

Review Article

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The Role of Buddhism Meditation in Spinal Cord Healing

Ven Sumedh Thero^{1*}, H B Kataria² and Aditiya Suman³

¹Sumedh Bhoomi Buddha Vihar, Dr Ambedkar Park, Jhansipura, Lalitpur-284403 India

²Doctor without Boundary

³RML Hospital Lucknow India

Abstract

Meditation lets you become more aware and more purposeful about your actions. It teaches you how to respond, rather than react, to situations in your life. Meditation sounds simple. But it takes discipline to remain still in body and mind. You have to block out the world around you and quiet your thoughts. You also need to practice at least 10 to 20 minutes a day to get the most out of your meditation. The benefits of meditation include: Lower blood pressure, Decreased pain, Better immune system function, Better mood and brain function. Thus there are many theories about how meditation may improve your physical and mental health. One theory is that it reduces activity of the sympathetic nervous system. This leads to a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, slower breathing, and muscle relaxation.

*Corresponding author

Ven Sumedh Thero, Sumedh Bhoomi Buddha Vihar, Dr Ambedkar Park, Jhansipura, Lalitpur-284403 India, Tel: 919415945895;
Email: vensumedh12@gmail.com

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You may not realize how much of the pain you experience with your spinal cord injury (SCI) day to day you could have complete control over. The mental component of pain is something that researchers have been analyzing for many years. It has been found through their extensive studies that “our perception of an injury can have a stronger influence on how much pain we experience than the actual tissue damage that has occurred.” It is not easy to accept that we could be making things harder for ourselves when we clearly want so badly for our condition to get better. Comfort yourself with the fact that this is human nature, something that people have learned to do and aren't aware that they can change. The key to making the appropriate mental adjustments, so that you are no longer a victim to your uncontrollable pain, is learning how to practice mindful meditation. Meditation allows those struggling with a physical disability to ignore unnecessary distractions and take control of their nervous system in a way that many wouldn't believe possible. With this newfound control, a person will suffer much less and recover quicker as a result. In order to begin this practice, one has to let go of their fear and anger and open their mind to allow themselves to accept their circumstance.

The Brain & Pain

According to Lorimer Moseley, a professor of neuroscience who studies pain, understanding exactly how pain as a system works can help people to experience less of it. The nervous system is made up of your brain, neurons, and your spinal cord. Pain neurons exist as a form of protection so you don't get too close to something that is hot or pick up something that is too heavy. The brain decides how intense of a message to send to you through pain

based on the level of danger it detects. Though the brain doesn't determine all of this, it has a very powerful influence. Therefore, if you perceive your injury in a certain way, your body will respond to this and your recovery time will be longer.

Achieving Mindfulness

Just as the brain has learned to communicate pain signals to you based on the level of danger, it can also be trained so that it doesn't send more signals than are necessary. Being able to control this is being able to achieve mindfulness. This can ultimately help with achieving recovery by: changing your perception of your circumstance and allowing you to see the truth of the situation rather than being led by your emotions. You will be able to see and accept the reality of your injury and notice how much of your pain is coming from your fear. With this awareness you can use your mind to focus on what is important rather than being distracted by your worries. Helping your nervous system to calm which will stop all of the “fight or flight” reactions you impose on your body when communicating that something is wrong.

The Practice

Here are the steps you can take when you feel overwhelmed and notice yourself starting to panic.

First: Focus on your breathe. Inhale through your nose and out of your mouth. Changing the way you breathe communicates to the nervous system that it can relax the muscles, slow down the heart rate, stop producing pain hormones, and produce relaxation hormones instead.

Next: Start to observe where the most intense pain is coming from. Examine this pain neutrally, completely from a studious perspective.

Last: Change your label for this sensation from pain, which has

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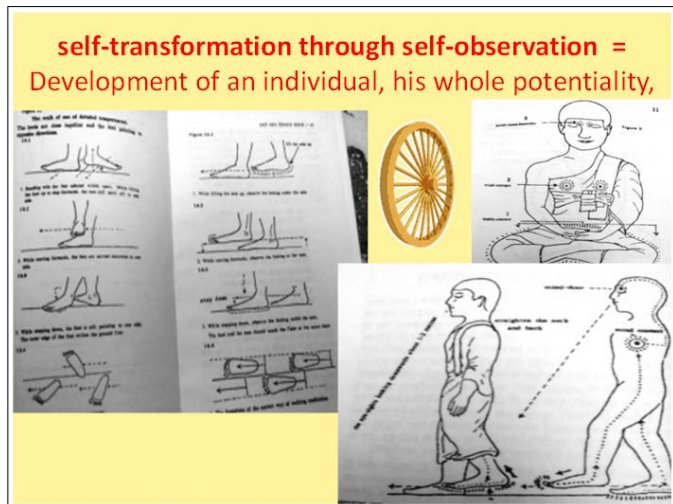
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("emptiness") Tibetan visualizations, Kamalashila (2003) [5].

paralysis is a step in the right direction."

The Power of Meditation

mental and physical health.

the means to redirect it.

react, to situations in your life.

20 minutes a day to get the most out of your meditation.

treatment for many conditions.

and muscle relaxation.

Mindfulness Meditation

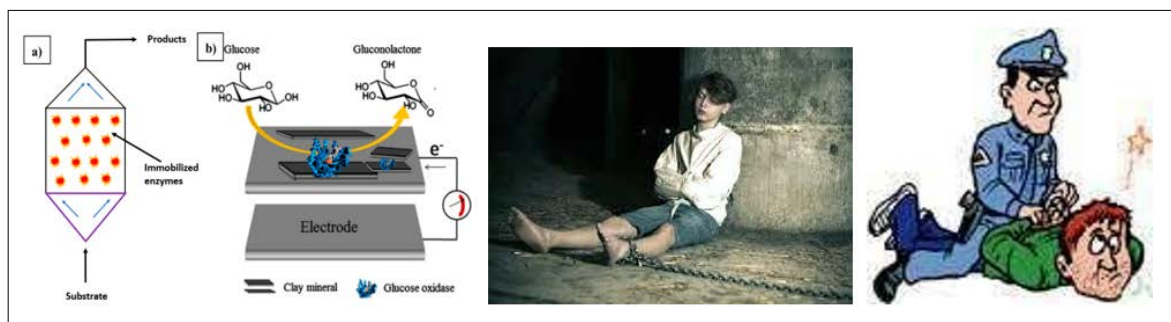
Find a quiet place with few distractions. Sit in a chair or on the floor.

Be aware of your breathing and focus on the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall and the air enter your nostrils and leave your mouth.

Watch every thought come and go. When thoughts come up, don't hold them back. Simply note them and return to your breathing.

As the time comes to a close, sit for 1 or 2 minutes, becoming aware of where you are. Get up slowly.

For best results, try to meditate every day for 20 to 30 minutes.



Moving Meditation

Fitting an extra 20 to 30 minutes of meditation into your already busy day may be hard. Another option is to try a form of exercise that combines fitness with meditation. These include:

Yoga: This focuses on breathing, movement, and posture to help you relax and control stress.

Tai chi: This form of meditation combines slow, gentle movements and deep breathing.

Walking meditation. With this method, you slow down your walk. Then you can focus on your steps and the movement of your legs and feet.

Not taking the effort to do so will disturb the mind which in turn disturbs the brain and subsequently the body. Because what we humans possess is not just a body, it's brain instructed body. All secretions in your body are controlled by one powerful machine seated at the top of your body, your brain. The real muscle for humans is a well-functioning brain.

Importance of Cerebrospinal Fluid

To express one's knowledge and for any successful action, one's brain and spine are of prime importance. And apart from other factors that maintain the functions of these two organs, they also need protection. Brain and spine are protected by the cerebrospinal fluid or CSF. This fluid protects the brain within the skull and cushions the spine. It also provides nutrients to the brain and eliminates toxins from it. In spirituality CSF is called as the 'sacred secretion', the fluid that initiates an alchemy of transformation. For cerebrospinal fluid secretion to be at its fullest, one needs no exercise but calmness. This calmness of mind can be easily achieved only through one condition, and that is meditation or atma-dhyana. Meditation isn't about miraculous experiences but through meditation one can bring essential changes required for good health and great experiences in life.

You might see no reason to meditate or get involved in spirituality, but ask yourself 'What is it that keeps CSF secretion undisturbed?' The answer is 'happiness' or 'Satchitanandam'. And how can one be happy all the time? You can be happy by being free of fear, doubts, worries and anger. This effort has to be taken within you and not outside of you. The second secret to happiness is thankfulness. To receive what you want in life, first be happy and thankful for what you already possess. This gratitude itself initiates changes in the body and will naturally deliver you circumstances and consequences that you expect to experience in life. Meditation is what helps create the condition to maintain this state of happiness. One needs a good life and to be the source of a good life for others, your happiness is the only requirement. It might be difficult to find happiness within oneself, but it is impossible to find it anywhere else.

You Have the Power to Shape Your Life

Let's realise the truth that our health, happiness, brain and CSF (which is necessary to maintain the health of the brain) are interlinked with meditation. Meditation is the physical requirement to experience the non-physical powers beyond consciousness, also called as vinyana bhairav. And the process to achieve this state is vinyana bhairav tantra.



Always remember that your life is your own creation and everybody has got the power to shape their own life. To hold that power, what is important is the brain power within the body, which once lost is very difficult to regain. This is not just a mere truth about our health, it's the ultimate reality if you want to take complete control over your personal and professional lives and achieve success from now and forever. Only if the brain is healthy, one will have the power to meditate and only by meditation, one can receive the power to prevent themselves from negative karma and create a life you really want to live. Wishing you a life full of peace, health and happiness and above all success in every aspect of life. A pilot study suggests that sleep paralysis can possibly be treated with a unique combination of meditation-relaxation. Sleep paralysis is a condition thought to explain a number of mysterious experiences including alleged cases of alien abduction and demonic night-time visits. The study was published in the journal *Frontiers in Neurology*. Sleep paralysis is a state involving paralysis of the skeletal muscles that occurs at the onset of sleep or just before waking. While temporarily immobilised, the individual is acutely aware of their surroundings. People who experience the phenomenon often report being terrorised by dangerous bedroom intruders, often reaching for supernatural explanations such as ghosts, demons and even alien abduction - to make somebody feel frightened by using or threatening to use violence against him/her. Unsurprisingly, it can be a terrifying experience.



As many as one in five people experiences sleep paralysis, which may be triggered by sleep deprivation, and is more frequent in psychiatric conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder. It is also common in narcolepsy, a sleep disorder involving excessive daytime sleepiness and sudden loss of muscle control. Despite the condition being known about for some time, to date, there are no empirically-based treatments or published clinical trials for the condition. A team of researchers report a pilot study of meditation-relaxation therapy involving 10 patients with narcolepsy, all of whom experience sleep paralysis. The therapy was originally developed by Dr Baland Jalal from the Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge. The current study was led by Dr Jalal and conducted in collaboration with Dr Giuseppe Plazzi's group at the Department of Biomedical and Neuromotor Sciences, University of Bologna/IRCCS Istituto delle Scienze Neurologiche di Bologna, Italy.

The Therapy Teaches Patients to follow Four Steps during an Episode:

1. Reappraisal of the meaning of the attack - reminding themselves that the experience is common, benign, and temporary and that the hallucinations are a typical by-product of dreaming.
2. Psychological and emotional distancing - reminding themselves that there is no reason to be afraid or worried and that fear and worry will only make the episode worse.
3. Inward focused-attention meditation - focusing their attention inward on an emotionally-involving, positive object (such as a memory of a loved one or event, a hymn/prayer, God).
4. Muscle relaxation - relaxing their muscles, avoiding controlling their breathing and under no circumstances attempting to move.



Participants were instructed to keep a daily journal for four weeks to assess sleep paralysis occurrence, duration and emotions. Overall, among the 10 patients, two-thirds of cases (66%) reported hallucinations, often upon awakening from sleep (51%), and less frequently upon falling asleep (14%) as rated during the first four weeks. After the four weeks, six participants completed mood/anxiety questionnaires and were taught the therapy techniques and instructed to rehearse these during ordinary wakefulness, twice a week for 15 min. The treatment lasted eight weeks.

In the first four weeks of the study, participants in the meditation-relaxation group experienced sleep paralysis on average 14 times

over 11 days. The reported disturbance caused by their sleep paralysis hallucinations was 7.3 (rated on a ten-point scale with higher scores indicating greater severity). In the final month of the therapy, the number of days with sleep paralysis fell to 5.5 (down 50%) and the total number of episodes fell to 6.5 (down 54%). There was also a notable tendency towards reductions in the disturbance caused by hallucinations with ratings dropping from 7.3 to 4.8.

A control group of four participants followed the same procedure, except participants engaged in deep breathing instead of the therapy - taking slow deep breaths, while repeatedly counting from one to

ten. In the control group, the number of days with sleep paralysis (4.3 per month at the start) was unchanged, as well as their total number of episodes (4.5 per month initially). The disturbance caused by hallucinations was likewise unchanged (rated 4 during the first four weeks). "Although our study only involved a small number of patients, we can be cautiously optimistic of its success," said Dr Jalal. "Meditation-relaxation therapy led to a dramatic fall in the number of times patients experienced sleep paralysis, and when they did, they tended to find the notoriously terrorising hallucinations less disturbing. Experiencing less of something as disturbing as sleep paralysis is a step in the right direction." If the researchers are able to replicate their findings in a larger number of people - including those from the general population, not affected by narcolepsy - then this could offer a relatively simple treatment that could be delivered online or via a smartphone to help patients cope with the condition. "I know first-hand how terrifying sleep paralysis can be, having experienced it many times myself," said Dr Jalal. "But for some people, the fear that it can instil in them can be extremely unpleasant, and going to bed, which should be a relaxing experience, can become fraught with terror. This is what motivated me to devise this intervention."

References

1. Thanissaro (2006) The Pali and Sanskrit word *bhāvanā* literally means "development" as in "mental development." For the association of this term with "meditation." Epstein (1995), p. 105; and, Fischer-Schreiber et al. (1991), p. 20. As an example from a well-known discourse of the Pāli Canon, in "The Greater Exhortation to Rahula" (Maha-Rahulovada Sutta, MN 62), Sariputta tells Rahula (in Pali, based on VRI, n.d.): *ānāp ānassatim, rāhula, bhāvanam bhāvehi*. Thanissaro (2006) translates this as: "Rahula, develop the meditation [*bhāvana*] of mindfulness of in-&-out breathing." (Square-bracketed Pali word included based on Thanissaro, 2006, end note.)
2. Rhys Davids & Stede (1921-25), entry for "*jhāna*"; Thanissaro (1997); as well as, Kapleau (1989), p. 385, for the derivation of the word "zen" from Sanskrit "*dhyāna*." PTS Secretary Dr. Rupert Gethin, in describing the activities of wandering ascetics contemporaneous with the Buddha, wrote: "[T]here is the cultivation of meditative and contemplative techniques aimed at producing what might, for the lack of a suitable technical term in English, be referred to as 'altered states of consciousness'. In the technical vocabulary of Indian religious texts, such states come to be termed 'meditations' (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*, Pali: *jhāna*) or 'concentrations' (*samādhi*); the attainment of such states of consciousness was generally regarded as bringing the practitioner to deeper knowledge and experience of the nature of the world." (Gethin, 1998, p. 10.)
3. Kamalashila (2003) states that Buddhist meditation "includes any method of meditation that has awakening as its ultimate aim 4-pp. * Bodhi (1999) To arrive at the experiential realization of the truths it is necessary to take up the practice of meditation [...] At the climax of such contemplation the mental eye [...] shifts its focus to the unconditioned state, Nibbana. * Fischer-Schreiber (1991) Meditation – general term for a multitude of religious practices, often quite different in method, but all having the same goal: to bring the consciousness of the practitioner to a state in which he can come to an experience of 'awakening,' 'liberation,' 'enlightenment. 142-pp. * Kamalashila (2003) further allows that some Buddhist meditations are "of a more preparatory nature 4-pp.
4. Goldstein (2003) there are more than fifty different practices outlined in this Sutta. The meditations that derive from these

foundations of mindfulness are called *vipassana* [...] and in one form or another – and by whatever name – are found in all the major Buddhist traditions. the forty concentrative meditation subjects refer to Visuddhimagga's oft-referenced enumeration 92-pp.

5. Tibetan visualizations, Kamalashila (2003) The Tara meditation [...] is one example out of thousands of subjects for visualization meditation, each one arising out of some meditator's visionary experience of enlightened qualities, seen in the form of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. 227-pp.

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