

MEDITATION PRIMER



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Intro

For most of us, our daily lives are a constant bombardment of information, stresses, time constraints and duties. Throughout this we also develop an “inner dialogue” that tends to reflect the outside world of hassles. Most of us aren’t even aware of all the tension and chatter that exists in our heads, or how it drains us, or how it keeps us from being at peace and connected with our world. That’s where meditation comes in. It rejuvenates our awareness of our inner selves, and our lives. It lets us reconnect with peacefulness, joy, energy, focus and so much more.

There are many meditation techniques, and many goals. You must find what works best for you. Remember – you are never doing it ‘wrong’. Experiences vary from person to person. The best attitude to have when beginning meditation is to not have any expectations – positive or negative. They will only cause unnecessary strain.

Formal meditation is rooted in Eastern spirituality, beginning as a secret well-kept by the spiritual and religious elite. It is mainstream in the West now – thanks to Beat Zen in the 50’s and the influx of Indian yogis and swamis in the 60’s and the current fascination with alternative health. It’s even being researched by modern medicine. But by virtue of what it is, it has not lost its central tenet – to connect with *being*.

Whenever you meditate, you are trying to move past all the mental chatter and just *be* in the clear moment. And then you bring awareness to that moment – of sensations, of insights, of Divinity, of creative solutions, of an ideal, of health, etc. A focused awareness upon such things at a time when your head is clear (in a meditative state) makes them pure, and effective. That is meditation in a nutshell!

What meditation IS

Meditation IS simple – relax, be quiet, turn your attention inward and focus your mind. You cannot *try* to meditate...meditation is the process of *allowing*.

It IS a journey – to find more happiness, more well-being, more energy, more peace of mind, more joy...whatever drew you to it.

It IS about connecting with your inner self, your higher self, and all that entails.

It IS a relaxed (alpha) and/or a very deeply relaxed (theta brainwave state) – regardless of spiritual background, definition, purpose or method.

What meditation is NOT

Meditation is NOT a specific religious practice

It is NOT folding your legs up in a knot, or burning incense, or dinging small bells or cymbals (although it can be!)

There are different types of meditation practices, developed all over the world for all different reasons. They are just different paths to the same goal.

Why meditate?

Some pursue enlightenment, others seek stress reduction. How high up the mountain would you like to climb?

Some of the more common reasons to meditate (all major accomplishments in their own right):

- Reduced tension, anxiety and stress
- Deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- Stronger focus and concentration
- More joy, love and spontaneity
- Clearer thinking and less emotional turmoil
- Lower blood pressure and cholesterol
- Support in kicking addictions or self-defeating behavior
- Glimpse a spiritual dimension of being
- Greater intimacy with friends and family members
- Increased self-understanding

What can I expect?

Meditation is a process of *doing* less and less while you are practicing, and *being* more and more. You work up to this by practicing your meditation and gradually focusing and simplifying. A few stages you may pass through on the path to just being:

- ✓ Getting used to sitting still
- ✓ Developing your ability to turn your attention inward
- ✓ Struggling to focus your attention
- ✓ Being distracted again and again
- ✓ Becoming more focused
- ✓ Feeling more relaxed as you meditate
- ✓ Noticing fleeting moments when your mind settles down
- ✓ Experiencing brief glimpses of stillness and peace

Getting Started

The secret of meditation lies in developing, focusing, and directing your awareness. Attention is just slightly focused awareness. So start with becoming aware of your awareness:

What is it like to be aware? Complete this thought: "I am aware of ..." Do this again and again and notice where your awareness takes you.

- *Are you more aware of internal or external sensations?*
- *Are you more aware of thoughts and fantasies than moment-to-moment sensory experiences?*
- *Does mental activity diminish your awareness of what's happening in the moment?*

Pay attention to whether your awareness tends to focus on a particular object or sensation or tends to be more expansive and inclusive. Just notice...don't try to change anything.

- *Does it shift quickly from one thing to another, or does it move slowly making contact with each object or sensation separately before moving on?*
- *Experiment with speeding up and slowing down your flow of awareness.*
- *Is your awareness repeatedly drawn to certain kinds of objects or sensations, but not to others?*
- *Try to identify which ones you are drawn to and which ones you want to avoid.*

Gently direct your awareness from one focus to another, like sounds or sensations.

- *Focus on one object for as long as you can.*
- *How long can you stay focused before your mind skips to the next thing?*

Concentration

To do just about anything well, you need to purposely focus your attention, or concentrate. For most of us, this takes practice. The practice of concentration can lead to an experience of absorption, flow, or union with your object of focus. This could be the story the writer is creating, or the golfer's club, or even the universe for the mystic. Try concentrating using some of these techniques:

- Paying attention to the flow of sensations in your body
- Mindful awareness of the present moment
- Contemplation of nature
- Following or counting your breath
- Repetition of a meaningful word or phrase, known as a *mantra*
- Cultivation of lovingkindness, compassion, forgiveness and other healing emotions
- Concentration on a geometric shape or other simple visual objects
- Visualization of a peaceful place or a healing energy or entity
- Reflection upon the nature of God or the Divine

Mindfulness

Once you are able to focus and ground your mind, you will prevent it from dissipating into all directions. At this point, begin practicing receptive awareness, or mindfulness.

Mindfulness is about existing in the here and now – paying attention to whatever arises moment to moment. This can be practiced anywhere, anytime.

MINFULNESS MEDITATION

Get comfortable, close your eyes and begin to pay attention to your breathing, and only your breathing. Just keep a natural rhythm. Follow your breath, don't control it. Notice what happens when you breathe...how your rib cage rises and falls...how your belly moves...how the air passes in and out of your nostrils or mouth. Are some deeper, and others shallower? Does the air feel light, heavy or liquidy? Spend a few minutes now just minding your breathing as if it were the first time you've noticed it. When thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, or external sounds arise, simply acknowledge and accept them, allowing them to pass through without judging or getting involved with them. When you notice your attention has gotten engaged in thoughts, emotions, or sensations, bring it back to your breathing and continue. Or, practice your concentration by seeing how many breaths you can count without losing track.

Concentration blocks extra stimuli and directs energy to the focus at hand, mindfulness embraces and assimilates every experience that presents itself, or is illuminated by this focus. These two things are the basis of meditation. Concentration allows you to be mindful of whatever you're meditating on by keeping external chatter at bay. This allows you to be fully open to, and experience, that which you are meditating upon. Good concentration and mindfulness will also help you visualize, stick to your goal, and gain insight from your experience.

Practicing concentration and mindfulness opens the door to contemplation of your inner terrain, and seeing the nature of things like sources of suffering and stress. They also pave the way for proactive meditations like cultivating healthy mind/body states (visualizing killer T-cells attacking cancer cells), or visualizing the perfect performance.

Solutions to common meditation problems

- Problem:** I can't stop the chatter in my mind
Solution: When people think they have a tendency to talk to themselves, thereby tensing their tongue, making it ready for action ... so relax your tongue; count your breaths, or slow your breathing; focus your attention on one subject without letting your mind wander (maybe even with your eyes open – staring at an object).
- Problem:** Can't remember the meditation when finished
Solution: Ground the experience by recalling it again before finishing, or verbalizing it or writing it aright afterwards
- Problem:** I fall asleep
Solution: Meditate lightly while staying awake, then gradually go deeper – practice; meditate with eyes open while gazing upon an object about 6 feet in front of you; sit upright without leaning back against a chair or wall
- Problem:** External noises
Solution: Use them to take you deeper inside

Methods for reducing unwanted thoughts

- Imagine unwanted thoughts as gray clouds against a blue sky – Blow away the clouds with your breath as you exhale. Continue until the sky is clear blue
- Imagine writing the thought on a piece of paper, then throwing it into a fire and burning it up.
- If there is a thought you want to remember for later like a creative idea, just file it away in a briefcase or filing cabinet where you can refer to it later.
- Withdraw from your thoughts using the Withdrawal Meditation:

Send your awareness outside the building you are in – into the street. Become aware of external noises. You may also be aware of the energy and atmosphere outside the building, especially if there is traffic or people moving around. Try not to label the noises or energetic vibrations, but just be aware of any sounds you may hear.

Gently withdraw yourself from the outside environment into the building. Try to take in the building, no matter how large it is. Become aware of any sounds, energies or movement within the building.

Now gently withdraw yourself from the rest of the building into the room that you are in. Become aware of the sounds, energies, and atmosphere of the room.

Now gently withdraw yourself from the room into your own body – into yourself. Become aware of the sounds, sensations, movements, and energies within your own body.

Now gently withdraw from your body into a place inside yourself where there is stillness – into your center. There exists inside you a place of stillness, silence, and peace. Find the place inside that is quiet and allow yourself to rest in that place for several minutes. Anytime a thought comes through, release it and return to that place of stillness.

As you prepare to return to the outside space, very gradually begin to be aware of what you are experiencing – the feeling of relaxation inside your body, the contents of your mind, and once again be aware of the place of peace and stillness inside. You may wish to find a few reminders, or keys for what this feels like to help you return to this state of consciousness more easily and effortlessly. These keys or cues might be a body sensation, a color, a word, an image, or even a sound.

Open your eyes (or move them around if you kept them open), take several deep breaths and allow yourself to stretch and reawaken fully, feeling alert and refreshed. [From 'The High Performance Mind', 1997]

Visualization and Sensualization

Visualization is also a very important tool for meditation – visualize what you want to happen as vividly and realistically as possible. Actually create it in your mind.

Meditations benefit not only from visualization specifically, but from sensualization – especially if you are better at one sense than another. To sensualize means to *See, Touch, Hear, Smell, Taste, and Experience (Kinesthesia)* – all in your mind to make your meditation as real and vivid as possible, and draw yourself deeper.

Little Help, Please?

Sometimes it's nice to have some help getting started. Many wonderful products exist in the form of vocal guidance, relaxing music and even technology for relaxation and meditation. Even adept meditators use products that can deepen their experience and help them out when needed.

Such tools are a bridge from an over-active mind with many thoughts to a calm one, ready to enter a clear state of meditation or even blissful sleep. CDs containing music and/or verbal guidance for meditation on a variety of subjects (i.e. wellness, stress control, consciousness exploration, sleep, etc) can be found at www.3PoundUniverse.com. You may also visit the book selection there containing several titles that discuss meditation in greater detail with expert guidance. Finally, renowned technology like Hemi-Sync programs and light & sound machines guide you through your mental clutter to the deep meditative zone of visualization and clarity. Visit us online for details.

Bringing it all together

Now that we have worked through the key components of meditation, let's bring them all together in the following classic exercises:

RELAXATION MEDITATION

This is a great meditation to practice 15-20 minutes each day, especially for stress management, hypertension, and a refreshing break.

Find a spot where you can sit quietly and undisturbed. Sit in a position that you can comfortably maintain. This period of time is a time for yourself, a journey inside to calm, soothe, heal and relax your body mind and spirit.

Close your eyes. Allow your mind to clear of all thoughts, and focus on your breathing. Breathe easily and deeply...breathe relaxation into your body, and breathe away any tension. Breathe relaxation into your mind, and breathe away any thoughts.

Gently begin to withdraw yourself from the outside environment...withdraw yourself from your surroundings...withdraw yourself from any remaining thoughts...withdraw yourself into yourself...into your own silence...into your own serenity...into your own peace...and relax.

Allow the muscles of your face to relax...your forehead, the muscles around your eyes, the muscles behind your eyes...your lips, tongue, throat, and jaws...all deeply relaxed.Allow the relaxation to flow down through your neck...into your shoulders. Allow it to flow down both arms...all the way to your fingertips. Allow the relaxation to flow into your chest...and down the back of your spine...allowing the muscles of your back to just let go. You let go...you let go...you just...let...go.

Take the relaxation down through your torso and allow it to go deep into your stomach...right into the very center of your body...right into the very center of your being. Allow the relaxation to flow down through your hips and pelvis...allow the relaxation to flow down both legs...all the way to your feet...and toes.

*Deep within yourself, you can visualize and experience your whole body as completely relaxed...
Deep within yourself you can visualize and experience your mind as quiet and still...very still.
Deep within yourself you can visualize and experience your emotions as calm and clear...your spirit as peaceful.
Deep within yourself you can visualize and experience your body, mind, emotions, and spirit in harmony.
Stillness...Silence...Rest...Peace...*

Very gradually allow yourself to find an image, symbol, color, word or phrase that describes how you are feeling right now.

And now, in your own time, when you are ready, very gently begin to allow yourself to find a closure for your meditation...taking all the time you need to come to completion inside, allow yourself to reawaken and return...back to the outside space...feeling alert and refreshed. Take several deep breaths, and allow yourself to stretch...beginning with your fingers and toes. Take a full body stretch, and allow yourself to return to an upright sitting position (if you had been laying down). [From 'Awakening the Mind', 2002]

HEALING MEDITATION

Many meditation traditions suggest that physical illness and emotional suffering are just different facets of the same basic problem – just different ways we contract away from our essential wholeness and health. Here's an exercise for directing the life-giving power of light to the places inside your body and mind that cry out for healing.

Begin by sitting down, closing your eyes and taking several slow, deep breaths, relaxing a little on each exhalation.

Imagine a luminous sphere of white light suspended about a foot above your head and slightly in front of you. Like a sun, this sphere embodies and radiates all the positive, healing, harmonious qualities you most want to manifest in your life right now. You may want to be specific at first – strength, clarity, peace, love; eventually, you can just flash on the light). If you find it helpful, you can imagine a spiritual being such as Jesus, Buddha, an angel or spiritual guide in place of, or inside the sphere.

Imagine yourself soaking up all these qualities with the healing light as though you were sunbathing.

Imagine this light radiating in all directions to the farthest corners of the universe and drawing the energy of all the benevolent forces that support your growth and evolution back into the sphere.

Visualize this positive, healing energy shining from the sphere, like the light of a thousand suns streaming down through your body and mind. Imagine the energy eliminating all the negativity and tension, darkness and depression, worry and anxiety and replacing them with radiance, vitality, peace and all the other positive qualities you seek.

Continue to imagine this powerful, healing light flooding every cell and molecule of your being, dissolving any contractions and stuck places you may be aware of and leaving you clean, clear and calm.

Visualize this illuminous sphere gradually descending into your heart where it continues to radiate this powerful light.

Imagine yourself as a luminous being with a sphere of light in your heart that constantly radiates clarity, harmony, and purity – first to every cell and particle of your own being and then, through you, to every other being in every direction. You can carry the feelings and images this exercise evokes throughout the rest of your day.

[From 'Meditation for Dummies', 1999]

This has been an introduction - a set of simple basics - to the practice of meditation. From here you are encouraged to practice, practice, practice. Keep an open mind and be creative. Remember – there is no wrong way to meditate. As you continue, it will all become easier, even second nature. Branch out and find what is organic and what works best for you. Most of all –
ENJOY YOUR JOURNEY!

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Thank You