

Yoga Ayurveda 12-Step Recovery

Overcoming addiction with a combination of ancient wisdom and modern practical tools

Many who desire to stop their addictive/compulsive behaviors turn to the numerous 12-step programs available nowadays. The most remarkable aspect of these 12-step programs is the fact that only the first of the 12 steps makes any mention of the addictive substance or act.

Sobriety is described as a “daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.” Our opportunity for genuine spiritual fulfillment is strengthened when we weave together the ancient wisdom of Yoga and Ayurveda with the practical tools of recovery programs. Together they offer us a truly empowering personal program of recovery.

“To Thine Own Self Be True” is commonly used in 12-step programs. This directly relates to the basis of health described by the Sanskrit word “Svastha,” which means “to be established in the self.” Ayurveda, like 12-step recovery work, is designed for those who are ready to take responsibility for themselves. Ayurveda views each individual as a unique expression of the five elements, refined into three essential doshas (Vata, Pitta and Kapha—biological humors).

Knowledge of your Ayurvedic constitution can be of great benefit in recognizing your addictive behaviors and the needs and vulnerabilities that underlie them. Vata types are prone to addiction and they are the most easily and severely damaged by them. They usually become addicted to substances that reduce their pain, worry, anxiety and insecurity. Pitta people adopt addictions that keep them at the high level of intensity and activity that they

associate with success. Pitta people tend to be self-righteous and have a hard time recovering unless they are convinced it is in their best interest. Kapha people may use substances to stimulate them as they tend toward lethargy and often fall into food addiction because of poor eating habits. These individuals have the strongest systems and can take more abuse from bad habits. Consequently, they have the hardest time recovering.

By understanding your Ayurvedic constitution, you can learn the areas in which you may become vulnerable when you are under stress, and you can determine what kinds of activities and changes in your lifestyle can best help you restore balance in mind and body.

Ayurveda offers simple and practical methods to maintain health and prevent disease through the use of such tools as proper daily and seasonal routines. It revitalizes the body’s systems and boosts the immune system, giving you a strong foundation in health to face the challenges and stresses of daily life without resorting or relapsing into old addictive behaviors.

All addictions are part of a psychological pattern of dependency. This must be addressed through efforts to contact the true Self that is independent and transcends environmental influences. In this regard, the 12-step program is like an introduction to the vast subject of Yoga—in particular, a synthesis of the four classical Paths of Yoga (Raja, Karma, Bhakti and Jnana Yoga). Raja Yoga is represented by the Eight-Fold Path and bears a striking

resemblance to the suggested personal recovery work outlined in the 12 steps; both suggest meditation as a sure method of consciously connecting with our Higher Power/Self. Meditation is preceded in Raja Yoga by purification through practice of the yamas, niyamas, asanas, etc. Similarly, the first 10 steps require moral inventory, confession of personality defects and restitution to those harmed. Helpfulness to others and the necessity of belief in and dependence upon God in the 12-step program are the tenets of Karma Yoga (selfless service) and Bhakti Yoga (devotion). Jnana Yoga is affirming our True Self; once we realize our True Nature, all psychological problems are removed at the roots. Affirmation of, and identification with the Self removes all cravings, self-esteem problems and self-defeating behaviors.

These Yogic paths towards self-realization are revealed through the practice of the five principles of Yoga as summarized by great Yoga Master Swami Vishnu devananda:

1. Proper exercise; 2. Proper breathing; 3. Proper relaxation;

4. Proper diet and 5. Positive Thinking and Meditation.

Combining the five Points of Yoga, the Yogic psychology of how to deal with the mind and the Yogic philosophy of the Self with the practice of the principles of the 12 steps, alongside an Ayurvedic lifestyle, offers a sure path from self-destruction to Self-realization—one day at a time.

This powerful combination can be experienced in depth at The Sivananda Yoga Farm in Grass Valley, offering two “Yoga, Ayurveda and 12-Step Recovery Retreats” in 2006. Our therapists are all active members of 12-step programs and a daily open 12-step meeting is offered alongside yoga asana and pranayama classes, meditation, Ayurveda workshops and talks on Yoga and techniques to understand and train the mind.

Four-day weekend, April 20-24, 2006; five-weekday retreat, August 13-18, 2006. See www.yogafarm.org for details.

For more information, contact Cathy O’Neill (Durga), BA, CAS, PKS, Certified Sivananda Yoga Teacher Tel: (530) 993 6048.