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## NEED FOR YOGA IN MODERN LIFE

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**Abstract:** *Patanjali recommended an 'Eight-Limb Path' as a way to change the mind positively. He believed that one of the mind's fundamental characteristics was its inability and refusal to stay in the 'here and now'. He described it as a monkey jumping from one branch of thought to another. As you will hear me describe in any of my classes, the mind is always wandering and being rebellious, never focussing on the moment, but instead getting distracted by past events, future plans and all the sensations it has to process in the meantime. As it is the mind's job to think, it is relentlessly interpreting everything that is seen, perceived and experienced. It is led by thought patterns, habits, doctrines, perceptions and conditioning which have been learned and instilled over the lifetime of the person. These behaviours, thoughts, attitudes have been reinforced through repetition, regardless of whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. The Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika all form the central concepts of yoga's philosophy of life. Yoga techniques were summarised for the first time by Patanjali so as to bring a practical form of yoga to the people. 195 sutras were written in short, concise meaningful sentences. As in modern day psychology they are explanations of the nature of the mind, how it works and the obstacles, difficulties and emotional disturbances that can affect its functioning in terms of self-knowledge and reflective action.*

**Keywords:** *Yoga, Development, Modernisation, Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika all form the central concepts of yoga's philosophy of life. Yoga techniques were summarised for the first time by Patanjali so as to bring a practical form of yoga to the people. 195 sutras were written in short, concise meaningful sentences. As in modern day psychology they are explanations of the nature of the mind, how it works and the obstacles, difficulties and emotional disturbances that can affect its functioning in terms of self-knowledge and reflective action. Patanjali recommended an 'Eight-Limb Path' as a way to change the mind positively. He believed that one of the mind's fundamental characteristics was its inability and refusal to stay in the 'here and now'. He described it as a monkey jumping from one branch of thought to another. As you will hear me describe in any of my classes, the mind is always wandering and being rebellious, never focussing on the moment, but instead getting distracted by past events, future plans and all the sensations it has to process in the meantime. As it is the mind's job to think, it is relentlessly interpreting everything that is seen, perceived and experienced. It is led by thought patterns, habits, doctrines, perceptions and conditioning which have been learned and instilled over the lifetime of the person. These behaviours, thoughts, attitudes have been reinforced through repetition, regardless of whether they are good or bad, right or wrong.

The ancient practice of yoga is thousands of years old. It was first brought to India 3,500 years ago by nomads from central Asia practicing an intellectual discipline they referred to as 'Yoga'. It was a way of using the mind to restrain the senses and control the body. The main tradition practiced in Western Europe is Hatha Yoga which is based on the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, which is a sort of manual of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. It describes how to train the body, so that it can be used as a means of enlightenment.

It is no wonder that the mind becomes agitated and unfocused amidst all the thought processes. Patanjali's Eight-Limb Path was developed to still the mind. As you will also hear me say in class, stilling or quietening the mind doesn't mean we want to stop thinking. We do not want to shut out the mind, but rather enable it to be unaffected by its constant turnings and instead focus exclusively on a single thought or object. If this is achieved there will be clear perception, clarity and a conscious concentration in the present. However, the mind constantly puts obstacles in the way of our journey to that goal. Yoga refers to these



as 'kleshas'. In modern day psychology they might be referred to as self-defeating behaviours as a result of threatened egotism, self-regulation failure and emotional distress. They are ultimately afflictions of the mind, a huge cause of suffering that prevent us seeing things clearly. In order to free the mind of these afflictions we practice Ashtanga. The Eight-Limb Path consists of

1. **Yamas** – *dealing with the world around us*. This is our moral code of conduct. These are the moral principles that govern the way you treat others and the world around you.
2. **Niyamas** – *dealing with yourself*. These are five observances or rules of conduct, by which we should live our lives i.e. purity, modesty, contentment, discipline, self-study and acknowledgement of our own limits.
3. **Asana** – *dealing with the body*. These are the physical postures or exercises in yoga.
4. **Pranayama** – *dealing with breathing*. This is the conscious control of energy by practising controlled breathing techniques.
5. **Pratyahara** – *dealing with the senses*. This denotes the withdrawal of the senses. It teaches us to close the doors to the senses so that the mind can still be aware of external stimuli but no longer responds to them.
6. **Dharana** – *concentration*. This is the ability to focus our entire concentration on one object, one question, or one consideration and keep it there.
7. **Dhyana** – *meditation*. This is an interaction with the object of concentration whereby we become observers and view the object intuitively, free from subjective notions. It is an acceptance.
8. **Samadhi** – *The absolute: the inner freedom*. This is the complete feeling of being at one with the world, knowledge of the true self. Ultimate enlightenment! Inner Happiness!

## NEED FOR YOGA IN MODERN LIFE

Yoga is a science of healthy living. For a common man yoga is a fashion for keeping himself healthy and fit. While for some others its a boon for developing their concentration, memory and creativity. It helps to improve muscle strength; stamina, immune stability, perpetual sharpness, intelligence, memory, emotional stability and altogether maintain a positive physical and mental health.



Yoga is a science not less than 5000 years old which can help a human life to move towards higher states of harmony and peace both as an individual and a social being. Yoga is done through several breathing exercises, postures and meditation. Although mankind has entered an era of well advanced hi-tech medical facilities which makes life more comfortable, the expected quality of life still seems to be far from reality. Problems like stress, anxiety, restlessness, nervous breakdown, other stress related ailments, fatigue breaking up of families, suicides is all on an exponential rise. The frustrated patients are now moving towards alternative non-scientific therapies for a better living. Yoga with its multifold advantages, is gaining popularity in all parts of the world. For a common man yoga is a fashion for keeping himself healthy and fit. While for some others its a boon for developing their concentration, memory and creativity.

### **NEED FOR YOGA**

Many of the common health and social problems cannot be solved through germ theories, antibiotics, vaccines or surgeries. The fascinating diagnostic tool has started pointing to the role of mind on matter. Biochemical, psychological, neuro-physiological and immunological researchers are recognizing the role of lifestyle, stress, suppressed emotions and so on as the cause of many of the challenges faced today. Hence health professionals are forced to accept the paradigm shift in the approach of understanding human health problems.

As everyone knows, yoga involves different patterns of exercises and postures, practicing them appropriately help to improve muscle strength, stamina, immune stability, perpetual sharpness, intelligence, memory, emotional stability and altogether maintain a positive physical and mental health.

### **UNDERSTANDING YOGA**

The term yoga means the art of joining. Yoga is that which unites. In traditional terminology, *"it is the union of the individual self with the universal self". "It is an expansion of the narrow constricted egoistic personality to an all pervasive, eternal and blissful state of reality".* As Swami Vivekananda puts it, *"It is a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life or a few months or even a few hours of one's bodily existence".* In action, yoga is a special skill which makes the mind reach it subtler state.

Yoga can be broadly classified into four streams. As Swami Vivekananda puts them as Work, Worship, Philosophy and Psychic Control.



- The path of work involves doing action with an attitude of detachment to fruits of action. This brings steadiness of mind.
- The control of emotions is the key to the path of worship. It helps to control the emotional instabilities by properly harnessing the energy involved in it.
- The path of Philosophy is for attaining the intellectual sharpness and happiness.
- The path of Psychic Control enables us to culture our minds for achieving success in almost all endeavors of our lives. It gives a practical and easy approach to reach higher states of consciousness.

## **YOGA AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Athletes can learn and develop a lot of these psychological skills through the practice of yoga and it is always worth acknowledging the value it can add to any psychological intervention. There are many research studies that show that yoga has the potential to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Previous studies carried out on the influence of yoga on anxiety suggest that yogic relaxation can counter balance sympathetic over-activity and increases in parasympathetic activity. All the somatic manifestations of anxiety such as the racing heart, palpitations, tremors, sweating, increased blood pressure, dry mouth, avoidance behaviour, restlessness and heightened responsiveness seem to decrease and slowly disappear after a yoga intervention. Recent studies also show an association between yoga and decreased serum cortisol (stress hormone) levels, as well as enhanced immune function, in healthy individuals. Apart from reducing stress, yoga practice promotes feelings of relaxation and enhances subjective well-being. Yoga's physical postures and breathing exercises improve muscle strength, flexibility, blood circulation and oxygen uptake which not only benefits general physical health but also mental health while also helping the practitioner become more resilient to stress.

Through the Eight-Limb Path in yoga an athlete is going to learn how to focus and concentrate the mind through the withdrawal of the senses and meditation. The breathing techniques are used as a way of centering the athlete to handle pressure and nerves, keeping the mind from wandering and staying in the present. Positive self-talk is encouraged through the yamas and niyamas which help increase confidence and self-esteem. Visualisations/mental imagery can be introduced during relaxation or 'shavasana' to



develop performance outcomes. While 'sankalpas' or positive intentions are set during yoga nidra (yogic sleep) which can equate to goal-setting.

No one overlook the physical and psychological benefits yoga can bring to any athlete. It is a holistic practice that encourages a body and mind connection through the breath. The skills learned on the yoga mat are skills for life and not just for sport. It is a grounding practice that infiltrates every part of your life with the ultimate goal to strip back all that is negative to help us achieve contentment and happiness. I truly believe that **'Better People Make Better Athletes'**.

## CONCLUSION

So now that we have established what yoga is and what it is trying to achieve. How does sport and exercise psychology fit in to the equation? Psychology is the science of behaviour. As sport and exercise psychologists we are interested in examining, researching and providing theory and evidence based interventions and solutions to cognitive and behavioural difficulties experienced by athletes that impinge their ability to perform to their highest potential. Afflictions of the mind such as experiencing competitive anxiety, dealing and coping with stress, handling pressure and nerves, staying in the present, remaining focused, coping with negative thoughts, the inner critic, low confidence, self-esteem and belief systems are all common issues experienced by athletes regardless of the sporting discipline. Some psychological interventions recommended that are evidence-based to deal with some of these common issues are developing pre performance routines, introducing positive self-talk, the use of mental imagery, goal-setting, concentration skills and deep breathing and relaxation exercises.

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