

Book Excerpt:

## The Body's Role in Emotional Transformation

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Excerpted from ***Yoga for Emotional Balance: Simple Practices to Heal Anxiety and Depression*** by Bo Forbes, © Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2010.

Over more than a decade - half my professional career - of integrative work using yoga as therapy, two discoveries astonished me and challenged the very foundations of my training as a psychologist. The first: although an active or physical practice of yoga and breathing improved the mood of most of my students and clients, Restorative Yoga and breathing exercises, the two techniques featured in this book, produced the real magic. With as little as 15-30 minutes of twice-weekly breathing exercises and Restorative Yoga, my clients' thinking became less emotionally reactive, and they were better able to tolerate passing emotional states. They became less anxious, less depressed, and more emotionally balanced. They began to develop the qualities and skills that we psychotherapists work so hard to help instill.

The second finding was even more radical. Restorative Yoga and simple breathing exercises greatly facilitated psychotherapy. Yet the positive results increased when I took the psychotherapy - the verbal processing - out of the session. In other words, the talking part of the session was not always necessary for change to take place. Clients didn't need to understand or even process their thoughts or emotions in order to experience dramatic shifts in mood, behavior, and well-being. I began to use more yoga and less verbal processing in my clinical practice, and marveled at how much immediate difference it made in my clients' lives. Yoga improved their mood, catalyzed greater self-compassion, and helped people forge a deeper sense of connection and meaning.

These sessions led to a realization that rocked my professional world: you don't have to process or understand a pattern in order to change it. At national yoga workshops where psychotherapists are present, there's always a nod of assent from the audience when I say this. This realization extends a step further, however. Sometimes, mental processing - and its stimulation of the mind, emotional regions of the brain, and body - may even interfere with change. Think for a moment: how many times have you known what your issues are, yet not been able to change them? *Conceptual insight is not required for change, and in many cases may actually obstruct it.*

By working in a body-based realm, we can bypass the mental faculties that may interfere with change and instill the new experiences that promote change. This discovery has informed my therapeutic work with clients, my yoga teacher trainings, national workshops, and the yoga therapy work we do at the Center for Integrative Yoga Therapeutics in Boston, which I founded in order to offer this work on a larger scale. Ironically, the ideology of yoga already embraces the view that mental processing is not necessary for change. It's just that our current cultural paradigm of change makes that 'old' concept seem suddenly new.

Yoga works through the body to transform the mind (including your thoughts and emotions) and brain (your emotional brain and stress centers). Its myriad physical benefits, now being corroborated through scientific research, include a positive impact on nearly all the major systems of the body: cardiovascular, circulatory, nervous, lymphatic, immune, muscular, skeletal, and endocrine. Because these body-based worlds are intertwined with our psychological and emotional worlds, yoga's most dramatic benefits may be psychological and emotional. Yoga's experiential practices permeate not just our physical bodies but our minds and brains as well. They create *embodied insight*, which has a significant healing effect on anxiety and depression.