

# Bone, Breath, and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment

Edited by Don Hanlon Johnson

Reviewed by Steven Kleinman, M.D.

This book is a fascinating anthology that should be of great benefit to serious yoga students, teachers, and therapists. The book's purpose is to introduce the reader to a wide variety of embodiment (mind-body integration) teachings that have been and continue to be practiced in North America and Europe; this book provides the reader with a historical perspective to appreciate the unifying principles and historical interconnections between these various independently arising teachings.

As a newcomer to these practices, I was amazed at the rich tradition, diversity, and early origins (late 19th and early 20th centuries) of these western approaches to mind-body exploration. The book accomplishes its aims by including original writings from the founders or influential representatives of these embodiment practices, as well as interviews with practitioners, in which the development of the work is explained in a more conversational fashion. The book features more than 15 different schools of embodiment practices, ranging from those that are relatively well known in contemporary America (Feldenkreis, Alexander, Rolfing, and dance therapy) to those that are more prominent in Europe (Eutony and offshoots of Gymnastik).

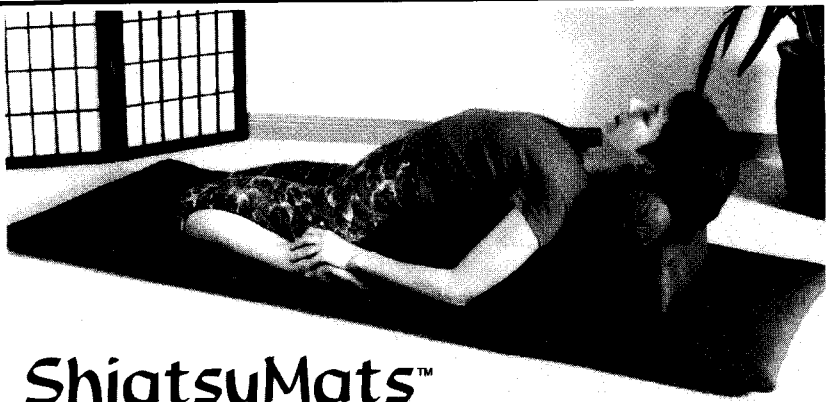
In the introduction, the editor, Don Hanlon Johnson of the California Institute of Integral Studies, articulates the common philosophy that underlies most of the embodiment teachings: that there is a unity of mind and body, that establishing change in the body will result in change in the mind (psyche) and vice versa, and that an integrated approach to exploring body and mind unveils a higher consciousness or spiritual aspect of being. When describing their system and techniques, most of the

authors articulate a common set of principles: the reliance on the individual's processes of self-observation, discovery, and self-awareness to unleash previously untapped potential. The techniques used by various practitioners include breath, movement, sensation, touch, mind power, and bodywork as means to facilitate these basic awareness processes.


Most of the philosophy and the basic principles underlying these embodiment practices will be very familiar to yoga practitioners. Asana and pranayama practice utilize many of the same elements used by these practitioners, and several authors acknowledge the contribution of yoga to the evolution of their teaching. I found it quite interesting that some of the basic principles that apply to yoga are articulated more clearly in this book than they are in many modern yoga books; yoga practitioners can benefit from reviewing these descriptions and reflecting upon how they impact yoga practice and teaching. I believe that such reflection may lead to a greater clarity in an individual's own yoga practice.

This book is not a technique manual and does not include photographs of models practicing techniques. While some practices are described, most authors make it clear that study with an established teacher is necessary to fully experience and learn their discipline. Nevertheless, experienced yoga practitioners can derive enough information to begin to experiment with incorporating some of these techniques into their yoga practice. An extensive bibliography is provided for the interested reader who might wish to explore a particular embodiment teaching in more detail.

Since mind and body are unified and since working with both affects the psyche through changes in thoughts, emotions, feelings, personality, and behavior, many authors discuss the psychotherapeutic dimension of their work. Yoga therapists can benefit from



**ShiatsuMats™**

 **YogaMats™**

**Handcrafted 100% Cotton Mats... PLUS!**

Yoga Bolsters • Pranayama Pillows • Zafus • Crescent Zafus  
Zabutons • Hara Weights • Neckrolls • Eye Pillows

**QUANTITY RATES FOR TEACHERS**

**YogaMats™**  
P.O. Box 885044  
San Francisco, CA 94188  
VISA/MC/AMEX

Call or write for our  
new catalog!

**1-800-720-YOGA**  
**1-415-626-7723**

the perspectives of some of these individuals who have spent a lifetime considering this issue.

The final section of the book contains three essays that attempt to unify the various embodiment approaches. In a 1977 essay, Thomas Hanna defines a new field of study, termed somatics, as the study of how the human being experiences him or herself from the inside. Since yoga certainly encompasses this experiential inquiry as one of its important elements, it is apparent that the study of yoga and somatics are mutually enhancing for practitioners in the modern world.

# The Heart of Yoga

By T.K.V. Desikachar

Reviewed by Jnani Chapman, R.N., C.M.T.

"Yoga is both a systematized body of knowledge and a practice," thus begins Mark Whitwell in his sixteen page introduction to one of the most thoughtful yoga books emerging in recent years, *The Heart of Yoga, Developing a Personal Practice*, by T. K. V. Desikachar. Ounce for ounce one of the best buys for anyone serious about yoga practically and transcendently, *The Heart of Yoga* is rich in conveying what yoga is and how to apply it.

Desikachar begins Part I, "The Practice of Yoga," which describes asanas, pranayama and bandhas, by offering a variety of definitions of yoga: Yoga means the thoughts come together to form an intention; yoga means attaining what was previously unattainable; yoga means we are always present every moment, in every action; yoga means being one with the divine. He cautions not to mistake the value of yoga as resting solely in practicing asanas, but to progress in yoga such that all aspects of life – our relationships to ourselves and others, our behaviors, our health, our breathing and our meditation benefit. Subsequent chapters of Part I crisply describe Desikachar's approach to physical yoga practice with sub-headings like: Beginning from Where We Are, Joining Breath and Movement, The Breath is the Intelligence of the Body, Counterposes, Designing a Session, About Resting, and Ways of Varying an Asana.

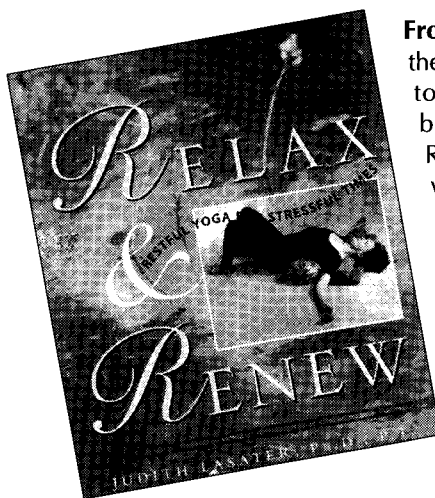
The asana sketches which accompany the text are numerous and clear, an obvious blessing for both novice and experienced hatha yoga practitioners. Each chapter and section of text begins with traditional black and white photos of Sri T. Krishnamacharya in a dothi demonstrating the poses. Family and other historical photographs accompany the introduction and the last section of the book, in which Desikachar and Whitwell use question and answer format to convey both the philosophy and the practical aspects of yoga.

Like the *Yoga Sutra*, *The Heart of Yoga* is divided into four parts, which each represent a different perspective, or approach to yoga. Part II, "The Understanding of Yoga," is a discourse in which Desikachar expounds upon the underlying principles of yoga philosophy and psychology. With chapter titles like "Actions Leave Traces," "The World Exists to Set Us Free," and "The Qualities of the Mind," the reader is introduced to an active and disciplined mental yoga, and may in fact want to contemplate excerpts from this section as a daily practice.

A book within a book, Part III of *The Heart of Yoga* (pages 145-215) is Desikachar's translation and commentary on the complete *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali. Avid *Sutra* fans will find Desikachar's rendition of the *Yoga Sutras* simple and profound: simple in understanding, wide in scope. For example, in chapter two Desikachar translates verse 35 to read, "The more considerate one is, the more one stimulates friendly feelings among all in one's presence;" and verse 39 as "At its best, moderation produces the highest individual vitality."

*The Heart of Yoga* serves as a student (Whitwell)'s abeissance to his teacher (Desikachar) in a lineage/tradition which places much emphasis on the need for a teacher-student relationship. "In yoga," says Whitwell, "the purpose is to bring some change and the teacher is the reference point." Desikachar, likewise, honors his teacher (and father), Sri T. Krishnamacharya, by devoting time in the introduction and the entire last section (Part IV) of *The Heart of Yoga* to him. Sri T. Krishna-macharya was over 100 years old when he died in Madras, India in 1989. The teacher, says Desikachar, must create a learning environment that enables each student to find his or her own way. Because "there is not just one approach for everybody," a teacher must attend "to each person's unique-ness," (and

## RESTORATIVE *Yoga*




From Judith Lasater, Ph.D., P.T.—the first book devoted exclusively to the supported poses and breathing practices called Restorative Yoga. Discover gentle ways to manage stress, and relieve back pain, insomnia, jet lag, and more. Three chapters address women's needs during menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause. Over 100 photos, drawings, and charts. 240 pages, \$21.95

**800 • 841 • 3123**

Amex/MC/Visa; plus \$4.00 s/h  
Add local sales tax in Calif.

Distributed to the trade by S.C.B.

2550 Shattuck Ave., #18  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
510 • 841 • 3123  
Fax—510 • 841 • 3191  
RodmellPrs@aol.com

RODMELL  
  
P R E S S

cultivate a personal re-relationship which is free from ex-ploitation and based on mutual trust and non-attachment, adds Whitwell).

T.K.V. Desikachar is a very thoughtful man who was raised and trained by an adept yoga master. The joy and the simplicity of yoga are resonant in the pages of this rare work. It is also no easy read. From its beginning blessing from Indra Devi (an early student of Krishnamacharya's, whose early students also included B.K.S. Iyengar and Patabhi Jois) to its two page index, three page glossary and four page closing set of practice sequence samples, *The Heart of Yoga* is a rich text ready to help any reader to establish a personal practice, so that the experience at the heart of yoga is available in daily life.

# Relax and Renew

By Judith Lasater, Ph.D., P.T.

Reviewed by Diane Rabinowitz and Ellen Serber

Judith Lasater's reputation as an authority on yoga is reinforced with *Relax and Renew, Restful Yoga for Stressful Times*, a very helpful and unique text which adapts yoga postures for times of stress as well as for students with stress-related conditions.

With a forward by Mary Pullig Schatz, M. D., author of *Back Care Basics*, *Relax and Renew* is designed with a distinctively Zen spaciousness and a soothing rhythmic flow. Each chapter begins with a full page light-exposure nature photograph. Throughout the book, inspirational quotes grace the text's wide margins. Each restorative pose is introduced first by a photograph of a person in the pose followed by text describing the pose; readers must be alert to this, and hopefully, subsequent editions will make this presentation format clearer.

Judith Lasater credits the development of these restorative poses – the book features between 26 and 29 postures – to B.K.S. Iyengar, who experimented with props (blankets, bolsters and belts) to modify poses so that students could prevent strain and could be help to recover from illness or injury. Iyengar yoga is known for its concern for structural alignment and for its physical intensity, which has influenced many teachers in many schools. Because of its strong demands on the student, Iyengar yoga is a wonderful challenge for some, but a major problem for others.

*Relax and Renew*, takes the pain out of Iyengar Yoga's supported poses and presents a new view on the restorative sequences which the Iyengars have developed. A typical restorative sequence from the Iyengars might include many inversions, held for 5 or 10 minutes, as well as backbends using chairs or forward bends held for a long time. Judith's restorative series, however, has a different premise. She wants the pose to support the body so totally that the person practicing can let go completely, without any hesitation or regret. The idea is to let the blankets and bolsters surrounding the body create a shape for the body to sink into, in order to let all the muscles release, and to allow for an experience of profound repose. There should be no stress while doing her restorative positions: "Let the pose do the work."

Restorative yoga relieves the effects of chronic stress. According to Judith, these practice sequences move the spine in all directions, alternately stimulating and soothing the organs to enhance exchange across cell membranes, use inversions to reverse the effects of gravity, and balance the energy of prana and apana: "Prana, the masculine energy, resides above the diaphragm, moves upward, and controls respiration and heart rate. Apana, the feminine energy, resides below the diaphragm, moves downward, and controls the function of the abdominal organs."

The first chapter of *Relax and Renew* explains stress and relaxation, complete with physiological effects, and orients the reader to the body of the text. The suggestions at the end of this chapter under the heading "Finding a Yoga Teacher" and the entire second chapter, "Getting Started," which outlines the nuts and bolts of beginning to practice, are valuable bits of advice to be read and reread. There is a short chapter describing the props (some people may find the use of blankets confusing, especially the requests to fold them in certain ways; a little practice helps.) Chapter four begins by introducing the basics: the basic relaxation pose and the breathing practice to use in all of the restorative poses. Throughout the book, each pose is introduced with a picture; then instruction for setting up, coming into, maintaining, and coming out of the pose is given, along with the known benefits, cautions and counter-indications.

*Relax and Renew* includes chapters on back pain, headache, neck pain, insomnia, breathing difficulties, menstruation, birth, and menopause. The postures and sequences described may be good for anyone with immune system disorders or other chronic complaints. The chapter on jet lag offers ideas for substituting props when travelling or when there is not access to manufactured props. These restorative poses could even be used at the

end of a more physical practice or as a lead-in to pranayama and meditation.

In the book's last section, *Living Your Yoga*, standing and sitting "mountain" poses are described along with ideas for bringing yoga into many moments of daily life. These scant pages are rich with practical tips – "position the interior rear view mirror in your car so that you have to stretch a little" as you drive; "decide here and now that you are your own first priority." This section will leave the reader desirous of hearing more of these gems from Judith.

*Relax and Renew* is a timely and practical addition to anyone's yoga library. Judith Lasater provides readers with enough guidance and direction to bring restorative yoga safely into daily life. These sequences are excellent for people who want to have a slow, soft practice. *Relax and Renew*, could be the ideal gift to encourage someone you love to take joyful moments out of every day for restoring and renewing body, mind and spirit.

## Greetings from the Editor and Reflections on Yoga Therapy

(continued from page iv)

experience of life requires continual self-observation and the willingness to remove obstacles, whether they be physical, mental, or psychological; he or she may be able to independently apply yogic techniques to facilitate the healing and self-development process. Thus, the need for therapy may bring people to yoga and may be appropriate at the outset; continued interest in yoga would lead people to self-motivated and self-directed growth, either independently or under the guidance of a teacher rather than a therapist.

It is my intention to continue to explore the definition of yoga therapy and its place in contemporary society in future issues of the *Journal*. In addition, the *Journal* will continue to feature a wide breadth of articles that provide detailed information about the therapeutic effectiveness of yoga and that describe specific techniques and approaches to yoga practice and yoga therapy.

Namaste.

Steven Kleinman, M.D.