



Meditation

Introduction

Anyone looking at these pages may or may not have an idea of what meditation is all about, this is why the following text introduces the practice of meditation from a more balanced point of view without any obscure jargon and mystery.

To begin with it is valuable to introduce meditation by firstly defining it, what the word actually means. This I believe offers valuable insight to the simplicity of what meditation actually is.

What is meditation?

The dictionary definition of the word meditation is 'thought', 'absorption of thought' and 'religious contemplation'. The word meditation is a noun that is based on the root word 'med' which means 'to attend to' and 'tion' means the 'the condition of'. Thus meditation means to attend to the condition of, in other words it is the art of paying attention.

So essentially we are looking at a process or practice of paying attention. The process is basically to assume a comfortable position allowing our mind and body to reach a state of natural stillness. It is not, however, enough to just relax, although this is very important, what we are really aiming for with meditation is to still the mind to achieve a state of mental clarity. And by clarity I mean developing the ability to completely clear your mind of stray or intruding thoughts.

It is also important to recognise that meditation although practiced by many religions, is not solely a religious practice. Despite religious deference I have discovered that most, if not all, religions, define meditation the same way.

Christian's meditation is to achieve oneness with God through the shedding thought. Within Jewish traditions they believe that the purpose of Judeo cultivation is to attain the state of emptiness.

In Zen Buddhism the word "Zen" means be nothing, think nothing. In the Ancient Indian technique of Vipassana meditation, Vipassana means to see things as they really are.

These are just a few examples but as you can see they all have the same tone to their objective of meditation.

Why meditate?

To achieve a state of mental and physical stillness we must as a simple question, why? What is the point, after all why meditation if we do not understand how it can help us?

Healing meditation

Perhaps we could consider the practice of meditation as a process of healing, mental healing? After all, the mind lies at the root of all the we experience, everything that is good and everything that is not so good. And because our mind can be filled with so much information from either the past or the present, which is in need of understanding we should really take the time to allow our mind the opportunity to sort through these thoughts. As life is a series of problems to be solved, ask yourself the question, do you allow yourself the time to truly think about the problem then apply the solution?

If we look at modern life in western society we soon start to realise that life as we know it is lived at a very fast pace not only that, in our quest to be a part of that society we have become strangers to ourselves. We have all be paying too much attention to the world around us, that we know nothing of the world within us.

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The biggest culprits that clutter the mind are fears, stresses and anxieties, which are basically accumulated fears. When the mind is in a state of stress, we cannot think straight, our decision making process is erratic and our ability to understand is greatly reduced.

How meditation can help physically

So how can meditation help us physically? Firstly I would like to take a look at physical health and what causes us to experience 'ill health'. If we look at the human body from a holistic point of view it is better to see ourselves as mind, body and spirit and especially when it comes to ill health and its affects. So what are some of the causes of ill health? Most scientific research point to one major culprit in terms of physical ill health and that is stress. 95% of all illness both mentally and physically is caused by stress. If we learn how to meditate we can begin to readdress the issues of imbalance that causes stress and thus minimise the onset of ill health

So how can a simple meditation help? When we meditate we actively reduce the levels of these stress hormones cortisol and lactate, enabling the body to manage them better. Meditation also helps the body to naturally heal itself, improving the production of 'T' cells and our white blood cells, which protect us from disease.

The simple practice of meditation has also been used extensively in scientific research to help sufferers of AIDS and HIV, asthma, improving airflow in the lungs, cancer, sufferers of high blood pressure and dependant drug users. It has also been used to:

- To decrease our heart rate and to increase our blood flow
- Meditation has helped heart patients increase their exercise tolerance
- It can lead to a deeper state of relaxation, reduce anxiety, decrease muscle tension,
- Help chronic disease like allergies and arthritis.
- It can help with postoperative healing, and reduce the activity of emotional distress.

The list of the physical benefits of meditation is never ending and these are just a few of the benefits to our physical health.

Meditation and spirituality

We have looked at how meditation can benefit us mentally and well and physically but what about spiritually, after all meditation is associated mostly with some form of religious or spiritual practice.

As I mentioned earlier, most, if not all spiritual and religious practices use meditation in some form or another and it is for the purpose of spiritual development or enlightenment.

For those who wish to walk the spiritual path, spirituality is more than just a belief, it is a way of life, it is the long journey of self discovery and the road to cultivating inner peace and oneness with the universe.

But we need to make room for our spiritual realization to blossom and so we need to clear the mind and prepare the way for insight and enlightenment. Thus meditation has been adopted as the necessary tool to bring calm to the mind.

How to meditate

Now that we have looked at some of the various applications of meditation and what meditation is we will now look at how to meditate.

For many people who have never meditated before some of their first concerns are usually are ones that are related to stress and fear. Questions start to filter into the mind:

Am I doing it properly?

Is the person next to me better at it than I am?

I am experiencing the right thing?

What will I experience?

What am I supposed to feel?

There are many more questions that can cloud the mind so it is a good idea to firstly let the mind and the body relax together and come back into balance. We may also have to take into consideration that we had a particularly hard day at work or at home and find our minds racing with too many thoughts. So to begin with as a prelude to the meditation it is a good idea to start with a simple and effective relaxation technique. It is important not to force your self to relax, just let it happen.

The setting

The first place to start is to set the mood and ensure that you will not be disturbed for about 15-30 mins max. To help with the ambience you may find it more comfortable to slightly darken the room and light some candles. You may wish to use some essential oils in a burner or light some incense.

Posture

Some people prefer sitting in a chair, and some people find it more comfortable to adopt a more traditional posture using a stool or a cushion. What matters the most is that you are comfortable. It may be worthwhile to avoid lying down to meditate; although this may seem more comfortable there is the possibility that you might fall asleep, which is not meditating.

If you are sitting in a chair it is a good idea to keep your spine straight, and airways open. Slouching in a chair can cause you to become uncomfortable and again you may begin to fall asleep.

You can also place your hands in a variety of positions, which ever you choose ensure that you feel comfortable.

Breathing (Focus)

By focusing on your breathing you will naturally allow your mind to begin calming down, breathing also acts as a natural point of focus to draw the attention away from your thought, thus helping your mind to calm down. And controlling your breathing will allow your body to find its natural physical state of rest. Just allow yourself to breathe naturally. Soon enough your body will also begin to relax as the mind relaxes. Just continue to breathe and relax, breathe and relax.

Not only does meditation calm the mind down, it also help us to become more alert, strange, as it may seem. What is actually happening during meditation in our brain is that the blood flow has increased. So in a state of relaxation we are actually more alert, which makes you less reactive to stressful events.

The meditation

There are a number of different meditation styles, some are silent meditations, and some are moving meditations like Tai Chi And Chi Qong, while some are guided meditations. The meditation that we are going to do today will be a guided meditation with some background music to set the mood.

Summary

Meditation is a natural, healthy way to allow the mind and the body to heal itself and to restore balance. It is simple and easy to integrate into our daily lives, we do not have to over complicate the act of meditation with ritual or pomp, simple take some time out of your day to enjoy a moments silence that will help us get back in touch with ourselves and hopefully to help us reconnect with life in a way that we never thought possible.

What you may experience

Tingling throughout the body

A sensation of warmth in the hands

You may see colours or images

Feelings of joy and happiness

Feelings of relaxation and peace

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