

Buddhist Meditation: An Effective Response To Healthy Living

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Humanity is currently witnessing that a material world is going up but human morality is going down in a bad way, a world full of uncertainty in many areas. And, all these phenomena are related to the mind or consciousness.

Consciousness, the subject of the action, is a special form of energy of the universe. When present in human being it gives us awareness, sense of the world. However, its activities are unfathomable, like a kaleidoscope of colour.

It is this consciousness (Pali: *Gandhabba*) which combines father's sperm with mother's ovule to create a new life as an embryo¹. Then from here into fetal development, it starts living a life. Then this creature will undergo a process: birth – growth - age - death. After death, the body disintegrates and the mind continues the journey with a new combination, and again and again. Like the law of conservation of energy:

“In physics, the **law of conservation of energy** states that the

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1. “Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving,” *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. 1, PTS, 2007.

total energy of an isolated system cannot change—it is said to be *conserved* over time. Energy can be neither created nor destroyed, but can change form.”²

Ālayavijñāna³ or eighth consciousness is seen as a warehouse which stores data or information. It is the source of knowledge from which all things and phenomena of the world are reflected and manifested by the subjective illusion created by ignorance. The seperable information from the five senses - eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body - is combined by the sixth consciousness and molded to produce an apparent cognition about the whole world. The eyes only see the picture but can not hear sound, similarly to the ear, nose, tongue, body. And the sixth consciousness knowing all the objects of the five previous senses. Thus, this knowing is not directly but indirectly of the world (Sanskrit: *Pravṛtti-vijñāna*) and is subjective as created by the seventh consciousness (Sanskrit: *Klisto-manovijñāna*).

This seventh consciousness considers Ālayavijñāna as a metaphysical person, confusing that the mind, the body is *Self* as subject of recognition (Sanskrit: *darśana-bhāga*) and the material world or phenomenon is object recognized (Sanskrit: *nimitta-bhāga*). And this discrimination of subject – object may have created the internal conflict, creating a chain of comparative psychological consequences, e.g. winnings - losing, good - bad..., and from this creates craving, hatred, despair... The seventh consciousness confuses itself by ignorance and confusion, sees the artifacts of its own unreality as real things. Most people are living with and affected by this illusory world.

Consciousness in general is interactive, interdependent or discrimination (Sanskrit: *paratantra*). For example, when connected with material shape eye creates visual -consciousness. Then this visual - consciousness creates touch, touch creates feeling, feeling creates perception, perception creates reasoning, reasoning creates obsessions and perceptions as follows:

2. “Conservation of Energy,” <http://en.wikipedia.org>

3. W. M. McGOVERN, *An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism*, Varanasi, 1968, pp. 89-95.

Eye + material shape > Visual consciousness > sensory impingement > feeling > perception > reasoning > the assault of a number of obsessions and perceptions.⁴

Consciousness creates perceptions. There are two types of perceptions: a) Hallucinations (Sanskrit: *parikalpita*) and b) Reality (Sanskrit: *pariniṣpanna*). It is the seventh consciousness which distinguishes, asserting that the “self / me” exists and from this illusions come. If on the contrary, one does not cling to “self / me” there would be no illusions and perception is true then.

Ālayavijñāna is considered as subconsciousness, where all types of consciousness arise and it works like a stream flowing restlessly (Sanskrit: *paratantra*); it is said that mind is compared to gibbon, and mental consciousness to horse. Under the influence of ignorance it will create negative sentiment. But with awareness / awakening this flow stops immediately.

And, let’s know the following wonderful experiment:

“The Self is a trick of the mind

Brain scientists have succeeded in fooling people into thinking they are inside the body of another person or a plastic dummy.

The out-of-body experience - which is surprisingly easy to induce - will help researchers to understand how the human brain constructs a sense of physical self. The research may also lead to practical applications such as more intuitive remote control of robots, treatments for phantom limb pain in amputee patients and possible treatments for anorexia.

The research follows a related study from the same group last year in which the scientists convinced volunteers that they were having an out-of-body experience. It was the first time it had been done in the lab and showed that the intensely spiritual experiences that patients sometimes have while on the operating table, for instance, can have a scientific explanation.

4. “The Honey-ball,” *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. 1, PTS, 2007.

“We are interested in how normal perception works, how we recognise our own body. And we do that by studying these perceptual illusions,” said Dr Henrik Ehrsson at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. “Critically it depends on the visual perspective and the so-called multisensory integration or the combination of visual signals and tactile signals.”

In the new study Ehrsson and his colleague, Valeria Petkova, attached two cameras to the head of a dummy. These were hooked up to two small screens placed in front of their subjects’ eyes. This gave the illusion that the person was looking through the mannequin’s eyes. For example, when they looked down they saw the dummy’s body and not their own.

To create the illusion of occupying the dummy’s body, the team stroked the abdomen of the subject and the dummy at the same time while the subject watched the stroking via the cameras on the dummy’s head. As a result, subjects reported a strong feeling that the dummy’s body was their own. The technique is similar to the “rubber hand illusion”, in which a subject can be convinced that a rubber hand is his or her own, but this is the first time the illusion has been extended to a whole body.

The illusion was so convincing that when the researchers threatened the dummy with a knife they recorded an increase in the subject’s skin conductance response - the indicator of stress that polygraph lie detector tests rely on. “This shows how easy it is to change the brain’s perception of the physical self,” said Ehrsson, who led the project. “By manipulating sensory impressions, it’s possible to fool the self not only out of its body but into other bodies too.”

Things got even weirder when the researchers dispensed with the dummy and put the cameras on the head of another person. After carrying out the same double stroking routine the subjects were convinced that they were occupying another person’s body. The illusion persisted even when the other person came over and shook the subject’s hand, producing the sensation of the subject feeling as if they were shaking hands with themselves.

The researchers plan to use the out-of-body illusion to try to treat amputee patients that experience phantom limb pain in the arm or leg they have lost. “We have begun to realise that there could be a link between pain perception and the feeling of ownership of the body,” said Ehrsson.

Another potential angle for research is body image in patients with anorexia. These people become obsessed with reducing their own weight even when they become dangerously thin. “Possibly this approach could be used for new diagnostic tools and maybe therapeutic tools to train people better to recognise their actual body size,” he said.

Another application is in remotely operated robots, for example in nuclear power plants or surgery. “The hope is to elicit a full-blown illusion that you are the robot,” said Ehrsson.”⁵

SOLUTION: BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Human activities are often driven by emotions of the heart and mind of the head. Most feelings are grief. And conflicts often occur in the head, only to find out the logic can cure the head. But it ought to combine the head and heart to control mind. For this it should have a method to train the mind. Scientists also showed that 70% of human disease come from the mental illness, the remaining 30 % from gene, body, environment...⁶ And there exists a method of training mind, i.e. Buddhist meditation.

The base of meditation is concentration. When the mind is focused on an object, it creates an inner strength as a shining headlight, making all things visible (awareness), while it inhibits and makes the rest cortex of resting, serene. Human mind is usually wandering, imagining, chasing evil desires and cause unfortunate consequences in ethic, law... There are various kinds of meditation, but there is one simple but effective, which is: Contemplating breath. He sits quietly,

5. “Body swap research shows that self is a trick of the mind,” *The Guardian*, Wednesday 3 December 2008

6. The *Tuổi trẻ*, Thursday, Dec. 04, 2008.

keeping backbone straight, closing eyes and noticing breath in and out. This breath is going in, he clearly knows it; the breath is going out, so does he clearly know. While so doing, if there are pictures, memories, thoughts, feelings, whether they are good or bad, happy or sad, he did not notice, bother or criticize. After a long time or quickly, depending on the efforts, result of training the mind correctly comes sooner or later as he felt his mind and body better than before, no dreams, anxiety & affliction on the decrease, fun, focusing on the work naturally. A method of training mind as such will eventually create a new conditioned psychological reflex which gradually replaces the old bad habits.

Meditation has two parts: concentration and contemplation. We can apply alternating both of them while meditating. If only concentrating is easily leading to sleep; on the contrary, contemplating to scatter.

- Concentration is stopping the wandering mind or awareness of breath in, breath out. There are two ways dwelling on breathing: a) knowing the breath on a straight line from the nose to the lower abdomen, or b) explicitly knowing a point between two pipes of nose that breath going through. At first, people often count the rhythm of breath from 01 to 10, then again and again. The counting breathing help practitioners easily concentrate and avoid 2 obstacles, i.e., sleep and scatter. Whilst such abiding the mind, if there are any phenomena as shadows, emotions, memories, anxiety... coming to one person then let them appear naturally, not suppress them, do not praise or criticize them and return to dwell on counting breath. Such training mind or concentration will lead the mind to deep tranquillity and free one's mind (from the negative psychology).

- Contemplation means analysis or absorbs the sense of 16 subjects: 4 subjects relating to body, 4 subjects to feelings, 4 subjects to mind and 4 subjects to things⁷. Such contemplation helps practitioners see the impermanent nature, birth and death, fragile things as holding a melting ice cubes. Therefore practitioners, who abstain from, not

7. "Discourse on Mindfulness when Breathing in and out," *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. 3, PTS, 1999.

craving or grasping everything in the world, accomplish deliverance (from negative views).

Therefore, be mindful / aware of the trick world, overcome covetousness – dejection in the world, and practice Buddhist Meditation.