



## Book Review

### **Meditation As Medicine, Dharma Singh Khalsa, M.D. and Cameron Stauth, New York: Pocket Books, 2001, 284 pp.**

In the United States, the number of people turning to alternative practitioners have been reaching record numbers. In 1990 alone, Americans made an estimated 425 million visits to alternative care practitioners compared with 388 million visits to primary care physicians. The majority sought remedies for long-term problems like obesity, chronic pain, anxiety, substance abuse and depression while few sought treatments for life-threatening conditions such as cancer and AIDS. Approximately \$14 billion is spent annually for alternative care treatment in the United States. This data published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* during 1993, indicated that conventional medicine might not always provide the "magic bullet" for some individuals and that many believe that alternative or non-mainstream practices seemed and continue to have valuable, therapeutic benefit.

Integrating certain forms of alternative therapy with standard, medical treatment may be more effective than applying the conventional, isolated approach. In *Meditation as Medicine* Dharma Singh Khalsa, M.D. and Cameron Stauth explained how medical meditation—kundalini yoga and advanced meditative techniques—could be combined with customary treatment to target and alleviate afflictions ranging from arthritis to high blood pressure to cancer. Each medical meditation was specific for each different medical condition or illness. It was this specificity that separated it from other forms of meditation practice.

The authors introduce *Meditation as Medicine* by describing how advanced meditation and yoga were actually secrets of spiritual power once guarded by ancient yoga masters and personally passed on from master to student for centuries. In 1969, however Yogi Bhasan—the world's leading authority on yoga and meditation—

relocated to America and revealed the secrets of Medical Meditation to anyone who had a sincere interest. Dr. Khalsa applied and continues to apply the techniques of this ancient science in a modern clinical setting. Since the application is relatively new, there have been few studies that demonstrate its effectiveness. Some of the studies have indicated that Medical Meditation was more therapeutically successful than any other form of meditation, including the most scientifically examined form in western culture—Transcendental Meditation. Evidently, more studies are required to assess the accuracy and validity of the findings.

The book is intended for the general population, is easy to read and incorporates practical information such as breathing and concentration techniques, postures/movements, and specific mantras, which can be used for meditation. Drawings and simple directions are included.

The authors described how Medical Meditation was successful because it influenced both the physical and ethereal milieu of our bodies. The physical milieu included specific body parts, organ systems, and glands, while the ethereal milieu included the chakras (centers of consciousness and communication), nadis (energy conduits connecting chakras) and tattwas (the complete relationship between a person's chakras and nadis). Both milieus reciprocally influenced health, and balance must be achieved through five, key attributes of Medical Meditation—breathing patterns, exact positioning of hands and fingers, focus of concentration, mantras, and postures/movements. The Medical Meditations were meant to open up channels of communication that existed between mind and body by changing the profile of endocrine, neurotransmitter and hormonal secretions. This was believed to relax an individual into a calm, healing state.

"*Meditation as Medicine*" should be read by persons who are interested in advance meditative techniques and yoga and those unfamiliar with alternative forms of therapy including medical students and health care practitioners.

"*Meditation as Medicine*" provides a wealth of information and insight into the use of meditation as an adjunctive modality.

*Charles DeMesa MPH*

