

## Yoga and Ayurveda:

"Life (Ayu) is the combination (samyoga) of body, senses, mind and reincarnating soul. Ayurveda is the most sacred science of life, beneficial to humans both in this world and the world beyond." — Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, I.42 -34

## Yoga and Ayurveda

Yoga is one of the most extraordinary spiritual sciences that mankind has ever discovered. It is like a gem of great proportions, containing many facets whose

light can illumine the whole of our lives with great meaning. Going back over five thousand years, it is one of the few spiritual traditions that has maintained an unbroken development throughout history. Comprehending all aspects of the human being and the world of nature, it can unfold all the higher powers that are accessible to us both internally and externally.

Yogic methods cover the entire field of our existence—from the physical, sensory, emotional, mental,

and spiritual to the highest Self-realization. It includes all methods of higher evolution in humanity — physical postures, ethical disciplines, breath control, sensory methods, affirmations

and visualizations, prayer and mantra, and complex meditative disciplines. Yoga understands the nature and interrelationship of the physical, subtle and formless universes into the boundless infinite beyond time and space, and shows us how these also exist within each human individual.

Yoga is the fruit of the teachings of the Himalayan sages, going back to what yogis regard as the beginning of this particular world age or cycle of civilization some ten thousand years ago. It is said to carry on the traditions of earlier, spiritually advanced teachings which present civilizations have forgotten. Yoga is a distillation of wisdom from the myriad of sages throughout the ages, the ongoing legacy of the spiritual urge of humanity, as adapted to the particular requirements of each age and each person. It is like a wide and luxurious banyan tree spreading out our higher potentials and giving them strength and nourishment.

Like yoga, with which it has grown, Ayurveda possesses a long history with many layers, much diversity and a continuous development that makes it rel-

evant for all people and all times. Ayurveda is one of the most remarkable holistic medical systems in the world. It covers all aspects of health and well-being-physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. It includes all methods of healing from diet, herbs, exercise and lifestyle regimens to yogic practices and meditation. With its unique understanding of individual constitution, Ayurveda provides the insight for each person and each culture to create a way of life in harmony both with the world of nature and our higher Self. It offers optimal health and development for all creatures by its profound understanding of natural law.

Following in the footsteps of yoga, which already has a worldwide presence, Ayurveda is emerging as one of the most important global systems of mind-body medicine. It shows us how to understand the language of nature, the language of life, so that we can live in harmony with the greater universe, not evolving only for ourselves but bringing benefit to all creatures. Ayurveda contains the secrets not only for healing the individual but also for uplifting society, all creatures and the planet itself.

Yoga and Ayurveda are sister sciences that developed together and repeatedly influenced each other throughout history. They are integral parts of the great system of Vedic knowledge which states that all the universe is One Self and that the key to cosmic knowledge lies within our own minds and hearts. As Vedic disciplines, yoga and Ayurveda work together to enhance their great benefits on all levels. They can be integrated with related Vedic or yogic sciences of astrology, architecture, music and language for an even broader approach.

Yoga is first and foremost a science of Self-realization. Its concern is spiritual practice, mainly through meditation, to take us beyond the sorrow and ignorance of the world. It teaches us how to move from our outer bodily and egobound identity to our immortal Self that dwells within the heart. Yoga provides the key to all spiritual development, which in the Vedic sense is gaining knowledge of our true nature beyond time, space, death and suffering.

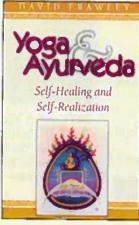
Ayurveda is primarily a science of Self-healing aimed at relieving the diseases of body and mind. This does not mean that Ayurveda is merely a method of personal healing which doesn't require help from therapists or doctors. In fact, Ayurveda says that medical practitioners are indispensable in dealing with the complexities of disease and the variabilities of health requirements. Ayur-

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veda as Self-healing means that it is concerned with restoring wholeness, with our inner Self as its ultimate goal, which is spiritual healing.

Ayurveda's concern is alleviating both bodily and mental diseases and promoting both physical and psychological well-being. Yet the ultimate goal of classical Ayurveda, like classical yoga, is Self-realization—the highest form of Self-healing. Ayurveda shows us how to attain optimal health not for outer enjoyment but to provide a wholesome foundation and sufficient energy to pursue the yogic quest.

The link between yoga and Ayurveda is prana, or the life-force. Yoga is the intelligence of prana seeking greater evolutionary transformations, while Ayurveda is its healing power, seeking to consolidate the life-systems it has already developed. Together, Ayurveda and yoga afford a complete discipline, one which can transform our existence from the physical to the deepest spiritual levels of our being with extraordinary vitality and creativity on all levels.

## Yoga and Ayurveda in the West

Yoga is a common term in the Western world today, where yoga classes can be found in every city or neighborhood. Most people identify yoga with the physi-

cal postures or asanas that are the most evident side of the system. While yoga asanas can afford a good doorway into the vast temple of yoga, they are hardly the entire structure or its central deity. Eventually, most who look into yoga will come into contact with its broader and more spiritual practices, such as mantra and meditation.

Ayurveda is similarly becoming known in the West today as a special system of natural medicine. There are ayurvedic centers in most cities in the country. Ayurvedic herbs can be found at most health food stores. The idea of ayurvedic constitutional types has been presented in a number of popular books and magazines. However, the physical side of ayurvedic healing through diet and herbs is only part of the system. Its inner aspect, healing the subtle body and the mind (which includes yogic practices and meditation), is the other and perhaps more important half.

A number yoga centers offer ayurvedic therapies and the two sciences are generally studied together. However, many people who have been introduced to yoga from a physical model may not be fully aware of the importance of its ayurvedic connection. This may include various yoga teachers and yoga therapists, who may themselves have no

ayurvedic training.

Traditionally, in India, yoga dealt with the spiritual side of life, what we have introduced as the path of Self-realization. Ayurveda, on the other hand, dealt with both physical and mental disease as well as with the prescription of lifestyle regimens. Yoga as therapy or exercise was traditionally prescribed in an ayurvedic context. Classical yoga therapy was ayurvedic both in theory and in application. This fact should be borne in mind by those using yoga today for healing purposes. They should not ignore the potential benefits of adding ayurvedic insights to yoga therapy. They should learn to understand the ayurvedic effects of yogic practices and not merely try to define yogic healing in terms of modern medicine or modern psychology alone.

The combined study of yoga and Ayurveda is of great importance for each discipline and for helping us understand the whole of life that both sciences address in such a profound manner. Restoring wholeness in body, mind and spirit is what we are all seeking, both individually and collectively.

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