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# Ask a Yoga Therapist

## What is the heart of YRx?



[www.matthewjtaylor.com](http://www.matthewjtaylor.com)

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## Ask the Yoga Therapist

This column is 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](mailto:askatherapist@yogatherapy.com)

**Q:** In the last newsletter you wrote, "Yoga after all is about relationships, not techniques." Techniques are what I sense most students that come into a Yoga class are looking to learn, especially the students new to Yoga. Would you please expand more on how Yoga is about relationships, or did you mean mostly Yoga Therapy? --- An RYT 500 teacher

**A:** I have had similar experiences of students and teachers searching for the technique, teacher or prescription of the technologies of Yoga in order to heal. The tendency to look outward for a formula is an interesting phenomenon of our unseen cultural bias. Such looking reveals society's assumption that when something is broken (diseased, painful, awkward or non-functioning) then the solution is to fix some-'thing'. We should be asking, "Who says things should be what way and why?"....our spouse? our peers? our parents? Madison Avenue?...technically vrittis according to the Sutras....those aspects of mind that Yoga asks us to recognize and stabilize (nirodha).

Understand there are plenty of times when there are technologies to employ, things to be done or corrected as teachers and therapists. My point is that it is the relations that ultimately link (yoke?) the 'things' together. So to going into Yoga searching for the right tool to fix suffering presupposes an understanding that the relationships at the root of the problem are already known. Pantanjali asks that we not be so quick to jump to that conclusion as reality. Rather, the sutras urge us to explore relationships to uncover Reality (purusha).

### **What relationships should we attend to then?**

While there are an infinite number, the three I find most useful in my practice (both personal and clinical) are the following: 1.) Relationship with self; 2.) Relationship with others; 3.) Relationship with Self. Put another way, the Yamas and Niyamas. Those in combination with the other 6 Limbs provide the framework for our Yoga either as personal development or as therapy.

### **An example:**

Let's conclude with this common example. Imagine you have a chronic, low-grade point of tension in the center of your right upper trapezius, midway between your shoulder and your ear. Doesn't kill you but hasn't gone away completely for over a year now.

### **Method A: The Fixer**

1.) Relationship with self: Following a structural assessment student is told that shoulder is elevated and rolled forward relative to the other side. Chest openers and rotations are prescribed with the intention of bring the two sides to balance.

2.) Relationship with others: No mention would be made because it is clearly a structural issue by assessment.

3.) Relationship with Self: This is clearly structural: we can both see it, what could the Self possibly have to do with this pain?

### **Method B: Discovering Relationships**

1.) Relationship with self: In addition to local structural assessment, relationships would also be explored with the feet, pelvis and diaphragm/breath. Emphasis would be less on visual seeing and more on drawing inward and sensing differences, and just becoming aware vs. fixing. Off the mat awareness of when these differences shift or are exaggerated would be “homework” (i.e., What causes you to sense the shoulder pushing forward? Who does that? Why?....noticing in the moment the connection. Balancing asana would of course also be used, but more to sensing differences than pushing for symmetry as the goal.

2.) Relationship with others: When you observe your thinking to be pushing something or someone to be a certain way, where is your shoulder? Your breath? What are the assumptions and thoughts behind the pushing? Do they match the Yamas and Niyamas?

3.) Relationship with Self: Can the student ask the above deepening questions in a spirit of personal inquiry to sense their bodily response to their relationship with Self in whatever form they understand Self? Gravity doesn't just decrease and pull the shoulder up and forward. Follow the trail back: action from emotion from thinking from spirit or how they relate with Self.

That is Yoga as relationships.

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