



TRADITIONAL YOGIC FOUR-STEP METHOD FOR ADVANCING SPIRITUALITY

Throughout my work I refer to the practice of meditation. This is an example. To prepare, do whatever movements, dance, exercise, stretching, or yoga that you like. Consider chanting a hymn, singing a song, or a mantra, such as "Om". Consider taking a few moments to read a passage from your favorite spiritual book and contemplate the words of wisdom. It may not be possible to learn the art on the basis of this document alone. A few lessons are usually enough, not necessarily from me! There are also many great recordings available on the internet.

1. Diaphragmatic breath control (Pranayama):

When you are ready to approach meditation, lay down on the back, as if for death. See that the breathing is through the nose if possible. Deep, even, continuous, smooth, and quiet. The inhale and the exhale are approximately the same length.

2. Squeeze and release:

Stand with the feet shoulder width apart or kneel as if to pray. Lean forward and place the hands on the knees, or on a chair or a countertop, so that the upper back can relax. Gaze into the earth beneath the nose. Exhale to squeeze the navel towards the back. Inhale to release carefully. When this becomes easy initiate the movement with the abdomen below the navel. Then lay down on the belly like a crocodile and squeeze and release the gluten area a few times. Squeeze and release exercises center the body mass around the pelvis. They may be good for sexual function and digestion. They help organize the bones into a shape to sit for meditation. When you have had a lot of practice with these larger muscles controlled, you may add the thin web of muscles that suspend the rectum and the urethra. This is not a total body workout. It just tones the muscles of the core in preparation to center the awareness inward and releases some commonly tense areas.

3. Alternate nostril breathing:

Sit in a classical yoga meditation pose or on the edge of a hard chair with the feet flat on the floor and the head, neck, and trunk as aligned as can be. Use the right thumb to close the right nostril and inhale completely through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with a right finger and exhale completely through the right nostril. Then inhale completely through the right, close the right nostril with the thumb, and exhale completely through the left. This is one round. Continue for as many rounds as you like until the practice feels complete. Always change sides at the top of the inhale. Always begin and end through the left nostril. When you are finished, take a nice breath from both nostrils. This may help balance the psychosomatic nerves. Alternate Nostril breathing prepares the mind to sit for meditation.

4. Meditate:

Repeat diaphragmatic breath control and scan the body for any muscular or energetic tension. Take a moment to willfully relax. Inhale. Mentally vibrate the sound "soo." Exhale. Think "hum." Look for the sound that is already hidden in the silent breath. This is a mantra that is cleared for use by absolutely everyone for deep meditation. It is so effective that many yoga masters have used it to carry themselves all the way up to the heights of spiritual mountain tops. If you know another mantra that you like, use that. New yoga meditators are sometimes taught to concentrate on a chakra or an area of the body, such as the heart or between the eyes. For purposes of grounding or if mantra yoga is unappealing, I like to concentrate on the navel. Especially if there is too much activity in the head. Through the navel is where we take in all of our energy for the first nine months of our lives when we are in utero. The navel remains the seat of certain types of body energy for the rest of our lives. It is stimulated by squeeze and release exercises. It is the center of body power to act out in the world. It is an organizational nexus of movement. Distracting thoughts will come up regularly. Allow them to occur without reacting emotionally. Repeatedly draw the awareness back to the object of meditation. Or use whatever method appeals most to your heart. It is best to commit to a single technique for a long time.