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Which Meditation is Best for You?

The question often arises: which type of meditation method is best?

The answer is individualistic. The question actually should be, 'What type of meditation method is BEST FOR ME? With which one am I likely to get results?'

There are many types of meditation methods you can use, and though they all have the same similar end goal of creating mental peace and physical bliss (and ultimately spiritual enlightenment when pursued far enough according to the correct principles), they use different methods to achieve that common set of goals. You can find a few meditation methods on our home page just for starters.

Because each individual is gifted with a different mental make-up and psychology, the best type of meditation for each individual is a highly individualistic affair. What works for one person will not work for another. Therefore, you usually have to try several different methods to see which one suits you best.

I always advise people to pick one they like and one they hate because it's the one you hate that will probably help the most. It's the very reason that it's helping, which is why you don't like it. So meditate twice a day with one you like and one you hate, and try to do at least 45 minutes each time, and eventually you'll start getting all the results you read about and dream about.

You know, many people actually turn to alcohol to drum out their thoughts and stresses or feel 'high,' and are actually seeking the very same states that meditation safely produces. Some people stare at TV to drum out thoughts, otherwise relax and destress on rocking chairs (my mom used to do that), while others need the loud noise of a disco to drown out the busy mind through another meaningless (but loud) activity.

I'm sure you can think of other options people turn to as well.

Meditation is an alternative well recognized, by spiritual traditions and modern science, as a way to give the thinking mind a rest and take a deliberate break from the stream of thoughts that constantly flow in and out of our minds. Most people who turned to all sorts of 'negative activities' (less than life affirming) did so because they weren't aware of meditation as a viable option, and didn't have a good teacher to teach it.

Most religions don't even teach this to people, or teach meditation incorrectly to add all sorts of extra garbage into the mix, so they did not know how to meditate to achieve this result of emptying their mental suffering or stressful thoughts, and weren't aware that meditation could even help them access blissful states of well-being.

The number of meditation methods in the world is nearly endless but they all have a common goal, which is to enable people to pacify their minds so that thoughts, emotions, cravings and impulses no longer distract, impel and unsettle the individual. Through the practice of meditation, anyone can eventually learn how to cultivate a mental realm of blissful clarity, peace, calm and well-being whose results will even extend to the body.

Meditation is a practice of mental resting with open awareness wherein you learn how to detach from thoughts -- and see them as an independent third person observer would -- so that you can ultimately detach from their impelling grip on you. That freedom of detachment from thoughts -- and the refusal to bolster them with energy -- in time causes them to lose strength and pass away.

It's just a fact - it's a scientific result. It just happens.

If an individual practices meditation to detach from thoughts while maintaining a clarity of continued clear knowing, then in time thoughts will naturally die down. This lowering of the 'volume control' for the internal dialogue of the head will gradually result in a state of mental peace, calm, stillness, quiet or 'emptiness' that is the purpose of meditation. It's a blissful state of '10,000 miles of clear skies' that does not impel one to follow thoughts, emotions, impulses or cravings of any type except those one selects to act upon.

Meditation practice is a way of learning how to cultivate this state of mental bliss and joy, which is gradually felt in the body as well as the mind. Meditation produces mental and physical states that can replace the sought-after states that alcoholics and drug users pursue, but of course it takes training and practice to access those states.

I'm discussing all these things from a conventional level, but from a higher level I'd mention samadhi states, states of one-pointed concentration, spiritual states, awakening and enlightenment. For now, however, let's keep staying away from those terms to make the topic more approachable.

The actual number of different meditation practices in the world is tremendous, but they all initially aim at calming the mind of wandering thoughts through various different means. The meditation method that is 'best' for an individual is simply the one that works best in helping you realize the same end goal. It works best because the underlying principles of that practice suit you best for helping you calm your mind.

For instance, there are 'adding meditation methods,' such as the mandala visualization practices of Tibet, that have you taxing your mind with so much required concentration that the mind, when it can concentrate no more, gives up the strain of continued one-pointed concentration. It gives up and abandons thoughts all together to produce a quiet realm of mental emptiness.

This method works similar to the act of loading a bridge with so much weight that it breaks (taxing the mind with so much concentration that it silences all thoughts and mental states), or asking a computer to perform so many simultaneous calculations that it slows down to a virtual halt.

Other meditation methods, such as mantra recitation (called 'japa meditation' in India) or the continued recital of a religious prayer in tune with the breath, have you listening to sounds recited over and over again. In these methods, the wandering thought mind is eventually silenced through the continuous listening but after that mental silence appears, the awareness of that empty silence remains. With meditation you learn not only how to produce that silence but how to stay in that state of peaceful open awareness.

For this method, use whatever mantra works best -- the Prayer of Jesus, 'namo Amitofo,' 'Ohm Mani Bei Me Hon' and all sorts of other mantras are just fine -- but don't make one up yourself and don't pay someone to teach you a 'secret mantra' or some such nonsense. I've heard of people paying up to \$1,000 and more just to learn a mantra and while you can say that's a form of 'expedient means' (skillful means) to help the payer actually practice it (compliance always rises when people have to pay), I think that's a little exorbitant.

Be careful because there are no secrets. Just look at our site and books and you'll see hundreds of things revealed. There's no secrets, just a lack of understanding on most people's parts. The unscrupulous will take advantage of you if you let them.

Now other meditation methods, such as 'subtraction methods,' teach you to let go of thoughts directly so that the mind abandons layers of thoughts and eventually enters into a state free from mental disturbances entirely.

Because thinking and breathing are related -- since chi and consciousness are linked -- breathing practices (called pranayama) are often cultivated together with thought-free meditation in order to calm the breath and body and mind. The idea is to reach a peaceful state where breath and consciousness (thoughts) both calm and become one. In this way, breathing and consciousness can unify and produce a state of mental peace, emptiness and clarity.

Another meditation practice, called 'cessation-contemplation' practice or 'shamatha-vipassana' (vipassana) practice, works by having the meditator watch their thoughts without getting involved with them. In time, the continued watching without following the thoughts and giving them energy will cause them to die down. Eventually a silent mental gap between thoughts will be noticed that, with further cultivation, can expand and ultimately burst to reveal the true empty nature of the mind.

Actually, most meditation methods are based upon the principles of cessation and contemplation, but most people don't know that. To find out more, you can read the Sandhinirmocana Sashtra.

In another type of meditation method, a practitioner strongly concentrates one-pointedly on a thought so that all wandering thoughts surrounding that selected thought/image subside into silence. Meditators who succeed with this method also produce a true mental realm of peace and quiet.

Yet other methods, such as Zen, have a meditation practitioner looking within (through introspective observation, investigation and watching) to try and find the true nature of the mind itself. By abandoning everything that isn't the mind, Zen practitioners find that thoughts are not the mind but fleeting images that appear in the the true empty mind for just an instant, and then pass away. Because they are not real, one learns to abandon them and all states of consciousness to arrive at the real nature of the mind and reality.

Obviously I could go on and on but the point is to show you that all these methods have the same target -- an empty state of mind we call stopping, cessation, samadhi, no more wandering thoughts, concentration, freedom from thought, emptiness, peacefulness and so forth. Secondly, they rely on different principles to help you access mental peace because everyone has a different avenue of access that works best. The big secret is that there are a variety of ways to get there, a variety of ways to calm the incessant wandering thoughts of the mind, and they work on different principle patterns. So don't get confused about it. There's nothing ultimately holy about the methods or techniques. You use what's virtuous, and you use what works.

Your only job is to find a method that suits you and then to practice it correctly and regularly with consistency. If you do that then gong-fu will come out. The general rule is that PRACTICE + EFFORT + TIME + PATIENCE will produce a RESULT, namely GONG-FU, along with all the normal,common, shared, non-denominational stages of transformation of the spiritual path including superpowers, psychic abilities, clairvoyance and so forth. If you think only one school or religion has 'got it,' you're crazy. If you think you don't have to do any effort to realize your fundamental enlightenment, you might as well turn the page as well.

Why does gong-fu happen when you meditate and why do you get all these special abilities? Because you are getting closer to the true root of the mind and its true abilities that you normally cover over with thought. Also, you are purifying your mind and your chi, and it's your chi that's responsible for small supernormal powers.

Does that mean that when you become psychic or get superpowers that you are therefore cultivating correctly and found a true way? No! It only means you've cultivated some special functions of the mind.

Unfortunately, there are countless deviations of the spiritual path available that produce unusual gong-fu you can cultivate,including extraordinary psychic abilities, and because they are beyond-the-ordinary people think THIS MUST BE RIGHT because ordinary consciousness does not access these states, therefore it must be spiritual and must be CORRECT.

Wrong again. It only means they are cultivating capabilities of the mind, but not necessarily cultivating correctly.

People who cultivate the chakras, chi channels, microcosmic circulations and so forth all tend to make these mistakes. Yes, they produce abnormal out of the ordinary supernatural results, but that doesn't mean their cultivation is correct.

I see countless cases of people cultivating the body who produce lots of unusual results like this, and yet their cultivation is all wrong. In fact, it's a waste. As my teacher says, the form-based schools commonly lead to this all the time (yoga, Tantra, Taoism) when practiced incorrectly, and these lead to the big catastrophes! The catastrophes I've seen and wasted time are incredible. Story after story after story. Master Nan, who is one of the few enlightened masters of the Esoteric school (Tantra and Vajrayana) refuses to even teach the topic! That's how bad it is.

So the whole point is that you want to cultivate mental emptiness through meditation - not mental suppression but the naturally empty but vibrant state. You also do not want to be focused on the body, its energy or energy flows, chakras, this or that. Attention on the body is just another way of clinging to form.

Lots of methods use different angles or avenues to get you to realize emptiness or 'see the Tao,' see the Way, and that's what you need to understand. A lot of routes are valid, but the majority that I see being taught today are wrong. It's almost as if the true dharma is non-existent anymore. If you can understand that, you're on your way to guiding yourself through correct principles of practice.

Unfortunately 'Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation' is out of print which explains all this and gives you 25+ different meditation methods to choose from. Unfortunately our video lessons are no longer available due to a technology issue, but if you want to learn more you can always turn to 'How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization' for a discussion of the correct principles of practice.

If you want to see how various religions and cultures have gone wrong in the past you can take a look at 'The Insider's Guide to the Best and Worst Spiritual Paths and Techniques' that Nan Huai-Chin produced in a series of lectures in Hong Kong. It's one of the best translations of his ideas available and it's fascinating to read **WHAT NOT TO DO** in your spiritual cultivation. Forget the chakras, chi channels, Taoist teachings and so forth. Most every school and its technique developed aberrations that were dismissed and discredited by enlightened sages - and Zen was no exception to this - so it's nice to know **WHAT NOT TO DO** from a definitive source.

The big thing I see today is such a lack of understanding of the basic principles like this that I just had to shoot off this email to you. It's so bad that I think I have to release the STAGES course in cassette tape form, so we'll work on that over the next few weeks.

The big summary of this whole lesson is as follows:

- 1) try to use at least 2 meditation methods, one you love and one you hate
- 2) try to practice meditation at least 45 minutes twice per day if you can
- 3) UNDERSTAND the target of practice is not thought suppression or realignment, but 'emptiness'
- 4) UNDERSTAND the principle by which the methods you are using work
- 5) don't focus on your body or bringing consciousness in your body, because consciousness is by nature non-local - and if you concentrate on physical form you'll likely go astray
- 6) all sorts of meditation methods produce supernormal results, but that doesn't mean the route that produces them is correct

If you can understand those principles, that's a lot. That's big headway.