



An Introduction to Meditation

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The principles that operate in the outer universe, discoverable by scientists, are called natural laws. But there are subtler laws that rule the hidden spiritual planes and the inner realm of consciousness; these principles are knowable through the science of yoga. It is not the physicist but the Self-realized master who comprehends the true nature of matter.

– Paramahansa Yogananda, Autobiography of a Yogi

Table of Contents

Resources	3
Introduction	4
The Four P's of Meditation	5
Six Ways to Think About Meditation	8
Mental Development	8
Focusing our Attention	9
Understanding the Mind	11
Becoming Familiar With	12
Purification	13
Tending and Befriending	14
A Final and Crucial Way to Think About Meditation: The Ultimate Non-doing	14
Total Peace	15
Total Truth	15
Total Love	15
Total Silence	16
Appendices	17
11 Essential Tips to Start (And Stick to) A Home Meditation Practice	17
Breathing Exercises	18
Meditation from Pantajali	19
The Six Preparatory Practices and Shanti-Deva's Seven Limb Prayer	20
Common Meditation Postures	22

Resources

- Books
 - Dalai Lama, *Live a Better Way*
 - Jack Kornfield, *A Path With Heart*
 - John Novak, *How to Meditate*
 - Joseph Goldstein, *A Heart Full of Peace*
 - Mark Epstein, *Thoughts without a Thinker*
 - Pema Chodron, *How to Meditate*
 - Ram Dass, *Journey of Awakening (A Meditator's Guidebook)*
 - Rupert Spira, *The Art of Peace and Happiness*
 - Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*
 - Spring Washam, *A Fierce Heart*
 - Thich Nhat Hahn, *No Mud, No Lotus*
 - Thupten Jinpa, *A Fearless Heart*
 - Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, *The Joy of Living*
- Websites
 - Tara Brach's Podcast and Meditation Recordings: www.tarabrach.com
 - AudioDharma www.audiodharma.org
 - BeHereNow Podcast network <https://beherenownetwork.com/>
- Apps
 - Calm
 - Headspace
 - HeartMind
 - Insight Timer
 - Stop Think Breathe

Meditation is supreme among all these tested means for personal change. Nothing is so direct, so potent, so sure for releasing the divinity within us. - Eknath Easwaran

Introduction

There is an old joke about meditation. One person asks, “what is meditation?” and the other replies, “It’s not what you think.” The humor behind the joke is the double meaning that meditation has something to do with not thinking so much, and also that many people have many misconceptions about what meditation is.

While the idea of meditation might bring to mind a specifically Buddhist monk in robes sitting in a monastery in the lotus position, the practice of meditation has been utilized by many different religions and spiritualities for thousands of years. There are yogic, Hindu, Christian, and Jewish meditations. Followers may use meditation to get closer to God, their guru, the divine outside or the divine inside.

Meditation has also become secularized in a number of circles today. Athletes may meditate before a big game, or follow certain visualization exercises in order to get better at their respective sports. A therapist might guide their clients through certain meditative exercises. A surgeon might meditate in order to prepare the body and mind before a long and arduous operation.

Despite all the rich and varied expressions of meditative practice, many people have only been taught a specific type of meditation practice without being informed of its lineage or background. As a result many people think there is only one way to meditate and may guide others through that one type too.

Meanwhile, meditation has gotten very popular in the past few decades. Nowadays you can find countless books, recordings, podcasts, apps, and websites dedicated to helping people meditate, and in almost any part of the world you can find meditation workshops and retreats. Scientists are continuing to expand their research areas into meditation, and have even done brain scans of experienced monks and practitioners who have meditated for tens of thousands of hours.

Many meditation teachers will tell you that the only way to learn about meditation is to meditate. Without much explanation as to the how or the why, teachers often instruct their students simply to breath or to “find peace.”

However, many Westerners are not used to simply following instructions, and often want to know why they are doing something before they do it. So it will help to know some basics of meditation, as well as some universal principles that apply to all meditation practices.

The Four P's of Meditation

In first learning about meditation, we can start with the basics, known as the four Ps:

- Place
- Posture
- Practice
- Problems

Place

When beginning any meditation practice, it is important to have a designated place to meditate. Ideally this is a quiet and tidy place, free of external distractions. Some people dedicate an entire room of their home to yoga and meditation, but for many people this is not feasible, so they will set up a small altar in the corner of a room.

Your meditation space is your place, a time to sit with yourself and be. You can infuse it with any spiritual and religious symbols you feel called, or simply with whatever inspires you.

Some things you might include in your altar and meditation space include:

- Sacred items such as statues of deities, singing bowls, dorjes, crystals, stones, mesa cloths, mala or rosary beads, amulets, talismans
- Pictures or of great gurus, sages, mystics, or leaders that inspire you
- Sacred texts such as the Tao Te Ching, The Torah, The Bible or the Bhagavad Gita
- Containers for the elements of water, earth and fire, including candle and incense holders
- Anything that can be lit on fire, including candles, incense, sage or palo santo
- Plants such as flowers, bamboo, or sage
- Important mementos with strong sentimental value
- Natural items like condor feathers, snake skin, cacao beans, or pine cones
- Anything with strong symbolism, such as fruit to represent mother earth, money to represent abundance, a skeleton or skull to represent death, rose petals to represent love

Your space should be kept clean and tidy, and it should look pleasing to the eye. Even if there are many items at your altar, it should be clear that they were set there with care and intention.

Posture

Traditionally, there are four meditation postures: standing, sitting, laying down, and walking.

When sitting, it is important to be upright and alert, while also relaxed. There are many different ways to sit, including:

1. Quarter Lotus (*sukhasana*)
2. Half Lotus (*ardha padmasana*)

3. Full Lotus (*padmasana*)
4. Burmese Position (sometimes called *muktasana* or liberated pose)
5. Accomplished pose (*siddhasana* for men and *siddhayoniasana* for women)
6. Auspicious pose (*svastikasana*) - putting your feet in calves
7. Seiza/Kneeling/Hero's pose/Thunderbolt (*virasana*)
8. Sitting in a chair

Quarter lotus is also called cross-legged position, or in yoga, *sukhasana*, which literally means easy pose. However, for many Westerners who are used to sitting in chairs, easy pose isn't easy at all! In fact, the poses from 1-6 listed above all require what is known as *external rotation of the hips*, which means when we have bent legs, the knees are pointed outward.

Many people when starting to meditate will experience some discomfort in the hips, knees, or lower back. While meditating is increasing our capacity to be with what is, it is still important to be comfortable, and to find the pose that works the best for you.

Once you find a comfortable seat, you can apply **The Seven Point Meditation Posture**:

1. Sit Down
2. Elongate Spine
3. Rest Hands
4. Release Shoulders
5. Tuck Chin
6. Open jaw, tongue behind the teeth
7. Rest gaze

Practice

Once we find our clean, quiet space and set up a comfortable, alert seat, we begin our practice.

Pantajali tells us in Sutras 1.13 - 1.15,

Abhyasa [practice] means having an attitude of persistent effort to attain and maintain a state of stable tranquility.

To become well established, this needs to be done for a long time, without a break.

From this stance the deeper practice continues to unfold, going ever deeper towards the direct experience of the eternal core of our being.

A practice is something we bring into our life by choice, every day.

Many people feel they do not have time to meditate. But to the degree to which a person cannot sit down for 5 minutes and mediate, is the degree to which they need to sit down for 5 minutes and meditate.

Mediation should become a habit, much like exercise or our hygienic practices. If we have time to brush our teeth every day, we have time to meditate. Many people spend so much time on their physical hygiene, they forget about their mental hygiene too. Just as we brush and floss to remove gunk and dirt from our mouth, we mediate in order to remove the “gunk” of attachment, ignorance, and anger from our minds.

The more you meditate the more benefits you will receive from your meditation practice.

Problems

Many people believe, and some are even told by their meditation teacher, that all they need to do is sit down and breathe in order to feel total bliss and at one with the universe. But in reality, as soon as we sit down, we encounter a large litany of problems.

After just a few minutes, our body starts to ache. Many people ache in the hips, lower back, or the knees. But the problems we encounter are not just physical, but mental and emotional too. Our mind may get anxious, bored, or distracted. We may even feel anger bubble up, or frustration as to how our meditation progress is going.

Pantajali also mentions problems, calling them *antarayah*. He names the following disturbances in Sutras 1.30: disease, idleness, doubt, carelessness, sloth, lack of detachment, misapprehension, failure to attain a base for concentration, instability. He then expands on even more *antarayah* in Sutra 1.31, adding distress, despair, trembling of the body, and disturbed breathing.

Although it may be tempting to want to push away these problems or to think that we are a “bad meditator” for encountering them, these problems are actually the point of the practice. That is because in meditation we are trying to increase our capacity to be with what is, while also deconditioning our mental and emotional habits that cause suffering in our lives.

In other words, meditation is not a relaxation technique, although there are some aspects of it that are relaxing. Nor is it meant to attain blissful states of consciousness, although at times we may feel blissful. We are aiming for a highly concentrated and clear peace of mind, in order to produce a number of intended effects.

Exercise: Sit for 5-20 minutes, count how many times the mind gets distracted

Six Ways to Think About Meditation

Next, we will cover five ways to think about meditation:

1. Mental Development
2. Focusing our Attention
3. Purification
4. Understanding the Mind
5. Becoming Familiar With
6. Tending and Befriending

Mental Development

For more guidance on how to approach our meditate practice, we can turn to the pali word for meditation, *bhavana*, which means to develop or to grow. From this perspective, meditation is a kind of mental development, where we intentionally try to cultivate positive mental states, while rooting out negative mental states. As the saying goes, “Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.”

Before it was mentioned there are many ways to meditate, depending on the religious or spiritual lineage. Similarly, what is considered a “positive” and “negative” mental state will vary depending on one’s perspective. When you look at almost every meditation practice, there is a purpose behind it. It is important to recognize what that purpose is and to know why you are doing what you are doing. .

For example, a mindfulness meditation will cultivate mindfulness. A kundalini meditation will most likely cultivate the awakening of kundalini. Most Buddhists would say they meditate to develop love and compassion. A Christian might meditate to be closer to God. A mystic might meditate to become one with God. A teacher might guide a class to cultivate self-love or self-compassion.

Most people would agree that things like peace, contentment, nonjudgement, or an open heart are also good things to cultivate. Gratitude is also a wonderful spiritual practice, hence the Buddhist proverb, “Train your mind to see something good in everything.” We might even meditate to be more creative or find inspiration.

Patanjali would say that we meditate to calm the mind and discover our true nature. But attempting to calm the mind does not make it calm, just as smoothing water over with your hand simply makes it more agitated. So Pantanjali also advises in sutra 1.33:

By cultivating attitudes of friendliness toward the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and disregard toward the wicked, the mind-stuff retains its undisturbed calmness.

We see these positive qualities of love and compassion across many religions and practices. They can be summed up in what are known as *the Four Brahma Viharas*, or noble qualities, so shown in the table below:

<u>Sanskrit</u>	<u>Pali</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Mantra</u>
maitrī	mettā	Loving-kindness	May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness
karuṇā	karuṇā	Compassion	May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering
muditā	muditā	Sympathetic Joy	May all sentient beings be inseparable from the happiness that is free from suffering.
upekṣā	upekkhā	Equanimity	May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free from attachment for friends and hatred for enemies.

What are some other positive qualities we might want to cultivate?

Once we begin to cultivate positive states of mind, we realize the fundamental truth: *what we think, we become*. The more time we spend cultivating positive thoughts, the more they arise naturally in our day to day experience.

A neuroscientist might put it that “neurons that fire together, wire together,” and that every thought we have increases the propensity of having that thought again. But I prefer the words of the Dhammapada,

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought: we are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfless thoughts give joy whenever they speak or act. Joy follows them like a shadow that never leaves them.”

Focusing our Attention

As soon as we sit down to meditate, we begin to notice just how scattered our mental experience is. The mind loves to grasp at things, and will continually run off in every direction it can, from the past to the future to our own imagination to our to-do list for the day.

If we do want to cultivate any of the positive qualities mentioned above, we have to focus our attention first. A 30-minute *metta* meditation will not be very effective if our mind is wandering for 29 of those minutes. In fact the more focused our attention becomes, the more effective our meditation will be. Eknath Easwaran summed it up this way, “in meditation we slow down the furious, fragmented activity of the mind and lead it to a measured, sustained focus on what we want to become.”

This so-called “monkey mind” jumping from thought branch to thought branch can be a huge impediment to our spiritual development. If we sit down for a 30 minute loving-kindness meditation, but 29 of those minutes our mind is somewhere else, we will not progress very much. Thus one of the most common ways to begin our meditation practice is to learn how to focus the mind. If we truly want to meditate, we must first learn how to pay attention.

While training the monkey mind requires a lot of effort, patience, and practice, the path is quite easy. We first establish our focus of concentration. We pick something to focus our attention on, and try to notice anytime our attention wanders. When we do notice our mind wandering, we simply bring it back to our object of concentration.

Keeping the analogy of the monkey mind, our focus of concentration is like sticking a post in the dirt. We then tie one end of a rope to the post, and the other end to the monkey. Anytime our monkey mind wanders off too far, we jerk our attention back to the post. This not only might happen a hundred or a thousand times during one meditation session, but continues for many many years.

The most common object of concentration is the breath. The breath has some advantages as an object of concentration. Teachers tend to focus on the breath for a number of reasons:

1. **Universality:** Everyone breathes, and pretty much in the same way. Choosing an object of concentration like “God” or “death” for example, can result in very different experiences for different people.
2. **Relaxation:** For most people, focusing on the breath can be quite relaxing. Simply the act of slowing down the breath can calm the nervous system.
3. **Presence:** Focusing on the breath brings us into the present moment, because we are breathing right now, not today or tomorrow.
4. **Interoception** - Our breath is a good odometer for the body, if we are breathing slowly and smoothly, our mental-emotional state as well will begin to calm.
5. **A Gateway to Stillness** - Breathing is both voluntary and involuntary, and while we may begin our practice with a strong focus on the breath, soon it takes us deep into stillness as somatic processes naturally take over.

6. **Spiritual Symbolism** - I must also mention the importance that breathing has held in the world's religious and spiritual traditions. In Judeo-Christian beliefs, God "breathed the soul" into Adam. In yoga cosmology, the breath takes in the flow of pranic energy. In shamanistic traditions, breath has a profound healing force and connects closely to spirit.

But many people do not realize that the breath is just one of many objects one can use to focus their concentration. Below is a table of different objects of concentration:

<u>Gross Body</u>	<u>Subtle Body</u>	<u>Listed in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika</u>
Breath	Any idea like nature or connectedness	Lotus in the heart
Sound	Guided Imagery	Tip of the nose
Spoken Mantra	Internal Mantra	Light of the mind
Any sensations - body, abdomen, nostrils.	Impermanence/Death and Rebirth	Any external object
Mandala	Chakras/Kundalini	

Practicing a focused attention on the present moment has innumerable benefits for how we live our lives. There is a saying, "a moment missed is a moment unlived." When we are lost in our own thoughts, we are missing out on life.

In our increasingly accelerating society, it becomes especially important to slow down. We need to practice something like mindfulness for 20 minutes a day, because all the other minutes of the day, we are unintentionally practicing mindlessness!

Understanding the Mind

It's incredible that some people go their entire lives without ever looking within themselves. Once we do look within, we recognize the *nature of our mind*. We are looking at how the mind works and how it functions, where our thoughts and emotions come from and also where they go. One thing we notice immediately is how often and quickly our mind grasps for things. We notice our mental conditioning, and how past patterns of thought continue to influence our current behaviors. We notice all the ways our mind not only takes us away from the present moment, but also robs us of truly being happy.

We might notice the “if-only” mind that tells us we would be happy if only certain circumstances were to happen in our lives. We learn about the obstacles preventing us from being truly happy, or the emotions getting in the way of unconditional love. In becoming familiar with the nature of our mind, we also realize that both past and future are figments of the imagination, while the present moment is all there is and all there ever will be. As the poet and spiritual teacher Alfred K. Lamotte wrote, “Dear one, you are never one moment old!”

When we become future in touch with the nature of our mind, we also recognize that the world is a reflection of ourselves. Or as one meditation teacher told me, “the world does not exist independently of your own mind.” If we are happy, the world seems brighter. If we are sad, the world seems like a gloomy place. If our mind is clear, simple, and sure, so too becomes the world. As Chuang-Tzu writes, “when your mind is transparent to the depths and your words and actions are one, the whole world becomes transparent.”

Becoming Familiar With

There is another perspective on meditation we can also incorporate into our practice. The Tibetan word for meditation is *Gom*, which most often is translated as “familiarization.” From this perspective, to meditate means to become familiar, and in the process of meditating there are many things we are becoming familiar with, in both our internal and external worlds.

We become familiar with our **deepest values and purpose**. The meditation teacher John Kabat Zinn warns his students that, “Meditation is not for the faint-hearted, nor for those who routinely avoid the whispered longings of their own hearts.” We become familiar with what really matters, what is truly the sources of our suffering and our joy. Through this discovery we learn precious intentions we can set in our other practices and our days. We also might find that we are not living in a way that is in line with our deepest values, which can often be a catalyst for radical changes in our lives.

We also become familiar with **our own true nature**. In meditation, we examine the spiritual question, “who am I?” After all it was Lao Tzu who wrote, “he who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.” Through meditation we look within to see if there’s anything lasting and permanent there. Along with learning the nature of our mind, we look at our attention, thoughts, intellect, emotions, consciousness, and awareness to look for any permanent structure we can point to and say is ourselves. Meditation puts us on the path towards self-knowledge. As Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

We also become familiar with **an innate source of love, joy, and wisdom**. Most of Western society is based on the idea that what we seek is somewhere outside of us. If you want to learn

something, that information needs to be disseminated from an outside source, like a book or a teacher. The same goes for if you want love: you better spend a lot of time looking for the right person to complete you. If you want to be happy, work really hard to buy the material comforts that will lead to happiness. But as soon as we sit down and look within, we see that what we seek are internal states, and they are already available to us right here, right now. Once we turn our attention within, we find the source of the love, joy, and wisdom that we seek.

Lastly, we become familiar with **the nature of reality**. We gaze closely at the subject-object relationship, dispel the illusions of ignorance and gain true insight into the way things are. This is the essence of *Vipassana* meditation, as *Vipassana* means insight, and followers believe they practice the same technique the Buddha did when we became enlightened. In Mahayana Buddhism, a *Bodhisattva* is a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings. But the term *Bodhisattva* also means “one who understands the nature of things,” for when we understand reality, we understand the connectedness of all things and will seek to relieve the suffering of all. In understanding reality we see that everything in this life is both connected and impermanent, which is summed up in the term, *interdependent*. The Bodhisattva knows that to be personally liberated, one must liberate all beings, because in truth, there is no self and no other.

The monk Pema Chodron summed up meditation as familiarization this way, “Meditation is the process of lightening up, of trusting the basic goodness of what we have and who we are, and of realizing that any wisdom that exists, we already have.” Once we stop judging ourselves from a distance, we become intimate with who we are, which taps into an undeniable wellspring of wisdom and joy.

Purification

There is a comic showing people meditating in an office setting. The man at the front of the class instructs, “in your mind’s browser, clear your cache... now delete your history... now navigate to a blank page.

This joke reflects another important perspective that meditation is a form of mental hygiene, a clearing and moving away of junk and clutter in the mind. Many people have daily practices for their physical cleanliness like the washing of clothes, bathing and the brushing of teeth, but fewer people are as focused as removing the gunk from their minds.

But what is the dirt of the mind we are getting rid off? Hatred, greed, judgement, cruelty, you name it. Our mind is full of clutter that no longer serves us. Just like a room full of junk with the

curtains drawn, the place becomes dusty and stale. Or a pond with no inlet of fresh water, it fills with muck and algae.

In the process of focusing our attention by choosing an object of concentration like from the previous exercise, an extraordinary shift also occurs in the mind: it becomes clear. A single thought, idea, mantra, or image can be like the cleansing rinse cycle that brings a purity to our mind.

The zen practice in particular is focused on total purification of the mind, not just hot hatred and ill-will, but also of any and all conditioned thinking. Hence the emphasis on the “don’t-know” mind and the beginner’s mind. Anything the mind can grasp is inherently limited, and if we are to purify it, we must release any and all clinging.

Tending and Befriending

Bob Sharples has an important recommendation for those using meditation as part of their self-improvement project:

There is nothing magical about meditation. Don't meditate to fix yourself, to heal yourself, to improve yourself, to redeem yourself; rather, do it as an act of love, of deep warm friendship toward yourself. In this view there is no longer any need for the subtle aggression of self-improvement, for self-criticism, for the endless guilt of not doing enough. It offers the possibility of an end to the ceaseless round of trying so hard that wraps so many people's lives in a knot. Instead there is now meditation as an act of love. How endlessly delightful and encouraging. Meditation is bound to fail if it is being done to fix a problem.

A Final and Crucial Way to Think About Meditation: The Ultimate Non-doing

So far, we have talked about meditation as something you “do” in order to produce an intended effect. We can develop mental and emotional capacities, increase our focus, patience, and concentration, and become familiar with our conditioning and our true nature.

However, even saying that meditation is a goal or direction oriented activity is controversial. There are some teachers that would say that meditation is not something you do at all, but instead *the ultimate non-doing*. Meditation is simply sitting still. That is all.

As Jianzhi Sengcan opened in his famous poem, Xinxin Ming, “The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences.” Meditation means resting in one place, no doing, and not wishing for things to be any different. We think not of the future, not of the past, nor put any layer of judgement on the present moment. We neither run from or run toward. There is no desire whatsoever to change anything at all. We let go of all desire, even the desire to let go of desire.

“With a single stroke we are freed from bondage; nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing. All is empty, clear, self-illuminating, with no exertion of the mind's power.”

Any thought of the past and future dissolve and we find ourselves outside of time and space. Hence Thich Nhat Hahn’s observation that, “In meditation you can feel that you are not traveling in time, but we are, we are eternity.”

There is a lot of logic in this approach. Earlier we mentioned that meditation can be a process of self-discovery and learning of our true nature. But how could we ever possibly realize who we truly are? The mind is inherently limited and could not possibly encompass more than itself. Aren’t we already who we are?

From this point of view, *meditation is the direct realization and embodiment of who we already are*. There is nothing that needs to be done, nowhere you need to go, no technique you need to master.

Once we stop all the doing, the clouds begin to part, and an extraordinary abundance of positive qualities permeates our awareness, including peace, truth, and love.

Total Peace

From this perspective, meditation is not a technique, but a way of being in the world. Like the saying, “there is no way to peace. Peace is the way,” meditation is not the practice of cultivating contentment, but being content.

Many yogis would say that “yoga is the state of needing nothing.” This peace that they talk about is the essence of our meditation, we stop grasping, stop craving and cease to be aversive to what it. In this way, we do not just find peace, we become peace.

Our task in meditation is to calm the mind in order to be at peace with all things. As Chuang Tzu recommended,

*As you simplify your mind,
You will see how simple life is.
As you learn not-knowing
Your heart will find its way back home.*

Total Truth

Many teachers will tell you that meditation is simply resting in your true nature, outside of time, space, and mental constructs. There are many ways to describe this resting state, some teachers will call it our natural state, original mind, unconditioned mind, pure awareness, or even “no mind” or emptiness.

The point is when we remove the do-er, we become the be-er. Rather on identifying as the *known*, we rest as the *knower*. We drop out of ego and feel into something greater, something larger, something deeper. The great sage Osho put it this way, “The ultimate meditation is surrender to reality. In deep surrender, the ego disappears. And when the ego is not there, for the first time you become aware of that which has always been there.”

Total Love

Approaching meditation from the stance of non-doing can greatly simplify the practice, while also removing much of the pressure we may feel that our meditation is supposed to be a certain way. Instead of forcing our meditation to be something, we surrender totally, completely, to what is.

Meditation as the ultimate act of surrender and non-doing is the wisdom behind the phrase, “Meditation is a universal ‘yes’ to everything.” Rather than seeking happiness it is a total allowing of everything in our experience, which may include happiness, but also sorrow and grief. In this way there is total closeness, a total embrace with our experience. Hence Zan Master Dogen’s saying that “Enlightenment is intimacy with all things.”

Every guest is welcomed, every experience is allowed, every sensation is embraced, and everything flows to and from the ultimate embracement: love. As Rupert Spira put it, “this empty space of your own being is not just present and aware; it is also love, pure intimacy. It loves everything it touches.”

Total Silence

If you wanted to wash a dirty car, it would clearly be better to use clean water rather than dirty water. In the same way, practicing stillness is clearing the junk and clutter from our mind, and it is important for our experience to be as clear as possible.

From this perspective, meditation is not a technique, and it is also not something that can be *guided*. A guided meditation is just another form of active listening. So to become silence we practice silence, in a silent space, in order to silence the mind. And when we experience that total silence, we experience what Carl Jung described as a “fountain of healing that makes life worth living.”

Meister Eckhardt put it this way,

Silence is a privileged entry into the realm of God and into eternal life. There is a huge silence inside each of us that beckons us into itself, and the recovery of our own silence can begin to teach us the language of heaven. For, silence is a language that is infinitely

deeper, more far-reaching, more understanding, more compassionate, and more eternal than any other language... There is nothing in the world that resembles God as much as silence.

Appendices

11 Essential Tips to Start (And Stick to) A Home Meditation Practice

1. **Same time, same place** - It is important to have a dedicated place that you do your meditation, and it can help to do it at the same time every day. Many people will recommend meditating in the morning.
2. **Different time, different place** - That being said, if you slip up in your meditation, that's ok! You can meditate anywhere. Even waiting in line at the grocery store, or sitting on public transportation.
3. **Dream big, start small, but most of all, start.** Don't wait until next week. Start your meditation practice now. Imagine all the benefits it will give you later on in life. If you do not have time for 20 or 30 minutes a day, start at 5 minutes a day.
4. **Stay disciplined and throw motivation out the window.** Motivation is fickle. Discipline puts you on your meditation cushion every day.
5. **Make it a habit.** Many people think they don't have time to meditate. But you found time to brush your teeth, take a shower, and eat a few meals today, right? Make meditation a habit that you do every day.
6. **Realize that perceived setbacks are part of the process.** Your growth will not be linear. You may have a perfect meditation on Monday and then struggle for the rest of the week.
7. **Realize that practice does not make perfect.** You will never become a meditation master. Meditation is rarely easy or even peaceful. Imagining how beautiful your meditation practice will be in the future will prevent you from experiencing real benefits today.
8. **Start with an intention, finish with a dedication.** No matter what happens during your meditation, you can encompass the practice by setting an intention at the beginning, and finishing it by dedicating the merits of your practice towards the benefit of all beings.
9. **Find a meditation friend or community.** It's hard doing things alone. It can help to find a community or a friend to meditate with.
10. **Love yourself.** Seriously! Don't let meditation be another self-improvement project full of judgement and criticism that you're not doing enough.
11. **Make it a ritual.** Make your meditation practice a ritual by approaching it with reverence. Light incense and candles, recite mantras, affirmations or prayers. Call in your gurus, past teachers, and spirit guides. Create an altar or shrine and fill it with sacred objects and photos.

Breathing Exercises

The breath is one of the most common and useful tools to bring to our meditation practice. Many meditations will begin or end with focusing on the breath. We have talked about the numerous benefits to listening to the breath.

But there are also many ways to focus, attend to, or be aware of the breath. Including:

1. Counting each exhale.
2. Counting backwards from 50 or 100 on each exhale.
3. Mentally labelling each inhale and exhale, such as with the mantra, “I am inhaling. I am exhaling.” Or simply “Inhaling. Exhaling.”
4. Mentally labelling the inhales as “1” and the exhales as “2.”
5. Focusing on sensations at the tip of the nostril and above the upper lip
6. Following the entire passage of air as it enters and leaves the body, from the nasal passages, to the pharynx and larynx, down to the bottom of the lungs, and back again.
7. Feeling the contraction and expansion of the thoracic and abdominal cavities.
8. Using the mantra, “Inhale, I am calming myself. Exhale, I am smiling.”
9. Using the mantra, “Inhale love. Exhale Gratitude.”
10. Any and all pranayama practices, from abdominal to three-part breathing to alternate nostril breathing.

Meditation from Pantajali

The meditative yogic traditions have been around for millenia. As such, great sages, mystics, and gurus have mapped out the territory of the mind so that we may better navigate it in our own meditation practice.

Earlier it was mentioned that “problems” is one of the main facets of our meditation. We meet all sorts of mental, emotional, and physical challenges in our practice, which helps us grow. As we conquer these problems, we are able to attain greater stages of our meditation practice, including moving from effortful concentration, to the ease of meditation, to the bliss of being completely absorbed in our meditation practice.

3.1 Dharana - Concentration

- Fixing the mind on one place - the lotus in the heart, the light in the brain, the tip of the nose, or any external object
- Tradak - gazing at something without blinking

3.2 Dhyana - Meditation

- Attention is unbroken and undistracted, fully present, continuous flow
- The image or impression that an object makes on the mind
- Focus on the exclusively on that object without any other distraction (possible loss of time and space)
- Dharana is like the dripping of a faucet, dyana is like the pouring of honey

3.3 Samadhi - Full Meditative Absorption

- Progression of concentrative absorption on the object of meditation
- Mind loses all notions of itself as a self-conscious, reflective mind
- Subjective meditator, meditation, and the object meditated upon, have collapsed
- Like a pure crystal placed in front of a rose, completely loses own character

The Six Preparatory Practices and Shanti-Deva's Seven Limb Prayer

In the Lam-Rim tradition as put forth by Lama Yeshe, there are six preparatory practices for beginning a meditation practice. These include:

1. Cleaning the space and preparing the altar
2. Making offerings on the altar
3. Applying the seven point meditation posture and establishing good motivation
4. Visualize the field of positive potential
5. Offering the seven-limb prayer (see below) and mandala
6. Requesting inspiration (from a Guru)

Seven-Limb Prayer of Shantideva

I take safe direction, till my purified state, from the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Highest Assembly. By the positive force of my giving and so on, may I actualize Buddhahood to help those who wander. May the surface of the land in every direction be pure, without even a pebble, as smooth as the palm of a child's hand, naturally polished, as is a beryl gem. May divine and human objects of offering, actually arrayed and those envisioned as peerless clouds of Samantabhadra offerings, completely fill the sphere of space.

1. **Prostration:** I prostrate to all you Buddhas who have graced the three times, to the Dharma and to the Highest Assembly, bowing down with bodies as numerous as all the atoms of the world.
2. **Offering:** Just as Manjushri and others have made offerings to you, the Triumphant, so do I, too, make offerings to you, my Thusly Gone Guardians, and to your spiritual offspring.
3. **Confession:** Throughout my beginningless samsaric existence, in this and other lives, I've unwittingly committed negative acts, or caused others to commit them, and further, oppressed by the confusion of naivety. I've rejoiced in them – whatever I've done, I see them as mistakes and openly declare them to you, my Guardians, from the depths of my heart.
4. **Rejoice:** With pleasure, I rejoice in the ocean of positive force from your having developed bodhichitta aims to bring every limited being joy and in your deeds that have aided limited beings.
5. **Request for teachers:** With palms pressed together, I beseech you Buddhas of all directions: please shine Dharma's lamp for limited beings suffering and groping in darkness.
6. **Request for the Buddha to stay:** With palms pressed together, I beseech you Triumphant who would pass beyond sorrow: I beg you, remain for countless eons so as not to leave in their blindness these wandering beings.

7. **Dedication:** By whatever positive force I've built up through all of these that I've done like that, may I remove every suffering of all limited beings.

By directing and offering to the Buddha-fields this base, anointed with fragrant waters, strewn with flowers, and decked with Mount Meru, four islands, a sun, and a moon, may all those who wander be led to pure lands. Om idam guru ratna mandala-kam nir-yatayami. I send forth this mandala to you precious gurus.

The Bodhisattva Prayer for Humanity

May I be a guard for those who need protection
A guide for those on the path
A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to cross the flood
May I be a lamp in the darkness
A resting place for the weary
A healing medicine for all who are sick
A vase of plenty, a tree of miracles
And for the boundless multitudes of living beings
May I bring sustenance and awakening
Enduring like the earth and sky
Until all beings are freed from sorrow
And all are awakened.

Common Meditation Postures



Full Lotus



Half Lotus



Burmese












On a stool



Seiza



On a Chair

Commonly Used Asana for Pranayama		
1 	2 	3  <small>SIDDHA YONI ASANA</small>
Sukhasana (easy)	Siddhasana	Siddha Yoni Asana
4 	5 	6  <small>RIGHT FOOT ON LEFT</small> <small>LEFT FOOT ON RIGHT</small>
Swastika (auspicious)	Vajrasana (thunderbolt)	Ardha Padmasana (half-lotus)
7 	8 	9 
Padmasana (lotus)	Simhasana (Lion)	Bhadrasana