

Notes from *Meditation and Its Practice*, by Swami Rama and Chapter One of *The Theory and Practice of Meditation*, ed. Rudolph Ballentine, M.D.

The meditation practice for this training is based in the tradition of Himalayan Masters as brought to the west by Swami Rama. It is a classical mantra japa (repetition) practice used by many traditions the world over. In this meditative tradition, a sincere student may be initiated by an adept teacher, at which point a personal mantra is given to the student. The guidance of the lineage is believed to support the spiritual progress of the initiate from this point onward.

Meditation is: (Some definitions)

- Channeling of consciousness, inviting awareness to become aware of itself.
- Introducing you to yourself = the atman, or center of higher self.
- Establishment in the state of Samadhi.
- **Practical, scientific, systematic technique for knowing yourself on all levels.**
- **A quiet, effortless, one-pointed, focus of attention and awareness.**
- **A technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness different than normal waking state.**

The root of word is same as medical and medicate, “to pay attention to,” in this case, attention to the deeper layers of your self. In meditation the mind is clear, relaxed, inwardly focused, quiet, concentrated.

MEDITATION IS NOT:

- Contemplation, or thinking, brooding, worrying, daydreaming.
- It is not religion. (religion tells what to believe, meditation teaches how to experience directly for yourself)
- It is not hypnosis or auto suggestion.

WHAT IT DOES:

- Meditation forms **a channel** for the presence of the Atman (‘do not brood’) and “make your ego travel to the center of consciousness. Know you are peace, happiness, and bliss. Freedom is your essential nature.” Swami Rama p. ix
- Gives tranquility, calmness and resistance to stress, joy, clarity, awareness, intuition creativity, energy, boosts immune system, relaxes muscles, balances nerves.
- Reduces stress, agitation, appetites of all kinds, balances emotions, limits reactivity, decreases need for sleep.
- Better ability to deal with mental/emotional issues that lead to psychosomatic problems!
- Trains the conscious mind and transforms the personality.

How it works in a nutshell:

By giving one internal focus of attention, it helps the mind to stop other stressful mental processes like worrying, planning, etc. Usually the focus is a sound or image or both.

Also, it helps us let go of unhelpful habitual thoughts by giving us opportunity and practice at witnessing them. Remaining objective and neutral to what comes up.

MANTRA

Mantras are:

- Sounds with no corresponding outer object, non-representational. VIBRATIONS that create form but the form is not external to you. Ex. sound waves on disc with sand on it.
- Special sounds that have particular characteristics and effects (not just any word).
- A combination of syllables or words corresponding to a particular energy vibration.
- Examples: Om, Amen, Shalom.

On mantra:

Sounds vibrating in themselves have no literal material meaning and are known only as vibrations. When they affect material substances, these vibrations create forms and their forms have names. Yet, actually, all forms and names result from the pure vibrations of sound. There are particular sounds which vibrate in silence and are very powerful and beneficial in their effect on the entire human being. In ancient times sages, who devoted their lives to meditation, heard these sounds within, which are now used as mantras. These special sounds have different effects on different aspirants; receiving a mantra from an authentic teacher is like receiving a prescription given by a physician. (p. 38)

Mantras operate at a deeper level than words, through the quality of vibration.

Basic Guidelines for Practice

In order to meditation learn how to:

1. relax the body
2. sit steadily and comfortably with head neck and trunk aligned
3. calmly witness objects in train of thoughts
4. inspect the quality of thoughts- promote helpful ones
5. remain centered / undisturbed in any situation, whether you judge it good or bad

In preparing to meditate lifestyle comes into play so if you are having problems sitting look at food, sleep, sex, mental fear-based agitations in life, i.e. “the four fountains”.

Cultivate experiences that lead to harmony and stillness – live life in a way that does not create unpleasant experiences. (p. 44)

Common physical problems are: illness, physical discomfort, fatigue and drowsiness, restlessness, food issues.

Basic Environmental Guidelines:

Quiet peaceful restful place
Uncluttered, clean

Good air quality

Anytime – but best is early am and late pm at REGULAR TIME

Steps:

Cleansing

Stretching

Relaxation

Sit quietly

Breath awareness (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Allow breath to become quiet and even

Mantra Attention: “So Hum” 10 - 20 minutes (adding in increments of 3 minutes)

Bring mind back to mantra when it wanders

****Time in practice****

Possibly massage legs and stretch a little afterward.

Meditation Posture: - should be still, steady, relaxed and comfortable.

The only true requirement is for the head, neck and trunk to be aligned and to breathe even and freely with the diaphragm.

Postures Used for Meditation:

3 MAIN ONES:

1. Maitri Asana – friendship pose. Seated on chair
2. Sukhasana – easy pose. Legs folded, simple cross-legged position
3. Swastikasana – auspicious pose. – with toes tucked in, not aligned in center. Right shin on top if possible.

OTHERS LESS USEFUL TO GENERAL POPULATION:

4. Vajrasana – thunderbolt pose. Use zen bench instead for better leg circulation
5. Siddhasana – accomplished pose – for Monks – perennial lock with ankles aligned.
6. Padmasana – lotus pose – cannot keep root lock and difficult to do correctly

A useful Mudra is Jnana Mudra the “finger lock” of thumb and index meeting to recycle energy at hand.

Also the lips should be closed and one should breathe through the nose.

“Often we are not aware of how noisy the mind is until we begin the practice of meditation. Our goal is to allow the noise to still itself.” (p. 43)

You can check progress by noting a sense of quiet and stillness.

Breath Awareness

The four defects: noise, shallowness, jerks, pauses at ends of inhalation and exhalation.

THE BREATH AND MIND ARE INTERDEPENDENT

“When the mind begins to follow the breath, we become aware of a deeper reality within – for there is a link between our innermost self and the center of the cosmos which supplies life energy to all living creatures.” (p. 49)

“The goal of breath training is to re-establish the body’s natural respiratory pattern, i.e. even diaphragmatic breathing.” (p. 50)

Nadis are the subtle coordinates of the nerves, of which there are 1000s with 3 central ones:

- ida – left nostril to base of torso
- pingala- right nostril to base
- shushumna – central channel.

[Swarodara is the “science of breath”]

To Make Progress in Meditation

1. Sit at same time each day so this becomes a habit
2. Maintain good sitting posture.

Understanding the Mind

Mind is master of the body, breath, senses for it is charged with the power of the center of consciousness, the atman or individual soul (jiva). All our thinking processes, emotional power, capacity for analysis, and the functioning of the different modifications of the mind are due to the power of the innermost soul. One simply has to become aware of this fact, i.e. that the mind is in direct control of the senses, breath, and body. It is the mind that influences the senses and causes them to function in the external world. It is the mind that desires to perceive the world through the senses and to conceptualize and categorize those sensory perceptions. The mind stores its impressions in the unconscious, the storehouse of merits and demerits, and then recalls them whenever it needs them. p. 69

All Sadhanas = spiritual practices are to train the MIND! (sadhaka = aspirant)

The Four Functions of Mind (antah karana)

Manas – lower mind – sense, doubts, questions,

Buddhi – higher mind – door to intuition, discriminates and judges, decides issues, wise

Ahamkara – ego, “I-ness, individual identity

Chitta- memory. Stores impressions.

The unconscious is extensive and powerful, a vast reservoir of impressions, actions, desires and emotions. An event is like a pebble splashing in the water of the mind, with the emotions like sharks swimming below. Through this process of meditation and self-

awareness (Swadhyaha or contemplation with analysis) we can examine our fears and eliminate them. Then we will live fearlessly.

Notes from Introduction and Chapter One of *Meditation and Its Practice*

Introduction

p. 3 The mind and emotions are major determining factors in health and disease. Through meditation we develop our powers of internal concentration, and we become aware of our internal processes, leading to the positive emotions of love, joy, and tranquility.

p. 4 By becoming an uninvolved witness or a dispassionate observer to our habitual mental functioning, we allow our subconscious impressions to come into awareness and become integrated into our personality.

Ch. 1: What is Meditation?

Definitions and Descriptions of Meditation

p. 25 The ultimate goal of meditation is to experience the Self or Atman, The Self is pure consciousness. This is a state of transcendence beyond time, space and causation= Samadhi, nirvana.

p. 23 In meditation a conscious, voluntary attempt is made to still the activity of the conscious mind, Through withdrawal of the senses and concentration, one-pointedness of mind is achieved. Then, like the continuous flow of oil from one vessel to another, concentration flows into meditation. The uninterrupted flow of the mind leads to timelessness, and intuitive knowledge dawns.

p. 15 Med. Is the process through which the mind is first made one-pointed and then expanded to the state of enlightenment. It involves a subtle yet definite effort which then leads to the superconscious state.

The method of meditation is an inward process that leads one to the foundation of life and light from where consciousness flows.

p. 17 The method of Med. Systematically leads one to the source of consciousness through experiencing various levels (of consciousness: waking, dream, sleep), one after another.

The first benefit of meditation is freedom from stress and strain; the second is clarity of mind, the third is knowledge of one's own internal states. Persistent practice -> *turiya* = state of freedom.

Meditation is an unlearning program it shows one how to know within oneself. It is a practical and systematic technique.

Med. Is a self-reliant methods of inner study. P. 13

Med. Leads one to the silence within. P. 14

It leads to the tranquil state, the greatest of all enjoyments.

Meditation teaches one how to be; it is an inward method for knowing oneself on all levels and for experiencing higher levels of consciousness.

Does not interfere with any religious or cultural beliefs!

Meditation is an inward method that leads one to the center of consciousness by stilling the mind. P.11

p. 9. As a citizen of two worlds, within and without, goal is to live in the world yet remain above it.

p. 10 Practice will make one perfect. Without practice, one cannot have inner experience, and without this experience one cannot be guided. Experience should be one's guide.

P 11 M should not be mingled with any sort of religion and religious ceremony. This creates needless conflicts.

Meditation, the word is used for other practices such as rumination, contemplation, reflection. Sanskrit it means to make the mind free from all disturbing thoughts.

Knowing oneself is a universal aim.

Contemplation is thinking with a definite idea in mind. Med has one single focal point. Requires an object for meditation.

p. 14: One should learn to pay attention to what one does.

Med. Is a practice that from the very beginning helps us find stability and calmness. We become freed from our restless desires, from the disturbing thoughts that normally come into our minds, and from our emotional reactions. As we progress, we come to find that these disturbances are gradually replaced by an ever-increasing sense of peace and happiness.

p. 15 Med begins with concentration. Through concentration the mind becomes steady and one-pointed. When concentration leads to the uninterrupted flow of the mind toward one object, this becomes meditation.

There are four states of mind or consciousness:

1. Waking (jagrata)
2. Dreaming (svapna)
3. Sleeping (sushupti)
4. Turiya (4th state)

p. 16 No one teaches us we can go beyond the 3 states; and also establish a link between the unconscious and the center of consciousness.

Meditation developed during Upanishadic Period 1700-500BCE. Spread to China and Japan Zen derived from *dhyana*.

p. 18 Bind faith is discouraged; rather try out the methods and see for oneself = empirical approach – first-hand experience.

p. 19 Yoga is a voyage of self-discovery. Guru = dispeller of darkness.

p. 21 Active Senses = karmendriyas. (outgoing) 5 Actions: elimination, movement, grasping, speaking, reproduction.

Kapalabhati and Bhaskrika.

Nadi Shodhana Pranayama. Nadis = energy channels.

Pratyahara controls and balances the jnanendriyas (incoming) sense of perception = smell, taste, touch, hearing, sight.

P. 23 Neti Neti practice of a sankalpa: “I am not my the body, I am not the senses, I am not the mind. I am the ATMAN, THE INFINITE.

So hum.

Mantra

p. 22: Initiation: sound, light, chakra, mantra. Some or all. The guru is a channel for power flowing down the long line of gurus dating back many thousand years.

p. 24 mantra = that which liberates the mind from all griefs, sorrows, and agonies.

Japa – act of repeating the mantra. Works at vibrational level, purifies the mind. “when the disciple is ready, the guru appears.” Initiated in dream.

p. 26: Causal sheath: fashioned out of our actions according to the law of karma.

Lotus of heart – where Atman dwells. Anahata chakra – Hrit Padma.

Distractions can be discouraging. They have always been there... just not previously aware of them.

**p. 28 Peace resides in the human soul as a manifestation of pure love.
Purity means to accept no influence other than the influence of the Divine.
Mental purity leads one from intellect to intuition.**

p. 29 Faithfulness is to admit and to manifest no movement other than that which is prompted and guided by the innermost consciousness.

p.29 Complete self-surrender requires a radical and total change in our lives. In this transformation, all of our habits and actions should be surrendered and exposed to the divine light.

Establishing oneself in divinity and then bringing forward that divinity from the innermost level and expressing it through mind, action, and speech is a sacred process that does not require any effort other than self-surrender.

p. 30 If one does not allow oneself to surrender, he is not allowing this force to work through him, he is imposing conditions upon it.

The human ego resists surrender; the mind has its own ideas and clings to them. The ego holds sway – our world is ruled by ego. We must sincerely desire to go beyond it! A surrender is the way of accepting the divine.

p. 31 Aspirant like a lotus – louts image: rooted in mud and supported by the water, but rises above it to bloom in the air and sunlight. ☺

Ch. 1: What is Meditation, Swami Rama

Ch. 2: Obstacles in Meditation, Ballentine MD

Ch. 3: Meditation in Action, Ajaya, PhD (Psychology)

Ch 4: Mind, Meditation, and Emotions, Nuernberger, PhD (Psychology)

Ch 5: Meditation and Meaning in Life, Arpita, PhD (Psychology)

Ch 6: Meditation and the Unconscious Mind, Ballentine, MD (Psychiatry)

Optional - Ch 7: The Tradition of superconscious Meditation, Arya, D.Litt (Swami Veda)

Two Appendices:

A. Instructions for Central Yogic Breathing Exercises

B. Beginning Meditation Practice Instructions