

Hatha Yoga and Aruyveda

An Introduction

By Jon Neiss

Hatha Yoga is an ancient discipline that is at least 4000 years old. It comes from what is now modern India. It is associated with what most people call Hinduism, but is more properly referred to as Vedantic religion (that originating from the Vedas - an ancient Indian text. The word "Hindu" comes from a mispronunciation of the Indus River and was originally a derogatory term used by a conquering enemy).

**Yoga teaches us to cure
what need not be
endured and endure what
cannot be cured. ~
B.K.S. Iyengar**

The term "Hatha Yoga" is from the Sanskrit language. Yoga means the path by which one is united/ re-united with God. There are different forms of Yoga. Hatha Yoga is the path through the body, per se, by which one is re-united with God. Other forms of Yoga include Jnana Yoga (the path to God through wisdom), Karma Yoga (the path to God through selfless acts of charity) and Bhakti Yoga (a devotional form of Yoga very similar to Western religions). It should be noted that Vedantic religion is not poly-theistic, though apparently this notion seems to persist to this day. Mahatma Gandhi wrote a bit directly on this subject.

**For those wounded by
civilization, yoga is the
most healing salve. ~
Terri Guillemets**

While Hatha Yoga can be viewed as the path to God through the body, it is, perhaps, more clearly represented as the path to keeping the body a fit instrument, so that the individual can then engage in spiritual pursuits. Because it developed to keep the body healthy, it is a profound (or perhaps even absolute) discipline for health as regards all body conditions and illnesses.

Hatha Yoga includes 84,000 asanas or postures. It is that broad of a discipline. These asanas include physical exercises for every single area of the body as regards muscular work, as well as exercises which affect and influence all the different organs and internal systems. And thus, Hatha Yoga has asanas for every disease condition of every body part, organ system and etc. Beyond asanas or postures, Hatha Yoga discipline includes proper (natural) diet, and various purification disciplines such as enemas to clear the toxins in the colon,

use of the neti pot to clear the sinuses and etc. Hatha Yoga also includes disciplines to affect the more primarily causal forces which affect the body.

Traditional Vedantic theology tells us that there are three forces which cause all action in the created universe. These three forces or ganas are sattwa, rajas and tamas. Sattwa is the divine or angelic force within us, rajas the dynamic force within us and tamas the slothful force within us. Thus, when one feels altruistic, one is motivated from sattwa. When one feels like conquering some challenge, the desire is coming from rajas. And when one feels like lying on the couch watching 8 hours of football, one is motivated from tamas (the ancient Indians having predicted American behavior long, long ago).

Again, these forces can act in combination. So, one might have a combination of sattwa and rajas that is both a divine inspiration to help as well as one's desire to conquer a challenge. And these forces exist in, let us say, the biology or bio-chemistry of the body and being. The health based system that studies how these forces affect health, disease and curing of disease is called

Ayurveda. This system is similar to that used in Medieval Europe and called the "body humors" or that used by the ancient Greeks (and perhaps Egyptians as well). The most common combinations of the three ganas are those called Ether (Akash), Air (Vagu), Fire (Tejas), Water (Jala) and Earth (Prthvi). These terms should not be confused with the scientific terms that were, in fact, derived from this terminology which pre-dates all science. Aryurveda looks at the specific constitution of the individual. By determining the pre-dispositions of each individual, Aryurveda allows the development of a specific methodology of healing to be applied to each individual, with their very specific individual needs. More fundamentally causal than the body or, let us say, matter, is energy. Matter, per se, doesn't even really exist, it is just, per se, a construct of energy. If we can deal directly with this energy, we are dealing more directly with everything that flows from that energy. And that, of course, includes all aspects of health and of healing.

Yoga has a sly, clever way of short-circuiting the mental patterns that cause anxiety. ~

Baxter Bell, quoted in "Worry Thwarts," Yoga Journal, March 2006

Can you remember what it was like to walk in the midst of a world of miracles? Can you remember ever traveling within a world of pure delight with a joy untainted by craving or aversion? What happened to that world? All yoga, including the Buddha's yoga, is often called "the path of return" -- a return to our true home, which we eventually come to see was never really lost.

FRANK JUDE BOCCIO,
Mindfulness Yoga

Aryurveda calls this energy prana. It is similar to the term chi used in Oriental medicine. Everything affects prana. What we eat affects prana, how we move (or exercise) affects prana, and even how we think affects prana. Prana not only effects health, but becomes our health. We can, through investigative logic and discipline discover how some cellular organelle is impacted by disease. That is a scientific approach. But we can also look to why the energy changes in the body allowed that impact in the first place. These ancient systems, like Hatha Yoga and Aryurveda (or say, its “equivalents” in Oriental medicine - Qi Gong and Traditional Chinese Medicine), go to the very source to discover the causes of illness and the sources for health.

So that is a brief introduction to Hatha Yoga and to its connection with the ancient Indian medical science of Aryurveda. Here is a link to a series of articles on Hatha Yoga by [Holistic Online](#). And here is a link to a series of articles on Aryurveda by [Holistic Online](#).

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The autonomic nervous system is divided into the sympathetic system, which is often identified with the fight-or-flight response, and the parasympathetic, which is identified with what's been called the relaxation response. When you do yoga - the deep breathing, the stretching, the movements that release muscle tension, the relaxed focus on being present in your body - you initiate a process that turns the fight-or-flight system off and the relaxation response on. That has a dramatic effect on the body. The heartbeat slows, respiration decreases, blood pressure decreases. The body seizes this chance to turn on the healing mechanisms. ~

Richard Faulds