

Yoga and Psychology for Therapy

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This presentation provides a perspective on the current approaches used in yoga therapy and psychotherapy and the various schools of thought informing both. Both approaches can be viewed keeping in mind their difference and similarity, but most importantly, there is an opportunity for Yoga therapy to benefit and learn from Psychotherapy in terms of applying qualitative scientific research methodology.

A recent report from Norway based on the study of School Adolescents as well as the current ongoing research with Kaivalyadhama on 'Cancer and Other Chronic Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs)'; both attempt to use the following philosophical framework:

- (1) Adopting a non-traditional collaborative approach based on a relationship of equality and driven by the mutuality of the interaction between the individuals concerned;
- (2) Using qualitative relational parameters and/or criteria, based on viewing individuals at a humanistic level to approach Yoga therapy; and
- (3) Valuing the subjective experiences of human beings, and recognizing the interactive nature of scientific research itself, thereby giving validity to qualitative research as a value in itself and as a supplement to other scientific methods.

The natural, physical and life sciences have traditionally been evaluated using the scientific method, which has primarily been quantitative in nature. The focus in such evidence based measurement and evaluation has been on the collection of numerical data using established, reliable, objective parameters and examining causal quantifiable relationships.

As researchers, we are well aware that psychology with its unique focus on people and relationships often finds itself in conflicting spaces in terms of which tools and research methods to use. It has in many ways settled for using the traditional scientific methods – that are objective, generalist and have clear quantifiers – an approach that could overlook unique and inward looking reflective nature of people, their behaviors and relationships.

It is my hope that the study of contemporary yoga research utilizes both evidence based quantitative research methods as well as the experiential evidences in the study and application of yoga and related methods. A focus on human experience and narratives are in line with more interpretative versions of psychology, as well as other social and humanistic sciences, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics.

It is with this lens that I foresee a shift in emphasis towards developing a comprehensive 'qualitative' research approach in the study and implementation of yoga methods and tools. This approach requires being observant and taking into consideration an individuals or groups conscious experience of yoga and yoga therapy as well as their response to such processes. It is a framework driven by individual narratives, the acceptance of human differences and the subjective interpretation of therapeutic tools and results.