

YOGA: a path for attaining spiritual energy and power

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Abstract

The United Nations has declared June 21 as International Yoga Day. Yoga means 'yoke' or 'union'. Yoga is a spiritual exercise to attain spiritual power and well-being. Yoga provides practical solutions to our physical and psychological problems. It is an experiential system of maintaining spiritual discipline. It has positive effects on our physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being. By developing attitude and creating awareness in our mind, it can increase our spiritual energy and power. Yoga can be linked with spirituality. If we understand YOGA as an acronym than it can be associated with concepts of Yearning, Observances, God Consciousness and Abstentions/Awareness. The author has explained these concepts in detail.

Yoga encompasses a holistic approach where the *asanas* and *niyamas* are the source of spiritual development that in turn promotes the holistic health of man. Yogic exercises are helpful in catering to the physical and psychological needs, and yearnings of humans. Yoga helps in creating awareness of our existence in this world and improving the spiritual health.

“Yoga is a practice of quieting the mind.”

- *Patanjali*

“The calm steadiness of the senses is called yoga.”

- *Katha Upanishad*

“When cesses five (senses) knowledges, Together with mind,
And the intellect stirs not, That the say is the highest course.

This they consider as Yoga, The firm holding back of the senses.
Then one becomes undistracted. Yoga, truly is the origin and end.”

- *Kathopanishad*

Key Words: Yoga, Spirituality and spiritual energy

Introduction:

The UN General Assembly held on Dec 11, 2014 approved by consensus a resolution declaring June 21 as 'International Day of

Yoga'. The date chosen, June 21 has special significance in many parts of the world and hence the suggestion made by India's Prime Minister to dedicate that day to Yoga. Maharishi Patanjali was called as the founding father of yoga. He was the first Sage who systematized and codified all of the existing theoretical and practical aspects of yoga in the form of Yoga Sutra. It is a

treatise containing 248 stanzas (slokas). Patanjali's *ashtngyoga* (*yam, niyam, asanas, pranayam, pratyahar, dharna, dhyan, and Samadhi*) is a comprehensive system to ensure physical social, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the person.

In India or elsewhere in the world, the galaxies of spiritual Saints and Seers have been selflessly working for the welfare of all. What most countries need today is what may be called a Yoga culture for attaining holistic health. A society should be concerned with the maintenance of health of

human beings. A society-centred action must give way to global awareness about yoga by any means. It should be transmuted into the will to serve and being actively involved for the welfare of the whole world. In this article, What is Yoga, types of yoga, purpose of Yoga, benefits of Yoga, and elements of Yoga (Yearning, Observances, God-consciousness, Abstentions and Awareness) have been discussed.

What is Yoga?

The tradition of yoga is originated in India. In Sanskrit yoga means 'join together' - joining the higher and the lower. Patanjali defines yoga as consisting in the suppression of mental states. Vyasa says that every mental state involves some element of suppression and steadiness, therefore also of yoga. Husain (2011) considers Yoga as a practice aspect of spirituality. Yoga involves physical, mental, and spiritual exercises for maintaining as well as enhancing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Yoga involves breathing exercises and physical postures. It improves mental functioning and develops spiritual energy. Yoga is inherently religious/spiritual in nature. Yogic exercises are on the way to the process of spiritualization, perfection and lead to an experience of self-fulfillment or enlightenment. Yoga helps people acquire self-control, develop concentration and transform individual into God consciousness.

Yoga is a psychophysical and spiritual science of holistic living aiming towards harmonious development of body and mind, and expansion of personality (Bhobe, 2000). In the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga is as integration of personality, emotional regulation, control over desires, decisiveness, and insight are associated with concepts of wisdom and well-being (Jeste & Vahia, 2008). Yoga is a way of coping with anxiety, depression and stress.

Yoga is a method of systematic discipline of all external and internal organs of the physical body, of all senses, vital forces, nerves and muscles, of all psychical functions, natural propensities, subtle desires and passions and of the entire intellectual ideas and judgments and reasoning with a view to the establishment of perfect control over and harmony among all of them.

Yoga's popularity in the East and West can be attributed to our need to cope with the physical and psychological stresses. Since we live in the high-pressured environment, Yoga offers an alternative approach to health based on five basic principles – exercise, breathing, relaxation, diet and meditation. Yogic practices demand self-discipline, but perseverance can lead to a profound sense of well-being and contentment.

Spiritual power comes directly from God and yoga is one of the path through which spiritual energy generates. Yoga can purify souls and remove the toxic waste of anger, attachment, ego, greed and lust. Yoga connects us to a spiritual power which is greater than our own power. Those who connect to God through yoga, the source of power sustain them. Yoga is a spiritual exercise to maintain body-mind balance. But the ultimate end of yoga is the attainment of supreme bliss and therefore there is not any possibility of imperfection. The ultimate aim of yoga is to attain perfection.

Types of Yoga

Patanjali distinguishes between two types of Yoga, (i) Yoga-consciousness-of-objects (Samprajnata) and (ii) Yoga-no-conscious—of-object (Asamprajnata). The distinction which Patanjali makes between these two is that *Asamprajnata* is yoga in which there is conscious or deliberate attempt to liquidate all experience with an

objective of letting the ‘real self’ (Atman) or ‘pure self’ remain by itself and in itself alone – this spiritual Yoga. The *Asamprajnata* Yoga is directed towards the realization of Atman and to the phenomenal world. In the *Samprajnata*, there is not any such deliberate or even practiced attempt but in which, the innate mechanisms of mind are allowed to operate naturally. Vyasa, Patanjali’s commentator, categorized yoga into two categories, namely, Yoga Proper and Yoga-not-Proper respectively.

Bhagavadgita proposes four forms of yoga suiting to the nature of the person, e.g., *gyanyoga* for knowledge oriented people, *karmayoga* for action oriented people, *dhyanyoga* for experience oriented people, and *bhaktiyoga* for emotion oriented people. But the aim of all of the forms of yoga is one i.e. establishing connection with God.

Today, we understand Yoga as Spiritual and Non-spiritual. Yoga, as envisaged in the Kathopanishad is a mechanism of experience or perception of all kinds, including both the spiritual and non-spiritual variety, covering the normal, abnormal, and also supernatural experiences and perceptions. “Yoga is the origin and the end” of all experiences (Katha Upanishad)

There is also a supporting evidence, with regard to types of yoga, which comes directly from Maitri Upanishad suggests that there are two types of Yoga. “Manifest Yoga” is involved in all applications of yoga in which the sole objective is to know the highest principle within. “Latent Yoga” is involved in all the ordinary knowledges and perceptions concerning the phenomenal world. In short, in the so-called higher knowledge (Para Vidya), yoga is drawn in and centered on the real self, i.e. the Aman, while in the lower knowledge (Apara Vidya), yoga is freely projected outward for engagement with the different objects of perceptions in the outer world.

From the above mentioned classification, it can be concluded that the relationship between the Upanishads and Yoga is very close. They regard yoga as an intrinsic mechanism which involves all kinds of knowledges and perceptions, including the highest type, that is, that of the Atma.

Yoga includes physical as well as spiritual exercises. There are many forms of physical and mental exercises which are rooted in Hindu lifestyle. The *Asanas* (i.e. physical exercises) are the physical postures that energizing and maintaining the harmony between the bodily and mental states. The term ‘*asana*’ means ‘steady pose.’ Yoga can be of various kinds such as *hatha* (physical), *raja* (mental), *tantra* (sexual), to attain enlightenment and spiritual energy. Yogic exercises induce a state of relaxation, and enhance physical and mental well-being.

There are various forms of yoga. Raja Yoga is the highest form, which is called the king of yogas. The teachings of Raja yoga connect the soul to its original, authentic Self, to the treasures within wisdom, virtues and spiritual powers. Raja yoga involves the process of purification and perfection of soul. Raja yoga is the symbolic of the spiritual intoxication and inner bliss. Yoga leads a moral, ethical, disciplined life to have a very deeply, orderly, and meaningful life, not just merely performing various physical postures but to mental exercises also. It is something that we should do to have perfect control over our body, mind and spirit.

Raja Yoga is concerned with developing mental concentration in order to experience *samādhi*. According to Kaarthikeyan (2007, p. 161) the state of pure experience of the divine and transcendence is the state of ‘*Samadhi*’. According to Singh (2007, p. 31) in the Raja yoga breathing, asanas (specific body postures), kundalini and spiritual experiences move towards the practitioner.

Purpose of Yoga

The purpose of yoga is to combine the forces of mind and the body so that they are not at odds with one another. An individual cannot acquire over the body without also acquiring control over the mind. Yoga is known to enhance whole- brain function. The more aware an individual is about functioning of body and mind, the greater is his opportunity to prevent or control injuries. The body and mind can only cope with a certain amount of stress before breakdown occurs, producing illness and injury.

Yoga aims at physical toning and awareness, controlled breathing, and controlled concentration. They function together to produce a greater control over the mind and body in competition. Yoga uses awareness, relaxation, visualization, and willpower techniques, all of which have been found to be effective in remoulding the mind and the body.

The purpose of yoga is Self-realisation. In fact, we embrace the inner and outer realities for a perfect harmonious balance but the important point is that we do not intellectually understand inner and outer realities but experience them. The practice of *asana* and *pranayama* aids us in meditation. Once the body is made steady by practice of *yogasana*, and flow of *prana* is regularized by practice of *pranayama*, it is easy for us to meditate. The ultimate purpose of yoga is to understand who we are, through meditation *or atma swarup*. So with advancement, one must meditate on the Self as *sat-chit-ananda*, which is also Brahmn, perceived as an existential reality of the universe.

Benefits of Yoga

Yoga is an ancient spiritual and psychophysical practice. It can exert positive effects on well-being and human health, and

is related to biological and physiological parameters. Yoga affects many cognitive, personality, and physiological aspects that may promote holistic developments of human behaviors and of great relevance for improving health-related quality of life.

Yoga keeps our body healthy, normal, active, alive, and full of energy, and improves well-being. In addition to the physical and mental benefits of yoga, it is a spiritual art. Its purpose is to establish the unified state. We come from God and are made in His image, and our hearts are restless until we achieve unity (yoga) with Him. In India, yoga has always been associated with the highest spiritual attainment.

Many Yogic exercises can help develop human personality and behaviors which can be of great relevance for the improvement of health-related quality of life. Yoga's best contribution is that it has positive impacts to individuals' health. The practice of yoga has tremendous potential for enriching both our individual lives and our society.

Researchers pointed out the relevance of Yoga with reference to personality; it has been noticed that Yoga can decrease neuroticism in premenopausal women (Chattha, Raghuram, Venkatram, & Hongasandra, 2008), and has a greater influence on Gunas (Personality) and self-esteem than physical exercise (Deshpande, Nagendra, & Nagarathna, 2009).

It has been observed that Yoga practice can have cognitive consequences: it can improve mindfulness (Shelov, Suchday, & Friedberg, 2009) attention, concentration, and visual and verbal memory related to right and left brain hemispheres (Rangan, Nagendra, & Bhat, 2009).

It has been observed that yoga can prevent negative emotional mood states (Shelov, Suchday, & Friedberg, 2009), improve eating attitudes (Dittmann & Freedman, 2009), reduce stress (Smith, Hancock, Blake-Mortimer, & Eckert, 2007), affect interoceptive awareness (Mehling, Price, Daubenmier, et al., 2012), improve well-being in children (Berger, Silver, & Stein, 2009), reduce addiction (Kissen & Kissen-Kohn, 2009), reduce depressive symptoms among cancer survivors (Brown, Huedo-Medina, Pescatello, et al., 2012), and improve the impact of cyclic meditation on quality of sleep (Patra & Telles, 2009). Reduced levels of somatization and anxiety are associated with Yoga practice (Hafner-Holter, Kopp, & Günther, 2009; Telles, 2009). Ashtanga Yoga has positive effects on weight management and psychological well-being in youths who are at risk of developing diabetes (Benavides & Caballero, 2009).

Tekur, Nagarathna, Chametcha, Hankey, and Nagendra (2012) found that seven days intensive residential Yoga program reduces pain, anxiety, and depression, and improves spinal mobility in patients with chronic low back pain (CLBP) more effectively than physiotherapy exercises.

Varambally and Gangadhar (2012) reported that yoga can lead to significant symptomatic improvements in psychiatric disorders, along with neurobiological effects which may underlie these changes. This suggests that mental health professionals should be open to the potential benefits of spiritual practices for their patients, either as complementary interventions to modern treatments or as sole treatment in some disorders.

Narke and Daryanani (2015) conducted a study to examine the effects of yoga practices, gender, and inhabitation on

students; adjustment. Results revealed that the main effects of yoga practices, gender, and inhabitation and their interaction effects were found significant to determine level of adjustment.

Elements of Yoga

In this article an attempt is being made to define yoga in terms of the yearning of the yogi and his optimal experience, connection with God, and developing awareness. There are four letters in YOGA. Psycho-spiritual concepts related to each letter are explained here. The YOGA related concepts focused on positive states of mental and spiritual well-being.

Yearning

Yearning is the root of every fulfillment or acquisition through some overt, covert, or both types of action. If the unbalanced state of mind takes a serious turn by the pressure of external desires or stresses, and if the mental disturbance is found, it is likely that the yogic exercises may give way to the yearning of external and internal equilibrium. Yearning revolves around the individual's personality. The basic yearning is to live better.

There is an innate yearning in each of us to expand our awareness to what we really are, and to experience union with the endless love and bliss of God. At a certain stage in this eternal quest, we feel drawn to explore inner stillness through the practice of yoga. We can help to attain our holistic health by yearning a positive attitude to illuminate our lives with yoga.

Yoga controls our mind and develops energy. When our body is properly aligned and relaxed, it generates an amazing amount of mental power with little effort. Yogic exercises yearns physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of health. In the stage of

yearning, the yogic personality has only one desire which is love of God.

Observances

This is the second of Patanjali's eight limbs of Yoga. Observance is the moral code that serves as the foundation for yoga practice. The observances are purity, austerity, contentment, study and devotion. It helps to strengthen the effectiveness of Yoga practice. It is impossible to progress without observances. It has great depth in terms of morality principles. Observances bring harmony to life consistent with the consciousness, for which Yoga aims (Frager & Fadiman, 2005).

God-consciousness

Yoga is the companion of God. God's direction to all human being is to purify the soul or spirit by performing yoga. Yoga connects to God and His goodness. Yoga is the only path through one's blissful communion with God we can experience. Yoga is true eternal belongingness with God. God consciousness is real and everything else which is its manifestation in different forms of yogic exercises is equally real.

Through yoga, we develop God-consciousness which connects with our deeper sub-conscious and higher Self that make us feel stronger and peaceful. Yogic exercises have a magnetic quality which attracts the grace of God. Yoga is a powerful tool to create and mould perceptual world. The Soul is an independent entity 'possessing' this consciousness. The relationship between yoga and consciousness is fascinating and every morning one should meditate upon it before taking meal. Every one of us has the ability to move beyond it and directly use consciousness, yoga is the tool used by the soul.

The yogi experiences the state of internal mystical awareness, relishing the fullness of his God consciousness. At that moment he is pulled out of the internal world into the external world of experience. Yogananda's message is the path of *Kriya* Yoga which he called "the airplane route to God". Yoga is the highest form of human activity towards the domain of eternal consciousness.

The yogi's experience is filled with universal God consciousness. Everywhere he looks, whatever he sees is filled with universal God consciousness. Then again, his eyes close and he is drawn inside. And again, after a few moments, his eyes open and he is drawn outside experiencing the world filled with the oneness of God. He cannot stop this process. This is the process known as *karma mudra*. The process of *karma mudra* results in absolute oneness, the state of absolute independence. The yogi, in this state, experiences that the internal world of mystical trance and the external world are absolutely the same. This independence and absolute oneness gives rise to the state of *jagadananda* or universal bliss.

Abstentions and Awareness

Abstentions include non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and non-greed. These qualities purify our body and mind. This is the principle of right action. If a Yogi lacks a calm and disciplined daily life, the concentration and peace gained from yoga practice soon waste.

Awareness is a state of being. Awareness is what you are. Any *asana* or *niyama* is performed to develop spiritual awareness will lead to attachment and single-minded devotion for the Supreme. A yogic person radiates the breath of spirituality and spiritual awareness into us. Being in the company of such a person will help focus our attention on the spiritfulness of life.

Through constant practice of yoga we can develop awareness and discover the purpose behind every event.

One good way of developing awareness is by focusing on breathing with awareness. Focus on your breathing and inhale with awareness. When we perform yogic exercises we are in a state of 'awareness'. Inhaling with awareness and focusing on breathing develop positiveness in our life. Let us perform yoga to achieve all good things related to healthy life.

All yogic exercises passes from body to mind are obviously sees physical and spiritual self of the world. There is no doubt that with its limited awareness confined the world view which our physical self projects. Awareness can create the meaning of existence. An individual can increase his level of awareness through *jnana* yoga up to different levels. The goal of yoga practice is to increase sattvic awareness.

Awareness is a process of inclusiveness, of embracing this entire existence. If we bring body, mind and spirit into alignment, awareness will blossom. In fact, the whole existence is just awareness. But once that blossoming becomes experiential for us, we suddenly explode into the oneness of existence. This is yoga, the ultimate union.

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Conclusion:

One needs to seek liberation and perform journey through yoga, which involve the discipline of the body and mind through exercises. Yoga is the life force and a path for attaining spiritual energy and power. Yogic exercises have spiritual powers for attaining holistic health. This is the road to enlightenment and enhances our energy level.

We should value the practice of yoga as a way to acquire spiritual powers and perceptions to understand and experience the purpose and meaning of life. The spiritual philosophy of yoga is that the adoption of yogic lifestyle helps in maintaining spiritual discipline.

Putting yoga on the global agenda as an international day is a way to provide an important platform for practitioners to see the world with a New Age Awareness; and an act for perfection towards the well-being of all people. In a spiritual context, if we perform yoga, there will be no suffering.

We can get happiness in our body and mind by doing yoga. Yoga is the best exercise in the process of bringing happiness. Take some steps to perform yoga. Do not be a passive spectator. As you consciously engage in yogic exercises, positive behaviour such as the presence of mind, memory and awareness, and positive actions will appear.

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