

Special Report: Helpful Hints for Meditation

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As a girl growing up, I loved all the “helpful hints” in my mother’s magazines. So my desire to share in this format goes back a long way! The nice thing about brief tidbits like this is that you can take whatever works for you and put it to practice easily. Some hints may provide inspiration for today, others for a later time. Scan through them in a few months and perhaps see what is more relevant, triggering your next steps for improvement.

These Helpful Hints for Meditation are based on your already having chosen some form of meditation to practice. They are not meant to be all-inclusive. They are strategies that have worked for me for a long time and I hope you will find a nugget or two to assist you!

If you are totally new to meditation, you may wish to sit quietly and silently, inwardly, repeat one of the following words: One (from Herbert Benson’s *The Relaxation Response*); Om (a Sanskrit word meaning the whole world and the self of all things and traditionally used in many Eastern forms of meditation; Peace; Love; Ananda (Sanskrit for bliss), or Ani-Hu (empathy with God). You might also try simply observing your breath. You may want to explore a suggested meditation practice from your particular faith. I give more details on how to meditate in my book, *The Power of Personal Peace: Reducing Stress by Loving Yourself from the Inside Out*, and there are many excellent books on meditation in bookstores everywhere.

1. **Have fun** learning to meditate or improving your practice!
2. **Meditate daily for at least five minutes**, more if you can. If you can work up to 15-20 minutes daily or even twice a day, you will really notice the benefits. You can meditate while seated quietly, (a highly recommended format,) or you can chant silently while doing ordinary tasks such as washing dishes, or while walking, jogging, etc. Please **do not** do meditative practices while driving or operating heavy machinery

as you can easily enter an altered state of consciousness and would not be safe.

3. **Falling asleep:** People today are so sleep deprived that often they quickly doze off when meditating. I've always been told that if you fall asleep during meditation it will be a deep and relaxing nap, and not to worry if that happens. However, if you have a tendency to doze off and you want a conscious experience, sitting up or even standing will help you stay awake.
4. **Timing:** Mentally suggest to yourself that you will return from your meditation in a certain amount of time. If you absolutely must, set an alarm clock, but this can be jangling.
5. **Tracking:** It can be fun and help you stay on purpose if you track the number of minutes you spend in meditation daily. Just make a note in your daily planner or PDA, or on the kitchen calendar, or anywhere else consistently handy for you.
6. **Journal Notes:** Make brief journal notes of any significant experiences during meditation and any awareness you have later that seems related to your practice of meditation. If you want to give yourself a lovely learning experience, keep these notes and refer back to them in a few months.
7. **Rate the quality of your meditation.** You may use the generic rating scale below or one of your own devising. I suggest because taking a moment to become objective and assign a score to your experience helps you to be a neutral observer of your life. This will reinforce the experience of peace in your meditation and eventually can transfer over into more areas of your life. You can add this note of your rating to the number of minutes you completed. There is absolutely no right or wrong to this; it's simply a way to help you observe any changes you experience.

Generic Rating Scale

- 10 Fantastic, magnificent! Total attunement. Peak experience.
- 9 Excellence. Attunement much of the time.
- 8 Pretty darn good. Experiencing ease and grace with this.
- 7 Doing well. This is getting to be fun.
- 6 A little better than 5.
- 5 Moderately, somewhat, about half the time.
- 4 Struggling, but making progress.
- 3 Intention present, but it's difficult.
- 2 Glimmers; bits and pieces of success.
- 1 Virtually no progress or didn't do it at all.

8. **Set an Intention to Meditate for Your Health, Relaxation and/or Upliftment:** To me, setting and holding an intention means setting a direction for yourself. For instance, "I'd like to be more loving with myself and others." "I'd like to experience more loving and learn more about it." "I'd like to practice living in loving on a daily basis." "I'd like more joy in my life." "I'd like to learn to meditate for relaxation and stress reduction." It doesn't mean gritting your teeth and saying, "I will come Hell or high water be 100% loving no matter what."

We're human. My experience is that most of our deepest growth and change comes in tiny, even microscopic steps, with gentle practice. In my research, I've noted that simply tracking an item once a day is a good way of holding an intention. It's as if by paying attention, observing a particular area, we let our heart and mind know this is an important area of life. Lo and behold, we begin to have experiences in this area, and to notice the changes, small and large.

9. **Requesting the Light:** Before doing Meditation, I recommend using a brief prayer according to your faith, or "requesting the Light." (If you do not consider yourself spiritual, you may still want to ask for the Light in a sense of universal goodness. Or you may skip these hints.) The Light as I work with it means the Light of the Christ and the Holy Spirit. This can be as brief or as long a prayer as you wish. My short form might be,

"Light for the highest good for this meditation." A brief prayer might be to address God in your preferred form and then ask that everything that comes forward during your meditation time be "in the Light for the highest good of all concerned." I frequently ask for "Light" as I go through my day, for myself, and for the people and situations around me. (That's the really short form!)

10. **Insurance clause:** Asking for the Light for the highest good is my safety clause. I may know, or think I know, what is best in a certain situation, but I don't have the bigger picture, certainly not from a divine perspective. By asking for the highest good, I'm saying, "OK, Lord (or Spirit, or Divine Essence*), you know best. I want what I think is best *or something even better, for the highest good for myself and anyone or anything involved.* Your will, Father, not mine." I know this prayer has protected me more times than I can count. It goes with the old saying, "Be careful what you ask for. You might get it." * Throughout this Special Report, please do not get hung up on my words. If mine don't quite fit for you, please simply substitute ones that you prefer. Go for the essence of your own uplifting and relaxing experience here!
11. **Forgiveness:** If thoughts involving judgments of yourself or others arise during meditation, do your best to **forgive and forget**. (I go into much more detail on how to do self-forgiveness in my ebook, *The Power of Personal Peace: Reducing Stress by Loving Yourself from the Inside Out.*) Please note that the second half of forgive is "forget," as in "Forgive and forget." As long as the issue keeps coming up, more forgiveness is called for until the slate is wiped clean inside of you.
12. **Loving:** The basis of loving is love, that quality from romance to *caritas* that is the subject of countless books and movies and is the matrix of our lives from birth to death. In a small inspirational book called *Loving Each Day*, John-Roger says, "Love is living in the spiritual heart." What I have learned over the years is that loving is an *active* process. The word ends in "-ing."
13. **Living in Loving:** Holding an intention to be Living in Loving will support your meditative practices. For me, Living in Loving is an intention and a choice. It has been an intention, although perhaps unconscious, since before I knew about meditation, or spiritual growth. To love and be loved seems to me to be the most natural and logical

activity around. Of course I step out of loving many times, into upset, blame, self-judgment, righteousness, and so on. But my overarching intention is to come back to a place of loving as fast as I can. I talk much more about Living in Loving in my ebook *A Way of Loving Intention*.

14. **Listen, Look and Sense for Answers within Yourself:** When you stop your outer activity and focus inwardly during meditation, you may find you automatically *see* things on the “screen of your mind.” Or, you may *hear* conversational voices inside your mind (a normal phenomenon quite different from hearing voices outside yourself as in hallucinations). Or, you may naturally *feel or sense* “good vibes,” things that “feel right” or “feel off.” Your body may produce sensations such as “gut-level” instincts that inform your choices. Or, you may simply *know* something with a direct kind of intelligence that isn’t connected to seeing, hearing or feeling.

You can greatly enhance your ability to receive answers from your own spiritual essence simply by *practicing* listening, looking and sensing or knowing. In paying attention, I may follow a thread of thought or vision to a deeper understanding. You don’t need any special training. You need not be “psychic.” All you need to do is become aware of the signals, the messages, from your inner senses. Making brief notes about these discoveries in your journal can be very helpful.

15. **Consciousness:** This is simply a working definition that may help you to be more comfortable with your experience of meditation. In meditation, you start to access your larger consciousness. What I mean when I refer to “consciousness” is that very large intelligence that is part of the real self, the spiritual essence of each of us. This consciousness, to my way of thinking, *includes* awareness – both conscious and unconscious – on many levels: physical, imaginative, emotional, mental, unconscious, subconscious, spiritual and more. I have learned that my thinking mind, although very useful, is only one small part of my overall consciousness. By working with the concept of consciousness as I do, I believe I give myself freedom to receive information and understanding from all the arenas of awareness within and around me.

16.Soul: I don't presume to be able to define the Soul, but one of the traditional aims of meditation is to awaken your awareness of your Soul. Here is a description I enjoy, that may provide inspiration for your meditation times:

“The Soul is an extremely dynamic, forceful, creative unit of energy. It is *alive* in the truest, most pure sense of the word. It is the part of every person that never dies, always exists, always is. It is an extension of God and a spark of the Divine. It is your truest reality. The body, mind, and emotions are the vehicles through which your Soul gains experience in this world. They are not who you are. They are illusionary and transient.” (John-Roger, 1997, *Inner Worlds of Meditation*)

17.What's the difference that makes a difference? Begin to notice and jot down notes on what makes a positive difference for you when you are doing meditation. Is it having the house to yourself with no interruptions? Is it using earplugs and an eye mask? Using a particular form of meditation? Meditating early in the morning when you are refreshed? After work or on your lunch break? Is it meditating in a group? Doing a guided meditation with someone to talk you through a visualization process? Sitting down? Lying down? Walking? What are the factors that make your meditation most peaceful and regenerating for you? Try to repeat these factors as often as you can.

18.Dealing with Thoughts in Meditation. Often, even after thirty years of practice, my meditations and spiritual exercises consist of “chanting and thoughts.” It typically takes me quite a while to move past the thoughts and into deeper levels of awareness. If you have a similar experience, a few things (listed below) may help. If one strategy doesn't work on a particular day, try another. I am not particularly visual in my inner perceptions, so there are few visual techniques listed below. If you are strongly visual, you might experiment with just “seeing” the thing I'm suggesting, or seeing an image that helps you to focus with greater clarity.

19.Five Minutes for God. Try telling yourself, “OK, just now, we're doing Five Minutes for God.” For these few minutes, attempt to focus gently but intently. This may help you drop the thoughts and listen and look inwardly with much less distraction, and move into greater levels of awareness and inner peace.

20. **Give the Marbles Away.** John Morton's book, *The Blessings Already Are*, contains a marvelous story from his childhood about how he gave away his huge collection of marbles. (Morton, 2000) It recently came to me that my thoughts during meditation are like marbles rattling around in my brain. I imagine pouring all my "marbles" from my brain into a tin, like for Christmas cookies, and handing the tin to someone special for safekeeping while I continue meditating. Try this imaginative technique to see if it affords you respite to refocus on going deeper in meditation.
21. **Listening for the Quiet.** Sometimes when I focus inwardly, I know I'm "there" because everything gets very quiet and still. If I can hold in that quiet place, my awareness will usually start to shift and move. Chanting, or repeating your word for a while, and *then simply listening inwardly* can help you to find this place of quiet.
22. **"Father, I receive."** This is another technique that I've heard numerous times over the years. When I want a deeper spiritual experience, I'll say, "Father, I receive," with a sense of opening myself, and then I wait in a receptive attitude to see what is next. I try to have no expectations, but to hold myself empty. Experiment with this to see if it assists you.
23. **"Peace, be still."** Many people report that this phrase from the Bible can help them to settle down and let go the thoughts. You might want to repeat it soothingly to yourself a few times as you gently breathe out.
24. **Write down the distractions.** Sometimes when the thoughts are running rampant, I'll get my clipboard or notebook and jot down things to do or buy until I run out of ideas. Or sometimes, creative inspirations come during meditation and I need to write them down while they are present. Once I've completed that, I can return to my quiet inner focus with renewed attention and devotion, without the distractions of demanding thoughts. If you have a mind working overtime, try jotting down your thoughts and resuming your meditation. It is also important, after your meditation, to get busy and handle the "to do" list in practical ways so that your consciousness knows it doesn't have to keep fretting and repeating them in your mind!

Resources: If you want more information about meditation, there are many books and tapes that explain particular forms of meditation. Check with your church, your local library, your favorite bookseller, or surf the net. Here are some classic resources that I've found most useful.

The Relaxation Response, by Herbert Benson

Creative Visualization, by Shakti Gawain

Inner Worlds of Meditation, by John-Roger

Autobiography of a Yogi, by Paramhansa Yogananda

Happy Meditating!

Let me know if you found any of these tips especially helpful, or if you have a favorite that I didn't include. You may email me at

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