

Stress Management: Lessons from our scriptures

Modern life is stressful. We are always in a hurry. And the work never seems to get over. When we feel we have accomplished one thing, something else comes up. We know that stress is bad for us. It takes a heavy toll on us over time. And yet we find it difficult to lead a stress free life. What is the secret to a stress free life? As Swami Sarvapriyananda, a scholar monk of the Ramakrishna Order explains, our rich heritage offers deep insights. Pl see Swamiji's video for a more detailed understanding of this important topic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTIhoDmOR70>

As Swamiji explains, there are very effective stress management techniques available in our rich heritage. These techniques drawn from our religious scriptures, were primarily developed to attain moksha or salvation or enlightenment. But it so happens that these techniques are also very useful for relieving stress.

Our scriptures talk of the 4 yogas:

- Karma Yoga: The path of action
- Bhakti Yoga: The path of devotion
- Raja Yoga: The path of meditation
- Jnana Yoga: The path of knowledge

Karma Yoga

In daily life, we are busy, doing various things all the time. If we can convert these actions into the worship of God, we are on the path of Karma Yoga. Karma can be of two types:

Sakama Karma: These are actions done with desire. Desire comes in all forms. Thus we may be trying to complete a degree or certification, negotiating a better salary, competing to win an award, trying to get a promotion, developing a

relationship with a stakeholder, winning a business deal. There is nothing wrong with pursuing any of these goals. But if we want to reduce stress, we must pursue these goals within the bounds of morality and decency. Doing wrong or unethical things to achieve our goals is one of the fundamental causes of stress. If we lead a clean life, we can greatly reduce stress.

Nishkama Karma: These are selfless actions undertaken for the welfare of others and without any desire or personal motive. When we undertake these actions, we are not looking for promotion, position or even a word of thanks. We are simply absorbed in our work, doing it and enjoying it. We stretch ourselves to the limit and work very hard and yet we feel happy and do not become tired. Think of Outreach activities. Think of a mother who works hard to take care of her children. (Psychologist Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi calls this a state of flow. We become so absorbed in what we do that we do not worry about the outcome or the effort we are putting in.)

Bhakti Yoga

When we think of religion, we think of Bhakti yoga. In Bhakti yoga, our capacity to love is directed towards God. By loving God, we move towards God. We see God in other human beings. So we start loving them too. We surrender to God and depend on Him completely. We have the complete confidence that whatever He does is for our good. Thanks to this deep faith in the Almighty, a big load disappears from our mind.

Raja Yoga

This is the path of meditation. Through meditation, we learn to calm the mind. By calming the mind, we go deep into ourselves and experience a reality that is beyond our mind. Think of a lake with pure water and completely still, without any waves. Similarly, meditation helps to make our mind pure and calm. Meditation helps to remove from the mind, the waves of anger, lust and desire. When we succeed in stilling our mind, our real self begins to shine. Deep meditation not only relieves stress but also energizes us. So much so that we lose our tiredness completely and do not even feel the need for sleep. Initially, when

we start to meditate, we feel sleepy. For the first time, we recognize our tiredness which has accumulated over time. But as we get used to it, meditation can remove stress and energize us.

Jnana Yoga

This is the path that is based on thinking and actively discovering what is our real self. We reorient our view of ourselves. Jnana Yoga is based on a concept that may look abstract at first but is essentially simple. The person who is seeing an object and the object itself must be part. The seer (Dhrashta) and seen (Dhrishya) must be separate. At a most basic level, the eyes see the world. So the eyes are the dhrashta and the world is the dhrishya. At the next level, the mind sees the eyes in action. At the most advanced level, our true self or consciousness starts seeing the mind. We become the knower of the mind. We become a witness to what the mind is doing. We become separate from the mind. We become fully aware of what is happening in our mind. When we reach this stage of detached thinking, stress will vanish! (This is the state that some modern day psychologists call mindfulness.) The key to breaking the cycle of karma is to break the connection between the "seer" and the "seen". Ignorance is the cause of this connection and breaking this connection is important. That is why this path is called Jnana Yoga. We develop knowledge about our true self.