

# YOGA RESEARCH

The Yoga Research Society Newsletter

Number 23

October 1999 – March 2000

## YOGA for Common Ailments

excerpted from *Yoga for Common Ailments*

by Dr. Monro, Dr. Nagendra & Dr. Nagarathna

“Yoga is skill in action” states the *Bhagavad Gita*, the best known of all the Indian philosophical epics. But this is not intended to mean action in just the narrow sense of physical movement. For as well as exercises for improving the “skill” of your body, Yoga also comprises techniques that act on your mind and emotions, and provides a complete philosophy for living.

In order to achieve this aim you must develop “skill” in all aspects of your life. A great Indian teacher of this century, Sri Aurobindo, regarded Yoga as a methodical effort toward self-perfection through developing your latent potential on the physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and spiritual levels. And the most fundamental step you can take toward expanding the limits of your consciousness is to gain mastery over your mind.

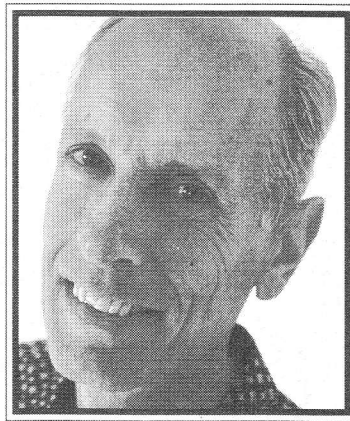
This is also the key to good health and happiness in today’s world. Great advances in medical science over the past century have reduced the incidence of most of the physical diseases that have plagued humanity for centuries. Ever-better drugs and surgical techniques have led to the eradication of most infectious diseases and the control of many metabolic disorders.

Soon even routine genetic interventions may be possible. But these techniques are less than effective against the new and ever-more-common causes of ill health – chronic stress and psychosomatic ailments.

Conventional medicine, by concentrating on a physical and mechanistic approach to healing can do little to relieve conditions such as these, since they are caused more by lifestyle and attitudes than by physiological anomalies. The frenetic pace of modern life exposes many people to continuous, unrelieved stress. And if you are largely sedentary in your habits and over-indulge in health-damaging

substances and foods, your wellbeing and fitness will be further compromised.

Eventually stress may manifest itself in the form of physical disease or mental breakdown. Modern medicine has countered with symptom-suppressing treatments,



DR. ROBIN MONRO

---

**There is no reason to settle  
for anything less than a  
positive sense of wellbeing.**

---

which do little to tackle the root cause of the problem. As a result, health has come to be regarded as a state in which disease is absent, rather than as a dynamic growth process in which you feel truly *well* on both the physical and mental levels. But there is no reason to settle for anything less than a positive sense of wellbeing.

Yoga has a lot to offer as we approach the 21st century. It gives us the means to complement medical technology with a holistic system of healthcare that addresses the problems of the mind and spirit, as well as those of the body.

Patanjali who wrote the classic text on Yoga more than 2,000 years ago, described it as “a science of the mind”. And it is through teaching you to control

your mind, your desires, and your reaction to stress that Yoga can fundamentally help you.

Mastery of the mind involves two aspects: the ability to concentrate your attention on any given subject or object; and the capacity to quiet your mind at will. Though most people have developed the first aspect to some degree, extremely few of us can lapse into inner peace even accidentally, let alone at will.

Yoga is an intelligent, skillful means for making the mind quiet, rather than a brutal, mechanical technique for stopping it. All aspects of Yoga work toward this in some way, thus bringing you closer to your goal.

Yoga develops your ability to maintain inner peace at all times, in all your actions, and thereby achieve physical and mental health. This calmness in action is the secret to attaining the “skill” referred to in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The approach of Yoga therapy is based on ancient Indian traditional beliefs about existence. In this philosophy there are five “sheaths” to existence, of which the physical frame is only the first. The second is the vital body that is made up of *prana*, the life energy that flows through you in invisible channels known as *nadis*. The third is the mind (your emotions and thoughts), the fourth is the higher intellect (perfect thought and knowledge), and the final sheath is the “abode of bliss”. The bliss sheath is thought to consist of the positive energy that is associated with the divine. It is from this sheath that the inner peace essential to true happiness emanates.

Happiness is often associated with jubilation and excitement, or the satisfaction of achieving desires. But these sources of pleasure are temporary, and in receding they are often followed by negative feelings, such as tiredness or



Yoga Research Society  
341 Fitzwater Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19147

This is the day the Lord has made;  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

King David

disillusionment. Real, sustainable inner peace involves no effort and engenders no fatigue. The texts of Yoga describe complete happiness as a state of silence, where you are no longer troubled by unnecessary thoughts and fears, a state of perfect poise and freedom of choice.

Yogic practices lay the foundation needed for you to achieve this, but you must also try to identify consciously what perfect happiness is and attempt to cultivate and maintain such a state for as long as you can.

Start by analysing what the feeling of pleasure comprises as you do something you enjoy. Yogis claim that actions bring pleasure when they briefly evoke the inner silence that defines true happiness. At the moment when you obtain something you desire or attain a hard-won goal – at the very instance of success – your thoughts vanish and your mind dips momentarily into the sheath of “bliss”.

This is the source of pleasure and all likes and dislikes – certain actions, or experiences, tend to open up temporary channels to the higher sheath, hence evoking positive sensations. But this feeling is temporary, and can tempt us to overindulge in the activity or substance that generated it. If you can isolate and remember that brief moment of satisfaction, however, you can learn to generate it from within and free yourself from dependency on external aids.

Disease is seen to arise through imbalance in any of the three lower sheaths of existence. In the physical, *pranic*, and mind sheaths, ego consciousness, which is centered around the self, predominates and

therefore harmony in these sheaths can easily be disturbed. The fourth and fifth sheaths are permeated by a wider, universal consciousness and cannot be perturbed. When you are truly healthy, the positive energy in the highest sheath

---

**The texts of Yoga  
describe happiness  
as a state of silence,  
where you are no longer  
troubled by unnecessary  
thoughts and fears,  
a state of perfect poise  
and freedom of choice.**

---

percolates freely through the lower ones and brings total harmony and balance to all your faculties. But though the harmony of the higher sheaths is constant, the free movement of bliss can be blocked by imbalances in the lower sheaths.

Ill health occurs when the total balance of perfect health is disturbed. And although the original disrupting influence may only affect one level at first, the disturbance soon spreads.

All the five sheaths of existence interact, thus something that primarily affects the mind, say, can soon spread to the body and *pranic* sheaths. A bad day at work may make you irritable, for example, but it also increases stress reactions, it may make you tense your muscles, and often depletes your energy level, leading to chronic fatigue.

For this reason, Yoga contains elements that address problems at every level –

*asanas* that relax and tone your muscles and massage your internal organs, *pranayama* that slows breathing and regulates the flow of *prana*, relaxation and meditation that act to calm your mind, and emotion culturing (techniques to change negative states of thinking) to heal your spirit.

The different types of Yoga practice augment each other and are more effective when done together. When you do the *asanas* and stretch your muscles, muscular tension is released and you are more able to relax. Likewise, when you relax the mind and release suppressed emotions you tend to become less tense on a physical level.

Every element of Yoga brings benefit throughout, and also acts to amplify the effect of other types of practices. For just as negative influences spread disruption, positive action has repercussions as well.

This is the essence of Yoga therapy – both as a preventive and as a curative. Daily practice of a complete Yoga session can restore your natural balance and harmony, bringing positive good health to all parts of your life – physical, mental, and spiritual.

excerpted from:

**Yoga for Common Ailments** (1990)

by Dr. R. Nagarathna, Dr. H.R. Nagendra,  
Dr. Robin Monroe. Gaia Books Limited: London, UK

**YOGA RESEARCH**

YOGA RESEARCH is published by the

Yoga Research Society

341 Fitzwater St., Philadelphia, PA 19147

Phone (215) 592-YOGA Fax (215) 574-1210

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Philadelphia, PA  
Permit No. 2935



Printed on Recycled Paper