

Yoga and Meditation



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Introduction

These two yoga and meditation are indivisible, since even those who are secular, enter into deep states of reflection, while engaging in yoga. The day begins well when one is able to contemplate, and do one's exercises simultaneously. The energy that is released is substantial, the mind is calm, one lets go of all the negativism that might have accumulated because of the disturbing events all of us are constantly exposed to. Best of all, the predatory instincts we have, as human beings, constantly engaged in competition with others, is muted.

Yoga helps to build up immunity, as our nervous systems are affected very badly by the noise pollution, the contaminated processed food that we all eat, and the way in which we live our lives, generally without stoppers. We move, as metropolitan citizens from one excitement to another, often stopping to merely draw breath, before we begin another excruciatingly exhausting assignment. The carbon trail we leave behind is as reminiscent of our own absorption of it, as we stand next to aero plane exhausts while disembarking, as frequently as we get stranded next to a spewing truck or bus or SUV in traffic jams, which last up to ten minutes at a time. How do we get rid of this carbon which accumulates in our blood, always making us yawn through the day, as we work endlessly? A good diet helps, and the free radicals are washed out by our drinking quantities of water and eating well washed salads and fresh fruit.

Yoga makes us, through its initial emphases on breathing exercises, spill out the air which is locked in our lungs, and by concentrating on the breathing, as we pull air in and push it out, it clears our brain. The concentration that is evident, as we do pranayama is probably the first step to meditation, since our mind and body becomes integrated in this preliminary exercise. The integration of body and mind, which yoga brings to us is its greatest benefit. As we proceed with the exercises that our guru teaches us, we find them appropriate to our age and physical condition. The guru selects exercises that are necessary for our well being. Even in a group setting, where there are people of different ages, it is the guru's wisdom that allows us to participate

in some, and not in others. If our age and physical circumstance does not permit us to do some exercises, we should not feel incompetent. I had an uncle in Kerala, who did head stands at the age of 90, and he always did his yoga and meditation before leaving for a twelve hour day at his shop, where he had been a spice merchant since his early youth. So age, by itself is not a determinant, but for those of us, who suffer from multiple sclerosis, the paralysis maybe so subtle, that even the simplest of exercises, such as lifting one's spine while lying on the floor, may take some time. Multiple sclerosis is a neurological illness, which is neither genetic nor infectious.

However, living in polluted cities, eating food which has been loaded with pesticides does affect one's chances of developing it. The similarities with rheumatoid arthritis and with diabetes are compelling. Many of the symptoms of MS, which is the slow or rapid loss of faculties and the deadness of nerves in the brain and spine, may result in blindness, loss of hearing and of course, paralysis. MS patients live with the dread of these, waking up in the morning, finding an eye inflamed, or ears blocked, or a body part stiff, without apparent cause. Yoga and meditation calm the body, and the mind. Shava Asana, like Pranayama, is excellent for returning the body to its accustomed tranquil space. For the galloping form of MS, where loss of limbs is immediate, meditation is calming, since the body accepts the context in which it has been placed. Most MS patients, whether it is the slow or rapid form of degradation, know that time is of the greatest essence, that what they have may well be taken away from them by the end of the day. They suffer exhaustion, which is almost continuous, and of course, fear, despair, anxiety. Care givers find their lack of attention to every day tasks, or their hypersensitivity to these, annoying in turn. They also suffer from the need to be attended to immediately. Meditation helps in controlling this need to be understood and attended to, as often, caregivers are busy with other tasks.

Yoga builds up those muscles which are in danger of atrophy due to the lack of blood circulation in such patients. Even flexing hands and feet, while in bed, or at the computer, can go a long way

in releasing the blood, where it has jammed or coagulated. Many times, MS patients wake up, in the middle of the night, with some limb gone completely dead on them. Ayurvedic treatment is a great boon, and sometimes, the patient emerges completely free of pain for a couple of months. The food that helps MS patients most are fruit and salads, cooking in sesame oil. Of course staying clear of butter, meat, chocolates, cakes, pickles and oily food does help in slowing the onset of illness. Since heat is the catalyst, those foods which are heating, trigger off MS episodes, or aggravate existing conditions. The heat rash and the inflamed eye is the first symptom. If the patient reads the sign that the body is overheated, and attends to it, then the chances are that she or he will work to cooling the metabolism down. Some are allergic to dairy products, some to meat. Each patient has to find out which is the catalyst to the exacerbation of their condition. Yoga, Ayurveda, Meditation and Diet are the most important in tailoring the palliative measures useful to controlling the

disease, as its tumultuous appearance disturbs everyone equally, without being very visible. MS patients, before paralysis sets in, look like everyone else, but deep within they are trying very hard to lead normal lives, and they experience the world much more dramatically than others. Homeopathy has great remedial doses for each symptom, as it appears differentially for every patient.

It is tailor made to the person according to the situation in which he or she finds himself or herself to be in, at any given time. The odd thing about MS is that every week, the patient finds a new body part is acting up, and standardized allopathic medicines like cortisone or interferon, are not equally available to all patients, and come with their own side effects, and are not custom made to the individual and unique nature of each afflicted person. Yoga, essentially, is a preventive system of therapy, which handles the pitta in the person's metabolism with its ability to understand that our relationship to the cosmos is constantly being divined by our attitude to it.



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