

cal health and spiritual evolution. When *vata* is balanced, *prāna* is elevated; when *pitta* is balanced, *tejas* (spiritual light) is increased; when *kapha* is balanced, *ojas* (liquid spirituality and a strong immune system) is increased.

In order to evaluate the efficacy of Yoga training, we need to have a way of assessing the student. In Ayurveda, we have methods such as pulse diagnosis to read the five sub-*prānas*. Yogis must rely on subjective experience to evaluate the *prānas*, and how can this be taught? I often ask students to describe the *prāna* and they do not know it other than as a concept. Direct experience of *prāna* is needed and can only be conveyed when the gross structures are transformed by contact with their subtler structures. This is a level of teaching that comes from the teacher's direct experience of *prāna* and being able to give that experimental knowledge to the students.

Western anatomy and physiology are quite different from the Yogic and Ayurvedic models of anatomy. It is in the latter that we find the building blocks that allow *prāna* to be increased in the practices of physical Yoga. Without knowing Yogic and Ayurvedic models of anatomy, *prānāyāma* is actually nothing more than *yāma*.

### *Anatomy and Physiology*

I am surprised at what John Kepner said was my reputation for being adept in anatomy and physiology, as I know nothing of physiology. However, I do know functional anatomy and kinesiology very well.

That is the crux of much of the challenge as I see it. What I have seen in many Yoga teachers is that they have some basic anatomy and physiology from a college-level point of view, but little functional knowledge of anatomy as it applies to *Yogāsana*. In other words, they lack knowledge of kinesiology. In many cases, Yoga teachers who have met the Yoga Alliance registry standards have taken redundant anatomy courses on the same topic. There is seldom a progress of building upon previous knowledge; instead, teachers take random classes that fulfill the requirement for certification. The problem stems in part from the fact that there is no statement of what we want teachers to know as a result of their studies in each area.

I am greatly distressed by the number of Yoga-related injuries myself, Leslie Kaminoff, Larry Payne, and other Yoga therapists treat. All systems of Yoga have been hurting students in various ways due to two factors: (1) teachers pushing students too hard in a *rajasic* Yoga practice, and (2) teachers' lack of knowledge of kinesiology.

Basic kinesiology helps teachers interpret what students say and gives them tools for assessing students' musculoskel-

etal bodies. For example, when a student complains of tight hamstrings, a teacher cannot take that as being a statement of truth. It is merely a statement of subjective experience. Yoga teachers steeped in Patanjali keep in mind that all moments of perception are likely to be filled with the ignorance of *avidya*. The truth is that tight hamstrings will limit range of motion (ROM) to below 90 degrees of hip flexion. Those with greater ROM do not have tight hamstrings. Without testing for this, the teacher is giving inappropriate practice to the student that will further his or her difficulties. Another example is the assumption that tight hamstrings are a sign of weak hip flexors. But that is also a case for a false assumption that needs to be tested with an *āsana* that will reveal the truth or falsity of the assumption. Muscle testing—isolating and testing one muscle's strength and then comparing it with ROM assessment—is a skill that I teach in my Structural Yoga Therapy.

An accurate body-reading is not possible without knowledge of kinesiology. From an accurate body-reading, the Yoga therapist can identify what is likely contributing to his or her student's preexisting pain or suffering. By knowing that the spine is twisted, for example, the teacher should then be able to identify which muscles are tight and which are weak, and thus which muscles are unlikely to support students in certain *āsanas*. With this information, a teacher can begin to live Krishnamacharya's motto for Yoga therapists: "Adapt to the individual."

Yoga teachers can afford to give a general class of information that will not hurt students, but they will not have the training necessary to help individuals who come in pain, or who injure themselves due to poor *āsana* practice. A teacher cannot help a student if the teacher cannot answer the questions: Where should I feel this pose? What are the danger signs of my practice? If I have a pre-existing condition, what are the contraindications? These things are not being covered adequately in trainings and are therefore not mentioned in public classes. I have recently surveyed the major teacher-training curriculums and do not find this information being offered anywhere. I wish to clean up my own future trainings for Structural Yoga Therapists. At this point, I find that I must give remedial training to those people who have taken 200- or even 500-hour Yoga Alliance courses, as they do not know how to protect their students from harm.

Yoga therapists need appropriate training in both these sciences—Ayurveda and kinesiology—which will give many more variables to the equation of what to give to the student or client. Overall, I would recommend a strong background in both subjects, perhaps at the 500-hour level, but some in-

troductory information on Ayurveda even at the 200-hour training level.

## The Need for Contact with a Teacher

Another aspect of Yoga teacher and therapist training that I find in need of an overhaul is the influence of the teacher. In both cases only 50% of the total required hours are contact with the teacher. Personally I find this disturbing, for it makes Yoga an academic curriculum rather than a process for personal evolution. Yoga can only be learned from a Yogi. Time with the teacher is invaluable. It is only with this time that the student can begin to fathom the change that takes place in the teacher's body and psyche as a result of commitment to Yoga *sadhana*. And it is only through time with the teacher that a certain degree of transmission is possible in helping the student take in the teacher's elevated state of consciousness. When Yoga teachers have been blessed by their teacher, there is a transformation occurring in them on a multidimensional level.

I identify myself as a Yogi, not a Yoga-based healthcare professional and certainly not as a Yogic physical therapist. In my training program, students are required to have a full year of study with a single teacher. Since my course is 27 months long, and I am the only teacher, I am often the first teacher that they have had to show them the depth of Yoga *sadhana*. They must form a working relationship with me that shows me they will rely on me to assist them in their ongoing *sadhana*, as well as challenges with students that they don't know how to work with. As a result, many students will not graduate my courses, since they don't know how to form an intimate long-term student-teacher relationship. I

am surprised at the lack of depth in students these days. Yoga students have so many options for workshop study. However, as Swami Satchidananda says, it is like digging many superficial wells. If we put our energy into one relationship and continue to persevere with *sadhana*, then some depth can come, and with it, a connection to the spiritual essence that is at the root of all Yoga.

## My Recommendations

1. Create a standardized curriculum for Yoga teacher and Yoga therapist training that incorporates Ayurveda as it applies to Yoga.
2. Have student teachers pass a test on where the major muscles are, what actions they do, what their normal range of motion is, and which *Yogasanas* are dangerous for specific common conditions.
3. Have Yoga therapists spend a large amount of their training with one teacher.

Blessings on your struggle to keep Yoga's spiritual depth while providing its obvious benefits to health as well.

## References

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2. Iyengar, Geeta. Yoga and Ayurveda. *San Francisco: Iyengar Yoga Conference Magazine*. 1987; p. 43.

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# Perspective

## What Yoga Therapists Need to Know about Ayurveda and Kinesiology

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This perspective responds to two questions that John Kepner, director of IAYT, asked following discussions on establishing standards of education for Yoga therapists:

1. What suggestions do you have on the anatomy, physiology, and possibly Ayurveda requirements for Yoga therapists? Assuming there is a limit to the requirements one might expect, should Ayurveda be a substitute for anatomy and physiology, or should strong anatomy and physiology be a foundation for all therapists?
2. I am quite sensitive to the student teacher relationship issue. It's a key part of Yoga therapy, and it's also a disappearing element in much of today's conventional healthcare environment. I don't know how to address that in standards, but I certainly don't want to impede that in any fashion either.

### Training Standards for Ayurveda, Anatomy, and Physiology

While educational standards are not yet set for the profession, it is generally assumed that a Yoga therapist will have more training than a Certified Yoga Teacher (CYT). The Yoga Alliance, a registry for Yoga teachers, has set recommended standards for CYTs at both the 200-hour and 500-hour level. While there are required hours for anatomy and physiology training, it is intriguing that for both levels of training, there is no requirement for training in Ayurveda or kinesiology, the study of *functional* anatomy and physiology.

### *Ayurveda*

The principles set down by the original Ayurvedic physician authors Caraka and Susruta are as true today as they were when they were written as much as 2,000 years ago. Caraka defines Ayurveda as the “science which imparts knowledge about life . . . the description of happy and unhappy life, useful and harmful life, and actions that promote and demote longevity.”<sup>1</sup> He outlines four steps to maintaining good health:<sup>2</sup>

1. Procuring good food, sound sleep, and control over the mind
2. Observing a daily and seasonal disciplined routine
3. Controlling and discarding impulses
4. Avoiding intrinsic and extrinsic diseases

Ayurveda is concerned with physical health and longevity so that Yoga *sadhana* can be pursued. In the *Yoga Sûtras* (1:12), Patanjali states that “success in Yoga is due to consistent earnest practice over a long period of time and dispassionate non-attachment to the results of the practice.” The obstacles to success in the pursuit of self-knowledge are cited in *sûtra* 1:30, and disease tops the list. By learning basic Ayurvedic information, one can learn how to have a healthy lifestyle, what diet to eat, the importance of regularity in practice, when *sadhana* is to be undertaken, and the signs of *sattvic sadhana*.

The yogic experience of *sattvic* harmony, which is attained by following the practical guidelines of Patanjali, is also achieved by following the Ayurvedic principles for balancing the three *doshas*. The *doshas* are the elemental building blocks of the *gunas*. Ayurveda presents practical guidelines for achieving this elemental balance that will result in physi-