

Holistic Influence of Yoga on Sleep

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Abstract:

The text explores sleep from an Ayurvedic perspective, defining it as a manifestation of *tamas*, influenced by factors like the time of day, illness, mental and physical strain, and imbalances in *Kapha*. It discusses seven types of sleep as categorized in *Astanga Sanhgraha*, and emphasizes the importance of balanced sleep for physical and mental well-being, comparing its effects to both life-sustaining nectar and the destructive *Kalaratri*. The text warns against both insufficient and excessive sleep, detailing the impact of daytime sleep-in different seasons and for various conditions. It also outlines treatments for complications arising from improper sleep, and lifestyle recommendations for those with sleeplessness, including diet, therapies, and sensory control. Furthermore, the text highlights the benefits of yoga practices such as *asanas*, *pranayama*, and meditation in promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and improving sleep quality. It specifically emphasizes the importance of *Shavasana* and *Yoga Nidra* for inducing deep relaxation and addressing various psychosomatic ailments, illustrating yoga's holistic approach to enhancing sleep by calming the mind and body.

Keywords: Psychosomatic ailments, Yoga, *Shavasana*, *Yoga Nidra*.

INTRODUCTION:

Sleep originated with the onset of the universe's creation, emerging from *tamas*. It is a manifestation of *tamas*, typically pronounced during the night. The *kapha* dosha is stimulated by food substances that block internal channels and hinder the normal functioning of the sense organs, leading to fatigue and the onset of sleep. When the mind experiences fatigue or becomes inactive and the sensory and motor organs cease to function, the individual falls asleep. A variety of dreams can occur during sleep. Sleep has been categorized into seven types according to *Astanga Sahgraha*, such as *Kala-swabhava* which results from the natural characteristics of night time. *Amayakheda-prabhava*, arise as a complication from other illnesses such as *sannipatajwara*. *Citta-kheda-prabhava* that is triggered by mental strain. *Deha-kheda-prabhava*, originating from physical exertion. *Kapha-prabhava*, resulting from an imbalance in *Kapha*. *Agantuka*, signifying a poor prognosis leading to impending death. *Tamo Prabhava*, caused by the influence of *tamas*

Joy and sorrow, sustenance and starvation, power and frailty, fertility and infertility, wisdom and lack of knowledge, existence, and demise—these all arise from the right or wrong quality of sleep. Too much, inadequate, or insufficient sleep can result in suffering and even death, akin to *Kalaratri* (the Goddess of death). Adequate sleep contributes to joy and longevity, similar to how the minds of the sages were enlightened through the understanding of the soul.

Staying awake at night leads to a sense of coarseness, which disrupts the balance of vata. Sleeping during the daytime promotes oiliness and, in turn, disrupts the balance of kapha. Taking medication while sitting does not result in either coarseness or oiliness. During the summer season, nights become shorter, leading to an increase in vata in the body due to fluid retention and its rough nature. Therefore, daytime sleep is recommended in summer. In other seasons, napping during the day can worsen kapha and pitta. However, daytime sleep is suggested across all seasons for individuals who feel depleted from extensive study. Activities such as riding, walking long distances, consuming alcohol, engaging in sexual activities, lifting heavy objects, experiencing anger, sorrow, fear, conditions like dyspnoea, hiccoughs, diarrhoea, along with the elderly, children, those who are frail, underweight, thirsty, suffering from colic, or experiencing indigestion, and individuals who are accustomed to daytime sleeping may benefit from this practice. This helps maintain the balance of the dhatus and supports overall strength, while daytime sleeping can increase kapha, nourishing the organs and promoting longevity. Individuals with excessive body fat, those who frequently consume oily foods, people with a kapha constitution, those experiencing kapha-related ailments, and those affected by artificial poisoning should avoid sleeping during the day.

Delusion, fever, lassitude, headache, swelling, nausea, decreased digestive power etc. are the complications arise due to sleeping at the improper time. This can be treated by following fasting, emesis, nasal administration. To manage the complications that arise due to excessive sleep, the following measures like strong emetics, strong collyrium, nasal administration, fasting etc can be administered. Sleeplessness leads to body aches, weightiness in the head, yawning, lethargy, fatigue, dizziness, indigestion, faintness, and diseases originating from the vitiation of vata. It is important to go to bed at an appropriate hour during the night and to get the necessary amount of sleep based on personal requirements, developing a routine of timely sleep. If someone's job prevents them from sleeping at night, they should take rest during the day for half the duration, without needing to eat.

Individuals experiencing sleeplessness should regularly consume milk, alcoholic beverages, mutton juice, and yogurt. One should also undergo treatments such as oil massage, powder massage, and bathing, as well as anointing the head, ears, and eyes with appropriate oils. Engaging in activities that bring joy to the mind is recommended. It is important to control the senses and avoid excessive indulgence in sexual activities. Those who adhere to a celibate lifestyle, refrain from excessive sexual activity, and are content with what they possess are less likely to suffer from insomnia and will be able to sleep at appropriate times.

Specific yoga practices, such as gentle stretching, restorative poses, and mindful breathing, can help shift the body into a parasympathetic state, promoting relaxation and preparing it for sleep. Yoga's emphasis on being present and letting go of ruminating thoughts can also improve sleep quality by addressing the mental chatter that often keeps people awake at night. Combination of asanas, pranayama, meditation and relaxation techniques helps to lower the levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, in the body. Lower stress levels make it easier to relax and fall asleep. Specific asanas, especially restorative ones, encourage muscle relaxation and calm the nervous system. This relaxation helps the body transition into a sleep-ready state. Pranayama, can slow down the heart rate and quiet the mind. Deep, rhythmic breathing helps to regulate the nervous system, promoting a sense of tranquility. Yoga emphasizes being present in the moment, which can help to quiet the mind and reduce the racing thoughts that often interfere with sleep.

Yoga can be a valuable tool in promoting better sleep. The practice incorporates physical postures, breathing techniques, and mindfulness, all of which can help to calm the mind and relax the body. Regular yoga practice can help reduce stress and anxiety, which are common culprits in sleep disturbances.

Shavasana and Yoga Nidra are simple and best practices for providing good relaxation to the body and to induce better sleep, but most people find it almost impossible to completely relax the body. Often, there is a tendency to retain tension in certain areas. The entire body should relax, allowing the breath to naturally slow down. Aim to disregard any mental distractions and focus solely on your breath and physical sensations. This practice is valuable for enhancing body awareness and pratyahara. When the body is entirely at ease, mental awareness increases. Its impact extends to both physical and psychological aspects. Shavasana is effective in the yogic treatment of high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, anxiety, hysteria, cancer, and all psychosomatic illnesses and neuroses. This practice is advantageous regardless of one's health condition, as it brings to light suppressed thoughts in the subconscious mind, allowing the active mind to relax and diminish. Thus, practicing shavasana is essential for cultivating dharana and dhyana. Although it is a stationary pose, it rejuvenates the whole system.

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