



Text of PM's inaugural address (via video conference) at the Annual International Yoga Conference in Rishikesh

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**Swami Chidanand Saraswati ji,
Shankaracharya Divyanand Tirth ji Maharaj
Swami Asanganand Saraswati ji,
Sadhvi Bhagwati Saraswati ji,
Seers, Acharyas, Friends,**

I am happy to join you today, through Video Conferencing, at the Annual International Yoga Festival.

Before I begin, I would like to share with you, some recent, remarkable achievements of our scientists in India.

Last month, our space scientists created a unique record.

They sent 104 satellites into space, through a single rocket launch.

101 of these satellites were owned by countries such as USA, Israel, Switzerland, Netherlands, Kazakhstan and UAE.

Our defence scientists too, have made India proud.

On 11th February, they successfully tested a high altitude ballistic missile shield, which can provide effective security cover to our cities, against missile attacks.

Yesterday, they added another feather in their cap by successfully testing a low altitude interceptor missile.

This is a capability that only four other nations currently possess.

I congratulate our space and defence scientists for their achievements.

हमारे अतिरक्ष और रक्षा वैज्ञानिकों की उपलब्धियों ने भारत की प्रतिष्ठा को पूरे विश्व में ऊंचा किया है।

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We in India believe in researching both the frontiers of science and technology, as also, researching deep within our souls, that is, both Science, and Yoga.

Perhaps, there can be no better place than Rishikesh, to host the International Yoga Festival.

This, indeed, is a place that has drawn sages, pilgrims, commoners and celebrities alike, over millennia, in quest for peace, and for the true essence of Yoga.

As I observe the large and diverse gathering from different parts of the globe, at the banks of the Holy River Ganga in Rishikesh, my thoughts turn to *Max Müller*, the great German scholar, who said, and I quote:

"If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India."

From Max Muller, to many of you present in Rishikesh today – all immensely successful people in their own right – whenever the quest to know one's real self has beckoned, their destination has been India.

And in most cases, that quest, has led them, to Yoga.

Yoga is a code to connect people with life, and to reconnect mankind with nature.

It expands our limited sense of self, to see our families, societies and mankind, as extensions of our own self.

That is why, Swami Vivekananda said, “expansion is life, contraction is death.”

By practicing Yoga, a spirit of oneness is created – oneness of the mind, body and the intellect.

Oneness with our families, with the society we live in, with fellow humans, with all the birds, animals and trees with whom we share our beautiful planet...this is Yoga.

Yoga is the journey from ‘me’ to ‘we.’

व्यक्ति से समष्टि तक ये यात्रा है। मैं से हम तक की यह अनुभूति, अहम से वयम तक का यह भाव-विस्तार, यही तो योग है।

This journey, as a natural by-product, brings the added benefits of good health, peace of mind, and even, prosperity in life.

Yoga makes the individual a better person in thought, action, knowledge and devotion.

It would be very unfair to see Yoga only as a set of exercises that keeps the body fit.

Yoga is far beyond physical exercises.

The quest for solace from the stresses of modern life, often drives people to tobacco, alcohol, or even drugs.

Yoga offers a timeless, simple, and healthy alternative. There is ample evidence that practicing yoga helps combat stress and chronic lifestyle-related conditions.

The world today, is also threatened by the twin challenges – terrorism, and climate change.

The world looks to India, and to Yoga, for a durable, and sustainable answer to these problems.

When we talk of global peace, there should be peace among nations. That is possible only when there is peace within the society. Only peaceful families can constitute peaceful society. Only peaceful individuals can make peaceful families. Yoga is the way to create such a harmony and peace within individuals, family, society, nation and ultimately all over the world.

Through Yoga, we will create a new Yuga – a Yuga of togetherness and harmony.

When we talk of combating climate change, we seek to move away from a lifestyle of consumption, or “*Bhoga*”, to one of Yoga.

Yoga can prove to be a strong pillar to lead a life of discipline and development.

At a time, when emphasis is on personal gain, and what one may get out of any endeavour, Yoga offers a refreshingly different approach.

Yoga is not about what one can get out of it. It is rather about what one can give up, what one can get rid of.

Therefore, instead of attainment, Yoga shows us the path to liberation, or *Mukti*, as we call it in this part of the world.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati ji, through his work at Parmarth Niketan has shown a way to live these noble ideals.

I appreciate the work being done by Parmarth Niketan in bringing Yoga to people across the world.

I recall the active role played by Swami ji, in compiling the 11 volume Encyclopaedia of Hinduism.

Remarkably, Swamiji and his team have accomplished this mission in less than a quarter of a century. And the depth of their work is amazing.

They were able to include almost all aspects of Hinduism in only 11 volumes.

This is indeed, a possession that can benefit every spiritual seeker, yogi, and even a common person.

Works like Encyclopaedia of Hinduism, when made available in various languages, increase the understanding and enhance the awareness of other traditions and cultures within the country.

This increased understanding, in turn, reduces hatred, misunderstanding and increases cooperation, peace and amity among communities.

Let me also take this opportunity, to compliment Parmarth Niketan, for the active role played by them in the Swachh Bharat Mission – a mass movement towards Clean India.

Indian traditions lay a strong emphasis on personal hygiene. Not only is keeping one's body clean and pure emphasized, but also cleanliness in one's house, place of work and place of worship is given a lot of priority.

Accumulation of any form of waste or filth within the four walls of these places is considered impure.

Even in our ancient scriptures, this importance of personal hygiene is captured.

There is, however, a tendency to dump dirt in open spaces.

This is not true for western and other developed countries, where the link between community hygiene and public health is more clearly understood.

Awareness and observance of hygiene of public goods like water bodies, land and air is crucial.

Therefore, good health is a collective effort of personal well-being and environmental well-being.

Through the Swachh Bharat Mission, we are attempting to establish the link between community hygiene and personal health.

Historically temples have played a key role in our societies.

Usually they were built at a vast area of land, and often away from the residential areas.

However, with passage of time, they were surrounded by markets, and residential colonies. And hence, they face unclean surroundings as a major challenge.

Swachh Bharat Mission, therefore, now includes the Project "Swachh Iconic Places" to address this issue.

In the first phase, we have taken Kamakhya Temple, Jagannath Puri, Meenakshi Temple, Tirupati, Golden Temple, and Vaishno Devi temple for making them and their surroundings clean.

And therefore, Swachh Bharat Mission – the quest for clean India – is linked to faith and spirituality in the country.

We were all witness to the great global upsurge for Yoga when, in September 2014, I proposed an International Day of Yoga, at the session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I must confess, I did not imagine the spontaneous outpouring of support that followed.

An unprecedented number of countries from across the world, joined hands with us.

And now, every year, on the occasion of Summer Solstice – June 21 – the world comes together, for Yoga.

The coming together of so many nations to mark the International Day of Yoga illustrates the real essence of Yoga - togetherness.

Yoga has the potential to herald in a new Yuga (a new era) - a Yuga of peace, compassion, brotherhood and all-round progress of the human race.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May the blessings of the mighty Himalayas be with you.

May you find fulfilment and bliss, in this great festival of Yoga, on the banks of the River Ganga, where our sages and rishis have meditated for millennia.

May you enjoy your stay in the spiritual city of Rishikesh, and the divine surroundings of Parmarth Niketan.

May Yoga be of benefit to one and all.

I wish the International Yoga Festival a grand success.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

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