

Essentials and Principles of Yoga

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Abstract

According to *Ayurveda* mind, body and soul are the tripod of life and their balanced state is responsible for health and imbalance for diseases. Yoga is the only method which creates harmony by balancing all these components into equilibrium state. Yoga is becoming very popular in all parts of the world. Yoga is an exact science. The science of yoga has its roots in *Upanishads, Vedas, Bhagvad-gita, Hathyogapradipika* and the *Yoga sutras of Patanjali*. Yoga is the finest resource for achieving physical, mental, social and spiritual well being. The impact of yoga on the life of people are-holistic development of personality, control of negative thought waves in the mind, creation of positive attitude, vast intellect, decision based on deep thinking, strengthen spiritual power, helps in sorting out psychological problems born out of tensions, conflicts etc., strengthen will power, understanding the purpose of life. Yoga helps in developing total personality in an integrated and holistic manner if it is done by proper following to the principles and essentials of yoga. This article is about some essentials and principles of yoga practice so anyone can get full benefits by following the above.

Keywords

Science, Spiritual Power, Yoga



Greentree Group

Received 02/12/15 Accepted 14/12/15 Published 10/01/16

INTRODUCTION

According to *Ayurveda* mind, body and soul are the tripod of life and their balanced state is responsible for health imbalance for diseases. Yoga is the only method which creates harmony by balancing all these components into equilibrium state. Yoga is mind-body technique which involves relaxation, meditation and a set of physical exercises performed in sync with breathing. It is the finest resource for achieving physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of the practitioners. This can be gain by systematic and disciplined practice of *Patanjali's Ashtang* yoga.

The first two limbs of *Ashtang* yoga are *Yam* and *Niyam* which are ethical code and personal discipline for the growth of our moral, spiritual and social aspects. Third and fourth limbs are *Asana* and *Pranayama* which help in physical development and enhancement of physiological functions. Fifth and sixth limbs are *Pratyahara* and *Dharana* for controlling senses and making the mind calm, concentrated and alert. The final two limbs *Dhyana* and *Samadhi* result in inner peace, higher level of consciousness and the ultimate union of our individual consciousness with the Universal consciousness. Yoga helps in developing

total personality in an integrated and holistic manner if it is done by proper following to the principles and essentials of yoga.

Essentials and principles of yoga

In order to derive full benefit of therapeutic yoga it is necessary to understand the following requirements and principles related to its practices:

Time:

Though the morning time, before breakfast, is regarded as best for practicing yoga, one can also perform it in the evening or at any other time, provided the stomach is empty and not heavy with food. The general principle is to give an interval of three to four hours after eating and then do yoga. Also a gap of half an hour or so should be given after drinking water, tea or any juice. The body should be in a restful and normal condition at the time of practicing yoga. The individual should select a time which is convenient for his daily routine and should try to do yoga at the same time every day.

The body loves regularity and easily falls into a rhythm. As much as you can, practice at the same time and place daily. Consistency creates a stronger sense of security. Following your word strengthens your self esteem, underscores your commitment and increases your ability to

hold a strong focus. The most important thing is that you are consistent and attentive so choose a realistic time of day to begin yoga practice.

Place:

Practice Yoga on the floor. Avoid *Chowki* or bed. Use a carpet, rug, blanket or mat on the floor. The place of practice should be neat, clean and well ventilated. There should be constant supply of fresh air at the place. Windows should be kept open for cross-ventilation. During summer, a fan can be used. But during winter the draft of cold wind should be avoided. If the place is air-conditioned, make sure that there is sufficient supply of air. Practice in a well-ventilated room. If you practice outdoors, it is best to avoid direct sun, excess heat, cold and drafts. Not only do these put a hardship on the body, they also distract from the inward focus essential to *Yoga*.

Silence:

One should maintain silence while doing Yoga. Any conversation, mental activity and even listening to music should be avoided. Silence helps in preserving energy as well as in being attentive during practice. Pick a quiet, undisturbed place that is out of the mainstream of traffic, dry, free from dust with enough room for all your movements.

Rest:

There are two types of rest in Yoga: (1) of short rest and (2) of long rest should be for about six to eight seconds only. This is taken in between two rounds of the *Asana*, or between one and the other *Asana*. The shorter rest is completed by breathing twice at the completion of one round of a posture.

The long rest comes at the end of all the *Asanas*, *Pranayama* and other *Kriyas* which one does at a stretch. The general principle is to devote one fourth of the actual practicing time for this rest. For example, if one has done yoga for twenty minutes, the rest at the end should be for five minutes.

This rest is better done in *Shavasana*. Those who cannot do *Shavasana* should just lie down on the floor, keeping the eyes closed, body loose, breathing normal and concentrating the mind on any place of natural beauty such as garden. In this simple method of resting there should be a feeling as if one is breathing the air of that chosen place and is relaxing by being mentally present there. After the rest is over, one should wait for three to five minutes before eating or doing any other routine work.

Dress:

Use non restrictive clothing (no belts, jewellery, or other encumbrances) and as little clothing as is comfortable. Male practitioners can wear half-pants or pyjama. Ladies can wear sari, slacks or stretch-pants with blouse. In winter, light woollen clothes may be used while doing yoga.

Bath:

For those practicing Yoga in the morning, it is not necessary to take a bath before they do yoga. It depends on the convenience and personal choice of the practitioner to bath either before or after the practice. For taking a hot bath after yoga practice one must wait for about fifteen minutes. Many people prefer to practice yoga after taking a bath because there are certain *Asanas* which are done better after the bath and it creates a feeling of neatness and purity.

Method of practice:

In order to obtain the fullest benefit of yoga, one must practice it in proper way. Since yoga is a scientific system it requires to be done in a specified manner. If the *Asanas*, *pranayams*, *bandhas* and *Mudras* are not done according to the established methods, it will become merely an exercise and will not give satisfactory results. The benefits of yoga on the body system are greater due to its methodology.

Every one cannot practice all the postures with perfection; they can certainly follow the method of doing them without any difficulty. Therefore the advice is to do yoga according to the limits of body. Do it only as much as you can. You need not to be perfect in forms. If you cannot do the full form, do the half of it or even less.

Follow all the steps carefully. Another important advice is to begin the practice with only a few *Asanas* during the first week. When two or three *Asanas* have been practiced for a week, the next two *Asanas* should be added during the second week. This way every week new *Asanas* can be added gradually according to the need and recommendation in a given case.

Female problems:

Female practitioners should avoid yoga practice during menstrual period and during advanced stage (after the fourth month) of pregnancy. Under such conditions, yoga practice should be generally discontinued. Yoga for pregnant women has to be performed on a selective basis under proper care and instructions of the yoga expert.

It is significant to mention that yoga has a great curative value for various ailments and disorders of women. It also works as an aid to their health. For example, menstrual

disorders are corrected and normalized through particular yoga. Proper practice of yoga during early stages of pregnancy enhances the health of the child in womb and it also helps to make the delivery painless.

How much yoga:

Yoga can be practiced for a longer time in the winter season than in summer. Maximum time devoted for actually practicing yoga should not exceed forty five minutes in a single day of winter. In summer, the maximum time for actual practice should be thirty minutes. This difference in practicing time has to be maintained because of variation in impact of weather on the body.

Through there should be only one session of yoga practice in a day those who would like to divide their time in two sessions should allow a gap of eight hours between the first and the second session. A minimum practice of fifteen minutes per day should be quite satisfactory for maintaining good health.

Proper diet:

Charaka has mentioned in *Agryaprakrana* that *Anna* is the best sustainer of life. He also described that the life of all living things is food and the entire world seeks food. Diet occupies a dominant place in the

yoga system. It is said that ‘As you eat, so you become’. This is because the kind and quality of food affects the physical as well as mental condition of the individual. Thus, the individual who does not take a proper diet and who does not have a proper understanding of the principles of eating, gradually begins to harm himself physically and mentally both. He begins to feel the ill effects of wrong eating habits on his appearance, behaviour, thought and also on action. The individual who’s thought, action and appearance would not be desirable for a particular period of time would naturally show undesirable consequences which would justify the saying that ‘As you eat, so you become’.

In yoga, all foods have been divided into three categories: *Rajasi*, *tamasi* and *Sattvik*. These are explained below:

Rajasi: It derives its name from the dining manners of Indian kings. Naturally in this type of preparation, dishes of various kinds—some fried, some roasted, and some curried and highly seasoned together with various sweets and drinks would be served. Foods of this type are regarded undesirable for the Yoga practitioners as they create extra weight and fat, generate feeling of heaviness

for a longer period of time after dinner and arouse passion.

Tamasi: The second category of eatables, that is *Tamasi* food include those which are prepared as hot stuffs. When any dishes-vegetarian or non vegetarian is prepared with too many spices and with excessive uses of salt, pepper, chilli and similar other seasonings, it becomes *Tamasi*. Hence, this type of food is undesirable and not recommended to the yoga practitioners.

Sattvik: In this type, the food is cooked with the least amount of spices and without much seasoning. Though the food is fresh, attractive and nutritive, it is cooked in a simple way. This type of food is desirable and thus highly recommended for yoga practitioners.

According to yogic principles, no food whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian is by itself *Rajasi*, *tamasi* or *Sattvik*. What makes it this or that type is the method of preparation and not the food by itself. The second point is that in yoga, food is not evaluated on the basis of their caloric count. Rather it is quality of food and the method of eating that are considered. Better the quality of food, more invigorating it is considered.

Balanced diet:

The most important principle is to eat a balanced diet. In *Ayurveda*, it is mentioned that any food can have its maximum effect if all the five *Bhutas* (elements) are present in proportionate quantity. A proper balanced diet corrects imbalances by pacifying the excessive *Doshas* and strengthening the weak ones. *Ayurveda* recommends that all six *Rasas* should be in every diet to enhance the *Bala*. These six *Rasas* directly influence the *Tridosha* and also influence the nutrition and transformation of bodily tissues (*Dhatus*). The most important is that the food should not only be nutritious from physical point of view but it should be such that it develops the intellectual and spiritual aspects of human.

When the following things are included in every diet, the diet becomes balanced. These items are: salad, fresh vegetables, and fresh fruits.

Salad: All the vegetables that are eaten raw constitute salad. Things such as cucumber, tomato, carrots, cauliflower etc are used for preparing salad. These should be cut into pieces. The ideal time to eat salad is to make it as the first item of lunch and dinner.

Fresh vegetables: Any vegetable which is not dried and is not deformed can be regarded as fresh. They are to be preferred

as fresh as possible. Fresh vegetables must be eaten in proportionate quantity every day. They should be prepared in a *Sattvik* way.

Fresh fruits: Fruits constitute the most nutritive food for any individual. For better results from the yogic practice, fresh fruits are essential.

Quantity of food:

Ayurveda lays stress over the quantity of food which one should take every day. According to *Charaka* one must eat in measure and the measure of food is determined by the power of digestion and his strength. He has further stated that 'A proper measure of food, when taken is digested in the time without impairing one's health'. Measured diet does not impair one's health; it positively promotes strength, complexion, health and life. He also stated that one third of the stomach should be filled with solid food, one third with liquids and one third should be left empty for *Vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. Eat not more than your capacity. When food is taken less than one's full capacity, it is easily digested and the body makes fuller use of the intakes. On the other hand, when the food is taken excessively and the stomach is completely stuffed, it is not properly digested and the body is forced to eliminate it without making proper use of

it. Further, by eating more the individual is over straining the abdominal system in particular and the body in general and the performance of his physical and mental powers are obstructed. Gaining of extra and unnecessary weight is the natural outcome of overeating.

Method of eating:

The proper method is to eat slowly and swallow the food after thoroughly crushing and chewing it. There are many benefits of slow eating. The individual gets full satisfaction in dinner even when he eats only a small quantity of food. Saliva can be properly mixed up with the food and make it easily digestible.

Other guidelines:

- Practice only with empty bladder, stomach and bowels. Clean, eliminate and freshen the body before every practice.
- Keep the eyes open until you begin *Savasana* practice.
- Unless otherwise instructed, breathe through nose.
- When you practice the body is active, but the mind should also remain watchful, alert and still.
- Some people like to do the same well balanced sequence daily while others like to vary their daily practice. Adjust your

practice to how you feel each day. Remember to enjoy your practice making it a positive experience.

➤ If mistakes in technique are repeated over an extended period of time then imbalances and injuries may result.

➤ A good generic sequence to use for practice is-warm ups, standing poses, inverted poses, backbends, forward bends and twists, ending with *Shavasana*. This sequence is neutral and balances the energies created from the postures.

➤ Twists are neutral and can be used in a variety of places as long as you breathe fully while performing them. Twists are wonderful for the diaphragm and intercostals muscles, and to rebalance the spine at the end of your *Asana* practice just before doing *Shavasana*. Please remember that there can be less lung capacity in these postures so breathe fully.

➤ Practice the poses evenly on each side. If you practice a posture on the right side, then duplicate it on the left for the same amount of time. When you practice to correct a specific functional imbalance you may practice more on one side than the other. An experienced teacher can assist you with that.

➤ Keep your throat, eyes and jaws relaxed as you practice. Remind yourself to relax all the places in which you habitually hold tension. Feel free to adjust the poses according to what relieves this tension. Yoga positions are not static; they are organic.

➤ Yoga poses are not gymnastic exercise. They are positions that create energy patterns, which can change your energy field and your life. Be slow and moderate in your movement. Remain aware and observe yourself both internally and externally.

➤ Yoga is a discipline. It is a personal experience and not in any way competitive either with others or with yourself. Practice suspending judgement altogether remaining in the present moment.

➤ If you are physically tired or ill, practice only what heals you. Rest when you need to, work when you can. Yoga should strengthen your energy, not deplete it. In fact your Yoga practice can be great energy management tool through which you can create health and longevity.

➤ If your practice exhausts you, then you may be practicing too strongly or incorrectly, becoming dehydrated, or just practicing the wrong kind of *Asanas*. If you

are physically exhausted for any reason, do not push your body further. Practice only in a restorative way for as long as it takes until you are revitalized.

➤ If you are suffering from high or low blood pressure, asthma, hernias or sciatica, a physician and an experienced, well trained yoga teacher should be consulted.

➤ Always complete your *Asana* practice with *Shavasana* as the last pose, a deep relaxation for ten to twenty five minutes. *Shvasana* is the most important position for both *Vata* and *Pitta*. It is the time when the body replenishes itself and balances the energy created in your practice. It is also a form of *Pratyahara* or sensory withdrawal in which we can rest our motor organs and contact the peace within that is the real goal of Yoga.

CONCLUSION

Yoga is a scientific system of physical and mental brilliance which has history of 5,000 or more years. It requires compliance to certain rules, principles and methodology in order to obtain satisfactory results. If these rules and principles are not followed it may cause harm and injury to body. Yoga is a drive of theory and practice; in order to

employ yoga appropriately and successfully, one must pay consideration to the ideas behind its practical disciplines and to the exercises and techniques about its theories. The practice of yoga calls for considerable personal efforts, which involves self discipline.

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