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Yoga for Healing by Stephanie Quirk

*“My own suspicion is that the universe
is not only queerer than we suppose,
but queerer than we can suppose”*

Haldane, J.B.S.

scientist, biologist

There are now many accounts of people being healed or restored through the practice of yoga. Better health, emotional balance and a holistic integration becomes evident in peoples lives. Many studies have been undertaken to verify the reported outcomes where yoga is benefitting people. Yoga is also found to be healing for many people, and is turning out to be a cure for some ailments.

But how does yoga work to heal? Why is it effective? This is what I will try to explain in this talk.

Why and how yoga heals appears quite mysterious. We have all felt it, but how did that happen?

We are, ourselves, we need to realize that we are beyond our breath. We are beyond more than our energy. We are more than our body, our mind, our arms and legs. We are more than our intelligence. We are more than the life choices we make. We are more than the ideals and the beliefs that we hold. Even we are, there are aspects of us that are beyond our mold, beyond our

reality, beyond our emotions. There're many aspects to our existence which are way beyond all of those things.

When everything is well and all of our life is coordinated, all those different levels that I just mentioned are working well together, then everything's fine. We feel the wellness. But if one small aspect isn't, then the whole unit, our whole life becomes discordant, becomes difficult to manage. It becomes unbalanced. We feel some degree of disconnect. We may be shaken because of the ill virtuous action or unskillful action that we might, not intentionally, but in the heat of the moment, end up undertaking, we feel disconnected. We feel discontent, and we feel conflict from that. That conflict itself can lead us towards situations, unhappiness and eventually or unhappiness that wears on us. So there are many ways in which we arrive at that state of disconnect.

How does it work for healing? What makes it work? What exactly is it that by practicing yoga healing happens? So often the benefits of yoga occur just by practicing it.

Yoga has always been a very heuristic subject, it is a "method of learning or solving problems that allows people to discover things themselves and learn from their own experiences". – *Cambridge Dictionary*. To enter the yoga path is to undertake a process that will ultimately lead us to inhabit ourselves as living and experiencing ourselves far beyond what we ever imagined. As Geeta once said "It is your practice that brings the secrets to you. No teacher can give you the secrets."

Learning through discoveries made through ones own experience leads to a deepening of qualities needed for deeper integration. This isn't to say that techniques and methods learnt from respected teachers isn't of value, it is ! It

gives the exercises, the arena for ones experimentation and discovery. It is via the experience and derived insight and integration that the healing of yoga comes.

So, just by practicing yoga, we can feel the benefit of yoga that makes yoga more unique than many other physical-physiological-psychological regime or body healing methodology.

The real purpose of yoga “is not about accomplishing, conquering or acquiring more poses and *pranayamas*. But through yogic methods we undergo a fourfold evolutionary process (*alinga*, *lingamatra*, *avishesha* and *vishesha*). These four are *alinga* - unfathomable as there is no mark or sign, *lingamatra* - apparent but only as subliminal signals, *avishesha* - discernable but not distinguishable as distinct or separate, and finally specifically discernable, where there is a specified distinction between things. It is at this level that we get a separate discernable sense of “I”. And that separate “I” relates to we/us/them, you yours, that this those, and so on It relates not just to things but also events – it is pretty much the world as we know and comprehend it.

It is the path of yoga that is specifically designed to work and touch the depths of our being. The yogis who have been devising the system over eons through trial and error, have seen into the deep layers of your existence. Patanjali has codified the system of harmonizing and rectifying errors from our substantial discernable body, to the subtle and to the causal body’s. The practitioners saw that the outer universe arranged itself and followed the same principles ; *alinga* and so forth. So from our individual consciousness *citta* - mind, intelligence, form of the self and capacity for inward reflection is principally

replicated. The outer universe and the inner universe have the same arrangement. We are in ourselves a whole cosmos.

In BKS Iyengar's there is a table, n.9. Call the evolution and involution of *prakrti*. It is a diagrammatic schema of the organization of nature (the nature or characteristic of everything).

So, yoga came about as a method that could evolve us through all of those spheres. Not just the outer physical manifest sphere, but also to work and bring a changing effect through the un-manifest, unspecific spheres of ourselves.

For this project of evolving through all of the spheres and facets of our being, the yogis devised a comprehensive approach. The approach was needed to nourish, nurture and heal everything that may have been discordant, everything that was afflictive. Developed a multi-disciplinary, comprehensive enduring system known as *ashtanga yoga*.

Changes in behavior occur through the practice of the *Yamas* and *Niyamas*, ethical restraints and spiritual undertaking of cleansing and calming, intense involvement in ones practices all deepen self-understanding. Those changes continue on into the further aspects of the *astanga*.

So, an approach in eight spheres was worked out to be able to bring about an alignment with the true self, or a healing change on all of the grossest, subtle levels of our being. As all the levels are continuous, i.e., not separate, the beneficial integrating effects can be brought deeply into subtle levels through the well staged positions of asana and pranayama; emotional contentment and stability of the mind is achieved. It is the way that this comprehensive approach brings about a healing on all levels of us simultaneously. That

comprehensive approach is unified and that unification affects us through all of the levels simultaneously.

Collectively, the ashtanga is a comprehensive practice and its effects permeate through the various layers of our being. People change through its practice it changes their ideals. What they hope and aspire to becomes transformed because they practice yoga. Their way of relating to themselves, to their closest friends and family, their outlook on the whole of society all undergoes a change. Their ideals start to become more comprehensive. More inclusive of society, of their family, of their relationships. And it is through that seeping down through the various gross to subtle layers of ourselves that we begin to feel and recognize exactly how yoga is beneficial.

So many exclaim, “I feel so much better than when I started”, though they may have just begun learning, yet they feel uplifted. But, for true healing to penetrate down through all the subtle levels of ourselves, and for the changes to remain it takes training. That training requires a thoughtful approach and dedication.

The practice of yoga itself invites the dedication to the practice of it. It's not by having a church or a religion or some other moral authority saying “this must be done, it would be good for you.” It's by feeling and recognizing the effect that the practice has had on us that we are prompted to go further with it. We begin to wish for that deeper contact with ourselves, the growing vibrancy of life. Touching all those layers begins to affect our own inner intention and we realize that we are forming our a more refined ideology around this new intention. This is what we would describe as *anusasanum* – consciously stepping onto the auspicious path of yoga.

So through the practice of yoga we learn to adapt. We learn our own inner state. We begin to observe things about ourselves through the practice of yoga. We bear witness to a truth of ourselves. Our deeper awareness leads us to understanding that is beyond all the self-help books, beyond our earlier hopes and wishes.

Asana is often defined as *sthira sukham asanam*. So the position of an asana has stability. It is not that it is inherent that it has stability. It means it builds stability in you, that you also get to experience that stability, and that is something that can't be doubted. It is a truth that you have seen and experienced – *rtambara prajna* (see Y.S. I.48).

You have a certainty that you have experienced yourself in a very stable state. That state is a deeply satisfying quality of experience - *sukha*. *Sukha* is actually a far more mental, pleasurable, beneficial, magnificent state of mind. You experience and recognize that that has happened to you. But *sthira* and *sukha* - - - (see Y.S. II.46), become your experience, become your changed state. You have the experience where there's nothing more and nothing less required of any effort or energy. That it is complete and balanced *prayatna saitya* - - - (see Y.S. II.47). You know feel yourself as complete, in which the element of precision comes in, where things are not left over or left out. It is just a state of completeness *tatah dvanda anabhigata* - - (see Y.S. 48), it brings you the feeling of poise.

We develop creative ways of changing and adapting a pose slightly and derive a slightly different effect. We feel more ourselves as being more stable and expanded, a more unified being, we have begun to open beyond the border that we had thought held us.

In learning to adjust and to maintaining a position we are learning discretion. We are learning discernment. In maintaining a position we learn a lot about patience. All of these, when actually discovered as real experience of practice will affect throughout the whole of your life. We trace and develop our inner imagination, we feel gravity, we are aware of rise and sinking of energy.

Through the practice we are imprinting positive imprints on our body. We are imprinting into the muscles, into our circulatory system. We calm, balance and bring harmony to nervous, hormonal and immune systems.

From the practice we recollect these things, and we collect those impressions that are built within us. We begin to have a storehouse of those changes and impressions. We learn to channel and hold our energy still. We learn to contain and store the energy so it's not lost.

There are further aspects that we are trying to develop. We are trained to coordinate. We are trained to hold a steady, still point while moving through some aspect, often asana or pranayama. That training and holding a steady, still point is the beginning of pratyahara, is the beginning of the quieting and the stilling of the senses of perception and the mind.

We trace the center of our gravity. We learn to become quite dexterous because we have an innate sense of where the gravity, the middle of our gravity is at all times. We learn to keep balance. We enact. We undertake actions of balance, and we train and we take the imprints from those actions.

So, all of these experiences are true experiences. We witness them. We witness them, and our body and nervous system and our mind takes impressions of them. So, we have this ability to evolve and to develop and to refine, becoming more and more skillful in understanding and finding our way

through these deeper layers of our self. All of this is done through practice, through *anusthana*, the auspicious intention and dedication to practice, through *abyhasa*, which is to repeated undertake those and through *sadhana* which brings us the deeper aspects of practice which takes us deeper. We learn and feel the deeper penetration in our lives and we see the bright awareness, poise and equanimity that come from it.

Thank you.