# Meditation Primer

**What is it?**

It is a process of deep concentration or merger into an object or a state of consciousness. Meditation releases reactions and unconscious habits and build the spontaneous and intuitive link to awareness itself.

According to yogis meditation is the route to union or yoga with the universal life force. The eight steps of Asthanga yoga include –

### Yamas

These are moral codes or behaviours that allow us to live in harmony with ourselves and within society.

### Niyamas

They are codes or behaviours that purify the relationship we establish with ourselves.

### Asana

This is the physical exercise to gain balance and strength.

### Pranayama

It is the set of practices related to the control and expansion of vital energy or prana/breath.

### Pratyahara

This is the practice of mental yoga through the control of the senses, to remain present but unattached.

### Dharana

Concentration. Calming the fluctuation of the mind.

### Dhyana

The meditation - become observers of ourselves, of our mind, at all times.

### Samadhi

It is the final state when we become one with the All, reaching the knowledge of the Absolute.

**Benefits**

* enhanced [communication](https://www.healthline.com/health/communication-techniques) and relationships
* improved focus, concentration, creativity and precision
* heightened clarity: intentions, decision making and reasoning
* reduced stress, anxiety and negative emotions
* improved sleep
* improved immune system function
* decreases in anxiety and depression
* decrease in stress related symptoms including chronic pain
* Gaining a new perspective on stressful situations.
* Focusing on the present
* Increasing patience and tolerance
* May reduce memory loss with aging
* May fight addictions
* Decrease BP
* Can be done anywhere
* Increased resilience to change and trauma
* More fluid adaptation to change and adoption of effective coping strategies
* Increased self-awareness, self-trust and self acceptance
* Enhanced appreciation of life and sense of meaningfulness
* Strengthens faith and self confidence

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**How long and how often?**

A favorite yoga teacher always reminded us….’any amount’. A few minutes a day is all it takes. The secret is consistency. In Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan he stipulated the following guidelines and their benefits.

3 minutes of meditation affects the electromagnetic field, the circulation, and stability of the blood chemistry.

11 minutes of meditation begins to change the nerves and the glandular system.

22 minutes of meditation balances the three minds (negative, positive, and neutral) and they start to work together so your mental integration changes.

31 minutes of meditation allows the glands, breath, and concentration to affect all the cells and rhythms of the body.

62 minutes of meditation changes the grey matter in the brain. The subconscious "shadow mind" and your positive projection are integrated.

2 ½ hours of meditation changes the psyche in relation to the surrounding magnetic field so that the subconscious mind is held firmly in the new pattern by the surrounding universal mind.

**The number of days of continued practice will also have different effects:**

*11 days:* 11 is the number of Infinity in the material world and conqueror of the physical realm. So it’s like the first step to break loose from the entanglement of the mind.

*40 days:* Helps to break negative habits that block you from the expansion possible through the Kriya or mantra, if done 40 days straight in a row. (Coincidentally a mandala is a period of approximately 40 days in which time the human system completes one physiological cycle.)

*90 days:* When you practice the Kriya or mantra for 90 days straight it will establish a new habit in your conscious and subconscious mind. It will change you in a very deep way.

*120 days:* When you commit to practice for 120 days without skipping a day it will confirm the new habit of consciousness. The positive benefits of the Kriya get integrated permanently into your psyche.

*1000 days:* This will allow you to master the new habit of consciousness that the Kriya or mantra has promised. No matter what the challenge, you can call on this new habit to serve you.

*© The Teachings of Yogi Bhajan, Aquarian Teacher KTI International Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Level One Textbook*

**Getting started**

The easiest way to begin is to sit quietly and focus on your breath. An old Zen saying suggests, “You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes every day — unless you’re too busy. Then you should sit for an hour.”

* Find a space where you will not be disturbed.
* Turn off phones and sit away from all screens
* Sit comfortably
* Close your eyes and focus on your breath
* Set a timer

**Tips for success**

Just Do it – any amount, every day for any length of time

Same time / same place. Make the habit intentional

Correct alignment

Warm up

You may chose to cover your head or wear a shawl

Find a technique that works for you

Experiment

Do not give up. It takes time to commit to introducing a new habit.

**How?**

Not all meditation styles are right for everyone. Find one that works for you – meaning that you can do it regularly.

In yoga we include a hand position or mudra combined with a focus or drithi and may also include a mantra. In all cases it is useful to have an intention when you begin. This is a thought or word to think about and to serve as an anchor should your mind wander.

**Mudra – ‘seal’** hand positions used in meditation and exercise. They seal the body’s energy flow in a particular pattern. The most common hand position is gyan mudra – connecting the index finger to the thumb.

**Dristhi** – eye focus. The most common is focusing on the space between the eyebrows with the eyes closed.

**Mantra** – A “mind tool’. It is a wave created through the repetition of sound and rhythm that directs or controls the mind.

When you recite them you have impact:

Through the meridian points in the mouth,

Through its meaning

Through its pattern of energy

Through its rhythm

And through its naad – energetic shape in time

Recited correctly a mantra will activate areas of the nervous system and brain and allow you to shift your state and the perceptual vision or energetic ability associated with it.

**Here are some examples of various types of meditation.**

**Breathwalk**

A kundalini practice of mindful walking incorporating different pranayams or breathing techniques.

**Celestial Communication**

A kundalini meditation practice where a mantra is accompanies with hand movements thus introducing a kinesthetic element to the meditation. This adds interest and the movements can be incredible powerful for unlocking blockages.

**Focused meditation**

Involves concentration using any of the five senses. For example, you can focus on something internal, like your breath, or you can bring in external influences to help focus your attention. Try counting [mala beads](https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-use-mala-beads), listening to a gong, or staring at a candle flame. This practice may be simple in theory, but it can be difficult for beginners to hold their focus for longer than a few minutes at first. If your mind does wander, it’s important to come back to the practice and refocus.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains why this is so powerful:

*Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It’s like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.*

As the name suggests, this practice is ideal for anyone who requires additional focus in their life.

**Labyrinth –** Using either a finger to trace a handheld labyrinth or walking will generate the relaxation response as defined by Dr. Herbert Benson, founder of the Harvard Mind Body Centre. Labyrinths are circuitous paths leading you to a center, commonly suggested as a metaphor of life with all its twists and turns. Entering is releasing, pausing at the centre is receiving and leaving is consolidating.

This is a very grounding practice and useful for those with busy minds and seek clarity or insights and for those who find it hard to sit still.

**Mindfulness**

Originates from Buddhist teachings and is the most popular meditation technique in the West. ie Vipassana. In [mindfulness meditation](https://www.healthline.com/health/meditation-for-sleep#mindfulness-meditation), you pay attention to your thoughts as they pass through your mind. You don’t judge the thoughts or become involved with them. You simply observe and take note of any patterns.

**Moving meditation**

Although most people think of yoga when they hear movement meditation, this practice may include walking through the woods, [gardening](https://www.healthline.com/health/garden-helps-my-anxiety), qigong, yoga flow series and other gentle forms of motion such as mindful walking. It’s an active form of meditation where the movement guides you.

[Movement meditation](https://www.healthline.com/health/9-ways-to-make-meditation-easier#move) is good for people who find peace in action and prefer to let their minds wander.

**Naad –** the inner sound that is subtle and all present. It is the direct expression of the absolute. Meditated upon, it leads into a sound current that pulls the consciousness into expansion.

**Pranayama** – the yogic practice of breath control. Prana meaning ‘vital life force’ and yama meaning control leading to the complete suspension of breathing.

Buddha is said to have given this advice: *When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in‑breath.*

Extremely effective to change states of mind quickly. Easiest to learn in the presence of a teacher.

**Progressive relaxation**

Also known as body scan meditation, progressive relaxation is a practice aimed at reducing tension in the body and promoting relaxation. Oftentimes, this form of meditation involves slowly tightening and relaxing one muscle group at a time throughout the body. In some cases, it may also encourage you to imagine a gentle wave flowing through your body to help release any tension. This [form of meditation](https://www.healthline.com/health/body-scan-meditation) is often used to relieve stress and unwind before bedtime. Ie Yoga Nidra or Body Scan

Body Scan Thich Nhat Han recommends this mantra: *Breathing in, I’m aware of my body.* When you practice mindful breathing, the quality of your in-breath and out-breath will be improved. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit.

Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that the next time *you’re stopped at a red light, sit back and practice the fourth exercise: “Breathing in, I’m aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body.”*

*Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day — in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.*

**Spiritual**

Used in Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Daoism, and in Christian faith and similar to prayer in that you reflect on the silence around you and seek a deeper connection with your God or Universe. Essential oils are commonly used to heighten the spiritual experience. Popular options include:

* frankincense
* myrrh
* sage
* cedar
* sandalwood
* palo santo

Spiritual meditation can be practiced at home or in a place of worship. This practice is beneficial for those who thrive in silence and seek spiritual growth.

**Transcendental Meditation**

Transcendental Meditation is a popular type of meditation. This practice has been the subject of [numerous studies](https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/acm.2013.0204) in the scientific community. You must take a course ot learn the technique and will be given a unique mantra to recite.

This practice is for those who like structure and are serious about maintaining a meditation practice.

# A person with a beard  Description automatically generated with medium confidence

# **Tratakum Meditation**

# In the yogic scriptures it says, “Even a glance from the eyes of a holy man can cure mental and physical imbalances.” Once in a very great while there is a picture that has a transcendent quality of neutrality that al lows the person gazing at it to go through it and into their higher consciousness. A photo with the direct gaze of neutrality can heal and give you the instant ability to contact your own higher guidance. Teachers are connected by the Golden Chain, unto Infinity.

**Visualization meditation**

Visualization meditation is a technique focused on enhancing feelings of relaxation, peace, and calmness by visualizing positive scenes or images. With this practice, it’s important to imagine the scene vividly and use all five senses to add as much detail as possible.

Another form of [visualization meditation](https://www.healthline.com/health/visualization-meditation) involves imagining yourself succeeding at specific goals, which is intended to increase focus and motivation.

Many people use visualization meditation to boost their mood, reduce stress levels, and promote inner peace.

Can be done by listening to a recording or app.

**Yantra / Mandala**

Diagrams used in meditation and protection. Yantras tend to be small and call in the divine feminine. They are flat or 3d with each color and shape having meaning.

Mandala in Sanskrit means 'circle' or 'completion' representing your inner and outer worlds and the totality of existence. They are geometric configurations of symbols used to focus attention, as a spiritual guidance tool, for establishing a [sacred space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganachakra#Sacred_space) and as an aid to [meditation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation) and [trance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trance) induction.

A mandala generally represents the spiritual journey, starting from outside to the inner core, through layers.

If you draw one it becomes a window for exploring one's inner self and is used for insight, **healing** and self-expression in a circular design, reflecting the wholeness of the person creating it.



