

WAKEUP TO LIFE: WELLNESS ACROSS A LIFESPAN

By

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The purpose of this study is to examine an academic course created for students at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. The intention of this course is to explore how students are receptive to different components of this program and what tool or tools have been beneficial for stress reduction.

The course is called Introduction to Relaxation, Meditation, and Wellness, and it consists of three parts: 1) Stress-reduction movements, such as yoga and various poses or postures and breath work; 2) Meditation and mindfulness; 3) self-motivational techniques, group support, and exercises aimed to modify habits and behavior that inhibit one's maximum potential and vitality.

Yoga postures such as chest expansion, triangle, balance, cobra, and sun salutation, are some of the asana or postures used to remove tension throughout the spine, strengthen muscles, and increase blood supply. Along with yoga postures, some breathing techniques such as shoulder raise, alternate nostril breathing, ujjaya, and diaphragmatic breathing were used for the purpose of stress reduction. Stress reduction occurs because of lung capacity expansion and increased oxygen uptake.

Meditation was based on the teaching of Zen meditation, which stems from Buddhism. There were various mindfulness exercises that were aimed at bringing one's focus to the present moment.

The self-motivational techniques consisted of exercises that could allow us to examine our conditioned mind, self worth, our inner negative voice, self resentment, and above all, what cultivates our inner growth that could lead us to a self-contentment in life.

The weekly journaling with different sentence stems was a way for one to become open to himself/herself.

The result and outcome of this study were obtained through questionnaires given to the students at the end of the program, to see their receptiveness to different tools or techniques. The questionnaires showed that 89% of students found the breathing technique a great tool to remove anxiety. Breath work combined with imaging visualization received 62.5% approval, while 85% of the students favored meditation. 79% found journaling to be a form of meditation and opening up. A total of 75% of the students favored yoga and the autogenic techniques, which is a relaxation exercise based on relaxation of muscles and the dilation of blood vessels. As for awareness exercises, the leading the blind exercise received a favorable response from 80% of the students, while the observing a raisin exercise got no comment from anyone. "Tell me who you are" exercise received a favorable response from 10% of the students.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all beings who are striving for a better and healthier life.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This study is based on an academic program created for students at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. The purpose of this study is to see how each individual responds to stress-reduction techniques and what the most effective tools for stress management are.

During the first session, students were asked to introduce themselves and state the reason for taking this course. Eight out of ten students had stress and anxiety problem due to studies, job, money and other demands. Only few commented that they needed to take the course for extra credit. The average age range of the students was between 20-25 with few exceptions who were in their thirties and forties. The subjects weren't under any controlled study such as gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic or other issues, but the purpose was how the techniques impacted each individual and how the stress level was changed before and after taking the course.

The program lasted for eight weeks. It met twice a week and each session met for an hour. The outcome has been studied by giving questionnaires to the students at the end of the course. 50% of students wanted a longer period for the course. They thought it should be extended to one semester with a longer hour. I could agree with the suggestion since meditation, and motivational techniques could require a longer time in order for one to be spontaneous and feel comfortable with the exercise.

Statement of the problem:

Hans Selye defined "stress as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it, that means good things such as a job promotion or bad things such as the

death of a loved one both are experienced the same physiologically”, (Greenberg, 1987, p.5).

One of Seyle follower, A.T. W. Simeons who related evolution to psychosomatic disorder stated that when our self-esteem is threatened, the brain prepares the body with fight or flight response. If the threat to self-esteem comes from fear of embarrassment during public speaking, neither fighting nor running away are appropriate reactions. Consequently the body has prepared itself physiologically to do something our psychology prohibits. The unused stress products break down the body, and psychosomatic disease may result.

Other researchers clarified the effect of stress on various physical problem; Stewart Wolf demonstrated its effect on digestive function; Lawrence LeShan studied the effect of stress on the development of cancer; Engel studied the effect on ulcerative colitis; Meyer Friedman, and Ray Rosenman identified the relationship between stress and heart disease; and Wolf studied stress and headaches (Greenberg, 1987). Carl Simonton believing cancer as a stress- related illness. He added a component to cancer therapy which is visualizing the beneficial effects of the therapy upon the malignancy. For headache, Budzynski successfully applied biofeedback for treatment; Benson a Cardiologist studied TM (transcendental meditation) for stress reduction. He and Robert Wallace developed a relaxation technique similar to TM and used it effectively to treat patients with high blood pressure (Greenberg, 1987). Autogenic training was another effective method for relaxation. In 1900, a physiologist by the name Oskar Vogt noted that people were able to hypnotize themselves. A German psychiatrist, Johannes Schultz,

combined this knowledge and with specific exercises to bring heaviness and warmth in the limbs that is a state of relaxation.

Yoga, Meditation and Breath work are some other techniques for stress reduction.

Meditation, as Swami Rama stated is a specific technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state (swami Rama, 1992, p.1). It is also defined as the experience of the mind, when

cognitive function becomes quiet, when association with the past and future fall away and you become fully conscious in expanded awareness of the present moment (Selby, 2003 p. 44). One of the main reasons to meditate is to learn how to tap your deeper wisdom.

When your thinking mind becomes quiet long enough, you can hear what your heart has to tell you. “Very often, in the middle of this blessed quiescence, there will emerge a new quality of thought-certain insights, or deep mental reflections of your intuitive mind”.

“As you hold your focus on your heart, you’ll begin to hear your heart talking and find yourself listening to an inner voice emerging not from your usual thinking center, but rather from some deeper mystic source (Selby, 2003 p.70).

Meditation also has an important influence on health especially on psychosomatic diseases that originate from mind or emotion. It makes people more self reliant and helps them to attain the inner strength to deal with life’s problem more effectively (Swami Rama, 1992).

Yoga: the objective of Hatha( physical ) Yoga are twofold, (one), to cultivate the natural beauty of the body and attain a high state of health,(two), to awaken a great power that lies dormant in the organism to be utilized for developing one’s individual potential that could lead to self realization (Hittleman, 2003).

There is more to Hatha Yoga than physical fitness, it stimulate endocrine secretions which are the major component in the manufacturing of emotions. It will uplift your mind as well as your emotions (Purna, 1998).

Breath work: Conscious breath is at the center of mind/body integration. When mind is agitated, your breathing is disturbed, when your mind is serene, your breathing is calm (Chopra, 2001).

### **Content of the program:**

The course is made up of 16 sessions, meeting twice a week for eight weeks. Each session consists of a lecture about a specific topic, discussion, and related practices and exercises. The course includes in-class and out-of-class assignments along with journaling. Each topic might require one or two sessions to complete.

The following topics are discussed in the class:

- Breath
- Yoga
- Zen meditation based on the book *Still Point*
- Various methods of meditations and mindfulness including awareness techniques
- Journaling based on a new sentence stem each week
- Autogenic relaxation techniques
- Psychology of inner growth

The program consists of three parts: 1) Stress-reduction exercises based on yoga techniques, breath work, and various stress-reduction movements. 2) Meditation and

mindfulness, which enhance the students' awareness of themselves and their environment. This is a way of being in relationship to the present moment, to oneself, and one's experiences. 3) A support group, and a number of self-help, motivational techniques and exercises that will modify the habits and behavior inhibiting one's maximum potential and vitality.

The program began with breathing techniques. There have been a number of studies that found the correct breathing increases the oxygen level uptake that leads to quick stress release (Anatomy of breathing; Holisticonline.com, 2007). Breathing expands the lungs during inhalation and reduces the volume during exhalation. Some of the breath work techniques that were practiced in the class were as follows: Diaphragmatic breathing, energizing breath, relaxing breath, or alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana), and the soothing breath (ujaya) (Chopra, 2001 p. 110 -111). Most breathing exercises create a chance to become intimate and one with breath. They also bring about lung expansion during inhalation and relaxation during exhalation. Other breath work techniques practiced in the class were complete breath standing and shoulder raise breathing (Hittleman, 1983 p.46-47).

In yoga, there are various movements that release the stress accumulated in different parts of the body. As an example, asanas such as Chest Expansion increases lung capacity, firms the chest, and refreshes the brain with an increased blood supply. The Triangle firms the sides and the Cobra provides immediate relief from tension, firms and strengthens the arms and lower back, and promotes flexibility through an intensive convex stretch. The Back Stretch relieves tension throughout the body, and strengthens the back and spine; and the Balance Posture promotes balance and relieves tension in the

back and shoulders (Hittleman, 1983 p. 6-9, 22-25, 28-29). Sun Salutations are gentle flowing movements synchronized with breathing (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta center, 1996). Refer to Appendix B.

In meditation and mindfulness we focused on three parts: The sitting posture, mental attitude, and doing the practice consistently. The purpose of sitting meditation is to quiet the mind. As Daido Looi comments in his book *The Still Point* (Looi, 1996), we are constantly busy with internal dialogue, and as a result we lose the opportunity to be present in the moment. He describes a technique in his book for how to tame the mind. The correct posture is very important, since it allows for natural and effortless breathing. Breath and mind have a direct impact on each other. When breath is calm the mind gets calm, and vice-versa. Being consistent in practice is very important; doing it daily even for 10 minutes is more important than doing the practice for one hour every now and then. Consistency in practice deepens our zazen; it develops a pattern of becoming more still that leads to settling of mind.

For the power of Self-Motivation and group support exercise, we begin with some of the essential needs for contentment and happiness and how some major strengths and factors such as, relationships, new learning, creativity, and positive vision, play a significant role in one's life. If human needs are compared to the needs of a healthy plant that requires water, fertilizer, pesticide, a stress free environment, optimum temperature, and light, then, it is important to find out what the essential elements for humans' happiness are. We drill on these essential needs through lectures, discussion, exercises, journaling, and group sharing.

According to the holistic approach there is a need to view humans as a whole: an integration of mind, body, and spirit (Chopra, 2001). The course is based on this concept, with the possibility that it could result in self-awareness and the ability for students to see and utilize their maximum potential.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The finding of this study can't be universally applied. Variables such as socio-economic impact, geographical variation, cultural and ethnic differences were not considered as part of the study. The study was based on the response of each individual to different stress reduction techniques. The accuracy of each response to the questionnaire would be a factor which falls within the limitation. . Factors such as previous exposure of students to the stress relief exercises, the willingness of the individuals to relieve stress, the impact of grades on questionnaire response (e.g. trying to achieve a better grade), are considered as a limitation. Also age and health factors as well as financial status weren't explored. Other stressors such as test anxiety could influence the result and further a limitation of this study. Finally, the questionnaire itself poses a limitation by selecting certain questions and eliminating inquiries which could lead to more objectivity.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This program has different components, and each component has been studied and researched by many scholars, resulting in scientific data.

#### **Breathing Techniques**

Breathing is important for two reasons. It supplies our body and various organs with oxygen, which is vital for survival. The second function is to get rid of toxins and waste products from the body. Scientists have discovered that the chemical basis of energy production in the body is a chemical called Adenosine Triphosphate. (ATP), and that oxygen is critical for production of ATP (Anatomy of Breathing, holistic.com, 2007).

According to Anatomy of Breathing, deep breathing produces the following benefits: It improves the quality of the blood due to increased oxygenation in the lungs and elimination of toxin from the system. Because of increased oxygenation, the health of the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and nerve cells improves. As a result, the health of the whole body improves, since the nervous system communicates with all parts of the body. On the other hand, improper breathing produces diminished mental ability. It is also true that mental tension produces restricted breathing. Certain body postures, such as leaning forward, drawing the arms together, or bending the head down, reduce lung capacity. Intense concentration leads to muscle tension in the arms, neck, chest, and thorax and causes restriction in inhalation and exhalation that results in short breathing. Quick shallow breathing produces oxygen starvation, reduced vitality, and premature aging. According to the Royal Society of Medicine, shallow breathing can

cause fatigue, sleep disorders, anxiety, stomach upsets, heartburn, gas, muscle cramps, dizziness, visual problems, chest pain and heart palpitations (Herrick, 2000).

Slow deep rhythmic breathing causes a reflex stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system, which results in a reduction of the heart rate and relaxation of the muscles. These changes result in relaxation of the mind, since body and mind are very interdependent (importance of breathing, info @holisticonline.com, 2007).

## **Yoga**

“Yoga can be traced back approximately 4000 years to the Indus River Valley in southeast Asia. It has evolved over centuries and includes both non-sectarian philosophy and well articulated health practices” (Herrick, 2000). Yoga consists of postures, breathing practices, and progressive steps in concentration and meditation. Yoga can benefit structural, physiological, psycho-emotional, and spiritual levels. In the West, postures (asanas) and breath work (pranayama) are the main focus of yoga practice. In yoga, the basic breathing pattern is deep, rhythmic, and diaphragmatic. Herrick (2000) mentions a medical journal article that reported the benefit of yoga practice for conditions such as asthma, hypertension, carpal tunnel syndrome, and arthritis. Further, a number of research studies have shown that with the practice of yoga people can learn to control blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory function, metabolic rate, skin resistance, brain waves, body temperature and much other bodily function. Yoga can be used to manage pain and emotional stress and can be approached as a therapeutic strategy.

### Synthesis of Yoga

Over the centuries, four different paths of yoga, (Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja) were developed. They are linked to four branches of a banyan tree, which puts down

roots from the branches. A synthesis of the four main paths is recommended, since one path could lead to an imbalance in the personality.

It is best to have one basic sadhana (spiritual practice), but to draw from the techniques of others as well (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, 1996).

#### Active path—Karma Yoga

This is a selfless service by which the mind is most quickly purified. Through this path one works hard both physically and mentally. He/she seeks to eliminate the ego and its attachment, serves humanity without expecting reward, and sees unity in diversity. This enables a yogi to tune to the one underlying divine essence that dwells within all beings.

Karma Yoga is suitable for people with temperament. It involves working in the world and giving of oneself, but working on a spiritual level (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, 1996).

#### Philosophical path—Jana Yoga

This philosophical or intellectual approach to spiritual evolution describes the world as an illusion. Using the two powerful intellectual techniques of viveka (discrimination) and vairagya (dispassion), the veils of illusion, or maya, are lifted. Jana Yoga is regarded as the most difficult of the four paths of yoga. This path demands a sharp mind and unclouded intellect.

#### Devotional path—Bhakti Yoga

This path appeals to those who are emotional by nature. Since emotion cannot be endlessly repressed, this path teaches techniques for their sublimation. Through various practices such as chanting, prayer, and the repetition of mantras (sacred formulae),

emotional energy is channeled into devotion, turning anger, hatred, and jealousy in a positive direction. Emotional love is changed into pure divine love.

### Scientific Path—Raja Yoga

Each individual possesses vast mental and psychic resources that lie virtually untapped below the surface of the conscious mind. To release this potential, Raja Yoga prescribes a psychological approach, based on a practical system of concentration and control of the mind. Right conduct, a healthy body and steady posture, breath regulation, and withdrawal of these senses are recommended. The superstructure of concentration and meditation can succeed only if this foundation is firm. Hata Yoga is a form of Raja Yoga that emphasizes asanas (postures) and pranayama (breath control).

### The eight steps of Raja Yoga

1-Yama (abstentions): Truth, nonviolence, control of sexual energy, no stealing, no covetousness.

2- Niyamas (observances): Austerities, purity, contentment, study, surrender of the ego.

3- Asanas: steady poses.

4- Pranayama: Control of vital energy.

5-Pratyahara: Withdrawals of the senses.

6- Dharana: Concentration of the mind.

7- Dhyana—Meditation.

8- Samadhi—The super conscious state.

### The Three Bodies

Most people question whether the body has a soul. The yogi says definitely,

“I am a soul that has taken a body.” Yoga philosophy sees the body as a vehicle for the soul in its journey toward enlightenment. The body is not considered as one type, but as three bodies.

1. The physical body, or food sheath, is born, grows, changes, decays, and then dies, the components returning to the earth and the food cycle. The food sheath is referred to when a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies (Bhagavad-Gita)

2. Every living being has an astral body. This is connected to the physical body by a subtle thread through which vital current passes. When this cord is cut, the astral body departs and the body dies. The astral body is composed of three layers. The first, a pranic sheath similar to the food sheath in form but more subtle, is made up of 72,000 astral tubes through which prana or vital energy flows. The second is a mental sheath, comprising automatic mind with instinctive and subconscious regions. This is the center of automatic daily function that is bombarded by input from the five senses. The third is the intellectual sheath, which controls and guides the automatic mind. Discrimination and decision making take place here.

3. The casual body is called “Karana sharira” in Sanskrit. The casual body is also known as the seed that contains within itself an exact blueprint of the plant it will produce. It will control the formation and growth of the other two bodies and determine every aspect of the next birth. At the time of death, both the casual and astral bodies, which remain together, separate from the physical body. The casual body is called the bliss sheath; it has only one layer, the anandamaya kosha or bliss sheath, in which the experience of happiness and joy resides (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, 1996).

## The Chakras

Chakras are the areas in the pranic sheath of the astral body where many nadis or astral nerves come together. Each chakra is associated with a sound and color.

1. Muladhara Chakra- the lowest chakra is located at the base of the spine. It is the resting place of dormant kundalini or spiritual potential. The mantra sound for this chakra is Lam, and the associated color is red. This chakra regulates the kidneys and adrenal glands. It determines vitality, stamina, and the ability to cope with the environment.

2. Swadhishtana Chakra—the second chakra is situated in the genital area. The mantra sound is Vam, and the associated color is orange. This chakra regulates the sexual and reproductive organs. It determines sexual energy and creative power.

3. Manipula chakra—the third chakra is located at the navel, which corresponds to the solar plexus in the physical body. The mantra sound is Ram, and the associated color is yellow. This chakra regulates the spleen, pancreas, liver, and stomach. It determines will power and determination.

4. Anahata Chakra—the fourth chakra is located at the heart center and is a focal point for meditation. It generates pure qualities, such as cosmic love. The mantra sound is Yam, and the associated color is green. This chakra regulates the thymus gland and circulatory system.

5. Vishuddha Chakra—the fifth energy center is in the astral body and is located at a point corresponding to the base of the throat. The mantra sound is Ham, and the associated color is blue. This chakra regulates thyroid and respiratory systems. It determines self-expression and left-brain activity.

6. Ajna Chakra—the sixth chakra is located in the middle of the forehead, and is often called the third eye. The mantra for this chakra is Ohm, and the associated color is purple. It regulates the parathyroid glands. It determines insight and right-brain activity.

7. Sahasrara Chakra or Crown chakra—the seventh, and highest chakra, symbolizing the infinite, located on top of the head. The mantra sound is So Ham, and the associated color is white. It regulates the pineal gland and located in the crown.

These centers are carrying the prana or vital energy and breathing exercises help to balance the energies (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, 1996).

### Prana or Life Force

Prana is the subtle element that sustains life in all living organisms and is the source of a steady and abundant supply of life force. If the supply is inadequate, irregular, or unbalanced, it could lead to physical, emotional, and mental disorder.

Air and food are the main sources of prana. Through a yoga program of eating for maximum nutritional value, yoga practitioners believe it is possible to reverse some of physical ailments such as asthma, hypertension, migraine headache, carper tunnel, high blood pressure, and arthritis by activating the life force that is currently present but repressed, within an organism. They do this by increasing the supply of life force from external sources (air and food) and eliminating or minimizing activities that inhibit or reduce the life force. In yoga's view of nutrition, the most desirable foods are fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and certain grains. They have a high quality life force. Foods that are processed, refined, canned, preserved, boiled, frozen, smoked, aged, colored, fumigated, bleached, emulsified, or thickened, are greatly reduced in nutritional value and life force.

The increased prana derived from Hata Yoga and healthy nutrition can elevate consciousness and direct it toward mindfulness meditation.

### Principles of What We Are Not

The basic premise of yoga philosophy is that we see ourselves as something other than what we really are. It is like looking at ourselves in a distorted mirror, such as the kind you find in an amusement park. It is this distortion that we accept in our daily lives; we accept it as real and accept the false as true (Hittleman, 1983). Anxieties, frustrations, fear, and a sense of self-dissatisfaction are the consequences of putting the false in place of the truth.

We should be clear about what reality or truth means. What is born and dies is subject to continual change between birth and death. These transient changes look like a mirage and vanish. In yoga what constantly changes and vanishes is in contrast with that which is eternal, never changes, and is beyond duality and quality. The fact that the body's senses, (nervous system, brain, and so forth) perform their various functions and interpret experiences such as pain, hunger, and gratification, does not mean that the body that dies is the true reality. The conditions and qualities that create pain and desire are impermanent, and the mind that we depend on, put our trust in, and that is reinforced by other people with whom we come into contact, is not the source of happiness and gratification.

This elusive mind, together with emotions, creates the ego. The ego is the illusion that gives rise to the individual self. The shadow of the ego is superimposed upon self and obscures it, as the tip of your finger, if held in the right position, can obscure the immensity of the sun. By removing impediments the true self emerges. The practice of

yoga is intended to remove the superimposed ego and dissolve it in the Self, as a wave that is formed from the ocean, but is never apart from it, has a momentary identity as a wave and then merges with and dissolves into the ocean. (Hittleman, 1983). It is necessary to state that there is nothing apart from self, like the rays of the sun that are not separate from the sun.

### The World within the Mind

In yoga scriptures it is explained that the word “Self” is used to indicate that the Absolute we are attempting to describe is self-luminous. It shines by its own light that has no beginning and no end. When it is manifested, one experiences an unqualified joy and direct (not relative) Knowledge.

We must distinguish between relative knowledge (small k) and Knowing. The mind knows only about relative, learned knowledge. It never completely encompasses something and knows its nature because it does not merge with anything. Its function is to analyze, distinguish, examine investigate, evaluate. To function in this order, it requires a subject-object relationship with everything that is perceived. In order to grasp the essence of something, it is necessary to merge. The mind and the senses can inform you of the shape, odor, color, texture of an apple. To know the essence or the true nature of the apple, one must become the apple. In becoming the apple, the subject-object condition is dissolved. Terminating the subject-object duality can be achieved through meditation (Hittleman, 1983).

The mind’s nature is to flow outward and examine what is external. What the mind appears not to know is endless because it continuously projects an infinite universe. The mind would have you believe that you perceive an external universe, an entity

absolutely real and apart from you. Each time the mind solves a problem, it is certain to fabricate a multitude of additional problems. The mind convinces you that your problems are external to yourself and that it serves you as a faithful servant by instructing you in the way to solve your problems.

Here, our objective is not to permanently suppress thoughts or eliminate the process of thinking. Recognizing that thoughts are necessary to assist us in performing what we perceive as our duties in life but they are not our Reality. The method for achieving self-realization, involves, eliminating, achieving, and dissolving the ego. The ego (the mind and emotions) obscures one's recognition of true Self. When one is released from hypnosis of mind and the infinite illusions it projects, one does not need to search for Self. It emerges the moment the mind is stopped and recognizes that the movements of the world have, all along, been superimposed upon it. Stopping the movements of the mind is a basic objective of yoga practices. Patanjali, a great guru who lived in India several thousand years ago and who is credited with synthesizing yogic practices into an eight-step structure, stated, Stop the movements of the mind and you will experience Yoga (Realization). The practice of Hatha Yoga is a great aid in this process. The mind is connected to the energies of the body, and as these energies are quieted and then redirected, the mind is restrained and can also be redirected from its outward projections to an inward investigation. This is why it is highly effective to practice meditation immediately following your Hatha sessions (Hittleman, 1983) Hatha prepares you for productive meditation by effecting a profound quieting of the mind and senses. This quieting and redirecting of the mind is the primary objective of Hatha Yoga. The high level of health and fitness that result from the practice are actually by-products.

### Reincarnation: The Consciousness of Desire

Karma is defined as cause and effect; every action has a reaction and each thought has an effect. A person's experiences are the results of actions that he or she has performed. When one has a good experience, it might be considered as good karma. The superficial interpretation is "as you sow, so shall you reap." In classical term, a good karma manifests as a force that guide the seeker in to those auspicious situations that expose or instruct him toward Self-Realization. As an example, a person born into a spiritual family is considered to have good karma. Bad karma is defined by experiences of adversity in a person's worldly life, but the more significant point is that a person with negative karma will obstruct his or her path to Self-Realization. It will be very difficult for the person to overcome ignorance and shake off the bonds that tie him or her to the ego.

If one's success, wealth, or lofty position does not result in his awakening, it is of small value. On the other hand, if a person who goes through a difficult life, characterized as having bad karma because of these difficulties, is led to search for the cause of his adversities and this search causes him to turn inward, the difficulties could result in his awakening.

Karma also defines reincarnation, since each action at sometime manifests an effect. If the physical body does not live long enough to experience the results of these actions, it is believed that the results will manifest through reincarnation. A new body is born in which desires and actions can continue endlessly, and that is why one is not aware of where desires come from and why one is reaping the results.

"There are three types of karma:"

1. That which is carried over from previous incarnations and is discharged during this incarnation
2. That which is carried over from a previous incarnation
3. That which is generated in this incarnation and together with the second type, is carried into future incarnations.

This infinite cycle of births and deaths can only be terminated by recognizing the Self, which automatically annihilates the ego (Hittleman, 1983, p. 177). When one performs actions not to achieve results, there is no cause and effect. When the ego's law of cause and effect is overturned, karma is terminated.

#### Meditation from the Yoga Philosophy Viewpoint

Meditation is essential in order to dissolve the ego. Meditation is not self-hypnosis, extra-sensory perception, occult powers, or a trip. It is not introspection in the sense of self-analysis. It is not prayer. It is the simple act of sitting quietly. The initial objective of meditation is to control the wilderness of the mind. When we begin to quiet the mind and reduce the frequency of thoughts, there is a possibility of seeing beyond the mind.

When a pool of water is disturbed by vibrations, one cannot see beyond the surface. But once these vibrations have ceased, our view of the bottom is clear. The vibrations caused by thoughts obscure the view of Reality that is our essence. To see the Reality of this nature, one's mind must be quiet. But the mind is like a wild horse that has run free for its entire life and resists all attempts to be restrained. The restraint must be gentle, methodical, and persistent. The mind should be introduced to a focal point which will be non-threatening. Gradually the mind begins to quiet, and when the thoughts

subside, the individual self and the ego begin to merge with Reality. There are various types of meditation techniques, and one should choose the one that proves to be both interesting and effective. It is suggested that one should start with Hatha Yoga practice and breath observation, followed by meditation, on a daily basis. One should resist the temptation of skipping meditation even for a day. It is said by practicing meditation, one shines light on the shadow of the ego. A shadow cannot withstand light, and as the intensity of light increases through meditation practice, the ego's reality fades accordingly.

The following methods are used for meditation practice: Observation of the breath and the use of yantras.

A yantra is a geometrical symbol: a circle with a dot at the center. It is used as a tool to facilitate one-pointed concentration. A yantra can be drawn on a piece of white paper or white cardboard.

1. Place yantra at a distance easily seen;
2. Sit in one of the lotus postures;
3. Observe your breathing for two minutes
4. Gaze on the yantra steadily for two minutes after observing your breath.

Each time a thought intrudes, patiently dismiss it. This can be practiced throughout one's lifetime, and unless one practices to achieve control, thoughts will maintain their complete domination of one's existence. Following the two-minute period, close your eyes and visualize the yantra for three minutes. This visualization quiets the mood and rationalizes the subtle body.

### Meditation on OM

As yantra results in heightened awareness through visual concentration, a mantra produces this state through audio vibration, in this case repetition of the supreme mantra OM. A mantra maybe introduced inwardly, that is, without sound that is externally audible.

Inhale slowly and exhale deeply. Divide exhalation into two halves. During the first half, intone the word “Oh” with force and energy in the sound. When you reach the second half, close your lips and pronounce the letter M: Mmmmmmmmm.

### Candle

1. Sit in a lotus posture
2. Place a lighted candle three feet from your mat
3. Gaze steadily upon the flame for two minutes
4. Following the two minutes, close your eyes and retain the image of the flame.

After you are proficient in retaining the image, slowly bring the flame forward until you merge with it. At this point there is no subject or object as a flame.

### Alternate nostril breathing

Sit in a lotus position and breathe through one nostril; count to eight for the inhalation, pause for four counts, and exhale for eight counts. Then alternate by inhaling through the nostril that was used to exhale and exhaling from the nostril that was used to inhale. This technique is used to soothe and relax the mind without the need for tranquilizers.

### Other thoughts on the way of meditation

According to Swami Rama the word meditation is used in a variety of ways. Some people mistakenly use the word to mean thinking or contemplation; others use it to refer to daydreaming or fantasizing. However, meditation is not any of these; it is a specific technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state (Swami Rama, 1998). In meditation you are fully awake and alert, but your mind is not focused on the external world or events taking place around you. The greatest difficulty is that the mind has never been trained to create this inner attention.

In every society people are educated in the skills needed to survive and function in their culture: how to talk, think, work, and investigate. But no one in any school or college taught us how to understand or attend to our own inner dimension. We merely learn to assimilate the goals and values of our society without knowing ourselves first, within or without. This leaves us ignorant of ourselves and dependent on the advice and suggestions of others. Meditation is a simple technique of learning how to pay attention and to understand the various levels, (the body, the breath, and the mind). As time progresses you might experience increased joyfulness, clarity, and awareness as much as you enjoy the relief you experience from releasing the physical, nervous, and mental symptoms of stress. It relaxes muscular tension and the autonomic nervous system. A person of meditation attains a tranquil mind and helps the immune system by limiting its reaction to stress and strain. Meditation decreases one's needs for sleep and energizes the body and mind. It also enhances one's innate talent and creativity in daily life.

The root of the word meditation implies the sense of “attending to” or paying attention to dimensions of yourself that are seldom known, your own deepest, innermost levels. These deeper levels are more profound than the processes of thinking, analyzing, or experiencing emotions or memories. Thus, in meditation we let go of the many mental distractions. By this process we cannot make the mind empty, but allowing the mind to focus on one subtle element or object leads the attention inward. A sound or image could be used to concentrate the mind in meditation, such as a mantra, which could be a word, a phrase, a set of sounds, or a syllable. Some universal mantras, such as OM, Amen, or Shalom, help the mind to focus and let go of distracting mental processes.

Very little of the mind is cultivated by our formal educational system. The parts of the mind that dreams and sleeps—the vast realm of the unconscious, which is the reservoir of all our experiences—remain unknown and undisciplined; it is not subject to any control. There is no other method to truly develop control over the totality of the mind except the practice of meditation.

#### What meditation is not

Meditating is not contemplation or thinking. Contemplation on inspiring concepts such as truth, peace, and love, can be helpful, but it is different than the process of meditation. In contemplation, you engage your mind in an inquiry into a concept, and ask the mind to consider the value or meaning of certain ideas. In meditation, one does not ask the mind to think of any concept, but rather goes beyond this level of mental activity. Meditation is not hypnosis either. In hypnosis, a suggestion is made to the mind, either by another person or by you. It is a way to program, manipulate, or control the content of the mind, to make the mind believe something helpful or make it think in a particular way.

Though the power of suggestion is powerful and can have therapeutic effects, it is important not to confuse it with meditation. The sages say meditation is the opposite of hypnosis; it is a state of clarity and freedom from suggestion or outside influence (Swami Rama, 1998).

In order to meditate one needs to be watchful of the following factors

- How to relax the body
- How to sit in a comfortable, steady position for meditation
- How to make your breathing process serene
- How to calmly witness the objects traveling in the train of your mind
- How to inspect the quality of your thoughts and learn to promote those that are positive and helpful to your growth
- How to remain centered and undisturbed in any situation, whether you judge it to be bad or good

### **Meditation Approaches from the World's Greatest Masters**

Krishnamurti states: To attain peace of mind and clarity of vision, we must learn to master our own minds and turn in to our inner center, beyond our cultural and religious beliefs (Selby, 2003). According to John Selby, author of *Seven Masters, One Path* (2003), “All true spiritual teachers lead their students toward the same realization and experiences” (p.12). He further comments that the seven masters he selected in his books are remarkable world teachers as well as people who touched his soul with their teaching and insight. Those teachers are: Patanjali, Lao Tzu, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Gurdjieff, and Krishnamurti.

Patanjali was a sage who was born before Christ and after Buddha, but the date and year is not known. He wrote detailed instruction on the art of meditation in his “Yoga Sutra.” The center of Patanjali’s teaching is awareness of the breath. One’s own awareness of breath is central to all meditation and specific breathing techniques can alter consciousness in quite specific spiritual directions (Selby, 2003).

Lao Tzu was born in southern China, about 2500 years ago, about one hundred years or so before Buddha was born. He was a Taoist teacher and author of the widely read spiritual text, *Tao Te Ching*. Tao meditation is simply to quiet the flow of thoughts through the mind so as to become conscious of the deeper “whole” nature of life (Selby, 2003).

Zen was born from Taoism and Taoist breath meditation, with new scientific insights for quieting the flow of thoughts and experiencing the core of meditation’s power and beauty.

Buddha was born about hundred years after Lao Tzu, around 500 B.C. His key to meditation was that when we refuse to accept the reality of the present moment unequivocally, we create ongoing inner trauma and keep ourselves separate from our Buddha nature. If you let go of all judgments and ideas, accept yourself and everybody and everything around you, and surrender to the present moment, you begin to look at the reality emerging in each moment. We observe beliefs and attitudes by consciously identifying them and disengage from them step-by-step, so as to attain harmony with reality and enter into more clarity and bliss (Selby, 2003). Through total acceptance of the truth of who we really are, we can approach and even attain liberation from suffering.

Buddha was perhaps the greatest psychologist of all time. He observed the functioning of the human mind (his own), and saw to the utter depths. He saw how the mind works in its usual conditioned and mostly unconscious mode and how it can be trained to awake itself to its true nature. He said his teaching is compared to a raft which is for crossing over and not for getting hold of and carrying on one's back (Rahula, 1974). Further, his teaching is through knowledge or wisdom and not believing through faith. The teaching invites you to come and see but not to come and believe. "According to the Buddha, man's emancipation depends on his own realization of Truth and not on the benevolent grace of a god or any external power as a reward for his obedient good behavior" (Rahula, 1974 p. 2).

Jesus' teachings essentially agreed with Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Patanjali, that being in touch with the inner breath of God is an essential aspect of the spiritual path, that peace of mind and inner quiet are essential practices to nurture, that we must stop judging and accept God's creation just as it is, and that love is the center of all spiritual life. The following phrases are quotes from the Bible regarding the teaching of Jesus (Selby, 2003):

- God is love
- Fear not
- Be still
- Know the truth
- Love your neighbor as you love yourself
- Love one another as I have loved you

Love from a spiritual viewpoint is an underlying power that is an infinite creative force that continually manifests physical reality. The Taoist understood this situation quite clearly. The name that can be named is not the Eternal Name and the unnamable is the originator of all. It is the mystery of mysteries that is the gate of all wonderful essence. How do we pass through this gate? Jesus said, “Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find, “knock and the door will be opened.” When one pauses and tunes into his/her heart and opens up to love, love comes flowing into that person’s heart. Buddha, likewise, taught that compassion is central to meditation. The difference between Buddhism and Taoism on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other is that Buddhism and Taoism are non-theist and do not speak of God.

Mohammed, who lived in the sixth century A.D., brought the great gift of Islamic culture and the belief in one spiritual power. Mohammed taught that this power is ultimately loving and forgiving and sees human beings as basically good and harmonious. A primary root of the word Islam is Peace and Surrender. Islam is surrendering one’s whole being to Allah, allowing God’s love to heal conflicts, disappointments, and confusions of the mind and emotions. The process of fully surrendering to God (by any name) will open one’s heart to receive a healing touch, guidance, and infinite love in one’s life. Such surrender and opening up to receive, takes one to the core of spiritual awakening, and by that, one’s negative feelings of fear, anxiety, hostility, and judgment are dissolved. The result is an experience of deep emotional healing (Selsby, 2003).

Gurdjieff lived from 1866-1949, from Jewish, Christian, Moslem realm of the Middle East and other mystic tradition movement throughout central Asia, Eastern

Europe and Africa. Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was a Greek-Armenian mystic teacher of sacred dances and meditation whose teaching is referred as “self remembering.” This deep awareness technique makes one more conscious and more fully alive with the present (Selby, 2003).

Krishnamurti’s teachings according to Selby, remind us that our inner meditation journey begins when our minds are quiet and attentive to the present moment. We allow our thoughts to flow and observe them, instead of being identified with them. In such an expanded consciousness our thoughts are often of a mystical nature and can lead to a sudden realization that transforms lives. In the middle of such an inspiration we often enter a stage where words fall away, and we are immersed in the bliss of pure existence in the present moment. Having had a fully expanded meditation experience, we are free to enter into a state of oneness with the Divine.

### **Meditation and the Search for Energy**

The search for energy has played a significant role in scientific development and human civilization. The focus has been mostly projected outward on the physical world. Zen Buddhist practice, for over 2000 years, has revealed a new form of energy other than physical phenomena. This form of energy is interpreted by Zen Buddhist practitioners as the radiance of our fundamental nature, the light of wisdom (The American Journal of Chinese Medicine, 2003). In Zen, fundamental nature means true self, and the ultimate goal is to attain this state, which is called Buddhahood. One can explore this inner energy by transcending the physiological (fifth), mental (sixth), subconscious (seventh), and alaya (eighth) conscious states. (American Journal of Chinese Medicine, 2003). Zen Buddhist practitioners have discovered that inner energy is the resource of health and

vitality; they remain younger and more energetic than normal people do. Zen meditation as an unconventional therapy has proved to have an impact on chronic diseases, infections and even some malignant tumors (The American journal of Chinese Medicine).

### **Meditation and Its Impact on Brain Wave Activity**

Brain research is beginning to produce concrete evidence for something that Buddhist practitioners of meditation have maintained for centuries. Mental discipline and meditative practice can change the working of the brain and allow people to achieve different levels of awareness (Kaufman, 2005). In the past few years researchers at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, working with Tibetan monks, have been able to translate mental activity into the scientific language of high frequency gamma waves and brain waves coordination. The left prefrontal cortex is the area where the brain activity associated with meditation is especially intense (washingtonpost.com). Scientists used to believe that brain cells were fixed early in life and did not change in adulthood. This assumption has been disproved over the past few decades with the help of advances in imaging and other techniques. The new evidence has led to the concept of ongoing brain development and neuroplasticity (Kaufman, 2005).

Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist professor at the University of Wisconsin, conducted an extensive EEG (electroencephalograph) study within the past fifteen years on some Buddhist monks, with a group of volunteer students who were non-meditators as a control group. Both groups were asked to meditate specifically on unconditional compassion. This focus was chosen because it did not require concentration on an object, image, or memories.

The results showed that meditation activated the trained minds of monks differently from the group of volunteers. There was a greater activation of unusually powerful gamma activity and the movement of waves through the brain was far better organized and coordinated than in the students. The monks, who had more years of meditation experience, generated higher levels of gamma waves. In previous studies mental activities such as focus, memory, learning, and consciousness were associated with the kind of enhanced neural coordination found in the monks. The intense gamma activity found in the monks has been connected to higher mental activity and a heightened awareness as well (Kaufman, 2005).

Davidson concludes from the research that meditation not only changes the workings of the brain in the short term, but quite possibly produces permanent change. This theory is based on the fact that the monks had more gamma wave activity than the control group, even before they started meditating (Kaufman, 2005).

### **Meditation in Buddhist Teachings and Western Psychology:**

Our brain has evolved to distort the environment in a manner that helps us survive. The information through various sensory organs that come into the mind is so vast that mind has to simplify and organize these information's into manageable units.

The Buddhist psychologist identify a number of distortions of perceptions, distortions of thought, and distortions of view that work on different level to contribute to the flaws of human understanding (Segall 2003).

Distortions are conceptual constructions. They are virtual tools used in a virtual world. Difficulties arise when we take these tools to be anything more than conceptual

Constructions. We create things out of the flux of phenomena by setting arbitrary boundaries between this and that, between self and other (Segall, 2003). The two other distortions of mind, happiness and suffering, stem from human desire.

#### A Framework for Healing or the Four Noble Truths

The first step in any healing process is overcoming denial and realizing that there are distinct symptoms that need to be addressed.

The first step in the Buddhist process of healing is called the first noble truth. Suffering manifests in many ways: the pursuit of pleasure, the avoidance of pain, the denial of change, the illusion of identity, the projection of beauty, and by ignoring death. These are different aspects of our daily life that limit our ability to have a lasting sense of safety, meaning, or fulfillment. What Buddha taught was to throw back concealing layers and reveal the true nature of self.

The second step of the healing process is to identify the cause of the illness, which is the essence of the second noble truth. There is a deep-seated thorn in our heart, which is the thorn of desire or craving. The agitation of this desire makes us restless. The desire to relieve suffering intensifies the behavior that stems from desire (Segall, 2003).

There are two types of desire: the desire to pursue pleasure and preserve it and the desire to avoid pain or deny it. Aversion or aggression toward what we do not like is part of the primitive instincts of survival. Often both forms of desire lead to a response that Buddhists call clinging, grasping, or attachment. Attachment to the desire to seek pleasure or avoid pain is itself the cause of suffering. Greed, hatred, and delusion are three other factors that cause suffering, and each afflicts various mind states. Ignorance and delusion are not due to a lack of intelligence or capability, but rather, the effect of

distortions of mind. Delusion is seeing the state of impermanence as permanent, seeing no-self as possessing a self, and so forth. Thus the second noble truth is to identify greed, hatred, and delusion as the root causes of suffering.

The third noble truth is about the cessation of suffering by the cessation of desire and ignorance. Buddha discovered that the pathological psychophysical dynamic causing suffering could be healed. He demonstrated this by awakening under the Bodhi tree in Gaya.

It is important to say that this is a practical, not a theoretical accomplishment. The theory points out the nature of the problem, but the practice of the Buddha way leads to transformation of the person.

The fourth and final noble truth is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering, and that is to follow the eight-fold path by acquiring insight and understanding through direct experience. According to Batchelor (1997), the eight-fold path signifies an authentic way of being in the world.

The eight-fold path is as follows:

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

The use of the word “right” in the eight-fold path refers to appropriate responses in each situation. (E.g. a knife can be used for peeling a fruit or as a killing instrument to end someone’s life.) In the eight-fold path the last three principles—right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—refer to meditation.

In Buddhism two types of meditation are recommended: tranquility (Samatha) meditation and insight (Vipasana) meditation

Right effort means moment-to-moment awareness without adding any extra thought, good or bad, to it. Right concentration is bringing attention to one object by not allowing other stimuli to compete for attention. That is called the practice of one-pointedness. It reduces the mind’s tendency to wonder around and lets it calm down. Right effort and right concentration allow the meditation experience a state of tranquility and equanimity. When the mind is calm there is space for development of insight or vipasana.

#### Vipasana Means to See Clearly

In tranquility meditation the practitioner is encouraged to let go of thoughts. With insight meditation, the practitioner is encouraged to be mindful and aware at each moment without any subjective judgement and associative thinking. Mindfulness helps to silence the internal dialogue (Segall, 2003).

Buddhist practice is based on four foundations of mindfulness.

(1) Awareness of the body (e.g. posture, breath); 2) feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral); (3) mind (thoughts emotions, intentions, volitions, and so forth) (4) mental objects (mental phenomena). With this insight we can experience, for example, a physical pain and differentiate it without turning it into emotional suffering. There are parallels

between Buddhist practice and various psychotherapies, such as behavior therapy and cognitive therapy. According to Mikalus (1990) cognitive therapy focuses on the products of the mind, such as thoughts and images. The aim is to change cognitive distortions into more realistic thinking or to change overt behavior, which then produces changes in cognition.

Two significant attempts to integrate Asian and Western psychology are Jack Engler's (1986) developmental model and the transpersonal theory of Ken Wilber's spectrum psychology. Both thinkers exhibit a mastery of traditional psychology combined with spiritual psychology. Engler believes that developing a strong cohesive sense of self is a precondition to disidentifying with the illusion of selfhood. In other words, one has to be somebody before one can be nobody (Engler, 1986). Engler's work is a great contribution to the Eastern-Western approach to human understanding.

Transpersonal psychology was developed in the late 1960s and the thinkers who have made significant contribution in this field are Ken Wilber, Roger Walsh, Frances Vaughan, Stan Grof, and Charlz Tart.

Transpersonal psychology focuses on altered states of consciousness and the state of wellbeing that results from them. Wilber's spectrum psychology centered on the nature of humankind and reality underlying every major metaphysical tradition. According to Wiber, there is a universal view of human consciousness and our innermost consciousness is identical to the absolute and ultimate reality of the universe which he terms Mind (Segall, 2003).

Wilber's spectrum of consciousness model is centered on human personality as a multilevel manifestation of a single consciousness. This could be compared to an electromagnetic spectrum or a light spectrum in physics.

Wilber proposed ten levels to the spectrum. In ascending order they are: sensoriphysical, phantasmic-emotional, representational mind, rule/role mind, formal-reflexive mind, vision logic, psychic, subtle, casual, and ultimate (Segall, 2003). Each level has its own cognitive development and is characterized by a different sense of personal identity. For example, "at sensoriphysical level, one identifies only with the realm of matter, sensation, perception, and to the ultimate leveling which one is identified with the universe"( Segall, 2003, p. 37).

I believe when Wilber refers to the universe, he is referring to the Cosmic conscious or the Big Mind that is a common term used in Buddhism.

Wilber, further comments that Western psychotherapies such as psychoanalysis, Gestalt, and transactional analysis address lower levels of the spectrum, while contemplative disciplines such as Buddhism address higher stages, leading to deeper kinds of transformation and liberation. Yet both disciplines are complementary.

### **Psychology of Inner Growth:**

The techniques of cultivating the inner potential was introduced and developed by a Persian psychologist, Abraham Khagehnoory, who was the founder of this school of thought. His school was an integration of some of the approaches of humanitarian psychologists like Karen Horney, Abraham Maslow, and some Greek and eastern philosophers. Though his book has not been translated in English, his approach to human contentment could be used in a program for self-help and motivation.

He compares human needs to the needs of a plant. A plant needs water, sun, fertilizer, its required environment, pesticides, and upon receiving all these requirements, it will have no choice but to grow and blossom. The human mind also needs its own requirements. It needs its own fertilizers and pesticides (Khagehnoory, 1986). Assuming the basic needs for food, shelter, and other physical necessities are met, we inquire what else the human mind needs in order to be content. According to Khagehnoory, some of those essential needs are as follows:

1. Giving and receiving love: The exchange of love and kindness can be like a food to the soul. It is a primary element for mental stability and growth.
2. New learning: This increases one's self esteem and confidence. Humans, unlike the animals, cannot merely live on his basic instinct, and needs to cultivate and expand their ability to learn and think.
3. Cultivating creativity: Lack of creativity brings a sense of boredom that can lead to helplessness and psychosis. The desire to create comes from basic instinct and it is one of the main keys in self-satisfaction.
4. Cultivating positive thought: This means to see the positive side of whatever we encounter. According to Khagehnoory it is always possible to see a positive point in anything, no matter how critical and opinionated we are. Positive thought can create a healthier mental balance and a better life if it becomes a habit. As an example, when we are walking in a park, we could enjoy looking at flowers and other plants, or we could choose to look at animal feces or trash. It is our choice to bring our attention to what makes us feel good.

Khagehnoory further points to some of the problems that the conditioned mind creates. It can lead one to a belief system that is nothing but an entrapment. Self-resentment can also stem from that false belief system. Inner conflict and duality is another factor that could drain one's energy. He suggests we should seriously look at this conditioned mind and see how to free ourselves from this imprisonment.

He further comments about one's childhood and a child's vulnerability in a hostile environment. He refers to Karen Horney and the basic conflicts of humans that she talked about in her book, *our inner Conflict* (1945). According to Horney, a child can and does move under the following circumstances to cope with the environment. He/she can move toward people, against them, or away from them. When moving toward people, he accepts his own helplessness and tries to win the affection of others and to lean on them. Only in this way can he feel safe with them. He tries to attach himself to the one who is the strongest within a group. This way, he gains a feeling of belonging, which makes him feel less weak and less isolated.

When he moves against people, he wants to be stronger and defeat them, mostly for his own protection. When he moves away from people, he wants neither to belong nor to fight, but keeps apart. He feels he does not have much in common with them and builds up a world of his own with nature, books, and his dreams. Helplessness is the main key in the first attitude, hostility in the second, and isolation in the third.

It is quite normal for an individual to have all the three attitudes, as long as there is no fixation on or tendency toward one particular behavior. As an example, when someone has a fixation on being dependent, he/she always seeks a partner who dominates and is superior to his/her inferiority. The feeling of dependence can be so deep-rooted

that he/she is forced to play a subordinate role and invite exploitation. On the other hand, if early experiences have molded a child to a rigid pattern, he/she will turn to a closed, detached, and rigid person, with difficulty opening to new experiences. When all three attitudes are present in any strong degree and mutually exclusive, a neurotic person is bound to be caught in a severe conflict.

Further, these changes can throw some light on whether we are conditioned by our childhood situation. If the early situations are not prohibitive of spontaneous growth, later experiences, especially in adolescence, can have a molding influence. There is only one way the conflicts can be resolved; changing those conditions within the personality that brought them into being (Horney, 1945).

A social scientist who complements Khagehnoory's ideas is the Israeli Aron Antonovsky. He developed the theory that three strengths (meaningfulness, comprehensibility, and manageability) lead to increased health (Cohen, 1999).

**Manageability** means people have confidence in their ability to deal with life.

As a result, they can be in control of their lives and do not act as a victim.

**Meaningfulness** means an individual has a sense of purpose and that life matters. People with this strength make commitments, get involved, and shape their destinies.

**Comprehensibility** means people make cognitive sense of what is happening. They see event objectively, have a clear view of things and a hopeful approach. They deal with change effectively because they see it as a norm. They see clarity not certainty.

Some of the factors regarding human contentment stated by other authors are as follows:

Uchiyama Roshi states that one of the sources of unhappiness is when we are searching for values in things outside ourselves, such as property, job or reputation. We feel the hollowness in our life because we always lived in relation to other people or things rather than living out our true selves. He further states, you will never be able to resolve the uneasiness in your life by drifting around seeking things outside your self. It is crucial to live out the truth of the self, which is self living the reality of self, and Zazen puts this concept in to practice (Uchiyama, 1993). In his book, Ruling Your World Sakyong Mipham says “when we have wind horse, we are able to accomplish what we want without many obstacles” (Mipham, 2005, p.20). This wind horse or inner power or energy carries a great jewel; it’s the wisdom and compassion that acts not on behalf of us, but for all beings. Once we possess this jewel, our life becomes blessed. Whatever we want happens without difficulty; there is nothing in our way. Anees Sheikh, in his book Healing Images ( Sheikh, 2003), talks about how mental imagery is associated with healing in Western civilization. Once one understands how to use this powerful mind medicine tool, one no longer has to depend on the clinician. He begins his book with the following remarks by Hermann Hesse: I can give you nothing that hasn’t already its being within yourself. I can throw open to you no picture gallery but your own... I help you to make your own world visible. That is all.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Methodology**

#### **Session 1—Introduction**

##### Introduction

- class exercise
- in class or out of class assignments
- journaling

##### Introduction

Students get to know the instructor, receive handouts for the course telling them what to expect, get to know each other, and talk about themselves, their goals, and what brings them to this class.

### Class Exercise

Students are asked to write five to ten ways they find peace and five to ten ways they lose peace. After writing the assignment they break into groups of four or five and share their thoughts. It is a way for students to get to know each other, and it is also very therapeutic for them to share feelings and listen to each other.

### In-Class or Take-Home Assignment:

Students are asked to identify what they want to change about themselves; is it a habit, a thought, a behavior, an attitude, an image of themselves? Then they are asked to make a list of costs and promises. Attention should be paid to only one issue at a time.

The students respond the following questions:

- What do I need to change?
- What is the cost of making that change?
- What is the promise of making that change?
- What is the cost of not making this change?
- What is the promise of not making this change?

When the students are in touch with the issues that need to be changed and ready to move on, they make a commitment to themselves to do so. They list their objectives and goals and create a timetable for taking responsibility for accomplishing their goal (Cohen & Rechtschaffen, 1999).

Students begin to learn how to use problem-solving skills and focus on their issues and learn that the first key to problem solving is acknowledgement. The exercise gives them capabilities of breaking problems into details. This practice enhances self-

motivation and confidence and removes the feelings of being stuck. The idea of seeing the problem, planning and taking action upon it will increase the self-esteem.

### Journaling

A written assignment is given at the end of the class so each individual can do a self-assessment. The question is: How do you feel about yourself? (Good and bad stuff). Students get a chance to contemplate on their feelings; some of the feelings can be very much at a conscious level and some feelings could be suppressed so they aren't invoked by the questions immediately but might be released gradually.

## **Session 2—Breath**

- Lecture and discussion
- Various methods of breath work and its impact on health followed by the practice
- Journaling: new sentence stem, “The way I am observing myself today...”

### Lecture and Discussion

Life is in the breath; therefore he who only half breathes, half lives.”(A yogic proverb). The body can go without food or drink for weeks or a few days, but without air the body expires within minutes. Yoga teaches that there is an element in the air called

prana or life force. The more life force one has in the body, the more alive one is. Life force is present in all forms of nourishment, but most accessible in the air. Most people have a habit of shallow breathing, using only the upper part of the lung. Even in attempts at deep breathing, the lungs are partially filled. Therefore, in complete breathing you learn how to fully utilize the lungs.

The word spirit means breath. When the mind is agitated, breath is agitated as well. In other words, breath has a direct impact on our emotions. “Body, breath, and mind are one reality. We tend to see them separately.” (Loori, 1996, p.33).

### Physiology of Breath

The air moves from the nasal cavities, passes through the pharynx and larynx, which are behind the oral cavity, and travels through a duct called the trachea, which is situated in front of the esophagus.

The trachea divides into two branches in the lungs, called bronchus. Ultimately the bronchus end up in smaller branches called bronchioles. Bronchioles connect to air sacs called alveoli (plural) or alveolus (singular). In each alveolus an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide takes place, and through the blood circulation, oxygen and other nutrients are distributed throughout the body and the organs.

### Various methods of breath work

There are various forms of breathing such as diaphragmatic breathing, alternate nostril breathing or Nadi Shodham, energizing breath, shoulder raise or complete breath, (Hittleman, 1983 p.46) & (Appendix A). Students practiced Alternate nostril breathing, shoulder raise, and diaphragmatic breathing each for 5-10 minutes.

### Session 3—Yoga

- Lecture and discussion on yoga;
- Group activities based on the lecture;
- Assignment: Reading the book *Still Point: A Beginner's Guide to Zen Meditation*.

#### Lecture and Discussion

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union or joining together. Centuries ago in India, men of high intellectual and spiritual power realized that human beings are very disjointed and that their body, mind, and spirit are fragmented and pulled in different directions. To unify these elements, these wise men or gurus came up with a system called yoga. There are two major types of yoga that we will focus on: Hatha (physical) Yoga and Raja (meditation) Yoga. Hatha Yoga mainly serves two purposes: One, to cultivate natural beauty; two, to awaken a great power that lies dormant in the human body. This power can be utilized to fulfill individual potential, that is, to achieve self-realization.

Hatha Yoga is composed of a series of postures or poses, called asanas in Sanskrit. Yoga attaches great value in terms of both health and beauty to a strong elastic spine. There is a saying: “You are as young as your spine is flexible.” Some of the asanas are used to release energy that can be trapped in joints and the spine, such as chest expansion, back stretches, and Cobra exercises.

Group activities: students began some yoga practices such as chest expansion, triangle, back stretch and some other postures related to sun salutation such as down dog, up dog (Appendix B) & (Hittleman, 1983 p.6-9, 12-13, 20-21, 22-29) that took about 20 minutes.

Student's assignment: begin reading the book, *Still Point* and be ready for discussion (at a given time).

#### **Session 4—Zen**

- Lecture and discussion on the assigned book, *Still Point: A Beginner's Guide to Zen Meditation*, by John Daido Looi
- Group practice;
- Journaling: new sentence stem: "The way I feel good about myself today..."

Lecture on Buddhism and Zen:

Zen could be considered as a philosophy as well as a religion. It is a way to wake to the present moment. Zen is a branch of Buddhism founded by an Indian monk, Buddhidharma, in the sixth century. He traveled to China and decided to practice Zen meditation for nine years facing a wall. He believed a true practice does not come from reading scripture or worshipping images, but through mindful meditation.

Buddhism was born in India in the sixth century before Christ and the founder was Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha was a prince who left his kingdom to search for truth. For six years he continued his search, and, at last, attained full enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree. He opened to the deepest wisdom and knew unlimited

compassion. He was a Buddha or an Awakened One. Speaking directly from an enlightenment experience, he outlined the four fundamental truths of life:

The truth of suffering;

The cause of suffering;

The end of suffering;

The path out of suffering.

These are known as the four Noble Truths.

Review of the Book *Still Point* by Daido Looi

There are many schools of thought in Buddhism on how to realize our true nature. In Zen the emphasis is on zazen, or sitting Zen. Zazen is the heart of the Zen path.

According to the great Zen Master Eihei Dogen:

“To study the Buddha way is to study the self,

To study the self is to forget the self,

To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things.”( Looi, 1996

p.2)

According to *The Still Point*, we are constantly carrying on an inner dialogue, and, as a result, miss the moment-to-moment awareness of our life. We see but do not see, listen but do not hear, eat but do not taste, love but do not feel. Preoccupation does not let cognition take place.

In Zen, we let go of our thoughts and inner dialogue and bring our focus to the breath. The mind is like a surface of a pond; when the surface is disturbed waves and ripples appear. When it is undisturbed the surface becomes like a glass and just reflects.

A still mind is unobstructed, open, and receptive. It does not hold on or attach to anything.

The sitting posture has a great impact on breath and on our mind. Sitting upright and bringing attention to the breath makes the mind calm. As Lori defines it, body, breath, and mind are one reality.

The book talks about several postures and what fits each individual. It also talks about centering and relaxation of the body before starting the meditation, which could be useful for the beginner. The hara is the spiritual center, located about four fingers below the naval. It is called the mind or the center of spirituality. A true practitioner does not think with his head, but with his/her hara. Ultimately, the emphasis for a true sitting meditation is:

- The correct posture
- The right mental attitude
- Doing the practice

This is the way to practice Zen and realize ones true nature.

Group Practice:

Students sat for meditation practice, learning how to correct the sitting posture, their diaphragmatic breathing with concentration on their breath. The practice took about fifteen minutes.

Journaling:

New sentence stem was given to the students as an assignment.

The sentence stem, “The way I feel good about myself today...” evokes a positive attitude in our thinking about ourselves, especially if we struggle with lots of self-resenting thoughts. Instead of holding a critical view, the mind begins searching to find ways that bring positive feelings about ourselves and others. Going through journaling assignments, I realized how each student searched to find his/her own way to feel good about life, which I found very promising.

### **Session 5—Zen**

- Continuation of Zen meditation;
- Sitting practice.

Lecture and discussions: various types of sitting meditation, correct posture, breath count, how to be mindful.

Sitting practice: doing the actual practice of sitting up right and how to be mindful.

### **Session 6—Various Methods of Meditation**

- Breath awareness, breathing with every cell combined with imagery technique
- Journaling: new sentence stem: “The way I am releasing stress...”

#### Breathing with Every Cell

The students did a breathing exercise consisting of five parts. The exercise is as follows:

### Part one

Sit comfortably and bring your attention to your nose. Imagine that a light blue colored air enters and follows the path down to the lungs. It swirls around, and as it leaves it carries away any tension, pain, and disease along the way. Do this for about a minute or two.

### Part two

Bring your attention to your belly and make an opening at that site through which the belly breathes. As the air enters, it swirls around in the abdomen, lower back, anal and genital areas, and carries away any tension and pain in those areas as it leaves.

### Part three

Make an opening at the center of your chest, close to your heart. Let the air enter into your chest, upper body, and into your heart, swirl around, and remove all the tension and pain as it departs.

### Part four

Bring your focus to the center of your forehead and let the air in through an opening. Breathe in and release the tightness of the facial muscles and clear out the cobwebs in your brain.

### Part five

Repeat the same process in other areas where there is pain and tension. Breathe from the palms of your hands, the tips of your big toes, the undersides of your knees, the base of your spine, etc. Now breathe with every cell of your body. Breathe naturally; begin to stretch and slowly open your eyes.

Journaling: new assignment on new sentence stem

Journaling “The way I am releasing stress...”brings one’s attention to the fact that there are ways that one could release stress rather than feeling stuck.

### **Session 7—Awareness**

- Stress-reduction exercise;
- Zen meditation;
- Awareness exercise using a raisin;
- Journaling: question, “What imprisons you?”

Stress reduction exercises: Ten minutes exercises on breathing, alternate nostril breathing, sun salutation,( Appendix A & B), taichi breathing,( standing ,raising the arms straight above the head while you inhale, then forcefully drop your arms and bend from the waist-up and exhale.

Zen meditation: meditation practice for ten minutes

#### Raising Awareness Exercise

This exercise is about mindfulness and is based on Jon Kabot-Zinn’s stress-reduction program at the University of Massachusetts medical center. Students are given one raisin to observe as though it is the first time they see a raisin. They feel the texture and notice the color. As they observe, they should be aware of any thoughts that are related to the raisin. They smell the raisin, bring it to their lips, feel that sensation, and then put it in their mouths and feel the texture with their tongues. They bite and chew it slowly to experience the taste. They notice the process of chewing and the movement of

the tongue and the teeth. They write down their thoughts about eating the raisin mindfully from moment to moment.

This exercise will increase one's concentration and sensory responses.

Journaling: what in your world imprisons you?

On a daily basis, students begin ten minutes meditation in the morning and ten minutes in the evening. After the meditation (either morning or evening), they begin to reflect on the following thoughts:

“What in your world imprisons you? Is it your job, responsibilities to your family, an addiction, anxiety attacks, a chronic or life threatening illness, a painful experience from your past? Contemplate these thoughts; make a list of what you believe incarcerates you. Date and sign it. Do this exercise on a daily basis, if possible. If there are days that no thoughts arise, you could leave it blank.”

### **Session 8—Awareness**

Awareness Exercise: Tell Me who you are (one hour practice exercise)

This is a profound mindfulness exercise. I personally have done this at a workshop that lasted for a few hours. The longer the session, the more settled one becomes.

For this practice the students select a partner, and as they sit facing each other, one begins questioning his/her partner by asking, “Tell me who you are.” Every three minutes the partners switch their roles. During this exercise there is a gradual sense of openness to surroundings and to the question of “who” that one contemplates. This is a practice of contemplation, a spontaneous insight to the question, rather than an analytic or intellectual process.

### **Session 9—Mindfulness (one hour time frame)**

Leading a Blind, and being a blind exercise:

The purpose of this exercise is mindfulness. I also had the experience of doing this process at a workshop and found it very useful.

Everyone chooses a partner. One of the partners is blindfolded, and then the partners begin walking together, while one relies on the other for direction. Every five minutes the leader (the one who sees) stops the blindfolded one in front of an object which is either nature or man made. The blindfolded partner opens his/her eyes and both partners look at the object for a minute or two, then he/she closes the eyes and both partners continue their walk while one being led by the other partner. They repeat the process three times at a few spots to observe objects and reflect on their feelings. After ten minutes, the partners change their roles; the leader becomes the blind one and the blindfolded one becomes the leader.

At the end of the practice the group gathers and each person expresses his/her experience as a leader or a blindfolded one during the exercise. There is an awakening process for each partner during this exercise, as well as a sense of security or insecurity as one is led by the other.

### **Session 10—Autogenic Techniques**

- Lecture and discussion
- Group exercise

Lecture:

Autogenic means self-generating, which means you are doing the procedure to yourself. Around 1900 a brain physiologist by the name of Oskar Vogt noted that some of

his patients put themselves in a hypnotic state, and, as a result, they reported less fatigue, less tension, and fewer psychosomatic disorders, (e.g., headaches). According to Greenberg, in 1932 a German psychiatrist by the name of Johannes Schultz developed autogenic training, using the observation of Vogt as its basis. He found that patients he hypnotized developed two physical sensations: warmth and heaviness. The sensation of warmth was due to blood vessel dilation and the heaviness was due to muscle relaxation. Since both vasodilatation and muscle relaxation are components of the relaxation response, autogenic training has been employed as a technique to help people manage the stresses in their lives.

Although autogenic training and meditation both lead to the relaxation response, they have two different approaches. Meditation uses the mind to relax the body, and autogenic training uses the bodily sensations of heaviness and warmth to first relax the body and then expand this relaxed state to the mind by the use of imagery (Greenberg, 1980).

Autogenic techniques have a great impact on psychosomatic issues as well as physiological problems. It has been used for migraine headaches, reduction of muscle tension, high blood pressure, adjustment of heart rate, reduction of respiration rate, reduction of serum cholesterol, treating Reynaud disease by increasing peripheral blood flow to the arms and legs, treatment of insomnia, and an increase in alpha brain activity, which is a sign of mental relaxation.

Group exercise:

Students began the practice of autogenic relaxation, based on vasodilatation (warm sensation) and muscle relaxation (a sense of heaviness); by positioning themselves in a comfortable chair or to lie down while their eyes are closed and began the following process:

**Stage 1: heaviness**

Position yourself in a very relaxing form while your eyes are closed. With closed eyes observe your right arm and tell yourself, “My right arm is heavy and then follow the sequence.

My right arm is heavy

My left arm is heavy

Both my arms are heavy

My right leg is heavy

My left leg is heavy

Both my legs are very heavy

My arms and legs are very heavy

**Stage 2: Warmth**

My right arm is warm

My left arm is warm

Both my arms are very warm

My right leg is warm

My left leg is warm

Both my legs are very warm

My arms and legs are very warm

**Stage 3: Heart**

Begin telling yourself, my heart is calm and regular (repeat four or five times).

**Stage 4: Respiration**

My breathing is calm and relaxed

It breathes me

(Repeat 4- five times)

**Stage 5: Solar plexus:**

My solar plexus is warm (repeat 4-5 times as your eyes are closed)

**Stage 6: Forehead**

My forehead is cool (repeat four to five times)

During the relaxation stages keep your eyes closed and maintain a comfortable position and an optimum body temperature. If you feel cold you should cover yourself with a blanket or jacket.

During autogenic stages, one should feel heaviness and warmth in limbs, a relaxed and calm heart and respiratory rate, warmth in abdomen, and coolness in forehead. It takes a regular daily practice to get to this level of relaxation and master autogenic.

### **Session 11—Autogenic Techniques**

- Continuation of autogenic techniques;
- Group exercises.

Lecture:

The benefit of the autogenic training and discussion

Exercise:

Practice of autogenic relaxation, going through 5 different stages. Getting feedback from students about the outcome of different stages and how they responded.

### **Session 12—Contentment and Happiness**

- Lecture on human contentment and happiness;
- Handouts on what does a good life mean to you? (Appendix C....)
- Discussion on the handouts;
- Journaling: progress report.

Lecture and discussion on contentment:

The lecture included some of the essential factors in human lives such as having relationship, creativity, new learning, positive thinking and....further we discussed and received individual opinion on why these elements are considered as essential needs, why relationship, creativity, new learning and .....are important in life.

Regarding the handouts and its content, we discussed and shared opinions on what a good life means to each individual and how we can maintain it. The lecture and discussion took about 20-30 minutes

## Journaling

The journaling assignment or the progress report: On a daily basis up to one week, examine what you did or discovered about yourself (positive or negative). An example of a positive act could be working on a relationship, a new learning, creativity, or seeing the positive sides of others or things you encounter. Negative discovery could be any negative thoughts, negative self-talk, self-resentment, destructive thoughts, or acts that stem from self-resentment.

The progress report is a discovery path to the inner self. Acknowledgement is the first initiation of any healing process.

### **Session 13: Inner Growth**

- Lecture and discussion on inner growth
- Exercise: Write, naming ten close relationships you can think of, (you could include yourself). Write what effort you make or what you do to maintain that relationship;
- Share ideas on relationship and progress report.

#### Sharing Ideas and progress report

Sharing ideas about relationships gives everybody a chance to see what they are missing in life, what they can do, or could be thankful for. It can be a nurturing process to realize what adds meaning to life. Sharing the progress report will also bring a sense of friendly atmosphere and a commonality in ideas and experiences.

### **Session 14-16: reviews**

- Meditation;
- Review of some of the stress reduction techniques;

- Continuation of progress report and group share.

Stress reduction: consists of breath work and yoga exercises. Breath work took about 5-10 minutes and it included alternate nostril breathing and breath with affirmation technique (take a deep breath and as you inhale tell yourself “I am,” and as you exhale say “relaxed”).

For yoga practice, do the sun salutation postures (appendix B) and other Asanas such as chest expansion, triangle, twist, bent knees hand on floor, lung stretch (Hittleman, 1983, p. 6-9) & Appendix B

Do Zen meditation with sitting upright for ten minutes. Candle meditation will be practiced in one of the sessions. (Observe the light and gaze for few minutes, then close your eyes and bring the image of the light to the third eye, the center of your forehead and look at the image for few minutes. This meditation will enhance one’s concentration.

Progress report: Progress reports were done on a weekly basis. The weekly topic is about “What has brought self satisfaction?” Students could choose different topics such as relationship, new learning, creativity, examining any self-negative thought or any action that stemmed from self-resentment. Acknowledgement of those actions, thoughts, writing about and sharing them in the class is indeed a progress. The progress reports can bring a sense of openness to our feelings and values and could bring a sense of connection to others as well.

## Chapter 4

### Results

In this chapter the findings from data collected from students' questionnaires will be studied.

#### **Questionnaire:**

-What is the concept of meditation? What does it mean to you?

- What did you learn about meditation in this class?

-How did you find the following techniques effective as a tool for relaxation?

- Breathing techniques?
- Journaling: Which sentence stem was more effective for you? How did you like the process of journaling?
- Meditation: Which method(s) was effective for you and how?
- Awareness exercise? Being blind, and leading the blind
- Breath combined with imaging techniques,(breathing with every cell):
- Autogenic techniques
- The handouts: Did you find them useful? Which one(s) were the most useful?

Responses to this questionnaire were collected over a two-year period from 200 students. Out of those 200,( 47) questionnaires were selected randomly and studied as to what techniques worked for individuals and how each student responded to different approaches.

The responses were as follows:

### **Breath and Different Exercises**

Breathing techniques were found to be one of the most favorable tools for removing anxiety, and students favored the techniques by 88.5% .Out of five breathing techniques (diaphragmatic, alternate nostril breathing, shoulder raise, complete breath, standing breath and raising the arms above the head), alternate nostril breathing was the most favorite tool while other techniques followed the alternate breathing in order of high to lower preferences.

### **Journaling**

Journaling was favored by 79% of the students. Those who did not care for journaling gave the following reasons: Lack of privacy of their thought, laziness about writing, too busy schedule, and not enough time to write. They preferred meditation to journaling. Those who liked journaling were mainly people who found writing to be a tool to express themselves. They gradually realized that this expression has an open window to their souls and found this an opportunity to be more intimate with their feelings. Most of these students found writing to be a form of meditation.

Responses to various sentence stems:

- The way I am observing myself...
- The way I feel good about myself...
- The way I release my stress...
- What in your world imprisons you? (Contemplation after meditation)
- Progress report.

The preferences for sentence stems were as follows:

- 50% preferred, the way I release my stress...

- 25% preferred, the way I am observing...
- 25% preferred, the way I feel good....

It is quite interesting to see how people click with specific sentence stem. The majority of students really liked the progress report and imprisonment as useful techniques but needed a longer time to practice the progress report to become more intimate with it. These comments were given verbally rather than responding to questionnaire. Thus, I didn't have a percentage to this response.

Progress reports were done on a weekly basis. The weekly topic is about "What has brought self satisfaction?" Students could choose different topics such as relationship, new learning, creativity, examining any self-negative thought or any action that stemmed from self-resentment. Acknowledgement of those actions, thoughts, writing about and sharing them in the class was indeed an improvement.

### **Meditation**

With regard to meditation, 60% of the students responded that meditation was a tool they could use to make themselves calm and relaxed. In addition, 25% responded that meditation was a way to get connected to oneself, aside from bringing peace and relaxation.

### **Awareness Exercises**

- Tell me who you are
- Being blind and leading a blind

Only a few students, about 10% liked the first exercise. The reason was that according to students' feed back, there was not enough time to get involved deeper in this

exercise and explore themselves. I have done this exercise at a workshop where we spent 12 hours on this exercise, which led to a vast openness, sensitivity, and compassion.

The second exercise was more fun and interesting for the students, since it required a shorter period of time to really sink in. This exercise was enjoyed by 80% of the students.

### **Breath Combined with Imaging Techniques**

62.5% of the students enjoyed this exercise; they could visualize the breath and felt the positive effect of this technique.

### **Autogenic Techniques**

This relaxing technique was favored by 75% of the students. The technique had to do with relaxation of the muscles and dilation of the blood vessel. Some students had an easier time with relaxation of the muscles, as opposed to the warmth in the limbs associated with blood vessel dilation. The breathing part of the technique also seemed to be easier, perhaps because participants had more practice doing the breath exercise. 65% of students commented that they intended to practice this technique on a routine basis as part of their lives.

### **Handouts Including the Book: Were They Useful?**

99% of the students were very positive about the book, *Still Point* and considered it a great resource for learning meditation.

The handouts on breath were thought to be very beneficial by 60% of the students.

The handouts on yoga were thought to be a good reference by 40% of the students. A few students regarded the article what does a good life mean to you? very

insightful but I didn't receive any written statements to accumulate data percentage for the feedback

Summary of Feedbacks:

Breath techniques	88.5%
Journaling	79.5%
Meditation	85%
Awareness exercises	
• Tell me who you are	10%
• Being a blind, leading a blind	80%
• Raisin	no comment
Breath combined with imaging; visualization	62.5%
Autogenic techniques	75%

Comments by Students Regarding Some of the Techniques:

- Question: What imprisons you? "It helped me realize my problems and be aware of how to find a solution."
- Sentence stem: The way I am observing...: "Gave me a chance to think about myself."
- Sentence stem: The way I feel good about myself...: "It makes me more optimistic and feel better about myself."
- Breath: "Focusing on breath clears and relaxes my mind and body. It is a great way to clear the mind."

- Meditation: “A process of relaxation, clarity, and getting in touch with myself.”  
“Learning to turn off the inner voice and not worry about the things I can’t control.”
- Handouts: “Breathing illustrations, yoga postures, and article about what a good life means to you, the book *Still Point*, and physiology of breath were practical.”  
“My favorite reading was *The Still Point* that I could use as reference for meditation.”
- Autogenic techniques: “I felt it is the most relaxing and refreshing technique.”

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Conclusions

An academic program was created for students at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. The program was called “Intro to Relaxation, Meditation, and Wellness.” The study was based on how students responded to stress-reduction tools or techniques and the responses were obtained and studied through questionnaires given at the end of the program.

The following responses were obtained from the students:

Breath work: 88.5%; meditation: 85%; journaling: 79.5%; awareness exercises: (Tell me who you are: 10%; Leading the blind: 80%; Raisin exercise: no comment).

Some of the comments received from students were about the short duration of the course which they thought should have been longer. The whole program lasted for 8 weeks and each session met for 60 minutes twice a week. Some of the practices, such as breath work, yoga, and journaling could be done within that timeframe, but, meditation practice, progress reports, and mindfulness exercises could require a longer time before one could feel intimate with the practice. As an example, meditation takes a longer time to practice before the mind begins to settle. As the mind gets quiet, the inner dialogue begins to fade and instead the present awareness becomes more prominent. It is through this awareness of the moment that one can experience a shift in consciousness and experience the deeper layer of connectedness.

Being a practitioner myself, I see how consistency in practice has an impact on deepening the practice. It might take sometime for one to be settled in the practice ,

depending on the perseverance and mental attitude of the practitioner and whether he/she maintains the correct posture during the sitting as well. I found that going on a retreat for few days, being with like-minded people, having solitary moments, and being far from daily distraction could be very beneficial.

As Swami Rama, founder of the Himalayan institute commented, “the most overlooked step in meditation is preparation,” “without the appropriate preparation, physical, mental or emotional, distractions will create obstacles that prevent one’s meditation from becoming deep or profound.”(Rama, 1998, p.13).

In this program most of the exercises were aimed at removing physical and emotional tension and stress such as progress reports, mindfulness practices (“Tell me who you are,” various types of breath work, and meditation. Most practices became more familiar as they were repeated and the practitioner became conditioned to the benefits. The progress reports were an assignment in a psychology workshop that I participated for a few years on a weekly basis. Some of the great benefits that came out of that assignment were self-confidence due to having emotional support from the people in our group, sharing and giving myself a chance to observe, explore, and acknowledge anything that would enhance my growth or obstruct it. Acknowledging any obstruction, whether it was coming from my own conditioned mind or from an outside source, was a real progress. Pursuing any issues such as relationships, new learning, creativity, aiming positive thoughts, would entice my mind to look for positive constructions rather than destructive thoughts or acts. By comparing my past experiences to the experiences of the group in the program, I realized that it requires a longer time of practice in order to see the benefits.

Through studying the questionnaires and the class observation, I noticed that there were known and possibly unknown limitation factors involved in responses to stress-reduction tools. These factors include the individual's conditioned mind, the degree of stress one holds, flexibility of the mind or the degree of openness to try new methods, intimacy within the members of the group, having had previous exposure to the ideas or techniques, taking the course just for credit or being interested in the content as an enrichment course, could impact the individual responses.

The program gave everybody a chance to sample some stress-reduction techniques, and each semester I had a chance to study my own teachings, hoping that I could provide a better program. Meanwhile I find my confidence increases as I teach longer, correct myself, and receive feedbacks from students, and yet the effort to improve this program for the benefit and well being of others is an ongoing process.

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## Appendices

## ENERGIZING BREATH

You can invigorate your body and mind with the breathing technique known as *bhastrika* or “bellows breath.” This exercise cleanses your lungs while increasing the oxygen flow to your cells and tissues.

Sit comfortably with your spine upright and close your eyes. Exhale all the air from your lungs. Then begin deep in-and-out breathing through your nose silently using the mantras “So” on the inflow and “Hum” on the outflow. For the first twenty breaths take two-second slow forceful inhalations and two-second slow forceful exhalations. It is easiest to keep track of the number of breaths by counting on your fingers.

The next twenty breaths are performed faster with approximately one-second inhalations and one-second exhalations. These are also performed through the nose while thinking “So” on the in-breath and “Hum” on the out-breath.

Finally, perform twenty rapid *bhastrika* breaths, with approximately half-second inhalations and half-second exhalations. After the twenty rapid breaths, perform one more slow deep breath and then simply feel the sensations in your body. You will notice that your mind is clear and quiet while your body is energized.

Do not hyperventilate to the point where you are feeling light-headed or dizzy. The breath movement is almost entirely abdominal, using your diaphragm to move air. Your head and shoulders should be relaxed and mostly still. Use *bhastrika* when you are feeling a little sluggish and need a quick replenishment of energy. It is also beneficial prior to your afternoon meditation to clear away drowsiness before you start your practice.

## RELAXING BREATH

You can calm your mind with the breathing technique known as *Nadi Shodhana*. In English this means, "clearing the channels." *Nadi Shodhana* is very beneficial when you are having a lot of anxious thoughts, and when you are trying to quiet your mind. It requires the use of your right hand to alternately close your right, then left nostril. Hold your hand so your thumb, index finger, and remaining fingers are separated. You use your thumb to close your right nostril and your third and fourth finger to close your left.

Take a slow moderately deep breath, and then close off your right

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nasal passage with your thumb. Exhale slowly through your left nostril, then inhale slowly through your left nostril, then close off your left nostril with your third and fourth fingers. Exhale through your right nostril, inhale through your right nostril, and then again close your right nasal passage, exhaling through your left. Continue with this pattern for five to ten minutes, alternating the nostril after each inhalation. After just a few cycles you will experience your mind calming and your body relaxing.



*Nadi Shodhana*

Use these practices throughout the day to balance your mind and body. Pranayama can energize you without the need for caffeine, relax you without the need for tranquilizers, and soothe you without the need for alcohol. These natural techniques help to balance and nourish the field of energy, transformation, and intelligence commonly known as your body/mind.

## Mind/Body Movement

Techniques such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong can be thought of as practice sessions for establishing yourself in a state of body/mind/spirit unity while engaging in action. Each of these ancient practices enlivens the integration between body and mind.

Breathing can profoundly influence emotional and mental states. Erratic breathing patterns and shallow chest breathing often point to emotional stress, upset, and instability.

Diaphragmatic breathing is the most efficient, least taxing way to breathe. Learning to breathe this way may prevent stress and disease. It also helps to balance and reintegrate the mind and body.

To try breathing diaphragmatically, find a quiet spot where you can sit comfortably. If you sit in a chair, keep both feet on the floor and your back comfortably straight.

- + extend your abdomen as you inhale
- + pull the air deep into the lungs without moving your chest
- + flatten your abdomen gently while exhaling
- + always breathe through the nose
- + breathe rhythmically and deeply, yet effortlessly
- + do not pause between breaths
- + concentrate on the breath
- + acknowledge and release any extraneous thoughts
- + refocus on the breath

Try practicing for five minutes three times a day. Some people find it helpful to imagine they are inhaling a relaxation "force" and exhaling tension, anger, frustration, etc., with each breath. You may want to slowly repeat the word "I am" on each inhalation and the word "relaxed" on each exhalation.

To get the full benefit of this technique, practice it daily. Be consistent about the times you choose to practice. Within a few weeks, it should become habitual. Notice any changes you experience.

## The Sun Salute (SURYANAMASKAR)



Palms together. Inhale and exhale.



Inhale. Stretch back. Arms in a V and head back. Arch back easily. Tighten buttock muscles so lower back will not take too much weight and cause irritation.



Keeping head between upper arms, slowly bend forward. Knees straight bending from waist. Relax head, neck, shoulders and arms. Exhale.



Bend both knees. Place palms flat on either side of the feet. Right leg back. Right knee on floor. Stretch chin up to the ceiling. Inhale.



Both legs back. Body straight. Head looking at the wall in front of you. Retain breath.



Toes, knees, chest, forehead on the floor (not abdomen!). Exhale!



Cobra posture. Inhale. Arch back the spine. Chin up to the ceiling. Hips on the floor. Elbows slightly bent. Toes on the floor.



Jack-knife hips up to the ceiling. Heels to the floor. Chin locked in chest. Exhale!

Right leg up between the two hands. Left knee on the floor. Palms flat. Chin stretched to the ceiling. Inhale!



Both feet together, knees straight, bend forward from the hips. Relax neck, head, arms. Exhale!



Slowly raise arms to either side of the ears. Stretch hands towards the wall in front of you. Inhale slowly, stretch up to the ceiling, arching back slightly. Arms in a "V." Head back.



Exhale. Bring palms together. Eyes closed. Observe the different body changes.

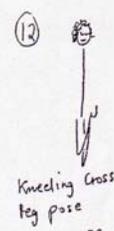


Observe carefully the increase of heat, your breath, your heart beat.

Each of the twelve postures should be held three seconds. Once you become familiar with the sun salute, each asana (posture) will flow one into the other.

At first simply do two sun salutes using different legs. There should be no feeling of breathlessness. Above all, go slowly according to your own capacity. If there is a history of high blood pressure or heart trouble, please check with your doctor.

Yoga



12 Kneeling Cross leg pose



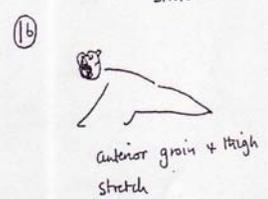
13 Kneeling



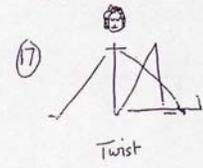
14 Sole to sole groin stretch



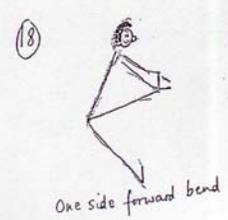
15 Burmese



16 Anterior groin & thigh stretch



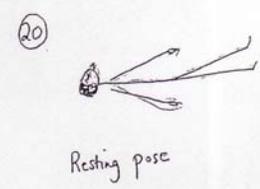
17 Twist



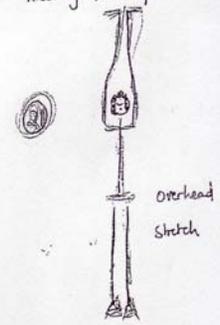
18 One side forward bend



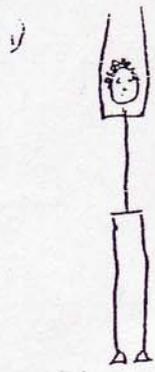
19 Kneeling turtle pose



20 Resting pose



21 Overhead stretch



②

Overhead stretch

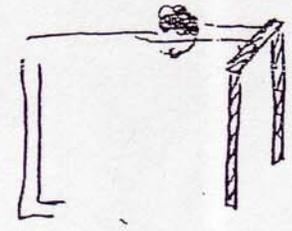
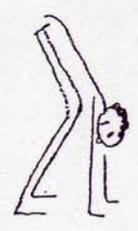


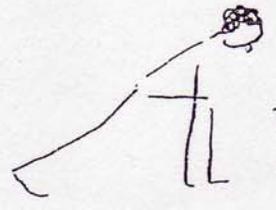
Table Pose

③



Bent knee hands on floor

④



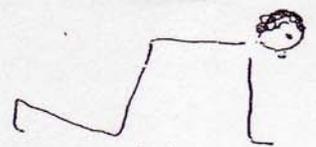
Forward lunge

⑤



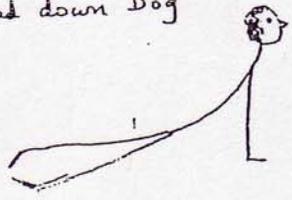
Head down Dog

⑥



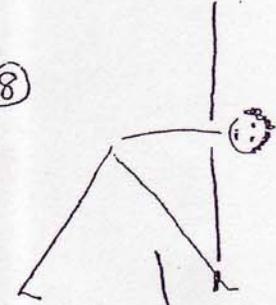
4 Point Kneeling

⑦



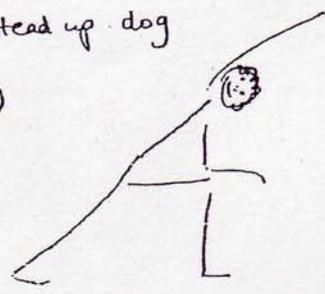
Head up dog

⑧



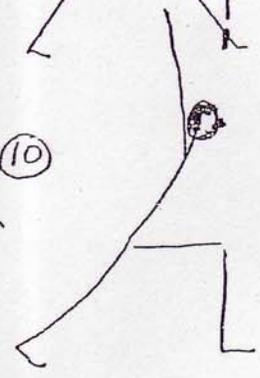
Triangle

⑨



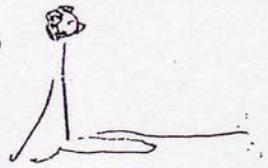
sideways lunge stretch

⑩



Overhead stretch lunge

⑪



Half kneeling

## What Does “Living the Good Life” Mean to You?

The good life involves discovering what lies beyond your defenses and the life prescribed by your critical inner voice; it involves establishing genuinely loving relationships in spite of the interpersonal pain and suffering inherent in the human condition. The good life is not achieved by seeking to be “happy” in the sense that this word is often used—to describe an absence of unpleasant experiences such as fear, anxiety, or pain. To the contrary, to be fully alive means opening yourself up to all dimensions of life—sadness as well as joy, and pain as well as pleasure. It also involves committing yourself to a search for personal meaning and transcendent goals—of which happiness is a by-product.

There is no formula for what makes up a meaningful life for any given person. Each dimension of the good life challenges the limitations the critical inner voice has been imposing on us. Attaining the kind of life we want to live and developing our human potentialities is a lifelong project that involves dedication and a focus on what is essentially human in all of us.

It is possible to establish our goals for a better life by understanding what it truly means to be a human being. The essential human qualities in each of us include: our desire to search for meaning in life; our ability to love and to feel compassion for ourselves and others; our capacity for reasoning and creativity; our ability to experience deep emotion; our desire and need for social affiliation; our ability to set goals and develop strategies to accomplish them; our awareness of our mortality and aloneness; and our ability and desire to ponder the sacredness and mystery of life. We need to be willing to take the risks necessary to lead a self-affirming life and suffer through the accompanying anxiety. Our *life-affirming human potentialities* are those abilities that enhance life for ourselves and others. Your own way of developing these attributes is unique to your abilities and particular life situation, but it will almost certainly involve having both a desire for self-knowledge and a vision of the future.

Although it is not possible to lay out a detailed blueprint of how to attain the good life, there are several actions that you can take to move in the direction of living a more self-affirming existence. The following guidelines, used as a supplement to the techniques and exercises suggested earlier in this book, can help you further break down your defenses and overcome self-imposed barriers to your freedom.

## Guidelines for Continued Personal Development

By embarking on the adventure of seeking the good life, you are giving yourself value. Because our self-image is often seriously damaged, all of us have trouble seeing ourselves as worthwhile and our lives as having intrinsic value. For this reason, freeing yourself of your early programming—separating out negative

Definitions:

**Ajna Chakra:** The sixth chakra, located between the eyebrows.

**Anahata Chakra;** the fourth chakra, located at the heart center.

**Asana:** physical yogic exercise, practiced to improve the control of the mind and body. In Sanskrit it means posture or position.

**Astral Body:** subtle body, containing the prana, mind, intellect, and emotions.

**Chakras:** The seven energy centers in the astral body where many nadis, or astral nerves, come together.

**Full lotus:** a symmetrical posture in meditation. The right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. The heels are drawn up to the abdomen and the soles of both feet should point at the ceiling.

**Half lotus:** The sitting posture in meditation, the right leg tucked under the left thigh. The left foot is then placed on the right thigh.

**Hara:** The hara is a point, two or three fingers below the navel. In Zen it is considered to be the spiritual center of the body.

**Hatha Yoga:** in Sanskrit "ha" is sun and "tha" is moon, hatha means the union of these two opposites. It is the path of Yoga that deals primarily with the physical body.

**Karma:** In Sanskrit means action. It operates through the law of cause and effect.

**Kundalini:** The primordial cosmic energy, dormant within each individual.

**Lumbar region:** The lumbar group in the lower back consists of five vertebrae.

**Mantra:** A mystical syllable, word, or phrase used to focus the mind during meditation.

**Manipura Chakra:** The third chakra, corresponds to the solar plexus.

**Maya:** illusion

**Mudra:** the hand position joining the thumbs and the active hand is held palm up and it holds the inactive hand.

**Muldhara Chakra:** The lowest charka, located at the base of the spine, the place of dormant kundalini

**Nadis:** In Yoga, there are about 72000 nadis or subtle tubes in the astral body. They equate to the acupuncture meridians.

**OM:** The sacred word means God and it is used as the universal mantra.

**Prana:** The vital energy or life force flows through the astral body in the nadis.

**Pranayama:** Yogic breathing exercises designed for strengthening the mind and body.

**Raja Yoga:** The “royal” path of Yoga applied mainly for mental control.

**Sacral region:** The five vertebrae make up the lowest region of the spine. They are fused to form a single bone.

**Sahasrara Chakra:** the seventh or crown charka, located on top of the head.

**Samadhi:** The superconscious state in which all ego identity of the mediator is gone. There is an experience of absolute bliss.

**Sanskrit:** The most ancient human languages.

**Solar plexus:** The network of nerves that lies just behind the stomach.

**Swadhishtana Chakra:** the second charka located in the genital area

**Transcendental:** The quality of going beyond the limitations of mind.

**Vertebrae:** The 24 bones that form the spinal column. There are, starting from the top, seven cervical, twelve thoracic, and five lumbar vertebrae, plus the sacrum and the coccyx.

**Vishuddha Chakra:** The fifth energy center, located at the base of throat

**Zazen:** Sitting meditation in Zen Buddhism

Zafu: a cushion you sit on during Zen meditation

**Zen:** is called Chan in Chinese, comes from the Sanskrit word Dhyana means sitting meditation. Zen comes from school of Mahayana Buddhism asserting that enlightenment can come through meditation and intuition rather than faith.





