

MANAGEMENT OF STRESS THROUGH KUNDALINI YOGA AND MEDITATION

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ABSTRACT

Stress is nothing but a reaction to a stimulus which is supposed to disturb our physical and mental balance. When the circumstances are adverse or demanding in nature, the body and mind may not adjust with the situation which results in mental or emotional strain or tension and we say that we are stress affected. When our mind is pressurized in a circumstance or event, the feeling so generated because of such pressure may be termed as stress. When the event is stressful, our body's sympathetic nervous system reacts in a typical manner. Its response may be a fight or flight response. Now-a-day's varieties of diseases are created because of stress factors. Depending upon the severity of stress, the physical and mental illness are originated accordingly. Though modern medications have created a scope of relief from stress related health hazards, their side effects in the long run can never be ignored. The alternative system of medicines like yoga, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, chanting of mantras and meditation provide the ways of relief from many stress related disorders. In ancient India, Kundalini yoga or laya yoga was practiced which was influenced by Shaktism and Tantra school of Hinduism. Swami Swatmarama, Swami Sivananda and Swami Nigamananda were pioneers in exploring and educating this unique method of yoga and meditation to the students and seekers. Modern Yogi Bhajan also advocated in favour of kundalini practice. So by learning this yoga and meditation from experts under guidance one can get rid of stress related disorders and lead a happy and harmonious life.

KEYWORDS: Stress, Stressors, Stress Disorders, Stress Management, Fight or Flight Response, Laya Yoga, Tantra School, Kundalini, Kundalini Yoga, Shaktism, Kundalini Energy, Chakra, Shakti-Chala, Kunda, Kundali, 3 HO, Psycho-Somatic Disorders

INTRODUCTION

We are passing through a time and living in a world where the total environment is full of stress factors. Being habituated to work in such a situation we are always stressed and have forgotten the keys of relaxation in our day to day life. As a result, various physical and psychological disorders have affected our life. It has stolen the harmony and peace of life. Since we are forced to perform things in a hasty, stressful and irritating manner, neither the work is successful nor there satisfaction. The word 'stress' comes into play, when the assignments seem annoying, heavy, unpleasant and disgusting and the performer becomes pressurized and is overloaded with the doubt of success in completing the task.

STRESS

There are many definitions to define stress; we give some of them below to give an idea regarding the meaning of stress.

Stress is simply a reaction to a stimulus which may cause disturbance in our physical and mental states. It is a part of eventful life and any event may be stressful which in turn may trigger the response of "fight-or-flight", which

causes body chemicals or hormones like adrenaline to surge through the body.

Stress is as anything or event which poses a threat or challenge to our very core of being and existence.

Stress is also defined as a natural method of body to interact with challenges.

We can define stress as a state of emotional or mental strain originating from threatful as well as demanding events and challenging circumstances.

Stress may also be defined as a physical, chemical or emotional factor which creates physical or mental tension and may result in disease formation.

As per Richard S. Lazarus, a leading authority on psychological stress, stress can be simply described as a special kind of transaction between a person and his environment.

STRESS AND STRESSORS

Now let us discuss the difference between Stress and Stressor.

Stressors are simple events which have a direct impact on the body or an indirect impact through varieties of mediators.

A stressor is a stimulus or an agent which creates stress. Stressors are the things in our environment which we need to respond depending upon our ability, personality and perception. Generally more the stressors we face, more stressful we become in our day to day life. Examples of stressors are many like-exam, interview, place change, transfer in job, loss of money, noises, unpleasant atmosphere or persons, high speed vehicles, busy traffic, want of money and dispute in conjugal life etc.

Anything or event that creates threat or challenges to our body and mind is stress. However all stressors are not bad. Some of them are necessary and creative in nature. They help us grow in our life. Without stress the life would have been monotonous and meaningless.

It will be just like a floating log in the water having no control over its destiny, direction and purpose.

Such type of life is unwarranted. However, when the stressors overflow and undermine our physical or mental health, they are no longer good and these stressors are treated as bad and harmful which need to be avoided and minimized.

INTERACTION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

While personal as well as situational factors combine to generate stress, our body reacts and responds to the environment in a characteristic way.

Hans Selye, one of the leading medical experts on the stress effects, suggested that physical stress reaction follow a three stage adaption syndrome.

- Alarm reaction stage-It is the emergency response of the body by sympathetic nervous system.
- Resistance stage-In case the stress persists, the person enters this stage, during which the body recovers from the initial stress reaction and begins to adapt to the situation.
- Exhaustion stage-Gradually the output from the sympathetic nervous system diminishes adrenal cortex and

pituitary gland produce higher output than normal. If the stress still persists the individual reach a final stage of exhaustion.

Next the question comes how do we respond to challenging or threatful situations. When we face a challenge or threat, our body accumulates and activates resources to protect us to both get away from the grip of the situation or fight and control it in our favour.

Incase we stay at upstairs at home and suddenly there is an earth quake, then we become anxious to release ourselves along with our family members as fast as possible to a safety outside place. The faster we are in our attempt; more is the possibility of survival.

The fight or flight response is the reaction of our sympathetic nervous system to an event or occurrence, which is supposed to be stressful.

Our body may generate large quantities of chemicals like adrenaline; cortisol or other products which may trigger a higher heart beat rate, heightened muscular spasm or contraction, sweating and trembling etc. All these factors are in fact needed to help and protect us in the challenging situation or circumstances.

There are many physical and mental symptoms which directly result from stress. Some of them are enlisted below.

STRESS RELATED BODY SYMPTOMS

Following are some of the stress related body symptoms when one becomes stressful.

Rise in b. p, rapid breathing, stomach upset, slowing down of the digestive system,

Increase in heart beat, lower immunity to fight against diseases, tense muscles, urge in frequent urination, sleeplessness or heightened state of alertness, sweating tendency, back pain, fainting situation, headache, loss of libido, muscular ache or pain, nerve twitches, nail biting, pin and niddle pinching sensation on body, sleep disorders

STRESS RELATED MENTAL EFFECTS

Following are some of the stress related mental symptoms when one becomes stressful

Anxiety, Anger, insecurity, Depression, Absentmindedness, Forgetfulness, Irritability, Grief, Restlessness,

BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS DUE TO STRESS

Following are some of the stress related behavioral disorders when one becomes stressful.

Desire for eating too much

Desire for eating too little

Craving for food

Sudden emotional outburst like weeping or being angry

Alcoholism

Drug abuse

Excess smoking

Excess tobacco consumption

Social withdrawal symptoms

Frequent crying

STRESS MANAGEMENT METHODS

Modern Medicines

Modern medications help a lot in combating anxiety and stress related diseases in an effective way.

Anxiety drugs are manufactured specially to treat anxiety syndromes and it may take weeks, months and even years to work on the body. These drugs work at a faster rate and serve the purpose of best suitable at home stress reduction techniques.

But these drugs have some serious side effects which in long run may decrease and set back our resistance to cope with the stress and anxiety in the future. Regular intake of these drugs may be very problematic in future in the long run.

Prevention of Stress by Teaching Coping Styles

Pitchik (1980) suggested the following eight basic coping styles for dealing with stressors

- Getting information
- Doing the opposite of what we feel
- Minimising the importance of the stressors
- Avoiding the stressors
- Seeking help
- Overcoming shortcomings
- Blaming others
- Doing unrelated pleasurable activities

Kundalini Yoga and Meditation for Effective Stress Management

It is accepted in yogic texts and scriptures that Kundalini is a form of dormant spiritual energy focused at the base of the spine. Laya Yoga is also the other form of Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini yoga is a school of yoga which was strongly influenced by Tantra Schools of Hinduism and Shaktism. Awakening the Kundalini energy through regular practice of Yogasana, pranayama, mudra, bandha and chanting of mantras are the different components of Kundalini Yoga. Swami Svatmarama prescribes different Mudras for awakening the kundalini energy. Kundalini yoga is otherwise a yoga of awareness which aims “to cultivate spiritual potential of a human being to uphold values, speak truth and focus on the compassion and consciousness required to heal and serve others”. A general practitioner may begin the kundalini yoga session with a stretching exercise to loosen up the spine. However the stretchings in Kundalini Yoga session differs and goes beyond the usual stretching exercises of other traditional forms of yoga. In kundalini yoga session, the practice is

performed by striking physical poses in addition to giving importance on breathing, meditation and chanting. As already discussed, the practice also involves use of finger motions (mudras) aimed to decrease the stress in the body, which can slow down the distribution of positive kundalini energy through the body system. Mantras in form of ancient Sanskrit phrases may be chanted during this meditation session. Since kundalini is a deeper spiritual force, to awaken it, intense practice in form of Kundalini yoga has been designed. Experts in the field insist upon more commitment, desire and involvement for attaining the success in kundalini practice which are not generally required in other yogic practices.

Laya yoga-The meaning of word 'Laya' in Sanskrit is 'dissolution' or 'absorption' or 'extinction'. Techniques of yoga and (like Raja Yoga) its result of 'absorption' of the individual into the cosmic may be referred as 'Laya'. Laya is almost always explained in the context of other yogic practices as in the Gorakha Paddhati, Amaraugha -Prabodha, Yoga-Tattva-Upanishad and the Varaha Upanishad. Because of long history of syncretism there appears a hazy distinction between traditional yoga schools. This might be the cause that many ancient sources of kundalini are depicted through the tantric and yogic texts and manuals like Hathayoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita and Shiva Samhita.

As per classic text Shiva Samhita, the qualified yogi has to practice 'the four yogas' for awakening kundalini energy while others yoga students may learn and adopt solely one or other technique, like Mantra Yoga and Hatha Yoga. Laya Yoga and Raja Yoga occupy the third and fourth place in this practice of 'four yogas'.

Here is an ancient way of Kundalini meditation; the Sanskrit verses are as below

Siraha kapala bibare dhyayed dugdhamahodadhim

Tatra sthitva sahasrare padme chandram bichintayet. (Siba Mahima 5/176)

There is a cave in skull, one has to meditate the white milk ocean there and also to contemplate on Chandra (moon) in Sahasrara (the thousand petalled lotus)

The word Kunda, is used as a noun which means bowls or water-pot which is found in Mahabharata age as the name of Nagas. The word kundalin is used as a Sanskrit adjective whose meaning is "circular or annular". As a noun, it may be used for a snake (in the sense of being "coiled" or in "forming ringlets"). The feminine kundali in Classical Sanskrit refers to "serpent-like" Shakti in Tantra schools and traditions as in 11th century texts "Saradatilaka".

Hatha yoga traditions used and adopted kundalini as a more technical term than other practices in almost 15th century and by the 16th century the term became widely used.

Let us refer to Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad which contains three small chapters. Verse (I. 1-2) states that Chitta (consciousness) is controlled by Prana which is being controlled by moderate food, postures and Shakti-Chala.

The concepts of moderate food are explained by the verse I. 7. Kundalini as the name of the Shakti has been introduced in verse I. 7.

Sakti-Chala as per Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad tells that a wise person should take it from the place of navel upwards to the middle of the eyebrows.

Kundalini is generally spiral in form. During kundalini practice two things are simultaneously necessary, one is Sarasvati-Chalana and the other is restraint of Prana (breath). By sincere practice only spiral Kundali is made straightened.

Though Kundalini yoga belongs to both Tantra and Hatha yoga system, Swami Nigamananda taught it in the form

of Laya yoga setting it aside from Hatha yoga system.

Swami Sivananda synthesized the laya yoga teachings from older sources of yoga text books like Hathapradipika and Satchakranirupana to explain the concept of kundalini yoga in his book in the year 1935.

Paramhansa Yogananda compares the manifestation of God as down flowing creative energy responsible for creation of children through sex and the Supreme also manifests in the form of Kundalini energy like Vasuki (snake) behaving like an uplifting current flow, which ultimately gives the bliss of divine realization at the end. (Chapter X-God talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita by Paramhansa Yogananda)

Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya(Gayatri Pariwar) describes Kundalini practice as higher stage practice of Gayatri worship. Unveiling the pancha kosha , it the part of Panchamukhi sadhana and its final result is in the kundalini practice. It can be told as union of Gayatri and Savitri. The awakening of kundalini is also a part. Of Brahmabarchhas Sadhana.

In the year 1968, Yogi Bhajan took yogic postures and techniques and attached them to Sikh Mantras, synthesizing a new modified form of Kundalini Yoga. He introduced this as his new brand of kundalini yoga named as “Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan” into the United States.

His organization 3 HO ((Healthy, Happy, Holy organization) became the teaching organization for this yoga.

CONCLUSIONS

Stressors are increasing day by day so also stress by affecting human life and its quality to a large extent. It seems there is no freedom from stress while rat race and cut-throat competition engulf the whole society. Man has become a puppet in the hands of the new demands, challenges and requirements. His craze after earning and reputation has gone high. So also the stress. The stress is a silent killer generating many health disorders affecting the human life span and its quality to a large extent. Many psycho-somatic disorders have been found in modern society. New medicines have been experimented to treat the diseases. Though they give a temporary relief to stress in the long run, their side-effects may cause an irreversible damage to the human physiology and psychology. Under the circumstances, it's high time to think over an alternative system like yoga, meditation, pranayama, om chanting and physical exercises for treating the stress related disorders. So in this context, practice of yoga and meditation shows a way of recovery. Kundalini practice and yoga will definitely be effective in stress management. But one thing is, since it's a part of advanced yogic sadhana (practice), one should understand the concept and learn this practice from experts in this field. There are many kundalini yoga techniques also as taught by Swatmarama Yogi, Swami Sivananda, Swami Nigamananda and many other spiritual gurus. Like Swami Yogananda. One can adopt the techniques and practice as per his or her suitability and convenience.

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