PAPER 180

MEDITATION AND THE GREAT EVOLUTION

MAYNARD SHELLY
Department of Psychology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, U.S.A.

Transcendental Meditation is seen as an important method of increasing satisfaction and happiness.—EDITORS

The following is a summary, prepared by the author, of two of his papers, Sources of Satisfaction and The Counter-Evolution, 1972.

A major collection of findings described in Sources of Satisfaction showed that mental processes are important in the regulation of satisfaction and happiness. It was the impending recognition of the significance of these findings which lead to the concept of "the great evolution" in The Counter-Evolution. Research on meditation has indicated that it is an important method of helping mental processes regulate satisfaction and happiness and hence that it shall probably play a major role in the great evolution.

Studies have shown that the practice of Transcendental Meditation leads those practicing it to report themselves as being happier than they were previously.1 Sometimes Transcendental Meditators (as a group) report themselves as being happier than a comparable group of nonmeditators, but never less happy.2

This does not appear to be a registration of the characteristics of those who begin the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM). There is evidence that those beginning TM are somewhat less happy than the average person,3 but they end up at least as happy as the average person.

This does not appear to be the effect of suggestions by teachers of TM that those beginning TM will be happier. Other concurrent effects, which those beginning TM could not be aware of, are obtained. One way by which happiness may be increased is to increase any type of satisfaction. Meditators report themselves consistently as being more relaxed than they used to be and often more relaxed than comparable groups of nonmeditators.4

If, as shown in Sources of Satisfaction, relaxation increases, we should expect to find excitements increasing also or at least remaining the same. Those practicing TM report at least the same frequency of excitements as do comparable nonmeditators.5 Furthermore, if relaxations increase, then we should expect a decrease in the optimal level of arousal resulting in an avoidance of extreme stimulation. Those practicing TM indicate that they find intense stimulation unpleasant.6 It thus appears reasonable that the increase in happiness experienced by those practicing TM is genuine.

Furthermore, if the practice of TM does lead to increased happiness, the length of time meditating should lead to at least small increases in reported happiness. This has been found.7 Those practicing the technique of TM correctly (as determined by a checking procedure) should report themselves as being happier. This has also been found.8 A composite measure of the effects of TM upon the individual was also found to be positively related to reported happiness.9

Evidence is beginning to accumulate that those practicing TM develop more personal (internal) satisfaction resources. Research reported in Sources of Satisfaction indicates that those heavily dependent upon environmental sources of satisfaction show considerable fluctuations in their happiness. By contrast, those practicing TM show greater state happiness10 (which is a combination of happiness and stability of moods). Furthermore, those practitioners of TM experiencing a very pleasant day achieve this degree of pleasantness with fewer environmental resources than comparable nonmeditators.11 One interpretation of this result is that those practicing TM have a more abundant source of personal satisfaction resources.
The research described above indicates only some of the more gross effects of the practice of TM. There are some preliminary and, thus far, less well-established findings which indicate that the practice of TM may have more subtle and ultimately more profound effects. There are suggestions that those practicing TM may increase in appreciative contact with their environment, a kind of euphoria combined with a feeling of union with one's environment. People who have greater amounts of appreciative contact report other phenomena most would describe as desirable.

The fundamental feedback system (the tendency to approach the pleasant and avoid the unpleasant) is perhaps the major mechanism underlying the achievement of happiness. (In a sense the seeking of happiness becomes a natural activity.) There are some preliminary findings which suggest that the practice of TM may greatly affect this feedback system.

It is on the basis of findings such as those above that it is tentatively concluded that a great evolution is possible and that meditation will play a major role in this evolution.

FOOTNOTES

1. Because of the manner in which the studies in meditation are done, it is difficult to report them. The goal of the entire research program on sources of satisfaction and happiness is to find relationships rather than to conduct studies. Thus, although many studies have been carried out, they are not reported as studies. Rather, they are stored on magnetic tapes or discs and the information is used to write books. The studies act as a type of library from which conclusions may be drawn and substantiated. To simplify references, however, the studies will be listed and given names below even though these studies will never be published as they are listed.

A. Davies, Penelope. A subjective study of changes meditators perceive in themselves. Honor thesis, University of Kansas. N = 48, all TM meditators. Subjects were students at the University of Kansas. Conducted in 1971.

B. Shelly, Maynard and Garland Landrith. A study of TM meditators, I. Meditators: N = 156 (college students from summer meditation course). Nonmeditators: N = 256 (students from same age group at the University of Kansas). Conducted in 1972. This finding was found in A (p < .01) and B (p < .001).

2. In B, meditators were happier than nonmeditators (p < .005); in C, meditators were happier than nonmeditators (p = .30); and in D, meditators were happier than nonmeditators (p < .001).

3. Records of those being initiated into TM indicate that they are probably no happier than an average group of students and perhaps somewhat less happy. In one tabulation, (N = 165) 40% of those beginning meditation checked that they were worried, tense or both worried and tense.

4. More relaxed than used to be: Study B (p < .005). More relaxed than nonmeditators: Study B (p < .005), Study C (p < .001), Study D (p < .01).

5. Study B: frequency of excitement (on a six-point scale), meditators = 4.19, nonmeditators = 3.78. Study C: frequency of excitement (on a six-point scale), meditators = 3.97, nonmeditators = 4.02. Study D: frequency of excitement (on a seven-point scale), meditators = 3.66, nonmeditators = 3.70.

6. In Study B, in reporting on a pleasant day, meditators avoided crowds and noisy places more than nonmeditators, (p < .05), and in Study C, also in reporting on a pleasant day, meditators avoided crowds and noisy places more than nonmeditators (p < .001).

7. In Study D, the correlation with happiness is .09 (p = .15).

8. In Study D, the correlation with happiness is .22 (p < .05).

9. In Study D, the correlation with happiness is .17 (p < .05).

10. Study B (p < .01), Study C (p < .01), and Study D (p < .005).

11. In Study B, meditators in reporting on a pleasant day, said they less often used specialized environmental resources (such as water skis, etc.) than nonmeditators (p < .01) and in Study C, the finding was replicated (p < .02).

12. Meditators report more frequent experiences of awe and beauty (Study B, p < .01; and Study C, p < .01).

13. This is a conclusion based upon a set of findings which would be too difficult to describe in detail in a single footnote. Roughly, however, those experiencing more appreciative contact tend to be happier, have more "beautiful" experiences, and a "greater awareness".

14. Again the set of findings upon which this conclusion is based is rather extensive. To again summarize, those practicing TM tend to register unpleasantness more effectively (such as through its having a more prolonged effect), but also respond positively to a wider range of stimuli, thus increasing the capability of the Fundamental Feedback System to move towards those factors leading a person to be happy.