



Harmony Of Body And Mind: Exploring The Benefits Of Life For Total Consciousness Yoga Practice In Young People

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Abstract

Yoga is the highest discipline that man can have. Its goal is to bring the limited individual over his limitations and merge with Total Consciousness, or the Divine. Patanjali described the strenuous eight limbs of yoga, Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi as the steps to reach this goal. Swami Isa developed a simple method of Ashtanga yoga, which he teaches to students at the Isa Viswa Vidyalayam, called Life for Total Consciousness. Children and youth under 25 were surveyed to observe any benefits to their emotions, quality of thoughts, and relationships. The respondents reported significant improvements in all three areas after regularly practicing Life for Total Consciousness for at least six months.

Keywords

Yoga, Education, Swami Isa, Total Consciousness, Life for Total Consciousness, Ashtanga Yoga, Patanjali, Samadhi, Asana

Objective

To determine whether regular yoga practice has a measurable benefit upon the emotions, quality of thoughts, or relationships in students of school-going age and young adults.

Introduction

The National Education Policy of India 2020 (NEP 2020) envisions a holistic education system, emphasizing timeless values and attitudes towards knowledge, as the central focus for nation's educational frame work. "Knowledge is a deep-seated treasure, and education helps in its manifestation as the perfection which is already within an individual," it says. Further it states that "the aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals."

The key principles of yoga and the holistic development of a students' personalities are both inter-connected and interdependent. As such, NEP2020 calls for implementing yoga in the educational system. The Isa Viswa Vidyalayam school, running under the Isa Viswa Prajnana Trust, is successfully implementing yoga as a part of its philosophy and practice of Education for Total Consciousness.

Yoga, rooted in Indian philosophy encompasses physical, mental and spiritual practices aiming for holistic well-being. Consciousness, a key concept, is widely explored in diverse religions and sectarian teachings, emphasizing knowledge of the self and connection to a higher existence. It is intriguing to observe that various philosophers and practitioners of yoga and meditation offer diverse interpretations of these twin concepts. Different perspectives emerge as individuals explore and articulate their understanding of the profound meanings behind yoga and consciousness. Despite differing interpretations a common consensus exists among philosophers and practitioners that yoga serves as a science for spiritual development, guiding individuals towards the ultimate objective of attaining total consciousness. It is seen as a systematic path aiming to elevate one's spiritual awareness and connection to the essence of existence. Yoga is viewed as a reliable path leading individual to discover their true nature, liberating them from illusions. The ultimate realization within this practice is the understanding that "I am a miniature of the universe." Through yoga practitioners aspire to remove the boundaries on the path to recognizing their intrinsic unity with the cosmic essence.

Because yoga is a vast subject with many different schools of thought and practice spanning thousands of years, we are limiting our discussion of the philosophy of yoga to Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga (translated as "eight limbs" or "eight steps") and more specifically to Swami Isa's interpretation of it in his teachings of 'Life for Total Consciousness'. In Patanjali's teaching, there is a specified series of eight steps designed to help individuals to achieve mastery over themselves and attain union with Total Consciousness. These eight steps are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi.

According to Swami Isa Ashtanga Yoga is the science and art of harmonizing the body, intellect, and emotions and coming into tune with one's life goal, or ultimate happiness. In Swami Isa's writings, yoga means "union with Total Consciousness" where Total Consciousness is sometimes described as "permanent happiness," and sometimes as "non-vibrating Energy", and sometimes as "the Divine". He teaches that this Total Consciousness is an individual's innate nature, but most of the time one cannot experience it. One is always seeking unbroken happiness, and that is the experience of Total Consciousness one is unconsciously always seeking. Therefore, to bring this seeking into conscious action, the individual must learn what he is made of and how this "equipment" helps him to reach his goal.

Much has been written about Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga and it has been interpreted by countless teachers. Swami Isa give a fresh interpretation for modern understanding, summarized below.

Yama: Proper cleansing of the body, and learning to avoid the distractions of the gross five senses. There are five Yamas: *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (not taking things that do not belong to you / only taking what is essential for us, not more), *Brahmacharya* (learning to see the divine in everything), and *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).

Niyama: Purification of the subtle five senses. The five Niyamas are *Saucha* (clean body and external purity), *Santosha* (maintaining a peaceful mind), *Tapas* (positive heat, self-discipline), *Swadhyaya* (self-studying process, and purification of the thoughts through positive knowledge), and *Ishwarapranidhanam* (contemplation on the supreme unchanging reality, or Total Consciousness). Together, Yama and Niyama are guidelines for living in a proper way and build the foundation for further yoga practice. It is important to note that if Yama and Niyama are not followed, the rest of the yoga practices will not bear positive fruits.

Asana: Comfortable posture. When the gross body (discernible by the five senses) and subtle body (not discernible by the five senses) become calm and quiet, one realizes the need to maintain the gross body. For that, one needs a comfortable proper posture. Asana means that much only: *comfortable posture*.

Pranayama: Control of Prana. Now the gross body, gross five senses and subtle five senses are under one's control and have achieved some purity. Then one can enhance awareness of prana, or vital energy. The unconscious processes of inhaling, retention, and exhaling start to become a conscious process. Pranic impurities and agitations are the cause of all type of problems. When the prana starts to be controlled, all other systems come under control.

Pratyahara: Intellectual peace. The withdrawal of the senses in order to direct perception to the inside. One thinks about reducing the quantity of thoughts by withdrawing the senses. This cleaning the thoughts and all the desires. With the help of logical, applied thought, one can remove the intellectual impurities. When thought impurities are removed, the intellect becomes calm and peaceful.

Dharana: Mental / emotional purification. When the intellect is purified, then it is easy to focus on a positive goal. Emotions also become focus on the goal and thereby become purified, positive. At that time, one becomes more aware about the heart.

Dhyana: Meditation. Once the thoughts and emotions are pure and positive, one has a clear concept about the goal or destiny: the real Self, or Consciousness, or Divinity. Continuous meditation on the single point is Dhyanam, like oil flowing without a break. One is always thinking about Total Consciousness. Meditation has two categories: with form and without form. One has to know which concept is more appropriate for one's self.

Samadhi: Union with the Divine. When the gross (physical) and the subtle (thoughts, emotions, prana) bodies are purified, the energy flow of the entire human being is straight and transparent. The frequency of their energy vibration is at the minimum, and the wavelength is maximum. One's system can enjoy the highest level of energy-based happiness. So finally, this purity leads to non-vibrating energy, or permanent happiness, or Total Consciousness.

Swami Isa writes, "When the first four limbs are properly applied, the second four limbs follow naturally. It is the process of changing dark, object-oriented information to the brilliant Total Consciousness. This is the life journey we call yoga."

What stands out the most in Swami Isa's interpretation above is his diversion from the modern interpretation of asana as physical poses. These postures have become the face of the modern practice of yoga. The majority of yoga practitioners only know this aspect of yoga, and mistakenly believe that physical health is the goal, when it is merely a means to attain a higher goal. For this reason, Swami Isa emphasizes comfortable posture that can enable one to forget the pains of the body and go deeper into the more subtle layers of the self, which become evident in the higher limbs.

Secondly, Swami Isa gives a new definition of Patanjali's last limb, samadhi, in terms of energy. Normally it is referred to as meditative absorption in which individual and universal consciousness unite—the step before moksha or liberation. In Buddhism, it is the last step of the eightfold path that leads to nirvana or moksha. In Jain meditation, samadhi is the last practice prior to liberation.

In his famous memoir *Autobiography of a Yogi* Paramahansa Yogananda refers to samadhi as "the breathless state". Swami Isa explains with precise scientific language how the meditative and breathless absorption is achieved: by reducing the frequency of the practitioner's energy vibrations.

Given the amount of dedication, time and perseverance that such a practice of yoga must take to reach the final step, it is no wonder that only few can attain the sublime heights of samadhi. And therefore, the question that comes is whether those who are young, such as the students of the national education system for whom yoga is recommended, experience any benefits from yoga practice.

Therefore, this study is designed to examine the benefits—physical, mental, and social—of yoga practice for students under the age of 25 who are practicing daily but not lifelong dedicated yogis.

Literature Review

Yoga and stress management. Acharya Yathendra (2019). "All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind" in the quest for understanding one's own mind, body and soul and to attain liberation each man seeks spirituality as per his own means and understanding. The yogic practice explained by Vivekananda become a way of life and hence lead to the realization of the absolute.

"Patanjali Yoga Sutras" by Swami Vivekananda (2021). Patanjali was the Yogacharya of ancient times. Yoga of Patanjali is commonly known as Raja Yoga or the Royal Path. He explained the eight fold path.

“Ashtanga Yoga” by Jagadguru Swami Isa. Yoga Teacher Training Manual published by the Isa Viswa Prajnana Trust (2018). Swami Isa describes the eight steps of Ashtanga Yoga, with scientific language of the planes of energy.

“Interview with His Holiness Jagadguru Swami Isa” by Lady Carla Davis. Masters of Health Magazine (August 2017 issue). Jagadguru Swami Isa answers questions about the different paths of yoga, Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga, consciousness, energy and education.

“Autobiography of a Yogi” by Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (1998). Yogananda describes in his famous autobiography meeting different saints and yogis, and his own master. He describes in detail his own samadhi experiences and that of others he witnessed, which he calls “the breathless state.”

Methodology

We hypothesized that Jagadguru Swami Isa’s Life For Total Consciousness yoga practice increases physical stamina, improving memory, provides mental relief and decreases stress, and improves relationships in young people those who are practicing continuously. A qualitative approach was used to analyze this.

Data was collected from two groups.

- Yoga learners between the ages of 13 to 15.(School Students)
- Yoga learners between the ages of 16 to 25. (Continuing yoga after schooling)

A questionnaire was prepared to collect the data.

Data Collection

Appendix 1

- Are you happy most of the time?
*Yes *No
- Do you enjoy learning new things?
*Yes *No
- Do you feel that you are as happy as others are?
*Yes *No
- Have you noticed improvements in your memory and concentration since starting Yoga?
*Yes *No
- Have you observed a decrease in negative thoughts since starting Yoga practice?
*Yes *No
- Do you feel more emotionally balanced and stable after incorporating Yoga into your routine?
*Yes *No
- Do you believe Yoga can reduce stress?
*Yes *No
- Have you experienced mental clarity after focusing Yoga?
*Yes *No
- Have you experienced improvements in your posture and body awareness through Yoga Practice?
*Yes *No
- Do you feel more energized after completing Yoga session?
*Yes *No
- Have you noticed an increase in your physical strength and flexibility since starting Yoga?
*Yes *No

- Do you believe that Yoga practice has positively influenced your relationships with others?
*Yes *No
- Have you noticed an improvement in your communication skills after Yoga practice?
*Yes *No
- Have you actively engaged in community or volunteer activities related to Yoga since practice?
*Yes *No
- Do you feel more confident in social settings and interactions after incorporating Yoga in your life ?
*Yes *No
- Have you observed an improvement in your overall academic performance since beginning Yoga practice?
*Yes *No
- Do you find that practicing yoga before studying, taking exams or taking an interview improves your performance?
*Yes *No
- Can you concentrate more in your studies or work after practicing Yoga?
*Yes *No
- Is there any improvement in your memory power after practising Yoga?
*Yes *No
- Does Yoga helps to improve communication within your family?
*Yes *No
- Do you practice Yoga together as a family?
*Yes *No
- Do family members encourage each other to participate in Yoga activities?
*Yes *No
- Has yoga improved your flexibility and balance?
*Yes *No

Data Analysis

From the Yoga learners between the age group 13 to 15 ,61% mentioned that most of the time they are happy and enjoy learning new things.65% mentioned that they feel as happy as others and family members encourage each other to participate in Yoga activities.92% mentioned that they feel more emotionally balanced and stable after incorporating Yoga in life ,they experienced mental clarity after completing yoga and they observed improvement in their academic performance.93% mentioned that they can reduce stress, there is improvement in posture and body awareness through Yoga practice and there is improvement in communicative skills after doing Yoga.88% mentioned that there is increase in physical strength and flexibility since starting yoga, they feel more confident in social settings and interactions and improved flexibility and balance.78% mentioned that Yoga practice positively influenced their relationships. they actively engaged in community or volunteer activities related to yoga and they find that practicing yoga before studying ,taking exams or taking an interview improves their performance.80% mentioned that they can concentrate in their studies and work and improves communication within family. 89% mentioned that they practice Yoga together as family.90 % mentioned that they can decrease negative thoughts since starting yoga practice ,94,% mentioned that they feel more energized and there is improvement in their memory power after completing yoga session. 87 % mentioned that there is improvement in overall academic performance .

Similarly between the age group 16 to 25, 73 % mentioned that most of the time they are happy.71% mentioned that they enjoy learning new things. 75% mentioned that they feel as happy as others and family members encourage each other to participate in yoga activities. 92% mentioned that they feel more emotionally balanced and stable after incorporating Yoga in life, they experienced mental clarity after focusing yoga.85% mentioned that there is improvement in memory and concentration . 95 % mentioned that they feel more energized after completing yoga and they observed improvement in their overall academic performance.95 % mentioned that they can reduce stress, there is improvement in posture and body awareness through yoga practice, and 89 % mentioned that there is improvement in communicative skills. 70% mentioned that family members encourage each other to participate in yoga activities. 88% mentioned that

there is increase in physical strength and flexibility, they feel more confident in social settings and interactions and improved flexibility and balance.76% mentioned that yoga practice positively influenced their relationships, they actively engaged in community or volunteer activities related to yoga .90% mentioned that they practice yoga before studying or taking exams improves their performance.82% mentioned that they can concentrate in their studies and work and improves communication within family.87 % mentioned that they practice yoga together as a family .96% mentioned that there is improvement in memory power .94 % mentioned that they can decrease negative thoughts after doing yoga .

Interpretation of data

From the above studies it is seen that second age group from 16-25 shows more improvement than the first age group from 13-15.Through Yoga practice learners get the awareness about themselves, and it helps to make changes in their negative qualities, and make themselves and others happy. Most of the students can make improvement in their memory power and their studies. Many students have room for improvement in their academic performance particularly in enhancing their memory skills and study habits. Their behavior and attitude are undergoing both physical and mental changes. Yoga is beneficial for enhancing the well being of both students and working individuals.

Conclusion

Swami Isa's Life for Total Consciousness Yoga Practice helps to make physical and emotional changes .It must be understood that Yogic philosophy gives full recognition to the underlying unity of life i.e. Consciousness. Yoga practice helps to remove unhappiness, energize and purify our body. With a smiling face make the life happy.

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