

Introduction to Meditation



by

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This *Introduction to Meditation* consists of 4 sections.

- **Relaxation and relaxation techniques:** this forms the basis for the practise of meditation. Techniques of **mind control**, accessing the Alpha/Relax state.
- **Correct Breathing and Breathing techniques:** Breathing is essential for health. Proper breathing is an antidote for stress. Although we all breathe, very few breathe correctly.
- **Body Awareness and Visualization Techniques:** When we become aware of our bodies, we begin to understand ourselves. With visualization you can train yourself to relax and it is an aid to reaching higher states of consciousness.
- **Meditation:** Requirements, Techniques and Practises. Examples of various meditation techniques.

Introduction

Meditation is one of the most natural and yet most profoundly rewarding of all human activities. Practised on a daily basis it produces astonishing results on all levels of your being: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It connects you with your inner powers of vitality, clarity and love.

What is Meditation?

Although the process of meditation can be stated simply, the actual attainment of the deepest states requires dedication and discipline. **Even a little practise of meditation will give immediate results.**

Meditation is not:

- *a mental escape into a state of passivity;*
- *a form of mental speculation;*
- *sluggish day dreaming.*

Meditation is directing your consciousness inward - to find the source of all life's manifestations. Meditation can be seen as a tool to attain your **goal**.

This goal can be anything worthwhile you wish to achieve or obtain. It is a goal for progress towards which body, mind and spirit are disciplined, refined, and perfected by psycho-physiological techniques, many of which provide health, relaxation, and self-mastery, quite apart from the mystical end-goal for which they are a preparation.

In each of us there is an innate yearning to expand our awareness; to understand the nature of the universe; to know who and what we really are; to experience union with your Higher Self/Cosmic Consciousness. At a certain stage of this "*eternal quest*" we are led inevitably to still the mind and practise meditation. Mental thoughts are a kind of mental 'static', which must be silenced if we are to hear the whispers of our inner self.

Some Benefits of Meditation

Physiologically: meditation has been found:

- *to reduce stress;*
- *to strengthen the immune system;*
- *to help the body's healing processes.*

During meditation:

- *the breath and brain waves slow down;*
- *blood pressure and metabolic rate decrease;*
- *circulation and detoxification of the blood increase.*

Mentally: meditation focuses and clarifies the mind better than any other activity. It also improves creativity, concentration, mental alertness and memory as well as increasing productivity.

Regular **meditation** has assisted people overcome addiction to tranquillisers and has reduced hypertension, insomnia, migraine, depression, anxiety and other psychosomatic illnesses. When you meditate successfully, the alpha brain waves that are produced allow you to experience the most balanced, relaxed, harmonious state you are able to attain.

Recent research into the function of the human brain suggests that meditation expands brain function by encouraging a balance between the separate hemispheres of the brain: the left-hand side, responsible for logical, rational and scientific thought and the creative, imaginary right-hand side.

The healthiest, the most productive and fulfilled people are usually those in whom the activity of these two hemispheres is well balanced.



Section 1

Relaxation and Mind Enhancement Techniques

Relaxation

The first stage in **meditation is relaxation**. One should be able to relax before you can begin to meditate effectively. Relaxation is thus an integral part of successful meditation.

There are two immediate advantages of learning to relax: **Firstly**, as you begin to practise relaxation techniques, you will become aware at once of the areas of your body that are most prone to stiffness and pain. This can help keep you on guard for factors that may exacerbate the strain:- your posture, the shoes and clothes you wear, and the way you use your body in general.

Secondly, you will simply feel much better almost immediately. Five minutes spent loosening your face, neck and shoulder muscles may banish a headache and leave you feeling calm and refreshed, while twenty minutes of deep relaxation can rest and revive both mind and body as much as three hours of sleep.

Mind Control and Alpha State

Mind control goes hand in hand with meditation. Without the ability to control the mind, meditation becomes laborious. Mind control is learning to use lower brain frequencies with awareness and apply this energy to make stronger impressions on brain cells. Since more information can be recalled when it has been strongly impressed, we see the memory is enhanced. We might say that mind control begins with the regulation of brain wave frequencies.

Scale of Brain Rhythm (cycles per sec)

Physical World Sight Sound Smell Taste Touch ↑↓ Time↔Space	BETA 21	ACTION Outer Conscious Levels
Mental World No Time/Space ESP	14 ALPHA	SLEEP Inner Conscious Levels
	7 <i>Basic Plane</i>	
Painless surgery etc	THETA	Inner Conscious Levels
Spiritual World (?)	4 DELTA	Subconscious

Examples of **positive statements** that you may include while in the Alpha/Relax state:

- *Every day in every way I am getting better, better and better.*
- *My life is blossoming in total perfection.*
- *I am relaxed and centred; I have plenty of time for everything.*
- *The more I give, the more I receive, and the happier I feel.*
- *I give thanks now for my life of health, wealth, happiness and perfect self-expression.*

Section 2

Body Awareness and Visualisation Techniques

Introduction

Body awareness and posture is important in the practice of meditation, because you must be able to sit comfortably for a long period in a relaxed way.

Visualisation is another powerful way to focus the mind for meditation. Visualisation bypasses the verbalizing areas of the brain and therefore helps enormously to focus and calm the mind. It is also taught to enable the person to learn to expand the mind as a form of mind control. It thus teaches you concentration - keeping your mind focused on what you are engaged in.

Visualisation

It is possible to significantly reduce stress with something enormously powerful: your own **imagination**. This practice of positive thinking in the treatment of physical symptoms was popularised by *Emil Coucé*, a French pharmacist, around the turn of the century.

The author of *Creative Visualisation* and *Living in the Light*, *Shakti Gawain*, states that visualisation is a form of energy creating life and life's happenings. Everything is energy and our minds create our world, much as a movie projector projects a "world" upon a blank screen.

Visualisation techniques are used extensively as a part of anti-stress and self-improvement systems e.g. *Silva Mind*. These are increasingly being used by doctors, dentist, athletes, pilots, artists and teachers, in the Unites States and Europe, to defuse stressful situations.

Effectiveness of Visualisation

In order to understand how visualisation works, its useful to look at several related **principles**:

- *The universe is energy*: physically, we are all energy, and everything within and around us is made up of energy. Thus, we are all one, even in a literal, physical sense. All forms of energy are interrelated and can affect one another.

- *Energy is magnetic*: One law of energy is this - energy of a certain quality or vibration tends to attract energy of a similar quality and vibration.

- *Form follows thought*: when we create something, we always create it first in a though form. A thought or idea always precedes manifestation eg. an artist first has an idea or inspiration, then creates a painting.

- *The law of manifestation and attraction*: this is the principle that whatever you put out into the universe, will be reflected back to you. "As you sow, so shall you reap."

Using visualisation: the process of change does not occur on superficial levels. It involves exploring, discovering and changing our deepest, most basic attitudes towards life. This is why learning to use visualisation can become a process of deep and meaningful growth.

Section 3

Breathing and Breathing Techniques

Breathing is important in meditation because the **breath** is the **link** between the body and the mind. Once the body is relaxed, we need to relax the mind - this is done through various breathing techniques.

Breathing is essential to life. Life itself is absolutely dependent upon the act of breathing. "*Breath is Life*". Breathing may be considered the most important of all of the functions of the body, for, indeed, all the other functions depend upon it. Man may exist some time without eating; a shorter time without drinking; but without breathing his existence may be measured by a few minutes.

Life Force

The active principle of life is **Life/Vital Force** or **Prana**. It is found in all forms of life, from the amoeba to man - from the most elementary form of plant to the highest form of animal life. This Life Force is **all** pervading. It is found in all things having life, in every atom - Life Force is everywhere and in everything.

Nostril-Breathing Vs Mouth-Breathing

One of the first steps in breathing and breathing practises is to learn to breathe through the nostrils, and to overcome the common practice of mouth-breathing. Many of the diseases to which civilized man is subjected are caused by this common habit of mouth-breathing. Children permitted to breathe in this way grow up with impaired vitality and weakened constitutions.

Effectiveness of Correct Breathing

Breathing exercises have been found to be effective in reducing anxiety, depression, irritability, muscular tension and fatigue. They are used in the treatment and prevention of breathholding, hyperventilation, shallow breathing and tuberculosis. It is also helpful in asthma, anxiety, tension and stress.

Simple Breathing Awareness

Start by simply observing the flow, the rhythm of your breathing and do not change it in any way. Let the air simply leave your body as you exhale. At the end of the exhalation, allow the new air to flow passively into the lungs.

Proper Posture for Meditation

In order to be able to relax the body sufficiently for meditation, proper posture is very important - you must feel relaxed without falling asleep and the position you use must not make you twitch or fidget or cause cramp or numbness.

There is no single "correct" position - essentially it should be right for you.

- Lying on the floor relaxes the back, limbs and internal organs, and supports the body.
- Sitting in a chair with your back supported and your feet and legs comfortable is a popular pose.
- Sitting on the floor, legs out stretched with your back propped up against the wall is also a good position for many people.
- The full or half lotus position, or simply sitting cross-legged, tailor fashion, may appeal to anyone who is fit and active.

Section 4

Meditation and Meditation Practices

Meditation is the practice of uncritically attempting to *focus your attention* on one thing at a time.

This object might be a candle, the breath, sound or on one of the aspects of God. Meditation has three stages - **relaxation**, **exteriorisation** and **expansion**. This process, simply explained is:

- **Relax** completely, both physically and mentally.
- **Interiorise** the mind and concentrate it one pointedly on your goal.
- **Expand** your consciousness until your individual mind merges with your goal.

Getting Started

- *Set Aside a Special Area for Meditation*
- *Time for Meditation*
- *Establishing Your Posture*

What Kind of Meditation?

The methods used in most forms of meditation quieten and relax the mind. It is based on bare attention, in which there is no intellectual comment or judgement. You sit in a poised posture, breathe quietly and smoothly and let passive attention dwell on a meditation object. You let meditation happen.

For successful meditation, the following *four basic elements* need to be present:

- * *a quiet environment;*
- * *a comfortable posture;*
- * *an object of attention to dwell on (meditation object);*
- * *passive awareness.*

Meditation Exercises Examples:

- **Gazing:** *Gazing at a candle – useful for concentration.*
- **Breath Counting Meditation:** *Counting your breaths in and out.*
- **Mantra Meditation:** *Finding a word or phrase and repeat with breath.*
- **Mindful Meditation:** It is this concentration on the *now* which allows your body and mind to enter a state of relaxation. *Living in the ‘here’ and the ‘now’ E.g. walking or eating meditation.*

Coming out of Meditation

It is important for the health of the nervous system that the meditator should return gradually from the subtle to gross levels of activity. At the conclusion of your meditation, sit quietly for a few minutes before opening the eyes. Blink the eyes a few times. Unfold your legs and stretch them out straight along the floor. Stretch the arms. Take two or three deep abdominal breaths. Never jump up immediately after meditation has ended.

Paramhansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic "*Autobiography of a Yogi*", said that **meditation** is not the same as **concentration**. *Concentration* consists in freeing the attention from objects of distraction and focusing it on one thing at a time. *Meditation* is that special form of concentration in which the attention has been liberated from restlessness and is focused on God. A man may concentrate on the thought of Divinity or of money; but he may not meditate on money or any other material thing. Meditation is focused only on thoughts of God or his attributes.



The secret of meditation is -

Steadfastness: for the more you meditate, the more you will want to meditate, but the less you meditate, the less will you find meditation attractive. ~ J. Donald Walters

Spiritual Diary

It is important for yourself to keep a **spiritual diary**, not only to determine how often you meditate or not, but also to act as motivation for yourself. Complete the diary every day before retiring to bed.

You can make up your own chart, including the following:

- * *What time did you get up to meditate?*
- * *How long did you meditate for?*
- * *Did you practice yoga postures (asanas)?*
- * *Did you control your anger?*
- * *How long did you spend in silence?*
- * *Did you read or study a scripture?*
- * *Did you do some form of selfless service?*

Suggested Readings

Autobiography of a Yogi, Paramhansa Yogananda.

Man's Eternal Quest, Paramhansa Yogananda.

Yoga, Swami Venkatesananda.

How to Meditate, John Novak.

The Complete Relaxation Book, James Hewitt.

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Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti!

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