Meditation: Its Not What You Think
The Role of Mindfulness in Stress Management

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Objectives

• To understand the nature of meditation and mindfulness
• Understand the causation of the stress response and how to cultivate its antidote: the Relaxation Response.
• Explore a more holistic approach to self care using a MindBodySpirit model.
• Review the emerging health benefits that arise from a meditation practice.
• Experience simple meditation practices that you can take home with you.
Benefits of Meditation: A MindBodySpirit Practice

• Insight into the nature of our minds and how our thoughts can lead to stress.
• Enhance body awareness and promote healing.
• Can be used to cultivate spiritual awakening.
Avera Center for MindBodySpirit

• Began in 2003
• Emphasized a holistic approach to health
• Started as an 8 week program with 2 hour classes each week
• Emphasized how stress affects our lives
• Introduced a mind-body-spirit approach for reducing stress
Avera Center for MindBodySpirit

• Basic yoga was taught to enhance body awareness
• Nutrition basics
• The important role of spirituality (one’s belief) and faith
• Understanding the role of one’s mind in health and disease: introduced the role of meditation
Health and Well-Being

Pharmaceuticals

Self-Care

Surgery and Procedures
MEDITATION

• Meditation is the practice of uncritically attempting to focus your attention on one thing at a time.
SPECIAL ISSUE

TIME

HOW YOUR MIND CAN HEAL YOUR BODY

- New ways to beat THE BLUES
- The link between MENTAL and PHYSICAL HEALTH
- Is HAPPINESS in your genes?
- Women, men and DEPRESSION
Common Meditation Myths

• The practice of meditation is an eastern religious practice.
• Meditation requires that one empties his/her mind of thoughts.
• Meditation is a form of hypnosis.
• Practicing meditation is narcissistic.
• Meditation is a practice of positive thinking.
The Nature of Mind

• For all of our sophisticated understandings about the ways of the world, we remain almost completely ignorant of how what we call “mind” is generated.
• Most people know more about how coffee is produced than how their thoughts created.
• People spend more time learning how to reprogram their VCR than learning how to understand their mental habits.

Wes Nisker, Buddha’s Nature
The Triune Brain
Your Brain—Basic Facts

• 3 pounds of tofu-like tissue containing 1.1 trillion cells, including 100 billion neurons.
• Each neuron, on average, receives about 5000 connections called synapses from other neurons.
• At its receiving synapses, a neuron gets signals—usually as a burst of chemicals called neurotransmitters—from other neurons.
Your Brain-Basic Facts

• The number of possible combinations of 100 billion neurons firing or not is approximately $10^{1,000,000}$ (or 1 followed by a million zeros).
• In principal this is the number of possible states in your brain.
• The number of atoms in the universe is estimated to be only $10^{80}$.
The Dissatisfied Mind: The Vacation Paradox

• Dissatisfaction appears to be built into the human condition….and it is apparently in the best interest of survival. The brain maintains a certain degree of unease running continuously, keeping us monitoring the world for some advantage or danger, always a little on edge and ready for action.

Wes Nisker, *Buddha’s Nature*
Brain’s Survival Strategies and Their cause of suffering

- Creating separations
- Maintaining stability
- Approaching opportunities and avoiding threats
- Everything is connected
- Everything keeps changing
- Opportunities remain unfulfilled; many threats are inescapable (e.g. aging and death)
STRESS: A Modern Epidemic or Age Old Struggle?

• A Story
• How would you define what stress is?
Definition of Stress

• The perception of a threat to my physical or psychological well-being

• And the perception that I am unable to cope with the threat
Stress is both useful and harmful

- As stress/anxiety increases, so do performance and efficiency------but not infinitely.
- At a certain level, if stress continues to increase, performance and efficiency start to decrease.
- When stress becomes chronic or excessive, it becomes distress and causes adverse responses in the mind, body, and spirit.
NEUROBIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO STRESS

Increased sympathetic nervous system activity

• Increased heart rate
• Increased blood pressure
• Accelerated rate of breathing
• Increased muscle tension
• Metabolism increases
• Increased levels of circulating stress hormones: adrenaline and cortisone.
How did I do it? I dunno, I guess the flight-or-flight mechanism kicked in and, well... in case you haven't heard, bob, I'm a penguin... we don't fly.
Hunter vs. Hunted
RESPONSE TO STRESS

- FIGHT OR FLIGHT
  Response to a sudden threat which can harm us. Also a response to sudden worry or stressful thoughts

- CHRONIC STRESS
  A more prolonged stress response; such as with chronic illness or pain
THE STRESS-REACTION CYCLE

External Stress Events
(stressors)

Perception
Appraisal

Cardiovascular
Musculoskeletal
Nervous System
Immune System

Internal Stress
Events

Stress Reaction
hypothalamus
pituitary
adrenals

acute hyperarousal
BP ↓, pulse rate ↓

Internalization:
inhibition of the stress reaction

chronic hyperarousal
HBP
arrhythmias
sleep disorders
chronic headaches, backaches
anxiety

Maladaptive Coping
self-destructive behaviors:
overworking
hyperactivity
overeating

substance dependency:
drugs
alcohol
cigarettes
caffeine
food

Breakdown
physical/psychological exhaustion
loss of drive, enthusiasm
depression
genetic predispositions
heart attack
cancer

Disregulation:
fight or flight
alarm reactivity

FIGURE 9
Our Mind and Stress

• Much of our stress and suffering comes from the way we think.
• The thoughts that usually cause stress are usually negative and distorted.
• We rarely stop to question our thoughts.
• The body does not know the difference between imagination and experience.
Stress and perception

- A story about misperception by Anthony De Mello
The Eye of the Beholder

- It is not the potential stressor itself but how you perceive or handle it that will determine whether or not it will lead to stress.
Images and Misperception

 carta com duas pessoas bebendo cerveja e falando:

"*% Obama! Now one of his liberal judges lifted the ban on gay marriages!"

"Obama opposes same sex marriages..."
Crazy Lines
Are these lines straight or crooked?
MEDITATION

- Meditation is the practice of uncritically attempting to focus your attention on one thing at a time.
TYPES OF MEDITATION

• Concentrative meditation: the most common form of meditation. A word, image, phrase, or sound is chosen that has meaning for you and then is repeated silently to yourself. Or you may choose your breathing as a focus of attention.
Types of Meditation

- Mindfulness meditation: all of your attention is focused on the present moment. You do not allow your mind to become fragmented, drifting into the future or past; rather you remain fully alert to the thoughts and experience of the present moment.
Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is practiced by paying attention on purpose, nonjudgmental, and with a welcoming and allowing attitude, moment by moment.
- Mindfulness is a basic human quality. It is the capacity for conscious presence.
- Mindfulness is an awareness that is not thinking.
Meditation

- Meditation helps us to stay in the present moment and to find a calm observing center in ourselves.
- It therefore helps us to become more aware.
- Awareness allows us to see where we are and stand for a moment outside of ourselves to observe our thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise within us.
Meditation

• Meditation therefore, is a window for us to see how our mind may limit or free us.
• Meditation allows us to become aware that we have thoughts but we are not our thoughts.
To See the Mind is to Free the Mind

• Meditators can watch the ordinary functions of the mind taking place on their own, and thus begin to develop a different relationship to their mental life.

• They can see the evolutionary roots of the mind and how much of their thinking is spun by Nature’s hand.

• The reactive thought patterns begin to have less control over them.
Beyond the Thinking Mind

• Meditation allows us to cultivate inner stillness where we can begin to separate from our thoughts. By doing this we can observe our thoughts and not always react to them. This is a principal pathway to manage the stress that is always a part of human suffering.
Instructions for Practice

• Create a quiet environment
• Establish your posture
• Adopt an object to dwell on: breath, word, prayer,
• Adopt a passive attitude toward the practice of concentration and refocusing when distracting thoughts occur.
So you see, if \( 2yz = \frac{h}{2} \), then \( y^2 = \)

"WOULD YOU ALL JUST SHUT UP?!!"

"Hey... ya wanna buy a distraction?"

"Ouch, my butt hurts."

"I want one. Waaaa..."

"YEAH, SWEET DUDE"

"Wow, what's going on in here?"
LISTENING TO THE BODY

- Pain often points to an imbalance before we can even name it.
- Fatigue points to a need to stop.
- Tears, anger, moodiness, resentment often point to unnamed and unmet HEALTHY needs.
- Emptiness and meaninglessness often point to need for spiritual renewal and reflection.

- What are my symptoms telling me?
- What is my body telling me that I need more of or less of?
Healing the Body: Meditation’s Role

- Helping us to be more mindful of the body’s symptoms
- Cultivating the Relaxation Response
Fight/Flight Response

- Metabolism increases
- Heart rate increases
- Blood pressure increases
- Breathing rate increases
- Muscle tension increases

Relaxation Response

- Metabolism decreases
- Heart rate decreases
- Blood pressure decreases
- Breathing rate decreases
- Muscle tension decreases
Benefits of Relaxation Response

- Allows stressed body to recuperate, relax
- Quiets the body and mind
- Allows for emotional distancing/stepping back
- Diminishes anxiety and fear
- Reduces pain & use of pain medications
- Increases feelings of well-being and control
- Promotes spiritual growth when combined with prayer/meditation
Instructions for Practice

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• Establish your posture
• Adopt an object to dwell on: breath, word, prayer,
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Emerging Health Benefits from Meditation

• Improved immune function
• Improved BP control in patients with HBP
• Improved attention in people with ADD
• Reduce anxiety, depression, addiction tendencies
• Improved outcome in patients with heart disease
• Helpful in chronic pain management
• Neuroplasticity: using our mind to help the brain to change
MRI images showing decrease in pain focus in meditators.
A NEW HEALTH MODEL FOR SELF CARE?

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Meditation
Meditation and Spiritual Practice

- In all the major world religious traditions, meditation is used to deepen spiritual practice. Although meditation is often associated with Eastern religions, it has been with Christianity for centuries. The practice of centering prayer is finding more popularity in the past 40 years.
New Eyes

• The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new landscapes but in having new eyes.

_Attrib: Marcel Proust. 1871-1922_
Recommended Reading

- Meditation for Beginners, by Jack Kornfield, Sounds True Press, 2004
- Why Meditate?, by Matthieu Ricard, Hay House Inc. 2010
- Practicing the Power of Now, by Eckhart Tolle, New World Library, 1999
- Full Catastrophe Living, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., Delta Press, 1991