

Stress Management, the traditional way



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Can we honestly try and figure out answers for these 3 (seemingly) simple questions. It would help us understand our priorities, and identify ways to harness our energies, rather than being mauled by stress on a minute by minute basis!

Other than working at an organization or being an entrepreneur, what is my larger goal in life?

Why am I working? Or what inspires me to work?

What is it that is creating stress right now?



It is not necessary to pressurize ourselves and figure out the answers right away. We need to reflect and identify the answers and prioritise them. As our priorities gain greater clarity, the way ahead makes it more meaningful. Such priorities lead to right choices in life; this results in a well managed and balanced life.

Careful self-observation will illustrate that during stressful situations, we seldom allow ourselves to 'become aware' of the turbulence, physical gestures, emotional upheavals, mental duress and intellectual commotions we undergo. We instantly react or withdraw, rather than provide a 'spontaneous response.'

An ancient Yoga technique, Sakshibhava¹, could enable us to develop and invoke this 'spontaneous response' mode at will. This has been found to be an efficacious tool to understand and manage stress and rebuild our emotional quotient.

Stress, a need
Science defines stress as 'force' per 'unit area.' This 'unit area' in us is our psychophysical energy system, comprising of the mind-body complex. The more we refine, tune up and prepare our 'unit area', the better we equip ourselves to handle the impact of force.

Here, 'force' includes professional pressures, personal challenges as well as the expectations of the myriad of relationships we are tagged to (amidst) these two spheres of action. In the process

the relationship that we share with ourselves undergoes a change with each encounter we have with stress.

The advent of social media has added spice to the already stressful lives of the present young workforce. Over involvement with the virtual world makes the separation of 'the real' stress from 'the illusionary' stress an achievement in itself .

Without right stress on the strings, a violin would not produce the intended musical notes, without struggle the moth can never metamorphose into a butterfly. Thus, reasonable stress is needed to bring the best out of each of us, as well.

Today, we are trained to see whether there is a palpable gain in each interaction we have with entities around us. The truth is something else. Each interaction in the world is definitely not designed to enrich us in terms of only calculable wealth (money, possession etc.) but also incalculable wealth (maturity, relationship, togetherness etc.)

We need to develop the ability to objectively analyse the situations we are in and consciously undergo a few anxious moments if we are to grow and evolve into a mature human being.

Corporate life at present
Right from the well-established organizations to the fledging ones, the focus is on results alone. The process driven approach is fast losing its sheen. Ultimately everything boils



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down to quants. Take the case of listed entities- if the quarterly earnings take a marginal dip as against the projected one, it is enough to pull down the valuation of their stocks. The history of this entity, its contribution so far to the growth of the sector and its contribution to the country's GDP, everything is forgotten. The market believes only one precept: 'living in the present.' Though this precept is often quoted in spiritual lectures, it is equally true with stock markets as well! Despite the inventions like computers, mobile phones, ATMs etc., and innovative applications like emails, instant messaging etc. stress seems to be on the rise rather than being balanced out. On a lighter vein, today, the top performers in organizations are sent on paid vacations... not to relax but to come back invigorated, to work harder and perform even better!

Thus let us accept that work, and stress related to it, are irreplaceable components of our lives. The best way to combat stress and enhance our work place productivity is through Yoga. A set of time tested Yoga processes work on the areas in our psycho physical energy system that are affected, or likely to be affected. Some of these would find mention later in this article.

Personal life today

Today, it seems no one is spared from the grip of stress. The boundary between 'worry' and 'concern' is fast collapsing. If you don't have a worry, you are looked down upon!

We constantly compare our lives with others and feel happy or sad. We easily forget that each of us is unique and instead struggle to fulfil someone

someone else's aspirations. This 'someone' else could be parents, spouse, children, friends etc.

The tendency of comparing and wanting to please others is a successful recipe to invite stress into our lives.

An analysis on stress in our lives can go on and on... Through a process called Yoga Nidra² we will learn to harness our desires to lead a rich and fulfilling life using stress positively as a stepping stone

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh envisioned the demands of our lives, more than 7 decades ago. Their practical advice to us has been to adopt time tested Yoga processes and get us out of this muddle:

"Life today is full of stress and strain, of tension and nervous irritability, of passion and hurry. If man puts into practice a few of the elementary principles of Yoga, he would be far better equipped to cope with his complex existence."

"Yoga brings perfection, peace and lasting happiness. You can have calmness of mind at all times by the practice of Yoga. You can have restful sleep and increased energy, vigour, vitality, longevity and a high standard of health. You can turn out efficient work within a short space of time and have success in every walk of life. Yoga will infuse new strength, confidence and self-reliance in you. The body and mind will be at your beck and call."

"Yoga brings your emotions under control and increases your power of concentration at work. Yoga disciplines, gives poise and tranquillity and miraculously rebuilds one's life."

References

1. Lectures of Sri Shankar Narayan, Delhi
2. Image Source: federico stevanin.
freedigitalphotos.net

2. Works of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga processes

1. Witness attitude (Sakshibhava)

Sit in a comfortable posture, on a mat, that allows your neck, back and head to be in a straight line. If you are practicing at your workplace, it is absolutely fine to sit on a chair with a stable back rest and allow the soles to rest on the floor

Close your eyes gently. Consciously and silently, inhale and exhale deeply

2. Developing awareness of the environment

Gently start counting backwards from 10 to 0. Once you reach the count '0', gently become aware of the sounds around

Ensure that you are not pre-empting or anticipating the sounds, just be aware of the sounds as and when they occur

Practice this external awareness for at least 2 minutes

3. Developing body awareness

Now, gradually become aware of your body... scan yourself from head to toe...

Then bring your awareness to the top of your head, your mouth, the right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, upper lip, lower lip, upper row of teeth, lower row of teeth, tip of your tongue, and base of your tongue

Move your awareness to the right shoulder, right elbow, right wrist, right palm, right hand finger tips, left shoulder, left elbow, left wrist, left palm, left hand finger tips

Next, become aware of right knee, right ankle, sole of the right foot, toes of the right foot, right hip, left hip, left knee, left ankle, sole of the left foot, toes of the left foot...

Run your awareness through the right side of the body (right armpit to waist), left side of the body (left armpit to waist), Move your awareness to the base of spine that is in contact with your seat, navel, stomach (above navel), centre of your chest, right armpit, nape of your neck, left armpit...

Now, run your awareness from your heart through the right arm to the right hand finger tips, from heart through the left arm to the left hand finger tips, from heart through the right leg to the right foot toes, from heart through the left leg to the left foot toes, from waist through both the legs and from your waist to the top of the head

Finally... be aware of the entire body

4. Developing breath awareness

Now, gradually, become aware of your breath

Remind yourself that you are a witness to your own breath!

Just observe the inhalation and the exhalation process

Once you are aware of your breathing, start counting the breath, backwards, as said below

o As you inhale count 16, as you exhale count 16

o Inhale count 15 and exhale count 15

Slowly count down to zero

o Try not to lose your count

o In case you lose your count, start from 16...again

Let go of the count and just be aware of the breath...say for 2 minutes

5. Closing the practice

Become aware of your body

If any part of your body is under pain, accept it

Thank your body, mind and breath for cooperating with you during the practice

With a few blinks, gently open your eyes

If possible, stay still (in silence) for the next 2 minutes

We will look into other processes like postural interventions (Stretches and Yogasana) and Yoga Nidra in the next issue.

