

## SESSION 1

### MEDITATION AND BEHAVIOR & MEDITATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

There are many things in life that are beyond our control. However, it is possible to take responsibility for our own states of mind – and to change them for the better. According to Buddhism this is the most important thing we can do, and Buddhism teaches that it is the only real antidote to our own personal sorrows, and to the anxieties, fears, hatreds, and general confusions that beset the human condition.

Meditation is a means of transforming the mind. Buddhist meditation practices are techniques that encourage and develop concentration, clarity, emotional positivity, and a calm seeing of the true nature of things. By engaging with a particular meditation practice you learn the patterns and habits of your mind, and the practice offers a means to cultivate new, more positive ways of being. With regular work and patience these nourishing, focused states of mind can deepen into profoundly peaceful and energized states of mind. Such experiences can have a transformative effect and can lead to a new understanding of life.

We can't imagine what life would be like without meditation. It has seen us through tough times and many life changes, keeping us sane and grounded and real. Life is challenging enough; we can never know what will arise next and only when our minds are clear and focused can we make the best decisions.

How are you able to deal with the madness and chaos that occurs daily? How do you deal with the challenges of life? Meditation is highly misunderstood and often under-rated yet is perhaps what it takes to be a truly sane person. How does meditation affect us? How does it shift our priorities, enable us to make friends with ourselves, to find answers to our questions?

Here are eight ways meditation can make your life more meaningful and enjoyable!

## **1. Living With Kindness**

No one deserves your kindness and compassion more than yourself. Every time you see or feel suffering, every time you make a mistake or say something stupid and are just about to put yourself down, every time you think of someone you are having a hard time with, every time you encounter the confusion and difficulty of being human, every time you see someone else struggling, upset, or irritated, you can stop and bring loving kindness and compassion. Breathing gently, silently repeat: *May I be well, may I be happy, May I be filled with loving kindness.*

## **2. Lightening the Load**

In a stressed state, it is easy to lose touch with inner peace, compassion and kindness; in a relaxed state, your mind is clear and you can connect with a deeper sense of purpose and altruism. *Meditation* and *medication* are derived from the Latin word *medicus*, to care or to cure. A time of quiet calmness is, therefore, the most effective remedy for a busy and overworked mind. Anytime you feel stress rising, heart closing, mind going into overwhelm, just bring your focus to your breathing and quietly repeat with each in- and out-breath: *Breathing in, I calm the body and mind; breathing out, I smile.*

## **3. Letting Go of Me**

Stillness is always there between the thoughts, behind the story, beneath the noise. What keeps us from experiencing our natural state of being is the habitual and ego-dominated monkey mind. Meditation enables us to see clearly, to witness our thoughts and behavior and reduce self-involvement. Without such a practice of self-reflection there is no way of putting a brake on the ego's demands. From being self-centered, we can become other-centered, concerned about the welfare of all.

## **4. Dissolving Anger and Fear**

We do not accept or release our negative feelings so easily; we are more likely to repress or disown them. But when denied they cause shame, depression, anger, and anxiety. Meditation invites you to openly meet these places, and to see how selfishness, aversion and ignorance create endless dramas and fears. Beneath these is a quiet stillness where you can get to know yourself; this is a wondrous and beautiful experience. Whether you practice for just ten minutes a day or longer does not matter. You are releasing your limitations, while opening to self-acceptance and awareness.

## **5. Awakening Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give yourself and others. As you sit in meditation and watch your thoughts and feelings moving through you, so you can observe that who you are now is not who you were just a moment ago, let alone a day, a week, or a month ago. Who you, or someone else, was when pain was caused is not who you are now. When you experience your essential interconnectedness you see how the ignorance of this creates separation and suffering, so that forgiveness for such ignorance arises spontaneously.

## **6. Generating Harmlessness**

Simply through the intent to cause less pain you can bring greater dignity to your world, so that harm is replaced with harmlessness and disrespect with respect. Harm is usually caused unintentionally, whether by ignoring someone's feelings, putting yourself down, reaffirming your hopelessness, disliking your appearance, or seeing yourself as incompetent or unworthy. How much resentment, guilt, or shame are you holding on to, thus perpetuating harmfulness? Meditation enables you transform this through recognizing your essential goodness and the preciousness of all life.

## **7. Appreciating Appreciation**

Take a moment to appreciate the chair you are sitting on. Consider how the chair was made: the wood, cotton, wool, or other fibers, the trees and plants that were used, the earth that grew the trees, the sun and rain, the animals that maybe gave their lives, the people who prepared the materials, the factory where the chair was made, the designer and carpenter and seamstress, the shop that sold it—all this just so you could be sitting here, now. Then extend that deep appreciation to everything and everyone in your life.

## **8. Being Aware**

Awareness is the key to awakening. Through awareness you can see your monkey mind and all its mischief. Almost everything we do is to achieve something: if we do this, then we will get that; if we do that, then this will happen. But in meditation you do it just to do it. There is no ulterior purpose other than to be here, in the present moment, without trying to get anywhere or achieve anything. You are just aware of whatever is happening, whether pleasant or unpleasant. No judgment, no right or wrong. Simply being aware. Enjoy!

## Meditation Improves Emotional Behaviors in Teachers, Study Finds

Schoolteachers who underwent a short but intensive program of meditation were less depressed, anxious or stressed – and more compassionate and aware of others' feelings, according to a UCSF-led study that blended ancient meditation practices with the most current scientific methods for regulating emotions.



Teachers who practiced meditation in a short yet intensive program were more calm and compassionate, according to a new study led by UCSF.

A core feature of many religions, meditation is practiced by tens of millions around the world as part of their spiritual beliefs as well as to alleviate psychological problems, improve self-awareness and to clear the mind. Previous research has linked meditation to positive changes in blood pressure, metabolism and pain, but less is known about the specific emotional changes that result from the practice.

The new study was designed to create new techniques to reduce destructive emotions while improving social and emotional behavior.

The study will be published in the April issue of the journal *Emotion*.

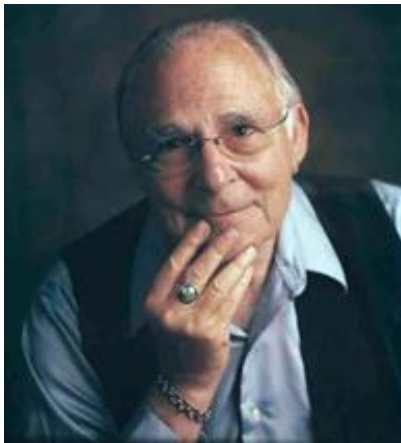


Margaret Kemeny, PhD

“The findings suggest that increased awareness of mental processes can influence emotional behavior,” said lead author Margaret Kemeny, PhD, director of the Health Psychology Program in UCSF’s Department of Psychiatry. “The study is particularly important because opportunities for reflection and contemplation seem to be fading in our fast-paced, technology-driven culture.” Altogether, 82 female schoolteachers between the ages of 25 and 60 participated in the project. Teachers were chosen because their work is stressful and because the meditation skills they learned could be immediately useful to their daily lives, possibly trickling down to benefit their students.

#### Study Arose After Meeting Dalai Lama

The study arose from a meeting in 2000 between Buddhist scholars, behavioral scientists and emotion experts at the home of the Dalai Lama. There, the Dalai Lama and Paul Ekman, PhD, a UCSF emeritus professor and world expert in emotions, pondered the topic of emotions, leading the Dalai Lama to pose a question: In the modern world, would a secular version of Buddhist contemplation reduce harmful emotions?



Paul Ekman, PhD

From that, Ekman and Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace developed a 42-hour, eight-week training program, integrating secular meditation practices with techniques learned from the scientific study of emotion. It incorporated three categories of meditative practice:

- Concentration practices involving sustained, focused attention on a specific mental or sensory experience;
- Mindfulness practices involving the close examination of one’s body and feelings;
- Directive practices designed to promote empathy and compassion toward others.

In the randomized, controlled trial, the schoolteachers learned to better understand the relationship between emotion and cognition, and to better recognize emotions in others and their own emotional patterns so they could

better resolve difficult problems in their relationships. All the teachers were new to meditation and all were involved in an intimate relationship.

“We wanted to test whether the intervention affected both personal well-being as well as behavior that would affect the well-being of their intimate partners,” said Kemeny.

As a test, the teachers and their partners underwent a “marital interaction” task measuring minute changes in facial expression while they attempted to resolve a problem in their relationship. In this type of encounter, those who express certain negative facial expressions are more likely to divorce, research has shown.

Some of the teachers' key facial movements during the marital interaction task changed, particularly hostile looks which diminished. In addition, depressed mood levels dropped by more than half. In a follow-up assessment five months later, many of the positive changes remained, the authors said.

“We know much less about longer-term changes that occur as a result of meditation, particularly once the ‘glow’ of the experience wears off,” Kemeny said. “It’s important to know what they are because these changes probably play an important role in the longer-term effects of meditation on mental and physical health symptoms and conditions.”

## Changing My Habits

It was hard for me to accept defeat. I enjoyed sports, but not when I lost a point or a game. If I got hurt during the game, that would make it worse.

I could feel the anger surge within in an instant fit of reaction. This is when I was at my weakest point. The anger wouldn't let me think straight and clear. Of course it didn't last long, but by then it would be too late. I would feel bad about my temper, and it would be a headache to deal with later. With regular practice and deepening of meditation, this behavior

In fact, I have stopped getting too attached or obsessed about anything I need to do. If things work for me, I am happy. But more importantly, if they don't, I don't fret or get into temper anymore. I've found this to be a very enjoyable way to live. I think meditation automatically changes a person's habits and behaviors because it improves the

and angry temperament began to change.

I did specific meditative techniques to cool down the anger and excessive reaction and thought, and they worked. Losing a point or an entire game is no more an issue for me.

personality and de-conditions the mind in a positive way. I've learnt to pay attention to my inner energy, and study how it works and what makes it stronger. When this is looked after, then I know that my well-being - whether emotional, spiritual, mental or physical - is also automatically taken care of.

### **it's Hard to Change Your Habits and Behaviors But Meditation Can Help AND is Part of the Solution**

Did you know that by the time you are age 3, your brain has formed up to 15,000 connections per neuron. However by the time you're a teenager, this number of neural connections will have dropped in half.

In other words, the brain initially forms twice as many connections between brain cells as it needs. Then it prunes this neuron tree to get rid of all the excess.

The question arises then, what exactly happens during this time period?

During this interim period, new brain connections continue to form (and old ones are strengthened) because of repeated thoughts or behaviors. These are the ones that last. If you frequently use a neural connection it becomes stronger but the ones you don't use and don't reinforce slowly fade away. Those are the ones that get pruned.

"Use it or lose it" is therefore one of the rules of brain development.

What this means is that learning that makes use of repetition tends to carve deeper and more permanent pathways in the brain. A thread becomes a string becomes a rope becomes a chain.

And the implications of all this?

Science says that the carving of these pathways helps form the individual's character because the mental (neuron) pathways you carve with your mind form a portion of an individual's behavioral matrix. For instance, if you get angry easily when young and this tendency isn't checked, you'll tend to carry this tendency over into adult life. If you have a rich emotional life when you're young, you'll tend to carry this over into your adult life because of the many neural connections you formed as a child.

This doesn't mean that change is impossible as you get older. Cultivators have no problem keeping their brains young and flexible to learn new skills. And as to lost skills, you can always reactivate old neuron pathways if you try, like doing bike riding again after years of inactivity.

What this does mean, however, is that learning and change tend to become harder as you age (did you ever notice that children have an easy time learning a foreign language but most adults have a terrible time). Furthermore, character changes become sluggish as people get older.

If you married someone with the hope that you can change them in a major way, you already know the truth behind the statement that it's hard to change other people. They change themselves when and if they want to change. In fact, a recent best selling business book on managing people, called "First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently" found that the best managers in the world commonly recognize the following ditty about people:

People don't change that much.  
So don't waste time trying to put in what was left out.  
Try to draw out what was left in.  
That is hard enough.

Okay, so changing your thoughts and behavior can be a difficult task, even for those who want to do so. After all, we tend to order the same foods every time we go to a restaurant, take the same route to work, wear the same type of clothes day after day and wish we were different all the while. The status quo is the preferred path of behavior, and the brain reactively produces a jerk response of "No!" to all but the most familiar of requests.

That is, ... unless you consciously always open yourself up to new experiences. Unless you consciously cultivate flexibility and openness and the willingness to try new experiences. Unless you learn meditation that changes the chi flows in the body, for the habit energies that flow in the body are related to chi circulations, not just to neural pathways. Cultivation science says this, but it's something science has to catch up with. What's so strange about that? Twenty years ago they weren't even talking about such things!

While you may want to shake things up and institute change in your personality or life, it will initially be hard because your brain is wired through all of your past behavior to do exactly what it has been doing in the past. That's why we have a tendency to constantly slide back to old behaviors ... it's because those neural pathways are deeper than the others due to their continual reuse. Those deeper



furrows equate with repeated behaviors that are the pathways of least resistance.

When you look at the big picture, it would be better, then, not to start bad habits in the first place. That's what the sages tell us. It would be better to learn good habits in their place, and also learn to like them. In fact, that's what Aristotle maintained. Aristotle said that virtue is a sort of habit and that the key to life and happiness is (1) to learn what is good for us, (2) to develop good habits to practice it (like athletes practice for their sport), and (3) to learn to like what is good for you.

In trying to live a better life, you must also consider that a new habit does not erase an old habit. An old habit will gradually fade away from disuse, but its underlying pattern will still remain in a dormant stage and you have to practice constant vigilance to make sure it doesn't rise and gain its previous prominence of aliveness.

Therefore you need awareness and willpower to go against habit energies and change them. Otherwise it's hard to stop smoking, quit eating sugary foods, and to stop all sorts of behaviors we'd like to get rid of. You're always going to have to struggle a bit until you consciously and intentionally repeat a new behavioral pattern over and over again so that it becomes the preferred pathway for the brain to follow.

To change your behavior, you literally have to forge new neural pathways in the brain and once you have them, you've got to keep reinforcing them over and over. You need awareness to make a choice, and will to put it into effect. Awareness, or the clear mind of seeing, you cultivate through meditation. Will you cultivate through any trick you have that helps with motivation.

NLP helps you form any new behavioral pathways you may want and so does self hypnosis, but meditation does this as well. In fact, I'll tell you the truth. Meditation is the only mind technology that helps you detach from your habit energies so that you can form new behaviors with ease because you practice being a third person watcher or observer who observes your impulses without getting caught up in their doings. That's why you can detach from them and have a hope of changing them in the first place.

As Confucius taught many centuries ago, in order to change your character, fortune and behavior, you must first practice awareness and then practice stopping, and from there things will prosper.

Research has also showed that 90% of self-talk, which is that internal dialogue we have in our heads, tends to be negative. We can use all the mind

technologies we want to help change self-talk but only meditation helps us reach a mental state where the self-talk gets down to zero. People recite mantras to tire the discriminatory mind and help jam self-talk, and in time self-talk does die down through this method as well.

People also use affirmations to substitute positive self-talk for negative self-talk, but in the purest forms of meditation people learn to detach from self-talk all together. They don't block thoughts from arising in the mind. They just detach from the internal dialogue and thereby gradually become mentally free of impulses that would normally impel them.

When you let go of thoughts and stop feeding them energy, but let them arise when they have to, they will automatically die down over time and cease to impel people along the paths of their old behaviors. That's when you can effect *real* change in your behavior, fate and fortune.

### **Can Meditation Change Compassionate Behavior?**



Most of us like to think that we're compassionate people – that, given the opportunity, we'd recognize another's pain and be moved to help. But in the midst of our daily lives, how compassionate are we, really? And is this something we can change about ourselves?

These questions were at the heart of a recent study led by Paul Condon, a graduate student studying social psychology with Dr. David DeSteno at Northeastern University. The experiment offered participants eight weeks of meditation instruction. Meeting for two hours each week, half of the participants were taught techniques to foster mindfulness, and the other half were trained in compassion. A comparison group of people who were also interested in learning meditation received their training after the study was complete.

After eight weeks of instruction, participants took various cognitive tests, believing that the experiment was measuring the effect of meditation on things like attention and memory. However, the real goal was to understand changes in compassionate helping behavior. This is where the experiment got elegantly clever.

The set-up went as follows. When a participant arrived for their cognitive testing at the end of the study, he or she entered a waiting room to find three chairs, two of which were occupied. Unbeknownst to the participant, the two other people in the waiting room were “confederates” – colleagues who were part of the study, but posing as bystanders. Naturally, the participant took the third seat and waited. After a minute, a third confederate, a woman, appeared around the corner with crutches and a walking boot. She winced in pain as she walked, stopped at the chairs and looked at her cell phone, then audibly sighed in discomfort and leaned back against a wall. The two other confederates continued to wait, seated. This scene was allowed to play out for two more minutes.

The real test was, would the participant feel moved to respond compassionately, and give up his/her chair to the woman on crutches? Condon and his colleagues found there was a clear difference in behavior: those who had undergone meditation training (either in compassion or mindfulness) were *five times* more likely to give up their seat to the woman on crutches than those who had not practiced meditation. That's a huge effect.

A small gesture? Maybe so. But some argue that these kinds of behavioral measures might be more meaningful than those derived from an EEG or an MRI machine – they tap into how we respond to our fellow humans.

This result is even more striking considering that the odds were stacked against the participant. “The truly surprising aspect of this finding is that meditation made people willing to act virtuous — to help another who was suffering — even in the face of a norm not to do so,” said DeSteno. “The fact that the other actors were ignoring the pain creates a ‘bystander-effect’ that normally tends to reduce helping.” Perhaps you've experienced this effect yourself, feeling less inclined to help someone in need if you are on a street full of other people who are pretending the situation doesn't exist. That these participants were so willing to help, even in the face of this implicit pressure to remain seated, suggests a powerful effect of meditation on social behavior.

Condon reflects, “We knew that meditation improves a person’s own physical and psychological well-being, but now we have evidence that meditation actually increases compassionate behavior.” Those who are familiar with meditation know that its sometimes easy to feel compassion when sitting peacefully (and alone) on the cushion, but its in our everyday lives and interactions with others where the rubber meets the road.

We at Mind and Life are thrilled to see this kind of research being done on the real-world effects of contemplative practice. Condon's study was funded by a [Mind and Life Francisco J. Varela Research Award](#), and will be published soon in the journal *Psychological Science*. Co-author Gaelle Desbordes of Massachusetts General Hospital and Boston University is also a past Varela Award recipient.

Condon was recently granted a [Mind and Life 1440 Award](#) to continue this work, which together with the study described above will make up his doctoral dissertation. Considering the role of the Mind & Life Institute in his career development, he remarks, “Mind and Life has been a great resource for me. The community provides me with a strong scientific foundation to study meditation, and an opportunity to interact with experts in neuroscience and contemplative scholarship. Funding from Mind and Life has allowed me to conduct interesting research on the social effects of meditation that I would not have been able to conduct otherwise. Overall, I probably would not have pursued meditation as a research topic without the support of the Mind and Life community and these awards.”

As with any study, this experiment has limitations, and follow-up work needs to be done. One potential caveat is that the comparison group was not exposed to the social interactions and the presence of an engaging teacher that was experienced by the meditation group on a weekly basis. Its possible that the observed increase in helping behavior was not due specifically to meditation, but to these other social influences. Measures indicate that both the meditation and control groups had similar levels of social interaction in their lives during the course of the study, making this possibility unlikely, but future research will need to rule it out conclusively.

We look forward to the results of Paul’s next study, which will extend his work to investigate the effects of meditation on behavioral and physiological responses to anger in real-world settings. Hopefully, studies like this will help us understand how the benefits of meditation transfer “off the cushion,” to alleviate suffering in everyday life.

We live in a distraction filled world often so difficult to navigate, much less escape. Most of us don't have even one moment of solitude in our day nor do we make the time. We fill our schedules to ensure no time gaps, but very well may be missing something valuable along the way.

Meditation offers you an escape from reality, yielding so many amazing and miraculous benefits. There is much more to meditation than meets the eye, with a limitless array of physical, spiritual, mental, & psychological benefits, anyone can benefit.

### **Meditation melts stress and anxiety**

Stress and anxiety can cause many problems, including shortening your life. There are some schools of thought that believe stress and anxiety, once trapped in the body, can manifest into illness and disease. If you don't find a way to melt the layers of anxiety that accumulate within your energy field, the layers continue to build and build causing a myriad of health problems. Regular meditation is like a mini vacation for your mind, and it is more effective than the strongest medication you can take.

### **The psychological benefits of meditation are wide ranging**

The psychological benefits of meditation are wide ranging: heightened creativity, decreased stress and anxiety, decreased irritability, improved memory and even increased happiness and emotional stability. Regular meditation can also help you to be a better problem solver, with a more focused mind, leading to greater overall productivity. In addition, psychologically speaking, meditation can increase awareness, while making self-actualization more probable, help with mood swings, boost confidence, increase self-acceptance & empathy.

### **Meditation gets to the core of who you really are**

Like cool rain on a hot day, meditation clears out the emotional debris and waste. It offers you a fresh perspective and a new look. It can be done anywhere and anytime; no special equipment needed. Meditation helps you get deep into your subconscious mind to help you realize that you are much more than your thoughts. Meditation can help you shed the layers to reveal your true, amazing self.

### **Meditation can help melt away dysfunctional mental & emotional layers.**

By effectively warding off depression, anxiety, sadness, & addiction, meditation

does a better job, in both the short and long term, than drugs and/or alcohol to alleviate stress.

### **Meditation allows you to be in the present moment**

Our emotions often control us and hold us back, causing us to constantly review and relive the past while fretting over the future. Meditation allows us to live in the present moment, which is a beautiful and rare gift. We tend to carry around our emotional baggage within our energy fields, and this can weigh us down. Meditation can help you release these painful emotional burdens, quite often transforming your life in miraculous ways.



Meditation Psychology

### **Meditation offers you the ultimate mind-body release**

When examining the psychology of meditation, one must not forget that meditation allows you to let go and go with the flow. When you learn how to simply let go, you can step away, if only momentarily, from the problems of everyday life. The often self-created problems we encounter in life prevent us from living in the present moment, as we tend to get lost or trapped within our own limited thoughts. You can escape these annoyances, these hindrances, these inhibitions and all the other aggravations of life in your daily meditation sessions.

### **Meditation offers us a rare opportunity to escape our thoughts**

Life can be very brutal, psychologically speaking: meditation offers us a rare opportunity to escape our thoughts. Meditation can teleport you to another place & time, shedding painful emotional burdens and self-defeating thoughts, tapping into your vastly untapped creative energy.

Meditation Psychology

What is meditation psychology? Is it merely the western world's attempt to try to understand what meditation is and how it works like it does or is it something more than that?

People in the Far East in places like Tibet have been using meditation techniques for thousands of years so that now contemplation comes like second nature to them, they can live a life that westerners may think of as less than ideal, with a smile on their face and an inner calm that we have yet to fully understand. Maybe this is why psychology is taking such an interest in meditation these days?

This is not to say that everyone should up sticks and run to Tibet and join monks atop the nearest mountain practicing rumination with them, as there have been many studies now that can show that even entering a state of reflection for as little as ten minutes can have dramatic physiological and psychological effects.

So then, just how do we know that entering these meditative states can have beneficial psychological effects? Well, mainly through research and the use of equipment like MRI scans on brain activity on people who are practicing meditation on a daily basis. These tests are then compared against tests on people who do not practice any form of contemplation at any time. So what do these results show? They show that rumination activates areas of the brain that look after functions of our bodies that we have no control over such as blood pressure and digestion, it is also worthy of note that these two bodily functions are also highly susceptible to stress. So if sessions of deliberation have positive effects on these areas of the brain then it would help to fend off stress related conditions like heart disease, infertility and digestive problems.

Many psychologists are now active meditators themselves and actively refer clients to meditation as a way of reducing the internal chatter and reducing stress. It is also a way for psychology and meditation to work together in ways to

help clients who are struggling with feelings of anxiety as he/she may benefit the calming aspects of meditation.

Some experts suggest marrying meditation to psychotherapy as both allow the person to be present for the moment, open and none defensive. In meditation and psychotherapy people are trying not to get caught up in internal chatter, but to be present with what is happening here and now.

Certainly anything that helps us fight stress is a welcome tool. But what else might meditation be doing for us? Since researchers began amassing data, numerous studies have shown that certainly meditation has not only a mental but a profound physiological effect on the body. Studies have shown that meditation can reduce pain and improve the body's immune system, enabling it to better fight disease.

Psychologists have seen first hand how meditation with psychology can help clients. There have been interviews with psychologists where they have stated that they have referred patients to meditation to try offering extra help. Clients who may have been constantly arguing have returned to their psychologist's office after having sessions of deliberation and are not arguing like they were before.

It seems that many psychologists believe that meditations effectiveness has to do with putting aside attachment to our egos. Upon deliberation you zero in on a sense of self, the self-important ego becomes elusive. You become more aware that you are interconnected with other beings and you can better put your own worries into their proper perspective."

While western scientists and psychologists are still exploring exactly how and why meditation works, we already know that there are physiological and psychological benefits. And many therapists consider it a valid complement to more traditional therapies. So perhaps we should simply do what makes us feel better in the end.