

# Yoga : The Art of Being and Science of Well-Being

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**Y**oga is an inner science comprising of a variety of practices and methods through which human beings can achieve a union between the body and the mind to attain self-realisation. The aim of Yoga practice (*sādhana*) is to overcome and endure all kinds of sufferings that leads to a sense of freedom in every walk of life with holistic health, happiness and harmony.

One of the deep impulses of human mind is a craving to know. We wish to understand the world around us, its source, its meaning and its probable future. Founders of philosophical thoughts - Vedic seers, ancient Indian Yoga Gurus, Maharishis, Mahavir, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and Sufis have dedicated their lives to the quest of understanding the source of suffering of mankind. All these masters have developed a common path, based on their concrete experiences which are practical, methodical and systematic for unfolding and culturing the unlimited potentialities of mankind which can be realised by the practice of Yoga. The roots of Yoga are in ancient India; its universal origin is the burning desire in the heart of the philosophers - the yearning to be happy and free of suffering. In Indian thought the term Philosophy stands for Darshana i.e. 'vision' as a means of self-realization through self-purification which claims to end the three-fold suffering of mankind forever. While minutely observing the life phenomenon, ancient Indian masters have concluded that so long as we do not pay any serious attention towards our day-to-day activities as well as the activities of Mother Nature, we go on performing all our actions mechanically in the form of reflexes

## About the International Day of Yoga Logo

Folding of both hands in the logo symbolise Yoga, the union, which reflects the union of individual consciousness with that of universal consciousness, a perfect harmony between mind and body, man and nature; the holistic approach to health and well-being. The brown leaves symbolise the Earth element, the green leaves symbolise nature, blue symbolises the water element, brightness symbolises the fire element and the Sun symbolises the source of energy and inspiration. The logo reflects harmony and peace for humanity, which is the essence of Yoga.



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in life and therefore, life seems to be full of pain and miseries. However, they have also observed that if we add our awareness to our activities we can understand life and phenomenon associated with it, we can overcome all kinds of pain and suffering, we can achieve total integration that can lead us to freedom.

Different social customs and rituals in India, the land of Yoga, reflect a love for ecological balance, tolerance towards other systems of thought and a compassionate outlook towards all creations. Yoga Sadhana of all hues and colours is considered a panacea for a meaningful life and living. Its orientation to a comprehensive health, both individual and social, makes it a worthy practice for the people of all religions, races and nationalities.

Nowadays, millions of people are practicing Yoga and have been benefitted by the practice of Yoga which has been preserved and promoted by the great eminent Yoga Masters from ancient times to this date. Yoga is being practiced as an art and science of well-being across the globe.

### Traditional Schools/Kinds of Yoga

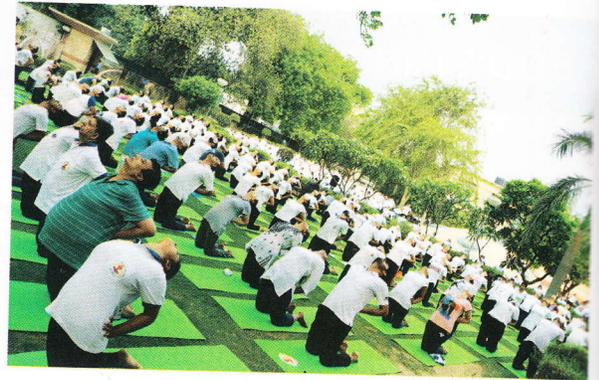
Different philosophies, traditions, lineages and guru-shishya paramparas of Yoga led to the emergence of different traditional schools. These include Jñāna Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Pātanjala Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Dhyāna Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Rāja Yoga, Jain Yoga, Bouddha Yoga etc. Each school has its own approach and practices that lead to the ultimate aim and objectives of Yoga.

### The Fundamentals of Yoga

Yoga works on the level of one's body, mind, emotion and energy. This has given rise to four broad classifications of Yoga: Karma Yoga where we utilize the body; Jñāna Yoga where we utilize the mind and intellect; Bhakti Yoga where we utilize the emotion and Kriya Yoga where we utilize the energy. Each system of Yoga we practice falls within the gamut of one or more of these categories.

Every individual is a unique

combination of these four factors. Only a guru (teacher) can advocate the appropriate combination of the four fundamental paths as it is necessary for each seeker. All ancient commentaries on Yoga have stressed that it is essential to work under the direction of a guru.



### Yogic Practices for Well-Being

The widely practiced Yoga sadhanas are: Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prānāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna, Samādhi, Bandhās and Mudras, Shatkarmas, Yuktāhāra, Mantra-japa, Yukta-karma etc.

Yama's are restraints and Niyama's are observances. These are considered to be pre-requisites for further Yoga practice. Āsanās, capable of bringing about stability of body and mind, "kuryattadasanam-sthairyam", involve adopting various psycho-physical body patterns and giving one an ability to maintain a body position (a stable awareness of one's structural existence) for a considerable length of time.

Prānāyāma consists of developing awareness of one's breathing followed by wilful regulation of respiration as the functional or vital basis of one's existence. It helps in developing awareness of one's mind and helps to establish control over the mind. In the initial stages, this is done by developing awareness of the "flow of in-breath and out-breath" (svāsa-prasvāsa) through nostrils, mouth and other body openings, its internal and external pathways and destinations. Later, this phenomenon is modified, through regulated, controlled and monitored inhalation (svāsa) leading to the awareness of the body space getting filled (puraka), the space(s) remaining in a filled state (kumbhaka), and it getting emptied (rechaka) during regulated, controlled and monitored exhalation (prasvāsa).

Pratyāhāra indicates dissociation of one's consciousness (withdrawal) from the sense organs which connect with

the external objects. Dhāraṇa indicates broad based field of attention (inside the body and mind) which is usually understood as concentration. Dhyāna (meditation) is contemplation (focussed attention inside the body and mind) and Samādhi (integration).

Bandhas and Mudras are practices associated with Prānāyāma. They are viewed as the higher Yogic practices that mainly adopt certain physical gestures along with control over respiration. This further facilitates control over mind and paves the way for a higher Yogic attainment. However, practice of dhyāna, which moves one towards self-realisation and leads one to transcendence, is considered the essence of Yoga Sādhanā.

Śatkarmas are detoxification procedures that are clinical in nature and help to remove the toxins accumulated in the body. Yuktāhāra advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living.

Yuktahara (Right Food and other inputs) advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living. However practice of Dhyana (Meditation) helping in self-realization leading to transcendence is considered as the essence of Yoga Sādhanā. However, 'a judicious combination of practice of asana, pranayama and dhyana daily, keep individuals healthy and disease free'.

The knowledge aspect of Yoga Sādhanā is being extensively researched, with advantage to Yoga practitioners. Psychological, Anatomico-physiological, Bio-chemical and philosophical phenomena underlying Yoga Sādhanā have been commendably

understood by us today. It is a matter of satisfaction for the entire humanity. So also, elaborate and effective means of its transmission, such as internet across the globe, is a great stride for propagation of yogic knowledge. Teaching methodology in Yoga has also ingrained modern educational methodological rigours into it. There is also a worldwide growth of teaching schools of Yoga across the globe. An earnest scientific and philosophico-literary research has also caught up globally and is yet another encouraging sign of evolution of Yoga further.

### Food for Thought

A few dietary guidelines can ensure that the body and mind are flexible and well-prepared for practice. A vegetarian diet is usually recommended, and for a person over 30 years, two meals a day should suffice, except in cases of illness or very high physical activity or labour.

### How Yoga Works

The following are just a few of the mechanisms through which Yoga works as an integrated mind-body medicine:

1. Cleanses the accumulated toxins through various *shuddikriyas* and generates a sense of relaxed lightness through Yogic *sukshnavyayama* (simple micro movements for all joints and ligaments of body). Free flow in all bodily passages prevents the many infections that may occur when pathogens stagnate therein.
2. Adoption of a Yogic lifestyle with proper nourishing diet, creates positive antioxidant enhancement thus neutralizing free radicals while enabling a rejuvenative storehouse of nutrients packed with life energy to work on anabolic, reparative and healing processes.
3. Steadies the entire body through different physical postures held in a steady and comfortable manner without strain. Physical balance and a sense of ease with oneself enhance mental/emotional balance and enable all physiological processes to occur in a healthy manner.
4. Improves control over autonomic respiratory mechanisms through breathing patterns that generate energy and enhance emotional stability. The mind and emotions are related to our breathing pattern and rate and hence the slowing down of the breathing process influences autonomic functioning, metabolic processes as well as emotional responses.
5. Integrates body movements with the breath creates psychosomatic harmony. In Yoga the physical body is related to *annamayakosha* (our anatomical existence) and the mind to *manomayakosha* (our psychological existence). As the *pranayama kosha* (our physiological existence sustained by the energy of the breath) lies in between them, the breath is the key to psychosomatic harmony.
6. Focuses the mind positively on activities being done, enhances energy flow and results in healthy circulation to the different body parts and internal organs. Where the mind goes, there the *prana* flows!
7. Creates a calm internal environment through contemplative practices that in turn enable normalization of homeostatic mechanisms. Yoga is all about balance or *samatvam* at all levels of being. Mental balance produces physical balance and vice versa too.
8. Relaxes the body-emotion-mind complex through physical and mental techniques that enhance our pain threshold and coping ability in responding to external and internal stressors. This enhances the quality of life as seen in so many terminal cases where other therapies are not able to offer any solace.
9. Enhances self-confidence and internal healing capacities through the cultivation of right attitudes towards life and moral-ethical living through *yama-niyama* and various Yogic psychological principles. Faith, self-confidence and inner strength are most essential for healing, repair, rejuvenation and reinvigoration.
10. 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.

Thus, Yoga is a perfect wellness module as it is comprehensive and holistic in its nature. Yogic principles of wellness help to strengthen and develop positive health enabling us 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 the practice of various Yogic practices.

### Scientific Studies on Yoga

Modern day lifestyle has brought in many challenges to health and has become a major cause for many ailments among people across the globe. Stress, improper dietary habits and sedentary living have led to decline in health, performance and led to diseases such as diabetes, asthma, cardio vascular diseases, metabolic disorders and cancer. Can yoga be a panacea for all these modern day problems?

Since most of the modern day health problems, particularly the chronic NCDs, are because of faulty life-style, Yoga is useful in combating these disorders and shows that science and spirituality need not always be treated as separate entities. Yoga has the potential to solve the lifestyle problems and psychosomatic diseases.

A series of research studies were carried out across the globe to scientifically evaluate and validate the

## PROMOTION OF YOGA

- UNESCO inscribed Yoga in the representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Yoga was inscribed in the UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity during the 11 th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in December 2016.
- Inclusion of Yoga In National Health Policy 2017: In order to leverage a proper healthcare legacy, the National Health Policy 2017 recommended introduction of Yoga in school and at work places as part of promotion of good health.
- Yoga in School Curriculum: In order to promote Yoga as a part of school curriculum, Yoga Education was made compulsory by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), a statutory body under Ministry of Human Resource Development, through its 15 Teacher Education Programmes.
- Yoga Certification Board: Established by Ministry of AYUSH for certification of Yoga professionals and accreditation of Yoga Institutions and Personnel Certification Body.
- UGC has established Yoga Departments in Six Central Universities and framed Standard Yoga Syllabi for various courses e.g. B.Sc., M.Sc. and Ph.D. programmes in Yoga by constituting an Expert Committee.
- National Eligibility Test (NET) in Yoga has been conducted for Lectureship and Research Fellowship for the first time.
- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) under auspices of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) also deputed Yoga teachers to Indian Missions for imparting training to local students and teachers. MEA also provides publicity material including videos, documentaries, coffee table books, instructional manuals on the different aspects of Yoga and yogic practices to Indian Missions for display and distribution.
- The ICCR signed an MoU with Yunnan Minzu University, China for establishment of Yoga College named "India-China College of Yoga".
- Yoga Olympiad: NCERT has taken the initiative of "YOGA OLYMPIAD" for School Children.
- Yoga training to Central Armed Police Force (CAPF): Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY), Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India has introduced Yoga training to Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and more than 1385 Master Yoga Trainers have been trained by MDNIY.
- PM Awards on IDY: Four awards, Two National and Two International, have been announced in the field of Yoga.
- National AYUSH Mission: It inter-alia makes provision for the following:-
  - (i) Upgradation of exclusive State Government AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries including Yoga.
  - (ii) Setting up of upto 50 bedded integrated AYUSH Hospital including Yoga.
  - (iii) Under the flexible components of the scheme of NAM, provision has been made for Grant-in- aid to the Yoga Wellness centers.

beneficial effects of Yoga. Physiological, biochemical, psychological and clinical variables have been studied in controlled experiments to assess beneficial health effects of Yoga. The studies revealed that yoga through its effects on autonomic nervous system and endocrine system influence cellular and molecular aspects of health in Yoga practitioners. It was observed that yogic practice brings stability of autonomic equilibrium along with strengthening of parasympathetic system, thereby minimizing the wear and tear in different physiological systems and thereby slowing down the aging process. Yoga practice results in relative hypometabolic state, thereby providing greater

buffer for stress response. The studies indicate improvement in physical and cognitive performance, improvement in thermoregulatory efficiency, body flexibility and stress tolerance. It also strengthens our immunity thereby preventing diseases.

### Conclusion

Yoga is a science and a way of healthy living, which helps to achieve a harmonious personality.

At present, global healthcare is dominated by modern medicine. Cost of medicine is going beyond the reach of poor and middle class people. On the other hand, communities need safe, effective, affordable and accessible

healthcare. The holistic wisdom of Yoga and other ancient health systems offers the necessary wisdom, experience and capabilities that are crucial for such transformational change.

As medicine experiences an explosion in its knowledge-base and genomic medicine opens a whole new approach to medical care, there seems to be an insatiable desire for ancient philosophies and approaches to medical care by the general public. Yoga is proving to be the most desirable traditional system of health and well-being in the present scenario. □

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