



Balancing Our Inner & Outer Cultures with Yoga & Ayurveda

by Mas Vidal

(Excerpt from the upcoming book titled Evolutionary Living)

One of the boldest themes of the Vedas is that of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all living things. Another theme is that of the light expressing itself through various forces in nature with the goal of life focused on winning the light.

I'm often asked, "What can I do to have more balance, peace, and happiness in my life etc...?" Surprisingly such questions often come from yoga teachers and practitioners of western health practices. My response has always remained consistent that postural yoga or any form of fitness without a properly balanced approach to lifestyle is basically a practice or an exercise reduced to stirring energy, thoughts, and emotions which often leaves a person with a bewildered sense of direction and a meaningless life. We must have a sense of knowing how to live and maintain discipline over the senses otherwise such a state places a person in a state of hoping for wellness instead of actually experiencing happiness.

Yoga practiced without Ayurveda is somewhat a blind endeavor, the two must be united. Ayurveda in a broader sense requires a cultural revolution. Ayurveda cannot be made "Americana, Asian, Latino" or readapted to any culture that prioritizes living for the senses and measures success on the material level and we should not also label Ayurveda as being Indian, thus we limit it for only a specific type of person or culture. The Vedic wisdom traditions are derived of the light and the soli-lunar cycles that produce laws and principles for humans to follow and these laws should be understood as universal and applicable to all of humanity.

Ayurveda as an expression of natural law itself is not a product of the human mind. It is designed to heal the conditioned mind by slowing it, calming it and bringing it into accordance with a vehicle (the body), that allows it to progress and evolve according to the pace and guidance of *mahat*, the supreme intelligence as referred to in the Samkhya philosophy. Through this intelligence, the five agents (elements) extend our connection to the living world.

One of the major challenges we all face today is urbanization, which typically segregates our spirit from the pace of nature. Success in yoga requires an integral practice of Ayurveda and for most in the western world, this means changing your cultural identity and the relationship one shares with life, nature, and all living things. Why are so many of us constantly spending money, traveling and complicating our lives? All in the name of success and happiness? Well, its simply

because our yoga sadhana (practice) is not supported by natural living, an approach to daily life that is simple and not only connects us to the body but teaches us to transcend it, to go beyond thinking "I am this body, I am this mortal life."

Nature can carry us into the highest levels of consciousness that exists directly within us and provide us with real health that endures the tests of time and the karmic fluctuations as reflected in our astrological birth chart. When yoga and Ayurveda are practiced together, they encourage us to exist as the whole self, the Divine Self and not just some partitioned concept of our existence. Be courageous and embrace Ayurveda so you can create a new cultural identity that is based on unity consciousness, one that awakens the universal mind. When I speak of culture in this regard I am referring to the quality of our consciousness. We must stop identifying ourselves as either male or female, this masquerades the ego even further in addition to all the conditions it carries from many past lives.

The modern lifestyle of most humans is fraught with the trappings of business greed, eating, socializing, paying bills and many more meaningless things that distract us from being with our Self. We keep creating more and more "doings" and all types of distractions because we have become conditioned to think and believe that happiness exists outside of us. I can't agree more with Yogananda when he said "Solitude is the price for greatness" being alone is really experiencing that we are all One. There is nothing lonely about it because it provides you with no distractions, no sidetracking of the mind. Simple and natural living is how Ayurveda purifies our senses, our mind, and emotions of the impurities that distract us from feeling good because when our lifestyle is in accord with the grander forces of nature we gain the power or capacity to reflect, slow down and exist as a soul, as the pure image of the Divine that we really are. Too often we forget this because the design of the modern lifestyle fosters forgetting our true essence. Vedanta reverently reminds us we are all Divine, the true essence of our existence is light, love and peace.

Self Care is the Best Healthcare

Many are beginning to accept that government-sanctioned health care is not the answer to greater health and wellness, it's actually the problem because it deters people from developing will-power, personal responsibility and many other things that our societies have conditioned us to believe are necessary for health and well being. I want to propose that we support a government or laws that mandate self-care, natural living, respect for animals and for the environment. Let us support yoga schools, institutions and charitable organizations that promote prevention and evolutionary living by encouraging people to spend less, enjoy more time in nature, cooking more and basically co-existing with nature and her laws. If you don't follow the rules then it is you that pays the price, not everyone else.

If you take a moment to observe people and their habits it becomes very evident how they treat the world, nature and living existence is also how they treat their own body. A person's own body is a small piece of ecology, its Divine property, they don't own it, they, are simply responsible for managing it. On a deeper level, the mind-body relationship reflects the direction of our lives and whether it is regressing or evolutionary. The process of evolutionary living begins with prevention, self-care and harnessing a sound mind-body relationship. Alternatively, if we walk around this planet in a conflicted state of mentality that lacks purpose, then what suffers is how we view everything around us. In other words, we struggle to see the good in the world. The message of the Bhagavad Gita, one of India's greatest scriptures is pertinent in this regard, and basically teaches... the war is within, we must change our inner culture so that our outer culture can cultivate harmony and well being. Yoga is a system for inner transformation and Ayurveda is the science for outer well-being, the two are intrinsically connected. They depend on each other just as this earth depends on the sun and the moon for life to exist.

Much of humanity today is brainwashed with erroneous concepts of history and has a vague understanding of what has actually occurred in the past. Basically, people follow what they are told or read through the media, movies and hear in their communities. Additionally, school

textbooks are filled with errors and the current world culture follows many religious practices and tries to enjoy what are supposed to be "holy-days" that are filled with socializing, boozing and meaningless gossip and chatter parties about people, movies and the weather. The secret to balance and well being in this world lies in changing our inner and outer cultures so they are in support of each other. Both are important, the inner must match the outer and vice versa.

Mind Over Body

Integral yoga encourages us to not only cleanse our body but to actually place more emphasis on the mind. What a paradox for the western mind, that spends countless hours cleaning their body, feeding it, exercising it with entertaining gadgets or with restless yoga classes that profess instant spiritual transformation, but yet, what about the mind? The mind is left to many hours per day of television, social media, movies, smartphones and highly stimulating social environments that leave us energetically wasted. The power of yoga lies in its capacity to purifying the mind of all the obstacles that deter humanity from feeling contentment (santosha). The obstacles are the mind itself and how we use it, the ego, senses, and the intellect. Through the methods of integral yoga (profoundly defined by sage Patanjali), we can create a refined quality of consciousness that will not get trapped in action-reaction dynamics or also known as an eye for eye or tooth for a tooth mentality. The idea of integral yoga is that our outer efforts in the form of rituals and practices lead us into the inner domains of the vast and peaceful realms of consciousness that lie within each and every human being. The work, for some, may deal with removing the mental obstacles while for others it may involve the higher practice of learning to surrender.

Watch the Show, Don't Become it

Yoga is a system that can transcend us into powerful states of observation (sakshi bhava), and discrimination (viveka) and lead us into the pure Divine essence of our existence (atman). Pranayama techniques are remarkable in this regard. It's simply amazing how a little awareness and control of the breath can change your inner state of being. In a whimsical way, yoga has the capacity to shift us from watching television into the experience of having *para-jyoti*, the inner vision or insight into the light of Divinity. Yoga teaches us how to experience the light and follow the truth regardless of what anyone says. Challenge the world like a real yogic kshatriya (warrior) and free your self of the reckless ride this world is on. The warrior keeps on with their yoga practice regardless of the obstacles, conditions, and habits. Slowly, with focus on all that is positive and good, all negative patterns begin to fall away. Along with the support of Ayurvedic lifestyle principles, we gain the support and power of nature to slow us down and preserve our energy so that prana (life force) can exist in ever-increasing capacities.

I want to leave you with a personal affirmation that has been dear to my heart for many years. It can be used as a daily mantra or it can also be used as a prayer before starting your day. Best of all use it as a reminder of who you truly are and what you can do for this world.

"I am a bright shining light.

I am filled with love.

My true essence is peace.

And everywhere that I go and everything that I do.

I will share and I will shine, my Divine qualities, always, always."