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TAYLOR™

Ask a Yoga Therapist

How to Support the Human Nervous System with Yoga?

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Ask the Yoga Therapist

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 understand Yoga reduces the stress response, which is good for the nervous system. How else can Yoga help people with conditions like MS, Parkinson's disease, post-stroke, and spinal cord injury?

A: (Disclaimer: This column is a not so subliminal ad...read on.) The human nervous system is a fascinating marvel of all five levels of the koshas (physical, bioenergetic, emotion, intellectual and spiritual). What the sages have been describing for thousands of years is finally being realized in Western medicine. Those conditions all benefit tremendously with a properly instructed Yoga practice. Unfortunately, they can also be hampered by an inappropriate practice!

When someone develops a long-term neurological condition like those, it is first of all of spiritual issue as it completely annihilates the small self's identity. This vulnerability is a perfect opportunity for the Yoga therapist to support the student in re-examining all the old illusions of who they thought they were, what they should/could be doing, and what matters most in their lives. Instability at this level has direct and profound effects on the individual's ability to think, dream, emote, breathe and sustain physical mobility and function. A good program addresses and supports these issues first. Asana may be a tool within the supports, first and foremost is acknowledging this level with the student because in general it gets brush over or under by nearly everyone.

Listening, asking clarifying questions and letting them know that such a "life sentence" can be viewed as a doorway to spiritual practice is a "headstand" perspective for the average student. My friend Matt Sanford describes disability as the ultimate spiritual practice. So let your student know Yoga is first and foremost a psycho-spiritual practice according Georg Feuerstein, PhD.

There are many incredible ways that Yoga generates health and healing within those conditions. Quite literally our thoughts and actions rebuild and alter the physical structure of our nervous system. Most important is the emphasis on "listening" to the altered feedback within their "new" nervous system. As to the how and why of all this, the explanation exceeds my column character limits.

If you want to learn more, see the ad on this page or log onto www.azmsyoga.com because I will be teaching this on Oct 9-10 this year in Phoenix. The entire registration fee goes to the AZ MS Society (my seva) and the principles you learn will support every student you have the honor to sit with in the future. Hope to see you and your colleagues there for a historic educational experience.

Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, RYT has a doctorate in transformational learning and change (a.k.a. yoga) from the California Institute of Integral Studies. Matt is an AYA member living in Scottsdale where he and his wife have a yoga-based rehabilitation clinic. He has authored numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and textbooks on yoga therapy. He serves on the board of directors of the International Association of Yoga Therapist, teaches nationally, and maintains a busy private yoga therapy caseload. He is an expert legal witness for yoga injuries and is passionate about yoga safety. For more information see www.drofyoga.com .

The "Ask a Yoga Therapist" series is for general information purposes and does not constitute as medical advice or prescription. Readers should seek local, qualified consultation and direction from their healthcare professional prior to acting on portion of these columns. Individual consultation is available with Dr. Taylor at www.drmatthewtaylor.com .

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