

Balance

Structural Yoga Therapy Course

July, 2008- New York

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Helen T. Case Study on BALANCE

My focus on the subject of “balance” is in determining the primary cause of Helen’s imbalance and through Structural Yoga Therapy techniques and Ayurvedic principles, bringing her into a more stable healthy balance for life.

Balance

- structural/physical aspects and the
- emotional (kosha levels) aspect
- inter-connection between the two and
- how one affects/influences the other (their relationship)

Utilizing natural alternative methods for bringing balance:

1. Yoga elements (specifically Structural Yoga Therapy): yoga poses (asanas) and Pranayama (breathwork) to support and “align” the body
2. Meditation as opposed to and natural alternative to prescribed chemical medication (for depression)
3. Ayurvedic principles in dosha balancing, diet and lifestyle changes/guidelines to determine and regulate Rajasic and Tamasic tendencies, bringing one toward a Sattvic balanced state.

Issues related to Helen’s imbalance:

-If pain or disease manifests in the physical body because of stress placed upon it due to emotional imbalance, what role does the mind play in causing and in releasing pain? Is Helen’s imbalance a result of past injuries (structural/physical) and/or great emotional upheaval? The spiritual writer Eckhart Tolle suggests that when we identify with the mind, emotional pain (resentment, hatred, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy) can cause physical pain and disease – either recent pain or past pain still imbedded in the mind and body. Research shows that strong emotions can cause changes in the body’s biochemistry.

-Does Scoliosis cause balance instability and if so, how much effect does it have?

-Does Sarcopenia (age-related muscle loss) and/or exposure to polio virus (her 7 year old twin sister contracted the virus and Helen was also exposed) have an effect on Helen’s weak leg muscles (specifically, quadriceps and inner thighs)?

Balance employs different sensory inputs:

1. Vision
2. Vestibular system (Hearing) calcium carbonate (ear rocks)
3. Proprioceptors (Nerves at bottom of feet, in cells of muscles and joints)

Balance disorders also could be caused by other factors such as problems in inner ear, the heart, aging, infections, head injury, certain medicines, or blood circulation problems. Also contributing and/or related to this case of balance instability could be conditions such as:

- weak muscle tone in legs resulting from limited exercise throughout her life -no daily walking or workout at gym, etc., although she has regularly enjoyed swimming 3xweekly for 20 years;
- weak muscle tone as a result of being exposed to polio virus at age 8 (her identical twin contracted the polio virus which is contagious;

- weak muscle tone resulting from Sarcopenia, which is a loss of muscle tissue resulting from aging (see reference source at end);
- mis-alignment (from conditions such as scoliosis or 3 fused vertebrae in neck, surgery to remove rib, tibia fracture with no follow-up checkup or physical therapy;
- horizontal vertigo (diagnosed June 2007- small bone in inner ear dislodged) which she does not have now.

Helen has a medical report of October 2005 showing a weakened structural (skeletal/bones) frame influenced by mild osteoporosis (femoral neck), disc fusion (C4-C5) and arthritis. Her bone mineral density test was normal for a woman her age; however there is a mal-alignment of the cervical spine with reversal of the cervical Lordosis. The C4-C5 disc fusion, according to the report, is due to long-standing degenerative disease on a partially congenital basis. There is also severe disc height loss at C4-C6 and multilevel facet arthritis (information taken from medical reports of 2005).

Helen has no immediate physical pain, and is not aware of any significant symptoms, except frustration, resulting from her difficulty with balance. When we initially began our private weekly yoga sessions 3 years ago, Helen was acutely aware of how difficult it was for her to do many basic yoga poses including maintaining balance in Table or movements bringing the foot forward (on hands & knees on floor) into Lunge position. She struggled to maintain stability in Lunge, could not balance, toppling over.

She could not walk forward from Down Dog pose into a forward standing bend (Uttanasana). Helen was aware that, on a daily basis, she was not confident in walking up and down stairs with packages or purse on her arm or shoulder. She felt secure holding onto a railing, putting down what she was carrying in order to maneuver the steps. Her goal was to get back to her “normal” self. Our goal was to determine what causes her imbalance, strengthen that which is weak and bring the body, mind and spirit into harmony. She is more balanced in her upper body, has strong arms, shoulders and torso from swimming for twenty years. She has 3 fused neck vertebrae and arthritis in her neck which her doctor diagnosed. As a result, the main focus of our SYT sessions and this case study are with the lower body (hips, sacroiliac joint, legs and spine).

Intake session: (over 3 sessions –March 20, 27 & April 3)

Helen is 71 years of age. Her health is very good and she has an excellent diet including organic fruits, vegetables, green tea for antioxidants, not many dairy products, lots of Tempeh and Nori, which is a seaweed and an excellent source of protein.

She lives alone with a recently adopted older cat in a coop she owns in Westchester, NY.

Helen has been divorced for 20 years, with two grown daughters: one is 34 yr. old, single, a former magazine editor living in NYC- her older daughter is 40 years old, living in California, a practicing plastic surgeon, who was recently diagnosed with Polycystic kidney disease which is devastating news to Helen.

Helen's long-standing and current job is as an Art teacher 3 days a week at an inner-city school in the Bronx –her stress is due to the commute-she has a wonderful respectful and learning (mutual) relationship with the 14 to 17 years olds she teaches.

Body reading: over 4 sessions: March 27, April 3, 10 & 17

Height: 4'10"

Slight small frame –she has noticed and medical reports show, she has lost some of her original height

She has course gray hair she cuts herself, regularly receiving compliments

Helen's facial skin is pale translucent, clean and fine textured, with minimal wrinkles.

She has broad shoulders and strong well-developed arm muscles (from years of swimming) although skin on arms is not firm

She has an erect posture, tends to stand with feet narrower than hip-width and feet slightly turned out

Helen's hips are not evenly level with her right hip higher

She has Scoliosis, an 8 degree right lumbar curve (measured using scoliometer)

Her pelvis tends to tuck under making her lumbar and sacrum area flattened, with a diminished derriere and insignificant lumbar curve

The skin on her legs is not firm and she tends toward varicose veins as well as a permanent fungal ailment of toes and overall dry skin on legs and feet

Eyes are grayish blue in color and intelligent, focused and clear

Her lips are prominent and nicely shaped. She always wears lipstick, which complements her facial features, giving her a stylish and polished look and adds to a strong first impression.

In my case study on Balance, the balance issue we are also working on involves balancing Helen's emotional state. Yoga and Structural Yoga Therapy in particular works with the whole individual, the body and mind and Spirit. Because she has had a series of serious traumas and tragedies in her life and a tumultuous family background, we are also working to balance and support her emotional health. Structural Yoga Therapy work also incorporates Ayurvedic principles in balancing the whole person, which includes working on the Five Kosha levels or "sheaths". This paper will also include our work in this area.

Some of Helen's emotional stress and imbalance are a result of:

A history of father sexual abuse/incest when she was 7 years old

Two marriages, one lasting 1 ½ years when she was 23, the second after 22 years ending in divorce

One of her three children, a schizophrenic son committed suicide at age 35

Her identical sister, who had polio, committed suicide at 39, leaving 2 small sons & a husband

Body Reading and Physical Assessment:

Breathing – during our yoga sessions, Helen tends to be overly concerned & dramatic with her breathing –noisy inhale and incomplete exhale, and tends to bring shoulders up around ears with inhale. She is not sure when to breath in and out while practicing yoga poses.

Her right and left hips are uneven, right being elevated

After jumping up & down, she landed with feet apart 2” (too narrow stance)

Wide shoulders, with Left shoulder raised 1 ½ ”– as a result possibly of having a rib on the left side removed surgically

Head slightly turns to left – and body tilts to left

Left arm approx. 2” from side body with hand 2” turned slightly out.

Right leg turns out (hip to right)

Side view: no curve in lower back

Slight rounding of shoulders inward

Buttocks/tailbone tucked under, sacral area flattened and tilting of pelvis forward

Scoliosis, extreme curve to Right lumbar area (using Scoliometer, 8 degree curve)

SI joint: initially at first reading, there was no movement in Right or Left

After 2nd reading of Sacroiliac stability exercise, Right did not move, Left moved down

Range of Motion Assessments							
Joint Action	ROM	4/17,22		6-12		7-28	
		Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
KNEE							
Extension	0°/180°						
Flexion (Supine)	150°	124	130	130	140	132	141
HIP							
Flexion (Bent Knee)	135°	122	126	124	126	128	130
Flexion (Straight-Leg Raise)	90°	75	80	80	85	82	87
Flexors-quad/psoas restriction	NSS						
External Rotation (Supine)	45°-60°	30	35	33	38	37	40
Internal Rotation (Supine)	35°	20	25	22	26	25	31
External Rotation (Prone)	45°-60°	32	38	34	40	37	42
Internal Rotation (Prone)	35°	25	30	26	32	28	32
Adduction (Side Lying)	30°-40°	20	25	24	28	26	28
Abduction (Side Lying)	45°	33	38	34	38	37	41

Muscle Testing Assessments						
Joint Action	April 24	April 24	June 19	June 19	July 28	July 28
	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5	Left, 1-5	Right, 1-5
KNEE						
Extension	3	4	3	4	4	4
Flexion	3	4	3	4	4.5	4.5
HIP						
Hip Flexors & Abs (Supine)	2	3	2	3	3	4
Trunk Flexion (Supine)	4	4	4	4	4	4
Hip Flexors - Bent Knee (Supine)	2	3	2.5	3	3	4
Iliopsoas Isolation (Supine)	1	2	2.5	3	3	4
Sartorius Isolation (Supine)	1	1	2	2	3	4
Abduction (Side Lying)	2	3-4	3	4	3.5	4
Adduction (Side Lying)	2	2.5	2.5	3.5	3	3.5
Gluteus Maximus Isolation (Prone)	1	1	1.5	2	3.5	3.5
External Rotation (Prone)	2	3-4	2-3	3-4	3-4	4
Internal Rotation (Prone)	1	2	2	3	2-3	3-4

Summary of findings

Muscles that are tight	Muscles that are weak	Muscles that need release
Hamstrings, gluteus minimus, gluteus medius, hip abductors/flexors	Hip flexors, Sartorius, rectus femoris, Psoas, Quadriceps, TFL, Adductors, Gluteus maximus	Hamstrings, Gluteus Medius and Gluteus Minimus

Observations from ROM & MT & palpation:

Hamstrings are extremely tight, hard and cord-like. The adductor and quadricep muscles are extremely weak. The gluteus maximus is weak and gluteus medius is tight. The left leg is overall much weaker than right and right hip tighter (SI stability exercise)

The psoas muscles on either side of the body are the main flexors of the thigh. They are located along the vertebral column and in addition to initiating flexion of the thigh muscle, they form a structural foundation, fundamental during sitting in balancing the torso. In standing, the iliopsoas counteracts the tendency of the torso to fall behind the line of gravity, in back of the hip joints. Well-toned psoas muscles align the lower limbs with the torso, free the spine, and aid in healthy balance. In Helen's case, the psoas and the sartorius are both substantially weak; the adductors and hip flexors are weak, the quadriceps and gluteus maximus/medius are weak and the hamstrings extremely tight.

Physical assessment involving Helen's past health history:

Medical history/ current physicians:

General medical practitioner

Gynecologist

Wellness doctor every six months for blood test, stress test – recommends MRI re: corroded artery test

Psychiatrist (known 10 years) every 2-3 months prescribes mild anti-depressant (Effexor) because she naturally lacks enough Serotonin (which is a relaxing hormone). She has mentioned she would like yoga to be a mellowing factor in her life so she can get off the Effexor.

Neck- approximately ten years ago, when she was 61 years of age, she had an x-ray which showed 3 vertebrae fused in neck because of aging (doctor's diagnosis) Two years ago she felt her arm tingling & had MRI of head and neck, which showed nothing significant.

Also, two years ago, at age 69, she fell out of bed & chin hit the ground pulling her head back. Again the CT scan showed nothing significant.

At that time, during yoga sessions, she proceeded with restrictions and modifications related to neck movement coming in and out of poses.

Lower Left arm- at age 40, the nerve center on her lower left arm showed a benign tumor which was removed by cardio-thoracic surgeon

Left Breast- at age 29, she had surgery on her left breast, as a result of a benign Adenoma (walnut sized) being removed as well as upper left lung and one rib; this had appeared on an x-ray four years earlier but she did nothing at that time.

Her **right** breast showed an inflamed lymph node, which was removed, at age 42

Note: One theory is that the upper left lung and rib removal cause a lumbar curvature of the spine (compensation regarding postural change and therefore, affect her balance)?

Lower right femur – age 50, had on the wrong shoes (high wedge heel), not holding onto banister, was running down steps & fell forward, causing a **hairline fracture break** in right lower femur bone, no follow-up or physical therapy after.

Helen had no knowledge of scoliosis until, at age 50, her doctor noticed it. It is not a source of concern or pain for her.

Note: How much is the broken R femur and/or scoliosis related to balance?

Breathing: not sure when to breathe in or out during asana practice.

Forced/artificial breathing when inhaling (sipping, not slow natural intake which results in holding breath (anxiety) and not completely exhaling all air out of lungs (being able to completely relax)

Swimming – Helen swims 3x week which helps joints and lung capacity, although this does not and did not seem to strengthen her leg (quadriceps) muscle tone.

Helen notices and is concerned with tiredness and lack of stamina in her legs going up stairs, and during certain asana practice, i.e., Down Dog and walking forward from Downward Facing Dog into Uttanasana (Forward Bend).

Ayurvedic Assessment:

Helen's is primarily a **Vata imbalance**: this is according to the amount of comfortable flexibility in the body (and mind). She has difficulty sitting in a

comfortable seated yoga posture and tends to be rigid and stiff in the joints (also a Vata imbalance). Anxiety is the main Vata psychological disorder: a feeling of ungrounded-ness caused by a lack of earth and water in the system. It follows from fear and uncertainty and usually goes along with low Ojas. Ojas energy is a Kapha attribute. The home of Ojas is the heart. Physically, Helen has a slight heart murmur but her doctor determined she has a very strong heartbeat. This is a Kapha quality of being firm and stable. She has a big heart, very loving, kind nature. Kapha dosha denotes strength and structure, two positive characteristics of Helen. On the side of imbalance is her tendency to have opinions and, as a result of low Ojas, Ashwagandha is recommended. This is an Indian herb recommended to be taken for Vata type anxiety, which is a result of excessive nervous activity, too much thinking and worrying which Helen is prone to.

Pitta imbalance: Helen tends to be critical and competitive (with herself and others) and judgmental. She has arthritis, which is a **Pitta imbalance** (inflammation – excessive heat in body) but also possesses good Pitta characteristics such as discernment and determination, enthusiasm and vitality. Most Pitta type anxiety occurs from an unwillingness to let go and wanting to control. To balance Pitta anxiety, flower fragrances such as rose or jasmine can settle the heart. Pitta heat can be diminished by drinking cooling water and practicing Sitali (cooling breath).

Basic Ayurvedic considerations and recommendations:

Regular Sesame oil (recommended for Vata) massages (particularly on dry legs and feet) to revitalize and tone tired legs and poor circulation, as well as nurturing/pampering/soothing effect to moisturize and soften skin and ground/bring Prana home to stabilize Vata tendencies

Drink more water to hydrate inside as well as outside

Incorporate ghee into diet to lubricate joints, to stoke digestive fire (Agni) and aid spiritual fire (Tapas) which is a burning away of that which is not pure or useful, in Helen's case, negative thought patterns including regret over past and anxiety over future. The fundamental idea is to stay present which reduces unwanted thoughts. Take time for meditative walks in nature, which clear the mind, build stamina via cardio-vascular exercise (walking mindfully improves balance and awareness) as well as strengthening leg muscle, promoting better posture, building confidence.

Appropriate meditation for Vata types are: visualization or mantra to stabilize a hypersensitive and hyperactive mind. Harnessing their abundant mental energy during meditation can counteract a Vata tendency to become ungrounded, lost in their thoughts, which disturbs Prana. Alternative nostril breathing is Vata balancing.

Kosha levels (Emotional) assessment:

Physical -Annamaya kosha – We are what we eat, literally. This is the outermost and physical level of the koshas – all physical aspects of life come and go just as food being consumed is used as nourishment and that which is not needed is discarded. Helen has always had good eating habits but could benefit from other forms of “nourishment” such as massage, a sensory stimulation which improves circulation and releases tight muscles, enrichment activities such as music

concerts, theater, walks in nature and stimulating intelligent conversation with like-minded people which fosters a sense of sharing and community.

Energy –Pranamaya kosha - Helen has a vital Prana (energy) that is restricted, hidden behind many layers of conditioned responses and suppressed anger, resulting from emotional conflicts surrounding the trauma in her life. Because she is very diligent and determined (needing to take control), she draws the breath in forcefully and aggressively, not calmly or quietly. As a result, she is not able to exhale completely, thereby retaining some air inside and never quite “letting go” or relaxing deeply in order to become grounded (bringing Prana home, balancing Vata tendencies).

Mental –Manamaya kosha - Helen has a strong, intelligent and creative mind (see Vijnanamaya kosha) but because of events in her life, she tends to be focused on what others are or are not doing. She is talkative and feels compelled to try to rationalize and intellectualize things through.

Wisdom – Vijnanamaya kosha - Helen possesses an inherent sense of wisdom underneath all the conditioning and intellectual processing and she has a very strong sense of Self. Unfortunately when this I-am-ness gets caught up with memories, and clouded over by mental chatter, it loses its positive strength.

Bliss – Anandamaya kosha -This kosha is the most inner of all the koshas. This kosha, the eternal center of consciousness, is the opposite reality from that of the mind. It is beyond the mind, beyond reason or stimulus that brings about a happy mental reaction. It is simply being; pure joy and bliss.

SYT is for CHRONIC pain not acute- In Helen’s case, her pain is reoccurring mental anguish from constant dialogues in her head about what should have/could have been; she wishes things in the past would have been different. These are things she wanted to control and could not. She feels her life was wasted. Because she had a psychotherapist to explore these concepts with, I felt comfortable hearing her summary of the mental pain.

Yoga has helped bring things into “balance” – she is beginning to not blame herself or others. She is more accepting, not as frustrated and angry and recognizes she is sometimes being judgmental in her assessment of people or situations. This recognition or discernment ability shows her balancing Pitta.

REGRET (over what she could have been). Helen’s long-time psychotherapist had told her she had a wasted life. This negative statement had such an impact on her, that she, to this day, believes this to be true. Only since moving toward a more Sattvic state through her yoga practice has she come to realize her self-worth and gain self-esteem. Because of a forced early marriage, a controlling and unloving mother and incestuous father’s love (guilt he placed on her saying he was an old man), she had fear as a child that if she did not do what he wanted, he would have a heart attack and she would be the cause of his death.

Guilt – when her mother was dying Helen could not have her mother visit because of extreme stress with her son who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. The next day her mother died. She felt she was not there when her parents needed her. We discussed how they could not help it; to show compassion for them. You cannot change the past but see it as a test and learn from the experience.

Her words: "Compassion God did not give – but strength of character and love he gave me (to survive this in life)".

Guilt - Helen felt her **twin sister** was prettier, and when she contracted polio at age 7, Helen was frustrated by her slowness when they walked to school, she felt sorry for her that she had to wear brace and was ostracized by other school children. Although her family was supportive and protective of her sister, she was sent away for one year (believing it to be contagious). Both had developed sore throats (mosquito bites at summer home), but her sister's did not go away. Helen related that she sucked her thumb until 9 years old because she was frustrated – she has had many frustrations in her life but because of her yoga practice, her attitude has changed to one of more patience and knowing: "everything works out well over time, NOTHING is overcome in one day".

Jealousy – During numerous sessions, Helen has discussed the conflicts she's having relating to her long-time friends who she feels have "supposedly" perfect lives; being married, children, homes, and she has none of that. From the beginning of our Structural Yoga Therapy sessions, she became aware of her need to criticize others or compare what others (teachers, friends) are doing or NOT doing. She has become more Sattvic as she realizes everyone is at different stages or learning levels in their life and as you think so you become and therefore, you attract that to you, which is needed. Over time she realizes she has changed and grown through her yoga and spiritual practice and as a result, less critical of herself and others.

She also came to the realization that she gave her daughters a stable home life despite a chaotic family life and upbringing. She feels reassured she is a good mother knowing they acknowledge that she did not abandon them like their father did & did her best with Adam during those difficult times they all experienced. She is a good mother and should be proud of that. Her daughters are intelligent and creative and love her very much.

DEPRESSION: Her statement "my depression is more than just emotional, it's physical" (she was diagnosed with not enough of the hormone Serotonin) She refers to her depression as a Black Dog (Hemingway's term)-and feels her dysfunction is because of her (in her words)

1. hideous past
2. true artistic nature (heightened sensitivity)

"I walk a thin line –I have to work harder to maintain stability"

Helen believes "Yoga will mellow me enough to not take medicine".

Some insights over the last couple of sessions: path to Samadhi

"I love to love". "She (her newly adopted cat) reflects everything I give her comes back to me "(love)

"Love others as you love yourself"

In response to the question: how do you sabotage your own best intentions?

Helen agreed she finds it hard to focus on her achievements and to be proud of her accomplishments. This realization or new point of view (Darshan, to see something that is unknown) is a step in eliminating fear and anxiety in order to

clear the space in the mind and body for building self-esteem in order to become more balanced, your true Sattvic, pure natural state.

In response to the question: how do you pamper yourself?

Helen agreed she could do more but felt guilty indulging herself. Recently her daughter gave her a spa certificate she was considering using. She was not enthusiastic in incorporating specific Vata recommendations such as warm sesame oil massage, (particularly on feet before bed, to help promote restful sleep)

General Recommendations for loss of tone and flexibility:

SI stability exercise: Fundamental and the key to opening up hip/joint area which tends to be locked in or “stuck”, great for improving flexibility in this area; the movement with this isolation exercise results in beginning to “feel”, become aware of sensations as well as concentration on and coordination of breath with movement. Once this area is free and stabilized, balance is improved.

Joint Freeing Series: focusing on Numbers 4 through 8 (#7 Sunbird with variations very effective)

Strengthen and tone quadriceps and inner thighs, improves joint flexibility

Release tight hip flexors for flexibility

Stretch spine for Scoliosis:

Wall Hang and

Mukunda’s Scoliosis Sampler for 24 poses:

Smiley face **Parsvottonasana:** since Helen has a right Lumbar curve, which is not the norm, (most Lumbar curves are left) we stepped forward beginning with the right leg.

Combined with **Navasana** which we have always practiced for balance,

Camel and standing **Warrior II, both with pelvic tilt** (isolating pelvic movement much like SI mobility exercise)

*Both these poses strengthen the gluteus medius and maximum and stretch the adductors

Down Dog with bent knees, pelvic tilt, not moving shoulders, repeat 10x

Rolling Bridge, repeat as long as not tired. Stay focused and relaxed

Other recommended poses include:

Camel to tone & release tight quadriceps, loosen tight hamstrings-do not push –5x

Chair pose (tone adductors and quadriceps) builds stamina in legs –squats- 10x

Standing (each leg) kicks to side - tone inner thighs and open hip flexors (balance on one leg, do not collapse in standing leg, reach crown of head upward) 10 ea.leg

Warrior I and II (do not tuck butt under, instead just “sit down” in each pose (do each separately 5x slowly, then repeat going into one and then the other 5x)

Tree for opening hips, (keep hands on hips) and improving balance and regulating gentle breathing (this will come later as Tree is a challenging pose for most people)

Cobra, Locust, Bridge, engage, strengthen gluts, lengthen spine

JanuSirsasana (Head to Knee pose) and seated and standing Forward Bend (to lengthen spine, release hip flexors, tone psoas, sartorius, adductors, quadriceps)

April 3:

Began SI test & evaluation:

No movement in either SI joint, measured 8 degrees Scoliosis: lumbar curve right

April 10: continue Intake information and begin measuring ROM, 2nd SI test & monitored, need to slow down to feel (focus w/breathing):

Recommend as homework 3x week-

Continue with Apanasana for release, cat/dog back (pelvic tilt) initially jerking movement, need to slow down, smooth out with meditative slow easy breathing – work on bringing awareness to this area to feel and release tight hips

Added Boat (for core stability & balance with smooth easy breathing –notice & focus on BREATH) relax toes, begin rhythmic inhale legs out, exhale legs in –10x slowly

Added Sunbird for toning, 5x each side

Viparita Karani – for tired legs, length spine (scoliosis) & quiet mind.

End with Savasana (lavender eye pillow) for calming aromatherapy & pressure to relax eyes, mind, and body...

Suggestions: use warm sesame (good for balancing Vata) oil foot soaks & massage to help restore restful sleep

Walk in nature, fresh air (bring Prana home & quiet mind)

April 17 continued ROM testing

Structural observations: during previous week and homework of last session

Insists on practicing Gate pose to check stability/balance; H. noticed greater stability & easier to do after JFS (in thighs, groin, hip area)

Made note that hips & lower back hurt from Apanasana and Sunbird - assessed that she is weak in this area and not used to doing this movement.

Read her the Wall Hang instructions as she did them, then I showed her myself doing them, she'll practice in the evening when she comes home to de-stress.

On becoming Sattvic: Helen's insights: (physical and mental) "One cannot attack yoga, must move into it slowly"

"Balance is dependent on: repetition day-to-day & NOT TOO MUCH in one day and totally relaxing (slowly)". Helen has come to this realization regarding this fundamental yoga philosophy: This is Patanjali's yogic teaching: relax the effort. This practice in daily life carries over and we can begin to relax whenever we feel ourselves tense up.

Helen feels guilt for rejecting parents at end of their lives-but not as angry now, feels it is resolved. She visits psychiatrist every 3 months (Mt. Sinai-) to discuss things upsetting –prescribed 1 yr. ago to present –Effexor every night .75 ml. And ½ pill Trazzadone –sleep aide)

Homework & Recommendations: hold off on all standing balancing poses and Gate– slow everything down and keep bringing focus back to breath (to balance

Rajastic nature and bring in and stabilize Prana, which grounds Vata) –more emphasis on “feeling” and focused awareness. JFS & SI stabilization exercise-

April 24 begin Muscle testing –

Structural observations:

In general, weight and balance on right leg is easier, feels more stable

She reports she’s been sitting too much and notices more lower back strain

Monitored her SI exercise and noted her observations were that the right hip feels tighter on the second part of SI stability exercise (where you move one hip up and over to turn to side).

SI test: both SI joints move down now (5th session)

On becoming Sattvic: Helen’s insights (physical and mental)

“The more I do this (SI exercise) I see all that all poses working together open up and help each other” –this statement shows Helen is moving toward balance

Trunk flexion Muscle test- abdominal muscles are strong and core strength is generally good, but need to work more on coordinating breath work with movement (building core strength by engaging the abdominals creating more stability).

Asanas: Supta Baddha Konasana –with bolster & blanket for gentle backbend helping open up the lungs, side body (intercostals and back ribs), open the heart and feel lungs breathing, subtle movement of body like waves of the ocean. Helen has a strong creative imagination and using her mind in this visual way visuals helps build awareness and promotes relaxation. Yoga Nidra also is another technique to be used to relax. Also lying in bed with pillows under knees to gently allow hips to open and lengthen lower spine aides in relaxation.

Homework & Recommendations – continue SI stability exercise 3x weekly or more if she has time -

May 1 and May 8 - continued Muscle Testing

Progress report (from last session): improvement in slowing down: tuning in to awareness and feeling sensations in that area; beginning to focus more with breath during SI stability exercises (on her own as 3x weekly homework) usually once in the evening when she comes home to de-stress.

Structural observations during previous week and practice/homework:

During SI exercise: with Right leg back, she felt right hip “stressed, stretched and tender”.

Lifting left hip was much harder, she admitted not being focused or relaxed and not flowing.

Asanas: Apanasana (Wind-relieving pose), Supta Baddha Konasana with blanet for gentle opening backbend, Chair pose, Downward Facing Dog, Child’s pose to open hips, relax mind and focus on slowing breathing, relax tension in face (jaw, eyes and mouth) soften shoulders down. Walk forward while breathing in (slow down), caution with position of neck. Neck remains neutral because of previous

injury and her doctor's recommendation. Camel for gentle backbend, Rolling Bridge with Joint Freeing Series, and Palm Tree Vinyasa.

Homework & Recommendations: 3x SI stability exercise, continue JFS especially #7 Sunbird to strengthen gluts in particular for stability. Also practice JFS: #3, 4, 6 and 8 (10x each side)

May 15

Progress report:

Enthusiastic about the results she's having with SI stability exercise.

I read her the Wall Hang instructions as she did them, then she watched as I did them. I recommended Wall Hang once in the evening when she comes home to de-stress, de-compress the spine (relieve pressure from her scoliosis)

Asanas: Chair pose, Down Dog, into long Child's Pose w/arms in front, inhale & lift up onto knees, (engage/strengthen abdominal muscles), stabilizing core, improve balance, come up into Camel. Then down into Cat back w/right hand forward, etc.

Homework & Recommendations: continue with JFS, SI stabilization exercise, and Sunbird w/ fire hydrant version for Adductors (10x each side), begin and end with Apanasana (to free and open hip flexors, lengthen spine (scoliosis) and decompress lower lumbar spine.

May 22 – practiced Wall Hang instructions as I read them to make sure she was going down and coming up correctly. Practice once in the evening when she comes home to de-stress. Then Viparita Karani (legs up the wall) to further lengthen spine, bring shoulders down on exhale and let hips open naturally, also quiet mind, focus on breathing. End in Savasana or Yoga Nidra (if time, scan body using tense & release technique)

Asanas: Continuation of last week's poses include: Boat pose with focus on relaxed breathing, noticeably unstable & feet tensed –relax!

Homework & Recommendations: incorporated beginning practice of Ujjai breath, for relaxing (when driving car to de-stress –I find this works for me and Helen has a great deal of stress driving and commuting to her teaching job.

-continue with JFS and SI stability exercise every day, as long as not fatigued

May 29 Progress report:

Bridge/pelvic tilt: Much improvement with connecting breath (intake of prana) with movement of pelvis. This was first incorporated into our earlier sessions as a way to focus on breathing the correct way (slow and mindfully, not dynamic BIG inhale with holding & then NOT letting all breath out). Since then, we've added lifting the hips higher to bring more equal, level balance to stabilize pelvic region (pelvic tilt) to isolate and bring awareness to hip openness, fluid movement to slow down & FEEL what is happening, awareness of integrating and strengthening inner thighs (which are weak), strengthening quadriceps (which are also weak) and building core strength for stability.

Observations: some concern with neck –10 years ago diagnosed with 3 bones in neck fused –head feels heavy like bones are not strong or off center

Notices: neck fragility, weak thighs and tight hamstrings

On Wall Hang: slightly dizzy coming up (this does not occur at home -?)

Note: Did not take blood pressure medicine today (could be the reason) and could not remember if eyes were open – noticed legs were not as tired. She noticed feeling lighter not heavy to the ground, legs felt better moving in sockets, easier to walk, not a strain to walk.

On becoming Sattvic

Will not pressure herself any more (like 6 months ago) is doing less, “if you don’t do it today, you can do it tomorrow”

Stress with daughters: she wonders when will they did NOT have problems. My advice was: it’s your reaction, how you deal with stress that is troubling you, therefore, stay focused in present –accept what you can not change but do your best. you cannot foresee the future, don’t waste energy worrying about something you don’t know.

Read her mindfulness meditation inspirational insights: –that the Path is the Goal--- slowly the situation (of those incompatible relationships draining her) will resolve (remove) themselves naturally as she becomes more Sattvic- recommended continued reading of Dalai Lama for inspiration and Sutras when she has time- Recommend

Diet: made hot vegetable broth w/whole wheat pita bread & raw organic almonds
Good warm nourishing, nurturing food, grounding & wholesome for balancing Vata. She is very interested in chart for which foods are alkaline/acidic. She does not seem to be interested in adding Ghee to her diet (recommended for lubricating joints, building Ojas, and satisfying soothing quality) she says it is too rich.

Structural Physical Improvements: able to stand on one leg with more stability & bring knee up lower than hip level –easier and longer length of time. Left leg still needs improvement she noticed but is overall pleased with her progress.

Asanas: Bridge with block pressing between knees to stabilize & strength inner thighs, continue as often as possible, as long as not tired or losing focus. Practicing Rolling Bridge strengthens the gluteus maximus, stretches the hip flexors and establishes core strength. Coordinating gentle breath leading into and out of (inhale up/exhale down) reinforces breath awareness and becomes a moving meditation.

Rolling up & down using exhale to push forward, promotes endurance & stimulates Tamasic condition into more Rajasic for balancing toward Sattvic state

Boat to Balance –MUCH improved. Helen is enthusiastic about her progress!

Camel – with hands on hips or palms down on sacrum, a gentle backbend that opens up lungs, heart and intercostal muscles and side ribs. Camel strengthens the gluteus maximus, tones the quadriceps and front body (as long as practiced with lumbar spine lengthening to relieve compression from scoliosis). Camel also

stretches the sartorius and psoas, both of which are tight in Helen's case. Talked about breath first, bring Prana into body & empty out again like waves of ocean

Homework & Recommendations: continue with Wall Hang for de-stressing, balance activity of mind, lengthen spine, inversion bringing fresh blood to brain
Note: (some concern, questions for Mukunda re: neck & dizziness coming up)
Will make spa appointment (daughter gave her coupon) to pamper herself
I recommend reading the Sutras while she is not teaching during the summer

Scoliosis: we have always incorporated Supta Baddha Konasana w/small blanket to elevate chest for gentle backbend to lengthen spine and create space along vertebrae in a case of scoliosis. Locus pose is also good for strengthening erector spinae muscles, supporting spinal column. We began spine-lengthening asanas (from Mukunda's Scoliosis Sampler for 24 poses): Warrior I & Parsvotanasana against wall.

Warrior poses tone the gluteus maximus and reinforce sacroiliac stability. This is a challenging pose regarding balance particularly when going into and out of each Warrior (I and II). Since we have always practiced both these standing Warriors, they are not as difficult for Helen but still, we limit the amount in these later SYT sessions so she is not overwhelmed or straining. Relax the effort.. Feel stability and anchor into the earth with feet and stretch crown of head toward sky to lengthen spine –feeling of spaciousness, lightness not heavy or stagnant energy.

Relax into Corpse pose with deep sigh exhaled through mouth occasionally to relax further. Savasana calms both Vata and Pitta.

June 5, 2008

Note: this session was discussion only, no physical/asana/structural work: Helen is working through some deep-seated emotions she has carried all these years. She made the remark she feels "lighter" –not just her legs when she walks but the burdens she has been carrying are in the process of being lifted.

This Sadhana, Sutra Chapter II, is a Kriya Yoga, a purification necessary for awareness needed for immersion into Spirit. This Sutra Chapter contains advice on the nature of the mind and how to relieve suffering, how to live a yogic lifestyle.

A couple of issues came up from before: her psychologist at the time had told her "You've had a wasted life" (he is dead now but she claims he "saved her life"). She realizes now what a detrimental negative thing to say to her because she remembers that even now and will the rest of her life. How powerful words are!

Most of our discussion this session focused on the fact that Helen was highly upset that her friend remarked that she looked "frail". Helen took this as a condescending remark implying that she needed to be taken care of. "Frail is more than physical, it's an illusion about someone. I'm not frail. When Helen was/is depressed she does not want to listen. Why? She couldn't handle it –totally undeveloped, not aware of who she is.

My response: you don't owe them anything. Now is Now.

Observations during previous week/ homework/last session: continue with JFS, especially Sunbird with variations for strengthening adductors, hip flexors, gluts, psoas and sartorius muscles. Helen notices strain or tiredness after doing this. This is a sign of working weak muscles that have not been used for a long time.

Structural Physical Improvements: She is proud to be able to stand longer on standing leg while demonstrating progress from SI stability exercises. She possesses enthusiasm and self discipline which are both Pitta tendencies. Factors contributing to her Pitta imbalance would be her frustration and impatience directed at herself when she cannot “perfect” the pose.

Asanas: Chair with block, standing on one leg and leg lifts to side works to strengthen the inner thighs/adductors, open hip flexors and improve balance
Homework & recommendations: continue her recommended JFS particularly #7 Sunbird with fire hydrant to strengthen gluteus maximum, hip extensors, psoas (practice with grace, do not fatigue). Hip flexion strengthens the sartorius and hip extension strengthens the gluteus maximus.

June 12, 2008

On becoming Sattvic: Helen’s insights: This session was a 2 hour discussion on different insights and how her view has changed. This is due to Helen moving toward a more Sattvic -balanced- state. Vata balanced is serenity. A Vata attitude is to seek balance.

Some aspects of the discussion:

Since last week’s discussion, she related that she doesn’t HATE her parents now but doesn’t LIKE them.

She comments that: “Water seeks its level: meaning –ordinary people don’t appreciate me. Why should I expect them to appreciate who I am- they haven’t reached my level.”

We discussed her judgmental attitude & feelings of superiority.

Her insight: when you feel good about who you are, you’re far less judgmental, not competing with others. This statement reveals she is moving toward Samadhi enlightenment. Other insights: “When power comes with yoga, when you feel in control of your body, you feel better about yourself, being able to deal with things. I don’t have to please everybody. Have confidence in my goodness and morality, how I treat people and a sense of ethics.”

“The movement of the core is an essential element of balance.”

“I have more energy with less sleep”.

“Balance has to be in your head too –the mind is integrating –balance can be affected if you’re running around and stressed; the mental state has to be calm”.

Recommendations: Mention READING SUTRAS to put into perspective SYT work: Resolved emotions regarding Judy: don’t have to put others down to make yourself look good-

Change in attitude from previous session re: her friend calling her frail. This would seem to stem from H’s concern about feelings of aging: that she is “old & feeble”-

she read excerpts from Deepak Chopra's book on Aging (see Resource list at end of paper)

Coincidentally Helen saw a newspaper photo of Paul Newman, who she always admired, in a newspaper headline that read: "Always Elegant but FRAIL" – her realization that: "God is on my side and telling me to believe in myself and feelings help guide me".

Called Judy to defend herself against words "fragile & frail" (not positive terms). but Helen did not want to "upset" Judy (knowing she is emotionally fragile: her only "tragedy was coping when her mother died peacefully in her sleep at 96 – COMPARED to Helen's life) so nothing was resolved.

She wanted to call again & begin by saying how excited she was about the wedding but THAT IS NOT WHAT SHE REALLY WANTED TO SAY:

Say the truth –one of the Yamas: SATYA: be truthful, say you were hurt and did not like that she said that about her. Helen realized, "This is about not trusting her friendship".

Helen concludes that her friend is jealous of Helen being slender and she "has no body" and that she wishes "frailty" on me. When we begin to become more Sattvic, we become less critical of ourselves and others, and are accepting and less frustrated.

Read her insights from Deepak Chopra's book: Ageless Body, Timeless Mind. "The quantum alternative to growing old" – how our perceptions of aging and ourselves are based on habits, patterns of conditioning or self image (low self-esteem)...

We discussed the concept of serving others, Satchidananda and the idea that sometimes our enemies are our best teachers, that conflicts are lessons to be learned from our reaction & how we deal with situations we are presented with in life.

Her advice to students in regard to being in abusive relationships (male & peer pressure for early sex): better to be alone than someone using you.

This example of Isvara-pranidhana, of Helen teaching troubled young adults (with patience and love) life lessons are a result of allowing her inner trust that has developed and wisdom gained to guide and underlie all her decisions and actions.

Their response: "you have a good job and you are not alone, you have us".

She notices she is more relaxed with her students and in her life in general.

Sadhana Pada –SUTRAS Chapter II

She revealed she is now very aware of her body and has more mobility in her spine. She feels her hip joints moving much easier while walking. She has become much more aware of and in control of her breathing.

She recognizes that the SI stability exercise was the key to improving her balance and as she states, "if the foundation is already established, don't try too hard (Patanjali –relax the effort) enjoy the path- feel the sensation".

An "accidental" encounter with a 41 year old man in her building, an electrician, has changed her perception of men. She gave him a Krishna Das CD and they

talked about their joint developing interested in yoga. He called her an amazing woman. It was important for her to discover that men can be intelligent and sensitive and responsive to her (needs) –unlike her husband. This was a start to building self-esteem, a chance to re-evaluate how she (& others) see herself. This also is an example of how the mind attracts what is needed and reinforces how a healthy peaceful mind underlies positive lifestyle changes, bringing the essential nature of the true Self into balance.

Helen started walking up 10 flights of stairs in her building to strengthen leg muscles. She also informed me she wanted to wear her high heels again (which I discouraged).

Swimming which she's done for 20 years builds up ankles but only lately has she begun focusing on kicking legs more (for toning quadriceps) when swimming on her back.

Asanas: Dog/cat Tilt, moving up into DD, then walking forward into Uttanasana. She practiced neck & head as unit coming up during Wall Hang and bending knees to tone the quadriceps. Legs wide as hips apart. She noticed legs began to quiver coming up each time: this is a result of weak muscle tone.

Recommendation: move up a little faster & concentrate on smooth fluid movement with steady easy breath.

Incorporated Chair (last session with block) this session with emphasis on dog tilt/pelvic tilt more exaggerated to feel hips move in more fluid movement.

Homework: practice Ujjai breathing, Wall Hang with recommendation from Mangala/Mukunda: neck & head move as one unit & move faster going down/coming up.

June 19, 2008

Incorporated a practice of Downward Facing Dog with straight and then bending knees. This provides stability in core, strengthens quadriceps, stretches and looses tight hamstrings, joint flexibility in hips and knees, improving balance

Over several sessions, we tried Ujjai breathing technique but she does not feel confident with it, so we leave it alone for now. She is also not that interested in Ayurvedic sesame oil massage (especially soothing for tired legs and veins in legs as well as counteracting dryness and toning legs) although she says she will try it. I mention adding ghee to her diet because it is lubricating, soothing and satisfying but she does not want to because she feels it is too rich. She has always included almonds, figs, and dates in her diet, however, which helps build healthy tissue.

June 24, 2008

Asanas: beginning with Dog/cat Tilt and moving up and back into Downward Facing Dog which is a good weight-bearing pose for countering osteoporosis and lengthening spine for those with scoliosis. From Down Dog, walking forward into Uttanasana, she practiced neck & head as unit coming up as in Wall Hang. Check and maintain that legs are hip-width apart. Noticed legs began to quiver coming up each time (this is a sign of weakness and repetition will strengthen and tone legs)

Recommendation: move up a little faster & concentrate on smooth fluid movement with steady easy breath.

Incorporated Chair (last session with block) emphasizing dog tilt/pelvic tilt, hips back & forth, exaggerated to isolate and feel hips moving with more fluidity. Repeat 10x with hands on hips and knees bent slightly. Also balance exercises such as: Rise up on toes (on ball of foot, not outside) & back on heels. Walk forward on toes, backward on heels and walk sideways with one foot crossing front & back.

Homework: continue to practice walking forward from Down Dog coming into Forward Bend (Uttanasana) to strengthen quadriceps and bring awareness to center of gravity/hip area, stabilize to improve and maintain balance while moving, similar to normal walking in daily life, especially practice in walking up stairs.

July 10- continued with our SYT (JFS & SI stabilization) work and add seated twists. Helen and I both notice how comfortable she is in Sukasana (Easy pose) sitting on two blankets with hips elevated and open, whereas before she was not comfortable and limited with locked in hip/pelvic area with her knees much higher. Seated twists are good for squeezing fresh blood into, pushing toxins out and massaging the entire colon area (Vata large colon and Pitta small colon). Twists are also good for managing scoliosis –inhale to lengthen and exhale into the twist each side to balance both sides of the spine. We also both noted progress in how far she has come in establishing and maintaining a feeling of calm serenity in her everyday life, feeling more balanced. We both notice she walks with greater ease and confidence, has more self-esteem and feels energy, joy and vitality in life.

July 17 –We will continue our weekly yoga sessions incorporating all we have gained from our SYT work. Helen is self-disciplined so she will have no problem staying motivated in feeling good. As long as she does not tire herself out (from her job and commute) and instead focus more on enjoyment of her life: take the time for things you enjoy that make life worth living, enjoying a summer night and a walk in the park, a spa treatment to pamper yourself and taking time to relax and slow down, to balance time and energy for work and creativity and play. This will be her continual life “homework”- to just BE and enjoy the ride!

Sri Swami Satchidananda: **What is the Sign of a Healthy Person?**

You are happy everywhere
You are relaxed everywhere
You are at ease
You are at peace within and without
You hate none, you dislike none
Total love, universal Love, emanates from you
There is no tension anywhere
No friction anywhere
That is the sign of being healthy.
A healthy person doesn't hurt anybody.
You are not afraid of anybody.
You don't have to fear and you don't cause fear.
A healthy person emits a healthy, loving, pure vibration.
To become a good instrument of the divine,

Maintain your health
Have an easeful body, peaceful mind, and a useful life.

RESEARCH/ RESOURCE INFORMATION:

Deepak Chopra's book: Ageless Body, Timeless Mind. "The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old"

The Concise Book of Muscles, Chris Jarmey

Yoga Anatomy, Leslie Kaminoff

Structural Yoga Therapy, Mukunda Stiles

Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy, Mukunda Stiles

Ayurveda, Life, Health and Longevity, Dr. Robert E. Svoboda

Ayurvedic Healing, A Comprehensive Guide, David Frawley

Prakriti, Your Ayurvedic Constitution, Dr. Robert E. Svoboda,

Yoga and Ayurveda, Self-Healing and Self-Realization, David Frawley

Ayurveda for Healthy Living, T. L. Devaraj

The Book of Ayurveda, a Holistic Approach to Health and Longevity, Judith H. Morrison

Yoga Nidra, The Meditative Heart of Yoga, Dr. Richard Miller

Five Koshas, Nischala Joy Devi's Cardiac Teacher Training course

Patanjali's Sutras – Swami Satchinananda

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali as interpreted by Mukunda Stiles

Inspirational reading:

Peace is Every Step, Thich Nhat Hanh

Little Book of Inspiration, Dalai Lama

Ethics for a New Millennium, Dalai Lama

Going to Pieces without Falling Apart, A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness, Mark Epstein, MD

Ask and It Is Given, Learning to Manifest Your Desires, Esther & Jerry Hicks

"The Power of Now" and "Practicing the Power of Now", Eckhart Tolle

Website information:

The Five Koshas: <http://www.Sanatansociety.org>

Preserving a Fundamental Sense: Balance: NY Times article, January 8, 2008

Sarcopenia: <http://www.jaapa.com/issues/j20061001/articles/sarcopenia1006.html>

Glute Camp: <http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/1846>

Yoga for Scoliosis, Elise Browning Miller, <http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/1060>

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