

VOICEOVER 5

Mind Your Yoga

Update your mental software

It is possible to positively revise the programmes in a way that leads to health and happiness

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What is yoga?

Yoga is updating your mental software. If you update your mental software, you will have happiness and peace. If you don't update it, you will be a mess.

Patanjali, the great sage, who synthesised the yoga sutras two thousand years ago, summarised in them the essence of yoga. Millions of people around the world are now engaged in various practices that go by the name of "yoga." Students in sleepy hamlets as well as in bustling cities are experiencing the benefits of yoga. Many including thousands of yoga students think of yoga as simply a series of stretching exercises. It has even become a competitive "sport!" And many others consider it a method of relaxation. Some think that it is an alternative treatment for physical diseases and mental disorders. Still others view it as a way to tap into esoteric or "secret" knowledge. And certain critics of yoga view it as a set of cultic religious practices.

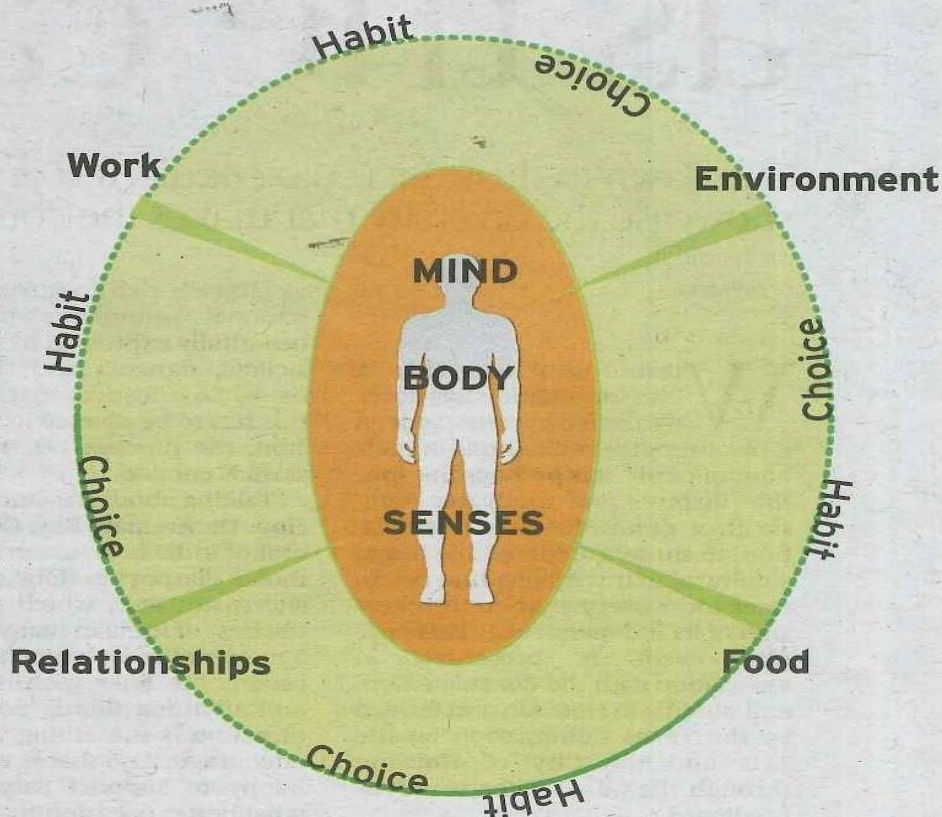
Timeless concept

In its uncorrupted state, yoga is not an abstract concept such as "happiness" that can mean different things to different individuals. Its purpose is not a matter of opinion, whim, or personal preference. Its basic objectives are not – and should never be – subject to revision, reinterpretation, or updating. They are timeless and ageless. Yoga is the means to update our mental software.

Actually, our mental software is continually being updated by the experiences in our lives. These automatic updates are out of our control. Sometimes they result in improvements; sometimes they degrade the system. Fortunately, it is possible to intentionally and positively revise our mental and physical programs in a way that leads to health and happiness. This is the possibility – and the promise – of yoga.

Our unconscious mental software updates are based on this universal wish: I want to live happily forever. By 'I' we mean our body and mind. By 'happily,' we mean in such a way that we get what we want, that we experience pleasure and avoid pain. By 'forever,' we mean an unchanging, everlasting continuum of pleasure.

The search for happiness begins in infancy and leads to endless cycle of pleasure and pain throughout our lives. For example, an infant feels the pangs of hunger and cries. When she is nursed by her



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mother she stops crying and becomes happy again. Another instance, a child covets his playmate's new toy. The playmate will not share the toy, so the child becomes unhappy. When the child's parents buy him the toy, he is happy. A teenager longs to have a new racing motorbike and when he gets one he is happy. An adult dislikes his job and is unhappy. When he is hired for his "dream job," he becomes happy. An older adult wishes to live closer to her family. When her son invites her to live with his family, she becomes happy.

An American student of mine told me that when he was a young man, his father gave him this prescription for a happy life: "By the age of thirty five, you should have two houses – one in the city and one in the country – two kids, two cars, and a million dollars in the bank." My student said that he had actually achieved all of those things by the age of thirty five, but, because of other changes in his life, he did not have lasting happiness.

But things can, and do, change in our lives. The child's new toy breaks. The teenager's bike gets damaged. The adult loses his dream job. The older adult can no longer climb the stairs to her bedroom in her son's house. All of these are external changes that in-

terrupt happiness.

Coupled with this are the internal changes that interrupt happiness. The mind changes, too. The child loses interest in the toy and wants another. The teenager becomes tired of the old bike and wants a new model. The adult loses interest in his career and wants a more exciting one. The older adult convinces herself that her family is ignoring her needs. Absence of change can also lead to unhappiness. How happy would a parent be if his two-year-old child remained two years old for several years?

Everything in the material world changes. And this fundamental fact – that everything in the external world is always changing in one way or another – suggests that there will always be a cycle of happiness and unhappiness for us. Likewise, because our minds are always changing, we are likely to experience cycles of happiness and unhappiness throughout our lives.

But this does not have to be so. External circumstances are partially, and often totally, out of our control. But internal changes are within our control. To accomplish this, though, it is important to know what we are dealing with when we speak of "mind." Yoga gives us this understanding and provides the means to steady our minds. We can be less affected by these cycles of pleasure and pain by steadying our mind. This is yoga.

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