

A Handbook for Yogasana Teachers: The Incorporation of Neuroscience, Physiology, and Anatomy into the Practise. Mel Robin. Published: Wheatmark Press, 2009. 1,106 pages.

Mel Robin's *Handbook for Yogasana Teachers* is one of the very few serious books on yoga and will certainly become one of the important books for yoga students.

First of all, Robin brings to the book a comprehensive neural, anatomical and physiological knowledge. But it is more than this. Movement in yoga is often distinct from ordinary movement; therefore much of what is brought to bear from physio-therapy, kinesiology and so on is inadequate and even misleading in respect of yoga movement. Much of the movement in yoga is counter-intuitive therefore a full understanding of that and the emotional complexes surrounding that are necessary for serious students. Hitherto, that has come only from teachers and the standards in yoga instruction are somewhat disparate to put it mildly.

Robin, in his exposition, distinguishes yoga movement eloquently and skillfully and references his statements to Indian and Western research on yoga, and to statements of his teacher, B. K. S. Iyengar. This has never been done in the detailed manner he has done – there are 931 note references in his work and they are not mere padding. There are references to works that would not ordinarily be accessible. Most explanatory and exploratory knowledge of yoga in the west has drawn solely on alien western practices such as sport muscular-contraction, physio-therapy and so on that have no real understanding of yoga movement, are disappointingly general, and presented dogmatically by fundamentalist how-to diviners aspiring to guruhood. The studies on yoga - more than you would think - do not reach many academic journals outside of the 'club' and work outside of the economically dominant areas tends to be ignored. Robin's comprehensive and inclusive use of sources is particularly welcome. He details the underlying anatomy with the understanding of movement basic to yoga. The result is, instead of following authority blindly, or attempting to mimic some secondary source, you have access to the basic processes of the body-mind that enable intelligent choice – an unconsidered concept for many.

The book does not limit itself to objective movement. It covers the anatomy of consciousness itself including the brain, nerves, vascular systems, emotion, pleasure, pain (fascinating section), sensation – the multitude of sensors throughout our body, respiration, digestion, sexual function, aging, bodily rhythms, balance, gravity – even memory that we take so for granted – in short it moves beyond the objective into the networks that are our life as it is and our consciousness that witnesses and empowers it all. The appendix on balance is a courageous attempt to explore this fundamental concept to asana based yoga. We are a moving miracle and Robin gives us a description that cannot help but indicate this even to one who has been born a blind capitalist.

By laying bare a deeper structure, Robin is able to offer method to yoga and allow us to understand meaningful limitation and enhancement of practice. That, of course, is the basis for any kind of therapy. I understand that Robin runs a medical practice that is

inclusive of yoga therapy. He has then a, body of knowledge that he has built up from practical experience in both yoga and medicine. This body of knowledge, with his reference to other sources such as B.K.S. Iyengar's knowledge referred to from books and actual instances, and his medical knowledge is an impressive foundation for a serious work on Yoga leading to Therapy.

This book is not going to be surpassed easily. There may be smaller specific studies that bring more to our understanding but the title actually says it all and the knowledge behind it supports that title and subtitle. No silly commercial names of this yoga or that yoga - this book attempts to covers materia at the level of the body and, in sheer volume, does that better than many smaller specific studies. It is very readable and a mine of information.

We have to thank Mel Robin for producing such a valuable reference for us. Truly, an important gift.