

## Learn to Meditate

A Simple Meditation Technique

(from Ananda Sangha)

*"Meditation is absorption in the thought of God or one of His aspects."*

—Paramhansa Yogananda

The following is a very simple meditation technique you can learn in five minutes.

### First, Sit Upright

Sit upright with a straight spine, away from the back of the chair. Place your feet flat on the floor, and your arms, palms turned upward, at the joint between your thighs and torso.

### Relax the Body

Do this Tense and Relax exercise to help you relax the body:

- Inhale sharply through the nose, with 1 short and 1 long inhalation (double breath)
- Tense the whole body until it vibrates with energy
- Hold your breath and the tension for five seconds
- Exhale forcibly through the mouth, with one short and one long exhalation (double breath)
- As you do, throw the tension out
- Repeat several times

### Breathe Evenly

Inhale slowly, counting to eight. Hold the breath for eight more counts, then exhale slowly to the same count. Without pausing, inhale again — hold — exhale, each to the count of eight.

This is called the Measured Breathing Exercise. Repeat it three to six times.

You can vary the count according to your lung capacity, but always keep it *equal* during inhalation, holding, and exhalation. Finish your practice by inhaling deeply, then exhaling completely.

### Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration

Now wait for the next breath to come in of its own accord. When it does, mentally say *Hong* (rhymes with *song*). This time, don't hold the breath, but exhale naturally. As you do, mentally say *Sau* (rhymes with *saw*).

Hong-Sau is an ancient Sanskrit mantra (a *mantra* is a word, syllable, or group of syllables, which can convey spiritual power when pronounced correctly, often with repetition). It means "I am He" or "I am Spirit." Try to feel that your breath itself is silently making the sounds of Hong and Sau.

Make no attempt to control your breath. Simply observe it as it flows in and out naturally.

In the beginning you may be mostly aware of the physical manifestation of the breathing process as your diaphragm and chest expand and contract.

As your breath grows calmer, however, try to become aware of its flow in the nostrils, then gradually transfer your awareness higher and higher in the nasal passages.

With the eyes closed, turn your gaze upward to the point midway between the eyebrows within your forehead. Concentrate there. This is the seat of spiritual consciousness in the body, also called the spiritual eye, or Christ Center. In time, try to feel the flow of the breath near the spiritual eye within your forehead.

Keep your gaze steady at the point between the eyebrows throughout your practice. Don't allow your eyes to follow the movement of the breath. If you find that your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to an awareness of the breath and the mantra.

Finish your practice of Hong-Sau by inhaling once through the nose, then exhaling three times through the mouth.

### **Meditation Proper**

Forget the breath. Concentrate deeply at the point between the eyebrows. Keep your mind focused and your energy internalized. Absorb yourself in the peace generated by your practice.

Continue for at least five minutes. Finish with a prayer to the Divine, offering yourself into the light of God.

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## **Ways to Deepen Your Meditation**

### **1. Relax the Body**

It is common for new meditators, in an effort to concentrate, to tense the body unconsciously. Deep concentration, however, is possible only in a state of complete relaxation.

Practicing the Tense and Relax exercise is an effective way to release stored-up bodily tension. Together with the Measured Breathing Exercise, these are preliminary exercises taught by Yogananda to help prepare the body and mind for meditation.

### **2. Pray**

Begin your meditation with a prayer. This will help you remember why you are meditating! You will also be inviting the Divine, or your Higher Self, to help you in your practice.

### **3. Sit Perfectly Still**

Moving your body even the slightly sends the energy into the muscles. The purpose of yoga is to withdraw that energy inward and upward, to the brain. Thus, any physical movement during meditation will counteract your meditative effort.

To keep yourself from fidgeting, try to think of your body as a rock-solid and unmoving. Refuse to move for the first five minutes of meditation, and you will find that your body will grow calm of its own accord.

Your physical and mental restlessness will subside the longer you sit still. A glass of muddy water will become clear in time if it's undisturbed. The same is true for us!

### **4. Eye Position**

Your eyes should be closed and held steady, looking slightly upwards, as if looking at a point about an arm's length away and level with the top of your head.

It is essential to keep your gaze gently raised to that point throughout your practice. This will magnetize your spiritual eye, and draw the energy to the highest spinal center, the seat of spiritual awakening in the body.

## **5. Do Not Control Your Breath**

After the preliminary breathing exercises, you should cease any effort to control the breath. Let it flow naturally. You may notice that the pauses between the inhalation and exhalation are gradually becoming longer.

Enjoy these pauses, for they are a glimpse of the deep state of advanced meditation. As you grow very calm, your breath may become so shallow, and the pauses so prolonged, that it hardly seems necessary to breathe at all.

Do not be alarmed. This is good!

## **How Long to Meditate**

It is entirely up to you. Make sure, however, to allow enough time after the Hong-Sau practice to sit still and enjoy the calm meditative state.

## **Where to Meditate**

If possible, set aside an area that is used exclusively for meditation. In time it will become saturated with spiritual vibrations. A small room, a corner of your bedroom, or even closet can suffice, as long as it is well ventilated.

Keep it simple. All you really need is a chair or small cushion to sit on, and perhaps a small altar. Face East if possible, and place a wool or silk blanket on the floor to insulate your body from the subtle magnetic currents of the earth.

## **Proper Meditation Posture**

In addition to sitting on a straight-backed chair, there are other ways of sitting that are appropriate for mediation. You can sit on the floor in any of the several poses: cross-legged, half-lotus pose, or full-lotus pose.

Two things, however, are essential: your spine must be straight, and you must be able to relax completely without slouching.