

Ayurveda and Mind: Using the Yoga Sutras to understand Healing

3 means of knowledge:

1. Direct perception
2. Inference
3. Instruction by teacher or spiritual text

5 types of mental activity:

1. Right knowledge
2. False knowledge
3. Imagination
4. Sleep
5. Memory

How do we learn and how do we gain knowledge? The *Yoga Sutras* are very specific about the means of gaining knowledge and the types of mental activities. If Yoga is the restraint of the modifications of the mind, then what are these modifications and how do we restrain them? Seems like a good place to start! Because the very next sutra says that once we do restrain them we exist within our True Nature, forevermore! And that alone sells me!

Chapter 1

Sutra 2: The restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff is Yoga.

Sutra 3: Then the Seer (Self) abides in His own nature.

Sutra 4: As other times [the Self appears to] assume the forms of the mental modifications.

Sutra 5: There are five kinds of mental modifications which are either painful or painless.

Sutra 6: They are right knowledge, misconception, verbal delusion, sleep and memory

Sutra 7: The sources of right knowledge are direct perception, inference and scriptural testimony. (*Yoga Sutras* pp. 3-15)

And that's it! Know that your mind has various kinds of actions, and the inner Self appears to exist as these specific forms of action. When we are imagining a future, we believe our Self to be engaged with us. When we falsely understand a situation and think we know the truth, we believe our Self to be engaged in this as well. In actuality, the Self lies even deeper within us than our intelligence and wisdom. And when our mind is engaged in right knowledge, seeing things as they are, we are closer to accessing our deeper Self through the gateway of the 4th kosha, our wisdom. Patanjali teaches that we arrive at this right knowledge through three means: direct perception or experience, inference and instruction.

Realizing a truth for our selves holds much more weight than simply being told. And even when we infer a truth, using previous knowledge, we really only gain true

knowledge when we directly experience or perceive this truth. I will give a personal example of the power of direct perception. When working with my Ayurvedic counselor I was advised to only breathe through my nose during my exercises while training for triathlons. I learned based on instruction that using the mouth to breathe and not relaxing will lead to a dominance of the sympathetic nervous system and an increase in adrenaline. While I trust my teacher it was not until I began to breathe deeply through the nose, checking the pulse before, during and after exercise and watching my body and mind's reaction to exercise throughout the day that I had a direct perception of this truth.

Ayurveda is the whole person approach to health and well-being, looking at all aspects of our being, the physical, mental, energetic, spiritual, emotional and cosmic elements. Aimed at self-healing through herbs, yoga, diet, exercise, Ayurveda takes its knowledge literally from the Vedas and offers a person a Way to be in relationship to their inner health and the Energy that sustains all life. Ayurveda relies on Yoga's conceptualization of the mind to understanding the learning process to better facilitate self-healing. Dr. Frawley writes:

“Ayurveda exists as part of a science of right knowledge. Its goal is to develop right knowledge about health as part of developing right knowledge of the world. Right knowledge brings peace and happiness (sattva) to the mind. Wrong knowledge leads to disturbance and eventual unhappiness, when we discover that things are not as we have thought them to be.

It is important that we learn to discern which form of mental activity is going on in our minds and which level of the mind is active. The Vedic system and Ayurveda with it not only teach us things, they first teach us how to learn. For us to discover this, we must know how our minds work. The Buddhi or intelligence is the level of the mind involved in the process of true learning. When it is not adversely influenced by ego or desire, it allows for the ascertainment of true knowledge.” (Ayurvedic Healing Course, Part IV p. 42)

From prakriti comes the 3 Gunas and from these we find the 3 Doshas. We have Sat (Being) represented by Vata; Chit (Consciousness) represented by Pitta; and Ananda (Bliss) represented by Kapha. What a beautiful thought that our physical body is created in the image of “life, light and love,” or “being, consciousness and bliss!”

“Sacchidananda, Being-Consciousness-Bliss, reflects itself in creation as Life-Light-Love. These are inherent in all life and it is the natural right of all beings to be able to enjoy these. They manifest as biological principles of Vata, Pitta and Kapha.

For this reason, all the Doshas have sattvic, rajasic and tamasic forms. Each of them can be used as a particular path of inner growth. All have their origin in the Divine and serve to take us back to it. They are another manifestation of the threefold nature of Reality itself. The three Doshas thus reflect the three basic statuses of the Divine being itself. Each is not only integral to creation but also to the transcendent.” (AHC, Part IV p. 39)

So now we are beginning to see the interplay and codependence of Yoga and Ayurveda. Yoga is the union of our selves with the Absolute Self within, the essence or pure consciousness that is reflected as us. Ayurveda is a system of healing that balances the manifestations (in the forms of body and mind) of this Absolute Self. Our physical body and mind are made up of the 5 elements of ether, air, water, fire and earth represented in the body as the 3 Doshas of Vata, Pitta and Kapha, which are in essence the life-force of the elements. These doshas appear because of the qualities of existence, namely the 3 Gunas, which are pure balance, movement and inertia. Without these essential qualities of nature, no thing could exist. Within the 3 Gunas is Prana, the primal moving force of the universe, which itself is the reflection of its source, which we can call Purusha, or Brahma, the transcendent Reality of All Things.

Ayurveda is the “looking” at this process of life; it is the knowledge of life itself. Healing occurs when we recognize this process and deal sattvically with the disharmony and discord that arises in both body and mind.