

Yoga as a therapy-5: MODALITIES OF YOGA AS A THERAPY

There are numerous therapeutic modalities used in the application of Yoga as a therapy. Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri has enumerated 52 aspects of Yoga Chikitsa in an encyclopedic manner. His exposition of Yoga Chikitsa is unparalleled yet this is a small attempt of mine to put some of these ancient ideas into a modern context for us all to work together towards and harmonious and healthy world.

Given below are some of the commonly used modalities with a brief description of each for the benefit of the reader.

PHYSICAL THERAPIES: Asanas (static postures), Kriyas (systematic and rationale movements), Mudras (seals of neuromuscular energy) and Bandhas (locks for neuromuscular energy) gently stretch and strengthen the musculoskeletal system in a healthy manner. They improve mobility and flexibility of the different joints and groups of muscles. There is also concomitant improvement in the systemic function such as respiration, circulation, digestion and elimination. A general sense of health and well being is also promoted by these aspects of Yoga that help release feel good hormones like endorphins and encephalins.

EMOTIONAL THERAPIES: Swadhyaya (introspectional self analysis), Pranayama (techniques of vital energy control), Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal), Dharana (intense concentration), Dhyana (meditation oneness) and Bhajana (devotional music) stabilize emotional turmoil and relieve stress and mental fatigue. They bring about an excellent sense of emotional balance that is vital for good health. Group work such as this is important to achieve proper emotional balance that is essential to good health.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROPER PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDES: Yoga encourages us to step back and take an objective view of our habitual patterns of behaviour and thoughts. This enables us to cope better with situations that normally put our bodies and minds under strain. Patanjali emphasized the need to develop following qualities in order to become mentally balanced humane beings: Vairagya (detached, dispassionate attitude), Chitta Prasadann (acceptance of the Divine Will), Maitri (friendliness towards those who are at peace with themselves), Karuna (compassion for the suffering), Mudita (cheerfulness towards the virtuous) and Upekshanam (indifference and avoidance of the evil) etc. Adoption of the right attitude is one of the most important aspects of Yoga as a therapy and if this is not done it is again more or less Yogopathy and not Yoga Chikitsa.

MENTAL THERAPIES: There are a great many Jnana and Raja Yoga techniques of relaxation and visualization that are useful. Other practices such as Trataka (concentrated gaze), Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana as well as Dhyana may also be utilized. Relaxation is a central element in Yoga as it is the body's own way of recharging its cells and helps to ease physical, emotional and mental tensions.

SPIRITUAL THERAPIES: Swadhyaya, Satsangha (spiritual gathering seeking knowledge of the reality), Bhajana sessions and Yogic counseling are important aspects of Yogic therapy that are often neglected in favour of physical therapies alone. Helping patients understand their inner spiritual nature and realize that "Oneness" is health whereas "Duality" is disease, is most important. We cannot remain lonely, depressed and

diseased if we realize that we are part of this wonderful, happy and healthy Universe (Multiverse).

PREVENTIVE AND REHABILITATIVE THERAPIES: Yoga has numerous preventive benefits especially when it is started early in childhood. It helps in prevention of accidents by increasing awareness as well as agility. Improved immunity helps in preventing infectious and contagious diseases. The added benefit of starting early is that the person knows the technique so that they can do it if needed at a later stage in life. Psychosomatic, stress related and lifestyle disorders may be effectively prevented by adoption of a Yogic way of life. Yoga also offers rehabilitative therapies for most musculoskeletal conditions as well as in recovery for debilitating illnesses. The practice of Yoga also goes a long way towards prevention of disability and improving quality of life in numerous chronic conditions.

PAIN RELIEF THERAPIES: Yoga is a useful addition to the pain relief therapies as it improves pain tolerance and provides an improved quality of life. It can be safely said that Yoga helps us endure conditions that it may not be able to cure. This is vital in end life situations where it is important that the patient has a sense of improved quality of life during their end days. Yoga can also benefit caretakers of such terminal patients who are under great stress themselves.

The right-use-ness of these modalities according to condition and needs of patients will enable us to strike at the root cause of the disease and by correcting its origin. If this is done properly, the manifestation of the disease corrects itself and health and harmony can manifest once again.