

About the Author:

ERICH SCHIFFMANN is a yoga master who studied at the Krishnamurti School in England, with various yoga masters in India, and with yoga master Joel Kramer in Bolinas, California. Schiffmann teaches yoga in Los Angeles, where he has many celebrity clients. His prize-winning, bestselling video, *Yoga Mind and Body*, featuring Ali MacGraw, has sold more than 250,000 copies. [FROM THE BACK COVER]

Yoga:

The Spirit & Practice of Moving into Stillness

by Erich Schiffmann

A TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTER WITH JOEL

In his highly acclaimed book, the prominent American yoga teacher Erich Schiffmann combines Joel Kramer's approach to yoga with his own approach to meditation. After previously studying with the world's most respected and influential yoga teachers in India and Europe, Erich credits Joel as the person who finally taught him how to actually do yoga and become his own teacher. Erich's book is based on the fundamentals of a "whole new way of doing yoga" that he learned from Joel.

Erich's autobiographical introduction to Yoga describes his transformative encounter with Joel in 1979 in England while Erich was the yoga teacher in residence at the Krishnamurti school in Brockwood. In the excerpts below, Erich describes his yoga practice prior to meeting Joel and Joel's subsequent impact that revolutionized his yoga and teaching once he finally "got" how to do yoga from within.



Image is from book cover.

FROM THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS IN *YOGA*

I would like to thank all my teachers. They've each inspired me in their own unique way. **Jim Fowler** at the Krishnamurti School, Brockwood Park, England (there's always something special about your first yoga teacher); **Sri TKV Desikachar** of Madras, India; **Jean Bernard Rishi**, Paris, France; **Mary Stewart**, London, England; **Donna Holleman**, Florence, Italy; **Vanda Scaravelli**, Fiesole, Italy; **BKS Iyengar**, Poona, India; **Krishnamurti**, India; and, most notably, **Joel Kramer**, Bolinas, California.

Prior to meeting Joel, even though I had been doing yoga for years, I had not yet learned how to do yoga—not really. I could perform most of the poses fairly well, but I hadn't yet discovered what it was all about. I was still looking to others to tell me what to do. Not surprisingly, and even though I loved it, I felt like I was doing someone else's yoga. It wasn't genuine yet. It wasn't mine. Joel taught me how to go within and run energy through my body. Within the first ten minutes of our first lesson, I was a changed man. From then on, yoga was mine.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO *YOGA*

*Erich explains how through meeting Joel
yoga finally became "his."*

When I returned to Brockwood after being with Iyengar, Krishnamurti asked me to show him what I had learned....The following Christmas I went home to visit my folks. One afternoon at the Bodhi Tree Bookstore I came across an article in the *Yoga Journal* entitled "A New Look at Yoga: Playing the Edge of Mind and Body" by a man named Joel Kramer.* I was totally wowed. Here was an article I could relate to. It was the perfect blend of Krishnamurti and yoga. I wrote Joel a letter as soon as I had returned to England asking if I could visit him the next time I was in the States. He wrote back saying, in effect, "Of course." But he also said he had a teaching engagement in England soon and that he was very interested in meeting Krishnamurti. Would it be possible, he wanted to know, for me to set up a meeting between them? "Sure," I said. "Easy. Come when K is here, and I'll introduce you." So he came to Brockwood a few months later, I introduced him to Krishnamurti at lunch, and they were able to talk.

Joel and I did yoga together in the early mornings and late afternoons. Joel was a wealth of information and experience. He taught me the fundamentals of how he did yoga, much as I am presenting them here in this book: how to breathe, how to stretch and run energy through your body in the poses, and how to "play your edge." It was a whole new way of doing yoga for me. It felt like the real thing, authentic, like the way the ancients probably practiced, and I was hooked immediately. This was a little awkward, I recall, because I was teaching yoga one way one day, and almost totally differently the next.

But I had changed. I had been transformed. I was "ripe," as Joel put it.

It took me a while before I was able to describe what had happened, but as I look back, I can see that this is when yoga finally became mine. I finally "got" how to do yoga. It finally became clear. It's internal. It's a way of listening inwardly and of being guided from within. Therefore, put simply, the basic technique is to go within and listen and then do as the within is prompting you to do. I had learned from Joel how to learn from my own practice and thereby be my own best teacher, rather than always going to someone else for information, inspiration, or technique. Yoga was no longer just a discipline, no longer something I did "because it's good for me" or because it might help get my head together. It became an inspired, creative act—more meaningful and more fun!

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. In Iyengar's classes, for example, he would say, "Move your little finger this way" or "Stretch the skin here"—and I would, and it always felt right. And then he'd say, "Move this skin" or "Rotate your arm in this direction"—and, again, I would, and it always felt right. But I had no idea where he was coming up with all this marvelous information, this detailed insight into how the poses worked. But when Joel taught me how to create a line of energy, suddenly all the intricacies that Iyengar had been talking about began happening by themselves. I would run energy down my arm, for example, and this skin would move this way, and that skin would move that way, and my little finger would move and my arm would rotate, just like Iyengar was saying. But instead of "me" doing it or being told what to do, it was coming from inside as a result of the energy flow. Suddenly I knew where Iyengar was coming up with all his information. He was being guided from within. I could now run energy through a line, feel what was happening, and then describe it to someone else as "Move here" or "Stretch that." These were not the main event, but the effects, the incidentals, the froth on the wave. The main event was the energy flow and going after the feeling of perfect flow. The main thing was getting in touch with the within. Once you get that, it's yours.

I left Brockwood several months after Joel's visit. This was part of going with the flow for me. Brockwood was beginning to feel stale, and I needed to move on.

Since that time I have fundamentally been my own teacher. This does not mean I do not learn from others. It means I learn from others when I am guided to do so, and that at all times I am in touch with the teacher within. What I especially enjoy, however, is the fact that every time I get down on the floor and do my yoga, it always feels new. It's not that I learned how to do yoga in the past and now I'm doing it. Each session is a learning event. It always feels as though I am in the midst of a personal yoga lesson designed especially for me. □ □ □

*Joel Kramer's *Yoga Journal* articles "A New Look at Yoga" (1977) and "Yoga as Self-Transformation" (1980) are at www.JoelKramer-DianaAlstad.com.