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FITNESS

Up close with Atul Vyas

YOGA is a much deeper exercise than pilates or interval boot camp or running, cycling, jumping rope, because it works on three levels: body, mind and spirit. It facilitates the opening of mental faculties like the blossoming of a lotus flower.

These were the words of Atul Vyas, a yoga guru whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Jaipur. We spoke for over an hour. Here are the highlights of his wisdom:

Yoga transforms you. It opens you up to your purpose and you begin to be aware of the oneness of things. It helps create harmony and balance within the practitioner. However, you have to practice properly. If you perform 32 sun salutations a day, and no moon salutations, you will heat up your HA (sun) energy, the masculine right side of the body without cooling down your THA (moon) energy, the feminine left side of your body.

Yoga also helps you gain control over your thoughts. This is known as Citta Vritti Nirodha (citta – brain, vritti – fluctuations, nirodha – calm).

Yoga was popular in India from ancient times but it was suppressed during colonial times as the English tried to make Indians look down on their own cultural practices and beliefs. Western science was made to be seen as superior. Much of the ancient knowledge was lost.

Violence is a weapon of the inferior. People with high self-esteem will not get angry or pick fights. Yogis are confident people. To reduce violence in the world, everyone should be taught yoga. All perverseness can be cured through yoga. Lack of energy, lethargy, lack of motivation can be cured by yoga.

Yoga is not only about physical fitness (asanas) but also about yamas and niyamas, recommended codes of conduct to prevent the leaking of consciousness or energy. If you are dishonest, that creates a hole in your pot, if you steal, that's another hole. Following yoga, all of it, including yamas and niyamas, helps you heal these holes so you can collect your consciousness and energy and channel it towards your higher purpose.

Here is the progression of yoga. At the start of the journey, you ask, who am I? You practice asanas and with time you master your body, realising that you are more than just your body. Then you assume you must be your breath, but with pranayama, you master your breath too, and realise you are more than that.

So you ask, who am I? Then you begin to realise that you are consciousness, you interiorise your consciousness, this is known as pratyahara. So you believe you are conscious and you concentrate on this belief. This concentration is known as dharana. Next you meditate on consciousness which is known as dhyana. With meditation, consciousness becomes effortless and your ego melts away so you can move away from your individual self and connect to the universal self, which is a state of Samadhi or divine bliss.

Releasing desires increases flexibility. Increasing flexi-

bility also helps you release your desires. With yoga, you begin to realise you don't desire much. All the worldly titles and goods seem less important. You win an award. So what? You have lots of money. So what? All that matters is how you feel within. Do you feel blissful and content and free?

Yoga makes people strong in body and mind. Genghis Khan's army performed 1000 sun salutations every day. That is why they were so powerful. There is a science of sun. Sun rays can change the atomic arrangement of material. Life is fire. Regulated fire can cook. Unregulated fire can only burn.

Yoga is a therapy for everything. It can cure diabetes, obesity, back aches, addictions, anything. The number of breaths you are destined to breathe are fixed by fate, but you can improve the quality of those breaths.

Health is not just absence of disease, it is balanced behaviour. Yoga is a science meant to ferry you across the river of life.

The world is created by the mind so yoga, which helps you control your mind and thoughts, can allow you to do anything you want. Yoga can cut the chain of illusions so you see

reality, this is enlightenment. Pride and ego are impediments to growth. Yoga helps you overcome these so you experience happiness without reason. You find yourself laughing out loud, you love yourself, you don't want to talk as much, you enjoy silence, you enjoy your own company. You go beyond dependence on your body and senses for existence. You feel beautiful. Success, failure, these things don't matter anymore.

Yoga brings about dramatic physical, mental, emotional changes. The world is becoming selfish. If you want to be less so, you may try yoga. Evolved humans think more of others, less of themselves.

Yoga is a science that can be experienced and mastered by anyone and everyone.

By Shazia Omar

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