

VIPASSANA MEDITATION AS AN ADJUNCT TREATMENT MODALITY IN THE TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH SUBSTANCE / DRUG ADDICTION

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ABSTRACT:

Addiction involves continuous use of a substance with neglect of other things in life. It essentially incorporates concepts like Craving, Tolerance, Withdrawal, Abuse etc., developing a sense of Dependence in the person. With the increasing civilization and modernization, abuse of various substances has been rampant across all age groups specially youth. Recent National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data indicates that maximum crime against society conducted by Youth were under drug or substance influence. With an overall increase in understanding, towards managing persons with substance abuse, various treatment modalities were in place. However, review of existing literature indicates that, use of behavioral and/or pharmacological treatment modalities, though targeting Craving issues are, at best yielding mixed outcomes. Relapses are commonly seen in person with addiction problems as the sense of Craving- meaning the urge to take a substance, is not well tolerated by the addict. Further, it also poses challenges even with use of cognitive therapeutic techniques to induce a sense of comfort in the substance/drug addiction, for, craving is not for the intake of substance/drug, but for the pleasure (pleasurable sensations) that the person gets after intake of a particular substance/drug.

So here Vipassana Meditation can be effective, for, it helps the person to understand the impermanence nature of all (bodily) sensations, be it unpleasurable or pleasurable ones. Thereby with practice of Vipassana, the person gradually develops a sense of perfect Equanimity of mind, so there will be no aversion for unpleasurable sensations and no Craving for pleasurable sensations. Thus, with practice of Vipassana the addict can come out of his addiction, permanently.

Key Words- Addiction, Craving, Vipassana, Meditation, Relapses, Equanimity

INTRODUCTION-

Drug use was always been there since mankind but its abuse has become a widespread international problem over past few decades, possibly owing to fast changing societal and personal values, ethics, beliefs and compositions, apart from our ever-increasing intolerance towards outside stressors. Though the nature and substance abuse pattern may differ from country to country. The process of intake or consumption of substance or drug (natural or synthetic) has many inbuilt constituents like intoxication, tolerance, withdrawal, craving which collectively can be best presented as dependence leading towards a far more composite phenomenon of Addiction.

ADDICTION – An Understanding

It is a bit difficult to find a single agreed definition of drug addiction in literature. According to World Health Organisation's (WHO) earlier expert committee on Addiction-Producing Drugs- Drug addiction is a state of periodic or chronic intoxication produced by repeated consumption of a drug (natural or synthetic) (WHO). This explanation essentially includes few inbuilt features like- an overpowering desire to continue taking the drug and to obtain it by any means, a tendency to increase the dose, a psychic (psychological) and generally a physical dependence on the effects of the drugs and detrimental effect on the individual and society. Newer understanding of addiction usually allowing for both psychological and physiological addiction, with the increasingly compulsive character of the irresistible urge as its central characteristic. As Scholz (1996) puts it by citing Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) that, "Addicts are not drinking to escape, they are drinking to overcome a "craving" beyond their mental control." it suggests that they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving (Silkworth, 1955).

Researchers were always fascinated about the impact of addictive substances (addiction phenomenon) on human personality. Some argued that addiction has minimal impact on the personality (Duster 2010). Others suggested that addiction of any variety brings about a total transformation of the personality (Wexberg, 1995). What is missing in such dualistic addiction concepts is the dynamic between these two fields of mind and matter (Scholz, 1996). Unless we know about this driving force, the underlying mechanism, how one becomes an addict, one cannot really come out of addiction. Nowadays, in the world of science and medicine, theories about the nature of addiction, and what should be done about it, have changed dramatically. Many researchers now agree that addiction irrespective of the type of substance is one single disease. As Scholtz (1996) puts it addicts switch drugs when the drug of their choice is not available, and display addictive behaviour even with drugs thought to be non-addictive in nature. Clearly this means that for developing a better understanding of the addiction phenomenon, it is the reaction of the person who is taking it, is the main problem and not the type of the chemical that has been selected and this dynamics between the two fields difficulty.

Further, as per the recent understanding, addiction means an over-dependency which has become habitual, governing all the different dimensions of an individual's life-physical, emotional, social and mental. this holistic understanding indicates that one-dimensional treatment strategies are not adequate.

The recovery from addiction has to be based on this multi-dimensional system. Hence, according to Scholtz (1996) one has to solve three problems:

- fundamental motivation is needed for changing the addictive behaviour through counselling or therapy).
- treating addiction at its deepest level, this is necessary to take out the deeply rooted mental cause (role of craving).
- providing adequate and empathetic support system for the drug addict

In the above plan of treatment, the issue of tackling deeply rooted cause of addictive behaviour pose challenge. it has to proceed in a systematic manner. it cannot be accomplished simply by changing outer circumstances or by an act of will; by simply wanting the addiction to go away. The work must be guided by investigation; one has to find out what the defilements (inner drives) depend upon and then see if it lies within one's power to remove the cause (Fleischman, 1991, 1986). There comes Vipassana meditation in to picture.

VIPASSANA MEDITATION–

A Brief Understanding-

The technique of vipassana has been re-introduced in India in 1969 by S N Goenka, who used to live in Burma (now Myanmar) and learned this technique from his Burmese master Syagi U Ba Khin (Hart, 1987). Since then, many centres in India and abroad has been established by S N Goenka along with fellow meditators where this technique is being taught in the form a residential programme (starting for

10 days at least). This technique essentially involve self-analysis in a particular manner. As Goenka puts it uniformly across Vipassana centres, it consists of “*annapaan-sati*” (observance of one’s own respiration) and “*Vipassana*”(observance of one’s bodily sensations). During Vipassana as the practitioner continues to observe his bodily sensations in a particular manner, he understands the impermanence nature of these sensations by experiential process, be it pleasurable or be it unpleasurable ones. There-by with gradual observance, he understands that all sensations have only one nature, the nature of impermanence (“*annichya*”, as referred in Pali scripts). Thus, subsequently a state of equanimity of mind is reached with respect to all occurring sensations, replacing our old habit pattern (conscious or unconscious) of aversion (for unpleasurable) and craving (for pleasurable ones). Therefore, the more equanimous the mind becomes, the more non-reactive the practitioner becomes for sensations (originating from inside or guided by outside).

How Vipassana Could Be Helpful In Managing Addiction Problems-

Irrespective of the reason for starting any substance or drugs (natural or synthetic) eventually, drug use becomes a reaction to the uncomfortable body sensations which result from the constant interconnection between mind and body and the thoughts which accompany these interactions. It is to understand here very carefully that one does not get addicted to anything outside or to some kind of inherent quality of the drug itself. From outside it may look like that. However, essentially people get addicted to their own vibrations of the body. By taking a substance or drug, a certain kind of biochemical process starts in the body and one feels a type of vibration, which one starts liking (pleasurable sensations). Since, it is enjoyed or liked so gradually one develops a craving for it initially and later on a develops a habit and finally gets addicted to the vibration (not to the drug or substance in question). Addiction is therefore like a continuum; one wants to enjoy that vibration again and again (Goleman, 1977). This is what happens in all types of addiction.

So, in other words, Addiction happens for a certain type of vibration that has been created by the substance or drug use and the subsequent chemical processes in the body. Usually, addiction goes to the deepest level of the mind and there is every likelihood of it becoming rooted in the deep unconscious. As Vipassana reaches the unconscious level of the mind by working with the sensations, it can remove the roots of addiction. Because as per Vipassana tradition, the deepest level of the mind is constantly in contact with the bodily sensations. As we develop an awareness of the sensations and observe them with equanimity, the addiction at the subconscious/unconscious level is automatically removed.

This interrelation of mind and matter is the key to Vipassana meditation, and it was of crucial significance in the teaching of the Buddha. “Whatever arises in the mind is accompanied by sensation” (Anguttara Nikaya, Mulaka Sutta) (Hart, 1987). Therefore, observation of sensations offers a means to examine the totality of one’s being, physical as well as mental. In the Sati-patthana Sutta, the discourse on the establishing of awareness, the Buddha (the enlightened one) had presented the practical method of Vipassana meditation, for purifying the mind. Here, the importance of sensation (‘vedana’ as called in Pali language) is stressed. Other references about the key role of sensations are found in various Pali scripts like Brahmajala Sutta, Pathama Akasa Sutta, Pathama Gelanna Sutta, Indriya Bhavana Sutta, Dighanakha Sutta, Pahana Sutta, Maha-Salayatanika Sutta, Apana Sutta (Hart, 1987).

When an addict understands that observing oneself at the level of sensation is the key to coming out of addiction, and works on sensation with Vipassana meditation, he or she will begin to recover. But Vipassana meditation is not some kind of magic or miracle. Progress requires a strong will to come out of addiction, and also a strong will to work towards this goal by observing oneself at the level of sensations. This is the point at which professional counselling or therapy will play an important role for motivating the client. This motivation enables the addict to work to eradicate the mental defilements of addiction and to face the difficulties which are bound to crop up during a Vipassana practice. This frame of treatment is practised in certain rehabilitation centres working with addiction. a most common example outside India is “The Cyrenian House” which operates with counselling, crisis intervention, the integrated philosophy of Narcotics Anonymous, and part of Vipassana.

During Vipassana, the addict is expected to pass out from different stages (Scholtz, 1996) like –

- As the sensations are kept completely in the unconscious so, as soon as there is the slightest hint that some of the pain will reach up to the conscious mind, the addict immediately gives in to his addictive substance/drug, with the assumption that it will prevent the pain.
- With the practice of Vipassana, the unpleasant sensations start to rise out of the unconscious mind. This is the most difficult part for drug addicts, as the habit of not facing the unpleasant, deeper unconscious reality is their weakest point.
- However, with continuous practice, the mind becomes more equanimous. Gradually by observing the reality within, one initially discovers that these sensations are acceptable and later on understands that the previous conditioning will be eliminated step by step which had led to the distorted perception about these sensations.
- As ignorance disappears, the addict looks at the reality as it is. The underlying tendencies of craving (for substance) gets eradicated and the drug addict slowly emerges from addiction.

However, the authors do feel that, one of the important aspects of this entire idea of using Vipassana meditation as an adjunct treatment modality in treating substance / drug addiction, so that the idea could come out from theory in to the mainstream and tested clinical practice, lies in preparing the motivational ground for passing through the Vipassana operation by providing psychotherapy/counselling to addicts in and out of rehabilitation centres (Neki, 1977). So that, after the Vipassana training, the power of emotional/social support delivered through the peer group, family, the outpatient programme and general social integration embedded with the depth of the meditation experience will ring the bell.

COLCLUSION-

One of the major problems with drug addiction is that even with one episode of drug use, a Pandora's box of dormant memories can get unlocked. It is this process of recapturing and reliving that makes people say: "Once you are an addict you are always an addict." Now, with the understanding of Vipassana meditation, relapse need not to be considered as a biological imperative. It is for this point, ordinary therapies and established methods in the field of drug rehabilitation have their natural limitations and Vipassana meditation has a role as it helps in eradicating the defilements of the deep unconscious mind. It is this scientific, methodically controlled process of Vipassana meditation, that purifies the unconscious mind that fuels the drive away from relapse, fighting and breaking the addiction pattern at the root level. Therefore, along with established medical and psychological treatment strategies recommended for dealing with addiction problems, introduction and use of Vipassana mediation would certainly be helpful in producing holistic and long-lasting results in the treatment of persons having substance/drug addiction.

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