

## SCIENCE OF MEDITATION

The human brain is divided into two halves or hemispheres. Each is responsible for different functions.

Left Hemisphere:

- sequential
- logical
- analytical
- rational
- verbal

Right Hemisphere:

- simultaneous
- metaphysical
- synthetic
- musical
- visual imagery
- intuition

The left brain has been most revered in Western culture. Only recently have investigators linked the increase in potential and feelings of wholeness reported by meditators with the activation of the brain. It appears that the increased empathy, relaxation, creativity, and wholeness associated with meditation may be partially accounted for by the increased use of right brain functions.

Other physiological phenomena that show up predominately in meditation research include relaxation and mental alertness. Experiments showing significantly reduced anxiety in meditators, increases in the sense of self control, decreases in neuroticism and increased self-actualization suggest that meditation may be an important aid to good psychological health. Research on using meditation and relaxation techniques to help control stress - the big killer in the United States and other post industrial societies today - suggests that meditation can be an effective way to reduce the physiological and psychological damage related to stress.

A preliminary report on a five year study of Ananda Marga meditators shows that average blood pressures are lower than for a comparable group of non-meditators. Two major studies, one at Dartmouth University and the other at Stanford University, showed experienced Ananda Marga meditators to be producing a high level of theta brainwaves which seem to be associated with higher levels of consciousness.

## ASANAS - YOGA POSTURES

Asanas or yoga postures, literally means those postures comfortably held and are composed of smooth, slow motion postures. During their practice, the body remains in a state of relaxed efficiency, and the deep breathing which naturally accompanies this means that more oxygen is carried to the bloodstream. During asanas, energy is accumulated and the body refreshed.

Asanas benefit all of the body's systems. The twisting and bending which these postures involve places pressure on the endocrine glands, helping them to function in a more balanced manner. The result is improved functioning of the entire organism, including its growth, digestive, repair and waste processes. In addition, since hormonal secretions affect emotions, asanas, by balancing these secretions, gradually help to bring emotional disturbances under control. Thus asanas relieve the mind of many upsetting influences, and mental composure is attained. Asanas have many other benefits: they relax and tone up the muscles and nervous system, stimulate circulation, limber the joints, stretch ligaments, improve digestion and massage the internal organs.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of god, and that the spirit of god dwelleth in you?

- 1 Corinthians 3:16

For a well-balanced, integrated life, a person should develop in three aspects: physical, mental and spiritual. Meditation calms and controls the mind and elevates the spirit; asanas and proper diet purify the body so that its development may not lag behind that of the mind. Through the discipline of asanas, the practitioner gradually learns to keep the mind and body poised in all situations. A perfectly functioning body and a mind free from emotional disturbances ... this is the aim of asanas.

Asanas are a dance to the music of your breathing. Listen to your body as it moves; go slowly and be aware of yourself - breathe deeply. Relax and rejoice!



Remember to practice asanas:

- 1) Regularly, a few in the morning and a few in the evening, before eating (and then leave 20-30 minutes before eating).
- 2) No sooner than 2-3 hours after large meals.
- 3) With a clean body.
- 4) Preferably when the left nostril is open.
- 5) While breathing through the nose, not the mouth, and breathing deeply, starting from the diaphragm.
- 6) Away from draft or direct sunlight.
- 7) In a well-ventilated room, free of smoke and fumes.
- 8) In supportive underwear and, if any other clothing is worn, loose clothing.
- 9) True asanas affect the hormonal and glandular system. Women should not practice these asanas during menstruation or after the third month of pregnancy. Asanas may be resumed two months after the child is born. Exercise can be done (and some asanas and exercises may be similar - the difference is the effect on the hormonal system). At these times do exercises that are appropriate.

Yogic postures help strengthen the endocrine system through exercise and also bring the emotions under control through concentration and relaxation. This ability to remain in relaxed equilibrium has an important psychological effect. Yogis, through their physical training, gradually learn to keep their psychological equilibrium unaltered to preserve a perfect psychological calm in whatever environment they happen to find themselves in.

There is a difference between asanas and exercise. Asanas effect the hormonal, glandular, endocrine, lymphatic systems. They have subtle effects on deep parts of the mind. If done improperly, the subtler effects are not realised. Asanas done while exposed to harsh elements, such as wind, hot sun, cold water will not enable these effects to be felt. Asanas done in unhealthy moods will also not be effective to elevate the mind. Indeed, the effect can be to aggravate lower propensities. The left nostril should be open because flow of breath is more subtle. Doing asanas while only the right nostril is open (which is the more cruder flow of breath and mind) will not realise the subtle effects. Changes in body functions should be particularly taken into account in determining what are the best asanas and whether they should be performed.

It is not necessary to go through a long complicated series of asanas. Depending on the particular needs of your body it may be necessary to perform only a few asanas each day. As each of us have different imbalances and needs, each person should have their own special set of asanas. Performance of certain positions may stimulate an already over-active gland, or harm a person in other subtle ways. Asanas, as with all other yogic techniques, are part of a whole, harmonious psycho-physical training, a step in a long path, which should be travelled under the guidance of a true spiritual teacher.

In Ananda Marga asanas are taught individually by trained 'acaryas' or spiritual teachers. A set of asanas are prescribed according to one's physical, emotional and psychological needs. They are not taught as some popular exercise technique. One can easily teach exercise - that is not difficult - and this is also done, but teaching asanas from a spiritual perspective is somewhat a different thing. Three common asanas can be done by anyone, and as with all asanas, should be followed by a self massage and deep relaxation for a few minutes. Remember, treat them as asanas and not as mere exercise.

The three common asanas are:

- **Yogasana** (or **Yogamudra**) - yoga posture
- **Ardhakurmakasana** (or **Diirgha Pranama**) - half tortoise posture
- **Bhujaungasana** - snake or cobra posture

All asanas that are for sitting in meditation postures can also be performed (eg lotus posture, half lotus posture, siddha posture).

Also remember to do corpse posture (Shavasana) after finishing all other asanas.

For detailed information on these and other yoga queries, consult with an Acarya. All consultations are free of charge.

