



CLOSE YOUR EYES & OPEN YOUR MIND
A Practical Guide to Spiritual Meditation

DADA NABHANIILANANDA

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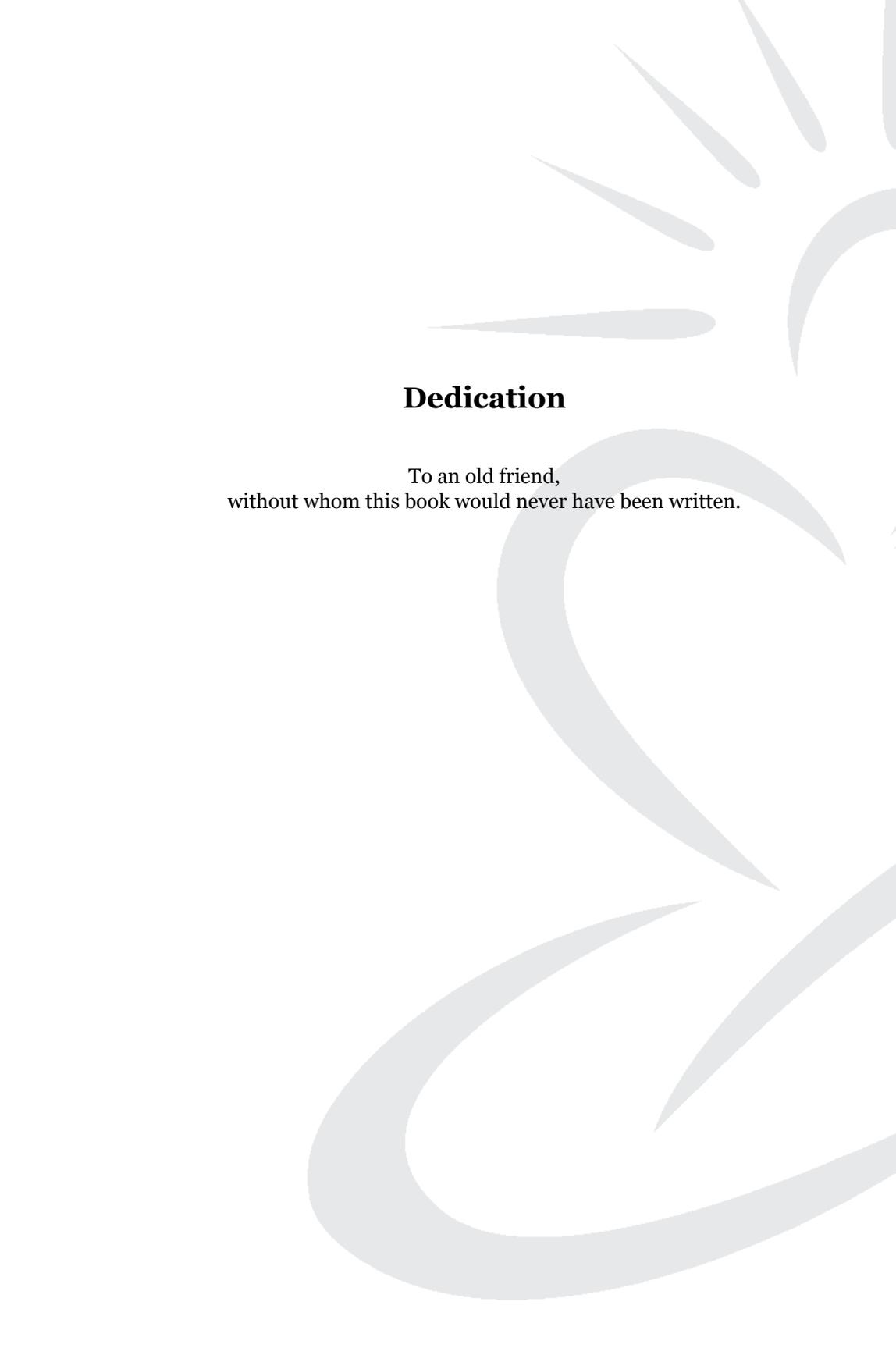
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Dedication

To an old friend,
without whom this book would never have been written.

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Introduction

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.”

Carl Jung

New Zealand, 1975. I started practicing meditation and my friends concluded that I had finally lost my last marble. It seemed as though I was about the only person on planet Earth who was into this stuff. I felt like an alien.

Never one to shy away from being different I followed my heart and ended up going to India to train as a meditation teacher. In 1979, I was ordained as an Acharya (a yoga monk and spiritual teacher).

Times sure have changed. Nowadays everyone seems to think that meditation is wonderful. Expensive advertising campaigns featuring images of slender ladies meditating promote airlines, clothing, furniture, legal services—even meditation. After a 7000 year history of people meditating and feeling more serene and calm, doctors and scientists produce lengthy research papers ‘proving’ that meditation makes you feel serene and calm. Not only does meditation work in practice—it works in theory as well!

And for anyone who thinks meditation is a bit wimpy, did you know that Wolverine from the X-Men films meditates? At least Hugh Jackman, who plays him, does. As of course does Yoda, the Jedi Master.

And let us not presume that all the Hollywood stars hanging out with the Dalai Lama are just forlorn planets hoping to catch a little reflected love. It turns out that many of them actually practice meditation themselves. What was an oddity back in 1975 when I was at the beginning of my journey is now more than just OK. Finally, meditation is cool.

Finally,
meditation
is cool.

So Why has Meditation become so Widely Accepted?

1. It reduces stress and promotes good health. Growing numbers of doctors and scientists recognize the beneficial physiological effects of meditation, especially in relation to stress relief and relaxation. Extensive mainstream research and documentation substantiates the significant health benefits of meditation. Even Kaiser Permanente health insurance offers meditation to their clients.

2. It is practical and something we can do alone, unlike going to church or therapy.

3. Meditation now receives widespread media coverage. Sports trainers and health care professionals openly advocate meditation; editors and advertisers portray meditation as a normal part of everyday life.

4. Popular culture now includes meditation. Although first developed in India 7000 years ago and introduced to ancient Greece nearly 3,000 years ago, a large part of this contemplative knowledge was lost over time. Five centuries ago, European intellectuals explored Asian mystical philosophies, with roots in meditation, as a by-product of the vast world wide exploration of the time. The 20th century emerged with a

re-introduction to meditation. But it took the revolution in thinking of the 1960s generation—and events like the Beatles learning meditation—to create widespread public awareness of the practice. As the ‘flower power’ generation enters middle age, many of their youthful values gain broad-based acceptance. ‘Normal’ for many people now means: to question religious dogma, act out of concern for the environment or use natural therapies to heal ourselves.

5. In recent years we have gained access to vast reservoirs of knowledge from a world of cultures. We choose from the best of an array of traditions. When asked why I choose a spiritual practice originating from a foreign culture, I reply that just because something originates in another country does not mean it is unsuitable. No one believes that computers, first developed in America, are not useful everywhere.

Meditation originated in India, has millennia of acceptance in Asia, but people from all backgrounds directly experience its benefits.

6. Meditation is a straightforward way to explore our own, personal spirituality. While institutionalized religion has recently disillusioned many people, meditation offers us a method to enter our own inner world to pursue a direct spiritual experience.

Meditation is a straightforward way to explore our own, personal spirituality.

Meditation is a Practice

Although we hear the praises of meditation in a hundred languages, it is surprising how few people actually meditate. Many people think meditation is a good thing, and tell themselves (or me) that they intend to ‘try it one day.’ People tell me that they believe in meditation but

they don't actually do it. This is like saying 'I believe in swimming' without ever taking the first stroke. We cannot experience the benefits of meditation by reading about it, hearing about it, or philosophizing, or listening to music by some rock star who used to meditate, any more than we can learn to swim from a book. A swimmer has to jump in and get wet. If we want to understand meditation, we have to practice.

Although reading about meditation is no substitute for practicing, it is important to understand the basics of meditation and its purpose. In spite of the great amount of information available, there is still some confusion!

Today a common reason to practice meditation is relief from stress. But relaxation is not the main purpose of meditation—it is

**...those who
choose to walk
the path of Self-
Realization
discover an inner
world of love,
bliss and wisdom
beyond imagining.
How much better
to radiate love
rather than merely
reflect it!**

just a wonderful side effect. This book focuses on what the Sages of old felt to be the main purpose of meditation: discovery of one's 'Inner Self.' These Sages developed methods of meditation at a time when relaxation and stress management were not the primary concerns of humankind. Meditation has its roots in the knowledge propagated by Sages living in ancient India. It evolved as a response to the human yearning to know the Inner Self—to know the mystical spiritual world, which we may sometimes glimpse but seldom truly grasp. Far more than just a therapy, it can bring spiritual fulfilment to a level beyond ordinary understanding. Who can comprehend the Enlightenment of the Buddha, or the ecstasy of the saints and Yogis? These experiences take us far beyond ordinary thinking...yet

merely by virtue of being human we all possess the potential to attain ever-higher spiritual states.

People tend to shy away from actively pursuing enlightenment for themselves. After all, it looks like a lot of work and it appears to be awfully difficult to actually attain enlightenment—or to even understand what that means. In the past, most people instead elected to worship those illuminated saints and yogis, but not to practice meditation themselves. Yet those who choose to walk the path of Self-Realization discover an inner world of love, bliss and wisdom beyond imagining. How much better to radiate love rather than merely reflect it!

Meditation Leads to Self Knowledge

When I was in Nepal in 1979 undergoing my training as a meditation teacher, we sat for meditation six hours each day. My mind became so clear and my concentration so sharp that I found that I could easily discern the inner meaning of difficult philosophy books. It was as if I already knew the information intuitively. If we want to understand spiritual concepts, it is best to first practice meditation to develop our intuition rather than just studying intellectual ideas. If we first understand ourselves through meditation, we will more easily understand everything else.

“If you want to know all, know One, and that One is your own Inner ‘I.’”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

Spiritual understanding is not an intellectual process. It comes from inner knowledge and self-realization. Some saints—such as Sri Ramakrishna—were illiterate, yet they developed a deeper understanding of the ultimate truth than the greatest intellectuals or scholars. That is why this book is not about philosophy, health or relaxation. It is purely about meditation practice—the key to higher awareness.

Why I Wrote this Book

In *Close Your Eyes & Open Your Mind* I aim to explain meditation in a simple way, without losing sight of its deeper spiritual purpose. Wonderful books have been written about meditation, yet I have not found one that teaches what I have learned, and many of them are quite difficult to understand. Although this book is for general consumption, I originally wrote it for my University students. As I was in University myself when I learned meditation, I am especially passionate about showing students the value of meditation.

Here’s what you will find inside ‘Close Your Eyes & Open Your Mind:’

1. Questions addresses commonly asked questions, helps to remove doubts or confusion, and explains what you might get out of a regular meditation practice.

2. Donkey Maintenance reveals secrets used by Yogis for thousands of years to keep their bodies healthy and strong for their meditation practice.

3. Close Your Eyes clarifies the first step of meditation—calming the mind and turning attention towards our inner Self.

4. Concentration describes focus, and what it means to be in the present moment.

5. Mantra: The Song of the Inner World explains auditory science and the role of sound and words to elevate our state of consciousness.

6. Open Your Mind: Ego and Intuition explores different levels of consciousness and demonstrates the importance of our attitude in determining our life's direction.

7. Karma: Be Yourself—Everyone Else is Taken casts light on this often misunderstood concept, and illustrates how our actions affect our state of mind.

8. Open Your Eyes discusses how we can apply our insights through meditation, for the benefit of society and the world.

There are different kinds of spiritual meditation coming from a variety of traditions. I have not practiced them all since it can take a lifetime to become adept in just one technique. But I do not believe that this is a problem. If we are in a dry land and need to dig for water, just one hole is enough. But we must go deep. Digging many shallow holes will not quench our thirst. The principles described here can be applied to any kind of meditation. The spiritual nature of human beings is universal, and the human mind has the same intrinsic characteristics the world over. I believe regularity of practice is more important than any particular style practiced. If we learn an effective technique and apply it sincerely, this is the way to satisfy our spiritual thirst.

If we are in a dry
land and need to
dig for water, just
one hole is enough.
But we must go
deep.

Although this book is intended as a practical introduction to meditation, it is important to remember that no book is a substitute for a good teacher. If you desire personal instruction in meditation, I encourage you to find a spiritual teacher.

I've included addresses and websites in the appendix to assist you in this search.

Meditation brings about a change for the better on all levels: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual. When I think of the way I

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forever.

have changed as a result of practicing meditation, and of the way millions of others around the world have changed as well, I am filled with a great hope. It is clear: humanity needs a new vision.

We need to change ourselves from the inside out—and clearly there is a way to do it. Our meditation benefits not only ourselves—our efforts create ripples touching those around us and spreading outwards across the universe...forever. And as people change, the world also changes. It is my hope that this book will guide you on your inner journey as you walk the upward leading path that finally we all must walk.

Dada Nabhaniilananda

“When we become interested in meditation, it is a sign that we are ready to take the journey to another level. As long as the journey remains an outer one, the real goal of our endeavours is never in sight. We continue looking out there for our destination, never realising that the ‘I’ that is doing the looking is what we are actually looking for.”

Chuang-Tse





Chapter One

Questions

“The important thing is to not stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when we contemplate the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if we try merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.”

Albert Einstein

When we close our eyes and enter the private realm of our own minds, we find ourselves in another world. Here everything is different. Thoughts behave differently than things. True, experiences, images and memories arise from the outside world, but feelings, sensations, ideas and understanding originate within us. These interact with our outer impressions of the outside world to create an internal universe with a unique terrain, governed by its own laws and seemingly endless possibilities.

Long ago, yearning to uncover the mysteries of this inner self, Yogis developed the practice of meditation. Through the mastery of this practice, it is possible to understand oneself more deeply. But it can go further than that. Through meditation we can gain control over our minds, transform ourselves and realize our true potential.

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potential.

This book explains how meditation works, and how to practice it. We begin by addressing a few commonly asked questions.

1. So what exactly is meditation?

Meditation has been defined as a kind of concentrated thinking, but this does not mean just any kind of concentrated thinking. Concentrating on a pet rock or ice cream is not meditation. Meditation is the process of concentrating the mind on the source of consciousness

within us. Gradually this leads us to discover the infinity of our own consciousness. This is why the goal of meditation is often described as ‘Self-Realization.’

2. What is spirituality?

“Spirituality is that which concerns Infinite Consciousness.”

Let me make it clear that ‘spirituality’ should not be confused with ‘spiritualism,’ which involves itself with mediums, psychics or communicating with the dead. Spirituality concerns Infinite Consciousness—the same Ultimate Truth as realized by the great spiritual teachers throughout history, such as Buddha, Jesus and Krishna. Spiritual philosophy espouses that the goal of life is to merge the individual mind into Infinite Consciousness; the way to attain this is through the practice of spiritual meditation.

3. What is Self Realization?

The goal of meditation is to realize who we really are at the core of our being. Yoga philosophy describes two distinct levels to our inner self: mental (which includes emotional) and spiritual.

The mental self is sometimes called the individual mind. It is limited because it is strongly associated with our limited physical body and is the cause of the feeling ‘I am this individual person. This is our ego speaking.

Infinite
Consciousness
is unchanging
and eternal; it
is at the core of
our true spiritual
‘Self.’

Yet our sense of self-awareness comes from our connection to a more universal, subtle form of consciousness. Yogic philosophy describes a reflection of an infinite, all-knowing form of consciousness within our minds. This Infinite Consciousness is unchanging and eternal; it is at the core of our true spiritual ‘Self.’

Identification with the small, ego-centered self is called Relative Reality, because that ‘small self’ is prone to change and death. When we realize the subtler, permanent reality behind the Relative one and we see that our true nature is pure unlimited Consciousness, this is known as Self Realization.

4. What is the difference between meditation and Yoga?

A common understanding of Yoga is as a series of physical exercises that stretch and tie our bodies into impossible knots. But these physical postures are only one aspect of yoga, known as ‘Asanas.’ The physical postures of yoga are practiced for their health benefits and because they help to prepare the body for meditation. Yoga is both a philosophy of life and a system of spiritual practice. The word ‘yoga’ actually means union between the individual self and Infinite Consciousness. Meditation is the most important practice in the yoga system and is the means by which this merger or union is achieved. So yoga is a system or science that enables an individual to develop themselves physically, mentally and spiritually. Meditation is the practice that makes the mental and spiritual development possible.

5. I’ve tried meditation but I can’t stop thinking. Am I doing it wrong?

The idea that you have to stop thinking in order to meditate is misleading. It is true that in the highest spiritual states normal thinking modes are suspended, but for most people this is a long way off. And, the way to achieve this state is not by trying to stop thought. You can meditate quite successfully by developing your concentration through regular practice. Do not try to think of ‘nothing’ or try to stop the thought process. This will only frustrate you. The mind needs something to focus on. This is where the Mantra comes in. Just focus on mentally repeating your Mantra. When other thoughts or feelings distract you, as soon as you become aware of that, simply direct your attention back to the Mantra. Then if your mind wanders again, as soon as you notice that, just direct your attention back to the Mantra again. It’s a bit like training a dog: it takes repetition and patience.

Do not try to think of ‘nothing’ or try to stop the thought process. This will only frustrate you. The mind needs something to focus on.

You will learn about Mantra meditation in Chapter Five.

6. Is meditation a science?

Science (from Latin *scientia* – knowledge) is most commonly defined as the investigation or study of nature through observation and reasoning, aimed at finding out the truth. The term science also refers to the organized body of knowledge humans have gained by such research.

Since the Yogic approach to spirituality uses both observation and reasoning to get at the inner truth, and there is an extensive body of knowledge associated with the tradition of Yoga, it can technically be referred to as a science, though some prefer the term ‘rational spirituality.’

Meditation has also been described as ‘Intuitional Science.’ Extensive laboratory tests demonstrate the physiological effects of meditation, but this only shows us its physically measurable effects. Even a recording of a person’s brainwave patterns is just a measurement of physical electrical waves. It does not tell us exactly what they are thinking or feeling. The only real laboratory for testing meditation is the mind itself, and the results need to be experienced personally. ‘Tantra’ is another name for this science, the discipline of spiritual meditation, which enables the practitioner to merge his or her individual mind into Infinite Consciousness.

7. Can Spirituality reconcile with Scientific Rationality?

The central idea of spirituality—that Infinite Consciousness is the ultimate reality—is common to most Asian and some Occidental forms of mysticism. It is not so remarkable that this idea is widely accepted by mystics and philosophers. And in the last century many scientists delineated parallels between quantum theory and the mystical view of reality as described in the ancient texts of Taoism, Buddhism and Yoga. Albert Einstein and virtually all his contemporaries including Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger and Max Planck (in fact most of the pioneers of modern physics) testified to a belief in mysticism. When Werner Heisenberg, discoverer

many scientists delineated parallels between quantum theory and the mystical view of reality as described in the ancient texts of Taoism, Buddhism and Yoga.

of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, went to India and met with Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel prize winning poet and great Yogi, he was enormously relieved to find someone who didn't think his ideas were crazy. The ancient yoga philosophy seemed to be saying much the same thing about Reality as the emerging Quantum Theory. This topic, though fascinating and the subject of much discourse, particularly since the 1960s, is beyond the scope of this book. If you want to learn more about this subject I recommend two books: *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjov Capra, and *The Unity Principle* by Steven Richeimer.

8. What is mysticism?

“The unending endeavour to bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite is mysticism.”

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

“The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is at the root of all true science. Someone to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, is my idea of God.”

Albert Einstein

9. What is the difference between Spirituality and Religion?

Founders of the great religions all taught spirituality, yet religion and spirituality are not the same thing. When my own spiritual master was asked if he was trying to start a new religion he replied:

“I am not interested in religion. I am interested in human beings and the goal of human beings, and how to bridge the gap between the two.”

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Many religions may make the same claim, but the reality is that all too often the spirituality taught by the founder gets lost or obscured by dogma and ritual. Notice the profound differences between the catechism of Christ and the practices of mainstream Christianity; between what Krishna taught and Hinduism; and between the teachings of the Buddha and Buddhism as practiced today. Over time, divisions develop within religions, leading to conflict, persecution and even war. When you look at the darkest periods of religious history, it is hard to believe that people could depart so far from the exalted teachings of their great founders. The original message may have been ‘spiritual,’ but that Spirit gets diluted or lost through a variety of processes: mistranslation and misinterpretation; the loss of spiritual meditation practice; attempts to cloak spiritual concepts in dogma for personal gain; and when religions become religious-political institutions.

Many religions espouse irrational dogmas that have nothing to do with spirituality. I recall my spiritual master laughing about the Hindu superstition that bathing in the Ganges River washes away all your sins and guarantees you a place in heaven. “If that is true,” he said, “then the fish living in that river must be the most spiritually evolved creatures in the world!”

Just because a ‘holy’ book makes some claim does not necessarily mean it is true. Some scriptures say that women have to re-incarnate as men in order to achieve spiritual salvation. Other texts state that you can only come to God by following (coincidentally enough) that same book. This kind of irrational dogma drives many religions. Our common sense can distinguish between dogmas and genuine spirituality. Yet within all major religions there are mystical traditions that include many of the features of spirituality. This includes the Sufis, Christian mystics, Yogis and the Essenes. But these mystical practitioners almost invariably represent a small minority who are often branded as heretics and persecuted.

What remains in our various religions is a confusing blend of spiritual truth and dogmatic, narrow, irrational doctrines, proclaimed as truth by religious authorities. If we wish to sift out the spiritual elements, it is important to understand the real differences between spirituality and religious dogma. With the passing of time, these differences within mainstream religion have become increasingly distinct:

a. Spirituality is theistic, supporting a belief in the existence of a personal God as creator and controller of the universe. Bear in mind, this is a highly developed and rational concept of God or Infinite Consciousness. Religious belief can be theistic, as in Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism and Islam, or atheistic, as in some forms of Theravada Buddhism and Shintoism. Dogmatic Religions

generally have either a poorly developed and irrational concept of God, or no concept of God at all.

b. Spirituality is non-dualistic, and states that the purpose of human life is to merge one's self (or sense of 'I') into Infinite Consciousness. Theistic religions tend to be dualistic, propounding both a fundamental separation between God and the world, and the belief that the purpose of human life is to enter into a relationship with God and go to heaven after one dies.

c. Spirituality is practical, and can be experienced and realized by practicing spiritual meditation. The focus is inward, taking the practitioner towards a personal realization. Religions, on the other hand, emphasize faith and belief. Although they teach people different types of prayer, most of the actual practice is externally focused, involving rituals, festivals and ceremonies.

d. Spirituality is a lifestyle choice, integrated into every aspect of a person's existence. Much of Religion is a ritualistic, compartmentalized part of a person's life, practiced primarily in temples and churches.

**Spirituality
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existence.**

Religion can only serve its proper purpose of liberating the faithful from ignorance and spiritual darkness, to the degree that it remains true to its original spirituality.

10. What is Spiritual Meditation?

In spiritual meditation our mind is directed towards a spiritual idea. The simplest way to conceptualize this is to think of infinite love, peace and happiness—or of an entity that embodies this. We may call it God but the name is not important. What is important is to remember that this Infinite Love is within us, surrounding us and always with us.

Spiritual meditation is concentration on a spiritual idea, one associated with Infinite Consciousness, the source of our awareness. As we contemplate this vast and beautiful idea, our mind gradually transforms into pure consciousness that has no boundary.

Spiritual meditation: the effort to merge our sense of 'I' into Infinite Consciousness.

11. What is the difference between prayer and meditation?

This depends exactly what you mean by the word ‘prayer.’ Here is what some contemporary Christian experts say:

“Contemplation, or meditation in some groups, was rediscovered in contemporary times beginning with the writings of Thomas Merton in the 1950s and 1960s. The word most Christians are more familiar with is simply prayer.

“Unfortunately, in the West, prayer had become something functional; something you did to achieve a desired effect—which too often puts the ego back in charge. As soon as you make prayer a way to get what you want, you’re not moving into any kind of new state of consciousness. It’s the same old consciousness, but now well disguised: ‘How can I get God to do what I want God to do?’ It’s the egocentric self, deciding what it needs, but now, instead of just manipulating everybody else, it tries to manipulate God.

“This is one reason religion is so dangerous and often so delusional. If religion does not transform people at the level of both mind and heart, it ends up giving self-centered people a very pious and untouchable way to be on top and in control. Now God becomes their defense system for their small self! Even Jesus found this to be true of the scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law.”

Adapted from CAC Foundation Set: Gospel Call to Compassionate Action and Contemplative Prayer

I would go further to say that as long as it is based on a dualistic conception of God, meaning that human beings and God are kept inherently separate, prayer cannot be considered spiritual meditation. Spiritual meditation places no limit on our realization. It is a non-dualistic practice, and its goal is to merge our inner ‘I’ feeling with the Infinite Consciousness.

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illogical.

Evidence of the existence of religion dates back more than 40,000 years. Early religions were animistic, believing that the forces of nature were beings or Gods, and later pantheistic, worshiping many deities and assigning divinity to the invisible but powerful forces of nature

that held sway over people’s lives. These fearsome gods were appeased through prayer or sacrifice. As society evolved, people gradually realized that there must be a single guiding power behind all these forces of

nature, and theism—the belief in only one God—emerged. But the relationship was still based on fear, flattery, appeasement and attempts to persuade God to grant special favors to individuals. Some religious prayer makes that attempt to this day.

Philosophically, praying to God to request some thing or action, even for someone else, is illogical. All the theistic scriptures of the world believe that God is an all-knowing (omniscient), infinitely benevolent being ('God is love'), who already knows if somebody's mother is sick or someone is unhappy, and by logical extension definitely cares enough to do whatever is necessary to help them. Any concerns, or ideas we have originate with God anyway, so telling God how to run the universe seems inappropriate, to say the least.

Yoga philosophy affirms that since Infinite Consciousness gives us everything, we need not ask that Entity for anything. But if we insist on asking for something, we should ask only for more love for God. This is known as devotion.

Prayer takes various forms. Intercessory Prayer is asking for God's intervention in our affairs. More developed forms of prayer include prayers of gratitude, worshipful prayer, contemplative prayer and meditative prayer. These help bring the worshipper closer to God through cultivation of devotion and the feeling of attraction towards Infinite Consciousness.

I believe that all of the great spiritual teachers practiced some kind of spiritual meditation and initiated their closest disciples into this practice. This was their treasured 'inner teaching.' With the passing of time, however, this esoteric portion of their teachings was lost or watered down, and subsequent followers received only the more superficial teachings about morality and philosophy. What is the key to realizing what these enlightened individuals attained? Spiritual meditation! Some subtle forms of contemplative prayer could also be described as spiritual meditation.

11. Do you have to be a monk to be successful in meditation?

Clearly not. Buddha was a monk, but Shiva—regarded by many as the father of yoga— had three wives. (This was not unusual 7,000 years ago). Swami Vivekananda was a monk; my own Guru, ShriI Shrii Anandamurti, was married. And many great spiritualists were women, such as St Theresa of Avila, who was a nun and Anandamayi Ma, who was married.

I chose to be a monk for both personal and practical reasons. This choice should not be viewed as any kind of pre-requisite for spiritual

practice or success on the spiritual path.

12. Isn't it self-centered to sit around meditating all the time when there is so much suffering in the world?

It rather depends on what you would be doing if you weren't meditating. If the answer is 'watching television,' by all means, meditate. But if it means you are neglecting your family or using it as an excuse to avoid doing something for others, that is another matter. Find more details about this subject in Chapter Seven.

13. Is meditation a form of brainwashing?

While surely it is true that the minds of some people would benefit with a good wash, I have to say that meditation is not a form of brainwashing. Usually when people express concern about brainwashing, they are afraid of losing control of their minds and being manipulated.

Meditation actually helps to protect us against having our minds manipulated, by strengthening our willpower and making us more self-aware.

If you're seriously concerned about other people manipulating your mind for their own purposes, I suggest that the first thing you do is switch off your television, a device which is used to great effect by corporations and politicians seeking to influence the behaviour of their audience.

If you're seriously concerned about other people manipulating your mind for their own purposes, I suggest that the first thing you do is switch off your television

14. Where did the practice of meditation first develop?

Tantric meditation was first developed by the tribes of South India 10,000 - 15,000 years ago, as an expression of their natural desire to understand their own consciousness. About 7,000 years ago it was

further developed by Shiva, the great Yogi of ancient India. This practice has since spread and been absorbed into different mystical traditions, including yoga, Taoism, Sufism, Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. Similar practices also emerged in indigenous cultures.

15. When did meditation come to the West?

Meditation practices were introduced into Europe at the time of the ancient Greeks, some of who travelled to the East and learned from Indian Yogis and philosophers. Alexander the Great, a student of Aristotle, brought a Yogi back with him from India to be his spiritual advisor. The great Greek mystic and social reformer, Apollonius, found wisdom in the East and was greatly revered for his spiritual power. An advocate of universal religion, he propagated the idea of internal—rather than external—worship. Refusing to champion one popular cult against another, he declared that he ‘was concerned with the spirit rather than the form of religion.’

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Shrii Shrii
Anandamurti

The early Judaic and ancient Egyptian religions were heavily influenced by Asian mysticism. Many people believe that Jesus practiced and taught a form of Yogic meditation that he learned in India during the 18 years of his life that are not chronicled in the Bible.

After the collapse of the western half of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, when most of the libraries of Europe were burned, Yogic meditation practices died out in the West. Later, both indigenous and Christian mysticism faced actively suppression, particularly during the dark period of the Inquisition. Europe became a spiritual desert, focusing its attention on intellectual and technological development, militarism, trade, exploration and conquest. Religious institutions started to take a greater interest in politics than in spirituality.

In the mid-nineteenth Century a spiritual renaissance began in Western civilization, spearheaded by such transcendentalist thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau, and through the reintroduction of Asian meditation practices by Swami Vivekananda, the dearest disciple of the great Indian saint, Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda was the first modern Yogic master to come to the West, at the beginning of the twentieth Century. This period saw the emergence

of the Theosophists, Rudolf Steiner's School of Anthroposophy and a growing interest in Eastern mysticism among European intellectuals like Carl Jung, Aldous Huxley and Herman Hesse. Other Eastern teachers followed Swami Vivekananda, and the 1960s fostered an explosion of interest in Eastern spirituality in Europe and America that quickly spread across the globe—even as far as New Zealand.

A most refined celebration of this merging of cultures is expressed in the writings of the great Indian mystic and philosopher Shrii Shrii Anandamurti (1922 – 1990) who was the first spiritual teacher to develop a full-fledged and harmonious blending of Western rationality and Eastern mysticism. He was the founder of the modern spiritual movement, Ananda Marga, meaning 'The Path of Bliss.' (If you want to know more about his life and teachings I strongly recommend the biography, Anandamurti—The Jamalpur Years by Devashish Acosta.)

Although spiritual meditation originated in southern India in ancient times, its influence can be found in many spiritual traditions. Today it continues to address the universal human need for self-understanding and spiritual fulfilment.

16. What kind of meditation do you teach?

I teach a form of Tantric meditation through the modern yoga and meditation school, Ananda Marga.

The nature of the object or idea you choose to concentrate on in meditation dictates the outcome. Meditation can be done for spiritual growth, for relaxation and stress reduction, or even for some other reason such as success in a sport or a career. The distinguishing feature of all spiritual meditation techniques, as taught in the great spiritual traditions, is that the technique has a single goal: merging with and becoming one with Infinite Consciousness. To put it another way, meditation helps us to realize that we always have been one with infinite Consciousness.

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In Tantric meditation, the practitioner learns, through a process of initiation, a personal technique and Mantra (which is repeated mentally). He or she is taught how to withdraw the mind from the external world and concentrate internally. The primary goal of Tantric meditation is to merge one's individual consciousness into Infinite Consciousness. This

is the meditation taught by myself and other teachers in the modern Tantric school of Ananda Marga.

17. You only practice one type of meditation-how can you be objective about other methods?

Only an enlightened soul is perfectly objective. The technique I am practicing is the best I have found. Otherwise I'd be doing something else. I try to keep an open mind, and from my study of a wide variety of teachings I understand that there are common psychological and spiritual principles used in spiritual practice. The extent to which these principles are understood and applied determines the effectiveness of a technique in taking us forward on the path of spiritual progress.

For example, it is a widely accepted tenet of psychology that 'as you think, so you become.' When this principle is applied to spiritual meditation, it means we should concentrate on the idea of Infinite Consciousness in order to become serene, loving and God-conscious. But if we have been taught since childhood to feel guilty, or afraid of God, this makes it more difficult to practice. If, on the other hand, we are taught that we are children of the Divine, and that our true nature is perfect and loving, then the feeling of bliss in meditation comes far more naturally.

It is not necessary to learn all techniques in order to grasp how they work...which is fortunate as this is an impossible task for just one lifetime!

18. How do I know if this is the right meditation technique for me?

Some things you must decide for yourself. If you come across a practice that makes sense to you, I suggest you try it. If you then experience that it is bringing the kind of changes you desire, keep doing it. If you experience difficulties, be patient. Don't hastily switch to another technique. You may face the same problem again—and then be forced to realize that the problem may be with you and not with the technique. If, after giving it your best shot, it still doesn't seem to be working, try something else. But don't keep shopping around forever—you should try to find a technique you're happy with and commit to it. Remember those holes we were digging for water? If you keep starting new holes you're going to end up very thirsty.

19. Do I need to have a Guru to learn meditation?

The word ‘Guru’ means ‘dispeller of darkness, and really refers to the Infinite Consciousness acting as a spiritual teacher and guide to individual souls. Since Infinite Consciousness is omnipresent, the real Guru is within us already.

the real Guru
is within us
already.

When an individual has attained Self Realization, they are often referred to as a Guru, because the Infinite Consciousness within them is able to act and speak without the distortions of ego. They are then in a position to play the role of a perfect spiritual teacher and guide to others.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asked his Guru, Krishna, whether it was possible to attain enlightenment through the guidance of the Divine, Inner Guru, without the assistance of a Guru in physical form. Krishna told him that while it is not essential to have a physical Guru, it will probably take you about 10,000 times as long to attain enlightenment.

Thirty years ago, I wanted to learn meditation but I didn’t know how to begin. I read some books on the subject, and with what wisdom I could glean from their pages I began to practice. Which means I wasn’t teaching myself—I was learning from various authors. Indirectly, they were my first—in some cases deceased—teachers. Soon I realized that I desired clearer guidance and I began searching for a living teacher or Guru.

When we are
entering the
mysterious
realm of
consciousness,
the most
rational course
is to take the
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knows the
territory well.

The fact that you’re reading this book indicates that you want information about meditation. All of the knowledge in this book comes, directly or indirectly, from a Guru. Literally all of the spiritual books of the world derive their ideas from great spiritual teachers—Gurus. Gurus are the pioneers on the spiritual path who go before us and light the way to guide those who follow.

Some people fear that having a Guru means you must follow blindly. This is a misconception. My Guru, Shrii Shrii Anandamurtii, often quoted an old scripture that says that if a child says something rational we should accept it, and if God Himself

says something irrational we should discard it like a straw. Genuine spirituality acknowledges rationality.

And what is the rational course when seeking self-knowledge? When we are entering the mysterious realm of consciousness, the most rational course is to take the advice of a guide who knows the territory well.

This territory can often be quite deceptive and difficult to traverse. If you read about the lives of great mystics like St Francis of Assisi or Milarepa of Tibet, you see that they all faced many trials and tests to transcend the temptations of pleasure and power in order to attain true greatness. At these higher stages on the spiritual path, the guidance of the Guru is even more important.

If you do not have the chance to meet personally with a real Guru (as they are few and far between), do not despair. It is possible to learn from a Guru through their writings, through learning of their inspiring example, and directly from people they appointed to pass on their teachings and techniques. Through meditation, it is possible to establish a personal relationship with your own inner Guru.

20. What does meditation cost?

Traditionally spiritual meditation is taught free of charge and is available to all regardless of a person's economic status. Meditation is a subtle spiritual practice and to attach monetary value to it taints and degrades this spiritual gift.

Nevertheless, there is a personal price. To get results from meditation, you have to put something into it—your own valuable time and effort.

21. How much time does it take?

I recommend that beginners spend at least 15 minutes twice a day in meditation. Later increase to two half-hour sessions. This should bring good results, though some people choose to meditate for longer periods and experience even greater benefit. How much you get out of your meditation is directly related to what you put into it.

22. What benefits have you experienced as a result of meditation?

The benefits I experience personally from this practice include:

- a. More mental peace.

b. More emotional balance. I am a musician—this is a very real benefit for someone with an artistic temperament!

c. More creativity. I have always practiced a variety of creative arts, and when I started meditation I felt that I'd tapped into a rich new spring of inspiration, ideas and insights. Many writers, musicians and thinkers report that their inspiration usually comes when the mind is quiet. It seems quite natural that the calming effect of meditation gives us easier access to the deeper, creative level of our minds.

d. A profound sense of purpose in life. I have a growing sense that all life is moving in a positive direction—towards greater awareness, towards a greater feeling of Oneness and harmony. I feel that I am also a part of that same flow of conscious evolution.

e. Improved self-awareness. Introspective practice makes us more aware of our own motivations and qualities. While not always comfortable, how can we improve if we don't see ourselves as we really are? More often it is inspiring to discover the amazing potential within ourselves.

f. A developing sense of universal love. As I am more in touch with the source of my own consciousness, I am more aware of the consciousness in everything. I feel more love within my self, and greater love and compassion for others. This naturally helps me relate to others more easily.

g. Improved good health. I lead a very busy life; I travel frequently with constant demands on my time. Yet I do not suffer from stress-related illnesses that afflict many busy people. Meditation and the consequential natural lifestyle are definitely a recipe for a long and healthy life.

h. Improved will power and concentration. Over the years I notice

I'm more emotionally balanced, more creative, I'm developing as a person, I sense a profound meaning in my life, I feel closer to God, closer to people, I feel more love. Of course I'm happier. I'd have to be crazy not to be!

my mind becoming clearer and stronger. If we exercise a physical muscle, it develops. The same is true of the mind.

i. Looking forward to my time in meditation. Sometimes it is hard work requiring concentration, but when it really flows this experience can be intensely blissful—more blissful than anything else I’ve experienced. It is far better than taking drugs (or so I’m told).

j. Feeling happier. I am much happier before I started on this path, and this feeling has grown over the years. I’m more emotionally balanced, more creative, I’m developing as a person, I sense a profound meaning in my life, I feel closer to God, closer to people, I feel more love. Of course I’m happier. I’d have to be crazy not to be!

23. How soon will I feel something in my meditation?

This is personal to everyone, however, here’s what happened to a friend of mine.

In the early 1970s, Steve, a young man living in Auckland, New Zealand, and his friends became interested in meditation, and they all learned from a Yogi, an Acharya of Ananda Marga like myself. After learning meditation, Steve practiced very regularly, for thirty minutes twice a day but he didn’t feel any effect. After a week or two he began to worry and asked his teacher what was wrong. They discussed what he was doing, and the teacher reassured him that he just needed to be patient and keep practicing.

Meanwhile, all Steve’s friends were enjoying their meditation, and some were having nice experiences. He continued. After another two weeks he became really frustrated and came to his teacher again and said he was not sure if he could go on. The teacher told him, “We are having a weekend meditation retreat in two weeks time. I am sure that if you keep practicing and come to the retreat, something will happen.”

Reluctantly Steve agreed to keep trying. He was afraid that if he gave up, his friends would ridicule him, so he kept at it but began to

when he thought nothing was happening during his meditation—were actually an essential part of the process.

hate meditation. When time for the retreat came around he didn't even want to go, but since he had said he would, he couldn't easily back out without looking like a failure.

The retreat was on Waiheke Island, and everyone had planned to meet at the ferry in the morning. It so happened that Steve's house was infested with wood eating insects called Bora. Since he was going away, he planned to ignite a 'Bora Bomb.' This canister of poisonous gas kills these insects and stops them from eating all the wood; otherwise they will eventually weaken the wood and make the house inhabitable.

So he put his luggage outside, lit the 'Bora Bomb,' came out and locked the door. When he got to the bus stop he realized he had forgotten his wallet. Part of him thought, "Great! Now I'll miss the bus and I'll miss the ferry and I won't have to go to the retreat." But he thought he still had to try to get there in case his friends interrogated him, so he ran home. Then he had to wait for his breathing to slow, as the house was full of poisonous gas. By the time he had caught his breath, went inside holding his breath, retrieved his wallet, and got back to the bus stop, the bus had left.

"Good", he thought, "but I suppose I should try to hitch hike." He was confident that no one would stop to pick him up, as he had tried before and never succeeded in getting a ride from this stop. So he put out his thumb. The first car stopped.

"Where are you going?" the driver asked.

"To the ferry."

"No problem, I'm going there too."

He was caught.

He arrived at the ferry just in time to meet his friends and then he was stuck on the island for a weekend meditating and chanting and eating vegetarian food, all of which he was now beginning to detest. His meditation was worse than ever and he was completely depressed. Everyone else was so happy and high and he thought maybe he was the only person in the world who could not meditate.

If they had not been on an island he would have left and gone home. Finally the last meditation session of the retreat began, and he thought, "This is the last time I am going to meditate in my whole life. Fantastic!" They were all chanting so happily and he was thinking, "So what? Who cares? I just want to get out of here."

He sat down for what he thought would be the last meditation of his life. Within seconds after closing his eyes he had an amazing experience. He felt as if the top of his head had been removed and was open to the whole universe. He lost all awareness of his body and became lost in a blissful trance. Afterwards he felt overwhelmed and went up to people in tears saying, "It works, it works," like a fool. So that wasn't the last time he practiced meditation after all.

A friend calls that my ‘can opener story.’

So how soon will we feel something in our meditation? Everyone’s mind is different, so it is difficult to answer this question precisely. Some people I know had an incredible experience the first time they sat for meditation. Others find it hard at first, then begin to enjoy it as they develop more concentration and mental stillness. Some, like Steve, have dramatic tales to tell. Others give up and never find out what might have happened if they had persisted just a little longer. One important thing to realize from Steve’s story is that all those weeks—when he thought nothing was happening during his meditation—were actually an essential part of the process. A deep change was going on within him all along. It just took some time to surface.

If we really want to know how long we will have to practice meditation before we too can taste its benefits, there is only one way to find out. The sooner we start, the sooner we’ll know.

So close your eyes and open your mind, and accept that meditation practice involves some focused time and effort. If you undertake this wonderful practice with sincerity, I am sure you will long thank the day you did.

Try This

- Here are some questions you might ask yourself. I suggest you write down the answers – in fact why not start a meditation journal so you can keep track of your thoughts and realizations as you progress on your journey.

- Your own questions. Try to answer them in as much specific detail as possible:

What do I want out of meditation?

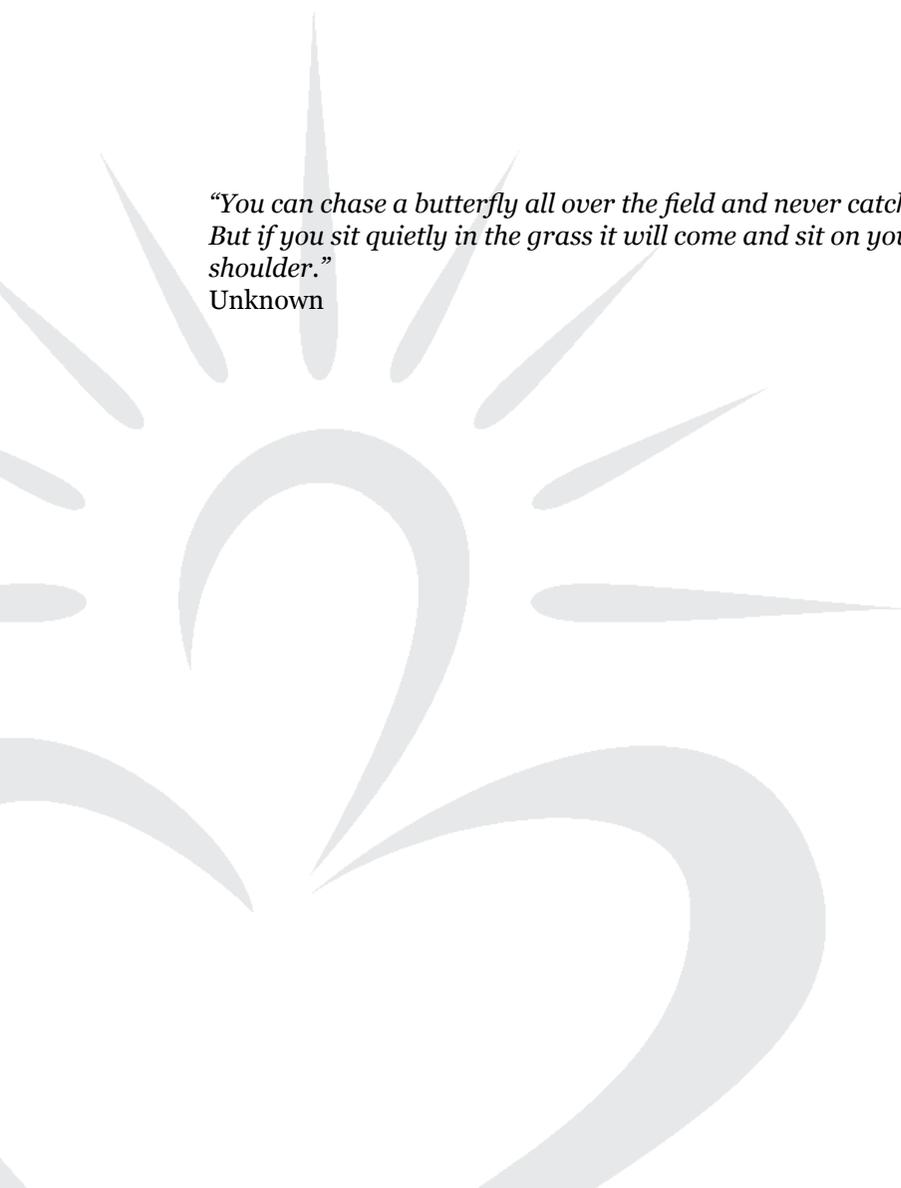
What do I really expect to get out of meditation?

What am I prepared to put into a meditation practice?

CLOSE YOUR EYES & OPEN YOUR MIND

*“You can chase a butterfly all over the field and never catch it.
But if you sit quietly in the grass it will come and sit on your
shoulder.”*

Unknown





Chapter Two

Donkey Maintenance

Donkey Maintenance

Saint Francis of Assisi referred to his body as his ‘donkey.’ This seems like a fitting metaphor for our body/mind system. The great Indian epic, the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita) uses similar symbolism. Here the chariot and the charioteer represent the body and mind. The horses are our senses and the passenger is the inner witness or the soul (the ‘Atman’ in Sanskrit).

If we consider the body to be a vehicle for the mind, what does this imply? The experience of driving a well-maintained vehicle in good working order is quite different from that of driving a neglected old wreck on its last legs. Our state of mind is affected by the condition of our body and vice versa. (And if I were a car I would greatly prefer that the driver were not drunk or sleepy.) How clearly can you think when you have a head cold or a fever? And how full of vitality do you feel if you are depressed? When either the body or mind is out of balance, the other also suffers. When the body is in optimum health, we feel better emotionally and think more clearly.

This mind/body connection has been recognized for millennia, but it is only very recently that we have begun to understand how it works in terms of bio-chemistry. Through the research of scientists like cell biologist Dr. Bruce Lipton, (author of *The Biology of Belief*) we have learned how our moods and thoughts can change our body’s chemistry, and amazingly even our DNA. Like it or not, our body and mind are joined in a lifelong dance, every minute of every day. It might be a good idea to keep this relationship harmonious. This is one couple that we really don’t want to contemplate divorce.

In light of all this it amazes me that so many people neglect their physical health. Most people take better care of their cars than their

When either the body or mind is out of balance, the other also suffers. When the body is in optimum health, we feel better emotionally and think more clearly.

bodies. We would not consider filling up our car with dirty gasoline yet we think nothing of putting all kinds of junk food in our own bodies.

A meditator seeking higher awareness needs to know how to maintain both body and mind in optimal health. Long ago yogis developed an entire system of health practices designed to do just that. These secrets are found in the traditions of Yoga, Tantra and Ayurvedic medicine.

The Importance of Physical Health for Meditation

In meditation we train our minds to bring our impulses under control. Eating food, or imbibing substances that cause us to lose control makes this much harder.

For best results in meditation, we need a body that is disease-free and flexible with a balanced flow of energy. This greatly improves our concentration. This involves more than merely not getting ill and being able to sit still and straight. The activity of our nervous system and glandular system directly affect the flow of vital energy (Prana) in our body—and this affects our state of mind. For best results in meditation our nerves, glands and the vital energy system of Chakras need to be in harmony. We cover more about Chakras in Chapter Five. For now you just think of it as maintaining a balanced flow of life energy throughout the body.

In Yoga the physical body is called the Annamaya Kosa, literally the layer of the mind that is composed of food. What we eat and drink influences our state of mind. Everyone knows how eating too much sugar makes young children hyperactive and uncontrollable. Or how even small quantities of alcohol affect our driving performance. In meditation we train our minds to bring our impulses under control. Eating food, or imbibing substances that cause us to lose control makes this much harder.

A Plethora of Advice

These days we find ourselves overwhelmed with information about health, much of it conflicting. Sometimes it seems quasi-religious or

is associated with product promotions, so we don't know if the advice is really in our best interests. Sometimes there are contradictions between the words and actions of experts who talk about health but are not healthy themselves. We read of amazing breakthroughs in microsurgery or gene technology, curing diseases—diseases easily prevented if people simply exercised and ate fewer burgers.

“Every new McDonald's creates 40 jobs. 20 dentists and 20 heart surgeons.” - Doucoure on Twitter

“An alcoholic is one who drinks more than his doctor.” - Unknown

One ‘expert’ tells us to eat no protein.

Another says eat only protein.

Good cholesterol, bad cholesterol, low-carb diets, hi-carb diets, gluten and lactose intolerance, chemical residues in the food chain, allergies that never existed before, drink gallons of water, drink no water. But wait, no need to worry about any of that. All you have to do is eat this berry from the lost jungles of Brazil and you will live forever!

No wonder people are confused.

I'd like to bring a bit of common sense back into this discussion. Let's start by looking at what is natural for our bodies.

If everyone followed these few simple guidelines, the health of humanity at large would be transformed.

What is Natural for Humans?

Our physical bodies have not changed significantly during the past 40,000 years. Here's a quick glance at how we humans lived during almost all of our recent past:

- No chairs or computers. The human body is not designed to sit in front of a screen all day. **We need to exercise regularly.**
- We evolved before electricity was invented. **It is more healthy to rise with the sun and sleep during darkness.**
- We evolved before processed food and chemical additives were invented. **Unprocessed food is much more suitable for us.**
- We evolved in a situation of food scarcity and went hungry regularly. **Our bodies are designed to fast periodically.**
- Our anatomy and physiology clearly indicate that we are not designed to eat meat. That is why we have to cook it. **We will be more healthy if we avoid eating meat.**

- Our bodies are composed mostly of water. Water purifies the blood and keeps our internal systems clean. **We should drink plenty of water.**

If everyone followed these few simple guidelines, the health of humanity at large would be transformed.

Incidentally such a shift in behavior would also have huge economic benefits. In the USA the single largest government budget item is health care, and it is growing along with the waistlines of the populace. Most of this enormous health care budget is spent treating preventable, lifestyle-related diseases. If enough Americans followed a more natural, healthier lifestyle, they could simultaneously solve their economic problems.

Disease Prevention vs. Disease Treatment

“First the doctor told me the good news: I was going to have a disease named after me.”

Steve Martin

The modern system of ‘allopathic’ medicine focuses on disease. We are told as children that germs cause disease. Scientists have made amazing advances in the study of different pathogens and how to kill them when they invade our bodies. Some years ago I was a passenger in a motorcycle accident and suffered abrasions to one foot. I was treated, but a few days later a dark red line crept slowly up my leg, under the skin, so I went back to the hospital. As soon as the doctor saw my leg he almost panicked and put me on an intravenous antibiotic drip. I asked him what would have happened if there were no antibiotics. “We would have had to cut your leg off,” he replied. I asked what would have happened if they did not cut my leg off, and he said, “When that red line reached your heart you would have died.”

This gave me a new kind of appreciation of the value of modern medicine in an emergency.

However, most common diseases are more easily prevented or cured using more natural means with fewer side effects.

A report published in the British Journal of Cancer in 2011 said that nearly half of cancers diagnosed in the UK each year—over 130,000 in

We didn’t expect to find that eating fruit and vegetables would prove to be so important in protecting men against cancer

More traditional systems of medicine, such as naturopathy, acupuncture and Ayurveda, focus on health rather than on disease.

total—are caused by avoidable life choices including smoking, drinking and eating the wrong things. One of the authors said: “We didn't expect to find that eating fruit and vegetables would prove to be so important in protecting men against cancer. And among women we didn't expect being overweight to be more of a risk factor than alcohol.”

More traditional systems of medicine, such as naturopathy, acupuncture and Ayurveda, focus on health rather than on disease. In the old Chinese medical tradition, doctors were paid a regular salary, and if anyone in their community of patients became ill, their pay was reduced. That's an incentive to keep everyone healthy! Nowadays

doctors get paid to cure illnesses, so the more people get sick, the more they get paid. And if you think the doctors make money from our illnesses, what about the drug companies! It doesn't seem very smart to reward our medical professionals for treating illness rather than for keeping people healthy.

Yoga teaches us how to better understand our own bodies so that we are not so dependent on doctors and medicines. It is a system of preventative medicine.

Digestion

One of the keys to health and longevity is good digestion. Here is something quite simple but very important to understand about digestion:

- Our digestive system has two functions: absorption of nutriment and elimination of toxins.
- Our digestive system cannot perform both of these functions at the same time.
- The primary cause of most common diseases is the build up of toxins in the body. Why? Because toxins weaken our immune system and create a breeding ground for harmful pathogens.
- Eliminating toxins from the body regularly is vital to maintain good health. There are several ways to do this:

- Avoid eating between meals so that our digestive system has a chance to perform its second function of elimination.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Avoid overeating.
- Choose food that is easy to digest so that un-digested food does not decay in our system and create toxic byproducts.
- Undertake periodic fasts.
- Exercise regularly.

Nine Health Secrets of the Yogis

1. Diet

When talking about health, food is the big gorilla in the room, so let's tackle it first. There are a thousand theories and arguments about what we should or should not eat but I do not want to get into a lengthy debate. I prefer to let the ancient wisdom of the yogis take precedence. If we then add a bit of common sense the picture becomes pretty clear. You do not have to be a nutritionist to understand what foods are best for you.

In fact, sometimes having too many advisors just serves to confuse matters. Take the 2011 decision by the US Congress to classify pizza as a vegetable. The big pizza companies wanted to keep selling pizza to schools, but the new health regulations required that more vegetables instead of junk food be served to children. So the corporate lawyers concocted an absurd argument that a school child could see through. The result? Now two tablespoons of tomato sauce supposedly magically converts a slice of white flour dough and some cheese into a vegetable. Don't argue—it is the law.

Sometimes elaborate 'logic' does not serve us as well as common sense. Especially when it is 'corporate logic.'

So don't worry too much about the arguments of hired 'experts.' If you follow the guidelines below as best you can, you'll do substantially better than most people.

a. Favor alkaline forming foods that are easy to digest. This generally means 'lighter' foods, like fruits and vegetables, as opposed to meat and eggs or cheese or sweets. That's right—the stuff that everyone knows is unhealthy is actually unhealthy. Not rocket science is it? And if you eat too much, even of good quality food, it is still bad for you.

**Favor
alkaline
forming
foods that are
easy
to digest.**

b. Prefer sentient food. Yogis are a bit more savvy than most people when it comes to understanding how food affects not just our bodies, but our minds. Here's a simplified list of the preferred diet of yogis, known as 'sentient' or 'sattvic' food.

Sattvic Foods: Good for body and mind—fruits, most vegetables, grains, pulses, beans & milk products.

Rajasic Foods: Not too bad in small quantities—coffee, tea, chocolate, carbonated drinks.

Tamasic Foods: Bad for body or mind—meat, fish, poultry, eggs, onion, mushrooms and garlic. Garlic may have certain health benefits, but it is very agitating for the meditators mind and makes it more difficult to concentrate. (This fact has made a lot of Italian yogis very unhappy...)

Mushrooms are another 'tamasic' item that surprises people. When I first learned meditation I was the kind of student teachers dream of. Whatever my teacher told me I followed strictly without question. When he merely suggested that I follow a Sattvic diet I immediately became a vegetarian and stopped eating onions, mushrooms and garlic. I found this really easy since I didn't like any of those things—with one exception. I was not happy without my mushrooms, so after a couple of months of abstention I thought to myself, "I don't see how mushrooms can be so bad for my meditation. They look pretty harmless to me, and they taste delicious." So I decided to conduct an experiment on myself to see if they really had any bad effect. The next morning I cooked up a plate of fried mushrooms on toast. Delicious! I felt fine and noticed no bad effect, until I sat for meditation that evening. It was terrible. I could not concentrate and my mind felt heavy and dead—no clarity. I learned my lesson and have not eaten mushrooms since.

A lot of people wonder about sugar. While it is not completely proscribed in the yoga diet, it is better to eat little or no sugar, especially as you get older. I gave up refined sugar in 2008 and feel that it was a very good move. As there are plenty of alternative sweeteners such as agave, honey, dried fruit, malt syrup and maple syrup, it is not as if I'm suffering. I'm just far less likely to suffer in the future from hypoglycemia or worse, diabetes.

More on the question of vegetarianism comes later in this chapter. Let's finish with the yogi's health secrets.

2. Proper Exercise

Exercise is of course the second key to vibrant health. It is no secret

that if you want to be healthy you should eat less and exercise more. The question is: what kind of exercise and how much?

Yoga recommends two main kinds of exercise:

- Aerobic exercise. The main benefit of this kind of exercise is physical—it maintains fitness and muscle tone. I recommend thirty minutes of strenuous aerobic exercise such as running or swimming, five times a week. Daily would be even better. In addition to this I recommend at least thirty minutes walking a day.

- Vital energy exercises—these are exercises such as yoga or tai chi where the effect is more subtle, creating a harmonious flow of vital energy and relaxation in the body and toning the nerves and glands. This kind of exercise is excellent for stress relief and concentration. It is also very good for preparing the body to sit in meditation. I recommend at least 20 minutes of yoga exercises per day.

- There are two special exercises taught in the Ananda Marga school of yoga which have the benefits of both aerobic and vital energy exercises. They are yoga dances of Kaoshikii and Tandava. You can learn them in any Ananda Marga yoga center or class.

3. Bathing

Bathing daily obviously keeps our bodies clean. Using cool water, below body temperature, cools the body and calms the mind.

Washing our hands, arms, feet and face with cool water before meditation and before eating has many benefits. It induces a physiological response called the ‘diving response’ that redirects the blood flow and the body’s energy to vital organs, aiding concentration and digestion. Just try washing your feet with cold water after a long walk on a hot day and you will feel immediate relief, not just physically but mentally as well.

4. Drinking water

Water is the elixir of life, and drinking plenty of pure water is one of the greatest of health

There are two special exercises taught in the Ananda Marga school of yoga which have the benefits of both aerobic and vital energy exercises.

If you are in normal health you should drink 4 - 6 pints (3 - 4 liters) of water every day.

secrets. This helps your body to keep your blood Ph slightly alkaline and gives you more energy, improves digestion and eliminates toxins. If you are in normal health you should drink 4 - 6 pints (3 - 4 liters) of water every day. This sounds like a lot, but if you space it out between meals it is quite easy. Avoid drinking for 30 minutes before a meal, and for one hour afterwards, otherwise you will dilute your digestive fluids.

5. Fasting

We need to allow our digestive system time to rest so that it is free to eliminate toxins. Our system cannot absorb nutriment and eliminate toxins at the same time, so it is best to avoid eating between meals.

To give our system a longer rest it is good to fast for a whole day. Yogis recommend that we fast for one day, twice a month and fast according to the phases of the moon. Our minds are affected by the moon phases; fasting helps to counteract any negative effect. The eleventh day after full and new moon is known as Ekadashi, a very good time to fast.

Fasting for one day may seem a little daunting at first, but most people find that it is not nearly as difficult as they expected. It is good to break your fast with a system flush. This consists of a large quantity (about 2 pints) of water with lemon and salt. Two flat teaspoons of salt, and half a lemon juiced is just about right. Within about 30 minutes of drinking, this concoction induces a bowel movement that flushes out the toxins your digestive tract has collected for elimination. The feeling afterwards is wonderful—you feel so clean and fresh. Having a clean bowel is great for meditation.

Fasting can also be very helpful in curing disease. If you plan to undertake a longer fast of several days or even weeks, it should be done under supervision. I once did a 21-day juice fast and at the end of it I felt that I'd added years to my life. A doctor conducted tests before and after and confirmed that my liver and kidney functions were completely rejuvenated.

Some years ago I knew a woman in Australia who was diagnosed with liver cancer. She was only thirty years old, and was told she would only live a few months. After she carried out a 30-day, water-only fast, the large tumor in her liver was completely gone. Her doctor was shocked. So how does this happen?

When someone undertakes such intense fast, the body begins to absorb tissue as an energy source after a few days with no food. It is smart enough to target non-essential tissue first. A cancerous tumor is non-essential tissue. This woman's body digested the tumor.

As you can imagine, this type of long fast must be carefully monitored. We don't want our bodies to start digesting more important tissue, like brain cells!

6. Meditation

The immediate cause of many diseases is pathogens—hostile organisms that invade our system. But generally we do not fall prey to these pathogens unless our resistance weakens in some way. Stress is a major factor in weakening our resistance to disease.

Meditation is well known as a stress management method. This is particularly important in our very frazzled modern environment, even as the physiological side effects of meditation practice are well documented.

But there is a more subtle and indirect health benefit we get from meditation. Most meditators observe that over time they develop a stronger sense of life purpose and a generally improved feeling of well being. They become happier. Recent studies have shown that people who lead satisfying, meaningful and happy lives also live longer, healthier ones. Which really should be no surprise.

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“Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine.”

Lord Byron

7. Raw Food

Consuming some raw fruits and vegetables every day is another of the secrets of long life. Raw fruits and vegetables contain plenty of fiber and retain important enzymes that are often destroyed by cooking. These enzymes help to digest and absorb the nutrients in food.

A friend in San Francisco helps many people cure diabetes (type 2) and come off insulin, just by convincing them to switch to a raw food for a month. He produced a great video about this, featuring patients accustomed to a diet of hamburgers and Pepsi, testifying to the transformation in their health. Some of them found it difficult at first to adjust to the new diet, but in the end they all felt it was well worth the effort.

8. Yoghurt

Not all bacteria are bad. In fact, most of the various bacteria in our bodies are benign or beneficial. Intestinal bacteria play a vital role in digestion and help to break down food.

The bacteria found in our stomachs are the same that transform

milk into yoghurt. To replenish and maintain a healthy population of friendly intestinal bacteria, it is good to take live yoghurt regularly.

9. Proper Rest

Regular, good quality sleep is essential for health. We get the most benefit from sleep between 10 pm and sunrise (assuming you're not in Finland in the summer). This aligns us with the natural cycles of Sun and Earth. Avoid eating before sleeping. Our sleep hinders our digestion—and our digestion disturbs our sleep.

I noticed that when I started to meditate regularly my need for sleep became less. I used to sleep eight hours. Now six hours is plenty. I use the extra time to meditate!

So there you have it: The Nine Yogic Secrets of Long Life. See you on the other side of ninety!

Vegetarianism

*“I am not a vegetarian because I love animals.
It is because I hate vegetables.”*

Woody Allen.

But before I go into this topic I want to make one thing clear. It is not essential to be a vegetarian in order to meditate successfully. If you are not vegetarian already, treat this section simply as a suggestion.

OK, so here we go.

Why do I, and many other people, prefer a vegetarian diet? I could write a book on this, but I don't need to as several other people have already done an excellent job of that, notably John Robbins in his book *Diet for a New America*. If you want to understand this issue in depth read his book, or watch the one-hour documentary version. Here's my short version.

There are four good reasons to be vegetarian.

1. I Don't Eat My Friends

“Animals are my friends and I don't eat my friends.”

George Bernard Shaw

(winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 1925)

It is not
essential
to be a
vegetarian
in order to
meditate
successfully.

There is no doubt that by eating meat, we participate in a process that causes a great deal of suffering to animals. As meditators we are naturally cultivating our own sense of compassion. This tends to make us more sensitive to the suffering of others, so avoiding harming animals seems like a natural follow through.

In *Diet for a New America*, John Robbins tells a story about a nine-year old girl who was sitting with her family at the dinner table one evening. They were eating lamb. They were watching a television program about spring, featuring lambs running about on the grass and playing. At this point the girl suddenly understood that these cute little lambs were what was on her plate. Horrified at what she had been eating, she turned on her parents in tears. “Why didn’t you tell me!” she accused them. In her fury, in that moment she declared, “I will never eat meat again. And nor will you!” Such was her moral outrage that the whole family became vegetarian on the spot.

2. A Vegetarian Diet is Healthier

We are not designed to eat meat. Here is a simplified list of physical features of a carnivore, compared to a human:

	Carnivore	Human
Teeth	Sharp teeth for tearing meat	Grinding molars for chewing grains and fruit
Saliva	Acidic	Alkaline
Sweat glands	Have none. Perspire through tongue	Have sweat glands
Digestive tract	Short to digest fast-decaying meat rapidly- three times body length	Long to digest vegetables and fruits - ten times body length

Meat is extremely difficult to digest—that is why we have to cook it and it is at the top of the list when it comes to acid-forming foods. It decays very rapidly because it lacks the rigid cellulose cell wall that supports plant cells. It decays while still in our digestive tract, creating toxic byproducts that pollute our entire system. Eating too much meat

is a leading cause of bowel cancer, constipation, rheumatism, arthritis, gout, heart disease and numerous other ailments.

Some insurance companies offer a discount on your health insurance if you're a vegetarian because they know you will cost them less money in medical treatment in the years ahead.

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3. Following a Vegetarian Diet Helps our Spiritual Progress

"Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace."

Albert Schweitzer
(Nobel Peace Prize, 1952)

"Vegetarian food leaves a deep impression on our nature. If the whole world adopts vegetarianism, it can change the destiny of humankind."

Albert Einstein

"My refusing to eat flesh occasioned an inconvenience, and I was frequently chided for my singularity, but, with this lighter repast, I made the greater progress, for greater clearness of head and quicker comprehension."

Benjamin Franklin

"Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages."

Thomas Edison

Eating meat has an effect on our minds. Some professional fighters are well aware of this, and are encouraged to eat plenty of red meat leading up to important fights precisely because it makes them more aggressive. Consuming a lot of meat reinforces certain animal instincts in us humans. This is the primary reason yogis avoid eating meat: they are trying to transcend their animal nature through their spiritual practice.

cultivation
of meat as a
food source
involves
extremely
inefficient
land use.
Soybeans
produce ten
times more
protein per
acre than
cattle.

4. It is Better for the Environment

“A 2006 United Nations report identified the world’s rapidly growing herds of cattle as the greatest threat to the climate, forests and wildlife. These hordes are the cause of a host of other environmental crimes, from acid rain to the introduction of alien species, from producing deserts to creating dead zones in the oceans, from poisoning rivers and drinking water to destroying coral reefs.

The 400-page report by the Food and Agricultural Organization, entitled *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, also surveys the damage done by sheep, chickens, pigs and goats. But in almost every case, the world’s 1.5 billion cattle are most to blame. Livestock—more than cars, planes and all other forms of transport put together—are responsible for 18% of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming”.

The Independent - UK 10 DECEMBER 2006

“Many things made me become a vegetarian, among them the higher food yield as a solution to world hunger.”

John Denver

Good point John (and thank you for all the beautiful songs!). This is reason number five: cultivation of meat as a food source involves extremely inefficient land use. Soybeans produce ten times more protein per acre than cattle.

Myths About Eating Meat

Myth 1: “We need meat for protein.”

This is nonsensical. Millions of people never eat an ounce of meat in their lives and do not suffer protein deficiency. The thousands of vegetarians I personally know are much healthier than the average person.

With a few exceptions (such as lemons), all foods contain protein. Many vegetarian foods are rich in protein: legumes, seeds, nuts, beans, tofu, cheese, yoghurt and milk. Vegetable protein, unlike meat and eggs, is free of harmful cholesterol. Simply switching from eggs to tofu as a protein source will cause your cholesterol level to plummet.

Myth 2: “We need meat for vitamin B12”

Critically important vitamin B12 is readily available through cheese, whey, yoghurt, milk and yeast extract, to name the top 5 vegetarian sources. None of these come from meat!

Myth 3: “We need ‘it’ for fatty acids Omega 3, 6, & 9.”

Do you believe that only source of these important brain food fatty acids is fish liver oil? This is untrue! Low cost vegetarian sources of omega oils include flax seed, walnuts and hemp.

Myth 4: “Vegetarians are weak and wimpy”

My mum foisted meat on me because she believed it was essential for getting sufficient protein so that I would grow up to be a big strong boy. It’s a pity she never read this list of famous athletes who are all vegetarians. Serious non-wimps:

Carl Lewis: 9 Olympic Gold Medals, including 4 in 1984.

Feted as “Athlete of the Century”

Martina Navratilova: Tennis player.

18 grand slam singles titles

Robert Parish: Basketball player.

Basketball Hall of Fame 2003

Prince Fielder: Baseball player. More than 50 home runs

Dave Scott: Iron Man World Champion—6 times!

Billie Jean King: Tennis player. 12 Grand Slam titles.

Bill Pearl: Bodybuilder. 4 time Mr. Universe.

Joe Namath: American football quarterback.

NFL Hall of Fame 1985

And many more...

Here’s a quiz question. Who is the least likely celebrity sports champion to become vegetarian? Turn to the end of this chapter to find the identity of the “World’s Least Wimpy Vegetarian.”

In case you have been told that vegetarianism makes you stupid, here are a few more famous vegetarians:

Albert Einstein

Leonardo Da Vinci

Sir Isaac Newton

Plato

Henry David Thoreau

Pythagoras

Adam Smith

Thomas Edison

George Bernard Shaw
Benjamin Franklin
Paul McCartney
George Harrison
Mahatma Gandhi
Abraham Lincoln
Clint Eastwood
Linda Blair
Bill Clinton

**And a very long list
of other notables.**

Conclusion:

So there you have it if you want it:
the yogi's 'secret' formula for health and
long life.

You may already have adopted some of
these lifestyle choices. Or the whole idea might seem daunting. If you
would like to improve your health by making just a few changes, here
are some suggestions for how you might want to go about it:

- A. Take baby steps—don't try to become Superwoman overnight. Or even Batman.
- B. Try some thirty-day trials. Pick just one point to try for thirty days without committing for longer than that. If you like it, continue it! Or try something else.
- C. Think long term—changes in lifestyle now pay off hugely when you are older.
- D. Remember the compound effect—adopting a small good habit, repeated daily over time, can bring remarkable results. This principle works both ways: bad habits practiced over a long period result in heavy attrition.
- E. Prioritize. Tackle one thing at a time.

We all have resistance to change. Here are some fun excuses from the Inner Wimp:

adopting a small
good habit,
repeated daily
over time, can
bring remarkable
results. This
principle works
both ways: bad
habits practiced
over a long
period result in
heavy attrition.

- I've been carbo-loading for the last 40 years in case I ever need to go on a 10,000 mile run.
 - If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would have put them on my knees.
 - I'm on a strict running program. I started yesterday. I've only missed one day so far.
 - I get a lot of mental exercise by thinking up weird ways to avoid physical exercise.
- “Health Food: any food whose flavor is indistinguishable from that of the package in which it is sold.”*
Henry Beard
- We lived for weeks on nothing but food and drink.
 - If we're not meant to have midnight snacks, why is there a light in the fridge?

Try This: Key Recommendations

- Do not eat between meals
- Avoid processed food—eat live food
- Eat less meat or eliminate it (pun intended)
- Drink plenty of water—6 pints a day
- Sleep and rise early
- Exercise (e.g. walk) every day for 45 minutes
- Practice yoga postures daily
- Meditate every day—after all, that's why we're meandering through this book together isn't it?

Write down in your meditation journal any commitments you make to yourself and check on them every week. Or every day!

Quiz question answer:

Mike Tyson, 9-time World Heavyweight boxing champion, became a vegetarian after he won all his titles. He has done quite a bit of soul searching and admits he is not proud of what he had done with his life. He attributes his character reform in part to his vegetarian diet. Is that cool or what?

"I realized meat has become a poison for me now."

Mike Tyson