

## **The Intersection of Psychiatry and Vipassana Meditation**

**- Dr. Melvin Chagas Silva**

*As a psychiatrist, I spend my days helping patients navigate the complexities of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. My day job involves seeing patients who come to me with various forms of anxiety and depression, which can stem from a range of causes, both physical and psychological. However, beyond my professional practice, I have a long-standing interest in and practice of Vipassana meditation.*

*Now, I am not a yoga teacher, and my yoga practice is quite modest—some Surya Namaskar in the morning, mainly to keep my paunch in check. But Vipassana, unlike yoga, is not a physical exercise, nor is it a treatment for cancer or any specific illness. Instead, it is a science of mind and matter—a way to observe and understand the interaction between your mind and body. Through Vipassana, you learn how the mind influences the body and vice versa. This ancient technique, which has its roots in India and is said to have been rediscovered by the Buddha, has gained global popularity as a means to achieve a peaceful and happy mind, which in turn can lead to a healthier body.*

*Vipassana begins with a ten-day residential course where participants fully immerse themselves in the practice. The foundation of the technique is built on maintaining simple moral principles: refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. These guidelines are not merely ethical teachings; they create the optimal environment for training the mind.*

*The course begins with a focus on concentrating the mind by observing the natural breath. For the first three days, participants practice this observation, which helps to sharpen, calm, and focus the mind. Once the mind is sufficiently calm and focused, it becomes a more effective tool for exploring deeper aspects of consciousness. The next step in Vipassana is to observe the sensations occurring throughout the body.*

*Often, we are unaware of the sensations our body experiences throughout the day. For instance, while sitting here, you might find yourself shifting positions without even realizing it, driven by subtle discomforts. Vipassana teaches us to become aware of these sensations and, crucially, to refrain from reacting to them. Similarly, it encourages awareness of the mind's activities and trains us not to react impulsively. This practice can bring about profound changes in how we experience and respond to life. Regarding scientific data, there is substantial research supporting the benefits of mindfulness, a concept rooted in Vipassana. Mindfulness practices, often taught in shorter, more accessible formats, have been shown to improve anxiety and depression, enhance overall mental health, and even promote neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections.*

*While mindfulness has garnered a lot of attention and research, there is also data supporting the benefits of the full ten-day Vipassana course. Studies indicate that this intensive practice can significantly improve mental well-being, reduce anxiety and depression, and lead to long-lasting positive changes in the brain.*

*In summary, Vipassana is not just about meditation; it's a profound exploration of the mind and body that can lead to greater awareness, emotional stability, and mental clarity. For anyone interested in deepening their understanding of themselves and improving their mental health, Vipassana offers a comprehensive and time-tested approach.*

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