

Contents

Editorial.....	3	Is Women's Participation in Different Types of Yoga Classes Associated with Different Levels of Body Awareness and Body Satisfaction?	60
Kelly McGonigal, PhD		Kelley Delaney, MA, APRN-BC, and Kristine Anthis, PhD	
<i>The Yoga Tradition</i>			
In the Beginning, In the Present Moment, In the Future	6	Transformative Life Skills: Pilot Studies of a Yoga Model for Reducing Perceived Stress and Improving Self-Control in Vulnerable Youth	70
Richard Miller, PhD		R. Ramadoss, PhD, and B.K. Bose, PhD	
A Dream Realized	9	<i>Yoga Therapy in Practice</i>	
Larry Payne		Ahimsa and Awareness: Core Principles Overlooked in Yoga Therapy	80
When Did Yoga Therapy Become a "Field?"	11	Monica Hanson, RYT	
Shanti Shanti Kaur Khalsa, PhD		Yoga Therapy: East-West Synthesis	86
Down the Road: Yoga Therapy in the Future	13	Robert Butera, MDiv, PhD	
Judith Hanson Lasater, PhD, PT		The Use of Yoga for Spiritual Development in Older Adults: A Theoretical Perspective	89
Looking Back, Looking Forward	14	Donna Wang, PhD, LMSW, RYT	
Eleanor Criswell, PhD		Yoga, Pradhana Dharma, and the Helping Professions: Recognizing the Risk of Codependency and the Necessity of Self-Care	92
A Conversation with Mark Singleton	16	Kate Hillman Garland, E-RYT-500	
Interview by Kelly McGonigal, PhD		Teaching Yoga in Urban Elementary Schools	100
<i>Issues In Yoga Therapy</i>			
Defining Yoga Therapy: A Call to Action	24	The Art of Yoga Project: A Gender-Responsive Yoga and Creative Arts Curriculum for Girls in the California Juvenile Justice System	111
Gary Kraftsow, MA, E-RYT 500		Danielle Arlanda Harris, PhD, and Mary Lynn Fitton, MS, FNP	
A Perspective on the Creation of Educational Standards for Yoga Therapy Practitioners	27	Healing Childhood Sexual Abuse with Yoga	120
Elissa Cobb, MA, RYT		Mark Lilly and Jaime Hedlund, RYT	
An Overview of Regulatory Issues for Yoga, Yoga Therapy, and Ayurveda	30	Yoga for Children on the Autism Spectrum	131
Daniel D. Seitz, JD, EdD		Jennie Ehleringer, MEd, RYT	
The Role of Outcome-Based Standards in Yoga Therapy	37		
Scott Laurence, PhD, LMHC, RYT-500			
Yoga and Managed Care: A Cautionary Tale	47		
Bo Forbes, PsyD, E-RYT 500			
<i>Research</i>			
Yoga and Chronic Low Back Pain	55		
Neil Pearson, MSc, RYT-500			
Yoga for Seniors with Arthritis: A Pilot Study	57		
Elizabeth de G. R. Hansen, PhD			

Editorial

Letting Our History Speak for Itself

Kelly McGonigal, PhD

Editor in Chief

Welcome to the twentieth anniversary issue of the *Journal*. This issue celebrates the history and future of Yoga therapy and our association, alongside the kind of practical, educational, and thought-provoking articles that have been this publication's mission since 1990.

As I found myself wondering what I could put on this page, I recalled a speaker who opened her talk by asking the elders in the room for permission to speak. "You each have earned the right to speak first," she told them.

In this spirit, I would like to use this editor's column to revisit some of the wise words shared by previous *Journal* editors and authors. I searched the archives for glimpses of our past that address, in some way, the question we find ourselves still asking after twenty years: "What is Yoga therapy?"

As you read the following quotes from the last twenty years, I think you will agree that together they convey the heart of Yoga therapy—even if, after twenty years, we're still working on the formal definition.

I could, of course, have filled this whole issue with such gems, and many wonderful contributors have been left out of this brief retrospective. Fortunately, all back issues are available to IAYT members at iayt.org. If you have not explored them, I encourage you to immerse yourself in our own modern history of Yoga therapy.

The rest of this issue is also peppered with Perspectives by those who have been with IAYT since its beginnings. You'll find personal stories and lessons learned mixed in with reflections on the past and visions for the future.

Enjoy!



"Yoga therapy holds a unique perspective on healing. It stands on the firm understanding that we are, from the very beginning, healthy, and that our true being is unqualified, undifferentiated awareness." —**Richard Miller, PhD**, IAYT Co-Founder, Editorial, Vol 1 (1990)

"All I seek is my own true nature. Whatever beautiful thing I am seeking, I am. But then, if it is so, why do I miss it? One cannot miss oneself. Still, if I keep missing it and begin searching for it, having countless plans and schemes, doing endless things to gain it, the search I would say stems from self-disowning, self-ignorance." —**Swami Dayananda Saraswati**, "Discerning the Fundamental Problem According to Advaita Vedanta", Vol 2 (1991)

"In our time, it is important, perhaps even necessary, that sensory experience be valued, be felt to be sacred. It is the most direct medium of our intimacy with the planet, out of whose elements our bodies are made." —**Brian Lynn**, "Resistance and Release in Yoga Practice", Vol 3 (1992)

"The Yoga therapist uses a wide range of techniques and props in this work. However, the most important skills we possess are the presence, understanding, and compassion that we have developed through our own process of transformation." —**Joseph LePage**, "An Integrative Approach to Yoga Therapy", Vol 4 (1993)

"At some point in our spiritual growth, we need to take the leap into trusting ourselves to know the answers for ourselves. We can only learn this by being supported by processes that take us to the edge of knowing and beyond....Our therapies have to teach us to trust ourselves and our capacity to know ourselves." —**Michael Lee, MA**, "The Call of Spirit: A Case Study in Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy", Vol 5 (1994)

“How is the therapist to bring the divine into his practice? His clients want relief, not religion. The answer is to do nothing but avow and trust that as he works, the inherent natural, evolutionary urge toward wholeness or unity spontaneously emerges. When the therapist has practiced Yoga, he develops faith in the intelligence of the natural energy of *prana*.” —**W. Michael Keane, PhD**, “When the Therapist Is a Yogi”, Vol 6 (1996)

“The question of ‘what is Yoga therapy’ is one of my favorite forms of entertainment. For me it is like being asked to define God, because for me it permeates everything and it is a part of all of our practices....I see it as the salvation of the universe.” —**Amy Kline Gage**, “Yoga Therapy: A Panel Discussion”, Vol 7 (1997)

“Compassion and contact with the inner Light are the major factors in healing. The challenge is to bring that Light into all aspect of life. Every human being is unique and individual. Compassion starts with acceptance of anyone who comes to you to be healed.” —**Swami Sivananda Radha**, “Light, Mantra, and Healing”, Vol 8 (1998)

“Looking at each person individually and teaching that person in the moment is a form of practicing Yoga. I try to remember that each person is an individual to be taught, not a problem to be fixed.” —**Judith Lasater, PhD, PT**, “Face to Face: The Student-Teacher Relationship and Private Yoga Classes”, Vol 9 (1999)

“Freud suggested that the therapist must learn to ‘loan the patient his ego.’ In Yoga therapy, I would say that the therapist needs to ‘loan the patient his or her witness consciousness.’ But the capacity to do so presupposes that the therapist herself is systematically developing her own witness consciousness and is capable of being the still point at the center of the storm of pain, dissatisfaction, craving, aversion, and delusion that the patient brings into the room. This requires enormous skillfulness, and for most of us this skillfulness is learned over the course of years of training and practice.” —**Stephen Cope, MSW**, “Toward a Definition of Yoga Therapy”, Vol 10 (2000)

“There is not really a word in the English language that covers the role of a Yoga teacher, let alone a Yoga therapist. One could say a ‘Yoga sharer’ or ‘Yoga helper,’ but that sounds odd. ‘Yoga teacher/student’ gives the impression of a barrier, one to the other. ‘Yoga therapist’ establishes the idea of a barrier more firmly....I think the proper role is only to help

with pointers to a person’s own therapeutic process. We really just need to let go and let healing happen. Don’t be too specific. Yoga in some ways is the art of doing nothing.”

—**Howard Kent**, Interview, Vol 11 (2001)

“Once an ailment strikes, it affects all aspects—physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. The ailment may be expressed in a part of the individual but affects the whole. Yoga plays the important role of not only recognizing the feeling of ill health, but of making work to resolve the ailment using all the sheaths together.”

—**Rajvi H.Mehta, PhD**, “Understanding Yoga Therapy”, Vol 12 (2002)

“Any excision of the spiritual aspects of Yoga in Yoga therapy will flatten its effectiveness. After all, as human beings we are not merely the physical body but a body-mind continuum capable of self-transcendence. This is, in fact, the big lesson that contemporary medicine is gradually and reluctantly learning. We should therefore not launch Yoga therapist education from a position that has been shown to be incomplete and inadequate for the treatment of the whole human being.” —**Georg Feuerstein, PhD**, Editorial, Vol 13 (2003)

“Yoga has a long history of freedom and innovation, two pillars of its preservation and growth over the millennia. This freedom, however, carries both traditional and modern responsibilities for students, teachers, and especially therapists....An established, respected therapy in the Western world requires commensurate accountability.”

—**John Kepner, MA, MBA**, Editorial, Vol 14 (2004)

“We are just at the beginning of the blossoming of Yoga therapy in the West. As this gentle, profound profession makes its way into Western culture and the Western medical setting, its potential for alleviating suffering in both relative and ultimate ways is unlimited.”

—**Trisha Lamb**, Editorial, Vol 15 (2005)

“An example definition of Yoga therapy is ‘the application of Yoga to individuals to empower them to progress toward greater health and freedom from disease.’ The word *empower* here is important because a key aspect of Yoga is the active participation of the patient in the process of therapy. The tools of Yoga require that the person make an effort. This is not a limitation of Yoga, but a great strength.”

—**Ganesh Mohan**, “Exploring Yoga as Therapy”, Vol 16 (2006)

“Right now, there is no healing profession that honors and studies the qualities of consciousness, transformation, and presence. If not us as Yoga therapists, who will champion the values of silence, *ahimsa*, and awe that occur in a Yoga therapeutic relationship when we are ‘being with’? What group of professionals will explore in humility that experience of the yoking of healing that goes beyond each of us as individuals?” —**Matthew Taylor, PhD, PT**, “A Fork in the Road: ‘Doing to’ or ‘Being with’?”, Vol 17 (2007)

“The education and courses you take that teach you how to become Yoga therapists are invaluable, but love and compassion transforms the whole idea of therapy into healing. Yoga therapy ceases to be ‘therapy,’ as it becomes a healing experience that comes through a deep love and compassion for your client, for yourself, and for knowing who you both really are.” —**Nischala Joy Devi**, “Touching the Oneness: What to Do When Nothing Else Works”, Vol 18 (2008)

“If you’re teaching Yoga to people therapeutically, you need to have a regular practice, where you systematically go deeper into the practices. The ability to see students, I believe, comes directly from your cultivated ability to see yourself. A big issue with licensing and credentialing is that what it takes to be a great Yoga therapist is a lifelong commitment to learning and growth and a steady practice, and no regulating authority will ever be able to control that.”

—**Timothy McCall, MD**, Interview, Vol 19 (2009)

“Many of you who are reading this and other articles in this twentieth anniversary issue may be new to the field of Yoga therapy. To you, my new colleagues, I say, ‘Welcome,’ and let’s continue supporting and growing our profession together.” —**Larry Payne**, IAYT Co-Founder, “A Dream Realized”, Vol 20 (2010)

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