

UNITY OF HEALTH THROUGH YOGA AND ISLAMIC PRAYER 'SALAH'

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Abstract:-In every religion, there is a set of rituals and modes of worship. In Islamic World, Salah is the fundamental religious obligation of every Muslim to offer five times a day at set times and conditions, following a proper sequence. The Salah positions have corresponding Yoga positions, so the culminated purpose of the study was to analyze the paramount effect of Salah on psycho-physiological and physical efficiencies of people offering regular Salah as provided by Yoga. The paper also suggests in the unity of two great religions of the world i.e. Hinduism & Islam as the Yoga and Salah have many common points which may illuminate the lives of both the communities in positive manner.

Keywords: Health, Yoga, Islam, Salah.

INTRODUCTION

The word Salah originates from the Arabic word 'Silah' which means connection i.e. connection with The God. The Islamic definition of Salah is the name given to the formal prayer of Islam. Salah is a fundamental principle of religion Islam and is an important practice which must be performed at set times and conditions', following a sequence. Islam is the religion where physical movements of prayer (Salah) are combined with spiritual exercise. The analysis has been made in the light of present day medical knowledge that how Salah can have positive effects on health. Salah is not just a religious obligation but a sure path towards better health and fitness as proven by contemporary science.

Now in the 21st century we came to know that washing hands, face and other parts of the body will prevent diseases. But fourteen centuries ago when there was no microscope, Prophet (SAW), was the walking encyclopaedia of scientific discoveries & inventions, if we may so describe him, gave us a prescription of 26 washing movements to be carried out 5 times a day, a total of 130 daily washing movements to grant us optimum health.

Salah has many postures like Standing (Qiyam), Bowing (Rukoo), Prostration (Sujood) and Sitting during the salutation (Tahayat), all have a strong relationship with spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of particular movements come up from right execution of the position or action, the span of time the posture is assumed and by careful and correct recitation.

The Yoga is the ancient most art of living prescribed by the Rishis and Munis of India. The sole aim of the Ashtanga-Yoga is to concentrate & connect with The God as prescribed in Dhyana & Samadhi. Traditionally Yoga is thought of as the inseparable part of Hinduism whereas the authors believe that the yogic teaching is the culminating enlightenment of every religion. Hence to think Yoga belongs to Hinduism only is a gross misconception. The only viable justification put forward by the scholars in recognizing Yoga as the inseparable part of Hinduism is the language of its scriptures and chanting i.e. Sanskrit, whereas authors found in the Qur'anic teachings where The Al-Mighty God has

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mentioned that “for every community, We have sent the Messengers and every Messenger had delivered our Message using the community's idioms, phrases and languages” (“Surah Ibrahim [14.4] - Al-Qur'an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم”). Hence this Quranic injunction has ruled out every misconception related to the affiliation of Yoga with Hinduism. It might be possible that the Yogic teachings (as prescribed by the Ashtanga-Yoga) had been descended by The God Himself to the community whose mother-tongue was Sanskrit, and now The God had sent Prophet Muhammad with His Message in Arabic as Arabic had been the mother-tongue of his people in Arabia. Moreover, it is interesting to note that in-between Yoga & Islam, we find every religion with more or less the same teachings as have been propounded by the Ashtanga-Yoga.

ISLAMIC PRAYER 'SALAH' AND 'YOGA'

Muslim prayers (Salah) can be called Islamic Yoga as through this the same benefits can be availed that the Yoga practitioners recommend through regular practice of Yoga, thus called Yoga as 'one of the oldest systems of personal development encompassing body, mind and spirit'. Yoga these days is the top growing health trend, well-known for centuries for its remedial powers.

(Burns, 2012) stated that Asanas in yoga have several body postures, which one has to maintain for a period of time while breathing in a recurring manner or declaiming 'Mantras'. Several agencies like Harvard Medical School and Menninger Foundation have researched the benefits of Yogic practices and now advise it to their patients.

Yoga is so trendy nowadays that several versions have been developed by people as per their needs, like secretaries have come up with a basic sitting version that they can do at their desks. Similarly elderly, pregnant women and athletes all have their specific versions based on their requirements. Interestingly Salah, one of the five pillars of Islam has provided Muslims with several of the Yoga's similar health benefits for 14 centuries. Several hospital researchers have concluded that patients benefit from even a simplified version of Yoga. Since Muslims presume different positions while offering Salah. Of course, not all the Yogic postures are found in the Islamic prayer. This light activity (Salah) also provides a person with physical, psychological and spiritual benefits five times a day (Burns, 2012).

The Islamic prayer (Salah) has some corresponding Yogic postures, and these postures collectively activate energy fields (seven chakras) in the human body. The activation of a chakra may sound linguistically strange, but in common terms the concept of energy fields can be understood by giving a thought to how the 'feeling' sense functions. A person observe, when touching a body part that part responds by being more conscious. Another part on the same nerve path may also respond without being touched (Burns, 2012).

The 'Takbir' and 'Qiyam' collectively are very much alike to 'Tadasana' (the mountain pose in Yoga), which helps to get better posture, balance and self-awareness. Blood pressure and breathing remain normal in this position, thus providing many benefits to asthma and heart patients. The hands which are placed on the chest during the Qiyam position are thought to set in motion the solar plexus 'chakra' or pathway. This is thought to direct the consciousness of self in the world and reins the health of the muscular system, skin, intestines, liver, and gall bladder. When hands are held open for supplication (Dua), they set in motion the heart 'chakra' said to be the centre of compassion, love, harmony and peace.

The position of 'Rukoo' is alike the Ardha Uttanasana in Yoga. While doing Rukoo thigh and lower back muscles stretches and help blood to be pumped into the upper torso, which tones the muscles of stomach, abdomen and kidneys.

The Sujud is said to stimulate the 'crown chakra' which is associated with individual's divine connection with the creation around and their passion for sacred pursuits. This nerve path is also linked to the vigour of the brain and pineal gland. Thereby balances ones inner and outer energies (Burns, 2012).

The posture during al-Qaaidah, (or Julus) is similar to the Vajrasana (thunderbolt) pose in Yoga, which strengthens the toes, knees, thighs and legs. It is thought to be beneficial for those prone to more sleep, and for those who like to keep working for hours. The 'throat chakra' is stimulated by turning the head towards first to the

right and then the left side at the end of prayer. This nerve pathway is related to the throat, neck, arms, hands and hearing-therefore, aid in individual's ingenuity and communication (Burns, 2012).

It is thought that a person who sets in motion all 7 nerve pathways one time per day. The individual can remain psychologically, bodily and spiritually well balanced.

2. PROCEDURE OF ISLAMIC PRAYER 'SALAH'

2.1 Standing (Qiyam) – Salah usually starts in a standing position. The hands are raised to the shoulder level or to the level of top of the ears. Both arms are then placed over chest, with the right arm over the left. The feet of the worshippers should be straight and towards Qibla i.e. the direction towards Kaaba in Mecca city in Saudi Arabia. This posture is somewhat like Tadasana in Yoga, with the only difference that the saadhak (worshipper) doesn't raise hands straight over the head.

2.1 Bowing (Rukoo) – While uttering some verses from the Quran in the standing position, Rukoo (Bowing) is done by leaning forward, especially at lumber joint supported by the palms placed on the knees with fingers spaced out. After reciting some verses in this position, the worshipper returns to his previous state i.e. standing position. This position is like Trikonasana in Yoga. After a few seconds, the worshipper gradually reverts to the previous state until vertebral column is vertical. This position is like the modified Paschim-Uttanasana (Standing Paschim-Uttanasana) & Trikonasana in Yoga.

2.2 Prostration (Sujood) – The act of prostration is done from the standing position to kneeling, the position involves having the forehead, nose, both hands, knees and all toes touching the ground together. This position is like Shashtaangasana in Yoga

2.3 Sitting (Tahayat) and finishing Salah – Sitting is an important step in Salah. After standing, bowing and prostration, sitting is done on the left foot along the ground with the right foot upright. After reciting some verses from Quran in this position, the Salah is concluded by reciting greetings of salaam by looking over one's right and then left side. This posture is more like virasana in Yoga

3. HEALTH BENEFITS OF SALAH

3.1 SALAH AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Purification is very important matter in Islam one must purify their intention for Allah (SWT) alone and purify their bodies and clothes before beginning the prayer. In the glorious Quran, Allah (SWT) states, “Truly, Allah loves those who turn into him in repentance and He loves those who purify themselves” (“Surah Al-Baqarah [2:222] - Al-Qur’an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم”).

Ablution / Wudu is an essential pre-requisite of performing Salah. It is very important for personal hygiene. Wudu is the usage of pure water on upon specific body parts, such as hands, face, forearm to the elbows and feet etc. Indeed it has been explained by Allah the Glorified and Exalted, and the messenger of Allah (SAW) clarifies it for people. Allah the Exalted said, “O you who believe! When you intend to perform prayer, wash your faces and your forearm to the elbows. And wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles” (“Surah Al-Ma’idah [5.6] - Al-Qur’an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم”).

3.1.1. Hands – wash hands in between the fingers and rub the surface and edges of the nails. Washing of hands is the only most important means of preventing the spread of infection. They attract germs and parasites etc. because hands are the main contact parts of our body to the outside world, if not washed these germs can cause viral infections of skin and other parts of the body contact infections (WHO, 2009).

3.1.2. Mouth – the obvious reason behind washing the mouth during ablution is to remove the food particles, which could cause teeth and gum problems that is also the reason why siwak (brushing one's teeth) is also encouraged before ablution. Common cold could be prevented over 30 Percent of the time by daily gargling with plain water. This simple hygienic habit could contribute to public health (Satomura et al., 2005)

3.1.3. Nose –Washing one's nostrils, one is also performing a preventive health measure as the germs trapped in the nostrils are removed and do not pass on to the respiratory system. According to a study conducted by a team of doctors in Alexandria University, the Prophetic tradition, which urges the exaggeration of washing the nostrils by introducing the water in the nostrils, then blowing it out, positively affects the inner coating of the nostrils. Those who carried out the washing in the correct form had clean, shiny nostrils with no dust clinging to the small hair inside An American study of 24 patients with different inflammatory conditions in the nose including allergies reported that patients who used nasal irrigation for the treatment of Sino-Nasal disease experienced statistically significant improvement (Tomooka, Murphy, & Davidson, 2000)

3.1.4. Face – Repeated washing of the face invigorates the facial skin cells and helps prevent early wrinkles as well as having a cleansing effect on the inside of the eyes, which prevents eye infection and retard acne or pimple growth (Tawfik, 2009).

3.1.5. Ears and Nape of Neck – Washing the ears helps rid them from wax accumulation, which may cause ear infections as well as affecting the inner ear, which eventually causes body imbalances. Neck is exposed area of the body that gathers dust, massage helps in cleaning and also reduces stress. In fact many stress therapists strongly recommend similar motion to reduce stress (Tawfik, 2009)

3.1.6. Feet – The Prophetic tradition of encouraging one to wash between the toes while washing the feet is also extremely important, as it prevents the foot, which in our modern times is trapped most of the day inside shoes, from accruing athlete's foot (Tawfik, 2009).

Magomedov, (2008) in his article “Muslim Rituals and their Effect on Person’s Health” stated that Ablution also activates the Biological Active Spots (BASes), same as the scheme behind Chinese reflexotherapy. Recently we came know that man is composite system of electromagnetic fields, meridians, biological rhythms. The internal organs of man are no less than complicated bio-energetically whole, having permanent multi-channel two-sided connections with the skin, which have special spots, who functions like buttons on “Control” and “Recharge boards” accountable for specific organs. These spots are known as Biological Active Spots (BASes).Chinese medicine is of the view that there 700 BASes or more and some of them have quick reaction therapy property and thus named as the aggression or antique or prime elements spots, majority of these prime spots are situated in areas obligatory for ablution while five are locate in ankle and knee region(an area which is desirable according to Prophetic traditions to wash).Thus Wudu (ablution) becomes a sort of action, which provides the hydro massage of the active spots, their thermal and corporal stimulation (Tawfik, 2009).

The same ritual of Ablution before every Islamic prayer i.e. Wudu (washing face, hand, feet, nostrils & wiping head) is also encouraged by Yoga experts who say that washing important motor and sensory organs such as the hands, arms, eyes, legs, mouth and genitals before sleep using cool water relaxes the body preparing it for a sound sleep (Vedprajinananda, 2014).

4. PHYSIOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF SALAH

During Salah muscles in the body contract, thereby blood flow is increased to the muscles and muscle tone is also increased. Salah improves posture, increased the intake of oxygen and enhances the functioning of respiratory, digestive, endocrine and reproductive and excretory systems. Pressure on abdominal muscles increases intestine movements to push forward its residual contents thus preventing constipation and promoting gut motility and absorption capacity .Even while properly bending with the back and elbows straight there is a squeezing pressure (just like pressing a sponge to release water) on the kidneys by the muscles of the back and abdominal wall that results variation in blood flow, mechanical pressure on the excreta forcing it into the ureters and bladder, In standing back the pressure is suddenly released and the kidneys undergo a sort of massage. Salah is a light exercise that helps to lower cholesterol, which is thought to be one of the causes of strokes, diabetes and many other medical conditions. Holy Prophet Muhammad said, “there is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the

heart” (Muhammad al-Bukhari,).

Salah gives exercise to the heart and make one healthy. Regular Salah also has a great impact on resting heart rate. Salah activity makes artery vessels more flexible due to rise and fall of blood circulation results in preventing heart diseases (Salam & Vijay, 2013)

4.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF SALAH

Psychological benefits ultimate satisfaction- peace of mind! It is a known fact that exercise improves mood, thought and behaviour. Exercise improves the quality of life, induces greater sense of well-being and energy, reduces anxiety and depression, influences mood favourably and contributes to self- esteem and any aura of confidence, improves memory in the elderly especially with constant repetition of ayaat (verses) from the glorious Quran and other ayaat which exalt his glory. Stress reduction, increases concentration, mental relaxation, improved appearance and resistance to set upset better sleep (Sayeed & Prakash, 2013).

4.2 PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF SALAH

Salah is a form of mild exercise which involves movements of all body parts and some such unsure movements that we normally don't make during routine course of day like prostration i.e. Sajdah (Haque & Ghosh, 2013). Done 5 times daily at regular intervals, it helps to maintain the body round the clock without causing any strain or tiredness.

Salah is a hemo- dynamic exercise which improves coordination, circulation, posture, balance and well-being. Salah has a great effect on burning off calories. It maintains muscle tone and body composition, joint flexibility and reduces arthritis, makes the back bone strong, prevents sciatica and retard the aging process. While Takbir at the commencement of Salah, an individual move his hands and shoulder muscles, in doing so the flow of blood towards torso is increased. A remarkable tissue in our body is cartilage, it is unique in being a living tissue with no direct blood supply, the only way it received nutrients and oxygen is by movements of the joints. The pumping effect aids blood supply towards the joint area which would otherwise be bypassed. Individuals who sit at the terminals are in danger of ending up with dead cartilage tissues that will consequently wear away. This will lead to arthritis, painful joints and paralysis. Salah therefore has many orthopaedic benefits for all people (Reza, Urakami, & Mano, 2002).

The physical and physiological benefits of Salah are multiple to say the least. Most of the body muscles and joints are exercised during Salah. In the most noteworthy movement of prostration besides the limb muscles, the back and perineum muscles as well are exercised repeatedly. The muscles in neck are strengthened such that it is rare to find an individual who offer Salah regularly, prostrating 34 times a day to be ill with conditions like cervical spondylosis or myalgias. Sajdah is the only position in which the head is in a position lower than the heart and therefore, receives increased blood supply. This surge in blood supply has a positive effect on memory, concentration, psyche and other cognitive abilities. During Sajdah dissipation of the electromagnetic energy accumulated from the atmosphere takes place by the grounding effect at regular intervals resulting in a calming feeling. A recent study investigating the alpha brain activity during Muslim prayers has reported increased amplitude in the parietal and occipital regions suggestive of parasympathetic elevation, thus indicating a state of relaxation. Sajdah (Prostration) also have constructive special effects on back muscles, while doing Sajdah and getting up, the muscles of the back contracts and gains strength, so a usual Namazi rarely suffer from backache. After performing Sajdah either the musalli (one who is praying) stands up or he sits to pray Attahiyat. In this posture an individual sits calmly with his hands resting on thighs which are folded towards the back. This is much similar to the relaxation position of Yoga and has soothing effect upon one's health.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to lengthen the posture of Rukoo (bending) and Sajdah positions and advised others to do so. From the above evidence it is apt to say that from medical perspective as well the advice of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is a golden rule for health (Beebani, 2009)

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the above discussion that the Yoga & Salah have psychological, physiological and physical effects on the individual. A sound body with sound mind is essential for

every individual to achieve the goal. Salah coordinates the action of body and mind of people

Salah has special characteristics in that it is a short duration mild-to-moderate psychological, physical and brain activity. Scientific evidence also supports the notion that even moderate intensity activities, when performed daily, can have some long-term health benefits (American Heart Association). Salah is like a free hand exercise. It can be performed in groups or individually without any equipment. Thus, a person in a rehabilitation program can practice the activity in their room with ease and comfort, even when sitting in a wheelchair or in bed. During the performance of Salah, most of the muscles and joints of the body are involved. This activity is convenient for all kinds of patients, including children, the elderly and physically handicapped, for strengthening their muscles as well as the mind. Whereas Ashtanga-Yoga is a powerful stream of knowledge which enables the practitioners to achieve radiant physical health, serene mind, and spiritual upliftment and creates the ability for harmonious social living.

This paper has the potential teachings to foster communal peace between the followers of two great religions of world.

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