

Tricks of the Trade and Habits of the Mind:

A Companion to “Ayurveda and the Mind” section from the March manual

Yogic medicine ultimately improves the quality of life through practices that elevate consciousness from the gross, through the subtle into the Divine. Yoga is concerned with how imbalances in the mind cause disorder in the body and looking outward for treatment is like grasping smoke in our hands. Good health, like happiness, is found first inside and then transmits outward. Understanding how our mind works will lead us into a greater understanding and deeper knowledge of how the gross body functions. If the mirror is cracked, light reflects in fragments. If the mirror is clean of qualities the image and the source unify.

We are all seduced by ideas: the idea of money, riches, big houses, beauty that lasts, health, importance of identity, and on and on. Our minds are experts at convincing our attention to stray from that of Love and Compassion to finding ways of fulfilling the most civilized ideas. Our minds are so adept at manipulation we are blind to its power and think what we want must be truth itself, because if it comes from the voice inside, it must be true!

For me shopping at REI is like being a child in a candy store. My mouth tends to water, my eyes bulge and my pulse races. I tend to wander the store taking mental inventory of what I lack, what I want most and what I think I need to survive another relatively short hike into the safe mountains by my house. To my advantage, and thank the Lord for this, I have my awareness, and unlike most kids, I only cry on the inside when I leave empty handed!

Realizing the tendency to follow my mind's wishes I look deeper into my life, and of course, those around me, and begin to see consistent habits that mask the manipulating nature of the mind. From my friend's habit of buying the latest technology, to a farmer's constant impulse to buy amulets that protect from ungodly winds and droughts I see our habits betray our deeper Nature, which is that of steady abundance and Presence.

Ayurveda and Yoga conspire to illuminate the wisdom of our True Consciousness and bring awareness to the illusion of the grasping mind. Without first identifying our habits and linking those to their source we have less chance for living sattvically, or with balance and harmony in mind rather than desire. So before we resolve to destroy the impulses to reach for whatever satiates those desires we must practice self-love and self-empathy, allowing life to be what it is without adding extra criticism and judgment. “Yes I want to buy that because I was taught I will ‘feel’ better if I do.” Or, “I’m gonna eat another piece of cake because I love the taste, even though I know I might not feel so good.” Know what you are doing and why you are doing it. If you can't explain your motivation, take some time before completing that action. Make those conscious

mistakes with care and compassion for yourself. Allow yourself the room to make these conscious mistakes until you are really ready for change.

Your mind will deceive you into fulfilling its desires and when you think you have one habit caged, the mind will spring the lock another way. When you are quitting smoking and end up in smoky bars; when you resolve to stop watching TV and pay attention while eating and end up reading the back of the cereal box; when you want to stop flirting and are sitting in meditation thinking of sex. The mind will create alternate routes to its destination, which is getting what it wants. The path here is not to isolate a habit in a metaphoric prison. The habit existed to satisfy a need that at one time was unmet. This habit is connected to various emotions and states of mind and so simply trying absolving your relationship to it will leave that part of your life unsettled. What we want to do is form a healthy and loving relationship to the original need. The irony is that the original need is no longer usually present and the habit itself is outdated. For example I started smoking at a young age to help relax myself in times of stress. Over time my meditation and deep breathing practice satisfied this need and unfortunately the smoking continued, "out of habit." When I tried to quit simply because it was "bad for my health," I didn't want to let go of the action itself, because I had not dealt with the original need. So when I finally understood, by means of consistent practice, discipline and non-attachment, that I no longer needed the action of smoking to calm me down I could then lay down the habit.

The dharma here is that we suffer because we create a world of illusory needs, which are actually strategies of the mind for fulfilling desires. The real needs, which are love, understanding, acceptance, compassion, community, etc can be met in each conscious moment, without creating habits of mind. When we fulfill a need the mind unconsciously creates a memory of that experience and seeks it out again and again. We must learn, through cultivating awareness and discriminative wisdom, how not to get involved in the mind's schemes to hoard those feelings of pleasure or to avoid pain. Things come and they go and the mind grasps at its desires without realizing (or not caring about) the cost.

Yoga teaches us to choose the most sattvic strategies for fulfilling needs without becoming attached to those strategies.

