

Meditation

Our five-movement model suggests why sitting still silently, in a symmetrical, “*metal-like*” posture for an extended time period is very challenging for many people. Even though we may be aware that the quiescent mood created in meditation is the exact missing element our lives would benefit most from, those of us with *rising (liver)* or *radiating(heart)* movement imbalances frequently have an aversion to meditation. “Stillness” it seems, opposes our most common behavioral style. Because of this tempo contrast, many people accept meditation more readily after spending time in an activity that is physically stimulating. The exhilarating effect of exercise is usually followed by a more relaxed state, which serves to clear the overactive mind preparing one for the ultimate experience of sitting in nothingness.

Setting the Space - When and Where

The benefits of meditation increase when we practice consistently. Choosing a particular time of the day to sit for 5- 20 minutes or longer will keep our efforts consistent. Many people find sunrise and sunset to be very effective times. Meditation that includes deep slow breathing is best avoided before sleeping because we will be too “charged up” to fall asleep. Find a time that works for you.

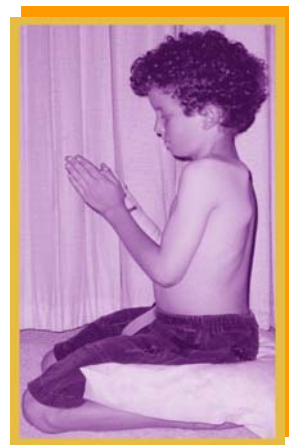
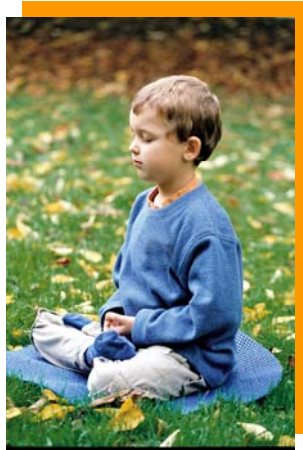
A common motivating factor for establishing a regular meditation practice comes through creating a sacred space to meditate in. A dedicated area, or room in one’s home or workplace acts like a magnet that draws one into practice, especially if it is decorated in a pleasing way. The traditional meditation space always utilized an altar— a table or shelf arranged with sacred objects, and/or pictures of loved ones, in a quiet area where one sits under the influence of peace, and serenity.

One popular altar design I like very much is based on the “yin/yang— expansion/contraction balancing” format. This traditional altar consists of candles (usually two) on the periphery of the altar, salt placed in a transparent bowl in the west or north direction representing contraction, water on the east or south to represent expansion and an offering of grain in the center to represent balance. This altar reinforces a constant burning light (the candles) that illuminates our existence throughout the daily balancing of our lives. Use your imagination to create an altar that inspires you to immerse your attention in the valuable practice of sitting quietly for reflection, prayer or meditation. Any elements of ritual (incense, stones, art symbols, plants, lighting, music etc.) you introduce to your sitting will provide a *hear-centered* presence to pray or meditate in.

The reinforcing effects we experience in our meditation environment impregnate our sacred space. The vibrations accumulate and eventually create a powerful magnetic feeling in this area. Over time the beneficial effects felt here becoming a part of our consciousness and in turn overflow into our daily activities as we take our sacred space with us in every waking moment.

The centered feeling resulting from meditation creates the perfect environment for our minds/consciousness to feel the surrender of silence. This clear vacuous state is the medium we utilize for receiving and developing intuition.

Start by sitting with a straight back position. When inflexibility of the legs makes sitting in a cross-legged position too physically demanding, use pillows under the coccyx (tailbone) if necessary until your flexibility improves.



For sitting “seza” Japanese style, pillows between the back of thighs and calves may be useful.

Avoid supporting the back from behind with pillows. Keeping our spine in an upright position maintains the minimum amount of energy necessary to assure wakefulness and efficient blood and energy circulation. If you get sleepy, it is best to lie down and rest. It means you are too tired to circulate Chi. The meditation posture is most likely signaling your attention to fulfill an important body requirement. An ideal time to meditate is after sleeping.

Feel your head and neck lifted as if suspended by a string from the space above you. Tuck the chin in slightly. Close the mouth as if you are about to crack a smile. This gesture keeps our mood joyful. Rest the tongue on the roof of the mouth behind the upper teeth. The mouth is often described as the space between heaven and earth. This tongue position connects the “energy circuit” between the lower and upper body. This technique of unifying heaven and earth is an essential component of many meditation styles. Breathe through the nose. Allow your vision to relax, eyes slightly opened, gazing downward and outward, without focus past the bridge of the nose. The eyes, pointing slightly downward maintains a rooted down to earth perspective.

The following illustrations demonstrate two common meditation postures, which accentuate expanding or contracting effects on the body. Assuming different hand postures referred to as “*mudras*” can balance one’s unique condition. Hold the illustrated hand position that feels more comfortable or research your own.

EXPANDING/OPENING

This open hand position initiates an offering to the heavens where the body expands and equally releases all that it receives



CONTRACTING/GATHERING

This hand position focuses energy to and from the “Hara”/Abdominal Center. The traditional Chinese Taoists compared the area around the navel to a cauldron that fills with Chi/energy and once filled, circulates throughout the body.



CULTIVATING AND CIRCULATING ENERGY

With practice, the gathered life force will gently bubble and steam, circulating vitality to the whole body. The “mist” rises, to nourish our “Shen”/Spirit making the eyes sparkle while we become relaxed and alert. All traditional sitting postures work by aligning the body in an energy enhancing "circulation loop." The crossed legs, touching toes (in Seza), and hand postures are all designed to continuously circulate energy through the body. The outside of the body remains quiet while the inner channels and organs are actively cultivating and circulating our life essence.

Breathing deeply, quietly in a slow, smooth breathing pattern while maintaining a relaxed, and aligned posture initiates increased circulation of blood and lymph, which helps to build immunity, circulate nourishment to all body cells, and cleanse us of wastes.

People usually report how sitting in meditation enhances the quantity and quality/taste of their saliva. This resulting increase of alkalizing saliva has been described in ancient texts as sweet divine nectar that as well as nourish the body by enhancing digestion also lubricates *all* cellular motion.

The ancient Taoists of China asserted that meditation cultivates additional life enhancing *substances* known as the “three treasures”: 1) the “*Jing*” or reproductive essence which is believed to be the basic component for many of our body structures (bones, brain, spinal cord, uterus) as well as the essential fuel of our willpower and creative drive, 2) the “*Chi*,” our life motivating force and 3) the “*Shen*” our spirit.

BREATHING

When sitting, the rising and falling of the breath is like a thread that weaves a connection between body, mind, and spirit. During meditation, the breath subtly tunes frequencies of expansion and contraction integrating our body’s connection with the source of all life. Emphasizing inhalation or exhalation can create different effects on the body.

Expanding - Ascending Consciousness

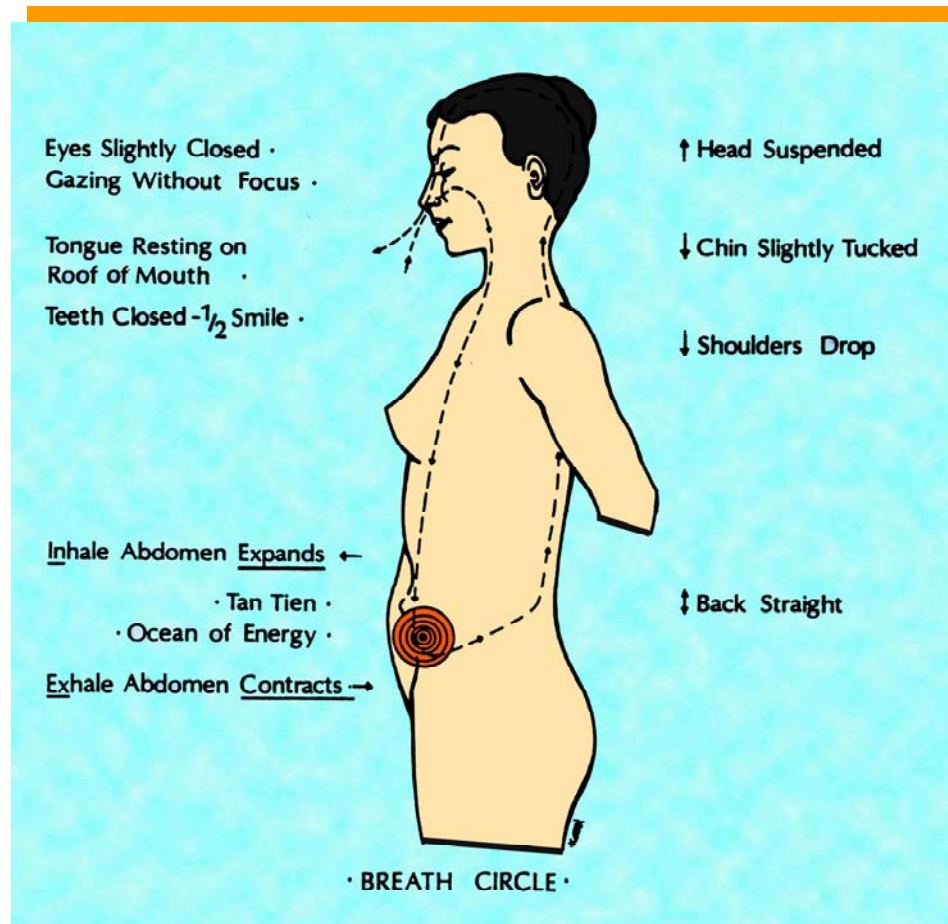
Emphasizing a long inhale paired with a short exhale while focusing attention upward to the brow area creates a light-headed feeling for many people. This is useful for those who feel too contracted, sunken, or heavy. Traditionally, this method was used for initiating an out of body experience. Some cultures practiced this method to help one’s spirit leave the body at death. **I recommend practicing this method rarely and for only short periods of time.**

Contracting - Grounding Consciousness

For establishing a more rooted focus, emphasize a long exhale followed by a smaller inhalation while focusing attention below the navel. This method was traditionally used to create physical vitality and a practical life approach. It is particularly valuable for those who are too “spacey” or spend too much time “in their head.”

Centered Breathing

Sitting while maintaining a slow, smooth, deep and quiet breathing pattern with an even inhale/exhale pattern is considered a balanced and safe method for everyone.



Observe how you feel after experiencing these different breathing methods. The one that facilitates an alert and peaceful state is likely the most effective. Keep in mind that we may require different breathing approaches at different times in our meditation practice. Also, *conscious* breathing is an effective first step in meditating. It is important to eventually stop conscious breathing and let the breath follow its natural course. Shallow, deep, and varied breathing patterns result once we attain a deep “*no mind*” meditative state.

Meditation, a seemingly harmless activity, can drain energy and resources (e.g. minerals, blood sugar) if the method initiates extremes. Hyperventilation, increase of body pains, and anxiety are signals that the breathing method, posture, or both are inappropriate.

The “chi” circulation, cultivated by the Breath Circle, can be further enhanced by contracting the muscles surrounding the perineum area, (base of the lower abdomen) on

the inhale and relaxing these muscles on the exhale. This alternation of closing and opening the abdominal center acts like a bellows to fan the flame of our internal energy.

A simple routine to focus on while meditating can be:

1) POSTURE

Suspend the head from above to straighten the head, relax the shoulders, tuck the chin slightly, place the tongue on the roof of the mouth and hold a slight smile.

2) BREATHE Count an inhale and an exhale as one and count for 10-20 or more deep slow and smooth full breaths depending on your time available

3) STILLNESS ~EMPTY THE MIND- Stop thinking. When you notice a thought come, follow your breath one or twice. Let your breath be like wind blowing the thoughts away leaving clear empty space within the borders of your body.... back to stillness. The duration of empty periods will increase with practice.

Simply repeat these 3 steps over and over—**MEDITATION**

VOCALIZATION OF SOUNDS

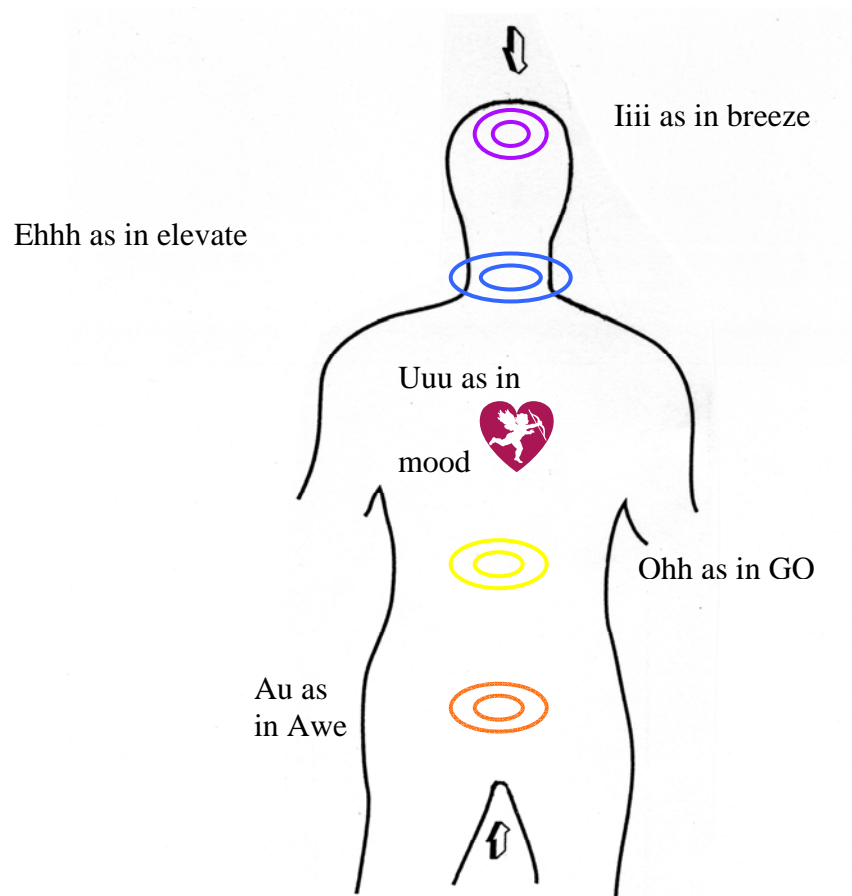
Sound vibrations ripple through the body affecting all our meridians, cells and internal organs. Many traditional cultures consider sound to be the ultimate tool for transforming the body's energy patterns. Chanting, praying, and toning sacred syllables have all been used by various cultures to restore, tune and evoke a natural harmony with nature.

Different frequencies, tones or styles of music can either enhance or detract from our health. How do you feel when listening to fingers scraped over a chalkboard or the screeching of automobile brakes— expanded, contracted, anxiety, fear? Perhaps the soothing sound of a gentle river stream establishes a relaxed, flowing or nurturing feeling. The many applications of sound can initiate a state of being that prepares the body for sitting quietly.

Toning or chanting sounds can tune the body by either charging or discharging different energies. Our emphasis on exhalation (releasing air) when vocalizing for a prolonged period may initiate an overall cleansing effect for some while others may experience fatigue, hyperactivity, or sensitivity to sound. Be aware of your own response. I recommend that chanting or toning be followed by silent natural deep breathing to assure a balanced body rhythm.

Slowly sound the syllable A (pronounced: “awe,” as in: omnipresent). Does your body feel more open or closed? Vowel sounds usually facilitate an opening or expanding movement compared to consonants, which close or punctuate the movement of sound vibrations. Sound the E (pronounced like, “ever”). Does it create more of a contracting or expanding feeling? Where do you feel it? Do the same for I (pronounced like, “please”), O (pronounced like, “over”) and U (pronounced like, “mood”).

CHAKRA VOWEL SOUNDS



Repeating or chanting these vowel sounds often provides balancing effects on the corresponding 5 Chakras found between the entrance points of heaven's and earth's force. It is interesting to note how many heartfelt songs use the *UUU* sound (as pronounced in the word mood) in background vocals. This Heart Chakra sound is considered to be centrally located in the scale of comparison between contracting and expanding vowel sounds. *Ahh* is the most expanding, *Iii* the most contracting. *Ahh* balances our lowest area (lower abdomen) while *Iii* balances our highest area (head). Vocalize them to verify, if they work for you in this manner. Perhaps the *Ahh* sound will balance constriction. Perhaps the *UUU* sound will help one to stay centered. Find the ideal effect for your own condition. ALSO the pitch you choose to voice these sounds will affect the charkas. Use lower pitch to vibrate the lower charkas and higher pitches for the upper energy centers. You will feel it in the right place when you find an appropriate pitch for each chakra.

The use of sounds has received both positive and negative feedback- Repeating sounds certainly accelerates vibration and various experts debate the value of toning while meditating. Find how it works for you.

The words we choose in speaking or thinking) create unique vibrations of heaviness or lightness that affect our body~ mind ~spirit.

It is interesting to assess the vibration around our names. How is “George” different from “Hillary?” Whose name has a softer or harder vibration? Does this reflect anything about the balance they seek in life? Break your name down into its expanded or contracted qualities

Do you think that there is any synchronistic balancing effect created by the names/sounds our bodies are called for a lifetime? - Food for thought. Repeat your name with a monotone at least five times. What was the effect? contracting, expanding, flowing, rising, radiating, grounding, gathering —how did it feel? It is quite common for people to change names. Perhaps the sound of one’s name is out of tune with one’s inherent nature or the direction in life she is moving in?

Sounds can be evoked or voiced silently as well. There are some traditions that view the silent or spoken repetition of individualized phrases called “*mantras*” as an essential component of meditation. Often an experienced teacher, who intuitively understands the meditator’s overall constitution and condition assigns these mantras.

Sounds, syllables, statements, words, and their meanings reverberate in our consciousness affecting our life experience. Aside from the use of syllables, chants, or words for prayer and meditation, what is the effect or impression imprinted in our consciousness when using phrases like: I quit, I hate, I can’t stand, or four letter curse words?

The experiences of our life are a direct result of our thoughts and the energy that these thoughts vibrate with. Being more aware of the brain’s internal dialogue and changing what we are sending out to the world is an important factor in transforming our lives.

Do you wonder why certain desires never become fulfilled? Ask, “how much time do I spend on judgment, frustration, negativity compared to peaceful and harmonious thoughts and the feelings that go along with them”? Becoming more mindful and shifting our attention to what we aspire towards will change our life experience.

In the traditional theory of complementary opposites, silent meditation is the receptive or passive (yin) approach to achieve higher consciousness. The spoken word, through prayer and language take the active (yang) means to achieve enlightenment. Affirmations, prayer or good-will wishes are sometimes written and/or spoken as forms of meditation. Sometimes these active/yang practices initiate over-stimulation of thoughts. To ensure a peaceful resting effect, I always recommend that people follow any active meditation practice by sitting in quiet emptiness.

Going Inward

During any activity, it is helpful to send your attention inside the body. While cleaning, cooking, standing in line or in conversation, bring your focus inward to the space inside you and listen inwardly as well as outwardly. This exercise (sometimes referred to as “mindfulness”) is an excellent tool for grounding ourselves when any emotional challenge arises. Breathe it in and listen~ Be Present.

Embracing Our Surroundings

Another technique, which augments “going inward,” is to sit quietly in the awareness of environmental sensations- sound, smell, sight, taste and touch. The listening to and immersion with our external surroundings often initiates a sense of unity and a deep state of tranquility. Here, tuning in to our surroundings while feeling our inner presence unifies us with our environment, keeping us fully present. One of the best opportunities to practice “*being present*” is during the many times we find ourselves waiting for an event to occur e.g. check out lines, traffic jams. Instead of being overtaken by frustration when plans are delayed, send attention inside your body, wait, and witness the physical sensations that come up. Get out of the brain and focus more on the sensations in your body. These steps will bring us closer to silent meditation:

Sit quietly. When thoughts arise focus briefly on the breath to blow them away from your awareness; like the wind scattering clouds to leave a clear empty/blank space. Even one second without thought creates benefits. Embrace/embody peace and quiet.

Or just WAIT

Sit quietly and simply wait. When a thought materializes, witness it, and go back to waiting.

*In the silence of NOW
No thing - not a peep
Guarding this space
Waiting for the slightest stir*

Emptiness extends~ longer ~ ~ longer ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
SK