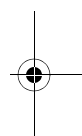


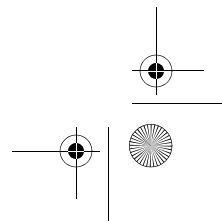
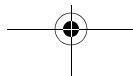
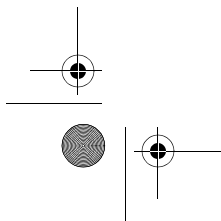
Meditation

“Stop thinking and talking about it, and there is
nothing you will not be able to know.”

Chinese Zen



Every religion agrees that the way to the Truth involves some
form of “quiet time,” sometimes called *meditation*. While *prayer*



can be called talking to God, meditation can be called *listening* to God. Both meditation and prayer are important. Meditation has been the focus of every religion at some time. Unfortunately, it has been almost completely lost in some of the religions, but it still remains a focus of others.

Meditation is a cornerstone of spiritual thought and practice for Kabbalists (Hebrew mystics), Sufis (Islamic mystics), Gnostics (Christian mystics), Essenes (a sect of Judaism from which Christianity was born), Buddha's teachings, some of Jesus' words, and of course the Upanishads and Vedas (Eastern scriptures).

It is obvious that meditation is of great importance in the Eastern religions. Here are just a few of thousands of examples found in Eastern teachings:

"Meditation is the one thing. Meditate! The greatest thing is meditation. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not at all material — the soul thinking of Itself, free from all matter."

Swami Vivekananda

"Thus hath been opened thee this Truth of Truths, the Mystery more hid than any secret mystery. Meditate! And- as thou wilt- then act!"

Bhagavad-Gita

"By meditation find the Soul in Self"

Bhagavad -Gita

Meditation is hidden in the Western religions but it is there. You will find entire books on meditation and Western thought in the bibliography. In his book *Jewish Meditation*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan explains exactly how it has been lost, and how the prayers that still remain today originally related to meditation:

"The Shema was (originally) meant to be a meditation ... (it) is teaching us to listen and hear the message with every fiber of our being."

The mystical sayings of Jesus often refer to meditation:

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,
and when thou hast shut the door, pray to the Father
which is in secret.”

Bible, Matthew 1:6

What exactly is meditation? It is a quieting, or controlling of the mind. As a simple exercise, close your eyes for one minute and try to think of only one thing — it doesn't matter what it is. You will notice that other thoughts come and go constantly. Sometimes they seem random or unrelated. You might start to think about this book, or what you're having for dinner. It is almost impossible to stop it! The mind is sometimes called an “endless chatterbox.” Meditation is the practice of picking a focus — something to look at, a thought to think about, a mental image, a sound in our mind, or *anything* — and trying to think only about that one thing for a period of time. The other thoughts still come, but you have to say to yourself, “Whoops, there goes another thought...” as you shift your focus back. Even though this may happen several times every minute, you are still meditating. *Anyone* can meditate. Meditation is not necessarily the stopping of thought, but the process of letting go and distancing from the outside world and the random thoughts that constantly bombard the mind. It is not a difficult process; it just takes patience. *Just to try it is doing it.* Through persistence, the other thoughts that bombard the mind eventually become less frequent. What happens is beyond description.

The positive effects of meditating, even for beginners, has been shown over and over again in scientific studies. Blood pressure decreases, and an enhanced state of relaxation occurs. Many people report a renewed feeling of positive energy and/or creativity after meditating. When we practice concentrating in meditation, it carries over to our regular life, making it easier to stay focused on our work and daily tasks. Some doctors now even prescribe daily meditation to relieve stress and prevent heart disease. It has been confirmed that deep meditation is a unique state of consciousness, and the brain emits unique brain waves during meditation.¹

1. see *Science and Religion* chapter for more details on brain waves.

One common teaching concerning meditation is to let go, to “be here now;” and to experience each moment for what it is. Daily practice starts to affect the whole life, giving us strength to put away things of the past and not worry about the future. Meditation is just what many people need in today’s hurried world. One of the great things about meditation is that while it is essentially a spiritual practice, it requires no faith, no belief in God, and anyone from any religion can practice it without feeling that they are sinning.

There are many methods of and suggestions about meditation, and countless books can be found in libraries and bookstores to help. A few tips are briefly discussed below.

As the random thoughts pass through the mind, it is our job to return to the focus of the meditation. Sometimes the thoughts that pass by may be interesting, or even disturbing which makes them more difficult to ignore. Whatever the thought is — good, bad, interesting, or boring — just let it go. Getting frustrated, or trying to analyze the thoughts only takes away from valuable meditation time.

One obstacle that many people experience is the thought of “how long have I been meditating?” or “am I done yet?” This thought can interfere with concentration and be very annoying. As a solution, a timer can be used to signal when meditation is done. The soft hourly “beep” that many watches have works great. A kitchen timer will work, but put it under a pillow so the loud signal isn’t too startling. Having something to signal the end is an easy way to reduce the annoying “am I done yet?” question.

Whether the goal is to seek spiritual knowledge, or just to learn how to relax, meditation is a valuable tool for everyone.

Prayer

Prayer is the counterpart to meditation. While meditation is passive, a way of observing, listening, or focusing, prayer is more active. It is literally talking to God.

While many ministers and clergy would like you to believe that you have to read from a book or go to Church to pray, you probably know in your heart that it just isn’t true. The Bible itself