



BRAW YOGA



# MANTRA MEDITATION MINDFULNESS

**Beginners Guide to Finding Contentment  
by Eliminating Stress Anxiety & Depression**

**BY RUTH STEEL**

# Mantra, meditation & mindfulness

*Beginners Guide*

Ruth Steel

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# DEDICATION

**When I sing Guru Mantra, I dedicate it to the healing Guru's in my life, my Yoga teachers, my sister, friends & beloved mother. Dedicated also to the difficult experiences, for I have learned such a lot from them.**

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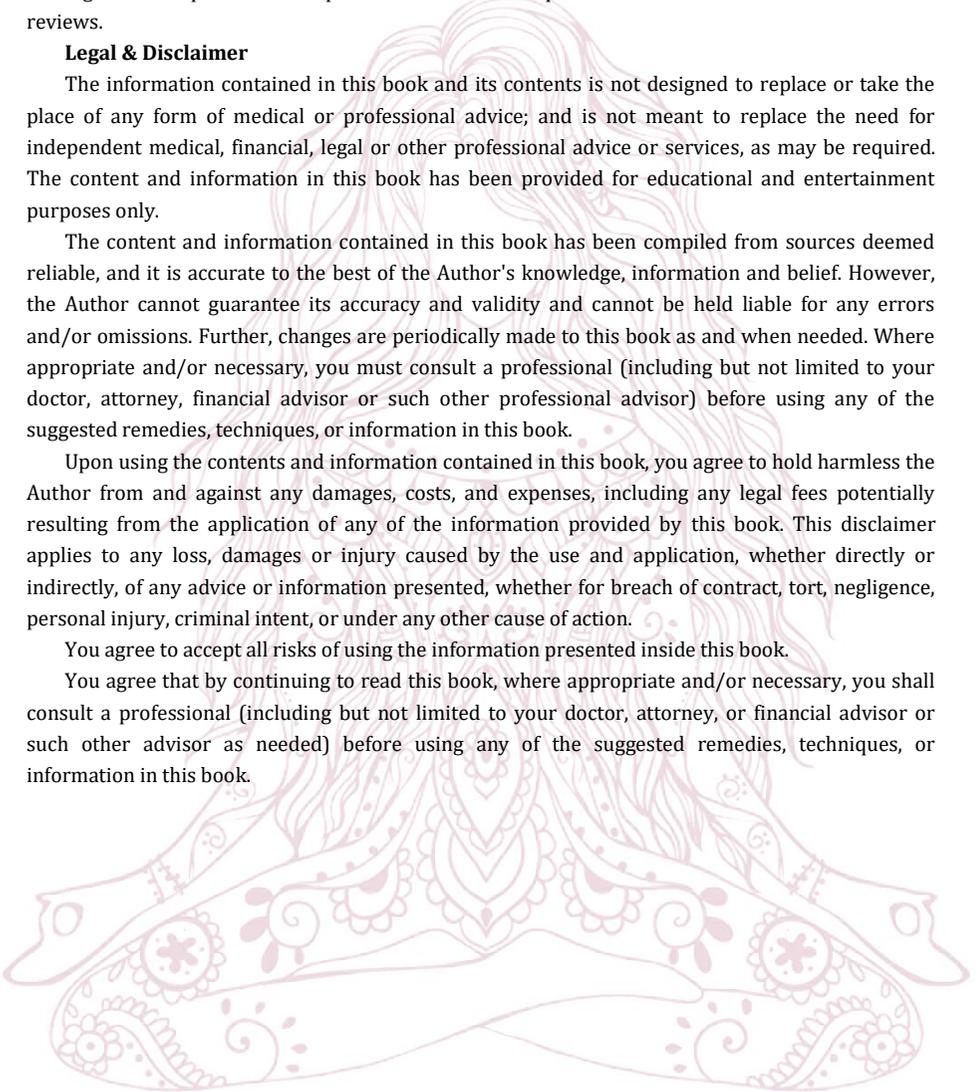
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# INTRODUCTION

## TO MANTRAS, MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

Yoga, to a Western audience means exercising the body for better health. However, the original purpose of Yoga was to lead a creative, content and a happy life. The physical part of Yoga is only to create the right environment for mental and spiritual growth. No doubt, Yoga includes physical exercises but they are only a means to a bigger goal – that of achieving happiness and peace of mind.

There are many ways to arrive at this goal of happiness – mantras, meditation and mindfulness. In this ebook we will look at various ways by which you can become happy. Of course, you need to understand the meaning of happiness first. Does buying a yacht or a Porsche give you happiness? You will readily agree that material wealth does make us happy. But such happiness is momentary. Modern science has explained this phenomenon of momentary happiness as ‘Hedonistic Adaptation’. The purpose of this book is to discover ways to avoid this trap of momentariness. Essentially you have to find genuine and lasting happiness – which frankly is a difficult objective. Perhaps, this is the reason why the ancient Hindu and Buddhist philosophers found ways to avoid falling into the trap of materialism. This does not mean that you escape into a forest in search of happiness. Our ancient sages found ways by which you can enjoy material things and yet find everlasting happiness. You will learn from this book about ways to establish a steady mind and overcome routine disappointments. The goal is to reach a state of undisturbed happiness.

### **Mantras**

Though the Western world knows yoga and meditation, there is an absence of information about mantras, which are a powerful way to attain a joyful state of mind. This book provides a glimpse into the world of mantras.

### **Meditation**

Do you want to lead a calm and serene life? It is said that your mind should be like the surface of a deep lake – still and tranquil. Currently your mind would resemble a sea wave bursting on a beach. The turmoil and confusion creates an unstable mental state. You are happy for a moment and yet again your mind bursts upon the shore and your happiness is lost and replaced by terror, fear and uncertainty.

In this ebook, you will learn about three very powerful techniques to control your mind through meditation.

**Anter Maun** or Inner silence is a meditation technique to calm your mind and senses. The practice of Anter Maun will enable you to overcome the upheavals in your mind which arise due to your everyday activities.

**Yoga Nidra** or Wakeful sleep is a wonderful yogic meditation practice which takes you to a different level of creativity. Currently, your mind is a prisoner of your circumstances. Yoga Nidra releases you from the bondage of everyday routine and enables you to relax deeply and discover your true self.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a technique which has evolved from ancient Buddhist practices. Mindfulness means to be present in the moment. If you reflect on your activities during the previous five minutes, you will discover that you don't really remember those activities. Some of your activities have no purpose. Your thoughts and actions are mechanical and lack substance. In this chapter you will learn about some powerful and enabling Mindfulness practices which will transform you into a new person – full of vitality and with a purpose in life.

# MANTRAS

Robert Virke was a dynamic and intelligent person. He was known in the investment banking circles as Midas, because whichever stock he touched turned into gold. No doubt he was the golden boy in his office. He enjoyed the perks of being the favorite and earned handsome bonuses, much more than others. Things were moving along great till tragedy struck. One of the stocks in which he had invested heavily tanked on the bourses and his company had to bear the losses. His life changed overnight. Luckily he was a bachelor and did not have the responsibility to look after a family. Maybe, his bachelorhood was itself the reason why he spiraled down into depression since he had no one to confide. As a result, he was thrown out of his job. This situation could have ended horribly but for a chance meeting with an old friend. Nicholas was a buddy from school who now worked in New York. Robert bumped into him in the tube station and the sight of Nicholas flooded his mind with many pleasant memories of the past. All the pent up frustrations and fears of Robert simply burst out from him. By the time Robert explained his situation to Nick, he was exhausted. Nick was obviously alarmed by the state of affairs and immediately realized that Rob was in need of help. Fortunately, Nick knew the perfect solution to the problem faced by Rob.

Nick was passionate about music from his childhood. When he picked up the saxophone at the age of nine, no one was surprised. Nick had joined 'Pinocchio' in New York, eight years ago and had stuck with the Jazz group since. During this time, he was introduced to Hindu mantras and chanting which became the biggest joy in his life. It was but natural that he would introduce Hindu mantras to Rob. Nick was certain that Rob would come out of the depression by chanting mantras. However, there was one problem. Rob was convinced that all the talk about mantras was a big lie and a way to make money from gullible people. Rob questioned the very basis of mantra chanting.

Nick had a hard time convincing Rob. He explained the scientific basis of mantras and also dwelt upon the benefits of chanting mantras. The chanting group moreover did not charge any money for joining and therefore could not be accused of making money.

Nick explained that according to Eastern and Hindu philosophy this physical universe is nothing but vibrations. It is pure energy which has been transformed into matter. This transformation of matter into energy and vice versa has been proved scientifically.  $E = mc^2$  is the possibly the most famous equation which converts energy into mass. This equation has been written by Albert Einstein. In Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma, the god of creation uttered the word Om, the first primordial sound which made the cosmic energy to transform into the physical universe. Om or Aum is a potent mantra which sets the body and mind into vibrations which have a powerful effect on your body and mind. This mantra, Aum can be chanted stand alone or in combination with other Sanskrit words.

Aum or Om or om̐ is divided into four parts.

The first syllable, “Aaaa” represents creation. The second syllable, “Uuuuu” means life. The third part, “mmm” is death. The fourth syllable, which is the most powerful of all, is the silence that follows.

When chanting Aum, the sound “Aaaa” must emanate or originate from the stomach. This signifies that creation or the seed develops in the womb. You must feel the vibrations coming out of the stomach and rising up to the throat. The second sound “Uuuuu” should be made from the throat. The throat must resonate with this sound. Feel the vibrations percolate, radiate and diffuse throughout your body. Meanwhile, let the sound travel upwards to the top of your head, when you release the sound “mmm”. Feel the vibration in your head and let go of the sound. Pause for a few seconds. Absorb the sound of Aum and feel it dissipate. Repeat the mantra as many times as you wish.

Robert was all ears, but Nick realized that convincing a person like Rob was difficult. He knew that people suffering from depression generally exhibit a lack of confidence in themselves and in others. Nick therefore went on to explain further. He explained that a mantra when chanted breaks the conscious barrier and directly resonates with the inner pure consciousness. This automatically opens the doors to your inner self which is in a state of eternal peace. Meditation and mantras can be chanted alone or in a group. Group chanting is called *kirtan* or *kīrtana*. These are quite popular in the Western world. You can play various musical instruments, like cymbals and drums while chanting. This gives rhythm and cadence to the chanting. Finally, it is you who has to decide the format of mantras. Do you prefer to do it alone or in a group? It is up to you.

Let me make it clear at the beginning, Nick said. “You don’t become a Hindu by chanting mantras.” You can remain a Christian, Muslim or a Jew and still benefit from the magic of chanting mantras. Remember that you can’t learn to swim by reading a book. You have to experience the power of mantras to truly understand its potency. You may get attracted to some mantras because of their sound. You may like some mantras when you understand their context and origin. Over time, you start experiencing the joy which comes from chanting. ॐ is only the beginning of a long and joyous journey which you undertake in your quest for permanent and everlasting bliss.

Nick emphasized the fact that Rob should ease himself into the practice of chanting mantras. It is important to grasp the meaning of the mantras. Getting used to the rhythm and pattern takes time. Before long you will start chanting mantras subconsciously. In Hindu yogic practice, breath is life or *prana*. You must learn how to breathe and synchronize the chanting of mantras. But you need not worry. Your breath will automatically align with your body and mind. The mantras will enable the rhythm of life or vibrations to spread through your consciousness.

Nick introduced Rob to a congregation which met every Sunday. Nick was a regular at these functions in which they chanted mantras accompanied by beautiful and uplifting music. Here, people sang aloud together while being led by an experienced group of mantra practitioners. Nick was happy to note that Rob responded enthusiastically to Kiran singing. The atmosphere was charged spiritually and the music elevated him to an altogether different level. “It is cathartic,” Rob has exclaimed with tears rolling down his cheeks. He had connected immediately and experienced a high like never before. Chanting mantras can be moving. Music is a potent harmonizer. It creates resonance between the conscious and the subconscious. The vibrations created by mantras elevate your awareness. Your senses awaken to a new world – a world you had never experienced earlier.

The kirtan form of chanting is a powerful force which combines the individual sounds to create a dynamic and immersive experience. Kirtan has found resonance with the Western world. Our spirit is uplifted by the Kirtan. Many new forms of kirtan have evolved which combine modern musical instruments. We must embrace such changes and modifications as long as the essence or seed of the original context is preserved.

Once, Nick had got him involved and interested in mantras, he introduced Rob to mantras which he had learnt. Though there are several hundred mantras, some of them form the core of the sublime philosophy of life.

## Guru Mantra

This mantra pays obeisance or salutation to the Guru. The concept of Guru is extremely important in Hindu philosophy. The Guru directs, channelizes and develops the intellect of the sishya or student. The student cannot realize the truth without the guidance of a Guru. You will remain ignorant and unaware of the truth if you try to grasp the purpose of life on your own. Of course, the situation has now changed dramatically from the olden times when knowledge was passed on from Guru to sishya orally. Even today, it is easier and faster to learn from a master than starting from scratch on your own.

### The mantra

gurur brahma gurur visnu  
gurur devo mahesvara  
guruh saksat parambrahma  
tasmai sri gurave namah

### Meaning of the mantra

The guru is *Brahmā*, the guru is *Visnu*,

The guru is *Śiva* [*Devo Maheśvara*],

The guru is *parabrahma* ( Para means supreme and Brahman I the universal self or spirit. One with no qualities or *Nirguna* and also with all the qualities or *Saguna*)

To the Guru I offer my salutations.

Guru mantra is suffused with meaning. While chanting this mantra, you should visualize the *parabrahma* or the universal truth and surrender to it completely. Our ego is the biggest obstacle in our quest for learning. We think that we know everything. We realize our position in life only when we are faced with the truth. The Gurus, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who are actually different aspects

of nature, guide us through life. We, as human beings, must keep our mind and intellect open to ideas and concepts. This is the only path to true creativity.

You can begin your daily spiritual practice with Guru Mantra which should put your mind in a state of receiving. There are many things in life which we reject because of our ignorance and ego. Once we accept the *parabrahma* as our Guru, we are able to transcend the limitations of our mind. Every moment of our life is suffused with opportunity. Every second is pregnant with the seed of growth. Our life is the consequence of the choices we make in our daily life.

The Guru, can also be imagined as a power which lies within each one of us. This Guru or eternal knowledge is hidden from our consciousness. We have to discover this power in order to fill our lives with joy and contentment. This journey within ourselves, leads us from one moment to another, from one truth to a larger truth, till we are bathed in the effulgence of the greater self.

## Asato Mā

Another beautiful and powerful mantra

Om Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya  
Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya  
Mrtyor-Maa Amrtam Gamaya  
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih

Om, Lead me from untruth to Truth  
Lead me from darkness to Light  
Lead me from death to Immortality  
Om, let there be peace all around

This mantra is a part of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. This treatise deals with the metaphysics of the universe and nature. According to it, the universe was created from nothingness by Prajapati. It claims that this world is much more than matter and energy. It is imbued with *prana*, Atman or life. This universe has a consciousness and a soul. The universe is a blend of opposites – the good and bad, light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance. It is our duty as human beings to find our way to light by dispelling our ignorance.

Light here means more than the physical. It refers to the darkness which is within us, in the form of ignorance. We have to emerge from the shadow of the obvious and progress towards the subtle and omnipresent. We begin this mantra with Aum which is the primordial sound.

We must, in the course of our life, confront untruth and realize the truth, journey from darkness unto light and finally conquer death and merge with the universal consciousness. The meaning of 'death' and 'eternal life' needs some clarification. According to Hindu spiritual discourse, our body is impermanent. It is compared to clothing which our soul discards on death. But this death is also not the end. An ignorant being cannot escape the cycle of birth and death. We take birth thousands of

times after each death. The soul, which is eternal, takes a different form each time. Once we realize the eternal truth or reality of the true nature of the universe, our soul is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. Our soul, at this point, merges with the super soul or the absolute truth.

We are led to question the meaning of life. We are but a tiny granule in the vast sands of time. Our ego, pride, individuality, success and personal greatness fade on the face of the universal truth. Let's realize that the goal of every individual is peace, bliss or Ananda. Once we realize this fact, we will no longer be engulfed by the fire of desire, greed and self-indulgence. While chanting this mantra, we must ponder over the nature of our true self. We must genuinely strive to realize the essence of life. We will automatically be escorted to everlasting and eternal peace.

## Gāyatrī Mantra

om bhur bhuvah svah  
tat savitur varenyam  
bhargo devasya dhimahi  
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat

Earth, Air, Heavens,  
We meditate on Savitr, giver of Light,  
May the consciousness illuminate us

The Gāyatrī Mantra has been mentioned in the Rig Veda, one of the oldest Hindu texts. Gāyatrī is a combination of *ga* (to sing) and *yatri* (protection). This mantra purifies and strengthens our mind when we chant this mantra. We can chant this mantra several times. 28, 108 or 1008 repetitions are prescribed in the Vedas. *Savitr* here refers to the Sun god, the giver of light.

The mantra signifies that our mind must be illuminated in order to realize the truth. This illumination refers to our capacity to discern between the absolute truth and the appearance of truth. This awareness is the ultimate state of consciousness which leads us to *moksha* or release from the unending cycle of birth and death— one that will allow swift and consistent progress on the spiritual path.

Gāyatrī Mantra is usually chanted during sunrise and sunset. However, there is no rigid rule concerning the timing of the mantras. Both men and women benefit from chanting this mantra. We must discard the controversies which stipulate that only men can chant this mantra.

## Om Mani Padme Hūm

om mani padme hūm  
The Jewel is in the Lotus!

The central theme of Buddhism is to escape from *dukkha* or suffering. The only way to find relief from *dukkha* is through *moksha*, the cessation of the cycle of life and death. In this transient and temporary life, this mantra enables us to be focused and resilient.

The purpose of chanting this mantra is to realize the true jewel in the lotus. The jewel is not the material jewel but the wisdom and knowledge of the ultimate truth. This truth is ever present in the lotus petals of the heart. By chanting this mantra we unfold the petals to reveal the gem of truth. We then realize our own bodhisattva nature.

While chanting this mantra we must reflect on the purpose of life. The endeavor is to discover the truth by peeling away the disillusionment and reveal the gem within the lotus flower which resides in our heart – in fact the lotus is the heart itself.

## Mahā Mantra

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa  
kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare  
hare rāma hare rāma  
rāma rāma hare hare

This mantra invokes the supreme forms of effulgence, Krishna and Rama. Harā means the all-powerful energy which dispels the darkness or disillusionment.

This mantra is well known to the Western audience and has been made popular by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON. By combining the popular music like the Beatles, the Maha Mantra has now assumed iconic proportions. It may be noted that the Maha Mantra is no greater or smaller than any of the other mantras discussed in this book. This mantra has found mention in Kali-santarana Upanisad and was popularized by Bhakti yoga Guru Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Maha mantra was popularized in the West by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. This mantra provides the direct link between the *atma*, the individual soul and the *paramatma*, or the transcendental soul.

We need to only chant this mantra and we will attain moksha or be released from the cycle of birth and death.

## Om̐ Namah Śivāya

om̐ namah śivāya  
om̐ I invoke the supreme essence of Śiva!

This mantra has been mentioned in the ancient Hindu text of Śiva Purāṇa. According the Saivaites, Siva or Shiva is the supreme god. Shiva is also a compassionate god and easy to please. He is benevolent and bhole which means Naive. Shiva is the greatest and all powerful god and we can attain moksha simply by chanting his name. In the previous mantras, we saw that the explanations were intricate and needed intellectual inputs. In this mantra we need not reflect on the nature of the universe or the metaphysics of Hindu philosophy. We can simply chant his name and receive the blessings of Shiva.

## Sat Nam

### Sat Nam

'Sat' is truth and 'Nam' means identity

Practitioners of Kundalini yoga are well aware of the power of this mantra. Sat Nam is also chanted by the Sikh community. This mantra is considered the seed mantra from which springs the eternal tree of pure consciousness. We can simply chant the mantra and receive the benefits without delving into Hindu philosophy. The union of your soul with the *paramatma* or universal soul is realized within you. Your inner light merges with the effulgence of god when you chant this mantra.

# MEDITATION, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Christine Bloney looked young, supremely confident and a happy woman, except that she wasn't. Looks can be deceptive. People who we think are the happiest are sometimes the saddest and loneliest, because we hide behind masks and conceal our real emotions. Tina was nineteen when she got married to her sweetheart. She was studying Physics in Yale and everybody expected to excel in her profession. But marriage changed the course of her life. Greg, her husband, was a year older than her. He was highly ambitious and wanted everything to be done his way. As a result Tina took up the job as a school teacher after graduation. Meanwhile, Greg went on to get a doctorate and was tenured in Yale itself. Maybe Tina's career suffered because of Greg's pursuit of success. Tina continued to play second fiddle to Greg and by the time she realized that her career had suffered a blow, she was already a mother of two. Her friends felt that Tina was lucky. She had everything – a loving husband, steady career and two lovely children. Moreover, the family owned a nice cottage in a prestigious neighborhood. It therefore came as a huge surprise when she revealed to Susan that she was utterly unhappy and on the verge of suicide.

Susan Koweri was a behavioral psychologist. From an early age she was fascinated by Eastern mysticism. When, as a research scholar, she was offered an opportunity to conduct research on Hindu Meditation practices, she grabbed it with both her hands. Initially, she thought that the mediation practices were esoteric with little scientific evidence to support their usefulness, but was soon convinced about their genuineness. In fact, she became a flagbearer of meditation.

Susan knew Tina from her university day. She would describe Tina as smart, intelligent and ambitious. When she heard Tina complain about her unhappy life, Susan knew where the problem sprung from. Susan was convinced that people suffered from too much of the good things in life. Their easy and prosperous life itself was the root cause of their problems. Susan knew that Tina was suffering from the same illness with which many thousands were afflicted. As a student of Hindu meditation techniques, Susan was aware of the impression which others had about meditation. Many were clearly skeptical and some even openly called it mumbo-jumbo. She therefore first explained the nature of meditation to Tina, before initiating her.

## **The problem with Christine**

Why is Tina unhappy when she should actually be the happiest person on earth? The situation looks incongruous. You are expected to be happy when you have all the good things in life, right?

Wrong. The problem lies in our materialism. Tina was suffering from a term called hedonistic adaptation. What does this mean? Imagine that you are a college student. You just want to get done with the studies and start earning because you have a huge student loan to pay off. You get a good job and manage to return the student loan. You, meanwhile, exchange your old second car with a brand new Ford Mustang. You have a nice place to live in. You are expected to start enjoying life and be happy, right? Wrong. You now want a bigger house and a bigger car. You work harder and longer hours. You come home late and work on weekends. To compensate for your absence from the family dinner table, you buy expensive gifts for your children. You think material things will make your children happy, right? Wrong. Your children want your attention. They are getting spoiled and getting the wrong message. They now equate happiness with material wealth. You, in your quest to buy a bigger house and a luxury car, borrow from the bank. You now own a bigger house and a luxury car but you are not happy. In fact you are suffering from constant stress. Who will pay back the loan? This is a vicious cycle which takes you farther and farther away from happiness. In the end you have a mental breakdown. This phenomenon is called hedonistic adaptation. You will never be happy if you base your happiness on material wealth. You will always want more and more. There is no end to material desire and want. Greed and envy are your worst enemies. Susan explained all this to Tina. One of the solutions is meditation.

Meditation takes on different meanings. Some have a vivid imagination and visualize a bearded person sitting on top a hill amidst a thick jungle while contemplating on heaven and hell. There are some who think that meditation is a tool to achieve good health and normal blood pressure. Meditation is not this or that. It is all this and more.

Primarily, meditation is a means to understand ourselves. Who am I? What is the purpose of life? What we see and observe with our sensory organs like the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Therefore, our notion of life and external world is only a sensory perception and does not represent the truth. Meditation allows removing the veil of untruth and reveals the true nature of ourselves and the universe.

To uncomplicated things, meditation is a mental exercise to enable a person to understand his/her thoughts. This leads to the realization that our mind is filled with unnecessary and unwanted thoughts which cause pain and suffering. By meditating, we remove these thoughts with conscious effort. This makes us joyful. We feel ananda or bliss.

The second purpose of meditation is to access our subconscious. We think consciously but our thoughts are actually a manifestation of our subconscious mind. We interpret the outside world through our senses, but each one of us interprets this world according to our subconscious impulses. Our creativity and resourcefulness actually stems from the subconscious. Meditation gives us access to this potential wealth which is hidden and latent within us.

The practice of meditation evolved in India. There is a misconception that you will become a Hindu or Buddhist if you follow meditation practices prescribed by ancient texts. This is not true. You can continue to meditate and still hold on your religious beliefs. You can remain a Protestant, Muslim or a Jew or belong to any creed or faith and still practice meditation.

The approach to meditation differs slightly between the Hindus and Buddhists. This difference arises due to the underlying difference in philosophies. Hindu meditation techniques focus on the sensory perceptions. You appreciate or understand the world through your senses. You are affected by what you see, hear, smell, taste and feel. You react to your senses without thinking. Your

response is automatic and reactive. This instinctive or animal behavior is the root cause of your troubles. Eliminating or removing reactive thoughts from your mind is the primary objective of meditation. The ultimate goal is to attain peace of mind. You have to shed ignorance to understand yourself. By doing so, you will become happy and joyful. You will lead a purposeful life.

The Buddhists believe that this world which we experience through our senses is an illusion, a dream. Meditation helps you to remove this veil and reveal your true self. By doing this you will no longer be ignorant. Your state of awareness will save you from misery and sadness which you generally experience in this illusionary world. Compassion for fellow human, generosity and empathy will enable you to become peaceful and calm.

Susan explained to Tina that it is natural that she may be apprehensive to try meditation as she unaware about it. She assured Tina that meditation cannot do any harm to the mind. It's a holistic healing practice that only relaxes and calms the mind. Just sitting with your eyes closed for a few minutes will engulf you in peace and tranquility, Susan explained. Once you practice for a while you'll feel yourself becoming composed and quiet. Meditation is the best anger management tool and also alleviates depression. Psychiatrists and counselors around the world are recommending meditation to achieve sound mental health, she said. Of course medication should also continue along with meditation.

Meditation is an amazing holistic healing practice. Susan promised to teach Tina simple and proven techniques and practices that'll help her remove stress and tension from her life. "So forget your worries and start a simple meditation practice. Once you're calm from within you'll see that the world around you is indeed a beautiful, amazing and wonderful place to live in," Susan said.

## Ātma-vichāra

The basic premise of Hinduism is that human beings are *Jivatma*. We have forgotten our true identity because our soul is corrupted by the material world. The goal of every human being is to shed this illusionary body and merge with the *paramatma* or the universal, eternal and imperishable soul. You may not have such lofty goals, but by practicing Hindu meditation techniques you will become aware of yourself, you will be mindful and be able to enjoy life to the fullest. Here are some powerful meditation techniques which you can practice. You need not become a Hindu or even believe in Hinduism to practice these meditations. In fact, all Hindu practices are spiritual in nature and have nothing to do with religion.

*Ātma* means soul and *vichāra* means searching. *Ātma-vichāra* is search for your original or true self, which is different from your physical body. When you are born in this world, your real nature gets corrupted by the material world and this leads to disillusionment. You think that you are the body whereas you are bigger than the earthly body. You are pure consciousness and your soul lives beyond the physical death. You are a source of eternal bliss and pure unalloyed joy. Why then do you live a life of stress, anxiety and need? "I am the unhappiest person on this earth and there is no way I can imagine this bliss you are talking about." You are not alone if your thoughts are running in this direction. Even the most evolved soul gets contaminated by sensual pleasures and forgets the meaning of true happiness. Here is a story about a great king who was born as a pig due to a curse.

According to Hindu scriptures, Lord Indra is the king of heaven. Once, he offended Brihaspati, his spiritual master. Brihaspati became angry and cursed him to be born as a pig. Indra was shocked

and fell at the feet of his Guru and asked for forgiveness. A pig, after all, is the dirtiest animal on earth. A curse cannot be taken back and therefore Brihaspati, taking pity on Indra promised to send Brahma, one of the gods of the Hindu trinity, to kill him and restore his position in heaven. Accordingly, Indra was born as a pig. What is the nature of a pig? It loves to roll in mud, eat feces and fornicate indiscriminately. Indra too loved his life as a pig. He copulated with other sows and begot piglets. Life on earth was heaven for him. Just when things were going great for him, he saw Brahma and realized that he was about to be killed. Indra started running here and there, fearing for his life. He begged and implored Brahma not to kill him. "I am happy living the life of a pig, please don't kill me," he said. Brahma reminded him about his original state as a king of heaven but he refused to be killed. Ultimately Brahma had to use force to kill the pig.

What is the meaning of this story? If Indra, the king of heaven, can be mired in ignorance, what about common folk like us? Your original condition is that of pure bliss but due to Maya or illusion you have forgotten your true self. *Ātma-vichāra* is a means to realize your true self.

*Ātma-vichāra* is the search for the true self. Who am I? What is my true nature? These are the questions which you must answer before you realize yourself. Your mind is bombarded by thousands of thoughts. Some are good and some are bad. However, your mind does not discriminate between thoughts. They come randomly and flee at their own pace. You don't have any control over your thoughts. In such a situation how do you practice *Ātma-vichāra*?

You must concentrate on the real 'I'. Who am I? This 'I' is different from your body. You are not your body. Can you feel your body in your dream? Your body has no shape or presence when you sleep. You are unconscious of your body. Therefore you must differentiate between thoughts of "I am the body" and 'I am'.

## How to practice *Ātma-vichāra*?

We have different goals in life. It is not necessary that you have lofty goals and seek salvation. Leading a peaceful life with full understanding of what is real and what is imaginary or illusionary is a perfectly reasonable goal. *Ātma-vichāra* can be achieved through a constant focus on your mind. You must always ask yourself 'Who am I'. Is this your true self or just sensations passing through your body? You can begin with breathing exercises – by being aware of your breath. Sit in a comfortable position, in a place without disturbance and watch your breath. Feel the cool air going through your nostrils when you inhale and the hot air when you exhale. Within a few minutes you will experience calm and single minded focus. Bring back your mind to your breath if your mind wavers. In this state of mind, you must meditate on the feeling of 'I'. The process of self-realization may be short or long depending on your level of consciousness. Remember that only ripe fruits fall from a tree. Likewise you have to allow your thoughts to ripen for you to realize your true nature.

## Antar Maun or Inner silence

Why does our mind oscillate between sheer joy and complete despair? There is a definite answer for this question. According to Hindu scriptures, your mind is a monkey which keeps

jumping from one branch of tree to another. It is natural for the mind to waver. Therefore to stop or cease from experiencing the ups and downs of your emotions you must control the mind.

Our body consists of seven layers of existence. The first is the body or physical layer, with which we experience the outside world. The second layer is the breath. This is the only physical phenomenon which is both voluntary and involuntary. We can consciously hold our breath for a short while. The breath will continue even after we stop making any conscious effort at breathing. Breath is therefore a bridge between the gross outer self and inner subtle self. The third layer is the mind which perceives the experiences of the body through the five senses. Without the mind, we would be unable to feel anything. The mind is not judgmental. It does not differentiate between good and bad. Even animals have rudimentary mind which recognizes sensations. The fourth layer of existence, intellect, is unique to human beings. With intellect we judge the thoughts emanating from the mind. Intellect tells us what is right and wrong. Our intellect would be unable to judge without a memory to compare present sensations with past experience. Memory is therefore the fifth layer of existence. Our mind constantly vacillates or wavers between past memories and future expectations. Instead of living in the present, we go back and forth between the past and future. This is the main reason for our discontentment, fears, desires and disappointments. The sixth layer of existence is our ego. Our ego comes between our happiness and discourages or deters us from understanding the true nature of this world. The last layer of existence is called the soul or Atma. This is a subtle form of existence which most of us are unaware of. According to Hindu scriptures realizing the self is the ultimate goal of meditation.

Now let's examine a day in our ordinary life. Our senses are constantly bombarded by outside stimuli. We respond to these experiences with joy or with sadness. We laugh and immediately thereafter we are forced to cry. This seesaw of emotions is like a wave in the ocean. It rises to great height only to fall to the lowest depth. This churning of the mind is the root cause of despair.

The role of senses, mind and intellect is beautifully brought out in an illustration where you are compared to a person sitting in a chariot, with a charioteer handling five horses. These five horses are your five sense organs. Each of them is trying to run in a different direction. Your mind is the charioteer who is controlling these runaway horses. As long as your mind is in total control, the senses or the horses will behave themselves. Unfortunately, most of our minds don't have the strength to guide our senses. As a result our lives are controlled by the whims and fancies of the senses. We may be drawn towards and succumb to a pleasure which we know will cause misery later. But we still continue to abandon our rationality and run after momentary pleasure.

## **How to practice Anter Maun?**

Anter Maun is a meditation technique to withdraw our mind from the experience of the senses. Here, there is a method by which you can take away your mind from the sensory perception. This method is called 'Three character visualization'. We are aware that our response to sensory stimuli leads to agitation in our mind. If you can withdraw your senses from your mind, you will achieve peace of mind. To attain this state of mind you have to mediate using Anter Maun technique. You must sit in a comfortable position, with your spine erect and in line with your head. The lotus

position, which is popular and most yoga practitioners recommend, is ideal. But you can also sit in a chair as long as your spine is straight and in line with the head.

In the first phase of Anter Maun, you must close your eyes and observe various sensations arising due to the outside environment. The five physical sensations are sound, sight, smell, taste and touch. The five corresponding sense organs are ear, eyes, nose, tongue and skin. Let us concentrate on the sounds coming from outside. Feel various sounds and rotate your consciousness from one source to another. You should not focus on any one sound.

Keep watching the interaction between the sound and your ears. The sound may be pleasant which will trigger happiness in your mind. It may be unpleasant which will cause your mind to get agitated. This is what happens in our daily life. In the practice of Anter Maun we have to learn how to detach our mind from the feelings which arise from sensory perceptions. This has to be done through a process.

In the second stage of Anter Maun, you should treat the interaction between sound and your ear as if two people are talking to each other. The sound is one person and your ear is another person. Their conversation has nothing to do with you.

You are a third person who is a mere witness or an observer to this interaction between the sound and ear. Now keep watching the interaction between them. As a third person you are not involved with the two people who are conversing with each other. You have no stake in the process.

As you progress in the art of withdrawing your mind from the interaction of the sensations with that of senses, you will experience peace of mind. This may take a couple of weeks or several months to master. The purpose of Anter Maun will be achieved once you can detach your mind from outside influences at will, whenever you want.

For example, let's assume your girlfriend/ boyfriend is arguing with you on a frivolous matter. You'll definitely get annoyed and may retort. It is at such times that Anter Maun comes to your rescue. It teaches you to keep calm. Now let's imagine that the words coming from your girlfriend is a person and your ear which perceives this sound is another. These two persons, the sound and ear are talking to each other. Meanwhile, you are the third person who is a mere witness, an observer or a bystander. As a witness you have no role to play in the interaction between the sound and ear. You are simply watching this interaction as a third person, like listening to music. What do you think will happen? You will not react to the situation. You will be calm and collected. After all, this conversation between the sound and ear has nothing to do with you. This position of an observer makes you detached from the sensations and ultimately leads to a peaceful mind.

In the third phase of Anter Maun, you have to train your mind to withdraw from your stray thoughts. In this phase you must begin with observation of your thoughts as they pass through your mind. Some thoughts will be pleasant and some will cause agitation in your mind. Keep observing them for a few minutes.

After some time, you must stop your thoughts from arising spontaneously. You must consciously direct a particular thought to come in your mind, observe this thought for a minute and consciously let it go. Get another thought into your mind, examine it carefully for a minute and let it go. Follow this process a few times. In a few weeks or months, you would have trained your mind to consciously fetch a thought in your mind and remove it at will. This is the ultimate aim of Anter Maun. Once you master your mind, you will no longer be swayed by temporary emotions and

feelings. The mind will not control you. The senses and mind will be reined in by your intellect. You will feel bliss and everlasting joy which is your right as a human being.

## Yoga Nidra

With Anter Maun practice you can become a master of your thoughts and actions. However, the old wise men realized that simply managing your thoughts is not really sufficient to rid yourself completely from misery and sadness. Memories reside in the subconscious and have a tendency to creep up at you when least expected. Unless we go to the root of the problem, which lies in the subconscious, we will not be able to erase bad thoughts altogether. To achieve this objective you must be able to access your subconscious which is only possible through a meditation technique called Yoga Nidra or Yogic sleep.

### How to practice Yoga Nidra?

In this type of meditation, you must lie down supine on the ground, with your legs one foot apart and hands next to the body. You already know that this posture is called Shavasana, or dead body. You must close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Remember that breath is a life force and it energizes the body. In the first phase of Yoga Nidra, you must open your mind to external sounds. You must notice the sounds and rotate your consciousness from one source of sound to another.

In the next phase you must turn your mind inwards. You should concentrate on your breath. Notice the movement of air through your nostrils during inhalation and the exit of warm air during exhalation. Do not force your breath. Your breath should be normal. Follow this process for a couple of minutes. Now shift your focus to your stomach. Your stomach expands and energizes your body when you breathe in. During exhalation your stomach contracts and you feel your body expanding and relaxing. Focusing on your breath will relieve tension from your body. You will feel relaxed. Your mind will feel calm and serene.

At this moment your body is completely relaxed and in near-sleep state and your mind comes in contact with the subconscious. Now you must take a pledge. Your pledge should be simple and must be in accordance with your nature. You may wish whatever you want. Repeat your wish three times with concentration and total commitment. A wish made in this state of consciousness always comes true.

In the third phase of Yoga Nidra, you must now rotate your consciousness through all parts of the body. You must begin with the toes of your right foot. When you see your first toe in your mind, you must say first toe. Likewise you must move up to your hands, fingers, shoulder, back, neck and head. It is said that this practice helps you to reach your inner self or subconscious.

In the fourth phase you must go back to your breath. Notice the inhalation and exhalation of breath through your throat. Feel the warmth of air as it goes out of your throat. Follow this process for a couple of minutes. Now is the time to repeat your vows or pledge. It must be the same as the earlier wish. Repeat three times with total commitment and belief.

In the last phase, you must once again take your mind to the external environment. Slowly become aware of your surroundings – where you are and in which part of the room. You can move

your toes and fingers slowly followed by body movements. Now you can open your eyes slowly. Yoga Nidra practice is complete.

The procedure followed in Yoga Nidra is such that you are likely to fall asleep. Keep reminding yourself that you are practicing Yoga Nidra and must not fall asleep. You will derive maximum benefit when you are in a state between wakefulness and sleep. This is the time when your mind can access the subconscious. Many strange thoughts and body reactions may be experienced during this state. It is possible that you start weeping or laughing uncontrollably. This happens because your mind experiences sensations which are arising from the subconscious. Many scientists, like Albert Einstein have confessed that their biggest discoveries have happened in a subconscious state. Friedrich August Kekulé is said to have discovered the structure of benzene after dreaming of a snake eating its own tail. Though they may not have called it Yoga Nidra, but the essence of their experience suggests that they may have gone through a mental state which can be achieved through Yoga Nidra. You must remember that Yoga Nidra is only one of the ways to access your subconscious.

If you practice Yoga Nidra on a daily basis, you will be able to access your subconscious. Deep seated thoughts and past fears will emerge from your mind. You need not force yourself to confront the dark past. The cleansing process is automatic and happens without your knowledge. Over a period of time, you will feel relieved of tension.

Practicing Yoga Nidra and Anter Maun together, can bring you to a state of constant bliss and mental peace.

“These meditation techniques are simple and can be practiced by everyone. Follow your dream but don’t get lost in it. Don’t run after material wealth because you will never be satisfied. Look within to find happiness,” concluded Susan.

# MINDFULNESS, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Mary Shockley sat in her favorite chair in the living room. She shook her head, thinking of the tumultuous time she had in the past one year. A messy divorce, losing custody of children to her ex and getting kicked out of a job was not a pleasant experience. But Mary was smiling. Thanks to her friend and now mentor Julie, her life had turned a new leaf. And how! Mary was at a stage in life when nothing mattered except the present. She was excited about the new friends she had made in the past few months. She frankly admitted that her sex life had spiced up with a wonderful boyfriend. What she had learnt was to savor life one breath at a time. How did this transformation happen? She gave all credit to mindfulness.

## What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means to be present in the moment. To enjoy life without thinking about the next day or year. Is it easy to become mindful? "Nothing comes easy in life," Julie had said when Mary popped this question. "Mindfulness is a process. Follow the process and you will become mindful," she had explained.

There are four steps to practice mindfulness. They are preparation, relaxation, mindfulness and stillness.

Step 1 - Preparation

Step 2 - Relaxation

Step 3 - Mindfulness

Step 4 - Stillness

Preparation is about all the practical details of posture, place and time to meditate, attitude and how to begin your meditation practice. You should always maintain a perfect posture while practicing mindfulness. You can either sit in Padmasana or lotus position or whichever position you feel comfortable in. Choose a place in your home where you feel relaxed. Meditate at the same place every day. It shouldn't be that you keep changing your place of meditation. So select a favorite corner where you particularly feel comfortable and sit there every day. You can also meditate out in the open. By the sea or on top of a mountain or in your neighborhood garden where you've chirping birds and waves for company. Your mind automatically gets calm and serene. Peaceful surroundings are essential for practicing any form of meditation, especially mindfulness. The endeavor is to create a space in your home or outside where you can feel safe and secured to meditate in peace. It'll be

your 'go to' place, away from the outside world where you can introspect and shed all your unnecessary and unwanted thoughts. This place will help you to heal, grow and bloom into a positive, calm and satisfied person. Some people are lucky to have a room for meditating. Keep that space de-cluttered. Maximum you can keep in that room is an aromatic candle, a vase with flowers and minimum furniture. Keep it as your meditation room so that the moment you enter the room peace engulfs you.

There are many ways of making the approach to meditation as joyful as possible. You can actually convert a drab place in your home into a sacred haven where you can relax and unwind. The moment you reach that spot you'll feel peace engulf you.

Sit cross legged with hands on the knees (Padmasana / lotus pose) with your spine straight and the back is erect. Your head looks ahead and hands are stretched. This position helps to concentrate on a single object while meditating as your body is balanced. Mindfulness is about concentrating on your breathing. Whether you sit up or lie down the aim is to have symmetry in your posture so that your body is balanced on both sides.

Relaxation has everything to do with your mind and body. Now that you've established a regular place to meditate you've thought about how to relax both your body and mind. Tell yourself that you're going to be fine and all your problems will be solved and you'll be free from worries. As you tell this to yourself you'll feel the tension leaving your body and you feel relaxed. As your mind is calm it becomes clearer and you're able to assess your situation with clarity. You let go of unwanted thoughts and think about the now. With awareness of where you are in space, slowly tell yourself to relax each and every part of your body. Here it is important to mention that you can keep your eyes closed. Start from your feet and move upwards to each and every part of your body. From feet you move to your legs then thighs, hips, hands, fingers, shoulders and then move upwards to your face. This is known as progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) exercise. Ask yourself how your body is feeling today? Are your feet fine? Is your hip aching? Here it is important to be positive. Don't question in a negative manner. Relax into relaxation and be content to notice how your body is feeling today.

Let go of all expectations during this exercise. The aim of this exercise is to practice without any judgment. Even if you're in pain tell yourself that it should go away. Simply push it away from your thoughts. This way your body will also respond positively to your mind. The PMR exercise makes you aware of each and every part of your body that'll help you to relax and enjoy this journey. Our mission is to relax the body that automatically calms the mind and takes you into the meditative state where you're fully mindful (aware) of yourself. Once you reach this state of relaxation the body and mind are in balance with each other.

The secret is to assume an open interest as to how your body feels at that particular moment, as you're performing this exercise and to accept that this is the truth of the matter, this is how it is, and then to use these techniques to lead your body into a deeper, more serene and relaxed state. The truth is it actually works. It's simple and direct. You spend 10 to 15 seconds on a specific part of your body and know how it feels and then move on to the next part to explore a different sensation. Your curiosity to know how each part of your body feels makes you to think about each and every part and that mindfulness (awareness) aids in relaxation.

When you're thinking about your muscles they contract and make you aware that you're thinking about them. For example if you're thinking about your calf muscle, it automatically

contracts and your mind helps you to identify that particular muscle group. Then you command your mind to relax it. This way you contract and relax each and every muscle in your body. While doing this you deliberately contract and relax the muscle there by removing the tension present in it. You'll notice that the muscle is softening and the tension created is going away. While releasing, the remaining tension also leaves the body and you relax completely. Once this exercise of contracting, relaxing and then 'letting go' of the tension becomes a habit, you automatically 'let go' of tension while not meditating also.

Mindfulness is the third step where you're aware of your thoughts. It makes you mindful of your surroundings as well as your inner thoughts. Once your body is relaxed after preparation and relaxation you become aware of your thoughts. Mindfulness is like waking up to life. When you're in an agitated state you forget to look around you or think with clarity. A mindless life becomes dull and chaotic. Have you ever noticed a sunset and really taken it all in? Or appreciated a child's laughter? With the practice of mindfulness, you'll start to notice these things and learn to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

Mindfulness develops attention, concentration and the ability to simply be present with little or no future, past or goal orientation. Mindfulness practice slows down the forward projection of the thinking mind, which is overly committed to achieving, getting, having, holding and protecting. Mindfulness practice slows down the momentum of the ego or the personality, and allows contact with a deeper, stiller, quieter part of one's true nature.

The basic principle of mindfulness is attention to breathing. Our breath is what keeps us alive on this planet. That is why it is called 'Prana' in Sanskrit which means life's force. If there is no prana then the body is just a corpse. It is prana that keeps us alive. So you need to concentrate on your breathing. There is no need to change your breathing pattern. Simply observe it. This is not a breathing exercise. The aim is to be aware of your breath rather than controlling it. No need to alter it. Simply observe your breath. Be aware of how the air is inhaled and exhaled. Concentrate on the place above the upper lip and below the nostrils. You can feel the cold air entering your nostrils. When you exhale you'll feel the hot air coming out. This heat is generated by your body and this is energy. The cold air gets converted inside you to propel your body parts to be in optimum shape. While breathing, you'll feel your stomach and chest muscles contract and release. Listen to the rhythmic feel of your breath as it is the essential life giver for growth. Attention to the breath can produce a deep respect and appreciation for the breath of life.

If you feel that your thoughts are wandering away from your breath, bring it back to concentrate on your breathing. This will help you to relax and be mindful of your surroundings and inner self as well. You're free of judgment and free of reaction. In doing so you're able to think with rationality and that helps you in achieving success. This is a very simple process where the effects are powerful.

Stillness As we become more mindful, we learn to give our attention more fully to whatever we are doing in the present moment, we notice a fundamental truth: there is activity in our life and there is stillness. Once you've prepared yourself for relaxing and being mindful of your breath your body and mind are in balance with each other. Now you should try to control your thoughts. When mind is still then there is bliss, joy and satisfaction. Controlling your thoughts is a very essential part of mindfulness. You become nonjudgmental and focus completely on what you're doing. You can also remain still in the mind with a room full of people. If you can disassociate your thoughts from

your surroundings then you can achieve stillness. Controlling your thoughts and training them to think what you want to is the ultimate aim of stillness. With continuous practice of meditation and mindfulness you achieve the state of stillness.

You may take up meditation to manage stress or to heal physically and mentally, to find more peace and balance in your life, to be more efficient at work or to perform better at sport, or to be a nicer person. All these things are real possibilities as a consequence of regular meditation, and it makes good sense to begin meditation with any of these intentions in mind. But the reason why meditation is the greatest gift you can give yourself—or, if you can, give to your loved one—is that meditation introduces us to our innermost nature, the truth of who we really are. You look within yourself and ask the question ‘Who am I?’ You find answers to questions that have been plaguing you for a long time. Finally you feel that you’ve come full circle.

In mindfulness you need to concentrate on each and every body part one by one. By doing this you become aware of yourself. Once you’ve focused on each part of your body like right leg, right knee, right hand, fingers, right eye, right ear and then move on to the left side. Now open your eyes and focus on a single object in the room. It can be anything like a flower vase or pen stand. Try to focus on it for half a minute and then turn away. While doing this keep your concentration on your breathing and your body parts. This triple focus makes you aware of your own self, your breathing and your surroundings.

## Benefits of Mindfulness

Mary realized that with mindfulness the world is full of surprises. The smell of roses became more intense and pleasurable. She enjoyed the blooming of a wild flower in her backyard; something which she was unaware of earlier. Her sex life was something else altogether. Why not? Sex is a great stress buster and it is a natural and beautiful flowering of desire. She realized that sex happens more in the mind than the body. She automatically felt aroused when she connected emotionally.

The modern world suffers from a deficit of sexually satisfied people, Julie had explained. You hide your inadequacy by covering it up between the sheets. You are not open with your sexual experience. This does not mean you have to shout and holler in public about your sexual escapades. Openness here means sharing your concerns and expectations with your loved ones. Mindfulness can assist you in overcoming the hurdles in enjoying sex naturally. Erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, disinterest in sex and sexual activities, lack of joy in performing sex and other such issues can be successfully managed with mindfulness, she had said.

The real problem in enjoying sex is the expectation of satisfying the partner and the anxiety which arises from it. You see vigorous and healthy individuals engaging in spontaneous sex when you watch movies, television serials and advertisements. Obviously you feel inadequate and wanting when you compare yourself with the Atlases and supermen showing off their sexual prowess. These individuals seem to attract the opposite sex at will. All these images fill you with anxiety. You also want to be a Hercules in bed. You face embarrassment and shame when you actually don’t rise to the occasion as expected. Mary had seen shades of her own self in these explanations.

Sex is not the only event which you can enjoy with mindfulness. Chronic pain like neck/back pain can be debilitating. They do not permit people from enjoying life. In case of persistent pain, the patients suffer from low self-esteem and constantly live with fear that the pain will last a lifetime. The cycle of pain is vicious. It feeds on itself and results in an ever increasing cycle of pain and anxiety. Have you noticed that your muscles tighten up when you feel pain? This tightening of muscles causes more pain to accumulate in the concerned part of the body. Mindfulness can help in escaping this cycle of pain. You can lead a fruitful life with the practice of mindfulness.

Earlier, Mary could not sleep properly. Her mind was abuzz with thoughts, fears, aspirations, grief, expectations and other stuff. How could her mind relax while carrying the burden of thoughts? The obvious fix was to get rid of thoughts. This was easier said than done. But with mindfulness she started enjoying undisturbed sleep.

# CONCLUSION

Now that you have a comprehensive view of mantras, meditation and mindfulness, it is time you started practicing them. You have to experience the joy of these Hindu and Buddhist spiritual techniques which can transform your life and take you to an exalted plane of joy and *ananda*.

You need not practice all the techniques presented in the book. In fact, it is not possible to practice all of them together. Each person is unique and you may like to perform certain meditation and mindfulness practice depending on your innate nature. Remember that the ultimate goal is the same – to lead a life of happiness, joy, contentment and *ananda*.

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# ABOUT RUTH STEEL



Yoga teacher, actress & presenter Ruth Steel is passionate about the healing benefits a daily Yoga practice has to offer. Having experienced a huge shift in her whole lifestyle, Ruth would like to thank all of the incredible teachers who have shared their knowledge & understanding of the true nature of this wonderful ancient practice.

Incorporating Mantra, Meditation & Mindfulness into her daily life continues to assist in overcoming stress, grief and anxiety following past Trauma.

"I'd like to break the common western belief, that Yoga is simply Asana/Body Postures alone. This is only one of the fundamental tools but can be a restricting belief for some. Even just starting with some mindful breathing each day, can dramatically shift the mindset required in helping others dealing with daily stress, anxiety & depression."

Ruth has a vibrant energy, shared without discrimination or limitation and believes Yoga is for everybody in some way, shape or form.

"Yoga means much more, than I could begin to express, it is a lifestyle that continually transforms the mindset and shifts our perspective. To me, it's all about helping us to live well & function better, preventing illness rather than curing it."

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