INTRODUCTION:
Yoga is gradually being welcomed into modern health care systems as an understanding of its multifarious benefits is gaining ground worldwide. In our haste to have it accepted into the mainstream medicare, we must not however forget that Yoga is first and foremost a spiritual science for the integrated, holistic development of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of our being. Though the recent advancements in the field of research have given evidence that Yoga helps normalize human physiological and psychological functioning more importantly the practice of Yoga as a way of life is calming and provides a rare opportunity in our chaotic lives to leave the madness of the outside world behind and attain an inner peace by helping us to focus inwards.

The World health organisation defines health as “The state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity”. The Yogic way of living is a vital tool that helps attain that 'state' of health. We must not forget that it is more important to have both a sense of “being” healthy as well as “feeling” healthy. Hence, the qualitative aspect of health, the spiritual nature of the human life is rightly considered more important in Yoga and other Indian systems of traditional medicine.

The Bhagavad Gita defines Yoga as equanimity at all levels which may also be taken as the perfect state of health where there is physical homeostasis and mental equanimity giving rise to a healthy harmony between the body and mind. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, also states that “Yoga improves the health of all alike and wards off diseases of one who tirelessly practices Yoga whether they are young, old, decrepit, diseased or weak, provided they abide to the rules and regulations properly”.

THE ORIGINAL MIND BODY MEDICINE:
Yoga is the original mind body medicine and is one of the greatest treasures of the unique Indian cultural heritage. As both an art and science it has a lot to offer humankind in terms of an understanding of both the human mind as well as all aspects of our multilayered existence. Yoga treats man as a multi layered, conscious
being, possessing three bodies (sthula, sukshma and kaarana sharira) and being enveloped in a five layered (pancha kosha) of existence.

This ancient science of mind control as codified by Maharishi Patanjali more than 2500 years ago helps us to understand our mental processes as well as the cause-effect relations of a multitude of problems facing modern man. Modern man is the victim of stress and stress related disorders that threaten to disrupt his life totally. Yoga offers a way out of this 'whirlpool of stress' and is a wholistic solution to stress.

Yogic lifestyle, Yogic diet, Yogic attitudes and various Yogic practices help man to strengthen himself and develop positive health thus enabling him to withstand stress better. This Yogic “health insurance” is achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it and by releasing the pent up stress effectively through various Yogic practices. Yoga is a wholistic and integral science of life dealing with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of the individual and society.

A PERSONAL EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY

Yoga is a continuous process. The whole problem with something being goal-oriented is that people think that the goal is something to be reached at the end of the journey, but it is the journey itself that is important. This entire yogic process is not what you learn and not what you achieve. Yoga is something that you “live” until your last breath, and even that last breath should be completed with awareness. You should go with the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your best. Yoga is a continuous process. It is a journey and the goal is the journey itself.

Yoga is getting to know what your body can and cannot do. Yoga is watching the breath, slowing down the breath and discovering that you can have a wonderful control over your emotions when slowing down the breath, because breath is the seat of our emotions. Yoga is not about the number of Yoga practices we do nor is it about how many times or how long we do them. It is all about how we live our life in tune with Dharma.

This is all about our evolutionary journey from the lower animal states of being to the highest divine states of being that has been beautifully described by the Sufi Saint Rumi hundreds of years ago. Rumi declared in ecstasy, “I died as a mineral to become a plant, I died as a plant to become an animal, I died as an animal to become a man, I died as a man to become an angel, I died as an angel to become a God. When was I ever the less by dying”?

Yoga is life and everything we do is Yoga. Yoga is in every second of life, Yoga is in every action you do and in every thought you have and in every emotion that you feel. For modern man in a modern setting, I feel more than anything else that Yoga
is skill in action. Whatever you do, you should do with the attitude that it is to be
done to the best of your ability and with total effort. I think that to have action
that is skilful and yet not motivated by any desire is a model concept for modern
man. I see Yoga, in its modern context, as skilful action without desire or concern
about the fruits of our actions.

YOGA AND HEALTH :

Yoga understands health and well being as a dynamic continuum of human nature and
not a mere 'state' to be attained and maintained. The lowest point on the continuum
with the lowest speed of vibration is that of death whereas the highest point with
the highest vibration is that of immortality. In between these two extremes lie the
states of normal health and disease. For many, their state of health is defined as
that 'state' in which they are able to function without hindrance whereas in reality,
health is part of our evolutionary process towards Divinity. The lowest point on the
dynamic health continuum with lowest speed of vibration may be equated with
lowest forms of life and mineral matter while the highest point with highest speed
of vibration may be equated with Divinity.

The Yogic concept of health and disease enables us to understand that the cause of
physical disorder sprouts from the higher levels of the mind and beyond. Adhi -
the disturbed mind is the cause and vyadhi - the disease is the effect manifested
in the physical body. Maharishi Patanjali mentions "vyadhi" as a hindrance to the
complete integration of the individual personality. He doesn't directly refer to the
treatment of particular diseases as his approach is more holistic and expanded
rather than analytical and limited. Patanjali prefers to 'integrate' rather than deal
exclusively with individual symptoms of dis-integration. The diseases are merely
gross symptoms that accompany disturbances of the mind called vikshepa which
appear as duhkha (misery or pain), daurmanasya (dejection), angamejayatva
tremors) and svasaprasvasa, (disturbances in breathing). Through the Yoga life,
one can control these disturbances before they become powerful enough to cause
breakdown. The two-pronged attack advised by Patanjali is holistic: yama-niyama on
the psychological side and asana-pranayama on the physical.

DEALING WITH OMNIPRESENT STRESS

Thousands of years ago, Yogeshwar Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (often referred to
as the bible of Yoga) taught us about the Yogic patho-psychology of stress and how
through our attraction to the worldly sensory objects we cause our own
destruction. These potent ancient teachings hold true even in today's world. In
chapter Two (Samkhya Yoga), the pattern of behaviour (stress response) is given
that ultimately leads to the destruction of man. In verse 62 Lord Krishna says,
"Brooding on the objects of the senses, man develops attachment to them; from attachment (sanga or chanuraaga) comes desire (kama) and from unfulfilled desire, anger (krodha) sprouts forth." Verse 63 tells us, "From anger proceeds delusion (moha); from delusion, confused memory (smriti vibramah); from confused memory the ruin of reason and due to the ruin of reason (buddhi naaso) he perishes." In the very next verse (64), he also gives us a clue to equanimity of mind (samatvam) and how to become a person settled in that equanimity (stitha prajna) who is not affected by the opposites (dwandwa). He says, "but the disciplined yogi, moving amongst the sensory objects with all senses under control and free from attraction (raaga) and aversion (dwesha), gains in tranquillity."

According to Maharishi Patanjali, most of our problems stem from the five psycho-physiological afflictions (pancha klesha) that are inborn in each and every human being. These pancha klesha are ignorance (avidya), egoism (asmita) and our sense of needing to survive at any cost (abinivesha) as well as the attraction (raaga) to external objects and the repulsion (dwesha) to them. Ignorance (avidya) is usually the start of most problems along with the ego (asmita). Our sense of needing to survive at any cost (abinivesha) compounds it further. Both attraction (raaga) to external objects and the repulsion (dwesha) to them need to be destroyed in order to attain tranquillity as well as equanimity of emotions and the mind. Maharishi Patanjali further states that the practice of Kriya Yoga (Yoga of mental purification) consisting of tapa (disciplined effort), svadhyaya (self analysis) and ishwara pranidhana (surrender to the Divine will) is the means to destroy these five mental afflictions and attain to the state of samadhi or oneness with the supreme self or the Divine.

The regular practice of yogasana, kriya, mudra, bandha and pranayama helps to recondition the physical (annamaya kosha) and energy (pranamaya kosha) bodies. The practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana techniques helps to recondition the mind body (manomaya kosha) apparatus. All of these Yogic practices help to foster a greater mind-emotions-body understanding and bring about the union and harmony of body, emotions and mind. This righteous (right-use-ness) union is Yoga in its truest sense.

Yoga helps us to take the right attitude towards our problems and thus tackle them in an effective manner. "To have the will (iccha shakti) to change (kriya shakti) that which can be changed, the strength to accept that which can not he changed, and the wisdom (jnana shakti) to know the difference" is the attitude that needs to be cultivated. An attitude of letting go of the worries, the problems and a greater understanding of our mental process helps to create a harmony in our body, and mind whose disharmony is the main cause of 'aadi - vyadhi' or psychosomatic disorders.
PRODUCING POSITIVE HEALTH AND WELL BEING

According to Swami Kuvalayananda, founder of Kaivalyadhama positive health does not mean mere freedom from disease but is a jubilant and energetic way of living and feeling that is the peak state of well being at all levels - physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual. He says that one of the aims of Yoga is to encourage positive hygiene and health through development of inner natural powers of body and mind. In doing so, Yoga gives special attention to various eliminative processes and reconditions inherent powers of adaptation and adjustment of body and mind. Thus, the development of positive powers of adaptation and adjustment, inherent to the internal environment of man, helps him enjoy positive health and not just mere freedom from disease. He emphasizes that Yoga produces nadi shuddhi (purification of all channels of communication) and mala shuddhi (eradication of factors that disturb balanced working of body and mind).

According to Swami Kuvalayananda, Yoga helps cultivation of positive health through three integral steps:

1. Cultivation of correct psychological attitudes (maitri, karuna, mudita and upekshanam towards those who are sukha, duhkha, punya and apunya),
2. Reconditioning of neuro-muscular and neuro-glandular system - in fact, the whole body - enabling it to withstand stress and strain better,
3. Laying great emphasis on appropriate diet conducive to such a peak state of health, and encouraging the natural processes of elimination through various processes of nadi shuddhi or mala shuddhi.

To live a healthy life it is important to do healthy things and follow a healthy lifestyle. The modern world is facing a pandemic of lifestyle disorders that require changes to be made consciously by individuals themselves. Yoga places great importance on a proper and healthy lifestyle whose main components are:

1. Achar - Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercise and recommends asana, pranayama and kriya on a regular basis. Cardio-respiratory health is one of the main by-products of such healthy activities.
2. Vichar - Right thoughts and right attitude towards life is vital for well being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following the moral restraints and ethical observances (yama-niyama). As Mahatma Gandhi said, "there is enough in this world for everyone's need but not enough for any one person's greed".
3. Ahar - Yoga emphasises need for a healthy, nourishing diet that has an adequate intake of fresh water along with a well balanced intake of fresh food, green salads, sprouts, unrefined cereals and fresh fruits. It is
important to be aware of the need for a satwica diet, prepared and served with love and affection.

4. Vihar – Proper recreational activities to relax body and mind are essential for good health. This includes proper relaxation, maintaining quietude of action-speech-thoughts and group activities wherein one loses the sense of individuality. Karma Yoga is an excellent method for losing the sense of individuality and gaining a sense of universality.

According to Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director ICYER at Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry, Yoga has a step-by-step method for producing and maintaining perfect health at all levels of existence. She explains that social behaviour is first optimized through an understanding and control of the lower animal nature (pancha yama) and development and enhancement of the higher humane nature (pancha niyama). The body is then strengthened, disciplined, purified, sensitized, lightened, energized and made obedient to the higher will through asana. Universal pranic energy that flows through body-mind-emotions-spirit continuum is intensified and controlled through pranayama using breath control as a method to attain controlled expansion of the vital cosmic energy. The externally oriented senses are explored, refined, sharpened and made acute, until finally the individual can detach themselves from sensory impressions at will through pratyahara. The restless mind is then purified, cleansed, focused and strengthened through concentration (dharana). If these six steps are thoroughly understood and practiced then the seventh, dhyana or meditation (a state of union of the mind with the object of contemplation) is possible. Intense meditation produces samadhi, or the enstatic feeling of Union, Oneness with the Universe. This is the perfect state of integration or harmonious health.

MODERN MEDICINE AND YOGA:

Though modern medicine may not share all of these concepts with Yoga, it is to be seen that there are a great many 'meeting points' for the construction of a healthy bridge between them. Both modern medicine and Yoga understand the need for total health and even the World Health Organization has recently added a new dimension to the modern understanding of health by including spiritual health in its definition of the 'state of health'. Spiritual health is an important element of Yoga and now that even the WHO has come around to understanding this point of view, there is hope for a true unification of these two systems. Modern medicine has the ultimate aim and goal of producing a state of optimum physical and mental health thus ultimately leading to the optimum well being of the individual. Yoga also aims at the attainment of mental and physical well being though the methodology does differ. While modern medicine has a lot to offer humankind in its treatment and management of acute illness, accidents and communicable diseases, Yoga has a lot to
offer in terms of preventive, promotive and rehabilitative methods in addition to many management methods to tackle modern illnesses. While modern science looks outward for the cause of all ills, the Yogi searches the depth of his own self. This two way search can lead us to many answers for the troubles that plague modern man. The *Shiva-Samhita* lists the characters of a fully qualified disciple (*shishya*) as follows. “Endowed with great energy and enthusiasm, intelligent, heroic, learned in the scriptures, free from delusion...” Doesn’t a true modern medical scientist require these very same qualities?

YOGA AND SOCIAL LIFE:

The science and art of Yoga, has for millennia guided man in his search for truth. Even in his personal and social life, Yoga has given him the tools and techniques with which he can find happiness, spiritual realization and social harmony. Various Yogic concepts have guided man towards shaping his life and the interpersonal relationships in his social life. The Yogic concepts of *samatvam* (mental and emotional equanimity) and *stitha prajna* (the even minded, balanced human being) give us role models that we may strive to emulate.

An understanding of the *pancha klesha* (five psycho-physiological afflictions) and their role in the creation of stress and the stress response help us to know ourselves better and understand the how’s and why’s of what we do. The concept of the *pancha kosha* (the five layered existence of man as elucidated in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*) helps us to understand that we have more than only the physical existence and also gives us an insight into the role of the mind in causation of our physical problems as well as psychosomatic disorders. All of these concepts help us to look at life with a different perspective (*yoga drishti*) and strive to evolve consciously towards becoming Humane Beings. The concept of *vairagya* (dispassion or detachment) when understood and cultivated enables us to be dispassionate to the *dwandwa* (the pairs of opposites) such as praise-blame, hot-cold and the pleasant-unpleasant situations; that are part and parcel of our existence in this life.

The regular practice of Yoga as a ‘Way of Life’ (as defined by Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj) helps us reduce the levels of physical, mental and emotional stress. This Yogic ‘way of life’ lays emphasis on right thought, right action, right reaction and right attitude. In short Pujya Swamiji defined Yogic living as “right-use-ness of body, emotions and mind”.

The *pancha yama* and *pancha niyama* provide a strong moral and ethical foundation for our personal and social life. They guide our attitudes with regard to the right and wrong in our life and in relation to our self, our family unit and the entire social system. The *yama-niyama* provide a strong moral and ethical foundation for our personal and social life. They guide our attitudes with regard to the right and
wrong in our life and in relation to our self, our family unit and the entire social system. These changes in our attitude and behaviour will go a long way in helping to prevent the very causes of stress in our life.

The pancha yama consisting of ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (proper channeling of creative impulse) and aparigraha (non-coveted-ness) are the "do not's" in a Yoga Sadhaka’s life. Do not kill, do not be untruthful, do not steal, do not waste your god given creativity and do not covet that which does not belong to you. These guide us to say a big "NO" to our lower self and the lower impulses of violence etc. When we apply these to our life we can definitely have better personal and social relationships as social beings.

The pancha niyama consisting of saucha (cleanliness), santhosha (contentment), tapa (leading a disciplined life of austerity), svadhyaya (introspective self analysis), and ishwara pranidhana (developing a sense of gratitude to the divine self) guide us with "DO'S" - do be clean, do be contented, do be disciplined, do self - study (introspection) and do be thankful to the divine for all of his blessings. They help us to say a big "YES" to our higher self and the higher impulses. Definitely a person with such qualities is a God-send to humanity. Even when we are unable to live the yama-niyama completely, even the attempt by us to do so will bear fruit and make each one of us a better person and help us to be of value to those around us and a valuable person to live with in our family and society. These are values which need to be introduced to the youth in order to make them aware and conscious of these wonderful concepts of daily living which are qualities to be imbied with joy and not learnt with fear or compulsion.

Living a happy and healthy life on all planes is possible through the unified practice of Hatha Yoga especially when performed consciously and with awareness. Asana help to develop strength, flexibility, will power, good health, and stability and thus when practiced as a whole give a person a ‘stable and unified strong personality’. Pranayama helps us to control our emotions which are linked to breathing and the pranamaya kosh (the vital energy sheath or body). Slow, deep and rhythmic breathing helps to control stress and overcome emotional hang-ups. The inner aspects of Yoga such as dharana and dhyana help us to focus our mid and dwell in it and thus help us to channel our creative energy in a wholistic manner towards the right type of evolutionary activities. They help us to understand our self better and in the process become better humans in this social world.

The adoption of Bhakti Yoga enables us to realise the greatness of the Divine and understand our puniness as compared to the power of the Divine or nature. We realize that we are but 'puppets on a string' following his commands on the stage of the world and then perform our activities with the intention of them being an offering to the divine and gratefully receive HIS/HER/ITS blessings.

DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF A GOOD HUMAN BEING

The universe is the Divine, nature is the Divine and every being is the Divine. You are the Divine and the Divine is you. Of course we must be careful that we don’t go on an ego trip by misunderstanding this reality. The Divine is ‘that’ which is beyond name and form yet manifests to us through every name and form dear to us. He, She, It manifests to me personally through my father, my mother, my wife, my children, my students, my patients, my teachers, anyone and anything I choose to hold dear to my heart. Yoga is the dearest thing I hold to my heart and so for me the Divine is Yoga and Yoga is the Divine.

Patanjali says that the Divine, or iswara, is beyond the impurities of klesha (affliction or poison) and fructifications of the karma. He also implies in the Yoga Darshan that ‘we’ can become ‘that’ divinity itself when we rid ourselves of the impurities that prevent that awareness. Every yoganga, every part of Yoga, every part of life itself is a state of being, a state wherein we are a pure vehicle for the universal nature to manifest in its totality. The Divine is therefore for me a ‘state of being’. If you are in that state, everything is Divine. On the other hand if we are not in such a state, then everything seems to be non-Divine.

Some of the important human qualities one must try and develop in the Yogic life are:

- Always be a good learner, ready to learn every moment
- Develop a strong self-introspective ability
- Be disciplined and dedicated towards the cause of Yoga
- Try to develop an understanding of the wholistic nature of Yoga physiology, philosophy and psychology along with a strong desire for spiritual evolution
- Be willing to learn from all situations
- Learn not to have an, “I know it all!” attitude.
- Develop a sense of empathy for others
- Be willing to sublimate our own EGO
- Have a good sense of humour and laugh at yourself without reservation
- Try to motivate others by self-example and lead the way as a true acharya.
- Always have devotion to the guru who has guided you for guru droha or treachery to one’s guru is considered the worst sin.
- Do your best and leave the rest for everything happens only for our spiritual evolution.

CONCLUSION:

Love for Yoga is the key component of a Yoga life. Of course, joy and fun are part of the Yoga life at all times. Develop an ardent desire to evolve on the path towards oneness and keep working on it non stop. Compassion, empathy and love are
important dynamics that are to be worked on while petty egocentric stuff needs to be kept at the bottom of the pile. The ability to sublimate one’s individuality for the sake of the group is an important part of the Yoga life. Constant growth through *satsangha* is very useful, and being open to correction and change at all times is a must. We need to remember that the *guru* is not just the physical manifestation but is a spirit of guidance that can manifest through so many vehicles. One must be constant on the lookout for its manifestation as such a spirit may manifest through our partner, our children, our neighbours, our students, our friends and often through our worst enemies too. I have found that people who consider me their worst enemy have actually helped my growth more than some who have always been caring and considerate. The ones who always looking for chances to degrade me keep me on my toes, and make me do the best I can without fail. They are the stimulant that enables the best to flower through me. When they play such a great role in my life, is not it right that I thank them for being a manifestation of the *guru* spirit too?

Yoga is not just performing some contortionist poses or huffing and puffing some *pranayama* or sleeping our way through any so-called meditation. It is an integrated way of life in which awareness and consciousness play a great part in guiding our spiritual evolution through life in the social system itself and not in some remote cave in the mountains or hut in the forest. As my beloved Guru-Father Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj said "Yoga is the science and art of right-useness of body, emotions and mind."

Through the dedicated practice of Yoga as a way of life, we can become a truly balanced humane being (*sthita prajna*) with the following qualities as described in the Bhagavad Gita:

- Beyond passion, fear and anger. (II.56)
- Devoid of possessiveness and egoism. (II.71)
- Firm in understanding and un-bewildered. (V.20)
- Engaged in doing good to all beings. (V.25)
- Friendly and compassionate to all. (XII.13)
- Having no expectation, pure and skilful in action. (XII.16)

The Yogi wishes peace and happiness not only for himself, but also for all beings on all the different planes of existence. He is not an “individualist” seeking salvation for only himself but on the contrary is an “universalist” seeking to live life in the proper evolutionary manner to the best of his ability and with care and concern for his human brethren as well as all beings on all planes of existence.

"*Om, loka samasta sukhino bhavanthu sarve janaha sukhino bhavanthu*

"*Om shanti, shanti, shanti Om*"
RECOMMENDED READING:


15. www.icyer.com

16. www.rishiculture.org

18. Yoga for Health and Healing, Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani. Dhivyananda Creations, Iyyanar Nagar, Pondicherry. 2007


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He is a Gold Medallist in Medical Studies (MBBS) with postgraduate diplomas in both Family Health (PGDFH) as well as Yoga (PGDY) and the 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.

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