

Tibetan Buddhist Meditation System

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The Tibetan Buddhist meditation system has been used extensively as a subject of scientific study by Benson (2000), Newberg (2001), and others. Like all major meditation systems, there are essentially two components. The first is called *shamatha* or *calm-abiding*. This is when the meditator is expected to be able to quiet the mind for increasingly longer periods of time. As the ACC is constantly transitioning between thoughts and ideas, the challenge is for the meditator to gradually slow down the thought-switching process. When a meditator detects an intervening thought, the goal is to gently return to the subject of the meditation, such as the breath.

The second component of the Tibetan Buddhist meditation system is called *analytical meditation*. The presumption is that the meditator has already mastered calm-abiding meditation. Once their skill level has reached that point, they then begin applying their attention to a concept such as compassion, impermanence, or some other aspect of their religious practice.

While these two core components are the major facets of their practice, the system does not stop there. Central to this brand of meditation are several visualization rituals –especially among their higher-level tantric (i.e. continuum) practices. The act of participating in these exercises requires the meditator to *see* certain auspicious historical (or symbolic) characters of their religion, memorize certain signs or artwork – as intricate as a two-dimensional mandala – or even visualize energy movements in their bodies. Through an orally transmitted teaching (i.e. an empowerment) a master teaches the student how to complete the visualized ritual in exquisitely vivid detail. The intent of these practices is to affect a complete mental and physical transformation.

The neurological impact of such a prolonged devotion to intensely detailed practice is amazing. The increased neuronal growth in the right prefrontal cortex, the hippocampus, the thalamus, and the parietal lobe is astounding. It is believed that the most advanced practitioners have a tremendous ability to manipulate bioelectricity and exert a significant level of control over their autonomic nervous system. What studies of the Tibetan Buddhist meditation system show is that it is possible to affect both mental and neuro-physiological transformation merely by the therapeutic use of attention.

Recent research findings regarding meditation are extremely significant to this dissertation. They represent some of the most thorough studies concerning attention and the use of imagination and visual memory. Through the use of reliable and replicable research methodologies, these results leave no doubt as to the power of the conscious mind to deliberately affect both neuro-physiology and behavior. Nevertheless, it appears that the impact of this work – which is being conducted by leading universities and research facilities around the globe – is not yet impacting allopathic protocols. At best some hospitals are opening up integrative health care facilities, which promote meditation, other relaxation techniques, and introduce patients to a variety of alternative healthcare modalities. Regardless, too many allopathic practitioners are still excessively skeptical and mistakenly continue to use phrases such as "the placebo effect" or "all in their mind" in order to rationalize empirical results that they have yet to match with recent scientific evidence.

[The International Hypnosis Research Institute](#) is a member supported project involving integrative

health care specialists from around the world. We provide information and educational resources to clinicians. Dr. Brunson is the author of over 150 [self-help and clinical](#) CD's and MP3's.

References:

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Newberg, A. & D'Aquili, E. (2001). *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science & The Biology of Belief*. New York: Balantine.