



‘Mindfulness’ and Meditation

Contemporary psychology has recently been promoting the benefits of what is often called simply ‘mindfulness’ and at other times ‘mindfulness meditation’. Mindfulness meditation is a formal practice, which may or may not be combined with a more informal practice of focusing attention on moment-to-moment sensations during everyday activities. Mindfulness techniques have become increasingly popular and the virtues of mindfulness are proclaimed in newspaper headlines, NHS-sponsored courses and self-help books. Mindfulness is often defined as ‘the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present moment — and accepting it without judgment’; others might define mindfulness practice as ‘paying attention with kindness’ to arising thoughts and feelings. The practice of mindfulness has its basis in meditation, breathing, and yoga practices which can be found in many religious traditions.

Psychological research indicates that meditation and mindfulness practices have the potential to increase an individual’s level of happiness, decrease anxiety, and have a supportive effect in coping with physical pain caused by other health conditions. There is a growing body of research in medical literature suggesting that the benefits of these practices are significant enough to warrant widespread recommendation and promotion.

There is a wide range of organisations that teach techniques of mindfulness, meditation, yoga and relaxation. Courses and classes may be presented primarily in terms of the potential benefits for health, well-being and happiness. These courses are run by a wide variety of organisations, both religious and non-religious. Mindfulness and meditation courses apparently affiliated with the NHS may or may not also be affiliated with a religious group.

Inform advises those interested in learning a mindfulness or meditation technique to look into the background of the organisation offering the teaching. Does it come from a particular doctrinal position? Are there any issues or concerns associated with this particular organisation? How experienced is the teacher in the techniques being taught? How open is the group or teacher to talking about any concerns or questions you may have? Are you encouraged to take further, associated classes or courses that have a focus beyond the techniques of mindfulness or simple meditation?

Research suggests that the health benefits of mindfulness are associated with a mental practice of non-judgemental attention to present-time sensations and phenomena. Many meditation and yoga techniques contain this technique, but also might be directed towards other goals, such as the ability to concentrate or develop a feeling of devotion towards the ‘divine’, or to promote an experiential understanding of a particular ‘Truth’. A particular tradition’s aims and methods may not be compatible with every individual’s beliefs and motivations.

If one course or technique is not working for you, it is worth remembering that there is a wide variety of methods you can try in order to achieve the benefits associated with mindfulness.

Problems with Mindfulness and Other Meditation Practices

Despite a widespread acceptance that mindfulness and other meditation practices can benefit health, in some cases health professionals may recommend stopping a practice. It can be helpful if the practitioner, friends and family keep thinking critically about the benefits of the practice for the individual, as well as watching for more negative effects. Although negative effects of mindfulness-based techniques are likely to be rare, the more people are encouraged to meditate, the more these issues are likely to occur.

Meditation teachers have warned that individuals feeling 'emotionally distraught, unstable, and unable to cope' may not respond well to traditional meditation practices. Some of the research on adverse effects of meditation has noted that those with a prior history of psychosis or Borderline Personality Disorder might experience a recurrence of the psychosis or further personality organisation difficulties. There has been some association between manic episodes and intensive meditation practice. Other research has noted a possibility of increased feelings of anxiety; and more generally some have found meditation a negative experience due to 'unfamiliar feelings and sensations, intrusive thoughts, a sense of losing control, floating, muscle cramps and spasms, dizziness, feelings of vulnerability, sensations of heaviness' and involuntary twitching.

It is possible that unexpected memories and historical traumas might resurface with the practice of meditation, particularly in the context of intensive meditation retreats. Experienced meditation teachers may be better prepared to help those having difficult experiences than teachers with less experience. Negative experiences with relaxation and meditation come as a surprise to many who begin the practice expecting it to be simple, straightforward and positive. However, these more 'negative' experiences are also well documented in historical meditation traditions. In the context of religious traditions, negative and anxiety-provoking experiences may be seen either as an obstruction on the path to greater understanding, or as a result of achieving a new level of understanding that causes a re-organisation of the personality. In ancient Buddhist texts, these difficult memories and experiences are catalogued as part of the path towards enlightenment.

In Christian mystical traditions, there is an idea of the 'Dark Night of the Soul' as one supposedly becomes closer in relationship to God; some contemporary Buddhist practitioners also talk about a 'Dark Night' of instability and personality re-organisation as one experiences new insight. Such experiences may occur unexpectedly for those who began mindfulness meditation practices as a simple and safe way to become happier.

Inform would advise that individuals should be prepared to stop a meditation practice and seek advice from mental health/medical professionals and/or senior meditation teachers about any adverse effects experienced in meditation. Some approaches might be more suitable for particular individuals, and the effects of a specific practice might need to be reassessed over time. While meditation teachers may be able to help those with less experience through these states, not every teacher may have the experience or training to do so for every individual. Some resources and self-help groups for those who have experienced troubling effects from meditation and other spiritual practices are listed at the end of this leaflet.

Many meditation courses/traditions allow some flexibility as to the practitioner's

physical position: mindfulness-based meditation can be done sitting on the floor, on cushions, on a chair, or while walking or while doing other purposeful activities such as yoga or tai chi. If one finds that a particular course/teacher is not able to modify the practice to account for physical pain, it might be worth consulting other teachers and/or exploring another meditation tradition.

Organisations Offering Meditation - Disclaimer:

There are many individuals and traditions offering courses and training in meditation and mindfulness. Something called meditation has been a part of almost all the major religious traditions. However, the aims and practices associated with meditation can vary widely both within and across different belief systems. **The mention of a particular organisation in this leaflet is neither a recommendation nor a warning.** The groups listed below are meant to represent some of the wide variety of organisations and individuals promoting practices in this milieu. All groups and institutions will have their own histories of problems and controversies. It is Inform's experience that if people are aware of the history of controversies and concerns raised about a group or practice, they will be in a better position to make a decision about what the best course of action is for themselves. While some groups have different techniques to achieve similar ends, there is also a huge variety of intended outcomes of meditation practices. The goals of meditation practices range from bringing the 'soul' closer to God, through non-judgemental self-awareness, to realising the true nature of reality (as defined by the tradition).

Inform can be contacted for more in-depth information about any group mentioned below, or other groups offering mindfulness and meditation techniques and practices. It also has leaflets outlining the diversity of mainstream traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism which can help to situate a particular group or practice in the wider context of a religious tradition. Although many meditation practices from major world faiths are detailed in this leaflet, Inform can provide more information about other traditions upon enquiry.

Secular Meditation

In psychological literature, mindfulness is often combined with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), a popular form of psychotherapy that aims to recognise and challenge patterns of thinking that are linked to 'maladaptive' behaviours such as rumination, which is linked to depression. In psychological literature, these practices come under a variety of names such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (MBCBT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) are the well-researched methods of meditation-therapy based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (b. 1944), emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Although Kabat-Zinn has a background in Zen Buddhism, he claims that the MBSR programme is neither religious nor spiritual in nature. In 2014, Oxford, Bangor, Aberdeen and Exeter Universities in Britain offer accredited master's degrees in Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy. Some accredited teachers may also be affiliated with a particular religious tradition which also teaches its own meditation practices. *Be Mindful* is a campaign run by the Mental Health Foundation to raise awareness of the benefits of mindfulness-based therapies as a treatment to improve mental and physical health, and its website

(<http://bemindful.co.uk>) offers a list of practitioners and courses searchable by local area.

Although the secular meditation technique used in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was developed specifically to 'treat' individuals with a history of clinical depression, teachers of MBCT will explain that the technique is most effective at preventing relapse, but is not recommended when someone is actually going through an episode of clinical depression or experiencing suicidal thoughts.

These programmes use several different techniques, often presented in the form of an eight-week course. The first technique is usually a process of becoming more aware of bodily sensations without judgement, followed by introducing some practices that use stretching and simple yoga postures to increase somatic self-awareness and acceptance. This is followed by a more focused meditation which encourages the practitioner to 'focus on the breath, the body, sounds, thoughts and feelings'; the practitioner is encouraged to observe these phenomena from a new perspective, discovering that 'thoughts often come and go like clouds in the sky'. Individuals are often encouraged to continue to set aside 20-30 minutes for meditation once or twice a day for continued health benefits. There has been some criticism that the gains made during the eight-week course may be lost without the motivation of a continuing association with other people meditating. The availability of ongoing support from other meditators and trained instructors may vary between courses.

Buddhist Meditation

When considering meditation, many people first think of the Buddhist tradition. Practices of concentration and contemplation were integral to the Buddha's teaching and many contemporary groups emphasise practices in these traditions. However, in the 2,500 years since the historical figure Siddhārtha Gautama sat by the Bodhi Tree, Buddhist meditation practice has expanded and diversified greatly. *The Buddhist Society* in central London offers classes in meditation from a wide range of Buddhist traditions (<http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org>). Inform has a separate leaflet that explains further the diversity of Buddhist beliefs and practices.

A few of the many organisations offering meditation classes from within a specific Buddhist tradition include:

Zazen or zen meditation techniques are taught by several groups including *The International Zen Association United Kingdom* (<http://www.izauk.org/>) and a similar technique is taught by the *Western Chan Fellowship* (<http://www.westernchanfellowship.org>). Zazen emphasises an awareness of body posture while sitting, and often involves a practice of counting breaths up to ten, becoming aware when other thoughts interrupt the counting, and then beginning the count again. After some time practitioners no longer use counting to focus, but keep their awareness on the breathing process while observing the coming and going of other thoughts and sensations.

Some study meditation and Buddhism under the inspiration of Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (b. 1926), who was ordained in a Zen-based tradition in Vietnam. In Britain, this tradition (see <http://interbeing.org.uk>) is organised mostly in peer-led groups that typically meet weekly for a practice that alternates between silent, guided and walking meditation, listening to a Dharma talk, and mindful sharing. They also arrange retreats both in the UK and at their main centre called Plum Village, near Bergerac in South-west France.

Groups offering meditation from Tibetan Buddhist traditions in Britain include *The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition* (<http://fpmt.org/>), *Diamond Way Buddhism* (<http://www.buddhism.org.uk/>), *Diamond Way Buddhism* (<http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org/>) and *Samye Ling Monastery* and its affiliated centres (<http://www.samyeling.org/>). The Tibetan traditions have a large number of different meditation practices, that can involve a focus on breathing, but more frequently emphasise concentrating and stabilising the mind through visualisations, repetition of sounds or phrases (mantras), focusing on intentionality of action, and visualising embodying positive qualities like wisdom or compassion.

The *New Kadampa Tradition (NKT-IKBU)* founded by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (b. 1931) often advertises its classes with the line 'Meditate in... (insert local area)'. The NKT-IKBU promotes a specific theology based on the Tibetan Buddhist teachings of the Gelugpa tradition, specifically focusing on the teachings of Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) as re-presented by Kelsang Gyatso for the modern world (www.nkt.org). Their main meditation practice follows Tibetan Lamrim teachings, a programme of 21 elements of insight into the Buddhist path. The embodiment of each aspect is believed to eventually lead to enlightenment. For example week one focuses on the unique opportunity for enlightenment in this 'precious human life', in week two the focus is on the Buddhist 'noble truth' of death and impermanence, and week three focuses on the danger of being reborn in a lower realm (e.g. as an animal) with more suffering and less chance of escaping the cycle of rebirth. The NKT-IKBU practices prayers directed towards Dorje Shugden, who they believed is an enlightened being; this practice has put them in conflict with the Dalai Lama who has advised all those who support him to cease all practices relating to this figure.

The *Triratna Buddhist Order* (formerly known as the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) is a modern Buddhist movement founded by an Englishman, Sangharakshita (born Dennis Lingwood) in 1967. It often goes under the name of the (local) Buddhist Centre (for example the London Buddhist Centre). In their introductory meditation courses, they teach two techniques, one of which involves focusing on the breath while observing how thoughts and sensations arise and dissipate, and the other involves cultivating compassion and feelings of 'loving kindness' towards oneself and others. In addition, some Triratna centres offer MBCT courses by members who have also taken one of the formal training courses in this method. For more information see their website (<https://thebuddhistcentre.com>).

Vipassana Meditation in the tradition of S. N. Goenka (1924-2013) is usually taught in the form of ten-day silent retreats (<http://www.dhamma.org/en/>). The techniques used on the retreats are Anapada (a meditation technique which focuses on the flow of air in and out of the body) and Vipassana (a meditation technique which is focused on systematically observing physical sensations of the body). On retreat, students are asked not to practise any other form of meditation or spiritual practice, not to bring any 'spiritual objects or reading material of any kind' and to refrain from talking to any other participant (although the teacher and staff may be approached with questions or concerns at any time). Similar techniques are also offered in the less intense format of weekly meetings by the *Insight Meditation* groups associated with Gaia House, a retreat centre in South Devon (<http://gaiahouse.co.uk/about-meditation/>).

Jewish Meditation

There are strong Jewish traditions of 'meditation' known as *hitbodedut* (self-seclusion) and *hitbonenut* (contemplation). The goal of such practices is '*dveikut*,

roughly translated as 'cleaving' to God. Jewish meditation practices may take the form of personal prayer and contemplation, study of holy texts, repetition of the names of God, or absorption through attentive observation of Jewish law. The Kabbalah mystical traditions have a huge variety of meditation practices, some of which are detailed online (e.g. http://www.learnkabbalah.com/basic_meditation_techniques/).

Some of the websites promoting a Jewish approach to meditation include the *Awakened Heart Project* (<http://www.awakenedheartproject.org/>), and The Inner Dimension website (www.inner.org) which is associated with followers of the Hasidic rabbi Lubavitcher Rebbe (1902-1994). *The Kabbalah Centre* (<http://kabbalah.com/>) founded by Philip Berg (1927-2013), and associated with a variety of celebrities, also promotes meditation practices inspired by the Jewish tradition. Inform has a separate leaflet on Berg's Kabbalah Centre.

Christian Meditation

The Christian tradition has many forms of meditation. Some of these are grounded within a particular denomination such as the Catholic meditations in the tradition of *St. Teresa of Avila* (1515-1584) (<http://www.comeaside.com/christian-meditation.html>) or *St. Ignatius of Loyola* (1491-1556) (<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com>).

Many Catholics interested in deepening their connection with their faith conduct layperson 'retreats' in the tradition of *St. Ignatius of Loyola*, who wrote an influential book called *Spiritual Exercises* and founded the Society of Jesuits. Although originally intended for monastics in solitary retreat, the 'Spiritual Exercises' have been adapted for contemporary laypersons to 'retreat' in everyday life. There are two primary forms of praying taught in this tradition: meditation and contemplation. Meditation here involves focusing the mind on principles, prayers, words and images which provide guidance. Contemplation involves harnessing the imagination to awaken feelings that support a closer relationship with God. There is also an emphasis on practising 'discernment of spirits', or increasing awareness about the internal processes of thoughts and feelings and the directions in which these thoughts and feelings lead the soul.

The Eastern Orthodox tradition of *hesychasm* also can be considered a form of meditation. The goal of this practice, originally carried out by hermits, is to experience God directly by withdrawing thoughts and sensations from all other activities. The main practice involves the repetition of the phrase 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner' with full awareness and deep feeling.

The 'silent worship' practices of the *Society of Friends*, better known as the *Quakers* (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/>) are experienced as meditative by many (although the tradition does not describe its main collective practice as meditation). There is no formal instruction given as to what to do in a Friends' meeting, but some suggestions include thinking about a 'query' (one of the reflections on living an ethical life), focusing on 'inward light' and being open for hearing God's inspiration. During the hour of worship, the general silence is sometimes punctuated by members who feel moved to speak. The ideology of the Quakers is broad enough that a number of those who attend Quaker meetings also describe themselves as Buddhist, although most Quakers consider themselves Christian.

An alternative approach is found in the ecumenical Christian meditation organisations, such as the prayer and singing style used by the *Taizé Community* (<http://www.taize.fr/en>) which participants describe as meditative. Another ecumenical meditation group is *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (<http://www.couk.org.uk/>), whose meditation practice involves repeating two words of Aramaic (the most likely language of the historical Jesus) as a way to focus the mind. The phrase used is *maranâthâ*. If the phrase is divided '*maran âthâ*' it is translated as 'Come, Lord!' while if the phrase is divided as '*mara nâthâ*' it translates as 'Our Lord has Come'. However, practitioners are encouraged not to think about the meaning of the word while meditating, but to try to concentrate on the sound itself.

Christians of many denominations may walk full-sized labyrinths (a kind of maze) or use a 'finger-labyrinth' as a way of focusing their mind on the contemplation of God (see: <http://www.labyrinthmeditation.com/>).

Meditation from Indian Traditions

Meditation practices have their roots in the Indian traditions. Some Indian traditions relate to a particular deity or deities, while others are more philosophical in nature or even atheistic.

Some of the more visible groups teaching meditation techniques include *Transcendental Meditation* (<http://uk.tm.org>) as taught by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917/18-2008). This practice involves 'letting the mind settle' while repeating a *mantra* (a word or phrase); it is recommended that this is practised for 20 minutes twice a day. The transmission of a mantra from authorised teachers to new meditators is done for a fee with a ritualised ceremony. A very similar mantra-based technique is taught by the *School of Meditation* (<http://www.schoolofmeditation.org/>). Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (b. 1956) established *The Art of Living Foundation* (<http://www.artofliving.org/uk-en>) which teaches a mantra-based meditation technique (Sahaj Samadhi Meditation) that it encourages practitioners to do for two 10-20 minute sessions per day. The Art of Living Foundation also teaches posture-based yoga and breathing exercises (*pranayama*). All the above groups are based in the non-dual philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. For more detail on this belief system see Inform's leaflet on the Indian traditions.

The followers of Sri Mataji (also known as Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi (1923-2011)), founder of *Sahaja Yoga* emphasise a method of guided meditation (<http://www.sahajayoga.org.uk/>) that aims to raise 'kundalini energy' that follows the spine and to awaken 'Self Realization'. Sahaja yoga practitioners frequently focus on images and use the recorded guidance of Sri Mataji, whom followers believe to be an incarnation of the divine.

The *Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University* (<http://www.brahmakumaris.org/uk>), founded by Lekhraj Khubchand Kripalani (1876-1969), have a central meditation practice known as 'Raja Yoga.' This practice involves calming one's mind by 'contacting the supreme soul' (represented as a point of light). Practitioners are encouraged to sit quietly for 10-20 minutes, with eyes open, gazing gently outward. This meditation combines withdrawing attention from the senses, observing the passage of thoughts, and introducing positive thoughts, e.g. 'I am a peaceful soul'. The object of all Brahma Kumaris meditation is to recognise the self not as a body but as a soul. The Brahma Kumaris maintain that their practices create a natural

peace and happiness and that people of all religious persuasions can practise Raja Yoga. However, they also teach that the practice will promote a mental union of the individual soul with God or the Supreme Soul (Shiva), a belief that is not necessarily compatible with other religious traditions. The Brahma Kumaris often offer talks and lectures on meditation, relaxation, time management, self-esteem and positive thinking at 'Inner Space' centres and other venues.

Devotional branches of Hinduism, such as *the International Society of Krishna Consciousness* (ISKCON/Hare Krishnas) and the *Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math* use mantra-based meditation as a way of bringing the individual into conscious union with a loving God in the form of *Krshna* (see <http://iskcon.org/> and <http://scsmath.com/>).

Many of the modern yoga traditions use the *Yoga Sutras* of Patañjali (c. 100BCE-500CE) as a foundational text; here achieving the goal of 'stilling the fluctuations of the mind' is broken up into eight different elements (*aṣṭāṅga*) that are associated with meditation practices, namely: *yama* (ethics in relation to others), *niyama* (ethics in relation to self), *āsana* (physical positions), *prāṇāyāma* (breathing practices), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the senses), *dhāraṇā* (concentration on an object), *dhyāna* (continuous concentration), and *samādhi* (absorption). These terms are incorporated by many different traditions and groups to describe meditation practices.

The majority of 'modern yoga' practices are focused on physical postures (*asana*) and breathing exercises (*pranayama*); some describe these practices as active mindfulness meditations. In these classes, the expected emphasis would be on holding or moving through positions (*asana*) which stretch and strengthen the body and may also have the effect of 'quieting the mind'. Many accredited yoga teachers are affiliated with the *British Wheel of Yoga* (<https://www.bwy.org.uk>) or the *Iyengar Yoga Association* (<https://www.iyengaryoga.org.uk>). There are many other popular traditions based on the teachings of other gurus, e.g. *Swami Sivananda* (1887-1963) (<http://www.sivananda.org>), *Baba Ramdev* (b. 1965) (<http://www.pypt.org>), and other accrediting bodies have their own criteria for qualifying teachers. Many yoga teachers incorporate a moment of seated meditation, chanting and/or breathing exercises into their instructions.

The aims of meditation practised by followers of Osho (also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990)) (<http://oshoinuk.com>) are described as the 'conscious witnessing without judgement by any mental processes'. The process of meditation in this tradition is dynamic and active. The primary active meditation is a one-hour process consisting of five stages which involve breathing, jumping, shouting, 'freezing' (being still) and then dancing. Other active meditations in the Osho-inspired repertoire use dancing (called *natara*), humming (called *nadabrahma*) or shaking (called *kundalini*) as a focus.

Islamic Meditation

There are some traditions within Islam, particularly the Sufi tradition, which incorporate meditation into their worship practices. Sufi groups can be associated with either the Sunni or Shi'a branches of Islam. They emphasise the importance of creating a personal relationship with Allah, and being constantly aware of his presence. Meditation techniques might emphasise conscious attention to the traditional actions of Islamic prayers, methodical repetitions of divine names with prayer beads (*dhikr*), and the repetition of devotional poems and Quranic formulas, such as the Islamic statement of faith (*shahādah*). The central practice of the Sufi Dervishes of the Mevlevi order is also called *dhikr* and involves recitation of

devotional Islamic prayer, coupled with dancing and whirling movements, to focus the mind completely upon Allah.

Sufi orders are called *Tariqas* and are traditionally led by an esteemed teacher who can trace his spiritual lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, his family or companions. These include the *Chishti*, *Naqshbandi* (<http://www.haqqaninaqshbandiuk.com>) and *Qadiri* orders (<http://www.qadiri-rifai.org>). Some of the places where Sufi meditation is taught in Britain include *The School of Sufi Teaching* (<http://www.schoolofsufiteaching.org>), *The Sufi Order UK* (<http://www.sufiorderuk.org>) founded by Inayat Khan (1882-1937), and the *Nimatullahi Sufi Order* (<http://www.nimatullahi.org>). There are also many movements that are syncretistic and borrow some aspects of Sufi beliefs and practices such as the *The Beshara School* (<http://www.beshara.org>) and *Sufism Reoriented* (<http://www.sufismreoriented.org>) which is associated with the teacher Meher Baba (1894-1969).

Sikh Meditation

As in many other theistic traditions, Sikh meditation focuses on keeping one's mind on God. The holy text of Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, particularly encourages its readers to meditate regularly on the names of God, to offer a prayer of supplication before beginning an activity, such as eating or the opening of the sacred text (*ardās*), and to participate in ritualised readings of the Guru Granth Sahib itself. Sikhs may practise *kirtan* (devotional singing), something they have in common with some other Indian traditions. On the Internet, much of the information about Sikh traditions of meditation has been developed by the followers of Yogi Bhajan (1929-2004) who founded *Sikh Dharma* (<http://www.sikhdharma.org/>) as well as *3HO/Kundalini Yoga* (<http://www.3ho.org/>). The *Sikh Dharma* organisation promotes many meditation techniques which overlap with other Indian meditative and yogic traditions.

Meditation in the 'Holistic Milieu'

Meditation practices from many of these traditions have found their way into eclectic teachings and might appeal for those who want to develop their 'spirituality' but not necessarily in the context of a specific religion. Some techniques in esoteric traditions aim to develop supernatural powers (like 'astral travel') or the recovery of memories of past lives. Other practices are more generally aimed at stilling the mind and promoting compassion. It is hard to generalise in this very diverse area. Contact Inform for more information about any specific group or practice.

Further Reading

Cantor, P. and E. Ernst (2003) 'The cumulative effects of Transcendental Meditation on cognitive function – a systematic review of randomised controlled trials' *Wien Klinische Wochenschrift* (2003) 115(21–22): 758–766. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14743579>

Eifring, Halvor ed. (2015) *Meditation and Culture: The Interplay of Practice and Context*. Bloomsbury.

Goyal M, Singh S, Sibinga ES, et al. (2014) 'Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis.' *JAMA Intern Med.* 174(3): 357-368. Available at:

<http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1809754>

Ludwig, David M. and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2008) 'Mindfulness in Medicine' *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 300(11), pp. 1350-1352. Available at: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=182551>

Shapiro, Shauna L., Gary E. R. Schwartz and Craig Santerre (2009) 'Meditation and Positive Psychology' in Shauna L. Shapiro (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press, pp. 632-645. Available at: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187243.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195187243-e-057>

Willoughby, Britton (2014) 'The Dark Knight of the Soul: For some, meditation has become more curse than cure. Willoughby Britton wants to know why.' *The Atlantic*. June. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/the-dark-knight-of-the-souls/372766/>.

Resources for those concerned about 'problems' with meditation practices

The mental health charity **Mind** (<http://www.mind.org.uk/>) provides free information and support for those experiencing difficulties with their mental health. They provide a free information helpline at: 0300 123 3393 and can be reached by email at: info@mind.org.uk

The Spiritual Crisis Network is a peer-support group that attempts to provide support for those going through 'profound personal transformation': <http://www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk/>

Cheetah House is a charity 'committed to providing support services directly to contemplatives in need as well as the ongoing exploration of and dissemination of knowledge about contemplative practices in the modern world.' It has a list of articles relating to the 'Dark Night' aspects of meditation practices here: <http://cheetahhouse.org/index.php/resources/articles/>

In **Tibetan Buddhist** traditions, increasing anxiety and other negative experiences are recognised as an occasional side-effect of meditation practices and are often understood in terms of 'lung' or wind disturbances. Some resources exploring these phenomena include the website:

<http://www.meditatorswindimbalance.org/>

and the book:

Cayton, A. (2007) *Balanced Mind, Balanced Body: Anecdotes and Advice from Tibetan Buddhist Practitioners on Wind Disease*, Ilford, Essex: Wisdom Books. Available at: <http://www.wisdom-books.com/ProductDetail.asp?PID=21523>

Endnotes:

1) For example: Ricard, M, A. Lutz and R. Davidson (2014) 'The Mind of the Meditator' *Scientific American*. November, pp. 39-45.

2) From <http://www.helpguide.org/harvard/mindfulness.htm>

3) For example, one recent meta-study of 47 smaller studies concluded that meditation was moderately effective for anxiety, depression, and pain-management. Goyal M, Singh S, Sibinga ES, et al. (2014) 'Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis.' *JAMA Intern Med*. 174(3): 357-368. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.13018.

- 4) <http://alohadharmawordpress.com/2013/07/23/the-refugees-of-mindfulness-rethinking-psychologys-experiment-with-meditation/>
- 5) VanderKooi, L. (1994) Meditation-related Psychosis and Altered States of Consciousness: Experiences and Perspectives of Buddhists. PhD Dissertation, University of Denver. Available at: <http://downthecrookedpath-meditation-gurus.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/meditation-related-psychosis-from.html>
- 6) Yorston, G. A. (2010) 'Mania precipitated by meditation: A case report and literature review' *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 4(2), 209-213.
- 7) Neale, M. (2006) Mindfulness Meditation: An Integration of Perspectives from Buddhism, Science, and Clinical Psychology' A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the California Institute of Integral Studies, p. 146.
- 8) <http://alohadharmawordpress.com/2013/07/23/the-refugees-of-mindfulness-rethinking-psychologys-experiment-with-meditation/>
- 9) For example, see the description here: <http://mbct.co.uk/cd-set/>