

# YOGA: THE ORIGINAL MIND BODY MEDICINE

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Yoga is the original mind-body medicine that has enabled individuals to attain and maintain *sukha sthanam*, a dynamic sense of physical, mental and spiritual well being. Bhagavad-Gita defines Yoga as *samatvam* meaning thereby that Yoga is equanimity at all levels, a state wherein physical homeostasis and mental equanimity occur in a balanced and healthy harmony.

It is well established that stress weakens our immune system. Scientific research in recent times has showed that the physiological, psychological and biochemical effects of Yoga are of an anti-stress nature. Mechanisms postulated included the restoration of autonomic balance as well as an improvement in restorative, regenerative and rehabilitative capacities of the individual. A healthy inner sense of wellbeing produced by a life of Yoga percolates down through the different levels of our existence from the higher to the lower producing health and wellbeing of a holistic nature.

*Yoga Vashista* one of the great classical Yoga texts describes the causation and manifestation of disease (*vyadhi*) in an admirable manner. In the dialogue between the great sage Vashistha and Prince Rama, it describes both psychosomatic (*adhija vyadhi*) as well as non-psychosomatic ailments (*anadhija vyadhi*). *Samanya adhija vyadhi* are described as those arising from day-to-day causes while *sara adhija vyadhi* is the essential disease of being caught in the birth –rebirth cycle that may be also understood in modern terms as congenital diseases. The former can be corrected by day-to-day remedial measures such as medicines and surgery whereas the *sara adhija vyadhi* doesn't cease until knowledge of the self (*atma jnana*) is attained.

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 mind body therapy is very effective in this phase.

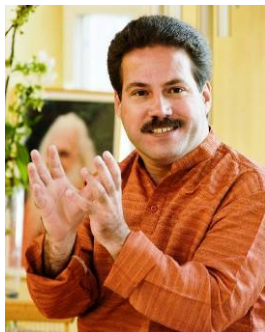
2. Psychosomatic Phase: If the stress continues there is an increase in symptoms, along with the appearance of generalized physiological symptoms such as occasional hypertension and tremors. This phase can be correlated with *manomaya* and *pranamaya koshas*. Yoga as a mind body therapy is very effective 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 also has positive emotional and psychological effects even in terminal and end of life situations.

Maharishi Patanjali, the codifier of the Yoga Darshan has explained the primary causation of stress based disorders through the concept of *pancha klesha* (psychological afflictions). These are *avidya* (ignorance of the ultimate reality leading to bodily identification), *asmita* (a false sense of identification), *raga-dwesa* (addiction and aversion), *abhinivesha* (clinging on to life for fear of death). *Avidya* as the root cause enables other *kleshas* to manifest in different forms from time to time. They may be dormant, attenuated, manifest or overpowering in their causation of pain and suffering. *Dwaitam* or the misplaced sense duality is the main initial cause of the imbalance at the higher level that then manifests through psycho-somatic stress mechanisms. This occurs through the various *koshas* (sheaths or bodies of our existence) resulting in various disorders depending upon the propensity of the individual.

The science of Yoga has numerous practical techniques as well as advice for proper life style in order to attain and maintain health and well being. *Bahiranga* practices such as *yama*, *niyama*, *asana* and *pranayama* help produce physical health while *antaranga* practices of *dharana* and

*dhyana* work on producing mental health along with *pratyahara*. Yoga works towards restoration of normalcy in all systems of the human body with special emphasis on the psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrine axis. In addition to its preventive and restorative capabilities, Yoga also aims at promoting positive health that will help us to tide over health challenges that occur during our lifetime. This concept of positive health is one of Yoga's unique contributions to modern healthcare as Yoga has both a preventive as well as promotive role in the healthcare of our masses. It is also inexpensive and can be used in tandem with other systems of medicine in an integrated manner to benefit patients.

The dedicated practice of Yoga as a way of life is no doubt a panacea for problems related to psychosomatic, stress related physical, emotional and mental disorders and helps us regain our birthright of health and happiness. It is only when we are healthy and happy that we can fulfil our destiny. With the adoption of a proper attitude and lifestyle through the Yogic way of life, we can rise above our own circumstances and our life can blossom as a time of variety, creativity, and fulfilment.



Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani is Chairman of the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India ([www.icyer.com](http://www.icyer.com)). He is also chairman of Yoganjali Natyalayam, the premier institute of Yoga and Carnatic Music and Bharatanatyam in Pondicherry ([www.rishiculture.org](http://www.rishiculture.org)). He is son and successor of the internationally acclaimed Yoga team of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj and Yogacharini Kalaimamani Ammaji, Smt Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. He is a Gold Medalist in Medical Studies (MBBS) with postgraduate diplomas in Family Health (PGDFH) and Yoga (PGDY) as well as Advanced Diploma in Yoga under his illustrious parents in 1991-93. A Fellow of the Indian Academy of Yoga, he has authored 19 DVDs and 21 books on Yoga as well as published more than a hundred papers, compilations and abstracts on Yoga and Yoga research in National and International Journals. He is a Classical Indian Vocalist, Percussionist, Music Composer and Choreographer of Indian Classical Dance in addition to his duties as Programme Co-ordinator of the Advanced Centre for Yoga Therapy Education and Research (ACYTER), JIPMER, Pondicherry. In recent years he has travelled abroad 11 times and conducted invited talks, public events, workshops, retreats and been major presenter at Yoga conferences in the UK, USA, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand. He is an Honorary International Advisor to the International Association of Yoga Therapists, USA ([www.iayt.org](http://www.iayt.org)) and various Gitananda Yoga Associations all over the world. He is on the Board of Directors of the Council for Yoga Accreditation International ([www.cyai.org](http://www.cyai.org)).