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## TOPIC OF THE MONTH

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### YOGA & THERAPY

With all our research on the internal workings of the postures I'd like to take a break this month and share some of Pattabhi Jois's information on the heart of this yoga.

This first part is excerpts from a transcript of a lecture he gave in Bangalore in 1977. The article was published in a book called *Yoga and Science*, published by the Budha Vacana Trust, 1977. Thanks to Eddie Stern for helping to make this information available to everyone, here is the link with the full transcript: <http://ayny.org/yoga-and-therapy.html>

### Yoga and Therapy by Pattabhi Jois

☪ My comments are bulleted and in different font. What is sweet; is that this information is copasetic with what I learned from all my current ongoing research :) I love when science backs up what yogis have been saying for a millennia.

**Mind is very fickle, like mercury. Fickle mind, with no discrimination of purity and impurity, flows arbitrarily, conducts itself with no restraints. Because of its unrestrained conduct, the mind influencing the organs of the body not only causes them to become sick, but endangers itself. If the mind becomes one-pointed or fixed, it regulates the organs of the body and protects them from disease. Illusion is also a function of the mind, leading to many sicknesses.**

☪ I have come across many texts and even research that shows where our mind goes our energy follows. We also now know (with studies based in science) our emotions effect our health, and how our organs function. Having a sound mind controls the emotions. When the mind calms down it reduces stress in our bodies (by not conjuring up stories that are not true!) allowing the organs function properly. Deep even breathing through your nose helps to calm the mind.

**The process of control and purification of mind is called yoga. Maharshi Patanjali has expounded this in an aphorism, *Yogah cittavrtti nirodhah*, which means that yoga is the process of controlling all the waves of the mind and fixing them on a specified object. This is also called "Astanga Yoga" which has eight fold factors: *yama*: restraints; *niyama*: observances; *asana*: posture; *pranayama*: breathing practice; *pratyahara*: sensecontrol; *dharana*: concentration; *dhyana*: meditation; *Samadhi*: contemplation.**

**These eight factors are divided into two groups called external devices and internal devices. Restraint, observance, posture and breathing practice belong to the external devices. Sense-control, concentration, meditation, and contemplation belong to the internal ones. It is far from easy to practice the internal devices without practicing the external. Therefore, to start with, one should practice the external devices.**



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ॐ The first four limbs being the external limbs including the “10 commandments” (see below for more explanation), yoga postures, and breathing. By practicing these external devices the internal elements manifest in us effortlessly. Put your effort into right living (the yamas and niyamas), asana, and breathing -- doing this work will let the internal devices (sense control and mind control) arise in us effortlessly over time. Don’t try to be too “yogi holy”, do your practices and let the goodness arise in you naturally.

**Among the external devices, posture and breathing practices stand pre-eminent. Those who are sick and weak, with defective organs, are hardly able to practice restraints and observances. Therefore, we must equip ourselves with sound bodies and organs free from defects, in order to practice restraints and observances. All the *Upanishads* and all yogis well versed in yoga consider posture and breathing practices as pre-eminent factors among the external devices.**

ॐ Here Pattabhi Jois gets to the point that “you can not meditate with a toothache” . . . He takes it a little further and says even restraints (the yamas) and observances (the niyamas) -- which are kind of like the 10 commandments -- yamas (restraints) being: truth, non-violence, not stealing, not being sexually inappropriate, and non-hoarding. the niyamas (observances) being: purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study, and surrender to God -- even these are difficult with defective organs!

ॐ The good news :) Do your postures and breathing, get your body and mind healthy -- these are the pre-requisites to not only a healthy body and mind but also enables us to live in harmony.

**Sri Svatamarama explains this in the Hathayoga Pradipika:**

***Hathasya prathamangatvat asanam purvamuccate | Tasmāt tadasanam kuryat arogyamcangalaghavam ||***

**This means that one hardly accomplishes any task without good health and buoyancy of limbs. Health and activity of body are essential and hence the importance given to posture and breathing practices.**

**Asanas are conducive to abating disease and bringing concentration of mind, while the methods of recaka-puraka (exhaling-inhaling) are prerequisites for the practice of posture. Sri Vamana explains in detail the methods of practicing posture. If one practices the postures with no understanding of inhaling and exhaling technique, he is liable to invite untold diseases instead of getting his ailments cured.**

ॐ I have heard it said that Sri Vamana wrote the Yoga Korunta, the manuscript Pattabhi Jois and Krishnamacharya found in the archives at the Calcutta Library which describes the method of Ashtanga Yoga.

**Sri Vamana has therefore made it clear:**

***Vina vinyasa yogena asanadinnakarayet ||***

**Translated: One should not practice posture without the method of inhaling and exhaling**



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Postures without proper breathing do not bring about the health benefits that postures with good breathing can. I have much I can share about the science behind breathing, here is just a bit of it (hopefully not too much!)

Breathing is the heart of our practice, as Harry, my yogi friend in Maui who has been practicing ashtanga yoga for almost 40 years told me Pattabhi Jois told him: **Asanas are just decoration for the breath!**

- ॐ Deep breathing stimulates cellular breathing -- taking in O<sub>2</sub> and giving off CO<sub>2</sub> in every cell of our body. This improves the health of each cell in our body, need I explain the benefit of that?
- ॐ Learning a yogic style of breathing as a way of breathing all day long; on a scientific level, helps our body better "digest" the air we breathe. Many of us do not pay much attention to our breath, resulting in shallow breathing. Shallow breathing does not oxygenate our tissues enough -- depriving us of oxygen and leaving us feeling drained of energy. Shallow and erratic breathing also disrupt the mind.
- ॐ Filling your body with O<sub>2</sub> and getting more O<sub>2</sub> to your cells and tissues is preventative medicine at a CELLULAR level. Preventing disease before it sets in to our tissues.

Cellular Health depends upon 2 processes -- getting nutrients into a cell and toxins out.

- ॐ Oxygen plays a vital role in every metabolic process in our body. Health depends on how efficiently nutrients can be absorbed and utilized at a cellular level, oxygen is what helps our cells absorb nutrients. (Oxygen is what breaks down food in the cell turning sugar into energy, remember the Krebs cycle? I love how we are one with the universe. Photosynthesis and Respiration are the same in reverse . . . Photosynthesis is a plant turning the Sun's energy into Sugar, Respiration is the process of turning that sugar back into energy :)
- ॐ Healthy cells are aerobic -- meaning they have adequate levels of O<sub>2</sub>. When cells are deprived of O<sub>2</sub> decay sets in and cells can mutate or die (because nutrients can not get into the cell).
- ॐ The primary cause of cancer is directly related to cells deprived of O<sub>2</sub>. Cancer cells are anerobic and thrive in an oxygen-deficient environment.

And the other side of breathing - the release of CO<sub>2</sub>. Health is also dependent on how effectively toxins and waste can be removed from the body.

- ॐ Cellular waste is removed from the body in several ways:
  - ॐ Some is dissolved in water and transported to the kidneys or to the liver where it can be excreted in our urine or bowels.
  - ॐ Some of the most toxic poisons in the body can only be "burnt up" and neutralized through oxidation. This is the job of O<sub>2</sub> rich blood cells. Have a good breathing session and "POOF" toxins gone ;)
- ॐ Breathe deep and Oxygenate your cells while you burn up toxins :)

**Hence, the necessity of postures is essential.**

**A regular practice of postures with regulated breathing can cure many diseases. In order to cure contagious diseases a doctor's help may be required, but not to cure chronic diseases. Chronic diseases can be healed by postures and breathing practices.**

**From my own mature experience I can say that many ailments, which cannot be cured by doctors, can be remedied by postures and breathing practices. For example, asthma, diabetes, gastric trouble and rheumatism, known to be incurable by medicines, are cured with**



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no medical aid. These well known ailments, for which no new medicines have been invented, are considered to be irremediable. No medicine so far has overcome these diseases. But it may be repeated that all these chronic ailments can be healed by yogasanas and pranayamas. Evidence for this is that our institution has brought relief to many chronically affected patients, by proper guidance of postures and breathing practices. Such ailments as paralysis, constipation, piles etc., can be relieved merely by the practice of anupara (liquids) without resorting to any medicine. What is needed essentially to support this yoga knowledge is faith, courage and adventure.

🕉 In the early days of ashtanga -- 1930s and 40s -- Pattabhi Jois and his teacher Krishnamacharya did a lot of research with yoga postures and curing ailments, that is his reference in the above paragraphs.

In this scientific age, the criteria for diagnosing diseases have been taken over by machines. We refuse to accept this standard. For example, a patient suffering from blood pressure feels dimness of eyesight, gets increasingly fatigued while doing even a little exertion in work, prefers to keep always lying down. By these symptoms it can be understood that his blood pressure is giving trouble. On the other hand, if none of the above-mentioned symptoms obtain, and if the doctor advises a patient based on the finding of medical equipment alone, the patient by mere hallucination is liable to invite blood pressure difficulty, which he did not originally have. This, therefore, compels me to say that we refuse to admit the theory of diagnosis of diseases by machinery equipment.

🕉 Preventative medicine is not going for colonoscopies, mammograms, prostate checks, or blood pressure screenings . . . randomly things come and go on the body. For example, some of the latest research tells us that lumps in the breast -- both malignant and not -- come and go. They pop up, the body takes care of them, they go away. Sometimes we have a random screening . . . and find a lump, we then are put through a lot of stress and poking and cutting which in turn stresses the immune system making it less likely for our immune system to take care of the "issue".

🕉 Preventative medicine is deep breathing, eating fresh home made foods with lots of vegetables, cleansing our body daily with yoga, and learning to control our thoughts with meditation and yoga.

**By the practice of yoga it is possible to purify many internal pulses, cells, veins, plasma, wind, liver, phlegm, circulation of blood, etc. Thus, the internal purification of the body alone facilitates the cure of ailments. Generally, the purification of any matter requires fire and wind.**

🕉 (Deep breathing and moving your body in unison with your breath creates fire and wind in the body.)

**Just as the gold in a crucible purified by a goldsmith with the aid of fire and wind, which eliminates all the impurities thereof, turns into brilliant gold, similarly the elimination of diseases as impurities needs fire and wind. That is why the wise have said:  
*Pranayamabhyasayuktasya sarvarogakshyobhavet | Avuktabyasayuktasya sarvarogasamudbhava ||***

**One who practices asanas and pranayamas properly finds that all diseases come to naught, whereas all kinds of ailments appear in the practicing improperly.**



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**Asanas are prerequisites for pranayama, which have to be practiced by following the methods of recaka and puraka (inhale and exhale). Little gain will ensue by asanas practiced with little knowledge of breath control.**

**Now we have seen how asanas are important for the healing and prevention of diseases. For example, certain asanas are prescribed to cure diabetes: Janushirshasana, baddhakonasana, and upavishtakonasana.**

☸ due to their effect on the vagus nerve

**For constipation and ailments of the anus, baddhakonasana is prescribed. In the posture of baddhakona, contracting the anus, one performs the long recakas and purakas (inhales and exhales). Sri Vamana says that this practice heals the diseases of anus. I know from experience that many have found themselves benefited by these practices.**

**But to ensure the stability of these asanas, many others must precede them. While practicing the posture prescribed for a certain ailment one must stay in it long enough to perform at least 50 receka-purakas (breaths). In this way the ailments become healed. But it cannot be said that by performing only those prescribed asanas, a person can cure a specified ailment. Only when all organs are functioning with proper blood circulation can the ailments recede, not otherwise. To understand this point, one should approach well-versed yogi, which means that a Guru is essential.**

☸ It is not just the asana that detoxify the body, it is the heat, the sequencing, the breathing and the bandhas combined with the asana that create quite an extraordinary therapeutic system -- this increases our blood circulation to all areas of the body -- circulation in the body is what keeps it healthy, blood brings nutrients to the cell and removes the waste, without this circulation cells can not stay healthy.

☸ The actual practice of learning and doing Ashtanga Yoga is therapy—the breathing, sweating, stretching, rearranging, realigning, squeezing and soaking, purifying, and transforming. It cleans out the system, destressing and detoxing as it assists the body in its ability to heal itself and maintain a strong and healthy immune system.

**In conclusion, one practicing yoga with correct knowledge thereof knows no fear of diseases and sickness. But one gets hardly any benefit out of it, if at the same time he fails to have any regulation over food, habits, speech etc. Therefore, it is my experience, which agrees with the opinion of those well versed in the shastras, that the yoga practitioner practicing with regulation of food, habits, speech and contact will find himself freed from all kinds of ailments, physical and mental.**

☸ Nice reminder here from Pattabhi Jois that these benefits from yoga can hardly come if you are eating processed foods or nutritionally inferior foods.

From: Yoga and Science, Buddha Vacana Trust; Bangalore, India, 1977