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THE CONTRIBUTION OF YOGA TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES

Summary: *During 1990s, there have been started substantial researches on the impact of emotional intelligence on various aspects of human life. In this paper, we considered contribution of yoga to the development of emotional competences through theoretical approach. Two elements of emotional competence were considered – self-awareness and self-control. Self-awareness or emotional awareness as the way of understanding of the manner that emotions influence working behavior and efficient decision making. We concluded that self-awareness represents the first step toward self-control and empathy with other people and that yoga practice may significantly influence that process. In the self-awareness development we listen to emotions and learn from them. Since yoga practice helps to increase self-control, the paper concludes that specific yoga techniques may be used in development of emotional competences and that there are needed further researches in order to examine this phenomenon.*

Key words: *emotional intelligence, yoga, self-awareness, self-control, self-realization, emotions.*

Introduction

The word yoga means unity and comes from the Sanskrit word yuj, which means to unite. In a spiritual light, this unity refers to the union of individual consciousness with the universal one. On a practical level, yoga means the way of balancing and harmonizing body, mind and emotions.

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras Yoga affects all four aspects of our mind (reason, intellect, subconscious mind and ego), which enables it to make an individual self-conscious, empathic, motivated or self-adaptive. All these qualities are known as elements of the concept of emotional intelligence. Even Mahatma Gandhi stressed the importance of the emotional dimension of an individual's life. He underlined that the man is conditioned and guided by his heart, not his intellect. He believed that the heart accepts the decisions that the intellect requires reflection on.

Yoga is an integral part of the philosophy of the East, the study of man and the totality of his being. Its goal is to bring about the harmonious development of man's abilities and potential using systematic methods of practice. Practicing yoga affects the establishment of health, and it is also the prerequisite of the harmonious functioning of all human physiological, biological, psychological, mental and spiritual functions. In 1977 World Health Organization stressed effectiveness of yoga and Ayurveda - traditional Indian medicine, which views a man in his totality and never heals the body alone.

Yoga has been practiced in an organized way in Serbia (in the form of associations and centers) since the 1960s. Still, it could be argued that it experienced a boom during the last 10 or so years with foundation of the Yoga Federation of Serbia, by Prof. PhD Predrag Nikic. Nevertheless, the number of studies dealing with the impact and contribution to yoga to different aspects of life, such as: spiritual, mental, and emotional, is still small. Therefore, I would like to stress the importance of the activities of Yoga Center Serbia and Yoga Federation of Serbia, which initiate scientific research in various scientific fields, perceiving yoga as a scientific discipline, as the experience and philosophy of life.

The starting point of this research is the hypothesis that there is a connection between the practice of yoga and the development of certain emotional competencies. The paper is based on a theoretical

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comparison of previously conducted research by way of summarizing and analyzing results. Sample was made of 30 participants out of which there were 15 women of approximately 27 years of age. Results didn't show any difference between women and men in effects that yoga practice brings. Results of yoga practice significantly affects the increase in the degree of self-awareness and self-control of the yoga practitioners, but only if yoga has been practiced for more than 3 months continuously. Break-even point is 90 days of continuous exercise. Therefore, we can conclude that the practice of yoga requires continuity in order to achieve results. There is a slight correlation with the role yoga plays in improving sympathy towards others (empathy), and healthy interpersonal relationships, but this may be the subject of another investigation.

Yoga is actually a reunion of the elements separated as a consequence of our way of life. It is a reunion of body, mind and spirit. Thousands of years ago, the Indian Rishis (sages and saints) investigated the nature and the universe immersed in meditation. That is how they discovered the laws of the material and spiritual world and gained insight into the bonds within the universe. From these experiences and insights originated far-reaching and comprehensive system known as Yoga. It gave us valuable and practical guidance for body, mind, concentration, relaxation and meditation. In one part of the Bhagavad Gita (God song) yoga is conceptually defined as proper action: Perform activities that are your true nature, it is your duty. Do not let the fruits of your work be your motivation. Act in accordance with the Creator, free from material desires. Do not be troubled by the success or failure. Such mode of action is called *Yoga*¹.

Yoga is not religion, but a source of spirituality and wisdom, and the root of many religions. Transcending religious boundaries, it shows the path to unity. Yoga comes from India and has its roots in Hinduism. It comprises a colorful variety of methods, exercises and practice of life with spiritual and religious goals. In his book (*Asiatische religiosen Stromungen in Europe*), Frotz Blanke, an authority on Asian religions, suggests that yoga introduces people to a new spiritual world, a new philosophy of life without them being aware of it.

Latest opinion polls indicate that over 110 million people in the U.S., have an interest in practicing yoga. In order to protect its originality, professionalism, competence, teachers, certified instructors and protect people from charlatans, two major global organizations - the International Yoga Federation and Yoga Alliance came into existence.

Numerous studies show that practicing yoga has a wide-ranging effect since it helps balance the physical and mental functions. In this way, yoga helps us perform everyday tasks, solve problems, overcome worries, achieve a higher level of understanding ourselves, the meaning of life and our personal relationship towards ourselves in our environment.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) stems from the concept of social intelligence, which was first identified by E. L. Thorndike in 1920. Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence as: a form of social intelligence that involves the ability of knowing one's own and others' emotions, distinguishing them, and using this information in thinking and acting.² A leading expert in the field, Daniel Goleman defines EI as the capacity for recognizing emotions in ourselves and others, self-motivation, and managing emotions in ourselves and the relationships with others. Emotional intelligence determines the potential for learning operative skills that are based on five elements (abilities). According Goleman's model, those are: self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and successful interpersonal relationships, where each element includes a set of different abilities.

¹ http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita, 2004, translation Swami Nirmalananda Giri

² Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1993). *The intelligence of emotional intelligence*. *Intelligence*, 17 (4), 433-442.

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Theorists of social and emotional learning have identified a long list of developmental values on which they base their programs. In 2005 the Association of academic, social and emotional learning (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, CASELLE) identified five sets of basic, interrelated, social and emotional competencies: self-awareness (self-awareness, accurate assessment of one's own feelings, interests, values and self-confidence), self management (self-management, the expression and management of one's emotions), social awareness (the ability to take the perspective of others and empathize with them), social skills (establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with others, resisting unwanted social pressure, constructive conflict resolution), responsible decision-making (consideration of appropriate ethical standards and social norms, contributing to the welfare of the community).

According to Goleman, emotional competence depends on EI, increases work properties and can be learned. He believes that emotional competence consists of personal competence and social competence. Personal competencies are the ability to deal with our own difficulties, such as: self-awareness, self-control and self-motivation, while social competences refer to the ability to master relationships with others, as well as and empathy and interpersonal relationships. Many authors avoid using the term intelligence when they talk about the same skills and abilities, but resort to other terms, so in literature we can encounter terms such as: emotional coefficient (e.g. Goleman, 1995), emotional literacy (e.g. Goleman, 1995; Dulewic and Higgs, 2000), emotional competences.

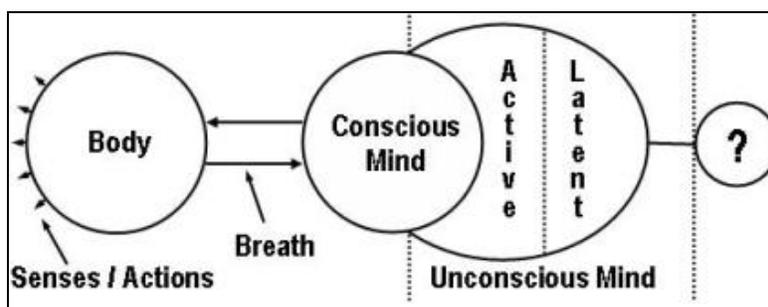
Emotional stability and maturity could contribute to an improved interaction with others and maintaining interpersonal relationships, greater motivation, higher capacity, higher productivity and effectiveness, and above all, better management of communication, while our emotional competence actually indicates how much of our potential we turned into operative skills.

The contribution of yoga to the development of emotional competence

We live in times when humanity seeks a way out of this modern chaos, a way out of moral and spiritual poverty, disease and internal emptiness that strains all of us. People are looking for a solution, a way to overcome the great stress of the modern age. One of many solutions to human problems is the practice of yoga as philosophy and practice.

Modern ideas in the field of psychology are surprisingly similar to the ideas that were set several thousand years ago in the Samkhya and Yoga darshan. Practicing yoga involves physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspect of man. By practicing yoga, all of these aspects are developed, or better put, the dormant abilities of each individual are revealed. Using different methods it awakes and transforms the latent powers of man, points to the path of purity and truth, frees from all forms of ignorance. It's a real spiritual path, where all aspects are integrated so that man becomes a complete being.

Figure 1. Influence of yoga on latent strengths of an individual.



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Emotional competencies determine how successfully we can use other abilities that we have to overcome all the frustrating situations that life often leads us into. They refer to learning and achievement, behavior, promotion of health and to the individual, social and health education.

Bennet (Bennet B.) made an interesting attempt to name one style of yoga Emotional Yoga, prompted by the very recognition that long-term practitioners of yoga increase their emotional competences. The development of emotional competences improves and enhances the development of listening skills and the ability to focus attention, responsibility and dedication to work, ways to control impulses and cope with upsetting events.

Emotional intelligence, yoga and self-awareness

EI consists of five elements: self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and successful interpersonal relationships. If we view emotional balance as a balance or equilibrium point between cognition and emotion from the perspective of yoga, then the same can be achieved by proper interplay nadis (energy flows) in the energy envelope. The right energy channel (Sun) corresponds with rational thinking, facing the outside world. The left channel (Moon) expresses the emotional dimension of being, facing internal affairs. The central channel has a quality of spiritual evolution. If we look at emotional intelligence from the perspective of the three nadis (Nadiš) and three qualities that go with them (modes of), or as a psychological phenomenon, we come to the conclusion that practicing yoga establishes the equilibrium point. Yoga could then be seen as a method that encourages the development of emotional competence (and therefore EI). The true meaning of yoga is a process of self-realization. Goleman identified self-awareness as the most important aspect of emotional competence because it allows self-control. Self-awareness is the first step towards self-control and empathy for others. When self-awareness becomes Self-consciousness, it automatically manages genuine empathy - seeing oneself in others.

Self-awareness, or emotional awareness, is the understanding of the ways our emotions affect our ability to work and the ability of our values to direct our decisions. Those who accurately assess themselves are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they are reflective, they learn from experience, they are open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning and developing themselves, they show a sense of humor and perspective about themselves alone. Almost all yoga techniques encourage the development of self-awareness and therefore the capacity of self-control as the key determinants of emotional competence. Very few studies have dealt with this topic. The research results of Professor Nikic indicate the presence of a higher degree of emotional intelligence of teachers and trainers compared with the control group composed of long-time practitioners of yoga. Also, we observed a higher level of EI of practitioners who practice yoga for many years compared with those who have just started practicing it.

Self-control, as a part of emotional competence, is the ability to refrain oneself from disruptive feelings and impulses. While as a step toward self-awareness we listen to our feelings and learn from them, self-control refers to controlling and managing these feelings so that they do more good than harm. Self-control creates a rational side and the time to calm down emotions when necessary. It also helps us to act with intention, not impulsively. Yoga also makes it easier for us to cope with conflict situations without too much stress, to be more relaxed, and to control our actions more easily. At the same time, it also helps the development of competencies.

In one part of his books Goleman also talks about the difficulties of self-control of the mind: the creative mind, in its primordial nature, is rebellious. In it there is a natural tension between the everyday self-control and innovative impulses. It is not that the creative people are out of emotional self-control, it rather comes to their tendency to meet with a wide range of impulses and actions than is characteristic of less adventurous spirit.³

³ Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books, str. 100.

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Emotional intelligence is a tool that our brain uses to make us self-define and shape the meaning of key concepts such as love, success and happiness. Awakening of the Self, self-consciousness, this is the role of yoga.

Conclusion

Yoga has developed a very effective practice for the acquisition and improvement of man's mental and physical health. Its benefits are manifold. However, the core one lies in the fact that it can be applied by almost everybody, regardless of gender, age and physical condition. Yoga consists of several thousand light physical exercises, positions (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama – a technique for managing life energy, the so-called prana), the mudras and meditations... By practicing yoga, we can achieve psychological and emotional stability, leading to the increase in the degree of self-awareness and self-control of emotions and calmness, which once again brings the individual closer to the next level of (self-) awareness, as it is confirmed by the results of our research. The hypothesis that yoga contributes to raising the level of self-awareness and self-control as important indicators of emotional intelligence, has been provisionally confirmed. We concluded that yoga affects some of the elements of emotional competence.

Self-awareness follows each step in the self-development of the practitioners of yoga. Self-realization is the primary goal of practitioners. By practicing yoga the awareness of self and self in others, leads practitioner through something more than ego, through infinite, universal existence. Practicing yoga encourages the development of sympathy towards others (empathy), which is another component of the concept of emotional intelligence. If we want to lead a life which is happier, more passionate, more intelligent and filled with more awareness, deep purpose and meaning, then yoga is definitely for us. When we learn how to practice yoga, it becomes a powerful instrument of our life. Yoga affects all levels of our being at the same time, i.e. holistically.

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