



SELF REGULATION IN YOGA: EXPANSION OF POSSIBILITIES UNLIMITED

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Abstract

Each person desires to attain the highest states of existence after continually muddling with the constraints and temptations of the material world. An inner world of truth, peace, love, enlightenment awaits to be discovered in each one of us, holding endless possibilities for transcendence from the worldly 'maya' into the sublime omnipresent 'paramatma'. Sages across centuries evolved unique ways to assist the 'indriyas' to search beyond the obvious and find ways that led to the culmination of this goal. Self regulation of thought, behaviour and emotions is one such technique to extend oneself beyond the physical self and unravel the hidden potential that remains submerged in our consciousness. The present paper strives to highlight the role of self regulation and its enhancement via Yoga in achieving all that one is capable of.

Keywords: Self Regulation, Yoga, Mind control

The word Yoga conjures up many a thought form in different people. It has evolved out of the wisdom of Indian sages who were not only masters of the secrets of our "paanch" tatva body as becomes evident in the Ayurveda but the finest and highest faculties of the human mind and their interactions thereof. Today yoga has adorned many a avatar from 'Bikram yoga' to "Tai Chi yoga" suiting the many needs of the multicultural pot pourri of humanity. Many people have realized its relevance in their lives and try to squeeze in a dose of yoga in their extremely stringent time schedules in the form of a weekend class or doing breathing exercises such as pranayam in the office. Understanding the zeitgeist of our times it is almost incredible to see a plethora of researches acknowledging the unlimited potential of yoga. The main reason behind this is that each person yearns to attain the highest states of existence after continually muddling with the constraints and temptations of the material world. An inner world of truth, peace, love, enlightenment awaits to be discovered in each one of us, holding endless possibilities for transcendence from the worldly 'maya' into the sublime omnipresent 'paramatma'. Sages across centuries evolved unique ways to assist the 'indriyas' to search beyond the obvious and find ways that led to the culmination of this goal.

Many people nowadays believe and promote yoga as a form of physical exercise alone. Yoga has surprisingly little to do with improving bodily flexibility only. Training the body is just one of the lower stages of Yoga which can be very helpful but is not at all the actual goal as is meant and defined by the word "Yoga", meaning: *Union*. Yoga practice reaches all the way from retaining physical postures to attaining that state of absolute mind control (synonymous with self regulation) and enlightenment. At its heart, yoga is essentially about self-regulation. In fact, some of the oldest writings on yoga state that it "is the cessation of the vibrations of the mind." The great sage Patanjali in the Yogasutra has explicitly defined the basic fundamental of this centuries old practice as "*Yogash chitta vritti nirodhabh*" which means Yoga is the restraint (control, mastery) of the modifications (changes, movement, thought-forms) of the mind field. *Nirodha* and *Mind Control* are terms that define the practice and the action. The mind and the senses are constantly interacting with each other and if we attain mastery on any one of them, we gain control over the other one as well. One ancient way adopted by the yogis to reach this state of complete self regulation was through calming the nervous system using breath awareness

and breathing techniques. The focal point of this principle was "self restraint". The link in the chain if understood by the dynamics of variables in Psychology appears to be the self regulatory skills and strategies. Self regulation of thought, behaviour and emotions is a technique to extend oneself beyond the physical self and unravel the hidden potentials that remain submerged in our consciousness. It can be understood as the willful, intentional acts in which people engage to align themselves with the person they ideally want to be or should be to attain goals set for themselves. This executive function of the self is now treated as one of the most important functions of the self. Anecdotal impressions and assorted research findings have suggested substantial individual differences in people's capacity for self-regulation and self control (Funder, Block, & Block, 1983)[1]. Some people are better able than others to manage their lives, hold their tempers, keep their diets, fulfill promises etc. Tangney & Baumeister (2000)[2] showed that trait self control was significantly associated with a variety of physical and mental health indices such as people higher on self-control reported fewer disordered eating and alcohol abuse symptoms, reduced anger proneness, higher self esteem, more secure attachment style, and even higher grade point averages. In a study of Dutch adolescents by Engels, Finkenauer, Den Exter Blokland, & Baumeister (2001)[3] high self control was linked to fewer transgressions, such as fighting, theft and vandalism, and also to more positive relationships with parents. Intrinsically determined self regulation has been linked to greater creativity, more cognitive flexibility (McGraw & McCullers, 1979)[4], less anxiety (Ryan & Connell, 1989)[5], a higher level of satisfaction (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989)[6] and better physical and psychological health (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2002)[7]. In another study ninety chronic pain patients were trained in mindfulness meditation in a ten week stress reduction and relaxation program. Statistically significant reductions were observed in measures of present-moment pain, negative body image, inhibition of activity by pain, symptoms, mood disturbance, and psychological symptomatology, including anxiety and depression. Pain-related drug utilization decreased and activity levels and feelings of self-esteem increased. Exemplifying the benefits of self regulation of the mind via meditation a study revealed that a group randomly assigned to 5 days of meditation practice with the integrative body-mind training method showed significantly better attention and control of stress



than a similarly chosen control group given relaxation training. (Tang et al., 2007)[8].

It is indeed persistent efforts of practising yoga and meditation which lead towards the gate way that ushers in transcendental awareness and timeless perception. Self Realization and enlightenment are terms that define the results that flow from this establishment. Both the action and the result are inseparable. Unraveling the wisdom in another verse of Patanjali we find the answer to the magnanimity of what ensues once the pinnacle of yogic practice is attained. He opines, “Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam” i.e., This yoga sutra described the state which is the result of Nirodha or Mind Control. Essentially what happens with mind control is that consciousness, remains dependent only on its own essence to comprehend the world. It is at peace and resides in itself. The observer becomes free. Consciousness is no longer dependent and identified with the transitory shapes and forms of nature and the mind. This consciousness is no longer bound to creation; consciousness is liberated. A person is *in* the world but not *of* the world. Then the seer abides (and rests) in its own true and fundamental self. Swami Krishnanada provides a profound description of this ultimate state “Initially the mind transcends the consciousness of matter and form, of distinctions and limitations, and gets concentrated on the idea of infinite space. This infinite perception brings joy to the mind, for here space-perception is freed from the usual concrete empirical perception of it and raised to a non-empirical abstract concept. Consequently the mind transcends the concept of infinite space and becomes concentrated on the concept of infinite awareness; it is merely aware of a concept of consciousness as infinite. Then the mind gets concentrated on the infinite void and is aware of the void alone. Finally the mind rises to a state where there is no knowing, or non-knowing, but an inexplicable awareness, which is pure and simple.” Beyond this the mind assumes the state of cosmic being and is one with all cosmic processes.

To reach such exalted states of experience we also need to identify, understand and challenge the impediments lying on the journey. It's the illusory perception of having completely overcome one's egoistic bindings and judgemental perceptions that eludes our progress. Every time we perceive something, automatically there is a response from the mind which could be just a fleeting thought or an act of reason and judgement. Because of this instant and automatic reaction we fail to observe reality as it is. We are not seeing what really exists but our perception is marred by believing we are seeing what we think should be there. The responses of the mind are acknowledged and assumed to be reality. If we want to establish a pure perception of reality as it is, we need to learn how to see beyond these judgements, and thoughts. Ultimately we should master the mind completely and always see things as they are without judgement. To begin with just taking slow deep breaths has a profound effect on the nervous system, which can give us a sense of control and can help with focusing. It is crucial that if we intend to discover the gems of self discovery through the techniques of self regulation in yoga and meditation we need to prioritise our daily activities accordingly. Unfortunately the time most people devote for practising yoga and meditation is too little in comparison to the extensive portion of the day which is vigorously

employed in the pursuit of pleasure by consciousness. Whatever little benefit has accumulated during the short period of meditation is likely to be swept away by the strong winds of desire during the larger part of the day. This is the reason that most individuals do not reap more than the fringe benefits offered by yoga.

Another obstacle which humans create for themselves is to become lost in their many selves. It becomes tedious to locate the emergence of one true self which is authentically you. Most of the times we are what we hear from others, what we have learnt from others and how others see us. Sri Aurobindo states, “Only a very few people who have an intense intellectual life, who are in the habit of reflecting, observing, putting ideas together, gradually form a mental individuality for themselves.”

Before an individual wishes to reach out to the divine, it becomes a pre-requisite to contemplate “who is that, which chooses to submerge himself?” Is this person individuated completely to be ready to lose himself to the cosmic truth? Only through the religious practice of yoga, dhyana, self regulation and self analysis does one embark on the journey leading to the dawning of the mystical. The relevance of self regulation is unparalleled since it serves as the vehicle which helps carry oneself beyond the shackles of mundane existence towards possibilities and horizons unlimited. The mastery of the impulses comes only through determined self regulation. Sri Aurobindo aptly states, “When the psychic being can by sadhana become dominant and freely use its instruments, then the impulse towards the divine becomes complete and the transformation of mind, vital and body, not merely their liberation, becomes possible”.

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