

Holistic Health through Yogic Life Style

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Abstract

The present research paper aims at clarifying the way to achieve holistic health through yogic life style. It goes without saying that health is the first need of life. Without sound health one can't enjoy the pleasure of life in true sense. The materialistic life style has invited so many physical and mental problems for the individual. The life style disorder has caused so many psychosomatic disorders. Thus the way remains is to adopt a yogic life style for the attainment of holistic health as several scientific researches have proved that an individual can attain physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being through yogic practices like *shatkarma*, *asanas*, *pranayamas*, meditation etc.

Key words: Holistic health, Yogic life style, Disorder, Well-being

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Introduction:

There goes the old adage: "If wealth is lost nothing is lost, if health is lost then something is lost, but if character is lost then everything is lost." Here the main emphasis has been laid on character, but the loss of health is also equally telling. It is a well known fact that if we are healthy then we cherish various offerings of life better. We can also use all tools and resources at our disposal more effectively to achieve happiness (1). Since ancient times sages have been saying: "*sareer madyam khalu dharma sadhanam*" which implies that the body is the primary medium for practicing dharma. In the Indian context, every good and positive deed is about fulfilling one's dharma or duties. Be it material or physical progress, nothing can be achieved without a healthy body (2).

Swami Vivekanand rightly remarks that: "Be strong, my friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Gita*. These are bold words but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the *Gita* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger" (3).

Thus the body is the medium through which we perform our duties, enjoy the pleasures of life and attain salvation as well. Therefore holistic health is the first need of life. Now the question arises what is health? WHO defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity. WHO has also in recent times suggested a fourth dimension of spiritual health (4).

"*Svasthya*" (health) word translates to a person established in 'sva' (self). Only that individual can be said to be completely '*svastha*' (healthy) who does not have any illness, who has overcome lust, greed, who has imbibed *adhyatma* (spirituality) in his life style, who

recognizes his duties, and who treats his body as a temple of God and exercises self-control (5).

Thus we can say that a person can't be called healthy unless he possesses physical, mental and spiritual well being. If the body is healthy and yet the person suffers from lust, anger, hatred, greed and other negative emotions, becomes the victim of bad thoughts and deeds, then the body begins to deteriorate and spiritual progress also slows down (6).

Health problem: the burning issue of the day

But today there is a million dollar question before us: we are really healthy? Can we think of five completely fit persons that we know? People who have no health problems whatsoever? No backache, no heart problems, no weight issues, no digestive disorders. How many did we count? (7). With the change in life style has come an increase in mental and physical disorders that are affecting people more vigorously these days. Today anxiety, depression, stress, obesity, diabetes, cancer, AIDS, high blood pressure, heart diseases, and respiratory problems have cropped up and becoming epidemics. It is also predicted that India will become the diabetic capital of the world by 2020. By the end of 2015 we have 5 crore (50 million) diabetes patients (8). There are 33.2 crore diabetics in the world. Cumulative research, media reports and anecdotal evidence over the past three decades reveal that suicides are an emerging epidemic the world over. Some 800,000 individuals in the world commit suicide every year largely on account of mental illness (9).

According to the international association of suicide prevention (IASP) more than a million people worldwide die by suicide each year (10). This phenomenon is growing in India. In 1997 95,829 people committed suicide any by 2007

the number of persons taking their own lives went up to 122,637, according to the national crime records bureau (NCRB). Thus the latest figures showing a 28 percent jump over the past 10 years (11).

It does not end here. Cancer is another profoundly increasing condition. Every year 3 lakhs of people die from this disease. According to national cancer registry this number will increase to 14 lakhs by 2025. India, according to the report of cardiological society is also gradually becoming the hub of heart ailments. Currently more than 10 crore (100 million) people are suffering from heart diseases. It is predicted that this number will go up to 60% of the total number of the world by 2020 (12).

Unfortunately even after spending 60 thousand billion rupees on medical services only about 35% of people, on falling sick, are only able to control their disease under modern medical system like allopathic, and about 65% people, on falling sick, are not able to afford the allopathic treatment (13). Modern medical science has been trying hard to find cure or control them but has not the desired results.

Thus the total burnout syndrome is quite a common phenomenon these days. So, what does one do to combat the unhealthy monster, which is hanging like a Damocles Sword over head. The medical experts blame that the physical and mental disorders which we are witnessing these days are due to people's rapid transformation to an unhealthy life style. In the last 30 years our life style has changed dramatically. Thus we need to reverse this trend by adopting a holistic approach. This is where yoga opens its door.

Swami Ramdev very strongly remarks and recommends that: "The main factors of illness are tension, degrading immunity, pollution, degeneration of the internal organic system or the main parts and hereditary genes. Yoga prevents degeneration by strengthening the internal organic structure with the help of balanced diet. Healthy life style and increasing

immunity along with some yogic practices like *asanas* and *pranayamas* like *Bhastrika*, *Kapalbhati* and *Anulom-Vilom*. We could achieve a state of complete health through yogic practices. Therefore yoga could be used not only as a philosophy but also as a weapon of potent against physical and mental disorders. In our society more than 100 crore people have benefitted from yoga. Yoga is now being accepted amongst doctors and scientists too and not just among common practitioners. It is the dawn of time when we should start accepting yoga or else our future generations might get entrapped in the endless epidemic cycles (14).

Acharya Balkrishna remarks that:

"From the very outset, yoga transforms the physical body. Self-discipline, celibacy, cleanliness and austere devotion, posture and *pranayama* have an important role in the transformation of the body. Practicing yoga helps in keeping the gross and subtle organs active in its natural state. Needless to say that natural functioning of the body organs is the basis of good health. The health maintained through artificial means can't be lasting. Consuming medicines especially allopathic not only reduces the sensitivity of physical organs but also eliminates the chances of reinstating the natural processes. It so happens that in the process of curing one disease, a particular medicine causes another. But different yogic practices like *asanas*, *pranayamas*, *mudra*, *bandh*, *shatkarma* clean or refine different glands, blood, vital energy or *prana* and other organs. All the waste matters that are the root cause of all disorders and diseases are eliminated from the body. The body which is maintained with proper diet, sleep and celibacy does not fall sick. The first two stages of *Astanga* yoga: *Yama* and *Niyama* actually forms the basis for a healthy human being and a healthy society" (15).

He further says: "It is true that common man can't afford huge cost of medicines and treatment. 65 percent of Indian population and a large number of people in other countries

who can't even think of seeking expensive medical treatment have been blessed with life saving medicine in the form of yoga. It is also a blessing for those who are well off but are almost dead as they suffer from incurable diseases. They have the resources but don't know what treatment to take. Yoga has prevented people from getting into such dismal situations. Yoga offers recourse for those who have lost hope, it opens a new path when all other paths are closed" (16).

Today yoga has emerged as a therapy across the globe. Many scientific researches have shown the therapeutic value of yoga. Yoga is being used as a therapy in various hospital and clinics across the globe. The yoga therapy has been proved successful in the treatment of various physical and mental disorders. In fact mental problems are the root cause for various kinds of health problems and therefore the mind and the spirit should be provided with some form of rejuvenation and stress relief.

The psychosomatic diseases can be uprooted only by treating the body. Since psychosomatic disease is primarily a mental phenomenon mere medical and surgical management does not give permanent solution to the problem; and there is absolutely no other satisfactory method to overcome these problems in the modern medical sciences. It is yoga which give the permanent solution (17).

The mind, body and spirit concept basically is the view that we human beings stand on three pillars. The thought process which is the product of our mind, the physical expression of existence which is our body and lastly our inner being which is called the spirit. The human existence therefore needs the well being of all these three for holistic health. That is why now even the modern medical sciences has started focusing more on the holistic treatment of the individual rather than just giving treatment to the body (18). Now that yoga simultaneously acts on physical, mental and spiritual levels, it paves the way for the physical, mental and spiritual well being of the individual.

The Role of yoga in Holistic health:

On physical level yoga helps in cleansing the internal organs the body i.e. blood vessels, cells, respiratory and digestive systems and makes the waste matter come out of the body. Yoga also increases the immunity of the body and thus the body becomes capable of fighting against diseases. The tired, weary body becomes energetic, the person becomes active and gets a new direction with regular practice of yoga. On mental level yoga increases mental power and destroys mental disorders. Yoga increases the concentration of the mind. The improved concentration and clarity of mind enhances the skills and increases productivity. Several researches have shown that yoga helps relax and handle stressful situations. Yoga instills a deep sense of well being which have its inward focus teaching the mind to let go off negative thoughts and stress. Yoga thus encourages positive thoughts, quiet the mind so that one can focus one's energy where he wants it to go (19).

On emotional level yoga refines the emotions of the individual. It is emotion or feeling which endows a person with human virtues. All the human virtues remain undeveloped and incomplete without emotion or feeling. If a person is emotionally weak, undeveloped or frustrated; he is deprived of pleasure and bliss. If such a person is emotionally hurt, his life becomes very painful. His life is totally destroyed or ruined. Yoga in fact is the technique of the refinement of emotion. It purifies the heart and soul washing away their dirt. A person whose heart becomes pure is free from mental and emotional disorders. A man who is emotionally unstable, never gets pleasure and peace. He is deprived of human virtues like truth, love, sympathy, service, cooperation, affection etc. Those virtues can never manifest unless a man does yoga practices like *dharna*, *dhyana*, *upasana*, prayer etc. In modern times when a person is flooded with negative emotions, like cruelty, selfishness, hatred, jealousy etc, the only option and solution left to get rid of them is yoga. On

spiritual level yoga paves the way for the spiritual well being of the individual.

To be spiritual means the upliftment of all the aspects of life which is possible only through yogic practices. Yoga stops the fluctuations of the *chitta* or mind and paves the way for the union of individual consciousness with Universal consciousness. This is what is called spiritual experience or the attainment of liberation which is the ultimate goal of yoga. If a man follows the path of yoga then he undoubtedly can attain this ultimate goal. A man no doubt wants to go ahead on the path of salvation (liberation) but the seeds of karma, the good or bad impressions of the karma as well as other factors sprung from ignorance comes on his way as a barrier and stops him from proceeding ahead on this path. The individual soul thus, due to the impression of the karmas of the previous births remains unaware of his true self. But when the impressions (*dirts*) covering the individual soul is washed away and uprooted by the practice of yoga, the individual soul is introduced to its real form.

This is what Lord Krishna in the *Gita* 4-37, 38 says: "As the blazing fire turns the fuel to ashes, Arjuna even so the fire of knowledge turns all actions to ashes. On earth there is no purifier as great as knowledge. He who has attained purity of heart through a prolonged practice of karma yoga automatically sees the light of truth in the self in course of time" (20).

Shedding light on the importance of yoga for a healthier and happier life The *Svestavatar Upanishad* 2-12 states:

*"Na tasya rogo na jara na mrituha,
Praptasya yogagnimayam sariram"*

Which implies that having attained the *yogagnimaya sarira* one wins diseases, ageing (oldhood) and premature death as well. The exertion done in yoga practice never goes in vain as it kills all types of suffering (21).

Hatha Yoga Pradipika states: "*Laghavam karma samartham sthairam dukh sahisnuta*" which implies that from yogic practices there comes lightness and stability in the body, and the body is free from pain and diseases. At the same time there is the increase in the physical strength and stamina of the body. The pain bearing capacity of the body increases as well.

Even The *Gheranda Samhita* says: "*Na cha rogon na cha clesh Arogyam cha dine dine*" which implies that the person, practicing yoga is oppressed neither by diseases nor by *kleshas* (pain) and attains holistic health day by day.

Thus considering the holistic approach of the yoga one must adopt it in one's life as a life style for holistic health this is what Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* 6-16:

*"Yuktahar viharasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu,
Yuktasvaprav bodhasya yoga bhavti dukha"*

"Which implies that the yoga is neither for him who overeats, nor for him who observes a complete fast; it is neither for him who takes too much sleep, nor even for him who is ceaselessly awake. Yoga, which rids one of woe, is accomplished only by him who is regulated in diet and recreation, regulated in sleep and wakefulness" (22).

Thus this directly applies to us in our modern day situation. Lord Krishna advises us to lead our lives as a yogi and its principles should reflect in our diet, deeds, actions, efforts, sleep and wakefulness.

Conclusion:

Thus, we see how yoga paving the way for physical, mental and spiritual well being provides the individual with holistic health. The use of yoga as therapy firstly aims at making one completely healthy or maintaining of good health and secondly uprooting the diseases. Another remarkable think about this therapy is that it is very easily available and affordable for the common masses. Secondly it has no side

effects. Like other therapies, yoga in fact, is a holistic approach which teaches a new life style and way of thinking to mankind. Needless to say that therapy is not the goal of yoga rather the ultimate goal of yoga is self-realization. But this is also true that how a sick person can attain self-realization without physical, mental and spiritual well being. This is the reason why our ancient *Rishis*, apart from propounding means for gaining self-realization such as meditation and Samadhi, they developed system for keeping people healthy and diseases free through various yogic practices The ancient *Rishis* although not having material comforts, would yet live a blissful life. Why? Because yoga was part and parcel of their lives. They had adopted yoga as a life style.

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