

“Yama & Niyama” for ‘Sound Mental Health”

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Abstract

Mental Health is the most important requisite for one’s life. While the popular saying “A Sound mind in Sound body” is, definitely, not meaningless, in reality, the Sound mind is only responsible for a sound body to exist. But it is easily said than done to maintain ‘good mental health’. Because, the self, the “I” in us is often made to stray by the mind, which takes total control of us. The fact is that ‘I’ the self, in the emotional deluge, forgets itself and merges with the mind of the individual, and the individual will then be ‘more the mind’ than the real self. The “Pseudo-Self” then drives all the thinking and doing. All the problems start from there. With the emotion engulfing the mind and the mind pervading the Self, the person is all emotion then. And emotion, as we all know, most of the time is irrational, non-pragmatic and meaningless. There are positive emotions, no doubt. Nevertheless, it is those which are the ‘non-conforming rush of emotions’ which lead astray the individual. With the thoughts and the actions emerging from such a state, the individual errs at every stage, inviting issues, which will be difficult to be managed, and at one stage the individual breaks down, when all the issues will start affecting the mental health of the individual. In the wave of unsound mental health, life becomes miserable. Yoga Shastra, in its pathway to the lofty ideal of Realization of the Self, takes us through certain basic principles called “Yama & Niyama”, categorized as the Restraints (social discipline) and the Virtues (Self-discipline), which work to transform the lives of individuals. By adopting scrupulously the principles under Yama and Niyama, one can manage the mind on a rational and pragmatic mode, resulting in the Self taking control of the mind by reining in the emotions. Superficially seen, the principles to be

adopted 'may look too much for deriving too less' on the objective part of life, and could also been as 'dry and stale' to follow, but the mastering of them can bring greater joy of living the life - meaningfully and purposefully. In fact, if one looks at them critically, there is nothing that the individual loses, as it is only a disciplined way of living and not living for living sake. The practices under Yama & Niyama also pave the way for the future lives to take a mentally healthy path to attain the ordained life-goal ultimately. It is in detail discussed in the paper as to how the precepts work to achieve mental health. The Principles under Yama & Niyama, pronounced by "Yoga Shastra" thus guarantee "Sound mental health". Practicing of Yama & Niyama should not be seen as an act of Renunciation, but a glorious act of Regulation for a life to be lived in a fulfilling manner, here and here after.

Keywords: *Psychiatry - Psychotherapy - Psychology - Mental Health - Ashtanga Yoga -Yama - Niyama - Anxiety - Depression*

Introduction

Defining mental health, we say, it is Emotional, Psychological and Social well-being. It determines how we think, feel and act. It is also one's ability to relate to others, handling the stress, and how we make our choices. Mental health is not for attaining something, but it is essential for every moment of life and at every stage. It is important for all at all ages. Yogic practices have a great role to address mental health issues and it is essential to know a few things which are vital to provide relief to people suffering from mental health. In fact, it is more for preventing issues of mental health. Yama and Niyama are the first and the foremost - two angas (stages) of the Ashtanga Yoga, propounded by the Sage Patanjali. If one tries to understand the deeper meaning of each anga, it would be known from its deeper philosophy, how it assists the gradual advancement of yogic aspirant in the path of attaining the Samadhi stage. Though these EIGHT steps unfold the facts on the path way to Self-realization, each stage - anga, is actually a stage of preparation providing strong ground for the next stage, so that mastering the stages - one after the other, the aspirant of yoga reaches the pinnacle - or the stage where the Self is not disturbed by any mental modifications, which means the mind does not toy with the Self. And the body, mind and Soul will be in a perfect equilibrium.

While Yoga is for the purpose of attaining Self-Realization, it passes through the said EIGHT stages going through which, the yogic practitioner moves ahead shedding his thoughts, words and deeds, that in the normal course of life keep the person grounded to worldly life. Taking relevance of the initial steps, the two angas - YAMA & NIYAMA, a normal human being

could keep his thoughts - well balanced (by the process of regulation and not by renunciation), so that he/she could live the life that is supported and enriched by sound mental health.

Feelings, thoughts, words and deeds are the one which make people do what they do. What people do (which are not legal) and what they do not do (to avoid issues or reasons specific to situations), might create mental suffering - temporarily mostly, sometimes for prolonged periods of time - leading to a stage of mental ill-health. If one looks at the psychological issues and start analyzing them, we can clearly understand that the mental worries arise due to either ‘what we do’ or ‘what we are unable to do’.

Methodology

The results and discussions which are part of the paper are based on the existing literature on Yoga as Bhashyas written by different scholars in the field and also the articles from sources which are considered to be reliable and authentic. The paper is more focused on bringing a connectivity and relation that Yogic practices could have with the Psychological intervention in treating the mentally ailing individuals. The details provided may fall short of the requirement for a few, but bring a strong connect to the field mentioned as per the author/s.

Results & Discussion

Getting to understand a little deeper about the normal goings on, we know that the mind of an individual always seeks pleasures and avoids pains. It is the general and obvious tendency that we see in people. All their thoughts, words and deeds will be oriented towards gaining pleasures and avoiding pains. The thoughts are, most often, energized by the emotions, which stage is the critical one, since the thoughts due to the influence of the emotion gets into words / acts without the needed check by the self. The problems start there, as such acts done emotionally, majority of the times, end in issues. Such issues become potential problems affecting the mental health. They could be openly blown up issues or those hushed up, sometimes. Such of them trouble the individuals for the next few moments, for a time period in future or for a longer time in future. When the issues are ones attracting legal action, they result in fear of punishment and when they are serious but go unnoticed they result in guilt in the mind of the person indulging. When the fear of punishment is the worry, normally, the guilt is seen as a feeble element affecting the mind. But there are situations, when guilt is big, then the fear of punishment will not be there and the individual will seek to be absolved by undergoing punishment - self imposed or otherwise.

So for people, it is a case of working on the principle to act for

Sukha prapti - **seeking pleasure / comfort**

Dukha Nivrutti - **Avoiding Pain / discomfort**

Every act of any individual will be for either of the causes, as already mentioned. There is no rider attached here - bringing in 'the guilt' or 'punishment'. It could be a Satvic way of expectation or a craving with desire for one or the other result of an act. So the mind works for Pleasure-gain or Pain-relief. [1]. One crucial thing here is that if an act done is sinful (according to the doer) but then if it is not going to bring punishment, then only the guilt will be the one troubling the mind. Greater the feeling of guilt, greater will be the suffering. But there are certain issues arising out of indulging in the acts which are not permissible or termed illegal, according to law. Here guilt is not the mental issue, but the fear of punishment. Greater the punishment expected greater will be the expectation of suffering mentally. And again here certain punishments such as paying fines or openly declaring having done such acts, absolve the doers, individuals may or may not be too much worried. So it is again a case of knowing what is that pleasure that is gained and towards that what will be the pain that would have to be undergone. Certain times, if the pain element is of deep level - one involving loss of prestige, name and fame, bringing unimaginable disrepute, then the mental worry is immeasurable - pushing the person doing such an act into disillusionment.

Sometimes, the mental worry arising out of "Sukha Prapti" and "Dukha Nivriti" is one of "Anxiety". Either the mind will keep worrying whether "Sukha Prapti" is going to be a reality or not, or whether Dukha Nivriti is possible or not.[1] Anxiety - whether or not very intense - will certainly leave a residual mental suffering. Anxieties of minor nature could be tackled by sleeping over them. Sometimes, the mind either engages the self (driven by emotion or not) to do something for a gain or to do a thing to avoid a pain. Such acts - either of them - could result in a state of Fear of punishment or state of Guilt in mind. Thus we can understand that Fear of Punishment and Guilt are the mental issues.

"Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test, or before making an important decision. But anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and various phobia-related disorders" [2]

The above information will reveal that anxiety is a state of uncertainty and a fear of probable eventuality, which is normally seen as a threat to peace and / or unknown personal disaster. Anxiety of this nature will be serious and devastating unless the inner strength could withstand it armouring with an attitude “come what may” or “let’s see” kind, on the positive side; it could also be an inner strong voice of “nothing can be done except to face the situation”. When an inner answer tries to shield the serious level of Anxiety it could be managed with the grit to fight it out. Such inner strength develops if the individual is a practitioner of ‘Yama and Niyama’ precepts. [3] The practice of Yama and Niyama precepts would not only work as preventive measure to see the life and face the situations with a strong conviction, but also could be made to work as a strong part of psychotherapy / relieving the person suffering through education on these facts of life - to ensure a phenomenal change in the person affected and is undergoing treatment. The medical intervention otherwise could go on, but the application of Yama and Niyama - the Yogic philosophy-based intervention would provide the needed reassurance and also speed up the recovery.

Predominantly the mental disorders are seen in people suffering on account of low or high esteem, guilt or fear of punishment), after effects of deaths of loved ones, disease and related trauma and incidence of undue expectations and anxiety, hyper-activity, etc. All these are mind related matters involving thoughts that keep disturbing them and not allowing them to be calm and peaceful. Thoughts keep crowding the mind never allowing the person affected to live life peacefully.

Based on the respective Medical conditions they are termed as ANXIETY DISORDER (again with different variants of it), BIPOLAR DISORDER of different types, PSYCHOSIS, SHYZOPHRENIA, ANOREXIA, etc. Since all these are mind related, the person suffering will be most of the times, depending upon the kind of problem, its intensity and duration for which the person has been suffering from, silent, perpetually thinking, fearing and totally cut-off to the world outside of him. A medical practitioner with experience in offering treatment will decide to give Psychiatric or Psychological treatment for periods, as are found to be necessary based on the standard protocols.

While the above being so, Science of Yoga has its strong role in the treatment of the patients running parallel to the psychotherapy or education, required for the patient, wherein the Yogic precepts - Yama & Niyama act as strong tools through the veracity of their moral guidelines resulting in solace to the patients. These are highly authentic and impeccable standards, and when adopted by people, they bring calm and peace to their lives resulting in

sound mental health. The intervention, thus, is through making the patient realize about the erroneous convictions that they carry in the mind which are responsible for their thoughts and beliefs. And that nothing is wrong or has gone wrong. Also in the case of those suffering due to guilt, they could be made to realize that with acceptance and repentance they are absolved and it's no more a sin. The patients thus are assisted in fixing the issues, which thereby provide calm and comfort. Sometimes it would be much easier than thought about to bring the patients to a comfort level, since small and petty issues would have been taken by them with greater seriousness. Here the patients are helped through their better understanding by making them learn about their own behaviours. When discussed by a professional therapist, they get the needed clarity through the de-cluttering in mind that happens. In the case of depression, motivation and confidence building measures are adopted to make the individual gain the normal mental condition. All these, of course, are done with medical intervention parallelly. Needless to say that the chronic patients would need several sessions of counseling with parallel medical intervention, wherever necessary.

Yama and Niyama guidelines apparently are found to be preventive in nature to avoid mental health issues and to advance in the life travel - more meaningfully and purposefully. But understanding the precepts under each of them would help the affected individuals to be live to the facts of life and to know what is there in life for every individual - on a regulated mode. Unlike the treatment to body, the treatment to mind is more through creating a positive approach to de-clutter the mind of the affected person, remove guilt, clarify and remove the fear of punishment, motivate them to build confidence to make them realize that there is more in life than something to be worried of. Counseling the person affected is to listen to the patient very patiently and bring in instances to clarify them. It is 'not proving them wrong', but getting them to accept and forget, as the process of remorse is enough and more for people to come out of the mental worry. Societal acceptance will be the strong tool with 'never again' attitude.

Yama - the restraints or Social discipline precepts - are those behavioural cues to be adopted for a sane life. Sane life is not sage life (life of sacrifices). It is a regulated life and not renounced life, as already mentioned elsewhere once. Satva guna in people keeps the mind in non-desirous but contented and cheerful state.

Ahimsa (Non-violence)

Satya (Truthfulness)

Asteya (Non-stealing)

Brahmacharya (Celibacy / moderation of senses)

Aparigraha (non-greed)

Ahimsa is not just ‘non-inflicting of injury or hurt’ to anyone, any creature or any living being - through thoughts, words and deeds, it is much more. A state of total equilibrium. A sense of perfect balance - the self pervading all around and seeing everything in us and seeing us in everything. Such a state of behaviour cannot bring any kind of mental modification in individuals. It is thinking of everyone and everything as we ourselves are - neither more nor less. The suffering could be theirs now because of us, and it could be for us tomorrow because of the world outside. In the eyes of the Creator, all are same.

Mental modifications (thoughts proliferation) are the primary reason and the root cause for the external behaviours. External behaviours otherwise could be Rajasic or Tamasic, which are responsible for the klesas. “Klesas or afflictions; they are Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (egoism), Raga (attachment), Dvesha (aversion or hatred) and Abhinivesha (Clinging to life and fear of death)” [4]

The klesas are the reasons for the mind modifications leading to unsound mental health. So by following the principles under Yama one can stop the influence of klesas. By practicing of them the klesas can be eliminated to end the remorse and start being calm and composed.

Satya - Speaking truth again is a yogic practice which speeds up Yogic progress towards the ultimate goal. Speaking truth may bring troubles to one-self or the others, but then the practice of being honest always, not fearing the consequences ‘come-what-may’ is a strong step forward to eliminate Klesas. The initially difficult-looking effort will be seen as a great tool to reform oneself. Speaking truth always makes the situations not to affect us. It is also one way of developing strong mind which is clear and determined.

Asteya- Non-stealing. We can see that most of us seem to be highly complying with the principle. While all are - almost - principled in following the precept, yet some only practice, since it can result in punishment / loss of face/image, etc. Ensuring not to have anything not owned by us even without our knowledge is important to be followed. Even a word or a thought of others would be not of us and spoken under quotes. It is also thinking to understand that when we are happy about our possessions enjoying the ownership, the others also think about their possessions and enjoy ownership. So it is absolutely improper not to respect others and their possessions, upon which we would not have any attachment.

Brahmacharya - “People may think a brahmachari is making a great sacrifice and is being denied life. But it is not so at all. If someone is a brahmachari only by dress, yes it is true, life is torture. But for a person who is truly walking the path of the divine, the petty pleasures that

the world offers will become totally meaningless. Once you enjoy the inner pleasures of your being, the external pleasures become totally meaningless.” [5]

It is said in the scriptures that practicing of celibacy (brahmacharya) is essential in meditation. The desire to indulge in sex is only to facilitate the process of procreation. Humans have higher level of intellect and have the freedom to act at will. “The Vedic scriptures lay great emphasis on practicing celibacy. Maharshi Patanjali states: brahmacharyapratishṭhāyām vīrya lābhaḥ (Yog Sūtras 2.38)[v9] “The practice of celibacy leads to great enhancement of energy.” It is to be understood here that Celibacy not only is the pathway to attain Kaivalya - the ultimate goal as the Yoga Sutras profess, but it also enhances energy of the practitioner and also speeds up the process of the attainment. Further, a very specific and valuable point to be noted here is that indulgence in sex is only for procreation. Clarity on this ‘normally ill-conceived aspect’ of knowledge supported by the authentic and masterly wisdom rendered by the scriptures, emancipate those suffering from the confusion arising out of this. [6]

Aparigraha - Non-greedy - Human being needs the essentials for the livelihood. All essentials in the Satvic mode are accepted - the essentials - what they are and how much, when and where could be the criteria governing the acceptance. Here the desire element should be lacking, as anything based on ‘Raga’ will be non-satvic. Aparigraha is the virtue - ‘looking for only the livelihood and not beyond that’ - anything beyond falls under the category of “greed”. This again is indirectly allowing everyone around and every living being around to have his/her share of requirement of essentials. Aparigraha thus works for the postulate “Sarve Janah Sukhino bhavantu”.

“By its nature it is a great remedy for the affliction of greed, but so are the other Yamas. It is more than just managing greed, it is a real respect for others and nature. Modern man has done its best to not just maximize nature’s resources but exploit them to the point of over-indulgence and a real lack of respect for nature’s forces. Additionally, aparigraha is a respect for oneself, treating the body and material possessions for what they are and not getting held back by them. The lack of material bondage allows the spirit to reveal itself” [7]

All the above restraints under YAMA work to discipline the minds of individuals and following which their life journey will be smooth to keep themselves healthy and wise - body, mind and soul. Since the ultimate objective of Yoga Sutras is for attaining Kaivalya, there cannot be a compromise on any and all of these.

The great take-away here is to note that for a transforming individual, there is every likelihood of stumbling, falling and straying away from the righteous paths, but it will be seen

whether they get up after the fall and get their principles right and follow them sincerely, as it is essential for meaningful, purposeful and peaceful lives. Everyone cannot be, right from their very birth, working to attain the yogic state, but it should be noted that even for living a life being happy - with Physiological, Emotional, Psychological and Social well-being, the path to be chosen cannot be different - though the time and distance for reaching the destination may be far away. For erring individuals (as most of us are) apart from the reformatory path providing scope for correction, the repentance offers a re-start option in life. So these principles not only provide solace to the psychologically suffering individuals due to unsound mental health to enable them to become normal, but also provide the right guidelines to follow for ever joyful lives thereafter.

Like Yama - under Niyama, the guidelines provided by the Yoga Sutras are - **Souca, Samtosha, Tapah, Svadhyaya and Isvarpranidhana**. While **Souca** is the Purity - keeping the body and mind clean to ensure that the Satvic Guna prevails - making the practice of principles easier and stronger, **Samtosha** is the state of contentment, which is not intermittent and selective, but all through the life. Samtosha provides great clarity to us that no religion or scripture restricts us from looking for people and things for the livelihood, but only says that the contentment is essential. What is needed for the life. There is no desire element for more or for exercising selection. Contentment is a great virtue that secures calm and peace for us.

“Śaucā (pronounced as Shoucha) – means cleanliness - both inner and outer cleanliness of the body. Along with personal hygiene, the mind also needs to be kept clean - antaha śaucā - bāhya bheetara śaucā. Śaucā and sañtoṣā (pronounced as santosha) go together. If there is no śaucā, there can be no sañtoṣā. Sañtoṣā is contentment and happiness. It is an attitude. If you are used to being unhappy, you will grumble and be unhappy even in the best of situations. Nothing can make you happy in the world. And if you want to be happy, nothing can pull you down”. [8]

The next niyama is **Tapah** - which is the third niyama, speaking about how resolute one should be on the principles and to be followed, being satvic and virtuous. Tapah is to vow to do something or not to do something which go to strengthen the non-Satvic principles. **Svadhyaya** is the fourth niyama which is continuous self-learning and making our minds clear and setting our path on the way to be more and more clear on what we do and what we are supposed to do. Svadhyaya is a great discipline, as any amount of study could provide us knowledge - which normally would not be total. So there is a continuous need for study and learning.

Finally the fifth niyama - the **Isvara pranidhana** - Here Iswara is the Parameswara - not restricting our minds to names, forms and the Gunas. Developing thoughts and doing the deeds with total focus, applying the means which are plausibly in-line with the sacraments and leaving everything after that to the destiny - is Isvarapranidhana - doing everything right and leaving it for the final word of God. Here man is given the right guidelines for self-course to attain the destination and is not blamed for something not happening, though most normally following the cause and effect theory - the rightful input should result in rightful output, which is very rarely proved wrong - for the reasons best known to HIM.

Conclusion

The unsound mental conditions are most normally due to ill-conceived, mis-understood, misled, imaginary and illusory thoughts, which disturb the minds of individuals resulting in suffering temporarily or for longer periods of time. We call the individuals suffering thus as having unsound mental health. The recovery from mental ill-health like any bodily ill-health needs medical attention/treatment and in addition - and more so - the intervention through Counseling and Psychotherapy. While the practices are proven and are as laid down on the scientifically documented methods for the treatment of mental health patients, the Yoga Sutras' based Yama and Niyama guidelines would enable effective and faster recovery in mentally ailing patients. YAMA & NIYAMA based practices ensure not only recovery but also guarantee long-term mental health to provide a strong pathway to their lives with a destination that is most sought after in the later part of their lives.

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