

# Yoga and Ayurveda

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## Introduction

Vaidya P. L. Lavgankar, the founder of Yoga Vidya Dham, Pune, was a great expert of both Yoga and Ayurveda. He always insisted that knowledge of both these sciences is essential for anybody who wants to practise, preach or teach Yoga. He was a Nādi-Vaidya who could dignose any disorder by Nādi-Parikṣā (examination of the pulse). Regarding this, he used to say that one who has studied yoga and especially prānāyāma for a sufficiently long period can venture to master the art of Nādi-Parikṣā.

Fortunately, to-day both Yoga and Ayurveda are receiving greater attention as valuable and useful ways of preventing and curing many disorders, especially where the modern medicine fails.

Yoga and Ayurveda are two important branches of ancient Indian science. Science and philosophy have always remained inseperable in the tradition of ancient Indian thinkers. The main object of all this thinking has been to attain a state which is completely free from the clutches of misery and sorrow. Yoga & Ayurveda are two such disciplines which help to fulfil this difficult task in their own ways. It is therefore interesting to note the points of comparison between these two sciences.

## History and Origin

According to our traditional belief, all the ancient arts and sciences in this universe have been created by God-the almighty, for the welfare of human beings. The origin of Yoga can be traced to Lord Siva as clearly mentioned in Hathayoga pradipikā.

श्री आदिनाथाय नमोऽस्तु तस्मै येनोपदिष्टा ह्ठयोगविद्या ।

‘I salute the primeval God (Siva), who taught (Parvati) the Hathayoga-vidya.’

In Siva-samhita, God Siva states.

अथ भक्तानुरक्तोऽहं वक्ष्ये योगानुशासनम् ।

‘I am teaching this Yoga to those who love me.’

Yoga also plays important part in the life of God Ramachandra as well as God Krishna. The work Yogavasiṣṭha consists of the yogic teachings by Guru

Vasiṣṭha to Ramachandra, while God Krishna taught the yogic philosophy of life to Arjuna through Bhagavadgita. Vedas are believed to be apouruṣeya (i. e. not created by humans), and are said to be created by Gods. Rigveda, the oldest of the Vedas, in its Munivarnanasukta mentions about Munis (sages) who could easily travel anywhere in the universe due to the siddhis (powers) achieved through the practice of prānāyāma. The Upaniṣads are considered as the Vendānta or the terminal part of the Vedās. Many of them, and mainly twelve out of them are considered as Yoga-Upaniṣads. Jābāla darṣana, ṣandilya and Nādabindu are the three prominent ones among them.

The history of Ayurveda dates back to God Brahmadeva who created Ayurveda (the science of life). Çarakasamhitā mentions that he constructed Ayurveda consisting of one lakh slokas (stanzas). Dakṣaprajāpati obtained this knowledge and taught it to Aṣṣvinikumars—the two physicians to Gods. God Indra further transferred it to Dhanvantari. Suṣruta and Bhoja were his disciples who specialized in the Surgical branch, while Bhāradvāja or Atreya-Punarvasu handed over the knowledge pertaining to the branch of Medicine to his six disciples. The knowledge regarding the branch of paediatric Medicine (Kaumar—Bhṛitya—Tantra) was mastered by Kāsyapa, Vasiṣṭha and others. Rigveda mentions many therapeutic skills of the Aṣṣvinikumars. It also includes anatomical descriptions of liver and spleen, and a clear mention about the three doṣas viz. Kapha (phlegm), Vāta (wind), and Pitta (bile or fire), and some details regarding a few medicinal plants. The period of Rigveda is considered to be 4,000 to 6,000 years B. C. Atharvaveda includes many references to the various aspects of Ayurveda, covering the Tridoṣa theory, the physiology of digestion of food, formation of urine, spermatogenesis and others. A detailed account of the signs and symptoms of diseases, of some disease-producing micro-organisms, and different ways of treatment including the use of herbs, chemicals, surgical methods and Bhuta-vidya (Demonology), is to be found in Atharvaveda. It is rightly said, therefore, that Ayurveda is an Upa-veda (branch) of Atharvaveda.

It is a pleasant surprise to find a common link between Yoga and Ayurveda in the history. Agniveṣatantra, a basic work on Ayurveda was created in or round about the year 1000 B. C. Based on the study of this work and on his own experiences, Çaraka wrote Çaraka-samhitā in later years. The great grammarian pānini also belongs to the same period. Patajali is also considered to be a contemporary scholar. He collected the old writings from the Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature, framed them into Yoga-Sutras and provided them with a background of Śamkhya philosophy. All these three persons are believed to be one person by the students of history. The

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आत्मस्थ मम  
तव हो सके  
आश्चस्त जम

similarity in the style of writing of these three persons is one of the factors to support this opinion.

### Basic principles

There is a great similarity in the basic principles of these two sciences. Both of them aim at the freedom from the clutches of sorrow and misery of this world, by obtaining total physical and mental health.

Patanjali in his Yoga sutras defines Yoga as follows—

योगः चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ।

‘Yoga is the restraint of mental operations.’ Swāmi Vivekānanda has explained this statement in a simple manner. “When the waves die out and the water becomes still, we can clearly peep into its depths. Similarly, when the mind becomes steady due to the refraint of mental activities, we can clearly visualise our own self. This is nothing but maintaining our mental and physical health.” Patanjali, while discussing every aspect of Yoga, has laid stress on the steadiness of mind. The sutra regarding Āsana (posture) reads as follows :

स्थिरसुखं आसनम् ।

‘The posture should be steady and also pleasurable to the mind.’ This explains the link between the steadiness of the body and the happiness of the mind.

Ayurveda also does not separate mind from body. Ćaraka-samhitā states :

शरीरं हि मनः अनुविधीयते मनश्चशरीरम् ।

‘The body follows the mind and the mind follows the body.’ Naturally, a healthy mind and a healthy body go together. Ayurveda defines health in the following manner :

समदोष-समाग्निश्च, समधातु-मलक्तियः ।  
प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रमनाः स्वस्थ इति अभिधीयते ॥

‘He is to be called healthy whose three doṣas (humours) are in equilibrium, (all the thirteen) agnis (fires) are well balanced, (seven) dhātus (elements) are in equilibrium, and the excretory functions are in good harmony, and whose soul, sensory organs and mind are cheerful.’

The section on ‘Maintenance of health’ or Swasthavritta from Ayurveda lays stress on dedication to God, wishing welfare to everybody, always performing good deeds and keeping away from violence and theft. Yoga prescribes yamas or the rules of social discipline, viz. Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (abstaining from stealing), Brahmaçarya (sexual

continence), Aparigraha (absence of greediness), and Niyamas or the laws of personal behaviour, viz. *Souçā* (purity and cleanliness of body and mind), *santoṣa* (contentment) *Tapa* (austerity or penance), *Swādhyaya* (self study), *Iṣwarapraṇidhāna* (dedication to God). The similarity in the way for a good mental health as suggested by these two sciences is highly significant.

## Anatomy and Physiology

‘Prāṇa’ is a unique entity which has been given the utmost importance in Yoga and Ayurveda. Surprisingly there is no reference to a similar element in the Modern Western Medicine.

The description of human body and its mechanisms as mentioned in Yoga is rather mystic, is based on experiences of the higher Yogic practices and can not be easily varified by the dissection of human body. In the work *Vivekacudāmani*, Sri Sankarācārya has described human body to arise from *pañca mahabhutas* (the five principles of the universe) viz. *Prithvi* (earth), *Āpa* (water), *Teja* (fire), *Vāyu* (air), *Ākāṣa* (sky, ether). The body consists of a *sthoola deha* (Macro body) and a *sukṣma deha* (Micro body). The *sthoola deha* is called *Annamaya koṣa* ( a unit arising from food), while the *sukṣma deha* has three units of *koṣas*, viz. *Prāṇamaya* (consisting of the life-force), *Manomaya* (consisting of the mind), and *Vijñanamaya* (consisting of knowldege). There are five sensory organs (*pañca jñanedriya*), five motor organs (*pañca karmendriya*), five *prānās*, and also *Mana* (mind) and *Buddhi* (intelligence). *Prāna* is an invisible force that flows through *Nadis* and *Çakras*—*Nadis* are channels that help the body to perform various functions with the help of *prāna*. The *Nādis* are innumerable, but most of the texts mention a figure of seventy two thousand. They arise from a centre near the umbilicus. Fourteen major *nadis* are described, three out of them are more important, viz. *Idā*, *Pinagalā* and *suṣumnā*. According to the modern thought *Idā* and *pingalā* represent the autonomic nervous system. The *çakras* are power-stations or relay-stations situated along the *suṣumnā* or the principal *nadi*. The modern scientists equate the *suṣumnā* with the spinal cord, and the *çakras* with different nerve plexuses or endocrine glands. The number of *çakras* mentioned in different texts is variable. Generally, they are considered to be seven, viz. *Muladhara*, *Swadhiṣṭhāna*, *Manipūra*, *Anāhata*, *Viṣudha*, *Ādyā*, *Sahasrāra*, but four more, viz. *Lalanā*, *Manasa* or *Surya*, *Soma* and *Bindu* are also described. The *Çakras* are connected with *Prāna* and their sensations can be experienced during certain *prānāyāmic* procedures by Yogis of a high order. They are supposed to control various physical activities through the agency of mind.

Yoga vasiṣṭha states that the body is made of *pañca mahabhutas* and all the functions are carried out by the *Kundalini ṣakti* (power) which is

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आत्मश्च मम  
तत्र हो सदे  
आश्चस्त जम

situated in the Suṣumna nadi, and which is characterised by Spanda (vibrations), Sparṣa (touch), and Samhit (consciousness). It vibrates through the five pranas and manifests in various Kalas (phases) viz. Çitta, Jiva, Manasa, Samkalpa, Ahamkāra, and Buddhi.

The anatomy of Ayurveda is more definite as it is based on observations made during the dissections of human body and the various surgical procedures. This science also considers the body to be arising from the pañca mahabhutas, from which Sapta dhatus (seven elements), viz. Rasa, (lymph), Rakta (blood), Mansa (muscle), Meda (fat), Asthi (bone), Majja (marrow), and Ṣukra (sperm), are formed from which the body is constructed. The five pranas, viz. prāṇā, apāna, udāna, samāna and vyāna. help the circulation and digestion of food, and it is transformed into the seven elements. The humours Kapha, Vata and Pitta are instrumental in this metabolic process. Thus the anatomy and physiology of Ayurveda is on a simpler plane.

### Pathogenesis or origin of disease

The modern medicine is laying greater stress on the mind as an important factor in the causation of disease, and to-day more and more disorders are being included under the heading 'Psycho-somatic.' They include High blood pressure, Heart disease, Diabetes, Asthma, sleeplessness, constipation, spondylosis and many others. In fact, it is now realised, that most of the disorders arise from the increasing stress and strain of modern life, which hasten the process of ageing. Yoga and Ayurveda are the only therapeutic sciences that can delay ageing and can keep you young in mind and body.

Yogavasiṣṭha states, that the loss of tranquility of mind (çitta-vaidhurya) leads to the unsteadyness of body mechanisms (Deha-samkṣobha). This disturbs the equilibrium of prānas (prāna-vaiṣamya). It affects the function of Nādis and creates a defect in the process of digestion or metabolism (Anna-duṣṭa). This results into the imbalance of the three doṣas (Doṣa-duṣṭi) and it culminates into a disease.

The pathogenesis in Ayurveda as stated by Çaraka is similar. Atatva-dnyana (loss of real knowledge) leads to the lack of control of the sense organs. Thus, one is likely to fall a pray to Moha (temptation), and pramāda (mistakes). This leads to the loss of natural lightness (Laghutra of the body), and the loss of ease in the usual mechanisms of the body. This causes disturbance in the function of nadis, which adversely affects the direction of flow of prānās. This results into the loss of balance of the three doṣas, which leads to a disease.

## Treatment and cure

The aim of both the sciences is a Mukti (complete freedom) from Ādhi (mental disorder) and Vyādhi (physical disorder), According to Yoga, the surest way of preventing such disorders lies in the observance of Yama and Niyama (the rules of moral behaviour and discipline). This leads to the path of Rajayoga which would keep the mind tranquil and healthy. As this path is not easy for the common man, Hathayoga comes to our help in the form of various Āsanās, different types of prānāyama, Mudras and Bandhas, and six type of śudhikriyās, viz. Kapālbhāti, Dhauti, Nauli, Neti, Basti, and Trātaka. They help to keep the body and mind steady, tranquil and healthy. Hathoyogapradipika states ;

वपुः कृशत्वं वदने प्रसन्नता  
नाद स्फुटत्वं नयने सुनिर्मले ।  
अरोगता बिन्दुजयोऽग्निदीपनं  
नाडीविशुद्धिर्हृठयोगलक्षणम् ॥

‘The signs of perfection in Hathayoga are, slimness of body, brightness in the face, manifestation of inner sound (nāda). very clear eyes, freedom from disease, control over the seminal fluid, stimulation of the (metabolic or digestive) fire, and complete purification of the nādis,’ Is there anything better that one desires to achieve than these signs of a good physical and mental health ?

How Āsanās help to cure various disorders can be seen from this stanza :

हरति सकलरोगानां गुल्मोदरादी-  
न भिभवति च दोषानासनं श्रीमयूरम् ।  
बहुकदशन भुक्तं भस्मकुर्यादशेषम्  
जनयति जठराग्निं जारयेत् कानकूटम् ॥

‘The Mayurāsana cures quickly all diseases like enlarged glands, gastro-intestinal disorders, etc, and overcomes the imbalance of humours. It reduces to ashes (e.i. enables digestion of) all foods indiscriminately taken, stimulates the gastric fire and can help to digest even kālakuta (the most terrible poison.)’

Regarding prānāyāma, it is stated.

प्राणायामेन युक्तेन सर्वरोगक्षयो भवेत् ।

‘A proper practice of prānāyāma can control all the diseases.’

Referring to the Sudhikriya (cleansing procedure) Dhauti, it is mentioned.

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आत्मस्य मम  
तव हो सके  
आश्चस्त जम



कासश्वासप्लीहकुष्ठ कफरोगाश्च विशतिः  
घ्नोतिकर्मप्रभावेण प्रयान्त्येव न संशयः ।

‘By the efficacy of Dhauti, bronchial diseases, asthma, splenic disorders leprosy and other skin diseases, and twenty other disorders brought on by phlegm disappear. There is no doubt about this.’

To-day the modern medical world has realised that many disorders can be controlled by Dhyāna (meditation), as can be seen from numerous reports on Transcendental Meditation in the medical literature. In short, almost all disorders can be prevented or controlled by various yogic practices performed under proper expert guidance.

The preventive aspect in Ayurveda is comparable to that in Yoga. In Swasthavritta, the rules of Āhāra (food) and Vihāra (behaviour), and detailed suggestions on Dina-çarya (daily routine) and Ritu-çarya (restrictions to be observed in different seasons) are described, the pañçakarmas (five cleansing procedures), viz. Basti (enema), Vireçana (purgation), Vamana (induced vomiting), Nasya (nasal irrigation), Raktamoçan (blood letting), are comparable to the Suddhikriyas of yoga.

Ayurveda considers Pathya or the behaviour on the correct path (patha) more important than the use of drugs. It is clearly mentioned.

किं औषधं निरूपणम् ।

‘Why the prescription of drug is needed,’ if the proper mode of behaviour (pathya) is followed by an individual, however, wherever necessary, Ayurveda prescribes drugs to suit the disorder, and also to suit the type (Prakruti) of the particular person.

If we follow the principles of Yoga and Ayurveda in our life, it will be easy to ensure total health for all.

‘सर्वेऽसुखिना सन्तु सर्वेऽसन्तु निरामयाः ।’

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