

Mental Stillness

A beginner's guide to meditation

John Eden



WHRIA

Women's Health & Research
INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SO WHAT IS WHRIA?

INTRODUCTION

PREPARATION – GETTING READY

CENTERING – HOW TO BEGIN

Vocal chanting or repetition

Focused breathing

Silence – The meditative experience

A few words about peace

The meditative experience – what is it like?

“Awareness”

How long is enough?

Tips

Closure – at the end

Concluding remarks

Further reading

NOTES

SOME OF THE ISSUES WHRIA CAN HELP WITH

CONTACT DETAILS

SO WHAT IS WHRIA?

(pronounced wi-ree-a)

At WHRIA our aim is to improve your quality of life

Established in 2007, we are a group of caring professionals dedicated to improving women's health through care, research and education.

Our team works together to provide a world-class standard of care in **gynaecology**, **women's hormones** and **pelvic pain**.

We offer the support of pelvic floor physiotherapy, acupuncture, osteopathy, psychology and pain management to provide more choice for women and girls.

Our treatment and education is tailored to each woman, and you always play a large role in the decision-making process about your health.

"From discovery and research innovation to reality".



INTRODUCTION

There are many different meditative techniques available today. The purpose of this small booklet is to introduce you to a simple, generic meditative method that can be used by anyone.

It is common in our modern, very busy lives to have an incessant 'mind-chatter' which can be very distracting. If you have ever been awake in the middle of the night for more than a few minutes, you will have noticed this mind-chatter. The Eastern tradition calls this busy mind 'The monkey-in-the-tree,' or simply, the "monkey-mind".

Imagine a chattering monkey sitting in a tree. If you poke it, it continues to chatter.



If you ignore it, he eventually becomes silent. The mind is the same.



Many people have trouble going to sleep because their mind is so switched on. Meditation offers a simple, effective method for silencing this mind-noise. Research has shown that meditating for as little as 10-20 minutes once or twice a day can improve physical and mental health, and reduce stress.

So what exactly is meditation?

One simple definition is that meditation is a technique that involves focusing or concentrating on a word, group of words or a symbol to help induce mental silence.

There are many meditation techniques available and most of the great world religions have their own meditative traditions. All result in mental silence and a profound sense of peace, and often feelings of love and joy. It seems that everyone has a 'covered well of peace' within. Quiet meditation seems to 'uncover' this well of refreshing soul-water.

This guide will teach you a very simple method that produces results quickly and can be adapted to many forms of spirituality. However, you certainly do not need to have a spiritual framework to meditate and obtain the benefits of meditation.

I would like to describe four movements or steps for the meditative experience:

1. Preparation
2. Centering
3. Silence
4. Closure

PREPARATION – GETTING READY

First, you need to make some time available. I like to meditate first thing in the morning and in the middle of the day. It seems to set me up for the two halves of the day. When you are starting out, try meditating for 10 minutes in the morning.

Second, find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.

Third, sit in a comfortable chair. You don't have to adopt a special posture, although I would not suggest that you lie down or you are likely to fall asleep!

Fourth, loosen any tight clothing; perhaps take off your shoes and socks.

Lastly, for the first few sessions, set an alarm (on your phone for example) at 10 minutes, otherwise your mind-chatter might worry about the length of time that you have been meditating, for example "Is it over yet? Is it over yet?"

Choose a small word or very short statement to use as a focal point during your meditation. Don't use a long word or words. You don't want the words to be a distraction. Usually a short, small word is best. Some of my personal favourite focal words include – "peace," "be still," "love," and "nada" (Spanish for "nothing" and Croatian for "hope"). You don't have to stick with the same word each time. There are no rules here. For teaching purposes, I'm going to use "Peace" as the focal-word through the rest of this exercise.

CENTERING – HOW TO BEGIN

"Centering" means to focus your attention. There are several techniques. We will try two popular approaches - vocal chanting and focused breathing.

Vocal chanting or repetition

Close your eyes. Breathe normally. Repeat a series of statements softly out loud.

Examples include:

- a. "Peace, Peace, Peace" or "Love, Love, Love."
- b. A forgiveness statement eg. "I forgive. I forgive everyone and I forgive myself."
- c. A love statement eg. "I love. I love everyone, I love myself."
- d. A short prayer such as "Maranatha" ("Come Lord!" in Aramaic).
- e. A mindfulness statement eg. "The past is gone. The future is uncertain. The only moment that exists is now."

Focused breathing

Close your eyes. Breathe normally. As you exhale, quietly speak your focal-word out loud.

(Exhale) "Peace"

(Exhale) "Peace"

(Exhale) "Peace"

Both of these exercises can help you to ignore your mind-chatter and prepare you to enter into mental silence. When you first begin, you might spend several minutes centering yourself. With practice, you will find that you will only spend a few moments in this opening phase.

After a minute or two, don't use "Peace" constantly; rather the idea is to centre your attention on the word. The word, "Peace", should hover in your mind, something like background music. It is not there for you to listen to, rather to block out or blur other sounds and thoughts. For me, it is sort of like sucking a hard-lolly. It lasts longer and is more enjoyable if I suck the lolly intermittently rather than continuously.

Another approach is to use focused breathing but "say" the focal-word, "Peace," in silence. In other words, you "say" the word, "Peace," in your mind, rather than out loud. After a minute or two, let go of using "Peace," and enter into silence.

Silence – The meditative experience

To summarise so far, we have used a chant or a breathing exercise to centre ourselves. We have used a focus-word to distract ourselves from the thought-train. But our goal is complete mental silence. It may take time and practice to get to that place. Distractions are common. Try not to pay any attention to words images or sounds that pop into your mind. There are a couple of approaches you can use:

- ☉ Thought-train running through your head and, over time, it will retreat into the distance.
- ☉ Some find it helpful to focus on the spaces between the thoughts, but not focus on the thoughts themselves.
- ☉ Simply 'observe' your thoughts, noting them but not reacting to them. This can be quite enlightening as much human thought is negative.
- ☉ Hurtful past experiences that you may have buried, might "float to the top," during meditation. Some call this "evacuation." This is normal and common. Use a short phrase such as, "I choose to let that go" or "I forgive (name the person)" or "I forgive myself." Just say the phrase under your breath. Usually, the memory will return over the next few days and weeks, each time with less pain attached. Speak out your phrase again. Eventually, you can "touch" the memory without pain.
- ☉ If you are being overwhelmed by thoughts, use "Peace" to push them away but then try to return to silence.

Imagine that your mind is a great ocean with your thoughts as waves rushing over the surface. With time and practice, the thought-waves will disappear into the distant horizon, leaving behind quiet, flat waters.



With practice, over time, Silence will come. Be still, rest.



A few words about peace

Both meditation and peace can't be "done," rather they can only be experienced. Both silence and peace exist within the core of your being. They seem to be part of our default-setting. All you can do is let go of those things that "cover" that well of silence and peace. Thus as you let go of your thoughts, you discover silence. As you let go of hatred, unforgiveness and taking offence, you find peace has been there all the time.

Some great spiritual teachers use the analogy of dying to describe this process. By "dying to self", that is letting go of bad attitudes and distracting thoughts, you discover at your centre is a deep well of peace. You can't "do" peace. It is already inside you but by letting go of negative attitudes that are covering it, you reveal your well of peace. The ancient Greeks invented a word for this process – **kenosis** – which means to "empty out". The Spanish word, "Nada," might be helpful too. Be in bondage to "Nada," not anything in your mind or the world, and the result will be profound peace and freedom.

The meditative experience – what is it like?

Once you get to that place of silence, most people experience profound peace, whilst being fully alert. There is no loss of self, nor any loss of personality. In that place, you somehow know that everything will be alright. Many feel a deep sense of joy, acceptance, and / or being filled with love. Over time, many meditators describe feelings of love extending beyond them selves to those around them, nature and the world in general.

The meditative state is characterised by:

Profound peace and (hyper) awareness

And often:

Acceptance (it's all ok)

Joy

Love

“Awareness”

Another word that is often used in meditative literature is “aware.” As one begins to meditate, you start to become self-aware and so you might notice for the first time in your life how negative your thought life is. The “evacuation” process may be seen as you become aware of previously unconscious painful memories – and finally healing them. Over weeks and months, this self-awareness grows and then seems to extend beyond yourself to those people and things around you. It is not unusual to experience nature more profoundly or find yourself concerned for a neighbour and so on.

In the West, our mind naturally thinks dualistically, that is in black-and-white terms. However, with silence, paradox is often used to describe this state –

Silence and yet aware.

Emptiness and yet fullness.

Nothing and yet everything.

Alone and yet one with others.

How long is enough?

At first continue meditating until the alarm goes off at 10 minutes. Over time, see how long you can sit in silence. With practice you will find the right length of time you need. For many it seems to be around 15-30 minutes.

Tips

- Never strain your mind or use your imagination; you won't succeed in that way. Leave the mind and imagination at peace.
- When you become aware of your mind-chatter; return ever-so-gently to “Peace.” You might link the word “Peace” to your breathing again, just for a few seconds. Don't worry if distracting thoughts continue; rather focus on the meditation word. Then let go of the focus-word too and return to the silence.
- It is best to use “Peace” wholly interiorly (in your mind, not out loud) without a definite thought or actual sound.
- Distractions are common. Use “Peace” and you'll quickly return to deep meditation. If thoughts and images and feelings come into your mind, don't focus on them; rather ignore them.
- If your mind begins to intellectualize the meaning and connotations of the words, remind yourself that its value lies in its simplicity.
- Do not concern yourself with anything material or spiritual - abandon them all. It is common to have images come into your mind whilst meditating – sometimes really nice images. Even so, the purpose of the exercise is to learn stillness and so these images should be ignored.
- It is also common to feel profound peace during the meditation. You don't have to do anything during these times. In particular, you don't even have to use your focus-word – simply enjoy!
- If you get an itch somewhere, scratch it!

Closure – at the end

When you finish the session, open your eyes and let a minute or so roll by. Don't rush to leave. Let the feelings of peace linger before finally getting up. In some traditions, the session is ended with a short statement, affirmation or prayer. Some examples include:

- ☯ I am full of peace.
- ☯ I am full of light / love.
- ☯ Amen.
- ☯ May peace stay with me today.
- ☯ I will be a peacemaker this day.

Concluding remarks

Like any worthwhile exercise, you need time and practice. Start small; say ten minutes in the morning. In the first few weeks, you might spend most of the time doing the breathing exercise. That's ok! Even that exercise is quite relaxing. Within a few weeks, most people start to experience small episodes of stillness. Expect flashbacks to painful experiences of the past. That's normal. Let them go. Release them and so, heal the memories. More peace will flow into your life. These episodes can be like doing counselling on yourself, whilst deeply relaxed.

Over a couple of months, try to have two daily sessions of meditation. You will find more and more tranquillity flowing into your life. You will find that you won't get as angry or upset as quickly as before. You might even try meditating with a small group of people. There is often a dynamic operating here that produces even more peace.

This guide is for beginners. As you become more and more experienced, you'll find that you will be able to just "enter into stillness," without much effort and without the need for all the exercises outlined here. Feel free to explore the mystics in your own spiritual tradition, if you have one. To quote a modern day sage, "Go deep where you are." Remember, this small book is just an introduction to meditation. There is a lot of good material available. Some examples follow.

Further reading

Books

Silence your mind. Dr Ramesh Manocha. Hatchette, Australia.

Ramesh was my PhD student many years ago and his book is a great summary of the scientific basis of meditation. He continues to research meditation and its health benefits.


Mindfulness for Health: A practical guide to relieving pain, reducing stress and restoring wellbeing. Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman.

Mindfulness for Women: Declutter your mind, simplify your life, find time to 'be'. Vidyamala Burch & Claire Irvin.


See the WHRIA website Useful Publications & Links & Audio for a taste of the audio to guide you through the simple 8 week program.

Online

What 15 top meditation experts struggled with the most at the start. By Locke Hughes SMH 26/8/2015
Great article on the difficulties of getting started on meditation.

 <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/what-15-top-meditation-experts-struggled-with-the-most-at-the-start-20150826-gj7zl2.html>

Smiling Mind Website and Free App
Interesting web site on mindfulness and meditation for all ages.

 <http://smilingmind.com.au/>

Integral Life

Ken Wilber is a social scientist and philosopher who has studied many types of meditation as well as stages of human development. This piece is a good summary of Ken's view on the stages of the meditative experience.

 <https://www.integrallife.com/integral-post/stages-meditation>

NOTES

SOME OF THE ISSUES WHRIA CAN HELP WITH



Bladder and Bowel

- Bladder Pain Syndrome
- Constipation & Straining (adults and kids)
- Incontinence
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Prolapse



Hormones

- Menopause
- Osteoporosis
- PMS & PMDD
- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome



Fertility

- Asherman's Syndrome
- Contraception
- Pregnancy Planning & Support
- Mirena® fittings in our rooms



Pelvic Pain

- Endometriosis
- Painful Sex
- Period Pain
- Pudendal Neuralgia
- Vaginismus
- Vulvar Pain



Gynaecology

- Check ups
- Children & Teenagers
- Heavy Periods



WHRIA

Women's Health & Research
INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

**Level 12,
97-99 Bathurst Street
Sydney NSW 2000**

T 1300 722 206

F 8021 1244

Suite 7, Level 3,
19 Kensington Street
Kogarah NSW 2216

Suite 30, Level 7, Prince of Wales
Private Hospital, Barker St,
Randwick NSW 2031

www.whria.com.au

E info@whria.com.au

ABN: 68 128 148 103