



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Living a sustainable life through yoga-a study

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ABSTRACT

The art of practicing yoga helps in controlling an individual's mind, body and soul. It brings together physical and mental regulations to achieve a peaceful body and mind; it assists manage stress and anxiety and maintains you relaxing. It also helps in increasing flexibility, muscle strength and body nature. It improves respiration, energy and vitality. Practicing yoga might seem like just stretching, but it can do much more for your body from the way you feel, look and move. Yoga asanas build strength, flexibility and confidence. Regular practice of yoga can help lose weight, relieve stress, improve immunity and maintain a healthier lifestyle. It provides a framework for managing our inner needs and desires, and when applied to communities and societies, can be a toolkit for sustainable living and global change. We believe in practically applying the principles of yoga on an individual level can lead to large-scale change in our relationship to our earth. Thus, Yoga is a very useful practice which is easy to do and helps in getting rid of certain serious health problems that are common in today's life style.

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INTRODUCTION

Yoga is an ancient form of exercise which evolved thousands of years back in the Indian society and is being practiced continuously since then. It includes various forms of exercises to keep a person in good shape and to get rid of various forms of diseases and disabilities. It is also considered as a strong method for meditation which helps in relaxation of mind and body. Yoga literally denotes to unite in Sanskrit. It is a holistic mixture of sustainable lifestyle practices with the objective of cleansing and maintaining our physical, mental, and spiritual health. A yogic lifestyle is practiced in unity and harmony with oneself, nature, society, and God. Through the practice of yoga a person becomes more sensitized to the interconnections of thought, energy, and action. Learning of yoga will bring to cultivate deep respect and reverence for the give and take that is inherent to our existence. By addressing this exchange from a yogic perspective, the practices detailed in this chapter offer specific insight into the ways that yoga can help to heal our bodies and the Earth (Aranya, 2000). Yoga is being practiced worldwide today. Approximately 2 billion people around the world practice Yoga. According to a survey, it is said that number of Americans doing yoga has grown by 50 per cent over the last few years to over 36 million as of 2016 from 20.4 million in 2012. In addition to these 9 out of 10 Americans have heard of Yoga, one in three have tried yoga at

least once and more than 15 per cent of Americans have done Yoga in the past six months. Yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India and is now practiced in various forms around the world. Indians have known the importance of Yoga from decades and from last many years the whole world is talking, practicing and adopting Yoga and its benefits (Mike Burley, 2012). People have known the Importance and power of Yoga over the period of time. Here are essays on importance of yoga of varying lengths to help you with the topic whenever you required. Further, Yoga teaches us to care for our bodies and to make choices that are life enhancing over those that diminish quality of life. We learn to breathe more fully and to appreciate the exchange of oxygen molecules that sustain the entire biosphere. With this knowledge we can begin to make choices that maintain clean air for all. We might walk more, use less aerosol propelled products, or take greater care to be more efficient with our driving habits. Perhaps yoga is not such a new concept, as many ancient societies have shown us how to live in harmony with Mother Nature, how every being deserves to be treated with fairness, and that being affluent is not about how much money you have, but rather the happiness and wisdom you achieve. There is a Native American Proverb that says, "Treat the Earth well and it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children, we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, and we borrow it from our children". This affirmation may even sound similar to how sustainability has been defined, maybe this is not such a new concept, perhaps we are only paying attention to a message that has been given to us by other traditional societies (<http://www.earthmag.org/>)

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stories/2016/9/27/asana-bhakti-ecology-lessons-for-sustainable-living-from-yoga-at-govardhan-eco-village). It is in this context, the present study concentrates on how yoga bringing a sustainable life condition through its tools particularly asana.

Applications of Yoga Concepts for a Sustainable Lifestyle:

Yoga has provided us with message and tools to live in harmony. Among those tools, the Yamas is a powerful tool which can help us to integrate actions oriented to more sustainable way of life. Few yamas sources are given below:

Ahimsa (non-violence): Ahimsa in sustainability by choosing products and supporting companies that manufacture their offer in a responsible way: avoiding child labor, unfair working conditions, animal exploitation or unnecessary pollution and environmental damage. It only requires for us to stay informed and to know the history of the company and the products we buy from. Information is now more accessible than ever, so I am sure we can accomplish this.

Satya: Satya encourages us to be honest in our words and actions. Sustainability requires us to change and adapt “good practices”, surely, this practices involve more work and therefore we reject to implement them arguing that our busy lives don’t allow us to do so. Well, if we are truly honest with ourselves, we can actually admit that yes, we can take time to separate our trash and take it to a recycle center. We can take a little more time and walk or use public transportation instead of driving individual cars; we may even be able to harvest our own veggies and cook at home more rather than eat out⁴. The fact that it takes more time or effort doesn’t mean it is neither difficult nor impossible.

Asteya (non-stealing): We do not take what does not belong to us, and also what we do not need. This requires for us to be brave enough to reduce our consumption and take from the Earth only what’s necessary, and not what we desire to satisfy our consistent ego. Many actions can be modified or avoided based on this Yama.

Aparigraha – (non-possessiveness): We have fallen for the biggest lie ever told; that we own this world with all its resources, and that we can do whatever we want with it. Well, I guess Global Warming and other concerns are proving this belief wrong. The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth; and I guess the more we understand it and the more we un-attach from that possessive line of thought, we will develop a more nature friendly way of life. Perhaps when we understand there is no need to possess things, and that sharing feels good, we will find that social system where everyone is treated well and with respect. After all, and as Ghandi said, “There is a sufficiency in the world for man’s need but not for man’s greed.”

Asanas: Asanas are the physical yoga postures as a part of the hatha yoga system. The system of hatha yoga was designed to transform the body to be able to receive and sustain higher levels of energy. It regulates the body’s secretions, hormones, breath, and brain waves to harmonise the body and mind. It is a means to make the body and mind supple enough to effortlessly handle day-to-day physical and mental exertions. Therefore, the output of yoga is not to become muscular but to have a flexible enough body and mind to easily go about one’s

daily activities. Asanas are unique from other forms of physical exercises as they focus on placing the physical body in various positions with awareness, relaxation and concentration. Even the simplest asanas can have a profound beneficial overall effect, especially as a part of the body-mind connection. While the body and mind are often regarded as separate entities, yoga and the practise of asanas integrates and harmonises the two. Often, people take to yoga for physical health, to reduce stress or to be fit. While physical and mental health is the natural consequence of practising yoga, its goal is more far-reaching. Yoga is about harmonising oneself with the universe to achieve the highest level of perception and harmony. Radhanath Swami illuminates this with an interesting real life story. There was a lady he knew who started practising yoga for physical fitness and to become beautiful. She wasn’t particularly interested in the spiritual or ‘bhakti’ aspect of it. After doing asanas, pranayama and the entire hatha yoga system and as the years went by, her mind became balanced and tranquil. Soon, in her calm and balanced state of mind she genuinely wanted a deeper spiritual experience and started taking the ‘bhakti’ aspect very seriously. Radhanath Swami summarises this by explaining, “The hatha yoga system is like a ladder with different stages that eventually brings us to the highest rung to realise the divinity within us. We then perceive sacredness in every being and in everything (<https://www.mettaearth.org/2016/09/06/the-link-between-yoga-and-sustainability-an-excerpt/>).”

Asana and Ecology

Amusingly, most asanas are named after flora, fauna and nature or are associated with sustainable agricultural practices, constantly reminding us of our connection with mother earth. The implication of the animal inspired asanas is quite interesting. Most animal and bird asanas are the resting poses of the animals. They do not rest horizontally like we do, and the asanas mimic their resting or standing poses. This reiterates that asanas are not meant to be strenuous exercises but are recreational poses to refresh a tired body, keep it fit and active, and develop steadiness of both the body and mind. The following is a partial and indicative list of nature and living off the land inspired asanas:

Nature-inspired: Tadasana (mountain pose), Vajrasana (thunderbolt pose), Vrikshasana (tree pose), Bhu namanasan (Earth worship pose), Shavasana (corpse pose).

Animal-inspired: Titaliasana (butterfly pose), Kakasana (crow pose), Vrscikasana (scorpion pose), Kapotasana (pigeon pose), Kukkutasana (rooster pose).

Agriculture-inspired: Chakrasana (wheel pose), Chakkichalanasana (grinding flour on the hand mill), Kashtha Takshanasana (chopping wood), Halasana (plough pose), Rajjukarshanasana (pulling rope).

Body movement-inspired: Hasta Sanchalan (arm movements), Pada Sanchalan (leg movements), Janu Sanchalan (knee movements), Skandha Sanchalan (shoulder movements), Kantha Sanchalan (neck movements). The above list is small and indicative. The entire list of yoga asanas are quite exhaustive and are either nature inspired or based on activities related to our body movements and living off the land. Asanas

prepares our body and mind for the next level of yoga. They also have incidental benefits such as physical fitness, increased body flexibility, and hormonal balance. In turn, this results in a sharp, balanced, and calm mind. Such a state of mind opens up to spirituality which in turn makes us compassionate towards all living beings and nature (Singleton, 2010).

Asana and Sustainable life

Socio-environmental issues are of utmost concern in present times. After colonialism, the industrial revolution, capitalism and in the current neo-liberal era, the progress of a country and society is measured only on the basis of its gross domestic product (GDP) and profits. It does not take into consideration environmental and social aspects, making this kind of development unsustainable and lopsided. More GDP and more profits mean plundering and exploitation of natural resources globally without giving back to mother earth, or simply put when development is driven by greed. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." Radhanath Swami, a monk in a Krishna-bhakti lineage and teacher of the devotional path of Bhakti-yog, while explaining the root cause of pollution, says, "It is the pollution in the ecology of the human heart that is the root cause of today's socio-environmental issues." He further elaborates on how people's hearts are polluted by toxic greed and egotism, which is intoxicating. He says, "The more it gets, the more it needs; it hardens the heart, justifies cruelty, induces envy, divides families, and provokes wars." Radhanath Swami also focusses on yoga as a medium towards sustainable living. He says, "Yoga is the science of cleansing the heart and tasting the joy of living in harmony with god, with all other living beings and with nature." He further elaborates, "There is a law of environmental economics where what we take, we must return, and what we return is what is going to come back to us. We exploit and take so much goodness from mother earth and return toxic waste into her and hence, in the long run, it is that very toxic waste that will come back to us and destroy us." Yoga is meant to bring about from within our own hearts genuine compassion and love for the well-being of other living beings. This is the greatest need in human society (David White, 2014). A yoga session mainly comprises of breathing exercises, meditation and yoga asana that stretch and strengthen various muscle groups. It is a good substitute for avoiding medicines that are harmful for our mental and physical health. One of the main benefits of practicing yoga is that it helps manage stress. Stress is common these days and is known to have devastating effects on one's body and mind. Due to stress people develop serious problems like sleeping disorder, neck pain, back pain, headaches, rapid heart rate, sweaty palms, dissatisfaction, anger, insomnia and inability to concentrate.

Yoga is known to be really effective in curing these kinds of problems over a period of time. It helps a person in managing stress by meditation and breathing exercise and improves a person's mental well being. Regular practice creates mental clarity and calmness thereby relaxing the mind (Marek Jantos, 2012).

Conclusion

If we can open our minds to the originally intended purpose of yoga, in addition to the physical, emotional, and mental health that it brings to our lives, then there is hope for allowing this practice to encourage environmental sustainability. Yoga provides us with a set of guidelines and tools to help us deal with ourselves and with the world around us. It offers a framework for managing our inner needs and desires, and when applied to communities and societies, can be a toolkit for sustainable living and global change. We believe in practically applying the principles of yoga on an individual level can lead to large-scale change in our relationship to our planet. It is clear that, Yoga is a very useful practice which is easy to do and helps in getting rid of certain serious health problems that are common in today's life style. Thus, yoga is a miracle and once followed, it will guide you the whole life. 20-30 minutes of Yoga per day can change our life in the long run by promoting a balance between physical, mental and spiritual health.

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