

Yogic Sciences in Achieving Complete Mental Health

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Introduction

In our culture, mental health is explained through sound efficient mind with controlled emotions. A mentally healthy person when threatened with conflicts and frustrations maintains the balance by working against stress. Mental health is the ability to adjust satisfactorily in social and emotional challenging situations. Mental hygiene is the means to sustain and develop mental health.

Mental health has got several dimensions. These are preservation, prevention, remedy and of course developmental dimension. Individual needs to maintain emotional control and manage stress to face the challenges of life. Here comes preservation of mental health. A preventive measure is designed to develop



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necessary skills that reduce the chances of occurrence of any mental health problem. The remedial measures are taken when the problem already exists. The developmental dimensions aim at increasing intentional functioning of the mental mechanisms. This includes techniques of coping with mental health crisis in life before they arise.

The mental hygiene movement started as long as 1908, when Clifford Beers published the book “A mind that found itself”. Through the work of Beers (1908) and others, initiatives were undertaken to educate the people on the importance of building mental health from early childhood. Different agencies like school, colleges, homes, religious institutions found to be nodal agencies to build up mental health for their target groups. Creating awareness on mental health problems and sustained efforts to promote and improve mental health considered to be the part of the education and socialisation process. We are mentally healthy when our personality is functioning well, when all our powers and abilities, needs and urges find expression and maintain harmony with one another. To fulfill our needs and developing our powers and talents, individuals need to identify right goals. A mentally healthy person keeps in view the individual’s goal and happiness along with the social goal and social welfare.

Following the Second World War in the past century, the faith on humanity and social welfare went to their lowest order due to the horrible impact of the war. A new branch of psychology – Existential Psychology emerged on the “faith on human beings”. Viktor E. Frankl’s writings on “Experiences in a concentration camp” and “The search for meaning” brought a revolution in the domain of Existential Psychology as a discipline, especially his experiences of witnessing the behaviour of a very few fully mentally healthy person in “Gas chamber”. Frankl (1968) observed that today existential crisis of man is steadily getting importance. Man’s search for meaning in life, is further increasing. Majority of the somatic symptoms of mental problems can be traced from fear and flight, moving away from freedom and responsibility. The search for meaning in life leads to a higher level of existence, may be spiritual life.

A few concepts on spiritual evolution of human beings are available in Indian and Western philosophy. These include “Sahaj Manush” (simple man) of Swami Nigamananda, as described by Basu (1955), “Superman” of Sri Aurobindo (2003), “Ubermensch” of Friedrich Nietzsche (1883), Sri Ramakrishnan’s (2003) “Everfree man”, “Maharishi” of Richardson (1946), “Man of self-realisation” of Parthasarathy (1984) and to a great extent “Metaman” of Abraham Maslow (1971).

The concept of Metaman as portrayed by Maslow (1971), the individual who frequently gets peak experiences, he has attended certain level of spirituality, he thrives for mankind, has love for beauty and goodness, justice in the world. Peak experiences give the feeling of being a part of the infinite and the eternal. Here comes the concept of fullest development of mental health. Metaman is the hypothetical portrayal of a man with the fullest development of psychological health and spirit.

Maslow (1967) perceived self-actualisation man prior to Metaman of the society. People having self-actualised needs are supposed to overcome other human needs like security, belongingness as well as esteem needs and continue to drive and fulfill potential to “be all that you can be”. They strive on becoming extremely complete. It seems, therefore, the purpose of education is to produce self-actualised men who have control over his emotions and have sound mental health. There are number of theories in psychology which deal with the concept of mental health. Theories related to the human needs appear to be from the basis of mental health. Maslow’s (1967) hierarchy of needs at the self-actualisation level and beyond, talked on “healthiness”. This healthiness is fullest development of mental health which was found out by Maslow (1971). He developed his concept of healthiness independently; it appears that he assimilated certain aspects of Eastern psychology which fitted to his concept. Yogic sciences form the core of eastern psychologies.

Several investigators have established the importance of yoga in maintaining psycho-physiological balance and improvement in personality. Koleman (1952) while working on Patanjali Yoga observed that “yoga discipline is a beautifully designed technique to induce pacification of body and mind, and in the serenity of that powerful detachment, to realise the self’s true nature being a pure spirit, absolutely unrelated and independent. Practices of yoga help in overcoming the emotional disturbances like anger, frustration, anxiety and tension”. Abhedananda (2009) brought out a book on Yoga Psychology. The book reflects the thought of a monk on effects of yoga on human psychology. Vaishwanar (1975) argued that practice of yoga does impart an exceptional control on sensory, autonomic and motivational (limbic) nervous system. Latha and Kaliappan (1987) in their study on effectiveness of yoga therapy in the treatment of migraine, tension and headaches used Yoga Asanas (postures) and Pranayama (Breathing exercises) in therapeutic purpose. Morbid thinking, anxiety etc have their effect on sympathetic nervous system through a mind-body connection. Yogic relaxation processes breaks up some of the inappropriate ‘loops’ of thinking. These inappropriate loops may be a series of worrisome thought (Benson, 1984). Naug (1975) conducted case studies on neurotic disorder by applying yoga. He

observed a positive improvement in the psychological response of the patient. The effects of postures and Pranayama which are inbuilt in yoga training reduce somatic symptoms of the neurosis. Radha Rani and Davidson (2018) studied the effects of yoga on social and emotional development and observed the positive effect. Akshatha (2018) studied the psychological effect of meditation on brain mechanism. She observed that meditation is one of the preventive medicines for anxiety and many other disorders. Several other investigators have studied different techniques of yoga in bringing about psychological equilibrium. These include Benson (1984), Bloomfield (1975), Ferguson and Gowan (1976), Mukhopadhyay (1993, 2004) and others.

C.G. Jung (1978) after extensive study on Indian philosophy by staying in India found the great treasure of Indian philosophy and yogic sciences. His research works on 'Psychology of the east' created huge impact among the psychologists and educationists of the west. It is not exaggeration to say that the awareness of the yogic sciences of India and its immense importance of achieving mental health was first brought out by Jung. Jacobl (1946) stated the concept of yoga by Jung. Accordingly, "Yoga is, as I can readily believe the perfect and appropriate method of fusing body and mind together so that they form a unity that can hardly be doubted. Thus they create a psychological disposition which makes possible intuitions that transcend consciousness".

In yogic sciences, practice of yoga comprises of several steps. These steps include yogic postures, Nadisadhana, Mudra, Pranayama and Meditation. There are several other related higher steps like "Dharana" and "Samadhi" before and beyond meditation (Nigamananda, 1907). Steps of meditation can be practiced independently without going to the next steps and certain positive results can be derived out of practice. For instance, certain postures like Padmasana (Lotus Posture), Siddhasana (Fulfillment posture) have the inbuilt system in it to achieve higher psycho-physiological equilibrium. In yogic sciences, the importance of practice of meditation is being accepted and preached by almost all the authorities towards achieving psycho-physiological equilibrium, thus achieving complete mental health.

Much before Jung (1936), Swami Vivekananda (1976) preached and encouraged practice of meditation in many places of United States of America in 1890s. When the world came to know about him after his historical address at Chicago Religious Congress he was invited at several places of America and England to talk on spirituality. His focus was solely on practice of meditation to achieve mental health and to reach highest level of spirituality.

In the past decade certain initiative by several saints, yoga teachers and authors are praiseworthy. Srimat Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1949) of Umachal Yogashram, Guwahati, Assam (India) wrote several books on yogic sciences and therapy. In India, the book titled *Yogabale Yogarajya* may be the first book of its kind in yoga therapy. Swami Sivananda (1994) gave more importance to the development of sound health and body through practice of yoga, which in turn will lead to development of sustenance of mental health. There are a number of authorities not possible to mention here, having major contributions over the decades, which strengthened the hands of our beloved present Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modi to initiate and celebrate the first International Yoga Day, 21 June 2015 all over the world.

Meditative Techniques

Meditative techniques are one of the core techniques sprouting under yogic sciences. This is one of the ancient tools to bring about changes in behaviour, most often practiced in Hindus and Buddhist culture. There are many modes of meditative practice in yogic sciences practiced by different schools of yoga. Some of the meditative techniques are discussed in the following paragraphs which have been proved to be high positive bearing in achieving mental health.

Transcendental Meditation (TM)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1963) is the propounder of this technique of meditation and in this technique religious trapping are not necessary (Benson, 1984). The transcendental refers to “going beyond”. Maharishi chose the TM to indicate the spontaneous shifting of the individual’s awareness beyond the familiar level of their wakeful experiences to a state of profound rest coupled with heightened alertness. TM creates an opportunity for two brief daily periods of effortless disengagement from our daily experiences which is made up of an unending cascade of thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions (Mukhopadhyay, 1980). The individual on practicing again and again, becomes successful to allow his attention to shift inward, he experiences the quiet level of mind. In this stage he becomes increasingly aware of the unbound nature of his awareness where objects are absent. This is the state of pure awareness” which is nothing more than being wide awake inside, without being aware of anything except awareness itself.

TM was inaugurated in the United States in 1959 and since then millions of people practiced and derived the benefit of improved mental health, free from morbid anxiety and stress. Empirical researches on TM and its benefit were conducted by Benson (1975), Bloomfield (1976), Ferguson and Gowan (1976) and others.

Chakra Meditation

Chakra Meditation (CM) is one of the processes of meditation which has been used widely by yogis and researchers (Nigamananda, 1907; Leadbeater, 2011; Sivananda, 1994; Vishnu Devananda, 1995). Chakras are present in the astral body and each chakra functions in and controls a particular centre in the gross body. In yogic sciences, chakras are known as “Padma” or lotus of the astral body. Nine principal chakras have been identified by yogis. Locations of these chakras in the subtle-physical body correspond to the nerve plexus of the physical body. In meditative practice, chakras are identified with lotus, each one with a specified number of petals. Each chakra has specific colour and is associated with a particular “Tattva”.

Meditation on each chakra has different benefits but all lead towards achieving complete mental health and spiritual upliftment. For instance, Manipura chakra (solar plexus) which is located in the naval region and the psychic characteristics associated with this chakra are shame, hate, depression, fear, jealousy, bitterness, etc. Thus, this chakra is associated with several emotions. He who meditates successfully on this chakra can get rid of the fear of fire, and several diseases. He gets control over several emotions.

Though meditation on each chakra is related to mental health and spiritual development but a few chakras seems to be more important to psychologists. Like Lalana chakra (Forehead chakra) is situated in the inner region of the upper cavity of the forehead. This chakra is the seat of “Aham Tattva” (Ego). The psychic characteristics related to this chakra are respect, satisfaction, honour, sympathy, guilt feelings, purity, affection, etc. Meditation on this chakra helps to cure neurotic and psychotic disorders. Further, to get rid of pain and headaches and overcome fatigue, one can meditate on this chakra.

Laya Yoga

Laya yoga is said to be the earliest form of meditation. The term “Laya” is coined with the yoga and is considered to be a broad term. The concept of laya yoga is self revealing. “Laya” means immersion and absorption into a blissful void. In Laya yoga the entire thought is projected on some internal or external object, real or imaginary and thus the mind is becoming passive. Further, Laya means dissolution, disintegration of the gross into fine and disappearance of the effect into the cause.

According to one of the ancient Indian Sanskrit literature Sibha Samhita, four types of yoga are usually perceived; which includes Mantra yoga, Hatha

yoga, Raja yoga and Laya yoga. Among all these, Laya yoga has undergone a number of transformations and today many forms of Laya yoga are available.

There are several techniques of Laya yoga. In Yogi Guru (1907) which is one of the best yoga book in India on yoga practices of our time, has cited sixteen techniques. Practice of Laya yoga may consist of five phases. These plans are setting stage; orientation and introduction; Practice; wind up; debriefing and feedback. No special support materials are required to practice this technique. Comfortable arrangements should be there to enable the subjects to lie down or sear depending on the technique. It is enough if the entire environment is quite. A few individuals may experience negative and unwanted feelings while going to deepest part of the yoga practice. This may particularly happen in case of Nama Japa (Mantra Yoga). Bhole and Karmblekar (1968) in their study on effect of yoga practices observed that a few subjects developed unwanted feelings at the end of the classes. Of course in practicing laya yoga if the purpose of meditation is gaining mental health through limited practices, then the chances of those negative reactions are remote.

The technique of Laya Yoga can form the basis of general mental health curriculum of any educational institution. It can be used as a part of the psycho-educational model in the educational institutions.

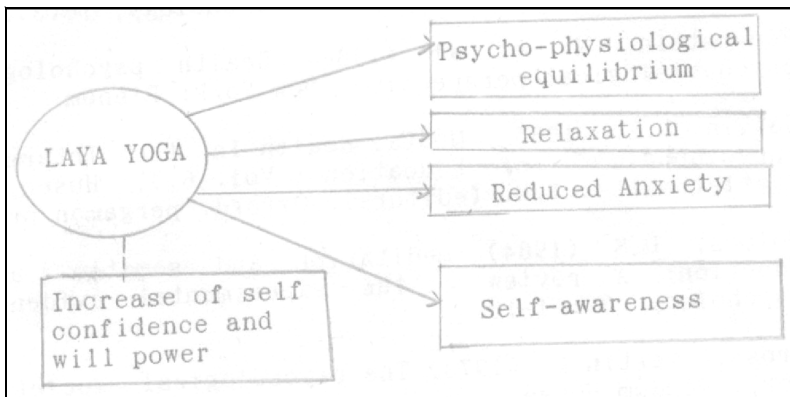


Fig. 1. Laya Yoga

Instructional Effects (→) and Nurturant Effects (—)

Laya yoga is the easiest way to physical, mental and emotional relaxation. Through regular practice of Laya yoga, it is possible to resolve dissatisfaction and bringing internal harmony. It brings about a dynamic equilibrium between thoughts and emotions. Its most powerful value lies in the maintenance and development of mental health. When individuals are able to practice

independently, it is likely to increase self awareness, along with self confidence and a surge of will power (see fig.1)

Yoga Psycho-Therapeutic Equilibrium Model (YPTM)

Alan Watts (1967) while analyzing eastern and western psychotherapy observed that eastern way of liberation has similarity with the western psychotherapy. This is because both are concerned with changing the feelings of people about themselves. Tart (1976) one of the great scholars in Transpersonal Psychology has contributions on altered states of consciousness. Yoga can help control such altered states. He has proposed to use eastern thought for understanding and controlling altered awareness. This altered state of awareness has new potentialities for personality of growth. Ram Dass (1971) emphasises the importance of spiritual growth and its inculcation to remove emptiness from life. He felt that meditation and other spiritual practices can result in therapeutic personality changes which cannot be done by application of drugs. The body has an inborn capacity to enter into a special state characterised by lower heart rate, decreased rate of breathing, slower brain waves, lowered blood pressure and lowered speed of metabolism. All these characteristics will counteract with the harmful effects of emotions and uncomfortable feelings of stress. Practicing certain forms of Yoga leads to the changed state of the body. By practicing yoga, psychotherapeutic equilibrium model (Mukhopadhyay and Renuka Devi, 2004), the individual reaches to a relative peaceful psychic condition. This initiates the change in an individual, his mental pattern, which as a result breaks free ‘worry cycles’.

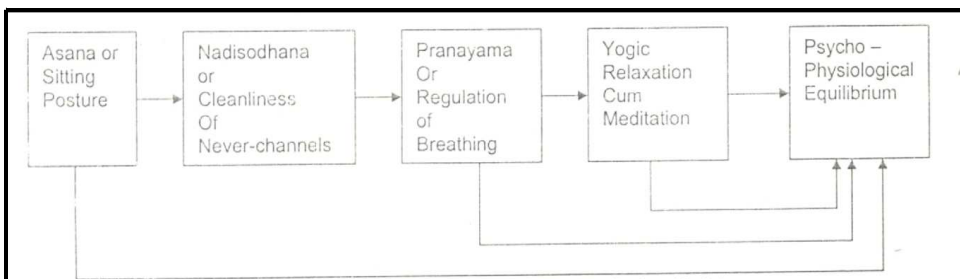


Fig. 2: Psycho-physiological Equilibrium cycle: Yoga Meditation Model.

These worry cycles are undesirable and unproductive complexes which are responsible for brooding of the mind again and again with the anxieties, uncreative and undesirable thoughts. This process is mostly involuntary. The practice of YPTM and its associated techniques can be instrumental in achieving psycho-physiological equilibrium at its fullest mental health.

The atmosphere should be positive and friendly for practicing YPTM. No support is necessary for practicing this model, but comfortable arrangements should be there to enable the subject to sit or lie down as and when it requires.

Conclusion

In present day, in the context of global competition with the increase of general stress levels of an individual, it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves to meet the challenges. Preservation and fullest development of mental health should be the “mantra” for everyone to get success in every field. Yogic sciences are the means to achieve highest level of mental health. Thus, practice of yoga by every individual in the society can bring about a total positive change in the individual and thus, to the society and the world.

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