

## **A better lifestyle through Yoga and Ayurveda to face global health crises – Ambassador Pavan Kapoor**

The world will celebrate the 7<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga on 21<sup>st</sup> June in the midst of the greatest health crisis of our times. The Covid-19 pandemic has made us all realize that despite remarkable progress of modern medicine and curative care, we still have a long way to go in dealing with pandemics and their long-term effects, especially on our mental health.

The relevance of Yoga in promoting both physical and mental well-being of people has never been more relevant. People around the world have embraced Yoga to stay healthy and rejuvenated to fight social isolation and depression that was witnessed during the pandemic. Yoga is also playing an important role in the psycho-social care and rehabilitation of Covid-19 patients in quarantine and isolation. It has been particularly helpful in easing fears and anxiety. Accordingly, this year's international day of yoga is being celebrated under the theme 'Yoga for wellness'.

Yoga's growing popularity and its acceptance is a testimony to the countless benefits that its practice brings. Yoga has moved from being a matter of curious interest to becoming an integral part of the lives of millions across the world. There is an increasing awareness and interest in ways to improve holistic health in our ever busy lives. There is a growing belief among the global community that Yoga can be one of the tools in our collective quest for promoting sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature. In this pursuit, Ayurveda, another all-round healing system, from India, is also gaining attention world-wide. There is an ongoing modern scientific research on traditional Ayurvedic practices to validate their contribution to the betterment of human life.

One of the most famous modern practitioners of Yoga, the late B K S Iyengar said, *"Yoga, an ancient but perfect science, deals with the evolution of humanity. This evolution includes all aspects of one's being, from bodily health to self realization. Yoga means union - the union of body with consciousness and consciousness with the soul. Yoga cultivates the ways of maintaining a balanced attitude in day to day life and endows skill in the performance of one's actions."*

Both Yoga and Ayurveda promote preventive and curative approaches to well-being. While the elements of the preventive approach seek to maintain health and longevity and to prevent disease, the curative elements focus on healing illnesses. Yoga is important for dissolving physical stress and calming the mind before meditation and is central to the daily routine. The curative Ayurvedic approach seeks to heal an illness through one or more methods like detoxification, palliative care, oil treatments, steam therapy, etc.

In November 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, announced the opening of a WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in India to strengthen the evidence, research, training and awareness of traditional and complementary medicine. This new Centre will support WHO's efforts

to implement WHO's traditional medicine strategy 2014-2023, which aims to support countries in developing policies and action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine as part of their journey to promote universal health coverage. In order to support global efforts for traditional medicine, the Government of India has set up premier institutions in Ayurveda, including the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA), Gujarat; National Institute of Ayurveda (NIA), Rajasthan; and All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), New Delhi.

Scientists in many countries are using modern scientific research methodologies to document the benefits of traditional medicine systems. The use of integrative approaches to health and wellness has grown within care settings across these countries. For instance, independent organizations like the Swiss Ayurvedic Medical Academy (SAMA, Geneva) have been working to become a centre of reference that combines clinical practice with teaching. Some of the best modern medical institutions like the American Heart Association have identified ideal health goals that include - maintaining normal weight, increased physical activity, a health diet, normal blood lipid levels, normal blood pressure and a normal fasting glucose. Traditional systems of medicine like Yoga and Ayurveda ensure that these health goals are met.

The Government of UAE has also been at the forefront to promote traditional systems of medicine. In 2001, approval was granted for the practice of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines (TCAM) and a separate department was established under the Ministry of Health and Prevention. Estimates are that more than 500 officially licensed Ayurveda practitioners are present in the UAE. Among the number of Ayurveda clinics that have come up in the UAE, Kottakkal Ayurveda Vaidyashala, launched in 1995 as a private initiative, now has branches in all the 7 Emirates and is a sought after centre for people seeking to improve overall wellness. More recently, in December 2020, an Ayurveda facility 'Vaidyashala' was inaugurated at the Burjeel Day Surgery Centre in Abu Dhabi offering a range of Ayurvedic treatments.

In India, it is the general belief that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body and spirit. The world has come to recognize the value of this holistic approach. We should not just focus on fighting diseases but also promoting good health.

Pandemics like Covid-19 bring choices for humanity in relief. The point of no return is looming with the regular emergence of newer health crises and rapid climate change. Traditional systems which, go beyond the individual and promote the idea of oneness with the universal whole, may be a useful way forward.

---