

Meditation
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1 Introduction

When one does yoga, lifts weights, runs, bicycles, etc., one is exercising their body. Different sorts of exercising provides different sorts of physical benefits. When one meditates, one exercises their mind. Different sorts of meditation provide different sorts of mental benefits.

There are four primary types of meditation providing the following alternative benefits:

1. relaxation
2. concentration
3. understanding
4. inculcation

The order of these benefits is important because each type depends, to one degree or another, on the mastery of the prior benefit or level.

2 Relaxation Meditation

Relaxation meditation is the most fundamental form of meditation. It establishes the critical basis of meditation.

Things learned in relaxation meditation include the following:

1. techniques and skills common to all types of meditation
2. how to relax your body and mind and reap the benefits therefrom

2.1 Common Elements

This section describes techniques that are common to all types of meditation. These techniques provide a great amount of benefit.

1. the physical elements such as location and posture
2. habit, including timing, frequency, and length
3. the process
4. experience the beginnings of the benefits

All of these elements are required in order to proceed to the next level.

2.1.1 The Physical elements

The physical elements are very important. On one hand, you don't want to be so comfortable that you fall asleep, and on the other hand, you don't want to be so uncomfortable and distracted that you can't perform anything mental. This is surely one of the biggest problems when one starts. As one progresses, however, it becomes less of a problem. One becomes much more flexible regarding the physical arrangement.

Sitting works well because it is less conducive to sleeping, yet one doesn't have to worry about balance, falling down, or getting tired of standing. Any chosen posture will be a problem to be overcome with practice and patience. Being able to sit cross-legged on the floor is unnecessary but convenient because a floor is always where you are. No need for a special chair.

2.1.2 Habit & Consistency

You can imagine that physical training is of little value when it is performed three times a year. If you look at anyone who has achieved any level of success with anything, you will see a consistent effort with that endeavor over an extended period of time. Think of a runner, a violinist, a doctor, a gymnast. Becoming good at anything requires time, effort, and consistency. The same is true of meditation. Although one can dabble in anything, to achieve any real results requires consistent effort over an extended period of time.

Forming a habit makes consistency easier because the practice has become part of your everyday routine. Habits are formed naturally over time.

My recommendation is to start with one fifteen minute practice a day, quickly moving to two fifteen minute practices each day. Any less than that and you'll not likely see much progress. If you are progressing well, you will likely feel the need to extend the periods to twenty, thirty, or more minutes. You will know when more time is called for because you will feel like there wasn't enough time, and more time is easy.

2.2 The Process

Sit in a comfortable place with minimum distractions — a place you know will remain relatively peaceful and without distractions for your entire time. Close your eyes and start relaxing for a few minutes. Resist the urge to fidget. For the first few minutes, don't try to do anything specific, and don't try not to do anything specific. Just relax and let your mind calm down.

After a few minutes, start counting from 10 to 0. Count slowly — perhaps one digit each fifteen seconds. In between the numbers, tell yourself that you are getting more relaxed with each number. Your neck, your shoulders, your back, your arms, your hands, your legs, etc. With each number, tell yourself you are getting more relaxed. Again, don't fidget.

After the relaxation counting, just relax your mind. Don't focus on anything, but don't specifically avoid anything. Observe the flow of your thoughts. Avoid fidgeting.

All of the above is not meditation. We are just trying to learn to sit, relax, and calm down — precursors. It is a relaxation technique. Although this is mainly a relaxation technique, and its benefits are limited, it is a good first step towards the more advanced techniques.

2.3 The Benefits

This relaxation technique can be very beneficial. It helps one relax, gets one used to the mental and physical process, and sets the stage for deeper and more beneficial practices. One can even stop at this level and gain much.

3 Concentration Meditation

Concentration meditation is best begun once the relaxation practice becomes easy, enjoyable, and a habit. Concentration meditation is a technique that strengthens one's ability to mentally focus. People's progress through this process varies widely depending on the individual and the consistency of the effort.

As was noticed with relaxation meditation, the mind is often like a monkey jumping from branch to branch. Likewise your mind endlessly jumps from topic to topic. If one is to achieve mental progress, this process of jumping all over the place must be tamed. Concentration meditation develops this ability.

3.1 The Process

First, the counting process and other techniques described in the relaxation meditation can be dropped. This can be done gradually or not. Instead, the mental technique will be changed into what follows.

The goal is to slow and eventually stop your mind from jumping all over the place. Give yourself the ability to focus on a single effort. This takes time and effort, but it can be done. Different people will take different lengths of time, but all should be able to develop this ability.

There are several things that one can focus their mind on in this practice. None is better than another. Pick one and stick with it.

3.1.1 Breath

With this technique one breathes through one's nose and observes the sensation of the air passing the tip of one's nose. Nothing else. That's it.

While attempting this, especially at the beginning, you will notice that your mind drifts from the observation and goes on jumping, like a monkey, from idea to idea. When you realize that you are doing this, gently go back to observation of your breath. Don't be forceful. Every time you realize your mind has drifted, gently bring it back.

At first, keeping focused on your breath will be difficult. You will find your mind drifting over and over. Don't be disappointed. It takes time. With consistent effort, it will get easier and easier. Eventually you will be able to stay focused for any length of time with only very rare lapses.

3.1.2 “Om”

Another technique, equally valid, is to focus on a word. The word is not important, but it is best to be a word without a specific meaning. The reason you want a word without meaning is because you are trying to calm the mind, as opposed to focusing on an idea. The word or sound “om” is traditional.

Keep repeating the word in the mind at a slow pace. Do not vocalize it. When you realize your mind has drifted to other topics, gently start again. With consistent practice, the process will be increasingly successful. Be patient and consistent.

3.2 The Benefits

With practice, the ability to focus ones mind will increase. This is a mental exercise that provides a stronger mind. The ability to focus ones mind to the exclusion of all else will be a vital tool needed in further techniques.

I'd like to make a quick comment about euphoria. As one's ability develops through the various stages of meditation, it is not uncommon to experience varying degrees of euphoria. This can be very enjoyable, and there is no need to avoid it. However, this is not our goal.

4 Understanding Meditation

Understanding meditation utilizes the tools that have been developed in the prior stages in order to focus one's mind on a single topic of interest.

In the past it had been hard to understand things in one's life. Efforts to think it through and understand were hampered by one's lifestyle and the limitations of ones mind to focus on the event. The practice up until now have given us this new ability. Use it.

4.1 The Process

Change to this process should be gradual. At first, and for some time, start with concentration meditation. This will relax your mind and body and get you focused. When you are able to concentrate easily and for long periods of time, you are ready for understanding meditation.

Have a single topic picked out in advanced, something you wish to work through or understand better. Then, when moving to understanding meditation, focus on the chosen topic. Analyze the options, the perspectives, the facts, the people involved, the desired outcome, the cost of the outcome, and the steps necessary to achieve the outcome.

As this effort progresses you will find that you have far greater understanding of yourself and things around you. It will be easier to deal with life's events with this increased understanding.

5 Inculcation Meditation

We all have things we wish to change about *ourselves*. Inculcation meditation, which depends on strength in the prior techniques, is a tool to affect these types of changes.

First, I cannot over emphasize this, you cannot change things about yourself by force. Force will always fail, and the true you will emerge. People (*you*) are motivated by emotions, and one emotion can only be overcome by a stronger emotion.

The idea behind inculcation meditation is to change ones habits or personality through, what amounts to, a form of self-brain washing. One picks certain things they want to change about themselves, and inculcation meditation provides a way of accomplishing this goal.

The inculcation meditation process depends on the skills described in the earlier sections. Only one thing can be changed about ones self at a time, so pick the goal. Perhaps you wish to change your eating habits, perhaps you want to stop getting angry at certain situations, perhaps you want to stop smoking, drinking, or gambling. Anything can be changed, however, only one at a time.

The time it takes to change a quality varies greatly depending on such factors as your meditation skill level, the amount of time and effort you put into it, the number of distractions you have on a daily basis, and the strength of the habit within you.

5.1 The Process

The process involves two meditation sessions per day. One should be early in the day, before the behavior in question would normally occur in a given day. The second session should occur after what would normally be the last opportunity of the day for the undesired behavior to occur. If this is not possible, as early and as late as possible is best.

Start with concentration meditation to calm and focus the mind for a time, perhaps 10 minutes, for each session.

Following the concentration portion, utilize understanding meditation to fully evaluate and understand the issue at hand. Be clear about what you wish to change and, this is important, why you want to change it. Be very clear about the problems caused by the behavior you wish to change, and be very clear about the benefits of changing the behavior. This is a critical point.

Finally, recall the most recent lapses in your effort. Be clear about what you should have done, and how those sorts of scenarios unfold. Concentrate on the event and how you will react differently next time.

What you are likely to find is, when in the actual circumstance, your mind will convince how this situation is different, and how it is okay, in this special circumstantial situations, for you to break from your effort. Unfortunately, if you fail, you will likely come to the conclusion later that it was not really a valid exception. This is important to focus on.

Recall a recent incident in which you exhibited the undesired behavior. Be very clear about how the event unfolded, and be very clear about the negative affects of the behavior. Finally, be very clear about what you *should* have done, and what the benefit would have been.

The difference between the morning session and the evening session is that the evening session spends more time on the events of that day. While the morning session focuses more

on various scenarios in which you've failed your effort and how you will act differently.

5.2 Comments

It is important to know that you cannot change yourself through force of will. The emotions you feel when you succeed in acting as desired are the forces that will enable a true change.

Consistency and tenacity in effort are critical.

Again, when in an actual event, don't allow your mind to convince you that this is a special case worthy of exception. It almost never is.