

Meditation for Health – Well Being and Inner Peace

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is a holistic and integral science of life dealing with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of the individual and society. It is a way of life that provides a rare opportunity to leave the madness of world behind and attain inner peace. Yoga is the original mind body medicine and is one of the greatest treasures of the unique Indian cultural heritage. Yogic lifestyle, Yogic diet, Yogic attitudes and various Yogic practices help us strengthen ourselves and develop positive health. This yogic “health insurance” is achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it and by releasing it effectively through various practices. We need to remember that Yoga is something that we “live” until our last breath, and even that last breath should be completed with awareness. Yoga is a continuous process as it is a journey and the goal is the journey itself. Yoga is not about the number of Yoga practices we do nor is it about how many times or how long we do them. It is all about how we live our life in tune with Dharma. This is more evident when we realize that Yoga enables us to adopt right attitudes towards our problems and thus tackle them in an effective manner. This article describes concepts of Yoga as a personal evolutionary journey and elucidates the role of Yoga in health, stress and in producing positive health and well being. Relationship of Yoga with modern medicine and its application in social life as detailed and Yogic concepts responsible for developing essential qualities of a good human being are discussed.

Keywords: Yogic life, Astanga yoga, Meditation, health, modern medicine.

MEDITATION

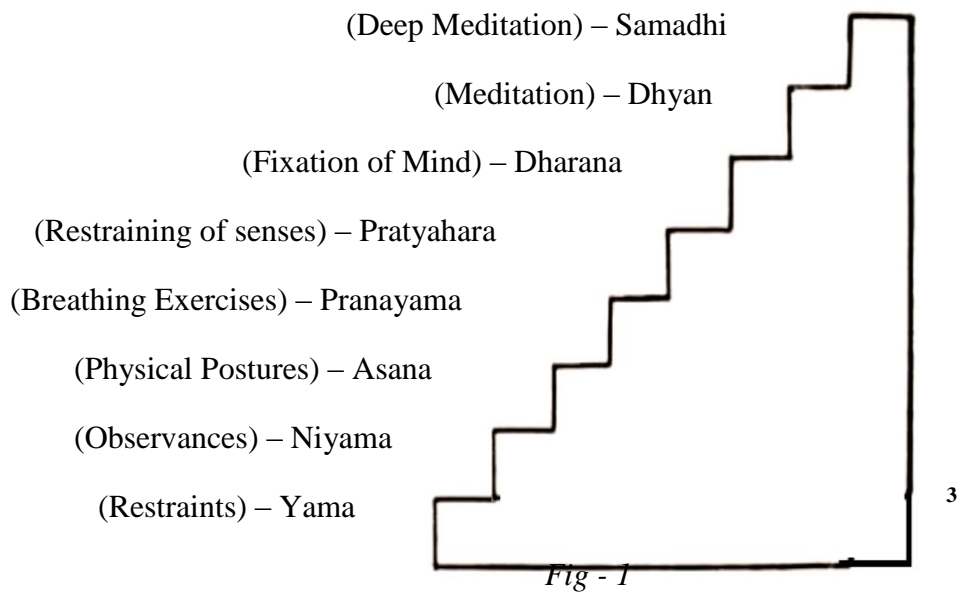
INTRODUCTION—

Dhyana or meditation is one of the most important components of Patanjali’s integrated practice of Yoga. At the same time, one should realize that it is difficult to master the technique of meditation. Further, there are several methods of meditation and hence one is liable to get confused about the proper method he should adopt to derive full benefit out of such a practice. Some of these aspects are discussed below for a proper understanding of the problem. One should remember that for successful meditation, the mind must be calm and for this we must conduct our normal life in peaceful manner. Generally a prayerful attitude in relation to work would be most useful. Further, we must realize the fact that divinity in some degree is present in every individual that we come across. This ultimately leads to peaceful life which in turn helps us calm our mind while we sit for meditation. In order to keep our mind in a peaceful state we should keep our body also in sound state of health. For this, we must have a balanced amount of food, good sleep and regular habits with regard to our work and recreation. When a person manages to have such a steady and healthy body and mind, he can “easily sit for meditation in a comfortable posture in a calm

atmosphere. Therefore, he resorts to Prayer and *Japa* (repetition of a holy name) in order to develop mental concentration on the divine consciousness. Meditation along with the repetition of a *Mantra* should, as far as possible, be practiced at a fixed time of the day”,¹ preferably in the morning and evening with empty stomach. Many people can practice meditation even without a *mantra*. In general repetition of a *mantra* is better way of doing meditation. In this regards Swami Bhavyanand states:- “Such aspirants after preliminary preparations for Meditation can start with Japa with slightly sounded whisper. Later, it will refine itself into a repetition done silently in the mind. As a result of continuous practice of the mantra, the mind becomes steady and concentrated and ultimately we feel the presence of God. In that state there is only awareness... One simply experiences the peace and joy of the awareness of God.”

Continuing he says: “Prayer, in which can be included reading, repeating and dwelling upon Hymns and Scriptures containing noble and elevating thoughts helps very much to prepare our minds for Japas and Meditation. We find that in every religion prayers form a fundamental part of the literature. As an aspirant grows spiritually, a prayerful attitude naturally develops in him..... Whenever we feel weak, God is the ready source of strength. In our moments of severe testing and turmoil which no human being can altogether escape, God is the one being to whom we can and should look for support”.² In this way, if we practice meditation we gradually develop confidence in ourselves and in our spiritual practice. Then the state of mental concentration becomes more natural and automatic.

EIGHT STEPS OF YOGA



REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDITATION—

In order to practice this effectively four essential things are required.

- (1) A quiet environment: For this, one is required to have a quiet room, as one usually keeps for worship. This greatly helps in minimizing distraction.

- (2) A passive attitude: This is the most important things in eliciting the relaxation response. One should not bother about any disturbing thoughts that come to his mind: he should let the matter go away and then concentrate on his practice.
- (3) A comfortable position: This is important to prevent undue muscle tension in the body. Any posture that would give a person maximum relaxation, such as the cross-legged lotus posture, is good. Though lying down posture is also good, yet it is liable to induce sleep and hence it should be avoided.
- (4) A mental device or Mantra : in order to shift the mind from the external objects to internal thought, one should have a mental device such as a Mantra which is usually a sacred word or phrase to be repeated silently or about 15 minutes with eyes fully closed and mind withdrawn.



CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEDITATION—

Consciousness is nothing but the awareness of ourselves and also of the universe around us. The mind consists mainly of constant flow of thoughts and it has four functions. It receives information from the environment: then it relates that information to our previous experiences and makes it a part of our personal experience; it further analyses and makes judgments on the basis of our new experience; ultimately it deposits the information in the vast store house of our memory.

Consciousness is something much higher and more powerful than the mind. It actually watches the mind. It is the self or 'I' which is constantly watching the activities of the mind. It is this which is known as 'Atman', the inner self, **Swami Muktananda** states, "Meditate on yourself, honour yourself and God dwells within you as you".⁴ It is this which can be called individual consciousness. It should be remembered that it is a part of the universal consciousness dwelling in the individual. In fact it is nothing but a small segment of the cosmic creative energy, which is present throughout the universe.

"According to yogic philosophy there are four states of consciousness: (1) waking state, (b) dreaming state, (c) dreamless sleeping state, and (d) turiya state or state of super consciousness in which one attains a silent and pure awareness."⁵ According to **Aurobindo** "the future evolutionary process of human beings would be marked by the attainment of different degrees of super consciousness by the individuals."⁶ But according to **Western scientist and psychologists**, "the future evolution of human beings is dependent upon the development of a strong healthy ego (Ahankara in yogic terminology). For Eastern or yogic psychologists, however, achievement of healthy ego with endless wave of thoughts, impulses and desires, is simply one more stage in our journey to achieve the highest goal of super consciousness. Such as ego which is one of the external activities of the mind is an important instrument necessary for functioning in the modern world, but we should realize that through it alone we can never make an evolutionary progress in future life."⁷

According to yoga experts one must learn to know the self, by directing our mind to look towards our inner self who lies beyond all thoughts and desires. In fact such a search ultimately leads to the realization that our inner self or individual soul is not a separate entity, but a part of God or universal consciousness.

TECHNIQUE OF MEDITATION—

It is always good to have a fixed place for meditation. One should preferably have a special room. Otherwise a corner of a living room will be enough. One should put on basis minimal clothes and sit on a mat especially prepared for the purpose. As far as possible one should meditate at the same the everyday. The early hours of the morning between 4 and 4 A.M. are supposed to be the best for the purpose, though one can meditate at any convenient time of the day or night. There are many methods of meditation recommended by several great sages. The Bhagavad Gita has described- “the technique of Atma Sayam Yoga in some detail in the sixth chapter.”⁸ Buddha has given his instructions for meditation in a simple form known as vipasyana Meditation. In this one has to concentrate on his own breathing. In recent years Maharshi Mahesh Yogi has popularized Transcendental Meditation all over the world. Similarly Swami Muktananda has been advocating Siddha Meditation Technique in recent years which have proved much useful. He described his technique in great detail in a simple language and the same is given here as a first choice- “Just as you slip easily into sleep you should be able to slip easily into meditation. Sit peacefully; be with yourself; focus your mind on the inner consciousness, the inner knower. Let your breathe move naturally and watch it. Do no force anything. Become immersed in your own inner self. Turn your mind and senses inwards. Absorb yourself in the pure ‘I’ To help in stilling the mind, you may take the support of a mantra. Repeat either ‘Om Namah Shivaya’ or ‘Soham’. The meaning of the former is ‘I bow to the Lord who is the inner self. The meaning of the latter mantra is ‘I am that’ which allows you to experience the self.”⁹

He continues: “The purpose of meditation is inner happiness, inner peace. When all the senses become quiet and you experience bliss that is the attainment. The word is the embodiment of joy. Joy lies everywhere. Find it and attain it Meditate on yourself. Honour self. Understand yourself. God dwells within you as you.” **Muktananda** further states:- “There are four factors involved in meditation: the object of meditation, which is the inner self; the mantra, which is the vibration of the self; asana, the posture in which we can sit comfortably for a long time; and the natural pranayama which arises when we repeat the mantra with love and reverence. These four factors are interrelated and when they come together meditation occurs in a very natural manner.”¹⁰

From all the above it becomes clear that one will have to devote sufficient time to meditation everyday by adopting any of the methods described above. By regular practice with keen desire to overcome all the obstacles in the way, everyone shall be able to achieve the goal of Samathi or Super-consciousness in the years to come depending upon various factors described above.

BIOFEEDBACK AND MEDITATION—

Alpha biofeedback has much use in the study of meditation since the subject’s feeling during meditation and alpha feedback remains the same. There are several

reports to indicate that practitioners of yoga and Zen develop large quantities of EEG alpha activity immediately after starting meditation practice. Thereafter, as meditation continues, the frequency of alpha wave becomes less followed by development of theta waves. In these practices also an attempt is made to turn the mind and consciousness inwards. Therefore, from the practical point of view meditation and alpha biofeedback appears to be similar and if both could be combined it will have an additive value for getting a quicker result.

PRODUCING POSITIVE HEALTH AND WELL BEING—

According to Swami Kuvalayananda, founder of Kaivalyadhama, “positive health does not mean mere freedom from disease but is a jubilant and energetic way of living and feeling that is the peak state of well being at all levels – physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual. He says that one of the aims of Yoga is to encourage positive hygiene and health through development of inner natural powers of body and mind. In doing so, Yoga gives special attention to various eliminative processes and reconditions inherent powers of adaptation and adjustment, of body and mind. Thus, the development of positive powers of adaptation and adjustment, inherent to the internal environment of man, helps him enjoy positive health and not just mere freedom from disease.”¹¹ He emphasizes that Yoga produces *nādi suddhi* (purification of all channels of communication) and *mala suddhi* (eradication of factors that disturb balanced working of body and mind).

According to Swami Kuvalayananda, Yoga helps cultivation of positive health through three integral steps:

1. Cultivation of correct psychological attitudes (*māitre, karuna, mudita and upekṣa* towards those who are *sukha, duhkha, punya* and *apunya*)
2. Reconditioning and neuro-muscular and neuro-glandular system – in fact, the whole body – enabling it to withstand stress and strain better.
3. Laying great emphasis on appropriate diet conducive to such a peak state of health, and encouraging the natural processes of elimination through various processes of *nadi suddhi* or *mala suddhi*.

To live a healthy life it is important to do healthy things and follow a healthy lifestyle. The modern world is facing a pandemic of lifestyle disorders that require changes to make consciously by individuals themselves. Yoga place great importance on a proper and healthy lifestyle and main components of which are:

1. ***Acara*** – Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercise and recommends *asana, pranayama* and *kriya* on a regular basis. Cardio-respiratory health is one of the main by-products of such healthy activities.
2. ***Vicara*** – Right thoughts and right attitude towards life is vital for well being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following the moral restraints and ethical observances (*yama-niyama*). As Mahatma Gandhi said, “there is enough in this world for everyone’s need but not enough for any one person’s greed.”

3. **Ahara** – Yoga emphasizes need for a healthy, nourishing diet that has an adequate intake of fresh water along with a well balanced intake of fresh food, green salads, sprouts, unrefined cereals and fresh fruits. It is important to be aware of the need for a *satwica* diet, prepared and served with love and affection.

4. **Vihara** – Proper recreational activities to relax body and mind are essential for good health. This includes proper relaxation, maintaining quietude of action – speech – thoughts and group activities wherein one loses the sense of individuality. *Karma Yoga* is an excellent method for losing the sense of individuality and gaining a sense of universality.

CONCLUSION—

Every day we realized that this world is moving at a faster rate than before. This is mostly due to the fact that science and technology are making a tremendous progress in every sphere of our activity. It is surprising that while making such a spectacular progress in the external materialistic world, we have comparatively made very little progress with regard to our understanding of man and his internal environment. In fact we have almost forgotten to take up this subject for our study. It is in this respect that our ancient sages have made remarkable contributions to the understanding of man, which can hold true even today as described in *kathopanishad*, Hence what we urgently need at present is a synthesis of our understanding of external world as per modern science and technology and the study of internal world of man as per the stud of our ancient suges.

Therefore the time has now come for a joint enterprise on the part of the modern scientists ad the custodians of ancient wisdom so that something good may come out for the betterment of humanity as a whole.

It is here that Yoga can be of immense help to all in preventing the development of stress diseases, and thereby living a long happy and healthy life. In this connection the famous sage Patanjali says that a few people in society are resistant by nature to every type of disorders of stress, a few others develop such resistance after birth by the prolonged use of some of the restorative medicines, and most of the other people can develop such resistance only by the practice of various types of yoga. The sage Patanjali has described eight limbs of yogic discipline (*ashtanga yoga*). Amongst them three, namely postures (*asanas*), breath holding exercise (*Pranayama*) and meditation (*dhyana*) are the important ones for our purpose. We found in healthy normal individuals that a regular practice of all these yogic procedures brings the neuro-humoral pattern to normalcy. Thus, if there is an excess of a neuro-humor it becomes less, and if there is less of other neuro-humors or hormones they become increased, to come to the normal level. In addition, it also improves the functional efficiency of all the organs and tissues by improving their microcirculation.

One often asks how this yogic practice brings about the changes in the cerebral cortex and thereby in the neurohumoral content. Modern physicists put forward a theory that the level of human consciousness depends upon the mobility of atomic components of the human brain. If one can increase the mobility of these atoms by the practice of Yoga, one can improve consciousness to a higher level. Here, one should also remember that the more sensitive is the area, the more will be the

effect of Yoga practice on that particular area. Thus, the psychic centre which is also supposed to be the area for spiritual growth becomes highly efficient in performing its function after the practice of Yoga. Therefore, it becomes more efficient in controlling the centres of motions, hunger, thirst etc. present in the limbic cortex and hypothalamus. Gradually, one can develop the power of voluntary control of involuntary functions of the body leading to more efficient functioning of the body and mind.

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