

# MEDITATION FOR WESTERN MINDS™

*By Stephan A. Schwartz<sup>1</sup>*



The ability to open to nonlocal consciousness is a function of coherence, that is, intentioned awareness, and this coherence is a function of the ability to focus. There are two ways to achieve this, one negative, the other positive. The negative way is through the development of neurotic obsessions that compel us to such focus. The positive way is the kind of training that comes from the consistent practice of meditation. Of all the things that you can do to come to know yourself, nothing will serve you as well as developing the practice of meditation.

Meditation is not Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, or Satanic. It can be done in the name of any of these faiths, but it is owned exclusively by none of them. It does not even require religious affiliation. It is a single term defining many practices, some of which have no spiritual component whatever. The things these paths - whether Christian, Muslim, or something else - all have in common is they are designed to **give practitioners a measure of focused control**, which affects psycho-physiological processes, such as blood pressure, serotonin levels, and brain function. This is the same control that produces the placebo effect. It is a way of training oneself to open to nonlocal awareness, and this is why meditation is important to nonlocal awareness.

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A Western Technique for Meditation

Meditation is definitely associated with mysticism, the inner path to experiencing transcendence. It is a foundation of most spiritual paths of Asian origin, and with good reason. The same rational empirical basis by which these cultures developed acupuncture and the martial arts, led them also to develop inner-listening practices. They observed over generations that there is a positive benefit to developing such inward-looking skills.

But it is equally true that meditation lies at the heart of the inner-wisdom of both Judaism - particularly the cabalistic practices - and Christianity.

**Psalm 19:14:** Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord.

**Psalm 49:3:** My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.



**“ For Buddhists, prayer is meditation. For Catholics, it’s the rosary. For Jews, it’s called dovening. For Protestants, it’s centering prayer. *Every single religion has its own way of doing it.*”**

The practice of meditation is also at the core of the Sufi schools of Islam, to non-Moslems the best known adherents of which are the dervishes. It is part of the traditions of pre-Columbian American cultures as well. The extended awareness of the Vision Quest is one example of it use. And it goes on and on across the rainbow of human culture.

It is notable how similar so many of these rituals are: The use of repetition — saying aloud, or in one’s mind, sounds or words or phrases. Sometimes it is not even a word, just the sibilant sound of the breath as it moves in and out of one’s lungs. It is this focus on a repetitive sound that helps produce the effect.

For the past 30 years, Harvard researcher physician Herbert Benson, MD, has conducted studies seeking to understand how the mind affects the body during meditation and prayer. Using MRI brain scans he has documented the **physical changes that take place in the body when someone meditates**. Benson says, “For Buddhists, prayer is meditation. For Catholics, it’s the rosary. For Jews, it’s called dovening. For Protestants, it’s centering prayer. *Every single religion has its own way of doing it.*”<sup>i</sup> [emphasis added - SAS]

Benson reports that all the forms of prayer and meditation he and his team have studied evoke what he calls a **relaxation response**: A change in the psycho-physical state that reduces stress, calms the body (lowering blood pressure being one example), and promotes healing. Benson's experimentation represents the work of just one laboratory; there are, in fact, researchers and laboratories throughout the world conducting research in meditation

Neurologist Olaf Blanke of the University Hospital of Geneva, Switzerland, for instance, published a paper in the prestigious journal *Brain* describing how the brain generates out-of-body experiences.<sup>ii</sup>

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All of it, collectively, presents us with a picture of the complex brain activity associated with meditation. As meditators go deeper and deeper into their discipline, although the body calms, intense activity occurs in the parietal lobe of the brain. This portion of your brain controls your physical orientation in space and is responsible for making the distinction between your sense of “self” and the outer world, that which is other than “you.”

Dr. Blanke argues that all the lobes of the brain play a part in something as complex as religious experience, but that the temporo-parietal junction is a prime node of that network.

Meditation research over the past two decades has documented a kind of **deep “stillness” that affects the entire brain**. When this occurs, the frontal and temporal lobe circuits - which track time and create self-awareness - seemingly disengage. The mind-body connection A Western Technique for Meditation dissolves. These studies show us that the limbic system is responsible for assigning emotional values to persons, places, everything in our total life experience. This assignment is based on a complex set of stimulus responses that collectively give something the quality I call numinous, about which I will have much to say later.

Since the limbic system, among other things, regulates relaxation, and ultimately controls the autonomic nervous system, heart rate, blood pressure, and metabolism, it produces both emotional and physiological effects when you react to the numinous quality of a specific object, person, or place. These reactions produce real emotional and physiological states. This is why your hair “stands on end,” your “skin crawls,” your stomach “lurches,” or your heart “beats faster.”

Often the response is not only to a single example of a category but the category itself, because memory also interacts with the limbic system. For example, if you are an avid baseball fan you might react to the specific baseball you caught at a big league game when you were a child. But you might also have a reaction, although perhaps not as strong, to any baseball. Or, if you were arrested as a youth, you may react to any picture of any policeman. If you were frightened by a graveyard as a child, a picture of a cemetery could evoke a response. Because meditation affects the limbic system, developing the discipline allows one to become more volitionally in control of these responses. The practice has a calming effect that leaves us relaxed and physiologically more evenly regulated. This, in turn, allows us to be coherently focused because we are less distracted by our inner dialogue and emotions, as well as our physiological responses.

## *Meditation Techniques*



The literature concerning meditation now runs to more than 3,000 studies. The physical, emotional, and mental benefits reported for those who meditate, in comparison with control populations who do not, make developing the practice an important positive life decision. But how to do it? There are literally hundreds of techniques.

I do have to proffer one warning. **People who use any meditation technique, tend, over time, to change their perspective.** They come to feel they are

not alone, that all life is interconnected and interdependent, and that this life network, including themselves, is connected to something profoundly good that is greater than themselves. If it is important to you to remain a materialist, and/or an atheist, meditation may be something you do not want to undertake.

I should also say that meditation is at once the simplest and hardest thing you will ever do. It is simple to do it a single time, or even for a week or two, but it is hard to do as a regular practice.

# “ Meditation will subtly but unquestionably change you and make you feel more in control of your life.”

Research has shown that most of what we do during our waking hours is unconscious reactive behavior. Presented with a person of a different race, or religion, or ethnic background, or sexual orientation, or social status, or economic group **we immediately have an entire set of programs that kick in to tell us how to react.** What passes for thought about this person is really, upon closer examination, little more than running the program until you fit them into the appropriate category so that a judgment can be made as to how to react to them. It is the same with food, or clothes, or music, or pets, or cars. We each have thousands of these little subroutines, little bots that run our lives down to the smallest detail. The energy they have to do this comes from ourselves, and they are defensive of their prerogatives. When you try to reclaim this delegated autonomy, and to integrate yourself so that your choices are made consciously and not by the bots, they will fiercely resist.

Like the story of the Golem, a creature of legend said to be created by mystical Jewish alchemists to defend their community, the bots live only to serve as programmed. The reality is, however, that there is a price for their service: Resistance to reasserting your core autonomy. **Meditation focuses you, independent of your religious or spiritual views.** It reclaims autonomy and allows you to live in what most spiritual traditions call the “now,” by which is meant you make a decision freed from the drag of biases derived from the past, or in anticipation of a particular future.

However you choose to practice it, meditation will subtly but unquestionably change you and make you feel more in control of your life, and will help you make choices that are actually what you want, and not what the boss want.



On the basis of the evidence accumulated through research to date, the practice of meditation will also make it easier for you to be consciously aware of the nonlocal linkage that lies at the core of your beingness.



**H**ere is the technique that I have developed and personally used for almost four decades. It imposes no beliefs, it offends the tenets of no religion, and one need not be religious to use it. I want to be clear here. This is but one technique of the many available. If you find something else that works better, do it. The important point is to develop the habit of meditation. Call this technique

## *Words of Power*

**1) Choose a regular time:** Select a time each day when you can sit undisturbed for 20 minutes. No phones. No interruptions. No unnecessary stimulus from radio or television.

You will probably find that this becomes the busiest time of the day. After a few weeks you will suddenly have any number of things that your mind tells you must be done only during those 20 minutes. Do not give way. Persevere.

**2) Select a spot:** Select a spot in your house or office that you use for your meditation session.

You are creating your own sacred space. Doing so in conscious awareness that this is what you are doing, is part of the process.

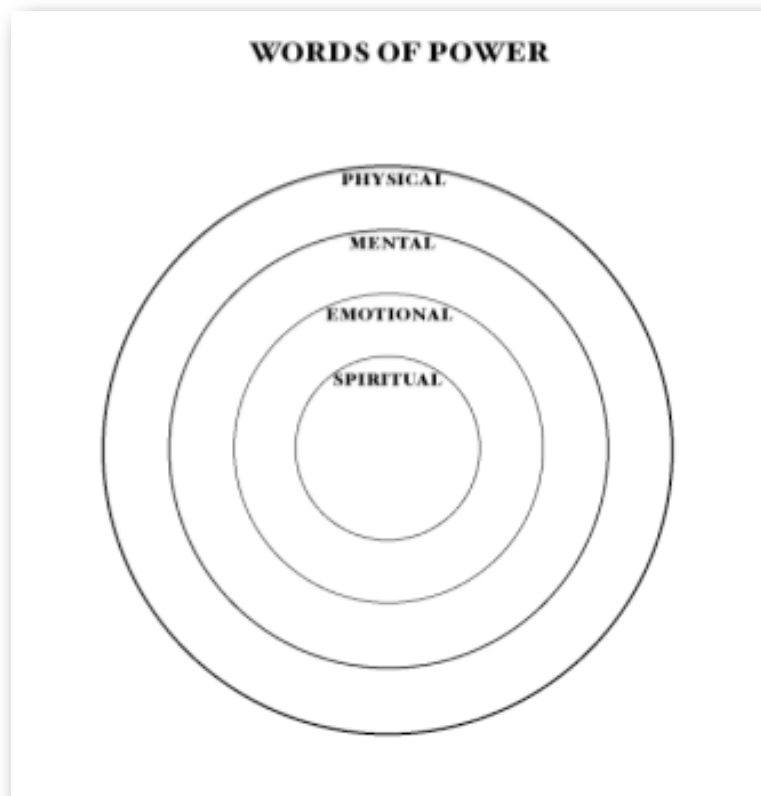
**3) Find a Central Phrase:** There is some phrase or sentence you have heard or read that has deeply impressed you, or with which you resonate or wish to align yourself.

It might be something from the Bible, or a favorite book. Or a verse in a song, or poem. It should be something that has a strong positive association in your mind, whether or not it would make sense to another person.

**4) Keep your phrase a secret:** If you tell others about this they will say your word, share with you their attitude about your choice. When you go to say it they may intrude into your mind. Their pronunciation, their intonation may be what you hear in your mind. By choosing your phrase you empower it as a goal to which you aspire; keep it a secret.

**5) Examine your life:** Consider where you are, and where you aspire to be.

Consider this from the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels. Look for patterns. In considering the physical, let's say you overeat. It has been a life-long problem. This is the negative. The positive is you wish to eat consciously only foods that are good for you and in appropriate amounts.



I have split the emotional and the mental because research suggests, and my own experience confirms, that they are often confused. When people are asked how they feel, they often respond by saying what they think. "How do you feel about what your friend just did?" "I don't think she should have said that to me." That's thinking. "I feel surprised and hurt that she has never told me this before." That's feeling.

**6) Choose four Words of Power:** Reduce those patterns to four words or phrases. Words or phrases that embody all the energy you have invested in these patterns, and your aspirations to make their positive aspects the reality of your life. The image on the preceding page may help. You can write in the Words of Power, the appropriate one for each circle.

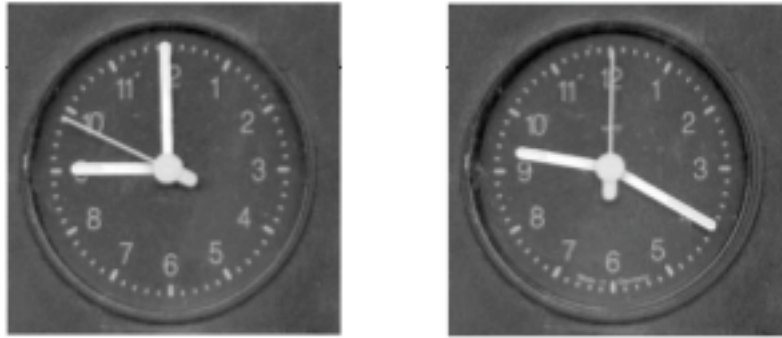
An emotional pattern might be that you feel you allow your partners to disregard your feelings, and then you feel angry. The positive of this might be that you will say what your feelings are, and choose only to be involved with people who will acknowledge them. Your word might be "feelings." Be as honest as you can, and don't tell anyone about it, or you will lie to yourself.

A mental pattern might be your sense that you do not think clearly enough about some task you have set yourself, so your word might be "clarity."

A spiritual pattern might be your sense of separation. A existential sense of alienation. In this case your word might be "oneness." When you have made your Words of Power sheet keep it a secret. For this technique to work you must be absolutely as honest as you can be, and I have found this is hard for most people to do when others know these things about them.

**7) Once a day in your chosen place, at your chosen time, be present to meditate for 20 minutes:** Sit comfortably. Loosen collars, belts, or shoe laces; anything that constricts.

**8) Look at a watch or clock:** Visualize the hands as they will be in 20 minutes:



You will be surprised at how accurate you become, and this time estimating skill will carry over to other aspects of your life. Many meditators regularly give themselves the suggestion to awaken at a certain time, and need no alarm clock.

**9) Say your Central Phrase in your mind:** Repeat it. Repeat it again. Wait. For awhile there will be nothing. Then you will find thoughts bubbling up. If the thoughts pertain to your phrase — whether anyone else would think they did or not does not matter — think them. After awhile you will find your thoughts wandering to matters that do not, in your estimation, have anything to do with your Central Phrase. When this happens, stop. Clear your mind. Take a deep breath. Say your Central Phrase again. Then again. Then stop. There will be nothing for awhile. After a bit thoughts will bubble up. If the thoughts pertain to your Central Phrase, think them. After awhile they will wander to other topics. When that happens repeat the process again.

In the course of a single session you may have to do this several times but, over time, you will find you need to do it less and less often.

Your thoughts may give you great insight into something going on in your life, or about which you are thinking. But it is in the periods of “silence” that the really interesting events in meditation occur. It is here that the transcendent experiences that change people’s lives take place. When these experiences will happen cannot be predicted, but they will happen. What happens has to be experienced to be understood.

**10) Close with your Words of Power:** At the end of your session slowly say in your mind your “physical” word or phrase of power. Pause a moment. Then say your “emotional” word or phrase. Then your



“mental” one and, finally, your spiritual word or phrase. It might help to visualize the words going out like arcs of light, or that you are plugging into a greater whole. Whatever works best, do that.

Over time you will find that one or the other of your words or phrases will go “flat,” as if the energy has gone out of it. Some words and phrases will go flat in weeks, others may take years before they need to be retired. It depends on you and the dance of your life. When this happens examine your life again. You may find that the goal you sought with that word has been attained. The change is usually subtle, and the transformation so gradual you have hardly noticed. But now you are there. When this happens select a new word or phrase in the same way as the earlier one, and begin again. Using this technique you can transform your life.

There will come a time when even your Central Phrase goes “flat.” When this happens consider what has changed. Really come to understand it. Make it part of your conscious life. Then select a new Central Phrase, and begin the process again.



There are a lot of things one might say about what is happening to you physiologically during meditation, but this can be summed up by saying that your brain chemistry changes, your blood chemistry changes, your stress level goes down, your muscles relax, your heart beat slows, your blood pressure decreases, and your sense of well-being increases. *Not bad for 20 minutes.*

Meditation gives you the ability to focus. Its reward is a kind of mental coherence that is hard to achieve in other ways, and it is this coherence that seems to bestow **spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health on longtime meditators**. If you will commit to a daily practice for just 90 days, I believe you will find good reasons for continuing.

**Learn The Scientific Evidence, From Stephan Schwartz That Will Allow You To Function In The New Reality Of The World. [CLICK HERE.](#)**

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