

SIMPLICITY In Yoga & Ayurveda

By Mas Vidal

When we first embark on the journey of Yoga, our inner search to understand the mystery of existence, it can be an overwhelming experience given the vastness of the endeavor. For this task, there are several themes the great teachers have emphasized, of which one of the most important is the concept of simple living.

Yoga is really very simple but do we really practice or cultivate it this way? Often not, given the complex nature of the modern mind and the conditions of our societies. We are caught up in trying to do too much too quickly. Because of the fast paced tempo of our culture, we carry the expectation of instant results in everything that we attempt. Therefore, along with simplifying our outer lives comes the additional very important practice of slowing down. This is particularly important when we begin any aspect of yoga practice. Over years of teaching, I have observed that many students begin a yoga practice too quickly with an intensity that eventually pushes them into frustration.

At a glance many people assume yoga to be merely a form of calisthenics, unaware of the psychological and emotional influences it can have. The complexities of the urban dweller's lifestyle, repeatedly pulls them away into the world of desires. They are often left with the exposure of many faults and weaknesses after moving into a yoga practice too quickly. For some at first the many tools of Yoga and Ayurveda look so mystical, inviting and beneficial to our health and well being that we want to practice them all. But what we do not realize is that the many modalities of both sciences contain very powerful techniques that can release a tremendous amount of toxicity both on the physical and mental levels that we may not be prepared to handle.

When you take action and make the time to attend your yoga class, or develop your sadhana (yogic disciplines) at home, you're doing your part in protecting yourself from vikrities (imbalances) created by the doshas. Ayurveda, being a science of self-care teaches us that our bodies are essentially a small replica of the universe, made up of five elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth. In essence, what the science of Yoga is teaching us is quite simple, to unite these five elements into one field of energy and gradually develop the unity of consciousness.

I once saw a billboard with the peace sign and above it read, "Never, Never, Never, Give Up." Commitment! I realized that the journey of deeper knowing and healing begins with commitment. In order to get anything done and see results requires a level of commitment or discipline, tapas, which gradually increases with time. When we bring in commitment, it strengthens our spirit, which prepares us for the journey of intergrating our practice of yoga into our way of life.

One of the travesties of the commercial American yoga movement is that there is no bridge between the practice and the lifestyle; they are kept as two separate aspects of existence. This is the antithesis of simplicity and integration. The maintenance of such regimens gradually increases our attachment to the physical body, which only strengthens the ahamkara or ego consciousness.

It all matters, even the small things like the words that we use when speaking to others. Control of speech develops the subtle essence of Tejas, which increases our ability to be radiant and have clarity and understanding. For example, if you say you are going to do something, follow through and do it! When speaking about others, don't say anything that you would not say to them directly. Not just for someone else's sake but also for yourself.

Our ability to follow through with the small things begins to build the foundation for bigger things and, most importantly, for our spiritual life. The key to this is consistency. Traditional Yoga and Ayurveda were founded on the power of rituals, actions and disciplines performed for a divine purpose. With consistency we slowly support a process that peels away the layers of impressed tendencies or bad habits acquired from our past lives.

The practice of consistency is not limited to lifestyle but is especially important towards the techniques that one practices. If we are constantly bouncing around between different teachers and techniques and approaches, the benefits will be minimized. Unlike western thought and practice, Yoga takes time because it works beneath the layers of the physical body penetrating the subtle aspects of our mental nature. The wise practitioner should be committed and consistent to their routine and then the magic of Yoga will become like a wand for physical, mental and spiritual transformation.

The laws of the universe of which the yoga and ayurveda traditions are created teach us time and time again that intake is equal to output. On the physical level, this is reflected in what we feed our bodies which determines how much energy we have and the level of immunity. According to Ayurveda this is known as Ojas, the subtle essence of the element of water or the ability to be compassionate and give to others. On the mental level, the environment we surround ourselves with will influence the choices that we make and how we feel emotionally. Prana, the life force is vibrating in varying degrees in all things and directly impresses the mental plane.

Paramahansa Yogananda, the father of yoga in the West, greatly emphasized in his teachings to westerners that "your environment is your greatest influence." In other words, collective energy is the most powerful, so we must choose our environments very carefully. Only those who have exercised their will power and developed tremendous mental concentration can overcome negative environments. On the soul level, the thoughts repeatedly passing through the field of the mind create the endless desires which support the process of karma and are stored within us. From this understanding, we can determine that everything matters and what we do the most we become. Therefore, in order to properly heal ourselves, we must consider all aspects of yoga and its practices,

particularly the intention behind them. And with Ayurveda we must consider how we live and spend our time.

The question then is how do we begin to practice this balanced approach of Yoga and Ayurveda? The answer is to start small and keep things simple. Emphasize the quality of your yoga practice and your Ayurvedic lifestyle more so than the quantity. With quality you'll find what you really like and what really works for you, and the proof will be in the results. Where we are now is an accumulation of what we have done consistently in the past. Do away with the things that you attempt half-heartedly and spend time with the people and things that support you in order to expand and grow whole-heartedly. Be willing to work for your needs and for what your soul yearns to know with all the fervor in your heart and you'll find that Yoga and Ayurveda are really quite simple and effective.