

THE ART OF MEDITATION

by Tom Crum

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Becoming quiet in a busy world is something we would all love to do. When people recognize that they can achieve that by taking time to center, they want more of it. Living from center on a daily basis is certainly enhanced by the discipline of meditation.

One of the difficulties that many people have in considering meditation is that they think it is one more thing that they have to do in their lives, another entry on that great list of things to do, much like working out, eating right, being on time, doing your job well. But meditation practice is not an effort in non-doing. It is a time to spend each and every day in that place inside ourselves in which there is deep security and peace. So meditation is not some stoic physical position or arduous mental exercise. It is really a letting go.

Taking time to meditate daily will actually save you time in the end because of the increased clarity you gain. But, since the normative system doesn't hit a gong at 8 a.m. or 5 p.m. for the world to settle down and return to its higher self, you have to establish the practice. This is where discipline takes place.

All cultures are steeped in an esoteric practice of one form or another to help people get in touch with that higher aspect of themselves. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is contemplative prayer - quietly listening to God's voice rather than throwing out a list of demands or requests as if writing to Santa Claus. In the far Eastern traditions, the vehicles of meditation often have to do with the autonomic aspects of the nervous system such as the breathing or the heartbeat. In India, mantras from Sanskrit are used as a vehicle to take us inside. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, it is sitting with awareness of thoughts without clinging to them. In all of these disciplines, the practice is not to force yourself into a state of peace, it is simply to acknowledge the mind's thinking nature and to relax into center so that you can settle down into deeper levels of thought, to the source of thought where the vibration level is most powerful. It is achieving a place of deep connection and tranquility, where you are accessing a field of intelligence that is far greater than that derived from the ego or intellect.

The particular type of meditation practice that you follow is an individual choice. It is important to explore various types of meditation that have come down to us and choose one that you are comfortable with. Some people are more visual so a technique that uses images may suit them; for others, sound may be more useful. You need to find a vehicle that you are comfortable with so you can practice regularly. The important point is to let go and let God. The vehicle needs to be simple so you can return to it effortlessly when your mind is consumed in thoughts.

Whether you sit in a chair or on the floor, you should begin by getting into a centered state with the spine straight and comfortable, in a position that allows you to easily be with the vehicle being used: the breath, the mantra, etc. This doesn't require conscious intellect or trying. An analogy would be sitting on the banks of a river watching the boats, leaves or debris go by. These represent thoughts. You don't hang on to them, you just let them go. And as you continue this process of letting go, you will start to dive down into deeper levels of thought. Your awareness will be less drawn to surface thoughts. In this state, stress is naturally released and your system is given a chance to realign itself.

Nature's way of healing is through deep rest. Taking time to dive down to deeper levels of thoughts on a daily basis will produce great peace that will, over time, superimpose itself on your daily life. You will find that you will remember to center; a deep sense of well-being and connection will permeate all activity. The ability to witness - to have a perspective larger than the one presented by ego - emerges, allowing us to make distinctions between what is really valuable and our patterned needs and desires. The ego has been running the show for most of our entire lives, tricking us into thinking that its desires will bring fulfillment when in fact, they create stress and suffering. To know that you have an ego, and that it can be your servant rather than your master, is critical training. Daily practice of meditation and centering provides us with this awareness.

MEDITATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

David Kingston

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1. What is meditation?

The basic idea generally associated with why people meditate is that during our day we are constantly subjected to sensory input and our minds are always active in the process of thinking. We read the newspaper, study books, write reports, engage in conversation, solve problems, etc., etc.

Typically, as we do these normal activities we engage in a constant mental commentary, sort of an inner "The Drama of Me." Usually people aren't fully aware of all the mental thought activity that we are constantly engaged in. Meditation allows all this activity to settle down, and often results in the mind becoming more peaceful, calm and focused.

In essence, meditation allows the awareness to become 'rejuvenated'.

Meditation can be considered a technique, or practice. It usually involves concentrating on an object, such as a flower, a candle, a sound or word, or the breath. Over time, the number of random thoughts occurring diminishes. More importantly, your attachment to these thoughts, and your identification with them, progressively become less. The meditation subject may get caught up in a thought pattern, but once he/she becomes aware of this, attention is gently brought back to the object of concentration. Meditation can also be objectless, for example consisting of just sitting.

Experiences during meditation probably vary significantly from one individual to another, or at least if different techniques are involved. Relaxation, increased awareness, mental focus and clarity, and a sense of peace are the most common by-products of meditation. While much has been written about the benefits of meditation, the best attitude is not to have any expectations when practicing. Having a sense of expectation of (positive) results is likely to create unnecessary strain in the practice.

As well, since meditation involves becoming more aware and more sensitive to what is within you, facing unpleasant parts of oneself may well be part of meditation. Regardless of the experience, the meditation subject should try to be aware of the experience and of any attachment to it. Failure to experience silence, peace of mind, mental clarity, bliss, or other promoted benefit of meditation is not in itself a sign of incorrect practice or that one can't concentrate properly or concentrate to be good at meditation. Whether one experiences peace or bliss is not what is important. What is generally considered important in meditation is that one is regular with their meditation - every day - and that one makes a reasonable effort, but not strain, to remain with the object of attention during the practice. With regular practice one inevitably acquires an increased understanding of and proficiency with the particular meditation technique.

Some people use the formal concentrative meditation as a preliminary step to practicing a mindfulness meditation during the day where one tries to maintain a calm but increased awareness of one's thoughts and actions during the day.

For some people, meditation is primarily a spiritual practice, and in some cases the meditation practice may be closely tied to the practice of a religion such as, for example, Hinduism or Buddhism.

3. How is meditation different from relaxation, thinking, concentration or self-hypnosis?

Relaxation: Relaxation is a common by-product of meditation. Relaxation itself can assume many forms, such as taking a hot bath or reclining in the Lazy-boy and watching TV, etc. Meditation is an active process where the meditation subject remains fully aware of what the awareness is doing. It also attempts to transcend the thought process whereas many forms of relaxation still engage the thought process. Meditation allows the body to relax and can offset the effects of stress both mentally and physically to a potentially much greater degree than passive relaxation.

Thinking: Thoughts generally consume energy in the process of their formation. Constant thought-activity, especially of random nature, can tire the mind and even bring on headache. Meditation attempts to transcend this crude level of thought activity. Through regular practice one becomes aware that they are not their thoughts but that there is an awareness that exists independent of thought.

Concentration: Meditation begins with concentration, but after an initial period of concentration, thought activity decreases and keeping the awareness focused becomes more spontaneous. At this point the person may or may not continue to employ the object of concentration.

Self-hypnosis: Self-hypnosis, like meditation, involves at least an initial period of concentration on an object. However in hypnosis one does not try to maintain an awareness of the here-and-now, or to stay conscious of the process. Instead one essentially enters a sort of semi-conscious trance.

4. What are the different meditation techniques?

Meditation involves concentrating on something to take our attention beyond the random thought activity that is usually going on in our heads. This can involve a solid object or picture, a mantra, breath, or guided visualization.

Typical objects employed include a candle flame or a flower. Some people use pictures, such as a mandala - a highly colored symmetric painting - or a picture of a spiritual teacher in a high meditative state. Mantras are sounds which have a flowing, meditative quality and may be repeated out loud or inwardly. The breath is also a common focal point. Finally, guided visualization is also considered by some to be a form of meditation.

A guided visualization can help to bring one into a meditative state; also, visualization may be used once a meditative state has been reached to produce various results.

5. Which meditation is right for me?

There is no "right" meditation technique for everybody. Some techniques work better for certain people while other techniques work better for other people. The important thing is to find what works for you.

6. What are some meditation guidelines?

There are a few recommended guidelines for meditation:

- It should be done every day, preferably at the same time
- It should preferably be done before a meal rather than after a meal
- A spot should be set aside for meditation, which should be a quiet place and used for nothing but meditation
- One should sit with the spine straight and vertical (a chair is ok to use)

7. Is there any religious implication or affiliation with meditation?

Meditation has been and still is a central practice in eastern religions, for contacting "God" or one's higher Self. Christianity also has semblances of meditation, such as the biblical statement "The kingdom of heaven is within you". Churches have a meditative atmosphere. Meditation deals with contacting something within us that is peaceful, calm, rejuvenating, and meaningful. Whether one calls this something "God" or "soul" or "the inner child" or "theta-wave activity" or "peace" or "silence" is not important. It is there and anyone can benefit from it regardless of what they believe. Most people in the world have already meditated. If you have relaxed looking at a beautiful sunset, allowing your thoughts to quiet down, this is close to meditation. If you have been reading a book for a while, then put it down to take a break and just sat there quietly and peacefully for a few minutes without thinking, this is close to meditation.

8. Does meditation have any ethical implications?

In many traditions meditation practice is a means for reinforcing ethical qualities. In these traditions, calmness of mind, peacefulness and happiness are possible in meditation and in life generally only if they are accompanied by the observance of ethical norms of behavior.

9. What is the best time of day to meditate?

While meditation is beneficial at any time, most people who meditate agree that early morning is the best time to meditate. Part of the reason is that it is said that in early morning the hustle-and-bustle of the world has not yet begun and so it is easier to establish a meditative atmosphere. Having an early morning meditation also lets us carry some of the energy and peace of the meditation into our daily activities.

Many people also meditate either before dinner or later in the evening. Others also meditate at noon. A short meditation at these times allows one to throw off some of the accumulated stress of the work-day and become rejuvenated for further activity. An important consideration is when your schedule will allow you to meditate. Having a time of the day set aside for meditation helps in maintaining regularity.

10. Why do some people use light and sound, music or binaural beat audio while meditating?

Light and sound tools, Meditative music (not rock-n-roll) or binaural beats audio can help in establishing a meditative atmosphere very quickly. Also, some people find meditation relatively easy but find that the hard thing is to actually get themselves to sit down and start their meditation. Music can help make this easier. Some people use music with their light and sound tools. Most people find light and sound machines give a deeper meditative state.

11. Should I meditate with my eyes open or with my eyes closed?

Different traditions give different answers. Closing your eyes may contribute to drowsiness and sleepiness--if that's the case for you then try opening them a little. Opening your eyes may be distracting. If that's the case try closing your eyes or direct your gaze on a blank wall (Zen-style). Or try with the eyes open halfway or a bit more, the gaze unfocussed and directed downward, but keeping the head erect with the chin slightly tucked in. Sometimes meditation subjects experience headaches from focusing on a spot too close to the eyes (perhaps closer than three feet). Whether focused or unfocussed, the gaze should be relaxed in order to prevent eyestrain or headache. Experiment and see what works for you and then stick with your choice of technique. If you are using a candle, flower, or other visual object in your meditation then here the technique itself requires your eyes to be at least partly open.

12. What are the physiological effects of meditation?

The most common physiological effects of meditation are reduced blood pressure, lower pulse rate, decreased metabolic rate and changes in the concentration of serum levels of various substances.

BALANCE

BALANCE IS THE KEY to mastery in a human being. Meditation is the foremost technique for achieving balance and addressing the challenge of human mastery. Throughout history, such mastery was the result of many years of arduous training and hours a day spent in isolated meditative practice. In our contemporary Western society, very few of us devote our time to create such a disciplined and rigorous lifestyle. Yet, the desire to move beyond our boundaries, to explore the nature of transcendental experience and to witness the peace which lies at the heart of our being is natural to human beings in

all times and all cultures. As Westerners, we seek a more efficient way, a method that is congruent with our fast-paced lifestyle and non-traditional belief system. We have found the most effective method available today for achieving balance and addressing the challenge of human mastery are Light and Sound tools.

13. When I meditate I experience physical pain in my body. What should I do?

Sensations (itching/aches/pains/etc.) can arise in the body when meditating for several reasons. Sometimes the cause is just an uncomfortable posture - make sure that your posture is comfortable under normal circumstances. Other times the cause is that sensations in the body are more noticeable in meditation. The body and mind are calmer and you are able to notice more details in your bodily experience. It is often interesting to simply observe these sensations in your body: to use them as the objects of meditation. Sometimes these sensations just go away without your having to move or change your posture. Remember that a quiet body contributes to a quiet mind.

14. How long should I meditate?

When first learning meditation it is usually not possible to meditate for more than 10-15 minutes. After regular practice for awhile, one becomes able to meditate for longer periods of time. Many people meditate twice daily for 20-30 minutes each time, but the right duration and frequency is for each individual to decide.

15. Do I need a meditation teacher?

The short answer is no. It is theoretically possible to learn meditation from a book. However most people who teach and practice meditation agree that a teacher can be an invaluable aid in learning a meditation technique and making sure it is practiced correctly. The beginner will usually have several questions which a teacher will be able to answer. Various individuals and groups teach meditation. Some charge and some do not. Many different techniques are taught, some more spiritual in nature and others mainly concerned with stress-reduction and gaining a little peace of mind. As always, the important thing is finding what works for you.

Monks, Shamans, Drum Beats, Primitive Cultures, Rhythmic Sound & The Brain

Studies have shown that vibrations from rhythmic sounds have a profound effect on brain activity. In Shamanic traditions, drums were used in periodic rhythm to transport the shaman into other realms of reality. The vibrations from this constant rhythm affected the brain in a very specific manner, allowing the shaman to achieve an altered state of mind and journey out of his or her body.

Brain pattern studies conducted by researcher Melinda Maxfield into the (SSC) Shamanic State of Consciousness found that the steady rhythmic beat of the drum struck four and one half times per second was the key to transporting a shaman into the deepest part of his shamanic state of consciousness. It is no coincidence that 4.5 beats, or cycles per

second corresponds to the trance like state of theta brain wave activity. In direct correlation, we see similar effects brought on by the constant and rhythmic drone of Tibetan Buddhist chants, which transport the monks and even other listeners into realms of blissful meditation.

The gentle pulsating rhythms (binaural beat) of our light and sound tools and brain synchronization tapes act in a similar fashion, yet because the frequencies are electronically generated, they are precise, consistent and can be targeted to induce highly specific and desired brain states. Much like tuning a radio to get a particular station, our brain synchronization tapes can induce a variety of brain states. Effecting Alertness, Concentration, Focus & Cognition Relaxation, Visualization, & Creativity Intuition, Memory, Meditation Vivid Visual Imagery Deep Sleep, Detached Awareness.

There are frequencies/rhythms which when dominant in the brain correlate with a specific state of mind. There are generally 4 groupings of brain waves:

1. Beta waves range between 13-40 HZ. The beta state is associated with peak concentration, heightened alertness and visual acuity. Nobel Prize Winner, Sir Francis Crick and other scientists believe that the 40HZ beta frequency used by using light and sound tools and many Brain Sync tapes may be key to the act of cognition.
2. Alpha waves range between 7-12 HZ. This is a place of deep relaxation, but not quite meditation. In Alpha, we begin to access the wealth of creativity that lies just below our conscious awareness - it is the gateway, the entry point that leads into deeper states of consciousness. Alpha is also the home of the window frequency known as the Schuman Resonance, which is the resonant frequency of the Earth's electromagnetic field.
3. Theta waves range between 4-7 HZ. Theta is one of the more elusive and extraordinary realms we can explore. It is also known as the twilight state which we normally only experience fleetingly as we rise up out of the depths of delta upon waking, or drifting off to sleep. In theta we are in a waking dream, vivid imagery flashes before the mind's eye and we are receptive to information beyond our normal conscious awareness. During the Theta state many find they are capable of comprehending advanced concepts and relationships that become incomprehensible when returning to Alpha or Beta states. Theta has also been identified as the gateway to learning and memory. Theta meditation increases creativity, enhances learning, reduces stress and awakens intuition and other extrasensory perception skills. When the brain is in Theta it appears to balance sodium/potassium ratios which are responsible for the transport of chemicals through brain cell membranes. This appears to play a role in rejuvenating the fatigued brain.
4. Delta waves range between 0-4 HZ. Delta is associated with deep sleep. In addition, certain frequencies in the delta range trigger the release of Growth Hormone beneficial for healing and regeneration. This is why sleep, deep restorative sleep, is so essential to the healing process.