

Vedic Principles of Therapy

A holistic consciousness-based approach

RW Boyer PhD

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“Fortunate are they whose minds are distressed for the misfortunes of others. More fortunate still are they who are able to relieve the misfortunes of others, themselves remaining undisturbed.”

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1967, p. 72)

Introduction

Ancient traditions of healing are increasingly accepted in contemporary society. This book introduces principles of the ancient Vedic tradition that constitute a consciousness-based approach integrating psychological, physiological, behavioral, and environmental technologies. In this approach the bottom-line of the mind is consciousness itself—accessed by transcending mental activity to its simplest ground state. This contrasts with conventional ‘unconscious-based’ approaches which hold the unconscious as the basis of mind, such as analytic, humanistic, and cognitive-behavioral therapies. Empirical research toward a general model of mind and cutting-edge developments integrating physics and psychology in theories of nonlocal quantum mind are shown to be converging toward the Vedic model of mind. Comparisons with contemporary therapies show further that the Vedic approach represents a major advance over approaches which don’t access the ground state of mind for holistic mind-body healing. The simplicity, subtlety, and depth of this Vedic approach have profound implications for contemporary methods of healing and human development.

This book introduces a different approach from applied and developmental psychology as well as contemporary conventional and alternative medicine. It is drawn from an ancient tradition toward which scientific understanding of the mind and body is progressing. It is termed *Veda*, translated as ‘total knowledge’ (Maharishi Vedic University, 1994).

The Vedic tradition has been described as the oldest continuous tradition of knowledge. But long classified as pre-scientific mythology, its essential technologies for natural healing and higher development had been lost. A pivotal contribution to their reemergence is the research of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to revive and test its practical applications in the scientific context as *Maharishi Vedic Science and Technology*.

In this Vedic approach the ‘bottom-line’ of the mind is pure consciousness, identified as a fourth state of consciousness in addition to the ordinary three states of waking, dreaming, and sleep. This *Consciousness-Based*[®] approach distinctly differs from westernized ‘unconscious-based’ approaches which emphasize the unconscious as the basis of mind, including analytic, humanistic, positive psychology, and cognitive-behavioral therapies. These therapies don’t access the most fundamental level of mind necessary for holistic mind-body healing, the essential contribution of Maharishi Vedic Science and Technology (Maharishi, 1963). In this approach the emphasis is on increasing the capacity to gain knowledge—expanding conscious mind—in addition to applying the mind’s current capacity. It provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for a holistic account of nature and a practical holistic approach to healing and human development.

In pursuit of broadening and deepening applied psychology and behavioral medicine by incorporating international perspectives and multicultural skill sets, Vedic principles of the consciousness-mind-body connection and how they are applied to therapy are overviewed in this book. Core aspects of this approach are summarized with respect to consciousness, mind, motivation, personality, and human development—the theoretical foundations for therapeutic applications. Also, similarities and differences are noted with psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, humanistic, existential, cognitive-behavioral, family systems, somatic, solution-focused, positive psychology, transpersonal, and integral approaches to therapy.

The intent of this book is to introduce Vedic principles and their practical applications. It is neither an exhaustive examination of underlying philosophical issues nor a recipe for yet another therapy. Rather, it emphasizes natural holistic healing in a simpler, more integrated understanding.

Hopefully it also provides insight into the view that conventional approaches are not grounded in consciousness itself and the natural tendencies of the mind. It proposes integrating therapeutic approaches into a new paradigm held to be an integrated understanding and experience of the consciousness-mind-body connection. It emphasizes effortless transcending of thought as the *holistic active ingredient* for healing and human development. The expanded awareness and deep rest that occurs as a result of this transcendent state of ‘restful alertness’ are held to activate natural healing mechanisms which dissolve deep-rooted stress and stabilize expanded awareness for healthier, more coherent behavior.

The Vedic approach is completely different from conventional therapies that focus on bringing to conscious attention underlying unconscious irrational thought patterns or traumatic memories to gain insight or work through them within the ordinary waking state of consciousness. These conventional approaches are viewed as overly intellectualized, ‘pathologizing,’ and not grounded in consciousness itself and the subtle natural tendencies of the mind. Key points relevant to the differences between conventional therapies and Vedic principles of therapy are discussed throughout the book.

Toward appreciating the scientific validity of this holistic Vedic approach, we will glimpse progress linking matter and mind in contemporary physics and psychology—the focus of Chapters 1 and 2. This progress reflects deeper understanding of the human mind and its relationship to the cosmos that fortunately is now starting to emerge in modern science, but is not yet incorporated into conventional approaches to healing and human development.

First, however, in this Introduction it may be useful to consider briefly the means we use to gain knowledge, in order to appreciate how deeper holistic understanding could have been gained in ancient times. To do this, the objective *experimental* means in modern science which applies the outer indirect *third-person* approach will be contrasted with subjective *experiential* means in *Yoga* which applies the inner direct *first-person* approach. These means to gain knowledge—which historically separated western and eastern sciences—are now being linked together into a unified understanding and experience of nature. This is a profound and most fortunate development in the laudable progress of science.

The indirect third-person approach

Modern science is relentless in its pursuit of total knowledge of the laws of nature. It is widely recognized that the primary means in this pursuit are logical reasoning and ordinary sensory experience from the outer, indirect, third-person perspective as an objective approach. This is consistent with Piaget’s (1972) well-known cognitive-perceptual theory that the highest stage or end-state of human development is *formal operations* or abstract reasoning, held to be the basis for scientific thinking.

In the objective approach the observer investigates the world through the senses as an outside, separate, independent world. There is a gap between outer objectivity and inner subjectivity. This object-subject duality reflects a fundamentally fragmented experience of nature. Based on this view, it is not surprising that modern scientific applications to healing also are fragmented. The

recent strong interest in the integration of approaches to applied psychology attests to its current fragmentation—not yet constituting a holistic approach.

To protect against unreliable subjectivity in reasoning and sensory processes, objective modern science relies on consensual validation or public agreement among scientists. It is important to recognize, however, that consensus is based on the level of functioning of those who contribute to it. The entire enterprise of modern science is based on logical reasoning and sensory experience shared by scientists within the object-subject duality of the ordinary waking state of consciousness. And there has been almost no recognition of this state-dependent limitation.

In the past century scientific investigation has progressed to time and distance scales far smaller than can be experienced directly through the senses in the ordinary waking state. This necessarily places more emphasis on logical reasoning such as mathematical modeling in formulating and even evaluating scientific theories (e.g., Bohm, 1980; Smolin, 2001; Penrose, 2005; Randall, 2005).

The evidence also is becoming clearer that objective sensory experiences in empirical research depend on subjective reasoning processes deeper in the mind. This is evident in atomic and quantum theories as well as theories of mind and consciousness. These theories are based on conceptual models of functions and structures that are not accessible to ordinary sensory observation in the objective third-person means to gain knowledge. But contemporary research is now challenging the long-held view of the independence of object (matter, body) and subject (mind) that has been a fundamental tenet of the objective approach in science.

As indirect investigations in physics, as well as in neuroscience, have gone from macroscopic tangible localized matter to theorized underlying abstract quantum fields, the *interdependence* of object and observer increasingly has encroached upon classical scientific objectivity. Matter and mind, object and subject, physics and psychology, can no longer be considered independent given the advances in modern science toward a much more integrated picture of the natural world.

To bridge the gap between objectivity and subjectivity for a completely unified understanding and experience of nature, systematic means to go beyond the fragmented object-subject duality of the ordinary waking state are needed. But both logical reasoning and ordinary sensory experience, the primary means of gaining knowledge in modern science, involve active mental functioning in the ordinary waking state.

Ordinary thinking and sensing—whether about matter, energy, quantum fields, cognition, emotions, social behavior, mind, nothing, the unified field, God, as well as introspection, self-reflection, or being mindful of some object of experience—tend to keep the thinker in the ordinary waking state of consciousness. Engaged only in active mentation in the ordinary waking state, the possibility of developing higher states of consciousness through transcending the mental activity of thinking and sensing, the centerpiece of ancient Vedic technologies, has not been understood or appreciated as means to gain valid knowledge in modern science.

The direct first-person approach

Like modern science, the ancient Vedic tradition also concerns the pursuit of total knowledge of the laws of nature. However, the Vedic tradition emphasizes direct *first-person* subjective means to gain knowledge as a complement to the indirect third-person objective means. It fully recognizes the *interdependence* of objectivity and subjectivity in nature.

And it actually applies the scientific perspective that the human mind and the universe examined by it share the same source and the same laws of nature. According to this view, valid knowledge can be gained directly through reliable, systematic subjective means—in the inner laboratory of the conscious mind of the scientist, investigator, or observer of nature based on higher human development.

Systematic first-person means to gain knowledge in the *Yoga* aspect of the Vedic tradition is said to facilitate higher development beyond the ordinary waking state of consciousness. This includes increased subtlety of experience of deeper levels of conscious mind that have been quite difficult to research and model from the outer third-person objective perspective. Indeed, these deeper levels of mind have been viewed as unconscious—a dark, unilluminated ‘black box’ of mind.

In therapeutic approaches that have developed within the mainstream physicalist worldview and ordinary range of experience typical of modern science, the basis of conscious mind is theorized to be psychobiological and biophysical processes in the dark recesses of the mind and brain that are not conscious. A completely different, integrated view of the consciousness-mind-body relationship is basic to *Yoga* in the Vedic tradition—expressed to various degrees in other ancient traditions as well.

The philosophical significance of the Vedic tradition has long been recognized in scholarly circles. But its essential holistic technologies to promote healing and human development had been lost. For many centuries the Vedic approach remained in obscurity, frequently classified as only of historical significance. Although its contributions to philosophy were recognized, its practical applications were not understood or applied on a societal scale. This is evident even in India, the land of the Vedic tradition, which has been plagued with major socioeconomic, health, and related problems that this ancient knowledge system purports to address. It suggests that its practical value was overlooked or misinterpreted for many centuries. But now it is becoming recognized for both its theoretical and practical value in a scientific context.

Contemporary view of ancient Vedic science

As noted earlier, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has focused on reestablishing the holistic value of the ancient Vedic tradition and empirically testing its practical applications using systematic methods of investigation. Maharishi became internationally recognized in the 1960s as teacher of the Transcendental Meditation® (TM) program. He established non-profit educational organizations including a doctoral-level accredited university in the U.S., and other universities and schools world-wide that teach TM, Ayurveda, and related programs along with traditional academic disciplines. Through this educational work, the Vedic system of holistic natural healing also has been revived and is beginning to be applied.

This book introduces key principles of the holistic consciousness-based Vedic approach in light of relevant major progress in modern science including physics and psychology. This progress is shown to be in the direction of the Vedic approach both in theory and in practice. The Vedic approach thus can be quite valuable in our continuing pursuit of efficacious, evidence-based healing technologies in the scientist-practitioner model.

This book also attempts to address typical issues arising when the Vedic approach has not been examined previously, especially with respect to the nature of consciousness, its relationship to mind and matter, and natural tendencies of the mind. This Vedic approach focuses on theoretical

consistency and empirical validation as in modern science. It is not a faith-based belief system, though certainly quite relevant to spirituality and religion.

The overriding direction of this Vedic approach is human development through higher states of consciousness to full enlightenment. The Vedic meaning of enlightenment has similarities with many other ancient cultural traditions. But it is quite different from how the term was used in the intellectual ‘Age of Enlightenment’ of the 18th and 19th Centuries, more accurately described as an age focused on intellectual reasoning—the ‘Age of Reason’ and its further development in the ‘Age of Science.’” In the Vedic approach as described in this book, enlightenment is not just an intellectual process. Fortunately the Ages of Reason and Science are advancing to a new era worthy of the name Age of Enlightenment.

We will first examine the underlying principles and models associated with this Vedic approach. Next we will explore the nature of enlightenment in higher states of consciousness. We will then have the framework for a consideration of the similarities and differences between contemporary therapeutic approaches and Vedic principles of therapy.

The most fundamental principle of this approach concerns the nature of consciousness. It is the main topic at the outset of this book because it is a distinguishing feature that integrates all the practical technologies in the holistic Vedic approach.

Only by understanding its approach to consciousness can the unique contribution of this Vedic approach be appreciated in relation to other approaches to healing and human development, including psychotherapeutic applications that are the focus of this book. We begin with a consideration of the nature of consciousness as the platform for the discussion of practical Vedic principles of therapy.