

Yoga for Holistic Health

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Abstract

Holistic health is an invaluable thing in life. It is a state of wellbeing at physical, mental, social and spiritual levels. To meet the challenges in life good health is essential. In healthy state all the anatomical and physiological factors are in balanced condition and the mind as well as sense organs are working in harmony. Health only becomes a problem when one does not have it. During illness first concern should be to attain perfect health. In the healthy condition care should be taken to maintain this exalted state of being. One should feel energy and vitality pulsating throughout the entire body and mind. He should use all means that are readily available and which are suitable for his specific ailment. Any healing system can be utilized to build up the good health. The natural state of body and mind is with the vibrations of good health. Interpretation of the yogic approach is particularly powerful to provide wonderful results. Yogic techniques simultaneously influence both the body and the mind. Regular yoga practice helps to maintain the health and at the same time can be the good preventative medicine.

Keywords: Yoga, Holistic Health, Health

According to yoga health is an integrated state of body, mind and spirit. There is a harmony in all the psycho-physiological functions. It is well coordinated and balanced condition of body and mind wherein the homeostasis is adequately maintained. Therefore, a feeling of happiness and contentment are essential factors of the sound health. Regular practice of yogic techniques will improve the quality of life by disciplining each and every aspects of the personality. The description of aṣṭāṅga-yoga is found in Bhāgavata Pūrāṇa. The purpose is to detach the awareness from the phenomenal objects in the material world for the sake of Supreme Consciousness to attain liberation. Maharṣi Patañjali has reaffirmed the technique of aṣṭāṅga yoga and defines in the sādhanāpāda of Yoga Sūtras as

*yamanyamāsanaprāṇāyāmapratyāhāra-/
dhāraṇādhyānasamādhayo 'ṣṭāvaṅgāni //Yoga Sutra 2.29//*

Eight limbs of yoga are yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna and samādhi. Restraints and observances that are bound by tradition and lineage follow uninterruptedly in the practice of yoga. These techniques enable the seeker to rise in the art of yoga, are called progressive sādhanā. Through these we can attain

perfection. First five aspects of aṣṭāṅga yoga are individual efforts for the evolution of the consciousness, while dhāraṇā, dhyāna and samādhi are the universal manifestation or the natural states of yoga (*yoga svarūpa*). The first four constitute the fundamentals of the physical hygiene. Yama is the social code of conduct and niyama is the personal code of conduct. They cultivate the correct mental attitude of the individual in relation to the society and self respectively by culturing the emotions. Viṣṇu Purāṇa defines yoga as the union with Brahman, through ātma-prayatna (principles of self-control, i.e., yama and niyama). The principle of yama involves non-violence (*ahimsā*), truth (*satya*), abstention from stealing (*asteya*), continence (*brahmacarya*) and absence of greed for the possessions of one's need (*aparigraha*). The principle of niyama includes cleanliness (*śauca*), satisfaction (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapah*), self-study (*svādhyāya*) and surrender to the God (*Īśvarapraṇidhāna*). Gradually the practitioner develops emotional stability to live a happy and healthy life.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa emphasizes āsana as the most important technique in spiritual sādhanā to contemplate on the divine existence. The dvandvā (pairs of opposites) belong to the physical and mental realms and cause disturbances in spiritual sādhanā. Maharṣi Patañjali has described that having mastery over āsana the practitioner remains undisturbed by dualities (*tato dvandvānabhighātaḥ*//Yoga Sūtra.1.48//). Developing the flexibility different āsana or the physical posture increase the blood circulation with adequate nutrients to all the muscles and joints. One attains steadiness, health and lightness. B K S Iyengar has defined that regular practice of āsana provides firmness of the body, steadiness of intelligence and the benevolence of spirit. In Bhāgavata Pūrāṇa āsana is defined as,

*śucau deśa pratiṣṭhāpya vijitāsana āsanam//
tasmin svasthi samāsīna ṛjukāyaḥ samabhyaset*//III.28.8//

It means in a clean place one should establish in a firm posture, on a seat, not being very high or low. Sitting there, being straight one should practice yoga. There having the one-pointed mind by controlling the senses one should sit and do meditation. Through daily introspection one can find the trap door of the vast subconscious mind for self-analysis. The fire of meditation will burn all the thoughts. Swami Sivananda had said that meditation is a potent antidote to annihilate the poisonous worldly thoughts. Gradually, the bubbling emotions, sentiments, instincts and impulses will calm down through silent meditation.

Sitting in a steady physical posture one should practice prāṇāyāma which expands the level of prāṇa by voluntarily regulating the breath. One learns to stop the dissipation of energy by regulating its flow for proper distribution throughout the body and mind. It strengthens the immune system and helps the healing power. In Yoga Sūtras it is defined that after having perfection the practice of prāṇāyāma should be done, which is the cessation of inhalation and exhalation. So long as breathing goes on mind remains unsteady; when it stops moving the mind becomes still and the yogī attains complete motionlessness. Therefore, one should restrain one's breath. Retention or kumbhaka is an important aspect of prāṇāyāma which arouses the inherent potentials of brain with

concentration and memory power. According to Kūrma Pūrāṇa prāṇāyāma is categorized as *uttama*, *madhyama* and *adhama*. *Sagarbha prāṇāyāma* is with mantra repetition and *agarbha prāṇāyāma* is without japa. It plays an important role for the physical as well as the mental health. According to Swami Swātmārām being established in āsana and having control (of body), taking a balanced diet; prāṇāyāma should be practised according to the instructions of the guru. To define prāṇāyāma he has said,

*cale vāte calaṁ cittam niṣcale niṣcalaṁ bhavet/
yogī sthāṇutvamāpnoti tato vāyurṁ nirodhayet//Hatha Pradipika 2.2//*

It means when prāṇa moves, chitta moves. When prāṇa is without movement, citta is without movement. By this (steadiness of prāṇa) the yogi attains steadiness. Therefore, retain the vāyu. Prāṇāyāma should be done daily with a sāt̥tvic state of mind because, when all the nāḍies and cakras are purified, then the yogi is able to retain the vāyu. As long as the breath is restrained in the body, the mind is devoid of thought and the gaze is centered between the eyebrows which ends the fear of death. Therefore, Brahmā and other gods in heaven devote themselves to practice prāṇāyāma.

Pratyāhāra is withdrawal of the sense perception from their respective sense objects. Sage Gheraṇḍa has said, ‘*yasya vijñānamātreṇa kāmādiripunāśanam*’//4.1//. It means knowledge of pratyāhāra eliminates the enemies of desire, passion, etc. In Kūrma Purāṇa it is defined that,

*indriyāṇām vicaratām viṣyeṣu svabhāvataḥ//
nigrahaḥ procyate sadbhiḥ pratyāhārāstu sattamāḥ//Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā.4.1//*

It means the nature of indriyas is to run towards the external objects. Their restraint is called pratyāhāra or abstraction by the spiritual masters. One has to remain quite indifferent being rooted in his self. Like the tortoise which withdraws on all sides its limbs, the practitioner withdraws his senses from this phenomenal worldly objects having steady wisdom of his self. It leads one to dhāraṇā or concentration, when the mind learns to remain steady on any object. With the increase of inner awareness dhyāna or meditation takes place. Swāmi Sivānanda has defined it as a powerful tonic for peace and prosperity in the daily battle of life. There is a steady and unbroken flow of attention directed towards the same point or region with profound contemplative observation. The mind of the practitioner is controlled as a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker. He transcends the senses and feels the infinite bliss of the self which can be grasped by the pure intellect. Developing the witnessing attitude, it improves the mind-body coordination to attain samādhi which is the superconscious state of self-identification. Awareness of the place vanishes into space and time. It is defined as

*ekākāraḥ samādhiḥ syāddeśāmbana varjitaḥ//
pratyayo hyathamātreṇa yogaśāsanamuttaram//Kūrma Purāṇa.II.11.41//*

Contemplation on the object of the concentration is samādhi, where the awareness of surrounding place is absent. This is the excellent state of yoga. Hence, the practice of aṣṭāṅga yoga gradually destroys the impurities until the rise of spiritual knowledge culminates in awareness of reality. On the decay of impurities through the practice of the accessories of yoga, there is an enlightenment of consciousness, till discriminative

knowledge is accomplished.

Hatha yoga is the process of establishing perfect physical, mental, emotional and psychic equilibrium by manipulating the energies of the body. It is through hatha yoga that one prepares for the higher spiritual experience. The mind automatically becomes harmonious with the proper regulation of the body secretions, hormones, breath, brain waves and prāṇa. Swami Swatmaram has instructed the knowledge of hatha yoga which shines forth as a stairway for those who wish to ascend to the highest stage of yoga, rāja yoga. It prescribes six cleansing techniques which are specially designed for this purpose. They are known as ṣaṭkarma, which specifically increase the vital capacity of the practitioner. Creating harmony in the body and mind they help for the smooth and perfect functioning of the bodily systems to be in a healthy condition. One becomes ready for the further higher practices to attain perfection in sādhanā. Swami Swatmaram has said that,

dhoutirbastistathā netistrāṭakam noulikam tathā/

kapālabhātiścaitāni ṣaṭ karmāṇi pracakṣate//Hatha Pradipika.2.22//

Six cleansing practices of ṣaṭkarma are dhauti, basti, neti, trāṭaka, nauli, and kapālabhāti. The technique of dhauti purifies the digestive system, basti purifies the large intestine, neti purifies the nasal cavity, trāṭaka purifies and vitalizes the eye muscles, nauli exercises the abdominal muscles and kapālabhāti purifies and vitalizes the brain cells.

One who has pure consciousness, takes agreeable and sweet food, practices his sādhanā regularly and maintains detachment from the affairs of mundane life, will definitely achieve the perfection. The food should be fresh, pleasant tasting. A yogi should always regard food as a medicine which will purify and fuel the body and mind for the maintenance of life and progress in sadhanā. The sātṭvic food which is full of nutrition for the nourishment of the body and mind. Food fuels the body and mind for the maintenance of life to keep one in a hygienic and strong state. The well-being of a man depends on perfect nutrition. A well-balanced and healthy diet only can produce perfect nutrition and can maintain the efficiency and health. Sātṭvic food increases the vitality and moral strength. It is very soft and pleasing to the mind with serenity and mental clarity. Being full of nourishment it is highly conducive to the health. Enhancing mental poise and nervous equilibrium it induces meditative attitude of the spiritual aspirant. According to yoga the diet should be balanced and rich in protective nutrients. Apart from all the above procedures sleep is one of the basic need of our existence. It provides optimum rest and prepares us for further activities. Sleeping at the prescribed time and waking up early in the morning are the important components of healthy life. The practice of yoga-nidrā is a potent tool to fortify the immune system of the body. Many diseases can be prevented and cured by improving the quality of life.

In conclusion, during this 21st century the yogic practices give direct and tangible benefits to everyone regardless of their spiritual aims. Physical and mental cleansing and strengthening is one of yoga's most important achievements. It is powerful and effective due to the holistic principles of harmony and unification. According to medical scientists, yoga therapy is successful because of the balance created in the nervous and

endocrine systems which directly influences all the other systems and organs of the body. After all yoga is a means of maintaining health and well-being in this increasingly stressful society.

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