

About Meditation

Important note: *Everything I say below is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences, or based on what I have read, heard and observed. I don't think there are absolute truths or ultimate answers.*

Introduction

I find that there are three kinds of meditation that are truly beneficial to me: (a) Mindfulness meditation which helps me with the idea of "living in the moment". (b) Analytical meditation which helps me become a better thinker and problem-solver. (c) Spiritual meditation which is for my spirit; it helps me feel peace and achieve a sense of unity with the universe.

Meditation techniques for developing mindfulness:

I would like to suggest a few ideas you can use to incorporate meditation into your daily life – in a sort of "micro-meditation" format. "Micro" because these meditation sessions may not take more than a few minutes.

Meditation becomes easier if you simply focus on the "present" through one of your sensory inputs since your body is good at persisting with a sensory input such as taste or sound.

Using the sense of hearing:

For example, one technique is to close your eyes and listen intently to every sound that you can hear – close or distant. The key is not to analyze the sound beyond cursory recognition: this is a bird chirping, that's a car that drove by, that is someone talking, etc. You must not analyze or ponder over that sound beyond the act of receiving it willingly and openly and just barely noticing it. There should be no emotional or intellectual involvement. The good thing about "auditory meditation" is you probably won't have time to do any analysis because you are supposed to continue listening as the sounds keep arriving.

Interestingly, there is a great side-benefit of this meditation as you practice and get good at it. We stop reacting to sounds (especially to what people say) with strong emotions such as anger, envy, judgement, etc. because we are simply watching the sounds and avoiding any emotional attachment or intellectual analysis. You become a dispassionate (and silent) observer of verbal discourses and interactions and get involved only when necessary or when asked. You could even become a stress-diffuser because your sense of humor (which is usually non-judgmental and doesn't take sides) is always awake.

Such "sensory" meditation can then be extended to a variety of day-to-day activities. Every time you eat, you should close your eyes and focus on the taste of every bite, every piece of food as it rolls around in your mouth, savoring its taste. Once again, no analysis, no thoughts such as where did this food come from, who cooked it, can I have more of it, when did I last ate it, and so on. Just taste, recognize the flavor if you must, and then just enjoy with gratitude as more food continues to arrive.

If you like to wash dishes, you could immerse your mind into it: feel the flow of the water running over your fingers, its wonderful texture, the music made by the utensils as they too enjoy the water, and so on. Think of nothing else.

Sensory meditation is simpler because the sensory organ continues to feed your mind and that can help you stay away from getting sucked into abstract thought/analysis.

I can name a number of sensory activities that you can treat as meditation sessions without much effort: listening to music (listen intently: notice every instrument and note, its tenor and texture, its cadence, the beauty of the composition, etc.), cooking (notice every smell and visual beauty of the ingredients), taking a shower (feel the water as it touches every cell of your skin), and so on. Lovemaking is a wonderful example where it should not take much effort to pay attention to a variety of sensory inputs coming to you continuously.

It helps to be grateful during all these sessions: grateful for being able to enjoy the sensations, grateful for the opportunity to live this pleasurable human life.

Analytical meditation:

In the Buddhist practice of "analytical meditation" you focus on a particular subject or even a word such as "compassion" and think about it from all angles and try to develop familiarity/understanding. I feel this idea can be extended to focus on any idea that we are trying to learn about, or work on a problem by looking at it with focused attention from different angles.

According to Buddhism, it is all "really in your mind". Mind is the single-most powerful source of all misery and joy. Analytical meditation is a great technique to watch your mind cooking up the astonishing variety of emotions moment to moment. You can then analyze the source of the unwanted emotions, develop understanding, and devise strategies to cope. It is easy to say I don't want the negative emotions, but unless you develop a deep understanding of why they occur in the first place, you cannot do anything about them.

Other meditation practices:

One common goal of meditation is to focus your mind away from random thoughts arising out of past memories and experiences, from the analysis of past and current events, and from imagination about the future. Meditation is initially the process of becoming a passive witness of all mental activity (thoughts) and ultimately the act of emptying your mind of all thought. Those who are able to achieve this state are said to experience peace and tranquility like no other. These people are then able to extend this peace to their day-to-day life.

The practice of meditation is the process of working towards this ultimate goal. Even if you never reach this seemingly impossible goal of "empty mind", the practice itself rejuvenates your mind, strengthens it, and brings peace to it. It also makes you more "mindful" in the sense that you are better able to concentrate on any activity of your choice: be it studies, work, or pursuit of some goal.

A lot of practitioners try to focus the mind on any one thing: for example in Vipassana you sit still and try to focus on your breathing and just observe how the air enters and leaves your body. Some people focus on sensations arising in the body while sitting still.

Some others imagine an object such as a candle or the image of their guru and observe it from all angles in their mind. In transcendental meditation one uses a mantra to achieve the mental focus.

Osho has designed a technique called Active (or Dynamic) Meditation which I find very interesting because it combines physical activity, breathing exercise and quiet time.

There is indeed a ton of material – in book format and on the Internet – on how to meditate. It really does not matter which technique you choose, **as long as it suits your nature and you are able to persist with it**. I will also emphasize once again that **you should not get too focused on the ultimate goal of "empty mind" because that is both difficult and unnecessary**. Any progress you can achieve in the journey towards this goal is helpful and joyful for the mind

Meditation with a spiritual perspective:

I think the spiritual angle is better appreciated probably after you have achieved your earthly pursuits, or let's say when you are done with your earthly pursuits.

You see, ultimately we can really be at peace after we reconcile with the meaning/purpose our existence and with the fact that one day each one of us will perish. We can meditate about this deep problem and try to achieve that most elusive understanding. Those of us who are believers, the problem might be less daunting. For instance, if you believe in Krishna you could then simply meditate about the idea that your life's purpose is determined by Krishna and after death you will reunite with him.

For someone like me, whose belief-system is rather unconventional, you could meditate about the idea that we are all part of this vast universe – our atoms and molecules are no different than those that make up other living and non-living things – and we get to make up our own meaning or purpose for our existence, and finally death is nothing but dispersing to potentially create other things or even life.

The point is, whatever your belief system, you can use meditation to ponder over these deep questions of purpose, meaning, and death to develop your own understanding and then simply stay with that understanding to internalize it, make it a part of yourself, to really start believing in it. That is the spiritual purpose of meditation.

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