

Reviews

Gregory P. Fields. *Religious Therapeutics: Body and Health in Yoga, Ayurveda, and Tantra*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001. Hardback, 222 pp., \$54.50; paperback, 222 pp., \$17.95. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

Religious Therapeutics takes a masterful scholarly look at the relationship between the body, health and healing, and spirituality filtered through three traditional Hindu systems, Ayurveda, Patanjali's Classical Yoga, and Tantra. Author Gregory Fields, an associate professor of philosophy at Southern Illinois University (Edwardsville), divides the therapeutic focus into four general areas: religious meanings that inform the philosophy of health and medicine; the religious means of health and, conversely, health as a support to religious life; and religiousness itself as a cure for human suffering. These then translate concretely into eight branches: metaphysical foundations, soteriology, ethics, physical practice, cultivation of consciousness, medicine and health care, aesthetics, and finally what Fields calls "community relationality," a phrase implying that health influences, and is influenced by, our relationship to our community. The first five of these are based on Patanjali's *ashta-anga* system, itself traditionally likened to a therapeutic process, while the last three are covered in the chapters on Ayurveda, Tantra, and the short conclusion.

Rather than propose a specific definition of health, Fields outlines fifteen "determinants" of health drawn from Ayurveda. Ayurveda approaches health, as we might say, holistically and proactively, seeking to pre-

vent illness through a "positive cultivation" of the health of the whole person. The determinants are grouped under four main headings: biological and ecological, medical and psychological, sociocultural and aesthetic, and metaphysical and religious.

Some determinants are obvious. You would expect a healthy person to live a long time, adjust to the environment in ways that are both "self-preserving and accommodating of impinging forces," and be free from pain. Other determinants, such as the ability to sustain a life-long creativity, are less obvious and serve to expand our usual understanding of the meaning of health.

Fields has a number of unique ideas about therapeutics. He contends, for example, that the Tantric modality has an aesthetic foundation. He uses the word "aesthetic" here in its original sense, "not only in reference to art, but also . . . pertaining to sense perception." The Tantric world is "sacred creation," a vast arena of self-revealed vibratory intelligence in which every sense perception, whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, can potentially lead us to the divine. Fields concentrates on the recuperative power of sound, whether chanted aloud as *mantra*, heard as subtle sound (*nada*), or heard as sacred music.

Published by the State University of New York as part of its Religious Studies series, *Religious Therapeutics* is a demanding text, but for Yoga therapists and serious practitioners it is well worth the effort. Fields expertly reveals the roots, relations, and healing possibilities of our Yoga practice and supplies a framework for an understanding of health and wholeness that embraces all dimensions of our being, from the physical to the spiritual.

B. K. S. Iyengar. *Yoga: The Path to Holistic Health*. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2001. Hardback, 416 pp., \$40.00. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

This book is primarily an *āsana* instructional manual, including about 40 postures, all easily within reach of even moderate practitioners. The instruction is spread out over two long chapters (out of six total). “Asanas for You” (Chapter 3) comprises 23 representative postures. Each is explained generally, usually in three to five paragraphs, then further elaborated with brief directions keyed right to the accompanying photos. Iyengar-style *āsana* instruction is extremely precise, which may seem overly meticulous to non-Iyengarists. The text also provides benefits and cautions, individual advice for beginning, intermediate, and advanced students, and hints on self-correction. Probably the most striking visual feature is the “round” of photos for each posture, showing it from (usually) eight different angles, as if the reader were circling the model and observing from the front, back, sides, and the four intermediate points.

“Yoga for Stress” (Chapter 4) deals with *āsana* modified for therapeutic applications, which relies heavily on an array of props—chairs, benches and stools, blocks, bolsters and blankets, straps and bandages—for which Iyengar-style Yoga is famous. Again, non-Iyengarists may have a problem, not only with properly arranging the props, but—as they are asked to do for certain postures—coming up with, say, 5 wooden blocks, or 4 bolsters, or a specially constructed bench (with no alternatives to these props suggested in the text). Altogether 38 propped postures are described, somewhat less than half

of which are variations of full postures described in Chapter 3.

All 40 or so postures are then organized into various therapeutic sequences (of anywhere from 15 to over 40 postures) in “Yoga for Ailments” (Chapter 5). About 90 ailments are listed, grouped in 12 categories according to various body systems, like the respiratory, digestive, and immune systems, or the skin, mind and emotions, and issues relating particularly to women’s and men’s health. There is no instruction in this chapter, just a short introduction to Yoga therapy, a two-sentence overview of each ailment, and small photos illustrating each sequence. Most of the ailments—like fatigue, headache, and mild forms of anxiety or insomnia—can be self-treated by just about any student, but a few others, like epilepsy, high blood pressure, and heart attack are best left to professional Yoga therapists or other trained health practitioners.

This is a well conceived and executed, if somewhat expensive, book (no doubt because of all the color photos), but the unparalleled instruction from one of the giants of modern Yoga makes it well worth the cost. Yoga teachers, Yoga therapists, and serious Yoga students of whatever stripe will definitely want a copy for their library.

Śrīvatsa Rāmaswāmī. *Yoga for the Three Stages of Life: Developing Your Practice as an Art Form, a Physical Therapy and a Guiding Philosophy*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2000. Large-size paperback, 262 pp., \$19.95. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

Śrīvatsa Rāmaswāmī had the unique opportunity to study Yoga with one of the most influential teachers of the twentieth century, T. Krishnamacharya. In part one of this

book, on the theory of Yoga, he first gives us a fascinating account of his 35-year relationship with Mr. Krishnamacharya, which ended with the sage’s death in 1989. Since his theoretical focus is Classical Yoga, Mr. Rāmaswāmī next retells the charming story of the semi-legendary compiler of the *Yoga-Sūtra*, based on a little known (at least in the West), 300-year-old biography of Patanjali, the *Patanjali Caritra*, by one Ramabhadra Dikshita. The remaining four chapters in this part answer the question, What is Yoga? Mr. Rāmaswāmī begins with a overview of Yoga, which provides a context for the more specific investigations of Patanjali’s philosophical foundation, his *kriyā-yoga*, outlined at the start of the second chapter of the *Yoga-Sūtra*, and the “ten commandments” of the eight-limbed (*aṣṭa-āṅga*) discipline, the self-controls (*yama*) and restraints (*niyama*).

Part two, on practice, covers various groups of familiar postures and their variations (*vinyāsa*), such as standing, supine (including an interesting reclining “gesture,” *tatakamudrā*, the “pond gesture”), headstand and shoulder stand, simple back bends, sitting forward bend (*pashchimotāna*) with several preparations and counter-postures, and lotus. Next comes instruction in Yoga breathing, followed by a special chapter on women and Yoga, a review of important Yoga texts, a discussion of the three so-called inner limbs (*antar-āṅga*) of the classical system—*dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—and a final short chapter on the yogic accomplishments (*siddhi*) and Patanjali’s ultimate goal, aloneness or freedom (*kaivalya*).

This is a thoroughly enjoyable book, written with the sincerity and wisdom you would expect from a long-time, dedicated student. It is not, however, as the author notes, a

book for absolute beginners: It lacks specific practice schedules—a must for novice practitioners—and includes some *āsanas* (like headstand, shoulder stand, and lotus) that are inappropriate for lower levels of experience (especially without the supervision of a teacher). More experienced students, teachers, and Yoga therapists, however, will certainly want a copy of this book in their library.

Krishna Raman, M.D. *A Matter of Health: Integration of Yoga and Western Medicine for Prevention and Cure.* Chennai (Madras), India: Eastwest Books, 1998. Hardback, 482 pp., \$45.00. Reviewed by Baxter Bell, M.D.

In this college-text-like book, Dr. Raman, an Indian-trained physician, engineer, and student of B. K. S. Iyengar, attempts a definitive presentation of therapeutic Yoga as a means for holistic health and prevention of diseases, as well as for the treatment of various disorders. The book is presented in four sections. The first, on “lifestyles,” explores Dr. Raman’s views of health and diet, of the effects of life-style and work on health, and of Yoga in sports, in the arts, for women, and for pregnancy.

Section 2, “Functional Anatomy and Physiology,” provides a broad, yet in some ways cursory, review of human systems, with a closing section on Yoga as a means of preserving the body. Section 3 addresses more specifically exercise, *āsanas*, *prānāyāma*, and the use of props, one of Mr. Iyengar’s great gifts to practitioners. In Section 4, the author turns his attention to specific medical disorders and their management, covering seven broad categories, ranging from cardiovascular disease

to orthopedic problems.

The appendix is helpful, but limited, in designing *āsana* and *prānāyāma* practices for specific health problems. There is also a glossary that includes both Sanskrit words and some limited medical terminology.

It is clear from Dr. Raman’s writing that his respect and devotion to the work of Mr. Iyengar is deep and profound. Obvious, also, is his belief in the potential of Yoga over all other therapeutic modalities in helping maintain and restore health. In reference to its effects on joints, he writes, “Smooth, soft, supple movements with alignment, and a steady state of stretch or contraction, are available *only* in Yoga. The range of movements far surpasses that in any other science” (page 282). Unfortunately, Dr. Raman rarely offers any support for this kind of bold claim, or for any of his claims of Yoga’s efficacy for various disorders, with any objective references to “evidence-based” research. One would expect a book of this nature to include an extensive bibliography of cited research, but there is none.

His apparent attitude toward Western pharmaceutical treatment of illness, despite his own Western medical background, seems at times overly critical. Likewise, his attitude toward other styles of Yoga is strongly apparent. To quote, “When one examines (medically) persons trained in other schools (of Hatha Yoga), the body parameters lag far behind students trained in the Iyengar system.” Dr. Raman fails again, however, to provide any references to objective studies to support such a statement.

Another potential difficulty in applying the author’s recommendations to our North American students, clients, and patients lies in the seeming disparity between treat-

ments used in India and in the United States. In reference to diabetes treatment, for instance, he discusses the class of medicines called sulfonamides, which, in this country, have largely been eclipsed by newer, safer medications having fewer side effects.

I do applaud Dr. Raman’s call to prevention and Yoga’s obvious place in its pursuit, and I believe we are beginning to see the results of the treatment of active disease with Yoga through well-designed studies here in the United States. Promising areas include the treatment of asthma, chronic pain, and arthritis. In terms of practical approaches to specific types of students, I found Dr. Raman’s section on sports and athletes to be particularly unique and insightful. However, at a time in Western culture when we are finally beginning to see an acceptance of “alternative” or “complementary” therapies in the world of medicine, it is uncertain how a premise of the therapeutic superiority of Hatha-Yoga, and more narrowly Iyengar Yoga, without offering any evidence-based support, helps to remove boundaries to understanding and integration.

Dharma Singh Khalsa, M.D., and Cameron Stauth. *Meditation as Medicine.* New York: Pocket Books, 2001. Hardback, 298 pp., \$25.95. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

The self-healing exercises in this book are collectively known as Medical Meditation. It is described as “one of the newest and most cutting-edge advances in the field of integrative medicine,” an adaptation and refinement of Kundalini-Yoga combined with meditation.

Each exercise consists of four

“healing elements”: a specific breathing pattern (*prāṇāyāma*); a special sitting posture (*āsana*) supported by other movements, muscular locks (*bandha*), and hand gestures (*mudrā*); sound (*mantra*); and mental focus.

The practical application of these exercises is covered in the third part of the book, “Healing with the Chakra System.” As the title suggests, the work is rooted in the traditional *cakra* system (here including an aura-like “eighth *cakra*”) and the “healing energy” of *kundalinī*. Each *cakra* is ascribed various physical, psychological, and spiritual characteristics and behaviors, mostly following the lead of traditional Tantric texts, along with a dominant emotional obstacle, such as lust or anger. According to Dr. Khalsa, most ailments, whether psychological or physical—everything from depression to Alzheimer’s disease to cancer—can be traced to an imbalance of or lack of energy in one or more subtle *cakras*. Anywhere from two to nine exercises are assigned to each *cakra*, each designed to stimulate healing energy and distribute it throughout the system.

I am not clear where the cutting edge is in all of this. The four healing elements, the *cakra* system and its associated transformative power, the complementary ideas that physical or mental illness has its source in the subtle body, and the use of yogic techniques to cure these illnesses, all are drawn straight from traditional texts or models. But Dr. Khalsa makes an earnest case for the efficacy of his method, which he backs up with inspirational case studies and testimony garnered from various scientific studies. If you are interested in Kundalinī-Yoga and its therapeutic possibilities, then this book provides an excellent introduction.

Jan Maddern. *Yoga Builds Bones*. Boston: Element Books, 2000. Paperback, 189 pp., \$16.95. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

Subtitled “Easy Gentle Stretches that Prevent Osteoporosis,” this book is designed for women over the age of 35 who want to improve their strength, flexibility, and physical balance, stimulate bone development, and positively affect their hormone levels and calcium balance.

The Hatha-Yoga-based practice consists of a short “getting started” warm-up and five major “routines” for the upper and lower body, the ovaries, the adrenals, and the parathyroid, pineal, and pituitary glands. There is also a concluding chapter on “special yoga for menopausal symptom relief” involving sun salute and several postures, breathing exercises, and a Yoga hand seal (*mudrā*) and belly lock (*bandha*).

Each routine takes about 20 minutes and incorporates eight or nine *āsanas* or *āsana*-like exercises and one finishing breathing exercise. Exercise instructions are straightforward, usually not more than a page in length, and the benefits of and focus for the work are clearly defined. For the most part exercises are easy and gentle, though there are a few—like the two cranes—that might not be suitable for all beginning students.

Much of the instruction, however, lacks sufficient cautions, especially for the back-bending, up-and-down squatting, and half lotus exercises, the first for the back and neck, the latter two for the knees. From my perspective, several of the illustrations—particularly those for the back-bending movements and the lunges—could have demonstrated better alignment, again for the back, neck, and knees.

It cannot be stated with any certainty that these exercises will “prevent” osteoporosis, as little supporting research has been done, but they will certainly provide a good foundation, along with the supervision of an experienced Yoga teacher, for a reasonable preventative program.

Mukunda Stiles. *Structural Yoga Therapy*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 2000. Hardback, 343 pp., \$40.00. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

Structural Yoga is a form of Hatha-Yoga that “creates a living understanding of anatomy and movement based on a deep reverence for the integrity of the human body and Spirit.”

The first four parts (of six) of the book include information on the origins and theory of Yoga; preparation for practice, including practice guidelines, how to find a teacher, and a practical review of sun salutation; the benefits of Yoga, including principles of body reading, a self-examination based on those principles, and an analysis of common postural misalignments; and basic anatomy, with a 21-step joint-freeing series, a 21-point mobility assessment test, and a six-exercise strengthening sequence.

The heart of the text (in Part 5) is the “complete series” of 24 structural *āsanas*, the “foundation from which all the other asanas are derived.” All are readily accessible to the average student. Each *āsana* has perhaps a half-page of Iyengar-influenced instruction, suggestions for a variation, if any, and focal movements on various muscles and bones, precautions and common errors, an informative paragraph or two on body reading, which discusses the possible physical weaknesses or misalignments revealed by the performance

of the posture, and the benefits of the posture. This section is followed by a chapter on *âsana* kinesiology, which discusses the correct and incorrect "feeling" of the *âsanas* and outlines the design of a personal *âsana* program.

The last part covers Yoga for specific goals, such as improving posture, enhancing body awareness, increasing strength and flexibility, strengthening the heart, and managing stress. The therapeutic process for each goal is illustrated with a short case history, outlining the author's work with an individual student. The book concludes with chapters on meditation training, Yoga therapy "secrets," and the organization of a complete Yoga practice.

I suspect this book was written with a general audience in mind, but I doubt the average student will be willing to wade through all the anatomy and kinesiology. Serious students and teachers, on the other hand, will find this a valuable reference source.

H. David Coulter. *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga: A Manual for Students, Teachers, and Practitioners*. Honesdale, Pa.: Body and Breath, 2001. Hardback, 622 pp., \$40.00. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.

Author David Coulter has a Ph.D. in anatomy from the University of Tennessee and has taught anatomy at both the University of

Minnesota medical school and Columbia University. He has trained in Yoga at the Himalayan Institute under both Swami Rama (from 1975 to 1996) and Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, and has been initiated by Swami Veda Bharati (formerly Usharbudh Arya).

His new book, despite its title, is much more than just a straight anatomy text. In its ten chapters you will learn all you ever wanted to know about the neuromuscular, vestibular, skeletal, and cardiovascular systems; the mechanics of breathing, and how breathing affects posture in general and also particular types of poses; muscular stretching and relaxation; the fundamentals of twisting, forward bending, and back bending; developing strength and flexibility; and much, much more. There is also instruction in six basic *âsana* groups: standing poses, back bends, and forward bends, twists, inversions, and standard sitting poses for meditation and *prânâyâma*, along with *mudrâs* (seals) and *bandhas* (locks) and various breathing exercises and techniques.

Coulter uses anatomy to illuminate the structure and execution of the poses and, at the same time, brings the anatomy alive through the poses and selected exercises. By my rough count there are around 50 *âsanas*, many accompanied by variations, at least three dozen exercises and preparations, and perhaps a half

dozen locks and seals. All of this is supported (again according to my rough count) by close to 300 illustrations and photos.

Coulter's writing has a nice light touch, which invigorates a subject that many people might otherwise find pretty heavy going. It goes without saying that the instruction emphasizes the physical aspects of the poses, though naturally, considering his Yoga pedigree, Coulter is certainly cognizant of their energetic and spiritual dimensions.

I have a few quibbles with the instruction, mostly due to our differences in approach, and a few disappointments. Among the latter, for example, is the almost total lack of instruction in the most basic of the three important *bandhas*, *jalandhara-bandha*, though *mûla-bandha* and *uddîyana-bandha* are well covered. But these complaints pale in comparison to the wealth of information provided.

This is not a book that will appeal to everyone. You will need more than a casual interest in the detailed nuts and bolts of Hatha-Yoga poses. But if you are a Yoga therapist or teacher, or a student who enjoys breaking down the poses and putting them back together again, then you will most definitely want a copy of this book to refer to over and over again.