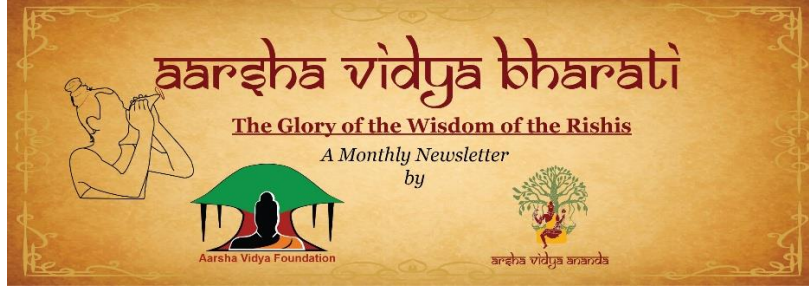

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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Importance of International Yoga Day

By Nirmala Iyer, London



Maharishi Patanjali

An integral part of the living tradition of Bharat has been the practice of *Aṣṭāṅga* Yoga – particularly *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma*. With millions across the world practicing Yoga, it seemed just right that the International Yoga Day was proposed by India at the United Nations and unanimously accepted. While addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 2014, the Honorable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi said - “*Yoga is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature and a holistic approach to health and well-being. Yoga is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with ourselves, the world and Nature.*”

June 21 was chosen as it is the longest day in the Northern Hemisphere. We offer our reverence to the Solar Deity, Sun. The deity of the *Gāyatrī* mantra is the Sun and also called *Savitā* for creation, protection and sustenance of the entire life in this universe.

Just like me, most people find that even a few asanas bring in a deeper level of self awareness, inner strength and learning to be relaxed - inspite of the busyness of life. But Yoga is much more than that. It is living in a holistic way by following a systematic approach laid out in the Yoga Sutras given by Maharishi Patanjali. The 8 anga-s or limbs are:

1) Yama-s - Self - Restraints – The observances for establishing a foundation of an ethical life are: a) *Ahimsā* - Non-violence, b) *Satya* - Truth & Integrity c) *Asteya* - Non-stealing d) *Brahmacarya* – Discipline and walking the path of Brahman, e) *Aparigraha* - Non-possession.

2) Niyama-s - Observances - They are disciplines to be practiced by oneself. These include: a) *Śaucam* - Purification (In thought, word and deed), b) *Santoṣa* – Contentment, c) *Tapah* – Austerity, d) *Svādhyāya* - Self-study, e) *Īśvara Praṇidhānam* - Surrender to *Īśvara*

3) Āsana - Posture and Movement – Body postures that help alignment, endurance, flexibility and in time work on the ligaments, energy channels, strength and internal organs of the physical body.

4) Prāṇāyāma - Breath control - Regulation of the prana for different purposes including quietening the mind.

5) Pratyāhāra - Withdrawal of sense organs - Turning one's attention inwards at the seat of meditation and not be distracted towards various objects or cravings or aversions.

6) Dhāraṇa - Intense Focus - Learning to focus the mind on an object or a deity is mastered in this limb.

7) Dhyāna - Meditation - It is maintaining an uninterrupted flow of attention on a fixed point or region. Eg. Japa dhyanam keeps the thoughts consistent & identical.



8) Samādhi - Absorption - The body and senses are at rest as if in sleep, but the mind and reason are alert as if one is awake. It is an experience of oneness.

One can grow through Yoga progressively by mastery in all these limbs as well as bringing each limb into one's life. For instance, the practice of both *Santoṣa* and *Tapah* while doing an asana – pushing oneself and also being content with where one is.

Regular practice of Yoga has a very subtle but a strong and a long-term effect on us and brings harmony in all walks of life. Even if we approach yoga only for disease prevention, health promotion and management of several lifestyle related disorders, we see the benefits of its blessings. Yoga is for everybody, regardless of age or physical ability.

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