



Concept of Stress, Innate Health and Yoga

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In ancient Indian texts the mind is considered as a part of Consciousness which is infinite, formless energy, while thinking and emotional responses are considered as functions of the mind [1]. Over time, the way we think or respond emotionally becomes predictable. This makes us respond to situations in the same way over time, reinforcing the pattern [2]. It is further described in the ancient texts that these fixed patterns of responding are reinforced by reasoning, but also by an irrational state of mind, imagination, memory and (even) the mental processes during sleep.

Whether these responses are good for us, or not, the presence of a relatively fixed pattern of responding can ultimately give rise to perceiving situations as stressful. The practice of yoga including meditation is believed to result in a completely 'free' mind, free from all ('good' and 'bad') patterns of responding. This steady mental state, which is equally undisturbed by 'good' and by 'bad' events, is considered as a state of 'perfect bliss' (*ananda*) which is the inherent state of every person, a blissful state quite different from a state of being able to withstand and cope with inevitable stresses [3].

In order to attempt to reach such a state it is necessary to understand the way in which a person develops a mental state which allows them to perceive situations as stressful. The ancient texts describe five factors which can influence the way we perceive situations. These are called 'sources of distress' (*kleshas*) and most people are influenced by them [2]. If these sources of distress are mastered one should be able to realize the innate state of well-being, present within every person.



In summary, it is possible that yoga practice which is a combination of physical practices (which are well known) as well as the less known philosophical insights, if practiced regularly can help to prevent or modify fixed response patterns. This may allow a person to perceive a situation previously considered 'very stressful' as 'less stressful' or even 'not stressful'. Hence yoga practice does not help merely in stress-reduction or in coping with stress, instead yoga practice helps to realize the inherent state of perfect health and happiness (*ananda*) of Man, and in understanding that stress is a product of our perceptions and responses rather than an actual reality.

References:

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2. Mehta R: Yoga - the art of integration. A commentary on the yoga sutras of Patanjali. Second Reprint. The Theosophical Publishing House: Madras, India. 1990.
3. Gambhirananda Swami: Taittreya Upanisad. Advaita Ashram: Calcutta, 2004.

