



Short Communication

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Meditation for Health, Happiness, and Meaning-Making

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"Meditation" in its modern sense refers to the yogic meditation that originated in India. In the late 19th century, theosophists adopted the word "meditation" to refer to various spiritual practices drawn from Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Thus, the English word meditation does not exclusively translate into any single term or concept. Meditation has been helpful to reduce stress, reduce symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as well as anxiety and depression. Meditation is an ancient practice that has been in existence for centuries, but only in the last two decades has scientific research supported its usefulness and effectiveness. This article will provide an overview of the benefits of meditation for those traumatized, as well as share its general benefits.

Through breath, meditation links our body with our heart and mind, providing emotional self-mastery and mindfulness. Mindfulness helps us practice self-love. Love is the center and the pendulum of duality swinging back and forth from positive/negative, masculine/feminine, light/darkness, yin/yang... Remember, throughout the course of existence, we have swung farther and farther into the realm of polarities.

All disciplined religions incorporate some form of meditation. Meditative quiescence is said to have a quality of healing and of enhancing creativity. The Prophet Muhammad spent sustained periods in contemplation and meditation. It was during one such period that he began to receive the revelations of the Qur'an.

There is an abundance of research studies indicating the effectiveness and usefulness of meditation for relaxation, stress reduction, cognitive decline, reduction of anxiety, and PTSD related disorders. A recent research study conducted by [1] looked at

how meditation impacted adults ages 55-90. Results showed that 8-week meditation significantly improved retrieving memories, decrease atrophy in the hippocampus, and decrease anxiety and stress.

Seventy years ago, the United Nations was founded on the principles of dignity, peace, justice and cooperation. UN's Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld stressed the relevance of these values stating: "Unless there is a spiritual renaissance, the world will know no peace." There is a special designated room for meditation at the United Nations, and Mr. Hammarskjöld, Delegates, Ambassadors and Non-Governmental Organization Representatives frequent the meditation room before important meetings.

Meditate for Peace by [2] indicated that 7000 people got together and meditated-- and global terrorism went down by 72 percent. Similarly, dramatic decreases were seen in war, fatalities and violent crime. Of course, there are always skeptics who want to argue about whether or not this is "real," the fact is that those who meditate have reported improvements in their lives.

This positive impact of meditation has been documented in numerous peer-reviewed publications, including the Journal of Offender Rehabilitation. According to several research studies, mindfulness meditation -- a practice that encourages focusing attention on the present moment -- can ease emotional stress. And evidence is mounting that mindfulness also may have key benefits for physical health from lowering blood pressure to helping curb addiction. A new study conducted by researchers working in Wisconsin, Spain, and France shows that mindfulness can even affect our genes. Specifically, the study shows that mindfulness can limit the "expression" of genes associated with inflammation.

A recent National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant proved meditation's effectiveness in generating alpha brain waves, which are relaxing and conducive to the sleep state. When our mind is tranquil and serene, our body then follows the mind's lead and relaxes, thereby releasing fears and creating a metabolic state that is tranquil and pure consciousness. This state is not only free of fear and pessimism, it's also a more optimistic state that heightens problem-solving skills and promotes an expanded view of the world in which we live and our role in it. A review of scientific studies identified relaxation, concentration, an altered state of awareness while suspending logical thought, and the maintenance of a self-observing attitude as the behavioral components of meditation; this mode is accompanied by a host of biochemical and physical changes in the body that alter metabolism and decrease heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and brain chemistry. Meditation has been used in clinical settings as a method of stress and pain reduction [3]. Meditation has also been used to reduce stress.

According to the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), which included a comprehensive survey on the use of complementary health approaches by Americans, 17.7 percent of American adults had used a dietary supplement other than vitamins and minerals in the past year. These products were the most popular complementary health approach in the survey. Approximately 8% used meditation.

Meditation is used widely for traumatized individuals. ATOP Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Teams have used meditation in over 45 countries around the world with great success, meditators stating: "I came in with a headache and after the meditation my headache is gone," "I had a pressure in my chest, feeling short of breath from my trauma, now after the meditation I feel the pressure is released," exemplified some of the responses.

Research conducted with veterans' to address the levels of PTSD. Interventions included yoga [4], meditation and mindfulness based cognitive therapy [5]. Results indicated a statistically significant reduction of stress and anxiety (Stoller et al. 2012), daytime dysfunction and Hyperarousal (Staples et al, 2013), decrease of depression [6].

Meditation has been integral in all deliberations in the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) at Meaningfulworld. Meditation is utilized at the beginning and end of all our monthly training and empowerment programs as well as at all of our humanitarian global outreach projects in more than 45 countries. Although most religions incorporate some form of meditation, at ATOP Meaningfulworld we focus on the healing and integrative aspects of meditation and its mind-body-eco-spirit effect, and therefore, it is not based on any religious foundation.

ATOP integrates meditation in the final stage of the seven-step healing framework, in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model (Biopsychosocial and Eco-Spiritual Model). At ATOP Meaningfulworld we use meditation to reduce stress in the central

nervous system (CNS) and to strengthen the immune system. Our mind wanders and moves inward and outward like a pendulum: When we are able to relax the CNS, we are relaxing our mind. Of course, relaxation is challenging for many individuals, since we live in a culture that over-identifies with production and volume of doing, rather than being mindful and conscious.

Breath is the foundation and center of any meditation. This is very essential for traumatized people, when they experience shallow chest breathing, and shortness of breath. Based on the fight-freeze-flight protection system, our past traumatic history may have inhibited complete expression of our breath. When we start breathing deeply, diaphragmatically, or through our belly, we bring the breath below the chest and lungs, we are able to heal the remaining suffering of old trauma, we are empowered – we establish a healthy distance between the traumatic memory and its effect on our emotions and our physical body [7-9].

Meditation also helps us ignite the fire within, activating our passion and love for humanity and Mother Earth. In order to create fire, we need two things: oxygen and fuel. Oxygen intake and distribution improves with meditation. Oxygen helps us expand our thoughts, concentrate on the important, and relax the joints, muscles, and all of our internal organs. The fuel is our passion and commitment to serve ourselves, our families, and the human family at large.

Acknowledgment

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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