



Dr. Nivedita Pingle has been running her own yoga therapy studio in Pune for people with musculoskeletal disorders, cardiac ailments and other diseases for the last 8 years, having treated more than 500 patients. Nivedita studies and teaches at the Kabir Baug, India's foremost yoga therapy center. She runs frequent Yoga Therapy courses at the Anand Prakash Ashram in Rishikesh, India. Colin, Sarah, and Dev have all taken intensive yoga therapy courses from Dr. Pingle, making her a major influence on Bodhi Tree Yoga. In the interview, Colin and Nivedita talk about teaching and learning therapeutic yoga, the role of "western" medicine in yoga therapy, as well as the current state of yoga therapy in India and Canada.

Colin Hall: How do you feel that yoga compares with other healing modalities (ie. Massage, chiropractic) for treating back problems?

Nivedita Pingle: First, comparison can be made between two similar things. Yoga differs from most other alternative therapies on a very basic premise- yoga is done by the person himself, albeit under guidance. Most of the other therapies have someone else doing something for you. Yoga is about self-awareness about one's own body space, its relation with the surroundings, the causes for its distortion and so on. A person wanting to correct his back problems has to know where the shoe bites. Yoga imparts better knowledge and understanding, thereby taking the penetration of the therapy deeper.

CH: How important is it that students "believe" in the healing capacity of yoga in order to be healed by the practice of yoga?

NP: You 'believe' in things you are really not sure of. when you 'know' something for true, you do not need to believe it. But to know if something unconventional would work for you or not, you would have to believe it works, take the risk, give it a good try and experience for yourself. The eight-year old just beginning to learn his first bicycle believes it will take him somewhere, mounts it, and falls 'n' number of times but finally gets it. Never heard anybody sue his parents for teaching him to ride. The proof of the pudding is in eating it, so they say.

CH: I've always wondered why the body just doesn't heal itself. Most of the time, when something goes wrong (like a pulled muscle, a cold, or an abrasion) the natural healing functions of the body kick in, but every now and then I get a cold that just won't go away, or a pulled muscle that seems to take forever to heal. Any thoughts on that?

NP: Doing too much of a good thing is as bad as doing too much of a bad thing. As far as muscular aches and pains go, I would say, one should know what is too much for himself. Over-enthusiastic pursuit of yoga itself can be a reason for RSI(repetitive strain injury) giving rise to frequent cramps and such. The other complaints are to do with the body's immune system, which also suffers due to our not acknowledging the mind-body connection. So, when you have a bad hair day, you also get a runny nose, back ache, general lethargy, and a grumpy boss and spouse.

CH: How popular is therapeutic yoga in India? Is it gaining in popularity?

NP: Therapeutic yoga is gaining ground in India on a big scale. I guess it is because of an increase in the overall awareness through media, celebrities endorsing it, yoga awareness campaigns undertaken by organizations, etc. Yoga is kinda in your face these days.

CH: Can you imagine yoga therapy ever being integrated into mainstream health care? How would you envision the role of the yoga therapist working in a complementary way with a family doctor?

NP: Well, I think, the next 50 years should see yoga being a pivotal part of the lifestyle of people in general. The medical fraternity cannot isolate itself from a popular therapy for long. The wheel of change is already in motion. Modern medicine is only 400 years old. The collective knowledge of mankind is very much common- the Africans, Easterns, the Greek, the Egyptians, all of them have a rich heritage of herbs, potions and techniques which have survived the technological juggernaut.. Sure, mainstream medicine is absolutely essential for so many disorders, but for lifestyle disorders we have to change the way we live. A yoga therapist can start a dialogue with the local doctor, show his results, testimonials and work jointly with the doctor. That way the patient would also feel he is not compromised.