

The Art of Meditation

The Purpose of Meditation

The ultimate goal of meditation or of yoga, is to allow the personal self to experience the greater Self, the Oneness which we can think of as Universal Divine Consciousness, Nature or 'God'

An Inner Centre of Peace

As the pressures of the world increase and multiply, many people see meditation as a step toward a calmer life, and towards direct realisation of the wellspring of strength and peace within themselves.

We must not lose sight of the fact that this is an inner journey. For just as the ocean has quiet depths, untroubled by agitation on the surface, so has every human. In those depths — the true centre and source of all that we are — abide stillness, peace and beauty. And we can reach this inner centre.

By meditation we can remove the obstacles, so that the door to those spiritual levels of consciousness can be opened. Then creativity and inspiration flow into our lives, reducing the urgency of our problems and allowing us to express love and peace in all that we do.

Meditation is perfect stillness — silence of the body, silence of speech, and silence of mind.

To find stillness of mind we have to learn the delicate art of allowing our actions, our thoughts and our feelings to be whatever they are, but not to let them control us.

A Science, Centuries Old

Meditation has been a central focus of most spiritual traditions and there are now many methods that have been developed. These include walking meditation, sand Mandala creation and others. Some include the use of mantra, others not. These are all ways of quietening and harmonising the physical and emotional nature and lead into the stilling of the mind. This is the final stage reached in Patanjali's famous Yoga Sutras, in which he describes eight stages to achieve the goal.

After stating the need for an ethical lifestyle and the stilling of the physical and astral bodies Patanjali instructs the meditator to "hinder" or slow down the "modification" of the mind — to stop it from identifying with, or responding to, stimuli. He then sets out the following four further steps necessary to master the art of meditation:

Observation (Awareness)

To observe intently, with undivided attention, develops the awareness or "mindfulness" that is essential in meditation. We must continually be aware of the conditioning that lies behind our thought-feeling and try to act more and more from the centre of stillness, which is our real Self.

Concentration

Concentration is necessary to discipline the "monkey mind". We must learn to hold the mind steady on a physical object, an idea, or a revered figure, and bring it back when it slips away. The mind tries to take control, but, by carefully watching the process of thinking, we can learn to ensure that we and not the mind, determine the content and activity of our consciousness.

Meditation

Meditation proper begins where active thought ceases and one becomes aware of the inner meaning of the object of meditation. It is like going from one-pointedness to no point and thus experiencing wholeness.

Contemplation

In this final stage the meditator becomes completely one with the object of meditation. This brings about an expansion of consciousness that lifts one out of the little self into a greater Self . There is no longer an "I and an "it" being meditated upon. There is only the One Reality.

How to Meditate

Each person tends to have his or her own way of meditation, but the following general techniques are common to all traditional methods:

1. Meditate regularly, preferably at the same time each day and in a private place.
2. Sit in a comfortable position with spine and head erect.
3. Relax all muscles — deep regular breathing is helpful.
4. Deliberately withdraw your attention from all outer stimuli.
5. Practice one of the specific techniques outlined below.
6. After about 15 minutes slowly return to normal consciousness.
7. Radiate the peace you have experienced outward to the world.

As aids to stilling the mind, several methods are used, some of which are:

A. Concentration on Breathing

Concentrate on the breath going in and out of the nostrils. Do not try to count breath; let them flow naturally, but focus your awareness on breathing. This keeps your concentration in the present moment— the only gateway to higher consciousness.

B. Dissociating the focus of attention progressively from less to more subtle levels e.g. I am not the physical body, I am the spiritual Self; I am not the emotional (Astral)...etc. for the higher levels.

C. Using Mantras

Mantra are words or phrases that by their special vibrational qualities, link us with the spiritual levels of consciousness. Chanting a mantram like "Om" or "Aum", "Om nama Shivaya", "Om mani padme hum", "Hail Mary, mother of God", is a powerful aid in meditation.

D. Focusing on an Object or Idea

A symbol such as the Seal of the Theosophical Society, or an affirmation such as "I am one with the Divine", or "Be still and know that I AM God" , or an object such as a candle flame or a Rose bud, can be used as a focus to initiate meditation.

E. Emptying The Mind

Simply try to empty the mind or still its activities, knowing that if this can be achieved an expansion of awareness will follow.

Caution

The experience of pain should be taken as a warning that modification of the practice causing it, is necessary.

The use of drugs as aids to meditation is strongly discouraged, for though they may open up paranormal awareness, drugs do not take consciousness to the higher spiritual levels and they can cause serious harm to the individual both physically and psychologically. In fact all practices that either promise to awaken psychic faculties, or encourage the meditator to give control of the mind to external agencies, are not part of true meditation.

Attaining the Goal

Experiencing Union with the Universal Consciousness is the greatest spiritual achievement any individual can enjoy.

Suggestions for Further Reading

A Yoga of Light
Geoffrey Hodson

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
Trans G.Feustein

Approaches to Meditation,
Virginia Hanson, Ed.

Meditation: A Practical Study,
Adelaide Gardner

Finding the Quite Mind,
Robert Elwood

Concentration and Meditation,
Christmas Humphreys

Concentration, An Approach to Meditation,
Ernest Wood

Why Meditate?
Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

The Silent Encounter,
Virginia Hanson, Ed.