

# **YOGA AND HEALING**

by Michael Lee, M.A. Founder of Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy

As yoga becomes more mainstream and more popular there are many people jumping on the bandwagon and hailing the miraculous benefits of the practice. Yoga therapists have known for many years how yoga can help anything from sciatica to a failed marriage. One of the problems associated with the popularization of yoga, however, is the tendency to apply it as a panacea and from an almost exclusive left-brained paradigm. At last year's Yoga Journal Pre-Conference on Yoga Therapy, I was on a panel to answer questions from many of the students attending. Many questions related to applications of yoga therapy in the form of "What posture do I recommend for such and such a condition?" One student even asked for postures for altitude sickness to which I suggested a car ride down the mountain or if that wasn't available try a headstand. That would at least get him a few feet closer to sea level. Fundamentally there is nothing wrong with such questions. The problem is the mind-set from which they arise. A mindset that is based on a paradigm of healing that says "do this procedure or apply this technique to get this result". To me this approach sells yoga therapy short. It is so much more than that. Yoga therapy is an holistic science. One that honors the complexity of being human and the unique makeup of each one of us in every aspect - body, mind, and spirit. To clarify this take a look at the following comparison between two different paradigms of healing that I have attempted to identify.

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## **Two Models of Healing**

### **PRESCRIPTIVE MODEL**

1. Based on diagnosis and treatment
2. Based on cause and affect
3. Outcome is known from study of previous cases and application of scientific method
4. Alleviation of pain or disappearance of symptoms = successful intervention
5. Power is primarily with the therapist
6. Client follows directions to affect cure
7. Dependence on therapist is possible and even likely
8. What is important is decided by therapist
9. Therapist is invested in successful outcome
10. Answers are more valued than questions
11. Ambiguity and chaos are limited in the healing process

### **HOLISTIC TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL**

1. Based on co-created exploration
2. Based on unique manifestation of energy of the individual
3. Outcome is unknown
4. Awareness of underlying dissonance in body, mind, and spirit can lead to life transforming change on same dimensions
5. Power is primarily with the client
6. Client makes choices from options presenting from new self generated awareness
7. Empowerment of client is likely
8. What is important is decided by client
9. Therapist leaves client to determine relative success without attachment.
10. Questions can be more valuable than answers

## 11. Ambiguity and chaos are valued and inherent in the healing process.

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Whilst I may sometimes choose to operate out of the first model. I believe the real power of yoga therapy is found in the second model and my 16 years of working with this process through Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy bears this out. It's when the second model is applied that deep healing and transformation occur. It is in this arena that the client will often uncover some aspect of their life that is out of balance with their spirit. Out of this awareness they will often make changes that will make a genuine difference in their lives from that moment on.

There is also a huge difference in the skill set required by the yoga therapy practitioner to operate in the holistic paradigm. In the prescriptive model the practitioner essentially needs to be a skilled technician. In the holistic model the practitioner needs to be trained in the acute application of awareness and presence - and 'not doing' becomes as important as 'doing.' Creating an appropriate relationship with the client is essential to the healing process. The practitioner is as much an educator as she is a clinician. Each and every session assumes the feeling of a unique voyage of discovery in an unknown world. I recall the tears of joy on the face of one 70 year old client who realized that his sciatica was no more than his unwillingness to let go of control and laugh at his inability to hold on to his grown children any longer. He would never have discovered this had I been simply "treating" his condition. He got there because we took a journey together into the depth of his spiritual essence while he took the lead while I held his hand and followed.

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MICHAEL LEE, MA, is the founder of Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy. Michael presents at both mainstream and alternative medical, psychotherapy and yoga conferences throughout North America, Australia and Europe and writes about his work. He also serves on faculty at the Omega Institute, the Open Center in New York, and has presented his work at both Duke University and at Findhorn in Scotland.

Michael's recently published book - "Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy - Bridge from Body to Soul" - shows how the practice of yoga with a body-mind focus, has application to many life issues - relationships, parenting, and day to day life in general Michael's work has also been published by the American Psychological Association in the book "Beyond Talk Therapy - Using Movement and Expressive Techniques in Clinical Practice" edited by Dr. Daniel Wiener.

Originally from Australia with a background in education and psychology, Michael followed his love for yoga and moved to the United States in 1984 and became a resident and teaching staff member at Kripalu Center. He directed several of Kripalu's professional training programs in the mid to late 1980's including Yoga Teacher Training and Holistic Health Educator Training. Based on his work there and his background in education and psychology he completed a dissertation on the therapeutic benefits of yoga for life related issues and gained an Masters degree in Holistic Health Education from Norwich University in Vermont. His leading edge body-mind work has found many applications including a residential program in a high school serving adolescents with emotionally related behavioral issues. Since its inception in 1986, Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy has grown to become a widely accepted modality in the field of body-mind therapies.

Further information about Michael or Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy can be obtained by calling 1-800-288-9642 or through the website [www.pryt.com](http://www.pryt.com). Michael's books and tapes can be ordered by contacting [theyogashop@pryt.com](mailto:theyogashop@pryt.com)