

Yoga as Science; Science as Truth; Truth as Religion

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One of the most famous examples of the historical battle for Truth between Science and Religion occurred in the 1600's. The Catholic Church, in power, locked Galileo away for the second half of his life for his discovery and insistence that the Earth revolved around the Sun. (He was not formally exonerated until the 1900's). Darwin's theory of man evolving from ape in the late 1800's led to the famous Scopes trial of 1925 in Tennessee.

These historical facts tell us about human nature--for some, a belief (a thought) is more powerful than the truth of that thought. Certain aspects of Truth are agreed by all (such as "death and taxes"), while others change continuously, like when we look back on life, seeing past events with new perspective.

Science is as guilty as Religion of manipulating Truth. The pharmaceutical, food, media and insurance industries regularly promote mis-information and hide other information to get us to consume, or not consume various products and services. Baby formula rather than breast milk (1950's), hormone replacement for women (1990's), and current osteoporosis² and cholesterol³ medications for the elderly and vaccines for newborns⁴ are just a few examples.

Government, supposed to be the purveyor of greater good, has become a vehicle of these industries and human nature; and therefore has become less trustworthy over time. How else could we have been so blind to the Truths of global warming, childhood obesity, expensive and ineffective "health care" and pending crises for our bees and children's nervous, hormone and immune systems due wanton chemical and electromagnetic pollution?

Fortunately the Internet has evolved seemingly as a counter-force, dramatically expanding access to different voices and truths. While some Governments actively block access to Truth on the Internet or from other sources, even if impeded, Truth does ultimately prevail. Yoga is another important tool.

Yoga as Science

If we define Science as method of searching for Truth, Yoga can be viewed as a scientific method. This is because classic Yoga inherently recognizes the limitations of the human mind: our sensations, thoughts, emotions, memories and concepts are NOT true; though they may seem so. Our minds must CONSTRUCT reality and in that process create distortion or illusion (maya). Like newer films enhanced with computer graphics, our perceptual systems cause us to SEE things that we know are NOT there. Just 'cause the world looks flat doesn't mean that it is. On the other hand, senses also DON'T show us what IS there—such as bacteria⁵, radiation, genocide and destruction of the rain forests. Our cognitive and sensory systems do a damn good job of designing our cars and keeping us from crashing, but do they represent Truth? Yoga teaches us that there are truths beyond our senses and thoughts, more "objective" than what our minds tell us, and that we can access these

Truths directly with simple but apparently elusive and difficult techniques.

"Ow, My Herniated Disc is Hurting Me"

A common illustration of this issue is the patient who walks into the doctor's office, limping, holding his back, stating the above, but doesn't want surgery. In such a case, the patient has been convinced that his pain is being caused by a herniated disc. However, the MRI might not show a disc, or it might be on the other side or a different location, not correlating with the pain. In fact, less than 5% of back pain these days can be helped by surgery or removal of a disc. More importantly, the patient's direct experience of pain has been superseded by the thought of "herniated disc"; and therefore the disc in his mind had become more difficult to heal than the pain in his back. Another example is when a doctor tells an elderly patient, who looks and feels fine, that he needs cholesterol medication⁵, or that she needs osteoporosis medication⁴.

Mainstream medicine defines a "symptom" as a "subjective" experience reported by a patient; while a "sign" is an "objective" observation by the physician. When the symptoms and signs match, we strike gold: a wound on the arm hurts more and more, the physician sees and samples the wound, the test shows bacteria and its sensitivity, an antibiotic is prescribed, and voila, a cure! Unfortunately, more than 80% of visits to primary care doctors are for "non-organic" causes, which means that the doctor will not be able to objectively validate the patient's symptoms. Hence the doctor concludes that his Objective truth is more valid than the patient's Subjective truth, and hands out a free sample of anti-anxiety, anti-depressant, sleep or pain medication.

Furthermore, 80% of dis-ease these days is "chronic", which essentially means there is no "cure", and the best the patient can hope for is "managing" (i.e. hiding) symptoms. However, this "treatment" leads to side effects, more medications and cost, dissatisfaction for the patient and doctor, and gradually worsening of the original problem = a huge amount of wasted time, energy, money, spirit and life. The "only" entities that benefit from this model, and are resisting current attempts to change, are the "health care", pharmaceutical, insurance, food and media industries!

This model of ill-ness, the inherent conflict between subjective and objective, between patient and doctor, is non-science at its worst. Yoga may be one of the most important solutions to this modern problem which is in part why it is growing in popularity (though when reduced to just physical exercise it might not do the job; see prior articles). By using yoga to flip the model 180 degrees, we begin to discover root-cause solutions to these symptoms and other modern problems, as has been done by yoga-patients over thousands of years. Yoga is Science at its best, because it gives us the tools to follow the Truth.

Yoga as Method

We begin by assuming that the subjective is objective, and the objective is subjective. This means that we assume that the symptoms, what the patient's body is telling them, are always objective and true. The body's mechanisms that produce symptoms and deliver messages to awareness are millions of years old and work successfully in most non-human species (including our pets) to preserve life. Those symptoms are not there to make us suffer, but to give us information that something is beginning to go wrong. Like the red light on the dashboard of the car, we don't want to cover the bulb with black tape; we want to get the car to the shop before the problem gets seriously wrong while traveling at 70 mph.

Symptoms are like text messages; however, they're written in a foreign language or not a language at all (such as music's powerful messages). We need to develop the skills to receive and respond to these messages. For most of us, by the time our symptoms have become intense or persistent enough to seek help, they have been present for months to years. Symptoms usually begin softly; if we haven't been taught how to pay attention, we're too busy, or the "pain killers" work, symptoms will often come and go, blink on and off, before turning into a steady red color.

Like symptoms, other impressions of the mind such as intuitions, inspirations and insights are subtle fleeting waves (vrittis) of non-sensory, non-cognitive consciousness that can easily be missed. However, when followed, (like the hair in the corner of CSI scene) they often can lead us to deep solutions, and have been the source of the greatest achievements of humankind. Unfortunately, we are socialized from very young to ignore and suppress these impressions; they are pejoratively called daydreams, hallucinations, visions, etc. Some cultures believe that dreams, both the nighttime and the daytime ones, are the True reality, and that the everyday sensations and thoughts are the illusions.

The Processes of Yoga, Science and Religion

Religion and Science are ways that we structure Truth. However, the mental structures that we impose on our mysterious and confusing lives are limited. Truth might rest in Process not Result.

History shows us that innovators, seeking Truth through honest observation and listening ("sitting with"), discover "data points" (or as one author coined, "factoids") that don't fit into the current Model of life—they serve as whistle blowers. Dishonest Science, Religion and Government alters, erases, silences, locks up or kills such outliers. Honest Science, Religion and Government seek out such innovators as essential purveyors of the next better Model. The phases of Scientific, Religious and Cultural revolutions are well documented in history—starting with "oh-no" but ending with "tah-dah". Unfortunately, history shows us that there is a lot of pain and sometimes centuries of delay involved in that process.

So, in the Process of seeking Truth (and Health) by applying the Scientific method called Yoga, that nagging back pain or anxiety may suggest or demand a pause or change that leads to a new diet, a new hobby, a new

profession, a new observation or discovery, a new relationship to self or other, or a life-transforming sequence of dominos falling on a personal and global level; the butterfly effect in multiple dimensions.

We know this is true, because over human history, the greatest scientists became more religious and the greatest theologians became more scientific⁶. Truth engenders awe; the mysteries only become more magnificent. As we age, we get wiser because of our ability to incorporate more information into our Models of life, refining them, making them more True. The pursuit of Truth is an entitlement, a freedom, and for many a Happiness that can never be taken away, even if locked in a cell or a body. However, it is also a Responsibility that we need to come back to as often as possible.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

Footnotes and Reading Materials (Books followed by ISBN number)

1. See prior Yoga Livings and Dr. Cheikin's website, www.cheikin.com, for related articles and expanded bibliographies.
2. Sanson, Gillian: The Myth of Osteoporosis, 2011, 0972-123-369.
3. Ravnskov, Uffe: Ignore the Awkward: How the Cholesterol Myths are Kept Alive. 2010. 1453-759-409.
4. The current practice of giving intramuscular vaccines to newborns on the first day of life is a horrendous distortion of science by the current politics and economics of health care.
5. In the mid 1800's Ignaz Semmelweis discovered unseen bacteria as a cause of mothers' death after delivery (child bed fever) but was ridiculed, persecuted, and ultimately died in a mad house.
6. Examples are Einstein and Giovanni Battista Riccioli.
7. Ballentine, Rudolph: Radical Healing: Integrating the World's Greatest Therapeutic Traditions... Three Rivers Press, 2000. 0609-804-847
8. Joy, W. Brugh: Joy's Way, 1979. 0874-770-858.
9. Cameron, Julia: The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity. Penguin, 1992. 0874-776-945.
10. Sivananda Center: The Sivananda Companion to Yoga. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983. 0684-87000-2.
11. Moritz, Andreas: Timeless Secrets of Health and Rejuvenation. 2007. 9780-9792-75753
12. Riso and Hudson: The Wisdom of the Enneagram, 1999, 9780-553-378-207.
13. Kuhn, Thomas: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Third Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. ISBN 0226-458-083

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