

New study suggests existence of meditation-induced near-death experiences

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New research by the University of Derby into near-death experiences (NDEs) has shown that they can be induced through meditation, with wider implications for our understanding of the phenomena and our ability to examine what happens to an individual during an NDE.

In the first study of its kind, Dr. William Van Gordon, from the University's Centre for *Psychological Research*, followed 10 advanced Buddhist meditators from eight different countries over a three-year period. He compared meditation-induced NDEs to other regular meditation practices and assessed their defining features to ensure they met the criteria of a conventional NDE.

Around four percent of adults in Western countries report having an NDE when they are close to dying or in the period between clinical death and resuscitation. Although individual, cultural and religious factors influence the vocabulary people use to describe and interpret their NDEs, consensual scientific opinion suggests that there is little variation in the components of NDEs.

These typically involve an out-of-body experience, a loss of sense of time and space, communicating with light beings, meeting loved ones and looking back over their lives. NDEs can often be transformational, prompting enhanced levels of intuition, changes in life insight and a greater understanding of the self.

The study showed that some advanced Buddhist meditation practitioners are able to harness these experiences at will, fostering insight into the psychology of death-related processes as well as the nature of self and reality more generally.

Unlike regular NDEs, participants were consciously aware of experiencing the meditation-induced NDE and retained control over its content and duration. Assessment was through a number of means including administering a battery of psychometric

scales within 24 hours of participants completing their meditation.

As a control, they also completed psychometric tests for a standard meditation practice that did not induce an NDE or involve any form of contemplation on death or death-related processes, as well as one that involved reflecting on death but again did not induce an NDE.

Participants reported that during the meditation-induced NDE, they visited non-worldly realms, experienced what happens during and after death, and experienced a state of existence known as 'emptiness'. Compared to regular forms of meditation, the meditation-induced NDE led to a five-fold increase in mystical experiences and a four-fold increase in feelings of non-attachment. Findings also demonstrated that the profundity of the meditation-induced NDE increased across the three-year study period, suggesting that the experience can be learned and perfected over time.

Unlike regular NDEs, participants were consciously aware of experiencing the meditation-induced NDE and retained volitional control over its content and duration.

Dr. Van Gordon, himself an experienced meditation practitioner, was the principal investigator for the study. The research was carried out in collaboration with the Awake to Wisdom Centre for Meditation and Mindfulness Research in Italy, the Psychology Division of Lincoln's Bishop Grosseteste University, the Miguel Servet University Hospital in Spain and Nottingham Trent University's Psychology Department.

Dr. Van Gordon said: "The practice of using meditation to gain a better understanding of death is longstanding, particularly in Buddhism where ancient texts exist that aim to help spiritual practitioners prepare for, or gain insight into, the processes of dying.

"This study appears to confirm the existence of these [meditation](#)-induced NDEs, which have never been observed or investigated under research conditions before.

"A key implication is that the present study shows it would be feasible – and ethical – for future research to recruit advanced meditators to assess real-time changes in a person's neurological activity during an NDE. To date, the health risks and ethical challenges associated with conducting such a study in those experiencing a regular NDE have made this impossible."

Provided by University of Derby

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