

## Yoga is a Way of Life

The word “Yoga” has firmly entrenched itself in the global vocabulary. Majority believe yoga is valuable because it cures or prevents disease, making it a superb keep fit exercise. Others will only value its effectiveness in weight reduction. Some, a few, will concede that yoga practice bestows peace of mind and a feeling of well being, even of increased energy levels. No one will deny that Yoga does indeed produce all these good things. But! This is not and never has been the goal of Yoga. All these results are merely side benefits. The real purpose of Yoga was, is and shall always be Moksha, liberation, the achievement of the Highest Goal of Human Life, oneness with the Universal Self.

Yoga is a methodology that has developed over millennia of experimentation by the great Rishis of India aimed at achieving the ultimate perfection of the human spirit. Yoga transforms the lower animal nature to a human one, and the human nature to a God-like Being, radiating Sat (Reality) Chit (Consciousness) and Anandam (Bliss).

Yoga is not a magic pill. It is not a technique, a trick, a convenient button which can be pressed to accomplish a mundane goal. Yoga is a Way of Life, Yoga is the lifestyle of the Rishis of India who “Saw Reality” and who were compassionate enough to return to lower levels of consciousness to show a path to these less developed themselves, enabling them to achieve the same pinnacle of un-fold-ment of spirit.

Yoga is a w-holistic way of life that encompasses all aspects of human existence: physical, mental, moral, ethical, emotional, material and spiritual. Yoga shows us how the human incarnation may be lived according to Dharma, the Cosmic Law.

Yoga is the Science of Right – Use – Ness: a methodology for using body, mind and emotions in the right manner. This involves a whole way of moving, non-moving, thinking, non-thinking, feeling, emoting, speaking, eating, working, sleeping, contemplating and even breathing. Yoga teaches us the correct manner to use all these aspects of our human life.

The world today is faced with numerous debilitating chronic illnesses related to aging, environment, and unhealthy lifestyle, such as cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, mental health disorders and cardiovascular diseases, as well as many seemingly incurable diseases such as AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome). It is heartening to see more and more modern medical advancements suggesting the integration of various traditional healing techniques including Yoga with modern medicine for the promotion of health, healing and longevity. While modern medicine has a lot to offer humankind in its treatment and management of acute illnesses, accidents, and communicable diseases, traditional systems such as Yoga has a lot to offer in terms of preventive, promotive, and rehabilitative methods in addition to many management methods to tackle modern illnesses. It is heartening that such a w-holistic integration of Yoga and Modern Medicine has been pioneered at Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, the Deemed University in Pondicherry through its innovative work at CYTER, the Centre for Yoga Therapy, Education and Research functioning at MGMC &RI since 2010.

Yoga is the best ever designed lifestyle which evolved in the hermitages of the Rishis of Bharat. Yet, it is pertinent even today. It is a lifestyle rooted in restraint of the subhuman impulses (Yama) and cultivation of humane virtues (Niyama). It is discipline of body (Asana) and control of breath / Prana movement (Pranayama). Yoga advocates conscious use (not misuse) of the sensory organs (Jnanendriyas) as well as the action senses (Karmendriyas) through Pratyahara. It teaches the correct use of mind in a non-personal, objective, positive, directed manner (Dharana). All these aspects of controlled living are woven into a natural, non-harmful, non-acquisitive, sensitive, simple, regulated life style which is guided by the high ideas of Dharma and Moksha.

The Indian Government under our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji has increased the visibility of Yoga both Nationally and Internationally with its advocacy of “Yoga diplomacy” at the UN resulting in nearly 130 countries supporting the adoption of 21 June as the International Day of Yoga. The creation of a new autonomous ministry for AYUSH has also enhanced the funding opportunities for research in Yoga as well as other Indian traditional systems of medicine. A National Board for Promotion and Development of Yoga and Naturopathy has also been formed in the ministry and it is hoped that this will create an ambiance of positive interaction between the traditional and modern systems of health and healing. We need to focus on both the scientific-medical-clinical aspect that deals with both fundamental and applied research in various medical conditions, as well as the often neglected philosophico-literary side that tries to develop an understanding of the context and traditional basis of Yoga. To this effect, the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) has been set up by the Indian Government to try and systematize the abundant traditional knowledge in Yoga and Indian systems of medicine.

We need to however not forget the real power of Yoga, for that most popular modern word, is a sound like an atomic bomb, which when penetrated deeply releases energy powerful enough to lift all its practitioners into higher realms of consciousness, propelling the Jiva far, far beyond the puny personality into the grand vision and life style of a true Universality.

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## Mantra meditation

Mindful repetition of a mantra, a sacred word, effectively reduces symptoms of combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and insomnia as per a randomized controlled trial published in The June 20 in the American Journal of Psychiatry.

Investigators compared mantra repetition to present-centered therapy in veterans with PTSD. Both interventions were offered weekly for a total of 8 weeks. Those in the mantra group had significantly greater improvements in both PTSD and insomnia. Benefits continued to be present at 2-month follow-up.

The study was a two-site, open-allocation, blinded-assessment randomized trial involving 173 veterans diagnosed with military-related PTSD from two Veterans Affairs outpatient clinics (January 2012 to March 2014). The mantram group (N=89) learned skills for silent mantram repetition, slowing thoughts, and one-pointed attention. The comparison group (N=84) received present-centered therapy, focusing on currently stressful events and problem-solving skills. Both treatments were delivered individually in eight weekly 1-hour sessions. The primary outcome measure was change in PTSD symptom severity, as measured by the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS) and by self-report. Secondary outcome measures included insomnia, depression, anger, spiritual well-being, mindfulness, and quality of life. Intent-to-treat analysis was conducted using linear mixed models