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Advice

GUEST COLUMN | DR ISSAC MATHAI

Treating the BODY and the MIND

Doctor, all my tests are normal, but I am not well. I can't understand what is wrong with me." This is a genuine plea from a patient whose pathology has not changed, but who is still unwell.

Mind-Body-Spirit healing techniques explore such cases, after ruling out hypochondria. Intuitively, our body has a message for us. But after prolonged distress, it gives up. At this point, one develops symptoms that do not necessarily show up in blood reports, but still need to be treated immediately. That is what preventive medicine is all about. This can prevent one from getting into chronic disease conditions.

The basic concept of the ancient Mind-Body-Spirit system

is: "Listen to your body and indulge and pamper this most precious gift." Unfortunately in today's world, demands on us are so high that we tend to ignore this. Mind-Body-Spirit medicine focusses on the interactions between the brain, the mind, the body, and human behaviour, and the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioural factors directly affect health. It regards as fundamental an approach that respects and enhances each person's capacity for self-knowledge and self-care, and emphasises techniques that are grounded in this approach.

The concept that the mind is important in the treatment of illness is integral to the healing approaches of traditional Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine, dating back to 1000 BC. It was also noted by Hippocrates, who recognised the moral and spiritual aspects of healing, and believed that treatment could occur only by taking into consideration one's attitude, environmental influences and natural remedies.

While this integrated approach was maintained in traditional healing systems in the East, developments in the western world by the 16th and 17th centuries led to a separation of human spiritual or emotional dimensions from the physical body. This separation began with the redirection of science, during the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras, to

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Treating the Body

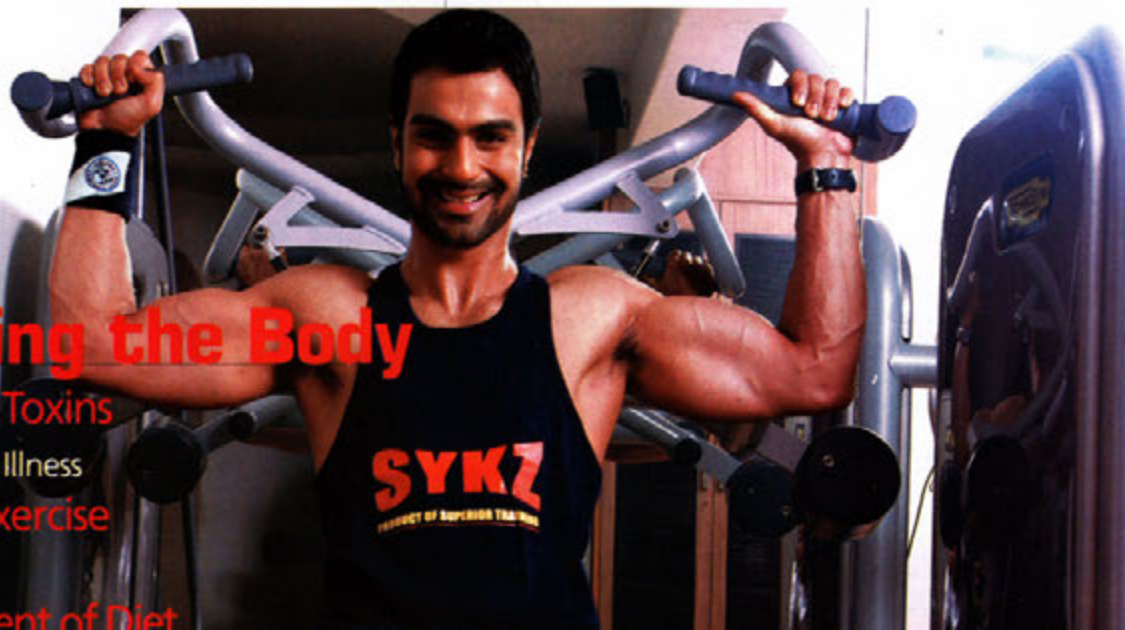
Release of Toxins

Prevention of Illness

Effect of Exercise

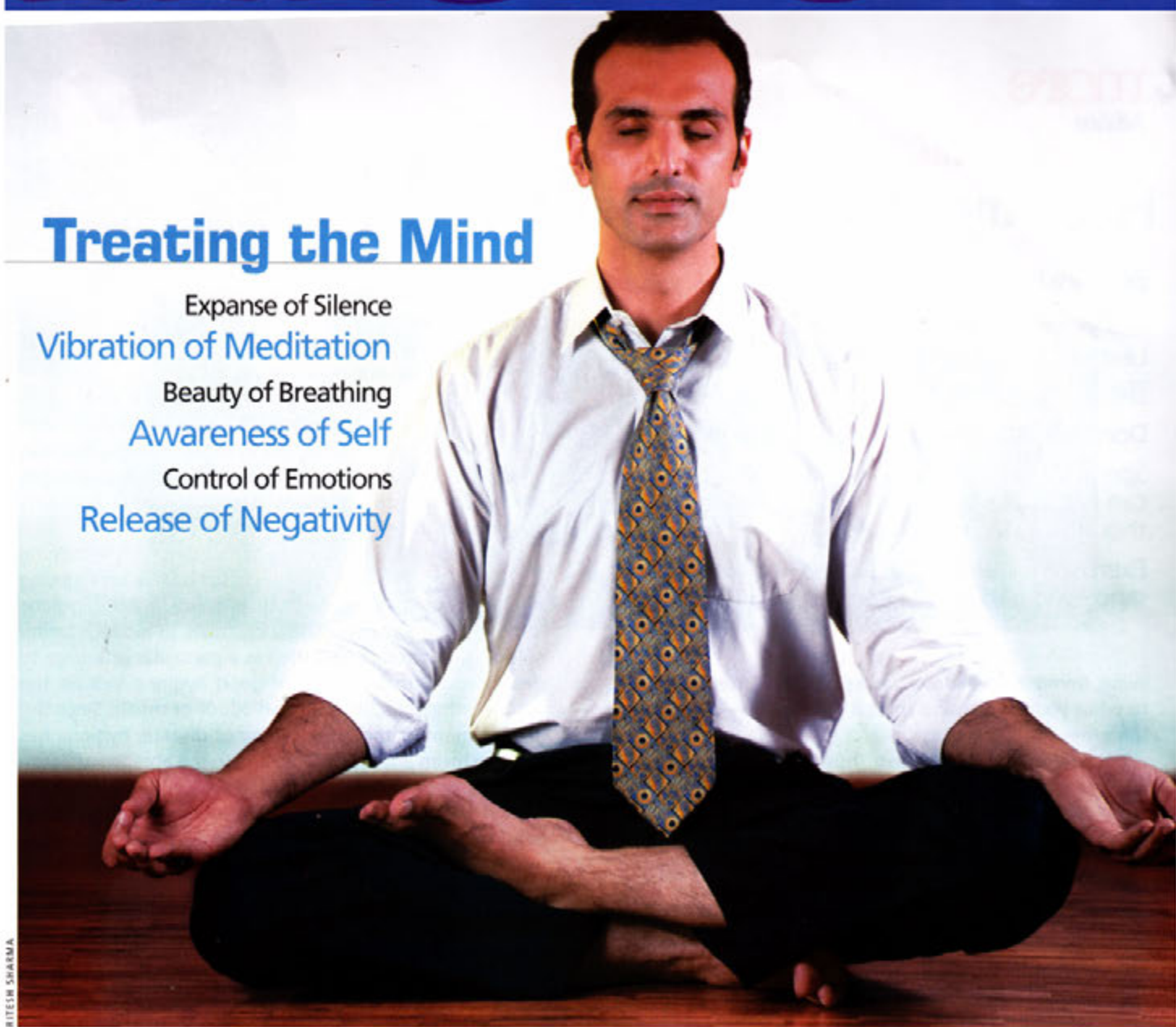
Boon of Rest

Management of Diet



Treating the Mind

Expanse of Silence
 Vibration of Meditation
 Beauty of Breathing
 Awareness of Self
 Control of Emotions
 Release of Negativity



the purpose of enhancing humankind's control over nature. Technological advances (e.g., microscopy, the stethoscope, the blood pressure cuff, and refined surgical techniques) demonstrated a cellular world that seemed far removed from the world of belief and emotion. The discovery of bacteria and, later, antibiotics, further dispelled the notion of belief influencing health.

Fixing or curing an illness became a matter of science and technology and took precedence over the healing of the soul. As medicine separated the mind and the body, neuroscientists formulated concepts such as the unconscious, emotional impulses, and cognitive delusions, which solidified the perception that diseases of the mind were not "real" that is, not based in physiology and biochemistry.

During World War II, the importance of belief re-entered the web of health care. On the beaches of Anzio, mor-

phine for the wounded soldiers was in short supply. Henry Beecher, MD, discovered that much of the pain could be controlled by saline injections. He coined the term "placebo effect," and his subsequent research showed that up to 35 per cent of a therapeutic response to any medical treatment could be the result of belief. The journey is worth making for what each of us might learn about this remarkable union of mind, body and spirit.

Health depends on a state of equilibrium among the various factors that govern the operation of the body and the mind; equilibrium, in turn, is reached only when man lives in harmony with his external environment. The natural healing arts have been with us for ages, and can often be very powerful—by engaging and supporting our body's innate wisdom. We need to pay attention to what helps us maintain balance, especially in these times of high-stress

Healthy Mind-Body Relationships

Be thankful

Bless the lives of others

Learn to forgive and let go

Be a peacemaker

Don't talk about your misfortunes or illnesses.

Spend 10 minutes a day meditating on how you can become a better person. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones.

Exercise regularly. Walk barefoot on grass or sand everyday. You'll sleep better.

living, immune breakdown, and pollution. Listen carefully to what your body-mind-spirit is telling you—it could be something important!

We need a more caring, humanistic approach—encompassing the mind, body and emotions—to be nurtured and empowered, treated with respect, and made a partner in the healing process. With the growing interest in holistic medicine, there are now an increasing number of practising holistic physicians and healthcare providers who have put into practice some of these sought-after ideals. They have preferred the safer, less costly, more effective and natural treatments, along with an emphasis on empowering the individual.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health cannot be defined as a state at all, but must be seen as a process of continuous adjustment to the changing demands of living and of the changing meanings we give to life. A holistic approach to healing recognises that the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical elements of each person comprise a system, and attempts to treat the whole person, concentrating on the cause of the illness as well as symptoms. Examples of such holistic therapies include Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Siddha, Unani, Tibetan Medicine, Acupuncture, Chinese Medicine, Yoga, etc.

Workplace health programmes are now recognised by more and more companies for their value in improving health and well-being of employees and form an integral

part of several companies' health and safety programmes.

These wellness programmes are designed to improve employee morale, loyalty and productivity. They could consist of as little as a gym full of exercise equipment that is available to employees on company property during the workday. But they may also cover smoking cessation programmes, nutrition, weight or stress management training, health risk assessments and health screenings.

Physical exercise is considered important for maintaining physical fitness, promoting physiological well-being; reducing surgical risks and strengthening the immune system. Hygiene is the maintenance of healthy practices. In modern terminology, this is usually regarded as a particular reference to cleanliness. Outward signs of good hygiene include the absence of visible dirt or of bad odour or smells. Since the development of the germ theory of disease, hygiene has come to mean any practice leading to the absence of harmful levels of bacteria.

Nutrition is a science that studies the relationship between diet and states of health and disease. Dieticians are health professionals who are specialised in this area of expertise. They are also the only highly trained health professionals able to provide safe, evidence-based and accurate dietary advice and interventions. The science of nutrition attempts to understand how and why specific dietary aspects influence health.

Mental health is a concept that refers to an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. It can be defined as "a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life." Cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how "mental health" is defined. One way to think about mental health is by looking at how effectively and successfully a person functions. Feeling capable and competent; being able to handle normal levels of stress, being able to maintain satisfying relationships, and lead an independent life; and being able to "bounce back", or recover from difficult situations, are all signs of sound mental health. ■

