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Yoga for holistic health: An analytical study

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Abstract

Yoga signifies the profound encounter with inner unity and oneness, a state achieved by transcending the dichotomy of mind and matter and merging into the supreme reality. It operates as a scientific discipline through which individuals navigate the path toward truth. The ultimate objective of all yoga practices lies in attaining truth, wherein the individual soul harmonizes itself with the supreme soul or god. At its core, yoga embodies mastery over the mind, and true contentment emerges when one can adeptly discern the real from the unreal, the eternal from the transient, and the virtuous from the detrimental through discernment and wisdom.

Yoga, beyond its spiritual aspects, serves as a therapeutic endeavor. Through the gentle elongation of muscles, internal organ massage, and comprehensive nerve toning, numerous diseases, even those deemed incurable, can witness alleviation or elimination. Its significance delves into the realms of mental and spiritual well-being, providing a holistic approach to health.

The practice of Yogasana, rooted in centuries of physiotherapy, extends its healing touch to a myriad of seemingly incurable and persistent ailments. The scientific precision of yoga as a self-treatment method is revealed, with Pranayama acting as the life force, regulating breath, and earning the title of the soul of yoga. Acknowledging the purifying role of bathing in cleansing both body and mind, the primary focus remains on fortifying the nervous system, concurrently enhancing the mind's concentration power.

Keywords: Disease, health, mental, physical, spirit, yoga

Introduction

Yoga signifies the profound encounter with inner unity and oneness, a state achieved by transcending the dichotomy of mind and matter and merging into the supreme reality. It operates as a scientific discipline through which individuals navigate the path toward truth. The ultimate objective of all yoga practices lies in attaining truth, wherein the individual soul harmonizes itself with the supreme soul or god. At its core, yoga embodies mastery over the mind, and true contentment emerges when one can adeptly discern the real from the unreal, the eternal from the transient, and the virtuous from the detrimental through discernment and wisdom.

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Yoga is a path towards total harmony of body, mind, and spirit.

The word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word yuj, which means union. Union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness.

Yoga is not merely a form of exercise for the body. It is an ancient wisdom - for a healthier, happier, and more peaceful way of living - which ultimately leads to union with the Self.

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It is an inherent desire in humans to be happy. The ancient sages, through inquiry about life, were able to reach a state of consciousness in which the secrets of healthier, happier, and meaningful living were revealed to them.

Though yoga comes from Hinduism, the knowledge of yoga transcends any religion or culture. Its application is universal!

Yoga has a long history. It is an integral subjective science. Its spiritual, mental or physical import cannot be separated from each other. According to Panini, the Grammarian, the word Yoga is derived from two roots, viz. Yujir and Yuja one referring to Yoking (Yujvir Yoga), and the other referring to mental concentration (Yuj Samadhi) and to sense control. Yoga standing for mental concentration is the theme of the entire Indian systems dealing with yoga. It also implies the control of senses. Thus the second derivation of the word yoga consists in Citta vrittinirodhah i.e., the silencing of (all) activities in the mind's substance.

Vyasa too, in his commentary on patanjali takes reintegration (Yoga) and identification (Samadhi) as synonymous, Shri Gaddadhara, the teacher of logic (Nyaya) says: "Reintegration means identification (samadhi). It is of two kinds: conscious (samprajnata) and unconscious (asamprajnata). The union (Samyoga) of some part of one's being with anything, whatever it may be of which there is a desire to know the essential nature, even though it be beyond sensory, perception its instability is called "conscious identification" (sampranata samadhi). "Unconscious identification" (asamprajnata) is that mental union (Manah samyoga) which arises in some part of the self but which because of the absence of inward uplift and of perfected inward contemplation remains uncoordinated.

"Conscious identification" is the state of full cognition. This means that in this state the object of contemplation is actually witnessed and the mind is fixed upon it. This is characterised by the silencing of all thought except that of the object contemplated upon. Hence, conscious identification is the silencing of mental activity. With, as its result, the witnessing of the object of contemplation. Since it is defined as state in which nothing is cognized all notions must be abolished in unconscious identification. In this state there remains therefore nothing of the mind except the traces left by its previous activities. If this were not so, consciousness could arise again. All intuitive perceptions come within the realm of unconscious identification. According to Vedanta, yoga means supreme realization. Yoga is the reunion of the living self with the supreme self. According to the treatises on yoga, supreme realization is considered as the aim of all yogic practices. But the means of this realization as well as all intermediary stages are also taken to be included in the term yoga. The main obstacle to realization being the consistent activity of the mind, yoga is thus defined to silence the mind leaving all mental activity is yoga. "The silencing of the mental activities which leads to the complete realization of the intrinsic nature of the supreme person is called yoga."

The word yoga can also be used as an extension for knowledge, love, action etc. Since these are also means of liberation (moksha) and are thus the instruments of reintegration (Yoga). The activities of the mind are said to be five in number. These are ascertaining of facts (pramana) false knowledge (viparyas knowledge contrary to facts), imagination (vikalpa), sleep the experience of being unconscious and memory (smiriti). The modes of

ascertaining the real nature of things are direct experience. Deduction therefrom and the traditionally transmitted revolution. The mental activity which through sensory perception leads to exact knowledge of things as they constitute the ascertaining of facts through direct evidence.

Mental activity resulting from the generalization of categories is deduction (anumana) mental activity contrary to facts constitutes false knowledge and is the result of a defeat (either in the perception or in the object). Memory is exclusively the activity resulting from imprints left upon the mind's substance by former experiences. The mental activity of sleep is limited to the experience of happiness during sound sleep which gives rise to such memories as "I slept pleasantly".

Concept of Yoga

The concept of yoga, rooted in ancient philosophical traditions, extends beyond the realm of physical exercise to encompass a holistic approach to well-being, uniting the mind, body, and spirit. Derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj," meaning to yoke or unite, yoga serves as a pathway to achieve harmony within oneself and with the broader cosmic existence.

At its core, yoga is a system designed to facilitate self-discovery and connection to a higher consciousness. It incorporates various practices, each contributing to the overall goal of achieving balance and integration. The foundation of yoga lies in the pursuit of inner peace, self-realization, and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings.

One fundamental aspect of the concept of yoga is the understanding that the human experience extends beyond the physical body. The ancient yogic texts, such as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, delineate a comprehensive framework that guides practitioners on their journey toward spiritual growth and enlightenment. The eight limbs of yoga, as outlined by Patanjali, encompass ethical principles (Yamas and Niyamas), physical postures (Asanas), breath control (Pranayama), sense withdrawal (Pratyahara), concentration (Dharana), meditation (Dhyana), and ultimate absorption (Samadhi).

The practice of asanas, or physical postures, is perhaps the most widely recognized aspect of yoga in the modern world. Beyond promoting physical flexibility and strength, these postures serve as a means to prepare the body for prolonged periods of meditation and spiritual contemplation.

Pranayama, the regulation of breath, is another integral component of yoga. It involves conscious control of the breath to enhance the flow of vital life force energy (prana) within the body. This practice not only supports physical health but also aids in calming the mind and achieving a heightened state of awareness.

The concept of yoga emphasizes the importance of mindfulness and the cultivation of a meditative state. By turning inward and quieting the fluctuations of the mind, individuals can attain a profound sense of inner peace and mental clarity. This meditative aspect of yoga contributes to stress reduction, increased focus, and an enhanced sense of well-being.

Yoga is not confined to a specific religious or cultural context; it is a universal practice accessible to individuals of all backgrounds and beliefs. Its adaptability and inclusivity make it a versatile tool for personal transformation and self-improvement.

In essence, the concept of yoga is a profound philosophy and practice that transcends the boundaries of mere physical exercise. It offers a comprehensive framework for individuals seeking a deeper understanding of themselves and their connection to the world, ultimately leading to a more balanced, harmonious, and fulfilling life.

Yogic Principles of Healthy Living

In Sanskrit the word for health is “Swasthya” which has a profound meaning. It is made of two root Sanskrit words - “Swa” or the Self and “Stha” meaning centered. So swasthya can be roughly translated as “Centered in one’s own Self”. In the Indian System, the Self is described as Sat-Chit-Ananda or Being Consciousness-Bliss. This is the true nature of every being. Any deviation from this state of well-being can be considered as a disease.

The first two parts of Yoga, namely Yama and Niyama are aimed at the external and internal harmony of an individual. Values such as truth, non-violence, non-stealing, cleanliness and contentment bring about harmony in the society as well as well-being in the life of an individual. Deviation from these values can cause stress and strain in life.

The vital energy in the body is called Prana. It is prana which maintains the physiology of the body. It is Prana that runs our digestive, cardiac and nervous systems. All activities in the body are controlled by prana. Prana flows in the body through channels called nadis. When there is block in the nadis, the flow becomes imbalanced and can lead to physical disorders. Asanas and pranayama help to balance the prana in the body and to remove the blocks, thereby improving the functioning all the systems.

Yoga can make the breathing slower and deeper, improving the capacity of the lungs and reducing the blood pressure. Yoga is known to reduce cholesterol and the sugar levels in diabetic patients, reducing the risks of heart attacks, kidney failures and blindness.

Pranayama and Meditation can calm the mind and remove stress and anxiety. It improves mental health leading to a greater peace and stability of the mind, experienced as a sense of constant well-being. Meditation induces the calmer alpha waves in the brain, which is usually experienced during deep relaxation, and can in turn improve memory, physical coordination and mental clarity.

Meditation can increase awareness and helps in dealing with the negativities of the mind like anger and frustration. This improves the social well-being, improves relationships and makes one strong enough to face all situations in life in a composed way.

Asanas bring about flexibility, strength and balance in the body. It tones the internal organs, improves blood circulation and removes toxins from the system. Yoga has the ability to regenerate the body tissues and reverse the aging process. It is good for flexibility of the spine and joints making the body feel younger. It can correct wrong postures and remove defects caused by improper work habits.

Swami Vishnudevananda summarized the yoga philosophy in 5 principles or the Five Points of Yoga which make the complex teachings of yoga easier to understand:

Proper Exercise - Asana

Proper exercise should be pleasant to the practitioner while beneficial to the body, mind and spiritual life. Asanas were invented to keep the physical body strong, open and well.

The principle is based on a balanced asana practice giving you everything your body needs. Yoga strengthens the body, improves circulation, helps with flexibility, and stimulates the endocrine system.

Proper Breathing - Pranayama

Control and regulation of prana, subtle energy.

Breathing is the practice of pranayama. Control of prana, or energy, is obtained through the practice of breath control. Exercises like Anuloma Viloma (alternate nostril breathing) and Kapalabhati (breath of fire) stimulate the nervous system, detoxifies the cardiorespiratory system (through the elimination of gaseous waste), and conditions us to maintain a calm and steady breath during times of physical or emotional stress.

Proper Relaxation - Savasana

Yoga teaches three levels of relaxation – physical, mental and spiritual.

When the mind and body are constantly overworked, their natural function, performance and homeostasis (internal states of equilibrium) significantly decrease. An enormous amount of healing takes place when we relax and restore. Deep relaxation restores our Prana (life-force) and allows us to experience a deep sense of inner peace. Physical and mental relaxation; resets the nervous system and metabolism, flushes cellular waste, reduces stress hormones, balances blood pressure and reduces pain perception.

Proper Diet - Lacto-Vegetarian We are what we eat.

The most fundamental ingredient behind this principle is simply choosing foods that are Sattvic, plant based, pure, simple, and natural that are easily digested and nourish the body. Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, herbs, herbal teas and fresh water. Listen to your body and eat intuitively to sustain the body and mind.

Positive Thinking and Meditation - Dharana and Dhyana The key to achieving peace of mind.

The mind will be brought under perfect control by regular practice of meditation. Focus the mind, deepen our experience, reach the ultimate goal of yoga, Samadhi (enlightenment, bliss).

Types of Yoga

The concept of yoga is intricately woven into an eightfold path, each stage designed to attain purity of the body, mind, and soul. These stages include Yama, emphasizing social discipline; Niyama, focusing on individual discipline; Asana, the practice of postures; Pranayama, breath control; Pratyahara, discipline of the senses; Dharana, concentration; Dhyana, meditation; and Samadhi, self-realization. Beyond this foundational structure, various types of yoga encompass different dimensions of practice, such as Karma yoga (action), Jnana yoga (knowledge), Hatha yoga (physical and mental purity), Raja yoga (awakening psychic awareness), Mantra yoga (utilizing vibrations for mental freedom), Laya yoga (conscious dissolution of individuality), and Bhakti yoga (intense devotion).

In terms of physical health, yoga orchestrates the coordination of muscles, bones, and various systems, fostering flexibility and adaptability. Asanas contribute to the body's ability to easily adjust to environmental changes, achieving balance in the sympathetic and parasympathetic

systems and regulating the endocrine system. Mental health benefits from yoga as well, strengthening the mind, developing determination and concentration, and fostering equilibrium and vitality. This mental fortitude enables individuals to face challenges with peace and stability, turning difficulties into stepping stones toward perfect mental health. Spiritually, yoga prepares the body for higher techniques, with asanas seen as stages on the spiritual path, facilitating the awakening of psychic faculties.

Importance of Yoga Healthy life

In contemporary times, the importance of yoga for a healthy life is underscored by its role in disease control. It proves effective in managing stress, depression, asthma, diabetes, and various other conditions, contributing to overall well-being. In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, practicing yoga is emphasized for maintaining mental steadiness, energy, and positive thoughts. Yoga serves as a tool for balancing the mind and body, offering strength and resilience during challenging times.

Conclusion

In the face of the current challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of yoga becomes even more pronounced. Regular practice not only contributes to physical well-being but also empowers individuals to maintain a steady mind and positive outlook. Yoga serves as a valuable tool in achieving balance between mind and body, fostering mental strength and resilience, making it a boon in these trying times. It represents a continual re-education of both mental and physical processes, contributing to overall well-being and progress in various facets of life.

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