

Open to Inner Peace

This is the second in a series of four articles exploring mediation. In the first we looked at why people meditate, dismissed a few myths and established some principles that meditations follow. We will now start to explore some specific approaches to meditation.

The purpose of meditation is to still one's mind and ultimately see ourselves in our true nature – not separate but part of a larger universal self. It can help us to live honestly, true to ourselves and accepting others & situations that come our way. Following this path we have greater chance to live free from fear and anxiety and in harmony with ourselves and the world. On the way it will help us relax, deal with stress, improve concentration, become more focused & efficient, improve personal relationships and benefit our general spiritual, mental and physical health. *There are many types of meditation we will explore just two common ones here.*

Breath Watching Meditation

Preparation

- Settle into a comfortable, well supported, warm, relaxed sitting position (on a straight backed chair or the floor), with your back and neck straight;
- Gently close your eyes if it feels comfortable and will help to avoid distraction, otherwise let you gaze rest on the floor a few feet in front of you unfocused.
- Focus on the sensation of breathing
- Calmly bring your attention to your breath and the whole process of breathing:
- Feel the cool air enter your nose and pass down into your lungs;
- Feel you belly rise or expand gently as you breathe in and fall or contract as you breathe out;
- Feel your ribs expand and contract sideways as your lungs fill and empty;
- If you are breathing deeply you will also feel your shoulders lifting and lowering;
- Notice that on the out breath the air is warmer and moister.
- Focus on each individual breath for its entire duration 'being with' your breath;
- There is no need to alter the way you breathe or seek to control it. There is no right or wrong way or any particular state to be achieved. You just need to let your experience be your experience and observe it without judgement.

What if my mind wanders ?

- Inevitably at some point your mind will wander away from your breath to other thoughts about your day, worries, plans etc.
- Congratulate yourself on noticing that this has happened and gently re-focus your attention back to your breathing;
 - Don't judge your mind wandering, just recognise it as part of your experience. It is not a mistake or failure, it is just what minds do;
 - In meditation we are developing our ability to be aware, so noticing our mind has wandered is just as valuable as being able to retain our awareness on our breath.

Mantra Meditation

With this meditation, the focus is on the repeated chanting of a mantra which is a sound, word or phrase that is believed to have spiritual or psychological power. The root meaning of 'mantra' is "that which protects the mind".

This works on three levels:

- It gives focus;
- The meaning of the mantra, so select an appropriate one, you should focus your intention on the meaning whilst chanting it;
- The effect of the vibrations from the sounds of the syllables. Many Sanskrit mantras are said to have spiritual cleansing properties.>>



>>Preparation

As for breath watching, indeed a few rounds of breath watching is a good way to calm the mind in preparation.

Chant your mantra

- There are many mantras or short texts that could be used for example words like peace, relax, calm or a short prayer or a Sanskrit mantra like:

- The Gayatri Mantra. Many believe that this beautiful mantra will help bring you from darkness to light;

- Om Mani Padme Hum. With the indivisible union of altruistic intention and wisdom we can achieve purity of body, speech and mind;

- Sat Nam (I come from truth), Aham Prema (I am divine love);

- Aum – the original sound of the universe.

- You can chant them out loud or silently, either as a group or solitary activity;

- It is traditional to chant mantras 108 times and use a string of mala beads to assist the count. 108 is a sacred number with many roots in multiple cultures.

Time to Meditate

The best time to meditate is first thing in the morning. It can be part of a formal practice or part of normal daily life. We can do it during a lunch break, whilst gardening, cooking dinner, cleaning the house or car etc.

After work is good as a natural boundary between work and home, also at any time we feel stressed to help settle the mind.

Avoid meditating too close to bedtime so it doesn't get confused with relaxation and sleep. Good luck with your practice.



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