

Effect of Dynamic Meditation on the Realization of Transpersonal Self

Efecto de la Meditación Dinámica en la Formación del Yo Transpersonal

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Abstract

Introduction: Transpersonal self and related concepts have been studied using various forms of meditation. However, there is a paucity of research examining the effect of dynamic meditation on the realization of the transpersonal self. **Objectives:** The present study was aimed at studying the effect of dynamic meditation on the realization of the transpersonal self. **Method:** The total sample of the study comprised 60 subjects, 30 each in experimental and control groups. Subjects in the experimental group received 21 days training in dynamic meditation. Transpersonal experiences were measured before and after dynamic meditation training in both groups with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. **Results:** Obtained data were analyzed with the help of Chi square and themes were identified qualitatively. In the post test, 73% subjects in the experimental, and none in the control group reported transpersonal experiences. The following six themes of the transpersonal self were identified: experience of being detached from physical body, experience of illuminating blissful and eternally calm self, experience of bliss and calmness which don't have a cause, experience of guardians or higher self in relation to physical and mental existence, perceiving the experience as indescribable, perceiving the experience as transformational. **Conclusions:** Dynamic meditation was effective in realizing the transpersonal self.

Keywords: dynamic meditation, transpersonal self, experimental group, control group

Resumen

Introducción: El yo transpersonal y sus conceptos relacionados han sido estudiados utilizando diferentes formas de meditación. Sin embargo, ha habido una escasa investigación al examinar el efecto de la meditación dinámica en la formación del yo transpersonal. **Objetivos:** Estudiar el efecto de la meditación dinámica en la formación del yo transpersonal. **Método:** La muestra consistió en 60 sujetos, 30 en un grupo experimental y 30 en un grupo control. Los sujetos del grupo experimental recibieron 21 días de entrenamiento en meditación dinámica. La experiencia transpersonal se midió antes y después de dicho entrenamiento en ambos grupos, con la ayuda de una entrevista semi-estructurada. **Resultados:** Los datos fueron analizados mediante Chi cuadrado y análisis temático. Tras el entrenamiento en meditación dinámica, un 73% de los sujetos del grupo experimental informaron haber tenido experiencias transpersonales, mientras que no hubo ninguno con esta experiencia en el grupo control. La experiencia relativa al yo transpersonal se clasificó en los siguientes seis temas: experiencia fuera del cuerpo, felicidad espiritual y paz eterna, éxtasis y calma sin causa, experiencia de guardianes o yo superior más allá de la existencia física y mental, percepción indescriptible de la experiencia, y transformación personal. **Conclusiones:** La meditación dinámica se ha mostrado efectiva en la formación del yo transpersonal.

Palabras clave: meditación dinámica, yo transpersonal, grupo experimental, grupo control

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Introduction

Transpersonal self

Transpersonal has been defined as experiences "in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). The common denominator of this otherwise rich and ramified group of phenomena is the feeling of the individual that his consciousness expanded beyond the usual ego boundaries and the limitations of time and space (Grof, 1993).

William James (1960) refers to transpersonal or wider self—a higher or spiritual self which is the source of religious experience. This "higher self" of a person to a large degree overlaps with highest selves of others (Maslow, 1973). The higher self (true, spiritual or transpersonal self) features prominently in the *psycho-synthesis model* developed by Assagioli (1991). Descriptions of the notion of transpersonal self can also be found in extensive writings of Aurobindo (1970).

Based on different conceptions, Daniels (2005) suggested aspects of the transpersonal self, or transpersonal identity that may be understood as:

- 1.- The Organismic "inner core" or Real Self
- 2.- Self-identification with highest values
- 3.- The whole psyche-conscious and unconscious
- 4.- The higher unconscious
- 5.- An archetype (inspiring, powerful, integrating, spiritual)
- 6.- The extension or "raising" of consciousness
- 7.- The integration of conscious and unconscious
- 8.- A guiding force or organizing principle
- 9.- An inner unifying centre
- 10.- A permanent centre of Being
- 11.- The reincarnating psychic being
- 12.- A subtle self-stream
- 13.- The individualized divine soul (Atman)
- 14.- The Universal Self (Atman-Brahman)
- 15.- The Transcendent Witness (possibly eternal)
- 16.- No Self or One Taste (anatta)
- 17.- The spiritual transformation of the personality
- 18.- The connected/permeable self
- 19.- The integrated, embodied spiritual life

Many transpersonal psychologists prefer to talk about transpersonal self or transpersonal identity rather than the soul. Unlike the term "soul" which carries all sort of religious metaphysical connotations, "self" and "identity" are essentially

psychological experimental constructs that make no particular metaphysical assumptions (Daniels, 2002).

According to Wilber, there are realms to self – gross/ego, subtle soul and casual/witness. "The ego (frontal self) includes all those self-structure or self stages that serve to orient us to the gross (physical) world. The soul (or deeper psychic) is the self- system that operates the level of subtle reality (pure thought). Finally the witness (or self) is adapted to the casual realm (root attention). They are always simultaneously present although to various degrees, and each develops alongside the other. The self witness is also charged with the role of attempting to integrate the various self-streams, along with other aspects of our experience (such as our cognitive development, world view, moral values)". What could an actual "transpersonal" experience really mean? It is not nearly as mysterious as it sounds. You yourself can be aware of your objective self, you can observe your individual ego or person, you are aware of yourself generally. "But who, then, is doing the observing? What is it that is observing or witnessing your individual self? That therefore transcends your individual self in some important ways? Who or what is that? The observer in you, the witness in you, transcends the isolated person in you" (Wilber, 1998).

Meditation is one way for the conscious development of higher consciousness or for realization of transpersonal self.

Meditation

Neuroscientists and other meditation researchers have used the generic term "meditation" to refer to a wide variety of disparate methods which "inevitably trivializes the practices themselves" (Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007, p. 500). In addition there has been a tendency to mix-and-match different methods as if they were equivalent which has resulted in an unfortunate conflation of definition (Awasthi, 2013). Presently, there are two popularly used definitions for meditation. One "camp" has defined meditation essentially as a family of mental training techniques (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008; Raffone & Srinivasan, 2010) —which can be called "method definition." The other "camp" has defined meditation by reference to the enhanced experiential states or altered states of consciousness which arise from the use of these methods e.g., "pure consciousness," "absolute unitary being," and "non-dual awareness"— which can be called the "state definition." Nash

and Newberg (2013) addressed this potentially confusing duality by proposing a model of meditation which is inclusive of both method and state. In this paradigm, method and state are viewed as separate stages in a dynamic process which unfolds over time. The method is considered to be a potentially facilitative tool and the state is the causally-related intended result.

Different meditation traditions also often have very different goals, ranging from physical health and mental well-being to harmony with nature, higher states of consciousness, and experience of God.

Lutz et al. (2008) suggested two categories of meditation practices: focused attention and open monitoring meditation. Travis and Shear (2010) added a third category of meditation practice, automatic self-transcending. Details of these are as follows:

1. **Focused attention meditation:** In focused attention or concentrative styles of meditations, voluntary sustained attention is focused on a given object, and attention is brought back to the object of attention when the mind has wandered (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Raffone & Srinivasan, 2009). The meditator is controlling the contents in the beam of attention.
2. **Open monitoring meditation:** Open monitoring or mindfulness-based meditations, involve the non-reactive monitoring of the content of ongoing experience, primarily as a means to become reflectively aware of the nature of emotional and cognitive patterns (Raffone & Srinivasan, 2010). Open monitoring practices are based on an attentive set characterized by an open presence and a nonjudgmental awareness of sensory, cognitive and affective fields of experience in the present moment and involve a higher-order meta-awareness of ongoing mental processes (Cahn & Polich, 2006). Mindfulness meditation includes a broad range of meditation practices which differ widely (Chiesa & Serretti, 2010; Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007; Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011; Grossman, 2011).
3. **Automatic Self-transcending:** Automatic self-transcending practices involve transcending of the procedures of the meditation. Since cognitive control increases mental activity, self-transcending procedures would need to involve minimal cognitive control- be automatic or effortless.

In addition to the above mentioned categories of meditations, some meditation techniques involve movement and they are known as movement-based contemplative practices. Compared to the extensive body of work on mindfulness-based practices, far fewer scientific studies have examined the mechanisms underlying movement-based embodied contemplative practices (Schmalzl, Crane-Godreau & Payne, 2014). Active/dynamic meditation is one such movement-based contemplative practice:

Active/dynamic Meditation

This refers to any meditation technique which does not have one's body assuming a static posture. Among many such techniques, dynamic meditation introduced by Osho is one of the most popular active mediation techniques. He said that if people are repressed, psychologically are carrying a lot of burden, then they need catharsis. So *dynamic meditation* is just to help them clean the place (Osho, 2003).

There are five stages of this meditation and it takes around 1 hour. Although it can be done alone, in a group it is more powerful. It is an individual experience so you should remain oblivious of others around you and keep your eyes closed throughout, preferably using a blindfold. It is best to have an empty stomach and wear loose, comfortable clothing while doing this meditation.

First Stage: 10 minutes

Breathe chaotically through the nose, concentrating always on exhalation. The body will take care of the inhalation. The breath should move deeply into the lungs. Be as fast as you can in your breathing, making sure the breathing stays deep. Do this as fast and as hard as you possibly can – and then a little harder, until you literally become the breathing. Use your natural body movements to help you to build up your energy. Feel it building up, but don't let go during the first stage.

Second Stage: 10 minutes

Explode! Express everything that needs to be thrown out. Go totally mad. Scream, shout, cry, jump, shake, dance, sing, laugh; throw yourself around. Hold nothing back; keep your whole body moving. A little acting often helps to get you started. Never allow your mind to interfere with what is happening. Be total, be whole hearted.

Third Stage: 10 minutes

With raised arms, jump up and down shouting the mantra, "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!", as deeply as possible. Each time you land, on the flats of your feet, let the sound hammer deeply. Give all you have; exhaust yourself totally.

Fourth Stage: 15 minutes

Stop! Freeze wherever you are, in whatever position you find yourself. Don't arrange the body in any way. A cough, a movement – anything will dissipate the energy flow and the effort will be lost. Be a witness to everything that is happening to you.

Fifth Stage: 15 minutes

Celebrate through dance, expressing your gratitude towards the whole. Carry your happiness with you throughout the day.

Dynamic meditation provides the meditator an opportunity for catharsis and to purify his mind and body which according to Osho is essential to gain the meditative state of mind.

Meditation and Transpersonal Self

There is a scarcity of research on meditation and transpersonal experience. Some research has been conducted on transpersonal related constructs such as phenomenological nature of sense of boundries (Ataria, Dor-Ziderman & Berkovich-Ohana, 2015; Ataria, 2014). EEG studies were conducted to identify the neuroelectrical correlates of related experiences such as union with God (Beauregard & Paquette, 2008; Josipovic, 2010; Travis, 2001) and specific neural correlates of meditations (Davis & Vago, 2013).

Some studies revealed meditators' self-reports claim a significantly more positive relationship between their selves and God (Nystul & Garde, 1977) and the link between self-transcendental experiences and self-actualization (Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991). Other studies have investigated the effect of meditation on the perception of the self (Bercovich-Ohana & Glicksohn, 2014; Shapiro, 1983).

Haimerl and Valentine (2001) found that scores on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal levels were a positive function of

meditation experience, suggesting that progress in Buddhist meditation leads to significant growth in these components of personality.

These studies were based on yoga and Buddhist meditation. However, research has not been conducted on various dynamic or active forms of meditation and realization of the transpersonal self. As noted by researchers different procedures of meditation might well be expected to produce different results with regard to different variables and thus ought to be evaluated individually (Jonathan, 2006).

In view of the above, the present investigation was planned to study the effect of dynamic meditation on the realization of the transpersonal self.

Method**Sample and Design**

Total sample consisted of 60 subjects, 30 each in experimental and control group with an age range of 18 to 55 years. 11 males and 19 females were in the experimental group, with a mean age of 35.47 years. There were 12 males and 18 females in the control group, with a mean age of 31.27 years. In the experimental group the number of undergraduate, graduate and post graduate subjects was 3, 20, and 7 respectively. In the control group, the number of undergraduate, graduate, and post graduate subjects was 6, 11, and 13 respectively. Subjects who had serious physical or psychological problems were excluded from the study.

The present study was a pretest - posttest control group design.

Data collection

Transpersonal experience is quite a wide concept having a number of categories. There are several scales to measure it, such as Experienced Deviation from Normal State (EDN) questionnaire (Kjellgren), Mystical States Scale (Hood, 1975), Expression of spirituality inventory (MacDonald, 2000). These scales have their merits in measuring dimensions of the transpersonal experiences they are specifically designed to measure. Both of them have their drawbacks being a quantitative measure of a highly abstract concept experience by human consciousness. The subjective experience of transpersonal self cannot yield itself to a quantitative method of assessment as to a qualitative inquiry.

"Many of the most significant and exciting life events and extraordinary experiences - moments of clarity, illumination, and healing - have been systematically excluded from conventional research" (Braud & Anderson, 1998). These existing quantitative tools don't capture the transpersonal self as conceptualized by Wilber (1999). Richness of highly refined and subjective experience like the transpersonal self can be assessed only through a qualitative method. Moreover, these scales were not standardized on Indian settings so it might have given additional bias in measurement. In order to capture the richness of subjective experience of the transpersonal self, a semi-structured interview was designed with open ended questions keeping in mind the abstract nature and dimensions of the transpersonal self.

The operational definition of the transpersonal self was: "Experience of Witnessing Self Detached from Body and Mind" as suggested by Wilber (1998).

Keeping in mind the nature of the concept of the transpersonal self, the following questions were formulated for the purpose of interviewing the subjects of the study:

- Do you think you have ever felt yourself detached from your body and mind?
- When did you have such experience?
- What does your experience mean to you?
- What's your evaluation of your experience?
- How do you account for or explain your transpersonal experience, what do you think is its cause or source?
- Please share your experience in detail.

Procedure

Subjects were contacted individually. Informed consent was taken from all the subjects

after explaining the purpose of the study. They were told that their identity will not be disclosed in any kind of publication of the study without their consent. Experimental group subjects were contacted by Osho Dhyandee Kendra, (located in Bareilly, India) where they received a 21 day dynamic meditation training under the guidance of Swami Gyan Samarpan, coordinator of Osho Dhyandee Kendra. The control group was matched in terms of important characteristics with the experimental group and were contacted in different localities of Bareilly city (Uttar Pradesh). Semi-structure interview was administered to the experimental and control groups before and after dynamic meditation training. Post assessment was done after 21 days of dynamic meditation training. Obtained data was analyzed with the help of Chi square and qualitatively themes were identified.

Results

The present study was a pretest-posttest design study which tries to find out the effect of dynamic meditation practices on the realization of the transpersonal self. The results of the study have been presented in Table 1.

In pre-experimental condition 40% subjects of the experimental group and 20% subjects of the control group were having transpersonal experiences. No significant group difference was found in terms of transpersonal experiences in the pre-experimental condition.

Significant difference was found in terms of transpersonal experiences in post-experimental conditions. Subjects of the experimental group (73.3%) were having more transpersonal experiences in comparison to the control group (0%) in post-experimental assessment (after 21 days training).

Table 1.

Transpersonal self experience of subjects

Condition	Group	Subjects not having transpersonal experience	Subjects having transpersonal experience	χ^2	df	p
Pre	Experimental	18 (60.0%)	12 (40.0%)	2.857	1	.158
	Control	24 (80.0%)	6 (20.0%)			
Post	Experimental	8 (26.7%)	22 (73.3%)	34.737	1	.000
	Control	30 (100.0%)	0 (.0%)			

Final comprehensive constituent themes in the transpersonal experience

In analysis of qualitative data we observed that in control group 6 subjects were having transpersonal experiences before meditation and they did not report any such experience after 21 days. Whereas, in the experimental group we found 12 people already having transpersonal experiences prior to the meditation workshop and after the 21 day meditation sessions, 22 subjects reported transpersonal experiences. It shows an increase in transpersonal experiences in the experimental group as compared to control group. Another point worth mentioning is that all the 6 subjects of the control group who reported experiences of the transpersonal in pre-conditions, reported their experiences either generated by some deep trauma or sudden accident. For them, such experiences were momentary and strange. They did not report it to be a great blissful or elating experience. Also, they did not count it as an overwhelming spiritual experience. On the other hand in the experimental group, people recognized it as a spiritual experience and showed their spiritual inclination even before learning of their conscious spiritual interests. This could imply a higher level of evolution in the experimental group subjects. Also considered was the fact that the people who came for the meditation workshop were already having more evolved psychic states and interests in spirituality. Qualitative data have been collected with the help of the semi structured interview and was analyzed with a phenomenological approach by analyzing and identifying themes within the qualitative interview data before and after the meditation. Analysis of data also brings us with 6 important aspects of transpersonal experiences, i.e.:

Experience of being detached from the physical body

These were some of the statements reported by subjects in the experimental group:

“In the step of stop I felt that my body was lying on the floor and I was watching it from the outside... it was amazing I have never had such an experience before. I was calm, composed, and illuminated in that moment... its [tough] to define the feeling actually” (Female, 28yrs old).

“I believe dynamic meditation cleanses the body, mind, and spirit to make us so transparent that we feel light and calm... being done properly it brings great results at every level, mind feels refreshed, body light and spirit liberated... that’s how I feel about it [having] had an experience to attend this 21 days(sic) workshop” (Male, 42 yrs old).

“In the beginning, I felt physical exercises to be very exhausting and tiring but slowly during the course of time I felt and I could see different aches and pains of my body more clearly and I felt when kept watching and witnessing these aches and pains goes away slowly and smoothly. It was like as if the door was open and pain gets [out] through it during the witnessing process. I got to have some glimpses of it during meditation that sometimes I felt myself different from the body. Also there were kind of zero state experiences and it was really beautiful and relaxing to have it. I felt sometimes that I don’t exist at all, a sort of no-self feeling, it’s so elating. I have never had such experience ever before” (Male, 42 yrs old).

Experience of illuminating blissful and eternally calm self

“While sleeping I got up in the middle of the night and saw my body lying on the bed sleeping soundly. I felt myself illuminated, calm, and content along with the experience of a soothing and sharp sound... it was an energizing and mysterious experience. I feel it was the sudden experience of the transpersonal self which made me to work more on this aspect of being and became my aim of being in the world...” (Female, 29 yrs old).

Experience of indescribable bliss and calmness which don’t have a cause

“I just felt blessed for no reason. I felt myself in a deep trance which just makes me feel indulged with myself and I was happy for no cause. It was like an unknown wind came from another world and made me refreshed. I enjoyed but I cannot explain it and cannot forget it either...” (Male, 25 yrs old).

Experience of guardians or higher self over the physical and mental existence

“I felt I was watching my body and mind and strangely I was just separate from it. I don’t know what to call this another self watching the previously known ME. I just felt they both were together but not same. I felt my psycho-physical self very much loved and safe in presence of the self, the detached watcher. And then that phrase made sense for me that God is watching everything” (Female, 29 yrs old).

Perceiving the experience as indescribable

“The more I try to give my experience words the more I fall short. I feel it to be the most difficult task to say what this experience was like! But one thing I know for sure even its memory make[s] me indulged in that fragrant experience again and I just feel like keeping mum on what I felt... it’s just too difficult” (Male, 45 yrs old).

“Such an experience cannot be described. And people of wisdom say not to share or discuss such an experience. They should be kept secreted otherwise they lose their effect. So I don’t want to discuss it but treasure in the core of my heart to give me strength in my hard times.... Like a fragrance of the other world” (Female, 52 yrs old).

“The experience of detachment from body and mind is not something [that] can be described in words. This is the most difficult task ever possible. But some difference I can mention here which happened to me after meditation like the quality of taking [a] breath changed significantly after my experiences and practice of meditation. It has become more rhythmic and deep. One more difference I see [is] the constant fight between my thoughts and actions has calmed down and settled to a great extent. Although meditation may be the ground which leads to detachment from body and mind gradually and spontaneously, it is very tough to reach and hard to describe. [A] relaxed mind and healthy body is an important prerequisite for such [an] experience in my opinion” (Male, 45 yrs old).

Perceiving the experience as transformational

This was an important theme found in the present investigation which transformed the person completely.

“It gives me meaning to my life. No matter where I go and what I do. This experience remains constant in my heart as the most mysterious and most valued experience of my life and gives me the blueprint of my life plan. When I move in the direction of that taste of experience my life becomes blissful. But when I move in the direction which neither lead nor fall in accordance I suffer like hell. This single experience holds my hand taking me as little baby and gives me guidance on path of life...” (Female, 29 yrs old).

“I can say I felt a little away from my psycho-physical being and the whole perspective of life changed after such experience. I don’t feel any hatred and enmity from any one with the effect of such an experience. It made me so calm and composed with its wonderful effect... Even now when I feel stressful I feel like doing it again....” (Female, 45 yrs old).

In the above given 6 themes, 5 were found in all the interviews describing transpersonal experience but the experience of guardian or higher self over the physical and mental existence was unique and distinct which was found only in one interview data. This distinctive theme gives an expanding view about the experience of the transpersonal self while the other five themes seem to be definite components of the transpersonal experience.

Discussion

The present study was a pretest-posttest design study consisting of 60 individuals (30 in experimental group and 30 in control group). The study was designed to study the effect of dynamic meditation on the realization of the transpersonal self. The study was done on 60 adults of both sexes, within an age group of 18-55. Data was collected before and after the dynamic meditation workshop from the experimental and control groups. Qualitative data had been collected with the help of semi structured interview by analyzing and identifying themes within qualitative interview data before and after the meditation. Data collected

through qualitative interviews was also treated as quantitative and a Chi-Square test was used to analyze it statistically.

In the control group, 20% of subjects had an experience of the transpersonal self before they were included in the study whereas, after the experimental period no subject of control group had any experience of this kind. In the experimental group, 40% of subjects had experienced the transpersonal self before they were included in the experimental group whereas, after the dynamic meditation practice 73% of subjects had an experience of the transpersonal self.

Also analysis of data brings us to 6 important aspects of the transpersonal experience:

- 1- Experience of being detached from physical body
- 2- Experience of illuminating blissful and eternally calm self
- 3- Experience of bliss and calmness which don't have a cause.
- 4- Experience of guardians or higher self over the physical and mental existence
- 5- Perceiving the experience as indescribable
- 6- Perceiving the experience as transformational

Themes that were established in the study are found to be consistent with the 23 types of transpersonal experiences given by Daniels (2005).

Similar results have been reported by Haimmerl and Valentine (2001). They investigated the effect of Buddhist meditation on intrapersonal (self-directedness), interpersonal (cooperativeness), and transpersonal levels of the self-concept. Only the advanced meditators scored higher on the transpersonal than on the intrapersonal subscale. The authors concluded that scores on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal levels were a positive function of meditation experience, suggesting that progress in Buddhist meditation leads to significant growth in these components of personality. In our studies, we also clearly found that subjects in the experimental group were already advanced on a transpersonal level. Per our findings, 40% of subjects in the experimental group reported transpersonal self experiences prior to the meditation workshop and it increased to 73% after the meditation whereas, in the control group 20% of subjects reported prior transpersonal experiences. After the period of 21 days in which no meditation training was being provided to them, not a single subject reported a transpersonal self experience. This clearly indicates that dynamic

meditation enhances the experience of the transpersonal self.

In summary, dynamic meditation is an effective tool in realizing the transpersonal self.

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