

MEDITATION, MUSIC AND MIND

Introduction

A large number of workers have reported that practice of spirituality exerts a positive impact on mental health of an individual by relaxing the mind, alleviating depression and improving cognition, coping ability and psychological well being. There are several important vehicles for practicing spirituality like religiosity, meditation, contemplation and other methods of concentration, music, yoga, vegetarianism, fasting and positive selfless conduct. Methods of concentration include transcendental meditation, vipassana, zen, tai chi, and qi gong meditation etc. Practice of music, incense touch, visual symbols all of which do not require cognitive pathways are particularly important methods of spiritual therapy for dementia. Spiritual peace can be achieved by as simple a method as watching nature e.g. setting of Sun. A closely related term is religion which is widely practiced by many. Majority of people believe in God; 9 out of 10 people pray and 97% believe their prayers are answered. Religion and spirituality are often regarded as same thing but they are different although overlap exists. Religion includes specific beliefs and practices by its followers whereas spirituality is a broader concept and is reflected in everyone in every day thoughts, feelings and actions. Spirituality represents how individuals think, feel, act and interact to achieve integration of body, mind and soul in relationship to God and the cosmic world. For instance, any number of positive thoughts like love, compassion, contentment, optimism, enthusiasm, composure, forgiveness, harmony, honesty, freedom, friendship could be the vehicles for practicing spirituality and giving a sense of feeling high and great. Developing such perquisites is the work of a life time and earlier done, better it is. For example, to develop enthusiasm, have faith in the goodness of life, self and others and belief that behind the dark curtain there is always a hidden unforeseen benefit. Uma is the goddess of enthusiasm in our country and she is constantly invoked for well being.

Since meditation and participation in musical activities are relatively easy and can be practiced by self or motivated by therapists in a short time , this paper describes these two aspects in relation to mind with particular emphasis on dementia.

Meditation

An ordinary person considers meditation or contemplation only as a religious action like worship or prayer. But meditation strengthens the mind, and makes it one pointed. In addition, blood pressure, metabolic rate and oxygen consumption in the body go down. Before launching on meditation, senses have to be brought somewhat under control. This is done by practice of rhythmic control of breath i.e. breathing exercises known as Pranayam which are of many types e.g. Nadi Shodhak Pranayam and Ujjayi Pranayam. Then follow the concentration exercises, Uninterrupted flow of concentration for 12 seconds is called 'dharna' and when this lasts for 144 seconds, it is called 'dhyana' i.e. meditation. One must meditate at a time for one Indian 'gharri' which is 24 minutes. Meditation is best carried out by sitting before your diety, fixing your loving gaze on His loving eyes and concentrate and mentally recite a Mantra without moving your lips or tongue. If the mind is restless, reciting or singing the Mantra loudly is permissible, but always keeping your gaze fixed on your diety with your eyes closed. Any Mantra can be selected i.e. Gaayatri mantra, Maha mantra, Soham, Om, Hari Om, Namah Shivaaya etc.

Using the words Om Shanti is one good powerful way of inducting yourself into meditation. It takes just a few seconds of concentration to connect with the soul-self and release the current of upliftment. It can be practiced a number of times during the day and only for about 10 to 20 seconds each time but with complete attentiveness. With this exercise, there is always time to reconnect and recharge.

Music

Music has also a positive impact on health especially mental health in the elderly. Music works as a stress buster and as a soothing balm. Music improves quality of sleep. In all tribal healings, music therapy is integral part of treatment. Music therapy is even known to improve quality of patients getting palliative treatment and can be a part of nursing care of older patients. Paythagoras asked for daily singing and playing musical instrument to ward off anger, worry, fear, sorrow etc. Music of Mozart has been shown to enhance concentration and creativity, even heighten intelligence and improve speech abilities and communicative skills. There is definitive evidence that music can lower levels of cortisone which is stress hormone in the body and raise levels of melatonin which is sleep inducer hormone. Music also releases endorphins which are natural pain killers. In western countries,

music therapists are known to work in psychiatric hospitals, medical hospitals, rehabilitative centres, OPDs, day care centres, facilities for disabled, drug and alcohol programmes, senior centres, nursing homes, hospice programmes, correctional facilities, schools and private clinics. In the Indian context, several 'ragas' have been claimed to have specific benefits in different neurological diseases as follows.

1. Komal-Rishabh-Asavari (morning raga) & Shankara (night raga) for depression.
2. Nat Bhairav (morning raga) and Sohni (night raga) for anxiety.
3. Ramkali (morning raga) and Gorakh Kalyan (night raga) for stroke.
4. Bhatiyar (morning raga) and Yaman (night raga) for Parkinsonism.

Music is also considered as an efficient non invasive alternative medicine in various diseases in elderly including Alzheimer's Disease. Music therapy can meet following needs of Alzheimer's Disease patients.

1. Facilitates reminiscences and evoke memories of significant events and people.
2. Motivates the patient for independence and communication.
3. Gives feeling of dignity and self worth.
4. Provides an outlet of self-expression.
5. Stimulates memory.
6. Decreases aggressive behavior in older patients of dementia.

In music therapy for Alzheimer's Disease, knowledge of music, Alzheimer's Disease and Counseling are all needed. Family members themselves are valuable resource for providing music therapy at home which is more useful than asking a patient to go to some centre or asking a music therapy specialist to visit home only periodically.

There are two types of music therapy, passive i.e. listening and active i.e. participating including playing on musical instruments. Some suggestions are singing old songs together and other group singing like kirtans, clapping on music and making body movements with music. Familiar music generates a more positive response than unfamiliar music, as it is predictable and reassuring. Slow rhythmic music is soothing and comforting while fast tempo music is stimulating and energizing. Watching spiritual TV channels, listening to devotional songs and religious discourses supported by music are also useful. Chanting of Om and other

Mantras help in healing the physical imbalances, relax the mind, improve concentration and as mentioned earlier help in meditating. Chanting of Om can dissolve pain quickly and gives a wealth of soothing energies and a rejuvenating experience contributing to health and happiness.

Discussion of Eternal Truth in the company of good and pious persons is called 'satsang and is a very effective method of securing spiritual development. Satsang comprises 'sat' which means truth. Prayers, singing of devotional or classical songs, chanting of hymns or contemplation thereof and recitations of mantras are done in these congregations. It can favorably affect physiological functions such as respiration, heart rate and blood pressure and communication.

Spirituality and dementia

Some would contend that those with dementia are still capable of high levels of spiritual well being even in the late stages of the disease. Spiritual and religious needs of dementia patients and their care givers, families and friends may not be respected nor addressed in clinical settings simply because health care provider may not be aware of such issues. It is recommended that religious services should be so designed as multisensory experiences which emphasize non cognitive pathways (e.g. visual symbols, touch, incense and music) over cognitive pathways (e.g. sermons, reading etc.). Emphasis has also emerged on spirituality for care givers and family members who are looking after dementia patients. Care giving often taxes these people to the extent of compromising their health and well being and changing the dynamics of their families. In addition, legal, occupational, financial and housing problems can creep up for these care givers. It has been shown that care givers who have spiritual beliefs and practice them are less likely to be negatively affected by the burden of care giving than those who do not carry such beliefs.

(Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India-DC Souvenir. 2014; 28-31).