

## Place of Aṣṭāṅgayoga in mental wellness.

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### Abstract:

The Yoga Sūtras are the basic text of Yoga philosophy. MaharīṣiPatañjali (approx. 500BC) divided his work, Yoga Sūtras into four chapters consisting totally of very concise 196 sūtra. He had suggested eight ways to achieve the realization of this energy within the human body. By these eight ways, life is a stress-free life. This article has tried to explain what these eight ways are and how they help in maintaining mental health.

### Keywords:

Aṣṭāṅgayoga, Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, Samādhi, mental wellness.

### Introduction:

**Yoga** - an ancient science and cultural heritage of India is widely known all over the world for its healthy and curative activities. Yoga is the term of Indian origin, while the concept of mental wellness is essentially the western term. Although we come across reference to 'happy state of mind' in ancient Indian literature. In Ayurveda as well as in Yoga, the concept of human well-being is holistic, encompassing all dimensions- physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual, for healthy wellbeing.

The Sanskrit word swāsthya (swa- self+stha- seated in) means seated in one's own (original normal) nature. At present 'health' is used as a synonym for 'swastha', although in fact the word health does not have the depth of meaning of it. Ayurveda defines health as a state of balance of all bio-factors (doṣās, mala, agni) of the physical body and a state of supreme quality and well-being of the senses, mind, and soul. In simple words, it can be said that health is a state of well-being of human beings in which all the biological factors, viz. the doṣās, dhātu, mala and

agni work in a coordinated manner at their own sites to maintain their stable position and thus create a sense of well-being at the levels of body, mind, senses, and soul. [1]

Ancient scriptures related to Yoga: viz. Vedas, Upaniṣadas, Purāṇa, Yoga, Darśana, Haṭha Yoga, Charaka Saṃhitā etc. preventive and corrective guidelines have been laid down for a better life for the human being to keep himself in full health in the interest of mankind and nature. Here is a description of the role of yoga in all dimensions of healthy wellness.

According to Hathayogic doctrine, nothing can be achieved without perfect physical health. Mind, brain, and soul can work efficiently only in a healthy physical body. [2] That is why Yoga prescribes ṣaṭkarmas (purification practices) for cleaning the internal organs of the body, i.e., stomach, nasal passages, respiratory tract, small and large intestines, eyes, tongue etc. [3]

Hatha Yoga also describes āsanas (postures) to maintain steadiness of body and mind by correcting the tone of the neuro-muscular-glandular system and various postural reflexes. [4] *Pātañjal Yoga Sūtras* prescribes the same. [5] (These āsanas should be practiced with regularity and punctuality along with all the principles of practice after learning them from a learned teacher.

Yoga also lays emphasis on healthy norms of dietary intake to maintain the homeostatic condition of the doṣās, dhātus and mala. It provides guidelines for dietary intake according to age, season, occupation, sex, body composition, time, quantity, etc. It recommends the quality of food in the form of sāttvic, rājasic and tāmasic food to maintain a healthy body and mind. Bhagvat Gītā says ‘Yuktāhāravihārasya yuktacheṣṭasya karmasu | yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogobhavatiduhkgaḥ || [6]

Mental and social dimensions- This aspect of well-being has been addressed in an efficient manner. The causative factors of the miseries of life are ignorance, ego, undue attachment to worldly things, hatred, fear of death.

### **Traditional method of yoga-wellness**

The doctrine of efficient actions without desire for their fruits (Niṣkāma Karma), the perishable nature of all beings and thus advocates performance of duties in the welfare

of mankind and nature, etc. In yoga philosophy, Maharishi Patañjali prescribes the observation of social and personal moral values.[7] i.e., Non-violence, truth, asteya, brahmacharya, non-attachment, purity, contentment, self-analysis, hard-working nature (tapasyā), self-surrender to God on physical, mental, and verbal levels. Being universal in nature, it must be followed by oneself. These five aspects of compliance should neither be done through other people, nor should they be recommended for promotion.

It was all about health in Yogic texts. Now let's understand what exactly Yoga is. Let us ponder over a few definitions of Yoga-

Swami Kuvalayananda, pioneer of Scientific yoga, states "The term Yoga is used to indicate the End as well as Means". Let us examine the statement of Swamiji based on Etymological understanding of the term Yoga and different definitions thereof available in the scripture:

The term yoga has derived from the Sanskrit root "YUJ" which stands for:

- a. Yoge or saṃyoge = to unite.
- b. Samādhau = put together or to integrate.
- c. Saṃyamane = to restrain.

a. Definition of Yoga representing the import of a. (i.e., Yoge or saṃyoge) "संयोगो योग इत्युक्तोजीवात्मपरमात्मनोः" "Saṃyoga yoga ityuktojīvātmanaparmātmanoh" i.e., unification of individual self with the Higher self is Yoga. Here the term yoga indicates the ultimate union and thus stands for the END aspect of Yoga. Commonly available in Haṭha Yoga.

b. Definitions of Yoga representing the import of Samādhau-

- i. "योगःसमाधिः" 'Yogaḥsamādhīḥ'
- ii. "समत्वं योग उच्यते" 'Samatvam yoga ucyate'[8]

These definitions also convey the END aspect of yoga.

- iii. "Yoga is integration and harmony between thoughts, words and deeds or integration between head, heart and hands". [9]

Based on the definitions available under a. & b. both represent the END aspect of Yoga either in terms of union or integration.

c. Definitions of Yoga representing the import of c. (i.e., Samyamane)

i.

“तांयोगमितिमन्यतेस्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणम्” ‘Tāmyogamitimanyatesthiramindriyadhāraṇam’ [10]

Stability of senses is Yoga.

ii. By controlling the senses concentrating the mind is Yoga. [11]

iii. “योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः” ‘YogaścittavṛttiNirodhaḥ’ [12] Cessation of all mental modifications is Yoga.

iv. “मनःप्रशमनोपायः योग इत्यभिधीयते” ‘Manahpraśamanopāyaḥ yoga ityabhidhīyate’ stated in Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. Yoga is a means for quietening the mind.

v. “तंविद्याददुःखसंयोगवियोगयोगसंज्ञितम्” ‘tam vidyādadhukhasamyogaviyoga yoga sañjmitam’ [13] Yoga is that which disassociate from pain or suffering.

Based on the Etymological understanding of the term Yoga we can conclude that the term Yoga has been used to indicate both aspects the ‘END’ as well as the ‘MEANS’.

### What is Aṣṭāṅgayoga?

This word is borrowed from Sanskrit aṣṭāṅga (in aṣṭāṅgayoga) "eight-limbed, having eight members," from aṣṭā "eight" + aṅga- "limb, member" Patanjali's classification of classical yoga, as set out in his Yoga Sutras. He had suggested eight ways to achieve the realization of this energy within the human body i.e., i. Yama ii. Niyama iii. Āsana iv. Prāṇāyāma v. Pratyāhāra vi. Dhāraṇā vii. Dhyāna viii. Samādhi

Yamas, Pratyāhāra mainly deal with the preparation of our intellect. Niyamas, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma deal with preparation of our body by carrying out what is termed as Nādisūdhī and Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna and Samādhi for preparation of the mind.

BhagwānPatañjali Muni described Yamas and Niyamas as Mahāvratā. These are to be followed by everybody irrespective of place, time, caste and creed at all costs.

1. The first and primary step of yoga is **Yama**. There are five Yamas.

- a. Ahimsā (non-violence)
- b. Satya (truthfulness)

- c. Asteya (non-stealing)
  - d. Brahmacharya (celibacy)
  - e. Aparigraha (non-desire)
- a. **Ahiṃsā** - Non-violence is the first and foremost Yama. The simple meaning of non-violence is not to hurt anyone. The real meaning of this word becomes clear as you ponder deeply on this word. Not causing physical or mental pain to anyone, not causing any pain or violence to one's body - all these come under the purview of non-violence. Not to cause pain to your mind, body, soul or anyone, even the smallest creature, and to treat them with love and sympathy is to practice ahiṃsā. If one tires his body by any action, that also is violence. To make a beast to move by beating it is also violence. While doing an Asan, if we exert too much pressure on our muscles so that our limbs are injured, that also is violence. Observing Ahimsa means we should not inflict any kind of suffering on anybody including our own self in any way.
- b. **Satya**: The second Yam is 'Satya'. The simple meaning of satya is 'truth'. It is mandatory for all men to be truthful in life. By doing something contrary to truth, by telling a lie, a man becomes weak and cowardly. Falsehood weakens the soul of man so much so that he is unable to maintain his self-respect. Some people are of the opinion that in business we have to take recourse to some falsehood. This idea is wrong, there is no substance in it. We should not give up the path of truth in any situation.
- c. **Asteya**: -Asteya comes third in the list of Yam. The simple meaning of Asteya is not to steal. To take anything which is not Our or something which we have no right to possess, to take something without the permission of the owner, is called stealing.
- d. **Brahmacharya**: The fourth Yam is Brahmacharya. The simple meaning of Brahmacharya is to lead a controlled sex life even as a householder living in society. Enjoying sex is one of the most natural desires of a householder. Without it, a man's life becomes dull and indifferent. But while controlled sex gives joy, energy and knowledge, inordinate indulgence gives rise to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. For a

man living with his family Brahmacharya means enjoyment of sex with one's spouse in a controlled fashion.

- e. **Aparigraha**-The fifth Yam is Aparigraha. The meaning of Aparigraha is not to hoard. But from the very ancient times men have been in the habit of accumulating things at every stage of life as a celibate student, as a householder or as an old man. This should be controlled;we should collect only as much as in necessary and not too much. We amass money, build houses and business. We also collect more than what is necessary for the body. The excess accumulation in our bodies makes us diseased. Now-a-days, not only the common man but also the protectors of our health, whom we call doctors accumulate more than what is necessary inside the body. They fall sick due to this. So, if you have collected much inside your body, then try to throw it out and in a few days, it will be completely light. Throw out accumulated dirt and never collect it again.

2. **Niyama**- The second component or step of Yog is Niyama. Niyamas are five in number. They are: -

- a. Śauca (Purity)
- b. Santoṣa(Contentment)
- c. Tapa (Austerity)
- d. Swādhyāya (Self-study)
- e. Īśwarapraṇidhāna (Worship of God)

a. **Śauca** (Purity)

Śauca is the first Niyama. The simple meaning of Śauca is cleanliness or purity. Water is the most needed thing for cleanliness. We can clean our body by taking a bath and can remain healthy. By drinking water, we can keep our internal organs clean. We can also clean our environment with water. We can lead a pure life by purifying our minds and soul with good thoughts, by discarding all evil thoughts and by adopting and spreading goodness. About cleanliness Manu says:

"Water cleans the body, truth cleans the mind. Learning and penance clean the soul and knowledge cleans the intellect."

**b. Santoṣa** (Contentment)

Santoṣa occupies the second place among Niyamas. The simple meaning of Santoṣa is contentment. When we harbour discontent within us, we create thoughts of harming others, thoughts of hatred and stealing and we are deprived of peace of mind. Therefore, we should remain content under all circumstances and should be joyful and at peace.

**c. Tapa** (Austerity)-

The third Niyama is Tapa. In simple words it means self-control. To be efficient, tolerant, and overcome difficulties is the meaning of Tapas. Tap does not mean to do meditation in a cave but to develop physical and mental tolerance. To keep one's senses controlled, to keep the mind controlled, not to be disturbed by hunger, thirst, cold and heat but to tolerate them and remain contented in all situations and to adapt oneself to the environment. This is called Tap.

**d. Swādhyāya** (Self-study)

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The fourth Niyama is Swādhyāya. The simple meaning of Swādhyāya is learning without any help. By study we acquire knowledge and we become learned. Swādhyāya increases knowledge. Without Swādhyāya we would have been living in the bullock-cart age not in the Jet age. So, we should study and learn to think by ourselves as much as we possibly can.

Age and time should be taken into consideration for Swādhyāya. A child of four or five who needs to know more about parents, brothers and sisters, home environment and other elementary things, should not be given the Vedas and the Upaniṣadas to study. The child would not gain anything.

Swādhyāya also has another meaning i.e., study of self. meaning, taking stock of ourselves. This self-study is the principal key to progress.

**e. Īśwarapraṇidhāna** (Worship of God)

Īśwarapraṇidhāna is the fifth Niyama. It means surrender to the will of God. Whatever we do, should be done as His work. We should understand that all the wealth of the world has been given by God and develop faith in him. This would teach us not to remain too attached to material things. The first step in the direction of Īśwarapraṇidhāna is to respect and love our

parents and teachers. We should eat and drink after serving them, we should sleep after putting them to bed. We should consider that our prosperity is the result of their blessing. The thought of surrender to God would arise out of love and respect towards parents and teachers because there is no one more worthy of our respect than our parents and teachers.

There is also another form of Īśwarapraṇidhāna, that is serving the poor and needy, because God is called the friend of the poor. All our strength and wealth are a gift from God. If we serve the poor our ego would not grow out of proportion. This poem of Rahima is a definition of Īśwarapraṇidhāna.

3. **Āsana-** The third step of Yog is Āsana. To adapt the body to different postures and to keep it comfortably steady in a particular position is called Āsana. Every Āsana has its own advantage and characteristic. Āsana is called Yogāsana since it is a component of Yoga. Yogāsanas can cure diseases and help us to remain healthy. It is very difficult to say anything definite about the number of Yogāsanas. But we can divide them into three types- a. Meditative āsanas b. Cultural āsanas c. Relaxative āsanas. Although apparently, we think of āsanas as a physical exercise, it has nothing to do with physic, it's all about the mind. These are certain special patterns of postures that stabilise the mind and body. They aim at establishing proper rhythm in the neuromuscular fonic impulses and improving the general tone of the muscles.

#### 4. **Prāṇāyāma-**

The word Pranayama literally means control of Prāṇa - the energy which is responsible for keeping the individual alive. Normally Prāṇāyāma is considered as practice of control of breathing. No doubt in Prāṇāyāmic practices control of breath is advised, the purpose behind is to control the utilization of prāṇic energy which is carried to different parts of the body along with every breath.

MaharṣiPatañjali has recommended the practice of Prāṇāyāma after one established in the practice of āsana. [14]It is said that Prāṇāyāma is to be practiced after Kriyā when there is an excess of fat and phlegm.[15]Probably, it may be because of keeping the body free from all the impurities (*malas*) and preparing a good background for Prāṇāyāma through āsanas and Kriyā so



far physical plane is concerned. The main aim of Prāṇāyāma is neither to have more oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) and nor the elimination of Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) but to take the practitioner from Bahiraṅga-yoga to Antaraṅga-yoga and keep the prāṇic activity in controlled condition.

### 5. Pratyāhāra-

It is withdrawing of our sense organs from the objects of their interests. It is very difficult to achieve. No amount of force can really remove the interests of sense organs from their field of activity. It is only when one realizes that all the impulses from various sense organs travel through their respective nerves in the form of electromagnetic waves to their respective interpreting centers in the brain. After interpretation, these sensory centers give necessary instructions in the form of waves again. No amount of indulgence in sensual pleasure can satisfy an individual. It brings only tired feeling and sense of sorrow when the individual is unable to experience this pleasure giving activity.

### 6. Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, Samādhi

These are the progressive stages of concentration of our mind when in the last stage (samādhi) an individual is aware about the experiences coming from the object of one's concentration only to the extent of being unaware about one's own existence.

All the earlier five processes (termed as Bahyaṅga) given by BhagwānPatañjali Muni are to help to achieve this samādhi state - highest level of awareness.

To attain this state is not easy and various other measures have been suggested by BhagwānPatañjali Muni as well as other ṛṣis, sages and thinkers. There are various ways suggested to bring about peace of mind and to progress in the path of achieving one pointed concentration of mind.

### Rationale of Aṣṭāṅgayoga:

It will be seen that these exercises begin at the physical level with proper control of awareness, posture, and respiratory functions. It then moves on to the progressive control of higher mental processes through techniques of concentration that lead to control of the mind. Through proper conditioning by this regimen several autonomic functions are also brought under control. This coordination of thought control with a program of daily exercises is of interest to physiological-psychology and religious philosophy.

Thus, there is a unitary system of bodily functioning with 'consciousness' and Cittaśkti as the Supreme. Keep in mind that in the ancient system 'consciousness' is supreme and mind, brain, body are an evolution of the Supreme Consciousness. In hierarchy the mind has great power over the body, a view that seems to be favored by eminent Western scientists.

**Spiritual Dimension-** Yoga is a spiritual discipline and lays emphasis mainly on it and provides guidelines and various pathways in respect of the interest of a person. Its basic requirement is regular Yogic Sādhanā. Various saints and ṛṣis have elevated themselves spiritually through Yoga and benefited the society and mankind in overcoming the miseries of the world.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, it can be conclusively said that yoga has a multi-fold approach to improve the well-being of an individual. Thus, yoga should be learned and adopted holistically as a way of life, not just a physical system of yogic exercises: viz., āsana, prāṇāyama and meditation.

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