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Meditation a Means of Holistic Approach to Health

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Abstract

Significance of the present study refers to the lack of required awareness about holistic approach to health from the spiritual perspective. Health benefits are brought about by the changes in brainwave activity during meditation. Soul together with its qualities like happiness etc. mind and objects of the mind are all located in the heart. *Heartfulness* Meditation can be considered as one of the best ways to relax, reduce anxiety, improve memory, even increase compassion and patience, thereby promoting a holistic approach to health.

Key words: Health, Heart, *Heartfulness*, Meditation

Introduction

The practice of meditation has become increasingly popular all over the world in the last few decades. Positive physiological and psychological changes following meditation are supported by a number of research studies[1]. Meditation is also recognized as a specific consciousness state in which deep relaxation and increased internalized attention exist at the same time[2].

Meditation may be defined as the continuous thinking of something, or about something. In a sense, therefore, anybody who is thinking continuously of something may be said to be involved in meditation. Ancient teachers, both in the East and the West, have taught that as one meditates so one becomes. It therefore follows that what we meditate upon we get or become and, inversing this formula, if we want to become something we must meditate upon that and nothing else. Therefore if our aim is Realization or the attainment of one-ness with the Ultimate, the object of meditation must be that Ultimate and nothing else.

Aspect of the significance of the present study refers to the lack of required awareness about holistic approach to health from the spiritual perspective. It has been suggested that the rate of mental and physical health related problems are increasing and hence such a kind of study among today's population is more relevant because not much information exists at this end due to meager study on the subject[3]. Meditation is currently considered to be associated with increased awareness. Meditation was described early on as training in awareness, which when practiced for some time leads to changes in perception, attention, and cognition. Further it is said that, meditation has been defined as training in awareness, which when practiced over a period of time produces definite changes in perception, attention and cognition[4].

Review of Āyurveda literature

Definition of health and disease as per Āyurveda

He, in whom, the *doṣa*, *agni* (digestive fire), *dhātu* (tissues) and *mala* (waste products) and their activities are normal; his soul *(ātma)*, sense organs*(endriya)* and mind *(manāḥ)* are calm/clear, is called '*Svastha*' (healthy person)[5].

*Āyurveda*in general seems to have given paramount importance to mental health specifically related to moral living following hygiene both mental and physical thereby helping to achieve the goal.

Any disturbance in the equilibrium of *dhātu* is known as disease and on the other hand the state of their equilibrium is health. Health and disease are also defined as pleasure and pain respectively[6]. On the same topic *Suśruta* states,

Diseases are defined as those which on conjunction cause pain. *Dalhana* has commented on the above verse, '*tad*' indicates person in context; *dukha* – pain pertaining to body, speech and mind[7].

Physiologically, these health benefits are brought about by the changes in brainwave activity during meditation. There are five brain waves frequencies: Gamma, Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta. Though once only anecdotal, the positive effects of meditation have been known by *yoga* practitioners, pray circles and new age thought enthusiasts. But are now been backed up by science and modern technology! MRI scans verify that changes in brain chemistry occur as a result of meditation. For example, anxiety and panic attacks have been linked with high beta waves, while alpha waves are associated with a more calm and relaxed state. Constant thinking and analyzing increase beta waves, while creativity, imagination and play decrease beta waves. The act of meditating has even been proven to reduce pain simply by focusing on removing the discomfort from the body. Too little gamma waves can cause Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression, and by practicing meditation you can increase gamma waves[8].

Control or direction of sense faculties and self-restraint constitute the action of the mind. Even the restraint of the mind is possible only with the help of the mind. As it has been said, "the mind, if combined with other qualities does dissociate itself with the objects of its indulgence". It has further

been stated that the mind being always directed towards its objects, cannot be taken away from the undesirable objects without patience. Patience alone is capable of controlling, the mind. Here, patience is the instrument by means of which the mind controls itself[9]. Meditation is the means to develop patience.

Concept of heart as per Ayurved[10]:

Two upper limbs, two lower limbs, trunk and head, other viscera, consciousness, sense faculties, five objects of senses, soul together with its qualities like happiness etc. mind and objects of the mind are all located in the heart.

It is significant to note that *cakrapānidatta*, has made an observation in his commentary on 30/3-4 in *sutrasthāna* of *carak saṁhitā*,

Now the question arises: "How the heart which is stated to be only of the measurement of two fingers, in breath can be a substratum for all the four limbs, trunk and head, the six sense faculties, their objects – more important of all the soul (which is omnipresent) together with consciousness, mind and its objects (which in fact represents something in the external world and not present in the heart)? The reply is that the heart is not considered to be a substratum of these elements in the sense of their being actually located there. The idea is that all these elements owe their existence to the heart as the frame work of thatch to the central girder. That is to say, it is only so long as the heart is in its normal condition that these elements also work normally and in the event of heart being injured, they are also injured.

If at all anything is actually located in the heart, it is only the soul, Consciousness & mind. It is not correct to say that the soul being omnipresent may not be located in a small place like heart. The soul represents not the universal-self but the animated self who enjoys happiness and misery. This soul together with consciousness & mind cannot but be located in the heart. That is why Consciousness, Happiness and Misery are felt only in the heart. One actually feels pain in the cardiac region & nowhere else while he is in the pensive or unhappy mood.

The heart is indispensible for all the normal mental & physical activities because the entire sense perception representing animation depends on the heart.

Discussion

The heart's bias[11]

The heart should not be simply considered a cardio-logical pump. Most traditions – secular, spiritual, atheist, literary or medical – admit to the heart's starring role in an individual's existence. The heart's intrinsic nature is goodness, and to allow this goodness to manifest in us is both simple and easy when we have a method to head the heart's guidance.

How about balancing the external conventions with a path that dedicates a bit of daily quiet time to our own heart?

Heartfulness - meditation is heeding the message of the heart. We are pre-endowed with the heart's wisdom and no one can offer that to us. The only magic wand is our interest to fortify the connection with our heart, which is user friendly and has the answerto every life situation.

"*Heartfulness* –meditation is about following the voice of the heart."

Demystifying meditation[12]

Often people ask out of curiosity, Q. "why do you meditate?" Ans. - to regulate the mind. Q." Why do you need to regulate the mind?" Ans. - to attain a state of peace. Q. "But what will we do with a regulated mind, with the stillness and calmness that exists within when we meditate?" Ans. -a lot is possible.

We can very easily differentiate between needs and wants that are supposed to be the root cause of all miseries as per Ayurved[13]

Through spiritual practice we transcend dogmas and rituals into the realm of experience and beyond. Pain, physical or mental, is sometimes inevitable. What is suffering then? Is it dwelling or brooding over pain again and again? Is suffering avoidable? What happens when we accept those painful situations? Perhaps pain remains but the suffering dissolves? When our dear ones at home have stomach ache, no doubt they go through pain and suffering, so we too in the process go through 'suffering' without the stomach ache.

Conclusion

Development and maintenance of health is one of the most fundamental aspects in spirituality for any individual. This is established in the heart and mind of men by sincere practice of *Heartfulness*-meditation through the reception of *Pranahuti* (Yogic Transmission). Thus, *Heartfulness* Meditation can be considered as one of the best ways to relax, reduce anxiety, improve memory, even increase compassion and patience, thereby promoting a holistic approach to health. From the days of yore to current days, the common thread seems to be adopting a spiritual practice of meditation for the transformation of present animalistic behavior to humanistic one, finally to become Divine.

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