

4.1 Meaning and Importance of Yoga

Meaning of Yoga

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root Yuj (To join, to use, to concentrate one's attention on) meaning to bind, join, attach and yoke to direct and concentrate one's attention on, to use and apply. Yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy. It was collated, coordinated and systematised by Patanjali (The propounder of Yoga Philosophy) in his classical work, the Yoga Sutras. The System of Yoga is so called because it teaches the means by which the individual soul can be united to or be in communion with the God, and so secure liberation.

Yoga is the science that teaches us the methods of uniting the individual soul with the supreme soul, or merging the individual will with the cosmic will. Yoga means to direct your mind towards God. It is a scientific method for approaching God.

Yoga in its simplest term is the steady movement of the individual soul towards the supreme soul. Yoga is a path that leads up to the state of supreme blessedness and peace. The purpose of yoga is to regain the true awareness and to realise his everlasting oneness with the God.

The message of Yoga is "wherever you are, whatever you are, try to find God, try to live a noble life, purify yourself."

Importance of Yoga

The advancement of science and technology, though a boon to mankind, is leaving behind a dark path which man has to endure with. The modern man's life is made so comfortable by the machines, computers and fast locomotion that he feels uneasy when these things are eliminated from his life. Much of the modern man's tasks are performed by the machines and computers, making him lethargic, unfit and unhealthy. The stiffness in the body is one of the most common outcomes of the mechanised life. Man has devised innovative and novel ways to overcome this stiffness. The oriental India, almost 4,000 years back, devised a set of exercises, known as yogic practices, which if practiced following certain regulations or by performing certain asanas may cure most of the common diseases. Asanas are postural patterns which are to be achieved slowly, maintained for sometime steadily and released again in slow and smooth manner, to train the body and mind in such a way that necessary equilibrium is established in overall functions.

Yogasanas not only work to bring fitness and vigour to physical body, but also harness our will and emotions to improve our power of analysis, insight and vision. They calm the mind and help control the emotions, without losing the sharpness of intellect which is the key to human progress. The science of yoga is dedicated to helping people to change their personalities and lifestyles.

Yoga is a timeless pragmatic science evolved over thousands of years, dealing with the physical and moral being and man as a whole. Yogic practices increase power of concentration at work, providing poise and tranquility. They lead one from ignorance to wisdom, from weakness to strength, from disharmony to harmony, from hatred to love and help lead one from diversity to unity and from imperfection to perfection.

All yogic exercises and processes aim at purification, nervous control and coordination of muscles. They give gentle exercise to the body as a whole, including individual organs. The simplicity of technique, lack of fatigue and non-requirement of any accessories are great advantages of yogic exercises. The caloric requirement of these exercises is much lower than that of other physical exercises.

Yogic curriculum consists of both mental and physical exercises. Yamas and Niyamas are mental exercises whereas Asanas are physical exercises. Asanas are of two types—cultural and meditative. The cultural poses are practiced for training the nervous and endocrinal systems whereas the meditative poses are undertaken to eliminate physiological disturbances from the mind.

Yogic exercises help in both prevention and treatment of diseases. Different exercises are recommended for different systems of the body. Exercises useful for stiff neck or back are Bhujangasana, Naukasana, Shalabhasana and modified Brahma-mudra. For respiratory system, the beneficial exercises are different types of Pranayama, Kapalabhati, Bhastrika and the practice of Neti.

Asanas are based on three basic human postures—standing, sitting and lying down. Asanas are physical exercises which enable the body to be physically fit. These exercises, in physical education, play an important part in helping the pupils to maintain a slim and youthful body. Asanas suit everyone irrespective of the sex, age or physical condition. Several tests and experiments have been conducted to know the value and importance of asanas. The most important point to realise before starting the practice of yoga is that the asanas are not just simple exercises but sustained scientific patterns of posture.



Yoga is all about feeling good; feel the blood surging through your veins, the energy pulsating through your nerves, the bliss coursing through your whole being. Best of all, Yoga is apt for all regardless of age, colour, caste, creed or religion: from the healthiest to the sickest, from the richest to the poorest, from the whitest to the blackest.

Benefits of yoga are:

- (i) Brings down stress and enhances power of relaxation
- (ii) Boosts physical strength, endurance and flexibility
- (iii) Bestows greater power of concentration and self-control
- (iv) Inculcates impulse control
- (v) Helps in rehabilitation of old and new injuries
- (vi) Intensifies tolerance to pain and enhances mental clarity
- (vii) Boosts functioning of the immune system
- (viii) Enhances posture and muscle tone
- (ix) Improves blood circulation
- (x) Results in healthy, glowing skin
- (xi) Cleanses and improves overall organ functioning
- (xii) Bestows peace of mind and a more positive outlook to life
- (xiii) Infuses a sense of balance and internal harmony

4.2 Yoga as an Indian Heritage

India is known as the earth of yogis and seers. Traditionally Lord Shiva is regarded as a founder of yoga. Maharishi Kapil has been proclaimed as the first teacher of yoga. The source of yoga is found in the vedas and upanishads. Yoga's roots began in India thousands of years ago. It is a comprehensive system linking body, breath, mind, intelligence, wisdom and spirit. Yoga is a collection of knowledge encompassing many areas such as mental and physical health, nutrition, art, history,



