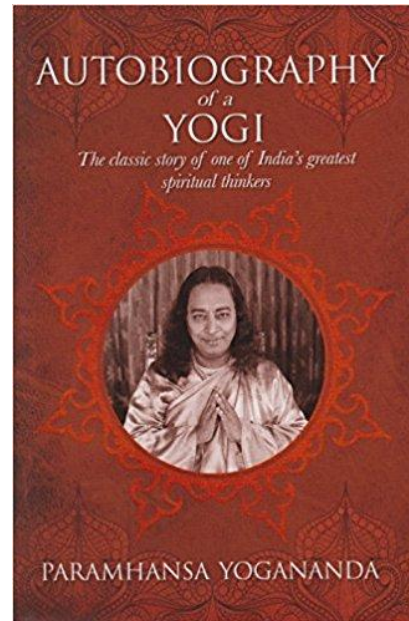


STUDENT PROFILE: EVANGELOS COUTSIAS; IN HIS OWN WORDS

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*As some have done in the past, Evan chose to write his own profile.
We've added some endnotes to flesh out three of his references.*

I first picked up Yoganada's book *Autobiography of a Yogi* when I was 15. Growing up in Greece in the 1960s – mostly in Athens, but my family also lived in both Rhodes and Crete for a time, there was no opportunity of finding a teacher, so I tried to apply what I could glean of the practices of Hatha Yoga and developed my own naïve meditation. Coming to California in the 1970s to attend college in physics and applied math at Caltech after one year at Athens University, I was at first totally confused and overwhelmed by the multitude of practices and the chaos among those professing them. I decided I needed something with a little more structure and discipline. So I began practicing Shotokan karate under Sensei Tsutomu Ohshima¹, which I continued for about eight years, at various schools, with interruptions. I also spent time with Shorin Ryu, Kung Fu, and Ninjitsu. However, gradually I found myself yearning for a more inward approach – less fighting imaginary outside opponents, more coming to terms with the real, inner ones.

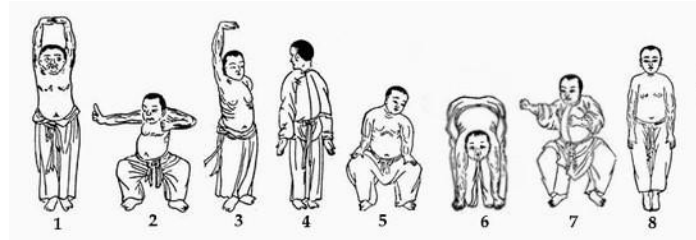


The key transformation in my life happened in 2001 when I met my life-mate and teacher, Laura, who – as a PT – helped me recover from a climbing injury shortly after we met by teaching me how to listen to the body and be guided by it. Together we explored the Feldenkrais Method² and Qigong, as well as mindfulness and focusing, and I was amazed at how the Eastern and Western ways touched the same places, seamlessly meshing the intellect and intuition. The ancient Greeks said: “A healthy mind needs a healthy body” and cultivating inner peace and happiness requires empowering oneself to seek those practices and habits that cultivate good health. Knowing deeply that health, as life itself, is not a given, but rather is as fleeting as a pleasant sunny day.

Among all the practices, our daily half hour of basic breathing Qigong exercises became for me the most cherished part of each day. After practicing Li Junfeng's Sheng Zhen Healing Qigong³ with Laura for several years as her health declined due to a mysterious illness, I found myself on Long Island in 2015 without her and I felt a strong need to return and explore Qigong further. Asking around for a teacher with strong foundation in the traditional ways, I learned about the Water Tiger School and I had the good luck to join as McElroy Laoshi was teaching Fragrance Qigong (*Xiang Gong*), which was exactly what I needed at a

very difficult moment. I have particularly enjoyed the friendly and respectful atmosphere in the school.

Over the past year, as I slowly have tried to reinstitute a daily practice in my extremely busy existence of learning to survive in a new place and in a new job with none of my old support



group, I have come to rely on the daily marshalling of body energy that Qigong offers to keep it all together and move forward. Among the various techniques we were exposed to last year in the Thursday evening class, I have found the Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade (*Baduanjin*) to be an especially strong foundation for my daily practice.

One of my problems with other practices, especially in the martial arts, was pushing myself beyond my body's limits, resulting in several injuries and setbacks. But although our practice at Water Tiger has constantly challenged my limitations, especially related to flexibility and reach, the atmosphere in the class engenders respect without competitiveness, and it has allowed me to slowly extend my limits, mostly the mental ones at first but slowly also the physical ones. In all, the year since I joined the school has been blessed with a steady improvement of health and the daily practice is again becoming the engine that energizes my days.

Endnotes:

¹ **Sensei Tsutomu Ohshima** is a prominent instructor of Shotokan. In 1957, he founded Shotokan Karate of America (ska.org) and established the first karate club on a university campus in the United States, the Caltech Karate Club. Also in 1957, his instructor and founder of Shotokan, Gichin Funakoshi, awarded Ohshima Sensei the highest rank in the lineage, 5th Dan.

² **The Feldenkrais Method** (feldenkrais.com) is an exercise therapy developed by Moshé Pinchas Feldenkrais (1904–1984) when, in the late 1930s / early 1940s, he sought to address his own movement issues originating with his chronically injured knee. The approach he developed seeks to "rewire" the mind / body connection to improve movement and, consequently, improve broader dynamic relationships, i.e., between the individual and gravity and the individual and society.

³ **Sheng Zhen Healing Qigong** (shengzhen.org) is an approach to energy work developed by Li Junfeng. "Sheng Zhen" translates as "Open Heart" or "Unconditional Love". The three stated functions of the approach are: 1) strengthens the body; 2) calms the mind through removal of negative emotions; and 3) opens the heart.

