

Types of Meditation

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Mindfulness-Based Meditations

Mindfulness meditation is probably what you think about when you think of Buddhist meditation. In mindfulness practice, you rest in a patient awareness, tuning into your experience with recognition and present-time attention.

Insight. The purpose of meditation with mindfulness is to gain insight into the nature of reality. Specifically, we are to notice the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence, suffering, and not-self. Recall the Buddhist Psychological Model.

Open Awareness. Instead of focusing the attention on any one object, we keep it open, monitoring all aspects of our experience, without judgment or attachment. All perceptions, be them internal (thoughts, feelings, memory, etc.) or external (sound, smell, etc.), are recognized and seen for what they are. It is the process of non-reactive monitoring of the content of experience from moment to moment, without going into them. Examples are: Mindfulness meditation, Vipassana, as well as some types of Taoist Meditation (note, Taoist meditation (/ˈdaʊɪst/, /ˈtɑʊ-/), also spelled "Daoist" (/ˈdaʊ-/)) refers to the traditional meditative practices associated with the Chinese philosophy and religion of Taoism, including concentration, mindfulness, contemplation, and visualization).

Effortless Presence. Another quality central to meditation is effortless presence. It is the state where the attention is not focused on anything in particular, but reposes on itself – quiet, empty, steady, and introverted. We can also call it “Choiceless Awareness” or “Pure Being.” Most of the meditation quotes you find speak of this state.

This is actually the true purpose behind all kinds of meditation, and not a meditation type in itself. All traditional techniques of meditation recognize that the object of focus, and even the process of monitoring, is just a *means* to train the mind, so that effortless inner silence and deeper states of consciousness can be discovered. Eventually both the object of focus and the process itself is left behind, and there is only left the true self of the practitioner, as “pure presence.”

Mindfulness of Breath

Mindfulness of breath is just as it sounds: a type of meditation in which you practice awareness of the breathing. In this type of mindfulness meditation, you are using the breath in the body as the object of your awareness. This is another form of meditation that many people come to know pretty early in their meditation path. Focusing on the breath is a common practice used in secular settings and outside Buddhist meditation groups, and it is useful in daily life and any situation. It is important to understand there is a difference between mindfulness of breath and concentration practice.

Body Scanning

A body scan meditation is often one of the first types of meditation people find. It is used in secular settings, Buddhist groups, and yoga classes sometimes. In a body scan you move through the body slowly, paying attention closely to each part of the body and sensations present. It can be done seated or lying down, and you can return to the practice in daily life. This type of meditation is a useful technique for beginners as it keeps the mind somewhat occupied with changing stimulation. The body scan practice helps you bring mindfulness to what is arising and passing in the body, recognizing your personal present-time experience.

Open Awareness

Open awareness is a form of mindfulness practice in which you rest in a patient state of waiting for something to arise in your experience. It is a little less structured than a body scan or mindfulness of the breath, and may be more difficult for those new to meditation. However, this is the type of meditation that really helps cultivate the skill of mindfulness and recognition. You can start a period of open awareness practice with some mindfulness of breathing or a body scan, but you will open your awareness up to see what else is arising. Notice the thoughts, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings in the body, and sights. You notice the responses and reactions of the mind, the liking and disliking of experiences, and the impermanent nature of experience.

Vipassana

Vipassana is a practice that is believed to have come from the Buddha himself, and has regained popularity in the West in the last century with S.N. Goenka and his vipassana centers. Vipassana practices start with focusing on the breath, most often at the tip of the nose or inside the nostrils. Eventually, you open up to other experiences arising and passing, returning to the sensation of the body breathing. Where vipassana becomes a unique type of meditation is in the noting. Mental noting is the practice of saying to yourself in your head what is arising or passing. If you notice a sound, you note “hearing.” If you recognize a thought is present, you note “thinking.” The object that is the focus of the practice (for instance, the movement of the abdomen) is called the “primary object.” And a “secondary object” is anything else that arises in your field of perception – either through your five senses (sound, smell, itchiness in the body, etc.) or through the mind (thought, memory, feeling, etc.). If a secondary object hooks your attention and pulls it away, or if it causes desire or aversion to appear, you should focus on the secondary object for a moment or two, labeling it with a mental note, like “thinking,” “memory,” “hearing,” “desiring.” This practice is often called “noting.”

A mental note identifies an object in general but not in detail. When you are aware of a sound, for example, label it “hearing” instead of “motorcycle,” “voices” or “barking dog.” If an unpleasant sensation arises, note “pain” or “feeling” instead of “knee pain” or “my back pain.” Then return your attention to the primary meditation object. When aware of a fragrance, say the mental note “smelling” for a moment or two. You don’t have to identify the scent.

When one has thus gained “access concentration,” the attention is then turned to the object of practice, which is normally thought or bodily sensations. One observes the objects of awareness without attachment, letting thoughts and sensations arise and pass away of their own accord. Mental labeling (explained above) is often used as a way to prevent you from being carried away by thoughts, and keep you in more objectively noticing them.

As a result, one develops the clear seeing that the observed phenomena is pervaded by the three “marks of existence”: impermanence (*annica*), insatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and emptiness of self (*annata*). As a result, equanimity, peace and inner freedom is developed in relation to these inputs.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is an important practice in Buddhism and many other traditions. Like sitting meditation, you focus the mind on an object and notice when the mind wanders. The only difference is that your body is moving. You may focus on the breath, on phrases of loving-kindness, or on the sensation of the body moving through space. It is an integral practice for many Buddhists across the world. Monks and nuns regularly practice walking meditation at monasteries, and you will find periods of walking meditation on many retreats.

Concentration Meditations

Focusing the attention on a single object during the whole meditation session. This object may be the breath, a mantra, visualization, part of the body, external object, etc. As the practitioner advances, his ability to keep the flow of attention in the chosen object gets stronger, and distractions become less common and short-lived. Both the depth and steadiness of his attention are developed.

Concentration Meditation

Concentration is a practice rooted deeply in the Buddhist teachings, as the Buddha himself sat in concentration quite often (according to suttas). In case the name does not make it obvious, this is a type of meditation in which we cultivate the ability to focus. There are many different ways to practice concentration meditation, but the most common is by focusing on the breath in one spot in the body. When the mind wanders, you bring it back. It takes time to build concentration, but each time you meditate you are strengthening the mental muscle. You can also build concentration working with sounds, phrases of metta, or any other object of awareness.

Zazen

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism have unique practices, and this is one of them. Zazen is of the Zen tradition, and is a practice that is dependent upon studying (as all meditation really should be). In zazen meditation, you focus on the breath and allow thoughts to come and go. They will subside naturally. Although this technique is very similar to concentration practices of other traditions, zazen is a bit more structured. Different traditions have specific postures, mudras of the hands, and ways to practice. You may find instructions to sit with eyes open, to breathe through the mouth, or to count the breaths.

As to the mind aspect of it, it's usually practiced in two ways:

- Focusing on breath — focus all your attention on the movement of the breath going in and out through the nose. This may be aided by counting the breath in your mind. Each time you inhale you count one number, starting with 10, and then moving backward to 9, 8, 7, etc. When you arrive in 1, you resume from 10 again. If you get distracted and lose your count, gently bring back the attention to 10 and resume from there.
- Shikantaza (“just sitting”) — in this form the practitioner does not use any specific object of meditation; rather, practitioners remain as much as possible in the present moment, aware of and observing what passes through their minds and around them, without dwelling on anything in particular. It's a type of *Effortless Presence* meditation

Heartfulness Meditations

Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)

Metta is a Pali word that is often translated as loving-kindness or gentle friendliness. It is one of the traditional heart practices in Buddhism, and is the cultivation of a kind, gentle, and caring heart. You can think of metta as the simple quality of wishing well for others (and yourself) in your life. This is done through a practice called loving-kindness meditation. There are many ways to cultivate loving-kindness, but the most popular is done through the repetition of phrases. A form of samatha meditation, this is a practice that calms the mind, focuses our intentions, and slowly opens the heart to care for beings. “May you be well. May you be happy. May you be Peaceful and at Ease.” Say this to self, loved-one, neutral person, difficult person, whole room, larger area/city, and the all beings.

Compassion Meditation

Compassion is another of the heart practices, and the actual technique is similar to metta practice. It is useful to address our relationship to difficulties and judgement from the beginning. In compassion meditation, you use phrases to cultivate a mind and heart that can tend to the moments of pain and difficulty with care. You can think of compassion as what happens when loving-kindness comes into contact with suffering. It is a form of meditation that can help us in practice when difficult moments arise, and in our daily lives as we face problems and pains. Consider Kristen Neff and her Self-Compassion Meditation- Soften, Soothe, Allow- it offers a way to acknowledging and being with the feeling in self or others, know that we all struggle in this way.

Appreciative Joy

The next type of meditation is another heart practice. Known as mudita, this is what happens when metta comes into contact with joy and happiness. We cultivate the ability to rejoice in the happiness of others and appreciate the joy in life. Rather than falling into envy or judgement, we open the heart to mindfully take in the happiness others experience. This again is done through the repetition of phrases and focused attention. As with other heart practices, you may not always feel loving and kind while doing it. However, you continue to practice, cultivating this intention to open the heart. These types of meditation that use phrases are not a quick-fix (no kind of meditation is), and it takes time.

Equanimity Practice

The final heart practice we have is equanimity. Equanimity is the quality of mind and heart which remain stable, especially when presented with emotional or strong experiences. With equanimity, we remain mindful and present, and do not get knocked off balance. This takes cultivation, but over time we are able to meet experiences with a patient wisdom. In equanimity meditation, we use phrases to recognize our own power to choose how we meet experiences. Rather than trying to control others or outside circumstances, we recognize that we have limited control.

Tonglen

Tonglen meditation comes from the Tibetan tradition of meditation. It is a type of meditation that helps us see with compassion and let go of our own difficulties. Traditionally, you breathe in the sadness and darkness from the world around you and offer out your wishes of love and kindness. You recognize that others are suffering, perhaps in a similar way as you. The practice of tonglen

is about giving and receiving. Traditionally, we are cultivating a heart that cares for the pain and suffering in the world, and meeting it with our own compassionate care.

Forgiveness Meditation

Forgiveness meditation is often included in Buddhist circles and groups, but is not a traditional heart practice. Like the other heart practices, you can use phrases to cultivate a mind and heart inclined toward forgiving. Teachers like Jack Kornfield and Sharon Salzberg encourage forgiveness practice. It can be deeply useful in working with the judgements and resentments. Forgiveness takes time, and we may not be ready to forgive in this moment. We continue to cultivate a slow opening, and allow ourselves to journey along the path rather than wishing for immediate forgiveness.

Mantra and Sound-Based Meditations

A *mantra* is a syllable or word, or sentence. Some meditation teachers believe that both the choice of word, and its correct pronunciation, is very important, due to the “vibration” associated with the sound and meaning, and that for this reason an initiation into it is essential. Others say that the mantra itself is only a tool to focus the mind, and the chosen word is completely irrelevant.

Mantras are used in Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions (especially Tibetan and “Pure Land” Buddhism), as well as in Jainism, Sikhism and Daoism (Taoism). Some people call mantra meditation “om meditation”, but that is just one of the mantras that can be used. A more devotion oriented practice of mantras is called *japa*, and consists of repeating sacred sounds (name of God) with love.

Here are some of the most well-known mantras from the Hindu & Buddhist traditions:

- Om (everything and everyone)
- so-ham (I am she/he/that or one with universe)
- om namah shivaya (honoring the divinity within me)
- om mani padme hum (from mud to lotus)
- rama (pause, witness, make evident; remove fear, promote harmony and success)
- yam (sound of the heart chakra, purify the heart)
- ham (throat chakra, voice; empowers physical and spiritual voice)

You may practice for a certain period of time, or for a set number of “repetitions” – traditionally 108 or 1008. In the latter case, beads are typically used for keeping count.

As the practice deepens, you may find that the mantra continues “by itself” like the humming of the mind. Or the mantra may even disappear, and you are left in a state of deep inner peace.

How to use a Mala. <https://youtu.be/SX5XTiHU580>

Primordial Sound Meditation (PSM)

PSM is a silent practice that uses a mantra. The mantra you receive is the vibrational sound the universe was creating at the time and place of your birth. It is calculated following Vedic mathematic formulas and is very personal and specific to you. Repeating your personal mantra silently helps you to enter deeper levels of awareness by taking you away from the intellectual side of the brain. The focus is on comfort, and PSM is generally practiced sitting down. Dr. Deepak Chopra and Dr. David Simon founded this method. This is the method of meditation taught at the Chopra Center and by Chopra Center certified instructors all over the world.

Transcendental Meditation

Founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1950s, Transcendental Meditation (TM), made popular by famous followers like the Beatles, uses a mantra or series of Sanskrit words to help the practitioner focus during meditation in lieu of just following breath. The mantra given to the student will vary according to a number of different factors, including the year in which the student was born and in some cases their gender. The year in which the teacher was trained will also affect the mantra provided. The teacher will have been given a list of mantras to use and this list varies depending on which year they received their instruction. TM is a seated meditation. In Transcendental Meditation, you practice by repeating a mantra for periods of 20 minutes, twice a day. You receive your mantra and training by attending a course, which is taught in a series of seven steps.

Chanting Practices

There are chanting meditation practices in many different traditions. In some traditions, such as Pure Land Buddhism, a specific mantra is chanted repeatedly. In others, sacred texts are chanted together by followers. Chanting offers a form of present-time awareness that utilizes hearing, speaking, and feeling in the body. It is another way to cultivate intention and be present. You can find chanting practices in Nichiren Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, some forms of Theravada Buddhism, and some Tibetan practices.

Self-Inquiry | Who am I?

Self-Inquiry is the English translation for the Sanskrit term *atma vichara*. It means to “investigate” our true nature, to find the answer to the “Who am I?” question, which culminates with the intimate knowledge of our true Self, our true being. We see references to this meditation in very old Indian texts; however, it was greatly popularized and expanded upon by the 20th-century Indian sage Ramana Maharshi (1879~1950).

The modern non-duality movement (or *neo-advaita*), which is greatly inspired in his teachings – as well as those of Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897~1981) and Papaji – strongly uses this technique and variations. Many contemporary teachers to employ this technique, the most famous ones being Mooji (whom I have personally been with and recommend), Adyashanti, and Eckhart Tolle.

This practice is very simple, but also very subtle. When explaining it, however, it may sound very abstract. Your sense of “I” (or “ego”) is the center of your universe. It is there, in some form or another, behind all your thoughts, emotions, memories, and perceptions. Yet we are not clear about what this “I” is – about who we truly are, in essence – and confuse it with our body, our mind, our roles, our labels. It’s the biggest mystery in our lives.

With Self-Inquiry, the question “Who I am?” is asked within yourself. You must reject any verbal answers that may come, and use this question simply as a tool to fix your attention in the subjective feeling of “I” or “I am”. Become one with it, go deep into it. This will then reveal your true “I”, your real self as pure consciousness, beyond all limitation. It is not an intellectual pursuit, but a question to bring the attention to the core element of your perception and experience: the “I”. This is not your personality, but a pure, subjective, feeling of existing – without any images or concepts attached to it.

Whenever thoughts/feelings arise, you ask yourself, “To whom does this arise?” or “Who is aware of _____ (anger, fear, pain, or whatever)?” The answer will be “It is me!” From then you ask “Who am I?” to bring the attention back to the subjective feeling of self, of presence. It is pure existence, objectless and choice-less awareness.

Another way of explaining this practice is to just focus the mind on your feeling of being, the non-verbal “I am” that shines inside of you. Keep it pure, without association with anything you perceive.

With all other types of meditation, the “I” (yourself) is focusing on some object, internal or external, physical or mental. In self-enquiry, the “I” is focusing on itself, the subject. It is the attention turned towards its source. There is no special position to practice, although the general suggestions about posture and environment are helpful for beginners.

Visualization Practices

Visualization Practices

In visualization practices, you are using the power of the mind to bring forth a situation, scenario, or experience to work with. Many forms of non-religious meditation use visualization practices to help manifest outcomes and desires. Whether you are visualizing a past experience that was difficult or your dream vacation, visualization offers a way to bring up specific experiences. There are also visualization practices used by psychotherapists and Buddhist meditation teachers. Tara Brach is a wonderful example, using visualization practices with her metta and compassion practices to help stimulate the mind and specific emotions. It is a technique that works especially well for people who think visually. You can find Tara’s meditations on her website, where some offer visualization in the meditation.

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Reference Web Pages

<https://oneminddharma.com/types-of-meditation/>

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