

MEDITATION

In the most basic and generic form, meditation is simply focusing on one and only one thing. In concentrative meditation, you focus attention on a single object or thought to the exclusion of everything else. In awareness meditation, you try to be aware of all that you are experiencing. It matters not what form you choose, but it is important to choose a method and be consistent in your practice. Otherwise, you will not have the opportunity to discover the many benefits that result from consistent daily practice.

Mindfulness Meditation is described as a process of gradual awakening. It is a concentrative practice, and the breath is the “object” used. It allows one to develop the ability to live fully in the present moment. Formal practice involves sitting and watching the breath flow in and out, with awareness of thought, feeling or sensation as it rises, returning again and again to the breath. Anchoring awareness to the breath allows you to float in the present moment. Informal practice can occur at all other time of the day, eating, walking, driving, working and relating. It is a process that effectively allows us to become continually aware of the presence of something greater than ourselves.

Physiologically, meditation interrupts the body’s stress response. It also provokes deep relaxation coupled with a wakeful and highly alert mental state. Psychologically, meditation creates greater efficiency in everyday life. It also allows us to comprehend other views of reality.

In the Classical Yoga described by Patanjali, the fourth limb – Pranayama or breath control provides a tool for crossing a threshold from the material world into the realm of awareness and consciousness. The fifth limb – Pratyahara involves withdrawing our awareness from our senses. We do not need to deny or negate the value or beauty of sensory stimuli – sights, sounds, and smells, tastes, pleasure and pain. We do need to understand that we are more than receptors of physical stimuli. By focusing on the breath, we can draw our awareness away from our physical reality, and move inward towards pure consciousness. It is in the realm of consciousness that we are able to co-create healthier habits and a peaceful world.

In his book Yoga for Transformation, Gary Kraftsow explains Patanjali’s Sutras that pertain to the last three limbs of classical yoga Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi:

Normal thought patterns can be characterized as the fluctuation between distraction and attention. Thoughts arise and move in different directions habitually and haphazardly through successive moments. The mind is an instrument of cognition and perception. Normal perception is mediated through a conditioned mind. Patanjali suggests that we develop capacity for attention to stay linked to an object of choice without distraction over a period of time. A second goal is to progressively reduce the degree to which past conditioning distorts our perception.

In the sixth limb – Dharana there is an effort to concentrate awareness on one object only. The object may be the breath, a sound or mantra, a flower, a candle, or a holy person or representation of a deity. In the seventh limb – Dhyana, concentration becomes effortless and sustained. A relationship has formed between the mind and the object of concentration. In the eighth limb – Samadhi the mind and the object become one. In this state the mind is able to absorb the true nature of the object. (pgs. 185-189)

If all of these words about the process of meditation are confusing to you. Don't worry. You are not alone. The end result of meditation is an experience that is ineffable – beyond words or human description. The practices are safe and they have been used throughout time and across cultures.

The Foundations of Yoga Practice Audio CD includes a short Mindfulness Meditation using the breath as the object of concentration. Listen to it first without engaging in the practice so you will know that it is safe. There is one minute of silence at the very end which allows you to experience the practice on your own – without words or prompting. Practice the meditation formally every day. You will find that you begin to practice informally at other times of your day. The practice is always accessible, because your breath is always with you. You can use the practice to help you to see more clearly especially during times of stress and confusion. With daily practice however, you will find that you have fewer episodes in your life of feeling stressed or confused.

SUKHASANA

Easy Pose

Once the position has become “easy” for you, it is a great position for seated meditation. The pelvis and the legs become a supportive base from which the spine can rise up in a stable and comfortable position. Just like anything else, the more you spend time with it, the more comfortable it becomes.

Recommendations:

- Use a firm folded blanket or meditation cushion to elevate your pelvis.
- Sit towards the front edge of the blanket or cushion so that your knees will be lower than your hips.
- Bend the knees and slide the feet toward the body until the feet rest comfortably on the floor.
- Place your hands and arms comfortably.
- As you breathe in, lift up out of the pelvis all the way through the crown of the head. Lengthen the spine and tuck the chin slightly toward the chest.
- As you breathe out, maintain the length of the spine, as you allow the weight of your body to press the sitting bones down into the blanket or cushion.

