

Intro to Meditation

There are many, many ways to meditate. You can focus on your breath, a word or phrase (mantra), a visual spot (drishti), hand movements (mudras), or a spiritual concept among many other meditation styles. The common thread is relaxed, focused attention, paired with a friendly acceptance of the fact that you will have to keep bringing your attention back to your focal point over and over again. This is the heart of meditation and its essential gift...the cultivation of bringing kind mental awareness to your attention and the art of gentle and persistent redirection back to the present moment.

Through the years I've enjoyed and recommended several basic meditation practices and they are all of value and appeal in different ways. However, the practice I've come to most consistently suggest as an introduction to meditation is Kirtan Kriya. This is slightly counterintuitive because it is a meditation with a lot going on, as opposed to one with a single focus. Yet perhaps precisely because the complexity itself offers so much to attend to, KK is often an easier place to start. Also attractive to many people is the fact that the Alzheimer's Association did decades of research on KK and recommends it for maintaining mental acuity. The handout I've attached is only slightly adapted from their site. (<http://alzheimersprevention.org/>)

KK is a singing meditation. You'll find that a meditation timer is extremely useful and timer apps are widely available for free or at a small cost. I use the app called i-Qi. For KK you set the timer to sound at the start, then at 2 minutes, 4 minutes, 8 minutes, 10 minutes and 12 minutes. The complete meditation is 12 minutes long.

As you'll read in the description you will be singing four syllables in a normal voice for two minutes, whispering them for two, silently mouthing them for two more minutes, then repeating this in reversed order (silently mouth the sounds for two, whisper them for two, sing them normally for two). The syllables are Saa (birth) Taa (life) Naa (death) and Maa (rebirth). The tune is "Mary had a (little lamb)". As you sing each syllable you press your fingertips sequentially to the tips of your thumbs (pointer to thumb, middle finger to thumb, ring finger to thumb, and then pinkie to thumb) with firm but comfortable pressure. The final thing is to visualize each tone dropping down into the top of your head and out through your forehead in an L formation. If you're familiar with chakras the tone will drop in from your crown chakra and out through your mind's eye.

This all can seem a bit awkward and overwhelming at the start but after some practice you'll have it down. As this is an extremely popular meditation, you also have the option of searching Kirtan Kriya on You Tube and watching one of several videos. Of course, if KK doesn't appeal give something else a try. One of the growing number of popular meditation apps available is Headspace, which offers numerous guided meditations.

Happy meditating!