

Health, Illness, Yoga

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Opinion

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Introduction

T. Krishnamacharya's teachings on yoga have spread throughout the world through four of his students: BKS IYENGAR, PATTABHI JOY, TKV, DESIKACHAR, T. SHRIBASHYAM, and the latest two being his sons. I had the privilege to meet TKV Desikachar in 1965 in Gstaad, Switzerland when he was the guest of Jiddu Krishnamurti to whom he was then giving âsana-s and prânâyâma s courses. When I started taking classes with him in 1966, in Chennai, I was surprised and fulfilled when I understood it was 121 courses. Furthermore, during the rather lengthy span of years I returned to study with him, from 1966 to the end of the eighties, I could appreciate the evolution, adaptation and deepening of their teachings, his' and his father's. The first years, the stress was put on learning âsana-s and prânâyâma-s as adaptable tools for health and well-being, together with the in depth study of Patanjali's masterly yoga reference book : yoga sugar. In the course of time, I understood how to apply the numerous means which yoga offers: âsana-s, prânâyâma-s, bandha-s, mudra-s, dharana-s, dhyana, etc. not only as ways to realize the inner self, Consciousness, but also how to help people with physical disabilities or mental illnesses. Moreover it unable me to show a holistic, a deep, a joyous approach to living, helping them to free themselves from fear, addictions, stress and the like.

Prophylaxis

Science has developed a sophisticated, complex and combative approach to diseases. It is invaluable in case of aggression from external causes: microbes, bacteria, etc. However it does not help to strengthen the inner stamina and is often poisonous through the use of strong chemicals. Ancient therapeutic approaches in India, China and Greece focused on preventing the imbalances

responsible for health disorders. Today, yoga offers a range of practices and behaviors that can protect us from stress, pollution, rapid changes in the societies in which we live, and the prejudices and misconceptions we have gleaned from our life trajectory.

The Psyche and its Balance

At the top of the ladder of prophylactic concepts listed by yoga are psychic factors. Indeed, fear, aversion and hatred, desire and attachment, the feeling of being exclusively the historical personality to which everyone is identified, the lack of intelligence with regards to the fact of being alive, are among the causes of stress and exhaustion that lead to almost all diseases, acute or chronic. The recommended attitudes and behaviors are: awareness, the feelings of benevolence and openness towards all creatures, respect of oneself with regards to the physical body and the personality, a personal hygiene, emotional and mental. These are aspects often taken up in religions here or elsewhere; what is singular here is that yoga does not propose these attitudes as obligations towards a sovereign power but as the practice required, at first, to find the physical and psychic equilibrium when lost, or to preserve it and, in a second time, to discover our true nature.

The Energy of Life

Indeed, the yogic theory poses the existence of a vital energy: prâna, which bathes us continually, which nourishes us by the inspired air which conveys it, by the ingested foods which contain it if they are fresh and natural, and above all, by a capital inherited from the ancestors that determines the theoretical longevity: ayuh (Sanskrit), which, of course, may be shortened by accidents or incurable diseases.

Energy Networks

This energy circulates in each cell of the living body through immaterial networks, nâdi, which are classified in various categories, in various body areas, identified by names that designate the global functions they contain. Thus, everyone has heard about the wheels: chakra or lotus: padma, which spread throughout the spine, from its base to its summit, traversed by polarized currents of energy, solar: sùrya, lunar: Chandra, which intertwining, draws a caduceus like form. In this perspective, yoga works by increasing or decreasing body heat using appropriate breathing techniques to restore a compromised metabolic balance and reestablishing the proper flow of prânic energy. Solar energy is mostly active in the combustion processes that take place in the belly, while the lunar energy is concentrated in the head, as a factor of serenity. One of the approaches used are inversions: vîparita karani, which, by reversing the position of the moon and the sun, preserves the peace of mind while stimulating the fire of digestion.

Zones and Functions

Other localization of essential functions is described in the teaching of yoga. Thus, synonymous with the vital energy, the zone of prâna, located at the top of the thorax and around the sensory organs of the face and the head, works by ingesting: air, food, sensations, feelings, ideas; the zone of apâna, constituting a polarity with the first zone and situated at the base of the trunk, works by expelling: the air, the feces, the urine, the sperm, the foetus arrived at term or before term; the samâna area, located between the diaphragm and the navel, works by digesting the air, food, sensations, feelings, and ideas and distributing them up and down the body; the vyâna zone, located in each living cell, thus in the whole body, functions by diffusing energy and creating the cohesion of cells between them; finally, the zone of udâna, situated between the sternal hollow and the summit of the skull, governs speech and above all, leads to the faculty of transcending the trials and difficulties of existence.

Rebalancing Functions: The Role of Awareness

The circulation of prâna in these areas can be hindered, for example by the stress and the nervous, muscular and visceral tension that it generates; in this case, the theory of yoga teaches that this circulation is reestablished thanks to the attention paid to this zone. Yoga exercises develop our ability to become aware of different areas of the body through the alliance of breath and postures: âsana. Similarly, the prejudices and misconceptions accumulated during our education and unintegrated life experiences have led to ideologies and negative behaviors responsible for suffering and, in the longer term, chronic diseases. The breathing exercises specific to yoga: prânâyâma, develop a very fine quality of attention which allows, in this immobile sitting of the body, to detect every thought, as furtive as it is, each unconscious mental image: pratyaya, and because of this, uproot ways of seeing and being wrong.

The ultimate cure

The Hindus, the Buddhists, the Jains, and with them the yogis, have recognized, in this embodied life, a definitive and incurable evil; they sought to get out of it definitively, without the risk of returning because of possible reincarnations. The yogis from the shivaïst tantric sects have felt the joy and power of being fully alive when free from any identification. Therefore, the proposition of yoga is to become aware of the fact that we are not this limited, sexed, born and going to die person, but an immutable and timeless consciousness: the "Seeing", drasht. The diseases of the "body-mind" structure: suffering, depression, malaise, disease, aging, are inevitable, even if we can reduce their destructive impact; the ultimate cure and the supreme remedy is to discover the true subject, which has no moment of time can be an object, which contemplates without aversion nor desire, nor judgment, the infinite game of the interactions of objects between them.

