

About Meditation

Question:

Guruji, can you explain what is meditation and what is its benefit?

Guruji:

Meditation is the act of focusing 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 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. 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

Question:

Guruji, which meditation techniques would you recommend for the ordinary people?

Guruji:

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.

I think focusing on a thought or an abstract object – by which I mean something that enters your mind through a non-sensory pathway – is hard because it is difficult to hold on to it. 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.

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. In fact, you won't have time to do any analysis because you are supposed to continue listening as the sounds keep arriving.

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.

There is no reason to stop your regular structured meditation practice and try to reach the goal of "empty mind". But, in addition to that practice, the "sensory meditation", in my opinion, is a wonderfully nourishing activity for your mind.

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