

Neuroimmunology and Kundalini Yoga: A Comparative Study towards Direct Knowing

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The increasing number of spontaneous non-ordinary and spiritual experiences reported in mature adults (Dawd, 1998; Shellenberg, 1998; Masluk, 1997; Waldman, 1997; Palmer, 1999), as well as the distinct spiritual component in the reactions of Americans to the tragedy of September 11 (Wall, Louchakova, 2002, in press) invites the research of the implications of this new phenomena for consciousness research, and psychosomatic medicine.

This paper examines possible psychosomatic mechanisms at the origin of spontaneous spiritual experience, with the emphasis on parallels between Kundalini yoga map of brain centers and the recent findings in Psycho-neuroimmunology. We are introducing the model of de-centralized consciousness, which resonates with Aristotelian notion "energeya", and Husserlian phenomenological intentionality. Central to the presentation will be the concept of subtle energies as a missing link in the Cartesian model of compartmentalized human being. Dynamics of Kundalini, the semi-hypothetical life energy, will be interpreted as a foundation for the theory of psychosomatic evolution. Neuroimmunological evidence of central and peripheral function of neuroactive molecules, as well as feedback loops mechanisms, and the data of phenomenological and cross-cultural research in life-span development and spiritual awakening support this approach.

We will analyze the map of 10 or more brain centers responsible for the variety of spiritual experiences in Kundalini yoga model. The table of psychosomatic forms of mysticism involving the practices activating the brain centers will be presented. Then we'll review the function and structural distribution of neurotransmitters, neuropeptides, and the mechanisms of the cytokine action, to demonstrate commonalities in findings between yoga and biological science. The amazing parallels between the phenomenological discoveries of yoga centuries ago, and instrumental discoveries of biomedical suggest the possibility of phenomenological approach to the study of the human body, towards the possibility of direct knowing as means of gaining the valid data in the health care.

We will demonstrate this approach used in the year and longer trials with large groups of healthy volunteers, allowed to develop the set of self-monitoring practices alternative to psychotherapy and sometimes medical treatment. Tested in Russia (1985-1991) and U.S. (1993-1998), self-monitoring practices provide the high degree of satisfaction with life, health improvement, positive change in values and relationships. They also proved to be effective in management of panic attacks, autoimmune disorders (initial stages of multiple sclerosis), chronic fatigue, mood and somatoform disorders.