

## MEDITATION BASICS

Richard Imprescia

**What is meditation?** Meditation is a process/tool for intentionally directing one's attention to the clear aspect of his/her inner nature.

**What is the purpose of meditation?** According to the mystics, the ultimate purpose for meditating is to realize our divine nature, to consciously rest in the experience of pure being. Although some may meditate for various reasons, consistent and correct practice will result in increased awareness of one's true nature as an expression of the Infinite. From that realization many benefits result.

**What is the form of meditation we teach?** Our technique of meditation is a simple form taught by the major enlightenment traditions of the world. Its whole purpose is as stated above: to help one come into a realization of his/her divine nature.

Meditation is not a means of striving for an altered state of consciousness. Quite the contrary, it involves awakening to a clarity not ordinarily experienced by many.

Meditation is not an attempt to get "high" or "blissed out." It is not for the purpose of solving problems (although a meditator finds that problems seem to naturally dissolve during the course of his day-to-day life). And meditation is not a means of escaping reality. Meditation brings one face-to-face with the reality of one's life--which is God.

**What are some of the benefits of Meditation?** The immediate benefits of meditation are: peace of mind, total relaxation, release of stress symptoms and increase in available energy. Some have reported an improvement in memory, increased interest in living and a reduction in physical and emotional symptoms related to hypertension. Others report that concentration is improved and a general sense of well-being is experienced.

The long-term benefit of meditation is the joy of God-realization through the experience of pure being.

**What can one expect during a meditation session?** There are numerous things that a new meditator may experience. Some have seen lights of various colors and geometric figures. Others have heard sounds such as pure tones or a clicking like crickets. A roaring sensation in the head is not uncommon. Sometimes one may have body sensations such as a vibration in parts of the body or tingling in the spine. Many experience none of these phenomena. These experiences are neither useful nor non-useful. They are just some of the things that can happen. An experienced meditator does not get involved in the phenomena but, rather, moves beyond them into the clear meditative state.

Most new meditators have difficulty quieting their mental activity. In fact, most experienced meditators have the same difficulty from time to time. They have learned, however, that persistence in practice moves them into the meditative state.

**What is the technique of meditation?** The technique is simple and involves several 11 steps:

- **Preparation:** Pick a place that is quiet, convenient and with subdued lighting. Read something of an inspirational nature for a few minutes. Say a short prayer or centering affirmation. After a while this place will become your personal sanctuary. Be consistent in your choice of time to meditate each day. For most people the early morning is best. This is the time of day before you begin to gear-up for all the day's activities. It is also a time when you are alert. You should never meditate when you are tired or just after having a meal.
- **Posture:** Sit in an upright position with your spine well supported and your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands in a comfortable position on your lap. It is not necessary to sit cross-legged on the floor. A chair works well.

- **Watch the breath:** Close your eyes and concentrate on “watching” your breath as you inhale and exhale. Don’t force it; just be aware of it. If you are uncomfortable at any time, do whatever you need to do to get comfortable. If you have an itch, scratch it. But always come back to watching the breath. You will find that you gradually become more and more calm, entering into a pleasant state of relaxation and at the same time become increasingly alert. After a while your breathing will become very quiet. You may lose track of it and find yourself resting in a state of alert relaxation.
- **Use of mantra:** “Mantra” is a word that comes from two Sanskrit words: “manas” which means thinking principle and “tra” which means that which takes one beyond. Mantra meditation involves the internal listening to a word or phrase that holds one’s attention during the meditation process. In this way we are “taken beyond” the busy and confused human mental states that may cloud our perception of Reality.
- Although mantra is just a tool to help us to focus our attention, there are great mantras that have been handed down to us from various religious traditions. One of the best-known mantras is “Rama”. This is a mantra from India that Mahatma Gandhi used throughout his life in his meditation practice. He also used it routinely as he went about his daily activities. It means, simply, to rejoice.
- In the Christian tradition, the simple repetition of the name of Jesus constitutes a mantra for anyone who yearns to become more Christ-like. Catholics often chant “Ave Maria” (Hail Mary) regularly and may be surprised to learn that they have a mantra.
- Jews may use the ancient “Barukh attah Adonai” (Blessed art thou, O Lord) and the Muslims routinely chant “Allah, Allah” (God, God) or “Allahu akbar” (God is great).
- Some meditation teachers suggest the use of a meaningless word, so that you don’t get distracted in thinking about and analyzing it. Herbert Benson in his book *Relaxation Response* recommends the word “one”. Whatever the mantra used, you should feel comfortable with it and be willing to use it for an extended period of time. It becomes part of the space you create as your devotional sanctuary.
- The use of the mantra is simple. If it is a two-word (or two syllable) mantra such as “God Love” (or “Rama”) you silently repeat the first part as you inhale and the second part as you exhale. If it’s a single syllable mantra such as “one” you repeat the word both on inhaling and exhaling, always directing the eyes upward toward the third eye.

**Coming out of meditation:** When you have gained some experience in this practice you will find that after a suitable period of time you will naturally flow your attention back to your immediate environment. It is useful to rest in this state for a few minutes feeling the effects of the meditation. If you are inclined to do so, this is a good time to pray for the welfare of the world and for those in need, as well as for any special needs you may have.

For beginning meditators it is useful to set aside a period of time that can be handled reasonably easily. It’s best to meditate at the same time every day. We recommend, as a start, at least 10 minutes for the actual meditation part of the practice. Twenty minutes for the whole process is more than adequate for a beginner. One session each day is adequate. Twice a day is better. As you become more proficient in the practice you will find that you just naturally meditate longer and look forward to your daily interludes with Reality.