

Yoga, Ayurveda and Poetics

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To understand Yoga involves a journey into many subjects. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, together with its major commentary, the *Vyasa Bhashya*, are impressive for their insights into psychology. Ayurveda provides a framework for understanding the physical and mental benefits of Yoga practice. Samkhya provides the metaphysical basis for understanding the human condition as a thinking, feeling organism. Hatha Yoga texts explore the intangible aspects of breath, mind, energy and life. Finally, Yoga psychology provides a base for understanding language and communication.

Psychology

The *Yoga Sutras* discuss the composition, workings and development of the mind; they also discuss the nature of consciousness. These explanations anticipate many of the findings of modern cognitive scientists; thus Yoga psychology has much to contribute to contemporary understanding of the mind.

Health

Over and above philosophy and psychology, Yoga is a practical subject. Mediaeval texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* speak of health benefits of *asanas* and *pranayamas*, using terms found in Ayurveda. Understanding the anatomical and physiological principles of Ayurveda as set out in the major works (Charaka, Sushruta, Vagbhata) provides insights into these health benefits, for example the vital sites of the body (*marmasthanas*) and the physiological energies of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

Mind and Mood Control

Ayurveda cannot explain the esoteric aspects of Yoga, such as the subtle body, *nadis* and *chakras*. Discussion of the subtle body and mental creation is found in the Samkhya philosophy with which Yoga is allied, whose major extant work is the *Samkhya Karika*. *Nadis* and *chakras*, first mentioned in certain Upanishads, are detailed in Hatha Yoga treatises, of which the *Goraksha Shataka* seems to be the earliest. Understanding the theory given in these texts helps to deepen Yoga practice.

Language

The *Yoga Sutras* offer interesting insights into language. They explain conceptualization as one of the five faculties of the mind. It is a language-based operation independent of reality. As such it provides a theoretical basis for understanding literary composition, of which poetry is acknowledged to be the acme.