

Introduction to Meditation

This document is a short introduction on meditation and includes:

- Very Brief History
- What is Meditation
- Types of Meditation
- Benefits of Meditation

Very Brief History:

- Hindu Veda teachings going back to 3000 years before Christ, record the use of meditation.
- Meditation has been part of Hindu and Asian cultures for thousands of years.
- Buddha became “awake” through meditation during his lifetime between 563 BCE – 480 BCE. Buddhist meditation is primarily split into two schools:
 - **Theravada:** Students do not focus on being bodhisattvas, or beings who vow to return to the human realm in order to help other beings achieve liberation (e.g. Dalai Lama). Theravada schools put more focus on the individual obtaining insight, mindfulness, and being awake.
 - **Mahayana:** In this tradition mindfulness, concentration, and compassion practice are also common. However, the concept of the bodhisattva is important. For many it is the sole goal of practice. People take bodhisattva vows, work toward the liberation of all beings, and may pray or make offerings to non-historical bodhisattvas.
- Meditation has only become known and more widespread in Western cultures in the last 100 years.
- 1967 the Beatles went to India to practice meditation with Maharishi Yogi. From that interaction, awareness of meditation became much more widespread in western cultures.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is a “present” moment experience. It is a vehicle to become more aware of self and everything around us. Although we may have goals, directions and aspirations, meditation practice is focused on the moment we are in and not the promise of the future or remembrances of the past. When we can be in the present moment, we are on our path to understanding, calmness, and peace. Meditation is a technique to assist in the re-discovery of these mind states and being more in touch with one’s own consciousness and body.

Krishnamurti said: “Meditation is one of the most extraordinary things, and if you do not know what it is you are like the blind man in a world of bright color, shadows and moving light. It is not an intellectual affair, but when the heart enters into the mind, the mind has quite a different quality; it is really, then, limitless, not only in its capacity to think, to act efficiently, but also in its sense of living in a vast space where you are part of everything.”

He also said: “Meditation is the movement of love...”

Types of Meditation

There are many different types and forms of meditation. Many of them reside, in some form or another, in spiritual and religious practices. There are 6 basic types of mediation they are:

- **Concentration**
 - Counting
 - Mantra (TM)
 - Visual (image or object like a candle)
 - Sound
- **Mindfulness (Awareness)**
 - Insight (Vipassana)
 - Contemplation (Question or Koan)
- **Meditations of Motion**
 - Tai Chi
 - Qi Gong
 - Chi Neng
 - Walking Meditation
 - Eating Meditation
 - Some forms and aspects of yoga
- **Guided (Transports the person through a “story” of sorts)**
 - Loving Kindness
 - Actual or ethereal story
- **Transformational (Solution based)**
- **Prayerful (Usually found in religious groups/contexts)**

Benefits of Meditation

The benefits of meditation come over time. Many people experience some changes right away, but deep and profound effects are generally noticed years down the line.

Among other things, meditation has the benefit of reducing stress and increasing mindfulness of actions over time through the quality of allowing oneself to be fully present to ourselves in any given moment. The benefits listed below have come from medical, empirical, and experiential studies.

Benefits of Meditation are:

- **Physiological**
 - Decreased metabolic rate, lower heart rate, and reduced workload on the heart.
 - Lower levels of cortisol (the so-called stress hormone) and lactate, two chemicals associated with stress.
 - Decrease in blood pressure.
 - Drop in cholesterol levels.
 - Higher skin resistance (lower skin resistance has been correlated with higher stress and anxiety levels).
 - Assists with pain management.
 - Reduction of free radicals which are unstable oxygen molecules that can cause tissue damage.
 - Improved airflow to the lungs.
 - Decreases the aging process.
- **Psychological**
 - Enhanced depth, quality, and texture of present awareness.
 - Increased brain wave coherence.
 - Greater creativity.
 - Improved memory and learning ability.
 - Increased self-actualization.
 - Increased feelings of vitality and rejuvenation.
 - Decreased anxiety.
 - Decreased depression.
 - Decreased irritability and moodiness.

- Increased happiness.
- Increased emotional stability.
- **Spiritual Benefits**
 - Increased and deeper compassion.
 - Increased desire for self-awareness.
 - Increased interest in the realm of spirituality.
 - Increased understanding and self-acceptance.

Qualities and Foundations of Meditation

Qualities:

All meditation traditions and forms share the following qualities:

1. **Attention:** The ability to establish ourselves in the present moment with focus and simplicity.
2. **Awareness:** The ability to develop a consciousness that is light, unburdened, sensitive and clear.
3. **Understanding:** The ability to understand the forces that move us in our actions, speech, relationships, and beliefs to gain deeper wisdom.
4. **Compassion:** The ability to not be narcissistic or self-interested. Compassion is the foundation on which we build Love, integrity, and respect into our daily lives.
5. **Mindfulness:** Is being aware of your present moment with the heart and mind as one. You are not judging, reflecting or thinking. You are simply observing the moment in which you find yourself. Moments are like a breath. Each breath is replaced by the next breath. You're there with no other purpose than being awake and aware of that moment.

Foundations:

John Kabat-Zinn defines 7 Foundations when practicing Meditation:

1. **Non-judging:** Mindfulness is cultivated by being an impartial witness to your own experience.
2. **Patience:** Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time.
3. **Beginner's Mind:** To see things as they are, many who practice meditation cultivate "beginner's mind". Beginner's mind is the quality of seeing everything as if for the first time.

4. **Trust:** Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation. Buddha said, “Trust your own deepest experience.”
5. **Non-striving:** In almost everything we do in our lives is for a purpose. In meditation this attitude of striving can be a real obstacle. Just watch. We are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is.
6. **Acceptance:** Acceptance means seeing things as they are in the present. Acceptance does not mean you have to like everyone and everything and that you have a passive attitude, abandoning your principles and values. Acceptance as we are speaking of means that you have come to a willingness to see things as they are and can then act appropriately.
7. **Letting go:** If we pay attention to our inner experience, we quickly discover that there are thoughts and feelings our minds want to hold on to. With good thoughts we keep the story going because we enjoy what we think. And with unpleasant experiences we sometimes bring them up over and over again thinking about what we could have done differently to make it a good experience. (An example of letting go is when we sleep, we let go just as we fall asleep).