

Meditation, Health and Well Being

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Abstract

Meditation is a supplement for treatments of various diseases, for if one has a strong will power, they are able to combat diseases more effectively. Buddhism imparts that ignorance is the origin of the three mental poisons: desire (Doed-chag), aggressiveness or hatred (Zhel-dang), and mental darkness or delusion (Ti-mug). These three mental poisons will produce the three pathogenic agents-air (rLung), bile (mKhrispa) and phlegm (Bad-kan), which are the origin of diseases. It is believed that the three humours should be balanced to have a good health. This can be achieved through the constant practice of meditation. One is able to build a calm mind and healthy body which is the basic aspiration of sentient beings. In this modern struggle, where most individuals are in the quest of fulfilling unlimited wants and desires, most people are unhappy, depressed and anxiety are the most common problems people face today. However, it is proven that meditation and mindfulness practice plays a vital role in improving the health of many. Many modern doctors have now proven that meditation help people manage symptoms of anxiety, depression, cancer and high blood pressure. While there are many forms of meditational practices, one can start with the basic meditational practice of adopting the seven point of meditational posture following Buddha Vairocana. One can practice and see, how few minutes of constant practice of meditation can change lives for better.

Introduction

Traditional medicine in Bhutan is called as *gSo-ba Rig-pa* where Buddhism is the heart of Traditional Medicine where people pray to the Medicinal Buddha, “Sangay Menlha” for healing. Sangay Menlha, is represented by his blue body.

His right hands hold out the Terminalia Chebula(Aru), which is believed to cure all illnesses, as a gift. In his left hand is a bowl of ambrosia, the elixir of immortality. Buddhism teaches that ignorance is the origin of the three mental poisons: desire (Doed-chag), aggressiveness or hatred (Zhel-dang), and mental darkness or delusion (Ti-mug). These three mental poisons will produce the three pathogenic agents- air (rLung), bile (mKhrispa) and phlegm (Bad-kan), which are the origin of diseases. Today, Traditional Medicine(TM) is integrated with the modern medicine whereby each TM unit is a part of district hospitals and Basic Health Units (BHUs). Cross referrals of patients and mutual consultations are carried out between the two medical systems. The two complement each other in treating the patients.

In this fast changing modern world, people are stressed and sick fulfilling their daily needs and demands. People are busier today and having to sustain both personal and work life, some find it hard to live a balanced life. More people are stressed and live with frustration. This directly affects the health and well-being of the people. While both modern and traditional health care are dealing with giving healthy lives, on a spiritual level, meditation has proven to provide peace and contentment to the mind and good health to the body. People seem to be very busy to stop and to meditate even for a while. However, even a few minutes of meditation constantly helps in making our monkey minds more calm and focused. Most of the modern lifestyle today contribute in the elevation of stress and anxiety in individuals. Therefore, learning to meditate will help reduce stress in our daily lives and help build healthy lives.

Meditation and Traditional Medicine

Everything in the universe - plants, animals, and human beings including all our body tissues, internal organs, skin, skeletal system and even emotions, are composed of five elements - earth, fire, water, air, and space. Therefore, in

traditional medicinal system, the diseases are based on three elements of the body, i.e Air, Bile and Phlegm (Three Humours) commonly known as rLung, mKhrispaand Bad-kan respectively. rLung (air) helps in respiration and movement of organs such as intestine, lungs, heart and blood vessels. It also controls bodily movement, and is the humour most directly related to mind. It is always involved in mental or emotional illness. Thrip (bile) arouses appetite and helps in digesting and maintaining body temperature. Badkan (Phelgm) helps maintain a healthy body and controls the body's physical stability. It is also responsible for movement of joints and muscles. It is believed that when these three elements are in balance, they help in maintaining good health in a person. The most common methods of treatment and therapy used in the traditional hospitals are golden and silver needle insertion, bloodletting, herbal steam and bath, cupping, moxabustion and massage. However, these methods of treatment can be supplemented by the practice of meditation for building better health.

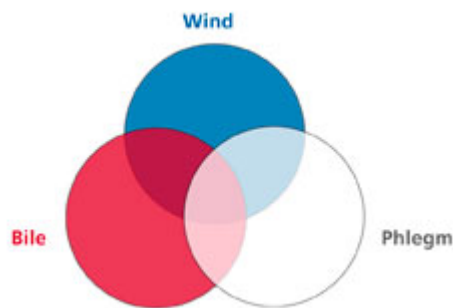


Image showing the balanced humours for good health

Today, people worry a lot about what happened in the past, worry a lot about what will happen in the future. In this process, people really forget to live in the present and enjoy the beautiful things life has to offer. For instance, in this fast demanding modern world, people are so busy earning money, while ignoring

small things, like being present for a small family gathering or even being there for your kids. Even for a small country like Bhutan, the modern trend is catching up where it is disheartening to see the rise in suicide rates among the youth and the high number of depressed adults and youths. The main reasons being unemployment, drugs, alcohol, loneliness and extra marital affairs which leaves people without a hope to live a good life. Time and again we keep hearing news of people who committed suicide and the number of depressed individuals on rise each year. This clearly indicates that even for a small country like ours, stress and anxiety are one of the growing concern. While the world at large and science in particular are working towards solving this issue to provide healthy lives. Most of the doctors now agree that **‘Meditation’** helps build calm minds which leads to happier and healthy lives.

Meditation

As Buddhists, we look up to Buddha as one of the major meditation icon. His teachings flourished far and wide across the Asian continents. Today, Buddhist meditation is gaining its popularity worldwide. Meditation has even spread to Western societies and people around the world has started practicing meditation understanding its multitude.

Meditation has been a spiritual and healing practice in most parts of the world. It has been practiced for thousands of years. The word “meditation” is known as “Gom” or “Zhi-ned” in the Bhutanese context. It is the most common form of meditation practiced not only in Bhutan but in most of the Buddhist countries. It has been termed as “mindfulness practice” in English which is observing our thoughts to come and go and to let it be as it is. Meditation was practiced for spiritual growth, enlightenment, personal transformation, or transcendental experience as their ultimate goal. Meditation is practiced in different ways. It is a mental and physical course of action that a person uses to separate themselves

from their thoughts and feelings in order to become fully aware. Meditation helps to calm our minds and frees us from mental stress. One can lead happier lives if one practices meditation constantly. It will even help us build positive thinking even in the most difficult situations. It can help provide a deep state of relaxation and a calm mind. During meditation, one needs to focus, clear the chaotic thoughts that crowd one's mind enhancing physical and emotional well-being. Gyalwa Dokhampa Rinpoche rightly states that, "We can use our mind to help calm our body, and use our body to calm our mind, especially through the breath". Meditation can be practiced while sitting, standing, walking and anywhere but since our minds are highly disorganized and easily distracted, the best to meditate would be in a quiet place. Successful meditation is not judging, it is just being aware and being at peace and to live each moment as it unfolds. From the Buddhist perspective, one of the main practice of meditation is to get rid of the three poisons: desire (Doed-chag), anger (Zhel-dang) and ignorance (Ti-mug) which are the root cause of all evils which is created by the mind. Buddhism teaches that the root of all suffering is ignorance, aversion and desire. These three poisons are depicted in the paintings of the wheel of life as pig, snake, and rooster respectively. Illness is a major suffering where in Traditional Medicine, the three humors is the root cause of all diseases and the most major root cause is the three poisons. The phlegm disorder is mainly from ignorance, bile disorder from aversion and wind disorder from desire. From the Buddhist perspective, it is very important to get rid of these three poisons in order to have a healthy life. This can be achieved from practicing meditation which will help eliminate the three poisons that arises from the mind.

From the many means to eradicate these poisons, Buddha has pointed out that right mindfulness is extremely important to be practiced where meditation plays an important role to develop a spiritual and calm environment to lead a healthy

and happy life. According to Khenpo Phuntshok Tashi (2010), “mind is like a king, speech is a minister, and the body as a retinue or attendant”. He states that the mind is the creator of all the beginnings of all actions. Thus, a calm mind will be able to attain happiness at its best. Lord Buddha has rightly said that what we think, we become. We have to learn to understand our own minds through the practice of meditation, we have to understand how it works, how attachment and desire arise, how ignorance arises and where emotions comes from. It is important to understand the true nature of all in order to achieve happiness and peace. The way we perceive things changes and we will have a positive outlook to life and all things will appear beautiful. Hence, the goal of meditation is not to control your thoughts but instead to stop letting it control you. (Lama Yeshe, 2003)

Meditation and Healthcare

In this fast changing world, there are many things beyond our control but it lies in our own hands to transform our minds for better. According to Buddhism, it teaches us to transform our monkey mind to a calm mind leading to development of concentration, clarity, emotional positivity, and a better outlook to life. Constant practice of mind trainings will lead to cultivation of calm and positive state of mind.

Meditation is all about studying deep connection between the body and mind. The mental and spiritual well-being directly affects the psychological and physical well-being. Meditation helps in maintaining well-being in this modern time where people are struggling with various psychiatric disorders mainly depression, anxiety, panic disorders, binge eating disorder and substance abuse. Many doctors and researchers today has admitted that the mind controls the body’s performance. Thus, the mind can be the cause of the disease to worsen

and it can also be a cure. Meditation helps develop the mind and body, bringing improvements to the health at the same time. Meditation can help balance the three humours and can maintain both a good mental and physical wellbeing.

Meditation is a supplement for treatments of various diseases for if one has a strong positive will, they are able to combat diseases more effectively than an individual who has less will power. Therefore, some treatments use intentions and will power, for instance, psychotherapy.

In this kind of treatment, a patient should have a clear positive mind and will power and not just depend on medicine. If a patient understands that his sickness is physical and doesn't allow it to affect his mental well-being, the patient will be cured more quickly. If the patient has a disturbed mind, then the sickness will take longer to treat. Thus, it is important to be positive, calm and clear headed while dealing with sickness. Meditation can be useful in medical conditions that can be worsened by stress. Many modern doctors have now proven that meditation help people manage symptoms of anxiety, depression, cancer and high blood pressure. It even improves mood and behavior and increases one's energy level. Thus, a person is more energetic, lively and positive.

Most of the health problems today especially even in a country as small as ours, the number of anxiety and depressed patients are on rise. Meditation as supplement to the medicines can help patients to improve emotional stability, decrease anxiety and it will help boost strong minds which will help gain clarity and peace of mind. A person who practices meditation constantly will be cured faster than the one who doesn't. It truly helps to deal with diseases since it builds confidence, it gives us the boost to tackle challenges in life. It helps us relax and

gives us the sense of calmness and stability to lead a happy balanced life in terms of physical, spiritual, mental and social well-being.

Types of Meditation

There are wide range of meditation techniques practiced by different religions and different countries. However, there are two main categories that are commonly practiced. They are concentrative meditation and mindfulness meditation. While the former focuses the attention on breath, an image or a sound, in order to calm the mind, sitting and concentrating on the dynamics of breathing is concentrative meditation in its simplest form. Observing one's breath going in and out will eventually lead to being aware. Mindfulness meditation is to observe whatever comes and goes in the mind and without being involved and reacting to it. If it comes let it be and if it goes, let it be. This form of meditation is simply about being fully aware and present with each of your activities. It focus on being mindful of what one does or thinks during daily activities. For instance, it is important to be mindful and to present in things we do every day, like eating or walking.

Meditation Posture

We should have a good and comfortable posture to practice meditation. From The Buddhist perspective, we should follow Buddha Vairocana who is often represented sitting at the center of the mandala of the five principle Buddhas. This meditation posture helps to balance the mind and body. As often seen in Buddha statues, the legs are in crossed –legged position. This is known as the full vajra or full lotus position. Through this meditational posture, one can obtain primordial wisdom and meditational stability.

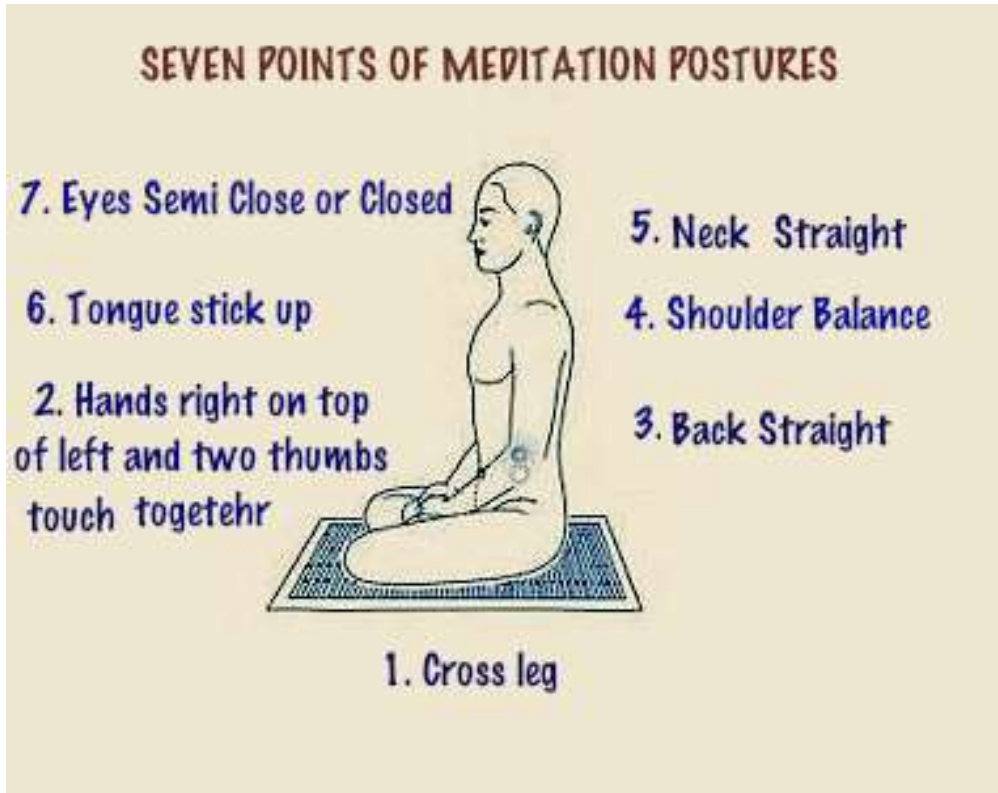


Image showing seven points of Meditation Postures Picture Courtesy: Google

First Posture: Sitting

Firstly, find a quiet comfortable place and sit on the grounds with your legs crossed with both feet resting on top of your opposite thighs, it commonly known as the ‘Lotus Pose’

Second Posture: Making sure your spines are straight

Having formed the Lotus pose, now, one has to make sure the back is straight. It is important to lift yourself up through the spine. The upright position promotes circulation to the upper body, room to breathe naturally and a sense of ease.

Third Posture: Make sure your hands are on the lap

Make sure your hands are comfortably relaxed on your lap. You can place your right hand on top of your left with your thumbs very lightly touching, resting them on your lap. This helps create more heat and energy. Symbolically, the left hand represents wisdom and the right compassion. So, it is a gesture to bring them both together.

Fourth Posture: Relax the shoulders

Relax your muscles in your shoulders and relax your back. Your shoulders can be pushed slightly back like vulture wings. This allows the breath to flow freely, gently and naturally. This creates a strong back while opening up the front body. It is a symbol of openness as we expose our heart.

Fifth Posture: Chin slightly lowered

Slightly tuck in your chin, so that you don't look directly down at your lap but you don't want your head held so far upwards for it may tire you out.

Sixth Posture: Tip of the tongue should touch the palate

Make sure your facial muscles are relaxed and your jaw hangs open. Place your tongue up against the roof of your mouth to allow for clear breathing and to slow down the swallowing process which can be distracting at times.

Seventh Posture: Resting the gaze past the tip of the nose

Relax your gaze two to four feet ahead of you on the ground, maintain a peaceful gaze. The eyes should look down towards the tip of the nose. The eyelids can be half closed or half open. In some meditational practice, the eyes are closed. While in the Buddhist context, the eyes are open to be present.

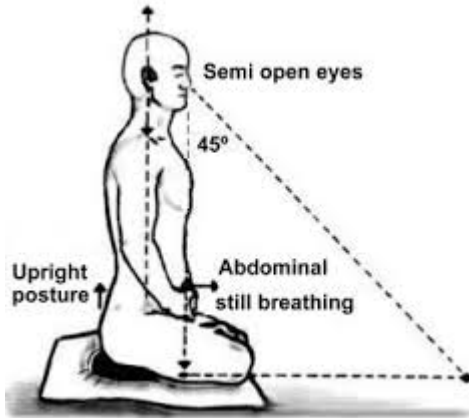


Image showing a good meditation posture

Image Courtesy: Google

One can practice the above mentioned postures to begin and practice meditation which can change lives. This position harness life energy mainly knowledge, will and action.

Conclusion

Meditation today is widely practiced for maintaining holistic health and wellness. From the medical point of view, it has proven to treat a variety of diseases more effectively. It helps people to transform themselves and to move beyond the distractions of the world and helps see the true nature of things. The very purpose of every human is to have a happy life which can be pursued through a happy state of mind. Therefore, the real source of happiness lies in the mind which can be achieved through the constant practice of meditation. From the Buddhist context, meditation not only helps eradicate the three poisons mainly desire, anger and ignorance, it also helps balance the three humours as mentioned in the paper for better health and well-being. Meditation helps individuals to be aware of the moment and helps transform our mind from a restless mind to a calm mind which is more strong and confident and mostly positive. Thus, one should start the practice of meditation to build healthier and happier lives and to help spread positivity and loving kindness to build a better world for ourselves.

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