

## Becoming Established in Meditation

### - Some Helpful Advice

#### 1. Carefully choose your place of meditation

Meditate in the quietest place possible. Best is somewhere outside in nature.

However, given that most often you will be meditating inside, and that most people don't have a room they can set aside just for meditation, arrange a corner of your room only for meditation and practice there.

Don't sit on your bed, as sleepy vibrations can be a hindrance. Your meditation corner could include your special meditation blanket, a small table, incense, candles, a photo of nature and be next to an open window, if possible.

#### 2. Create for yourself an interruption-free environment

Arrange for a member of your family or a flat-mate to answer the telephone or the doorbell, or put on an answering machine. Allow yourself 100% focus on your meditation. This will ensure peace of mind to allow you to go deeper into your meditation.

#### 3. Meditate twice a day at a regular time

If one sincerely desires to explore the heights and depths of meditation, it is important to establish a habit of regular sitting. It is easier to meditate if you practice at the same time each day, as the body and mind establish rhythms of their own, and you find after some time that you feel like meditating, just as you feel like eating at your habitual dinner time. In the long run it is much easier, because meditation becomes like brushing one's teeth or eating--it is something one does without thinking about it.

Optimum times for meditating for most people are around sunrise and sunset.

#### 4. Meditate on an empty stomach

After eating, the energies of the body are directed towards the digestive processes at the expense of mental processes--you may have observed the sluggishness that follows a heavy meal. This is why it is always easier to meditate on an empty stomach.

One of the quickest ways to establish regularity of meditation is to make a rule for yourself: "no meditation, no meal". In other words, take your breakfast and evening meal only after your meditation. If you are really famished after work, take a glass of juice "to hold you over", but do your meditation before the evening meal. If you have children who expect you to eat with them at 5:30 PM., for example, this may mean doing evening meditation substantially sooner, perhaps at 4:00 PM.

#### 5. Chanting (kiirtan)

Chanting the Baba Nam Kevalam mantra, or listening to a tape for a while before meditation helps greatly in getting into the right mood for meditation. Some people like a particular tune, so if the tune you like is not long enough on the tape, feel free to customize your own tape using a copying machine. You can record ten minutes of your favourite tune, leave a 15 or 20 minute blank space for your meditation, and then bring the chanting back in so that you can just leave the tape on and don't have to worry about how long you've been sitting.

#### 6. Posture

It is important to keep a straight back while meditating. When meditation proceeds properly there is a powerful flow of energy upwards through the spinal column. Slumping or slouching impedes this energy flow, restricts breathing, and diminishes mental alertness.

Most people find that putting a cushion or folded blanket under their buttocks alleviates discomfort in hips or knees on the knees and induces better posture by

elevating the base of the spine. If you are still really uncomfortable, try a bigger cushion, or prop up your knees with another cushion. Practice the stretching exercises we learnt with the yoga postures. You'll be surprised how quickly you become more flexible and comfortable.

#### 7. Attendance at weekly collective meditation

Meditation, many say, is one of the most rewarding and inspiring things a human being can do. Many people would like to meditate but few are able to maintain it. Why is this so? So many of our lifelong habits (ingrained for 20, 30 or 40 or more years) have conditioned us not to meditate. Not only our only mental habits, but our normal social environment often stand in the way of our practice. Just being with other people who are going through the same process, or who have experienced the same difficulties can be very supportive and inspiring.

Group meditation also creates a kind of collective energy which very beneficial for our practice. This is why spiritual teachers of all ages have always emphasized the importance of fellowship with others who are doing the same thing.

#### 8. Attendance at retreats

There is so much to learn about meditation! Retreats and seminars offer the beginning meditator a wonderful opportunity to get in-depth understanding of the subject. Not just intellectual knowledge, but a rare and beautiful experience can be had by attending. Many people experience their first really deep meditation on a retreat.

#### 9. Bath or cold wash

Cool water makes the mind feel fresh and alert, and it is recommended to take a cool shower or bath before meditation. If this is not convenient, at least splash the face and hands (and feet if possible) with cold water.

#### 10. Vegetarian diet

In order to learn meditation one doesn't have to be a vegetarian. However, according to Yoga philosophy, different types of food affect our body and mind quite significantly, and eating meat is not helpful for meditation. There are also both ethical and health reasons for recommending vegetarianism as a part of the Yoga lifestyle.

#### 11. Yoga Postures

Yoga postures help to regulate the bodies hormonal system and lead to a more relaxed state of mind. They are also good for the back, and the nervous system. Try practicing yoga postures in the morning or evening every day.

#### 12. Books

Meditation is 90% practical, but that other 10% is still important. Spiritually uplifting books provide us not only with information and better understanding of what we are doing, but also with inspiration. Try to get some of the books on the reading list provided, and read a little each day. Share them with your friends!

#### 13. Consult a qualified teacher

Feel free to ask questions or arrange a time and talk with your teacher individually -- that's why he or she is there. Many problems or difficulties you may be having can be easily solved with the help of your teacher (acharya). If you have been practicing your introductory technique regularly you may be ready to learn your own mantra. You can always ask.

#### 14. Accept the Challenge

Generally people in our culture tend to be judgmental about their meditation and become discouraged if they don't notice instant results. But we are not really in a position to know whether we had a "good" meditation or a "bad" one. In a sense, every meditation is a "good" meditation by virtue of the fact that we sat down and

did it. Never be discouraged. What you think is your "worst" meditation may in fact have been an essential part of the growth process - one of your "best". Be happy, be content, and rest assured that you will soon notice significant changes in your life as a result of your dynamic struggle.

"Obstacles in fact are no foes in the path of sadhana' (spiritual practice), but indeed friends. They only do service to human beings. It is on account of these obstacles that we strive to overcome them, and this countering effort alone brings the sadhakas (spiritual aspirants) to their cherished goal."

Shrii Shrii A'nandamu'rtil (founder of Ananda Marga)