

Yoga – Mind and Body

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Abstract: *In this paper, we discuss similarities between the psychosomatics in yoga, and contemporary medicine and psychology. Psychosomatics of yoga offers practices which can serve either as prevention of certain disorders, or as therapy for certain diseases. While psychosomatics in medicine mostly serves as an explanation for certain diseases, and as orientation in choosing the best therapy, psychosomatics in yoga mostly serves prevention.*

Prevention is also important for medicine, but it is kept aside in it, i.e. in most case medicine is called upon when you have an obvious disorder, although prevention is more emphasized in modern times. In this paper we point to the influence of yoga on development of transpersonal psychology, as a particular orientation within the personality theories, and psychotherapies. In particular it was influential in articulation of certain concepts, like "peak experience" and its meaning in life.

Keywords: *yoga, psychosomatics, prevention, healing, transpersonal psychology.*

Yoga and Psychosomatics

Having in mind that yoga during its development in India (between the 2nd c. BC, and 10th c., i.e. between the time of Patanjali and Goraksha) had developed a holistic psychosomatic platform, which stresses the interaction of mind and body, it is an interesting model for the psychosomatics which developed in the West, during the second half of the 20th c., although it can be said that the process started in the 16th c., during the Renaissance time, when the interest for nature and the human body – i.e. for macrocosm, and microcosm - steadily was growing.

1) As noted by Vladislav Klajn ("Neurosis, theory and clinical practice", 1962), to consider mind and body as an inseparable unity was something that was neglected in the process of developing medicine, during the 19th and 20th c., and contemporary psychosomatic medicine (which was developing in the second half of the 20th c.) has accepted the unity of mind and body, "not as a philosophical or intuitive stand, but within a natural-scientific, and experimental viewpoint".

What caused problems in such trend, was the fact that during a certain period (60-80's) psychosomatic medicine for some authors has taken a form of another extreme in relation to somatic medicine. That is, while the somatic consideration of all diseases – for cancer, to depression and schizophrenia – understood them as an effect of some organic factors and disturbances (from hereditary factors to viruses), psychosomatic medicine sometimes went into another extreme, and considered all diseases – from cancer, to depression and schizophrenia – as caused by psychogenic factors, where eventual organic factors were treated just as performers on the scene, which was set up by the mind (simplified – the formula was: that is all in your head).

After a while a balanced platform was found, which Vladimir Adamović (Belgrade psychiatrist) named as "psychosomatic approach" – to make a difference in relation to psychosomatic medicine, as an extreme standpoint, which was just in opposition to the "somatic medicine". So the idea was to find a balanced viewpoint, which takes into consideration mind and body, psychic and somatic factors.

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Adamovic defines the psychosomatic approach as follows: “The psychosomatic approach considers an ill person as a dense combination of hereditary and acquired somatic and psychic attributes, which never appear in a same combination. And his illness is an effect of his organism defenses giving up, in confrontation with one or more causes of the illness, among which we consider psychic causes having an important place. In some cases this psychogenic factor is essential. These are primary psychosomatic illnesses. In some of them it is just one among others: those are secondary illnesses. In the third group the psychogenic factor is not important (for example in infectious diseases), although the psychic condition during the illness can have an important place in recovery, or in the fatal end” (Adamović: 1983, p. 24).

For the psychosomatic approach for several decades it was a challenge "how to prove development of a psychosomatic illness", and that is also the title of one of the chapters in this book by Adamovic (Ibid., pages 25-35).

Now, it is interesting to note, that it was also a similar challenge for yoga in the West – for its psychosomatic standpoint, its theory and practice – how to prove that practicing yoga is beneficial for psychic and somatic well-being, or health. Yoga had a similar challenge during the 20th c. as the psychosomatic approach in medicine – i.e. how to prove its positive psychosomatic effects.

2) During its evolution in India – from Patanjali to Tantrism and Goraksha, i.e. between the 2nd c. BC to the 10th c. – yoga has created a psychosomatic approach, but not primary as an approach in explaining illness, but as an attempt to explain humans and their capacities beyond illness and health, which will also be the goal of transpersonal psychology in the second half of the 20th c.

Psychosomatics of yoga is different from psychosomatic approach in medicine, because yoga offers practice which can be efficient as prevention, as well as part of a therapy for certain disturbances and illnesses. While the psychosomatic approach in medicine serves mostly as an explanation of illness, and as possible help in choosing the adequate method of healing, the psychosomatic of yoga is open toward prevention, and its leading principle is – prevent, rather than heal.

Prevention is also important for medicine, but in it prevention is aside, or, in many cases the patient appears only when the symptoms and illness are present, although in recent times prevention is more underlined.

3) When we speak about applying yoga as prevention, and a healing method, regarding effects of yoga on hypertension, we should bear in mind the book “The Effects of Yoga on Hypertension”, 1978. The author first explains what is hypertension and how modern medicine deals with it. Then he gives some advices how to apply certain yoga exercises (*asanas*, *pranayama*, meditation, and nutrition), very detailed and systematically exposed within an introductory course of eight weeks. In the meantime, for the last thirty years a number of similar books have been published, with the motivation to apply yoga practices to many other types of illness.

4) Now, related to this, one can raise a relevant question, which has also a general importance. The question is: does yoga practice depend, or is based (and in what measure) on accepting some general philosophical ideas and beliefs – as it was in India – and that is, belief in reincarnation, and a possibility to reach, through yoga, liberation from the circle of birth and death, and reach some higher state, or identity, which were variously named and defined – from the time of Upanishads, to Tantrism (i.e. between the 6th c. BC, to the 6th c.)?

In other words - can yoga practice be effective and make sense for me, if I just apply it to reduce hypertension, and if I do not believe into reincarnation, but into a Christian immortality of the soul, or if I am sure that there is no life after death in any sense – as was the conviction of some philosophers in India, China, and Europe?

To reach the answer I will use one other example, as analogous. We know that the decimal number system has been invented and existed in India more than thousand years before the Italian mathematician Fibonacci during the 13th c. introduced to Europe. With some hesitation, and resistance, which went over for a century or so, this number system was gradually applied, with benefit for mathematics, as well as other sciences and the society in

Europe, and the West, until our times. Applications of this system were spreading no matter that it started in India, and the mediators, from whom Fibonacci took it over, were the Arabs (therefore they were named as Arabic numerals).

No matter that yoga practices were created in India, in one specific cultural and spiritual milieu, and within certain concepts about humans and their possible specifications, we find that these practices can be also applied in different cultural milieu, still having its application, because they are based on a psychosomatic concept of humanity, and on a general unity of humans from various cultures, and regions of the planet.

Therefore, although the general concepts - out of which yoga and its practices were created – are not, or are not necessarily ours, yoga and its practices can be useful in a different context, and with different premises – as part of a psychosomatic culture of healthy life, or in the service of keeping good health, and psychological well-being.

Another factor can be something else - which is in transpersonal psychology named as spiritual integrity and peak experiences, that transcend the horizons of health and normality.

Transpersonal Psychology and Yoga

During the 50's, two orientations were dominant in psychology – psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Some psychologists were not satisfied with this situation and wanted to create an alternative. Within such context appeared a group which identified itself as "Third force psychology", in relation to psychoanalysis, and behaviorism, and named itself as humanistic psychology. Abraham Maslow (1908-70), and Anthony Sutich (1907-76) started the Journal of humanistic psychology (in spring 1961), and two years later, the Association for Humanistic Psychology – AHP.

Maslow initiated further development of humanistic psychology together with Carl Rogers (1902-87), Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965), and Erih Fromm (1900-80). Humanistic psychology considers that mental illness appears when social repression disturbs normal development of personality, and psychology (or therapy) should have as its goal to develop the full potential of a particular person, which was hindered by outside factors. Humanistic psychology considers that growth, self-actualization, authenticity and normality are natural potentials of persons, and the meaning is the primary goal of life. In this context, therapy, or elimination of conflicts and purification from tensions, are just a primary goal, or step, while the ultimate goal is self-realization, balance between the real and ideal self. Therefore, a normal, healthy person also can have as its target self-realization, as a further goal of possible mental development.

On the basis of humanistic psychology will appear transpersonal psychology, which will even more accentuate that there are spiritual potentials which transcend the boundaries of normality and mental health in ordinary setup. For Maslow this was a further step, after humanistic psychology - "Fourth-force Psychology". In 1968 he wrote that humanistic psychology was a transition, or preparatory step for the forth force in psychology, or for transpersonal psychology, which transcends even the categories developed before, like self-actualization (Maslow: *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 1968). For such stand Maslow was motivated by his observation that some persons have peak experiences, or experiences of self-transcendence. Therefore, this would be the field for transpersonal psychology. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* was founded in 1969, by Maslow and Sutich. In 1972, in California his followers founded the Association for Transpersonal Psychology – ATP. In 1975, Robert Frager founded the Institute for Transpersonal psychology, in Palo Alto in California, while in 1977, Stanislav Grof (1931 -) founded the International Transpersonal Association – ITA. In Europe, within the British Psychological Society was established the Department for transpersonal psychology, in 1996, and European Transpersonal Association - EUROTAS) was established in 1999.

Transpersonal psychology is eager to relate psychology, its concepts, theories and methods, like psychotherapy, with ideas and practices of so-called spiritual disciplines. Its essence is the ideal and possibility of self-transcendence, or supposition that a person can realize a deeper, and wider integrative identity – which goes

beyond his social identity, as well as those defined by psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology. Therefore, transpersonal means what is beyond the individual personality.

Transpersonal psychology tends to put into function the offers of traditional spiritual disciplines, to serve the development of humans, heal their disorders, and help them counter the challenges of life, as well as difficulties in their spiritual seeking. It is based on holistic and ecocentric concept of humans and their environment. On such basis it founds the possibility of going beyond the conditioned personality, toward an identity that is deeper, and completely (not only through DNK) related to the wholeness, which makes up life.

Along with this, it does not suppress individuality, because it tries through the individual and the actual situation, to realize possibilities of transcending give limits.

Certain practices in transpersonal psychology include meditation and contemplation, and some authors – rephrasing the psychoanalytic phrase that dreams are a royal way toward the unconscious - say that meditation is the royal road toward the transpersonal (Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. Paths beyond ego: the transpersonal vision, Tarcher, Los Angeles, 1993).

Peak Experience

Maslow introduced the concept of "peak experience" in order to transcend religious connotations, or local contexts and meanings, connected with the mystic experience. Essentially, characteristics of the peak experiences are the following:

- a) powerful and deep positive emotions, which make it similar to ecstasy, elation;
- b) deep feeling of peace and serenity;
- c) feeling to be in accordance with the universe;
- d) feeling of deep understanding, or insight;
- e) feeling that this experience is hardly possible, or impossible to express through words.

In his books (in particular in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pages 104-114), Maslow gives detailed descriptions of peak experiences, with 16 aspects.

Experiences of Ivo Andric

It is interesting to note that Ivo Andric has left records of some his experiences and insights which can be related with some insights in yoga terms, and peak experiences. I will quote four examples from his book "Signs along the path" (Andrić, 1980).

"In certain moments, in active life, I have a feeling that suddenly everything goes away, that beings are leaving the world, and man is leaving man. Then I go back to my loneliness, as the real home of my consciousness. And my loneliness is not the silence and immobility, darkness, and unconsciousness, it is the scream and cry of all human destinies and life cravings, from the beginning of the world, until today, it is a whirling of numberless suns, in relation to it our sun that keeps us warm is just a toy, it is a humming of millions of universe bells in which the planets serve as clappers. And through this universe, without end and name, is struck, from the top to the bottom, a sword of light – my consciousness" (p. 14).

"In certain moments I have a full illusion that within the terrible crash and transition of everything that is around me, I have been given five minutes of life on white bread, to breathe and think, freely and peacefully. And I use this time full of joy and power, being peaceful like a plant, and I am not concerned about its beginning or the end. My mind extends these five minutes into eternity, beyond all motions, conflicts, or storms, I live a luminous and deep life of thought, and cannot see the end of any of those moments, since they are wider than the world, and deeper than happiness" (p. 14)

"There are moments when I feel, as something powerful and strange... the fact of existence, naked, wonderful and terrible. The world exists, and I in it. ...I am lost trying to express this... just one sign, one letter, one sound, which could clearly and dependably say: We exist. In such moments it happens that I stand still on a

square, full of traffic... among the stream of cars... while their drivers watch me with anger, and astonished” (p. 131).

“There are moments when water and fire are the same for me. (...) Then this painful world, with its contradictions, completely disappears, and I see, clearly and perfectly, I feel the unity of all the elements that circulate in the universe. Nothing has name, face, direction, or justification. In its essence and its final outcome, everything is oneness, in this millionth fraction of a second, called eternity” (p. 76).

Conclusion

In the early confrontations with the practice of yoga (in the late 19th and first half of 20th c.) a part of the interested researchers and public in the West – given its traditional role in the Indian culture – was under the impression that this is a practice that is inseparable from different types of Indian devotion, asceticism and spiritual traditions. Some believed - as Carl Jung, at the time when he held his own seminar on Kundalini yoga - that is one part of the theory of yoga (especially regarding the doctrine of the chakras), contained a rich spiritual and psychological experience that is as interesting as a comparative material for Western psychology and personality theory, because it expands the horizons of understanding of the psyche and body, but which remains connected to its context and tradition, that is, it is not possible in some way to directly apply it in the culture of body and mind in Western culture.

However, in the second half of the 20th century, yoga has affirmed as a global practice that also has multiple positive effects on those who practice it outside the Indian tradition, that is, the source of psychosomatic conception of man, who in the meantime developed into a psychosomatic approach in the West.

First, as a means of recreation, that invigorates the mind and body and enables practitioners for ongoing daily efforts. But - unlike the practice in the gym – it doesn't take to a distinctive growth of muscles, but maintains and develops the mind and body for easier overcoming - ongoing work and overcome the effort in potential of engaging in some of the sports.

Second, what distinguishes psychosomatic approach in yoga from psychosomatic approach in medicine is that yoga offers the practice that may be useful as a preventative and as part of therapy for certain disorders and illnesses. While psychosomatic approach in medicine is used mainly as an explanation of disease and as a possible factor in choosing a method of healing, psychosomatic approach to yoga is primarily oriented towards prevention, that is, its guiding principle is - better to prevent than cure.

Third, yoga can be applied as an auxiliary or independent therapeutic tool for a number of disorders or diseases that have already occurred as a consequence of some environmental factors, bad habits, or the aging process, in a wide range, from a purely somatic disorders, through psychosomatic problems, to mental disorders (such as neurotic disorders).

Fourth, if we take into account the view of transpersonal psychology, which seeks to understand human above the limitations of diseases and health, ie. from the viewpoint of possible spiritual progress and development in the spirit of the category of transpersonal psychology, yoga (its somatic aspects - *asanas* and breathing exercises, as well as types of its mental practice) appears as a good cooperater and an approach that defines some spiritual goals, and practices that lead toward realization of these goals.

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