

Meditation Techniques

1. Loving-kindness meditation



Loving-kindness meditation is also known as Metta meditation. Its goal is to cultivate an attitude of love and kindness toward everything, even a person's enemies and sources of stress. While breathing deeply, practitioners open their minds to receiving loving kindness.

They then send messages of loving kindness to the world, to specific people, or to their loved ones. In most forms of this meditation, the key is to repeat the message many times, until the practitioner feels an attitude of loving kindness.

Loving-kindness meditation is designed to promote feelings of compassion and love, both for others and oneself. It can help those affected by: anger, frustration, resentment, and interpersonal conflict.

This type of meditation may increase positive emotions and has been linked to reduced depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress or PTSD.

Start by developing loving-kindness towards yourself, then progressively towards others and all beings. Usually this progression is advised: 1. oneself, 2. a good friend, 3. a "neutral" person, 4. a difficult person, 5. all four of the above equally, 6. and then gradually the entire universe

2. Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that urges practitioners to remain aware and present in the moment.

Rather than dwelling on the past or dreading the future, mindfulness encourages awareness of a person's existing surroundings. Crucial to this is a lack of judgment. So, rather than reflecting on the annoyance of a long wait, a practitioner will simply note the wait without judgment.

Mindfulness meditation is something people can do almost anywhere. While waiting in line at the grocery store, for example, a person might calmly notice their surroundings, including the sights, sounds, and smells they experience.

A form of mindfulness is involved in most kinds of meditation. Breath awareness encourages practitioners to be aware of their breathing, while progressive relaxation draws attention to areas of tension in the body.

Because mindfulness is a theme common to many forms of meditation, it has been extensively studied.

Research has found that mindfulness can: 1. reduce fixation on negative emotions, 2. improve focus, 3. improve memory, 4. lessen impulsive, emotional reactions, 5. improve relationship satisfaction

Some evidence suggests mindfulness may improve health. For example, a study of African-American men with chronic kidney disease found that mindfulness meditation could lower blood pressure.

3. Kundalini yoga



Kundalini yoga is a physically active form of meditation that blends movements with deep breathing and mantras. People usually learn from a teacher or do a class. However, someone can learn the poses and mantras at home.

Similarly to other forms of yoga, kundalini yoga can improve physical strength and reduce pain. It may also improve mental health by reducing anxiety and depression.

4. Zen meditation



Zen meditation, sometimes called Zazen is a form of meditation that can be part of Buddhist practice. Many Zen practitioners study under a teacher because this kind of meditation involves specific steps and postures.

The goal is to find a comfortable position, focus on breathing, and mindfully observe one's thoughts without judgment.

Again, this form of meditation is similar to mindfulness meditation but requires more discipline and practice. People may prefer it if they are seeking both relaxation and a new spiritual path.

5. Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation is a spiritual form of meditation where practitioners remain seated and breathe slowly. The goal is to transcend or rise above the person's current state of being.

During a meditation session, practitioners focus on a mantra or a repeated word or series of words. A teacher determines the mantra based on a complex set of factors, sometimes including the year the practitioner was born, and the year the teacher was trained.

An alternative allows people to choose their mantra. This more contemporary version is not technically Transcendental Meditation, though it may look substantially similar. A practitioner might decide to repeat "I am not afraid of public speaking" while meditating.

People who practice Transcendental Meditation report both spiritual experiences and heightened mindfulness.

6. Yoga Meditations

Origin & Meaning

There is not one type of meditation which is “Yogic Meditation”, so here it is meant the several meditation types taught in the yoga tradition. Yoga means “union”. Tradition goes as far as 1700 B.C, and has as its highest goal spiritual purification and Self-Knowledge. Classical Yoga divides the practice into rules of conduct (*yamas* and *niyamas*), physical postures (*asanas*), breathing exercises (*pranayama*), and contemplative practices of meditation (*pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*).

The Yoga tradition is the oldest meditation tradition on earth, and also the one with the widest variety of practices.

How to do it

Here are some types of meditation practiced in Yoga. The most common and universal Yoga meditation one is the “third eye meditation”. Other popular ones involve concentrating on a chakra, repeating a mantra, visualization of light, or gazing meditations.

- **Third Eye Meditation** — focusing the attention on the “spot between the eyebrows” (called by some “the third eye” or “*ajna chakra*”). The attention is constantly redirected to this point, as a means to silence the mind. By time the “silent gaps” between thoughts get wider and deeper. Sometimes this is accompanied by physically “looking”, with eyes closed, towards that spot.
- **Chakra Meditation** — the practitioner focuses on one of the seven chakras of the body (“centers of energy”), typically doing some visualizations and chanting a specific mantra for each chakra (*lam*, *vam*, *ram*, *yam*, *ham*, *om*). Most commonly it is done on the heart chakra, third eye, and crown chakra.
- **Gazing Meditation (Trataka)** — fixing the gaze on an external object, typically a candle, image or a symbol (*yantras*). It is done with eyes open, and then with eyes closed, to train both the concentration and visualization powers of the mind. After closing the eyes, you should still keep the image of the object in your “mind’s eye”. This meditation is so important and powerful, that I wrote this post on the subject.
- **Kundalini Meditation** — this is a very complex system of practice. The goal is the awakening of the “kundalini energy” which lies dormant on the base of the spine, the development of several psychic centers in the body, and, finally, enlightenment. There are several dangers associated with this practice, and it should not be attempted without the guidance of a qualified yogi.

- **Kriya Yoga** — is a set of energization, breathing, and meditation exercises taught by Paramahansa Yogananda. This is more suited for those who have a devotional temperament, and are seeking the spiritual aspects of meditation. To learn it, you can apply to receive the Self-Realization lessons, free of charge.
- **Sound Meditation (Nada Yoga)** — focusing on sound. Starts with meditation on “external sounds”, such as calming ambient music (like Native American flute music), whereby the student focuses all his attention on just hearing, as a help to quieten and collect the mind. By time the practice evolves to hearing the “internal sounds” of the body and mind. The ultimate goal is to hear the “Ultimate Sound” (*para nada*), which is a sound without vibration, and that manifests as “OM”.
- **Tantra** — unlike the popular view in the West, most Tantra practices have nothing to do with ritualized sex (this was practiced by a minority of lineages. Tantra is a very rich tradition, with dozens of different contemplative practices. The text Vijnanabhairava Tantra, for instance, lists 108 “meditations”, most of them more advanced (already requiring a certain degree of stillness and mind control). Here are some examples from that text:
 - Merge the mind and the senses in the interior space in the spiritual heart.
 - When one object is perceived, all other objects become empty. Concentrate on that emptiness.
 - Concentrate on the space which occurs between two thoughts.
 - Fix attention on the inside of the skull. Close eyes.
 - Meditate on the occasion of any great delight.
 - Meditate on the feeling of pain.
 - Dwell on the reality which exists between pain and pleasure.
 - Meditate on the void in one’s body extending in all directions simultaneously.
 - Concentrate on a bottomless well or as standing in a very high place.
 - Listen to the Anahata [heart chakra] sound.
 - Listen to the sound of a musical instrument as it dies away.
 - Contemplate on the universe or one’s own body as being filled with bliss.
 - Concentrate intensely on the idea that the universe is completely void.
 - Contemplate that the same consciousness exists in all bodies.
- **Pranayama** — breathing regulation. It is not exactly meditation, but an excellent practice to calm the mind and prepare it for meditation. There are several different types of *Pranayama*, but the simplest and most commonly taught one is the 4-4-4-4. This means breathing in counting up to 4, holding for 4 seconds, breathing out for 4 seconds, and holding empty for 4 seconds. Breathe

through your nose, and let the abdomen (and not the chest) be the one that moves. Go through a few cycles like this. This regulation of breathing balances the moods and pacifies the body, and can be done anywhere.

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