

Spiritual Consciousness in Sports Fitness

“जब मन शांत हो जाए,
जब मन खाली हो जाए,
जब मन चंचल न हो,
तब शरीर स्वस्थ और फिट रहता है।”

Upanishad

The connection between sport and spirituality might seem hard to see at first. There is a pronounced - though usually hidden - psychic and spiritual aspect to sport, which the best sportsmen are familiar with, even though they may not use the word 'spiritual' to describe it. Once a sportsperson is 'locked into' a state of flow, his or her absorption might intensify further, until it reaches a state which is similar to "dhyana". At this point unusual things may happen. Spiritual teachers tell that psychic and paranormal abilities emerge naturally in higher states of consciousness, as a 'side effect' of spiritual progress, and sports people occasionally experience these.

What is Spiritual Consciousness

When one talks about "spiritual consciousness" one is talking about a state of Being where all limiting, conflicting and contradictory ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, circumstances and events blend together and dissolve into harmony. Inevitably, this creates what is called "Expanded Consciousness," which is whole and undivided, and entirely at peace with itself and its surroundings. In other words, achieving spiritual consciousness, True Success, and experiencing the state of True Joy takes substantial work and a significant amount of time and energy. More than that, it requires the skilful application of specific and little-known tools, strategies and techniques, all of which one must master and learn to apply with the skill and dexterity.

Meditation & The Spiritual Consciousness

Constant practice of meditation has a profound influence on the consciousness and the mind. The mind is restless and loves constant movement and change. Meditation removes the restlessness of the mind, making it a better and more useful tool. Meditation develops concentration, awakens inner peace and brings the mind under our control.

Constant practice develops peace of mind, silence, inner quietness, joy and inner power that no outer circumstances can take away or change. When the mind is at peace, there arises a kind of calm, joyous and powerful consciousness, which is different from the ordinary, everyday consciousness. It is vast and endless, full of calmness, rest, happiness, joy, power and invincibility. It is a sort of an altered state of consciousness, which is not a state of trance or lack of awareness of the earthly plane. It is an awareness that encompasses both the earthly and spiritual planes.

Sports

Sport is defined as physical performance that has set limitations to it. **The sport has to be competitive and all players must present a sportsmanship way of behavior. Sports are goal orientated so a person who participates in sports will have a set goal for that sport and their underlying motivation will be to achieve that goal.**

Sport Accord uses the following criteria, determining that a sport should:

- Have an element of competition
- Be in no way harmful to any living creature
- Not rely on equipment provided by a single
- Not rely on any 'luck' element specifically designed in to the sport

Meditation & Sports

Something similar to meditation can happen when we play sports. The activity or game itself can have the same function as a mantra in meditation: it focuses our attention. We turn our attention off to everything outside it, and as a result, the level of consciousness-energy that we give away

drastically reduces. In addition, if we focus our attention well, then our 'thought chatter' subsides too. As a result, there is an intensification and purification of consciousness-energy inside us, which equates with states of *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and perhaps even *Samadhi* (enlightenment).

Thus, sport can be a kind of spontaneous spiritual practice. In addition, for those who, for cultural or social reasons, do not have the opportunity or the desire to follow an actual spiritual path, it's probably very significant in this regard, since it's a way of adding a spiritual dimension to their lives. However, even if we do follow a spiritual path, activities like sport should still be important to us. In the end the connection between sport and spirituality reminds us of what spiritual teachers (especially Tantric teachers) have always insisted: that instead of just being 'spiritual' for the half an hour or so that we sit down to meditate, we should try to integrate spirituality into every aspect of our lives. Even the most mundane aspects of our lives are potentially divine, and offer us the opportunity to taste spiritual well-being.

Dr. Nilima Patel, PT, Ph.D, FIAP



The author is a Physiotherapy professional into academics and clinical practice for more than 30 years at the college of Physiotherapy, SSG Hoospital, Vadodara. She can be reached at drnspatel@rediffmail.com

Pope John Paul II, for whom soccer was a passion in his youth, explained that the Church "considers sports as an instrument of education when it fosters high human and spiritual ideals; when it forms youth in an integral way in values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, solidarity and peace."

"Surmounting differences of cultures and ideologies, sports offer an ideal occasion for dialogue and understanding among peoples, for building the desired civilization of love," The Holy Father appealed, "to put into practice these values, based on the dignity of the human person, in face of possible interests that might darken the nobility of sports itself."

Teams consisting of players without integrity have a tendency to self-destruct. Bad character and lack of integrity are always exposed in a team situation. When coaches focus on ability at the expense of character, they are exposing the team to conflict and confusion within the inner circle and they are creating potential problems for society. The coach who focuses on strictly recruiting and developing the physical skills required to "win" games while overlooking their professional responsibility to teach character and hold the players to "standards higher than victory" is one, that too often ends up producing outstanding individual performers who are destructive to their teams, to themselves, to their families and to society.

Therefore, it is natural for our desires to outpace our ability to fulfill them. This can lead to frustration. Practicing patience allows us to be more realistic & avoid unnecessary stress while playing a game.

"Patience & focus go hand in hand while in a game"

DETERMINATION - Diligently works to reach goals regardless of the obstacles.

"Determination when blended with dedication and devotion nurtures a patriotic feeling and motivates the player to give his fullest form of energy and performance".

Sportsmanship is an attitude that strives for fair play, courtesy toward teammates and opponents, ethical behavior and integrity, and grace in victory or defeat. Sportsmanship expresses an aspiration or ethos that the activity will be enjoyed for its own sake. To be a sporting, ethical and a fair sportsman, spiritual consciousness is necessary, which can be strengthened and nurtured by some core values.

Personal Core Values for Sports Fitness

INTEGRITY - Internal traits that guide behavior." Integrity is telling me the truth, and honesty is telling the truth to other people." Integrity is structural in nature. It is a combination of all inward traits that build upon one another to determine who we are.

"If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you do not have integrity, nothing else matters." Life is a journey of integrity. An integrated team can definitely succeed in all its endeavours.

HONESTY - Proclaims the truth. To live by truth does require courage. However, commitment to truth enhances life. Genuine integrity and dedication to truth can inspire others to trust us. It can open surprising and unexpected opportunities for us in life. Practicing honesty can significantly reduce fear while playing a game. Adherence to truth builds self-respect and gives us a solid standard to live by.

"Honesty is the best policy to win a sports event"

POISE - Demonstrates calmness & self-control in the face of adversity.

"A state of calm and poise increases self confidence and physical endurance in a sports person"

PATIENCE - Developing Patience can relieve stress. It exercises inward strength in the face of adversity without demanding a deadline to remove it. Our culture values speed & fast results. Our minds can work faster than our bodies. Moreover, we can usually think of things faster than we can do them.

PASSION - Has an intense emotion and feelings towards their sport and improving their performance.

RESPONSIBILITY - Responsibility is another important core personal value. Responsibility means doing the best we can to honor and fulfill our obligations and promises. Responsibility also means resisting the temptation to blame the "other guy" for our mistakes. Life is a learning opportunity. Events do not always happen the way we want them to.

However, when we look to see how we could improve our behavior, rather than blaming the other person, we can learn from our experiences and do better the next time. This nurtures positive attitude towards the game. Without a spiritual background, man has no moral responsibility: man without moral responsibility poses a danger to society.

COMMITMENT - Commitment can reduce relationship stress. This is very essential in any sports activity. Commitment requires dedication. It reduces uncertainty. It promotes trust, soothing continuity and stability in a game. This reduces stress. Commitment to relationships with a player is another key personal core value for stress relief during the game.

Yoga for Sports Performance

Why this ancient discipline has become the latest cross-training tool to enhance athletic performance and reduce the risk of injury.

Yoga is a value-based approach. Yoga practices inculcate the core values. Yoga practices have many benefits - from increasing mental concentration and improving flexibility and balance to preventing common injuries and honing skills in a particular sport.

Yoga disciples use poses, or asanas, to prepare their bodies for meditation practice - much as a sports person would prepare for a sports competition. The poses also serve as a means to alter one's consciousness and mental focus in the spiritual quest for "enlightenment." This spiritually transformative process is, in fact, the overriding purpose of the practice of hatha yoga. In essence, yoga is designed to bring body, mind and spirit into balance.

Through the practice of yoga, elite players and weekend warriors alike can benefit from this type of balance. This is especially true when players have pushed their bodies to the max, resulting in weakness or injury. Yoga can restore a weakened body and build it back up. Yoga postures, breathe work and inner focus can help rebalance, strengthen and restore overtaxed muscles, joints and ligaments. Through this restoration process, players can increase their career longevity and develop an inner balance that will last a lifetime. Balancing the mind, body and spirit is a primary philosophical principle of yoga. It is considered the true way to honor the body.

Players in all sports are finding that yogic conditioning not only elongates tight, shortened, fatigued muscles but also brings calmness and clarity to the mind. Some players begin the practice to rehabilitate an injury and to gain more flexibility, stability and strength. Others take it up to increase their powers of concentration and quiet the mind. In addition, some do it because they do not want to miss what everybody else is raving about! The reasons are many, but the results are consistent.

John Douillard, DC, PhD, is the author of *Body, Mind and Sport* (Harmony Books, 2001). When working with professional athletes, Douillard concentrates on improving their breathing. He says slow, steady, conscious breath increases blood oxygen flow, elongates the muscles & allows the body to engage in more stressful work without a degenerative emergency response - all effects that can help reduce injuries. In his work as director of player development for the New Jersey Mets professional basketball team, Douillard teaches the players to remain calm during the stress of a game using a technique he calls "**breathing in the eye of the hurricane**." Douillard says this technique - which employs slow, mindful, focused breathing - has helped the players consciously slow down their heart rates and improve endurance at the height of physical & mental stress.

Conclusion

Spiritual health is key component in achieving sports fitness. Health & Fitness is not just about being physically fit but having an all round development spiritually, mentally & physically. Spiritual consciousness in terms of maintaining faith in God is another way of maintaining health & fitness. Physical fitness is just one of the many factors of staying healthy as exercising gives relief from stress and illness. Physical health contributes to the overall psychological health, but it is mental health, that really decides a positive well-being. Maintenance of the healthy lifestyle is conducive to a psychological well-being. This well-being is achieved if one has the right attitude towards life. One should have a sense of awareness of his or her lifestyle, as it will bring a sense of heightened self-esteem.

A person's psychological well being is imperative to providing sports fitness. His mental life should be free from anxiety, depression and stress. Maintaining a positive self-concept and removing any pessimistic thoughts can achieve this. A person worries more if his frustration increases by not achieving the goals. This is so only when either the goal is too big for that person to achieve or his personality potential cannot bear it.

Therefore the key to success in sports, is the all round development of fitness in physical, spiritual and mental aspects. With heightened spirit, one will entail a better self-concept. Let us give everyone confidence to inspire them in sports and life.

**Remember to
PLAY to LIVE
& LOVE the
SPORT !**