

# Yoga + ayurveda: The perfect formula for balance

by Tresca Weinstein

Larissa Hall Carlson first discovered Kripalu through Ayurveda: her mother bought her a gift certificate for a healing arts service at Kripalu, and she chose the Ayurvedic massage known as udhvertina-shirodhara, which is still her favorite treatment.

Six months later, Larissa landed a job booking treatments at Kripalu's Healing Arts desk. "As fate would have it, part of my required training was to receive all the treatments on the menu, so I could explain the services to guests from direct experience," she recalls. "I most enjoyed the Ayurveda treatments, and found immediate healing from them. When I eventually had an Ayurvedic consultation, I was hooked for good and more formally began my Ayurvedic exploration."

Today Larissa is not only a certified 500-hour Kripalu Yoga teacher, she has also graduated from both the Ayurvedic Lifestyle Consultant and the Ayurvedic Yoga Specialist certifications offered by the Kripalu School of Ayurveda. Since she began studying Ayurveda, Larissa says, she has transformed not only as a yoga teacher, but also as a yoga practitioner.

"The way I've been teaching yoga is so dramatically different since I started studying Ayurveda, and my personal practice has changed dramatically as well," Larissa says. "It changes from season to season, from day to day. I'm constantly aware, in a much more complete way, what's going on in my body and mind, and I make choices accordingly."

Ayurveda offers practitioners the key to a deeper and broader understanding of the complexity of body, mind, and spirit, says Hilary Garivaltis, Dean of the Kripalu School of Ayurveda. Often referred to as "the sister science of yoga," Ayurveda is a 5,000-year-old medical and philosophical system rooted in India's ancient Vedic texts and in the rhythms of nature.

"From ancient times, yoga and Ayurveda were studied side by side," Hilary says. "The yogi in the village was also the doctor in the village—there was no distinction between the two."

Kripalu's Ayurvedic Lifestyle Consultant (ALC) certification provides "a whole different way of looking at the body and the anatomy," says Devarshi Steven Hartman, Dean of the Kripalu School of Yoga. According to the Ayurvedic system, the body is made up of multiple koshas, or layers, including the prana, breath, physical, mental, and emotional bodies. Each person has a specific dosha, or constitution, which requires balancing and pacifying.

"You start to look at every aspect of your life—what you eat, how you speak, your energy, your rhythms and cycles, your connection to the earth," Devarshi says. "You learn about balance on all levels, how to stay in harmony with yourself, with others, and with nature."

Through in-depth study of Ayurvedic diagnostic tools and healing protocols, the ALC training prepares students to provide personal consultations that focus on optimizing physical, mental, and spiritual health. Comprised of Foundations of Ayurveda, offered in two 12-day sessions, plus four additional 9-day modules, the comprehensive curriculum ranges from pulse readings and the use of natural spices and herbs to dinacharya (self-care routines such as self-massage and daily cleansing) and the basics of an Ayurvedic approach to cooking and nutrition.

Many students enrolled in the Ayurvedic Lifestyle Consultant training who are already certified as 200-hour yoga teachers opt to take an additional 7-day intensive that certifies them as Ayurvedic Yoga Specialists. This training offers an Ayurvedic understanding of each stage of Kripalu Yoga; how to use yoga, meditation, and pranayama to address imbalances; and how to customize yoga classes for the season, for the time of day, or for a specific dosha.

Graduates of the Kripalu School of Ayurveda conduct workshops, seminars, and retreats, teach public-education classes, and offer private and group Ayurvedic consultations and yoga sessions. When they understand the qualities and self-care practices associated with a student's or client's dosha—whether kapha, pitta, or vata—Ayurvedic practitioners are able to fine-tune a yoga practice or private session to help that person find and maintain balance in life and in the body.

"As teachers, we can take this out into our yoga teaching, both in private sessions and in group settings, where we can adjust the practice to meet the needs of the majority of students," says Larissa. "I adjust the way I teach a class based on the season and time of day." On a hot day, for example, she might incorporate cooling pranayama into a class, along with postures that stimulate the energy channels that release heat from the body. A "kapha day" (cool and damp) might call for a stimulating, energizing vinyasa to raise prana.

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## Yogic wellness retreats on local farms

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Integrated into the retreat curriculum are simple tasks on the farm, which offer a form of meaningful, meditative exercise. Weeding, picking rocks, or harvesting provide a clear point of focus and feedback for attention, and serve as an entry for those who find meditation challenging. Simply bending over compresses abdominal lymph and organs and increases blood flow to the brain, along with many additional physiological benefits. A participant's state of body and mind will be different by the time they complete the activity—particularly when they spend time cycling between the task and intervals of stretching and breathing. This approach also helps create a new habit of pausing amidst life's momentum—a benefit when participants return home.

So many of the practices on a farm are poignant lessons for our lives—the need to sow, tend, and weed, to have fallow phases and grateful harvests. Modern contexts often desensitize us to the abundant and cyclical nature of reality.

A major theme of Farm Wellness Retreats is to cultivate participants' impulse and ability for self-nourishment, turning to friendships, service, and inspiration from the natural world, as well as food, for more fulfilling sources of satisfaction. Retreat participants learn basic self-care practices and expand their skills for self-nourishment through yoga, breathing, reflection, and growing and preparing food. Nourishment



and self-care activities include breathing exercises, detox, and restorative asanas, as well as sharing, harvesting, and cooking low-cost, nourishing bulk meals for a work-week. Giving people information, however, is secondary to the priority of helping them experience states of being that inherently transform their relationship to food, their bodies, and being in the world.

In the words of Antoine De Saint-Exupery, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea." Creating a context of vitality, community, and contemplation will offer a unique opportunity for healing, economy, and enrichment for all.

Farm Wellness Retreats will be partnering with Shelburne Farms for our regional training, Sept 18–26, 2010, and in the spring of 2011. This beautiful and internationally renowned farm and community education center in Shelburne, Vermont, is a leader in innovative ventures such as the Farm to School Food programs.

In 2011, we hope to expand the organization's work from New England to California and Europe and to formulate a Spanish and family version of the retreat model. Our program vision is eliciting very positive responses from farmers, yoga teachers, and health practitioners. Any interest, referrals, or contributions of skills or funding you choose to share are all gratefully welcomed. If you feel called to train, learn more, or donate services and support, please contact me at [grace@farmwellnessretreats.org](mailto:grace@farmwellnessretreats.org) or visit our website at [www.farmwellnessretreats.org](http://www.farmwellnessretreats.org). ■

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Find out about the workshop Grace will offer at KYTA Conference 2010, June 24–27, [on page 6](#).

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Larissa teaches classes and workshops on Ayurveda and yoga at Kripalu and at studios up and down the East Coast, and often receives requests for dosha-specific classes, designed to pacify a particular constitution through a sequence of carefully chosen postures, pranayama, and meditation.

According to Devarshi, Ayurveda is the next wave, poised to follow yoga into the mainstream as more and more people seek alternative approaches to healing and finding balance. And yoga teachers are in a unique position to catch that wave. "If a yoga teacher is interested in the nuances of how yoga can be individualized per person, Ayurveda is the foundation for learning how to do that," Devarshi says.

In both the ALC and AYS certification tracks, study of the Vedic texts inspires yoga teachers to bring familiar concepts, such as the yamas and niyamas, into all aspects of their lives. "I've learned to apply the yamas and niyamas to all my activities—the way I plan my day, the way I approach food, the way I interact with people, the way I plan my work schedule," Larissa says.

Along with gaining knowledge and methodology to enhance their careers, students in the Kripalu School of Ayurveda experience powerful transformation on multiple levels, Hilary says. "It turns their practice and their lives around, it teaches them how to care for themselves. Their health improves, their energy improves, their lives change dramatically for the better." ■

Find out more about the [Kripalu School of Ayurveda](#).