Editor's note: In the last (2004) issue of the International Journal of Yoga Therapy, we brought a somewhat critical review of the first volume in the Crystal Clarity Publishers new series of books on Yoga therapy. We invited the authors to respond, and they provided a most educational and pragmatic alternative point of view. IAYT's director, John Kepner, wrote a concluding commentary. Since the publication of the 2004 issue, the next volume in the Crystal Clarity series has been published, and we are bringing a review of the new volume in the present issue that again brings constructive critique. In addition, we are bringing a critical review of another recently published book and wish to make a policy statement in this regard.

Some publications have the policy of not reviewing a book or DVD unless the review can be completely or almost entirely positive. Books that could benefit from some constructive critique or that are uniformly below standard, or that present material that is not necessarily accepted by knowledgeable experts in the field, are simply ignored. It is IAYT's intention, however, to consider for possible review all the major books that are being published under the aegis of Yoga therapy, including both popular works and those that are more in-depth.

Our purpose in doing so is threefold. First, we wish to help our members make an informed decision about whether or not to purchase the book, and whether or not to recommend it to their students/clients. There are not many books currently available on the application of Yoga therapy to specific disorders, which can encourage a tendency to acquire anything that is published regardless of quality, and we would like to help members with their decision-making in this regard.

Second, we wish to encourage authors and publishers of Yoga therapy books to keep the standard high for this burgeoning field. If a book claims to be complete or definitive, it is our goal to find an expert to comment on how well this was accomplished. If a book is written for a popular audience, all factual information should be correct and in accordance with the latest research, the Yoga practices presented should be appropriate to a beginner, proper precautions regarding Yoga practice should be given, etc.

We also recognize that there can be sharply contrasting views on the appropriate use of Yoga in therapeutic applications, on the underlying theory or science, and even on the standards that should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the practice. This is inevitable and healthy. A third purpose of a constructively critical review is thus to support an educational dialogue between different but responsible points of view. This helps readers to be informed about underlying professional debates in the field.

We hope to encourage, not discourage, authors with our feedback and help those writing in the field to join our efforts to maintain high standards for this profound profession. Yoga therapy's potential as a healing modality is unlimited, and taking good care in its presentation will help it to reach that potential.


Overcoming Insomnia has become a highly prevalent disorder that largely goes untreated. Most doctors who do encounter insomnia patients find themselves poorly equipped to provide an effective long-term treatment because there is little training in most medical schools in sleep disorders medicine. Consequently, many doctors simply default to handing out a prescription for the latest sleeping pill. This is unfortunate given that there are well-known effective behavioral treatments (including relaxation exercises) for insomnia. I believe that Yoga has a place in the treatment of sleep disorders, and so a book on the topic is a welcome addition to the literature.

I looked forward to the publication of Yoga Therapy for Overcoming Insomnia, which sets out to provide a comprehensive overview for insomniacs, including education about sleep and sleep disorders, the available treatments for insomnia, and finally a Yoga program. In considering whether the authors have succeeded in fulfilling this goal, I find it to be a somewhat humble contribution overall, especially on the sleep side, given the current availability of numerous good books on the behavioral treatment of insomnia by experts in the field.
(see the list of books and websites at the end of this review). The present book is part of a series of books on Yoga therapy dedicated to the use of a particular Yoga style, rather than a standalone effort focused on Yoga and insomnia, and this may be a factor.

There are a number of instances in this book where the statements about sleep and insomnia are not in accordance with what is known about sleep physiology. For example, melatonin is a sleep-promoting hormone that is secreted rhythmically starting just before habitual sleep onset, with high levels during the night that decrease again just after habitual wake time. It is not secreted at all during the daytime. Environmental light coming in through the eyes in the late evening or early morning (or even through artificial lighting at night) acts to suppress this melatonin secretion. The book, however, erroneously suggests that melatonin is secreted continuously during the day and that it is the daylight that keeps the levels low during the daytime. This mistaken understanding may have led to a recommendation in the book to get lots of light during the day in order to suppress melatonin and maintain alertness.

Fortunately, getting extra light exposure during the day is not harmful, and may actually be beneficial, although for other reasons yet to be determined. Another related recommendation in the book for getting lots of light in the morning to improve sleep is, however, questionable; this may actually further compromise sleep in certain individuals. Consideration of age and type of insomnia are both important factors in determining when to apply light therapeutically and requires either professional guidance or a thorough understanding of the physiology of sleep.

In another example, the book states that the well-known decrease in body temperature that occurs at the beginning of sleep facilitates sleep onset. Following this logic, the book recommends against taking a hot bath just before bedtime because it raises body temperature. Actually, it remains to be determined whether a drop in body temperature helps sleep onset or whether it is sleep that causes the drop in body temperature. In addition, a hot bath has often been recommended as an aid to sleep, and one study has shown that it was helpful for elderly individuals with insomnia. In this instance, the book appears to be in the paradoxical position of recommending against a potentially useful technique for treating insomnia.

The book does include descriptions of other well-established behavioral treatments for insomnia. This is a plus, since it makes sense to use every possible behavioral treatment available in treating chronic insomnia, and most of these treatments are both clinically and experimentally well established. This material could have been presented somewhat more comprehensively, however, similar to the more thorough presentation of the Yoga treatment in the book. For example, current behavioral therapy programs incorporate a strong component dealing with insomniacs’ dysfunctional beliefs and attitudes about sleep. While the positive affirmations in the book represent a reasonable technique in this regard, adding information to help insomniacs recognize and counter these beliefs and attitudes might have strengthened their recommended treatment package.

In terms of the Yoga presented, it is not clear on what basis the authors chose the exercises included, although this appears to be a feature common to many how-to Yoga therapy books and articles. The question that arises in such texts is whether the selection of exercises recommended is based on clinical or personal experience, logic, or on the teachings of a Yoga master or a master teacher. My sense is that the exercises and the suggested duration of treatment may not be entirely sufficient for effectively treating a condition as resistant as chronic insomnia. The proposed routines in the book range from 5 to 15 minutes long, and this differs from most mind-body relaxation techniques for insomnia in research studies, which typically involve a longer daily practice session.

The book also suggests that the reader’s insomnia could resolve quickly, noting that “once your difficulties with insomnia diminish—which might happen right away—switch to the Short Routine.” A potential problem with such a suggestion is that those following it may have unrealistic expectations about how soon their insomnia might be relieved, and may become discouraged if it does not happen soon. The changes necessary to reverse the chronic arousal in insomnia most likely take weeks to occur for insomniacs; research studies and behavioral treatment programs typically stretch the relaxation intervention out over one to two months. Furthermore, there is a high degree of night-to-night variability in insomnia, and insomniacs may misinterpret a few good nights as a sign of success only to find that a number of bad nights follow. This could potentially lead to a premature discouragement with the treatment and subsequent discontinuation, despite the likelihood that the treatment might have been effective if continued with full effort over the long term.

On the positive side, the Yoga is presented clearly and comprehensively, with full consideration and cautions for readers with physical or medical limitations.
Readers will undoubtedly derive benefit from the information and practices, helping them learn valuable mind-body skills and potentially alleviating or reducing the severity of their chronic insomnia. The presentation of the book is attractive with a pleasant, readable layout and good photography.

Following is a list of books and websites for understanding and treating insomnia:

- Jacobs, Gregg. *Say Good Night to Insomnia*. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1998. A six-week, drug-free program developed at Harvard Medical School by Gregg Jacobs and long-time meditation researcher Herbert Benson that includes a basic meditation technique as part of a comprehensive multicomponent behavioral treatment program.


- American Insomnia Association website: http://www.americaninsomniaassociation.org/home.asp. Provides information on insomnia and its treatment including a link to a directory of sleep disorders centers across the country.


- WebMD website: http://my.webmd.com/webmd_today/home/default.htm. Contains an internal link for all of the sleep disorders, including insomnia, which covers diagnosis, treatment, and links to other sites.

Reviewer Sat Bir S. Khalsa, Ph.D., has conducted research in neuroscience, biological rhythms, sleep, and sleep disorders for over 25 years and is currently on the faculty of the Division of Sleep Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School. He has been involved in the practice of a Kundalini Yoga lifestyle for over 30 years and is a certified instructor. His research interests are in basic and clinical research on the effectiveness of Yoga and meditation practices, and he is currently conducting clinical research trials evaluating a Yoga treatment for insomnia funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine of the National Institutes of Health. He has traveled extensively in India meeting and collaborating with Yoga research scientists, and he also teaches a course at Harvard Medical School in Mind-Body Medicine.


This is an inspiring, educational, and challenging book, worthy of reading slowly and with reflection. It is inspiring because of the many stories of lives positively affected by the actions and attitudes encouraged in this book. It is educational because of the systematic discussion of many of the key instruments of Yoga, followed by specific practices using these tools. It is challenging (to those who call themselves Yoga teachers and therapists) because the importance of personal example is revealed again and again. My favorite explicit illustration is the healer who would not tell a young child to stop eating chocolate and sugar until she herself could stop for two days. Implicitly, but powerfully, the personal example of the author is felt throughout the book.

Nischala Joy Devi is well known as a pioneer in Yoga therapy. She was one of the primary initial instructors for the Lifestyle Heart Trials of Dr. Dean Ornish, which proved that a Yoga-based program, along with a low fat diet, exercise, and group support could reverse heart disease. She also developed Yoga-based retreats for Dr. Michael Lerner's Commonweal Cancer Help program. She is presently a popular teacher of therapeutic applications of Yoga, including a 10-day "Yoga of the Heart" program. *The Healing Path of Yoga* is her first book, distilling over three decades of experience. As she puts it, her last thirty years have been spent trying to answer the question...
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