

# Yoga for Mental Wellness

❖ Stephen Lewis



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# Introduction

- ❖ What is this presentation about?
- ❖ Why I'm doing this work



# Yoga

- ❖ What is it?
  - ❖ Uniting, oneness, “skill in action”
- ❖ History
- ❖ Yogic philosophy
- ❖ Yogic psychology



# Types of Yoga

- ❖ Hatha yoga: physical practices
- ❖ Karma yoga: action / work
- ❖ Bhakti yoga: devotion
- ❖ Jñana yoga: knowledge / wisdom
- ❖ Raja yoga: cultivation of the mind  
(eight-limbed path)

➤ Different practices for different people



# An eight-limbed path

From Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

- ❖ Yama – restraints
- ❖ Niyama – observances
- ❖ Asana – postures
- ❖ Pranayama – breathing exercises
- ❖ Pratyahara – ‘sense withdrawal’
- ❖ Dharana – focused concentration
- ❖ Dhyana – meditation
- ❖ Samadhi – total absorption (enlightenment)



# Holistic Applications



- ❖ Mindfulness:
  - ❖ Equanimous awareness of present moment experience
- ❖ Kripalu Yoga approach:
  - ❖ “Nonjudgmental introspective focus during the coordination of breath and movement
  - ❖ – a meditation in motion.”
  - ❖ Three Stages
- ❖ Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy
  - ❖ Person- & body-centered transformation
  - ❖ Therapist supports client in gentle yoga postures

# Benefits of Yoga

- ❖ Physiological
- ❖ Cognitive / Emotional
- ❖ Psycho-spiritual



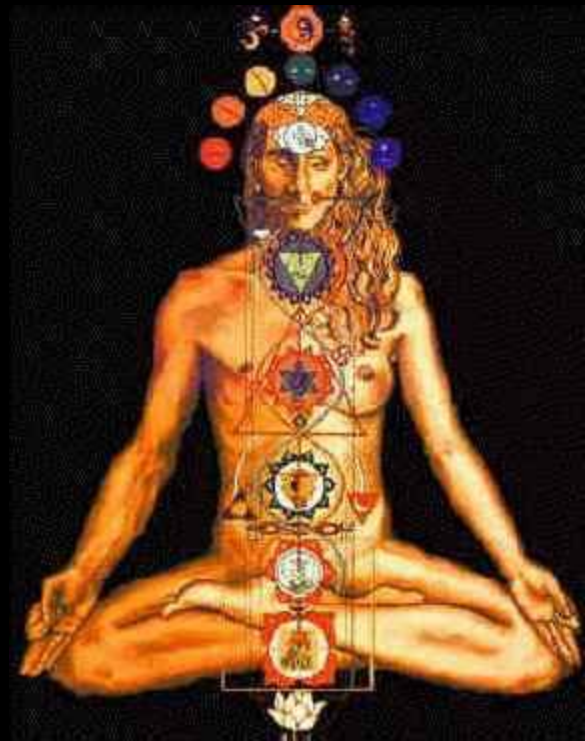
# Physiological benefits

- ❖ Strength
- ❖ Flexibility
- ❖ Balance
- ❖ Bone density
- ❖ Weight loss
- ❖ Heart Rate Variability (HRV)
- ❖ Circulation
- ❖ Oxygen absorption efficiency



# Cognitive – Emotional benefits

- ❖ Access to emotion
- ❖ Mood state
- ❖ Stress relief
- ❖ Coping skills
- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Acceptance
- ❖ Resilience



# Psycho-spiritual benefits

- ❖ The original purpose of yoga
- ❖ Expanded worldview
- ❖ Meaning-making
- ❖ Connection to a high power/ universe
- ❖ Faith (in life / reality)
- ❖ Experience of oneness
- ❖ Transcendence



# Body-Mind in Psychotherapy

- ❖ Somatic psychotherapies:
  - ❖ Wilhelm Reich – body armor / orgone
  - ❖ A. Lowen – Bioenergetics
  - ❖ Body Psychotherapy
- ❖ Acceptance-based approach
- ❖ John Kabat-Zinn – Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
- ❖ *Yoga Psychotherapy ?*



# Clinical Applications

- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- ❖ Bipolar disorder
- ❖ Substance recovery
- ❖ Schizophrenia



# Clinical Applications

*Studies show that practicing Yoga:*

- ❖ Increases oxytocin and prolactin levels, improving mood
- ❖ Reduces cortisol levels, reducing stress
- ❖ Balances the biochemistry of the brain
- ❖ Certain practices stimulate the vagus nerve (to treat depression)
- ❖ Develops the ability to control one's state of mind.



# Clinical Research Findings

- ❖ **Anxiety**: Sahasi, G., Mohan, D., & Kacker, C. (1989). Effectiveness of yogic techniques in the management of anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Clinical Studies*, 5(1), 51-55.
- ❖ **Depression**: Pilkington K, Kirkwood G, Rampes H, et al. Yoga for depression: The research evidence. *J Affect Disord* 2005;89: 13-24.
- ❖ **Mood State**: Lavey, R., Sherman, T., Mueser, K. T., Osborne, D. D., Currier, M., & Wolfe, R. (2005). The effects of yoga on mood in psychiatric inpatients. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 28(4), 399-402.
- ❖ **PTSD**: van der Kolk, B. A. Clinical implications of neuroscience research in PTSD, from R. Yehuda (2006). *Psychobiology of posttraumatic stress disorders: A decade of progress* (Vol. 1071). Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. (pp. 277-293). Malden, MA, US: Blackwell Publishing. xxiii, 547.
- ❖ **Addiction Recovery**: Wagner, R. A. (1998). Hatha yoga for individuals in alcoholism recovery. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 59 (5-B).
- ❖ **Schizophrenia**: Visceglia, E. (2007). Healing Mind and Body: Using Therapeutic Yoga in the Treatment of Schizophrenia. *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, 17.



# Therapeutic factors of Yoga

- ❖ Internal awareness & knowledge
- ❖ Realizing the internal locus of control
- ❖ Self-acceptance & self-love
  - ❖ Body, mind, heart, and spirit
- ❖ Tangible, practical techniques
  - ❖ The yoga tool bag



# Practical helpfulness

- ❖ Self-help skill-building
  - ❖ daily practice to maintain balance
  - ❖ to use as needed (e.g., stressful situation, depressive episode, substance use urge)
- ❖ Discipline → motivation
- ❖ An offering: try-it-yourself-and-see approach
- ❖ Thanking yourself
  - ❖ promotes encouragement and appreciation



# Potential concerns

- ❖ Acceptability: religious conflict?
- ❖ Dissociation
- ❖ Spiritual bypass
- ❖ Agitation → Mania → Psychosis
- ❖ Directive or non-directive?
- ❖ Compliance
  - ❖ External and internal



# Psychotherapeutic Yoga Resources:

- ❖ Ajaya, Swami. (1997). *Psychotherapy East and West: a unifying paradigm*. Honesdale, PA: The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy.
- ❖ Faulds, R. (2006). *Kripalu yoga*. New York: Bantam Dell.
- ❖ Swami Rama, Ballentine, R. & Swami Ajaya. (1976). *Yoga and psychotherapy: the evolution of consciousness*. Honesdale, PA: The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy.
- ❖ Udupa, K.N. (2000). *Stress and its management by yoga*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited.
- ❖ Weintraub, A. (2004). *Yoga for depression*. New York: Broadway Books.



# Conclusion

- ❖ Yoga psychotherapy: an emerging field
- ❖ Contact and collaboration:
  - ❖ [stephen@yogapsychotherapy.org](mailto:stephen@yogapsychotherapy.org)
  - ❖ 917- 723- 4685

❖ Questions?

