

Fusing the Sister Sciences of Yoga and Ayurveda in the IAYT Educational Standards

By Larissa Hall Carlson and Arun Deva

Ayurveda has fittingly arrived in the new IAYT standards, providing exciting concepts to study and expand the yoga therapy repertoire (see 1.3.1 and 1.3.2, sidebar).

Ayurveda is known as yoga's sister science; both spring from the ancient and renowned veda-s (the four primary ancient Indian wisdom scriptures), and began their therapeutic paths all the way back in the first hymn of the *Rig Veda* ("knowledge of verses," an ancient Indian sacred collection of *Vedic* Sanskrit hymns) honoring fire (*agni*). Proper cultivation of *agni* is essential for thriving in both yoga and Ayurveda. From the ayurvedic perspective, balanced *agni* supports healthy digestion, mental clarity, and spiritual vitality, which all help to reduce suffering and promote overall wellbeing. From the yogic perspective, balanced *agni* supports fiery *tapas* (discipline; austerity; heat) for dedicated yoga practice, and enhances concentrated focus for *swadhyaya* (self-study; study of wise words), propelling the yogi forward in the search for harmony, truth, and enlightenment.

Because this concept of *agni* is so vital to both sciences, we believe that acquiring comprehensive knowledge of it (and other central Ayurvedic concepts listed in the standards) will not only enrich each yoga therapist's personal yogic journey and existing therapeutic abilities, but may also provide simple and essential instruction for spreading fundamental healthy-living practices to all clients.

The definition of Ayurveda is itself quite revealing of the all-encompassing nature of this healing science. Splitting the word in two we find:

1. Ayus = Life, composed of body, senses, mind, and soul
2. Veda = Knowledge

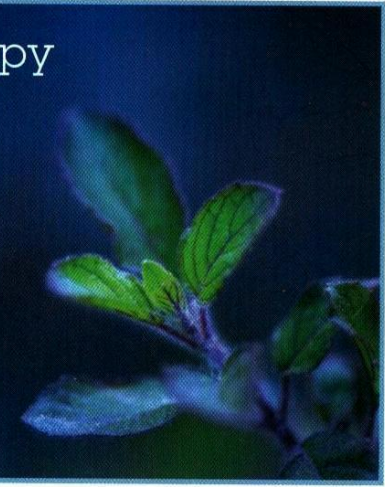
Therefore, the word "Ayurveda" means "knowledge of life"—not a concept to be taken lightly!

The *Upa Vedas* and *Upanishads*

When we look into the practical interconnectedness of yoga and Ayurveda, we find that the currents of Ayurveda inherently run within the context of healing through yoga therapy. The matrix of *Vedic* sciences reveals certain specialized *upa-veda-s*, or specific fields of knowledge: art, music, martial arts, astrology, astronomy, and dance, for example. Yoga can be viewed as a practice with its own specialization as an art form, because its techniques require great dedication to master. Yet yoga's practical, healing side is built on the only medical science the *Vedic* tradition had back then: Ayurveda.

the ability to heal and connect them all.

It is in this context that the language of yoga therapy originates. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* you will see references to the constitutional forces (*dosha-s*), the supportive tissues (*dhatu-s*), the anatomical understandings, the grand internal passage known as the digestive tract (*maha srotas*), and the importance of the free and easy movement of *prana* through the various channels (*nadi-s*) for a sustainable health paradigm. There are at least twenty *Upanishads* (the later, higher *Vedic* teachings) that reference yoga. Indeed, they are the source of the *pancha maya kosha*, the five sheaths of being, from the gross outermost layer moving toward the subtle core itself—an integral part of Ayurvedic healing modalities not known in other medical sciences.



To separate yoga therapy from its ancient foundation is to shortchange ourselves as yoga therapists.

Ayurveda is an *upa-veda* and, as mentioned earlier, is translated as the "knowledge of life or living." Perhaps a lofty claim for a medical science, but also quite telling about how it sees the health and healing paradigm: nurturance of the life force in all *koshas* (sheaths), from body to soul. Ayurvedic principles are responsible for road-mapping the human terrain to reveal a consistent interchange of energies between the physical, energetic, mental, emotional, and spiritual natures of our being, suggesting that we are, indeed, greater than our mechanical parts—and that *prana* (vital life force) has

This model serves as the basis of yogic healing because of its practical Ayurvedic application techniques.

The Ayurvedic Definition of Health

The vast storehouse of ancient Ayurvedic medical procedures is indelibly connected to yoga through these *vedic* ties. These sister sciences thoroughly support one another, and the more Ayurvedic knowledge woven into the practice and study of yoga, the more potent and fully healing yoga therapy sessions can become. There is no denying the invaluable contributions

of conventional medical paradigms to the newly reformulated field of yoga therapy in the West. But to separate yoga therapy from its ancient foundation is to short-change ourselves as yoga therapists.

To create a holistic framework for healing, yoga therapists and Ayurveda practitioners should work together in united and supportive stances that approach the human as a complete universe—an integral viewpoint through which yoga and Ayurveda are intimately connected. When we attempt to define yoga by reducing it to its singular parts, we reduce its potency; likewise, we should not ascribe to yoga any powers that it does not have—especially if we are to begin linking it to the health paradigm. To address our health through therapy we need to begin by establishing the etiology, pathology, and prognosis of the disease process, which, in Ayurveda, is known as *nidana*. Similarly, treating a condition with a medical intervention is referred to in the classic texts of Ayurveda (*Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridayam*, etc.) as *cikitsa*. It is important to note that none of the essential texts of yoga have chapters on *nidana* or *cikitsa*. We propose, then, that all therapeutic measures of yoga were formulated by the diagnostic techniques already in place through the sister science of Ayurveda, whose every text has detailed chapters dealing specifically with two disciplines: diagnosis and therapy.

It's also helpful to know the Ayurvedic definition of health (*Svastha*):

*Samadosha samagnis ca sama dhatu
malakriyah/
Prasannatmendriya manah svastha ityab-
hidhiyate//*
—Sushruta Samhita 15.38

Dr. Vasant Lad translates this as follows: “One who is established in Self, who has balanced *doshas* [*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*], balanced *agni* [fire], properly formed *dhatu* [tissues], proper elimination of *malas* [waste products], well-functioning bodily processes, and whose mind, soul, and senses are full of bliss is called a healthy person” (*Textbook of Ayurveda* Vol. 1, 2002, p. 279).

Ayurveda and the Yoga Therapist

Ayurveda looks not only to balance, but to sustain bliss—or wellbeing—in the entire

person, from gross body to subtle soul. If you have a fundamental understanding of the *dosha*-s (constitutional humors) and *guna*-s (qualities), you can more quickly and more accurately reach an assessment, diagnosis, and healing strategy for yoga therapy. We fully believe that this additional line of study will provide refreshing inspiration and fulfilling acuity to the profession of yoga therapy, just as intended by IAYT, per the following excerpt from the Preface to the Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists¹:

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.... Its inclusion here is meant as support to the practice of yoga therapy and does not, in any way, imply a level of knowledge sufficient to function as an ayurvedic practitioner.

Wise *yogacharya*-s (yoga teachers) are immersing themselves in the sister-science study and practice of yoga and Ayurveda today. It is well known that Shri T. Krishnamacharya used many Ayurvedic principles, procedures, and herbal protocols in his therapeutic capacity as a yoga master. What will be the value of such study for our more modern yoga therapists? Well, for one thing we will be able to expand our arsenal of tools beyond asana, pranayama, or even any of the other eight limbs of yoga, as well as the associated practices such as *mudra*, *bandha*, and *mantra*.

But even more importantly, we will be able to access the very same healing wisdom that informs the structure of yoga. The language of *Vedic* healing is Ayurveda. All of the terms yoga and Ayurveda share draw their therapeutic or medical interpretations from this source—from *prakriti* and *samprapti*, to the concepts of the four goals of life (*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksa*), to the various anatomical definitions (e.g., *triguna*, *tridosha*, *dhatu*, *mala*, *ojas*, and *agni*). Both Ayurveda and yoga share therapeutic wisdom and language, with roots in the same rishis and divine sources—even with, by some accounts, the same authoritative author: Bhagvan Patanjali.

Though basic understanding of Ayurveda will hopefully enrich the per-

spective and fatten the tool-bag, it's important to remain in the proper scope of practice when applying this knowledge. During Ayurvedic studies, one may quickly become comfortable with the fundamental principles and qualities of the *dosha*-s (*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*), but without full training as an Ayurvedic practitioner, one should avoid diagnosing a client's *prakriti* (*doshic* constitution at birth) and *vikriti* (current *doshic* expression), because accurate assessment without Ayurvedic diagnosis through pulse and other accepted traditional tools can be quite challenging. However, understanding the *doshic guna*-s may be wonderfully helpful for fine-tuning the yoga therapy protocol. For example, if a client is suffering from acid indigestion, then just a basic understanding of the *guna*-s tells us that there is excess heat (*ushna*) present. Therefore, using cooling (*shita*) yogic techniques will be necessary (e.g., *shitali* pranayama, the cooling breath). *Guna*-s represent a very simple and appropriate ayurvedic tool that use opposite qualities in the yogic treatment plan to bring about balance.

Here is another example of applying simple Ayurvedic knowledge in yoga therapy sessions: if a client is suffering from sluggishness, lethargy, or lack of motivation, then to balance the heavy (*guru*), dull (*manda*), dense (*sandra*) qualities of this condition (which may have a lot to do with *tamas* and/or *kapha*), the ayurvedic practitioner applies the opposite qualities: light (*laghu*), penetrating (*tikshna*), and mobile (*chala*) yogic practices (e.g., *kapalabhati*, the skull-polishing breath, which stokes *agni* and helps reduce dullness). This understanding of the *doshic guna*-s can be extremely useful for pin-pointing which types of yogic tools to use in yoga therapy sessions—potentially saving a lot of time and energy for both therapist and client.

New IAYT Educational Standards

Learning the Ayurvedic tools required in the new IAYT Standards will lead to enhanced agility in yoga therapy, but we must also recognize the power of collective wisdom found in experienced community members, who can provide inspiration and support. When a client is suffering from a condition that needs support beyond that which you, as the yoga therapist, can offer, consider aligning with an Ayurvedic consultant, who can supervise the diet and lifestyle protocol necessary to

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fully support the client. As the Ayurvedic practitioner works with the body, senses, mind, and soul of the client through diet and lifestyle recommendations, the yoga therapy sessions that follow can be much more productive and effective.

When we have well-rounded knowledge of this ancient Ayurvedic wisdom, think of how we can begin to use the other limbs of yoga, such as *karma* yoga, *jnana* yoga, and *bhakti* yoga, as healing tools. This is because as we begin to understand the matrix of Ayurveda, we find it synchronizes perfectly with the matrix of yoga. This cross-referencing results in a very natural synthesis of diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, and definition of healing far beyond the parameters of our current contexts—taking us into the very realms of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. **YTT**

Reference

1. International Association of Yoga Therapists (2012). Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists. Retrieved from http://www.iayt.org/development_Vx2/IAYT_Standards_7%201%2012%20.pdf



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IAYT Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists¹

Ayurveda components:

1.3.1 Knowledge of the basic perspectives on health and disease from yoga and Ayurveda relevant to the practice of yoga therapy, including the concepts of

1.3.1.1 *pancha maya (kosha)* (fundamental structure of the human system);

1.3.1.2 subtle anatomy;

1.3.1.3 *tri-dosha* (effect of the elements on the physical body);

1.3.1.4 *tri-guna* (effect of *sattva* [equilibrium], *rajas* [activity], *tamas* [inertia]);

1.3.1.5 *prakrti/vikrti* (*dosha* constitution at birth/imbalance of the *dosha* currently expressed in the body);

1.3.1.6 *ama* (undigested food, emotions, etc. accumulated in the body);

1.3.1.7 *agni* (internal fire[s] and their contribution to health);

1.3.1.8 *prana vayu* (*prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana*, *samana*);

1.3.1.9 *prana prakopa* (disturbance of the *vayu*);

1.3.1.10 *surya/chandra* (sun/moon);

1.3.1.11 *brmhana/langhana* (expansion/contraction); and

1.3.1.12 *vyuha* model: *heya* (the symptoms), *hetu* (the causes), *hana* (the goal), *upaya* (the tools).

1.3.2 Knowledge of categorizing illness, including

1.3.2.1 Development/evolution of disease (*samprapti* [pathogenesis], including but not limited to direction, intensity, onset, and duration and their influence on the ease or difficulty of healing and disease management); and

1.3.2.2 Setting priorities: symptoms/pacification (*shamana* [short term]) and purification/strengthening (*shodhana* [long term]).