

Issues in Yoga Therapy

Perspective

Bridging Yoga Therapy and Personal Practice: The Power of Sadhana

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Yoga chikitsa (yoga as a holistic therapy) is becoming extremely popular, and numerous studies worldwide are providing scientific evidence of its therapeutic potential.¹⁻⁵ In our zest to make yoga popular, we may be missing the experiential link in the chain. The interconnectivity between research findings, their therapeutic applications, and the yoga therapist's practice must be strengthened to maintain the integrity of the practice of yoga. The strength of any chain is defined by its weakest link. Similarly, the healing potential of yoga chikitsa depends on the personal *sadhana* (practice) and conscious living of the therapist. We are the conduits, and we are responsible for transmitting the spirit of yoga to our patients or clients.

In our developmental process we initially gain data, collecting pieces of information and forming cognitive maps and schemas. As this information is consolidated, it becomes knowledge. When this understanding is assimilated with life experience, this knowledge becomes wisdom, or *jnana*. The commitment to and deepening of our *sadhana* enables us to experience an expansion from our finite, limited, ego-bonded consciousness into an infinite, limitless, universal consciousness. At this point we attain the state of *prajna loka*, a dimension where we are one with the wisdom of the Universe itself.

Spirituality and science were not separated in ancient cultures. It is only in modern times that they have been artificially divided. As Albert Einstein stated, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."⁶ Further, "All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree."⁷ Yoga is both an art and a science. As one who loves both its dimensions, I am heartened by Einstein's con-

attention that "everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble."⁸ Truly, science and spirituality are indivisible at both the cosmic and the individual level.

In many ways modern yoga has lost touch with its holistic nature. Therapists may prescribe yoga techniques for different conditions as if *asana*, *pranayama*, *mudra*, *bandha*, and the like are antidotes for specific conditions. This is yogopathy and not yoga chikitsa, the holistic application of yoga as a therapy.⁹ In the absence of personal *sadhana*, or direct experience, how can a yoga therapist knowledgeably recommend practices to others?


The same holds true for researchers studying the effects of yoga techniques. When individuals lack personal experience with the practices, how can they comprehend what they are studying? Without this experience, one cannot truly understand what to measure or how to examine the richly interwoven tapestry of a participant's experience. One could argue that a physician does not need to experience an illness or a treatment to be effective. But yoga differs from modern medicine in that its central philosophy is predicated on the wisdom that comes from personal experience with the practices (*jnana*), not only the knowledge of them.

As yoga practitioners, teachers, researchers, and therapists we bear the responsibility to live the philosophies and practices of yoga through *sadhana*. In bridging *sadhana* and yoga therapy, we unlock the potential for transformation for our clients and communities as well as for ourselves.

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