

SCIENTISTS STUDY THE BRAINS OF TIBETAN BUDDHISTS RESEARCH DURING POSTMORTAL MEDITATION

A short interview with journalist and St. Petersburg-based physiologist Sviatoslav Medvedev*. He received access to monasteries from the Dalai Lama and is researching post-mortem meditation, the thukdam state.



So, one scientist from St. Petersburg, a physiologist and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Academy academician received access to the oldest Buddhist texts from the Dalai Lama XIV monasteries and studied posthumous meditation there, during which the body of an experienced practitioner is preserved. What secrets of the human brain were revealed during the study?



Discussion of psychophysiological meditation research results in February 2019. Here you see researchers from the Human Brain Institute. The founders of the institute hang on the wall Portrait of Natalia Petrovna! September 2019

For 27 years, Sviatoslav Medvedev has been the head of the Institute of the Human Brain, focusing on the study of the secrets of consciousness. Scientific interest

He is inherited by unrecognized and, at first glance, inexplicable phenomena.

So, Medvedev's great-grandfather, the famous Soviet psychiatrist Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev, the first in Russia to begin studying hypnosis, and Natalia Petrovna Bekhtereva was extremely interested in the phenomenon of "after-death experiences" and was not afraid to speak out about paranormal things to Russian scientists.

Meditation has been studied by hundreds of scholars, but mostly in Buddhist monasteries in the West or in university laboratories. And they were given access to the oldest monasteries in India with the permission of the 14th Dalai Lama himself. How did this happen?

S. Medvedev says:

- I met the Dalai Lama back in 2009. At that time I was leading the Human to the brain institute. The Dalai Lama said that if Buddhist dogma contradicts scientific data, then the dogma must be changed. And then he added that the words of scientists are more important than the words of religious figures. He knows this and has an interest in ensuring that the phenomena that Buddhist monks observe

in monasteries, would be scientifically confirmed. Unusual words for a religious leader. I was impressed. I wouldn't work with someone who was just convinced, that he is right. As a result, in 2019 our laboratories appeared in two South Indian monasteries - in the Buddhist world, they are something like Oxford and Cambridge. As a child, I dreamed of space and the Andromeda Nebula. And so our team was admitted to "another planet" inhabited by 12 thousand people (so many monks live in the territory of two monasteries) – which focuses mainly on the study of consciousness. We studied ten posthumous meditation cases, two were confirmed. The Dalai Lama suggested studying **thukdam**. What is it? This is a state of posthumous meditation, when the body of an experienced specialist (Buddhist) does not decompose for many days or even weeks. The last thukdam lasted 36 days (in India, a piece of meat left on the table in the morning would rot by the evening).

How many cases of post-mortem meditation have you confirmed?

"Ten have been studied, but only two have been tentatively confirmed. In other cases, the bodies still decompose, but more slowly. We have only proven the fact of the phenomenon's existence." But it's not like this is because of Buddhism. Our research has nothing to do with religion, and I'm not a Buddhist myself.

How to enter thukdama and preserve an imperishable body?

- Monks enter this state through a certain type of meditation. These meditations the point is to distance yourself from the outside world and stop feeling it. I can't answer the question of how monks do this and how the body doesn't decay yet. It is likely that at the moment of death the brain sends **an electrical or biochemical signal**, and all the cells preserved. (*Maybe the light of photons prevents the body from dying? - My note*). They prepare for thukdam all their lives, and how this preparation takes place, we study by analyzing psychophysiological changes during meditation. At the moment we have studied 135 monks, 20 of them tantric - this is the most elite and closed Buddhist group. We will share our interim results at the International Congress of Psychophysicologists.

Is it true that during the study, the electroencephalogram (EEG) is recorded by the Buddhists themselves monks?

- Yes. There are still many taboos in monasteries. And it is difficult to imagine a situation where "white barbarians" install sensors on the heads of monks and sit with them during meditation. Before the pandemic, I was on several expeditions in India, but research is happening every day, and it is actually carried out by the monks themselves.

Buddhist newspapers write that a historic event is taking place: for the first time, Buddhists have allowed experimentation in monasteries, and for the first time, a new class of monks has emerged. specialty – researcher monk. Eight volunteers were selected who studied English for six months, and then came to study in St. Petersburg and Moscow. They listened to lectures by scientific neurobiologists. The monks were taught to do electroencephalograms and work with devices. They were crazy excited about this project! Now, during the pandemic, we are organizing online training for another 25 people.

What happens in a Buddhist monk's brain during meditation?

- The brain completely stops perceiving the world around it. The Buddhist monks who study with us suppress thinking to the maximum during meditation.

Does this kind of meditation lead to longevity? How?

- Natalya Petrovna Bekhtereva also proved that brain neurons are multifunctional, that is, the same neurons ensure our thinking and, for example, regulate the heart rate. EEG results show that brain activity during meditation is very intense, all its zones are involved. I guess that when doing such intense work, a kind of “massage of internal organs” is triggered - as a result, a person recovers more easily, lives longer. The study could help people with ADHD, pilots, and truck drivers

Can Buddhist tools be used to treat mental illness?

- The importance of our work is that we explore the interplay **between matter and consciousness problem, the relationship between the material and the ideal**. There is a material world that we see, and there is an ideal world that cannot be seen or touched. However now we speak the same language and imagine the same images. Our The brain is essentially the interface between the ideal and the material world. Meditation helps this interface, the brain, to function better. **Meditation is learning to control the mind**. Perhaps in the future we will be able to use its mechanisms in adults and for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children. Or to prevent so-called monotony – that is, loss of concentration during boring, monotonous work – in pilots on long flights and truck drivers.

Why is the research on meditation so controversial? Some claim it's beneficial, others deny it.

