

## TYPES OF MEDITATION

There are hundreds of techniques from around the world, but it seems to me that they all parallel each other into four or five major categories. This sheet goes over all the categories, and then gives you a basic technique to start out with.

CLASSICAL or TRADITIONAL meditations are entirely self-generated. They are ideally done in a dark, quiet room with the eyes closed (usually), with the meditator sitting still and engaging a profound inner technique: either *mantra*, *image* and/or *point of focus* in the body somewhere. Examples would be feeling a mantra repeating itself inside the heart, or feeling the air on the tip of the nose as you breathe. These techniques are often combined with breathing, which as the most basic and important rhythm of the body, is often considered the most profound mantra by itself.

EXTERNAL INPUT meditations are easier since one or more of the senses are utilized: looking at something (a deity statue perhaps), listening to something (a voice or music), or feeling something (one's body as you move it). Although in one sense these meditations are less subtle than the classical ones since they provide a more definite thing for the mind to focus on, they are fundamentally the same in that the object is to completely focus the mind and ignore whatever else it may be doing. MOVEMENT meditations would be a subgroup within this category. The instructions of how to actually perform the meditations in these first two categories are always very simple.

CONTEMPLATIVE meditations are fundamentally different in that the thinking and imagining capacities of the mind are used, although in a subtle way. The Buddhist metta, or lovingkindness method is an example. Certain moral principles or ideals are contemplated, in order to acquire a sense of unifying compassion for all living things. Instead of ignoring the mind so that Grace might let you transcend it, this brings you to a profound concept which can then be let go of later on.

*Analytical* or *Confrontational* meditation would fall into this category. The best-known name associated with this is Ramana Maharishi's "Who Am I?" This basically consists of confronting your own issues by repeatedly pondering and eventually disidentify with them, one by one.

UNSTRUCTURED meditations are different in that no technique is used as an "anchor" with which to go deeper within one's self. They are sometimes thought of as advanced techniques because you need an unusually stable mind to begin with. In the first two categories above, meditators use mantras, images, or listen to certain types of music, etc., precisely to prevent the mind from wandering. At a certain point, many seekers stop using an anchoring device, since they want to meditate in a more general sense all the time. Perhaps that's a good way of understanding the unstructured category.

These categories are frequently combined. Vipassana, for example, seems to borrow elements from the first three groups above! You learn it over the course of a ten-day retreat—in which a

great deal is imparted about mystical spirituality in general, not just the basic technique of how to do it.

Ultimately, on more subtle levels, there are as many techniques as there are seekers, since no two of us approaches God/Self in precisely the same way.

## INTRODUCTORY TECHNIQUE INSTRUCTIONS – BREATH-COUNTING

1. Be alert, well-rested and on an empty stomach (ideally early morning, after shower and before breakfast. Otherwise anytime, as long as you're not too tired and digesting food.)
2. Find a dark, quiet, warm place.
3. Sit cross-legged or in a half-lotus ideally (one foot on top of opposite thigh); if sitting in chair, keep both legs parallel with feet flat on the floor.
4. Whether leaning against a wall or not, sit up and try to keep your head, neck and back all in a straight line, at least at first.
5. It's good to do a brief ritual act at this point to formally begin your meditation. Bring your hands together and take one deep breath.
6. Close your eyes and breath normally again. When you exhale, count to your self "one." On the next exhalation, count to yourself, "two." On the next one "three," and on the next "four." Then go back to one and start the counting process over. (Do NOT count one, two, three, four all in the same exhalation.)
7. If any thoughts, external stimuli etc. just begin the breath-counting again as soon as you remember.

*Source: Lawrence LeShan, How to Meditate, but also basic Zen method—although, traditionally they count to ten outbreaths, not four!*