Attaining Holistic Health by Yoga

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Abstract

The lifestyle today is posing numerous challenges in front of entire society. It is inviting various physiological as well as psychological ailments, which are beyond the scope of modern medical science. That's why people are shifting towards the ancient science (yoga and meditation) of health and well-being. The yogic techniques are quite rich and helpful in purification of body and mind. Studies reveal that yogic practice helps in establishing the equilibrium in the social behaviour, personal traits (emotions & intellect) and mind and body of the individual. Its regular practice works like an antidote for various psychosomatic and lifestyle imbalances. So the science of yoga should be learned and practiced by all for attaining holistic health. This article will bring into light certain ways in which yoga can help in attaining holistic health.

Keywords: *Health, Holistic Health, Yoga*

Introduction :-

Today's world is fully equipped with various technologies. In other words technology has become an indispensible part of one's life. Due to this technological advancement people have all the material comforts. This technological advancement has changed the entire lifestyle of the people. Besides changing the lifestyle it has posed numerous challenges in front of the society such as health constraints, psychological problems and others.

Talking in terms of health, just some decades back, mankind used to suffer from various infectious and contagious diseases which are under control due to the developments in the medical sciences. But nowadays people are suffering from psychosomatic ailments. Scientists are holding modern lifestyle as the major contributor for the prevailing condition. The highly advanced modern medical science is realizing its limitation in treating these ailments. So people are trying to find out some alternative solution for these types of problems. One such solution could be Yoga and Meditation.

Concept of Yoga

Undoubtedly, yoga has its origin in India. It was practiced for the sake of spiritual attainment. Yoga is basically the way towards enlightenment. The word 'yoga' has been derived from the Sanskrit *dhatu or root* 'yuj' which means 'union' joining or attachment. This union is the union of individual soul to the universal soul i.e. God. Yoga is one of the primeval systems for promoting the health as well as spirituality. Patanjali Yoga Sutras are considered as the text that codifies yogic practices, but many of its practices are older than this text. The yoga sutras describe the unified and comprehensive system of yoga as asthanga yoga (eight fold yoga).

1) **Yama-** it refers to abstentions of five vows of Jainism (Ahinsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahamcharya and Aparigraha).
2) **Niyama-** it refers to five obsevances (Shaucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya and Ishvarapranidhana)

3) **Asana-** Posture Discipline of body. (rules and postures to keep body disease free and healthy)
4) **Pranayama-** control of breath. (Benefits the health and helps in concentration).
5) **Pratyahara-** control over senses. (Withdrawing the senses from other objects).

The last three levels are called internal aids to Yoga (*antaranga Sadhna*)

6) **Dharana-** concentrating mind on some physical object such as lamp's flame, on agya chakra i.e. mid-point of the eye brows.
7) **Dhyana-** persistant meditation (uninterrupted stream of thoughts around meditational object).
8) **Samadhi-** oneness with the object of meditation.

At present almost every individual is trying and devoting some time for yogic activities out of their busy schedule. As these activities helps in releasing their stress, keeping their mind calm and relaxed, improving their capacity to work, helping them to focus their mind and developing a positive attitude . Apart from this, it also helps to overcome various physiological problems such as digestive disorders, cardiac problems, thyroid, diabetes and even arthritis.

Health

Health is a nebulous word, as it doesn't have any universal and uniform definition. Some defines it as the absence of disease which means if a person doesn't have any disease than the person is considered to have a good health. Some holds that, "health is wealth", which suggests that no individual can attain its full prospective in absence of good health. This view is also supported by Mahatma Gandhi as he also said that instead of the pieces of gold and silver, heath is real wealth. By saying so he validate the thought that health is more important in comparison to affluence. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh has stressed that health is the all-round development of individual's personality with reference to physical, intellectual, mental, social, emotional and spiritual levels. This process helps in overcoming the limitations and imperfections among the individuals and paves the way of being a superhuman. Same view was put forward by a well-known sociologist Will Wright when he said that health is "an individual's ability to be fully human".

World Health Organisation (WHO) described the term 'health' as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity. Initially there were only three constituents- physical, mental and social. The role played by spirituality was recognized after knowing the potency of yoga as a holistic science. Three interdependent fields are suggested by the Lalonde report, Canada as the fundamental determinants of the health of any individual. These fields are-

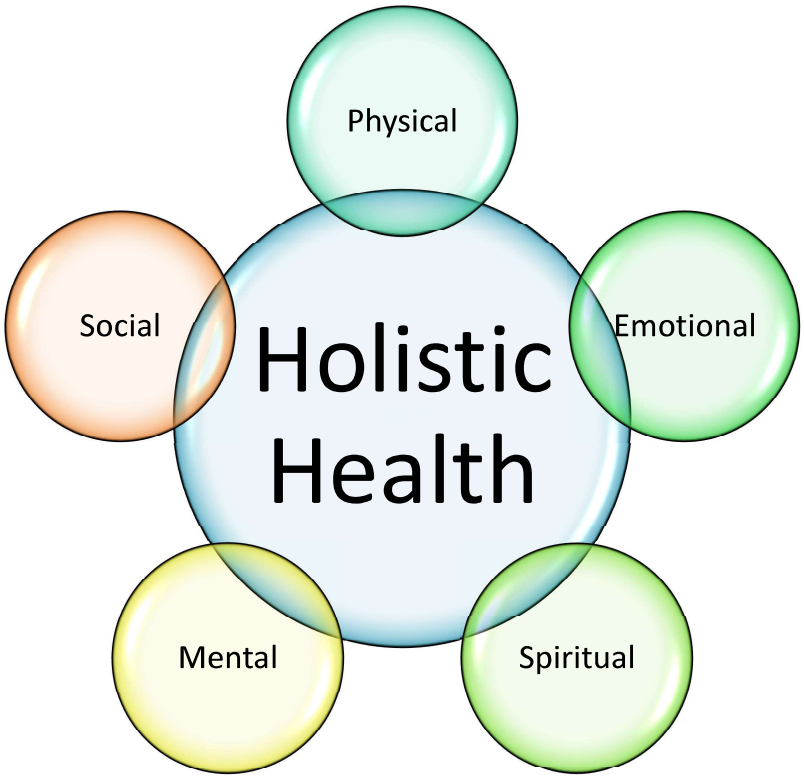
- **Lifestyle:** accumulation of personal judgments (which are under person's control) that may contribute to illness or death
- **Environmental:** all matters related to health external to the human body and over (which are somewhat/not under individual's control)
- **Biomedical:** each and every aspect of health (physical and mental), that gets developed within the body of individual genetically.

Holistic Health

Plato has rightly said that, "The part can never be well unless the whole is good". Same thing goes with the health. Conventionally the immediate response of any individual on hearing of some disease is to address the specific part revealing symptoms of illness not on the whole body. This approach is focusing on the part rather than the whole. While the holistic approach to health focuses on the treatment of whole person (taking into consideration the mental and social aspects) rather than a particular disease.

Holistic health emphasises on establishing a balance and harmony in all the aspects of health such as physical, mental emotional, social, moral and spiritual. It widens the narrow concerns of traditional medical concerns as it also takes into account the psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being. It sees illness as a disparity that is prevailing in the energy spheres of our spiritual, social, emotional and physical selves. Healing occurs when there is a proper balance of these energies.

It can be depicted as



The American Holistic Health Association (AHHA) described holistic health as- Instead of focussing on the illness or specific part of the body holistic approach to health focuses on an individual as a whole. In addition to this it also considers how an individual interacts with the prevailing environment. Mind, body, and spirit of the individual are also focussed to achieve maximum well-being.

Yoga for Holistic Health

Scientific studies reveal that yogic practices are beneficial for accomplishing health and well-being. The aim of yoga is the blending of mind with the body so that they function lucidly. Yoga plays an important role in reinstating the health and attaining physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual benefits. Yoga as a whole is quite effective and useful in maintaining the healthy lifestyle by preventing the common lifestyle diseases such as stress, anxiety, diabetes, blood pressure and others. Yoga improves the functioning of the organs, corroborates immune system and brings glut of additional benefits.

Some of the ways Yoga contributes to Holistic Health-

1. Deep and relaxed breathing (Pranayam) prevents individual from respiratory disease.
2. Yoga practice helps in increasing the size of hippocampus (a part of brain that controls memory). Yoga also helps in maintaining connections between the nerve cells in the brain, which helps in preventing the onset of disease.
3. Yoga helps in regulating the production of cortisol (stress hormone), thus keeping the brain healthy.
4. Yoga corrects the posture thus improving the spinal health and leads to reduction in the back pain, cervical, sciatica and herniated disc.
5. It also helps in production of two hormones vital for cultivating happiness- oxytocin and endorphins.
6. Every asana performed by the individual enhances self-awareness and control over breath. Such mindful activities improve focus and concentration powers of the practitioners.
7. Pratyahara kriya helps in avoiding the stress as it focuses on detaching self from the worldly entities. Thus contributing to the psychological health.
8. Yoga helps in producing proper sleep patterns, leads to development of proper attitude and increased productivity.
9. Practising *dharna* helps in achieving mental health by developing the clarity of thought.
10. Dhyana or Meditation provides solution to psychological ailments, stress, agony and depression which are beyond the access of modern sciences.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental needs of human being is health. Good health is pivotal to happiness and wellness. But in this fast-paced and result oriented world success is usually measured in terms of wealth not health which is quite opposite to the actual concept, and this is the biggest reason of disorders in lifestyle. This lifestyle gives birth to various psychological and physiological issues. These ailments are beyond the scope of modern medical science so people try to seek the answer to their queries in the traditional practice of yoga and meditation. Studies reveal that yogic practice yields better results and have infinite possibilities of providing better health and well-being. Hence one must understand the science of yoga, learn it and practice it whole heartedly for attaining holistic health.

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