



## Spirits Living in a Material World

By  
Mas Vidal

The essence of Yoga and Ayurveda is based on the relationship we share with nature and this is not limited to nature in terms of trees and animals but also includes the perspective and vision we hold of existence. These aspects of life according to the Vedic tradition are distributed into four areas, personal (*kama*), profession (*artha*), life mission (*dharma*), spiritual (*moksha*). This is a simple manuscript for balanced evolution. The physical senses are what we use to explore and enjoy these principles.

The senses can be powerful instruments for understanding the world, if used properly. The question is, do we keep bombarding our senses until we are exhausted, or perhaps consider if the information we are gathering is redundant. This comes in the form of media, advertisements and the broader interests of society, which measures success on mostly on a material level. These days it seems that using our senses takes precedence over anything else. Each day when we arise, decisions are made as to how we will satisfy these unruly features of our human existence and then we proceed without much awareness, eating, watching, hearing, smelling and acquiring whatever it is we think is necessary to satisfy them. Have we taken the time to ask our selves, is this a balanced approach to life? Or are we using our senses with discretion with the idea that the senses should not rule us but simply be used as aids for functioning and enjoying the world?

The other side of this sensory relationship is the one we have with our inner Self as the highest knowing of truth. Introspection, reading, meditation, writing and time in silence are all important practices to increase this knowing of our true nature. Yogananda once said, "Solitude is the price for greatness". Such practices help us understand the meaning of life's experiences and bring us guidance in the direction we are headed. Ancient traditions such as the Vedic have always relied on various types of relationships, with our parents, teachers, mentors and gurus, nature and the Divine as ways to develop all aspects of life.

For example, friends and family provide guidance and support for maintaining emotional balance and basic needs of affection or *kama*. Many friendships and relationships these days are maintained through the Internet, which is creating a lack of human contact and poor use of the ego, as it is a superficial means of human interaction and creates an energetic gap. Mentors and teachers serve to give instruction or training and teach the tricks of the trade for a vocation and to establish a worthy trade to support the family life. The role of the guru is strictly for *moksha*

dharma (enlightenment) to give the necessary wisdom and discipline for spiritual development. Traditionally, Latin and Asian cultures followed more similarly to that of the Vedic yet with urbanization of societies much of this is changing and becoming more Americana, and has led to emotionally depleted anima<sup>1</sup>. In the modern era people are taught to find solutions to life's problems and challenges outside of themselves. In the spiritual world the solution is to go inside, reflect and discover that our outer circumstances are simply mirroring our inner nature. Purpose or *dharma* is the highest ideal and when we discover the deeper meaning of life's experiences then the broken puzzle starts to become a beautiful picture. All human beings have a purpose and it's the responsibility of each person to discover what that is and how to follow it. The words of the late Joseph Campbell remain etched in my mind with regards to this point...

*"Follow your bliss and doors will open where there were walls."*

The life story of Lord Rama is an ideal example of having balanced character through healthy relationships. As a husband he was loyal to his wife Sita and demonstrated a love beyond conditions and obstacles. As a dharma king he creatively balanced his worldly obligations and responsibilities along with his immense spiritual stature. As a son he graciously accepted exile from his village for 14 years as requested by his father. He was also a great brother giving kindness and understanding and was a great servant to humanity by always expressing compassion. The epic story of Lord Rama's life is told in the Ramayana and has been one of the great mythologies the Indic culture has always turned to for guidance and inspiration.

One of the greatest challenges with American culture is that it has no ancient myths to live by and reflect on, so to attain guidance for society and for personal development. As a culture based on opportunity and the promise of equality we have become very advanced materially speaking although the inner side of life has left us emotionally and spiritually bankrupt and naturally where there is material greed there is a spiritual need. Today, it is a saddening story that prescription drugs and alcohol use have become standardized, to a degree, and have been accepted as requirements to what is defined as "healthy". Access to more drugs, surgery and doctors is not the solution to better health because it becomes a band-aid that prolongs destroying the causes of health issues and prolongs the cry of the soul. Gandhi shared a similar view...

*"Spiritual relationship is far more precious than physical. Physical relationship divorced from spiritual is body without soul".*

The essence of a balanced relationship is not that we continue to fake it until we make it, but that we actually make it and manifest a lifestyle is connecting us to the source of our existence. That is what true success should be valued on. Our outer relationships should depend mainly on living in a responsible manner that affords us time for study, good social experiences, family, work and serving our community in some way. We all have things to do in our lives and it's a matter of just doing them yet success lies in the choices that we make.

As our relationship with the God improves our inner knowing of who we are equally improves as well as the quality of our life, in all aspects, as parents, in work, society and our friendships. The teachings of ayurveda and yoga are unique in that they are purely based on the mastery or *acharya* of our energies. Aum is the cosmic sound (vibration) that permeates all living things and supports life on the planet earth as prana or life force. Ayurveda is the wisdom of cultivating a synchronistic relationship with such forces through our body. Yoga although it depends on a strong societal and personal foundation for a sound mind-body relationship, is designed to guide

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<sup>1</sup> The part of the psyche that is directed inward, and is in touch with the subconscious. Often contrasted with persona.

us beyond the frenetic function of the senses into stillness, awareness and the true flexibility that yoga is associated with in the mind. A flexible mind is an adaptable one. What good is a flexible body if the mind continues to react, judge, criticize and be tantalized by the senses. Awareness is the flexibility that gives us the power of adaptability, tolerance and resilience, all of which are developed through our inner proximity with the Divine. In this regard Vedanta is one of the greatest gifts of ancient wisdom, because it is designed to keep us connected to the purpose of life. In a basic sense, ayurveda emphasizes a deeper understanding of how these energies (as the five 5 great elements) function inside of us mentally and physically, and the system of yoga is focused simply on how we can use the mind to become more aware and more present. It culminates in a realization that everything is alive, everything is Divine.

Ultimately, the mind transcends beyond physical body consciousness into nature's body of consciousness in a subtler manner. The mind-body tools are assets to our spiritual development and have a direct impact on the quality of our lives, however for most of humanity the mind and body have become obstacles, issues, problems. It seems apparent that the balance of the inner-outer relationship fluctuates individually as it has globally throughout the ages. Education, study and self-improvement remain as essential tools to seeing the light through the darkness.

*Life is not a matter of removing the darkness but rather about cultivating the insight to grow through it.*

Even today, certainly more people are interested in self-care, which includes yoga postures, exercise and sports with an ideology that perfect health is based on a long life, a lean body and many other superficial things. Until humankind returns back to nature's way of life, real health may never be attained. It's ok to put attention and mental energy onto the body as long as it does not end there. May we talk less, walk more, read and reflect, listen, learn and love and share our best, forgetting the rest, remembering always We are Spirit, eternal, vast and immortal. ☺