



Does Yoga Heal?

By Laurie Saunders

In the broadest sense, the answer is, “Absolutely!” In a narrower and more accurate sense, the answer is “Yoga supports healing in a way that is unique to its method.”

The fundamental truth about healing, well understood in all medical practices, whether mainstream or alternative, is that doctors are trained facilitators of that which actually does the healing. That “something” has power and capacity beyond what can be described in scientific or even human terms, and manifests visibly as the simple healing we take for granted: we cut our skin, and within hours, the scab has formed, and, within a week or a month, there is only a scar. We don’t have to think about it, and all doctors and nurses count on this miracle every day.

There are five “truths” we can therefore put forward about yoga and healing:

- Our human systems – the physical, as well as the non-physical realms of thoughts and feelings – are endowed with a life force that actually does the healing;
- Circumstances – outer and inner, inherited and acquired – come together in an individual life to restrain or obstruct that life force;
- Such slowing and blocking of the life force results in what we observe as symptoms – such symptoms coalescing in patterns we call diseases;
- Through the structured movement and breath-awareness exercises we call “yoga,” there is an opportunity to gradually break up and dissolve those restraints and blockages; and
- The life force that does the healing has infinite capacity, and a yoga student who diligently cultivates contact with it can expect with confidence that his or her life will be changed for the better.



The academic community continues to study yoga in relationship to various health conditions, and positive benefits can be seen using evidence-based research methods (see [Yoga Alliance Research Portal](#)). As practitioners, though, we can study our own direct experience: if we carefully till the soil of our systems using asana, pranayama and meditation, we will discover for ourselves how that “change for the better” will be expressed, and we’ll be happy to have found it.

There’s never a need to choose one healing modality over another – yoga can be the perfect complement to any modality, traditional or not. Since every modality is fundamentally rooted in “that which does the healing,” a wise strategy for suffering humans is to develop a broad and deep understanding of themselves and a willingness to investigate which specific strategies are best for them. Even if we’re in a state of uncertainty or fear about our health, yoga gives us respite from worry and, in deep relaxation, allows us to have insights and intuitions about our condition that can guide our decision-making.

Swamiji says, in [Dynamic Stillness, Volume I](#), discussing the essential practice of utilizing breath and movement as entry points into contact with the highest vibration of energy in our individual systems,

“Our practice of asana and pranayama....enables us to experience something beyond the data provided by our bodies, minds, and emotions....There, we discover and begin to participate in a profound renewal on every level. That is what yoga is all about.”¹

Namaste,

Laurie Saunders



Laurie’s diagnosis of MS in 1999 has led her to develop teaching approaches for people with illness or injury. In her class at TMC called “Healing Yoga Practice,” she worked with students to build personal practices tailored to each unique health situation. This year, she’ll be presenting a 6-week workshop on yoga for conditions affecting the brain and nervous system, such as Parkinson’s, MS and stroke recovery.