

## Reviews

### Books

**Mira Mehta.** *Health Through Yoga*. London: Thorsons Press, 2002. Paperback, 227 pp., \$19.95. Reviewed by Sandra Summerfield Kozak, M.S.

In *Health Through Yoga*, Mira Mehta brings the world a well-needed book on the sister sciences of Yoga and Ayurveda. She writes as a master of Yoga and a life-long practitioner of Ayurveda, combining the practical benefits of each to provide a program designed to create good health, maximum energy, and longevity.

The first section of chapter one provides a wealth of information for Yoga students new to Ayurveda. Here the author introduces Ayurveda and covers the concepts of the elements, properties, tastes, energies, body tissues, temperaments, wastes, constitution, digestive fire, and the mind and soul. This chapter also offers instruction on the important Ayurvedic topics of daily and seasonal regimens and the *marma* points.

In the second section of chapter one, entitled “Understanding Yoga Through Ayurveda,” the author brings the two sister sciences together. Combining Yoga and Ayurveda she discusses physiology, psychology, cleansing treatments, energy and pain management, and how to create better health and well-being.

Chapter two, “Practice Routines for Longevity,” addresses the various aspects of the body and mind through the practice of *āsana*. The author progresses from simple to more complex poses, providing a systematic course that can be followed from beginning to end. Ms. Mehta starts the program by creating anatomical strength in the foundation of the poses—beginning with the feet and legs and then moving upward. After creating

a foundation of strength in the body, she moves to the arena of physiology with poses that enliven the abdominal area, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, the immune system, and the female organs. The author closes this first third of her book by addressing the mind and mental and emotional well-being. The program offered here is thorough, and her instructions are clear and refreshingly concise.

Ms. Mehta completes this work with a chapter entitled “Readings for Serenity,” which is composed of selected pieces from major treatises relevant to Yoga: the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and the *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patanjali. In this third and final chapter she expresses her poetic nature and her yogic mastery through explanation of the selected readings. These readings offer a perspective on various aspects of living addressing philosophical issues that include the purpose of life, the nature of living, what mind is, how to deal with suffering, and finding happiness. In the author’s words, “The ancient answers to these questions, the fruit of profound reflection[,] are as relevant and gladdening today as when they were formulated.”

This book will be a rewarding purchase for those interested in using the basics of Ayurveda in their Yoga practice and life.

*Reviewer Sandra Summerfield Kozak, M.S., an internationally respected Yoga teacher and teacher trainer has been studying and teaching Yoga full time for 31 years. She presents monthly workshops throughout North America and biannual seminars in Europe. She is the founding president of International Yoga Studies and the president of Light Transitions Tapes. Sandra is a member of the Senior Teachers Council of Yoga Research and Education Center and a board member of Yoga International Magazine. She is coauthor of Yoga for Your Type: An Ayurvedic Approach to Your Asana Practice (Lotus Press, 2001).*

**L. Robert Keck.** *Healing as a Sacred Path: A Story of Personal, Medical and Spiritual Transformation.* West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002. Hardcover, 312 pp., \$24.95. Reviewed by Jan B. Newman, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.I.C.S., A.B.H.M.

As I read this book two *sūtras* from the *Shiva-Sūtras* floated into my mind: “The union of the elements, the separation of the elements and the union of the universe” (1.21) and “As it is here so it is elsewhere” (3.14). There is no mention of Yoga in Bob Keck’s book and only a passing reference to Indian pundits, yet he speaks Yoga. He begins by telling us his life story and about how by responding to his personal challenges and using illness as a “wake-up” call he was able to discover himself on ever deeper levels and experience a “miraculous healing.” He continues with an historical voyage to examine how we got to where we are in medicine and religion and ends with steps to union, holism.

In his personal journey he relates his paradigm shifts, which were partly catalyzed by illness. In the historical journey he relates the separation of the soul from the body and intellect, and the separation of religion from medicine, science, and God. He takes us back to the era of Enlightenment where the geopolitical environment was still one of fiefdoms, popes, and kings. Scientists of that era were attempting to escape the unsubstantiated dogmatism of their predecessors and the Catholic Church. The introduction of the scientific method and Koch’s postulates made possible reproducibility of results, truth instead of dogma, reasons other than sin for disease. The side effect of this has been reductionism and increased fragmentation. Taken too far and with incorrect

motivation this has resulted in *reductio ad absurdum* and the desire to dominate instead of share. This is thus society’s necessary disease for its healing and its sacred path.

The second part of this section provides an excellent encapsulation of the current work that physicians are doing to return holism to medicine, e.g., healing a system as a sacred path.

The last part of the book, entitled “The Future Story of Miraculous Healings,” is a bit chaotic, but then Dr. Keck tells us about chaos theory and embracing the chaos in this section. He interweaves his personal mystical experiences, shamanic quotes and anecdotes, and statements of medical authorities and research studies and exhorts us to open ourselves to the natural world and to each other with love as part of his, our, and society’s sacred path to healing.

He utilizes the story of “Jonah and the Whale” to encourage each of us to follow the commands of our panentheistic God (our inner Self). For if we, like Jonah, decide that we would rather go to Tarshish instead of doing God’s work in Ninevah, we will be beset by storms and end up in the belly of a whale to be deposited in Ninevah anyway. The storms and the darkness are, according to Dr. Keck, our ailments. We cannot evade our destiny. This is a universal theme and the story could just as well be Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* exhorting Arjuna that it is his *dharma* to fight the righteous war. If Arjuna had chosen not to do his *dharma*, like Jonah he would be forced to do it anyway (*Editors’ note*: From the traditional viewpoint, following the *dharma* requires a conscious act, so one would say that although Arjuna would be forced to act, it would be under the influence of arising conditions rather than *dharma*).

Dr. Keck carries the concept of metaphor into the realm of disease and speaks of metaphorical meaning in disease. In this arena he walks the tightrope over the edge of New Ageism and comes very close to slipping off.

These are worthy concepts, however. It is important to bring these ideas to the fore. Illness may have deeper meaning and may be an opening to a deeper, more meaningful life. Some people may experience a miracle healing through this kind of process. Illness serves many purposes, and sometimes meaning can only be discerned by retrospective analysis years after an event. There can be healing, even though a disease is not cured, and death, too, can bring healing to families and friends or even society. There will, however, be some people who will never be able to deal with the emotional components of their physical ailments—their ailments are ongoing necessities in their lives. Also, as the saying goes, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar; a disease is just a disease. With the right genetics and environmental triggers a person will get sick (*Editors’ note*: Genetics and environment may still be considered aspects of *karma*). Dr. Keck does not address these latter possibilities.

This is a very delicate arena, through which a physician must tip-toe lightly.

The prudent physician, priest, physician/priest must be a *guru* in the sense of having the discrimination to know when to discuss these issues, and with whom, and must recognize a cigar when there is one. As the ways of *karma* are mysterious, so can be the ways of disease. We must all be very careful to not go overboard with this and thus do more harm than good.

Dr. Keck invites us to journey to holism by embracing the chaos,

uncertainty, and contradictions of human existence with patience and faith and attaining a balance between being and becoming. He challenges all of us—doctors, clergy, and patients—to grow together and become whole.

This book offers a synthesis of ideas and concepts that are refreshing, and it is timely and much needed. Like the *Shiva-Sûtra*, Bob Keck beckons us to take this timely step toward union.

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## CDs/Audiotapes

**Kamal Obiorah. *Yoga Relaxation Therapy: Relax and Speak*. Double CD set and booklet. London: East West Yoga, 2002. 114 minutes, £24.95 (includes postage and packaging), or approx. \$39.17US or 39.78 depending on the conversion rate at the time of ordering. Available from East West Yoga, P.O. Box 22292, London SE5 9YW, U.K., or online via <http://www.yoga4stuttering.com>. Reviewed by Molly Kenny, M.S.-C.C.C.**

The following review will briefly describe the causes, characteristics, and therapeutic approaches of stuttering, and will ask and answer three important questions: Is Yoga a viable therapy to address stuttering? If so, is a CD a useful tool in this context? If so, is this particular CD a good one?

## Practice in the Straightaway What You'll Use in the Curve

As a graduate student in speech pathology, I was required to take a course in the causes and treatments of stuttering. I remember very little about the class, except that it seemed that there was no known cause for stuttering and no sure-fire therapy to resolve this painfully frustrating condition. My professor used to always say, "Teach people to practice in the straightaway what they'll use in the curve." I never quite understood what the meaning of that phrase was, but I was pretty sure it had something to do with teaching people management tools for their everyday lives that they could apply in moments of crisis.

Later, when I was a practicing speech pathologist in a busy speech and language clinic, I had the occasion to work with and try to help many stutterers. It still seemed that no one knew what caused stuttering, or how exactly to address it, but I dutifully used the techniques taught to me in graduate school: practice, desensitization, and slowing down. I did see some results, but never saw anyone become fluent, unless they were very young children whose stuttering behaviors had not become engrained. The only thing I really saw happening in therapy was the patient's relief at and gratitude for the opportunity to express his or her thoughts—not just about stuttering but about everything—in a supportive, nonjudgmental setting where they were empowered to take some responsibility for their own progress. After many years in the clinic, I decided that I did not want to work at "fixing" people anymore, and I left to start my own private practice, one in which Yoga philosophy and Yoga exercises formed the basis for all of my work.

Over the past couple of years in my private, Yoga-based speech-language pathology practice, I have been asked many times if I use Yoga for people who stutter, and if Yoga would work for people who stutter. Although I have yet to have a student come to me to address this particular issue, I always respond to the question the same way: *Of course Yoga would help*. After all, Yoga provides management tools for our everyday lives that we apply in moments of crisis. Yoga is about practice, desensitization, and slowing down. And finally, a Yoga approach should always be supportive and nonjudgmental and clearly require the student to take responsibility for his or her own progress.

## A CD Approach

I was very interested then to learn about Kamal Obiorah's *Yoga Relaxation Therapy: Relax and Speak*.

Obiorah has an interesting story, outlined on his website and in the booklet. After apparently spending most of his life as a stutterer, a pivotal event occurred when, overcome by the pressures of rapid responding in the competitive environment of his university, Obiorah left his studies in the field of physiotherapy to pursue his desire to become a more fluent speaker. His search led him to India where he lived and studied for many years and, based on his speech on the CD, also overcame stuttering. Based on his successful experience, Obiorah has attempted to outline a set of exercises to reduce stuttering, and he has presented them as a booklet of general tips and specific *âsana* practices and a two-CD set of meditation and breathing practices.

To provide a fair review of *Yoga Relaxation Therapy: Relax and Speak*, I found myself having to ask

three important questions: Is Yoga a viable therapy to address stuttering? If so, is a CD a useful tool in this context? If so, is this particular CD a good one?

### Is Yoga a Viable Therapy to Address Stuttering?

As discussed earlier, Yoga does seem to be an approach that is as, or even more, appropriate and effective as any other. In fact, although searching the website of The Stuttering Foundation of America for “Yoga” yields no results, The S.F.A. does advertise in the back of *Yoga Journal*, suggesting a tacit endorsement of a Yoga-based approach to stuttering.

To decide what approaches might be most effective, it is important to understand, on even a very basic level, the nature of stuttering. Stuttering is a speech communication disorder that is characterized by excessive effort in producing sounds, sound sequences, or even whole words. This effort, evidenced by tension in the mouth, face, and sometimes in the entire body, results in nonfunctional repetitions of the sound or sound sequence being produced, or conversely, in no sound being produced at all, just the accompanying tension. Although stuttering affects approximately 1% of the population, and about twice as many males as females, there is still little known about stuttering’s exact causes. There may be a genetic link, a specific structural abnormality in the left hemisphere of the brain, or a faulty mechanism for the correct exertion of neuromuscular force, or stuttering may be a psychological issue, resulting from excessive anxiety about normal speech dysfluencies, or (and most likely) stuttering may be caused by a combination of these factors. Obiorah’s contention is that stuttering is “merely a habit”

developed at an early age when all emerging speakers experience dysfluent speech. In fact, as Obiorah points out, every speaking person is dysfluent several times throughout the day (watch your speech over the next hour and see how many times you stumble on a word); it is only considered “stuttering” when these dysfluencies become a problem for the speaker and are accompanied by visible signs of tension.

Because there is no exact information on the causes of stuttering, there can be no one treatment that is guaranteed to be effective. Generally accepted therapies for stuttering rely, at least in part, on teaching the student to recognize both the physical and emotional aspects of tension, and to reduce the tension through practice, desensitization, and slowing down. Although it is widely accepted that stuttering is a disorder of speech, communication, behavior, and emotion, most therapies do not go far enough in addressing these aspects in a holistic fashion.

Yoga then begins to seem even more promising, as it necessarily addresses the student on all levels of challenge and provides precise, time-honored methods for increasing awareness and reducing tension. Yoga, more so than any other approach, also has the potential to provide another key piece of this complex puzzle: Yoga is a path to self-acceptance. Yoga philosophy tells us that “the cause of avoidable pain is the union of the Seer (Purusha) and the seen (Prakriti)” (Sri Swami Satchidananda, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: Translation and Commentary*, Pomfret Center: Satchidananda Ashram, 1990, II.17). Or, as Swami Satchidananda says in his commentary, “This identification with other things is the cause of all our pain. Instead, if we are just ourselves always, things may change or

stay as they are, but they will never cause us pain because the changes will be in things we possess and not in us.” In other words, by giving students a philosophy and practice designed to lead to peace, happiness, and self-love through nonidentification with what is outside of them, a Yoga-based therapy for stuttering necessarily gives students a powerful tool to cease thinking of themselves as “stutterers.” This identification is, in fact, a hallmark of the diagnosis.

### Is a CD a Useful Tool in This Context?

If we accept that a Yoga-based approach would indeed be an effective intervention to increase fluent speech, we must consider the next question: Would a CD be a useful tool in this context? Clearly, a CD set, implying that the exercises are exactly the same each time the student listens, is not the optimal approach to learning anything. There is no personal guidance, no feedback, no one cheering the student on or explaining and clarifying nuances of the practice. Further, there is the inherent risk of boredom and of difficulty maintaining focus when hearing the same instructions repeated in exactly the same way for, as Obiorah suggests, “a period of time . . . [optimally] half an hour in the morning, and if possible twenty minutes in the evening.”

As is true for many new skills, a CD can, however, be a good starting point, used as an introduction to a practice leading the serious student to search out more personal (and hopefully live) methods. Furthermore, a quick search of the Internet yields several sites that summarize effective therapies for stuttering, and most do suggest a home practice, even suggesting that working with a speech

pathologist (the discipline most likely to provide stuttering therapy) may be too costly and time consuming with minimal results. As a speech pathologist, I agree. Certainly the best-case scenario is one in which the person who buys and uses a CD to learn about a Yoga-based approach to reducing stuttering subsequently seeks out a qualified and experienced Yoga therapist to create and continue a more individualized practice.

### Is This Particular CD a Good One?

Finally, if a CD is indeed a useful introduction to a Yoga-based therapy for stuttering, is *Yoga Relaxation Therapy: Relax and Speak* a good one? Being that it appears to be the only one of its kind, this CD and its accompanying instructional booklet become, ipso facto, the best. The written and verbal instructions are concise and easy to follow. The *âsana* practices in the book are well explained, both in terms of how to do them and what their benefits are. The accompanying photos are clear and non-intimidating, as Yoga photos can sometimes be. The supplemental information on diet and sleep is short and sweet and, like the introductory background of Obiorah's experience and personal theory of stuttering, is not pedantic or preachy.

With regard to the actual practices on the CD, they are spoken in a natural, soothing manner and are, theoretically, sound and appropriate. I say "theoretically" because—and I know I am not the only one—*yoga-nidrâ* practices and inner silence meditations tend to, against all my best efforts, put me to sleep. I found myself having to listen to the CD repeatedly just to make it through each practice in order to fairly evaluate each one. This may be the inten-

tion, i.e., providing a subliminal experience, but it does not seem like it, because, as in any good *yoga-nidrâ* practice, the clear instruction is to try not to fall asleep. [Editors' note: We Westerners, who tend to be sleep deprived to some degree, often fall asleep during the practice of *yoga-nidrâ*, caused both by fatigue and by the fact that we automatically associate the act of lying down and closing our eyes with sleep. It thus requires a very strong motivation, along with adequate rest, to heed the *yoga-nidrâ* instruction to remain awake during this powerful practice.]

The bulk of this CD consists of meditative practices, including a 40-minute and a 12-minute *yoga-nidrâ*, an 18-minute Yoga breathing practice, and a 30-minute inner silence meditation. Every one of these practices is valid and well instructed, but it seems highly unlikely that even if someone could stay awake during them that he or she would practice them repeatedly "over a period of time . . . [optimally] half an hour in the morning, and if possible twenty minutes in the evening."

The only other fault I found with this CD is that it does not do enough to remind the student that he or she is perfect just the way s/he is, i.e., that the non-identification of oneself as a "stutterer" may go a long way in helping the student actually attain increased fluency, but may also allow the student to see that even if fluency never improves, he or she is still the Self, not the stutterer.

Yoga is, without a doubt, a viable approach to address the frustrations of stuttering. Having this CD available provides the interested student with an excellent starting point to think of the condition in terms of its physical, emotional, and psychospiritual attributes and to address each of those accordingly and holistically.

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**Sannyasi Vishnuswaroop. *Yoga Nidra: The Psychic Sleep CD*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Satyananda Yoga Center. URL: <http://faculty.washington.edu/swittet/Satyananda/html/supplies.htm#yog-nidra>. 60 min. Swami Janakananda. *Experience Yoga Nidra CD*. Sweden: Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School. URL: <http://www.scand-yoga.org/english/shop/index.html>. 75 min., \$20. Dharmanidhi. *Yoga Nidra CD*. Berkeley, Calif.: Tantric College of America. URL: <http://www.tantricollege.org/shabdastand/index.htm>. 70 min., \$12. Jenni Adams. *Yoga Nidra* audiotape. Great Britain: Mind Your Body Cassettes. 60 min. Address: 5 Thurlow Road, Torquay, Devon, Great Britain TQ1 3DZ, tel.: 01803 295652. Reviewed by Richard Rosen.**

The arrival of these three CDs and one audiotape at YREC provides us with the opportunity to take a broad look at *yoga-nidrâ*, an ancient (as its exponents claim) Tantric practice. *Nidrâ* is a Sanskrit word for "sleep," so *yoga-nidrâ* literally means "yoga sleep." This is in a way a pun on the usual way we understand the word "sleep." In a spiritual context, "sleep" describes the average person in a state of self-ignorance, but for *yogins* and *yoginîs*, this word means just the opposite. They are "asleep" to the world of appearances and suffering, and so

are in fact fully “awake” to their authentic self.

The practice of *yoga-nidrâ* consists of an intentional investigation of the various dimensions of our being, with the goal being to answer the ultimate question: Who am I? This investigation proceeds sequentially through the five sheaths (*kosha*) of the embodied self, beginning with the grossest, or “food sheath” (*anna-maya-kosha*), penetrating to the subtlest, or “bliss sheath” (*ânanda-maya-kosha*), and finally reaching beyond to the nature of the immaterial Self itself.

The three CDs are fairly similar in the way they approach the practice and in the general organization of the teaching material. All three practices are performed in *shavâsana* (corpse pose), and the presenters forewarn and continually remind the practitioner that it is important while falling into “yoga sleep” to stay conscious of the project at hand and not fall asleep. Each also enjoins practitioners to initiate their practice with a resolve or positive intention—something they wish to accomplish spiritually—that will shape the practice and help guide them to their goal.

All three practices then proceed by investigating in turn, as mentioned above, the five sheaths of the physical, etheric, mental, subtle mental, and causal (or bliss) bodies. The first step is to quickly “rotate” awareness through specific points on the food sheath, usually beginning with the fingers and ending with the toes, and then return from the toes back to the fingers. Next, various areas of the body are experienced, such as the back body where it touches the floor. Then all the sensations are integrated into an awareness of the entire body. The *prâna* sheath is investigated through observation of the natural breath, or aspects of that breath, such as its

temperature or its touch on the lining of the nostrils. Surveys of the remaining sheaths are conducted through experience of various emotions, such as pleasure or pain, through visual images or symbols, or through imaginary “journeys” along a seashore, say, or through a forest.

The Tantric College of America CD, based on the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, presents two practices, one about 50 minutes long, the other about 20. The former is probably the most complex and detailed of all the practices on the three CDs (as well as the longest), even including an imaginary *âsana* practice. The presenter, Dharmanidhi, has an authoritative, business-like style that encourages intense awareness. The Satyananda Yoga Center CD provides a simpler presentation, with three practices of 10, 20, and 30 minutes each. The first of these consists of a basic awareness rotation through the gross sheath, the second includes attention to both body and breath, and the third attention to body, breath, and an eclectic assortment of images (e.g., candle, clouds, smiling Buddha, church with cross). The presenter, Sannyasi Vishnuswaroop, gives particularly clear instructions and offers a number of helpful hints about performing the practice. The Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School CD consists of two practices, one of about 20 minutes, the other about 45, separated by a 7-minute musical interlude. The presenter, Swami Janakananda, has the most appealing style of the three CD presenters, with a pleasantly singsong voice that would have “rocked” me into Yoga sleep, if not for the background sounds on the practices—nature sounds (e.g., birds, running water) on the first and music on the second—which I found totally unnecessary and distracting. How-

ever, if nature sounds enhance your imaginings and you enjoy practicing to music, then you should find this CD quite enjoyable.

Jenni Adams’s audiotape is a little different than the CDs. It seems like the most down-to-earth of the presentations, certainly the most informative about the theory behind *yoga-nidrâ*, and is offered primarily as a tool for relaxation and self-healing. On the first side is a half-hour overview of *yoga-nidrâ* that explains the general goals of the practice and the five sheaths, provides some helpful practice tips, and gives a few suggestions regarding what you might expect as you progress through the practice.

The half-hour practice itself, again performed in *shavâsana* (corpse pose), is on side two. It consists of an awareness rotation through the body and various imagery, notably of a light in the heart. Adams has a soothing voice and a distinctive way with words; I especially liked her description of *yoga-nidrâ* as “sleepless sleep.”

*Yoga-nidrâ* is an interesting practice that stands alone as a formal meditation session, whether of short or long duration. Its awareness rotation technique also can be used at the beginning of *âsana* practice to enliven the physical body, while any one or more of its other techniques can be used in *shavâsana* at the end of the practice as relaxation tools.

## Videos

**Peter Van Houten, M.D. *Cardiac Physiology and Medical Therapy for Yoga Teachers*. Nevada City, Calif.: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2002. 3 hours, \$34.95. URL: [http://www.crystalclarity.com/videos/cardiac\\_yoga.asp](http://www.crystalclarity.com/videos/cardiac_yoga.asp), tel.: 800-424-1055. Reviewed by Jan B.**

**Newman, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.I.C.S., A.B.H.M.**

Dr. Van Houten is to be lauded for this first of its kind effort to increase the medical and scientific knowledge base of Yoga teachers. This instruction is much needed. Dr. Van Houten's medical knowledge is current and comprehensive, and I learned things I did not know from this video.

With an informational/instructional video such as this the questions to be addressed are: 1) What are the goals of the instruction? 2) Who is the audience? 3) Is the audience at a level where they can absorb the instruction in the manner in which it is given? 4) Does the subject matter meet the goals? 5) Is the subject matter presented in a way that it can be understood?

The goals as stated for this video are: "You'll learn anatomy and physiology of the heart, how to work with yoga students with cardiac disabilities, how to work with the medical community as a yoga instructor."

The audience to which this material is presented is a group of Yoga teachers who are taking a 10-day training at Ananda to become Cardiac Therapeutic Yoga Instructors. The wider audience is Yoga teachers.

Yoga instructors have varied backgrounds and scientifically based instruction must bear this in mind.

The tape begins with a discussion of how Yoga teachers should interface with medical professionals. This section is well done and well thought out. I have often grimaced when told by a Yoga instructor that my pancreas was being massaged and my thyroid stimulated by various *âsanas*. My medical colleagues who have never practiced any of these disciplines would regard these statements as ridicu-

lous. Dr. Van Houten rightly recommends omitting this language. He makes excellent points about logistics and directions, and about CPR and defibrillator training. His notes about communication, dress, attitude, paperwork, and expressing thanks for referrals are all excellent. His enjoinder about not practicing pseudo-medicine is an imperative.

He does not tell us which students should or should not be in Yoga classes, although he alludes to this frequently. This is particularly important in a tape for people who do not have other lecturers to fill in the missing pieces.

The next section is on anatomy and physiology. The lack of appropriate visual aids makes the anatomy section almost impossible to follow. The explanations are either overly simplistic or too in depth. The same is true of the physiology section. Appropriate visual aids need to be provided both in the video and with the video. A working understanding of anatomy and physiology is necessary to understand cardiac disease. We are referred to the American Heart Association website for diagrams, but I could not locate them there.

The cardiac disease section is spotty. The part on cholesterol is in great depth and covered very well, whereas other areas are not covered to the same degree. For instance, the cardiac rhythm disturbance section is uneven and difficult to understand. This is a section that needs to be clear, as the major complication experienced by patients doing Yoga for prevention and rehabilitation will fall into the rhythm disturbance category. The symptoms of a heart attack were likewise not presented clearly. This is the second major complication and it is very important that teachers know not only when a student with a little pain should stop,

but also whether that little pain might be a sign of something far more serious. The section on valve disease was nonexistent, and the presentation on congestive heart failure was spotty.

The diagnostic section was thorough and may actually be in too much depth for the student without any medical background and certainly could have been markedly improved by more audio-video aids. This also is true for the medical therapy section.

There is no mention of how to appropriately work with Yoga students with cardiac disabilities, and thus the video did not meet the stated goal in that area.

I found myself like Goldilocks looking for the bed that was not too hard or too soft. It was difficult to find that which was just right in these sections of the video. The video itself is lacking in a yogic sense—i.e., the connection or union between the anatomy, physiology, and disease; the disease's manifestations, diagnosis, and medical treatment; and where and how the Yoga therapist fits in is missing. Part of this is due to having extracted a single lecture out of a course of this nature, and thus the video overall is not quite ready for prime time.

It is a good starting place, and there currently are no other videos available with this source material. It provides a familiarization with medical terminology and an excellent discussion on how to interface with the medical community, but the student should not look to this video to provide him or her with a complete knowledge of cardiac physiology or enough understanding to safely work with cardiac patients.

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**Yoga System. *Healing Science of Yoga: Arthritis.* Falls Church, Va.: Yoga System, 2001. 105 minutes. \$20. URL: [www.yogasystem.com](http://www.yogasystem.com), tel.: 866-990-4008. Reviewed in the 2002 issue of the journal.**

**Yogacharya Dhananjaya Kumar, President, Yoga Systems, replies to Richard Rosen's review of this video in the 2002 issue of the journal (edited due to space limitations):**

We appreciate you taking the time to review our video on arthritis. With gratitude and humility, I wish to bring a few points to your attention.

We appreciate your acknowledgment that “the heart is in the right place,” and that “it would be hard to find a tape on the market nowadays that offers such a complete and sincere presentation of Yoga practices.”

You have pointed out that there is no mention of arthritis on the tape. In fact, the title appears on the jacket, on the cassette inside the jacket, and at the beginning of the program. The content of the video deals with Yoga practices for arthritis, rather than a description or medical explanation of the disease. We had debated this point during production and concluded that it would be beyond the scope and duration of the tape to provide medical information about arthritis. Since Yoga is recognized as a holistic therapy—dealing with the whole person and the root cause of the ailment—we decided to teach and demonstrate a complete program of Yoga techniques which will prevent or alleviate the ailment. Instead of high-

lighting an ailment, we have emphasized the practices. These practices are timeless wisdom, whereas physical/medical explanations of various diseases are still evolving.

Nevertheless, on our website, and in our catalog, which all buyers are likely to review, it is clearly stated that the video on arthritis is “intended to strengthen the bone joints and the entire skeletal system, reduce inflammation, excess wind and mental stress.”

You have mentioned that the tape should have shown how these practices can be altered to better serve individual needs. We feel that there is a large enough range of available practices to which alterations may not be necessary . . . The tape includes detailed instructions on practice, precautions, and contraindications. There may be several levels of arthritis, from mild to debilitating, and some people may be interested in preventing arthritis. Hence we have included very simple and easy practices as well as more or less challenging practices. We have clearly and repeatedly cautioned the students to respect their physical limitations, begin with what they can comfortably do, before undertaking the practices which are harder for them. And some sufferers may need to avoid certain practices altogether . . .

Obviously an acute sufferer cannot and should not attempt the lotus pose, for example. But a mild sufferer or someone using this tape for preventive purpose has no reason not to attempt the lotus pose. We have no dislike for any Yoga technique; no Yoga technique has ever harmed anyone if the practices are done correctly with due respect to individual limitations and contraindications.

Moreover, since Yoga is ultimately a spiritual practice and the goal of *āsana* practice is to prepare

oneself for meditation, lotus pose is highly recommended as a meditative posture. There is nothing wrong with this particular pose, as you imply. We, therefore, do not share your conclusion that “the lotus pose should be avoided on just about any tape, let alone for arthritis . . .” Also, we do not consider any Yoga technique, including *kunjâl* (water vomiting), as disturbing.

As a certified and recognized Senior Yoga Teacher and having taught thousands of students and trained dozens of teachers, I have witnessed that all my students who practice regularly and correctly have progressed over time, both physically and spiritually. Many of my students with a variety of ailments . . . have benefited from the practices presented in our videos. Our collaborating institution—Swami Vivekananda Yoga Therapy and Research Foundation in Bangalore, India—has been running a Yoga therapy hospital, training students for master's degrees and Ph.D.s in Yoga, and performing numerous medical studies and [creating] research publications on Yoga therapy at home and abroad. Their chief medical officer and an internationally renowned physician and Yoga teacher—Dr. R. Nagarathna—was one of the lead medical advisors on our team. Another distinguished advisor—Dr. Sandra McLanahan—is the executive medical director of Integral Health Center in Buckingham, Virginia . . . Above all, and most satisfying, is . . . a continuous flow of messages from patients who have benefited from the practices taught in our videos. Contrary to what you have stated, anyone would hardly regard the above synopsis as “lack of experience.”

Our paramount objective is to heal, not to impress . . . There may be shortcomings in our video programs,

but nothing is gained by denying a healing option to reduce suffering . . . Praying for love and peace to all.

### Richard Rosen responds:

I appreciate you taking the time to make such a thoughtful reply to my review of your video. It has been awhile since I have watched your video, and since I have sent it back to the YREC library and do not have it on hand, and since I have seen dozens of other yoga videos in the meantime, I cannot make honest replies to all your points.

Certainly it is clear enough from the video's package that the presentation is intended for arthritis sufferers. But if my rather poor memory serves me correctly, there is not much, if anything, on the tape itself that addresses arthritis in general, or how the yoga *âsanas*, or any of the other practices you so expertly demonstrate, will benefit an arthritis sufferer. It is my limited understanding that there are many different forms of arthritis (e.g., osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia) that effect different parts of the body. It seems to me that a practice

designed to alleviate the pain of arthritis at least needs to make passing reference to these different conditions, and point out during the course of the presentation which of the practices are especially beneficial for the particular condition. Without this, I feel you are putting too much responsibility on the viewer, who may or may not have any practical Yoga experience, to devise an effective therapeutic or preventative program. Surely a short, simple 10-minute introduction to arthritis and Yoga at the outset of the program would not have been "beyond the scope and duration" of the tape.

I am afraid I must strongly disagree with your contention that there is no reason for an arthritis sufferer "not to attempt the lotus pose." I did not mean to suggest that there is anything wrong with *padmâsana* (lotus); obviously it is a highly valued seat in the Yoga tradition. What I meant was that it is simply too challenging (and potentially injurious) a position for most chair-sitting Westerners, especially older folks who will presumably comprise the bulk of your audience. You just cannot know who out there in videoland will decide, wrongly, despite all your

best cautions, that they are perfectly capable of performing this seat. I believe that lotus (and other poses such as *shîrshâsana* [headstand]) should only be learned under the supervision of a live teacher. There is plenty of room to grow in the Yoga tradition without doing lotus; again, if memory serves correctly, one of the old Hatha-Yoga manuals—the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradîpikâ*—extols the meditative benefits of *siddhâsana* (adept's pose), a much more accessible seat than lotus.

Again, you have presented a clear and complete but generic Yoga program that seems, by the way you describe it, to be applicable to a range of ailments, not just arthritis. I suppose any disagreements between us about its value for arthritis sufferers come down to our expectations. You have this wonderful faith in the curative properties of Yoga in general, which definitely comes through in the presence of your young models. I feel, however, that to be truly effective, a therapeutic program should address specific issues (arthritis of the knees or the lower back, for example) with specific exercises.

I wish you all the best with your video series.