

Meditation Instructions

A Variety of Practices

“Peaceful Abiding” Meditation

- 1) Take your meditation posture: The spine is upright, with a natural but alert posture. The hands are resting on the thighs. The arms and shoulders are relaxed. The back of the neck is relaxed, which allows the chin to come down very slightly. The eyes are open and gaze downward about 6-8 feet out; the gaze is unfocussed and soft. The face and jaw are natural and relaxed. If you’re sitting on a cushion or the floor, keep your ankles loosely crossed. Make sure you are sitting on a high enough support so that your knees don’t stick up higher than your hips. If you’re sitting on a chair, keep your feet flat on the floor.
- 2) Begin by noticing how your body feels for about 30 seconds, settling down into your meditation practice.
- 3) Make a clear and precise beginning to your practice. Tell yourself (silently, in your mind): “Now I will work with my mind and develop peace for myself and others.”
- 4) Place your attention on the breath. Stay with its flow. Do not manipulate your breath, just notice the breath rising and falling in the body. Feel the body breathing. Stay with the feeling of the flow of the breath.
- 5) At first, you may find that you have many thoughts that distract you. That is completely natural. When you notice you’re caught up in thinking it, acknowledge it; you can silently label it “thinking” in your mind if you wish. Then gently let the thought go and return to noticing the breath. With time and practice, your ability to stay with the breath will gradually become more steady.
- 6) Practice staying with the breath – and returning to the breath when you realize you have gotten distracted – over and over again. A daily session of just five minutes has great benefits. Over time, you can also build toward longer sessions of up to an hour or more.

Centering Prayer

Before starting Centering Prayer choose a word that can remind you of your intention to detach from any thoughts that may arise during the prayer period. Words like peace, joy, trust, and listen are good. Some prefer breath, life, joy, yes, mercy, God, Allah, Jesus, or any word that helps us let go of our thoughts without creating new thoughts.

Set aside time for practice. Twenty minutes is the goal, but do what is feasible, twice a day if possible.

Sit comfortably on a chair, bunk, or on the floor with your back against a wall. Whatever position you use, sit unmoving and keep your back straight—for many this is easier if your back is supported. (Lying flat on your cot can also be a good option, as long as you can stay awake.)

Close your eyes and take a few deep, slow breaths. Silently introduce the sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent and surrender to the Presence within you. As thoughts and feelings rush in, silently and gently repeat your sacred word until they go by.

Thoughts are normal; don't try to stop them, but use your sacred word to replace them. As you get more comfortable with this practice you may not need your sacred word as frequently. At times it may simply drop away and you can abide in the quiet.

Adapted from Chaplain Ray Leonardini

Lovingkindness Meditation

You can begin the practice of lovingkindness by meditating for fifteen or twenty minutes. Let yourself sit comfortably. Let your body be relaxed. Let your heart be soft. Let go of any plans or preoccupations.

Begin sending lovingkindness to yourself. Breathe gently, and recite inwardly the following:

May I be filled with lovingkindness.

May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May I be well in body and mind.

May I be at ease and happy.

As you repeat these phrases, picture yourself as you are now, or as a young and lovable child, and hold that image in a heart of lovingkindness. You can change the words in any way that best opens your heart of kindness. Repeat these phrases over and over, letting the feelings permeate body and mind. Practice this meditation for a number of weeks, until the sense of lovingkindness for yourself grows. Be aware that this meditation may at times feel mechanical, awkward, or painful. Be patient with yourself.

When you feel you have established some stronger sense of lovingkindness for yourself, you can then expand your meditation to include others. Start a session by first focusing on yourself for five or ten minutes, and then choose a benefactor, someone in your life who has loved and truly cared for you. (In fact, some people find lovingkindness for themselves so hard that they begin their practice with a benefactor—this is fine.) Picture this person and carefully recite the same phrases:

*May you be filled with lovingkindness.
May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May you be well in body and mind.
May you be at ease and happy.*

After this you can include others: Spend some time wishing well to a wider circle of friends. Then, in future sessions, gradually extend your meditation to picture and include community members, neighbors, people everywhere, animals, all beings, the whole earth. Finally, include the difficult people in your life, even your enemies, wishing that they too may be filled with lovingkindness and peace. This will take practice. But as your heart opens, first to loved ones and friends, you will find that in the end you won't want to close it anymore.

Adapted from Jack Kornfeld

Daily Reflection

This is a method, perhaps taking 15-20 minutes, for reviewing in a spiritual light the day you have just had. It is based on the "Examen" of St. Ignatius of Loyola, but as adapted for general use.

- 1)** I ask a Higher Power (God, Allah, Jesus, Krishna, or any divine principle you feel connected with) for light. I want to see my day through the eyes of a Higher Power, not merely my own.
- 2)** I give thanks. The day I have just lived is a gift from a Higher Power. I am grateful for it.
- 3)** I review the day. Looking over this day, where did a Higher Power give me strength to endure challenges? Where have there been blessings even amidst life's hardships?
- 4)** I honestly face my shortcomings. Knowing I am not perfect, and yet I am loved and accepted by my Higher Power, I admit where I could have done better and ask for forgiveness.
- 5)** I look toward the day to come. I ask for strength where I am weak, vision to see life's blessings, and help and guidance from my Higher Power for how to fulfill my spiritual purpose.