

A STUDY ON IMPORTANCE OF YOGA IN MODERN LIFE

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Introduction

Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle Science which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science for healthy living. The word "**Yoga**" is derived from the Sanskrit root *yu* meaning "**to join**", "**to yoke**" or "**to unite**". According to Yogic scriptures, the practice of Yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with universal consciousness. According to modern scientists, everything in the universe is just a manifestation of the same quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is said to be "**in Yoga**" and is termed as a yogi who has attained a state of freedom, referred to as Mukti, nirvāna, kaivalya or moksha. "**Yoga**" also refers to an inner science comprising of a variety of methods through which human beings can achieve union between the body and mind to attain self-realisation. The aim of Yoga practice (sādhana) is to overcome all kinds of sufferings that lead to a sense of freedom in every walk of life with holistic health, happiness and harmony.

Brief history and development of Yoga

The science of Yoga has its origin thousands of years ago, long before the first religion or belief systems were born. According to Yogic lore, Shiva has been seen as the first yogi or ādiyogi and the first guru or ādiguru. Several thousand years ago, on the banks of Lake Kantisarovar in the Himalayas, ādiyogi poured his profound knowledge into the legendary saptarishis or "seven sages". These sages carried this powerful Yogic science to different parts of the world including Asia, the Middle East, northern Africa and South America. Interestingly, modern scholars have noted and marvelled at the close parallels found between ancient cultures across the globe. However, it was in India that the Yogic system found its fullest expression. Agastya, the saptarishi who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core Yogic way of life. Yoga is widely considered as an "immortal cultural outcome" of the Indus Saraswati Valley Civilisation – dating back to 2700 BC – and has proven itself to cater to both material and spiritual uplift of humanity. A number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati Valley Civilisation with Yogic motifs and figures performing Yoga sādhana suggest the presence of Yoga in ancient India. The seals and idols of mother Goddess are suggestive of

Tantra Yoga. The presence of Yoga is also available in folk traditions, Vedic and Upanishadic heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, Darshanas, epics of Mahabharata including Bhagawadgita and Ramayana, theistic traditions of Shaivas, Vaishnavas and Tantric traditions. Though Yoga was being practiced in the pre-Vedic period, the great sage Maharishi Patanjali systematised and codified the then existing Yogic practices, its meaning and its related knowledge through Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. After Patanjali, many sages and Yoga masters contributed greatly for the preservation and development of the field through well documented practices and literature. Yoga has spread all over the world by the teachings of eminent Yoga masters from ancient times to the present date. Today, everybody has conviction about Yoga practices towards the prevention of disease, maintenance and promotion of health. Millions and millions of people across the globe have benefitted by the practice of Yoga and the practice of Yoga is blossoming and growing more vibrant with each passing day.

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 utilise the body; Jnāna Yoga where we utilise the mind; Bhakti Yoga where we utilise the emotion and Kriya Yoga where we utilise 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 is necessary for each seeker. "All ancient commentaries on Yoga have stressed that it is essential to work under the direction of a guru."

Traditional schools of Yoga

The different philosophies, traditions, lineages and guru-shishya paramparas of Yoga led to the emergence of different traditional schools. These include Jnāna Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Pātanjala Yoga, Kuṇḍalini Yoga, Haṭha 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.

Importance of Yoga

We are living in a fast-paced and digitized world. The pressure to succeed, meeting deadlines, delivering high-quality work, and erratic schedules have taken a toll on the physical and mental well-being of people. In light of this, it has become the need of the hour to create a balance, develop awareness and follow healthy habits. One can achieve this by including Yoga in their life. Unlike the common misconception, Yoga is not a religion but a way of life. Yoga is not

limited to just postures and asanas but also involves pranayamas, kriyas, **dhyana or meditation**, breath work, living mindfully and following a healthy diet. Yoga is extremely significant for people who aim to master the mind, healthily manage their emotions and have a healthy and flexible body. Yoga offers innumerable benefits for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Yoga has a holistic approach to wellness and helps in coping with daily issues, constant worries and health problems from an aware and positive state of mind. Through Yoga, one develops mindfulness, improves brain power, begins to heal, opens up the mental and emotional blockages, gives the body movement and encourages flexibility, improved breathing. Yoga is not only important for attaining physical and mental health but it also helps in improving relationships as it makes one more kind, mindful, compassionate and calm. It creates harmony and boosts love among each other. With regular practice of Yoga, one begins to develop better control of their emotions and leads a disciplined and happy life. Yoga improves strength, and stamina, tones muscles, builds immunity and teaches one how to live a Yogic life.

Benefits of Yoga

Yoga as a practice offers numerous benefits for physical and mental health, development and healing. Yoga works wonders in reducing joint pain, and muscle or back pain. It helps in reducing blood pressure levels, improves - brain function, heart functioning and lung capacity, muscle strength, balance and flexibility and much more.

Yoga for Physical Health

- **Improved flexibility and balance:**

Through the practice of yoga asanas and postures, the body moves in different directions which helps in improving the flexibility of the body. Additionally, the yoga asanas help one to balance their weight and posture with increased focus.

- **Strengthens the muscles:**

The yoga asanas help in building core and muscle strength. Regular practice increases endurance, upper body and muscle strength.

- **Better functioning of the heart and lungs:**

The practice of Yoga improves heart health, and oxygenation in the body and reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. When one regularly practices yoga asanas and pranayamas, it reduces heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol levels and BMI.

Through pranayama, breathing becomes controlled and improves lung functioning by increasing its total capacity.

- **Boosts Blood Circulation:**

Yoga asanas and pranayama improves oxygen supply and nutrients to the body and enhances blood circulation to the body. The improved blood flow improves the health of the organs and glows skin.

- **Improved Posture**

The practice of Yoga asanas makes one more aware of their body and self. With this, one begins to be more conscious about their posture – the way they sit, stand and walk. Yoga asanas help in balancing and controlling. It makes one look confident and healthy.

- **Increased Immunity**

Yoga helps in building immunity and boosts every cell in the body. With Yoga, the strength of the body increases becomes healthy and keeps diseases at bay.

Yoga for Mental Health

- **Reduces Stress**

Stress is one of the major causes of many physical and mental health issues. With yoga practice, there is a decrease in the stress hormone called ‘cortisol’ and an increase in the happy hormones called ‘serotonin’. Yoga stimulates relaxation and calmness of the stressed nerves. Yoga asanas, pranayama and meditation help in shifting the focus from negative thoughts to the present moment. It reduces depressive symptoms and anxiety.

- **Improved Sleep Quality**

Yoga helps in the release of ‘melatonin’ – a hormone that helps in falling asleep and getting good quality sleep. Through the practice of yoga asanas and pranayama, the mind calms down and reaches a state of relaxation which ultimately prepares the mind and body to sleep.

- **Increased Focus and Awareness**

Focus and Concentration are two aspects that people struggle to maintain whether it is at work or home. With the constant chatter of the mind, the attention and focus are always distracted. Thoughts are always racing in the mind, concentration is divided and stability is hard to achieve. With the practice of yoga asanas, pranayama and dhyana, one learns to develop a one-pointed focus and be mindful of their thoughts, word and actions. When one develops awareness, a person is alert and present in the now which boosts focus and enhances productivity.

- **Enhances Self-Acceptance and Self-Love**

In the digital world, everyone is seeking validation from the outside world in the form of likes, comments and praises. The opinion of other people has a huge impact on our perception of ourselves. Yoga teaches us to love, accept and respect ourselves. With Yoga asanas practice, one learns to develop awareness about their self – strengths and weaknesses. It makes one become more confident about themselves and increases self-esteem.

- **Boosts Energy Levels & Reduces Lethargy**

After practice of yoga asanas, one doesn't feel tired or experience fatigue. One is charged and feels energetic. Yoga makes one more active and reduces laziness.

- **Anger Management and Increased Calmness**

One of the most important benefits of Yoga is it helps in managing anger and makes one more calm and relaxed. Yoga broadens the mind-set, opens the blockages and makes one more empathetic and understanding of others' emotions. This helps in raising awareness which reduces **anger** and makes one adopt a calm and composed approach towards a particular situation. Yoga is an experiential science and one has to practice regularly to gain optimum benefits. Once you begin practicing, you will witness the transformation on all levels and experience overall development.

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