

## **Mind-Body Mantra: Unleashing the Potentials of Life through Mind-Body Medicine illustrated in the Essays of Swami Vivekananda and Deepak Chopra**

<https://doi.org/10.59136/lv.2024.2.2.12>

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### *Abstract*

Good bodily and mental health is a condition of well-being. We may keep our bodies in good health by embarking on a quest to explore the deepest corners of our minds. The practical and scientific approaches for comprehending the relationship between the mind and body are the main emphasis of the study. Through their writings, Deepak Chopra and Swami Vivekananda emphasize the vitality of the fountain known as consciousness as a prelude to awareness, focus, and purpose - all of which are subsequently incorporated into medical procedures like radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery. Both the writers' literary works highlight and discuss ancient Indian life sciences like Yoga and Ayurveda as well as Western Medicine. Through the field of Medical Humanities, the intersection of Literature, Philosophy, and Medical Science, this research will engage significant elements required for the purpose. Thus, the research delves into both the physiological and psychological facets of preserving bodily health.

**Keywords:** Mind-body balance, awareness, attention, Ayurveda, Yoga

### **Introduction**

The World Health Organization endorses the renowned declaration that health constitutes “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease or infirmity,” emphasizing its significance as a key theme on its official website (“Health and Well Being”). To attain this state of well-being, one needs to clearly understand the difference between a ‘disease’ and an ‘illness.’ A disease can be explained as something that happens to the body, it can be further understood by diagnosis whereas illness is what a patient undergoes or experiences. These experiences can have a subjective touch, and the only way to understand them is to live through the traumatic events that led to them. These can be accomplished through dialogues that, regardless of the possibility of physical recovery, can reveal the potential for spiritual and emotional restoration. (Cole et al. 25).

Being an interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary field, Medical Humanities focuses much on experiences, contexts, and critical and conceptual issues in medicine and health care. Hence,



a deeper exploration of patient experiences and a nuanced understanding of their requirements can be facilitated through the utilization of a range of disciplines, such as literature, psychology, and anthropology. In this discourse, the significance of well-being is examined through the lens of Literature, Indian philosophy, and modern medical science, referencing the essays penned by both Swami Vivekananda and Deepak Chopra. Astin et al., in their research article *Mind-Body Medicine: State of the Science, Implications for Practice*, emphasize the critical relationship between mental and physical health. They stress that despite a growing body of evidence over recent decades suggesting that psychosocial factors have a direct impact on both physiological function and health outcomes, the medical field has been slow to adopt the biopsychosocial model. This reluctance, they argue, is partly attributed to a lack of exposure to the evidence supporting this holistic approach. (131). In his book *Quantum Healing*, Chopra even transcends the conventional mind-body dichotomy and delves into a broader perspective, suggesting, “Beyond the link between mind and body lies a profound connection between the present moment and eternity.” (14). The journey ahead involves an exploration of various research findings in the field of Mind-Body Medicine, probing into different paradigms to deepen our understanding.

### **Methodology**

This research is predicated on a textual examination of primary sources, such as Deepak Chopra’s *Quantum Healing* and Swami Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga*, as well as secondary sources, which include books, journals, and articles about mind-body medicine and health.

### **Indian Medical System and the Modern Medicine**

#### **a) Ayurveda- The Science of Life**

India’s traditional medical system, Ayurveda, is based on holistic principles and is primarily concerned with individual health and well-being. It’s getting more attention in the medical literature, along with Traditional Chinese Medicine and Traditional Tibetan Medicine. Ayurveda takes a “whole person” approach to well-being, combining therapies and practices that promote mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Integrative medicine is a rapidly expanding field in the US and Europe that combines evidence-based complementary therapies with conventional allopathic therapies. In many ways, it aims to imitate the holistic principles and practices of traditional medical systems like Ayurveda. India, being a land known for its myriad diversity is also famous for her contributions to the world of science. One among those is Ayurveda, the name itself can be described in a broader sense. The word ‘Ayurveda’ is derived from two Sanskrit words, ‘Ayus’ or ‘Life’ and ‘Veda’ which means



either ‘knowledge’ or ‘science’. Thus, known as the ‘Science of Life’ which is known from time immemorial for creating a healthier world. This Eastern system of medicine is widely used for curing delusions divesting away the conclusive nature of diseases and by producing a healthy mind and body.

### **b) Ayurveda- Practices and Impacts**

Recent studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatment modalities for a range of medical diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and gastrointestinal health, and have opened the door for greater acceptance of this alternative therapy. The effects of Ayurvedic treatments on stress relaxation, moods, and cognitive performances have proved to be more efficient than other forms of treatment. In their article, *The Self-Directed Biological Transformation Initiative and Well-Being*, Mills et al. demonstrate how an Ayurvedic intervention program involving diet, herbs, yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises was effective in improving low-density lipoprotein cholesterol and triglycerides in a small cohort of patients with coronary heart disease. This noncontrolled pilot study proves the authors’ hypothesis through experimentation. They quote “Few if any controlled studies have examined the potential benefits of Ayurvedic approaches to well-being using the more holistic approach advocated by Ayurveda (i.e., not using only isolated modalities found within Ayurveda but rather a simultaneous prescription of meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, adaptogenic herbs, oils, massage, diet, and discussion of relevant knowledge related to well-being)” has shown a great amount of improvement in the patients. Thus, their study investigated the psychological impact of a short-term, multifaceted Ayurvedic-based well-being program on psychological well-being in comparison to a control group proved to be more successful. Concerning this particular program and its results, Deepak Chopra regards it as a sophisticated analysis, conceding its partial accuracy. He compares ancient Greek notions with Ayurveda and elaborates on this idea in his essay *Birth of a Disease*:

A disease cannot take hold without a host who accepts it, hence the current attempts to understand our immune system. Historically, both Greek medicine and Ayurveda were founded on the idea that the host is all-important. The Greeks believed that there was a fluid called *physis* that flowed in, out, and through all of life. The flow of *physis* tied the organs inside the body with the world outside, and as long as the two were in balance, the body would be healthy. (This premise is still reflected in our use of the word *physics* to explain the outer world and the related *physiology* to explain the inner.) In Ayurveda, it takes the balance of three elements, called *doshas*, to maintain health. The point is not whether *physis* or *doshas* exist, but that one’s own state of balance determines whether one is sick or well. (241).



### c) Modern Beliefs and Practices

Modern medicine still believes that a disease is caused by objective agents which is the exact opposite of traditional practices for curing. Modern Medical practices abandon patient-centered medicine and fail to give individualistic care. This can be further explained by the Foucauldian term ‘the clinical gaze’ where the practitioners focus more on the treatment of diseases rather than caring for the patients which is the opposite of traditional methods of treatment. Deepak Chopra cites in the essay *The Body Has a Mind of Its Own* of *Quantum Healing* “Hippocrates stated at the dawn of Western medicine that a patient who is mortally sick might yet recover from belief in the goodness of his physician.” (24).

Thus, any form of ailment can be cured through an internal balance. The mind-body connection plays a very significant role. Ancient literary texts such as *the Vedas*, still serve as a major source of information about mind-body medicine. Swami Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga*, a collection of literary essays emphasizes the significance of the mind-body balance. Swami Vivekananda in the Introductory Essay of *Raja Yoga* says it takes a long time and constant practice to maintain a proper mind-body balance. He says “If we believe that the mind is simply a finer part of the body, and that mind acts upon the body, then it stands to reason that the body must react upon the mind. If the body is sick, the mind becomes sick also. If the body is healthy, the mind remains healthy and strong.” (130). The mind is connected to the body the process occurs in physical but mostly mental aspects. The mind being the finer part of the body acts upon it. When the mind gets disturbed, the body also gets affected the same happens when one gets angry. If we maintain a healthy body then only, we would have a command over our mind. When the body is controlled, we can try to compel our mind to concentrate on the powers which we desire to have. Here, *Sankhya Philosophy* is used as the genesis of perception. Mind is the instrument that handles the soul or *Purusha*. Swami Vivekananda elucidates the significance of the external signals given from the body to the brain and these signals alert the *tanmatras* which are the subtle matters that make up the mind. Thus, the intellect and grosser matter make the degree of difference thus making the mind attached to the organs to maintain a perfect harmony. (132) When a person gets ill, to overcome the disease, one has to have perfect control over the mind, and



then only the process of healing works. Deepak Chopra explains this process of healing through the essay *The Mystery of the Gap in Quantum Healing*:

As long as the patient is convinced by his symptoms, he is caught up in a reality where ‘being sick’ is the dominant input. The reason why meditation is so important in Ayurveda is that it leads the mind to a free zone that is not touched by disease. Until you know that such a place exists, your disease will seem to be taking over completely. This is the principal delusion that needs to be shattered. (189).

According to Dr. Bruce Lipton in *The Biology of Perception*, quantum physics has shown that since matter and energy are intertwined, the immaterial mind can have an impact on the physical body. Dr. Lipton was excited to note that his experiments “revealed on the single-cell level a truth for multicellular organisms- that the mind (acting via the central nervous system’s adrenaline) overrides the body (acting via the local histamine signal).” (106) He asserts his findings by conveying about the significance of thoughts in our mind. These thoughts can be termed as the ‘energy’ which intrinsically affects the body. These energies can activate or inhibit the proteins in the cells and can have more efficacies than the chemicals showing the power of mind is more effective than therapeutic drugs in terms of maintaining a healthy body. He thus says, his colleagues condemned the usage of the term ‘mind’ as it was not an acceptable biological concept. He explains these through the statement “The ‘mind’ is a non-localized energy and therefore is not relevant to materialistic biology. Unfortunately, that perception is a ‘belief’ that has been proven to be patently incorrect in a quantum mechanical universe!” (106).

#### **d) The practice of concentration and heightened awareness**

Another crucial aspect to consider is attention, where the individual’s concentration plays a pivotal role. To maintain control over the mind one has to have control over distractions and focus upon balancing the mind and the body to lead a healthy life. The presence of mind plays a positive role where ‘self-compassion’ or ‘inner compassion’ helps in better understanding oneself to know one’s own body. Swami Vivekananda in the essay *Dhyana and Samadhi* says,

When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external location, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current, as it were, towards that point. This state is called *Dhyana*. When one has so intensified the power of *Dhyana* as to be able to reject the external part of perception and remain meditating only on the internal part, the meaning, that state is called *Samadhi*. The three — *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi* — together, are called *Samyama*. (184)



Meditation can be used as a powerful tool to improve the power of thought. Even many diseases can be cured by controlling the thoughts. Health is thus the sum of both positive and negative impulses occurring within our body. The medicine would do wonders for the human body if the body and the thoughts are in control. As a result, meditation has emerged as a key component of the New Age Movement. Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated that meditation can bring about significant transformation; it is not just for relaxation, as most people in the West believe, nor is it limited to the medical benefits of lowering blood pressure, stress, and other ailments.

Similarly, Swami Vivekananda has also elucidated the significance of maintaining a perfectly healthy body by practicing the eight essential steps in ‘*Ashtanga Yoga*’. They are: “*Yama* which means non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving of any gifts. *Niyama* which is cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study, and self-surrender to God”. (138) Then comes “*Asana*, or posture; *Pranayama*, or control of *Prana*; *Pratyahara*, or restraint of the senses from their objects; *Dharana*, or fixing the mind on a spot; *Dhyana*, or meditation; and *Samadhi*, or super consciousness.” (138). The goal is to discover the innermost recesses of our minds to generalize their contents and form conclusions from them to maintain a healthy life.

‘Awareness’ is another invisible factor that has powerful long-term effects on the body and the mind. “Being aware of what is happening as it happens without being swept up by pre-established mental activities like judgments or ideas, memories or emotions, is one way of describing mindful awareness.” (Siegel 60). These are recognized in Eastern traditional medicine like Ayurveda, being well thus begins by being aware of your body. The key to well-being is a person’s coping skills and this coping begins in the mind. Swami Vivekananda in the essay *Dhyana and Samadhi* proves the significance of awareness by stating,

The mind should first be employed in perceiving the external causes of sensations, then the internal motions, and then its own reaction. When it has succeeded in perceiving the external causes of sensations by themselves, the mind will acquire the power of perceiving all fine material existences, all fine bodies and forms. When it can succeed in perceiving the motions inside by themselves, it will gain the control of all mental waves, in itself or in others, even before they have translated themselves into physical energy; and when he will be able to perceive the mental reaction by itself, the Yogi will acquire the knowledge of everything, as every sensible object, and every thought is the result of this reaction. Then will he have seen the very foundations of his mind, and it will be under his perfect control. (185).



## The Self-Directed Biological Transformation

The concept of well-being is complex and dynamic, encompassing actions connected to health as well as spiritual and psychological aspects. The World Health Organization considers better mental health is sometimes referred to as positive well-being. Better physical health, including less autonomic arousal and inflammation as well as improved coping mechanisms for long-term conditions (such as cardiovascular illnesses), has also been associated with well-being. The famous psychologist FA Huppert states “Well-being is about lives going well”. (137). Positive human functioning, which encompasses positive psychology and positive psychiatry, studies how characteristics like gratitude and spirituality promote well-being in contrast to more persistently negative emotions and traits that tend to compromise our well-being. Clinically, this research has paved the way for the development of disciplines like behavioral cardiology and psycho-oncology. Positive characteristics, such as a general feeling of spirituality and hope, help patients in certain therapeutic populations manage the difficulties of both their acute therapies and their illnesses. For instance, there is a link between improved mental and physical health and spiritual well-being in individuals with heart failure.

### a) Yoga: The Science and Art of Life

For over five millennia, yoga has been a revered practice in Indian tradition, celebrated as one of the most profound contributions from the East to the global community, serving as a cornerstone for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Yoga is thus a comprehensive body of knowledge that integrates philosophy, positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and science. Swami Vivekananda in the essay *Concentration: Its Spiritual Uses* says “Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (*Chitta*) from taking various forms (*Vrittis*)” (198). The Eastern philosophy of *Sankhya Yoga* is the source of both the science and the art of “living life.” The Sanskrit term “*Yuj*,” which means “to yoke” or “to unite,” is where the word yoga originates. Scholars have identified three meanings for yoga: to bond, to unite, and to identify with the self and the divine, resulting in inner serenity and liberation. Relieving suffering is the actual goal of the psychospiritual lifestyle of yoga. Practice of the breathing, mental, and bodily postures (*asana*) system with Ayurveda brings about a greater level of consciousness and the realization that the soul is not in pain. The goal of yoga therapy is to achieve mental and physical balance while feeling at one with the cosmos and oneself. It is recommended to practice yoga therapy for all chronic illnesses, either as a supplemental therapy or as a



palliative approach. The idea of strata of existence or *koshas*, along with diet and nutrition, yoga and yoga therapy incorporate the five sheaths of the physical layer, energy layer, mind, intellect, and innermost bliss, which are composed of the gross physical body, subtle body (mental, cognition, emotional, and intellect), and energy vortices (*chakras*).

The practice of physical posture (*yogasanas*) increases strength, neuromuscular coordination, endurance, balance, and flexibility in addition to causing postural alignments. A series of breathing exercises such as *pranayama*, when combined with the right *yogasana*, help to expand the chest cavity, increase lung capacity, and oxygenate cells. Additionally, practicing mindful breathing techniques improves one's awareness of one's own body and mind, including its thoughts and feelings. Consequently, yoga transcends ordinary life with conscious inhibition of overthinking and limited and selective energy-consuming distractions, along with peaceful postures, gradual physical stretches (awareness of somatic sensations), mindful meditation (awareness of thoughts and emotions), and ongoing self-reflection and introspection. As a result, a regular yoga practice combined with a yogic diet, detoxification, and purification methods increases mental turbulence resilience and reduces mental clutter. Instead, thoughts are directed towards self-care and compassion towards achieving harmony with the universe and life in general. By inducing relaxation in the parasympathetic limb, the autonomic nervous system restores equilibrium and facilitates improved respiration, blood flow, digestion, emotion management, and thinking processes. Yoga serves as a form of mind-body medicine, with regular and consistent practice fostering not only physical well-being but also a positive perspective on life, promoting good health and happiness. To accomplish this, the eight limbs of yoga (*Astanga Yoga*) work in concert to create a life that is meaningful and purposeful to a considerable extent. The four main tenets of yoga therapy are: treating the human body as a whole, nature-aware organism; honoring and respecting each person's distinct qualities; starting with self-care; compassion and empowerment; and, finally, cultivating an optimistic, accepting mindset that embraces acceptance leading us towards a healthy life.

Rituparna Barooah in the research paper *Role of Applied Physiology in Management of Muscular Dystrophy by Yoga and Meditation* explains the concept of self-regulation using Yoga “Yoga philosophy is founded on self-regulation. Yoga practice functions as a skill set integrating higher and lower brain networks. Self-regulation includes self-monitoring, self-discipline, and motivation towards the achievement of the desired goal.”

#### **b) Breathing Exercises or the Control of Psychic Prana**





The terms *prana* (breath) and *ayama* (stretching) combine to form *pranayama*. Hence, *pranayama* is a series of breath exercises in which the practitioner lengthens and stretches their breathing pattern (inhalation and exhalation) to the limit of their capabilities. It is important to know some key aspects regarding holding the breath after inhaling and before exhaling or before inhaling and before exhaling. This kind of breath work known as *kumbhaka* involves holding your breath. A few of the main *pranayamas* include alternating nostril breathing, which involves inhaling through the nostril through which air was exhaled in the previous cycle, based on the pattern of attention on the respiration phase. *Bhastrika* performed with a powerful, energetic inhale and a passive exhale. Another such technique is *kapalbhati*, which emphasizes strong and vigorous exhalation. Although it is categorized as a *pranayama*, *kapalbhati* is a breathwork-based purification method. Rituparna Barooah says “Breath is the bridge between body and mind. *Pranayama* is best practiced early in the mornings, before meals, and in open/well-ventilated spaces in a peaceful surrounding, better still in natural surroundings”. (5).

There are numerous types of *pranayamas*, accessible to anyone, yet it's advisable to choose them selectively based on factors like the time of day, season, environmental conditions, and the individual's specific affliction or dosha. *Pranayamas* are better practiced as a standalone performance or after *yogasanas*. Again, to Barooah, “*Pranayama* or breath regulation practice consists of three steps usually- a slow deep inhalation (*puraka*), long and complete exhalation (*rechaka*) and *kumbhaka* which is breath retention, either between inhalation and exhalation (*antarkumbhaka*) or between exhalation and inhalation (*bahirakumbhaka*).” (5). Swami Vivekananda in the essay *Prana* thus explains the quintessence of *Pranayama* which is not only a breathing exercise but a mental process to control the body. He says “The science of *Pranayama*, by external means. *Prana*, manifesting itself as mental power, can only be controlled by mental means. That part of *Pranayama* which attempts to control the physical manifestations of the *Prana* by physical means is called physical science, and that part which tries to control the manifestations of the *Prana* as the mental force by mental means is called *Raja-Yoga*.” (157).

### c) Healing Body: A Quest through Visualization Therapy

Healing is not just a mechanical process to recuperate the ailing body it's a spiritual quest toward well-being. To Chopra, the goal of quantum healing was far more drastic. It is like gaining a fresh perspective on yourself as an offspring of the cosmos. Based on this very realization, he adds, “Self-care cannot help but begin at the source, where your consciousness



merges with cosmic consciousness. You can't truly value yourself until this happens, and then self-care is like caring for Nature itself." (50). Chopra also discusses about Visualization theory by quoting the work of Dr. Carl O Simolton, a radiologist at the University of Texas experienced in treating a sixty-one-year-old cancer patient. In this particular case study, Dr. Simolton asked the patient to undergo radiation therapy by visualizing the disappearance of cancer. Chopra quotes "He was taught to visualize his cancer as vividly as possible. Then, using any mental picture that appealed to him, he was asked to visualize his immune system as the white blood cells successfully attacked the cancer cells and swept them out of the body, leaving only healthy cells behind". (35). Such cases show the power of mind and how fatal diseases can be cured just by having faith in oneself and nature. Visualization therapy is an emerging branch of the mind-body program that has been suggested in Alternative therapies throughout the world which proves the statement "There are other problems that run deeper than inconsistent results: the mind-body field continues to be plagued by an inability to rigorously prove its basic tenet, that the mind influences the body toward either health or disease." (37).

### Conclusion

Mind-body treatments, through the encouragement of resilience via self-care, can be beneficial adjuncts to addressing noncommunicable diseases that are exacerbated by stress, such as chronic pain. They can significantly enhance well-being and lessen symptoms and the physiological effects of stress, even though they are not a cure-all. Thus, these underutilized resources have a lot to offer society and individuals alike. Many miraculous cases were reported throughout the globe stating the significance of mind-body medicine and how placebo effect and positive thinking cure many dreadful diseases. Vitetta et al. in the research article *Mind-Body Medicine Stress and Its Impact on Overall Health and Longevity* stated: "When the body is working well, nutrition and mental health are also good. If one then feels good about oneself, quality of life is enhanced, and a long life is made possible." (502).

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*There was no funding source for this particular study.*

