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## **Role of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga in formation of life**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents the Role of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga in formation of life.

**Keywords:** Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, formation, life.

### **Introduction**

Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. The word 'Yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Yuj', meaning 'to Join' or 'to Yoke' or 'to unite'. As per yogic scriptures the practice of yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with that of the universal consciousness, indicating a perfect harmony between the mind and body, man and nature. According to modern scientists, everything in the universe is just a manifestation of the same quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is said to be in yoga and is termed as a yogi, having attained to a state of freedom referred to as 'mukti', 'nirvana' or moksha'. Thus the aim of yoga is self-realization, to overcome all kinds of sufferings leading to 'the state of liberation' (Moksha) or 'freedom' (Kaivalya). Living with freedom in all walks of life, health and harmony shall be the main objectives of yoga practice.

### **Description of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga**

Yoga as described in the yoga-sutras of Patanjali refers to Ashtanga Yoga. The yoga-sutras of Patanjali is considered as a central text of the yoga school of Hindu Philosophy. It is often called 'Raja Yoga', 'Yoga of the Kings', a term which originally referred to the ultimate royal goal of yoga. In Sanskrit Ashta + anga' is Ashtanga'. 'Ashta' means Eight and 'Anga' is limbs so it means Eight limb path. According to Patanjali, the path of internal purification for revealing the universal self-consists of the following eight practices:

*Yama* (moral codes)

*Niyama* (Self-purification and study)

*Asana* (Posture)

*Pranayama* (Breath Control)

*Pratyahara* (Sense control)

*Dharana* (Concentration)

*Dhyana* (Meditation)

*Samadhi* (absorption into the universal)

**These eight practices are described below**

1. **Yama** – Yama includes five general discipline which is to control the body, mind and speech. Yama means restraint or control or abstention. Five moral practices under yama are –
  - a. **Ahimsa**- Ahimsa or non injury, implies non-killing. But non-injury is not only non-killing, it is much more than that. More comprehensively, ahimsa means, entire abstinence from causing any pain or harm whatsoever to any living creature, either by thought word or deed. Non-injury needs a harmless mind, mouth and hand. Ahimsa is not mere negative non injuring.
  - b. **Satya**- Satya is truthfulness. It is more than just telling the truth. One's actions should be in accordance with one's words and thoughts. God and man's true self are truth, and in order to tune in with that consciousness we need to live truthfully at all times. Further more lying creates many thoughts in the mind which go against the raja yoga objectives of calming the mind.
  - c. **Asteya** – Asteya is non-stealing. This one is pretty self explanatory. However, it is good to bear in mind that there are many subtle ways to appropriate what does not belong to us. As for the other yamas, much self-analysis will be necessary to catch the subtle lower tendencies of our mind.
  - d. **Brahmacharya** – Brahmacharya has two main meanings. In the broad sense it means control of the senses or Indriyas. More specifically it refers to celibacy or chastity. Like all traditional spiritual tradition yoga advocates restraining from indulging in sensual gratification. One of the many reasons in that practicing the higher limbs of ashtanga yoga – dharana, dhyana, Samadhi requires a tremendous amount of energy or prana. This energy is built up through the practices of yoga such as asanas, pranayama and japa but is dissipated during sensual enjoyment of all the sensual activities, sex is the one that will be the most depleting to the psychic and nervous system. Most people don't like to hear this but like the other yamas, everyone should practice brahmacharya to the best of their ability. It is a fact that the more people gratify their senses, the less energy they have their senses, the less energy they have and the less ability they have to meditate on the absolute.
  - e. **Aparigraha** – Aparigraha is non-covetousness. This involves being happy and content with what we need and not always coveting unnecessary and luxury items. Not that aparigraha includes the notion of not accepting gifts that would bind us to the giver.
2. **Niyama** : Niyama also includes five steps to achieve in self discipline. Niyama deals with five discipline steps to improve oneself. Five physical and mental rules of conduct under Niyama are –
  - a. **Saucha** – Saucha is purity. The deepest and most subtle aspect of saucha is purity of thoughts and feelings. But it also means cleanliness of the body, which for hatha yogis includes the internal cleansing practices known as kriyas. A yogi must also keep his surrounding (home, car, workplace etc) very tidy and clean. Purity is the essence of the Sattvo guna of paramount importance to mediate successfully.
  - b. **Santosha** – Santosha is contentment. This is the ability to recognize that although it is important to try to better our environment and life situation through proper effort, the world around us is never

going is to be perfect and absolutely to our liking. Therefore the raja yogi should be happy with what he has and endeavor to do the best he can with what he has got.

- c. **Tapas** – Tapas is austerity. The luxury and comfort of our modern society, with all its advantages, makes our mind soft and weak. To strengthen ourselves physically and mentally we must practice austerities. The highest tapas is meditation on God or the divine self. Daily practice of yogic disciplines is considered tapas. A very good practice is fasting.
  - d. **Swadhyaya** – Swadhyaya literally means study of the self. The main practice is the study of the yogic scriptures but it also includes Japa (Mantra repetition). Not any yoga or spiritual book qualifies as proper material for Swadhyaya. For a vedant in the best scriptures are the Upanishads, the Bhagavad – Gita and the Brahma Sutras. There are also many other scriptures such as the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata etc. Next come the books written by great mystics or masters such as Swami Sivananda, Swami Vishnu devananda or other saints from all traditions.
  - e. **Ishwarapranidhana** - Ishwarapranidhana is surrender to God's will and devotion. All ethical and moral precepts of yoga culminate here. The mortal mind can simply aspire to realize the Divine through dedication, purification, tranquility and concentration of the mind. This Divine contemplation spills over to all aspects of the yogi's life.
3. **Asana** – Patanjali described asanas as 'sthira sukham – asanam which means (third position which is comfortable and steady. Asanas are certain specific body positions or postures that assist in developing control of the body and mind. Asanas consist of various static and dynamic body movements to release tension, improve flexibility, increase energy flow and assist in gaining concentration. Asanas provide comfort, relaxation and awareness. Asanas keep our body healthy and free from disease and physical deformities. Yoga has like Padmasana, Vajrasana, Sukhasana, Halasana, Salvasana, Chakrasana, Sirsasana.

Asana is a state of being in which an individual remains steady, calm and comfortable. Asana is fair to be a position of complete equilibrium of body, mind and spirit. Asanas provide us number of benefits like keeping body healthy and provide longevity of life. It develops physical and mental powers to keep our self in control. It protects body from disease and postural deformities. Asanas help in overcoming gas trouble, blood pressure, headache like common disorders etc.

4. **Pranayama** – Pranayama controls the inhaling and exhaling of breath which assists in bringing body and mind purity. The word pranayama is composed by two words – Prana means vital energy (air breath) and yama means control. Pranayama is considered controlled breathing exercises aimed at gaining energy from the air for the internal organs. Pranayama utilizes breathing to influence the flow of prana in the nadis (energy Channels) of the body. Pranayama also includes a word ayama which means expansion. Therefore pranayama also stands for the expansion of the dimension of prana.

Pranayama teaches us the correct methods of inhalation and exhalation of air through proper respiratory functions. Pranayama having number of benefits, human body contains oxygen as one of the main components, pranayama helps in maintaining and purifying the components for healthy and oxygen enriched body. Puraka, Kumbhaka, Rechaka are the three main steps under pranayama.

Puraka (inhalation) – in taking of maximum air possible.

Kumbaka (Suppression) – after maximum possible inhalation, retaining of the breath.

Rechaka (Exhalation). Gradually exhaling the inhaled air.

5. **Pratyahara:** Pratyahara means abstraction or bringing back. Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the sense powers. Asana is a help in pranayama and pranayama is a help in Pratyahara. Pratyahara is keeping the senses in discipline. It is a process in putting the sense under restraint. Pratyahara does not let the mind be disturbed by worldly objects. Distraction of senses leads to distraction of powers, process of Pratyahara keeps senses under discipline and gains power or energy.  
Pratyahara is the limitation of the senses of the mind, withdrawing them from their respective objects.
6. **Dharana** – Dharana is the firm control of the senses and mind to develop the ability to hold the awareness of the mind / senses on one point, one object or one place without wavering. Concentration prevents the mind from wandering aimlessly in all directions. Concentration is said as one pointedness of mind. Dharana is to assist mind to concentrate on a particular point or object. Concentration is important in every walk of life, understand self and perform good. In the process of Dharana, an attempt is made to concentrate on an object which can be external like the idol of God or internal like part in between the eyes. Concentration leads to meditation. Dharana is the beginning stage of meditation.
7. **Dhyana** – Dhyana is the complete meditation on the object of concentration. In Dhyana one is able to realize the whole of the objection when he was concentrating. Dhyana is an increased focus of attention unbound by time and space. Dhyana is the process through which emotions disappear from the range and grip of mind. Dhyana puts a complete check on the thoughts and emotions of an individual.
8. **Samadhi** – Samadhi is the stage of super consciousness. It is the last stage of yoga. The process of concentration and then meditation prepares one to reach at the stage of Samadhi. All the above seven stages are the steps to gain this state. Samadhi is also said as the stage of complete self-realization. In the process the subject and object become one. The oneness (no differences between the concentrating object and the subject) is referred as the stage of samadhi. It is the stage of supreme happiness free from pain and sadness.

The first four limbs – Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama are considered external cleansing practices. Pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are considered internal cleansing practices.

### **The benefits of yoga**

Patanjali's Ashtanga yoga helps to improve our life from various aspects. These are as follows-

- **Physical aspect –**

The important benefit of yoga is physical well being. The aging process, which is largely an artificial condition, caused mainly by auto-intoxication or self poisoning, can be slowed down by practicing yoga. By keeping the body clean, flexible and well lubricated we can significantly reduce the catabolic process of cell deterioration. To get the maximum benefits of yoga one has to combine the practices of yogasanas, pranayama and meditation. Regular practice of asanas, pranayama and meditation can help such diverse

ailments such as diabetes, blood pressure, digestive disorders, arthritis, varicose veins and heart conditions. Laboratory tests have proved the yogi's increased abilities of consciously controlling autonomic or involuntary functions, such as temperature, heartbeat and blood pressure.

Research into the effect of yogic practices on HIV is currently under way with promising results.

According to medical scientists, yoga therapy is successful because of the balance created in the nervous and endocrine systems which directly influences all the other systems and organs of the body. Yoga acts both as a curative and preventive therapy. The very essence of yoga lies in attaining mental peace, improved concentration powers, a relaxed state of living and harmony in relationships.

- **Mental aspect :** Many people who practice yoga speak of freeing the mind from mental disturbances 'calming the spirit' or 'steadying the mind : Reduction of nervousness, irritability and confusion, depression and mental fatigue and some of the benefits experienced. Yoga is said to result in the reduction of a variety of mental ills. These may range all the way from vague feelings of frustration, persecution, insecurity, on the one hand, to acute and specific types of insanity, on the other.

Yoga helps us to be relaxed and handle stressful situations more easily. It teaches us how to quiet the mind so we can focus our energy where we want to go into a difficult yoga pose. It always encourages positive thoughts and self-acceptance.

**Social aspect :** Yoga impresses upon discarding violence and corruption which are the polluters of social life. Violence is intentional persecution whereas Ahimsa is its avoidance. Ahimsa is not the repudiation of 'otherness' but it is the sacrifice of that persecution which can be held valid in the presence of the other. Likewise truth being avoidance of deceit through glib words is execution of altruism through valid and secret words. Asteya in the form of avoidance of others' possession and Aparigraha in the form of non-amassing of the riches creates a social balance from an economic point of view. Out of these, the former indicates about the wrongs of consumption without producing anything and the latter declares the hoarding, exploitation and artificiality created scarcity to create imbalance in the social life is improper. Thus these principles educate us to 'produce more and accumulate less' or 'Maximum production and minimum profit'. Maitri, Karuna, Mriduta and Upeksha which have been accepted in Patanjali's yoga, can be implemented only in the social context and these feelings gradually soften the behavior towards commonly hard, hit people, progressive individuals and the enemies.

- **Spiritual aspect –** Yoga builds awareness of our body, feelings, the world around us, the needs of others. It promotes an interdependence between mind, body and spirit. Apart from physical and psychological benefits of yoga the major impact of yoga on the spiritual energy, self-consciousness and mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to focusing our attention on what we are experiencing in the present moment without judging ourselves. The scientist has found that by regular practicing of Dhyana many parts of the brain got activated and release the neurotransmitters and enzymes which increase mindfulness and mind awareness.

## Conclusion

Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga can help to equip oneself with basic knowledge about one's personality, to learn to handle oneself well in all life situations, to learn to handle oneself well in all life situations, to learn techniques of

gaining good health, to develop a discriminative mind capable of knowing the real from the unreal and to face the dualities of life with equanimity. So, adequate knowledge regarding Ashtanga Yoga is necessary for us.

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