



## The Power of Herbs for Yoga & Lifestyle

Yoga and all the Vedic systems have always been deeply aligned with nature as Mother Divine and have worshipped her unlike any culture in the world. While many in the West incorrectly look at yoga as a form of therapy, they should ideally be looking to Ayurveda for therapeutic healing.

Ayurveda is an integrated system dedicated to healing the mind-body complex of doshic excesses (issues of the elements) and provides a bounty of wisdom on how to use plants for healing or *dravya guna*. Herbs are not only medicinal but are also vehicles for moving our consciousness because they not only aid the body but are also psychologically supportive in that they provide a direct bridge that links us to some aspect of nature that is out of accord within us.

Yogis, to enhance sadhana or spiritual evolution have equally used these plants in all their forms. The term Soma is often associated with Ayurvedic herbs to mean nectar and the essential healing composition of a plant. Soma also means the moon and the sublime qualities it exudes especially when it is full. The use of herbs is not limited to addressing imbalance issues of the doshas, however, herbs should be taken as preventative measures especially during seasonal changes or during equinoxes and solstices. They are easy to use and can make all the difference.

Years ago I had a client who came to me with premenopausal issues and I prepared an integral approach to address all the symptoms and causes she was experiencing. Weeks later when I followed up with her she said to me "I have to be honest with you Mas, I don't want to bother with all of these suggestions, I really like taking the herbs, I feel so much better and I am very happy with how I feel." I was thankful she was honest and at the same time, I was elated to know the herbs made such a substantial difference.

The spiritual use of herbs for the enhancement of your sadhana is the highest appropriation of nature. Once the sadhaka (aspirant) has a good sattvic (balanced) lifestyle in place then herbs should be used to support and increase ojas, the sustaining force of the body. Increasing ojas (immunity or drive) is an important principle of Ayurvedic science and is referred to as Rasayana or restorative. Today, this concept is largely ignored in modern avenues of health and fitness that practice extremely aggressive forms of cross fit and sports that exhaust the body.

Depending on your constitution (prakriti) and your level of yogic austerity herbs can be used to support your yoga practice. Many people think yoga meditation is simply relaxing and releasing stress. However, true meditation requires tremendous energy for concentration, keeping the spine straight and maintaining

stillness. Herbs like ashwagandha, brahmi, shatavari and guduchi are excellent in this regard. For those with a monkey mind (vata-vikriti) such herbs as jatamansi, shankapushpi, mucuna and tulsi can be taken as a tea or with warm happy cow milk. Herbs are also excellent for postural yoga practices that demand much of the muscles, nerves, and joints. Herbs like guggulu, turmeric, and boswellia serrata help improve flexibility, strengthen the joints and help reduce inflammation and lactic acid.

*Whether it is to reduce an imbalance of the doshas, strengthen your yoga practice or simply for lifestyle enhancement purposes, taking herbs permanently is not ever encouraged from the Ayurvedic perspective.*

One should always look at herbs as compliments to their lifestyle. A trained Ayurvedic practitioner can prepare a custom formula or you can easily purchase them in the commercial retail market, however its best to get sound advice on not only what to take but when might be the best time to take them according to your type, lifestyle and overall health patterns. Herbs are commonly used as a palliative remedy for issues caused by an imbalance of the doshas and are considered mild-mannered measures that can often do the trick. Ayurveda refers to this as *shamana* or gentle measures of detoxification that can help remove toxicity from the body or blood for example, which can take some time, especially when dealing with skin issues. Additionally, herbs can be used to prepare for *pancha karma* (5-treatment series), profound measures for expelling the doshas from the body. These strong measures, *shodhana*, are often too strong for many people who are experiencing adrenal burnout or have undergone, trauma or surgery, so, in many cases such as these, the long but gentle route is taken and herbs along with diet and specific postures and breathing techniques for the imbalance or constitution are given. When counseling my clients I often recommend 3-5 postures along with 1-2 pranayama's that they can perform daily like an herbal supplement. Together the postures and the herbs work so magically, enhancing lifestyle and the yoga techniques to bring great success.

Many years ago on a train route from Delhi to Ranchi a man across from me noticed I was reading a book on Ayurveda, I noticed him staring but I continued reading. When I finally took a break he caught my attention and he stated boldly "That's the old medicine and it takes long time for results" I comfortably replied "Yes! But it's the good medicine that eventually reaches the real goal of fixing the problem between the human mind and nature" and so it is the case today. Everyone wants healing to occur quickly but yet they had spent many years entertaining bad habits, so we must remember that often the best things don't come easy, especially with health and requires changing habits that can be very hard to break however with *abhyasa* or continuity of yoga practice and the soma of herbs we attain victory over the mind and body and establish health and wellness in life.



### **Mas Vidal (Maheshananda)**

Yogi, mystic and practitioner of Ayurveda, Mas has become an influential teacher of Yoga and Ayurveda, integrating a background of athletics, therapeutics, science and ecology into a dynamic synthesis that has lead to him becoming an innovative voice in the field of integral Yoga and Ayurveda. He offers unique certification and educational programs internationally and maintains an active counseling practice that embraces Vedanta, Ayurveda and Vedic astrology. He follows the lineage teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda of the Self Realization Fellowship and Swami Jyotirmayananda of the Sivananda lineage and in 2014 he appeared in the triumphant film *Awake, The Life Of Yogananda*. As director of Dancing Shiva, an educational organization based in southern California, he promotes health, wellness and societal reform by means of embracing universal spirituality and a natural approach to lifestyle. He also maintains an active ayurvedic astrology counseling practice and international teaching schedule.