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## **TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MONASTIC DEBATE AND ANALYTICAL MEDITATION ON COGNITION, EMOTION AND BRAIN**

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**Background:** A lot of research on contemplative practices focuses on individual meditation practices, grouped in focused attention and open monitoring. However, there are many more practices that remain so far unexplored.

**Aims:** This Bial-funded project examines how one such practice, monastic debate, which is a form of analytical meditation, affects affect and cognition.

**Method:** In the past half year, we have focused primarily on how emotion regulation is affected by monastic debate, using validated questionnaires such as the PANAS and the DERS, which were translated into Tibetan. We have compared the scores on these questionnaires between beginners and more experienced monks.

**Preliminary results:** We have found that more experienced monks show lower negative emotions and better emotion regulation on some aspects. Interestingly, we have also run into substantial difficulties with cultural differences in the valuation of emotions such as shame, which is considered positive in Asian communities but negative in Western communities. For this reason, we are now working on developing an implicit emotion regulation task consisting of recording brain activity while the participant is watching culturally-appropriate images or videos. In addition, we are working on collecting data from control groups matched on culture from the neighborhood of the monastery, and control groups matched on education from the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur community. Finally, we are engaging in interviews and back-translation to better understand how monks are understanding validated Western emotion questionnaires. Apart from this cross-sectional investigation comparing beginners and more experienced practitioners, we have also collected more data from individuals who are learning monastic debate for one month, and whom we compare before and after this training. This group showed substantial increases in positive affect, decreases in negative affect, as well as improvements in emotion regulation and non-attachment at the second time point. Unfortunately, we are having difficulty finding a suitable control group, so we are currently working on recruiting a passive control group that only is matched in age, education and gender.

**Keywords:** Monastic debate, Analytical meditation, Emotion regulation, Cross-cultural psychology

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