

CONCEPT OF PHYSICAL HYGIENE IN CLASSICAL YOGA



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ABSTRACT

Preservation of good health is important. For this we must follow certain rules. We must observe the laws of health and certain golden rules for life. The most important rule of life is obviously “Hygiene”. Health and hygiene are inseparably connected. There can’t be good health if we live in unhygienic condition and keep our body unhygienic. As per the world healthorganisation (WHO) hygiene means: “Hygiene refers to conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases”. We must have a clear idea of what diseases are and how it is caused. We can very well avert diseases if we understand the biological laws which govern life, the rules of health and hygiene and the importance of cleanliness. Absolute purity of air we breathe, water we drink and the food we eat must be ensured with a view to maintain a satisfactory standard of public health. Epidemics of cholera and typhoid fever, dysentery, guinea worm, stone in the urinary track etc. are caused by impure supply of water. We all know that unwholesome food is injurious to health. It causes irritation and inflammation of the gastro-intestinal tract and as a consequence, indigestion, diarrhoea, dysentery result. The main objective of this paper would be to propagate the awareness of hygiene to maintain health, prevent the spread of diseases and to give a proper knowledge as per our old classical yogic texts which teach us to live in hygienic condition by adopting the yogic way of living with sustainable equity.

Key Points: *japa, Brahmacharya, sattvic, yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dhyana, yoga nidrā, śaṭkarmas, neti, dhauti, basti, nauli, trataka, kapalbhati, mudra, shavasana, jala neti, shankhprakhshalana*

Yoga has a substantial contribution and a scientific as well as potent part to play in the field of physical hygiene¹. We must have knowledge of the rules of hygiene. If the rules we follow, then only we can maintain a high standard of health. The laws of hygiene are the laws of health or the laws of natural living. Hygiene teaches 'live in open air, inhale fresh air, drink pure uncontaminated water, take wholesome food, live in a healthy place, in healthy surroundings and in healthy house, keep your cloths clean, protect your food from flies and take plenty of water with regular exercise. He who observes the rules of health and hygiene, who is moderate in eating, drinking and other things, who is regular in prayer, *japa*, meditation, etc., who is free from jealousy, pride and hatred, who observes *Brahmacharya* is free from diseases. He is healthy and attains longevity².

Following certain rules, we can naturally have good health. With regular exercise the muscles, ligaments and tendons of each and every organ can be activated. Flexibility will be developed and there is a good flow of the oxygenated blood and vital energy to each cell of the body. Each and every organ in the different systems will function effectively. It is necessary to promote the repair and formation of tissues and excite the demand for oxygen needed for utilisation of food. Sri Henry Thompson, M.D., F.R.C.S., in 'Diet in Relation to Age and Activity,' says, doctors are looking to prevention rather than cure as the great agency in raising the physical condition of the nation³. The medical training of the present day is directed for the prevention of disease. It is being realized that every means should be resorted to prevent the association of disease rather than merely attempt to cure it when it comes.

Vegetarians have done a great deal with the health and wellness. Seven researches in physiological hygiene under world famous physiologist Dr. Ancel Keys hope to find whether habits of physical activity or diet can prevent or delay degenerative diseases⁴. The well-being of man depends on perfect nutrition. A well-balanced and healthy diet only can produce perfect nutrition and can maintain physical efficiency and health. Intake of *sattvic* food develops a balanced personality. The *sattvic* foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are savory and agreeable, induces serenity and helps the aspirant to enter into deep meditation, mental poise and nervous equilibrium⁵. It supplies the maximum energy to the body and the mind.

¹See, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Dynamics of Yoga*, p.10

²See, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, *Health and Happiness*, p.32

³See, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, *Health and Diet*, p.33

⁴See, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, *Health and Hygiene*, p.22

⁵See, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p.441

One remains pure and calm. A correct diet is a fundamental factor in the maintenance of perfect health and a high standard of vitality. It provides essence to the body for growth, maintenance, repair and efficient functioning of its various organs and structures. As a result, the whole human machine works harmoniously at its highest level. Health, strength, stature, weight, capacity for endurance and hard work, physical and mental efficiency, output of work, power of resistance against disease, etc., depend upon food. Therefore, diet should be bland, substantial and easy to digest. Apart from this, regular exercise is very essential for keeping of good health, vigour and vitality. Relaxation is also necessary at intervals which provides a complete rest to the whole system. Apart from this mental hygiene is another aspect of our existence.

There is an intimate connection between the mind and the body. If we have any problem in our mind, the entire body gets affected. According to Yoga Vasistha the cause of all diseases is the mind. If the mind is pure and strong, if the will is strong and irresistible, if the mind is free from cravings and desires, one can enjoy a high standard of mental health. *sattvic* food, *pranayama*, regular *dhyāna* and *yoga nidra* pave a long way for the attainment of a good mental health. Patanjali also prescribes four fundamentals of physical hygiene as *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, and *pranayama*. Hatha yoga prescribes six purification techniques of *śaṭkarmas* which includes *neti* (nasal cleaning), *dhauti* (internal cleansing), *basti* (yogic enema), *nauli* (abdominal massaging), *trataka* (concentration gazing) and *kapalbhati* (purification of the frontal brain). All these are the important techniques of physical hygiene. The vital capacity of the practitioner enhances. The bodily functions become smooth and perfect. A sound mind prevails in a healthy body. Mind gets focused and peaceful. Practice of *mudra* stops the flow of pranic energy from the body and develops stability.

The science of yoga is very much concerned with modern living. Its regular practice can remove physical and mental afflictions. After the daily round of mental and physical exhaustion it can bring back resilience, vigour and restore equipoise. Yoga stands for both physical and mental well-being. Regular yoga practice maintains the physical body in an optimum condition and promotes optimum health even in an unhealthy body. The dormant energy potential is released and experienced as increased confidence in all areas of life⁶. It has a substantial contribution as well as a scientific and potent part to play in the field of physical

⁶Swami Satynanda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, p.11

hygiene. One attains perfection in life who is *Brahmachari*, takes moderate and pure food, is regular and intent on yoga⁷ and renounces attachment with the sensual objects.

To meet the challenges in our life good health is essential. Yogic techniques massage and improve the efficiency of the internal organs through Asana. It tones up the nerve connection and improves the blood circulation by Asana. It improves respiration and general vitality of the body through Pranayama. It cleans the body of impurities through Asana, Pranayama and the Shatkarma. The mind and body get relaxed through the scientific relaxation techniques of shavasana and yoga nidra. Removing the mental suppressions, phobias, neuroses and all other negative aspects of mind this brings about great happiness in life and removes many diseases. Yoga aims at bringing the functions of different organs, muscles and nerves into perfect coordination, so that they work for the overall good of the body.

Shatkarma is the fundamental cleansing technique of Hatha Yoga. It plays an important role to keep the internal organs clean. A state of purification is achieved. It includes six fundamental cleansing techniques through which the body can be made free from disease, clean and clear. Sage Gheranda considered these practices for cleansing the body to be the first dimension of yoga. They have manifold, wondrous results and are held in high esteem by eminent yogis. The vital capacity of the practitioner enhances. The harmony in the body and mind is maintained and one prepares for further practices. They bring about smooth and perfect functioning of the bodily systems. The mind will become free from turbulence and disturbances and thus be better able to concentrate and to move towards Dhyana. The effect of Shatkarma can be summed up in one word – purification. When the different systems of the body have been purified, the overall result is that energy can flow through the body freely. One's capacity to work, think, digest, taste, feel, experience, etc. increases and greater awareness develops.

Yoga corrects our life style by influencing our body and mind⁸ in a specific way as follows:

- Massages and improves the efficiency of the internal organs through the regular practice of *asanas*.
- Tones up the nerve connections.
- Develops flexibility and improves the blood circulation.
- Improves respiration and general vitality of the body through *pranayama*.

⁷See, Swami Muktibodhananda, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, p.134

⁸See, Swami SatyanandaSaraswati, *Yoga and Kriya*, p.675

- Purifies the body and mind through *shatkarma*, such as *jalaneti*, *kunjalkriya*, *shankhaprakshalana* and so on.
- Relaxes the body and mind through *shavasana* and *yoga nidra*.
- Removes mental suppressions, phobias, neuroses, and other negative aspect of the mind. This provides health and happiness in life.

CONCLUSION

Attainment of good health and attain happiness in life is the essential need of today. Yogic practices will be more effective for physical hygiene. Various yogic texts prescribe many fundamental rules, regulations and practices in the name of *shatkarma*, *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *mantra*, *meditation*, *yoga nidra* and diet to lead a healthy and happy life. Body is the instrument by which man has accomplished all his purposes in the world. However, physical wellbeing is essential for further spiritual development. Body should be kept clean, strong and healthy. The food that builds the body and the mind should be pure, wholesome, nutritious, substantial and bland. Yoga has a substantial contribution as well as a scientific and potent part to play in the field of physical hygiene. It is the horse that takes him to attain perfection for self-identification with sustainable equity.

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