

Meditation & Deep Relaxation

In a clean spot, having fixed his seat – a firm seat, neither too high nor too low – and having spread over it kusa-grass and then a deer skin, and then a cloth,

And sitting there, he should practice yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6 – The Way of Meditation, Verses 11-12, Translation by Swami Nikhilananda

Why Should I Meditate?

by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

Meditation gives you something that nothing else can:

It introduces you to yourself on all levels.

Meditation will bring you:

- Peace of mind, calmness, and a sense of well being
- Better relationships, better health, and a better life
- Personal, philosophical, and spiritual insights
- The direct experience of your eternal center of being

The benefits of meditation are your birthright, whether you are Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Taoist, follow some other religion, or none at all.

How to Sit for Meditation

Sitting on a Cushion

- Elevate the hips higher than the knees. The spine will naturally lengthen.
- Knees should touch the ground, creating a tripod effect between the knees and pelvis.
- If one or both knees don't come to the ground, place a block or cushion under the knee(s) for support.
- Allow enough space and cushion so the ankles can maintain circulation.
- Sit in a way where you can maintain a slight curve to the lower back.



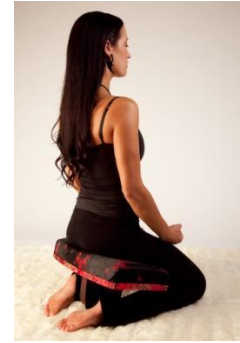
Sitting on a Chair

- Sit with the hips higher than the knees. Use a cushion to elevate the hips, if necessary.
- If the feet are dangling, rest them on a cushion, stool, etc.
- Sit toward the front of the chair with the lower back unsupported. If you need to lean back, use a cushion to support the lower back, leaving the upper back free.



Sitting on a Meditation Bench

- A blanket or cushion under the bench will ease strain on the knees.
- It may be more comfortable to let the toes rest over the edge of the cushion to maintain circulation in the ankles.
- Sit in a way where you maintain a slight curve to the lower back.



Further suggestions and pointers:

- Gently press through the crown of the head, lengthening the spine. Then relax.
- Keep the chin parallel to the floor. Some people notice when the chin lifts they tend to space out and when it drops, sleepiness comes!
- Let the hands rest comfortably. If the weight of the arms pulls the shoulders forward, rest the hands on a blanket on your lap.
- Experiment with different variations and styles to find out what works best for your body.
- If you are new to sitting, or sitting for long periods of time, you will naturally fatigue the core muscle that support you in sitting up straight. Persistent practice and core strengthening exercises will help you to sit for longer periods with less strain. This takes time and practice.
- In meditation we are constantly challenging ourselves to be present. Mindfulness of unpleasant sensations is part of our practice. At the same time, listen to and honor your body's signals for rest, stretching, trying different posture variations, and taking breaks.
- **No posture will render you pain-free, but finding a supportive posture can help avoid unnecessary discomfort.**

The above article is from Meditation for Dummies.

Defining Meditation

What Meditation Isn't: falling asleep, zoning out, spacing out, daydreaming

What Meditation Can Be:

"Meditation refers to a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" - Walsh & Shapiro (2006)

"The term 'meditation' is used to describe practices that self-regulate the body and mind, thereby affecting mental events by engaging a specific attentional set.... regulation of attention is the central commonality across the many divergent methods" - Cahn & Polich (2006)

"We define meditation... as a stylized mental technique... repetitively practiced for the purpose of attaining a subjective experience that is frequently described as very restful, silent, and of heightened alertness, often characterized as blissful" - Jevning et al. (1992)

"The need for the meditator to retrain his attention, whether through concentration or mindfulness, is the single invariant ingredient in... every meditation system" - Goleman (1988)

Styles of Meditation

Now that you know how to sit, what are you going to "do" for your meditation? You've got lots of options. There are myriad techniques you can use for meditation and many schools of meditation. Just Google it! Here are a few popular styles of meditation:

Meditation from the Yoga Tradition

Yoga Meditation is the art and science of systematically observing, accepting, understanding, and training each of the levels of our being, such that we may coordinate and integrate those aspects of ourselves, and dwell in the direct experience of the center of consciousness. Yoga Meditation is not a separate aspect of Yoga, due to the fact that Yoga is meditation. However, the phrase Yoga Meditation is being used here to discriminate between Yoga Meditation and the now popular belief that Yoga is about physical postures. Yoga or Yoga Meditation is a complete process unto itself, only a small, though useful part of which relates to the physical body. - Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati



Transcendental Meditation

The Transcendental Meditation technique is based on the ancient Vedic tradition of enlightenment in India. This knowledge has been handed down by Vedic masters from generation to generation for thousands of years. About 50 years ago, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi — the representative in our age of the Vedic tradition — introduced Transcendental Meditation to the world, restoring the knowledge and experience of higher states of consciousness at this critical time for humanity. Learn more at www.tm.org.

Meditation Styles from the Buddhist Tradition

- Vipassana Meditation

Vipassana, which means to see things as they really are, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was rediscovered by Gotama Buddha more than 2500 years ago and was taught by him as a universal remedy for universal ills. Vipassana is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. It focuses on the deep interconnection between mind and body, which can be experienced directly by disciplined attention to the physical sensations that form the life of the body, and that continuously interconnect and condition the life of the mind. It is this observation-based, self-exploratory journey to the common root of mind and body that dissolves mental impurity, resulting in a balanced mind full of love and compassion. Vipassana has been secularized into what is commonly referred to as Mindfulness Meditation. It is also sometimes referred to as Insight Meditation.

- o **Vipassana Teachers:** Goenka, Jack Kornfield, Tara Brach (Insight Meditation)

- Zen Meditation

Zazen (translation – “seated meditation”) is considered the heart of Zen Buddhist practice. The aim of zazen is just sitting - suspending all judgmental thinking and letting words, ideas, images and thoughts pass by without getting involved in them. Generally speaking, it is taught in 3 ways: concentration, introspection on a Koan (a story, dialogue, question), and just sitting.

- o **Zen Teachers:** Thich Nhat Hanh

- Metta (loving-kindness) Meditation

The Pali word 'Metta' is commonly translated in English as 'loving-kindness.' Metta signifies friendship and non-violence as well as "a strong wish for the happiness of others." Metta is, in fact, a very specific form of love -- a caring for another independent of all self-interest -- and thus is likened to one's love for one's child or parent. Understandably, this energy is often difficult to describe with words; however, in the

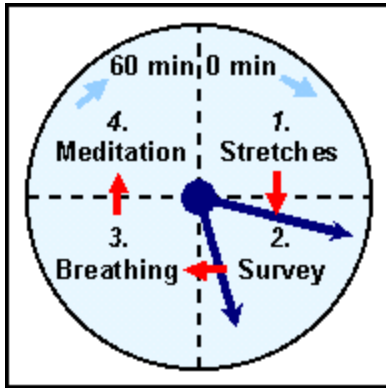
practice of Metta meditation, one recites specific words and phrases in order to evoke this "boundless warm-hearted feeling." The strength of this feeling is not limited to or by family, religion, or social class.

- **Metta Teachers:** Sharon Salzberg, Thich Nhat Hanh

What is Yoga Meditation?

by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

Yoga meditation is a systematic process, in which you work with the grosser, or more external aspects of your being, and then move inward, doing the more subtle practices, which gently brings you to meditation.



The specific stretches or postures, survey or relaxation methods, breathing practices, and types of meditation will also vary, depending on your level of expertise and predispositions.

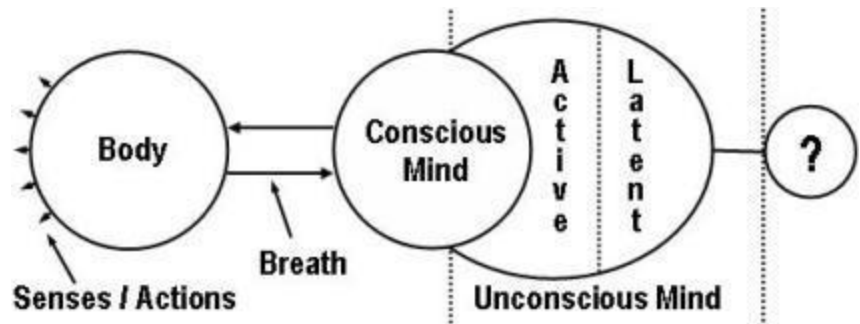
The amount of time spent with each of the practices may vary, depending on your own training and predispositions. The total length of practice (all four) may also vary (The 60-minute clock in the picture above is just an example).

Whichever practices are done, and however the time is divided, practicing in this systematic way will definitely provide a deeper and richer meditation.

Yoga Meditation of the Himalayan Tradition

In the Yoga Meditation of the Himalayan tradition, one systematically works with senses, body, breath, the various levels of mind, and then goes beyond, to the center of consciousness. The science of Yoga Meditation as taught by the Himalayan sages is already a whole, complete science that has been torn into smaller pieces over time. Individual parts have sometimes (unfortunately) been cut out from the whole of Yoga Meditation, given separate names, and then taught as unique systems of meditation.

The perspective of Yoga Meditation on the SwamiJ.com site is that it is not a pasting together of disparate Yogas, but an already unified whole that we might call Yoga Meditation, or simply Yoga.



Yoga Meditation of the Himalayan tradition is holistic in that it not only deals systematically with all levels, but also involves a broad range of practices, including meditation, contemplation, prayer, and mantra, as well as the preparatory practices leading up to these. Yoga Meditation

also explores all of the levels of reality and self-construction, including the gross (vaishvanara), subtle (taijasa), causal (prajna), and the absolute (turiya), as reflected in OM Mantra.

Finally, Yoga Meditation leads one to the direct experience of the absolute, pure, eternal center of consciousness.

The root meaning of Yoga Meditation lies in the meaning of the word Yoga itself, which comes from "yuj" which means "to join," to bring together the aspects of yourself that were never divided in the first place. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is a primary source of learning the practices of Yoga Meditation. The finer points of Yoga Meditation are described and taught face-to-face, as it is an oral tradition.

In the Himalayan tradition, Yoga Meditation is not limited to just the Yoga Sutras, but also includes Vedanta and internal Tantra, while also acknowledging that the practices are also contained in many other sources. The teachers of the Himalayan tradition may emphasize or draw on some of these (or other) sources more or less than others, matching the teachings with the student. Yoga Meditation also involves the process of Kundalini Awakening.

Yoga Meditation is not a religion, although some of the principles are contained within the various religions.

Preparation for the Steps of Meditation

1. Prepare the body physically. Bathe or wash your face, hands, and feet. Empty the bowels and bladder. Have a regular time and place. Establish a lifestyle conducive to meditation.
2. Before doing the actual meditation sequence of stretches, survey, breathing, and meditation, it is most useful to spend some amount of time practicing contemplation, prayer, and/or mantra. This pre-meditation time is also an excellent time to reflect on your day, relationships, priorities in life, and reinforcing your commitment to your spiritual practices. This is a process of internal dialogue, a positive way of self-discussion; it is a two-sided communication with yourself, a dialogue, not just a one-sided monologue, or chattering of the mind.

The 4 Steps of Meditation

1. Stretches or Hatha Yoga postures

First, do a few simple stretches, or do hatha yoga postures, or do some other form of exercise to loosen the body. Be sure to stay well within your own comfortable capacity. (Within the Yoga

system of meditation, the hatha postures are very useful as preparation for meditation, though not absolutely necessary when one wants only to sit for meditation.)

2. Survey of body or Relaxation

Next, do some form or relaxation exercise, such as Tension/Release, Complete Relaxation, or 61-Points. [or Yoga Nidra.] Become an explorer, an interior researcher, doing these practices as if you are really curious about knowing yourself at all levels. In a sense, this stage is actually the beginning of meditation (#4), in that you are meditating on the various aspects of the body. One very simple, straightforward way to do this is to simply sit still, without moving, being aware of your ability to move, but that you are not using that ability. Many sensations and thought patterns will naturally arise and pass as you do this.

3. Breathing or Pranayama

Next, after the Stretches and Surveying, then regulate your breathing, starting with breath awareness, diaphragmatic breathing, spinal breathing, and alternate nostril breathing. Learn to practice breath awareness in both seated and in corpse postures. Eliminate jerks and pauses, and allow the breath to be quiet and not shallow. Later, you may add energizing practices such as bhastrika and kapalabhati. After working with the body and breath in these ways, the mind wants only to go inside for meditation.

4. Meditation itself

After the Stretches, Survey, and Breathing comes Meditation itself. For meditation, first learn to meditate on feeling the touch of breath as it flows in and out of the nostrils, learning to let thoughts come and go. Gradually, allow the conscious mind to still itself. You may wish to use a mantra or sacred word, or some other object of focus (The Soham mantra naturally flows with the breath). Later, learn to examine the unconscious while remaining undisturbed, unaffected, and uninvolved.

After learning to meditate on breath, then add meditation in the space between the breasts or eyebrows, depending on your predisposition either for emotions and feelings, or for thoughts and thinking. Follow your predisposition for either listening into the silence for the source of all sound, or watching into the darkness for the source of all light, that which is the source of the part of yourself that declares, "I am".

There are a variety of other categories, objects, or methods of meditation to explore as well within the Yoga system of meditation. Each of them brings progress on the path.



Attention

The process of Attention moving inward moves through stages:

- 1. Dharana, or concentration:** The effort to repeatedly bring the attention to that one point of focus, while learning to remain undisturbed by the activities of the world, the sensations of the body (though this exploration is a preliminary practice), and the many other streams of the mind (though these are also explored in the purifying process).
- 2. Dhyana, or meditation:** When the attention remains on that one point of focus for a sustained period of time, or said differently, when the same object repeatedly arises in attention, without other intervening thoughts capturing attention, this is called meditation.
- 3. Samadhi, or absorption:** With concentration (dharana) and meditation (dhyana), there are three things: 1) observer, 2) process of observing, and 3) object that is being observed. With deep absorption, or samadhi, it is as if these three collapse into only one, the object. It is as if there is no longer an observer and a process of observing; there is only the object of observation. The three have merged into one, unbroken experience.

Tips on Meditation (from Sri Dharma Mittra)

1. Sit in a positive place which is clean and free of clutter.
2. Light incense to purify the Astral plane.
3. It is best to have a corner of the house reserved for concentration and meditation. Do not practice in the kitchen, as thoughts of food may arise in the mind and disturb practice. A church, temple, or synagogue or shrine is an excellent place to practice, as it is a place where many people come to pray and the associated devotional vibrations infuse every nook and cranny.
4. It is best to meditate at the same time every day.
5. Later, with practice, one should be able to concentrate at any time one desires.
6. To insure success when practicing with seed or focusing on an external object, choose one that attracts the mind and work with it for 30 consecutive days.
7. If possible, meditate for four sittings a day: one during the "hour of Brahma," one at midday, one in the late afternoon, and one an hour before retiring for the evening.
8. Start with 5-10 minutes at each sitting.
9. The best time to do sadhana is between 4:00 am and 6:00 am. This two-hour period is known as Brahmamuhurta, or the Hour of Brahma, and is the most sattvic time of day. The mind is calm upon waking and one slips easily into meditation. Do not think that sleep is being sacrificed, as mediation imparts far greater benefits than sleep.
10. The more one practices, the faster progress is made. It is entirely due to the great effort applied to Hatha Yoga sadhana that one will achieve success in meditation.

Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana & Samadhi

most excerpts are from Raja Yoga by Swami Sivananda, unless noted otherwise.

Pratyahara (sensory-withdrawal), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (absorption) are the last 4 steps of the Ashtanga (8-limbed) Path. They are sometimes referred to as “Raja Yoga” – royal yoga.”

Pratyahara

Pratyahara, or abstraction, is that by which the senses do not associate with their own objects and imitate, as it were, the nature of the mind-stuff (Chitta). PYS II.54

Pratyahara is abstraction. It is the withdrawal of the Indriyas (senses) from the objects. The senses are assimilated in the mind, which is rendered pure through the practice of Yama, Niyama, [Asana], and Pranayama. The mind becomes more calm now. The nature of the Indriyas is to always have connection with the objects. When the vision is turned outward, the rush of fleeting events engages the mind. The outgoing energies of the mind begin to play. When they are obstructed by the practice of Pratyahara, the other course for them is to mix with the mind and to be absorbed into the mind.

Pratyahara itself is termed as Yoga, as it is the most important Anga in Yoga Sadhana. This is the fifth rung in the Yogic ladder. The first four rungs deal with ethical training and purification of body, mind and Nadis. Now, with pratyahara, proper Yoga begins, which eventually culminates in Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi.

Thence (from the practice of Pratyahara), comes the supreme mastery over the senses. PYS II.55.

Yogins enjoy sound, etc., without Raga (attachment) and Dvesha (aversion). Worldly persons enjoy sound, etc., with Raga & Dvesha. This is the difference. The Yogi, not becoming a slave of the Vishayas (objects) enjoys as a master out of his own free will. The Indriyas cannot grasp the objects even though they are placed before them. This is “Indriya Jaya.”

There is a difference between control and supreme control. By controlling one Indriya alone, the other four will not come under your control. When the mind is rendered pure and one-pointed, and when it is turned inwards towards the Purusha (Self), then and then alone supreme control of all organs follows.

He who has practiced Pratyahara can have good concentration and meditation. His mind is always peaceful. This demands patience and constant practice. It takes some years before one is well-established in Pratyahara. He who has mastery over Pratyahara will never complain of distraction of the mind. He can sit in a place in a busy city where four roads meet and meditate



whenever he likes. He does not want a cave for meditation. Just as the tortoise draws in on all sides its limbs, so also, the Yogi withdraws all his senses from the objects of sense through the practice of Pratyahara. When the Indriyas are withdrawn from the objects, then you can fix the mind on a particular point (concentrate). Dharana (concentration) and Pratyahara are interdependent. You cannot practice one without the other.

Techniques to help achieve Pratyahara

Observation of Sensory Stimuli:

Mouna:

Dharana

Dharana, or concentration, is the fixing of the mind on one place (object or idea). PYS

III-1

Dharana is the fixing of the mind on something external or internal. The mind can be fixed externally on the picture of Lord Hari, Lord Krishna, or Lord Rama or on any other object or point. Internally it can be fixed on any Chakra or any part of the body or on any abstract idea. Having controlled the Pranaya through Pranayama and the Indriyas through Pratyahara, you should try to fix the mind on something. In Dharana you will have only one Vritti or wave in the mind-lake. The mind assumes the form of only one object. All other operations of the mind are suspended or stopped.

Pranayama steadies the mind, removes the Vikshepa (distractions) and increases the power of concentration. Fixing the mind on something is Dharana. Dharana can be done only if you are free from the distractions of the mind.

*His (he who concentrates) power extends from the
finest atom to the greatest infinity. PYS I-40*

The mind can easily meditate by steady practice on the most minute as well as the biggest object. This is the proper test for concentration. He has mastery in concentration starting from the smallest of atoms to infinity. He has full concentration. He does not want any more practice.

He who practices concentration will possess a very good health and very cheerful mental vision. Through concentration you will get penetrative insight. Subtle esoteric meanings will flash out in the field of mental consciousness. You will understand the inner depths of philosophical significance when you read the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads with concentration. Those who practice concentration evolve quickly. They can do any work with greater efficiency. What others can do in six hours can be done within half an hour.

Concentration purifies and calms the surging emotions, strengthens the current of thought, and clarifies the ideas. Concentration keeps a man in his material progress also. He will have a very good out-turn of work in his office. What was cloudy and hazy before becomes clearer and definite; what was difficult before becomes easy now; and what was complex, bewildering and confusing before, comes easily within the mental grasp. You can achieve anything through concentration. Nothing is impossible for one who practices regular concentration.

Dharana Techniques

Dharana on Sense Perception

Or, by the practice of concentration on higher sense perceptions brought about by the enjoyment of senses, causes steadiness of mind. PYS I.35

For example, concentrate at the tip of the nose, the tip of the tongue, the palate, the middle of the tongue, the root of the tongue, etc.

Dharana on Saatvic Mind

*Or, by concentration on the Supreme, ever-blissful Light within.
PYS I.36 (Satchidananda translation)*

Dharana on the Desireless Mind

Or, on the mind that is free from desire for objects. PYS I.37

For example, Mahatma Gandhi, Lord Jesus, Buddha, etc.

Dharana on the Knowledge of Dream



Or, concentration on the knowledge of dream and sound sleep. PYS I.38

Dharana on Any Chosen Object:

Or, by meditating on one's own chosen object. PYS I.39

Japa (repetition) of OM:

Candle Flame Trataka:

Beautiful Flower Trataka:

Om Symbol Trataka:

Dhyana

A continuous flow of perception (or thought) is Dhyana (meditation). PYS III.2

There is a continuous current in the mind of one object like the flow of water in a river. There is only one Vritti in the mind. The meditation should be done at the appointed time daily. Then the meditative mood will come by itself without any effort. Sit also in the same place daily for meditation.

Tips on Dhyana (from Swami Sivananda)

1. Meditation is difficult. It will be very difficult, nay indeed impossible, for a beginner to take to subtle meditation all at once. There must be graduated practices and the mind must be rendered very subtle for higher practices of concentration and meditation. Just as the archer first aims at gross things, target, etc., and then takes to subtle points, so also the student of Yoga should do gross concentration to start with and then take to subtle concentration practices. There must be a gradual ascent in the successive stages of Yoga.

2. Why do you read many books? It is of no use. The great book is within your heart. Open the pages of this inexhaustible book, the Source for all knowledge. You will know everything. What is that knowledge of Brahman or the Source or Self? Close your eyes. Withdraw the senses. Merge deep in the Supreme Soul, the Light of lights, the Sun of suns. Complete knowledge will be revealed to you. All doubts will vanish now. All mental torments will disappear. All hot discussions, heated debates will terminate now. Peace alone will remain.
3. Forget the body. Forget the surroundings. Forget friends and relatives. Forgetting these is the highest Sadhana and it helps meditation a great deal. By remembering God you can forget all these things. Merge within by practicing deep, silent meditation.
4. You will have to note carefully whether you remain stationary in the spiritual path even after many years of meditation – or whether you are progressing. Sometimes you may even retrograde or fall downwards if you are not vigilant and careful, if your Vairagya (detachment) wanes and if you are slack in meditation.
5. When you advance in the spiritual practice, it will be very difficult for you to do both meditation and office work at the same time daily because the mind will undergo a double strain.
6. When you sit again for meditation in the evening, you will have to struggle hard to wipe out the new worldly Samskaras you have gathered during the course of the day, and to get a calm, one-pointed mind again. This struggle sometimes brings on a headache.
7. It would seem, therefore, that advanced Yogic students will have to stop all worldly activities for some time as they advance in meditation, if they desire to advance further. They themselves will be forced to give up all works if they are really sincere. Work is a hindrance in meditation for advanced Yogic students. That is the reason why Lord Krishna says in the Gita: “For a sage who is seeking Yoga, action is called the means, for the same sage when he is enthroned in Yoga serenity is called the means.” Then work and meditation become incompatibles like acid and alkalis or fire and water or light and darkness.

Dhyana Techniques (from Sri Dharma Mittra)

Eternal Question Meditation

Positive Quality Meditation

Third-Eye Meditation



Spiritual Heart Meditation

So-Hum Meditation

Study of the Self – as described in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, verses 11-15. Translation by Swami Nikhilananda.

11. *In a clean spot having fixed his seat – a firm seat, neither too high nor too low – and having spread over it kusa grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth,*
12. *And sitting there, he should practice yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point.*
13. *He should sit firm, holding his body, neck, and head erect and still, and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose, without looking around.*
14. *Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vow of brahmachari, disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal.*
15. *Keeping himself ever steadfast in this manner, the yogi of subdued mind attains the Peace abiding in Me-the Peace that culminates in Nirvana.*

A Higher Hum: Breath and Mantra Meditation

The following meditation is based upon the mantra “so hum,” (“I am that”) used within the traditions of Tantra and Vedanta. By Shiva Rea

Mantra, the chanting of sacred words or sounds, is a central part of yogic meditation. Mantra comes from the combination of two syllables: “man,” meaning “to reflect” or “be aware,” and “tra,” meaning “tool for” or “agent of.” A mantra is a tool for reflection and the cultivation of awareness, and is used for both concentration and contemplation on the Source.

Within yoga, mantras are based upon sounds that reflect the energy of our divine nature. Om is considered to be the universal, consummate mantra. The following meditation is based upon the mantra “so hum,” (“I am that”) used within the traditions of Tantra and Vedanta. Since “so hum” also indicates the sound of the breath, it is a mantra that repeats itself effortlessly.

Find a comfortable posture for meditation (seated on a cushion or blanket, in a chair or against a wall). Place your palms facing up in jnana mudra (forefinger and thumb touching) with your



palms facing up to open your awareness or facing down to calm the mind. Scan your body and relax any tension. Let your spine rise from the ground of the pelvis. Draw your chin slightly down and let the back of your neck lengthen.

Bring your attention to the tidal rhythm of your breath, feeling the rise and fall of your inhalation and exhalation. As your focus settles on your breath, begin to employ the simple mantra “so hum.” As you inhale, say “so” silently to yourself, and as you exhale say “hum.” Keep your focus on the sensation of your breath while silently repeating the sacred syllables, “so hum.” As you draw your inhalation, gently drawing your breath along the base of your throat, listen for the sound of “so.” As you exhale, listen for the sound of “hum” as your breath is amplified in the throat.

Let your mind become absorbed in the sound of so hum-in your internal chanting and your actual breath. As if you were watching the waves of the ocean, let your mind be naturally drawn into presence and stillness—no place to go, nothing to do, so hum, so hum. If a thought (vritti) arises, come back to the mantra so hum.

In the beginning, it may be helpful to set an external timer for 10, 20, or 30 minutes so you are not distracted. When you are finished, bring your hands together in anjali mudra (prayer position) and close with a moment of gratitude, reflection, or prayer to soak up the energy of your meditation into your being and life.

Samadhi

The same Dhyana is Samadhi when it shines with the object alone, as it were, devoid of itself. PYS III.3.

Samadhi is the eighth and final step of Patanjali’s Ashtanga (8-limbed) path wherein there is absorption with the object or subject of concentration. The thinker and the thought, the meditator and the meditated become one. The separate notions ‘contemplation’ and ‘contemplated’ and the ‘contemplator’ vanish. In the state of Samadhi the aspirant is not conscious of any external or internal objects.

The modification of Samadhi is the destruction of all-pointed-ness (of mind) and appearance of one-pointedness of mind (concentration of mind). PYS III.11.

With the destruction of the nature of the mind to run after all objects, and with the increase of the one-pointed nature of the mind, the mind assumes the state of Samadhi.



*For others, it (Samadhi) is preceded by faith, energy, memory and discernment. PYS
I.20.*

Faith is the firm conviction of the mind with regard to the efficiency of the Yoga and the goal to be reached. Sincere faith forces a man to do energetic action to realize the fruit. This brings memory of all knowledge of the subject. Then he concentrates and meditates. He then acquires discrimination between the real and the unreal, and the highest knowledge. Those who apply themselves diligently to Yoga with perfect faith get themselves established in the highest Asamprajnata. Faith sustains the Yogi like a kind, affectionate mother.

*Success (in Samadhi) is quick (for those) whose (Vairagya – detachment) is intense.
PYS I.21.*

Those who feel ardently for Self-realization, who have burning Vairagya, attain at once to the state of Asamprajnata. Burning vairagya and intense Sadhana are needed. Then the fruit is near at hand. According to the degree of Vairagya and degree of Sadhana, there are nine stages or steps wherein Yogis halt. The fruit of Samprajnata Samadhi is Asamprajnata Samadhi, and the fruit of Asamprajata Samadhi is Kaivalya, or absolute independence.

Deep Relaxation

Deep Relaxation after Asana Practice

Deep relaxation must always follow an asana class. The length of time may vary depending on the length of the class. Deep relaxation should never be shorter than 5 minutes! Here's an idea of how long of a relaxation period you should allow at the end of your class.

45-minute class – 6 minutes relaxation

60-minute class – 8 minutes relaxation

75-minute class – 10 minutes relaxation

90-minute class – 12-minutes relaxation

Why Deep Relaxation?

“Deep relaxation is the best antidote for impurities.” – Sri Dharma Mittra

This is a beautiful and critical time for the yogi to absorb the practice on physical, emotional and mental levels. It activates the Parasympathetic Nervous System (read more in the Anatomy section) which creates a relaxation response in the body. It is only during this time that the organs can restore, regenerate and come into balance. During exercise and typical American daily lives the Sympathetic Nervous System (the stress response) is activated – and when this is activated, the organs for healthy daily function (e.g. digestion, circulation, immune response, reproduction) become a lower priority and, thus, over a period of time, become imbalanced and maybe even ill. Hence, activating the Parasympathetic Response, even if for 10-minutes a day, can prove to be extraordinarily rewarding for the well-being of the practitioner.

Guidelines for leading Deep Relaxation at the end of class

1. **Savasana.** It is recommended to use Savasana for the deep relaxation portion of class. Some students may insist on doing restorative poses, legs up the wall, etc. If that is the case, let them be! Kindly suggest that all students come into the Savasana position – and instruct them to make sure their legs and arms are comfortably apart from one another/the body so they can relax them. You can suggest that they move any props that may be in their way, put on their socks, etc. Do your best to help them become as comfortable as possible.
2. **Music.** If you decide to use music, or it becomes necessary due to the volume of outside noise (e.g. the gym noise, street sounds, people waiting outside the classroom), use soft and soothing music. Music without lyrics is best.

3. **Talking.** You can give a guided relaxation, read a poem or something inspirational, or simply be silent. All methods are powerful in their own right. If you decide to give a guided relaxation or a reading, always save a few minutes at the end for complete silence.
4. **Windows/Fans.** If possible, shut the curtains and windows and turn off any fans.
5. **Props.** Offer students props (if available) to help themselves get completely comfortable. Eye pillows, bolster under the knees, blanket over the abdomen or the entire body, or a small pillow under the head (not lifting the head too much) are very useful.
6. **Adjustments.** If you choose to give adjustments in savasana, follow a few guidelines: (1) Pause to honor each student before putting your hands to them – mentally repeat a prayer or an offering. Make a compassionate connection before touching them. (2) Make a little noise or motion so they don't become startled when you place your hands on them. (3) Use lotions or oils at your discretion. Be mindful of the smell, the texture, the placement of the lotion (e.g. hair, face).

Deep Relaxation vs. Yoga Nidra

Deep relaxation can be achieved many ways, just like there are many ways to meditate and many ways to breathe. It typically takes at least 8 minutes to enter a state of deep relaxation for the average person. Some common methods are:

- Body scanning
- Autogenic training
- Progressive relaxation
- Guided imagery

Yoga Nidra is a longer process (although you can do very shortened forms of it) and has a specific sequence that should be followed. If you are interested in learning more about the practice of Yoga Nidra, the book [Yoga Nidra](#) by Swami Satyananda Saraswati is really lovely! Here is a brief excerpt from the book to define Yoga Nidra more thoroughly.

Yoga nidra means sleep with a trace of awareness. It is a state of mind in between wakefulness and dream. When you practice yoga nidra you are opening the



deeper phases of your mind. At this moment, your intellectual mind is operating, but when you are able to relax, the subconscious and unconscious levels of the mind open.

If you practice yoga nidra, then the nature of your mind can be changed, diseases can be cured, and your creative genius can be restored. The subconscious and the unconscious mind are the most powerful forces in the human being. This simple practice of yoga nidra has the capacity of penetrating into the depths of the human mind.

The subconscious mind is a very obedient disciple, and immediately carries out the orders that you put to it. If you know how to practice yoga nidra, you can train your subconscious mind completely. Then the ordinary mind and intellect will follow suit.

Outline of the Yoga Nidra Practice

1. Preparation for the practice.
2. Resolve or sankalpa.
3. Rotation of consciousness.
4. Awareness of breath.
5. Feelings and sensations – usually through pairs of opposites (heat and cold; heaviness and lightness; pain and pleasure; fast and slow)
6. Visualization.
7. Ending the practice.