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Yoga for Physical Fitness and Wellbeing

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INTRODUCTION

The true essence of Yogic asana and kriya revolves round improvement of physical and mental energy, which is required in every aspect of life; be it sitting, standing, sleeping, reading, playing, etc.

Definitions

1. According to Kathopanishad :- "When the sense are stilled, when the mind is at rest, when the intellect wavers not then, say the wise, is reached the highest stage. This steady control of the senses and mind has been defined as Yoga. He who attains it is free from delusion".
2. Maharishi Ved Vyas:- "Yoga is attaining the pose".
3. Shri Bharti Krishan Tirth:- "Oneness of man with God is known as Yoga."
4. Agam:- "The knowledge about Shiva and Shakti is yoga."

The literal meaning of the word yoga is yoke. It means for uniting the individual spirit with the universal spirit or God.

The word Yoga is derived from the roots of Sanskrit Yuj which means to join, to attach, to bind & Yoke, and to concentrate on one's attention. It also means Union. Yoga is the true union of our will with the will of God.

Yoga means Union, joining, harnessing, yoking, contact or connection. It is the union between the individual self & the universal self. At the individual level this refers to the unity of body, mind & spirit and the underlying aim of all yoga practices is to cultivate harmony & the balance throughout the totality of our being. It is the harnessing of one's own underlying nature as well as under natural forces from which one has emerged. It is the yoking together of the body mind, & spirit through self discipline.

Yoga was the foundation of the body - its secret energies & natural intelligence - to reach the summits of the spirit. In yoga philosophy, the Sanskrit terms for these concepts are Atman & Brahman. There is Brahman (Ultimate reality), which is advalta (non dual), eka (one without-a-second), santana or nitya (eternal), avikari (changeless), sarvagata (all-peruading) achala (unshakable), sthanu (stable) guantita (transcendental) and ananta (infinite).

BRANCHES OF YOGA

- Heath Yoga or Yoga of Postures
- Bhakti Yoga or Yoga of Devotion
- Raja Yoga or Yoga of Self - control
- Jnana Yoga or Yoga of the mind
- Karma Yoga or Yoga of service
- Tantra Yoga or Yoga of Rituals

There are eight components of yoga to secure purity of body, mind and soul. They are -

1. **Yama (Social Discipline):** Yama means restrain or abstention. It has five moral practices. Non-violence (Ahimsa) means not to hurt any creature mentally or physically through mind, Truthfulness (Satya) is the presentation of a matter as perceived with the help of the sense organs. Non-stealing (Asteya) means not to covet and acquire physically, mentally or by speech other's possessions. Calibacy -Moderation in sex (Brahmacharya). Brahmacharya does not mean life-long celibacies, but but moderation in sex between married couples. Non-acquisitiveness (Aparigraha) means abandoning wealth and means of sensual pleasure.
2. **Niyama (Individual Discipline)** - Physical and mental rules of conduct towards oneself. cleanliness means internal and external purification of the body and the mind. Contentment (Santosh) is a state of mind by which one lives happily and satisfied in a congenial or

uncongenial atmosphere. Austerity or Penance (Tapas) is the conquest of all desires or sensual pleasures by practicing purity in thought, speech and action. Self-study (Svadyaya) means exchange of thoughts in order to secure purity in thought and accomplish knowledge. Surrender to God (Ishvara Pramidhana). It is pure devotion to God and surrender of all actions to him.

3. Asana (Postures): Asana means holding the body in a particular posture to bring stability to the body and poise to the mind. The practice of Asana brings firmness to the body and vitality to the body and the mind.
4. Pranayama (Breath Control): Practice of pranayama is to stimulate, regulate and harmonize vital energy of the body e.g. as bath is required for purifying the body, pranayama is required for purifying the mind, and internal organs.
5. Pratyahara (Discipline of the sense): The extroversion of the sense organs due to their hankering after worldly objects has to be restrained and directed inwards towards the source of all existence. This process is putting the sense under restraint.
6. Dharna (Concentration): It means focussing the pure mind on one's personal deity or on the individual self. The practice of Dharna helps the mind to concentrate on a particular object.
7. Dhyana (Meditation): When one sustains and maintains the focus of attention through Dharana unbound by time and space, then it becomes dhyana (Meditation).
8. Samadhi (Self-realisation): In this one's identity becomes both externally and internally immersed in meditation. Supreme happiness, free from pleasure, pain or misery, is experienced. Samadhi is the climax of Dhyana.

TYPES OF YOGA

- Karma Yoga is the yoga of action.
- JnanaYog is the yoga of knowledge and wisdom.
- Hatha Yoga is the yoga of attaining physical and mental purity, (shuddhi).
- Raj Yoga is the yoga of awakening the psychic awareness and facilities.
- Mantra Yoga is the yoga of freeing dissolution of individuality.
- Laya Yoga is the yoga of conscious dissolution of individuality.
- Bhakti Yoga is the yoga of intense devotion.

IMPORTANCE OF YOGA

The origin of yoga dates back to the early days of human civilization and represents one of the intangible aspects of India's spiritual heritage. Yoga facilitates attainment of self-realisation and harmony. Man is a physical, mental and spiritual being; yoga helps promote a balanced development of the three. Yoga can be practiced by any individual, irrespective of the background, who is ready to transcend the self and attain enlightenment. The practice of yogic exercises increases self-awareness, bestowing upon every aspirant the power to control body and mind. It brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve a peaceful body and mind, it helps to manage stress and anxiety and keep you relaxing. It also helps in increasing flexibility, muscle strength and body tone. It improved respiration, energy and vitality. The practice of Yoga reduces stress and tension in the physical body thereby making us emotionally stable. Breathing exercises help to control the bodily functions and steady the mind.

Yoga postures can foster strength, stamina and flexibility of one's body and can contribute to the efficient functioning of all body organs and systems. They can stimulate healing by accentuating the process of clearance of toxins and channelizing the flow of energy.

- I. Improves the purity of the body – Various Yogic exercises can detoxify the human body and the internal organs. Substantially our body comprises of three elements, i.e. kaph, pitta and vaata proper balance of these three elements can ensure a healthy lifestyle. Few examples of yogic exercises that help in detoxification can be Neti, Dhoni, Nauli, Dasti, Kapaalbhati and Tratak etc.
- II. Makes Mentally Strong –Yoga can be one of the powerful methods of stress relief. It reduces deep seated mental and emotional tensions. Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana play a vital role in attainment of peace of mind. Vajrasana, Shavasana, Padmasana, Siddhasana and Shalabhasana are very beneficial for releasing mental stress from the body.
- III. Yoga relaxes body and mind – Yoga can make one feel relaxed, restored and rejuvenated. It pulls stress and negative energy out of the body. Shavasana, Makarasana, Padmasana and nadam Sadhana are yogic exercises good for relaxation and reducing mental fatigue.
- IV. Yoga Cure and Prevention from Disease –Yoga can improve the quality of life and help alleviate some chronic diseases by promoting relaxation and overall fitness. Yoga can have profoundly

- positive impact on people suffering from diseases such as bronchitis, myalgia, neurasthenia, arthritis, high blood pressure, leprosy. Vajrasana, a yogic exercise, can lower the diabetic levels; further exemplifying the positive impact of yoga.
- V. Yoga tone the body – Yoga is commonly regarded as a wonderful option to obtain a toned physique. Practicing yogic asanas can give a limber look while improving cardiovascular wealth and overall wellness. High intensity Yogasanas can help building strength, Mayurasana can be helpful for lifting facial beauty; adding to one's glamour.
 - VI. Yoga keeps the correct posture of Body – The true essence of yoga revolves around elevating the life force or '*kundalini*' at the base of the spine. Today's modern lifestyle has strained the spine by keeping it curved for longer time. Sedentary jobs, long working hours and excessive use of gadgets make our body more slouch and hunched and bring postural deformities. A correct body posture keeps a body in shape and helps in maintaining a smart, confident appearance. Regular yoga practice brings awareness about one's body.
 - VII. Yoga helps in Spiritual Development – Yoga brings synchronization of mind and body, creating a sense of calmness. The practice of yoga perpetuates composure, tranquility and control over mind.

YOGA PROMOTES PHYSICAL HEALTH AND LONGEVITY OF A SPORTSMAN

Yoga is a powerful instrumental force that helps to prepare the body, mind and reflexes of a sportsperson. It is the 'pranaic' forces where the 'Nadis' (channels of the body) are cleansed, keeping the mind and body healthy. 'Pranamaya' contributes to greater energy transmission and improving concentration. Yoga is not only a form of exercise but it relaxes the body as well, from tension and stress. It also helps to strengthen joints and spine along with the nervous, digestive and cardiovascular system. Yoga actually helps in an all-round development of the mind and body and prepares a sportsperson for better reflexes and performances.

CONCLUSION

Yoga is a process of bringing mind and body to synchrony in order to gain good health, balance of mind and self-realization. It heals our mind and liberates our soul. With proper understanding and regular practice, one can reach the zenith of physical and mental fitness. Sound mental and physical capabilities are a result of maintaining a balance among exercise, diet and relaxation. Although yoga has the potential power to make us lead a healthy lifestyle, add to our vigor, still most people lack the knowledge of systematic practice of yoga.

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