Yoga is not an intervention but may be yogopathy is

Sir,

It was with interest and admiration that I read Dr. TM Srinivasan's editorial “Is Yoga an intervention?” in the recent issue of IJOY.[1] His sincere questioning of the prevalent usage of Yoga as an “intervention” hit the nail on its head for it was straight forward, rational and logical. I readily accept that we need to evolve better terminology for both Yoga therapy and Yoga research.

In a recent perspective, I have stated the need for us to move away from the current model of Yoga research that resembles the pharmaceutical industry, with researchers trying to find a “single Yoga pill for each ill”.[2] We must not allow Yoga to be made “small” just so that it can “fit” the straight jacketed “box” of modern scientific methods. We see many excellent scientists jumping onto the Yoga bandwagon and researching Yoga.[3,4] However, because their understanding of Yoga is so limited, they end up missing the bus completely. Excellent papers are published from a scientific perspective, but are very limited from a truly Yogic perspective.

My beloved father and illustrious Guru, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri said, “Yoga Chikitsa could be termed as man’s first attempt at unitive understanding of mind-emotions-physical distress and is the oldest wholistic concept and therapy in the world.”[5] He often reminded us that we must take into consideration a healthy life nourishing diet, a healthy and natural environment, a wholistic lifestyle, adequate bodywork through asanas, mudras and kriyas, invigorating breath work through pranayama and the production of a healthy thought process through higher practices of Jnana and Raja Yoga. Having been brought up in a Yogic Guru Kula, it is no wonder that I was stunned to receive the following ironical query from an international journal. They were asking me how I concluded that “Yoga” produced evidenced changes in our study participants when it may have been due to the dietary components of our study and not necessarily due to the Yoga practices themselves!! For them, it seemed that Yoga therapy was just asana therapy.
and had nothing to do with counseling, lifestyle, diet or even a shift in attitude!

If we perceive health as an integrated state of oneness (advaita sukham) and disease as the discordant lack of it (dwaita duhkham), then Yoga becomes the tool as well as the methodology and process of re-integration/re-harmonization at all levels of our being. Even when Maharishi Patanjali mentions “vyadhi” as a hindrance (antharaya) to the complete integration of the individual personality, he doesn’t directly refer to treatments of particular diseases as his approach is more wholistic and expanded rather than being analytical and limited. Patanjali prefers to ‘integrate’ rather than deal exclusively with individual symptoms of dis-integration. For me, this is “Yoga” and this is where Yoga Chikitsa (Yoga as a therapy) exists only when it is wholistic, all encompassing and integrated into every moment of one’s life with awareness and consciousness.

Unless we aim to correct the manifest psycho-somatic disassociation as well as the underlying ignorant jaundiced perception of reality in the individual, we are not practicing Yoga Chikitsa. Managing and suppressing the manifest symptoms with Yoga techniques is just as good or bad as modern Allopathy that focuses on symptomatic management without ever getting close to the real cause of most disorders. How many modern doctors look at the emotional and psychological issues that are the primary cause of the problem in so many of their patients? When Yoga therapists make the same mistake of merely treating the manifest symptoms with Yogic techniques without remedying the root cause, I prefer to call it YOGOPATHY.[6]

Yoga is the original mind body medicine, one of the greatest treasures of the unique Indian cultural heritage. As both an art and science, it has a lot to offer humankind in terms of understanding all aspects of our dynamic, multilayered existence. Yoga is a continuous process, something that we need to “live” every moment. Yoga is really not so much about the number of techniques we do nor is it about how many times or how long we do them. Yoga is life itself and is how we live in tune with our Dharma.

Yoga to me is all about becoming “one” with an integrated state of being, whereas Yogopathy seems to be more about “doing” than “being”. When viewed from this wholistic perspective, Yoga can never really ever be an intervention, but maybe Yogopathy can.

Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani
Chairman ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani,
Chairman ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India
E-mail: yognat@gmail.com

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