

MEDICAL UNDERSTANDING OF YOGA



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3rd Edition



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Chapter 3

The Preliminaries

At the beginning of practice of Yoga, resolve as under:
By my thoughts, speech and actions I shall not hurt any living being
I shall always speak the Truth
I shall not steal
I shall observe celibacy
I shall not collect beyond my needs
I shall maintain clean body, mind and surroundings
I shall be contented in what I have
I shall bear whatever comes my way
I shall study myself
I shall surrender to the Almighty

If one decides to learn any discipline, one has to first follow the preliminaries. Let us now see what the scriptures of Yoga have to say about how to begin with the practice of Yoga, especially, *haṭha-yoga*.

Diet

नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।
न चाति स्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥

गीता 6 / 16

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥

गीता 6 / 17

*Nātyaśnatastu yogosti na chaikāntamañśnataḥ.
Na cāti svapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna.
Yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu
Yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhahā.*

BG 6/16-17

‘O Arjuna! Neither he who eats too much nor he who eats too little succeeds in yoga. Neither the one who sleeps too much nor the one who keeps awake!

Only to the one who takes appropriate quantity of food, does appropriate amount of effort and takes appropriate amount of sleep the yoga becomes destroyer of all sorrows’.

(Bhagvad Gītā 6/16-17)

मिताहारं विना यस्तु योगारम्भं समाचरेत् ।
नानारोगो भवेत्तस्य किञ्चिद्योगो न सिध्यति ॥

घे. सं. 5 / 16

Mitahāraṁ vinā yastu yogārambhaṁ samācaret.
Nānā rogo bhavettasya kincidyogo na siddhyati.

G.S. 5/16

‘He who begins the practice of Yoga without controlling his diet suffers from many diseases and does not make progress in Yoga.’

शुद्धं सुमधुरं स्निग्धमुदरार्धं विवर्जितम् ।
भुज्यते सुरसंप्रीत्या मिताहारं इमं विदुः ॥

घे. सं. 5 / 21

Śuddhaṁ sumadhuraṁ snigdhamudarārdha vivarjitam.
Bhujyate surasampriṭyā mitāhāraṁ imam viduḥ.

G.S. 5/21

‘Controlled diet is one which is pure, sweet, lubricated, and fills only half of the stomach and which is palatable and is eaten to please the God (in oneself).’

अन्नेन पूरयेद्धं तोयेन तु तृतीयकम् ।
उदरस्य तुरीयांशं संरक्षेद्वायुचारणे ॥

घे. सं. 5 / 22

Annena pūrayedardhaṁ toyena tu tṛtiyakam.
Udarasya turyāṅśaṁ saṁrakṣedvāyucāraṇe.

G.S. 5/22

‘One should fill half the stomach with food, one quarter with water and the fourth quarter should be reserved for the movement of air.’

■ Purification

All the air passages must be clean and clear. If one has a blocked nose, the practice of *prāṇāyāma* is impossible. The nasal passages should be washed clean by the technique of *neti*. Later we will also learn about *nādi-shodhana prāṇāyāma*.

■ Frenulectomy

For those aspiring to achieve the difficult ‘*Khecari Mudrā*’, the tongue-frenulum needs to be cut. Yogis have recommended cutting it a fraction of a millimeter everyday regularly. This increases the motility of the tongue and then by slow, slow practice it is possible to make the tongue turn back to reach the back of throat. I have no personal experience of going through this procedure but what

I think is that the tongue, freed from its tie with the floor of the buccal cavity, can serve several different purposes. This way one can regulate the flow of air in one or the other nostril without having to use the fingers. At times, the backward-turned tongue can even be used to close the larynx. This technique might have been used by the ancient yogis for entering into *Samādhi*, of which we shall discuss in a later chapter. Frenulectomy is not a prerequisite for everyone, but for the desirous, a modern-day ENT specialist will make it very easy; a one-step procedure.

■ The Best Season to Start

It has been recommended that Yoga-practices and learning should be started either at the beginning of winter or at the beginning of summer.

वसन्ते शरदि प्रोक्तं योगारम्भं समाचरेत् ।
तदा योगी भवेत्सिद्धो रोगान्मुक्तो भवेद्ध्रुवम् ।

घे. सं. 5/9

Vasante śaradī proktaṁ yogārambhaṁ samācaret.
Tadā yogī bhavetsiddho rogānmukto bhaveddhruvaṁ.

G.S. 5/9

It is said that one should begin the practice of yoga in either *vasanta* or *śarada*. (When the atmospheric temperature is pleasant, neither too hot nor too cold). Thereby the yogi attains success and definitely becomes free of disease.

■ The Ambience

The place where one undertakes to practice of Yoga everyday, should be clean, well illuminated and ventilated, free of noise, smoke and insects like ants, cockroaches, mosquitoes and houseflies. There should be no distractions on the walls in the form of posters, etc. although a poster depicting ॐ (*Aum*) is helpful.

■ My Practical Tips for the Beginner

1. For all those leading a modern, busy life, my recommendation is that they must start by taking a mega dose of vitamin D (Available at the chemist shop as sachets/capsules/syrup containing vitamin D 60,000 units) at first weekly for 8 weeks and then at least once a month. The reason to advise this is that the modern day schedule leaves little scope for an individual to get exposed to sunlight. In addition, if we do not eat non-vegetarian diet regularly, we are all somewhat deficient in vitamin D. This fact has been well recognized by the Association of Physicians of India (API). In fact, the API had made a recommendation to the Government of India to make arrangements for fortification of some food material with vitamin D. In the USA, milk fortified with vitamin D is available.

To avoid deficiency of vitamin C we must take a lot of sour fruit like lemons and oranges. In addition, amla, country gva and potatoes are good sources. Vitamin C acts as an antioxidant and is a reducing agent for the enzymes prolyl- and lysyl-hydroxylase, which are responsible

for hydroxylation of proline and lysine residues in pro-collagen. It is, thus, essential for the formation of strong collagen. If vitamin C is lacking, the collagen formed is weak and one may get pain in joints on performing *āsanas*, as the ligaments are stretched. In absence of a fruit diet, one can be sure of taking all the vitamins by taking one-tablet-a-day of a good multivitamin preparation; one that contains all the required vitamins more than the daily requirement.

2. The morning time is the best time to perform yoga *āsanas* and also for *prāṇāyāma*. One must start early in the morning, and after finishing with the toilet and taking a bath, one should do first the *āsanas* and then the *prāṇāyāma*. I see no harm if there is a ceiling fan running if the weather is hot, or even in installing an air conditioner.
3. The practice should be performed at a place which is cool, comfortable, not visited by several people, and free of insects such as mosquitoes and houseflies and also free of noise. Preferably there should be no disturbance from the call-bell or a telephone. The mobile phones should be kept switched off.
4. There should be a blanket or a thick carpet, which does not easily slip away on the floor. Synthetic 'Yoga Mats' are good, although I have often found their size inadequate. In winters, they need to be covered with a clean bed-sheet. The clothing should be loose enough to allow all types of movements of limbs.
5. If performing in a group, one should use a deodorant spray or talc to avoid foul smell of sweat. Often the foul smell in the sweat is due to anaerobic organisms and can be avoided by dusting metronidazol powder in shoes as well as in the axillae and in the groins.
6. A big mirror on the wall helps in showing whether the spine is straight or not and whether the body is symmetrical while performing the *āsanas*.
7. A wall clock is very useful to indicate time in seconds, sometimes if there is enough calmness in the room one can count the seconds by its ticking.
8. A small rosary helps in counting number of *mantras* chanted.

MEDICAL UNDERSTANDING OF YOGA

Medical Understanding of Yoga is a research-based book that reveals several facets of yoga that are unknown either to yogis or to medical doctors. The book describes how periodic fasting can benefit people suffering from obesity, menstrual disorders and several autoimmune diseases. *Medical Understanding of Yoga* states that several yogic techniques like *Prāṇāyāma*, *Nauli-kriyā* and *Agni-sāra* offer several benefits through brief intermittent hypoxia, such as increasing Nitric Oxide production, generation of collateral vessels in ischemic areas and facilitating stem-cell trafficking. Chapters in this book discuss the positive role of air in the gastrointestinal tract, in inhibiting the causative organism of peptic ulcer, contributing to satiety and uplifting mood; and also helping release of factors that prolong life of insulin-secreting beta cells and facilitate their regeneration.

This book reveals that breath-holding beyond comfort zone switches on non-shivering thermogenesis. Activation of parasympathetic nervous system by nose-gazing, by *Auñkarjapa* and some other techniques and that of sympathetic nervous system through *mūlabandha* which bring about favorable changes in heart rate and blood pressure have also been discussed. A new twist has been given to the understanding of the well-known *Sūryanamaskāra* which, according to the author, is not a physical exercise but a great technique to fill the intestines with air, which can enable one to reduce food intake without getting the usual cravings and also inhibit several intestinal pathogens. One can even bloat oneself to buoyancy and stay afloat on waters of immeasurable depth. The secret air-drinking yogic technique has been revealed in this book. With revolutionary concepts like 'Eating Protein is Madness' and possible reality and utility of Human hibernation (*Haṭha-yogic Samādhi*) this book will serve as an invaluable companion not only for doctors but for those who are established in Yoga practice or involved in Yoga-teaching or Yoga-research.

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This present book is a result of his strong zeal to share the revelations. Hypoxia as a mechanism of beneficial effect of *Prāṇāyāma*, *Sūryanamaskāra* as the technique for filling the intestines with air, instant voluntary activation of the sympathetic nervous system with *mūlbandha* and concepts like 'Eating Protein is Madness' are but a few of them.

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