



Yoga Classes (Yogic Asanas and Pranayama) and Spiritual Growth

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ABSTRACT

Mind-body fitness programs use a combination of muscular activity and mindful focus on awareness of the self, breath, and energy to promote health. The ancient discipline of yoga includes physical postures and breathing and meditation techniques. Scientific evidence exists about the physiologic effects of yoga. Mind-body fitness programs may offer therapeutic effects different from those offered by traditional body fitness programs. Yoga breathing is an important part of health and spiritual practices in Indian traditions. Considered fundamental for the development of physical well-being, meditation, awareness, and enlightenment, it is both a form of meditation in itself and a preparation for deep meditation. Yoga breathing (pranayama) can rapidly bring the mind to the present moment and reduce stress. In this paper, we review data indicating how breath work can affect longevity mechanisms in some ways that overlap with meditation and in other ways that are different from, but that synergistically enhance, the effects of meditation. The yoga breathing is used in the treatment of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and for victims of mass disasters. By inducing stress resilience, breath work enables us to rapidly and compassionately relieve many forms of suffering.

KEYWORDS : Yogic Asanas and Pranayam , yoga breathing ,meditation, post-traumatic, stress

INTRODUCTION

The understanding of the composition of the human body and its various subtle bodies is very important. Modern science has gone in some depth into understanding the physical body. However its understanding of the other aspects of human existence is still very limited. For example the understanding of the human psyche and intellect is still more or less limited to their physical aspects. However spiritual science has studied the entire human existence in great detail. A balanced life requires that we take care not only of the necessities of the body, feelings and mind, but also of the spirit, and this is the role of spiritual growth. We are called to spiritual growth-that is, the formation of the investment of faith God gives us that we give back to Him in dividends. This is a deep conviction of our faith, a practiced submission that shows our obedience, and a life of personal and relational maturity. We have to listen to God; if not, we will not learn and then we will not grow and then we will not have a life of transformation and growth. Instead, we experience a storm-tossed sea of life, wayward in every perspective because our eyes and ears are not upon our Lord. A living person is made up of the following bodies.

1. The gross body (sthūladēha)
2. The vital body (prāna-dēha)
3. The mental body (manodēha)
4. The intellect or causal body (kārandēha)
5. The subtle ego or supracausal body (mahākārandēha)
6. The soul or the God Principle in each of us (ātma)

The physical body is best known to modern science. It comprises of the skeletal framework, muscles, tissues, organs, blood, 5 sense organs etc. The vital energy body is also known as the prana-deha. This body provides the vital, life sustaining energy for all the functions of the physical as well as the mental body.

There are five types of vital energies or prana:

- ✓ Prāna: Energy for the activity of inhalation.
- ✓ Udāna: Energy for the activity of exhalation and speech.
- ✓ Samāna: Energy for the activity of the stomach and intestines.
- ✓ Vyāna: Energy for voluntary and involuntary movements of the body.
- ✓ Apāna: Energy for urination, excretion, ejaculation, childbirth, etc.

At the time of death the vital energy is released back into the Universe and also helps in propelling the subtle body in its onward journey. The mental body or the mind is the seat of our feelings, emotions and desires. It carries in it countless number of impressions from this life and previous lives. It is made up of three parts:

- The conscious mind: It is that part of our thoughts and feelings that we are aware of.

- The sub-conscious mind: It contains all the impressions required to complete our destiny in our current lifetime. Thoughts from the sub-conscious mind sometimes emerge into the conscious mind from time to time either in response to some external stimulus or at time even without it. For example during the course of one's day one gets a random and unrelated thought about some vague incident in one's childhood.
- The unconscious mind: This is the aspect of our mind that we are completely unaware of. This contains all the impressions that are associated with our accumulated account.

The sub-conscious mind and unconscious mind together are known as the Chitta.

Sometimes we also refer to an aspect of the mental body as the desires body or vāsanādēha. This is the aspect of the mind that contains all the impressions of desires.

The physical organ associated with the mental body is the brain. The causal body or the intellect body is the body which deals with the decision making process and reasoning ability. The physical organ associated with the intellect body is the brain. The subtle ego or the supracausal body is the final vestige of the nescience and is the feeling that we are separate from God.

The soul is the God principle within us and is our true nature. It is the main component of the subtle body which is a fraction of the Supreme God Principle with the qualities of Absolute Truth (Sat), Absolute Consciousness (Chit) and Bliss (Ānand). The soul is unaffected by the ups and downs in life and is in a perpetual state of Bliss. It looks at the ups and downs of life in the Great Illusion (Maya) with an observer stance. The soul is beyond the 3 subtle basic components; however the rest of our consciousness like the physical body and the mental body is made up of it.

The subtle body is defined as that part of our being or consciousness that leaves our physical body at the time of physical death. It comprises of the mental body, the causal body or intellect, the supracausal body or subtle ego and the soul. What is left behind at the time of physical death is our physical body. The vital energy is released back into the Universe.

The following are some other aspects of the subtle body

- Subtle sense organs: By subtle sense organs we mean the subtle aspect of our 5 sense organs by which we are able to perceive the subtle realm. For example we are able to perceive a subtle fragrance such as jasmine without there being any stimulus to cause it. Also the fragrance may only be experienced by one person and

not by the others in the same room.

- Subtle motor organs: By subtle motor organs we mean the subtle aspect of our physical motor organs such as our arms, tongue, etc. All activity is initiated first in subtle motor organs and then executed in the physical dimension by one's gross motor organs.

All the other aspects of our being other than the soul are part of the Great Illusion. It is called Nescience or Avidyā which when literally translated means absence of knowledge. The word Nescience stems from the fact that we identify ourselves with our gross body, mind and intellect and not with our true nature which is the soul or the God principle within us.

Nescience is the root cause of unhappiness. Man gets attached to money, his own house, family, city, country, etc. The greater the attachment to any individual or object, greater is the likelihood of unhappiness arising from attachment. Even an ideal social worker or a Saint may become attached to the society or His devotees respectively. The greatest attachment that each one has is for himself; that is his own mind and body. Even a slight discomfort or illness can make one unhappy; hence everyone should gradually become detached about one and accept pain and illness in one's stride. This is of course with the inherent understanding that happiness and unhappiness in life is experienced primarily due to our destiny. Also that only by identifying with the soul can we experience perpetual Bliss.

The soul and Nescience together constitute the embodied soul. Nescience for a living person has twenty components in all - the gross body, five subtle sense organs, the five subtle motor organs, the five vital energies, the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, the intellect and the ego. Since the functions of the components of the subtle body go on continuously, the attention of the embodied soul is drawn to them instead of the soul that is away from spiritual knowledge to Nescience.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more mature in one's relationship with God. Someone who is growing spiritually will become more and more about God. The spiritually mature will be able to "distinguish well from evil. Spiritual growth begins the moment a person comes to faith in God and should continue until a person enters God's presence after this life. Scripture offers valuable insights into how a person can grow spiritually. It is God's power in the believer that gives us the ability to grow spiritually. As we rely on His power and follow His teachings, we can develop greater maturity.

We should be aware that growth often comes through trials. Just as physical strength is built through exertion and straining against resistance, spiritual strength is developed in the hard times of life. "No pain, no gain," as they say. God gives encouragement: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing". It is God's will that we grow. We also have the promise that the Lord Himself will oversee our growth and bring us to maturity. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Spiritual growth is the process of inner awakening, and becoming conscious our inner being. It means the rising of the consciousness beyond the ordinary existence, and awakening to some Universal truths. It means going beyond the mind and the ego and realizing who you really are. It is a process of shedding our wrong and unreal conceptions, thoughts, beliefs and ideas, and becoming more conscious and aware of our inner being. This process uncovers the inner spirit that is always present, but hidden beyond the ego-personality. Spiritual growth is of great importance for everyone, not only for people who seek spiritual enlightenment and choose to live in far away or secluded places. Spiritual growth is the basis for a better and more harmonious life for everyone, a life free of tension, fear and anxiety. By discovering who we really are we take a different approach to life. We learn not to let outer circumstances influence our inner being and state of mind. We manifest composure and detachment, and we develop inner power and strength, all of which are very useful and important tools. Spiritual growth is not a means for escaping from responsibilities, behaving strangely and becoming an impractical person. It is a method of growing and becoming a stronger, happier and more responsible person.

You can walk on the path of spiritual growth, and at the same time live the same kind of life as everyone else. You do not have to live a secluded life in some faraway place. You can raise a family, work or run a business, and yet at the same time engage in practices that lead to inner growth. A balanced life requires that we take care not only of the necessities of the body, feelings and mind, but also of the spirit, and this is the role of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is the birthright of everyone. It is the key to a life of happiness and peace of mind, and the manifesting the enormous power of the inner spirit. This spirit is equally present within the most material person, and within the most spiritual person. The level of the manifestation of spirituality is dependent on how much the inner spirit is close to the surface, and on how much it is hidden, by thoughts, beliefs and negative habits. Yoga gives more spiritual growth.

TIPS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH:

1. Read spiritual and uplifting books. Think about what you read, and find out how you can use the information in your life.
2. Meditate for at least 15 minutes every day. If you do not know how to meditate, it is easy to find books, websites or teachers who can teach you meditation.
3. Learn to make your mind quiet through concentration exercises and meditation.
4. Acknowledge the fact that you are a spirit with a physical body, not a physical body with a spirit. If you can really accept this idea, it will change your attitude towards many things in your life.
5. Look often into you and into your mind and try to find out what it is that makes you feel conscious and alive.
6. Think positive. If you find yourself thinking negatively, immediately switch to thinking positively. Be in control of what enters your mind. Open the door for the positive and close it for the negative.
7. Develop the happiness habit, by always looking at the bright side of life and endeavoring to be happy. Happiness comes from within. Do not let your outer circumstances decide your happiness for you.
8. Exercise often your will power and decision making ability. This strengthens you and gives you control over your mind.
9. Thank the Universe for everything that you get.
10. Develop tolerance, patience, tact and consideration for others.

A good start toward spiritual growth is achieved when we accept the challenge to obey God's command to grow, believe we are capable of growing with God's help and set both behavioral and functional goals as described in the Scriptures. Spiritual growth, like any other successful venture, requires a positive attitude! With it, God will help us reach our goals for

Spiritual growth. Without it, we fall short of becoming what God would have us to be.

1. YOGA CLASSES AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Attending yoga classes has become quite popular around the world. Many yoga classes teach yogic postures (āsana) and breathing exercises developed by the ancient yogis for regulating the vital energies in the body (prāṇāyāma). From the perspective of spiritual growth we decided to explore the benefit of attending yoga classes that mainly consist of yogic asanas and pranayam.

2. Yogic asanas and pranayam purify our physical and vital bodies

Spiritual research undertaken by SSRF has revealed that if one practices yogic asanas and pranayam, one may encounter certain limitations from the point of view of spiritual growth. The following chart shows the average spiritual purification that happens across the various bodies of our existence after undertaking yogic asanas and pranayam.

Purification* of various bodies achieved with Yogic asanas (yogasānas) and Prānāyāma

The various bodies (Max. possible purification)	Yogic asanas (yogasānas)		Prānāyāma	
	Maximum possible purification	Years required	Maximum possible purification	Years required
The physical body (20%)	20%	10	20%	8
The vital body (30%)	75%	10	30%	8
The mental body (100%)	5%	10	10%	8
The causal body (100%) (The intellect)	2%	10	2%	8
The supercausal body (100%) (The subtle ego)	1%	10	1%	8

*By purification we mean the increase in the sattva component in that particular body.

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From this chart you can see that yogic asanas and pranayam purify the physical body and the vital body (prāna-dēha) respectively that is increase the Sattva component in them. For example by yogic asanas the physical body would be spiritually purified up to 20% by an increase in the Sattva component, and this would require 10 years on an average.

3. More subtle forms of spiritual practice required for rapid spiritual growth

Increasing the Sattva component in the more subtle bodies such as the mind, intellect and subtle-ego will require a more subtle-type of spiritual practice. Moreover the purification achieved in the physical and vital bodies by yogic asanas and pranayam can occur by following other paths of spiritual practice as well.

4. Yogic asanas and pranayam may not prevent the effect of destiny

It is important to add that there is no connection between purification of the body and the destiny to be experienced by it. For example if a person is destined to sustain an accident, or develop some muscle disease like a degenerative myopathy, having done yogic asanas is not going to prevent it. Purification of the body however increases the tolerance of the body to face its destiny.

5. Spiritual purity required to attain Heaven after death

One of the objectives of spiritual growth is to attain a higher plane of existence like Heaven (Swarga), Maharlok, Janalok, Tapalok or Satyalok after death. Even to attain the subtle-region of Heaven, which is the lowest among the aforementioned positive regions in one's afterlife each of the various bodies of our existence mentioned in the above table should be at least 50% pure.

CONCLUSION

Yogic asanas pranayam are very useful in worldly life to make the physical body and vital body healthy. With a healthy body one is better able to undertake spiritual practice such as satsēvā or service towards the Absolute Truth. If yogic asanas and pranayam are complemented with other forms of spiritual practice to purify the mental body and other bodies then a person can achieve rapid spiritual progress in his lifetime. Thus a person can make progress to achieve the purpose of life which is to merge with God.

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