

Unworried-Mind Meditation and Well-Being

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Meditation is the most misunderstood practice in Yoga circles. The ancient authorities define it as the extension of concentration on an object or place over a period of time, without interruption. Yet nobody is looking to the ancient authorities for guidance; everyone is taking for granted that they know what it is. And so all sorts of practices are being advertised as meditation.

Before meditation (*dhyana*) you have to learn concentration (*dharana*), if you are a Yoga practitioner following Patanjali's eight-fold scheme. And before concentration you have to learn *pranayama* and cleanse the *pranic* channels where the mind travels along with the breath.

Before doing *pranayama* you have to strengthen the body to be able to sit erect and motionless. In our modern times people have weak spines because of sitting on chairs, bending the head to do desk work and, recently, to look at mobile phones. Therefore it has become necessary to do many postures (*asanas*) to rectify the postural problems that are leading to aches, pains and disease.

Asanas also help to quieten the sense organs and stop their constant gathering of information from the outside world. This prepares the senses for non-activity, the stage of sense-withdrawal called *pratyahara*. This is a prerequisite for concentration and meditation.

When the spine is erect the connection with the brain is vertically positioned and the spinal fluid is delicately balanced in its flow from head to body. Any disturbance, postural or mental, disrupts this tranquil connection with the brain. Without a continued, unruffled connection concentration and meditation are not possible.

Yogic endeavours are for achieving peace of mind and Yoga has many practices for this end. They address different aspects of the person; all are necessary to gain health and well-being. They include ethical behaviour and a life-style consistent with aspirations towards self-development. These two form the bedrock of practice.

The senses are an enormous block to the effort of the mind to go inwards to find itself. The eyes, ears and other sense organs are designed to respond to stimuli and they trigger brain and motor activity. Therefore a lot of effort needs to be put in to quietening them and keeping them quiet. The restfulness needs to be introduced right from the beginning of practice.

Here I give two practices that help the senses to become more rested.

Lying-Down Sensory Rest

Lie on the floor with a folded blanket under the head. Close the eyes. Let the arms and legs relax. Keep the palms facing upwards with the fingers curled softly. Let the legs and feet drop outwards. Keep the whole body still.

Let the tongue rest on the lower palate. Relax the eyes and let them sink down towards the back of the head. Relax the ears so that they don't strain towards outside sounds. Relax the nose so that you feel the skin moving downwards. Relax the skin on the face and all over the body. Bring the senses back to a state of relaxation continuously.

Maintain this practice for two or three minutes. Then let go, turn to the side and get up.

Seated Heart-Awareness

Sit cross-legged on two folded blankets on the floor. Lift the trunk up, take the shoulders back and join the palms in front of the chest. Close the eyes. Quieten the brain and draw the brain energy into the heart. Do this for half a minute. Then raise the head, release the palms and open the eyes.