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A YIN YOGA BOOK COMPARISON ON THE PURE FLOW OF THE  
BODY AND ITS ENERGIES

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# YinSights, A Journey into the Philosophy & Practice of Yin Yoga

By Bernie Clark

Read any magazine cover and drive through any city and notice the US's keen strive for health and wellness, youth and vitality. You'd think we'd mastered the essence of and commanded the intelligence of our bodies' inner and outer workings of wholeness of health like no other nation. Isn't our nation a leader: with places like world renowned Johns Hopkins for illness cure and the Stegman Clinic of Vail for ligament tears; a healthcare system that inspires the world as a model for accessibility and cleanliness (you wouldn't want to go under the knife in Hangzhou China where images of WWI blades and knives rolled out in cloth are used for surgical procedures); and the advancing technological diagnostic and robotic procedures and pharmaceuticals? Here in the West, the Wild West, you'd think that we'd have captured the market on being healthy with organic unfried, ungluten'd, dairy free, wide open spaces-livin. But, in reading these two texts, I've come to realize most Americans as a whole, my Colorado-self included, have much to learn about health.

What is health? As Bernie describes it, it's derived from the word wholeness. In this book he takes a fascinating exploration into the models of health and postulates Yin Yoga Poses in detail as a way to promote wholeness of body. For the person to remain whole or healthy, maintaining lines of communication between the mind, body and soul is the key. These lines of communication are inner connected through a chemical, electrical and magnetic flow and on what I'd call the macro/visible (skin, bones, muscle and organs) and the micro/invisible (emotions, energy, and subatomic cells) levels.

To focus on merely the two Western energy flows would seem to cut our bodies short of the communication it needs to stay healthy. The first view focuses on the chemistry of the body as far as blood is concerned (or Prana in Yoga) and the other focuses on the electricity of the body as far as the nervous system is concerned (or Chi in Chinese). What about God's greatest gift to our body, the mind and soul? Where does this get accounted for in our highly educated Western post-modern view? It would seem as if a model of health that lacks inclusion of mind and soul would form a breakdown of communication. What happens when this line of communication gets blocked over time? Illness, disease and a trip to the doctor.

If our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, how do we propose freeing ourselves from the possible threat of disease and illness? Let me introduce you to Yin Yoga, a mindful exercise of gentle stretching postures that focus on the lower half of the body. Yin Yoga has the same objectives as other yoga exercise, but targets connective tissue, ligaments, bones and joints in the lower half of the body. It's the slower, more meditative balancing practice for your strenuous muscle building mat exercise. The Bible instructs us to meditate on God's word and what better way to integrate mind, body and spirit than with a Yin Yoga stretching class.

Bernie notes that it's proven science that a massage therapist presses on your muscles and thus opens channels of communication in your body electromagnetically. You can create the same pressure on yourself in Yin Yoga by holding relaxing stretches for 3-5 minutes. By the end of class, the connective tissue of your body softens and the wrinkles blocking communication to your cells get ironed out. A typical class offers a sense of wellness that feels much like a whole body Swedish massage.

The last 1/3 of the book breaks down 24 Yin Yoga poses. He has a good photo of and verbally describes each physical posture for its benefits, contraindications, alternatives and options, communication channels/organs affected, joints affected, length for holding the pose, counter poses.

I have hope from reading this book that America is on a path to opening the boundaries of knowledge on health and wellness. As devices are being invented to measure the flow of communication in our bodies, it's showing evidence of the proof of the benefits the bodily healing that the ancient Chinese and Indian Yogis had postulated. Once we learn to integrate our typical Western medicine with ancient Eastern mindful and spiritual practices of Yin Yoga, it could prove to offer healing to our wellness deprived modern society.

## Yin Yoga Principles and Practice (10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition)

By Paul Grilley

I enjoyed reading this book but it didn't intrigue me quite as much as YinSights. Paul's approach to the book is to offer a quicker read to understanding Yin Yoga. The part that resonated with me was the breath work. How to use it, where to send it and how to engage it for it's healing powers.

My take away from the book are:

- ✦ yin is the stable, unmoving, hidden aspect of an object
- ✦ focus of the book is the "elasticity of tissue"
- ✦ when stretching, bouncing is yang and bad for joints
- ✦ exercises that focus on muscles and blood are yang, connective tissue is yin
- ✦ immediately following yin pose joints feel fragile/vulnerable but is brief and passes in minutes
- ✦ phase change – lengthening of tissue and feeling of ease leading to greater movement of chi (pleasurable and healing)
- ✦ yin postures should be held with muscles relaxed
- ✦ in a forward bend you may want to pull with your arms or engage your abs to protect the spine, but the muscles along the spine must be relaxed or the connective tissue will not be stretched
- ✦ have a yin attitude when doing yin yoga
- ✦ the power of yin is time, not effort
- ✦ yin qualities = patience, gratitude and contentment
- ✦ general advice is to breath normally
- ✦ release phase – "feel the rebound" "focus on the sensation of chi" "feel a sense of pressure dispersing away from an area and spreading thru the body" "feel energy in your spine and legs" "morph into a general feeling of peaceful calmness"
- ✦ while in a pose – "stay calm" dreadful painful spasms will not come, the rebounding wave will crescendo and then subside – a life changing experience
- ✦ guiding principles: forward bends are yin (heart muscle is relaxed, blood pressure all over the body is reduced, harmonize chi along the spine, calms and sedates you), backwards are yang (use shorter holds, do in am and cold day), yin is appropriate in warm/night

- ✦ half butterfly – “drop your chin to your chest, lean forward, and try to grasp hold of ankle or foot”
- ✦ half frog – “if your torso stays over your straight leg, the hamstrings are stretched. Middle is for groin and hip” “be careful to not strain the bent knee”
- ✦ dragon fly – “try to touch your hands on the floor in front of you”
- ✦ caterpillar – “drop your chin to your chest so the muscles and ligaments at the base of the skull are stretched”
- ✦ leg raises, crocodile are yang
- ✦ infant – “stimulates blood circulation in the abdominal area”
- ✦ saddle – set up by sitting on your feet with knees spread apart
- ✦ ½ saddle – the free leg can be positioned as one wishes
- ✦ I’d like to learn how to set up for Frog on the Wall
- ✦ In the physical dimension: sitting still, slowing the breath. In the astral dimension: controlling our responses to the emotions we experience. In the casual dimension: calmly observe our thoughts without reaction or attachment
- ✦ Non-attachment – to examine them they lose some of their emotional energy, then they become a new source of strength and wisdom: helps to develop compassion and understanding of others
- ✦ Jnana yoga – reflecting on the truths of spiritual teachings
- ✦ Why awaken vasana of muladhara – pelvis floor: it manifests as identifying with outward things of body, possessions and reputation
- ✦ Svadhithana – lower abdomen: lust anger and fear
- ✦ Manipura – upper abdomen: greed and worry
- ✦ Anahata – chest cavity: aggression and responsibility “practice gratitude and contentment” “receive other’s chi” “Control your own chi” “open this and develop a healing touch (hands and voice)”
- ✦ Vishuddha – throat: pride and grief “see the beauty in all things and recognize that all things are passing” “practice focusing on any subject for a long period to improve your memory”
- ✦ Ajna – center of brain (3<sup>rd</sup> eye)