

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR MEDITATION

Swami Kriyananda



1. What you must strive for is not to reach out towards anything that you are not, but only to realize what you *are* already, even now. Long ago the Indian sage, Patanjali, referred to this realization as *smriti* or memory. Worldly man sees all things as a becoming, as reaching out from what is to what has never been, to what might still, despite all his efforts, never be. Hence the struggle, the exhaustion that accompany his labors. But in yoga it is not so much by effort that one advances as by a gradual elimination of the sense of effort. Tensions are dissolved in ever deeper relaxation—physical first, then emotional and mental. God need not be shouted to in the distance. He is already here, behind the press and sway of our restless thoughts. He awaits only our notice. Remember the words of Jesus: “Lo, I am with you always.” Does not a sense of strain in one’s search for the Divine imply a subtle doubt?
2. If you have the time, exercise a little before meditation. Unless the body has been freed of toxins and sluggishness, it will resist your meditative efforts. The exercises one performs before meditation, however, should calm, not excite, the nervous system. A few Hatha Yoga postures, such as those described in our booklet, *Yoga Postures for Self-Awareness*, or the energization exercises that Paramhansa Yogananda originated, are an excellent preparation for meditation.



3. Meditate sitting down. Any of the classic sitting positions of yoga may be recommended, but an armless, straight-backed chair will do if your legs cannot adapt themselves to a cross-legged position. (It is God, after all, not your aching knees, that should be the object of your meditation!) Yogis say that one should sit on a deer skin or on a woolen blanket, facing east or north. If you sit on a chair, let the blanket run under your feet and up over the back of the chair. The purpose of this covering is to insulate you from certain currents in the ground that tend to draw the life force downward. The direction in which you face helps to put you in harmony with certain magnetic currents that circle the earth. If you sit in a chair, keep your feet flat on the floor. Especially important is the position of your upper body. The spine must be kept straight, the body in an attitude of alertness. If you sit on a chair, try not to lean back. Keep the body erect, the chest out, the shoulder blades drawn gently together, the chin parallel to the floor. Place your hands palms upward on the thighs at the juncture of the abdomen.

Sitting erect will induce a positive mental attitude. It will also make it easier for you to breathe properly. (The breath plays an important role in yoga practice.) Above all, an erect posture will facilitate the awakening of certain subtle energies in the spine. (A discussion of this aspect of the subject belongs properly to more advanced yoga teachings than to the present, basic instructions.)

4. Having assumed the correct posture, begin your meditation. Throw out of the mind all thought, all plans for the morrow, all attachments to the outer world. Chants, such as those in Yoganandaji’s book *Cosmic Chants*, or the repetition of certain Sanskrit *mantras* (word formulae), are particularly helpful. The simple repetition of the syllable, AUM* is often recommended.

The main purpose of chanting is twofold: to awaken fervor in the heart, and to concentrate the mind. Yogis claim that certain chants and mantras have power to influence the inner man, calming and centering him in himself. “Chanting,” Yoganandaji often said, “is half the battle.”

5. Inhale, counting mentally to 12; feel that you are filling your whole body with air. Hold the breath, counting to 12; exhale, counting to 12. If you prefer, make the count 6-6-6 or 20-20-20, according to your own lung capacity. *Never strain*. Repeat this breathing exercise six to twelve times. Then inhale, tense the whole body, throw the breath out and relax; repeat two or three times. (The practice of tensing and relaxing the whole body will help to relax even those muscles which are tensed without your conscious knowledge.)
6. You should now be relatively relaxed. *Hold the body still*. Mentally check it from time to time to see that no part becomes tensed again inadvertently. Remember, most of the difficulty experienced by beginners in meditation is due simply to physical tension.

* Pronounced “OM.” AUM is described as the symbol of the Creative Word, the vibration of Infinite Consciousness manifested in creation. AUM was identified by Paramhansa Yogananda as the Holy Ghost of the Christian Trinity.

7. Meditate on the concept of space—space surrounding your body, space inside the body. Feel that you have become weightless. Bear in mind that the soul cannot soar in the vast skies of Spirit so long as the mind is weighed down with body-consciousness.
8. When thoughts come, release them into the space surrounding you. Watch them drift away into nothingness. Be free of the impulse to think constantly!
9. If plans and projects disturb your concentration, meditate on the concept of timelessness. If you can persuade yourself that no future exists, what purpose can remain in planning for it?
10. Now, concentrate at the point between the eyebrows. Yoganandaji called this the Christ Consciousness Center, or Christ Center. Yogis call this the seat of concentration. Why?

Different states of consciousness are associated with different areas of the brain. Fear stimulates one area; hunger, another. When energy becomes focused in sufficient strength, in any area, appropriate physiological reactions occur. In the case of fear, there is, among other things an increase in the pulse rate and in the flow of adrenalin. In the case of hunger, digestive juices are secreted. Psychologists have recently found that even by stimulating these areas of the brain artificially, the associated physical reactions can be induced.

According to the teaching of yogis, a deeply concentrated, uplifted, or ecstatic state centers one's awareness in the frontal lobe of the brain. And physiologists tell us that this area is the most advanced part of the brain. It is particularly interesting, in the light of recent psychological research, that yogis should always have taught that by concentrating on, and thus stimulating, this frontal lobe, one may enter more easily into an uplifted state of consciousness.

Nor is such concentration lacking in its physiological effects. In ecstasy, for example, the heart beat and breathing are calmed, the nervous system is made peaceful. Even by deliberate concentration at the Christ Center the heart can be slowed, the breathing calmed, the whole nervous system harmonized. While one is outwardly immobile, one's inner awareness is intense.

To concentrate at this Christ Center, look upward gently with half-open or with closed eyes. The direction of one's gaze influences the state of one's mind; an upward gaze has always been associated with an upliftment of consciousness. One's main effort, however, should be directed towards centering his *consciousness* at the point between the eyebrows. Don't strain, therefore, in looking upward. Let the *gaze follow* the inner absorption of the mind.

11. Meditate with joy, with devotion. Don't wait for God' joy to make you joyous. To know Him as Love, reach out to Him with love. To know Him as Joy, be joyous first yourself.
12. Once you are very calm and concentrated, meditate on the thought of an expanding light and joy. Watch this light extend outward from your body in all directions, encompassing your city, your country, your continent, the world, then expanding beyond this world to include the solar system, our galaxy, the entire universe. Feel that all things are contained in this infinite light and joy.

A couple of recordings that we have prepared of this and of another visualization exercise, with a background of music, may be helpful to you. Paramhansa Yogananda's book, *Metaphysical Meditations*, contains many such exercises, the fruit of his own deep realizations. Yoganandaji used to say that, although the actual techniques of yoga are of prime importance, visualization exercises such as these come close to the techniques in effectiveness. They do so because they help to accomplish what Patanjali taught: They awaken *smriti*, the hidden memory of a state native to us, but long-forgotten.

If your worship takes a more personal turn, however, you may prefer simply to practice Bhakti Yoga (devotion), repeating constantly, with your mind centered at the point between the eyebrows, any heart-felt prayer such as "Reveal Thyself, reveal Thyself!" or "Come, Spirit, come!" or "I am Thine, be Thou mine!" or some Sanskrit *mantra* such as, "Sri Ram, jai Ram, jai, jai Ram, Om!" (O Lord God, victory to God! Victory, victory to God!"—that is to say, "May Thy light be victorious over darkness (in me and in others), Thy love over hatred, Thy joy over sorrow.")

13. How long should one meditate? Five minutes is better than none. Fifteen minutes is better still. Half an hour is bare minimum if one wants to achieve more than a fleeting touch of inner peace. But in fact, the sincere seeker should begin with half an hour in the morning, and—if possible—an hour at night, or with an hour in the morning and half an hour at night.

It is better to meditate deeply for a short time than absent-mindedly for hours. But the longer you can meditate *deeply*, the more rapid your spiritual progress will be.

14. It is best to meditate at the same time every day. Reflect on Pavlov's experiments with dogs. Pavlov rang a bell every time he placed food before the dog. In time, the association of the bell with food grew so strong in the dog's mind that the bell-ring alone, even when no food was given, sufficed to stimulate the digestive juices. Such is the power of habit!

In meditation it is difficult enough to become calm, so conditioned is the human mind to restlessness. But if one can sit to meditate at the same hour every day, an association will soon be formed. Thereafter, whenever the hour of meditation approaches, one will feel a hunger for the peace he has come to associate with that time of day. It will be easier, then, to put aside for the time being the cares and distractions of daily life.

15. If you set one place aside strictly for meditation, you will gradually build up vibrations in that sanctuary that will help you to go deep. If it is not possible for you to set aside a whole room, then perhaps you can screen off a portion of your bedroom.
16. Pause occasionally during the day and recall the peace and joy that you felt that morning in meditation. Yoganandaji told me once, "Live in the Self." It may help you to imagine a halo of light and joy surrounding your body—to feel that from it you are drawing your sustenance.



There are far deeper aspects to yoga, not touched on here, especially the Kriya Yoga technique described in Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Spiritual awakening is not something that just happens, vaguely, without reference to anything physical or mental that mankind already knows. You will find, especially as you go deeper, that the spine plays an important role in your spiritual progress. Try to be more conscious of it in meditation. Feel the life currents flowing there. Visualize them rising toward the brain as you soar in the skies of inner peace. If, later, you learn the technique of Kriya Yoga, your spiritual progress will be hastened, and your soul-satisfaction will be immense.

For lo, the very universe can be yours, if you will but claim it in God!

☞ *Yours — The Universe!* ☞