

The Yoga of Healing: Exploring Yoga's Holistic Model for Health and Well-Being: An Introduction

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Yoga is an ancient philosophy and practice of health and well-being. Thousands of years ago when Yoga was first conceived and practiced, people led physically active lives by necessity. There were no cars, no washing machines, microwave ovens, plumbing systems, etc. The routine of daily life provided people with all of the exercise they needed. It was in this physically demanding world that Yoga originated, not to give people more physical exercise, but as a *system of healing* with special emphasis on the mind.

Today, most people identify Yoga only with *āsana*, the physical practice of Yoga, but *āsana* is just one of many tools used for healing the individual. In the *Yogasūtra* of *Patañjali*, widely acknowledged as the authoritative text on Yoga, only three of the 195 *sūtrās* mention *āsana*. The rest of the text discusses the other tools of Yoga, including conscious breathing, meditation, lifestyle and diet changes, visualization, and the use of sound, to name only a few. These tools address all dimensions of the human system: body, breath, mind, personality, and emotions.

Four basic principles underlie the teachings and practices of Yoga's healing system:

- 1) The human system is a holistic entity. It is comprised of different dimensions that are interrelated and inseparable from each other. The health or sickness of any single dimension affects the other dimensions, and vice-versa.
- 2) Each individual is unique. For this reason, each person's problems must be approached in a manner that addresses the unique needs of that individual. There is no "one-size-fits-all" pill in Yoga.
- 3) Yoga is self-empowering; the student is her own healer. The teacher can offer direction and give a healing practice, but it is up to the student to *do* the practice. Unlike other healing modalities, such as surgery or massage, in Yoga the student is empowered and required to participate in her own healing.

- 4) The quality and state of a person's mind is crucial to healing. If the student maintains a positive state of mind, then healing takes place more quickly. If the student's attitude is negative, then healing may take longer.

The yogic path to holistic well-being, therefore, is both extremely comprehensive and highly specific to each person. Yoga does not treat specific diseases or specific symptoms; as stated earlier, it treats the individual and his entire human system: the physical body, the breathing body, the mind, the personality, and the emotions.

How Yoga Heals: Understanding the Dynamics of the Holistic Body

One model of healing offered in the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* and used in Yoga is the *pañcamaya* model. *Pañca* means "five," and *maya* indicates "something that is *all-pervading*." According to this model, the human system is multidimensional—we are not just our physical body, for example. Rather, the human system is comprised of five interconnected and interpenetrating dimensions. Moving from the most gross to the most subtle dimension, they are: the physical body, the breath, the intellect, the personality, and the emotions.

Some of the many commentators on the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* have used the word *kośa* to describe these aspects, but this word is misleading, because it gives the impression that each dimension exists separately from the others. The imagery often used to demonstrate the concept of *kośa* is the layers of an onion that may be peeled away from each other. The *pañcamaya* model implies something quite different, however: that these five dimensions are all present, all the time, in each part of the human system, even in each cell of the body. They cannot be "peeled" apart; they are inseparable from each other. What happens on one level or dimension of the human system, therefore, affects the others.

Because each dimension is connected to the others so profoundly, it is possible to influence problems in one dimension by working on the other dimensions. For example, conscious breathing with an emphasis on exhalation often provides relief to people who suffer from insomnia.

Having offered this example, it is important to note that it is impossible to conclusively universalize the application of a single technique. *There is no one-size-fits-all solution* to any problem. How a sickness affects me will be different from how it affects another person. Our minds, personalities, attitudes, emotions, and bodies are so different that each of us will require a different solution, even though we may be suffering from seemingly similar problems.

Recently, a married couple came to the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) seeking help for similar problems: they were both depressed and overweight.

Both husband and wife are the same age and work in the same profession. They also shared a similar diet and lifestyle. The reasons for the husband's depression and weight gain, however, were quite different from those of the wife. The wife was depressed because she was overweight, while the man was overweight because he was depressed and had begun drinking too much. We offered the wife practices to reduce her weight, and once she began to notice the effects of this practice, she started to recover from her depression. We gave the husband practices to calm him and reduce his stress, and as a result he stopped drinking, changed his eating habits, and began to lose weight.

So although both husband and wife suffered from similar problems, we offered different practices to each of them. The type of practice offered was mandated by each patient's unique needs, not by a one-size-fits-all treatment for weight loss and depression.

In addition, Yoga teaches us that we do not need to address all at once every problem from which a patient is suffering. In the case of both patients discussed above, one problem turned out to be the source of the other. We thus addressed the source or root problem first, and when the root problem was treated, this alleviated the symptoms. In the case of the wife, the root problem was associated with her weight gain and the symptom was depression. In the case of the husband, the root problem was depression and a symptom was weight gain. In both cases, treating one dimension of the patient's system affected other dimensions.

Illness, whether it is cancer or depression or a minor backache, does not draw a line between the physical body and the other four dimensions of the human system. If one is affected, the other dimensions are affected. For example, when someone gets angry (emotional dimension), the whole system changes as a single unit: the face reddens and the muscles tense (physical dimension), the breath becomes short, shallow, and rapid (breath dimension), mental attitudes become negative (intellectual dimension), and communication becomes very aggressive (personality dimension).

It is also true that illness may manifest most prominently in one dimension: for example, as backache in the physical dimension, or as depression in the emotional dimension. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the root cause of the ailment is in the same dimension. A backache is not necessarily entirely physical (or even primarily physical for that matter), nor is depression entirely emotional. It also does not imply that there is only one cause for the ailment. There may be multiple causes spread over multiple dimensions, and these causes may be related or unrelated: it depends on the individual person, and every person is different.

The Role of the Mind

The mind plays a central role in the healing process. Mind is present in all of our activities; without mind we would not be able to perform any conscious activity—lift a finger, read a book, drive a car, turn a cartwheel, react calmly in a negative situation, etc. The state of our mind greatly influences the quality of our actions. When we are anxious because we are running late to work, we rush around, and that “rushing” quality is evident in all of our actions: from the way we drive the car, to the impatient tone we use when addressing the parking lot attendant who takes too long to give us our ticket.

When our state of mind changes, our whole human system changes with it. This is why almost anyone can do Yoga: the only requirement is an active mind. If a person is able to pay attention and is willing to try various practices, he or she does not have to be able to move the physical body at all in order to practice. Only the ability to focus and discipline the mind is essential to healing through Yoga. By changing the quality of our state of mind, we can transform ourselves in a profound and positive way.

Steve, a student of mine who lives in Australia, suffered a stroke a few years ago. He woke up in the hospital unable to move the left side of his body, and his speech and memory were severely impaired. Doctors arranged for him to be treated by a physical therapist, a speech therapist, and a psychologist, as well as by an acupuncturist. After some time had passed with little progress, a friend suggested Steve try working with a Yoga teacher. Although, being partially paralyzed, Steve could not do *āsana*, it did not mean he could not practice Yoga. His teacher introduced some basic breathing practices and then visualization techniques. She asked Steve to visualize the breath moving to the left side of his body while inhaling and moving from the left side of the body outward while exhaling.

This is just one of many visualization techniques Steve’s teacher practiced with him, and over time they dramatically influenced his condition. Not long after he began these Yoga sessions, to the amazement of his doctors (and Steve himself), he was able to make small movements with his left hand and leg. After two years, Steve had recovered all of his lost mobility and speech, and he was able to return to his job full time and continue with his life as before.

Healing vs. Curing

At this point, it is important to draw a distinction between healing and curing. In the case of a presently incurable disease like AIDS, where there is little or no hope of recovery despite advanced medical treatment, Yoga’s healing model still offers valuable tools. Yoga may not be able to *cure* a disease like AIDS, but it

can still *heal* the individual by bringing about a positive change in attitude and quality of life.

For example, one of my students in Europe is HIV-positive. Before he started practicing Yoga, he was so depressed that he spent most days in bed doing nothing. After taking a few Yoga classes, however, he became more interested in chanting than in focusing on his disease and spending the day in bed. Gradually, through his *āsana* and chanting practices, he became interested in Sanskrit, and he is now studying Sanskrit very seriously. He also is taking music classes in order to develop his voice.

This is healing: a change in mind, in perception, in attitude. Many conditions tend not to be curable—those with certain illnesses may not be able to live life as they did before the onset of the illness. Yoga, however, can help them make the most of their situation, whatever their state of health, and live a happy, productive life.

Yoga makes this possible because the focus of Yoga therapy is healing, which is not the same as curing. Healing implies a method of treatment that is holistic. Curing, on the other hand, implies a method of treatment focused on eradicating illness in one dimension of the human system, typically in the physical body. Whereas the potential of a “cure” may be limited, Yoga offers countless healing and therapeutic options. The lack of a definitive cure for an illness does not mean there can be no healing for the individual. When such healing occurs, mental, emotional, and physical suffering are alleviated, and the patient’s quality of life improves. These improvements also may contribute to an increase in the patient’s life expectancy.

Beyond its holistic, individualized approach to healing, there are additional advantages to Yoga that set it apart from other therapeutic practices. One of these advantages is its self-empowering nature. Yoga engages the student in the healing process. Rather than being a passive recipient of treatment, the student plays an active role in her journey toward health and is primarily responsible for her recovery. The role of the teacher becomes that of a guide directing the student to the tools for recovery and teaching the student how to implement them. The teacher offers the student healing, but cannot do the healing for him or her; the student must commit to the healing process and actively follow the Yoga therapist’s instructions. It is the role of the student/patient to practice diligently according to these instructions, observe changes, and report the changes to the teacher. *The healing thus comes from within the student*, rather than from an outside source.

This requirement that the student/patient exercise his or her will in the healing process is deliberate. Medicine has the power in many cases to heal a physical

disease and alleviate some psychological disorders, but it is not always effective, as, for example, in the case of paralysis, cancer, or Down syndrome. In addition, it can be argued that a *purely* medical approach is far less effective in healing the emotional, intellectual, and personality layers of the human system.

Where a pill or even surgery may fail, the will, i.e., the focused and deliberate exercise and retraining of the mental muscles, may prove successful. Yoga is, at its root, a science of the mind—a philosophy of healing through the conscious focusing of the mind. Bringing both methods together—the Western and the yogic—with one model supporting and complementing the other in an integrated, thoughtfully negotiated plan of treatment, can provide the opportunity for even deeper healing for the patient.

For the healing process to move forward, there are a few conditions that must be met. First, the student's mind must be in a state to listen to and understand instructions. For example, if someone is a drug addict and is unwilling or unable to stop taking drugs, he is not ready for Yoga. The mind is not active in such a case, but rather is captive to the drug and will not be responsive to instruction. At the KYM, we never ask people to stop doing anything—the practice leads them to that point, if they follow it. If a person is for some reason incapable of actively receiving and following simple instructions, he or she cannot be helped by Yoga.

In addition, for treatment to be completely successful, the student must have full confidence and trust in the healer. This combination of confidence and trust, or *faith*, is another key element in the healing art of Yoga. This confidence and trust between student and healer provide part of the student's motivation to commit to and complete the healing process.

This commitment comes from both sides: the teacher commits to the student, and the student commits to the teacher and to the practice of Yoga. A trust relationship is built over the course of the treatment. Its foundation is the structure of the treatment itself, proceeding from the gross to the subtle, the simple to the complex, moving forward step by step.

The trust relationship between the healer and the student is built in the same manner, step by step. There is never any movement into more subtle, deep-seated issues until the student is ready. Only the teacher who knows her student as a unique, complex individual, and not just as a dysfunction, disorder, or disease, can know when this point has been reached.

In other words, according to the ancient Yoga masters, only a teacher who cultivates the qualities of a healer will be able to build, maintain, and nurture the

kind of trust-based, patient-teacher relationship necessary for Yoga therapy to progress successfully. The essential qualities of a healer are presented below.

Vaidya Lakṣaṇa: The Qualities of a Healer

Not everyone can become a healer. Collecting information about the healing process from books and workshops is not necessarily going to bring about the transformation. It is not solely a matter of knowledge—even if a person studies for years, he or she may not become a great healer.

The ancient masters spoke of the *qualities* a person must possess in order to be a competent, effective healer. There are a few people who are born possessing all of these qualities, but most who want to be a healer must actively cultivate them.

Jñāni: One who is wise. A teacher must be knowledgeable and wise. She must know what the sickness is and how to help the student. Wisdom also implies knowledge of one's own limitations. If a healer does not know how to treat a student, he must know where to direct that student, so that the student can receive the appropriate treatment.

Mauni: One who has disciplined communication. A teacher must be able to communicate clearly and effectively. This is crucial to the healing process. Problems can arise if a teacher has poor communication skills. The teacher's speech also must be tailored to the student's ability to hear. A teacher must always reflect carefully before speaking and acting.

Jitātmavān: One who has self-control. A healer must have self-control and be able to maintain self-control throughout the healing process. She must remain firm and detached, retaining presence of mind while also being empathetic. A teacher must never exploit a student or abuse the teacher-student relationship in any manner.

Dāta: One who is generous. A teacher should be generous in many ways: with words, with time, with healing, with his heart. His generosity nourishes self-healing in the student. On the other hand, if a teacher is not generous with his care, healing will not take place. *Dāta* is related to *aparigrahi*, the next quality.

Aparigrahi: One who is modest. While a teacher must be generous, she herself should not accept favors or gifts from a student. Appropriate compensation is one thing, but how do we determine what is appropriate and what is inappropriate? It is the duty of the teacher to refuse what is more than appropriate, even when the student freely offers more. When a teacher accepts gifts or favors that are not appropriate to the relationship, the dynamic between

the student and teacher changes, and clarity and trust may be lost. On the other hand, a teacher may perform a favor for the student when appropriate.

Dharma rakṣaka: One who is ethical. In this context, *dharma* refers to a set of values or ethics, and *rakṣaka* means “one who protects or upholds.” A teacher should be a *dharma rakṣaka*: a person who respects and practices the ethics of the healing system. In other words, the behavior of the healer is important. Healing takes place within the context of a relationship between a healer and a student, so how the healer behaves has a direct bearing on that relationship and, by extension, on the health of the student. This is not a trivial matter. If a teacher is not a living example of what he teaches, how can he expect the student to respect and follow his instructions?

Sthitadhī: One who has a stable and focused mind. A healer must have a stable and focused mind—Yoga heals through the focusing of the mind. A healer who is not already stable and focused in her own mind will not be able to help cultivate that quality in another. In addition, a teacher who is not stable is likely to project her own problems onto the student.

Satyaparāh: One who is honest. The teacher must always interact with the student in an honest way and speak the truth. This does not mean the teacher must necessarily speak all the truth all at once; this depends on the student and his situation, and what part of the truth—all or just a portion—the student is ready to hear. Sometimes the truth is painful and may harm the student or drive him or her away, so the teacher must be sensitive to the student’s situation, know what the student is able to hear, and know how to communicate with him appropriately.

Śraddhāvan: One who is confident or has conviction. The teacher must have conviction that the treatment will work and convey that confidence to the student. This cannot be a false confidence: both teacher and student must be convinced of and have confidence in the treatment in order for it to work.

Sampradāya sevaka: One who is committed to a lineage. *Sampradāya* means “lineage.” Each tradition has its own approach to healing and its own way of describing the healing process, and the teacher must be consistent and clear about which lineage she follows. If she is not, she risks generating confusion and distrust between her and her student. In addition, mixing and matching one lineage with another may dilute the efficacy of the practice. If we teach something from another lineage that conflicts with what has already been established in our practice, it weakens the practice’s legitimacy.

In other words, a lineage’s practices are built upon the specific theoretical foundations of that lineage. Thus, although we may encounter many of the same

terms and concepts across lineages, these terms and concepts will vary in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, depending on how a particular lineage interprets them. Such differences are even more pronounced when we look at culturally distinct systems of healing like Chinese medicine and Āyurveda.

Even more importantly, a teacher who respects his lineage can always refer back to *his teacher* when he runs into a roadblock when working with a student. He will always have a tradition to turn to for guidance. In this way, the *sampradāya* provides invaluable support to the healer.

Even within a lineage, there are still times when a teacher wanders from his path, with negative consequences for his students. We see this happening nowadays. In such a situation, it is the *sampradāya* that stands behind the student and protects her from the teacher. It is also the *sampradāya* that sets rules to rehabilitate the teacher. This is another reason why it is so crucial for a student to belong to and serve a tradition of teachers. Unless there is accountability, it is difficult to set and implement clear boundaries in the student-teacher relationship.

Let me also say that there is no single path that is suitable for everyone and that can heal every problem. Thus, if as a healer you find you need to access help outside your lineage, send your student to someone you respect and let go of that part of the healing process. Work with what you know. Work with what you can do, with what you can heal.

How Yoga Defines Illness

The ancient Yoga masters defined disease or sickness in a specific way based on their holistic view of how our whole human system functions. In order to understand how Yoga heals and make effective use of the tools it offers us for healing, we need to understand the ancient masters' conception.

The Yoga masters identified three distinct types of illness, then further differentiated them by classifying them based on the causes(s) and severity of the illness

First, we will look at the three general types of illness as defined by the Yoga masters.

Duḥkham

The Sanskrit word *duḥkham* usually refers to emotional suffering, but *duḥkham* is felt on other levels as well. *Duḥkham* derives from the Sanskrit *duh*, which means "constriction" and *kham*, which refers to the space in our heart

considered to be in the center of our chest. *Duḥkham* is thus literally the constricting, tightening, or closing of the space of our heart. The opposite of *duḥkham* is *sukham*, or openness in the space of our heart, an expansion of that space.

Roga

Roga refers to discomfort and/or unease that stems from being in a situation in which we do not wish to be.

Vyādhi

Vyādhi has many meanings, but in this context it refers to an imbalance occurring in the three aspects of our *physical system*: *dhātu*, *rasa*, and *kāraṇa*.

Dhātu refers to the aspects of our system that give form to and sustain the body, such as bones, muscles, and skin. Examples of *dhātu* imbalance include broken bones, one leg longer than the other, one arm stronger than the other, etc.

Rasa refers to the liquids of the body, such as saliva, blood, tears, menstrual fluid, etc. Examples of *rasa* imbalance include dry eyes, dry throat, and anemia.

Kāraṇa refers to our senses, including the mind, eyesight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Examples of *kāraṇa* imbalance are blindness, deafness, and sinus problems.

The word *vyādhi* also can be derived from the Sanskrit *vi*, meaning “disconnected,” and *ādhi*, meaning “inner consciousness.” When we are in a state of *vyādhi*, we are in a state of illness—we are imbalanced in the three aspects of our human system. This imbalance draws our attention outward: the mind becomes distracted, attaching itself to the pain, discomfort, or disease generated by the physical imbalance. In our distraction, in our imbalanced state, we lose the connection to our stable, balanced core, or inner consciousness.

Classifications of Disease Based on Cause and Severity

Yoga further classifies disease or illness based on the *cause* and also on the *severity* or *manageability*.

1. Cause

What is the cause of my illness? In other words, who is responsible for my illness?

Ādhyātmika: Myself. I am the cause. For example, a person develops asthma because of her smoking habit.

Ādhibhautika: Someone else or an outside cause is responsible: for example, a woman who has contracted HIV or a sexually transmitted disease from her husband, or a person suffering from a dog bite (unless, of course, the person provoked the dog, and then this would be a case of *ādhyātmika*). In both cases, the individual in question is not responsible for her illness, but someone or something else is.

Ādhidaivika: Divine force is responsible. In other words, something out of our control is the cause: for example, trauma caused by an earthquake or certain kinds of birth defects.

It is important to know the cause of a sickness, because it influences the course of treatment. The cause of an illness might be just one of the above-mentioned causes or a combination of any two or all three.

2. Severity and Manageability

Susādhya: Easily healed. Minor back pain is an example.

Dussādhya: Not so easily healed. Healing is possible, but with some difficulty. Considerable time and effort will be required, but the situation is not impossible.

Asādhya: Impossible. Some sicknesses (and here we are referring only to the sickness/disease itself, and not to the whole person) are impossible to heal: presently AIDS and mental retardation are examples in this category.

Yāpya: Manageable, even though it cannot be cured. Even though this sickness cannot be removed from the system, it can still be managed in a way that does not worsen it and that may even result in remission. Examples include asthma, AIDS, and mental retardation. I have listed the latter two again on purpose, to emphasize the importance of treating the human system as a whole and each person as a distinct, complex individual. AIDS may presently be an incurable disease, but the *person* with AIDS can still be healed and the incurable disease managed through readily available AIDS medication.

Whether healing will occur after an individualized treatment has been prescribed depends, ultimately, on the person and his or her commitment to the healing process. Two people with the same “easy” sickness may not come through the healing process successfully. One may succeed quickly, while the other may heal much more slowly, or possibly not at all, depending on his or her level of commitment to the healing process.

How the Yoga Therapist Approaches Healing

Step 1: Heyam: Recognizing the Need for Help

The very first step in the healing process actually belongs to the patient, who must recognize that he is in trouble and needs help, and then must seek help. The recognition that we need help is called *heyam*. Unless a person recognizes that he or she is in trouble, the healing process cannot begin. This recognition happens as a result of familiarity with the symptoms of suffering.

According to *Patañjali's Yogasūtra* (YS I-31), suffering expresses itself in four ways:

1. Emotional state: When we become sick, our emotional patterns change, which is another way of saying that our emotions mirror our situation. When we are sad or angry or unhappy, we need to recognize this, admit it, and ask why.
2. Negative mental attitudes: We may become very pessimistic or negative, or begin to find fault in ourselves or others, or in a situation. The mind is not still, but rather is constantly fluctuating.
3. Physiological changes in the body: There may be changes in bodily patterns. For example, the body temperature may change, hair may begin to fall out, the breath may smell bad, dark circles may form around the eyes, we may have digestion or elimination problems, etc.
4. Breathing pattern: The normal breath is long and smooth, but if it becomes short or labored or very heavy, then we know something is wrong.

The human system is, of course, a single whole, and often times we will experience more than one symptom; that is, the different dimensions of our human system will express suffering in different ways.

Step 2: Hetu: Identifying the Causes of Duḥkham, or Suffering

What causes a person to suffer? We know from experience that nothing happens without a cause. If we are suffering, our suffering must also have a cause. In order to heal suffering, the teacher must know and understand the causes of suffering. Some of the causes of suffering are:

Pariṇāma: Change. We suffer because there has been a change, either outside of us or within us. Even a simple change in the weather can trigger allergies, physical discomfort, colds, etc. Another example would be a change in diet. If I travel to another country and cannot eat the food I am used to eating, I suffer. In addition, as I grow older, my body's nutritional needs change, and if I do not temper my eating habits appropriately, I will suffer.

Tāpa: Excessive thirst. Sometimes we have an excessive thirst for certain things like food, sex, alcohol, drugs, etc. Such "thirst" may elevate to an addiction and even to illness. Illness or a negative pattern of behavior may also result when the thirst is not quenched.

Samskāra: Our patterns, habits, and other automatic behaviors. A habit may be appropriate in one context, but not appropriate in another. When you visit England, if you continue to drive on the right side of the road, as is your habit, you will suffer. Habits may also result from experience. For example, after a series of bad luck events, we may get into a habit of negative thinking and see all new situations in a negative light. The problem with automatic behaviors is that we do not think, we just act "automatically," and how we act may or may not be appropriate to the situation. If it is not appropriate, we will certainly suffer.

Asatsaṅga: Inappropriate association or company. The company you keep and the relationships you maintain (social, familial, professional, etc.) are important because they influence you. There is an English adage that illustrates this point very well: if you lie down with dogs you are bound to get fleas.

Asatmya indriya samyoga: The linking of the senses to something inappropriate or abusive. In this situation, you can suffer from too much exposure or from underexposure. For example, excessive television viewing and video-game playing or long-term exposure to loud music will certainly causes problems for us over time, especially later in life. Anything, even Yoga, can be overdone.

Ayutka svātmika gauravam: Inappropriate self-esteem. This can mean either excessive ego or lack of self-esteem. There are many obvious examples of how people suffer because of lack of self-esteem or because of excessive ego.

Vāta prakopa: Literally, "angry wind." Anything we do that agitates the breath causes us to suffer. Breathing is central to life, and if we allow the breath to become agitated, the breath will retaliate and cause suffering. This suffering can take the form of bodily twitches or trembling, yawning, flatulence, indigestion, dry skin, bowel and urinary disorders, and even fertility problems. In some of the

ancient texts, as well as Āyurvedic texts, there is considerable space devoted to the different kinds of illnesses triggered by *Vāta prakopa*.

Ayutka āhāra: Inappropriate food or eating habits. This includes what a person eats, as well as how he or she eats—how much, in what way, at what time, where, and with whom.

Ayutka vihāra: Inappropriate lifestyle. This refers to sleeping and exercise habits, where a person lives, who the person lives with, the workplace and work habits, extracurricular activities, etc.

Janmaja: Congenital disorders. These are problems present at birth. Sometimes we see children born with blindness or who are HIV-positive. They are born with their illness, and they cannot be blamed for it.

Īśvara samkalpa: Divine will. An example would be a person hit by lightning. There is no explanation for why this should happen, except that it was a random act of nature or “Divine Will.” Some may argue that this is a result of *karma*, but the point here is that the cause is unseen.

It is important to note that these categories are not rigidly distinct. They will overlap on many occasions. It should also be noted that this list covers the most important causes, but there are others as well.

As healers, we must develop the ability to observe, to be able to look at all the different dimensions of a person and to know what to look for. A healer must know not only what to observe (symptoms), but also *how* to observe. In Yoga, there are three methods of observation.

The Three Methods of Observation

Darśanam: Observation through the medium of the senses. This refers to what we see, smell, hear. Is the student’s voice weak or strong? Do I smell bad breath? Do I see drooping shoulders and a collapsed chest? We might also ask the patient to perform a physical posture or two as part of this observation process.

Sparśanam: Observation through touch. This includes such things as taking the temperature or pulse, or feeling the shoulder and neck as a way to check for muscle tightness. When using this method of observation, we should always ask patients if it is okay to touch them before doing so.

Praśnam: Interaction and dialogue. This refers to talking with the student and observing how he or she responds to questions. Do not always take a verbal

response at face value. How the patient responds can often tell you much more than what was actually said. Sometimes the truth resides in what a person does not say.

The teacher should be adept at utilizing all of the observation methods at once and integrating them in a manner that fits the needs of the unique situation. In other words, the person you are healing is always more important than any checklist of techniques. The unique needs of the student should guide your choices. You are healing an individual, not fulfilling the requirements of any generic, institutional checklist or form.

Continuing with the healing model from *Patañjali's Yogasūtra*, we now need to decide what we want to accomplish in the healing process. Healers create practices that are designed to address illness and its causes, so it is important to know where we are starting from in the healing process.

By the same token, it is equally important to know what the desired result of the healing process is: if we do not know where we are going, how can we decide how to get there? A healer must carefully choose and prioritize reasonable goals for the healing process. Let us therefore discuss some ideas regarding health and determine what we are trying to achieve.

Step 3: Hānam: The Five Elements of Health and Prioritizing Health Goals for Healing

It is important to remember that when someone is sick, the symptoms do not manifest in the physical body only. Whatever the cause, the illness also will affect other areas of the student's life. We thus need to look at all the things that are happening in the student's life, decide what the priorities are in the healing process, and address the priorities first. The five elements of health, presented below, are all possible goals, or *hānam*, for the healing process.

Samatvam: Balance and harmony in the human system. Examples include eyes that are neither dry nor watery; an appropriate, balanced alignment of the body; clear sinuses; efficient, regular digestion and elimination; etc. We look for this quality especially in reference to *dhātu*, *rasa*, and *kāraṇa*.

Arogyam: No "roga," or no dis-ease. There is no anxiety or discomfort in one's situation.

Sthairyam: Stability. This refers to stability of mind, body, energy, emotions, etc. Ideally, an individual daily has the same amount of energy, the same stability and focus of mind, a balanced emotional state, etc.

Dvaṅdva sahanam: The ability to remain undisturbed by extremes (of weather, of circumstances, of emotion, etc.). If it is extremely cold, I am not affected, for example, by this extreme in temperature. I, of course, need to put on a jacket, but this does not agitate me. Responding in a balanced way to shocking news is also *dvaṅdva sahanam*.

Indriya nigraha: Literally, "holding the senses." A healthy person is someone who has their senses under control, who can direct them or rein them in at will. In such a case, the senses obey the person rather than drawing the person here and there in pursuit of whatever catches the senses' fancy. Sickness results when the senses dominate us, as in the case of any addiction: drugs, food, shopping, sex, video-game playing, etc.

In the process of healing, it is not always possible to address the root cause of illness immediately, because the student is not ready. In such cases, we need to choose intermediate goals. Once we have accomplished these intermediate goals, perhaps then the student will be ready to focus on addressing the root cause of the illness. Our goals must be approached in steps, where one step prepares us for the next and healing takes place gradually.

In selecting short-term goals, a decision needs to be made on how to prioritize them, which leads us to the next issue.

The Application of *Śamana* and *Śodhanam*

There are two approaches a healer may take when choosing and prioritizing goals:

Śamana: Pacification. When an individual is suffering a great deal, especially emotionally, the best approach to healing is an indirect one: to first pacify the person and stabilize him, rather than addressing the root of the problem immediately. This means that the roots of the problem will probably remain, but the point here is to bring some stability to the patient before doing any deeper work, which, at this juncture, might threaten or even harm the patient. *Śamana* is the most common starting point for healing work.

Śodhanam: Refinement and cleansing. *Śodhanam* is the removal of the root of the problem. In some cases, a student's suffering may be due to a specific cause. For example, I may have stress because of my poor lifestyle choices. We may keep pacifying our stress using certain pacification methods. The stress will continue to exist, however, until the root of the problem, which in this case is the unhealthy life style, is addressed. To address the root cause of the problem is *śodhanam*.

A healer does not have to begin with *śamana* and end with *śodhanam*. Every decision, every choice, every step in the healing process is based on the healer's observations and interactions with and knowledge of the individual person. One student may be safely and successfully helped using a *śodhanam* approach from the outset. *Śodhanam* often provokes a strong reaction in people, however, so for many it is best if the healer initially adopts a *śamana* approach. Then, as the healing progresses, the focus can gradually be turned to the root problem. *Śamana* may thus be the short-term goal, while *śodhanam* would be the long-term one.

A woman in her mid-forties came to our center seeking relief from chronic depression. After working with her, we found that the cause of her chronic depression was the poor relationship between her and her husband. The strain in their relationship was caused by some choices the woman had made, but she was not able to look at her own issues right away. She needed to be pacified first, and so this is the method we used with her. Once we had worked with her for a while in this way, she became more calm and stable and was able to look at her own choices and resolve her relationship issues.

If we had chosen to confront this patient immediately with her problems, she probably would not have been receptive and might even have abandoned the healing process. This is why a healer needs to make this crucial choice between *śamana* and *śodhanam*.

Healing takes time; we can't expect to deal with everything at once. We must first determine what it is we want to accomplish and then we prioritize our goals according to the student's unique needs. We approach the healing process one step at a time in a logical, orderly manner that is always attuned to the needs of the student. *Who* is going to be practicing is always more important than what technique is used.

Step 4: Upāyam: Finding and Implementing the Tools for Healing

Patañjali presented the concept of *Upāyam*, or tools, last because only after we know where we are going, and from where we are starting, can we determine how to proceed. If we decide to go to Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., how we travel would be very different if we set out from San Diego, California, U.S.A., rather than from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Likewise, the tools of healing only make sense in the context of their use; if we don't know what sickness the student is suffering from and how we intend to treat her, how can we choose the appropriate tools for healing?

We must choose the tools that will help us accomplish our healing goals. If we are going swimming, we would need a different set of tools than if we were setting out for a hike in the mountains. What good is a surfboard to us in the mountains? By the same logic, just because we have access to a tool does not mean it is an appropriate one for us to use. Once we determine the goals for the student, then we can choose the right tools. The goals determine which tools we use, as well as how we use them in the healing process.

Before choosing any Yoga tool, there are several factors the Yoga therapist must consider for each patient in order to evaluate whether a tool will be useful in that patient's healing process, and how the tool may or should be applied. These factors include the following:

Kāla: Time. The healer must take into consideration how much time a person can set aside to practice, that is, how much time he or she can comfortably commit to. We might offer a busy executive a fifteen-minute practice to be done twice each day, while a part-time student might be able to set aside 45 minutes every night for practice. We also should consider what time of day the person would be practicing. We tend, for example, to be more flexible at night than we are first thing in the morning. In addition, some practices are very energizing and thus should not be done in the evening. Time of the year is another aspect to consider. Each person reacts differently to seasonal patterns. Spring may bring on allergies, while winter may bring on sinus problems or depression, etc.

Deśa: Place. Where will the student practice? Is the climate tropical, temperate, cold? Altitude makes a big difference as well. In high altitudes, even a seven-second inhale can be difficult, whereas at sea level up to fourteen seconds may be easy.

Vayah: Age. The prescribed practice must respect the restrictions and distinct needs of the student's age. For example, while a thirty-year-old woman could be expected to sit and meditate on the tip of a candle for fifteen minutes, a nine-year-old boy could not. This is why the ancient masters suggested that the main focus (not the only focus) for youth should be *āsana*, for middle-aged students *prāṇāyāma*, and for older people meditation.

Vṛtti: Occupation or profession. If the student's job involves sitting at a desk all day, he or she will probably need a more dynamic practice. A farmer, on the other hand, would probably need a less strenuous practice. A psychologist might benefit most from a practice for his body or a practice that clears the mind between meetings with clients.

Śakti: Power or ability. How much physical, mental, and emotional strength does the person have at any given time? We have to respect the abilities of the person.

Īcchā: Interest. What are the student's likes and dislikes? Consistent with the student's interests, we can add a few qualities to the tool so that it motivates the student to practice regularly. For example, if a student has a spiritual interest, perhaps a spiritual ingredient might help motivate practice and help generate a positive attitude about practice.

As healers, considering these parameters helps us to evaluate the whole person and his or her needs and abilities, instead of fixating on the disease. We can now look at the tools Yoga offers us for healing the whole person.

Śarīrika Cikitsā: Healing Using the Body

There are three methods of healing that engage the physical body.

1. Āsana

Āsana is the practice of physical postures. Our concern as healers when using the tool of *āsana* is the pose's function, not its outward form. The Yoga masters classified *āsana*s into five categories based on their functions.

Āsana is utilized primarily for affecting the health and well-being of our physical body, but we must remember that all five dimensions of the human system are interconnected: affect one dimension and all dimensions are affected. The physical dimension is the least subtle of the five. If we cannot connect with our physical body, our "grossest" dimension, how can we possibly connect with our subtler ones? *Āsana* is thus a good starting point, a place to begin to open oneself to the possibility of connecting with the subtler dimensions of the human system.

Beyond certain important, practical physical functions, each type of posture serves additional functions that are more subtle. These are based on another model, consisting of the *nāḍīs*, the *cakras*, and the *kuṇḍalinī*. For our purposes, however, in this introductory article we will briefly discuss only the physical functions of the postures in each category of *āsana*.

The five main categories of *āsana*

Samasthiti: These postures are reference postures. The spine in these postures is erect, or vertical. In other words, all of the important vital points of the spine are

in a neutral, healthy alignment. When the spine is in correct position, there is no inter-organ pressure: the body is not collapsing too far forward, compressing the organs and throwing the skeletal structure out of proper alignment, nor is the body leaning too far back or too far to one side or the other, etc., which also puts unnatural stress on the organs of the body and on the various joints. It is in these neutral, erect *samasthiti* postures that the breath is able to flow most freely and easily, so these postures also serve the function of helping to prepare the student for *prāṇāyāma* and meditation. By extension, therefore, *samasthiti* postures also contribute to the process of cultivating a calm and focused mind.

Postures in this category include *samasthiti* and *tādāsana*. *Śavāsana* also is classified as a *samasthiti* posture, although we are lying on the back in this position, and the spine is thus not technically vertical.

Paścimatāna: *Paścimatāna* literally means “stretching the back of the body.” It is important to note that *paścimatāna* postures should be done on an exhalation. The natural breath accompaniment to a forward bend is exhalation, because as we bend forward, the chest cavity naturally compresses and becomes smaller, expelling (exhaling) the air from the chest. All *āsana* movements should begin from the point where the starting breath originates for that particular type of posture. In the case of *paścimatāna* postures, movement must start from the abdomen, as these postures are done on an exhalation.

In some cases, when a student’s back is overarched or when the stomach muscles are too tight, we practice *paścimatāna* postures to correct this tendency. In *paścimatāna* postures we are drawing the abdomen in and up as we exhale, willfully engaging the abdominal muscles to help counteract any tendency, for example, to overarch in the area of the lower back or sink in the belly. Stretching the body in the opposite direction of the misalignment, we help pull the spine back into a neutral, natural alignment.

Examples of *paścimatāna* postures are *paścimatānāsana*, *uttānāsana*, and *vajrāsana* forward bend (commonly referred to as child’s pose).

Pūrvatāna: *Pūrvatāna* may be translated as “stretching the front of the body.” The natural breath accompaniment of a backbend is an inhalation, because as we bend backward, the chest cavity naturally expands and gets larger, drawing (inhaling) air into the chest. As pointed out in the previous section, *āsana* postures start from where the breath begins in that particular type of posture. In the case of *pūrvatāna* postures, they begin with inhaling, so the movement should begin from the chest.

Typically, the physical function of *pūrvatāna* postures is to bring back to healthy *samasthiti* alignment a spine that exhibits a tendency to “slouch.” For example,

people experiencing depression will often exhibit a distinctive posture: chest and shoulders hunched forward and rounded, collapsing the chest area. To counteract this tendency to slouch, which we also frequently encounter in people who work at a desk all day, we might ask the student to work with postures such as *pūrvatānāsana*, *dvipāda pīṭham*, or *bhujāṅgāsana*.

Parivṛtti: These postures involve twisting the body. They are done on exhalation (the same body/breath principle applies here as described above in *paścimatāna* postures, and so we begin the movement in these postures from the abdomen).

Sometimes the spine is straight on the vertical and lateral axis, but it is not aligned on the axial axis (the spine turns, instead, to one side or the other). For example, we encounter this unnatural axial twist in people who tend to sit at work and talk to customers, while also typing on the computer keyboard, which is usually on the table to the right. The body, in such cases, is held in a partially "twisted" position for extended periods each day. Postures like *trikoṅgāsana* and *jāthara parivṛtti* can be used to correct this kind of misalignment and bring the spine back to *samasthiti*.

Pārśva. These postures involve lateral movement of the spine and can be used when working with an individual whose spine is tilted to one side. An example would be a student's shoulders or hips that are uneven due to a birth defect or certain lifestyle choices.

Lateral postures like *pārśva koṅgāsana*, *pārśva trikoṅgāsana*, or *godhāpīṭham*, are examples of *pārśva*-type postures. This type of posture may be offered to correct misalignment, bringing back lateral symmetry to the body and promoting healthy, *samasthiti* alignment.

There is also a sixth category of *āsana*, *viparīta* (inversions) that was created after the others. In most cases, the oldest texts mention inverted postures only very briefly, or not at all. Some masters classify inversions as *viśeṣa* (special), as if hinting that these are reserved for a special few who are healthy enough to do them. There are few benefits of inversions that cannot be obtained from an appropriate combination of postures drawn from the original five classifications. Inversions thus should be utilized carefully in the healing process, and only used when necessary and the student is ready for them.

Remember, *āsana* impacts not only the physical dimension of the body, but all of the dimensions of our human system. As an example, when we use *pūrvatāna* postures to correct a stooped posture (physical dimension) resulting from depression (mental and emotional dimensions), we are affecting not just the physical manifestation of the problem, but also the mental and emotional layers of the problem.

Often, when performance of the posture improves, the person is able to breathe better. A smoother, longer, more comfortable breath helps to calm the mind and, by extension, the emotions. For this reason, the principle underlying function of any posture, regardless of which category it belongs to, is bringing the posture as close to *samasthiti* (the healthiest position) as possible. In this way, working only with the physical body, we are able to bring changes to the mind or even the emotions.

Sometimes in applying *āsana* in healing, we may need to utilize many of the functions of the various categories of *āsana*. We are not limited to one function. We can create for the student a flowing sequence of postures combining the desired functions in a smooth, safe way. In addition, some postures combine effects/functions from more than one category. For example, *vīrabhadrāsana* combines both *pūrvatāna* and *parivṛtti* effects, as we start from a position in which we have to twist the spine to face the front.

If a student has physical limitations that prevent her from doing traditional postures, we need to identify the functions of those postures we want to offer and create adaptations that preserve them. If we ask the student to do a posture she is not physically able to do, she will get injured. If there is any doubt about what a student is capable of doing, it is always better to be safe.

Finally, we must not forget to offer preparatory and counter-poses for any *āsana* practice. Proper sequencing is essential, as it prevents injury and optimizes the healthy effects of the practice. Sequencing is a whole science in itself, and a thorough discussion of it is beyond the scope of this introductory article.

2. *Dravya Upayoga*

Dravya upayoga is the application of prepared mediums or certain other materials on the body, in particular, the physical application of oils or pastes. Just as with the practice of *āsana*, the application of oils for specific physical problems may promote healing beyond the physical level. If a student has a stiff neck and we apply oil to help with the stiffness, we also may see results on other levels. There is a whole science behind this, the exploration of which is beyond the scope of this article.

3. *Abhyangam*

Because Yoga focuses on supporting self-empowerment in the healing process, massage is not mentioned in the Yoga texts. Massage is, however, a part of Āyurvedic healing practices. T. Krishnamacharya, who was also a master of

Āyurvedic healing, said that a good *āsana* practice is like a massage without a masseur.

In some cases, when the student is unable to move on his own—when he has suffered a stroke for example—then it may be useful to use some massage techniques to alleviate some issues. Here we are again dealing with a topic that falls outside the scope of this article.

Prāṇa Cikitsā: Healing Using Prāṇa

When *prāṇa* is moving freely throughout the human system, we function in a normal, healthy manner, but when it is obstructed, there is sickness. We can work directly with *prāṇa* to remove obstructions and promote healing, but before discussing the latter, we should first examine *prāṇa* itself.

Prāṇa is a complex concept that easily could provide enough material for a separate article. For our purposes here, however, our explanation will be simple and brief.

Prāṇa refers to both the breath and to a kind of vital energy, or subtle life force, that is within the body and which animates us. As long as we have *prāṇa*, we have life. If *prāṇa* leaves, we die. The ancient yogis identified the close connection between breath and life (if we stop breathing, we die) and connected breathing directly with the vital energy that animates the living body. Every cell of our body, they determined, is imbued with *prāṇa*, and all *prāṇa* is the same in terms of origin and substance. The ancient yogis gave specific names to *prāṇa* residing in different parts of the body, however, and attributed specific functions to each.

Description of the five *prāṇas*

The Yoga masters divided the body's *prāṇa* into ten different types, called *vāyus* (literally, "winds") and attributed different functions to each *vāyu*. We will briefly present five of the most important *vāyus*, which are called the *mahā vāyu* (great *vāyu*). See Figure 1.

Apāna vāyu: Located in the area below the navel, this *vāyu* is responsible for the vital functions of elimination, reproduction, and fertility.

Samāna vāyu: Located in the area of the belly around the navel, this *vāyu* is responsible for digestion.

Prāṇa vāyu: Located in the heart and chest area, this *vāyu* is responsible for mental functions, thoughts, and emotions. In other words, the ancient Yoga masters believed that the seat of the mind is in the heart, not the head.

Udāna vāyu: Located in the throat region, this *vāyu* influences communication and expression functions.

Vyāna vāyu: This *vāyu* is present throughout the human system, but it is specifically responsible for moving *prāṇa* throughout the body. It also is responsible for functions in those areas not influenced by the other *vāyus*. It is responsible for movement of the fingers and toes, for example.

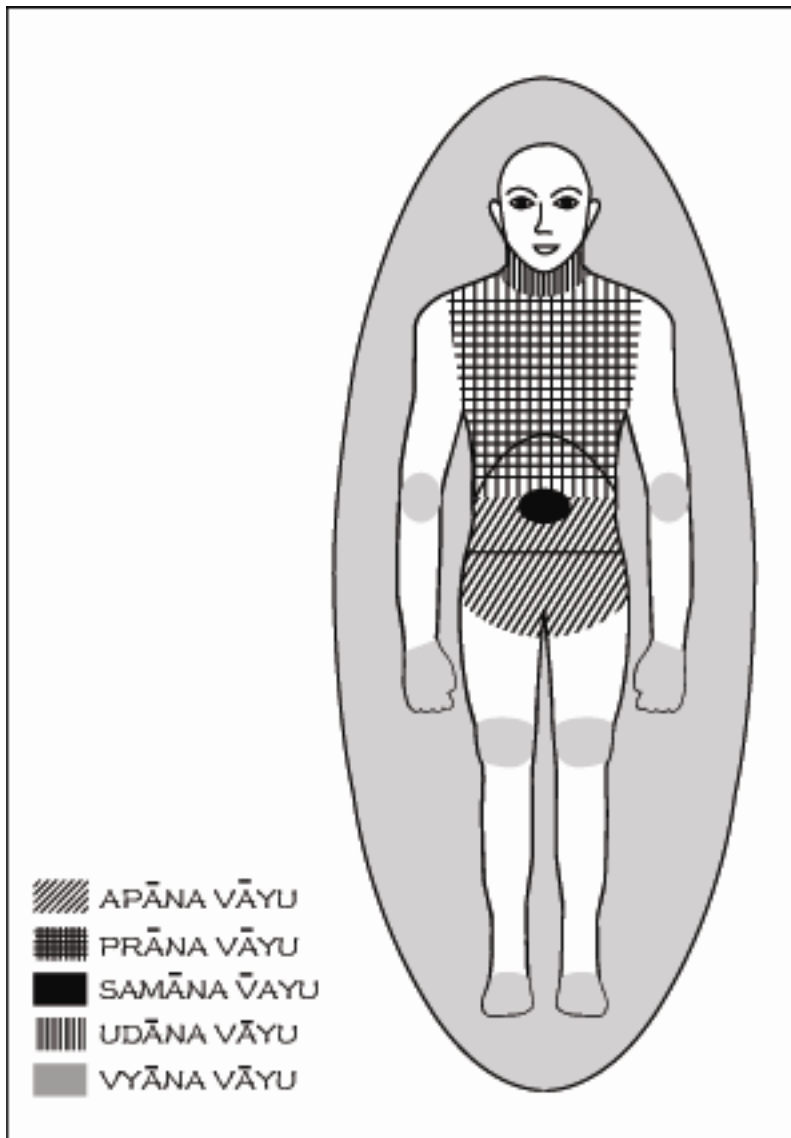


Figure 1

If a student is experiencing a problem in a specific area of the body, one of the ways we can address that problem is by prescribing practices that work on the *vāyu* responsible for that area.

The most powerful tool for working with *prāṇa* is *prāṇāyāma*. *Patañjali* defines *prāṇāyāma* as “conscious breathing” (YS II-49).

It is impossible to discuss the application of *prāṇāyāma* for specific ailments, because the needs and abilities of the whole person, not just how to treat their ailment, must be considered before prescribing a practice. Generally speaking, however, we can use the exhalation and holding after exhalation to work with the *apāna vāyu*. Inhalation and holding after inhalation influence the *prāṇa vāyu*, and breathing ratios in which the inhalation and exhalation are of equal length influence the *samāna vāyu*.

Another important tool for working with *prāṇa* is the set of practices known as *bandhas*. *Bandhas* are advanced techniques and should not be used casually or without the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher. If a knife is used correctly, it is a very useful tool, but if used incorrectly it can cause severe damage. Similarly, when utilizing *prāṇāyāma* and *bandhas*, if we force things or apply the wrong breathing ratios, we may agitate whatever problems already exist in the student’s system.

Additionally, *bandhas* do not engage automatically (there are a few exceptions where it may happen automatically, such as *jālandhara bandha* in the posture *dvipāda pīṭham*). The practitioner must engage *bandhas* willfully, and this is easier to do in certain postures than in others. The ancient texts that discuss *bandhas* advise that they be done only in *samasthiti* postures, i.e., when the spine is straight.

Having offered these cautions, generally speaking, we can say that *jālandhara bandha* will bring attention to the throat region and thus affects the *udāna vāyu*. *Uḍḍiyāna bandha* brings additional attention to the *apāna vāyu* and to the *samāna vāyu*, and *mūla bandha* influences the *apāna vāyu*.

The Yoga masters claimed that as the breath becomes longer and smoother, *prāṇa* flows more freely throughout the human system. So anything that helps the practitioner to smoothly and comfortably extend breathing is a good tool. A long breath by itself is not enough, however—the breath must be not only long, but also comfortable. If the breath is long and ragged, or if we have to strain to make our breath long, we are working in the wrong direction and will likely aggravate any problem.

In addition to the *bandhas*, *prāṇāyāma* may be combined with other, complementary healing techniques, including *āsana*, *bhāvana* (visualization), *mudrās*, oils, and chanting (*adhyayanam*).

For example, when chanting, we produce sound only while exhaling, so we can use the pronunciation of sounds as a way to help the student extend exhalation.

Chanting is a powerful tool for healing imbalances of the *udāna vāyu*. Beyond this most obvious application, chanting also has the potential to influence all of the *vāyus*, as each Sanskrit sound resonates at a specific location in the body. *Ha*, for example, resonates in the throat, while *ra* resonates in the belly. The Sanskrit sound *hra* resonates in both. That is why it is absolutely crucial that when chanting in Sanskrit, we pronounce each sound correctly. The meaning of the sounds and words are secondary: it is most important to master the correct pronunciation.

It should also be pointed out that chanting is not a musical activity; we do not sing the sounds, we speak them. There is a difference between *kīrtan* and *adhyayanam*. Singing the sounds changes them, and since the sound has a specific function in *adhyayanam*, we do not want to alter it in any way.

Other techniques that work on *prāṇa* are *mudrā*, or hand gestures, and *bhāvana*, or visualization. Most *mudrās* influence the *vyāna vāyu*, because *mudrās* require consciously directed movement of the fingers and hands. In order to get our hand to hold the desired shape, we have to concentrate, and this conscious effort stimulates the *prāṇa* in the area of the hands (*vyāna vāyu*). If we then move our hands to the chest region, we are directing the focus to the *prāṇa vāyu*. The point here is that bringing the mind's attention to a particular area of the body stimulates the *prāṇa* in that area.

Mudrā accompanying *prāṇāyāma* would be one possible way to work with someone with Parkinson's disease, an imbalance in the *vyāna vāyus*. Bringing one's awareness to these physical actions (the *mudrās*) with *prāṇāyāma* focuses and redirects the imbalanced *vāyus*. For example, we can use the "cin" *mudrā* (which is joining the index finger with the thumb) during *prāṇāyāma*. During every breath, the person can be asked to change the finger that links with the thumb. This brings the person's attention to the fingers, and hence facilitates the flow of *prāṇa*. As the ancient masters said, wherever our attention is, there flows *prāṇa*. What this practice may do is strengthen the *vyāna vāyu*, whose weakness may be a cause of the trembling of our hands. As is true for every example used in this article, however, this is merely an illustration, and we must not think of this as a prescriptive way to work with people with Parkinson's.

Visualization is another powerful technique for working with *prāṇa*. When I visualize that I am a mountain or that I am sending the breath to my knee, for example, this is what "happens" during the visualization. And this *experience*, originating from my visualization, has an affect on me.

One of the ways we can use visualization is through *intention*. In Sanskrit this is known as *samkalpa*: the idea that I am now going to do something, an intention to do something. For example, I might say, "I am now going to work on inhalation to influence the *prāṇa dimension* of my system, and I am going to do this by putting my hands on my chest and visualizing the inhalation getting longer and longer." As we engage in this visualization process, the system changes and our breath does become longer.

Finally, *kriyās* may also be used to work on *prāṇa*, but we do not advise that they be used. It is too easy to misuse *kriyās*, and many Yoga masters have said that the same effects can be achieved in a safer manner through the use of *prāṇāyāma* alone.

Indriya Cikitsā: Healing through the Senses

Having discussed the physical body as well as *prāṇa*, let us move on to an even more subtle level of our human system that can be used for healing: *indriyās*, or the senses. Before we can discuss the senses as tools for healing in Yoga, however, we need to understand how the ancient yogis understood the role of the senses in our lives.

Beyond the *pañcamaya* model of the human system, there exists an even deeper aspect, which is the foundation of our being. In Yoga, this center of our being is called *puruṣa*, *cit*, and *drastr*. These different Sanskrit names indicate the same thing, but emphasize slightly different aspects of it (just as brother, son, and husband all describe "me," yet emphasize different aspects of me).

Puruṣa means "one who dwells in the city," *cit* means "that which is conscious" or "that which cognizes," and *drastr* means "that which perceives." In other words, there is something at the very core of our human system that is conscious, that perceives (or is the source of perception), and that is the master of the human system.

This core is fundamentally different from the five dimensions of our human system as presented in the *pañcamaya* model: the core is "spirit," while the five dimensions are "matter."

Although this core is both the source of perception and the source of cognition, it cannot function in the world on its own. It requires a medium through which it

can act. That medium is the five dimensions of the human system: body, breath, personality, intellect, and emotions. Through these dimensions, which encompass the senses, *puruṣa*, or consciousness, functions in the material world.

The metaphor traditionally used to illustrate the relationship between the *puruṣa* and the rest of the human system is that of a lame man and a blind man cooperating in order to live successfully in the world. *Puruṣa* is the lame man: *puruṣa* can see, but cannot walk. The human system (*pañcamaya* model), including the senses, is the blind man; he can walk, but he cannot see. The blind person carries the lame person on his shoulders; they work together (consciousness and material body) as one, because without each other, they cannot function.

The point at the heart of this metaphor is that body, mind, and senses are tools only. Mind is not the source of cognition: it is merely a tool, a kind of mirror, which reflects cognition. Cognition itself originates from a place other than mind.

Of course, the quality of the tools (body, mind, and senses) matters. They must be healthy if we want to live a healthy, balanced, fulfilling life. If the tools are defective, the results of the actions that utilize these tools will be flawed. In other words, if the senses are unhealthy, out of balance, or undisciplined, then *puruṣa* "has no legs," and its movements in the world will be equally unbalanced, undisciplined, and flawed. As the *Yogasūtra* says, suffering and sickness are bound to be the result.

What Are the Senses?

According to the Yoga masters, the senses, or *indriyas*, are a subtle kind of matter that helps *puruṣa* to function in the world. The ten senses help the *puruṣa* in two different ways, and thus the masters divided them into two categories: senses that gather information and senses that enable us to act.

Jñāna indriya: Literally, "knowledge senses." Hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling are the senses that support perception by gathering information about the surrounding world in the form of sound, feel, sight, taste, and smell.

Karma indriya: Literally, "action senses." These senses support our actions and enable us to do things. These action senses underlie a kind of power or capability of the hands, legs, reproduction system, speech, elimination processes, etc.

Both types of senses can cause us problems, but in different ways. For example, blurry sight or a diabetic being overcome by temptation and indulging in sweets are examples of *jñāna indriya* malfunctions. Acting violently or telling lies are

examples of *karma indriya* malfunctions. Since the two sets of senses malfunction in different ways, different practices are suggested to address the problems associated with them.

Indriya Cikitsā: Tools for Disciplining and Healing through the Senses

To maintain the health of the *karma indriyās*, *Patañjali* suggests (in *sūtrās* II-30 to II-45) that we cultivate certain attitudes and behaviors called the *yamās* and *niyamās*. These are essentially strategies or disciplines for keeping the senses of action pure and, as a result, healthy.

Yamās are rules governing our conduct and interactions with others. They are specific social practices we should follow. For example, if I speak to someone in a way that harms him, I am abusing the sense of communication (speech). If, however, I restrain myself and speak in a way that does not cause harm, I am healing myself, because I am actively taking steps to stop a certain cycle of behavior that causes suffering to myself and others. If someone steals, then he also is creating a certain kind of cycle as well as actively participating in a negative pattern of behavior that will probably cause trouble later on. If we change our conduct, our behaviors, however, we can change our life.

In the *Yogasūtra*, *Patañjali* offers five *yamās*:

Ahimsā: Non-harming. Anything that hurts another being should be avoided. This means practicing nonviolence, not only at the physical level, but also the mental and communication levels. In every situation, before acting we should pause and consider the other's position.

Satya: Truthfulness. *Satya* encompasses more than simply speaking the truth. *Satya* means speaking the truth that is consistent with *Ahimsā*. This is not just "the truth," but how we speak the truth. Speaking the truth may hurt another, and in such a situation it may be better to say nothing. *Satya* should not conflict with our efforts to behave with *Ahimsā*.

Asteya: Not stealing. This means not taking something that does not belong to you. *Asteya* encompasses many different levels: material (for example, money), intellectual (for example, plagiarism), etc. It is nonattachment in word, thought, and action to objects belonging to others. To practice *asteya* is to refrain from serving only your own interest or harming somebody else's.

Brahmacarya: Appropriate sexuality. *Brahmacarya* is a complex concept, often translated simplistically as "sexual abstinence." *Brahmacarya* literally means "a person moving toward ultimate truth," and it refers to our responsibilities in different situations and throughout the course of our lifetime. As a husband, my

responsibilities are different from those I must fulfill in my role as a teacher or as a student. Since each of these roles is different, although each one is a part of me, it is impossible to generalize about what I must do in any specific situation. It is possible, however, to say that we must act in a way appropriate to our responsibilities in any given situation. In other words, I must uphold my responsibilities in a manner consistent with the hat I am wearing at the time.

Aparigraha: Not to receive what you do not deserve. The idea is to not grasp things, not to hold onto or accumulate things, but to take only what is necessary. In other words, do not take advantage of the situation. A doctor receives money for seeing a patient: is it right that he also receives a commission for prescribing certain medicines? A teacher receives a fee for giving instruction, but just because her student, in gratitude, offers her one million dollars, this does not mean the teacher should accept it.

Niyamās are personal disciplines, attitudes we should adopt regarding ourselves. There are five *niyamās*.

Śauca: Cleanliness, inside and out. Outer cleanliness refers to the normal routine of personal cleanliness: bathing, brushing our teeth, other grooming practices, etc. Inner cleanliness refers to the healthy functioning of our body, as well as to clarity of mind. Practicing *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* are both means of attending to *śauca*, as are approaching diet and lifestyle practices with care.

Santoṣa: Contentment with what we have. When we have *santoṣa*, we do not covet what is beyond our resources. *Santoṣa* encompasses our mental activities, physical efforts, and the way we earn a living. If I am content with what I have, I will be happy and calm. But if I am discontented and agitated, I will not respond appropriately in my relationships, and this is bound to cause problems sooner or later.

Tapas: Cleansing process. *Tapas* refers to the process of eliminating undesirable elements from all levels of our human system. We have defects, and if we don't correct these defects, we will suffer. Of course, removing unhealthy elements from our life is difficult. *Tapas* means, literally, "to heat." Just as the impurities are eliminated from iron ore by heating the ore, so too impurities can be removed from our system through intense, concentrated effort. There are many different ways to eliminate rubbish from our system, including refining our eating habits, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* practice, meditation, etc.

Svādhyāya: Understanding the self results from self-examination. All learning, all reflection, all contact that helps us to learn more about ourselves is *svādhyāya*. *Tapas* has no meaning without *svādhyāya*. How do we identify the defects that need to be removed from our system, or what efforts do we need to undertake

to do this? The more I know about myself, the better I am able to identify and then begin to eliminate the unhealthy tendencies in my system.

Īśvara praṇidhāna: Acceptance of a higher force. Literally, *īśvara praṇidhāna* means “to surrender to the Lord.” We are not the masters of everything we do: many aspects of life are beyond our control. All we can do is act, and the result of that action depends on many different factors, most of which are beyond our control. The point is to focus on the *action*, not the result of the action, to pay attention to the quality of our actions and accept whatever may happen. If we do what is right simply because it is right, then we will always have a clear conscience. But if we act in order to achieve a certain result, we may or may not achieve that result, and who knows how we will feel about ourselves afterward.

To address problems related to the *jñāna indriyaṣ*, we offer practices that distract these senses from their habitual patterns and provide them with a healthier focus. Practices and techniques used to discipline the *jñāna indriyaṣ* are called *pratyāhāra*, literally, “opposite food.” We give the affected sense a food other than its habitual, unhealthy food, so that it no longer seeks the unhealthy option.

For example, a student who was suffering from various skin problems approached our center. Through consultation and primary examination, we determined that the woman’s skin problems were due to a liver problem. This in turn, we found out, was caused by a very inappropriate eating pattern. The course of action suggested was to put the student on a strict diet and a moderate exercise regime. The discipline of replacing her normal food with a new, healthier diet proved to be a *pratyāhāra* that saved her from further agony. Over time, through her strict adherence to our dietary suggestions, her problems vanished.

Traditionally, problems associated with the *jñāna indriyaṣ* have been illustrated through the metaphorical image of a chariot pulled by five horses (which signify the five senses). As long as the charioteer maintains control of the horses, the chariot (the body) functions well. But as soon as the horses become undisciplined, the chariot is pulled hither and thither and eventually it is pulled to pieces. In other words, if the senses are allowed to choose their own (often unhealthy) directions, they will pull us along with them. If we can discipline the senses, however, control them and focus them, then the chariot of our body will function well.

To discipline the senses is difficult. If we are going to shift the senses away from a habitual focus, we must offer a replacement object or objective. We are thus not actually “withdrawing” the senses from a particular focus: we are deliberately

re-focusing the senses on an object or direction of our choice. We are replacing an unhealthy focus with a healthy one.

For example, *trāṭaka* (meditating on a candle flame, which trains the gaze and the mind/thoughts) forces the senses and the mind to go in a particular, chosen direction (the flame). The senses are not allowed to wander aimlessly, but are drawn in the specific direction. Other examples are *nāda* (cutting off the sight, smell, hearing, and taste and listening only to the heart sound in order to train the hearing to become sharper and more focused), *eka rasa āhāra* (eating only one particular taste for ten days to stimulate one kind of taste bud, then changing to another taste, thus refining over time the sense of taste), and *mauna vrata* (a vow of silence to train both the sense of hearing and speech).

Each of the tools we have discussed here, *yamās*, *niyamās*, and *pratyāhāra*, has an important element in common: *the use of the will*. Conscious choice plays a critical role in each of these practices. One way to view it is the following: *yama* is the practice of conscious thought, *niyama* is the practice of conscious behavior, and *pratyāhāra* is the practice of conscious perception. These practices thus will not work unless the student has a strong desire to succeed and is committed wholeheartedly to the practice. Some people react negatively to this kind of self-disciplined practice, and, as in all cases, the healer must observe carefully to see if the practice is causing the student more agitation. If it is, then the approach must be changed.

Manasika Cikitsā: Healing Using the Mind

There are so many different ways to use the mind in healing that we cannot possibly discuss them all here. Moreover, mind clearly plays a central role in all of the tools that we have discussed thus far, not just *manasika cikitsā*. If we are unable to pay attention, even for short periods of time, we will not be able to practice any of the techniques presented in this article.

Practice requires attention. If during my morning *āsana* practice I am constantly thinking of the tasks waiting for me at work, then I am, for all intents and purposes, already at work, because my mind is preoccupied with work. My body may be going through the motions of *trikoṇāsana*, but I am not doing my *āsana* practice, because my mind is engaged in something else. Presented another way: *mind is fundamental* to all of our activities. Consequently, it is fundamental to any healing process in which we are *actively* engaged. In fact, we can say that mind is the central tool of healing in Yoga.

We could go on here to discuss the role of the quality of the mind in healing and also specific meditation techniques, which are essentially innumerable, but these

topics, although important, do not fall within the scope of this article. For our purposes, we need to focus on how mental activities heal the human system.

Bhāvana: The term *bhāvana* derives from the Sanskrit root *bhû*, meaning “to be.” *Bhāvana* refers to visualization—not just visualization of objects, like the sun or the moon or light, but also of certain attitudes we might desire to cultivate in ourselves, such as compassion or courage or stability. For example, I know I have to attend a meeting with a person with whom I do not get along. If before the meeting I visualize how I will deal clearly and effectively with that person, then when I do see him, there will be a subtle change in how I communicate with him. I change my attitude using visualization, and I thereby change the situation and myself.

Visualization also can involve visualizing movements of the body, as in the case presented earlier of the student who had suffered a stroke. The doctors told this young man that he would never be able to move certain areas of his body again. As a practice, his Yoga teacher offered him *prāṇāyāma* in combination with some visualization, asking him to visualize himself raising the affected arm and leg. Gradually, over time, he regained mobility in the paralyzed areas.

Dhyānam: This term means “meditation.” Meditation serves two purposes in the healing process of Yoga. First, meditation helps us to refine our mind, so that we can act in a manner appropriate to the situation in which we find ourselves at any given moment. In this sense, one of the definitions of meditation according to Yoga is “refining the memory.”

Our past experiences leave impressions on us, and these past impressions influence our current perception, sometimes appropriately, other times inappropriately. When I meet an old friend, I do not just see him, I simultaneously remember some past experiences we had together, remember his face, personality, the emotions he invoked in me, etc. How else would I be able to recognize him in a crowd of people and differentiate him from everyone else I have ever met? Memory is thus very useful to us.

On the other hand, past impressions can become so powerful and influential in our behavior that they control our actions. We no longer respond to the actual situation as it is, but instead respond according to our habitual way of thinking, which may not be appropriate to the actual situation. Responding inappropriately can cause suffering for us and for others.

Once, when I was in an airplane traveling home to India, I felt a tap on my shoulder and heard a voice, “Hello, Kausthub—how are you?” I turned my head and recognized the person behind me as a schoolmate I had not seen in nearly fifteen years. The moment I saw him, however, rather than greet him with the

same politeness he had shown me, I spoke in a rude and rather ugly manner, which shocked us both.

I later recalled the issues left unresolved between us since childhood and realized that I needed to resolve these patterns of behavior. These patterns had no value in the present, yet they surfaced as soon as I recognized my schoolmate. I was struck by the power of the patterns that dominate our lives, and I went back and apologized to him.

Meditation in this sense means recognizing our automatic behaviors, sorting through them, and creating new ones that are appropriate to the changing situations in our lives.

The second important purpose meditation serves in Yoga is related to what happens as a result of our meditation practice.

We should think of meditation as a process comprised of three aspects: there is a meditator (a perceiver), there is something that is perceived or meditated upon (an object), and there is the link between the two. Meditation is the process of gradually deepening the relationship between these three aspects.

Step 1: Dhāranā

The first step in the meditation process is for the meditator to choose an object to focus on. This "object" can be a thing or a concept or a word, but it must be *something*. Meditation here is not making the mind "blank," or nothingness of mind. Meditation is focusing on a specific, chosen object, directing the mind toward that object, and maintaining focus on the object. This is not easy. Choosing an object and staying focused on that object alone requires a great effort of will.

Step2: Dhyānam

If we succeed in focusing our mind in a chosen direction and in maintaining that focus, then gradually the link between the meditator and the object deepens. The link eventually deepens to such an extent that the meditator is aware of only two things: the object she is focused on and the feeling she is perceiving it. Nothing else is perceived—only the focus of the mind is perceived. At this point, only the faculties of the mind necessary to perceive and understand the object are operating.

Step 3: Samādhi

If we are able to maintain this link and it continues to deepen, at some point the link between the meditator and the object becomes so strong that even the feeling "I am perceiving" drops away, and there is only the object. It is as though the meditator disappears and only the object exists.

The more intense the link becomes, the more we experience the object. Most importantly, as we continue to link with the object, deepening our connection and our experience of the object, we gradually assimilate the qualities of the object of meditation. In other words, we slowly become like the object, and this is how healing occurs as a result of meditation.

Consequently, choosing an appropriate and relevant object of focus is crucial. The object must not only be appropriate for the situation, but also for the individual.

For example, a teacher might ask a student who lacks the quality of stability, whose mind or relationships or emotions are unstable and unbalanced, to use the image of a mountain as his object of focus. This does not mean, however, that every "unstable" person should meditate on a mountain. If the student has had a bad experience on a mountain, it will be very difficult for that person to focus on one. A mountain, therefore, would be an inappropriate, potentially harmful choice for that student.

The student's behavior is the indicator of whether or not a meditation practice is working appropriately. Since the student should be assimilating the qualities of the object, the state of her mind should change, and as the state of her mind changes, so should her behaviors. When there is a positive change in the quality of the mind, the student's life and relationships should improve. This is why we often say that we know whether a person's Yoga is working by the quality of his or her relationships.

***Ādhyātmika Cikitsā*: Healing from the Core**

With *ādhyātmika cikitsā*, as with *indriya cikitsā* and *manasika cikitsā*, we are using more subtle tools than the physical body or even the breath to heal an individual. *Ādhyātmika cikitsā* is healing using our "core," i.e., the deepest, most subtle layer of who we are. According to the Yoga masters, this core is pure consciousness.

There are several tools that may be used with *ādhyātmika cikitsā*, but we will present only the two most important ones here.

Īśvara Praṇidhāna

This can be interpreted in two ways as it applies to the work of *ādhyātmika cikitsā*.

Faith

Here, we are not referring only to spiritual or religious faith, although *īśvara praṇidhāna* encompasses these aspects of faith as well. Faith, in this context, means faith in a higher force, be it God, Nature, or something else. The point is you do not have to believe in God or be engaged in a religious practice in order to have faith. When we have faith in something higher than ourselves, whatever this higher force may be, then in times of suffering, we are able to maintain a positive outlook and are less likely to suffer even more from fear, anxiety, and despair. In this way, faith contributes to our healing.

My father and his friend, the late Dr. B. Ramamurthy, who was one of the finest neurosurgeons in the world and the first from India, were once discussing the role of the brain in healing. I was very curious about this subject, particularly about the impact of faith on healing. I asked Dr. Ramamurthy if faith had any value at all in the healing process.

"Our body functions on signals sent by the brain," he answered. "If the brain sends a signal to the hand to move, it moves. If the brain sends a signal to the eye to open, it opens. Everything in our body happens based on signals the brain sends. And these signals can be either positive or negative, and this makes a whole difference to how we are and how we function. When we have fear, anxiety, etc., the brain sends negative signals, and this is why we feel the way we feel when [we are] overpowered by such feelings. However, when we have faith or confidence, the brain sends positive [signals] and this is what promotes healing. This is known in medicine as the "placebo effect." Our ancient masters called it *śraddhā*."

A few years ago, my father was treating a woman with breast cancer. The woman's doctor was recommending surgery, but the woman was frightened and resistant. When my father expressed his support for the doctor's recommendation, however, she immediately agreed to undergo the surgery. My father assured her before she left that he would be praying for her on the day of the operation.

Just as he had promised, on the morning of the scheduled surgery, my father did some chanting in the *sannidhi* (a small, sacred space on the grounds of our home) and also made an offering of flowers. Afterward, my father gave the flowers to me and asked me to bring them to his patient at her house.

When I reached the woman's house, she was just about to leave for the hospital. Relief softened her face when she saw the flowers in my hands. She knew her teacher had prayed for her; I did not have to explain.

The surgery was successful. When the woman met with my father afterward, she related a conversation she had with her doctor just before the operation.

The doctor, she told my father, remarked on how calm she was. He said that he had never seen a woman with breast cancer awaiting surgery appear so calm.

"I know my teacher has prayed for me," she told the doctor. "So, why should I worry?"

This is an example of *ādhyaत्मika cikitsā*. The woman knew deep in her heart, in her consciousness, that her teacher was supporting her; she had faith in her teacher, and so she was not agitated. She was at peace, even though in such a situation the mind may bring up all kinds of fears and anxieties. She was, however, not affected by the fluctuations of the mind: her *faith* was stronger.

Every Action a Conscious Action

Īśvara praṇidhāna also encompasses the idea that we may offer all our actions to a higher force. When we do this—when we perform every activity as a service to a higher force—then we immediately adopt a more attentive state of mind in everything that we do. Because we are more attentive to our actions, we are less likely to do things that cause us to suffer, and so we suffer less.

Much of our sickness and suffering is self-imposed, stemming from our lack of attentiveness to our actions. For example, consider what you eat and how you live. Every day you make choices about both. Many people make these choices without actually choosing, i.e., without attentiveness or conscious choice. They thus eat food that is bad for them and live life in a manner that causes them suffering by engaging in unhealthy relationships or over-scheduling their daily lives. This causes stress levels to rise, which negatively affects their physical, emotional, and mental health, etc.

Suppose, however, that we ate each meal with the intention of offering up this simple action in service of a higher force, i.e., consciously, attentively, with care for the choices we are making nutrition-wise and attention to the act of eating itself. *Acting consciously*, we would suffer less.

Yajña

The second important tool in *ādhyātmika cikitsā* is *yajña*, or ritual. Simply stated, *yajña* is “a set of actions or techniques performed with mindfulness and a specific intention.”

Perhaps the best way to explain *yajña* is to offer an example. When I was in Norway teaching at a workshop a few years ago, a young woman approached me seeking help. She told me she had no luck keeping jobs or boyfriends for very long, although she was well educated and attractive. I asked her a few questions, and it soon became clear that the young woman had very low self-esteem. At work, she would tell her boss, “I am not good enough. Maybe you should hire someone else.” When she would interview for a new job, and the interviewer asked her why she should be the one to get the job, she would say things like, “Maybe you are right. Maybe someone else deserves it more than I do.”

With boyfriends, she would repeat the same pattern, telling them that they were the best and she was bad, that whatever bad thing happened was all her fault, and that they deserved better than her.

She wanted me to give her some poses to help her overcome her problems. I told her I would teach her some poses later, when I returned the next year. I met her in September and intended to return the following March. Meanwhile, I asked her to do a ritual everyday.

“Buy a Christmas tree,” I told her, “and keep it in your house. Each night, sit down in front of the tree and think about the good deeds you did that day. For each good deed you have done of any kind—in thought, word, or action—tie a silver ribbon to the tree. If you have done two good deeds, tie two ribbons. If you have done four, tie four ribbons. Do this every day.”

After several weeks, I received an email from her. She told me the tree was full and there was no room for more ribbons. I told her to buy one more Christmas tree and continue her practice.

A short while after this, I received another email from her. “Kausthub,” she wrote, “I did something today. I hope it is okay. I was sitting in front of the tree and I could not come up with any good deed I had done that day. This made me very sad, and so I apologized to the tree. I felt bad because I couldn’t tie a ribbon on it today, because I had not done anything good.”

At that point, she wrote, she realized she *had* done something good—she had been honest with the tree. So she went ahead and tied a ribbon on it.

When I met with her again in March, her life was already changing. She had held a job by then for over a month—a record for her. And she had been seeing the same young man for three weeks—another record.

Doing the ritual diligently, attentively each day helped her to see herself from the other side. Suddenly, there were all of these ribbons, all of these good deeds, and she could see them clearly. The action of tying the ribbons made her mindful of these good deeds by remembering and honoring them. And slowly it dawned on her that she was not that bad, after all. Her opinion of herself slowly changed. She changed. And her life changed.

For this to happen, however, she had to do this ritual every day with the right intention. If she had not done these things, she would not have come to these realizations about herself, and her situation would not have changed.

Conclusion

The ancient discipline of Yoga offers us a timeless and holistic model of health and healing. Yoga is not exercise, nor is it a method for curing physical disease. It is about healing the individual person holistically, which means healing not only the body, but also every aspect of the human system, including the mind and emotions. Healing through Yoga may or may not result in the elimination of physical diseases from the body. Yoga cannot cure cancer, but it can offer a path of healing for the whole person. The only conditions a person must meet when seeking Yoga therapy is being open and receptive to instruction and possessed of a mind capable of some attentiveness.

Because Yoga is a holistic healing system that addresses the needs of the whole person, its approach to healing is extremely personalized. You cannot heal the whole person unless you seek to understand the whole person.

At the same time, it is necessary to point out that there can be no healing without the student's active participation. Unlike most healing systems, Yoga is *self-empowering*. Ultimately, we could say, Yoga is a state of mind: not the teacher's mind, but the student's mind. It is not the teacher's mind, her knowledge, or her ministrations that heal the student. It is the student's own power of will and mind, with careful guidance and application of the proper tools by a fully trained, competent teacher, that heals him.

Unfortunately, the kind of training needed to become competent in the art of Yoga therapy is not widely available. There are many places in the United States and abroad that will train anyone in *āsana* for a weekend or for a few hundred

hours and certify them to teach some postures. There are also many books and programs being publicized that offer “prescriptions” for various illnesses. They offer “Yoga for depression,” “Yoga for PMS,” “Yoga for asthma,” etc. This, however, is not consistent with the spirit of Yoga therapy. Yoga does not prescribe one-size-fits-all doses of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* for healing an illness. Every person, even every person with the same illness, is a unique individual. And Yoga’s tools for healing the individual, as well as the combinations that may be created from these tools, are numerous and must be specifically tailored to meet the needs of each student by a knowledgeable, trained teacher.

Sometime ago, I read an article about Yoga for thyroid problems. In this article, the author, who is also a Yoga teacher and M.D., suggested that people with thyroid disorders would benefit from practicing *sarvāṅgāsana*. But what if our student with the thyroid problem weighs 300 pounds and has weak neck muscles? In such a case, *sarvāṅgāsana* could prove more harmful than useful.

The point is, before we can claim that we are Yoga teachers or Yoga therapists, we need to be trained in the complete healing system of Yoga, and we need to make sure that the teacher or institution offering us this training meets the highest standards in this field. It is not enough to learn a handful of postures and a few breathing techniques. Healing through Yoga is a much more complex endeavor.

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya introduced Yoga as a holistic healing system to the modern world and practiced the art of *yoga-cikitsā* (Yoga therapy) in India for over seventy years. Very few in the modern world know of and appreciate this aspect of his extraordinary and varied life’s work.

Today, most people know Krishnamacharya only as a master of *āsanas*. When he returned to India from Tibet after studying eight years with his master, he brought back the knowledge of over 500 Yoga postures, when at the time yogis in India were practicing only twenty to thirty postures. The ripples generated by his work with Yoga *āsana* provide the foundation for our modern Yoga practice, which has spread throughout the world by many of his now famous students.

This is not Krishnamacharya’s only revolutionary contribution to the world of Yoga, however. His work in healing and Yoga therapy touched the lives of many thousands during his own lifetime and many more after his death. He combined his unique expertise in Yoga, Āyurveda, and many other Indian spiritual traditions with the powerful healing practice of *yoga-cikitsā* to address the suffering of the individual holistically. The healing Krishnamacharya offered to people was not based on *āsana*, although *āsana* is one important tool in *yoga-cikitsā*. Krishnamacharya drew from the entire spectrum of Yoga’s tools and also from the tools of complimentary ancillary traditions.

The world in general is now beginning to take a keen interest in *yoga-cikitsā*. *Yoga-cikitsā* is a complex art, however, comprised of many layers of knowledge, tradition, and practice that cannot be learned in 200 or 500 hours. The process of becoming a teacher in the healing system of Yoga requires an ongoing commitment. Krishnamacharya is the only master in the modern era to have practiced this aspect of healing and Yoga.

T. K. V. Desikachar studied with Krishnamacharya for over thirty years, and he is the only student of Krishnamacharya who received training from him in the full spectrum of *yoga-cikitsā*. No other student of Krishnamacharya had this great privilege. In 1976, Desikachar founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) in Chennai, India. For almost thirty years, the KYM has carried on the work of Krishnamacharya, utilizing the complete spectrum of Yoga's tools to offer healing on an individualized basis and a course of treatment unique to each person.

The KYM also offers teacher training in the complete holistic healing art of Yoga, not only for beginners, but also for those who have completed their initial training and are seeking continuing education, another requirement for any serious student.

Finally, Yoga is a profoundly transformative healing system, but it is not a cure-all system. No single health field has all the solutions to our sickness and suffering. The foundation of the Yoga healing modality is respect for the needs of each individual. When Yoga does not have the solution, the teacher must seek help from a trusted expert in the appropriate field, be it a cardiologist, an ophthalmologist, an acupuncturist, or a teacher from another lineage, etc. In Yoga, the student's well-being is more important than the tradition. Cooperation among the healing systems will only better serve the needs of the patient. As long as we remember this message, students will find in Yoga a safe haven for healing.

Authors' note: The main material for this article was drawn from the healing work done at the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) for nearly 30 years, since its inception in 1976. The work done at the KYM is based on the teachings of T. Krishnamacharya, who used his mastery of many classical texts and healing sciences to heal others. Some of the texts used as sources for this article include Patañjali's Yogasūtra, Yoga-Yājñavalkya-Saṁhitā, Haṭha-Yoga-Pradīpikā, Yoga-Rahasya, Aṣṭāṅga-Hṛdayam, Caraka-Saṁhitā, Taittirīya-Upaniṣad, and Saṁkhya-Kārikā.

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