

KHYF

THE KRISHNAMACHARYA HEALING & YOGA FOUNDATION

FEAR IN ILLNESS

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FEAR IN ILLNESS

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Annexed to this thesis you will find the translated report of my student who underwent a breast cancer operation

FEAR IN ILLNESS

**“Without health there is no peace,
in order to be healed one needs to let go of fear.”**

TKV. Desikachar

Illness or disease is a condition where we tend to identify with the body and its problems. When the mind is vexed or is full of anxiety and agitations, we are disconnected from clarity. Then the pure and eternal Consciousness is used only to illuminate the mind and make us aware of our suffering. Such absence of clarity is evidenced by the absence of peace. If we can reduce the agitations and calm the anxieties we regain tranquility to the same degree that we are able to make an effort.

Yoga is the healing process that permits such a transformation. If a compassionate teacher can instill hope and a positive motivation to practice yoga and teach us what is adequate and appropriate at that time, then, if we apply yoga with attention, the agitations will lessen. Slowly the mind relaxes and the *rajasic* and or *tamasic* predominance changes.

During my internship in the KYM I noticed how often illness is accompanied by anxiety and fear.

From personal experience I know that anxiety can be associated with pain or with the fact that assistance is needed. Not to be self-sufficient is a major contribution to fear in illness and disability. Even though we know all this intellectually, it is the feeling that remains and agitates from inside. It is the feeling of the pain, the feeling of the discomfort, the feeling of being a burden to others and the feeling of the fear to remain bedridden and helpless that undermines all intellectual knowledge and certainties.

YOGA IS THE PROCESS that is able to create a pause in the anxious agitations. With the help of conscious breathing and, when there is faith, with the repeated chanting of a mantra, the agitated mental waves slowly loose their strength and their grasping hold. Conscious breathing and repetition of a mantra I have found to be the life-saving waist that keeps us from drowning in the turbulent waves of agitations. If we hold on to this life-belt with all our might and with all our attention, we are sure to be saved.

FEAR: the word and its meaning

The very word *fear* or *bhayam* in any language creates a mental state of aversion. Even in art, the feeling of fear is portrayed with disturbing sounds or with mime and gestures that evidence this aversion.

In today's world the word "fear" includes anxiety, stress, nervousness, over-activity and depression.

The Webster dictionary gives these definitions of fear:

Fear is an emotional response to a perceived threat.

Fear is a basic survival mechanism occurring in response to a specific stimulus, such as pain or the threat of danger.

Fear in its general term implies also anxiety and usually loss of courage.

Fear is related to the behaviour of escape or avoidance.

Fear, dread, fright, alarm, panic, terror, trepidation are words that point to a painful agitation in the presence of danger.

Description of fear

Charles Darwin in "The expressions of emotions in man and animals" gives the following description:

"Fear is often preceded by astonishment, and is so far akin to it, that both lead to the senses of sight and hearing being instantly aroused. In both cases the eyes and mouth are widely opened, and the eyebrows raised. The frightened man stands like a statue motionless and breathless, or crouches down as if instinctively to escape observation. The heart beats quickly and violently, so that it palpitates and knocks against the ribs... The skin is much affected under the sense of great fear, we see in the marvellous manner in which perspiration immediately exudes from it... The hairs also on the skin stand erect; and the superficial muscles shiver. In connection with the disturbed action of the heart, the breathing is hurried. The salivary glands act imperfectly; the mouth becomes dry, and is often opened and shut."

A direct experience of wonder and astonishment

Sitting under a tree with eyes closed, I hear a sound. I open my eyes and see a snake that fell or purposely let itself fall from the tree in order to catch a small mouse-like animal. The snake fell right in front of me on top of the

animal. The little animal jumps and runs and the snake behind with great speed. For quite some time they run and jump in circles in front of me, over my lap, then they disappeared.

Wonder and astonishment predominated. I was busy observing, following constantly what was happening. There was no fear. Neither during the happening or after.

Soldiers and others who are exposed to extreme violence in war are sometimes so busy with things to do that they have no time for fear. But fear catches up with them, later on, as worries and sleepless nights.

Fear of death

Psychologists have formulated the hypothesis that fear of death motivates religious commitment.

The analysis of fear of death or death anxiety is an important feature of existentialism and terror management theory.

Anxiety

The Webster dictionary defines anxiety as a painful or “apprehensive uneasiness of mind over an impending or anticipated ill”.

Anxiety is a distress “*anxious*” the Latin word is related to anger and worry.

From the above definitions and descriptions we learn that fear is a deep feeling.

Anxiety relates to an emotionally agitated mind.

Myth narrates that *Adharma* married *Nrtti* and to them were born three sons: *Bhaya* or fear, *Mahabhaya* or great, intense fear and *Mrtyu* or death!

Agitations and confusion lead to fear. Clarity leads to courage. We are free to choose. With the help of a teacher we can enter this process with confidence and hope.

“The mind uncontrolled and unguided will drag us down, down, for ever – rend us, kill us; and the mind controlled and guided will save us, free us.”

Swami Vivekananda

FEAR IN ILLNESS

Fear in illness is different from fear of illness. Fear in illness develops with illness, due to illness or because of a disability. This fear grows and declines with illness; it follows illness like a shadow.

The fear may relate to pain or a new inner restlessness that overcomes the sick person. Fear may be related to the loosing of independence: the dependency on other's help to dress, to eat, and to wash, to walk or to do anything.

Or the fear may be related to time, how long will the rehabilitation take. Will it affect my job, my career?

Then, there are relationships that are affected by illness. Will my wife or my husband still love me; how will the children react?

While the illness is a fact and as such is – or slowly becomes accepted, it is these shadowy fears that make the healing process more difficult.

At times, “**the disease of the disease**”, as Shri Desikachar calls the accompanying fear, creates more agitation than the illness.

Fear can be very deep. Fear of failure, fear of judgment, fear of shame and fear of loneliness or the fear of being abandoned. These fears often have their causes in painful experiences and losses in the early period of life. In later life we try to hide these painful facts and our mind constructs a protection. A protective shield made of fear! A protection that prevents our free movements and robs us of our freedom and of our inner wellbeing.

People who suffer from an illness or a disability that affects the upper trunk, like heart or lung-related-problems, seem to be especially prone to these accompanying fears. Panic attacks are now quite common in our modern society.

The heart region is the place of feelings, it is the home of fear. But it is also the home of serenity and joy.

Although pregnancy is not an illness, fear manifests nowadays more and more also in pregnancy.

For many ladies in the West, late pregnancies are not only a joy but are also the cause of many fears.

Pregnancies after the 40th year are now common. In such pregnancies regular tests and some invasive examinations that help ascertain if the fetus is healthy are normal. These tests are usually accompanied by fear and anxieties that do not subside even if the test result shows that there is no problem.

THE APPLICATION OF YOGA ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT TEXTS

In ancient times, when the **Vedic Tradition** was lived, the emphasis was on Non-fear or *Abhayam*.

In ancient India the sages observed not only the outer landscapes and its happenings, they scrutinized also the inner landscapes and its workings. The feeling of fear and its paralyzing effects were well known.

The Ramayana describes a distraught and brooding *Rama* who lacked the initiative to act. Sage *Agastya* reminded him of the sun and of its glory and asked him to meditate upon the rising sun. Thanks to this meditation *Rama* could identify with the inner sun of Consciousness, understanding that the essence of the inner sun and the essence of the outer sun are one. His mind stirred to the need of action. When he was ready to act, he vanquished the negative forces of *Ravana*.

Anandavalli of the Taittiriya Upanishad traces the human being back to the universal and eternal Source of everything.

The human system is described like a flying bird that has a head, two wings, a central trunk and a tail. The outer form of the body contains a more subtle interior form. Within the gross material-form flows the life-energy and breath, within this energy-form the mind plays its many parts, within this mental structure exists our personality that harbors our inherited talents and our potential and within this wonderful accumulation thrive all the feelings and the emotions, even those we experienced in our mother's womb.

In a moment the emotions can flood the whole system with rage or joy, with serene peace or with agitated turmoil.

Through a process of transformation the mind becomes calm, the breath smooth and long and the body can regain health. Through further education and a gradual process of transformation all the five interconnected *maya-s* may get infused with calm clarity. Clarity that permits to become aware of the Source of everything. When that happens, there is no more fear in any situation. As long as there is duality, there is the possibility of fear.

The Bhagavad Gita narrates the tale of the fallen hero on the battlefield of life. Overcome by misplaced pity for those whom he considers as relatives, *Arjuna* refused to act and fight. The teaching of Sri Krishna slowly educated his mind and disciplined it. Only when *Arjuna's* mind was clear and tranquil could it be nourished with new trust and faith by his teacher. *Arjuna*, in this state of non-fear was able to get up and absolve his duty. The description of

Arjuna by Vyasa (his limbs are heavy, the mouth dry, the body trembling, the skin burning, unable to stand, his mind is reeling...) tallies with the picture of fear that Dr. Charles Darwin describes.

The Yogasutra of Patanjali tells us that fear is a *klesha*, an obstacle that is associated with action and the motivation of action. Sooner or later it causes suffering. The *klesha* of fear is said to pervade our being, flowing like a sap. It affects all, the wise and the ignorant. Freedom from fear is said to be a sign of good health. The healing process that liberates the mind gradually from the grip of fear is first a process of purification of our intentions, our actions and expressions (= Kriyayoga). Later this process expands. A positive relationship with others and with oneself is needed (yama and niyama) When the non-attachment to things, like a healthy body grows because the mind is directed towards something within that doesn't change, then the senses follow the direction of the mind and discernment becomes possible (= Asthangayoga).

The mind thus purified and educated, always with the help of attention and confidence, will become fit for *dhyanam*.

Meditation, when united with *shraddha*, on what is eternal and permanent leads gradually to a state of non-fear.

To maintain this state of non-fear, even the most subtle parts of the mind have to be purified so that the *sattva*-state can expand. When that happens a person is said to be independent, there is no more dependency of any sort - in any situation.

The application of yoga today follows the happy revival of the ancient Teaching thanks to Sri T. Krishnamacharya's profound knowledge and his wide experience. He adapted all the tools of yoga according to the patient's needs and abilities. Sri TKV Desikachar, his son and long time student, adapted this teaching to our present day needs where fear seems to grow at all levels in our agitated and violent world.

In order to spread well-being and to apply the healing yoga, Shri TKV Desikachar founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in 1976 in Chennai.

Today KYM is the most important affiliate center of the Krishnamacharya Healing and Yoga Foundation, founded by Shri TKV Desikachar and his son Dr. Kausthub.

THE HEALING PROCESS IN THE EAST

The most subtle “substance” of our system is the feelings and the emotions. In a moment these can invade the whole system. Positive feelings help the healing process and negative feelings like fear create tensions and restrictions that hinder the healing process.

When fear floods the system, confidence loses its nourishment. Faith and trust become lean and undernourished. With confidence gone, the mind is agitated, the breath is chaotic and the body expresses the inner pain and suffering. In this stressed condition the body’s defense system is weakened and the person is prone to fall sick.

The Yoga of Healing

Today, the practice of yoga relies on the daily practice of an adequate yoga course. Adequate is what is possible for the student, what is possible for him or for her with the physical, mental and emotional problems he or she has to cope with.

Thanks to the teachings of *Sri Krishnamacharya* and the careful as well as skillful implementation of these teachings by *Sri TKV Desikachar*, an adequate yoga practice is possible today for everyone.

Nowhere is this fact more evident than in *Yoga cikitsa* as it is practiced today in the KYM that *TKV Desikachar* founded in 1976 in Chennai.

In this Healing Institute, all the yoga tools are used and applied with great success. The practice involves the practitioner in a positive way so that he or she is taking the responsibility of changing from a state of *duhkham* to a state of *sukham*. The tools that the teacher carefully chooses are those that will activate the inner resources of the person who seeks help.

Communication skills and the ability to relate with others in an easy way are the main requisites of the teacher. A teacher does not qualify through a lot of studies, but through the application and practice of all the yoga tools under the vigilant eyes of a caring mentor.

The *Yoga-sutra* of **Patanjali**, this basic and profound text on yoga that analyses the functions of the mind, teaches how to rid the mind of agitations and confusions.

The process of calming the mind needs effort, the effort of an un-interrupted practice together with the passive effort to let go of what disturbs.

The effort to do is easy, it comes almost natural, above all, if a teacher tells us what to do and how to do it and what not to do.

But the effort of letting go is a different story. It is only when we try it that we realize how we hang on to things, how attached we are to attitudes, to habits, to values, to ideas and to our very own feelings! We feel the hurt, we feel the pain and the despair, but to let go...to let go of the feeling -"I am hurt, I am in pain". No, we hold on to it. We even want others to know how much we suffer or how deep within we feel the pain. But who is interested? Everyone seems to care only for his or her own suffering. Everyone identifies only with his or her own pain.

Yet, we all look for contentment, we search for happiness and we long for peace.

If we look for help, we will find it with yoga.

The first thing needed is a qualified teacher who can guide us and teach what is adequate at that time, in that particular situation.

The rest is up to us. We need to practice, practice regularly and with attention.

As the practice goes on, the teacher encourages and verifies and the conscious application proceeds and keeps us going. Soon we look forward to the practice because the practice time is a blessed time of peaceful attention. The body feels light, the mind is at ease. The problems and disturbances lessen. There is a sense of a new well-being. We find that we are able to face situations that earlier were difficult for us to accept. The self-confidence grows.

And one blessed day, when we are fully absorbed in the practice, the endless identifications and the restrictions suddenly dissolve, and what remains is a serene peace. Even if it lasts only seconds or minutes, this nourishment acts like ambrosia.

A feeling like that of creative spring awakens something new. A new trust and fresh courage and infuses our being with an up to now unknown vigor.

As the practice continues with care and attention, we discover that letting go is possible. We discover that it is possible to relax not only the well-known outer body, but also the inside of the body, the muscles, the ligaments as well as the bones.

The ever busy mind too learns to relax and, after some time, actually enjoys it.

Letting go can become a new habit thanks to the transformation process of yoga.

The transformation happens because the teacher very skillfully guided us, provided the needed motivation and stimulus, changed the practice according to our changing needs and watched over the progress with interest and care.

A smiling face testifies the inner serenity and the newly found well-being. To be working on oneself, to do something to transform our troublesome habits and actually succeed in doing so gives a lot of satisfaction.

Such satisfaction becomes then the motivation to start yet another process. We learn that we are in charge of our psycho-physical well-being.

Shraddha fills the heart and from there it spreads through all the five *maya*-s or the interconnected structure of our system.

Thanks to *sraddha* it is possible to link with what is beyond the mind: Consciousness.

When this link flowers into a full living relationship, fear recedes and *shraddha* or trust and confidence increases. When this happens, no illness can harm us.

I remember 50 and 60 years ago, whenever there was an epidemic of typhus or smallpox, my mother-in-law in India would nurse the sick without any fear of catching the illness. She wasn't vaccinated, but her faith protected her and gave her the needed strength.

Illness may come and it may even devour the body, but the mind remains clear and tranquil, a faithful servant of Consciousness.

The aim of yoga is to establish a clear mind and keep it clear and tranquil even in difficult situations. A clear mind is needed if we want to learn anything, be it a language or mathematics. A clear mind can direct the senses for a sharp perception of things outside. A clear mind is needed to be able to distinguish between what is important for us and what is not so important so that we can make conscious choices in our life. In a disciplined mind the positive attitudes will expand and nourish confidence. When faith and trust expand, fear recedes.

People from all over India and from abroad come to the *KYM* with the most different body and mental problems. There, professionally trained yoga teachers instruct the students with skillful patience to pay attention to breath. The students learn to breathe consciously and then they learn to co-ordinate their breathing with some movements. They learn to focus their minds on the breath or on sound or on counting.

As their breath lengthens and gains in quality, as their minds accept to be educated and disciplined, these people change their attitudes and life style habits and regain their health and self-confidence.

Most students come to the *KYM* when they have a health problem. Sometimes they appear again and again, each time with a new problem. Some however, stay on even when the problem has been resolved. For them yoga is not just an easy way to maintain health but it opens up a new enquiry – the ancient, and ever fresh enquiry of “who am I?”

For them the initial mind-education is the stepping stone to deepen the discipline and the enquiry.

The ancient medical science **Ayurveda** defines health as “*SWASTHA*” which means to be stable in one’s own self.

The Ayurvedic approach to health, like that of yoga, is holistic, and takes into consideration the whole human system. The right diet is fundamental. Emotions and feelings and the mental states as well as a good and rhythmic breathing are believed to play a major role in maintaining health.

Emotions and feelings are known to further or hinder the healing process.

It is believed that in each human being there exists a divine Healer. (Sri Dhanvantari) It is up to us to find this inner Healer and activate the Healing.

Ayurveda helps the healing process with herbal medicines. **Yoga** relies on the harnessing of the inner resources of the person.

THE HEALING PROCESS IN THE WEST

In ancient Greece the holistic vision was no doubt the foundation stone upon which *Hypocrates* 460 – 377 BC invented the clinical chart and introduced concepts like diagnosis and prognosis.

Galen gained great fame as a Roman medical practitioner 131 – 201 AD. He insisted on the importance of food, physical activity and psycho-physical equilibrium. His writings were the sole medical texts up to the Middle Ages when **Avicenna** (Abu Ali al Husayn **IBN SINA**) 980 – 1037 developed “*The medical Canon*” or *Kitab al Qanun fi alTibb*, known as the Law, (*Quanun*). This text remained the medical authority in Europe for centuries.

The medical Canon was first translated into Latin and later, in 1279 into Hebrew.

Avicenna recognized the causes of health or of illness to be:

Material causes, elements, the humors and the changing humors, the temperaments, the psychical faculties, the vital force, the organs, the efficient causes, the conventional causes, the vital faculties, the final causes.

Avicenna also recognized the close link of emotions and the physical health and considered music to have a beneficial effect on the physical and psychological wellbeing of the patient.

The Latin version of the Law was first printed in 1472.

It was during the scientific renaissance of the XVII century that the medical science started to formulate laws that were based upon experiments.

Later, the more science advanced, the more the medical professionals became involved with the sick parts of a person. Slowly, the person was forgotten and the body parts became all important.

However, throughout the medical history of the West there were always medical practitioners who tried to see beyond the parts. The old fashioned family doctor knew the moods of his patients and was able to listen to their complaints and give advice and solace with encouraging words that often worked more wonders than the potions and powders they prescribed.

Dr. Hahnemann's (1755 – 1843) *Homeopathy* took great care of the different moods of patients and administered his medicines carefully according to the person and not according to the illness or the affected parts of the body.

During the late 18th century and the early 19th century the medical profession was, in certain circles, more esteemed than that of the priests or the church fathers. Many of the medical professionals had broken away from the church and called themselves “**free-thinkers**”, they looked to science and to nature for inspirations. It was a time of great discoveries in the realm of nature and in the realm of the unknown immense cosmos.

The **use of prayer** was well known to help in the healing process as well as keeping the healthy in health. At that time there was born an awareness of something un-nameable and great. Man could get into contact with IT through poetry or through conventional prayers. The medical doctors and healers of that time were well aware of the potency of prayer. They also saw unlimited possibilities in nature’s forces. They felt that, if harvested, these forces could be used in healing. I remember my grandfather (before the Second World War) “playing” with copper plates that were attached to electric wires and then inserted into basins filled with water. When one kept the hands or feet in that water there was a funny tingling feeling in the whole body; my grandfather maintained that it would help the circulation.

The impact of eastern spirituality on the West

The impact of eastern thinking and spiritual speculation reached its apex in the US after **Swami Vivekananda** 1863 - 1902 had addressed the Worlds Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the 11th September 1893

From that time and place the word spread to England and then to the Continent. Germany was particularly affected by the spiritual speculation that soon influenced the philosophical systems of the day.

The influence of **Vivekananda** was followed by the influence of **Rabindranath Tagore**, (1861 – 1941) not only as poet, but above all as educator and person of deep spiritual insights.

Mahatma Gandhi’s (1869 – 1948) self-confidence and non fear influenced thousands of his followers in a positive way. His mass gatherings were silent assemblies, one heard only the humming sound of the spinning wheels. To spin is a wonderful discipline. Extreme attention is needed to spin without letting the thread break. His ability to embrace non-violence also in extreme situations worked wonders with the violent fanatics during the time of partition. He paid for it with his life; but he gave it gladly, murmuring God’s Name.

IN Germany where scientific methods were appreciated in every field of life, **Rudolf Steiner**, (1861 – 1925) experimented with biological agriculture, with holistic medicine based on the work of Homeopathy, with democratic education and every kind of artistic expression.

From these beginnings evolved a whole new style of living: wholesome bio food, cultural positive nourishment, artistic expressions that helped the people, especially after the first world-war to cope with every day life.

Since 1920 Steiner's *Anthroposophical Medicine* tries to bring the patient and his well-being to the centre of the medical attention. *Anthroposophical* Health-care is not seen as an alternative medicine, but as a broadening and enlargement of the allopathic medical system. In Germany and Switzerland hospitals were built and these are still functioning with a care that goes beyond mere cure.

The patients are given medicines, mostly of the herbal variety and great care is taken to further the well-being of each person. Nurses and caretakers are trained to really care for the sick and for the old. As far as possible the care-providers try to occupy the patients in various artistic expressions like music, painting, theatre, and orations of poetry in order to create a relaxed and positive mental atmosphere. An elaborate and stylized dance and pantomime evolved from the need to bring order into the human system. The followers of Steiner try to develop a sense of aesthetics in daily life. The German poet Wolfgang Goethe (1749 – 1832) whose artistic and scientific activities embraced every field of human knowledge and thought is their inspiration.

In England, in 1931, **Edward Bach**, (1886 – 1936) a medical professional, published "*Cure yourself*". His work didn't attract much attention until after the second world-war. **Bach** saw the cause of all illness to reside within the human system, above all in the emotions. He said that fear mirrors itself in the inner organs and in the tissues. His cure consists in introducing the lacking positive emotions through the essence of blossoms from trees, shrubs or flowers. In this way, according to **Bach**, mood swings become stabilized. **Dr. Bach** maintained that the newly gained positive attitudes and the emotional stability is the foundation of health.

After the Second World War this method found a great following all over Europe. **Dr. Bach** also suggested that visualizations of a state of peace will enhance the healing process.

In today's hectic world, **Prana-therapy** and **Reiki** take it for granted that in each individual operates a healing energy. However, this energy needs to flow and the therapy's aim is to liberate the channels so that this innate energy may flow freely. People who cannot, or do not want to make an effort in order to enter consciously into a healing process, are particularly attracted to these healing methods.

Today's scientific approach

Today, there exist many international organizations and health institutions that take individual moods, feelings and emotions very seriously, recognizing that feelings and emotions play a significant role in ill-health as well as in health.

J. Krishnamurthy 1895 - 1986 addresses fear directly in many of his talks and publications. In "Freedom from Fear" he states that *Fear* is the greatest problem in life and is the direct cause of aggression. In talks with his followers he investigates the central root of fear.

The mind-body connection becomes definitely accepted after **Dr. Deepak Chopra's** many popular books on the subject.

The enquiry of how emotions affect the body has become routine after science was able to demonstrate that emotions are an expressions of the chemistry of the brain's molecules; as "*The molecules of emotion*" by **Dr. Candace B. Pert, Ph.D** gives ample testimony.

The most spectacular form of scientific enquiry into the brain's functions is the *video narration* of **Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, MD** She suffered a stroke and later called it "*My stroke of insight*".

Eight years after the stroke, she succeeded to narrate what happened to her and above all what happened within her brain as she tried to call for help. She was so busy ordering the two parts of her brain that there was NO TIME FOR FEAR. She couldn't afford to be emotional, with utmost effort she kept her mind focused so that her fingers could dial a phone-number.

ATHA....

Yoga calls on us to be present, to be aware of what we are doing, thinking or saying. During our life's journey we have to face different situations. Each time we manage to be present and to respond consciously, a good feeling spreads through our system.

The aim of yoga is clarity: To be fully present and conscious in every action. Yoga has many different tools to achieve this goal.

The journey to clarity is a gradual process. With the help of a compassionate teacher the student is able to progress and evolve thanks to the appropriate effort. In this process he learns also the art of letting go of what hinders him on the journey. The faith in the teaching and in the teacher grows with his regular daily practice and opens up the storehouse of our energy and self confidence. The practice of yoga brings *swa-tantra* or independence. Dependency is dreaded and feared by all who are ill. The goal of independence is therefore not easily forgotten.

For those who have faith in a Higher Being there is *Ishvarapranidhana* which means a complete dedication and devotion to that *Being* or concept a person is able to relate with. The way to invoke *Ishvara* consciously and with feeling is taught to each student according to his or her family tradition or *Ishta Devata*.

Obviously, obstacles and problems come our way whether we are bedridden or well. Different ways and means to overcome these obstacles are indicated in the first chapter of the *Yogasutra*.

Two of these tools are mandatory: A first concern is the regularity of a practice no matter in what condition we are, the practice can always be adapted to our possibility. To be focused, at least for some time, to one object or to one concept is the challenge.

The second mandatory tool is the application of specific positive attitudes in our relationships with others.

Patanjali is compassionate and gives us various other options in order to regain a clear mental state: we can work with our breath and learn to exhale, we can focus our mind and observe its relationship with objects, we can remember that there is a special space in our heart, we can take council with elders and well-wishers; the possibilities are many and end only with *dhyanam* or prayer (prayer intended as glorifying and praising **That** what doesn't change). Applying these methods with the help of a teacher is sure to clarify our minds.

The second chapter of the YS emphasizes the careful observation of our behavior and gives us three means through which we can purify our system (life-style, observation of our habitual behavior and our attitude to the results of our actions. Are we able to accept what comes our way?)

This three faced *Kriyayoga* evolves slowly and gradually into the celebrated *Ashtangayoga* of *Patanjali*. The relationship we have with others (family and society) may gradually bring the capacity not to hold on stubbornly to our own views or keep a habitual mental attitude but see things from a different angle.

Then, there is the relationship we can develop with ourselves, with our ideas and ideals. We can see and observe our need and will to implement what we feel is right. We can also see that often we impose our ideas and our ideals on others.

Finally, there is the relationship with what is deep within us. The ability to link with the inner Consciousness or with what we deem is our Source - and the ability to relate with **It**, to create a living link is a great support, especially in difficult situations or in illness. All the *anga's of yoga*: *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyanam* and *samadhi* have to be learnt and practiced under the compassionate eyes of a Teacher.

The tools of yoga are actually many more: a healing may start with the acceptance of a discipline, a change in diet and life-style, *mantra-japam*, the conscious repetition of a mantra whose meaning touches our heart,

Vedic chanting that permits to create a link with our Source, *nyasam*, a particular attention on different parts of the body, *svadhyaya* as active enquiry or also the capacity of listening to professional advice.

Then there is *bhavanam* or visualization as well as *pratipakshabhavanam*, or the possibility to see and appreciate an opposite point of view.

A combination of techniques may become a kind of ritual like a *yajna* that leads to *dhyanam*, during the process of *dhyanam* one learns that nothing, no activity is possible without the presence of our Source.

The use and artful application of these tools depend also on the creativity and on the communicative skill of the teacher.

At times just to be silent and sit with the teacher has a soothing effect. The possibility to sit and chant together with the teacher infuses an inner strength

that lasts in time. Sometimes a teacher has to be specific and tell us what we should practice or not practice. When there is trust, the student is able to follow the advice.

The importance of accepting the illness

In yoga we learn that the healing happens from within. To let this happen the patient has first to be relaxed and confident. The *Hrd-ayam*-feeling should be awake and nourished. It can be done with *nyasam* in *asana*, with *pranayama*, with *mantra-japam* or with *Vedic* chanting.

The sick person has to make peace with him or herself. He or she has to make peace with the illness, with the body and with the pain.

The more we hang on to a perfect health-image, the more we dislike or hate our actual state of suffering, the more fear grows and obscures the light in the heart. Then there will be fear of loosing health, fear of pain, fear of suffering and fear of death.

Yoga can be of immense help in changing the attitude towards the illness. The new, positive attitude, when nourished well, will favor the healing process.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

My interest in **Fear in Illness** started with a personal experience where yoga helped me. This interest was consolidated after a student of mine who was operated for breast cancer stated that she was not only cured but felt to be healed and thus refused the chemo and radio therapies that usually follow an operation. She maintains her conviction and is in good health.

My observations that I made in the **KYM** during my internship confirm that fear is often more evident than the illness. This is especially true when a person comes with cancer or with a cardiac problem. However I found fear also present in people who come with a long standing, chronic pain. Their fear is covered by a total dejection that is often expressed as depression.

In all these situations I have seen that the teachers of the **KYM** have the ability to side-track the attention of an emotional care-seeker to something the student can relate to. The new attention furthers neutral attitudes and feelings. The teacher's encouragement is active and is given with smiles and the authority of long standing positive experiences.

The learning process starts from where the person is.

Hope and confidence grow as the teachers give very clear and simple instructions. Any discomfort is immediately attended to. Instructions are repeated with patience and clarity. The student is sent home only when the teacher is satisfied that the student has understood what he or she has to practice at home.

Since everyone feels good with care and feels good when breathing consciously, the experience of a new well-being awakens a positive motivation to practice and to come back for verification and later to change the course according to the progress made.

A simple breathing practice may evolve into a practice with coordinated movements that opens the chest or it may evolve into a meditative practice.

CASE STUDIES

1. A personal experience of fear in ill health

Some years ago, I suddenly felt sick with acute pain in the chest. The pain grew and expanded over the whole body. I felt my body only as one lump of pain that radiated from the chest where the pain was most acute. I figured that my last hour had come.

I faxed my teacher. He immediately replied, telling me to lie down and repeat 108 *mantra-s*. He suggested a *mantra* with which I was already familiar.

I lay down; at the first attempt I was able to repeat three *mantra-s*, then five *mantra-s*, after some rest 10, then 12, then 20, 30 always with some rest in between. By the time I managed to repeat 50 mantras many hours had passed. The longer I was able to repeat the mantra, the less I paid attention to the pain. When the attention did go to the pain, it felt to be less acute. When I finally came to 108 repetitions of the mantra, I felt as if I was enveloped by the mantra, its sounds pulsated in my whole being. The conscious repetition created a state of *dhyanam*. (It is only now, when re-evoking what had happened, that I am able to give a name to what I felt.)

The pain was perceived only as a slight discomfort and, within a day, that disappeared also. I was weak, but alright.

The repetition of 108 *mantra-s* seemed easy after the first attempt. It gave me that wonderful feeling of entering completely into a state where I was taken care of. In that state I felt protected, the breathing was regular and the body felt light.

2. My student Elena (not real name) informed me that after a biopsy she was diagnosed for breast cancer and had to be operated immediately.

The past years have been difficult for her because of a worsening relationship with her husband. Anger was her dominant emotion. It was even stronger than fear. At the time of the operation she had two adolescent children, a son and a daughter.

When she suddenly had to be hospitalized, the husband, the children and her mother were all very concerned and, maybe for the first time, showed and expressed their concern.

Being a long time yoga student, she was able to practice conscious breathing before and after the operation.

When she came home from the hospital, the whole family hovered around her, helping her and making her feel loved and indispensable.

The lymph nodes under the arm were also removed, so there was a time of rehabilitation that she did with the help of yoga.

During this time she could appreciate her husband's support and that of her mother. The family doctor too was a great sustaining force.

Then, the doctors from the hospital called her for a control visit and advised her to have a cycle of chemo therapy. They said it was a protection, just in case... she was able to argue with them, and even to convince them, maintaining that she was totally healed. On this stand that she had adopted, she had the support of all her family, husband, mother and children as well as that of her family doctor.

As her teacher I supported her too because I observed that during her rehabilitation her attitude to yoga had changed. Now she really took the practice serious and paid much more attention to her breathing.

It was during this period that she developed a serious interest in Vedic chanting.

Every six months she goes for the routine check-up, after having practiced *pranayama*. She is well and is convinced to be totally healed.

Her relationship with her husband has changed, because she is able to let go of some of the expectations she had. She continues learning to accept him as he is.

Thanks to the support she received from her family, some of her attitudes changed that brought about a change also in the other relationships.

A full report of her interesting experience is translated into English and is annexed to this thesis. It reveals the many ramification of fear in illness and testifies to the fact, that fear weakens when trust and faith grows. When that happens, there is no need to fight fear.

The case-studies that follow do not all have a happy ending, because the healing process is a never ending process. Often, as soon as one hurdle is overcome a new obstacle arises.

All the names of the students have been changed.

3. Viola is a 55 year old married woman. She is mother of two adolescents, a boy and a girl. Viola is working the whole day in the office of a Television Center. Often there are meetings in the evenings and she is able to go home only after 9 pm. She tried Jyengar yoga before she came to me.

She is not tall (about 1.52), her body evidences a hefty build (75kg). In the office she finds the relationship with the others very difficult. When she talks about her problems she weeps.

She started to practice yoga with me about three years ago because she was troubled by menopause problems and suffered from various related symptoms: a burning vagina, a weak back, no sleep and constipation. These problems do not trouble her anymore, although her neck is still full of tension and sometimes, when she has to work late, she feels the heaviness also in her arms.

She visits me about once every two months. Once she started to practice regularly she found out that the practices helped her "to survive". This "survival" she mistook to be an emotional stability. The picture that she had of herself was badly shattered when her homeopathic family doctor advised her to take some medicines to help her with her emotional weakness. She phoned me in dire distress. I advised her to listen to her doctor and continue with the yoga practice.

It is hoped that this incident will prone her to look upon her yoga practices as something more than just a survival kit.

A year later, she suddenly realized that her son and her daughter grow up and do not need her as before. This fact brought about a crisis. She is now able to view this new situation with the help of a practice and breathing exercises where the exhale is with sound.

4. Barbara is a 40 year old slim and tall unmarried business lady who looks like an adolescent. She practices sports like tennis, golf and swimming. Before she came to yoga she practiced gymnastics at home, including weight lifting. She gives the impression of being a healthy, competent young woman who knows and gets what she wants.

She came to me in order to keep fit in a healthy way. During the summer heat she suffers from low blood pressure. Her breath was extremely shallow

and quick. She managed to inhale and exhale in one second! Actually it was difficult to understand if she was inhaling or exhaling.

The regular practice altered this fact drastically. Now her breath reaches five seconds and she is able to insert holds after EX and after IN.

The main problem that she wants to overcome is her fear, nay terror to enter a hospital or meet a doctor.

Since 2009 she is in psychotherapy to overcome this fear.

In yoga we worked with body, breath and visualizations. *Pranayama* with sound on exhale gives her confidence.

The therapist's aim was to take her to a hospital and have her blood taken.

They went together, but when she sat in front of the doctor with her arm outstretched, she withdrew.

A second time she went alone, after she had practiced *pranayama* and she was able to have her blood taken. During the whole process she relayed on breath.

She is very sensitive and suffers when she sees or experiences the insensitivity of others.

She has no time for an evening practice but has a regular morning practice of about 30 minutes. The seed of *shraddha* has been planted.

5. Primo is a new student who lives 600 km south of Rome. He motored up to my place with his wife. He is 60 years old, a retired engineer, has two adult sons and two grandchildren.

He weighs nearly 90 kg and is 180 cm tall. He had e mailed me and revealed that he had just finished a two year yoga formation course in his city and that he had written a thesis on TKV Desikachar!

I was very intrigued. His thesis, I found, is a mixture of the books he read peppered with his own conclusions. Nowhere is there a hint of experience.

He came, so he said, because his blood pressure was not alright and his back gives him pain.

His pulse is racing so quick one can hardly follow it or count it. Observing his practice I saw how much he forced himself. My first concern was to impress on him not to force himself, neither at the body level nor at the breath level.

He learnt some very simple movements coordinated with breath and during his stay of three days there was no sign of his usual frequent tachycardia, the cause of his fear, according to him.

Hopefully he continues with the practice. I am waiting for some feed-back.

After some months I hear that he feels at ease with the breathing.

6. Francesco is an old student of mine who has finished his Teacher's Training and is now teaching yoga and *Vedic Chanting* himself.

Francesco is 45 and 1.95 m tall with long arms and long legs. Ever since his youth he "plays" with words. Some of his poems have been published and some of his plays as well. He loves music and Vedic chanting.

His ideals float over him like clouds. He has difficulty in accepting the reality and is much attached to his ideals.

He has also a problem with relationship. There was in the past, fear in and of relationship, specially with his family. His father never appreciated his sensibility. He had wanted him to take over the family business after he had suffered an accident that left him infirm.

Francesco has difficulty in accepting criticism.

He was attracted by *Vedic Chanting*. In the beginning it was not easy to correct him, but now, thanks to the very chanting, he has changed. I think the chanting helped much more in his transformation than *asana* and *pranayama*.

The chanting went straight to his heart.

Today, his relationship with his parents is very much better. Now, his father accepts his choice and even supports him. Thus, Francesco has improved his self-confidence. Nowadays he is even able – for a while – to step down from the high pedestal of his ideals and look reality into the face.

His fear expresses itself in the asana practice, he suffered from a chronic low back problem, that awakens, according to him, because of the practice.

I have tried various approaches: my first aim was to relax the spine, then to strengthen the whole back. Once he learnt to start his body-movements from the low back, he felt better and was more confident. At last he felt that he need not fear, but could practice with trust in his body and have confidence in his breath.

An important fact, because when he was young, he said that he suffered from asthma. There is no asthma now, but the feeling of fear remains. The fear becomes acute when he feels that he is exposed to the judgment of others, like during an exam.

In teaching him *bandha*-s, I found that he has the tendency to uplift the abdomen immediately without first creating a good abdominal contraction. The need to potentiate the abdominal contraction and not to jump into *Uddhiyana bandha* is evident.

Having done so much, I am sure his positive transformation will continue.

With the help of *viparitakarani mudra* and *Rudram* in chanting, he attended and passed the PLA examination! During the first part of the exam, all his old fear-habits flowered fully, the mind was so agitated that he was unable to present a short essay in English. However, he was able to resist the temptation to run away!! The written part went well. At the end, the whole examination was felt to be a positive experience.

7. Felicetta is a tormented soul and is full of fear. She talks much and quick. She is 58, minute, but well built. She works as director in an important Art Museum in Italy. She is married and has a son. Her husband too works in the field of Art-exhibitions and their son is said to be a genius.

All this may sound wonderful, but in life things never happen as per our expectations!

During the past months her brother committed suicide, soon after, her mother died. Her genial son of whom she would like to be proud, has confirmed her suspicion, he is a homosexual.

Felicetta has great difficulty to accept these realities that for her are tragedies.

Her husband refuses to talk about the "problem" of the son and buries himself in his work.

The conflict is acute, the agitations of the mind are many, and anxiety grows.

Felicetta used to practice yoga in a different school. She is still in the habit of forcing herself into postures. Due to non appropriate yoga practices, she developed a prolapsed uterus. When she practices what is right for her and with attention, there is no problem. With emotional strain the uterus prolapsed again. *Dvipadapitham* taken on exhale helps her a lot.

She has learnt to take care and help herself, she knows what to do.

During this phase of her life, she needs constant assurance, encouragement and support.

The letting go is important. But in order to further an inner and outer relaxation, she needs first to develop some inner strength. Mental strength that comes with attention. Usually one learns the hard way.

8. Pietro and Anita are a fine young couple. They have a baby boy of two years and Anita is pregnant again.

Pietro is my student since ten years. He has finished his yoga teacher training with me and teaches yoga. Anita was not my student. When she was pregnant with the first child I gave some advice.

When Anita discovered that she was pregnant for the second time, she was asked to take a routine blood test. The result showed that she had contacted a particular virus that can influence the growth of the fetus in a negative way. When she was four months pregnant the liquid of the placenta was analyzed and the same virus was found to be present. Naturally fear and anxiety increased. Anita spent some sleepless nights. Now, in the fifth month the doctors want another, more profound analysis of the liquid that permits to know if the child is normal or not. Only then, according to the doctors, one can take into consideration to interrupt the pregnancy.

Anita doesn't want to take the risk of having a handicapped child. She is a kinder-garden teacher and is aware how handicapped children suffer from loneliness because the others, children and adults do not accept them.

Pietro feels very strongly that it is his duty to support his wife, whatever the decision.

With this conflicting problem they motored for 5 hours to come and see me. Once they had arrived, rested and after some tea we sat down together. Before we talked, I chanted *Sri Suktam*, and then Anita exposed her fears and worries. She is sure that if the child is affected by the virus she wants to interrupt the pregnancy, she is not ready to bring up a handicapped child. On the other hand she became also aware that such a decision would leave permanent traces that might affect the relationship with her husband and even the education of their child who is now two years old.

Through our very open and frank dialogue it became clear that whatever the decision taken, it would have consequences for all of them.

Being nearly five months pregnant, the abdomen is already nicely rounded with life. There were already perceptible to her, some bubble-like movements. The natural bond of mother and child is evolving.

They saw only the conflict: to kill or, not to kill and accept a sick child.

I told them that the question of killing does not arise. I narrated how *Arjuna* refused to fight because he didn't want to kill his friends and relatives; and how his teacher, *Sri Krishna* explained to him that life cannot be killed, that life is eternal, has no parents.

I advised Anita and Pietro to look at her womb as filled with luminous golden light that was given into their custody. If they cannot accept the gift, the only option they have is to offer this luminous light to the very Source from where it originated.

I taught them the mantra: *Om Srim Sriyai namah* and I advised Anita to repeat it mentally during the whole time of the next examination.

Thus, whatever the verdict of the doctors, whatever the response of the couple, they will act consciously and without the burden of guilt.

PS. Anita phoned to say that according to the doctors the baby is NOT affected by the virus!

PPS. In January 2011 a healthy baby boy was born.

9. Carlo is a healthy, flexible man of 45. He is a yoga teacher, having learnt in a different school. He comes to me for his personal practice since about four years.

His personal life is very difficult. Observing the way he practiced when I met him, it seemed to me that his backbone was missing.

His father committed suicide when he was young.

Carlo leads a married life with a partner who treated him "worse than a dog". He was always at her beck and call. She would scold him in front of others. When she needed him, she whistled.

And he took it, he submitted to all this for more than seven years. Then they separated.

Carlo suffers from a skin eruption when the climate gets warm; it is most acute in summer when it is hot. It erupts mostly on his hands, fingers, arms up to the elbow and on his feet, rarely on the legs.

Carlo is able to practice a vigorous *asana* course for about 40 to 45 minutes in the morning. Since he practices with me, his breath has improved. He is able to work with a rhythm that contains holds after IN and after EX.

He practices very regularly. His skin problem has become less virulent with every spring and this summer (2010), in spite of the heat, there were only a few patches, but no blisters.

His self-esteem has considerably improved. The way he stands and walks is different. His body expresses confidence. And he has learnt to trust his breath. During the present heat-wave in 2011 there was no skin eruption.

10. Riccardo is a 45 year old Art-dealer with many aspirations but without the capacity to make an effort to reach the goal.

There is always some pain somewhere in his body that gives him a valid alibi not to apply himself.

He came to me because of low back pain. There was fear of pain, the fear strangles his breath capacity. During the rare moments when his breath evidences its full potential, and when he is invited to use his breath, some pain surges up, either in his neck, in the hand, on a finger! Somewhere there will be some pain.

His back is much better, he admits, but he doesn't believe that it will last.

He phones me about two times a year, to say that he wants to start again, but then he never comes.

11. Beatrice is a 50 year old lady who is a teacher of the "focusing-therapy". She is divorced and has three children. The boy lives with the father, the eldest daughter is married and the youngest is at home with her.

Beatrice was interested to join the teacher-trainer course, but then it was found that she suffers from multiple sclerosis = MS. She dropped out of the teacher-training course.

She comes to me regularly for her private practice, Vedic chanting and the study of the yoga-sutra text. She enjoys chanting, she is a good listener.

She is taking "Interferone", the classical medicine in Italy for MS. Her hope is that with the help of yoga she may switch to a less invasive medicine, as "Interferone", when taken for a long time, is known to affect the liver.

Her days are very different, there are Yes-days and No-days as she calls them. On the yes-days, she is alright. Recently, on a holiday in the Alps where it is cool, she was able to walk every day, slowly but steadily and she enjoyed it. During her no-days she has no strength. Then every movement becomes a great effort.

This year she also entered the menopause phase and at times has hot flushes.

When we meet, I give her different practices, one for the yes-days, one for the no-days and now also the breathing (Shitali, followed by Candrabhedana and again followed by Shitali) that helps her with the hot flushes.

This arrangement works fine. She has learnt to pick the adequate practice. Since she lives at the other side of Rome and driving, especially on no-days is difficult for her.

There are two *bhavana-s* that she likes: to imagine to sit under a cool cascade of water, or to visualize a white flower in her heart.

Meditative practices give her joy and satisfaction. On no-days she has to relax her head, her body and her mind. On yes-days she can build up some energy.

She has a strong personality and on the whole a positive outlook in life. She enjoys being alive and is able to thank life for the good and beautiful things, like the birth of her first grand-daughter.

Thanks to yoga she is able to deal with her illness in a positive way. During the summer of 2011, feeling well, she has discontinued taking her medicine and is now searching for a doctor who will treat her homeopathically. She is in touch with a research center in Milan where it was found that often, with menopause, MS drastically changes or even vanishes.

It might well be that for her, the usually feared menopause period will bring some positive change.

12. Sonia is 48, very intelligent and able to talk with authority on any subject.

When she was 11 years old she developed Diabetes 1. She is on insulin. Since one year she doesn't need the injections but has an automatic "pace-maker" attached to her body that releases the needed insulin into the system.

Sonia works as a dance therapist and gives teacher training courses in dance therapy. This work keeps her very much in movement the whole day.

She acts and behaves as if she was very sure of herself.

Her relationship with others is perceived as arrogant by the others. But she is unaware of this fact.

Beyond the arrogance, hides the fear: the fear that accompanies her illness since childhood, the fear of being different from other children, different from other youths. The fear that drives her to achieve – even now as an adult - whatever she wants or plans or desires.

Since about three years she is divorced and has a new partner with whom she desperately **wants** a child. (She has an adolescent son from her former partner). Since the autumn 2009 she has had three spontaneous abortions.

She comes to me every 3 to 4 months for a personal practice. She also wanted to learn to chant "*Mantrapushpam*". But she is unable to listen. When she chants, she creates her own sounds and is convinced that she chants correctly.

If only she could let go of all that she wants to achieve. A deep relaxation would release a different energy. By deep I mean a relaxation that would involve her whole system. Then her intelligence could flower.

But to relax, one needs trust. And when the heart is filled with fear there is no space for trust.

13. Vincenzo is 31. Though young, his body is full of tensions. He is a bio-chemist and works in a laboratory.

When he came for the first time three and a half years ago, he suffered from panic attacks, complained of chest pain that was accompanied by tachycardia. His chest was slumped. His body gave the impression of an old man. Often he had neck pain, his upper back and lower back were extremely stiff. He could sleep alright but his sleep was often disturbed by nightmares. During the day he was plagued by negative thoughts. Observing his breath, I saw that even the diaphragm was stiff and blocked, it didn't participate in the breathing.

He gave the impression of being a frightened bird that fell out of the nest.

And then he started to practice yoga very regularly because he felt an immediate benefit.

We started very gently to open his chest with arm movements in standing, lying and seated postures. The progressive expansion of his exhale permitted that at the end of the practice he could inhale for 3 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds. Later, I introduced different MA-sounds in the exhale. He learnt to inhale with *shitali* and with the help of *cakravakasana* he learnt to let his diaphragm free to move along with his breath.

He progressed steadily, his panic attacks were less frequent, his nightmares ceased. The absolute non mobility of his back changed. His stiff legs became a bit less stiff.

He comes to me once in two months. I have never met anyone who can give so detailed information of what he felt in each posture or in each *vinyasa* or what effect certain sounds have on him.

Of late he joined a Vedic Chanting group. He is the most attentive listener and makes few mistakes. His voice that lacked energy now has a different volume.

Thanks to his conscientious and regular practice he is a changed man. His chest has expanded; his breath is long and continues to grow in depth. His self-confidence has increased. His body profile has changed. Now the inhale expands his chest. The relationship with others is easier.

Recently he had the courage to successfully attempt a *vinyasa* that ended in *Caturangadandasana*. The ability to enter into *Urdhvamukhasvanasana* and then move on to *Caturangadandasana* and back filled him with a quiet joy and pride.

He has joined the yoga teacher training. I am sure that he will be a very attentive and caring teacher.

For his teacher-training he was asked to choose a *Sutra* of the *Yogasutra*-text and explain it using his own experiences. He chose *sutra* I.20 on *shraddha* and explained it very clearly. As practice that would help in this *shraddha*-experience, he created a practice where *Urdhvamukhasvanasana* is the *pradhana*-posture. He explained how he was able to feel the *sthiram* and the *sukham* in this posture.

14. Agnese is the mother of two sons. One suffers from "tetraplegia" since birth, meaning that all four limbs are paralyzed and capable only of distorted movements. The other son is normal but he grew up with the guilt complex of being normal!

Agnese is 61. Her whole married life was dedicated to her sons. She and her husband have never been able to teach any discipline to their handicapped son. He grew up, accustomed to be served with whatever he needed. The work and care of a fully handicapped adult is enormous. Agnese has never time for herself. Her breath is shallow, her body aches.

She lives in Sicily. To come here is possible, if all goes well, only once a year. Then I teach her a position to rest her legs and her back. She learnt *shitali* inhale and MA sounds on exhale. She learnt some arm movements lying on her back to ease her pain. When she rests I chant for her.

During the rest of the time, she phones me and empties her heart and her mind. When things are very difficult, she asks me to chant for her, sometimes also on the phone.

The feeling of being sustained and understood helps her. Then she is able to practice something, and she feels better.

She is not able to practice regularly, but she maintains that yoga is her sustaining force!

15. A personal experience of the healing process

With 77 I had a bad fall in the house of my daughter. She had guests and had asked me to come over for dinner. At 9 pm they were still busy in the

kitchen and I went to excuse myself, being tired. Having greeted the guests I turned to go - and fell. The first impact was on my cheek. I remember thinking "oh - this body is heavy"! Then I fell on the left shoulder and the left knee.

Instead of going to bed, my daughter had to take me to the Hospital. The left cheekbone was fractured, the left shoulder dislocated and the humerus bone was fractured just below the shoulder. The left knee was badly swollen but otherwise intact. The thumb on the right hand was fractured.

At the first aid station I had to wait for more than three hours until it was my turn. During this time I realized that my whole upper bone structure had collapsed. I could not sit upright, but sat in a forward slump with my arm dangling down.

When I was finally with the doctors, the dislocated shoulder was replaced into its socket and I could sit upright, sort of. Then I was tightly bandaged with the bent left arm pressed against my chest. My right thumb was given a plastic hood and a bandage. The cheek and the knee needed only time to heal.

Back at home, I was helped to lie down. But how difficult! I could lie on my back only when I felt my spine was directly involved in the movement. My spine was the only support for my body structure. To do any movement I needed to consciously solicit the spine, make it feel comfortable and relaxed. I learnt to do this each time I wanted to get up or needed to lie down. I could not be long in any posture because the structure got tired.

Since there was much pain it occurred to me to try to relax the shoulder area. Deep breath was not possible with the tight bandage, but I was able to breathe! With every exhale I talked and chanted to my shoulder area "relax... relax... *shaithilya-shaithilya*...! The first practice was to consciously relax the injured part of the body.

Chanting was possible and it had an extraordinary effect: I was aware of the sound-vibrations within the chest. It created space (in spite of the tight bandage) and felt wonderfully good.

Then I figured that if the shoulder-area was relaxed, it could be nourished with *prana*.

So after the relaxation of the shoulder area, I sent *prana* on inhale to the shoulder and on exhale I visualized that *prana* expanded its nourishment to the whole shoulder area.

Around this time my teacher phoned. What a joy to hear his voice, to feel his concern and listen to his chanting.

I tried out some movement with the right, healthy arm. I opened my arm, and then placed the hand on the broken left shoulder. This was possible if I

did all the movements on hold after exhale. The inhale and the exhale I did when my right hand rested on my left, painful shoulder. When I did this a few times I **imagined** doing the same movement with my injured left arm.

The first 15 days passed thus with conscious breathing, conscious relaxation and simple movements, actual and imagined. The awareness of the importance of the spine and its role in movement and rest deepened.

My teacher phoned me again, telling me that in KYM the teachers were chanting for me and he was chanting and praying for my recovery. I felt so blessed and thankful.

When the first 3 weeks had passed, they liberated me from the tight bandage and gave me a tutor to wear. I could take it off for a shower. I took it off also for the exercises.

The arm that had been kept bent and bandaged felt like a lame limb. Even the turning of the hand was possible only with the help of the right hand, or the four fingers that were free. Very gently, very slowly and very gradually I learnt to move the arm.

My practice consisted in *sitali* breathing that was dedicated to the spine. Then, still seated, I lifted my injured left arm with the help of the right hand, a bit. All the movements were possible only on hold after exhale, otherwise there was pain. I learnt to listen to the body and learnt to respect it. The shift from the seated posture on a stool to a lying down posture on the floor and back to a seated posture on the floor was possible thanks to the conscious involvement of the spine. I felt the spine to be so important like the central mast on a boat. The spine helped me to relax and to move.

Lying on my back, slowly and gently I learnt to move both my arms in an opening gesture, palms down, and then I turned the palms up. First these movements were possible only from the elbows down. Every two or three days the opening widened a bit. Slowly the practice evolved, I learnt to move the whole arm on exhale, inhale with the arms open and relaxed, and then bring the arms back to the sides of the body on exhale.

The body showed a remarkable intelligence.

Right from the beginning the body preferred symmetric movements, when there was an a-symmetric movement the body was not fully relaxed. For example, opening one arm and placing the hand on the opposite shoulder, the spine collaborated better if both arms worked in the same way. Obviously, it was not possible to keep the left hand of the injured shoulder on the right shoulder. At first the left hand could go up only as far as the right hip. I found that the spine helped me when I made the same modified movement also with the right hand. I felt it was a question of harmony and

symmetry. In this symmetry of movements the spine was fully relaxed and could help me better.

How important this structural equilibrium is, I found out these days, nearly 3 months after the accident happened. In order to write this thesis obviously I use my right hand and arm. (I write by hand and then copy it on to the computer) Yesterday, to my astonishment I found that my left injured shoulder was hurting. If the right side works, somehow the left side gets involved and becomes tense. The typing might have activated the ligaments too much. Now, I have again consciously and carefully to relax both shoulders, then move the arms gently and gradually. When I let go of the tensions, the pain ceases, when there is no pain, the spine holds up the structure in a different way.

This ongoing healing process is a great teaching experience.

I feel that the importance of relaxation cannot be over estimated. The ability to consciously relax any part of the body opens up new vistas.

If we can relax parts of the body, we can learn to relax the senses, we can learn to relax the mind and its different states and its actions and we can learn to let go of fear.

When I met my teacher in London, four months after the fall, most of the arm-movements were again possible but he showed me how to regain some of the lost strength. Doing some already possible and familiar arm-movements, holding a rolled up journal in the hand helped a lot in the rehabilitation.

To be able to do all the arm movements and rest relaxed with both arms took more than a whole year of attentive practice. And the healing process is an ongoing process. How much one learns in such a way is astonishing.

This brings to my mind the skiing accident of one of my students.

16. Costanza is a tall and slim lady of 48 years. She is married, has a family with three children, Two daughters and a son. She works as a Psych-therapist. During the 2011- winter skiing holidays, she fell and broke her leg. She was operated and some hooks, screws and a long iron rod were inserted. The leg was left without plaster-of-paris-cast.

She phoned me when she lay in the hospital, waiting for the operation. Being a long time yoga student, I advised her to lie down and relax and consciously breath. I asked her to extend, if possible, her exhale, some breaths, then rest, some breaths then relax. She did this before and after the operation.

Then her husband had to bring her home from the alps. During the long journey, she continued with these conscious breathings and conscious relaxations until she was finally at home in her own bed.

Her husband who is also my student, informed me of how she was doing. Her leg was very swollen and in great pain.

I gave instructions to her husband. He found an adequate support for her legs, that could be kept on the bed, with her bent legs rested on the support, she could do some progressive arm-movements. Later she could slide the heel on the support, thus bring the knee towards her, without the burden of extra weight on the leg. These sliding movements of the alternate heels allowed her to gradually bring one knee at the time always a bit nearer to her. She did all the movements on exhale.

Later on she learnt to lift the bent leg up, very slightly.

The accident happened around the 12th of January, for the whole January and a part of February she worked thus on her bed. Whenever she was seated on the bed, in order to eat or dress or do anything, she would do some shitali breathing, and again before she would be lying down.

Slowly, it was possible for her also to sit on a chair and progressively put some pressure while exhaling on to her legs.

Then she learnt to maintain the pressure also during hold after exhale. Gradually the holds after exhale increased progressively.

By the end of February she was able to stand up, leaving the broken leg slightly bent.

Then, standing, with the help of wall-support, she learnt to straighten her leg on exhale, on inhale she let it come back to the comfort position.

Later on this was possible also on inhale. And still later, she didn't need the support of the wall, but could straighten out the leg and bend it freely.

In March we started with a very mild *Virabhadrasana*, her palms on the wall. Every five days, she lengthened the stride of her legs a bit more. When she had arrived at her normal stride, we tried *Virabhadrasana* with the wall behind her, with heel support. Of course every practice was compensated with the resting of her legs on the stool.

In May she was able to do a - for her - normal practice. But how her breathing had changed! During her rehabilitation she really learnt to breath and to use her low abdomen on exhale and during the hold after exhale. She discovered the great usefulness of a strong abdominal belt. Thanks to her intense breathing practices, she is now a changed woman. The first to notice it is her family and her colleagues at work!

The magic of conscious breathing is best testified by an experiment!

17. Rosa is a 65 year old retired High school teacher. She is very much interested in art and literature. She is a thin and nervous lady with a wrinkled face. She talks very fast and when she talks she doesn't face you, there is no eye-contact.

Since she practices yoga, there are some moments when there is an eye contact. She consults me regularly once every two months. She usually tells me for what problem she needs help that day! She wants to be in charge!

Before coming to me she was in Psycho-analysis for more than 12 years. The analysis ended because her analyst fell seriously sick.

Recently she appeared distressed and told me that every day when she wakes up, she is gripped by fear. She is healthy and has no pain. She lives alone and has a good monthly income. She has no children. I think she never married, but I know that she lived with her companion, an artist, who died of cancer some years back. She has a good relationship with her sisters and her nephews and nieces and she has many friends.

Apparently she has everything she needs. But there is this fear. She said it was not fear of something, but pure fear. In her case probably fear of the illness "samsara"-dukkham.

Confronted with her fear, I told her that we could make an experiment.

I made her lie down and we pretended that she had just woken up.

I directed her breathing through various changing breathing rhythms. After about 30 minutes of *pranayama* her face had changed, she actually smiled and was ready to face the day.

From that day on, she tells me that she practices these breathing exercises every morning in bed, after waking up. Sometimes, after the breathing she prays or reads something in the Bible.

The *pranayama* practice was thus composed:

In bed, immediately after awakening, in a comfortable lying posture

6 breaths inhale + pause 2" – exhale + pause 2"

A few normal, but conscious breaths

6 breaths: inhale + 2" pause, exhale + 3" pause

A few normal, but conscious breaths

6 breaths: inhale with two krama-s and two pauses, each 2"
normal exhale + 3" pause, the attention is on the pauses

A few normal, but conscious breaths

10 breaths: normal inhale + 3" pause
Exhale with two krama-s and two pauses, each 2"
The attention is on the pauses

6 breaths: IN and EX normal, but with bhavana
On IN feel to receive energy, on EX feel to create space

6 breaths: the same, same bhavana

Breathe normally, but remain with this sense of fullness received from the breathing. Feel grateful to Breath!

A similar positive experience with breath was made by another student of mine.

18. Vittoria is a 45 old artist. She is from Naples. Like most people who are born and brought up on volcanic ground, she is very emotional. Very often she feels depressed.

To start the day with a pranayama practice that contains krama breathing on inhale helps her a lot.

Her practice looked like this:

On bed, lying on your back, hands on the low abdomen
Inhale and exhale consciously for 5 breaths, then

5 breaths IN + 3 " hold
 EX + 3 " hold

- 5 breaths IN with two steps, each hold 3"
EX + 3" hold
- 5 breaths IN + 3" hold
EX in two steps, each hold 3"
- 5 breaths IN + EX with two steps, each hold 3"
- 5 breaths IN + 3" hold
EX + 5" hold
- 5 breaths IN feel the energy entering you
EX create space for the energy to flow
- 5 breaths normal IN + EX

Remain for some time with what you feel now.

CONCLUSION

Fear can accompany any illness; it may even provoke an illness. Fear is not always related to a physical illness but it manifests when there is an illness. Fear manifests each time the person loses contact with the Source. Illness becomes the pretext so that the fear can be seen and dealt with. Fear affects the whole system in a negative way, through all the five *maya* levels.

The non-fear state of mind has a great influence on the whole system and furthers health in a positive way. Whatever we can do to alleviate fear will be positive to the whole system.

When the mind is pacified and stable, when there is nourishment from faith, either through Vedic chanting or through a positive dialogue with the teacher, the appropriate yoga practice empowers the student to be active. The student takes responsibility for his own health and later also for his own state of mind.

Time and regular effort is needed for students to become conscious of their body and to make friends with their breath. The other important factor is the relationship with the teacher. There has to be trust and respect, but not dependence.

When a student takes responsibility for his own well-being and for his own state of mind, the usual attachments lose their strength. Then, healing becomes possible. The letting go is possible – with trust and faith even the letting go of fear is possible.

The student feels thankful towards the teacher and the teacher feels the joy of the living Teaching.

However, at times it takes a lot of effort for both student and teacher. There is this woman who said she suffered an abuse when she was 9 years old. Today she is a married woman with two grown sons, a caring husband and a good business that involves them both.

Yet, her only identification is with that old suffering, with something black and terrible. This identification with *duhkham* is so strong that she is afraid to lose it and be – nothing. The mere words “to let go” cause aversion and more fear. At the moment it seems to me that the only possibility is to create a new positive self-image but the very process to do so, creates nausea. The lady tells me that she feels that it is the *Shitali*-breathing that causes the nausea. We try with ordinary breathing. I have tried to insert *Hridayam mayi – aham amrte – amrtam bramhani* into her practice.

Now, confronted with this nausea reaction, as teacher, I feel that I need help. And the wonderful thing is that help is always there, because as teachers we are linked to our own teacher who is ever ready with advice and help. As teachers we are also linked to KYM and the KHYF and we can benefit by all the experiences of the teachers who are responsible within these institutions.

As teacher, I can affirm that I am never alone.

At times an answer comes after some breathing or, more often still, after some Vedic chanting. Suddenly, one knows how to proceed.

At times there is the glance at the photo of Sri T. Krishnamacharya and the knowledge of how my own teacher, Sri TKV Desikachar, relies on his Teacher for help and guidance.

And then as a last resort, we can ask for help directly. I know that Dr. Kausthub answers an appeal for help immediately, wherever he is. His precious advice gives us the direction in which we can proceed.

This all-round support makes it possible for me to enter into a relationship with people and find the right indications of how to move on.

To be an eternal student renders me confident and strong.

More important still, being an eternal student, I am conscious and grateful for all the gifts received and that I continue to receive. The awareness to be part of this living *guruparampara* makes it possible for me to respond from the heart and share with others what is in my heart.

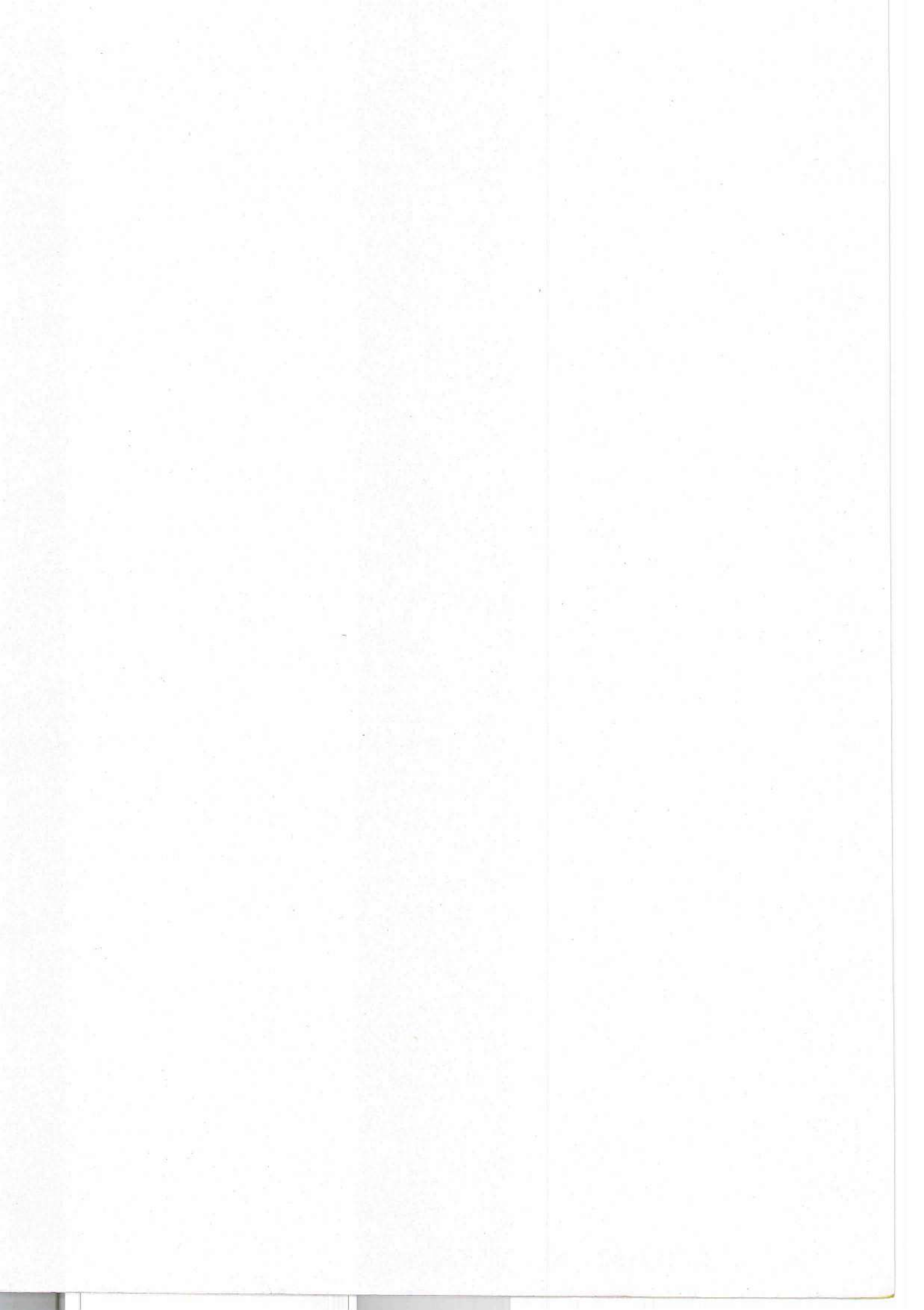
According to *Sri T. Krishnamacharya*

A person who practices cikitsa must be disciplined in diet and must be of pure mind.

“If he has disciplined himself to achieve this, he will be able to help even in the most difficult cases.”

Acknowledgment:

I am thankful for the help rendered by my student Dr. Alberico Bruno in researching the early part of the Healing process in the West. (Page 12)



What follows is a report of my student who underwent an operation because of breast cancer.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEAR: A PRATIPAKSHABHAVANA

I discovered a hard little ball under my skin on my right breast towards the end of February 2006. The probability that it was made of cancerous cells seemed already very high after the tissue analysis.

On the 4th of April 2006 the surgeon removed the nodule and some tissue around it. He removed also the first alar lymph node because, if the tumour had already started spreading, the place where one can find it is in this lymph node.

Fortunately, and to my great relief, everything seemed to be limited to the nodule even though it was certain that the cells of the nodule were cancerous.

What happened next is very interesting.

The doctors were saying "Did you know that you can consider your self cured?" and as soon as I happily said, "Of course I know!" they seemed to be sad, even sorry.

Doctors are used to people who ask for every thing that can possibly be done to them, so that they can, as they say, have "peace of mind".

However, for me it was the so called "cures" like chemotherapy, radiotherapy and even more the hormones that scared me, just as much as the tumour did, which had been completely removed.

During this period my yoga teacher was very caring and present in every way possible even though she lives in Rome, about 600 km from where I live.

I told her that I could not accept the phrase "fighting against cancer" and that I didn't feel like I had to fight against anything or against any one.

The word "fight" was disturbing me: it created a very strong feeling of aversion.

During this period, before and after the operation, I had received more affection and comprehension than usual and I appreciated the reciprocal love from my children in a special way.

Like all mothers, also my mother was very worried when confronted with the illness of her daughter, never the less she kept on telling me that I would certainly be able to overcome everything that could happen.

To hear this expressed felt good.

To say "you will overcome everything" is very different from saying "who knows what awful things are waiting for you", or "I feel sorry for you etc."

The support from my mother was normal for me and in this serene normality, I was able to really believe that there would have been no problems.

My husband was present. He showed me reliability by fully understanding what was happening and what could happen. But he didn't seem worried.

From my seventeen year old son I received constant love and care. He made this love evident and tangible in every moment. We joked often together, and the respect he had for me was beautiful.

A calm force came over me when I watched him. This force was useful to me to reassure my eleven year old daughter who needed my direct support.

She showed her fear by shunning me, as if this invisible illness was my way of betraying her. The illness was a threat and I, in her mind, was somehow responsible.

This is what was happening to her but she wasn't conscious of it. However there was anger and fear in her.

In her reaction I saw a symptom/effect of the illness. To cure it, I felt, was an absolute priority.

Like my own mother's care and love made me believe, without any doubt at all, that nothing dramatic would have happened to me, in the same way, my daughter was able to believe me when I told her "I promise you, I assure you, that I will not die and I give you my word that I will always be with you."

We were alone and happy in the kitchen that afternoon and she was doing her homework. Suddenly, her eyes lit up, in that instant, as she smiled, her appetite and serenity returned.

That "I will not die" is the only thing that she wanted to know.

That I wasn't going to die, I had already been told by a friend, a homoeopathic doctor, who is also my children's paediatrician since they were born.

When I felt the fear coming on, I would go to him, and he would say: "Calm down, what's the hurry?!" he gave me his time and his expertise but most of all, slowly, one step at a time, he opened me up to a new way of seeing things. He made me understand that the tumour doesn't bring death but is a signal.

A signal that was switched on because, according to him, I felt that I didn't get enough attention.

"Have the operation if you want," he would tell me, "but afterwards nothing will be necessary, in fact, it will be necessary to do nothing anymore."

Our twenty year old friendship was already very solid. However, since then I owe him so much more.

Afterwards, I saw how happy it made him that I had actually listened to him. I understood that during those moments of our special communication, he felt to be a real doctor.

I have another friend. He is a gynaecologist but I am not his patient. We talked long and very frankly, at the end of our discussion, he said to me: "Dear friend, in the last 20 years surgery has come a long way whereas the pharmaceutical industry hasn't even been able to make a little step because the interests are enormous. The drugs in use don't have any medical motivation to be used".

I thanked him very much for giving me his sincere medical opinion.

Yes, the word *fight* disturbed me a lot. It had nothing to do with what was happening. What sense could the word *fight* have?

We confuse the fight against cancer with the will to live.

We translate wanting to get better with attachment to life, when it is the attachment to life that produces the fear of dying...

and then the fear of dying becomes a good reason for any fight.

So, when the doctors call the medicines "arms against cancer" we understand that they need some kind of battle-field in which to activate their weapons.

Often this system seems to work because, in reality, it is life itself that is strong and we need to ask our selves to what extent these "cures" can heal.

My teacher gave me an exercise suitable for me, for the moment and the situation.

I am sure that in that moment she wanted to weaken my fear.

Therefore, if there really was a fight, it was the fear that was being fought. And slowly fears weapons seemed to be less powerful against me.

In the mean time, to honour of the truth, I have to say that the oncologist had advised against chemotherapy, admitting that in my case it would have done more harm than the hypothetical good but he adamantly advised radiotherapy. As we know chemo and radiotherapy don't cure anything but it is believed that they are able to reduce the chances of a re-growth.

However concerning the hormones that were meant to induce a chemical menopause, I had never had any doubt: I would never take them.

My teacher, the doctors, my friends, my family and I thought that these therapies were useless and irreversibly harmful.

When the different viewpoints were clear in me, and they were so in a progressive way, I was able to refuse every "cure". Again my paediatrician friend had seen correctly: all that is needed is a bit of calm. I felt a lot lighter after having politely told the responsible employee of the waiting list for radiotherapy to cancel my name.

Now I could personally take care of the situation.

Certainly, I was well aware that all of this was made possible for me because the prognosis was very favourable.

Honestly I don't know how I would have acted if the cancerous cells had spread all over my body.

I find my experience very beautiful.

Psychologically you live with fear, not with the cancer, because in most cases the actual cancer is removed.

Instead it is fear, fear that kills and invades every cell of the human organism. But nobody cares for fear, cures it, nobody removes it and nobody wants to abandon it.

Ill people cannot rid themselves of fear because doctors need "patients with infinite patience" associated with immediate, blind trust and little energy to react.

To follow-up over a period of five years for women who have had breast cancer and had the cancer removed surgically may be very useful to the data base of various research centres. It may also give the patients a feeling of precariousness that, like the sword of Damocles threatens every instant of our lives.

In the next five years nobody will come and see if I am alive or dead, if I have had regressions, if I am well or not. Nobody will check if I have undergone these so called cures. Nobody will ask me how I lived during this time, short or long, in which I had no nausea, no suffering and no fears. Nobody will see that I have started to live every day with a new serenity and, in perfect health.

Nobody asks, nor will we be able to know, how many years of quality-life are destroyed by months of useless therapies, which are mainly acting as the defence of the good name of science.

I have already experienced the uneasiness of having an "appointment with destiny" when in November, I underwent a series of breast examinations and fortunately everything is well.

Women who have had breast cancer and who have taken part in these statistical tests are asked to undergo monthly blood tests, x-rays of every organ, examinations of any kind every year or six months for about five to ten years. Certainly the fear that a cancerous cell materialises in some part of the body and escapes every kind of test presents itself again and again.

Vice versa many women feel cared for, looked after, protected by all of the organisation and this way of being can only be good for them and indisputably contribute to their recovery.

Well then, which is the cure that really heals?

In my case, it is thanks to the support I received from my family, from my teacher and from courageous, as well competent doctors.

I think it is thanks to this all-round support that I have been able to completely entrust my self to a Higher Power, which is the real force that is able to cure everything.

This report was written in January 2007