

Positive effects of short-term contemplative meditation on stress perception, well-being and transcendence perception

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Background

The effects of (Buddhist) mindfulness meditation on quality of life, well-being and stress have been widely studied.

For Christian contemplative meditation (Eucharistic worship) there are no such studies.



Contemplation
(Veneration of
the Eucharist)

Bildquelle: <https://www.erzdioezese-wien.at>

Aims

We intended to analyze whether a **5-day intensive contemplative intervention** has, similar to mindfulness meditation,

1. effects on stress perception and well-being, and
2. whether it improves perception of the Sacred in life and thus lower spiritual dryness?

Methods

Intervention study (5-day participation for at least 30 minutes in sacred rooms, followed by further voluntary participation) with three measurement times: before (t_0), after 1 week (t_1), and 3 months after (t_2). Missing values were multiple imputed.

Results

122 people participated (73% women, 27% men; mean age 52 ± 15 years; 33% without significant prior experience in contemplation; 27% without meditation experience).

Over time, the following outcome variables **improved slightly** ($p < 0.01$, Friedman) (Cohen's d t_0 - t_1 and t_0 - t_2):

- Wellbeing (WHO-5): $d=0.40$. $d=0.25$
- Stress perception (PSS): $d=0.13$. $d=0.35$
- Light-heartedness (ERG): $d=0.30$. $d=0.28$
- Situational Awareness (CPSC): $d=0.33$. $d=0.17$
- Self-efficacy Expectation (SEE): $d=0.17$. $d=0.22$
- Transcendence Perception (DSES-6): $d=0.24$. $d=0.27$
- Awe/Gratitude (GrAw7): $d=0.07$. $d=0.22$
- Spiritual Dryness (SDS): $d=0.20$. $d=0.28$

A **marginal decline** was observed for:

- Positive mood (ASTS): $d=0.24$. $d=0.18$
- Emotional Tiredness (ASTS): $d=0.33$. $d=0.20$

Frequency of religious, existential and prosocial-humanistic practices (SpREUK-P) did not change within this short time frame.

Table 1: Development of variables during the intervention

	T0 (prior)	T1 (after)	T2 (3 months later)	p value (Friedman)
Quality of life related variables				
Stress perception (PSS)	19.4 \pm 4.8	18.8 \pm 4.6	17.8 \pm 4.4	<0.0001
Wellbeing (WHO-5)	63.2 \pm 18.0	69.9 \pm 15.4	68.0 \pm 18.3	<0.0001
Positive Mood (ASTS)	17.5 \pm 5.7	16.2 \pm 5.3	16.5 \pm 5.3	0.041
Emotional tiredness (ASTS)	19.2 \pm 4.9	20.8 \pm 4.8	20.2 \pm 5.0	0.001
Light-heartedness (ERG)	55.3 \pm 14.4	59.6 \pm 14.3	59.3 \pm 14.5	0.001
Openness / Social contacts (ERG)	70.9 \pm 19.1	73.7 \pm 17.1	73.2 \pm 19.9	0.036
Self-efficacy Expectation (SWE)	25.0 \pm 6.1	26.0 \pm 5.6	26.3 \pm 5.7	<0.0001
Situational Awareness (CPSC)	1.92 \pm 0.55	2.11 \pm 0.60	2.02 \pm 0.60	<0.0001
Indicators of Spirituality				
Perception of the Sacred (DSES-6)	25.4 \pm 7.2	27.1 \pm 7.0	27.3 \pm 6.9	<0.0001
Awe / Gratitude (GrAw7)	65.7 \pm 25.6	67.3 \pm 22.1	71.0 \pm 23.5	0.010
Spiritual Dryness (SDS)	2.19 \pm 0.71	2.04 \pm 0.77	1.99 \pm 0.72	<0.0001
Frequency of spiritual practices (SpREUK-P)				
General religious practices	77.2 \pm 23.9	79.5 \pm 21.4	79.8 \pm 22.1	n.s.
Catholic religious practices	63.4 \pm 27.1	66.8 \pm 26.4	68.0 \pm 27.1	0.001
Existential religious practices	59.7 \pm 23.8	61.4 \pm 22.3	63.1 \pm 25.0	n.s.
Prosocial-humanistic practices	70.7 \pm 22.3	71.4 \pm 20.7	72.0 \pm 22.0	n.s.

Conclusions

- A 5-day contemplative meditation period slightly improved participants' **wellbeing**, **stress perception**, **situational awareness (mindfulness)**, and **light-heartedness**,
 - for stress perception also 3 months later.
 - **Perception of the Sacred** in daily life increased weakly,
 - and was higher even 3 months later.
 - Perception of **Spiritual Dryness**, a specific form of spiritual struggle, **improved slightly**, too
 - and remained even lower after 3 months.
- For people with a Christian background, contemplative meditation (Eucharistic worship) may be **suited to 'center'** - with **positive effects on mental health indicators**. Further studies would thus be worthwhile.