

**The Value of Incorporating Diverse Cross-Cultural and Spiritual Practices and  
Frameworks to Support Performance Excellence**

Camille Powell

University of Western States

COUN 6210 – Psychology of Performance Excellence

Dr. Matthew Condie & Dr. Cari DeCandia

## **Introduction**

Understanding the value of incorporating diverse cross-cultural and spiritual practices and frameworks support performance excellence for athletes of all backgrounds in the following ways (Roychowdhury, 2019). Spirituality has been found to enhance sporting performance, fostering performance excellence, individual growth, as well as overall well-being (Roychowdhury, 2019). Many athletes employ spiritual practices to overcome setbacks and enhance performance (Roychowdhury, 2019). Spiritual practices have been found to buffer against stressors, including acting as a deterrent for negative behaviors, such as substance abuse (Roychowdhury, 2019). According to Roychowdhury (2019), athletes must remain task-focused, technically experienced, and effectively manage stressors and distractions, to achieve optimal performance.

### **The Implementation of Diverse Cross-Cultural and Spiritual Practices and Frameworks**

The practices of mindfulness support performance excellence by providing athletes with the tools to bring themselves more effectively to the present moment and achieve relaxation from effective breathing practices and present moment awareness by directing and redirecting their attention on the here and now (Roychowdhury, 2019; Mindfulness, n.d.). Mindfulness practices are associated with self-control, clear goals, task concentration, and loss of self-consciousness (Roychowdhury, 2019). The athletes' ability to take control of the moment through the practices of mindfulness helps to diminish their self-consciousness, increases their sense self-control, allowing them to act appropriately in the moment and set clear goals that optimally support their performance (Roychowdhury, 2019; Mindfulness, n.d.). The increase in confidence and trust in their abilities supported by the present moment awareness provides the athlete with the opportunity to recognize all that they are capable of at any given moment, optimizing the

chances of flow, resulting in optimal performance outcomes (Roychowdhury, 2019; Mindfulness, n.d.)

According to Amihai & Kozhevnikov (2015), the meditation practices of Vajrayana and Hindu Tantric lead to heightened sympathetic activation and phasic alertness, while types of meditation from other traditions such as Theravada and Mahayana elicit heightened parasympathetic activity and tonic alertness, that support athletes in achieving their individual zones of optimal functioning (Amihai & Kozhevnikov, 2015; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). The practices of Vajrayana and Hindu Tantric support athletes in achieving higher arousal levels and alertness, by activating the sympathetic activities (e.g., increasing the heart rate, providing more blood flow to the working muscles, through shallow, rapid breathing exercises), supporting them in performing at optimal levels if they are feeling low in energy before a performance (Amihai & Kozhevnikov, 2015; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

In contrast, if the athlete is feeling anxious and their sympathetic activity is activated beyond their comfort level, athletes can benefit from employing Theravada and Mahayana that elicit heightened parasympathetic activity and tonic alertness, such as through deeper, slower diaphragmatic breathing exercises and slow mantras, helping them to experience deep relaxation (Amihai & Kozhevnikov, 2015; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). The relaxation and arousal achieved through the preceding eastern practices increases an athletes' ability to achieve performance excellence by supporting them in achieving optimal arousal levels that maximize their concentration and confidence to perform at their best (Amihai & Kozhevnikov, 2015; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

It is also important for coaches and consultants to understand and consider individuals' spiritual worldview (Roychowdhury, 2019). Current mental skills training approaches can benefit from also considering how individuals' spiritual orientation and beliefs shape their attitude, motivation, and temperament (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). This is of great significance, especially when working with individuals who have specific and/or different spiritual beliefs and practices that they equate with their overall well-being (Roychowdhury, 2019).

When sport psychology consultants incorporate elements of an athlete's spiritual belief and/or practice into their pre-performance routines it will not only foster confidence and perseverance in athletes but will also make the athletes feel assured and respected in the consultants' approach to service delivery, thereby strengthening the athlete–consultant relationship (Roychowdhury, 2019). Approaching people with consideration of their different spiritual beliefs and practices improves the efficacy of the various performance routines, ultimately support performance excellence (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Implementing spiritual practices that are congruent with an athletes' beliefs, allows the routine to optimally improve their attitude and motivation, both of which are integral in effective performance (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

For instance, if a person has spiritual beliefs that identifies with having a god, they might benefit from incorporating a mantra that involves having a prayer with their god prior to competition (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). The preceding technique would decrease their anxiety, by relaxing their mind through practicing their spiritual belief (e.g., believing that there is a higher power supporting them) that they strongly

believe supports them, increasing their confidence in their ability to perform, and ultimately supporting performance excellence (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). In contrast, if a person was an atheist, who does not identify with having a god, and it was assumed that they engaged in prayer, they might question and meet the process with resistance, considering that they did not spiritually identify with methods that were chosen to support them, distracting them from their process, diminishing their confidence, and increasing their anxiety, ultimately decreasing their performance excellence (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

While the preceding has the potential to support athletes in performance excellence, it is important to understand and consider how the different spiritual practices can support different athletes in optimizing performance excellence (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Implementing practices that are congruent with an individuals' cultural and spiritual beliefs, allows them to optimally improve their attitude, motivation, and temperament, all of which are integral to performance and ultimately supports performance excellence (Roychowdhury, 2019; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

## References

Amihai, I. & Kozhevnikov, M. (2015). The influence of buddhist mediation traditions on the autonomic system and attention. *BioMed research international*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/bmri/2015/731579/>

Burton, D. & Raedeke, T. D. (2008). *Sport psychology for coaches*. Human Kinetics.

Roychowdhury, D. (2019). Spiritual well-being in sport and exercise psychology. *SAGE open*.

Retrieved from: doi10.1177/258244019837460