

*Upon the publication of
Cerebral Investigation
of a Yoga Master during Meditation*

— Towards the end of suffering: The contributions of
integrating mind, body and spirit by Mr. Kawakami —

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In a world where there are wars, hatred, religious persecution, unspeakable suffering, illness, premature death and demagogues appealing to the baser instincts of people, it is an honor to know a teacher who life is dedicated to nurturing the nobler instincts of people. I am honored to have the privilege to collaborate with and learn from Mr. Mitsunasa Kawakami over the last 17 years (Arambula et al 2001; Peper et al 2002; Peper et al 2005). For fifty years his teaching and actions had offered people skills to nurture the Buddha nature that is within each of them. By teaching yoga in the Kawakami Slow Yoga Studio, he supports people so that they can easily make positive life choices. Because of his teaching, many more people have the skills and spiritual perspective to make the correct choices as illustrated in the old Cherokee American Indian story.

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.

"One is Evil - It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self - pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

"The other is Good - It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility,

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kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

Mr. Kawakami has dedicated his life to teaching and sharing the wisdom of yoga. He offers people a self - healing approach based upon ancient wisdom and at the same time has been open to integrate the most recent scientific knowledge. I have been deeply impressed by his participation in research studies in which he was the subject. Mr. Kawakami is remarkable for his willingness to investigate and document the practice of yoga and his own abilities. He lives what he teaches.

The teachings of yoga is a perfect anecdote for a majority of diseases in the industrialized first world countries. These illness are caused or aggravated by stress, depression, anxiety and unhealthy life patterns (Cohen, Tyrrell & Smith, 1992; Figueira & Ouakinin, 2008). For example, 38% people in Europe will annually experience a mental disorder each year, such as depression or anxiety (Wittchen et al, 2010), 1 in 5 Caucasians and 1 in 3 African Americans will be diagnosed with essential hypertension, and 1 in 3 people will be diagnosed with cancer (Gorter & Peper, 2011). The immune system of people becomes suppressed when they lose purpose and meaning in life.

When patients visit their physician in many cases there are no known organic causes (Katon & Walker, 1998; Kahn et al, 2003; Kroenke & Mangelsdorff, 1989) as shown in Figure 1.

Sadly, it takes significantly less time to prescribe medication to lower hypertension than it does to teach the client a set of lifestyle skills which may take twenty hour long sessions to learn (Dusek et al, 2008).

In a modern world where people are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (a '24/7' lifestyle), and where both patient and physician education

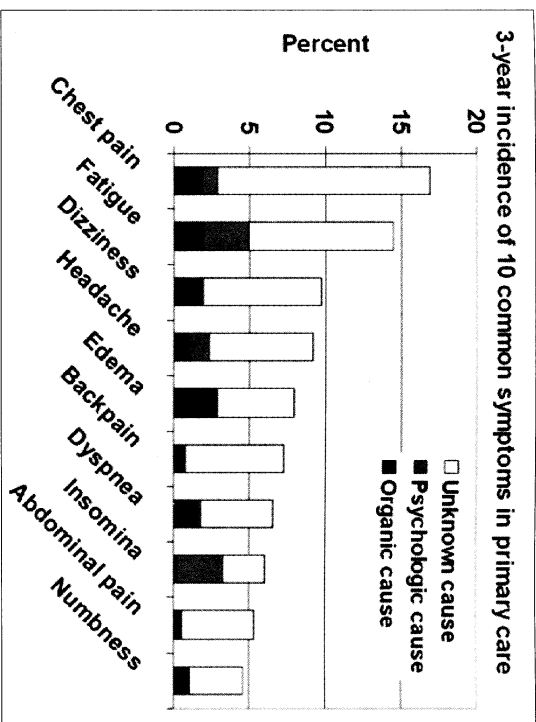


Figure 1. Three - year incidence of ten common symptoms observed in primary care. 16% of the symptoms have organic causes and 10% of the symptoms have psychologic causes while 74% of the symptoms have unknown causes. Most likely, the symptoms are a manifestation of stress, anxiety and depression. Graph drawn from the original data in Kroenke & Mangelsdorff, 1989

has been influenced by pharmaceutical companies, patients demand quick solutions to their problems. Medication appears to be a perfect solution since getting a prescription affirms that the problem is outside the patient's mental or emotional control, and that the problem is due mainly to a dysfunctioning biological system. However, there is often a delayed cost of taken medications and the long term negative side effects. As a result, clients and patients begin to believe they have no responsibility for their health, and thus remain unaware of how their own thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and stress - responses contribute to the development and maintenance of the illness.

Many unexplained disorders can be successfully treated with a variety of self - control treatment strategies such as autogenic training, progressive relaxation, mindfulness training, psychotherapy, stress management techniques, diet and life style modifications, and biofeedback

(Chandiramani, 2015; McGrady & Moss, 2013; Peper et al, 2009). Yoga practices are a successful approaches to teach people mental, emotional and spiritual skills to support health and promote healing.

Yoga teaches people voluntary control so that they can choose to act instead of react to life situations. Through yoga mind/body/spirit practices the participants gain the compassion and the skills to make healing choices and nurture spiritual wisdom and freedom. It offers them the peacefulness and patience to make choices. As Viktor E. Frankl stated:

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

During our collaborations at San Francisco State University and at his ashram in Japan, he challenged our beliefs and encouraged us to explore our self - healing potential, frequently reminding us that the limits of experience and possibilities are often constrained by the limits of our beliefs. When a person is not limited by beliefs, more opportunities are possible. Mr. Kawakami demonstrated his mastery of self - regulatory slow breathing by maintaining a breathing rate of two breaths per minute for 20 minutes while sustaining normal oxygen saturation without significantly increasing end - tidal carbon dioxide (Peper et al, 2002). In a recent study exploring the electroencephalographic activity associated with tongue piercing, he demonstrated the ability to control pain and bleeding (Peper et al, 2005). Mr. Kawakami showed that through Yoga :

- **The limitations of experience are the limitations of thoughts and beliefs.** Mr. Kawakami transcends familial and cultural conditioning. With an open mind, he inquires about the goal or task at hand — taking a Zen - like attitude of *Beginner's Mind* (Kabat - Zinn, 1990). His innate response is, "Let's explore and see."
- **Implement action based on intuition.** Health involves listening to one's intuition and acting upon it, regardless if others disagree. Allow for expression of your inner self. When we sing our own song, and each of

us has a unique song to sing, our immune system is enhanced and health is promoted.

- **Be open to experience and other perspectives.** Mr. Kawakami appears to live his life with passion and excitement and is not constrained by dogma: he thinks and acts independently of parental and social constraints. He incorporates whatever appears helpful and will facilitate the teaching and healing approach. The absence of rigidity and increased flexibility is part of his healing style.
- **Joy and play aid the therapeutic and educational process.** Mr. Kawakami demonstrates living life with joy. He expresses joy not only in his use of language and humor, but also in his use of activity. He dances with total freedom, and even sings karaoke. He appreciates when others are achieving their own personal moments of play and joy. His small gifts of friendship are often playful.
- **Mastery of skills requires disciplined training.** Mr. Kawakami's many skills may appear to be magical, but on closer inspection, they are the result of discipline and practice. In his many years as a body - builder — he became Mr. Japan in 1972 — he learned a core principle of success: Personal achievement is based upon commitment to high quality and quantity of training. In this process he shaped his attitude and developed discipline. He did not approach the task with a young man's false bravado, a bravery for which one often gets injured, but rather he approached with an open mind and desire to attain mastery.
- **Compassion can be expressed in varied ways.** Mr. Kawakami reflects a desire to further the Buddha nature in each of us. Often he does this with humor, sometimes with specific healing skills, but most importantly with an energetic radiance that evokes the healing potential in clients.

In summary

The articles in this volume report the findings and remarkable possibilities that Mr. Kawakami has shared. Mr. Kawakami's wisdom and teachings nurtures us to make the right choices and "feed the good." Remember

There may be more to the human being than thoughts and flesh. We are each a center of consciousness that is affected by our past and by others, thus we need to be aware of our internal states. Be open to a spiritual perspective, changes, and new experiences in your life. Look to exploration with an open heart and mind, rather than reaffirming limitations. Say, "Yes, I will explore it" instead of, "This is not possible."

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