

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

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ABSTRACT

As an Indian, I feel proud to share with you that we are the originators of Meditation. It is from India that this mindful practice spread across the globe. Swami Vivekanand, S N Goenka, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and other Indians were instrumental in popularizing this important practice around the world. Its benefits are immense and hence people across the world assimilated this knowledge and made it a routine practice in their lives. In this paper we shall explore the meaning of Meditation, its history, its different types, what it does to our body and mind, brain functioning during the act and its enormous benefits.

Keywords: *Meditation, Yoga, Mindful practices, Patanjali Sutras, Mind calmness, brain and Meditation*

We, the Indians, can proudly claim that we are the originators of the beautiful concept of Meditation. Our learned ancestors, the Rishis and the great saints invented this practice to attain learning about self through opening and wading through our inner corridors. Since childhood, I thought meditation was not for normal people like us but for saints and spiritual people. I had read about these saintly people meditating to attain divine knowledge and power as a blessing from God. But as I grew, its importance and meaning to us the normal people dawned on me.

There are some things which can be explained only through experiencing them, Meditation is one of them. Only words are not enough to bring out the correct meaning of this term. The vibrations inherent in it and its meaning can only be experienced. Our Yoga teacher made us experience this and we could feel the calmness in mind and body after the experience. These were the minor after-effects but not the real fruits of the experience, which, it is said, can come only through mastering it through the long and deeper practice of meditation.

Frederick Lenz says, “*Don’t try to be someone. Be yourself. This is what meditation should teach you.*”

Acharya Rajneesh gives the following explanation about Meditation-- *Meditation means removing all your prejudices, putting all your conclusions aside, seeing without any hindrance, seeing without any curtains, seeing clearly without any mediation of any thought, seeing without Buddha standing between you and reality, or Krishna, or Christ.*”

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Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

Meditation is not just sitting quietly with closed eyes, it is much more!

In this paper we shall explore the meaning of Meditation, its history, its different types, what it does to our body and mind, brain functioning during the act and its enormous benefits. This paper aims to bring readers the correct awareness of the phenomenon so they can reap its benefits. So here it goes...

Meaning of Meditation

Mediation is a mental exercise which calms the mind and makes you feel serene. It is a mental exercise that involves **relaxation**, **focus**, and **awareness**. Meditation is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body. The practice is usually done individually, in a still seated position, and with eyes closed. In Psychology, meditation is defined as “*a family of mental training practices that are designed to familiarize the practitioner with specific types of mental processes*”.

Meditation is practised in one of three modes:

- **Concentration:** focusing attention on a single object, internal or external (*focused attention meditation*)
- **Observation:** paying attention to whatever is predominant in your experience in the present moment, without allowing the attention to get stuck on any particular thing (*open monitoring meditation*)
- **Awareness:** allowing awareness to remain present, undistracted and not engaged with either focusing or observing

Other characteristics of meditation include:

- Meditation is an **individual** practice, even if done in groups (such as in a meditation retreat).
- Meditation is often done with **eyes closed**, but not always (Zazen and Trataka, for example, are open-eye styles of meditation)
- Meditation usually involves **bodily stillness**. But there are also ways to do walking meditation, and to integrate mindfulness in other activities.
(Source: <https://liveanddare.com/what-is-meditation/>)

What is brought out in the above narration is only the most obvious meaning. It has a deeper meaning which means that meditation lets you reach a mental state where you attain a serene calmness and you know the real inner self.

West¹ posits the fact that the word meditation stems from the Latin term *meditatum* which means “to ponder.” Most approaches agree that by practising meditation, we become more aware of how our minds work and how thoughts are connected to feelings and behaviour.

As per the ancient Hindu Holy book, Vedas, mediation means an exercise of consciousness that results in the expansion of consciousness beyond the day-to-day experience of duality. It is an experience of unity, which reduces stress and brings increased creativity and efficiency to the functioning of the inner faculty.

(Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4895748/>).

Lisa Tabor² endorses the West’s view when she says that the actual meaning of meditation is based on the Latin word *Meditatum*, which means ‘**to ponder**’. This pondering situates the practitioner in the present moment, not the past or the future through the attention to the now. Living present moment by moment is what meditation makes you do.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

As per Sriram Sarvotham³, Patanjali Yoga Sutras define Meditation in the following manner: Meditation is the alert state of mind that remains the same from one moment to the next. The mind, filled with awareness, is so still, so calm, so free of disturbance that the state of mind is identical from one moment to the next.

As an analogy, consider the surface of a lake. When the surface is free of disturbance or turbulence, an object on the lake's surface (say, a flower) remains in the same spot from one moment to the next. Furthermore, there's no effort to keep the surface still or keep the flower in the same spot. It just is. When our mind is similarly free of disturbance, we experience meditation. It happens effortlessly.

Thus, we can summarize the definition of Meditation as a process of mental exercise of pondering through concentration to reach a state where this pondering situates the practitioner in the present moment so that each moment is the same as the previous *present* moment and one feels calmness and tranquillity. The attained state reduces stress and brings increased creativity and efficiency to the functioning of the inner faculty. The mind becomes peaceful and serene leading to inner joy.

Meditation is not new to us; it has been with us since ancient times. Let us have a look at its history.

History of Meditation

As stated earlier, mediation had its roots in India and then it propagated to the world. Susan chow⁴ posits that Meditation is an ancient practice that is believed to have originated in India several thousand years ago. Throughout early history, the practice was adopted by neighbouring countries quickly and formed a part of many religions throughout the world.

The terminology used today to “meditate” was not introduced until the 12th century AD, coming from the Latin word *meditatum*. The earliest documented records that mentioned meditation involved Vedantism, which is a Hindu tradition in India, around 1500 BCE. However, historians believe that meditation was practised even before this time, as early as 3000 BCE.

Between 600-500 BCE, the development of other meditation forms was recorded in Taoist China and Buddhist India, although the exact origins of these practices, particularly Buddhist meditation, continue to be debated among historians. The formula for the salvation of morality, contemplative concentration, knowledge, and liberation was believed to involve meditation as a central component.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, outlining the eight limbs of yoga, were compiled between 400-100 BCE. During this same period, the *Bhagavad Gita* was written, which discusses the philosophy of yoga, meditation, and the practice of living a spiritual life.

The practice of meditation also spread to other cultures in the West via the Silk Road to influence religions such as Judaism. Later, in the 3rd century AD, Plotinus developed meditative techniques; however, they were not easily integrated into the Christian faith.

Nash⁵ feels that it is difficult to know when, where and how meditation originated but admits that the written record of meditation has its roots in the Vedas of India. He goes on to say that given the broad range of techniques that are termed “meditation,” not only is it impossible to

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

date the origins of meditation, but nobody can identify who created or invented meditation. Rather, it's been proposed that it emerged as a natural human capacity based on introspection. He gives the Meditation Timeline as presented in the table appearing on the next page.

India has been at the forefront since it originated Meditation. Indians were instrumental in spreading the concept globally.

As seen from Nash's timeline, Guru Padmasambhava went to Tibet in 8-9th century AD and established Vajrayana Buddhist Meditation and Ritual practices in Tibet.

One significant difference between the Western idea of meditation and some of the meditation practices in Vajrayana is that the meditation practices in Vajrayana is that Vajrayana practitioners often focus on a buddha during their meditations. This is called yidam practice, which is seen as inseparable from one's teacher. Vajrayana is a meditation process where one becomes inseparable from the yidam and one opens to feel oneself and the enlightened being as one and the same. This helps us to feel our Buddha nature. We can also taste our Buddha nature when we tune into our basic goodness.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

History of Meditation Timeline

5,000 BC - 3,000 BC Ancient roots	India The oldest documented evidence of the practice of meditation is depicted on wall art in India.
1500 BC Hindu Meditation	India The Vedas contain the oldest written record of meditation.
1000 BC Jewish Meditation	Palestine The Torah includes accounts of Isaac going to 'Iseach' in a field.
6 th - 5 th century BC Early Buddhist and Taoist meditation	China, India The development of meditation in Taoist China and Buddhist India.
3 rd - 5 th century AD Early Christian meditation	Egypt The Desert Fathers practiced Christian meditation and contemplative prayer in the Egyptian desert.
5 th - 14 th century AD Orthodox Christian Meditation	Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Greece Hesychasm, a tradition of contemplative prayer in the Eastern Orthodox Church, involved the repetition of the Jesus prayer to guard the heart and cultivate union with God.
8 th century AD Chan/Zen Buddhist Meditation	China, Japan Buddhist meditation practices spread across Asia into China (Chan Buddhism) and Japan (Zen).
8 th - 9 th century AD Tibetan Buddhist Meditation	Tibet Guru Padmasambhava traveled from India to Tibet and established Vajrayana Buddhist meditation and ritual practices.
11 th - 12 th century AD Islamic Meditation	Arabic Peninsula The Islamic practice of Dhikr is a meditative practice focused on the remembrance of Allah through the repetition of God's names. It became an essential element of Sufism.
14 th - 18 th century AD Catholic Christian Meditation	Europe Prominent Catholic mystics, such as St Ignatius of Loyola and St John of the Cross, began to teach meditation and contemplative prayer practices with roots in the practices of the Desert Fathers.
19 th century AD Western Vedic and Buddhist Meditation	Europe, USA Swami Vivekananda brought Vedic philosophy and meditation from India to the UK and the USA. The Vedas and Buddhism became a favorite topic of Western intellectuals and influenced the transcendentalist philosophers Emerson and Thoreau.
Mid to late 20 th Century to the present Christian Meditation Revival	Europe, Canada, Australia and USA A gradual re-emergence of Christian meditation practices included the Centering Prayer practice of Fr Thomas Keating, inspired by fellow Trappist monk Thomas Merton, and taught widely by Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault.
1950s Vipassana Meditation	Myanmar, India S. N. Goenka began teaching the Burmese Vipassana technique in India outside of traditional Buddhist temple settings.
1950s to the present Transcendental Meditation (TM)	India, Europe, USA Maharishi Mahesh Yogi began teaching transcendental meditation using personal TM mantras which became a huge movement in the West.
1960s ECG and EEG Meditation Research	USA Swami Rama, an Indian Hatha yoga master, became one of the first yogis to be studied by Western scientists.
1975 to the present Insight Meditation Society (IMS) launched	USA The first IMS center was opened in Barre Massachusetts by Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and Jack Kornfield - combining Thai Theravadin techniques with Western psychological approaches to understanding meditation.
1979 Medical Applications-MBSR is launched	USA Jon Kabat-Zinn begins offering a mindfulness program for adults in clinical settings from UMass medical school. He calls it mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) which he uses to treat chronic conditions exacerbated by stress.
1981 to the present Goenka's Vipassana Meditation Goes Global	America, Australia, and worldwide The first Vipassana meditation centers outside India and Myanmar were established in Massachusetts and Australia.
1987 to the present Mind and Life Institute	USA Co-founded by Tenzin Gyatso, the 14 th Dalai Lama, Francisco Varela, a scientist and philosopher; and Adam Engle, a lawyer and entrepreneur to pursue scientific research into meditation and establish contemplative science.
1990s to the present Mindfulness-Based Interventions Expand	USA, Australia, and Europe John Kabat-Zinn's work begins to gain widespread recognition leading to the development of a range of mindfulness-based interventions and a vast body of scientific research.
21 st century AD Meditation Goes Global	Global Meditation practices from all traditions begin to flourish and thrive through a proliferation of apps, online and in-person courses, and retreat centers.

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Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

Vajrayana Buddhism teaches that one can reach enlightenment in a single lifetime. Meditation of many kinds is the primary practice Vajrayana Buddhists use to achieve spiritual understanding and a sense of the present. The mind is considered a sacred space of transformation. While often meditation uses breathing techniques, there are many different spiritual aids Vajrayana Buddhists can use to amplify their efforts in cultivating one's Buddha nature. (Source: <https://www.sukhasiddhi.org/blog/vajrayana-buddhism-beliefs>)

Thus, in a sense, meditation opens inner corridors to unite with the self and this unity makes each moment feel the same present. Serenity prevails and the whole essence of our presence feels calmness which can't be described in words.

From the timeline of meditation as explained in the above table we find that besides the teachings of *Guru Padmasambhava*, Swami Vivekananda was instrumental in spreading the knowledge of meditation in the UK and USA. He brought Vedic philosophy and meditation to these countries in the nineteenth century. Vedas inclusive of meditation became a favourite topic for Western intellectuals and influenced Western transcendental philosophers like Emerson and Thoreau.

In 1950, *Vipassana Mediation* was revived by SN Goenka. Vipassana meditation is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. Vipassana means to see things as they really are and meditation to achieve this mental state is Vipassana Meditation. The technique is ancient and it was taught in India more than 2500 years ago as a universal remedy for universal ills.

Goenka described Vipassana meditation as an experiential scientific practice, in which one observes the constantly changing nature of the mind and body at the deepest level, through which one gains a profound self-knowledge that leads to a truly happy and peaceful life.

Vipassana Mediation truly opens the inner corridors through the realisation of the inner self and this realisation leads to a truly happy and peaceful life.

The quest for self-awareness through mediation continued with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who travelled across the globe to spread Transcendental Meditation (TM).

Rick Ansorge and Amy Gopal⁶ bring to us the history of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's transcendental meditation:

- The late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi created TM based on a meditation technique from the text of the Hindu Vedas.
- Maharishi was born as Mahesh Prasad Varma. He began his spiritual work as a disciple of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati (also known as Guru Dev), who was based in the Indian Himalayas. After his guru died in 1953, he worked to develop his meditation style for all people.
- By 1955, he changed his name and began presenting his method across India before going on tour across other continents. The technique was officially called TM when he brought it to the U.S. in 1959.
- Maharishi captured the attention of celebrities, including the Beatles, causing interest in TM to grow. The Beatles travelled to Rishikesh, India, in 1968 to learn about TM from Maharishi.

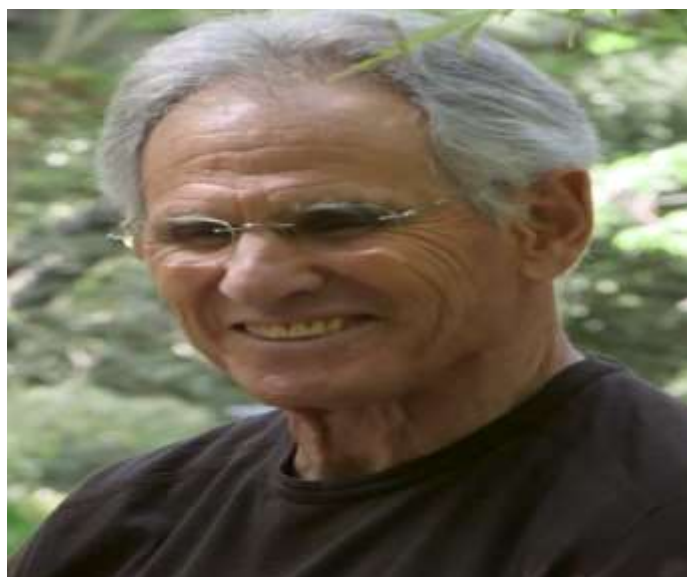
Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

- Over the next few decades, Maharishi continued to tour around the world to spread his message, built TM centres, and trained TM teachers. He died in 2008 in the Netherlands, estimated to be about 91 years old.
- Transcendental Meditation is still very much in practice all over the world. Maharishi made a great impact through transcendental meditation.

We have come a long way since Maharishi's days and as seen in the table above, a lot of things have happened and are happening concerning Meditation. We are now in the era of apps and Meditation apps have sprung up and meditation practices are being held in online courses. Meditation has gone global in the 21st century.

Discussions on the history of Meditation will not be complete without a mention of contemporary Western expert on meditation **Jon Kabat-Zinn** (born **Jon Kabat**, June 5, 1944) who is an American professor emeritus of medicine and the creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care.

Wikipedia⁷ talks highly about him. His practice of hatha yoga, Vipassanā and appreciation of the teachings of Soto Zen and Advaita Vedanta led him to integrate their teachings with scientific findings. He teaches mindfulness, which he says can help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and illness.



John Kabat Zinn--- Western originator of therapeutic Mindful Meditation

The stress reduction program created by Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), is offered by medical centres, hospitals, and health maintenance organizations, and is described in his book *Full Catastrophe Living* So much so for the history of meditation.

Reference was made about Vipassana and Transcendental meditation and Mindful Meditation in the above narration. We discuss these and other types of meditation. Let us explore them:

Meditation types

Vipassana Meditation: Vipassana means to see things as they really are and meditation to achieve this mental state is Vipassana Meditation. The technique is ancient and it was taught in India more than 2500 years ago as a universal remedy for universal ills.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

The technique of Vipassana is a simple, practical way to achieve real peace of mind and to lead a happy, useful life. Vipassana means "to see things as they really are". It is a logical process of mental purification through self-observation.

If you're interested in trying Vipassana meditation at home, follow these steps:

1. Set aside 10 to 15 minutes to practice. It's recommended that you do Vipassana when you first wake up in the morning.
2. Choose a quiet area with little to no distractions. An empty room or a secluded spot outside are great choices.
3. Sit on the ground. Cross your legs in a comfortable position. Engage your core, straighten your back, and relax your body.
4. Close your eyes and breathe normally. Focus on your natural breath and what you feel.
5. Be mindful of each inhale and exhale. Observe your thoughts, feelings, and sensations without reacting or judging.
6. If you become distracted, simply observe the distraction and return to your breath.
7. Aim to do this for at least 5 to 10 minutes when you first start. As you get used to this practice, work up to 15 minutes or longer of Vipassana meditation.

(<https://www.healthline.com/health/vipassana-meditation#how-to>)

Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a technique for avoiding distracting thoughts and achieving a state of relaxed awareness. According to the supporters of TM, when you meditate, the ordinary thinking process is transcended. A pure state of consciousness replaces it. In this state, you achieve perfect stillness, rest, stability, order and a complete absence of mental boundaries. The end goal is to achieve a state of relaxed self-awareness. The inner doors fling open and you swim in the ocean of awareness of self and the tranquil universe. The mental pleasant state, apart from letting you experience calmness tranquility and serenity, can also reduce chronic pain, anxiety, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Mindful Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice that teaches you to slow down racing thoughts, let go of negativity, and calm both your mind and body. It combines meditation with the practice of mindfulness, which can be defined as a mental state that involves being fully focused on "the now" so you can acknowledge and accept your thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment.

Techniques can vary, but in general, mindfulness meditation involves deep breathing and awareness of body and mind.

Here are some simple steps to help you get started on your own:

- Find a quiet and comfortable place. Sit in a chair or on the floor with your head, neck, and back straight but not stiff. It's also helpful to wear comfortable, loose clothing so you're not distracted.
- Become aware of your breath, attuning to the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall as the air enters your nostrils and leaves your nostrils. Pay attention to the temperature change when the breath is inhaled versus when it's exhaled.

Notice Your Thoughts: The goal is not to stop your thoughts but to get more comfortable becoming the "witness" to the thoughts. When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them. Simply note them, remain calm, and use your breathing as an anchor.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

Imagine your thoughts as clouds passing by; watch them float by as they shift and change. Repeat this as often as you need to while you are meditating. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts—whether with worry, fear, anxiety, or hope—observe where your mind went, without judgment, and just return to your breathing. Don't be hard on yourself if this happens; the practice of returning to your breath and refocusing on the present is the practice of mindfulness.

Several other types of meditations followed by people in their day-to-day life are explained in an article by ServDharm⁸:

Spiritual Meditation

This meditation style helps you develop a deeper connection or bonding with your favourite deity. It is typically practised in silence and the emphasis is on your breath. In other words, all your thoughts must be focused on your breath. Interestingly, the experience rendered by the meditation varies from individual to individual.

Some people opt for spiritual meditation to develop a clear mind and seek spiritual growth while others find that it helps them to feel relaxed and free of stress. This meditation can be done at home or in a temple.

Kundalini Meditation

This is one of the most difficult types of meditation. Taking lessons from a professional to do this is a must. The meditation can be done anywhere and involves taking several deep breaths and chanting a mantra of your choice. It is often done by sitting upright in a cross-legged position and can be practised for as little as 3 minutes or as long as 2.5 hours. The main focus is on arousing the kundalini energy of a person present at the end of his/her backbone and guiding it towards enlightenment.

Practitioners of Kundali meditation often chant the “I am” or the sat nam mantra to pay attention to their breath and awareness. This meditation is believed to bring a perfect balance of the body, mind and soul. It also enhances your sleep and the cognitive functioning of your mind.

Chakra Meditation

The Sanskrit term chakra means wheel and there are 109 chakras in the human body. Among these, seven of them have the most significance and represent energy centres. These energy centres are located at pivotal points from the bottom of the spine to the crown of the head and are interconnected. Each chakra is associated with a different colour. They must be balanced perfectly for healthy living and act as a link to connect the mind, spirit and body as a single system. Chakra meditation can be done in a lying down position or sitting in the lotus pose. Once you have chosen a comfortable position, take a deep breath to relax your body.

You should start this meditation by first focusing on the root chakra and ending with the crown chakra. Chakra meditation is ended with several deep breaths followed by opening your eyes and stretching yourself. It helps to get rid of blockages in your body. It enhances vision, helps in depression, and helps in keeping anger under control.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

Some other popular types of meditation practised are:

Movement Meditation

Many forms of meditation encourage you to remain in one position, but movement meditation focuses on the body in motion. Walking meditation is one form of mindful movement; this technique can also be associated with yoga or tai chi and other martial arts. Committing some form of physical discipline is very beneficial. Once you can be present in your body during movement meditation, you can expand your awareness to include just about anything that keeps you moving: gardening, walking the dog, washing up, playing golf, etc. Meditation benefits by exercise and visa versa. In each case, the movement of your body is the object of meditation.

This technique of walking meditation can be combined with mindful sitting meditation. It can be a good choice for people who have trouble sitting still for long periods, as well as for those who naturally find it easier to concentrate while they're moving.

Focused Meditation

In this technique, we concentrate exclusively on whatever it is that we are doing: it is the exact opposite of multitasking. We witness and admire the exceptional power of concentration of athletes, musicians, chess players and the like, and we may forget that to succeed in life, we too have to be able to focus on the task at hand. We've led ourselves to believe multi-tasking is necessary to get everything done on our to-do lists, but we're only really doing one thing at a time anyway. This jumping around between many thoughts and activities leads to a scattered mind and a lot of dissatisfaction.

[\(https://mindworks.org/blog/different-types-meditation-technique/\)](https://mindworks.org/blog/different-types-meditation-technique/)

There are some meditation types popular in the West, let us take a look at Western meditation:

Western Meditation

Western meditation began with Christianity as early as the 6th century. This form of mediation varied greatly from Eastern forms as it required no specific action, phrase, or posture, but mainly involved bible readings, praying, and contemplation. Hannah Aster⁹ posits that many forms of Western meditation are based on the idea that there's a universal source of infinite power and knowledge, and you can tap into it by harnessing your thoughts and willpower. This isn't necessarily a religious belief; some people believe that this universal source is God, but others might call it "the universe," "Source Power," or simply "a higher power."

Westerners have absorbed Transcendental Meditation and now the in thing is Mindful Meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation

This meditation technique, which has become extremely popular in the West, is based on the teachings of the Buddha. Mindfulness meditation can be instrumental in helping us understand how our minds work. This self-knowledge serves as a foundation for overcoming dissatisfaction, impatience, intolerance and many of the other habits that keep us from living fuller, happier lives.

There are several steps to follow if you want to become skilled at this technique. These include:

- Acknowledging your reality, beginning with being mindful of your body and thoughts;
- Observing your mind and recognizing each thought that arises without judging or manipulating it;
- Coming back to the object of meditation, such as the breath; and

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

- Learning to rest in and appreciate the present moment.

(source: <https://mindworks.org/blog/different-types-meditation-technique/>)

Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs created by Kabat-Zinn are being successfully conducted by medical centres, hospitals, and health maintenance organizations in Western countries.

We have discussed the meditation types; these are only major types and the list is not exhaustive. Different touches are being given to basic meditation techniques and new types are mushrooming. We shall not be able to cover all the amended types in this paper due to the paucity of space.

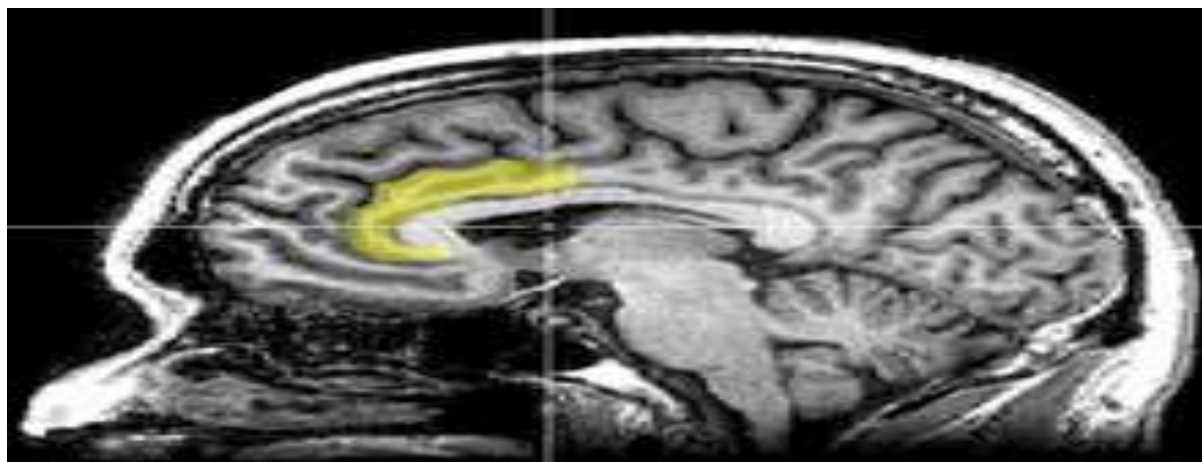
Meditation of any type positively impacts our body and brain. It makes the body calm and we are at peace. We shall explore its effect on the body and examine the brain activities when we are meditating:

Impact of Meditation on our body and brain

Emily Boynton ¹⁰ says that the brain develops through neural connections. Neurons, the information-processing cells in the brain, connect to make neural pathways which are responsible for thoughts, sensations, feelings and actions. When you repeatedly do an activity, you strengthen the neural connections involved, which develop the associated regions of your brain. This same process happens when you meditate.

Some studies have found that over time meditation may lead to increases in gray matter density in the hippocampus and other frontal regions of the brain as well as increases in anterior insula and cortical thickness.

Increases in grey matter and the left hippocampus aid learning, cognition and memory resulting in better retention of facts and more mindful behavior. And increases in the anterior insula and cortical thickness benefit cognitive function, attention and self-awareness.



Highlighted region shows the anterior cingulate cortex, a region of the brain shown to be activated during meditation. (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_activity_and_meditation)

Body and mind both get benefitted through the practice of meditation. If we practice meditation regularly, it helps in reducing anxiety, pain, depression and stress. People doing meditation find that they have sound sleep and their blood pressure is well regulated.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

Blood pressure decreases during meditation and over time in people who meditate regularly. This can reduce strain on the heart and blood vessels and help prevent heart disease.

Regular meditation helps with mental health issues like social anxiety, fears and obsessive-compulsive behaviours.

Other positive physiological effects include a lowered state of physical arousal, reduced respiration rate, and decreased heart rate.

With meditation, our body is tuned to respond calmly even when faced with instigating impulses. We learn to respond and avoid reacting. Our emotions are well regulated and our composure is not disturbed easily.

Meditation is becoming immensely popular because people greatly benefit from doing meditation and many have made it a part of life. Apart from health benefits as described above, meditation brings many more benefits to us.

We shall be concluding this paper after exploring the importance of meditation in our lives and how we are benefitted from it.

Benefits of Meditation

There are many benefits of meditation. Millions of practitioners believe that it keeps them healthy and improves their lives both physically as well as mentally. People seem to derive diverse benefits from meditation- be it improving health, improving the capability of concentration and focus, making you self-disciplined or attaining inner peace.

Matthew Thorpe and Rachael Ajmera¹¹ list out many benefits of meditation:

- ***Reduces stress-*** Stress reduction is one of the most common reasons people try meditation. Over time, physiological markers of stress, like increased cortisol and heart rate, can have wide-ranging impacts on everything from sleep to blood pressure. A 2017 review of 45 studies suggests various forms of meditation can help to decrease physiological markers of stress.
- ***Controls Anxiety--*** Meditation can reduce stress levels, which translates to less anxiety. An older 2014 meta-analysis including nearly 1,300 adults found that meditation may decrease anxiety. Notably, this effect was strongest in those with the highest levels of anxiety. Another study found that 8 weeks of mindfulness meditation helped reduce anxiety symptoms in people with generalised, along with increasing positive self-statements and improving stress reactivity and coping.
- ***Supports Emotional Health-*** Some forms of meditation can lead to improved self-image and a more positive outlook on life. A 2015 study found that people who completed a meditation exercise experienced fewer negative thoughts in response to viewing negative images than those in a control group).
- ***Enhances self-awareness--***Some forms of meditation may help you develop a stronger understanding of yourself, helping you grow into your best self. Self-inquiry meditation aims to help you develop a greater understanding of yourself and how you relate to those around you. Other forms teach you to recognize harmful or self-defeating thoughts. As you gain greater awareness of your thought habits, you can steer them toward more constructive patterns.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

- ***Lengthens attention span-*** Focused attention meditation is like weightlifting for your attention span. It helps increase your attention span's strength and endurance. A study found that people who regularly practised meditation performed better on a visual task and had a greater attention span than those without any meditation experience. Even meditating for a short period each day may benefit you. Another study found that meditating for just 13 minutes daily enhanced attention and memory after 8 weeks.
- ***May reduce age-related memory loss-*** Improvements in attention and clarity of thinking may help keep your mind young. Some studies in people with age-related memory loss have shown it improves performance on neuropsychological tests. An older 2014 review found preliminary evidence that multiple meditation styles can increase attention, memory, and mental quickness in older volunteers.
- ***Can generate kindness-*** Some types of meditation may particularly increase positive feelings and actions toward yourself and others. Metta meditation, a type of meditation also known as loving-kindness meditation, begins with developing kind thoughts and feelings toward yourself. Through practice, people learn to extend this kindness and forgiveness externally, first to friends, then acquaintances, and ultimately enemies. A meta-analysis of 22 studies on this form of meditation demonstrated its ability to increase peoples' compassion toward themselves and others.
- ***May help get rid of addiction-***The mental discipline you can develop through meditation may help you break dependencies by increasing your self-control and awareness of triggers for addictive behaviours. A 2018 study involving 60 people receiving treatment for alcohol use disorder linked practising transcendental meditation with lower alcohol cravings, and alcohol use after 3 months.
- ***Improves sleep-***A study done in 2014 compared mindfulness-based meditation programs and found that people who meditated stayed asleep longer and had improved insomnia severity, compared with those who had an unmedicated control condition. Becoming skilled in meditation may help you control or redirect the racing or runaway thoughts that often lead to insomnia.
- ***Helps control pain-***Some research suggests that incorporating meditation into your routine could be beneficial for controlling pain. For example, a 2017 review of 38 studies concluded that mindfulness meditation could reduce pain, improve quality of life, and decrease symptoms of depression in people with chronic pain. A large 2014 meta-analysis of studies enrolling nearly 3,500 participants linked meditation with decreased pain.
- ***Can decrease blood pressure-***Meditation can also improve physical health by reducing strain on the heart. Over time, high blood pressure makes the heart work harder to pump blood, leading to poor heart function. High blood pressure also contributes to atherosclerosis, or a narrowing of the arteries, which can lead to heart attack and stroke. A 2015 meta-analysis of 12 studies enrolling nearly 1,000 participants found that meditation helped reduce blood pressure. This was more effective among older participants and those with higher blood pressure before the survey.

It is agreed worldwide that meditation is beneficial and more and more people are practicing meditation in their routine lives. People are attracted to Meditation not only by its publicity but because once you experience it you realize its importance because of the positive impacts it has on you. It is said “Seeing is Believing” but to me, it is “Experiencing is Believing”. No description could be nearer to the truth when compared to the revelation of truth after the actual experience.

Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

I can vouch for this fact because I, myself, experienced it and found that it was much more than what I had learnt about it after reading or even after having a lecture on it by my Yoga teacher. The Yoga teacher while putting us in meditation used to time and again remind us not to pursue the thoughts as it will make you involved deeper into it, and try to let it pass. Hearing this I felt it must be easy but it was not. Thoughts would not pass because whatsoever I tried to ignore them, ignoring them made them important and thoughts stayed prominently with me making me entangled in them and I could not proceed further in the process of meditation. After some sessions which were failures for me, I tried to be with thoughts passively and did not try to ignore them and I found that the thoughts slowly passed over and newer came which when treated passively again passed away and it took me several more sessions to come to a stage where the thoughts even if there did not interfere with my attaining mental peace and calmness and this state of peace and calmness remained with me for several hours after the sessions. The world had slowed down for me. I was able to live each moment and could stretch that moment to squeeze out full enjoyment from the moment. During my morning walks in the colony garden, I must have daily seen leaves, petals and flowers but now I was able to grasp and admire the beauty these had; I could find enjoyment in the things which came my way because the world had slowed down and I was in the moment while living it. I found that I had several seconds available to me to comfortably switch gears or slow down the car to tackle the traffic and the need for braking did not arise as the calm state of mind was far more clear to slow down the car appropriately so braking did not become a necessity. My mind was slow but quite alert. Even during disputes, the calmness of my mind stopped me from reflexively reacting and made me respond reasonably. Now after several more sessions, it has become my nature that I am not easily provoked and can maintain my composure in the situations which earlier were making me furious. My mental frame, now, makes me face adverse situations more maturely and I find myself a changed person now and the change is positive. Earlier I always felt that there were some invisible knots which kept my mind tense for no apparent reason. The knots have dissolved now and my mind is serene and calm. I, really, enjoy this frame of mind which has changed my way of looking at things and I find myself floating within an ocean of positive energy.

I have tried to bring to you a picture close to what I am experiencing but I can still say that you won't get the true picture unless you, yourself, experience it. I exhort the readers not to blindly believe what is said in this paper but to go after the truth by actually experiencing meditation and its aftereffects.

I am ending this paper with an apt quote by Amit Ray- "Meditation is listening to the song of the inner Soul, seeing the beauty of the inner Self, smelling the fragrance of the inner Spirit, experiencing the touch of the Divine inner energies and tasting the intense sweetness of the inner God." (https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/492884.Amit_Ray?page=4)

The above quote resonates well with my staunch belief that *Meditation, truly, opens our inner corridors.*

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Meditation—Opening Inner Corridors

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Conflict of Interest

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