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Editorial Commentary

The Real Posture

By Richard C. Miller, Ph.D.

Postures are stances we take in the world, be they by way of beliefs we hold in communications we make with others or in the asanas we practice in yoga. Yoga Therapy is a view or stance we take in helping another.

As there are many paths leading to the top of the mountain, there are many paths in Yoga Therapy – each possessing its unique view and approach. In thinking about the word posture I was stimulated to write the following essay which addresses the underlying ground of all postures – consciousness.

In 1937 a discussion between W. Y. Evans-Wentz (translator of the Tibetan Book of the Dead) and the great Indian sage, Ramana Maharshi, unfolded as follows.

EW: Which posture (asana) is the best?

M: Any asana, possibly sukha asana (easy posture or the half-Buddha position). But that is immaterial for jnana, the Path of Knowledge. Posture really means location and steadfastness in the Self. Yoga aims at union of the

individual with the universal, the Reality. This Reality cannot be new. It must exist even now, and it does exist. Therefore the Path of Knowledge tries to find out how viyoga (separation) came about. The separation is from the Reality only.¹

The Sanscrit word Asana is derived from several letters: a, which represents the mother principle – the Divine mystical vibration; as, which implies the downward movement of Divine energy into physical manifestation; sa, which implies the projection upward to receive the Divine; and an, which represents the meeting ground of the Divine and physical manifestation. So as-sa-an-a, taken altogether as asana, is the place where we take our posture in and as the Divine, right here, right now.

The real posture (asana) is, therefore, non-conceptual. It does not live in memory. When we live in memory we project idealized visions from our past into the present moment. However, conceptualizations are never what they represent. Have you ever seen a R.O.S.E.? The real rose, like the real posture, is non-conceptual experience, direct, immediate, without the superimposition of memory.

The real posture is alive; a moment-to-moment living expression of life. We may have beautiful things to say about life, but real living, the real posture, is beyond words, beyond formulations.

The real posture is energetic, flowing. Like life, it is ever changing. It has no boundaries, extending without center or periphery – pulsating, vibrant, alive.

There is, then, no ideal posture, no correct alignment. Each moment calls forth the real posture, the real alignment. Otherwise words like “pose” and “alignment” are concepts that move us away from ourselves and the moment-to-moment expression of living. Concepts are partial truths, fragments of wholeness. Our minds can manipulate these fragments. However, manipulation is a tortuous route. As fragments we can only be fragment relating to fragment. Then we do not perceive or live our wholeness, our spontaneously creative nature.

Each moment of living calls us to respond. In our nakedness, innocence – listening – we are with bare facts that speak to us directly – supramentally. So the real pose appears and disappears in our not-knowingness.² It can never be objectified and leaves no trace in memory. It is, in reality, an extension of Awareness – Consciousness. The real pose, being an extension of consciousness, is absolutely and always untouched by change or death. It is primordial, pure, pristine and is at once intelligent, cognizant, radiant and always awake.

Therefore, in the real pose there is nothing to achieve or become – there is no progression. We are already perfection. Living this understanding frees us to move without images of how we should be. Movement (asana), then, is a celebration of spontaneity unfolding in awareness without anticipation, comparison or judgment. We are then free from psychological reactivity and move in relationship with Wholeness. Thus living in awareness brings freedom in action. We realize that real action (asana) arises out of stillness-awareness, unfolds against the background of stillness and disperses back into stillness. The real posture is therefore integrated with daily life. It is not separate from all

other expressions of life. It is not mechanical. It is alive and invites us to fully partake in it and in life.

¹Maharshi, Ramana, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi, Sir Ramanashram, Tiruvannamalai, 1984, pp.10-11.*

²A man once asked Ramana Maharshi to say something to him. When asked what he wanted to know, he said that he knew nothing and wanted to hear something from the Maharshi. Ramana replied: “You know that you know nothing. Find out that knowledge. That is liberation!” *Ibid, p.3.*

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Editorial Commentary

Non-Violence in Therapy

By Donna Martin

My role this year as editor of the IAYT Journal has evolved out of many years of teaching yoga and practicing therapy including yoga therapy, psychotherapy and a number of other therapeutic modalities.

My perspective of yoga is so broad and my being is so steeped in its principles that it seems to me that everything I teach is essentially yoga (“oneness”) and every therapeutic situation involves “Yoga Therapy” in some way.

In this and future issues, we are inviting your input about the meaning of Yoga Therapy. Joe LePage has contributed his model of yoga therapy for this issue of the Journal. In the last issue, I reviewed Ron Kurtz’ Hakomi method of “body-centered psychotherapy” and used it as a basis to look at what I consider to be the essential principles of yoga therapy: oneness (unity), the mind-body connection, trusting the Guru within (organicity), mindfulness, and non-violence.

The following commentary comes out of my experience working with abuse “survivors” and my growing awareness of what constitutes abuse, especially in its more subtle forms. I have noticed that people who experienced violence or abuse when they were growing up tend to abuse themselves or others as adults, or they may be drawn into relationships that continue to be abusive. Therapy, in my view, (as with teaching) should be a healing experience, ie. supporting wholeness.

As I write these words, the sounds of a family quarrel from across the street attract my attention. As the angry words of the parents toward each other grow louder and louder, so, too, does the crying of the infant accelerate to a screaming pitch. Whether or not there is any physical contact, violence is occurring.

One of the principles of yoga which is so important for therapists and healers of all types to consider is the principle of non-violence, ahimsa. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, II.30., non-violence is named as the first of the yamas, or abstinences; the others being truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-greed. Patanjali (II.34.) points out that “wayward or perverse reasoning is often indulged in to rationalize violence etc., whether such violence are direct personal actions, or indirectly caused, or merely witnessed or acquiesced in.” (Swami Venkatesananda, Enlightened Living) “When there is natural

firmness in non-violence all hostility comes to an end in its very presence. Conflict ceases in such a mind." (II.35. Venkatesananda)

Anyone practising therapy today needs to be concerned with the subtle forms of violence that occur, not through intentional abuse, but rather through lack of awareness. In his commentary on the Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali, Swami Hariharananda Aranya explains that "non-injury is not merely refraining from injuring animals, but developing and entertaining feelings of amity towards all living beings. It is not possible to practice non-injury unless selfishness is given up in respect of all external matters...Yogins practice non-injury everywhere and always."

No matter whether clients are dealing with physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual issues in therapy, there exists the possibility of a connection with a background of abuse. With the growing awareness of the extent and impact of childhood abuse, more clients are seeking ways to safely feel and express the emotions that surround the abuse. It is clear now that childhood trauma affects us later in life, setting us up for illness, relationship problems, addictive behaviors and so on.

Unfortunately, a history of unresolved abuse can also program a youngster for continued abuse as an adult. An expectation of abuse in relationships and an unconscious association of abuse with love results especially from parental abuse. Often, someone who was abused as a child ends up married to an abusive spouse. Such a person may even find themselves drawn to a therapist, or style of therapy which is abusive.

Violence, or abuse, in therapy may be quite subtle as Ron Kurtz points out in his Hakomi method of body-centered psychotherapy. My training in both Hakomi and yoga has given me an appreciation of the need for non-

violent therapy to break the cycle of abuse for many clients and reestablish the healthy boundaries that go along with strong self-esteem.

Let's assume that the obvious forms of abuse in therapy (including verbal and sexual abuse) are totally unacceptable. Now we can address the less obvious ways that therapy can be abusive.

In my opinion, abuse occurs when:

1. The therapist identifies the problem and the solution;
2. The therapist tells the client how he/she feels;
3. The therapist contradicts or interrupts the client;
4. The therapist presumes to know what's best for the client;
5. The therapist tells the client what probably happened to him/her as a child;
6. The therapist ignores what the client says;
7. The therapist puts words in the client's mouth;
8. The therapist has a fixed agenda for the sessions;
9. The therapist decides how many sessions are needed;
10. The therapist touches the client in any way without specific permission;
11. The therapist claims that his/her words, impressions etc. "come from God;"
12. The therapist asks questions to gather information for him/herself, often interrupting the client to do so;
13. The therapist feels or acts more...than the client (more powerful, wise, spiritual, capable...anything.)

Non-violence in therapy honors the inner wisdom of each client and respects the person as the ultimate authority on his/her healing process. "Non-violence is born of an attitude of acceptance and an active attention to the way events naturally unfold." (Ron Kurtz) Without this attitude, emotions may well be brought up to the surface and expressed without more than a temporary feeling of relief. Physical or emotional release is of limited value

without the true healing that is based on empowerment and self-esteem.

We all have the opportunity to be healers, whether or not we are "therapists." As teachers, friends, neighbours, colleagues, or chance passers-by, our lives are filled with healing moments whenever we make contact with another – physically, emotionally, verbally, visually, mentally, whatever. And every moment of contact (of any sort) can be spiritual and divine if the quality of honoring is present, for the other and for the self.

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