

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

Dr. Abdul Wahab Pathath^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Aging has been viewed differently by different people. Whereas to some it means power, authority, wisdom and respect, others consider it as a forced retirement leading to a state of dependency, loss of charm and of physical strength. To most, aging implies physiological and psychosocial changes that are reflected in their reduced income, lesser activities, and consequential loss of status, both in the family and in the society. In recent past, family was looked upon as the only institution to take care of the elderly and provide both emotional and financial support to them. But changes in the living arrangements and family structure, migration of children for jobs outside, and more prominently, radical changes in the nature of people from accommodative to an independent, self-centered, and individualistic outlook with callous concern for even very near relations, have compelled many old people to live alone. It appears that the changing family structure has affected the well-being of the elderly by depriving them of the familial support of a traditional joint family set up as well as improving upon them to adjust to the changing values and norms of the younger generation. In the present century, spirituality and religion have become welcome topics for health professionals in general and for mental health professionals in particular. There is a quest to integrate religion and spirituality with human behaviour.

Keywords: *Well-being, Meditation, Institutionalized elderly, Mental Health, Mental Alertness*

Graying population is one of the most “*significant characteristics*” of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the “*twenty first century*” is known as the “*age of aging*”. Aging is the progressive decline in function and performance, which accompanies advancing years. It is the process of growing old, resulting in part from the failure of body cells to function normally or to produce new body cells to replace those that are dead or malfunctioning. Aging refers to the regular changes that occur in mature genetically representative organisms living under representative environmental conditions as they advance in chronological age.

¹ Assistant Professor, Dept Of Clinical Neurosciences, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia

*Responding Author

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

In old age, the elderly get affected due to lack of social, psychological and economic support from children who would have grown into adult hood and are in the web of fulfilling their own priorities. And due to lack any worthwhile scheme of “social insurance” and or “social assistance” these elderly would become one of the marginalized and vulnerable sections of these societies. Problems of the elderly are multi-dimensional and ever increasing in the modern era leading to a transition from rural agrarian economy to urban non-agrarian economy. In India, around four million people aged sixty and above are said to be suffering from mental illness and two third of these are diagnosed as depressed (Rao, 1988). Further a study by Patel (1997) on the mental problems of aging reveals that the chief mental problems are: mental tension, fear of death, feeling of dependence, anxiety, feeling of loneliness, feeling of helplessness, depression, feeling of uselessness and feeling of mental freedom.

It is unusual to find an elderly subject who has a physical illness but has not affected his mental and social states [1]. A sound mind can exist only in a sound body however, mental health is dependent on social harmony, family relation and sound or independent financial status. But loneliness is a deadly enemy during old age.

Psychological Well-Being

The roots of well-being can be traced from the beginning of human civilization. Since times immemorial men have prayed, “sarve sukhino bhavantu” (let all enjoy well-being). For centuries the emphasis have been on the negative aspect of well-being, emancipation from suffering – suffering from the consequences of events of actions, or suffering from the tensions of desire. Indeed any objective state of things to constitute a state of one’s well-being must be experienced by one self as satisfying. Roger’s (1959) has emphasized man’s reality is what he experiences and perceives with a certain degree of dependable predictability, and one’s satisfaction consists in the satisfaction of one’s need as experienced in the field as perceived. Well-being, however, is not merely as self based experience. It is primarily affective and is largely of the nature of a feeling and essentially a positive or pleasant feeling, a state of happiness or satisfaction. Well-being may also induced by qualities of one’s own or other’s behaviour. The sources of well-being are different in childhood, adolescence, youth, adult and old age. Well-being is also associated with the historical period in which one lives, the part of the world to which one belongs, one’s nation, country, religion, occupational group, organization and family as well as one’s own personality. People also draw a lot of well-being from those with whom they come in contact physically, socially, intellectually or otherwise.

General well-being refers to the subjective feelings of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life, experience of ones role in the world of work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness with no distress, dissatisfaction and worry, etc.” (Verma & Verma, 1989). In other words, general well-being implies hope, optimism, happiness and faith in the normal absolutes of truth, beauty and goodness, a proper perception of the means and ends related to the purpose of life and

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

more than all a realization of the value of life. General well-being is a part of the broad concept of positive mental health which is not a mere absence of disease or infirmity (Verma, 1998). Verma (1998) opines that the absence psychological ill-being / ill-health does not necessarily mean presence of psychological well-being. Most studies in the past defined "wellness" as not being sick, as an absence of anxiety, depression, or other forms of mental problems. The new conception emphasizes positive characteristics of growth and development. There are six distinct components of psychological well-being. These are:

- (a) having a positive attitude towards oneself and one's past life(self-acceptance)
- (b) having goals and objectives that give life meaning (purpose in life)
- (c) being able to manage complex demands of daily life (environmental mastery)
- (d) having a sense of continued development and self-realization (personal growth)
- (e) possessing caring and trusting ties with others (positive relations with others)
- (f) and being able to follow one's own convictions (autonomy).

Western Perspective

The work on subjective well-being or psychological well-being is carried out under the broad topic of quality of life. The concept of well-being has been defined variously by the behavioural scientist. According to Campbell and others (1976), the quality of life is a composite measure of physical, mental and social well-being. Levi (1987) defined well-being as a dynamic state of mind characterized by a reasonable amount of harmony between an individual abilities, needs and expectations and environmental needs and opportunities. The WHO has also declared health as a state of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being (WHO, 1987, carbofuran. Verma et al., 1989)

Veenhoven's (1991) definition of life satisfaction as the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of life as a whole favorably was extended to represent subjective well-being. Psychological well-being is a person's evaluative reactions to his or her life either in terms of life satisfaction 'cognitive evaluations' or affect 'ongoing emotional reactions' (Diener & Diener, 1995)

Good life can be defined in terms of "subjective well-being" (SWB) and in colloquial terms is sometimes labeled as "happiness". Nishizawa (1996) interpreted the term "psychic well-being as the same as "happiness" along with one's cognitive appraisal of how satisfying his or her life has been and is, also encompassing positive future prospect of life, "hope". Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998) stated that subjective well-being is not sufficient for the good life but it appears to be increasingly necessary for it. According to Diener (2000) "Subjective well-being refers to people's evaluations of their lives-evaluation that are both affective and cognitive. People experience abundant subjective well-being when they feel many pleasant and few unpleasant emotions, when they are engaged in interesting activities, when they are satisfied with their

lives" (p 34). The field of subjective well-being focuses on people's own evaluations of their lives.

Eastern Perspective

The concept of well-being is well illustrated in the schools of Hindu philosophy. Buddhism and Jainism represent a view of personality and describe methods for its growth into particular form of perception. Well-being is equated with the integration of personality.

Psychological well-being to the Hindu means (1) integration of emotions with the help of an integrated teacher (a spiritual master, Guru), (2) acquiring a higher philosophy of life which helps to resolve inner tensions, (3) channeling basal passion directing the emotions to ultimate reality, (4) developing an attitude whereby everything is viewed as a manifestation of ultimate reality, (5) cultivation of higher qualities which replace negative qualities, and (6) the practice of concentration (Sinha, 1965).

The concept of well-being in Indian (Hindu) thought is significantly characterized by a state of "good mind" which is peaceful, quite, and serene. The Bhagavad Gita speaks of being steady of mind (Sthitapragya) and of performing ones duties without being lustfully attached to the fruits of one's action (Karmayoga) as presenting a healthy person. The dissolution of the self or ego is considered the most evolved stage of mental health; further it is believed that the healthy mind acts but does not react and, therefore, is always watchful of the root cause of any disturbance. A mind, which is free from conflicts and hence is clear about its duties that are performed with a spiritual mission, is a mind, which enjoys well-being (Verma, 1998).

Subjective well-being is an important and relevant theme in psycho-gerontological theory and practice. Scott Ehrlich and Derek M. Isaacowitz (1999) [2] individuals vary in their levels of Subjective well-being (SWB). SWB is a measure of how good an individual feels about his or her life at a moment in time. Early research predicted that SWB was influenced by a host of socio-demographic variables that explained individual differences in SWB (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999) [3]. The literature is consistent with higher levels of less negative emotional responses in older adults. Emotional experience is included in the component of emotional response of SWB. Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade (2000) [4] explored age differences in emotional experience in adults 18 to 94 years old. This research provides another piece of converging evidence that negative affect seems to stop declining at best, and is perhaps increasing in advanced old age. Age and life satisfaction refers to the cognitive-judgmental aspect of SWB. While there is less literature on life satisfaction than on emotional response, Diener et al (1999) provide a summary of several studies on the age differences of life satisfaction. According to this summary, life satisfaction seems to stay the same, if not increase with age. This finding countered earlier conventional wisdom that older people were less satisfied because they were unhappy with their fulfilled lives as they reached the uselessness of

old age. The increase in life satisfaction with age may be attributed to a trend in greater involvement in satisfying areas of life among older cohorts. Nonetheless, there seem to be a slight increase in life satisfaction from age 20 to age 80 with negative affect held constant. Considering that life satisfaction stays the same or increases in old age. Diener et al suggests that people become better at adapting to their conditions as they get older (1999).

MEDITATION

Meditating is any technique which enables us to relax our body and our mind and, besides, to free our mind of unnecessary thoughts and brain activity. For us Meditating is not an end in itself or a special experience, but just a very efficient technique, which helps us to control our mind and to relax our body. In general any form of Meditation rests on the following three principles:

1. In order to concentrate our mind we focus on one thing or object. This focus could be our breathing, a word that we repeat, sensations in our body, or even our thoughts. When meditating we often concentrate on our senses. When we smell, feel, listen or taste we escape from our puzzling thoughts and we live again in the now.
2. When our thoughts start to wander, we take them back to our object of Meditation or focus. We do not try to hide our thoughts or suppress them. Fighting to bring rest to our mind has nothing to do with relaxing. The whole process looks like focussing a camera on an object. The object comes to the fore and all other things are present but they disappear into the background. Every time we are distracted by objects in the background we again focus on our object in the foreground. This process may be repeated an endless number of times during a Meditation session.
3. During our Meditating, we ignore all irrelevant thoughts and sensations. When we meditate, we still hear the sound of passing traffic, we still feel yesterday's hangover, we still think of the jobs we will have to do tomorrow, etc. The big difference is that these distractions do not disturb us any longer. During our Meditation, we try not to judge, not to draw conclusions or to think of trivial matters. We accept the present moment as it is.

Meditating differs from other forms of relaxation in the sense that during Meditation we are more awake, more alert and better focussed. We are relaxed and still alert. Research has proved that the longer we keep practicing Meditation the more we become relaxed. At the same time we also become more observant and more aware, something that other ways of relaxation do not achieve because they do not train our powers of concentration. Therefore, we should not confuse Meditating with a dream, with sleep or a state of trance.

For with such activities we are not concentrated and alert. And during Meditation we are. During Meditation we focus on what happens now, at this very moment. Every thought has by definition to do with the past or the present and diverts us from what is happening NOW. When we focus we give our mind but one single demand. Because we only have to deal with one command this

costs us little trouble and little energy. We are not faced with an emergency or a stressful situation and therefore our body and our mind can start to relax. As we are relaxed we can enjoy our experiences in a more conscious way and we get more aware in everything we do. Think of what this can mean for all the beautiful moments of your life and how intensely you can enjoy nice hobbies and simple things like pleasant moments. You will admit that all the best moments of your life take place when you are not thinking, but experiencing and thus are living the present moment. Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., a pioneer in the field of mind/body medicine, defines Meditation as any activity that brings us to the present and keeps us there. The methods of Meditation we can also easily practice in our daily lives. Meditating teaches us to become more aware and more observant, so that we spend more and more time in the NOW and the quality of our life improves. We achieve our end by simply BEING and not by doing something. That is the essence of Meditation.

There are many methods of meditation. Sage Patanjali described eight steps in yoga to achieve the goal of super consciousness. Vipasana meditation of Lord Buddha (500 BC) and other types of meditation has been reviewed recently. The main issue of concern for clinical psychology and health psychologist is whether meditation is a useful procedure for enhancing happiness or psychological well-being. Many people believe that meditation enable the person to reach a state of profound rest, as claimed popular self-help books (Foremen, 1974). Bhaskaran (1991) [8], observed that meditation would appear to have preventive potential. Meditation would also seem to have potential for enhancing psychological well-being, especially if we include the spiritual dimension in our concept of happiness. The author has personal experience of effects of meditation in enhancement of his subjective well-being by participating in 10 days Vipassana camp at Galta, Jaipur. Meditation may promote the “Being” mode of living postulated by Fromm (1976) [9], against the “Having” mode.

TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION

Meditation is one of the Five Principles of Yoga. It is the practice by which there is constant observation of the mind. It requires you to focus your mind at one point and stilling the mind in order to perceive the self. Through the practice of Meditation, you will achieve a greater sense of purpose and strength of will. It also helps you achieve a clearer mind, improve your concentration, and discover the wisdom and tranquility within you. Meditation is also one of the Eight Limbs of Yoga which leads to Samadhi or Enlightenment. Research shows that the practice of Meditation contributes to our physical and psychological well-being. It can reduce Blood Pressure and relieve stress and pain. Meditating also brings our mind to a level of consciousness that promotes healing or what is known as the alpha state. Achieving the alpha state can help decrease Anxiety, Depression and other Mental, Psychological, or emotional problems. This meditation process is good to induce relaxation response. Plan to make meditation a regular part of your daily routine. Set aside 10 to 20 minutes each day at the same time, if possible. Before breakfast is a good time.

Mindfulness Meditation

Free your energy flow for Well Being by practicing Mindfulness Meditation. In mindfulness, we observe inward, watching our thoughts without attachment to them. The practice is quite simple. To begin, set your timer or stopwatch for 5 minutes. Then sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and focus on your breath. FEEL the breath coming and going, going and coming, through your nose. Your breath becomes the vehicle to carry you towards peace. Now notice how easily you become distracted from the feel of your breath. A thought travels through your mind. That thought leads to another, and another. Finally, you remember that you are supposed to be feeling your breath, and you return. But from where did you return? Where does the mind go? Experiment again and this time you feel a pressure or pain in your body. You follow that pain and another series of thoughts results. And again, you return to the breath. Each time you return to the sensation of your own breath on your nose you have gained a little more control over your own mind.

Our own mind carries us away. Our thoughts are like unruly children, constantly pulling us here and there. And this constant pulling is the source of our stress and pain. Mindfulness is the skill that allows us to watch our thoughts and feelings without being pulled by them. Initially in practice all this mental chatter preoccupies us. Then we begin to realize that we do have control. By noticing and observing, we stop reacting. And it is our reactions to our thoughts that bring us emotional stress and physical dis-ease.

Simple Meditation

1. Choose a quiet spot where you will not be disturbed by other people or by the telephone.
2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Refer to the section on postures for recommendations on sitting positions.
3. Eliminate distractions and interruptions during the period you will be meditating.
4. Commit yourself to a specific length of time and try to stick to it.
5. Pick a focus word or short phrase that's firmly rooted in your personal belief system. A non-religious person might choose a neutral word like one, peace, or love. Others might use the opening words of a favorite prayer from their religion such as 'Hail Mary full of Grace', 'I surrender all to you', 'Hallelujah', 'Om', etc.
6. Close your eyes. This makes it easy to concentrate.
7. Relax your muscles sequentially from head to feet. This helps to break the connection between stressful thoughts and a tense body. Starting with your forehead, become aware of tension as you breathe in. Let go of any obvious tension as you breathe out. Go through the rest of your body in this way, proceeding down through your eyes, jaws, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, upper back, middle back and midriff, lower back, belly, pelvis, buttocks, thighs, calves, and feet.
8. Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word or phrase silently as you exhale.

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

9. Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say, "Oh, well," and gently return to the repetition.
10. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. After you finish: Sit quietly for a minute or so, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open. Do not stand for one or two minutes.

Meditation is one of the five principles of yoga. It an important tool to achieve mental clarity and health. An overview of the different beginner and advanced meditation techniques will aid in choosing the right meditation exercise for you.

Walking Meditation

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, one simple way to bring awareness into your life is through walking meditation. "This brings your attention to the actual experience of walking as you are doing it, focusing on the sensations in your feet and legs, feeling your whole body moving, " Dr. Kabat-Zinn explains. "You can also integrate awareness of your breathing with the experience." To do this exercise, focus the attention on each foot as it contacts the ground. When the mind wanders away from the feet or legs, or the feeling of the body walking, refocus your attention. To deepen your concentration, don't look around, but keep your gaze in front of you. "One thing that you find out when you have been practicing mindfulness for a while is that nothing is quite as simple as it appears, " says Dr. Kabat-Zinn. "This is as true for walking as it is for anything else. For one thing, we carry our mind around with us when we walk, so we are usually absorbed in our own thoughts to one extent or another. We are hardly ever just walking, even when we are just going out for a walk'. Walking meditation involves intentionally attending to the experience of walking itself. Meditation is one of the five principles of yoga. It an important tool to achieve mental clarity and health. An overview of the different beginner and advanced meditation techniques will aid in choosing the right meditation exercise for you.

Vibration Meditation

Also called sounding meditation, this technique uses the repetition of a word or sound as its focal point. Vibration meditation has appeal to those who find that making noise is a path to inner quiet. We are taught to be nice and quiet as little children. Releasing sound and noise helps us release stress. Get on your feet. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, your knees slightly bent and your hips centered, as though you are about to squat. Or, if you wish, sit or lie down. Keep your body loose and comfortable with your arms at your sides or on your hips. Begin by taking a few cleansing breaths. Pick a word, any word. Choose a word that alternates vowels and consonants-like "serenity." The word that you select does not necessarily have to be a spiritual one. It just has to feel good when you say it. Repeat after yourself. Repeat the word, chant the word, focus on nothing but saying the word repeatedly. Let the sound of the word vibrate through your body. Let the word resonate up from your abdomen and let it go to your hands,

your feet. Let your muscles move as you chant the word. Some people have a tendency to clench their muscles when they are tense. It is important to roll the sound through your body so that you can clear out the tightness in your muscles. Doing so promotes the meditative state of relaxation that feels like a natural high.

Mantra meditation

Prepare for your meditation as usual. A mantra is a word or a phrase that is repeated over and over as a means of achieving focus and concentration for deep meditation. The failsafe method of meditation is with mantras. No matter how much trouble you are having concentrating or getting time, a mantric meditation will always get you meditating quickly. It is also the easiest. I like to use mantras during the day at any time (not aloud) to get me centred. For example, at work, I might be sitting in a boring meeting & chanting quietly helps me remember my life's goals (and keeps me awake). AUM is the most powerful mantra. It is able to reveal all the qualities of the soul. But choose a mantra you would like to use. Repeat it aloud or to yourself. Feel that the source of the mantra is in the deepest, inmost recesses of your heart and that you have to really focus, really concentrate to open the floodgates of that quality. Use the flow of your breath if you like to create the rhythm of the flow of energy.

For this exercise, please try three different mantras. As you know in the classes, I always give people the opportunity to vote for the mantras they like the best. Invariably 'Peace', 'Love' and 'AUM' are the most popular - so let's try them. For each of these mantras I would like you to feel that you are not creating the quality but rather that the quality exists in infinite measure within you and all you are doing is allowing it to be channeled into your consciousness. For example, let's try 'peace'. Please close your eyes and imagine a fountain of peace is flowing from the inmost recesses of your heart. You might visualize it is a light or even a rainbow that is shining from deep within and flowing out into every atom of your being. With each repetition of 'Peace' feel that flow of energy. Try and remember that this flow is not your possession - it is the channeling of the infinite peace that is the nature of the kingdom of heaven and rises from within each of us.

Repeat the mantra out loud for 2-4 minutes then for the same time to yourself. Take a moment or two to contemplate what you have felt at the end of each mantric exercise.

Repeat the process with the mantra 'love'. You might imagine that your repetition of the mantra is allowing you to connect to that most powerful connecting force, love.

Finally with the mantra, AUM, you might simply recall that AUM is said to be the closest sound to the actual vibration to the soul. That every quality is present in AUM and the wonderful thing is that whatever we need will be presented to us with the repetition of this most powerful of all mantras.

Journey Meditation

Journey Meditation combines imagery and visualization to achieve a meditative state. This form of Meditation appeals to those who find peace by picturing themselves in a peaceful place.

Sit up straight. Get into a comfortable position. Either sit on the floor with your back against a wall, or sit in a chair with your feet on the ground and your hands resting on your knees or thighs. Have a pad and pencil nearby.

Write down the worries, concerns or problems that you are afraid will distract you from Meditation, and promise yourself that you'll deal with them when you're done. Take a few Cleansing Breaths. Breathe in slowly and deeply for five counts, then exhale slowly for five counts.

Journey Meditation Technique

Find a peaceful place. Close your eyes and concentrate on a soothing, tranquil place where you feel safe and calm. As distractions flutter through your mind, remind yourself that you will deal with them when you are finished Meditating. A quiet beach is an ideal mental destination for most people. Picture yourself resting on the sand. Feel the sun on your skin, hear the water lapping the shore, listen for the sounds of seagulls or see the ships gliding out to sea. You can use the same routine for any beautiful, serene place that calms you.

Do it twice a day. Most persons will benefit from a 5- to 15-minute Meditation practiced several days a week. A good rule of thumb for practicing Journey Meditation is to do it in the morning and then again later in the day. A peaceful Meditative Journey as you wake up can improve the whole tone of your day. Journey Meditation is also an excellent antidote for afternoon slump. Most people find that at about 3.00 PM, they are at their lowest energy level for the day. This is a good time to take a short nap or to take a short journey break. In as little as ten minutes, you'll find that you've refreshed yourself.

Body Scan Meditation

Body Scan Meditation is often used by people who want to try a more formal type of mindfulness without attending a Yoga or Tai Chi class. Lie on your back with your legs uncrossed, your arms at your sides, palms up, and your eyes open or closed, as you wish. Focus on your Breathing, how the air moves in and out of your body. After several deep breaths, as you begin to feel comfortable and relaxed, direct your attention to the toes of your left foot. Tune into any sensations in that part of your body while remaining aware of your Breathing. It often helps to imagine each breath flowing to the spot where you're directing your attention. Focus on your left toes for one to two minutes. Then move your focus to the sole of your left foot and hold it there for a minute or two while continuing to pay attention to your breathing. Follow the same procedure as you move to your left ankle, calf, knees, thigh, hip and so on all around the body.

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

Pay particular attention to any areas that cause pain or are the focus of any medical condition (for Asthma, the lungs; for Diabetes, the pancreas). Pay particular attention to the head: the jaw, chin, lips, tongue, roof of the mouth, nostrils, throat, cheeks, eyelids, eyes, eyebrows, forehead, temples and scalp.

Finally, focus on the very top of your hair, the uppermost part of your body. Then let go of the body altogether, and in your mind, hover above yourself as your breath reaches beyond you and touches the universe.

Breath and Navel Meditation

Breath and Navel Meditation is the oldest Meditation Method on record in China as well as India. It is also the method usually taught to Beginners. Breath and Navel Meditation works directly with the natural flow of breath in the nostrils and the expansion and contraction of the abdomen. This Taoist Meditation is a good way to develop focused attention and one-pointed awareness.

1. Sit cross-legged on a cushion, on the floor, or upright on a low stool and adjust the body's posture until well balanced and comfortable. Press tongue to palate, close your mouth without clenching the teeth, and lower the eyelids until almost closed.
2. Breathe naturally through the nose, drawing the inhalation deep down into the abdomen and making the exhalation long and smooth. Focus your attention on two sensations, one above and the other below. Above, focus on the gentle breeze of air flowing in and out of the nostrils like a bellows. In exhalation, try to 'follow' the breath out as far as possible, from 3 to 18 inches. Below, focus on the Navel rising and falling and the entire abdomen expanding and contracting like a balloon with each inhalation and exhalation. You may focus attention on the nostrils or the abdomen, or on both, or on one and then the other, whichever suits you best. From time to time, mentally check your Posture and adjust it if necessary. Whenever you catch your mind wandering off or getting cluttered with thoughts, consciously shift your attention back to your Breath. Sometimes it helps to count either inhalations or exhalations, until your mind is stably focused.

Central Channel Meditation

Central Channel Meditation is an ancient Taoist method modified and taught by Master Han Yu-mo at his Sung Yang Tao Centers in Taiwan and Canada. It is a simple and effective way for Beginners to rapidly develop a tangible awareness of internal energy and a familiarity with the major power points through which energy is circulated and exchanged with the surrounding sources of heaven and earth. It relaxes the body, replenishes energy, and invigorates the spirit.

1. Adopt a comfortable Sitting Posture. First, take a deep breath and bend forward slowly, exhaling audibly through the mouth in order to expel stale breath from the lungs; repeat three times. Then, sit still and breathe naturally, letting the abdomen expand and contract with each breath. However, instead of focusing attention on the flow of air through the nostrils, focus on

the beam of energy entering the crown of the head at a point about two inches above the hairline, called the 'Medicine Palace'.

2. Feel the beam of energy flowing in through this point as you begin each inhalation and follow it down through the Central Channel into the Lower Elixir Field below the navel, then follow it back up the Central Channel and out through the Medicine Palace point on exhalation. The sensation at the crown point is most noticeable at the beginning of inhalation and the end of exhalation and feels somewhat like a flap or valve opening and closing as energy flows through it. There may also be feelings of warmth, tingling, or numbness in the scalp, all of which are signs of energy moving under the scrutiny of awareness.

3. After practicing this method for a while, your head may start to rock spontaneously back and forth or from side to side after fifteen or twenty minutes of sitting, or else your entire body may start trembling and shaking. This is a good sign, for it means that your channels are opening and that energy is coursing strongly through them. Try neither to suppress nor encourage these spontaneous tremors; instead just let them run their course naturally. After practicing this method for a few weeks or months and developing a conscious feel for energy as it moves through the Medicine Palace point, you may start to work with other points of exit during exhalation, always drawing energy in through the crown point on inhalation. For example, you may bring energy in through the crown and down to the abdomen on inhalation, then push it back up and out through the 'Celestial Eye' point between the brows. This point usually brings rapid results - a distinct tingling or throbbing sensation between the brows. The Celestial Eye is the point through which 'psychic vision' perceive aspects of the world that are hidden to ordinary eyesight. The mass of magnetite crystals between the forehead and the pituitary gland is sensitive to subtle fluctuations in surrounding electromagnetic fields. In other words, psychic vision perceives by virtue of its sensitivity to electromagnetic energy rather than the light or sound energy perceived by eyes and ears. So-called 'psychics' are those who have learned how to interpret the electromagnetic signals from the magnetic organ between the eyes in terms of ordinary perception and rational thought. In addition to the brow point, you may also practice expelling energy on exhalation through the points in the centers of the palms, the centers of the soles, and the perineum point midway between genitals and anus. In each case, look for sensations of warmth or tingling at the point of exit.

Microcosmic Orbit Meditation

This is the classic Taoist Meditation method for refining, raising, and circulating internal energy via the 'orbit' formed by the 'Governing Channel' from perineum up to head and the Conception Channel from head back down to perineum. Activating the Microcosmic Orbit is a key step that leads to more advanced practices. Taoists believe that Microcosmic Orbit Meditation fills the reservoirs of the Governing and Conception channels with energy, which is then distributed to all the major organ-energy meridians, thereby energizing the internal organs. It draws abundant energy up from the sacrum into the brain, thereby enhancing cerebral circulation of blood and stimulating secretions of vital neurochemicals. It is also the first stage for cultivating the

'spiritual embryo' or 'golden elixir' of immortality, a process that begins in the lower abdomen and culminates in the mid-brain. This is probably the best of all Taoist methods for cultivating health and longevity while also 'opening the three passes' to higher spiritual awareness. Taoists often refer things in symbolic languages. (See the section on Human anatomy from the Taoist perspective for a description of the symbolism used in referring to the human anatomy.) 'Opening the Three Passes' is another name for this Meditation method and refers to the three critical junctions which pave the way for energy to travel up from the sacrum through the Governing Channel along the spine into the head.

1. The first step is to still the body, calm the mind, and regulate the breath. With this settled mind, sit alone in a quiet room, senses shut and eyelids lowered. Turn your attention within, and inwardly visualize a pocket of energy in the umbilical region; within it is a point of golden light, clear and bright, immaculately pure. Focus attention on the navel until you feel the 'pocket of energy' glowing in the umbilical region. The breath through your nose will naturally become light and subtle, going out and in evenly and finely, continuously and quietly, gradually becoming sligher and subtler. When the feeling is stable and the energy there is full, use your mind to guide energy down to the perineum and back up through the aperture in the coccyx.
2. Steadily visualize this true energy as being like a small snake gradually passing through the nine apertures of the coccyx. When you feel the energy has gone through this pass, visualize this true energy rising up to where the ribs meet the spine, then going through this pass and right on up to the Jade Pillow, the back of the brain.
3. Then imagine your true spirit in the Nirvana Chamber in the center of the brain, taking in the energy. When this true energy goes through the Jade Pillow, press the tongue against the palate. The head should move forward and tilt slightly upwards to help it. When you feel this true energy penetrating the Nirvana Chamber, this may feel hot or swollen. This means the pass has been cleared and the energy has reached the Nirvana Center.
4. Next, focus attention on the Celestial Eye between the eyebrows and draw energy forwards from the midbrain and out through the point between the brows. This may cause a tingling or throbbing sensation there. Then the center of the brows will throb - this means the Celestial Eye is about to open. Then move the spirit into the center of the brows and draw the true energy through the Celestial Eye. If you see the eighteen thousand pores and three hundred and sixty joints of the whole body explode open all at once, each joint parting three-tenths of an inch, this is evidence of the opening of the Celestial Eye. This is what is meant when it is said that when one pass opens all the passes open, and when one opening is cleared all the openings are cleared.
5. You may wish to stay and work with this point for a few minutes, before letting energy sink down through the palate and tongue into the throat to the heart. This may feel as though there is cool water going down the Multistoried Tower of the windpipe. Do not swallow; let it go down by itself, bathing the bronchial tubes. Then the vital energy will bathe the internal organs and then return to the genitals. This is what is called return to the root.

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

6. From the heart, draw it down through the Middle Elixir Field in the solar plexus, past the navel, and down into the Ocean of Energy reservoir in the Lower Elixir Field, where energy gathers, mixes, and is reserved for internal circulation. Then begin another cycle up through the coccyx to the mid-spine behind the heart and up past the Jade Pillow into the brain.

7. Breathe naturally with your abdomen, and don't worry whether energy moves up or down on inhalation or exhalation; coordinate the flow of breath and energy in whatever manner suits you best. However, if you reach the stage where you can complete a full Microcosmic Orbit in a single breath, it's best to raise energy up from coccyx to head on exhalation and draw it down from Upper to Lower Elixir Field on inhalation. If you practice this way for a long time, eventually you can complete a whole cycle of ascent and descent in one visualization. If you can quietly practice this inner work continuously, whether walking, standing still, sitting, or lying down, then the vital energy will circulate within, and there will naturally be no problem of leakage. Chronic physical ailments, Taoists believe, will naturally disappear. Also, once the inner energy is circulating, the breath will naturally become fine, and the true positive energy of heaven and earth will be inhaled by way of the breath and go down to join your own generative energy. The two energies will mix together, both to be circulated by you together, descending and ascending over and over, circulating up and down to replenish the depleted true energy in your body. This true energy harmonizes and reforms, so that the vital fluids produced by the energy of daily life again produce true vitality. When true vitality is fully developed, it naturally produces true energy, and when true energy is fully developed it naturally produces our true spirit. If you have any physical problems or discomforts in a particular section of your body, focus your energy at the pass closest to the discomfort and let it throb there for a while. This will help heal and rejuvenate the injured tissues. For example, if you have pelvic problems, focus energy on the coccyx pass; for lower-back pain focus on the lowest lumbar vertebra just above the sacrum; for upper-back and shoulder pain focus on the fifth thoracic vertebra, and so forth. This Meditation may also cause the head to rock or the body to tremble, which, Taoists believe, is signs of progress.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Research has shown that Meditation can contribute to an individual's psychological and physiological well-being. This is accomplished as Meditation brings the brainwave pattern into an alpha state, which is a level of consciousness that promotes the healing state. There is scientific evidence that Meditation can reduce blood pressure and relieve pain and stress. In the coming sections we have divided the health benefits of meditation in three parts: (1) physiological benefits; (2) psychological benefits' and (3) spiritual benefits.

Physiological Benefits

- Deep rest-as measured by decreased metabolic rate, lower heart rate, and reduced workload of the heart.
- Lowered levels of cortisol and lactate-two chemicals associated with stress.

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

- Reduction of free radicals- unstable oxygen molecules that can cause tissue damage.
- Decreased high blood pressure.
- Higher skin resistance. Low skin resistance is correlated with higher stress and anxiety levels.
- Drop in cholesterol levels. High cholesterol is associated with cardiovascular disease.
- Improved flow of air to the lungs resulting in easier breathing. This has been very helpful to asthma patients.
- Decreases the aging process.
- Higher levels of DHEAS in the elderly. An additional sign of youthfulness.

Psychological Benefits

- Increased brain wave coherence.
- Greater creativity.
- Decreased anxiety.
- Decreased depression
- Decreased irritability and moodiness
- Improved learning ability and memory.
- Increased self-actualization.
- Increased feelings of vitality and rejuvenation.
- Increased happiness.
- Increased emotional stability.

Spiritual Benefits

The longer an individual practices meditation, the greater the likelihood that his or her goals and efforts will shift toward personal and spiritual growth. Many individuals who initially learn meditation for its self-regulatory aspects find that as their practice deepens they are drawn more and more into the realm of the "spiritual." In her work with many cancer and AIDS patients, Dr. Borysenko has observed that many are most interested in meditation as a way of becoming more attuned to the spiritual dimension of life. She reports that many die "healed," in a state of compassionate self-awareness and self-acceptance.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND MEDITATION

Meditation is a mental exercise in which we direct our mind to think inwardly by shutting our sense organs to external stimulations. It is a vedic exercise which can be used as a powerful instrument to restrain sense organs, control autonomic nervous system and also to attain super consciousness. [4] ordinarily there are two planes in which the mind functions, the conscious and unconscious. Yet there can be one more plane, which is higher than both, one where the mind goes beyond the level of self-consciousness called super consciousness. When a man goes to sleep he enters the plane of sub consciousness; on waking up he regains his consciousness and

becomes a normal person. But when a person has attained super consciousness, usually through the prolonged practice of meditation, on returning to the conscious state he becomes a different person having acquired greater knowledge and wisdom. Studies on normal individuals have indicated that a regular practice of yogic postures (physical) leads to psychological improvement in the intelligence and memory quotient and a decrease in the pulse rate, blood pressure, respiration and body weight. The biochemical examination of the blood has shown decrease in blood sugar and serum cholesterol and a rise in the serum protein level. However, practice of breathing exercise Pranayam etc. alone produces similar results except that fall in serum lipids was more marked than was noted in the practice of physical postures. After intensive meditation for 10 days there was a marked rise of neurohumours and their enzymes such as acetylcholine, catecholamine, cholinesterase's and monoamine oxidases with a fall of plasma cortisol. When all the three integrated yogic practices, namely physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation were combined it was found that there was a decrease in the neurohumours and their related enzymes and an increase in the plasma cortisol levels. After practicing kundalini type of meditation for many years, Gopikrishnan described his great experience of attaining super consciousness and the subsequent remarkable events that occurred in his life [5]. Still recently Maharishi Mahesh Yogi described a simple method popularly known as transcendental meditation for attaining self-consciousness to be guided by the law of Nature [6,7].

EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDITATION ON ELDERLY

Meditation particularly, transcendental meditation in a comfortable sitting position and Benson's meditation for beginners even in lying down position short of sleep can be practiced in all conditions and at all ages. It has been suggested that regular meditation is the key to health (mental, physical and social well being) in elderly subjects [10]. Scientific evidence of its effect on health and disease is quite recent. In recent years Transcendental Meditation (TM) has been shown to reduce anxiety, decrease hospitalization, improve intelligence and performance [11]. However, it has been demonstrated that regular practice of TM 20 minutes in the morning and evening reverses the aging process. It is of particular interest of elderly subjects to practice meditation.

Vipassana meditation has recently been shown as a perfect anti-stress remedy with significant increase in neuro-humoral contents of blood and a decrease in plasma cortisol level, whereas transcendental meditation caused greater tranquility with increase in alpha wave activity in addition to wide ranging effect on health, memory, intelligence, performance and reversal of aging process.

Current research shown mindfulness meditation and 'OM' mantra can influence mental alertness. Controlled studies of effect of meditation in young students in improving intelligence, memory and performance and in elderly in relation to health and reversal of aging process are under study

at Medical Research Centre, Bombay Hospital. However, practice of meditation particularly TM along with modified and balanced diet might be contributory [12].

CONCLUSION

In order to lead an active life as age advances, proper planning is essential right from the middle age itself so as to have good physical and sound mental health along with social harmony.

Meditation is a vedic technique known for thousands of years claiming wide ranging effect on body and mind, however, scientific research on meditation is quite recent. Yogic exercises have been shown to benefit certain diseases however, when combined with meditation (integrated yoga) produces tranquility of mind and increases resistance to stress including elevating the level of super consciousness.

Presently controlled studies are going on in the Medical Research Centre of Bombay Hospital, amongst the Nursing students on meditation in relation to improved intelligence, performance, and alertness and in the elderly subjects in relation to improved health and reversal of aging process.

Acknowledgments

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- [1] Law R Charlmerse. Medicine and elderly people. A general practice survey. Brit Med J 1976; 1 : 565-68.
- [2] Carstensen, L.L., Isaacowitz, D. M. & Charles, S.T. (1999). Taking time seriously: A theory of socioemotional selectivity. American Psychologist, 54-,165-181.
- [3] Diener,E., Suh, E.M., Lucas, R.E. & Smith, H.L. (199). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. Psychological Bulletin, 125, 276-302.
- [4] Carstensen, L.L., Pasupathi, M. Mayr, U. & Nesselroade, J.R. (2000). Emotional experience in everyday life across the adult life span. Journal of personality & Social Psychology, 79, 644-655.
- [4] Udupa KN. Yoga and meditation for mental health care coverage World Health Organization Geneva. 1983; 134-41.
- [5] Gopikrishna. The awakening of kundalini. New York, Dutton. 1975
- [6] Scientific research on Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation, a review. Maharishi International University press. Fairfield, USA. 1993.
- [7] Dhar HL. Veda in relation to human physiology and health. Bombay Hosp J 1996; 38 (2) : 354-71.

Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation

- [8] Bhaskaran, K. (1991). Meditation from a Mental Health Perspective. Indian Journal of Psychiatry, 33, 87-94.
- [9] Fromm, E., (1976). To have or to be. Suffol Abacus.
- [10] Dhar HL. Health and aging. Ind J Med Sc 1977; 51 (10) : 373-77.
- [11, 12] Scientific Research on Maharshi's Transcendental Meditation. A review. Maharishi International University Press. Fairfield, USA . 1993.
- [13] Dhar HL. Meditation and health. Bombay Hosp J 1977; 39 (4) : 738-41.
- [14] Drar HL. Research on meditation. Bomay Hospital Journal 1999 41 (3) 505-508.

How to cite this article: A Pathath (2016), Psychological Well-Being of the Elderly through Meditation, International Journal of Indian Psychology, Volume 3, Issue 4, No. 77, ISSN:2348-5396 (e), ISSN:2349-3429 (p), DIP:18.01.071/20160304, ISBN: 978-1-365-51571-2