The Concept, Approaches And Benefits Of Yoga

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to assess the findings of selected articles regarding the therapeutic effects of yoga and to provide a comprehensive review of the benefits of regular yoga practice. As participation rates in mind-body fitness programs such as yoga continue to increase, it is important for health care professionals to be informed about the nature of yoga and the evidence of its many therapeutic effects. Thus, this manuscript provides information regarding the therapeutic effects of yoga as it has been studied in various populations concerning a multitude of different ailments and conditions. Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions and involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations. Results from this study show that yogic practices enhance muscular strength and body flexibility, promote and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life. Yoga is a subject which can be looked at intellectually and some useful and beneficial ideas imbied. Yoga can be imbied by adopting certain attitudes which alter the nature of the samskaras. Yoga can be imbied by living in an ashram environment and trying to be aware of the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions at the same time.

Introduction

Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines which originated in ancient India. There is a broad variety of Yoga schools, practices, and goals in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Among the most well-known types of yoga are Hatha yoga and Raja yoga.

The origins of yoga have been speculated to date back to pre-Vedic Indian traditions, it is mentioned in the Rig-Veda, but most likely developed around the sixth and fifth centuries, in ancient India's ascetic and sramaṇa movements. The chronology of earliest texts describing yoga-practices is unclear, varyingly credited to Hindu Upanishads and Buddhist Pali Canon, probably of third century BCE or later, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali date from the first half of the 1st millennium CE, but only gained prominence in the West in the 20th century. Hatha yoga texts emerged around the 11th century with origins in tantra.

Origin of yoga

Yoga’s history has many places of obscurity and uncertainty due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings. The early writings on yoga were transcribed on fragile palm leaves that were easily damaged, destroyed or lost. The development of yoga can be traced back to over 5,000 years ago, but some researchers think that
yoga may be up to 10,000 years old. Yoga’s long rich history can be divided into four main periods of innovation, practice and development.

**Pre-Classical yoga**

The beginnings of Yoga were developed by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in Northern India over 5,000 years ago. The word yoga was first mentioned in the oldest sacred texts, the Rig Veda. The Vedas were a collection of texts containing songs, mantras and rituals to be used by Brahmans.

**Classical Yoga**

In the pre-classical stage, yoga was a mishmash of various ideas, beliefs and techniques that often conflicted and contradicted each other. The Classical period is defined by Patanjali’s Yoga-Sutras, the first systematic presentation of yoga. Written sometime in the second century, this text describes the path of Raja Yoga, often called "classical yoga.

**Post-Classical yoga**

A few centuries after Patanjali, yoga masters created a system of practices designed to rejuvenate the body and prolong life. They rejected the teachings of the ancient Vedas and embraced the physical body as the means to achieve enlightenment. They developed Tantra Yoga, with radical techniques to cleanse the body and mind to break the knots that bind us to our physical existence. This exploration of these physical-spiritual connections and body centered practices led to the creation of what we primarily think of yoga in the West: Hatha Yoga.

**Modern Period**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, yoga masters began to travel to the West, attracting attention and followers. This began at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago, when Swami Vivekananda wowed the attendees with his lectures on yoga and the universality of the world’s religions. In the 1920s and 30s, Hatha Yoga was strongly promoted in India with the work of T. Krishnamacharya, Swami Sivananda and other yogis practicing Hatha Yoga. Krishnamacharya opened the first Hatha Yoga School in Mysore in 1924 and in 1936 Sivananda founded the Divine Life Society on the banks of the holy Ganges River. Krishnamacharya produced three students that would continue his legacy and increase the popularity of Hatha Yoga.

The importation of yoga to the West still continued at a trickle until Indra Devi opened her yoga studio in Hollywood in 1947. Since then, many more western and Indian teachers have become pioneers, popularizing hatha yoga and gaining millions of followers. Hatha Yoga now has many different schools or styles, all emphasizing the many different aspects of the practice.

**Concepts Of Yoga**

There are generally considered to be 12 major concepts associated with Yoga. All of these Yoga concepts were derived from the original meanings of the words that make up these concepts. As many early writings about Yoga appeared in the ancient language called Sanskrit, unlocking the true meaning of each concept depends on an understanding of the language. Fortunately for you, all of the major concepts in their original language are explained within this
article. The intent of this article is not to provide a Sanskrit lesson on the specific words used to describe the various concepts associated with Yoga.

Yoga

- Original Sanskrit Word: Yuj
- Interpretation: A joining or union.

This concept refers to the joining of the practitioner with a supreme being. This includes any method that you might choose to achieve this union. The major consideration with this term is the uniting of an individualized spirit with the almighty spirit. This concept was originally taught by the widely considered founder of Yoga, Patanjali.

Karma, Dharma, Swadharma, Manah, Buddhi, Samskara, Vasana, Kriya, Viveka, Vairagya, Sannyasa

As is evident, there are several concepts associated with the art of Yoga. While not all individuals will care to learn the specifics related to each of the 12 major concepts of Yoga, for individuals that would like to understand these concepts, and have a better understanding of the various philosophies associated with Yoga, please feel free to peruse through our section on Yoga.

However, it will be important to understand the various concepts associated with Yoga, at a cursory level, as it will better prepare you to choose which type, and how, you will practice and integrate Yoga into your daily lifestyle.

In addition, as you better understand the various concepts related to yoga feel free to experience the different concepts that present the most interest to you.

Approaches Of Yoga

Since the late 19th Century, when Yoga was introduced to the Western hemisphere from its Indian homeland, it has undergone various adaptations. Today, Yoga is practiced for five reasons:

- As a method for physical fitness and health maintenance
- As a sport
- As body-oriented therapy
- As a comprehensive lifestyle
- As a spiritual discipline

Yoga As Fitness Training

The first approach, fitness training, is the most popular way that Westerners practice Yoga. It’s also the most radical revamping of traditional Yoga. Yoga as fitness training is obviously targeted at the physical body — its flexibility, resilience, and strength. This is how most people start Yoga training. Fitness training is certainly a useful gateway into Yoga, but later on, some people discover that Yoga also includes moral and spiritual practices that they want to explore.

Yoga As A Sport

This approach to Yoga is especially prominent in some Latin American countries. It is also widely controversial. Its practitioners, many of whom are excellent athletes, master hundreds of extremely difficult Yoga postures to perfection and demonstrate their skills and beautiful
physiques in international competitions. But this new sport, which also can be regarded as an art form, has drawn much criticism from the ranks of more traditional Yoga practitioners. They feel that competition has no place in Yoga. Still, there is nothing wrong with good-natured Yoga competitions as long as self-centered competitiveness is held in check.

Yoga As Therapy

Yoga as therapy attempts to restore health or full physical and mental functions. Although the idea behind Yoga therapy is very old, its name is fairly new. Yoga therapy is, in fact, a whole new professional discipline, calling for far greater training and skill on the part of the teacher than is the case with ordinary Yoga. Commonly, Yoga is intended for those who don’t suffer from disabilities or ailments requiring special attention. Yoga therapy, on the other hand, addresses these special needs. For example, Yoga therapy may be able to help you find relief from chronic back pain, asthma, rheumatism, and many other ailments.

Yoga As A Lifestyle

This enters the proper domain of Yoga. Yoga as fitness training, sport, or therapy certainly has their places, but you unlock the real benefits of Yoga when you adopt it as a lifestyle. This means living Yoga, and practicing Yoga every day, whether it’s physical exercises or meditation. Above all, it means applying the wisdom of Yoga to everyday life. Yoga has much to say about what and how you should eat, how you should sleep, how you should work, how you should relate to others, and so on. It offers a total system of conscious and skillful living. Don’t think that you have to be a yogic superstar to practice lifestyle Yoga. You can begin today by making a few simple adjustments in your daily schedule and keeping your goals vividly in front of you. Whenever you are ready, make further positive changes one step at a time.

Yoga As A Spiritual Discipline

Lifestyle Yoga centers on healthy, wholesome, functional, and benevolent living. Yoga as a spiritual discipline adds to that the traditional ideal of enlightenment—that is, discovering your spiritual nature.

What All Approaches To Yoga Have In Common

The five approaches to Yoga share at least two fundamental practices: the cultivation of awareness and relaxation.

• Awareness is the ability to pay close attention to something, to be consciously present, to be mindful. Yoga is attention training.

• To demonstrate, try this: Pay attention to your right hand for the next 60 seconds. That is, feel your right hand and do nothing else. Chances are, your mind is drifting off after only a few seconds. Yoga consists in reining in your attention whenever it strays.

• Relaxation is the conscious release of unnecessary and therefore unwholesome tension in the body.

Without bringing awareness and relaxation to Yoga, the exercises would be merely exercises not yogic exercises.
Conscious breathing is often added to awareness and relaxation as a third foundational practice. Normally, breathing happens automatically. In Yoga, awareness accompanies breathing, which then makes it into a powerful tool for training the body and the mind.

Potential Benefits Of Yoga

- Improves your flexibility
- Builds muscle strength
- Perfects your posture
- Prevents cartilage and joint breakdown
- Protects your spine
- Betters your bone health
- Increases your blood flow
- Drains your lymph and boosts immunity
- Ups your heart rate
- Drops your blood pressure
- Regulates your adrenal glands
- Makes you happier
- Founds a healthy lifestyle
- Lowers blood sugar
- Helps you focus
- Relaxes your system
- Improves your balance
- Maintains your nervous system
- Releases tension in your limbs
- Helps you sleep deeper
- Boosts your immune system functionality
- Gives your lungs room to breathe
- Prevents IBS and other digestive problems
- Gives you peace of mind
- Increases your self-esteem
- Eases your pain
- Gives you inner strength
- Connects you with guidance
- Helps keep you drug free
- Builds awareness for transformation
- Benefits your relationships
- Uses sounds to soothe your sinuses
- Guides your body's healing in your mind's eye
- Keeps allergies and viruses at bay
- Helps you serve others
- Encourages self-care
- Supports your connective tissue
- Uses the placebo effect, to affect change.

Conclusion:

My experience inspired me to pore over the scientific studies I’d collected in India as well as the West to identify and explain how yoga can both prevent disease and help you recover from it. Here is what I found.

Yoga is a subject which can be looked at intellectually and some useful and beneficial ideas imbibed. Yoga can be imbibed by adopting certain attitudes which alter the nature of the samskaras. Yoga can be imbibed by living in an ashram environment and trying to be aware of the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions at the same time. Yoga can be learnt in a classroom environment as science, as psychology, as an applied subject, with the aim of providing new understanding and insight into the life process, into areas where karmas are performed, into areas which shape the inner being in terms of awareness, inner development, the experience of harmony or balance, eventually culminating in the experience of samadhi and the fullness of wisdom.

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