

Yoursself

Whether you need to relax, zone out, tune in or relieve stress a regular mediation practice can be a joyfully nurturing experience.

by Scott Cole

When this meditation assignment came to me, I felt this sudden surge of joy. Like a grand curtain had risen or a veil had been lifted to bring forth a vital light, I experienced something similar to Kabbalistic mysticism. It occurred to me that I have been teaching guided imagery and meditation in various forms as well as writing actual meditations for well over 10 years. Surprisingly, in all that time, I had never written an article about meditation. This assignment both excited and scared me. I have been joking with friends for over a week not to bother me because I'm struggling to sit still long enough to actually write.

As I searched my restless inner self for answers, I realized that what I was feeling was no different from what many average Americans feel. On some level we feel unworthy, like we really aren't quite centered enough, legitimate enough, or clear enough to really meditate. Americans enter most circumstances with performance anxiety, including meditation. My imposter voice inside of me delivered disqualification's ranging from "Scott, you have never been to India" to "Scott, you're from Texas for God's sake." We all have wacky inner voices at times, and it's important to hear them, reflect upon them, enjoy them for the clarity they can bring, and then happily invite them to move along.

Actually, what I just described is a form of meditation—a focusing inward, a relaxation with what IS, and

(like a good exhale) a letting go. The letting go brings forth the clarity, the self-love, and the confidence we need to act within our truth. In my instructor workshops I always say, "Teach what you know and what you are comfortable with, and all will be fine." When we're learning something new it is important to trust, to be open to new ideas, and to move into a zone that feels right for us. I guess I am finally adhering to what I tell everyone else to do.

Face Your Fear

Meditation in the Western world has been somewhat elusive because of our fast pace and because of our misunderstanding of what meditation is and can be. Simply put, meditate

means "to plan or intend," or "to think deeply." I had to laugh at the definition I found in one old student dictionary, which read "to pass some time thinking in a quiet way." This isn't a wrong definition, but the "pass some time" part suggests that meditation is best done when you are bored and have absolutely nothing better to do. This detached "lala woowoo" lazy attitude about meditation seems to keep meditation out of the mainstream, as does right-wing religion, which often warns of the perils of New Age meditation. Hogwash. Any scholar worth his tassel knows that all of the great spiritual leaders "went inside" or out in nature to clear their minds enough to actual-

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Tangerine Green Meditation

Scott describes his CD as "a happy new Journey of interactive guided imagery that takes the listener through 4 life-affirming meditations: Child's pose, Open Invitation, Energizing Release and Brilliant White Light." I describe it as a beautiful, mystical, otherworldly release of tension, stress and daily aggravation. His voice will soothe your frazzled soul and his

light-hearted approach sets an easy tone that immediately invites you in to a new, peaceful world.

If you've never done meditation this is a perfect introduction and if you've been doing it for a while you'll find yourself going deeper - making a deeper connection - and discovering wonderful new things about your body as well as your mind. My favorite one is Brilliant White Light, especially good if you're feeling bad, either physically or mentally. Scott will show you how to use the power within yourself to heal most of life's little dramas. You'll feel refreshed and completely ready to face the next challenge. I often use it at the end of my classes and my students love it! — Rita Trieger

Journey to the Center...

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ly hear the messages within. I have never quite understood the fear of opening up to the beauty of what is inside of each of us, unless one is scared of what he or she will find. Rest assured, when you find "it," you'll be better able to deal with "it," and 99% of the time "it" will not be as scary as you imagined.

Our culturally instilled fear of meditation reminds me of a similarly spelled word, "medication," which not only represents the Western world's poor interpretation of detachment but is also qualified in the same dictionary with: "It is often dangerous to medicate oneself without a doctor's advice." Ya think? It seems that Western culture promotes avoiding or covering-up one's feeling(s). Most of us would rather make the symptoms simply disappear. In order to achieve our utmost avoidance, we enlist a doctor's help to properly medicate us into oblivion.

Therefore, it's not very surprising

Moving Meditation

Much of my martial and healing arts background is in Tai Chi, which is often called "the moving meditation" due to its focus on the centering of the "chi" (or energy) and because of the internal focus that grows with time and practice.

Through practice one's movement and thought takes on a path of least resistance. Meditation is about the revealing of internal truths. It's about discovery, developing an awareness of our internal being, and the resulting outward expression of that truth. Energy has the ability to spiral inward to incalculable depths and, by the laws of nature, to spiral outward with equal force. Martial artists know and experience this through the practice of katas, drills, and displays of focused strength. A gymnast can visualize performing a great routine and see that internal vision become a marvelous external reality. This is yet another form of meditation, involving movement and focus. — SC

to discover that the Western depiction of one who meditates has pretty much been that of some detached, psychotic, aloof stoner who gets high and meditates/medicates because he has no purpose or nothing better to do. The depiction at the other extreme of a super-advanced yogi whose wisdom, knowledge, and ability far exceeds anything that mere mortals could possibly achieve is equally discouraging. Here is your first lesson in meditation: let those perceptions go! Permission is hereby granted to explore the richness and beauty of meditation.

Finding the Right Path

There are many ways to meditate, which makes defining only one both alienating and a little absurd. You can meditate for one minute, one hour, or one week. You can place your hands on your knees, over your heart, or lie flat on your back in corpse pose. Meditation can be used to relax, zone out, tune in, relieve stress, or develop a fine-tuned focus. By definition, one can "think deeply" about anything whether it is visualizing a potential pole vault, settling into a yoga pose, letting go of anger, sending healing light through one's body, aligning the chakras, or entering into a silent internal state—what would be called a "transcendental" or supernatural state—far beyond the known limits. From the lightest, sweetest, most focused thought to the depths of transcendental meditation, it is all good.

Keep in mind, however, that each person is on his or her own journey and that all meditative states are different. Reaching a "supernatural state" is personal for each human being. It doesn't mean being abducted by aliens—it is simply reaching a deeper personal understanding, comfort, and awareness for YOU, and it is extremely important not to judge your journey or compare it with anyone else's.

It's okay if you have trouble sitting still or if your back hurts and you can't sit perfectly upright for 30 minutes. Your continued yoga practice will help with the back issue, but in the meantime, get a pillow, get

comfortable, make your meditation space relaxing and allow the experience to be yours—meditation is not a Turkish prison, this is supposed to be joyful and nurturing.

Start Simply

We all have issues about slowing down, going inside, and taking the time to be still. If you have never meditated before (or even if you have), I suggest that you start simply, with just five minutes of silence in a seated upright position. Your legs should be crossed at the ankles, the crown of your head lifted, your chin pushed slightly forward, your spine lengthened but relaxed, and your eyes focused down on one spot. Your hands can rest on your knees or be turned outward with palms up. Once you feel secure and relaxed, breathe gently and fully from the belly. Sit silently for 10 minutes. As you feel ready in future sessions, extend the time to 20, 30, or 60 minutes. Or book yourself at a silent retreat, if that's your joy. Remember, meditation is not a competition, but a practice—you are the master of your own time and space. ☯

Wellness expert, Scott Cole, creator of the Discover Tai Chi series (and whose Tangerine Green Meditation CD is regularly and enthusiastically used by Fit Yoga editor Rita Trieger—see sidebar on page 39) can finally relax a little now that his meditation article is DONE. Scott offers listeners a free meditation on his website, www.scottcole.com.

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