MEDITATION: THE INNER YOGA

Yogacharya Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

In this article, Yogacharya Ananda Bhavanani explains that meditation is a way of uniting with our supreme nature and may be described as fixing the mind on the Supreme with devotion and discipline. As we know, dhyana or meditation is the seventh of the eight steps in the Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali and is part of the antaranga or inner steps of Yoga, the path leading to Self-realization. Yogacharya offers an overview of meditation and suggests some aids to meditation including the use of mudras and tratak, or yogic gazing.

Maharishi Patanjali is the codifier of the Yoga Darshana, the yogic view of life. Meditation is preceded by dharana, or one-pointed concentration that helps us to flow into meditation. Patanjali defines dharana or concentration as deshā bandhah chittasya dharana, meaning that concentration is the process of binding the consciousness to a point, place, region or object. This implies a duality between the seer and the seen. He further defines dhyana, or meditation, as tatra pratyaya ekatanata dhyanam, meaning thereby that meditation is a state in which there is a steady and continuous flow of attention and concentration on a point, place, region or object. There ceases to be a duality between the seer and the seen. The final step in the three, free-flowing higher states of consciousness is samādhi or union with the divine nature in the ultimate, universal unification.

The one-pointedness of concentration, of dharana raises the yogi into the higher stages of the ideating mind, where buddhi, or intellect, is available as an instrument of the Cosmic Mind. When free-flowing concentration is achieved, it is known as dhyana, or meditation. Meditation is not “thinking,” as so many today mistake it to be. Meditation is a transcendental state, where if there is awareness, it is awareness of awareness itself, a state beyond the mind.

Meditation is the fruit of long and arduous effort. The mind is so trained in its focus that it naturally flows into the object of contemplation. A deep, vibrant quietness is the characteristic of meditation, which infuses one’s entire lifestyle with calmness and control. Meditation becomes a quality of mind that manifests in all aspects of our daily life. The mind develops the capacity to delve into every experience, thought, emotion and situation that arises, and this focused awareness produces yogic skill in living.

Mudras for Meditation

Various hastha mudras, or hand gestures, are used to enhance the concentration and deepen the experience of meditation. At the end of your meditation, when ready, slowly release each of these mudras and bring your hands back to the thighs.

Jnana Mudra: This “Gesture of Wisdom” is performed by joining the thumb and forefinger together in a perfect circle. The other three fingers are outstretched in a rigid fashion. Jnana Mudra is placed over the knees and held with the palm facing upwards. This mudra helps focus the restless mind and enables us to attain a state of jnana, or discriminatory wisdom. It is an excellent mudra for meditation and contemplation and can be used at times of study and introspection.

Chin Mudra: This gesture of consciousness helps us to go within and attain a state of elevated consciousness. From a straight-back sitting position such as Vajrasana, bring both hands up to the chest level with palms facing forward. Join the tips of your thumbs and index fingers to form a perfect circle. Keep the other three fingers straight and with their sides joined together in parallel. Place the Chin Mudra on your thighs with the palm facing down. Contemplate the mudra as it stimulates the mind into higher states of consciousness.

Namaskar Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. Bring both your hands up to your chest and join your palms together. Keep your elbows in a lifted position. This mudra is commonly used in many eastern cultures as a gesture of greeting and peace as it helps us to recognize that the Divine manifests through all beings.
Anjali Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. To perform this gesture of salutation, slowly lift both arms up from the side of your body. At the peak of the stretch bring both your palms together with your arms high over your head. Hold the mudra with sensitivity and awareness. Contemplate the subtle energies of the six higher chakras that are located in the higher region of the subtle body.

Kailash Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. Slowly lift both your hands and perform the Anjali Mudra. Gently bring the Anjali Mudra down to your head so that your wrists are touching the top of your head. Make sure that your elbows are kept in line with your shoulders. This mudra forms a beautiful triangular frame for your face. Try to visualize Mount Kailash in its wonderful snow-coated splendor. This mudra helps energize the sahasrara chakra, the crown center of psychic energy and is a useful mudra for contemplation.

Bhairava Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. Bring your left hand onto your lap with the palm facing up and then place the right hand on it with the right palm facing upwards also. Sit quietly and contemplate the mudra. The right hand represents the masculine energy of Shiva and in this mudra that energy is kept dominant.

Bhairavi Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. Bring your right hand onto your lap with its palm facing up and then place your left hand on it with the left palm facing upwards too. Sit quietly and contemplate the mudra. The left hand represents the feminine energy, and this mudra indicates the dominance of our creative and artistic energy of Shakti over the masculine energy of Shiva.

Yoga Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture. Entwine the fingers of both hands with the fingers of the right over the left. The right thumb should be at the top of the piled up heap of fingers. Place the Yoga Mudra on your lap in a relaxed manner and enjoy the calm arising within yourself. Perform deep breathing and become aware of how this mudra brings about a steady and harmonious balance between the right and left flows of energy in your subtle body.

Bhumi Sparsha Mudra: Sit in any meditative posture and perform the Jnana Mudra. Place the hands over the knees and then extend the fingers forward until the tips are touching the ground. This earth witnessing or earth touching gesture is a gesture of reverence for our planet, the earth that sustains our race. Ancient yogis were true environmentalists and through the development of reverence for nature, they upheld the highest ethical principles of conservation.

Mahabhinishkramana Mudra: From a sitting position, bring your left hand close to your navel with the palm facing upwards. Make your right hand into a clenched fist with your thumb directed straight upwards and place your right hand on the upturned left palm in front of your navel. This hand gesture represents the symbol of Lord Shiva, the Lord of evolutionary change. This mudra’s name means, the “mighty gesture of renunciation.” After you have held the mudra for a comfortable period of time, relax your hands back to your thighs and sit quietly to absorb the higher energies of evolutionary change and renunciation that will start to flow through your system.

Trataka: Yogic gazes

Concentration upon a single point or object for a prolonged period helps to shut out the outer world and also produces a state of alert awareness. With prolonged practice of one-pointed, concentrative gaze, all irrelevant sensory feedback can be eliminated from consciousness, leading to the experience of a state of meditation. Various types of concentrative points may be chosen for the practice of yogic gaze. Here are a few of them:

Jyoti Trataka: The term jyoti means a “luminous light,” and so this trataka is the concentrated gaze at the tip of the flame of a lamp kept in front and at eye level 3 to 4 feet away. Sit in any of the meditative postures and gaze steadily at the tip of the flame without blinking the eyes. Don’t allow any distracting thoughts to enter your mind, and if they do, then clean them out at once. Try to maintain the gaze and control the blinking of the eyes as much as possible. Do not strain the eyes. Repeat the practice at least 3 to 9 times at each sitting to obtain maximum benefit. To relieve any tension that may have accumulated in your eyes, rub your palms together to generate healthy, warm, pranic energy. Place your cupped palms over the respective eye blocking out any external light and relax for some time.
Bhrumadhyya Drishti Trataka: Bhrumadhyya Bindu refers to the midpoint between the eyebrows and is one of the most important concentration points in Yoga. Perform Siddhasana and do a few rounds of deep breathing. Open your eyes wide and gaze upward. Focus your gaze on the Bhrumadhyya Bindu. Concentrate on this point without blinking your eyes as long as possible and then relax your gaze. Close your eyes and hold this point inwardly for 15 to 20 seconds. To relieve any tension that may have accumulated in your eyes, rub your palms together to generate healthy, warm, pranic energy. Place your cupped palms over the respective eye blocking out any external light and relax for some time. Repeat the practice 3 times at each sitting until a sense of inner concentration is achieved.

Nasagra Drishti Trataka: In this practice, we gaze open-eyed upon the tip of the nose, an important concentration point used in the inner practices of Yoga. Sit in Padmasana and do a few rounds of deep breathing. Open your eyes wide and focus your gaze upon the tip of your nose. Your left eye must catch the tip of the nose with the same balance and lack of tension as does your right eye. If there is tension, close your eyes and imagine that you are still gazing at the tip of your nose. Hold this concentration for 15 to 20 seconds and then open your eyes to see if the tip of your nose is actually still in the drishti of your eyes. Repeat 3 to 9 times at each session until a sense of relaxation is achieved. One should gradually increase this practice without putting too much strain on the eyes. To relieve any tension practice the eye cupping technique previously outlined.

If a headache develops, stop the practice session and rest your eyes with palming. It is advisable to washout your eyes with lukewarm saline solution after the practice if any tension is still felt in the eyes.

Anthara Dharana

Anthara Dharana refers to the various techniques of inner concentration that can be done from Dharmika Asana (the devotional asana, or Child’s Pose):

Kshitijan Kriya: Kshiti means “horizon” in Sanskrit, but the horizon used for this inner concentration is the inner-mind horizon. After performing the Dharmika Asana, mentally think of the point where your head is touching the floor. Directly inside the head between the hemispheric folds of the brain is a nerve center called Bindu Nadi. Withdraw your concentration into this Bindu and imagine that you are looking into the Eastern sky, just before dawn. Your inner screen or mental horizon is one of velvety, warm darkness. Then, imagine a full sun rise, with all its colors. Relax in this pleasant inner view, letting the experience flood through your entire nervous system.

Eka Varna Kriya: This practice elicits inner light experiences. Concentrate at the same Bindu point, thinking only about your favorite color. Choose the color that you like best from the entire color spectrum. Imagine that you are completely engulfed in this liquid color, as though you have fallen into an ocean of colored liquid. Sometimes a swirling sensation of color will develop, and you will be literally sucked into a point of light in which you may also experience some inner sounds. Do not let these sounds interrupt your concentration, but become completely lost in the color and sound. This is very healing to the body and the mind.

Jyotir Darshana: This is the blessing of a view of the inner light. Begin by concentration in Bindu Nadi, at that point where the head touches the floor in Dharmika Asana. Imagine you are sitting out of doors in bright sunlight or watching a bright sunrise. Concentrate fully on this idea. If you do so, a pinhole of light will appear from within the mind’s eye, the third eye, the Ajna Chakra. Hold this light gently in your inner gaze. Do not concentrate too hard, or it will go away. Learn to gaze passively, without a desire to grasp, possess or hold what your mind experiences. Keep the concentration until the light fades or you feel sufficiently relaxed to discontinue the practice.

Pranava Dhyana

This practice is a one pointed concentration on the form and nada, or sound, of the sacred Pranava AUM, known as the mantra of all mantras. This can be done from any of the sitting postures but make sure that your back is erect. It is best to do this after performing a few rounds of conscious deep breathing so that the mind is in a calm state. Pranava Dhyana harmonizes the body, emotions and mind. In this practice emphasis is first placed on making the sounds AAA, UUU and MMM.
separately and then in combination. This is followed by the performance of the practice mentally without the audible sound. Sit in Vajrasana and place the Chin Mudra on your thighs. Breathe in deeply into your lower chest area 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound, Aaaaaa. Breathe in 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound, Aaaaaa. Now concentrate on the sound, Aaaaaa mentally and perform the same practice 3 times without the audible sound.

Curl your fingers inward to form the Chin Mudra and place it on your thighs. Breathe deeply into your mid chest region 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound Ooooo. Breathe in 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound, Ooooo. Now concentrate on the sound, Ooooo, mentally and perform the same practice 3 times without the audible sound. Perform the Adhi Mudra by clenching your fists with your thumbs in the center and place the mudra on your thighs. Breathe deeply into your upper chest and clavicle regions 2-3-4-5-6. Now, exhale with the sound, Mmmm. Breathe in 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound, Mmmm. Breathe in 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out with the sound, Mmmm. Now concentrate on the sound mentally and perform the same practice 3 times without the audible sound.

To perform the 4th part of the practice that unites the 3 earlier parts, perform Adhi Mudra and then place it with the knuckles of both hands touching in front of the navel. This is now known as the Brahna Mudra. Take a deep breath into the low, mid and upper chest regions. Now let the breath out with the sounds of Aaaaa – Ooo – Mmmm. Breathe out Aaaaa – Ooo – Mmmm. Breathe in 2-3-4-5-6. Breathe out Aaaaa – Ooo – Mmmm. Now concentrate on the sound Aaaaa – Oooo – Mmmm and perform the same practice 3 times without the audible sound.

A practice of 3 to 9 rounds of the Pranava Dharana, when done daily, helps to relax the body-mind-emotion complex and provides complete healing through the production of healing vibrations at all levels of our existence. This is the cornerstone of yogic breath therapy and can produce health and wellbeing for all. When the concentrative aspect of the practice is taken to its peak, a state of meditation, or Pranava Dhyana, can ensue.

**Chakra Meditation**

This meditative sitting is best done facing North or East. The practice of a few rounds of deep and conscious breathing in Savasana prior to this meditative sitting can serve to enhance its effect dramatically. Kneel in Vajrasana, or any sitting posture in which you are absolutely certain that the spine is yogically erect so that the energy can move upward in an effortless and smooth manner. Do some pranayama focusing on the chakras. As you come up through the chakras, starting from the base of the spine and through to beyond the top of the head, try to become aware of each of these centers. With practice and inner growth these centers will start to become conscious centers filling with light, sound and color.

When the breath is completely filled in and you are in the Sahasrara Chakra, beyond the top of the head, hold your breath in a Prana Kumbhaka, a held-in breath, for a lengthy period of time. Slowly let the breath out and keep your concentration in that Thousand-Petal Lotus Chakra. Let the breath take on any form that it wishes and simply hold the idea that you are sitting in the midst of a beautiful thousand-petal pink lotus. Hold that idea as long as you can, repeating the visualization over and over until there occurs a pleasing sensation of being suspended.

Dr. Bhavanani is the son of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri and Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. He grew up in the gurukula of Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry, India, where the knowledge of the art and science of Yoga was imbibed as a 24-hour-a-day sadhana. Following in his father’s footsteps, he became a medical doctor in order to combine eastern wisdom with the best of western science. He directs the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research in Pondicherry, India, and he is also a featured speaker at Yoga conferences around the globe. For more information: www.icyer.com.