

MEDITATION

Opening to Grace

About Meditation

Meditation is the disciplined observation of thoughts, feelings, impulses, and sensations as well as the spontaneous turning of heart and mind toward a presence beyond the ordinary self. By combining “self-observation” with what is sometimes called “contemplative prayer,” in meditation you can contact new depths of being, awareness, and delight.

Meditation deepens an awareness that transcends your ordinary functioning. As you continue meditating, you realize that you are more than any mental picture, more than any emotion, more than any impulse, more than any bodily process, more than any pattern of experience with which you typically identify. That “something more,” you will find, brings an unshakable security, freedom and delight.

The all-encompassing embrace of meditation helps sustain a radical renewal of your entire organism. Because it transcends your particular parts, it helps you rise above the many obstacles to growth we encounter. In the course of meditation, many people experience a gratitude for life that impels them to commune with a higher power. The sense of blessedness that deep meditation bestows turns the heart toward the source of things. Meditation naturally turns to that source, asking for nothing more than loving contact with it.

Practice Meditation

Posture. Assume a sitting position with back straight, on a floor cushion with your legs crossed or in a chair. An erect sitting posture, either on a cushion that elevates your seat from the ground or in a straight-backed chair, will help you remain alert. During meditation, a good physical attitude facilitates a good psychological attitude. An alert but relaxed posture tends to produce an alertly poised state of mind. In this, the body and inner life mirror one another.

Relaxed Focus. Place your attention a few feet in front of you. Do not stare or strain to concentrate. Instead, maintain a relaxed focus, as if you were gazing into at a gentle stream. This style of attention, this soft downward look, is not as fatiguing as staring. It also helps to keep your mind from drifting. You can also meditate with eyes closed.

Breathing. When your posture is comfortable, let your belly expand. Make sure that your breath is not confined to your chest. Full, relaxed respiration, in which both the lower and upper abdomen are involved, is more conducive to meditation than constricted breathing, which typically causes or is caused by anxiety. Anchor your attention in the rise and fall of your breath. Focus on your lower abdomen and return to it whenever your mind wanders.

Awake and Aware. As your posture, gaze, and respiration join to form a state of alert relaxation, remain calmly present to your stream of consciousness, to both its familiar and unfamiliar patterns. Do not judge yourself, for in meditation of this kind there is no “good” or “bad.” You are simply deepening your self-awareness, whatever it brings to light. You are getting more intimate with yourself. You are gently exercising new control of your mind and exploring new depths of your body and soul.