

# Meditation: Is That Sitting and Contemplating My Navel?

Long, long ago, when I was a freshman in college, my sister came to visit me for a weekend. During her stay, in my dorm room, she mediated. Coming from a family in which this was not the norm, I observed from a respectful distance. Curiosity got the better of me and I asked her about it. Luckily she was available to tell me what she was doing and why. This simple, short exchange of information, changed my life. She did not sell me anything or even talk very much about it. She didn't proclaim the benefits of meditation or give me a lengthy description. All I knew was that I wanted some.

Two years later I paid what was a lot of money to me to learn the TM (Transcendental Meditation) method of meditation. Thirty years later I realize that investment in my health, wellness and spiritual development was a bargain. TM is a mantra method of meditation. To put it simply, the trainee is given a mantra (Sanskrit healing sound or words) and taught how to meditate, by sitting still, with eyes closed and repeating the mantra to themselves for 20 minutes, 2 times a day.

My first experience meditating was one of bliss. I felt like I had come home to something that I didn't know I had been away from. I felt like I had come home to something that was as right as rain. I felt like I had come home to something that was as natural as breathing, and as pleasant as heaven. I felt safe when I was meditating. I felt whole. I felt indescribable quiet joy. I felt connected to all living things. I felt peaceful, grounded and transcendent, simultaneously.

Needless to say, I was a convert and I have quietly been meditating daily ever since. Over the years we learned many other meditation techniques, from good teachers, from books, by attending meditation classes and groups and even discovering new methods of my own while meditating.

The practice of meditation effects the mind, body, emotions and spirit. There really is no goal to meditation, it is in the practice of it that the benefits manifest. Meditation is simply being present in the moment, in a structured way. Quietly allowing thoughts to drift in and out, not holding on to any one. Just allowing your breath to breathe you, without judgment.

In ancient times there wasn't a word for meditation. It was simply called sitting. Sitting, breathing, eyes closed, allowing, sitting, breathing, eyes closed, allowing. The formal methods and practices came later. The paradox is that the human mind needs something to hold on to while it is letting go! By using a method, either a breath technique or a mantra method, a guided imagery technique or a mindfulness practice, the mind is given a task to do. It is within this concentration experience that the benefits start. Yet even after your meditation practice is complete for the day, the benefits go on and on and on, for minutes, hours, days and years.

Over the decades I have learned a wide variety of meditation techniques that can be used anytime and anywhere. We don't always have the time and place to formally meditate. Yet as a meditator you always have your breath and simply by changing how you breathe, you can create a relaxation response, anytime and anywhere. I am famous for my STOP sign meditating. When I am at a stop sign, while driving, I actually stop, exaggerate my inhalation and say to myself as I breathe in, "I breathe in peace." As I exhale I exaggerate it and I say to myself, "I breathe out peace." I drive through the intersection seconds later mellowed and rejuvenated.

by Adair Wilson Heitmann

Meditation is different for everyone and every meditation experience is different. When some of my students first start to meditate they report they feel like their skin is crawling, others start to cry, while others report a sensation of floating or an awareness of wisdom or grace. Let me repeat, everyone is different and each time you meditate, it is different. Even after meditating all these years, my mind can sometimes race for 19 of the 20 minutes I meditate. I can be distracted and I can constantly watch the clock. Yet I know from experience that I am a different person after I meditate. I am more responsive in life, I have more perspective, I am happier, funnier, I can roll with the flow more and my problem solving ability and creative inspiration is off the charts.

By practicing meditation we can lower our blood pressure, relieve pain, and oxygenate the blood which allows the body's natural opiates, endorphins to enter the blood stream, thus facilitating natural healing. By practicing meditation we allow ourselves the space to really feel our feelings, even if those emotions are sad, mad, glad or scared. In meditation we don't suppress or deny these feelings, we effortlessly allow them their space. In meditation we don't attempt to fix anything, we allow ourselves to be. Just the other day, I went into meditation angry. I didn't attempt to change that and yet after meditating I had more clarity on the situation, my part in it and the other person involved. I also noticed that my rage had reduced and I was in a more conscious position to deal with everything.

Meditation is the art of sublime relaxation. The practice of it feeds your soul. You become clearer, more alive, more resourceful and healthier in mind, body, emotions and spirit. Meditation is easy, it is the commitment to the act of practicing it that so many people have trouble with. Some people have said that meditation doesn't work for them. The fact is that meditation works, every time you meditate, even if you are distracted, meditation works. The key is to practice it.

If you are interested in learning more about mediation, I recommend the following books: "The Joy Within", by Joan Goldstein and Manuela Soares; "The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation", by Joel and Michelle Levey; and "Touching Peace", by Thich Nhat Hanh. You can also look for meditation classes and groups. Every teacher will be different, so ask questions on the telephone up front. Some teachers will teach only one style of meditation, while others teach a variety of techniques. Some classes are in ashrams, others are at your local wellness center. The benefit of learning and practicing meditation in a class gives you the opportunity to ask questions, learn by observing others and be in a gathering of like-minded people. Sometimes finding a meditation instructor who offers private individual sessions that can be customized just for you is the way to go. We live in a time and an area where we have a plethora of meditation information and techniques to choose from. Find one, practice it, let go and enjoy the ride!

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