

Making The Case For Uniting Yoga and Ayurveda For Therapeutic Purposes: *A Comparative Overview Of Supportive Principles*

Yoga means Union. Some years ago I was attending my first Seminar with Dr. Vasant Lad. I had been to his Institute twice already to take the Ayur*yoga Program. We got to talking. In the course of our conversation, he suddenly remarked: You should focus on uniting yoga and Ayurveda. I was startled. Here was a clear mandate that was revealing the very same echoes in my heart! It was like a clarion call to arms! Irresistible. Of course, later on I found out he says the same to everyone! So here I am some years later with his words still ringing in my ears and still working on this particular Yoga: this very auspicious union between the science of medicine circa ancient India and the science of yoga therapy circa 21st century!

Let us be clear, although I have asked around and dug around, and I have asked some very laudable authorities and dug in some very ancient texts, the roots of yoga therapy as we know it, are not that deeply sunk into the soil of the Veda-s where the philosophy of yoga rules Supreme. Yes, yoga as a philosophy I can trace all the way back to very ancient texts including the *Rg Veda* itself.

There are numerous references in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* that include references to both the *Rg* and the *Yajur Veda* in this regard. And it may be that we will find the development of yoga to be quite considerable, much before we get to the Yoga Sutra-s of *Patanjali*. There is even debate between the *Vaishnavites* and the *Shaivites* as to who is the original teacher! Although tradition places *Hiranyagarbha* as the originator of the science of yoga as far back as the *Rg Veda* and it is from this source that the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, which is primarily a Shaivite Upanishad, looks for and mentions *Hiranyagarbha* as the source of yoga. Which makes the need for a contentious debate seem irrelevant. Especially as the two deities themselves are so intertwined in their love and admiration for each other!

However, that being said, we are back to the question of yoga therapy and Ayurveda as a Union. It is pretty obvious that if you wish to unite two things you must know their properties, especially in respect to their compatibility. To examine yoga therapy, we need first and foremost to know Yoga. Thus you could say yoga is the elephant in the room! And how do we usually identify an elephant? Through its most prominent focal point, its unique trunk. If yoga is the elephant in the room, then its trunk is asana, yes? Let us be honest, we do not say I go to asana class, we say we are going to yoga class but what we are practicing is asana. In fact we might even say, I have found a yoga teacher who *also* teaches pranayama and meditation! So we have made the trunk into the whole elephant.

Its time to examine the context of yoga as a complete practice. Because if we are going to practice yoga therapy we greatly benefit by knowing that all aspects of yoga can be used therapeutically. We also need to be aware that therapy is a side benefit to the practice of yoga. And we may be shocked to also know that asana is shared by many of the other vedic arts including martial arts and dance! In fact it is quite

possible that much of what we practice today comes from those roots rather than from the more traditional and older yoga texts. And this practice, as you can imagine, may not be so different from the athletic or gymnastic endeavors of other cultures. After all, the Human Body is pretty much the same all over the world. There is a wonderful book put out by the Lonavla Yoga Institute with illustrations of asana-s from Egyptian, Mexican, Celtic, Tibetan, Thai, Persian, Arabic and Chinese Cultures.

In any case, there is much more sharing going on than this between the cultures of the ancient worlds and so the divisions may have come about as civilizations solidified into different molds. And when it comes to the Vedic mold, the larger picture shows an intricate interweaving between all the different branches of knowledge and practice. This would include between the science of Ayurveda and the absolutely practical and hands on philosophical manuals of yoga.

The latter, a great teaching pathway for accessing our *purusa* or inner most self, and the former, for the art of living within our *prakruti* or essential manifested nature. Let us be clear that the goals of yoga and Ayurveda are different but the language, the terrain, the shared tools and the cross referencing are inherently the same. In other words, when yogin-s wanted to reference their health, they did not create a new language at all. Rather, they used the language that was already present and that language, in its therapeutic application, is Ayurveda.

Now, when it comes to our current understanding of yoga therapy, we do not necessarily make this connection. Rather, we, beginning with some of the more modern *yogacharya*-s from India and moving on to some very well respected masters arising here, connected its therapeutic applications to the current evolving medical paradigm. This is modern yoga therapy. And I, for one, do not see any major conflict here, especially if we are mindful that in any co-mingling, we look for common factors that make the blending a more palatable medicine.

In the end any therapy must be preceded by diagnosis. There are numerous references in older texts to the therapeutic effects of certain yogic practices but no related references to diagnosis. Where there is a reference to diagnosis it is simply to refer to either a *vaidya* (Ayurvedic Doctor) or to an imbalance in *dosha*, *dhatu*, *vayu* etc, all Ayurvedic terminology that could be as easily understood then as basic medical terminology is today. A language by which a medical professional can communicate with his/her patient.

For the purposes of uniting yoga and Ayurveda today, this implies two things at the very least:

A, that the ancient authors were well aware of the value of yogic practices to our health and B, that they relegated that aspect of treatment to a *vaidya* when practical and/or to the general understanding of the connection between certain asana-s and the imbalances of *dosha-dhatu-agni-mala-manas-atman*. That is: constitutional identity and its imbalance, tissue repair and promotion, banking of the digestive fire

to perfect pitch, helping to remove wastes, creating a balanced mind and accessing clarity in that mind for our intimate connection with our inner most Being which we can refer to as the Soul/Purusa.

Any diseases that arose out of these fields of balance/imbalance/excess/deficiency etc were named in Yogic texts by their Ayurvedic names: some examples: *ama-vata* refers to toxic build up in the body due to a chyme formation imbalance and can be treated by such asana-s as *baddha-padmasana*, *bhujangasana*, *gomukhasana* and *dhanurasana*, all taken from different medieval texts of yoga such as HYP, Sacitra Caurayayasin Asane (Marathi) and Sacitra Vyavaharika of Mahajan. And from more recent masters such as Swami Sivananda. There are many more such references but look at the names of the diseases: *alasya* (lethargy) *apana-vayu-dosa*, *kasa* (cough) *grahani* (diarrhea), *kamala* (jaundice), *kostha baaddhata* (constipation) even asana for *krsna-kesa* (overcoming grey hair)! All these terms arose not from a new therapeutic language but borrowed from the sibling science of Ayurveda.

And in the end, here are two quotes of significance:

In the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Svamarama says: *In all diseases the skillful physician should carefully administer treatment according to the methods prescribed by the science of medicine and also administer yogic treatment.* This shows that there already existed an intertwining of yoga and Ayurveda for therapeutic purposes. The second quote is referenced best in light of the above as it delineates what we may consider yogic treatment: It is from the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* and it says: *The yogin gets rid of a disease by means of asana, sin by pranayama and gives up the mental disorders by withdrawing the mind (pratyahara). By Dharana he attains mental fortitude and in Samadhi acquires marvelous consciousness and with the renunciation of observance both auspicious and inauspicious, attains liberation.*

In fact, in the reference to disease, the first of significance is in the Yoga Sutra-s themselves and only refers to that state as a hindrance in our practice of yoga. Which is very reminiscent of the earlier Vedic view of disease being a demon that disturbs our health. In the HYP, in a version published by Kaivalyadhama, there is a chapter on Dosa-Cikitsa and all through many of the texts are scattered references to *dosha-s* and *dhatu-s*.

Let us look once again at *yoga'sana* but now from the eyes of Ayurveda. In Ayurveda, the practice of yoga (*yoga'bhyasa*) would fall under the category of self-care (*swasthavritta*) as part of the daily regimen known as *dinacharya*. The *Ashtanga Hridayam* describes this schedule as that which encourages appropriate diet, activity, behavior, and those daily chores most compatible with one's own wellbeing/*satmya*.

This would be the general application of yogic practices especially asana as *vyayama* or exercise. The purpose is three-fold: physical strength, tolerance and lightness of body. Because Ayurvedic terminology includes complete system integration of body,

mind and spirit, wellbeing is personal to the individual's constitution and condition. Thus one is admonished to:

- a) Exert the body in such a manner as to cause one to become tired, with the specific requirement that we exercise at half our strength when healthy and *less* when not.
- b) Mold the body into different shapes, which means development of self-control in the form of *asana-s*.

Sounds to me very much like a common sense admonishment on how to tailor yoga practice to your own personal needs!

And in the end, yoga therapy would be this: This being a direct quote from Dr. NC in Chennai who trained and was the senior therapist at KYM before starting his own organization, Viniyoga Healing Foundation Of India:

Health is the greatest wealth.

Every one of us is unique, highly individualized.

Unique, highly individualized at all levels.

At all levels - **Physical, Physiological, Psychological and Deeper.**

So one standard yoga practice for all – simply does not work.

No ailment exists alone.

It always inhabitates individuals.

The name of the ailment may be the same.

But the individuals affected are different.

So one Prescription like yoga practice for any ailment – simply does not work.

Disease oriented yoga approach is not an objective reality.

Individualized orientation is all that is required.

Please know that Dr. Chandrashekharan is a Medical Doctor. Not an Ayurvedic Practitioner. What is being implied here is that to access the code of yoga as a therapy, our diagnostic tools must refer us to a context based diagnosis. This is best summed up by Dr. NC himself in a succinct quote from Shri T. Krishnamacharya:

Question: What is Yogatherapy for Asthma?

Sri T.K. : Who is Asthma?

So, what are these common aspects of yoga and Ayurveda that we can study for therapeutic purposes?

For this and other related answers, let us turn for a moment and give thanks to IAYT for the tremendous clarity in its new efforts at creating Standards for Yoga Therapists. *It is encouraging, thorough, extremely valuable, well thought out and well presented.* Kudos to the IAYT Educational Standards Committee for what is definitely a hallmark achievement!

Let us here introduce some of the suggestions they have made, for putting this presentation in perspective, and also to show wholehearted agreement with the standards requiring a yoga therapist to be able to cognize an Rx by the western medical field or modern healthcare per se.

This, *before* I applaud them for including the similar needs of adding an understanding of the *Ayurvedic* perspective! ☺

And let us also make it clear that as it is the prerogative of training as an MD, a Chiropractic, a Naturopath or even an Osteopath, to make a diagnosis; it is the responsibility of a well trained yoga therapist to be able to understand and then, *using the tools of yoga*, address the diagnosis in accordance with the practices of Yoga. The same would apply to Ayurvedic diagnosis and prognosis: it needs to be made by a trained Ayurvedic Practitioner and as the sister organization, NAMA, is doing currently; they are upgrading these qualifications to a higher level of competency.

First quote of relevance:

To serve the clients of yoga therapy, yoga therapists must be grounded in the foundations of anatomy, basic physiology, and the common terminology of modern healthcare.

Second quote, in relevance to the goals of yoga therapy:

In addition to presenting and categorizing specific content, the Competencies Profile, as a whole, is intended to be a tool for understanding yoga therapy as a personal, individualized approach to healing and wellness...

Third quote: ah, now we come to Ayurveda☺:

Relevant theory from Ayurveda, the sister science of yoga, was included to offer an additional, congruent perspective on assessment, development of protocol, and evaluation of the effects of yoga tools when applied in a therapeutic context.

And finally:

Yoga is a scientific system of self-investigation, self-transformation, and self-realization that originated in India... Yoga therapy is informed by its sister science, Ayurveda.

Now, if you will allow me I will go back to Dr. NC for some more wisdom:

- Shri Krishnamacharya equated its (yoga therapy) precise efficacy to that of a surgical therapy without the usage of surgical instruments.
- Strength of a structure depends on its foundation. In the same way, yoga therapy owes its strength to its basic foundational knowledge system:

Yogic Anatomy, Yogic Physiology, Yogic Psychology and Yogic Methodology of Examination.

He goes on to add:

Yogic anatomy deals extensively on the Panchamaya model...Tri Sarira Model...and their relevance to yoga therapy.

Yogic physiology elaborately discusses Prana, Nadi-s, Chakra-s, Agni, Amruta, Pancha

Vayu-s,and **Yogic methodology** of examination and assessment of prana-flow and its correction is explained in a practical way.

Yogic psychology deals with all the facets of mind –Jnana, Smriti, Samskara, Klesha, Shad Urmi-s, Vasana-s, etc.

And finally:

Therapeutic methodology of yoga charts out a precise and effective model for complete observation, verification and assessment of the individual *and the effect of the ailment on the individual....*

So, now we have some ideas on yogic anatomy et al. If we look at the terms mentioned in the Standards of Competency urged by IAYT the list increases dramatically to include:

- *Tri-guna*
- *Tri-dosha*
- *Prakrti/Vikrti*
- *Ama*
- *Agni*
- *Samprapti*

Not only do these terms arise out of the terminology of Ayurveda, but also their basic understandings are considered essential for application of yoga therapy. This is because they identify the individuality of the patient/client as well as the possible pathways of the disease. Thus one can see clearly the manner in which one can remove the obstacles in the pathway and reverse the disease process to the extent possible. This is cause and effect medicine.

In Ayurveda one would further say that this would be dependent primarily on two things: the stage of the disease (in Ayurveda there are six clearly identifiable stages to the disease process) and the state of the patient (the nature and condition of the field in which the disease is manifesting).

How can we make this knowledge more accessible to a yoga therapist so that they can have procedural understanding? Quite simple. The nature of the patient as well as the current condition, are both covered under the prakrti/vikrti paradigm. The understanding of passageways is broadly explained under another yogic/Ayurvedic concept: *nadi-s*. The energy that moves through any of these channels is Prana.

And here is the key to Ayurvedic medicine, in the words of its most revered teacher, Acharya Charaka:

Agñiveśa listen, physicians are of two kinds – the superior who promotes prāṇa and thus destroys diseases (roga) and the inferior, who pursues roga (disease) and thus destroys prāṇa – from Ca Su 29

What is “yoga therapy” if not the understanding of how best to manage and promote *prana!*

In the very first sloka in *Hathayoga Pradipika*, Brahmananda, in his commentary “*Jyotsna*” describes Hathayoga as follows:

हश्च ठश्च हठौ सूर्याचन्द्रौ तयोरयोगो हठयोगः येतेन हठ शब्दवाच्ययोः सूर्याचन्द्राख्ययोः प्राणापानयोः
ऐख्यलक्षणः प्राणायामः हठयोग इति हठयोगस्य लक्षणं सिद्धम्।

haśca ṭhaśca haṭhau sūryācandrau tayoryogo haṭhayogaḥ yetena haṭha śabdavācyayoḥ
sūryācandrākhyayoḥ prāṇāpānayoḥ aikhyalakṣaṇaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ haṭhayoga iti
haṭhayogasya lakṣaṇam siddham|

'Ha' and 'Tha' makes Hatha. Surya and Chandra, their union is Hathayoga. By this word Hatha is meant Surya and Chandra, that is Prana and Apana, thus it signifies their union. So, Pranayama is the definition of Hathayoga and that is the meaning/conclusion.

In other words, if we can manage prana, we have discovered a magical aspect of yoga. According to Srivatsa Ramaswami, a yoga scholar par excellence and student of Shri Krishnamacharya for over 33 years, there is another definition of yoga. He does not however, give the source but here it is anyway because it is magnificent!

“*aprāpya prāpaṇam prāpyam yogam*”.

Yoga is attaining what is generally considered impossible and is also the means of obtaining the impossible.

As yoga therapists, you may be called upon to treat the *tri-sharira*. That is, the causal, subtle as well as the physical bodies. Where are you going to learn how to diagnose these imbalances? The medical, per se, aspects of the subtler two *sharira*-s is well understood by Ayurveda whose roots run deep into the Veda-s, especially the Atharvaveda, where diagnosis was on the very subtle level and treatment was mostly carried out by herbs in amulets and special *mantra*-s naming the disease as a demon and facilitating its exit from the patient. Supposedly this was not ineffective and it makes it interesting that alongside, they were doing some, albeit simplistic, surgical procedures!

This type of subtle body healing still goes on today and the well-known, in *yogic* circles, Neem Karoli Baba was often recorded as having performed such “miraculous” healings. There was one Dr to whom he would send patients who were facing issues other Drs had been unable to treat. The Dr would give them some simple medicines and they would become all right. He later said: “I gave them the medicines but Baba cured them.”

Later on, even as medicine became more empirical, it too took the guise of a living being, a Goddess (Devi) known as Ayurveda. So the connection between the subtler planes: *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and the more physical plane of *annamaya* is not so distinct in Ayurveda, just as it is seamless in the yoga and *vedantic* tradition from which it originated.

From “Unified Dimensions of Ayurvedic Medicine” by Dr. J.S. Tripathi:

“Einstein revealed that every atom in the universe contains an enormous amount of energy...everything in this universe comes into being through fluctuations in a unified field

of energy and intelligence, which is the very foundation of nature.”

Furthermore: “Quantum physics...points out the fact that beyond its material or physical form, the body is really a pulsating dynamic field of energy...Underlying material being or gross physical body is another body, which consists of pure forms of energy, pure intelligence and pure process.”

Continuing this train of thought: “From the point of view of quantum physics, there is not much difference between the fluctuations of thought arising in the unified field and the wave vibrations that give rise to the particles that make up the physical body”

And finally: “ The *Sthula Sarira* (Physical Body) is interwoven with a complex multicentric energy body (of) *Suksma Sarira* (Subtle Body), which is responsible for the phenomenon of life...it is comparable to the force that holds the charged particles of an atom together”

Again we are back with *Prana*. So let us look at the diagnosis and management of prana through Ayurveda. The word “prana” is derived from two Sanskrit syllables: *pra* and *ana*. *Pra* is “constant” and *Ana* means “movement”. This is a perfect description of vibration. And that makes it the life energy of a conscious force (*Cetana Sakti*) It has been described as the specific quality of *Atman* coming from *Paramatma: Taitarriya Upanishad*. Its main source is the Sun. It is equated with *Prajna* or Supreme Intelligence and Knowledge: *Sankhyayan Aranyak*. All substances in the universe are produced from it and survive because of it. It has a diverse nature and the *Prasnopunisad* describes it as also being radiant (*Agneya*) in a biological sense. The Mind and the five senses are said to be variants of it. *Susruta Samhita*, a famous Ayurvedic text, says of prana: It is represented within us as in twelve aspects: *Agni, Soma, Vayu, Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, the five sense organs and Bhutatma (individual consciousness.)* It infuses Kundalini Shakti, manifests as six main energy centers called *Cakra-s*, travels through all the *nadi-s* while the Microscopic Prana travels primarily through ten great vessels connecting to the sense apertures and the bioenergy of prana manifests itself into small concentric energy fields known as *marmani* (Marma Points). These are directly related to the life principle and any injury specific to these sites can disturb our energy field enough to even cause fatality. The three most vital channels of course all yogin-s know: *ida, pingala* and *susumna*.

Most of the manifestations of *prana* are located in the subtle body emanating from *prana-maya-(kosha)* and this has been associated with a cloud like appearance with constant activity. And it is also known as the *pranic field* or Bioplasmic Body.

According to this theory, all diseases are ultimately caused by improper distribution of *Pranic* energy in the physical body. Thus all therapeutic modalities facilitate the distribution of prana. The basic technique should be to balance any excess through mobilization and distribution to affected parts of the body that manifest deficiency. This is where Yoga Therapy comes in. Approaches through Ayurveda for treatment of *prana* are primarily of two types:

1. *Naisthiki cikitsa*: Liberation from physical and emotional bondages.
2. *Laukiki cikitsa*: System to preserve health and cure disease.

And here comes the important part, to quote:

The former is designed in line *with Yoga for transformation of consciousness* and the latter approach *includes yogic techniques* including *relaxation techniques*.

If we are dealing with Yoga as a healing tool then we must realize we hold a very potent tool indeed!

The Union of Yoga and Ayurveda creates a powerful medicine when we look at all the shared terminology.

Ayurvedic understandings could diagnose deeper, subtler currents to our health and wellness paradigm and by including yogic therapies increase the ability to dispense appropriate medicines from appropriate diet, herbs, lifestyle to exercise and may I say it, even such yogic aspects as *bhakti* or *karma yoga*.

Similarly Yoga therapists whose considerable arsenal already includes some very powerful, well researched and effective modern medical understandings, would be able to understand the deeper implications of using *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dhyana*, *dharana* and *Samadhi* to touch *dosha* (Constitutional Humors), *dhatu* (The seven concentric tissues of the body), *mala* (Waste Disposal Systems), *agni* (Digestive Fire), *manas* (Mind), *chitta* (Consciousness) and even *atman* (Individual Soul). And as mentioned above, even use the more rarefied states of yoga such as *bhakti*, *jnana*, *kriya* and *karma* for therapy.

Another common tool now comes to mind. It is common to almost all Vedic systems, from philosophies to arts to sciences. And it arises from Prana. In the Yoga Sutra-s its source is known as *Pranava*: Om. Om is a *mantra*. And mantra-s for healing are very powerful.

"Mantanam trayata iti": Mantra is that which protects the one that chants it.

Among these are the lovely *Shanti Mantra*-s that many in the yoga community love and use quite fondly. Including, of course, the mantra *"Lokah Samasta Sukhinau Bhavantu"*

There are great healing powers in these mantra-s. There are also *bija mantrah*: such as AIM, HRIM, KLIM. Dr. Lad in an article on "Mantras For Healing" relates them to the three dosha-s as such: AIM (vata) HRIM (pitta) and KLIM (kapha). Each Chakra reverberates to a unique *bija mantra*. And in the same article we are introduced to *bija mantra*-s for the organs including eyes, ears, lungs, heart, stomach, liver and kidneys among others. Here is simple healing that works at the level of the subtle body.

As you can see, the common bonds between yoga and Ayurveda are intricately intertwined.

Where does one begin and where does one end? Can one survive without the other? That is not the point as they obviously have already! So that cannot be what this presentation is about.

So what is it about? It is about relationships. Yoga is about relationships. And this

relationship is ancient and symbiotic. If anything we would be bringing awareness to a relationship that already exists, has always existed and cannot be otherwise. Whether it is one we endorse, embrace and support today is in our hands once again.

And let us be very clear: It is not and should not be at the expense of any other relationship. As we said, yoga is about relationships. We can never have enough healthy relationships!

Let not it ever be said we sacrificed one relationship for another. That would be to impoverish both.

Yoga Therapy is a new field. It does not have a traditional history. Yes, yoga is therapeutic. But that is why it must be wielded with great care. And why we should seek to use all its tools including its specialty, the great understanding of the subtle body. For which we should look to Ayurveda to find the necessary tools of diagnosis, prognosis and prescription.

In making the case for uniting Yoga and Ayurveda: A Comparative Overview of Supportive Principles, I would like to sum up thus:

Samkhya:

Veda-s:

Upanishad-s

Tattwa-s

Mahabhuta-s

Jnanendiryani

Ahamkara

Manas

Chitta

Pancha Maya

Chakra-s

Sattva/Raja/Tamas

Prana

Dosha

Dhatu

Agni

Kriya

Karma...

The list goes on...

Which of these is not in both Sciences?

Thank you.

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Srikantha Murthy. Choukahamba Krishnadas Academy, K 37/118 Gopal Mandir
Lane, Varanasi 221 001 cssoffice@satyam.net.in

Sakti And Sakta: Sir John Woodroffe. Ganesh & Co 36 Thanikachalam Road, Madras
(Chennai) 600 017 service@kkbooks.com