

Sister Science – Beyond Asana
Module 2 : Lesson 5
Sharing Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy

Hi there! Jacky Rae here, co-founder of Yoga Veda Institute & creator of Sister Science™ a course designed to introduce you to the world of Ayurvedic healing.

Today we wrap up our Sister Science course with some important information on Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy, how it works, and why it's important for us, as Yoga Teachers to include Ayurveda in our practices, our teachings and in our lives.

Dr. David Frawley is one of the modern leaders in the field of Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy, and in his various publications he shares the importance of bringing Ayurveda back into the practice of Yoga as Therapy. He tells us that the Ayurvedic view of our embodied nature (body, mind and soul) and how it works, the causes of disease and the treatment of disease are all connected together in a beautiful, clear and wonderful system of optimal health and total well-being.

Ayurveda addresses all aspects of medicine including diet, herbs, drugs, surgery, bodywork and its own special clinical procedures like Panchakarma. It brings in ritual, mantra and meditation for healing the mind. In addition, it provides life-style recommendations for health, longevity and disease prevention as well as special methods for rejuvenation of body and mind. It includes the practices of Yoga from asana and pranayama to mantra and meditation as part of its healing tools.

We do not find any Chikitsa Padas or therapy sections in the usual Yoga texts. The term Chikitsa does not occur in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and is not a major topic of concern in Yoga philosophy. This is because the concern of classical Yoga is Sadhana, not Chikitsa, which was regarded as the field of Ayurveda. Most importantly, we do not find in Yoga texts a discussion of disease, pathology, diagnosis or treatment strategies apart from the approach of Ayurveda. There is no Yoga system of medicine in terms of diagnosis, pathology and treatment, apart from Ayurveda.

What we do find commonly in Yoga texts are discussions of the pranas, senses, mind, nadis and chakras, worship of deities, discussion of the inner Self and nature of consciousness, as well as the types of samadhi or inner absorption. Disease is addressed briefly in some Yoga texts as it is regarded as one of the main obstacles to



Yoga practice. But when this does occur, the language of Ayurveda is usually employed.

Modern Yoga has defined itself primarily in terms of asanas or physical postures. These are usually taught en masse in exercise classes for people primarily seeking physical well-being. We commonly identify Yoga teachers as those who conduct asana classes. Some of these Yoga teachers may have some knowledge of the greater system of classical Yoga. This situation impacts what is popularly regarded as Yoga therapy, which is colored by the Yoga as asana emphasis.

Yoga therapy or Yoga Chikitsa is a new, popular and powerful movement in Yoga today that is still trying to define itself and its scope of application. However, for the most part, modern Yoga therapy, following the asana as Yoga model, consists primarily of an adaptation of asanas or asana styles to treat disease and improve health. This view of Yoga is different from and a reduced version of classical Yoga that is defined primarily in terms of spiritual practice and deep meditation (Sadhana and Samadhi).

Any therapy must rest upon a system of medicine for diagnosis and overall treatment strategies. A therapeutic method – whether herbs, drugs, asana or pranayama – cannot be applied independently of a medical orientation and an examination of the patient as a whole.

So if one is practicing Yoga therapy, the question arises as to according to what system of medicine that therapy is being applied?

Modern Yoga therapy largely consists of the application of Yoga asanas as an adjunct physical therapy for the treatment of diseases as primarily diagnosed and treated by modern medicine. Modern Yoga therapists aim at working with doctors, nurses and other biomedically trained professionals in hospitals, and rehabilitation settings. Such a Yoga therapist, we should note, is not himself or herself necessarily a doctor or primary health care provider but functions more like a technician, applying the techniques of asanas as guided by a doctor or nurse. While there is nothing wrong with this approach and much benefit can be derived from it, Yoga therapy as asana therapy does not unfold the full healing potential of classical Yoga and its many methods. It keeps Yoga subordinate in a secondary role, reduced primarily to a physical application.

The term Yoga itself means to unite, combine, harmonize or integrate. A truly yogic approach is inherently an integrative approach, harmonizing body, prana, senses,



mind and consciousness. It cannot be reduced to the body alone. A yogic approach to healing is not a specialization or a side-line technique but requires a synthesis of all levels and aspects of healing. That is why classical Yoga has an eightfold approach from lifestyle practices and values through asana, pranayama to samadhi. If we reduce Yoga to asana, we are not practicing Yoga or an integrative approach but falling into the same trap of mainly focusing on the outer material reality and losing track of the inner reality of prana, mind and consciousness.

A real Yoga therapy must consider all eight limbs of Yoga. It cannot just isolate the physical aspects of Yoga like asana. Otherwise it is caught in the same type of physical reductionism that too often occurs in modern medicine. In this regard, not only asana has important therapeutic application, but all the limbs of Yoga.

The first two of the eight limbs of Yoga, the yamas and niyamas, the yogic principles and practices of right living, provide the foundation necessary to sustain any spiritual or healing practice. They also provide an ideal code of conduct for doctors, therapists and Yoga teachers.

We can call asana the ‘external medicine’ of Yoga. It primarily treats musculo-skeletal disorders, but indirectly can benefit many other conditions and can provide an ideal form of exercise for everyone. Yet without the proper diet, its healing potentials are limited, as bodily activity is going to reflect the nutrition the body receives. Asana works best in the context of Ayurvedic dietary and lifestyle recommendations.

Pranayama can be called the ‘internal medicine’ of Yoga. It brings Prana or vital energy directly into the body and can be used to direct prana in various ways as needed. Pranayama directly impacts the doshas or biological humors of Ayurveda (Vata, Pitta and Kapha), which are modifications of Prana. Pranayama primarily treats conditions of the respiratory, circulatory and nervous systems but through these has a powerful impact on all physical and psychological conditions. Pranayama is a great aid for the use of herbs and functions much like them to correct the movements of energy within our physiological and psychological systems.

As all forms of healing involve altering the movement of Prana and increasing the healing power of Prana, pranayama is a primary and direct form of healing for body and mind, whereas asana is secondary and indirect. This means that a real Yoga therapy even for the physical body must emphasize pranayama over asana and employ asana in the context of pranayama.



Pratyahara is the internalization of energy necessary for deep healing or for true meditation to occur. If we have not reached the stage of pratyahara, we are still not really practicing Yoga as a sadhana or spiritual practice. In pratyahara, one withdraws the Prana and mind within. For real healing, the body and mind must be put in a relaxed state and the energy directed within. Many forms of treatment like massage or Pancha Karma are largely simulated forms of pratyahara, putting the patient into a condition of deep rest in which all toxins can be removed from the body.

Dharana is the necessary concentration of mind and the development of the power of attention required to sustain any healing practice. Dhyana is reflective meditation, the inner balance of awareness, which allows the mind to heal itself. Samadhi is the unitary state of mind, prana and awareness that develops the full healing power of body and mind and releases us from physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. These higher aspects of Yoga, aid in providing the right attitude and state of mind for healing to take place on any level.

The internal practices of Yoga (dharana, dhyana and samadhi) or the inner aspect of Yoga are primarily for treating the mind and used in Ayurveda mainly for dealing with psychological disorders. This means that classical Yoga therapy is primarily a psychology employing mantra and meditation. Yoga as applied according to Ayurveda is one of the most powerful approaches for healing the mind and emotions that is available in the world today.

It is important to reintegrate Yoga and Ayurveda in order to bring out the full healing and spiritual potential of each. Bringing Ayurveda and Yoga provides a yogic and Vedic system of medicine to allow for the full healing application of all aspects of Yoga. It provides a diagnosis and treatment in harmony with Yoga philosophy, as well as a diet and herbal treatment that follows the spiritual approach of Yoga. Bringing Yoga into Ayurveda adds a spiritual and psychological dimension to Ayurvedic treatment,

without which Ayurveda tends to get reduced to a physical model in which its full Vedic healing powers cannot be easily realized.

Ayurveda provides the appropriate life-style recommendations for Yoga practice, as well as the background to unfold the full healing potential of all aspects of Yoga. Yoga provides the spiritual and psychological basis for Ayurveda and its higher applications.



For a truly holistic and spiritual approach to medicine and healing, we need both Yoga and Ayurveda, but with Ayurveda providing the medical foundation and Yoga the spiritual goal and practices. This is the original Vedic scheme. The key to a comprehensive Yoga therapy and Yoga system of medicine lies in restoring Yoga's connection with Ayurveda. This reconnection of Yoga and Ayurveda will also provide the basis for a real dialogue with modern medicine addressing not only specific therapies but also the real causes of disease and how to maintain health and well-being in society.

This means that we need to do some fundamental rethinking as to the nature of Ayurveda and Yoga healing and therapy. There are tremendous resources for us to draw upon both in Ayurveda and in Yoga for this purpose, particularly in the classical texts. We should examine the ancient literature of Yoga and Ayurveda for this purpose and look to those teachers who combine both together, especially deeper applications of pranayama, pratyahara, mantra and meditation.

At the same time, we should examine Yoga's connection with other Vedic sciences including not only Ayurveda but Vedic astrology (Jyotisha), Vastu (Sthapatya Veda), and Gandharva Veda (music). We should explore the healing potentials not only of Hatha and Raja Yoga but also of Bhakti Yoga (devotion), Jnana Yoga (knowledge) and Karma Yoga (ritual and service).

Combining Yoga and Ayurveda in their full applications and in the greater context of Vedic science offers a complete system of well-being for body, mind and consciousness, such as perhaps has no parallel anywhere else in the world. It can become the prime force of planetary healing that is so desperately needed today. It can add a spiritual and preventative dimension to modern medicine as well as adding important new keys for the understanding of disease and for applying natural therapies that can reduce the growing cost of high tech medicine.

When we begin to incorporate Ayurveda into our teachings, and into our lives, we are offering our students a system of mind - body medicine that has the potential to change lives far beyond the scope of asana alone.

Be sure to pop on over to our Sister Science Facebook group to share with us your plans on how you will begin to share Ayurveda with your community! I can't wait to hear your insights!

Thank you for being a part of Yoga Vedas Sister Science program and until next time. Namaste.

