Moving from 'Me' to 'We' - Yoga and Transformational Behavioral Health Leadership

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"This dream is the natural state of man. We live in this dream as we live in the air, and it would be hopeless if we were not able to realize sometimes that we live not only in this world, but also in another world, where it is possible for us to awaken to different perceptions, to another way of being, of thinking and of feeling. The act of waking up can change everything; it is to be born to another world within oneself."—Henri Tracol, "The Taste for Things That Are True," (Element, 1994) From "The New World," Parabola Magazine, Volume 32, No. 4; Winter 2007.

APPENDIX

Part VIII - Grounded in research

We know research reveals that we can simultaneously heal both our bodies and our minds using integrative mind-body practices derived from ancient wisdom traditions. Yoga is one powerful example, as well as meditation and other synchronizing practices. While some practices benefit the body alone (exercise) or the mind only (talk therapy), a mind-body approach to health and wellbeing offers the benefit of synergy and increased self-regulation across the cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of human and experience and functioning. Mind body synchronization practices invite a generative and co-evolutionary quality of living, learning, working and loving.

Positive collective intelligence may arise from our conscious use of creativity and innovative practices, moving together to expand capacity and ground our findings in different ways that help us make sense of all the interconnected parts, at all levels of complexity. From person to planet.

Further, research evidence is growing about the benefits of mind-body integration and legislation is now dictating that we all find ways to live in community regardless of ability.

Mind-Body Integration: Five evidence-based practices

The 'trickle-down/trickle-up effect' works this way: by impacting the body we can change the mind and by influencing the mind we can change the body. Pulling from the latest in mind-body research here are 5 practices that can support both body and mind:

• Mindfulness Meditation is Good for your Mind. Dr. Sara Lazar showed that subjects who practiced mindfulness meditation for 30 minutes daily for 8 weeks reported less perceived stress. And a part of the brain, the amygdala (the "smoke
detector"), not only showed less activation when confronted with emotional stimuli, but it had actually shrunk![1]

- **Mindfulness Meditation is Good for your Body.** Not only does the brain change, but studies show that when we practice mindfulness meditation, this mental training changes the body by improving the immune system, decreasing inflammation, improving sleep, lowering blood pressure, and decreasing cortisol levels.[2]

- **Yogic Breathing Strengthens your Resilience.** The vagus nerve, part of the parasympathetic nervous system, (the "rest and digest system"), helps to regulate digestion, heart rate, and mood. When the vagus nerve is functioning well we have greater resilience to life's ups and downs. A yogic breathing technique called Dirgha-Ujayi (three-part ocean breathing) helps to stimulate the vagus nerve and to balance the nervous system.[3][4]

- **Yoga Postures Release Relaxation Chemicals in your Brain.** Studies show that slow, mindful movement (yoga postures) along with yogic breathing increases brain GABA levels, which helps us to feel relaxed, minimizing feelings of anxiety. In fact, one study showed that yoga practice increased GABA levels more than simply walking alone. [5][6]

- **Mind-body practices Improve your Sense of Connection.** A primary tool in mind-body wisdom is self-observation without judgment (a willingness to be present to what is happening moment to moment). Studies show that people who practice meditation report experiencing less loneliness. Other studies report that people who meditate feel more attuned to other people. Brain studies reveal that when we become absorbed in the story and experience of another our brain begins to sync with theirs and we begin to experience a sense of oneness or deep connection to the other. Mindful attention is key in this experience of heightened attunement. [7][8]

Abstract: Potential self-regulatory mechanisms of yoga for psychological health

HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY ARTICLE

Research suggesting the beneficial effects of yoga on myriad aspects of psychological health has proliferated in recent years, yet there is currently no overarching framework by which to understand yoga’s potential beneficial effects. Here we provide a theoretical framework and systems-based network model of yoga that focuses on integration of top-down and bottom-up forms of self-regulation. We begin by contextualizing yoga in historical and contemporary settings, and then detail how specific components of yoga practice may affect cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and autonomic output under stress through and emphasis on interoception and bottom-up input, resulting in physical and psychological health. The model describes yoga practice as a comprehensive skillset of synergistic process tools that facilitate bidirectional feedback and integration between high- and low-level brain networks, and a different and input from interoceptive processes (somatosensory, viscerosensory, chemosensory). From a predictive coding perspective we propose a shift to perceptual inference for stress modulation and optimal self-regulation. We describe how the processes that subserve self-regulation become more automatized and efficient over time and practice, requiring less effort to initiate when necessary and terminate more rapidly when no longer needed. To support our proposed model, we present the available evidence for yoga affecting self-regulatory pathways, integrating existing constructs from behavior theory and cognitive neuroscience with emerging yoga and meditation research. This paper is intended to guide future basic and clinical research, specifically targeting areas of development in the treatment of stress-mediated psychological disorders.

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