

STRESS RELIEF TECHNIQUES BASED ON PATANJALI YOGA SUTRA

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Abstract

The practice of yoga is an art and science dedicated to creating union between body, mind and spirit. Its objective is to assist the practitioner in using the breath and body to foster an awareness of ourselves as individualized beings intimately connected to the unified whole of creation. In short it is about making balance and creating equanimity so as to live in peace, good health and harmony with the greater whole. This art of right living was perfected and practiced in India thousands of years ago and the foundations of yoga philosophy were written down in *The Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, approximately 200 AD. This sacred text describes the inner workings of the mind and provides an eight-step blueprint for controlling its restlessness so as to enjoying lasting peace.

The core of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* is an eight-limbed path that forms the structural framework for yoga practice. Upon practicing all eight limbs of the path it becomes self-evident that no one element is elevated over another in a hierarchical order. Each is part of a holistic focus which eventually brings completeness to the individual as they find their connectivity to the divine. Because we are all uniquely individual a person can emphasize one branch and then move on to another as they round out their understanding.

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8 Limbs of Patanjali's yoga

1. Yama: outward observances

Yama often translates as “restraint”, but the yama(s) (yes, Patanjali gives a list of 5 yamas) are invitations to external observances, or outward practices, that promote peace and harmony in life—in interactions with the outer world of social and environmental circumstances. They are as follows:

Ahimsa: non-harming, affirmatively translated sometimes as compassion for self and all others.

Satya: truthfulness, in thought, word and action

Asteya: non-stealing.

Brahmacarya: energy conservation. This yama has many translations, but one translation that may apply well to our day and age would be “wise use of energy,” that is, learning to safeguard energy, and to choose our battles

Aparigraha: non-grasping, non-hoarding, or non-attachment. This yama could also mean, again, using Devi's affirming language, “resourcefulness” or “abundance,” i.e. the ability to recognize and cultivate gratitude for one's own resources.

2. Niyama: inward observances

Patanjali offers a list of 5 niyamas as well. Niyamas are inner observances and actions that improve one's self and one's immediate environment. They are as follows:

Sauca: cleanliness. Sauca is cleanliness not only of one's body and surroundings, but cleanliness of mind.

Santosha: contentment. Santosha is the practice of contentment, practice being the operative word. Sometimes life is difficult, and it's hard to remember the feeling of contentment. Santosha is the process of looking for the good, or of counting one's blessings regardless of the circumstances that arise.

Tapas: literally “heat;” energy of transformation, specifically self-transformation. Self-transformation can happen in numerous ways.

Svadhyaya: literally “study of texts,” but often translated as self-study. Let's combine these two translations and call svadhyaya the process of taking great teachings so much to heart that they

become a part of the practitioner, which provides insight on becoming a consummate observer of the all aspects of one's self.

Isvarapranidhana: surrender to the fullness of self. Isvara is a word for god in Sanskrit, but has come to have additional connotations meaning best or highest expression of self. Pranidhana means "placement under the fullness."

3. Asana:posture, seat.

The most commonly known of the eight limbs, the word asana means "seat," or "to find a steady and comfortable seat." Interestingly, Patanjali does not comment extensively on the practice of asana. He does, however, offer general advice, in Sutra 2.46. He says, "sthiram sukham asanam."

4. Pranayama:to extend (ayama) one's vital life force (prana).

In other words, pranayama is the process of understanding and utilizing the wisdom of the breath. Studies have shown that deepening the breath calms the nervous system as well as the mind. By deepening and evening the breath, yogis for centuries have experienced less physical stress and less mental chatter.

5. Pratyahara: to turn awareness inward, to withdraw sensory information from external stimuli.

Some scholars posit that Patanjali wrote the 8 limbs in a specific order because one limb creates the circumstances necessary to make the proceeding limbs more easily accessible

6. Dharana:concentration.

Here again Patanjali outlines a natural progression from one limb to the next. Dharana is the process of bringing the mind to a single point of focus and holding it there. Remember, the word yoga means to yoke. Dharana yokes or harnesses the faculties of the mind toward undivided concentration.

7. Dhyana: meditation.

When able to concentrate on a single point of focus (be it the breath, a posture, or the highest ideal for oneself), meditation begins to happen. Meditation can be an elusive word. Let's think of

meditation here as the process of being able to hold the mind steadily and continuously on one point of focus.

8. Samadhi: total absorption, bliss, to hold the realization of unity.

Samadhi, the final criterion for the experience of yoga, is a state in which the yogi is completely immersed in the object of concentration. The yogi then gets a taste of what it might be like to reach Patanjali's yogic ideal: a quiet mind with which to remember one's humanity as the essence of peace. For some, doing the dishes may be a meditation, for others it may be painting, or running, or practicing asana. Samadhi, however, is that moment when everything else disappears and only the elements of the present moment exist, the practitioner is able to see not only connection of body, to mind and to the breath, but to everything. A sense of real peace—bliss—arises out of this deep connection to oneself and one's surroundings.

Dhyana

Dhyana is meditation, the 7th limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga yoga. The goal of Patanjali's yoga is a steady mind and meditation is the path. Sharon Gannon and David Life write, "Dhyana is an effortless state that can arise only after you have trained yourself to sit still and concentrate on one object without distraction." (Jivamukti Yoga) It is the realization of one-pointed focus, continuous and unbroken, upon the object of meditation. It is merging with the object of meditation and transcending body consciousness and separateness. It frees the mind from thinking, from the constant chatter, from any fluctuating at all.

Meditation, like all of yoga, is a practice. It is extremely challenging physically and mentally to sit still, but the more you practice, the easier it becomes. Far more troubling to me than establishing a daily asana practice has been to work my way into a meditation practice. There are endless methods to meditate, but they all begin with finding a comfortable seat. Once you have established your seat, whether it be in front of an altar or not, the choice of object to meditate on is endless. You can think about union, connection to God, repeat a sacred mantra, watch the breath or focus on a chakra. Truly, you can meditate on whatever feels right to you and this may require trying out different methods. To meditate, simply sit down, close your eyes, draw your attention inward and be still. See if you can create more space between the thoughts and eventually let them fall away.

According to him meditation (Dhyan) means –

"Full concentration of the mind focused on one of those experiences"

In simple terms the spontaneous concentration of the mind on the object is Meditation. Now let us see in detail what exactly he means to say about Dhyan(meditation), We all know that our mind is fickle, like a butterfly, which always flies from here and there and does not wait at one place for long. But the speed of our mind is far more than the butterfly or it may be greater than the speed of light.

Mind can recollect past experiences, keeps thinking about the future and experiences the present with all its might and we do not have any control over our minds journey.

'Dhyan'(meditation) is the study of deep concentration, calmness and tranquility of the mind. It is the study of attaining complete control over ones mind. Meditation takes the consciousness beyond conscious, sub conscious & unconscious states to super consciousness.

In the fundamental stages of meditation one has to decide some target upon which one can concentrate. One has to concentrate with the help of his sensors like ' Eyes, Nose, Ears, Mouth and Touch'

Once the mind thinks of some other factors our meditation comes to an end . This stage is truly a very fundamental stage and needs a lot of practice because we are never used to control our minds.

Once you have achieved this for specific period of time you can try for the 'Dhyan'.

To explain with Omkar as the target, we have been looking at it, reciting and listening the mantra, our mind stays (appeases) upon it for a specific amount of time.

Now further we close our eyes and recollect the picture of the OM.

At the same time we are reciting or listening to the omkar. Then again with closed eyes we are only hearing the reciting of the mantra on the cassette without reciting by our mouth. Further our minds only recollect the experiences taken by our eyes, ears and mouth. The actual Dhyan stage has only one dimension, now we concentrate on only a part of our target and in the next Samadhi stage the person experiencing the target tends to be nobody. Only the experience remains.

At this stage the minds target as a number of dimensions. The mind thinks of all the factors, which it has experienced in the initial stages.

Meaning, Properties & Functions of Mind

It is very difficult to understand the nature of the mind because it has no physical existence. It is very subtle as well as hidden. But the existence of the mind can't be denied, as many of our problems physical, mental and psychological are the outcome of our mental condition. Mind exists in the body but it is distinct from the body and organs.

Mind is also distinct from the spiritual self, 'the Knower' as he just observes the mind and its functions. The Knower perceives the external objects through sense organs but with the help of the mind. Perception of any event is not possible without the presence of mind. So in every event of perception there is an external object, an organ of perception (ears, eyes, nose tongue or skin) and there is mind and the 'Knower' or 'self'. All these are connected very closely, inseparable but still distinct from each other.

The mind can multiply or divide the strength of the Body. The person can't work if he is mentally not prepared for the work but a person can work with extra energy if he has mentally decided to work.

The mind has tremendous speed. It can travel from one point to another point at infinite distance within fraction of a second.

The mind interconnects the 'Self' with the physical body. The mind controls the physical organs through Brain, Autonomous Nervous System, and Endocrine Gland System.

We can summarise seven functions of the mind as follows.

Consciousness, Thoughts, Emotions, Perceptions, Memory, Intelligence and Judgment.

While we meditate all these seven functions start working in a positive direction letting all the negative energy flow out from us and leaving us in a state of peace and tranquillity.

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