



by Swami Kriyananda

# Meditation KEYS FOR Beginners

**H**ow long should you meditate? The first rule is: Don't be ruled by what others do. What works well for them may not work for you. Accept that in certain ways you are unique. Here are a few general guidelines for meditation.

- ❁ Intensity of effort is far more important than the time spent in meditation.
- ❁ Never meditate to the point of mental fatigue, strain, or boredom. If you feel joy in meditation, stop meditating when the joy begins to diminish. One rule for right eating is to leave the table a little hungry. Apply this rule to meditation. In that way, you'll always look forward to your next time for meditation.
- ❁ On the other hand, make an effort to meditate a little longer at least once a week. Gradually you'll break the habit of thinking you can meditate only for short periods.
- ❁ In longer meditations, imitate the ocean tides in their ebb and flow. Let periods of intense concentration alternate with periods of relaxed effort and peaceful receptivity. Like waves coming in to shore, high intensity will alternate with low intensity in long meditations, and there may be pauses when no waves come at all. Until you can transcend body-consciousness in superconsciousness, it is unlikely you'll be able to meditate deeply for very long. Think of your thoughts as dirt that has been stirred up in a glass. Stop stirring it, and it will gradually settle. The greatest difficulty, in long meditations especially, is physical tension. Make an extra effort to keep your whole body relaxed.
- ❁ As a general guideline, try to meditate at least half an hour twice a day—in the morning after you get up, and in the evening before going to bed. An hour and a half twice a day is better. But if you are a beginning meditator, more than one hour a day may be extreme.
- ❁ It is better to meditate a few minutes with deep concentration than a whole hour absentmindedly. Moreover, I don't mind bargaining with you! For although five minutes, let's say, isn't much for anyone who has developed a taste for meditation, it may be all you feel you can spend in the beginning. So be it! Think of meditation, if you like, as daily spiritual hygiene. You brush your teeth, bathe, and brush your hair every day. Why not add to that routine five minutes of meditation?
- ❁ You'll come to enjoy meditating, in time. Then you'll find yourself meditating longer because you want to, and not because someone is nagging you to do so. But if you think you're too busy, here's something to think about: You can always find the time for something you enjoy doing, can't you? In time, you'll wonder how you ever lived without meditating daily. And the answer, of course, will be: You didn't. What you did, that is, wasn't really living.
- ❁ Be natural in your efforts. Make haste slowly, as the saying goes. Don't force yourself to meditate when you'd very much rather be doing something else. At the same time, don't stop meditating altogether with the excuse that you have other things to do. Remember, there's only one direction to go that makes any lasting sense: toward your own Self, in superconsciousness. No substitute will ever work for you; it's never worked for anyone. No appointment is more important than your appointment with life.
- ❁ Be a little stern with yourself. Success won't come to people who never try. Only bear in mind that tension is counterproductive. In meditation, concentrate first of all on relaxation. Remember this also: The more you meditate, the

more you'll want to meditate; but the less you meditate, the less you'll enjoy doing it.

☛ Another rule: As soon as you sit for meditation, get "down to business." Don't dawdle, as if telling yourself, "Oh, I have a whole hour, so what's the rush?"

☛ Be regular in your hours and practices of meditation. It is a good practice to meditate at the same hours every day. Routine conditions the mind. You'll find yourself wanting to meditate whenever those hours return. It will be much easier, then, to set all distractions aside.

☛ As soon as you sit to meditate, pray for depth and for guidance in your meditation. Pray also for peace for all humanity. Don't isolate your sympathies from others; embrace all in your divine love.

☛ We develop intuition. Paramhansa Yogananda said, by prolonging the peaceful aftereffects of the meditation techniques. After meditation, don't strip your mental gears by plunging hastily into outer activity. Try to carry the meditative peace into everything you do. To develop this habit, it may help to begin with outward activities that don't involve your mind too much. While doing them, chant inwardly to God.

☛ As a focus for your devotion, you may find it helpful to set up an altar in your place of meditation. Include pictures

on the altar, if you like, of saints, or of images of God, or of infinite light and space.

☛ A helpful practice also, if it pleases you, is the burning of incense as a devotional offering. The sense of smell is closely related to the memory faculty. You may recall, for example, catching in some fleeting scent a reminder of some childhood episode that awakened a host of associated memories. Incense, when used regularly in meditation, will help to create meditative associations in your mind, and bring you more quickly, therefore, to inner calmness.

☛ Above all in meditation, be happy! If you want to experience peace, meditate peacefully. If you want to know love, offer love first, yourself. ☸

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*Swami Kriyananda (J. Donald Walters) is an internationally known author, lecturer, and composer. Widely recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on meditation, yoga, and spiritual practice, he has taught these principles and techniques to hundreds of thousands of students around the world. A direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, Swami Kriyananda is the founder of Ananda Village in Nevada City, California, dedicated to spreading the spirit of friendship, service, and community throughout the world.*

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By Paramhansa Yogananda

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—Paramhansa Yogananda

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