

YOGA-MĪMĀNSĀ

A Quarterly Journal Devoted to Scientific
and Philosophico - Literary Research in Yoga

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JANUARY 1998

Vol. XXXII

No. 4

KAIVALYADHAMA
LONAVLA - 410 403 (Maharashtra), INDIA

Eutonia - the Gerda Alexander Method: A Preparatory Phase to Yoga

Souto, Alicia*

Abstract

The author is a professional eutonist and yoga therapist. Her experience with treatment and rehabilitation programmes for different groups of patients has resulted in her conviction in viewing Eutonia as a preparatory phase to Yoga and Meditation. Some important stages, principles and diagnostic pointers, governing the progress of treatment through Eutonia, have been elucidated.

Key Words: Eutonia, Yoga, Therapy.

Introduction

Eutonia, indicative of a harmonious muscle tone, has been developed as a therapeutical tool by Gerda Alexander, Rhythmic Professor at Dalcroze School, Denmark. She gave much importance to 'feeling' the ambience of one's own body by way of body focusing, intuitive visualization of functional and emotional aspects of one's own being. Perceived awareness of 'difference of warmth' of the fluids in the body, 'pressure changes' inside the body, 'congestion' and so on is given due importance in Eutonia. The most important aim of this discipline is to find the suitable tone during rest or even during the most dynamic situations. The tonic

* Professor, Salvador University (Argentina), Guest Professor, Faculty of Physical Education & Yoga (Brazil), Ex-President of Latin American Association of Eutony, Member of International Association of Yoga Therapist (L.A., U.S.A.), Member of International Federation of Holistic Medicine (Italy).

control along with relaxation makes *Eutonia* very useful in therapy. It can be regarded as a preparatory phase in yogic practices. It helps people to find a deeper awareness of their own body and consequently the awareness of 'being in contact with one's essential nature' as their practice gets established in course of time. This indeed signifies the integration of personality at the higher level, and hence *Eutonia* may facilitate meditative states too.

Eutonia proposes to go deep in the discovery of the self with 'an expansion' of awareness by which we can liberate our potential creativity along with a better adjustment to different life situations. The word "*Eutonia*" was coined in 1957 to convey the idea of 'an optimally balanced tonicity in the process of one's adaptability to psychophysiological events.

Hypertonia and hypotonia are two different tonic states:

1)*Hypertonia*: As seen in catatonia or in neurological problems such as spasticity.

2)*Hypotonia*: Depressive states, all the states with below normal tonicity.

Muscle tone involves movements necessary for achieving an optimal state of muscles, ligaments and tendons to counter many a resistance encountered.

In relation with these examples one may conceive an *optimal tone* to be somewhere in the midway of both the states. It is, in fact, the balanced tone for any activity. Muscle tone is the most important factor in psychomotor performance. It gets adjusted constantly to suit the need of each situation which could be phasic in nature.

Muscle tone involves movements necessary for a regular 'progression', with appropriate measure, in relation to the resistances encountered. The tonus pervading the body assumes an

appropriate balance for each posture and gesture, building up the attitude in movement or quietness and in continuity of an action. So *Eutonia* tries to develop the adaptive capacity suitable for all situations.

The Eutonist should know how to guide a student or patient during different stages of tonus arising out of hypo and hyper states of the muscle tone so that the student/ patient should acquire the capacity of perceiving the variations in tone and also to control the same at will.

The methodology has the following stages:

I. Body Awareness: To become aware of tonic imbalances through an inventory. One has to feel one's own body, generally lying on the floor or in a sitting posture. The inventory of the body parts which touch the ground helps in this 'awareness search' and permits to feel the ongoing tonic variations.

II. The stage of Contact: For this we first need the awareness of the touch of the skin with different surfaces and materials; as well as the awareness of the difference between what is inside and outside the skin. *Contact* differs from *touch*, in the sense, in the former we *direct* our awareness from our internal space through the different tissues in the direction of another surface or another person or some element like bamboo or seeds or tennis balls. With *contact* we can relieve pain in a number of cases. Of late, the contact principle has been tried with a reasonably high success rate in the individual treatment procedures.

III. Control Postures: Certain body postures to diagnose muscular shortenings, tensions, joint

problems and so on. The aim of these postures (some of them are like *Yogasanas*) is to reveal to the patient the aforesaid imbalances through their very own experiences. These postures require the normal length of the muscles in resting condition. In this way we can diagnose: pathological and postural problems; residual tensions or even the extent of relaxation possible.

The following diagnostic pointers guide us in the *Eutonia* treatment process:

- i. **Passivity** in some way through the awareness of the muscular mass of the body, its volume and weight to permit this experience of passivity.
- ii. **Bone Awareness:** This principle leads us to the feeling of lightness, we have to guide the individuals to the perception of the bone structure; the difference between hard and soft tissues , the spatial position of bones etc. An anatomy text book can be consulted by the beginners, if needed, for the purpose.
- iii. **Micromovements:** *Vibration, Pushing and Transport* are important constituents. Transport is a consequence of the impulse pushing up in a certain direction. Due to this impulse one feels the micro movements spreading from the resistance that is built between our own weight and the ground. This movement can be perceived throughout the body.
- iv. **Awareness of the Inner Space and Outer Space:** We became aware of these spaces through our own breathing, warmth and so forth. This method is based on the feeling of *wholeness* and awareness of *interconnection* of each part of the body. In the process we can relieve the muscle from unnecessary work. There are virtually no limits to the transformation of the body in

relation to the movement. The practitioners learn to sense 'themselves' all the time in relation with their bodies.

In the process the 'whole body awareness' may transform itself into an uniformed and uninterrupted 'stream of consciousness' akin to the Patanjalian *Dhyāna* (P.Y.S. III:2).

The aim is the 'transparency' of the body, arising out of body awareness on the *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya* levels, culminating finally into *one pointed awareness* of the subtler aspect of the body, the subtler awareness being the object of *dhāraṇā* that culminates into *dhyāna*.

If used in conjunction with Yoga, *Eutonia* seems to have the potential to be an essential therapeutic tool for many a psychosomatic disorder.

Relevance to Yoga Practices

Prāṇāyāma: Awareness of touch of air inside the nostrils, in equal measure, magnitude and force, help a practitioner to transcend the mechanics of breathing and help him to enter into the domain of sensations, feelings, and experiences. 'Visualizing' intuitively the filling-up and emptying of the internal cavities, expansion and contraction of the thoracico-abdominal area, help him further in delving deeper into pranayamic dynamics.

Āsana: Feeling of 'balanced' tone of muscles helps us to be sensitive to proprioceptive and viscerosensitive impulses. Maintenance of and 'adaptation' to an asana involve neuromuscular coordination and reflex system at complex levels. This sensitivity is facilitated by the penetrating awareness gained through *Eutonia*.

Dhyāna: *Eutonia* helps us feel an internal space as well as its relationship with the surrounding world at the subtler plane and thus help mind and body to get stabilized. This in turn may result in one pointed awareness, once the dharana stage gets established.

Eutonia is now taught in Universities and Schools and used in the treatment and rehabilitation of physical disabilities and neurological diseases at many places in Europe. It is also being accepted as an important tool for training sportsmen, dancers, musicians and physical education teachers.

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