

Yoga as a therapy-6: USING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, the founder of Ananda Ashram at ICYER, Pondicherry and one of the foremost authorities on Yoga in the past century, has explained the concept of Yoga Chikitsa in the following manner.

“Yoga Chikitsa is virtually as old as Yoga itself, indeed, the ‘return of mind that feels separated from the Universe in which it exists’ represents the first Yoga therapy. Yoga Chikitsa could be termed “man’s first attempt at unitive understanding of mind-emotions-physical distress and is the oldest wholistic concept and therapy in the world.”

To achieve this integration at all levels it is essential that we take into consideration a healthy life nourishing diet, a healthy and natural environment, a wholistic lifestyle, adequate bodywork through Asanas, Mudras and Kriyas, invigorating breath work through the use of Pranayama and the production of a healthy thought process through the higher practices of Jnana and Raja Yoga.

The application of Yoga as a therapy can be correlated with the Pancha Koshas (the five aspects of our existence) and various Yoga practices may be used as therapeutic interventions at different levels in this respect.

At the Annamaya Kosha (anatomical level) Jattis (simple units of movements), Mudras (gestures for energy generation and conservation), Kriyas (structured movements), Asanas (steady and comfortable postures) along with the dietary modifications are useful.

At the Pranamaya Kosha (physiological level) Shat Karmas (cleansing actions), various Pranayamas, development of breath awareness and working on breath-movement coordination with emphasis on balancing Pranic energy is to be done.

At the Manomaya Kosha (psychological level) there are numerous practices such as Trataka (concentrated gaze), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), Japa and Japa-Ajapa practices that are useful. Various aspects of concentration such as the Mandala Dharana and other Yoga Drishti techniques are also available in the Gitananda tradition for this purpose.

When trying to deal with the Vijnanamaya Kosha (intellectual level), Swadhyaya (self analysis), Satsangha (lectures and spiritually uplifting exchange) along with the

wonderful Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga relaxation and concentration practices of Yoga are useful. We must remember that according to Swamiji, we thankfully cannot disturb the Vijnanamaya and Anandamaya Koshas! However what can happen is that we get the other three bodies out of sync with the higher two and so suffer consequences of such ignorant actions.

To understand and work with the Anandamaya Kosha (universal level) it is important to loose sense of the limited individuality. Learning to implement principles of Karma Yoga (Yoga as skilled action performed without expectation) and following the principle of action in relaxation help us to achieve a sense of joy in all activities. A realization that we live in a blissful universe and that all life is joy is to be brought about in this intervention through use of Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and other aspects like Bhajana, Yogic counseling and Satsangha.

We live in a happy and healthy universe and there is no reason we cannot or shouldn't be happy and healthy!