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MOTIVATE

Editorial Note:

Greetings! Bringing you lots of cheer and health, this issue of Motivate is dedicated to celebrating International Yoga Day on the 21st of June. The term 'Yoga' has lately become a very commercialized concept with classes for the same popping around every corner. This issue of the newsletter is being brought out to showcase the true essence of what Yoga is, in its entirety. Along with this, it also attempts to connect the practice of Yoga with its psychological benefits.



Yoga has been derived from the Sanskrit word- 'Yuj' which means to join, attach or harness. Popularised by the text 'Yoga Sutras' by Patanjali, it was essentially used to mean the joining of the individual to the universal consciousness (Aatman with the Brahman) in purely spiritual terms. Patanjali's text on Yoga is one of the most comprehensive ones on the subject even though it

has been estimated to have been written in or even before 1st Century C.E. There are many paths using which one could reach the universal consciousness including the Bhakti Marga (through devotion), Karma Marga (through one's actions), Jnana Marga (through self-awareness) and Raja Marga. It is the last one which is popular when the term 'Yoga' is used. Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga (8 Limbs of Yoga) follows the Raja Marga.

In recent times, research has shown how practice of Yoga has multiple psychological benefits, which will be explored in detail. This issue of the newsletter is also an attempt to dispel the myth that Yoga is all about Asanas and Pranayama- which form the basis for what is commonly known as Hatha Yoga. It is, in fact a set of practices that can help a person become complete- physically and psychologically.

Thinker's Corner:

As a 28-year-old psychologist attempting ballet to better understand her ongoing PhD variables (factors that affect learning and achievement), I started Yoga supposing that it would help me be a less of an embarrassment in ballet. Yoga turned out not to be just a life jacket but a primary communication channel with my body. I suddenly understood how my body was talking to me and telling me before my mind cognized it for me in labels that were not always befitting or simply failed to cognize. The biochemistry of every emotion and thought that passed through my mind now registered into my awareness. This communication was 2-way. Without needing to verbalize these physiological reactions, I now could manipulate, manage, mitigate or just simply regulate them by choice.

The ache in the neck when felt stressed was not verbally addressed but also physically strengthened by working the shoulders and strengthening them to take the load and free the neck muscles in – Adho Mukha Svanaasan. A lack of problem-solving abilities were addressed by not just adapting abstract perspectives to view the problem but also supplemented with an insight derived by going

into Shirshasana for a couple of minutes. Assertiveness was not simply a change in paralinguistic behaviour and drawing up clear boundaries in words but learning to hold ground when jumping into a Adho Mukha Vrukshasana.

As my awareness and trust in body grew. I witnessed the quality of breathing that accompanied emotionally charged situations and the quietness of the mind that can be achieved by smoothening the breath. A series of Suryanamaskaras charged me up just as much as a shot of chocolate on a damp day. Challenging limitations accompanied literal struggles on the floor with my body as I attempted advanced poses, while my mind shouted “You must be kidding”.

As a psychologist I now have begun to appreciate that the dichotomy between the body and mind is more an oversimplification of an almost mystical organic phenomenon, that yoga demonstrates is a unified seamless process. So the next time you are attempting to explore or be adventurous or simply craving for a new exciting experience, walk into a yoga class!

Dr. Sowmya Puttaraju is best described as the epitome of creativity, especially when it comes to making use of innovative ideas in her therapy. She is currently Director of Psychotherapy and Counselling Services at Training and Research Initiatives (TRI). A licensed REBT practitioner and an accomplished ballet dancer, her optimistic attitude and joie de vivre are contagious as is her love for learning!



Facts and Fiction:

Raja Marga or the path of kings was considered one of the highest paths to join the individual with the universal consciousness. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the practice of Ashtanga Yoga is considered one of the best ways to follow the Raja Marga. The name is derived from the terms 'Ashta' meaning 'Eight' and 'Anga' meaning 'Limbs'. Put together it stands for 8 aspects or disciplines which must be followed for a person to attain the universal consciousness. These are, in essence, progressive practices which help a person attain true wisdom. Many practitioners have delineated techniques for each of the 8 aspects. The eight practices are-

1. **Yama** (Ethical Standards)- These are moral codes that should govern our social interactions. This consists of Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (non excess of sensual pleasures) and Aparigraha (non-avarice).
2. **Niyama** (Self-Discipline)- They refer to personal practices that must be observed. They include Shaucha (cleanliness of mind and body), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (austerity or perseverance), Swadhyaya (study and awareness of oneself) and Iswara Pranidhana (contemplation of the higher powers).
3. **Asana** (Postures)- This is the component of Yoga that most of us would be familiar. These consists of different postures, all of which promote physical and psychological health.
4. **Pranayama** (Breath control)- This step literally means regulation of one's Prana (Vital life energy). These are techniques



which hone the connection between one's breathing, the mind and emotions.

5. **Pratyahara** (Sensory withdrawal)- This stage requires one to withdraw one's attention from the objects of our senses in the external world and essentially focus on one's internal process in preparation to narrow down the focus of the person to reach out to the ultimate wisdom.
6. **Dharana** (Concentration)- This is the stage where one's concentration starts focusing on one aspect for a prolonged time. Once the person's attention is focused inwards, this state allows for individuals to pointedly concentrate on one point only.
7. **Dhyana** (Meditation)- Though confused often for the 4th stage of Pranayama, Dhyana is transcending beyond the focused concentration in the previous stage of Dharana. It is being focused on nothing but being aware of everything. The sense of ego disappears in this stage. It is a stage of contemplation where there is an uninterrupted flow of awareness and cognition.
8. **Samadhi** (Oneness)- The final stage of the Ashtanga Yoga is where the integration of one's individual consciousness becomes one with the universal consciousness and starts merging their sense of identity with all living things.

As can be seen, Yoga goes beyond postures and breathing techniques. It is shown how there is a clear connection between one's physical and psychological selves at the various stages, thus making it an ideal technique for everyone.

Ramblings:

Yoga is one discipline which everyone, regardless of gender, age and physical condition can utilize, with varying benefits. One only needs to step into a general yoga class to find people who come in from all walks of life and with varied purposes. From the past few decades, there has been a lot of research in the area of psychology to understand how people have benefitted from the practice of yoga in terms of psychological well-being. Some of the ways in which it has helped have been listed below-

1. **Reduces Stress and Anxiety-** The regular use of Yoga Asanas and Pranayama has shown to have a marked effect on one's stress and anxiety-reducing both psychological as well as physiological symptoms of both.
2. **Sharpens Concentration and Memory-** Since the various stages of Yoga leads up to one's improving focus and attention, its practice has shown increasing levels of concentration and in turn memory.
3. **Improves Mood and reduces Depression-** This is one of the most researched aspect of Yoga. As with physical exercises, practice of Yoga

Asanas have shown to increase the endorphin production in one's body thus improving one's mood as well as help righting the chemical imbalance in the body which may lead to depression.

4. **Increases Mindfulness-** One of the reasons the practice of Yoga has become popular especially in the Western world is that it has been proven to help increase mindfulness within people. This means that the practice of Yoga can help one's awareness of the current moment and increase one's experience of the same simultaneously.

With the above and many more psychological benefits being offered by yoga, it is imperative that one tries the right way of using the discipline of Yoga. With it being commercialised the way it is around the world, the essence of its philosophy is often lost and this is, in turn, essential for one to experience the complete aspects of Yoga.

Brief Report:

1. Dr. Deepti Swamy conducted a workshop on 'Academic Roadblocks' at Muktha Foundation on the 15th of May.
2. At the in-house conference for faculty members at Vidyaniketan Public School, Dr. Deepti had a session on using the 'PERMA' model in daily life, on the 17th of May.
3. The firm released the Handbook for UGC-NET Paper 1 consisting of guidelines for each chapter of the exam plus some general psychological tips.
4. Dr. Deepti conducted a session on 'Multiplicity in the Teaching-Learning Process' at Muktha Foundation on the 9th of June.

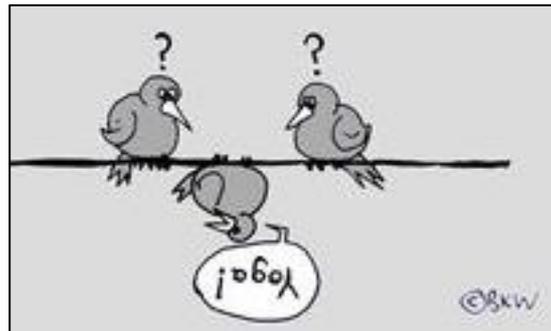
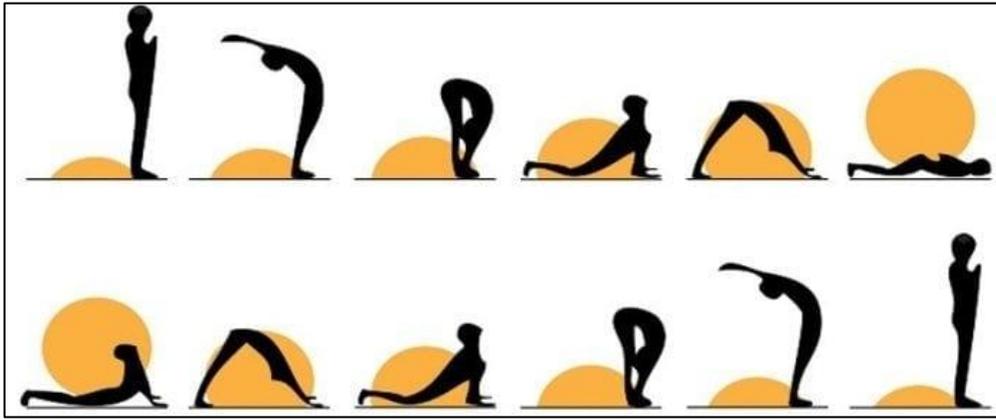
Mind Workout:

It can be really confusing for people who have no idea regarding how to go about choosing the right classes for them when beginning the practice of yoga. There is so much choice for everyone now. Here are some tips to be kept in mind when beginning on the practice-

1. Learn about what the different terms mean. One of the best ways to make a beginning is to understand what each of the terms like Vinyasa, Hatha, Bikram, Iyengar, Power Yoga etc. mean. This will give you an indication regarding what the class actually is all about.
2. Reflect on all the reasons for why you want to take up Yoga. Once you are familiar with all the terms, understand the reasons as to why you want to take it up. Remember, it is not only the Asanas and Pranayama but also goes beyond that.
3. Understand your body. It is essential to understand the limits of your physical bodies. Certain Asanas cannot be done or should not be attempted by people with specific conditions. So all of these should be explored beforehand.
4. Ask questions and read up. Do not hesitate to pose questions to your instructors. Read as much as you can about the subject.
5. Try to take it beyond the practice of Asanas and Pranayama. Develop good and healthy habits, make sure you avoid stressful situations as much as possible and find time to relax once in a while consciously.
6. Take it one step at a time. Just because of seeing people do complicated Asanas, do not be influenced into attempting it out before you are ready for it. It takes years of practice before our body becomes flexible enough for it. Remember- it is always safety first!
7. Do not look at classes only for its glamour and aesthetics. Some Yoga studios have a lot of aesthetic beauty and not a lot of substance while there are those which have incredible instructors but not much anything else. Find one which has both! Talk to people in the classes, attend a couple of trial classes and you will be able to discern for yourselves.
8. Choose a class which utilizes unique techniques and tools to aid during the practice of yoga. Some of the more progressive classes are helping people complete the Asanas using a combination of different types of aids. Check if these appeal to you.
9. Work in pairs or groups. It is important to stay committed to practicing during those difficult first few days. Join the class with friends or near ones so that you can motivate one another.
10. Do not forget to have fun. If the practice of yoga is something that is making you miserable, you are not doing it right. Figure out where you are going wrong and make sure it is fun and inspiring.

Fun and Funny:

One of the most comprehensive set of Asanas is that of the 'Surya Namaskara' or the 'Sun Salutation'. After suitably warming up, try each of these poses at home safely. Be careful not to push yourself and to make sure that the poses are possible.



We would love to hear your opinion about this issue and theme. Do write to us at deepti@i-dentitee.com or log on to our Facebook page at fb.me/identiteellp

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