



YEARS OF
CELEBRATING
THE MAHATMA

Yoga

an introduction



Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy

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YOGA : AN INTRODUCTION



Concepts and practices of Yoga originated in India several thousand years ago. Its founders were great Saints and Sages. The great Yogis gave rational interpretation to their experiences of Yoga and brought about a practical and scientifically sound method within every one's reach. Yoga today is no longer restricted to hermits, saints, and sages and it has taken its place in our everyday lives and has aroused a world wide awakening and acceptance in the last few decades. The Science of Yoga and its techniques have now been re-oriented to suit modern sociological needs and lifestyle. Experts of various branches of medicine including modern medical science are realising the role of these techniques in the prevention of disease, mitigation and cure of disease and promotion of health.

Yoga is one among the six systems of Vedic philosophy. Maharishi Patanjali, rightly called "The Father of Yoga" compiled and refined various aspects of Yoga systematically in his "Yoga Sutras" (aphorisms). He advocated the eight fold path of Yoga, popularly known as "Ashtanga Yoga" for all-round development of human personality. They are:- Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. These components advocate certain restraints and observances, physical discipline, breath regulations, restraining the sense organs, contemplation, meditation and samadhi. These steps are believed to have a potential for improvement of physical health by encouraging better circulation of oxygenated blood in the body, refraining the sense organs and thereby inducing tranquility and serenity of mind. The practice of Yoga prevents psychosomatic disorders/diseases and improves an individual's resistance and ability to endure stressful situations.

DEFINITION OF YOGA

Yoga is a discipline to improve or develop one's inherent powers in a balanced manner. It offers the means to reach complete self-realization. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word Yoga is 'Yoke'. Accordingly, Yoga can be defined as a means for uniting the individual spirit with the universal spirit of God. According to Maharishi Patanjali Yoga is the suppression of modifications of the mind.

TYPES OF YOGA

Japa Yoga : To concentrate one's mind on divine name or holy syllable, mantra etc. like 'OM', 'Rama', 'Allah', 'God', 'Vahe Guru' etc. through repeated recitation or remembrance.

Karma Yoga : Teaches us to perform all actions without having any desire for their fruit. In this sadhana a Yogi considers his duty as divine action, perform it with whole hearted dedication but shuns away from all desires.

Gyana Yoga : Teaches us to discriminate between the self and non-self and to acquire the knowledge of one's spiritual entity through the study of scriptures, company of Saints and practice of meditation.

Bhakti Yoga : Bhakti Yoga is a system of intense devotion with emphasis on complete surrender to divine will. The true follower of Bhakti Yoga is free from egoism, humble and unaffected by the dualities of the world.

Raja Yoga : Raja Yoga popularly known as "Ashtanga Yoga", is for all-round development of human personality. These are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

YAMAS (Observances)

Practice of Yamas pave way to increase the power of concentration, mental purity and steadiness.

The following are the Yamas :

- **Ahimsa** - not to harm others
- **Satya** - to be truthful
- **Asteya** - not to steal
- **Brahmacharya** - celibacy
- **Aparigraha** - not to possess beyond actual needs

NIYAMAS (Restraints)

There are five Niyamas:

- **Shauch** - external and internal purification
- **Santosh** - contentment
- **Tapa** - to make right efforts to achieve goals
- **Swadhyaya** - to study authentic texts and religious scriptures to acquire correct knowledge of self and the supreme divinity
- **Ishwar Pranidhan** - complete surrender to the divine will

A set of Asanas, Mudras and Pranayamas practised with faith, perseverance and insight rejuvenates the brain, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidney, bowels, all nerves, muscles, tissues and glands of the body by ensuring oxygenated and balanced blood supply, kindles up the appetite, bestows control over seminal fluid, senses and mind and imparts increased vitality, vigour and longevity to the practitioner.

SURYA NAMASKAR (Salutation to Sun)

Surya Namaskar is the most useful and popular mode of Yogic exercises which briefly bestows the benefits of Asanas, Pranayama and Mudras altogether. It consists of a series of 12 postures which are performed early in the morning facing the rising Sun. Surya Namaskar energises the entire neuro-glandular and neuro-muscular system of the body and its regular practice ensures a balanced supply of

oxygenated blood and perfect harmony to all the systems of the body, thus invigorating the entire psychosomatic system of human constitution.



ASANAS (Postures)

These are special patterns of postures that stabilize the mind and body through static stretching. Their aim is to establish proper system in the neuromuscular tonic impulses and improve the general muscle tone. Two basic principles governing the performance of asanas are stability and comfort. This suggests that the nature of asanas is psycho-neurophysical and not only physical. Every asana should be performed effortlessly and maintained for a comfortable time. There should be no jerks and the performance of asana should not lead to undue fatigue.



Asanas may be classified as : 1) Meditative; 2) Cultural , and 3) Relaxative.

1. **Meditative Asanas** are sitting postures, which maintain the body in a steady and comfortable condition. By various arrangements of the legs and hands different meditative Asanas are performed. The characteristic feature of the Meditative Asana is, however, keeping the head, neck and trunk erect.
2. **Cultural Asanas** involve static stretching which brings about proper tone of muscles. They contribute to the flexibility of the spine and render the back and spinal muscles stronger. They also stimulate proper working of the vital organs in the thoracic and abdominal cavities. There are innumerable varieties of cultural Asanas, which are performed in sitting, lying and standing position.
3. **Relaxative Asanas** are few in numbers. They are performed in the lying position and are meant for giving rest to the body and mind.

PRANAYAMA (Yogic Respiration)

These practices bring control over the respiratory impulses, which form one of the channels of the flow of autonomic nerve impulses. Holding of the breath for a prolonged and comfortable time is an essential technique of Pranayama. However, in the initial practice the breath holding phase is completely avoided and emphasis is put on the controlled inspiration and expiration with a time ratio of 1:2 between them. The expiratory phase is so controlled that the following inspiratory phase is not affected in its slow and controlled inspiration. The main purpose of pranayama is to gain control over the autonomic nervous system and through its influence the mental function is also controlled and regulated. It is useful in higher yogic practices like meditation.



PRATYAHARA (Withdrawal of Senses from their Objects)

It is a method for control of the mind. It is a practice for withdrawal of the senses from their respective objects. It is also a process for the prevention of mind wandering and indulgence to unhealthy thoughts, and hence, can be considered as a psychological practice.

DHARANA (Contemplation)

The attempt of fixation of mind on a single object or thought or sound at any place or spot external or internal of the body is Dharana. It improves power of concentration, memory and intellect. Its regular practice results in peace, better mind-body co-ordination and balanced growth.

DHYANA (Meditation)

Continuous and un-interrupted flow of mind in the same direction wherever the mind is fixed is Meditation. This is the practice involving control of the mental functions which start from the initial withdrawal of the senses from external objects to the complete oblivion of the external environment. It is a process of absorption in which the individual tries to turn his attention to experience. It is not always safer to start one's practice in meditation without preparing adequately through Asanas and Pranayama. By regular practice of meditation one acquires the power to concentrate deep resulting in manifold benefits such as increased physical energy, mental efficiency, creativity, calmness, memory, intellect, psychic power and intuitiveness. The basic principle of meditation is to develop internal awareness.



SAMADHI (Enlighten State)

Samadhi literally means "completely in agreement", also called Samapti. It is a state of super-consciousness where the meditator, meditation and meditated upon become one. It is a state of bliss and oneness with immense being (universal consciousness).

Samadhi is the final state of yogic practice. In this phase there is development of mind for appreciation of yogic philosophy, for knowledge which brings salvation - object of sadhana. With the development of Samadhi, there is realization of soul - (Atma), this soul is also Paramatma as such, 'AHAM is SOHAM' - as the Yogi realises he is not AHAM (physical existence) only but his existence in every being in every individual as soul. According to Patanjali Darshan - Samadhi can be achieved by the practice of Ishwar pranidhan alone i.e. complete surrender to the divine will.

SHATKARMA (Six Cleansing Acts)

These are Yogic purificatory techniques which are meant for the progressive all round development of healthy body and mind. These techniques are classified into six division and therefore they are called Shatkarmas. These are Neti (Nasal washing techniques), Dhauti (Stomach washing technique), Basti (Colon washing technique), Kapalbhati (Purificatory yogic breathing), Nauli (Isolation of abdominal recti muscles) and Trataka (Yogic visual gaze), each one of which consists of many subsections. They increase the range of adaptability of the tissues forming various organs and systems and raise the threshold of their reactivity. Kriyas bring control on different reflexes and establish psycho physiological balance. The modes of purification in the kriyas are air, water, friction and manipulating movements. The regions of cleaning involved in various kriyas are Nasopharyngeal, orocranial, gastroesophageal, anorectal and intestinal.



BANDHAS AND MUDRAS (Locks and Holds)

These are locks and holds of the semi-voluntary and involuntary muscles in the body. They decongest the vital organs, improve circulation and nutrition by pressure manipulations and contribute to general health and emotional stability. A difference is made between the Bandhas and Mudras on the basis of their use in Pranayama. Mudras that are used in Pranayama are usually called Bandhas because they bind and channelise a particular nervous activity in a particular place or direction. Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola are important Bandhas. Some asanas are called mudras because of their specific effects and channels through which the effects are brought about.

SOME IMPORTANT ASANAS AND THEIR BENEFITS

Padmasana - For physical, mental and emotional equilibrium.

Vajrasana - Regular practice for 5-10 minutes after meal kindles up digestion. It is useful for insomnia.

Mandukasana - Increases the digestion. It cures constipation, dyspepsia and flatulence.

Uttanamandukasana - Useful in the treatment of lumbago, cervical pain, bronchitis and diabetes.

Gomukhasana - Beneficial in curing asthma, rheumatic pain in knees and ankles and improves the capacity of lungs.

Ardha-matsyendrasana - Useful in the treatment of diabetes and cervical spondylosis.

Kagasana - Energizes the thighs, calves and ankles.

Simhasana - Prevents the disorders related to neck, eyes, nose and ears.

Shavasana - Imparts physical, mental and emotional relaxation.

Supta-Pavanamuktasana - Useful in curing gastric trouble, flatulence and back pain.

Urdhva-Sarvangasana - Beneficial for the health of eyes, face, brain and hairs.

Sarvangasana - Brings suppleness to the spine and prevents the ailment of respiratory system and neck.

Chakrasana - Harmonizes the secretion of all glands, reduces obesity and is effective in the cure of bronchial asthma and diabetes.

Paschimottanasana - Useful for physical, mental and spiritual development.

Katichakrasana - Useful in the prevention and cure of disorders relating to lumbar region, spine and chest.

Urdhva Hastottanasana - Useful for lumbar pain, bronchial asthma and digestive disorders, reduces obesity and helps in increase of height.

Konasana - Useful in increase of height and energizes the digestive and respiratory systems and heart.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Systematic research with proper controls have been carried out in India and abroad to evaluate the prophylactic, promotive and curative potentials of Yoga. In India, reputed institutions such as Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Vivekananda Yoga Research Foundation and Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla have conducted extensive research using physiological and clinical variables. Earlier research at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had focused on physiological potentials of Yogis who developed extraordinary power of staying in the air tight compartment or underground by lowering the metabolism as well as slowing down their heart rate under voluntary control. These studies indicated that long term yogic practice helps to develop voluntary control over the autonomic nervous system.

Studies conducted revealed that six months of yogic practice leads to enhancement of parasympathetic activities, provides stability of autonomic balance during stress, produces a relative hypermetabolic state, improves thermoregulation efficiency, body flexibility, physical efficiency at sub-maximal level of work, improves adaptability to environmental stress and cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, learning, efficiency and vigilance. Therapeutic potentials of selected yogic

practices in the control and management of essential hypertension and the underlying physiological mechanism were also demonstrated.

Clinical Studies have lucidly demonstrated the therapeutic potentials of yogic practices in treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease such as Bronchitis and asthma. Similar effects have brought out on the therapeutic potentials of Yoga for the treatment of diabetes, low back pain and stress related psychosomatic disorders. The research program conducted at DIPAS with regard to the Coronary Artery Disease regression by life style intervention which includes Raj Yoga meditation, low fat high fibre diet and aerobic exercise showed quite encouraging results in terms of the risk management.



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