

# YOGA RESEARCH

The Yoga Research Society Newsletter

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## Yoga & the Power of Digestion

Taking the digestive system into consideration...we find that the principal organs responsible for digestion are the stomach, the small intestine, the pancreas and the liver. All of them are situated in the abdominal cavity which is supported by the pelvis from below and by very strong muscles on all the other sides.

Nature has made ample provision for maintaining the health of the digestive organs by arranging for an automatic and gentle massage of these organs for all the twenty-four hours of the day. To understand how this massage is carried out, one has to observe the abdominal movements of a man in normal respiration.

With every exhalation the front abdominal muscles are contracted and they push all the abdominal viscera including the organs of digestion inwards and upwards. In doing this they gently massage these abdominal viscera. Again at the time of inhalation the diaphragm presses the abdominal viscera downward and forward; and the relaxing abdominal muscles while being driven forward by the pressing viscera, again give them a gentle massage. In this way something like fourteen to eighteen times every minute the digestive organs are being massaged by the abdominal muscles gently and automatically.

This gentle and automatic massage is the most important provision made by Nature for keeping the digestive organs healthy. Now it is obvious that this automatic massage can be most effectively given only if the abdominal muscles are strong and elastic. But if they are weak, they cannot massage the abdominal organs properly, and indigestion is the result. In people suffering from dyspepsia, these abdominal muscles are found to be too rigid or too weak. Hence if perfect digestion is to be secured, the abdominal muscles must be kept strong and elastic.

Do the Yogic poses make any provision for preserving the strength and elasticity of the abdominal muscles? Yes, they do. The Yogic poses not only keep the abdominal muscles strong and elastic, thus ensuring an effective automatic massage of the digestive organs, but they also make a special provision for giving a forced and vigorous internal massage to the abdominal organs with such a degree of efficiency as is hardly to be met with in any other system of health culture.

It is an admitted scientific fact that muscles can maintain their strength and elasticity if they are subjected to stretching and contracting exercises. Bhujāṅgāsana, Śalabhāsana and Dhanurāsana are fine stretching exercises for the front abdominal muscles, and serve as contracting exercises for the back muscles. Yoga-Mudrā,

Paśchimātāna, and Halāsana require vigorous contraction of the front abdominal muscles and put the back muscles on a very healthy stretch. What these six poses do for the front and back muscles of the abdomen, is done by Vākṛāsana and Ardha-Matsyendrāsana for the side abdominal muscles. Śalabhāsana very vigorously exercises the diaphragm. Thus it

will be clear that Āsanas can give an efficient exercise to all the abdominal muscles and enable them to carry out the automatic massage of the viscera very effectively.

However, when we take into consideration Uḍḍiyāna and Nauli, we see the real beauty of the Yogic exercises. Uḍḍiyāna gives a vertical massage to the abdominal organs. One can see with his own eyes the abdominal viscera slipping up and down behind the front abdominal muscles and thus getting themselves massaged vertically. Nauli gives a lateral massage to the abdominal organs. The two contracted recti roll from side to side across the whole expanse of the abdomen several times a minute, giving all the viscera lying behind them a massage the efficacy of which is simply surprising.

No impartial student of the different systems of health culture can resist the conclusion that Uḍḍiyāna and Nauli have no parallel in any other system and that the

*continued*



## Transformations of Myth Through Time

by Joseph Campbell  
Harper & Row, 1990

Joseph Campbell was this century's greatest mythology teacher. He compared seemingly disparate folklore and religions, treated each with respect, and celebrated recurrent motifs, as well as explained why myths are important to us.

This book shows, again, his broad knowledge of myths and religions both renowned and obscure. In one chapter he goes through a Navaho myth, with tangents to Iceland, the Old Testament, Catholicism, the Greeks, and Black Elk, before concluding with some general remarks:

*"A society that does not have a myth to support and give it coherence goes into dissolution. That's what's happening to us...But [myth] concerns also the mystic dimension that informs all this. If that's not there, you don't have a mythology, you have an ideology."*

This is typical Campbell. Actually a series of lectures first shown on PBS, the book also has his disarming wit and delivery. This combination of humor, intelligence, and insight makes for delightful and thought-provoking reading. Here he's discussing Mahayana Buddhism:

*"The best discipline is: Enjoy your friends, enjoy your meals. Realize what your play is. Participate in the play, in the play of life. This is known as maha-sukha, the great delight...Bhoga is yoga. Delight and enjoyment (bhoga) is a form of yoga."*

Two chapters concern Kuṇḍalini Yoga and the chakras. Campbell on Chakra 2:

*"Everything is coming up roses. The birds are singing. The bells are ringing for me and my gal."*

But read the whole book!

\_\_\_\_ KERRY BIRNBAUM, M.L.S.



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"Tell me what you eat, and I  
 will tell you what you are."

**Anthelme Brillat-Savarin**

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## Yoga & the Power of Digestion, *continued*

Yogic seers have taken the best care of the abdominal muscles.

The strength of the abdominal muscles is useful not only in giving an automatic massage to the viscera, but it is also of a singular importance in keeping the abdominal organs in their proper places.

These organs are either loosely hanging in the cavity of the abdomen or are feebly attached to its back wall. Thus they require a very strong support from the front. Otherwise they become displaced downwards and lead to various disorders, and to dyspepsia in particular.

Now this front support is offered by the front abdominal muscles and its strength is proportionate to the strength of these muscles. By keeping the front abdominal muscles strong and elastic, Yogic poses not only give the automatic massage to the

abdominal organs, but they hold all the abdominal viscera in their proper places and thus ensure proper digestion and absorption.

When this is done the part to be played by the digestive system in supplying the tissues all over the body with proteins, fats, salts and sugars is satisfactorily discharged.

Swami Kuvalayananda (1931). Scientific Survey of Yogic Poses. *Asanas*. (115-117) Lonavla, India: Kaivalyadhama.



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