

What is 'Meditation'?



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Many people think, for one reason or another, that they should 'do' something that they call 'meditation'. What they have in mind is maybe going to a meditation class of some sort or 'doing' some form of purely physical 'yoga'. Whether or not they do so however, 'meditation', understood in this way, is taken as just another thing to 'do' - and therefore also just another thing to make time for in their busy or stressful lives. This is a paradox, for the true meaning of meditation does not lie in adding to the list of things we need to make time to do. Indeed the true meaning of meditation does not lie in making time to 'do' anything at all, nor even making time just to 'be' in some ambiguous way. Instead the meaning of meditation lies in making time *to be aware*. Not at some future time but here and now, and in every moment of our lives.

There is what is 'going on' right now ... whatever it is you are doing, thinking, feeling, saying etc. And there is *the awareness* of what is going on – the awareness of whatever it is you are doing, thinking, feeling, saying etc. This awareness embraces not just what is happening in the here and now but its larger *where* and larger *when* – the overall situation and larger life context *within* which it is going on, goes on, and out of which it is emerging. Ultimately it is an awareness that embraces all of space and time.

We say that some people are more sensitive or 'aware' than others. What we mean is that they are generally aware of *more* than others are - more aspects of what is going on, whether in themselves or in others, in the world at large or in the here and now. Those with lesser awareness may have a need to *express* themselves more – for example through therapy - merely to discover just how much more there is for them to be aware of. Those with greater awareness however, may have a no lesser need to express themselves - needing to share all that they may be aware of with others in order not to feel overwhelmed or isolated by that awareness. Both communication and creativity themselves are seen as ways of *giving out* through self-expression, rather than as occasions for fully taking others in, whether through the word or in receptive silence.

As a result, people's social interaction consists simply of talk and telling stories - everyone sharing in words, each for themselves, what is most important to them, whilst their private life is either mute, uncreative and expressionless or else an ongoing search for some form of highly personal self-expression. The fact is however, that we do not need to share all of which we are aware, for awareness itself communicates and transmists itself silently, wordlessly, needing no form of outward expression.

Whether their awareness is greater or lesser, most people have a tendency to identify it with whatever it is they are aware *of*. Not understanding the true nature of awareness they take it as their *own* - as the private property of their ego or 'I'. This is reflected in common ways of speaking. If for example, we are aware of a thought or feeling what we think to ourselves or say to others is '**I** think this' or '**I** feel that'. In doing so we identify ('**I**-identify') with whatever it is we are aware *of*. Meditation demands that we overcome the misconception that awareness as such - what is called pure awareness - is something that is 'ours', that is 'yours' or 'mine' - and thus the personal property of our ego or 'I'.

To enter a true state of *meditative* awareness however - to 'meditate' - is the opposite of '**I**-identifying' with any thing or things we are aware of.

To meditate is to give ourselves time to identify with the pure awareness of what is going on - and not with any element or aspect of it.

That is why the truly aware person on the other hand, does not think '**I** think this' or '**I** feel that', '**I** recall this' or '**I** would like that'. Instead, were it put into words, their *experience* of awareness would not begin with the word 'I' but with the words 'There is..'. They would not think to themselves '**I** think this' or 'I feel that' but rather '*There is an awareness in me of this thought*' or '*There is an awareness in me of this feeling*'. Thus they would not think 'I feel tired' or 'I feel anxious' but rather '*There is an awareness of tiredness in me*' or '*There is an awareness of anxiety in me*'. This is important, because the foundation of all meditation is the understanding that the awareness of a thought or feeling, mood or emotion, impulse or activity, need or desire, *is*

not itself a thought or feeling, mood or emotion, impulse or activity, need or desire, but is instead something innately free of all these elements of our experiencing. For just as our awareness of a thing such as a table is not itself a thing, not itself a table, so is our awareness of a thought not itself a thought. Instead it is something innately thought free. Thus we do not need to effortfully ‘empty’, ‘clear’ or ‘free’ our mind of thoughts in order to reach a state of pure thought-free awareness. On the contrary, all we need do is identify with the pure awareness of our thoughts. The same applies to all elements of our experience, all so-called contents of consciousness. We do not need to empty our consciousness of these contents in order to achieve a state of awareness free of attachment to them. For the simple awareness of those contents is itself an awareness free from and unattached to them.

Meditation then, is based on the recognition that awareness as such – pure awareness – is not bound or restricted to any particular thing or things we are aware *of* – whether in the form of thoughts or feelings, impulses or sensations, needs or desires, memories or anticipation. Instead, it is like *space* – for though space is inseparable from the objects in it, it also remains absolutely distinct from them, and is not itself any ‘thing’. Pure awareness, quite simply, is a clear and empty space *of* awareness – for whilst it embraces everything we experience, yet it remains absolutely distinct from each and every element of our experience, each and every ‘thing’ we are aware *of*.

To not get lost, stressed, drained, depressed or fatigued by whatever is going on - whatever we might be doing or saying, thinking or feeling – demands only that we stop identifying with the immediate *focus* of our awareness and identify instead with the larger space or *field* of awareness around them. What we ordinarily call ‘consciousness’ is a type of highly focused or focal awareness. True *awareness* on the other hand is a type of non-focal, non-local or *field consciousness*. As long as people are identified with the immediate focus of their awareness whether external or internal, they remain as if *encapsulated* in a bubble from which no amount of social interaction and communication will free them – for all this allows them is the relief of *self-expression* of whatever it is they are aware of from within their respective bubbles. Paradoxically, freedom from such

encapsulation in ourselves and in what we think of as ‘our’ awareness can be attained only by granting more awareness to our most *fleshly* capsule - our skin – using it to sense the larger space *around* our heads and bodies. For that larger space is in essence but a larger field or space *of awareness*. It is by identifying with this larger space that we identify with the *pure awareness* of all that is going on - whether within or between our own ‘bubbles’ of awareness and those of others.

Expanding our *awareness of space* then, is the key to *experiencing* awareness itself *as* an expansive, all-embracing and transcendent space - embracing and transcending not just our own body but that of every thing and person within it. By sensing and identifying with an expanded awareness of space, we cease to experience awareness as something encapsulated in our minds or brains or bounded by our own skin.

To truly be *aware* is to literally be *in* awareness – to experience ourselves abiding or dwelling within a spacious field of pure awareness in the same way as our bodies abide and dwell within space. That spacious expanse of that pure awareness in which we all dwell in is not ‘ours’, not ‘yours’ nor ‘mine’, and yet it is the very essence of the divine. For as it is written in the *Bhagavad Gita*

**As the mighty Air that pervades everything ever abides in
Space, know that in the same way all Beings abide in Me.**

We all seek ‘breathing space’ in our busy lives. To ‘meditate’ is to identify with *the pure awareness* of all that is going on. This means sensing and identifying with the larger field or *space* within which it goes on. In this way we begin to feel more *breathing* space – not by breathing fresh air or by doing exercises in ‘breath control’ but by literally breathing in the very ‘air-ness’ of pure awareness itself – that ‘higher air’ or ‘aether’ which pervades all things, yet abides in the seeming emptiness of the space around them.

To begin with however, all we need ‘do’ to meditate is to give ourselves time to grant full awareness to our *bodies* - allowing ourselves to be as fully aware as possible of any

elements of anxiety, stress, tension, restlessness or dis-ease, however subtle or intense, that we sense within them. By giving awareness to our bodies in this way, we can, at the same time, give time to become more aware of things going on in our lives that may be ‘on our mind’ or that ‘come to mind’ as conscious mental thoughts or concerns directly related to what we are feeling in our bodies. The longer we do this, the more time we give ourselves *to be aware* - first of all of our bodies as a whole and then of all that preoccupies our minds - the more we will sense a gap opening up between our body-mind and the everyday self it constitutes and the very awareness we are granting it. In this way we begin to feel a gap between our everyday self and identity and another deep self - that Self which is *granting awareness* to our everyday self and lives, that Self, which, in its essence *is* the awareness we are granting. When we begin to sense that second, deeper Self we take the second major step in meditation. If the first step is giving ourselves time to be aware, the second is passing from ‘being aware’ to ‘being awareness’. This means ceasing to identify with anything we are aware *of* in our bodies and minds, but identifying instead with that very *awareness* we are giving ourselves, and with the Self that *is* that awareness, our ‘awareness self’ (the ‘Atman’). Feeling that Self ‘immanently’ - from deep down inside or within our bodies – we can then begin to feel it ‘transcendentally’. This is the third stage of meditation. We reach it by giving awareness not just to all that is going on inside us – in the inner spaces of our bodies and within our minds – but also to our skin surface, using it to sense more intensely the clear empty space surrounding our heads and bodies. As we expand our awareness into that space we begin to feel it as an infinite space *of* awareness - of which not just our body but all bodies are but different shapes or expressions. All that we were previously more intensely aware of as ‘going’ on in our body and mind – indeed in our everyday life in its entirety – we now experience nothing more than shallow ripples and reflections on the surface of a fathomless, underground ocean of awareness. At the same time, we feel the deeper Self within us as one centre of a vast, vaulting *time-space* of awareness - one that spans our entire lifetime. It is *as and from* this Self that we can give ourselves time to ‘meditate’ at any time, simply by giving more awareness to all that is going on within us or pre-occupying our bodies and minds - whilst at the same time ‘breathing’ the pure air or ‘aether’ of that clear, contentless awareness which surrounds us as space itself, and that spans all of time.