



How to Meditate Using Chakras, Mantras, and Breath

Dennis K. Chernin

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This book can be used by both beginning students who want to learn about the theory and practice of meditation as well as by individuals who have had experience with meditation and breathing techniques and would like to refine or deepen their practice.

- People with specific physical illnesses or mental health concerns can also use this book if they are interested in using meditation and breathing techniques as part of their treatment plan.
- There is an overview of the goals of meditation. We explore the question of why we practice meditation, and look at what it means to attain expanded states of consciousness.
- Different forms of meditation are described from both Eastern and Western perspectives.
- Misconceptions about meditation are clarified, and there is a discussion of the differences between meditation and concentration, contemplation, and prayer. We explore emotional, psychological, and spiritual benefits of meditation as well as the similarities between meditation and psychotherapy.
- Personal qualities that we must cultivate to begin the process of meditation and to sustain an ongoing practice are detailed, including openness, curiosity, effort, persistence, simplicity, tranquility, and mindfulness.
- We discuss the importance of applying the principles and approaches of meditation to daily activity.
- We explore medical research on the benefits of meditation in such areas as decreasing levels of hormones related to the stress response, controlling high blood pressure, and helping depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The mechanism of the stress response is outlined, followed by a detailed description of how meditation and breathing techniques help us better control the autonomic nervous system and other brain functions.

Another section in the book deals with the underlying concepts of the philosophical systems Tantra, Samkhya, and Vedanta. These great schools of thought form the theoretical basis and provide the actual techniques for the type of meditation presented in this book.

- The five components of the mind that are presented are thoughts, the sensory-integration component, the sense of self, decision making, and memory. These aspects of the mind are all strengthened by the practice of meditation.
- The system of raja yoga is described in detail because the form of meditation presented in this book closely follows the eight steps on this path. This includes five restraints on behavior and five observances to prepare us mentally for meditation, the postures and practices of hatha yoga, breathing exercises, withdrawal of the senses to deeper states of awareness, concentration techniques, sustained concentration (the actual definition of meditation), and absorption with the highest states of consciousness.
- In order to deepen meditation, we must have an object on which to concentrate. These objects, which need to have the inherent ability to guide the practitioner to expanded levels of awareness, are generally chakras (energy centers in the body), mantras (subtle inner vibrations), yantras (geometric shapes that reflect a

condensation of the seen and unseen universe), and the breath (control of energy or prana within the body). Several sections in this book focus on these powerful objects of concentration. Since the form of meditation presented in this book uses concentration techniques focused on the chakras, a detailed, colored image of the chakras appears on the front cover of this book.

· Later in this book we focus on the techniques used to prepare the body, breath, and mind for meditation. We analyze the relationship between hatha yoga and meditation. Hatha yoga postures are useful not only to improve flexibility, but also to strengthen the spine so the practitioner can sit for longer meditations.

· In the next chapter, there are descriptions of several sitting postures used during meditation. Breathing techniques (pranayama) are discussed in detail because these breathing exercises have many important functions in the process of meditation. They have positive effects on the body and mind, helping such health related concerns as sinus problems, hypertension, thyroid disease, and anxiety. Pranayama also is very important in helping to focus the mind for deeper meditation, and there are specific techniques that help to activate latent energy in the body (kundalini).

· The following chapter explores the idea of kundalini, or latent energy that is stored in the first chakra, located in the lowest part of the spine. This primal force is activated and moved upwards to the higher chakras during meditation, and as it moves through the seven major chakras, physical, psychological, and spiritual transformations occur.

The final part of the book describes the preparations necessary to begin a meditation practice as well as the specific meditation technique itself.

· The actual meditation technique is divided into several phases so that readers can systematically and slowly develop their own practice at their own speed. It is designed so that a person can choose to practice simple diaphragmatic breathing and breath awareness to relax and focus his/her thoughts. The reader can also choose the greater complexity of using mantras and concentrating on moving energy through the chakras with the goal of experiencing more expanded states of consciousness.

· The final chapter briefly describes meditation techniques that can be practiced by more advanced students who are working closely with an experienced teacher.

Audio CDs that systematically lead the practitioner through the various phases of the meditation described in this book are also available. They can be used in conjunction with and also separately without reference to the book. World famous drummer Muruga Booker accompanies Dr. Chernin in the tracks that prepare the student for meditation.

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