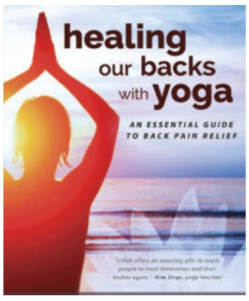
MediaReviews



Healing Our Backs with Yoga: An Essential Guide to Back Pain Relief

By Lillah A. Schwartz

Beneficial Services Inc. through Ingram Press, 2016

Review by Steven Weiss

In a comprehensive 182-page exploration, Lillah Schwartz outlines some of the possible physical causes of back pain and offers an extensive compilation of asana sequences that addresses each the factors reviewed. She introduces back-pain sources that include long and short musculature, arthritis, osteoporosis, scoliosis, sacroiliac, and spinal-disc issues. The book is well-formatted, providing an introduction to back pain accompanied by realistic, easy-to-reference sequences and extensive instructions for asana setup. The author generously shares her deep study and extensive teaching of yoga.

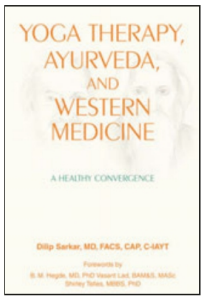
The therapeutics are exclusively asana-based, but the information is comprehensive and addresses topics such as leg-muscle inflexibility, hip and sacroiliac limitations, and back-musculature imbalance. Schwartz also explores abdominal muscle strength and shoulder function.

The book employs basic postures with reminders to either stay at that level or move forward. Photographs representing each pose are abundant, and I found the use and translation of Sanskrit asana names satisfying. Yoga therapists might consider using this book with their clients to help them develop a regimen of yoga postures that will effectively and logically address common issues related to back pain. The final sections supply an extensive chart of muscle/asana relationships and photo-sequencing of asana for specific back-pain conditions, making this a useful reference.

The book is successful as a basic introduction to some causes of back pain and its etiology. In some cases, additional details on back-pain issues, for example, ligament function in managing joint stability and flexibility, will no doubt be desired. However, a competent knowledge of the causes of back pain can be acquired here. With her background in massage therapy, the author's primary determinant and assessment for back pain focuses on muscular issues—specifically, whether muscles are long or short. Although this approach can successfully address numerous issues, it may not deliver when other causes, such as joint instability or fixations, are involved. To be fair, Schwartz does address joint function by reminding us to establish length and joint space before strengthening the back musculature.

Schwartz self-describes as a dedicated student of B. K. S. Iyengar. As is common with Iyengar-directed teachings, her focus and expertise are on pose-by-pose specifics. More general principles that can apply to all asana are not supplied, although this is perhaps a philosophical choice. All said, this book is a valuable resource for asana and its application to back pain. YTT

Steven Weiss, MS, DC, E-RYT, C-IAYT (injuryfreeyogapractice.com), is a holistic chiropractor and nutritionist. He teaches with many yoga teacher trainings internationally and has authored several books, including The Injury-Free Yoga Practice *and the forthcoming* Yoga Alignment, Principles and Practice.



Yoga Therapy, Ayurveda, and Western Medicine: A Healthy Convergence

By Dilip Sarkar, MD, FACS, CAP, C-IAYT

Lulu Publishing Services, 2017

Review by Robyn Tiger

Two snakes intertwine around the stem of a lotus flower whose center is the eye of wisdom and lies just above a petal transformed into the word "aum." Using this symbol throughout his book, Sarkar depicts the convergence of Eastern and Western philosophies necessary for a more complete healthcare system. [It must be noted here that Sarkar is the immediate past president of the IAYT board.]

The author's own life has come to represent this healthy convergence. After sustaining a heart attack requiring coronary bypass surgery, Sarkar took control of his own health with a daily routine combining yoga therapy and ayurveda. To his physicians' surprise, he was then able to live a healthy life without medications. At their request, he designed this fundamental text to teach both patients and physicians these principles and practices.

Sarkar is not alone in his medical history. Morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases are increasing worldwide, and stress is a major causal factor. However, stress can be controlled with the lifestyle changes outlined in this book. Chapters include teachings spanning yoga anatomy and physiology; ayurvedic principles; and a daily routine composed of cleansing, asana, meditation, pranayama, and mudras. Numerous color photos of Dr. Sarkar demonstrating his practice lend authenticity to his teachings. He invites readers to make only a few changes at a time to increase the accessibility and success of their new practice.

I read this book with two pairs of eyes: those of a Western-trained physician and those of a yoga therapist trained in Eastern philosophies. My own personal daily practice was greatly deepened when I combined these two perspectives. I found myself highlighting, taking notes, photocopying for future reference, and pausing to practice. I was reminded of why I do certain practices and why I should add certain practices back into my daily routine while simultaneously learning new ones. I was also reminded of what not to do —like snacking while reading this book!

As a physician, I commend Sarkar for his thorough explanations of the complex physiology behind Eastern practices. The medical community will find the concepts understandable and credible. I commend him for his ability to create a text that can deepen an existing practice whether the readers are medical or yoga practitioners. I believe this book is a strong step in the right direction toward the much-needed transformation our current healthcare system requires. YTT

Robyn Tiger, MD, C-IAYT, RYT 500, founded Yoga Heals 4 Life, serving those touched by cancer, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. She is Trauma Informed Yoga Therapy faculty and serves on their medical advisory board for research.