

Meditation



**Ancient Tool
for
Personal
Transformation**

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M.B.B.S.

Meditation

Ancient Tool for Personal Transformation

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Daily Nourishment

Nourish Your Spirit with Stillness

Nourish Your Mind with Knowledge

Nourish Your Heart with Unconditional Love

Nourish Your Body with Living Food

Nourish Your Relationships with Thoughtfulness

- Dr. Tim Ong, 2005

Meditation

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Meditation

**Ancient Tool
For
Personal Transformation**

Foreword

As a practicing doctor in primary care with more than 15 years of clinical experience, I've come across all kinds of patients and diseases. The most common, by far, is psychosomatic illnesses – physical illnesses arising from mental or emotional stress.

People from all walks of life, regardless of whether they are CEOs and executives, or menial workers and labourers, all suffer from stress. In today's fast pace society, where everything is expected to be instant, life is even more stressful than it used to be. The computer, far from making life simpler for us, has only raised the level of expectations. In addition, we now have computer-related stress, both physical and mental.

There is a greater need than ever before to slow down. We have to learn to pace ourselves and to reduce the number of tasks we have to do on a daily basis. We need also to reduce our wants – for bigger house, bigger cars, bigger salaries, etc. Instead, learn to be happy with what we already have and to be grateful, honestly grateful, for them. There is great power in gratitude that most people today have forgotten. Gratitude allows abundance to flow right into our life. Ingratitude creates resistance to the flow of abundance into our life.

The increased number of people with stress has led to a greater demand for methods and ways to manage stress. Thus, stress management courses continue to mushroom.

Due to this need to handle stress, I have begun teaching meditation to some of my patients. We run our meditation classes every Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. and it lasts for about an hour.

On a personal level, I've been practicing meditation since 1992. I first learned Loving-Kindness meditation from an American monk. Later, I also took up Insight meditation from a Burmese monk – the venerable Sayadaw U Janaka.

Since then, my meditation practice has grown from strength to strength. I can personally see the benefits of meditation in my life. Meditation makes me calmer and more composed in dealing with daily

stresses. There is also a significant increase in self-awareness, with heightened awareness of thoughts and feelings of particular usefulness in dealing with emotions. There is the ability to just watch the thoughts and feelings as they arise, thus offering me greater choice and control over how I choose to respond.

Meditation also helps you to be more in touch with your spirituality. This is important for we are in fact spiritual beings manifesting in a physical body to experience the physical sensual world. We are not mere physical being as is generally the accepted "fact" in our prevalent Western thinking.

Because I have practice meditation and have tasted the benefits, I know what it can do for others too, if only they give themselves a chance to find out. However, practicing meditation takes discipline and courage. It takes persistency. Needless to say, not many have the patience and persistency to practice but if they know what I know meditation can do for them, they'll probably be willing to put in more effort in their practice.

If this book can convince you about the benefits of meditation and you end up either learning or practicing meditation as a result, then it would have serve its purpose well.

I wish you every success in your practice, and in your life.

Warmest wishes,

Tim Ong
October 2005

Part One

What is meditation?

Meditation is an ancient art of mental cultivation.

The ancient sages and mystics all agree that meditation is a necessary aspect of spiritual development. In fact, some traditions believe that meditation is the only way to attain liberation from all sufferings and pain in this worldly existence.

Today, many people are beginning to be aware of the benefits of meditation in coping with the various sources of stress in their daily lives. In addition, the practice of meditation on a regular basis has been shown to improve health, mood and vitality.

The Goal

The final goal of meditation is total purification of the mind. This is achieved through constant practice of mindfulness of thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.

In our daily lives, we go about our activities in a “dream” state. We are not fully aware of our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. In fact, when we look at it, we are not truly the master of our thoughts, feelings or body senses. We are slaves to them.

Our thoughts jump from one subject to another in an instant, and very often without our ability to direct where our thoughts should go. The same thing happens with our feelings. No wonder we have outbursts of anger and irritations. Needless to say, we are consciously seeking new pleasurable body sensations every moment of our waking state and we make every effort to avoid unpleasant sensations. Thus, when we encounter even a little bit of discomfort, we complained or grumbled about it.

The practice of meditation increases our self awareness and expands our consciousness. We will eventually reach a state of heightened awareness where we are much more in touch with our thoughts, feelings and sensations.

For most people, however, meditation offers them a simple way to cope with living. It brings about a higher level of self awareness, insight and more importantly increased threshold to stress.

The Sleep State

We live our lives every day in a hypnotic state, with very little awareness of who or what we are, and what we are experiencing within and without us. So, although we are physically awake and doing things, our mind is as if it is asleep or in a stupor or daze, not fully comprehending and experiencing life.

In this state, we are not aware of who we really are and the kind of power that we have over our own lives. We do not realize how our internal thoughts and beliefs influence our external experience. Thus, many people end up believing that their lives are fated when in fact the truth is that they have much more control and power over their lives than they realized.

The Natural State of Being

Many meditation teachers illustrate the state of our mind by using the analogy of an onion. An onion has layers upon layers, and you'll have to peel each layer by layer to finally get to its core, which in actuality is empty.

That emptiness is a potential – for good or bad, for happiness or sufferings. That emptiness is the natural state of our being. In this **natural state of being**, all things are possible, but we cannot access or even see this natural state of our being because we are clouded by layers upon layers of defilements – beliefs, concepts, notions, presumptions, assumptions, etc.

It is important to realize that emptiness in this sense does not mean nothingness. It does not mean zero. A better way of looking at it is that it is infinity but even that does not come close to the true essence of emptiness. Emptiness actually encompasses everything that is.

In this natural state of being, where the mind is free from defilements, the experience is one of joy, bliss and knowing, and of oneness with nature or creation. The quality or characteristic of this natural state of being is unconditional love and wisdom.

The Way

In order to reach and re-experience this natural state of being, we need to peel off each of these layers of defiled state of mind. The more layers we peel off, the more aware or awakened we are to our natural state of being, and the more control we have over our lives and what we attract into our lives.

The way to reach this natural state of being is through constant meditation.

What happens in meditation is that we learn to still our thoughts. Our thoughts or constant mind chatters is a distraction that prevents us from seeing and experiencing our natural state of being. When our mind is busy thinking, it cannot experience itself. By stilling our mind or our thoughts, we gradually experience our true nature. This is like the early morning mist that gradually clears, allowing us to see everything clearly.

Illustration

One way to illustrate our mind in its natural state and the present state of our mind is by using the analogy of a glass of water. That glass of water is our mind in its natural state – clear, clean and full of potential.

Gradually, however, we contaminated it with negative thoughts, fear, doubts, false beliefs and concepts. This contamination is similar to contaminating that glass of clear water with sand, sediments and all kinds of things. Pretty soon, we cannot even see through that glass of water anymore because it has become cloudy.

The way to purify that contaminated glass of water is to pour more clean water into the glass. As we pour more and more clean water into the glass, the once contaminated and cloudy water will gradually turn clearer and clearer until we can see through it again.

This is what happened when we meditate.

Another illustration is by comparing our mind to a garden.

Our natural state of being is a garden that has fertile soil for all sorts of plants to grow. Its potential is unlimited. In order to get a beautiful garden, we must tend to it by removing weeds and undergrowth on a regular basis, and by planting only the trees, shrubs and plants of our choice.

Our mind works the same way.

We have to constantly guard it against negative thoughts and emotions, which are like weeds in our mental garden. We guard this by being constantly aware of our thoughts or being mindful.

At the same time, we plant good thoughts and emotions in our mental garden by constantly bringing to mind all positive thoughts and emotions. In this way, we will attract only good things into our lives.

Scientific Evidence for Meditation

Is meditation just some new age hype or is there really some scientific truth to its benefits?

Scientists today are ever more intrigued by the many benefits that regular meditators seem to get from their practice. As more and more researches and clinical studies are conducted, we are consistently getting the same results – meditation has real benefits to our overall health and well being.

Brain Waves Change

As far back as the 1960's, scientists have been trying to map the brain waves activities of regular meditators and compared them to "normal" people.

They found that regular meditators have more frequent brain waves in the alpha range as compared to non-meditators.

Under normal circumstances, our brain waves are in the beta range (above 14 Hertz). People with anxiety, worries and agitation have brain waves at the upper range of beta while the rest of us who are "normal" are at the lower range of beta.

Alpha brain waves (8 – 14 Hertz) are found in people who are calm and relax. At this range, the brain is very receptive to learning and creativity. Some people referred to this state as a state of "super-learning".

As the brain waves slow to theta range (4 – 8 Hertz), we achieve a state of heightened creativity and a closer awareness of our subconscious mind.

The slowest brain waves range of delta (0 – 4 Hertz) is found in our sleep state.

Biochemical Changes in Our Body

Regular meditators also have increased level of endorphins in the body. A high level of endorphins increases threshold to pain and stress, makes one feel better, sleep better and concentrate better.

Blood Flow Changes in the Brain

With the advancement in medical technology, doctors are now able to measure precisely the amount of blood flow to specific parts of our brain by using functional MRI or fMRI.

Using fMRI, doctors researching on the effects of meditation noted that senior Tibetan monks who meditate regularly have increased level of blood flow to their brain compared to the normal individuals. Some of these increased blood flows into areas of the brain that normally receives only small amount of blood.

Changes in the Neurons

Changes are even found in the neurons. Neurons are nerve cells that are found abundantly in the brain and the nervous system of the body. In the past, scientists believe that once neurons are matured, they cannot grow anymore and injured neurons have very slow recovery rate.

Neurons communicate with one another via a connection called dendrite. A dendrite is an extension from one neuron to another.

However, researchers are now finding out that regular meditators seem to be able to grow more dendrites in their neurons than the average person. This increased in dendrites translates to an increased integration between the neurons, and therefore between the two sides of the brain as well.

Thus a meditator appears to have better overall integration of his physical body, emotion and mind not just subjectively but also objectively.

The Benefits of Meditation

The benefits of meditation extend all the way from wellness in the physical body to emotional and mental well being to spiritual development.

In fact, many sages and spiritual teachers agree that the only way to re-experience the divinity in you and to know the natural state of being is through meditation. There is no short cut and no one else can do it for you. You have to walk the path.

How Meditation Influences Our Life

It has been known for some times now that our thoughts influence our emotions, and that in turn influence our body and behaviors. Our thoughts therefore create our destiny.

Scientifically, it has been shown that our thoughts and emotions produce chemical changes that affect our blood and hormonal levels, and these in turn affect changes in our muscles, cells, nerves and body.

The observation is that positive thoughts and emotions result in positive effects to the body, and negative thoughts and emotions lead to negative effects. For example, regular meditators tend to have normal blood pressure, feels calmer and more relaxed.

In addition, regular meditation leads to a heightened sense of self awareness or mindfulness that enable one to be more in touch with one's body, feelings and thoughts, and therefore allow better integration of all these three aspects. This leads to a life that is whole and more in tune with our true nature.

Therapeutic Mindfulness

Psychiatrists are also finding out that meditation has great benefits for their clients. Through meditation, people are in a better position to cope with their daily stress.

What happens is that meditation results in a change in perceptions on life and problems. This change in perception has been given many different names such as re-framing and paradigm shift but they all mean the same thing. Externally, the situation has not changed, but internal belief has. Meditation leads to insights about life and our true nature. Although these insights may seem small, the effects on our lives result in big changes that can sometimes be considered transformational.

For example, people with chronic diseases such as arthritis may continue to experience pain but they do not suffer as much anymore. For them, pain may be present and even unavoidable but suffering is optional.

Healing Destructive Emotions with Meditation

Many people find meditation to be very useful in healing destructive emotions such as anger and guilt.

Destructive emotions can be healed through these four steps:

1. Recognize or identify the emotion

This is a very important first step. If we cannot even identify or recognize our emotion, how can we even try to deal with it? So, learning to identify our emotion is essential. Meditation helps us to be more in touch with our feelings and therefore more aware of the types of emotion we experience.

2. Acknowledge the emotion

There is no right or wrong feelings, just feelings we like or don't like. Feelings are just feelings. There is no need to put a value to our feelings. However, it is important to acknowledge our feelings instead of pushing it into the deep recesses of our subconscious mind. Burying our feelings in an attempt to ignore it only allow them to brew into bigger unmanageable feelings that will manifest in other forms later.

3. Express the emotion

Whatever is suppressed or repressed gets expressed in other ways. In some instances, these repressed emotions get

expressed in physical illnesses, including cancer. So it is important to find a positive way to allow full expression of our feelings.

4. Let go (Forgiveness and Acceptance)

Although it may seem logical to simply let go of our negative and destructive emotions, it is not as easy to do it in reality. We have a habitual tendency to cling on to everything we claimed as our own, and that includes our emotions.

Learning to let go of our emotions means accepting our emotions without judgment or putting a value to them. It may require forgiveness on our parts – forgiving ourselves and others. Acceptance becomes easier with constant meditation practice.

We can hold on to our destructive emotions such as anger for years or we can decide to let it go. The choice is ours to make.

The Forgiveness Process

Forgiveness is not an act; it is a process. You need to allow the entire process to run its course for healing to occur.

There is a:

- period of pain (hurt) and anger
- acknowledgement
- expression
- resolution

You need **time** for the entire journey to run its course. Understanding will come with forgiveness and one will feel lighter as if a burden has been lifted.

It is important to realize that every pain has a message or lesson for us.

Cultivating Positive Emotions

Not only must we learn to heal our destructive emotions, we must also learn to cultivate our positive emotions.

For meditators, cultivating positive emotions means consciously and mindfully bringing forth positive and wholesome emotions such as unconditional love not just during meditation but also in daily activities. It also means spreading and expanding that positive emotion outward to embrace all other beings. This is done unconditionally, even to enemies.

Happiness

A scientific study conducted some time ago noted that there are only two things that bring about lasting happiness:

1. The quality of our relationships
2. A higher purpose in the things we do

People who meditate regularly will eventually realize these two.

Self Responsibility

Self responsibility means

- not blaming anyone (including yourself)
- not blaming anything, not even fate

Through meditation, we will realize that we are in fact fully responsible for what happens in our lives. Whatever we experience is a result of our thoughts, speech and deeds in the past. Therefore, in order to experience good things in our lives, we need to take charge of our thoughts, feelings and actions now so that we are consciously creating our future.

Effects of meditation

Meditation is not just hype or some new age mumbo jumbo. It has a real effect on our body, emotion, mind and even spirituality. Let's take a closer look at some of these effects.

Effects of meditation on the body:

Studies have shown that certain people are more likely to have cancers than others. Researchers labeled these people as having a "cancer personality". People with such a personality are usually:

- overly eager to please others, to the extend of self-sacrificing
- believes he or she needs to do that for acceptance
- have low self esteem
- deep down inside, feels a sense of hopelessness
- feels trapped by circumstances

The reason why these sorts of people are prone to cancer is because whatever emotions or feelings that are suppressed or repressed eventually find expression in the body.

Through meditation, one is able to be more aware of his or her feelings, and allow those feelings to be expressed in a safe and healthy way. There is also a greater level of acceptance, resulting in an ease in letting go.

Effects of meditation on the mind and emotion:

Unresolved emotions and conflicts not only act on the body but also find expression in other ways. We may feel more stressed up, confused, clouded, and an unexplained feeling of ambivalence, conflicts and indecision. After all, whatever you resist will persist and they will continue to persist until and unless you gave it acknowledgement and expression.

Meditation gives us that extra degree of clarity to recognize, acknowledge and resolve our unresolved emotions.

Effects of meditation on daily life:

Meditation brings a greater level of self awareness to our lives. Through this greater self awareness, we are able to understand ourselves better and are better able to recognize our thoughts and emotions. This gives us tremendous power to control our lives and how we respond to events in our lives. It empowers us, transforms us and gives us the flexibility for self expression.

Meditation also makes it easier for us to forgive ourselves and others, to be non-judgmental towards everyone and to avoid the blaming game. It further raises our threshold to stress, increases understanding and concentration as well as improves relationships.

Transformation in meditation occurs through perceiving small insights about life that can lead to big changes in the way we see life. It can change our belief systems and raise our overall consciousness.

Effects of meditation on spirituality:

The ancient mystics used meditation as a tool for spiritual evolution. For many, meditation is still the only way to achieve spiritual awareness. Through raising the level of consciousness and insights, one is able to access the meta-consciousness or universal consciousness that leads to spiritual knowledge. Some may even achieve occult or psychic powers such as clairvoyance or greater intuition. Others have reported out of body experience.

The ultimate achievement is freedom or liberation from sufferings.

Through meditation, we can realize and know that we are spiritual beings manifesting in physical bodies to experience the physical realms. We are not just physical beings in search of a spiritual experience.

However, for many people, meditation is initially taken up in order to experience benefits related to our day to day physical lives. As they progress, they will eventually experience a spiritual transformation.

Transformation in Practice

For a beginner, meditation may seem like a very daunting task. Most people simply assume that they cannot meditate. Some say so even when they don't know what meditation is. The assumption is that meditation is not something that everyone can do.

In fact, meditation is very simple. However, one cannot derive true benefits from meditation without constant and persistent practice. So discipline plays a very important part in a successful meditator.

The Beginner's Experience

Since no two persons are the same, each person experiences the process and progression of meditation differently. However, there are some general similarities in the meditation process as we continue to meditate diligently.

Physical Discomfort

Physical discomfort such as pain is one of the most common discomforts experienced by beginners. Most of us are not used to sitting still in a single posture for long. Our body tends to want to move about. Thus, when we are faced with having to sit for 20 to 30 minutes without moving, we feel uncomfortable. Certain parts of our body ache.

Many people therefore assume that they cannot meditate because of this.

In actual fact, this physical discomfort has more to do with our mental discomfort than real physical pain. If you persist in your meditation posture, you'll be surprised to learn that your discomfort and pain eventually disappear by themselves. You'll gradually be able to sit for 20 minutes, then 25 minutes and then 30 minutes. In fact, after some time, it'll be just as easy for you to sit in meditation for 45 minutes or

more. This is not because your bodily sensations have suddenly ceased to feel. Rather, your mind has increased its threshold to the body discomfort.

This is the first hurdle for the beginner to overcome.

Emotional Discomfort

Just as we have to learn to move out of our comfort zone with regards to physical comfort, we need to do the same for our emotional and mental comfort zones.

As we meditate, we will encounter vague and difficult-to-describe sensations of discomfort or heaviness in the heart. We are feeling the discomfort because we are entering unfamiliar territory and stirring up old emotional wounds and scars.

For some people, this unfamiliar feeling can be rather frightening and therefore they choose to avoid feeling it. They resist it. The problem with this approach is that whatever you resist then to persist. They won't go away just because you ignore or avoid them.

The truth is no personal growth or transformation can occur without resolving this uncomfortable feeling. You will just have to face it and the trick to this is to simply let whatever happens be okay. What this means is that you allow the uncomfortable feelings to arise without judging them and simply watch them as dispassionately as you can.

The natural tendency of our mind is to resist any discomfort, whether they are physical, emotional or mental. However, this tendency is not necessary a good thing for our personal growth. We therefore need to put in conscious effort to overcome this tendency. This is what is meant by moving out of our comfort zone.

The more effort we put into overcoming this resisting tendency, the more we will reap from our effort. The reward is personal growth through insights and self understanding. This exercise in overcoming our tendency to resist facing our discomforts also eventually helps us to increase our threshold to stress.

The key to facing this tendency is NOT to overcome force by force. Instead we use a gentle approach. Simply watch the unpleasant

feelings as they arise. Do not judge them. Do not resist them. Do not avoid them. Simply watch them as they arise and eventually pass away. Each time you succeed in doing this, you raise your threshold to stress a little higher.

You will eventually realize that your discomfort arises from your resistance. The more you resist the more discomfort you experience. The less you resist the less discomfort there is.

It is also important to realize that some of this resistance that is encountered during meditation may sometimes be carried forward into our daily life. This unresolved resistance may be expressed in various ways, such as a feeling of negativity towards certain people or events, or even towards oneself, or projecting these negative feelings towards someone else in an attempt by the ego to blame someone or something outside of ourselves. More commonly, there is a feeling of anger, depression or anxiety that we cannot seem to place accurately as to its source. In some cases, meditators may actually express all these in physical illnesses such as a flu or sore throat.

Mental Discomfort

Of all the discomfort, mental discomfort is the most difficult to overcome. Mental discomfort here refers to the tendency of our mind to move from one thought to another seemingly beyond our control.

Our mind behaves like a monkey. It cannot sit still even for a moment. It jumps from one thought to another at will – unfortunately not often our will. It seems to have a mind or will of its own.

However, as we practice longer and we put in the conscious effort to focus the mind, we notice that our mental activities eventually slow down. We can actually be aware of our thoughts as they begin to arise and we can note where they go. We can even note the space in between thoughts and we can observe our thoughts as they pass by, just like observing clouds in the sky.

Eventually, we can gently direct our mind to where we want it to go, and focus on a single object for a longer period of time. We achieve access concentration. This is the preparatory stage to achieving absorption concentration. Absorption concentration is a stage where

we can maintain our one-pointed concentration for a long period of time.

Achieving absorption concentration leads to tranquility, joy and bliss. It can also lead to the attainment of supernormal or psychic powers such as clairvoyance or clairaudience.

However, in order to completely eliminate our false views and see the true nature of our mental and physical phenomena, and the true nature of life, we need insight meditation.

A New Reality

In each of us, there is an internal map of reality that we adopt and use to guide us in our life. This internal map of reality is our "operating system", much like the operating system of a computer. Our internal map of reality is formed from our past experiences.

People who meditate regularly and who face their discomforts will eventually encounter an upheaval from within. This upheaval is a sign that our internal map of reality is being challenged. Eventually, we will emerge from this upheaval with a new and better set of internal map, one that has a higher threshold to stress and a new perception of reality.

When you have reached this stage, you will have no more doubt that meditation is an excellent tool for personal transformation. You will also be able to appreciate the benefits of putting aside some time each day for your meditation. In fact, you may even feel "incomplete" when you don't meditate.

Progress in Meditation

Meditation is an ongoing and long-term process.

Changes are not going to happen overnight, and there may be periods where it seems as if nothing is happening or even that you are "regressing". Do not let this discourage you.

You didn't get to where you are overnight, and you're not going to get out of it overnight. If you had a particularly traumatic childhood (or

adulthood, for that matter) it may be slow going at first, because parts of you will not feel safe changing and will resist.

That's all right.

Just remember that the key to success in meditation is discipline and consistency. Practice your meditation daily and you will eventually see the progress.

As in our earlier illustration using the glass of water, your effort will eventually wash away the many layers of defilements from your mind, leaving only the clear water in its place.

Some Words on Self Awareness

Self awareness is your ability to watch your thoughts, feelings and behaviours as they arise without forming any opinions or judgments. Self awareness is increased in regular meditators.

Through heightened self awareness, you can achieve mental clarity, happiness, inner peace, an increased threshold to stress, an ability to heal of unresolved emotional material, an increased connectedness with the rest of the world, and an increased ability to create and manifest in the world whatever you want in your life.

Heightened Self Awareness leads to the ability to see clearly:

- how your mind or thoughts influence your emotions, and how those emotions in turn influence your behaviors
- how your past experiences influence your beliefs and concepts you have regarding a particular person or situation, and how those beliefs result in a particular way you respond to that person or situation
- how by being aware of this allows you to clear away that particular blind spot that you would otherwise not be able to see
- how just by seeing this blind spot, you can automatically and instantly change the way you perceive and respond to people or situations

Thus your new level of self-awareness:

- a. makes you realize that every situation provides us with a **potential** response and that we have a **choice** as to how we want to respond to that situation
- b. with this insight, we are **empowered** in knowing that our lives are not merely fated, and that in fact, we are the master of our own destiny
- c. with this insight, we experience true **freedom** and **power** over our own lives
- d. with this insight, we raise our **threshold** to stress
- e. we realize that we have the power to **design** or **re-invent** our lives accordingly

Change your beliefs, and everything changes.

In essence, when we realize that we have a choice in every situation we encounter, we free ourselves from our habits or reactive responses. We realize that even though the people around us and in our lives have not changed, and the environment or situations in our lives have not changed, we have and that has made all the difference.

Blind Spot

A blind spot is an aspect of ourselves or our lives that we are not aware of. It is that area of ourselves that *we don't know that we don't know* (as opposed to those that **we know** and those that *we know we don't know*)

Everybody wants to change for the better but we cannot change or eliminate old patterns or habits when we cannot see or even suspect that there are certain aspects of us we need to change.

Thus our blind spots have more power over us than we realize, for they can lead us down blind alleys, wrong paths, restrict our growth, limit our opportunities and keep us stuck in our present predicaments.

Through meditation, you increase your self awareness and that heightened self awareness leads to new revelations about your blind spots, and the mere act of seeing your blind spots for what they are removes them from your life. As soon as you see them, they disappear.

Part Two

Getting Started

Learning or practicing meditation requires some amount of preparation. These preparations are easy and usually require very little additional financial investments on your part.

ENVIRONMENT

Meditation is best practiced in a conducive environment. A conducive environment is one that is quiet, safe and comfortable, with little or no disturbance.

If you are practicing in your house, choose a time and place that offers you the best uninterrupted session. For most people, the time is either early in the morning, before other members of the family wake up, or just before going to bed at night. As for the place, you can meditation in a small corner in your own bedroom or if you have an unused room, use it for your meditation. The important criterion is that it is a space that offers you a period of quiet and safe practice.

This place should be comfortable too, not too cold or too warm. Some amount of ventilation is good.

ATTIRE

The rule for attire is that it should be comfortable for you. Most people prefer loose clothing such as a T-shirt and track pants. Tight jeans and shorts make sitting for long period uncomfortable and that may interfere with your focus when you meditate.

Remove any straps or attachments to your body such as wrist watch, mobile phone, MP3 players, etc. If you need to have a mobile phone by your side, remember to switch it to vibration mode so that it does not disturb your concentration when it rings. Better still, switch it off.

POSTURE

When practicing meditation, it is good to sit comfortably. Most people prefer to sit on a meditation cushion. This cushion should be flat and firm. It should not be too high or thick so that the knees, when folded, may tilt slightly downward. This offers some degree of stability in the posture.

Spine:

The spine should be straight. One way to assure this is to imagine a string tied to the top of your head and then imagine pulling it upward until the spine is straightened.

Keep your head straight too.

Close your eyes to reduce any chance of visual distractions. Some people prefer to have their eyes slightly opened, gazing at a spot about 3 to 4 feet in front of them. This is quite acceptable.

Posture:

There are several ways to sit in meditation. By far, the most common way is to sit with one leg folded inward and the other leg just slightly outside the first. This is called the Burmese pose and it affords the most level of comfort for beginners.

The other method is the half-lotus posture. In this posture, one leg is folded on top of the other. There is also another more difficult posture called the full lotus posture. In this posture, each leg is folded across the other. While it offers the most stability, it is also the most difficult pose to practice in.

Breathing:

Breathe as naturally as possible. It is not necessary to artificially control or regulate your breathing. Your breathing will eventually settle down to a more synchronized rhythm on its own as you get absorbed in your meditation.

Mind:

Allow your mind to relax. Do not have any kind of expectations in your practice. Sometimes our meditation session can be very good, and sometimes it can seem quite bad. Whatever it may be, just allow it to be. There is no need to judge it. The lesser expectations you have, the easier it is for you to settle down and focus.

The Meditation Session

The meditation I taught in my meditation class is called Loving-Kindness meditation. The aim of this meditation is to bring out the feeling of unconditional and universal love for oneself and others.

Universal love is unconditional. It applies to every living being. It is also a kind and gentle love. It does not judge and it does not expect anything in return. Many people can relate to a mother's love as being the closest to universal love. Even so, a mother's love still has some amount of ego and attachment to it. Universal love is devoid of ego and attachment.

Why would anyone want to practice Loving-Kindness meditation?

Loving-Kindness meditation, when practice regularly, puts us in touch with our inner self and with our natural state of being. Our natural state of being is the pure nature within that is devoid of all stains from our mind and emotions. In this state, we are pure spiritual being and the quality is that of unconditional love, joy and bliss.

The way to access this inner quality of ours is through meditation.

Apart from this, there are of course all the other side benefits of meditation that we have discussed earlier.

MEDITATION SESSION

In a normal meditation session on Loving-Kindness that I conduct, there are four parts. However, not all these are present in a beginner's class. For completion sake, they are all included here.

Breathing Exercise

The first is a breathing exercise. This exercise is aimed at helping the meditator to relax both body and mind.

Here's how it is done:

As you breathe in, imagine breathing in fresh, warm, positive, healing energy from the universe, and as you breathe out, imagine breathing out stale, negative energy from your body and being.

Do this repeatedly for about 5 to 10 minutes.

Total Body Relaxation Exercise

The second part is the total body relaxation exercise. This exercise helps the body and mind to relax further.

The Method:

- a. Consciously relax your muscles from head to toes, focusing on individual group of muscles, such as muscles of the scalp, face, neck, shoulders, arms and hands, chest and abdomen, back, buttocks, legs and feet.
- b. Imagine a bright, warm, glowing and healing light at the top of your head, penetrating into your brain, filling up each and every cell in your body, from the head to the toes, including the internal organs such as your lungs, heart, liver, pancreas, spleen, kidneys and adrenals, stomach, small and large intestines, sexual organs.
- c. Pay special attention and spend more time at areas in your body that need healing.

This exercise incorporates visualization and is also useful as a form of healing. In areas that need healing, spend more time at those areas, visualizing the positive energy actively healing the affected areas.

The Forgiveness Process

This is the third part of the meditation session and one in which I considered to be important. In our daily life, we often encounter dealings with people that are not too ideal and sometimes downright nasty.

Through this simple forgiveness process, we can heal emotional wounds, discard emotional baggage and allow energy to flow freely into our entire being. In contrast, unresolved issues and ambivalent emotions tend to cause a resistance within us that impedes the healthy flow of healing energy into our being.

Here's how we do it:

There are three groups of people to forgive – those who have hurt us, those we have hurt and ourselves.

To forgive those who have hurt us, simply visualize them in front of us and say to them mentally "I freely and sincerely forgive you".

For those whom we have hurt, it is our turn to seek forgiveness from them. Again, visualize them in front of us, and say to them mentally, "Please forgive me."

Lastly, but not the least, we need to forgive ourselves for the silly mistakes we make, either out of anger or because of our ego. Gently forgive yourself by saying to yourself, "I freely and sincerely forgive you" as you visualized yourself in front of you.

Loving-Kindness Meditation

The Loving-Kindness meditation that we do at our center focuses on four groups of people – oneself, one's benefactors, family and others. In each group, there are four further areas to focus on – the heart, the mind, the body and the whole person.

For example, we start the meditation by focusing on ourselves.

We first visualize a ball of warm, healing energy at the heart area (heart chakra) and we say to ourselves, "May my heart be peaceful and free". We then move on to the mind or crown chakra, again visualizing a ball of warm, healing energy at the crown chakra, and we say, "May my mind be happy". Then we move our focus to the entire physical body and visualize the ball of warm, healing energy embracing the whole body, and we say, "May my body be healthy". Finally, we bring our attention back to whole self and we say, "May I be well and happy".

While visualization is useful for some, others may find it difficult to visualize clearly. For them, it is not necessary to visualize. Simply by focusing on the specific parts such as the heart, the mind, the body and then the whole person and saying the appropriate statements accordingly is good enough to bring one to a state of concentration.

In the same way, we can radiate loving-kindness to our benefactors, our spouse and family, and finally to anyone else we have in mind.

In radiating loving-kindness to our benefactors, most people choose to radiate to their parents or teachers. However, who you choose is entirely your choice. You know best who your benefactor is. The person whom you choose to radiate loving-kindness to may or may not be happy or healthy, or may even have passed away. That does not matter.

All you have to do is to visualize him or her in front of you in a happy state and with full, vibrant health. Then you repeat for him or her what you did for yourself earlier.

Thus, if you are radiating loving-kindness to your mother, you visualize her in happiness and good health in front of you, and bringing your focus to her heart, you say, "My mother, may your heart be peaceful and free". Then you move your focus to her crown chakra and say, "May your mind be happy". From there you move on to her body and say, "May your body be healthy". Finally, you focus on her entire being and say, "May you be well and happy".

You may, of course, have more than one benefactor that you want to radiate loving-kindness to. That is perfectly alright and even desirable.

Once you are done with your benefactors, you move on to your spouse and family members, radiating loving-kindness to each of them individually.

Finally, you do the same to others. At this stage, most people choose to radiate loving-kindness to all living beings on earth. Some may even include beings from other realms of existence. It is also a good idea to radiate loving-kindness to those groups of people we know who are suffering from some natural disasters. For example, we radiated loving-kindness towards people in America who suffered from the catastrophic destructions of hurricane Katrina and Rita recently.

To further enhance your meditation, you can also synchronize your meditation with your breathing. This is best done after you've become familiar with the above process.

To synchronize your meditation with your breathing, simply say your statement as you inhale and exhale at the end of the statement. For example, as you inhale, you say "May my heart be peaceful and free" and then you exhale. Then as you begin your next inhalation, you say "May my mind be happy" and then you exhale. You repeat this same rhythm as you say the third and then the final statements.

So you see, Loving-Kindness meditation is actually very easy to learn. However, mastering it takes practice.

Gratitude

I like to end my meditation session with a sense of gratitude for what I already have in my life. I believe this helps the flow of abundance into my life. My favourite mantra for gratitude is this:

*Thank you for the abundance,
Thank you for the wealth;
Thank you for all the happiness,
Protection and Good Health.*

Final Words

From the many things that I've written about meditation in this book, I'm sure you know by now that I am very much FOR meditation. That is why I make it a habit to spend at least half an hour each day in meditation.

I make that half to one hour a special time just for myself.

Most people don't know how to be kind to themselves. Spending time with yourself is a good way to start. Make this time a special time just for yourself, for you to be in touch with your inner, pure nature – the quality of unconditional love, kindness, compassion, bliss and joy that you know is in you. Learn to live in the present moment with your self.

I must readily admit that in the early years of my practice, sitting down to meditate was a great struggle. It was a chore. It was difficult to discipline myself to take time off to meditate.

Now, having gone through the process and having tasted the benefits that come with regular meditation practice, spending that special moment with myself is the best thing I can do for myself. In fact, if I don't meditate for a day, it seems like the day is not complete. Very often I can see the difference in my approach towards work and life when I have meditated as opposed to when I have not.

I also notice that when your mind is in "Love", you tend to attract good things and good people into your life. In the presence of love, fear also cannot exist. There is greater degree of self confidence and self esteem. There is greater joy in work and in play. There is greater connectivity with other people in your life as well as with nature.

In other words, life seems more complete and whole.

Is Meditation for Everyone?

Much as I would like to answer yes to the above question, the truth is "No", meditation is not for everyone.

Meditation is not recommended if you have:

- A psychiatric illness
- Unstable personality or Confused mind
- Major depression or anxiety disorder
- An unwholesome objective

People with psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia and paranoia already have a distorted sense of reality. Meditation may actually tilt them further towards more severe psychiatric symptoms.

Someone with an unstable personality or confused sense of reality should also be discouraged from practicing meditation. These people usually have a very fragile sense of self and can easily be overwhelmed by the emotional upheaval that may follow meditation in some instances.

People who are having acute major depression and anxiety disorder are also not conducive to practice meditation. It is difficult for them to focus in their state of depression or anxiety. The exercise may become a source of further stress to them instead of having a calming effect on them. However, having said that, people with past history of depression or anxiety but have recovered, can practice meditation without any problem. It is only when they are in the acute state of depression or anxiety that they should avoid it.

Lastly, there will always be some who want to practice meditation for its psychic or supernormal power. While it has been recorded that such psychic power is possible with meditation, it is not desirable for one to practice meditation just to obtain these supernormal powers. In fact, it is downright dangerous to become obsess with possessing them.

Meditate because you want to learn more about yourself and about life.

Meditate because you want to be able to handle your emotions and thoughts better.

Meditate because you want to be in touch with your true nature.

Meditate for all these reasons and I can assure you that you will achieve them if you are diligent in your practice.

The only way to fail is to not practice. So strive on diligently.

I wish you the very best in life!

APPENDIX

USING MODERN TECHNOLOGY TO ACHIEVE DEEP MEDITATIVE STATES

Binaural Beats – New Revolutionary Audio Technology That Gets You into Deep Meditative States

Article Source: Binaural-Beats.com

Binaural beat recordings are specially generated sounds, designed to alter your brainwaves - bringing about states of happiness, creativity, or relaxation, for example. They're perfectly safe, non-addictive, and can be used as often as you like.

For a long time, we've been aware that certain frequencies are associated with certain states of mind. For example, the alpha frequency of 8 to 12Hz is present when individuals are in the "zone", in "superlearning", positive-thinking mode. This mind frequency is only usually obtained through meditation, and can be verified through an electroencephalograph (EEG) reading.

We can't however simply listen to such frequencies in an attempt to adopt that frame of mind. The ears can only typically hear between 20 and 20,000Hz.

If we could manage to replicate the lower frequencies somehow, we could play these to the mind and thereby recreate these effects on demand.

Well, that's just what German experimenter H.W. Dove discovered in 1839. He found out that playing two coherent sounds of similar frequencies into each ear (using stereo headphones) could be made to produce a third "binaural beat" at the desired frequency.

Let's take an example. Imagine a pure tone of 400Hz is presented to the right ear, and a pure tone of 410Hz is presented to the left ear. Inside the head, the difference between the two tones is realized... and a third "binaural beat" of 10Hz is produced. This is equal to the

alpha frequency, which brings about light relaxation, "superlearning" and positive thinking.

Which Frequencies Work? Of course, all of this information would be useless without actually knowing which frequencies induce the desired states of mind.

Thankfully, thanks to much scientific research and the latest electroencephalograph reading studies, these frequencies have long been well-known to the community. And here they are:

Delta 1 - 3 Hz Deep sleep, lucid dreaming, increased immune functions
Theta 4 - 7 Hz Deep relaxation, meditation, increased memory, focus
Alpha 8 - 12 Hz Light relaxation, "superlearning", positive thinking
Beta 13 - 25 Hz Normal state of alertness, stress, anxiety

Of course, further studies have shown that specific types of exposure to certain frequencies is better at assisting different mind states. For example, we know that a 30-minute session at 5 Hz can replace around 2 to 3 hours work of sleep. Insomnia can be assisted with a ten minute dose of between 4 Hz and 6 Hz, then entering frequencies below 3.5 Hz for twenty to thirty minutes, then settling on 2.5 Hz and fading out. Accelerated learning can take place at between 7 Hz and 9 Hz.

[This company](#) has focused on combining the results of hundreds of the best research projects, identifying exactly which frequencies induce the best mind states. These have then been combined with more complex binaural beat effects - such as panning, background triangular wave chords, sound "spinning", enveloping, and the "phaser" effect - to produce a set of what we believe to be the most powerful binaural beat CD's currently available.

Best of all, you don't have to do anything with these amazing binaural beat recordings. You simply sit back and let the binaural beats move you without effort. Improve your mood. Boost your creativity. Get in the "zone" during the day. Get super-relaxed at night.

That's what binaural beats are all about. They're the 21st century tool for accessing your genius mindset, something allowing you to switch into "zones" that would usually take years of meditation and enlightenment.

Binaural beat recordings use specially generated sounds to alter your brainwaves. Using our research skills and the latest computer technology, we have produced the following range of binaural beat CDs, allowing you to quickly and easily enter states of creativity, relaxation, or pure energy!

For more information on binaural beats and what it can do for you, visit our website at Binaural-Beats.com

The Awakening Prologue

The Awakening Prologue is a set of CDs that use the new revolutionary binaural beats audio technology to help you easily get into deep meditative states. Produced by Centrepointe Research Institute using their Holosync technology, this amazing tool helps reduce your resistance to change and re-organize your internal map of reality at a higher level, thus increases your threshold to stress.

Bill Harris, the founder and owner of Centerpointe, is himself an exceptional guy and his company offers amazing after-sale support. I am personally using this program, so I can safely tell you that their support is first class.

The only setback is that it is a bit pricey compared to other companies' similar products but I believe their products are clearly a class above the rest. Personally, I felt it was worth the money I paid for it.

[You can visit their website here.](#)