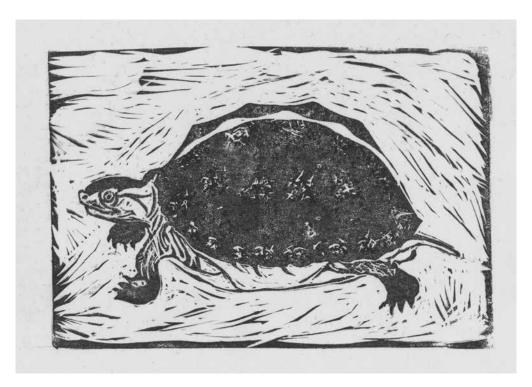
From our human perspective, we appear to participate in a linear sequence of time and events. But is this really an accurate, complete perception of what we call time?



A stopped watch time stands still. Yoga can bring a feeling of timelessness. Clients often express amazement that an hour has disappeared as they explored inwardly.⁴⁴

Our culture tends to be in a tremendous rush and, in this endless hurrying, many aspects of life hurtle by without being acknowledged. Yoga offers an opportunity to slow down and find a different relationship to time. Instead of focusing on clock time, we let natural rhythms (the speed of our breathing, the pace of our movement, and the rhythm of settling and feeling) dictate the flow of events. This slowing down and its associated de-stressing is one of the huge benefits of yoga therapy. Stress often arises through the perceived inability to cope and often has a time component. According to WebMD.com, stress is involved in more that 80 percent of all illness; indeed 75 to 90 percent of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related reasons. Most of us are likely aware of these statistics at some general level, but how do you change the conditions?

For yoga therapy to be effective and for it to facilitate healing in the most long-lasting and integrative way, clients must de-stress, slow down and take their time. Vanda Scaravelli said, "To have time implies that quality of elegance and ease which gives poise to our movements and wisdom to our actions."



Slow and steady as the tortoise. Life is not a race and yoga teaches us to slow down and find a different pace.⁴⁵

Time is also a consideration in yoga therapy with regard to when and how we practice. Certain times are more ideal for certain kinds of practice. For example, strong inversions or quiet supine meditative journeys may not be recommended after lunch; and calming, settling practices might be preferable to strong, vigorous practices before bed. In some approaches to yoga, it is suggested that practice be avoided on the full moon because the energy is too high and injury is more likely.

As physicists have told us, time is relative. It often seems to expand or condense depending on what is happening. How we observe events affects what we observe. When we move quickly, we observe our world in a certain way and have particular priorities. When we slow down, we see things differently and observe different patterns. By slowing down, clients bring a different level of awareness and precision to the creative process associated with exploring the postures. In some ways, as we explore yoga, we enter into a timeless realm.



Spiritual practitioners throughout history have used desert conditions to go inwards and become present. The desert has long been synonymous with retreat and exile. This activity of retreat is badly needed in our current world as the speed of life and communications are creating deep stress within the human being. 46

THE PRESENT MOMENT

Yoga requires that we bring our attention to what is occurring in the moment. As a culture we tend to never quite be with ourselves, either concerned with what is coming next or stuck in reflection on past events.

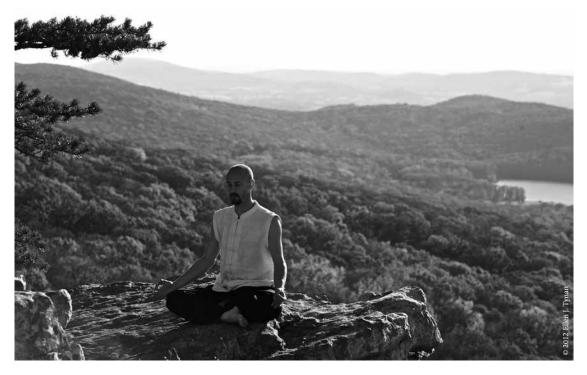
Yoga therapy requests that we anchor ourselves in the here and now, which, when fully experienced, takes us out of worrying about the future or the past. We ask clients to reduce their speed to the tempo of feeling and sensing, which is different than the speed of thought. This is not easy for modern people who have been trained to live life in the head, rather than being embodied and living from the heart.

The reason for bringing presence to what is happening during practice is that healing can only happen in the moment.

When clients come to the mat, they move into a healing space in which extraordinary changes can happen. By slowing down and tuning in to what is occurring, they can deeply affect their own body physiology. Through listening and becoming more receptive, they begin to hear their body's communications and can respond accordingly, rather than missing these communications by being caught up in the endless planning and worrying that dominates most people's minds. To be fully in the present moment, we open all five senses. We observe, taste, smell, touch and listen. In addition to these we can also open ourselves to information through extrasensory channels of perception.

One aspect of this extrasensory realm is deep internal listening. Listening with the inner ear is an extremely receptive state where we turn our attention inside, rather than focusing outside. Many of the principles described in this book require this type of listening which few people are practiced at. Culturally, listening is a dying art, and in many contexts it is being replaced by waiting for your turn to speak with many people planning what to say, rather than listening.

Meditation practices aim at cultivating this ability to listen. There is a current trend toward mindfulness as the benefits of meditation are becoming more widely recognized. Buddhist practices are spreading and being adopted into many areas of Western culture. Mindfulness-based stress reduction, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a good example. With regard to yoga therapy practice, we adopt an open attitude in which we attempt to be empty, able to be filled by the contents of the moment. Zen Buddhism depicts this by emphasizing that the usefulness of a cup is in its emptiness.



Meditation seems to happen outside of time and develops focus and attention in the individual.⁴⁷

ATTENTION AND FOCUS

Attention and focus are interrelated. Attention describes the way we relate to something—the process of noticing or taking special care of something. Maintaining attention develops concentration. Learning not to get distracted leads to the ability to focus for longer periods of time.

Due to our educational system and our technology, we tend toward rather scattered attention, focusing on many things in the outside world simultaneously without giving anything our full presence. Shifting to an inner focus requires a change in the way we attend to the moment.

As yoga therapists, what we focus on during yoga therapy differs from client to client. What we attend to depends on what is happening in our experience which is determined by our focus. It dictates what we see and subsequently what adjustments we make. Each of the principles in this book involves shifting our focus to a different aspect of the inner landscape.

SHIFTING LEVELS

We can either look at things with a hard, sharp focus, studying the details much as we do when we visually and spatially focus to pick up a small object. Or we can explore with a soft, wide focus, similar to the way we might take in the vista of a landscape. This form of perception allows us to recognize wholeness more readily.

In yoga therapy, we invite the client to shift focus from a local point, to a regional area, and then to the global whole. We often oscillate from the local to the global within a single postural exploration.

The wider view is difficult for many clients as technology and a culture of separatism are driving our species toward a narrower focus.

In yoga therapy, we support clients by giving them space to relax and learn to see differently. As they begin to trust, their attention naturally becomes more flexible.

THE QUALITY OF ATTENTION

Raising the quality of our attention is elusive. It cannot be fully described in words and more accurately relates to a feeling. Some of the things that might give a sense of it are:

- Work outside of time. Put the clock aside.
- Cease to rush.
- Be present and mindfully aware.
- Develop a soft, wide sensory focus.
- Maintain a sense of wholeness while exploring local and regional phenomena.

CASE STUDY

AG is a lady in her seventies. She arrived at my practice with shoulder and neck strain from picking up a heavy item. Rotator cuff injury had been diagnosed.

Over the years she had developed a strong kyphosis in her thoracic region which was placing strain on the structures of the shoulders, neck and head and had set up the conditions for the injury caused by the lifting.

When she arrived she had no background in yoga or any other movement practice. Like many people of her generation she had not been exposed to mind/body work at any point throughout her life, causing her to be unused to taking responsibility for what was happening to her.

As a slender lady, in good physical health, she had been through physical therapy in an attempt to address her injury but had found it too strenuous. She already had tremendous softness and gentleness and a slow, unhurried pace at which she moved and spoke. As a result, her attitude was just right for this approach and her body began to change quickly.

With some very gentle mostly supine practice, using the ground and gravity and the breath, AG began to bring her attention to her body in a new way.

It was important not to add strain to the shoulder girdle as we progressed so I took out Dog pose to avoid weight-bearing through the arms. Instead, we introduced movements designed to encourage opening and freeing of the tighter areas. I also used some gentle hands-on work to sense into the tension around the neck and shoulder.

The main thing that I invited her to become aware of was how to use her practice to sense both local and global release in her body as she did the postural and movement explorations. Because of her disposition, she quickly developed the quality of attention necessary.

She worked extensively between our weekly sessions and her posture, which seemed rigid and held, become softer and more elastic.

She now has a simple home practice that supports her body. AG's shoulder pain is now minimal and she is no longer experiencing the same strain with which she arrived.

EXERCISE

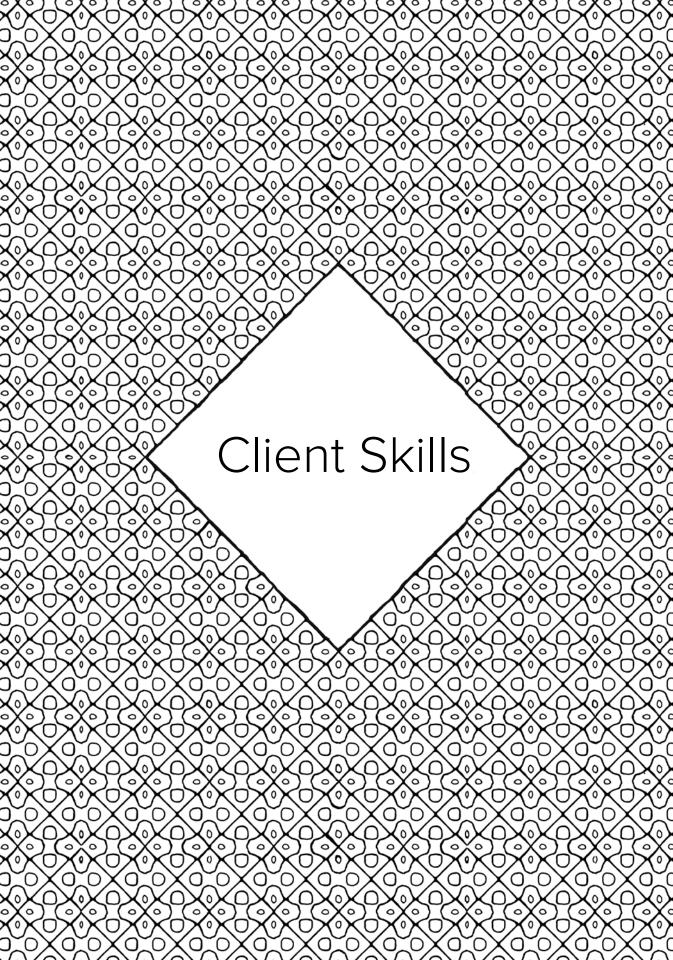
First, explore the physical manifestation of soft, wide focus:

- · Lie down on the back and relax.
- Look up toward the ceiling. Rather than fixing the eyes on a certain object on the ceiling above, adopt a wide gaze and take in the whole width of the space above you.
- Next, take this wide feeling back into the body. Notice how it feels.
- See if you can feel the whole, a global sense of the body.
 Then tune in only to the body's points of contact with the ground, a more local sensation.

Second, explore what it feels like to shift out of normal time and focus on local and global awareness:

- Start on the back of the body with the knees bent and tune in.
- Feel the body relaxing. Notice if the mind is busy. Let it settle if it is and attune yourself to all of your senses.
- Place your hands on your belly and notice the sensations you can feel locally under the hands, then throughout the whole body.
- Focus lightly on what you can feel and begin to lift the pelvis when it feels like the initiation of movement is in tune with the body and the breath.
- Explore a number of postures. For example:
 - Dog pose
 - Cobra pose
 - Lunges with leg swinging up and back
 - Headstand

- Shoulder stand
- Back bend from the ground/wheel.
- See if you can remain aware of the inner body rhythms and only go into the postures when it feels right inside.
- In each position, notice what you are focusing on. Now try the following:
 - Bring your attention to the spine, and then bring your attention back to the whole.
 - Bring your attention to the area of most restriction, and then bring your attention back to the whole.
 - Bring your attention to the heart and lungs, and then bring your attention back to the whole.
- This can be explored with any part of the body and can include regional awareness, for example foot, leg and then whole body.





CLIENT SKILLS

Working in the field of yoga therapy is about working with people, in all of their uniqueness and diversity. Developing a varied skill set to support people through the yoga therapy process is essential. We must carefully observe the people who arrive in our office so that we can begin to get a sense of who they are and what drives their world.

ESTABLISHING AN ENTRY POINT

When a client first arrives in our office for a yoga therapy session, we take a client history. This is an important stage of the process where the client gets to describe why he or she has come and with what intention. It is a crucial first junction and needs to be given adequate time, possibly making the first session longer. Some information may be gathered ahead of time. We may have developed a specific client intake form for this information gathering, or we may decide to use a more open format.

Whatever the approach, we do our best knowing there will be key information omitted and invariably that the first pass will not capture the client's situation in its totality. The client reveals more information as the relationship deepens, which is natural and cannot be hurried.

By including inquiry on the different aspects of the individual and the different phases of his or her life we do our best to capture what we can before we set our initial trajectory.

CUSTOMIZED SESSIONS

Traditionally yoga was taught to individuals or small groups. When Krishnamacharya returned from the mountains he taught the youngsters at the Mysore temple in large groups. In yoga's transition to the West, class numbers have remained large as yoga has become a commercial enterprise, and teachers and studios attempt to maximize efficiency and profits.

Group work is powerful. As a group works together over the course of a class, individuals bond, creating a sense of community and a collective deepening happens. If the group works together over a period of time, rich connections can form between members of the group.



The author teaching a large group in Annapolis, MD. Group work can be a powerful collective experience when well facilitated.⁴⁸

Krishnamacharya's work with individuals was the forerunner of yoga therapy. He customized and adapted each session based on the needs of the individual, as discussed earlier. This customization process is best suited to a one-on-one environment.



Yoga therapy is often undertaken in a one-to-one setting. This allows the individual to receive personalized instruction to meet their needs.⁴⁹

Vanda Scaravelli was also known to look closely at individuals who arrived for sessions. She offered diverse suggestions to students, such as "run around the outside of the house," and even set one student up to go to sleep.

It is essential that the yoga therapist take into account their clients' situations in as much depth as possible to customize their sessions accordingly. This adaptation is one of the hallmarks of yoga therapy and continues to evolve as more information is revealed over time.

CLIENT EDUCATION

Part of the task of the yoga therapist is educating the client regarding the process they are embarking upon.

This involves an element of coaching, but is not a truly accurate description. When people arrive at a session they often believe in an old paradigm that someone else is responsible for their health. Education around the nature of health enhancement is essential. Yoga therapists aim to support clients by helping them find their own relationship to their health and their yoga practice. In this way we help clients to begin to take steps on their own.

Another aspect of the old paradigm mindset is symptom reduction. Yoga therapists receive such questions as, "When will the pain go away? How many sessions will it take?"

Yoga is a process and cannot be made to give health. If clients start yoga in the later part of their lives it may take considerable time and effort to find their way out of long-held patterns. A large part of the education process is that health is an ongoing process which requires daily dedication and commitment as the body changes and ages.

ENVIRONMENT AND LIFESTYLE

The body and its environment are interrelated and cannot be separated. The health of the environment is essential for the health of the individual. This includes not only all aspects of the physical environment but also the emotional environment, the work and the home environment. Modern Western medicine tends to look at the body's symptoms without considering these other areas of a person's life in a holistic way.

Whilst it is natural that people want to return to a pain-free condition, this may not always be quick. A lifestyle change may be needed to support this, as well as adaptations that include exercise levels or types, diet or stress or something else. Individuals may feel too challenged to make these changes initially and so may require additional support from another professional. Most likely the body's current circumstances were created by decisions, thoughts and choices from the client's past.

Advice on diet, supplements or herbal medicine is outside the scope of this book and should only be broached if the practitioner is trained in these fields.

TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTER-TRANSFERENCE

Yoga is a transformational process, and working with a yoga therapist is a deeply interpersonal process. Deep trust is placed in the yoga therapist, whether explicitly or tacitly stated. The yoga therapist must remain professional and be vigilant for these common therapeutic processes.

Transference is where the client projects feelings of attraction onto the therapist. Counter-transference is where the practitioner projects feelings onto the client. Both are equally dangerous for the health of the relationship.

It is natural for human beings to feel things in relation to people they develop a relationship with. The yoga process is an intimate one, which involves clients revealing aspects of their personal world, followed by a process being developed that allows a client's body and mind to begin to change. When this happens clients may look outside of themselves for the source of this change, rather than recognizing that they made the efforts and created the change themselves.

If transference does begin to occur, the therapist must take responsibility and ensure awareness of the larger process taking place. If carefully managed, through this process the client can become more self-aware and can become better able to identify deeply held assumptions and patterns.

WORKING WITH SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

A variety of opinions exist on how to work with specific conditions in a yoga therapy capacity.

B.K.S. Iyengar created whole lists of sequences that he determined, through observation and study, supported the return to health of people with those conditions. This is a helpful guideline.

Information from physical therapy and other healing modalities provide clues as to how to address symptoms and also rebuild balance.

Many ways to explore the yoga therapy process exist. Indeed, the approach taken will dictate the type of outcomes that arise. This suggests that the "how" of yoga therapy is as important as the "what."

The modern medical approach of labeling can be somewhat misleading. Although common attributes of certain conditions do exist, which enables our modern medical profession to make fast decisions around treatment protocols, in reality each expression of an illness occurs uniquely within the individual. This is not to say that we shouldn't use a labeling convention for specific diseases and conditions, only that we acknowledge that the treatment process for one individual may not be the same for a second person, even if they have the same diagnosis.

The challenge of the yoga therapist is to work with each person as a whole, seeing that person as clearly as possible. The therapist may have previous client experience which may give clues about a treatment approach, but ultimately the individual and his or her circumstances are unique.

By being careful with each individual we begin to develop greater levels of sensitivity, as well as a deep, precise ability to observe. The areas of the body affected by any condition must be treated with great care and respect. This ensures that the processes and function of those structures are not compromised or adversely affected by the yoga therapy process and that we can then minimize the effects into adjacent areas.

KNOWING OUR LIMITATIONS

We must be careful to set safe, realistic and achievable expectations when we begin a yoga therapy relationship, and this must be continuously revised as the professional relationship progresses. Expectations must be set carefully to ensure clients have either a formal or tacit agreement about what is going to happen. The client and the therapist then work together over the course of the relationship to achieve these objectives.

However, at times, the therapist may need to refer the client to another healthcare professional with more specific skills.

CLIENT COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

Clients need to feel both empowered and supported in between sessions. But how much support is appropriate and what kind of support do we offer clients? We need to set clear boundaries and respond to client communications in a timely fashion for our business to be a success. These are core business skills in any profession. Responding to messages within several days is generally acceptable, but this varies depending upon the environment.

As yoga therapists we are not providing emergency support. All enquiries of this kind should be dealt with by the emergency services.

Providing contact details allows the client to ask follow-up questions and may enable a feeling of support. An email address may be an appropriate mechanism or perhaps a phone number for specific questions. All of this must be negotiated and the practitioner must stay firm if these boundary mechanisms are compromised in any way.

MANAGING THE TRANSITION

When yoga therapists have addressed their issues, clients may then decide to conclude personal sessions and return to practicing in a group environment. This should be encouraged in most instances. Understanding the end point of the therapeutic relationship is an important skill to develop, and yoga therapists must be vigilant about not getting attached to their clients. Rather, they may find that they continue to support clients but in a different way, such as infrequent check-ins.

OVERALL APPROACH

Yoga therapy has the capability to support the healing and wellness of many processes. Each person who decides to embark on the journey arrives with experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, relationships, troubles and joys; all of the things that we encounter during the course of a human life. From there they begin a personal journey toward wholeness and healing. This journey is supported by the yoga therapist who approaches the person with an open heart, knowing that both parties require commitment, determination and dedication.



COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING STYLES

Every client we work with is unique, gifted with individual preferences and skills that differentiate the way he or she learns.

In yoga therapy, the aim is communication transfer, helping the client to find their own sense of yoga to enhance their wellness. The client learns from the yoga therapist, through these three main modes of communication:

- aural
- visual
- sensory/hands-on touch.

These different methods of information transmission enter into the client's field, and then get absorbed through the many layers of their being, particularly being integrated into the nervous system. This integration informs how clients undertake their physical yoga practice. The teachings they have received impact how they move, how they breathe and how they interact with their inner world. These in turn affect their goals and become barometers for their personal yoga practice.

Collectively these three modes of communication are how the client gathers information. As yoga therapy practitioners, we gather information from the client in the same way to help him or her progress.

AURAL

Language creates the framework for a client's understanding of the yoga journey. The yoga therapist's words and tone of voice have a huge effect on the individual. These create the therapeutic environment and convey many important things such as kindness, a positive sense of the client's practice and the client's possibilities within it. Language also communicates principles of safety, connection and collaboration.

The yoga therapist uses the initial intake to gauge the type of verbal communication that will be most effective and then constantly refines that communication modality based on what obtains the best effects. (A specific section on language is provided in Chapter 24.)

VISUAL

The visual sense dominates the other senses in our culture. Even before cognitive understanding, children absorb immense amounts of information by watching their parents. This even includes their initial postural, structural and breathing patterns. The evolution of the whole human system has led to prioritizing this most primary of senses. In a yoga therapy setting, the client learns visually by watching the therapist's movements and then attempting to emulate what has just been demonstrated.

In this approach to yoga therapy, the smallest details are particularly important. The client must be subtly attentive to movement to tap into the principles discussed throughout this book. This quality of attention is required in both understanding the approach and in determining what the therapist is encouraging the client to find within their own body.

SENSORY/TOUCH

Touch is perhaps the most underused and yet the most powerful tool available to the yoga therapist. It can have a profound impact on individuals, especially since, in our society, many people are touch deprived. In the case of yoga therapy, skillful touch can be an essential part of healing the psyche and the body. It awakens areas of the body that have tightened up, fallen asleep or lost feeling.

The yoga therapists use touch intelligently, safely and carefully to gently guide the client along the journey toward increased sensitivity and awareness. As the client's practice develops, touch helps to bring attention to various relationships on both the outer layers and the inner recesses of the body, such as how the psoas and deep spinal muscles web into chains of connection with the more superficial structures.

The client's perception of the body's physical relationships and spatial locations improves, while touch adds a sensory boost to awareness growth processes that help the client make fundamental changes faster.

The guiding touch of the yoga therapist improves over time, with the confidence that comes from experience. In time the yoga therapist helps to support subtle changes in the client's awareness, as well as physical adjustments.

NON-VERBAL CUES

Within the yoga therapy relationship, both client and therapist receive and convey information through non-verbal communication. These include:

- attitude
- body language
- confidence
- · personal power
- internal emotional state.

The yoga therapist picks up a range of information from the client by observing how information is received and action taken. This includes the level of mental understanding, attitude and physical understanding of the communication.

HOW CLIENTS FIND US

The clients that are drawn to us do so to support their own healing process. Why is this?

The exact reasons are unclear. In some cases they may have been referred, or they may have stopped by your office by chance. Ultimately

they come because they feel drawn to work with the practice and therapist to support a healing process. Clients are drawn to work with us because of the energetic signature that we hold, which they sense either consciously or unconsciously as a match for their needs.

The universe is vast and mysterious and we only have a very limited understanding of why things work out the way they do.

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR

When adopting the function of yoga therapist, understand that only a portion of the information perceived about the client is accurate, perhaps only 50 percent at best. The remainder exists as a projection on the part of the therapist. For example, when we are in an emotional state we often see the rest of the world as being in that state too, even though this belief is coming from our own perception.

A helpful model for understanding this is the client as a mirror, which comes from psychology. Each client reflects back to the therapist information about the therapist.

The client-as-a-mirror model divides individuals into categories:

- Dark Mirror (those reflecting mainly our negative traits/ attitudes).
- Light Mirror (those reflecting mainly our positive traits/ attitudes).
- Clear Mirror (those reflecting neutral traits/attitudes).
- No Mirror (those who fail to show up in our awareness).

This model teaches us to take whatever we see in the client with caution, as we may be seeing ourselves in our assessment of them. Care should be taken when making sweeping statements. It is wise to reflect carefully before communicating certain perceptions to clients. The yoga therapist is also a human going through a personal development journey.

Although we may perceive inaccurately from time to time, we work at understanding a client's needs on many levels, not only with our rational mind but also instinctively and intuitively. As well as being potentially powerful, this model is also inherently uncertain.

Inaccurate assessment and personal projection onto a client can profoundly impact the spirit of a client even if the client is unaware of the triggers.

For example, comments and suggestions made by the therapist about lifestyle can be seen as criticism by the client, so the words spoken and suggestions given must be carefully considered and titrated as the relationship develops.

Underlying all yoga therapy is the understanding that the client's body and universal spiritual energy are the forces accomplishing the restoration of health. Client and therapist work as a team to encourage the body's intelligence to reconnect to the universal intelligence, thus re-establishing the blueprint of health and wellness that underpins the human form.

COMMUNICATION AND BOUNDARIES

How the beginning of the client/therapist relationship is established determines the subsequent boundaries for healthy communication and support.

The client may wish to communicate with the therapist between sessions. If the therapist permits such communication, it must be managed carefully to ensure boundaries are not compromised. Usually setting times and appropriate modes of communication give the client the confidence that he or she is being supported without compromising the yoga therapist's personal life. If these boundaries are breached, communication needs to occur as soon as possible to resolve the situation.

When working with individuals, the therapist uses all forms of information gathering to make decisions that have both the client's and therapist's best interests at heart. In this way the practice can become heart-centered.

SUMMARY

Communication is an essential element of yoga therapy. While yoga therapy processes are not psychiatry, talk therapy or counseling, a mental and emotional component to the work does exist and some coaching or guiding may be required.

The level to which this happens depends upon the skill and background of the therapist. If the therapist recognizes that some aspect of the client's journey requires additional support or if the therapist has reached the boundary of his or her scope of expertise, then the therapist needs to refer the client on to the appropriate practitioner in another discipline.

Yoga therapists must remain aware of their power to influence others in the therapeutic setting. Awareness of all the different levels comprising a human being is essential to a holistic approach to health.

EMOTIONAL BALANCE AND THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

LEARNING TO FEEL

Yoga therapy offers the opportunity to inhabit our bodies more fully by reconnecting with our felt sense and beginning to tap in to material held at an emotional level, material that may have been repressed, as it could not be met and acknowledged in the moment. This is highlighted in the exceptional work of Bessel Van der Kolk (see Van der Kolk 2015), who uses yoga and other modalities as part of an integrated approach to trauma resolution. He observes that experiences of trauma and shock often coincide with a decline in our physical health, emotional balance and nervous system regulation.

For many reasons in our culture, trauma has been hidden and only certain kinds of feelings have been encouraged, often only in very specific contexts. Emotional health and expression has not been included in the Western medical paradigm as part of an overall view of the health of an individual until recently. Healthy expression and the capacity to feel a full spectrum of emotions are closely linked to health. The overall emotional health and emotional tendencies are shaped by an individual's environment and experiences from conception into early life.

Most clients that arrive to explore yoga therapy bring up primarily physical ailments, but as the relationship develops emotional material also tends to surface.

THE SYSTEM THAT FEELS

The nervous system is an essential part of our body and gives us the ability to sense ourselves and our surroundings. It gives us our sense of touch, integrates information from our internal environment and gives us information about how safe we feel in certain situations.

In some ways the nervous system can be thought of as the bridge between the emotional world and the world of our felt sense. All of the sensory nerves ultimately connect to the central nervous system, sending information to the brain to build a picture of our world. These inputs give us information that helps us orient to our three-dimensional surroundings.

Most nervous system sensing is done unconsciously and we do not need to think when we step or touch something. In yoga, we bring the nervous system sensations into our conscious awareness and begin to open up into a rich sensory experience.

By beginning to sense the nervous system we begin to feel the system that feels and develop awareness of the relationship between ourselves and other things.

THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

The autonomic aspect is a sub-function of our nervous system. It regulates tone and task by encouraging the mind/body system to relax or rest or prepare for danger and rapid response. There are many aspects of modern life that leave the body in a tendency toward fight or flight.

These include:

- the pace of our society and its obsession with constant communication
- the use of computers and digital communication, essentially released into the public sphere without sufficient testing for long-term impacts on the nervous system
- the nature of our entertainment industries
- the culture of overworking.

This is important because when the system tends toward this fight or flight mode, many other functions involved in health and healing are affected and essentially become less of a priority.

This results in:

- challenges around sleep
- a narrowed focus or more isolated limited view of things
- slower digestion
- tendency to be in the head or to indulge in over-thinking
- slower healing responses.

The autonomics are part of the way that the nervous system mediates between other body processes and in turn affects overall functioning. Working with them is important because the nervous system plays a role in most illnesses and diseases. If we are to effectively support our clients we must be able to help the nervous system find balance to meet its challenges.

To do this we may need to work with the client to assess which branch of the autonomic system needs to activate. In most cases, it is the parasympathetic branch that needs attention, the branch which supports relaxation and rest, as opposed to the sympathetic branch which brings the overall system to a higher speed and a state of alertness. A smaller proportion of the population has a hypotonic autonomic tendency, creating a kind of parasympathetic paralysis.

Through the early stages of our life, and on an ongoing basis, the social nervous system is being refined and fine-tuned based on experiences.

In reality, our autonomics oscillate throughout the day as we meet the many requirements of our daily lives. All of our activities affect the nervous system, from working to dealing with technology, from driving to social interactions, from how we exercise to what and how we eat.

Our current mentally oriented thinking-centric culture has led people away from their bodies and from sensing how they feel. The role of the yoga therapist is to help clients become aware of their nervous system, so that they begin to notice how they feel again and discern what they need in any particular moment. This is done partly by exploring how different postures, movements, tempos and themes affect an individual, and by helping the client understand the role of slowing down and reaching stillness to increase health.

However effectively we support the client's nervous system awareness, this is only a substitute. What seems to fully reset the nervous system is good sleep, where the mind/body gets to integrate and restore itself and the system fully settles.

INTERWOVEN SYSTEMS

Psycho-neuro-immunology is a relatively new science that studies the body's integration in complex ways. Our classical Western medical understanding tends to view body systems as functioning in isolation. This new area of inter-scientific exploration brings together knowledge on the:

- nervous system
- immune system
- hormone glandular apparatus
- cardiovascular system
- emotional system.

Through the studies arising from this field, our understanding of the unity of the living system and the human experience is being appreciated and improved.

In a 2013 lecture, Dr. Gabor Maté observes:

These systems are not separate. Therefore we are not even really studying and describing the links between them but are really learning about the differentiated functioning of the same super system.

Another way of describing these complex relationships in our mind/body system is to see our bodies as a neuro-endocrine-immune-perceptual system. This idea, developed by Dr. Jim Jealous, sees our perception as deeply intertwined with biochemical health and the feelings of our mind/body system.

From a yoga therapy perspective, these descriptions give us clues as to the ways in which processes work cross-functionally, which we can then view within ourselves and in our clients. As we improve our ability to understand complex relationships and find simplified approaches to health based on these views, we can see how our work can affect clients on a deep and fundamental level.

Through careful feeling, sensing and releasing as part of the yoga therapy process, we essentially rewire our own psycho-neuro-immunology, which has profound effects on our health, our emotions and our perception.

EMOTIONAL BALANCE

The process of exploring yoga therapy can act as a tool to open up into feeling and sensing, where clients can learn to feel safe with their feelings and begin to regulate them.

The yoga therapy process can act as a place to observe emotional experience in a safe environment.

As yoga practitioners and therapists, we aim to support the client's healthy emotional expression, and in the process their maturity and emotional balance.

WORKING WITH THE EMOTIONS

Yoga therapists support the client in several ways in working with the emotions. We are in no way attempting to block the emotions or the feelings that are arising with the client. Yoga therapists have tools that can provide support when the client is ready.

If a client is experiencing emotions or feelings, we sit with them inviting them to "let go and allow" what is happening. The guidance may include taking deep breaths, feeling gravity and the ground and relating to the many other principles of yoga therapy described here. In some arenas this act is called "holding space." We can invite clients to identify what it is they are feeling so that they are present, sensing the feeling and not getting stuck in the story. They can then also experience communicating that with another person. They may wish to fully express their feelings and can choose how they do that, within safe parameters, which gives a feeling of choice.

When a client is in the midst of a strong emotional experience, we might physically orient them to the moment. This involves bringing a person into their physical awareness and perhaps asking them what they feel in the body and the location of the feeling being experienced.

By using language, gentle physical adjustment and touch we can let the person know we are there to support them in the moment. Yoga therapists can use a variety of subtle sensing skills during these vulnerable moments. For example, we can use touch to sense into the central nervous system and begin to support its settling and we can learn to see emotions affecting people's bodies and invite them to name what they are feeling.

These are some very simple methods to meet emotional material within a client situation. They produce profound results, and if done skillfully can bring a client to a calmer state. However, no one way always works, as each person and each moment is different. The emotional world is mysterious, complex, exhibits little order and cannot be rationalized.

Our task is to hold a heart-oriented space, without leaning in. We are not trying to fix people, but allow them to find their way back to a greater sense of wholeness. Getting too involved in the client's emotional process can be all too easy. The yoga therapist needs to stay centered, so that the client has a stable fulcrum to orient to.

Yoga therapists are not trained mental health professionals. Yoga therapy can support people with a range of mental health challenges and provide the fields of psychology and psychiatry with an alternative to medication as a way to affect body and brain chemistry. If any client begins to exhibit mental health issues, however, it is essential that we refer that client to a trained professional. If a client begins to access repressed material of a traumatic nature, this also requires referral to an appropriate specialist, who is better placed to support that client's health.

In order to see beyond the mental/emotional field, the client must see past the stories, feel deeply into the feelings and move through into the stillness of heart and mind that lies on the other side. The purpose of the physical component of yoga is to calm the fluctuations of the mind. In yoga therapy, we are well placed to support the client's use of the physical practice to go within and balance the various levels of the self.

EXERCISE

- Stand in Tadasana (Mountain pose).
- Notice any story that is running in the mind. Observe the emotions that are present and what can be sensed, physically in the body, in that moment.
- Close the eyes and open the heart smile and calm yourself deeply with several slow deep breaths.
- Soften the joints of the legs (ankles, knees and hips).
- Place one hand on the sacrum (use the back of the hand on the body to avoid unnecessary twisting in the wrist) and one hand on the back of the upper neck just below the base of the skull. In this position, you hold either end of the central nervous system in your hands and you can sensitively gain access to this internal aspect of the body.
 - This approach to sensing can be used for therapist self-care and for sensing the client. When working on yourself, you can explore this exercise lying down, in sitting or in standing. With a client, it can be explored on the back, lying down, sitting or on all fours.
- What does it feel like? Is there movement or total stillness? What sessions can you feel? (Can you feel buzzing, pulsing, vibrating movement at a slower pace?)
 Does the tone or speed of the nervous system change as you track it? Does it feel like it slows down or speeds up as you gently palpate it?
- Explore several postures at different speeds of transition.
- Reassess the nervous system. Notice the differences.
- Have the emotions changed? Is the story still present in the same way?

A great time to assess the nervous system is after getting home from a busy, stressful day or after a nap. This develops the ability to sense variations and draw comparisons, building experience with what you are feeling. When sensing the body in this subtle way, avoid being invasive with your attention. Use gentle contact to encourage a gentle nervous system release, as you observe your living system, and always intend balance.

The release itself may be perceived as a subtle widening, locally around the spine.



LANGUAGE IN YOGA THERAPY

The language used in yoga therapy can have an impact on the healing process. Listening to what the client says and how it is spoken is essential, as is the language used by the yoga therapist. This chapter outlines some of the areas for consideration within this aspect of the work.

TYPES OF LANGUAGE

The type of language that will be most effective will depend upon the client's background and orientation (e.g., structural, classical, medicinal, simplified, complex, energetic, new age, poetic, enthusiastic). The more we find the language that resonates with the person we are working with, the better. For example, communicating the work to a lawyer may require different language skills than speaking with a massage therapist about the same topic.

TONE AND TIMING OF VOICE

The tone of our voice and words can radically change their meaning. It is helpful to bring this into consciousness. It reflects our overall style, mood, enthusiasm, personality and underlying intent of what we are saying. Timing of speaking also plays a role on impacting the pace of the client's internal body rhythms (e.g., rhythm of the heartbeat and the nervous system).

ENERGY OF SPEECH

The energy we bring through our words is another important aspect. In Native American Indian culture, they talk about words as medicine, having either a positive or negative effect. Negative language from a person in a position of power, such as a therapist, can have an enormous impact. When we speak we pass on our energy, making it important that we look to pass on only what is positive, by maintaining self-awareness. Every word impacts the overall therapeutic outcome and affects the biology of the client. Studies in Japan, performed by Masaru Emoto, author of the book *The Hidden Messages in Water* (2005), have given us a greater understanding of how living fluid systems can be affected by language and intent.

LISTENING TO THE CLIENT

The language we use is self-defining and illustrates our world view. What language does the client use? Listen carefully as it may provide helpful clues as to who the client is, what he or she is capable of and what that client believes. Are there any words that seem out of context? These may be something being repeated by someone close to the client, that has been unconsciously adopted.

What we perceive may not always be accurate, and how we converse with the client before, during and after the session is important. We must be careful as to what we share with clients from our perception and intuition. Perception is complex and may not be accurate.

Ultimately, language affects our relationship to ourselves, our surroundings and particularly our experience. It gives us the tools for description of perception and interpretation of reality. The client and their environment are interrelated and therefore both are vital in any treatment approach. The conceptual and language environment the person has grown up in and currently experiences affects their healing process.

CULTURE AFFECTS LANGUAGE

Each language and culture has its own relationship to experiential reality and creates a construct with perceptual boundaries. Native people's languages tend to have a more porous relationship with their environment. As countries become mixing pots of different cultures, references from one culture can leak into another and so on. At the same time, some aspects of culture and perspective may get homogenized. We can draw on the different relational experiences that cultures have to their environment and their understanding of health.

Classical Eastern approaches to medicine use many factors to assess the health of the individual and have whole systems of understanding in place that link the outside of the person to the inside. Chinese medicine and Vedic sciences pay attention to the eyes, tongue and skin as well as structural and energetic phenomena (e.g., nervous system activation levels, body language, speech, posture and attitude). All of these Eastern systems of health ask the practitioner to widen his or her observation skills.

To use any of these other systems of health effectively with clients, we must receive the relevant extensive training. For someone familiar with the terminology, we may use concepts from these other cultural systems in our communications; however we must target our dialogue to the people we are working with while remaining authentic to what we know.

HEALING OUR PLANET/HEALING OURSELVES

The evolution of language in the West has created a partition between ourselves and our planet. The breakdown in our relationships with the Earth, water and air during the last hundred years has coincided with how our language and our attitudes have driven a barrier between ourselves and our environment. In our current culture, symbols have become more important than reality. For example, flag burning is punishable by imprisonment but mining and fracking, which seriously damage the land, continues unabated. This brings to mind the quote by Alfred Korzybski: "The map is not the territory."

In a more specific yoga therapy-focused example, consider how our culture, science and language trap breath inside of our body, in the same way that it insists that intelligence is isolated inside of humans.

Breath has become an isolated, separate process rather than the vehicle for connecting us to our animate, living environment. We must personally reintegrate ourselves to the world and then, from there, we can aid another in the reintegration process.

CREATIVE USE OF LANGUAGE

"Each generation develops its own syntax." (Don Juan in *The Wheel of Time*)

To be effective and truly alternative, we have to break out of our Western language constraints, perceive in a more holistic way and find language that supports this. This transition returns us to a way of seeing more like traditional Aboriginal societies and leads to a situation in which we speak and perceive in a way that:

- sees everything as interrelated
- utilizes awareness of all aspects of the client in supporting their situation
- allows us to always learn to see more.

This change in approach ultimately leads to a view of the client that is based on a greater degree of wholeness.

RETHINKING OUR APPROACH

As we grow within a certain culture or language, we structure our sensory contact with our environment in a particular manner, paying attention to certain phenomena and ignoring others. This is natural to a certain extent as we take our place within any community of human speakers. To fully understand our clients we must unravel ourselves from these restrictions and see, as much as it is possible, from the client's perspective.

EXERCISE

- Have any metaphors shared during your yoga journey stayed with you?
- What type of language resonates with you? Is it structural, classical, medicinal, simplified, complex, energetic, new age? What background or experiences have you had that give you this inclination?
- Think of some words that you use in your teaching or your description of practicing yoga that you would see as specifically resonating with your approach.
 - Where does your emphasis lie?
 - Would you use this language with all clients?
- Build a teaching script, teaching several poses using more energetic language and then only using structural language. Choose your language carefully.



THE THERAPEUTIC JOURNEY

Despite being explored in a therapeutic way, yoga therapy is not a onestop solution to every kind of issue that arises in the human experience.

Certain issues are well suited to resolution by yoga therapy, but there are also those better addressed through other methods. Sometimes, a solution may include conventional medical methods in partnership with complementary or alternative approaches.

While yoga is a deep and complex system that has developed over thousands of years as a path toward wholeness, we would be naïve to assume that all problems can be resolved solely through a single path.

This is not a disclaimer in a typical sense, but it does recognize that life is extremely complex and healing is non-linear.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MODALITY

When assessing a new approach or modality, consider exploring it for a while on its own so that its merits and effects can be assessed individually, as much as that is ever possible.

Once a client is confident that an approach works and is committed to a modality as a therapeutic direction, additional levels of support can be added. Multiple modalities can be explored simultaneously. The practitioner should be able to give some indication on whether practices work together. Ultimately it will be the client who elects what they explore in order to find the most optimal and effective route to healing and systemic rebalancing.

There are hundreds of modalities that report to support mind/body/ spirit healing. Techniques vary in terms of focus and intention, but many modalities work with the central axis or the spine in some way.



As yoga therapists we are working with the client's spine and midline. Learning to assess the health of the spine can be an important skill and can give us clues as to where the root cause of an issue may lie.⁵⁰

CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Yoga therapeutics support people in many ways. In order for it to be effective, however, the client needs to take a certain level of responsibility. Yoga therapy takes commitment. Practice may be required over an extended period of time in order to gain the benefits. This level of engagement is different than the conventional medical approach and requires patience on behalf of all parties concerned.

Yoga therapy is not always easy and sometimes can bring new challenges. As change happens, pain and discomfort may arise. This may be part of the transformation. Working closely with a teacher is important in the early phases to ensure that pain is carefully managed and mitigated where possible and that challenges are addressed, even if not understood rationally.

The process is only really effective when the client explores in his or her own time, away from sessions with the practitioner. This might be called self-care or homework. Hours of practice at home are not required, although some may wish to dedicate this kind of time to accelerate their journey. What it does require is that some reflection, self-awareness or personal exploration be undertaken, making a degree of self-motivation necessary. If the client only explores yoga in the sessions with the practitioner, the process will take a long time and change will occur very slowly.

Ideally, the yoga therapy process has a clear end point. When
the original symptoms have been reduced, a good point to
conclude may have been reached. Or it may seem like a good
point to conclude but it may take a longer period of time for
issues to be fully addressed and more or less resolved.

Some people may wish to leave after the initial benefits have been attained. Other clients will find that the original symptoms are dwarfed by other findings as the yoga therapeutic journey unfolds. The therapist needs to periodically check in with the client with regard to journey outcomes. Renegotiating the statement of work and associated therapeutic goals can make things clearer and may be important for some people.

It is not unusual for the therapeutic journey to morph into a teacher/student relationship at a certain point. The original issue has been resolved and yet the client wishes to continue to be supported. It is important to ensure that everyone is comfortable with this transition, as slightly different relational dynamics may occur in terms of objectives, conventions, appointments duration and so on. Bringing this into consciousness can be helpful and clarifying.

WORKING WITH CLIENTS IN PAIN

Pain is as old as life itself, and physical pain is very powerful, impacting every stage of human life. Many who work in the healing arts are empathic. We all have different perceptions of pain and different levels of tolerance for dealing with it. As cranial sacral therapy practitioner Steve Haines says, "Pain is really strange." Pain's subjective qualities make it both a mystery and a universal experience.

Pain is a tricky aspect of therapeutic practice, for both the client and the yoga therapist. Although each of us experiences pain over the course of a lifetime, exactly what we feel can never be felt by another person in the same way. In his recent book, Haines (2015) suggests that as pain science evolves we are coming to realize that pain is often actually held in the system that feels rather than in the tissues themselves. In this sense, pain is held at some level in the nervous system and in the mental realms.

When people experience physical pain, avoidance of that pain or attempts to not use the painful area quickly become habitual. We do whatever we can to continue with our daily activities. Many people are living with low-level pain all the time resulting from postural abnormalities, unaddressed conditions or injuries that don't heal. Often the body blocks this out or the individual uses pain medication to avoid the discomfort. Over time this may become chronic. If acute pain coming from an injury or surgery becomes too great, then we are forced to stop activities more quickly to make progress toward healing.

By remembering any pain we have had in our lives we can develop compassion and patience for our client as they experience theirs. Choices exist on how we meet this kind of challenging experience. If we can, we encourage clients to meet pain with curiosity, kindness, lightness and care. Under such circumstances, amazing things can happen.

We cannot take pain away from the people who opt to become our clients, but we can invite them to develop a practice that supports healing, encouraging them to feel into the diversity of sensations it creates in their bodies. By observing the way pain and discomfort morph and change over the course of a session, clients can transform how they perceive sensations of pain so that their relationship to it may shift. For many clients, pain management is an ongoing process and has many different durations, degrees and ways that it expresses uniquely. We must watch carefully for signs of increased stress in the client's physical system, as sometimes activities we suggest can trigger a spiral of increased pain. We ask that the client take responsibility for their experience and stop if pain increases, as we act as secondary monitors from the outside.

At some point in their work with clients, many healing arts practitioners begin to feel the pain carried in their clients' bodies. As we become more sensitive as therapists, we may be able to feel and perceive this exchange. This seems to occur because of the close relationship between client and therapist which creates a resonant field dynamic, created by bodies occupying the same space and sharing similar frequencies. If you are someone for whom this tends to happen, then self-care is essential. You can read more about this topic in the next chapter.



Working with other people in a therapeutic capacity can be subtly taxing. As yoga therapy practitioners, we have to maintain our own health in order to effectively help others. This requires that we engage in self-care. There are many elements which comprise a healthy, self-care routine. This list is not exhaustive but covers some of the main components:

- Nutrition: A healthy, balanced diet is essential to wellbeing. A nutritious diet should be low in processed foods, which the body has difficulty processing. Nutritional information is constantly changing so it helps to remain up-to-date on how to eat in the best way possible. In truth, what constitutes a good diet is different for everyone and each of us must find what works for us at each stage of our lives. A diet rich in fruit and vegetables that have been locally grown, without chemicals and sensibly portioned out at meal times would seem to be a good starting point.
- Water: Water is essential to our lives and is a sacred substance which cleans, heals and refreshes. Drinking plenty of water is critical for our health and yet we need to be aware of its quality due to high levels of chemical pollutants in much of the fresh water that remains on our planet. Drinking clean water helps us to cleanse our bodies and flush out toxicity that builds up from our environment and lifestyle. Showering or bathing after a long day with clients is a healthy way also to clear away the energetic exchanges of the day.

- Air: Like water, clean air is essential to health. We depend on our environment to be clean enough that the air we breathe is healthy and reasonably free of toxins. Regularly finding time to be outside and exercise in natural places where the air is clean brings health to our bodies, minds and spirits. In yoga philosophy, there is the idea of "prana" or breath energy that rides into us on the breath. The more natural the place, the stronger the prana.
- Rest: Rest is a key factor in emotional balance, clear positive thinking and physical healing. Living fast-paced lives that include constant use of technology and a tendency toward stress causes rest to often be sacrificed. Thus we need to prioritize rest, time off and sleep and invite our clients to do the same. If we neglect sleep, we can find ourselves out of balance and with a negative outlook. From this perspective, we can think of tiredness as being one of the gateways for heavy energies to enter this realm. We don't necessarily need the same amount of sleep each night. In fact, our sleep cycles shift according to what is happening in our lives, our diet, our age and many other factors. If we listen carefully, our body will tell us when we need rest. Following this inner guidance keeps the mind, body and spirit refreshed. It is unwise to regularly override the body's wisdom around rest and doing this may cause a range of problems. Rest includes taking time off, making space for vacations or holidays, and time away from our normal pattern of activities, possibly in a retreat environment. This time off helps us gain perspective on our lives.
- Regular yoga and movement practice: As yoga therapists, I believe that we need to ensure that we maintain our own practice in some form. Continuing to refine our yoga self-practice would seem to be essential for us to flourish in the profession. This does not mean that we exclusively do yoga all the time. Walking, running, dancing, swimming, moving meditation or any of another thousand activities may be more appropriate in any given moment. As practitioners of these arts, we continue to deepen our work and take our own wellbeing seriously. Moving and breathing each day

keeps us healthy in many ways, prolongs our life and gives us energy. As people advocating for health and inspiring others we must practice what we preach and bring awareness to our increasingly sedentary culture.

Receiving work: One very important aspect of self-care is regularly receiving work for ourselves from one or more sources. This may take the form of body work, attending classes or courses with a teacher of our choosing, or some other more formal psycho-therapeutic route. Receiving work helps us maintain our own balance as we engage with our personal and professional journey. Having places in which to discuss our work is essential to being able to let go and move on. This may be accomplished in the form of talk therapy, through a supportive peer group or by acquiring a mentor more senior in the profession. The reason we need to do this is that it brings to light our shadow material, as we are often unaware of our blind spots. Discussing our work in a confidential setting can prove helpful in processing our experience, just as bodywork is also helpful to clear physical and energetic stagnancy from the mind/body system.



Receiving regular work to calm the central nervous system is a powerful reset for the body which can benefit both practitioners and clients.⁵¹

- Relational health: Often overlooked is the importance of the social environment we choose to have around us. Although we may not be able to choose our family members, we can make healthy choices about our partnerships and friendships. If this aspect of our life is toxic, it can overflow into our personal inner landscape and our working environment.
- Self-inquiry: This aspect of self-care relates to personal development and is broader than just maintaining a yoga practice, although it may include that. By continuing to reflect on our own lives, our personal situations, our planet and our existence, we consciously create an environment of learning, grounded in awe and curiosity regarding the processes of life. Self-inquiry stretches us and encourages us to continue to grow and develop. For our yoga therapy community to flourish, it requires conscious self-aware individuals who are pioneers in their lives, both personally and professionally, and who exhibit the qualities we teach to clients.

BEING EFFECTIVELY RESOURCED

Ample attention to self-care creates a feeling of being fully resourced. This is true both within the client and within the practitioner. Clients attentive to their individual self-care help support optimal healing and personal development processes. If a practitioner is attentive to individual self-care, more self-awareness and awareness of the client emerges, as well as a greater capacity for presence. In essence, therapists become more available and aware of situations as they arise.



BEYOND ASANA

At present, no definitive list exists as to what constitutes a yoga therapy practice. Clients arrive at yoga therapy with a fairly limited view about what it is and what it can do for them. Commonly what draws people to yoga therapy is a simplified perception that yoga can alleviate pain—which is true to some extent. In terms of the scope of yoga therapy, the commonly held view from the general public is that yoga is solely about postures. A more classical and comprehensive approach to yoga therapy may also include:

- meditation
- mudras
- prayer
- energetic awareness practices
- visualization and focusing
- breathing practices (pranayama)
- chanting
- lifestyle choices (eating activities)
- cleansing.

A full description and assessment of the therapeutic effectiveness of all of the practices that fall under the yoga therapy umbrella is outside the scope of this book. Many of these categories have not been discussed during this basic discourse as they do not form part of my own approach to yoga therapy. The qualified yoga therapist may call upon a variety of

practices depending upon their own study preferences and the needs of the client. However, regardless of the practices used, one of the main outcomes for the yoga therapist is a development of energetic awareness and a growth in perceptual abilities.

PERCEPTUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

A useful definition of perception is as follows (Oxford Living Dictionaries n.d.):

- the ability to see, hear or become aware of something through the senses
- a way of regarding or interpreting something.

The development of enhanced levels of perception is a key aspect of the yoga therapy journey. It is a natural process and takes clients beyond healing to an expanded vision of their lives. This has always been part of the yogic path and the third book of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is dedicated to the special skills that develop through the flourishing of yoga. This could be described as the development of the sixth sense, or opening to our extra-sensory capabilities.

These skills are the birthright of each human being but invariably get tied up with the ego. As we undergo perceptual growth, we also work to reduce our self-importance. Perceptual growth can occur in many different directions simultaneously. Common perceptions in the early phases of yoga include shifts in the visual realm, such as auras and lights, and the perception of an energetic phosphorescence at times. There are many layers to our world and our modern culture tends to focus on a very limited bandwidth of what is "real," dismissing all that is unseen.

Western principles and values tend to dominate our sense of perception, placing it within the traditional framework of normal perceptual allowances. As perceptual development takes place, there is a fine line between the diligence, discipline and commitment needed to continue and becoming over-ambitious and attempting to rush the process. In order to check the ambitious aspects of our character we must use the optimal amount of effort and continue to observe.

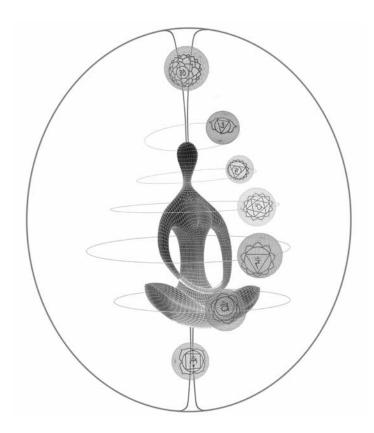
PERCEIVING ENERGY DIRECTLY

Part of what happens as our yoga process develops is that we become able to perceive energy directly. We all get glimpses of this as we watch an emotion surge through someone. In the yoga therapy process we begin to more carefully observe our own energetic experience, as well as that of our clients.

In order to accumulate more energy, which in turn supports our healing journey and helps us deepen our perceptual gifts, we have to stop pushing or pulling, in much the same way as we are asked to let go of will in the physical asana practice. Ultimately, the practice moves into a more receptive mode.

This move toward opening to receive energy begins processes that are difficult to describe in words. It does not involve doing or not doing. As the weight of the physical structure flows down toward the ground, energy flows up. This happens without us needing to engage directly, yet we are engaged passively. The physical work of asana allows energy pathways to open more clearly to allow this energy to move through. As our practice deepens, we can begin to perceive our own energetic sphere and also the cocoons of domestication that have blocked our perception.

As our awareness develops we may begin to perceive energy that forms part of the classical models, whether it is meridians from the Chinese paradigm, koshas, bhandas, chakras or nadis from the Indian paradigm or something else entirely. For further information on this topic, I would recommend further detailed study of classical Indian and Chinese philosophy and plenty of practice. There are dozens of specific practices throughout the ancient world that offer opportunities for perceptual expansion. My objective in this chapter is simply to orient readers to the fact that they exist so you can begin to follow your own path.



The chakras form the basis of the energetic and emotional partitioning of the midline in the yoga traditions. This image illustrates the classical symbols that are used to represent these chakras and their locations within the human energy field. As our perception develops, can we learn to tune in to these planes of energy, at different levels in the energetic sphere, and sense what the old yogis may have felt?⁵²

Ultimately, we have to trust our own experience and not be afraid so that we can continue to grow. As we continue to grow, our capacity for stillness and inner silence increases, which in turn allows us to see more. As we acknowledge ourselves as spiritual and energetic beings, vast realms become available for exploration.

DIAPHRAGMS: TRANSLATING BETWEEN CULTURES

In yoga, several of the physical diaphragmatic structures correspond to what are called the bhandas. Bhandas are energetic seals, gates or locks. Some yoga practices engage these physical structures directly in a bid to activate the energetic principle. In reality they begin to engage naturally through the practice.

The three main bhandas are:

- Mulabhanda (in the pelvic floor region)
- Uddiyanabhanda (at the respiratory diaphragm)
- Jalandharabhanda (at the thoracic inlet region).

The following exercise will help the practitioner to become aware of these energetic phenomena.

EXERCISE

- Explore a deep yoga therapy practice. Open up the body and breath and allow the mind to relax.
- Finish the practice and adopt Savasana or similar closing supine posture.
- Place your hands on one of these areas of the body and notice what you sense:
 - Lower abdomen: Little fingers on hip points, lower back/pelvic floor
 - Respiratory diaphragm: Hands on costal arch, thumbs around back intercostals
 - Thoracic inlet: Hands on clavicles, arms crossed.
- Notice what you notice, feel the feelings and perceive as fully as possible. Are there energetic experiences that you can describe? If not, don't worry. Just keep practicing and staying open to the next moment.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In concluding this book, I choose to reorient us to the overall intention of this work and the classical context of this approach to healing with an extended quote by one of the leaders and guiding lights of modern yoga therapy.

"Yoga therapy is based on the ancient principles of citaska karma (therapeutic orientation), which derive from the yoga tradition of Patanjali and the Ayurvedic system of health, both of which in turn derive from the Sankhya and Upanisadic traditions of Vedic India.*

Yoga citaska is a remedial tradition, founded on a recognition that our physical condition, emotional states, attitudes, dietary and behavioral patterns, lifestyle and personal associations, and the environment in which we live and work are intimately linked to each other and to the state of our health.

According to yoga therapy we live within a framework of constant change (parinama), and, within this framework, develop conditioned patterns (samskaras) that are present in every dimension of our lives and that influence our perceptions, thoughts attitudes and behavior at every level. The good news is that nothing is static, our condition will inevitably change. The salient question is, will it change for better or for worse? Our challenge is to influence the direction of change for the better. This challenge is complicated by those patterns, often operating beneath the level of our conscious awareness, that influence our action. We may heal

^{*} with Vedic India being the birthplace of the Vedas, India's oldest yoga texts.

the body through some medical or alternative healing modality, but, unless there is transformation at the level of our deep patterns, we may end up re-creating the same or similar conditions again.

Yoga citaska is the art of tapping the resources deep within us to heal ourselves (to influence these deep patterns)...and involves a progressive reintegration of the entire system by creating harmony in every aspect of our lives." (Gary Kraftsow, *Yoga for Wellness*)

May all those who wish to share yoga therapy bring deep awareness to the process, whilst staying connected and inspired by these themes and principles that echo the need for wholeness.



CRANIAL SACRAL THERAPY

Instinctual and intuitive hands-on healing has been used since the dawn of time and served mankind from the first years of our evolution. With the dawn of modern science, great advances were made in understanding the human body and the nature of disease, enabling specific problems to be identified and addressed with drugs and surgery. The future of healthcare and wellness requires the marriage of the ancient with the modern.

The cranial sacral therapy approach to healing derives its origins from osteopathy and cranial osteopathy and is a light-touch, noninvasive healing modality developed by frontier doctors in the early years of the United States.

The classical osteopaths used their perception and their knowledge of the systems of the body to identify dysfunction, using their hands. They used their perceptive skills to gain access to a subtle rhythm they called "the breath of life" to aid healing in their patients. This silent force, which can be thought of as a field of energy or chi, blows through the cranial sacral system, animates it and infuses it with information and intelligence.

The ability to listen to and facilitate the reorganization of these forces is the basis of a cranial sacral therapy training and the practitioner develops skills in stillness and deep listening.

In more recent times, the physiological effects of these forces have now been understood to be a combination of: the movement of bones, associated connective tissue changes along with fluid and bio-electrical shifts. The goal of the therapy is therefore to aid the body in balancing this myriad of complexity.

Western science is beginning to understand that the brain, memory and emotions exist beyond the head, given that events happen to the whole person, and therefore the cellular body acts as a warehouse of memories. These can release, change and return to equilibrium, given the right conditions.

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GLOSSARY

Asana Yoga posture

IAYT International Association of Yoga Therapists

Kumbhaka Breath retention

Pranayama Breathing practices

Spiritus Latin for inhalation

Supine Lying on the back of the body

Trikonasana Triangle pose

Vinyasa Movement combined with breath, a flowing yoga practice

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