

Yoga and its Applications in Modern Life

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Yoga is a science of healthy living. For a common man yoga is a fashion for keeping himself healthy and fit. While for some others it's a boon for developing their concentration, memory and creativity. It helps to improve muscle strength, stamina, immune stability, perpetual sharpness, intelligence, memory, emotional stability and altogether maintain a positive physical and mental health. Yoga is a way of life for good living and for the benefit of the body. Yoga is the only way through which the body will be fit and fine without any trainer, without equipment and medicine.

The word "Yoga" originated from the Sanskrit word Yuj meaning to yoke, join or unite. This implies joining all aspects of the individual - body with mind and soul - to achieve a balanced life.

Yoga has gained remarkable popularity during the last few years, and today millions of people practise yoga on a regular basis. Yoga existed thousands of years ago but it is the most rapidly growing health segment today.

What is Yoga?

Yoga is a Hindu traditional way of exercise to make the body physically and mentally strong. It uses posture and breathing techniques to induce rest and its health benefits may exceed those of other activities.

Yoga has several types of posture called 'asana', and it is the main feature of total eight limbs of yoga. Very often, asana and yoga are mistaken to be the same and used interchangeably. The eight limbs or branches of yoga described by Patanjali in his Sanskrit Sutras are:

1. Yama (Principles)
2. Niyama (Personal Disciplines)
3. Asana (Yoga Positions or Yogic Postures)
4. Pranayama (Yogic Breathing)
5. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses)
6. Dharana (Concentration on Object)
7. Dhyana (Meditation)
8. Samadhi (Salvation)

Modern day's relevance:

Today, millions of people across the world are following yoga either in the form of one particular asana or a combination taught by a Yogi or guru. Some books even refer to particular asanas depending upon the medical requirement.

Modern yogis claims that yogic exercises cure various diseases like obesity, diabetics, dislocation of disc, respiratory problems, arthritis of various types and various spine problems, high blood pressure besides stress and even cholesterol problems and heart diseases.

Yoga guru Swami Ramdev and many of his cults are making yoga more popular all over the world by demonstrating modern physical exercise of yoga.

Parents who have learnt yogic exercise are motivating their children by teaching them yoga exercise to make them conscious about their health. Even people's attitude toward health has changed dramatically due to yoga, as they tend to look for answers for their everyday problems.

It is observed that many old persons or senior citizens are meticulously learning and performing some exercise after the live discourse of Swami Ramdev on popular TV channels.

Benefits of Yoga

- Yoga has numerous physical benefits. It stretching and breathing exercises Improves muscle tone, flexibility, strength and stamina.
- Yoga also reduces stress and tension and it is an effective form of psychological therapy. It reduces nervousness, resulting in better health and better concentration.
- Yoga helps in treating a wide variety of emotional and mental disorders, including acute anxiety, depression, and mood swings.
- The gentler forms of yoga are known to lower blood pressure and improve blood circulation in the body.
- Creates sense of well being and calm.
- Yoga can also cure insomnia, as regular yoga practice leads to better and deeper sleep.

Yoga in India

The 'Upanishads' and 'Puranas' composed by Indian Aryans in the later Vedic and post-Vedic period contain references to yoga. Patanjali wrote 'Yoga Sutra', about two thousand Years ago. 'Yoga Sutra' is the most important basic text on Yoga.

Swami Ramdev, a new-age yoga guru is dominating Indian viewers with both his performances of yoga asanas and his candid comments against corruption. Swami Ramdev, who hosts a television show with 30 million viewers across the country, owns a peace island in Scotland.

Swami Ramdev has ushered in a hope for people suffering from different kinds of ailments, even the incurable ones. Thousands of people in Europe and USA have attended his Yogic exercises. In India, millions in urban and rural areas watch the Yoga exercise on TV and listen intently to his discourses.

Management of the mind

From the psychological perspective it can be said that the total potential of the personality can be realized when one is able to sublimate the primal energy from the lower dimension to the higher dimension. This is possible by fulfilling the needs of the individual – from material to more subtle spiritual needs – in a systematic, balanced and disciplined way. As we have seen, these needs and desires are diversions on the path of free-flowing energy. This is the reason why management of the lifestyle is given so much importance in yoga. To bring to fruition any yogic practices, the background of a disciplined lifestyle is the foremost prerequisite. This is also the reason why Rishi Patanjali places yama and niyama before asana and other yogic practices.

The yamas and niyamas are the two essential prerequisites for achieving the ultimate goal of the yogic path. They are listed as follows:

Yamas (social code)	Niyamas (personal code)
1.Ahimsa (non-violence)	1.Saucha (cleanliness)
2.Satya (truthfulness)	2.Santosha (contentment)
3.Asteya (honesty)	3.Tapas (austerity)
4.Brahmacharya (sensual abstinence)	4.Swadhyaya (self-study)
5.Aparigraha (non-acquisitiveness)	5.IshwaraPranidhana (resignation to God)

The five yamas and five niyamas form the basic yogic attitudes which help an individual to attain self-discipline at both personal and social levels. They also prepare a solid foundation for the path of yoga. Rishi Patanjali advises these disciplines for calming the mind; he knows that there is a large discrepancy between the mind in terms of thoughts and feelings, and the behaviour or conduct of the individual. Through the practice of yama and niyama one can discard this discrepancy.

Living with these ten positive attitudes will always create a harmonious environment for the aspirant, both internally and externally. Psychology has realized that the mind and body are closely interrelated; the state of one affects the other. For example, if my body is exhausted then I will clearly see that my mind is dull and tired and vice versa. Similarly, if my mind is filled with healthy, positive thoughts, it transforms all the internal processes of the body. The mind is such a powerful agent; it can produce a disease like cancer and yet it also has the potential to cure such a disease. Therefore, the way we think, feel and behave affects our physical body, changing the whole chemistry of the body considerably.

In another way we can say that our thoughts and feelings transform themselves into different bodily responses. We have seen that 80% of diseases are psychosomatic in nature, which means the root or cause is in the mind. Therefore, in yoga we use this mind as a tool to reverse the condition of the body

by following the same psychosomatic route which has caused the disease. Manage your mind, organize your thoughts and feelings, make them positive and healthy and you will definitely get results.

Proper utilization of energy

The mind runs after the senses all the time, which in turn are fuelled by the instincts, and because of this we can't perceive the unified picture of reality. The senses, mind and instincts are transient in nature and will always prevent us from developing a state of balance in our personality. According to yoga psychology, to achieve mental balance and stability management of the instincts is advised. Food (ahara), sleep (nidra), fear (bhaya) and sex (maithuna) are the four basic instincts described in Indian philosophy which pull the individual down to the instinctive level of existence. These instincts colour our thinking, feeling and behaviour, and we fail to enjoy spontaneity and freedom. So, freeing ourselves from these instincts means achieving a state where energy and consciousness move freely without any blockages or barriers in their path. Management of these four instincts also corresponds to the management of the four different dimensions of our personality, the physical (food), mental (sleep), emotional (fear) and energy (sex).

To develop positive interaction within the personality these four instincts must be managed efficiently. Yoga advises using the two tools of viveka, discrimination, and sanyama, restraint, through which we can sublimate our energy. Using one's viveka, discrimination between right and wrong, and sanyama, restraint of the senses, mind and behaviour, one can free oneself from the clutches of the instinctive patterns of behaviour. The aim of all yoga practices is to strengthen these two potent qualities in order to elevate oneself above the realm of instincts. As long as behavioural patterns are guided by these instincts we remain subject to the principle of duality. Hence we remain in a state of despair, tension and suffering. According to yoga, the transient tendencies of the mind are the cause of kleshas, afflictions, and many other neurotic states such as obsessive thoughts, anxieties, fears, passions, etc. Therefore, until and unless one frees the mind from the conditioning of these basic instincts, elevation from the plane of suffering is a distant dream.

Following a lifestyle based on yogic principles acts like a panacea in this modern age; such a lifestyle not only prevents and cures disease, it also promotes health and well-being.

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