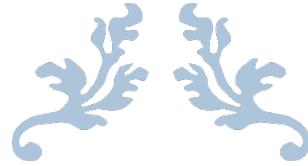




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THE MORSL GUIDE TO FAITH- BASED MEDITATION

An introduction to meditative practices from various major world religions



MAY 5, 2020

MCGILL OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The MORSL Guide to Faith-Based Meditation

The information in this guide is paraphrased from the sources linked at the end of each section. Click on or copy the link for more information. Please note that the information is not representative of all elements, interpretations, and practices of meditation in each tradition. Rather, it offers a sampler of meditative practices from diverse faiths. We hope that this guide will introduce you to – and perhaps spark your interest in – various types of meditation.

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Meditation in the Baha'i Faith

In the Baha'i Faith, prayer and meditation are key requisites for spiritual growth. The Bahá'í writings do not prescribe any fixed procedures for meditation. However, meditation always entails focused, silent, reflection, through which one gains valuable insights.

Who should meditate?

Everyone! Meditation allows us to discern the reality of things, frees us from the animal nature, and puts us in touch with God. Through meditation, man receives the breath of the Holy Spirit and attains eternal life.

What is meditation?

Abdu'l-Baha describes prayer as "conversation with God." Concerning meditation, He says that "while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit...you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed." He also says that "The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation... Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food." Indeed, He describes meditation as "the key for opening the doors of mysteries."

Similarly, Shoghi Effendi says that "Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá'í he is connected to the Source; if a man believing in God meditates, he is tuning in to the power and mercy of God...Meditation is very important."

The Baha'i Writings teach that prayer and meditation are intimately connected to our social reality. Shoghi Effendi correlates the spiritual nourishment of our inner reality with the health of our society, stating that religion seeks to improve society's condition. Prayer and meditation create a cognitive and/or spiritual state that allow us to act thoughtfully, and to be mindful of the moral implications of our actions. In turn, these actions affect our social reality. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings also allows us to understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.

How should we meditate?

Baha'u'llah has specified no procedures to be followed in meditation. Believers are free to meditate as they wish, provided they do so in privacy, silence, and harmony with the Teachings. Bahá'ís are advised to center their meditative practices on the Holy Words of this Revelation. Shoghi Effendi "thinks it would be wiser for the Bahá'ís to use the Meditations given by Bahá'u'lláh, and not any set form of meditation recommended by someone else; but the believers must be left free in these details and allowed to have personal latitude in finding their own level of communion with God."

One suggested way to meditate is to repeat the Greatest Name, Allah-u-Abha, ninety-five times a day. The daily practice of reading from the holy writings also provides a natural opportunity to meditate on profound concepts, on how they might be applied to one's life and to societal

progress. *“Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide”* is a counsel of Baha’u’llah vital to Bahá’í life.

Don’t be discouraged if you get distracted while meditating. Meditation is a spiritual faculty that takes practice, as you need to build the capacity to hold that conversation with your own spirit or God. If the mind wanders, constantly and gently bring your attention back to God, back to the question posed to your own spirit, back to the conversation.

It is not unusual for a Bahá’í to discover that he has been meditating for years, without realizing it. People sometimes meditate when engaged in routine tasks, such as cleaning the house or washing dishes. Others find themselves in a meditative frame of mind just before going to sleep, or when they first awaken in the morning.

Remember that the ideas which come to you through meditation are not an infallible truth to be followed unquestioningly. The Guardian states, "implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God's Will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God's Will, through the exercise of his intuition." For counsel, Bahá’ís can turn to the Holy Writings, the authoritative interpretations of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice, and the Institutions of the Administrative Order.

Bahá’ís should always remember Shoghi Effendi’s reminder: "Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential."

Fasting is closely related to meditation, as it sets out a prescribed period of time for the individual to be intensely mindful of their inner reality. According to Shoghi Effendi, “The fasting period [...] is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul.” These inner adjustments (e.g., to thoughts, beliefs, values) might then lead to changes in one’s outer life (i.e., behaviours).

Sources:

Adriana Cabrera-Cleves, MORSL Faith Volunteer

<https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/devotion/meditation>

<https://www.bahaiblog.net/2019/11/meditation-and-the-bahai-faith-a-personal-exploration/>

https://www.bahai-library.com/khan_meditation

<https://www.bahaiblog.net/2018/03/fasting-prayer-meditation-bahai-inspired-reflection/>

<http://bahai-library.com/uhj/meditation.html>

Meditation in Buddhism

Meditation is essential to Buddhism. In the Eightfold Path, the Buddha's guide to enlightenment, meditation encompasses two of the eight aspects. However, Buddhism is not *only* meditation; meditation *alone* is not Buddhist. You can find many articles on the basics of Buddhism here: <https://www.lionsroar.com/category/how-to/>.

Basic Buddhist meditation starts with practices to help calm and concentrate the mind. From there, you can begin to investigate the nature of reality and develop insight. Pema Chödrön lists five key qualities that emerge through meditation practice: steadfastness, clear seeing, courage, attention, and a sense of “no big deal.” Scientists have found that meditation can improve your attention, resilience, compassion, and relationships. Ultimately, the Buddha taught meditation as an essential tool to achieve liberation from suffering.

The most common and straightforward form of meditation is breath meditation, in which you rest your attention on your breath. It is also the basis of many other forms of meditation. Different Buddhist traditions have slightly different instructions for breath meditation. Vipassana meditation is the form of meditation thought to have been taught by the Buddha himself. Zazen is the stripped-down practice at the core of Zen Buddhism. Mindfulness is the science-backed practice gaining widespread secular popularity.

How to Practice Breath Meditation

For more guidance, follow along with the audio version of this meditation while sitting: <https://www.lionsroar.com/category/how-to/>

1. Find a quiet and uplifted place where you can do your meditation practice. When starting out, see if you can allow 5 minutes for the practice.
2. Take your seat. Sit cross-legged on a meditation cushion or on a straight-backed chair with your feet flat on the floor, without leaning against the back of the chair.
3. Find your sitting posture. Place your hands palms-down on your thighs and sit in an upright posture with a straight back—relaxed yet dignified. With your eyes open, let your gaze rest comfortably as you look slightly downward about six feet in front of you.
4. Notice and follow your breath. Place your attention lightly on your exhalation, while remaining aware of your environment. Be with each breath as the air goes out through your mouth and nostrils and dissolves into the space around you. At the end of each exhalation, simply rest until the next inhalation naturally begins. For a more focused meditation, you can follow both the exhalations and inhalations.
5. Note the thoughts and feelings that arise. Whenever you notice that a thought, feeling, or perception has taken your attention away from the breath, just say to yourself, “thinking,” and return to following the breath. No need to judge yourself when this happens; just gently note it and attend to your breath and posture.

6. End your session. Although this meditation practice is over, there's no need to give up any sense of calm, mindfulness, or openness you've experienced. See if you can consciously allow these to remain present through the rest of your day.

One of the biggest obstacles that can arise in meditation is the misconception that you can be good or bad at it. But you can't fail at meditation: *if you can breathe, you can meditate.*

How Do You Establish a Regular Meditation Practice?

There's no denying it: meditation is more effective when you do it regularly. One of the biggest challenges for meditators of all experience levels is maintaining a regular practice. The first question many meditators ask themselves is: how long should I meditate? Any time spent meditating is good, no matter how short! Figure out what you can manage comfortably and make it a habit.

You might find meditation physically uncomfortable. Don't worry: many meditators, even experienced ones, struggle with discomfort. When you're just getting started, it can help to set a dedicated space in your home with a meditation cushion (sometimes called a zafu).

Are There Other Forms of Meditation in Buddhism?

Yes - The Buddha taught that we should ideally be able to hold the mind of meditation whether standing, sitting, walking, or lying down. Even everyday events like eating an apple or taking a photo on your smartphone can be opportunities to flex our meditation muscles. Various types of meditation are designed to help you cultivate positive qualities. Some other popular types of meditation are walking, running, metta, and tonglen.

Head to this link: <https://www.lionsroar.com/category/how-to/> for more articles, tips, and information on Buddhist meditation.

Meditation in Christianity

Here, meditation relies on silence, stillness, and simplicity. Silence means letting go of thoughts. Stillness means letting go of desire. Simplicity means letting go of self-analysis. Meditation does not replace other forms of prayer but, on the contrary, it revives their meaning.

Meditation allows us to take the attention off ourselves. As Jesus said, leave the self behind. In the Christian tradition, contemplation is seen as a grace and reciprocal work of love. Not surprisingly, if we become more loving from meditating this will express itself in all our relationships, work, and sense of service to those in need.

Meditation in the Bible

The word “meditate” is mentioned 19 times in the Psalms. For example, right before Isaac first met Rebecca, “He went out to the field one evening to meditate.” (Genesis 24:63 NIV). There are numerous examples of prophets spending time focused on the Lord, living for extended periods in isolation. Jesus demonstrated a life of contemplation, as shown by the 40 days and nights he spent in the wilderness, as well as by his night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

How to meditate: general tips

- Engage in slow, deep breathing
 - Inhale through your nose (on count one, two, three, four)
 - Exhale through your mouth (five, six, seven, eight)
- Meditate in a comfortable position. If sitting, sit up straight. You may want to hold your palms up.
- Start with short meditations. You can increase the duration over time if you’d like. You might choose to meditate twice a day, morning and evening, for between 20 and 30 minutes.
- It may take a time to develop this discipline and the support of a tradition and community is always helpful.

Word focus meditation

- Choose your favourite phrase from the Bible
- Start by breathing deeply
- Focus on each word
- For example:
 - The LORD is my shepherd
 - The Lord IS my shepherd
 - The Lord is MY shepherd
 - The Lord is my SHEPHERD

Another way to practise Christian meditation

Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then silently begin to recite a single word – a prayer word or mantra. Some recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word "Maranatha," which you can recite as four equal syllables. Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it silently, gently, faithfully and - above all - simply. The essence of meditation is simplicity. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and in each meditation day to day. Don't visualize but listen to the word as you say it. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words. Don't fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it or when your attention wanders.

Source: <https://www.wccm.org/content/what-meditation>

The Examen:

One meditation practice that comes out of the Jesuit tradition specifically, which was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is called the Examen. There are several orders within Catholicism, and this is a *Jesuit* approach. It is not all-encompassing of all Catholic practice.

The Examen is a prayer that uses the method that St. Ignatius of Loyola prescribes. It contains five points:

1. To give thanks to God for the benefits you have received;
2. To ask for grace to know your sins and rid yourself of them;
3. To ask an account of your soul from the hour of rising to the present Examen, hour by hour or period by period; first as to thought, then words, then deeds;
4. To ask pardon of God our Lord for your faults
5. To resolve, with his grace, to amend them. Close with an Our Father.

This is sometimes referred to as the examination of conscience which Catholics perform before the sacrament of reconciliation, but the Examen is generally more prayerful and meditative. In French and Spanish, the word for conscience also can mean consciousness. As a result, many pray the Examen not just to examine their sins or wrong doings but to take note of *all* aspects of their day and their being.

Some Catholics have noted that the Examen has made them more attentive and observant to their inner workings throughout the day, not just in retrospect when they pray the Examen.

How to do the Examen

1. *Prayer for light.* This is not daydreaming about the past, but a search for graced understanding;
2. *Thanksgiving.* Go through your memory of the past 24 hours looking for things that evoke gratitude to God;

3. *Feelings*. Revisit the day again, alert to memories that carry distinct feelings, positive or negative, for these are where the action was, and therefore good starting places for prayer;
4. *Focus*. Pick just one of those stronger memories, and speak to the Lord as you are moved;
5. *Future*. Face the future, to the extent it is predictable, using your appointment book as a prompt if that helps, and pray about anything that stirs some emotional response, positive or negative.

What's the point of the Examen?

“Finding real things to pray about, growth in self-knowledge and awareness of other persons and fellow creatures. I think Zen practitioners call this mindfulness.” – Father Dennis Hamm, a Jesuit priest, spiritual director, and professor emeritus of theology.

Source: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/01/02/case-taking-ignatian-examen-new-year>

Meditation in Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a form of mystical, meditative Christianity. It draws upon Gnostic and mystical Christian tradition, but there is space for individual exploration. While liturgy and scriptures serve as a guide, Gnosticism allows openness and flexibility. Gnostics believe that there is one Godhead who created the universe. They are panentheists: they believe that everything has the spark of the divine, but that there is also an aspect of God that transcends the sum of creation.

Gnostic worship can include ritual, including the seven Christian sacraments (baptism, communion, etc.), as well as meditation in a group setting. Gnostics also do personal spiritual work, consisting of meditation, contemplation, and often daily spiritual practice.

Gnostic meditation is similar to that of other Christian traditions, just placed in a Gnostic framework. MORSL's Gnostic faith volunteer, [Rev. Jonathan Stewart](#), suggests the following as general mystical Christian meditation resources:

<https://cac.org/>: The Centre for Action and Contemplation website offers diverse contemplative resources, including several [podcasts](#) and free, daily, text-based [meditations](#). Founded by Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr, the CAC is rooted in ecumenical, meditative, mystical practice.

<https://www.wccm.org/>: The World Community for Christian Meditation website offers various meditative [resources](#), including a podcast, audio and video recordings, weekly readings, and daily and weekly teachings.

Meditation in Hinduism

Hindu meditation can be defined as a state of relaxed contemplation on the present moment, or a state of reflection where the mind dissolves and is free of all thought. The goals of this method of meditation vary and can include spiritual enlightenment and the transformation of attitudes. Hindu meditation can be classified according to its focus.

Some types of rumination focus on the type of experience and perception which occurs during meditation. These types are called mindfulness meditation, but it is important to distinguish between Hindu mindfulness and the modern secular notion of mindfulness. With origins in Hinduism, mindfulness became a key element in Buddhist meditation, and in today's mainstream culture it is largely regarded as a non-spiritual practice, used to support emotion management, reduce stress and focus the mind.

In the Hindu approach, emotional management, stress reduction and enhanced mental focus are also important goals. However, they are beginning-level goals. The Sanskrit term *smriti*, which means remembering, speaks of the idea of being mindful, remembering ourselves and our relationship with what we are aware of, being present to that. Mindfulness is a preparatory practice for Raja yoga, which leads to the advanced attainment of higher states of consciousness and, ultimately, union with the Divine as the omnipresent and loving consciousness within us.

Other types of rumination involve deliberation on a pre-selected object. These types are called concentrative meditation. Hindu meditation encompasses both mindfulness and concentrative meditation.

Hindu meditation has been described as a journey to the deeper part of one's being. The strength developed through meditation is believed to sustain the meditator throughout the day, preventing the calm center from being disturbed. Fear, doubt, and other earthly troubles cannot touch the practitioner of Hindu meditation who has tapped into this strength.

There are several types of Hindu meditation. Each one is a component of Yoga, which is one of the six branches of Hindu philosophy, deriving from the primary text of the Bhagavad Gita. The types of Hindu meditation encompassed by Yoga include, but are not limited to, *Vedanta*, *Raja Yoga*, *Surat Shabd Yoga*, and *Japa Yoga*.

Vedanta is a Sanskrit word meaning "the culmination of knowledge," and deals with the nature of reality. This school draws its source material from a set of philosophical scriptures called the Upanishads. These scriptures dictate the forms of meditation used in this school.

Raja Yoga, also referred to as *Ashtanga yoga*, is concerned primarily with cultivating the mind through meditation. The goal of this cultivation is to finally achieve liberation from reality.

The practice of *Surat Shabd Yoga* comes from Sanskrit words meaning "essence of the Divine." This form of meditation seeks absolute union with the Divine whole. This Divine spirit is seen as

the first force of dynamic creative energy, embodied as sound, which was sent out at the beginning of time.

Japa Yoga refers to the meditative method of repeating a mantra or name of the Divine. Usually this mantra is spoken softly, or sometimes only in the subject's mind. The Japa form of Hindu meditation is usually performed while sitting in a meditative yoga posture, such as the classic cross-legged position. This discipline is given the most emphasis by Hinduism and by other Dharmic Religions.

A step by step guide to Mantra Meditation (from Japa Yoga)

The Mantra is a syllable or word, usually without any particular meaning, that is repeated for the purpose of focusing your mind. More devotional meditation uses sacred sounds (name of God) as the mantra. The mantra is not an affirmation used to convince yourself of something. One of the most common mantras to use is "om".

It is usually practiced sitting with spine erect, and eyes closed. The practitioner then continuously repeats the mantra in his or her mind, silently, during the whole session. Sometimes this practice is coupled with being aware of the breathing or coordinating with it. In other exercises, the mantra is whispered very lightly and softly, as an aid to concentration.

As you repeat the mantra, it creates a mental vibration that allows the mind to experience deeper levels of awareness.

"As you meditate, the mantra becomes increasingly abstract and indistinct, until you're finally led into the field of pure consciousness from which the vibration arose. Repetition of the mantra helps you disconnect from the thoughts filling your mind so that perhaps you may slip into the gap between thoughts. The mantra is a tool to support your meditation practice. Mantras can be viewed as ancient power words with subtle intentions that help us connect to spirit, the source of everything in the universe" – Deepak Chopra

Here are some of the most well-known mantras from the Hindu tradition:

-om

-so-ham

-om namah shivaya

-om mani padme hum

-rama

-yam

-ham

You may practice for a certain period or for a set number of “repetitions” – traditionally 108 or 1008. In the latter case, beads are used for keeping count.

As the practice deepens, you may find that the mantra continues by itself like the humming of the mind, or the mantra may even disappear, and you are left in a state of deep inner peace.

Mantra Meditation is just one kind of Hindu meditation. We encourage you to also research the other types of meditation mentioned above.

Sources: https://www.project-meditation.org/a_mt2/hindu_meditation.html

<https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5956>

Meditation in Islam

From [Omar Edaibat](#), one of MORSL's Muslim faith volunteers:

The word often used for Islamic 'meditation' is '*dhikr*', meaning 'remembrance.' The goal of meditating and 'worship' (*ibāda*) for Muslims is to remember God, the Sustainer, Creator, and Caretaker of all existence. In traditional Islam, the knowledge pertaining to this meditative practice is '*Ihsān*,' or 'Spiritual Excellence,' which has been the preserve of *Tasawwuf*, or 'Sufism.' '*Ihsan*' deals with the art of purifying oneself from sin, transcending the limitations of the ego, and entering into an experiential knowledge of God. '*Tasawwuf*' outlines the spiritual teachings and practices which the seeker must follow to reach spiritual illumination, where she transcends her human limitations and becomes an empowered Knower (*'ārif*, pl. *'ārifīn*) of God.

In the Islamic paradigm, humans can identify with different layers of existence. The aim of the spiritual journey and its meditative practices is to traverse deeper through these layers, from the body ("I eat, therefore I am"), to the 'intellect' or *'aql* ("I think, therefore I am"), to the 'heart' or *qalb* ("I desire, I seek, therefore I am"), and finally to deeper elements *within* the heart. Through this journey, we seek to raise our level of consciousness and remember the meeting we had with our Lord in the state of our pre-existence.

The human being cannot truly be a caller on the path to God without becoming first realized at the 'heart' level, where they begin to know God. As their Love for Him grows, they identify with a deeper layer *within* the heart, the "Spirit" (*Ruh*). Declaring, "I love, therefore I am," the *Ruh* enables us to truly love the Divine. The heart yearns to meet with its Lord, and the seeker thus advances in their journey until all veils between them and the Creator are removed. They then access a deeper layer of existence within the *Ruh*, the innermost "secret," or (*Sirr*). The *Sirr* declares, "I witness, I remember, therefore I am." We thus 'remember' our past existence, where we communed directly with our Lord and openly testified that He is our sole God and Caretaker.

The Tools of 'Consciousness Development' in the Islamic Tradition

The acts of worship in Islam are intended to be but tools of consciousness development, such that the seeker comes to truly know and experience God. Below is a brief summary:

- I) Salat: Connecting with God through the 5 daily meditational prayers.
- II) Pondering the Qur'an: A powerful spiritual exercise meant to empower the Spirit within. Its regular reading attracts Divine Light and increases one's faith.
- III) Meditation or 'Remembrance' (dhikr): Meditation in Islam takes many forms, but the goal always remains the same: to transcend the illusions of the ego and enter in the circle of human consciousness, where one gains an experiential awareness of God's Presence in one's life.

One powerful form of *dhikr* is to meditate upon the Beautiful Names of God, of which 99 Names are especially sacred and emphasized in the Islamic tradition through their abundant

repetition as a mantra. These Names or Qualities of God (*Asmā' Allah al-Husna*) serve as a bridge that allows us to experience and relate to God directly, allowing us to build a relationship with the Divine and to attract God's Beautiful Qualities within us. One of the forms of the *dhikr* that a spiritual master may give his disciple is to chant or repeat certain Names of God. It is advisable to engage in this practice with a qualified spiritual master, the practice can evoke powerful spiritual states.

Another form entails spiritual formulas and invocations, which focus and shift the consciousness to a state of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) and dependence upon God. This allows God's Light to penetrate and transform the heart. Three types of invocations are especially important as a daily spiritual practice; a healthy minimum for each is 100 times per day. Ideally, one sits in a state of ritual purity (*wuḍū'*) in a quiet and consecrated sacred space, sitting comfortably with minimal movement, and repeating the invocation silently or chanting it out loud.¹ The goal is to minimize distractions, direct one's focus internally, and synchronize oneself with the meanings of the invocation. One must free the imagination, connecting to the spiritual Presence in its message.

These three formulas involve:

- i) seeking forgiveness (*istighfār*) and repentance (*tawba*)
e.g.: *Rabbī ighfir lī wa tub 'alayya innaka anta al-Tawwāb al-Raḥīm*
(My Lord, I seek Your Forgiveness and Repent before You, for You are the Ever-Pardoning, the Merciful)
- ii) seeking spiritual empowerment and a direct connection to the Light of the Prophet and His legacy (*salawāt*), increasing one's spiritual empowerment in this life and the next.
Allahumma sallī 'ala Sayyidinā Muhammad wa 'alā Ālihi wa Saḥbihi wa sallim
(My Lord continue to send your Peace and Blessings upon our Master Muhammad and to nourish His Light and Legacy, and connect us to him, his Companions, and his Noble Family).
- iii) the witnessing of God's Unity (*shahada*) as the only God worthy of worship, a crucial daily mantra. This art of surrendering to God allows one to begin the spiritual journey.
"There is no God other God, and Muhammad is His Messenger"
(*Lā Ilāha illa Allah, Muhammadun Rasulu Allah*).
It may also be recited in its abbreviated form as:
La Ilāha illa Allah (There is no God other than God).

One continues to repeat this invocation as a regular practice until God's Presence illuminate the heart and transforms the consciousness. The seeker's state of awareness thus begins to move into deeper layers of meaning. Initially, one focuses on the simple meaning of:

¹ These conditions are ideal in facilitating the practice, though they are not necessary requirements.

There is no deity worthy of worship except God (*La ma'buda illa Allah*)

As one continues to travel, one becomes realized in the meaning of:
There is none who is witnessed except God (*La mashhūda illa Allah*)

Finally, one reaches the station of 'spiritual annihilation in God' (*al-fanā' fi Allah*),
where one witnesses the reality of:
Nothing truly exists except God (*La mawjuda illa Allah*)

The Glorification of God (*Tasbīh*)

There are also other important invocations glorifying God, powerful meditation exercises which reflect the phases of the spiritual journey. The wider our spiritual vision and the more elevated our consciousness, the greater our witnessing of God's Favours upon us. Through these meditations, the spiritual seeker traverses a spiral of spiritual growth and consciousness development, leading to greater Gratitude and a witnessing of God's immense Grace, Favours, and Blessings upon His creation.

The spiritual journey begins with a moment of awakening to the Glory and Majesty of God. This elicits the response of '*Subḥan Allah*' (Glory be to God) from the seeker. They next begin to walk the path of Gratitude, becoming more conscious of God's Gifts in their life. Gratitude evokes the powerful meditation of '*al-Hamdu lil Allah*' (Praise be to God). As the seeker continues to nourish their faith, this elicits a far Greater response from God. As God, the Exalted, declares in the Qur'an: "*So remember Me, that I may Remember you,*"² and "*If you are grateful, I will increase you.*"³ The greatest increase that God can bestow upon is the Gift of greater Consciousness and awareness of His Blessings. This is represented by the meditation of '*Allahu Akbar*' (God is Greater), for God's Gifts are far greater than anything that we can offer Him.

Daily Litanies & Supplications

Supplications (*du'ā'*) is what is commonly meant when we say 'praying' to God: the act of turning to and conversing with Him, seeking aid and spiritual empowerment from Him directly. This could be achieved using one's own words, or by reciting the various prayers of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the righteous saints and sages, or even the supplications of previous Prophets and sages that have been revealed in the Quran, God's Peace and Blessings be upon them all.

The Muslim sages and saints of the Sufi tradition have also composed litanies (*awārd*), collections of Prophetic prayers and blessed verses of the Qur'ān. These are recited daily to boost one's spiritual state and invite God's Protection, Guidance, Mercy, and Blessings. Examples (with English translation) from the Bā 'Alawī Sufi tradition can be found here: https://muwasala.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Al-Khulasa_Habib-Umr_29-01-2015.pdf

² Qur'an 2:152.

³ Qur'an 14:7.

Some helpful resources on Islamic Spirituality:

1. The Rhoda Institute: <https://www.rhodainstitute.org/home>
2. The Sanad Collective: <https://sanadcollective.org>
3. Shaykh Hamdi Ben Aissa:
 - a. English: <https://www.facebook.com/shaykhhamdi/>
 - b. French: <https://www.facebook.com/shaykhhamdifr/>
 - c. YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCun1IMgQgMDKzICL5e0GIDQ>

Nashqandi meditative practices, from online resources

Ibn Al-Qayyim has provided one of the best explanations of the many meanings of “meditation” in Islam. He states that an integral part of our preparation for the Hereafter is by “reflecting (tafakkur), remembering (tadhakkur), examining (nathr), meditating (ta’amul), contemplating (i’tibar), deliberating (tadabbur), and pondering (istibsar).” Each of these words represents different shades of mental activity that can be considered forms of meditation.

For the purposes of attaining mindful self-awareness, we are interested in the act of inward ta’amul: continuously examining our inner life, in silent seclusion, until our mental and emotional states (“conceptual frameworks”) become clear. This is a technique for cultivating inner awareness, to notice our thoughts as they bubble to the surface. To become more mindful of what is happening within us, we need to understand how our thoughts progress through stages into actions. Mindfulness exercise in this context is not about suppressing thoughts, but simply becoming aware of them and learning to let them pass.

Below is a guide to beginning meditation in Islam. There is no prescribed method of mindfulness exercise in Islam like there is for the daily ritual prayers. This is a voluntary activity that complements the obligatory acts of worship, although it incorporates acts of worship including remembrances (dhikr) and supplications (dua’). Regular practitioners will find that they can build upon their exercise, to adapt and customize it to their particular preferences.

Mindfulness Exercise in Islam

1. Choose a time when you can be alone in a quiet place. For instance, a quick exercise is a great means of mental preparation for prayer. It’s good to pick a regular daily time, but the duration is up to you. Beginners should commit to at least five minutes daily, and gradually increase it over time.
2. Find a posture that you find comfortable, but not so relaxing that you will fall asleep. (As a side note, meditative remembrance of Allah when laying down for sleep can help ease us into sleep.)
3. Begin by focusing on your breathing. Progressively relax the muscle tension throughout your body: your arms, your legs, your core, your jaw. Either close your eyes or simply lower them. Feel for a sense of your state of heart and mind in this moment: what are

you feeling and thinking? Try to settle your mind by bringing awareness to your natural, relaxed breathing, feeling the life and energy Allah gave you throughout your body. Feel gratitude to Allah for your breath, your living and being in this moment.

4. As you settle into stillness within your inner space, begin to perceive the feeling of muraqabah with Allah. Know and feel that “He is with you wherever you are.” He knows everything going on inside you, right now and at all times. Focus on the feeling of muraqabah in this state of inner silence (samt al-sirr). Try to stop talking to yourself (hadith al-nafs) or pursuing trains of thought. Silence your inner dialogue as much as you can and simply focus on being present with Allah in the moment.
5. When your mind starts to wander off—and it surely will—you want to bring your awareness back to the center of your being, and to your presence in this moment before Allah, by quietly reciting remembrances of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ would use supplications to bring him back into a state of muraqabah if he had become distracted. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, at times there is fog over my heart, so I seek the forgiveness of Allah one hundred times in a day.” Al-Nawawi explains this hadith, saying, “It is said that it means he had periods of inattention and unawareness of the remembrance of Allah, which was his normal state of affairs. When he had a period of inattention, he would consider that a sin and seek forgiveness for it.” Even the Prophet ﷺ would sometimes experience short periods of forgetfulness, so he would seek the forgiveness of Allah (he would say “astaghfirullah”) as a way to bring himself back into the state of muraqabah.
6. In this exercise, the supplication or remembrance acts as an “anchor” for your muraqabah. An anchor is a phrase that you say inwardly when your mind wanders, which helps bring your mind back to the center of awareness. It is not necessarily an object of intense focus, repeated over and over; it is a calming phrase that your mind will come to associate with the state of muraqabah. It is best to pick an anchor from one of the numerous authentic supplications in the Sunnah, “Two words are beloved to the Most Merciful, light on the tongue but heavy on the scale: Glory and praise to Allah (subhan Allahi wa bi hamdih), and glory to Allah Almighty (subhan Allahi al-‘Athim).” And again, “The best remembrance is to declare there is no God but Allah (la ilhaha illa Allah), and the best supplication is to declare all praise is due to Allah (al-hamdulillah).” Seeking the forgiveness of Allah (al-istighfar) is ideal, as it was one of the Prophet’s ﷺ anchors. Your anchor could also be one of the beautiful names of Allah that elicit remembrance and awareness in your heart, or you could combine all of the above.
7. As you are present in this moment before Allah, the mind will wander off again and again into distraction. This is ok! Don’t blame or censure yourself, just use your anchor to come back into a state of muraqabah and silent awareness. This is the act of ta’amul, repeatedly bringing yourself back into the state of muraqabah, with Allah and with your inner self, until it becomes a natural habit to be in this state. Through continued practice you will strengthen your mental and spiritual muscles.
8. Sometimes our minds won’t stop racing or wandering off, and we are left feeling that we haven’t achieved anything from our exercise. That’s a mistaken notion, as the best mindfulness exercise is the one you completed! No matter how long your mind spent in unmindfulness, it became stronger every time you brought it back to muraqabah. And

every time you mentioned the name of Allah inside you or nurtured gratitude for His giving you life and energy and breath, it was written down by angels in the record of your good deeds and it polished away some of the rusted spots over your heart.

Sources on Nashqbandi meditation:

<https://www.nurmuhammad.com/sufi-meditation/>

<https://www.naqshbandi.asn.au/meditation.html>

Meditation in Judaism

Note: The following information refers to Jewish ideas and texts. To learn more about what these mean, click on the link at the end of this section. Each term has a definition on the website.

The Talmud tells the story of a thief who prayed to God for success. Is this thief a believer or not? If yes, what is he doing thieving? If not, then why pray to God? The answer is that he does believe, only his belief is peripheral and he has not internalized his faith to the extent that it has had an effect on his entire way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Belief must be intellectualized, internalized, and integrated into one's actions, and that is the purpose of Jewish meditation.

Sadly, most Jews today have never heard of Jewish meditation, and typically when asking a group of Jews how many of them meditate on a regular basis, the answer is only a few. Many people associate meditation with eastern religions, but few associate it with a regular synagogue service. The truth is, however, that meditation is an essential ingredient of our religion and the base of all observance. There are 613 *Mitzvot* in the Torah. Six of them are obligatory every single second of the day, and upon deeper reflection we see they are the bedrock of observance. They are:

1. To believe in God.
2. To unify His name.
3. To love God.
4. To fear Him.
5. To love a fellow Jew.
6. Not to turn astray after one's heart and eyes.

The Maggid of Mezritch once asked, "How is it possible for G-d to command an emotion?" The Torah states that we are to "Love the Lord your God," and to "Love your fellow Jew as yourself." Love is a very powerful emotion and very personal. How can God demand that all His creatures love Him and each other? Is it possible to switch on an emotion impulsively upon demand? The Maggid answers that the command is not to instantly become emotional, rather the command is to meditate.

Deep meditation and intimate knowledge of G-d brings one to love Him, and contemplation on the Godly essence of every individual leads one to love every Jew.

When the Sages constructed the order of prayer, they did so with this in mind, and each stage of the prayers is a rung in the ladder of meditation. We begin with *Modeh Ani*, which is a simple

expression of faith. We then express our deep thanks to G-d for our faculties and wellbeing in the morning blessings.

We proceed to the section describing the daily sacrifices, which is called in Hebrew *Korbanot*. The word “Korban” actually means to “draw near.” Spiritually this means that we all need to sacrifice our animalistic nature on the altar of the heart.

Through fiery and passionate love of God, we can burn excess and indulgence and draw near to true service. Next, we read the *Pesukei D’Zimrah* (verses of praise), where we become truly overwhelmed by God’s benevolence and omnipotence. We then speak of the service of the angels and how they stand in awe in their daily lauding of God. Following this we proclaim God’s absolute unity in the *Shema*, realizing that God is all and all is God. Only then do we stand for the *Amidah* and request from God.

This daily service cannot be rushed or done without preparation, and it must be realized that the order and words are precise and meaningful. It also requires a solid comprehension of its meaning, both literally and conceptually. But beyond that, it requires personalization. We should reflect on what they mean to us individually, how it will help us change for the better, and how it has an impact on daily life. Meditation gives us the tools not only to understand the words of the prayers, but to carry these words and their meaning into our daily lives when we engage in the day-to-day activities that can sometimes seem far from obvious Godliness. This is why *chassidim* of *Chabad* placed such emphasis on the study of *chassidic* teachings before prayer. It gives the mind and heart focus and language with which to meditate and integrate.

Most important is the discipline of training oneself to understand that a rich spiritual experience cannot be gained by rote; rather, it is attained by exertion of the mind and body, focusing, and internalizing.

Meditation requires practice and study. For the beginner, a good place to start would be to decide that before one prays one should sit quietly for a few moments and “know before whom you stand.” One should study a particular discourse in Hassidism that explains in detail the dynamics of God’s unity, or the love and fear of Him, and one should reflect regularly on that discourse. Most important is that this meditation be of a detailed nature and not just cursory reflection. The more detailed the meditation, the stronger its effect.

Source: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361886/jewish/Jewish-Meditation.htm

Meditation in Quakerism

Quakerism is a very diverse faith tradition, which includes both theist (Protestant Christian) and non-theist adherents. Quiet prayer – time spent listening for God – is the heart of the Quaker faith. Many Quakers engage in “unprogrammed worship,” wherein they gather for silent prayer with their hearts open to God. There is no agenda, scripture reading, or officiant; any member can speak if they feel called to share a message. The silent contemplation of unprogrammed worship is sometimes described as a Quaker form of meditation.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxjH4sa2RFI>

MORSL’s Quaker faith volunteer, [David Summerhays](#), has graciously shared the following labyrinth-based online resources. Contemplation in a labyrinth (even a virtual one) is very meditative, and it is sometimes paired with prayer.

Finger labyrinth walk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz3gwlwUqIA>

Online labyrinth walk experience with music: <https://labyrinthsociety.org/flash/labyrinth.htm>

Another style of labyrinth walk experience:

<http://www.labyrinth.org.uk/labyrinthswf/onlineLabyrinthpage2.html>

A finger labyrinth to walk on screen: http://www.lessons4living.com/finger_labyrinth.htm

Download paper finger labyrinths designs: <https://www.labyrinthsociety.org/download-a-labyrinth>, <https://www.relax4life.com/download-paper-finger-labyrinths/>

Meditation in Sikhism

Meditation is called *Simran* in Sikhism. The Sikh Scriptures instruct seekers to use the word *waheguru* as the mantra during meditative practice.

The Four Stages of Meditation

1. It's a good idea is to do some pranayama (breathing exercises such as alternate nostril breathing) and yoga exercises to start, to get your body relaxed and ready for meditation. All the energy in the central nervous system moves through the spinal cord, so you have to sit with a straight spine – all the vertebrae lined up without tension, but straight. Shoulders relaxed. That way you will not get sleepy, and will have a much more powerful experience. Meditation can be done with eyes closed and gazing at the third eye point (ajna) right in between the eyebrows, or with the eyes 9/10 closed but very slightly open ("sleepy eyes") gazing at the tip of the nose. The fixed gaze stimulates the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland and brings the brain into the alpha rhythm (relaxed but alert state) to allow yourself to let go and become absorbed into concentration. You can even meditate with your eyes open, staring at a single point such as a candle or a mandala. This is called yantra meditation. But we are going to discuss mantra meditation here, and that is much more easily done with eyes fully closed or 9/10 closed.
2. Next, fix your attention on the mantra and the breath. This is called "Dharana." Meditation must begin with a focal point. That does not mean that you "stop thinking." No, it means that you begin focusing on the mantra and just let your thoughts happen. The mind will produce thousands of thoughts every second. That's what it does! You can't stop it. But you can use the mantra as a filter to clean the mind and the breath to gain control over it.
3. Third, you allow yourself to concentrate, "Dhyana." You must relax, let go and allow yourself to be drawn into the sound of the mantra and the rhythm of the breath. How? By listening deeply. This is what Guru Nanak Dev Ji means by "Suniai" in Japji Sahib. Suniai means deep listening. You must listen to the sound of your own voice as if it were a sound coming from outside yourself. Pay attention. Really hear the sound you are making. Listen deeply. Let your thoughts come and let your thoughts go. Watch them as they arise and fall away. Do not follow a thought. Observe it. As you begin this process, your ego will try to distract you: "My leg is falling asleep." "My nose is itching – should I scratch it, or just sit still?" "Did I remember to lock the door?" "Oh, I forgot to call veer ji!" etc. etc. This is where many people fail. People just give up too soon and say, "Well I can't get into it. I'm not any good at meditating."

Just let the thoughts come and then let them go. Although you cannot stop thinking, you can observe your own mind at work instead of letting it get you. Don't let your thoughts 'grab' you. If you find yourself following a thought and forgetting the mantra, just let the sound bring your concentration back to the sound. If you keep going, you will get through this stage of distraction and enter a deeper stage of absorption. It is like magnets. Have you played with magnets? As they get closer you feel the pull and then they pull harder until

they finally come together. Let the mantra pull you in. Go deeper... relax and let go. Allow yourself to be absorbed in the sound-current.

Remember, the mind makes a wonderful servant, but a lousy master. Master your own mind. The tragedy of life is when the subconscious mind releases garbage into the conscious mind and you allow yourself to indulge in it. Keep going and clean out the garbage.

4. Lastly comes the stage of "Samadhi." In this stage of meditation, you lose all track of time and space and become completely absorbed in your meditation. The breath becomes naturally very slow and deep and the thoughts of the mind fall away into the "background" while the mantra seems to go on all by itself, enchantingly beautiful. Vaheguru!

Remember that when you meditate, you will see your own mental rubbish. You will see it very clearly, but the mantra will filter it for you. It is a gradual process; a normal part of daily meditation.

Source: <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/how-to-meditate>



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