

# Back Care Basics: A Doctor's Gentle Yoga Program for Back and Neck Pain Relief\*

By Mary Pullig Schatz, M.D.  
Rodmell Press, softcover,  
\$19.95, 264 pages.  
Reviewed by Richard Rosen

A few days after receiving *Back Care Basics*, I ran across an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on the latest trend in what the author called “sportswear chic”—the weight-lifting belt.

**D**esigned to support the lower back while lifting heavy weights—and so a familiar piece of body-building gear in health clubs—this belt is now becoming more prevalent around the home and workplace. Why? Because Americans are suffering through an epidemic of back-related injuries, and by wearing the belt while, for example, carrying groceries or moving furniture, they hope to forestall more serious problems.

According to the article, four out of every five Americans—about 200 million people—are afflicted with low-back pain sometime in their lives; injured backs are the most common work-related disability; and insurance companies shell out over \$15 billion a year for back-care costs. Out of curiosity, I checked the card catalog at my local library and found 37 titles listed under back pain and therapy. What surprised me was that none of these books

focused on yoga as therapy, though yoga is now recognized by medical doctors and other health professionals, such as chiropractors and massage therapists, as a safe and effective means for both treating and preventing back injury. (Indeed, in a study published in *Medical Self Care* magazine several years ago, yoga, when practiced regularly, proved to be by far the best method for ameliorating back pain.) Now this void has been filled admirably by Mary Pullig Schatz, a physician and a senior Iyengar yoga instructor.

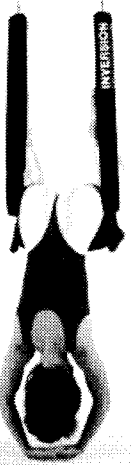
The strength of Schatz's *Back Care Basics* is evident right from the crucial first stage of the therapeutic process it outlines, when the reader is asked to determine the exact nature of his or her problem. In the National Back Fitness Test, a commonly applied self-assessment tool, a rather simplistic four-step protocol is used to evaluate the health of the back by gauging its flexibility and the strength of important supporting muscles. Schatz, however, recognizes that there is often more involved in back pain than just tightness or weakness of the muscles around the spine. Her book's self-assessment has 14 tests that give readers a holistic picture of their bodies and the many possible areas (such as ankles and feet, knees, pelvis, and shoulders) and special conditions (among them scoliosis and arthritis) that could contribute to back pain.

Proper alignment is a central concept in Schatz's method, both for self-assessment and for therapy. Most books underestimate the importance of alignment and try to fix the problem with a handful of exercises which, if not performed properly, could make the injury worse. I shudder when I read their descriptions of groin or hamstring stretches and imagine how the average reader would interpret them. Back Care Basics provides more than 50 exercises, all based on traditional yoga postures, with instructions for position and adjustment that reflect a keen understanding of the restorative benefits of correct alignment. Accompanying photos demonstrate the right and—when appropriate—wrong movements, so that even the most inexperienced reader will know what to avoid. As a further aid, each exercise chapter ends with suggestions for two or three practice routines lasting anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes.

Another advantage of Schatz's approach is her expert use of props such as chairs, blankets, and straps, a technique pioneered by Mr. Iyengar over 40 years ago. These common articles are invaluable as therapeutic tools, helping to create both firmness and release. Schatz shows how, by using something as simple as a rolled blanket or a folding chair, many of the exercises can be tailored to suit the reader's special needs.

Significantly, a chapter on relaxation precedes all of the "active" work in the book, in recognition of an essential point that is frequently missed: emotional and muscular tension go hand in hand, and "letting go" of back pain literally begins with the release of stress. The importance of relaxation is then re-emphasized in each exercise with a section on breathing and imagery, thus engaging the body, breath, and imagination—what yoga calls the "sheaths" of matter, prana, and mind—in the process of healing.

The core exercises are presented as "Home Base" poses, which include



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gentle reclining and kneeling positions that ease the reader into the practice and lay the foundation for the exercises to follow. "Moving On" postures increase the challenge by adding such standing poses as Triangle, Warrior, and Downward Dog. Succeeding chapters address sciatica, neck pain, scoliosis, tips on safe exercising, and the "yoga of daily living"—how we should sit, stand, walk, sleep and even drive a car to protect our back.

From my own experience as a yoga teacher, I know that many students have successfully mended their ailing backs with yoga. Professional help for illness or pain is always welcome, but finally, there is no substitute for the ability to preserve our own health and treat ourselves when injured. If you are working with your own back or helping others to work with theirs, Back Care Basics will be an indispensable resource. As far as yoga therapy for back pain is concerned, I believe this

book will prove to be the definitive instructional manual.

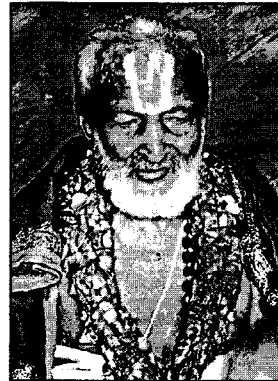
\* IAYT gratefully thanks the Yoga Journal and Richard Rosen for allowing us to reprint this review which originally appeared in the Yoga Journal, November/December 1992 issue. The Yoga Journal may be reached at 2054 University Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704, tel: 510-841-9200.

# Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram Darshanam

The following interview took place in April 1994, in Madras India, between Mala Srivatsan, the managing editor of Darsanam and student of Professor T. Krishnamacharya, and Sonia Nelson (the American distributor for Darsanam), a yoga teacher and student of T.K.V. Desikachar.

**S.N.** Can you tell me how the idea for Darsanam came about?

**M.S.** It was Krishnamacharya's wish that the theoretical aspects of yoga be spread to people by way of a magazine. While he was alive one issue was published but at that time there were not enough subscribers to continue it on a regular basis. So this idea was basically Krishnamacharya's



but it wasn't pursued again until four years ago when we thought we should revive this project which had been so dear to him.

**S.N.** Can you elaborate on Krishnamacharya's intention for a journal?

**M.S.** I assume that his main aim was to spread the message of yoga in a simple way. He wanted people to know that something called yoga exists, can still exist, and should be preserved. I'm sure it was, in part, like spreading hope, bhakti, the spirit of yoga. He thought that a journal would be the best way for the rest of the world to see the value of yoga.

**S.N.** Was it part of the original intention that Darsanam be accessible to the lay person as well as the serious student?

**M.S.** Yes, that is the main aim. You see, if you read his original works, they are difficult to understand. Luckily we have a teacher, Krishnamacharya's son, T.K.V. Desikachar, to explain and simplify them. The idea is to preserve yoga. Krishnamacharya didn't want yoga to be out of reach, a high philosophy that could only be understood by a few. You can see, for example, in his approach to asanas, that even though he was a strong disciplinarian throughout his life he modified many things. He thought that you needed to have some adaptability to suit present day requirements and physical conditions. I'm sure this attitude can also apply to his theoretical teaching. He had vast knowledge and we wanted to present it in a way that people could understand.

**S.N.** To do that without losing the essence is quite a challenge.

**M.S.** Yes, that's the most difficult task we have. In Darsanam the main focus is Krishnamacharya's teaching. We felt it was important to show a continuity of teaching, to establish a link between Krishnamacharya and his ancestors. So, for example, we decided to serialize the Yoga Rahasya of Nathamuni. We told how he received it, what the basic ideas were, and gave background on Nathamuni so that people would know the origin of this teaching.

**S.N.** This must be a difficult task considering that the original texts and much of Krishnamacharya's writings are in Sanskrit.

**M.S.** We decided to replace many of the Sanskrit words with English even though we run the risk of diluting some of the power and emphasis present in the original. But since the philosophy was very important to him, we felt we must find an appropriate way to include it. Otherwise we would not be doing justice to his teaching.

**S.N.** How do you choose the content of Darsanam?

**M.S.** The aim is to keep a balance between practical and philosophical articles. If you looked at all the issues you would see that each one has a focus, some more on asana and pranayama techniques, others a little more on the philosophy. For example, the February issue was about sirsasana—what is the purpose of doing this posture, who should do it. The lead article by Desikachar describes sirsasana as an aspect of hatha yoga which is known as viparita karani mudra and he explains the ancient ideas behind the use of this posture. The slokas from the Yoga Rahasya are included along with an article on the biomechanics of sirsasana and a medical opinion on its use by a noted Indian neurosurgeon. Then we conclude with a photo essay featuring Krishnamacharya performing sirsasana and its variations at the age of ninety-three. The focus of the November '93 issue was the Sandhyavandanam—a Hindu ritual which acknowledges the sun as the benevolent provider for the human race. A presentation of Krishnamacharya's poetic commentary on the ritual is accompanied by a step-by-step photographic illustration of its performance which includes many asanas. This is followed by an article in which Desikachar answers questions on the significance of different aspects of the ritual. In each issue we attempt to go deeply into the subject, coming at it from different angles and exploring it thoroughly. At the same time we try to respect the varying cultural and experiential backgrounds of our readers who come from all over the world.

**S.N.** I think that's something many people appreciate about Darsanam. It has depth and at the same time appeals to a wide audience. Each issue also features Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the Yoga Rahasya, can you say something about that?

**M.S.** Yes. The Yoga Rahasya is a text that is considered by many to be lost. But we were told by Krishnamacharya that it was given to him in a dream and we have presented the story

of how he acquired it. We have the verses as given to us by him, and his explanation of these verses translated by Desikachar. So we thought it was very important to share this with our readers since it was not available elsewhere. And the Yoga Sutra was the one text that he was so fond of. He would say, there is nothing that has not been mentioned in the Yoga Sutra whether it be practical aspects of life, philosophy of life, asana, pranayama, relationship with society, looking within yourself, every aspect of your life. He used to say that it was the Yoga Sutra that deals with life as a totality and is also a practical text that one can easily follow. Krishnamacharya had numerous explanations of the Yoga Sutra and I think it will take us centuries before we can compile and publish them.

**S.N.** Would you say that these are the foundation texts of his teachings?

**M.S.** Yes, the way he looked at Yoga Sutra was that it represented him. And what he taught through the Yoga Rahasya is the foundation of Krishnamacharya's approach. Every aspect of yoga is in the Yoga Rahasya. So every principle that we teach is from Yoga Rahasya excepting the adaptations themselves which came in later, but still the entire concept is there. We have presently started serializing Yoga Makaranda, which is an original work by him. It completes the picture, so we have what Krishnamacharya believed in, what interested him most, what he received from his teachers, and his own work, Yoga Makaranda.

**S.N.** There is another aspect to Darsanam, how this teaching is being applied today for example, the articles on case studies. Can you say something about how you choose the case studies and what you are trying to get across by using them?

**M.S.** Basically, 99 per cent of the people who come to the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram do so for

therapeutic reasons and we have a record of their entire course material, the way they have progressed. There are even cases where they haven't progressed, and we note how the course was changed and what we thought was the problem, if it was the practice that was not working or some other difficulty. So everything is analyzed and noted and this is what we present in Darsanam. You see how a particular case has been dealt with and how each case is different. It is very important in our work, for example, that two cases of headache are not treated by the same method. The case history, the background and the constitution of the student are so different that the course given is entirely different—completely individualized. By comparing two different manifestations of the same problem you can see clearly that the practice itself cannot be generalized.

**S.N.** This is very important since people often read case studies with the intention of finding a formula to apply to specific conditions rather than discovering a process of individualizing.

**M.S.** Right. In the journal we try to show that whenever we deal with asana and pranayama there is no set practice for any problem. We deal with people as individuals who happen to have a certain condition—and this brings out the uniqueness of Krishnamacharya's teachings.

**S.N.** And you're using the case studies to reflect that diversity.

**M.S.** Yes. In this direction we now have a research wing at the Yoga Mandiram. We hope to publish the results of this research in the journal. Asana is one of our major areas of research and mental retardation is an ongoing study. We've done case studies on high blood pressure, and we've now taken up the effects of asana and pranayama on maintaining health after bypass surgery, women's health concerns, the use of yoga in treating substance abuse, and the therapeutic use of chanting.

**S.N.** I notice that at different times there have been articles on other subjects aside from yoga, articles on ayurveda, for example.

**M.S.** As I said earlier, since the focus of Darsanam is to propagate Krishnamacharya's teaching, it is important that people know that he was just not a yoga teacher in the sense of teaching asana and pranayama. He was a philosopher, a yoga therapist, as well as an ayurvedic specialist. He had about fifteen titles and degrees from universities throughout India. Ayurveda was part of his teaching. When he examined a student, he would examine from the point of view of the doshas and then he would know what asana and pranayama to teach, and if required he would know what ayurvedic medicine to give. So he was an ayurvedic doctor and he related his knowledge of ayurveda to yoga. He was interested in so many elements of Hindu culture which is why we incorporate ayurveda and other subjects related to yoga.

**S.N.** Yes, we feel that a magazine cannot be closed. A magazine is something that is open to everybody. We invite articles from others and we are open to criticism. Suppose you wrote an article or letter expressing a different point of view. We would then be able to compare your point of view to Krishnamacharya's and this helps to clarify the teaching. In the forthcoming issue there is an opinion which refutes the authenticity of the Yoga Rahasya as received by Krishnamacharya, and we are going to give our supportive answer—why we think it is authentic. We're also planning to invite articles from abroad from those who have been associated with the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram or who have been coming here to study with Desikachar, or who had the opportunity to know Krishnamacharya.

**S.N.** Aside from what you've already mentioned, what kinds of articles are planned for future issues?

**M.S.** One thing that has been incorporated since the May '94 issue is essays written by Krishnamacharya. We want to open up more and more of his works on various subjects. But since he wrote in Sanskrit, Kanada, and Telugu the task of translating his words into English is enormous. Another focus will be on asthma, from the therapeutic point of view using two case studies that are not dealt with in the same way. We will also have an update on the research we are doing in asthma. Then, the November issue will be on meditation. We have a lot of suggestions from our readers as to what they would like the focal issues to be.

Darsanam is published quarterly in February, May, August, and November. The issues are sent air mail from India and then distributed book rate from California, usually arriving toward the end of the following month. Subscriptions are \$40.00 per year and may be obtained by sending a check made out to: Antaranga Yoga c/o Sara Cloud, 331 S. Lomita, Ojai CA, 93023.

# Daughters of the Goddess: The Women Saints of India

by Linda Johnsen, Yes International Publishers, 1994.

Reviewed by Brenda Dobia

Several visits to India over a short period of time have transformed my secularist reserve on the topic of Hindu mythology into a keen fascination for this subject. The Hindu goddess, having already become a prime influence in my life, is now the central character in my Ph.D. dissertation research.

**I**t was therefore with a sense of delighted affinity for the material and a keen interest in what a sister *sadhika* had learnt about her emissaries that I seized on the chance to read and review this book.

**T**hough the material opens onto a world that is vastly different from the one most of us experience in our Western milieu, for those already hooked on yoga it is perhaps not too large a step to venture into the richly subscribed traditions of goddess worship in India. Linda

Johnsen demonstrates how, despite coming from a Western heritage, an adventure like this can hold a special appeal and fascination.

**I**n *Daughters of the Goddess* the point of departure is Linda's desire to find out whether there are any great women saints in the Indian tradition. After a brief introduction to women saints of the past, she invites us on a journey that criss-crosses between the U.S. and India, as she follows contemporary women teachers. She presents us with accounts of the work of six: Sri Ma of Kamakhya, Anandamayi Ma, Anandi Ma, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, Ma Yoga Shakti, and Ammachi.

**E**ach chapter skillfully interweaves historical information about the life of each woman saint, extracts from talks or other quotations, interviews with devotees, and Linda's own observations and experiences as she researches her subject. In most cases she manages to blend an attitude of reverence with the kind of questioning that is appropriate to the development of *viveka*—discrimination. This kind of reflection seems especially important when the spiritual understanding that is the object of our inquiry derives from a cultural context with which we (at least those of us who, like Linda Johnsen, come from firmly Western origins) did not grow up.

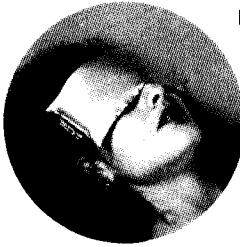
Given the cultural crossing required for understanding the lives of the women presented, we may well ask why this is so intriguing. In her introduction the author offers the suggestion that "Perhaps as we once adopted yoga and meditation from the East, we will also learn to value feminine leadership in spirituality, inspired by the example of the liberated women of India." (p. 27)

I found the sense of inspiration infectious. Each case evoked a particular resonance that stood out. In Linda's account of Sri Ma I was struck most by her absolute humility and serenity. Her portrait of Anandamayi Ma left me with a sense of her intense and uncompromising passion for realization. Anandi Ma came through as particularly thoughtful and sincere in her care for students and her concerns about cultural differences. Gurumayi Chidvilasananda impresses with her beauty and grace. Ma Yoga Shakti stands out for her discipline and accomplishment. And the chapter on Ammachi exudes strength, determination, and absolute commitment to social service through the feminine.

Of course, each one of these women saints is all of the above. The point of comparison is only for us to appreciate the vast beauty in the many forms of the Divine Mother as represented in human flesh and blood. This is discussed by Linda in her final chapter: "If some part of you responds, it is because the Mother herself is using your eyes to read these words, is lifting your fingers to turn these pages, is suspecting her all-pervading existence in the stirrings of your intellect." (p. 111)

One further resonance in *Daughters of the Goddess* is a kind of restlessness that comes with the inter-cultural terrain. In Linda Johnsen's case she notes that "As a contemporary Western woman my encounters with Indian saints have not been entirely rhapsodic. ...More than once my response to these women has not been melting surrender but

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sputtering feminism" (pp. 120-121). Is this admission to be seen as a failing, an example of yet another Westerner caught up with ego? Or is there a case for acknowledging that contemporary feminism is also a manifestation of the Divine Mother's return at a time when the world is in grave danger?

Were today's Indian society a model of the spiritual values its great traditions promulgate. I would rest easier with the notion that all we need to do is develop our *guru bhakti* in order to overcome our limitations. But, as Johnsen alludes to, women are especially prone to turn devotion into submission and so, instead of developing our own *shakti*, we give it away too easily. The questions, it seems to me, are important, and so is the need to acknowledge and understand our own cultural roots as we pursue a path of spiritual development.

Like Johnsen, I share a very great reverence and respect for the Shakta teachings and the work of contemporary Indian women teachers. They are undoubtedly inspired and inspiring models. This book is therefore not only for those interested in Indian culture but should be welcomed also as a worthy addition to a burgeoning literature in which Western women are exploring the dimensions of our own experience of the sacred feminine.

# Pathways Exercise Video for People with Limited Mobility

By Shoosh Crotzer

Reviewed by Mara Carrico

Shoosh Crotzer's Pathways Exercise Video provides beginning students with limited mobility an excellent option for developing and sustaining a home practice. Segmented into four parts, this 48-minute class begins and ends on the floor, includes both seated and standing exercises, and is completed with a 10-minute relaxation.

**S**hoosh's video is designed for anyone with limited mobility, including seniors, people with multiple sclerosis, arthritis or other limitations as well as those who are overweight or temporarily limited. Intended to be used independently, instructions are both given and demonstrated for those working with a teacher or an assistant. A small chart with stick figures and helpful hints is included with the video.



**T**his program is valuable because of its simplicity. The directions are uncomplicated and the content of the program covers very basic exercises for breathing, posture, flexibility, strength and balance.

**A**lthough Shoosh gives the customary pre-program cautions regarding safety, pacing and physician approval, there are a few instances within the program where additional recommendations would be helpful. When the



exercises are done supine, she neglects to suggest the use of a support under the head or neck for comfort and correct cervical alignment. In savasana or the relaxation pose an additional suggestion for support under the knees for lower back comfort would also be appreciated. The embryo, or child's pose, would again be more comfortable for most beginner's in this specific population if they were directed to place the folded arms or a folded towel under the forehead.

Two of the exercises given in the program might be too difficult or even contra-indicated for many of her intended audience. The first is the half-shoulder stand or inversion given with the feet placed on the edge of the couch. People who are weak or heavy would be fairly challenged with this pose. A useful option would be the same movement done with the feet placed on the floor such as in pelvic press or *dwi pada pitham*. The push-up exercise, even with the knees on the floor, is extremely difficult for this population. An option here would be simply to hold a half plank position with the knees on the floor. If directed to hold this pose and concentrate on keeping the back flat with the tailbone tucked down and the abdominals lifted, the student would benefit far more than practicing a push-up in poor form.

An awkward and curious moment appears in this same section when Shoosh speaks of the importance of strengthening the arms for those in wheelchairs. She says this when she is down on the floor beginning the cat stretch. How is a person who is in a wheelchair going to do this? Here she could have included, for the chair bound, some seated arm strengtheners. These could be arm exercises which are isometric or involve hand held light weights or a theraband. The standing section would have been enhanced if it was also demonstrated at the wall which would be helpful for both alignment and balance. Even though a basic abdominal curl is given, I would have suggested more frequent remin-

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ders about lifting or pulling in the abdominals for both balance and lower back support.

Shoosh's directions are good and her manner is pleasant. The overall production is neat and professional, scripted and staged without pretense. Filmed in a living room setting, a homey atmosphere is created. The music, by Iverson & Walters, is exactly as it should be: soothing background music, which creates a contemplative mood.

I recommend this tape as a useful and worthwhile program for use by teachers specializing in movement therapy and for the physically challenged who are in need of guidance for their home practice. Thank you, Shoosh and company, for providing us with an easy-does-it tape, catered to a specialized population. Mostly neglected in the home video market, this group will truly appreciate Shoosh and company's efforts.

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