

Day 1 Commitment and Meditation

Day 1: Commitment and Meditation

Meditation has been practiced by Eastern and Western mystics for centuries. Yogis realized that thoughts come and go in succession, at speeds faster than light. This incessant stream is made up of images, dialogue, our versions of problem solving and chatter.

Yet beneath these thoughts lies a quieter observer. There is a calm, still place that merely witnesses the ebb and flow of life.

Meditation is the art and science of connecting with this part of our consciousness. Most people think meditation is hard and it can be, but here are tips to access this beautiful state of mind with more ease....

1. Tune in to the breath: sit up in a comfortable position- even on a chair. Tall, long spine. Begin by breathing from the base of the spine to the crown of your head. If you aren't comfortable, your mind can't let go of the body and then meditation will be impossible. Become alert and attentive without aggression or "violence". Watch your breath. Concentrate upon it. Visualize it. Witness it.
2. With your mind's eye- visualize the breath moving in and out- inhaling and exhaling. On the inhalation feel length and space, on the exhalation feel depth and rooting.
3. Visualize the breath moving from the center of the chest (the spiritual heart's center) to the center of your two eye brows (third eye). Inhale heart- exhale third eye. Inhale third eye- exhale heart. Focus and concentrate this way for 5-15 minutes daily. If you lose concentration- don't worry about it. Just begin again. Try to steer your self gently back to the practice of watching your breath. You will gradually improve your concentration as your practice unfolds.
4. We breathe unconsciously, without thinking of our breath, or by consciously thinking about our breath. During times of stress, our breath is hollow and fast. We tend to only breathe partially.
5. When we tune into our breath we make it long, slow and deep. We fill the lungs up so completely that the back body feels the stretch on its skin. The lungs can actually fill to their top capacity! Try to feel places in your body where there is no breath and or movement. Now, breathe into that space. That is breath awareness too. Notice when you are breathing long, slow and deep. Notice how the body responds to this awareness with a state of blissful calmness. This is the key way in. Sometimes we may feel like we want to jump out of our own skin and escape. The truth is, the only way out.. is to go in. Because... the body and mind are intimately connected.

Meditation often happens not by trying too hard, but by letting go. But the question is - letting go of what? What are we attached to? What constant stream of thought is in in our head? Is it a you tube video that just keeps relaying itself over and over again daily? When focused on the breathing the mind is empty and we stop the incessant feeding to old habit patterns. Patterns such as reactivity, competitiveness,, distractedness, judgement, criticism, vanity, fear, anxiety- those feelings are no longer being fed by your mental energy or unconscious loyalty when you practice meditation. Those old habit patterns begin to lose their power over us and diminish. Their factors become less important on our mind state. Wellness and healing become a byproduct of mindful breath meditation. We begin to promote the wonderful feelings of unity, harmony, trust, love, and basically strong, healthy relationships arise and everything and everyone around us is touched in a loving manner.

It is truly impossible to stop thinking. The mind is always working on taming the ego- In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali- the ancient yogic texts- the Citta Vrtti Nirodhah- sutra number 2 - is discussed- The restraint of the modifications of the mind stuff..is yoga. " If you can control the rising of the mind into ripples, you will experience yoga" ..

Our mind is like a jungle monkey swinging from branch to branch. If we can tame the monkey and observe how the mind is attached to a thought .. and literally observe thought floating away-(like a cloud

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floating in the summer sky) we can cultivate a sense of non attachment to our thoughts and focus on merely witnessing the thoughts in our head without tension.

Some people think that numbing our minds with TV or Video games produces a relaxed feeling, actually it produces a more dull inner state without much prana/ vitality. At that time there is little awareness of the deep joy of our lives. The yogi's call this a state of "Tamas".

What we are looking for in a state of relaxation and harmony is that yogic term as Sattva. This means that you are both relaxed and in touch with deep sense of relaxation and inner peace. This contentment lets go of attachments of the mind, the "Citta Vrtti Nirodhah", lets life flow without pain and suffering.

Upon reflection, then, we start to see that it is a mistake to understand the causes of our disturbing emotions purely in terms of the things, or the people, who trigger them in us. If we step back and take some time to reflect, we find that even though our grievances may to some extent be legitimate, our feelings of irritation and frustration are actually rather unrealistic and often exaggerated beyond what the actual situation merits. We may also find that such disturbing emotions recur over and over, not just because of external factors, but also because they have become something of an emotional habit for us.--

The Dalai Lama, Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World, p. 128

Observe your body in Meditation - Observe your meditation in your Asanas

When you feel a state of calm and relaxation, simply witnessing our thoughts becomes a treat and our bodies will begin to feel different. Lightness and ease, the anxious body will soften and relax, the pressures will melt away. There will be ease in our breathing and our muscles will not tighten as a result of our thoughts. The relaxing of body and mind go hand in hand. Meditation will foster this relationship. This is a very simple way to come into a deep state of presence.

True that our breath is our guide to linking the mental and the physical. We can also observe how we use the breath in our asanas during our yoga practice. The breath allows us to feel calm and focused in difficult or challenging asanas, - As my teacher Bryan states: " We use our breath to approach, enter and exist within, and exit each asana". We will learn more about this throughout our teacher training together.

So, move in harmony with the breath instead of trying to ignore it- Inhales lengthen and expand and reach up-- exhales deepen soften, contract.

Opening your heart in Meditation

A meditation that is based in loving kindness also embodies feelings of : presence, equanimity generosity, morality, patience, truthfulness, non judgement, wholesome living, kindness towards people, nature and animals. This personal love and happiness can cultivate insight and increase your capacity for sharing love, giving love and being loved. Being present tunes us in to the love of the heart that informs us that we are connected in one giant web of life. As Bryan Kest, my teacher once said: "The web is only as strong as the integrity of each and every strand." Be present, cultivate strong stands in your web of life and practice meditation to focus, regroup and stay healthy!

Another wise teacher of mine closes her classes with this metta/ love infused phrase: "May you be protected and safe- may you feel contented and pleased, may your physical body support you and may

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your life unfold smoothly with ease.” If you turn the “your” into “my” and repeat those words to yourself as you wind up your meditation - on a daily basis - you begin to hold your own heart in your hands and trust the light and love you have within yourself to be shared with others in the world.

Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu.. may all beings everywhere be happy and free and may peace and happiness prevail.

Namaste