

Religious Therapeutics

Body and Health in Yoga, Āyurveda, and Tantra



GREGORY P. FIELDS

RELIGIOUS
THERAPEUTICS

SUNY series in Religious Studies

Harold Coward, editor

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*Body and Health
in Yoga, Ayurveda, and Tantra*

GREGORY P. FIELDS

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SYMBOLS AND NOTES ON SOURCES

Radical √ indicates Sanskrit verbal roots or Indo-European root words.

Single brackets [] in translations enclose words added for clarification.

Quotations from the *Yoga-sūtras* are translated by Gregory P. Fields.

Quotations from the *Yoga-bhāṣya* and the *Tattva-vaiśārādī* are from the English translation *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras* by Rāma Prasāda (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1912, 1978).

Quotations from the Āyurvedic text *Caraka-saṃhitā* and its commentary *Āyurveda-dīpikā* are from the translation of R. K. Sharma and Bhagwan Dash: *Caraka-saṃhitā of Agniveśa: Text with English Translation and Critical Exposition Based on Cakrapāṇidatta's Āyurveda Dīpikā*, 3 vols. (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Vol. 94, 1976). Clarifications are provided based on the translation of P. V. Sharma: *Caraka-saṃhitā: Agniveśa's Treatise Refined and Annotated by Charaka and Redacted by Dīḍhabala*, 4 vols. (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Orientalia, Jaikrishnadas Āyurveda Series, Vol. 36, 1994, 1995), in consultation with etymological and secondary sources.

Quotations from the Tāntric texts *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* and *Ṣaṭcakra-nirūpaṇa* are from, respectively: *The Great Liberation* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1913, 1953), and *The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1918, 1964), both translated by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe).

Etymological analyses of Sanskrit terms are based on:

English-Sanskrit Dictionary by V. S. Apte. New Delhi: Publications India, reprint 1989.

A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary by Arthur Anthony Macdonnell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924, 1990.

A Sanskrit-English Dictionary by Sir Monier Monier-Williams. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899, 1974.

The Roots, Verb-Forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language by William Dwight Whitney. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1885, 1945.

Secondary sources are cited in endnotes, and primary sources are cited in the body of the text, identified by the abbreviations on the next page.

ABBREVIATIONS

AV	<i>Atharva-veda</i>
AD	<i>Āyurveda-dīpikā</i>
BhG	<i>Bhagavadgītā</i>
CS	<i>Caraka-saṃhitā</i>
HYP	<i>Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā</i>
MNT	<i>Mahānirvāṇa Tantra</i>
RV	<i>Ṛg-veda</i>
SK	<i>Sāṃkhya-kārikā</i>
SKB	<i>Sāṃkhya-kārikā-bhāṣya</i>
SCN	<i>Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa</i>
TV	<i>Tattva-vaiśārādī</i>
Up.	<i>Upaniṣads</i>
	Bṛhad. Up. <i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka</i>
	Chānd. Up. <i>Chāndogya</i>
	Kaṭh. Up. <i>Kaṭha</i>
	Mait. Up. <i>Maitri</i>
	Muṇḍ. Up. <i>Muṇḍaka</i>
	Śvet. Up. <i>Śvetāśvatara</i>
	Tait. Up. <i>Taittirīya</i>
VC	<i>Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi</i>
YBh	<i>Yoga-bhāṣya</i>
YS	<i>Yoga-sūtras</i>

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Introduction

THE IDEA OF RELIGIOUS THERAPEUTICS

World religious traditions abound with connections between healing and spirituality—for instance, the work of Jesus as savior and healer. Another example is Navajo religion's focus on healing as restoration of well-being to persons who suffer some form of digression from the flow of the life-force. The Hindu religio-philosophical tradition, operating from the premise that life is suffering, is a rich source of therapeutics to remedy the human condition. The Hindu subtraditions are in general concerned with well-being of persons in their spiritual dimension, and thus emerges a concept of 'spiritual health.' This study examines relations among body, health, and religiousness in Āyurveda, classical Yoga, and Tantra. These three traditions treat the relationship between embodied life and sacred life in ways that are interestingly different from standard Western views. And because of their emphasis on physicality, these three traditions are also unusual in the Hindu context, since Hinduism has a strong inclination to conceive of spiritual Self-realization or God-realization as entailing transcendence of physicality.

The idea of *religious therapeutics* embraces principles and practices that support human well-being with recognition of the common ground and cooperation of health and religiousness. Dimensions of religious therapeutics include the following:

Major Dimensions of Religious Therapeutics

- Religious meanings that inform philosophy of health and medicine
- Religious means of healing

- Health as a support to religious life
- Religiousness itself as a remedy for the suffering of the human condition

The idea of religious therapeutics can apply to any number of relations among health, healing, and religiousness. Taking a broad view, a whole tradition can be examined from the standpoint of its therapeutic impetus, or the term *religious therapeutic* can designate specific principles and practices, such as meditation, or use of prayer for healing.

In recent decades, there has been a surge of interest in health and healing in the context of spirituality. Humankind has an increasingly sharp awareness of threats to the health of the earth and its inhabitants, and of spiritual poverty as one of the factors underlying damage to environmental and human health. Contemporary thought and culture show strong interest in healing—physical, psychological, environmental, societal, political, and religious. The model of religious therapeutics is offered as a heuristic or interpretive lens for identifying and understanding relations among healing and religiousness in Hindu and other world traditions. Philosophically, the many constellations of factors in the common domain of religion and medicine reveal a great deal about the human being—embodied and spiritual. In addition, I hope that an evolving model of religious therapeutics will contribute to a more satisfactory account of health, applicable to human life in its many dimensions, including the spiritual, thus informing productive work in philosophy of medicine, health education, health-care, and health-related pastoral care.

RELIGION AND MEDICINE

Religion and medicine are distinct fields of human endeavor, but the need for well-being of body, mind, and spirit marks the common ground of medical and religious effort. The idea of religious therapeutics is evident in Paul Tillich's position on the intimate relation of religion and healing. His view is based on New Testament accounts of healing, which he says should not be taken as miracle stories, but as illustrations of Jesus' identity as the universal healer. Human beings in their finitude require 'particular' healing, that is, healing of specific ailments through surgical, pharmaceutical, psychotherapeutic, and like means. But the human being in his or her ultimate nature needs salvation or liberation in a total and ultimate sense. Jesus as healer embodies the meaning of savior: the (Gk.) *sōtēr* or healer is the one who makes healthy and whole.¹

The idea of religious therapeutics demands inquiry into the relationship of soteriology (the theory of salvation) with health and healing. The common ground of salvation and healing is evident in etymological analysis. The words ‘soteriology’ and ‘savior’ are derived from the Greek verb *sōzein*, ‘to save.’²² The Latin equivalent is *salvāre*, which is the source of the word ‘salvation.’²³ The Indo-European root $\sqrt{\text{sol-}}$ (variant $\sqrt{\text{sal-}}$) means ‘whole.’ Descendents of $\sqrt{\text{sol-}}$ include the Latin *sālus*, health or wholeness, and the English words *save* and *salvation*.²⁴ *Salvāre* can denote religious salvation, and can also mean ‘to make whole.’²⁵ ‘To make whole’ is the literal meaning of the Old English verbal root *hāl*, origin of the word *heal*. *Heal* carries the meaning of *restoration* from an undesirable condition, and at an elemental level pertains to saving, purifying, cleansing, and repairing to bring about restoration from evil, suffering, or unwholeness. These are also functions of religion. Reference to *healing* in the domains of human physicality and psychology is the most common use of the word, but the fundamental meaning of *healing* is recovery of wholeness, which spiritual liberation entails.

The word *therapeutic* is from the Greek *therapúein*, and pertains to curing and restoring. The term *therapeía*, healing (akin to *therápōn*, ‘attendant’), can connote religious or medical endeavor, for it refers to the attending of a healer to a patient, and also designates ‘attending’ in the form of religious ministering.²⁶ The terms ‘cure’ and ‘restore’ reveal two perspectives on healing. *Curing* refers to alleviating impaired functioning and discomfort, while *restoring* connotes returning to an original state of well-being. These two meanings support a conception of healing as having religious as well as medical implications. The close relationship between healing and religion is well substantiated in the Indian tradition, where liberation is often construed as return to the unimpaired state of one’s true nature. This is reflected in the Sanskrit terms for health, *svāsthya* and *svasthatā*: ‘self-abiding’ or ‘coinciding with oneself’ (*sva* ‘oneself’; $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$ ‘to stand’). Wilhelm Halbfass notes in his analysis of the Indian tradition’s therapeutic paradigms that in Advaita Vedānta, these two terms are used by Śaṅkara and his disciple Sureśvara “to refer to their soteriological goal, the unobstructed presence and identity of the *ātman*.”²⁷ The comparable term in classical Yoga is *svarūpe* ‘*vastānam*: establishment in one’s own essential nature, which is Yoga’s prime goal [YS 1.3].

Contemporary interest in religious therapeutics is evident in the expansion of research activity under the rubric of religion and medicine. For instance, in his article “Mantra in Āyurveda” Kenneth Zysk writes:

At all times and in almost every culture, a connection between medicine and religion is demonstrable. The belief that by soliciting divine intervention through prayer and ritual no disease is incurable cuts across cultural boundaries.⁸

Zysk's emphasis here is medical applications of religious speech in Āyurveda, and although religious therapeutics may include religious means of treating health problems, religious therapeutics embrace many other relations between healing and religiousness. In classical Yoga, physical and psychological maladies may be remedied by religious effort, but such healing is instrumental to a more fundamental healing: restoration to one's Self-nature as consciousness, unencumbered by psychophysical limitations.

Religion and medicine serve the common purpose of helping persons with transitions through the stages of living and dying, and they share the aim of remedying human suffering. In India, the relation that obtains between religion and medicine is importantly different from that of the dominant tradition of the Anglo-European world, where science and religion are treated more dichotomously. In the West, medicine is oriented toward the body and life in the present world, while religion is considered the province of non-material spirit, and particularly concerned with an afterlife. In the Indian tradition, there is a much greater affinity between religion and medicine. One of the major commentaries on the *Yoga-sūtras*, Vācaspati-miśra's *Tattva-Vaiśaradī*, states that the science of Yoga is similar to the science of medicine for both "are taught for the welfare of all" [TV 2.15]. The contrast of Anglo-European and Indian perspectives on religion and medicine is rooted in their divergent metaphysical conceptions of person, body, and human potential. The Indian tradition has a more holistic view of the human being as a unity, with psychophysical and spiritual dimensions. The first three of the traditional four aims of life (*dharma*, righteousness; *artha*, material well-being; *kāma*, enjoyment; and *mokṣa*, liberation) serve embodied well-being, but, more than that, each can contribute to attainment of the fourth and ultimate goal: self-realization and spiritual liberation.

Anglo-European and Indian approaches to health and spirituality diverge also in the way the two traditions regard knowledge. While the Indian tradition in general gives more credence to intuitive and mystical knowledge, in the West, science and reason are strongly valued. Medicine in the Anglo-European tradition relies heavily on empirical knowledge, but in Hinduism, religious knowledge, and, to a large extent, medical

knowledge, are rooted in the Vedic knowledge intuited by ancient seers. Vedic knowledge is considered to provide comprehension that is more complete and truthful than knowledge gained through the senses. Āyurveda exemplifies cooperation of empirical and intuitive knowledge, and attention to both earthly and spiritual concerns.

From the standpoint of value theory, the Western presupposition that rationality is among the highest goods supports the application of reason and knowledge for utilization of the earth's natural resources. Technologically developed material resources are central to diagnosis and treatment in contemporary scientific medicine, evident in the use of sophisticated diagnostic instruments, pharmacology, and surgery. On the Indian view, however, healing involves transformations not only of matter but also of spirit, and healing incorporates self-knowledge and self-transformation, guided by essential elements of Indian value, such as cultivation of one's inherent awareness, and the uncovering of one's ultimate Self-nature.

... yoga and other practices are helping to change our whole concept of health and restoring the broken link between medicine and spirituality. As the modern practitioner finds himself more and more helpless in the face of purely functional disorders, we seem to be on the eve of a medical revolution, which should restore the lost balance and do way, among other things, with excessive reliance on drugs.⁹

Classical Yoga is a source of many specific concepts and practices that promote well-being, psychophysical and spiritual. Further, Yoga is a paradigmatic system of religious therapeutics—a path of healing that serves the purpose of religious liberation. Among world traditions, classical Yoga is a useful starting point for inquiry into the relationship of medical and religious health because it connects the cultivation of physical and psychological health with spiritual well-being and exemplifies the idea of religious liberation as healing.

In the Indian religious and philosophical traditions in general, the human body is considered different from the true Self that is eligible for liberation. Body and mind are generally considered as a unity, and an ontological distinction is drawn between body/mind and Self, rather than between body and mind, as Western traditions tend to do.¹⁰ Consonant with the Indian view, I use the term *psychophysical* to refer to states and processes of embodied human life. This term distinguishes the domain of body/mind from that of the ultimate Self. Indian philosophy is often stereotyped as strictly dualistic as regards body and Self. In particular,

Sāṃkhya and classical Yoga have dualistic ontologies, with consciousness and materiality as the two primordial forms of being. However, investigation of the relation of spirituality and healing in Yoga and other Indian traditions reveals a range of interpretations of the relation of body and Self. As regards concepts of health, Western thinking tends to regard health in physical and psychological terms, but Indian views of person and body substantiate a broader interpretation of health, embracing religious and other dimensions of well-being, and demonstrating a closer relation between medical and religious concerns.

Psychophysical health is integral to Yoga's religious path, but even more important is the healing that constitutes liberation: the prevailing of a person's true nature, and the overcoming of limitations and suffering. Classical Yoga is a system of self-cultivation enjoined for the attainment of liberation, and progress on Yoga's religious path is a process of healing (recovering the wholeness) of one's true nature. Liberation as actualization of unobstructed self-identity, and, consequently, the elimination of suffering, constitute achievement of the health of the person in her or his fundamental nature. While cultivation of body and health is not an end, but a means in classical Yoga, Yoga makes a significant contribution to our understanding of health and the relationship of health and religiousness. This study offers a model of religious therapeutics, based on analysis of body and health in Āyurveda, classical Yoga, and Tantra. Relations between healing and spiritual life are treated within the two following broad categories:

1. Health in its ordinary meaning, pertaining to physical and psychological well-being.
2. Liberation as healing in an ultimate sense.

A MODEL OF RELIGIOUS THERAPEUTICS

Religious therapeutics in classical Yoga operate from a concept of the person as having a psychophysical and a spiritual dimension. Each of these dimensions is subject to healing; in short, to overcoming problems that restrict well-being and vitality, produce suffering, and interfere with the prevailing of the person's true nature. Both psychophysical and spiritual meanings of health are instrumental in classical Yoga. As regards *psychophysical health*, this study focuses on the soteriological role of body and health in Yoga and argues that the refined awareness, disci-

pline, and cultivation of the body/mind are integral to Yogic religious life, and prepare one for the higher stages of cultivation of consciousness leading to liberation. Presentation of classical Yoga as a paradigm of religious therapeutics addresses both somatic and spiritual experience, focusing on these two main themes:

1. Although body and psychophysical health are of instrumental and not ultimate value in classical Yoga, body and health have significant soteriological functions.
2. Liberation in Yoga is healing in an ultimate sense. It concerns attainment of well-being with respect to the human being's most fundamental nature and highest soteriological potential.

Because the word 'health' is ordinarily used to denote physical, psychological or psychophysical well-being, it might seem that the use of 'health' in reference to spiritual well-being is a metaphorical application of the term. However, there are grounds for broadening the extension of the term 'health' to apply to the well-being and freedom from suffering of the whole person. If the human being is considered to be more than a psychophysical entity (as is the case in Yoga, where *puruṣa* or consciousness is held to be the person's true nature), then it is legitimate to speak of health with respect to this spiritual Self, and of ultimate liberation from suffering as healing. Self-identity is a significant determinant of both psychophysical and spiritual well-being. This idea is suggested by Wilhelm Halbfass, who identifies the recovery of self-identity and well-being as a point of connection between psychophysical healing and religious liberation.¹¹ The concept of *liberation as healing* utilizes meanings of health revealed by analysis of Āyurvedic determinants of health, and explores metaphysical conceptions of personhood—such as freedom and identity—in their medical and soteriological implications. A model of religious therapeutics is presented below with eight branches. The first five areas, based on classical Yoga's eight limbs, provide an initial matrix of religious therapeutics. A more comprehensive model is established by incorporating the traditions of Āyurveda and Tantra. The Āyurvedic view of the person differs significantly from classical Yoga's position that body and Self are utterly distinct. Āyurveda adds the dimension of *medical therapeutics* within a holistic context of embodied and spiritual life. In Tantra, body can be understood as a vehicle to enlightenment, and as enlightenable itself. Tantra adds to an evolving model of religious therapeutics the dimension of *aesthetics*, incorporating sacred and healing music,