



Editor's Note: Welcome to the Department of Meditation, where you are treated to the ageless wisdom and inimitable wit of our very own meditation guru, Constance Wilkinson, psychotherapist and card-carrying Buddhist.

Constance welcomes your feedback and questions about meditation at triptych2@gmail.com

Department of Meditation

by Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA

Meditation: Yo, What's the Point?

So here you are, reading.

Apparently, you're sufficiently interested in the subject of meditation to at least begin reading an article in CapeWomenOnline called "The Department of Meditation." What is it that you want, really? Change? More of the same? Relief from suffering? Brighter mood? More creativity? More happiness? Less misery? Something different, you're not sure what?

The benefits of meditation are well-recognized these days, including (but not limited to) promoting relaxation of mind and body, reduction of stress, improving physical and mental well-being, even "turning on" genes; some studies have shown that meditation practice can change actual structures in the brain, suggesting the power of mind over matter may be just precisely the way things really are.

University of Wisconsin neuroscientist Richard Davidson, Ph.D., has studied and documented these changes, and stated in an interview, "We all know that if you engage in certain kinds of exercise on a regular basis you can strengthen certain muscle groups in particular ways. Strengthening neural systems is not fundamentally different. It's basically replacing certain habits of mind with other habits."

Sounds promising, doesn't it?

No need for some big deal spiritual trip.

Just a tiny bit of meditation.

Harvard psychiatrist Herbert Benson, M.D., an early proponent of what became known as "Mind-Body Medicine," was one of the first to discover that some simple types of meditation work as methods to elicit what he called "The Relaxation Response," naturally lengthening breathing, lowering blood pressure, decreasing heart rate, decreasing muscle tension.

Benson's program of relaxation-oriented meditation has been studied for decades. Relaxation-response meditation has proven effective at alleviating a variety of conditions such as anxiety, heart disease, depression, infertility, GI disorders, and chronic pain.

Benson's technique, as taught at the Benson-Henry Institute, is this:

Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system, such as "one," "peace," "The Lord is my shepherd," "Hail Mary full of grace," or "shalom."

Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes.

Relax your muscles, progressing from your feet to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head, and neck.

Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, say your focus word, sound, phrase, or prayer silently to yourself as you exhale.

Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh well," and gently return to your repetition.

Continue for ten to twenty minutes.

Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return. Then open your eyes and sit for another minute before rising.

Practice the technique once or twice daily. Good times to do so are before breakfast and before dinner.

Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA is a licensed psychotherapist who uses a mindfulness-based, solution-focused approach to help reduce symptoms of dysregulation, as well as to develop clients' personal goals and strategies to achieve them. She is trained in EMDR, clinical hypnosis, EFT, and expressive arts.

She has an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College in creative writing and an MA in clinical mental health counseling psychology from Lesley University. Since 1978, Ms Wilkinson has been practicing meditation and studying with distinguished Tibetan Buddhist refugee teachers in the United States, India, Nepal, and Tibet.

Constance Wilkinson can be reached at 508-648-8105 Or by email: trptych2@gmail.com



Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA
The Center for Change

mindfulness-based, solution-focused psychotherapy
expressive arts--EMDR--clinical hypnosis

Brewster, MA
508-648-8105
trptych2@gmail.com

A few minutes of just plain vanilla meditation. Couldn't be simpler—and it's absolutely free. Free. Isn't that amazing?

It makes the whole thing almost revolutionary.

Here's a life-enhancing technique that is absolutely available to all. What else even comes close to that? Meditation is available to all, regardless of race, creed, social class, economic status, religion, gender, sexual preference, physical location, country of origin, family of origin, time zone, taste in music/art/fashion/books.

What will it take for you to make the practice of meditation a part of your life?

A plan.

A plan that makes it a habit, just like the habit of brushing your teeth.

Benson recommends morning and before dinner; I recommend morning, right after you're up, before you're dressed, right after you brush your teeth.

Teeth-brushing could be just the trigger you need every day—because you already know you're going to brush your teeth, every day. You're already committed.

Plan: you link

Brush teeth!

with

Take five to meditate!

You'll be halfway there already.

I'd make some tea the night before, put it in a thermos by your bed, if that's where you plan to be sitting, or in another room that you've chosen. Put some symbol [a book?] for meditation right by your toothbrush, so seeing the toothbrush, seeing the symbol remind you of what you've chosen to do.

Really, you want to just brush your teeth, see the symbol, remember your chosen commitment, go get your tea, sit down. Once you've sat down, you're already on a roll. You're sitting. Now it will be harder to stop than to start. Take your time, enjoy your tea (English breakfast? Assam? Green tea?) mindfully.

Maybe it would be good to have a notebook or a piece of paper where you can "sign in" officially—you write down the date and the time, making it formal, giving yourself a feeling of accomplishment, "Ha, look at me, I did it, I'm sitting down, ready to start."

Then you just start. Follow your technique, the one we've reviewed here before, or Benson's method, or another that you like. Don't just do any old thing with your mind, however. Random rumination meditation is not.

Five minutes later, ten minutes later (decide beforehand; again, don't just wing it), you're done. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

Just rolling out of bed, brush teeth, splash some water on your face, snuggle down with your tea, and – begin. Easier to do before you've really woken up—before discursive mind wakes up, and starts to tell you all the myriad reasons you're waaaaaaaaaay too busy to meditate.

So, yes, it's true, meditation is good for you, really good, and it's free, and you can do it.

Will you?