

Ayurveda - Health notes

Yoga and Ayurveda

Vital Health Topic: The Yoga-Ayurveda Connection

In recent years Yoga has become increasingly popular in Ireland. While many view yoga as a gentler way to exercise, most long-time practitioners realize that yoga is not just physical - it creates balance in mind, emotions and consciousness as well. And they are starting to realize that yoga shares the same origin and goal as ayurveda, the traditional Vedic system of health care.

SAME ORIGIN AND GOAL

Both yoga and ayurveda have their origin in the Vedic tradition of India, and both are a means to gain better health.

We can compare a verse from the Yoga Sutra, *yogas chitta vritti nirodhaha*, which describes yoga as the settled state of the mind to a verse from ayurvedic texts, *svasmin dishati iti svasthah*, which states that one who always remains united with the Self is a healthy person. These verses show that both yoga and ayurveda have the same goal, which is attaining union with the Self, the most settled state of the mind.

Other verses from the ayurvedic texts also point to this self-referral state of the mind as the basis of health. A verse from the Sushruta Samhita, for instance, says, "He (she) whose doshas are in balance, whose appetite is good, whose dhatus are functioning normally, whose malas are in balance and whose Self, mind and senses remain full of bliss, is called a healthy person."

So again, this verse points out that the experience of the self-referral state of bliss is an essential part of the definition of health in Maharishi Ayurveda.

UNITY OF MIND, BODY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Yoga literally means "union" or "to join together" in Sanskrit. It has the same root that gives rise to the English word "yoke," as in "to yoke together," and refers to the union of body, mind and soul. Yoga helps the mind become stronger by connecting the mind with the Self, the Atma.

This experience of unity is also the aim of Maharishi Ayurveda. For instance, the word "ayurveda" is derived from the Sanskrit word *ayu*. While one common meaning of *ayu* is "life" or "lifespan," and thus ayurveda is "the science of life and longevity," another meaning of *ayu* is mentioned in Charaka Samhita, *sharirendriya sattvatma sanyogo . . . ayu*.

This verse defines *ayu* as the state where the physical body, senses, mind, and soul are integrated. So you see that whether you are talking about yoga or *ayu*, it is a state of unity -- or complete integration of mind, body and consciousness -- that is the goal.

YOGA IS PART OF AYURVEDA

Yoga is mentioned in ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita. Yoga is important for dissolving physical stress and calming the mind before meditation, and is central to *dinacharya*, the ayurvedic routine. It is the ideal ayurvedic exercise, because it rejuvenates the body, improves digestion, and removes stress.

Yoga balances all three doshas, and different poses have different effects. Forward bending postures cool Pitta dosha. Twists are good for Kapha because they stimulate digestion. Backward bends are heating, and thus balancing to Vata types, as long as the person has

Backward bends are heating, and thus balancing to Vata types, as long as the person has the strength to do them. Yoga postures tone every area of the body, and cleanse the internal organs of toxins, which is one of the goals of ayurveda.

AND AYURVEDA IS PART OF YOGA

At the same time, yoga practitioners can benefit from the ayurvedic daily routine as part of their yoga practice. For instance, abhyanga (ayurvedic massage) helps remove toxins from the body and relaxes the muscles for yoga practice.

"The knowledge of Maharishi Ayurveda provides tremendous support to yoga practice" says Dr. Donn Brennan "Without a foundation in ayurvedic knowledge, hatha yoga runs the risk of becoming just pure physical exercise."

Dr Brennan points out that yoga aims to cleanse the nadis, or channels, with different postures. "But trying to do that without using the ayurvedic principles for removing ama is like hopping on one leg. That's why traditional yoga schools have always taught ayurvedic principles as well as yoga asanas, because the two are so interdependent."

If someone is attending a yoga class on a regular basis, he or she is starting to dislodge ama (digestive impurities) in the body. "But if they are still maintaining a lifestyle and diet that creates ama, all they are really doing is moving their sludge around," says Dr Brennan. "The yoga practitioner needs to know how to detoxify through the dietary, lifestyle, and purification practices of Maharishi Ayurveda."