When we talk about Yoga as a therapy we are talking about Yoga Chikitsa, which implies an attempt to get back to our state of integrated, wholistic, healthy well-being. Health is a state where there is well-being at the physical level, mental, emotional, spiritual, - well, at every level of our existence: a sense of well-being. And you know there are people who have 999 things wrong in their body, yet are healthy because they are in a state of well-being, and you have those who have nothing wrong in the body who are unhealthy because they are not in a state of well-being. Now those are both the extremes; most of us lie in between. If we understand Yoga as the art and science of integration, reintegration, union, reunion, communion, of the mind and body, the spirit and the universe; something that integrates us, makes us whole (Whole, not hole!), makes us whole again, and that is why when my father, my mother and now me, when we write the word wholistic we have a W in it. Editors keep sending my writings back and saying “don’t you know it is spelt without a W?” and I say but with a W it gives the meaning of what I want – getting back to being whole, integrated. Now if integration is health, disease is disintegration. Yoga enables us to attain that state of integration and gives us tools. The tools that Yoga gives us are the means through which we can attain to that state of integration. For me Yoga is both the state of integration as well as the process of reintegrating ourself. It is both – it is not just the destination but it is the journey also. My father often said “people are so busy getting ready to die, they forget to live in between!” We must remember that the whole process is Yoga and the goal is also Yoga. Now keeping this in mind here are a few definitions that go in tune with Yoga as a therapy.

The Kathopanishad (one of the shortest Upanishads) deals with the question of death and beyond. It is a dialogue between a young boy, Natchiketa, who encounters the Lord of Death Yama, and Yama gives him 3 boons; and one of the boons he wants is to know what happens after we die. The Upanishad tells us that Yoga is a state of mastery over the senses and the mind. Now when we understand that the mind is basically the super-sense, the mind is energy, that keeps the computers of the senses going. It is like the plug that plugs up the whole system – if I want to switch the system, I just pull the plug! That’s our sensation. If you take mind out of it, the senses can’t function – the whole process of pratyahara is that.

The Bhagavad Gitâ talks about Yoga as equanimity of mind, samatvam. Again people say it is equanimity of mind; I like to say at the physical level, the physiological level it is homoeostasis. Homoeostasis is the whole aspect in your physiology that enables you to
come back to a balanced state whenever you go off balance. It may be temperature regulation, it may be blood pressure regulation, it may be your heart rate regulation, it may be your blood sugar regulation, it may be anything but the whole process that occurs in your body enabling you to come to a balanced state whenever you go off balance, is homoeostasis – that for me is that equanimity, samatvam, that the Gîtâ talks about. The Gîtâ gives us a very nice definition; when the Gîtâ says “Yoga is disassociation from union with pain”. You know, many of the patients when they come to me and they say “Doctor, my diabetes is getting bad, my blood sugar is going up, my diabetes needs control, we have to do something about my diabetes”, and I’m like, why are you so attached to your diabetes? What happens is, people identify so much with their disease, some people are in fact scared to get cured! Because then they don’t have anything else to hold onto, they are so used to holding onto what’s wrong with them. Please understand, now this is easy to say, it may not be “politically correct” also, but still it has to be said. This identification with the disease, where it has become my cancer, it has become my hypertension, it has become my backache; I say “can you please start saying at least the diabetes, the hypertension, so at least there’s the sense of it being something you want to get rid of – it doesn’t matter what the condition is! Now you don’t start saying the husband and the wife, okay please! (laughter) You know this identification, my suffering and my pain and what happens is that people get so caught in it, and the Gîtâ tells us – a disassociation from the union with pain; we need to create a gap, a gap that enables us to see what needs to be done and then go about doing it. And as long as it is mine, my, my I am so subjective about it, I cannot be objective any more. You are just so close to it, you don’t see any answer to it. And that is why sometimes it helps to have a second opinion – a second opinion of someone you trust, someone you value. Where do you find these people? It’s a bit more difficult!

The Yoga Vashistha, another beautiful scripture, says that Yoga is a skillful and subtle process to calm down the mind. Please understand it is a subtle process and a skillful process so again, it is not something you learn on-line! You don’t learn to be a doctor on-line, you don’t learn to fly an aircraft on-line, yet we think that Yoga can be done that way! We have to be very careful. You need very clear grounding, that grounding is only possible with interpersonal relationship teaching. And that is why it is very essential to have that person-to-person contact, with teacher, with mentor, with guru, whoever it may be. A skillful and subtle process to calm down the mind, because the mind agitation is where everything starts. The Maitri Upanishad talks about oneness of breath, mind and senses, abandonment of all states of existence – well, a type of vairagya where you see that everything is illusion and you move away from it.

A few quotations from my father: Yoga is the art and science of mastering the mind; the path of moderation; and four- or five-fold awareness. The first awareness is to be aware of your body, the second awareness to be aware of your emotions, the third is to be aware of your
mind, the fourth is the state of awareness of awareness itself, it is sort of a samâdhi state. This is my father’s definition, and then my mother came along and said “well, before all that, you have first to be aware of how unaware you are”! So that is really the first one. And do you know how this happened? My mother was a student of my father primarily before she became wife (and my mother, in that order). And she said “Swamiji, I want to know all about awareness and consciousness, and I want the highest awareness”, and she was going on and on and on and virtually holding onto his kurta collar and cornering him on it, and he just said “Meenakshi, will you please get off my toes”. (laughter) She was so enthusiastic about gaining awareness of awareness that she was unaware that she was standing on his toes and asking him about it! And that’s when she came upon the first stage; she said “to be aware of how unaware we are is where we start”. I think that’s a very important state. Often I find the first important stage in our development is to say “how did I contribute to this going wrong?” I think that’s a very important step to take rather than say it’s all somebody else’s fault. I think the first one is to just say “maybe I had something to do there”. It’s a good step, now there are many more steps to go.

Now if we look at disease and how Yoga views it, the primary cause is dwaitam, or duality. This dwaitam is a feeling of separation from the universe. We and the universe are one. Yet, due to avidya which Patanjali had told us, what happens is we create a sense of division, dichotomy, you are different than me – and friction starts. This is what has happened with all human-made divisions. You are different than me, and we keep on making it smaller and smaller until we are on our own and then we say “I feel lonely”. Everybody’s become different than us because you know we are just divided and divided and divided. The state of oneness is a state of health; the moment we disassociate from it, the moment we split away, we have fallen away from health. Now people talk about spiritual health, and I often say you cannot really be spiritually unhealthy – it doesn’t really sound okay to me! But you can be unaware of your spiritual health – that is possible. And to regain the awareness of your spiritual health, work towards it – I think that is possible and that is worth it. Disease is dis and ease – moving away from ease; what is ease? Sukham, sukha – as in sukham sukha, or the sukha prânâyâma where you breathe in for 6 and breathe out for 6 – an equal count in and out is sukha prânâyâma, the comfortable, easy breath that puts you at ease. In fact that is why the concept is âsana is sthira sukham âsanam; what happens with âsana, when you attain stability and are at ease with yourself in your posture, it doesn’t matter whether you are on your feet or on your head – at that point where you are stable and at ease with yourself. Dwandwa anâbhigatha, that is what Patanjali tells us – you go beyond the dualities. What are the dualities? They are the whole bipolar aspects of us, our body, our mind, our emotions. You transcend these divisions, you go beyond the division, the division doesn’t exist anymore, there’s a state of oneness. Now that is what âsana is to do. Along the way it helps your hamstrings and your abdominal muscles, fine, but the aim of âsana is to get into a state where you are stable and at ease with yourself. My father used to ask people, what is
your âsana? Oh my favourite âsana is shirshâsana. No! What is your âsana is: where are you established in steadiness and comfort? Comfort not in the sense of a sofa, but at ease with yourself. That place, that niche, that point where we are – Patanjali also says “swarupe avasthânam”, that point where you are yourself – that point is the point where there is a sense of well-being. And health is – I come back to it! - a sense of well-being. The WHO, the world Health Organisation says health is a state of well-being; very nice, and I’m happy they brought in spiritual health finally (they struggled for many years, because what is spirituality, what is religion, they had a big problem trying to find that and they had a lot of committees. Do you know what committees do? I’m on numerous committees in India and other countries. Committee means come, eat, have tea but don’t commit!). The WHO struggled with that and then came upon it and they said a state of well-being; now when you say a state of well-being you think wow! All I have to do is attain that and live happily ever after – you know the fairy tales! Well, it’s not so easy; it’s a dynamic state – every moment, that state is changing, and that is why a dynamic state of well-being, why I say that Yoga samatvam, a balance, but it is not balance that you achieve and that’s all. It is constant, every-moment balance, and Yoga is not about not falling down – never feel bad if you fall down! Everybody falls down, and if they say they don’t fall down, most probably they’re lying. We all fall down but how quickly, how well, how efficiently, how skillfully we can regain our balance – that is Yoga. “Oh you’re a yogi and you got admitted in hospital!” Come on! We are also human, we have a human body, the human body is subject to wear and tear, infection, so many things! So it doesn’t mean you are not going to fall down but how well you come back. That is yoga. So, a dynamic state of well-being – that we are looking at.

Now there is the concept of the 3 doshas, the vata, pitta kapha. Vata is the air element, the element of movement as in your nervous system, nerve energies, or in your intestines, small intestine where there is a lot of gas moving around. It is also called pavan or vâyu. Whereas when you look at the pitta, it is more of a heat-generating, chemical reactions that generate heat in your body, especially the biliary secretions that are part of the digestive process. And the kapha which is more about the mucus element, that element that holds things together. So that which holds your body together is also kapha, so please do not think that kapha is good or pitta is good or vata is good – it’s a combination of all of them. So there’s nothing like having one is better than the other – please do not ever fall into that trap! Each one has the plusses and the minuses and you need to balance it. So according to the doshas, what happens is that the doshas influence the type of disorders that manifest in us. So the kapha would manifest maybe as a respiratory problem, which you end up with sinusitis or bronchitis or something like that, where pitta may manifest as a peptic ulcer or regurgitation that is coming or a digestive imbalance; the vata may end up with a nervous over-activity or under-activity or your joint problems. So this could manifest but why does it manifest? Depending on our genetic predisposition, everything comes down and rounds off at one point. And that is why the same changes that occur from mind to body may manifest in
different people in different ways based on genetic predisposition – and what is genetics? It is the sabija karma, it is that karma we are carrying from the last incarnation that has chosen which family we are to be born in, which country we are to be born in, in which part of that country we are to be born in, so that we manifest it. So the sabija karma plays a role. But I don’t mean that there’s no answer for it; I’m just putting it in its perspective.

The diseases could also be due to imbalances of the pancha prâna vâyu, the 5 major airs, and of course the 5 minor airs, where you have the prâna in the lung and chest region, you have the apana which is moving down in the rectal region and helping with expulsion; you have the samana which works on the navel region, digestive process; you have vyana which is throughout the body and udana which is in the throat region. So depending on the prâna vâyus and the minor airs – naga, again to do with the digestion, regurgitation; the kurma to do with the eyes; devadatta is yawning. Why do we yawn? All of these are protective mechanisms, each one of the upa prâna vâyu, the subsidiary vital airs, is a protective mechanism – blinking, throwing out that which doesn’t work with your body, sneezing – all of these are protective mechanisms that are part of you, but then, when the protective mechanism starts to work against you, that is when it becomes a problem. It’s like your immune system; when your immune system works for you, it’s fine but when it starts to work against you, it starts to have a dichotomy. I was telling that disease is dichotomy - when your immune system says “you are not me” and starts attacking your pancreas, or your thyroid, or your joints – auto-immune disorders. What is the root? Dwaitam at one level.

The Yoga Vashistha, a very excellent scripture on Yoga, gives us the concept of psychosomatic and non-psychosomatic disorders. In modern times we can also talk about the somato-psychic disorders where problems of the body start to influence our mental conditioning and mental state, and this is something that modern medicine in very recent times has started to understand: the somato-psychic and psycho-somatic. A couple of hundred years ago, me as a medical doctor, if I had opened my mouth and talked about the mind and the body, most probably I would have been locked up, along with Galileo and other guys. It’s only in the last not-too-many decades that medicine has come to understand this. Now we are talking of a scripture which thousands of years ago, brings out this concept, saying that there are the Ādhija Vyâdhi, those that are the psychosomatic disorders, and Anādhija Vyâdhi, those which are the non-psychosomatic. Though the scripture says it and though modern medicine talks about it, in recent times I have begun to doubt whether we have any non-psychosomatic disorders at all! Because you name any disorder and you find a psychosomatic element to it; it’s very difficult to find a non-psychosomatic disorder. One of the old textbooks used to list accidents under it – to call it non-psychosomatic is to miss a lot of it! They used to talk about genetic disorders being non-psychosomatic; well, we all have genes, and many of the genes are good and many are bad. Which of the genes are going to
manifest depends on our choices. The Head of our hospital, a few months ago in a conference, told us that our genes are like a loaded gun! Now whether the gun goes off or not depends on the choices we make in our life. I’ll just put in another word here. I was talking in Delhi for a Yoga Week and at the end of my talk a young computer professional, an Indian settled in the U.S.A., came and he said “Doctor, I really enjoyed your talk, it was awesome, and I need your consultation”. I said “okay, fine”. He said “My grandmother recently got operated for cancer of a part of the intestine. And after doing the operation the doctor said I should have my genetic code tested. I went ahead and did it, and now the doctors say my genetic code is the same as my grandmother’s and that in 40-50 years from now I could end up with this cancer, and have suggested that part of my intestine be removed to prevent that from happening”. (Gasps in audience) This is called preventive oncology. Maybe that is why our director didn’t understand when I said that Yoga has a role in preventive medicine. He said: “What do you think?” You know what I told him? You will guess! But anyway, I said : “He said there are something like 94% chances of your developing it and so they want to do the preventive oncology surgery to prevent you having that whenever it is time. Well, if you live as your grandmother did, if you eat as she ate, if you stay in the same place she stayed, if you do everything she did, think the way she thought; congratulations, it is not 94, it is 100%. But if you start eating in a different way, if you start living in a different way, in a different environment, doing things differently, there is no reason that should happen. Despite the 94% genetic chance”. Genes are there, they are a loaded gun all ready; are you going to let it go off or not? It’s in what you do. A simple change of switching from non-vegetarian to vegetarian diet for that guy would lower his chances as low as 50% straight away. Because that type of bowel cancer is directly linked to meat-eating. But you know, I had a surgery professor who used to smoke in class, non-stop! One of my favourite teachers. We asked him: “Sir, the conclusive proof that smoking leads to lung cancer…” “Not me!” He died a few years back of a very serious lung tumour. You know, this “not me” is so prevalent. It’s only one in hundred that escape so I’m going to be that one. We humans are optimistic at the wrong time!

Anyway, coming back here... psychosomatic and non-psychosomatic disorders, and what does the Vashistha say? He is a great sage teaching Lord Rama, God Incarnate. And he tells him the Śāmānya diseases (śāmānya are the ordinary diseases) can be rectified by rectifying the mind-body disharmony, using medicines, herbs, chants, any therapy that is there. That is śāmānya. But there is an essential disorder, the sāra ādhiya vyādhi, which is the disorder that keeps on coming back again and again and again and it is only ātma jnāna, knowledge of the Self, self-realisation is the way to get out of that. Well, to think that even being born is itself a disease is not too positive a thought! At the same time we are born as humans for the sake of attaining our divinity. It is a God-given opportunity for liberation that we have a human incarnation. We have that incarnation for that opportunity. Now, whether we make it this time or the next is up to us.
Now in this treatise that Vashistha gives Lord Rama he says that the ādhi is the original cause, the root cause. He says it works through the mental agitations. There is a nidus, and that nidus starts the mental irritations; the mind starts going in all directions. This is called the psychic phase of psychosomatic disorders. There will be irritability, agitation, anxiety, depression, going up and down and the mind being restless – this is all in the psychic phase. Now if that is not controlled, it comes down into the pranic level. You can link the mental agitations to the manomaya kosha - the mind body, the mind sheath; it comes down into the prānamaya kosha where the haphazard flow of prāna and unstable nādīs. Please understand the nādīs, which are the subtle energy conduits which carry the energy, the pranic energy through the body, the pancha prāna vāyu. And if they start to get agitated, what was in the mind as agitation comes down into energy imbalances – this is what now has come into many therapies, correcting the energy imbalances – these energy imbalances start to settle down through the digestive system (the reason why such great importance is placed on the digestive system in Yoga. If you look at the 6 cleansing techniques, the shat karma or the shat kriyā,3 of them deal with the digestive system – dhauti, nauli and basti. Dhauti deals with the upper intestinal tract, nauli with the middle, basti with the lower, and the benefit of all 3 can be obtained through one technique, the Shankha Prakshalana, it’s a 3-in-1 technique, though it’s not part of the classical shat karma. There are at least 108 cleansing techniques, it’s just that 6 are high-lighted.)

Now, in your digestive system it could be working lower than normal or more than normal, or there is some sort of abnormal metabolism happening. Now I like to stretch this a bit (I usually do that!) Everybody translates jirana as digestion, jirana means digestion, I do not dispute that. But digestion could also be metabolism. Please understand that the metabolic activities of the body are a form of digestion at the chemical level. Now look at Ajjiranatvam as the metabolic functioning being lower than normal, so all the hypothyroid, hypoadrenal, hypopituitary – all of those start to come under that. You start to look at Ajjiranatvam as the hyperthyroid, hyperadrenal functioning, or pituitary tumours etc., And start looking at Kujiranatvam as what we call paraneoplastic syndrome, where places that should not be secreting hormones start to secrete hormones. Now that takes it to a new level – not just the digestive system, the whole metabolic framework of our body; all the chemical reactions, the enzymatic reactions, are part of a type of digestion. And what does that lead to? The physical disorder. Where does it start? Way back there (indicating the Ādhi) in the chart but in here (the head). Something starts off in the mind. Now this Ādhi is what we want to reconnect by creating harmony because if the body and mind work together, everything is going to be normal, but your body and mind start to hate each other. And I often quote a joke: the body and mind become like two people who hate each other to death, having to live in a one-bedroom flat for their life together. That’s what psychosomatic disorders are all about, your mind and body. And what is it that bridges the mind and body? The breath! What is so essential in Yoga and Yoga Therapy is the breath. It’s not about shirshāsana, it’s

*Yoga therapy for various medical disorders*. Extracts from Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani’s talks at IYTA, Sydney, Australia in Nov 2012 transcribed by Yogacharini Jnanasundari (Janita Stenhouse), France.
not about *sarvangásana*, it’s not even about *shavásana*! It is about the breath. Because if the person can connect through the breath the body and the mind, it doesn’t matter whether it is acidity, or cancer, or whichever spectrum you want, something good can start to happen. All you are doing is connecting, re-connecting! The diplomat, the counsellor who puts the husband and wife together and tries to get them talking again; well, that’s what the breath is doing. The breath is the medium.

Now if a man sees a spider, immediately the hippocampus, the hypothalamus starts to release hormones, factors, that come down, influence the pituitary gland, which releases the adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH) which comes down to the adrenal glands lying like dunce caps over your kidneys, and the adrenal glands secrete the glucocorticoids like cortisol, that immediately work, and you have your respiration going faster, your heart rate going faster, energy mobilization so that you can run away. Your gastro-intestinal function starts to slow down because who cares if you digest your food in an emergency?! And your immune function could either go up or down. Initially under stress, the immune function goes up and as the stress continues, the immune function comes down. Your alertness goes up with stress; the more the stress continues, the alertness goes down. So a little bit of stress is good, it’s called use-stress. It’s like, the deadline today is this, okay fine, but if every day I came in and every hour I said “this is the deadline, this is the deadline”, at one point you get dead! (laughter) And last but not least, the reproductive function goes down because who cares about having you-know-what when your life is under threat? So this is the stress reaction, which is absolutely what the psychosomatic model of *Âdhiya Vyâdhi* is all about. *Âdhiya Vyâdhi* works on the psychosomatic stress response model, which prepares you to fight or flee. It is fine for that time; please understand that if you take away the emergency system, people are going to have trouble! Okay, I have an emergency looking at a spider – fine. I have an emergency looking at a snake – fine. But then I should not have it when I am looking at my husband or wife. I should not have it when looking at my boss at work. I should not have it when I look at anybody in the train. But what is happening is we have divided; we have said “you are different than me, you are a threat to me”. Everything starts to become a threat. This reaction goes on pounding away, pounding, pounding away, exhausting our resources, and we collapse. And at that point, whatever genetic tendencies are there, they manifest. And suddenly the diabetes occurs, the hypertension occurs, suddenly cancer comes. Where was it hiding all this time? It was under the board and this exhaustion has led it to come out. In modern medicine, we just treat what we see, the tip of the iceberg, but what is under it? Unless you regain mind/body harmony, you are not going to correct it.

There is a beautiful cycle between the nervous system, the endocrine system and your immune system. Psycho-neuro-immune – there’s a whole new aspect that medicine talks about – psycho-neuro-immunology. Now what happens? Stress enters the same pathway
and Yoga also enters the same pathway. The stress is going to worsen whatever happens. It sets off a vicious spiral – not just a cycle but a spiral, whereas the effects of Yoga go against the whole stress-related changes. In the emergency situation, the respiratory rate goes up; you all know that you start working with Yoga, your respiratory rate comes down. The heart rate goes up in stress; the heart rate comes down with Yoga. Energy mobilization increases there is just for the acute situation whereas in Yoga it is more balanced for when you need the energy. Digestive function improves, immune function normalises, the reproductive function – well, I don’t know! It depends on so many factors, not just you but.....

The physiological responses which are happening due to stress are modified by something called allostatics. Allostatics is a natural mechanism - this is not Yoga, this is science – allostatics is that aspect that balances; when you’ve gone off balance, allostatic helps you get back to balance. But then, if every moment you keep on getting off balance, it “gets tired”, it gets exhausted. And that is called allostatic low – and that is where disease manifests. There are environmental stressors, at work, home, neighbourhood, trauma, abuse, major life events, and this is perceived stress. Perceived stress sets off behavioural responses, individual differences and the physiological responses – that is why it is different in each person; it depends on so many things; but where does it all come into you? Perceived stress! Not just stress – perceived stress. So what does this mean? If you do not let something stress you, it cannot stress you. It’s simple! Now, simple to say, tough to get into life! I’m not saying I have the answers, or that I walk through it, but at least I know this is where we have to work. And you catch yourself – pratipaksha bhavanam, stop! That’s where it works. If I don’t stop it there, I get into this whole cycle; the moment I put a stop there, my perception, I have said NO, I don’t want that. And this is very important because dichotomy (“you are different than me”) starts off the stress. If I realise the same divinity that lies in me lies in every one of us (and everybody running out there), if I realise that all human beings have an essential nature that is same, why should I be afraid of you? Why should you be a threat to me? Why should your culture, your religion, your nationality, your language – why should it be a threat to me? The moment I realise the Oneness that lies there, you are not a threat – no more stress! I am just trying to say this because this is what we have to help people to understand if they are going to get better.

I’ll give you an example – story-telling time! I was working out in the villages, this was before I joined my present job where I coordinate the yoga research, therapy and education for medical professionals at the hospital. I used to go into the villages where no doctor would go and give some consultation, allopathic modern medicine. They all wanted a vitamin injection and doubted whether I was a doctor because I didn’t give injections as much as they wanted! There were a lot of nice old ladies there, we had a lot of fun and every week, after getting their medicine they would give me a nice pinch on my cheek – that was my reward for taking care of them! I wrote an article on that saying “wherein lies happiness?” The happiness you
get from helping people in that is much more than what my friends believed as a Gold Medallist I should have gone to the USA and become God knows what type of surgeon and made billions of dollars. And they said “how can you say you are happy out in the village getting paid peanuts and treating old villagers – and you say you are happy?” So I wrote that article for my friends. Some of them understood it, some thought I’m dippy. It’s okay, no problem! I’d rather be known as dippy than anything else. And one of the ladies used to come and she had hypertension; we used to give her hypertension medication. And it used to be quite controlled, I used to see her once a week because we went each day to a different village; and some of the weeks her blood pressure would be very high despite medication and other weeks it would be quite okay – with medication. I didn’t want to increase the medication for her because it’s not happening all the time. We started talking, more and more; one of the things I give my patients is a lot of talking and more than talking, listening, because most doctors do not. And we hit upon the sequence that, whenever her son came home, who lived in another village - the time that her son was home with her, her blood pressure would go sky-high; when he went back to the next village, her blood pressure would be controlled with the medicine. So we talked a bit more and we find out her son, an adult married with two children, not holding onto a job, sitting around doing nothing in the village, getting into different sort of abuses, that whenever he came home, this was right in front of her, she saw it, it affected her and her blood pressure was going sky-high; as soon as he went out of the village, she didn’t think about it so much – he was still the same okay, he wasn’t any different, but her blood pressure came down. And I started talking to her about it, I said “see, this is what...” and she said “yes”. And just talking about it, after that we were able to manage things better without increasing medication. Now if I were just to take the normal allopathic route I would say “okay every time your son comes home, take another tablet, and when he’s not there, reduce the dose”, but talking about it, just making her realise that her worry about him was doing this – and he didn’t care a damn about it! Please understand, stress can only stress you if you allow it. The choice is yours. And that is why responsibility for health and happiness lies with us; not with the government, not the hospitals, not the health worker, not the insurance company. And this is something I try to take to my patients. We need to be responsible. Okay, how can I be responsible? Lifestyle changes! Okay, can’t I just take another pill?

I have a dentist, she was diagnosed as having hypothyroidism, the thyroid was working lower than normal. Her father is a Yoga fanatic, convinced about Yoga, so he told her: “You must take up Yoga, it can help you.” She came to us, very receptive; we gave her some counselling, dietary advice, a series of practices to do. She started doing them. Six months down the line, her thyroid levels are normal. She had to go back to Kuwait where she is working as a dentist, and one year later her blood tests normal. One and a half years later, normal. Two years later – normal. Just with the Yoga and attitude, lifestyle changes. But she spends 40 minutes every day on her practice. Now a couple of her colleagues said: “We also
have hypothyroidism. What is it that you are able to do that you are not taking medication?” She said “fine, this is what I do” and they said “wow! Wonderful!” They came for 3 days and then they said “This is too tough, it’s easier to take my Eltroxin every day in the morning”. So please understand, it is not so easy, and that is why, though the pharmaceutical companies are a bit worried about therapies like Yoga which will cut down their profits, they should not really be worried because we humans are so lazy that their profits are not going to go down, because however much you try, the effort that it takes – we have seen it. Another patient, seriously, my colleagues are astounded by it, because a diabetic patient came in with diabetic keto-acidosis, now that’s an emergency. In the emergency department, she was given insulin, fluids, and brought back to normal, put on anti-diabetic medication, started her Yoga, and 18 months later she is still normal without her diabetic medication, her blood sugar, glycosylated haemoglobin – all within normal limits. But she and her husband, every day one hour in the morning, they do the practices, they have changed their lifestyle, have changed their diet, and her husband (who doesn’t have diabetes) said “You know, it has changed our life so much (he’s a chartered accountant) that work I used to take 3 days to do, I do in 3 hours! In my office they are astounded at the efficiency I have gained by my Yoga practice”. And with her husband’s support, both have been coming to the classes. And they stopped her medication without my permission, which I don’t like. Because I tell my patients: “you are not competent to stop it, and though I am technically competent I will not stop it until you get back to the doctor who prescribed your medicine. Because they know what you were when they started the medication, not me. And let them reduce the medication. Two benefits: one, the safety net, and two, that doctor comes to know that Yoga can also work”. But you know what my friends will say when I say this? They say “maybe her diagnosis was wrong in the first place!” Well, we have the case record; I told her I am going to wait for 3 years before I publish that case record. I want to really make sure, but that is going to be something that is really amazing. 30,000 patients in 3 years, and we have 2 of those stories. Call it chance; call it luck – that’s what the scientific community would like to say. It’s just that if people do it, it works! And more than the technique – please understand it’s not about does shavasana or does sarvangasana work or is it pavana mukta on the right side or left side – none of that! That is why a Yoga therapist must have intelligence and empathy. Those are the two essential prerequisites. Patanjali talks about shraddha virya.

The first thing I ask my patients is: “What do you want from Yoga? What do you want – what is your aspiration?” Because you know, me, sitting in my desk, I may feel that’s what they want but what do they want? Somebody might just want to sleep better. Somebody may want to reduce their medicine. That is very essential – you have to put yourself in the other person’s shoes; empathy is essential, and intelligence – common sense. We talk about not taking much salt when you have high blood pressure. Once, again in the village, I was talking to someone and I said “You should reduce salt”. “No! In our family we don’t take any salt at all”. I said “Wow, what do you eat?” He said “We have the rice and we have the curd rice”.

"Yoga therapy for various medical disorders”. Extracts from Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani’s talks at IYTA, Sydney, Australia in Nov 2012 transcribed by Yogacharini Jnanasundari (Janita Stenhouse), France.
Now curd rice you cannot eat on its own. So I said “What do you have?” He said “Well, we have pickles”. Now you know in Indian pickles there’s enough salt in one spoon to last you 2 weeks! “No salt in my diet. Oh, you say pickles are salt? Well I have a couple of pappadums”. Again salt! The thing is that you need to bring it out, show people what they eat.

(At this point a questioner asks about the effects of grief on stress, using the example of losing a child.)

It is still perceived stress, because losing one’s own child or someone else losing their child: there is a difference in our reaction. People come to me and say “I have this problem and it is so great and it’s over-burdening”; and you’re like: well that’s not really a problem. That’s not so big. That’s tackle-able. But then that same thing happens to you…. What has happened is that the sense of me, my and the attachment that we have has expanded it to such a level that we end up hurting ourself. Now, grief is good, because grief is a chance to get it out. So grief is good, but then again, to what level? And that is where objectivity comes in. Objectivity will only come in when we take a step back. I know people who, when something happens in their life, for the next ten years they do nothing. Now it doesn’t help them, it doesn’t help the person who is gone. Whereas if you can get them out of it… I have had people who have really lost very close ones, and what I try to say is that it is now your dharma, it is your duty, it is your role to fulfill what that person wanted, and the moment you get around to doing that, you are going to help that person. By doing it rather than sitting around saying “poor you, poor me, poor you, poor me” – get out and do it in that person’s name. In fact at one point we had a student who died and it could have been a catastrophe at one level. And the family decided that rather than be a catastrophe they said: “In his memory we set up a scholarship for other students, which will help the other students”. And today so many people have benefitted from that scholarship in the memory of someone, thus creating positivity out of a loss which is absolutely negative. So I think it is absolutely natural and it is important sometimes to let things out – bottling things up is a major issue. Not just here! Schoolchildren. In school you say “keep quiet”, at home you say “keep quiet”, and where are you going to get it out? And so when they come to our classes we say “okay, it is fine to make a sound like a cat miaow! Get it out! Roar like a lion, or bark like a dog. What you do is you get it out. What is bottled up goes down there – into disease. This is where the old cultures had situations where if somebody died, the community would come together and there’s a lot of breast-beating and crying but what happens is you dissipate it. But in the name of civilization, we are not supposed to cry and not supposed to express and where does it go? It goes down into disease. I’m not saying to go out into the road and scream – always moderation, within normal limits.

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When the chakric energies are working properly, the sahasrara is this beautiful, blooming lotus, not a lotus coming down on your head with the petals going down. If you go outside...
and you see a flower drooping down - now, I give you 2 options: is it alive or dead? (laughter) A *sahasrara* lotus drooping down is fine, but it a *sahasrara* that is not alive, not energized. And then when it blooms, it blooms in all directions – please see it in 3 dimensions, as an energized blooming.

We have 3 bodies at least, the *sthula*, *sukshma* and *karana*. The *sthula* is the gross body, associated with the *annamaya kosha*, the physical sheath. It is your anatomical existence – your 2 hands, your 2 legs, your eyes - anatomy. In the *sukshma sharira*, the more subtle aspect of our existence, we have 3. The *prānamaya kosha*, where now you have energy so it becomes the physiological existence; now your heart is functioning, your hands can move, your feet can move, your brain can think. *Manomaya kosha* where now the thoughts start to come in. Again, please remember that thoughts are something we underestimate. We say: “I think I am hungry”, “I think I am sleepy” – it’s no thinking there at all, please remember that. It’s just that you are hungry, or you are sleepy, but we phrase it in a way that we think we are thinking. How many thoughts do we really have in a day that are not just mere language representation of things? Well, the moment we start to think about other people in the universe I think finally something starts happening! *Vignanamaya kosha*, the sheath of intellect, the higher intelligence, the wisdom. And *karana sharira*, the causal body; with the *anandamaya kosha*, the sheath of Eternal Bliss – our cosmic existence. And please understand that, though I talk about the cosmic existence as out here and the body here, they all are one and the same – every cell in your body has all the *koshas*. So it’s not that it’s “out there” but just for the sake of an image, where you have the *annamaya, prānamaya, manomaya, vignanamaya* and *anandamaya* – but please understand that the *anandamaya* percolates right down into the *annamaya*. So in fact the *annamaya* in turn encompasses all of them. You take the body out of it, now you are left with energy and above; body and energy out, mind and above; intellect and above; and the above. So it’s like they all go in and out. So you can go externally also, to the same *anandamaya*; you can go internally also, to the same *anandamaya*. It’s the macrocosm and the microcosm. Some of you may have seen a beautiful presentation on the Net where you go down into a leaf, into the subatomic, subcellular, it goes down to the power of 7 or something, and you get a certain image. Then they go the other way, you go out to the Earth, the planetary system, the Milky Way, and out to the power of 17 or something. It’s a beautiful journey showing the microcosmic and macrocosmic and you know what? At the end, both the images are very similar! That’s what it’s all about! The *anandamaya* can be taken as the extreme at one end as well as the most interior intreme (if that English word exists! It doesn’t? I just created one!). Just as you have the extreme you have this; and both are valid because it percolates through everything.

Now, coming back to where science understands things. Some of the physiological benefits of Yoga practice. Now I am very grateful to Tricia Lamb Feuerstein, wife of the late Georg Feuerstein; she had compiled on their website many years ago a very beautiful list of
benefits of Yoga. A few more have come in but these are still very relevant. You are looking at:

- Improved general health, posture, muscle tone, sleep, immunity, pain tolerance – across a wide spectrum. Virtually every physiological function will benefit by Yoga. This is basically the bottom line. Some have been studied, some have not been studied, some in more detail, some, less detail.

- Weight normalizes – please understand I use the word “normalize” not reduce or increase.

- Stable autonomic nervous system; again this is dynamic stability, capable of responding when there is change or challenge, at the same time capable of relaxing when you have the opportunity – a sympathetic/parasympathetic balance.

- Improved cardio-respiratory efficiency, because your heart needs to pump, your lungs need to bring in the oxygen and take out the carbon dioxide. Your lungs are working well, your heart is not – no use. Your heart is working well, your lungs are not doing the job – no use. So this coupling of the heart and lungs is very beautiful, and with the Yoga it becomes more. Musculo-skeletal flexibility, range of joint movement – these are things we find a lot.

- If you look at the heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate and the muscle activity – they all reduce, signifying relaxation.

- And your GIT and endocrine function normalise. Please understand, in stress they were all going off kilter, and (are normalised) through the practice of Yoga - and this is not about one asana or one technique, it is the general wholistic practice.

Now looking at the psychological benefits, they say there is:

- Improved mood – well, we all have experienced that!

- Increased *somatic awareness – this is that body awareness. We know where our hands are, our feet, what we are doing.

  * kinesthatic awareness, of movement; it definitely improves a lot with the yoga. * subjective well-being – that is SO very important because at the end of the day, it’s not that you get back from the doctor and he says everything is wonderful, but you feel down in the dumps, but that you feel you are well. *Self-acceptance. Ah! That is important, especially for the young people because with all the advertising! You know in India they are advertising creams to become white! And in other countries it’s tanning lotions! Seriously, we human beings are...
marvellous! Once you realise the positives and negatives, you can get on with it much much better.

*Self-actualisation. Social adjustment. Of the thousands of kids who have studied with us over the last 44 years, I would say that they may not be yogis, they may not be Realised, they may not be enlightened, but they are good human beings. They are not going to be anti-social, they are not going to throw stones at a bus, they are not going to kill people and I think that is very important.

- Decreased hostility, anxiety and depression. We can all do with that!

The psychomotor benefits give increased grip strength, dexterity and fine skills. These are a lot of studies from the sVyasa University in Bangalore, have shown these changes. Improved eye-hand coordination – this prevents so many accidents. Please understand that if people had good eye-hand coordination, good reaction time and depth perception – these three are so vital for preventing accidents. Steadiness and balance again – so many falls can be prevented. Integrated functioning of body parts. I think all of these psychomotor benefits prevent falls. If you fall, you know how to fall – that’s what Amma used to say whenever she fell off her scooter! You fall in a way that your body knows how to fall - your body gets a certain type of body intelligence.

Cognitive functions. These have become more and more important in modern days. Memory, attention, concentration, depth perception, and learning efficiency. I think across the spectrum of ages, we do a lot of work with children who have mental handicaps. When I was first asked to work with these kids about 12 years ago, I wondered what I could teach them. Those kids have proved me so wrong! They are amazing! It’s amazing what they can do, what they will do, and the benefits they get. Every week they have a yoga class and when the teacher goes in, she is mobbed with joy, hugged by every one of them because it is just such an important class for them every week. You should see the enthusiasm; we have yoga sport events and they get to demonstrate – you should see the joy when they get a prize! (We give them all a prize so that everyone is happy.) It’s as if they had won an Olympic gold medal – the smiles! We published a study on reaction time in these kids and just a simple breathing technique and how it could change the speed of reaction. Amazing! Science says not much can be done and then – we do it!

Biochemical effects – your blood profile. It shows an anti-stress, an anti-oxidant effect, important in the prevention of degenerative disorders. Be it joints, be it the brain, be it the nervous system – the whole profile changes something like this:

There’s decrease in the blood sugar, the sodium, cholesterol, triglycerides, the LDL and VLDL which are the bad cholesterol, these are the ones who don’t do their job of collecting
and taking – they don’t. Whereas on the other side you have HDL cholesterol which is the
good guy who goes around scavenging what’s left behind by the bad guys and gets the job
done. HDL increases. Recently I sent for publication a paper on a study on 60 nursing
students who we gave 6 months of Yoga twice a week. Amazing blood changes! I would like
to point out the fact that your haemoglobin, the lymphocytes to fight off infection, thyroxin,
vitamin C and the serum protein – if these are naturally being secreted by your body, if these
functions are going on, you are not going to need supplements. If you need supplements, let
the supplements be as natural as possible; if you can get it straight from an apple, please
take the apple. (no, I’m not going to tread on that territory, it’s a dangerous place to go!)

And just to reiterate what I’ve been saying, most Yoga phenomena are beyond the mere
physical manifestation of their effects. It’s like people say “shavasana lowers blood pressure
and heart rate”. Fine, but to say the only thing shavasana does is lower your heart rate and
blood pressure is 10%. The ultimate relaxation and true renunciation, the whole attitude
change that occurs through shavasana is much much more than just bringing down
your heart rate and blood pressure. Every study we have done in hypertensives and
diabetics reiterates this, but more important than that is the attitude changes that occur.
Now for the attitude changes to occur, it has to be communicated. If you say “lie down,
relax your head, relax your feet, breathe in, breathe out” – that may not happen. But if you
help them understand that shavasana is an opportunity to let go of everything, a chance to
experience death without dying for it! You see the ancient Yogis were very clever! They said
that the ultimate relaxation is death; death is like a mini kaivalya. And they said what do you
do? Put yourself into that position, experience it – every time you lie down in shavasana you
experience a chance to let go of the past, let go of your worries, let go of all that is bothering
you, and restart when you get out. Now if that is brought in, it becomes an attitude that will
change. But if you say okay at the end of the class let’s lie down for ten minutes in shavasana
and breathe in and breathe out – well, okay, maybe. But please understand these are
opportunities. Let me put it this way. Why do we stand on one leg and do the tree pose?
Why? Okay, it’s good for this leg and the hamstrings and gluteal muscles and okay, it also
stretches my abdominals and helps me coordinate and breathe well and balances my right
and left brain, okay, fine. More important than that, when I stand on one leg, stationary,
without moving, it makes me realise what a tree is feeling. The idea is developed, empathy
for a living being that cannot move, a living being which from its birth to death is stuck in one
spot, helping you so much by giving you oxygen, by taking away your carbon dioxide and all
we do is cut it down! And what does the tree pose do? It is to make you feel empathy. We
do a lot of tree-hugging! And this is the original tree-hugging, getting into the tree pose.
When you get into the mountain posture, feel the stability of a mountain. When you do a
bird posture, what does a bird feel like? When you do an animal posture, what does the
animal feel like? Developing empathy, not just for other human beings but other living
beings, static, non-static. When that empathy develops, you start to see the Oneness. If you
start to see the Oneness, the perceived stress goes down. Who does it help? It helps us. This is where you develop what is the attitude, what is the \textit{bhava}, what is the emotion, what is the thought behind each practice? The yogis didn’t create \textit{āsanas} just so that you may have a nice chart. These are there because, if we can see that Oneness, if we can tap into that unitive impulse that exists in Nature, we start to become harmonious. We start to regain that integration, that harmony, that ease, that was lost. And this is more and more important in today’s world. We are talking about eco-friendly, environmentally friendly movements. Yoga is the original eco-friendly, environmentally friendly movement if you want to put it that way. But of course modern yoga has moved a lot away from that. But just to get back, please remember 10% above, 90% below, and it’s not for me to list every \textit{asana} and what is does, but to give you the clue that every \textit{asana} you do, try to understand what is the emotion, what is the thought, what is the feeling associated with it? Try to give it to the people to whom you are teaching. So along the way, your hands should be straight – very good, nice; your knee should be perpendicular – beautiful; 90 degrees – perfect; make sure you are breathing in and breathing out and concentrating – fine! That is all very important. But that is just the body. You have to give the soul.

We create beautiful dance compositions, my wife and me, amazing compositions, but then we see something is lacking. And then my mother comes in and, after one session, it’s alive! I say we create the body, she gives it life. Please understand we should not limit ourselves at just the body level; the body is important but please understand that which lives in it, that which breathes through it, that which metabolises through it – that should be stimulated.