

What Is the Role of Health in Yogic Movement?

Health is the essential basis for all forms of human self-effort. When you are healthy you can work for ethical perfection, material security, vital satisfaction, and finally, the state of Self-realization. But when the body is diseased and sickly, the soul will be unable to seek its perfection.

“Sound mind in a sound body”—this is a well-known proverb. It represents an ideal toward which humanity must aspire. However, the implications of attaining this ideal must be understood.

The health of the physical body is a mysterious development having two aspects: the mind and the body. If either of these two is ignored, you cannot be considered truly healthy in the light of Yoga. Health is a psychophysical foundation for the soul to discover its essential glory.

It is not important to possess absolute perfection of the physical body in order to advance on the path of Yoga. Rather, an obsession to perfect the body at the risk of ignoring the deeper needs of the mind is a diseased movement in life. There must be a balance adopted between one’s concern for physical health and the need for mental integration; one should not be sacrificed for the other. In the long run, the body must serve the mind, and thus exists for this central purpose.



By Swami
Jyotirmayananda

Your physical body is like a house in which you live as a spirit. It is important to keep the house free from the influences of rough weather, rains, storms and chilly winds. It is further delightful to possess a house that offers many conveniences and is beautiful to behold. But if the dweller is unable to enjoy the house and its facilities, he continues to be miserable. On the other hand, one who possesses a poorer form of house, yet makes full use of it, is in a more blessed condition.

Much in the same way, the ability to use the resources of the physical body for the advancement of the soul is the basis for your real health. When you lack this ability, you become spiritually weak and diseased, even though you may possess a wonderful physical body. On the other hand, some Yogis possessing very powerful minds are endowed with very poor physical bodies. It is important to understand that your mental state cannot be determined on the basis of your physical state. Can you describe fully the nature of a

householder by simply studying his house?

The ideal of perfecting the body must be pursued to the extent it is possible. The laws of health should not be ignored. If, however, in spite of one’s best efforts, the physical body cannot give up its abnormalities, then one must learn to transcend the body. The process of mental advancement should not be interrupted or thwarted because of the condition of the body—and an aspirant must strive to develop the spiritual strength to make this possible.

You may ask, “Isn’t Yoga powerful enough to promote perfection in the physical body?” In order to understand the power of Yoga properly, you must realize that the body is a tool and not your essential reality. Therefore, the power of Yoga is not employed in the direction of the physical body alone.

Insight into the law of karma is also important to understand why the physical body must undergo unexpected changes. Diseases in the physical body, whether hereditary or acquired during life, are caused by karmic fructification. Certain negative karmas, as they fructify, begin to govern the flow of vitality in the physical body. As a result of this, the chemical balance in the body becomes disturbed, leading to various diseases and afflictions.

Karmic fructification has a very wide range. It includes body, mind, circumstances, and relationships. The body is only one of the many important aspects of a karmic fructification.

A negative karma based upon violence, greed, and hatred gives rise to sickness that may affect the mind, or the body, or give rise to unpleasant circumstances, or create bitter experiences in human relationships. If the negative karma is intense, it may express itself in all these aspects.

Similarly, a positive karma based upon compassion, sacrifice, selflessness, truthfulness and magnanimity gives rise to favorable circumstances, a healthy body, a balanced mind, and pleasant relationships. The extent of a karmic effect depends upon the intensity of the karma.

Every karma does not fructify immediately. At times, karmas of the past give rise to a condition in which the body and circumstances grow into a healthier state, but the mind and human relationships begin to be confused and miserable.

This explains why even great Sages were not completely free from physical diseases, weaknesses and disabilities. In spite of possessing feeble bodies, they were not unhealthy from a Yogic point of view. They were the fountain source of all health, vitality, inspiration, and joy. Because they were not identified with their bodies, they did not depend upon their bodies for their spiritual expansion. The purpose

of possessing the body was truly realized by them.

When a ladder has enabled you to reach your destination, you do not need to be concerned about its physical condition anymore. In the same way, though Sages continue to observe the laws of health to the best of their capacity, they are unconcerned if the body cannot maintain perfect vitality, or if it continues to sustain a deep-rooted disease, or if it continues to weaken itself through advancing age.

Old age and death constitute the destiny of every physical body. If spiritual movement completely depended on the body, it would

become an impossible task to advance spiritually. But, since the body is a tool, an instrument, or a residence for the soul, it must be well taken care of.

Promote good karmas in order to nurture a deeper urge for a healthy development in the body and mind. At the same time, continue to develop that spiritual vision of the Self that enables you to be free not only from the transient body, but from all potential embodiments in the future that unfold as the wheel of karma continues to revolve. With such vision, you become free from karmas and experience the infinite bliss of the Self.

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