

Yoga and Ayurveda: Children of the Vedic Teachings

Have you ever wondered why some asanas seem to leave you feeling calm, still, centered and balanced while others seem to leave you agitated, sore and off center?

Take the case of a thirty-one year old woman who came for treatment with repeated neck pain and nervousness. She had been practicing yoga for six years and could not understand why she was having such difficulty. Our work with Ayurveda^[1], the 5,000 year old "knowledge of life," helped this woman to understand how the Yoga asanas she had been practicing affected the movement of energy in her body. She found out that some of the asanas she had been practicing aggravated the subtle energies of her body. She also learned new asanas, which were more in harmony with her unique energetic balance. With this new knowledge she was able to modify her practice and eliminate her neck pain and nervousness while bringing greater well being to her body and mind.

In addition to the profound dietary and lifestyle advice that Ayurveda is most well known for, Ayurveda also sheds profound new light on the practice of Yoga. Yoga and Ayurveda are in fact, two paths intertwined in such a close relationship that it is hard to imagine traveling down one of these paths without knowledge of the other. Yoga is the ancient art and path of preparing the body and mind for the eventual liberation and enlightenment of the soul. Ayurveda is the ancient art and science of keeping the body and mind healthy so that individuals can pursue the goals in life that they have set for themselves.

The popularity of Yoga in this country has been growing steadily since Swami Vivekananda first brought the ideas of Yoga to the West in 1893. While Yoga found a welcome home in the West, its sister, Ayurveda, was left behind in India, a distant counterpart to these important Vedic teachings. Today, just over 100 years later, Ayurveda has landed on this distant western continent in search of its sister, in search of its other half. Ayurveda does not come to this country empty handed but brings with it many gifts. It brings with it the knowledge of how to keep the physical body healthy and how this relates to ones spiritual journey. It brings a gift specific to the yogi: the knowledge of how the asanas affect each one of us. Ayurveda sheds light on which specific asanas are best for each individual.

The Vedas, the oldest known writings and teachings, are the origins of both of these ancient arts. The Vedas are comprised of five books. One of them, the Yajur Veda, is considered by scholars as the origins of the knowledge of Yoga. Ayurveda has its roots within the Rig and Artharva Veda. According to Dr. David Frawley, Vedic scholar, "Yoga is the practical side of the Vedic teachings while Ayurveda is the healing side." In practice, both of these paths overlap a great deal.

Classical yoga has, as a part of its traditions, an aspect which addresses health and health practices. It is not simply asanas for differing conditions, but purification practices as well. In the same vein, Ayurveda is much more than dietary principals. Ayurveda can be seen as the science of understanding how we interact with our environment and how to alter our environment in such a way that it is harmonious with our deepest nature. Ayurveda is the science of how energies interact. As such, Ayurveda addresses our entire lifestyle including exercise and Yoga. Ayurveda sees each individual's path toward perfect health as a unique path, hence Ayurveda can help us to understand which Yoga asanas are best for each individual as well as understand how the different forms of Pranayama affect us.

Ayurveda and Yoga are so closely related that it is argued as to whether Patanjali, considered by many to be the father of Yoga, and Caraka, often considered as the father of Ayurveda, may have in fact been one and the same person. The name "Caraka" translated means "the wanderer" or "the traveler." It is surmised that in his travels around India he may have been known by different names. While the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the definitive work on Yoga, the Caraka Samhita is considered the definitive work on Ayurveda. Whether Patanjali and Caraka were indeed one person will never

likely be known.

Philosophically, both Yoga and Ayurveda are rooted in the same basic philosophy of Sankya, one of six schools of classical Indian philosophy. The foundation of this philosophy can be described as follows:

1. There exists a fundamental state of pure being that is beyond intellectual understanding and which all life consciously strives for. This is the state of enlightenment or self liberation (Moksha)
2. Suffering is a part of our lives because of our attachment to our ego or self-identity (Ahankara).
3. The path toward ending suffering is the path of dissolving or transcending our ego (Ahankara). In doing so all fear, anger and attachment are eradicated.
4. To achieve this goal, we must live a purely ethical life. These practices are described as the Yamas and Niyamas of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.
5. Any disturbance within the mind or body interferes with this path. Ayurveda is the science of keeping the biological forces in balance so that the mind and body may be healthy.

Ayurveda is based on the idea that there exists three forms of the life force called Doshas. They are Vata, Pitta and Kapha. We are all made up of a unique combination of these three forces. This unique combination, determined at the moment of conception, is our constitution^{1[2]} or Prakruti. These forces constantly fluctuate according to our environment which includes our diet, the seasons, the climate, our age and many more factors. The current state of these three doshas most commonly defines our imbalance or our Vikruti. Since we all have a unique constitution, and unique imbalances, it makes sense that each person's path toward health will likewise be unique. This is a major principal of Ayurveda. In addition, what will keep each of us healthy is also unique. Understanding our prakruti and our vikruti offers each of us the potential to make correct choices for ourselves along our paths.

To understand these forces and how they interact with our environment it is necessary to understand the five elements. The ancient Vedic people defined the world by what they saw around them. Without the benefit of fancy instrumentation, it was easiest to define the world by what they knew. Hence, the five elements became a way to describe all things. The five elements of the Ayurvedic system are: earth, air, fire, water and ether. These elements are not meant to be taken literally but are to be seen as metaphors or ideas. When something is hard or dense, they said that it had a lot of earth in it. Something, which is moist, was said to be composed of water. When something was light and had great movement they said it was made up of a lot of air. If something was hot they said it had a lot of fire in it. The last element is harder to describe. Ether is the idea of connectedness. It is that which connects all things together and is the space that the other elements fill.

Whether we are talking about diet, the weather or yoga, all things can be described in terms of these five elements and this includes the three doshas. Vata is said to be made up of air and ether. It is compared to the wind and is said to be light, drying, cooling and capable of movement. Pitta is said to be made up of fire and water. Considered to be mostly fire, it is said to be hot, light and neither too dry or moist and is immobile, though it can be easily moved by the wind (Vata). Kapha is said to be made up of water and earth, which combine like mud. Kapha is heavy, moist, cool and stable.

The importance in understanding the Doshas is that like increases and like opposites balance each other. Hence, that which has similar characteristics as the Dosha will increase it and that which has opposite characteristics will decrease it. Knowing this we can adjust our Yoga practice, diets and other factors from our environment to affect these forces in ways that help us to create greater balance and harmony.

The three Doshas fluctuate constantly. As they move out of balance they affect certain areas of our bodies in certain ways. When Vata is out of balance, typically in excess, we are prone to diseases of the large intestine like constipation and gas along with disease of the nervous system, immune system and joints. When Pitta is in excess we are prone to diseases of the small intestine like diarrhea along with diseases of the liver, spleen, thyroid, blood, skin and eyes. When Kapha is in excess we are prone to diseases of the stomach and lungs, most notably mucous conditions along with diseases of water metabolism such as swelling.

Another pillar in the construct of Ayurveda is the understanding of the three Gunas, or qualities of nature. This is the science of Ayurveda applied to the emotional and spiritual aspects of an individual. Understanding the qualities of nature leads to greater understanding of ourselves and our spiritual journey along with how our lifestyle choices and actions affect that journey. The three Gunas are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas and again all things can be described as a combination of them.

That which is sattvic is said to be light, clear and stable. Sattva is the state of being which comes from an awareness of our connectedness to God or Purusha and in which we manifest our highest expression and most virtuous qualities. The pure state of sattva can be said to be that of enlightenment.

That which is rajasic is said to be active, agitated, turbulent or motivated. Rajas is the state of being which comes from a distraction from our truest essence. In this state we are unaware of our connectedness to our spirit and as such manifest the emotions we've come to label as "challenging". These emotions include fear, worry, anger, jealousy, attachment and depression. Rajasic action is the cause of pain and suffering.

That which is tamasic is said to be heavy, dull, dark and inert. In this state we are expressing our darker nature and become harmful to others or ourselves. The actions include violent or vindictive behavior toward others along with self-destructive behaviors such as addiction, depression and suicide.

The importance in understanding the gunas is that, like the doshas, like increases like. When we live a lifestyle that is tamasic, we increase the influence of tamas within ourselves and bring about destruction. When we live a lifestyle, which is sattvic, we increase the influence of sattva within us and enhance our spiritual growth and evolution. Cultivating sattva brings freedom from disease while the manifestation of rajasic and tamasic behaviors causes disease. Understanding these principals allows us to structure our environment, diet and yoga practice in ways that support our spiritual growth as well as our well being.

Understanding the principles of Ayurveda allows us to apply these principles to many aspects of our lives. Lets take a look at the implications of Ayurveda on the practice of Yoga.

In order to understand how the principles of Ayurveda affect our practice of Hatha Yoga we must first understand the energetics of movement. All movement/activity is by nature rajasic and heating to the body. Yet, some movements are more heating and others are less so. Likewise, some movements are more rajasic and others are less so. Those, which are less so can also be said to encourage greater sattva. Generally speaking the slower the movement the less rajasic and the less warming to the body and mind. The faster the movement the more rajasic and the more heating. In this context Hatha Yoga along with other disciplines like tai-chi are inherently less rajasic than say, jogging or aerobics. It can also be said that any form of movement practiced with great awareness is more sattvic. Those that are practiced with distraction or less attentiveness are more rajasic. Thus one way to enhance our experience of Yoga is to practice slowly and with greater awareness of how we are feeling and what our breath is like. To practice yoga without awareness is to invite injury; to practice with awareness is to invite learning about us.

Can any movement be purely sattvic? This is questionable. The inherent nature of movement is rajasic, as rajas is the principal of energy and movement requires energy. Hence, the sattvic qualities of one's nature is most advanced in meditation where one can find silence and stillness and become pure awareness.

It is important to note at this time that while movement is by nature rajasic, this does not make it bad for us. That which is rajasic serves the useful purpose of stimulating our bodies and minds allowing for activity to take place. We could not function in our world without a part of us being rajasic. When we transcend our rajasic nature and become enlightened, we no longer function in this physical world in the same way.

Taking the principles of movement into account we can begin to see that people of vata constitution or imbalance are most supported by a yoga practice which is calming, quieting and yet warming.

People of pitta nature or imbalance are most supported by a yoga practice, which is calming, quieting and less heating. And, people of kapha nature are most supported by a yoga practice, which is stimulating and warming. Each individual has different needs. To practice in a way that does not support you is to invite greater imbalance and the related consequences.

In developing a healthy yoga practice students must not only take into consideration their constitution and imbalance but also their age, the season of the year and the times of day they practice. These influences affect the balance of energies in our bodies and hence this must be reflected in a healthy yoga practice.

When designing a yoga practice for yourself the influence of the season, your age and the time of day are not as important as your overall vikruti or imbalance. These should be seen as the factors that modify your practice but not the factors that create it. Your vikruti is, in fact, the single most important determinant of your entire lifestyle regime. It is even more important than your constitution! When you are in near perfect balance you can create a program based almost entirely on your constitution, the seasons and time of day as the most important determinants. This program will help you to stay in balance.

In Ayurveda it is understood that at different times of our lives different doshas play a greater role. This is a part of the natural fluctuation of these forces. It is said that when we are born our bodies and minds are more affected by kapha and that this is true until puberty. During this time our bodies are growing at a rapid rate requiring a greater influence of the earth element. Hence during this time in our lives, regardless of our constitution, kapha is likely to be increased unless we take measures to balance it. From puberty until around our retirement years the influence of pitta increases. This is because these are our years of greatest productivity requiring a greater influence of fire. The later years, post - retirement are the time of our lives most dominated by Vata. This is a time of reflection and the influence of ether increases. During each of these periods we must pay attention to the effect our age has on us and modify our practice appropriately. In this sense, when we are young, our bodies can better tolerate the more aggressive styles of yoga. As we age we need to practice more calming asanas.

The seasons also affect a healthy practice. Remember that like increases like. Hence the season of cold dampness increases kapha. The season of warm weather increases pitta and the season of cool dryness increases vata, as does the windy season. In different parts of the country these take place at different times and hence placing the names of traditional seasons upon them can be confusing.

During the kapha season it is best to alter your Yoga practice to help balance its influence. Hence, a practice, which is more stimulating and warming, is better at this time. In the pitta season a practice which is not as warming is best. In the vata season a calming practice supports greater health.

Finally, the time of day we practice will affect the balance of the doshas. Kapha naturally increases within us during the hours of 6:00 until 10:00 in the morning and evening. This is the time when we are moving slowly in the morning and slowing down toward the end of the day. Pitta naturally increases between the hours of 10:00 and 2:00 a.m. and p.m. This is the time the digestive fire is at its height, and in the day times parallels the movement of the sun to its peak. Vata naturally increases within us between 2:00 and 6:00 a.m. and p.m. This is a time of transition from night to day and back again.

Most people practice yoga in the early morning. This is the most sattvic time of day when there is greater stillness and quiet and the energy of our environment is most sedate. The time of vata is closely related to sunrise and sunset. Before 6:00, during the time of vata a quieter and gentler practice is recommended. During the sunrise and sunset, vata is most stimulated and so calming asanas at these times are best. After 6:00 in the morning, the time of kapha, a more stimulating practice is appropriate.

Putting this into examples: Let's say you are of a vata nature or imbalance (vata is the most common imbalance), it is the cool dry or windy season, and you are 67 years old practicing Yoga at 5:00 a.m. Your health would be best served practicing a routine to balance vata (vata routine described later). Suppose you are of pitta nature and of vata imbalance. Practice a regimen that will balance vata

first. Then modify it later so that it does not aggravate Pitta. As you are balancing Vata you may modify your program so that it is warm but not extremely heating. With this in mind let's take a look at some yoga asanas.

Asanas for Vata

The asanas which are most suitable for vata are those which are calming and grounding by nature. This will balance the tendency for those with a vata imbalance to be "spacey" and agitated or nervous. These asanas will help allay fear, worry and anxiety on the emotional level and also improve vata physical imbalances such as constipation, lower back pain and joint pains. These asanas compress the lower abdomen or cause the lower abdomen to become taut. The lower abdomen, pelvis and large intestine are the main residence of vata in the body. In addition, asanas that strengthen the lower back help alleviate vata. In general most yoga asanas are good for bringing greater balance to Vata since most asanas are calming to the mind. There are, however, some which are more exceptional and some which should most certainly be avoided. The following will focus on these since it would be tedious to list every asana.

One exceptional asana is Uttanasana (forward flexion from a standing position.) To perform this asana, stand erect with your feet about a shoulder width apart. The arms may be raised over the head as you reach to the sky or you may wish to bend the elbows clasping the opposing arms just above the elbow as you let your forearms rest on or just above the crown of your head. Keeping your back straight slowly bend forward from the hips as you exhale. Bend as far forward as you comfortably can. Your hands may touch the floor in front of your feet, remain crossed as you hold the opposing arm or if you are very flexible, be placed just behind your heels. For the less flexible the hands may be placed upon blocks which rest on the floor. Let gravity assist the lengthening of your spine. All standing asanas tend to be grounding if awareness is placed on the feet honoring the connection between your body and the earth. It is important to note that this asana can put quite a strain on an injured lower back, so care should be used and there are many modifications that may be made by an alert Yoga instructor. If the lower back is simply tight, a condition related to imbalanced vata, this is an excellent asana. The seated version of this asana, Paschimotanasana (seated forward bend) will have similar value and may be easier if your back is sore. Vajrasana with forward bending, (child's pose) is another excellent asana for bringing compression to the pelvis and Vata region. To perform this asana, sit upright with your knees flexed and placed underneath your buttocks. Keeping your arms to your side, bend forward from the hips until your head is resting on the floor in front of you. If you do not have the flexibility to place your head on the ground, place a folded blanket or a pillow on the floor in front of you for your head to rest upon. Compression asanas are excellent for constipation and for chronic gas. Another very good compression asana aiding the lower back and constipation but is more advanced is BaddhaYoga Mudra. (The bound Yogic Seal.)

Supta Virasana (supine backward bend) is another exceptional asana for vata. To perform this asana, sit in Virasana. Move the legs out to the side of the pelvis so that the buttocks slide down in-between both legs. Place the hands on the soles of the feet and lean back onto the elbows. This may be enough extension for many people. If you are flexible enough gradually lower your back down to the floor. Your hands may lie by your side or be stretched above the head to achieve greater lengthening of the spine. While this stretch does not compress the pelvis, it creates a mild extension of the lower abdominal muscles and lower back. This action increases the pressure in the pelvis again alleviating vata. According to Dr. Vasant Lad, this asana is particularly useful as a part of treatment for Vata type asthma conditions. Another asana, which extends the lower back and places pressure on the pelvis, is Dhanurasana (bow pose). To perform this asana, lay on your stomach with your arms to your side. Lift the head, shoulders and chest off of the mat and bend both knees. Reach back and take hold of the ankles. Let your legs draw your chest further into the air so that your body weight rests on the pelvic region. This is essential for the maximum relief of Vata.

Sitting asanas like Virasana, Siddhasana and Padmasana are very calming poses which sedate vata's agitated nature. These meditative poses are excellent for calming the nervous system, a common site for vata imbalance. Calming the nervous system aids in the healing of anxiety, nervousness, sciatica and muscle spasm. Padmasana (lotus pose), while calming and sedating, also moves energy upward toward the head. This is not very grounding but can be helpful in alleviating vata type depression. Placing attention on the tailbone during this pose helps make this a more grounding

asana for vata. The most calming pose of all is, of course, the supine Savasana (corpse pose).

People of vata nature should avoid certain asanas. They should particularly avoid those which are overly stimulating to the nervous system such as repetitive Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar) and those which place excessive pressure on sensitive joints in the body. The cervicothoracic junction is one of these areas. This is the bony region where the neck meets the shoulders. Here, large vertebrae stick out like "sore thumbs". People of vata nature and imbalance tend to have weaker bones, less fatty padding, looser ligaments and are more susceptible to pain. For these reasons Salamba Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) and Halasana (plow) should be avoided or modified by placing a blanket under the shoulders for extra padding. This also decreases the extreme flexion the neck is placed in. Even still, people of vata nature or imbalance should not hold these poses for very long or they will risk injury.

Asanas For Pitta

The best asanas for pitta are those, which are calming, and not overly heating. People of pitta nature or imbalance tend to be more assertive and intense individuals. Calming poses help sedate their intensity and their sattvic nature helps these people to transcend the emotions of anger and resentment that they are more prone to. By alleviating pitta, these asanas are good as part of the treatment for such conditions as ulcers and hyperacidity, liver disease and acne.

Asanas which help balance pitta are those which place pressure on the naval and solar plexus region. This region is the residence of Pitta, which resides in the small intestine and directly affects the liver and spleen and helps regulate the strength of the digestive fire.

An exceptional asana for bringing balance to pitta is Ustrasana (camel pose). To perform this asana sit in Virasana and then extend the knees to a right angle as though you are standing on your knees. Place your palms on your buttocks. Move your thighs and pelvis forward as you extend the lower back. Allow your hands to fall onto the heels of your feet. Gently extend your neck. Remember to breathe while in any posture. This asana opens up the abdomen, solar plexus and chest allowing for freer movement of energy through these regions. Other excellent solar plexus extension poses for pitta is Bhujangasana (the cobra) and Dhanurasana (bow pose described above.) These asanas can play a role in the treatment of ulcers and hepatitis. To perform the Cobra lie face down with your feet together and ankles extended. Bend the elbows and place your hands flat on the floor by your lower ribs. (Less flexible individuals may choose to place the palms on the floor at shoulder level.) Upon inhalation extend the elbows and raise the head, chest and abdomen off the floor while keeping the pelvic bones on the floor. The head may be held in a neutral position or in extension.

Compression of the abdomen helps to alleviate pitta as well. [Authors note: It is my hypothesis that compression decreases the flow of energy through the solar plexus (site of the third chakra) sedating Pitta while extension increases circulation through the solar plexus breaking up stagnation and freeing up the circulation. There is no reference for this.] Both compression and extension are important to keeping the pitta in balance. Exceptional abdominal compression asanas for balancing Pitta are Janu Sirsasana and Paschimottanasana (previously described). To perform Janu Sirsasana sit on the floor with both legs extended out in front of you. Bend one leg forward and place the sole of the foot against the inside of the opposite thigh. Bend forward over the extended leg from the hips keeping the back straight. Along with compressing the solar plexus and pelvic regions, both Janu Sirsasana and Paschimottanasana stretch the lower back and hamstring muscles.

Yoga asanas, which should be avoided for people of pitta imbalance or constitution, are headstands. Headstands are heating to the body and much of this heat accumulates in the head and the eyes. The eyes are organs controlled mainly by pitta as they are involved in metabolism of light and visual impressions. For this reason, headstands can contribute to the onset or make worse diseases of the eyes. Individuals with diabetes should avoid all inversions as a complication of this condition causes hardening of the small blood vessels in the eyes. This makes them more susceptible to damage from the increase in blood pressure in the head. People with glaucoma should avoid inversions as well, due to the increase in intraocular pressure. If a person of pitta constitution chooses to do headstands, perhaps because they have no serious imbalance, then the headstand should be held for a very short period of time.

Asanas for Kapha

Asanas which are most suitable for kapha are those which are more stimulating and heating to the body. These help to balance the heavy, slow cold and sedated nature of kapha. Asanas best suited to individuals of kapha nature or imbalance are those which open up the chest. The stomach and chest are the areas where kapha accumulates. In the chest, kapha takes on the form of mucous. These asanas are excellent for the prevention and treatment of congestive conditions like bronchitis and pneumonia as well as constrictive conditions such as asthma and emphysema.

Exceptional asanas for kapha are Ustrasana (camel pose, already described above) and Setu Bandhasana (bridge pose). To perform this asana, lie flat on your back with your arms to your sides. Allow the palms to face down toward the floor. Using your elbows and forearms raise your trunk off of the mat as you keep your head and feet on the ground. Next extend the head and increase the arch of the spine so that there is a smooth arc from your heels to your head. If you have the strength, you may place your hands on your thighs and support your body weight with your head and feet. As a gentle alternative to this posture, a person may lie on their back in extension over a bolster and a pillow. (For a demonstration of this see page 80 in Yoga, the Iyengar Way.) Both of these do an excellent job opening the chest allowing for greater circulation of energy through this region. These asanas also affect the flow of energy through the heart chakra aiding the development of compassion and unconditional love.

The calming and sedating effect of most asanas needs to be balanced by other asanas that are more stimulating and heating for those of Kapha nature and imbalance. Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) is a very good aerobic exercise for kapha when done repetitively and helps in the treatment of obesity and depression, two common kapha conditions. This group of movements can perhaps be said to be the ideal asana for Kapha as it is very active, creates heat, and opens the chest. The strength enhancing asanas like Vasisthasana (sage pose) also increase the heat of the body and are excellent as well. People of kapha nature can best handle strength poses as their joints and muscles tend to be strong and stable. Increasing flexibility is extremely important for those of kapha nature, as it is the tendency of kapha to become overly stiff or rigid. The sun salutation is the ideal asana for Kapha as it is very active, creates heat, and opens the chest. There are twelve parts to this asana.

To perform the sun salutation, begin by standing erect with the feet touching each other. Bend the elbows and bring the palms together in the middle of the chest. This is position one. Raise the arms above the head and extend the neck and torso backward. This is position two. Bend forward and bring the hands to the floor. Keep the knees straight. This is Uttanasana and is position three. From this position lunge backward with the left leg as you bend the right knee. The knee of the left leg may lie on the floor. The foot of the right leg should be between both hands. This is position four. Bring the right leg backward and place it by the left leg as you bring your buttocks high into the air. (This is the "downward facing dog" position.) This is position five. Allow the elbows to come to the floor then glide your body forward into Bhujangasana (cobra pose). A variation includes keeping the knees and pelvis off the ground in this pose with less extension placed upon the lower back. (This is called "upward facing dog".) This is position six. Position seven returns us to downward facing dog. Next lunge the left leg forward as we bring our pelvis low to the ground. The left foot is placed between the hands and the knee is bent, held close to the chest. This is position nine. Bring the right foot forward as you return to Uttanasana (standing forward bend). Extend upward to a standing position and raise the arms once again over the head extending the back and head as in position two. This is position eleven. To complete the cycle, return the hands to the chest, palms together. This is position twelve. Sun salutations are excellent for anyone during the Kapha hours of the day. People of Kapha nature should do the most repetitions and they should be performed with greater speed. While in general, people of Vata nature should avoid this asana, it may occasionally be performed very slowly and with great awareness. This will decrease its Vata aggravating tendencies. People of Pitta nature should avoid this series, as it is very heating or should do limited repetitions, preferably during Kapha hours.

Few asanas are harmful to kapha as their nature allows them to benefit from all forms of stretching and movement. However, two weak areas of the body for kapha individuals are the lungs and the kidneys. Asanas, which place excessive pressure on the lower abdomen, if held for too long, may

aggravate the kidneys. Asanas like Dhanurasana (bow pose) is one such pose.

Awareness of breath while practicing yoga is very important as it is an aid to the awareness of the body. If a pose is creating pain or if a person is stretching too far, most often, the body will react with an alteration of breathing prior to an injury taking place. This alteration may be a shortening of the breath or an increased rate of breathing. In this way, awareness of breath leads to awareness of the body. Practicing with awareness increases the sattvic nature of one's practice of yoga and as such enhances one's spiritual development.

People of all constitutional types should perform the asanas with slow, quiet, yet full breaths. This type of breathing calms vata and pitta. People of kapha nature should breathe in the same manner when performing gentle stretching asanas but should balance the calming, sedating effect of these asanas and the accompanying slow breathing pattern with active and strengthening asanas which allow the breath to become quicker and shorter. This form of breathing warms and stimulates the body and mind and hence brings greater balance to kapha.

Pranayama and Ayurveda

Pranayama, the art of yogic breathing, is an art shared within the tradition of Ayurveda. It has been associated in the West as a part of the yogic practices for affecting the flow of energy through the body and for creating an experience of both blissfulness and one-ness with the cosmic life force. Ayurveda compliments this knowledge by describing how the different forms of pranayama affect the three doshas and how pranayama can be used in practical ways as a part of the healing process. Like all things of nature, the different forms of pranayama can be understood as heating or cooling and sedating or stimulating.

Lunar pranayama, the act of inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right nostril, has a cooling and calming affect upon the mind and hence the body. Thus this form of yogic breathing helps bring balance to pitta and its subtler mental counterpart, tejas.

Solar pranayama, the act of inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left nostril, has a heating and stimulating affect on the body and mind. Thus this form of yogic breathing brings greater balance to kapha and its subtler mental counterpart, Ojas.

Vata, and its subtle mental counterpart Prana, are balanced by alternating the two breathing techniques or by inhaling and exhaling through both nostrils simultaneously with attention and awareness. This action is calming and is neither too warming or too cooling.

These forms of pranayama mentioned are a good general practice along with one's Hatha Yoga practice. It is generally recommended, however, that a person practicing pranayama be of strong body and mind. This is a person who has prepared themselves with years of Hatha Yoga practice and has been trained by an experienced pranayama teacher. These basic forms of pranayama can be practiced by anyone with minimal instruction who understands their Ayurvedic constitution and Vikruti, and is willing to begin slowly and practice on a regular basis. The first time they are practiced, however, should be with a trained practitioner who can teach the finer points.

While recommended as a general practice, pranayama is especially important for those suffering from respiratory ailments. These breathing techniques can be very useful as part of an overall program for allergies, asthma, sinus conditions and chronic colds.

Bhastrika, the breath of fire, by its very name tells us of its energetic properties. This form of yogic breathing involves forced exhalation through the nose with natural inhalation. This action is very heating and stimulating. It is best performed by those of kapha constitution and avoided by those of vata and pitta. According to Dr. Versant Lad, "This exercise is the equivalent of running two miles." It is a good part of a complete program for the treatment of obesity as it stimulates metabolism and increases the breakdown of fat.

Sheetali, a form of pranayama where one inhales and exhales through a rolled up tongue, is a form of pranayama which is cooling and hence a natural part of the process of bringing pitta into balance.

Both Bhastrika and Sheetalī circulate the pranic energies more aggressively and as such require greater instruction. They should not be practiced without the guidance of a trained practitioner of pranyama.

Ayurveda and the branches of the Yoga Tree

Yoga is defined as the "union" with god or Purusha (That which is without form and not of the material world.) There are many paths to this state of enlightenment. The major branches of the yoga tree defined by Georg Feurstein describe these different paths. There are of course, as many paths as there are people. Ayurveda, by viewing each person as an individual with unique gifts as well as unique challenges, helps us to understand how each of us may be naturally more attracted to one path and more repulsed by another.

Bhakti Yoga, or devotional yoga, is the path of learning about us through learning about our heart and our ability to love unconditionally. This unconditional love is for all people, including us and for the Divine. This path is most attractive to those of kapha constitution as in their more sattvic expression, devotion is a natural state. The gift of love, compassion and devotion are kapha's natural gifts and the path of Bhakti yoga can help them to discover it. While this path is for all that choose it, those of strong vata or pitta natures may find it more difficult as it does not stress their natural gifts.

Jnana Yoga, the path of discernment, often referred to as the "path of the sage", is the path of becoming clearly perceptive to truth. In this way one becomes capable of distinguishing false imagination from absolute reality. This path requires a person to directly dissolve the ego, which acts as a filter and distorts the truth. Understanding Ayurveda, we may postulate that this very difficult path is most suited for those of pitta nature, who in their more sattvic way of being, allow the fire which burns in the mind to burn away false imaginings from reality. The path of Jnana yoga emphasizes the natural gifts of pitta. This path may be more difficult for those of greater vata and kapha nature.

Tantric yoga, the path of transcending the self through sacred ritual and the worship of deities, emphasizes the realization that all that is around us is divine and that nothing separates the unholy from the holy. Through ritual, all things are honored as sacred. The path to the embodiment of these principals appears to be most suited for those of vata constitution who by their nature tend to be more open to experimentation, ritual and the abstract. This path to the esoteric suits the nature of vata well, as they are often more sensitive to subtle energies of their bodies and surroundings. In their more sattvic expression, people of vata nature are divinely inspired and their creativity is just one of their gifts to the world. Tantric yoga may be a more difficult path for those of strong pitta and kapha natures.

Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action, is the path of surrendering the self or ego through service. This path of learning about ourselves and finally transcending ourselves is a path suited for all constitutional types. All individuals are bound to the physical world by their karma. In this context karma refers to any action which springs from the ego and sets in motion a cascading series of effects. This is a particularly useful though challenging path for those of pitta nature who by the nature of their intensity are often most focused on achieving through their work. Selfless action creates balance to their otherwise rajasic nature.

In Ayurveda, balancing the effects of the doshas is only one half of the formula to creating health and well being. The other half is developing a more sattvic lifestyle and learning to express our more sattvic nature. Our sattvic nature is that aspect of ourselves, which through an awareness of our connectedness to Spirit, allows us to express our highest or most virtuous qualities. In this state we realize three fundamental truths:

1. All things material are illusions. This includes not only our expensive toys, but also our emotions and our thoughts.
2. The universe is unfolding perfectly and we fit into that perfection, even with our challenges.
3. We are all spirits growing and evolving. Until we become enlightened we will continue to have challenges.

When we realize these three truths three results become apparent:

1. We need not be attached to anything material since all is transient. With this realization we can let go of our idea of ourselves and in the process let go of depression and over sentimentality.
2. If the universe is unfolding perfectly we can have faith and trust in this process. Hence, we can let go of fear and worry.
3. We all have challenges and hence it becomes unnecessary to judge others or ourselves since each of us is perfect for where we are in our continued evolution. With this realization we can let go of all judgment and the anger, resentment, and hatred associated with it.

Yoga, along with meditation and proper lifestyle, in harmony with one's nature, is the Ayurvedic path toward balancing the doshas and enhancing Sattva. Through this path each of us can reach our full potential and achieve the goals in our life we have set. In this light we can begin to see Yoga and Ayurveda as separated children of the Vedic teachings being reunited in modern times. Both bring gifts to help guide us along our paths. Blessings upon your journey.

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Table 1: Summary of the three doshas.

Dosha	Vata	Pitta	Kapha
Qualities	Cool, light, dry, mobile, agitated	Hot, light, neither too dry or too moist, movable, intense	Cool, heavy, moist and stable, sluggish
Age	Above 60 years	15 to 60 years	0 to 15 years
Season	Dry, cool and windy	Hot and moist	Cool and damp
Time of Day	2:00 to 6:00	10:00 to 2:00	6:00 to 10:00
Balancing Principles	Warm, moist, heavy, stable, calming	Cool, heavy, stable, calming	Warm, light, dry, active, stimulating
Yoga Asanas (partial list)	Uttanasana Paschimotanasana Vajrasana Balasana (Vajrasana with forward bending) Supta Virasana Siddhasana Padmasana	Ustrasana Bhujangasana Dhanurasana Janu Sirsasana Paschimottanasana	Ustrasana Setu Bandhasana Vasisthasana Surya Namaskar

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