

From this issue of Choice we are delighted to introduce a new series on Yoga and Mental health. Yogi Ashokananda has agreed to share some of his knowledge with us and we are hopeful that you will benefit reading his column.

Yogi Ashokananda was raised in India and has been practicing yoga since he was

6 years old with his Grandfather being his first teacher. Over many years Yogi has been fortunate to develop his teaching, experience and education of yoga under some of the great remote, Indian masters.

Yogi Ashokananda is an expert and pioneer as a practising master of yoga

and meditation and a speaker on humanity and spiritual philosophy. He has taught the teachings of the Bihar School of Yoga, the Sivananda Ashram, hatha yoga and meditation at the Shri Ved Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh and the Yogamaya Ashram in Vrindavan. Now he teaches a number of his own pro-

found disciplines and insights which have their roots in ancient, sacred Indian tradition.

As well as teaching in the UK and internationally, Yogi Ashokananda is continuously working on developing community projects at the Ashok Tree in Tiruvannamalai, India. The aim of these projects is to

support and help local people with Ayurvedic medicine, practical support, yoga, meditation and spiritual sustenance as well as provide work in and around the cultivation of herbs and vegetables, and working at the Ashok Tree ashram and retreat centre. In 2008 Yogi Ashokananda established the Sita Devi charity school

which provides education for primary school children and vocational training. He is a registered senior teacher with Yoga Alliance UK and runs teacher trainings through his registered yoga school, Yogi Ashokananda School Yearly retreats and teacher training are also run at The Ashok Tree, Tiruvannamalai, India.

Yoga and Mental health - Part I



Yoga is an ancient science which many of us, even who come from yoga's homeland, have lost touch with this paradoxically simple and complex system of total health care for the body and mind. If you take care of your

body and your mind then the spirit is more easily accessible. The spirit doesn't need any healing for it is already whole and complete. A tree has no essence without the root. Yoga is the foundation for optimum health.

In recent years, Yoga has been associated with only physical improvement, whether that be losing weight, increasing flexibility or slowing down the ageing process. It's physical benefits are unquestionable both on the external appearance of

the body and on the internal health of the organs. Originally, however, yoga was a life style – as a complete, authentic system of health both physically and mentally. The function of yoga in terms of the asana practice was to cleanse the body enabling the pathways of the nadi to distribute the energy through the entire body and make sure all the functions of the body are operating at their highest level and align with our individual intelligence (buddhi). The experience of meditation

therefore is much stronger and more aware as well as the way you live in your daily life; your karma is done with full awareness (yogah karmasu kaushalam, chpt 2 vs 50 BG) योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्, translating as excellence in karma or in actions of daily life. The central nervous system, our brain, is also one of these internal factors which get positively affected by yoga if "yoga" in the lifestyle sense is adhered to. All our actions, all our ways of thinking, the quality of

our actions all depends on the brain. The brain gets affected by the asanas, the food we eat, meditation, faith, love, it all affects our brain. Our intelligence, our brain gets affected by every angle of our life. No matter what our angle is it can be positively affected by the yoga. If you want to know yourself, if you want to know God, make your body, your senses, your intelligence, as healthy as you can, then God is not far away.

Healthy Tip: Lie on back, inhale hold breath in

and clench fists, squeeze toes and engage all the muscles in the whole body including face muscles, hold for as long as you feel the whole body engaged and relax when you let go and exhale. Repeat 10 -15 times. This exercise helps to connect the brain to the entire body, including internal muscles you do not usually engage.

The Light Within: Meet the Matrix of the Mind with Yoga and Meditation
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