

Yoga: A Spiritual Science for Holistic Well-being

Dr. Renjith P.G^{1*}

^{1*} Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, SNM College, Maliankara, Email: renjithpgskt@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Yoga Darsana, one of the six classical systems of Indian philosophy, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human consciousness and the nature of reality. Rooted in the ancient texts of the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, Yoga Darsana emphasizes the union of the individual self with the universal consciousness (Brahman) through disciplined practice. This abstract explores the scientific dimensions of Yoga, particularly how its concepts align with and inform modern scientific understandings of psychology, neuroscience, and health.

KEYWORDS: Moksa, Bija, Asana, Sthirasukham, Sthita prajna, Bhastrika, Sādhana,

Introduction

Yoga is a spiritual science designed for the integrated and holistic development of our physical, emotional, mental, and moral-spiritual aspects of being. The philosophy of yoga is applicable in our day-to-day living. Yoga has been documented to normalize psycho-physiological functions, and recent advances in research have shown that it has a sound scientific basis.

Yoga is first and foremost a *moksha-śāstra* (science of liberation), meant to facilitate the individual in attaining final freedom, liberation, or emancipation. One of the important by-products of the yogic way of living is the attainment of health and well-being. This is brought about by the right use of the body, emotions, and mind, with awareness and consciousness. This must be understood as a dynamic state of health that can be attained despite the individual's *bīja-karma* (root karma), which manifests as their genetic predispositions and the environment into which they are born. Yoga also helps maintain health after it has been attained through disciplined self-effort.

The qualitative aspect of health is something that yoga and Indian systems of medicine have considered important for thousands of years. The definition of *asana* given in the *Yoga-śāstra* as *sthira-sukham* implies a state of steady well-being at all levels of existence (*sthira-sukham - asana - Yoga Darśana* 2.46). Patanjali tells us that through the practice of asana, we can attain a state of well-being (*duḥkhādaḥ svaśāntim - Yoga Darśana* 2.48).

Yoga understands health and well-being as a dynamic continuum of human nature, not merely a state to be attained and maintained. The lowest point on the continuum, with the lowest speed of vibration, is that of death, whereas the highest point, with the highest speed of vibration, is that of immortality. Between these two extremes lie the states of normal health and disease. For many, health is defined as a 'state' in which they can function without hindrance, but in reality, health is part of our evolutionary process toward divinity. The lowest point on the dynamic health continuum, with lower speed of vibration, can be equated with the lowest forms of life and mineral matter, while the highest point with the highest speed of vibration is equated with divinity.

Mental Health According to Yoga

Yoga not only considers physical health but also, more importantly, mental health. Qualities of a mentally healthy person (*sthita-prajña*) are enumerated in the Bhagavad Gita as follows:

- *Vitarāga-bhaya-krodha* (beyond the animal tendencies of passion, fear, and anger) (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.56)
- *Nirmamo nirāhārīkaraḥ* (devoid of possessiveness and egoism)
- *Sthira-buddhiḥ asammudhaḥ* (firm in understanding and unbewildered) (*Bhagavad Gita* 5.20), and so on.

The central tenet of yoga is the golden mean—finding the middle path, a constant search for moderation and harmonious homeostatic balance. Yoga is the “unitive impulse” of life, always seeking to unite diverse streams into a single powerful force. Proper practice produces an inner balance of the mind that remains stable and serene even amid chaos. This ancient science shows its adherents a clear path to the ‘eye of the storm’ and ensures a stability that endures within, even as the cyclone rages externally.

Maharshi Patanjali tells us that we can gain unexcelled happiness, mental comfort, joy, and satisfaction by practicing contentment (*santoshā*), which leads to supreme happiness (*anuttama-sukha-labhaḥ*) (*Yoga Darśana* 2.42). This link is quite apparent once we think about it, but not many associate the need for contentment with their endless greed for material things.

Causation of Psychosomatic Disorders

The root cause of disease, as seen from a yogic perspective, is the holistic, unified concept of oneness, or *Advaita* (non-duality). Happiness, harmony, and ease—*disease* is created when duality (*dvaita*) arises in the human mind. This loss of oneness leads to the fragmentation of our nature, which manifests as mental, emotional, and physical ailments. Yoga helps return the individual to their pristine, whole nature, the *Atman* or Self. This is *ease*—a loss of ease creates *disease*.

Duality is the first insanity, the first disease—the unreasonable thought that “I am separate from the whole... I am unique. I am me.” The ego is a manifestation of disease. Only a distorted ego could feel alienation and suffer from “the lonely disease” in a universe that is completely filled with the Self.

Yogic Perspective of Depression

According to the *Yoga Darśana* codified by Maharṣi Patanjali, depression (*daurmanasya*) is one of the four *vikṣepa-sahabhāvana* (mental disturbances) that accompany obstacles in yoga practice, known as *nāva-antarāya* (nine obstacles). The other *sahabhāvana* are *duḥkha* (suffering), *aṅgamejayatva* (tremors), and *svāsa-prāśvāsa* (irregular respiration) (*Yoga Darśana* 1.31).

When we analyze this sutra deeply, we see that these disturbances are true reflections of our inner state:

- *Duḥkha* refers to painful suffering at the physical, emotional, or mental level, which can drive us to despair. Suffering tricks our mind, and very few are capable of realizing what is really happening in the process of their evolutionary journey. The moment suffering ends, most people give up, and the lower mind survives to fight another day.
- *Daurmanasya* refers to dejection and despair. Depression is not just a mental state but has many physical aspects as well. A state of depression is another tool by which the lower mind tries to halt the spiritual progress of a *sādhaka* (practitioner). However, we must realize that the greatest teachings often arise during moments of great despair. The art and science of yoga understands that this may be the best “teachable” moment. Many of the highest teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* were delivered when both Lord Rama and Arjuna were in the depths of their depression. It is important to say that a nervous breakdown is actually an opportunity for a spiritual breakthrough if we can recognize its positive implications. The teachings of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which can be seen as the first and second recorded “psychological counseling” sessions in human history, were delivered when both Lord Rama and Arjuna were at the depths of their depression. If we recognize that this is a window of opportunity for growth, success will come to us swiftly. But if we miss this golden chance, even divine intervention may struggle to help us out of our self-pity.
- *Aṅgamejayatva* refers to physical tremors of the body. The practice of *asana* helps attain control over the body, enabling us to transcend the *dvandva* (pair of opposites) that cause these tremors. Tremors are external manifestations of internal imbalances of emotions and mind. Imbalance at higher levels affects the neurochemical transmitters and psycho-physiological pathways of the body, resulting in these tremors. Confronted with this frightening manifestation, many aspirants get scared, thinking they are harming themselves, and stop their *sādhana* out of fear.
- *Svāsa-prāśvāsa* refers to irregularity in breathing patterns. One of the main physical manifestations of mental and emotional disturbances is erratic breathing. Ancient yogis contemplated this deeply and realized that by stabilizing the breath, we can stabilize emotions and the mind. This knowledge is still used today in the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, which is one of the best examples of the somato-psychic applications found in *hatha yoga* (the physical science of balancing energies).

Yogic Methods to Attain and Mental Health

The science of yoga offers numerous practical techniques, along with advice for a proper lifestyle, in order to attain and maintain health and well-being. Yoga works toward the restoration of normalcy in all systems of the human body, with special emphasis on the psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrine axis.

In addition to its preventive and restorative capabilities, yoga also promotes positive health that helps us navigate the health challenges we encounter during our lifetimes. Yoga has both a preventive and promoter role in health care, and it is inexpensive, making it possible to integrate it with other systems of medicine for the benefit of patients.

The Science of Yoga

In the science of yoga, body movement and breath must be synchronized. The breath pattern is particularly important, especially in practices like *Surya Namaskara* (Sun Salutation), where the body is lifted on an incoming breath and lowered on an outgoing breath. Certain breath patterns, such as *Bhastrika*, strengthen the solar plexus area and diaphragm, building stamina while producing internal cleansing of the organs and bloodstream. *Kapalabhati* is another dynamic technique that helps break through the depths of depression by creating a sense of activation.

Surya Nādi and *Vijayi Prāṇāyāma* can help activate those who need stimulation for healthy well-being. The *Bandha Trayam* (three locks) and *Āśvini Mudrā* are both invaluable for those suffering from depression as they revitalize the entire psycho-neuro-endocrine system. *Pranava* and *Bhrāmari Prāṇāyāma* work toward creating inner harmony, resulting in a state of mental calmness.

Prāṇāyāma and Its Benefits:

- There is an absolute and direct correlation between the way an organism breathes and its energy level.
- There is an absolute and direct correlation between the way a person breathes and their lifespan.
- There is an absolute and direct correlation between the way a person breathes and the clarity of their thoughts.

- There is an absolute and direct correlation between the way a person breathes and the quality of emotions they experience.
- There is an absolute correlation between the way a person breathes and the subtlety of the thoughts passing through their mind.

Yoga, which emphasizes the universal, is a perfect foil to human activities that glorify the personal. In short, the practice of yoga as a unified whole helps the individual shift from a “I”-centric approach to a “we”-centric approach.

Conclusion

The dedicated practice of yoga as a way of life is undoubtedly a panacea for problems related to psychosomatic and stress-related physical, emotional, and mental disorders. It helps us regain our birthright of health and happiness. Only when we are healthy and happy can we fulfill our destiny.

Many people have benefited from the life-enhancing qualities of yoga as a way of life. Many of them were on the verge of committing suicide before they came to yoga. Today, after years of sādhanā coupled with the adoption of yogic attitudes, they have not only climbed out of the “deep self-made well” of depression but are now guiding others. Some have become beacon lights to hundreds of their fellow human beings, helping them emerge from their shells and shine as bright stars. A lighted lamp gives off more light when it shares itself, thus illuminating the universe.

Reference

1. Bhavanani, Dr. Ananda Balayogi (2008)
2. Divyananda Creations,
3. Yyanar Nagar, Pondichery.
4. Back issues of yoga mimamsa, Journal of kaivalyadhama, Lonavla, Maharashtra.
5. Swarupananda, Swami,(2007), Srimad Bhagavatgita, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkatha
6. K Taimini, The science of yoga , A commentary on the yoga sutras of patanjali in the light of morden thought. A dayar, Madrass, India.
7. Ganganath jha, yoga sara samgraha of vijñanabhikṣu , Parimal Publications, Delhi.