Seventh Sense for the Regulation of Psychoneuroimmune Functions

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Psychoneuroimmunology- the study of the interactions among psychological, neural and endocrine functions and immune processes- has now developed into a bonafide field of multidisciplinary research (Ader, 1983; Ader et al., 1991). Earlier unknown and unspeculated connections between the brain and endocrine system which is the base for all functions very much inclusive of psychological as well as immune system, laid a basis for the present innumerable observations which could be summarized as below:

(1) The manipulation of neural and endocrine functions alters immune responses; similarly the antigenic stimulation that induces an immune response results in changes in neural and endocrine functions.

(2) Psychological processes are capable of influencing immunological responses and conversely the immunological status of an organism has a profound influence on various psychological functions (Broadbent et al., 1984; Glaser et al., 1987). This modern research indicates that the nervous and immune systems, the two highly complex systems involved in homeostasis form an integrated mechanism responsible for
the adaptation of the individual and perhaps for all the other species as well (Geiser, 1989; Irwin & Custeau, 1989). Psychoneuroimmunology emphasizes the functional significance of the relationship between these systems (psychological on one hand and biological- neuroimmune- on the other). This approach is definitely not a substitute for the more traditional disciplinary analysis of the mechanisms governing functions within a single system; but actually this integrated approach adds significant inputs to whatever knowledge that already has existed regarding the reciprocal relationship among various psychobiosystems.

The range of relationship between psychological and immunological factors is quite wide and deep; so no attempt will be made to offer even a cursory summary of all the findings. The focus here is to highlight the role of psychological factors especially emotions which have a definite neuronal basis and to regulate the immune functions within the framework of psychology that too integrating the Western and Indian approaches.

**Emotions and Immunity**

Nearly a century after some leading physicians first recognized the powerful role of the psyche (more scientific term- personality) in health and healing, biobehavioural scientists have begun to decipher how exactly stress and other emotional states can influence the onset and course of disease.

Aided by new biochemical techniques and a vastly expanded understanding of immunology and neurochemistry, research studies show that emotions acting through the brain can affect functioning of the nervous system, hormone levels and immunological responses, thereby changing an individual’s susceptibility to a host of organic pathological conditions. Depending on the circumstances, studies on animals and human beings have revealed that emotional reactions can suppress or stimulate disease- fighting white blood cells and trigger the release
of adrenal gland hormones and neurotransmitters including endorphins which in turn affect dozens of body processes.

Emotional stress is a very serious problem in this competitive and technocratic modern world. Scientists working in the departments of biology and behavioural sciences are engaged in finding out ways for developing immunity against the adverse conditions of modern life. Theses scientists adopt strategies which are western oriented. It now appears that an alignment of some aspects of the eastern thought with the emerging science of psychoneuroimmunology may provide channels for managing stress.

**Principles of Psychoneuroimmunology in the *Vedanta***

An attempt is made in this article, bringing to the focus some concepts of the *Vedanta*. The concepts of spiritual synergy and existential rhythm can be meaningfully applied to the field of psychoneuroimmunology (Davidson et al., 2003; Patel, 2004).

The paradoxical nature of self portrays tendencies of egotism, pride, envy, jealousy, hatred, greed, anger etc., on one hand and kindness, love, compassion, humility etc., on the other. With this mixture of both positive and negative traits, the self moves toward greater freedom or a larger self through empathy and transcendence over its sense of duality. Empathy and transcendence prepare a ground for the development of spiritual synergy. The spiritual synergy is a power carrying a sort of buoyancy that enables the self to hold from ‘Within itself’ and become increasingly objective toward events. This tendency to stand ‘aloof’ on the part of the self is a unique hidden power of our being and comes into operation with a greater freedom.

From the *Vedanta* it is learnt that it is the larger self which is more capable of developing spiritual synergy through the action
of the individual Prana conjoining with the cosmic Prana. As there is a vital link among physical, psychological and spiritual existence, there is a common platform for the operations of the individual and collective consciousness where the spiritual synergy can possibly bring about changes in the attitudes of individuals and minimizes both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. Now let us turn our attention to the existential rhythm.

On every plane of existence, the entire sequence of the creation of a higher principle of existence is repeated till we arrive at the thoughts and feelings which synthesize the material and spiritual aspects of our being. By transcending the thoughts and feelings we move towards a higher self-creation and this self-creation is essentially the creation of real meaning and purpose in the larger self (Rosen, 1994). Human beings have a hidden aspiration to move form one realm of possibilities into another; since this aspiration is not restricted to material existence, their urge to transcend spiritually in their quest for “meaning behind meanings” is rather instinctive, providing an evidence to the fact that self creation is an irreversible and irrevocable process where unity and multiplicity are intertwined. Human beings as explained in the Vedanta are alienated from their own selves when the existential rhythm expressed in the process of self creation is disturbed under conditions which suppress their urge to transcend: under the Vedantic paradigm this is existentially imperative. This alienation form oneself is a source of stress and other adverse conditions like loneliness, boredom, inclination to commit suicide and so on. Modern computer era has destroyed empathy, suppressed the urge for self-creation on the spiritual plane and thus has disturbed the existential rhythm, besides blocking the sources from the creation of spiritual synergy.

If the Vedantic view is translated into the language of modern psychology. It would mean that the essence of psychoneuroimmunology lies in releasing the urge for self -creation or transcendence which has been suppressed under the
existing condition of modern life and in emancipating the inner self from ‘absorptions’ or from fixations in trifling dualities.

In the *Atharvana Veda*, mantras are said to have therapeutic effects and immunizing influence. The *Vedic* seers believed that mantras expressed as prayer would influence the attitude of the patient toward the medicine (Dossey, 1993). According to Krippner and Patrick (1992) the vision of the ancient seers of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* was not away from the modern scientific thinking; in fact, Western science of the present millennium can make substantial advancements by paying attention to the *Vedantic* view.

**WHAT IS THE SEVENTH SENSE?**

Seeing, hearing, smell, touch and taste are the five basic senses. The information received through these sensory systems shapes our thinking, guides our action and influences our opinions. In addition to these five physical senses, there is intuition, all of which contribute to common sense, that is, the sixth sense. This is also called rational thinking. There are times when intuition is irrepressible such as, “I don’t know how I know, but I just do. Trust me”. Mostly these intuitive hits come in discreet and quiet ways, gathered from physical sensations, quiet hunches, dreams and pieces of memories entwined with wanderings of thoughts. Intuition flourishes when we pause, notice and listen a little more deeply. Intuition is sharpened by learning how to code the information that resides within one’s brain and body.

Awakening and developing one’s intuition starts with a deep appreciation of how one’s mind and body function as a harmonious unit- informing, warning and sensing in subtle ways. This appreciation serves as the gateway to one’s seventh sense, that is one’s fitness instinct. Our bodies are normally guided by this dynamic instinct which begins at the moment the life impulse enters a living creature and stirs throughout its life span.
Jordan (2002) discovered this seventh sense when he experienced how the body on being unleashed from previous conditioning and judgment, has an innate wisdom about just what it needs or what it should do.

Just as one must open oneself up to different ways of listening to tap into one’s sixth sense, one will have to explore one’s connection with one’s body in new ways to reach one’s body’s movement instinct. Here is the four-step process that awakens the seventh sense.

Awakening of the Seventh Sense

The first step is to transfer authority back to oneself. Too many individuals let others ‘own’ their bodies. They let their respective spouses or family members tell them how much to eat and doctors tell them how much to exercise. To unleash one’s fitness instinct, one must ignore all of these external sources of input and look deep within oneself. In other words, the locus of control has to be internal rather than external. This will enable the human being to find an internal source of motivation. Some may call this source an inner advisor or God, the Source, the Higher Self. As we listen to this inner voice, we develop ‘body authority’, the confidence and inner power originating from knowledge that we are the ones in charge of our respective bodies and the state of well-being. Taking back authority is not quite easy these days as we are bombarded with so many medical findings, research studies and so-called breakthroughs that we often wonder what really helps, what actions to take and what sources to trust.

We do not state here that transference of authority is always inappropriate. Obviously when we are learning a skill that we have not yet mastered, dependence on the advice of an expert adds to our knowledge. Yet, we cannot really break the pattern of automatically deferring to experts and other people unless we
become aware of the moment of self-effacement and actively replace the automatic response. The next time we consult somebody about anything, pause and ask ourselves, “Is this an appropriate time to depend on an external authority? Do I need expert advice or is it well within my domain to figure out and choose?” Simply asking these questions, initiates the reembodiment process. We need to ask ourselves the following questions as well:

“How is my posture?”
“How long have I been in one position?”
“Do I have any sore spots that I have ignored for the past one hour?”
“How is my breathing- smooth and full or shallow and jerky?”

Energy generators are our answers to the questions mentioned above. These generators do not draw energy from our energy reserves, but they add to them. An outdated thinking in fitness is that if we are tired we need to generate energy with some physical exercise. Perhaps it is not correct anymore. Pushing oneself too hard physically thinking that fatigue could be shed with some high adrenaline aerobics may do more harm than help.

Once authority is transferred back to oneself, the second step of doing a body scan regularly begins. To do the body scan, we need to check our physical status and follow the instructions given below:

“Close your eyes, take a breath, exhale slowly and scan your body from head to toe”.

As we scan, we will get in touch with the truth of our present condition. We will realize that there are no ‘shoulds’ in our scan; there is only ‘What is so’. The ‘shoulds’ of conventional exercise thinking are uncreative, ineffective, habitual responses, inadequate for determining what is really called for. The body scan will let us accurately sense our physical need and choose a suitable antidote. Movement is a good medicine, but only when the choice
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of movement fits the physiological need. The body scan is quick and easy way to take the dreaded ‘shoulds’ out of exercise. It detours the usual ways that we think about exercise and tunes in to what we really need. It works on the principle that there are basically four different physical states of being (i) fatigued- too tired; (ii) tense- too wired; (iii) languid- too uninspired and (iv) dynamic- mired. Figuring out which of these four states we are presently in is our ticket to our fitness instinct.

As we transfer authority and become proficient with the body scan, our fitness instinct starts growing. This is the third step namely reawakening of our fitness instinct. This triggers a playful positive attitude. We will be willing to have fun with new ideas, stand apart from the orthodox view, explore and acquire new skills. Dr. David Weeks, a clinical neuropsychologist at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital in Scotland and Jamie James, authors of the book entitled ‘Superyoung’ (1998) are of the opinion that individuals who are younger than their biological ages do not censor themselves or expect others to do so. Highly adaptable, these age resistant characters tend to be eccentric, giving themselves permission to engage in behaviour that others might view as odd. The superyoung individuals exercise regularly involving all the dimensions of human personality (that is, both physical and psychological) and enjoy a robust sex life (Weeks & James, 1998).

Now let us quickly move onto the last step which is to nourish fitness instinct toward progress. The impulses to progress are triggered by the deepest reverberations or vibrations in one’s body as explained by the Prana of Indian traditions and qi in the East. We can learn to sense this instinct and fan the glowing embers into a roaring blaze. Once we are fully in touch with holistic fitness we move beyond an integration of mind, body and spirit on a personal level and connect with the greater community, bio- region and planet.
All of us just form an integral part of the same community. Positive thinking is innate. This means that we all are born predominantly positive. But for a variety of reasons we lose our positiveness and acquire negative attitudes, behaviours etc. ten specific traits characterize a positive thinking person: They are: (1) belief, (2) integrity, (3) focus, (4) confidence, (5) courage, (6) determination, (7) enthusiasm, (8) optimism, (9) patience and (10) calmness. Each one of these traits if leveraged properly in a given situation produces powerful results.

If we want to live longer, be happy, healthy and successful. All we have to do is to tell ourselves that we can do it by tapping the healing forces within. There is no greater joy than a healthy positive life. We feel exhilarated, energetic, happy and on top of the world. A sense of total well-being permeates our personality. We feel good to be alive.

Unlike sleeping, magnetic relaxation puts the individual at rest but subconsciously or psychologically alert. When the individual is consciously relaxed, positive suggestions seep into the substratum of one’s personality. To achieve maximum benefit from this magnetic relaxation following are the instructions:

“Sit in a comfortable chair, or lie down on a bed. Let go of all the tension by repeating to yourself: ‘I can now relax comfortably. I can now relax my body. I can now relax my mind easily, quickly and positively. Now I can enjoy the state of alert relaxation peacefully’. Let a feeling of soothing comfort take over. Let go of yourself totally. Feel a universal healing energy surrounding you and getting absorbed into your body and mind. Feel a cool breeze around your body. Visualize a white sparkling light pouring through your head down your body and seeping deep within you. Think that soothing and healing forces are vibrating within and radiating from you.”
Maintain a positive and peaceful state of mind during the session. Also take precautions that you are not disturbed. Tell yourself repeatedly ‘Day by day in every way I’m getting better and better’. This is a general formula that will heal you of all sickness”. Doctors also recommend it for physical and emotional well-being.

At the subconscious level, knowledge, power, wisdom, understanding to heal and to maintain perfect health are stored. It is the interference of negative suggestions that causes ill health and weakness. So whenever we feel that something is not right we need to get back onto the right track. Here is a simple set of instructions which can be absorbed into personality to raise our immunity level.

“Attuned with universal healing powers and the source of life, all my bodily organs are now becoming normal and fit: they will function perfectly to maintain excellent health, strength and vitality up to a great age”.

At the subconscious level, human personality is perfectly programmed with a survival package in the form of universal instincts that can be synchronized with conscious programmes to live in harmony. Accepting our latent instincts relieves us of half of our health problems. We are always receptive to suggestions that transpire from the conscious part of personality. So we need to entertain creative, positive, pleasant, peaceful and productive thoughts. As we repeat these positive suggestions often till we feel confident, they become permanent habitual responses.

Magnetic energy plays a vital role in self-healing. The more energy we generate through eating, breathing and exercising, the longer we will live with health and happiness. Human beings do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of one’s mouth. When we speak to ourselves in positive terms we tend towards self-healing. We can build up positive statements as follows:
• I am healing my self positively
• Positive energy is keeping me healthy
• Healing myself and others is easy for me.
• Today, I am feeling better than ever before.

The magnetic self- healing schedule that follows is an invincible method that can take us to the height of perfect health, strength and happiness. After practicing it over a period of time we will find that all of our past health problems initiated and maintained by psychological factors, automatically disappear. The watch word here is consistency. All that we need to do is to read the affirmations as soon as we get up in the morning and before going to sleep. Thus we can develop the seventh sense- Fitness instinct- through reality oriented positive thinking which is bound to tone up our immune functions.

Till now the majority of behavioural studies have involved the effects of stress in laboratory animals. Studies on effects of stress however are becoming more sophisticated indicating a biphasic immune response and a dissociation of adrenal and immune responses during the course of extended exposure to “stressful” stimulation. “Stress” research remains of experimental and clinical interest and has been the subject of several papers in psychoneuroimmunology in the last few years. These data indicate that both humoral and cell mediated immune responses may be suppressed and or enhanced by a variety of environmental circumstances (Monjan & Collector, 1977; Solomon Amkraut and Kasper, 1974). Whether or not they should be classified under the rubric of “stress” the impact of psychosocial factors on immune responses is also documented by the early studies of differential housing (Solomon, 1969; Vessey, 1964) which have led to similar experiments in recent years and the studies of prenatal and early life experiences (Laudenslager et al., 1988; Solomon et al., 1968). Given the rapid growth of psychoneuroimmunology this can be expected to reawaken interest in a developmental perspective to
the behavioural modulation of immunity in terms of Central Nervous System function are those indicating that immunologic reactivity can be modified by learning.

It is important that work in this field be interpreted with great care and caution. The true importance of brain, neuroendocrine and immune system interactions in vivo remains unknown. We hope that this collection of facts may serve to bring attention to the close interrelationship of the nervous and immune systems that it may also stimulate others to explore this relationship with scientific rigour.

REFERENCES


