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Relationship of yoga, spirituality and physical fitness

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Abstract

Yoga works by engaging the whole body and mind, providing activities that incorporate different learning styles. Health is an important psychological as well as a physical issue. Good health is something that people achieve by actively engaging in a healthy lifestyle rather than something taken to be granted. The person's state of health is a complex interaction of biological factors such as genetic predisposition and social factors such as the amount of social support one receives from friends and family. The stress of modern life can also lead to mental suffering like the feeling of inadequacy, isolation and powerlessness. Yoga is foremost coping technique for all these stressful events. As remarked, "Yoga is a light, which once lit, will never dim; the better the practice, the brighter the flame." Good health results from perfect communication between each part of the body and mind; when each cell communes with every other. Although Yoga is essentially a spiritual science, it leads to a sense of physical and emotional well-being. Our body exists in the past and our mind exists in the future. In Yoga, they come together in the present. It generates cosmic powers. Mind is naturally active and dynamic, while the soul is luminous. Yoga removes the sluggishness from the body and brings it to the level of the active mind. Yoga releases the creative potential in life. In the 1980s, yoga became popular as a system of physical exercise across the Western world and is often called Hatha yoga.

Keywords: Yoga, stress, self-actualization, mental, emotional

Introduction

Yoga ascended in the age of Vedas and Upanishads. It is well recognized that yoga an ancient Indian philosophy, aimed at obtaining liberation through perfect control and mind from part of our life style. Yoga is the science of life and art of living. In addition to daily practice of asana, pranayama and meditation certain principles are to be adhered to in day to day life. Nowadays every individual is conscious about health and wants to look handsome, like their role models heroes. Today youth spend a lot of time in the gymnasium to improve their muscles, to reduce fat and to maintain quality of life. In fact we know yoga exercises helps to improve cardio-vascular system and to reduce fat. Yoga knowledge is essential and very much important for individuals before starting any program. With a sensible approach one can be benefited without any side effects. If one goes astray the wrong footsteps of yoga practices may leads to side effect on the human body. One should always remember to train under the guidance of a professional coach which gives him very fast results in a safe way. Yoga was first introduced in second century A.D by the father of yoga Patanjali. Yoga is a method by which one can remove ignorance and attain union with the supreme self (B.K.S. Iyengar, 1983).

Yoga As Stress Reliever

Stress is a common condition, a response to a physical threat or psychological distress, that generates a host of chemical and hormonal reactions in the body. In essence, the body prepares to fight, pumping more blood to the heart and muscles and shutting down all nonessential functions. As a temporary state, this reaction serves the body well to defend itself When the stress reaction is prolonged, however, the normal physical functions that have in response either been exaggerated or shut down become dysfunctional. Many have noted the benefits of exercise in diminishing the stress response, and a host of studies points to these benefits. Yoga, too, has been recommended and studied in relationship to stress, although the studies are less scientifically replicable. Nonetheless, several researchers claim highly beneficial results from Yoga practice in alleviating stress and its effects. The practices recommended range from

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intense to moderate to relaxed asana sequences, along with pranayama and meditation. Yoga is a promising approach for dealing with the stress response.

Yoga for Self- Actualization

The aim of all types of yoga is to achieve Nirvana. But the integral system of yoga by Sri Aurobindo revolutionized the yoga system. This integral yoga does not abandon life. According to it, the whole external nature of the body, mind and life along with the soul must be perfected and spontaneously respond to the Divine consciousness. Sri Aurobindo maintains that yoga does not suggest the inaction of life but says that “All life is Yoga”. All life is only a lavish and manifold opportunity given to us to discover, realize and to express the Divine. Integral yoga implies not only the realization of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a Divine consciousness and become part of a divine work. The goal is the transformation of the entire nature of one’s being. Nothing is left behind.

Integral yoga is the inward psychicism by which the sadhak gets in contact with the inner divine or psychic being and the spiritual transformation. Spiritualization refers to the bringing down of the larger spiritual transformation. Both of these Psychicism and Spiritualisation are needed for the ultimate stage that is Supra-mentalisation. It is the final stage in the integral yoga, enabling the birth of a new individual fully formed by the supramental power.

Sri Aurobindo remarked that God-realization never obliges us to kill all feelings, to make our heart a sterile land. But an integral yogi becomes a bridge between earth and heaven. The perfection of life comes from the practice of yoga. For the attainment of perfection, the four instruments are needed. These are Sastra (knowledge of truths), Utshaha (enthusiastic zeal), Jagad Guru (inner guide) and Kala (time). When these four aids are possessed by the sadaka, he achieves his goal. The major pre-requisite in the process of integral yoga are call or willingness, sincerity, faith, surrender, aspiration, patience and vigilance.

Apart from the spiritual goals, the physical postures of yoga are used to alleviate health problems, reduce stress and make the spine supple in contemporary times. Yoga is also used as a complete exercise program and physical therapy routine. Many studies revealed the effectiveness of yoga as a complementary intervention for many diseases. In a national survey, long-term yoga practitioners in the United States reported muscular–skeletal and mental health improvements.

Physical Benefits of Yoga

As remarked “The rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind, and the harmony of the soul create the symphony of life”. Because of the deep, mindful breathing that yoga involves, lung capacity often improves. This in turn can improve sports performance and endurance. Most forms of yoga emphasize deepening and lengthening your breath. Pranayama, the practice of breath awareness prominent in yoga, encourages parasympathetic drive, allowing the body to slow down and bring the mind and body back into balance. Transferring this skill of breath is key to handling stressful situations. It provides motivation, cultivate an internal locus of control, and facilitate deeper and more restful sleep.

With yoga, energy is diffused from the brain to the other parts of the body. The brain and body then work together and energy is evenly balanced between the two. Yoga is termed as sarvangasadhana or holistic practice.

Consumers today are bombarded by unhealthy food marketing, promoting processed foods, junk foods, and fast foods that fit into our fast-paced lives. Obesity is linked to such unhealthy eating habits. According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, yoga provides learning experiences in all major focus areas of a physically educated and active person. Thus, actively engaging in yoga on a regular basis is one way to help children remain within a healthy weight range.

Long-term yoga practitioners in the United States have reported musculoskeletal and mental health improvements, as well as reduced symptoms of asthma in asthmatics.

While the teenage years can typically be a time for disconnect, this age group can also vastly benefit from yoga. As Tummers (2009) states, “Practice allows for self-study and self-care as well as development of vital intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, such as improved communication skills, which are critically needed at this developmental stage”.

Yoga for Mental and Emotional Transformation OF the Human being

Yogic practices make possible not only physical and mental development but also intellectual and spiritual development. Yoga practices are called a ‘Non-Violent Activity’ (Sharma. 1984) The effect on the mind takes longer to register because yoga deals with the causes and not just the symptoms of stress. With regular practice the senses that divert the mind to the external environment are drawn inward, calming the restless mind. This safe and nurturing environment can also foster physical, intellectual, and spiritual development. Yoga offers a way for yogis to reconnect their bodies with their minds.

Literature review of the research on the use of yoga for treating depression said that preliminary research suggests that yoga may be effective in the management of depression. Both the exercise and the mindfulness meditation components may be helpful.

Yoga cures attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. A 2010 Cochrane review concludes that there is insufficient evidence to assess the effectiveness of meditative practices such as yoga in the management or improvement of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Yoga means less stress, more calm. Implementation of the Kundalini Yoga Lifestyle has shown to help substance abuse addicts increase their quality of life according to psychological questionnaires like the Behavior and Symptom Identification Scale and the Quality of Recovery Index. Mindfulness has been a fundamental aspect of yoga since its early documentation in the Yoga Sutra: Mindfulness is attained through the practice of yoga in that one is able to maintain awareness of the present, releasing control and attachment of beliefs, thoughts and emotions. By letting go of one’s thoughts and mind, allowing the mind to be calm and at peace, one is able to attain a greater sense of emotional well-being and balance. Research has indicated that there are health benefits of applying mindfulness-based approaches to pain management, physical functioning, and ability to cope with stresses in everyday life. During the past 80 years, health professionals in India and the West have begun to investigate the therapeutic potential of yoga. To date, thousands of research studies have been undertaken and have shown that with the practice of yoga a person can, indeed, learn to control such physiologic parameters as blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory function, metabolic rate, skin resistance, brain waves, body temperature, and many other bodily functions. Now-a-days

researchers combine modern medicine with traditional solutions like yoga and ayurveda. The integration of modern science with yoga and music therapy can provide answers for chronic illnesses.

Yoga experts are trying to standardize this ancient form as a therapeutic module. Yoga practitioners in Kerala have succeeded in treating ailments by integrating yoga with ayurveda. In Rishikesh, rejuvenation camps integrate yoga, ayurveda and naturopathy.

Yoga is not just about the physical regime; it's the overall package that helps in rejuvenating the system. Yoga has more takers in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore than in its birthplace India. It is unfortunate that we Indians are yet to realize the significance of our tradition. Yoga works by engaging the whole body and mind, providing activities that incorporate learning styles such as visual, kinesthetic, musical, intuitive, and naturalist. By providing people with inner resources such as calming, transforming and self-acceptance, yoga helps them feel connected and whole. Words fail to convey the total value of yoga. It has to be experienced.

Conclusion

To practice YOGA means to choose to evolve spiritually in an accelerated aware way. Many human beings practice YOGA in a superficial way, believing that if they do a HATHA-YOGA posture it will be enough to produce transformations in their being that they will quickly become healthy and purified because of the energies that pass through their body. But it's a great hoax. Even though this passing of the energy is produced, without a proper awareness of the processes that are triggered in our inner universe – when our spiritual practice – effects on the body, our psyche and mind are much reduced and it takes a longer period of time until they become visible in the physical plan. In this situation, analogically speaking, we are like a sieve that receives pure spring water, but the water will escape immediately through the holes of the sieve, leaving only a small part on the surface of the sieve. But if we begin to cover the holes of the sieve, one by one, carefully and patiently, we will notice that the water starts to be retained within the sieve and we will benefit more and more from the purity of that spring water.

These moments are particularly important because they represent milestones in our lives. If until that time we accumulated sufficient beneficial, transforming and purifying experiences in our being, they will become for us genuine spiritual anchors which will not let us go away from the ultimate spiritual goal already set in our mind. What we have to do when these difficult moments appear in our spiritual evolution, is to continue what we started with even more tenacity and perseverance, evoking the exceptional moments which we had lived until then. As soon as we pass over this spiritual threshold, a new spiritual ascent will follow.

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