

# Meditation

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**Meditation** is a practice where an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to realize some benefit or for the mind to simply acknowledge its content without becoming identified with that content,<sup>[1]</sup> or as an end in itself.<sup>[2]</sup>

The term *meditation* refers to a broad variety of practices that includes techniques designed to promote relaxation, build internal energy or life force (*qi*, *ki*, *prana*, etc.) and develop compassion,<sup>[3]</sup> love, patience, generosity, and forgiveness. A particularly ambitious form of meditation aims at effortlessly sustained single-pointed concentration<sup>[4]</sup> meant to enable its practitioner to enjoy an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any life activity.

The word *meditation* carries different meanings in different contexts.

Meditation has been practiced since antiquity as a component of numerous religious traditions and beliefs.

<sup>[5]</sup> Meditation often involves an internal effort to self-regulate the mind in some way. Meditation is often used to clear the mind and ease many health concerns, such as high blood pressure,<sup>[6]</sup> depression, and anxiety. It may be done sitting, or in an active way—for instance, Buddhist monks involve awareness in their day-to-day activities as a form of mind-training. Prayer beads or other ritual objects are commonly used during meditation in order to keep track of or remind the practitioner about some aspect of that training.

Meditation may involve generating an emotional state for the purpose of analyzing that state—such as anger, hatred, etc.—or cultivating a particular mental response to various phenomena, such as compassion.

<sup>[7][8][9]</sup> The term "meditation" can refer to the state itself, as well as to practices or techniques employed to cultivate the state.<sup>[10]</sup> Meditation may also involve repeating a mantra and closing the eyes.<sup>[11]</sup> The mantra is chosen based on its suitability to the individual meditator. Meditation has a calming effect and directs awareness inward until pure awareness is achieved, described as "being awake inside without being aware of anything except awareness itself."<sup>[12]</sup> In brief, there are dozens of specific styles of meditation practice, and many different types of activity commonly referred to as meditative practices.<sup>[13]</sup>



Nature contemplation

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## Etymology

The English *meditation* is derived from the Latin *meditatio*, from a verb *meditari*, meaning "to think, contemplate, devise, ponder".<sup>[14]</sup>

In the Old Testament, *hāgâ* (Hebrew: הָגָה) means to sigh or murmur, and also, to meditate.<sup>[15]</sup> When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, *hāgâ* became the Greek *melete*. The Latin Bible then translated *hāgâ/melete* into *meditatio*.<sup>[16]</sup> The use of the term *meditatio* as part of a formal, stepwise process of meditation goes back to the 12th-century monk Guigo II.<sup>[17]</sup>

The Tibetan word for meditation "Gom" means "to become familiar with" and has the strong implication of training the mind to be familiar with states that are beneficial: concentration, compassion, correct understanding, patience, humility, perseverance, etc.<sup>[18]</sup>

Apart from its historical usage, the term *meditation* was introduced as a translation for Eastern spiritual practices, referred to as *dhyāna* in Buddhism and in Hinduism, which comes from the Sanskrit root *dhyai*, meaning to contemplate or meditate.<sup>[10][19]</sup> The term "meditation" in English may also refer to practices from Islamic Sufism,<sup>[20]</sup> or other traditions such as Jewish Kabbalah and Christian Hesychasm.<sup>[21]</sup> An edited book about "meditation" published in 2003, for example, included chapter contributions by authors describing Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.<sup>[22][23]</sup> Scholars have noted that "the term 'meditation' as it has entered contemporary usage" is parallel to the term "contemplation" in Christianity,<sup>[24]</sup> but in many cases, practices similar to modern forms of meditation were simply called 'prayer'. Christian, Judaic, and Islamic forms of meditation are typically devotional, scriptural or thematic, while Asian forms of meditation are often more purely technical.<sup>[25]</sup>

## History

The history of meditation is intimately bound up with the religious context within which it was practiced.<sup>[26]</sup> Some authors have even suggested the hypothesis that the emergence of the capacity for focused attention, an element of many methods of meditation,<sup>[27]</sup> may have contributed to the latest phases of human biological evolution.<sup>[28]</sup> Some of the earliest references to meditation are found in the Hindu Vedas of Nepal and India.<sup>[26]</sup> Wilson translates the most famous Vedic mantra 'Gayatri' thus : "We meditate on that desirable light of the divine Savitri, who influences our pious rites" (Rgveda : Mandala-3, Sukta-62, Rcha-10). Around the 6th to 5th centuries BCE, other forms of meditation developed via Confucianism and Taoism in China as well as Hinduism, Jainism, and early Buddhism in Nepal and India.<sup>[26]</sup>

In the west, by 20 BCE Philo of Alexandria had written on some form of "spiritual exercises" involving attention (prosoche) and concentration<sup>[29]</sup> and by the 3rd century Plotinus had developed meditative techniques.

The Pāli Canon, which dates to 1st century BCE considers Indian Buddhist meditation as a step towards liberation.<sup>[30]</sup> By the time Buddhism was spreading in China, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* which dates to 100 CE included a number of passages on meditation, clearly pointing to Zen (known as Chan in China, Thiền in



*Man Meditating in a Garden Setting*

Vietnam, and Seon in Korea).<sup>[31]</sup> The Silk Road transmission of Buddhism introduced meditation to other Asian countries, and in 653 the first meditation hall was opened in Singapore.<sup>[32]</sup> Returning from China around 1227, Dōgen wrote the instructions for zazen.<sup>[33][34]</sup>

The Islamic practice of Dhikr had involved the repetition of the 99 Names of God since the 8th or 9th century.<sup>[35][36]</sup> By the 12th century, the practice of Sufism included specific meditative techniques, and its followers practiced breathing controls and the repetition of holy words.<sup>[37]</sup> Interactions with Indians, Nepalese or the Sufis may have influenced the Eastern Christian meditation approach to hesychasm, but this can not be proved.<sup>[38][39]</sup> Between the 10th and 14th centuries, hesychasm was developed, particularly on Mount Athos in Greece, and involves the repetition of the Jesus prayer.<sup>[40]</sup>



Buddhist monk meditating in a waterfall setting

Western Christian meditation contrasts with most other approaches in that it does not involve the repetition of any phrase or action and requires no specific posture. Western Christian meditation progressed from the 6th century practice of Bible reading among Benedictine monks called *Lectio Divina*, i.e. divine reading. Its four formal steps as a "ladder" were defined by the monk Guigo II in the 12th century with the Latin terms *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* (i.e. read, ponder, pray, contemplate). Western Christian meditation was further developed by saints such as Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila in the 16th century.<sup>[41][42][43][44]</sup>

Secular forms of meditation were introduced in India in the 1950s as a Westernized form of Hindu meditative techniques and arrived in the United States and Europe in the 1960s. Rather than focusing on spiritual growth, secular meditation emphasizes stress reduction, relaxation and self-improvement.<sup>[45][46]</sup> Both spiritual and secular forms of meditation have been subjects of scientific analyses. Research on meditation began in 1931, with scientific research increasing dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>[47]</sup> Since the beginning of the '70s more than a thousand studies of meditation in English-language have been reported.<sup>[47]</sup> However, after 60 years of scientific study, the exact mechanism at work in meditation remains unclear.<sup>[48]</sup>

## Modern definitions

### Definitions and scope

As early as 1971, Claudio Naranjo noted that "The word 'meditation' has been used to designate a variety of practices that differ enough from one another so that we may find trouble in defining what *meditation* is."<sup>[53]:6</sup> There remains

<b>Definitions or Characterizations of Meditation: Examples from Prominent Reviews*</b>	
<u>Definition / Characterization</u>	<u>Review</u>
•"[M]editation 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	Walsh & Shapiro (2006)

no definition of necessary and sufficient criteria for meditation that has achieved universal or widespread acceptance within the modern scientific community, as one study recently noted a "persistent lack of consensus in the literature" and a "seeming intractability of defining *meditation*".<sup>[54]:135</sup>

In popular usage, the word "meditation" and the phrase "meditative practice" are often used imprecisely to designate broadly similar practices, or sets of practices, that are found across many cultures and traditions.

<sup>[21]:55]</sup>

well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration"<sup>[49]:228–9</sup>

• "[*M*]editation 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"<sup>[50]:180</sup> 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"<sup>[51]:415</sup> 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"<sup>[21]:107</sup> Goleman (1988)

\*Influential reviews (cited >50 times in PsycINFO<sup>[52]</sup>), encompassing *multiple* methods of meditation.

Some of the difficulty in precisely defining meditation has been the need to recognize the particularities of the many various traditions.<sup>[56]</sup> There may be differences between the theories of one tradition of meditation as to what it means to practice meditation.<sup>[57]</sup> The differences between the various traditions themselves, which have grown up a great distance apart from each other, may be even starker.<sup>[57]</sup> To accurately define "what is meditation" has caused difficulties for modern scientists. Scientific reviews have proposed that researchers attempt to more clearly define the type of meditation being practiced in order that the results of their studies be made clearer.<sup>[56]:499</sup> Taylor noted that to refer only to meditation from a particular faith (e.g., "Hindu" or "Buddhist")

...is not enough, since the cultural traditions from which a particular kind of meditation comes are quite different and even within a single tradition differ in complex ways. The specific name of a school of thought or a teacher or the title of a specific text is often quite important for identifying a particular type of meditation.<sup>[58]:2</sup>

The table shows several definitions of meditation that have been used by influential modern reviews of research on meditation across multiple traditions. Within a specific context, more precise meanings are not uncommonly given the word "meditation".<sup>[59]</sup> For example, "meditation" is sometimes the translation of *meditatio* in Latin. *Meditatio* is the third of four steps of *Lectio Divina*, an ancient form of Christian prayer. "Meditation" also refers to the seventh of the eight steps of Yoga in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, a step called *dhyāna* in Sanskrit. Meditation refers to a mental or spiritual *state* that may be attained by such practices,<sup>[10]</sup> and also refers to the *practice* of that state.

This article mainly focuses on meditation in the broad sense of a type of discipline, found in various forms in many cultures, by which the practitioner attempts to get beyond the reflexive, "thinking" mind<sup>[60]</sup> (sometimes called "discursive thinking"<sup>[61]</sup> or "logic"<sup>[62]</sup>) into a deeper, more devout, or more relaxed state. The terms "meditative practice" and "meditation" are mostly used here in this broad sense. However, usage may vary somewhat by context – readers should be aware that in quotations, or in discussions of particular traditions, more specialized meanings of "meditation" may sometimes be used (with meanings made clear by context whenever possible).

## Prayer beads

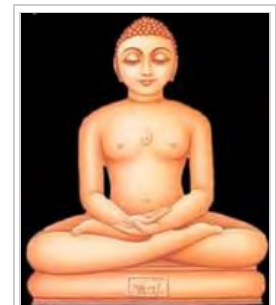
Most of the ancient religions of the world have a tradition of using some type of prayer beads as tools in devotional meditation.<sup>[63][64][65]</sup> Most prayer beads and Christian rosaries consist of pearls or beads linked together by a thread.<sup>[63][64]</sup> The Roman Catholic rosary is a string of beads containing five sets with ten small beads. Each set of ten is separated by another bead. The Hindu japa mala has 108 beads (the figure 108 in itself having spiritual significance, as well as those used in Jainism and Buddhist prayer beads.<sup>[66]</sup> Each bead is counted once as a person recites a mantra until the person has gone all the way around the mala.<sup>[66]</sup> The Muslim mishbaha has 99 beads. Specific meditations of each religion may be different.

## Religious and spiritual meditation

### Indian religions

#### Jainism

In Jainism, meditation has been a core spiritual practice, one that Jains believe people have undertaken since the teaching of the Tirthankara, Rishabha.<sup>[67]</sup> All the twenty-four Tirthankaras practiced deep meditation and attained enlightenment.<sup>[68]</sup> They are all shown in meditative postures in the images or idols. Mahavira practiced deep meditation for twelve years and attained enlightenment.<sup>[69]</sup> The *Acaranga Sutra* dating to 500 BCE, addresses the meditation system of Jainism in detail.<sup>[70]</sup> Acharya Bhadrabahu of the 4th century BCE practiced deep *Mahaprana* meditation for twelve years.<sup>[71]</sup> Kundakunda of 1st century BCE, opened new dimensions of meditation in Jain tradition through his books *Samayasāra*, *Pravachansar* and others.<sup>[72]</sup>



Mahavira in meditative posture

Jain meditation and spiritual practices system were referred to as salvation-path. It has three important parts called the *Ratnatraya* "Three Jewels": right perception and faith, right knowledge and right conduct.<sup>[73]</sup>

Meditation in Jainism aims at realizing the self, attaining salvation, take the soul to complete freedom.<sup>[74]</sup> It aims to reach and to remain in the pure state of soul which is believed to be pure consciousness, beyond any attachment or aversion. The practitioner strives to be just a knower-seer (Gyata-Drashta). Jain meditation can be broadly categorized to *Dharmya Dhyana* and *Shukla Dhyana*.

There exists a number of meditation techniques such as *pindāstha-dhyāna*, *padāstha-dhyāna*, *rūpāstha-dhyāna*, *rūpātita-dhyāna*, *savīrya-dhyāna*, etc. In *padāstha dhyāna* one focuses on Mantra.<sup>[75]</sup> A Mantra could be either a combination of core letters or words on deity or themes. There is a rich tradition of Mantra in Jainism. All Jain followers irrespective of their sect, whether Digambara or Svetambara, practice mantra. Mantra chanting is an important part of daily lives of Jain monks and followers. Mantra chanting can be done either loudly or silently in mind. Yogasana and *Pranayama* has been an important practice undertaken since ages. Pranayama – breathing exercises – are performed to strengthen the five *Pranas* or vital energy.<sup>[76]</sup> Yogasana and *Pranayama* balances the functioning of neuro-endocrine system of body and helps in achieving good physical, mental and emotional health.<sup>[77]</sup>

Contemplation is a very old and important meditation technique. The practitioner meditates deeply on subtle facts. In *agnya vichāya*, one contemplates on seven facts – life and non-life, the inflow, bondage, stoppage and removal of *karmas*, and the final accomplishment of liberation. In *apaya vichāya*, one contemplates on the incorrect insights one indulges, which eventually develops right insight. In *vipaka vichāya*, one reflects on the eight causes or basic types of *karma*. In *sansathan vichāya*, one thinks about the vastness of the universe and the loneliness of the soul.<sup>[75]</sup>

Acharya Mahapragya formulated Preksha meditation in the 1970s and presented a well-organised system of meditation. Asana and *Pranayama*, meditation, contemplation, mantra and therapy are its integral parts.<sup>[78]</sup> Numerous Preksha meditation centers came into existence around the world and numerous meditations camps are being organized to impart training in it.

## Buddhism

Buddhist meditation refers to the meditative practices associated with the religion and philosophy of Buddhism. Core meditation techniques have been preserved in ancient Buddhist texts and have proliferated and diversified through teacher-student transmissions. Buddhists pursue meditation as part of the path toward enlightenment and nirvana.<sup>[79]</sup> The closest words for meditation in the classical languages of Buddhism are *bhāvanā*,<sup>[80]</sup> *jhāna/dhyāna*,<sup>[81]</sup> and *vipassana*. According to Manmatha Nath Dutt, there is hardly any difference between mainstream Hinduism's Dhyana, Dharana and Samadhi with the Buddhist Dhyana, Bhavana, Samadhi, especially as both require following the precepts (nayas and niyamas).



Dynamic tranquility: the Buddha in contemplation.

Buddhist meditation techniques have become increasingly popular in the wider world, with many non-Buddhists taking them up for a variety of reasons. There is considerable homogeneity across meditative practices – such as breath meditation and various recollections (*anussati*) – that are used across Buddhist schools, as well as significant diversity. In the Theravāda tradition alone, there are over fifty methods for developing mindfulness and forty for developing concentration, while in the Tibetan tradition there are thousands of visualization meditations.<sup>[82]</sup> Most classical and contemporary Buddhist meditation guides are school-specific.<sup>[83]</sup>

The Buddha is said to have identified two paramount mental qualities that arise from wholesome meditative practice:

- "serenity" or "tranquillity" (Pali: *samatha*) which steadies, composes, unifies and concentrates the mind;
- "insight" (Pali: *vipassana*) which enables one to see, explore and discern "formations" (conditioned phenomena based on the five aggregates).<sup>[84]</sup>

Through the meditative development of serenity, one is able to release obscuring hindrances; it is with the release of the hindrances through the meditative development of insight that one gains liberating wisdom.

<sup>[85]</sup>

## Hinduism

There are many schools and styles of meditation within Hinduism.<sup>[86]</sup>

### Traditional

Yoga is generally done to prepare one for meditation, and meditation is done to realize union of one's self, one's ātman, with the omnipresent and non-dual Brahman. This experience is referred to as moksha by Hindus, and is similar to the concept of nirvana in Buddhism. The earliest clear references to meditation in Hindu literature are in the middle Upanishads and the Mahabharata, the latter of which includes the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>[87][88]</sup> According to Gavin Flood, the earlier Brihadaranyaka Upanishad refers to meditation when it states that "having become calm and concentrated, one perceives the self (*ātman*) within oneself".

<sup>[86]</sup>

Within Patañjali's Ashtanga yoga practice there are eight limbs leading to kaivalya "aloneness." These are ethical discipline (yamas), rules (niyamas), physical postures (āsanas), breath control (prāṇāyama), withdrawal from the senses (pratyāhāra), one-pointedness of mind (dhāraṇā), meditation (dhyāna), and finally samādhi, which is often described as the realization of the identity of the Self (ātman) with the omnipresent (Brahman), and is the ultimate aim of all Hindu yogis.

### Modern

Meditation in Hinduism has expanded beyond Hinduism to the West.<sup>[86]</sup> Mantra meditation, with the use of a japa mala and especially with focus on the Hare Krishna maha-mantra, is a central practice of the Gaudiya Vaishnava faith tradition and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna movement. Other popular New Religious Movements include the Ramakrishna Mission, Vedanta Society, Divine Light Mission, Chinmaya Mission, Osho, Transcendental Meditation, Oneness University, and Brahma Kumaris. According to Brahma Kumaris, meditation means "be in remembrance of Supreme soul".

## Sikhism

In Sikhism, simran (meditation) and good deeds are both necessary to achieve the devotee's Spiritual goals; <sup>[89]</sup> without good deeds meditation is futile. When Sikhs meditate they aim to feel God's presence and immerge in the divine light.<sup>[90]</sup> It is only God's divine will or order that allows a devotee to desire to begin to meditate. Guru Nanak in the Japji Sahib daily Sikh scripture explains, "*Visits to temples, penance,*



*compassion and charity gain you but a sesame seed of credit. It is hearkening to His Name, accepting and adoring Him that obtains emancipation by bathing in the shrine of soul. All virtues are Yours, O Lord! I have none; Without good deeds one can't even meditate."* Japji Sahib (Stanza 21).<sup>[91]</sup>



Sikhs gather in Gurdwara's and recite Shabad Kirtan, a vocal meditation

Nām Japnā involves focusing one's attention on the names or great attributes of God.<sup>[92]</sup> The practices of Simran and Nām Japnā encourage quiet internal meditation but may be practiced vocally in the sangat (holy congregation). Sikhs believe that there are ten 'gates' to the body, the nine visible holes (nostrils, eyes, ears, mouth, urethra, anus) and the tenth invisible hole. The tenth invisible hole is the topmost energy level and is called the tenth gate or Dasam Dwaar. When one reaches this stage through continuous practice meditation becomes a habit that continues whilst walking, talking, eating, awake and even sleeping. There is a distinct taste or flavour when a meditator reaches this lofty stage of meditation, and experiences absolute peace and tranquility inside and outside the body.

Followers of the Sikh religion also believe that love comes through meditation on the lord's name since meditation only conjures up positive emotions in oneself which are portrayed through our actions. The first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev Ji preached the equality of all humankind and stressed the importance of living a householder's life instead of wandering around jungles meditating, the latter of which being a popular practice at the time. The Guru preached that we can obtain liberation from life and death by living a totally normal family life and by spreading love amongst every human being regardless of religion.

In the Sikh religion, kirtan, otherwise known as singing the hymns of God is seen as one of the most beneficial ways of aiding meditation, and it too in some ways is believed to be a meditation of one kind.

## East-Asian religions

### Taoism

Taoist or Daoist meditation has a long history, and has developed various techniques including concentration, visualization, *qi* cultivation, contemplation, and mindfulness meditations. Traditional Daoist meditative practices were influenced by Chinese Buddhism beginning around the 5th century, and later had influence upon Traditional Chinese medicine and the Chinese martial arts.

Livia Kohn distinguishes three basic types of Daoist meditation: "concentrative", "insight", and "visualization".<sup>[93]</sup> *Ding* 定 (literally means "decide; settle; stabilize") refers to "deep concentration", "intent contemplation", or "perfect absorption." *Guan* 觀 (lit. "watch; observe; view") meditation seeks to merge and attain unity with the Dao. It was developed by Tang Dynasty (618–907) Daoist masters based upon the *Tiantai* Buddhist practice of *Vipassanā* "insight" or "wisdom" meditation. *Cun* 存 (lit. "exist; be present; survive") has a sense of "to cause to exist; to make present" in the meditation techniques popularized by the Daoist Shangqing and Lingbao Schools. A meditator visualizes or actualizes solar and lunar essences, lights, and deities within his/her body, which supposedly results in health and longevity, even *xian* 仙/僊, "immortality".



"Gathering the Light", Taoist meditation from *The Secret of the Golden Flower*

The (late 4th century) *Guanzi* essay *Neiye* 內業 "Inward training" is the oldest received writing on the subject of *qi* cultivation and breath-control meditation techniques.<sup>[94]</sup> For instance, "When you enlarge your mind and let go of it, when you relax your vital breath and expand it, when your body is calm and unmoving: And you can maintain the One and discard the myriad disturbances. ... This is called "revolving the vital breath": Your thoughts and deeds seem heavenly."<sup>[95]</sup>

The (c. 3rd century BCE) Daoist *Zhuangzi* records *zuowang* or "sitting forgetting" meditation. Confucius asked his disciple Yan Hui to explain what "sit and forget" means: "I slough off my limbs and trunk, dim my intelligence, depart from my form, leave knowledge behind, and become identical with the Transformational Thoroughfare."<sup>[96]</sup>

Daoist meditation practices are central to Chinese martial arts (and some Japanese martial arts), especially the *qi*-related *neijia* "internal martial arts". Some well-known examples are *daoyin* "guiding and pulling", *qigong* "life-energy exercises", *neigong* "internal exercises", *neidan* "internal alchemy", and *taijiquan* "great ultimate boxing", which is thought of as moving meditation. One common explanation contrasts "movement in stillness" referring to energetic visualization of *qi* circulation in *qigong* and *zuochan* "seated meditation",<sup>[97]</sup> versus "stillness in movement" referring to a state of meditative calm in *taijiquan* forms.

## Iranian religions

### Bahá'í Faith

In the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, meditation along with prayer are both primary tools for spiritual development<sup>[98]</sup> and mainly refer to one's reflection on the words of God.<sup>[99]</sup> While prayer and meditation are linked, where meditation happens generally in a prayerful attitude, prayer is seen specifically as turning toward God,<sup>[100]</sup> and meditation is seen as a communion with one's self where one focuses on the divine.<sup>[99]</sup>

The Bahá'í teachings note that the purpose of meditation is to strengthen one's understanding of the words of God, and to make one's soul more susceptible to their potentially transformative power,<sup>[99]</sup> more receptive to the need for both prayer and meditation to bring about and maintain a spiritual communion with God.<sup>[101]</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the religion, never specified any particular form of meditation, and thus each person is free to choose their own form.<sup>[98]</sup> However, he specifically did state that Bahá'ís should read a passage of the Bahá'í writings twice a day, once in the morning, and once in the evening, and meditate on it. He also encouraged people to reflect on one's actions and worth at the end of each day.<sup>[99]</sup> During the Nineteen Day Fast, a period of the year during which Bahá'ís adhere to a sunrise-to-sunset fast, they meditate and pray to reinvigorate their spiritual forces.<sup>[102]</sup>

## Secular applications

Meditation may be for a religious purpose, but even before being brought to the West it was used in secular contexts. Beginning with the Theosophists meditation has been employed in the West by a number of religious and spiritual movements, such as Yoga, New Age and the New Thought movement.

Meditation techniques have also been used by Western theories of counseling and psychotherapy. Relaxation training works toward achieving mental and muscle relaxation to reduce daily stresses. Jacobson is credited with developing the initial progressive relaxation procedure. These techniques are used in conjunction with other behavioral techniques. Originally used with systematic desensitization, relaxation techniques are now used with other clinical problems. Meditation, hypnosis and biofeedback-induced relaxation are a few of the techniques used with relaxation training. One of the eight essential phases of EMDR (developed by Francine Shapiro), bringing adequate closure to the end of each session, also entails the use of relaxation techniques, including meditation. Multimodal therapy, a technically eclectic approach to behavioral therapy, also employs the use of meditation as a technique used in individual therapy.<sup>[103]</sup>

From the point of view of psychology and physiology, meditation can induce an altered state of consciousness.<sup>[104]</sup> Such altered states of consciousness may correspond to altered neuro-physiologic states.<sup>[105]</sup>

Today, there are many different types of meditation practiced in western culture. Mindful breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and loving kindness meditations for instance have been found to provide cognitive benefits such as relaxation and decentering. With training in meditation, depressive rumination can be decreased and overall peace of mind can flourish. Different techniques have shown to work better for different people.<sup>[106]</sup>

As stated by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a U.S. government entity within the National Institutes of Health that advocates various forms of Alternative Medicine, "Meditation may be practiced for many reasons, such as to increase calmness and physical relaxation, to improve psychological balance, to cope with illness, or to enhance overall health and well-being."<sup>[107]</sup>



A collective meditation in Sri Lanka

### Sound-based meditation

Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School conducted a series of clinical tests on meditators from various disciplines, including the Transcendental Meditation technique and Tibetan Buddhism. In 1975, Benson published a book titled *The Relaxation Response* where he outlined his own version of meditation for relaxation.<sup>[108]</sup> Also in the 1970s, the American psychologist Patricia Carrington developed a similar technique called Clinically Standardized Meditation (CSM).<sup>[109]</sup> In Norway, another sound-based method called Acem Meditation developed a psychology of meditation and has been the subject of several scientific studies.<sup>[110]</sup>

Biofeedback has been used by many researchers since the 1950s in an effort to enter deeper states of mind.<sup>[111]</sup>

## Abrahamic religions

### Judaism

There is evidence that Judaism has had meditative practices that go back thousands of years.<sup>[112][113]</sup> For instance, in the Torah, the patriarch Isaac is described as going "לַשׂוּחַ" (*lasuach*) in the field—a term understood by all commentators as some type of meditative practice (Genesis 24:63).<sup>[114]</sup>

Similarly, there are indications throughout the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) that meditation was used by the prophets.<sup>[115]</sup> In the Old Testament, there are two Hebrew words for meditation: *hāgâ* (Hebrew: הָגָה), which means *to sigh* or *murmur*, but also *to meditate*, and *sîhâ* (Hebrew: שִׁיחַ), which means *to muse*, or *rehearse in one's mind*.<sup>[116]</sup>

Some meditative traditions have been encouraged in the school of Judaism known as Kabbalah, and some Jews have described Kabbalah as an inherently meditative field of study.<sup>[117][118]</sup> Aryeh Kaplan has argued that, for the Kabbalist, the ultimate purpose of meditative practice is to understand and cleave to the Divine.<sup>[116]</sup> Classic methods include the mental visualisation of the supernal realms the soul navigates through to achieve certain ends. One of the best known types of meditation in early Jewish mysticism was the work of the Merkabah, from the root /R-K-B/ meaning "chariot" (of God).<sup>[116]</sup>

Meditation has been of interest to a wide variety of modern Jews. In modern Jewish practice, one of the best known meditative practices is called "*hitbodedut*" (הִתְבּוֹדְדוּת, alternatively transliterated as "hisbodedus"), and is explained in Kabbalistic, Hasidic, and Mussar writings, especially the Hasidic method of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav. The word derives from the Hebrew word "boded" (בוֹדֵד), meaning the state of being alone.<sup>[119]</sup> Another Hasidic system is the Habad method of "hisbonenus", related to the Sefirah of "Binah", Hebrew for understanding.<sup>[120]</sup> This practice is the analytical reflective process of making oneself understand a mystical concept well, that follows and internalises its study in Hasidic writings.

The Musar Movement, founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter in the middle of the nineteenth-century, emphasized meditative practices of introspection and visualization that could help to improve moral character.<sup>[121]</sup>

## Christianity

Christian meditation is a term for a form of prayer in which a structured attempt is made to get in touch with and deliberately reflect upon the revelations of God.<sup>[123]</sup> The word meditation comes from the Latin word *meditari*, which means to concentrate. Christian meditation is the process of deliberately focusing on specific thoughts (e.g. a biblical scene involving Jesus and the Virgin Mary) and reflecting on their meaning in the context of the love of God.<sup>[124]</sup>

Christian meditation contrasts with Eastern forms of meditation as radically as the portrayal of God the Father in the Bible contrasts with depictions of Krishna or Brahman in Indian teachings.<sup>[125]</sup> Unlike Eastern meditations, most styles of Christian meditations do not rely on the repeated use of mantras, and yet are also intended to stimulate thought and deepen meaning. Christian meditation aims to heighten the personal relationship based on the love of God that marks Christian communion.<sup>[126][127]</sup>

In *Aspects of Christian meditation*, the Catholic Church warned of potential incompatibilities in mixing Christian and Eastern styles of meditation.<sup>[128]</sup> In 2003, in *A Christian reflection on the New Age* the Vatican announced that the "Church avoids any concept that is close to those of the New Age".

<sup>[129]</sup><sup>[130]</sup><sup>[131]</sup>

Christian meditation is sometimes taken to mean the middle level in a broad three stage characterization of prayer: it then involves more reflection than first level vocal prayer, but is more structured than the multiple layers of contemplation in Christianity.<sup>[132]</sup>

In Frankfurt, Germany in 2007 the Centre for Christian Meditation and Spirituality in the Holy Cross Church, Frankfurt-Bornheim was founded by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Limburg. In and by the centre different kinds of church services are offered like for example with elements such as expressionist dance, moreover days of exercises of christian mysticism, contemplative prayer, meditative singing, meditation courses, Zen-meditation courses, days of reflection, spiritual exercises and retreats<sup>[133]</sup>

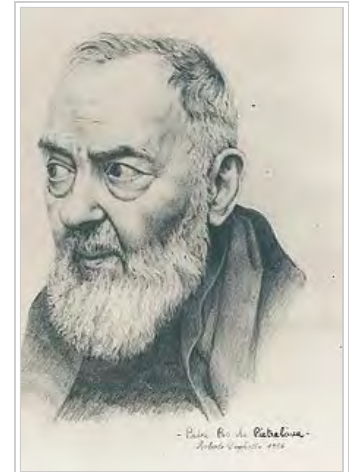
## Islam

Remembrance of God in Islam, which is known by the concept Dhikr is interpreted in different meditative techniques in Sufism or Islamic mysticism.<sup>[35]</sup><sup>[36]</sup> This became one of the essential elements of Sufism as it was systematized traditionally. It is juxtaposed with *fikr* (thinking) which leads to knowledge.<sup>[134]</sup> By the 12th century, the practice of Sufism included specific meditative techniques, and its followers practiced breathing controls and the repetition of holy words.<sup>[37]</sup>

Numerous Sufi traditions place emphasis upon a meditative procedure which comes from the cognitive aspect to one of the two principal approaches to be found in the Buddhist traditions: that of the concentration technique, involving high-intensity and sharply focused introspection. In the Oveyssi-Shahmaghsoudi Sufi order, for example, this is particularly evident, where *muraqaba* takes the form of *tamarkoz*, the latter being a Persian term that means *concentration*. Meditative quiescence is said to have a quality of healing, and—in contemporary terminology—enhancing *creativity*.<sup>[135]</sup>

*Tafakkur* or *tadabbur* in Sufism literally means *reflection upon the universe*: this is considered to permit access to a form of cognitive and emotional development that can emanate only from the higher level, i.e. from God. The sensation of receiving divine inspiration awakens and liberates both heart and intellect, permitting such inner growth that the apparently mundane actually takes on the quality of the infinite. Muslim teachings embrace life as a test of one's submission to God.<sup>[136]</sup>

Meditation in the Sufi traditions is largely based on a spectrum of mystical exercises, varying from one lineage to another. Such techniques, particularly the more audacious, can be, and often have been down the ages, a source of controversy among scholars. One broad group of ulema, followers of the great Al-Ghazali, for example, have in general been open to such techniques and forms of devotion.



A strong believer in Christian meditation, Saint Pio of Pietrelcina stated: "Through the study of books one seeks God; by meditation one finds him."<sup>[122]</sup>

In recent years, meditation or Muraqaba has been popularized in various parts of the world by Silsila Naqshbandia Mujaddadia under Nazim Al-Haqqani and Silsila Azeemia under Khwaja Shamsuddin Azeemi.

## Modern spirituality

### New Age

New Age meditations are often influenced by Eastern philosophy, mysticism, Yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism, yet may contain some degree of Western influence. In the West, meditation found its mainstream roots through the social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, when many of the youth of the day rebelled against traditional religion as a reaction against what some perceived as the failure of Christianity to provide spiritual and ethical guidance.<sup>[137]</sup> New Age meditation as practised by the early hippies is regarded for its techniques of blanking out the mind and releasing oneself from conscious thinking. This is often aided by repetitive chanting of a mantra, or focusing on an object.<sup>[138]</sup> New Age meditation evolved into a range of purposes and practices, from serenity and balance to access to other realms of consciousness to the concentration of energy in group meditation to the supreme goal of samadhi, as in the ancient yogic practice of meditation.<sup>[139]</sup>

### Pagan and occult religions

Religions and religious movements which use magic, such as Wicca, Thelema, Neopaganism, occultism etc., often require their adherents to meditate as a preliminary to the magical work. This is because magic is often thought to require a particular state of mind in order to make contact with spirits, or because one has to visualize one's goal or otherwise keep intent focused for a long period during the ritual in order to see the desired outcome. Meditation practice in these religions usually revolves around visualization, absorbing energy from the universe or higher self, directing one's internal energy, and inducing various trance states. Meditation and magic practice often overlap in these religions as meditation is often seen as merely a stepping stone to supernatural power, and the meditation sessions may be peppered with various chants and spells.

## Western context

### Dissemination in the west

Methods of meditation have been cross-culturally disseminated at various times throughout history, such as Buddhism going to East Asia, and Sufi practices going to many Islamic societies. Of special relevance to the modern world is the dissemination of meditative practices since the late 19th century, accompanying increased travel and communication among cultures worldwide. Most prominent has been the transmission of numerous Asian-derived practices to the West. In addition, interest in some Western-based meditative practices has also been revived,<sup>[140]</sup> and these have been disseminated to a limited extent to Asian countries.<sup>[141]</sup> Also evident is some extent of influence over Enlightenment thinking through Diderot's Encyclopédie; although he states, "I find that a meditation practitioner is often quite useless and that a contemplation practitioner is always insane".<sup>[142]</sup>

Ideas about Eastern meditation had begun "seeping into American popular culture even before the American Revolution through the various sects of European occult Christianity,"<sup>[58]:3</sup> and such ideas "came pouring in [to America] during the era of the transcendentalists, especially between the 1840s and the 1880s."<sup>[58]:3</sup> But

The World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, was the landmark event that increased Western awareness of meditation. This was the first time that Western audiences on American soil received Asian spiritual teachings from Asians themselves. Thereafter, Swami Vivekananda... [founded] various Vedanta ashrams... Anagarika Dharmapala lectured at Harvard on Theravada Buddhist meditation in 1904; Abdul Baha ... [toured] the US teaching the principles of Bahai, and Soyen Shaku toured in 1907 teaching Zen...<sup>[58]:4</sup>

In the late 19th century, Theosophists adopted the word "meditation" to refer to various spiritual practices drawn from Hinduism, Buddhism and other Indian religions. Thus the English word "meditation" does not exclusively translate to any single term or concept, and can be used to translate words such as the Sanskrit *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, *samādhi* and *bhāvanā*.

More recently, in the 1960s, another surge in Western interest in meditative practices began. Observers have suggested many types of explanations for this interest in Eastern meditation and revived Western contemplation. Thomas Keating, a founder of Contemplative Outreach, wrote that "the rush to the East is a symptom of what is lacking in the West. There is a deep spiritual hunger that is not being satisfied in the West."<sup>[143]:31</sup> Daniel Goleman, a scholar of meditation, suggested that the shift in interest from "established religions" to meditative practices "is caused by the scarcity of the personal experience of these [meditation-derived] transcendental states – the living spirit at the common core of all religions."<sup>[21]:xxiv</sup>

Another suggested contributing factor is the rise of communist political power in Asia, which, "set the stage for an influx of Asian spiritual teachers to the West,"<sup>[58]:7</sup> oftentimes as refugees.<sup>[144]</sup>

## Western typologies

Ornstein noted that "Most techniques of meditation do not exist as solitary practices but are only artificially separable from an entire system of practice and belief."<sup>[145]:143</sup> This means that, for instance, while monks engage in meditation as a part of their everyday lives, they also engage the codified rules and live together in monasteries in specific cultural settings that go along with their meditative practices. These meditative practices sometimes have similarities (often noticed by Westerners), for instance concentration on the breath is practiced in Zen, Tibetan and Theravadan contexts, and these similarities or "typologies" are noted here.

Progress on the "intractable" problem of defining meditation was attempted by a recent study of views common to seven experts trained in diverse but empirically highly studied (clinical or Eastern-derived) forms of meditation.<sup>[146]</sup> The study identified "three main criteria... as essential to any meditation practice: the use of a defined technique, logic relaxation, and a self-induced state/mode. Other criteria deemed



Meditating in Madison Square Park, New York City

important [but not essential] involve a state of psychophysical relaxation, the use of a self-focus skill or anchor, the presence of a state of suspension of logical thought processes, a religious/spiritual/philosophical context, or a state of mental silence."<sup>[54]:135</sup> However, the study cautioned, "It is plausible that meditation is best thought of as a natural category of techniques best captured by 'family resemblances'... or by the related 'prototype' model of concepts."<sup>[54]:135[147]</sup>

In modern psychological research, meditation has been defined and characterized in a variety of ways; many of these emphasize the role of attention.<sup>[21][49][50][51]</sup>

In the West, meditation is sometimes thought of in two broad categories:

concentrative meditation and mindfulness meditation.<sup>[148]</sup> These two categories are discussed in the following two paragraphs, with concentrative meditation being used interchangeably with focused attention and mindfulness meditation being used interchangeably with open monitoring,

Direction of mental attention... A practitioner can focus intensively on one particular object (so-called *concentrative meditation*), on all mental events that enter the field of awareness (so-called *mindfulness meditation*), or both specific focal points and the field of awareness.<sup>[54]:130[149]</sup>

One style, Focused Attention (FA) meditation, entails the voluntary focusing of attention on a chosen object. The other style, Open Monitoring (OM) meditation, involves non-reactive monitoring of the content of experience from moment to moment.<sup>[150]</sup>

Other typologies have also been proposed,<sup>[151][152]</sup> and some techniques shift among major categories.<sup>[97]</sup>

Evidence from neuroimaging studies suggests that the categories of meditation, defined by how they direct attention, appear to generate different brainwave patterns.<sup>[151][152]</sup> Evidence also suggests that using different focus objects during meditation may generate different brainwave patterns.<sup>[153]</sup>

## Meditation in the Workplace

There are no exact statistics on how many corporations are utilizing meditation in the workplace, but it is estimated that around a quarter of US employers are using stress reduction initiatives and the number is growing.<sup>[154]</sup> Many large companies have introduced mindfulness programs to their employees. In 2010, Aetna, one of the largest healthcare benefits company, developed, launched and studied two mindfulness programs - Viniyoga Stress Reduction and Mindfulness at Work.<sup>[154][155]</sup> The goal was to help reduce stress and improve reactions to stress. Aetna now offers its program to its customers. Another company that implements mindfulness is Google. The company offers more than a dozen meditation courses but its most prominent one is called "Search Inside Yourself" and has been implemented since 2007.<sup>[155]</sup> General Mills



Bodhidharma practicing zazen.



is one of the top companies in the world with strong leadership training programs, which includes the Mindful Leadership Program Series. The course uses a combination of mindfulness meditation, yoga and dialog to develop the mind's capacity to pay attention.<sup>[155]</sup>

The increasing amount of quantifiable research that mindfulness has on the brain and body is one of the major reasons why corporate mindfulness programs has become more prominent in the modern day business world.<sup>[156]</sup> Studies conducted by Yale University found that mindfulness meditation is associated with lower levels of activity in the Default Mode Network (DMN), which is part of the brain network that is responsible for self-related thinking and mind wandering.<sup>[157]</sup> Volume changes in key areas of the brain are also found as a result of meditation.<sup>[157]</sup> In 2011, a team at Harvard found that mindfulness can actually change the structure of the brain after conducting an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) on participants.<sup>[157]</sup> The research found an increase in cortical thickness in the hippocampus, which controls learning, memory and emotion regulation.<sup>[157]</sup> The research also found decreases in brain cell volume in the Amygdala, which is responsible for fear, anxiety and stress. These changes were also aligned with the participant's self-reports of their stress levels.<sup>[157]</sup>

According to a study on spirituality and performance in organizations, the increase in corporate meditation programs can also be linked to a complex paradigm shift in the structure and system of organizations.<sup>[158]</sup> The changes in management include a shift from an economic focus to a balance of profits, quality of life, spirituality and social responsibility concerns.<sup>[158]</sup> For the past 300 years, the mechanical paradigm shaped the economy where the main corporate objectives were to satisfy shareholders by increasing competition and exploitation.<sup>[159]</sup> The new emerging business paradigm is called the "Spiritual Movement" and moves away from a materialistic to a more spiritual orientation.<sup>[159]</sup> In this new paradigm, a company's competitive advantage resides in how much it invests in its human capital and the qualities of its employees. The shift in business paradigm's can be explained by the fact that the business world is more competitive, globalized and fast-pace than ever.<sup>[158]</sup> The boundaries between work and home are blurred, where work has become central to people's lives and employees can be connected to their work whenever. The increase in the importance of work has led to an increase in stress and burnout.<sup>[158]</sup> The workplace is a place where employees spend most of their lives, develop friendships, create value and make meaningful contributions to society.<sup>[158]</sup> This means that they are looking for satisfaction beyond work. According to a report on emerging cultures, the shift in paradigm can also be explained by American demographics.<sup>[159]</sup> "The American adult population is divided into three groups, each with a different set of values and view of the world."<sup>[159]</sup> The "Cultural Creatives," whom constitute 24% of U.S adults are the newest and increasingly growing worldview.<sup>[159]</sup> "Their values align with ecological sustainability, globalism, women's issues, social conscience, self-actualization and spirituality".<sup>[159]</sup> They reflect a major change that has been growing in American culture.

Nursing professionals work in a stressful environment. According to a report conducted at Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network (LVHNN), nurses are at high risk for chronic burnout and stress.<sup>[160]</sup> The nurse's roles are regarded as stress-filled based upon physical labor, human suffering, work hours, staffing, and interpersonal relationships.<sup>[161]</sup> Work stress and burnout are significant concerns on both an individualistic and an organizational level. On an individualistic level, stress symptoms can contribute to health problems such as high blood pressure and diabetes.<sup>[161]</sup> On an organizational level, work stress may

lead to absenteeism and turnover, which impedes on the quality of care.<sup>[161]</sup> According to a 2016 National Healthcare Retention & RN Staffing Report published by NSI Nursing Solutions, the national average turnover rate among nurses is 17.2%, a 0.8% increase from 2014.<sup>[162]</sup> During the study, 27 nurses voluntarily participated in an 8-week-stress-reduction program called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).<sup>[160]</sup> Data analyses revealed that the MBSR program had significant benefits that could be categorized into two. "The early weeks of the training program conveyed that benefits were related to increased relaxation, slowing down, feeling a sense of peace, and learning to be in the present moment."<sup>[160]</sup> Results in the late weeks of the training program were linked to self-acceptance, self-awareness and self-care.<sup>[160]</sup>

Employee turnover rate is a significant problem in many industries. According to a 2008 report, turnover rate among sales people has exceeded 40% annually with similar figures in the USA.<sup>[163]</sup> This is a disadvantage to businesses because replacing labor is extremely costly. The report studied the impact Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy had on 166 financial service sales agents from a major British Insurance Company which had recently been acquired by a competitive, results-oriented organization.<sup>[163]</sup>

Measurements were based on employee well-being, job satisfaction, productivity and turnover.<sup>[163]</sup> Major organizational changes lead to a substantial amount of employees quitting. Three months prior to the study, 71% of the participants reported experiencing work-related stress and performing poorly.<sup>[163]</sup> According to the results, there were major improvement in employees' attributional style, psychological distress, self-esteem, job satisfaction and intention to quit.<sup>[163]</sup> Symptoms of psychological stress warranting intervention reduced from 37% of the sample to 10% after training.<sup>[163]</sup> The psychological changes were also accompanied by a 66% reduction in employee turnover rate.<sup>[163]</sup> Productivity had also improved post two years after training where 65% of the sample had achieved sales figures above the average. This is a significant increase prior to training where 29% of participants were barely performing at acceptable standards.<sup>[163]</sup>

## Effects of meditation in the classroom

Studies related to meditation in education were evaluated by<sup>[164]</sup> to determine how it affects middle school, high school, and college students regarding academic achievement and well-being.<sup>[164]</sup> also compared the effectiveness of different forms of meditative programs on student outcomes. Research indicates that meditation programs have significant effects on well-being and social competence.<sup>[164]</sup> To further explore questions related to the effectiveness of meditation in education, a sample of studies were evaluated to examine how graduation rates, academic achievement, stress reduction, and cognitive enhancement were influenced by meditation.

Transcendental meditation (TM), a form of meditation that focuses on stress reduction, was implemented to study its' impact on graduation rates, college acceptance, and dropout rates in a study on high school seniors.<sup>[165]</sup> Volunteers practiced twice a day for 15 minutes and were taught by certified TM teachers who gave introductory hour-long lessons. Students who did not volunteer for the training were the control group, and the dependent variable was graduation. Most notably, in a comparison of 78 meditating students

with high grade point average (GPA) and 78 non-meditating students with low GPA, graduation of meditating students was 82.1% compared to 66.7% for non-meditating students.<sup>[165]</sup> This suggests that TM or GPA can positively influence the academic achievement of students.

In a similar study involving TM,<sup>[166]</sup> identified 189 racial and ethnic minority middle school students who performed below the proficiency level on the California Standards Test (CST) in math and English at baseline. One hundred and twenty five students participated in a three-month TM program twice a day, while 64 acted as the control group and received no meditation training. For those that participated in TM, 40.7% achieved an increase of at least one level on CTS in math compared to on 15% of the control group. There was a difference in the English sections as well with 36.8% increasing a level versus 17.2% of the control group. This suggests that students who practice TM are more likely to increase test scores than those who do not.

To evaluate how meditation affects university students' cognitive abilities,<sup>[167]</sup> incorporated meditation training in a sociology class. Students were encouraged to practice at least five to ten minutes a day and asked to record their activity in a journal. They were given pretests in two executive function measures. Although no statistical significance was found, the data did show that higher reported meditation practice was associated with a more significant change in executive function abilities when pre and post-test were compared. This study highlights that there are research limitations and that more research is necessary to provide a better understanding about how meditation impacts cognitive functions.

Stress is often associated with lower academic achievement and overall well-being of students. Importantly, a study of ethnic minority high school students with exposure to high levels of violence and pressure to acculturate finds that TM is an effective way to reduce psychological distress and anxiety.<sup>[168]</sup> The study focused on 106 students from four public high schools throughout the US and was composed of 87% minority students. Students were given pre/post test to measure psychological distress, stress, and mental health. Researchers adjusted the 7-Step TM program to cut the time spent meditating to 10–15 minutes instead of the prescribed 20 minutes recommended for adults. In reviewing the available research, there appears to be a need to explore the design of developmentally appropriate meditation practice programs for children and young adults. As suggested by,<sup>[164]</sup> additional research may lead to a proven form of meditation that works best on young minds who are learning and would benefit from its stress reducing stressful benefits.<sup>[164]</sup> point to a lack of available research as a major hurdle to evaluating studies effectively. Nonetheless, research does suggest many positive academic and personal/social benefits to those who practice medication. That, combined with its' relative ease of use make a strong argument to incorporate meditation into the school curriculum.

## Forms of meditation

### Physical postures

Various postures are taken up in some meditation techniques. Sitting, supine, and standing postures are used. Popular in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism are the full-lotus, half-lotus, Burmese, Seiza, and kneeling positions. Meditation is sometimes done while walking, known as kinhin, or while doing a simple task mindfully, known as samu.

Some mantra techniques (as with Transcendental Meditation) do not require learning special positions, only sitting comfortably with eyes closed.

## Mindfulness

Over the past 20 years, Mindfulness and mindfulness-based programs have become increasingly important to Westerners and in the Western medical and psychological community as a means of helping people, whether they be clinically sick or healthy.<sup>[169]</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, who founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program in 1979, has defined mindfulness as

'moment to moment non-judgmental awareness.'<sup>[170]</sup> Several methods are used during time set aside specifically for mindfulness meditation, such as body scan techniques or letting thought arise and pass, and also during our daily lives, such as being aware of the taste and texture of the food that we

eat.<sup>[171]</sup> Some studies offer evidence that mindfulness practices are beneficial for the brain's self-regulation by increasing activity in the anterior cingulate cortex.<sup>[172]</sup> A shift from using the right prefrontal cortex is claimed to be associated with a trend away from depression and anxiety, and towards happiness, relaxation, and emotional balance.<sup>[173]</sup>

Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation was developed by American physician Edmund Jacobson in the early 1920s. In this practice one tenses and then relaxes muscle groups in a sequential pattern whilst concentrating on how they feel. The method has been seen to help people with many conditions especially extreme anxiety.<sup>[174]</sup>

As a result of the popularity in participation of mindfulness, conferences such as Wisdom 2.0 have arisen.<sup>[175][176][177]</sup> Mindfulness has entered the secular world in many ways allowing to reach many different groups of people.<sup>[178]</sup>

It has also been shown that mindfulness has result in increased antibody titers to the influenza vaccine.<sup>[179]</sup>

## Mental silence

Sahaja yoga meditation is regarded as a mental silence meditation, and has been shown to correlate with particular brain and brain wave activity.<sup>[180][181][182]</sup> Some studies have led to suggestions that Sahaja meditation involves 'switching off' irrelevant brain networks for the maintenance of focused internalized attention and inhibition of inappropriate information.<sup>[183]</sup> Sahaja meditators scored above peer group for emotional wellbeing measures on SF-36 ratings.<sup>[184]</sup>

## Research on meditation

Research on the processes and effects of meditation is a growing subfield of neurological research.

<sup>[185][186][187][188][189]</sup> Modern scientific techniques and instruments, such as fMRI and EEG, have been used to see what happens in the body of people when they meditate, and how their bodies and brain change after meditating regularly.<sup>[190][191][192][193][194]</sup>



Young children practicing Transcendental Meditation in a Peruvian school

Since the 1950s hundreds of studies on meditation have been conducted, though many of the early studies were flawed and thus yielded unreliable results.<sup>[195][196]</sup> More recent reviews have pointed out many of these flaws with the hope of guiding current research into a more fruitful path.<sup>[197]</sup> More reports assessed that further research needs to be directed towards the theoretical grounding and definition of meditation.<sup>[195][198]</sup>

There is evidence that meditation is associated with changes in brain structure, although further research is necessary before making definitive conclusions.<sup>[199]</sup>

Clinical psychology and psychiatry since the 1970s have developed a number of therapeutic applications based on mindfulness for helping people who are experiencing a variety of psychological conditions.<sup>[200]</sup> Mindfulness practice is being employed in psychology to alleviate a variety of mental and physical conditions, such as bringing about reductions in depression symptoms,<sup>[201][202][203]</sup> reducing stress,<sup>[202][204][205]</sup> anxiety,<sup>[201][202][205]</sup> and in the treatment of drug addiction.<sup>[206][207][208]</sup> Recent studies demonstrate that mindfulness meditation significantly attenuates pain through multiple, unique mechanisms.<sup>[209]</sup> It has gained worldwide popularity as a distinctive method to handle emotions.

## Meditation, religion and drugs

Many traditions in which meditation is practiced, such as Sahaja Yoga, Transcendental Meditation<sup>[210]</sup> Buddhism,<sup>[211]</sup> Hinduism,<sup>[212]</sup> and other religions, advise members not to consume intoxicants, while others, such as the Rastafarian movements and Native American Church, view drugs as integral to their religious lifestyle.

The fifth of the five precepts of the Pancasila, the ethical code in the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions, states that adherents must: "abstain from fermented and distilled beverages that cause heedlessness."<sup>[213]</sup>

On the other hand, the ingestion of psychoactives has been a central feature in the rituals of many religions, in order to produce altered states of consciousness. In several traditional shamanistic ceremonies, drugs are used as agents of ritual. In the Rastafari movement, cannabis is believed to be a gift from Jah and a sacred herb to be used regularly, while alcohol is considered to debase man. Native Americans use peyote, as part of religious ceremony, continuing today.<sup>[214]</sup> In India, the soma drink has a long history of use alongside prayer and sacrifice, and is mentioned in the Vedas.

During the 1960s and 70s, both eastern meditation traditions and psychedelics, such as LSD, became popular in America, and it was suggested that LSD use and meditation were both means to the same spiritual/existential end.<sup>[215]</sup> Many practitioners of eastern traditions rejected this idea, including many who had tried LSD themselves. In *The Master Game*, Robert S de Ropp writes that the "door to full consciousness" can be glimpsed with the aid of substances, but to "pass beyond the door" requires yoga and meditation. Other authors, such as Rick Strassman, believe that the relationship between religious experiences reached by way of meditation and through the use of psychedelic drugs deserves further exploration.<sup>[216]</sup>

## Popular culture

Various forms of meditation have been described in popular culture sources. In particular, science fiction stories such as Frank Herbert's *Dune*, *Star Trek*, *Artemis Fowl*, *Star Wars*, *Maskman*, *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton, and *Stargate SG-1* have featured characters who practice one form of meditation or another. Meditation also appears as overt themes in novels such as Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* and Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*.

## See also

- Autogenic training
- Intrapersonal communication
- List of ineffective cancer treatments
- Meditation music
- Sensory deprivation

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19. The verb root "dhyai" is listed as referring to "contemplate, meditate on" and "dhyāna" is listed as referring to "meditation; religious contemplation" on page 134 of Macdonell, Arthur Anthony (1971) [Reprinted from 1929]. *A practical Sanskrit dictionary with transliteration, accentuation and etymological analysis throughout*. London: Oxford University Press.
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27. Buddhist scholar B. Alan Wallace has argued that focused attention is a basis for the practice of mindfulness. He writes that "Truly effective meditation is impossible without focused attention... the cultivation of attentional stability has been a core element of the meditative traditions throughout the centuries" (p. xi) in Wallace, B. Alan (2006). *The attention revolution: Unlocking the power of the focused mind*. Boston: Wisdom. ISBN 0-86171-276-5.
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42. *Christian spirituality: themes from the tradition* by Lawrence S. Cunningham, Keith J. Egan 1996 ISBN 0-8091-3660-0 page 38
43. *The Oblate Life* by Gervase Holdaway, 2008 ISBN 0-8146-3176-2 page 109
44. *After Augustine: the meditative reader and the text* by Brian Stock 2001 ISBN 0-8122-3602-5 page 105
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60. This does not mean that all meditation seeks to take a person beyond *all* thought processes, only those processes that are sometimes referred to as "discursive" or "logical" (see Shapiro, 1982/1984; Bond, Ospina, et al, 2009; Appendix B, pp. 279-282 in Ospina, Bond, et al, 2007).



61. An influential definition by Shapiro (1982; republished 1984, 2008) states that "*meditation refers to a family of techniques which have in common a conscious attempt to focus attention in a nonanalytical way and an attempt not to dwell on discursive, ruminating thought*" (p. 6, italics in original); the term "discursive thought" has long been used in Western philosophy, and is often viewed as a synonym to logical thought (Rappe, Sara (2000). *Reading neoplatonism : Non-discursive thinking in the texts of plotinus, proclus, and damascius*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-65158-5.).
62. Bond, Ospina et al (2009) – see fuller discussion elsewhere on this page -- report that 7 expert scholars who had studied different traditions of meditation agreed that an "essential" component of meditation "Involves logic relaxation: not 'to intend' to analyze the possible psychophysical effects, not 'to intend' to judge the possible results, not 'to intend' to create any type of expectation regarding the process" (p. 134, Table 4). In their final consideration, all 7 experts regarded this feature as an "essential" component of meditation; none of them regarded it as merely "important but not essential" (p. 234, Table 4). (This same result is presented in Table B1 in Ospina, Bond, et al, 2007, p. 281)
63. *Mysteries of the Rosary* by Stephen J. Binz 2005 ISBN 1-58595-519-1 page 3
64. *The everything Buddhism book* by Jacky Sach 2003 ISBN 978-1-58062-884-6 page 175
65. For a general overview see *Beads of Faith: Pathways to Meditation and Spirituality Using Rosaries, Prayer Beads, and Sacred Words* by Gray Henry, Susannah Marriott 2008 ISBN 1-887752-95-1
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79. For instance, Kamalashila (2003), p. 4, states that Buddhist meditation "includes any method of meditation that has Enlightenment as its *ultimate* aim." Likewise, Bodhi (1999) writes: "To arrive at the experiential realization of the truths it is necessary to take up the practice of meditation.... At the climax of such contemplation the mental eye ... shifts its focus to the unconditioned state, Nibbana...." A similar although in some ways slightly broader definition is provided by Fischer-Schreiber *et al.* (1991), p. 142: "**Meditation** – general term for a multitude of religious practices, often quite different in method, but all having the same goal: to bring the consciousness of the practitioner to a state in which he can come to an experience of 'awakening,' 'liberation,' 'enlightenment.'" Kamalashila (2003) further allows that some Buddhist meditations are "of a more preparatory nature" (p. 4).
80. The Pāli and Sanskrit word *bhāvanā* literally means "development" as in "mental development." For the association of this term with "meditation," see Epstein (1995), p. 105; and, Fischer-Schreiber *et al.* (1991), p. 20. As an example from a well-known discourse of the Pali Canon, in "The Greater Exhortation to Rahula" (*Maha-Rahulovada Sutta*, MN 62), Ven. Sariputta tells Ven. Rahula (in Pali, based on VRI, n.d.) (<http://www.tipitaka.org/romn/cscd/s0202m.mul1.xml>): *ānāpānassatim, rāhula, bhāvanam bhāvehi*. Thanissaro (2006) (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.062.than.html>) translates this as: "Rahula, develop the meditation [*bhāvana*] of mindfulness of in-&-out breathing." (Square-bracketed Pali word included based on Thanissaro, 2006, end note.)

81. See, for example, Rhys Davids & Stede (1921-25), entry for "jhāna<sup>1</sup>" (<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.1:1:2005.pali>); Thanissaro (1997) (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/onetool.html>); as well as, Kapleau (1989), p. 385, for the derivation of the word "zen" from Sanskrit "dhyāna." PTS Secretary Dr. Rupert Gethin, in describing the activities of wandering ascetics contemporaneous with the Buddha, wrote:
 

"...[T]here is the cultivation of meditative and contemplative techniques aimed at producing what might, for the lack of a suitable technical term in English, be referred to as 'altered states of consciousness'. In the technical vocabulary of Indian religious texts such states come to be termed 'meditations' ([Skt.:] *dhyāna* / [Pali:] *jhāna*) or 'concentrations' (*samādhi*); the attainment of such states of consciousness was generally regarded as bringing the practitioner to deeper knowledge and experience of the nature of the world." (Gethin, 1998, p. 10.)
82. Goldstein (2003) writes that, in regard to the Satipatthana Sutta, "there are more than fifty different practices outlined in this Sutta. The meditations that derive from these foundations of mindfulness are called *vipassana*..., and in one form or another – and by whatever name – are found in all the major Buddhist traditions" (p. 92). The forty concentrative meditation subjects refer to Visuddhimagga's oft-referenced enumeration. Regarding Tibetan visualizations, Kamalashila (2003), writes: "The Tara meditation ... is one example out of thousands of subjects for visualization meditation, each one arising out of some meditator's visionary experience of enlightened qualities, seen in the form of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas" (p. 227).
83. Examples of contemporary school-specific "classics" include, from the Theravada tradition, Nyanaponika (1996) and, from the Zen tradition, Kapleau (1989).
84. These definitions of *samatha* and *vipassana* are based on the "Four Kinds of Persons Sutta" (AN 4.94). This article's text is primarily based on Bodhi (2005), pp. 269–70, 440 *n.* 13. See also Thanissaro (1998d) (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an04/an04.094.than.html>).
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144. Taylor (1999, p. 7) stated that "the increased Soviet influence in India, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Communist Chinese takeover of Tibet and Mongolia, and the increased political influence of Chinese Communism in Korea and Southeast Asia were key forces that collectively set the stage for an influx of Asian spiritual teachers to the West. An entirely new generation of them appeared on the American scene and they found a willing audience of devotees within the American counter-culture. Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, Swami Satchitananda, Guru Maharaji, Kerpal Singh, Nayanaponika Thera, Swami Rama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Chogyam Trungpa, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Swami Muktananda, Sri Bagwan Rujneesh, Pir Viliyat Kahn, and the Karmapa were but a few of the names that found followers in the United States... [and] the most well known and influential... today remains Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989."
145. Robert Ornstein (1972, originally published 1971), in: Naranjo and Orenstein, *On the Psychology of Meditation*. New York: Viking. LCCN 76149720
146. "members were chosen on the basis of their publication record of research on the therapeutic use of meditation, their knowledge of and training in traditional or clinically developed meditation techniques, and their affiliation with universities and research centers.. Each member had specific expertise and training in at least one of the following meditation practices: kundalini yoga, Transcendental Meditation, relaxation response, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and vipassana meditation" (Bond, Ospina et al, 2009, p. 131); their views were combined using the "The Delphi technique... a method of eliciting and refining group judgments to address complex problems with a high level of uncertainty" (p. 131).
147. The full quotation from Bond, Ospina et al (2009, p. 135) reads: "It is plausible that meditation is best thought of as a natural category of techniques best captured by 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein, 1968) or by the related 'prototype' model of concepts (Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Mervin, 1975)."
148. Lutz, A., Slagter, H. Dunne, J. and Davidson, R. (8 March 2010). Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2693206/>). "The term 'meditation' refers to a broad variety of practices...In order to narrow the explanandum to a more tractable scope, this article uses Buddhist contemplative techniques and their clinical secular derivatives as a paradigmatic framework (see e.g., 9,10 or 7,9 for reviews including other types of techniques, such as Yoga and Transcendental Meditation). Among the wide range of practices within the Buddhist tradition, we will further narrow this review to two common styles of meditation, FA and OM (see box 1–box 2), that are often combined, whether in a single session or over the course of practitioner's training. These styles are found with some variation in several meditation traditions, including Zen, Vipassanā and Tibetan Buddhism (e.g. 7,15,16)...The first style, FA meditation, entails voluntary focusing attention on a chosen object in a sustained fashion. The second style, OM meditation, involves non-reactively monitoring the content of experience from moment to moment, primarily as a means to recognize the nature of emotional and cognitive patterns"
149. The full quote from Bond, Ospina et al (2009, p. 130) reads: "The differences and similarities among these techniques is often explained in the Western meditation literature in terms of the direction of mental attention (Koshikawa & Ichii, 1996; Naranjo, 1971; Orenstein, 1971): A practitioner can focus intensively on one particular object (so-called *concentrative meditation*), on all mental events that enter the field of awareness (so-called *mindfulness meditation*), or both specific focal points and the field of awareness (Orenstein, 1971)."
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## External links

- Meditation ([https://www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality/Meditation/](https://www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Meditation/)) at DMOZ

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Meditation&oldid=757932550>"

Categories: [Meditation](#) | [Mind–body interventions](#) | [Self](#) | [Spirituality](#) | [Spiritual practice](#) | [Personal development](#) | [Silence](#) | [Yoga](#)

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