

Mia Goldstein / where Yoga and Craniosacral therapy meet.

I am forever fascinated by how the following of subtle yoga instructions enables the body to organize itself as it seeks its steady and comfortable posture within its space.

Through many years of teaching and practicing yoga, and through the study and practice of craniosacral therapy, I have discovered similarities shared by the principles of the Vijnana Yoga method and the Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy approach to the concept of health and healing.

The Vijnana Yoga method aims towards our sensing of a middle place within the body. As we bring our attention to the sensations felt when our limbs touch the ground, the mind becomes quiet while the body, feeling supported, relaxes. Subtle and spontaneous reactions rise from within and we can sense gentle inner movements organizing towards a middle place.

In the Biodynamic approach of Craniosacral Therapy, the practitioner's "conscious hand" stays steady on the patient while it supports and witnesses the process through which the body begins organizing itself to align towards its inner state of well being.

"When we understand the "middle" principle, it turns into a fulcrum" / (Orit Sen-Gupta, the heart of the practice).

In the yogic standing postures, by placing the back of our hand on the sacrum and observing this meeting place where they touch, we can feel the sacrum slowly moving on its own towards the hand, and the stomach independently starts to move towards the spine, creating a sense of our "middle" place. From here, the back becomes quiet and the upper body can easily release. Using the principle of connecting, the body stays as a unified unit throughout the full standing pose.

In the tree pose, if we imagine the foot sinking downwards, we can feel as though it is blending with the earth, and as we pay attention to the rising sensations, a re-organizing of the muscles towards a "middle" place begins, allowing the hands to lift upwards naturally from the center of the body.

Through relaxing the body, for example when lying on the stomach with the arms spread forwards: we begin to relax the arms and knees, and as we

bring our attention to the sensations felt as we imagine them sinking towards the earth, the stomach from itself moves towards the back and the limbs can be felt gathering towards a middle place in the body. Similar to this, applying the principle of rooting in downward dog pose, we enable the hands to release and sink downwards. As we observe the place where the hands touch the earth, we can suddenly notice that our shoulder is contracted, and as it releases on its own, the arm begins to elongate and a widening of the shoulder blades occur.

In yoga, when practicing gradual inhalation breathing, as we become aware of our sitting bones touching the ground, subtle sensations can be felt in each area where the suspension of breath is observed, causing a fuller and spontaneous breath to enter the body and an inner expansion is felt in the chest.

Just as the yoga practice echoes inner sensations, the “conscious hand” of the craniosacral therapist on the patient echoes a gentle and wondrous inner system residing within the body.

Craniosacral therapy relates to an “inner breath” inherent within us. It is that which causes subtle fluctuations in the body expressed through movements that are happening on their own - a gentle shifting of bones, organs, fluids and membranes, much like the way a boat undulates on the surface of the sea. On a deeper level, the force of “inner breath” causes the “breathing” of the cells and tissues, which behave in a similar way to the expanding and contracting movement of a coral in the sea.

The force of this “inner breath” also sets in motion the longitude fluctuation of the cerebral spinal fluid, creating a kind of tidal movement, like a tidal wave in the sea. Craniosacral therapy relates to a place of stillness that exists between the movement of the waves, where the body has the opportunity to find and express its inner health resources:

“The systems in the body have a few options - they assemble into a place of rest, they accumulate strength in the system as something in the body gathers together, or a release and re-organization occurs around the midline.”
(Shaily Feinberg.)

The conscious touch of the craniosacral practitioner resembles a cork on the water. It is present, but does not blend itself with the body. In the beginning the therapist's hand sinks into the skin, and then gradually moves away until it feels itself becoming one with the body; it listens and waits for the subtle movements to appear and come towards him, exposing themselves without any effort, followed and supported by a quality of an observing and present mind. Through this light conscious touch, the therapist can sense the natural inherent delay of movement of the fascia. Here it has the possibility to re-organize: the fascia can find new directions of movements and release itself from a fixed pattern.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the importance of how a daily yoga practice can allow new and healthy patterns to sink in, enforcing their memory in our body and mind. The subtle instructions that follow a quiet and observing presence can encourage the spontaneous movements from within, directing themselves towards the “middle” - where we can experience inner stability and a feeling of being safe, supported and relaxed. From here we can recharge ourselves anew, in each and every moment, and hopefully observe the changing reality from a new perspective.

Mia Goldstein is a certified teacher in the Vijnana yoga method. She completed a three- year Senior Yoga Teachers Training Course at the Wingate Institute in 2001 under the guidance of Orit Sen-Gupta. She has been teaching groups and individuals for over 20 years. From 2005 she has engaged in courses in Craniosacral therapy in the biodynamic approach with Shaily Feinberg.