

Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind-Body Healing

by Deepak Chopra, M.D.

Reviewed by Donna Martin

Deepak Chopra, a practicing endocrinologist who trained both in India and the United States, brings together in this book both Western medical understanding and research with the insights of Ayurveda as given to him by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

This ancient healing tradition from India is based on the principle that "the body knows how to maintain balance unless thrown off by disease; therefore, if one wants to restore the body's own healing ability, everything should be done to bring it back into balance." According to Dr. Chopra, "the ancient doctors of India were also great sages, and their cardinal belief was that the body is created out of consciousness...theirs was a medicine of consciousness, and their way of treating disease pierced the body's matter and went deeper, into the core of the mind."

This, of course, is not a new concept for modern medicine. Hippocrates stated two thousand years ago that it is nature that cures disease. Paul Brenner,

M.D. wrote in *Health is a Question of Balance* (1978) that "unresolved stress sets the stage for illness...there is the external manifestation of disease - but to treat, one must learn the internal chronology. What is happening in your life to allow illness?" In *How Shall I Live*, Richard Moss, M.D. states that "health and our state of consciousness are inseparable." Other doctors trained in the tradition of Western medicine, such as Carl Simonton and Bernie Siegel, have written immensely popular books exploring the influence of the mind on the body and on healing.

Dr. Chopra, former chief of staff of New England Memorial Hospital and founding president of the American Association of Ayurvedic Medicine, brings to this "mind-body" approach both the knowledge and credibility of someone trained as an M.D. and the wisdom and practice of Ayurveda. Although other books on Ayurveda written by Dr. Vasant Lad, Dr. R. Svoboda, and David Frawley present more detailed information about its methods of diagnosis and treatment, what Dr. Chopra's book offers is a highly readable explanation of "a number of the concepts of Ayurveda (relative to) a modern systems/information theory of health and illness as exemplified by the rapidly developing field of psychoneuroimmunology." (G. F. Solomon, M.D. professor of psychology and biobehavioral sciences, University of California, Los Angeles.) Chopra

manages to bridge the huge gap between traditional Western medical approaches and the new "mind-body" theories, presenting the paradigm shift in an amazingly understandable and readable way. The description of the DNA, for example, what it is and how it works, is both simple and wonderful.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, *The Hidden Physiology*, discusses the phenomenon of miracle cures, spontaneous remissions, and the basic principles of mind-body medicine. "For decades", Chopra writes, "medicine has known that much disease has a psychosomatic component, yet dealing with that component has been like trying to harness the wind. Inside us there must be a 'thinking body' that responds to the mind's commands, but where could it be and what is it made of?" He notes that a major limitation of medical research is that the "first thing that is killed in the laboratory is the delicate web of intelligence that binds the body together." In reviewing what medicine knows about the body's own healing mechanisms, he draws three conclusions:

1. *"intelligence is present everywhere in our bodies";*
2. *"our own inner intelligence is far superior to any we can try to substitute from the outside";*
3. *"intelligence is more important than the actual matter of the body since without it, that matter would be undirected, formless, and chaotic."*

His explanations of the body's physiology and healing processes are simple and clear. Cancer, eating disorders, schizophrenia, depression, and other illnesses are explained, as are the effects of steroids, Vallium, interleukins, and other forms of treatment.

There is a fascinating discussion of the role of memory in illness, something therapists should be more aware of. As Chopra explains, "a cell's memory is able to outlive the cell itself." In fact, he defines a cell as "a memory that has built some matter around itself, forming a specific pattern. Your body is just the place your memory calls home." He continues to explore the role of memory in addiction, saying that "the cell's memory for the addictive substance is what is hooked, and it keeps creating distorted cells that reflect its weakness. In other words, an addiction is a distorted memory." (I am reminded of what Paul Brenner, M.D. stated in his avant-garde paper on Chronic Pain in 1977: "...chronic pain is a sordid memory...")

These concepts arise from a way of understanding reality which is both ancient and "new age". "Before this", Chopra writes, "science declared that we are physical machines that have somehow learned to think. Now it dawns that we are thoughts that have learned to create a physical machine." In ancient India, "it was supposed that intelligence existed everywhere; it was called Brahman, from the Sanskrit word for 'big', and was just like an invisible field." (Contemporary theorists like physicist David Bohm and biologist Rupert Sheldrake propose that reality is created and held together by an invisible field (or "morphic resonance").

Chopra quotes a wonderful line from an ancient Indian Upanishad which says, "the power penetrating the universe is much more than what shines through." It is this realization that opens the door for "quantum healing". The techniques used by Ayurveda depend on the mind being able to influence "the invisible patterns that order the body."

In Part II, *The Body of Bliss*, Dr. Chopra looks at healing from this ancient Ayurvedic approach, which is subjective rather than objective like our Western approach. The rishis, who were the ancient sages that wrote the vedic texts, were, he says, "much more avid for direct experience than any quantum physicist. Their subjective approach was called Yoga, the Sanskrit word for union." According to the rishis, the brain is not important as an object. "It is important because our own subjectivity shines through it." In other words, when we use our brain to see the world, what we are really seeing is ourselves. According to Maharishi, the purpose of transcending is to expand the mind and subjectivity, and with this its reflection - the whole visible world. Meditation is a vehicle to contact that supreme intelligence which shapes and heals the body. "When the mind shifts, the body cannot help but follow."

Ayurveda, the sister science of Yoga, literally means "science of life." Although usually thought of as a medical system, Dr. Chopra suggests that it could also be called "a system for curing delusions, for stripping away the convincing quality of disease and letting a healthier reality take its place". The reason why meditation is so important in Ayurvedic healing is "that it leads the mind to a 'free zone' that is not touched by disease."

Quantum Healing is a book filled with information, research, anecdotes, and personal stories. It is written in a clear, understandable and captivating style. As a yoga therapist, what I find most valuable in the book is the emphasis on the underlying principles of mind-body healing from both the Western and yogic points of view. "You are like a light", writes Chopra, "radiating on everthing in nature."

"Quantum healing", as defined by Dr. Chopra, is "the ability of one mode of consciousness (the mind) to spontaneously correct the mistakes in another mode of consciousness (the body)." It is my personal belief that "mistakes" may be an inappropriate and limiting word to use here. However, I agree with Dr. Chopra that healing happens when the body's own natural self-regulating process is assisted to do what it knows how to do. The primary tool for this is the power of attention. Mind-body healing occurs when the obstacles to awareness - "the veils called Maya" - are removed. For the yoga practitioner and therapist who has already tuned into this truth, "Quantum Healing" supports, validates, and enhances the very foundations of our practice.

Yoga for the West

by Ian Rawlinson

Reviewed by Jim Dreaver, D.C.

Ian Rawlinson's *Yoga for the West* is a beautifully presented, easy-to-read manual for the serious yoga student. The book opens with a foreword by T.K.V. Desikachar, one of India's leading yoga teachers and the main inspiration behind the author's work.

The author, a native of England, spent two years studying with Desikachar in India and then became an established teacher in his own right, teaching extensively in England, Switzerland and the USA. He has written many articles on yoga and for three years was the principal teacher at the British Wheel of Yoga Annual Congress and he continues to teach and lecture throughout American and Europe. It is of interest to note that the author is also a licensed acupuncturist, and combines yoga therapy with his busy acupuncture practice in Petaluma, California, where he now resides.

As a long-time student of yoga myself, what appeals to me about this book is the thoroughness and the orderliness with which it unfolds. Ian Rawlinson's purpose is to describe the principles of practicing *asana*, or the postures, and *pranayama*, or breathing,

as taught to him by Desikachar, and in this he succeeds excellently. The book is well-illustrated, with some photos, but mostly with a series of finely-drawn stick figures which have been done in such a way that they illustrate the various *asanas* perfectly, and even have an endearingly "human" appeal to them.

Central to understanding the Desikachar approach, and to getting the full value from this book, is the concept of *vinyasa* - the arranging of a sequence of postures in an intelligent order so that there is a goal, a preparation for the goal, and a gradual descent after the goal has been reached. The goal might be a particularly challenging posture, or it might be to hold a position for a certain length of time, or again it could be to use a breathing ratio in a number of *asanas*. There are many possibilities, and the beauty of the *vinyasa* approach is that it allows the student to be creative and flexible in designing a yoga practice.

As the author stresses over and over again, each student is unique, with different needs and abilities. A posture that is easy or beneficial for one person may be extremely difficult and even potentially harmful for another. As a chiropractor, I have seen quite a number of yoga students over the years who have injured themselves through the incorrect practice of yoga. With the Desikachar approach advocated in this book, along with the supervision of

a qualified teacher - the need for which the author repeatedly emphasizes - the chances of doing injury to oneself are effectively minimized.

Throughout the book are many examples of *vinyasas*, though the possibilities for creating one's own sequence of postures are infinite. A simple *vinyasa* might consist of a standing posture, a lying posture, an inverted posture, a back bend, a twist, a forward bend, and then concluding with a sitting posture. The whole idea is to gradually warm-up the body, to begin with the easier postures as a preparation for the more difficult ones. This reduces the risk of injury and allows the student to refine his or her yoga practice in such a way that it produces maximum physical and mental benefit.

The various chapters in the book deal with such aspects of yoga practice as the principles of counter-pose, use of the breath, static and dynamic *asanas*, variations and modifications of poses, observing and analyzing one's practice, and planning a practice so that one gets the most out of it. Another example of the author's thoroughness is that at the end of each chapter is a short list of questions which provide an opportunity for testing one's grasp of the material.

In working with this book just a little myself, I have already discovered some ways in which my own yoga practice can be improved. For the committed student of yoga, I give *Yoga For The West* the highest recommendation. It is a practical book, free of any mystical or philosophical speculation, and has the authority of an authentic yoga tradition behind it. Ian Rawlinson has done a fine job. The book, in quality paperback format, is published by CRCS Publications of Sebastopol and retails for \$14.95.

For information about classes and individual instruction, the author himself may be contacted at phone (707) 762-4309.

Science of Stretching

by Michael J. Alter, M.S.

Reviewed by Willow Rain

Deconditioning the body, relaxing the mind, freeing perception: these are some of the benefits of a regular yoga practice. Studying for intellectual clarity is an essential part of that practice, and information is available from a dizzying selection of sources and disciplines.

The subject of this book is flexibility within the context of gymnastics and kinesiology. Author Michael J. Alter is a former gymnast, coach and nationally certified men's gymnastics judge. When reading this book from the perspective of a yoga teacher and therapist I found it difficult at first to separate the material that pertains to yoga from a mechanistic gymnastic's approach to movement. Although there is an extensive bibliography there is no glossary, which makes for slow going in the technical sections.

Several chapters are devoted to the histology of muscle, connective tissue and nerves, and the gross anatomy of the legs and pelvis, spine, shoulders and arms. This material is valuable to a yoga practitioner because it is presented within the context of the

study of flexibility. Intellectual clarity on stretching at the cellular level provides a yoga teacher/therapist with a solid foundation for guiding students away from over-zealous goal achievement, and toward a more self-loving, tolerant practice within the given limitations of their individual bodymind. Gymnasts are usually athletic, yogis are not necessarily so. The range of motion that a gymnast may routinely expect to achieve may not be within the scope of a person's body who is investigating yoga postures. The yoga teacher needs to be able to explain the anatomy, and so give each student affirmation, and permission to be less than ideally flexible.

Alter gives a brief nod to methods of relaxation, the efficacy of breathing with movement, and to the accommodations one needs to make to age, gender and body type. These are not investigated to any depth and quality information is better sought from other sources.

Other key technical sections describe various methods of stretching, how injuries occur, how to avoid them, and the anatomy and physiology of muscle soreness. Some of this information is hypothetical and controversial, but most of the material provides valuable insight into principles of stretching, and the finer points of injury prevention in movement.

The final third of the text is taken up with illustrated stretching exercises, amplified with brief instructions and warnings. This section complements the anatomy and kinesiology with a table that cross references the exercises with the parts of the body they particularly affect. For the yoga practitioner this is an ideal source for creating training routines for fitness and healing.

The substance of the book, for me, is the histology and anatomy material which sheds light on some of the bio-mechanical aspects of asanas and is of use in the healing applications of yoga and for fitness training. Interwoven with this material is state-of-the-art kinesiology, with illustrations of normal range of motion, and tests for diagnosing and analyzing problems associated with limited movement.

For example, in the interrelationship of stretching the lower back, pelvis, and hamstrings (p. 133) Alter warns: "When stretching or testing for flexibility, one must be careful to distinguish between tight, normal, and stretched muscles. Equally important, one must also make sure that only the desired muscle groups are stretched. Often, the true results are marked or obscured. Therefore, some additional knowledge of the structures that are involved is necessary." He illustrates the point with a series of drawings of a figure in *Pachimatanasana*, showing the effects on the range of motion in the posture of a variety of factors, such as: short gastroc-soleus muscles, short hamstrings, over-stretched upper back and short low back muscles.

As becomes apparent from regular yoga practice, range of motion is limited by individual anatomical features. Alter refers in this regard to the cervical region of the spine (p.127): "The major determinants of the direction and extent of motion reside in the shape of the vertebral bodies and in the contours and orientations of the intervertebral articulations. Flexion of the neck is limited by apposition of the lower lips of vertebral bodies anteriorly with the surfaces of adjacent vertebrae; range of motion is limited (in extension) by approximation to the spinous processes; the locking of the posterior edges of the superior atlantal facets in the condyloid fossae of the occipital bone."

Range of motion, then, can increase only within the limitations of structural uniqueness. This is a subtle warning to approach bodywork or asanas without a predetermined goal or image of perfection. It is an invitation to be sensitive to the body, and to approach training with open hearted no-mind.

Yoga is not spiritualized gymnastics, although Alter does mention the spiritual advantages of bodywork and quotes from B.K.S. Iyengar in *Light on Yoga*: "To the yogi, his body is the prime instrument of attainment. If his vehicle breaks down, the traveller cannot go far. If the body is broken by ill-health, the aspirant can achieve little. Physical health is important for mental development, as normally the mind functions through the nervous system. When the body is sick or the nervous system is affected, the mind becomes restless or dull and inert and concentration or meditation becomes impossible." (pp. 24-25) Some of the illustrated exercises are classic hatha yoga postures, and by carefully maintaining a yoga perspective while studying this book, a yoga therapist, teacher, or serious student may derive much information of practical value. It is a book for people for whom yoga is more than a passing interest, who are sure of their spiritual footing and therefore free to wander among other ideas and approaches and not lose their way.