



THE YOGA OF NOURISHMENT *FEEDING YOUR WHOLE BEING*

TEXT: UWE VAMDEV FRANZ © 2002

There is a big difference between nutrition and nourishment, between being fed and being nourished, between being full (of food) and being satisfied (with what you just ate). In a time of fast »fill-up stations« like the famous fast-food chains, nourishment is in decline while diseases based on malnutrition are on the rise.

Food is primal to our human existence and nourishment is what we can receive if what we eat is really in sync with what we need. As all primal needs, eating the food we need and getting the nourishment which satisfies us, is enveloped in great pleasure. Fulfilling this need promises great satisfaction and comfort. But where has our pleasure and satisfaction gone when we eat?

How often do you go out to eat, anticipating a wonderful experience, in a restaurant where the food looks so yummy, so inviting, everyone raves about it, and after you ate there you suddenly feel tired, exhausted, and even a little disgruntled? Maybe you get food into your system but you were not nourished.

It is strange: We need to eat in order to live. Our bodies truly are nothing more than food, digested according to an ingenious blueprint. So eating should make you feel happy and alive. But how often do you feel that way after you had a meal? How often do you feel that great lightness, great enthusiasm which comes with being alive as a human being.

This is not just a question of our lifestyle, our fast-paced lives, where taking the time to enjoy is an optional luxury. Something has happened to our way we treat and prepare our foods.

The yoga tradition, and so do all other ancient schools of health and well-being, sees food and nourishment as so much more than just the gas to drive our bodies. The science of nutrition in yoga explains the need for nourishment of the different levels of our being. So according to this science an apple would not only give minerals, carbohydrates, vitamins and other substances to our organs, muscles and the respective parts of the body which need these. A certain percentage of this apple would be sublimated into energy feeding the energetic level of our bodies. Again, a certain part of that energy would be sublimated into a much more refined energy form to feed our emotional »body« and so on. All in all there are five different levels of our body which need to be fed.

The apple was a great example for complete nourishment. However, many of the foods we eat today only feed, and not even that is a given, the physical body of muscles, bones and tissues. In yogic terms this would not be considered real food. This is also true for any form of dead animals. If you kill a cow or any animal or animal eggs, the life in these animals vanishes instantly (most people could not eat live animals, an interesting psychological barrier distinguishing us from real carnivores!). These foods only contribute to the physical body. There is nothing left to feed the other levels of our being. This is why most yoga texts recommend a vegetarian diet. It has nothing to do with ethics, because in this tradition of nourishment, broccoli and corn are considered to be just as alive as a fish or a cow. And eating broccoli or corn you kill that living being in the same way as you would eating the cow or fish. But the life energy in plants does not leave instantly, and it is believed that if you eat freshly harvested plants, you can take in most of their life force.

There is another interesting concept in yogic nourishment. Plants have a unique capacity, well recognized by the ancient sages and authors of yogic texts: Plants can absorb cosmic energy directly and transform it into life, growth, vitality. In modern biology this, of course, is a well-known fact: Photosynthesis is one of the most fascinating process in nature on our planet. It literally give plant the ability to »eat« the sun's energy.

Humans, on the other hand, have their own great contribution to make, these texts point out: We can take the energy in form of plants and digest it into consciousness. Yogic writer of ancient India were very clear about that. This process of transformation from cosmic energy to consciousness where plants and humans have to develop a powerful symbiosis can only happen if we nourish our bodies with the life force or prana in plants.



This text is a publication of Uwe Vamdev Franz. He practices and teaches yoga since 1977.
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