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An Esoteric Case for the Scientific Study of Meditation

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Abstract

The science of meditation has served to help overcome ego-related obstacles in meditation, and has enable the propagation of a powerful tool for the increased consciousness, health and peace of humanity.

Keywords

Meditation, Mindfulness

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An Esoteric Case for the Scientific Study of Meditation

Vish Chatterji

For centuries, meditation was a practice confined to the realm of the spiritual seeker, who through faith in the power of such practice, dedicated themselves to develop an enlightened state of living.

In recent decades, the “side benefits” of meditation have been extensively studied, as scientists focused their attention and increasingly sophisticated measuring tools to assess if meditation really works. Today the studies abound in validating meditation as a tool to lower stress, increase productivity, boost immunity, normalize biological markers, slow down the aging process and change both the physical and chemical composition of the brain. With this type of powerful evidence, we have seen meditation practice manifest in everyday life, from the corporate boardroom, to the classroom to the clinic.

The science of meditation has served to propagate a powerful tool for the increased consciousness, health and peace of humanity.

I would like to offer a more esoteric gratitude for the scientific study of meditation, one that has to do with our intellect and ego. In the ancient Vedic tradition of India, from over five thousand years ago, an ancient Indus River Valley Civilization first documented approaches to human self-development in a series of texts described as the Vedas. Their insight and understanding of our universe were remarkable for its time, and today’s scientists are slowly validating many of the insights of these ancient “seers”. Incidentally, they developed their deep insight through the very practice of meditation, and in this, they were experts.

They described the interplay of several different layers of our human existence, often reduced in current parlance to mind, body, spirit – or mind, body, consciousness. They explained that many of our limitations and challenges stem from the level of the mind. Specifically, they referred to an “ego” that got in the way of our accessing deeper states of consciousness and knowledge. Meditation is often described as a practice where we transcend the ego and the mind.

When we transcend the ego however, that very ego, will get concerned! The ego likes to be in charge, and stay in charge. In the famous Yoga text, Patanjali’s Sutras, he describes that as a spiritual aspirant gets deeper into a meditation practice, the ego starts to throw up all sorts of distractions in an effort to maintain its control and prevent being transcended. Regular meditators can attest to such distractions where the ego starts to conjure up red flags. The self-talk can range from “I don’t think this is really working” (doubt), or “I don’t really feel like doing this today” (laziness) or “I don’t think I am using the right technique” (confusion) or, “I don’t think this is making a difference in my life (feeling stuck).

These are normal distractions on the path of meditation. However, it is the scientific study of meditation and validation of its exemplary benefits that help soothe our ego, help remove distractions such as doubt, laziness, confusion and feeling stuck to help us transcend the mind. When one reviews the scientific research around meditation, the ego is signaled “This will make me happier, healthier, peaceful etc.”, and so we can satisfy and soothe the ego, as we silently transcend to enjoy a happier, healthier and more balanced life.