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Ashtanga Yoga for Holistic Health

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Abstract :

Life; in the modern age, has become so complex that seen and unseen risks to health have increased to multiple folds. Our environment has been so badly degraded that education for health care needs to be given more importance. A healthy state is a precondition for a life of joy, of which; peace is the primary factor. With the ever- changing life style health care should be given due importance. Definition of health is not absence of diseases but it is a complete union of the body, mind and spirit. This kind of complete or holistic health can be gained by the regular practice of Yoga. The Yoga system gives special emphasis on its nature, form, the different steps of practice and many other important things concerned to it. If a person maintains regularity studiousness in his duty, he can very well attain good reward irrespective of his age. In other words, age is immaterial for practicing Yoga.

Introduction :

Life; in the modern age, has become so complex that seen and unseen risks to health have increased to multiple folds. Our environment has been so badly degraded that education for health care needs to be given more importance. A healthy state is a precondition for a life of joy, of which; peace is the primary factor. With the ever- changing life style health care should be given due importance.

Definition of health is not absence of diseases but it is a complete union of the body, mind and spirit. This kind of complete or holistic health can be gained by the regular practice of Yoga.

The Yoga system gives special emphasis on its nature, form, the different steps of practice and many other important things concerned to it. Yoga believes that attainment of holistic health can only be possible if one manages to control or terminate the functions of the body, the sense organs, mind, and intellect. For that Maharshi Patanjali has devised eight-fold path that is Ashtaangashtanga Yoga viz., Yama, Niyama, Aasana, Praanaayaama, Pratyahaara, Dhaarana, Dhyaana, Samaadhi.

I. यमः (Yama) : It is a first discipline which includes Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha

अहिंसासत्यास्तेय ब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः – यो.सू. –साधनपाद- ३०

१.अहिंसा (Ahimsa) : Non-violence means not to kill or hurt anybody by thoughts, words or deeds in any circumstance, at any place. In other words abstains from all kinds of injury to any life.

२.सत्य (Satya) : It means truthfulness in thought and speech. One who experiences non-falsehood in their thoughts can dwell on the path of Satya.

३.आस्तेय (Aasteya) : A desire to acquire other's belonging is stealing. Asteya is non-stealing. As a result of practicing Asteya the mind will be purified and there will be no bondage of karma.

४.ब्रह्मचर्यः (Brahmacharya) :न तपस्तप इत्याहुर्ब्रह्मचर्यं परं तपः ॥

It is the real penance in one's life. Weakness is caused by the loss of strength and the strength is perfectly maintained by regularly practicing Bramacharya. He who follows complete Brahmacharya would certainly gain spiritual energy to march on the path way to Samaadhi.

५. अपरिग्रहः (Aparigraha): Non-acquisition of unnecessary gifts from anyone. One should be satisfied with minimum wealth, garments and items of material comfort. Maintaining the Aparigraha one can get knowledge of past and future.

II. Niyama : It is contained in the cultivation of following good habits.

शौच संतोषतपः स्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि नियमाः ॥ यो.सू. – साधनपाद –32

1) शौचः(Purity) :

One should purify his body with water every day, purify mind with good behavior, and by knowledge purification of intelligence is made. Here purification is of two types – external and internal. Body should be purified both internally and externally through Shatkriyaas like mud bath, sun bath, steam bath, neeti, tratak, nauali, kapalhati, etc. which will help in performing higher steps of Yoga.

धौर्बस्तिस्तथा नेतिस्त्राटकं नौलिकं तथा ।

कपालभातिश्चैतानि षट्कर्माणि प्रचक्षते ॥ ह.प्र. २-२२

Mind is purified through removal of Panchakleshas (Avidya, Asmitaa, Raaga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha) (अविद्याऽस्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः पंचक्लेषाः यो.सू. – साधनपाद – 03)

and intellect through Karuna, Maitri, Mudita and Upeksha. Negative Vrittis to be changed to positive through a spiritual or divine touch to mind.

मलशौचं मनःशौचं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

सर्वभूतदयाशौचं जलशौचं तुपञ्चमम् ॥ ब्रह्मस्पतिः

2) संतोषः (Santosha) : It is a habit of being self-contented with what comes of itself without undue exertion. One should fulfill one's objectives with the available resources. This virtue strengthens the health of individual and society. If one is satisfied with what he has gained this will reduce the evils of society like robbery, stealing, raging etc.

3) तपः (Penance) : तपो द्वन्द्व सहनम् – This means whatever pains, troubles come in the way of accomplishment of our objectives they should be accepted gracefully and should march forward towards our goal continuously without deviating. Tapas are of three types. 1) Mental 2) Physical 3) Verbal.

- Mental Tapas – Praying for the welfare of all creatures in the world. (सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः)

- Physical Tapas – Nishkam Karma (of a person) towards the health and prosperity of a person or community.
- Verbal Tapas – Uttering holy words distinctly for the sake of prosperity of a community or nation.

4) स्वाध्याय (Swadhyaya) : Swa + Adyaya which means by self-study experience the realization of internal self, or thinking about our existence with the help of chanting Pranav and regular study of Bhagavad-geeta & Upanishad etc. The result of this is the Sadhaka who chants Omkara Mantra and never faces difficulties in devotion.

5) इश्वरप्रणिधान (Ishwar Parnidhana) : क्रियाणां अर्पणम् which means devoting all our actions to the supreme God. The ultimate objective of a devotee's life and efforts should be to dedicate each and everything that he has to god, including his existence. This results in attaining the stage of Samaadhi.

III. Aasana :

It is a discipline of the body and consists in the adoption of steady and comfortable posture. स्थिरसुखमासनम् 2 – 46. There are various types of Aasana as Padmaasana and Vajraasan etc. which can be properly learnt only under the guidance of experts. These aasanas play an important role to keep the body free from disease and for establishing the concentration of the mind. The main systems of body like digestive system, nerveous system, respiratory system and circulatory system etc. and Jnanendriya and Karmendriya are controlled and maintained by performing Aasanas and Kriyas. Yoga prescribes 84 types of different Asanas for becoming activate, flexible and healthy. The prescribed Aasanas preserve the vital energy and strengthen and purify the body and mind.

IV. Praanaayaama :

It is regulated suspension of the breathing processes either after Rechaka (exhalation) or Puraka (inhalation) or Kumbhaka (simply by retention of the vital breath.)

Praanaayaama is of four types :

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|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1) Baahya Vritti | 2) Abhyantara vritti |
| 3) Stamb vritti | 4) Baahya Abhyantara – vishaya kshepi |

1) Baahya Vritti (external condition) :

This can be made with Bandha etc. by exhaling breath. This type of Praanaayaama is beneficial and does not cause any harm to the body. It improves digestion capacity and useful for

stomach disorders. By purifying body it improves peace of mind. It enhances and sharpens the intellect also. It regulates sexual organs and helps to cure premature ejaculation, night fall and other semen related problems.

तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ॥ यो.सू. – साधनपाद –49

2) Abhyantara vritti (Internal condition) :

Holding the breath internally and making Bandha etc. is Abhyantara vritti. It cures the respiratory problems. It is extremely beneficial for Asthama. It increases Vitality, Vigor and enhance the complexion of the body.

3) Stambha Vritti (Holding breath) :

This Praanaayaama helps in concentration of mind. There is a direct connection between mind and Praana. If we control the breath automatically it controls the mind. Because Praana and mind are the two faces of same coin.

चले वाते चले चित्ते निश्चले निश्चलं भवेत् । ह.प्र.-02-02

4) Baahya Abhyantara – vishaya kshepi :

Holding breath during inhaling and exhaling. By doing this praanaayaama mind and sense organs come under control. Getting control over mind is the prime aim of Praanaayaama. Sharpening the intellect and mastering over difficult and minute aspects of a subject. It results in increasing the vigour and vitality.

V. Pratyahaara :

It deals with the withdrawal of the sense organs from their respective external objects and keeping them under the control of the mind.

स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगे चित्तस्य स्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः । यो.सू. –साधनपाद- ५४

This is the stepping stone to the Antaranaga Saadhana.

The five steps of Yogangas mentioned above (Yama, Niyama, Aasana, Praanaayaama & Pratyahaara) are considered as external means to Yoga. (Bahriranga Saadhana) And the remaining three(Antaranga Saadhana, Dharan, Dhyaana & Samaadhi) are internal means of Yoga (Samaadhi).

VI. Dhaarana :देशबन्धः चित्तस्य धारणा – यो. सू. – ३.१

It is a mental discipline by which the mind is held upon desired object which may be one among the six chakras(Shatachakra). Thus the act of detaching the mind from the worldly objects and indulging it on the subtle objects of soul.

VI. Dhyaana : तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम् – यो. सू. – ३.२

A tremendous concentrated flow of superior knowledge is called Dhyaana.

Submerging the mind with supreme soul and not thinking of anything else. Only healthy and calm mind can perform or achieve this.

VII. Samaadhi :

It is the final step of Yoga where the presence of body and mind goes down to nil and has no awareness of itself. At this stage he/she perceives the whole universe in his/her own self. In other words, the ultimate limit of knowledge is asceticism. This leads to the salvation of the soul. He has no fulfillments to achieve and is free from the circle of life and death.

Conclusion :

The dealt, among these aforesaid steps of Yoga, above steps of Ashtanga Yoga the first five i.e. Bahirang Saadhanaas enhance the holistic health for worldly life. The rest are higher level which lead to divine life. This can be attained only when the self is prevented from identifying itself with mental modifications. Svaatmaaraama in his Hathapradapikaa says – if a person maintains regularity studiousness in his duty, he can very well attain good reward irrespective of his age. In other words, age is immaterial for practicing Yoga.

युवा वृद्धेति वृद्धोवा व्याधितो दुर्बलोपि वा ।

अभ्यासात् सिद्धिमाप्नोति सर्वयोगेश्वरतन्द्रितः । ह. प्र. १ – ६४

Goal cannot be attained just by studying scriptures of Yoga, without regular practice of these methods in Yoga.

क्रियायुक्तस्य सिद्धिः स्यादक्रियस्य कथं भवेत् ।

न शास्त्रपाठमात्रेण योगसिद्धिः प्रजायते ॥ ह. प्र. १-६५

Neither simply the dress of Siddha nor the discussion on Yoga brings success in Yoga. It is but practice that makes him successful. Thus, Yoga as a valid source, provides concrete technology for the entire mankind to reach the supreme goal through holistic health.

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