



MEDITATION MATTERS

Meditation helps us be more skilful at living in the present.

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Brain imagery shows some of the biological changes that occur in people who meditate regularly. It seems that meditation enables the brain to literally re-wire itself in positive ways and that negative patterns of emotional reactions diminish. This demonstrates that it's not only the physical body that has a naturally tendency to heal; our minds are likewise designed to relinquish unuseful patterns that are not borne of our essential nature. In meditation we literally loosen our attachment to our second nature, our acquired nature ~ the overlaid patterning of the past ~ and experience the truth of our consciousness or first nature.

Meditation has no particular religious connection though the mystics of every great religion practise it in some form. Its practice creates the rich possibility for experiencing all that is sacred within and around us. It is the state in which we directly experience our true nature, our essence, our consciousness, our connection to the creative spirit.

You have very likely experienced it without being aware that it was called meditation. You might have many such memories or you might have to dig deep, perhaps back to childhood to remember these luminous moments; when the mind is bypassed and beauty, joy, love, a sense of union with all things or a profound moment of peace and realisation strike us. These glimpses of a more fully alive state of awareness stir us in our depths. We yearn for the experience of being rapturously alive. We can all actively work towards living in that conscious awareness.

Meditation becomes a way of life, not just a formal practice once or more a day. We can live each moment of our lives, consciously aware of all that surrounds us and is within us. From this serene state, we respond open-heartedly, moment-by-moment to life's encounters. This is living in heaven.

We don't meditate to become fabulous mediators'. We meditate so that we are more easily able to liberate ourselves from the judgments, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and patterns that would keep us bound to the past and because it helps us to become more skilful at living in the present.

Regular meditation practice enables us to live with more clarity and choice. It is simple to practice and it establishes a foundation from which we create our lives.

Much of our life is spent taking on more information, more identities and more learning. We so often identify who we are by what we do; 'I am an old person, a young person, a mother or father, a teacher, a plumber, a professional, a technician, a doctor' ~ believing that our value lies in these accumulations of 'doing' rather than



simply in our 'being'. In meditation, we find our human 'being' beyond our human 'doing'.

Human endeavour and achievement is often brought about through struggle, strain and tension whereas in meditation we relax into a deeper sense of ourselves. Meditation is the process of unlearning, of letting go these false identities, the accumulated information we've gathered about ourselves.

The regular practice of meditation gives us greater presence of mind. With presence of mind comes the possibility of choice: we can continue to *react* to the events of our lives from our unprocessed emotional history or make a more appropriate *response*. Until we are present, aware, awake we don't see the choice, we simply react. It is liberating when we react less to events in our lives and have a greater ability to respond to them instead.

'Presence of mind' is that state of being when the mind is present to what 'is' rather than caught up in the inner world of idle mental chatter. You are not your mind. You are more than a mind. Our responsibility is to quieten the mind so that we can hear the voice of our intuition. Otherwise, the mind is forever jumping five seconds, minutes, weeks, months or years into the future or into the past.

Meditation liberates us from these thoughts and feelings as we develop our ability to witness and release them, but not react *from* them. In this way, we choose new and more appropriate responses to life situations.

Whilst your mind is often absorbed in the future or in the past, your body is always in the present. One of the most effective ways of bringing your mind to rest is to focus on the senses of your body. Do this simple practice now while you're reading these words.

Take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths. As you exhale, feel your body soften and relax. Become aware of your weight and posture. Feel the pressure of the chair against your body, the floor against your feet or whatever your body might be in contact with. Become aware of the space between your feet and the floor. Feel the touch of your clothing against your skin. Notice its texture and the temperature your clothing helps create. Feel the touch of the air against your hands, your cheeks. Become aware of all the sounds within and outside the space you're in ~ not judging, labelling or resisting anything, simply allowing every sound to be heard ~ to come to pass. Let your listening travel right out until you hear the silence beyond all sound. This state, where the mind is at rest is what we're aiming to achieve by focusing it in the present moment.

The more present we are to our own lives, embracing each moment without judgment, the more alive we become. Connecting with the senses of the body can become our constant practice. The mind is forever projecting into the world of 'what isn't' by projecting into the future which hasn't happened yet, or rehashing, resenting or reliving the past which we cannot change, whilst our bodies are immersed in the world of 'what is'.



Meditation gives us greater access to our intuition. Access to our intuition is available to everyone who brings the mind to rest. Intuition only functions when the mind is quiet. The chemical and electrical state of the brain when the mind is quiet makes it available and receptive to information from within and around itself. The chemical and electrical state of the brain when the mind is agitated makes it impossible for our intuition to function.

In time, meditation enables us to live by our intuition. Then we know effortlessly what to do, how to be, where to go, when to speak, when to reach out and touch, when not to, when to stay silent, when to use humour, when to stay with the anguish and say nothing and so on. Intuition is our greatest guide for living skilfully on the planet. It is the voice of our creative essence.

In meditation, as the mind quiets and becomes more peaceful, so your body relaxes. Meditation is the state of simply being. It has no religious connections, though it may be a profoundly spiritual experience. We see the benefits of meditation in our lives through increased clarity, joy, spontaneity, creativity, wisdom, love, confidence, vitality and humour.

Just as there are the chemicals and hormones of stress, so too, our bodies secrete beneficial chemicals when we experience contentment, peace, joy, love and bliss. When the mind is anxious or stressed, our bodies secrete many chemicals and hormones into the blood stream. These inhibit the natural functions of our bodies decreasing the activities of some whilst increasing the activities of others. In this way, we significantly contribute to our physical health.

Your mind is not separate from your body. Your emotions are not separate from your body. As human beings we're an integrated whole. The beliefs and thoughts that we hold in our minds affect the functioning of our bodies. The feelings that we have, whether acknowledged or ignored, have an effect on our bodies. They are our experience of reality and therefore are real for us. Therefore each person's reality is unique to them.

We all have the capacity to change the beliefs that our mind holds dear. This gives us a tremendous point of power in that we can change the beliefs that cause us stress, depression, fear, resentment, hopelessness, powerlessness, frustration into those which lay down the foundations for greater peace, fulfilment and joy in our lives. This choice is unique to human kind.

One of the most powerful tools for change is meditation. There are many techniques of meditation that different people promote. Some believe theirs is the best or the highest! The best technique is the one that works for you. There is no right technique, no higher or lower technique, nor is there one teacher. There are as many techniques and teachers as there are people. Allow yourself the freedom to find the right technique and teacher that works for you. The technique is not meditation. It is the tool we use to lead us into the state of meditation.

Meditation is like relaxation for the mind. It is very simple. Just as we bring our awareness to the various muscles in our body and allow them to soften and relax, so we observe the thoughts and feelings, which pass through our mind, through our



body. Observe and let go. Not holding on to thoughts or feelings, not adding to them, not judging them, not resisting them, just observe, and let go.

If we're to experience our own creative source, we need to return to the stillness that is beyond the mind's activity. This silent observer witnesses without judgement, without comment, without preference, without resistance and without aversion. The practice of meditation involves the conscious witnessing of our mind's activity. As soon as we become aware that our consciousness is absorbed by the mind, we let go the thought, the image, the feeling and return to witnessing.

The clarity and peace in your mind *after* meditation is what your practice is aiming to achieve. It is this calm and centred state of mind that we continue to practice and prolong so that it infuses every moment of our day. The result of regular meditation is a profoundly heightened awareness in daily life. The richness it brings to our everyday experience is a treasure beyond words and should we lose it even momentarily, it is sorely missed.

A Zen disciple asks his master, 'Master how do you put enlightenment into action? How do you practice it in everyday life?' The master replied, 'By eating and by sleeping.' 'But master', the disciple said, 'everybody sleeps and every body eats.' The master replied, 'But not everybody eats when they eat and not everybody sleeps when they sleep.'

An excerpt from Petrea's forthcoming book, *Your Life Matters ~ Practical Spirituality in Times of Change* to be published in early 2004.