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## Metaphysics Diploma • Course C2

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# MEDITATION & VISUALISATION

Upon completion of this course, you will know:	Extras
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The benefits of meditation</li><li>• How to meditate and visualise</li><li>• Mudra and Mantra meditation techniques</li><li>• Breathing techniques</li><li>• How to ground and balance</li><li>• Different levels of the mind</li></ul>	E-books and audio

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## MEDITATION AND VISUALISATION

We are going to learn about meditation at this early stage in the course as each lesson in this course includes a meditation or meditations.

Meditation has been practiced around the world in many religions, from Buddhism to Hinduism for eons. Many people have meditated for spiritual communication, personal fulfilment, as a form of worship or just to relax and relieve stress. Each culture and each religious path has its own views about the purpose of meditation. And even within the same religion, different practitioners can view the practice in different ways.

During this century western societies have begun to recognize the benefits of meditation from an Eastern philosophical perspective. This can be seen in many metaphysics-based courses, books, websites and magazines. Meditation has even shown up in mainstream hospitals and rehabilitation centres as a method to focus on fighting diseases. The breathing and visualizations employed by traditional medicine have

shown to help patients fight cancer, physical illnesses, relieve stress and so on. Basically, meditation is an altered state of consciousness achieved through controlled breathing and visualization. Webster's Dictionary (2003) defines meditating as "a practice to engage in mental exercise (as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness". While this definition is partly accurate, meditation is so much more.

A person who practices a mediation technique on a regular basis will begin noticing a few side effects. Most often they become a little calmer and more relaxed during regular daily activities. They become better able to handle unexpected events or can think more clearly when dealing with a problem or trying to find a solution to a challenging issue. Some of the stress and tension gained throughout the week will subside each time the person performs their chosen meditation technique. All in all, less stress and less tension will lead to a healthier and happier person who is better able to think clearly. On the spiritual side, a degree of self-discovery may also begin to happen. People who meditate on a regular basis report feeling the "need" to improve their attitudes or outlook on life. Individuals may begin to notice an increased interest in their chosen religious or spiritual path. Many people often report that they feel there is more to life than this physical existence and they want to know and understand what that is. I believe this is a result of successfully bridging the conscious, subconscious and spiritual minds together, which occurs during regular meditation practices.

Those who follow a metaphysical practice have long believed in the concepts of a higher self within. Many call this a higher level of consciousness or the Divine Self. This is the part of you that works on becoming an enlightened spiritual being. Many people hold their spiritual being separate or at a higher level than their physical being. From one perspective, seeing the spiritual self as a higher level of consciousness may be an accurate view. But the spiritual self is part of who we are within. It's not something that's separate or outside of our physical being. With that said however, we are still physical incarnated beings and a part of our physical being also needs to be present and cared for in a spiritual way to work toward achieving enlightenment in this lifetime. So let's work on bringing these two parts of the self together, through meditation.

Meditation can be used for:

- Increasing mental clarity
- Deepening concentration and insight
- Finding inner guidance
- Unlocking creativity
- Self healing
- Developing intuition

- Chakra awakening, clearing and balancing
- Exploring higher realities
- Manifesting
- Reduce the use of prescriptive drugs
- Reduce chronic pain and muscle tension
- Reduce emotional anxiety and the respiratory rate
- Decrease elevated blood pressure
- Reduce cholesterol
- Reduce cortisol and stress levels
- Reduce substance abuse
- Increase concentration and
- Increase longevity and quality of life.

Where visualisation uses the mind and the imagination for creative and healing purposes, the main purpose of meditation is to link with the higher self and spiritual source. This can only take place when the mind is still. All effective meditation techniques lead to this calming of the mind. In doing so, meditation allows the personality to make contact with the soul, providing a channel. Meditation is a great healing technique.

Apart from its physical benefits, meditation has been shown to be effective in stress release. These positive effects act on the levels of mind and emotion to release stored negative and other unwanted energies. Repressed emotional and mental material may be stored in any part of the physical body or in the chakras. Meditation has the power to unblock these energies and bring renewed energy flow.

In the meditative state we are wholly conscious, but the mind is as still as possible. If prayer can be described as “talking” mode then meditation can be described as “listening” mode.

The mind is able to be slowed when we have something to focus on that helps it to distract itself. When we learn to slow our minds down and think of nothing without any help, we are able to bring ourselves into a state of total awareness. In this state 100% healing can take place and we are able to access our inner child and higher mind.

With the use of soft or rhythmic music we are able to place our focus on something that does not need our intense concentration. Music has this ability to slow our thought process down. When we stop thinking, we start to truly listen to what is going on within ourselves. We are able to hear our higher mind and our inner child. We learn how to listen to our body and what it has to say. If something is off balance or not right, we are able to talk to our bodies and find out exactly what the problem is. Through meditation we learn to train our mind to function the way it was meant to. Instead of our mind controlling us, we control our mind. The soul becomes in charge once more. All our extra sensors open and we are able to access our hidden knowledge and gifts that are blocked from us through the mind stopping them coming through. Meditation provides all of these powerful healing tools.

When you see a drama going on in your life, say to yourself that you refuse to be food for negativity. Start meditating and learn to bring back your self-awareness. Allow your inner frequencies to become open and alive. Allow love, joy and happiness to flow through you. Allow yourself to connect to mother earth and feel where you belong. Allow yourself to unite with the heavens and connect to your true destiny and purpose.

Get into the habit of meditating and learn to slow your mind down and open yourself up to your inner awareness. You will learn how to tap into your body, higher mind and inner child.

The point of meditation is not to discover some cool techniques to occupy your leisure hours; it's to make the simple but momentous shift from doing to being. Don't make the mistake of turning your meditation practice into another urgent item on your list of things to do. Use it, instead, as a welcome oasis from doing, an opportunity to be, without strategy or agenda. In other words, keep it simple. Play with a few of the techniques at first to decide which one feels right for you; then stick with the one you've chosen. It really doesn't matter which method you use — they all end up depositing you in the here and now.

## **HOW TO MEDITATE**

### **General Guidelines for Meditation**

Put your expectations aside, and don't worry about doing it right. There are infinite possibilities and no fixed criteria for determining "right" meditation. There are, however, a few things to avoid. They are:

- Trying to force something to happen.
- Over-analyzing the meditation.
- Trying to make your mind blank or chase thoughts away.
- Putting too much emphasis on doing it right.

It's not necessary, or advisable, to meditate on a completely empty stomach. If you're hungry, have a little something to eat before meditating.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to meditate. You can sit in a comfortable chair, on the bed, on the floor - anywhere that's comfortable. It's not necessary to sit cross-legged.

Eliminate as much noise and as many potential distractions as possible. Don't worry about those things that you cannot control.

When you sit to meditate, sit comfortably, with your spine reasonably straight. This allows the spiritual energy to flow freely up the spine, which is an important aspect of meditation. Leaning against a chair back, a wall, headboard, etc. is perfectly all right. If, for physical reasons, you can't sit up, lay flat on your back (but try not to fall asleep).

Place your hands in any position that is comfortable.

If it does not go against your beliefs, call on a "higher power" for assistance in your meditation. Any form you are comfortable with is all right. This can be quite helpful, but is not absolutely necessary.

Meditation is so easy that it only takes up a small part of your day, so it can be done first thing in the morning and/or last thing at night. You could be on a bus, in a park, or even at the office in your lunch hour. It does not matter where you are - if you have a spare 5 minutes you can meditate.

When you wake up in the morning, take a few minutes to wake yourself up. Give yourself a good shake, then find somewhere where you can sit without being disturbed. It can be on the floor with a couple of pillows or even sitting up in bed, out in the morning sun, or anywhere where you feel comfortable. You can have some soft music on or, if you prefer, just have silence.

There are numerous forms of meditation. Yoga, Tai-Chi, Mantras, Gazing and Freeform are the most common types practiced in the western world (see definitions below). No one way is better than another. What works for one person may not work for another. So it's best for a person to choose the type of meditation that feels the most comfortable for them. Of course, the next step is continual practice on a regular basis.

## **Yoga and Tai-Chi**

These methods use physical movements or positions to focus the mind and body away from everyday happenings. The best way to learn Yoga or Tai-Chi is to find an experienced teacher or master and take a class. There are also a great number of instructional DVDs available today as well. These methods require several physical movements that lead the mind down a relaxing path into a relaxed state of awareness.

## **Mantras**

This vocal method uses a personal sound, like a hum or phrase, to focus and clear the mind. Mantra Meditation is the technique of using sound to open the heart and mind. Mantras can be whatever you choose they do not need to be Sanskrit words, which are frequently used in Yoga. You can use whatever sounds you like. During an inhalation you may say, "I am" and during your exhalation "at peace." Or you may say simply recite, "I am". A Mantra is a sound repeated over and over until it integrates into your consciousness, frees the mind from its constant doing, and elevates the meditator to an altered state of awareness.

## **Gazing**

Using an object, such as a crystal ball or candle, to help focus and find the meditative state. The Gazing method is much like the freeform method, the only difference being one you do with your eyes closed, the other you have your eyes open as you stare at an object. The object can be any object you choose. Many people like using a scrying mirror, which is a very highly polished slice of stone or marble. An individual focuses on one point of the object, focuses on their breathing and allows their mind to move into an altered state of awareness.

Whilst many people choose to meditate with their eyes closed, it is possible with your eyes open. Alternative forms are lowering your eyes,- you do not need to close them but do not focus on anything.

## **How to meditate with the Gazing Method**

In this a regular candle is used, however, any other object of choice can be used (e.g. a flower). The candle is set up at an arm's distance, level with eyes, and steady gazing is first done with the eyes open. After some time, the eyes are closed, and the after image of the flame is 'gazed at' with eyes closed at the eye brow centre. Try not to move throughout the practice. Relax your breath, let it lengthen, deepen. This open gazing of the flame and then with the eyes closed is alternated a couple of times before concluding the practice.

If using a candle for gazing, the gaze should be fixed at the wick tip and not on the flame.

## **Benefits:**

This form of practice is believed to help improve the optic function, both external and internal, such as poor eyesight and visualization abilities. It helps develop concentration and mental resolve. Develops the ability to maintain focus amongst the noise and distractions of daily life. It also supports the development of Intuition.

## **Freeform**

This method is generally the most common type of meditation practiced today. Freeform is just that - it does not rely on sound, movement or visual stimulus to focus the mind and body. Rather, it uses your own ability to concentrate on nothing. Soft, relaxing music can accompany this form of meditation to help the mind block out background noises and distractions.

The visualizations employed in the Freeform method help your conscious mind create some of those energy patterns to physically relax and push out stress from your body. These visualizations are highlighted in the following steps, to help you gain the most benefit from your meditation practice. However, once you learn the basics, you should think about changing the visualization patterns to best suit your own needs and interests.

## **How to Meditate with the Freeform Method**

Choose a piece of music that you find relaxing. Classical and some soft Jazz can be used, but the best form of music is New Age. Many music stores are now carrying New Age music, so these should be easy to find. You can even find music created specifically for meditation exercises. Your meditation music should be totally orchestral (no vocals) and should act as sound barrier between you and the outside noises of the world.

1. Find a quiet place to sit and relax where you won't be disturbed for 20 to 30 minutes. Meditations have no time limit, but to really appreciate the event, a minimum of 30 minutes is really all that's needed. Many people like setting aside a full hour for their meditation period. This is fine too.
2. Sit or lie comfortably. Keep your back as straight as possible. Your arms should be placed comfortably in your lap with your palms up (if you are sitting) or at your sides with the palms up (if you are lying down). Remember that you're going to be in this one position for at least 30 to 60 minutes and that you want to be comfortable during that time.
3. Begin your meditation with a deep cleansing breath and close your eyes as you exhale.
4. With your eyes closed, focus on your breathing. Slowly, take in 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, filling your lungs to their fullest capacity. Then, just as slowly, exhale through your mouth, allowing your lungs to collapse as much as is comfortable for you.
5. Visualize: As you exhale, imagine the stressful events of the day or week being carried out through your mouth on a gray smoky cloud. Put these worries aside and begin to relax your entire body and mind.

6. Return to normal breathing and begin to relax each portion of your body, especially your muscles. Feel the tension in your muscles begin to subside. Visualize: With each inhale; imagine a Divine white light collecting inside your body around the solar plexus. With each breath you take in, this light grows stronger, more vibrant and soon begins to increase in size. Within a minute or two, the light grows so large that it encompasses the entire mid-section of your body. Now, begin by pushing the lower portion of the light down toward your toes slowly. Imagine the white light pushing all the stress and tension out of your muscles and your body, one at a time. Imagine this stressful energy like a gray smoke being pushed down your lower extremities until it's pushed out your toes. Now the lower half of your body is fully surrounded inside and out by this Divine white light. (This visualization should take approximately 1-2 minutes). Use the same technique to push the light from the solar plexus up your back, neck and head, pushing the "gray" stress out the top of your head (the Solar Plexus is a network of nerves in the abdominal cavity behind the stomach and just below the position where your rib cage meets).
7. This step takes a little practice. Don't worry if you can't do this for any extended period of time, but at least give it a try. (It gets easier with practice, but even daily practitioners don't do this step during their entire meditation). Keep your eyes closed, but look up at the pineal gland. This is a small gland located in the middle of your forehead, just above the brow. Try to keep your eyes focused on this point. The muscles around your eyes may become sore as you stretch them upward, so don't overdo this at first. As you practice, this step will become easier and easier to do. For centuries, the pineal gland has been considered by many to be the location of the third eye. This step then is a symbolic gesture to bridge the physical eyes with that of the third eye.
8. Now the hard part - clear your mind of the everyday fluff. Don't think about the work on your desk; don't make your grocery list, just think about being at peace. You are training your mind to shut down for several minutes and to do nothing. This is a state of mind foreign to most people but with practice you'll be able to do it. This step is the key to effective meditation. First timers may want to concentrate on their breathing instead. Keep it slow and relaxed.

### **Quieting the Mind - How do you do that?**

Many people believe they have to see nothing - just blackness. This, in fact, is keeping your mind busy and active trying to force yourself to see darkness. So there is a difference between thinking of nothing and quieting the mind. It's not as simple as it sounds, but it can be done. Calming the mind is left up to you, not to some outside force or mantra. The easiest way is through a visualized process. Each time your brain makes a list of things for you to do, shut it down by imagining yourself walking down a road away from your cares and troubles or through a field or along an empty beach. A useful visualization is to see a large ocean wave fall over the list and wash it away. Sometimes it's hard for people to tell which images are from their conscious mind and which are

from their higher self. If you begin to see strange images, like potted plants or a hand coming from nowhere to give you a dozen roses, let it happen. As long as the image is non-threatening and peaceful, don't force it away.

## **Additional Meditation Techniques**

### **Meditative Journeys**

A meditative journey is much like visualization, but with a specific purpose. You can visualize a specific set of images to get in touch with your higher consciousness, to travel to an island and meet your animal or spirit guide, or to your spiritual sanctuary to examine files in your Akashic records. The possibilities are endless and are bound only by the confines of your imagination.

### **Visualisation CDs**

If you have a hard time with visualization, try finding CDs that guide you through a visualisation. These are excellent methods to help you learn how to reach that relaxed state or can be used for specific purposes, such as letting go, healing physical ailments, connecting with your guides, etc.

The most important thing about meditation is to remember what that works for one person may not work for another. Everyone is different and trying different methods can help each person find what works best for them.

## **Misconceptions That Make Meditation Difficult**

**Misconception 1 ~ Meditation requires much training to get it right.** Not true. Meditation can be easily learned and practiced. Meditation is only difficult if you become too concerned with doing it right. There is, in fact, no such thing as "right" or "wrong" meditation. There is only doing it or not doing it.

**Misconception 2 ~ To meditate, you have to turn off your thoughts and make your mind blank.** Not 100% true. Have you ever tried to make your mind blank through sheer will? For most people, it's just not going to happen - at least, not for more than a few seconds. That's where the various methods come into play. By going through the steps of a particular method, your mind will begin to quiet down by itself - some days more, some days less, as your meditation experiences are likely to differ from day to day.

**Misconception 3 ~ To meditate, you have to be good at focusing your attention.** Not true. Although staying focused in meditation does become easier with time and practice, it is definitely not a requirement for beginning to meditate. Thinking that you should be good at focusing when first starting out is essentially putting the cart before the horse. What you will discover is that even if you are not good at focusing, you will still begin to notice many benefits in your life from meditating regularly.

**Misconception 4 ~ There is one specific "state of meditation" and the aim is to get into that state.** Not true. There are many possible states of awareness you might experience when meditating, and they are all part of the process of meditation.

## **4 Guidelines for Making Meditation Easy**

### **1. Put your expectations aside.**

Forget about everything you may think is "supposed to" happen when you meditate, and completely accept whatever does happen. Regardless of what seems to be happening, if you are following the basic steps of your method, something valuable is occurring each time you meditate. Even if it seems as though nothing is happening, the meditation is catalyzing positive changes on a deep inner level of your being, and before long you will begin noticing these inner changes manifesting in your outer life.

### **2. Thoughts are not your enemy.**

If you are busy fighting with your thoughts, how can you experience inner peace? Thoughts are a natural product of the mind, and are actually one of the ways that stored up stress is released in meditation. At times, the thoughts will subside on their own. The result of simply going through the steps of your method. However, as you continue meditating, you will discover that you can experience deep relaxation and inner peace, even when there are thoughts in your mind.

### **3. Meditate with relaxed effort.**

Relaxed effort, or "medium effort", is somewhere between the two extremes of strenuous concentration and no effort at all - between "trying your brains out" and simply spacing out.

### **4. The less concerned you are about what you experience in your meditation, the easier and more enjoyable it gets.**

Placing too much importance on anything tends to make it harder to attain.

## **Meditation Practice Derailers**

Along with these 8 important points, I think you will find it helpful to understand the things most likely to derail your meditation practice. Ideally, you will use this information to help you stay on track with your meditation practice, rather than as 3 excuses to avoid meditating.

**1. Resistance to growth** ~ We all have within us a force that resists growth and change. We also have a force within us which gently urges us to evolve and make positive changes. At times when the resistant force kicks in - and it generally does when

we start doing something that accelerates our growth - you might find yourself avoiding your meditation. You may experience this consciously, or you may unconsciously devise a variety of creative ways to avoid meditating. To stay on track, try to follow the positive evolutionary force within you.

**2. Detox discomfort** ~ Meditation clears away stored up stress and physical/emotional toxins. If you find that you are releasing these toxins in your meditation, or outside of meditation, be aware that a valuable healing process is occurring and will pass shortly, leaving you free of these limiting, negative energies.

How do you recognize this? You may experience some form of negativity, according to the type of stress or toxins you are releasing. If it is physically-related, you may feel a bit tired or physically "off". If it is emotionally-related, you may experience some of the feelings or memories associated with the toxins you are releasing. If this should occur, it is important to continue with your regular meditation schedule, as this facilitates the clearing process. Unfortunately though, the subtle and unusual discomfort resulting from this process tends to cause some people to back away from meditating.

**3. Time** ~ These are indeed busy times, and it may not be easy at first to take the time to do something you are not absolutely convinced will make a positive difference in your life. However, if you commit to giving it a shot - carving just 10 to 15 minutes out of your busy schedule - you will begin to experience how incredibly worthwhile it is to find the time to meditate.

## **BRAIN WAVES DURING MEDITATION**

When we meditate, several important things happen physically and mentally. Firstly, we are focusing internally and letting go of the outside world (similar to going to sleep, but without losing consciousness). This allows our brains to shift into more stable, stronger brain frequencies normally reached during sleep (alpha and theta). When we can reduce our brain frequencies to these levels whilst staying awake, we are able to bring the subconscious mind to the conscious level.

**What happens when you meditate?** Your brain functions on a small amount of electricity, much like a computer. This electrical current vibrates and pulses at various speeds. When you are wide awake, with your eyes focussed, your brain vibrates 20 times per second – what scientists call 20 cycles per second, or the **Beta** frequency. You are probably at the beta level of mind right now, as you read this.

When you go to sleep, your brain frequency slows down, all the way to about half a cycle per second in the deepest levels of natural sleep. This is known as the **Delta** level. In between beta (awake state) and delta (deep sleep state), there are two other levels of mental activity. When you are in a light level of sleep or in meditation, you are in the **Alpha** range, which is 7 to 14 cycles per second. This is the centre range and this is what we mean by saying "going to your centre". Going to the alpha level or centering is

essentially the same thing as meditating. When someone meditates, they are simply reducing their brain wave frequency to alpha. This is the level we use to activate our minds. **Theta** is a level of deeper relaxation or sleep, when your brain waves are at 4 to 7 cycles per second.

Jose Silva (founder of the Silva Life System) found that people who can remain in the alpha level whilst analysing information have access to more information than those who remain in beta state to do their thinking. Feelings of intuition, creative ideas, inspirational thoughts and ideas come to people whilst at this alpha level. This level is also good for programming your mind. At the alpha level, you can learn to overcome all kinds of problems, such as insomnia, tension, bad habits, and more. You can also programme your mind to help you achieve your goals and make your dreams come true.

The measurement of brain waves in meditation is a relatively recent development, as scientists strive to discover how the ancient practice of meditation can reduce stress, increase feelings of well-being, and benefit overall health, amongst other advantages. It is of specific use to help one increase alertness, relaxation and reflection even in “waking” states. Brain waves in meditation are predominantly those discussed below, whilst those in normal consciousness are of the beta type. Each type, as discussed below, has specific benefits.

Brain waves in meditation shift through various stages. The most common brain waves in meditation are **alpha** waves. These alpha brain waves in meditation basically promote changes in the autonomic nervous system that calm it. Regular contemplative practice of this type reverses the roles of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems so that the normally dominant sympathetic nervous system takes a back seat to the normally secondary parasympathetic nervous system. This lowers blood pressure and heart rate and lowers the amount of stress hormones in the body, as well as calming the mind. One of these stress hormones is cortisol, incidentally, which has been shown to encourage weight gain when it is elevated over the long term.

**Gamma** brain waves in meditation also greatly increase. Gamma waves denote intense focus and are usually weak and transient in normal brain activity. In experienced meditation practitioners, it was particularly noted that gamma brain waves in meditation were especially high in the left prefrontal cortex of the brain. This is an exciting finding, since this area is often associated with decreased anxiety and fear, positive emotions, and a decrease in depressive feelings or symptoms.

**Theta** brain waves in meditation are said to help open the “third eye” for practitioners. This “etheric eye” is said to be the channel through which practitioners gain illumination wisdom via vibrations received through the third eye. In practical terms, theta brainwaves in meditation also invoke a deep sense of relaxation and also encourage creativity and make problem solving and memorization easier. Most people have also experienced a theta state, for example, in the condition known as “highway hypnosis,” wherein drivers can perform driving tasks so automatically that they don’t remember making the drive

home from their office. Theta waves also present themselves for most people when they do any task that is automatic or nearly so, such as folding clothes, washing hair, etc.

Finally, delta brain waves in meditation are the slowest of all. Everyone experiences delta waves in deep sleep, but delta brain waves in meditation are said to help experienced practitioners access the unconscious mind. Their existence may also be part of the reason that newly learned skills may be best integrated if one “sleeps on them,” since they are associated with a person's ability to integrate newly learned tasks.

## ESTABLISHING A "RITUAL" FOR MEDITATION

Some people need a ritual to get them in the right mood for meditation, for example, choosing a regular time and place to do the meditation. If you are able to set aside a separate space for you to meditate, keep it clean and fresh. You can keep a candle there, or even a little shrine of sorts. Aromatherapy burners also add to the experience, or perhaps incense, if you prefer.

## SUSPENDING JUDGMENT

According to *Meditation for Dummies*, if you're like most people, you're constantly judging your experience as good, bad, or indifferent and reacting accordingly: “Ooh, I like that. I'm going to try to get more of it.” “I hate that. I'm going to avoid it at all costs.” “That doesn't do anything for me. I'm not going to pay any attention to it.” When you meditate, you begin to notice the steady stream of judgments and how they dominate your mind and distort your experience. Instead of indulging this habitual pattern, you can practice witnessing your experience impartially, without judgment. When judgments arise, which they undoubtedly will, you can just be aware of them, while avoiding the temptation to judge them as well. Gradually, the habit of judging will loosen its grip on your mind.

### Accepting

The flip side of suspending judgment involves learning to accept things just the way they are. You don't necessarily have to like what you see, and you're welcome to change it — but first you need to experience it fully and clearly, without the overlays of judgment and denial. For example, you may have lots of anger bubbling up, but you may believe that this particular emotion is bad or even evil, so you refuse to acknowledge it. In meditation, you have an opportunity to observe the anger just as it is — recurrent angry thoughts, waves of anger in the belly — without trying to change or get rid of it. The more you welcome the full range of your experiences in this way, the more space you create inside yourself to contain them — and the more you defuse those old familiar conflicts between different parts of yourself.

### Letting go

Participants in 12-step programs sometimes talk about “letting go and letting God.” The first stage involves letting go of the illusion that you have unlimited control over your life.

In mindfulness meditation, you can practice letting go by dropping all struggles to control your mind — and all ideas you may have about how your meditation is supposed to look — and relaxing into the present moment as it unfolds, both inside and outside. Believe it or not, you already know how to let go — you do it every night when you drift off to sleep.

## Unmasking

Letting go also has a deeper dimension: The more you loosen the stranglehold of your likes and dislikes, preferences and prejudices, memories and stories, the more you open to the experience of just being, beyond any limited identities or interpretations. These identities are like the layers of an onion or clouds that hide the radiance of the sun. As your meditation deepens, you can learn to accept and then let go of these clouds, without mistaking them for the light they obscure. By disidentifying more and more with what you are not — the masks that hide your true nature — you gradually begin to identify with what you are: pure *being*.

## Surrendering

As your meditation opens you to an experience of pure *being*, you may begin to recognize the value of the second stage of the 12-step dictum: “letting God.” The truth is, the power or force that’s actually controlling your life (and which you essentially are) is far bigger than your small self, and it’s eminently trustworthy — some would even say it’s sacred or divine. When you begin to loosen your vice-grip on the steering wheel of your life, you don’t plunge headlong into the chaotic abyss, as you might fear; instead, you relinquish your apparent control to the one who has always been in control — call it God or Self or pure *being*. In your meditation, you may actually experience this surrender as a deeper and deeper relaxation into the sacred silence or stillness that surrounds, suffuses, and sustains you.

## Accepting and letting go

Holding on tightly and pushing away hard, lusting and hating, defending and attacking — traditionally known as attachment and aversion — are the primary causes of suffering and stress. Along with indifference, they form the proverbial three poisons of meditation lore. Fortunately, you can cultivate the antidotes to these poisons by practicing the two most important gestures or functions of meditation: accepting and letting go. They’re inextricably entwined: Until you accept, you can’t let go; until you let go, you have no room to accept again. As one Zen master put it, “Let go of it, and it fills your hand.” Here’s a little exercise that gives you an opportunity to practice both accepting and letting go:

1. Begin by sitting comfortably and taking a few deep breaths. Now place your attention on the coming and going of your breath.

2. After a few minutes, shift your awareness to your thoughts and feelings. Take the attitude that you're going to welcome whatever arises in your experience without judging or rejecting it.
3. As thoughts and feelings come and go, notice the movement to avoid or push away or not see what you find unpleasant or unacceptable. Accept this movement as you continue to welcome your experience, whatever it may happen to be.
4. After five or ten minutes, when you have a feel for accepting, shift your attention to the process of letting go. Take the attitude that you're going to let go of whatever arises, no matter how urgent or attractive. Notice the movement to hold on or indulge or get involved with thoughts and feelings you find pleasant or compelling. Gently restrain yourself and continue to loosen your grip and let go.

When you have a feel for both accepting and letting go, you can combine them in the same meditation. Whatever arises, welcome and let go, welcome and let go. This is the twofold rhythm of mindfulness meditation.

## **USEFUL MEDITATIONS AND VISUALISATIONS**

### **A morning meditation**

When you are comfortable, focus on your breathing. Slowing the breath, bring your awareness to your feet and travel up your whole body from your knees to your hips, from your hips to your stomach, from your stomach to your heart.

Now notice your heartbeat, breathing with the rhythm of the heartbeat. Try to stay focused. If you find your mind wandering do not be alarmed. WITH TIME AND PRACTICE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO STOP THIS.

Breathing with the heartbeat will help you to understand the rhythm of your body and this is the start of learning to listen to your body. When you have mastered this art you will be able to read the warning signals in your body when something goes wrong. When you are ready, bring your focus back to your body. Focusing on your shoulders, breathing slowly, bring your awareness to your neck, and then to your head.

When you have reached your head, slowly bring your whole awareness to all of your body. Now take time to listen to your whole body. Listen to the sounds coming from your body and breathe with those sounds.

After you have done this, bring yourself back to reality. Slowly allow your mind to start its thinking process and your breathing to go back to normal. Now just sit for a few minutes and feel how calm and relaxed you are. When you are ready, get up and start your day. You will notice that by doing this morning meditation, your whole day will feel more peaceful and there will be less stress around you because you will have given your mind a rest.

You can also use meditation to help you with any problems you may have in your life. Before you enter into your meditative state, focus on the problem and then ask your higher mind to help come up with answers. Go into your meditation and, after you have finished, see if you receive any advice or hidden insight that could help you. It may be that you will see the problems in a different perspective. If you are after some emotional healing within yourself you can also focus on the issues that are causing you pain, grief or worry before you go into your meditative state. Ask that your inner child help you heal these situations. After the meditation, you may well find that you see your pain, fear and worries in a different light.

### **VISUALISATIONS FOR MENTAL RELAXATION**

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Take three deep breaths and let go of any tension or anxieties with the out breath. Relax your body. Let your mind settle peacefully.
- Visualise a place you can go to where you can be totally at peace. Perhaps your mind will show you a place you already know. If not, visualize a peaceful place such as an empty beach, a forest clearing or a mountain side.
- See your peaceful place in all its detail. See the forms and colours. Look around you. Take in this scene of peace as you breathe slowly and gently.
- Go for a short walk in your peaceful place. Enjoy everything you see and sense.
- When you feel like it, sit down. Look around you again, slowly taking in the whole scene.
- Now sit or lie down comfortably and be at peace. Stay in this place for as long as you need to.
- When you feel ready, come back to where your body is, slowly and gently. Make sure you can feel your feet. Make a note of everything you felt and observed.

This next visualisation takes the relaxation a stage further.

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Take three deep breaths and let go of any tension or anxieties with the out breath. Relax your body. Let your mind settle peacefully.
- You are walking down a country lane at an easy pace. The sun is shining. There is a slight breeze which you can feel on your face. As you walk along you feel totally at one with things; at one with the country lane, the air, the sun, your body. Your footsteps are light on the ground. Your body feels light and fresh inside.

- You look to your left and see a horse grazing in a field. It is a picture of peace. You look to your right and notice some beautiful trees. Their presence is full of peace. You are at one with the horse, the trees and the field.
- Ahead of you is a gateway which is inviting. You open the gate and see a path leading to a beautiful garden. You go up the path to the garden, noticing the flowers and shrubs as you pass.
- There is a seat for you to sit on. As you sit down you notice the beautiful flowers nearby. You breathe in their scent. Birds are singing sweetly. The sun shines down on you as you breathe deeply and gently. Bees and other insects busy themselves about the garden. You feel at one with this place. Breathe in the peace of nature.
- Stay here as long as you need to. When you feel it is time to come back, walk through the garden, down the path to the gate. Close the gate after you. Walk back down the lane, taking your time. Note the trees and the horse on your return. Give thanks to all that you see as you pass by. It is important that you come back exactly the same way as you first went.
- Come back to where your body is. Make sure you can feel your feet. Make a note of any feelings or impressions you would like to record.

You can use your imagination to create your own visualisations, remembering to include elements of peace and harmony in your scene. Relaxing background music further enriches the exercise.

## **VISUALISATION TO OBTAIN GUIDANCE**

One of the functions of visualization is to create a situation where you can obtain information, guidance, reassurance, where you can get help in problem solving or where you can receive answers to important questions. This is sometimes known as creative imagery. This technique links up with the wisdom of the Higher Self, so honour this with your attitude to the exercise.

- Sit comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting palms up on your thighs. Relax the elbows. Relax the body and let the shoulders drop. Take three deep breaths and then breathe normally. In your mind's eye you are setting off to a place where you will receive the guidance you need.
- You see yourself walking along a road. The atmosphere is calm and peaceful. You feel light and optimistic within yourself. You are making your way to a special house. You see the house and recognize it by its appearance. The house has a welcoming feel, as if it is inviting you in. Go up to the front door, which is open.

- Inside you find yourself in a well-lit hallway which has some doors leading off it. You look at the doors. On one there is a label which says "guidance. please enter". Inside this room you will meet a wise person who will help you with your problem. Enter the room and wait patiently to see what happens.
- When you have received what you need, thank the wise person and close the door behind you. Leave the house carefully, noting as much as you can about it. Retrace your steps back and return to your seat.
- Give yourself time to absorb the experience before you gently come back. Make sure you can feel your feet by moving your toes. Rub your hands together. Now make a note of the experience in as much detail as you can recall. Everything you see and experience is a clue to what you need. You can always return to that room and ask for what you need, just go back the same way as before.

### **POSITIVELY ENERGISING YOUR WORKPLACE**

To prepare yourself for work, see it from your still centre. Before you leave for work or even on your way to work, you can fill your workplace with positive energy.

- Sit or stand in a relaxed state.
- Breathe in. On the out breath visualise the workplace being bathed in healing light. Let the light go to every corner, illuminating every area of darkness or shadow. Sometimes this exercise takes effect quite quickly. By the time you get to work, the air may have become clear and light and other people may remark on this.
- Sometimes your place of work needs the energy of a particular colour, just as you do. See the place in your mind and ask it what it needs, or ask to be shown the colour. This is the colour you should fill your workplace with.

### **A PROCESS FOR CLEARING, CLEANSING & SETTING PROTECTION**

The following is a step-by-step process for pushing the negative energies out of your body and calling upon the Divine forces to lift your "spirit" and aid in your protection. It doesn't take long to perform this mini-ritual. But you can certainly add to this with candles or other tools to enhance the process.

1. Sit in a comfortable position, to help you alleviate the stress within your body.
2. Close your eyes and take in a deep cleansing breath. Fill your lungs to their fullest capacity. Then release the breath through your mouth and push all the air out of your body. Take in 3 deep breaths through the nose, imagine the white light from the universe

coming into your lungs and collecting at your solar plexus. (The solar plexus is located in the centre of your abdomen, right where your ribs connect at the bottom).

3. With all 3 exhales, image all the stress, anxiety and negativity you have leaving your body carried out to the universe on a gray smoke where it can be dissipated and no longer do harm to anyone.

4. With each inhale; imagine the light collecting at your solar plexus beginning to enlarge. Each intake of white light increases the size of the white bubble of light. See this white light moving up and down the inside of your body from this point. Imagine the warmth of the white divine energy as it passes through your muscles and organs. Feel the tingling sensations as the light moves down to your toes and simultaneously up your body to the top of your head. Imagine your entire body filled by this white divine light, from the inside out.

5. As the light of divine energy grows imagine any leftover negative stresses, anxieties and unwanted energies being forced out of your body. See this as a cloud of gray smoke being pushed out of your being by the growing divine white light.

6. As you breathe in the energy from the divine, image the light is growing so much that it pushes through the confines of your body. Imagine the light growing to encompass your physical body about 2 feet in diameter. See the last aspects of the unwanted energy floating out into the universe where it too can be dissipated and no longer do harm to anyone.

7. Say a prayer asking the Divine Universal Spirit, your guides or spiritual teachers to come to you and to help with the purpose of this protection. State your intention clearly and ask The Divine to help you with your purpose. Don't forget to thank all those forces up front for their efforts.

8. You can add a little step here for putting an exclamation on setting divine protection if you would like. Take one more very deep breath and see a strong gold divine light, shimmering down into your body to your solar plexus. See this light quickly grow and pass through the white light you have established as your shield. The two light sources do not mix, they should remain clearly separate. Think and see the gold light as the hand of the Divine Universal Spirit passing through the shield you created and within seconds and forming its own shield around yours. Seeing clearly the outer rim of gold, protecting the inner white shield. Think of this as a hard shield of Gold from the Divine's own hand, setting a hard outer shell to protect the white energy shield you created.

There are many types of shields a person can set. A bubble is just one. You can also set a mirrored shield, which is designed to reflect negative energies back to those who are trying to send their negativity to you. This method is somewhat confrontational and may not be the best methods. But it is a popular one found throughout the Internet.

This process described above can also be used to clear unwanted energy from your house as well. You can create the ball of divine white light in the centre of your home. Imagine as your house breaths with life, the Divine Universal Spirit helps that ball to grow while it pushes out stress and negativity. Until finally the ball of Divine white light encompasses the entire home or even your entire property.

As you set your protective shield around yourself or your home, you can also visualize the energy passing through your animal family. Seeing the effects of negativity and anxiety being pushed out of them is good.

Many people feel a connection to certain animal spirits, such as wolves or dragons. And adding these to your visualization certainly can't hurt. So if you have a connection to dragons, consider asking them to stand guard on the four corners of your property to zap any negative energies with their fire as it passes over your home.

Just like meditation, what works for one person may not work for another. Everyone relates to visualizations in his or her own way. Even a person's culture or upbringing can have positive influences when incorporated into a protective visualization process. So try different things that bring comfort to you and this will add to the success of your protective efforts.



### Inner Light Meditation

In this meditation, the light you see when you close your eyes and look at the back of your eyelids - your "inner screen" - will be your primary object of focus. Focussing on this light will produce a pleasant state of relaxation, plus this light serves as a bridge to connect you with the light of your Inner Essence - your Core Self. It's a fairly simple meditation, but is potentially very deep.

#### Steps of the Inner Light Meditation

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed.
2. Look at the screen that fills the space behind your closed eyelids.
3. Notice any light that appears on your inner screen. The light may appear as little particles, patterns, images, colours, "snow" on a tv screen, etc. (Consider anything that is not absolute darkness to be a form of light.)

4. Gently focus on the light.
5. It is not necessary to focus clearly. Simply look at the light with relaxed attention.
6. If you feel as though you are slipping into a sleep-like or dream-like state, allow it to happen.
7. If you do not see any light on your screen, it's ok... just focus on the dark screen. Whatever you experience is right.
8. If you notice you have drifted off into your thoughts, simply bring your attention back to your inner screen and continue looking at the light.

### **Benefits of this meditation:**

- Relaxation and stress reduction.
- Increased flow of fuel to the brain.
- Gradual opening of the 6th chakra - the "inner eye" or "third eye" - giving clear insight and inner vision.
- Direct experience of your calm, unbounded Inner Essence, connecting with your Inner Essence taps a wellspring of spiritual energy which nourishes and enhances all levels of life. When connected with your Inner Essence, life flows more effortlessly, and you begin to perceive the world as a more supportive, enjoyable place. Regular contact with your Inner Essence catalyzes a gradual shift to a higher level of consciousness.



### **Energy Healing Meditation**

In this simple healing meditation, you send the powerful healing Life Force directly to the area in need of help. This Life Force is the energy behind all healing. Wherever this energy is flowing and in balance, there is health and well being. Wherever this energy is blocked or out of balance is where illness manifests.

1. Sit reasonably straight and close your eyes.

2. Breathe slowly, as silently as possible. (Holding your breath after inhaling or exhaling is not recommended.)
3. As you inhale, feel yourself breathing the healing Life Force in through your solar plexus. Picture this Life Force as a very refined, light energy.
4. As you exhale, gently direct this light energy to the afflicted area. If there is not a specific ailing area, disperse this light energy throughout your body as you exhale.
5. Continue until you feel the area has received enough Life Force.

Although energy healing can be effective for diminishing pain, tension and various localized ailments, if you have a serious illness it is suggested that you see a qualified health practitioner.



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**How often should I meditate?** Optimum results come from daily practice - once or twice daily. However, you may choose to meditate on an as-needed basis.

**How long should my meditations be?** If you are just beginning meditation and wish to practice regularly, it's best to start meditating 10 to 15 minutes once a day. After a while, you may want to increase that to 20 minutes once a day, or 10 minutes twice a day.

**More meditation is not necessarily better. Why is this?** Meditation taps into some very powerful inner energies. These energies are very healing and uplifting, but it takes some time to acclimate to their higher frequency, and is best done gradually.

Also, these higher energies tend to catalyze some degree of emotional and physical detoxification - a release of stored up negative energies. This may be particularly noticeable when you are first beginning to meditate (during or outside of meditation). If this initial detoxification is accomplished gently, you are more likely to continue the practice of meditation.

Generally, the experiences when one begins to meditate are quite enjoyable. People often report feeling more peaceful, positive, loving and centered in daily life. Many experience new insights and greater clarity.

**How do I know when my meditation time is up?** When you think that your designated time is up, open one eye and peek at the clock. This won't bring you all the way out of meditation. If there is still time left, close your eye and continue. You can also set a watch alarm or musical alarm, or place a wind-up kitchen timer under a pillow.

**What time of day is best to meditate?** Any time of day is good. It is best to have a specific time that is your meditation time. At first, though, you may find it helpful to experiment with various times to see if one particular time of day consistently produces more enjoyable meditations. If you are having trouble finding time to meditate, I suggest you do it first thing in the morning.

**What should I be experiencing when I meditate?** The possible experiences when meditating are unlimited. They can range from extraordinary to ordinary; from blissful to boring; from peaceful to turbulent; from insightful to nonsensical. There may be periods of no thought and periods of myriad thoughts. You may feel tired and foggy or very alert. All of these experiences are alright and perfectly normal. The point is to accept whatever occurs in meditation.

Meditation experiences tend to be based on cycles of "clearing" and "clarity." During periods of clearing - when you are releasing accumulated physical/emotional toxins - experiences tend to be more thought-filled and don't seem very deep. At times when there is less clearing, there tends to be more clarity and depth, and fewer thoughts. It is important to remember that both poles of this cycle are necessary and valuable parts of a larger process of profound growth and transformation.

**At times in meditation I experience a state that feels a lot like sleep, but it's not exactly sleep. What is it?**

The sanskrit term for this state of consciousness is "yoga nidra," although some refer to it as "yogi blackout" or a "theta state," because the dominant brainwaves would be theta waves, measuring at 4 to 7 cycles per second. When experiencing this, you have slipped into a deep state of awareness, but your inner senses are not alert enough at the time to experience it clearly, so it can feel sleep-like or dream-like. With continued meditation, you will gain more clarity at this level of consciousness. Do not be disappointed, as a deep level of healing happens in this state, even you are unaware of it and you may feel as though you "missed out" or "didn't experience anything" as you can't remember it.

**Does meditation have to be spiritually based?** No, meditation can be used purely to achieve inner peace and calm and subsequently personal empowerment, which is

deeply powerful and often life changing. Because of the powerful impact meditation can have, it often connects with a spiritual experience.

## MUDRAS

Mudras are an ancient system of precise gestures that are often used in meditation and yoga. They are believed to develop energy circuits within the body to be used in healing and promoting higher states of consciousness. It is believed there are 24 basic mudras and are intended to link the individual energy force with the Universal force. The Sanskrit word for Mudra means “seal”. In yoga, these hand positions “seal” the energy flow in the body.

It is believed there is a chakra in the centre of the palm that emits an electro-magnetic ray. The hand is like a miniature universe representing the complete system. In both Buddhist and Yogic systems, the right hand represents the SUN and the left the MOON. The Sun represents intelligences and the moon meditation.

### The Five Elements

In both hands, the fingers represent the five elements:

THUMB: Sun

INDEX FINGER Air or wind

MIDDLE FINGER Sky or space

RING FINGER Earth

LITTLE FINGER Water

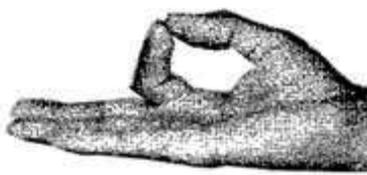
Mudras are believed to help control the 5 elements in our bodies as they create energy waves, which help to balance the 5 elements and, some say, are able to cure disease whether they are physical, mental or spiritual. During my research it would seem that there is conflicting evidence as to how long and often you should hold a mudra for but like all meditation I believe practice is elemental and so hold the mudra for as long as it feels comfortable.

## Anjali Mudra



Press both palms firmly together. This neutralises the positive (male) and positive (female) side of the body. By connecting we bring both hemispheres of our brains into balance. You will see that this is the same as the prayer position. Using the Anjali mudra is a purposeful opening of the heart, as well as a calm centering of the mind and it reduces anxiety and tension.

## Gyan Mudra



Place the tip of the thumb on the tip of the index finger while the other fingers remain relaxed and extended. Do this with both hands and place them on the thigh in a relaxed position. When the fingers point upwards it is called a Chin Mudra and when they are pointed downwards it is called Jnana Mudra.

Most used in meditation and during chanting Om and the Gayantri Mantra. It is considered effective in cases of mental ailment, imparts happiness, the intellect develops, memory is sharpened. This mudra is useful for enhancing mental capabilities. Its regular practice over a substantial stretch of time helps in sharpening the memory, mental concentration and thinking process and in increasing the grasping/learning capacities. Several types of mental disorders are prevented and cured by consistent practice of this mudra. It is beneficial for those suffering from insomnia. Short-tempered and impatient people can also get soothing improvement in their nature by practicing this mudra.

The Sanskrit word "jnana" means pure knowledge. It is linked with sagacity and enlightened wisdom. That, which enables us discriminate between the right and the wrong and which shows us the light of truth, is "jnana". Great spiritual endeavours (sadhana<sup>2</sup>) are required for attainment of jnana. The jnana mudra pertains to the yoga practices for such a sadhana<sup>2</sup>. Lord Buddha's idols and pictures often depict his hands in this mudra. Practice of this mudra smoothly increases the flow of blood-supply and circulation in the brain to help energize the neurons for instant action. This is how the jnana mudra helps in curing many brain-related problems.

## Apaan Mudra



Bring the tips of the middle and ring finger to the tip of the thumb. One of the most important benefits of the Apan Mudra is its ability to purify the body. This mudra helps the body get rid of unwanted toxins and is also helpful in healing with constipation, flatulence, anuria, and absence of sweat. It is also said to be useful during childbirth in

case there is a delay in child birth.

## Prana Mudra



Join tips of ring and little finger to the tip of the thumb. This is recommended for overall good health. As the name suggests, this mudra helps optimal flow of the prana (vital energy) in the body. Practicing this mudra energizes and activates every cell of the body and thus helps in regulating the biochemical and physiological processes and induces youthfulness and alacrity. This mudra enhances vitality and immune system of the body. It invigorates the defence mechanism of the body and thus increases its capacity to fight against dreaded diseases. Its regular practice is found quite effective in recovery against thyroid problems and several kinds of cancer. The more you practice it, the greater would be the benefits.

## Prithvi Mudra



Join the tip of the ring finger to the tip of the thumb. This makes the body sturdy. One experiences happiness – considered to help remove all kinds of physical and mental weaknesses, maintains energy, freshness and happiness, removes limited thinking and vibrates stamina, vitamin and mineral disorders, anaemia, anorexia, IBS, personality disorders, lack of love or being underweight. Deficiency of minerals and vitamins causes weakness in the body. Although externally you may look healthy and strong, your body gets weak and 'hollow' from inside - even a little exertion tires you. The prithvi mudra is especially recommended for this. The practice of this mudra removes the fatigue and strengthens the weak or tired organs of the body. The body begins to feel energized from inside. The energy of the body naturally strengthens and enthuses the mind, which was earlier dull and irritated because of the constant weakness of the body. A happy mood helps in cheering up and broadening the attitude and focusing the mind. Narrow-mindedness and prejudices are significantly reduced by the practice of this mudra. The tip of the ring finger is kept perpendicularly on the tip of the thumb in this mudra to induce gentle pressure. It restores mutual balance of the agni and the prithvi tatvas.

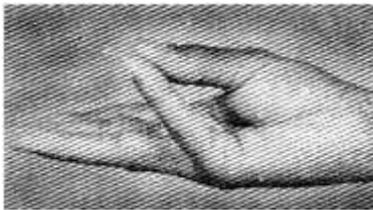
## Ling Mudra



Place both palms together and clasp the fingers. One thumb remains upright and encircled by the thumb and index finger of the other hand. Keep both hands in front of the chest. Weakness of chest and associated diseases are cured by the practice of this mudra over an extended period of time. Keeping the hands folded in this posture generates an energy current, which warms up the body. People are often seen putting their hands in this position in winter. Chronic patients of cough and cold can benefit a lot from its regular practice for thirty to fifty minutes a day. Regular practice of this mudra is an excellent antidote against diseases

caused by cough or other chest ailments. According to the natural constitution theory of the ancient Indian system of medicine, the excess of jala tatva or reduction in agni tatva as compared to its balanced proportion with jala results in cold, cough, running nose, chest congestion etc. Balancing the two in natural order is the best cure for such disorders; it also prevents further complications, e.g. asthma. The ling mudra restores this balance.

### **Varun Mudra**



Joining the tip of the small finger to the tip of the thumb whilst keeping the other fingers straight and touching each other. This mudra is effective in treating disorders connected with water, considered to help fortify the blood. Useful as a remedy for several disorders of the liver. It is also found effective in removing blood related problems. All the health problems caused by the deficiency of water are controlled and removed by regular practice of this mudra. Water constitutes about eighty-five percent of our body. Reduction in this level disturbs the body functions. Stiffness in the body or disorder in blood properties often occur when there is a deficiency of water (jala tatva) or an imbalance in its proportion with agni tatva. Such ailments, including those of the excess of agni tatva, are gradually cured by the practice of varuna mudra.

### **Lotus Mudra**



Lotus Mudra belongs to the heart chakra and is the symbol of purity. It is believed that Lotus Mudra is synonymous to opening towards the Sun, the divine principle. Moreover this mudra is practised when you feel drained, misunderstood, or lonely. Lotus Mudra is practised by placing both hands in front of the chest so that only the edges of the hands and pads of your fingers touch each other. This forms the bud of the lotus flower.

Open the hands, but maintain the contact between the tips of the little fingers and the outer edges of the thumbs. The next step follows of spreading the other fingers open as wide as possible. After four deep breaths, one may close both hands back into a bud, place the fingernails of the fingers of both hands on top of each other; now join the backs of the fingers, the backs of the hands, and let the hands hang down relaxed for a while. In the same way, bring hands back into the bud and the open flower. This process can be followed repeated a number of times. This mudra relates to the heart chakra, the Lotus Mudra is a symbol of purity and helps to open the heart centre.

## Dhyana Mudra



This mudra, as the word indicates, is helpful in conditioning the mind for meditation. Keeping the hands stable in this mudra for some time generates a state of peace in the mind. Regular and consistent practice for increasing the duration gradually releases the tensions, stresses and confusions that keep the mind in perpetual turmoil. The calming comfort one feels in this mudra can be likened to what one would feel when he goes beneath the cooling shade of a huge tree after a tiring walk under the blazing hot sun. Quietude and relaxation of the mind are essential for meditation. The dhyana mudra serves this preconditioning purpose. Therefore, those engaged in spiritual practice of meditation (dhyana sadhana) are often seen in this mudra.

This mudra induces relaxation in the entire body and thus freshens up its every organ and limb. That is why one feels infused with vibrant energy and enthusiasm after sitting in this mudra even for fifteen to thirty minutes. This mudra should be practiced while sitting, preferably in sukhasana (i.e. sitting with erect spinal cord with legs rolled round). For this, both the hands are kept on the lap – palm of the right hand is kept open above the palm of the left hand. In a healthy state of mind and body, one can instantly feel the relaxing effect of this posture.

## Surya Mudra



Practice of this mudra removes lethargy and dullness and, instead, induces alacrity and activity. The sun (surya) symbolizes brilliance and energy. In its absence there is night when every creature feels tired, fatigued and sleepy. Sunrise infuses new life, energy and alertness in everyone; tiny insect, birds and humans, every one becomes active in their daily routines. The rise and setting of the sun, in a way controls the sleep and the awakening of the entire world.

Similar effects of adducing alertness and energy are experienced by practicing the surya mudra. It eliminates all fatigue, heaviness and laziness in few minutes. The experts of the science of mudras claim that regular and long-term practice of this mudra awakens supernormal powers hidden in the human psyche.

## Vayu Mudra



The ancient Indian science of Healing (Ayurveda) refers to the disorders caused by gases or air pressures in and around the veins, arteries etc, as – vata ailments. Joint pain, arthritis, rheumatism, etc are common examples of such disorders. The

vayu mudra helps control and cure the vata ailments. The optimum time of practicing it at a stretch and the overall duration would depend upon the stage and type of the ailments. It is also efficacious in recovery from paralysis attacks. Best results are obtained if this mudra and the prana mudra are practiced together, one after the other. This mudra is generally effective in alleviating toothache, headache, stomach ache, etc. As in case of the other mudras, its practice by healthy people is an excellent preventive measure against all vata related problems.

There are many more mudras that exist, some used in yoga, some used in meditation, and even some used by Buddhists to achieve certain states. If this interests you, Google is a great place to start.

## MANTRAS

Mantra Meditation is an easy form of meditation and can be practiced by anyone at anytime and under any conditions.

A Mantra is a grouping of sound vibrations, which have an effect on the mental and psychic consciousness. Although traditionally given by a Guru, the practitioner may choose his own mantra. An important criterion for mantra selection is that it must appeal to the mind fully when spoken verbally. Mantra chanting creates powerful vibrations, which are said to be directed to the right chakras to attract divine forces. This process is said to mysteriously heal the spiritual, physical and psychological body. It is important that when the mantra is chanted, the words and their rhythm must be enjoyed and one must surrender oneself to this experience. Mantras do not have to have any specific meaning. Their power lies not in the meaning of the word but through the vibratory effects of the sound that they produce when spoken verbally or mentally.

A mantra can also be a positive affirmation which you understand and repeat to yourself – such as “I am loved” or “All is well” The most common way of practicing Mantra Meditation is performed by repeating a mantra in sync with the rotation of a mala but you can do it without the use of a mala. A mala is a rosary of 108 beads where each bead is turned after the mental or audible recitation of the mantra and is effective because it provides an anchor to bring the mind back as it experiences wavering thoughts and this is one of the most recommended forms of meditation for the beginner.

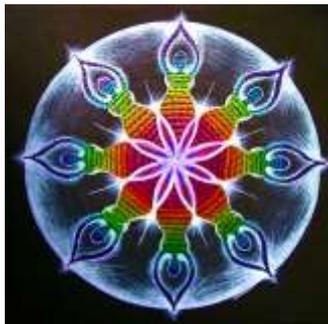
## Mantra Words

I am love; health; lam; I am happy; peace; vam; I am healthy; clarity; ram; I am grateful; gratitude; yam; I am peace; love; ham; I am generous; tranquil; aum; I am compassionate; silence; prosper; I am filled with balance and loving kindness; I am well nurtured; I release anger for transformation; all is well; forgive.



## MANDALAS

What is a mandala? It is a design which uses images and geometric designs to create a visually balanced pattern with a dominant theme in the centre. Generally, the term refers to any such design which is used in meditation and rituals (particularly in Hinduism, Buddhism, and yantra yoga); some of the images might depict religious icons, deities, and personal symbolism. Below are two examples of mandalas:



Mandalas are symbolic. Each part of the mandala represents one of the forces in our lives; the mandala's *pattern* depicts the *interplay* of these forces. These elements are arranged symmetrically, to express the ideally organized, balanced, and unified functioning of our mind, our affairs, and the universe. In this unity, some mandalas depict "opposites," such as Tantric Buddhism's "wrathful deities" and "peaceful deities" - or a psychotherapy patient's "conscious mind" and "unconscious mind." When we create a mandala, the particular arrangement of elements characterizes our psychological and

spiritual state at that moment; Jung discovered that when his schizophrenic patients were in their worst condition, their artwork often depicted mandalas, in an apparent attempt to bring order - as portrayed by the mandalas - into their psychological chaos.

A mandala is a geometric design. The word "mandala" means "circle"; most mandalas are circles. However, the *inside* of the circle often contains a "quaternity" (as Jung called it) - a four-sided geometric form such as a square, which could symbolize the totality of the directions of east, north, west, and south. The centre (i.e., the "bindu") portrays the Self, or the primary deity, or another symbol of wholeness or enlightenment. Jung wrote, "The mandala's basic motif is the premonition of a centre of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy. This centre is not felt or thought of as the ego, but if one may so express it, as the self. Although the centre is represented as the innermost point, it is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self - the paired opposites that make up the total personality. This totality comprises consciousness first of all, then the personal unconscious, and finally an indefinitely large segment of the collective unconscious whose archetypes are common to all mankind." (From "Concerning Mandala Symbolism," *Collected Works* 11:23ff.)

The technique for creating a mandala: If we make a mandala, we gain some advantages: (1) the mandala can contain personal symbolism which might make the mandala more effective; (2) we can use the time during which we create the mandala as a meditation upon the creative process itself and upon the feelings which are being expressed.

1. The medium. We can make the mandala on paper. Or we can use other types of media, e.g., embroidery or rug-weaving - or arrangements of stones, tiles, beads, gems, or coloured sand. We can even make a three-dimensional mandala, in a sculpture.
2. The colours. We can draw the mandala in black ink on white paper. Or we can use colours, from crayons, felt-tip pens, water colours, or oil paints.
3. The images. The mandala's images can be geometric designs (e.g., squares, triangles, hearts), internally generated images (from dreams, daydreams, fantasies, visualizations, guided meditations, memories, etc.), externally acquired images (from books, magazines, etc.), images from our daily life (e.g., people, possessions, places), religious symbols (e.g., a deity, a crucifix, images from religious art), or any other images which evoke feeling and meaning for us.
4. The creative process. While creating the mandala, we allow a flow of creativity, feeling, intuition, and inspiration. If we are using this time for self-discovery (rather than the construction of a formal piece of artwork for public display), we allow ourselves to be spontaneous; we do not follow a preconceived concept regarding the finished product, nor are we concerned with the artistic quality of the mandala.

## **Technique for using a mandala in meditation**

1. We gaze at the mandala. There are variations in this technique:
  - The centre. With our peripheral vision, we also see the outer images of the design.
  - The totality. Starting at the centre, we let our eyes wander throughout the mandala to its edges; then we gradually return our attention to the centre.
  - An inner image. Instead of gazing at the mandala itself during our meditation session, we can look at it just long enough to become familiar with it; then we close our eyes and re-create the image in our imagination.
2. In our meditative state, we sense a commonality between ourselves and the various aspects of the mandala - the images, the opposites, the balance (in the visual symmetry), and the image in the middle. We "identify" ourselves with each of those aspects, and we align our own psychological dynamics with the dynamics of the aspects.
3. With this alignment, the mandala's characteristics reinforce those of our psyche, e.g. the diversity, the order, the balance, and the distinct centre.

## **BREATHING TECHNIQUES**

### **Transmutation Breathing - what is it?**

How often have you heard “take in 10 deep breaths to calm down”? Or before you make a decision or release stress someone often makes a comment about a deep sigh or deep breath to relax. We can often find much wisdom in these “old wives tales”, and this one isn’t an exception. Breathing is a metaphor for life. If you cut off your breathing, then try to see what in your life you are cutting off. By learning how to breathe properly, you can add to the flow of energy within your body and increase the “life” in events around you. That’s basically what transmutation breathing is. It is a mechanism for helping the lungs transform its energies for the betterment of the whole body.

When you breathe on a physical level, you pull in oxygen. Everyone knows our body needs oxygen to survive. We breathe to deliver oxygen to the brain, to oxygenate the blood in our body and so on. When you breathe deeply, you expel the natural build up of water in your lungs. Keeping the lungs dry and free from illness. We do this naturally, but

when we're stressed or in situations of great fear, we have a tendency to alter our breathing. This alteration can cause a build up of the fluids in the lungs and a person slowly develops bronchitis or even phenomena.

This physical requirement often causes us to forget about the "life force energy" that our spiritual body requires. Life force energy is also called Prana, Ki and Chi, and when we breathe, we pull in this energy along with the oxygen. It is an energy that helps our spiritual body connect to the world around us. It helps us balance, address issues and find higher states of awareness that can assist in our enlightenment. Ki is just as important to our spiritual body as oxygen is for our physical body.

## **Why do we need to learn how to breathe?**

When breathing normally, most people will breathe into their stomach. Instead of watching the rise and fall of your chest, you can see the effect in your tummy. Now, think about this for a second. Where are your lungs? When you take in a deep breath, you force your body to breathe properly, you force the air into your lungs and not your stomach. You not only increase the levels of oxygen in the body, but you also pull in more Ki energy as well. Just as the lungs are properly equipped to maximize the benefit of the oxygen delivery to the body, they are also equipped on a spiritual level to deliver the Ki energy to the spiritual body. Simply learning how to breathe properly can affect many changes in your life.

## **Just how do you prepare for Transmutation Breathing?**

The easiest way to begin is to set aside some time during the day to specifically work on your breathing. Now that's not as hard as you might think. You take your lungs with you everywhere you go. So why can't you breath at the next red light or while you're waiting to pay that toll during rush hour traffic.

1. 4-6 times a day, take in 10 deep breaths. As you breathe in, set the intent for your breath work. For instance, say an affirmation or a state a purpose for what you want to change in your life. If you have recently addressed some fear you have in your life, then use breath work to help you overcome and release it.
2. As you breathe in say to yourself "I want to express my emotions, desires and feelings in a free and positive way". Not "I want to release fear", this approach focuses on the fear.
3. Focus on each breath. With each inhale, state in your mind or out loud the affirmation or intent. On the exhale, imagine the stress and anxiety about this issue travelling out of your body like a gray smoke.
4. On the last exhale, say a quick prayer for the energy you've released... As you watch the last gray smoke travel out your body, say to yourself...Great Spirit I release this

energy into the ethers where it can be dissipated and no longer do harm to me or anyone else in the universe.

You should breathe in through your nose, pulling in the oxygen and Ki into your lungs. But you should expel the stress and anxiety through your mouth.

At least once a day, try to find 5 minutes to sit down and relax to really focus on the transmutation process.

1. Start with 10 deep breaths focusing on your intent.
2. Once you have completed the breath work, focus on the muscles in your body, starting with your toes. As you breathe in, tighten one muscle group at a time, and imagine positive Ki energy going into the muscle.
3. With the exhale, relax the muscles and imagine the Ki pushing out any residual stress or anxiety stored in your body. Continue this process up your body to your head.
4. When you have completed this step, focus once more on just the breathing. Take in 5 deep breaths, stating the intent as before. Only add a positive remark about returning health and balance to your body.

Nasal breathing is a centring mechanism. Energizing the left/right brain atmospheres. The problem is, most people pull those breaths into their stomach and not into their solar plexus where repressed emotions are kept. The solar plexus is the bridging chakra. It is the centre point of the body, connecting the lower physical chakras to the upper spiritual chakras.

The solar plexus is located at the lower point of the rib cage, where the ribs meet in the middle. By focusing on breathing into the lungs, you are feeding the solar plexus with the Ki energy. The energy can then help you release the repressed emotions and therefore effect positive change in your health, balance and spiritual being.

Transmutation breathing can be done alone, or as a prelude to your meditations. As with any method of effecting change, you have to make the effort to do it, and you have to truly want to make the transformation. As you practice and work through your breathing technique, you should try to increase the deep breaths. 100 consecutive deep breaths take about 5 minutes to accomplish. This is exactly what you want to aspire to.

As with any thing, what works for one may not work for another. So if you feel comfortable altering this method to suite your specific needs, then give it a shot. Add some ritual, or designate a specific time to do your breath work. There are as many approaches as their people who breathe, so experiment for about 2 weeks with each method until you find the combination that works best for you.

And if you don't have time during the day to breath, or work on this method 4-6 times a day, then don't discard the idea. Even doing this once a day or even once a week is better than not at all.



### **Additional Breathing Exercises and Techniques**

You may use these simple practices lying down, walking, standing, or sitting – try to do one of them for 10 –20 minutes per day.

**Counting the breath:** Begin silently counting the breaths: 1 as out inhale, 2 as you exhale, 3 on the next inhalation and so on up to 10. Then start again. Continue until the timer has sounded. (you need a little clock or some kind of time for this)

#### **Earth Breath: magnetises and grounds**

You can use this to prepare yourself before meditation. The Earth's magnetism gives strength and you can do this with your feet on the ground or lying on the couch if you are able to use visualisation. Breathe in and out through your nose, letting go with each exhalation. Imagine drawing the Earth's magnetism through the soles of your feet and palms of your hands. Take the breath up the spine and as you exhale imagine the light travelling down the spine, letting go of any tension and sleepiness.

#### **Water Breath: releases feelings - letting go**

Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Imagine a waterfall washing over you and the water flowing through you – with each exhalation it flows through you

#### **Fire Breath: energising and lifts us out of depression**

This is the light breath and it can energize and lift us out of depression. Breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose. Visualise the solar plexus as a furnace that you stoke as you breathe in. As you breathe out imagine radiating light out through the heart centre, shoulder blades, crown and base centres and sides of the body.

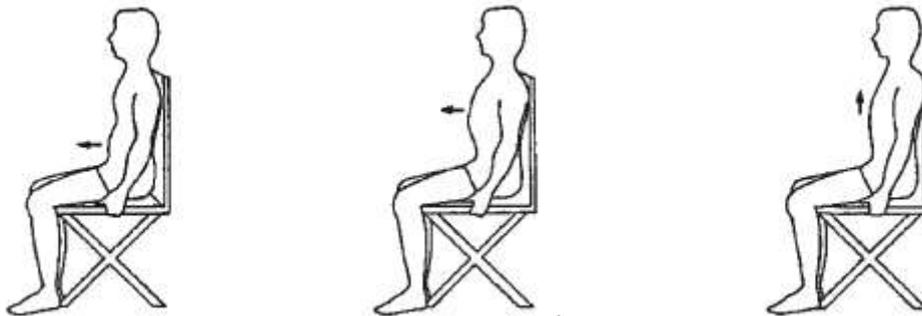
## **Air Breath: for clearing out the cobwebs in the mind**

Breathe in and out through the mouth. Imagine your thoughts as a pile of leaves forming a point up at the “third eye”. Breathe in and focus on the third eye. As you breathe out imagine it as a wind that scatters over a huge expanse.

## **Three Stage Deep Breathing**

### **Filling the lungs:**

- Fill the bottom of the lungs – abdomen expands
- Fill middle third of lungs – chest expands
- Fill top third of lungs – shoulders lift



### **Emptying the lungs:**

- Top third of lungs empties first – shoulders relax
- Chest cavity contracts, pushing air out of middle third of lungs
- Abdomen is pulled in, forcing all remaining air out of lungs



## Alternate Nostril Breathing

- Left nostril is held closed; air is drawn in through right nostril
- Air is exhaled through the mouth



Repeat three times, using the three state deep breathing exercise.

- Right nostril is held closed; air is drawn in through the left nostril
- Left nostril is then closed; air is exhaled through right open nostril



Repeat three times, again using the three-stage deep breathing exercise.

## MINDFULNESS

This is getting to know the here and now. The aim is to become absorbed by what you are doing. It's concentrating on the "here and now", becoming aware of how the here and now is affecting you. Practising "mindfulness" can be doing anything at all including posture work, sitting, breathing, exercise, walking, even doing the washing up or watching a butterfly in the garden. It does not mean "analysing" the sensation or focus but being aware of it. i.e during walking meditation you become aware of each step you take and the soles of your feet on the ground.

The mind can be divided into 4 parts:

The **lower mind** is the thinking mind. It is the mind that receives information through the sense organs, i.e. eyes, nose, ears, mouth and skin. All that you have seen, heard, smelt, touched and tasted is stored in your mind in the same way a computer stores information. When more information comes in it refers back to stored data and that determines how you will react to the new information. We act into the world through our organs of action, i.e. hands, feet, vocal chords, organs of elimination and reproduction. The world as we see it is the result of all the information and experiences you have had since the day you were born. In other words we are programmed in our likes, dislikes, beliefs, perceptions, prejudices and how we should behave. No two people see the world in the same way. Our perspective depends on our programming.

The **memory mind** contains all our fears, anxieties, phobias, habits, all our unfinished business which manifests as anger, hatred, depression, etc. as well as all the positive aspects of love, joy, compassion, caring. It contains unmanifest desires and attachments.

The **ego** is the part of the mind which is responsible for our feeling of separation. It creates the I, me and mine. It is the part that strives to be superior, to have more. It accumulates knowledge, possessions, skills to make it feel important. It fears not having enough. We identify with the ego as the Self but it is not - it pretends to be.

The **higher mind** is known as the Buddhi or intellect. It has nothing to do with being intellectual through the accumulation of knowledge. The intellect is the seat of creativity, intuition, inspiration and discernment. It cannot be accessed consciously. When we develop our ability to access the higher mind, we start to question what we have been programmed to believe. We start to recognise prejudices, beliefs and who we think we are and to question the truth of it.

Another aspect of mind is the collective consciousness of which Carl Jung spoke. It contains the blueprint of our past and all the knowledge of our ancestors and archetypes.

From the time we are born, we become aware of the world around us and project outwards. We become so identified with the world around us that we no longer experience the Self. We get caught up in gratifying the senses. During meditation we take our consciousness to different parts of the mind. We move away from intellectualising. When we start to meditate the consciousness is drawn to the lower mind, here it starts to clear out the unfinished business. We may experience this as thoughts moving across our mind or visions. You may be confronted with actual experiences or they may clear out easily and unnoticed. Once the lower mind is cleared, we begin to access the higher mind. (This is a very simplified version.)

The benefits of meditation far outweigh the experience in the beginning. You may have some very deep meditations and some where thoughts seem to be crowding your mind for the full 20 minutes. Even if the latter is the case, don't give up. What you will soon

start to notice is that you deal with stress more peacefully that life appears brighter. You experience more joy and happiness. Your attitude changes. When we clear out the accumulated fears, phobias, complexes, etc. we experience joy and peace in our everyday life. Our self image improves, as does our relationship with our environment. As we change towards the world, the world changes towards us. Like attracts like, so as we become more positive, we attract more positive things into our lives. If we see the world as a fearful place it is because we have fear in our mind. If our world is loving, it is because we are loving.

So what is mindfulness? It is a moment-to-moment alertness to the events of our world. We cultivate "bare attention" - our mind merely observes, without elaborating. Mindfulness meditation is a practical form of meditation for busy people, because it does not require us to set aside any time for it; instead, we are simply mindful of whatever activity we are doing. Although that might not seem like meditation, mindfulness (*satipatthana*) is practiced in many Buddhist sects.

In mindfulness, we are aware of whatever is happening. Rather than concentrating on a particular object (e.g. a candle flame), we allow our attention to shift continually from one object to another, in the natural course of our daily actions; we do not direct our attention toward anything in particular. We can be mindful of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensory input, bodily sensations - and external phenomena such as people, objects, and movements. As our attention moves from one object to another, we can mindfully notice both the object and the reason why our attention was drawn there.

Don't strive for bare attention all of the time. Perhaps in advanced stages, we can maintain this mindful state continually. But for the rest of us, a constant "bare attention" would be repressive of other states which need to be expressed. We can use the mindful state as our centre, our home, from which we venture out to engage those other non-mindfulness states, and to which we return when we have concluded each interaction. Those non-mindful states include:

1. Analytical thought. In mindfulness, we merely observe our thoughts as they pass through us. However, sometimes we benefit from lingering with our thoughts, to delve into them more deeply.
2. Imagination. Sometimes we might need to daydream in reverie and fantasies; we shut off the input from the external world and become functionally mindless.
3. Personal response. Instead of merely observing, we might need to affirm our human identity and boundaries by indulging our personal reactions, opinions, liking or disliking, and our intent to change certain elements in our life.

We gain benefits from mindfulness.

1. We act consciously rather than automatically. This enhances our spontaneity, flexibility, creativity, and freedom of choice. From this position of centeredness, we are ready for anything. We notice our behavioural habits and the thoughts or emotions which propel them; with this awareness, we might modify the habit to one

which is more productive, or we could lift the behaviour from the realm of the habitual altogether and perform it with full attentiveness. Eventually mindfulness itself becomes a habit; it is the natural state of the mind.

2. We are more aware of our emotions and thoughts. We notice them as soon as they arise, so we are less likely to become lost in them and thus to perpetuate non-productive habitual emotional responses or trains of thought or fantasies or compulsions. This awareness of our inner world might be developed more easily in "thought meditation" when we are turned inward specifically to observe our thoughts and feelings, but we can also observe them during mindfulness of our daily activities.
3. We acquire more information. Because of our increased alertness, we learn and remember more details and subtleties. Because we attend to each distinct moment, we are continually receptive to new information rather than accepting a closure (as in the statement, "I already know how to do this, so I don't need to pay attention").
4. Our senses become more acute. We notice both the beauties and the dangers around us. For example, we have a greater enjoyment of a delicious apple, and we are more conscious of the circumstances when we are driving; my favourite place to practice mindfulness is in my car, being fully aware of my vehicle, other drivers, and the road.
5. We perceive more accurately. Mindfulness helps us to "see things as they are" by developing an open, neutral stance from which our input is not distorted or repressed by biases. We directly observe each moment as unique and intimate, so we don't rely on abstract concepts or stereotyping labels; for example, rather than viewing a person simply as "Peter," we might experience him as "a happy person who seems excited to share some news with me." (That perspective frees us to live in this moment of "sharing some news" rather than being unduly restricted by any prior associations which we have had with Peter.)
6. We increase our understanding of our physical body. (The benefits of mindfulness in the use of the body are examined in the chapter regarding movement meditation.) As we become more mindful of our body:
  - We can enhance its energy, pleasure, comfort, breathing, relaxation, efficiency of movement and posture - and thereby increase our healthfulness.
  - We notice more of the tensions and pains which alert us to situations which need to be corrected, and we discern our reactions to specific foods, or to "bad habits" such as overeating, or smoking, or taking drugs.
  - We might become aware of the subtle physiological states which occur in response to our thoughts and emotions; for example, we notice the change in our breathing and muscles when we are afraid even if we are telling ourselves that we are *not* afraid. Conversely, we recognize the ways in which physiological states influence our thoughts and emotions.

7. We learn to live in the moment. The present is where we find joy and life itself. We attend to the current process rather than fantasizing about the eventual goal. In mindfulness, the past and the future do not exist (except perhaps in a sense of "flow" from one moment to the next). Contrarily, our thoughts are never in the present; even when we are thinking about a present occurrence, the amount of time in which we process the data about the occurrence has already made it a thing of the past.
8. We learn about life's impersonal nature. As we watch the phenomena around us, we notice that the components exist separately from us, despite any psychological connection to them (as in "my" home). Our actions and thoughts and body seem to have a life of their own when we watch them closely. To an extent, we are a mass of impulses, spontaneous movements, and functions which occur without our conscious knowledge or consent; some people believe that we are composed of nothing but this impersonal activity with no permanent self behind it. (Those of us who believe that there *is* a permanent self can still use this general principle to perceive the world around us with less of the "personal" overlay of our projections, desires, aversions, judgments, and fantasies.) We become simple awareness - a spectator who senses events (and ourselves) as mere "processes" involving semi-autonomous elements. To explore this impersonal-ness, we can ask ourselves, for example, "Who is walking?"
9. We learn about life's transitoriness. When we observe objects, we see their changes, their growth, and their decline. In contrast, when we experience life conceptually, we don't notice the changes, because the tree, for example, is still a tree, rather than a sprouting life which has more flowers than it had yesterday. We also realize the impermanence of ourselves - the passing of thoughts and feelings and moods and identities which might seem continuous if not observed carefully; for example, we might have generalized ourselves as a sad person, but in mindfulness, we notice the many other emotions (including those of "a happy person") which pass through us. Long-lasting experiences become a series of separate momentary occurrences; for example, what we might consider to be simply a two-hour car ride becomes millions of ever-new sights and sounds. We begin to feel the general impermanence of the phenomena around us; objects are no longer "solid" but rather we sense them as shifting energies. In advanced stages of mindfulness (and Zen), practitioners say that they can detect "mind moments" - the individual, extremely brief periods of time in which the entire universe repeatedly ends and recreates like the separate frames of a movie.
10. We become more aware of our energy.
  - When we perceive the living, active qualities of our interactions (instead of experiencing them conceptually), we discern them as exchanges of energy; thus we can enhance these exchanges by directing our attention (and thus our energy) more mindfully.

- We notice the ways in which we squander energy in mindless behaviour or involuntary emotional responses.
  - We notice more interesting elements around us, so we are less apt to experience the energy-draining state of boredom.
  - Because we are attuned to present occurrences, we are not frittering our energy with worry about the future or regrets about the past.
11. We learn about the nonverbal aspects of ourselves. Some people think too much; we allow a continual flood of thoughts - labelling and judging and over-analysing everything around us, and also processing regrets about the past, and worries about the future. The mind creates thoughts constantly; sometimes we need to attend to those thoughts. But at other times, we can direct our attention to other valuable interests; for example, we can decide instead to be attentive to the refreshing and stimulating objects of the senses - the cool breeze, or the background music, or the warm sensations of our body, or our feelings regarding our surroundings, or our imagination, etc.
  12. We experience more of life and its possibilities. As Thoreau said in *Walden*, "Only that day dawns to which we are awake."

The technique? Simply, we pay attention to whatever we are doing.

1. Accept whatever is occurring. In mindfulness, we are accepting and *self*-accepting, regardless of whatever is presented to us. With this acknowledgment of things as they are, we do not become immersed in thoughts of interpretation, judgment, reaction, opinion, expectation, liking or disliking, or wanting to change anything. In mindfulness meditation, everything is equal; it is simply an occurrence to be observed in what the Buddhists call "choiceless awareness." For example, if we feel unhappy, we behold the unhappiness; if we are excited, we behold the excitement. We surrender to the experience of our life, rather than denying or avoiding - but if we find ourselves denying or avoiding, we can be mindful of those activities, too. Acceptance is not passive. It does not transform us into "mindless" victims who would have a "choiceless awareness" about whether to walk into a busy intersection; we accept the fact that we must wait for the traffic light, and we accept the smog and noise (or we accept the realization that they irritate us), and we are mindful of the conditions which would permit a safe crossing. At such times in this complex world, we must be analytical - but we can be mindful of our analysing, and not allow the analysis to proceed into an emotional reaction (and judgment, opinion, etc.). The analytical part of the mind is necessary in certain circumstances, but it doesn't need to be left running all the time; when its service is completed (i.e., after we have crossed the street), we can shift to a different mode in which to be mindful.
2. Move slowly. We can be mindful at any speed, but our practice is easier if we move slowly. When our actions are at a relaxed pace, we can feel our body adjusting to various motions, and we have the time to notice more elements

around us. After we strengthen our habit of being mindful, we can attain that same degree of awareness in our typical faster pace.

## **Exercises in mindfulness**

We can be mindful during all activities, but these exercises give us some special challenges.

1. Repeat a simple activity for a period of five minutes. We can select action which is so easy that we would ordinarily become bored (and mindless) while doing it. For example, sit at a table with your arms resting on the table. Now, very slowly, reach several inches to pick up a pen. Raise it a few inches and then set it down. Move your hand back to its original position of rest. While you repeat this action throughout the time-period, experience each repetition with freshness, as though you have never done it before. You can direct your attention toward different aspects of the movement: watching your hand, or feeling the muscles contracting. You can even close your eyes and concentrate on your sense of touch, sliding your hand across the table toward the pen, and being aware of the different textures and pressures. (With eyes closed, a variation is to dwell on the sounds which are created by the sliding and your movement of the pen.)
2. Listen to some enjoyable, peaceful music. Each time you become distracted by a thought, write a brief note about the content of that thought. After five minutes, read the notes. What types of thoughts pulled your attention away from the music? Why did those particular thoughts attract you? Were they derived from charged elements in an archetypal field?
3. Watch a movie or television program while maintaining mindfulness. (Our habit - and the producers' goal - is to lose ourselves in an emotional involvement.) Try different types of programs: sitcoms, news reports, dramas, soap operas, etc.
4. Write down the details of an activity after you have performed it mindfully. (This activity can be a short walk or a household chore.) Then repeat the activity, and notice the many details which you did not recall the first time.
5. Do a familiar activity as if this is your first time. Say to yourself, "I have never done this before." In Zen, this viewpoint is called "the beginner's mind." Be fascinated and surprised by each step of the process; you don't know what to expect next, so the activity is fresh and exciting and even ecstatic.
6. One of my favourite variations of mindfulness meditation is to use the phrase, "This is just ..." (e.g., "this is just walking" or "this is just driving"). That phrase releases me from the burden of analysing an activity in terms of my personal benefit and thus it frees me to experience the activity in its own manner, with a resulting exhilaration and an experiential intimacy.

## **The further stages of mindfulness**

We can expect the following developments. However, during the mindfulness practice, we do not seek these states as "goals," nor do we seek a sense of improvement in our mindfulness skill; to do so would impose an overlay which would distract us from the mindfulness itself. We simply do the practice, and we let it unfold in its own manner.

1. We become progressively aware of smaller increments of the phenomena around us, so the benefits stated previously become more profound. For example, we see more details; we hear more nuances in the sounds around us.
2. Mindfulness becomes a habit because:
  - We are attracted to the pleasure which it creates.
  - It is a more natural and streamlined mode of functioning, so it appeals to the mind's aspiration for efficiency.
3. We explore the nature of perception. As we strip away the personal overlays (our emotional reactions, etc.), we strive for a direct, intimate contact with our surroundings. In doing so, we realize that this supposed "contact" is actually a series of nerve messages and brain processes which occur entirely within us. (We don't know what is "out there"; we only know how the external world is experienced through our human nervous system.) If we seek a more-profound contact through mindfulness, we might transcend our physical senses to become mindful of intuitive or "psychic" perceptions of the energy of those objects. But there are more subtle levels beyond the psychic, as explained below.
4. We contemplate the duality of "the person who sees" and "the object which is seen" - and we achieve the state where the "seeing" is an impersonal function; "seer" and "seen" are merely two sides of that function. For example, when we are walking mindfully, we might feel our foot reaching down to touch the ground while the ground simultaneously reaches up to touch the foot, and in their contact is a perfect gestalt, a wholeness which is so complete that nothing exists in the universe except those two agents briefly merging into one incident within a field of emptiness. We might sense that the mind and the objects which the mind perceives arise together from that emptiness; neither one has an enduring quality nor an independent existence, and neither of them constitutes "who we are" nor a reason to provoke our personal concerns.
5. When we can maintain mindfulness continually, it matures into "insight meditation" (*vipassana*). Because our mindfulness is constant, in regard to all that we encounter, we begin to perceive these elements' interplays and patterns. We have no distractions which would cause us to miss a moment of the action (and which would leave us with the absence of important pieces from our puzzle). Thus, we gain "insight" into the general nature of our world and ourselves.
6. We can maintain mindfulness during sleep. We develop this ability in lucid dreaming and in "Tibetan dream yoga," to be conscious during the entire sleep-

period. During some lucid dreams, we are as mindless as we are during wakefulness; however, we have the option of practicing mindfulness as we pursue activities within the dreamscape. Some people are able to maintain consciousness 24 hours per day; they are "lucid" during their dreams, and aware also during the non-dreaming periods. When they awaken, they are fully refreshed, because their body has had a natural sleep and their mind, too, has recharged itself.

An example of mindfulness: typing at my computer. We cannot be mindful of everything, but we might be mindful of some of the following elements while typing. Possible digressions are also described.

1. My computer's monitor: I see the blinking cursor; I digress into a thought that it is blinking very quickly and so I should adjust the speed - but then I return to mindfulness and simply observe the blinking, and I notice (for the first time) the individual pixels which are visible within the cursor. I see the white-on-red color of my text on the computer; I digress into a thought that it looks blood-red and that that's morbid - but then I look at the color itself and notice the tingling sensation in my eyes as they process the image. I look mindfully at the monitor itself, and I notice the texture of the plastic (for the first time), and the shadows which lie on it, and I sense the fervent electronic activity which is occurring within it. I sense the physical composition of the monitor - the minerals which were extracted from the earth and were then fabricated into this machine, and I feel their connection to the minerals in the ground outside of my home; in a further penetration - not a digression - I sense their participation in an infinite flow which temporarily has fashioned them into a human device but will eventually return them to the ground.
2. My hands on the keyboard: I feel the smooth surface on top of the keys. I hear the clicking of the sound of the keys; I digress into a thought they sound business-like - but then I listen to the sounds themselves, and I feel tingling in my ears (but I digress to compare the tingling to the sensation I had felt in my eyes when looking at the monitor). I feel the heat and muscular tautness in my forearms. I feel the acute readiness in my fingers, preparing to type more words; I digress to compare their bursts of activity to that of a machine gun. I look at the curve of my ergonomic keyboard; I digress to feel happy that its ergonomic quality is protecting my health, and I feel proud that I am "smart enough" to have bought an ergonomic device - but then I return to looking at the keyboard and I notice the many individual shapes and shadows of the keys.
3. Myself: I sense the connection of my body's energy to the keyboard, and I feel the energy flowing into the plastic and electronics, and I also feel it radiating back to me as a warmth. I notice the typing of my fingers; I digress to feel proud of the speed and skill, but then I am corrected and humbled by the recollection that when I try to claim that skill as my own, my fingers become "self-conscious" and clumsy, and they regain their swiftness only when I withdraw and become the "typing" itself rather than the "typist," so I withdraw my identification and I permit the impersonal action to occur. I feel anxiety surrounding my desire to write more pages of text

today; I digress to plot a remedy to this anxiety - but then I accept the anxiety, and I feel a transcendent peacefulness which allows the anxiety to exist, and I notice that I am no longer compounding the original anxiety by being disturbed about it; eventually the original anxiety fades of its own accord as my attention inevitably redirects toward a mindfulness of something else. I observe my body's involuntary movements: the shifting of my weight on the stool, and the adjustments in my posture, and the scratching of an itch, and the periodic squinting of my eyes, and the pauses in my breathing, and the tiny "jiving" rhythms to which my body playfully moves as though it were listening to a silent song.

4. My surroundings: I look at the curtain in front of my desk, and I notice its bright blue color and the intricate weave of threads; I digress to notice that it needs to be washed. I see the papers disarrayed on my desk in a chaos of shapes and shadows and colors which fascinate my eyes; I digress to judge the papers as a "mess" which should be organized. I hear the air conditioner, and I notice that the sound is not a steady white noise but instead it has a pulsing and a variety of pitches; I digress to remember that it probably needs to be serviced. I feel the stool upon which I sit; if I allowed my mind to digress with no control, I would follow a mindless stream-of-consciousness that would proceed through these thoughts: This is a hard stool. I looked for a comfortable stool at a store which is north of town. That store is across the street from the park. I haven't gone to the park in a few weeks. I used to go there before my weekly shopping-trip. I need to buy groceries tomorrow. I need to make a shopping list. My shopping list is in a folder in my box. I need to process some of the paperwork in that box. I don't have time for that. How am I going to spend my time tonight? I need to read some books. I need to go to the library for more books. ... And so on. Such is mindlessness.

## **GROUNDING AND BALANCING**

After meditating, you might have noticed at times that you were light headed and dizzy afterwards. These are symptoms of not being fully grounded. Luckily there is something that you can do about it, but first of all, what is grounding yourself and why do you need it?

When you meditate, your mind enters an altered state of mind, one that no longer resonates with our physical world. As they say, you are 'somewhere else', and no longer in contact with the here and now. While this is the desired state to be during meditation or any energy and psychic work, when you end that work, your mind has to come back,

after all, here is where you function normally. By having your mind in the clouds as they say, you are more prone to accidents and other misfortunes and you'll simply not be able to function correctly.

Here are some of the signs that you might not be grounded enough:

- you're dizzy and disconnected
- you have a headache
- you're clumsy and dreamy
- you might even be a bit nauseous
- you are forgetful of simple things
- you are low in energy and feel down

If you feel some of these more often, you should do something about it. Grounding yourself is important.

You can ground yourself in various ways, depending on the time you have at hand and whether you are all alone or not.

- Once you finish your meditation, yoga, reiki, massage therapy or other such energy work, drink plenty of cold water. If you perform energy work on others, such as reiki or massage, wash your hands afterwards. This grounds you back into the here and now and separates you and another person's energies.
- If you are out in the nature near some trees, go ahead and hug a tree. Tree hugging is not all silly, there is a reason for it. By hugging (or touching) a tree, you ground yourself back to the earth and draw its healing energy into your body.
- Do some grounding meditation or visualization exercises. Sometimes even some grounding breathing is enough.
- Gardening is a great way to ground yourself. You are actually working with the earth, and this is exactly what you want to touch for best way to ground yourself the fastest way possible.
- Eating something sugary grounds you, so if you like sweet stuff, this is a good excuse to indulge (ever so slightly).

**DECISION MAKING WITH MEDITATION**

**Step One:** List the decisions you need to make in different areas of your life:

**Work:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Relationships:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Finances:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Family:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Health:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Purchases:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Step Two: The Steps in Decision Making**

1. Select one small decision you want to make and formulate a question that can be answered “yes” or “no”.

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2. Consider the decision from as many angles as possible. What facts and issues are you already aware of?

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3. Will your decision affect others? If so, how?

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4. What are the likely consequences of each way of deciding?

	“Yes”	“No”
Good Results		
Unwanted Results		

5. Breathe into your heart three times and then see how you feel as you imagine going with a “yes” decision. Also watch for any images that may come to mind.

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See how you feel if you go with a “no” decision:

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6. Hold each answer, together with your spiritual ideal and your ethical views. Check compatibility with:

Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

No: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Considering all of your answers so far, make a tentative decision:

Yes

No

8. Now put this tentative decision aside and meditate.
9. At the conclusion of your quiet time, silently ask your “yes” or “no” question, give the tentative answer you reached earlier, and then wait for any feelings or images that come to mind. Note those here:

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What would you say is the “inner” answer?

Yes

No

10. If you are unsure of your inner guidance, you may repeat these steps on another day. However, if you feel confident that your decision is the right one, think about how you might act on your decision.

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11. Take the action and watch for results.

