



# A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF MEDITATION

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# 01

## WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is a practice enjoyed by many people all over the world, regardless of their cultural background and traditions.

It is an ancient practice of acknowledging silence and stillness and embodying that deeper domain of our being. This is why meditation is often practiced (but not limited to) sitting quietly with closed eyes, calming the mind and focusing inwardly.

The mind is always active and we tend to get lost in the thinking activity, eventually becoming overtaken by it - planning, remembering, worrying, considering... activities that fill up our attention and leave no space for being present, for being in the moment.

In yoga they say "Where your attention goes, energy flows". As we give all of our energy to thoughts, that's what we feed. When the mind gains all the importance, as result the tables turn and we can feel overpowered by it - and that leads to stress, overwhelm and even anxiety.

Meditation teaches us to become the witness of our thoughts instead of getting caught in them. Noticing the space between the thoughts creates more space in our lives - a glimpse into freedom, wisdom and detachment. This is why people who practice meditation regularly, even for a short time, often find themselves becoming calmer, more relaxed and less reactive to the stresses of daily living. Eventually meditation can bring an insight into the Freedom of our being, of being in the Heart and it's higher wisdom, compassion and infinite Love instead of being stuck in limiting thoughts. Any consistent practice of meditation will bring transformation. How much change you are willing to allow for, depends on you. It will inevitably foster joy, lightness and deeper understanding of life. It may also take you on a journey into a deeper knowledge of Self and consciousness.



Ultimately you create your path by walking it. In the beginning of such a journey, and on a consistent basis, it is good to ask yourself: "What is my intention in starting or dedicating more time to a meditation practice?"

Starting with pure intention is a cornerstone. Knowing the Why of walking the path can be a solid ground one can come back to again and again, even if things don't seem to be going "right".

So, here is an invitation to STOP.

To tune into your Heart.

And to listen.

Why are you reading these pages?

What would you like to cultivate and bring into your life through the practice of Mindfulness and Meditation?

In this book, you'll also find the meditation journal pages where you can write down your insights.

My hopes are that this is an important first step you're taking towards a more fulfilled and enriched life. By being present you can create a more effective, rewarding, healthy and happier life for yourself and for others.

Here are some of the reasons for millions of people around the world to choose meditation as a part of their daily routine:

- enhanced natural relaxation response
  - mental health
  - improved management of stress and anxiety
  - increased joy and happiness
  - increased self-awareness
  - improved relationships, connection to others and self
  - greater confidence and authenticity
  - improved concentration and focus
  - clear and well directed mind
  - lengthened attention span
  - improved memory
  - overcoming addictions and destructive behavioural patterns
  - rejuvenated body
  - stronger immune system
  - improved sleep and ability to rest
  - regulated heart rate and blood pressure
  - pain management
  - greater empathy, compassion and sense of gratitude
  - more courage and openness to life
- ... and the list goes on!

So why wait? Let's get into it, together.



# CHAPTER

# 02

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDITATION

Meditation is an age-old practice that is found in many different traditions around the world. It is practiced in different ways in Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Daoism, Hinduism and Islam, yet it is also a practice perfectly free from any religious connotation.

Sitting in silence and finding inner peace is a UNIVERSAL tool for greater wellbeing and every culture has something to teach us when it comes to mindfulness and being at peace with one's self and nature.

It is impossible to give a starting date and say when and where meditation originates. Often it is linked to the most ancient texts from the Indian lands called the Vedas from over 5000 years ago, in which the practice of Dhyāna or Jhāna is referenced as the training of the mind, often translated as meditation.

Early forms of meditation are referenced as far back as the 3rd and 6th century BC in China and linked to the Daoist tradition and the writings of Lao Tzu.

The Buddha was a prince who became a monk, sage and philosopher. It is his teachings on which Buddhism was founded. Yet it wasn't the Buddha who "created" or "invented" the practice of meditation as he himself sought out other enlightened teachers to learn the ways of self-fulfillment from and became a great instrumental in spreading the value of meditation as a practice.

Sufism is an ancient Islamic tradition that dates back as far as 1400 years. It is a mystical practice of connecting with the Divine through self-reflection and devotion, and Sufism developed its particular practice of meditation that includes a focus on breathing and the use of mantras.

Meditation first began to be of interest in the West in the 1700s, when some of the Eastern philosophy texts, containing references to meditation techniques and practices, were translated into different European languages. Though only in the 20th century meditation became more popular, after a prominent yogi, Swami Vivekananda, delivered a presentation at the Parliament of Religions in the United States.

The surge of interest in Eastern models of spirituality in the West influenced a number of other spiritual teachers from India to migrate to Europe and the States including yogis from India and Buddhist monks, representatives of the various schools of thought, such as Zen and Theravada.



Now that meditation has taken a life of its own in the West, it is significantly freed from the religious connections and teachings of its roots and is widely taught in more relatable ways. Since the 1960s and 1970s, meditation is being researched via scientific studies, further removing its spiritual contexts and encouraging the practice to be used by anyone, not just those seeking spiritual fulfillment.

Today Meditation is taught in corporate environments, hospitals, prisons, mental health units, and serves people from all walks of life in returning back to themselves and to the peace of their heart.

Everyone is unique and all approaches to meditation are valid. In the next chapter you'll receive some guidance which is universal and applicable to all.





# CHAPTER

# 03

## THE PRACTICE

### **Where do I start?**

While there is no need to learn meditation from a teacher or to attend a class in order to practice meditation, it is highly recommended to do so in the beginning. A teacher or an experienced meditator can guide you through some of the rough patches when starting a personal practice. Meditating in a group is a very supportive way to approach sitting still, as it encourages will, motivation and determination.

### **Posture**

The most important aspect of the meditation posture is that it is stable and yet relaxed. See it as an embodiment of Presence.

Which is why sitting with spine straight, in an alert, wakeful and aligned position, is the most common recommendation.

Yet, the most important thing is to be comfortable and supported so that you don't have to think about your body during the meditation. Prop your tailbone higher than the knees if sitting on the floor or simply use a comfy chair!

### **Eyes closed ?**

Not all traditions require practitioners to have their eyes closed during meditation, but it is actually a very helpful element. By closing the eyes, we reorient our attention and senses inwards.

There is a lot of energy that we tend to spend outwardly and in mediation we want to redirect both our attention and energy towards inner awareness and from there to embrace in it any external information.

### **Duration and Timing**

There is no "right" or "wrong" here. Any minute spent in awareness is valuable and "counts". How long and when you practice meditation depends entirely on you, your unique lifestyle and your willingness.

The longer the meditation is though, the deeper you can go. As you grow more mindful, you'll notice that in the first 10-15mins the mind is usually still active and we need to apply a technique to centre. Once we overcome that milestone, real meditation comes - an effortless and natural flow of awareness.

There are many techniques available nowadays to quieten the mind and centre. Here are a few basic ones you can use each day:

- **Observe the breath** - simply bring all of your curiosity to the flow of the inhales, exhales and the spaces of stillness in between. It is in those pauses that you may choose to invest special attention as a pointer into deep inner peace
- **Count the breath** in cycles of three, seven or ten - learn to discipline your mind to stay focused on one thing only and learn to witness its tendencies and strategies without involvement
- **Watch the thoughts** as if you're watching clouds drift though the sky or as if watching the street traffic - letting them come and go but not staying with any of them for too long



- **Bring yourself in the Heart space** - rest in the middle of the chest, centring away from thoughts and closer to a feeling of "me" or "myself". It is usually the chest that we point to when we refer to ourselves. There is a lot of reference to the Spiritual Heart (Hridaya) found in the contemplative traditions as the seat of the Self. Bringing our attention there feels natural and even familiar - like coming back home
- **Enquire deeper** into the wisdom of the heart, your inner knowledge and stillness. That is an endless source of inspiration and aspiration which brings profound self-knowledge. Ask yourself "Who am I?" with freshness and an open mind, with no need to give an answer and enjoy the silence and mystery that follow the question
- **Stay with it** - remember to treat the mind like a child, and continuously bring yourself back to practice with care, love and perseverance again and again



Congratulations on completing this first introduction into the fascinating world of meditation!

Now you hold some valuable tools to keep on your journey into self-knowledge and positive transformation.

And there is so much more you can learn about meditation made available by books, videos, podcasts, websites, apps.

But you'll also realise that true knowledge of meditation comes from one's own direct experience and the further along the path you go, the greater the love for the practice grows.

The true essence of the teachings lies within and can't be obtained by reading books or educating the mind about meditation.

The best way to establish a solid practice and deepen into it is committing to a course or a retreat, in which stillness and meditation are the main focus to come back to, again and again.

If you'd like to receive guidance and support from a long term practitioner and an experienced meditation teacher, please visit Radha's website for all upcoming events and retreats:

[www.heartawakening.org](http://www.heartawakening.org)