

Yoga for Health

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Abstract: *In this paper, we examine different approaches to yoga as the discipline of self-development. Interview was conducted on a sample of 30 yoga cognoscente. Their views about yoga, yogic routes to health and happiness, show that yoga can be perceived as contemporary too of mental and emotional harmony that improves overall health. Yoga contributes to creation of the life style in which biological, social, emotional, psychological, creative and spiritual dimensions of individual are daily cultivated.*

Key words: *yoga, health*

Introduction

Individual's quest for peace, happiness and good health is increased by growth of stress, pressure of time and rapid urbanization of the life style. Diseases are on the rise (coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, asthma etc.). People find it difficult to adapt and make necessary life style modifications. In order to regain health, they keep looking for quick solutions. When they fail to achieve their goal, they take heavy medications. Yoga as the form of alternative non-pharmacological therapy can significantly contribute to the health.

Yoga has been widely recognized as a discipline. Yoga practice can have preventive and therapeutical role (Bhushan, 2004). People have adopted yoga as a tool that keeps the body and mind fit and helps to cure diseases.

Postmodern age, stress and anxiety

Direction towards the inner potentials is sacrificed for the fast hedonistic lifestyle. Greed is all pervasive and it is considered desirable. However, people still feel the emptiness in their life and they still look for the way to become happy. Search for health, as a prerequisite for achieving happiness, became the primary. Although the mortality resulting from infectious diseases declined, mortality due to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, endocrine disorders, asthma and diabetes grows. They are mainly a product of inappropriate life style.

Unable to find happiness in the material goods, people are increasingly turning towards spirituality as the path that will lead them to the yearning for happiness or bliss. The postmodern age can also be called the age of spiritual revivalism.

Meaning of Yoga

The meaning of the word yoga is unity. In the traditional terminology, it is unity of the individual Self with the universal Self.

Around 200 BC one of the great seers Patanjali in his "Yoga Sutras" point the essential features and principles of yoga in the form of aphorisms.

"Yoga is a process of gaining control over the mind." (*Yogah Citta Vrtti Nirodah*)

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“By controlling the mind processes, we reach our original state.” (*Tada drastuh swarupe avasthanam*)

The techniques of mind processes control prescribed by Patanjali involve two aspects:

- 1) Power of ability to concentrate on any desired subject.
- 2) Ability of the inner silence (to control thoughts and speech all the time).

Other important yoga scriptures also portray subtlety of the yoga practice approach.

“Yoga is skill to calm down the mind.” (*Manah prasamanopayah yoga itayabhidhiyata, Yoga vasistha*)

„Yoga is ability of awareness in action.

Yoga is ability to be balances in all situations of life.

Yoga is a discipline; a disciplined mind and a disciplined body are the main instruments of yoga.” (*Bhagavad Gita*)

Yoga in general, meditation and *pranayama* techniques (management of energies through breathing) in particular, provide a being the means to reach the subtler layers of awareness. Results of conducted experiments show that practice of the *pranayama* techniques and meditation incite creativity which is structured in the subtler layer of mind or deeper state of consciousness (transcendental states). These creative faculties of mind lay hidden in the higher state of consciousness (Yadav and Yadav, 1998).

Perception of health in spiritual context

We conducted an interview on the sample of 30 yoga practitioners, with the aim to find the way that they perceive health, importance of yoga in restoring health and methods of the health promotion. Representatives of the Ramakrishna Mission, Arogya Dham (Haridwar), Institute of Yoga Training – Yoga Mandir, practitioners form Gurudwaras, Jaina Mandirs and others participated in this research.

Table 1. The perception of health

The perception of health
Health is wealth.
Health represents the presence of a sharp mind in activities.
Emotional well-being, state in which both mind and body are free from weaknesses (ailments).
Health is the state of spiritual realization, without diseases, and calm state of mind.
Health is holistic balance of mind and body.
Health is more mental than physical quality – it represents a being in a good shape that is able for social and moral goodness.
Health is the state of mental and physical enlightenment, it is a characteristic of the whole individual.
Health doesn't mean only absence of disease but the capacity of expression of one's full potentials.
Mental health is more stable than physical health, which is unstable.
Health is a faith in the soul, doing things for the exaltation of the spirit.
Health consists of physical and mental aspect. Acting properly on both aspects makes us happy.

All respondents express importance and connection between psychological and physical health, bringing the noble values that can enrich life and get the individual closer to the ideal of self-realization, i.e. happiness.

Table 2. What are the characteristics of a healthy person

The perception of the characteristics of a healthy person
A healthy person is one who is physically healthy and active, mentally stable and emotionally strong, abstains from bad habits that would ruin his/her health.
Healthy person is happy and balanced, disease-free, physically active and spiritually elevated, with calm, contented and stable mind.
Healthy person is the one who is able to create pleasant atmosphere and spreads positive energy and vibration.
Healthy person is characterized with a higher level of mental and physical care, he/she uses yoga meditation in order to relax and clear the mind, contributes to society and spreads peace and happiness.
Healthy person is free of diseases, he/she is active, useful, successfully adapted to stress, doesn't harm the others and have a positive attitude towards life.
Healthy person has happy and content spirit, healthy person has a common sense and aims toward spiritual development.
Healthy person is the person who lives life in a full capacity and has good mental and physical state.

The respondents express similar perception of the characteristics of healthy person, stating that it's the person who is active, useful and able to manage his/her potentials.

Table 3. The contribution of yoga in establishing health

The role of yoga in achieving health
Yoga creates positive approach to life, helps in maintaining good shape, readiness and effectiveness
Yoga helps on three levels: at the physical (body) level (preventive and curative) improves appearance and good health; at the mental level (preventive and curative), helps in overcoming stress, improves memory and attention (focus); at the spiritual level, it helps in the process of self-awareness and move towards the self-realization.
Yoga helps in development of mind, achievement of balance between material and spiritual world.
Yoga gives physical and mental stability.
Yoga helps in achieving disciplined life style and promotes health.
Unity with creator is yoga. In this state of existence, there is no anxiety, tension nor disease.

All respondents point that yoga helps in achieving and maintaining the good health: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Table 4. The contribution of yoga meditation in establishing health

The role of yoga meditation in achieving health
That's the path of self- enlightenment and development
Meditation helps in giving meaning to life, makes one clear about goals/purpose in life, leads one to self-actualization.
Meditation helps to gain control over thoughts, thereby improving concentration, visualization, it makes us more confident, balanced and instills a feeling of control over thinking.

Meditation provides inner strength to face the stress and everyday living efforts.
Real meditation leads the individual toward the clear consciousness, not to become unfruitful, but fruitful and versatile. Meditation and yoga renew spiritual awareness.
Yoga meditation techniques are the ways to improve well-being of the individual.
Help in developing inner strength.
The fine art of non-doing, resting the mind, the art of surrendering and being. It helps in controlling negative energy and channeling our energy/thoughts in positive direction.
Meditation is the tool for development of holistic personality.

Yoga meditation is important instrument of the yoga method. It is the method for exploring and managing inner potentials, getting to know our thoughts, feelings and body functions. Respondents stress that meditation is a vehicle for achieving meaning of life and self-realization.

Table 5. Yoga practitioners' recommendation

Yoga practitioners' recommendation for achieving and maintaining health
Leading a balanced lifestyle, avoiding excesses and positive thinking lead to a healthy lifestyle.
Think right, eat healthy, have a routine and exercise regularly.
Disciplined life style, healthy diet and good habits help in prevention of disease.

Respondents point to the importance of positive thinking, which results in correct behavior.

Conclusion

By practicing yoga we can develop mental and physical health.

The old yoga scriptures teach us how to live an active life free of stress and arise in dynamic action. When practicing yoga, it becomes easier to identify the cause of stress as the personal attitude of the individual and not activity.

Mind, burdened by the bondages of attachments, feels suffocation and stress (Sehgal, 2005).

Proper yoga action is based on unselfishness. It calls to get rid of egoistic thoughts and greed and to act in accordance with the laws of nature. Mind, which is a prisoner of desire, is in a vicious circle: want more and more. An individual can bring these desires under control, overcoming greed, lust, desire for reward and attachment. Such action, colored with a deep gratitude, an eternal source of joy, energy and happiness.

Yoga is the pathway to healthy living. The disease makes you feel uncomfortable. Models of illness range from biomedical to bio-psychological model. Bio-psychological model considers emotional problems and stress as the source of the most physical problems. Relationship between stress and illness is influenced by factors such as toxic emotions (anger, hostility, fear, depression, anxiety and jealousy) and healing emotions (love, faith, hope, joy and zest for life).

The relationship between stress and disease is also affected by: (not) provided social support, positive attitude towards life and personality factors.

Respondents who are yoga practitioners share similar views with representatives of the western school of health, particularly in perception of multidimensional nature of health. They all agree that disease contains many etiological elements, that the roots of disease may lie in the emotional problems; that diseases caused by stress can be prevented and treated by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Consideration of health by yoga practitioners find support in modern scientific research on the basics of good health and the ways to achieve it. These traditional methods are increasingly adopted around the world. The striking difference in perception of health in yoga practitioners and modern medicine is its emphasis on spirituality, yoga and yoga meditation, as a major catalyst of good health.

Practicing yoga also gives the opportunity to achieve self-actualization and peak experiences (Maslow, 1968). Traditional yoga model of good health is holistic in its approach and has a universal character. Judging

by different statements of respondents, spiritual health is a state of well-being. It is a state of being in which we are at peace with ourselves. It is a state in which we have a support in ourselves, which is filled with self-esteem and confidence, which comes from the experience of unity that gives a special meaning and purpose to life.

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