

# Meditation: Introduction

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What makes one decide to meditate? Everyone has their reasons: mental, physical, spiritual – meditation aids in all of these on multiple levels and is the driving force of bringing all of them together. When first sitting down to meditate it is important to keep one thing in mind: let it flow naturally. Never force yourself to meditate longer than you are able. For many just starting out, if they can pull off ten minutes of meditative stillness, this is a great accomplishment. Start slow and try and leave all preconceived notions of snap insights and instant enlightenment behind. Keep it simple and expect nothing. This is, after all, a life long journey and isn't something you can get the 'cliff notes' on. Patience is key.

Realistically speaking, when first starting out it's possible to not take to meditation right away. There are some who are so thirsty for the calm it brings, they will slip into the practice without a second thought ...but, in fact, most have problems of some sort. In a way, it asks a lot - those who aren't raised on meditation almost have to alter their thought processes. Let's be honest, quieting your thoughts and going to the state of simply "being" – not exactly something anyone can fully grasp in a single sitting or two. You'll quiet your mind, sink into meditation and suddenly you're thinking about a test that you have the next day or what to fix for dinner or what needs to be done at the office. Practically everyone goes through this and above all, never let it be a source of frustration. Again, patience and let it flow naturally. If you find yourself in that situation, simply let the thoughts go and

return to your centering method. (be that breathing, mantra, etc)

Now, you've heard it practically everywhere: meditation is the key; meditation is the foundation. So, what does meditating accomplish? Meditation is the art of quieting the mind, allowing you to listen totally and completely to yourself. Any answers that you seek are already within you, waiting – you need only still your mind and listen. As time goes on and your meditation deepens so does your understanding of yourself and with this a door is opened into a totally new world. Your journey in meditation is a journey to the depths of yourself and, as it goes without saying, therein lies ultimate awareness of the force.

The coming lectures will cover a wide range of meditative techniques and practices. For the most part, the basic set up stays the same for any meditative exercise: sitting normally in a chair or on a flat surface (floor, bed, etc) with your legs comfortably folded or flat on the floor, back straight, eyes closed, in as quiet of an area as possible.

Again, always remember to let the meditation process flow naturally, with time you'll find that it seems to take on a life of its own. Patience is key and frustration is the opposite of what you are wanting to accomplish. If you find yourself unable to quiet your mind, try not to let it bother you. Use a different centering technique, get up and do something, go to sleep – any thing but get frustrated with yourself and your meditation. And above all, enjoy the practice – meditation opens countless doors and will help usher in deeply esoteric states of awareness ...it's a long journey but truly a vital one.

# Meditation: Breathing

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Breathing is one of the most basic as well as important aspects of meditation. Whatever technique you decide to use, breathing will most likely play a large part in it. For the most part, the average person breathes very shallow - drawing in air from the throat area as opposed to taking it in deeply from the chest. There is a difference to be aware of. In meditation, deep breathing is very important - to inhale, slowly expand your chest, aware of the air as it moves through you - exhale slowly and just as deliberately. Be sure that your breath is even and that you follow it with your focus. Just sit in the silence with that intention, simple and deliberate breathing. Starting with just a basic breathing meditation, be aware of your breath. For that moment in time that is the only thing that your mind should focus on -- the gentle inhale and exhale of your own breath.

You'll come across many excellent breathing techniques, go with what you are comfortable with and stick with it. To give you a good starting place, I've found this breathing method to be very, very beneficial and recommend it for anyone no matter what stage you are at in your meditative learning. It is as follows...

Place your tongue just behind the ridge behind your upper teeth, this works on an energy level, completing a main circuit where in energy flows through out the body (similar to the kundalini line) - hold that position through out this exercise. Next, inhale through your nose, counting slowly to four. Hold it, counting slowly to seven; then exhale slowly through your

mouth, this time counting to eight. Note the operative word here is "slowly" - always be deliberate in any meditative exercise, it helps control and deepen your focus. This is a very simple but very powerful exercise - just remember: 4, 7, 8. Inhale 4, hold 7, and exhale 8. It acts on many physical and mental levels, it steadies the mind and centers the energies of the physical body. Try it several times in succession and you can automatically feel its effects.

Proper use of meditative breathing can begin to surface in the various aspects of your life. When you are comfortable with your breath (i.e., it has gone from its normal shallow to a much deeper state) you can call on it at different points in your day to day life. Various relationships, anxiety, stress, five o'clock traffic - you name it, through the use of this breath you can bring yourself back to your meditative center at any moment. \*Highly\* beneficial, especially if you're like most people and don't live in a peaceful monastery in the mountains. Just stop and breathe during your regular day - take two minutes and go through the basic exercise. Remember that meditation is not something that you do once or twice a day in special place in your home - it is to be integrated fully into your life as a whole. Whether you're at work or school - it's vitally important to take a few minutes just to center yourself and regroup. It's very easy just to get into the hectic flow of the day, but by bringing your meditation with you, you're able to transform that everyday life. Which is what many people strive for, transforming the day to day - it doesn't take a great awareness to do that, just a few minutes here and there to quiet yourself, be aware of where you are and simply breathe.

# Meditation: The Mantra

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Probably one of the most common means of centering is the mantra or a simple word or short phrase that holds a deep meaning for you. It acts as direct link to that sacred, calming space within you that is the goal of meditation – correctly chosen, the mantra should resonate that state.

In choosing a mantra, go with your gut reaction – the one that really sings to you. Like many of the answers we seek, when we are open to it – it presents itself immediately, selecting a mantra is no different. Depending on your religious background (if any) a mantra can relate back to that, for example: "Abba" is a common Christian mantra (it's widely considered that it was used by Jesus) but then, it was also used by Ghandi as well (his mantra was his dying words). "OM" is probably the most common (and very sadly, the most stereotyped) example of a mantra. Found practically everywhere, this literally timeless mantra is the resonating tone of the third eye or 6th chakra. Personally speaking, I've found it to be probably the most powerful and harmonic mantra for use in meditation.

Basically, a mantra can be anything - as long as it is sacred to you. Generally speaking, it should be very short, no more than handful of words (example: "Om mani padme hum" which translates loosely from sanskrit as "lotus at the center of the garden"). Again, choose one that you feel comfortable with, look in your favorite sacred text, go into a few minutes of quiet meditation and see what comes to you... whatever you choose, let it be your own.

When meditating with a mantra, simply sit in the quiet in the meditative position you are comfortable with, letting the mantra flow with your breath within your mind. As you inhale, the only thought that you let through your mind is your mantra, nothing more. Using "OM" as an example – breathe in, "ooooooooooooooooommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm" a slight pause, holding it briefly, then exhale - again, the mantra is carried the length of your breath. And from there the cycle begins again: inhale with the mantra, hold for a moment of silence, exhale with the mantra. With each in and exhale you are drawn deeper inside your meditation, towards the center of yourself where there is true calm and nothing more. If random thoughts start to drift through your mind (and they always do!) don't get frustrated, smoothly bring back your mantra, clearing those other thoughts away and continue on.

Very simple and it will help deepen your meditation immensely. When first starting out in meditation, it's a common misconception that you should jump immediately into sitting in the pure silence with nothing else – while this probably works well for some and generally leads to frustration at not being able to focus. In this regard, using a mantra is excellent – it's widely regarded as one of the very best methods of centering yourself not only in meditation but within your "normal" day to day life as well (as is discussed in the previous lecture on breathing).