

Comments to:

Health Realization/Innate Health: Can a quiet mind and a positive feeling state be accessible over the lifespan without stress-relief techniques?

Judith A Sedgeman

Med Sci Monit, 2005; 11(12): HY47–52

Dear Editor,

In the article by Judith Sedgeman, health realization or innate healing offers a unique perspective about the state of stress as an occasional temporary interruption of life which is normally healing and positive, related to changes in thinking and emotion [1].

Thoughts are emphasized as ever changing and originating from the 'formless infinite energy of all things'. The concept of health realization is manifestly different from the premise that some degree of stress is inevitable for everyone and that stress-reducing techniques provide a respite from stress and improve the ability to withstand and recover from stress. There is a similarity between the concepts of health realization and those described in ancient Indian texts. This comment attempts to summarize these ideas.

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 [2]. 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 [3]. 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 [4]. 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 [3]. If these sources of distress are mastered one should be able to realize the innate state of wellbeing, present within every person. The five factors are (i) lack of knowledge (*avidya*), (ii) a sense of 'I-ness', which is man's absolute identification of himself with everything that he is involved in (*asmitha*), (iii) strong preferences (*raga*) and (iv) strong dislikes (*dvesha*), where attraction and aversion are due to an absolute identification with a mental state which is pleasurable, and wanting that state to continue without interruption. This wish for continuity of pleasure if taken further results in (v) a desire for a continuity of life (*abhinivesa*) (which is the fifth source of distress) and consequently a fear of death and to a lesser degree of anything which appears threatening. Knowing and understanding these five possible sources of distress can help people to understand that circumstances considered to be stress-inducing are in reality dependant on the way they are perceived based on our likes, dislikes, being poorly informed, an overwhelming sense of 'self', and our fears.

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.

Sincerely,

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