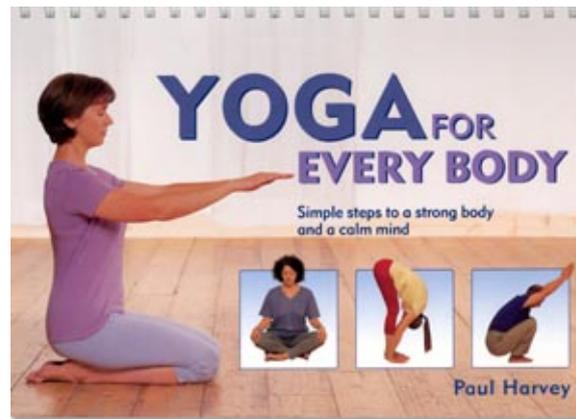


This guiding principle of seeing the person rather than the problem



Yoga Practices for Therapeutic situations

As the basis of this book is Yoga for Every Body I would now like to focus on this aspect of Yoga. To help in understanding how to proceed we will firstly discuss some basic principles for Yoga as a form of therapeutic intervention. From here we will look at different examples of practices for different students each with a unique story accompanied by unhelpful symptoms arising from their particular life story.

It is tempting here to propose a technique and then state that this technique will help this particular situation or problem. However, my teacher taught me that Yoga is to be tailored to the needs and aspirations of each person rather than fitting the person to some ready made technique.

Thus with this guiding principle of seeing the person rather than the problem or disease and the acceptance that we are not working just with a preordained technique we can continue.

This means that within Yoga we are considering a person who, because of their lifestyle, is experiencing certain problems or illnesses. We are also presuming that their situation has become such that they are willing to explore alternatives to live a more harmonious relationship with their inner nature and outer lifestyle.

*"The spirit of viniyoga is starting from where one finds oneself.
As everybody is different and changes from time to time,
there can be no common starting point,
and ready-made answers are useless.
The present situation must be examined
and the habitually established status must be re-examined."*

- TKV Desikachar

In this context it is difficult to apply techniques for a problem without knowing first who is the person behind the problem and what is their relationship with life, as well as their problems. The effect of a headache in one person will be different, as will be their response, from another person who has what is also described and experienced as a headache.

We are all very unique and as a Yoga text called the Secret of Yoga tells us, differences in age, culture, beliefs, occupation and physical and mental health all need to be respected.

Therefore examples of practices are suggested to illustrate different individuals and the problems arising from their unique lifestyle patterns and the personalised proposals for each situation. This is the way Yoga is presented according to the person, rather than practices which just appear to help a common type of problem.

- Practice examples

So we come back to the question of practices for specific people rather than practices for specific problems. The uniqueness of each student's story can be illustrated by comparing two situations where the presenting problems and symptoms were similar.

I mentioned earlier the example of the effect of a headache and the response to a headache varying from person to person. In these two situations we can appreciate these differences.

Two people came suffering from headaches and the effects of stress. However, on further investigation we find that their stories and therefore our responses are different.

- Case Study 1

In the first person's case the stress although chronic, was more general in origin and had accumulated from different areas of their lives such as work, family life and lifestyle patterns. The overall effect was a stress pattern which, for them, resulted in headaches. Examination and discussion gave no indication of a specific stress related situation.

Based on the information gathered through one to one meetings, discussing personal history and observation of their body and to a lesser extent their responses, a practice was proposed with the overall aim of reducing stress generally and with it lessening the pattern of headaches.

As there are no particular physical precautions a practice was proposed using postures with breathing techniques to lead this person to a state where they could extend their breathing and work with simple visualisations.

So a practice was given where the emphasis is on generally relaxing and lessening accumulated stress.

- Case Study 2

In the second individual's case the complaints of stress and headaches were the same presenting symptoms. However, on exploring their story we find some important differences.

Firstly, it turns out that although this person is also suffering from accumulative stress. They also spend many hours working at a keyboard and computer screen. This leads to closer examination of the person's neck and shoulders for any physical disturbance such as muscle spasms.

The discovery is that for them the pattern of headaches is a result of excessive tension in their neck and shoulders probably exacerbated from the specific working situation they find themselves in. Here the consequence of increased stress from their specific work role is in its effect on their neck and shoulders.

This in turn leads to headaches and more stress compounded by having to work in such a situation. So we have a pattern of headaches related to occupational stress rather than life stress.

However to propose a similar practice to the first student's story is likely to exacerbate the tension. What is required is something more suited to this person's particular situation. In this case the emphasis in the practice is on relaxing specific areas of tension, here the accumulated stress on the neck and shoulders, plus some work to ease the strain on the eyes.

Such a practice would serve both as a rejuvenative and as a preventative to help in minimising any further build up of tension in the head, neck and shoulder area which given their work situation seems inevitable.

With that in mind we can now illustrate how Yoga may be used purposefully to help a person with their problem. Four further situations have been offered as examples.

- From unpublished material written for "Yoga for Every Body' 2002