

MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS (TM)

*Peace of mind is the opposite of stress and anxiety.
We all seek peace of mind and meditation is a key skill.*

INTRODUCTION

The goal of meditation is a quiet, peaceful, and focused mind. Everyone experiences meditative moments, when attention is fully engaged in a single activity. Sitting quietly by the fire, knitting, or boating on a sunny summer afternoon are some examples. At these times serenity and contentment replace a busy mind, and the concerns of daily life are transcended.

However, these activities bring us only temporary peace during the time they absorb our interest, or perhaps for a short lingering period afterwards. Once the mind returns to a busy state we are again activated by one thought after another. We have an estimated 30,000-50,000 thoughts each day, an average of approximately one thought per second!

Every thought has a subtle effect on our entire being. Worry and negative thinking, for example, lead to agitation and unrest. Our survival instinct responds to these thoughts as signals of danger or threat. As a conservative mechanism that takes no chances, our survival instinct reacts quickly and defensively to negative and "what-if" thoughts. We become tense and activated with no rest or recovery time.

Meditation counteracts these mind-body patterns. By focusing on just one special word or positive thought, and letting all other mental activity dissolve into the background, the mind becomes still, clear, and empty. In turn, the body relaxes and becomes at ease.

As a beginner you may have little control over your thoughts. You may be easily distracted by and reactive to your thoughts. But with steady practice, you will succeed in letting go of your thoughts and focusing on the quiet space behind thoughts. This will be an important step, with benefits such as clearer thinking, more tranquil mind, and stronger will power. With additional practice you will attain a higher level, where you transcend your mind and become one with the stillness behind thinking. You will want to carry that experience into your daily life and continue to be mindful of your inner peace and equanimity.

The benefits of meditation take time to realize and they may not come easily. As with any skill, you must practice regularly in order to make progress. As one meditation teacher, Swami Vishnu Devananda, explains, "A beautiful tree grows slowly. One must wait for the blossom, the ripening of the fruit and the ultimate taste" (in Lidell, L. *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

INSTRUCTIONS

- Choose a time when you can be relatively free of outside distractions. The quiet time of dawn and dusk are ideal, but any time that fits your lifestyle is appropriate. Set aside approximately 20 minutes for meditation, once or twice each day.
- Set up a special place for meditation, such as a corner of a room, where you can build up a peaceful atmosphere to help quiet your mind. However, you can meditate anywhere, including a park bench or while waiting in a parked car.
- Sit straight but not rigidly, with head, neck and back in alignment. It is also important to be relaxed, warm, and comfortable in order to minimize distraction.
- If necessary, stretch or exercise before meditation.
- Close your eyes and begin with relaxed breathing, pulling in your diaphragm to fully empty your lungs as you exhale. Establish a natural, deep breathing rhythm, with approximately three seconds each of inhalation and exhalation.
- Let your mind wander initially as you regulate your breathing, then gradually focus on the sensations of breathing. Next, gently bring your attention to the focal point of your choice. This can be a blank screen, a mental picture, a steady sound such as flowing water, or a special word or prayer. You may also try gazing steadily at an object, such as a candle flame or an inspiring picture.
- Hold your concentration on the one focal point, gently returning to it each time your mind is drawn away by passing thoughts. This is the essence of meditation practice. Do not be frustrated by the frequency of losing focus. Cultivate an attitude that does not judge your thoughts, but instead detaches gently from them.
- Keep a notebook handy for stubborn or compelling thoughts, and release them by jotting them down. Then close your eyes and return to concentrating on the focal point or the space between thoughts.
- Rise calmly upon completing your session, and remain connected to the thin and delicate thread of awareness. Carry the serenity of meditation into your daily life, and continue your practice on a regular basis.