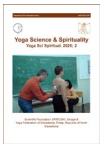
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# From Yoga to Acupuncture: A Journey of Integrative Medicine and Personal Development - Interview with Dr. Amalia Parousi, Acharne, Greece

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**Abstract**

This interview presents a retrospective account of a professional journey that began with medical studies in Skopje in the 1970s and developed into an integrative practice combining Western medicine, yoga, and acupuncture. It reflects the early development of organized yoga activities in Skopje and the establishment of structured training programs and professional societies. The narrative further describes the transition from yoga teaching to acupuncture practice, supported by medical education, international training, and professional engagement. It highlights the development of an integrative approach in which Western medicine, acupuncture, and yoga therapy are used in a complementary manner. The interview concludes with reflections on the value of combining traditional and modern medical systems in a holistic approach to health care.

**1) Dr. Amalia, you are one of the first students of teacher Pavlos K. Hassanagas. You came to Skopje and began your studies at the Faculty of Medicine.**

**Could you tell us more precisely when you arrived in Skopje, how you adapted to the new environment, and what life and studying in Skopje were like?**

I began my studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Skopje in February 1973 as an international student on a scholarship (Figure 1). Before starting my regular classes, I attended a program that helped foreign students adapt to their new environment and learn the Macedonian language.

During my studies, I lived in a student dormitory. Living in Skopje, a modern and vibrant city for its time, I felt warmly welcomed by both my fellow students and the local community.

At that time, Skopje was a true student city, attracting young people from many parts of the world, while its universities offered education in a wide range of scientific and academic fields. In such a multicultural environment, supported by the care and attention devoted to students' well-being, we had valuable opportunities to exchange cultural experiences and perspectives, broadening our understanding of both the world and our respective fields of study.

It was in this inspiring environment that the idea of integrating Western medicine with acupuncture and yoga first emerged—an idea that would later become an important part of both my professional career and my personal journey.

**2) How and when did you learn about yoga? Have you already had any prior experience with it, or did you begin practicing it in Skopje?**

Back in my high school years in my native Poland, I developed a strong interest in human potential, both physical and spiritual. I eagerly searched for answers to questions that had fascinated me from an early age, exploring books, magazines, and other available sources of information.



*Figure 1: Dr. Amalia Parousi*

However, at that time I had little opportunity to pursue these interests in practice or gain direct experience. The social climate in Poland then offered limited space for deeper engagement with such subjects and for exploring broader spiritual questions.

When I came to Skopje, an entirely new world opened up before me, one that naturally resonated with my interests. Early in my studies, while living in the student dormitory, I encountered a small group led by Pavlos Hassanagas that was devoted to yoga and yogic practices.

Thanks to the knowledge I had already gained through my independent study in Poland, I was eager to become part of that group. My genuine curiosity and desire to deepen my understanding of yoga, together with Pavlos's inspiring presence and guidance, motivated me from the very first sessions to dedicate myself fully to this practice and to explore its deeper dimensions.

**3) You were one of the first students of teacher Pavlos, and later an assistant and yoga instructor. What was the level of interest in yoga in the 1970s?**

**As far as I know, foreign students also attended yoga classes, didn't they?**

When our small group began to grow, yoga was still relatively unknown in Yugoslavia. At first, we were simply an informal gathering of students united by shared interests and enthusiasm.

At that time, state institutions closely monitored new ideas and movements with spiritual or philosophical dimensions. Activities of this kind were often subject to official review. Our modest size in the early years allowed us to develop quietly and devote ourselves to study and practice.

Interest in the group gradually increased, attracting increasing numbers of local and international students.The growing need for new instructors, together with my own desire to deepen my understanding of yoga, led me to take on the role of instructor at a relatively early stage.

New members continued to arrive, and the group expanded year after year. As it grew, so did the need for a more structured organization. By 1978, we had become large enough to be formally established as an official Yoga Section within the Foreign Students' Friendship Club, with separate groups for beginners and more advanced practitioners.

**4) In March 1978, a Yoga Section was established within the Club for International Friendship of Students. These first public yoga courses were attended by both foreign and local students, and possibly also some citizens of Skopje. I know that you were involved in organizing the activities in the club, as well as in conducting yoga classes. At that time, more people started attending yoga, and your responsibilities in both organization and teaching increased. Could you tell us more about this period of 1978 and 1979, when the Yoga Section was active in the club?**

**Were there only beginner courses, or was an advanced group also formed? What other activities did the section organize—did you hold seminars, lectures, and other events?**

The period 1978–1979 was one of rapid development and great enthusiasm. Interest in yoga continued to grow, and during this time around a hundred participants were involved in the activities. Until 1978, our work was mainly conducted in the student dormitory, after which we moved to the Foreign Students' Friendship Club (Figure 2), where we had better conditions for our activities and further development.



*Figure 2: Teaching a class at the Club for International Friendship of Students – Skopje, 1978*

At that time, we were no longer working only with beginners. In addition to beginner groups, there were also advanced groups, specialized health-oriented programs, as well as training groups for future instructors preparing for teaching roles.

My responsibilities were diverse. Thanks to my medical studies, I gave lectures on human anatomy and physiology, proper nutrition, and vegetarianism. At the same time, I monitored participants' health status

and helped develop specialized programs for individuals with specific health needs or those requiring preventive care. This included pregnant women, individuals with musculoskeletal issues, cardiovascular conditions, and other health concerns requiring a careful and individualized approach. For each participant, we aimed to select techniques and exercises best suited to their specific needs.

In addition to regular classes, we organized numerous lectures, presentations, and other educational activities, which further expanded and evolved over time.

For me personally, this was an extremely fulfilling period. I experienced deep satisfaction in seeing how collective effort produced results and how more and more people were discovering yoga. At the same time, this work gave me additional energy and inspiration to continue my medical studies in parallel and to deepen my knowledge of traditional healing systems such as shiatsu, acupuncture, and Ayurveda.

**5) In the early 1980s, activities related to yoga in Skopje expanded significantly: a Training School for yoga instructors began to operate, public interest in yoga increased, and gym halls were rented for classes. Courses were organized for beginner and advanced groups (levels 1 through 5). In March 1981, the Skopje Yoga Society was founded, followed later by yoga societies in Struga, Prilep, Bitola, and Shtip. Federal seminars began to be organized, which later developed into international events. Research activities also started at the Institute of Physiology at the Faculty of Medicine. Specialized courses were conducted for residents of the Institute for Speech, Hearing and Voice in Skopje, and seminars were organized with well-known yoga teachers from India.**

**How were you, together with the teacher and some of your students, able to manage and coordinate all these activities and ensure that everything functioned smoothly?**

I still recall an incident that brings a smile to my face. One of our students lit a scented incense stick that had been given to us by an Indian colleague. This raised concern among the club authorities, who feared that we might not be an ordinary yoga group, but a sect or similar organization. As a result, our activities were temporarily suspended.

It was at that moment that we realized how important it was to present yoga through its health-related and scientific value. We therefore approached professors and research staff at the Faculty of Medicine to explain the therapeutic value of yoga in medical terms.

As a result, scientific research on yoga began at the Institute of Physiology of the Faculty of Medicine in Skopje, where I had studied. Professors Trojachanec and Spiroski, together with their collaborators, were involved in this work. Their scientific support lent credibility and seriousness to our activities and helped dispel doubts surrounding our work.

In this context, the Yoga Instructor Training School was established, where our most advanced students continued their development. One of the earliest and most dedicated among them was Vancho Taseski, now a respected associate professor and responsible for the scientific program of yoga. I am especially proud to have witnessed the early development of such an important figure.

In 1981, the Skopje Yoga Society was founded, marking an important milestone in the development of yoga in our country. Later, similar societies were established in Struga, Prilep, Bitola, and Shtip, and yoga gradually began to spread beyond the capital.

At the same time, we began organizing national seminars (Figure 3), which later developed into international events. Our collaboration with the Institute of Physiology continued and expanded through scientific research programs, and we also developed specialized programs for residents of the Institute of Speech, Hearing and Voice in Skopje.




*Figure 3: At the International Yoga Seminar: YOGASANAS in Struga, 1986. Pavlos K. Hassanagas, Dr. Zdravko Trojachanec, Dr. Amalia Parousi, Vancho Taseski*

Particularly important for our development was the opportunity to organize seminars with distinguished yoga teachers from India. In this way, we maintained direct contact with the original tradition while simultaneously developing yoga within a modern, scientifically grounded, and educational framework.

**6) One of the most important activities in the field of yoga in our country has been the training and further development of yoga instructors. At that time, you were directly involved in the Instructor Training School both as a yoga instructor and as a**

**medical professional.**

**Could you tell us more about this, and which subjects or content you personally taught?**

The training and development of new instructors was one of our most important areas of activity, as the future development of yoga in the country depended on the quality of its instructors.

As a medical student and later as a healthcare professional, I was mainly responsible for theoretical instruction in anatomy, physiology, nutrition, and applied yoga therapy.

My goal was for future instructors to understand not only how a particular technique is performed, but also why it is used, what its indications and limitations are, and how it can be safely adapted to each individual's needs. I believe it was precisely this integration of yoga with scientific knowledge that formed one of the key foundations upon which yoga later developed and became established in our environment.

**7) In addition to your studies at the Faculty of Medicine and your engagement in yoga, you were also interested in acupuncture as an ancient healing method.**

**Where did you acquire your theoretical knowledge and practical training in this traditional method of treatment, and did you also attend training courses outside the country?**

During the final phase of my medical studies, while I was completing my clinical internship, the first acupuncture congress in Yugoslavia was organized in Ohrid (Figure 4, Figure 5).




*Figure 4: Participation in the First Congress of the Association of Acupuncturologists of Yugoslavia, 1985. Dr. Amalia Parousi, Dr. Lazar Dimitriev and others*

At that time, my teacher Pavlos encouraged me to attend the congress as a representative of the Yoga Society of Skopje, which we had founded in 1981.

During this congress, I met Professor Lazar Dimitriev, a physician, gynecologist, and general practitioner, who at the time served as president of the Yugoslav Acupuncture Society.

This encounter opened the door to the world of acupuncture for me. What began as professional curiosity quickly developed into a serious commitment and further education.




*Figure 5: The First Congress of the Association of Acupuncturologists of Yugoslavia,1985. Dr. Amalia Parousi; Dr. Lazar Dimitriev - gynecologist and acupuncturist; Academician Dr. Antonie Skoklev - maxillofacial surgeon and acupuncturist; Pavlos K. Hassanagas - yoga teacher; Dr. Oikonomopoulos – acupuncturist*

Seeing the possibilities that this ancient therapeutic method offered within modern medical practice, I felt that I had found the next important step in my professional path.

Thus began my work as an acupuncturist—a profession to which I have remained dedicated for the past four decades, up to the present day.

**8) Have you participated in international professional and scientific conferences with presentations on the field of acupuncture?**

Continuing to bridge yoga and acupuncture in Yugoslavia, we organized a public lecture titled "Yoga and Acupuncture," where the speakers included Dr. Dimitriev, my teacher Pavlos, and myself.

A year later, after completing my medical studies in 1982, I moved to my homeland Greece and settled in Athens.

There, I immediately came into contact with physicians practicing acupuncture and joined the Panhellenic Acupuncture Society, where I later also served on its Medical Council. At the same time, I became a member of the World Medical Acupuncture organization, ICMART, based in Brussels.

Over the following years, I participated in numerous congresses, seminars, and educational programs around the world. Among them, I especially remember the World Congress on Acupuncture, Yoga and Ayurveda in Sri Lanka in 1984 (Figure 6), further

training in Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture in China (2010), as well as advanced training in traditional healing research at the Institute for Traditional Health Systems in Moscow (2006).




*Figure 6: World Congress of Alternative Medicine, Sri Lanka 1984*

In parallel, I completed my specialization in general medicine at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and obtained the title of specialist in family medicine.

From 1984 to the present day, I have been working as a physician in my private practice, cooperating with health insurance funds, while also actively practicing medical acupuncture.

Looking back, I feel that the path that began during my student years in Skopje, through yoga, naturally led me to acupuncture and to a broader vision of health, which I continue to follow today.

**9) As a physician, yoga instructor, yoga therapist, and acupuncturist, do you believe that a synergy can be established between Western medicine, acupuncture, and yoga therapy in the treatment of various diseases?**

**If so, for which conditions do you think this synergy would be most effective?**

Yoga and acupuncture are two traditional therapeutic systems that share a common goal – the establishment of balance, harmony, and holistic human development on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

In yoga, individuals actively participate in their own health care. With the guidance of a teacher, they learn various techniques, gradually adopt a way of life, and become conscious participants in the process of their own physical and mental development.

In acupuncture, the therapy is administered by the acupuncturist, while the patient receives treatment for therapeutic, preventive, or balancing purposes. When these two approaches are combined, the results are often even more effective.

What has always struck me is that both yoga and acupuncture are universal systems. They do not depend on a person's political, religious, or ideological beliefs, nor on their level of education or cultural background. For this reason, they are now practiced successfully in many parts of the world.

Western medicine, on the other hand, is an indispensable foundation of modern healthcare. It is supported by extensive scientific achievements, advanced diagnostics, pharmacotherapy, and surgical methods that save lives every day.

I believe that the greatest benefit for the patient is achieved when these three approaches are applied in a complementary way. Western medicine provides scientifically validated diagnostics and treatment when necessary; acupuncture can offer effective solutions without drugs or invasive procedures when appropriate, particularly in musculoskeletal conditions, functional disorders, and conditions related to the autonomic nervous system; while yoga therapy allows individuals to actively participate in their own recovery and maintenance of health.

For me, these three approaches are not contradictory. On the contrary, they complement one another. When applied with scientific responsibility, proper clinical assessment, and respect for the individual needs of each person, they can contribute to truly comprehensive care for both physical and mental health.

Looking back, I feel deeply grateful to have been part of this remarkable journey. From my early student days in Skopje until today, yoga, medicine, and acupuncture have been not only part of my professional career, but also of my way of life and way of thinking.

The people I have met, the friendships that have been formed, the collaborations that have developed, and the shared commitment to health and humanity have left a lasting mark on my life.

And today, I am happy to say that it all began right here in Skopje. I will always remain grateful to my teacher Pavlos, to my collaborators, students, and friends, as well as to all those who contributed to yoga becoming part of the lives of so many people.

I wish the Yoga Federation many more successful years, new generations of teachers and students, and that it never loses the spirit in which it was founded forty years ago.

Dr. Amalia, thank you for your insights in this conversation. Your words are a testament to your beginnings in the fields of yoga and acupuncture, two ancient holistic systems that play an important and irreplaceable role in human holistic life and health. Through this conversation, from this perspective of time, I have learned certain pieces of information and facts that are new even to me. But even more so, they are vital for the current and future generations in this

region, as well as the readers of this journal, to become acquainted with a part of the pioneering developmental path of yoga in our country, which began with the arrival of Teacher Pavlos in Skopje in 1972. The foundations of yoga here were laid then, it has endured in these regions for more than half a century, and that developmental path continues forward.

Thank you once again, and I wish you good health and success in your noble mission of applying your knowledge and experience as a person, a medical doctor, a yoga therapist, and an acupuncturist for the well-being of people.