

TYPES OF MEDITATION

There are hundreds of techniques from around the world, but it seems to me that they all parallel each other into four or five major categories. This sheet goes over all the categories, and then gives you a basic technique to start out with.

CLASSICAL or TRADITIONAL meditations are entirely self-generated. They are ideally done in a dark, quiet room with the eyes closed (usually), with the meditator sitting still and engaging a profound inner technique: either *mantra*, *image*, and/or *point of focus* in the body somewhere. Examples would be feeling a mantra repeating itself inside the heart, or continually visualizing an image of a saint. These techniques are often combined with *breathing*, which, as the most basic and important rhythm of the body, is often considered the most profound mantra of all, in and of itself. These methods are difficult to follow for most people since they are so subtle and quiet.

EXTERNAL INPUT meditations are easier since one or more of the senses are utilized: looking at something (a deity statue perhaps), listening to something (a voice or music), or perhaps feeling something (one's body as you move it slightly). The instructions of how to actually perform the meditations in these first two categories are very simple: to completely focus the mind on that thing, and to ignore whatever else the mind may be doing.

MOVEMENT meditations often involve the whole body, as with the Zen Kinhin walking method, or some Sufi dance techniques. Chanting might be considered a movement meditation of sorts, since the vocal cords are used and the person's body often sways back and forth. (Many other things might fall into this category. A juggler or mime practicing in silence, or a karate student performing a kata (imaginary fight) by himself, etc.) Once the movement is learned, these methods are easier still than external input methods, since the whole body is used.

CONTEMPLATIVE meditations are fundamentally different in that the thinking and imagining capacities of the mind are not ignored used, although in a subtle way. The Buddhist metta, or lovingkindness method is an example. Certain moral principles or ideals are contemplated in relation to things in the person's life, in order to acquire a sense of unifying love and compassion for all things. Instead of ignoring the mind, you are training it to focus on more profound and meaningful dimensions of existence at all times.

Ramana Maharishi's "WHO AM I?" self-confrontational method deserves special mention in this category. The mind takes an active role in direct self-inquiry, progressively disidentifying the

Self from more and more subtle things. Initial steps might be, for example, “I am not *American*, not *from California*, and not *the physical body*. More subtle issues are often purely conceptual, such as, *I deserve to harbor anger toward my abusive father*. All such attachments must be relinquished. The most profound understandings, such as *I have nothing to do with space or time*, are also eventually surrendered. This is certainly one of the more difficult methods.

UNSTRUCTURED meditations are different in that nothing is used as an “anchor.” These methods are sometimes thought of as advanced techniques, because you need an unusually stable mind to begin with. All the methods above use some device to either contemplate or “hang onto” by way of focus. At a certain point, some seekers stop using an anchoring device, since they want to meditate in a more general sense all the time.

These categories are frequently combined. Vipassana, for example, seems to borrow elements from most of these categories. This rather unusual method is learned over the course of a ten-day retreat—so a lot more is obviously involved than simple meditation instructions.

Ultimately, we could say that there are as many techniques as there are seekers, since no two of us approaches God/Self in precisely the same way.

INTRODUCTORY TECHNIQUE INSTRUCTIONS – BREATH-COUNTING

1. Be alert, well-rested and on an empty stomach (ideally early morning, after shower and before breakfast. Otherwise anytime, as long as you're not too tired and digesting food.)
2. Find a dark, quiet, warm place.
3. Sit cross-legged or in a half-lotus ideally (one foot on top of opposite thigh); if sitting in chair, keep both legs parallel with feet flat on the floor.
4. Whether leaning against a wall or not, sit up and try to keep your head, neck and back all in a straight line, at least at first.
5. It's good to do a brief ritual act at this point to formally begin your meditation. Bring your hands together and take one deep breath.
6. Close your eyes and breath normally again. When you exhale, count to your self "one." On the next exhalation, count to yourself, "two." On the next one "three," and on the next "four." Then go back to one and start the counting process over. (Do NOT count one, two, three, four all in the same exhalation.)
7. If any thoughts, external stimuli etc. just begin the breath-counting again as soon as you remember.

Source: Lawrence LeShan, How to Meditate, but also a basic Zen method—although, traditionally they count to ten, not four!