

Meditation can be integrated into a busy lifestyle and become a resource for inner discipline and clarity...



Meditation

For A Clear Mind

BY C. ALEXANDER SIMPKINS PH.D. AND ANNELLEN SIMPKINS PH.D.

In the midst of martial arts practice, the mind is kept continually busy. Workouts can be fast-paced, moving from one thing to the next without a pause. Everyday life is often like that too, with every hour scheduled and filled. Even during less scheduled moments when the mind could take some time to reflect, most people don't take the opportunity to stop and meditate. But meditation can be integrated into a busy lifestyle and become a resource for inner discipline and clarity.

Meditation has many benefits. It can sharpen your senses, keep

you calm even under pressure, and give you quicker reaction times. It carries you directly to quiet depths, steering through the continuous flow of conscious thought, navigating into calm seas, and revealing reality in its crystal clear reflection, the ideal mind-set for the martial artist.

Meditation is a firsthand method; nothing can substitute for your personal exploration of your own mind. We encourage you to begin meditating regularly and you will feel the effects reflected in everything you do.



About the Authors: C. Alexander Simpkins Ph.D. and Annellen Simpkins Ph.D. are martial arts instructors of Tae Chun Do, an art integrating Tae Kwon Do with meditation and soft arts. They are authors of numerous books on meditation, Eastern philosophy, martial arts, psychology and hypnosis. Their most recent books include: *Principles of Meditation with Audio CD*, *Living Meditation with Audio CD*, *Meditation from Thought to Action with Audio CD*. These three book/CD combinations inform and then lead people easily into a deep meditative experience. The Simpkins also have a new series on Easy Lessons series on *Eastern Philosophy: Buddhism in Ten*, *Tao in Ten*, and *Zen in Ten* which take readers step-by-step into experiencing and using these philosophies to improve their lives.

The article is adapted from their recent book: *Buddhism in Ten: Easy Lessons for Spiritual Growth*

How to Begin

People have a stereotype of meditation as sitting motionless on the floor. This is one valid way to meditate, but certainly not the only way. Because your awareness is here and now, always available to you, meditation can be done anywhere, any time. As later lessons will reveal, there are many ways to meditate, and many settings for doing so. But people who are new to meditation might find it easier to begin meditating in a place that minimizes distractions.

For your first experience with meditation, pick a quiet room, or even a corner of a room, with subdued lighting and a comfortable temperature. Your dojang may be a natural place for meditation. You may prefer a shady place outdoors in nature, seated on the grass. Find a

time of day when you don't have any demands on you. Wear comfortable clothes that don't bind or constrict such as your dobok. As you get better at meditation, you will be able to sustain awareness in more varied situations.

Some people find it helpful to set the stage for meditation. Mild incense can put you in the mood for meditation. A picture or a statue of Buddha might inspire you to meditate. Meditation music may also help to gently lead you into greater calm. There are a number of artists who perform soothing music suitable for meditation. You may find a section of meditation music at a store that sells varieties of music.

If you are comfortable on the floor, use a small pillow or a mat to sit on. You probably won't need a pillow if you are

sitting on soft grass outdoors. There are meditation pillows for sale, or you can use any small pillow. The pillow not only cushions you, but also takes the strain off your legs.

Sit down on the pillow or mat. The traditional posture is the lotus position, where each foot rests up on the thigh of the other leg. But many people will find this uncomfortable, and so a half-lotus (with one foot resting up on the opposite thigh and the other tucked under) or a simple cross-legged position works just as well. Let your back be relatively straight, with head facing forward. Muscles should remain relaxed but not slack. Sometimes people will slump forward without realizing. But slouching may put strain on your back and restrict your breathing passages, so keep your-



Meditative Tea:
You don't have
to be alone to
meditate or even
sitting still to
experience this
illuminating win-
dow to the mind.

self upright.

Hand placement can have significance. One well-known meditation hand position is to place one hand on your lap, palm facing up and open. The second hand rests on top of the first so that the thumbs just barely touch. This position symbolizes unity, and with the legs crossed, allows for the body to form a continuous circle.

Meditation can be done with eyes open, eyes half-closed, or eyes closed. Beginners will find it easiest to close their eyes since this tends to remove visual distractions. Many Zen practitio-

ners meditate with eyes half open and half closed. But when you are meditating in the midst of everyday life, or while working out, you will often keep your eyes open.

Concentration

Meditation is sometimes translated as concentration. Concentration is a step on the path to emptying the mind. By focusing attention, the constant flow of thoughts slows. Many people have trouble concentrating. Meditation can train you to focus. With practice you will develop the ability to direct your attention when and where you need.

Focus on Counting the Breaths

One of the classic meditations in concentration involves counting your breaths as you breathe. Although breathing is a common focus for meditation, you might prefer to start with any of the exercises included here. Sometimes people find one form of meditation is easier than another, so it is helpful to try different variations and feel your reaction. All forms of meditation can be pathways to more enlightened consciousness.

Sit down on your meditation pillow



“Many Zen practitioners meditate with eyes half open and half closed.”

(or chair, grass, or dojang mat). Close your eyes. Silently count each breath. A full breath in and out is one count. Count up to ten, and then start again. Counting will help you to keep your attention directed to your breathing. If you notice that you have lost count, gently bring your attention back to counting. Sustain your counting for a few minutes. Try to extend the amount of time you can stay focused on counting.

Focusing on an Outer Object

Pick a simple shape, such as a box, a ball, a simple painting, or sculpture. Set it down where you can easily look from your meditation seat. Then sit down and focus all your attention on this object. Think of nothing else. If your attention wanders, bring it back to the object. Remember not to criticize yourself—just gently look again at the object. Notice everything about the object: its texture, color, size, etc.

Focusing on an Inner Image

After observing closely for several minutes, close your eyes and picture the object in your mind. Keep your attention focused on this image. If you find that you have forgotten some detail, open your eyes briefly to look and then close your eyes again. Keep trying to visualize the image. People vary on how crisp and clear the image will be. Don't worry if you can only imagine a vague representation. Most important is to keep your concentration on your image of the object.

Clearing the Mind

Loosening the Grip of Activity

Clearing the mind begins by stopping your activity: by not doing. This requires a shift in your usual intent. Most waking time is spent doing something. Even when relaxing, you are probably engaged in some kind of activity such as reading a book, watching a movie, getting together with people, or playing a game. But not doing is a step on the path leading to emptiness. In filling yourself with activities, you may miss what lies deeper.

Sit down in your meditation area. Let your body relax. Breathe comfortably. Don't do anything in particular; just sit. At first you may feel uncomfortable deliberately doing nothing, but not doing is an important inroad into meditation. You might begin with a short amount of time, such as a few minutes. As you become more at ease with sitting quietly, increase the time. You will feel more at ease, relaxed, and calm. Let it happen.

Using Symbolic Imagery

A clear mind is like a calm lake; so smooth that it reflects the world all around. When a cloud

moves across the sky, the lake reflects it. When the cloud is gone, the lake does not try to hold on to the cloud but lets it go, reflecting whatever comes next.

Imagine that your mind is like the calm, clear lake. As a cloud drifts past, your mind reflects it and then returns to calm clarity. Keep reflecting the clouds that pass, but always return to the clear lake. After some time, all clouds clear and the lake reflects the vast, blue sky. Stay with the clear lake.

Slowing Thoughts to Stillness

Clearing the mind begins from where you are. Sit quietly for a moment or two and turn your attention to your thinking. Notice the first thought that comes to your mind, think about it for a moment, and then let it go and try to just sit calmly with no thought in mind. When the next thought comes along, do what you did before: notice it briefly, but disengage from it and return to calmly not thinking about anything as soon as you can. Keep noticing each thought that arises, think about it briefly, and then return to no thought. As you stay with this, your thoughts will eventually begin to slow down. The spaces between thoughts will lengthen until eventually you will have periods of clarity.

Conclusion

It is in these meditative moments of mental clarity that you discover your capacity for a disciplined mind. Then you find yourself doing whatever you do well and fully. Next time you are working out, you may surprise yourself by performing better, quicker, and stronger in everything you do! ●

**From C. Alexander Simpkins Ph.D.
& Annellen Simpkins Ph.D.'s**

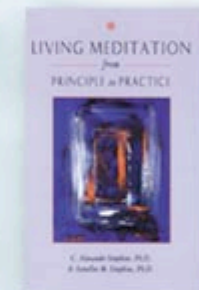
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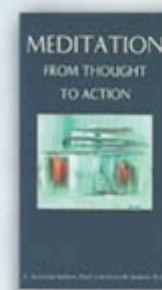
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