

# THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

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## 1. The Purposes of Meditation

There are two purposes of meditation:

1. To have tranquillity in daily life
2. To attain self-transcendence or the spiritual life

Before we can attain the second one, we must first attain daily tranquility, which means having inner peace amid all the duties, pressures, and problems in life. That's the reason why many corporations are sending their executives to meditation training even if they are not interested in spiritual life. The purpose is to make them less stressed at work and be more effective in life.

In choosing the meditation method that we can adopt with confidence, we need to familiarize ourselves with two things: (1) The levels of human consciousness, and (2) the study of time-tested methods in meditation that have been used for thousands of years that have proven to be effective in attaining serenity and transcendence.

## 2. The Levels of Human Consciousness

Understanding the levels of human consciousness is essential to the appreciation of the purposes and processes of meditation. The lower levels are known to everyone, while the higher ones are validated by the collective experiences of mystics of many cultures through the centuries. Thus, this knowledge is not based on particular dogmas of religions, although spiritual traditions affirm them.

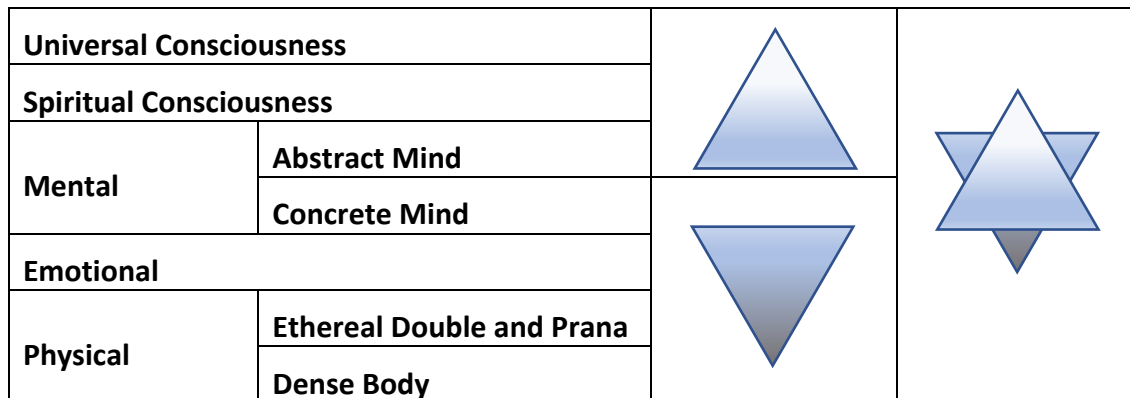
<b>Universal Consciousness</b>	The state achieved by a few: Union in Christianity, Nirvana in Buddhism, and Fanah in Islam
<b>Spiritual Consciousness</b>	Known and validated since ancient times. Now part of scientific exploration
<b>Mental</b>	These three levels are within the experience of the average person
<b>Emotional</b>	
<b>Physical</b>	

- The existence of transpersonal consciousness or spiritual consciousness is now part of scientific studies in psychology (transpersonal psychology).

- The highest level is the Universal Consciousness or Atma. Its attainment leads to the cessation of personal ego. The self melts away, and there is a consciousness of universality or non-duality.

The mind has two levels: the concrete mind and the abstract mind. The concrete mind thinks with colors, shapes, or words. But the abstract or subtle mind thinks without images. It understands concepts or essences without having to use pictures. These two levels are the arena of meditation.

On the physical level, there is also a division: the dense part and the ethereal part, including prana. These are relevant to meditation because they are sources of disturbance.



The division between the lower and higher mind is the crucial dividing line between what we may call the higher self and the lower self, also called the individuality and the personality. The three upper levels – the higher mental, spiritual and universal consciousness – are symbolized by an upright triangle, while an inverted triangle represents the lower mind, emotional and physical levels. These two are the higher and lower nature of a human being. The higher self is not fully developed in an average human being. On the other hand, the lower self is highly active but is usually filled with conditionings or habits that conflict with one’s higher self. But when the lower self is purified and cleansed of conditionings that are incongruent to one’s higher principles, then it can blend very well with the higher nature. This fusion is symbolized by the interlaced triangles or the six-pointed star, the symbol of the integrated human being. Thus, the practice of meditation consists of not only awareness of our mind, but also the re-training of our lower self as well as the progressive awakening of our higher faculties.

### 3. Time-Tested Methods

Another factor in choosing a method of meditation that will be effective is to study the various approaches that have been tried over the centuries. This is a part of the study of comparative mysticism. The most well-known methods are those of yoga, Zen Buddhism, Theravada methods, TM, and Christian contemplative practices. Many researchers have scientifically tested these techniques for their effect on stress, calmness, the capacity to focus, brain wave production, etc.

But more important is the role of meditation in nurturing and deepening spiritual consciousness among dedicated practitioners. Among these methods, those in the East have the most extensive accumulated experiences and insights.

All these meditation practices have stages that serve specific purposes in bringing about tranquility. The best classification is found in the *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali written more than two thousand years ago and which remains a standard meditation guide today. It identifies two phases of the practices that are essential: concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*). These methods were adopted in Buddhism and became *Ch'an* Buddhism in China and Zen Buddhism in Japan.

Most of them use mantras, names, or counting of breath. In the Theosophical Society, we avoid methods that are associated with any religious tradition; hence the best is to use the counting method.

## 4. The Practice of Meditation

The two levels of the mind are the levels where we practice meditation. There are, therefore, two essential stages in meditation practice. The first is the taming of the lower mind, and the second is the sustenance of awareness of the higher mind when the lower mind is no longer noisy. The first stage of meditation is concentration, and the higher step is meditation itself.

In the practice of meditation, therefore, we have to undergo two stages of proficiency.

To practice this, we must do some preparations for a few minutes.

- The body must be relaxed. This is done consciously by being aware of any part of the body that may be uncomfortable or tense.
- When the body is fully relaxed, then we will notice that the emotions also become quiet and peaceful.
- Next, we must be aware of our thoughts. We don't reject them. We also don't entertain them. Just be mindful that they are coming and going.
- After being aware of our thoughts, we will notice that our consciousness has a space. We cannot determine its boundaries, but this space contains all thoughts, memories, images, ideas, perceptions.

### 4. Stage 1: Disciplining the Lower Mind

When we start the practice of meditation, we must first tame the noisy habits of the lower mind, like the taming of a wild horse. It is simple and quite natural. First, we become aware of our natural cycle of breathing.

- Then as we breathe in, we mentally say "one."
- As we breathe out, we mentally say "two."

(You can change the "one" and "two" to whatever you wish, such as a mantra or a name you revere. It is not important. This is just an object for us to focus on. Later we will not need the counting or the mantra.)

For those who find that they have difficulty in maintaining "one" and "two" because they keep on getting carried away by thoughts, then you can use another way:

- When you breathe in, mentally say "one"

- When you breathe out, say “one”
- Breathing in, say “one”
- Breathing out, say “two”
- Keep on counting up to 50 when you are breathing out
- If you forget what number you are in, then just go back to “one”

Do this exercise for at least 20 minutes each day.

One of the significant effects of this practice is that it gradually develops a substratum of consciousness, which we may call “peripheral awareness.” While we are engaged in anything in daily life, there is an awareness in the background of our mind that makes us aware of things that we have not noticed before.

For example, previously, when we get angry, our consciousness is fully absorbed in anger. We are carried away by it, and we may express the anger in destructive ways. When the peripheral awareness is developed, however, something is added. We may still get angry, but this time we are aware that we are angry, including tension in the body, heat around the ears, strong heartbeat, etc. When we are aware, we are now no longer hijacked by the emotion. We have the option to watch and become calmer. This peripheral awareness grows and becomes more permanent as we continually practice meditation. It is the link between meditative awareness and daily life.

## 5. Stage 2: Meditation Proper

When we have practiced the taming process with breathing and counting, we will notice that after a few weeks, the mind will become calmer and quieter. During meditation, stray thoughts do not pop up anymore, even when we no longer do the counting. Note that the counting of breath is just a tool, not meditation itself. H. P. Blavatsky wrote that counting breaths will not bring us absolute tranquility. This is evidently true, and it will have to be dropped at some point in the practice. But it is a useful time-tested tool to quiet the monkey mind at the beginning.

When the noisy habits of the mind have ceased, we enter into the second stage of the practice, which is awareness of our mind without trying to tame it. There is no longer any counting, and we are aware of the space of consciousness, especially the subtle thoughts that are formless. This is meditation proper, or *dhyana*. *Dhyana*, said the Yoga Sutras, is the uninterrupted flow of thought on an object chosen (III,2).

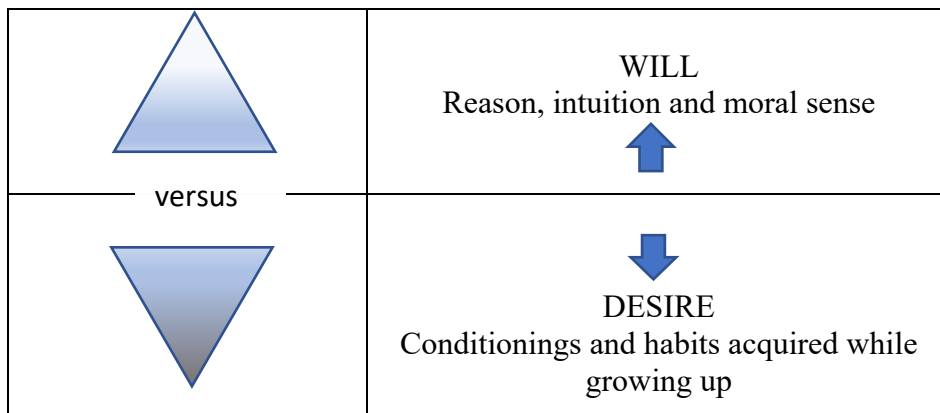
The critical element in this stage is sustained awareness. There will now emerge many kinds of thoughts from the subconsciousness and the subtle level. We notice them but not identify with them. It is during this stage that we must seriously attend to the inner and outer conflicts that we have: our habits, attitudes, values, relationships, attachment, ethics, etc. When these are not integrated, then we will continue to be bothered by them.

These disturbances come from the activities, concerns, and preoccupations of our daily life. We will discover that success in the practice of meditation involves our entire life process, not just sitting down for 30 minutes. We must review our whole philosophy of life and our values in life and remove contradictions in our behavior, habits, livelihood, attitudes, etc.

## 6. Integration with the Personality and Daily Life

As mentioned above, the conditionings of the personality must be re-trained so that there will be no conflict between the higher nature and the lower nature. The realizations or perceptions of the higher self become the principles by which we would like to live by. We want them to become the guiding truths in our life. This recognition or affirmation is our higher Will, which is different from the desires or habits that we have acquired while we were growing up.

This stage will accentuate the life-long conflict between the higher and lower nature, the battle between Will and Desire. For most people, it is the desire that wins. But for people aspiring for maturity and the spiritual life, the Will must reign supreme. H. P. Blavatsky wrote that the duty of every theosophist is “to control and conquer, *through the Higher, the lower self.*” (*Key to Theosophy, Sec. 12*)



Meditation strengthens the inner Will because the higher values become clearer to oneself in moments of silence. At the same time, when one becomes aware of the urges and manifestations of the lower personality, the energies of the emotions get released and start dissipating, thus weakening those habits. When this higher nature becomes dominant, then it will be the primary factor that leads to the attainment of our highest destiny, which is self-realization.

Hence in the practice of meditation, we must not neglect to re-educate our lower triangle or personality so that it becomes obedient to the higher will. This is not easy, especially when one grows older, and the habits have been deeply ingrained already.

## 7. Ending the Meditation

In concluding the meditation, end gradually with a transition toward regular activity, such as in the following manner:

- Continue to be aware of the space of the consciousness
- Then be mindful of the sounds around us
- Be mindful of our body and feelings
- Open the eyes and be aware of the surroundings, but still aware of the inner space

- When we are about to move parts of our body, be conscious that we are about to move and be aware when we move them.

### 8. Stage 3: The Higher Stages

When our meditation practice has deepened enough, then we will note that we begin to be in touch with a higher level of consciousness, which we call Buddhi in theosophy. It is the faculty of intuitive perception, *prajna* in yoga and Buddhism, or the contemplative consciousness in Christianity.

This faculty enables us to see the deeper essence of things. In time, the higher mind will be influenced by this spiritual faculty, making it more intuitive. Madame Blavatsky calls such a mind *manas-tajasi* or the Radiant Mind, the mind illuminated by the Buddhi. A practice that is relevant to this stage is the “Diagram of Meditation” given by Blavatsky to her pupils.

After years of practice, we may find that we are ready to enter into a deeper stage of meditation, which is the awareness of the ego or self. Who is this meditator? Who am I? Who is this thinker? Where do these thoughts come from? There is a famous enlightened yogi, Ramana Maharshi, of South India, who taught a deep meditation method called *vichara*, which means Self-Inquiry. It just continues to ask, “Who am I?”

This is one of the deepest levels of meditation, but it requires that one is already able to quieten the mind, on both the higher and lower levels.

### 9. Summary

To summarize the processes involved in the practice of meditation, let us study this chart that refers to the functions and characteristics of each of the levels of consciousness:

<b>Level of Consciousness</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Approaches</b>
Universal Consciousness	No sense of ego	Unstructured awareness meditation, no words, self-inquiry (“Who am I?”)
Spiritual consciousness	Intuition, spirituality	
Higher Mind	Concepts, intentions, ideas	2 <sup>nd</sup> stage: Meditation proper; continuous flow of consciousness on any chosen object of attention
Lower Mind	Jumping “monkey mind”	1 <sup>st</sup> stage of meditation: concentration or counting of breath
Emotions	Anger, fear, depression, resentment, hurt, etc.	Self-awareness process to release suppressed energies
Ethereal Double and Prana	Tension, Stress, Instability	Abdominal breathing, Scanning Process, Pranayama
Physical Body	Pain and Disease	Healthy living

The Theosophical Society must actively promote the regular practice of meditation not only to its members but also to the general public. It can be done weekly for 1-1/2 hours. The meditation practice can be done in 20-25 minutes, followed by a talk on aspects of meditation, plus, if desired, a question and answer period.

Meditation is an essential practice for everyone, regardless of whether one is interested in spirituality or not. By being inwardly aware and developing self-mastery, meditation redirects one's life destiny. It is the key to true inner peace, social peace, wisdom, and spirituality.