

Yoga and 12-Step Recovery

BJ Rahn/ 200 Hour Thesis

Introduction

My interest in the subject of yoga for 12 Step-Recovery began when I made a trip to my local public library. I was browsing through the section of new titles and picked up a book, *Yoga and the Twelve-Step Path* by Kyczy Hawk. I started reading and could not put it down. Hawk spoke from her own experience of addiction and her practice and study of yoga. Having been affected by the addictive behavior of a family member, I was drawn to the idea of yoga as another tool for him on the path to recovery. I had instinctively felt for some time that yoga would be beneficial and here was someone telling me how it had worked for her. I knew little about the 12-Steps, but it quickly became clear that there were extraordinary parallels between yoga and the 12-Step path.

In the introduction to Hawk's book she mentioned Nikki Myers, the founder of *Yoga of 12-Step Recovery* (Y12SR). I found Myers' website and was intrigued by her Y12SR program. It is modeled from the meetings of 12-Step programs, and combines a group sharing circle followed by a therapeutic yoga class. I discovered that she offered yoga teachers Y12SR Leadership Training, and was based in Indianapolis. When I saw that she had an upcoming training there, I knew I was being guided to this important work. So, at the end of September 2012, I traveled to Indianapolis to CitYoga where I began a three day intensive program in leading *Yoga of 12-Step Recovery* meetings.

The intention of my paper is two-fold. First, is to explore how yoga provides tools that may be useful to those recovering from addiction. My knowledge of both yoga and the Twelve Steps is incomplete at best, but it is my hope that the reader will begin to see some of the many connections between yoga and the recovery path. My second intention is to introduce the reader to the Y12SR relapse prevention program.

What is Addiction?

Before I address the use of yoga in recovery, it is necessary to look briefly at addiction itself. The word "addiction" is derived from a Latin term for "enslaved by" or "bound to." Addiction creates a craving for the object of addiction, loss of control over its use, and continuing involvement with it despite adverse consequences. According to Hawk, "It is the unrelenting desire to continue consuming a substance or behaving in a certain manner despite serious

negative consequences.” In other words, you no longer feel that you have the choice to stop. Nikki Myers (Y12SR), herself a recovering alcoholic and addict, described it this way, “I used when I knew better; when I really didn’t want to.”

Overcoming addiction is possible, but it is often a long, slow and complicated process. When researchers first began investigating the causes of addiction, they believed that people with addictions were morally flawed or lacked willpower. Now addiction is recognized as a chronic disease that changes brain structure and function; addiction hijacks the brain. Experts also used to believe that only alcohol and powerful drugs could cause addiction, however, more recent research has shown that pleasurable activities like gambling, sex, or shopping can also be addictive. Myers believes that, “Anything used to escape an intolerable reality is something that could lead to or form an addiction.”

There is not one certain path to addiction or a simple explanation of its causes, but many people get caught in its web. “According to the latest government statistics, nearly 23 million Americans – almost one in 10 – are addicted to alcohol or other drugs. More than two-thirds of people with addiction abuse alcohol. The top three drugs causing addiction are marijuana, opioid (narcotic) pain relievers, and cocaine.” (Harvard Health Publications: *How Addiction Hijacks the Brain*.) There are certain risk factors that make one person more susceptible to addiction than another. According to Harold Urschell, *Healing the Addicted Brain*, risk factors include: genetics, emotional state, psychological factors, social and cultural factors, age, gender and family history. Myers believes that at the heart of every addiction is a core pain and unresolved trauma, and according to the *Big Book* (basic text of AA), a significant reason for using is to deal with inner pain and anesthetize the self.

How Addiction Hijacks the Brain

The brain registers all pleasures, drugs, food, and sex in the same way. Every type of reward that has been studied releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine in the brain. Scientists used to think that the experience of pleasure alone was enough to make people continue to seek the addictive activity or substance. But more recent research shows that not only does dopamine contribute to the experience of pleasure, but it also plays a major role in the brain system that is responsible for reward-driven learning. The reward circuit in the brain includes areas involved with motivation and memory as well as pleasure. Repeated exposure to an addictive substance or behavior motivates us to take action to seek the source of pleasure. However, over time the brain adapts and the desired substance or activity becomes less pleasurable. People must take more of it to get the same dopamine “high.” The pleasure they once got from the substance or behavior lessens, but the memories of the effect and the desire to recreate it persist. These

cravings contribute to the addiction and also to relapse. “Conditioned learning helps explain why people who develop an addiction risk relapse even after years of abstinence.” (Harvard Health Publications: “How Addiction Hijacks the Brain.”)

What is the Twelve-Step Program?

The program of recovery that all “anonymous” twelve-step groups are based on, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), brings together a community of people who desire to become and remain sober. They follow the principles of the Twelve Steps which were first developed in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Dr. Robert Smith, two alcoholics who are considered to be the founders of AA. All other 12-Step recovery programs are founded on these principles. For many who suffer with addiction, Twelve Step programs have transformed their lives and been their lifeline.

“Knowledge of the Twelve Steps is of critical importance to all recovering people for two reasons: (1) The Steps work if you work them, and (2) Twelve Step programs are inexpensive and readily available in most communities. As a result, they are the most widely used lifeline for people recovering from chemical dependence, codependence and other compulsive or addictive disorders.” (Gorski)

The heart and soul of all Twelve Step programs is the Twelve Steps. The steps are numbered sequentially and are meant to be worked in order. They are also meant to be worked more than once, as people’s perspectives change during recovery. Most of those in Twelve Step programs see Twelve Step work as a lifelong process.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Where Yoga and the Twelve Steps Meet

The Twelve Step program is not a religious organization, but it is spiritual. It is a philosophy of life which helps addicts to recognize the benefits of discovering and expanding their spiritual nature. It is left to each individual to decide what the concepts of God and Higher Power mean to him or her. The Twelve Step program is a recovery tool, but it is also a journey toward wholeness. As people work on their life problems using the Twelve Steps, they grow physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Yoga takes all these aspects of wholeness into account too, and integrates the body, mind and spirit in a way that no other path does.

Hawk, *Yoga and the Twelve-Step Path*, says the similarity between yoga and a Twelve-Step program begins with the “rooms of recovery, which are magical places.” She continues by saying that anywhere you go in the world, the format of a meeting will be similar and the message will be the same: “You don’t have to use anymore. Welcome. We care.” Meetings provide a safe, welcoming environment where addicts can find support on their path to sobriety. Yoga studios also provide a safe haven from hectic everyday life. “Walk in and remove your shoes (as you symbolically leave behind the concerns of your daily life); roll out your mat, take a seat, and breathe.” (Hawk) Sangha (the company of a spiritual community or group of like-minded people) is an important aspect of Twelve Step meetings and yoga studios. Addicted people need to cultivate a new social circle. In yoga classes they can participate in an activity that doesn’t center on using or being alone.

Myers believes that the characteristics of addiction can be summed up in one word, “separation.” Yoga on the other hand, is the art and science of balance and integration; yoking. Kevin Griffin (*One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps*) says, “Addiction itself can be a misguided spiritual search and many people find that when they get sober they have some longing in them, and that their addiction has been a longing for connection.” If indeed at the bottom of addiction is a longing, a desire for spiritual well-being and connection, then yoga seems to be a perfect tool for healing. “Addiction is the ultimate checking out of the moment...Yoga, on and off the mat, is the checking in to reality. Brilliantly, yoga and recovery programs work together to cover all the bases.” (Futuronsky, *Yoga and Recovery: 12-Step Spirituality*)

The Koshas

Ancient yoga philosophy tells us that the personality is multidimensional. The koshas, or sheaths, are the layers, or masks, that surround the true nature of the Self. Ideally, the human system is integrated and these layers become transparent allowing us to see ourselves clearly. The sheaths are all interconnected and the health of one sheath affects the others. “When the

bodies are misaligned, disconnected or imbalanced the system is susceptible to disease and dysfunction.”(Myers) The outermost mask, the Anna-Maya-Kosha, is the physical body. The practices of asana, healthy eating and relaxation maintain this kosha. At this level, addicts learn to take care of the physical body which is often neglected. They learn to feel their physical sensations and begin to work on the emotional body which is contained in the sheaths below it. The sheaths inter-penetrate, and emotions are often held in the body; as Nikki Myers says, “the issues are in the tissues.” “Yoga is one way to help repair [the body] from the inside out.” (Keith Arnold, Sierra Tucson Hospital, Arizona).

The next sheath, the Prana-Maya-Kosha, is the energetic body. Prana is our life force energy. Working with those in recovery on breathing practices (pranayama) helps to purify this kosha. The next body, the Mano-Maya-Kosha is the mental or emotional body, the mask of the mind. This sheath can hold and manifest trauma. Asana, relaxation, pratyahara and meditation can help those in recovery bring contentment and peace to this mind. Vijnana-Maya-Kosha is the sheath of the intellectual body; inner knowledge, wisdom. Character is built through the yamas and niyamas, and samskaras are recognized and transformed. Satsung, the study of yogic teachings, and meditation purify this sheath. The final sheath, the Ananda-Maya-Kosha is the bliss body, the sheath of joy and deep harmony. This is the most subtle of the layers and is attained through the last three limbs of yoga (concentration, meditation and Samadhi). For those in recovery, prayer, meditation and ritual may help them glimpse this sheath.

Patanjali called the ‘afflictions’ that cause our suffering, kleshas. The kleshas, or causes for suffering are:

- Avidya - incorrect comprehension, distortion
- Asmita - ego, a distorted sense of self
- Raga - attachment, fear of not having something again
- Dvesa - attachment to past pain, fear of something happening again, refusal, rejecting things
- Abhinivesa - fear of death, attachment to the body

These kleshas are powerful forces that can cause us to act in ways that lead to misunderstanding and unhappiness. Becoming aware of how these afflictions distort the mind and perceptions is important in finding balance and avoiding relapse.

Patanjali’s Eight Limbs of Yoga

In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali outlined the classical eight-fold path of yoga that leads to wholeness. This path purifies the mind and body and leads ultimately to knowing the unbound

Self. Whether or not a recovering addict reaches Enlightenment, this ancient path provides many healing tools to those in Twelve Step recovery programs.

The Moral Principles: The Yamas and Nyamas

The first of Patanjali's eight limbs of Hatha yoga, are the yamas; the ethical guidelines of yoga. The yamas are disciplines that help to restrain us from living in unhealthy ways. The Fourth Step of the Twelve Step path teaches members that they must make a "searching and fearless moral inventory." As recovering people work the fourth step, they must ask themselves hard questions such as, "Is the way I am living my life good for me or bad for me?" "Is it helping me and others or hurting me and others?" Answering those kinds of questions requires telling the truth about how they are living and getting "clean" within themselves. Nikki Myers says that a characteristic of addiction is dishonesty and denial. Her clever acronym, "DENIAL stands for 'Don't Even Know I'm Lying,'" cuts to the heart of the matter. Addicts must take an honest look at themselves; their strengths and weaknesses, or character defects. The yamas provide a set of guidelines to use in this searching. In recovery, just as in yoga, if we are going to be free from suffering, we must recognize what leads us away from right thinking and destructive actions.

Yamas:

- Ahimsa; non-harming
- Satya; non-lying
- Asteya; non-stealing
- Brahmacharya; non-excess
- Aparigraha; non-attachment/clinging

The niyamas are the second of the eight limbs of yoga and guide us in our relationship with ourselves and ultimately with others. They invite the yogi on an inward search for truth and authenticity. When we deal with ourselves in a truthful and authentic way, we bring that truth and authenticity to our dealings with others. Deborah Adele says, "The niyamas are an invitation into a radical exploration of possibility. Just how good can you feel? How joyful can your life be?" For recovering people, the niyamas offer a path to living life more fully.

Niyamas:

- Saucha; purity
- Santosha; contentment
- Tapas; discipline
- Svadhyaya; self-study
- Ishvara; surrender

The ancient yogis understood the mind's contribution to bad habits and called these samskaras. Samskaras are habits of action and thought that get deeper over time. Addicted people have many misperceptions and mistaken beliefs that have become like deep grooves in a muddy road. Yogis believe if you create new samskaras and strengthen them by repetition; over time you can create new habits strong enough to replace older, dysfunctional ones. Practicing yoga, helps build new, healthy habits.

Patanjali outlined a system of self-transformation he called Kriya yoga. Tapas, svadhyaya and ishvara pranidhana are the three elements of this yoga of 'action' and are the last three niyaymas. Tapas, or fire, keeps yogis dedicated to their practice and also disciplines the mind. For recovering people, finding tapas during asana practice allows them to build inner strength and to learn to redirect their mind and overrule the mind's objections and excuses. This ability to endure may provide the willpower needed off the mat to remain sober. Svadhyaya, or self-study also happens on and off the mat. On the mat, addicts can begin to monitor the state of their body, breath and emotions. They learn to listen to their body and honor their limitations. In time they may find themselves bringing this self-awareness off the mat and examining how their choices make them feel off the mat. This may lead to making different, better choices. Ishvara pranidhana is devotion to God or faith in a higher power. As we know, giving up the illusion of being in control is a key element in 12-Step Programs. Knowing they don't control the results, frees Twelve Step members to set intentions (in yoga called sankalpa), make a plan of action and give it their full effort knowing the results are in "God's hands."

The Physical and Energetic Principles: Asana and Pranayama

People with addictions are often unaware of their bodies and have neglected and abused them. Annalisa Cunningham, in *Healing Addiction with Yoga*, asserts: "Most people in recovery have a history of degrading their bodies." Yoga helps to restore the body to balance. Timothy McCall (*Yoga as Medicine*), asserts, "As someone who has been an MD for over twenty years, I can tell you that yoga is quite simply the most powerful system of overall health and well-being that I have ever seen." He continues, "This single comprehensive system can reduce stress, increase flexibility, improve balance, promote strength, heighten cardiovascular conditioning, lower blood pressure, reduce overweight, strengthen bones, prevent injuries, lift mood, improve immune function, increase oxygen supply to the tissues, heighten sexual functioning and fulfillment, foster psychological equanimity, and promote spiritual well-being...and that's only a partial list."

Asana (the postures), bring healing to the physical body and prepare the body for pranayama. "The basic shapes, or poses, are designed with an intention, which is to bring flexibility to the

joints and connections in the body, to access energy pathways, and by bringing the breath into alignment with movement, to focus the mind.” (Kyczy Hawk) By focusing on physical sensation and expanding the breath, asana helps recovering people become more present to and aware of their body, mind and emotions. Since addicts have often experienced trauma, they may have painful memories and difficult feelings trapped in their bodies. This unresolved emotional trauma is energy and energy collects somewhere. Nikki Myers likes to say that, “the issues are in the tissues.” Asana helps remove the blockages in the body so that prana (life force energy) can move. She says, “Prana moves when you feel safe.” Yoga allows you to meet your energy where it is (anxious, depressed) and create a safe practice for releasing that energy. All bodies record the physical and emotional traumata of living – the happenings of life.” (Ida P. Rolf) Myers says, “Trauma is a fact of life, but it doesn’t have to be a life sentence.” Yoga allows the emotional body as well as the physical body to heal.

Asana practice also prepares the body for the next limb of yoga, pranayama. Correct and conscious breathing clarifies the mind and effects how prana (energy) is utilized and distributed through the body. Breath soothes the mind and calms the body. Addicted people, whose autonomic nervous systems may be imbalanced, may take short, shallow breaths. Learning to breathe fully and deeply increases vitality and calms the nervous system. Hawk says, “[the effects of breath] can include enhancement of well-being and peace of mind, reduction in levels of stress levels, support of the immune system, increased optimism, relief of anxiety and depression (mild, moderate, and severe), enhanced brain function (increased mental focus, calmness), and increased speed of recovery from stressful stimuli...there can also be emotional releases from past traumas that require care and understanding to process.” Pranayama is powerful and quickly affects the nervous system and mental state and there are numerous breath- control methods with specific intentions that should only be learned from an experienced teacher. “We use pranayama to purify the mind and stabilize currents of thought, making the mind fit for concentration and meditation.” (Lori Gaspar, *Prairie Yoga Teacher Training Manual*, 2011-2012)

Through the yamas, niyamas, asana and pranayama we are prepared for the next phase of Patanjali’s eight-fold path, meditative, self- reflection.

The Psychological and Spiritual Disciplines: Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi

Step eleven of the Twelve Step program is the “spiritual step.” Step Eleven says that prayer and meditation is the path to a deeper relationship with God. A spiritual approach to recovery results in a personal transformation and a spiritual awakening for many recovering people. “During spiritual experiences, you feel a unique sense of well-being. It is as if you are at peace with the universe. You feel extremely important and terribly insignificant all at the same time. You sense that you are part of something bigger than yourself and as a result, you feel serenity,

a unique state of well-being.” (Terence Gorski, *Understanding the Twelve Steps*) In yoga, the spiritual awakening is called Samadhi (bliss) and is the fulfillment of the promise of yoga: the union of body, mind, and spirit united with the Universe. The yogic practices of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana lead to discovery of bliss and union. Twelve Step members can use these yogic tools to help them on their journey toward a more meaningful, happier life.

Pratyahara is the turning inward of the senses. Rod Stryker says, “One of the reasons that we experience so much fatigue is that the senses are just overwhelmed with too many stimuli. The more we can turn our awareness inward, turn the senses internally, the more they are replenished and rejuvenated. That internalization of attention is also a bridge to the healing power of yoga.” Stress reduction helps improve an addicted person’s ability to face cravings and avoid addictive behavior. In addition to reducing stress, being able to withdraw may carry over off the mat and help addicts pull away from unhealthy thinking. “We know the power of thought in twelve-step programs of addiction recovery. We are cautioned not only to physically “stay away from slippery places,” but to avoid “stinkin thinkin.”(Hawk) Withdrawal of the senses can be challenging, but is an important step toward dharana (concentration).

Dharana is total concentration. It is being at one with the moment. In order to find this single-pointed concentration, everything else around us must drop away (pratyahara). When there is near complete concentration on a single thing, that is dharana and it is a prelude to meditation. Dhyana (meditation) is only observation, with no attachments or judgments. “This is a very important part of meditation: letting go of the judging mind. Witnessing the thoughts, acknowledging their existence, and then releasing them is the practice.” (Hawk)

“In most people the mind constantly roams from topic to topic, provides a running commentary on how things are going, interspersed with seemingly random streams of thought: worries, to-do lists, snatches of song lyrics, sexual fantasies, images from the media, and assorted memories. This is what yogis call the monkey mind...Much of what fills the monkey mind are mental samskaras: repetitive, automatic thoughts about what you fear, desire, or hate. The monkey mind rarely attends to the present moment.” (Timothy McCall)

Learning to attend to the present and letting go of the judging mind is important to those in recovery. Meditation is a way to make the mind a safe place to be. Those in recovery may find their “monkey” mind thinking about their addiction, painful memories or negative self-talk. Meditation helps move the mind away from stressful and painful thoughts and helps to uncover the habits of the mind that contribute to suffering. It allows freedom to choose one thought over another and allows you to control your life experiences. Patanjali says in Sutra 1.2, yoga slows down the fluctuations of the mind. This is the very definition of yoga. According to Sri Swami Satchidananda, “If you control your mind, you have controlled everything. There is

nothing in this world to bind you.” The final limb of Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga is Samadhi (bliss divine).

TKV Desikachar says, “When we succeed in becoming so absorbed in something that our mind becomes completely one with it, we are in a state of Samadhi.” This is a state of coming home to our true Self and to complete union with our Higher Power and all of creation. This sounds like the promise of the Eleventh Step.

Karma Yoga and the Twelve-Steps

In the Bhagavad Gita, Karma Yoga is described as one of the Four Paths of yoga; it is the yoga of action. One aspect of Karma yoga is practicing selfless service to others. “The Bhagavad Gita, the ancient Sanskrit text in which karma yoga is defined and discussed, states that ‘without concern for results, perform the necessary action: surrendering all attachments, accomplish life’s highest good.’ This is the perfect definition of service: doing what is required and letting go of the results.” (Hawk)

The Twelfth step instructs the recovering person to carry the message of hope and recovery to others who suffer. They must also provide service to others with no expectation of personal rewards. “By trying to help others, people in recovery transcend their own selfishness; they interrupt the self-centeredness that is central to most addictions and compulsions. By trying to help others, addicts no longer remain the central part of their own personal addictive network. They begin to expand their world beyond the tip of their nose. In doing so, they find new values to govern their lives.” (Gorski) This means sharing their recovery experience, their strength and hope. Participating in meetings, speaking, and sponsoring are a few ways recovering addicts perform service to the group and to each other. A slogan of the Twelve Step Program says, “In order to keep it, I have to give it away.” This means that the addicted person recovers by helping others and helps others by sharing what worked for them; by giving it away. ‘To keep growing, you must keep sharing. If both of your hands are full and you don’t want to let go of what you have, you can’t pick up anything else. When you give something away, you free up one of your hands to pick up something new.’ (Gorski) If the motivation for doing these things is to be an instrument of recovery, then this is karma action.

The Yoga of Twelve Step Recovery

Nikki Myers founded Y12SR in 2003 out of her own personal experience. When she introduced herself to those of us at her Leadership Training, she began by saying that she is an addict, and

an alcoholic. She told us that has been a prostitute, been in jail, in institutions and in debt. When Nikki found a 12-Step program in 1987, “it absolutely, positively saved her life.” She relapsed after eight years, but then got back into a program. At that time she discovered yoga, and stopped attending meetings and relapsed again after four years. Myers said yoga helped her stay sober for four years, but then she realized that yoga and the Twelve Steps had to come together. That’s when Y12SR was born. It has been thirteen years since her last relapse.

Nikki describes Y12SR as the coupling of the ancient tools and practices from the art and science of yoga, with the wisdom of the inspired and practical tools of the Twelve Step program. She believes this is a natural match; that yoga helps to reintegrate the five bodies that the ‘ancients’ taught us. Nikki believes that addiction is a physical, mental and spiritual dis-ease, and that AA addresses the mental and ‘approaches’ the spiritual, but not the physical. Yoga, on the other hand, addresses mind, body and spirit.

Y12SR is not a replacement for Twelve Step programs; it does not replace meetings and getting a sponsor. Nor does it represent or have an affiliation with any other Twelve Step program. Myers says that the Twelve Step program is hands down effective in helping millions of people deal with their addictive behaviors. Y12SR is an adjunct to the Twelve Steps. It is one part of a holistic, recovery program. Nikki calls it a ‘relapse prevention program.’ She believes that for many, the biggest issue isn’t getting clean or temporarily stopping; it’s staying stopped. Life shows up and it’s very easy to go back to old behaviors.

Myers says that in a word, the characteristics and effects of addiction could easily be described as, separation. “Addictive behaviors separate and disconnect us from ourselves, other people, our environment and whatever it is we call our bigger energy.” She points out that yoga is often translated as, union, integration, balance and wholeness. Y12SR explores how to recognize and identify signs of relapse and it uses yoga to help restore balance before relapse happens.

Y12SR is a 12-Step based discussion group followed by an intentional therapeutic yoga class. It is open to anyone dealing with their own addictive behavior or affected by the addictive behavior of others. All “A’s” are welcome. It is truly a grass roots movement with weekly meetings “popping up across the USA.”

Conclusion

I began this journey with a library book about yoga and the 12-Step path. The journey has taken me to Indianapolis to learn to be a Y12SR leader and has led me to my own exploration of yoga as a tool for those in recovery. It has helped me grow in compassion for those who suffer from

addiction; and it has deepened my respect and love for the wisdom of yoga. It is my hope to bring Y12SR yoga classes to my community.

In Sutra 2.16, Patanjali tells us, *Heyam Duhkham Anagatam, future suffering can and should be avoided*. He implies that we have some control over our suffering. There are some sources of suffering that are beyond our control, but there are other sources of suffering that we bring upon ourselves. TKV Desikachar writes that we should do what we can “to develop within ourselves the capacity to anticipate, prevent, reduce or accept” causes of painful effects. This same belief can also be found in the Serenity Prayer which is often read at Twelve Step meetings.

“God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

My journey is far from over. As my knowledge and understanding of yoga grows, I hope to continue to find connections between yoga and the Twelve Step path. Both of these great systems have the power to transform lives, and to end the suffering of those recovering from the disease of addiction.

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