

Yoga as a therapy-3: PRINCIPLES OF YOGA CHIKITSA

When we set out to practice Yoga Chikitsa (yoga as therapy) it is vital that we are conversant with important principles of this unique system of healthy living. One of the outcomes of Yoga practice is attainment of health. This implies as healthy a state that may be attained in spite of our Sabija Karma that manifests in this lifetime as our genetic predispositions and the environment we are born into. Yoga also helps maintain and sustain this dynamic state of health after it has been attained though self effort. We must not however forget that it is often actually more challenging to maintain this state than to attain it in the first place. Ask any World No.1 Sports Champion and they will testify to this inherent truth that applies to sports as well as to life itself.

1. BECOME AWARE OF YOUR BODY, EMOTIONS AND MIND:

Without awareness there cannot be health or healing. Awareness of body implies conscious body work that needs to be synchronized with breath to qualify as a psychosomatic technique of health and healing. Psychosomatic disorders that are the bane of the modern world cannot be tackled without awareness.

2. IMPROVE YOUR DIETARY HABITS:

Most disorders are directly or indirectly linked to improper dietary patterns that need to be addressed in order to find a permanent solution to the health challenge. One of the most important lifestyle changes that needs be implemented in management of any lifestyle disorder is diet.

3. RELAX YOUR WHOLE BODY:

Relaxation is most often all that most patients need in order to improve their physical condition. Stress is the major culprit and may be the causative, aggravating, or precipitating factor in so many psychosomatic disorders. Doctors are often found telling their patients to relax, but never tell them how to do it! The relaxation part of every Yoga session is most important for it is during it that benefits of practices done in the session seep into each and every cell producing rest, rejuvenation, reinvigoration and reintegration.

4. SLOW DOWN YOUR BREATH MAKING IT QUIET AND DEEP:

Rapid, uncontrolled, irregular breathing is a sign of ill health whereas slow, deep and regular controlled breathing is a sign of health. Breath is the link between body and mind and is the agent of physical, physiological and mental unification. When the breath is slowed down the metabolic processes also are slowed and anabolic activities begin the process of healing and rebuilding. If breath is calm, mind is calm and life is long!

5. CALM DOWN YOUR MIND AND FOCUS IT INWARDLY:

The mind is as disturbed as a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion say our scriptures. To bring that wayward agitated mind under control, and take it on a journey into our inner being is fundamental in finding a way out of the 'disease maze' in which we are entangled like a fly in the spider's web. Breath work is the base on which this mind training can occur and hence much importance needs to be given to Pranayama and Pratyahara in Yoga Chikitsa. It is only after this that concentration practices leading to meditation can have any use. Just sitting and thinking about something is not meditation!

6. IMPROVE THE FLOW OF HEALING 'PRANIC LIFE ENERGY':

Improve the flow of Healing 'Pranic Life Energy' to all parts of your body, especially to those diseased parts, thus relaxing, regenerating and reinvigorating yourself. Prana is life and without it there cannot be healing. The various Prana Vayus that are energies driving different physiological functions of the body need to be understood and applied as per needs of the patient. In patients of digestive disorders, focus must be on the Samana Vayu whereas in pelvic conditions it needs to be on Apana Vayu.

7. FORTIFY YOURSELF AGAINST OMNIPRESENT STRESSORS:

Decrease your stress level by fortifying yourself against the various omnipresent stressors in your life: when face to face with the innumerable thorns in a forest, you may either choose to spend all your time picking them up one by one while others continue falling or choose to wear a pair of shoes and walk through the forest. The difference is in attitude. Choosing the right attitude can change everything and bring about a resolution of the problem by healing the core. Stress is more about how you react to the stressor than about the stressor itself!

8. INCREASE YOUR SELF RELIANCE AND SELF CONFIDENCE:

Life is full of challenges that are there only to make us stronger and better. The challenges should be understood as opportunities for change and faced with confidence. We must understand we have the inner power to overcome each and every challenge that is thrown at us by life. The Divine is not a sadist to give us challenges that are beyond our capacity!

9. FACILITATE NATURAL EMANATION OF WASTES:

Facilitate the natural emanation of waste from your body by the practice of Yoga Shuddi Kriyas such as Dhauti, Basti and Neti. Accumulation and stagnation of waste materials either in inner or outer environment always causes problems. Yogic cleaning practices held to wash out the impurities (Mala Shodhana) helping the process of regeneration and facilitating healing.

10. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN HEALTH:

Remember that ultimately it is “YOU” who are responsible for your own health and well being and must take the initiative to develop positive health to tide you over challenging times of ill health. Yoga fixes responsibility for our health squarely upon our own shoulders. If we do healthy things we are healthy and if we do unhealthy things we become sick. No use complaining that we are not well when we have been the cause of our problem. As Swamiji Gitananda Giri would say, “You don’t have problems-you are the problem!”

11. HEALTH AND HAPPINESS ARE YOUR BIRTHRIGHT:

Health and happiness are your birthright, claim them and develop them to your maximum potential. This message of Swamiji is a firm reminder that the goal of human existence is not health and happiness but is Moksha (liberation). Most people today are so busy trying to find health and happiness that they forget why they are here in the first place. Yoga helps us regain our birthrights and attain the goal of human life.

When we remember to inculcate these principles of Yoga Chikitsa in our practice and help our patients to understand them thus assimilating them in their own lives, we are practicing Yoga Chikitsa. If not it is again merely -Yogopathy!