

# Gary Kraftsow, MA, E-RYT 500

Founder and Director of the American Viniyoga™ Institute, LLC

*"I have a passion for the authentic tradition of yoga therapy—it's been my whole thrust in yoga."*

- Gary Kraftsow

For more than 30 years, Gary Kraftsow has been a pioneer in the transmission of yoga for health, healing, and personal transformation. His journey as a yoga student, practitioner, teacher, therapist, and teacher of yoga teachers and therapists began at age 19 when he traveled to Madras, now Chennai, India, to study Saiva Siddhanta, the Saivite Tantra of south India, with the respected mystic/scholar V.A. Devasenapathi, and yoga with T.K.V. Desikachar, son and student of T. Krishnamacharya.

Gary had a rare opportunity while studying in Madras to combine insights gained from the mystical teaching and practices of Saivite Tantra with the practical science of yoga. Krishnamacharya was not only a yoga master and a master Yoga Therapist, but also well versed in Ayurveda, Jyotish and the various religious traditions of India. Desikachar, also a master Yoga Therapist, added to these fields of knowledge an education in western science and a deep understanding of western health care models. The profound knowledge and experience of his teachers shaped his orientation to the study, practice, and teaching of yoga.

Back in the United States, Gary continued his studies with respected scholars in world religions and philosophy. These foundations of learning gave him a unique opportunity to understand the human condition from the perspective of diverse cultures as well as an appreciation of the universal relevance and applicability of yoga. During his doctoral studies in a program on psychology and religion at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Gary studied under Dr. Raimundo Panikkar. In addition to being a Catholic priest and a Vedic scholar, Dr. Panikkar had multiple PhD's, was a scientist, a world-renowned scholar of world religions, a world leader in interfaith dialogue, and a living example of integrated spirituality. Gary's master's degree under the direction of Dr. Panikkar focused on health as a paradigm for spiritual transformation.

Following his studies at UC/Santa Barbara, Gary returned to India where he delved deeper into yoga, particularly Viniyoga, and the practical tools of spiritual integration and transformation, including meditation and tantric yoga. Impressed by Panikkar's knowledge of science and guided by Desikachar who was also an engineer, he began a serious study of the science of yoga therapeutics.

In 1983, Gary established Maui Yoga Therapy. That year his ability to train teachers in the Viniyoga lineage was recognized and he was awarded the Viniyoga Special Diploma from Viniyoga International in Paris, France. Continuing to explore and learn, Gary traveled to study further with Desikachar and another influential teacher, the great Tibetan Buddhist master, Kalu Rinpoche. He pursued a deeper study of Vajrayana, the great Tantric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

In 1999, Maui Yoga Therapy became the American Viniyoga Institute (AVI). Through AVI, Gary has developed and refined several professional training programs, including the AVI Viniyoga Teacher Training, AVI Foundation for Yoga Therapy, and the AVI Viniyoga Therapist Training. As AVI evolved, so did Gary's transmission of the teachings.



*"Increasingly, yoga is being looked at more seriously by western health care. Further western style research, such the NIH study on back pain, is needed to document and create what is called evidenced-based medicine for yoga therapy."*

- Gary Kraftsow, MA,  
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This evolution resulted in two books, *Yoga for Wellness* and *Yoga for Transformation*, two DVDs, *Viniyoga Therapy for Low Back, Sacrum, and Hips* and *Viniyoga Therapy for Upper Back, Neck and Shoulders*, and numerous articles, interviews, and keynote addresses.

As part of his deep commitment to furthering the work of Yoga Therapy, Gary serves on the International Association of Yoga Therapists Educational Standards Committee and actively participates in Yoga Therapy research. He developed the yoga protocol for the 2003 National Institutes of Health study "Evaluating Yoga for Chronic Low Back Pain," which demonstrated the positive effect of yoga on low back pain. In 2005, the study results were published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Since then Gary has developed the yoga protocol for a Harvard Medical School study for generalized anxiety, designed another for an Aetna Insurance company pilot study on managing workplace stress, and consulted on several studies for other health conditions, including abdominal obesity, COPD, and non-small cell lung cancer.

### **Publications/DVDs/CDs:**

- 1999 Kraftsow, G. *Yoga For Wellness: Healing With The Timeless Teachings Of Viniyoga*. New York: Penguin Putnam.
- 1999 *Yoga For Wellness: Healing With The Timeless Teachings Of Viniyoga* by Gary Kraftsow. CD Set with 2 complete practices.
- 2002 Kraftsow, G. *Yoga For Transformation: Ancient Teachings And Practices For Healing The Body, Mind, And Heart*. New York: Penguin Putnam.
- 2005 Designed sequences for Yoga Away DVDs: 1) The Workout, 2) Finding Focus, 3) Stress Reduction, 4) A Good Night. [www.yogaaway.com](http://www.yogaaway.com)
- 2007 DVD: *Viniyoga Therapy for the Low Back, Sacrum and Hips*. San Francisco: Pranamaya
- 2007 DVD: *Viniyoga Therapy for the Upper Back, Neck and Shoulders*. San Francisco: Pranamaya
- 2007 Kraftsow, G. Approach to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (p. 242-246) and Pancha Maya model (p. 247-49) in T. McCall: *Yoga as Medicine*. New York: Bantam Dell.
- 2010 Kraftsow, G. *Asana as a Tool: A Viniyoga Approach*. Integral Yoga Magazine. Spring 2010.
- 2010 Kraftsow, G. *Pranayama: Unique Gift of the Yogic Tradition*. Integral Yoga Magazine. Fall 2010.
- 2010 Kraftsow, G. *A Living Healing Tradition*. Yoga International. Winter 2010-11.
- 2010 Kraftsow, G. *Defining Yoga Therapy: A Call to Action*. International Journal of Yoga Therapy. No. 20 (2010).

