



Meditation: A Tool to Strengthen Your Life and Practice

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You may have already read many articles about the wonders of meditation. It has been practiced for millennia and studied formally for more than fifty years. My guess is that many of you already meditate and many others have ruled it out. So why another article? I am a neophyte in Healing Touch (I have taken a Level 1 workshop) but a fairly experienced daily meditator (13 years), as well as a scholar-practitioner. My hope is to bring a little perspective to that question and open the door to the possibilities that meditation brings to those of us who practice Healing Touch and many other healing techniques, both conventional and complementary.

I am a great believer in cross-training at many levels. Having learned a number of techniques, I choose from among them for each of my client sessions and my self-care sessions. You probably do the same. I have been excited about a number of techniques, including Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT, aka “tapping”), Reiki, yoga, hypnosis, meditation and Healing Touch. What I have noticed over the years is that as I add new techniques, layer upon layer, I experience deeper levels of connection with my clients and hear positive feedback from them regarding the depth and effectiveness of the sessions. Additionally, I experience a sense of personal depth—an inner resource that feels expanded and more present in my own life.

I have experienced Healing Touch sessions at the hands of gifted practitioners. My own training in it gave my work a level of deepening that I think comes from additional tools. Yet with all my training in various energy healing modalities, I keep returning to meditation as the basis for all my healing work. Why is this the case?

A number of years ago, I saw various images in popular magazines of brain scans of some sort — usually they were obtained with Functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI). The neuroscientific community communicated their excitement about the world-changing understanding that our brains could, in fact, grow. Neurogenesis and neuroplasticity were real and it meant that we were not limited by a set number of brain cells, which we destroy routinely and eternally. One of the consistent themes in the many articles about brain optimization was the importance of the practice of meditation. Meditation seemed to be the foundation and key practice that allowed positive changes to occur.

Once that new understanding percolated through my mind, I realized that I wanted to optimize my brain in whatever ways I could. In my personal life, I began meditating. In my professional life, I often suggested meditation to clients. In my academic life, as I began to explore what was most meaningful for



me to pursue in a dissertation project, I decided that I wanted to learn about positive human transformation. While that concept is rather ephemeral, as my dissertation chair pointed out to me, meditation — a well-known agent of transformation — was concrete. I was fascinated by the studies (Lazar et al., 2005) that showed evidence of the increase in cortical mass as a direct result of meditation.

What this means is that we can physically improve our brains by meditating. Meditation is known for so many, many positive outcomes. Increasing those outcomes in our lives — focus, compassion, self-efficacy,

positive affect and increased mindfulness and self-awareness (Kemeny et al., 2012). Shonin et al. (2014) found that meditation can contribute to an increased sense of personal agency and well-being.

Exploration of neurological aspects of meditation has been the focus of a number of studies in recent years. Lazar et al. (2005) hypothesized that regular “meditation practice might be associated with changes in the brain’s physical structure” (p. 1893). To test the hypothesis, the authors used Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to ascertain the thickness of the cerebral cortex of experienced meditators and nonmedi-

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lower blood pressure, lower reactivity, heightened immune response, a sense of well-being, among many others (see References below) — can, I believe, amplify and deepen our other Energy Medicine practices. Have I seen any literature on this notion of amplification? No. But for those of you who have a research bent, I encourage you to formulate some good questions and do the research.

For those of us who are simply interested in increasing the positive aspects of our lives, however, I invite you to start or rekindle your meditation practice. There are so many benefits that occur as a result of meditation that it is challenging to list them all. In addition to the benefits listed above, others associated with meditation include cognitive improvement, psychological improvement, neurological improvement and the reduction of pain (Moore & Malinowski, 2009; Morone et al., 2008; Lykins & Baer, 2009; Lazar et al., 2005).

Regular meditation has also been found to facilitate the development of such positive psychological qualities as increased self-compassion, reflection and well-being as well as lowered negative reactivity (Lykins & Baer, 2009), decreased negative affect, increased

tators. They controlled for age and individual right-hemisphere average thickness. Increased thickness in the cortical regions that are specifically related to emotional, cognitive and sensory processing was evident in meditators. Increased cortical thickness, according to Lazar et al. (2005), supports increased neural function. Thus, increases in the regions noted above indicate that function improved in those areas. Additionally, Lazar et al. (2005) noted that meditation “may slow age-related thinning of the frontal cortex” (p. 1895). Other neurological studies of meditation conducted in recent years have begun to point toward various states traditionally associated with spiritual mastery, namely loving-kindness, compassion and calmness (Davidson et al., 2003; Giordano & Engebretson, 2006; Lutz et al., 2008).

Thus frequent, and optimally daily, meditation for the long-term seems to be beneficial. And while it seems obvious, meditation must be practiced in order for the benefits to be realized. So often we challenge others with ideas for good practices, but we forget to give ourselves the gifts of these practices.

As I completed my doctoral research in a study on



the effects of the experience of long-term meditation in the lives of a variety of meditators, a number of themes emerged, including increased equanimity, compassion and acceptance of self and others. Additional themes that emerged include a cultivation and deepening of personal spirituality; a sense of meditation as being connected to the creation of personal life purpose and meaning; and peak spiritual experiences, regardless of spiritual practice or background (Shaner, Kelly, Rockwell, & Curtis, 2015). Participants described the importance of meditation as giving them an anchor during difficult times and being one of the most important aspects of their lives.

Potentially, the regular incorporation of meditation is likely to usher in these transformational, positive effects. I know that has been the case for me. As we deepen our own levels resilience, acceptance and compassion, we can be more present for our loved ones, our clients and ourselves. €



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