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Lecture Title

Relevance of Yoga in The Modern Age

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Friends today in this lecture we will be talking about relevance of yoga in modern age and the importance of Yoga in today's crazy world

Today's world, whether you're a housewife or a college kid, is frenetic. There's no two ways about it. Everything we do requires us to be in a constant state of rushing around. Time is of essence more often than not and we tell ourselves that we would do a certain thing only if we had more time. Yoga on the other hand, handed down through centuries when time had a completely different meaning, can teach us a thing or two about how to deal with the monster called time.

How will yoga benefit our life?

Slow activity – here we are talking about power yoga here, but the yoga in its pure form of slower stretches and breathing. A lot of people shun the idea of ever doing yoga because it is slow. In fact, there are couples of people who actually did one class and left because they got bored with the pace. But in today's world, where life is flying by us and we barely seem to keep up, does all activity need to be frenetic too?

We have already established that exercise helps us to unwind. But doing something that adds to the pace may not always be an answer. Yoga on the other hand makes you stop in your tracks and slows down your mind and body. During a tough yoga session, your mind has to be present in order for you to perform. Which means it will switch gears from thinking overtime about all the other things going on and focus on the present. What could possibly be more relaxing?

Unnatural postures – Another thing that we do a lot more today than we ever did before is sitting. We sit for hours and hours at our work desks or at home in front of the TV. Sitting on chairs is not exactly the most natural of postures for human beings

What sitting does though, is that it ignores a lot of vital muscles in our bodies, the glutes for example. The glutes are very important to strengthen as our entire body revolves around them. Yoga with its many postures strengthens and gainfully employs these sleeping muscles like the core and the glutes so that they gain power and come to life again.

Yoga also plays an important role in correcting our posture, which has gone out of spin, due to the hours of sitting. An incorrect posture leads to a whole range of new problems, the older we get.

So give yoga a shot if you feel that the pace of life is getting to you. Try something slow and deceptively easy for a change. You'll be doing your mind and body a huge favour.

Now let us have a look on 10 benefits of Yoga in daily Life

Weight loss, a strong and flexible body, glowing beautiful skin, peaceful mind, good health – whatever you may be looking for, yoga has it on offer. However, very often, yoga is only partially understood as being limited to asanas (yoga poses). As such, its benefits are only perceived to be at the body level and we fail to realize the immense benefits yoga offers in uniting the body, mind and breath. When you are in harmony, the journey through life is calmer, happier and more fulfilling.

With all this and much more to offer, the benefits of yoga are felt in a profound yet subtle manner. Here, we look at the top 10 benefits of yoga practice.

1. All-round fitness. You are truly healthy when you are not just physically fit but also mentally and emotionally balanced. Health is a dynamic expression of life – in terms of how joyful, loving and enthusiastic you are.

This is where yoga helps: postures, pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation are a holistic fitness package. The benefits accrued by being a regular practitioner are numerous. Some very discernible ones are:

1. Improves health
2. Gives mental strength
3. Increases physical power
4. Protection against injury
5. Detoxifies the body

2. Weight loss -Yoga benefits here too. Sun Salutations and Kapal Bhati, pranayama are some ways to help lose weight with yoga. Moreover, with regular practice of yoga, we tend to become more sensitive to the kind of food our body asks for and when. This can also help keep a check on weight.

3. Stress relief- A few minutes of yoga during the day can be a great way to get rid of stress that accumulates daily - in both the body and mind. Yoga postures, pranayama and meditation are effective techniques to release stress. You can also experience how yoga helps detox the body and de-stress the mind at the Sri Sri Yoga Level 2 program.

4. Inner peace- We all love to visit peaceful, serene spots, rich in natural beauty. Little do we realize that peace can be found right within us and we can take a mini-vacation to experience this any time of the day! Benefit from a small holiday every day with yoga and meditation. Yoga is also one of the best ways to calm a disturbed mind.

5. Improved immunity- Our system is a seamless blend of the body, mind and spirit. An irregularity in the body affects the mind and similarly unpleasantness or restlessness in the mind can manifest as an ailment in the body. Yoga poses massage organs and strengthens muscles; breathing techniques and meditation release stress and improves immunity.

6. Living with greater awareness-The mind is constantly involved in activity – swinging from the past to the future – but never staying in the present. By simply being aware of this tendency of the mind, we can actually save ourselves from getting stressed or worked up and relax the mind. Yoga and pranayama help create that awareness and bring the mind back to the present moment, where it can stay happy and focused.

7. Better relationships-Yoga can even help improve your relationship with your spouse, parents, friends or loved ones! A mind that is relaxed, happy and contented is better able to deal with sensitive relationship matters. Yoga and meditation work on keeping the mind happy and peaceful; benefit from the strengthened special bond you share with people close to you.

8. Increased energy-Do you feel completely drained out by the end of the day? Shuttling between multiple tasks through the day can sometimes be quite exhausting. A few minutes of yoga everyday provides the secret to feeling fresh and energetic even after a long day. A 10-minute online guided meditation benefits you immensely, leaving you refreshed and recharged in the middle of a hectic day.

9. Better flexibility & posture-You only need to include yoga in your daily routine to benefit from a body that is strong, supple and flexible. Regular yoga practice stretches and tones the body muscles and also makes them strong. It also helps improve your body posture when you stand, sit, sleep or walk. This would, in turn, help relieve you of body pain due to incorrect posture.

10. Better intuition-Yoga and meditation have the power to improve your intuitive ability so that you effortlessly realize what needs to be done, when and how, to yield positive results. It works. You only need to experience it yourself.

Remember, yoga is a continuous process. So keep practicing! The deeper you move into your yoga practice, the more profound are its benefits.

As we know modern age is the age of science and reason. Like any true knowledge, science has a great future. In recent years, there have been revolutionary developments in science and information technology. Our country is emerging as a leader in these areas and our lifestyle is being significantly influenced by these developments. In twentieth century alone, millions have perished due to wars and terrorist violence based on ethnic, religious and political hatred. Science has no answer to this grave problem staring us in the face. What does science tell us about how to behave, battle our emotions and passions and what to believe / not believe?

Solution to the crisis of character has to be in moral-spiritual terms. It is clear that scientific 'know how' should be guided by spiritual 'do how' so that science is practiced at its noblest.

Science cannot be ethically neutral and needs to be purified of its undesirable and arrogant obsessions. With the advancement of science, there should be a parallel development of art and spirituality. Otherwise we will have nuclear giants who are emotional pigmies and spiritual infants. Realizing this fact, Einstein has said that 'science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind'. However, many religious cults are based on mutually antagonistic doctrines and unscientific system of beliefs. They emphasize sectarian religions above humanity and spirituality. Religious beliefs that are in conflict with morality, humanity and reason cannot be accepted. Hence, there is a need to emphasize spirituality which not only transcends sectarian religious beliefs, but also is complementary to science. In the Vedic tradition, dharma is that which helps us in achieving all round progress in the external material world (abhyudaya) as well as development at the inner, spiritual level (nihshreyas) .

Yoga is a spiritual science for the integrated and holistic development of our physical, mental as well as moral-spiritual aspects. Yoga is based on philosophy that is practical and for our day-to-day living. True wealth of a nation consists of superior and noble persons it harbors. Popularisation of yoga will spawn a good number of such persons who will be an asset to the society and fit to be called as world men/women (vishva maanav), the ideal of Rig Ved. Yoga is the most precious gem of our cultural heritage and Vedic thought. Vedic culture has some distinguishing features. It considers all life to be interconnected and sacred. Ahimsaa which implies respect for life is naturally the first yam (the first limb in ashtaanga yoga). It also considers all humans as children of God. Vedic thought also accepts the entire humanity as a single entity and considers the whole world as one family (vasudaiv kutumbakam). These lofty principles are effective remedy against cruelty to animals, mutual conflicts, greed and exploitation that are the bane of modern competitive age. It is a tribute to the wisdom of yoga rishis of yore that their timeless teachings are highly relevant for the modern age when information technology is transforming the whole world into a global village. Materialistic outlook and consumerism, pollution of mind and environment, dependence on junk food and drugs, deficiency of noble virtues and deeds and the stress of daily life are the bane of modern society. Being holistic, yoga is an ideal solution for all these problems.

The very first limb of ashtaang yoga is yam, which consists of five moral principles of

- i) Ahimsaa or non-violence
- ii) Satya or truthfulness
- iii) Asteya or noncovetousness
- iv) Brahmacharya or living a Godly life and control of sensuality and
- v) Aparigrah or non-hoarding.

Aparigrah implies simplicity and moderation to counter greed consumerism and wasteful expenditure that is being promoted by television advertisements.

Progress is not explosion of consumerism and increased capacity for ingestion. Real progress means improvement of overall quality of life, including attitudes and behaviour. In Bhagvadgita (which is referred to as yoga shaastra), Yogeshvar Krishna stresses the importance of moderation in all aspects of life including eating, recreation and desires. Market-driven capitalism and increase in the greed for consumption has resulted in depletion of natural resources and overall pollution of the environment

From the yogic point of view, natural resources are to be harnessed for common good and not for satisfying human greed. Good health, knowledge and creativity are more important than material wealth and power. We should realize the primacy of man over machine and humanity over materialism. Unfortunately, in the name of materialism, some people are slavishly aping decadent aspects of western, materialistic culture. Their life is cluttered with too much of worthless things and three dimensional cultures of drink, dance and drugs. Junk food, junk entertainment, superfluous needs and wasteful consumerism are being promoted by callously commercial self-seekers. Materialistic and sensory pleasures do give us happiness. However, real and lasting joy (aanand) comes by strengthening and purifying our body-mind-soul complex and performing noble deeds and selfless actions (nishkaam karmayoga). That is why, yoga and ayurved have always given due importance to our physical body, subtle body as well as soul . All thoughts, including those of war and peace start in the minds of people. Hence, the mind should be calm, cultured and not dulled by drugs, drinks and taamasik / junk food. Yoga gives due emphasis to the purity of food . Another serious problem of the modern society is mind pollution caused by mass media like television. Instead of emphasizing education and healthy

entertainment, the media portray junk programmes, vulgarity and violence. This is highly detrimental to children and youth whose education, career and higher goal suffer. Violence on screen promotes antisocial behaviour and cultural degradation.

Yam (the five moral codes) is the very first step in ashtaanga yoga. According to Patanjali, these moral codes of conduct are beyond any class, place or time and hence universal great vows. They guide our thinking, behaviour and interpersonal dealings. Hence, they must be cultivated consciously and nurtured continuously. Bad thoughts and habits are like comfortable bed, easy to get into but hard to get out of. However, it needs to be emphasized that any undesirable thought can be extinguished by cultivating desirable and good thought. If we have smile on the face, we cannot have anger at the same time. That is what Patanjali means by saying that “By raising an opposing thought wave, one can overcome the negative one”.

Yoga is an ideal method for purifying as well as strengthening our body and mind. Purified, strengthened and disease free body-mind complex of a yogi is the temple of the Divine (deho devaalayah) and an efficient instrument for doing all the noble deeds. It should be noted that evil is a strong force except against the evolved mind of a disciplined yogi. During the last few decades, three important things have happened.

- i) We have moved away from mother nature and our lifestyle is becoming more and more unnatural and stressful due to ‘modern’ lifestyle
- ii) Modern medicine has conquered infectious diseases and decimated epidemics
- iii) There has been a significant prolongation of our life span. The result of all these is a phenomenal increase in lifestyle and psychosomatic disorders like headaches, sleep disturbances, depression, mental stress, eating disorders, obesity, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, angina, bronchial asthma, peptic ulcer, irritable bowel syndrome, arthritis, impotency, menstrual disorders and carcinomas. Medical diagnosis and treatment of these diseases are becoming more and more expensive and beyond our available resources. It needs to be emphasized that yogic lifestyle and yogic techniques are very effective in prevention as well as treatment of these diseases. Yogic treatment can be administered along with medical treatment as a complementary therapy. As yogic treatment is effective and inexpensive, we will be able to save billions of rupees annually and there will be a tremendous reduction of pressure

on our hospitals which are over-crowded, under-staffed and fund starved. It should be noted that while drugs have many undesirable side effects on our physical and mental health, yoga has beneficial 'side effects' in terms of improved psychosomatic health. Modern research has established the scientific basis of yogic techniques and yoga has now gained international acceptance and acclaim. It is desirable that yoga be made an integral part of our educational as well as health care systems. If our masses practice yoga, they will be physically healthy, mentally calm and spiritually evolved and hence more productive and happy. The rush and burden on our hospitals will be greatly reduced. Hence, there is an urgent need to popularize yoga among our masses. Yoga is consistent with our culture and complementary to science.

Conclusion- It is clear that yoga is a boon for the 'modern' society which has become a victim of everyday stress. Yoga should be made an integral part of our educational as well as health care systems. There is a great need of Yoga in this technological age.

Thank you