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## Editorial

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### What is the Evidence for Yoga Therapy?

Much of the conversation among Yoga therapists and researchers these days is about *how* we talk about Yoga—with each other, with the public, with healthcare professionals, and with “the powers that be,” also known as the funding agencies, the program directors, and the policy-makers.

There is one stream of conversations that I have the privilege of “overhearing” and, in many cases, moderating: the flow of ideas between the authors who submit articles to the *Journal* and the peer reviewers who provide feedback. These are the questions we’re asking each other, and they reveal how we think about Yoga therapy. These conversations also provide key insights into what will be required of the field as we communicate the value—and *values*—of Yoga to those outside our field.

There is one question that comes up again and again in peer reviews, and it may be the most critical question for the field as a whole to address. That question is: *What is your evidence for that claim?*

Reviewers consistently want to know more about why an author is claiming that this breathing practice will be helpful for this disorder, or this posture is contraindicated for this condition, or this psychological disorder is associated with this energetic imbalance. Our reviewers want to know: On what authority do you make that claim? The lineage of your teachers, and your teachers’ teachers? Your own clinical experience developing a therapeutic Yoga practice for a specific condition or population? Your training in another therapeutic or healthcare profession? Evidence from scientific research?

A big part of this question is reviewers trying to figure out what paradigm the author is working from: Ayurveda, a specific style of *Hatha* Yoga, Western medicine, somatic psychology, some other perspective, or some combination

of perspectives? Many of us try to juggle multiple paradigms in our work, and we know that different paradigms require different kinds of evidence. Reviewers don’t necessarily want every possible kind of evidence, just evidence that the author is working with integrity within a given paradigm.

As you can tell from a quick look at the list of reviewers on the inside cover of this issue, and the author bios at the end of this issue, this is a diverse group of people. For an article on something like Yoga for depression (this issue has two!), the peer reviewers may include a clinical psychologist, a Yoga therapist trainer specializing in mental health, and a Yoga researcher. They may each have very different ideas about the role Yoga therapy plays in mental health, and what evidence is required to support a specific approach. Their collective and sometimes conflicting feedback requires the author to be more clear in his or her discussion about not just the what, but the why of Yoga therapy. So far, this system is working well (in this editor’s opinion) to produce articles that contribute to the larger, ongoing conversation about Yoga therapy.

But as a field, I believe we have yet to fully come to terms with the fact that we do not all work from the same “evidence base.” In this issue alone, authors supported their claims with the following types of evidence:

- Traditional Yogic and Ayurvedic texts
- The author’s direct relationship with a well-known and respected teacher
- The reported/published opinion of a well-known and respected teacher
- Peer-reviewed, published scientific studies
- Popular-press articles and books
- The author’s general professional experience
- Specific case studies from the author’s professional experience

- The author's professional training in fields *outside* of Yoga therapy
- The author's logic or opinion, with no additional evidence

Although not cited in this journal, direct personal experience, including spiritual realization, are commonly cited in the Yoga community as evidence for an approach.

Are all of these types of evidence "equal" to you? Or are some more convincing than others? Which form of evidence would hold stronger sway in your own mind and heart if the evidence they provided seemed to contradict each other? Are we each well-trained enough to evaluate different forms of evidence, including scientific studies, different teachers' claims, and individual interpretations of traditional texts?

Recently, there have been calls within our organization to make Yoga therapist training programs "evidence-based." What would that look like? Who gets to decide what counts as evidence? Should a field like Yoga therapy align itself with the "student" model of knowing that relies on direct experience, studying traditional texts, and working closely with a respected teacher? Should we focus on outcomes as evidence, whether that comes from case studies, clinical research trials, or expert consensus about "what works" within the community? When do we know that we have enough of the "right kind" of evidence to recommend an approach?

I don't have any answers to these questions. But I do think that if we as a field don't bring this discussion into the open, we risk splintering into interest groups who accept their own evidence and reject evidence from outside their primary paradigm.

With a field as diverse as our own, we need to be clear about the basis for our individual and collective work, and

expect that certain types of evidence or reasoning will be more compelling than others to different individuals and organizations. Individually, we cannot—and should not try to—offer all forms of evidence for our work. We simply need to be clear about what we believe is "good enough" evidence to guide our work, be it the study of Yoga philosophy, a committed relationship with one teacher or lineage, in-depth Western or Ayurvedic medical knowledge, our years of clinical experience, a list of scientific studies, or some combination of the above.

The value of an organization like IAYT is that it is creating and documenting an evidence base for Yoga therapy that draws on every definition of "evidence" that a Yoga therapist or outside party might find compelling. What approaches to Yoga will this large evidence base support the most? Will Yoga therapy be, as most of us believe, helpful for just about anyone and any condition, if it is adapted with skill and compassion?

That remains to be seen. If we have already made up our minds and are simply looking for the evidence to support our beliefs, there can be no such thing as true evidence-based practice. But the one element of evidence-based practice that we can all practice immediately is a willingness to observe what is actually happening in the present moment. This means using every tool available, from direct observation to sophisticated data analysis. As the editor of this journal, I welcome your contribution to this conversation, and look forward to asking you, "What is your evidence for that?"

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## Perspective

### *Karma*, Yoga, and Business

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*"Instant karma's gonna get you, gonna knock you off your feet."*  
–John Lennon

The idea of *karma*, although seemingly esoteric, permeates our conventional thought and even makes its way easily into pop culture. *Karma*, translated from Sanskrit, simply means "action." We have popularly come to understand it as a law of action, a concrete rather than abstract construct: for every one of our thoughts, words, or deeds, we will receive a commensurate corresponding one. Say something rude about someone, stub your toe on a door.

As Yogis, we have a firm grasp on the concept of *karma* as a path to Yoga: selfless service of our fellow beings is direct service to God, and helps pave our way to that bliss we seek through our practice and teaching. In Buddhism, the idea of *karma* is slightly different, and is based on the notion of subtle impressions of the mind that we create through our actions. As we generate more positive energy through our thoughts and practices, we reap the benefit of that energy in the forms of good relationships, health, and wealth. Herein lies the basic idea of an abundance mentality.

We understand *karma*, and may even believe in it, but just like so much of our culture, we are much more likely to trust something that works right away. John Lennon was onto something with that idea of "instant" *karma*. Who wants to change their diet to reflect their Ayurvedic constitution for increased health when we could just as easily pop a pill? Why embark on a steady practice of Yoga *āsana* when we could have a simple "in office" procedure to alleviate pain in the body?

But we're Yoga people; we love to put sesame oil up our nose or churn our abdominal muscles in pursuit of health and happiness. We are used to taking the long route, waiting for nature to take its course, aided by our skillful actions. Why then, do we collectively seem so afraid to trust

the natural course of things, *karma*, in our business choices and practices? If I had a dollar for every Yoga teacher or Yoga therapist who complained of not making enough money, or fear of the future, I would be halfway to rich. Give me another dollar for every Yoga teacher, therapist, or studio owner who believed that the only way to make money was to charge more and not give anything away for free, and I could stop working altogether.

But that's too easy. I'd simply be profiting from the pervasive poverty mentality of our profession. I love to work, mostly because I love my life; I love Yoga, I love people, and I love God. But I also love to work because I know that from my work come the rich rewards of a life relatively well-lived. I believe in *karma*, and I have seen it work in my business and my life with profound clarity.

Before I was a Yoga studio owner and therapist, I was a speech-language pathologist working for many years in a conventional clinical setting. I wanted to leave the large HMO where I was employed, but I didn't want to serve only those who could afford what I thought I would have to charge. I wanted to be able to work with anyone I believed I could help. But I had never owned a business before, and I knew I also needed to make money. Those student loans loomed heavily. My very first client offered me \$100 a month for weekly visits. It was a lot less than I was accustomed to being paid, but hey, I really liked her, and I knew I was in for an exploration. I didn't know for sure if I could give her the best possible service, as I was embarking on a new way of working. After some thought, \$100 seemed like a fair exchange.

Eight years later, I still see this young woman for the same rate. I have gotten to see her grow up and blossom. I have gotten to know her family, and we have even seen her mother for depression in our center. Through my affiliation with this family, I have gotten school contracts, used my