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# Meditating in midstream

In the West today, meditation is mostly practiced as an aid to mental and physical health, usually without any religious goal, and emptied of all metaphysical content. In this form Atheists, Agnostics, Pagans and Pantheists can all do it. Meditation takes a bewildering array of forms in world religions. It is best known from the Eastern traditions, starting in India perhaps seven centuries BCE and taking sophisticated forms in Yoga and Buddhism. It's also present, though less formally stressed, in Taoism. In these traditions the goal is individual: to pass beyond suffering, to attain unity with some underlying ultimate and impersonal reality, whether that be Brahma, Nirvana or the Tao.

The three Abrahamic religions are distant from this type of meditation. They have always had their own intense forms of contemplation, whether of God's mercy, Jesus' sacrifice, Mary's intercession, or submission to Allah. Their goal is more usually that of imagined communion with some supernatural person. But one has only to remember the face of John Paul II in prayer to realize that there is an intense process of focus going on. And all three have also had their own mystical versions, in Kabbalah, Sufism, or profound Christian mysticism such as Meister Eckhart's.

Is there a specific Pantheist approach to meditation? Probably there are some of us who don't consciously meditate at all. Many Pantheists do meditate, and we cherish our meditation time. We don't have a prescribed method: the articles in this edition of Pan show that we have many different ways of doing it. Yet there is a common thread and a common approach.

None of us use esoteric methods that require prolonged or expensive training. None of us use meditation as a way of escaping the world. We may use it as a way of calming our

concerns and anxieties and entering into a state of peace. But it is not just an inner peace: it is a peace with Nature and with the real world.

We may use it as a way of losing our sense of time – but only in order to enter more deeply into the actual present moment and the unmediated presence of things. Most of us don't suppress all ordinary thoughts that arise, but simply pass beyond them.

Many of us meditate by focusing specifically on concrete natural things like rocks and trees, processes like flowing water, activities like walking or breathing. Meditation does not take us away from these things – it brings us face to face with them in more intense ways, sometimes so intense that we

lose the sense of self. It is a form of meditation that could be practiced even while rafting down a raging torrent

Several of our groups, such as the ones in San Diego, Los Angeles and London, have used group meditations as a way of reflecting on our place in nature, and of cementing our feeling of community.

With a young tradition like ours, we have much to learn. Can we take from ancient traditions while dropping their supernatural content?

What settings are most conducive (light/dark, nature/home)? What

physical aids are helpful (candles, pebbles?). What sounds work best (running water, blowing winds, gentle music)? Could biofeedback devices be helpful? What about sensory isolation tanks, fasting, drugs, sleep deprivation, Tantric sex? Can some forms of meditation be harmful to some people?

We don't have set answers but we offer experiences and suggestions and invite you to explore for yourself. Don't just browse or study the articles; the fun is in experimenting with the methods and discovering for yourself what they do – or don't do – for you.

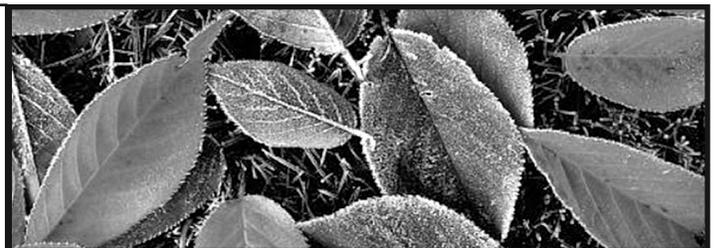
Every day, priests  
minutely examine the Dharma  
and endlessly chant  
complicated sutras.  
Before doing that,  
they should learn how to read  
the love letters  
sent by wind and rain,  
snow and moon.  
  
Ikkyu (1394-1491)

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# The Art of Being-Here-Now

by **Walter Mandell**

Why meditate? There are physical benefits such as lower blood pressure, and there are mental health benefits, such as stress relief, anger management, and control of anxiety.

But the most important reason to meditate is simply to learn to “be here now.” Over and over, we all forget what is happening here and now. Unintentionally, but inevitably, we drift off, getting lost in memories, thoughts, hopes, daydreams and fears. We lose track of what we are really doing, seeing, and feeling. So, we are often unaware of our life as we are living it! What could be more precious than reclaiming the moments of one’s life? And what could be worse than to let the never-to-be-repeated moments of one’s life slip by unnoticed and unappreciated?

Meditation won’t end our tendency to space out and lose track of the here-and-now. With practice, though, it will lessen it.

I define meditation as the art of dwelling in the present moment, calmly aware of whatever is happening in your body, your mind, your emotions and your surroundings. In practice meditation is simply this: non-judgmentally noting, and calmly just being with whatever is happening as it is happening. Or put more simply, “the art of being-here-now.”

“Here. Now. This. Just this.” These words, or some variation on them, can form the basis of awareness meditation suitable for Pantheists. They make no metaphysical assumptions, and require no act of faith, no theological belief.

Calming one’s mind, often by concentrating on a mantra, or an object such as a candle flame, or one’s breath, is a preliminary step which most methods use; but it is not the essence of meditation.

The next step is more important – learning to intentionally remain in touch with whatever you experience, without judging it, craving it, or rejecting it. This requires learning how to just

matter-of-factly be with, and be fully conscious of, whatever you experience. Some Zen master long ago wrote, “How miraculous, I hew wood, and I draw water.”

And at heart, that’s all meditation is – calmly paying attention to whatever you are experiencing and just “being-with” your experience. You are meditating whenever you are mindfully “being here now,” dwelling in the present moment. Nothing supernatural or occult about that!

Any method that helps you to stay centered in the here and now, is a meditation practice. There are meditations that can be done in an ordinary chair, or while walking in the woods, or while driving a car, rather than sitting cross-legged on the floor.

In this article, I shall discuss several methods which work – for me. You might find these also can work for you. Try them and find out for yourself. These are simple, but powerful, techniques to make me more aware of my life as it is lived from moment to moment.

As with every skill, progress comes with practice. If your first try is unsuccessful don’t give up. Keep trying. If a particular method still is not helpful, try another. One size does not fit all.

## Consulting the Senses

The entire meditation is done with eyes open, while engaged in normal activities. It can be done at home, or while walking on a trail. It starts off with the words (thought silently, not spoken to others) “Here, Now, This. Just This.” I take a deep breath in and out and note the sensation of breathing, and I relax as I exhale. I then purposefully smile, and tell myself “I dwell in this wonder-filled moment.” Then I get in touch with each of my senses in turn: “Now I see THIS” (whatever this happens to be at the moment). I look ahead of me, to my right and left, at my feet, above my head, and simply try to see what is there. I may label what I see e.g. “falling leaf” or may just note it silently, without

labels. Either is okay, but I try to note the visual aspect of the here and now. “Now I hear THIS:” I proceed similarly, noting all ambient sounds, the sounds I myself am making by breathing, walking. “Now I smell this:” I breathe in and out, noting the smells I can smell. I may pick a leaf and smell it. “Now I taste this:” I note whatever taste is in my mouth. If I am walking I might pick a blackberry and taste it.

**You don’t have to do it in a rigid posture, facing a blank wall in a monastery. You can do it anywhere you like.**



“Now my skin feels this.” I note all the tactile sensations I have from my head to my toes – the way sunlight feels on my skin, of the way clothing touches it, or the wind. I may touch an object and see how it feels.

“Now my muscles, tendons and joints feel this.” I tune into muscle tensions, aches, kinesthetic sensations, how it feels to move. “Now my heart, lungs, gut, and other organs feel this.” I pay attention to all sorts of internal sensations. “Now my feet feel this.” I pay attention to the sensations of my feet as I walk, stand.

I then tell myself “Now I feel this emotion.” And try to identify what I am feeling – non-judgmentally. I then tell myself “Now I am doing THIS” (and label my current activity).

#### **Landmark Meditation.**

I do this daily while walking my dogs, on a trail through the woods, or on country roads. It greatly improves my mood. I call it “landmark” because I use a series of physical landmarks to periodically remind myself to “Be Here Now.” This meditation is based on an indisputable fact: Wherever I am is “here,” whenever I am is “now.” And every different “here and now” is unique in the whole history of the Universe.

First, I call up my attention by (silently) saying the word “Now!” Then I pick out a feature – perhaps a tree, or stone, or a patch of sunlight – as my first “landmark.” It is best if it is located about a half minute’s walk ahead of me. On days when my mind wanders more than usual I will select landmarks spaced closer together, and when my powers of concentration are better I will lengthen the distance between landmarks.

Next I smile (that’s really important in this meditation) and say to myself. “Here. Now. This. Just this.” And I try to dwell with whatever I am perceiving, thinking, feeling, I may neutrally label it with a simple label; e.g. “thinking,” “bluebird,” “mosquito,” or “impatience.” Or, if I can, I may remain mindful of it without affixing a verbal label.

When I reach the landmark, I select another landmark further

down the trail, and repeat the whole process. I continue this Landmark Meditation for the duration of the walk

#### **What’s this? What’s next?**

The next meditation I find suitable for doing while driving. Obviously, I wouldn’t want to do a meditation that will put me to sleep while I am driving! But, this one will actually help me be a better, more observant driver. This method can also be done when engaged in other activities such as housework or yard work. Step 1. I say to myself “NOW! What’s this?” And I answer myself (silently) by naming an object, or situation that I perceive, or an activity which I am doing. For example, when driving, I may answer this question with “big truck approaching” or “I’m driving too fast.” Step 2. I ask myself “What’s next.”

And I answer by predicting what is about to happen, or what I must do next. For example, “That truck is about to turn left” or “I will slow down.” I keep repeating steps 1 and 2 for the duration of the meditation.

#### **Sitting Mindfulness Meditation**

This is a standard Buddhist (Vipassana and Zen) meditation. Step 1. I sit quietly in a straight backed chair and half close my eyes. I then count my breaths, counting by 1s on each exhalation 1,2,3,4. I breathe normally, not controlling my breath, just counting it. When I get to

the count of four I repeat the process. I do this until I feel calm. Step 2. I no longer count my breaths, but I still attend to them just quietly telling myself “in” when I breathe in, and “out” when I breathe out. I breathe as quickly or slowly as is comfortable. When my mind wanders from the counting task, I mentally label the distraction with a simple one word non-judgmental label; e.g. “thinking,” or “itch,” or “ache” or “boredom.” I do not scold myself for getting distracted, I just calmly return to observing my breathing.

If the distraction is too great, I change my focus from the distraction itself. For example, if I hear an annoying ringing in my ears (tinnitus) that won’t go away, I calmly permit myself to just hear it and make the tinnitus the object of my concentration. So the persistent distraction turns out not to be an impediment to meditation, it becomes just another tool for mindfulness – for being calmly aware of what is happening as it is happening.

When the distraction goes away, I can always return my attention to the in and out of my breathing. Breath is a great tool for sitting meditation; since you are always breathing, it is always available.

#### **Walking Meditation**

This is a popular Buddhist Meditation, it can be done barefooted or while wearing shoes. Walk slowly up and down your room, or on a safe short garden path, with eyes half closed, looking at the ground ahead of you. Feel each footfall as you walk. When your right foot touches the ground say to yourself “right.” When your left foot does say to yourself “left “. Pay attention to the sensations of touch, motion, and pressure in your feet. Noting how your heel makes contact with the ground, how the pressure of contact then shifts as you roll onto the ball of your foot then onto your toes. Keep this up for 10 or 15 minutes. When thoughts, or other distractions, arise just note them, apply a one word label e.g. “thought” and return to feeling your footsteps.

**Breathing in,  
I calm my body.  
Breathing out, I smile.  
Dwelling in the present moment  
I know this is a wonderful  
moment.**

*Thich Nhat Hahn (1926 - )*



# *A Monastery in the Vastness of Nature*

Mira Fong juxtaposes pantheistic unity with Christian transcendence.



**T**he bell tolls in the distance and travels far through the red rock canyons. Everything here dwells in deep contemplation—mountains, river and juniper bushes, they rest

peacefully under the northern sky.

I had long wanted to come here and do a retreat in this remote monastery, “Christ in the Desert” in Abiquiu, New Mexico. Two hermits live here by the Chama River, along with twenty other monks; they form a small monastic community. These are the Benedictine monks that devote their entire lives to silence, prayer and manual labor.

After a two hour drive through the high plains, followed by eighteen miles of dirt road winding through the canyons and high mesas, finally I entered into a world of imperative silence. The remoteness was a blessing, undisturbed by the noise of the outside world.

The chapel is the gathering place, where the monks sing Gregorian and Byzantine chants seven times a day. Draped under black robes, each quiet face seems belonging only to another time.

The interior of the chapel is like a dream that I have often had. Huge windows open to the red rock mountains that surround the monastery. Light streams down through the windows and enters into the vast emptiness of the room. Only a small altar stands in the middle, a pure space uncluttered by thoughts and things. Solitude is the soul’s companion.

All the daily work is done in silence. Sometimes during dinner hour they play classical music. The evening of my visit, they play the Cello Concerto of Elgar, a treat for me.

My room is basic, with no electricity. There is only a small wood stove for heat. On the desk, two oil lamps for evening reading. A small bed in the corner for resting. This is all that I need.

The monks arise around three in the morning and retire around nine in the evening. Lunch is the

main meal of the day. Since they don’t eat meat, most meals include rice, vegetables, soup, bread and potatoes. A simple hot meal can be so satisfying after a day’s hard work in the cold mountain air.

It was also much appreciated that after a week of seclusion; the monks can relax and chat with the guests during Sunday teatime after the High Mass. During lunch, Father Bernard said that humility should be the foundation for all our practices and relationships. The words were what I needed to hear.

I walked down to a nearby river in freezing wind as the first dawn light awakened the sleeping desert, and lit up the faces of the cliffs. There was the joyous sound of wild geese flocked together in the woods, like the festive sound of trumpets to announce the arrival of a New World, fresh and deeply conscious. The winter air was crisp and cold and the road was muddy from the melting snow.

Each step I took sunk deeper into the mud. Each step required effort, as if the desert was inviting me to stay, to slow down, and to listen where the great silence reigned. From cliff to cliff, mountains to canyons and the harsh desert vegetation were all draped by the white robe of a late January snow. What was the language of the snow? It was as if they were all part of a monastic order, surrendering to the hardship of solitary existence.

As I sat by the Chama River, listening to the gentle lapping of the waves, a voice came to me, “Beauty and grace enter only through the soul’s longing.” I have come to the river to listen to its many voices. The things that I was attached to were like waves of impermanence ever carried away by the river of life. Nothing remains the same, except the constant movement of meeting and parting.

In the evening, I returned to the chapel to listen to the last evening chant. The room was dimly lit by candles. The monks were motionless, kneeling in humble gestures, absorbed in prayers before retiring for the night.

As I walked back to my room from the chapel, the wind began to blow wild. The stars were crystals in a cosmic sea. All of a sudden, the sky became a magic light show; mysterious rays rose from behind the mountains and swept across the terrain as if they were walking along side with me.

After returning to my room, my body was

If you cannot find the truth  
right where you are, where else  
do you expect to find it?  
*Dogen (1200-1253)*

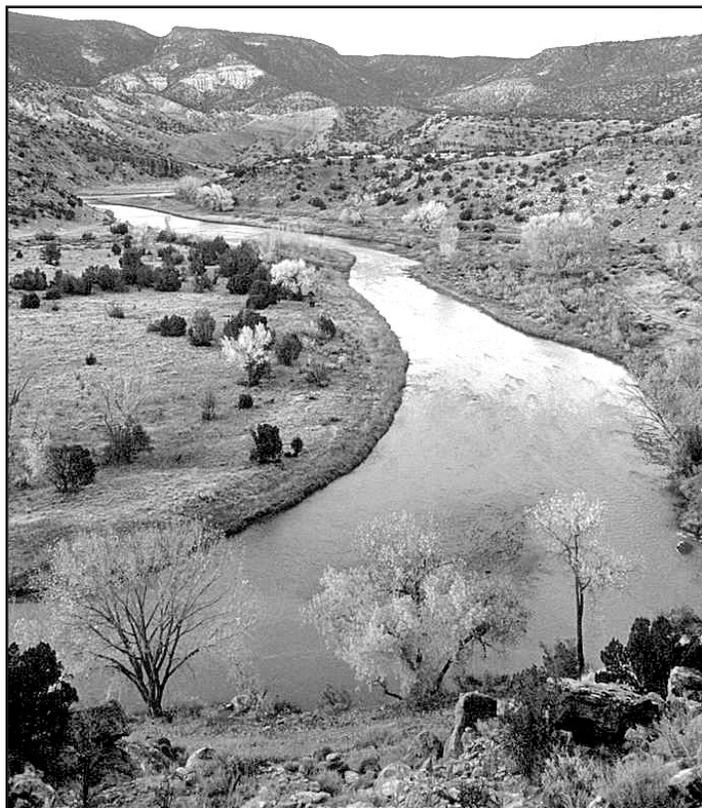
warmed by the cozy fire from the woodstove. A poem flew into my mind as I was writing under the flickering candlelight, it was about gratitude.

In the middle of the night, I woke up to the distant howling of coyotes, the sound of the magical beasts roaming wild in the desert. The night was as dark as coal, and so was my dream.

I was secretly invited to a temple of stars. The monastery of my soul lies in the vastness of nature. A lone tree stands on the edge of a high cliff with roots imbedded into the rock. A herd of cows contentedly graze in the woods, and wild geese swim in the river.

It is here I found my true community. Time no longer clings to past or future or to anyone's desire. There was a total emptiness and freedom in me. My heart was as serene as the river, reflecting a majestic sky.

Unknowingly, I was called by a mysterious voice to come to this interior canyon. Wandering alone in the desert, tears flooded my face; they were tears of gratitude, of homecoming.



## Reaching altered states of consciousness

by John “Eljay” Love-Jensen

Everyone is familiar with the waking state and with the sleeping states: light sleep, deep sleep, and dreaming sleep (REM). But the human mind is capable of quite a few altered states—of—consciousness. Alcohol, marijuana, and many other drugs will induce an ACS.

Meditation is a way of intentionally inducing an ACS through activity. Meditation allows me to get in touch with my inner feelings. It helps me deal with anxiety and stress. It allows me to engage in an internal dialog, and work out many issues in my life – to prioritize things which are deeply important to me, and to reflect upon those things that bring unhappiness into my life and how to address them. Meditation gives me a sense of serenity, tranquility, and inner peace. In this hectic world, meditation is an indulgence in some “me time,” it is treating myself, like eating a delicious chocolate truffle confection. If it were a chore, I would not do it.

Meditation is not magic. It is not supernatural. It is not occult. Yet, it can be very powerful. For example, in certain altered states—of—consciousness, you can be cut or burnt without feeling any pain.

Preparation is important. Set aside twenty to thirty minutes of time. Take care of any personal business, so you won't be hungry or have to interrupt your meditation session to use the bathroom. Start by being comfortable, free from distractions. I find lying prone or strolling to be comfortable. Many other meditation practitioners prefer a cross-legged sitting position, but I find that to be slightly uncomfortable and somewhat distracting.

Relax, conscientiously, each part of your body in turn. All the while breathing. Natural rhythm. This kind of preparatory relaxation technique is a form of meditation itself. It is also a form of autohypnosis.

I regularly use four different meditation practices.

In **Lucid Dreaming**, I engage my imagination to have a waking dream or daydream. I can either willfully control the action, or allow the action to unfold however it will. This works for both having a rest on the couch, or a prelude to going to sleep.

For **Still Mind**, I disengage from thinking about stuff. I focus on breathing. On relaxing. When a stray thought intrudes, I do not engage it. I let it go. I just “be.” Focus on the now. Don't concern yourself with your last breath – that breath is the past, not the now. Don't concern yourself with your next breath – that breath is the future, not the now. The sense of “self” abates. Thinking goes into neutral. Just be. Peace. Quiet. Just be. Still Mind lends itself to a strong sense of being “one with the Universe.”

For **Disassociative Cognition**, I also disengage thinking about stuff. However, when a stray thought intrudes, I follow it, and go to wherever it leads. I willfully engage in a free-flow stream of consciousness. Undirected. Unmoderated. Unstructured. Non-judgmental. I “tune out” my senses, and let my thoughts wander wherever they happen to roam. No rhyme or reason. Literally “no reason,” as I do not “think

about” the thoughts that I am thinking, I just let them happen. In my opinion, this kind of meditation is closest to what I would designate as a pantheist meditation. Especially when done while gazing at the stars on a clear night, or watching the lazy clouds roll by on a halcyon day.

Finally **Introspection** is a rigorous self-assessment. Looking deep into my own fears, hopes, dreams, loves, beliefs, understandings, regrets, sorrows, joys, blessings, shortcomings. Coming to know myself. Setting my priorities and what is important to me. Testing my values. Engaging in

an internal dialog with myself. If there is something bothering me and I can't put my finger on it, a good introspection session will often ferret it out.

There are all sorts of things you can buy: meditation pillows, incense, candles, books, music, decor, special foods, special drinks, teas, statues, gongs, bells, chimes. Gurus will sell you meditation classes, personal meditation trainers, and meditation retreats. But you are already fully equipped mentally and physically to engage in meditation. You just need the interest, discipline and motivation to try.

The Temptation of St. Anthony by Hieronymus Bosch, detail



Khajuraho temple sculpture. Photo © Shunya: www.shunya.net

Historically, meditation has appeared in a vast range of forms from the Tantric mysticism of Khajuraho (above) to the world-renunciation of hermits like St Anthony (left), plagued by obsessive sexual nightmares.

## Alternative approaches you might try out. Or maybe not.

I have described the techniques that I regularly employ. Are there other sorts of meditation? Yes. Using the term "meditation" liberally to cover to include other forms of intentional altered states-of-consciousness, here's a few you might try.

**Fasting.** Not just the 12-hour fast, or a lose-weight bad diet plan. This is the "fast for days until you start experiencing hallucinations and delusions". I think this one is dangerous to one's health.

**Primal scream therapy.** Scream out your anger. Let loose your inner Tasmanian devil. Rage against the machine. Beat your chest and howl at the moon. Discharge those pent-up emotions. This is actually kind of fun. I still do this sometimes while driving by

myself in my car.

**Beserkergang.** Takes primal scream therapy to the next level. Smash things. Destroy. Broken glass. Holes in walls. I do not recommend this one - and I have intentionally engaged in it. Beserkergang is a high-impact exercise.

**Tai Chi** is a combination of movement and meditation, originating from martial arts and associated with Taoism. It involves slow, smooth, graceful transitions between different postures. The postures harken back to their martial arts roots. Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise.

**Runner's High.** Besides the benefit of exercise, distance running can effect an altered state-of-consciousness which makes the runner feel euphoric.

**Hold hands & pray.** The human body physically reacts to human contact. The act of holding hands causes physical chemical reactions in the body. There is an implicit level of trust involved, which also involves some relinquishing of control. Praying as a central focus for a group has a strong bonding

impact on the participants. All of these factors can produce an altered state-of-consciousness that gives a pleasant sense-of-belonging experience that is not normally part of our waking state-of-consciousness.

**Rapture.** Work yourself up into a religious frenzy until a feeling of ecstasy overwhelms you. A willful "letting go", coupled with a prominent feeling of presence.

**Massage therapy.** Both the human contact aspect, and the deep tissue and fascia stimulation can relieve tension and provide a pleasant altered state-of-consciousness. The downside to massage therapy is that it requires at least two people, one person to act as masseur or masseuse. Frequenting a professional may become an expensive habit.

**Dancer's frenzy.** At drum jams and dance halls, some dancers experience an altered state-of-consciousness possibly similar to that of the runner's high.

**Sex** is considered by some as a meditation technique. Some cultures such as Tantra have formalized sexual practice as a meditation technique.

## Guided meditations for pantheist and nature-reverent groups

# You are where you ought to be

*a breathing exercise by Karl Slinkard*

I would like to see meditation, guided and otherwise, as a cornerstone of Pantheist gatherings. Meditation is free of the theological implications of “prayer.” It is already sanctioned by its practice in Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen and a variety of groups that want a “spiritual” focus without theological underpinnings. It is becoming popular in addiction recovery where people of various religious orientations (and none) come together and are ready to be emotionally moved as a group in a way that will not be offensive to any spiritual orientation.

The journey into “inner” space is an emotional and mystical analog to the transcendentalism of theistic religions. We can achieve a clear full appreciation of a situation or theme that transcends just “thinking or arguing “ about it. Group meditation has a “gravity” about it, denoting the importance of the coming together without the supernatural implications of many other rituals.

The deep relaxation and psychological benefits of regular personal meditation are a known value in and of themselves. Guided meditation can teach techniques in a group setting which can be practiced in solitude, helping the meditator confront life’s problems with some degree of equanimity.

The general technique of meditation is simple. You relax. You focus on some simple object or process such as breathing. You try to avoid judging, and view all within your perceptual sphere simply, just as it presents itself to you. And that’s it.

Although there are many variations on this theme, the general notion is that we are bound by our preconceptions and habits to a narrow band of experience and understanding. By sitting and monotonously attending to some simple action, we become aware of things that were outside the realms of our everyday constricted perception. When these new perceptions are combined with our everyday commonsense approaches, we find we have a more sane and comprehensive world view.

We can also meditate in a group setting, in guided meditation. This is when a person sets the stage for the meditation and guides the meditators through the process. This approach is particularly suited to novice meditators, for stress reduction and for group solidarity. I have had considerable experience with guided meditation, both as leader and participant, and although the

experience varies, generally it leaves me relaxed, at peace, and with a feeling of solidarity with my fellow meditators.

In setting the stage, I find it useful to have soothing music playing quietly in the background. Soft classical works well, but any restful music will do. I find soft lighting or candlelight helpful. Other props I use include a clear bell, gong or cymbal to softly signal the beginning and end of meditative phases. A garden or sitting room both work well.

Have your group seat themselves comfortably – well grounded with back erect in a posture they can easily hold for twenty to thirty minutes. Once everyone is comfortably seated, I softly sound the bowl and ask my group to relax and focus on

their breathing – breathing in deeply – holding the breath about 5 seconds and then exhaling fully. Repeat the words several times in soft, slow chant.

Continue the process through the whole body: eyes and the facial muscles, neck and shoulder muscles, back, arms, hands, spine, stomach, buttocks, thighs, calves, feet and toes. Go through the same mantra with each body part until the whole group is fully relaxed and at peace.

Once everyone is fully relaxed, the leader can quietly suggest that the

outside world with its distractions is beginning ever so slightly to fade. We are drifting down within ourselves. Just as there is infinity outside ourselves, there is infinity inside ourselves.

Experiment with how far to take this and in which direction to guide the group. There are also taped and CD guided meditations, which may help to learn how others have used this technique. Then create your own, tailor-made for Pantheist meetings.

One of the themes might be to imagine one’s consciousness existing in some one else’s body. What would it be like to be someone else in the room? Feel what it would be like to be a rock or squirrel or comet. Meditate on what we could do to bring more peace to our family, job, community, world.

After about twenty to thirty minutes, softly sound the gong and announce that when everyone feels ready, they might want to return to “normal consciousness,” open their eyes, look around and smile. You have just guided your first meditation. Congratulations!

**Focus on your breathing**  
**Inhale deeply – hold – exhale**  
**Inhale the good air – hold – exhale**  
**There is no place else you need to be**  
**There is nothing more important you need to do**  
**Inhale the good air – hold – exhale**  
**Now relax your body and mind completely**  
**Feel your scalp. Really feel the scalp from the inside.**  
**Is there any tension there?**  
**Does it remind you of anything you need to let go?**  
**Inhale the good air – hold**  
**Breathe out and let go of whatever troubles you.**  
**Relax your scalp and totally let go**  
**You are where you ought to be**  
**You are doing what you need to do**  
**Relax. Close your eyes and relax**

# Pause for a moment, and consider yourself

Tom Brower presents some of the guided meditations used by the WPM's San Diego group at their monthly meetings

## Earth

Pick up the soil, a token of the stuff of the earth. Study its textures and colors. Smell its raw earthiness.

The gift of soil is not given to us by an external creator. Each inch of the good soil takes ten thousand years to evolve. It has been prepared over billions of years by the tiniest of beings.

A teaspoon of living soil contains a million bacteria, 20 million fungi, 1 million protozoa, and 200,000 algae - a stupendous reservoir of genetic materials that have evolved continuously since the dawn of the earth. These micro-organisms are busily engaging in photosynthesis at the surface. They fix nitrogen to roots. They bury carbon that is then released back into the air through the transformation of organic matter into carbon dioxide, a process known as soil respiration.



The soil is active. The soil is alive. The soil is a life related to our own life. And our very sustenance comes from the soil.

Billions of years ago, the same carbon that is in our bodies today exploded from a supernova, became the stuff of stars and helped give rise to the planets.

What we call dust comes originally from the universe binding itself to become the surface of our planet. Single-celled bacteria eventually formed plants through pho-

tosynthesis; chloroplasts in the cells of plants created oxygen and organic material. Dancing mitochondria in our own cells today turn those same elements into the energy for human life; and long after we die, our age will be measured in the carbon that remains.

Pause for a moment and consider yourself not as a specific individual, but as a part of the surface of the spinning earth.

Feel a part of nature, not separate from it.

## Fire and light

Light the candle. Study its form and graceful beauty. . .

Our ancestors lived by the lights in the sky. They rose at dawn and retired at dusk. They navigated by the stars, and the sun served as guide to the seasons, and, in turn, the timing of planting and harvesting. Most ancient sacred sites were oriented exactly to the patterns of the sun. Newgrange, an ancient Irish site, is carefully constructed of huge rock slabs, with a small aperture set above the entrance to the main chamber. Precisely at the dawn of winter solstice, the sun's first rays pierced the hole and illuminated the circular interior.

Close your eyes and remember in your mind's eye one of the most beautiful sunsets that you have



ever seen. . . . Remember the exquisite swirl of colors . . . and the how the stunning effect slowly evolved before your eyes like a grand kaleidoscope, gently turning. . . . See the sun slide behind the horizon and remember a dark night sky teeming with stars and the misty Milky Way. Imagine the earth moving on its celestial path, the stars like distant beacons.

We are in heaven, there is no above and no below, just patterns of light. The very first explosive fire ignited the cosmos and gave off light. That same light is expanding today, carried within inscrutable energy units called photons. The fire continues in the center of our earth, and starstuff is in our own beings. Like air, water, and soil, we need light for life itself.

Feel a part of nature, not separate from it.

# as a part of the spinning earth . . . .

[Meditations on air and water were presented in Pan issue 6]

## Gratitude Meditation

Close your eyes and breathe in, slowly and deeply and release it with a gentle sigh. Do this several times, focusing on the sensations of your breath sounds. Become acutely aware of your breath, the air you live by. Breathe—slowly, deeply, gratefully. And feel your connection to the sky, the cosmos. Breathe in its resources, delight in its beauty, welcome its gifts.

Imagine the first images from space of our planetary home—a blue orb cloaked in white lace—breathtaking in beauty.

Now sense the presence of the Earth below. Be in present awareness. Feel at home.

The human advent on earth was a relative moment ago.

We as a race found a home perfectly outfitted for us and astonishingly beautiful—deep forests, fleshy fruits, surging oceans, gentle rains, living creatures, dappled sunlight, rich soil.

And we came to understand that it is perfect for us because we arose from it and are a part of it.

Let's silently express our heartfelt gratitude and offer a thankful tribute to the universe for its gifts:

To the earth which supports us and gives us the home where we dwell and experience the journey of our lives;

To the oceans and bays, to the currents and streams, to the quiet pools and lakes, to the underground rivers, the earth's reservoir of life-giving water;

To the fish, great and small, who have given of themselves that others may live;

To the whales, our cetacean relatives, for the lessons of family they have taught us, and to their cousins and our relatives, the dolphins, for the joy they have brought us;

To the corn stalk and the yellow maize, to the fruits and the berries, to the medicinal plants and trees, for their sustenance and healing powers;

To the forests and groves, for the shelter they provide and the air we breathe;

To the eagle whose bold flight inspires us;

To the tiny insects who help keep the balance;

To the great winds that sweep the earth and the gentle breezes that caress our senses;

To the thunder that excites and inspires awe;

To the overarching sky which cloaks and protects us, repository of our life-sustaining breath;

To the luminous moon which influences the movement of the waters and the cycles of the harvest;

To the mighty sun, which sustains us with light and warmth;

To the stars which illuminate the vast reaches of the universe;

To the great mystery that holds the secret of our very existence...

We offer a collective "thank you."

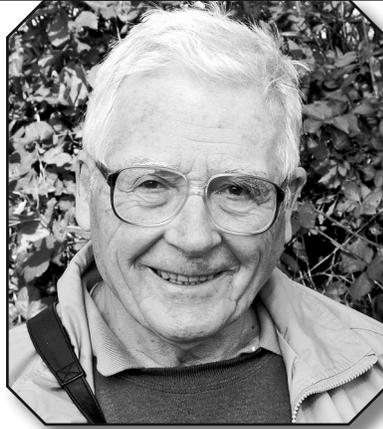


## *Lovelock and Suzuki become honorary advisors*

Over the summer two world-famous scientists agreed to become honorary advisors to the World Pantheist Movement. Both are laureates of the United Nations Environment Programme Global 500 award, which WPM president Paul Harrison also holds. They join existing advisors Ursula Goodenough and Michael Shermer

**James Lovelock** is best known as the originator of the Gaia theory, Dr Lovelock has been a lifelong inventor, among other things of instruments used by NASA to analyze the composition of the Martian atmosphere. It was the comparison of Mars' chemically stable atmosphere to Earth's that led him to develop the Gaia hypothesis: our 21% of the intensely reactive gas oxygen would be impossible without the presence of life.

Put simply, the theory states that living organisms are not separate from the earth, but evolve in an environment that includes the earth's crustal rocks, oceans and atmosphere. In turn they influence these non-living elements, in a way that keeps conditions tolerable for life, despite a gradual increase in solar output that would otherwise overheat the earth. "In no way do organisms simply "adapt" to a dead world determined by physics and chemistry alone," says Lovelock. "They live in a world that is the breath and bones of their ancestors and that they are now sustaining."



*'In no way do I see Gaia as a sentient being, a surrogate God. To me, Gaia is alive and part of the ineffable Universe, and I am a part of her.'*

The Gaia theory has followed the standard path of new and challenging scientific theories: at first ridicule and isolation, then reasoned rejection, then increasing acceptance. At the same time it has been refined and improved in response to the early criticisms. The Gaia hypothesis has now graduated into the Gaia theory.

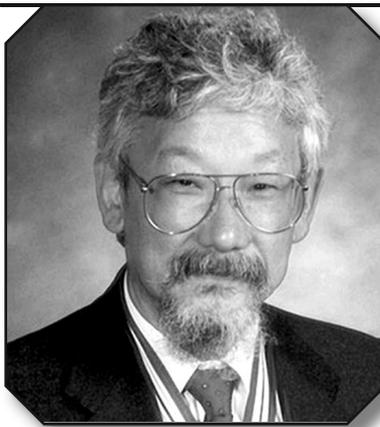
From a scientific point of view the theory has stimulated new research into the complex interactions at work. It has also given a strong stimulus to a more interdisciplinary approach to biology, ecology, geology, meteorology and oceanography.

The choice of a name borrowed from a Greek goddess was suggested by British novelist William Golding. This decision, as well as Lovelock's comments on spirituality, has expanded Gaia into something more than a scientific theory. It has also become an inspiration and a focal concept for nature-lovers and environmentalists. "For me," Lovelock writes, "Gaia is a religious as well as a scientific concept. Gaia should be a way to view the Earth, ourselves and our relationships with living things."

**David Suzuki** is Canada's foremost science broadcaster, host of the long running CBC series *The Nature of Things*. He has authored over 30 books, and is widely recognized as a world leader in sustainable ecology. He is the founder and chair of the David Suzuki Foundation which promotes environmental research, policy advocacy and public awareness.

Dr. Suzuki has 16 honorary doctorates and numerous other awards for his work, including a UNESCO prize for science and the Order of Canada. For his support of Canada's indigenous peoples, Dr. Suzuki has been honored with formal adoption by two tribes.

Like the WPM, Dr Suzuki recognizes the need for a non-theistic nature-focused spirituality as part of the urgent task of preserving our planet and its diversity. His book *The Sacred Balance* (Prometheus Books 1998) and the TV series of the same name developed this idea. "What aboriginal people tell us that the Earth is



*'There is no environment "out there" separate from us. We ARE the environment. What we do to the air, water and soil, we're doing directly to ourselves.'*

our mother. And I have come to understand, they are absolutely right in a profoundly scientific way.

"We are created out of the most important elements of the planet. We are fire. Because every bit of the energy in our bodies that we need to move, and grow and reproduce is sunlight. Sunlight captured by plants, converted into chemical energy that we consume and store in our bodies. So, when they speak about the Earth as our mother, and the four sacred elements: Earth, air, fire and water, they mean it literally. And they are right.

"Spirit is so important. We have to have sacred places that are far more than simply opportunities. We have to know we're immersed in nature. This doesn't conflict with science! For most of human existence we knew we were part of nature and dependent on it. That's what many of our prayers, our dances and rituals were all about and we knew we had responsibilities to act properly to keep it all going. But now our world is shattered, and we no longer see the connections. If we don't see that everything is interconnected, then any action has no consequences or responsibility. So the challenge is to reconnect ourselves to the world."



# *Surfing the ocean of reality*

by Paul Harrison

When I was a child, my father used to come in late at night and softly play very romantic piano pieces, often weeping with emotion. Sometimes I would still be awake and I would hover near the lounge door, listening, watching through the crack of the door, curious and fascinated.

It wasn't till later that I began to share his emotionality about music. When I was fifteen my mother bought our first record player and a stack of used 12" vinyl records. I listened to Grieg's piano concerto, alone, in the dark, with only the small red on-light glowing. I was totally drawn into the movement of the crystalline notes, oblivious of the crackling and hissing on the tracks – or indeed of anything else except the notes, freely soaring and plummeting like hawks. I felt as if the notes were playing the piano of my heart and spirit. My brain was flooded with intense emotions that had no specific content but were ecstatic and affirmative. There was harmony, but it was never static, it was always in motion. Spirit and body were fused, deliberative thought vanished, there was only the moment and the movement. It was almost a religious revelation.

With hindsight now those early intimations seem closely connected to my current spiritual practices. You could call these meditation, or any number of other words such as mysticism, self-therapy, mindfulness, focus. In the West today the word meditation is mostly used for techniques aimed at stress reduction and physical and mental health. But etymologically it covers not just Eastern-derived concepts and methods, but any form of disciplined thought directed at deep topics, usually religious. Sometimes meditation is part of a deeper quest for mystical experience, with a common element, shared across all religions, of loss of self and union with the Ultimate, however that might be conceived. So the peace of meditation, at its extremes, phases into the ecstasy of mysticism.

My first adult experience of this kind occurred when I was about eighteen, on a walking holiday in the English Lakes. I was walking down a trail towards Buttermere. The lake was directly between me and the afternoon sun, and there was a copse of beech trees between me and the lake. I stopped and watched the dance of lights, glinting on the wind-ruffled water, filtered through the leaves which were also rustling in the breeze. The lights were diamonds, suddenly bursting into existence and disappearing, completely unpredictable in their patterns and rhythms. I defocused my eyes so that I saw only the dance of the lights, and it plunged me into a trance-like state in which I felt a shiver of ecstasy floods through my veins.

Reflecting on this afterwards the lights seemed like the dance of energy in quantum waves, restless and ever changing, but in the change there was a profound kind of peace. The Universe is pure energy, always changing the individual forms in which it is manifested. Today when I want to be in closest touch with the fire of existence, I seek out the dance of sunlight on water. My practice echoes conventional meditation or mysticism in some of its goals, but not in the meaning of those goals.

My aim is to get beyond the negative emotions that plague us – anxieties, regrets, jealousies, angers. To escape the

world of human words and symbols in which we find ourselves so often wrapped up – almost literally wrapped, as in plastic, so we can't see out. To pass beyond time – not in the sense of passing into a realm of static perfection or dark emptiness, but of being only in the present, without mulling over the past or planning or worrying about the future.

I aim to experience a loss of self and a union with the



*The detail is always different, always unexpected, always exhilarating . . .*

all. To reconnect with the Ultimate – but for me the ultimate is not a creator god or some unknown “ground of being” or changeless realm. It is physical existence in its concrete reality, and in the flux of endless change.

When I say “aim” I don't mean I originally set out with these goals and devised ways of arriving at them. It's rather that when doing, experiencing or attending to certain things I found that these rewards came along, so now I repeat the activities in order to repeat the end results.

However, my approach does not resemble conventional meditation in its methods. I don't sit cross-legged, striving to

*File, yogin, don't squint at the end of your nose . .  
Thought bound brings bondage . .  
When bound it dashes in all directions,  
But released, it stays still.      Saraha*

blank all thoughts out of my mind. I tend to feel that a mind without thought is an impossibility. Thinking about not thinking is still thinking. My activities do not require long or arduous training at the feet of a guru: they are free and accessible to everyone. I meditate with eyes wide open not closed. I don't try to connect with emptiness but with fullness.

I don't try to achieve a state devoid of emotions – rather



*Tree barks in the San Geronio wilderness  
Photos © Paul Harrison*

a state of entirely positive emotions. The state is usually one of heightened focus on reality, always with love and curiosity, sometimes with elation, occasionally of ecstasy. It's similar to the feeling I had and still have with music – a flooding with emotion, which is also an actual flooding of my blood and brain with hormones and neurotransmitters. It's like taking a shower in a waterfall, surfing in the ocean of reality.

It's easy to talk about avoiding negative emotions, harder to actually avoid them. There are certain times of extreme

stress in life when it's very difficult to stop thinking about your problems and you have to work really hard and concentrate. But mostly it's not so difficult. What I do is something akin to the way in which distraction can make people entirely unaware of pain. I distract the negative emotions by focusing on uplifting aspects of nature: the stronger the focus, the greater the distraction. Over the years I have become very good at deferring thought about uncomfortable things until such time as I can properly deal with them. I don't have any tips for this, except that practice will make you better at it.

Music does the trick for me almost instantly – especially certain composers like Rachmaninov, and especially piano music. Equally often (that is, daily) my approach uses natural objects, forms and processes, preferably out in nature but, if that's not possible, then I use found natural objects for the same purpose, such as rocks, pebbles, tree seeds and pieces of fallen bark, or candle flames.

I focus on detail. Detail is always different and often unfamiliar, so there is no relaxing into stereotyped reactions. The texture of bark fascinates me, especially if it is patched with color as in some species of sycamore and eucalyptus. Rocks too, and I am particularly blessed in the Santa Monica Mountains with their combination of igneous and sedimentary rocks, with rising and waving layers of sandstones and mudstones. Often they are blotched with reds and purples and yellows. I prefer chaotic shapes to regular ones, because they are unpredictable and dynamic and don't correspond to any abstract ideas in my brain.

Water in motion is my favorite, either in ocean waves or in rocky streams – whitewater streams are best suited, since their flow is so turbulent and complex. In the summer months, when most streams around here dry up, I use clouds. It find it fascinating to lie on my back on a humid day and watch cumulus forming and dissolving. Often wind in leaves, especially beech or aspen, will produce the same effect.

Many people get this same intense contact and interaction with reality through risky (and less risky) sports like skiing, sky-diving, mountaineering, rafting or sailing. Sex can be another form of intense focus on the physical, involving the complete loss of self, total fusion of spirit and body, total escape from all verbal realms, total focus on the present. For that it must be performed with a complete lack of self-consciousness or guilt. Pantheism's affirmation of physical existence is the perfect mental context for this, while non-theism allows a much greater degree of non-self-consciousness. The nagging thought of a judge perched on your shoulder watching your every move can be very distracting.

This overall approach to meditation may seem prosaic when compared to the mystification of most classical writings on the subject – but through loving contact with the Real it can produce all the beneficial effects, all the profound sense of union and purification, all the peace and acceptance. Nature, unlike imaginary gods, is not esoteric or hard to find. Any time you want, Nature is right there within you and around you.

Many years ago, I spent a year teaching outdoor education to grade school children. The students would be bussed out from the city for their once-a-year instruction about wild nature. In addition to providing the scientifically-oriented subjects that were the core

## Something special may happen

By Thomas Schenk

of our outdoor education curricula, I attempted to get students to sit quietly for a few minutes and attend to the sensory qualities of nature. To get them to quiet down, I would tell them: "if we sit quietly, something special might happen."

I usually did not have much success getting students to be still, but one morning I had a group sitting quietly when two fawns walked right into the middle of the circle we had formed. Wow, I thought, this is special! Strangely, it didn't create nearly the buzz among the students I expected. Later I asked the teacher why the students were not more impressed. She said, "They think you do this for every group." Oh well!

In the lingo of outdoor education, the technique of sitting quietly in this way is called Seton Sitting. It was named for the naturalist Thomas Seton. It is nothing more than trying to sit very quietly in a natural area until the wildlife forgets you are there. Some people call it "still stalking."

Once, while Seton Sitting, a Northern Goshawk landed on a ledge about ten feet from me and graciously ignored me for about ten minutes.

Though its goals are not quite as lofty as enlightenment or attaining oneness with God, Seton Sitting is not too different from the formal practice of meditation. In both Seton sitting and meditation, you have to become somewhat ignore-ant. Yes, you have to ignore the ants that crawl on you, and be unresponsive to a variety of other stimuli. This, I think, is what all forms of meditative practice have in common: to practice them, you have to create a "space" between the stimuli and the response.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl writes about his experiences as a prisoner in the Nazi death camps. Frankl recognized that he had lost control over his activities and his environment. He came to realize, however, that though he could not control the stimulus he was subjected to, he could decide within himself how he would let it affect him and how he would respond to it. Meditation is like this. In meditation, however, it is that very space between the stimulus and response, rather than the response, that is the focus.

I often think of meditation as a "space" between stimulus and response. The ordinary mind has a patterned response to various internal and external stimuli. To meditate, a person learns to be unresponsive, or at least less responsive, to these stimuli (though maintaining the ability to respond if necessary).

Once you have become proficient in creating this mental space, you can do two things with it. You can remain in the silence and emptiness of this space, or can choose some object of attention, such as an idea, symbol, or impression, and become deeply immersed in it. Both have their distinctive values. I call the first of these, meditation, and the second, contemplation, but this distinction is not present in ordinary usage.

In the practice of meditation, we learn to become unresponsive

to both external and internal stimuli. The external stimuli cannot be shut out; the internal stimuli – thoughts, emotions, desires – can be slowed, but not stopped. The practice of meditation deepens as we learn to let both external, and internal stimuli pass through us without letting them elicit a response. This is not easy. Most of us have a very strong inclination to respond to a thought or image by thinking it through. In the early stages of learning the practice of meditation, again and again one finds oneself abstracted from the present moment, entangled in a thought. With time, though, maintaining this space between the stimulus and the response becomes easier, and this space can develop into an inner refuge of self control and peace.

I mostly learned meditation on my own, but for a brief time I practiced meditation in the Zen tradition with Katigiri Roshi, a Zen Master. (Roshi was also Robert Pirsig's teacher.) Zen is a form of Buddhism, and the goal of Buddhism is Nirvana. Nirvana means something like extinction, and what is extinguished is the need to respond to stimuli. One of the incredible images from the Vietnam era was a film clip of Buddhist monks protesting the war by dousing themselves with gasoline and calmly setting themselves on fire. While burning, the monks meditated quietly and showed no outward signs of suffering. This seems to be a powerful vindication of the idea articulated by Frankl, and many others before him, that humans have the freedom to choose their response.

But this is meditation at its extreme: the ultimate anodyne to the pains and suffering of life. The world is certainly rife with degradation and pain, and I honor the Buddha for his commitment to finding and communicating a means for us to escape it. But the world is also filled with beauty and grace and occasions of joy. If one becomes unresponsive to pain and suffering, does it not entail also becoming unresponsive to beauty and delight? Zen Buddhism, which developed in China, was strongly influenced by philosophical Taoism. Taoism offered a different approach to meditation. In Buddhism, meditation is good and more meditation is better. In Taoism, meditation is good, but only to a point. In verse 15 of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tze observes that muddy water settles and becomes clear. In verse 16 he observes that leaves fall from the tree to return to the roots. I read these as an invitation to bring all the muddiness, all the sorrow, distractions and joys of the world into our meditation. And there we let them settle, so that we come forth from meditation with a deeper sense of our being's root-ness in this world and with a clearer mind.

This is the approach to meditation I have come to embrace.

The poet T.S. Eliot described the modern condition as being "distracted from distraction by distraction." Our world pulses



with disjointed stimuli, pulling the mind this way and that like leaves in the wind. The distracted mind's readiest refuge is in entertainments abundantly supplied by the popular media. But, these entertainments are just that distraction from distraction. To gain clarity and rootedness requires a different approach.

A formal meditation practice may be the right approach for some, or just sitting quietly with nature might work better for other. One has to try a few things to find what works best. And it is worth it. As I told my students many years ago, if we sit quietly, something special might happen.

## Doing nothing - and doing it well

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "to meditate" as "to exercise the mind in (esp. religious) contemplation." The word comes from the same Indo-European root as the words "measure," "middle" and "medicine." Deepak Chopra describes meditation as "not doing."

It's worth reminding ourselves of some Buddhist concepts and approaches to meditation. Mindfulness means developing a full consciousness of all about you and within you, whether you are seated in a special posture, or simply going about your life. The bases for all Buddhist meditation are *shamatha* – calm abiding, or peacefulness. The development of tranquility is a prerequisite to any further development. And *vipashyana* – clear seeing or special insight, with intuitive cognition of suffering, impermanence, and egolessness.

The more heavy-duty kind of meditation, *Samadhi*, involves intense focusing of consciousness, bringing the four *dhyanas* or absorptions. *Dhyana* is rendered as Ch'an in Chinese, Zen in Japanese.

The first *dhyana* is characterized by the absence of negative emotions and by blissful sensations, bodily and mental. Some discursive thoughts are still present. In the second *dhyana* discursive thought ceases, but pleasurable sensations are still present. It is a state of no thought, but of acute alert awareness. In the third *dhyana* awareness of the body is still present, but it is a global and peripheral awareness of the body, as if from a great distance. Rapturous bodily sensations are absent, but a state of thought-free mental contentment is experienced.

In the fourth *dhyana* bodily awareness is lost, and mental bliss is no longer experienced. It is a state of complete perfect mental harmony. Nothing can affect you, but (supposedly) your state of mind can still have a profound beneficial

influence on others.

In Yoga, a distinction is made between **concentration meditation** – in which one focuses attention on a single object, like a candle flame or a mantra – and **mindfulness meditation** – in which one strives to be aware of everything that is happening, both in one's environment and inside oneself, without becoming attached to any particular perception. These two forms of meditation are not opposites but are complementary: concentration meditation often leads to mindfulness meditation.

Yoga and Buddhist meditation are often helped by aids such as mantras (evocative sounds like the syllable *Om*, background image), mudras (symbolic gestures), and mandalas (symbolic diagrams). Traditionally, a mantra must be received from a spiritual teacher, or guru, and is specifically chosen to suit one's own nature.

In 1972, Robert E. Ornstein and Claudio Naranjo – a psychologist and a psychiatrist respectively – published a book called, "On the Psychology of Meditation." It was an attempt to study meditation scientifically. They studied experienced meditators from three of the major world meditation traditions. They measured brain waves of meditators as well as blood pressure, heart and respiration rates.

They found brain waves associated with various meditative states. Alpha waves were associated with deep meditative states. They also found that regular meditation seems to lower blood pressure and slow heart and respiration rates, even after subjects are no longer meditating. One interesting experiment involved using words such as "one" or "all" instead of traditional mantras; these produced the same results of lowering of blood pressure and change of vital signs.

Other researchers studied the Yoga master Swami Rama. They

found that during deep meditation, Swami Rama could voluntarily slow his breathing and heart rates close to zero for extended periods of time, without ill effects upon arising from meditation.

I personally define meditation as deliberately observing one's immediate reality, the Here and Now, both internal and external, without becoming attached to any particular perception.

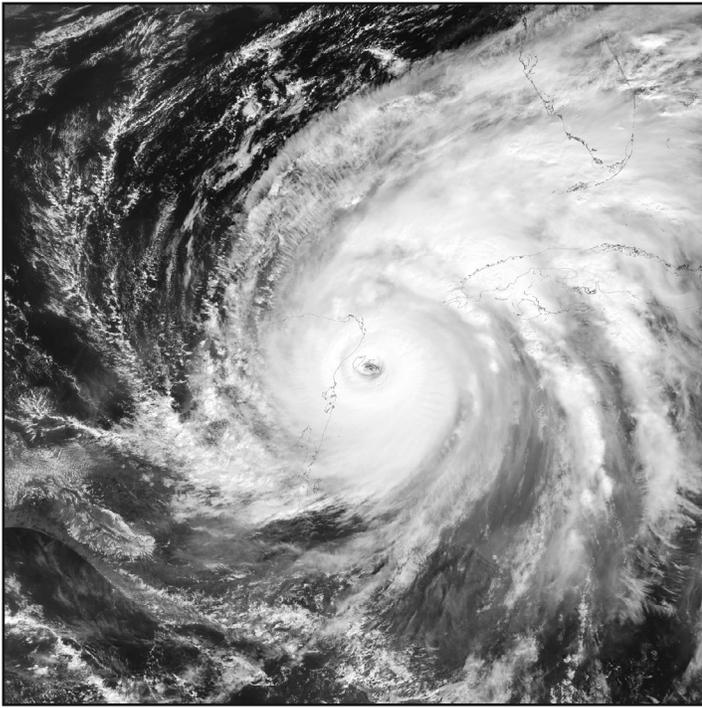
I have been practicing first Yoga meditation and then Buddhist meditation of sorts for many years. I used to use the universal mantra "So-Ham," but now I usually just start by counting my breath. My favorite place to meditate is my backyard. I like to turn on the sprinklers to water the lawn and sit in a patio chair and sip iced tea and watch the birds and squirrels flutter and scurry about.

I have taken the lead from Chopra's "not doing" and think of meditation as "doing nothing and doing it well." Chopra speaks of "listening to the silence between [one's] thoughts." I have adapted this as "listening to the silence underlying all sounds, the background of silence from which all sounds arise." I find this listening to the silence quite restful, comforting and refreshing.

I used to sit in my living room with a candle lit, and incense burning and soothing music or nature sounds playing on the tape player. That was effective too, but I find that the external aids were not necessary.

Is there a specifically Pantheist meditation? When I used to use the mantra "So-Ham," or "That I am," I used it in a pantheistic way. I used it to heighten my awareness of my identification with the universe, with nature. I contemplated the fact that the universe was conscious through me – that Nature was conscious of itself through me. I still use meditation to enhance my feeling of oneness with nature and the universe.

Dave Kiebert



**Nature's wake-up call?** On October 21, the eye of Wilma, the strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded, hovers over the Yucatan, while her whirling arms sweep the entire Gulf of Mexico. 2005 has become the busiest year on record for tropical storms and the busiest on record for hurricanes. The number of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes has nearly doubled over the past 35 years, while maximum wind speeds have risen by 50%. The increase is thought to be linked to global and ocean warming. **Photo © NASA.**

## Membership: Join or Renew

The World Pantheist Movement depends on the generous support of its members to sustain, improve and expand its activities and services. If you would like to join or renew by check in US \$, please fill in the form below and mail check and form to us. Otherwise please renew at <http://members.pantheism.net/imdms/> or join at <http://www.pantheism.net/join.htm> Please tick as applicable if this is an address change and if you wish us to correct the database entry for you.

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Please mail this form with your check (US \$ only) to:

**World Pantheist Movement**  
**P.O. Box 103, Webster, NY 14580, USA**

# Calendar & Almanac

## Special events

### November

- 1 All Souls/Day of the Dead
- 16 International Day for Tolerance
- 21 World Television Day [Switch it Off]
- 24 Spinoza born [1632]
- 30 John Toland born [1670]

### December

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 International Day of Disabled Persons
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 25 Birth of Isaac Newton [1642]
- 29 International Day for Biological Diversity

### January

- 11 International Laughter Day
- 16 Martin Luther King Jr. Day Religious Freedom Day
- 22 Surrender of Native lands by Chief Seattle

## Equinoxes & Solstices

Winter solstice  
 December 21 18:35

Spring Equinox  
 March 20 18.26

## Full Moons

November 16 00:57  
 December 15 16:15  
 January 14 09:48  
 February 13 04:44

All times Universal time =  
 Greenwich Mean Time