



Review Article

# Pragmatic Review of Yoga and *Salaah* Health Benefits with Connotation to COVID-19 Pandemic

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## I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

The word "Yoga" is rooted in the Sanskrit term 'Yuj' which means "to combine", "to yoke" or "to unite." Yoga is a spiritual discipline having a very subtle transcendental science as its background which can develop a sense of harmony between mind and body. This art and science helps to promote health, wellbeing and thus can increase life span. This practice targets at vanquishing all afflictions and create freedom in body and mind creating holistic health, happiness and harmony.

In this paper an emphasis is being given to explore many postures and techniques of Yoga and *Salaah* as parallel approach towards attainment of holistic health. Extensive literature and evidence based scientific studies are commendable to prove that yoga postures and techniques are often considered for overall well-being. '*Salaah*' consists of not only prayer recitation and meditation, but also of body movements and position. This is an effort to seek out the similarities between *Salaah* positions and yoga *asanas* for varied health benefits.

**Keywords:** Yoga, *Salaah*, *Asanas*, Holistic, Spiritual Exercise, Meditation

## Introduction

The novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19, has been among the utmost challenges humanity has faced in recent history. Because the pandemic continues to kill thousands each passing day, and therefore the countries slowly attempt to revisit to the new 'normal', the stress on physical and psychological state is more today than ever before. And Yoga, the traditional physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India, has been garnering a renewed appeal as being a proven tool for well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Islamic 'salat' prayers include both spiritual meditation and physical movements of various parts of the body. These movements improve equilibrium, balance, and joint flexibility and thus, maintain lower limb performance.<sup>2</sup>

Each prayer include a series of postures, movements and Quran recitations, in conjunction with other specific supplications. The prayer starts with a standing posture. Afterwards, the individual bends at the waist keeping the hands on the knees while keeping the rear straightforward (bowing). Then returns to the standing posture. After that, assume prostration position in which the forehead, nose, hands, knees, and balls of the toes touch the floor for some seconds. The forearms and elbows should not touch the floor during prostration (Sujud). Then the individual sits on the legs for few seconds and then rise up to face. This series of motion is named as 'rakah'. Rakah is repetitive,<sup>2-4</sup> times based on the prescribed number of 'rakah' in each particular prayer. Five times (regular) prayers are mandatory to perform between dawn and night in single day. Physical

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activity associated with prayer regimes improves standing equilibrium of healthy people.<sup>3</sup>

Studying the wide-ranging aspects of Salaah, inference had been drawn that the organs like heart, spinal column, and brain functions like memory, attentiveness, consciousness, cognitive impairments, are all affected by the beneficial effects of various postures of Salaah.<sup>4</sup>

### Yoga for Good Respiratory Function

Similarly, yoga incorporates many breathing exercises, which could help improve breathing and lung function.<sup>5</sup> In one study, 287 college students took a 15-week class where they were taught various yoga poses and breathing exercises. The study was concluded with the positive outcomes that deep *breathing exercises* may help *increase lung capacity*.<sup>6</sup>

Vital capacity may be a measure of the utmost amount of air which will be expelled from the lungs. It's especially important for those with lung disease, heart problems and asthma.

Another study in 2009 found that practicing yogic breathing improved symptoms and lung function in patients with mild-to-moderate asthma.<sup>6</sup>

### Cardiovascular Endurance

From pumping blood throughout the body to supplying tissues with important nutrients, the health of your heart is an important component of overall health.

Studies show that yoga may help improve heart health and reduce several risk factors for heart condition.

One study found that participants over 40 years of age who practiced yoga for five years had a lower vital sign and pulse than those that didn't.<sup>7</sup>

A study followed 113 patients with heart condition, watching the consequences of a life-style change that included one year of yoga training combined with dietary modifications and stress management.

Participants saw a 23% decrease in total cholesterol and a 26% reduction in "bad" LDL cholesterol. Additionally, the progression of heart condition stopped in 47% of patients.<sup>8</sup>

### Mental Well-Being Proclamation

Poor psychological conditions, including stress and depression, are known to extend the danger of acute respiratory infections.<sup>9</sup> Rising numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths possibly raise stress and anxiety, while loneliness and depressive feelings are probable. Yoga is understood for its ability to ease stress and promote relaxation. Pranayama is known to enhance lung function.<sup>10</sup> Meditation is found to scale back inflammation markers and influence markers of virus-specific immune reaction.<sup>11</sup> Yoga including meditation might be an easy and useful home-based practice for the

prevention and post-recovery management of COVID-19. In fact, multiple studies have shown that yoga can also decrease the secretion of cortisol, the primary stress hormone.<sup>12,13</sup>

For example, In one study on 24 ladies who self – perceived emotional distress. After a three-month yoga program, they had significantly lower levels of cortisol. It was also noticed that their levels of stress, anxiety, fatigue and depression were decreased.<sup>14</sup>

### Rectification of Eating Disorders

Yoga encourages mindfulness, which can be wont to help promote mindful eating and healthy eating habits. This practice has been shown to market healthy eating habits that help control blood glucose, increase weight loss and treat disordered eating behaviors.<sup>15,16,17</sup>

One study incorporated yoga into an outpatient disorder treatment program with 54 patients, finding that yoga helped reduce both disorder symptoms and preoccupation with food.<sup>18,19</sup>

### Subsiding Inflammatory Conditions

In addition to improving your psychological state, some studies suggest that practicing yoga may reduce inflammation also.

Inflammation may be a normal immune reaction, but chronic inflammation can contribute to the event of pro-inflammatory diseases, like heart condition, diabetes and cancer.<sup>20</sup>

According to a study conducted in 2015, in which 218 participants were divided into two groups: regularly practicing yoga group and non- practicing yoga group. Then, to induce stress, both groups were asked to perform moderate and strenuous exercises. As per the inference of the study, the individuals belonging to yoga- practicing group had lower levels of inflammatory markers as compared to those who didn't.<sup>21</sup>

### Relieving Chronic Painful Conditions

Chronic pain may be a persistent problem that affects many people and features a range of possible causes, from injuries to arthritis. In one study, 42 patients with carpal tunnel syndrome either received a wrist splint or did yoga for eight weeks.

At the end, yoga was found to be effective in reducing pain and improving grip strength than wrist splinting.<sup>22</sup>

### Body Flexibility and Strength

Research shows that practicing yoga can help improve balance and increase flexibility.

According to a recent study, on 26 male college athletes, doing yoga for 10 weeks, significantly improved several

measures of flexibility and balance, as compared to the control group.<sup>23</sup>

A 2013 study also found that practicing yoga could help improve balance and mobility in older adults.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to improving flexibility, yoga may be a welcome addition to an exercise routine for its strength-building benefits.

A 2015 study had similar findings, showing that 12 weeks of practice led to improvements in endurance, strength and adaptability in 173 participants.<sup>25</sup>

### Boot out Migraine

Studies show that yoga may stimulate the vagus and reduce migraine intensity and frequency, alone or together with conventional care.<sup>26</sup>

A 2007 study divided 72 patients with migraines into either a yoga therapy or self-care group for 3 months. Practicing yoga led to reductions in headache intensity, frequency and pain compared to the self-care group.<sup>26</sup>

Another study treated 60 patients with migraines using conventional care with or without yoga. Doing yoga resulted in a substantial decrease in headache frequency and intensity than conventional care alone.<sup>27</sup>

Researchers advocate that performance yoga may help trigger the vagus, which has been shown to be operational in getting rid of migraines.<sup>28,29</sup>

### Sound Sleep

Poor sleep quality has been related to obesity, high vital sign and depression, among other disorders.<sup>30,31,32</sup>

Studies show that including yoga into your routine could help promote better sleep as it affects melatonin, a hormone for sleep regulation.<sup>33</sup>

According to a study conducted in 2005, 69 elderly patients were allotted to three different groups, one yoga-practicing group, one group taking an herbal preparation and a third control group.

The yoga-practicing group fell asleep sooner, slept longer and felt well-rested in the morning than the other groups.<sup>34</sup>

### Intensification of Spiritual, Physical and Mental Health

#### (Islamic Perspective i.e., Namaz & Yoga postures)

One of the foremost corresponding features between Islam and 'hatha' yoga is that the similarity of '*Salat*' to the physical exercises of yoga '*asanas*'. The basic meaning of the word *Salat* is 'to bend the lower back', as in hatha yoga. The Persians interpreted this idea with the word namaz; which is alike in meaning 'to bow', etymologically related to the Sanskrit word 'Namaste'. A number of postures and positions

known to 'hatha' yoga are often classified into many basic types in namaz, which include spinal stretches, standing, inverted and seated postures. The genius of Islamic '*Salat*' is to include all of those in rudimentary form into a compact, flowing sequence, ensuring a radical, all-round course of exercises permanently health that is easy for everyone to practice. Muslim prayers are often called Islamic Yoga, as through them an equivalent benefits are often availed that the Yoga practitioners recommend through regular practice of Yoga. Yoga as well as Muslim prayer consists of a number of "*asanas*" or body positions, which should be retained for a desired length of time while either reciting "mantras" or breathing in a rhythmic manner. Its benefits have been researched by many doctors who now recommend it to their patients. In Islam physical movements of prayers (*Salah*) are combined with spiritual exercise.<sup>35</sup>

*Salaah* consists not only of prayer recitation and meditation, but also of physical movements, and postures. The major body positions comprising '*Salaah*' are standing (*qiyam*), bowing (*ruk'u*), prostration (*sujud*) and sitting (*julus*) positions. As per the ordained prayer protocols, the movements are performed repeatedly.<sup>36</sup>

If a Muslim practises '*Namaz*' strictly and properly, he will be automatically fit and sound physically, mentally and spiritually. Though there are some religious distinctions between '*Salaah*' and Yoga, some medical or health benefits of '*Salaah*' is almost similar to Yoga.

### Salaah Positions and Yoga Asanas

There are some positions in '*Salaah*' which are similar to some *Asanas* in Yoga.<sup>37</sup>

- *Qiyam* (Standing for *Salaah*) vs *Namaste* and Tadasana (Mountain Position)
- *Ruku* Bending at the waist/ Bowing vs *Trikonasana*/ *Ardha Uttanasana*/ Standing Forward Bend, Halfway Up Pose
- Prostration position (Sitting in Kneeling Pose) vs *Vajrasana* or *Simhasana* or Lion Pose
- Sitting (*Tahayat*) and finishing Prayer/*Julus*/Thunderbolt Pose /*Vajrasana*
- Peace to the right and left (sitting)/ *Ardha Matsyendrasana*/ Spinal twists/ Seated Easy
- Twist Pose/ Easy Seat Pose/ *Sukhasana*/ Throat Lock/ *Jalandhara Bandha*<sup>38</sup>
- *Julus* Sitting vs *Vajrasana*
- *Sujud* or *Sijdah* (Prostration) vs *Balasana*
- Prostration position/ *Utkatasana*/ Chair Pose *Shashtaangasana* (*Shashankasana*)
- Connecting Hands / *Dhyana mudra*- *Kundalini* yoga

**Correlation between '*Salaah*' and Yoga:** Yoga rejuvenates the mechanism of body and mind. Yoga Therapy is a refreshing process as well as a cost-effective solution; tries

to find out the very root cause of diseases. It helps to restore harmony among various components of lifestyle- physical, social, emotional, spiritual, mental and psychological. Being drugless therapy, it boosts sustainable and functional ability of the body. Same is the case with 'Salaah' also. Yoga and Salaah are definitely a synonym of tension and disease free individual. There are many benefits by performing 'Salaah' such as improved physical health, Spirituality and other medical benefits which may be considered as benedictory influence in Islamic life. For a stress and disease free personality Yoga and 'Salaah' are definitely a substitute.<sup>39</sup>

### Benefits of Salaah Postures and Yoga Postures

Owing to the varied research proven benefits of *Salaah*, it is recommended by many physicians to their patients. *Namaz* (Islamic yoga) aids in the conditions such as tension reduction, emotional well-being, elasticity and coordination, strengthening the immune system & improved balance & postural alignment. Islamic yoga respites them from the stress & improves the memory.

As per the yoga philosophy, some of the yoga positions together "activate" all seven "chakras" (energy fields) in the body. Each of the chakras corresponds to major nerve ganglia branching from the spinal cord. For a sound mind and sound body, it is important that all the movements should be performed perfectly & precisely rather done in a hurry.

Yoga be treated as a lifestyle, rather than just a group of 'asanas', which is completely related with health, happiness and longevity of individual. A careful and judicious combination of these two (i.e., prayer and yoga) therefore, could possibly double the benefits in enhancing psychological state. Prayer has various main positions which are almost like to certain *Asanas* in yoga. Both practices involve stretching the body and activating certain spots in the body (identified as chakras in yoga).<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

Many yoga techniques influence the different physiological systems of our body. Extensive literature and evidences based scientific studies are commendable to prove that yoga postures and techniques can be considered for overall well-being. It is having a benevolent impact on the important physiological systems of the body especially cardiovascular system, the respiratory system, the musculoskeletal system and the nervous system. Thus, when these systems remain in utmost harmony, the resistance/immunity of the body will ultimately be in perfect manner, very much hoped-for in the unprecedented times of the pandemic. One of the most obvious correspondences between Islam and 'hatha' yoga is the resemblance of 'Salat' to the physical exercises of yoga 'asanas'. The main body positions involved in 'Salaah' are standing (*qiyyam*), bowing (*ruk'u*), prostration

(*sujud*) and sitting (*julus*) positions. Though there are some religious distinction between 'Salaah' and Yoga, some medical or health benefits of 'Salaah' is almost similar to Yoga. If 'Salaah' is performed strictly and properly, the person automatically becomes fit and sound physically, mentally and spiritually. Being drugless therapies, they improve sustainable and functional ability of the body. Thus, yoga and 'Salaah' are definitely a substitute of stress and disease-free personality.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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