

MEDITATION

By Pastor Jerry Truex

The art of meditation has been practiced by Christians for thousands of years. There are many types. Here I will introduce three, including breath, sacred text, and witnessing.



Breath-Meditation

Description. Breath-meditation is a form of *one-pointed concentration*. In Buddhist terms, the goal is *samadi*, meaning “concentration,” which results in *shamatha*, meaning peaceful (*shama*) abiding (*tha*).

Purpose. The purpose of breath-concentration is to realize inner peace and tranquility during the meditation and then, when the meditation is over, extend that inner peace into the rest of the day. Breath-meditation *temporarily shuts down the senses and mental chatter*. This reduces physical tension, increases emotional calm, strengthens mental clarity, and opens one to the depth of God’s presence within.

Whereas eastern religions understand breath meditation as a path of liberation from illusion and suffering, Christians emphasize the presence of God in the deep, non-cognitive serenity that breath meditation can yield. God gives us the breath of life (Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25) and thereafter every breath is gift from God (Job 12:10). What better way to praise God and be still before God, than through breath meditation?

Job 12:10 In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. (NRSV)

Psalms 46:10. Be still, and know that I am God! (NRSV)

Psalms 150:6. Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! (NRSV)

Comments. When you first begin to practice concentration-meditation, you’ll probably only be able to hold the object of concentration (the breath in this case) for a couple of seconds before being distracted by other thoughts or before dullness or drowsiness happens. It usually takes several sessions before real calm abiding is experienced. You may experience “release phenomena,” which refers to jerking or quivering of the body, falling asleep, gurgling of the

stomach, tingling feelings or numbness, mental images, inner sounds, distracting noises, internal self-talk, “monkey-mind”—the body and the mind are “in full revolt” against releasing control to your spirit.

Practice. Choose a place you won’t be disturbed for 5-10 minutes. Make it as quiet as you can. Set a quiet timer to sound after so many minutes.

1. Sit on a straight back chair in a posture that is both relaxed and alert. Keep your spine as straight as you can manage. Start your timer.
2. Gently allow your eyes to close or gaze downward.
3. Let your body naturally settle into the natural flow of your breath.
4. Focus on your upper chest or your nostrils where you clearly feel your breath. This is your “anchor point.”
5. Simply observe the natural comings and goings of your breath at your “anchor point”.
6. If you are distracted by thoughts, images, or body sensations, simply notice this is happening. Then, gently bring your attention back to your breath or “anchor point”.
7. Continue to watch your breath, returning to it whenever you realize that you have wandered from it. Do this until your timer sounds.
8. Slowly open your eyes. Carry this peacefulness on to your next activity.



Sacred Text Meditation

Description. Meditation on a sacred text is also a form of concentration-meditation. Instead of focusing on the breath, focus on the word or words of the sacred text. It involves repeating the text or word over-and-over again aloud or silently to yourself. This is also called “mantra” meditation and “centering prayer.”¹

Purpose. The purpose of repeating the text over-and-over is not to think about the words, but to shut down temporarily the internal noise and the external distractions. In this way, one might experience a *present awareness of the self*. That self is the one that transcends your thoughts, emotions, desires, and sensations.

One ancient form of sacred text meditation is called the “Jesus Prayer,” which forms the core of *Hesychast* prayer practice. The Greek word, *hesychia*, means quietness, silence, solitude. This quiet is entered by repeating the “Jesus Prayer” over-and-over: “Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 9:13) or, more simply, *Kyrie elēson*, “Lord have mercy.” Almost any other

¹ M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form* (New York: Image, 1982); Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (Third Edition, New York: Crossroads, 2009).

sacred word or text can be used, such as “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15), *Maranatha*, which is Aramaic for “Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22), or even longer passages.

Practice. Select a sacred text from one word to a small paragraph. It is generally better if you have the text memorized and can repeat it with eyes closed. Choose a place you won’t be disturbed. Make it as quiet as you can.

1. Sit on a straight back chair in a posture that is both relaxed and alert. Keep your spine as straight as you can manage.
2. Begin with 2-3 minutes of meditation on the breath.
3. When your whirling mind slows down, let the words of the sacred text proceed slowly.
4. Concentrate on one word at a time. Hear the sounds of the words.
5. Allow the mind and senses to shut down temporarily.
6. If your mind wanders, gently come back to the sacred word or text, the “anchor point.”
7. Under no circumstances answer questions or recall things during meditation. That’s what the mind wants, to assert control over the spirit.
8. Under no circumstances allow yourself to become emotionally upset for the lack of concentration. That’s what the emotions want, to assert control over the spirit.
9. When you have meditated for an allotted time, slowly open your eyes.
10. Carry the sacred text within you to your next activity.



Witnessing-Self Meditation

Description. The witnessing-self meditation ponders our phenomenal self in order to become more aware of our transcendent self, our “witnessing self,” or our “observing spirit.”

Purpose. The purpose of “the witnessing-self meditation” (also called the “self-identification exercise”) is to enhance your awareness of your true self or spirit, increase your inner peace, disidentify from your phenomenal self, and gain greater non-attached control over your body, desires, emotions, and thoughts.

Practice. This exercise has two phases: *disidentification* and *self-identification*.²

1. The first phase is *disidentification*, discovering what is not the self. Begin with 2-3 minutes of meditation on the breath to induce relaxation. Then slowly recite the

² Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of Will* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1974) 157-8; Will Parfitt calls this the “self-identification exercise” and says it is the “most important” exercise in his book, *Psychosynthesis: The Elements and Beyond* (Glastonbury, England: PS Avalon, 2006) 46-48; see also Molly Young Brown, *Unfolding Self: The Practice of Psychosynthesis* (New York: Allworth, 2004) 36-38.

following statements to yourself. Try to realize as vividly as possible the significance of each statement. Repeat several times.

- a. "I have a body, but I am not (or *more than*) my body. I can see and feel my body, but what can be seen and felt is not the *True Seer*. My body may be tired or excited, sick or healthy, heavy or light, but that has nothing to do with my inner *self* or *spirit*. I value my body as my precious instrument of experience and action in the outer world, but it is only an instrument. I treat it well, I seek to keep it in good health, but it is not my *self*. I have a body, but I am not (or *more than*) my body."
 - b. "I have desires, but I am not (or *more than*) my desires. I can know my desires, but what can be known is not the *True Knower*. Desires come and go, floating through my awareness, but they do not affect my inner *self* or *spirit*. I have desires, but I am not (or *more than*) desires."
 - c. "I have emotions, but I am not (or *more than*) my emotions. I can feel and sense my emotions, but what can be felt and sensed is not the *True Feeler*. My emotions change and are sometimes contradictory. They swing from love to hate, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow, yet my essence, my *True Self*, does not change. Emotions pass through me, but they do not affect my inner Self or Spirit. I have emotions, but I am not (or *more than*) my emotions."
 - d. "I have thoughts, but I am not (or *more than*) my thoughts. My mind is a valuable tool of discovery and expression, but it is not the essence of my *self*. Its contents constantly change from moment to moment, year to year. I can observe my thoughts, but what can be known is not the *True Knower*. Thoughts come to me and thoughts leave me, but they do not affect my inner *self* or *spirit*. I have thoughts, but I am not (or *more than*) my thoughts."
2. Next comes the *self-identification* phase. Affirm slowly and thoughtfully: "I am what remains, a center of awareness, a self or spirit that witnesses the thoughts, emotions, feelings, and desires. I am a center of will, capable of observing, directing, and using all my psychological processes and my physical body."³

³ Will Parfitt, *Psychosynthesis: The Elements and Beyond*, 47;