Buddhists are right: meditation makes you kinder, scientists find

It seems science has backed up the Buddhist notion that meditation makes you more compassionate.

Meditation—the practice of taking time out for quiet contemplation, in order to relax or develop spiritually—is a key feature of many Eastern religious traditions.

Scientists have previously found that meditation benefits the brain and body, but a new study by David DeSteno of Northeastern University in Boston and colleagues examined its impact on kindness. They found that people who meditate are more apt to become that helpful stranger who steps forward in a situation when no one else will.

The study, to appear in the journal *Psychological Science*, invited participants to complete eight-week trainings in two types of meditation.

After the sessions, they were put to the test. Sitting in a staged waiting room with three chairs were two actors. With one empty chair left, the participant sat down and waited to be called. Another actor using crutches and seemingly in great pain would then enter the room. As she did, the actors in the chair would ignore her by fiddling with their phones or opening a book.

The researchers watched whether people who had done the meditation would be more likely to offer help to the "injured" person. It turned out they did: half of them helped, compared to only 15 percent of non-meditating participant, the scientists said. The result held for both meditation groups, DeSteno added.

"The truly surprising aspect of this finding is that meditation made people willing to act virtuous – to help another who was suffering – even in the face of a norm not to do so," DeSteno said, "The fact that the other actors were ignoring the pain creates as 'bystander effect' that normally tends to reduce helping. People often wonder 'Why should I help someone if no one else is?'"