

Meditation

Meditation, simply put, is the process of quieting the mind. However, doing it is not always so simple. Meditation does not mean being passive and withdrawing from the world. It actually increases awareness and brings better interactions with the surrounding world.

The first step in meditation is paying attention.

How much time do you spend on “automatic pilot” such as: eating while watching TV and not being aware of the tastes, odors and textures of the food; or driving and not noticing what you passed along the way?

The Present Moment

So much time is spent worrying about the past or the future. Meditation brings you to the present. Consider the following about the present moment:

- **The present moment is calmer.** Thoughts of the past or future often bring fear, anxiety, or worry. Being absorbed in what you are doing or experiencing at the present moment is less stressful. Appropriate amounts of time can be spent learning from the past or planning for the future. However there is no need to stay in the past or future for long. Return to the present and allow yourself to experience the current situation.
- **The present moment is productive.** Focusing on the task at hand is more efficient and less fatiguing than thinking about the past or future while doing a task.
- **The present moment is sensual and joyful.** Thinking about the past or future takes away from experiencing the current situation whether it is a sunset, a story, a piece of music, food, or a smile and a hug. Meditation helps you to learn to focus on the situation at hand.
- **The present moment is liberating.** Many of our lifestyle choices come from years of habit. When living more in the present, there is less attachment to old habits and new choices are easier to follow through on.

Types of Meditation

Several types of meditation are described below. We will work with several of these methods in class in order to identify the ones that each person finds effective.

- **Focusing on the Breath:** See section on normal breathing
- **Concentration:** In this style of meditation, the mind focuses on a particular point or object. The concentration could be on an apple on the table, a sunset or the foot during asana work. Pranayama is a concentration on the breath.
- **Meditation in action:** This is the process of paying attention to whatever you are doing at the present moment, eating an apple, listening to music, or driving down a bumpy road. A walking meditation is an example of this style. This helps you to accept each situation and not be limited by preconceived ideas or judgements. Experiencing a situation without the preconceptions and judgements are less stressful. Judging does have survival value and needs to be used when appropriate. It is not necessary every moment.

- **Prayer or devotion:** This is done according to a person's own belief system.
- **Focusing on sound:** The mind can also become quieter by focusing on a sound. The sound is repeated over and over again. This could be a religious (amen, shalom) or a secular (aum, one) sound.

Starting a Meditation Practice at Home

When starting a meditation practice at home, it is helpful to set aside an area within a room to use only for meditation. Something as simple as a mat in the corner of a room will do. Eventually you will associate that area with meditation and you will feel more peaceful just by being there. Find a time that fits your daily routine. It is better to meditate regularly for a short time, than irregularly for a longer time.

At the end of a meditation, when you find that you feel stronger and calmer, remember that you feel this way because you quieted your mind enough to experience what you already have within you. You have found the quiet that is under all the chatter. You didn't have to get it from someone else, or change the way someone else thinks about you. You didn't even have to get it at a store. You already have it.

Remember: Meditation helps you to

*Learn from the Past
Plan for the Future
Live in the Present*

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