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## Beginning Meditation

By Howard VanEs

In its' simplest description, meditation can be described as a process of quieting your mind so that you can come into contact with quiet and peace that is always available to you inside.

A regular practice of meditation offers many benefits including: overall stress reduction, activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation response), clearer thinking, more creative thinking, helps to quiet the mind, fosters an increased sense of peace and contentment, helps to balance the emotions, provides a connection to your Spirit. An ongoing practice of meditation also helps to provide a context for observing thinking patterns and emotions as well as an opportunity to cultivate peace and relaxation. Hundreds of modern research studies now confirm what the yogis new 5000 years ago!

There are various ways to meditate and they usually involve as point of focus such as your breath, a mantra or visualization. A variety of techniques are explained below.

Before you try them there are a few guidelines that are helpful to be aware of. The first has to do with time and place. It is ideal to meditate at the same time and the same place each time you meditate. In this way you create an association of meditating and peacefulness with the space you have chosen. Each time you come back to this space, you will anticipate the experience of meditation. Additionally, by using the same time and space, you will be developing a habit. This is important to nurture as the consistency of your practice is most important, even if it is just ten minutes a day. Dawn and dusk are traditional times to meditate, but anytime can work. Begin with ten to twenty minutes and work up to forty-five minutes if possible.

Another consideration regarding time is knowing when to stop. Some people just let their inner clock guide them while others prefer to use an alarm clock so they don't have to be concerned about the time. If you practice regularly, you will most likely find that your sense of time becomes exquisite, and you will automatically know when it is time to stop meditating.

A comfortable and stable sitting position is also important. The classic meditation posture is the lotus position. The reason for this is that it is quite stable and the spine held erect. However most people in the West are not comfortable in this position. The truth is that any stable seated posture can work - even

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sitting in a chair. Placing a folded blanket or meditation cushion under your sitz bones also makes sitting more comfortable. Some people find that their back muscles aren't strong enough and begin to ache when they sit in one position for more than a few minutes. If this is happening to you then sit near a wall and when you feel you can no longer hold your back upright comfortably then move against the wall and you will get the support you need. Whichever way you chose to sit just make sure it is stable, comfortable, and that your head neck and spine are in one line, and erect.

As you begin meditate it is common to have any or all of the following experiences:

1.You mind wonders. This is quite natural and expected. Just bring yourself back to your point of focus.  
2.You are not sure if you are doing it right. You are most likely doing it right. Meditation is pretty simple to do - more challenging to stay with.

3.You will have memories, images or thoughts that you may have not thought about in years. Just

acknowledge them and bring your awareness back to your point of focus.

4.You start to analyze yourself. Remember this is a time for meditation not for psychotherapy. Analyze later, meditate now.

5.You have certain revelations. Again, acknowledge these and then bring yourself back to your point of focus.

6.A body part is sore or itchy. The first time you feel something in your body, just acknowledge it and bring your awarness back to your point of focus. Often, it will go away. If it continues to irritate you then change your body positions.

### Meditation Techniques

Below are two classic meditation techniques. Feel free to try both and see which works best for you. Ideally you will want to start with ten to twenty minutes and overtime you can work up to forty–five minutes if you like. A daily practice yields the most benefit and progress. It is better to practice for fifteen minutes every day than to practice for one hour once a week. Your mind is like any other muscle – the more your exercise it the stronger it becomes!

#### Focusing on a sound or mantra

In this method a sound or "mantra" is repeated over and over and over again, either silently or outloud. The mantra becomes a point of focus or "object". A universal mantra is "Om" which is said to be the sound of creation. Another is "Ham (pronounced "hung") "Sa" which means "I am that" – referring to spirit. Ham is said as you inhale and Sa as you exhale. The breathing is relaxed and easy through your nostrils Just keep bringing your awarness back to the mantra as you find your mind wondering.

Remember, there is no need to beat yourself up for this as it is a natural phenomenon . Overtime you will find that mind wonders less and less. Some people like to use their own words such as "peace", "love" or "let go". If you have a special word or short group of words that has meaning for you, try using

it.

Focusing on your breath:

Breathing in through your nostrils and through your nostrils, notice the feeling of the breath at the very point it enters your nose and follow the feelings of the air moving into your nasal passage to appoint where it ends. As you begin to exhale, notice where in your nasal passages you first notice your breath again and trace the feeling of your breath to the point where it exits your nostrils. Continue to notice your breath in this way, gently bringing your attention back to your breath when you catch your mind wondering. Another version of this technique is focus on the feeling of your torso moving in and out as your inhale and exhale.

One last point. It is sometimes very helpful to practice with others. Consider finding a meditation class at a nearby yoga studio or parks and recreation department. Practicing with like minded people and a good instructor can be very inspiring!

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yoga instructor teaching in the East Bay area of San Francisco. He is author of "Beginning Yoga: A Practice Manual", co-creator of the audio CD "Shavasana/DeepRelaxation. Howard is also a former psychotherapist.

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### **Guided Meditation To Make You Whole**

**By Carl Walker**

Guided meditation is a form of stress relief that is conducive to relaxing the whole body, in part by finding a way of peaceful and calming relaxation from within the body. Guided meditation may utilize soothing photographs or scenarios to enhance the ability of the mind to relax and guide the body to a point of relaxation so that the person in meditation can find a true sense of inner peace. Quite often, guided meditation will be accompanied by soft music or sounds of nature.

One of the keys to successfully having a session of Guided meditation is finding an area where the one meditating will be free of distractions. Any outside interference will prevent proper concentration and make the attempts at guided meditation futile and perhaps even frustrating, further aggravating the problem seeking to be solved by the very use of guided meditation.

After finding a suitable location for guided meditation, other factors need to be taken into consideration. Some practitioners of guided meditation feel that visual stimuli can be used to help achieve a sense of inner peace and help to achieve true relaxation. Still other practitioners of guided meditation feel that

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any outside visual stimulation will detract from the mind's ability to properly focus on the body and the results of the guided meditation will be hindered or even reversed.

The same can be said for audio stimulation during sessions of guided meditation. While some individuals believe that soothing sound effects or even quiet music is conducive to the guided meditation, still others believe that it is only a hindrance and will do nothing more than create a harmful atmosphere for the practitioner of such guided meditation.

The basic concept of guided meditation is to relax. This is done by taking oneself on a guided tour of sorts through their own body. In the practice of guided meditation, it is normal to find a focus point in the body and begin there, someplace that is easy to relax. While staying focused on the body and in particular the muscles, the practitioner of guided meditation attempts to relax the muscles of the body. Allowing the body to completely relax allows the practitioner of guided meditation to next completely relax the mind.

When the mind and body are completely relaxed, the person can begin to concentrate on focusing his thoughts and ideas during the guided meditation. When using guided meditation, thoughts are usually thought to be transcendent and more in focus allowing the practitioner to perform better in all aspects of life. Whether or not guided meditation is right for a person is not only dependent on spiritual beliefs. Anyone contemplating the benefits of guided meditation must be seeking to improve themselves as a whole as well.

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