

# The 'How to' to Meditation

If you're not Meditating yet you will want to start soon. The benefits of Meditation, an ancient and global practice of concentration and prayer, are widely recognised from esotericism to "big" science. Meditation increased productivity, heals, and creates a deeper sense of enjoyment.

However, seeking out Meditation as a tool to increase peacefulness and mindfulness, yet without having a broad understanding to the how to meditate, the power and usefulness of this practice is often simplified and watered down.

Sit and observe your breath. Sit and don't think of anything.

Sound familiar? Whilst the beginner practitioner may not need to know and fully grasp the breadth of this practice, it is down to the teachers to carry an arsenal of practices with them to share, and ultimately emancipate the beginner to move towards a self sustainable and ever growing informed self-practice. Just as the specialised training of an olympic athlete rests on a solid foundation of generalised physical fitness, as well as specialised an continuous training, similarly we must take the practice of meditation beyond the introductory basics, which can be considered preparatory practices for the subtler meditations.

Patanjali, the man behind the institutionalisation of the Ashtanga Eight Limbs of Yoga, described nine reasons why a person may experience obstacles within their practice, never achieve or go beyond samadhi, or reverse engineer emotional issues and actually cause greater detriment to themselves.

These nine reasons are outlined here:

- 1 Sleep and lethargy. Lack of sleep leads to dullness. To prevent this, proper rest should be taken before meditation. In meditation, slowly overcome the desire for sleep by awareness, energy and enthusiasm.
- 2 Wandering of the mind. This happens because the mind is easily distracted. Either use willpower to concentrate on the object of meditation or use a mantra repeatedly to reduce the distracting mind.
- 3 Reluctance to practice regularly. This is due to tendencies and impressions in the unconscious mind. All past thoughts and tendencies are stored as seeds in the subconscious. In this state, the mind is neither sleepy nor restless. To counteract this read to inspire or listen to (devotional) music. Ultimately it is a practice and therefore needs to be done regularly to enhance the effects and increase the depth of the work. Perseverance and determination are important to overcome this obstacle.
- 4 Rasaasvada - getting caught in the pleasant experience of meditation, usually after having practiced for a while, and not wanting to progress into deeper or new unknown levels.
- 5 Disease. If the body is effected by disease and illness the mind gets disturbed and vice versa. A disturbed mind cannot meditate.
- 6 Lack of interest. Only with an understanding of the benefits of meditation, effort and determination can one overcome this obstacle.
- 7 Doubt about the efficacy or goal of yoga and meditation.
- 8 Lethargy and reluctance to give up sense pleasures and cravings.
- 9 Delusion and erroneous perception.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga as developed by Patanjali describe eight different practices, which together, enable the development into a person of steady wisdom or enlightenment.

Asana (physical yoga practice, pranayama (breath control and focus) and meditation are the three main categories of yogic techniques to achieve this.

One can break the 8 limbs down into two processes, the first being concerned with the skills and techniques to prepare for meditation and the second constituting proper meditation but with increasing levels of depth.

The first four constitute the Yamas (Values) and Niyamas (Observances), Asana (physical yoga practice and Pranayama (breath control and focus).

The second four constitute Pratyhara (disconnecting senses from objects), Dharana (concentration to object), Dhyana (meditation and awareness without a seed or object) and Samadhi (stages of enlightenment).

To be a person of steady wisdom, one must practice meditation on all emotions, thoughts and objects that create obstacles to one, rather than working on only one type of emotion and then preaching one has reached Samadhi. This is what is called a 'new age guru', someone who may have done lots of hours of work on one aspect of their personality however fails to understand that many other angles have not yet been developed.

There are seven main chakras within the body. A chakra is described as a place or wheel where energy can be stored, locked, or freed.

- 1 Root Chakra — Represents our foundation and feeling of being grounded.
- 2 Sacral Chakra. Our connection and ability to accept others and new experiences.
- 3 Solar Plexus Chakra — Our ability to be confident and in control of our lives.
- 4 Heart Chakra — Our ability to love
- 5 Throat Chakra — Our ability to communicate
- 6 Third Eye Chakra — Our ability to focus on and see the big picture
- 7 Crown Chakra — The highest chakra represents our ability to be fully connected spiritually

Those who feel meditation is effortless have raised the Kundalini energy, the energy we are looking to work with to develop a sense of enlightenment, to the higher chakras. Those who are often intercepted by desires, their energy is limited to the lower chakras. It's good practice to work from bottom upwards, unlocking one chakra after the other. There is research that suggests that it can be harmful to work on higher chakras if lower ones have not yet been dealt with. One needs to raise the Kundalini energy to the energy centre with the realisation that one seeks.

Yoga is a scientific method that does not leave to chance what fruit meditation will bring, but knows exactly how to produce the exact conditions that make the desired results more likely.

### Exercise one

Purification of the energy channels

### NADI SHODANA or ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

Sit upright, spine straight. Ideally in cross legged with the sole soles of the feet facing upwards. Beginners may practice on a chair with the feet on the floor.

Left hand rests on the left knee. Eyes open or ideally closed. Right hand only. Middle finger crosses over index finger and fingertips touch the space between eyebrows and nose back.

Right thumb blocks right nostril. Inhale through left nostril. Block left nostril with left pinky finger. Exhale through right nostril. Inhale right, block, exhale left. This is one round. Do three rounds.

Repeat 3 - 5 more further rounds and count 5 counts for the inhalation and exhalation.

Take a couple of deep belly breaths.

Repeat with internal and external breath retention. If this makes you feel dizzy return to taking deep belly breaths, or practice internal retention only.

Breath in left 5 counts. Close left nostril. Keep the breath in the chest for 5 - 10 counts. Open right nostril, exhale 5 counts. Keep the breath outside of the body, external retention, for 5 - 10 breaths.

### Exercise two

Body scan meditation - basic Vipassana (Vipassana is a Buddhist awareness meditation technique)

Sit upright. Spine straight. Ideally in cross legged with the sole soles of the feet facing upwards. Beginners may practice on a chair with the feet on the floor. Hands rest one on top of the other in the lap facing up, or on the knees facing down.

Focus your attention on the internal sensations. Is anything aching, sore or in pain? Spend some time with this area. If nothing is in pain focus your awareness on your natural breath at your nostrils.

Move your awareness down to your toes. Feel your feet against the floor. Feel your ankles and your calves. Notice your legs and what position they are in. Feel your hips, your bottom on the surface. Notice your belly expanding like a big balloon, or simply notice your breathing rhythm. Notice your chest, feel your shoulders and your arms. Notice your fingers. Sense your face and your eyes. Notice the crown of the head.

Gently open the eyes. Breathe gently. Notice your surroundings with avid interest.

### Exercise three

Bija Chakra awakening mantra meditation (sound of the chakras)

Repeat the following words silently in your mind, whilst focusing on specific areas in the body, the locations of the various chakras.

Sit upright. Spine straight. Ideally in cross legged with the sole soles of the feet facing upwards. Beginners may practice on a chair with the feet on the floor. Hands rest one on top of the other in the lap facing up, or on the knees facing down.

Bring your attention to the base of your spine, near your tailbone. The Root chakra is awoken with with the word LAM. Repeat it internally over and over during the inhalation and exhalation.

Bring your attention to the lower abdomen, about two inches below the navel and two inches in. The Sacral Chakra is located here. Repeat the word VAM on inhalation and exhalation.

Bring your attention to the upper abdomen in the stomach area, more towards the spine. The Solar Plexus Chakra is located here. Repeat on the inhalation and exhalation the word RAM.

Bring your attention to the Heart Chakra, in the centre of the chest. Repeat the word YAM on inhalation and exhalation.

Bring your attention to the throat, towards the spine. The Throat Chakra is connected with the word HAM. Repeat on the inhale and exhale.

Bring your attention to the forehead between the eyes, where eyebrows and back of the nose meet. This is the location of the Third Eye Chakra. Repeat the word OM.

The seventh chakra, located on the crown of the head, is also activated through the sound OM. Beware to keep the breath in the body and avoid sending it deeply into the head.

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