

## Yoga: Health & Self-Realization

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### Abstract

Yoga is an Indian traditional art developed and formulated by Indian ancient rishis and sages. It is a gift to mankind. The ancient vedic scriptures say that yoga is the fundamental practice of meditation for God realization. Yoga is a technical subject about human health. The objective of yoga is to have better health with longevity of life and for self-realization. It improves concentration as well as health conditions to keep the body fit. It slowly unites the body, mind, and soul. The mind controls the senses and body, but the mind is restless and turbulent. Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita elaborates on how to control and concentrate the mind on request of Arjunas enquires on the battlefield. The purpose of human life is to go to the Supreme abode and attain liberation. In the beginning, it looks like yoga is a practicing of different postures of human body for physical fitness or health consciousness but in fact it leads to controlling of senses and spiritual realization. Since the recognition of yoga by the UN General Assembly, celebrating every year June 21st as International Yoga Day (IYD), yoga has become more popular and followed by many countries for the benefit of humanity and spirituality and also to reduce the stress of the employees in the organizations. The analysis presented in this paper represent how this yoga can be used for physical fitness and self-realization, and how the modes of nature (satwick, rajo, and thamo) affect the diet and behavior of humans.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, Yoga, health, spirituality, mind, life, self-realization, nature, food.

### 1. Introduction

India is a land of spirituality and Vedic science. Yoga is an Indian traditional art mentioned in the Rigveda by our great ancestors and it is a gift given to mankind. The person who does yoga is called a yogi. The word yogi stands for healthy person and self-realized man in search of God. Yoga embodies unity of mind, body, soul, and thoughts; harmony between man and nature, as well as man and God. It is a basically treatment or therapy for the holistic development of the human body and this can be grouped into asanas and pranayama pertain to four categories: i) physical postures and movement; ii) breathing exercises; iii) mindfulness and meditation; and iv) relaxation.

It is believed that Adi Yogi was the first yogi who formulated the science of yoga even before the Vedas and Upanishads were written. It is true that our great rishis and sages could visualize the power of yoga techniques through Divy Drishti and were able to formulate different types of

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yoga and their significance in maintaining the human body as it is well known that health is wealth and a steady mind is the resource state for critical analysis of any object or any issue. This was the main motto of the yogis. This has helped them to write the vedic scriptures for the benefit of the people for self-realization and reduce the karmas and to elevate the people to go any higher levels in this birth and next birth. Yoga with devotional services is the only way to go to higher planets and Supreme abode.

The objective of yoga is to develop a proper concentration, better health with longevity and for self-realization in life. Human values and yoga activities are the need of the hour at a global level. This can be derived from regular yoga classes and seminars. The yoga practitioners are physically as well as mentally strong and devotionally rich in Indian philosophical wisdom and human values of Indian culture and tradition. The various types of yoga systems and their significance are well illustrated in Bhagavad Gita<sup>1</sup> and Patanjali<sup>2</sup>. The inquiry about the restless mind raised by Arujuna is well explained by Krishan in Bhagavad Gita.

This yoga therapy recommends having natural satwick food. Its significance are widely accepted and followed for generations in Bhartiya culture and traditions. In general, the purpose of food is to increase the energy and strength of the body and mind which increases the longevity of life. The behavior of the yogis depends on the modes of nature or Prakriti. They are the mode of goodness, the mode of passion and the mode of ignorance. The type of food determines the nature of the person. Based on food habits, it one can generalize what type of human he is. The satwick people will follow the proper yoga system and try to consume vegetarian food. These are analyzed in the next section.

The philosophy of yoga is treated as a science with immense health benefits, hence it was recognized and approved by the United General Assembly (UN resolution) on December 11, 2014 and June 21st is considered International Yoga Day (the longest day in the northern hemisphere, shortest in the southern hemisphere and summer solstice marks the transition to Dakshinayana). Since then, it has gained more popularity and is accepted by the worldwide people for health consciousness, human values, relaxation meditation and self-realization towards spirituality.

In the present global scenario, this has been noticed many organizations in India and abroad that long working hours cause inefficiency of the employees and economic loss. It is proposed to introduce the concept of yoga during working hours. With this international recognition, people started realizing its multiple benefits in their behavior, mindsets, happiness, and health issues. All walks of people in the world started practicing yoga with different styles with the same vision of happiness and good health. In fact, yoga is a devotional activity with a large number of asanas with a scientific approach. One need not practice all asanas as mentioned in the literature but they can prefer few asanas as per their health conditions and their availability of time. The leaders, scientists, and academicians in the world are concentrating on value and moral-based education and yoga for health benefits for which India is the premier country in the world to provide proper global ethical education.

## 2. Analysis

Yoga is a science of physical exercise of body and mind yields a holistic approach to the well-being of a man and health as well as self - realization.

### Self-Realization

Since human civilization there have been only two research fields – i) how to survive (good health and longer life), and ii) to explore the god and his universal creations, to understand these basic fundamental queries of humans such as who I am, from where I came, where will I go, why I have come and what is my job, and so on. These philosophical unanswered questions have been thought-provoking since human civilization. While doing continuous investigations of this logical interrogation within himself, proper techniques and procedures were evolved by the ancient rishis and sages through their Divya Dristi. These systematic approaches or techniques to resolve the above two questions are properly designed and formulated. That is called yoga.

Yoga needs to be practiced systematically and regularly as per the directions of the authorized yoga professionals as it is a technical subject. Some people think yoga means a simple physical exercise and moments of the body, and some pose different asanas with vulgar postures which are not prescribed in the science of yoga. It is a physical and devotional activity for self-realization. The real outcomes of yoga arise when one does yoga regularly through devotion.

### Pranayama

The system of yoga for controlling the breathing process is called Prananyama (Prana means life, and Ayam means longevity). Is a type of sacrifice carried without the feeling of position, attachment and desire of fruit but with the object of God realization. The subject of yoga is mysterious and difficult to understand it. This can be realized who practice yoga regularly such as yogis.

The Bhagavad Gita (BG: 4.27 and 29 ) illustrate

तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान्बन्धूनवस्थितान् ॥  
कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।

*tān samīkṣhya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān bandhūn avasthitān  
kṛipayā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdann idam abravīt*

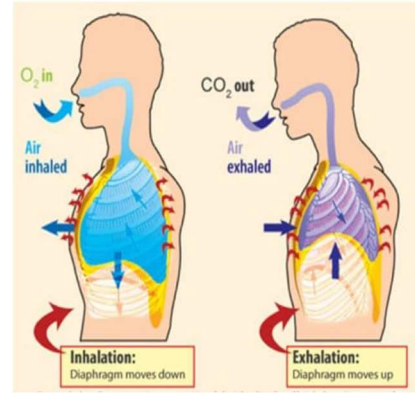
Those who were interested in a self-realization in terms of the mind and sense control offers the functions of all the senses as well as the vital force breath of ablations into the fire of the control the mind.

वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥  
गाण्डीवं संसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते ।

*vepathuśh cha śharīre me roma-harṣhaśh cha jāyate*  
*gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāt tvak chaiva paridahyate*

There are even others who inclined to the process of breath restraint to remain in a trans and they practice stopping the movement of outgoing breath into the incoming and incoming breath into outgoing and thus at last remain in trans stopping all breathing. Some of them curtailing the eating process offer the outgoing breath into itself has sacrifice.

There are three types of pranayama- inhalation, exhalation and holding the breath. The pranayama which controls the air inhaling (going inside downwards) called apana air and exhaling (going outside or upwards) is called prana air. Holding the breath after deep inhalation called puraka pranayama equilibrium and converting the exhale air into inhale air is called recaka. When the exhale air use as an inhale, is called kumbaka yoga. In more detail, when the practitioners deeply inhales air through the nostrils the external air gets united with the prana air (exhale) centered in the heart and both of them pass through the navel and disappear into the apana air. In this process the external air repeatedly inhaled and held within the body.



The process of offering apana air into the prana it is the prana air which represents the fire whereas apana air represents the oblation. Thus the practicing of kumbaka yoga increase the duration of life by many, many years and he said to be in the spiritual plain. The person who is in transcendental platform always be engaged in the service of the Lord and no chance of becoming diverted and never falling down and enters into the Supreme abode. This can be attained by reducing the regular eating habits and taking only Lords prasadam or food. Thus there is no possibility of getting out of the material entanglement. In other way, the more food gives the more energy to the body and leads to the un-controlling of the senses. The practitioners and yogis have only one type of meal, and gurukulas and temples offer a prasadam only once to be away from the material enjoyment.

But the practicing of yoga is very complex and it involves controlling body, mind, and soul. Even this was also realized and faced by the great warrior and concentrator Arjuna on the battlefield. Then he asks Lord Krishna (BG 6.34)<sup>1</sup>,

अर्जुन उवाच ।

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।

तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥

arjuna uvācha

chañchalam hi manaḥ kṛiṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛiḍham

tasyāham nigrahaṁ manye vāyor iva su-duṣhkaram

"The mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate, O Krishna. It appears to me that it is more difficult to control than the wind."

Lord Krishana replies (BG 6.35)<sup>1</sup>,

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥

śhrī bhagavān uvācha

asanshayaṁ mahā-bāho mano durnigrahaṁ chalam

abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa cha gṛihyate

"Lord Krishna said: O mighty-armed son of Kunti, what you say is correct; the mind is indeed very difficult to restrain. But by practice and detachment, it can be controlled."

Lord Krishna agrees that it is tough to control the mind but at the same time, he says that it can be controlled by practicing yoga in a sacred place focusing the mind in the Super Soul on the Supreme Lord restraining senses and mind by concentrating at the tip of the nose. This can be attained through yoga techniques. But these yoga techniques are not mechanical they are dependent on the four aspects of the human body- senses, mind, emotions, and energy. They are energetic and live. It is not easy to control the senses and emotions which need proper wisdom, energy, and curiosity.

Thus, yoga is a set of techniques or procedures consisting of asanas and pranayamas. The asanas deal with the physical exercise for the external part of the body whereas pranayama deals with the circulation of the air (inhaling and exhaling) cleans the inner parts of the body, the way a broom cleans the water tank. Yoga controls and maintains the human body through chakras for transferring energy through feelings, actions and postures of physical exercises. The regular practice of yoga improves concentration, attention or focus the mind at a particular point or issue. The Bhagavad Gita depicts various types of yoga such as Karma yoga, Gnana yoga, Bhakti yoga, Kriya yoga, Hatha yoga, Tantra yoga, Astanga yoga, etc. for controlling the mind and liberation.

## Health

In the present global scenario of the advancement of science and technology, people are in their comfort zone, sticking to technological comforts and going away from nature which are indirectly affecting the health consciousness and ill affects to the younger generation. The whole

world is facing turmoil because of nuclear families with one or two children unable to control and trending towards evil effects such as unethical principles, intoxication, sexual affairs, harassment, and etiquette without understanding the pros and cons of the actions at the teenage level.

People in the world are facing a lot of stress and strain in their lives with many reasonable unreasonable and unimaginable desires, and ambitions in the material world for self-gains. It is especially visible in urban areas because of many factors. In the present circumstances for the past 15- 20 years the employees of computer-based industries and 24-hour cycle of jobs or facing health issues due to the longer hours of employment without any physical exercise. It is leading to health-hazardous cancer, heart attack, spondylitis, obesity, back pains, indigestion, eyesight, etc., and the stress and strain due to the time-bound assignments and continuously sitting in air conditioners not exposing to the open air, not interacting with others and taking junk food that too at odd hours with improper diet.

These are the observations of the employees as well as the management of the various companies in the world. In order to increase the efficiency of the company results, the authorities of reputed companies have taken the initiative to implement yoga during working hours. This is a good sign for accepting yoga as a natural healthcare medicine that improves the health conditions of employees.

Since it is a technical subject, it should be learned by yoga professionals. One should take proper training for a certain period and then can continue. One who does yoga every day inculcates it in the blood and becomes a habit in life as a daily human activity. The holistic development of the human body can be attained using yoga therapy with different asanas and pranayamas such as Padmasana, Tadasana, Dhanurasana, Matsyasana, Garudasana, Gomukhasana, Trikonasana, Surya namaskars, and breathing exercise, Omkar and so on for maintaining the human body in good health conditions. There are a large number of asanas in the yoga literature which have different impacts on various parts of the human body. One need not learn and practice all but one can choose the required as well as suitable asanas as per the directions of the yoga professions.

### **Food**

The type of people and the behavior of people and their minds depend upon the type of food one consumes every day. The living entities are conditioned souls and entangled in the material world. The actions, behavior, and growth of living entities depend on nature (prakruthi) which leads to three modes of nature - mode of Goodness (satwick), mode of Passion (Rajo), and mode of Ignorance (Thamo). Again, the type of food is also based on three modes of nature – satwick, rajo, and thamasic food. The Bhagavad Gita clearly describes three varieties of food and their impacts on human life which yield three types of people – satwick, rajo, and thamasic people. The slokas in Bhagavad Gita (BG 17.8-10) enlighten us as:

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥

āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ

rasyāḥ snigdḥāḥ sthirā hṛidyā āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ

"Persons in the mode of goodness prefer food that promotes life span, and increase virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent, nourishing, and naturally tasteful."

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।

आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥

kaṭv-amla-lavaṇāty-uṣṇa- tīkṣṇa-rūkṣha-vidāhinaḥ

āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkha-śhokāmaya-pradāḥ

"Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and full of chillies, are dear to persons in the mode of passion. Such foods produce pain, grief, and disease."

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ 10॥

yāta-yāmaṁ gata-rasaṁ pūti paryuṣhitaṁ cha yat

uchchhiṣṭam api chāmedhyaṁ bhojanaṁ tāmasa-priyam

"Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance."

The constitution of the mind and behavior of the person is determined by the kind of food he takes. The man's faith in a particular object depends on his mental constitution and his diet. If the food is pure the mind will be pure. A pure diet leads to purity of thoughts, feelings behavior actions, and temperament of individual persons. The milk products, sugar, rice, wheat, and vegetables are grouped into satwick. The food that is bitter, too salty and chilly, hot and cool, which create indigestion are classified under the mode of passion. The food which is very hot, more chilly and bitter, odor and, non-vegetarian - meat, pork, chicken, etc., which attracts people are considered to be the tamasic food. The food which is prepared before three hours is considered to be tamasic nature. The food which is prepared freshly by satwick people with good intentions having with spiritual desires is considered to be pious, satwick, and healthy food. The satwick food called nivedyam once it is offered to God is called prasadam. Thus, one who

consumes such prasadam is called a pure devotee or ideal devotee and will have good health which leads to liberation.

### 3. Conclusion

The purpose of yoga is for a steady mind, good health, and self-realization. Yoga improves breath, sleep, heart, digestion, health conditions, eating habits and rejuvenates health, and reduces stress. Yoga should be inculcated in the minds of the students in schools and colleges which indirectly produces healthy, wise, and spiritually oriented citizens.

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