

MEDITATION

What is Meditation?

When most of us think of meditation, we picture a guru on top of a mountain, sitting for hours like a human pretzel. Fortunately, one doesn't have to go to such lengths to meditate! Meditation is often considered an "Eastern thing." Few Westerners know that prior to the end of the 1800s, it was also practiced in the West as part of Christianity. There are thousands of forms of meditation (the Buddha taught 85,000 himself). *This means that there is no one right way to meditate, so you can feel free to find your own way.*

Meditation is a way of quieting the body and the mind. The idea is to become more aware of yourself, the way you think, and how you feel. Often this is the first step in healing emotional wounds and in changing life patterns. Meditation is also a means of learning how to let go of obsessing over things. Another benefit is that many people find it relaxing; however, meditation is not always a relaxing experience. For example, people who have buried a traumatic experience from their past will sometimes remember it in meditation. Meditation can also get one in touch with intense feelings that have been kept at bay. When these things happen, it can be emotionally painful. If you have any concerns about what might come up for you while meditating, you might wish to work with an experienced guide, such as a therapist.

How Long Do You Meditate For?

Generally, it's a good idea to start with a shorter period of time, say ten minutes, and then work up. Several authorities on meditation recommend at least 20 minutes a day. How long you meditate is a matter of personal preference, so work up to a length of time that feels right to you.

When Do You Meditate?

Again, it's a matter of personal preference. Some people are morning people, some are afternooners, and others prefer evenings or before bed. Some folks meditate more than once a day for short periods of time, others do one longer session. It's up to you.

Where Do I Find More Information?

Books and tapes on meditation abound. Try your favorite bookstore, or the library. Some people find meditative music very helpful--you can find these tapes at music stores and bookstores.

☺ **Happy Meditating!** ☺

A Basic Guide to Meditation

1. Find a comfortable, quiet place. It can be outside or inside. It is helpful if you can keep yourself from being disturbed by closing doors or unplugging phones.
2. Choose your position. Meditation is most often done in a sitting position. Some people like to sit in a chair, others in bed, and others prefer to sit cross-legged on a cushion. Meditation can also be done in a standing position, and you can even walk. The idea is to be comfortable and relaxed, be able to breathe easily, and to stay awake (why meditating is not usually done in a lying down position...). Within these guidelines are a world of possibilities. Experiment! You don't always have to use the same position either. For example, if you are having trouble staying awake in a sitting position during a meditation, try a standing one instead.
3. Breathing is an important part of meditating (not to mention life in general). In fact, many meditators use the flow of the breath as the anchor (see 5). Breathe deeply and slowly, filling your lungs and then emptying them completely.
4. Relax all your muscles as much as you possibly can. It is helpful to do a progressive relaxation before meditating, if you are having trouble relaxing. Close your eyes or focus them on a stationary object, like the floor.
5. Select an anchor. The anchor can be your breath, a word, a phrase, an image. Ideas for anchors include:
 - a word, like LOVE, PEACE, CALM, MERCY, ONE, IN (on in-breath), OUT (on out-breath), or counting on the in-breath and out-breath (1,2,3,4,5...)
 - a phrase, perhaps a piece of a song or poem, or something from the Bible or your favorite book, or a quote
 - an image like a character or symbol (keep it simple so you don't get lost in it)
6. Focus on the anchor and observe passing thoughts and feelings. This is really the heart of meditation. It involves focusing on the anchor you have chosen. For example, let's say you've chosen the word "CALM." You would say in your mind "CALM," as you breathe in, and then again as you breathe out. You keep saying this over and over as you breathe in and out. Sounds pretty boring right? Actually, that's when things start to get interesting, because you'll notice that your mind begins to wander. You discover that you've lost your anchor and are floating about in a sea of thoughts and/or feelings. At this point it is helpful to notice what you're thinking about and how you're feeling. Then you let go of whatever it is and return to your anchor. It is in this noticing and letting go that the true healing of meditation takes place. The noticing helps you to become aware of your thoughts and feelings and develop "witnessing" awareness. This awareness will start to carry over into your life outside of meditation. The letting go is the first step towards learning to let things flow more in your life, which makes living much less stressful. Sometimes you may come to a place in yourself, where there is no thought and where there is a feeling of unity and bliss. This is one of the true joys of meditating.