

## **MEDITATION**

(Notes from reading: Complete Guide to Pilates Yoga, Meditation & Stress Relief, 2002, Paragon Publishing, Bath, U.K.)

1. **What is Meditation?** Meditation is more than just relaxation. During relaxation the mind wanders uncontrollably, whereas during meditation the mind stays alert and focused. By using meditation to restrain the wanderings of the mind, we can bring ourselves back to full awareness and experience things as they really are.

There is no doubt that the mind's ability to analyze, discriminate, plan and communicate has helped us reach where we are today. Yet it can be a double-edged sword. Although the brain may help us to reason, to think creatively and to relate to others, if we do not learn to switch it off it can overwhelm us. Meditation can bring relief from these anxieties by helping us to silence inner chatter, to recognize and dismiss negative thoughts and to create a feeling of peace and serenity.

2. **Health Benefits:** Clinical studies into the effects of meditation are encouraging: they have shown reductions in migraines, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, premenstrual syndrome, anxiety, and panic attacks, as well as lower levels of stress hormones, lower blood pressure and improved circulation. Many doctors are now recommending meditation for stress related physical symptoms.

3. **Restoring Balance:** Meditation helps us to restore balance between the left and right sides of the brain. The left side of the brain deals with thinking, speaking, and writing. When we are awake and in a busy, thinking state of mind, the brain emits faster electrical patterns called "beta" waves. In this state we are able to rationalize and think about the past and future.

The right side of the brain deals with intuition, imagination and feeling. When we are sensing something – such as listening to music- and we are in a receptive rather than an active state, the brain emits slower electrical patterns called "alpha" waves. In the alpha state we are more passive and open to our feelings. The alpha state is most likely to happen when we live in the present rather than in the future or the past.

4. **Finding a Place to Meditate.** Any place is fine but if you find a quiet place that is free of distractions, this will be easier as you begin to practice.

5. **Mindfulness**. Many of us spend our time “sleepwalking”. We perform actions automatically and are unaware of what is happening around us. Sometimes we may be in the presence of the beauty of nature or the beauty of a friend, but our mind is distracted by thoughts of the past or perhaps worries of the future. Mindfulness helps us to reclaim each moment, to live in the present so that nothing passes us by. When we listen mindfully, we pay attention to every detail of the person, each word, their expression, the sound of their voice and every thing in the present moment.

How would you?

- a. Eat with mindfulness.
- b. Walk with mindfulness.
- c. Listen to music in church with mindfulness.

6. Mindfulness Meditation.

1. Pull your mind away from wherever you are, and concentrate on what you are doing at that moment. It doesn't matter whether you are standing up, walking or sitting down. Whatever you are doing- walking home, having a shower- start doing it with all your senses. Smell the fragrance of the air around you, taste every mouthful of food you are eating, feel the sensation of water against your skin as you shower. Ask yourself what you are doing and what you are experiencing and feeling.

2. After a short while, you will probably find your mind trying to distract you. Notice the thoughts that arise but don't follow them. Let them go, and bring your mind gently back to the present moment. You will gradually find yourself moving into the peaceful alpha state.

7. Affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that you can repeat silently or out loud to yourself, over and over. In every day life, people can use affirmations to reprogram their minds into a more positive way of thinking.

- a. I am very confident
- b. I forgive myself
- c. I will give a good speech
- d. I am at peace
- e. I am completely relaxed

### **Breath Meditation**

(From the C.D., "Meditations for Relaxation", Published by Tharpa Publications)

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet on the floor. As with any meditation, the key to success is to be clear what the object of meditation is and keep your attention focused on it. In this meditation the object is the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.

2. You will need to spend some time to find this object. Once you have found it, however faint it might be, try to focus on it to the exclusion of everything else. There will be a great temptation to follow your thoughts but try to resist this and remain focused single-pointedly on the sensation of the breath.

3. If you discover that your mind has wandered and is following your thoughts, gently and without judgment return to your breathing. Repeat this as many times as necessary until your mind settles on the sensation of the breath.

4. If you practice patiently in this way, gradually your distracting thoughts will subside and you will experience a sense of inner peace and relaxation. Your mind will feel lucid and spacious and you will feel refreshed. Stay with this state of mental calm for the remainder of the meditation.

Let go of any tension allowing it to fall away. Notice your normal breathing pattern.