

Meditation Skills

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Introduction

In the *New Webster's Dictionary* (2002), meditation is described as the "act of meditating; serious contemplation" and "to dwell on anything in thought." This definition is limited and does not begin to describe the practice that we will study in this course. You could say that this definition describes meditation in a purely mental sense. This is a portion of meditation, but not the whole. So what is meditation? How is it practiced? Why should we meditate?

In *How To Meditate* (1974), by Lawrence Le Shan, the author describes a conversation had at a conference attended by a group of scientists who practice meditation on a daily basis. They were discussing different approaches to meditation, when the author brought up the question of why they meditated. Various members of the group posed several different answers but nothing really rang true, until one of the men in the group said, "It's like coming home." After a moment of silence, they all began to nod their heads, and agreed that this was the most true answer they could think of.

Meditation is the vehicle we can use to go "home," to visit the place where we originated, before the illusion of separation solidified in our consciousness. Does this mean we are escaping from our present reality? What are the benefits of reawakening to this central field of consciousness?

In the book *Meditation* (no date indicated) Wendy Momen recounts a story which takes place in 1913 at the Friend's Meeting House at St. Martins Lane, London. Abdu'l-Baha, the son of the founder of The Baha'ia faith, is speaking of meditation and how it can benefit individuals and society. He recalls, "A society formed in Persia about 1000 years ago...who gathered together for silent communion with the almighty. By meditating, and turning their faces to the Source Of Light... all the divine problems were solved. When faced with a decision to be made... [the group] would come together in silence and, freeing their minds from everything else, they would sit and reflect. Before long the answers to the problem would be revealed to them. Many abstruse divine questions were solved by this illumination, including such age-old mysteries as the reality of the spirit of man and life after death as well as the scientific questions of the day and even the essential nature of divinity. Called The Followers Of The Inner Light, these people attained to a superlative degree of power and were entirely freed from blind dogmas and imitations." So what did this group find in this process of coming together in meditation? How was it that in silence these people found answers to the deepest questions of their hearts?

In *A Master Guide To Meditation And Spiritual Growth*, (1999), author Roy Eugene Davis, a direct disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, says, "There are no secrets or mysteries about spiritual growth. It is the natural process of soul—or Self-illumination—when conditions are suitable for it to occur. At our core, behind the finest layers of thoughts and emotions, we are forever established in God. Before the beginning of time we existed as individualized units of pure consciousness, reflections of thoughts. When the universe no longer prevails, we will continue to abide in God." He goes on to say, "If we are not yet conscious of our essential, spiritual condition and our relationship with the Infinite, our need is to learn how to be awake."

So, if at our center, we can find God, our Higher Self, the One Mind, Great Spirit, Eternal Consciousness, or whatever name for Divinity we choose, what is the path inward? How do we find the trailhead that leads to our own Realization of Divine Self? How is it that we "wake up?"

There are many different paths we can travel to bring ourselves into the realization of "home," and awaken our consciousness to its true nature. Taking a look at the history of meditation, we can see how people have always attempted this journey.

Review Of Literature

(Exam questions are not drawn from the following material in this section, Review of Literature)

Yoga And Ayurveda (1999), by David Frawley is written in a clear and concise way, and is an excellent and thorough introduction to these ancient sciences. The information is well organized and entertaining, and written in such a way as to allow transparency, for the reader, of the highly complex concepts which make up the wisdom of Indian science. The following is from the cover: *Yoga and Ayurveda form a complete approach for optimal health, vitality, and higher awareness. Yoga & Ayurveda reveals to us the secret powers of the body, breath, senses, mind,*

and, chakras. More importantly it unfolds transformational methods to work on them through diet, herbs, asana, pranayama, and meditation. This book has the power to change the lives of those who read and apply it.

The book *Seven Arrows* (1973) by Hyemeyohsts Storm, has an inscription to the reader as follows: *If you and I were sitting in a circle of people on the prairie, and if I were then to place a painted drum or an eagle feather in the middle of this circle, each of us would perceive these objects differently. Our vision of them would vary according to our individual positions in the circle, each of which would be unique...* So begins Hyemeyohsts Storm's teaching of the ways of the Great Plains people, the Brotherhood Of The Shield, an orderly and peaceful society existing for hundreds of years before European settlers came to North America. This teaching, through story within story, tells of the great unifying teachings of the Seven Arrows, the Medicine Wheel, the Vision Quest, and the Sundance. This book is a doorway into this very deep and sacred way, telling of the metaphorical aspects of the stories, giving us a key to the oral traditions, steeped in wisdom, which made these people and their culture one of the most peaceful, compassionate, and *successful* societies in recorded history. These teachings are timeless, and apply here and now. They are for all people, and can be understood at many levels. This book is highly recommended to all.

A Master Guide To Meditation (1984), by Roy Eugene Davis, describes in-depth the process that Roy Eugene Davis teaches in order to successfully meditate, as well as reach personal fulfillment and spiritual growth goals. Roy Eugene Davis writes in simple and concise language, and presents the esoteric concepts of meditation philosophy in an organized and easy to explore format. Davis was a devotee and personal disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda. He is the founder and director of Center For Spiritual Awareness, as well as the author of many books and the publisher of Truth Journal Magazine. He travels and lectures worldwide, teaching meditation and spiritual growth methods.

Meditations To Heal Your Life (2002), by Louise L. Hay, is a warm and supportive book, combining meditation with affirmations, two of the most powerful spiritual tools available. It is filled with beautiful meditations on over 100 different life issues or situations. Some of the issues covered are acceptance, addiction, adolescence, changing our thinking, community, control, deserving, elder years, enough for everyone, fear, finances, God, housekeeping, individuality, love, planetary healing, rejection, sexuality, time, violence, and work. Louise Hay is a beloved spiritual teacher who has lectured, taught, and given workshops worldwide, as well as writing many books filled with loving and compassionate teachings on self-acceptance and self-realization. Any book by her is recommended, and this book is no exception.

The Science Of Being And The Art Of Living (1996), by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi introduces a spiritual process called "transcendental meditation" to the world, in order to honor the author's vision for "spiritual regeneration of the world." A direct descendant of the sacred tradition of India's great masters, he wrote the now classic book *The Science Of Being And The Art Of Living*. In a very comprehensive and detailed text, he describes his ideas on how transcendental meditation can bring about a state of greater awareness, mental lucidity, physical connectedness, vibrant health, and the ability to live a peaceful, powerful, joyful, effective life. He discusses transcendental meditation as being the vehicle by which one can realize the "transcendental field of absolute existence." This book is written with a scholarly tone, is well-organized, and highly recommended for anyone seeking to understand life's greater meaning.

In *Meditation* (no date indicated), Wendi Momen describes the creation of this book as "A group of Baha'is and friends began to meet fortnightly to explore different forms of meditation and relaxation, using as the focus of our Meditation the Baha'i scriptures. This book is the product of those gatherings." Some of the topics covered are *What Is Meditation, Meditation Techniques*, as well as several sections studying Baha'i scriptures as they relate to meditation. Included in this is a section called *Great Questions*, in which the timeless questions of man, such the reality of the spirit of man, the inner life of the spirit, as well as the spirit's fate after the ascension from the body, are covered.

The Way Of The Shaman (1990) by Michael Harner is the classic introduction to modern shamanism, including the history and origin, and practical information on how to begin your own shamanic journey. Michael Harner is considered a world-class teacher of modern shamanism. He is the founder and director of The Foundation For Shamanic Studies, and has practiced shamanism and shamanic healing for over 25 years.

In *The Way Of Zen* (1957) Allen W. Watts, writes about the history and origin of Zen Buddhism, with its strong Taoist roots, and then, coming from a Western perspective, explores and comments on this deep spiritual practice, from its principles to its application. Watts perfectly balances his writing between Western scientific language, and the symbolic and mystical language of Eastern writing. *The Way Of Zen* is an important book for the Westerner exploring Zen philosophy. Alan Watts spent decades lecturing, teaching, and studying religion and

philosophy. His area of interest was Eastern religion and thought, and at the age of 20 he wrote his first book on the subject, *The Spirit Of Zen*.

Meditation, Man-Perfection In God-Satisfaction (1978), Sri Chinmoy is a renowned author, artist, poet, athlete, spiritual leader, and peace visionary who has dedicated his life to the pursuit of world harmony and to the fulfillment of the unlimited potential of the human spirit. He is the inspiration behind several peace initiatives which have brought together millions of people worldwide in the spirit of friendship and Oneness. This book covers such topics as *Why Do We Meditate*, *How Do I Start*, *Preparing Yourself To Meditate*, *Quieting The Mind*, *Discovering Your Treasure Within*, and *The Essence Of Aum*. Much practical advice is given in a question and answer format, with Sri Chinmoy answering all sorts of questions about meditation in a gentle, loving, consistent, and firm way.

The book, *The Spiral Dance* (1999), by Starhawk, is considered a classic of the modern Goddess movement. It includes history and ancient lore, as well as modern applications of the "old religion," its symbology, mythology, and ritual teachings. This book is highly recommended for anyone who is interested in learning about the religion of the Great Mother. Starhawk is a world-renowned teacher, social activist, and priestess of the goddess religion. She has written and co-written nine books, including *The Spiral Dance*.

If you want to skim the surface of meditation practice, either just out of curiosity, or to find a practice which attracts you, *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), by Victor N. Davich, is a great tool. This book is a condensed reference of many meditation practices. It presents a light and entertaining, though somewhat tongue in cheek, look at worldwide meditation practices throughout history. Most information is fairly accurate, but for the serious practitioner, further study is recommended.

Rajidner Singh is considered by many to be one of the world's greatest spiritual teachers. He is an internationally recognized teacher of meditation, a direct successor in the lineage of Sant Kirpal Singh, and the current president of The World Council Of Religions. In *Inner And Outer Peace Through Meditation* (2003), Singh has created a gentle guide for practitioners of meditation. With a tone of wise compassion, he creates a tapestry of beautiful words, describing a practice with the potential to lead one to a lasting experience of peace and happiness. With a forward by the Dalai Lama, this book brings the reader into the presence of this wonderful teacher.

Empowering Your Soul Through Meditation (2003), by Rajidner Singh, is another beautiful text from this master, in *Empowering Your Soul Through Meditation*, Singh gives us a comprehensive and engaging teaching on coming into full realization of the soul, using meditation as a tool.

The Inner Guide Meditation: A Spiritual Technology For The 21st Century (1988), by Edwin C. Steinbrecher, is a well-known and highly respected astrologer, who pioneered the process of meditating in order to connect with inner guides. His work deals with integrating the shadow self, which he describes as the male shadow and the female shadow, with the help of inner guides. This book shows how to connect with the inner guides and, using the archetypes of tarot, as well as the energies of astrology, tap into inner wisdom in order to integrate the shadow self and become whole. A very interesting book, if you are studying in astrology, it is highly recommended.

In this book, *The Art Of Meditation* (1956), Joel S. Goldsmith teaches of the vital practice of prayer, as a way to experience directly the presence of God, and bring this presence into daily life. Joel Goldsmith is a spiritual healer and Christian mystic. Throughout his life, he spent many years in silent prayer with people, writing about the insight he received.

Breath By Breath: The Liberating Practice Of Insight Meditation (1998), by Larry Rosenberg, tells us "to contemplate breathing is to contemplate life itself." He takes the Buddha's sutra on breathing, and using these teachings, creates an enlightening look at the importance of breath in meditation. He uses many entertaining anecdotes from his years of practice and teaching. Rosenberg has been a longtime instructor of insight meditation. *Breath By Breath: The Liberating Practice Of Insight Meditation*, is recommended for anyone seeking to get in touch with the rhythms of the breath of life.

How To Meditate, A Guide To Self Discovery (1974), was authored by Lawrence Le Shan. Lawrence Le Shan was a practicing psychotherapist, who was a pioneer in the exploration of the therapeutic benefits of meditation. This is a beginner's book, in which Le Shan gives his thoughts on how to navigate the metaphysical realm to gain psychological health from the practice of meditation. Le Shan shows little understanding of the spiritual depth of this practice (in one section, he debunks the etheric or energetic body and chakras claiming they are somewhat psychologically harmful creations of the imagination) and endeavors to share his vision of the marriage of this practice of spiritual seeking, with scientific thinking. This book is used in this course because it contains some good examples of specific meditations.

History Of Meditation

Meditation has been practiced since before recorded history began. All culturally intact indigenous people use some form of meditation. As humans have always longed for connection with the divine, all traditional people have intuitively known that through silence, looking inward, using mantras, studying dreams, chanting or contemplation, a doorway opens to connect one with the creator. In the following section, we will explore a cross section of some of the many different spiritual practices worldwide which relate to meditation. This study in no way represents all the information on this subject, but is meant to give you a taste of how the practice of meditation underlies the application of many spiritual practices.

Tribal Meditation Practices

Shaman, medicine man, conjurer, witch doctor, shape shifter, bruja, priest, priestess, wizard, witch, or, simply village healer; these ones have been known by many names, and have been around throughout history all over the world. They have held many roles in the community, such as mediator, spiritual advisor, and storyteller, yet underlying all these roles was the role of initiator into other worlds, often with the help of powerful meditation practices. In this way, the Wise One, through journeying and self-realization, could create a map, and be a guide, to the inner realms for the people of the community.

Shamanism

The Shaman often used trance-inducing drumming to "journey" to the upper and lower worlds. Another Shamanic method of inducing an altered state of awareness is the use of hallucinogenic plants, called "power plants," "medicine," or "plant allies." These substances suppress certain parts of the brain in order to allow altered perception, and highlight the functions of areas of the brain connected to the higher mind. The Shaman also used methods of asceticism similar to the yogis of the East, such as fasting, meditating, staying awake for extended periods of time, and spending periods of the time in isolation. One of the more barbaric forms of ritual involved blood sacrifice. The Shaman would sacrifice an animal and drink its blood in order to "ride the energy of the blood to the other side." These and other meditation and ritual forms were used by the Shaman in order to "journey" to other worlds where the soul can roam.

In *The Way Of The Shaman* (1990), Michael Harner tells us, "Archeological and ethnological evidence suggests that shamanic methods are at least twenty or thirty thousand years old. Quite possibly, the methods have much greater antiquity, for after all, primates that could be called human have been on the planet for more than two or three million years." The word shaman is a Siberian word, yet shamanic practices can be found in primitive cultures all over the world. Indigenous cultures separated by continents and oceans share very similar, in some cases identical, shamanic practices. It is possible that meditation originated with the shaman. These were the wise ones, the ones who found a doorway, and stepped through to the inner realms.

Great Spirit

Many Native Americans experience God as Great Spirit. Great Spirit is a divine being neither male nor female, whom these Native people meditate on and pray to daily, throughout all their activities. The following is an excerpt from the book *The Best Guide to Meditation* (1998). Victor N. Davich gives an example of a meditation on, or prayer to, Great Spirit:

Grandfather, Great Spirit you have been always and before you no one has been. There is no other one to pray to but you. With you, everything that you see, everything has been made by you. The star nations all over the universe you have finished. The day, and in that day, everything you have finished. Grandfather, Great Spirit, lean close to the earth that you may hear the voice I send. You towards where the sun goes down, behold me! Thunder beings, behold me! You where the White Giant lives in power, behold me! You where the sun shines continually, whence comes the daybreak star and the day, behold me! You where the summer lives, behold me! You in the depths of the heavens, an Eagle of power, behold me! And you, Mother Earth, the only mother, you who have shown mercy to your children! Hear me, four quarters of the world—a relative I am! Give me the strength to walk the soft earth, a relative to all that is! Give me the eyes to see and the strength to understand, that I may be like you. With your power only can I face the winds.

Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather, all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike. With tenderness have these come up out of the ground. Look upon the faces of children without number and with children in their arms, that they may face the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet.

This is my prayer; hear me! The voice I have sent it is weak, yet with earnestness I have sent it. Hear me!

This prayer is an example of the way many of the Native American peoples view their world. This prayer is a form of meditation, among others. Some other ways Native American people meditate besides prayer are:

Drumming: For Native Americans, ritual drumming is a central meditation practice.

Pipe Ceremony: Ritual tool given to the people by White Buffalo Calf Woman, symbolizing the spirit and earth joining. It is also symbolic of the male/ female joining, and the human body as the center point of earth and spirit.

Singing: Singing devotional songs, songs celebrating nature, songs to prepare for war, birth, and just about anything in their world, are important parts of the spiritual practice of many Native American tribes.

Ritual dances: Many Native American tribes also created ritual dances to raise energy and access altered states in preparation for, or in celebration of, certain events. Some examples of these are the Sundance, the Long Dance, the Ghost Dance, and the War Dance.

Teaching stories: Common to cultures with oral traditions, the teaching stories of Native American people are filled with metaphors, containing within them their ancient teachings, passed down through the stories, and containing many layers of wisdom. From a very young age, these teachings were given to the people, and contain the understanding of how to live in harmony with creation.

Sweat Lodge: Some tribes practice Sweat Lodge Ceremony, a ritual in which a small enclosed area is created, and hot stones, carried in from a ritual fire, are placed in a pit in the center of the space. Water is poured on the stones to create steam, and people sit inside the space praying, drumming, and singing, in order to purify themselves.

Use of medicine plants: Certain plants were used to create altered states in order to connect with "Great Spirit" or "The Creator."

Meditation on the natural world: Most native people of this country viewed themselves as part of nature, seeing less separation than is common in the current dominant culture. There was an intimacy with the natural world, with the plants, animals, insects, as well as with the elements of earth, water, fire, and air. The people saw themselves as not-separate from these things. Alliances and connections were made with the spirits of nature, through meditation and a deep understanding of Oneness. People often had specific "medicine" animals and plants, beings who would become allies, helpers, and teachers.

The many different tribes of Native American people have distinct cultures, as well as differing rituals and meditation. The above list is only a fraction of the sacred practices of Native American people.

The spiritual nature of the Native American, the ancient teachings inherent in the culture of these people, comes from an understanding that the center, or home, is everywhere in everything that can be seen, as well as in that which cannot be seen. The cultural teachings of these deeply, naturally, spiritual people, were, and are centered around the natural world as a reflection of Great Spirit. Two other important Native Americans tribal meditation tools are the Medicine Wheel, and Vision Quest. The archetype of the Medicine Wheel is an example of a symbol used for meditation in order to connect with Great Spirit.

The Medicine Wheel

The symbolism of the medicine wheel teaches that all beings are related and that all things on the earth must retain balance and harmony. The medicine wheel is a metaphor for the universe and all it contains, and is represented by a circle, with a line running through the center horizontally and vertically, forming four quadrants. Representing the four directions, from which comes the four winds, and which creates all things. Many of the teachings begin with the Medicine Wheel.

This symbol has ancient roots and can be found in other forms in many cultures. The circle has no beginning, no end, and contains all things. The cross in the center which forms the four directions represents the place where the world of spirit intersects with the world of form. The center point is the place where life manifests, and all beings in this world are born. This is a deep and profound tool for meditation, which

symbolizes that "the sum is greater than the total of its parts." This is a symbol which includes all of creation and which, when meditated on, can connect one with the inherent Oneness of all things.

Vision Quest

The Native American Vision Quest, which was widely practiced by the people of the Great Plains, plays an important role in the spiritual development of the native people. Traditionally, this practice was only utilized by young men who were seeking their true name, and *medicine*.

Under the direction of the medicine man, after very specific preparation, the young man would journey into the wilderness. When he returned, the medicine man, as well as other chosen tribal members, would listen to the young man recounting his experiences, the insects, animals, and plants he saw, and the content of his thoughts and dreams. They would then analyze the symbolic meanings of his experiences, and tailor special teachings which would help him understand his "*medicine*." At this time he would also be given his true name.

Today many people are drawn to embarking on a vision quest of their own. This is a powerful practice that can benefit all people, and seeking out the help of a spiritual elder in order to facilitate this process is recommended, though not absolutely necessary. Truly, all roads lead to God, Great Spirit, enlightenment, nirvana, or "home."

Orishas

In Africa, the Namibian people have built altars to the *orishas*, or gods and goddesses for thousands of years. These altars are built anyplace in which contact with the Divine is desired. They are built with natural materials to blend with the environment, and resonate in harmony with nature. The objects on the altar include sacred medicine fetishes, called *minkisi*, magical containers, and symbols and pictures.

The altars are often placed on boundaries such as along the river bank, between a meadow and a forest, at a burial ground, or anywhere that indicates a "place between," which is symbolic of and carries the energy of a doorway between the earthly plane and the spirit world. Again, the Namibian people, by their cultural practices, show an inherent understanding of the oneness of all things. These intact cultures, having never known any other way, having never truly "separated" from all that is, "live" their meditation. This could be considered the ultimate goal of meditation practice, to live life with the realization of the absence of separation from Source.

Africa is a great continent with a very wide variety of cultural and tribal traditions. I have included only one example here, as I found it difficult to find resources on spiritual practices of African people. If you are interested in this subject, a thorough internet search is recommended.

Hindu Meditation Practices

Yoga

Hinduism is a term that covers a wide range of Indian cultural and spiritual practices. One of the spiritual disciplines practiced throughout India is yoga. Yoga is a comprehensive spiritual practice, which addresses the whole being as a spiritual system. In *Yoga And Ayurveda* (1999), David Frawley quotes The Bhagavad Gita as follows: "Yoga is severing the connection with that which causes suffering. Yoga should be practiced with insight and with an unperturbed heart." The word yoga literally means "to yoke," and refers to the mind and creative potential being harnessed by the Yogi (practitioner of Yoga). Yoga is a life affirming system, which includes meditation. This system of teaching is based on Dharma, which is a Sanskrit word meaning "that which points to universal truths." The word implies a foundation or pillar, the fundamental principles on which all things are built. Raja Yoga, a system of Yoga presented by Patanjali, puts forth the "eight limbs of Yoga" which are as follows:

Yama: rules of social conduct

Niyama: rules of personal behavior

Asana: physical postures

Pranayama: control of the vital force

Dharana: right attention or control of the mind

Dhyana: meditation

Samhadi: absorption

Pratyahara: control of the senses

The teachings of these "eight limbs" form the basis of Yogic practice. There are five different paths or approaches to yogic practice. Since there are many different types of people with various personalities, these paths give choices to the practitioner, as each person tends to resonate with a different path. These paths are:

Jnana Yoga: *Yoga of knowledge*. This path involves inquiry into the true nature of self, God, and of the universe.

The inquiry is done through contemplation on these questions and deep listening in observation, with the goal of uncovering these truths. This path emphasizes "Knowing-By-Being," or Self-Realization.

Bhakti Yoga: *Yoga of devotion.* This path is the path of immersion in Divine love. It includes devotional practices, such as the Guru/devotee relationship. Christianity, in its original form, is a beautiful example of this path. Bhakti yoga emphasizes Realization of Divine love.

Kriya Yoga: *Yoga of technique.* This path follows the development of consciousness through techniques involving the body, the breath and the mind. It is a Yoga of purification and preparation to bring about readiness for self-realization.

Karma Yoga: *Yoga of service.* This path is based on the understanding that one's spiritual practice should be in service to all beings. A practitioner of karma yoga purifies consciousness in order to be of service to all. This path emphasizes Divine service

Raja Yoga: *Integral Yoga.* This path is a combination of the four Yogic paths.

Much of the influence of thought in Western meditation practice, including most of the language, comes from Hindu philosophy. Many Americans think of yoga as a physical discipline, and meditation as a mental or spiritual discipline. The great philosophical and spiritual traditions of the East have permeated American culture, to some degree, yet most people who practice yoga and meditation in America have little understanding of the roots of these powerful practices. If the practice is focused only on physical postures, (*asanas*) and does not have a spiritual element, then this is not correct yoga practice. Yoga is a synthesizing process which brings awareness to the Self.

The Five Pranas

The five pranas arise from the magnetic polarization of the soul, or causal body. This movement gives birth to the two basic pranas. From these are born the opposites of masculine and feminine, inhalation and exhalation, attraction and repulsion, eating and elimination, etc. The parent pranas generate an electrical force that divides into the five pranas:

Prana: one of the two "parent" pranas, it is the energy that moves inward.

Apana: the other "parent" prana, it is the energy that moves outward and downward.

Samana: holds the energy of center, or balance.

Vyana: the energy of expansion.

Udana: the energy that moves upward.

Meditation on the pranas brings one awareness of the movement of energy in the system of bodies. These consist of the physical body, the astral body, the causal body, and the Self or Pure Consciousness.

Bijas and Mantras

The use of a mantra, formed from a *bija*, or seed sound, is often applied as a focal point, a sound which is listened to and concentrated on in order to hold the attention of the meditator. Mantras are sacred words, or sounds, which carry vibrational signatures. Mantra is energized sound, and sound is vibration. In focusing on the sound, one is drawn into the vibrational frequency of the sound, which is Pranic in nature, and carried within. The idea of a sacred sound is common to most religious systems, as in Christianity, where we find in the gospel according to St. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God."

In *Yoga and Ayurveda*, (1999), by David Frawley, the author writes of "Mantra Purusha," or "person of sound." Frawley says, "Sound is the original form of all energy. Space, which ultimately is consciousness, gives rise to energy which is Prana, or Life. Sound is the mental aspect of Prana. All aspects of the mind, from the outer to the inner, have their corresponding sound vibration. The mind is composed of thoughts, which are words and sounds. Each person's mind has its own sound pattern or mantra. The soul itself has its own mantric vibration; when we learn it, we can awaken all the powers within."

He goes on to explain, "The human being is a creation of sound which creates our different bodies, starting with the causal body. The causal body, soul, or deeper mind is our aspect of the Divine word. The creator breathes this divine word into the soul as its immortal life. This word is the vibration of cosmic consciousness which is the origin of time, common intelligence and prana. It forms the ideal pattern or Dharma behind our soul's existence."

Finding your soul's mantric vibration, the seed sound of the Self, and using this mantra, in meditation, as well as in daily life, is a powerful tool for aligning all your systems with Source.

Some commonly used bija mantras are as follows:

OM : (Also AUM) This sound is considered to be the primordial sound. It activates the third-eye, or Ajna chakra. In the human body it is the place in which feminine and masculine currents join, and

unity is realized. Om exists in the void, beyond duality, and represents the cosmic vibration from which all things are born. It is said that Om holds all the secrets of the universe, and that chanting Om reveals that which is hidden. Om is used with other mantras because it is considered that Om contacts divine guidance within.

HRI : This sound lifts the veil of creation, can dispel ignorance, and transmutes lower energies. It is associated with the heart chakra, and the Hindu goddess, Parvati. It is a mantra of purification, and is one of the most important of all mantras.

KLIM: This sound is associated with the magnetic force of the universe. It holds the energy of attraction, and can be used with other mantras to add energy. It is associated with the Hindu goddess Kali.

SHRIM: This sound manifests beauty and light. It holds the energy of expansion, and brings abundance of all things beautiful. It is associated with the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, goddess of abundance and prosperity.

HUM: This is the sound associated with the inner fire, which transmutes negative energies. It is a powerful mantra of protection, as well as a mantra of healing.

SVAHA: This sound carries the vibration of surrender to the inner fire of awareness. Many mantras end with this sound.

PHAT: This sound carries the vibration of amplification, and can be used with other sounds to expand the vibration.

These are a collection of *bijas*, or seed sound mantras. Many mantras are made up of a combination of seed sounds. The following combination of seed sounds, with definitions, is an example of a powerful mantra of healing:

HUM PHAT SVAHA: In this mantra, HUM carries the *vibration of inner fire, the truth that dispels illusion*.

PHAT carries the *vibration of amplification of the energies*. SVAHA carries the *vibration of surrender to the inner fire of awareness*. When these seed sounds are combined, they form a powerful mantra of vibrational energy, which carries your intent into cosmic consciousness, where the energy is then returned to manifest in your life.

Mudra

Mudra is a Sanskrit word that means “gesture” or “attitude.” Mudra practice involves gestures of the hands, face, feet, and other body parts, usually in conjunction with asanas or Yoga postures, bandhas (which are muscular contractions), as well as with mantras. Mudras are a practice often associated with advanced Yoga, in which the practitioner is able to sense the subtle currents of energy flowing through the bodies, and uses a mantra to facilitate the flow. These advanced Yogic practices are covered extensively in the UMS course: *Mantras and Mudras*.

Puja

Puja is the ritual practice of devotional worship, which is widely practiced throughout India. According to yogic philosophy, puja would be a form of Bhakti Yoga. Most people have altars in their homes, dedicated to the God or Goddess of the family, and as well, many people have personal altars to honor the God or Goddess with whom they resonate with. Daily puja is practiced, in which an offering is made to please the God or Goddess and bring favorable attention. This practice is integral to many families in India. Each household may worship a different deity, according to family tradition, and each village may worship a specific god or goddess, according to the traditions of that area.

Often the day is begun with Puja, which might include an invocation to the Divine One, such as through prayer, chanting, ritual singing, contemplation, or an offering of one's awareness in meditation. As well, it might include the ritual washing and adorning of the deity, lighting of incense, offerings of milk and honey, or milk infused with herbs, the lighting of a candle, or the offerings of flowers, gems, resins, sacred herbs, and other things which are pleasing to that particular deity. There are three parts to puja, which are as follows:

- Observing, seeing, or witnessing the Deity.
- Devotional offerings made, in which the image of the God or Goddess might be washed and adorned, and offerings made.
- And finally the devotee receives the blessing of the deity through partaking of the offerings of food and drink, which are believed to carry the blessings of the God or Goddess.

In addition to daily, or small, puja in the home, a very important part of Hindu practice is daily worship in temples, or great puja. Temples are often grand and palace-like, as the God or Goddess is considered a king or queen. A temple is built to honor a certain deity, and how it is adorned reflects that aspect of the Divine. The inner room of the temple is dedicated to devout worship of the Divine-One, and is adorned simply, with the image of the

God or Goddess as a focal point. Priests and priestesses offer puja daily to the temple deity. It is thought that, in remembering and honoring the God or Goddess, this being will come into and bless the lives of those offering puja.

Great puja is the form of puja that the community practices together, during religious festivals or other important occasions. According to the information on the web site <http://www.archaka.com>, the following describes the ritual process of Great Puja:

Avahana: the invocation of the deity

Asana: a seat is offered to the deity

Svagata: the deity is welcomed, asked about his journey and whether he faced any problems coming to the place of puja

Padya: the feet of the deity are washed with water

Arghya: a respectful offering of water is made to the god. This water is laced with sandalwood paste, vermilion, and rice

Achamania: water is then offered for washing the face and mouth of the deity

Madhu-parka: a beverage made of honey, sugar, and milk is offered to the deity

Snanajala: the deity is offered water for bathing

Bhushana-abharanasya: clothing, jewels, and ornaments are offered to the deity

Gandha: sandalwood paste or other fragrant objects are offered

Akshata: grains of rice are mixed with vermilion and offered

Pushpanjali: flowers are offered

Dhupa: incense is lit

Dipa: the lamp is lit

Najdvadya: rice, fruit, butter and sugar are offered

Visajrana: the deity is finally bidden farewell

Arati: a metal plate, filled with oil or ghee, and containing 5 wicks is lit and waved in front of the deity in a clockwise direction

This shows us just how deep the attitude of devotion shown to the God or Goddess is in the practice of puja

Buddhist Meditation Practice

Buddhism, born in the East, out of Hinduism, brings us the most established tradition of meditation, as well as a teaching that brings a thorough understanding, through the dedicated and intensive practice of a large number of Buddhist monks and practitioners, of the established pathway to Buddha Realization.

Buddhism is a practice originating with a young man named Siddhartha, a Hindu who was born in 563 B.C., the son of a prince of the Gautamas, whose kingdom was located in the foothills of the Himalayas. The following is a brief synopsis of his path to enlightenment.

When Siddhartha was in his 29th year, he had a visitation in which he saw four signs. The signs involved an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a monk. At this time he began to experience great concern for the suffering of mankind. He was filled with thoughts of the impermanence of happiness, and he wondered at the injustice of so many suffering while he lived in luxury. He became an ascetic, following a strict practice of self-deprivation and self-denial. After following this practice for some time, he became dissatisfied with his progress, and began to experience temptations in the form of Mara, The Hindu Goddess of Illusion, who visited him and tempted him to give up this ascetic life and return to a life of luxury. Siddhartha, instead, sat at the foot of the bodhi (banyan) tree, and began to meditate on ending suffering. He meditated continuously for 49 days and thus attained complete enlightenment, and in this way he became Buddha, literally translated as "enlightened one."

Buddha then traveled throughout India, tirelessly teaching anyone who would listen. At the center of his teaching was the idea that through realizing Nirvana, or absorption in the Divine, one could be released from the Wheel of Karma. Karma is defined as a nexus or link *Webster's New School And Office Dictionary* (1960), and represents that which keeps us connected with the cycle of birth and death. He taught of his realization of the four noble truths, and the eightfold noble path, through which humanity can become enlightened. Many people began to follow his teachings as much because of the peace that emanated from him as because of what he taught. Buddha literally transmits the enlightened state of being, the state of non-duality, or Oneness. One of his students, Ananda, began recording his teachings in writing, verbatim. These writings are called sutras, and are central to all schools of Buddhism. (*Sutras literally means "verses" in Sanskrit*). This transmission is still available today to all who follow these teachings.

The Four Noble Truths

1. All phenomena is impermanent, all experience is unsatisfactory, suffering is inevitable.
2. Suffering originates in desire, attachments, a clinging to people, possessions, life itself
3. Transcendence of suffering is possible and comes with the "rooting out" of the ongoing desire
4. Freedom is found in following the eightfold noble path, which leads to Nirvana

The Eightfold Noble Path

1. **Right Seeing:** seeing things clearly within one's own being, as well as outside oneself
2. **Right Resolve:** making a commitment to the highest good of all beings
3. **Right Speech:** speaking with clarity and kindness
4. **Right Conduct:** taking action for the highest good of all beings
5. **Right Livelihood:** participating in a livelihood which does no harm and honors all beings
6. **Right Effort:** all effort in alignment with the highest good of all beings
7. **Right Mindfulness:** being mindful in all ways of the highest good of all
8. **Right Meditation:** daily meditation practice focused on enlightenment

Buddha taught that enlightenment comes from following the middle way. The middle way is a balance between seeking and surrender. Buddha taught people that this was the place of non-duality, and ultimately the path to enlightenment.

Zen Buddhist Meditation

Zen is one of the offshoots of Buddhism which has gained popularity in the West. The Zen tradition came out of India, and moved to China in the sixth century, and to Japan in the 12th. The word Zen comes from the Japanese form of the Sanskrit word for meditation, dhyana.

In *The Way Of Zen*, (1957), by Alan Watts, the author quotes Zen master Sokie-an Sasaki describing his first moments of enlightenment: "One day I wiped out all the notions from my mind. I gave up all desire. I discarded all the words with which I thought and stayed in quietude. I felt a little queer—as if I were being carried into something, or as if I were touching some power unknown to me...and Ztt! I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but I felt I was standing in the center of the cosmos. I spoke, but my words had lost their meaning. I saw people coming towards me, but all were the same man. All were myself! I had never known this world. I had belief that I was created, but now I must change my opinion; I was never created; I was the cosmos; no individual Mr. Sasaki existed."

In Zen philosophy, it is believed that the truth cannot be spoken in words. There is a well-known quote which goes, "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know." Only through inner silence can we know Zen. In this clarified Buddhist path, it is understood that our natural state is enlightenment. In *The Way Of Zen* (1957) Alan W. Watts says, "To practice with an end in view is to have one eye on the practice and the other on the end, which is lack of concentration, lack of sincerity. To put it another way: one does not practice Zen to become a Buddha; one practices it because one is a Buddha from the beginning, and this original realization is the starting point of the Zen life."

The Zen Buddhists use a form of riddle called a "Koan" in meditation, in which the teacher poses a question, seemingly unanswerable, and instructs the student to meditate on the question. These questions encourage right brain thinking, the mind's source of intuition and wisdom. Deep meditation on the Koans is known to open the mind to an understanding of Zen. The following are three examples of common Koans:

Koans:

1. Does the dog have a Buddha nature or not?
2. What is the face you had before you were born?
3. What is the sound of one hand clapping?

One of the most important aspects of Zen Buddhism is the posture taken in meditation. The posture is very specific, and the teacher instructs the student to return his attention to the posture each time a thought enters the mind. The breath is also the focal point, and the teacher instructs the student to return his attention to the breath as well.

One of the forms of Zen practice is called Soto Zen, its central focus being Shikantaza, which can be translated to mean "just sitting." The philosophy of this school says that posture is everything, and to sit as Buddha sat, perfecting the posture, is All. It is believed that taking the posture and not relying on breath techniques, koans, or other focuses of meditation, is a pure form, where all is present, and duality nonexistent.

Insight Meditation

Insight meditation, also called Vipassana, has its roots in the Southeast Asian practice of Theravada Buddhism. Vipassana means "insight" in the Pali language. The practice involves total consciousness of the present moment and meditation on the now.

Insight meditation uses the teaching of mindfulness, which is the development of awareness paired with detachment. Insight is cultivated through the practice of mindfulness. Through insight, enlightenment is attained. The practice of insight meditation does not focus on one thing, but teaches practitioners to meditate on whatever is at the forefront of the attention, bringing mindfulness to this. The purpose is to observe whatever arises with mindfulness, and so allowing it to pass away again, as all things must.

Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism came to Tibet by way of India, and is a form of Mahayana Buddhism. Its goal is the liberation of all beings. The Dalai Lama of Tibet embodies these compassionate teachings for many practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

A very important part of Tibetan Buddhism is the concept of *ahimsa*, which could be translated as nonharming, or nonviolence. Many of us have watched the movie *Seven Years In Tibet* about one man's account of his experiences with the young Dalai Lama while he was visiting Tibet. In the story, which is based on actual events, the man builds a movie theater for the Dalai Lama, and is disconcerted when the laying of the foundation is delayed, as the monks who are digging the foundation carefully and lovingly remove each and every earthworm from the site, and carry them to a new home. This is a prime example of *ahimsa*, and also a tribute to the Tibetans, who carry on such a beautiful, compassionate tradition.

Loving-kindness is the Buddhist practice of having compassion for all sentient beings. Part of the practice of loving-kindness is sending love and compassion to another in order to ease their suffering. This is a powerful concept to bring into your meditation practice. In *Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich tells the story of one of Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness: "Just as mindfulness can dispel fear, so can loving-kindness and compassion. It is said that the Buddha first taught loving-kindness and compassion to his monks as a tool to help them overcome great fear. Legend has it that these monks went out into the forest and encountered some major demons. They came running back to the Buddha, who urged them to return to the forest, and when they encountered these demons again, to send loving kindness and compassion to them. The monks heeded the Buddha's advice and returned to the woods. When the monsters appeared again, the monks were able, through the practice of loving-kindness and compassion, to overcome their fear. The monsters evaporated."

There is an ancient Tibetan meditation technique called "Tonglen," which is a high practice of loving-kindness. Tonglen means "to send and receive." The focus of this bodhisattvic practice is to take on the suffering of another, and transmute the energy into joy and happiness. After the energy has been purified and raised to higher vibration, it is returned. This is an especially useful practice to use with family members and loved ones who are ill or dying.

Falun Gong or Falun Dafa

Falun Gong was founded by Li Hongzhi, and he began teaching it in China in 1992. It is based on the teachings of Mr Li, and at the heart of these teachings are the three virtues of Truthfulness, Benevolence, And Tolerance. Another main practice of Falun Gong are five sets of exercises. They are described as follows:

Buddha Showing a Thousand Hands: this exercise stretches the body, opens up the energy systems, and strengthens the energy field.

Falun Standing Stance: the standing stance is a tranquil standing meditation with four "wheel holding" positions. It opens the entire body, and is said to enhance wisdom and strengthening divine energy.

Penetrating The Two Cosmic Extremes: this exercise channels cosmic energy and blends it with the energy of the body. It opens meridians on top of the head, and expands one's energy fields.

The Great Heavenly Circuit: this exercise any pulls the energy of the human body to circulate over large areas, allowing the yin and yang energy to circulate freely. It is said to strengthen divine powers.

Strengthening Divine Powers: this exercise is one of tranquil cultivation. It is an advanced practice that has been secret in the past, and involves hand positions, or Mudras, from Buddha.

From the time of its introduction, Falun Gong has spread very quickly. It has spread through word-of-mouth, as people experience its benefit and tell others. It is practiced in 40 countries worldwide, and is taught free to

all people who seek the teachings. The Chinese government has reacted to the popularity of Falun Gong, as if threatened by it. The government has declared it illegal, and widespread harassment and imprisonment of practitioners is common. Many people around the world are protesting the Chinese government for its persecution of those who practice Falun Gong. This practice is covered in more detail in the UMS elective course *Falun Gong*.

Tantric Meditation Practice

Part of the Mahayana teachings include Vajrayana, the tantric vehicle. This is considered the highest form of meditation practice, according to Mahayana teachings. In the West, when we think of tantra, often we think of this as a sexual technique. In tantric practice, however, sex becomes a *vehicle* of meditation. (the word tantra is not exclusive to sexuality, but is actually a defining term for a type of spirituality.) The focus of Tantric sex is not to climax in orgasm, instead it uses the energy created to awaken kundalini, open the chakras, and to purify practitioners who channel this energy for the good of all beings. Through Tantric meditation practice, the state of bliss is realized through embracing human pleasure as a vehicle to transcend desire. One who practices Vajrayana meditation is working with a transformation of energy in which the suffering of the world is changed through the expansion of the practitioner's consciousness, making enlightenment available to all.

In *Introduction To Tibetan Buddhism* (1995), John Powers says, "Instead of viewing pleasure and desire as something to be avoided at all costs, tantra recognizes the powerful energy aroused by our desires to be an indispensable resource for the spiritual path. Because the goal is nothing less than the realization of our highest human potential, tantra seeks to transform every experience—no matter how unreligious it may appear in the path to fulfillment. It is precisely because our present life is so inseparably linked with desire that we must make use of desire's tremendous energy if we wish to transform our life into something transcendental."

Jewish Meditation Tradition

The Jewish meditation tradition is ancient. Jewish mysticism has its roots in a powerful focus on the infinite, and a great desire to celebrate the gift of life. The voice is used as a tool or doorway, to connect with the divine. In spoken word, as in reciting the Torah, in raising voice in sacred songs, and in the rich tradition of the beautiful Hebrew language, the voice is understood as a way to connect with Adonai (a Hebrew name of God).

In *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich shares with us the Shema meditation: "Contemplating the Shema awakens us to the primordial space from which the sacred words emerge. To practice this meditation, find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted for 15 or 20 minutes. Sit comfortably. Gradually feel your body relax. Take a few deep and easy breaths and close your eyes. Enter into your meditation with Shalom, and a feeling of calmness and peace. Begin by reciting the six words of the Shema in your mind: "Shema Yisrael: Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Ecbad." (Hear, O Israel: The Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One.) Bring your attention back to these words when your mind wanders.

After a few minutes, begin to meditate on the heart of the Shema, the two central words, "Adonai Eloheynu." Continue meditating on these two words until you are ready to conclude. Finally, meditate on the entire Shema again. After a few minutes, take a deep breath, relax and return to normal. End with a "shalom," and feel harmony emanate from the stillness you have found in these sacred words."

Tree Of Life

One of the branches of Judaism is the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah. Within this teaching system is the story of the tree of life. This story is central to the mythology of the Garden of Eden. In its original form, it tells us that there were two trees in the garden, the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil and the Tree Of Life. The Kabbalists believe that Adam and Eve were instructed in the secrets of the tree of life before they ate from the fruit of the Tree Of Knowledge Of Good And Evil. The teachings of the tree of life were kept secret for many, many generations, yet with the renewed interest in Jewish mysticism this knowledge is being studied again. The Tree Of Life consists of ten Sephiroth, or angelic realms of influence. Each Sephiroth holds a vibration as divine energy manifests itself into form; in *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich quotes a 19th century hermeticist named Eliphas Levi, in his explanations of the ten Sephiroth:

1. **Kether:** the crown, the equilibrating power that makes the manifest universe possible
2. **Chokma:** wisdom, equilibrated in its unchangeable order by the initiative of intelligence
3. **Binah:** active intelligence, equilibrated by wisdom

4. **Chesed**: mercy, which is wisdom in its secondary conception, ever benevolent because it is strong
5. **Geburah**: severity, necessitated by wisdom in itself, and by Goodwill. To permit evil is to hinder good
6. **Tepereth**: beauty, the luminous conception of equilibrium informs, intermediary between the crown and the kingdom, mediating principle between creator and creations, sublime conception of poetry and its sovereign priesthood
7. **Netsah**: victory, that is, eternal triumphal of intelligence and justice
8. **Hod**: eternity of the conquests achieved by mind over matter, active over passive, life over death
9. **Jesod**: the foundation, that is, the basis of all belief and all truths—otherwise, the absolute in philosophy
10. **Malkuth**; the Kingdom, meaning the universe, entire creation, the work and mirror of God

The Kabbalist's believe that to activate the seeker's relationship to the Sephiroth, one must meditate on a Name of God. The names are recorded in the Torah, which is the book of Jewish law and spiritual truth. In the Torah there are 25 names of God. In *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich quotes *The Book of Names*, an anonymous kabbalistic text. According to *The Book of Names*, "The tree of life has to be lighted by one of the names of God. Without the name, the tree will be dead, lifeless...When the one who is meditating speaks one of the names of God, while meditating profoundly on the Tree Of Life, the tree lights up, and all phenomena disappears. This may happen gradually or instantly, and the one in meditation can experience a fourth state of consciousness in which, the book of names tells us, "The Sephiroth of the tree of life flash into our consciousness in a way which may be very profound and quite different from the way we imagined it." The author also says, "When the tree flashes into life becomes living, pulsating, then the meditation, which has started in the heart, moves into the head, deepening until the tree completely disappears."

25 Kabbalist Names Of God

Abicha - Our Father	Gadol -Great	Kodosh -Holy One
Abir -Mighty One	Ha Tzur -The Rock	Ra'a Ya -Shepherd
Adonai -Lord	Chaim -Life	Shalom -Peace
Ahavah -Love	Kabud -Honor	Torah -Law
Ehyeh -I Am	Masika -Messiah	Tehom -Great Deep
Elohi -Great Living One	Nora -Full Of Awe	Tamim -Perfect
Anochi -I	Olam -Everlasting Worlds	Yod He Vav He -
Eshda - The Fiery Law	Tsaddik -Saint	Brilliant Name Of Fire
Gabor -Mighty	Zion -Place Of God	

The Kabbalist tradition of meditation on the Names of God and Tree Of Life is a beautiful and powerful practice, which corresponds with other sacred spiritual systems, and creates a path for meditating on reality, from the earthly to the divine.

Christian Meditation Traditions

Jesus' lineage was steeped in Hebrew Mysticism. He was born in Palestine, estimated around 4 B.C. (interesting!), and likely grew up in Nazareth, or nearby, during the reign of Herod the Great. According to *The World's Religions* (1991), by Huston Smith, he came from a Hebrew tradition in which "...Prophets and seers who comprised that tradition mediated between the everyday world, on the one hand, and the Spirit world that enveloped it. From the latter they drew power, which they used both to help people and to challenge their ways."

In Jesus' youth, he witnessed the suffering of his people, who were under Roman rule. He witnessed much injustice including cultural annexation, as well as grossly unfair taxation. He was baptized by John, an important prophet of the time, who spoke of God's coming Judgment.

In *The World's Religions* (1991), Huston Smith tells us that John, after baptizing Jesus, spoke of this act causing his "third or spiritual eye to open," and "the heavens opened and the spirit descended upon him like a dove." After this experience, Jesus retreated from the world and sought solace in the desert, spending 40 days in meditation, prayer and fasting. After this time, Jesus returned and began his service ministry of leading, teaching, and healing.

In his realization of Oneness, Jesus returned with a new language, based on this understanding. He became a channel for the Great Compassionate One, the aspect of God, or Yahweh, which was called forth from him. He spoke with many people, was kind, and he would lay his hands on people, directly transmitting grace, and they would be healed. He also transmitted grace through his words, his gaze, and his presence. He challenged the social structure around him, yet his teachings were of forgiveness "for they know not what they

do." He gave his life for what he believed in, not backing down from the Truth. In this way he became immortal in word and deed as well as Spirit.

Many people since then have meditated on the teachings of this man, who opened, in the fabric of reality, a direct passage to the Divine Grace of the Heavenly Body. In the words of Huston Smith, "Again we must come back to what those teachings were about. Everything that came from his lips formed the surface of a burning glass to focus human awareness on the two most important facts about life: God's overwhelming love of humanity, and the need for people to accept that love and let it flow through them to others. In experiencing God as infinite love, bent on people's salvation...and to perceive this love and let it penetrate one's very marrow was to respond in the only way that was possible—in profound and total gratitude for the wonders of God's grace."

Prayer

When disciples of Jesus asked him, "teach us how to pray," Jesus taught them the "Lord's prayer."

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. AMEN. "

This prayer has become a guiding light for followers of the Christian faith. This is one translation of the words of Jesus, and there are other translations of this prayer. Regardless of the words spoken, the transmission of truth that Jesus gave to the people is constant. Many Christians meditate faithfully on the words of this prayer, and find great peace, tranquility, and faith in this practice .

Some time after Jesus' death, Christian monks, who became known as "The Desert Fathers," retreated to the remote regions of the Egyptian desert in unbroken meditation on Jesus. They repeated the prayer of Jesus continually throughout the day. They devoted themselves to minimizing worldly distractions and focusing only on this prayer to Jesus; "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me." These monks were able to directly access the transmission of Jesus Christ through meditation and prayer.

Prayer is a form of devotional meditation. It could also be said that prayer is communication with God, while meditation is realization of self as God. In *A Handbook Of Living Religions*(1985), a compilation of essays on the religions of the world, edited by John R. Hinnells, is an essay on Christianity by Andrew Walls. Walls tells us, "Prayer is generally held to be both an obligation upon Christians and a privilege arising from the accessibility of the transcendent world."

Walls speaks of three different perspectives influencing Christian prayer in particular: "...adoration, thanksgiving and confession," as from lower man to higher Deity; Prayers of petition, in which a person asks for intercession from God; and deep, contemplative prayer, which is closely related to Yogic meditation practices. The desert fathers practiced the latter form of prayer, and in the essay by Walls, he quotes a 17th-century Maximus Confessor when speaking of, "a vision of boundless divine light... the mind is ravished, and loses all sensation of itself or of any other creature, and is aware of him alone, who through love has produced this illumination."

Contemplative prayer is a form of meditation in which communication with the divine is made through spoken word and prayer focused inward. Walls also tells us of a Syrian writer of unknown name, "usually called pseudo-Dionysus" who was very influential to Christian philosophy. "God," he says, "is beyond affirmation, being or knowing; the Divine is dark through very excess of light. It is therefore by *unknowing* that the divine is approached: inner stillness, requiring unceasing and absolute renunciation, bringing to bear the deeper powers of the soul."

Another form of Christian contemplative meditation, discussed by author Victor N. Davich in *Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), is taught by Basil Pennington, a Trappist monk, who teaches a form of meditation he calls "a centering prayer." In the centering prayer a single word or simple phrase is meditated on, to allow the practitioner to become centered in their being, arriving at a place which is beyond thought. Here again we find a close relationship between the philosophies of Yogic meditation and Christian contemplative prayer.

Prayer is practiced extensively in other religions, including Islam, and Judaism. This devotional practice of communication with the Divine is a valuable spiritual practice for many people.

Chant As Meditation

Chanting has been used as a form of meditation in many cultures, and Gregorian chanting is a type of Christian religious meditation that dates back over 1500 years. Gregorian chants consist of vocal expression of prayer, unaccompanied by music and sung without harmony. The chanting follows the natural rhythm of the words and is sometimes referred to as plainsong. Choirs often chant together, but a soloist can also chant, as well as a cantor (or leader) and choir, using a call and response format.

In a monastery setting, chanting and meditating together helps the monks become attuned to each other and creates a powerful feeling of community. When the monks come together, their voices raised in prayer, a powerful energy brings expansion of consciousness with awareness beyond the personal and of the greater good of God.

Canonical Hours

Another form of meditation practiced at monasteries and convents is called the Canonical Hours. This practice breaks up the day into sections with different prayers and intentions set according to the time, and the activities and tasks of that time of day.

A bell is rung at certain hours of the day to indicate the beginning of each time period. The Divine Offices of the Canonical Hours are called in the following order:

Vigils: the day begins with a call to vigils in the early morning. In the still dark hours the night is honored as part of God's mystery, and despite the unknown element, to be entered into with faith in God.

Lauds: as the morning sun rises, lauds is called to honor the gift of life.

Prime: at this time intention is set for the work of the day as the community comes together to receive their assignments. Work is entered into as a form of prayer to be performed with joy.

Terce: at midmorning terce is called as a pause in the day, to renew the spirit, and bring the attention to the miracle of life's energy.

Sext: at the noon hour, sext is called to refocus the energy and intent of the day.

None: in the afternoon none is called, and the community comes together, to contemplate the impermanence of life as the day ends, and to contemplate the value of keeping the focus on the present moment.

Vespers: as the sun sets and the lamp are lit, Vespers is called. The focus is letting go of the day and all that arose during the day, and finding peace and acceptance in what is.

Compline: before going to sleep the community makes confession, and seeks forgiveness, with the intent of doing better the next day.

The practice of going about the day with such intention can be valuable for anyone to use in a meditation practice. Giving pause at certain points during the day to refocus and bring greater awareness to your activities can be a very powerful practice.

Islamic Meditation

The Islamic religion uses meditation throughout the day as well. The practice of this faith came through the Prophet Mohammed as he meditated in the desert. During his meditation an Angel appeared to Mohammed, telling him how to bring his people back to God. At intervals throughout the day all Muslims take time out from whatever they are doing and face the direction of Mecca, meditating on the phrase, "La ilaha ilia Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah!" Translated, "There is no good but Allah, and Muhammed is the prophet of Allah!" (Allah is the Muslim name for God.) Many Muslims also study and meditate on the Koran, the holy book of Islam.

Every Muslim, during their lifetime, is instructed to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. This journey symbolizes each Muslim's personal connection to Allah. For many Muslims this is a hardship, yet all are encouraged to make this journey regardless of the effort it takes. The practice of making a pilgrimage to a sacred place could be a valuable meditation for anyone. In *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich gives suggestions for making your own holy pilgrimage. They are as follows:

Select a site and make arrangements for the pilgrimage. Ask for God's, Divinity's or nature's blessing on it. On the way there, meditate on the significance of the journey to you. What do you hope to get out of it? What feeling or insight do you hope to return with?

Try to achieve a real sense of reverence and sincerity. When you reach the spot, ask for a blessing.

Spend as much time there meditating as you can. Clear, center, and relax yourself. Open yourself to whatever feelings and sensations bring their info. Ask yourself these two questions: What is the specific significance of this place to me? Why do I consider it a holy place? Try to get in touch with that feeling.

Shift your meditation from yourself to the holy place itself. See it in your mind's eye as well as with the physical eyes. Try to become one with it, see with its eyes, feel with its heart, take on its form. What does it feel like to be the holy place?

When you leave, ask for a blessing again.

At home, take time to meditate on your pilgrimage. What did you learn or feel? What did you come away with? Give thanks to God for allowing you a safe journey and for whatever you were allowed to experience because of it.

Sufi Meditation Practice

Sufism has its roots in Islam, and is thought of as Islamic mysticism. Sufis hold perfection as their ideal, and strive towards the truth in all their actions and relations. Like the Zen Koan, the Sufi master will tell a story for the student to meditate on for spiritual enlightenment. The Sufi stories use paradoxical prose as well as humor to activate right brain thinking in the student. Meditation on the stories is thought to bring about a state of bliss and enlightenment, as referenced in *The Best Guide To Meditation (1998)*, Victor N. Davich states, "These stories may reflect the Sufi state of 'being inwardly drunk and outwardly sober.' This intoxication is spiritual, not alcoholic, and results from the inner ecstasy of a close communion with God."

Many of the Sufi stories have as their central character a man named Nasrudin, a mythical *hoja*, (teacher). One such story finds a man approaching Nasrudin to inquire what the *hoja* would charge to teach his son to read. "300 piasters," said Nasrudin. "That's too high," the man said. "For that I could buy six donkeys." "Buy them then," the *hoja* replied, "and your son will make the seventh."

The Sufi practitioner meditates on life questions such as: "How do I follow the path of perfection?" "What are the obstacles on this path?" "What is the role of the Sufi master?" Careful contemplation of these questions can bring about an expanded Consciousness and greater understanding of life's spiritual lessons.

Another important aspect of Sufi meditation is *Zikr*, known as the "dance of remembrance." This is a meditational form of dance in which practitioners chant mantras, while whirling and dancing, to bring about ecstatic consciousness. These dances often last many hours, filling the dancer with the pure energy of spiritual bliss. The core mantra used in the dance is, again, "La ilaha ilia Allah!"

Contemporary Meditation Practices

The Fourth Way, Self-Observation

There are many forms of contemporary Western meditation practice. Russian philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff greatly influenced Western meditation practice with his approach to meditation, which he called the Fourth Way. He was a student of various traditional meditation forms, and he developed a meditation discipline resonating uniquely with the Western mind. As described by Victor N. Davich in *The Best Guide To Meditation (1998)*, Gurdjieff categorized approaches to meditation practice as follows:

- The First Way:** the path of the fakir, who works on the physical body to conquer physical pain. This is the most difficult path. One must surrender everything and do as you are told.
- The Second Way:** the path of the monk. This way requires faith above all. You develop the emotional center on this path.
- The Third Way:** the path of the yogi. This is the path of knowledge and consciousness. One develops the intellectual center.
- The Fourth Way:** the easiest path for Westerners, One works on the inner self while living in normal life. Gurdjieff's approach, the Fourth Way, is described for its ease in use for the Western mind. Here are some of its unique qualities:
 - You don't have to give up everything you own. All the work goes on inside you.
 - You continue to live the same life as before, in the same environment. These circumstances are the best for you anyway.
 - If you start to work and study in these conditions you can attain something valuable. Eventually you'll be able to transform yourself and environment, but not before you sense the need to change. Nothing is harder than to change the inner you without changing the outer, external you.

Here is an additional quote from a student of Gurdjieff, taken from the book *The Best Guide To Meditation(1998)* by Victor N. Davich: "We are imprisoned within our own minds, and however far we extend

them and however highly we decorate them we still remain within their walls. If we are ever to escape from our prisons, the first step must be that we should realize our true situation and at the same time see ourselves as we really are and not as we imagine ourselves to be. This can be done by holding ourselves in a state of passive awareness..."—Kenneth Walker

Gurdjieff used a method called self-observation, in which the practitioner focuses on softening the line between themselves and the world around them. The idea behind self-observation is that we have lost our ability to expand our consciousness beyond the boundaries of cultural limitations. Through careful observation of the self we can begin to notice the energy behind our existence, and how this energy is continuous with the rest of creation. As the student of the Fourth Way begins to meditate on the self, it is revealed that self is an illusion, and that our personalities are made up of different aspects which come forward, depending on the situation, as a reaction to the environment. Through this process the student gradually begins to break from identification with the personality, awakening to fully present awareness, and reaching enlightenment.

Gurdjieff developed the idea of self-remembering as a way of meditating. Through self-observation, the practitioner can begin to understand that the thoughts arising within the mind are not the self. When this distinction is made, the state of self-remembering occurs in which the practitioner recognizes the true nature of existence. In *The Best Guide For Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich quotes a student of Gurdjieff, P.D Ouspensky, as saying, "We think we can study meditation or meditate ourselves. If you can remember yourself, you can meditate; if not, you cannot. Self-remembering means control of thoughts, a different state. Meditation is an action of a developed mind, and we ascribe it to ourselves. It would be very good if we could meditate, but we cannot; self-remembering is the way to it. You cannot begin from the end; you have to begin from the beginning like in everything else." This idea is very similar to the Zen philosophy we explored earlier, which asserts that we have always been enlightened, we just need to remember the true nature of the Self.

Self-observation is a process by which we can observe, with detachment, all outward phenomena. As we observe phenomenon arising and passing, this practice brings us into awareness of the energy behind the self, or selves, which is our true nature. In this way, we remember the Self, and wake up.

Walking Meditation

Meditation does not have to be practiced sitting in the Lotus position. Meditation can also involve movements. Walking meditation is an example. Mindfulness meditation, a form of insight meditation, is practiced by Thich Nhat Hahn, A Vietnamese Buddhist monk. Walking meditation has become a popular form of retreat meditation. The focus of the walking meditation is not to get from one place to another, but to be fully present where you are. In walking, the focus is on the body, the sensation of movement, the muscle expansion and contraction as each step is taken, while the breath moves in and out of the lungs. The meditation is approached with intent, and it is practiced slowly, mindfully, and consciously.

Another ancient form of walking meditation is the practice of walking a labyrinth. This meditation originated in the Catholic church. According to *The Best Guide To Meditation* (1998) by Victor N. Davich, "In this form of contemplative prayer, worshipers engage in prayerful meditation and contemplations as they tread a tiled or painted labyrinth design on the floor of the church's nave." This book also quotes Dr. Lauren Artress, from her book entitled *Walking A Sacred Path* where she describes this ancient practice as, "...a spiritual tool meant to awaken us to the deep rhythm that unites us to ourselves and into the light that calls from within."

Labyrinths are most often circular Mandala type patterns with a walking path through to the center. There is only one way in and one way out. In *The Best Guide to Meditation* (1998), Victor N. Davich says, "This path serves as a metaphor for life: we choose our path, follow it, and accept what comes."

Meditation Retreat

Meditative retreats have become popular in the West in the past few decades. Serious spiritual practitioners of many faiths have long used meditative retreat to consciously focus their intention and energy on connection with the Divine in an environment free from worldly distractions. Modern day practitioners of meditation take advantage of retreats to immerse themselves in a focused, and often intense meditation practice. The retreat allows the practitioner to be free of worldly responsibilities in order to connect with the sacred inner world. There are as many different kinds of retreats as there are different kinds of meditation, there are silent retreats, walking retreats, yoga retreats, nature retreats, mindfulness retreats, and many others. The main idea

behind a meditation retreat, again, is to release oneself from the patterns and rituals in the daily responsibilities of life, in order to contemplate the inner world.

Guided Meditation

A guided meditation is one in which a person guides another, or a group, on a journey through the mind, in order to assist the person or group in reaching higher states of consciousness. There are many different forms of guided meditation, and these have been practiced in many cultures and traditions.

Though guided meditation can use inquiry, it most often uses imagery. Imagery came before language, and on a deeper level our mind communicates through images. Guided meditation seeks to use imagery to bring awareness to areas of the mind that are unconscious, and to access higher states of awareness.

The shaman guided the apprentice on a journey, often of epic proportion, in which the apprentice would have to face the darker parts of his or her consciousness in vivid and symbolic encounters in order to complete the journey. The shaman would also make these journeys in order to heal someone, retrieve parts of their soul, or act as an intercessor between human and Divine forces.

Today, guided meditation has become one of the most popular forms of meditation practice. With technological advances in communications we are able to make these journeys in the comfort of our own home, with the aid of a tape recorder or CD player. Many metaphysical teachers and healers, and even many psychologists are using this powerful tool to guide people on their journey towards self-healing and self-realization. There are also many spiritual teachers who offer different forms of guided meditation to groups. Some very powerful guided meditations occur when an accomplished spiritual teacher leads a guided meditation for a large group of people. When people come together in this way, group mind becomes one mind, and transcends the personal. There are many groups today who are doing meditation like this on a large scale in order to raise the vibration of the planet, create world peace, revitalize Mother Earth, and assist in the shift from the old paradigm to the new one.

The tapes and CDs accompanying some courses at UMS are excellent examples of guided meditations.

Transcendental Meditation

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was another person who brought meditation practices to the West. Maharishi was a direct descendant in the sacred tradition of India's great masters. He spent 13 years as an intimate devotee to the renowned Being, Swami Brahmanand Saraswati Majaraj. Through this gathering of wisdom, he came to recognize the vision to which he would dedicate his life, which he called the "spiritual regeneration of the world." He then went on to establish spiritual regeneration centers throughout Asia, Europe and North America. He established the Academy Of Meditation in the town of Rishikesh on the Ganges River, at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. From here, he trained people from all over the world to teach transcendental meditation, the system which he believed could, "Rechannel the course of humanity through the widest possible propagation of the knowledge and practice of deep meditation." True to his vision, centers of meditation have been established in major cities in most countries in the world.

He wrote a book called *The Science Of Being And Art Of Living* (1966). In this book, Maharishi speaks of the practices and techniques of transcendental meditation, and in a very comprehensive and detailed text, describes his ideas on how transcendental meditation can bring about a state of greater awareness, mental lucidity, physical connectedness, vibrant health, and the ability to live a peaceful, powerful, joyful, and effective life. He discusses transcendental meditation as being the vehicle by which one can realize the "transcendental field of absolute existence."

This book is written in a scientific manner, discussing such things as: "What is Being?" "How To Contact The Being" "What Is Life?" "How To Use One's Full Potential" as well as discussing the arts of being, thinking, action, and behavior. It describes the system by which one can access the wisdom of the ages through a detailed look at the truth of human life, in a way that is complementary with modern living. Transcendental meditation is described as "the process of bringing the attention to the level of the transcendental Being." This idea corresponds with Buddha's teachings of "absorption in the Divine."

Mahesh describes the mind as being like an ocean, in which thoughts are formed in the depths of consciousness, and slowly ascend to the surface level, the conscious mind. In transcendental meditation, a thought is followed from its grosser form at the level of the conscious mind, to its more subtle forms at the deeper levels of the mind, and eventually to its point of creation in the most subtle realm. Here the thought is transcended in the transcendental field Being, thus Transcendental Meditation. It is in this place that one can

realize his true nature, and bring great joy, peace, and fulfillment to life on earth. In the words of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, from *The Science Of Being And Art Of Living* (1966), speaking of transcendental meditation: "Life need not be the painful struggle it is commonly represented to be. We are meant to be happy, and here is a way for everybody; a way which involves no austere discipline, no break with normal life and tradition, and which gives *fuller* and deeper meaning to all religions."

Visualization

Visualization is a form of meditation which seeks to manifest the wants, needs, and desires of the practitioner. One creates a picture in the mind's eye of what is desired and meditates on this image, bringing intention, focus, and awareness to the manifestation of the object.

The Goddess tradition, including the practice of Wicca, meaning "to bend or shape," has used visualization as a means of manifesting the will of the Goddess into the realm of form for thousands of years. In *The Spiral Dance* (1999) by Starhawk, many exercises are given for strengthening the ability to visualize. Visualization uses the sixth chakra, or third eye, to mentally form a picture of what is desired. Meditating on this picture brings about manifestation of its form.

In this practice the old adage "be careful what you wish for" is commonly warned because the energy which brings about manifestation of thought is neutral. It can be used for self-centered ends as well as for manifesting the Divine Will. Most teachers of visualization teach of aligning one's will with the Source Of Life when using this ability.

Shakti Gawain, author of another well-known book containing these techniques, *Creative Visualization* (1978), brought this practice into the forefront of the metaphysical and self-help movement. In this book she teaches about the connection between our thoughts and our physical reality.

Gawain tells us, "Every moment of your life is infinitely creative and the universe is endlessly bountiful. Just put forth a clear enough request, and everything your heart desires must come to you." She bases her book on three basic ideas; "the physical universe is energy...energy is magnetic...form follows idea." She also discusses the "law of radiation and attraction... [the] principal that whatever you put out into the universe will be reflected back to you." She says, "The process of change does not occur on superficial levels, through mere 'positive thinking.' It involves exploring, discovering, and changing our deepest, most basic attitudes toward life. That is why learning to use creative visualization can become a process of deep and meaningful growth. In the process we often discover ways in which we have been holding ourselves back, blocking ourselves from achieving satisfaction and fulfillment in life through our fears and negative concepts. Once seen clearly, these limiting attitudes can be dissolved through the creative visualization process, leaving space for us to find and live our natural state of happiness, fulfillment, and love..."

Through meditation, visualization, and affirmation, Ms. Gawain teaches us how to connect deeply with our true nature, and live from this place.

Many other schools of meditation used imagery to focus Divine energy. In Tibetan Buddhism, the practitioner brings his or her attention and focus to visualizing a positive image she or he would like to see brought into the world of form. The visualization may be directed at self, another, or to all beings. Light, color, and sound can also be used as imagery during the visualization.

Here we have explored the history of meditation and a variety of its forms. We have seen that meditation has likely been used by humans, in some form, throughout our history. We have learned that many of the world's religions practice some form of meditation. We know that people meditate in order to "go home," as a means of connecting with the Self, with our own divine nature. We have also explored some of the many paths one can take in order to get "home." So what are the scientifically documented benefits of meditation? Why is it that meditation is fast becoming a mainstream practice, one that physicians recommend, and corporations as well as the government, schools, hospitals, law firms, and prisons are offering classes in? In the next section we will explore these questions.

Meditation and Science

In recent years the scientific community has taken a strong interest in studying the effects of meditation. Because of the links found between stress and disease, and the interest in relaxation as a preventative model, scientists are earnestly studying the physiological and psychological effects of meditation.

The society we live in has become busier and busier. We are a culture of consumers, busy making money to buy things and making things for people to buy. We are raising our families, commuting, working, watching television, talking on the phone, shopping, and driving, driving, driving. We clench our jaws, grind our teeth, hold our breath, bite our nails, and suffer from insomnia, road rage, and stiff necks. We are stressed out. Heart disease, cancer, hypertension, depression, alcoholism, mental illness, and many other diseases are on the rise. Multiple studies have been done, linking these *dis-eases* to stress. Stress makes us sick. Health-care costs are astronomical, and many people are beginning to look to preventative approaches for improving their health and well-being.

Time magazine did an article in August 2003 called *Just Say Om*, written by Joel Stein (pg. 50). This article presents such a comprehensive study of the most up-to-date scientific information on the effects of meditation on the human mind and body, that much of the following information is referenced from this source. Actual quotes give credit, but some of the following information is also paraphrased from the article.

In 1967, Dr. Herbert Benson, a professor at Harvard Medical School began a study involving practitioners of transcendental meditation. He found that when the subjects were meditating they used less oxygen, and their heart rates were significantly lowered. He also found an increase in the Theta brainwaves which occur during deep relaxation and which most often appear right before sleep. Dr. Benson wrote a book called *The Relaxation Response*, and founded the Mind/Body Medical Institute. He asserted that meditation "counteracted the stress-induced fight or flight response, and achieved a calmer, happier state."

According to Joel Stein, "...Current interest [in meditation] is as much medical as it is cultural. Meditation is being recommended by more and more physicians as a way to prevent, slow, or at least control the pain of chronic diseases like heart conditions, AIDS, cancer, and infertility. It is also being used to restore balance in the face of such psychiatric disturbances as depression, hyperactivity, and attention deficit disorder (ADD)."

It is becoming increasingly obvious that meditation can boost the immune system function. Many recent studies have been done which show that meditators tend to be healthier. Because we know that stress makes us sick, and we know that meditation reduces stress, a clear link is established between meditation and wellness.

One of the driving factors of the steady increase in interest in preventative medicine, is the high cost of health care. In the article in Time magazine, Joel Stein puts it frankly: "Compared with surgery, sitting on a cushion is really cheap."

In addition to the beneficial physiological effects of meditation, there are some major psychological benefits. Those who meditate might say that all these things are connected, in the "Unified Field of Being." Physical Science, on the other hand, has traditionally tended to compartmentalize the realms of the body and the mind. Despite this tendency, the scientific world is having to admit that the most recent research shows what meditators and practitioners of metaphysics have been saying for ages: that you cannot separate the mind, with its patterns of thinking, from the body and its manifestation of health or illness. Science and metaphysics are meeting at the point of understanding that *the mind is the cause, and the body, the effect*.

According to Joel Stein, a researcher in India named B.K. Anand, "found that Yogis could meditate themselves into trances so deep that they didn't react when hot test tubes were pressed against their arms." What happens to the brain in these deep states of awareness? Recent technology has allowed us to be able to take a look at the brain during meditation in new and fascinating ways.

Stein tells us of the study done in 1997 at the University of Pennsylvania by Andrew Newberg, a neurologist. In this study Newburgh "hooked up a group of Buddhist meditators to IV's containing a radioactive dye that he hoped would track blood flow in the brain, lighting up the parts that were the most active. But the only way for Newberg to freeze frame the exact moment when they reached their meditative peak was to sit in the next to room, tie a string around his finger, and snake the other end under the door and leave it next to the meditators. When they reached meditative Nirvana, they pulled the string, and Newberg released the dye into the subjects arms. His results showed that the brain doesn't shut off when it meditates but rather blocks information from coming into the parietal lobe." So as one practices meditation, outer stimuli ceases to be accessed by the brain, allowing the attention of the mind, or consciousness, to rest in its true nature.

Another study referenced by Stein was done at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, by Richard Davidson. He "used brain imaging to show that meditation shifts activity in the prefrontal cortex (right behind our foreheads) from the right hemisphere to the left... Stein then shares with us, 'People who have a negative disposition tend to be *right* prefrontal oriented; *left* prefrontals have more enthusiasms, more interests, relax more and tend to be happier, though perhaps with less real estate.'" So the receptive part of the brain is awakened during meditation, and one is able to access, through this side of the brain, the deeper, core level of being.

Some especially interesting research began in March 2000 when the Dalai Lama met with Western psychologists and neuroscientists at the Mind And Life Institute to initiate studies in which Buddhist monks, masters of meditation and the mind, began to corroborate with scientists to bring to light an understanding of the benefits of meditation. Subsequently this developed into a mutually beneficial cooperation between top scientists interested in the study of the mind, with Buddhist Masters interested in bringing techniques for the enlightenment of humankind to secular society.

One of the scientists involved in this collaboration is Richard Davidson, director of the Keck Laboratory for functional brain imaging and behavior, and a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin. When speaking of this meeting of science and Buddhism, Davidson said, "This dialogue has motivated us to vigorously pursue research on contemplative practice because we believe it can be beneficial. We hope eventually to take techniques involved in various kinds of meditation out of their Buddhist context and apply them to secular training that may improve mental and physical health." His holiness Dalai Lama said in response, "Buddhism essentially has the same goal... All human beings have an innate desire to overcome suffering, to find happiness. Training the mind to think differently, through meditation, is one important way to avoid suffering and be happy." Davidson also spoke of one very important aspect of contemplative practice being explored, saying, "One important issue discussed...involved plasticity of the brain, its ability to change even in adulthood. Buddhist monks have known for centuries meditation can change the mind. Now we are inspired by His Holiness to examine with our technology the precise brain changes that occur with practice."

That scientists are being "inspired" by such a compassionate religious leader is truly a heralding of a new age. Underlying this coming together of these two realms of human consciousness is a vision of unity, which has been held by many before. It is only now, as this man who is the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Of Compassion brings through this vision and intention of unification, that this is able to manifest. A final quote from the Dalai Lama, "I have great respect for science. But scientists on their own cannot prove nirvana. Science shows us that there are practices that can make a difference between a happy life and a miserable life. A real understanding of the true nature of the mind can only be gained through meditation."

This alliance shows of the coming together of science and spirituality, a union which has great implications as both these realms join to transcend the duality of human life. His Holiness The Dalai Lama, bringing great light, heart, compassion, humor, and joy to these meetings with respected scientists, has opened a channel between two communities that have had seemingly dual roles in society. The gifts of this union will be reaped for many generations to come.

While the results of the study initiated by the Dalai Lama will have far-reaching effects, there are many smaller studies which have had very interesting findings.

For many years Dr. Dean Ornish has used meditation as part of his program to reverse the effects of heart disease. He claims that meditation together with yoga practice and changes in diet can actually reverse the buildup of plaque in coronary arteries. He has also worked with patients with prostate cancer and shown a reduction in the rate of growth for this stress related disease. Dr. Ornish has had great success with his program, yet it is hard to show the direct link between meditation and healing in these instances because he has used exercise and diet as well as meditation in his program.

Another researcher, Jon Kabat-Zin, a student of Buddhism who founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, has been using meditation with his patients for many years, attempting to find a scientific link between meditation and management of chronic pain. He has worked with thousands of people teaching them to live with their pain without medication by bringing awareness and attention to the source of pain. In this way the meditators "become one" with their pain, and learn to accept it, which often leads to transcendence and ultimate relief. Joel Stein quotes Kabat-Zin as saying, "These people have cancer, AIDS, chronic pain... if we think we can do something for them, we are in deep trouble. But if you switch frames of reference and entertain the notion that they may be able to do something for themselves if we put very powerful tools at their disposal, things shift extraordinarily."

In a study conducted with Richard Davidson, Kabat-Zin used a group of meditators and a group of non meditators and gave them both flu shots. They then measured antibody levels in their blood, and also measured their brains to look at whether mental activity shifted from the right to the left. The study found that the meditators had more antibodies at both four weeks and eight weeks after the shots, and that the people whose brain activity had shifted had even more antibodies.

According to the Internet web site ABC-of-Yoga Meditation (at <http://www.abc-of-yoga.com>) the health benefits of meditation are as follows:

Physiological Benefits

- Deep rest as measured by decreased metabolic rate, lower heart rate, and reduced work load of heart
- Lowered levels of cortisol and lactate (two chemicals associated with stress)
- Reduction of free radicals (unstable oxygen molecules that can cause tissue damage)
- Decreased high blood pressure
- Higher skin resistance (low skin resistance is correlated with higher stress and anxiety levels)
- Drop in cholesterol levels (high cholesterol is associated with cardiovascular disease)
- Improved flow of air to the lungs resulting in easier breathing (helpful to asthma patients)
- Decreases the aging process
- Higher levels of DHEA in the elderly, an additional sign of youthfulness

Psychological Benefits

- Increased brain wave coherence
- Greater creativity
- Decreased anxiety
- Decreased depression
- Decreased irritability and moodiness
- Improved learning ability and memory
- Increased self-actualization
- Increased feelings of vitality and rejuvenation
- Increased happiness
- Increased emotional stability

While we have been looking at the benefits of meditation from the scientific perspective, we have already established that science, by its very nature, separates and fragments what it is studying, in order to attempt to understand it. This can be seen as an opposition to the very nature of meditation, the goal of which is to realize Oneness. When we explore the “psychological benefits,” and the “physiological benefits,” or even the social benefits, we are coming from the perspective that these are separate areas of study. Western thought and its heavy dependence on the scientific method is actually working backwards, separating everything in order to put it back together. When we connect with source, all information becomes available to us. This method is truly superior to the scientific method, although the scientific method is a valid human path, which will ultimately lead to the same place.

The true benefit of meditation, then, is connection with source, and the clarity of this connection determines the span of the benefits. When we connect with source we come into balance, our natural state of being. When this happens and again to the degree to which it happens, we will experience the above benefits (as well as many not yet measured by science).

In *A Master Guide To Meditation* (1999), Roy Eugene Davis wrote, “*The Life Enhancing Benefits Of Contemplative Meditation And Intentional Living*” (title of chapter 3). In this chapter he talks about the benefits of “deep conscious rest and renewal” which is initiated through the slowing of the breath and calming of the mind. “The body’s life forces become balanced contributing to organize the function of physical systems.” He goes on to say, “Because of physical disturbance, emotional distress, or irregular sleep habits, many people do not get the rest they need when they sleep. The results may be low energy reserves, moodiness, depression, irritability, mental confusion, poor concentration, inefficient work performance, accident-prone behavior, and lower resistance to disease or illness. Meditation does not replace sleep, though one or two short meditation sessions a day will enliven the body, energize mind, and contribute to improved performance of activities so that regular hours of sleep can be an interlude of undisturbed rest that is physically and mentally restorative.

He also writes about the benefits in the dream state, saying, “As meditation results in the unfolding of superconscious states which persist even during normal waking hours, one’s regular hours of sleep may be occasioned by episodes of being conscious while the body and mind rests. The gaps between levels of consciousness become less defined and one may experience lucid perceptions of ‘being conscious of being conscious during sleep, and of abiding in the eternal now, while simultaneously being aware of infinite oneness.’”

Mr. Davis connects these benefits directly to physiological and psychological benefits: "...Physical tension and mental anxieties fade as stress is reduced. An examination of blood lactate levels before and after meditation often reveals a reduction of those levels, which are usually higher when one is in a "fight or flight" physical or psychological state—a common condition for many people who feel it is necessary to struggle to survive or who perceive threats to their well-being from real or imagined sources."

He continues to connect the far-reaching beneficial effects of meditation, saying "stress, confusion, despair, anxiety, fear, loneliness, hopelessness, unnatural living habits, and unhealthy environmental conditions can weaken the body's immune system, its safeguard against disease and deterioration. Regular practice of contemplative meditation unfolds superconscious states which, being superior to conditioned states of consciousness, organize the body systems and infuse them with enlivening forces.

Intentional cultivation of optimism, hope, faith, purposefulness, and feelings of love, also exercise a healthy nourishing influence upon the immune system. It is not mere coincidence that happy, healthy-minded, creatively purposeful people, are relatively disease-free and tend to live longer, more successful lives. They know consciously or instinctively that life is for living and respond with enthusiasm to their opportunities to creatively express... Contemplative meditation that results in sustained superconscious episodes regulates biochemical secretions and infuses the body with superior energy—frequencies which spiritualize it. Long-term meditators tend to experience the diminishment of biological aging processes. They have higher energy levels, keen interest in living, faster reactions to stimuli, usually better eyesight and hearing, and stronger immune systems than do persons who are not long-term meditators."

When speaking of the benefits of meditation with regards to intellectual abilities, Mr. Davis tells us, "The power of intellectual determination is the spiritual ability demonstrated by using mental faculties. Beyond intellectual determination is intuitive perception: direct apprehension and comprehension of whatever is examined. Intuition is not dependent upon mental processes since it is in the soul's capacity to *know directly by knowing*. When mental delusions and illusions prevail, or if the brain or nervous system is impaired, intellectual powers can be diminished. They can be improved by cultivating overall wellness, rational thinking, and in introducing the mind and physiology to the enlivening regenerative influences of higher state of consciousness. Superconscious influences, experienced during meditation and persisting afterward, enliven the nervous system, refine the brain structure, and purify the mental fields: all of which contribute to allowing any powers of intelligence to be more easily expressed."

Conclusion

So what is meditation? What are its benefits? Hopefully, after studying this course, you will be better equipped to decide for yourself what the answers to these questions are. But to truly understand meditation, you must experience its effects for yourself. So now comes the most important part of this course, the direct experience of meditation.

Please feel free to adjust or change these meditations to suit your own particular style. It is also very helpful to read meditations into a tape recorder for yourself to listen to later. Being guided by your own voice is a powerful experience. There are hundreds of books with wonderful ideas and scripts for meditations (with a few mentioned in the Review Of Literature) that you can read to yourself on tape. Enjoy!

Exercises And Techniques

The Bubble

Picture yourself sitting quietly comfortably on the bottom of a clear Lake. You know how slowly large bubbles rise through the water. Each thought, feeling, perception, etc., is pictured as a bubble rising into the area you can observe, passing through and out of this space. It takes five to eight seconds to complete this process. When you have a thought or feeling, simply observe it for this time until it passes out of your visual space. Then wait for the next one and let it pass in the same amount of time, and so on. Do not explore, follow or associate with the bubble, just observe it with the background of "Oh that's what I'm thinking, feeling or sensing." Then, let it go as it passes out of visual space. Wait quietly for the next bubble. Do not be thrown off the meditation if the same bubble rises several times. If you cannot see the connection between the bubbles or the source of your thoughts, simply stay with the discipline. Most confusing connections will clear out when your mind goes blank. Feeling blank makes a fine bubble...

Tibetan version: Thoughts Are Logs

Picture yourself sitting on the bank of a broad, gentle river. From time to time, logs come floating down the river. Follow the same procedure, using the logs instead of the bubble concept.

Other Variations On This Meditation:

Thoughts are leaves passing in a stream

Thoughts are clouds that appear and disappear, or pass by, in the sky

Thoughts are raindrops, and they disappear as they hit the ground or the ocean

Thoughts are animals who pass by as you sit in the forest

Thoughts are snowflakes that blend into oneness as they become one with the snow on the ground

Thoughts are... (you fill in the blank, get creative!)

You Are The Cosmos

In this meditation, think of yourself as an atom first, then a molecule, then a cell, then a body, then a city block, then a town, then a state, then a country, then a planet, then a solar system, then a galaxy, then a bunch of galaxies, then a universe, then several universes, then the container that holds all-that-is. When you reach great stillness and centeredness, with nothing else that can be contained, you have reached the goal of this meditation.

Following The Breath

In this meditation, the breath is followed as it enters and exits the body. Focus awareness completely on the breath. In this meditation it is not important to breathe in a particular way, only to bring your attention to this function. You breathe in, and you follow the breath. You breathe out, and you follow the breath. If you notice a thought moving through your mind, continue to bring your conscious awareness to your breath. Continue this meditation for 20 minutes or longer.

Tips To Remember

Mind / Emotions Connection

when both are intertwined and moving, it's a catch 22

when mind is still, emotions are still

thought always comes first, then the emotion connected to it sets in

Mind

mental gridwork around you

thoughts are like vortexes in the gridwork

obsessive thinking when tangled never comes undone, consciousness loop

Emotions

like liquid movement, swirling around you

emotions get tangled in mental gridwork when thought comes up

thought brings in the connected emotions

Affirmation: "I am now taking a break from all my thoughts and emotions."

Still Mind: ignoring the thoughts, become transparent, let thought pass through you as if you are air.

Emotions and thoughts come from general inner landscape:

sometimes emotions are there even though you are not aware of the thought connected to them.

attitudes that are actually unconscious, crystallized thoughts, have become beliefs/facts

these kind of emotions are connected to inner attitudes that are an over all tone, but aren't specific thoughts.

your inner landscape supports happiness or unhappiness.

Inner dialogue is usually the culprit

Negative self dialogue comes from self criticism, lack of self worth, cynicism

Positive self dialogue comes from self appreciation, self worth, and optimism.

More Meditations To Try

For Thoughts:

Meditation I

wait for a thought

imagine there is a little tornado starting somewhere in your mental body gridwork when thought comes up

detach the base tip of the tornado from the gridwork, lift it off the gridwork

let the little tornado float off into space away from you until it simply dissipates and disperses

Meditation II

imagine yourself as a still pond, not a single ripple, clear as glass, a mirror
wait for a thought
turn thought into a ripple
watch it ripple out to the edges and disappear

Meditation III

imagine your mind is a stream or a river with nothing in it but water going by
wait for a thought
imagine that the thought is a leaf in the water, it just floats by and disappears

For Emotions:

Meditation I

imagine emotional body around you, like a cloud of colors and shapes, constantly in motion
wait for an emotion to crystallize
disperse the emotion with a burst of light that comes from deep inside yourself
imagine clarity, emotional body is clear, no colors, no forms, no motion

Meditation II

find a negative attitude that represents your inner landscape in your down moments,
i.e.: general depression general fearfulness
 general cynicism general self dislike

how does this appear to your inner vision in your emotional body
find the thought or inner dialogue that is attached to the emotion / attitude
write it down for future introspection
now disperse the emotion and the thought into the ether

Meditation III

find a place in the mental body gridwork where an emotion has become tangled
imagine that you are unraveling the tangle, straightening out and separating the thought from the emotion
now, disperse the thought and the emotion in separate motions, first one, then the other
imagine your mental body gridwork clear and intact, no interruptions or deviance from the
original (perfect) template
imagine your emotional body clear and free of all disturbances, no colors, forms or movement
look at the mental body and emotional body as separated templates, no connections whatsoever,
just two separated bodies around your physical body

Audio meditations included with this course:

On Tapes: Tape 1, Side A: (1) Observing Thoughts, Letting Them Go, (2) Deepening The Silence
 Side B: (3) Following The Breath & Observing The Body
 Tape 2, Side A: (1) Object As Focal Point, (2) Falling Through The Layers Into Stillness
 Side B: (3) Relaxing From Toe To Head

On CDs: CD1 (1) Observing Thoughts, Letting Them Go (15:00) (2) Deepening The Silence (15:00)
 (3) Following The Breath & Observing The Body (30:00)
 CD2 (4) Object As Focal Point (15:00) (5) Falling Through Layers Into Stillness (15:00)
 (6) Relaxing From Toe To Head (30:00)

Descriptions Of Meditations

1. **Observing Thoughts, Letting Them Go:** See how thoughts can come and go without becoming attached to them, and experience the stillness that results from attaining a state of quiet mind in the eternal now.
2. **Deepening The Silence:** Deepen your experience of the quiet mind, learn how to maintain this depth of silence, and allow yourself to rest and rejuvenate there.
3. **Following The Breath & Observing The Body:** Follow the breath continuously, giving the mind something to do while the consciousness frees itself from the mind, notice how two streams of consciousness can operate at the same time.

4. **Object As Focal Point:** Pick any object and with the open eyes use an unwavering gaze, allowing it to become a way to deepen concentration.
5. **Falling Through The Layers Into Stillness:** Fall through the layers of emotion, perception, imaginings, and thought into the true stillness of the eternal self.
6. **Relaxing From Toe To Head:** Relax each muscle in the body, one at a time, beginning with the toes and finishing at the top of the head. This meditation can be done while laying down, but if you tend to fall asleep, do this meditation while sitting up until you are able to straddle the sleep/awake border more skillfully without falling asleep.

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Meditation Skills Exam Questions

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

(Please supply name, phone #, and address as identifying factors for giving credit properly)

1. When a group of scientists were discussing why they meditated, the answer they all finally agreed upon was that, "It's like coming home." **T F**
2. What was the name of the ancient group from Persia, who meditated together regularly?
A. The Followers Of The Inner Light
B. The Essenes
C. The Enlightened Ones
D. Neither A, B or C
3. From where does the word shaman originate?
A. Persia
B. Siberia
C. South America
4. Which of these is a type of meditation practice not listed as used by Native American tribal cultures?
A. drumming
B. ritual dances
C. drinking of sacrificial blood
D. pipe ceremony
5. What do the Namibian people call gods and goddesses?
A. Purushas
B. Koans
C. Orishas
6. The literal definition of the word Yoga is:
A. To sleep
B. To yoke
C. To dream
D. To put the body in specific postures
7. The five paths of Yoga are Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Kriya and Raja. **T F**
8. From where do the pranas arise?
A. from the bija
B. from the apana
C. from the masculine and feminine electrical forces
D. from the magnetic polarization of the soul
9. A bija is a type of drum. **T F**
10. What is a Mudra?
A. a sacred sound
B. a state of deep meditation
C. a gesture or attitude
D. a point of concentration
11. There are three parts of puja. **T F**
12. What was the name of the student/disciple who recorded The Buddha's teachings?
A. Asoka
B. Arjuna
C. Ananda
D. Asana
13. What is the first of the 4 Noble Truths that Buddha taught?
A. The soul is eternal
B. God is the ultimate reality
C. Suffering does not exist
D. Suffering is inevitable
14. What is "the middle way" that Buddha taught?
A. Eat only one meal a day
B. Never continue striving
C. A balance between seeking and surrender
D. Neither A, B or C

15. What is a Koan? A. a poem B. a bell C. a riddle D. a Zen master
16. What is the name of the Tibetan concept of non-harming?
 A. Ahimsa B. Gandha C. Avahana D. Mahayan
17. The Tibetan practice of Tonglen involves taking on the suffering of another. **T** **F**
18. Li Hongzhi founded Falun Gong. **T** **F**
19. In Jewish meditation methods a sephiroth is an Angelic sphere/realm of influence. **T** **F**
20. According to Kabbalist tradition, what activates the seeker's relationship with the sephiroth on the tree of life?
 A. Meditating on one of the 25 names of God C. Silence
 B. Pure desire D. Neither A, B or C
21. A Gregorian chant is a contemplative chant accompanied by beautiful music. **T** **F**
22. How do Muslims orient their bodies when praying?
 A. toward the sunrise B. toward the Koran C. toward Mecca
23. What religion is the root of Sufism? A. Taoism B. Buddhism . C. Hinduism D. Islam
24. Who developed the meditation practice called The Fourth Way?
 A. Thich Naht Hahn B. Rudolph Steiner C. G.I Gurdjieff D. H.H. the Dalai Lama
25. What is the focus of walking meditation?
 A. To enable you to think B. To be fully present where you are C. A peaceful form of exercise
26. What is described in Contemporary Meditation Practices as, "A spiritual tool meant to awaken us to the deep rhythm that unites us to ourselves and into the light that calls from within?"
 A. Mantra B. The Labyrinth C. Sufi Dance of Remembrance
27. What part of the brain is "awakened" during meditation?
 A. the right prefrontal B. the receptive side C. the hind brain
28. What spiritual leader is working with top scientists to form a unified approach to studying the beneficial effects of meditation?
 A. H.H. the Dalai Lama B. Ammachi C. Sai Baba D. Neither A, B or C
29. According to the website ABC-of-Yoga meditation, the first three psychological benefits of meditation listed are increased brainwave coherence, greater creativity and decreased anxiety. **T** **F**
- 30 According to Roy Davis, "intuition is not dependent upon mental processes, since it is in the soul's capacity to know directly by knowing." **T** **F**
31. In your own words, what is meditation? (*use separate piece of paper if necessary*)

Meditation Skills, Audio Meditations Report Name: _____

In the spaces below, describe briefly your experiences with the meditations included with your Meditations Skills course. Use extra paper if necessary. Even if very little happened during the meditation, this is fine, for there is no wrong way to experience a meditation.

1. Observing Thoughts And Letting Them Go:

2. Deepening The Silence:

3. Following The Breath And Observing The Body:

4. Object As Focal Point:

5. Falling Through The Layers Into Silence:

6. Relaxing From Head To Toe: