

Meditation Using a Mantra

There is a difference between a meditation technique and meditation practices. A technique is what you do use to initiate and sustain the meditative experience that makes it meditation. It can be a focus, an observance or an action that is employed to heighten awareness, usually repetitively to create the meditative experience. Breath-following, the Relaxation Response, TM (Transcendental Meditation), and Trataka Meditation (gazing) are all techniques used for meditation. They themselves are not a practice, but they are a way to practice. Meditation itself has a lineage. Its origin is of a spiritual nature. Spiritual seekers used meditation to reunite themselves with the divine, to become aware of, and understand the meaning of their life's existence. There is documentation that meditation has been practiced for as far back as there are records of humanity. Most of the meditation styles originated from these times when one's spirituality was the only real worthwhile pursuit. However, meditation is not religion.

From these spiritual origins with their different lineage's which all seemingly lead to the same place, different focuses were used to practice meditation. It is these differences that the techniques come from. For example, there is a difference between Zen and Vipassana meditation even though they are both Buddhist in nature. Buddhist meditation can also include Insight Meditation and Loving Kindness Meditation. There are literally hundreds of possible focuses and techniques. You can say the lord's name (mantra) over and over, you can repeat a prayer or you can count beads. You could follow your breath, stare at an image or focus on healing. You can expand yourself exponentially, use your body as a vessel to channel the suffering in the world into positive energy, open your chakras, or cleanse your soul. Meditation can be used for spiritual pursuits, physical well-being, psychic endeavors, mental hygiene or whatever you want. No matter what style you practice or what technique you use, meditation is beneficial to practice. Until you've become comfortable with meditation, which may take time, you may not understand the difference between using techniques and pure experience. Using techniques to meditate are very helpful especially for beginners. Depending on the practitioner, the day may come when you no longer need a technique to stay with whatever comes up in your meditation experientially, consciously or otherwise. When that's true you may want to try other meditative practices and/or focuses.

Mantra Meditation

This technique goes back thousands of years. A mantra is a word or words, usually with some significant meaning (truth, love, union, god, union with the absolute). Japa is the repetition of the mantra. By actively repeating the mantra a sense of control begins to develop between the consciousness and the mind or thought waves and this eventually leads to *citta vrtti nirodah* (cessation of thought). The mantra becomes the primary focus and the secondary thoughts begin to diminish until, so it seems, only the manta is left.

Relaxation Response

Relaxation response is also mantra meditation. It was introduced by Dr. Herbert Benson in 1968. Dr. Benson and colleagues at the Harvard Medical School studied the physiological effects of meditation on the mind and body. Dr Benson introduced a simple mantra, the word "one" that could be used to keep the mind focused while breathing comfortably. Similar to the other mantra type meditations, no focus is emphasized other than the repetition of the mantra, in this case the word "one". When the mind wanders, or you realize you're not still repeating the mantra or if you simply forget, you reintroduce the mantra and continue from there. This technique is so simple that it works for almost anybody. The word "one" is easily repeated, it's not difficult to remember, it's not a secret, and it costs nothing to get.

Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation (TM for short) – is also mantra Meditation. It was developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The huge success of his technique was due to its compatibility with our culture's temperament (not so Hindu). It was introduced in America in 1959. TM quickly became very popular and is still widely practiced. TM centers or clinics give instruction on how to practice this type of meditation and introduce a secret, personal mantra to its practitioners. Basically, one mentally repeats the word (mantra) while sitting still. The lips and tongue should not move. The eyes are closed and the attention is turned inwards. No mental force should be used. Each time the mind wanders the mantra is reintroduced.

The basic technique for practicing mantra meditation is to pick a mantra. It can be any word that can be easily remembered. It can have a particular meaning or be mumbo jumbo. Come to a seated position in a chair or on a bench, a pillow or the floor, in any way that you can so that you can sit comfortably for an extended amount of time with your back straight. From this position, close your eyes and begin following your breath for a minute or so, then introduce the mantra and continue for as long as you've allotted for meditation. Every time you forget the mantra or notice that you're not still using it, simply reemploy the mantra and continue. There is no minimum or maximum time that meditation has to be practiced. If you're a beginner, trying to meditate for forty five minutes would be unrealistic. Try following these guidelines. As a beginner, start with seven to ten minutes. When you can stay with it for ten minutes; progress to fifteen to twenty minutes. Most meditators meditate for between twenty and forty five minutes. More isn't necessarily better.

Using a mantra provides you with a distraction so that whatever is going on in your mind becomes less obvious (you're not as aware of) and the mantra becomes the object of your awareness. This can be particularly useful when you feel stressed out or overwhelmed. Sometimes it's really difficult to feel good when there is so much going on in our lives and this is reflected by the state of our mind. One of the reasons for practicing meditation is mental hygiene, to clear the mind even if it is only temporary so that you stop reliving the past and stop worrying about the future that hasn't happened yet. During meditation your mind will relax and even if you have to work really hard to continuously employ the mantra it will be less stressful than the events of a hectic day. Even if we don't think that we do, we choose how we react to our experiences and what we think about in our daily lives. Once we come out of our meditation if we want to go back to thinking about whatever it was that we were thinking before the

meditation, we can. We choose. After a while you will come to recognize how you can let go of the thoughts or things that you're thinking until you need to come back to them if at all.

Like anything else that you try, you should do it a few times before you decide if it works or not.

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