
Meditation Techniques and Practices

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There are many different meditation techniques. But, what comes to your mind when you hear the word meditation?

Possibly someone promoting some evangelical adherence to an Eastern form of mysticism?

Perhaps someone promoting vegetarianism?

Or maybe someone sitting in an uncomfortable position and turning off from the world?

A way to drop out perhaps?

Or a way to rip off the gullible by dressing up snake-oil nonsense in a cloak of respectability by associating it with an ancient wisdom? You can be forgiven for that.

Is this your idea of meditation?

Perhaps you are not so cynical and see it as a means to attain some form of insight or spirituality, but feel that it's just not for you?

Put these thoughts aside. In a sense, this is your first practice of mindfulness.

Learning and using meditation techniques is simply a skill but is an important part of mindfulness.

Mediation Traditions

The various meditation traditions that exist can be divided into four broad categories.

Concentration meditation where the aim is to provide your mind with greater calm, stability and clarity so that problems such as confusion, anxiety and lack of attention are overcome.

- In contrast, if you just let your mind wander freely then you will have very limited mental capacity to address issues and challenges.

Reflective Meditation, also described as contemplation. In this approach you choose an idea, situation, or question and focus your contemplation on it.

- The basic premise is that your ability to develop insights rests on your ability to direct your

attention repeatedly to your chosen theme and to be open to whatever arises in your mind from that experience.

Creative meditation which aims to transform and apply the habits of the mind with greater efficiency by developing and strengthening particular qualities.

- The premise is that by bringing desirable emotionally charged images into our awareness a practitioner can exercise productive control over our imagination and influence the positive qualities of our mind.
- However, meditation, or simply thinking about something, is not going to achieve the outcomes you desire.

Mindfulness Meditation which aims to create a state of awareness in and of the present moment.

- It requires that your mind is relaxed and conscious of your experience, including thoughts and feelings, along with sensations and breathing.
- In this state you accept everything with an attitude of non-resistance and equanimity. You accept what you find because it is.
- No further analysis is required.
- You experience everything fully without self-criticism or clinging to your personal identity and importance.

Different Meditation Techniques

There are a number of meditation techniques. Among the types you may encounter are:

- **Sitting quietly** with the aim of quieting your mind. In some respects this can be the simplest form of meditation, but you may need an aid such as background music or a quiet setting to help.
- **Mantra meditation** is the practice that many in the west most closely associate with meditation. This approach uses a word, a phrase, or a sound to provide a focus for the mind. This may be repeated aloud or in the mind.
- **Mandala meditation** where the sound is replaced by an object, usually a picture or a symbol, which acts as the focus. The object can take different forms, either simple or elaborate, and may be placed either in front of the person or simply called to mind as a mental image.
- **Breathing meditation**, where the action of the breath is used as a point of mental focus. This may include some minor quieting or deepening of the breath, but this is usually just an associated effect.
- **Pranayama meditation** where a set of practices are used to directly manipulate the breath. This can impact the pH and oxygenation level of the blood, resulting in an altered state of consciousness
- **Visualization meditation** which covers a wide range of practices, such as seeing tension leaving

the body part at a time to practices that imagine the physical body dissolving or becoming filled with energy and light.

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Mindfulness and the Present

What distinguishes mindfulness mediation, also known as Vipassana, it is that the person pays close attention to their thoughts.

Be clear that this is not simply setting aside quiet time to ‘think about things’.

One aim of this focused awareness is that those thoughts cease to be of any importance.

The main techniques include awareness of breathing and sitting quietly, but there is never any aim to control the breathing or to visualize a different place or setting to the present and familiar.

Notice immediately that there is no aim in mindfulness mediation to get away from the reality of modern living, as might be the case with reflective meditation. Indeed, it is exactly the opposite.

Above all else, this is the reason why mindfulness is so amenable to being integrated into modern lifestyles and being used to improve performance in work situations.