

One Meditation #1, Jan. 2025: “What Is Meditation?” (Apr. 4, 2025)

Welcome to the monthly Meditation Listserv. Thanks for being among the 170+ people at the start! Most of you signed up by individual invitation. A smaller group listed your email in The Edge magazine or other public sources, and I thought you might enjoy this listserv: a monthly 300-600 word message about meditation modern and ancient, Western and Eastern, scientific and spiritual. Your email never is shared, you don't need to reply, and you can unsubscribe anytime by emailing me. I've meditated 60+ years on and off, researched the subject almost as long, and have graduate degrees in the field. I'm located in Minneapolis, USA, and at www.richardjewell.org. –Richard

ONE MEDITATION #1, Jan. 2025. “WHAT IS MEDITATION?”

How can you start meditating? Meditation has two major definitions: (1) science says it is a conscious calming of the body and mind, and (2) experienced practitioners often define it as aware attention for the purpose of inner growth.

Using these two definitions, the word “meditation” covers most major spiritual practices. In addition to traditional half-hour sitting, they range from chanting, visualization, prayer, forest bathing, and yoga to many others. Mindfulness, too, say the Mayo Clinic and other scientists, is a type of meditating. All of these outer forms and more are linked by having, in common, very similar purposes and scientific results.

What are the effects? Harvard PhDs and bestselling authors Goleman and Davidson describe in *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*, their review of the 60 best scientific studies of 6000 available to them. These 60 showed that generally, during and after meditation, the rate of heartbeats slows, blood pressure lowers, and symptoms of anxiety may ease. Some studies also suggest improvement in health and an increase in longevity of a year or two. The more often you meditate, the longer stronger the benefits.

But for right now, how can you best practice meditation? Do you have to keep it up for half an hour? No. Length of time varies. Ten minutes once or twice a day, or a couple of half-hour sessions each weekend, may work for you. To retain sustained calming, an hour—or two half-hours—per day creates stronger body and nerve habits. But simple mindfulness can be practiced often for as little as ten seconds at a time each day.

How about posture, place, and time of day? You can sit on the floor or in a chair, lie down, stand, walk, run, do yoga, exercise vigorously, be in nature, dance, sing, make art, hug or make love, sit in a hot bath (say Japanese researchers), chant or hum or breathe while doing any of these, be mindfully ethical and/or loving to others, or labor physically in a selfless and mindful way. You can do it alone in silence or with music, in nature or with recorded sounds of it, with others, during lunch or in the bathroom at work, or be mindful in the

middle of a meeting even when talking or speaking.

Science is behind all of these. The significant difference between meditating and not doing so is that when you practice these activities, you get off the usual merry-go-round, pay attention, and observe instead of react.

For example, outwardly I use four meditation methods. Two are popular, now: one is forest bathing (from *shinrin-yoku* or “forest bath”), well studied by Japanese researchers. It means surrounding yourself in nature. I often walk briskly among trees by a Minneapolis lake while meditating: a triple method of exercise, being in nature, and inner concentration. The other now-popular practice I use is mindfulness, which means observing your own thoughts, feelings, and actions as they occur.

Of the two traditional methods I practice, one is to sit in meditation daily, in a comfortable chair. The other is, once a week, to attend a group event, which has the effect of magnifying my meditation.

Meditating, however you practice it, eventually can become a steadying influence: a flame, a flutter, a mist, a shower. It may be as thin as a puff of air or as strong as a mighty tree—sharp or gentle, thick but invisible, and always there to support you.

What places and times might work best for you?

Next Month: FOUR GENERAL TYPES OF FOCUS IN MEDITATION

Peace, Strength, Joy

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