

Right here. Right now.

Eating mindfully and applying atha to your practice.

--by Melina Meza, RYT-500, BS Nutrition



I've been deeply inspired in my daily life by the very first sutra in the classic text called Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. The arrangement in which the sutras are placed is related to their significance, so the very first word in the first yoga sutra is central to understanding what Westerners call "yoga." The whole sutra is atha yoga anusasanam. Atha is translated as now, also referred to as the moment-to-moment transition. This simple word, atha, echoes the basic wisdom often forgotten in today's society, that in order to feel whole and connected, you must be present. Right here, right now. But, where do we spend most of our life? Somewhere in between the past and future.

I once heard a riddle that asked, "If you had a treasure to hide, where would you hide it?" The answer is, "in the present moment." What would happen if we started weaving this wisdom from the Yoga Sutra into our daily life and eating? Would our health improve? I believe it would. This first step is perhaps the most important step on this journey because it brings your attention to what you are doing in the moment, no matter what you are doing. How can you ever understand or feel the benefit of a well prepared meal, restorative or vigorous yoga practice, healthy relationships, parenting, working, or whatever you do in life, if you are always distracted with emails and text messaging or if you are busy fantasizing about some time other than right now?

One translation of the word "mindfulness" means to pay attention or take care in every thing you do. Mindfulness and atha have a lot in common, they both remind us that now is the prime time to pay attention to life and take nothing for granted, they both graciously steer the waxing and waning mind towards one goal, one task versus many. After all, can your energy really go more than one place at a time? Mindfulness or atha can be used as a "mantra" to be repeated throughout the day in various activities such as yoga, meditation, walking, cooking, paying the bills, or listening to a friend. Repeating this mantra throughout your day will help remind you to stay present and awake, right here and now. What would it be like to wake up to each moment's sensual offerings and accept that moment as enough?

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Mindful eating

What if eating became a part of your meditation practice? Whether you eat three square meals a day or numerous smaller meals, eating food is something every human must do to survive. To maintain healthy tissues and organs, it's essential to eat the right foods everyday. Because we all need to eat so regularly, it's a great place to consider sequencing in mindfulness and aha into your daily routine. Enjoy how your food tastes, smells, how well it digests, and how much you need to satisfy your hunger.

In the western culture, people are not fully conscious of the fact that they are eating; instead we are busy driving, typing at the computer, watching the TV or a movie, reading the paper or discussing politics or the latest Facebook events while hanging out with friends. Each of these scenarios requires a certain amount of energy output--energy that is pulled away from the digestive and metabolic functions occurring within. There is a classic saying, "Where your mind goes, your energy will follow." So, why not focus on eating when eating, to prepare your digestive organs to process the nutrients?

If we were to apply mindfulness to eating, we would start by choosing a special, clean place to eat each meal, free of clutter and distractions. I believe it is valuable to choose a specific comfortable seat just for eating (like you do for meditation) other than your couch, desk, bed, or car because it promotes conscious eating. This also prevents overeating. Consider the classic conditioned behavior patterns described in Pavlov's experiment. His research proves just how easily you can train yourself to get hungry every time you approach your desk, couch, or car, if that is where you most commonly eat. Conscious, mindful eating promotes efficient digestion and metabolism, so you'll have more energy at the end of the day, week, and year to do your life's work. When you take the same seat over and over again to eat, you'll remember that eating is a ritual for nourishment rather than a reward or comfort tool.

By eating in a quiet seat, you also give your body the opportunity to stop vibrating from the day, calm the sense organs, indulge in a few deep breaths, and drop into a moment of appreciation for the delicious food you are about to consume. The food you eat, after all, will soon become you, so it would be wise to be attentive to your new guests and pray for a speedy, harmonious transformation in the walls of your GI tract.

Learn more about yoga, nutrition, and Ayurveda in one of Melina's upcoming workshops or retreats: www.melinameza.com

Melina Meza, BS Nutrition, 500-RYT, has been exploring the art and science of yoga and nutrition for over 16 years. She combines her knowledge of Hatha Yoga, Ayurveda, whole foods nutrition and healthy living into a unique style called **Seasonal Vinyasa Yoga**. Melina's Seasonal Vinyasa Yoga **classes, workshops** and **DVDs** emphasize the healing teachings of the ancient yogis and inspires students to adapt their asana practice, diet and lifestyle routines to better harmonize with the seasonal changes occurring in nature. Melina is the lead teacher at Seattle's 8 Limbs Yoga Centers and is also the author of **Art of Sequencing** an innovative book that includes 34 unique yoga sequences and over 1,500 photos offering creative inspiration for experienced yoga teachers as well as fresh instructional ideas to jump start a home practice. More information about Melina and her offerings can be found at <http://www.melinameza.com/>