

# What is Meditation ?



By Ian McArthur

## **What is Meditation?**

What is Meditation is a good place to start if you have become interested in this subject.

There is a big difference between knowing about meditation and experiencing it for yourself.

When I first became interested in meditation after having various treatments for a whiplash injury, the things that really struck me was the sense of peace and energy flowing in the body. This was experienced along with vivid colours I could see with my eyes closed. I could see purple orb like shapes floating up and down against a blue or green background. These sensations were experienced whether I was undergoing traditional physiotherapy or other treatments such as Reiki or acupuncture. I became fascinated by these colours and shapes and at the time I genuinely thought this was meditation. I assumed everyone saw the same thing when they meditated and if I didn't see them then I hadn't meditated properly. I can remember feeling incredibly frustrated when the colours didn't appear and even if I felt peaceful for a while in the meditation, it wasn't good enough! I had to see these lovely greens, blues and purples for me to feel I was doing it right.

I wasn't until I met my teacher Helen a few months later, that I realised I was only scratching the surface of what meditation is. The more I meditated and started to explore different ways to meditate, the more my understanding grew. It finally all fell into place when I attended my first silent retreat hosted by Adyashanti in Surrey in England.

On the day we registered for the retreat we were handed a short document on "True Meditation" which we were encouraged to keep with us and read for the duration of the retreat. After reading this document numerous times during the retreat and along with Helen's teachings it really started to cement with me what meditation is.

Meditation is quite often sold as a state we induce or somehow create. If we can manage to clear our minds and at the same time control our emotions and bodies, then a state of meditation will be experienced. Many teachers will talk and describe meditation in such a way.

However, there are other teachers who will describe it differently as they realise that meditation is simply our natural way of being when we let go of trying to manage or control our current situation in any given moment. We normally have some resistance about what is happening in our lives at any given time. Whether it is thoughts giving us opinions or whether it is an emotional reaction or a physical reaction to a situation. There is usually something about us wanting this moment to be different in some way. When we let go of trying to manage or control this moment and surrender to whatever is happening then we'll notice our true nature. That is meditation.

Once we realise this, we can acknowledge we have all noticed this before but haven't really understood this fully. We all have had times in our lives when we have "experienced" meditation.

For Example

- When we have sat down and are reading a book. We become so engrossed in the words of the book, the story that is unfolding in our imagination that when we look at the clock, we suddenly realise half hour has flown by! Where did that thirty minutes go?
- When we go to the cinemas to watch an anticipated film. We just sit and watch and can be enthralled with what is occurring on the screen. Then we suddenly realise we've been sat for over an hour in peace as we've been lost in the story that the film is telling us.
- When we are driving a car. Have you had the experience of driving on a very familiar journey? Perhaps a daily commute up and down a motorway and you suddenly realise that you are not exactly sure how far you've come or exactly where you are? You've just been driving in peace – no dispute with anything. Just in the moment.

In all these situations the common theme is not having an agenda or argument with what is currently happening. Whether it is reading or watching a film or driving a car. When we are not managing or trying to control anything then meditation comes to the fore.

It is so peaceful and calm as we no longer are at odds with life and we start to relax fully into the moment.

At first, we may only notice this as we “come out” of it. We may notice that there seems to have been a period when time has flown by. It may feel like we were not present and missing something. When we start to practice meditation rather than just noticing these occurrences, we will be able to be aware of meditation as it happens rather than when it appears to stop or you “come out” of it.

You can never really “come out” of it though, as it is our True Nature. It is simply that we have been not tuned into this as we have followed thoughts, emotions, sensations and everything that is going on in the outside world.

If we allow this realisation about meditation to sink in, we can come to understand that one of the ways we can tune into meditation is to put our attention fully onto an activity. As we have experienced in life, if we concentrate fully on something like reading a book then we can start to notice that meditation naturally happens. It can be any activity. We put our attention back on the activity, when we notice we have become distracted in some way. No matter how many times we are distracted we simply go back to putting our attention fully on the activity.

The activity or technique can be anything. We can sit and follow our breath, or we can go for a walk and follow our breath. We can sit outside and watch the leaves of a tree as they move in the wind or we can listen to the sound of the rain hitting the windows. We can visualise a certain colour or image of a flower with its petals gradually opening or we can focus on our body moving as we practice Qigong or Tai Chi.

There are so many ways we can meditate. Depending on how you are hooked up, you will be drawn to or find a technique which really resonates with you.

### ***Why Meditation techniques work***

Meditation techniques work as they are allowing us to mimic what we have always naturally done to find peace and relax. Whatever pastime, hobby or interest we have, we all look for something that allows to unwind and escape from the stresses of our daily busy routine.

Say if we've always painted for pleasure and enjoyment. Obviously, there are times when we probably found painting not so pleasurable when things didn't go to plan and we didn't like what we have created. However, there will be times when everything is going well, and we are enjoying every moment as we paint. When this happens, we may find time just flies by as we are at peace with what we are doing with no objections to anything that we are experiencing. We are simply painting. Everything else in the world is on hold as we concentrate fully on what we are painting.

So, when we start to meditate, and we choose a technique such as watching the leaves of a tree blowing in the wind. We place our attention fully on the leaves and nothing else. Just like in painting we are putting our attention fully onto something and nothing else.

The more the practice with the technique, the more we are likely to discover peace and calmness just like we found when we were painting. We are just recreating what we have always done, but we no longer need to get the paints and paint brushes out each time we want to relax.

We just need a little patience with ourselves to stay with the techniques long enough so that it is established as something we just do. Meditation then becomes part of our daily lives.

We can then practice meditation at any time during the day if we choose the right technique. We can't always see trees with their leaves blowing in the wind, but we can use another technique like following the movement of your chest and stomach as you breath in and out.

Initially, we just need to explore and discover which meditation techniques work best for you. We are all unique so we'll find different techniques will suit different people. Some will be drawn to visual meditations like watching a candle flame while others may find listening to music more appealing.

In the end you may discover you can use any meditation technique as your understanding of meditation deepens on your journey.



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