

“IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND YOGA IN THIS PANDEMIC OF COVID-19”

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Abstract - In the middle of the month November in the year 2019, world came to know about the novel CORONA Virus. WHO in March 11, 2020 declared the disease coming out of coronavirus i.e. COVID-19 as a global pandemic. What started in the Wuhan City of China in mid-November 2019 has now spread around the world. It is very difficult to know the exact statistics about those infected by the Coronavirus because of the lack of testing in many countries, but what we can say is that the numbers are increasing very rapidly. Fears seem to come in bundles.

But meanwhile, the society is in need of some spiritual and yoga practices to lessen the impact of fear and uncertainty which is being created by this event. Although these practices may not really minimize the very real dangers of this global health emergency, but surely they can help the society to deal with the associated stress, accept what we cannot change, and build up our resilience. This research paper focuses on the aspects of Spirituality and Yoga practices that can enable us to symbolically address this issue or a problem in our lives.

Key Words: (Size 10 & Bold) Spirituality, Yoga, Coronavirus, Covid, Fear etc

1. INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the month November in the year 2019, world came to know about the novel CORONA Virus. WHO in March 11, 2020 declared the disease coming out of coronavirus i.e. COVID-19 as a global pandemic. What started in the Wuhan City of China in mid-November 2019 has now spread around the world. It is very difficult to know the exact statistics about those infected by the Coronavirus because of the lack of testing in many countries, but what we can say is that the numbers are increasing very rapidly. If we see the analysis of the figures worldwide, we can say that those most likely to die from this disease are older people and those with underlying health conditions and weak immune systems. COVID-19 is a "novel" or new virus, and scientists, health worker and our governments don't know much about its present and what to about what to expect from it in the near future. Everyone of us know that it spreads quickly and that it will be difficult to get everybody who might be infected tested and also the fact is that a vaccine is 12 to 18 months away. No drugs are currently available to slow down the virus. We will come to know more about the unknown qualities of this virus and pandemic only after days and months go on.

Fears seem to come in bundles. A fear about catching the coronavirus may be accompanied by other fears — of death, losing a loved one, isolation, financial problems, and more.

But meanwhile, the society is in need of some spiritual and yoga practices to lessen the impact of fear and uncertainty which is being created by this event. Although these practices may not really minimize the very real dangers of this global health emergency, but surely they can help the society to deal with the associated stress, accept what we cannot change, and build up our resilience. This research paper focuses on the aspects of Spirituality and Yoga practices that can enable us to symbolically address this issue or a problem in our lives.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Spirituality is recognized as a factor that contributes to health in many persons. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. (AAMC, 1999)

The psychophysiological benefits of yoga have contributed to the rationale for its clinical use as a therapeutic intervention (Khalsa, 2004). According to Bussing et al. (2012), the majority of research on yoga focuses on its psychophysiological and therapeutic benefits, while the spiritual aspects are rarely addressed (Bussing, Hedtstuck, Khalsa, Ostermann, & Heusser, 2012).

Because yoga is a mindfulness practice, the movement sequences or quiet time spent focusing on the breath may bring up unsettled feelings related to physical, emotional, or spiritual domains. For some, this kind of self-exploration may only be acceptable within a religious context. A literature search using "yoga research" and "spirituality" yielded few references (Bussing et al., 2012; Macdonald & Friedman, 2009; Quilty et al., 2013). While Quilty et al. (2013) cover the concept of spirituality, the majority of their respondents were white, female, and college educated (Quilty et al., 2013),

which has been documented as the norm for most yoga users in the U.S. (Birdee et al., 2008). While the reasons are not clearly documented, yoga may be less accessible and/or less acceptable to those from minority backgrounds (Middleton et al., 2013).

3. DISCUSSION:

Following are some of the ways suggested to cope up with the stress related to COVID-19:

- **Thought Power: Time to Spread positive thoughts**

The first thing you need to know is that this is a pandemic, but also this is a situation that touches the whole world, and it changes the vibration of the whole world. The whole world is in a panic, in the worrying and questioning mode. It is very important that yogic teaching is known at this time so people will turn from negative thoughts to positive thoughts and know the cumulative action of thoughts. The thinking together as a collective consciousness, the positive thinking, affects the whole world. Now more than ever we need to be aware of that. We need to be aware that our positive thinking or positive talk affects the world and the way we can help the world to heal and to uplift their consciousness is to more consciously practice our sadhana or yoga. It is so important that you see everything collapsing, changing and the whole world is in lockdown. What that means is people will stay at home and they have a lot of time, things stop, what are all of these people going to do? This is a moment of transition, a moment of choice, either we are going to be depressed and you will go down with everybody or we are going to rise up.

- **Raise vibrations with mantras**

It is very important that you raise your thought vibration by continuing to do your practice. Even though you might think that you are alone in your house doing your practice, you need to do it for the sake of the world. When you do your practice, yoga and meditation, it is not only improving your life but also improving the vibration of the whole world. So the easiest way to increase your vibration and help the world is repeating Mantras. There are a few Mantras that you can do, now more than ever, and gather people together to repeat the Mantras because of the collective effect. It's like adding the energy together and you know that, when you add energy, you don't just add energy to your country but you add energy to the whole world. We need to create this positive vibration to balance out all the negative vibration. It is a question of knowledge, not just of blind faith. That means that you know that vibration or thought or Mantra thoughts have effect. You need to repeat a few Mantras and teach people to repeat Mantras as well.

- **Connection between Prana, Thought and Immunity:**

The more that you do things to increase prana, the more that you are strong and your immune system will be strong to prevent disease. Prana is that which you can find in nature. The best thing to prevent the world from being sick is to increase immunity, which is the fighting mechanism that nature has given us in order for us to prevent diseases. The prana needs to be high, so you need to increase the prana by absorbing the prana from nature by having a proper lifestyle, eating the right food and also by not spending the prana through negative thinking, worries and actions that are mindless.

- **Physical Relaxation:**

The next point is you need to help people to increase relaxation because this is a time of stress. Know that there are three levels of relaxation. The first level is physical relaxation, because when your mind is tense, your body will be tense. By asana and simple stretch, you let the prana move, you are more relaxed. Savasana or tensing and releasing with attention are a very good exercise. Maybe your family members or your neighbors are not ready to practice yoga; maybe they still have some kind of prejudice against yoga. It doesn't matter if you just tell them to lie down and to do some stretch, tense and release, and use their mind to relax their body. It's called Savasana or physical relaxation, releasing the tension from the body by stretching.

- **Mental Relaxation:**

The second level of relaxation is mental. What that means you need to understand clearly. When the mind is distracted, it is not calm. When the mind is distracted, the mind has a tendency to worry. It needs to be concentrated. The best thing is that people concentrate on repeating Mantras, singing kirtan, reading books, and studying, but they need to keep their mind focused on something positive. That is called mental relaxation, when they focus on something positive. It is wrong to think that mental relaxation means your mind is empty. It is wrong because when the mind is empty, it is time to worry. Even though you might not be aware, but thoughts of worry and all kinds of imagination can come into the mind when it is idle. Make sure that people understand that.

- **Spiritual Relaxation:**

The third level of relaxation is called spiritual relaxation. Spiritual relaxation is when you know who you are. Most of us are in the dark. This is not only virus crisis, is not only a mental-emotional crisis in the world, but also it is a spiritual crisis because we go on and denying the spirit. We got lost in the consumer world and technological world, and we can go on living our life very rajasic or very externally oriented. We don't take time to sit down, to think, to study, to introspect, to make wise choices, because we're being pushed here and there by the senses, by the pressure of advertising, by consumer society. Now is the time also to spiritually rethink. Spiritual relaxation comes when you have more knowledge of the truth, of this life, when you have more knowledge of yourself, (called self-knowledge). That comes only when you are able to meditate or you have faith. We can talk about faith another time. Try to get people to relax, physically relax, mentally relax and spiritually relax. The more they are calm and positive, they are spiritually relaxed.

- **Yoga for overcoming anxiety:**

How do you teach yoga for overcoming anxiety? The first point is that you need to help people to improve the breath, body and mind awareness. Improve breath, body and mind awareness with rhythmical breathing. Just breathe with the diaphragm to get more oxygen, but also use rhythmical breathing, and then it will help. When you do asana, make sure that people coordinate their breath with their movement and do pranayama. People are afraid sometime to breathe because they are afraid of bringing in the virus. It's a kind of wrong thinking because it creates more tension. Unless you are already a yogi that you can hold your breath and survive but you are not an advanced yogi so you need to breathe. Now the best thing is to find nature to practice breathing. You might not be able to go out in the street but you can open your window. You need to ventilate your room and your house. Don't just close the windows. You need to sit near to the window and you need to breathe. Do pranayama. In general for yoga teachers, you need to know that now is not the time to do intense variations, intense yoga asanas. It's the time to do gentle yoga to slow down so that you allow more mindfulness, more awareness in your breathing and in your movement. It will counteract the fear and anxiety. You need to do restorative yoga. If you don't know what is restorative yoga then you can learn. Basically it is be in very relaxing postures and put some kind of props like blankets and pillows on different parts of your body, on your chest primarily, but also on different parts of your body. It feels like weighed down and comforted. The focus is on mindfulness, awareness, slowing down and be comforted.

- **Asanas for stress resilience:**

The second point is to increase the prana, which I said already, by moving the body in order for the prana to move. If you feel that you are stuck and if you feel that you are panicking, then the prana is blocked. At that time your thought goes down more. You need to just keep moving, but in the yoga postures in order to move the prana and to balance the flow of prana. It is very important at this time because it will help you for your stress resilience. People will increase in their capacity to deal with stress if the prana is balanced. Simple moving of the body, stretching but moving the body in the way of yoga, right and left, backward and forward, in a balanced manner with awareness. At that time the mind will be balanced and you increase your stress resilience.

- **The best person who can support you is your Own Self:**

You need to experience the connection with your own self and to others so the sense of connection is very important for mental health. People talk about social distancing; everyone needs to stay away from each other, not moving. But then people don't know what to do. So they stay home and they are depressed. They miss their friends. They miss their social activities, so they are depressed, angry and worried. This will make things worse. You might help in not spreading the virus, but you are increasing the spreading of the negative virus of the mind. When people are worrying and they send the negative thoughts out to the atmosphere. You need to be aware of that. You need to help people feel the connection to their own Self. These yoga techniques of asana, pranayama and meditation are helping at this time for people to feel the connection with their own Self. We are having the bad habit to always think of something external or somebody external to ourselves is supporting ourselves. And these relationships are very essential for our well being. Fine and good. You have your supportive network, your friends and people that you trust and love. This is very good. I don't say anything against this. But what we can say is that you need to have your own support system in your own Self. And you need to turn your mind inward in order for you to find that support system within your own Self. And that would help you because even if you have your loved ones, they cannot be there with you 24 hours 7 days a week. They cannot be there for you all the time. And then you feel let down, worried and anxious when they are not there. So the best person who can support you is yourself. Turn inward, feel the strength from within.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the above discussion, we can conclude that it is the Spirituality and the Yoga which can take us out of this pandemic. Spirituality is nothing but the connection of oneself with him and the almighty God. Each & every one of us needs to create a positive environment by meditation, connecting with self & sending out the positive thoughts to the World. Basically, the COVID-19 is a breathe related disease which can be easily tolerated or avoided or can be overcome by making your lungs stronger through the Yoga & Pranayams and by increasing your immune system through the spiritual way.

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