

Types Of Meditation

- An Overview of 22 Techniques -

Ok, so you know that meditation has [dozens of benefits](#), and everybody is doing it. You look for information online or on a bookstore, and see that there are a LOT of different ways of doing meditation, tens of meditation techniques, and some conflicting information. You wonder which way is best for you.

This article will help you navigate the sea of different practices, briefly explaining each of them, and pointing to further resources. There are literally hundreds – if not thousands – of types of meditation, so here I will explore only the most popular ones.

The advice regarding the posture of meditation is very similar among the different styles of seated practice, so I will go in to more detail about it only once, when talking about the first technique (Zen meditation).

I have strived to include a “Is it for me?” section, with general observations about each practice. Keep in mind these are tentative; they are there to give some direction, and potentially any person could feel attracted to any of these modalities.

This article does NOT tell you which is “the best” type of meditation – because there is no such thing, and I’m not here to create controversy. Also, I have here focused more on meditative practices; I may write another article on other similar practices, that are more about relaxation or contemplation.

If you are a beginner, you may also enjoy the post on [meditation tips](#) and [meditation for beginners – how to build the habit](#).

GENERAL TYPES

Scientists usually classify all types of meditation, depending on the way they focus attention, into two categories: Focused Attention and Open Monitoring. I’d like to propose a third: Effortless Presence.

Focused attention meditation

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Focusing the attention on a single object during the whole meditation session. This object may be the breath, a mantra, visualization, part of the body, external object, etc. As the practitioner advances, his ability to keep the flow of attention in the chosen object gets stronger, and distractions become less common and short-lived. Both the depth and steadiness of his attention are developed.

Examples of these are: Samatha (Buddhist meditation), some forms of Zazen, Loving Kindness Meditation, Chakra Meditation, Kundalini Meditation, Sound Meditation, Mantra Meditation, Pranayama, some forms of Qigong.

Open monitoring meditation

Instead of focusing the attention on any one object, we keep it open, monitoring all aspects of experience, without judgment or attachment. All perceptions, be them internal (thoughts, feelings, memory, etc.) or external (sound, smell, etc.), are recognized and seen for what they are. It is the process of non-reactive monitoring of the content of experience from moment to moment. Examples are: Mindfulness meditation, Vipassana, as well as some types of Taoist Meditation.

Effortless Presence

It's the state where the attention is not focused on anything in particular, but reposes on itself – quiet, empty, steady, and introverted. We can also call it "Choiceless Awareness" or "Pure Being". Most of the [meditation quotes](#) you find speak of this state.

This is actually the true purpose behind all kinds of meditation, and not a meditation type in itself. All traditional techniques of meditation recognize that the object of focus, and even the process of monitoring, is just a *means* to train the mind, so that effortless inner silence and deeper states of consciousness can be discovered. Eventually both the object of focus and the process itself is left behind, and there is only left the true self of the practitioner, as "pure presence".

In some techniques, this is the only focus, from the beginning. Examples are: the Self-Enquiry ("I am" meditation) of Ramana Maharishi; Dzogchen; some forms of Taoist Meditation; and some forms of Raja Yoga.

1) BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Zen Meditation (*Zazen*)

Origin & Meaning

Zazen (坐禪) means “seated Zen”, or “seated meditation”, in Japanese. It has its roots in the Chinese Zen Buddhism (Ch’an) tradition, tracing back to Indian monk Bodhidharma (6th century CE). In the West, its most popular forms comes from Dogen Zenji (1200~1253), the founder of Soto Zen movement in Japan. Similar modalities are practiced in the *Rinzai* school of Zen, in Japan and Korea.

How to do it

It is generally practiced seated on the floor over a mat and cushion, with crossed legs. Traditionally it was done in [lotus](#) or [half-lotus](#) position, but this is hardly necessary. Nowadays most practitioners sit like this:



Or on a chair:



Images courtesy of [Zen Mountain Monastery](#)

The most important aspect, as you see in the pictures, is keeping the back completely straight, from the pelvis to the neck. Mouth is kept close and eyes are kept lowered, with your gaze resting on the ground about two or three feet in front of you.

As to the mind aspect of it, it's usually practiced in two ways:

- Focusing on breath — focus all your attention on the movement of the breath going in and out through the nose. This may be aided by counting the breath in your mind. Each time you inhale you count one number, starting with 10, and then moving backward to 9, 8, 7, etc. When you arrive in 1, you resume from 10 again. If you get distracted and lose your count, gently bring back the attention to 10 and resume from there.
- Shikantaza (“just sitting”) — in this form the practitioner does not use any specific object of meditation; rather, practitioners remain as much as possible in the present moment, aware of and observing what passes through their minds and around them, without dwelling on anything in particular. It's a type of *Effortless Presence* meditation

Learn more:

- [Zen Mountain Monastery](#)
- [Open Way](#) (PDF)
- Visit a Zen Buddhist center near to you. Most of them teach zazen for free.

Is it for me?

Zazen is a very sober meditation style, and you can easily find a lot of strong communities practicing it, as well as plenty of information on the internet. There is a lot of emphasis in keeping the right posture, as an aid for concentration. It is usually practiced in Zen Buddhist centers (*Sangha*), with strong community support.

In many of them you will find it coupled with other elements of Buddhist practice: prostrations, a bit of ritualism, chanting, and group readings of the Buddha teachings. Some people will like this, others won't. Personally, I practiced zazen in a Buddhist group for 3 years, and I found that those elements and a bit of formality can also help create a structure for the practice, and in themselves they are also meditative.

Vipassana Meditation

Origin & Meaning



“Vipassana” is a Pali word that means “insight” or “clear seeing”. It is a traditional Buddhist practice, dating back to 6th century BC. Vipassana-meditation, as taught in the last few decades, comes from the Theravada Buddhist tradition, and was popularized by [S. N. Goenka](#) and the [Vipassana movement](#).

Due to the popularity of Vipassanā-meditation, the “mindfulness of breathing” has gained further popularity in the West as “mindfulness”.

How to do it

[There is some conflicting information on how to practice Vipassana. In general, however, most teachers emphasize starting with mindfulness of breath in the first stages, to stabilize the mind and achieve “access concentration.” This is more like focused attention meditation. Then the practice moves on to developing “clear insight” on the bodily sensations and mental phenomena, observing them moment by moment and not clinging to any. Here goes an introduction, aimed for beginners. To know more I’d suggest following up the links provided or learning from a teacher (perhaps in a Vipassana retreat).]

Ideally, one is to sit on a cushion on the floor, cross-legged, with your spine erect; alternatively, a chair may be used, but the back should not be supported.

The first aspect is to develop concentration, through *samatha* practice. This is typically done through breathing awareness.

Focus all your attention, from moment to moment, on the movement of your breath. Notice the subtle sensations of the movement of the abdomen rising and falling. Alternatively, one can focus on the sensation of the air passing through the nostrils and touching the upper lips skin – though this requires a bit more practice, and is more advanced.

As you focus on the breath, you will notice that other perceptions and sensations continue to appear: sounds, feelings in the body, emotions, etc. Simply notice these phenomena as they emerge in the field of awareness, and then return to the sensation of breathing. The attention is kept in the object of concentration (the breathing), while these other thoughts or sensations are there simply as “background noise”.

The object that is the focus of the practice (for instance, the movement of the abdomen) is called the “primary object”. And a “secondary object” is anything else that arises in your field of perception – either through your five senses (sound, smell, itchiness in the body, etc.) or through the mind (thought, memory, feeling, etc.). If a secondary object hooks your attention and pulls it away, or if it causes desire or aversion to appear, you should focus on the secondary object for a moment or two, labeling it

with a mental note, like “thinking”, “memory”, “hearing”, “desiring”. This practice is often called “noting”.

A mental note identifies an object in general but not in detail. When you’re aware of a sound, for example, label it “hearing” instead of “motorcycle,” “voices” or “barking dog.” If an unpleasant sensation arises, note “pain” or “feeling” instead of “knee pain” or “my back pain.” Then return your attention to the primary meditation object. When aware of a fragrance, say the mental note “smelling” for a moment or two. You don’t have to identify the scent.

When one has thus gained “access concentration”, the attention is then turned to the object of practice, which is normally thought or bodily sensations. One observes the objects of awareness without attachment, letting thoughts and sensations arise and pass away of their own accord. Mental labeling (explained above) is often used as a way to prevent you from being carried away by thoughts, and keep you in more objectively noticing them.

As a result one develops the clear seeing that the observed phenomena is pervaded by the three “marks of existence”: impermanence (*annica*), insatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and emptiness of self (*annata*). As a result, equanimity, peace and inner freedom is developed in relation to these inputs.

Learn more:

- [Types of Vipassana](#) (read the answer from Anh-Minh Do)
- [Vipassana Dhura](#) (very in-depth article)
- [Vipassana for beginners](#) (Goenka style)
- [Mindfulness in Plain English](#) (free eBook)
- Visit a Vipassana center near you

Is it for me?

Vipassana is an excellent meditation to help you ground yourself in your body, and understand how the processes of your mind work. It is a very popular style of meditation. You can find plenty of teachers, websites, and books about it, as well as 3~10 days retreats (donation based). The teaching of it is always free. There are no formalities or rituals attached to the practice.

If you are completely new to meditation, Vipassana or Mindfulness are probably good ways for you to start.

Mindfulness Meditation

Origin & Meaning

Mindfulness Meditation is an adaptation from traditional Buddhist meditation practices, especially Vipassana, but also having strong influence from other lineages, such as the Vietnamese Zen Buddhism from [Thich Nhat Hanh](#)). “Mindfulness” is the common western translation for the Buddhist term *sati. Anapanasati*, “mindfulness of breathing”, is part of the Buddhist practice of Vipassana or insight meditation, and other Buddhist meditational practices, such as *zazen* (source: [Wikipedia](#)).

One of the main influencers for Mindfulness in the West is [John Kabat-Zinn](#). His *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* program (MBSR) – which he developed in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School – has been used in several hospitals and health clinic on the past decades.

How to do it

Mindfulness meditation is the practice of intentionally focusing on the present moment, accepting and non-judgmentally paying attention to the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that arise.

For the “formal practice” time, sit on a cushion on the floor, or on a chair, with straight and unsupported back. Pay close attention to the movement of your breath. When you breath in, be aware that you are breathing in, and how it feels. When you breath out, be aware you are breathing out. Do like this for the length of your meditation practice, constantly redirecting the attention to the breath.

Your mind will get distracted with sounds, sensations, and thoughts. Whenever that happens, gently recognize that you have been distracted, and bring the attention back to the breathing.

Learn to enjoy your practice. Once you are done, appreciate how different the body and mind feel.

There is also the practice of mindfulness during our daily activities: while eating, walking, and talking. For “daily life” meditation, the practice is to pay attention to what is going on in the present moment, to be aware of

what is happening – and not living in “automatic mode”. If you are speaking, that means paying attention to the words you speak, how you speak them, and to listen with presence and attention. If you are walking, that means being more aware of your body movements, your feet touching the ground, the sounds you are hearing, etc.

Your effort in seated practice supports your daily life practice, and vice-versa. They are both equally important.

Learn more:

- [Psychology Today](#) (more details on how to practice)
- [Palouse Mindfulness](#) (MBSR free online course)
- [Mindfulness exercises](#)
- [Mindful Schools](#)

Is it for me?

For the general public, this is perhaps the most advisable way to get started with meditation. It is the type of meditation that is most taught at schools and hospitals, as far as I am aware. The “mindfulness movement” as practiced nowadays in society at large, is not Buddhism, but an adaptation of Buddhist practices due to their benefits in good physical and mental health and general wellbeing.

For most people, Mindfulness Meditation may be the only type of meditation they will like, especially if their focus is only the physical and mental benefits of meditation, as it is usually taught dissociated from several of the eastern concepts and philosophies that traditionally accompanied the practice. And for that it is great – it will bring [many good things](#) to your life.

If your focus is a deeper transformation and spiritual development, however, then mindfulness meditation may be just an initial step for you. From here you can then move into Vipassana, Zen, or other types of meditation.

Loving Kindness Meditation (*Metta*)

Origin & Meaning



Metta is a Pali word that means kindness, benevolence, and good will. This practice comes from the Buddhist traditions, especially the Theravada and Tibetan lineages. “Compassion meditation” is a contemporary scientific field that demonstrates the efficacy of *metta* and related meditative practices.

Demonstrated benefits include: boosting one’s ability to empathize with others; development of positive emotions through compassion, including a more loving attitude towards oneself; increased self-acceptance; greater feeling of competence about one’s life; and increased feeling of purpose in life (read more in our [other post](#)).

How to do it

One sits down in a meditation position, with closed eyes, and generates in his mind and heart feelings of kindness and benevolence. Start by developing loving-kindness towards yourself, then progressively towards others and all beings. Usually this progression is advised:

1. oneself
2. a good friend
3. a “neutral” person
4. a difficult person
5. all four of the above equally
6. and then gradually the entire universe

The feeling to be developed is that of wishing happiness and well-being for all. This practice may be aided by reciting specific words or sentences that evoke the “boundless warm-hearted feeling”, visualizing the suffering of others and sending love; or by imagining the state of another being, and wishing him happiness and peace.

The more you practice this meditation, the more joy you will experience. That is the secret of [Mathieu Richard's happiness](#).

“For one who attends properly to the liberation of the heart by benevolence, unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned.” – The Buddha

In [this article](#), Emma Seppälä, Ph.D explores the 18 scientifically proven benefits of Loving-Kindness meditation.

Learn more:

- [Wikipedia on Metta Meditation](#)¹
- [Metta Institute](#) (Buddha's word on *metta*)
- Huffington Post article on [the benefits of metta](#)

Is it for me?

Are you sometimes too hard on yourself or on others? Or feel like you need to improve your relationships? Loving-kindness meditation will help you. It is beneficial both for selfless and self-centered people, and it will help increase your general level of happiness. You cannot feel loving-kindness and depression (or any other negative feeling) at the same time.

It is also often recommended, by Buddhist teachers, as an antidote to insomnia, nightmares, or anger issues.

2) HINDU MEDITATION (Vedic & Yogic)

Mantra Meditation (OM Meditation)

Origin & Meaning



A *mantra* is a syllable or word, usually without any particular meaning, that is repeated for the purpose of focusing your mind. It *is not* an affirmation used to convince yourself of something.

Some meditation teachers insist that both the choice of word, and its correct pronunciation, is very important, due to the “vibration” associated to the sound and meaning, and that for this reason an initiation into it is essential. Others say that the mantra itself is only a tool to focus the mind, and the chosen word is completely irrelevant.

Mantras are used in Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions (especially Tibetan and “Pure Land” Buddhism), as well as in Jainism, Sikhism and Daoism (Taoism). Some people call mantra meditation “om meditation”, but that is just one of the mantras that can be used. A more devotion oriented practice of mantras is called *japa*, and consists of repeating sacred sounds (name of God) with love.

How to do it

As most type of meditations, it is usually practiced sitting with spine erect, and eyes closed. The practitioner then repeats the mantra in his mind, silently, over and over again during the whole session.

Sometimes this practice is coupled with being aware of the breathing or coordinating with it. In other exercises, the mantra is actually whispered very lightly and softly, as an aid to concentration.

As you repeat the mantra, it creates a mental vibration that allows the mind to experience deeper levels of awareness. As you meditate, the mantra becomes increasingly abstract and indistinct, until you're finally led into the field of pure consciousness from which the vibration arose.

Repetition of the mantra helps you disconnect from the thoughts filling your mind so that perhaps you may slip into the gap between thoughts. The mantra is a tool to support your meditation practice. Mantras can be viewed as ancient power words with subtle intentions that help us connect to spirit, the source of everything in the universe. (Deepak Chopra)

Here are some of the most well-known mantras from the Hindu tradition:

- om
- so-ham
- om namah shivaya
- om mani padme hum
- rama
- yam
- ham

You may practice for a certain period of time, or for a set number of "repetitions" – traditionally 108 or 1008. In the latter case, beads are typically used for keeping count.

As the practice deepens, you may find that the mantra continues "by itself" like the humming of the mind. Or the mantra may even disappear, and you are left in a state of deep inner peace.

Learn more:

- [Wikipedia article on Mantra](#)
- [Mantra Yoga and Primal Sound](#) (book)

- [Mantras: Words of Power](#) (book)

Is it for me?

People usually find that it is easier to focus with a mantra than with the breathing. Because a mantra is a word, and thoughts are usually perceived as words, it can be easier to keep the focus on a mantra rather than on the breathing. It is useful especially when the mind is racing with many thoughts, since it mantra meditation demands constant attention.

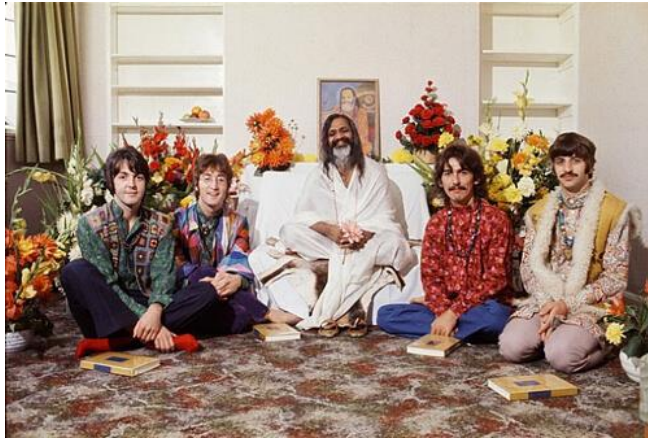
Meditating with a mantra can also make it simpler to integrate your meditative state into your daily life. In whatever activity you find yourself into, it can be as simple as repeating the mantra in your mind.

Transcendental Meditation (TM)

Origin & Meaning

Transcendental Meditation is a specific form of Mantra Meditation introduced by [Maharishi Mahesh Yogi](#) in 1955 in India and the West. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Maharishi achieved fame as the guru to the Beatles, The Beach Boys and [other celebrities](#).

It is a widely practiced form of meditation, with over 5 million practitioners worldwide, and there is a lot of scientific research, many sponsored by the organization, demonstrating the benefits of the practice. There are over 600 scientific papers, many of them peer-reviewed, and I have used part of their research when composing my [benefits of meditation](#) page. However, there are also critics of the Maharishi and his organization, and some accusation of cultish behavior and doubtful research practices.



[Image from NurseTalkSite.com]

How to do it

Transcendental meditation is not taught freely. The only way of learning it is to pay to learn from one of their licensed instructors. The support given seems to be good, though.

In general, however, it is known that TM involves the use of a *mantra* and is practiced for 15–20 minutes twice per day while sitting with one's eyes closed. The mantra is not unique, and is given to the practitioner based on his gender and age. They are also not “meaningless sounds” – rather, they are Tantric names of Hindu deities. This probably is irrelevant for most people.

This is the official site of the movement: [TM site](#).

There is another similar technique, called *Natural Stress Relief*, which was created in 2003 by a former TM Teacher, and is much cheaper to learn (47 USD instead of 960 USD), and has stripped out some mystical elements of the practice of TM, such as the initiation (*puja*) and yogic flying (part of *TM-Siddhi*). You can learn more about NSR in comparison to TM [here](#) and [here](#).

Is it for me?

Personally I don't feel comfortable advising anyone to try Transcendental Meditation anymore, especially if you are looking to go deep into meditation. Email me if you want to know more (giovanni@liveanddare.com).

If you wish to try something similar, for a fraction of the cost or for free, have a look at NSR (above), or Mantra Meditation.

Yoga Meditations

Origin & Meaning



There is not one type of meditation which is “Yogic Meditation”, so here it is meant the several meditation types taught in the yoga tradition. Yoga means “union”. Tradition goes as far as 1700 B.C, and has as its highest goal spiritual purification and Self-Knowledge. Classical Yoga divides the practice into rules of conduct (*yamas* and *niyamas*), physical postures (*asanas*), breathing exercises (*pranayama*), and contemplative practices of meditation (*pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*).

How to do it

Here are some types of meditation practiced in Yoga. The most common and universal one is the “third eye meditation”.

- **Third Eye Meditation** — focusing the attention on the “spot between the eyebrows” (called by some “the third eye” or “*ajna chakra*”). The attention is constantly redirected to this point, as a means to silence the mind. By time the “silent gaps” between thoughts get wider and deeper. Sometimes this is accompanied by physically “looking”, with eyes closed, towards that spot.
- **Chakra Meditation** — the practitioner focuses on one of the seven chakras of the body (“centers of energy”), typically doing some visualizations and chanting a specific mantra for each chakra (*lam, vam, ram, yam, ham, om*).
- **Gazing Meditation (Trataka)** — fixing the gaze on an external object, typically a candle, image or a symbol (*yantras*). It is done with eyes open, and then with eyes closed, to train both the concentration and visualization powers of the mind. After closing the eyes, you should still keep the image of the object in your “mind’s eye”.
- **Kundalini Meditation** — this is a very [complex system](#) of practice. The goal is the awakening of the “kundalini energy” which lies dormant on the base of the spine, the development of several psychic centers in the body, and, finally, enlightenment. There are several dangers associated with this practice, and it should not be attempted without the guidance of a qualified yogi.
- **Kriya Yoga** — is a set of energization, breathing, and meditation exercises taught by Paramahansa Yogananda. This is more suited for those who have a devotional temperament, and are seeking the spiritual aspects of meditation. To learn it, you can apply to receive the Self-Realization lessons, [free of charge](#).
- **Sound Meditation (Nada Yoga)** — focusing on sound. Starts with meditation on “external sounds”, such as calming ambient music (like Native American flute music), whereby the student focuses all his attention on just hearing, as a help to quieten and collect the mind. By time the practice evolves to hearing the “internal sounds” of the body and mind. The ultimate goal is to hear the “Ultimate Sound” (*para nada*), which is a sound without vibration, and that manifests as “OM”.
- **Tantra** — unlike the popular view in the West, most Tantra practices have nothing to do with ritualized sex (this was practiced by a minority of lineages. Tantra is a very rich tradition, with dozens of different contemplative practices. The text [Vijnanabhairava Tantra](#), for instance, lists 108 “meditations”, most of them more advanced (already requiring a certain degree of stillness and mind control). Here are some examples from that text:

- Merge the mind and the senses in the interior space in the spiritual heart.
- When one object is perceived, all other objects become empty. Concentrate on that emptiness.
- Concentrate on the space which occurs between two thoughts.
- Fix attention on the inside of the skull. Close eyes.
- Meditate on the occasion of any great delight.
- Meditate on the feeling of pain.
- Dwell on the reality which exists between pain and pleasure.
- Meditate on the void in one's body extending in all directions simultaneously.
- Concentrate on a bottomless well or as standing in a very high place.
- Listen to the Anahata [heart chakra] sound.
- Listen to the sound of a musical instrument as it dies away.
- Contemplate on the universe or one's own body as being filled with bliss.
- Concentrate intensely on the idea that the universe is completely void.
- Contemplate that the same consciousness exists in all bodies.
- **Pranayama** — breathing regulation. It is not exactly meditation, but an excellent practice to calm the mind and prepare it for meditation. There are several different types of *Pranayama*, but the simplest and most commonly taught one is the 4-4-4-4. This means breathing in counting up to 4, holding for 4 seconds, breathing out for 4 seconds, and holding empty for 4 seconds. Breathe through your nose, and let the abdomen (and not the chest) be the one that moves. Go through a few cycles like this. This regulation of breathing balances the moods and pacifies the body, and can be done anywhere.

Yoga is a very rich tradition, with different lineages, so there are many other techniques. But the ones above are the most well-known; the others are more specific or complex.

For a start, [this video](#) is an excellent resource on how to do Yoga style meditation, and it combines breathing, body awareness, mantra, and chakra meditation.

Learn more:

- Chakras: [Seven Chakras](#), [Mind Body Green](#), [Wikipedia article](#)
- [Trataka](#) (Wikipedia)

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- [Meditation and Mantras](#) (book)
- [Raja Yoga](#) (book)
- [Kriya Yoga](#) (Self-Realization Fellowship)
- Nada Yoga: [Spirit Sound](#), [The Practice of Nada Yoga](#) (book), [Wikipedia](#), [Bindu Magazine](#) (comprehensive article)
- [The Science of Pranayama](#) (book)
- [Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy](#) (book)

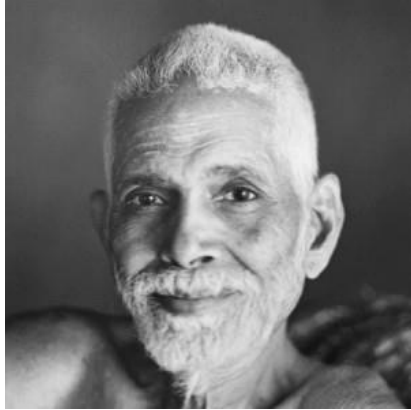
Is it for me?

With all these types of meditation in Yoga, you are likely to find one that you like. If you are a musician, perhaps *nada yoga* is something that will attract you. If you are a devotional person, *kriya yoga* is a good option. Kundalini and Chakra meditation should only be attempted with a teacher.

Probably the simplest one to try is the “third eye meditation”, which is simple and yields results fairly quickly. For the other types you would probably need more instruction, either of a teacher or a good book (see references above). Besides, *Pranayama* is definitely something anyone can benefit from.

Self-Enquiry and “I Am” Meditation

Origin & Meaning



Self-Enquiry is the English translation for the Sanskrit term *atma vichara*. It means to “investigate” our true nature, to find the answer to the “Who am I?” question, which culminates with the intimate knowledge of our true Self, our true being. We see references to this meditation in very old Indian texts; however, it was greatly popularized and expanded upon by the 20th-century Indian sage [Ramana Maharshi](#) (1879~1950).

The modern non-duality movement (or *neo-advaita*), which is greatly inspired in his teachings – as well as those of [Nisargadatta Maharaj](#)(1897~1981) and [Papaji](#) – strongly uses this technique and variations. Many contemporary teachers to employ this technique, the most famous ones being [Mooji](#) (whom I’ve personally been with and recommend), [Adyashanti](#), and [Eckhart Tolle](#).

How to do it

This practice is very simple, but also very subtle. When explaining it, however, it may sound very abstract.

Your sense of “I” (or “ego”) is the center of your universe. It is there, in some form or another, behind all your thoughts, emotions, memories, and perceptions. Yet we are not clear about what this “I” is – about who we truly are, in essence – and confuse it with our body, our mind, our roles, our labels. It’s the biggest mystery in our lives.

With Self-Enquiry, the question “Who I am?” is asked within yourself. You must reject any verbal answers that may come, and use this question simply as a tool to fix your attention in the subjective feeling of “I” or “I

am". Become one with it, go deep into it. This will then reveal your true "I", your real self as pure consciousness, beyond all limitation. It is not an intellectual pursuit, but a question to bring the attention to the core element of your perception and experience: the "I". This is not your personality, but a pure, subjective, feeling of existing – without any images or concepts attached to it.

Whenever thoughts/feelings arise, you ask yourself, "To whom does this arise?" or "Who is aware of ____ (anger, fear, pain, or whatever)?" The answer will be "It's me!". From then you ask "Who am I?", to bring the attention back to the subjective feeling of self, of presence. It is pure existence, objectless and choice-less awareness.

Another way of explaining this practice is to just focus the mind on your feeling of being, the non-verbal "I am" that shines inside of you. Keep it pure, without association with anything you perceive.

On all other types of meditation, the "I" (yourself) is focusing on some object, internal or external, physical or mental. In self-enquiry, the "I" is focusing on itself, the subject. It is the attention turned towards its source. There is no special position to practice, although the general suggestions about posture and environment are helpful for beginners.

Learn more:

- [Guided "I am" Meditations](#) with Mooji:
- Teachings of Ramana Maharishi: [Happiness of Being](#), [David Godman's blog](#), [Sri Ramanasram official site](#)
- Nisargadatta Maharaj: [Enlightened-Spirituality](#)
- [Quotes apps](#) (iOS)
- [Be As You Are](#) (book or Ramana's teachings)
- [I Am That](#) (book of Nisargadatta Maharaj, a modern spiritual classic)

Is it for me?

This meditation is very powerful in bringing inner freedom and peace; yet, if you don't have previous experience with meditation, you may find it very hard to follow through. As an initial aid to give you a feeling for it, I would advise following some guided meditations from Mooji, in YouTube.

3) CHINESE MEDITATION

Daoist Meditations

Origin & Meaning



Daoism is a Chinese [philosophy and religion](#), dating back to Lao Tzu (or [Laozi](#)). It emphasizes living in harmony with Nature, or Tao, and its main text is the Tao Te Ching, dating back to 6th century B.C. Later on some lineages of Taoism were also influenced by Buddhist meditation practices brought from India, especially on the 8th century C.E..

The chief characteristic of this type of meditation is the generation, transformation, and circulation of inner energy. The purpose is to quieten the body and mind, unify body and spirit, find inner peace, and harmonize with the Tao. Some styles of Taoist Meditation are specifically focused on improving health and giving longevity.

Image from InternalArtsInternational.com

How to do it

There are several different types of Taoist meditation, and they are sometimes classified in three: “insight”, “concentrative”, and “visualization”. Here is a brief overview:

- **Emptiness meditation** — to sit quietly and empty oneself of all mental images (thoughts, feelings, and so on), to “forget about everything”, in order to experience inner quiet and emptiness. In this state, vital force and “spirit” is collected and replenished. This is similar to the Confucius discipline of “heart-mind fasting”, and it is regarded as “the natural way”. One simply allows all thoughts and sensations arise and fall by themselves, without engaging with or “following” any of them. If this is found to be too hard and “uninteresting”, the student is instructed with other types of meditation, such as visualization and Qigong
- **Breathing meditation** (*Zhuanqi*) — to focus on the breath, or “unite mind and qi”. The instruction is “focus your vital breath until it is supremely soft”. Sometimes this is done by simply quietly observing the breath (similar to Mindfulness Meditation in Buddhism); in other traditions it is by following certain patterns of exhalation and inhalation, so that one becomes directly aware of the “dynamisms of Heaven and Earth” through ascending and descending breath (a type of *Qigong*, similar to *Pranayama* in Yoga).
- **Neiguan** (“inner observation; inner vision”) — visualizing inside one’s body and mind, including the organs, “inner deities”, *qi* (vital force) movements, and thought processes. It’s a process of acquainting oneself with the wisdom of nature in your body. There are particular instructions for following this practice, and a good book or a teacher is required.

These meditations are done seated cross-legged on the floor, with spine erect. The eyes are kept half-closed and fixed on the point of the nose. Master Liu Sichuan emphasises that, although not easy, ideally one should practice by “joining the breath and the mind together”; for those that find this too hard, he would recommend focusing on the lower abdomen (*dantian*).

Learn more:

- [1stHolistic.com](http://1stholistic.com) (detailed practical information)
- [Wikipedia article](#) (Overview of historical development of different Taoist meditation practices)

Is it for me?

People that are more connected with the body and nature may like to try Taoist meditation, and enjoy learning a bit about the philosophy behind it. Or if you are into martial arts or Tai Chi, this might be of your interest. However, Taoist centers and teachers are not as easy to find as Buddhist and Yoga ones, so it might be a challenge to follow through.

Qigong (Chi kung)

Origin & Meaning

Qigong (also spelled *chi kung*, or *chi gung*) is a Chinese word that means “life energy cultivation”, and is a body-mind exercise for health, meditation, and martial arts training. It typically involves slow body movement, inner focus, and regulated breathing. Traditionally it was practiced and taught in secrecy in the Chinese Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist traditions. In the 20th century, Qigong movement has incorporated and popularized Daoist meditation, and “mainly employs concentrative exercises but also favors the circulation of energy in an inner-chemical mode” (Kohn 2008a:120).

For a deep study on Qigong history, theory, and philosophy, I recommend [*The Root of Chinese Qigong*](#).

Daoist practices may also employ Qigong, but since Qigong is also applied in other Chinese philosophies, I decided to treat it as a separate subject.

How to do it

There are thousands of different Qigong exercises cataloged, involving over 80 different types of breathing. Some are specific to martial arts (to energize and strengthen the body); others are for health (to nourish body functions or cure diseases); and others for meditation and spiritual cultivation. Qigong can be practiced in a static position (seated or standing), or through a dynamic set of movements – which is what you typically see in YouTube videos and on DVDs. The exercises that are done

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as a meditation, however, are normally done sitting down, and without movement.

To understand more about Qigong and learn how to do it, I'd recommend getting a book or DVD set from Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, such as [this one](#). But here goes an introductory overview of the practice of seated Qigong meditation:

- Sit in a comfortable position. Make sure your body is balanced and centered.
- Relax your whole body – muscles, nerves, and internal organs
- Regulate your breathing, making it deep, long, and soft.
- Calm your mind
- Place all your attention in the “lower *dantien*”, which is the center of gravity of the body, two inches below the navel. This will help accumulate and root the *qi* (vital energy). Where your mind and intention is, there will be your *qi*. So, by focusing on the *dantien*, you are gathering energy in this natural reservoir.
- Feel the *qi* circulating freely through your body.

Other famous Qigong exercises are:

- Small Circulation (also called “microcosmic circulation”)
- Embryonic Breathing
- Eight Pieces of Brocade (see this [book excerpt](#) & [Wikipedia article](#))
- Muscle Tendon Changing (or “Yi Jin Jing”, taught by Bodhidharma)

The first two are seated meditation, while the latter two are dynamic Qigong, integrating body stretches.

Learn more:

- [Wikipedia article](#)
- [Yang Jwing Ming DVDs](#) (YouTube)
- [The Qigong Institute](#)
- [Qigong Forum](#)

Is it for me?

Qigong meditation may be more attractive to people that like to integrate a more active body and energy work into the practice. If seated meditation is unbearable for you, and you prefer something a bit more active, try some of the more dynamic forms of Qigong. Again, there are

several styles of Qigong out there, and you may need to try with different teachers or DVDs to find the one that suits you. Some people have a taste of dynamic Qigong through the practice of Tai Chi.

4) CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

In Eastern traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Daoism) meditation is usually practiced with the purpose of transcending the mind and attaining enlightenment. On the other hand, in the Christian tradition the goal of contemplative practices is, one may say, moral purification and deeper understanding of the Bible; or a closer intimacy with God/Christ, for the more mystic stream of the tradition.

Here are some forms of Christian contemplative practice:

- **contemplative prayer** — which usually involves the silent repetition of sacred words or sentences, with focus and devotion
- **contemplative reading** — or simply “contemplation”, which involves thinking deeply about the teachings and events in the Bible.
- **“sitting with God”** — a silent meditation, usually preceded by contemplation or reading, in which we focus all our mind, heart and soul on the presence of God

To read more about this, check out our post on [Contemplative Prayer and Christian Meditation](#).

5) GUIDED MEDITATIONS

Origin & Meaning



Guided Meditation is, in great part, a modern phenomenon. It is an easier way to start, and you will find guided meditations based on several of the above traditions.

The practice of meditation requires some dose of determination and will-power. In the past, people that were into meditation were more committed to it, and also had strong ideals fuelling their motivation. Their life was more simple, with less distractions.

We live in very different times now. Our life is busier. Will power is a less common personal asset. Distractions are everywhere, and meditation is often sought as a means to develop better health, enhance performance, or improve oneself.

For these reasons, guided meditation can indeed be a good way to introduce you to the practice. Once you get the hang of it, and wish to take your practice to the next level, I would urge you to try meditation unassisted by audio. It is up to you to decide when you feel like taking this step.

Guided Meditation is like cooking with a recipe. It's a good way to start, and you can eat the food you make like this. But once you understand the main principles and flavors, you can cook your own dish. It will have a different, unique taste; it will be tailored for you, and more powerful. And then you will not want to use the recipe anymore – unless if you are trying a dish of another cuisine.

[Image from BinauralBeatsMeditation.com]

How to do it

Guided meditation usually comes in the form of audio (file, podcast, CD), and sometimes audio and video. You will find that any guided meditation will fall in one of below categories (with some overlap, obviously).

- **Traditional Meditations** — With these types of audios, the voice of the teacher is simply there to “illustrate” or “guide” the way for your attention, in order to be in a meditative state; there is more silence than voice in it, and often no music. Examples are the ones offered by Thich Nhat Hanh and Tara Brach, which are rooted in authentic Buddhist practices. The purpose is to develop and deepen the practice itself, with all the [benefits](#) that come with it.
- **Guided Imagery** — Makes use of the imagination and visualization powers of the brain, guiding you to imagine an object, entity, scenery or journey. The purpose is usually healing or relaxation.
- **Relaxation & Body Scans** — Helps you achieve a deep relaxation in your whole body. It’s usually accompanied by soothing instrumental music or nature sounds. In Yoga these are called *yoga nidra*. The purpose is relaxation and calmness.
- **Affirmations** — Usually coupled with relaxation and guided imagery, the purpose of these meditations is to imprint a message in your mind.
- **Binaural Beats** — Binaural beats were originally discovered in 1839 by physicist Heinrich Wilhelm Dove. He discovered when signals of two different frequencies are presented separately, one to each ear, your brain detects the phase variation between the frequencies and tries to reconcile that difference. This is used to generate alpha waves (10 Hz), which is the brain wave associated with initial levels of meditation. There is scientific research into [why and how](#) binaural beats work.

While they all have their merits, it is the first type that most naturally evolves into individual unguided practice.

Learn more:

- [UCLA Free Guided Meditations](#)
- [Head In The Clouds](#) (big collection of free guided meditations)
- [Free Binaural Beats](#)
- [Yoga Nidra](#) (YouTube)

- [Headspace app](#) (Guided meditations on your phone!)

Is it for me?

If you feel traditional meditation is a bit too hard, or you are unsure where to start, then guided meditations can be the way for you to begin. Or if you are seeking some very specific experience or benefit – like improving self-esteem, working through a trauma, or just letting go of some tension in your body – you can also find some guided meditation that suits you.

PARTING THOUGHTS

There you go. With all these styles available, and some many nuances in each of them, you are sure to find a practice you like. You can try some of these practices by yourself. But try also to find a teacher with whom you can connect with, as this can make a huge difference in your journey. Meet different teachers and groups and see what their practice has done for them. Finding the right practice for you [is important](#).

Once you have chosen your practice, and [built the habit](#), the next step is to better understand the [process of meditation](#).

Do you know any other interesting resources (books, sites, teachers) that were not mentioned here? Please **leave a comment**.

My intention, like with all posts, is to work towards the mission of this site: *“To bring meditation and personal growth to one million people”*. If you have learned something from this post, it would mean a lot for me if you **share** this.

I have more epic posts like this coming. **Subscribe to the newsletter** to keep in touch.

What else to read about meditation?

- [76 Scientific Benefits of Meditation](#)
- [How to Build a Meditation Habit](#)
- [200 Meditation Quotes](#)
- [The Process of Meditation](#)

- [34 Myths About Meditation](#)
- [45 Questions and Answers on Meditation](#)

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