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Ask a Yoga Therapist

What is Yoga Therapy?



www.matthewjtaylor.com

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This column is part of a new, ongoing column where you can submit your or your students' questions about yoga challenges and related health and safety concerns. Submit your questions to askatherapist@yogatherapy.com

Q: I am hearing more about Yoga therapy these days and wondering what is it and how is it different than Yoga?

A: Yoga therapy is both very old and fairly new. While a full discussion is beyond the space we have here, let me share some important aspects of Yoga therapy. On one hand it can be argued all Yoga has a therapeutic effect, therefore the term is redundant. That is true philosophically. We see various schools and lineages of instruction treat the terminology different as well. Some call it the therapeutic application of Yoga, reserved for only the most senior teachers and others grant entry level training for individuals with little or no training. No wonder it's confusing!

Presently the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) is the professional association for those individuals that call themselves Yoga therapists. Just last year they generated the first definition of Yoga therapy as:

"Yoga therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and well being through the application of the philosophy and practice of Yoga."

This definition at first glance may not seem to say much, but it was derived through a long process of considering the history of Yoga, legal considerations and the essence of Yoga. Let's consider each in turn.

Historically Yoga is psychospiritual practice designed to alleviate human suffering. We get into trouble, or suffer when we forget who we really are through a process of misidentification. When one practices Yoga, one rediscovers through a *process* of practice. That is, it doesn't happen overnight or as an event.

Legally, all Yoga is Yoga, not therapy. Therapy implies a therapeutic effect and this falls under government regulation. This is a key point....the therapist isn't "doing therapy" to the student, rather the therapist empowers the student through the application of Yoga to experience a relief through discovery of their true essence. This is very different than most therapy where the therapist "makes" someone better.

The essence of Yoga is that within the relationship between the student and therapist both come to discover the source of suffering and in that discovery the barrier to health and well being is eliminated. Again, this is a succession of process steps, but the student is empowered to progress in their practice, guided and supported by therapist, but not dependent on the therapist as the healing agent.

To learn more about the various schools of Yoga therapy and how to find a Yoga therapist please visit www.iayt.org.

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