

MIRACLE CURE AT KRIPALU?

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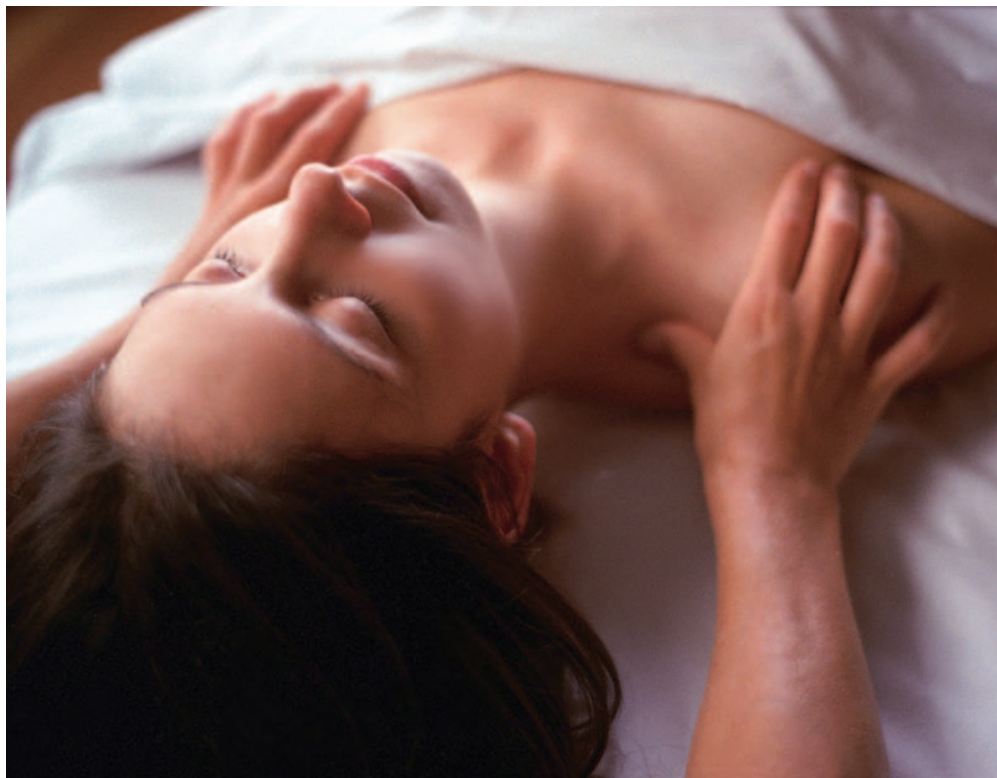
Soul + Body / Enlightened Diet / Connections / Actions / Expanding Universe

Miracle Pain Relief at Kripalu?

In the '80s, at *American Health* magazine, we often giggled about a remarkable study on what is called "referred pain," in which a balloon was attached to a long tube and inserted into the rectums of some brave volunteers. The experimental procedure was sort of like a colonoscopy, but instead of looking for polyps, the researchers would inflate the balloon at various places along the colon to mimic severe constipation — and to trace where it might hurt. And the short answer was, "Everywhere." Inflating the balloon created stomach pain, back pain, neck pain, headaches, and joint pains. The results underscored the deep significance of the phrase to "relieve oneself" — and also pointed to the vast complexities of diagnosing pain. Where something hurts may have little to do with what is actually causing the pain.

By the same token, profound healings can occur with seemingly ordinary movements someplace else — with results that can seem like magic.

I was reminded of simple yet seemingly magical healings on a recent visit to Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, which is located in the Berkshires near Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Kripalu feels like a place of healing. The grounds are spectacularly beautiful and soothing, the site of a Carnegie mansion called



Shadowbrook. The mansion burned, and land was then given to the Catholic Church, and a Jesuit Seminary was built in 1957. But the seminary never reached capacity, and in 1983 the enormous building became an ashram for the devotees of Amrit Desai, a guru in the lineage of the Indian saint Swami Kripalvananda. In the early '90s, however, the celibate, all-volunteer organization was racked with scandal, as Desai was exposed

for having sex with his devotees and living extravagantly on about \$350,000 a year. The ashram dissolved, but many of the devotees stayed to transform the place into a not-for-profit yoga school and retreat center. Their goal was to embody the ideals of Swami Kripalu in a sustainable business, and they have succeeded. Kripalu has been rated the best yoga retreat in the nation and currently trains about 500 yoga instructors annually. All told, about

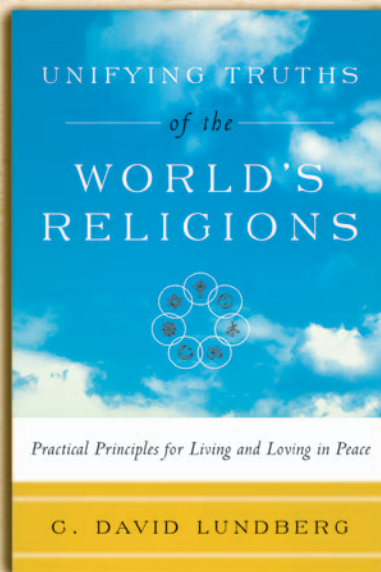
30,000 people now come each year for yoga training, special events, or simply a few glorious days of R&R. Kripalu recently opened a more luxurious and remarkably "green" 30,000 square foot annex to keep up with their guests.

But it wasn't the yoga classes or postures that sparked thoughts of miraculous pain relief. Instead, it was the Healing Arts Center on the fourth floor, where many of the therapists are trained in a form of gentle postural manipulation known as "positional therapy," or "strain/counter-strain." Developed by osteopath Lawrence Jones in the '50s, the healing therapy is based on creating proper alignment for the pelvis. By looking at my pelvic alignment, for example, my therapist, Henry Horning, PT, quickly pinpointed two painful spots in my spine and shoulder (the result of years of rowing) — places that various massage therapists have worked on from time to time. But this time, by shifting my pelvic alignment while I was fully clothed, both the painful areas relaxed. This pain relief required no direct rubbing at all.

But the more dramatic healing occurred during a session that I watched. After the pelvic alignment, the therapist, Lee Albert, asked the woman if anything hurt, and she mentioned her hand. She said she had been to hand surgeon who had failed to diagnose the beginnings of arthritis but gave her a brace to wear at night. When the pain became chronic, other doctors recognized the arthritis, declared it incurable, and suggested ibuprofen to reduce the inflammation. But Albert saw it differently. Her arthritis was an inflammation caused by a muscle being under strain, so he took her hand and squeezed for about a minute to put a "counter-strain" on another muscle that would allow the tight muscle to relax. Much to her surprise, her pain went away. Albert showed her how to provide her own counter-strain and suggested soaks with Epsom salts. Two weeks later, she reports that her pain is much reduced. Had the exercises been started when her symptoms first appeared, she might not even have arthritis.

Easy access to ever more powerful painkillers means that we often don't fix things when they begin to hurt — before

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the sore hand is crippled or the sore hip needs replacement — and before the gut lining and liver are ravaged by painkillers. And most doctors are not trained in healing arts like positional therapy and have no “billing codes” for it, so they won’t be reimbursed by insurance if they learn. By the same token, many doctors still don’t understand that “incurable” is an extremely damaging way of saying “I don’t know how to cure it.” The body is made of at least 10 trillion cells, so the likelihood of anyone understanding all its connections and misconnections is zero.

Albert also says that the basics of the therapy are not difficult and can be learned during a weekend intensive at Kripalu. Will such a week provide “miraculous” pain relief? Who knows? But the combination of a beautiful and loving environment, high-fiber organic foods, yoga, massage, and gentle body alignment probably makes for the best overall health insurance one can get.

— STEPHEN KIESLING

How Botox Paralyzes Feelings as Well as Frowns

In our last issue we reported that failing eyesight as we age — through untreated glaucoma, for example — may actually be a cause of dementia. Losing sensory inputs through clouded vision, much like losing oxygen to the brain through clogged arteries, may gradually cloud our very sense of self. Now here’s another threat to the self that, oddly enough, is self-inflicted: Botox treatments. It turns out that these oh-so-careful injections of neurotoxins to paralyze our frown muscles also reduce our ability to

read emotions . . . and even to feel them.

To test how blocking a frown might affect comprehension of language related to emotions, researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison asked patients of cosmetic surgery to read written statements that were angry or happy. The patients were then treated with botulinum toxin, commonly known as Botox, to deactivate the muscles in the forehead that cause frowning and asked to read the same statements again. After the Botox treatment, the patients took more time to read the sentences, which also resulted in changes in cognition and their mood. Normally, the brain sends signals to the periphery to frown, and the extent of the frown is sent back to the brain. But when “frowning” muscles are deactivated, that loop is disrupted and so is the intensity of emotion and our ability to understand emotional language.

Pioneered first by scientists of the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, Germany, this study is breaking new ground, linking the expression of emotion to our ability to understand language. This could have far-reaching consequences for people



who have cosmetic surgery. As one of the scientists put it, “people respond to fast, subtle cues about each other’s understanding, intention, and empathy. If you are slightly slower reacting as I tell you about something that made me really angry, that could signal to me that you didn’t pick up my message.” (University of Wisconsin–Madison, Jan. 2010)

— MONIKA RICE