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Yoga and psychic diseases

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Abstract

Although widely popular for physical benefits, Yoga has been underutilized for the promotion of psychic diseases. Health professionals and general public continue to remain in different about the suitability of Yoga for treating psychic diseases, managing psychological wellness of patients and promoting mental health of the normal population. Therefore, an attempt is made to document the key preventive, promotive and curative opportunities for mental health through yogic practices and identifying major hurdles in its practice.

Keywords: mental health; yoga, psychic disease

Introduction

Mental health concerns are escalating globally and current allopathic treatment regimens are insufficient to bring people towards the state of mental well-being. Yoga is gaining popularity as an accessible, acceptable and cost-effective practice for mind and body. People are turning to yoga to control psychic disease. Yoga has minimal side effects and is cost-effective in comparison with pharmacological treatments and psychotherapy. Yoga's added benefit is that it improves physical fitness and encourages self-reliance. In this brief article we discuss the evidence for yoga as a form of mental health promotion, illness prevention and treatment for depression.

The reason why people all over the world are accepting yoga is because of its curative effects on mind, body and spirit. Yoga has never been a religion, nor even metaphysics. It has never been a way to escape from the world. In fact the very purpose of yoga is to redeem each and every man from his personal problems. The rishis, seers and yogis in the past witnessed that the practices of yoga could free one from physical and mental problems, and therefore they gave this science to their disciples through the guru-disciple tradition. Thus we can consider yoga as a science of the curative faculty. If we understand yoga as a system of gymnastics, then we really miss the point, but if we understand yoga from the scientific point of view, then we can follow the real point. Even the practice of asanas and pranayamas has a deep effect on the most intricate principles of the human body. To give you an example: when a person is suffering from asthma, you administer cortisone and adrenaline tablets, and if he has more trouble in breathing, you give him oxygen to inhale. However, the yogic treatment is a comparatively simple matter of incorporating those postures which influence the adrenal glands. Adrenaline and cortisone are already in the body; we all have an inexhaustible pharmacy within us. If, by yoga postures, you are able to influence the adrenaline and cortisone producing glands, you will be able to get rid of the asthmatic trouble. This is just one example of how yoga aims at the origin of illness and affects a cure.

Recently, all over the world there has been a sharp increase in the incidence of a fairly modern disease, hypertension. In eastern countries and more so in western countries, the hectic life, food, environmental pollution, and many other things are causing these cerebral hypertensions. When they occur, the brain is not able to control the functions of the body and therefore coronary diseases, as well as dozens of other diseases, occur on account of hypertension.

Hypertension is a state caused by the presence of various toxins, the result of responses to stress, which come from living a very externalised life. Whenever you inhale an insufficient amount of oxygen, tension will always be present, and when the air you breathe is itself polluted, more tension naturally ensues. When the food is impure and unnatural, that also

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causes tension. When you have to be alert and cautious all the time, there is further tension. Tension in the brain affects the blood pressure because the veins and arteries, the coronary system, and the whole process of blood pressure regulation is controlled from the brain. Then tensions create more possibilities for excess cholesterol to enter the system, and the hypertensive condition influences the endocrine secretions. These secretions are directly injected into the blood stream, and they are capable of stimulating or depressing the whole system. When the tensions are too great, the endocrine glands inject hormones directly into the blood stream influencing the blood clotting mechanism and allowing heart attack to eventually take place.

Yoga has been greatly instrumental in reducing hypertensive conditions of the brain. Hypertension can be reduced greatly and high blood pressure brought to a normal level by regular practice of yogasanas and pranayamas. The efficiency of the heart action is increased. The heart/lung action is harmonized, thus helping to utilize oxygen at an optimum level.

For another example, diabetes is caused by a malfunction of non-function of the pancreatic gland which produces insulin. When the pancreatic gland does not produce insulin, diabetes is the outcome. Now, insulin is a hormone which is directly controlled by the parasympathetic nervous system. If there is a threat or some strain in life, then the brain does not function properly, parasympathetic impulses are blocked temporarily and secretion of insulin is impeded. Once you remove stress and strain from the brain, the parasympathetic nervous system begins to behave normally again and insulin can be produced. These things pertain to the physical body and brain, but eighty to ninety percent of the causes of disease are not physical, they are psychic or psychosomatic in origin. Scientists now accept this, which means that many diseases originate not from viruses or bacteria but from the depths of our bodies. This body has five aspects, or sheaths as they are traditionally called. The first sheath is the physical body, the second is the energy process or pranic body, the third is the thinking process or mental body, the fourth is the feeling process or psychic body (the same body which comes up in the dream state) and the fifth is the unconscious process or bliss body, which you don't see.

Medical scientists have only been talking about this physical body, and they are correct so far as that is concerned. Smallpox and cholera belong to the physical body, but what about the other, four bodies? To give you a simple analogy - I am sitting in this room, but the room consists of more than four walls; there are also lights, curtains, windows, furniture and carpets. Now, if you think that the room consists only of a floor, a ceiling and walls, then you have no idea of this room. In the same manner, this physical body is a container within which there is a pranic body, a mental body, a psychic body and an unconscious body.

If a disease originates from the unconscious, it is almost incurable. It cannot be eliminated by any system of meditation nor by the practice of asanas; it can only be cured by the practice of tantra, mantra and yantra. Some of you already know that if a sick person receives the appropriate yantra, he can be cured. This is because yantras as well as mantras are occult symbols, and they alone can influence the unconscious body, which is a storehouse of karma or patterns of experience.

Here is an analogy to help you understand what your unconscious body is. If you place a movie camera outside this building it will record on film everything that happens within its range of vision. Now, at any time, if you wish to view a

particular frame of the film, say a photograph of a crime which took place within camera range, this you can do. The police would then take the photograph and catch the criminal. In the same manner, whatever your brain perceives throughout your life is all photographed, everything significant or insignificant, important or unimportant good or bad. Everything is recorded; there are no exceptions and the whole of this information goes for storage in the collective unconscious. Then, at a particular moment, somehow it is triggered and just comes out. We do not know how it happens, but one small insignificant experience in your childhood or youth may become a grave disease.

The psychologists and psychiatrists have the same viewpoint and many experiences of people to whom this has happened. For example, suppose that once while sitting in a room you saw a small piece of paper fluttering in the breeze, so you picked it up and put it in place. That karma could go back to your unconscious and come up as a disease after fifteen or twenty years. Now, if a disease can be due to your karma, what medicines can be administered to cure it? If karma can cause a tumour, cancer or a multitude of other things, how to effect a cure? The answer to this lies in the realm of the science of tantra, yantra and mantra. This is a sickness of the psychic body. When the psychic body becomes sick, it is unhappy and when the psychic body is really sick it is more and more unhappy. If the sickness continues, the man becomes very tired and does not want to live. He is not happy with anything and wants to escape; that is a psychic disease.

How are psychic diseases overcome? The best way is through concentration of mind. All the psychiatrists have come to the same conclusion- to consolidate the differences in the mind. A psychologist will always tell you not to accelerate your distractions but to integrate your personality. In yoga they say unify the mind. This unification of mind is focusing of the mental powers on one point. The mind which is distracted and broken must be integrated, brought to one point and when the consciousness flows in one direction, then psychic diseases can be overcome.

Disease does not belong to only one dimension of the body, but to ail five dimensions. When you eat the wrong types of food, your physical body becomes sick. When you have wrong thoughts, your pranic body develops sickness in the form of fear, insecurity, jealousy, hatred, revenge and so many other things as well. All these are seeds of diseases in the pranic body, then they go to the mental body and to the other bodies. A disease can travel both ways. From the unconscious body, a disease can gradually travel down to the physical, and from there it can again travel to higher bodies.

A physical disease can later become a mental disease, and a mental disease can also become a physical disease. Jealousy can cause many physical problems. So when you talk about the curative effects of yoga and tantra on the human body, you must understand that the body is not one, but a composition of five layers or aspects. In tantra we never say that a disease is merely mortal, mundane or ordinary. To give you an analogy: In this room, if the plaster breaks, you will call the plasterer, but if the window frame breaks, you will call the carpenter. If there is something wrong with the electricity, you will call the electrician. If there is a fire you will call the fire brigade, and so on. So even as this room can have a number of problems, requiring different treatments, in the same manner this body also needs different treatments. Therefore, in yoga, there are five systems called the curative systems.

Conclusion

For diseases of the unconscious body you must practice yogasana and pranayama. Diseases of the psychic body require the practice of concentration and raja yoga techniques. For diseases born of the mind, practice bhakti yoga and a little deep relaxation. For diseases of the pranic body, practice pranayama, and for the physical body's diseases you must practice yogasanas. But remember that no disease is only mental, only physical or only pranic; it is a combination of a great many irregularities in the five layers of life. Therefore, whenever you are unhappy, sick, tired or feeling negative, you must see that in addition to the physical treatment of modern medical science, you must also take to yogic treatment. When you teach yoga or learn yoga you must have a wide knowledge of the whole structure of human existence.

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