

APPLICATION OF YOGIC CONCEPTS IN THE PROMOTION OF POSITIVE HEALTH

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Yoga is a spiritual science for the integrated and holistic development of our physical, mental and moral-spiritual aspects of being. The philosophy of Yoga is practical and applicable in our day-to-day living. Yoga has been documented to normalise physiological function and recent advances in the field of research have shown that it has sound scientific basis.

Yoga is first and foremost a *moksha shastra* meant to facilitate the individual to attain the final freedom, liberation or emancipation. One of the important by-products of the Yogic way of living is attainment of health and well being. This is brought about by right-use-ness of the body, emotions and mind with awareness and consciousness. This must be understood to be as healthy a dynamic state that may be attained in spite of the individual's *sabija karma* that manifests as their genetic predispositions and the environment into which they are born. Yoga also helps maintain and sustain this dynamic positive state of health after it has been attained through disciplined self effort.

This qualitative aspect of health is something that Yoga and Indian systems of medicine have considered important for thousands of years. The definition of *asana* given in the *Yoga Sutra* as *sthira sukham* implies this state of steady well being at all levels of existence (*sthira sukham asanam- Yoga Darshan II:46*). Patanjali also tells us that through the practice of *asana* we can attain a state that is beyond dualities leading to a calm and serene state of well being (*tato dvandva anabhighata- Yoga Darshan II: 48*).

Yoga understands that physical ailments that are not of a psychosomatic nature can be easily managed with surgery, medication, prayers, douches and lifestyle modifications as required. Various Yoga techniques may also be used to help correct the physical ailments and restore health with regeneration, recuperation and rehabilitation as necessary. Accident prevention is an important benefit of a Yoga life, for better alertness, reflexes and physical condition enables one to prevent accidents as well as avoid getting traumatized both physically and mentally by such occurrences.

From the Yogic viewpoint of disease it can be seen that psychosomatic, stress related disorders appear to progress through four distinct phases. These can be understood as follows:

1. **Psychic Phase:** This phase is marked by mild but persistent psychological and behavioural symptoms of stress like irritability, disturbed sleep and other minor symptoms. This phase can be correlated with *vijnanamaya* and *manomaya koshas*. Yoga as a therapy is very effective in this phase.
2. **Psychosomatic Phase:** If the stress continues there is an increase in symptoms, along with the appearance of generalized physiological symptoms such as occasional hypertension and tremors. This phase can be correlated with *manomaya* and *pranamaya koshas*. Yoga as a therapy is very effective in this phase
3. **Somatic Phase:** This phase is marked by disturbed function of organs, particularly the target, or involved organ. At this stage one begins to identify the diseased state. This phase can be correlated with *pranamaya* and *annamaya koshas*. Yoga as a therapy is less effective in this phase and may need to be used in conjunction with other methods of treatment.
4. **Organic Phase:** This phase is marked by full manifestation of the diseased state, with pathological changes such as an ulcerated stomach or chronic hypertension, becoming manifest in their totality with their resultant complications. This phase can be correlated with the *annamaya kosha* as the disease has become fixed in the physical body. Yoga as a therapy has a palliative and quality of life improving effect in this phase. It does also produce positive emotional and psychological effects even in terminal and end of life situations.

Often, however, the early stages of the disease process are overlooked and the final stage is seen as an entity unto itself, having little relationship to one's living habits and patterns. This is because modern medicine only looks at the physical aspects and neglects effects of *pancha kosha* and *trisharira* on health and disease.

In order to create an environment conducive to the development of positive health as also to prevent and manage the lifestyle disorders that are threatening humankind, Yoga offers us many practical 'day-to-day' methods of action. Some of these tools for positive health are as follows.

1. **Become aware of your body, emotions and mind:** Without awareness there cannot be health or healing. Awareness of body implies conscious

body work that needs to be synchronized with breath to qualify as a psychosomatic technique of health and healing. Psychosomatic disorders that are the bane of the modern world cannot be tackled without awareness.

2. **Improve your dietary habits:** Most disorders are directly or indirectly linked to improper dietary patterns that need to be addressed in order to find a permanent solution to health challenges. One of the most important lifestyle changes that needs be implemented in management of any lifestyle disorder is diet.
3. **Relax your whole body:** Relaxation is most often all that most patients need in order to improve their physical condition. Stress is the major culprit and may be the causative, aggravating, or precipitating factor in so many psychosomatic disorders. Doctors are often found telling their patients to relax, but never tell them how to do it! The relaxation part of every Yoga session is most important for it is during it that benefit of practices done in the session seep into each and every cell producing rest, rejuvenation, reinvigoration and reintegration.
4. **Slow down your breath making it quiet and deep:** Rapid, uncontrolled, irregular breathing is a sign of ill health whereas slow, deep and regular controlled breathing is a sign of health. Breath is the link between body and mind and is the agent of physical, physiological and mental unification. When breath is slowed down, metabolic processes are also slowed and anabolic activities begin the process of healing and rebuilding. If breath is calm, mind is calm and life is long!
5. **Calm down your mind and focus it inwardly:** The mind is as disturbed as a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion say our scriptures. To bring that wayward agitated mind under control, and take it on a journey into our inner being is fundamental in finding a way out of the 'disease maze' in which we are entangled like a fly in the spider's web. Breath work and sensory control are the base on which mind training can occur; hence much importance is given to *pranayama* and *pratyahara*. It is only after this that concentration practices leading to meditation can have any use. Just sitting and thinking about something is not meditation!
6. **Improve the flow of healing 'Pranic Life Energy':** Improve the flow of healing 'Pranic Life Energy' to all parts of the body, especially to those diseased parts, thus relaxing, regenerating and reinvigorating yourself.

Prana is life and without it there cannot be healing. The different *prana* and *upa prana vayu* that are energies driving different physiological functions of the body need to be understood and applied as per needs of the patient. In patients of digestive disorders, focus must be on the *samana vayu* whereas in pelvic conditions it needs to be on *apana vayu*. The fifth chapter of the *Hathayoga Pradipika* has a detailed analysis of various malfunctions of the *vayu* and their correction.

7. **Fortify yourself against omnipresent stressors:** Decrease your stress level by fortifying yourself against the various omnipresent stressors in your life. When face to face with the innumerable thorns in a forest, one may either choose to spend all their time picking them up one by one while other thorns continue falling or choose to wear a pair of shoes and walk through the forest. The difference is in attitude. Choosing the right attitude can change everything and bring about a resolution of the problem by healing the core. Stress is more about how you react to the stressor than about the stressor itself!
8. **Increase your self reliance and self confidence:** Life is full of challenges that are there only to make us stronger and better. The challenges should be understood as opportunities for change and faced with confidence. We must understand we have the inner power to overcome each and every challenge that is thrown at us by life. The Divine is not a sadist to give us challenges that are beyond our capacity!
9. **Facilitate natural emanation of wastes:** Facilitate natural emanation of waste from the body by practicing *shuddi kriyas* like *dhauti*, *basti* and *neti*. Accumulation and stagnation of waste materials either in inner or outer environment always causes problems. Yogic cleaning practices help wash out impurities (*mala shodhana*) thus helping the process of regeneration and facilitating healing.
10. **Take responsibility for your own health:** Remember that ultimately it is "YOU" who are responsible for your own health and well being and must take the initiative to develop positive health to tide you over challenging times of ill health. Yoga fixes responsibility for our health squarely upon our own shoulders. If we do healthy things we are healthy and if we do unhealthy things we become sick. No use complaining that we are not well when we have been the cause of our problem. As Swamiji Gitananda Giri would say, "You don't have problems-you are the problem!"

11. **Health and happiness are your birthright:** Health and happiness are your birthright, claim them and develop them to your maximum potential. This message of Swamiji is a firm reminder that the goal of human existence is not health and happiness but is *moksha* (liberation). Most people today are so busy trying to find health and happiness that they forget why they are here in the first place. Yoga helps us regain our birthrights and attain the goal of human life.

The art and science of Yoga has infinite possibilities for providing answers to most health problems troubling modern humankind. However we often misunderstand this science and want it to be a miracle pill. A pill that we take only once, and want all the problems to vanish into thin air! Yoga is a wholistic science and must be learnt and practiced with a holistic view.

The dedicated practice of Yoga as a way of life is no doubt a panacea for problems related to psychosomatic, stress related disorders helping us to regain our birthright of health and happiness.

When we remember to inculcate these principles of Yoga in our practice and help our patients to understand them thus assimilating them in their own lives, we are practicing Yoga. If not it is merely -Yogopathy, the symptomatic management of conditions using techniques of Yoga!

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