



Guidelines for Meditation Practice

By Miranda Macpherson

*'There is a state beyond both effort and effortlessness.
Until it is realised, gentle effort is necessary'*

Ramana Maharshi

The central invitation of this teaching is learning to BE AS YOU ARE. From the non-dual view of reality, we are inherently that which we seek and more – the depth of our being IS God, IS love, joy, beauty, infinite depth, strength, intelligence itself, and our potential to express and live that is literally infinite. The core problem is that this depth is covered over by layers of adaptive defences, habits of mind, emotional reactions and internal agitation that is the human condition asleep to itself.

Commonly we are busy trying to fix or change or check out of our current state. This activity keeps our disconnection firmly in place. Meditation helps address this on so many levels: it guides us how to BE STILL, relaxing the usual interference and calming the surface agitation of body, heart and mind. It orients us within rather than towards outer distractions. It increases witness consciousness, making us wiser and less reactive. It is profoundly nourishing and rejuvenating, connecting us with the source of peace. It makes us receptive to the more subtle dimensions of grace and guidance....not to mention offering countless physiological and psychological benefits. Suffice to say, meditation greatly supports your capacity for inquiry, for coming to know yourself as you truly are. Meditation shows you how to rest in God, drink from the stream that can truly quench your thirst, and abide there.

Three important things about meditation:

- 1) It is difficult at first. Just accept this as you would accept it takes your body time to adjust to a new form of exercise you might not naturally be great at. Be patient but persistent and show up for your practice not because you 'should' but from your heart's love for contact with what's real. It is not a competition and you cannot 'fail'.
- 2) While the goal of meditation is 'samadhi' – dissolving/ non-doing/ abiding in pure being, most spiritual traditions agree that the prelude to this is cultivating one pointed CONCENTRATION. For this you need a clear method. I offer here three options for concentration practice.....both of which offer a platform then to shift the point of concentration to something particular, to just resting in God (Samadhi – Just Being)

3) Sitting still but floating about in your thoughts and feelings (mentally reviewing the day, planning, analysing, processing feelings etc) is not meditation! Even if you need to bring your focus back to the point of concentration every two seconds for the whole practice period, you will gain more benefit than just mind wandering.

Beginning your Practice:

* ***Dis-engage from usual distractions:*** Sit somewhere comfortable where you won't be distracted (cell phone/ computer off etc.)

* ***Posture:*** Sit in an upright posture with your spine erect, neck long and slightly tucked in. Have your hips square and feet on floor (or in comfortable lotus). Never cross your legs and slouch – or attempt to meditate lying down. Relax your jaw and let tongue touch roof of mouth lightly. Let your hands facing upwards on your lap, or together on lower belly.

* ***Dedicate your practice to the benefit of all beings***

* ***Give thanks for the blessing of receiving the teachings/ practices....***and all who have played a part in handing them to you.....

* ***Invite God of your understanding*** (Jesus/ Tara/ Ramana/ Shiva/Holy Spirit/Pure Being Itself) to guide your practice. If you have an inner guru or teacher, visualize their hand upon your crown.

Engage Your Practice of Concentration:

“Melting into Being” practice:

In the same way that ice melts naturally in the warmth of the sun, so the practice of ego relaxation is ultimately very natural and simple. On each exhale, feel a sense of melting inwards, letting the focus on the external world ‘melt’...Let your body melt with each exhale into the structure of the chair and floor...recognizing that you are held, that is not necessary for you to effort to hold yourself. Let any particular tensions you are aware of in the body melt with each exhale (but without trying to ‘get rid of it’), feeling yourself drop down into your body and heart.

See if you can let the usual activities of mind “melt”, by simply not following the tendencies to plan, effort, control, achieve anything particular. Thoughts can arise but you do not need to follow or resolve them. Let them melt into the heart. Same with your emotions – they can all arise, and all melt into the space of the heart. Nothing you need to repress, change, fix or do.

Notice the space at the end of each exhale; the space in which there is nothing you need to do. Where you are simply being itself. Melt into that space and let yourself just be. If the mind wanders, let whatever it has been ‘caught’ on just melt, and find your way back to the space at the end of your exhale...melting into the space of pure being.

‘Mountain of Presence’ Meditation:

The ‘kaph’ or ‘dan tien’ is the deep belly center, located about 2 inches below your navel and in towards the core. Human spiritual physiology contains three primary centers – which really offer us three ways of experiencing true nature - Head (clarity) Heart (intimacy) and belly (immensity). My teachings encourage an integrated awakening and so it helps if we aim for balance and engage practices that support that. Most people in the west have very under-developed belly centers, and very egoically developed head and heart centers.....which is what produces a jumpy, distracted mind and a reactive heart that tends to feel unsupported. Concentrating on the breath rising and falling in the deep belly is so straight-forward that anyone can do it. It does not require a belief in anything, but is surprisingly powerful in its impact. It is especially great at grounding us, cultivating inner support in the subtle body, brings us into the immediacy of the present moment, quietening the mind, while it develops the capacity for more subtle sensing, which is an important component in holistic self inquiry.....particularly for opening up more expanded dimensions of awareness.

CORE PRACTICE: As you sense the ground underneath your feet, chair underneath your body, consider what lies below the earth we see – rocks, minerals, water, and deeper still into immense dynamic energy arising out of infinite space that is the ground of all being. Sense that immense dynamism beneath you and rising up like a vast mountain of presence – the crest of that mountain resting in your deep belly center, and the rest of you just resting in it. Keep awareness concentrated on the breath rising and falling in the deep belly.

When distractions arise, just bring focus back to sensing the breath in the belly, sitting in a mountain of immense presence. Over time a sense of inner stability will arise.....at which point you relax the concentration and just rest. Just Be.

Centering Prayer Practice:

I have written extensively about this method of meditation in ‘Boundless Love’, which is adapted from the Christian contemplatives. It uses a more ‘top down’ approach to centering us in presence, inviting us to fall into the arms of God within. It is more suited to those with a devotional temperament, who feel a natural relationship with a sacred presence that is loving and beneficent. (If that is not the case this will develop it). Start by inwardly saying the name of God that your heart loves best.....this is highly personal, but try to keep your mind out of it. If you were dangling from a precarious root off the edge of a cliff and knew you were at the mercy of something much greater than yourself, what name would you call out to? That’s likely your name for God.

CORE PRACTICE: Say that Name inwardly with the exhale, as a way of beginning to focus your awareness. Melt into it..... Then pray that name as a way of taking in the intense loving light of the cosmos, as if receiving a shower of all infinite light and grace falling down your head, your center line, through the heart and into the belly.....then pray that name from the love in your heart....aware that this name represents the truth about you, about everyone, and everything.....when ready, drop the effort and just rest in God.

Resting in God: Just being

Once we are settled and somewhat concentrated, you can just let go of all efforts, even the gentle effort to concentrate. Let yourself just be, aware that you draw breath entirely because of some grace that you did not produce. That you already abide IN That grace. Like a molecule or water is naturally part of the ocean itself – intrinsically inseparable, there is now nothing to do. Just let yourself be.

If thoughts, memories, awareness, emotions arise, no need to push them away or follow them. Just let everything rest in the foundation of it all. Absolutely everything can consciously come to rest in God, where you already abide – always and forever.

2 Primary Obstacles to Meditation:

Whatever method of meditation you use, the two classical problems that arise are *sleepiness/fogginess, spacing out*, or else *agitation, jumpiness, monkey mind*.

If you get sleepy in meditation, increase the volume of your breath, open your eyes slightly letting them rest softly on a neutral point, or stand if you have to. If agitation is more your challenge, sharpen your focus on the concentration, and bring yourself back often. Don't make it mean anything about you that your mind is jumpy. Sometimes that's just how it goes. With practice that will change.

As we deepen in our practice over time, we become more steady in our seat of awareness. It does not mean distractions don't arise, it is that we come back to the practice more easily and rest there longer....It can lead us to unbroken concentration, and this is when our practice of self-inquiry really takes off. Unbroken concentration does not mean that thoughts, feelings and memory does not arise, it's that we are not pulled off our intention by them. We can witness, and our focus becomes crisp, awake but effortless. This is what we most need to embody our inner realisation into daily action.

Transitioning back into Activity:

While many people like to set a timer for their meditation practice, be real with yourself and do not set unrealistic expectations. Better to commit to 10-15 minute sits and build up to half an hour or more. Assess your lifestyle and capacity and see what you can build in regularly. Refuse to attack yourself if you don't do it – instead, inquire into why. What is your resistance is actually about?

The transition from silent interior meditation to action is important. Think not of 'ending your meditation', but rather bringing the meditative awareness into movement and action of the day. It is more natural than you think to engage in all kinds of activities from an inner point of non-doing. (It actually heightens more of our capacities). These pointers will help you transition:

- Let eyes open softly. Instead of reaching out with your eyes in the usual way, let light and color and shape come to you.
- Let sounds come to you. See if you can allow them all equally.
- Sense your feet, legs, pelvis, seat, the space around you. See if you can relate to the body as your vehicle – that YOU are not just a body and a mind – but

awareness – a point of infinite light that happens to be inhabiting and expressing through this particular vehicle.

- Give thanks. Pray, journal or chant as your heart wants to.

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