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Bangalore Engineer Travels Planet Teaching Free Yoga

Raghu Ram, a civil engineer from Bangalore, India tours many different countries for six months every year and teaches yoga workshops on how to relieve human ailments in modern society. He helps people heal eating disorders, anxiety and depression as well as asthma with the help of yoga and meditation. You may not believe in the "flying nun," but Raghu Ram is a "flying yoga teacher" who practices what doctors and researchers developed at the Vivekananda Kendra Yoga Research Foundation in Bangalore.

"I earn my bread in the first six months of every year, and then spend from June through December in the service of humanity all over the world," says Raghu Ram, who is employed by the Karnataka Power Corporation. In his current and fourth year of the world tour, he started from Bangalore in mid-June, stopped in Germany and Switzerland for two weeks, then spent a month on the a month and a half in Houston, carried on research work for asthma in Denver, Colorado, three weeks in Southern California and a week in San Francisco. He left the US this past October enroute to Japan, Singapore and Jakarta, where he will teach workshops. He returned to Bangalore in December.

Despite the hectic travel, "I never suffer from jetlag, due to the yogasanas I practice," said Raghu Ram. "At the Vivekananda Kendra our purpose is to dispel the mystic aspect of yoga. We want to persuade people in the logical, scientific way about how yoga can help the modern man or woman for freedom from disease as well as for general well being," he told HINDUISM TODAY.

He continued, "My wife, Dr. Nagarathna - a medical doctor - and I used to spend three to four months a year visiting many regions within India to teach yoga workshops. Among the attendees were several poor patients suffering from ailments like bronchial asthma, anxiety, neurosis and diabetes. They couldn't come to Bangalore. Local people who had been to Vivekananda Kendra in Bangalore would host the workshops."

"Yoga's approach to treatment is thorough as well as integrated. It aims to work from the inside out," explains Raghu Ram. "Also, it works on four levels within an individual. On the physical level - the annamaya kosha - the asanas and kriyas are effective. On the vital energy or pranayama kosha, pranayama helps a person. On the mental level or manomaya kosha, meditation calms the mind. On the intellectual level - the vijnanamaya kosha - imparting the right knowledge to the individual, and reorienting his attitude with logical convincing brings enlightenment. Yoga has this multi-level approach to correct the imbalance in the personality. It helps bring in harmony and remove disease."

Raghu Ram doesn't charge his patients. He lectures on the Upanishads in the evenings, for which people may make donations. His knowledge of the Upanishads is mainly through self study. Listening to him, it feels like his knowledge comes from deep thought and insight, not from parrot-like learning.

While in Northridge, California - as well as many other locales - he conducted special yogasana and meditation classes daily to patients suffering from anorexia nervosa, bullimia and obesity - ailments rampant in American society. Raghu Ram relates, "Fourteen Americans came to my classes in Northridge, and I taught them relaxation techniques and specific yogic postures, the ones that release the rigidity and tightness in the abdominal walls and muscles. I remind them of the Indian philosophy that the human body is a temple, and you have no right to misuse it. I help them change their attitude toward themselves and to whatever pain they harbor psychologically."

How does this yoga help remove the eating disorders? "According to Yoga Vasistha, a Sanskrit treatise on yoga," explains Raghu Ram, "eating disorders as well as digestive disorders are intimately related to a person's mental condition. Yoga Vasistha declares that immediate mental disturbance, residual memory from the past or suppressed causes punish or satisfy the stomach. The psychological condition can cause under digestion, wrong digestion or over digestion."

Eating disorder patients are taught to remove the attitude of tension through the fourfold yogic process. They can learn to break the stimulus response sequence of seeing the food and eating.

In Northridge, California, he helped 16 patients in 1990 and 10 in 1991. "At the end of each class, the patients reported feeling so relaxed," said Raghu Ram. They feel the effects deep inside. They also report on being able to sleep well. The patient's attitude toward the outside situation changes enormously. Some effect of yoga can be seen in 7 to 10 days, but a few months of practice is needed to stabilize the attitude.

In what ways does yoga alleviate the conditions of neurosis and depression? "In such mental illnesses, the patient suffers from dense mental energy. Hundreds of thoughts clutter the mind at the same time, and they can be conflicting thoughts going in different directions. The person is bogged down with too many targets, directions and too many value systems," said Raghu Ram. As far as Indians settled in the US, they often have to juggle diverse value systems, the Eastern and the Western, which adds stress.

With the help of the four-fold process mentioned above, yoga reduces the speed of the mind, lessons the density and thereby brings down the basic stress level. "Achieve your goal, but do not be a slave to your goal," says Raghu Ram. When we develop too much restlessness in our mind, we tend to translate that into unnecessary work. The relaxation obtained through yogic postures helps slow down a person, relieving the density. The surya namaskar and pranayama empties that extra energy. The mental space expands by two methods, a) by cultivating the nourishing emotions like compassion, love and childlike simplicity.

Depressed individuals forget the blissful nature of their own souls, the Satchidananda Swarupa. Through the guidance of yoga, they are made aware of that. Hindu philosophy believes in the positive direction of life, and the life's rich and profound fullness. The Upanishads declare, "From that fullness comes this fullness." A depressed person is made aware of this innate rich fullness of life.

Raghu Ram, on the behalf of Vivekananda Kendra, has also participated in organizing S.M.E.T. courses, short for Self Management of Executive Tension. Such

classes are taught at corporate centers of different cities in the US, and consist of a three-hour session each day for three days. An in-house corporate program was taught successfully at Dupont corporation in Delaware.

While in Bangalore, Raghu Ram teaches yoga classes at the Vivekananda Kendra. He also trains senior workers and teaching staff. Among the specific illnesses which he helps alleviate through yoga therapy are acute depression and suicidal tendencies, especially in the younger generation of frustrated youth.

He also taught yogasanas to the noted Indian astronaut Rakesh Sharma, prior to his space adventure. "I taught a set of 17 yogasanas to Sharma in 1988 and 1989, which enabled him to adjust to the changed environment, like lack of gravity, lack of air pressure, loneliness and space phobia inside the space craft. It is now a requirement for Russian space explorers to undergo yoga training," Raghu Ram informed HINDUISM TODAY.

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