TRAINING REPORT:
AYUR YOGA THERAPY
BY CHRISTINE KAMER DIEHL

Ayur Yoga Therapists in Training

This report describes my experience in the 2004-2007 Ayur Yoga Therapy Training held by Remo Rittiner in Zurich, Switzerland. This program was the first Yoga therapist training ever held in Switzerland.

The intense and in-depth three-year, 500-hour program was designed for Yoga teachers, Yoga practitioners, health practitioners, and therapists. The training has now been restructured to provide 300 hours of training over two years, divided into six weekend trainings and a one-week intensive course per year. In addition to that, homestudy and preparation for tests or teamwork must be done. The Ayur Yoga Therapy training is recognized by the EMR, an independent Swiss authority that assigns quality labels to therapist trainings in the area of complementary medicine.

Remo Rittiner is the founder and director of the Ayur Yoga Center in Zurich, Switzerland. Remo is a full-time Yoga teacher and therapist and an experienced Yoga practitioner. His Ayur Yoga approach is based on the Yoga tradition of T. Krishnamacharya and Ayurveda. He has studied in India with A.G. Mohan and other teachers in the Krishnamacharya lineage, such as Srim in Germany, Gary Kraftsow in Maui, Hawaii, and Mukunda Stiles in Boulder, Colorado. His wife, Dr. Asmita Rittiner, an Ayurvedic physician, is responsible for the Ayurveda training of the course.

In his course, Remo follows a holistic approach for balancing body, breath, and mind by combining Yoga, Ayurveda, and Western therapy treatments such as physiotherapy and muscle function therapy. The readings for the training and home study included Yoga: A Guide to Personal Reintegration by A.G. Mohan, Yogasutra (translated by R. Srim), Structural Yoga Therapy by Mukunda Stiles, and Yoga for Wellness by Gary Kraftsow.

The weekend courses are held at the Ayur Yoga Center in Zurich, while the intensive week is held in Weggis on the lake of Lucerne, a very harmonic and idyllic place surrounded by mountains. This location allows the participants to get away from the hectic rhythm of everyday life and fully concentrate on Yoga and the training. In addition, each participant has private meetings with Remo to discuss his or her personal Yoga development or training issues. A training class consists of roughly 15 to 20 participants, which allows both a personal teaching approach and a positive team experience.

One of the major principles Remo teaches to future Yoga therapists is to only treat clients with treatments that you have experienced yourself, and not to rely on theoretical treatments or healing results “by hearsay.” According to this learning-by-doing principle, participants consistently practice Yoga asanas and meditation and study the Yoga Sutras and philosophy in-depth.

The training program is enriched by invited speakers, including other experienced Yoga and meditation teachers and medical specialists such as osteopaths or physicians. To help participants develop practical experience as Yoga therapists, volunteer clients visit the class, and real therapy treatments are given both in class and privately within the final certification process. In addition to the countless practical exercises and case studies, there is a lively exchange of experience and know-how not only between teacher and participants, but also between the participants themselves, who all have interesting backgrounds.

During the first year, we concentrated on Yoga tradition and Ayur Yoga therapy, the use of Yoga asanas in specific therapies, traditional Yoga anatomy, observation of conditions, and muscle function therapy. Muscle function therapy can be compared to acupuncture, as the therapist finds tense muscle origins and then releases both muscular and emotional tension by pressing on the tense spots. As with all other methods, we had to test and practice this therapy on each other, which was both fun and sometimes painful. We discovered muscles we never knew we had, and woke up with aching muscles the following day!

In the second year, we focused on Ayurveda, Ayur Yoga Therapy for structural problems and chronic pain, adaptation and sequencing for specific needs and designing programs for individual clients, and muscle testing combined with anatomy and kinesiology. The third year focused on Patanjali’s Sutras, meditation and mantras, pranayama and the healing power of breathing, spiritual support within Yoga therapy, and the relationship between the Yoga therapist and client.

Both during the first and the second year, we had to pass a written exam on our practical and theoretical knowledge acquired. During the third year, we started working on our final paper of 30-50 pages. The paper focuses on Yoga therapy for a specific condition such as back pain, asthma, or other chronic conditions.

We were required to work on a long-term basis with at least one client who suffered from the chosen condition, creating individual Yoga programs for the client and observing any changes and results for the client. The therapy sessions included many of the tools we had learned, from Ayurveda to muscle testing and muscle
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function therapy. In addition to this practical therapy work with real clients, we were required to summarize our acquired Yoga therapy knowledge and deliver the classical medical background of the chosen condition, which required research and consulting medical professionals.

The final exam included creating a therapy session in front of the class for a volunteer client. We were not told in advance what kind of structural or emotional condition the client would have. This offered both a unique experience of a “real live” situation and an interesting and instructive situation for the rest of the class, as we could all learn from each case.

The Yoga therapy training involves much more theory, research, and working on case studies than Remo’s Yoga teacher training, which focuses more on the intense practice and understanding of asana. However, the individual days are structured in such a way that asana, pranayama, and meditation are almost always included. Especially during the intensive week, early morning and evening meditation take place on a daily basis, as well asana practice sessions.

One of the best experiences is probably the development one can observe of every participant and of oneself. By doing such an intense training over a longer period of time, we “live” Yoga and get in touch with both wonderful and difficult, even painful, experiences, which we learn how to handle. This is how participants prepare themselves best for a real live therapy situation, which can sometimes be difficult as well, and how they develop empathy and understanding for future clients. They experience the benefits of Yoga and Yoga therapy as well as its challenges and difficulties. Just one example of such a process is the focus on “Healing and Transformation,” in which Remo leads the class through the process of self-acceptance, self-reflection, self-healing, and self-confidence. This includes a specific meditation and vinyasa on each of the four topics, accompanied by relevant sutras of Patanjali.

I can only recommend this training to anyone who is interested and willing to acquire a comprehensive and in-depth Yoga therapy know-how, to develop the ability to work with and help clients, and to look into oneself. In other words: to live the Yoga spirit.

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For more information visit www.ayuryoga.ch. YTIP interviewed Ayur Yoga founder Remo Rittiner in the August 2006 issue. IAYT members can access that interview online at: http://iayt.org/publications_Vx2/ytip/aug06/Rittiner0806.pdf. YTIP publishes training reports to help members understand the approaches of various Yoga therapist training programs. If you have recently completed a training and would like to write about it, contact editor@iayt.org. Previous training reports are available to IAYT members on iayt.org in the YTIP archives.

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