

The Fourfold Yoga - Yoga Therapy

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"Excellence in action is Yoga " declares the Song Celestial, an authentic treatise on Yoga and the quintessence of the Upanishads. Yoga, as the science of Holistic living, is a way of life. Yoga does not mean physical exercises even though such exercises have been prescribed for improving the skill of our body. Yoga comprises techniques that transform our intellect, mind and emotions while providing a comprehensive philosophy for Integral Life.

In order to live an integral life, we must develop skill in life. Aurobindo defined Yoga as "the Art of Conscious Self Finding". The first and fundamental thing we should do if we are to expand the limits of our Consciousness, is to gain mastery of the mind. This is not easy.

The incidence of most of the physical diseases that have plagued humanity for centuries have been reduced by glorious advances in the medical sciences. The eradication of most infectious diseases and the control of many metabolic disorders have been effectuated by better drugs and surgical techniques. Soon, even routine genetic interventions may be possible. But new and ever more common causes of ill health haunt us today. They are psychosomatic ailments and chronic stress. Allopathy is less than effective when dealing with these ailments.

The cause of these are found to be attitudes and lifestyle choices and not physiological anomalies. Allopathy, by concentrating on a physical and mechanistic approach to healing, can do little to relieve conditions such as these. The frenetic pace of modern life exposes many people to continuous high mental tension and unrelieved stress. And if we are largely sedentary in our habits and overindulge in health damaging substances and foods, as we are fond of doing, our well-being and fitness will be further compromised. Eventually stress may manifest itself in the form of physical disease or mental breakdown. Allopathy is symptomatic, and has countered with symptom- suppressing treatments, instead of tackling the root cause of the problem. Lack of disease has been regarded as health, rather than as a dynamic growth process in which we feel truly well on physical, mental and spiritual levels.

The Evolution of Medicine and the Three Eras of Medicine

Allopathic Medicine or "Physical Medicine" belongs to the first era. It is based in Cartesian philosophy and creates a dichotomy between mind and body. Treating a disease is like fixing a part of the machine.

The second era of medicine refers to 'Mind-Body medicine.' It became popular in the 1960s with the advent of meditation, imagery, hypnosis and bio-feedback. Mind and body are interconnected by messenger molecules and these molecules are invoked to accomplish the healing process.

The third era of Medicine refers to "Transpersonal Medicine". It became popular in the 1990s with the advent of group support and spirituality to heal.

Yoga therapy supplements the second and the third eras of medicine.

Yoga therapy complements medical technology with a holistic system of health care that addresses the triune problems one may be experiencing- physical, mental and/or spiritual. The author of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali, defined it as the 'Science of the Mind'. Mind is the root cause of bondage and in order to redeem us from the thralldom of the mind, we have to annihilate the mind. Extirpation of thought waves is Yoga. And it is through teaching us to control our mind, our desires, and our reactions to stress, that yoga can fundamentally help us. It is based on the tripod of Life - Body, Mind and Self and the three levels of Being- Doing, Thinking and Pure Being.

Mastery of the mind involves 2 aspects:

- 1) **Concentration** - The ability to concentrate our attention on any given subject or object
- 2) **Meditation** - The ability to quiet our mind at will.

Though the first has been mastered partially by most people, the second is very difficult. It is difficult indeed to lapse into a state of inner peace, let alone at will. As an intellectual, skillful means for quietening the mind, Yoga is unparalleled. A still mind is pure Spirit.

All aspects of the Fourfold Yoga work toward this in some way and if we practice this master Science, we reach closer to our goal. Yoga generates that inner mental peace perpetually, in all our actions, and thereby we achieve physical and mental health. This calmness in action is the secret to attaining the skill, according to Yoga Philosophy. This is known as the strength of Superconscious stillness !

*Stillness itself is inertia
Action itself is discord
When stillness and action equalise
Then is the Highest Cosmic Union*
Yoga Sutras

*Lo! steadfast a lamp burns sheltered from the wind
Such is the likeness of the Yogi's mind
Freed from sense storms and burning bright to Heaven
When mind broods placid, soothed with holy wont
When Self contemplates Self and in itself
Hath comfort!*
The Song Celestial

Health and Yoga Therapy

The World Health Organisation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease and infirmity. WHO also suggests a fourth dimension-spiritual well-being. It is clear from this definition that

health should be conceived as a continuous function indicating the state of well being and not a lack of ill health.

The approach of Yoga Therapy is based on the holistic concept of human being; the five "sheaths" of existence of which the physical sheath (*Annamaya Kosha*) is only the first. The second is the Vital Sheath (*Pranamaya Kosha*), that is made up of the Vital Energy called Prana which flows through invisible channels called *Nadis*. The third is the Mental Sheath (*Manomaya Kosha*) The fourth is the Intellectual Sheath (*Vijnanamaya Kosha*) and the final sheath is the Bliss Sheath (*Ananda Maya Kosha*). The Bliss Sheath is found to consist of the positive energy associated with the Divine Self. It is from this sheath that the inner peace characteristic of true Bliss emanates.

Disease is defined as any imbalance in any of the three lower sheaths of existence. Ego Consciousness, which is centered around the Self, predominates in the physical, vital and mind sheaths. Harmony in these sheaths can be easily disturbed as the ego is up in arms against the world most of the time. The fourth and the fifth sheaths are permeated by a larger, Cosmic Consciousness and cannot be disturbed as they are closer to the Self. When we are truly healthy, the positive energy in the higher sheath percolates freely through the lower ones and brings total harmony and balance to all our faculties. But the imbalances in the lower sheaths block the free movement of Bliss despite the harmony of the higher sheaths being constant.

A great treatise on Yoga, the Yoga Vasishtha, declares that there are two types of physical illness, and each requires a different approach. The first are the illnesses with a strong physical element, such as contagious diseases and accidental injuries. These are most effectively dealt with by conventional medicine, though Yoga can play a substantial supportive role. Yoga is prophylactic and also helps prevent the occurrence of such ailments by improving our general health and making us less accident-prone.

The other types of illness arise through disturbances in the mind sheath and includes all the psychosomatic and degenerative ailments. In these disorders, psychological factors play a much greater role, and conventional treatment alone cannot effectuate healing. According to Yogic Psychology, such ailments are thought to be caused by mental diseases called *Adhis*. *Adhi* creates *Vyadhi*, disease. These arise when excessively strong feelings of like or dislike (*Raga* and *Dvesha*) becomes amplified and established acting to distort personality and to obstruct the flow of positive energy to the lower sheaths. This causes imbalances that result in physical ailments and also makes us feel restless and discontent.

The positive energy from the bliss sheath is responsible for our natural state, which is Peace. While the flow of this energy is interrupted by *Adhis* (mental blocks), our sense of well-being is diminished, and in our attempt to regain it, we may be further aggravating the problem by behaving inappropriately.

We may eat the wrong type of foods, lapse into negative states of mind, drive ourselves too hard, overwork ourselves, live in unhealthy surroundings and add more tension and stress. These methods, however will give only momentary relief and may be actually damaging to our health.

Yoga Therapy provides that all-important element that conventional therapies lack while dealing with psychosomatic illnesses, as it acts directly on the mental

imbalances that underlie them. While meditation and emotion-culturing makes us conscious of the fact that thoughts and emotions are tyrants, Happiness-analysis teaches how to look within ourselves to find beatific peace and contentment. This effectively complements allopathic techniques which improve the situation physically but are unable to eliminate the root cause of the problem.

The root Cause of all Disease - Bhoga or Sensory enjoyments

Bhoga (enjoyments of the senses) is *Roga* (disease). It can only be cured by Yoga (Divine Alchemy).

All food that is tasty is detrimental to the body, declares Prakriti Therapy. The food which cometh from Nature, fruits and vegetables, are alkaline by nature. Maximum health is in an alkaline body. We can only be healthy if we keep a 80%- 20% ratio. (80% alkalinity and 20% acidity). This means we have to eat more natural foods and less processed foods (which are more or less acidic). Truly speaking, processed foods, even though they taste good, rob us of our natural, vibrant health.

Happiness Analysis for Lifestyle Change

Happiness Analysis is a technique for analysing the cause of happiness, what constitutes Bliss, the inner beatific peace that characterises the fifth level of Being. It basically embodies the realization that happiness comes from within and is not dependent on material possessions or physical enjoyment.

When we achieve desires, we are happy temporarily because of the satisfaction involved and happiness is often associated with jubilation and excitement. But such feelings of euphoria are often followed by negative feelings such as tiredness and disillusionment. The Beatific Peace, which is the aim of Yoga, involves no great effort and engenders no fatigue. The authoritative texts of Yoga postulate that the Ultimate State of Bliss is a state of eternal silence, wherein we are not troubled by tormenting thoughts and fears and where we are freed from all sorrows.

Though Yoga practices lay the foundation needed for us to achieve this, we must also make determined efforts to sustain a state of perfect happiness by analysing our feelings of pleasure. The basic hypothesis of Yoga is that actions bring pleasure when they briefly evoke the inner silence that defines true happiness. When our desire is fulfilled or when a goal is won, at the very instance of success our thoughts vanish and our mind dips momentarily into the Bliss sheath. Actually, what we do is to open up temporary channels to the higher sheath, hence evoking positive sensations. This is merely a temporary feeling and cannot be perpetuated.

Can we generate that moment from within and free ourselves from dependency on external aids? Yes, we can, if we try enough. Practice makes one perfect and at first we may not be able to maintain inner peace for long, but gradually we will become less vulnerable to negative influences. The likes and dislikes (*Raga* and *Dvesha*) that can lead to mental diseases (*Adhis*) will become less important and our growing awareness of Cosmic Consciousness will give meaning and coherence to every aspect of our life.

The Basis Of Yoga Therapy

Yoga therapy is fundamentally different from allopathic practice in its approach to health care. Instead of trying to reduce the cause of disease to a single factor and to correct it using a specific cure, Yoga aims to treat illness by improving health on all the five levels of Being - physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual simultaneously and restoring inner harmony.

Ill-health occurs when the total balance of perfect health is disturbed. And although the original disrupting influence may only affect one level at first, viz the physical level, the disturbance soon spreads to the other four levels. All the five sheaths of existence interact, thus something that primarily affects the mind can soon spread to the body and the subtler sheaths. A bad day at work may make us irritable and it also increases stress reaction, makes our muscles tense and often depletes our energy level leading to chronic fatigue.

While emotion culturing generates equanimity, relaxation and meditation can calm our mind. Positive action produces harmony, just as as negative influences spread disruption. The different types of yoga practice augment each other and are more effective when done together. All wisdom is given in the one word "Relax".

Physical relaxation can be effectuated when we do the prescribed *asanas* and stretch our muscles as muscular tension is released.

Mental relaxation is effected when we relax our mind during meditation and release suppressed emotions.

This is the essence of Yoga Therapy, both prophylactic and therapeutic. Daily practice of a complete Yoga session can restore our natural balance and harmony, bringing positive good health to the three levels of Being- physical, mental and spiritual.

The Therapeutic Potential of Yoga

Yoga, holistic science and integral life, has become popular because it promotes positive health and is also useful in the prevention and treatment of diseases. Its therapeutic potential has largely been investigated for stress-related psycho-somatic ailments. But with the recent interest in "Psycho-neuro-immunology" (the effect of psyche on the immune system), there is also a possibility that Yoga therapy can modify the course of infectious diseases.

One of the stress conditions which can definitely be controlled through yoga therapy is bronchial asthma. Beneficial effects of specific yoga practices, such as *pranayamas*, or *kriyas* can alleviate asthma. Patients with type II diabetes mellitus were also shown to improve significantly following yoga practice. Systematic studies on the effects of Yoga therapy for essential hypertension has shown that Yoga therapy compares favourably with bio-feedback. A study conducted in the UK on patients with rheumatoid arthritis demonstrated that Yoga therapy reduced symptoms and need for medicine.

Scientific studies also show that if pathological angst (anxiety) patients practice Yogic techniques such as *Pranayamas* (which means the control of the Vital Force, *Prana*), they show significant improvement.

Yoga therapy has also been used in the rehabilitation of the mentally handicapped. Ten months of yoga practice significantly improved the IQ, eye-hand coordination and social adaptation of 45 children with varying degrees of mental retardation.

Psycho-neuro-immunology has given rise to interest in the idea that Yoga therapy can be used for the management of infectious diseases such as pulmonary tuberculosis. Studies indicate two months of Yoga therapy along with short term chemotherapy caused tremendous positive change. This beneficial effect of Yoga on the immune system has delighted the alternate medical community. Holistic health practitioners now talk about the effect of Yoga therapy in cancer and even in AIDS patients. It has been shown that the practice of Yoga reduces the unpleasant side effects of chemotherapy in patients with cancer of the uterine cervix. It is also interesting to study scientifically investigated reports on cancer regression following meditation. It is also encouraging to note that there has been a scientific study which showed that AIDS patients benefited (clinically, psychologically, immunologically) from Yoga therapy.

Ayurveda, Tai Chi, Yoga Therapy, Kai-Igaku, Pranic Healing, Reflexology, Reiki, Acupuncture are all included amongst the 70 systems of Alternative Medicine which are prevalent today. All these come under the rubric of Holistic Medicine which highlights the greatness of the Whole more than the parts.

A good site where you can get quality information about Holistic Medicine is www.holistic-alt.com

Yogic Diet and Prevention of Cancer

Modern research shows that diets such as smoked fish/meat or other foods known to contain carcinogenic chemicals should be avoided at all costs. Because of the Western fast food type of diet, colon cancer in men, promoted by high meat (beef) and fat consumption is on the increase in the West. There is no doubt that a high fibre, low-fat diet reduces the risk of colon cancer.

Many compounds which are potent carcinogens are contained in cigarette smoking as well as smoked or barbecued meat or fish products. They include benzenes (in the tar component of cigarette smoke), heterocyclic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (in smoked / barbecued meat or fish). That explains why lung cancer is on the rise in the Western male population during the last century. Colon cancer has reached endemic proportions in the West (because of higher consumption of barbecued meat and beef fat) and stomach cancer occurs at an alarming rate in Japan because of the Japanese habit of consuming fish.

Claims which need further research

While spices such as (black or green) or spices such as fresh ginger, garlic and turmeric have been reported to reduce the risk of colon cancer, onion is claimed to lower the risk of stomach cancer. Soybean products reduce the risks of prostate cancer. Skin cancer is reduced, it is claimed, by topical application of some constituents of ginger oil and ginger extract. It is true that more research is needed on natural compounds. One breakthrough is the discovery of taxol, a plant product which is of tremendous benefit in certain cancers. There are many such waiting for

their discovery, particularly from indigenous plants in India, with proper scientific research tools and testing.

Hygiea's Commandment that "Thou shalt eat unprocessed, living natural food" merits consideration here. Naturopathy asks us to consume 100 grams of fruits and 300 grams vegetables (organically grown) daily. Yoga with its emphasis on a naturopathic diet of fruits and vegetables can show us the path to perfect health and Wisdom. Naturopathy is a branch of Ayurveda, the Science of Life, which is allied to Yoga.

More info about Ayurveda can be had from <http://www.chakrapaniayurveda.com>

The Healing Centre in us

Yogic philosophy avers that true healing comes from within, the Self, the divine component in man.

His great transparent mirror, Self!

Within each of us is the source of Life and health, the Divine Centre. We have to learn to turn to that source and return to it again and again. When we breathe it in, the freshness engages us. Yoga frees us from the thralldom of both mind and matter and we become whole.

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