

MEDITATION COURSE

Student handout

A brief history and theory of meditation

Meditation has been recorded in history for thousands of years dating back to ancient times.

Indian artefacts reveal the existence of a meditation called Tantra dating back 5000 years.

Archaeological research suggest that primitive hunting and gathering societies were the first to have discovered meditation and its many different states of consciousness while gazing into the flames of their fires.

The link between primitive cultures and meditative states is well supported by ancient forms of writing and artefacts that have been found and studied over time.

The history of meditation has evolved over thousands of years, into a structured practice that many people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds use daily to enhance their modern lives.

The Buddha is well known as one of the biggest meditation icons in both current and times past and dates back to 500 BC. Through the teachings of Buddha, followers were able to understand that one of the greatest achievements in life is the obtaining of enlightenment.

Through Buddhist Meditation techniques, practitioners are able to leave behind every day worries and concerns and instead turn their contemplation inwards to the core of their own being, or outwards, towards the contemplation of the greater world that surrounds them.

In either case, meditation became an integral part of Eastern religions many centuries ago and spread throughout the Asian continent.

After meditation became popular in the East, it still took thousands of years for it to spread to Western societies.

It wasn't until the mid-20th century that it finally started to gain popularity in the West. In the 1960s and 1970s many researchers and professors discovered the multitude of benefits that meditation had to offer as they began testing its effects.

Benefits include:

- Decreases the heart rate
- Decreases the respiratory rate
- Decreases blood pressure
- Decreases oxygen consumption
- Decreases muscle tension



It was discovered that meditation helps people achieve mental and physical balance. While it has taken several decades to gain acceptance in conventional medicine, it is now used routinely to treat a range of conditions including depression, stress and anxiety, sleep disorders, low self-esteem, and a range of emotional disorders.

Meditation is also used to assist to overcome addiction to smoking, alcohol and drugs, reduce blood pressure and minimize the symptoms of menopause and premenstrual syndrome, and a wide range of other diseases.

How does it work?

Meditation helps to lower the heart rate and blood pressure by slowing down breathing, which lowers the amount of oxygen needed for the body.

Mental processes are also slowed down, muscles relax and the body begins to function at a calmer and more natural level, which assists to relieve muscle pain, improves the function of the immune system and returns the entire body to its perfect natural balance.

Brain waves during meditation

The measurement of brain waves in meditation is a relatively recent development, as scientists endeavour to discover how this ancient practice can reduce stress, increase feelings of wellbeing, and benefit overall health.

During meditation, brain waves shift through different stages. The most common are **Alpha** waves, which cause calming changes in the autonomic nervous system.

Regular meditation reverses the roles of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems so that the normally dominant sympathetic nervous system takes a back seat to the normally secondary parasympathetic nervous system.

This lowers blood pressure and heart rate and lowers the amount of stress hormones in the body, as well as calming the mind.

Gamma brain waves also greatly increase during meditation. They signify intense focus and are usually weak and transient during normal brain activity.

This is an exciting discovery, as this area is often associated with decreased anxiety and fear, positive emotions, and a decrease in depressive feelings and symptoms (it's the happiness brain wave).

BASIC MEDITATION COURSE

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A brief history and theory of meditation

Theta brain waves during meditation are said to help open the "third eye" through which practitioners can gain illumination and wisdom.

In more practical terms, Theta brainwaves invoke a deep sense of relaxation and also encourage creativity and make problem solving and memorization easier. You experience this at times when you feel you are on auto pilot or 'zoned out'.

Delta brain waves are the slowest of all. Everyone experiences Delta waves during deep sleep, but Delta brain waves during meditation help the subconscious mind.

Benefits of meditation

The benefits of practicing meditation regularly are immense! Anyone can learn how to meditate, and it can be learned at almost any age. It can be practiced anywhere at any time, it is safe and it's free.

Meditation offers a drug-free and natural way to greatly improve and maintain mental, physical and emotional health.

Relaxation exercises

The muscle relaxation exercises you learn and practice throughout this course will help train your brain to recognise when your muscles are tense.

Many people are so used to having tight muscles all the time that they hardly know the difference between a tense and a relaxed muscle.

This exercise will also train you to automatically release muscle tension as soon as your brain detects it.

Guided creative visualisation

Guided visualisations are meditations that require you to use your imagination to create images and picture physical sensations in your mind.

You will be given a story line and suggestions by the person guiding the meditation.

Visualisations help teach your brain to switch off the chatter and focus. Sometimes called Guided Imagery, this style of meditation helps to develop creativity, heightens the senses, promotes positive thinking, and enhances the sensation of wellbeing.



Zen Meditation

Zen Meditation is the practice of calming your body and mind and opening yourself up to discovering insight into the nature of your being.

As you relax and close your mind to thought and images, after a period of time, your heart rate will slow, your breathing will become shallow, and you will pass into a reflective meditative state. It is very similar to Mindfulness Meditation.

In your practice of Zen Meditation, your mind is only in the moment; **the now**. You will not be thinking about the past or the future. You will not be thinking about how to get your work done or what you should have said to that guy who cut you off in the grocery line.

You will be thinking thoughts such as, "my nose is itching", "I can hear a bird" and "the sun on my back feels beautiful".

You are in the moment, only reacting to what is happening right **now**. If you think about this, you are not really thinking at all. You do not have thoughts. You are not having reflections about your life. You are simply being in and observing the moment.

Mastering the art of Zen Meditation takes practice so don't be too hard on yourself or expect amazing results too quickly. As you become more experienced it will become much easier and you will be able to reach a state of deep mediation quickly.

Meditation is fantastic!

Ancient people knew it, wise men and prophets throughout history have endorsed it, and science has proven its health-giving benefits.

Meditation is free to practice and available to all people, at any place and any time!

With routine practice it will make you healthier and happier.

Practice

Attending a regular meditation class is a great idea and you will certainly benefit from the meditations you learn and practice in your class.

However, if you are serious about improving your life through meditation you must also make time to practice regularly outside of your class.

Set aside at least 20 minutes a day for meditation. The results will be worth it a hundred times over.