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Meditation and Our Spiritual Nature

When we think of nature, we often think of our world – our oceans, rivers, mountains, forests, and wildlife. We also think beyond our world to our universe. And we think of our human nature. If we're interested in yoga, meditation, or the inner path, we might also think of our spiritual nature, which many of us believe is our most essential nature. In this article, we will look at a belief that most of us hold, and consider its true implications. And then as always, we'll look at how our topic relates to the practice of meditation.

First, let's consider the widely held belief that our essential nature is our spiritual nature – an eternal soul that survives death and exists beyond time. Although the majority of the world's population believes in an eternal soul, very few of us have ever considered what this would actually mean. Let's start with the fact that the earth itself is not eternal. Although its life span may be billions of years, it does have a finite life span, as do all the galaxies and planets in the universe. If our soul is eternal and the earth is not, what does this say about the nature of our soul? It says, or at least strongly suggests, that the soul does not require oxygen for its survival, since after the earth and its oxygen are gone, the soul will still exist. The soul would not need food or water or other sustenance provided by the earth. It would not need senses that

are designed primarily to survive on our planet. And it would not need the linear and sequential type of thinking mind that we possess to make sense of the way the earth operates. If the soul is eternal, it would not require the form of a time-bound being. After we deduct all the things that the soul is not, what we are left with is a kind of awareness or capacity to be aware.

As a human being, when we glimpse this eternal aspect of our nature, this is exactly what we experience – the feeling of pure awareness. So instead of looking at the ocean, for example, we have an experience of ourselves looking at the ocean. When we experience such natural moments, we often attach spiritual connotations to them, although we don't know exactly why. The reason is that we have shifted to our spiritual identity and realize we are essentially a soul participating in a human life. In this state, every activity, every action, movement and thing that we sense carries a feeling of wonder. It is why a spiritual master would say, "Before enlightenment, I worked, I ate, I slept; and after enlightenment, I worked, I ate, I slept." The human life remains the same human life. It's just a matter of perspective; whether we are experiencing from our human nature or from our spiritual vantage point. So how do we experience enlightenment? How do we shift from the human perspective to the spiritual perspective? Or how do we shift from the captive controlling nature of human faculties to the freedom and clarity of our spiritual awareness? First we engage in a practice that quiets our human

motivations and allows our pure awareness to emerge. Naturally the one we'll consider in the article is the practice of meditation.

So where do we start in meditation? We start with what is happening at the moment. So in the very moment that we sit and take a meditative posture, we become aware of our sitting. We become aware of the discomfort of sitting or slouching or whatever position our body assumes. Then we become aware of the tensions in our body. Next, our awareness moves to our mind and the thoughts flowing through it; and finally the natural ebb and flow of our breathing. Our meditation then leads us to directly to our spiritual nature. When we are centered in our spiritual identity, we experience more and more moments that are more free and spiritual and not merely human, mechanistic and controlling. With the extraordinary sense of intrinsic satisfaction that comes from living from this spiritual awareness, we no longer need anything from our human identity other than what it naturally offers. For the spiritual person, here might be the truth of what it means to live a natural life. When you're hungry, you eat. When you're thirsty, you drink. When you're tired, you sleep. Without a spiritual realization and with only human motivations, we are always looking for the next bigger and better thrill that will captivate our senses and make us feel new again. When we are centered in our essential spiritual nature, the simple, natural human life carries a new sense of wonder with each passing moment. ▲

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Yoga: *A Natural Path Towards Balance*

THE PRACTICE OF ASANA AND MEDITATION OFFER NATURAL HEALTH-GIVING BENEFITS.

Further, yoga might be viewed as a spontaneous response of our bodies experiencing this physical world. Teacher Shiva Rea has pointed out that Surya Namaskar (the sun salutation), a basic building block of many yoga classes, are a natural response to feeling the sun on one's skin. We feel physically invigorated, and grateful for the chance to experience a new day. In this way yoga gives us a way to bridge external and internal, to make connections between our experience of the physical world and something larger than ourselves.

The ability to practice yoga - indeed, to live yoga, to embody yoga - is inherent in each person. Each of us has the potential to walk this path with devotion and discipline. Each of us might have a predisposition to prefer one manner of practicing yoga over another, but while the path might look different, the result is the same. Whether our primary path consists of serving others or a focus on spiritual devotion, we all benefit from spending time on asana, pranayama, and meditation. The more we practice, the more clear it becomes that each strand of yogic discipline, each strand of our life's fabric, is interwoven with the others.

Breathing is the most natural, the most fundamental of our actions. Yet in our fast-paced world, full of distractions, our breathing is easily compromised. When we begin a yoga practice and take time to notice our breath, we tend to notice positive changes to our physical and mental health. Breath awareness is the doorway to this system of well-being that humans were blessed to discover and develop thousands of years ago.

When we first sit on our mats and notice the breath, our minds are likely full of chatter from the outside world. We have a habitual pattern of making things more complicated than they need to be. Returning to the breath helps us to strip away the nonessential and

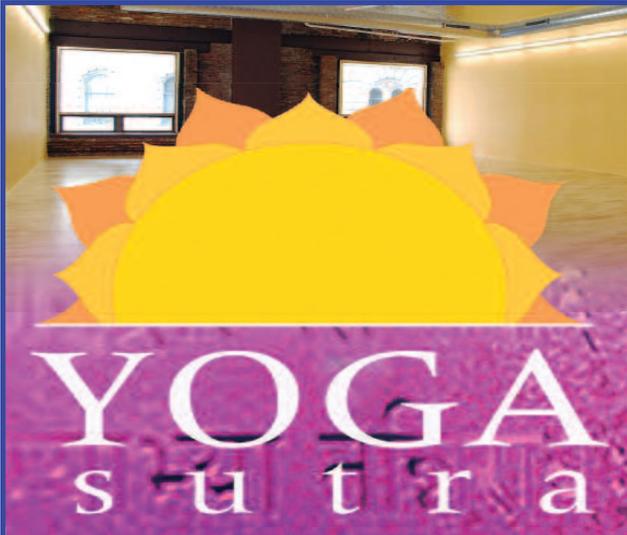
get down to our natural, inner strength. Breath practice can help us quiet the voice of ego and open to a sense of spaciousness in our minds.

We sometimes come to our yoga mats to practice asana as another self-improvement project. In this case, we might be exercising, but we are not experiencing yoga in a deeper sense. When we remember that we need only be fully present in each moment, we have a natural antidote to the sense of striving (and its mirror images of disappointment and failure). Letting the breath flow through us, we can cultivate a space where our created images of what we "should" do can fall away. We can be present for ourselves, and feel the breath as a gift.

We might first meet the yamas and niyamas while on the mat, or through formal study of yogic teachings. Perhaps a teacher advises us to practice ahimsa (non-harming) by respecting our own body's limitations. Then one day we might be about to lose our temper with someone, and the teaching comes back to us: non-harming. Eventually we experience how the teachings on the mat naturally trickle over into other parts of our lives. This can help us to see that our lives, in fact, should not have to be compartmentalized; we can live yoga all the time. In this way, the yogic path tends naturally toward a holistic worldview.

A full yoga practice gives us a natural sense of balance in our lives. Within asanas, we cultivate stillness even as we move. After asanas, we can sit in meditation with a deeper sense of stillness. Dualities begin to fall away, and we see that as we get to know ourselves better, we also can more readily see our connections with others. For example, noticing our breath connects us with a sense of unity with other beings. It is a natural antidote for loneliness and a powerful spiritual tool. We also begin to sense that all beings have the same struggles and confusions that we ourselves experience. Eventually, we are drawn into wholeness and the sense of balance that comes from knowing that our life is our practice. ▲





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Jesus in the Lotus

Many of us feel a deep loyalty to the traditions in which we grew up. Even after we perceive dysfunction in a tradition, we feel it is still our family. If you have felt a call to open up to another tradition, you may be unsure how to respond to the call, or you may have responded in a way that has failed to bring the desired results.

Twenty-five years ago I heard the call. In responding to it, I became a bridge between traditions, starting by becoming a Benedictine monk in a monastery that fully expressed itself in the culture of Yoga. I lived and studied under a gurulike figure, Bede Griffiths, who was also the abbot of a Christian monastery. Interestingly, my own ancestry is both Hindu and Christian, and through my life as a monk in this Hindu-Christian monastery, I discovered that Yoga and Christianity can benefit each other, and that both offer the spiritual seeker important insights. This does not mean seekers must convert to another tradition or otherwise compromise the core values of their own. Instead, one can live the best of both authentically and simultaneously. At the very least, one may choose to embrace the parts of another tradition that are most appealing, perhaps even most challenging, in order to evolve and enrich one's own tradition. This is our future: interspirituality.

Please note that I am not talking about syncretism here, which is based on the idea that all traditions are the same, and that it does not matter which one you choose. Bede Griffiths, my mentor, spoke strongly against syncretism, as do I. Syncretism blurs the differences between, and dishonors the uniqueness of, traditions, and therefore it impairs the unique challenges for growth that the emphasis of each tradition offers us. Followers of any given tradition can always point and say, oh, but we too have that aspect! But the important question is, how much is it emphasized, and, if it's emphasized, how effective is that emphasis — how is it affecting the world today? This brings up the subjects of form and expression. Christianity, we know, is in crisis; and form and expression are crucial to that crisis. This is where Yoga can help, and it can do so by contributing to Christianity without taking away from it.

Many Christians are discomforted by Yoga and are worried about any relationship that develops between it and Christianity. These Christians accuse the Hindu tradition of converting Christians to nonreligious yoga. While it is true that, in its integration into Western culture, Yoga stripped itself of all religious and cultural associations with Hinduism in order to gain credibility in Western society, the motive was never to convert others to Hinduism or to wean them away from their Christian faith. It is also important to bear in mind that Yoga, as a tradition within Hinduism, historically rejected many institutional and superficial aspects of its own mother tradition. Many of these rejected aspects are the same issues that Christians have objected to: the caste system, or external religious observances devoid of inner understanding, or superstitions, to name a few. However, these rejections do not undermine the depth and power of the Hindu tradition any more than the Protestant reformation did to Christianity. Of equal note is the fact that many practitioners of the Yogic and Hindu traditions, in turn, harbor an understandable distrust of and prejudice against Christians and Christianity. In this work, I try to soften these strong views in the hope that they will give way to a better appreciation of what is worthy in Christianity.

Yoga is the fastest-growing spiritual phenomenon in the United States and internationally, and many celebrities have embraced its powerful techniques. Christians, even if grudgingly, have to come to terms with the fact that Yoga is here to stay, and that the influence of Yoga is destined to have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences for the development of consciousness in the West and, in all likelihood, the world at large.

Would it not be wonderful if practitioners of Yoga could connect to what is deep and good and powerful in Christianity, in a way that complements the deepest aspects of Yoga practice? And wouldn't it be equally wonderful for Christians to embrace the fullness of Yoga practice without feeling they are betraying their faith and tradition? The sooner we can heal this divide, the better for our world. It will be a great day when the spiritual leaders of the world can join hands and proclaim that a saved Christian, an enlightened Buddhist, and a self-realized Hindu are equally good, and that a deluded Hindu and a Christian who has not awakened to the core of Jesus's message are equally lost. ▲

Based on the book *Jesus in the Lotus: The Mystical Doorway Between Christianity & Yogic Spirituality*. ©2009 by Russill Paul. Printed with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA.

Devotion: Your Protection in Difficult Times

WHEN DEVOTEES FEEL OVERWHELMED BY DIFFICULTIES AND TRIALS, IT'S MOSTLY BECAUSE THEY'VE ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO SLIP AWAY FROM DEVOTION. In difficult times, the most important thing is that you love God. That is your best astrological amulet, your most secure protective curtain. And if you love Him, then why be afraid? If you're afraid, for that moment you're losing that love. It is love of God that gives you the power, as Paramhansa Yogananda put it, "to stand unshaken amidst the crash of breaking worlds." This is something to remember, to write on your heart, because it's the truth: Nothing will take you down if you inwardly always love God. In fact, when you're really in love with God and in tune with the divine flow, you find that nothing else matters very much. You understand that things happen as they ought to and that ultimately, everything works out for the best.

LET GOD SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

People who are very worldly have a tendency to laugh at devotees as "impractical." What they can't figure out is why things somehow go so well for those devotees who don't worry too much about any of the things worldly people consider so important. But when you love God and put your trust in him, you find that He solves your problems for you, through you. All you need is to be enough in tune and your intuition will guide you. The way to achieve that attunement is through devotion and, in that devotion, to uplift yourself in Him and let Him work through you. A very interesting case in that context is that of Jacinta, one of the three children in Fatima in Portugal who had the visions of the Madonna in 1917. Jacinta was seven years old and lived in a tiny village. Her entire life was one of devotion, prayer, and helping others through prayer.

Because of her devotion, and the intuition that resulted, she was able to give counseling to adults concerning the kinds of problems and difficulties that only adults have. She was able to understand their problems, not necessarily from the mind, but she said things that showed a deep understanding was coming through her.

That kind of understanding comes from being in tune with the divine flow. Saint Teresa of Avila said, "In a moment of ecstasy, you understand things that it would take you many years of study to grasp on a mental level."

The mind functions at a very low level of your total potential but in ecstasy, in that experience of oneness with the Divine, suddenly you understand. You understand how God manifests in the world — how He manifests through languages, through food, through the flow of history, through an individual's problems. You understand without reading, studying or thinking.

GOD WATCHES THE HEART

I have often seen people on the spiritual path who think they can have their feet in two boats, who think they can combine a worldly life and a spiritual life and do well at both. Ramakrishna used the illustration of a woman who had lost her husband and, before casting herself on the ground in an "agony of

bereavement," carefully removed her glasses and jewelry for fear of breaking them.

Many people pretend great love for God, but first they want to be sure that everything's in order, that the stock market's behaving itself, and that they've been practical on every possible level. They say, "Oh, Lord, I give myself to you," but one eye is on the door to make sure it's locked.

It's not possible to have your feet in two boats. Inevitably, a moment of decision will arrive and it will be necessary to decide whether to please the world or to take the more difficult step of pleasing God. God watches the heart. If you love Him but give Him a secondary place in your heart, He won't be able to come to you.

WHAT IS TRUE DEVOTION?

True devotion means to love God purely and not to think of anything except, "I long to know You. I long to serve You. I long to be one with You." In pure love, there are no ulterior motives, no likes and dislikes, only the desire to please Him.

Saint Therese of Lisieux said, "I would like to go to hell to be able to love God even there." It is beautiful to think: "Wherever I am, I don't want to lose my love for You, Lord.

This would be the worst possible mistake. You can put me wherever You wish, if You give me the grace not to lose my love for You. This is all I ask."

So pray for devotion. It's a gift of God and by your very act of prayer you will be putting out the magnetism to draw that gift to you. Pray this simple prayer as often as you remember: "Divine Mother, awaken your love in me, and then help me to awaken that love in all."

When you meditate, do so with an attitude of self-giving, with no thought of any reward, only of His pleasure. Try to develop the kind of love that says, "I want Him now but if it be His will,

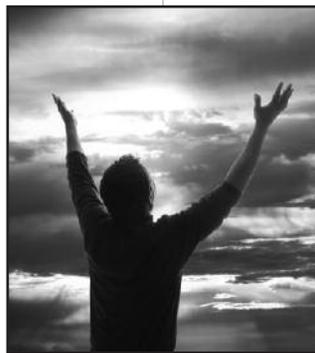
I'm willing to wait forever." The more you offer yourself up to Him in that way, the more His love will be able to flow through you.

"GOD, MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS"

A very good attitude to have when difficulties and trials come to you suddenly is: "God, my life is in your hands." Try to develop that attitude by practicing over a period of time until you can come up with it instantly. It's very helpful to imagine the worst. God will give you joy if you live in Him and, even if calamities come to you, his blessing will be there. People who leave their bodies with God in their hearts don't suffer — any pain they might feel is minimized or non-existent. Those who die thinking of God or for God, like a Joan of Arc, go in bliss.

If in the face of death itself you feel joy, that itself is a great victory. All victory depends upon being in tune with God, the source of all truth. So try to love in a divine, unconditional way as much as possible. ▲

Reprinted with permission from Clarity Magazine - Winter, 2008 - Talk excerpted from September 2008 talks at Ananda Village and the following recordings: Devotion vs. Emotion; Overcoming Obstacles to Spiritual Growth; and The Wisdom of the Heart.





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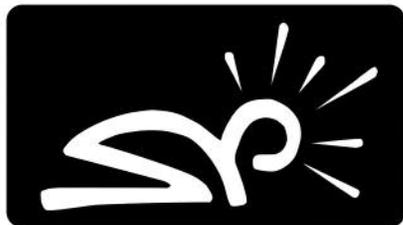
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NATURAL LIVING MAN

NO SOONER DO I THINK OF WHAT IS NATURAL TO HUMAN AND THE EARTH, THE SELF TAKES ME WHERE I CAN EXPERIENCE NATURALLY, THE DREAMTIME.

I watched a great hockey coach. He was great because he stressed the fundamentals of the game thereby returning the players to the talents that they had by Nature. As a result, his players allowed their talents to show and scored easily. I saw a great player make a pass that cut through the entire defense to his teammate in front of the goal. The teammate scored easily. *This short Dream seems innocent; yet, it awakens so much meaning within us. Functioning on skates requires a great deal of balance. To live Naturally, we must balance all the parts of us, the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. By so doing, all the parts of us function as a team. The coach, a metaphor for the Higher Self, is the One Who continually sends the Grace that enables us to balance our inner and outer parts. It is only in balance that we can utilize all the Natural Gifts that we have brought to Earth, and the expression of our balanced Gifts easily fulfills the desires of our Hearts. The great player is the One who has balanced and Mastered his Natural Gifts. His teammates are the Gifts themselves. Together, they slice through the defense, or the physical illusions that we meet in the material world. With balance and teamwork, we succeed at manifesting extraordinary results easily.*

In addition, the DreamTime provides a necessary component not easily found in the waking state. While awake, we spend much time and focus on Mastering our Gifts of Spirit. Usually, we do not

experience success until we have practiced for a while. The DreamTime, through mutual participation, puts all our parts together and immediately provides the experience of success and the elation that accompanies it.

A teacher found success in the classroom by implementing new and Creative methods. These methods moved naturally and applied themselves when required. This teacher succeeded because she discovered methods that moved naturally and freely. They applied themselves of their own accord. The teacher had found a way to express her subject by the Natural Gifts that she possessed thereby connecting to the Natural Gifts of her students. This Natural flow eliminated any force and the Natural resistance that accompanies force. Natural Flow implies cooperation and, by virtue of what it is, eliminates all competition.

A friend spoke about the connection of Nature to bridges. Her Truth impressed those who heard it. Living by virtue of our Natural Gifts connects us with our bridges. Bridges are the pathways that we cross when we advance to a more expanded and self-realized level. Natural Living affords us the ease and freedom to cross at the appointed time.

A marketer for football knew that his football team could not defeat a team of monkeys. This was so because the monkeys played in the heat from their natural habitat, and the monkeys just played to have fun, not to win. Our Natural habitat is our home where all our Natural



Gifts abide. All parts of Nature cooperate with one another. Ego presents us with a system of self-evaluation based on whether we are greater or lesser than another. Conversely, Nature shows us that all of its parts are equal, and each component aids the success and fulfillment of the other. Furthermore, through Natural Flow, we understand that we can only realize our chosen experiences with the cooperation of all those who Create with us. In "Monkey Business," all win.

I walked the Earth. I saw the most beautiful scenes of Nature. I saw bright sunshine, clear landscapes, and blue skies with white clouds. I acknowledged the beauty of it all. Walking the Earth in the DreamTime re-turns us to our origins on the Earth. We first experienced the scenes above as we connected with the Garden of Eden, the land of the First Light. We were then free to walk the Earth and share in its unlimited bounty. Though we had descended into physical form, we still saw our Father in the bright sunshine and our Mother in the clear landscapes of the Earth. Now, by acknowledging the magnificence of it all, we re-connect to our Spirit Self, the part of us that had never left Divinity. It is in Nature and Natural Living that we abide in the Glory of who we are. ▲

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WHEN NATURAL'S NOT NORMAL



“NATURAL” IS A HIGH-VALUED WORD FOR MOST OF US THESE DAYS. STILL IT DOES GET A BIT TRICKY AT TIMES.

It means, on the one hand, just what’s normal, or expected, in a situation. As in, “It’s natural to grieve a loss.” But it goes regularly a bit deeper and signifies flows from the primary “nature” of a process or thing. So I might assert, “Economic collapse is the natural result of unregulated greed.” And sometimes, more often than we might like these days, what’s “normal” is not at all in accordance with the deeper nature of things. What happens then?

For instance, walking empty-handed into a store is for so many of us still the most natural thing in the world. What’s even slightly noteworthy about that, you ask? Right--you don’t see it either. Well, from the deeper perspective, empty-handed store entry is dangerously unnatural. We should be walking in mostly hands-full--with our own set of reusable bags and/or containers. What’s “normal” here is a profound violation of the life-sustaining cycles of Nature. It’s an extremely high-volume, one-way process that threatens the entire biosphere. It’s only when your attention is drawn to the huge amount of discarded packing and carrying materials thrown out each week, and you connect that to the garbage landfills and the presence of plastic cups in the water a thousand miles out to sea—that you start to see.

I spent my junior year of college in Germany. There, I walked empty handed a few times into stores—but stopped very quickly. The cashiers had no bags. You got your own Gepacknezte (“package nets”) and carried them around with you. Otherwise the checkout person looked at you and said, “So vat do I put dis shtuff in?” Still, back in the US, I lost this good habit almost immediately. A good nylon Gepacknetz would crunch down so small you could almost put it in your pocket, yet would hold the equivalent of nearly two of the plastic shopping bags we throw out constantly today. They didn’t—and still don’t—sell such elegant nets here.

One habit I did bring back from junior year, and never lost, had to do with how I used silverware eating. In my family, the proper way to eat involved moving food to your mouth always with the fork only in your right hand. So, to cut something, you shifted the fork to your left hand, picked up the knife, made the cut, put the knife down, shifted the fork back to your right hand, and loaded and transported the bite. When things were hard to stabilize on the fork (think peas), we kids used our fingers as a pusher and got yelled at. In Europe, the fork stays always in the left hand, the knife in the right. The knife is a slicer, but also constantly used as the perfect pusher, to build nice bites. If there is a natural way for two-handed beings to employ knives and forks—this is it. Fewer unnecessary moves, more functionality. I never looked back.

The truth is, we are facing this “what’s natural isn’t normal for us” situation a lot these days. From petroleum-based, largely singly occupied vehicles, to turning off unneeded lights, to how much sugar

we consume—many of our habits are going to need changing.

The two instances from my junior year abroad shed some light on how this can work. Shifting to the European silverware regime was totally up to me—not dependent on any wider cultural mores or supply chains. I didn’t need different utensils. Furthermore, how I ate was either so unnoticeable, or else if noticed so demonstrably more functional and elegant and “continental”—that I could only gain socially from the change. Carrying my own shopping bags into stores on the other hand cut against the grain of American consumerism in so many ways. Widespread pre-existing cultural choices already made rendered my small choice an uphill battle. Not even the better tools existed.

As we enter now a period of profound reassessment and change, there will be many invitations to shift what is narrowly “natural” (normal) for us towards what is “natural” in the wider and deeper senses. Consider making the easier personal choices not all at once, but steadily--as you can. At the same time, don’t beat yourself up too much if you are slower to make the harder ones, where so much in our current culture makes them difficult. Make at least symbolic efforts, and lend your awareness and communication skills to the shifts in broader consciousness that will make the right things easier, and eventually normal.

“Natural,” at bottom, means “balanced” on broader and deeper scales. So, being the change you wish to see, here, means first of all staying balanced in your own efforts to change. In the end, embodying this deep sense of “natural” as you evolve is likely to provide the most success and the strongest impact. ▲



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Diarrhea, IBS and Colitis: Listening to The Wisdom of the Gut

DIARRHEA, OR LIQUID STOOL, OCCURS OCCASIONALLY IN ALL OF US. The occasional and sudden form is often caused by a Gastro-Intestinal ("GI") virus, such as the recent noro-virus, which can also cause purging from the other end of the GI tract, i.e. vomiting. Sudden diarrhea can also be caused by food poisoning, when we eat food that is populated with an organism that irritates the GI tract itself or through toxins.

However, recurrent or persistent diarrhea is a very different animal, and as with constipation, it is more important than the discomfort that it produces--it represents a serious problem that is both a result and a cause of illness.

Previous articles have discussed leaky gut syndrome, stomach acid and enzymes, and constipation; therefore this article will only briefly touch upon these concepts and their related GI anatomy and physiology.

Persistent diarrhea is a medical emergency because it depletes the body of water and critical minerals (sodium and potassium, among others, collectively called "electrolytes"). Though we can survive without drinking water for up to a few weeks (depending upon the environmental conditions), because diarrhea so rapidly depletes us of our internal supply, serious diarrhea can kill in a matter of days.

Until modern medicine discovered bacteria, parasites, and vaccines, diarrhea was a major cause of illness and death. The increased life expectancy that we all enjoy compared to just 150 years ago is due to public health measures of sanitation and vaccination, which largely prevent diarrheal illness. Unfortunately, third world countries still have significant morbidity and mortality due to poor nutrition and sanitation, with consequent death of the young and old from diarrhea.

Though the average adult is supposed to drink approximately 8 cups of water day, the body pours numerous quarts of fluid and it's own cells into the GI tract each day to facilitate digestion. This water is absorbed throughout the small and large intestine, so by the time stool exits the body, there is only 5 ounces this water left. Digestion not only requires huge amounts of fluid; the entire process, including liver function, consumes 25% of our energy. This is why most creatures, when ill, lose their appetite – it is done to preserve energy and water. (So our mothers were wrong, eating while very sick does not help us heal, with the possible exception of thin fluids such as chicken soup!)

The body also loses water through the skin and urine, but it works hard to limit this loss, and will shut down these functions in cases of dehydration.

In extreme cases of diarrhea, where the lining of the GI tract is damaged, blood and mucus also appears in the stool. This is usually called colitis, or Inflammatory Bowel Disease ("IBD"). Modern medicine breaks colitis into two forms - Crohns Disease, which can affect the entire GI tract, and Ulcerative Colitis which usually affects the colon. In addition, many people have Irritable Bowel

Syndrome, or "IBS", which is not inflammatory. While classic IBS involves alternating diarrhea and constipation, some people have more of one or the other.

While Modern Medicine makes a distinction between all of these conditions, Holistic Medicine finds these distinctions somewhat arbitrary. In many cases, people progress from one to the other. IBD has an auto-immune aspect, where a confused immune system attacks the GI tract. In many cases, there is a family history of auto-immune disease. However, genetics determine only 20% of our health – our lifestyles dominate by turning the bad and good genes on and off. We know this from identical twin studies, where twins have different disease profiles based on life factors. Fortunately, the holistic approach to colitis largely overlaps with the holistic treatment for autoimmune disease, so there can be healing of both (and other) conditions simultaneously.

Why Diarrhea?

The body's reason for diarrhea is often simple - it can't or doesn't want to handle what is in the bowel. The same usually goes with vomiting. Assuming that the body is wiser than our mind (modern man's mind is only 50-100,000 years old; our digestive wisdom is hundreds of millions of years old), we should acknowledge and be thankful for the message that our inner wisdom provides. However, because the symptoms of diarrhea are inconvenient and at times disabling, Modern Medicine, as it does with many conditions, has developed drugs that suppress diarrhea. This may be OK for a business trip or other time-limited issue, but to chronically use a suppressive often allows the root cause to be missed until the diarrhea spirals into a relentless, non-responsive misery. In such cases, desperate patients agree to have sections of their bowels surgically removed.

Holistic Approach

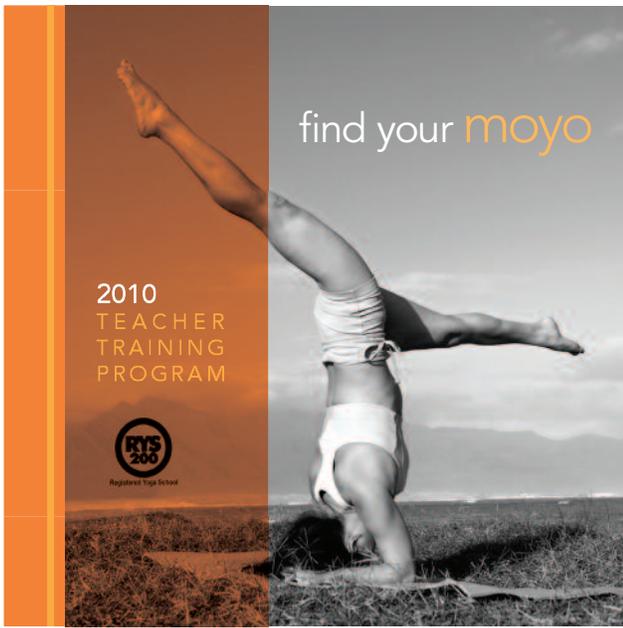
Any treatment that is complex and dangerous reeks of manipulation; whereas a treatment that is simple and elegant suggests that the root cause is being addressed. The holistic approach for diarrhea and colitis is relatively simple. It assumes that there are toxins that need to be eliminated, deficiencies that need to be corrected, and then repairs the GI tract's lining and ecology. This approach is successful in up to 90% of patients.

The approach sometimes begins with diagnostic tests; other times, when the story and situation are straight-forward, treatment can begin rapidly, and the response (or non-response) to the treatment can validate the assessment or indicate a need for further testing.

While a conventional stool test can sometimes identify bad bacteria, yeast or parasites, there are limitations to the stool test. First of all, one or two stool samples may not yield sufficient quantities of the offending organism. Secondly, for some species, the lab technician must sift through the sample, looking for parasites or eggs. This job qualifies for the TV show "World's Dirtiest Jobs". Depending upon the diligence and experience of the technician and quality of the



continued on page 34



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Carol Bowman, MS, past life regression therapist for fifteen years, is the internationally-known lecturer and author of *Children's Past Lives* and *Return From Heaven*.

Carol has been featured on national TV and radio including *Oprah*, *Good Morning America*, *The Art Bell Show*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *ABC Primetime* and as reincarnation expert on A&E and The Discovery Channel.

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sample, parasites may or may not be found. Thirdly, the lower colon has little oxygen in its contents – most of the species living there are designed to live with little oxygen – called anaerobic organisms. Therefore, when a stool sample is exposed to the air, some of these organisms can perish or be significantly suppressed to limit detection. Lastly, it is hard to quantify the ratio of good to bad bacteria or yeast based on a sample. Since there is always some, detecting bad bacteria or yeast may or may not have any meaning.

There are ways around these limitations. Firstly, one lab has developed a test using DNA amplification, the same method used by CSIs to magnify the DNA found in a fingerprint or other small sample. In such a case, the organism doesn't need to be found, only it's DNA. In another test, the urine is tested for markers that are produced by "bad" bacterial and yeast species and if present, represent significant presence and toxicity. However, the absence of such markers does not fully rule out these organisms. This special urine test also looks for markers for good bacteria, and if decreased, suggests the need for "pro-biotics".

Holistic Treatment

So, whether the tests are done first, or saved till later, treatment is initiated with natural agents, and the response provides additional diagnostic information.

The toxins that need to be considered include: bacteria, yeast, parasites, certain foods, chemical toxins, and emotional/energetic toxicity.

The deficiencies that need to be addressed include critical vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and oils that are needed for the body to repair the lining of the gut, to enable the immune system to mount an attack when there are offending organisms, and/or to suppress the immune system when it attacks the GI tract.

It is almost always effective to begin with "pro-biotic" bacteria and yeast. These are the good organisms that can re-populate the GI tract and push out the bad organisms.

It is also important to remove known toxins from the diet and lifestyle--which include hydrogenated oils, artificial sweeteners, caffeine, alcohol, cigarette smoke, pesticides, preservatives, colorants, and cosmetics (which are absorbed through the skin). Foods that are known to be allergenic should be removed, which include at least, all dairy, gluten, soy and nightshades. Since food allergy is a hidden but very prevalent condition, and in allergy the body can react to a single molecule, it is not sufficient to remove most of these foods--they must be totally eliminated, for a while at least. Some allergens persist for months. Once the situation is stable, missed foods can be re-introduced one at a time to observe whether there is a reaction.

Special mention should be made of Celiac Disease and gluten sensitivity ("GS"). Gluten is a family of proteins which are in different amounts in most grains, mostly wheat, spelt, rye, barley, and oat. Some people inherit a genetic sensitivity to gluteins – and consumption of gluten will trigger an auto-immune reaction to the gut lining. Up to 90% of GS goes undiagnosed, and sometimes the tests are falsely negative (i.e. the person has GS but the test says there is none). Therefore, eliminating all grains except rice and quinoa is strongly advocated. Some people have sensitivities to foods without having a frank immune response, sometimes called food intolerance. This situation will be discussed in a future article.

The last toxins that need to be briefly addressed are heavy metals such as lead and mercury, which though subtle, can alter immune, hormonal and nerve cell function and be a hidden cause of any disease.

Often, these measures alone will make a significant difference. Identifying and correcting deficiencies of critical nutrients, through supplementation, if tolerated, is an important component of healing. Important supplements include glutamine, fish oils, gamma linoleic acid (an anti-inflammatory omega-6 oil), vitamin D, and others. Sleep should be considered a nutrient that needs sufficient quality and quantity.

Additional measures include the adding of "pre-biotics", compounds that support the GI lining and the good bacteria that populates the gut.

In addition, when the lower GI tract is dysfunctional, it can reflect and/or cause dysfunction of the stomach, pancreas, gallbladder and upper GI tract. Addition of digestive acid and enzymes (under the supervision of a properly trained practitioner) can be a critical component of healing. Supporting the body's detoxification systems through special supplements can also be necessary.

Chronic illness can cause adrenal fatigue; testing and or treatment may be indicated early or late in the process based on numerous considerations--see the article on this topic published previously.

Lastly, the energetic aspects of the gut should always be considered. In Ayurvedic (Indian) and Chinese medicine, the colon has a significant relationship to emotional and spiritual themes of control, survival, obsession, anxiety, grief and depression. A remarkable healing has been experienced by numerous "unresponsive" patients by the addition of yoga, acupuncture and other specific energy treatments.

There are additional tests and measures that are in the tool box of the holistic practitioner. Most cases of diarrhea and colitis can be healed, even after decades, if these principles are applied systematically in a collaborative relationship between a patient and holistic practitioner. ▲

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of an experienced practitioner.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Your skin is the largest organ of your body. Whatever you put on your skin enters your body just as though you are eating it! It is absorbed through your pores and enters your blood stream.

Do you know what is in your body care products? I find that in many cases, we have no idea what we are putting in our bodies in terms of what we apply to our skin via shampoos, lip balms, deodorants, lotions, and laundry detergents. The principles of living naturally apply here the same as they do with food... when we take careful measures to be good to our bodies, we are also doing the earth a huge favor. Take a look the ingredient list on your shampoo bottle. Is it long and confusing? Do you even recognize the ingredients?

Use the following rules of thumb to make wise choices:

1. Choose products with ingredient lists that are short and easy to read and understand.
2. Choose products made by a small company and/or a local artisan. Generally, their products are less likely to have harmful ingredients.
3. Avoid popular brand names. Even if the word organic appears somewhere on the packaging, this does not mean that the product is good quality.
4. Research and educate yourself. See web resources at the end of the article.
5. Do not be fooled by good marketing and packaging. Many products say "paraben free" or "does not contain SLS" but they have other harmful ingredients in them.
6. Make your own products.

Avoid these common toxic ingredients found in soap, shampoo, toothpaste, sunscreen, lotions, and lip balm.

1. **Propylene Glycol:** Ingredient in anti-freeze and found in make-up, lotion, deodorant, sunscreen, shampoo. Can cause skin irritation and cancer. It is an endocrine disrupter (hormonal system) and a neurotoxin (brain and nervous system).
2. **Parabens (Butyl, Methyl, Ethyl, Propyl):** Found in toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, styling mouse. Endocrine disrupters- Parabens attach to your estrogen receptors and disrupt your own estrogen from working naturally in your body. Neurotoxin.
3. **Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLS):** Chemists use this to split cells open in the lab... and we put it on our heads in via shampoos and toothpastes! Also found in bubble bath solution and mascara. Strong skin irritant.
4. **Petrolatum, Paraffin, Mineral Oil:** Interfere with your body's own natural moisturizing mechanism, found in lip balms and lotions. Derived from petroleum.

5. **Dimethicone:** A drying agent found in lip balms and lotions, sunscreen, and eye shadow.
6. **Phthalates:** Plasticizing ingredients linked to birth defects. Found in nail polish, cuticle treatments, wart removal. Toxic to the environment, respiratory system, immune system, nervous system.
7. **Flouride:** Found in toothpaste, mouthwash, breath fresheners. Occupational hazard, neurotoxin, toxic to organs, aids tumor formation, endocrine disruptor.
8. **Artificial Fragrance:** Can cause asthma. Found in perfumes, lotions, shampoo.
9. **Diethanolamin (DEA or TEA):** Causes allergies, skin irritation, and toxic to immune system. Found in sunscreen, moisturizers, foundation, hand cream, soap.
10. **Synthetic dyes:** Neurotoxins.
11. **Titanium Dioxide:** An effective window cleaner because it degrades anything it touches. Toxic to respiratory and immune system. Found in sunscreens. Please note - the nanoparticles are even more dangerous as they absorb deeper into your body.
12. **Zinc Oxide:** Mutates skin cells, endocrine disrupter. Found in sunscreens.
13. **Aluminum:** Toxic heavy metal. Neurotoxin
14. **Toluene:** Made from tar. Found in fragrances, Causes organ damage

Do not be fooled by all the products carried in health food stores. Just because they have healthy looking labels does not mean they are good quality.

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www.youngliving.us
www.aubrey-organics.com

Read more here

<http://www.organicconsumers.org/bodycare/index.cfm>
<http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/> (look up a product or an ingredient and they will tell you how harmful it is)

As with food, it is important to transition slowly to avoid overwhelm. If you are a typical American, you are bombarding your body daily with neurotoxins via skin and hair care products and toothpaste. Start by using a better toothpaste or deodorant. Take the body care product that you use most frequently and use a better version of that. More companies are responding to consumer demand for better products. Do your part by demanding purity of the product and integrity in advertising. I prefer to use products from reputable companies or made by someone I know because then I know that what is on the label is true. Remember that your health is precious and you are valuable. Feeding your skin naturally is an important piece of reclaiming and enhancing your health! ▲

