

## ***Relaxing into meditation***

The basic practice of meditation involves sitting quietly and turning the energy that usually pours out through your senses back into yourself. You close your eyes and focus your mind inward. From there, you may want to pay attention to the flow of your breath. Its natural rhythm will help keep your mind focused and quiet. If thoughts come up, the best thing to do is to just let them float by and keep your mind focused on your breath.

### **Spirituality in Action**

Here are three steps you can use to meditate:

- 1. Watch your breath.**
- 2. Let your mind become quiet.**
- 3. Become the witness of your mind.** See whether you can watch your thoughts pass by without identifying with them. Remember that you aren't your thoughts; rather, you're the one who is thinking them!

## ***Starting a meditation practice***

You may want to start by meditating for 15 minutes or so in the morning. You can start with a shorter meditation and gradually extend the time until you've reached a comfortable but substantial time, such as one hour of meditation each day, or every few days, or once a week.

### **Don't Forget**

Some meditation is better than no meditation. As with every spiritual practice, I suggest that you try different methods and schedules to see which ones work best for you.

Here are a few more suggestions for beginning your practice of meditation:

### **Consider meditating in the early morning because:**

- Your mind is usually quieter when you first awaken from sleep. You've just had a long rest and have also gone through deep inner states of consciousness, such as the dream state and what spiritual scriptures call the *deep sleep state*, where your mind is completely quiet and still.
- The world is most quiet early in the morning. Because your personal energy is connected with the energies around you, meditating in a quiet city or town can help ease you into a more peaceful state.
- The sun represents brightness and activity and affects your brain and internal rhythms. While the world is still dark or when the sun is just beginning to dawn, your mind is biologically programmed to be still.

## Consider

Whether in the morning or any other time, it is beneficial to meditate at the same time of day if possible, especially when you're first learning to meditate. Keeping a steady meditation schedule prepares your mind, body, and spirit to be in a meditative state during that time. Just as lunchtime brings inspiration to eat, so meditation time can bring the inspiration to meditate. Your mind is a creature of habit, so you may as well use that tendency for your benefit!

- **You may want to use a special set of clothes just for meditation, as well as a special meditation cushion or cloth to sit on.** Meditating in and on the same fabrics can help your meditation practice because when you meditate, the energy in and around your body becomes more spiritualized, concentrated, and powerful. Although this spiritual energy is invisible and not fully detectable by technological devices, you will likely be able to feel it moving in and around your body. This energy also permeates the clothes you wear and the seat you are using, giving them a special bath in your meditation energy. The peaceful spiritual energy of meditation that gathers in your clothes and seat helps you to glide more smoothly into meditation the next time.
- **If you have the means and space, you may want to set aside a special room or corner of a room where only meditation takes place.** Create your own holy space, either in a room or in the corner of a room. Your spiritual energy accumulates in that area and makes it easier for you to meditate. Meditating repeatedly in the same place is like putting your meditation energy in the bank — except in this case, your balance keeps growing the more you use it.
- **Meditate regularly.** If you wash your hands carefully with antibacterial soap and then go outside and touch unclean things, you can't say, "Well, I cleaned my hands extra carefully this morning, so they don't need more cleaning now." If you eat a big delicious meal and feel completely full, you can't just say, "Well, I'm full now, so I should never need to eat again." If you exercise regularly for a year and then stop exercising for ten years, your muscles will eventually lose their strength. In the same way, even though one meditation session can be greatly beneficial to your spiritual journey, you benefit most from meditation when you practice it regularly.
- **Consider meditating with a group of other meditators.** A room full of concentrated, quiet minds can help you keep your mind still for several reasons:
  - Meditating in a group inspires you to sit still, because you won't want to disturb anyone else's meditation by getting up or moving around.
  - A powerful energy permeates the atmosphere in a place where people are meditating. If you have a group of meditators sitting together — each creating and adding to this energy — the whole room fills with their spiritual energy, making it easier to absorb your mind into meditation.
  - Expert meditators have even more of this powerful meditation energy, and it's contagious. Therefore, meditating in the presence of expert meditators is a good idea.

## Be Careful

Even though meditation energies are contagious, don't get caught up in thinking about how much energy you're going to get from others. I know some who have gotten greedy for this meditation energy — and, of course, greed is not a quality you want to cultivate on your spiritual journey!

### What is flapping?

Four monks were meditating in a monastery. Suddenly, the prayer flag on the roof started flapping. The youngest monk came out of his meditation and said: "The flag is flapping."

A more experienced monk said: "The wind is flapping."

A third monk who had been there for more than 20 years said: "The mind is flapping."

The fourth monk, who was the eldest, said, visibly annoyed: "Mouths are flapping!"

### ***Sitting correctly when you meditate***

Sit still, either on a straight-backed chair with your feet on the floor, or with your legs crossed. Yogis usually suggest sitting in a cross-legged position for meditation. Cross-legged configurations help circulate the energy within your subtle system, making your body like a closed circuit. A lot of meditation energy leaves your body through your feet and hands, so crossing your legs helps to keep the energy from your feet moving back up into your body instead of moving out through the soles of your feet to dissipate into the air.

Personally, I prefer to sit in a posture called *half-lotus*, in which my legs are crossed, with one leg resting on top of the other, and one foot resting on top of the other thigh. Some limber folks are able to sit in what is called *full-lotus* posture, with their legs crossed and both feet on top.

If these fancy positions aren't your cup of tea, you can just sit in a regular cross-legged posture or perhaps kneel with your calves folded under you and your derriere resting either directly on your feet or on a pillow tucked between your seat and your feet. If sitting on the floor is difficult for you, you can also sit comfortably upright in a chair with both of your feet flat on the floor.

## Consider

If needed, you can sit on or support the small of your back with a pillow. You can even meditate while lying down in bed, although habit may bring you into a state of sleep instead of meditation.

When sitting for meditation, you want to keep your spine as straight as possible while staying relaxed and comfortable. The spiritual energy is said to move up through your spine, so a steady, straight, and relaxed posture can help create a good space for that energy to flow through your spine.

You may also want to touch your thumb of each hand to the first finger, which allows some of the energy that would normally flow out of your hands to circulate back inward, bathing your body in more of your own meditation energy and spiritual life force.

## Spirituality in Action

Try bringing the tips of your thumbs and first fingers together. See whether you can feel the increased energy flowing from your thumb into your first finger and vice-versa. Or you can bring the palms of your hands together in a prayer pose and feel the energy connect there.

If you want to quiet your mind during the day, you can meditate outside in nature or even on a bus, train, or at work (during a break! Signed, your boss). Adding short moments of peaceful pause to your day can help you integrate the benefits of meditation into your daily life.

One of the closest experiences many people have to meditation is when they take a short nap. You know how it feels to just settle down and relax your mind into that peaceful sea of your own inner consciousness during an afternoon nap?

If you're lucky, during a short nap, you'll experience that one moment of shift where your mind is reset and filled with new, vibrant energy. This shift is similar to an experience you can also have in meditation — where you may sit quietly for a whole hour just to experience that one precious moment of divine shift of spiritual rejuvenation.

## Be Careful

As with everything else, the key is moderation. You don't want to be extreme by meditating too much or your mind may become a little spacey. Let your practice develop gradually and naturally.

## **Spirituality in Action**

### **A global awareness meditation**

Sit quietly and contemplate all the things that are going on around the earth right now.

You may want to sit outside for this exercise so that you can hear the sounds of nature and feel the gentle rumble of the earth under your seat. Let your thoughts calm into a deep awareness of all that is happening on this planet.

Become gently aware of a world filled with people laughing, crying, yelling, loving, sleeping, dreaming, giving, and taking, with dogs barking, and wild animals killing, being killed, and loving and protecting their young. Remember all the insects, fish, animals, plants, and people that are working, sleeping, eating and starving, living and dying — all on this very earth upon which you sit quietly. Offer a prayer of blessings to the whole world from within your powerful state of meditation.