

## Living with yoga in everyday life

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### Abstract

**Background:** Yoga practices have been recognized over time to bring positive effects to all parts of the complex human organism to make them work optimally and also to be useful for the wellbeing of mental faculties as well. Today's life is much occupied with diverse engagements in household, educational, professional and social fronts. It seems not easy for all people to dedicate time to practice their interest or doing activities like yoga, physical exercises and other hobbies even periodically, in spite of having willingness to do so. However, it is to ponder that our lives are not only based on yoga, it is something which we are living with knowingly or unknowingly. In this context the eight limbs of Patanjali Yoga Sutra (PSY) of Maharshi Patanjali who has given the most reflective explanation of yoga have been referred to see how they are echoed in our lives. A few literatures with research publications have been studied to write this article. It has been thoughtfully explored with the aim to suggest how yoga practices can be synchronized with daily activities with the conclusion that the yoga practices may be incorporated in our life along with day-to-day activities without spending further time.

**Objective:** The objective of this article is to relate some of the limbs of yoga from the perspective of our daily life and to explore some ideas to practice yoga even when we are not able to manage time to be on the mat for the same.

**Methods:** A few texts of yoga and published researched articles have been studied and referred to the write-up.

**Conclusion:** Yoga practices may be united in our life with our day-to-day activities. We can practice yoga without spending further time. It may be stretched throughout the day.

**Keywords:** Yoga practice; Daily Life; Yogasana; Pranayama; Dharana; Dhyana.

### Introduction

**Yoga practice in today's life:** Yoga practice is not restricted now to a few qualified individuals, as it was happened to be in ancient times. Owing to the efforts of the Masters aimed at the welfare of the humanity, the knowledge of yoga practice has reached to every corner of the world. People today are taking interest in yoga, be it for their health, physical flexibility, overall well-being or to experience their spiritual [1,2]. The number of yoga enthusiasts has risen significantly all over the world in recent years especially after the time of covid-19. Human as a whole again have appreciated the necessity of physical strength and fitness. Yoga techniques have been used for the wellbeing of all the complex human systems for their optimal functionalities, especially the activity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and the autonomic nervous system, which are the two major systems deal with physiological stress [3]. Stress is the most addressed issue nowadays for overall

health and many people have incorporated yoga practice in their daily routine during this pandemic to reduce their stress load. Research says, yoga does indeed increase the activity of Parasympathetic nervous system and the GABA levels in the thalamus which are linked to our emotional state of mind [4]. Today's life is much occupied with different activities in household, educational, professional and social fronts. It seems not easy for many people to dedicate time for the practice of yoga and other hobbies regularly, even periodically, in spite of their willingness to do so. However, it is to ponder that our lives are not only based on yoga, it is something which we are living with knowingly or unknowingly. If we study closely the human life from the perspective of yoga, it is startling to notice that life is rooted in yoga. We are in many ways actually following yoga through our conducts, movements and actions in daily life. Yoga offers enormous scope to explore and experience its varied techniques which can be implemented in everyday life through proper knowledge of those techniques and their

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proper understanding.

**Human living is encompassed by Yoga:** Yoga is embedded eternally in life if we analyze it credibly. We see that life begins in yoga in mother's womb. Body grows and takes a shape of a posture to stay there for months and life begins there in a state like samadhi. Yoga happens from the very beginning of our existence. Then we see from birth till death, all living beings are connected through one earth, same air, undivided space, one source of water and same energy from the Sun. So, we are united by the means of same natural basics and co-exist through them in our lives. All these are open knowledges but we all hardly pay heed to them. Understanding of yoga starts with awareness. Yoga practices make one aware of one's own-existence, the other existences, and the connection among all. We find that living beings in the nature other than human do not practice yoga discretely, yet, they are nature-bound and overall healthy. Human is no exception but a part of nature too. Human body and mind also are meant to be tuned to the nature's rhythm for their healthy workings. Thus, it is obvious that the lessons of yoga practices have been developed by the sages and rishis through observations of the vast nature, other beings and natural functioning of own body. We find that many of the natural entities, actions and postures of other species have been adopted as the yoga techniques by Yoga Masters at different times.

In the classical text of yoga, Patanjali Yoga Sutra (PSY) of Maharshi Patanjali, we find the most reflective explanation of yoga with its eight limbs [5]. They are, Yama (Being disciplined with social rules and universal values), Niyama (Being disciplined by self-observances), Asana (Physical postures), Pranayama (Techniques to stretch the life-force or energy inside us by directing the flow of breath), Pratyahara (Withdrawal of the senses from the sense-driven matters), Dharana (Concentration on anything inside or outside of oneself), Dhyana (continuous flow of concentration, Meditation), Samadhi (Being absorbed in self). (PYS : Chap-II, Aphorism 29). If we reflect subtly on the limbs of yoga, we see that they are the implicit indicators of living life in harmony. We find many people in the society correspond to some of those limbs in their lives.

## Objective

This write-up is to focus on how we are following some limbs of yoga in our daily life naturally and to explore the possibilities of yoga practice from different angles to fit them into our daily routine without spending considerably additional time.

## Methods

A few texts of yoga and published researched articles have been studied and are referred to this write-up. It has been thoughtfully explored to suggest how yoga practices can be synchronized with daily activities.

## We are living in Yoga knowingly or unknowingly

Even though the importance of yoga has been acknowledged by the people from all walks of life, yet there are people who consider yoga practice as an additional work for which they need to find time and extra efforts. However, it is to ponder that our lives are not only based on yoga, in many ways we are in step with the same in daily life through our movements, activities, conducts and thoughts. If we are aware of them, we can put us on the trail of yoga. Yoga practitioners may have this discerning knowledge, yet people in general do not have this realization. It is something with which we are living in knowingly or unknowingly.

For illustration, let us reflect the first limb of PYS, 'Yama' (Universal values) which is defined by the approach of not being violent and harmful (Ahimsa), being truthful (Satya), being in the spirit of non-stealing (Asteya), being in continence (Brahmacharya), and being in the psyche of non-hoarding (Aparigraha). (PYS:Chap-II, Aphorism 30). When a man's conduct and attitude are abided by those universal values, they revere the principles of Yama.

The second limb, Niyama has been defined in PSY by the way of keeping up with cleanliness (Saucha), contentment (Santosha), austerity (Tapah), self-study (Swadhyaya), and surrender to God (Iswara pranidhana). PYS : Chap-II, Aphorism 32). We find some people acquire one or more of these qualities through their natural upbringing. We find many people maintain cleanliness, some people are contented with whatever they have, some people are sincere, self-disciplined and particular with whatever they do, some people are naturally retrospective about their actions, some people are surrendered and devoted to Ishwara or God. When a person is self-disciplined in life within the domain of Niyama, we can say that the person implements niyama in life.

In similar way, if we observe our daily livings with insight, we can relate our lives to one or more of the limbs of yoga on various instances. For example, some of our natural body postures are similar to yogasana, our breathing changes with different emotions which we may be connected with awareness to match the practice of pranayama. We experience the glimpses of Pratyahara in many instances in life. For example, on a loss of a near one, mind takes a break from sense bound affairs. It may also happen in a mental state of fulfillment and contentment. We go through the states of Dharana and Dhyana many times in life as well. For example, moment to moment of concentration happens when an artist performs, a singer sings or a dancer dances. A musician immersed in the play of a music or a serious student's concentration to any learning may be considered as the state of dharana. A scientist's continuous absorption into his research study or an artist's continuous absorption in the creation of a piece of art, or a mother's continuous flow of attention to her new born may be compared to, or if united with awareness be elevated to, a state of dhyana. Nature makes us practice those states through different occurrences and events of our lives. A plenty of examples we can think of, to realize that many a times in our lives, we are actually in rhythm of some of the limbs of yoga by our

thoughts, deeds and conducts. We meet people who acquire one or more of these merits naturally from environment or through their valued upbringing or through practices.

**Yoga has the vastness to offer:** Yoga literally means union; however, it has immense implications in its essence. Accordingly, we find Yoga has been expounded with varied insights in early texts and scriptures, and by the realized masters. Yogic procedures have been developed with times and taught variedly by the Masters of different ancestries. However, the common aspect of yoga practice is principally the practice of being aware of everything in and around oneself. The foremost lesson of yoga practice is to become aware. We simply step into the state of yoga just by connecting our awareness to our body, breath, mind, thoughts and emotion, or whatever we are doing, or anything in and around us. Yoga practices are intended to make us aware of every moment of living. Union of awareness with anything is pertinent to the practice of yoga. Some people are keenly inspired to take time out for yoga practice. Some people are yet to understand the magnitude of the benefits of yoga practice. Again, many people just can't manage time out of their busy schedules. Though it is always good to practice in a particular time and place with appropriate environment, however, yoga has the vastness to offer. Yoga offers diverse practices to take everyone into its potentials. Yoga practices can uplift and advance everyone on this path. Regular yoga practice may be possible every day without devoting additional significant time but within everyone's fixed time.

#### **Yoga practices on the go ~**

A few yogic practices are discussed here which may be considered to do with our normal physical and mental activities in everyday life without being bothered to find spare time to practice them.

**Yogasana:** The most accepted yogic practice is yogasana. Asana is defined in PSY as, being steady (Sthira) and relaxed (Sukha) in a posture. (PYS : Chap-II, Aphorism 46) We see many yoga postures are allied to our natural body postures in lying, sitting or standing. Through the natural body movements and positioning throughout the day, we are in different postures which may not be rightly positioned and steady always. However, by being aware of the same and thereby making some correctional adjustment, we can bring steadiness to our postures in a while without much efforts. Effortlessness is a desirable condition in asana practice for advanced spiritual purpose (PYS: Chap-II, Aphorism 47). We may not be accurate in all the postures and it is not possible in all situations also. However, we can initiate the practice of an asana just by bringing our attention to our normal body position without much effort. We can do asana many a time in a day, may be for a few moments and that can bring poise to our body.

**How can we do that?:** A yoga posture begins with a starting position and then it requires either of bending, turning or twisting a few the body parts to go into the final position, preferably uniting the breath with the movements. From start-

ing position to go to the final position, there are a number of postures in between. When we are not able to do a correct posture in any situation, or the body is not able to make a posture perfect, then any of those in-between postures can be assumed whether we are on the mat or on the go. Making ourselves aware of the same, we can make our movement and the body posture correct and steady for a few moments, or from moment to moment, to be in the state of asana anywhere subtly. A few examples would be appropriate here. We sit in sukhasana (cross-legged easy pose) in yoga sessions. Often, we do the same in daily life while on an elevation or on the floor. On the mat we do it mindfully by bringing our awareness to the body position, making the head, neck, and spine aligned. Off the mat by becoming aware of the same, while sitting in such position, we can make the body in the state of an asana. We can do subtle yogic practices daily like toe bending, ankle rotation, Knee bending etc. while we sit with legs out-stretched. We can perform other sitting postures like ardhapadmasana (half lotus pose) [6], vajrasana (thunderbolt pose) (Saraswati, 2002,107), and similar postures by making ourselves aware whenever we get to sit to be in a state of yogasana. We can practice yoga even when we are sitting for any work or recreation. We then may do soft shoulder rotation, eye exercises like blinking of eyes, broadening and squeezing of eyes, eye rotation, ear pulling and similar practices. We can do some yoga postures in supine position (lying on back) like padotthanasana (raised legs pose), padachakrasana (leg rotation) (Saraswati, 2002,49), pada sanchalana (cycling) (Saraswati, 2002,50), pawanmuktasana (leg lock pose), naukasana (boat pose) (Saraswati, 2002,58), Setu Bandhasana (bridge pose), shava-udarakarshanasana (universal spinal twist) (Saraswati, 2002, 57) and in prone position (lying on stomach), ardhshalabhasana (half locust pose) (Saraswati, 2002,203), saral bhujangasana (easy cobra pose) (Saraswati, 2002, 197) and easy relaxing postures like advasana (reversed corpse pose), jyestikasana (superior posture) (Saraswati, 2002, 89), Makarasana (Crocodile pose) (Saraswati, 2002,90). All these postures can be performed easily by most of the people within a few minutes just before leaving the bed in the morning or any other free time in a day while one is in light stomach. Similarly, while we are in standing position, might be for some work or just for a walk, we can stretch ourselves subtly for a while. We can steal a few moments of the time when we are standing to stretch ourselves vertically, as we do in tadasana (Palm tree pose) (Saraswati, 2002,142) posture on the mat. A few rounds of slow side bending and twisting, can give us some positive effects similar to that of tiryaka tadasana (swaying palm tree pose) (Saraswati, 2002,144) and kati chakrasana (standing spinal twist pose) (Saraswati, 2002,145) respectively. However busy we are, we can manage only a few minutes of time in a day to practice those last three postures. They can take great care of our nervous system, waist line, spinal column and associated nerves, also shoulders, abdominal organs, hence digestive issues and make body feel light. (Saraswati, 2002, 142, 145, 146) Yoga postures have contra-indications, one needs to know about them before performing. The above-mentioned postures may be practiced by all if there are no chronic physical conditions.

**Pranayama:** Breath is the means for the practice of pranayama techniques. From PYS we learn that pranayama is the breaking of the natural courses of inhalation, exhalation and retention of breath externally and internally to places with different durations and counts, may be long or short. (PYS : Chap-II, Aphorism 49 – 51) Breathing is generally automatic and unconscious process to the living beings. However, one can take control of the same consciously. It creates a bridge between conscious and unconscious mind. (Saraswati, 2002, 373) Various pranayama processes are there to practice by controlling the breath with different forces, counts and rhythms. All practices are not suitable for everyone and every condition. However, simple awareness of the breathing process is suitable for everyone and it can relax the respiration process. (Saraswati, 2002, 378). Some basic practices can be done consciously by stretching the natural inhalation and exhalation with different counts by making them longer, deeper, or slower smoother, or faster according to one's physical condition and situation. Simply sitting in upright position, one can practice inhalation, retention and exhalation with equal counts for a few rounds in between any work. A breathing practice known as ujjayi (victorious) pranayama (Saraswati, 2002, 402) which can be done any time along with other works. This practice is very effective for our throat region, to raise energy level and mental strength. In the morning before leaving the bed, we can do pranayama like, bhastrika (bellow breathing) (Saraswati, 2002,405),and kapalbhata (forced exhalation along with stomach sucking in) (Saraswati, 2002,410). These pranayama techniques are good enough to get rid of morning laziness and to get instant flow of energy to our whole system and to the mind with other benefits. (Saraswati, 2002, 407, 411). It will take barely 3 to 4 minutes for a few rounds of practice. A pranayama called as bhramari pranayama (Saraswati, 2002, 399) is very good to practice before sleep. If we cannot manage to do it on the mat, we can do it at bed time and may get rid of day-long various stress exposures and can have sound sleep. Bhramari pranayama practice is beneficial for sleep related issues and very effective for calming the disturbed mind and nerves and also has other benefits. Another pranayama known as nadi shodhana pranayama (alternate nostril breathing) (Saraswati, 2002, 385), can be done any time for a few minutes preferably in light stomach or when one is stressed and exhausted. It helps to bring balance to whole system.

**Dharana or the practice of Concentration:** Sage Patanjali defined Dharana as uniting the mind to any place or point. (PYS: Chap-III: Aphorism 1) One of the easiest ways to go into it, is by focusing on any part of one's body. It can be done by focusing on any point or place in one's body, taking a few minutes of break. It can also be done by focusing on natural flow of breath any time of the day. It can be practiced by concentrating on any natural element like moon, early morning red glowing sun or a star or a flower or anything for a few moments. This practice can be done by listening to soothing songs or chantings. This practice helps one to be in present moment and to be focused to the work along with other beneficial influences to the body and mind [7].

**Dhyana or Meditation:** As said by Maharshi Patanjali, Yoga is for restraining the modulation of the mind. (PYS: Chap-I: Aphorism 2) A few minutes of meditation practice every day, is required to bring the moments of silence to calm the mind with the aim to limit its distractions. Continuity in the state of concentration leads to meditation. (PYS: Chap-III: Aphorism 2). Research says, Meditation and breathing practices can sharpen the mind [7,8].

Meditation brings true rest and positive changes to our whole system. According to a recent study, meditation practiced over an eight-week period can bring a prominent change to the meditators in the expression of 172 genes which regulate inflammation, circadian rhythms and glucose metabolism which yet again linked to blood pressure [9]. Meditation happens easily to the people who are devoted yoga practitioners. Study shows that meditation can manage different aspects of life like managing stress and anxiety, improvement of resilience, memory, and concentration. Meditation happens to be an accessible, self-care resource that can benefit mental health, behavioral-regulation, and may be used as integrative medical care [10].

Common people may also have the experience of silence which again may start with silent observation of one's body, breath, and mind. It can be done several times in a day at different situations. For example, while we are travelling, or taking a short break in the working hours or during refreshment time at office, during a break of household time or in similar situation we can steal a few moments to practice silence. Simple way of going into meditative state is to become aware of the present moment of one's existence at physical level, or mental level. When we are uniting mind to any component of our existence at present moment, it brings us a moment of halt. It brings us the moment of true rest. There are other techniques to do meditation like, by taking the help of any mantra, by chanting any mantra silently, with the help of mudra (gestures) practice or taking the guidance of the masters or teachers. Other way of doing it is by adding total awareness to any activity with conscious focus on the same.

## Conclusion

In spite of all demoralizations in the society, human values and ethical practices still prevail in human mind. Whatever is done mindfully in harmony with the rhythm and principles of nature may be considered as the way of yoga. When we have the intention and time to practice yoga, we set ourselves on the mat. We follow then a structured module of practices combining a series of asana, pranayama, dhyana and some other yogic practices. It generally takes 45 minutes to 1 hour of time for a yoga session. If we can't manage time for that, we can synchronize our regular movements, activities, thoughts and conducts with yogic principles. It can be stretched throughout the day if we have the knowledge to do so. When we practice yoga, it reflects to others through our body, overall energy level, our outlook and attitude towards the life. We may not have dedicated time for yoga practices; however, we can keep going on with yoga. We can make the moments of yoga anytime anywhere!

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