

Meditation Masterclass

Essential knowledge and skills



William Bloom





Liberation

Meditation is natural. How else could it have arisen in so many different cultures, geographies and times?

To be at ease.

To be watchful, observant and enquiring.

To be caring and compassionate.

To feel connected to the wonder and energy of life.

These are natural.

This handbook is the result of decades of exploring, practising and teaching meditation. There are many different meditation practices and traditions from all across the world. But at their core is a universal state.

So it is appropriate for meditation to be liberated from any association with just one particular tradition.

Albert Einstein is reputed to have said, 'If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.' I have tried to take that approach in clarifying that there is a core and universal state to meditation; that there are many gateways into that core state; and that there are diverse meditation practices. But this simple model needs to be balanced with a respect for the mystery of consciousness and being.

This handbook is for teachers, practitioners and beginners. When people are sitting quietly who can tell the difference? Silence is democratic.

When people are trained as teachers and educators one of the crucial insights is that effective learning builds on what people already know. This recognition of prior experience and instinctive human skills is deeply encouraging for people developing their meditation practice. It is an educational error to learn the core skills of meditation — being at ease, observant, compassionate and connected — as if they are completely new practices.

This handbook takes a learner-centred approach to spirituality, which has been developed by the Spiritual Companions Trust, a UK educational charity. Our first enquiry is always: *What works best for you?* This approach is also incorporated in our *Diploma in Practical Spirituality and Wellness*, the first vocational qualification in this field to be on the Ofqual Register. The essence of our method can also be found in our companion publication *Your Spiritual Health Programme*. Members of the public looking for trained teachers who use our approach will find them via the Spiritual Companions Trust.

William Bloom

Spiritual Companions Trust

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I Overview

**Meditation is a natural human behaviour.
It was not invented by one particular tradition.
All across the world, in all cultures, women and men have
followed their instinct to be
still and calm.
This is a crucial starting point for how we learn and teach
meditation. We are not teaching a special ability.
We are supporting the development of an
innate behaviour.**

•

Historically meditation schools were geographically and culturally isolated. The different traditions did not talk to each other or share their practices. Today we can explore all the diverse approaches and recognise their universal principles. At the same time we can dismantle some of the out-of-date cultural clothing and recognise that:

- Meditation is a natural human behaviour.
- It does not belong to any particular tradition.
- It is accessible to everyone.
- There are many different strategies/gateways used to enter into meditation.
- There is a universal core state of meditation.
- There are many different practices we can use once we are in the core state of meditation.

Many Gateways → Universal Core State → Many Practices



Overview

SO WHO INVENTED MEDITATION?

It is normal for people to seek quiet time and to enjoy the ambience of being emotionally and mentally still. So over thousands of years of human history who knows how many people have 'invented' meditation?

Here are three short anecdotes about ordinary people that illustrate how meditation could have been invented.

The Householder

A woman lives in a village in a house full of children and relatives. One day she feels an instinct to get away from the noise and activity. She walks until she finds a quiet spot under a tree by a stream.

She closes her eyes. She feels the tree against her back and the soft grass and earth beneath her. The breeze touches her cheeks. The sound of the stream is soothing. After a few minutes she feels some anxiety and accompanying thoughts about her family and neighbours. She feels an impatient urge to get up and go home. But there is an equal instinct to stay sitting quietly.

She sighs, notices tension in her chest and begins to breathe more softly.

She stays sitting quietly, just patiently waiting, letting her body and feelings become easier. This feels good.

She returns the next day. And the next day. And the next.

In the silence, her mind and her feelings are calm. Her psyche is able to contemplate, enquire and explore.

She is meditating.

No teacher. Just an instinct.

Do you relate to this story? Yes No



The Worker

A man works in the city. He is stressed and anxious. His doctor prescribes a sedative. He takes the medication for a couple of weeks but dislikes the side effects.

Following an instinct he stops taking the medication. On his way to and from work he begins to pause regularly to calm down – sometimes on a park bench, sometimes in a church or library. Pausing and sitting quietly soothes him.

This pausing to self-soothe becomes a daily behaviour.

After a few months something else begins to happen when he sits quietly. A part of his mind starts to enquire:

Who is this inside me who is choosing to calm myself?

What is this part of me watching and guiding all this?

Wow! Here is another part of my consciousness. It feels good and interesting. I want to sit longer and explore all this.

He is meditating.

No teacher.

Do you relate to this story? Yes No



The Warrior

There is a soldier who is weary of fighting.

One day, off duty, she feels a rising anger within her. She recognises that she needs to calm herself down.

She follows her instincts and finds a space where she cannot be observed. She then practises some of her martial arts moves – strikes, punches and kicks – at the same time vigorously expelling air from her lungs with grunting breaths.

After thirty minutes of this extreme activity and catharsis, she can still feel some of her internal fury. Her next instinct is to sit still.

Disciplined and choosing to self-manage her emotions she sits quietly for a while. Her mind scans the circumstances of her life, contemplating her ethics and her behaviour.

The anger subsides. She is in a place of watchful good-humoured equanimity.

She repeats this behaviour the next day.

And the next...

She has become a meditator.

Do you relate to this story? Yes No



Overview

A MEDITATION CONTEST

Now imagine if each of these meditators – the Householder, the Worker and the Warrior – gathered a group of friends and followers, who wanted to copy their behaviour. We would now have three separate meditation schools. When they meet there is the possibility of conflict.

My teacher says . . .

You must meditate in nature!

No! Only in a church!

It must be preceded by disciplined vigorous movement and chanting!

Don't do anything. Just be!

And so on.

Newbies and teachers often think that their way is the only way or the best way.

Linked to a Particular Tradition

Do you feel a link to a particular meditation tradition?

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agni Yoga | <input type="checkbox"/> Pagan | Others: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychedelic | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CBT | <input type="checkbox"/> Quaker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Raja Yoga | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Druid | <input type="checkbox"/> Shamanic | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Intelligence | <input type="checkbox"/> Sikh | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healing | <input type="checkbox"/> Sufi | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hindi | <input type="checkbox"/> Tai Chi | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignatian | <input type="checkbox"/> Tantra | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insight | <input type="checkbox"/> Taoist | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish Kabbalah | <input type="checkbox"/> TM | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mindfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Vipassana | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mysticism | <input type="checkbox"/> Wicca | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim | <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-dual | <input type="checkbox"/> Zen | |



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The Core State of Meditation

Whatever the approach or tradition there is a universal state at the heart of meditation.

Meditators are:

1. At Ease

Physically, emotionally, mentally calm

2. Awake

Conscious, mindful, aware, watchful, observing, curious, enquiring

3. Kind

Compassionate and benevolent to self and others

4. Connected

Sense of being at one with everything



Core State

In your own words describe what you think the state is of someone who is meditating:

Physically

Emotionally

Mentally

Spiritually

Core State of Meditation

AT EASE, EMBODIMENT (core state I)

You have been at ease so many times

It does not matter what type of meditation you do, your body, mind and emotions are at ease. This is not a new state. You are taking your body into the same state as when resting or sleeping.

Your body knows how to be at ease.

Your emotions know how to be calm.

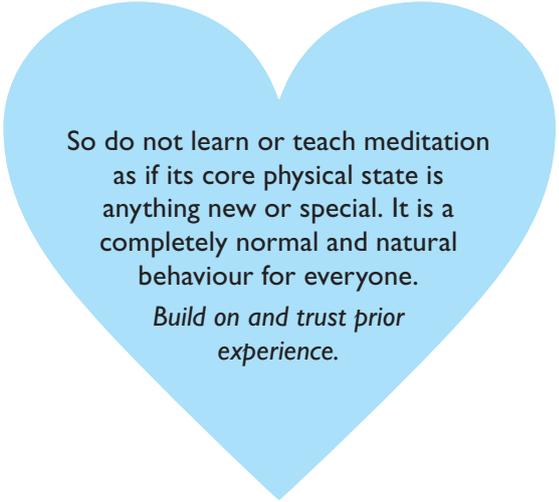
Your thoughts know how to be quiet.

You are not taking yourself or learners into a new, strange or difficult condition. We have all been doing it since we were in the womb. It is built into our DNA. The muscle memory is there. The neural grooves are deeply engrained.

In meditation the difference is that you choose to go into a state of rest while fully awake.

In your daily life when do you experience being at ease?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> At theatre/cinema | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On holiday | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for others | <input type="checkbox"/> Resting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At a good meal | <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting in a café |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing arts, crafts or hobbies | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching sport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching television |
| <input type="checkbox"/> During or after movement | <input type="checkbox"/> With family/friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In museum/art gallery | <input type="checkbox"/> Working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship, prayer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music | <input type="checkbox"/> Ceremony, ritual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With children | Others: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking at a view | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meditating | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On holiday | |



So do not learn or teach meditation as if its core physical state is anything new or special. It is a completely normal and natural behaviour for everyone.

Build on and trust prior experience.

Embodiment

Observe any experienced meditator. They always look at ease. Breath is calm. Body relaxed.

Simultaneously they are aware of their physicality and any subtle sensations.

Whatever is happening in their body, they give it kind attention.

This kindness to your body is beneficial.

Physically your caring self-awareness positively stimulates the neuro-endocrinal system.

Psychologically you embed an attitude of self-care.

Spiritually you land or 'incarnate' consciousness fully into into your vehicle, your body.

Your soul resides in its temple.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Core State of Meditation

The Anatomy of Being at Ease

For some people it is helpful to understand what happens physiologically when we are at ease. The information is also reassuring to those who enjoy an analytical approach. It explains how meditation is beneficial to health and wellbeing. There is substantial research on what happens in the body during meditation. The effects are similar to when asleep, resting or in deep relaxation.



Brain

The electrochemistry of the brain is soothed. It transits into states similar to sleeping and dreaming. Brainwaves move from Beta into Alpha, Theta and Delta.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Nervous System

Information and messages are transmitted through the nervous system that influence the production of neuropeptides and hormones in the endocrine system. Particularly via the vagus nerve the brain, heart and gut are all connected.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Endocrine System

The hormones of anxiety, adrenaline and cortisol, are reduced; and a cocktail of feel-good hormones – endorphins, serotonin, oxytocin, dopamine – are stimulated into production. Tissue relaxes and the immune system is boosted.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Draw in this outline how the brain, heart, lungs and gut are connected.

Heart and Breath

Breathing is calmed and heart rate variability (HRV) is regulated.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Gut

Your gut is balanced and at ease. The enteric nervous system ('gut brain') settles down into a healthy PH balance (less acidic); and beneficial gut bacteria and flora are supported.

Familiar with this? Yes No

Practice Improves and Deepens

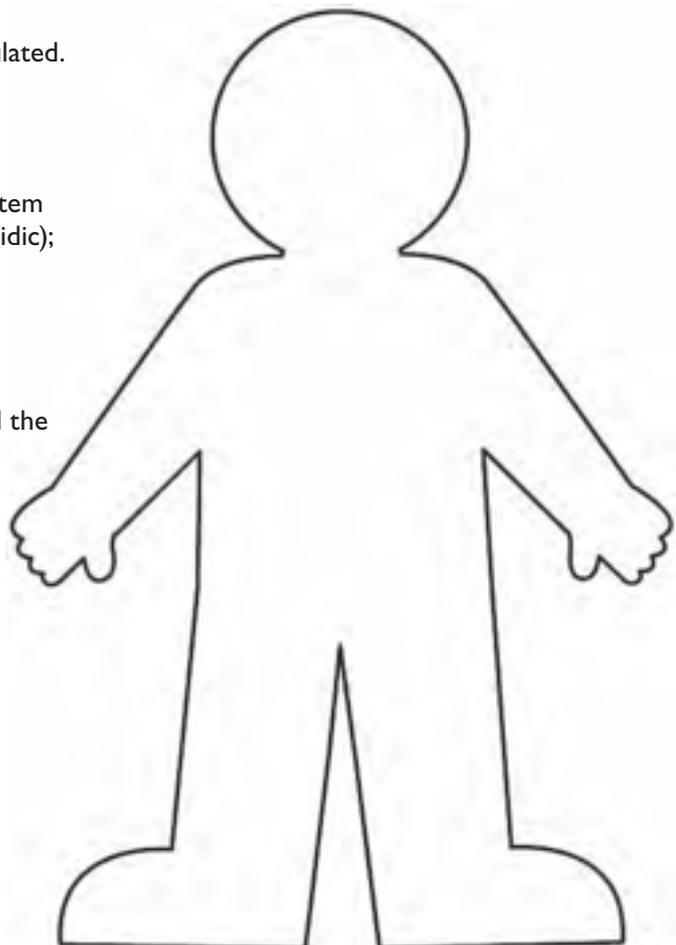
The more that you practise being calm, the more you build the muscle memory and deepen the relevant neural pathways. Especially when you might be anxious or aroused, frequent practice creates a stable and habitual foundation so you can come gracefully home to your body.

Classic Body Scan Practice

Notice subtle sensations at the top of your head. Hot, cold? Tense, relaxed? What can you feel against your skin?

Patiently notice these subtle sensations as you slowly scan down your body. Area by area. Head to toes.

(Take about 20 minutes to do this.)



Core State of Meditation

AWAKE, OBSERVANT, MINDFUL (core state 2)

In meditation you are fully conscious, awake, aware, watching, witnessing, observant, interested, noticing, enquiring.

And you are also at ease.

It is a natural behaviour to be relaxed and a spectator; enquiring and reflecting.

When have you experienced being at ease *and* watchful?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> At theatre/cinema | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for others | <input type="checkbox"/> Resting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting in a café |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing arts, crafts or hobbies | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> During or after movement | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching sport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching television |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In museum/art gallery | <input type="checkbox"/> With colleagues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In nature | <input type="checkbox"/> With family/friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music | <input type="checkbox"/> Working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On holiday | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship, prayer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing | <input type="checkbox"/> Ceremony, ritual |

Others:



3. COMPASSIONATE, CARING (core state 3)

To feel compassionate and behave in a caring way is a natural human behaviour. Built into our mammalian DNA is an instinct to behave with care, especially towards vulnerable creatures in distress. It is one of the ways in which our species survives and evolves. It is also one of the core states of meditation.

There are many circumstances in which you may have felt compassion and care.

- Watching or reading about a tragedy.
- With a person or animal who was in distress.
- Looking at the state of the world.
- Filled with love for everything.
- Inspired by someone else's example.

Others:

In the core state of meditation you allow or guide yourself into this attitude of care and compassion.



Metta Practice • Inner Smile Loving Kindness to Self

In this exercise you use the caring attitude you might have towards a tearful child or vulnerable animal. You direct this kind and caring attitude firstly to yourself and then to the whole world around you.

Be comfortable and quiet.

Allow your body to drop down into being at ease. Let your stomach and abdomen drop and sink.

Take three or four soft quiet breaths down into your abdomen.

As best you can . . . Open your heart and feel some gentle love.

Soften your eyes.

Now turn your focus down into your own body.

In the same way that you might lean down and care for an injured child, or cradle an injured bird in your cupped hands, you direct this same quality of kindness down into your own body.

Have a kind and loving attitude to your own body. Have a caring and compassionate attitude towards your life and circumstances.

Notice any feelings of distress, tension or pain inside you.

Be accepting, tolerant and patient.

Now extend the same compassionate attitude out to the world beyond you. Have kind thoughts and supportive sentiments for specific people and situations and for the whole community of life.



CONNECTION

Calm, at ease and patient.

Compassionate and caring.

Be aware that just because you exist
you are connected to the great mystery,
the energy and wonder of life.

It is around you and in you.

Let yourself feel it.

Like soaking in a warm bath.

You are a tiny speck
in the infinite cosmic ocean.

Melt. Give way. Yield. Surrender. Open. Empty.

Allow yourself to be nothing and everything.

4. CONNECTED (core state 4)

Universal Experience

Sooner or later there is a universal experience in meditation. The meditator's sense of calm deepens and expands and there is a shift in mood and awareness. There is a shift in the experience. It begins to feel very different, physically, emotionally and psychologically. It is difficult to find the right words to express this...

It is an expansion of consciousness.

You feel more integrated and connected. There is a new sense of being at ease internally and externally. A sense of connection. At oneness.

This Is the Beautiful Jewel

When the body, emotions and mind are at ease — when consciousness is awake, alert and watching — when the mood is compassionate and benevolent — meditators begin to feel connected to everything. Connected. At one. At peace. The awesome mystery.

This is a beautiful experience. But it is helpful to be aware that this experience flows and changes like an ocean that has currents, tides and waves.

Sometimes it is subtle and minimal. At other times it is ecstatic and blissful. It deepens and expands the longer we spend in meditation.

Normal

Many people have had a background sense of this connection since they were children. For them it is normal and they expect everyone else to have the same sense. They are often baffled by the excitement of other people when they first encounter this experience of connection. For others it is an experience that awakens later in life.

Spiritual?

This experience is often described as 'spiritual' — spiritual without being attached to religion. We need to be careful and appropriate with our language, because people have so many different ways of engaging with this topic according to their character and culture. In any social situation it is appropriate to discern what language and terms of reference people already use; and build on that foundation.

How shall we describe this beautiful experience of Connection?

Perhaps you relate to one of these terms:

- Beatitude** **Benediction** **Blessed** **Bliss**
- Buddha Consciousness** **Christ Consciousness**
- Cosmic Consciousness**
- Connected** **Ecstasy** **Grateful**
- Heaven** **Nirvana** **Paradise**
- Rapture** **Samadhi**

3

Frequently Asked Questions

BODY LANGUAGE

There is a link between your body language and your mood/state of mind. For example, clench your fists and tighten your face. You will immediately feel the beginnings of a particular emotion. In the same way, feigning laughter can induce genuine good humour and mirth.

So body language can support your meditation practice.

Posture

Some traditions teach posture as a pre-requisite for meditation. But if posture and how you sit were crucial then this would be suggesting that people with physical disabilities cannot meditate. That of course is an offensive idea.

What is important about posture is that it should enable people to be at ease and to stay awake.

If you are supple or practise yoga or martial arts, then of course you can use a cross-legged position if it is comfortable for you. Sitting in a chair with your feet firmly on the ground is sometimes called the 'Egyptian' posture, like a Pharaoh on a throne.

Certainly a straight back can help people stay alert and can be beneficial to spinal health.

Where are you most comfortable and at ease?

- Armchair
- Bed
- Chair
- Cross-legged
- Lying down
- Meditation cushion
- Meditation stool
- Sofa

Other

However for many people an unsupported back is painful and distracts from being at ease.

Some people can stay perfectly alert lying down.

Use the posture that works best for you.

And if you become uncomfortable or experience pain, slowly and mindfully change your posture.

Facial Expression

It is good practice for your face to take on an expression of calm ease. Eyes relaxed and slightly lowered is the usual practice, but this can vary in different traditions.

Hands

There are traditions that focus on the position of the meditator's hands, called mudras in yoga. In the West the most well known mudra is to have your hands in a prayerful position; or placed on your heart. If you are interested, then feel free to research and experiment with the different postures.



When?

It is easiest to meditate when you have energy and are not tired. If you are tired then meditation may just be a gateway to falling asleep!

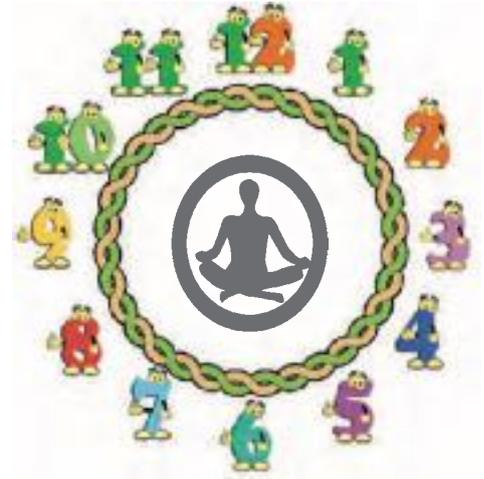
If your body easily becomes stiff and painful then meditate after doing some movement. Some people, for example, start their day with movement — such as yoga, stretching, walking, dance or housework — and then do their meditation.

In some traditions people get up to meditate in the middle of the night or very early in the morning, enjoying the special quiet and stillness.

Others come home from work, bath/shower and exercise, and then still themselves.

If you have a family with children, then you will need to be strategic in creating the time for yourself.

People need to find the rhythm and timing that works best for them.



How Long?

Human beings are highly sensitive creatures, always responding to the stimuli of family, work, media and neighbourhood. The nervous system becomes habituated and addicted to these responses and arousals.

So people need to sit long enough for all these internal stimulations to calm down. Beyond that, people then need to soak, bask or luxuriate in the state of being at ease. In this way the nervous system becomes soaked, habituated and trained into being fully awake and simultaneously at ease.

The benefits of meditation are felt not just during the practice, but also in how it spills over into the rest of your life. Years ago some people were making fun of me for being a meditator and a friend defended me: ‘Can you imagine what he would be like if he *didn't* meditate?’

Generally it is suggested a minimum of twenty minutes. But the longer you sit in a session the more you can deepen your sense of compassionate connection and your ability to be conscious and watchful. So the longer you meditate, the better.

Same Time?

It can really help support a meditation practice if people sit at the same time every day. The regular timing creates a biorhythm that the body expects.

On the other hand some people are just fine with an irregular schedule.

Meditate every day. Embed the rhythm.

Group Meditation?

Group meditation can be a very useful way to kick-start and sustain a meditation practice.



Dharma Primary School

Group Meditation Etiquette

- If late do not join the group unless there is a space near the entrance and you can quietly come in and sit.
- Stay until the end.
- Do not breathe loudly, for example using yogic breath techniques.
- If you need to move, do so mindfully and quietly.
- Do not make notes.
- Do not drink.
- Do not fiddle with cough sweets.

FAQ

HEALTH BENEFITS

Stress is implicated in many physical and psychological illnesses. At a very basic level meditation is as beneficial for our health as sleeping, resting and relaxing. There are numerous health benefits. Tick any that might be relevant to you or that you have experienced.

Physiological

- Reduces any illness where stress is a factor
- Lowers blood pressure
- Enhances pain management
- Strengthens immune system
- Lowers cholesterol levels
- Improves airflow, eg. in asthma
- Slows ageing, rejuvenates and vitalises
- Helps you sleep



For many meditators the whole state of being a conscious caring observer — of ourselves and everything else — is a truly healing balm. Whatever else is going on in your life you can enjoy being at ease, awake, compassionate and connected. This provides a powerful foundation for a psychologically balanced and healthy life.

Emotional/Psychological

- Stress reduced
- Self-management leading to improved confidence and self-esteem
- Sense of self
- Reality check on thinking (CBT)
- Supports intelligence and concentration
- Reduces depression
- Increases emotional control
- Feel more vital and alert
- Better relationships
- Supports learning ability
- Enhances clear thinking and memory
- Less irritability and moodiness
- We get to know our 'true' selves
- Clears away the overload from daily life
- Spills over to create a calmer and more centred lifestyle

Psychological Risks

There are risks. For example people with a tendency towards a mental health challenge may find meditation too stimulating or may find themselves sinking deeper into their illness. It is easy to imagine how this might happen for someone with a tendency towards delusion, or paranoia, or depression. People with bi-polar or psychosis may be agitated by meditation. And folk with a tendency to dissociate may find that meditation amplifies their susceptibility. There are also the issues that can come with any lifestyle fad or faith. People may become obsessive or fundamentalist, losing a sense of balance.

There is also the more general problem that in meditation people begin to feel and become aware of what is actually going on inside them. Past traumas and emotional wounds that have been kept well forgotten and repressed can begin to emerge too fast, causing distress and anxiety.

Advice

In general the advice will always be the same: if meditation is agitating your psychology in a way that is overwhelming, then stop meditating. It is also recommended that you talk with an appropriate friend, teacher or counsellor.

4 Gateways

MANY STRATEGIES

There are many strategies that help to take people into the core state of meditation. These strategies have evolved in diverse cultures and can be dramatically different. Here are a few of them:

Altered states of consciousness

Aroma

Arts, crafts

Attitude

Being, formless

Body awareness

Breath

Catharsis

Ceremony, ritual

Drumming

Guided journeys

Guided relaxation

Healing

Imagery

Making love

Mantra

Movement

Nature

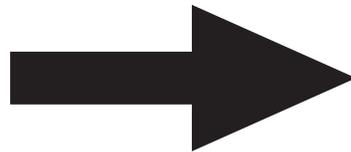
Prayer

Reading

Sacred space

Sound, music

Touch



The strategy you use to enter meditation ought to be the one that works best for you and is appropriate for your situation. If you are part of a group you need to consider what will work best for your companions. What is their culture? What do they expect? What is acceptable?

The approach you use needs to be authentic and congruent. If you are unwieldy, for example, do not use dance or yoga. If you are a devotional tantric type, it might be best to avoid Christian prayers.

Perhaps you are already associated with a group and know their culture well. This might guide you. For example if you practise yoga then you can easily flow into meditation at the end of your session when you are in corpse pose. Just stay longer in that space.

If you work with young people you will need to discern what best suits the school or youth group culture. You might use mindfulness, or drumming, or dance, or guided visualisation.

We encourage teachers and learners to explore, research and experience different approaches.

There are literally thousands of meditation books, videos, audios and groups. But to repeat the main point: the core state of being at ease, kind, conscious and connected is always the foundation.

The way in which this handbook is structured — gateways, core state and practices — provides signposts for further research.

Gateways

SHIFTING MOOD AND ATTITUDE

Using a particular strategy to come into a meditative state is not a new behaviour for most people. Nearly everyone has their own way of shifting their mood and attitude. Understanding this can be reassuring for those who are starting a meditation practice.

Have you ever chosen deliberately to calm yourself when you felt that you were too anxious or close to overwhelm?

Yes No

If 'Yes' what strategy did you use?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focused on your breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Chose to see the best in the situation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grounded and centred yourself | <input type="checkbox"/> Went for a walk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opened your heart | <input type="checkbox"/> Switched on TV/radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Took yourself physically away into another space | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercised |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Took yourself mentally away and focused on something else | <input type="checkbox"/> Did craftwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pulled an internal lever and wilfully changed your mood and attitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counted to ten or some other number | <input type="checkbox"/> Deadened yourself with drugs/food/alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Said a prayer or mantra | Others? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asked for spiritual help | |

Meditation is a conscious choice to shift mood and awareness



What follows is a brief description of the most commonly used strategies for going into meditation

With each strategy the process is the same. Use the strategy — eg mantra or breath — for as long as is necessary to enter the meditative state. Then when you are in the meditative state of being at ease, watchful, compassionate and connected, you can experiment with pausing the strategy but still remaining in the meditative state.

This varies from person to person. Explore and develop the way that works best for you. Be patient and good-humoured with the process.

1. Altered States of Consciousness

Deliberately inducing an altered state of consciousness through strategies such as fasting, psychotropic drugs, plant medicines and extreme physical activities.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

2. Aroma

Smelling essential oils, incense.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

3. Arts, Crafts

Painting, dance, music, clay, pottery, weaving, knitting, etc.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

4. Attitude

Choosing deliberately to switch on and maintain a particular attitude and mood such as: impeccable listening and awareness, gratitude, appreciation, humility.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

5. Being, Formless, Emptying

Just wait. Be patient. Be benevolent. Be awake and observant. This approach is particularly associated with Vipassana, Zen and Christian emptying. Some people integrate this approach with Body Awareness and Breath (see below).

Tried it: Yes No

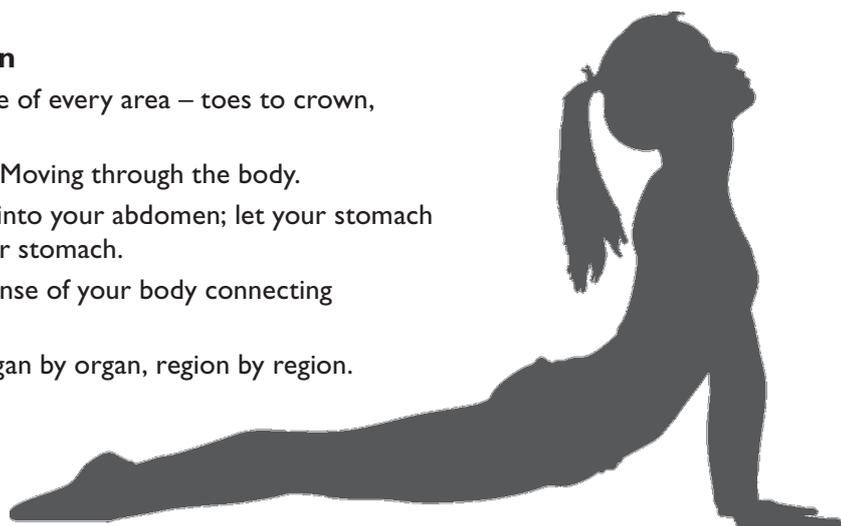
Interested? Yes No

6. Body Awareness and Relaxation

- Slowly scan your body, becoming aware of every area – toes to crown, or crown to toes.
- Tense your muscles. Then relax them. Moving through the body.
- Allow yourself to drop and sink down into your abdomen; let your stomach drop and relax; breathe softly into your stomach.
- Grounding, rooting and earthing – a sense of your body connecting deep down into the earth.
- Giving kind attention to your body, organ by organ, region by region.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No



Gateways

7. Breath

Many variations (*pranayama* in yoga)

- Often added to the Being, Formless approach (number 5 above).
Noticing the subtle sensations and movement of the breath. Allowing it to soften.
Tracking the subtle sensations through the body – nose, throat, lungs, chest, back.
- Counting your breaths.
- Pause between each in-breath and out-breath.
- Apply specific counting eg: In-breath count to 7. Pause count to 5.
Outbreath count to 7. Pause count to 5. There are many variations.
- Alternate your breath between nostrils and mouth.
- Alternate your breath between your left and right nostrils, ie: In-breath left nostril.
Out-breath right nostril. In-breath right nostril. Out-breath left nostril.
- Changing the force and pressure of your breath, for example soft to vigorous.
- Breathing into different parts of your body starting with upper, middle and lower chest.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

8. Catharsis

This is a more dramatic gateway in which you allow yourself to release and express repressed emotions. It may involve screaming and shouting, beating a pillow, wild dance and body shaking. After the cathartic discharge you feel calm and drop into silence.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

9. Ceremony and Ritual

This can be as simple as slowly lighting a candle. Or it may be longer and more complex such as the Christian Eucharist or a shaman working with the four directions.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

10. Clearing Your Desk

This can be harmoniously combined with the Being, Formless approach. While you are patiently waiting for everything to calm, allow your mind to be aware of the current issues in your life – relationships, work, neighbours, finances and so on. Contemplate how best to manage and guide them. Allow yourself the gift of giving full awareness to all aspects of your life. (Do not use this approach if you are feeling overwhelmed by life.)

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No



11. Drumming

The rhythm, vibration and movement of drumming is often found in tribal and pagan groups. It is very effective for bringing young people into meditation.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

12. Guided Journeys

These are long led meditations in which you are guided through a story and/or a landscape. Your mind is engaged and calmed by the story.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

13. Healing

Giving or receiving spiritual healing can induce a beautiful meditative state.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

14. Imagery

People with good visualisation skills can use imagery as a gateway into meditation.

These may include images of spiritual teachers, icons, mandalas, candle flames, colours, something from nature.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

15. Making Love

There are Tantric, Kabbalistic and Taoist approaches to meditation in which lovemaking is carefully used as a gateway into a meditative state.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

16. Movement

There are so many forms of movement that people use to go into a meditative state. Dance, exertion, shaking, laughter, sport. Contemplative movement, yoga, walking, body prayer, tai chi, posture.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No

17. Nature

Just being in nature is a wonderful gateway for many people.

Tried it: Yes No Interested? Yes No



Gateways

18. Prayer and Mantra

Most traditional faith communities have meditation traditions that use prayer or mantra to take you into a calm and aware state. These range from a simple repetition of the Sanskrit OM to a repetition, for example, of the Lord's Prayer. As always use the ones that are appropriate and authentic for you and your culture.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

19. Reading

Reading a text that is meaningful to you is a wonderful way of going into meditation. Read quietly and then put down the book.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

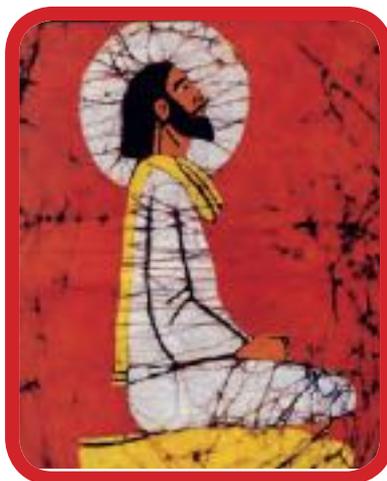
20. Relaxation Exercises

There are many relaxation techniques. Probably the most well known is the strategy of tensing and then relaxing muscles, starting with the feet and moving up through the body. Many people listen to these on prerecorded audio.

See *Body Awareness* above.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No



21. Sacred Space

Temples, shrines, groves, churches, synagogues, standing stones, holy wells, a quiet spot in nature.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

22. Sound, Music

The use of sound and vibration to induce a calm state can be very simple, such as the sound of a meditation bell or gong.

Or it can be a repetitive noise

or word. Or it can be something more choral. Any kind of music can be used, from western classical or world music to jazz or heavy metal.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No

23. Touch

Holding a stone, crystal or meaningful object.

Tried it: Yes No

Interested? Yes No



A UNIVERSAL GATEWAY SCRIPT

You can record it for yourself

Speak slowly, softly and clearly. Pause between each section. Trust your intuition as to how to pace it. If in doubt, pause.

Close your eyes.

As best you can allow your body to sink down and be at ease.

This is like after a good meal sitting in your favourite chair. Like sitting in a café watching the world go by. Or out in nature after a walk and enjoying the view. Your body knows how to be at ease. Just let it drop down.

Move your toes. Notice how your backside feels on the chair or cushion. You can also feel the texture of your clothes against your skin. And the texture of the chair padding or cushion. And beneath them the floor.

Let your stomach and abdomen drop and sink.

Take three or four very soft, silken, long and quiet breaths — completely quiet — down into your stomach.

Soften your eyes. A kind, good-humoured softness in your eyes.

Let your heart be warm and open.

You know that mood and attitude of compassion and care that you give to a vulnerable creature. Like when a toddler has fallen and is crying and you bend down to care for their grazed knee. Or when a small bird has fallen out of its nest and you hold it in your cupped hands.

Feel that mood of caring and compassion. Turn your awareness down into your own body and give your own body that same care and compassion.

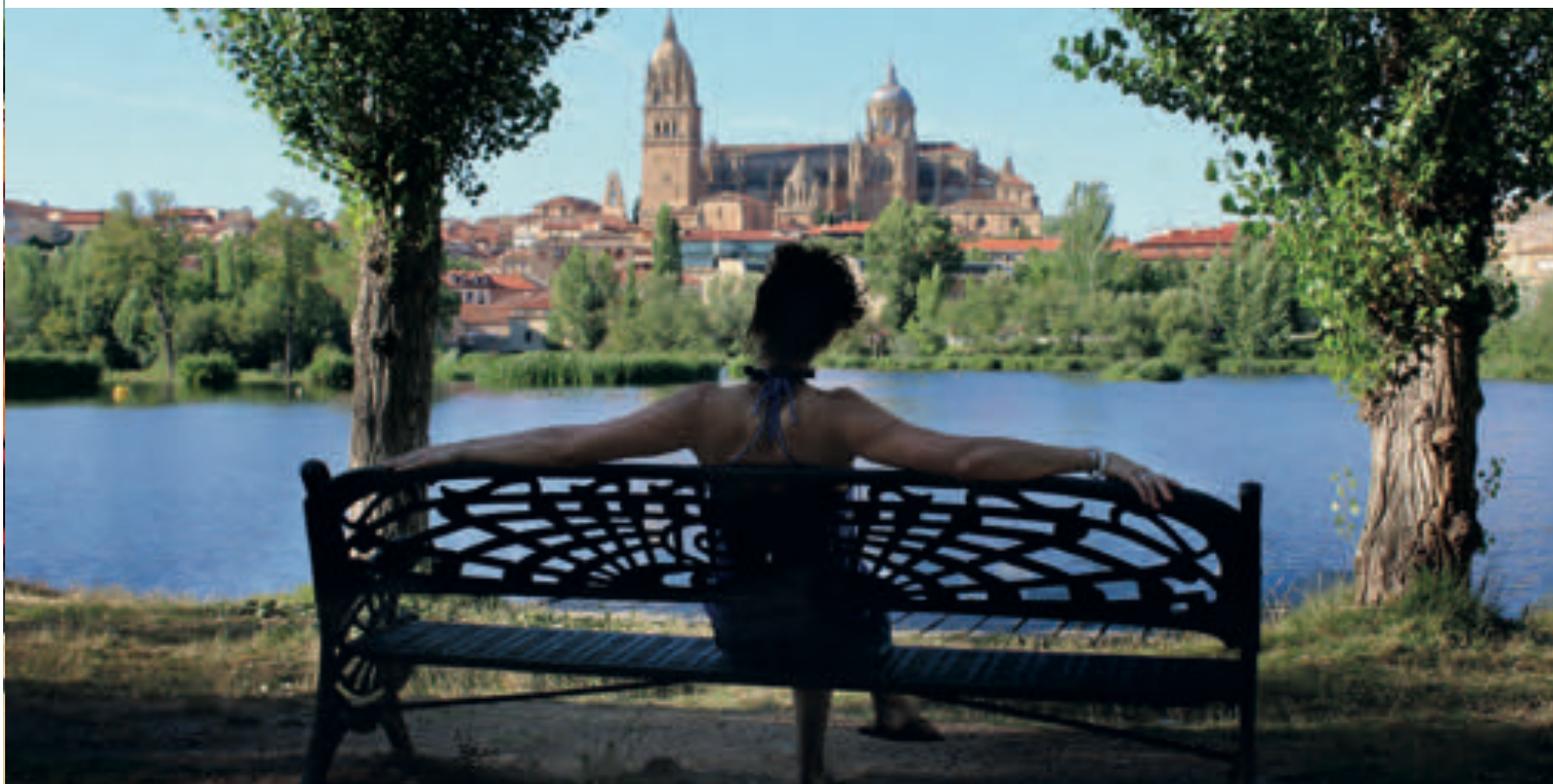
Soft eyes. Soft breath. Warm open heart.

Stay sitting silently for as long as you want. Any time that you feel that you are losing your centre, come back to:

Soft breath. Soft kind eyes. Allow your body to drop and be at ease.

When you have finished, gently and slowly stretch.

Notice that all the references in this guided meditation build on your prior experience. What is new is giving that care to yourself.



MEDITATION MAP

Gateways → Core State → Practices

Altered states
of consciousness

Aroma

Arts, crafts

Attitude

Being, formless

Body awareness

Breath

Catharsis

Ceremony, ritual

Clearing your desk

Guided journeys

↑
*Gateways
into Meditation*

↓
Healing

Imagery

Making love

Mantra, Prayer

Movement, Yoga Tai

Chi

Nature

Reading

Relaxation exercises

Sacred space Sound

Music Switch off TV

Touch

At ease
Alert Mindful
**UNIVERSAL
CORE STATE**
Compassionate
Connected

Just being

Compassionate
witness

Loving presence

Reflection,
planning

Self-healing

Spiritual
anatomy

Expansion of
consciousness

↑
*Meditation
Practices*

↓
Devotion

Prayer

Seed thoughts

Contemplation

Enquiry

Energy work

Metaphysics

Healing

Prayer

Forgiveness, Tonglen

Nature, Seasons

5

Meditation Practices

It can sometimes surprise followers of a particular tradition when they hear that there are different meditation practices. But that is one of the blessings of the modern world, that we can learn about, research and experience different approaches that were previously isolated. For the purposes of this manual they are classified into the following groups.

1. Just being
2. Compassionate witness and loving presence
3. Know thyself – reflection and planning
4. Self-healing
5. Spiritual anatomy
6. Expansion of consciousness
7. Devotion and prayer
8. Seed thoughts, contemplation and enquiry
9. Energy work, metaphysics and journeying
10. Service – healing, prayer, forgiveness
11. Nature and the Seasons

Most experienced and wise meditators use all these practices. Once you are in the core state of being at ease, watchful, compassionate and connected, you accept that meditation is like a warm ocean. There are currents, tides and waves. Mindfully you are intuitively drawn into the practice that arises. Mindfully you also guide where you focus.

Meditation is a developmental process.

It changes, deepens and expands.

Compassion grows. Consciousness expands.

You melt more fully into the ultimate mystery.

It is also private and personal.

Inside meditation you are completely free.

Your meditation practice is the most personal and liberated space that you can experience.

Meditation Practices

1. Just Being

This is a formless approach and is most often associated with traditions such as Vipassana and Zen. In this practice you stay calm and alert and witness/observe whatever feelings, sensations or thoughts arise in you.

The mind is kind, watchful, aware, interested and softly curious. This approach has a purpose, which is ultimately to achieve a state of complete consciousness, compassion and oneness with all that is. *Nirvana. Moksha* (liberation from the wheel of incarnation). The ego dissolves, melts, expands. You are at one with cosmic consciousness, the ultimate mystery.

Familiar? Yes No

3. Know Thyself – Reflection, Planning

There is no better place than meditation to reflect on yourself and your life. Meditation provides the perfect mood and attitude to contemplate anything and everything about yourself. Your own compassionate and witnessing mind is your best friend. Who knows you better than yourself?

Witnessing

Allow thoughts and feelings about yourself to arise. Stay detached and witnessing. In this way, just watching what arises, you learn about yourself.

Conscious Enquiry – Know Thyself

Choose to give awareness to a particular aspect of yourself – a behaviour, a mood, an attitude, a memory, an emotion. Allow your compassionate and enquiring mind to contemplate and understand yourself. Be aware of the good and the bad. Always stay compassionate to yourself. Contemplate the next steps needed for your personal /spiritual development.

Daily Review

Day by day, slowly review and assess your recent actions, thoughts, feelings. Were you loving, kind, conscious? Be honest and patient. Be aware of the good and the bad.

Planning

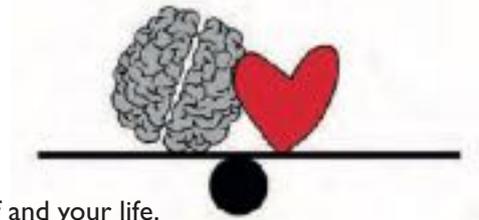
Meditation is a wonderful space in which to contemplate your work and relationships. Allow insights and intuitions about next steps.

Familiar? Yes No

2. Compassionate Witness and Loving Presence

Just being is never practised in a cold, martial or detached way. It is practised with an attitude of kindness, care and compassion. You may then develop softening your mood and attitude even more. You begin to amplify your compassion and to sense more fully that your presence is benevolent and a blessing to the world around you — both in meditation and in daily life.

Familiar? Yes No



4. Self-Healing

Compassionate witnessing is also the foundation for more active self-healing and internal psychotherapy.

Physical

Becoming aware of subtle sensations, scan your body and notice how every part of your body feels. Do this with kindness and acceptance of any pains or discomfort. This action, in itself, sends reassuring messages through your nervous and endocrine systems. It inhibits the production of stress hormones and triggers a wellbeing cocktail of neuropeptides. Tissue relaxes. The immune system is boosted. Healing and recovery are boosted.

Psychological

This act of self-care puts you in the driver's seat of managing your psychological state, improving emotional stability and confidence.

Spiritual

Your kind attitude directs healing energy (*prana, qi*) into any damaged or stressed tissue.

Psychotherapy and Inner Dialogue

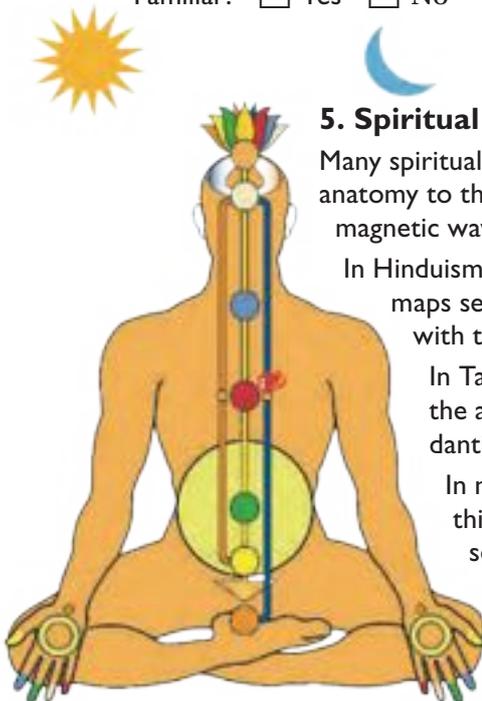
The essence of psychotherapy is to facilitate the movement of unconscious stuff up into awareness, so that it can be healed and integrated.

From a place of stable and compassionate witnessing, you can choose to focus on psychological issues, such as childhood trauma or negative feelings, and patiently develop a more conscious awareness of these hidden dynamics. Stay stable and compassionate. *If you have any history of trauma do this practice slowly and carefully.*

Health and Safety

Self-healing may need special care if old trauma surfaces too fast and becomes overwhelming. So always be prepared to back off from this practice and seek support.

Familiar? Yes No



5. Spiritual Anatomy

Many spiritual traditions teach that there is a subtle anatomy to the human body, similar to electromagnetic waves and invisible to the human eye.

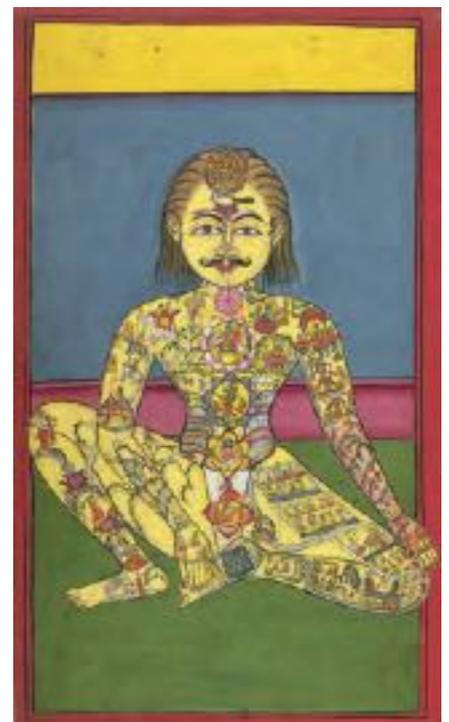
In Hinduism there is the Chakra system, which maps seven energy centres that integrate with the endocrine system.

In Taoism there is the subtle anatomy of the acupuncture meridians and the three dantiens of the abdomen, chest and head.

In meditation you can contemplate this subtle anatomy, noticing subtle sensations and any insights.

There are many exercises in which you may explore moving energy, sounds and colours at different speeds and frequencies in, around and through your subtle anatomy.

Familiar? Yes No



Meditation Practices

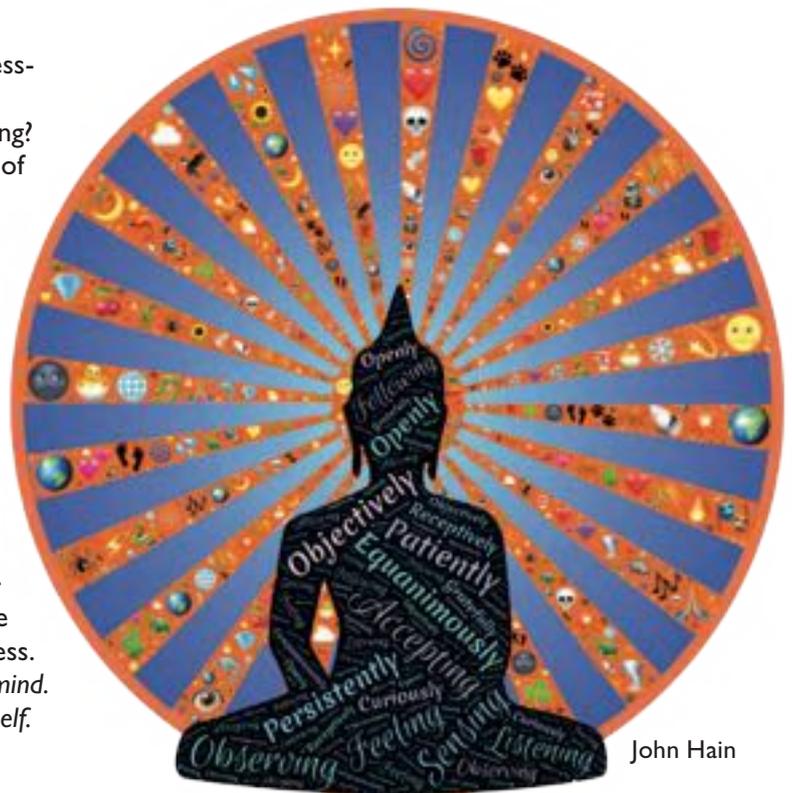
6. Expansions of Consciousness

Who is the 'I' in you that is doing the witnessing? What is the nature of your witnessing consciousness? Is it developing and expanding? This is one of the most intriguing enquiries of meditation. For many meditators this is the essence of their practice. In a sense it is unavoidable.

Sitting day by day for long periods meditators experience altered states of consciousness. These are very subtle and difficult to describe. Occasionally these altered states are dramatic, bringing experiences of bliss, 'white light' and other sensational happenings. Most of the time however altered states of consciousness are more quiet and paced.

There are disagreements about the ultimate nature of this expanded human consciousness. *Atma. Core self. Divine consciousness. Higher mind. Multidimensional self. Soul. Spirit. Witnessing self.*

Familiar? Yes No



John Hain

7. Devotion, Prayer

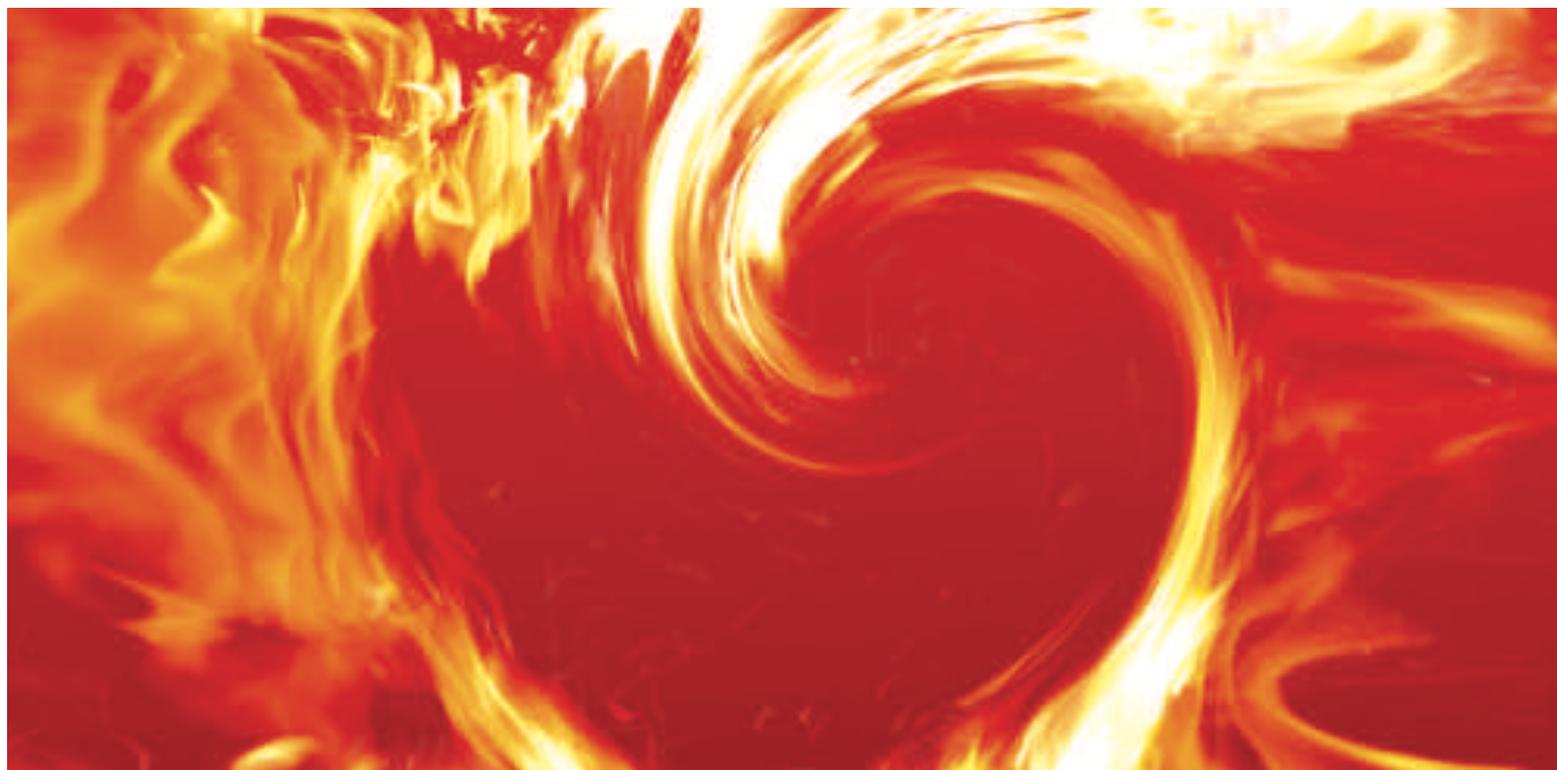
With sincerity, purity and fiery commitment, you may focus on the subject of your devotion – God, cosmic consciousness, a guru.

Through sincere intention and focus, you amplify your devotion and sense of connection. Often a prayer, chant or mantra is repeated over and over with a sense of passionate yearning and a profound willingness to surrender.

Familiar? Yes No

*Moved by whom does thinking attain its object?
Who directs the function of vital breathing?
Moved by whom do people engage in speaking?
Say what force directs both the sight and hearing.
Essence, the hearing's Hearer, the thinking's
Thinker, speaking's Speaker, even the breathing's
Breather. Eye of eye.*

Kena Upanishad



8. Seed Thoughts, Contemplation and Enquiry

In meditation you are free to study, contemplate and enquire about anything that interests you. In the altered state of meditation the mind is open to intuitions and insights. The Indian mystic Patanjali described this as *the raincloud of knowable things*. The process is straightforward.

You place whatever interests you as a small thought — a seed thought — in your mind and heart, in your psyche. You just let it float there.

Your awareness is receptive and open. You are calm and patient, You notice thoughts and insights as they come to you.

If a topic really engages you, you can visit it over and over again for years. Your topic might belong to everyday life such as how to handle a relationship. Or it might be more subtle such as:

- *Beings*: Archetypes, Christ, Buddha, gods, goddesses, avatars, saints, angels.
- *Concepts*: God, infinity, source, purpose, love, compassion, evil, redemption.
- *Vibration*: Mantra, sound, the Word, AUM, OM, Amen.

For many, the most important seed thought is to enquire into the benevolence of the cosmos. It can bring deep insights and interesting expansions of consciousness.

Familiar? Yes No

9. Energy Work, Metaphysics, Journeying

Meditation is the ideal space in which you can explore the world of subtle energies and beings. Be aware though that this can be a contentious subject. This is because many people are suspicious of metaphysics and associate it with delusion and, worse, mental health challenges.

In all these metaphysical practices you open up like a receptive radar dish and sense subtle sensations and subtle insights. It is similar to how you work with seed thoughts (see above) but here there is more of a focus on the pure energetic and vibrational experience.

Grounding, Earthing

The most widespread energy practice is that of grounding and earthing in which you sense an energy connection running down your body and into the centre of the earth; you then sense this connection coming up from the earth into your own core. There are many variations of this, such as being a tree with roots.

Subtle Anatomy

You sense and explore moving energy around your body using systems such as chakras, dantiens and meridians. You experiment with different speeds, vibrations and circuitry.

Subtle Cosmology

Here you sense, explore and play with the energies of the cosmos.

You may loop your energy with the sun and moon; the planets; or Sirius and the Pleiades. Again, you explore different velocities, vibrations and circuits.

Qi Gung and Kabbala, for example, have useful maps and guidance for this practice.

Journeying

You follow a guided journey through a metaphysical landscape, gaining insights on your way.

Familiar? Yes No



Meditation Practices

10. Service, Healing, Prayer, Forgiveness, Tonglen

It is always appropriate that meditation contain some form of conscious service to the community of life. Here are various practices.

- Gently radiate a benevolent vibration.
- Kind thoughts of healing and grace towards those who are suffering.
- If you have experience and training you may use a spiritual healing strategy more directly. Other service activities which require a stable and strong psychological state include:
- Awareness of people who have recently died and facilitating their journeys across into the clear light.
- Prayers of responsibility such as the Responsibility Prayer, which may be applied to any situation where there is suffering: *This is my responsibility – I am sorry – Forgive me.*
- Tonglen is the Tibetan name for the practice of choosing to absorb negative vibrations, transmute them with compassion and then exhale a blessing. It is similar to absorbing someone's grief while comforting them. Only do this practice if you feel strong and mentally stable. It is similar to the Christian practice of turning the other cheek. Good meditation teachers always practise this with their groups. (See below.)

Familiar? Yes No

11. Nature and the Seasons

Just being with nature brings its own beautiful experience and learning. From a blade of grass to distant stars we are intimately connected. So being conscious of the natural world can be a wonderful practice.

Many people also bring into their meditations a sense of the seasons and other natural rhythms such as the lunar cycle, solstices, equinoxes, fire and harvest festivals.

Familiar? Yes No



6

Managing Challenges

CHALLENGES ARE NORMAL

Meditation beginners need reassuring that resistance, self-sabotage, inconsistency and irritability are totally normal experiences when people start a meditation practice. Some people slip gracefully into a daily practice. Others need patience, motivation, discipline, psychological wisdom and good humour to carry them through the challenges.

Here is a list of the normal challenges that may arise before, during or after meditation. Tick off the ones with which you are personally familiar.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Memories of punishment, associations with fear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Militaristic, mistakenly thinks everything should be absolutely quiet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body shame | <input type="checkbox"/> Monkey mind chatting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot establish the time/space | <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cartoons in mind | <input type="checkbox"/> Over-excited |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discomfort from unrecognised anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer the groove of daily life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distracting thoughts and feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> Repressed arousals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easily aroused and distracted by external stimuli | <input type="checkbox"/> Resistance to new behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fall asleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Resistance to self-development; uncomfortable with change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-critical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashing light in eyes | <input type="checkbox"/> Space out, dissociation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frigid and unreceptive, not yet understood that the ocean of cosmic consciousness is warm, moving, emerging, always in flux | <input type="checkbox"/> Stoic – judges that it is weak or selfish to give care to one's self |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has not found the appropriate Gateway | <input type="checkbox"/> Tinnitus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headache | <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma memory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger | <input type="checkbox"/> Undisciplined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impatience | <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual cold or heat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impulse to get up | <input type="checkbox"/> Unworthy of self-care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritable | <input type="checkbox"/> Worry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Judge it all a waste of time | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lazy | |

All these challenges are normal. They pass. They arise. They pass again.

Managing Challenges

Some Psychological Wisdom

In meditation we meet everything that we are. It is a place where we cannot hide from ourselves. You may want to use meditation as a way of transcending emotional wounds and psychological difficulties; and that transcendence may be temporarily possible. But sooner or later you will meet, feel and experience every aspect of yourself — conscious and unconscious.

Almost immediately some people may experience discomfort when they meditate. Especially if they have an intense lifestyle and emotional state, they will suddenly have a raw experience of their state. This is when a gateway like drumming or dance can be helpful because it releases their excess energy.

Meditation is also a developmental process as you develop more love, compassion, consciousness and connection. Be realistic. You are human. Your negative, wounded and self-centred self may not easily yield and transform into something more generous and expansive. The pioneering psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung wrote, 'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.'

This is why compassionate witnessing and patience are crucial and not optional add-ons.

In the twenty-first century it is recommended that anyone seriously interested in meditation also become familiar with the basics of human psychology, counselling and psychotherapy, so they have improved skills for self-management.

Psychology Audit

Are you realistic about the dynamics of your unconscious? Yes No

Are you prepared to be completely honest with yourself? Yes No

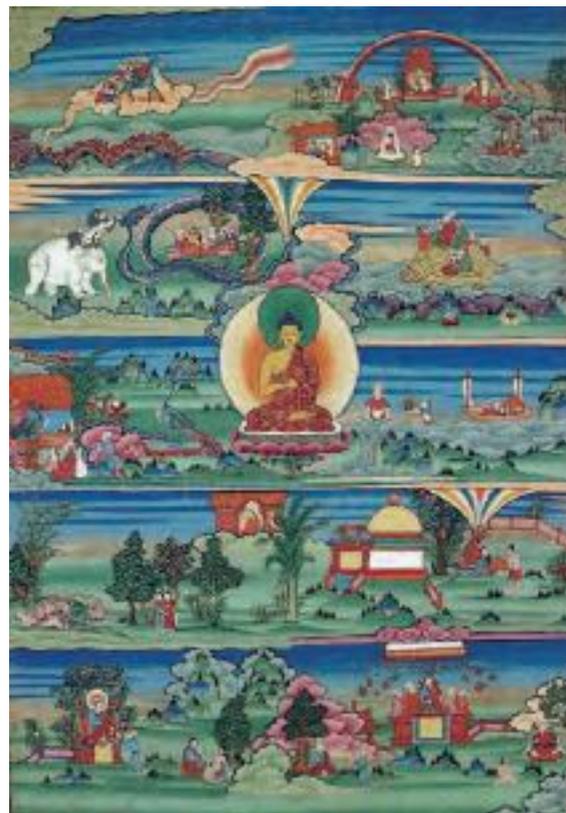
Do you have the psychological skills to self-manage? Yes No

What might you do to improve your skills?



The two images on this page are thangka paintings.

They communicate the complexity of the human psyche.



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

1. Repeat Your Gateway

Whatever gateway practice works for you — eg: breath, prayer, mantra — return to it and sustain it.

Familiar? Yes No

2. Compassionate Equanimity and Patience

You are human. Resistance, bad moods and arousals of many kinds are all completely normal. Have the discipline and wisdom to be compassionate, detached and patient.

Familiar? Yes No

3. Inner Dialogue

Use any challenges or self-sabotage as an opportunity for self-healing and reflective inner dialogue. Self-criticism only creates more pain.

Familiar? Yes No

4. The Void, Big Mind, Big Heart

Sense your mind, heart, imagination and psyche expanding out into the cosmos. There is infinite space here. There is room for everything. This is an attitude in which all feelings and thoughts are welcomed and allowed. Your heart and mind are so big that you can comfortably hold everything. Do this with insight, gentle care and compassion. You are a good host at a busy internal party.

Familiar? Yes No

5. One Brain Cell

In the midst of your challenge and self-sabotage, have one brain cell watching yourself with kindness and acceptance. This is like a single candle flame glowing in the darkness.

Familiar? Yes No



Managing Challenges

6. Soft Breath, Soft Eyes, Inner Smile

Soften your eyes and your breath. Practise the Inner Smile and send reassuring messages through your nervous and endocrine systems.

Familiar? Yes No

7. Motivation, Commitment and Self-Discipline

Check that you are motivated, that you really want to have a meditation practice. Remember the instinct that attracted you to meditation.

Familiar? Yes No



8. Monkey Mind Chatter

Mental chatter is normal. Our brains are hard-wired to think, interpret and create stories. It is an evolutionary survival mechanism. When we sleep the mind continues its activity through dreams and when we meditate our minds may still keep whirring. Over time it calms. The real issue is being able to calmly observe this chatter and guide it so that it is reflectively useful.

Familiar? Yes No

9. Fatigue

Do not meditate when you are physically tired. Do meditate when you are emotionally exhausted.

Familiar? Yes No

10. Falling Asleep

This may be a sensitive topic because falling asleep may not simply be due to fatigue. There may be other reasons.

- The meditator may be carrying some trauma or grief, so when they close their eyes and sink into their bodies, they dissociate to avoid the painful feelings associated with the historic injuries.
- Equally poignant, people may dissociate and fall asleep because of childhood abuse. They have a pattern of dissociating when they close their eyes because this was their survival mechanism when being abused.

Both of these challenges obviously require sensitivity and compassion; and possibly professional care.

Familiar? Yes No

11. Empathic, Sensitive and Vulnerable

You may be naturally empathic and sensitive to vibrations and atmospheres; and you may open up more fully in meditation. So when you come out of meditation you may feel over-sensitive and seek to avoid people and other stimulations. The solution is mindfully to close down your energy field — like a tulip closing its petals at night — and ground yourself fully. These kinds of strategies are known as psychic protection.

Familiar? Yes No

DISCERNMENT – IS YOUR PERCEPTION REAL?

In meditation the brain/mind can play all kinds of tricks.

Especially working with metaphysical and seed thought practices, it is possible to be deluded. The human imagination can deliver almost anything.

There is a famous story of a newbie to meditation excitedly telling their teacher,

'I saw many wonderful colours and lights. There were cosmic beings who came to me.'

The teacher listened compassionately and replied,

'Do not be concerned. These things will pass.'

This is a delicate subject. For many of us the subtle impressions and insights found/ received in meditation are profoundly valuable and enriching. They support and inspire wise spiritual development.

But on the other side there are deluded visionaries and naïve innocents who will accept almost anything. So be careful.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for assessing impressions received in meditation.

- Always stay calm and watchful. If you become excited wait until you have calmed down before making an assessment.
- If you have an urge to talk about your impression, stay quiet.
- Ignore an impression if it does not serve the good of the whole.
- Ignore an impression if it suggests that you harm others or conflicts with your personal ethics.
- Welcome new information relevant to your personal and spiritual development.
- If you see images and pictures, immediately assess their vibration. Are they benevolent or negative, loving or destructive?
- Does the impression sit comfortably with you? Can you stay at ease with it?
- Be cautious if the impression is critical of anyone or anything.
- Be aware that impressions may arise from your own unconscious or higher mind; or telepathically from others; or from subtle beings who may be ignorant or wise.

Familiar? Yes No



**Keep your delusion
scanners switched on.
Be discerning.**



7

Teach and Lead

PREPARATION

In this section we have concepts and strategies that will help those of you who may teach or lead meditation. The ideas are also useful for learners because in the silence of meditation there is a deep democracy of experience. We are all equal. Good teachers are also always students.

Meditate

We start with something simple and obvious. Day by day within your own meditation prepare to be with your group. Where else could possibly be better for this preparatory work?

Familiar? Yes No

Space

Contemplate the space in which you will be meditating with your group. Be in the space before you are actually in it.

Familiar? Yes No

Welcome and 'Hold'

Greet and welcome the people who will come – known and unknown. Be grateful that you can serve them. Greet their souls. *Namaste*. Extend your ambience safely to 'hold' your group (see next page).

Familiar? Yes No

Gateway

Contemplate how best you can help your people to enter the core meditative state. Your gateway needs to be appropriate to their culture and also authentic for you.

Familiar? Yes No

Prior Experience

Remember that your people have already experienced being at ease, observant, caring and connected. They have the core skills to meditate but probably have never practised them consciously. You are building on their prior experience. Develop what they already do; let them know they have these innate skills.

Familiar? Yes No

Generosity

Recognise that you may have to support someone after a session. As an educator have a big heart and generosity of spirit. Your group members each bring their own genius and their own challenges and histories.

Familiar? Yes No

Congruent

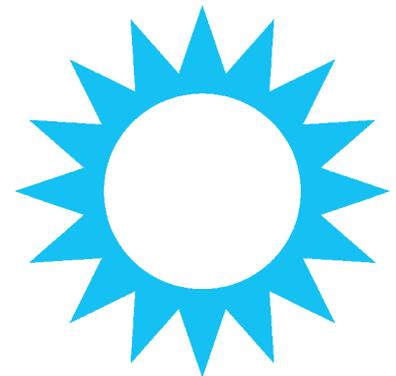
As teacher/leader your job is to lead the way, so contemplate that *your leadership begins always with you yourself being in the core meditative state*.

Familiar? Yes No

Help

Be humble. Ask and pray for help from your spiritual allies.

Familiar? Yes No



**THE
BEST PLACE
TO PREPARE
TO LEAD
OR TEACH
MEDITATION
IS IN
MEDITATION**

‘HOLD’ YOUR PEOPLE

This is a crucial strategy for all meditation leaders and teachers. You may already practise it. Good teachers, parents, leaders and carers do it instinctively.

When you are with your group:

Sink down into your body. Be at ease. Open your heart.

Imagine, sense and feel that your aura is warm, safe and reassuring.

It radiates from your torso, enfolding your group like soft arms or wings.

You are now ‘energetically holding’ the group in an atmosphere of care and safety.

This may be the biggest blessing and benefit that you bring to your people.

(You can practise it too in supermarket queues or meetings.)

Empathic Resonance and Tonglen

Meditating with your group you will empathically sense and feel what is happening in the group — for example whether it is in a happy flow or struggling and in distress.

Over time you will learn to trust this empathic sense. *Trust what you feel.*

Sometimes when you feel distress in your group you will choose to absorb their distress.

(This is like the sensation of holding and reassuring a child who is crying.) You absorb, hold, love, heal and transform their distress. You then gently radiate care, safety and love —

Breathe in negativity. Breathe out blessing.

In Tibetan Buddhism this practice is called Tonglen. In Christianity ‘turning the other cheek.’

We might also call it ‘empathic compassion.’ Some meditators include this in their daily practice.

(See above in Practices.)



Teach and Lead

Tone of Voice and Volume

- Your voice soothes and guides.
- Rehearse your tone and pace.
- Soft, audible and slow.
- Only say what is necessary. Every word and phrase must serve a purpose.
- Prepare and draft your script. It must be appropriate to the culture for your group.
- If in doubt, edit it out.
- Get feedback from friends, students and colleagues.
- Record and listen to yourself.

How do I know when to move on or say something?

Most meditation teachers/leaders have an intuitive guidance system and they learn to trust their sense of what is happening in the group. This is an aspect of empathic resonance (see previous page).

A general rule is that if you can feel it in your body, then that is what is happening in the whole group.

Other meditation teachers/leaders have an internal Yes/No system. They ask themselves Is this the right time to say this or end the session? And they have different systems for discerning Yes or No. For example:

- A sense of their bodies inclining forward (Yes) or backward (No); a kind of internal dowsing
- Green light/Red light in their minds.
- Muscle-testing. A sense of strength equals Yes. Weakness equals No.
- Simple intuitive knowing..

“Kind eyes.
Soft
abdominal
breath.
Warm open
heart.”

Your Notes

CHECKLISTS

Your Daily Practice

Where

When

Gateway

Posture

How long

Practice

For Teachers/Leaders

- Attuned to group/students in advance
- Greeted their souls
- Committed to spiritual generosity
- Chosen appropriate gateway
- Chosen appropriate practice
- Rehearsed words
- Respect/build on prior experience

GATEWAYS

- Altered states of consciousness
- Aroma
- Arts, crafts
- Attitude
- Being, formless
- Body awareness
- Breath
- Catharsis
- Ceremony, ritual
- Clearing your desk
- Guided journeys
- Healing
- Imagery
- Making love
- Mantra, Prayer
- Movement, Yoga
- Nature
- Reading
- Relaxation exercises
- Sacred space
- Sound, Music
- Switch off TV
- Touch

CORE STATE

- At ease
- Alert, mindful
- Compassionate
- Connected

PRACTICES

- Just being
- Compassionate witness
- Loving presence
- Reflection, planning
- Self-healing
- Spiritual anatomy
- Expansion of consciousness
- Devotion, Prayer
- Seed thoughts
- Contemplative enquiry
- Energy work, metaphysics
- Healing
- Forgiveness, Tonglen
- Nature, seasons

Further Reading

- Alice Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*. (Metaphysics.)
 William Bloom, *Psychic Protection and Feeling Safe*. (Boundaries.)
 Ann Weiser Cornell, *The Power of Focusing*. (Body awareness, inner dialogue.)
 Deb Dana, *Polyvagal Theory in Therapy*. (Physiology, trauma, therapy.)
 Miguel Farias & Catherine Wikholm, *The Buddha Pill*. (Risks.)
 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*. (Mindfulness, mental health.)

Meditation Masterclass

Handbook for Teachers and Practitioners Essential knowledge and skills

Overview

Who 'invented' meditation?

Core State of Meditation

At ease - Mindful, Awake, Observant - Compassionate, Caring - Connected

Frequently Asked Questions

When, how long - Health benefits - Psychological risks

Gateways into Meditation

Altered states of consciousness - Aroma - Arts, crafts - Attitude - Being, formless - Body awareness - Breath - Catharsis - Ceremony, ritual - Drumming - Guided journeys - Guided relaxation - Healing - Imagery - Making love - Mantra - Movement - Nature - Prayer - Sacred space - Sound, music - Touch

Practices

Just being - Compassionate witness and loving presence - Know thyself, reflection, planning - Self-healing - Spiritual anatomy - Expansion of consciousness - Devotion - Seed thoughts, contemplation, enquiry - Energy work, metaphysics, journeying - Service, healing, prayer, forgiveness - Nature, the seasons

Managing Challenges

Practical strategies - Discernment

Teach and Lead

Preparation - Empathic resonance - Tone of voice

Checklists

Daily practice - Revision

Spiritual Companions Trust

Mission Statement

We believe that humanity is an evolutionary species with the potential to develop a global culture of love, wisdom and care for all.

And that spiritual health is the crucial fuel and inspiration for people to achieve their best and serve the whole community of life.

Our goal is that spirituality and spiritual health become as accepted, necessary and valued a part of everyday culture as diet, exercise and the arts.

We achieve this through providing world-class educational resources and programmes through an approach that is holistic, practical and person-centred.

spiritualcompanions.org

William Bloom currently leads the Spiritual Companions Trust. He has been researching and teaching meditation for over forty years. His many books include *The Endorphin Effect* and *The Power of Modern Spirituality*.

'William Bloom has an encyclopaedic knowledge of meditation.' *The Independent*

