Welcome

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Yoga - A Public Health Strategy for Diabetes Prevention & Education

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This book is by a well known yoga teacher, researcher and a socially committed medical doctor. This book is a compilation and expansion of all the research conducted by Dr. Ananda Balayogi and Dr. Madan Mohan, Head of department of Physiology at JIPMER, Pondicherry. The book has eight sections and 31 chapters which include most problems of body and mind that one sees in clinics around the world today. Thus the book is a handy compendium of Yoga Therapy and its applications to many disorders.

The book opens with a section on general principles of Yoga Therapy without loosing sight of the higher echelons of Yoga, if one wants to ascend to Moksha. This is important since many Yoga teachers loose sight of the grand design of Yoga Sastra, or Yoga Science which is to transcend the human condition itself. In the opening chapter by Smt. Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, this is succinctly brought out when she says: “Yoga is the ancient science of India which shows man not only how to claim his birthright of health and happiness, but also to obtain the goal of life – moksha” [p.3]. She further says that breaking the eternal law of dharma brings all the suffering we see around us. Yoga vidya and Yoga vidhi – Yogic knowledge and Yogic technology – are the two wings that guide us in this quest for health and for transcendence.

It is important that we work with a model that is at once self consistent and testable. Such a model is provided for the origin of diseases from a Yogic perspective [p. 54]. The Yogic concept of diseases is well brought out and discussed along with statements from Tirukkural (ancient Tamil treatise), Yoga Vashista and Shivaswarodhaya. Knowing the source and cause of disease, it is then easy to provide a therapy appropriate to the condition; Yoga Chikitsa provides a broad base for such an approach. In a chapter on Yoga Chikitsa, Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri has written about various yogic therapy methods along with an exhaustive account of all possible Yogic related techniques including Bhakti yoga, astrological medicine, bone setting, Yoga glandular therapy etc. The grand summery of this is that “there is only one disease, duality. Its cure is a return to Universal Oneness” [p. 88].

In Section II, the book takes up the important
aspects of cardiovascular conditions, which are termed lifestyle disorders. Introduction of spanda - nispanda is important which is a tension-relaxation exercise for an effective relaxation of the musculoskeletal system. This is followed by the practice of pranayama and some ‘contemplative practices’ such as prana dharana, mindfulness and ajapa japa.

Section III deals with metabolic disorders including obesity and diabetes mellitus. Section IV deals with respiratory disorders, starting with a presentation of the nasal cycle. Traditional views on Swara Yoga is initially presented followed by chapters on specific pranayama and kriya techniques that are found useful for many breathing disorders. Section V is on musculoskeletal conditions including back pain, spondylosis and problems related to aging and mobility. These are all very important aspects of rehabilitation since many physiotherapy techniques border on Yoga like techniques, while Yoga asanas and pranayama could target both local and global problems related to musculoskeletal complications. Specific yoga asanas, pranayama and kriyas are suggested and are of great help especially as one grows old and suddenly finds oneself at the receiving end of annamaya and manomaya problems.

Section VI deals with psychiatric and psychological aspects; Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is an ideal base for understanding, controlling and ultimately overcoming problems of the mind. Areas of interpersonal relationships, stress, depression, geriatric psychiatric disorders are all introduced and holistic approach in each area is presented. Section VII deals with ‘special target groups’ such as children, differently-abled groups, pregnancy, patients with Multiple Sclerosis and senior citizens. All these groups need special attention to specific problems such as learning difficulties, attention deficit, hyperactivity, hypo-activity etc. It is possible to tailor Yoga modules for each section of the population; some need easy flowing asanas and some need pronounced activity. The presentation is useful in catering to specific needs of these unique categories.

In the final section, the author presents the true message of Yoga and aspect of Yoga Chikitsa. The latter is not simply applying (or prescribing) some asanas and breathing for a particular problem. The author says: “The strength of Yoga Cikitsa depends on the therapist’s personal Sadhana and conscious Yogic living and how clearly this ‘Spirit of Yoga’ is passed on to his or her client” [p. 320]. Similarly, he argues that researchers should get into the spirit of Yoga through personal practice and experience. Otherwise, the Yoga activity itself becomes life-less and prana-less and simply an exercise in intellectuality. Thus, we need to elevate Yogopathy (author’s term) to Yoga Cikitsa by integrating every minute of our existence into a Yoga based activity both in body, mind and in our spiritual pursuit.

The book is a veritable knowledge base for many aspects of Yoga, its psycho-physical base and as a Cikitsa modality. Every section contains copious references, though some important ones are not included. Each section also contains possible physiological mechanism in the theme of the section. This is important for researchers who seek to understand and clarify some fundamental pathways of activity. Many possible mechanisms are needed at various levels and this book contains some of the important ones that are required for further research. In summary, we can voice with Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Maharaj [p. 89]: “Health and happiness are your birth right – claim them. Moksha is your goal – attain it!”

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