

## **Eastern Wisdom based therapies blended with cutting edge western neurosciences can offer dynamic results**

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*You are what your deep driving desire is.*

*As your desire is so is your will.*

*As your will is, so is your deed.*

*As your deed, so is your destiny.*

- *-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4,5*

Psychiatrists and their patients are increasingly aware of the basic need of all human beings need for a source of meaning that is greater than one's self. There is evidence that this awareness is being driven on one side by patient's wishes for their therapists to recognise their need for self-transcendence (1) and from another side by professionals goals to reduce the disability from mental disorders, these have resulted in a growing need to foster spirituality and well-being in clinical practice. This has led to a groundswell of professional work to focus on the importance of development of health and happiness rather than merely focussing on the earlier held goals of relieving disease and distress. (2)

The treatment of mental disorders has been improved with the introduction of many medications and psychotherapy techniques that show acute benefits in randomised controlled trials. However the benefits of treatments are moderate and incomplete, seen from frequent drop-outs, relapse and recurrence of illness.(3) The inadequacy of these available treatments result in persistent residual symptoms of disease and distress, as well as low levels of life satisfaction and well-being in most patients with mental disorders. The absence of life satisfaction and positive emotions is a serious problem, because the current evidence suggests the absence of positive emotions is more predictive of subsequent mortality and morbidity than the presence of negative emotions. (4) Unfortunately there is little evidence of any improvement in life satisfaction and positive emotions from the introduction of psychotropic drugs or manualized forms of psychotherapy from 1950 to present time. (5)

Therapies - Blending the best of eastern and western traditions.

Fortunately there is growing evidence showing it is possible to improve well-being in general populations as well as with patients with most mental disorders. Therapies that have incorporated the blending of philosophy, the practice and the spiritual venerable time known, eastern wisdom and cutting edge western sciences have now been found to give the dynamic results. These effective methods of intervention focus on the development of positive emotions and the character traits that underlie well-being, as has been described in positive approaches to philosophies of life, psychology and psychiatry. Evidence is there from randomized controlled trials of these therapies using cognitive exercises to achieve

acceptance, hope, meaning and purpose along with behavioural exercise of meditation and rituals to enhance well-being and happiness in patients with mental disorders. (6) These therapies have also shown enhanced well-being in samples of student and volunteers.(7) These methods use the best of eastern and western traditions to achieve improved well-being, increased positive emotions and reduced negative emotions.

### Science of Well-being

New research from Well-being centre in Washington USA suggest that well-being can be accomplished by working on the development of the three branches of mental self-governance that can be measured as character traits in the temperament and character inventory.(TCI) (8) The three character traits of the TCI are self-directedness ( i.e., responsible, purposeful, resourceful), cooperativeness (i.e., Tolerant, helpful, compassionate) and self-transcendence (i.e., intuitive, judicious, spiritual) Western concepts of mental health usually emphasize self-directedness and cooperativeness but has neglected the crucial role of spiritual awareness and meaning based on self-transcendent values. Therapies using western scientific operative structured modules which incorporate eastern concepts, that offer the practice of catalytic sequences of exercises, such as mediation, silence of the mind, giving and receiving, cause and effect, reflecting and seeking purpose in life, have been able to demonstrate the enhancing of these character traits. This is seen with self-directedness, through the strengthening of the sense of hope and mastery, with cooperativeness, through kindness and forgiveness and with self-transcendence through increased awareness and finding meaning greater than oneself. (6, 2) There is now evidence that exercising and strengthening of these three character traits of the TCI can result in increased scores on the personal well-being index scale. (6)

### Science of positive emotions

Positive emotions which include compassion, forgiveness, love, hope, joy, faith, trust, awe and gratitude arise from inborn mammalian capacity for unselfish parental love. (the unconditional sacrifices a mother makes for her offspring from birth to death are an universal and inherent trait in human behaviour) As they emanate from our feelings of limbic mammalian brain they can be understood as part of our evolutionary heritage. Thus all human beings are hardwired for positive emotion (10) and we see these positive emotions are a common factor in all major faiths that human beings practice. Negative emotions such as fear and anger are also inborn and are of importance, as it plays a role in individual survival and hence is about the self. The long term end points of these two emotions are quite different. While negative emotions are often important to very survival, though only in time present, positive emotions are more expansive and help the person to broaden, build and survive in time future. (11) Studies have shown that negative emotions narrow attention (12) while positive emotions such as joy make thought patterns more flexible, creative, integrative and efficient. (13, 14) The effect of positive emotions on the autonomic nervous system has much in common with the relaxation response to meditation. (15)

Different to the metabolic and cardiac arousal that the flight or fight response that negative emotions induces in the sympathetic autonomic nervous systems. Positive emotions via the parasympathetic nervous system can reduce basal metabolism reflected in lowered blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and even muscle tension. Functional imaging studies of Kundalini yoga meditation have shown increased parasympathetic activity producing relaxation, followed by a profound sense of quiescence. (16) Positive emotions, meditation and spiritual experiences cannot be disentangled, suggesting that spirituality has a deep psychobiological basis. (10) Positive emotions is a brain activity. Neuropsychological Studies have shown that in subjects with gloomy introverted personalities the right prefrontal cortex is more active than the left prefrontal cortex while in subjects with bright outgoing personalities the left prefrontal cortex is more active than the right. (16)

### Psychiatry and Humanity

Psychiatry is derived from Greek and literally means “healing of the psyche.” The “Psyche” is the Greek word for spirit, which is the immaterial but intelligent aspect of consciousness of a human being. Human consciousness is characterised by a capacity for self-awareness. The great mystery of neurosciences is that human consciousness cannot be explained or reduced to materialistic processes.(9) Thus in understanding and incorporating eastern positive approaches to philosophies of life, psychology and concepts, psychiatry can transcend the important need to understand what it means to be a human being. Humanity cannot be reduced to matter, as in behaviourism or molecular psychiatry. Psychiatrists need information to supplement their education and understanding of spiritual development as a biopsychosocial process that is not dogmatic or sectarian. Thus authentic development of well-being requires the autonomy of others and (a higher level of ) tolerance of very divergent opinions.

### Self-awareness and well-being

Self-awareness a character of human consciousness requires an understanding of the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of a human being. Researchers have described the major stages of self-awareness associated with the path to achieving well-being. (21) When self-awareness is lacking people might act on their immediate likes and dislikes usually described as an immature or ‘Child Like’ ego state.(2) Normally adult cognition involves a capacity to delay gratification to attain personal goals but remains egocentric often resulting with frequent distress when attachments and desires are frustrated. This is considered the adult state. There is a choice to relax and let go of negative emotions thus allowing for acceptance of reality and movement to higher stages of coherent understanding.(2) When a typical adult operates like a good parent who is allocentric in perspective, that is others-centred, he or she is capable of calmly, considering the perspective and needs of others in a balanced way, that leads to satisfaction and harmony, this is considered the stage of met cognitive awareness and mindfulness.(2) At this stage a person is able to observe self and others understanding without being judgemental and blaming or retaliating. The next stage

of self-awareness is the stage of contemplation, which is the direct perception of one's initial perspective- that is the preverbal outlook or schemas that direct one's attention and provide the frame that organize our expectations, attitudes and interpretation of events. This is equated with the state of well-being. (2) Extensive empirical work has shown that movement through these stages of development can be achieved in terms of steps in character development. (22) The clinical utility of this is that therapist can teach people their capacity for self-awareness, moving through each of these stages of awareness that is described. Thus to foster a fuller awareness, therapies could be augmented with an added focus on existential issues, such as finding self-acceptance and meaning in coping with life challenges. Meaning can be found by encountering someone or something that is valued, acting with kindness and purpose in the care and service of others, or developing attitudes such as compassion and humour that gives meaning to suffering. There is evidence that spiritually augmented therapy is more effective than CBT in activating feelings of hope and life satisfaction and has shown in randomized controlled studies to reduce relapse rates and to enhance functional recovery. This reduction in relapse rates might suggest that fostering the search for meaning may help people develop their character to new levels in which they are able to sustain/consolidate improvement and reduce their vulnerability to future episodes. Fostering the development of character traits such as being self-directed, cooperative and spiritual can lead to a good quality of life. Thus understanding ways to foster this development allows a therapist to treat the full range of psychopathology, provided the therapist knows appropriate and effective ways for dealing with the many likely obstacles that patients may encounter along their path to well-being

## Happiness and Success

Understanding the concepts of happiness in Eastern cultures and Western cultures is useful. In the western cultures positive hedonic experiences of happiness are associated with personal achievement, whereas in eastern cultures happiness is associated with social harmony. (17) Similarly western traditions emphasis is on 'doing' oriented toward rewards (18) while eastern traditions focus on continuous excellence of 'being' that is associated with stable character traits. Happiness as a trait and can be cultivated by specific yoga practices. It represents a deep sense of well-being and a reduced vulnerability to outer circumstances. (20)

Understanding the anatomy and physiology of success is useful. Success in life could be defined as the continued expansion of happiness and the progressive realization of worthy goals. Success is the ability to fulfil your desires with effortless ease. But success including the creation of wealth has always been considered a process that requires hard work. There are many aspects to success; material wealth might be but only one component. Success is a journey and not a destination. Thus material abundance in all its expressions might be one of those things that make the journey` more enjoyable. But success also includes good

health, energy, and enthusiasm for life, fulfilling relationships (a sense of fulfilment), creative freedom, emotional and psychological stability – positive emotions and a sense of well-being.

## Conclusion

In providing this interlude into these directions, I believe that these understandings might help achieve for patients, beyond fighting of disease and distress, the important need of also achieving life satisfaction, well-being and happiness. Eastern based time tested traditions and values are now accepted as an important part of giving patients whole person care - the much advocated patient centred care that is being recommended. With new advances on the biological aspects of eastern models of meditation, yoga, mindfulness and its impact from gene expression and epigenetics to structural expressions from imaging studies there is an increased need to incorporate these evidence based best practises to get the ultimate desired best outcomes for patients and general populations which we work with.

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