

Chapter 17

Yoga for Attaining the State of Mindfulness

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ABSTRACT

Mental peace, inner peace, and spiritual enlightenment are often emphasized in ancient scriptures for the holistic development of man. Every culture and religion of the world teaches, preaches, and practices these virtues for a vertical development of love and restating the brotherhood in society. Yoga and Mindfulness are two prominent and popular practices to achieve the good values and virtues. These two practices are dissected by philosophers, researchers, and physicians to the threshold only to conclude that the effects are inevitably gainful. This chapter brings together yoga and mindfulness on same page to show their complementary relationship. Here are mentioned few challenges and issues that both the practices have to face often.

INTRODUCTION

Since ages, almost all ancient scriptures emphasize the acquisition of mental peace, inner peace as life goals and suggest various paths for its attainment. Irrespective of the origin of the oldest and common religions of the world, gurus (central figure) portrayed their struggling, fighting, preaching and practicing peace. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism or Mazdyasna and Buddhism emphasizes on peace and non-violence. If one prepares a Venn diagram using the values preached in each religion, the common value shared by all religions will be 'peace'. To attain peace, meditation is commonly practiced and suggested. Of these religions, Hinduism and Buddhism have different types of meditation- Yoga and mindfulness respectively are the most common meditational practices in current times.

Found about 2600 years ago in Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness is now a popular meditational practice in neurophysiology and psychology literature. Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined it as non-judgemental attention to the present moment; and the main techniques to practice the core of mindfulness are meditation, mental body scan, and breathe watching and mindfulness yoga (Kabat-Zinn 2003). According to

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Tang and Posner (2013) different mindfulness skills converge to a common goal i.e. being in the state of awareness and placidity of the phenomenological field. This meditational practice requires a conscious acceptance by one of the present conditions or situation, both behavioural and mental. Numerous research in mindfulness provides pieces of evidence for its effectiveness in emotion regulation (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen 2009; Geschwind et al., 2011; Mathew et al., 2010; Nyklíček & Kuijpers, 2008; Zhang et al., 2019), enhancing happiness and satisfaction (Davidson et al., 2003; Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998), reduce anxiety, depression and experience equanimity (Baer et al., 2006), reduce addiction (Bowen et al., 2006) and increase cognitive abilities (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., 2007; Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007; Low et al., 2008; McCracken & Yang, 2008; Ortner, Kilner, & Zelazo, 2007; Tang et al., 2007). According to Schoenberg and Barendregt (2016) mindfulness involves a fine-tuning of attention to dismantle mental processes into basic constituents and observe this dismantling from a distant ego. They have used Vipassana as a synonym for Mindfulness (Schoenberg & Barendregt, 2016). Mindfulness or Vipassana meditation involves observing the abdominal breathing movement to bring attention focused on abdominal movements. The practitioners are required to meditate for 13-14 hours a day with stipulated time for other activities such as mealtime etc. (Schoenberg & Barendregt, 2016). Mindfulness meditation manifests discipline and concentration in lifestyle and actions. Insight emerges once the discipline and concentration are developed in behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels of individuals. Schoenberg & Barendregt (2016) structured the advancing of mindfulness meditation (according to discipline, concentration and insight) into levels for better functionality. The first, second and third levels are discipline levels that require a restriction of physical output, mental output, avoidance of any distractions through persistence (Schoenberg & Barendregt, 2016). As a result, this process developed concentration and mindful observation of actions and thoughts, thus ensues insight i.e. awareness of what, how and why of happenings. The above study claims a heightened resolution of observation of internal or external stimulus as the emergence of equanimity and established an empirical baseline with neurophysiologic markers. Hölzel et al. (2011) proposed four effective compositions of mindfulness namely, attention regulation on the chosen object, body awareness, regulation of emotional reactions and changing perception about self. They found these four components similar to “*SatipatthanaSutta*” in the Theravada Buddhist scriptures (Hölzel et al., 2011). Davis and Hayes (2012) review several articles on mindfulness and concluded various benefits for both people in health and ill-health, and psychologists.

To be consistent with the above studies and Ancient Buddhist literature, ‘mindfulness’ can be referred as a psychological state of awareness that one attains with the practice of promoting awareness about self and environment. It is non-judgemental momentary awareness of individual experiences. Since it is a state of mind, certain practices can cultivate it. Walsh and Shapiro (2006) mentioned that mindfulness can be cultivated by several disciplines, including yoga, tai chi and qigong but most of the literature focus on mindfulness meditation. It is noteworthy that that a mindful state is a lifestyle and not limited to remedy as suggested by some above-mentioned studies. Consistent with the suggestions by Walsh and Shapiro, one can attain mindfulness as a lifestyle via yoga. It prevents the individual from the physical and psychological pains; cures one from the same. A common idea of yoga is limited to *Asana* or physical pose (Gulati, 2018; Issacs, 2008; Martin 2018), but the literature is ambiguous in explaining the relationship of various steps of former and latter practice.

Mindfulness leads to focused awareness and connecting with reality, the surroundings. It helps to be detailed about people around us, have a sharp observation of behaviour and be more attentive as a person. It requires an unbiased presence of mind to attend the present moment (Bishop et. al., 2004).

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