

An inside look at meditation

Experiences for healing, support, and transformation

Carrie Heeter, PhD, RYS200

Forewords by Chase Bossart, MA, C-IAYT, E-RYT500
and Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT

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This free digital version of *An Inside Look at Meditation* is my gift to you and to my teachers.

I designed this to be a colorful, engaging paperback book. If you like what you see in the digital version and want a richer experience, purchase the paperback from [amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

Visit my web site (<https://yogamindtools.com>) to experience some of the meditations featured in the book.

If aspects of the book are meaningful to you, let me know! Email carrie@carrieheeter.com



Carrie Heeter, PhD, RYS200, Yoga Mind Tools

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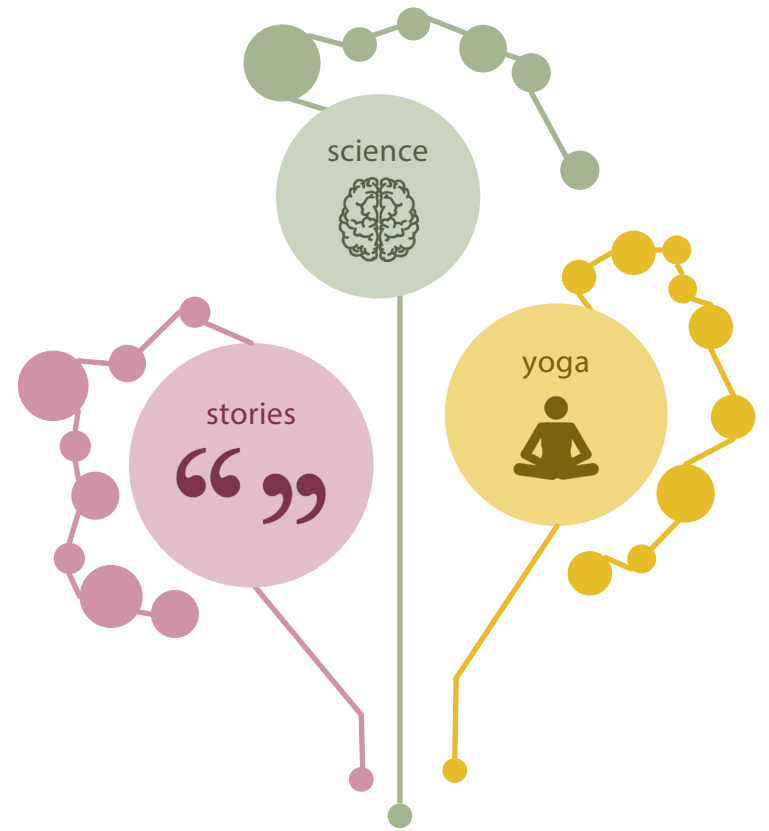
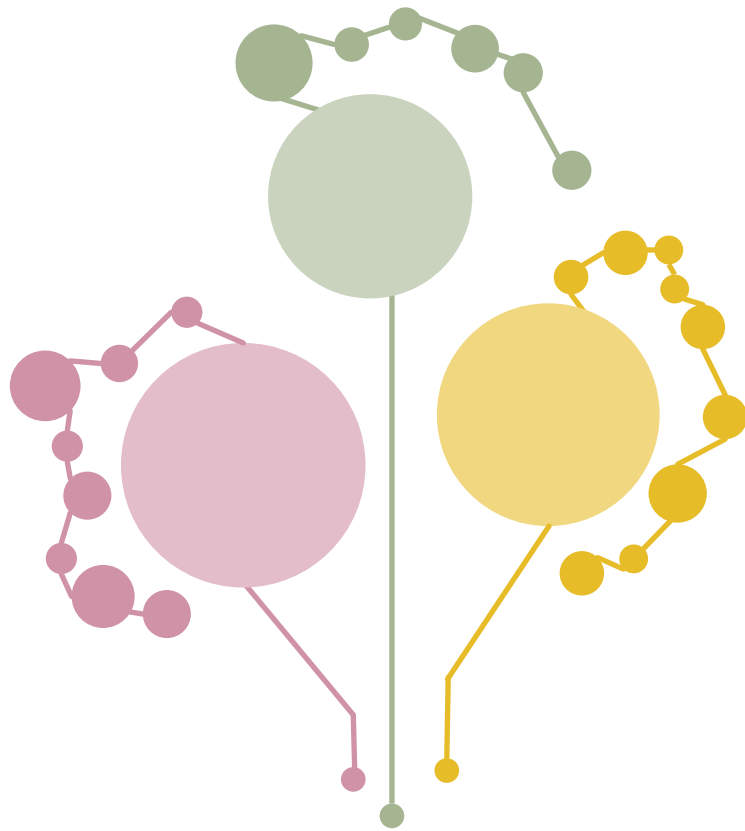
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Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT
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An inside look at meditation

Experiences for healing, support, and transformation

Carrie Heeter, PhD, RYS200

Forewords by Chase Bossart, MA, C-IAYT, E-RYT500
and Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT

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This book shares inspirations, stories, and explanations of how and why meditation works. Personal decisions about appropriate meditation practices are the responsibility of the individual. The author offers no assurances and assumes no responsibility for outcomes of any meditation practice.

An Inside Look at Meditation was initially written, revised, and refined in Microsoft Powerpoint using a custom 9" x 6" tradebook template. Most pages are self-contained—each conveys a complete idea illustrated by an example, story, or graphic. The sequence of pages forms a narrative.

Book designer Darcy Drew Greene collaborated with author Carrie Heeter to transform this sequence of pages into a coherent book. We wanted it to be colorful, fun, clear, and elegant. We evolved the visual style and navigation elements through constant iteration.

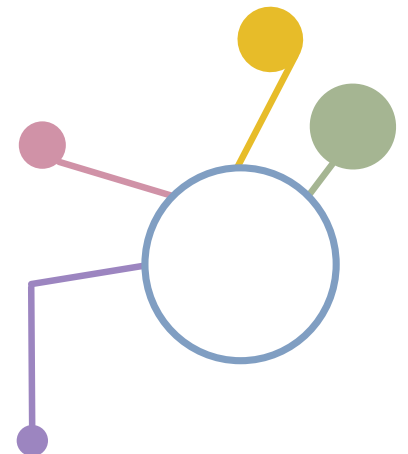
Technologically the book is a mashup of Adobe InDesign and Powerpoint. Carrie exported images and the primarily visual pages she had created directly from Powerpoint. Darcy used InDesign to craft the layout of text-intensive pages and to pull all the elements together.

The fonts we used include Myriad Pro by Adobe, Minion Pro by Adobe, and Bradley Hand by Richard Bradley, published through International Typeface Corporation

All internet addresses given in this book were correct at the time of publication. The author regrets any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Marcel Allbritton—my teacher, friend, and colleague—who introduced me to meditation and has been there for and with me every step of the way.



Foreword by Chase Bossart

Scientific explanations of first-person experiences are fraught with difficulty. For example, discussions of how olfaction uses chemoreceptors to create signals processed by the brain utterly fail to capture the exquisite delicacy of smelling a freshly blooming rose blossom. Neither can descriptions of force and its conversion into movement describe the joy of riding a bicycle.

Studies of such things end up falling into one camp or the other—either presenting dry, informational structures from a third-person perspective or else over-describing the intimate, experiential aspects of the first-person experience.

And that is what makes this book unique and absolutely important. It accurately captures both the informational and the experiential elements of the practice of meditation. It explains key elements of how meditation works intertwined with wonderful examples of what the process looks like from the inside.

Having been the guide for several of the stories presented in this book, I am struck by how effective they are in demonstrating and explaining the principles underlying meditation and how it works.

In this way this book breaks new ground in presenting an age-old science of mind and personal transformation. Whether you are a practitioner or a researcher or merely interested in meditation I highly recommend reading, and rereading, this book.

It will make a difference in who you are and how you relate to the world.

Chase Bossart, MA, C-IAYT, E-RYT500
Yoga Well Institute
yogawell.com

Foreword by Marcel Allbritton

If you have an interest in meditation personally or professionally, then this book is for you. If you have found that meditation just works for you, then this book is for you. This book will bring new insights and depth to your meditation practice. It will also help you relate to and practice meditation in new and different ways. If you are a practitioner of meditation, this book will help you gain even deeper knowledge of meditation. It will open up and expand your understanding of meditation. Meditation is about changing the state of your system. Ideally, when you have a meditative experience, something happens. You feel something.

Over a decade ago, Carrie came to me and wanted to learn about meditation. Like yoga, meditation can only be taught through experience. Yoga and meditation are not intellectual endeavors. To understand a concept in yoga you must practice and apply the concept before the understanding of the concept becomes integrated within you. Carrie has this integrated understanding of meditation.

The origin of the information in this book comes from the classical body of knowledge that is known as yoga and is part of the Darsanas (Hindu schools of philosophy) in Indian wisdom. This wisdom comprises a body of knowledge that is yoga, a whole system of understanding the body, breath, mind, intellect, personality, and emotions.

This is an exceptional book. This is a book about experiences as all meditations are experiences. This book is also something that will enrich your experience of meditation. It will be insightful and useful, and may even shift something inside of you in terms of the way you show up in your life. Carrie shares, in her own voice, her deep love, appreciation, and fascination with the science of Yoga and one of the main components of yoga—meditation.

Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT
Yoga for Practitioners & Core Resonance Works
yogaforpractitioners.com, coreresonanceworks.com

Preface

Why I am writing this book

My experiences with meditation are more mind-blowingly cool than any science or yoga books I have read. I am writing this book because I want to share the joy and possibility of the kind of meditation I study, practice, and design.

Instructions about how to meditate can explain how to have a beginner experience. As someone who has been studying and practicing meditation for a decade, I assure you that early experiences don't begin to hint at the magic that comes later.

An explanation of how bicycles work conveys nothing of the experience of riding a bicycle across the Golden Gate Bridge. An explanation of how meditation works conveys nothing of the experience of meditating about the moon every day for a month.

The experience of meditation evolves and keeps getting better with expert guidance, ongoing practice, and exploration.

An Inside Look at Meditation weaves together meditation stories, explanations, commentary, examples, illustrations, and big ideas from yoga and science.

You'll encounter many of my own personal stories. You'll read about experiences of the seven long-time meditators who I interviewed.

- If you are new to yoga meditation, you'll gain a tangible sense of what meditation can be. Perhaps you will be tempted to try it.
- If you already do yoga meditation, my simple explanations will feel familiar and you may gain new insights.
- If you teach yoga or meditation, this book may inspire new ideas and meditation objects to use in your teaching.

The ideas did not originate with me

I want this book to be accessible to readers with no background in meditation or yoga or science. I often use my own vocabulary and illustrations to label and explain.



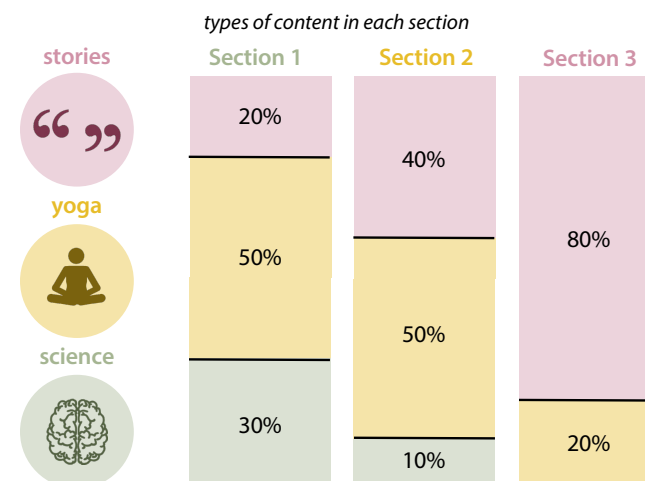
Although much of what I write feels like my ideas because the ideas have become part of me, they did not originate with me.

Learning yoga meditation is experiential. Ideas are shared. Experiences are offered. My own understanding is a work in progress.

In this book I share ideas and offer experiences to you. There is much more to discover about yoga and science when you want to go deeper.

What you'll find in this book

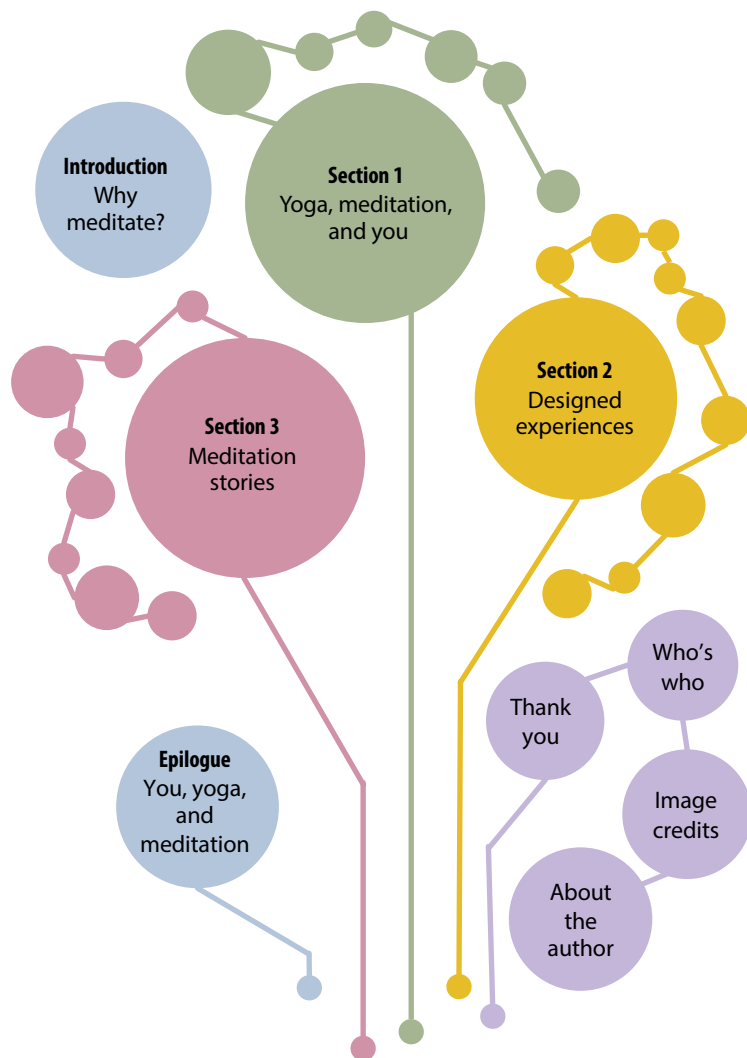
- **Section 1** introduces concepts from yoga and from science that are central to understanding how and why meditation works.
- **Section 2** explains how and why a boundless assortment of meditation objects can be used to help people transform and to spark insights.
- **Section 3** is packed with personal stories of yoga meditation in action and example meditations.



Please enjoy this celebration of possibilities for yoga meditation.

Carrie Heeter, PhD, RYS200, Yoga Mind Tools
Scientist, professor, game and meditation designer (a.k.a. CH)





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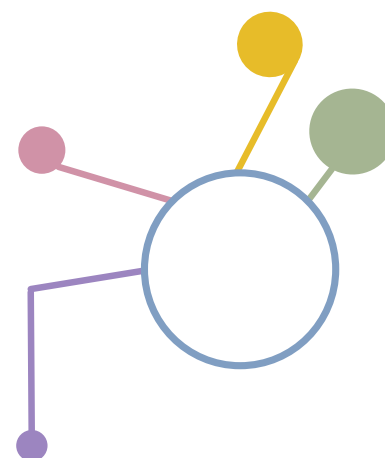
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 | Chase Bossart's classes and the Yoga Well community enabled me to write this book
 | Marcel's one-on-one mentoring is the foundation of my understanding of meditation



| I hope the stories in this book inspire you
 | Yoga and meditation teachers may recommend this book to your students
 | **Try this:** Take some time to reflect on your experience of reading this book
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Introduction **Why meditate?**

We all have our reasons.



stories
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We all have our reasons

People who meditate have their own reasons why they meditate and their own sense of what makes a meditation satisfying.

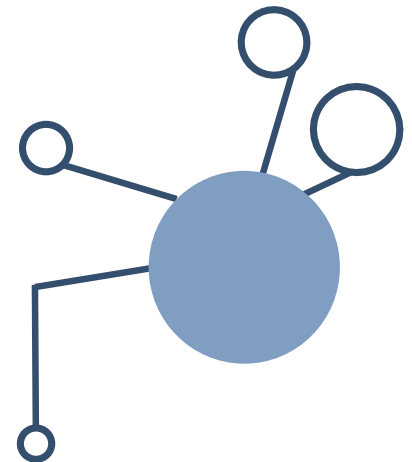
You've gotten through life figuring out how to be in this body and in this world.

You have your routines that work for you:

- things you do to heal and be healthy,
- things you do to relax and relieve stress,
- ways you practice self-care,
- things you do to learn and grow.

Come with me on this voyage of possibility. Behold what meditation can be.

Perhaps you will discover something that resonates for you.



My experience of meditation
is part of everything I do. –CH

yoga



Meditation is

- a way of knowing
- a way of becoming
- a way of life

Functions of meditation in yoga



Healing

to alleviate physical
or mental health
challenges



Support

to maintain balance
in daily life



Discovery

to nurture
insight and
transformation

One way of thinking about the goals of a yoga meditation is whether a meditation is primarily intended to heal, to maintain balance in the midst of life events and activities, or to cultivate insights and transformation.

Why do you meditate?

“

Meditation is central to how I operate. I meditate in the mornings as part of my daily yoga practice. I feel like what happens is an opportunity for me to see what's really happening. There's quiet. The external world is not requiring my attention. I can put my attention on what's within me. And then I see things about what is going on within me when I'm upset or unsettled.

Meditation is also the means to work with whatever needs attention in my life. It is the main mode I use to navigate my internal experience.



Amanda Green, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, Innermost Yoga

”

“

Meditation for me is about altered states. My meditations can be shallow or very deep. I'm primarily visual, but I'm also auditory – I hear information through the meditation that offers me wisdom and guidance.

The experiences of meditation are powerful for me. As a therapist I did years of training and then practicing the use of music and imagery personally and with my therapy clients. The imagery can take many different forms: physical sensations, memories, visual, and on and on.



Carol Jones, MA, C-IAYT, The Infertility Counselor

”

Meditation is central to Amanda's and Carol's lives and their work. Both have had a personal daily practice for more than a decade. They have studied viniyoga. Amanda is a yoga therapist, yoga, and meditation teacher. Carol is a yoga therapist and an infertility counselor.

You'll hear more about their meditation experiences throughout this book.

In my experience, meditation is really fun and really cool. –CH

yoga



Meditation can be

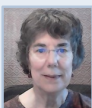
- profoundly playful
- incredibly interesting
- transformational

What makes meditation satisfying for you?

The experience of meditation is exquisitely personal. Even doing the same meditation, each person's experiences are unique.

I am fascinated by the differences in what Grazia, Robyn, and Marcel enjoy the most about a meditation experience.

“



A great meditation is when I am able to see a new pattern of my behavior or thinking, or to see an existing pattern from a different perspective

Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy, yoga, and meditation teacher

”

“



A satisfying meditation is when I can connect to the quiet vastness. Then it is easier to remember: perfect, whole and complete, lacking nothing. That ever-deepening line in my forehead between my eyes gets a little softer.

Robyn Love, C-IAYT, E-RYT500, Atha Yoga School

”

“



A successful meditation is when I feel a kind of energetic shift in how my human system is operating. That's how I know a meditation is working.

Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT, Yoga for Practitioners

”

Grazia loves the insights that can arise in meditation.

Robyn is a student of Buddhism, a certified yoga therapist, a yoga and meditation teacher. She loves how meditation connects her to a deep sense of wholeness.

Marcel is a yoga therapist, my teacher, and my mentor. He loves the energetic feeling—the shift that happens for him in meditation.

Why my students do weekly meditations

The quotes on this page are some of the reasons students in my meditation adventure class say they come to my meditations.

I teach a half-hour meditation experience that combines yoga-based movement and breathing with a meditation object. Then we discuss what went on for each person.

Every week there is a new meditation object to focus on. Some relate to healing, or support, or discovery.

These students know I am trying out new ideas. That's part of what makes it an adventure for all of us.

I always gain new understandings of how and how not to design meditations. My students teach me so much.

“

To appreciate who I am at a level I've forgotten about. To remember who I am. I can't access myself in the same way outside of meditation.

• • •

To experience wild inner adventures that are consistently surprising, fun, and healing.

• • •

I have a lot going on in my head and in my body. It is so helpful to shift into a different way of being during the meditation.

• • •

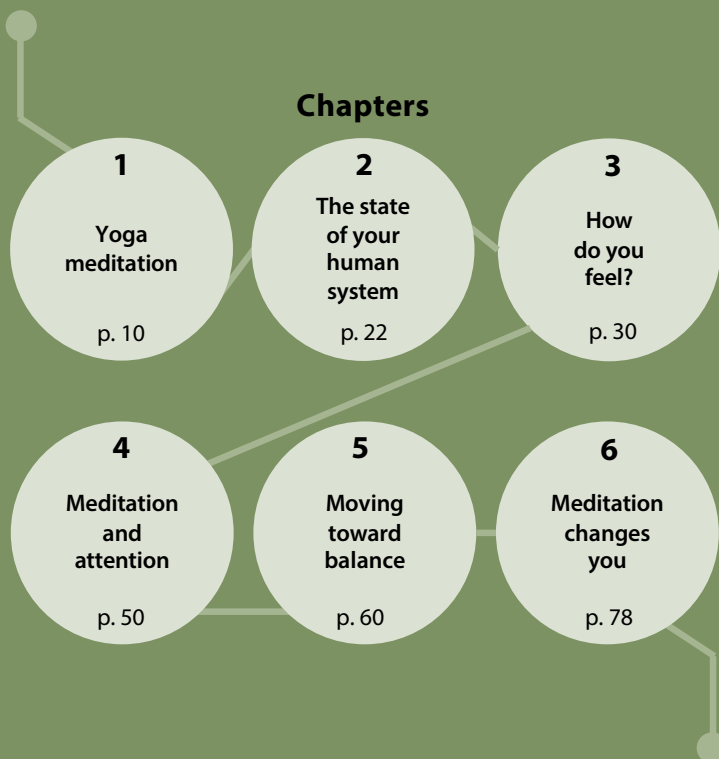
Doing the meditations feels creative. Each time aspects of me show up and my mind makes new connections.

”

Section 1

Yoga, science, and you

Chapters



Section 1: Yoga, meditation, and you

Here I establish what is meant by meditation in the context of this book. I describe the process of meditation from a yoga perspective and explain a little of how and why meditation works.

Chapter 1. Yoga is a meditation tradition. This book is about meditation from the perspectives and tradition of viniyoga.

Chapter 2. How you feel—the state of your human system—influences your thoughts and behavior. How you feel also influences your meditation experience.

Chapter 3. Meditation helps open a window to your internal world. Meditation helps you connect with feelings, emotions, and other bodily sensations. Interoception unites mind and body.

Chapter 4. In meditation, you learn to pay attention to your attention. In meditation, you direct and observe your attention. Your thoughts become more contained.

Chapter 5. To prepare your mind to be directable for meditation, movement, breathing, and attention help your mind and body transition toward a state of balance. When you are in a state of balance, your human system operates differently.

Chapter 6. Science shows that meditating regularly changes you. Meditating regularly enhances well-being and results in measurable, positive changes in how your mind and body function.

Chapter 1

Yoga meditation

Yoga is a meditation tradition.



stories
“ ”

When I consider what to teach in a meditation I connect, with appreciation and reverence, to thousands of years of those who have come before me. –CH

yoga



It's important to acknowledge that what we have received (about yoga and meditation) is the result of a great amount of care and love across thousands of years, the vast majority of Indian origins.

We are caretakers, maintaining and passing on what we have received.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

Yoga resides in an ocean of mind-body practices

Imagine that yoga and every form of meditation dwell in a giant ocean of ways of using attention, mind, and body.

The ocean of mind-body practices encompasses mindfulness meditation, guided imagery, mantra meditation, transcendental meditation, progressive relaxation, spiritual meditation, and more as well as meditation that is part of yoga, tai chi, qi-gong, and other practices with a physical component.

Because mind-body practices all involve ways of using the human system—your mind, body, and attention—it is not surprising that we find commonalities along with unique practices and outcomes.

We can label a region of this ocean yoga, rooted in a strong ancient tradition. As with water in an ocean, boundaries of defined regions are porous. A related ancient tradition is Buddhism. Secularized western “mindfulness” overlaps with yoga and Buddhism.

This book is about yoga.

locating yoga in the ocean of mind-body practices



This book is about viniyoga meditation

Zooming in on yoga reveals a diverse patch of mind-body yoga practices.

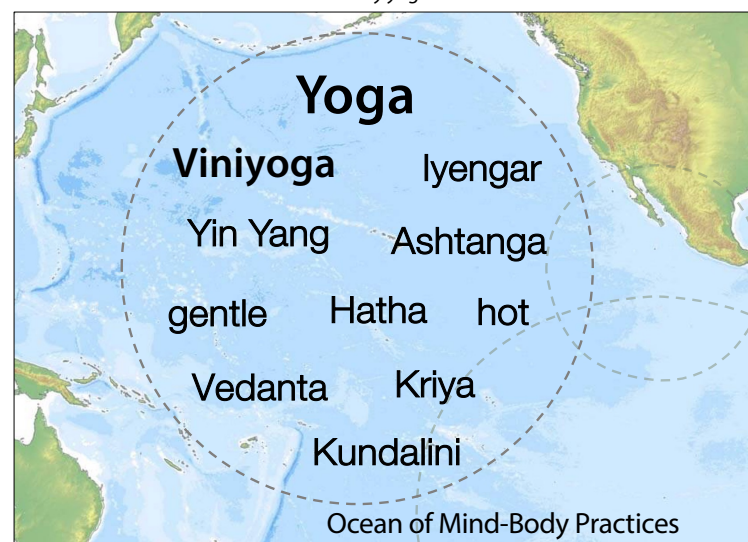
Some of the forms of yoga popular in the west include Iyengar yoga, Ashtanga yoga, hot yoga, Kundalini yoga, gentle yoga, Yin Yang yoga, Kriya yoga, Vedanta yoga, and Hatha yoga.

My training and experiences are in viniyoga.

Traditionally a student studied yoga with a guru—a teacher—someone deeply practiced and knowledgeable who themselves studied yoga with their guru. For example, Iyengar yoga was founded by B.K.S. Iyengar, who studied with Sri Krishnamacharya. Ashtanga yoga was founded by K. Pattabhi Jois, who was a student of Sri Krishnamacharya.

Viniyoga was developed by Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar, the son and long-time student of Sri Krishnamacharya.

some of the many yoga traditions



My teacher's teachers

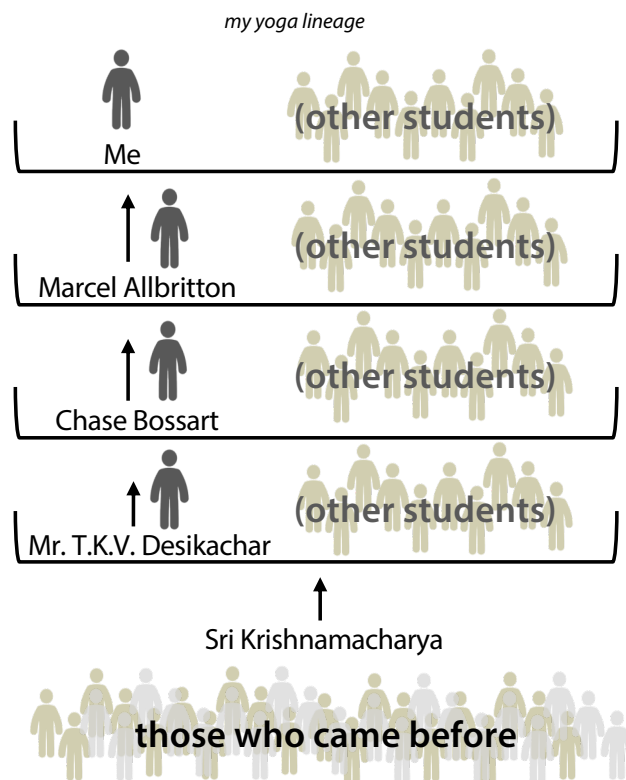
Yoga lineage and community

I'm on a lifetime journey of exploration and personal transformation. Though I started my journey late in life, stopping is unimaginable.

I'm part of an informal community of learners who I have met through Yoga Well Institute classes, each of us on our own journey.

I study one-on-one with my mentor, Marcel Allbritton. I have continuously participated in formal programs and courses offered by Marcel's mentor, Chase Bossart. Chase was a long-time student of Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar, who studied with his father, Sri Krishnamacharya.

The lineage of yogi and student extends back thousands of years.



In viniyoga, we adapt the yoga to the person.
–CH

yoga

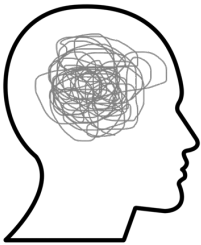


Viniyoga is intimately personal
and deeply experiential.

Viniyoga is giving what is appropriate
to each person.

It is specific and highly individualized.

N. Chandrasekaran
Principles and Practice of Yoga Therapy



The process of meditation

We enter meditation from whatever state we are in.

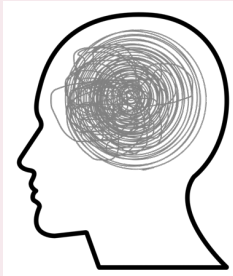
ENTER sacred space

PREPARATION

moving the system toward balance, so the mind becomes directable

LINK TO MEDITATION OBJECT

CONCENTRATION
directing attention toward the meditation object



2-WAY FLOW
shift to allowing rather than trying to direct the experience



LEAVE sacred space

Meditation is a process

When you begin a meditation session, you transition from outward focus on the external world to inward focus on the world inside. This can be an abrupt shift!

Usually you will need to slow down, to calm down, to de-scatter. You need to quiet your mind before it is possible to connect with a meditation object.

1) As preparation, tools of yoga—such as movement and breathing or chanting—are used to help bring your human system toward a state of balance, so that your quality of attention improves and your mind becomes directable.

2) Next, you direct your attention toward the meditation object. You maintain your attention there. You filter out other thoughts or sensations that would pull your attention away. If your attention wanders, you bring it back.

3) When your connection with the object is stable, a shift may happen. Something else takes over and you shift from directing your mind to allowing the meditation experience to unfold.

You can't make these steps happen. They do not happen every time.

As a meditation designer I try to create experiences that increase the likelihood that these three steps occur.

Even if the only outcome of a meditation session is moving your system in the direction of balance, there are health and well-being benefits that arise from focusing inward and quieting your mind.

This quote from a busy professional who was one of my meditation circle participants illustrates some of the value of moving mind and body toward a state of balance.

“

I have been very busy and this meditation brought me away from the busy feeling. I didn't want to leave the meditation so I just stayed in my chair with a gentle joyful feeling. My body is much calmer. There is a space for my self. I will get up soon and take this feeling with me.

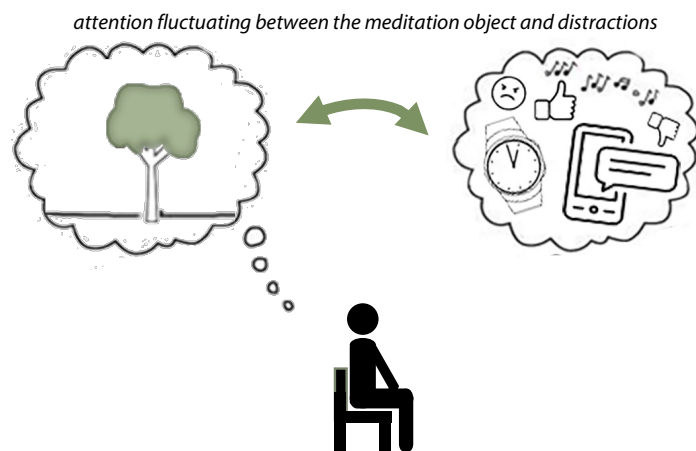
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Conscious effort keeps attention focused on the meditation object

In this phase of meditation there is conscious effort to keep attention focused on the meditation object.

Throughout a meditation there will be times when your attention is focused on the meditation object and times when thoughts, external events, or bodily sensations distract your attention away from the meditation object.

The illustration below shows a meditating person trying to focus attention on the meditation object (a tree). They are able to concentrate on the tree some of the time. Other times their mind wanders to other thoughts, activities, and upcoming tasks.



When your connection with the meditation object becomes stable less effort is needed to stay focused. There is less self-talk and more listening. You shift from being the driver of what happens to more of a passenger. You experience rather than try to direct what shows up.

Curiosity and openness to self-observation

It is helpful to approach meditation with a sense of curiosity about yourself—an openness to self-reflection—and a positive attitude.

One of the benefits of meditation is increased capacity for discerning self-observation. So you are not only experiencing what happens in the meditation, you are also observing yourself having the experience.

Every time you meditate, there is an opportunity to notice how your mind and body and breath are doing today—right now—during the meditation. You can observe when and why you get distracted. You notice whether you get annoyed with yourself when you realize your attention has wandered.

There is so much to see during a meditation that reveals your patterns (ways you typically act and respond) and how your mind and body are functioning in that moment.

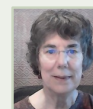
“

Recently in a meditation we were guided to feel the support of the ground. We were doing breath and movement lying down, feeling the support of the ground. And I did not feel supported at all. What I felt instead was gravity pulling me down.

I realized I must have a burden of some sort in my life right now that's pulling me down. That insight gave me something new to explore, relating it to my current circumstances.

Those kinds of insights are really satisfying.

Something I didn't expect shows up, or a thought that I've had before, but somehow didn't register at the time and I understand it in a different way.



Grazia Jaroff, yoga philosophy, yoga, and meditation teacher

”

Appropriate effort means trying just hard enough. And then being OK with whether or not meditating works. –CH

yoga



Perfect attention is not possible.

Getting annoyed at yourself for losing focus backfires.
Trying really hard usually backfires.

The secret is to be curious and compassionate about yourself.

Just notice how your attention is today.

Going down the slide

The third phase of meditation that can occur happens outside of your control. When your attention on the object of meditation is stable, your mind may shift from concentration—trying to control the direction of your thoughts—to instead becoming an engaged observer watching, allowing, and experiencing what happens in the meditation.

In yoga, that shift is sometimes described as feeling like going down a slide—letting go of control—allowing an experience with the meditation object to unfold.

One moment you are telling your mind to focus on the meditation object, and then you are watching what happens in your meditation. Something takes over, and part of you becomes an observer—a witness—along for the ride.

It is here that a special quality of insights and experiences can arise.

For example, Amanda describes being surprised by what happened during her meditations.

“

It was remarkable to me that I could have somebody suggest a golden bed of light in a meditation and then I could really experience it. The warmth was there. The color was there. The sensation was so real.

I remember another meditation where we were connecting with the sky. I remember the feeling of the sky, sort of creeping down underneath my body and threatening to take me off the earth. I didn't want that experience. It just showed up and it was so visceral, so tangible.

It felt as real as if I were doing it with my eyes open. Those two early experiences stood out because it felt like those things were physically happening.

I was curious after that. I was really hooked. How can this progression of movement and breathing allow for those experiences?



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

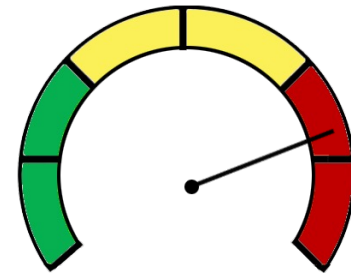
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Chapter 2 The state of your human system

How you feel—the state of your human system—influences your thoughts and behavior.



You can use a dial that goes from green to red to describe the state of your system



green to red stress meter

One general way to characterize the state of your system is using a dial that goes from green (calm and stable) to red (stressed out and anxious).

In civil defense warnings, red alert is the most serious stage, indicating imminent danger. Yellow alert indicates that danger is near. Green indicates absence of danger.

Symptoms of the green zone

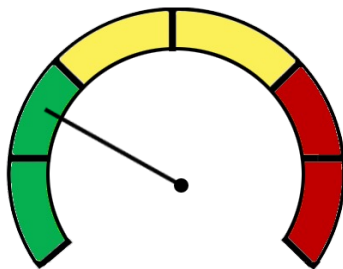
Here are some symptoms of being in the green zone.

You feel calm, stable, able to focus. You feel a general sense of ease. You feel balanced.

Being in the green zone makes it easier to see clearly. You are able to notice more. There is more space inside. You can be more open to possibilities. You are comfortable. Your choices will reflect that orientation.

When you are in the green zone your perceptions and your choices are colored by how you feel.

symptoms of the green zone



- Calm
- Stable
- Able to focus
- A sense of ease

Symptoms of the red zone

Where you are on the dial changes all the time.

Something upsetting can instantly push you into the red zone.

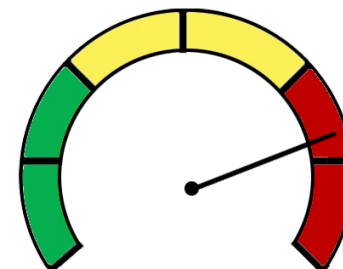
Often your attention is on what you are doing or what you are worrying about. You may not even be aware of the state of your system.

Here are some symptoms of being in the red zone:

You feel stressed out, overwhelmed, anxious, upset. You experience a general sense of dis-ease. You feel out of balance.

Being in the red zone makes it difficult to see clearly. Your perception and your choices will be colored by how you feel.

symptoms of the red zone



- Stressed out
- Anxious
- Upset
- A sense of dis-ease

Why subtle differences in level of stress matter

The six-step stress meter graphics in this book represent the way Marcel talks about stress with his clients.

I just wanted to be in the green zone. It took me a long time to accept that yellow is a realistic and valuable goal. Now I love noticing differences in how low and high yellow feel.



“

When I work with clients, I use a dial with six steps to talk about subtle differences in level of stress—

- two steps for green,
- two for yellow,
- and two for red.

Most of the time, yellow is a realistic goal. Green is often not possible. You want to stay out of the red.

Being in upper yellow is very different from being in lower yellow, because if you're in upper yellow and you get activated, you go into red.

If you're in lower yellow and get activated, you're still in yellow.

Identifying how you are doing using this six-step gauge helps you understand and develop your capacity to cope with stressful events.



Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”

The state of your system is always somewhere on the green to red dial

Bringing attention to how you are feeling gives you important information.

Your body evolved to react to stress by going on high alert to help you respond to a threat.

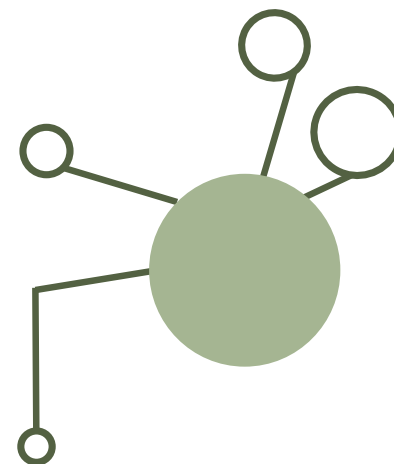
Once the threat is dealt with, things calm down.

Chronic stress is when you stay stuck in the red zone.

Stress hormones, muscle tightness and tension, inflammation and impaired immune response are among the many effects of chronic stress on the body.

Bringing attention to the state of your system lets you know how you are doing, giving you a chance to take actions to change your state.

The mind and body are natural partners. Modern minds have become habituated to ignoring the body. Meditation helps rebuild that partnership.



In yoga and meditation, you check in with your mind and body. –CH

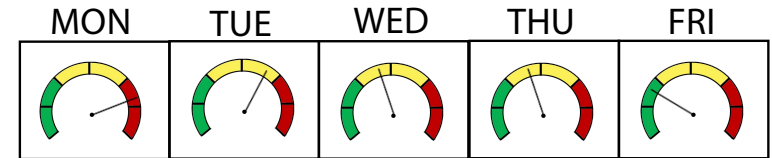
yoga



Practicing yoga and meditation changes how you feel.

Doing a daily practice shows you how you are doing compared to other days.

Good days and bad days impact my meditations



my general stress level throughout one week

“

Doing my personal yoga meditation practice every day teaches me about my life and my patterns.

In addition to preparation steps and meditation, my daily practice involves checking in with my body and mind.

I have lived with multiple sclerosis for 46 years. Because of MS, how well my body functions changes a lot from day to day. On different days some movements work fine and I need to adapt or skip other movements, depending on how my body is doing.

I get up early enough every morning to have time to do my practice before starting other obligations of the day. That way I'm not up against time pressure. I'm showing up—meditating regularly and faithfully.

Meditation will work perfectly. Right?

Even on bad days I feel better after doing my practice. But I discovered that the quality of my attention and my experience of meditation are diminished the morning after a night of working late.

I almost wish I didn't know my daily yoga meditation practice is affected by how much sleep I get. How well my brain and body function throughout the day are likely also affected.

Who has time to sleep? Do I practice meditation so my life will be better? Or do I structure my life so that my practice will be better?



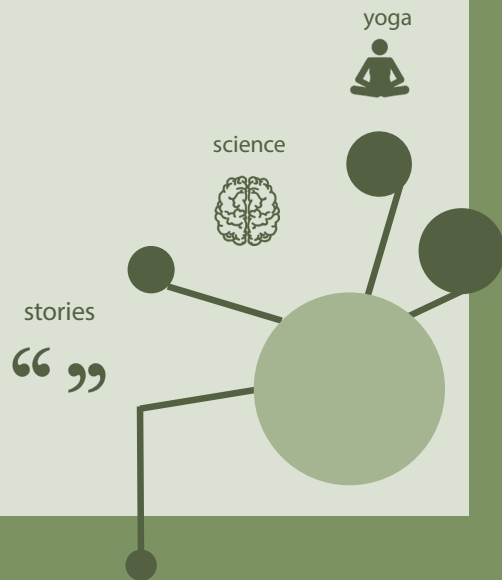
Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools

”

Chapter 3

How do you feel? (interoception)

There's more detail about how you feel
than where you are on the green-red dial.



You are an embodied being

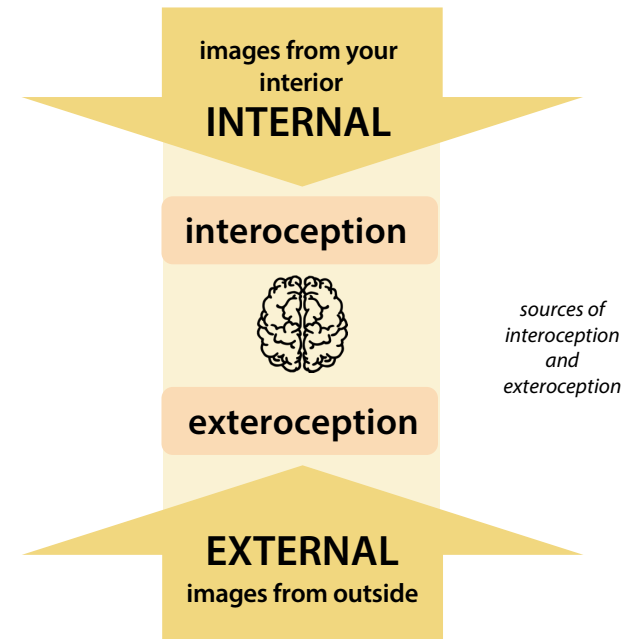
Your mind, your self, lives in a body.

Your senses constantly flood your brain with simultaneous streams of information about the external world. Scientists call this exteroception.

Your brain also constantly receives simultaneous streams of information about the state of your internal world. Scientists call this interoception.

Interoception and exteroception inform you about what is happening in the present moment, around and within your body.

Meditation helps open a window to your internal world—by focusing attention on interoception.



Interoception is one of your sensory systems

Your senses include sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. A sense of balance and the awareness of where your body is in space are also part of exteroception. These seven senses bring you information about the external world surrounding and affecting your body.

Interoception is a sensory system of information representing the condition of your entire body. Interoception originates from within your body—including from your viscera, muscles, joints, teeth, and skin.

Bodily feelings are how you experience being alive. They are a part of all of your thoughts, perceptions, motivations, intentions, and actions.

your sensory systems

	sensory system	location in body
Exteroception (outside world)	Touch	skin
	Balance	inner ear
	Body Awareness	muscles & joints
	Sight	eye
	Hearing	ear
	Taste	tongue
	Smell	nose
	Interoception (inside body)	inside the body

Adapted from Bud Craig, *How Do You Feel?*

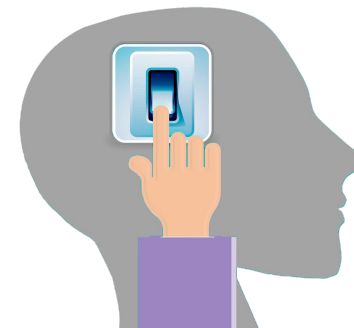
Why close your eyes to meditate?

Closing and opening your eyes is like turning a light switch on and off. When your eyes are open, visual perception dominates your awareness. You are less able to perceive your internal state. Other senses are also suppressed when your eyes are open.

Closing your eyes activates attention to interoception. What is going on internally is easier to perceive.

Closing your eyes also enhances the sense of touch, proprioception (vibration and position), pain and temperature as well as smell and taste. If you want to really appreciate how something smells or tastes or feels, close your eyes.

Closing your eyes when you meditate helps activate your awareness of interoception and supercharges imagining and remembering.



*closing and opening your eyes
is like turning a light switch on and off*

Notice how you feel

“



One of the meditation objects I use the most with my yoga therapy clients is, at the end of their practice, after they've done the movement and the breathing, having them place their attention on their system and notice how they feel. What is the quality of your body? What is the quality of your breath? What is the quality of your thinking?

Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”

Noticing how I feel was the meditation Marcel gave me at the end of my daily practice for at least the first year of working with him. I got to play with more interesting and fun meditation objects in weekly meditation classes. But for my personal practice, the state of my human system was the focus for a long time.

My focus was on more than just am I OK or is there discomfort. I asked what am I able to observe about my mind and body right now? I checked in after each step and at the end of the practice.

Living in a body with MS that is often uncomfortable, numb, painful, always changing but rarely pleasant, I had mastered the skill of ignoring how I feel and pushing through.

Most years I never missed a day of work. After all, what is more important than work? (Note to self—think more about this.) It was a mark of pride never to miss a day, given the challenges I dealt with.

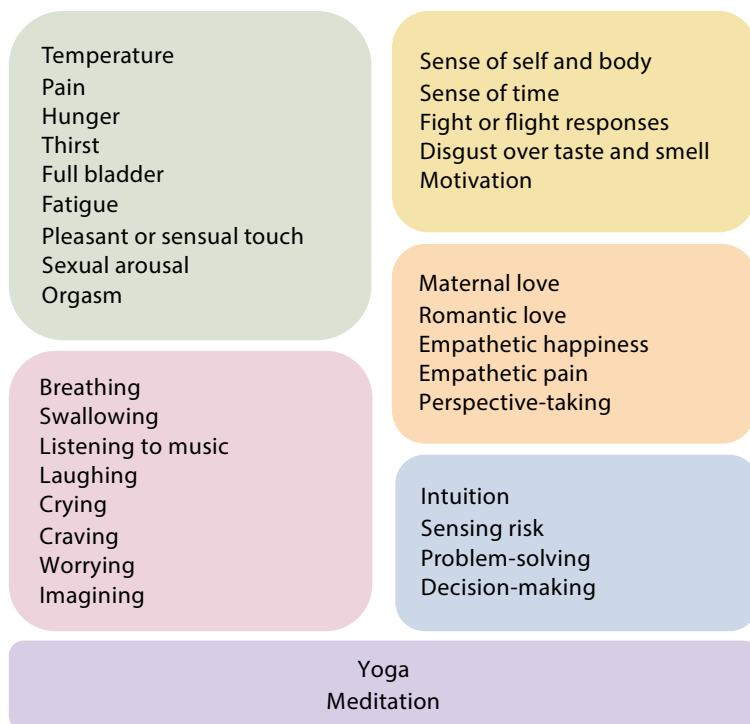
The meditation was not an exercise in cataloging aches and pains. It was an adventure in noticing how each step in the practice felt that day and getting to know aspects of me that are fairly consistent and aspects of my human system that are different on different days.

I developed more detailed awareness of how I am doing during meditation. Over time that awareness also became more available to me during daily life. It's such useful information.

try this

- Close your eyes and take a minute to check in with yourself.
- How are you doing right now?
- Where are you on the green-yellow-red dial?
- Throughout the day and throughout the week, check in with yourself.
- You're getting to know how your human system operates.

Interoception is involved in these activities



Adapted from Bud Craig, *How Do You Feel?* and Kelly Mahler, *Interoception: The Eighth Sensory System*

Interoception is not just something you do with eyes closed. Interoceptive feelings help keep you alive. They alert you to danger. They motivate you to eat, drink, swallow, and sleep. They fill you with love or empathy or disgust.

Interoception is the source of intuition and gut feelings. Interoception informs your decisions and guides you as you solve problems.

Meditation and yoga activate interoception and help train your awareness of and ability to feel interoceptive signals.

Feelings influence your thoughts and behaviors, even when you do not notice or pay attention to them. –CH

science



Feelings motivate our actions.
Feelings exert a tug on us, a pull,
literally disturb us.

They are insiders.

Feelings give the mind an incentive
to act according to the positive
and negative signals of their messages.

Antonio Damasio
Feeling and Knowing

Notice how you feel when you look at this picture



Before you turned to this page you may have been thinking about feelings but not particularly feeling them.

Pausing to appreciate this picture of a cute baby animal may make you feel a little bit happy. It probably attracts your attention and activates a momentary flash of benevolence or nurturing.

1) Your brain recognizes the photograph is of a duck. Specific cues—the fuzzy feathers, the size, the wide open eyes—clarify it is a baby duck. The small size and innocent eyes seem cute.

2) Your brain calls for changes in your body.

3) Your endocrine system releases a burst of oxytocin (the love hormone) and a dash of dopamine (the happy hormone).

4) And then you experience those changes. You feel a little bit good. You feel a little bit happy.

Your brain causes changes in your body, which you then feel as emotions.

You assign emotional meaning to bodily sensations

As you just experienced with the baby duck picture, you construct emotional meanings from interoceptive bodily signals using your knowledge and your past experiences. **This process of constructing emotional meaning is invisible to you.**

- Your brain selects what it decides are relevant sensations (the baby duck) and ignores irrelevant signals (such as background colors and shapes).
- Your brain constructs a best guess of what is happening and assigns an emotional meaning. (Awww, cute.)
- Then your brain causes changes in your body associated with the meaning it has assigned (in your skeletomuscular, neuroendocrine, and autonomic nervous systems) that you experience as emotional feelings. (Love, happy.)

The process is astonishing. Something of potential emotional significance is detected. (Call it an event.) Your brain evaluates the signals and assigns emotional meaning. Next, your brain causes your body to change—to embody the emotion. Then you experience the emotion that is being expressed in your body.

the process of experiencing emotions



Your body experiences feelings from moment to moment. Some are mild and some are intense. Feelings are a source of information. –CH

science



Affect is the universe of our ideas transmuted into feelings—the musical score that accompanies our thoughts and actions.

Feelings help living organisms [including you!] clearly identify what is required for their survival.

Mindbody is united by feelings.

Antonio Damasio
Feeling and Knowing

You experience emotions in and with your body

Your mind changes your body to activate an emotion throughout your body. And then the feeling is available for you to experience (or to ignore).

When your mind is busy thinking or worrying about other things, you do not necessarily notice the other emotions your body is experiencing. You are more likely not to notice if the intensity of the feeling is moderate or mild.

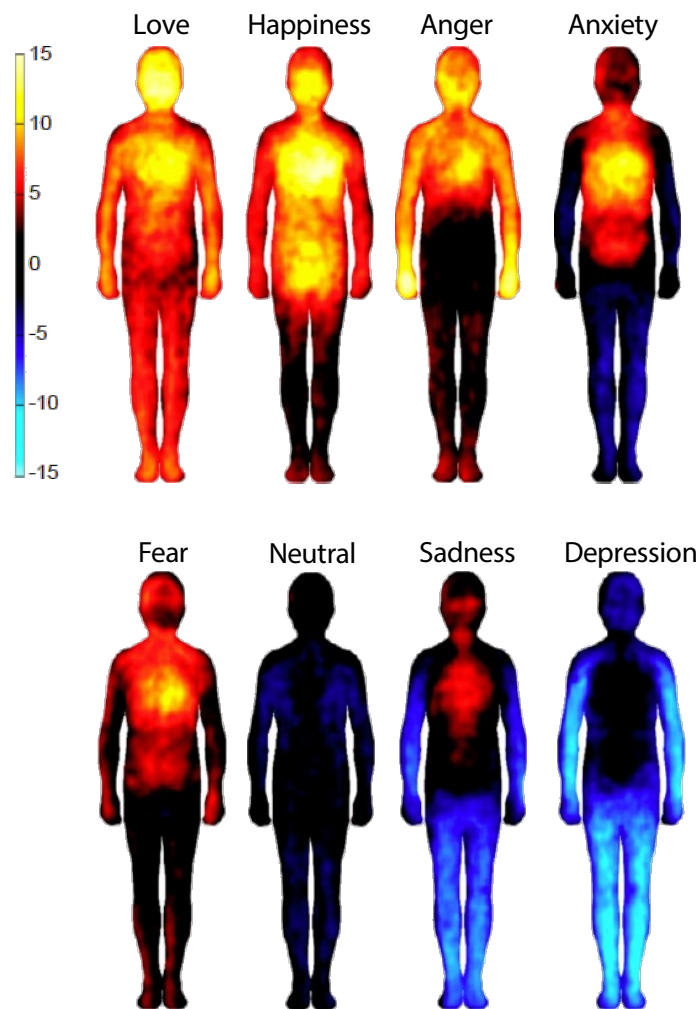
Meditation helps train your human system to be more aware of the messages your body is sending you.

In meditation, you bring attention to bodily sensations such as the state of your system and your breath.

In meditation you may be guided to focus on a meditation object—such as being in a favorite place in nature—that activates emotions and other bodily feelings.

You feel emotions in your body

the location where eight common emotions are felt in your body



Adapted from Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., Hari, R., & Hietanen, J. K. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(2), 646–651.



Your mind projects emotions onto particular areas of your body

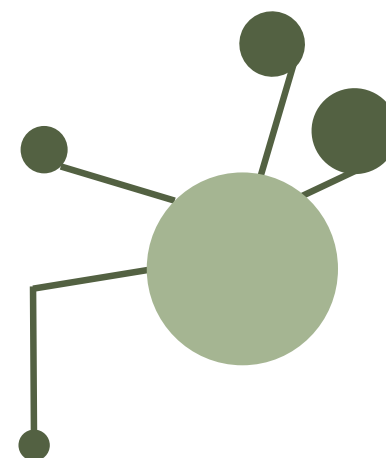
The silhouettes on page 41 show where in the body eight different primary emotions are experienced.

Parts of the body colored yellow are the most activated, followed by red, which represents a lower level of activation. Black is neutral. Dark blue is deactivated and light blue is the most deactivated.

Research finds general agreement across Western Europeans and East Asians as to where in the body these different emotions are felt.

Feeling love shows the most full body activation of these eight emotions. Depression shows the most full body deactivation. Anger involves head, upper torso, arms and hands. Sadness deactivates the lower body and activates heart, eyes and mouth region.

This research was published in Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., Hari, R., & Hietanen, J. K. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(2), 646–651.



try this

- Call to mind one of your favorite places in nature.
- Close your eyes and spend a minute imagining yourself in that favorite place in nature. Remember the sights. The sounds. The smells. Bring yourself there.
- Notice how you feel. Notice how your body feels.
- Be aware of any emotions that arise.

Adapted from Nature Meditation by Marcel Allbritton.

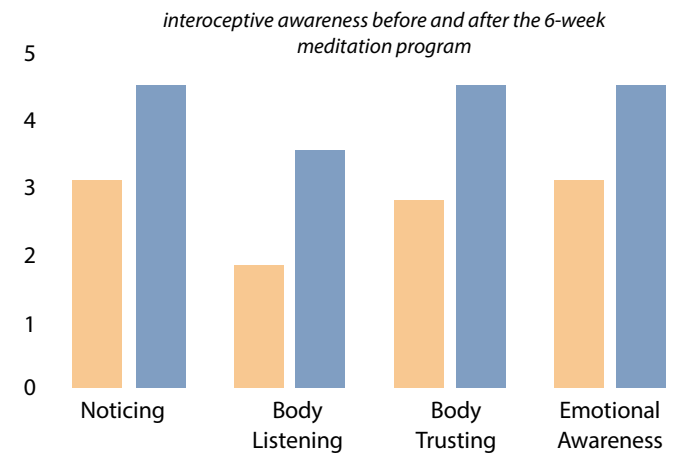
Meditating increases interoceptive awareness

Scientific research shows that meditating increases awareness of bodily sensations and emotions (interoceptive awareness).

Research on a 6-week yoga meditation program Marcel and I created for hospice professionals found significant increases in interoceptive awareness at the end of the program—compared to before the program began—along these dimensions:

- Noticing body sensations, including sensations that are uncomfortable, comfortable, and neutral,
- Actively listening to the body for insight,
- Experiencing one's body as safe and trustworthy,
- Being more aware of the connection between body sensations and emotions.

The orange columns in the graph below are average scores before doing any meditations. The blue columns are average scores at the end of the program. Five is the highest possible score. Zero the lowest possible score.



Adapted from Heeter, C., Lehto, R. H., Allbritton, M., Day, T., & Wiseman, M. (2017). Effects of a technology-assisted meditation program on healthcare providers' interoceptive awareness, compassion fatigue, and burnout. *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing*, 19(4).

This study was funded, in part, by a grant from the Michigan State University/ Sparrow Health System Center for Innovation and Research.

Hospice professionals described ways doing the meditations helped them

My research colleague Rebecca Lehto and I conducted focus group interviews with some of the hospice professionals who did at least two meditations per week for five weeks.

The benefits hospice professionals described from doing the meditations were related to being more aware of how and what they were feeling.

“

I often put my needs on hold because patients or family members need me. Doing the meditations remind me to focus on me.

Nurse, Meditation Study Participant

• • •

When I take care of my mental and emotional health, I'm able to relate better towards others.

Social Worker, Meditation Study Participant

• • •

When I notice that I'm feeling stressed, I visualize doing the movement and breathing to calm myself down.

Nurse, Meditation Study Participant

”

These and other findings were published in Lehto, R., Heeter, C., Allbritton, M., & Wiseman, M. (2018). Hospice and Palliative Care Provider Experiences With Meditation Using Mobile Applications. *Oncology Nursing Forum* 45(3):380-388.

Imagining emotions and experiences

Humans are very good at simulating emotions.

When you imagine an emotion—such as love or frustration—your body goes through some of the same changes as happened when you experienced that emotion in the past.

Imagination covers all of your senses, it's not just visual. You can imagine sounds, your physical body, feelings.

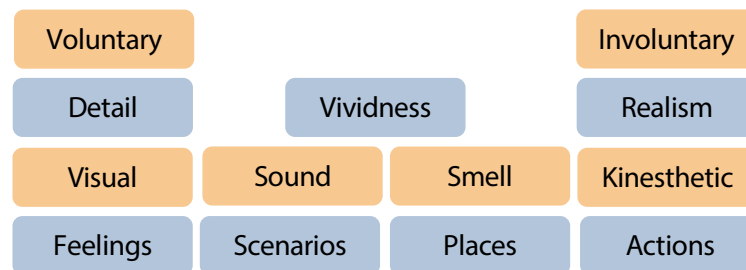
When you try to imagine an emotion or an experience or an object, your mind reaches for memories of that thing. Your brain combines, constructs, and manipulates what you imagine.

The same sensory organs that created the original experience are involved in imagining. What you imagine is created by your mind and your body.

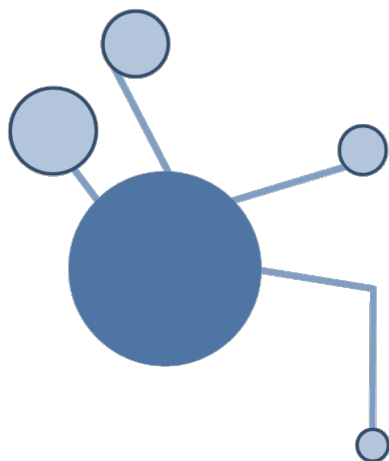
Everyone is unique. You may be able to visualize objects and events. Or perhaps you more easily imagine how something would feel.

Imagination plays a big role in meditation. For example, meditation can focus on the moon or the rising sun, a mountain or a large, vibrant tree.

What shows up when you call to mind a mountain in meditation is revealing and intriguing. Is it a specific mountain you have visited? Is it a general visual image of a mountain—or just a sense of a mountain? How much detail shows up? How real does it feel? Where are you in relation to the mountain? How do you feel?



some attributes of Imagination



How do you feel? (interoception)

48

Chapter 3



This meditation helps healthcare workers reconnect with their “healing the healers” experience. –CH

Time in nature can be healing, even transformative.

Imagining time in nature through meditation changes body and mind in some of the same ways as being in nature. It has healing effects.

Front-line healthcare workers have endured crushing exhaustion, loss, trauma, and personal risk as they cared for us throughout the global pandemic. Through her company—The Wild Institute—my sister Chris Heeter offered healers day-long canoe trips on the St. Croix River. The Canoe Day experiences gave welcome respite, but only lasted one day.

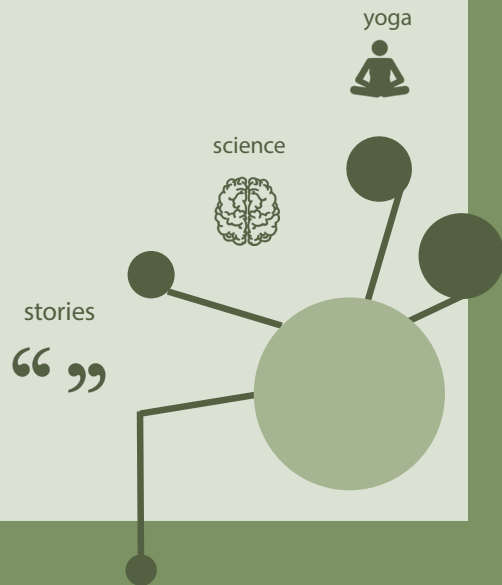
The meditation used movement and breathing steps to help prepare the mind and body to concentrate on meditation. Then I guided people to invite a memory of their time on the river to show up.

Remember what it felt like to be there. What shows up might be an image of the river or the shore. You might remember a sound—the sounds of the river, the sound of laughter.

Or you might remember a physical feeling—the feeling of paddling, of being in a canoe moving through the water, the sun, or perhaps it was rain touching your skin. Invite a memory of Canoe Day to show up.

Chapter 4 Meditation and attention

In meditation, you learn to pay attention
to your attention.



Mind wandering

Mind wandering is spontaneous and undirected thought that mostly occurs without deliberately directing your mind.

Your mind wanders frequently, every day. Research estimates that human minds wander for about 40 to 50 percent of waking life.

During mind wandering, interoceptive awareness and exteroceptive awareness are suppressed. You are not paying attention to what your body is currently experiencing. You are not paying attention to immediate things happening right now in the world around you. Your mind is somewhere else.

Your experience of the present moment is frequently interrupted and superseded by mind wandering.

What matters is not just that your mind is not focused on present-moment experience. Where has it gone?

You have your own unique patterns of how you talk to yourself and the kinds of things you talk to yourself about.

Studies show that although mind wandering can be positive, it is often negative.

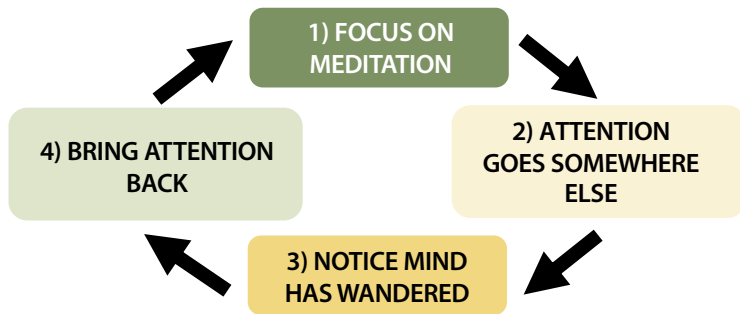
- Mind wandering can be unpleasant. Worrying or feeling anxious about the future is one way that minds wander.
- Mind wandering can be depressing. Self-criticism or ruminating about the past are other ways that minds wander.
- Mind wandering can also be creative, productive, and relaxing.

Meditating increases your capacity to notice that your mind has wandered. You may also notice where your mind has gone, and choose to bring attention back.

Meditating regularly over time reduces mind wandering.

Attention and meditation

the cycle of attention during meditation



In meditation you direct and observe your attention. Your mind has less freedom in where it goes.

Each step in a yoga meditation instructs where to place your attention.

In movement and breathing steps, you ask your body to move in a certain way—and to align the speed of each movement with the length of each breath.

Figuring out how to do a new step gives your mind something to do. Once you have understood the moving and breathing for that step, less attention is required and your mind may wander. When you notice this has happened, you can choose to bring your attention back to movement and breathing.

During meditation steps while you are trying to concentrate on a meditation object, you will notice your mind has wandered. When you notice this has happened, you bring your attention back to the meditation object. Ideally you resist the urge to get mad at your mind for wandering.

Noticing when your mind wanders during yoga and meditation is a form of self-observation. You are getting to know your mind.

Noticing your mind has wandered and bringing your attention back is an ongoing cycle for long-time and novice meditators.

The Yoga Sutas of Patañjali is a Sanskrit document from ~200CE that defines the philosophical basis of yoga. According to the Sutas yoga cultivates your ability to direct your attention. –CH

yoga



Yoga is the containment of the fluctuations of the mind.
(Yoga Sutra 1.2)

Yoga is the binding of the mind to a chosen place.
(Yoga Sutra 3.1)



Being OK with where you're at

“

One of my big patterns has been wanting to be perfect. Not wanting to make mistakes. Kind of seeing myself as wrong and a problem to fix.

I have a mind that's very active and creative. My mind is jam-packed with thoughts and ideas. I like to create stories about it all.

It's not easy for my mind to settle.

So for a long time when I meditated, I just thought I was wrong.

I'm almost 20 years into this practice and it's only very recently I'm realizing there's actually nothing wrong. To really believe that.



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

”

You can't force your mind to settle. Trying too hard causes agitation. Agitation moves you away from a state of balance.

“Try just hard enough but not too hard and be OK with whether or not meditating works.”

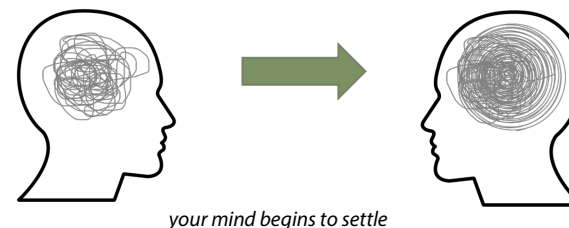
That's easy to say and hard to do.

When we have a daily practice, every day there is another chance to practice just the right amount of effort.

Every day there is another chance to practice acceptance—letting go of the outcomes.

And like Robyn, every day there is another opportunity to realize—and then realize again—there is actually nothing wrong.

To meditate you begin to settle your mind

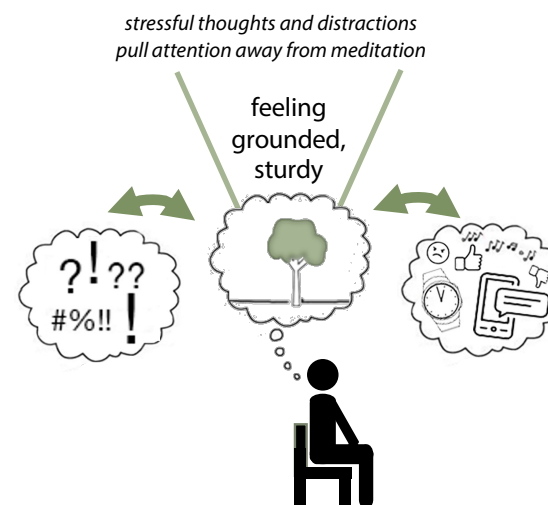


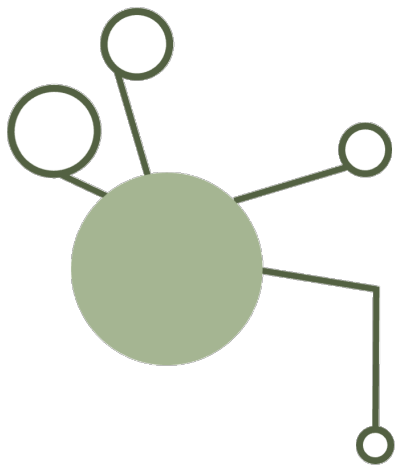
Your mind is used to doing whatever it wants—focusing here or there—wandering—unrestricted.

Perhaps your truck broke down, your dog ate your bagel, and your co-worker called in sick. A big project may be due or overdue. A loved one needs your support. You may be irritated with yourself or someone else about something that went wrong.

When you start a meditation session you need to disconnect from what you had been thinking about or doing. You begin to look inward and ask your mind to settle—to stop wandering.

Some times you are able to focus, such as the example tree meditation below. Other times thoughts intrude, pulling your attention away.





try this

- Set a timer for 3 minutes.
- Close your eyes and allow your mind to wander.
- Let your mind go wherever it goes. Don't try to control your thoughts. Just allow whatever shows up.
- When the timer indicates 3 minutes have passed, reflect on your experience.
- Where did your mind go?
 - Were you re-living something upsetting?
 - Criticizing yourself?
 - Daydreaming about something nice?
 - Planning?
 - Worrying?
- Throughout the day, notice what your mind tends to do when it is not busy with a task.

Scientists study how attention works. –CH

science



- Attention is the ability to select information while filtering out the rest.
- You have limited attention bandwidth.
- You can only fully process one or a few things at a time.

Science shows that your attention
1) can be drawn to something, or 2) you can
choose to pay attention to something,
or 3) your mind can wander. –CH

science

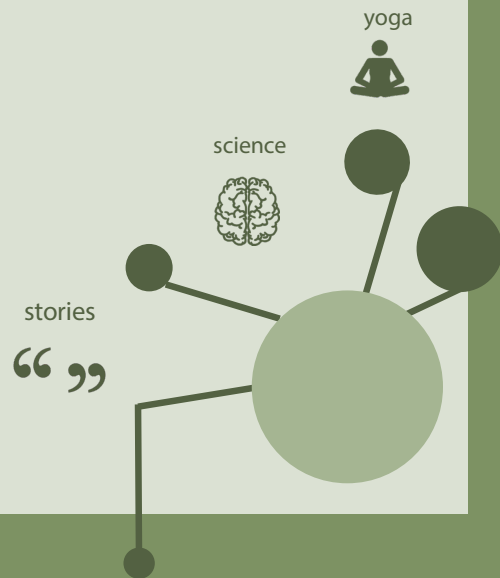


- **Stimulus-driven attention** is attracted to a stimulus of potential interest—such as a loud noise or a looming object.
- **Directed attention** refers to intentional, conscious focusing of attention.
- And then there is **mind wandering**, when attention is not on the present moment experience and is not directed.

Chapter 5

Moving toward balance

When you are in a state of balance,
your human system operates differently.



Yoga fosters and values balance

When you are in a state of balance, your human system operates differently. You make better decisions. You perceive things more clearly. Your quality of attention is more stable and easier to direct. You are less affected by things. You experience a sense of equilibrium.

symptoms of balance and imbalance

Symptoms of Balance

When you are balanced:

you become less mental
more connected to self
body relaxes
calmer
less stressed
there is space

When you are in balance
thoughts are contained.

More symptoms of
balance:

clear mind
hopeful attitude
focused
steady
alert

Symptoms of Imbalance

When you are out of balance
your whole system is
affected.

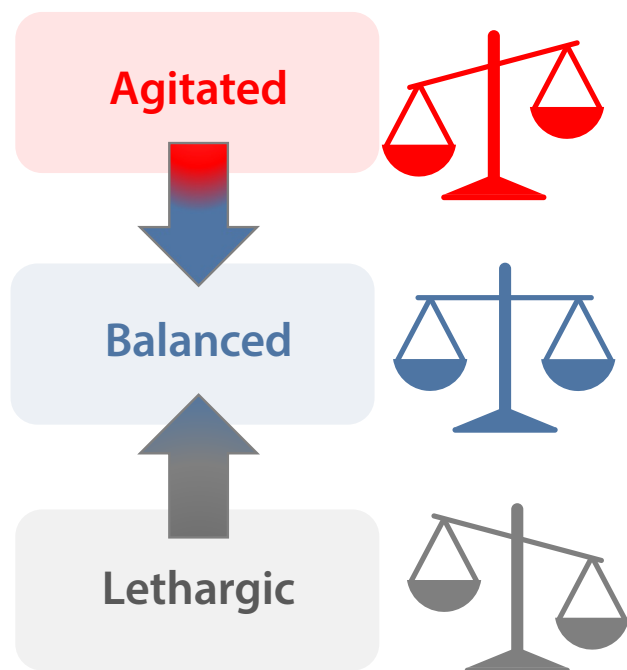
Black and white thinking is a
symptom of imbalance.

When you are out of
balance you don't see
clearly.

Chase Bossart, Yoga Well Institute

To prepare your mind to be directable, you move your system towards balance

agitation and lethargy are states of imbalance



Closing your eyes, devoting time and attention to meditating, and checking in with how you feel all help move your system toward balance.

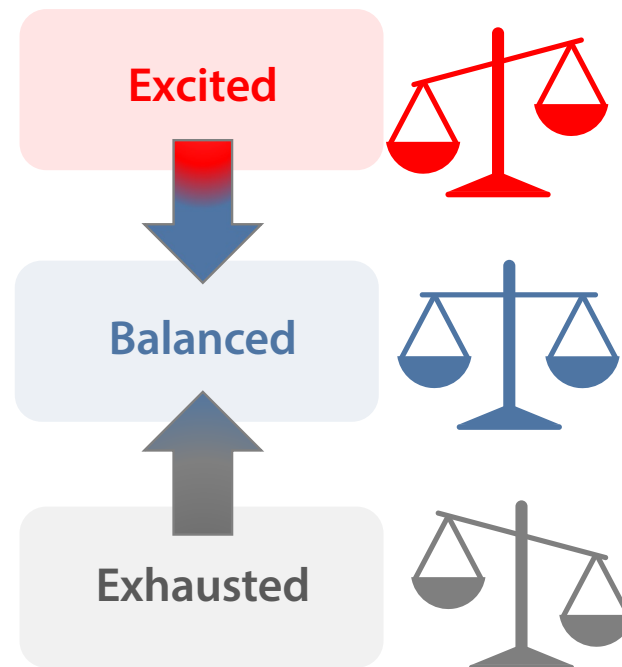
Moving toward balance can mean calming down if you are agitated.

On the other hand, moving toward balance can mean becoming more alert if you are lethargic.



If you are excited, going full speed, multitasking, thinking about a million things, you are out of balance. To prepare to concentrate during meditation, movement and breathing steps help move your system toward balance.

excitement and exhaustion are states of imbalance



If you are exhausted from lack of sleep or over-exertion, focusing on meditation will likewise be difficult. In this case, preparation helps your system become more alert as a way to move toward balance.

Or else you get some sleep and try again later.

Exhaustion makes concentration difficult

Moving towards balance often involves calming down. Quieting a busy mind helps you be more able to concentrate on meditation. Relaxing your body helps you be more able to concentrate on meditation.

On the other hand, if you are exhausted when you start a meditation, calming down may lead to falling asleep rather than increasing your capacity to focus on the meditation.

Some of my meditation circle participants regularly stay up late working on projects. Others are parents of new babies, so their sleep is compromised.

“

I get so relaxed that I often fall asleep in the middle of the meditation when there are no movements involved.

”

To help tired participants stay alert enough to meditate, I often include optional movement and breathing to accompany periods of focusing on a meditation object.

During meditation you notice how you are doing

A father of young children tried several times to participate in a live online 10-minute meditation. He showed up late or had to leave early for the first two sessions. The third time he was finally able to stay for ten minutes and then take part in the follow-up discussion. He had this to say:

“

What I am most aware of is that I never get enough sleep.

”

The father's insight about needing more sleep is right on target. More sleep may not be possible now. Realizing the importance is a first step.

Sleep is arguably more important for him right now than meditation. However, three attempts at meditation have already helped him begin to understand how lack of sleep hampers his ability to function.

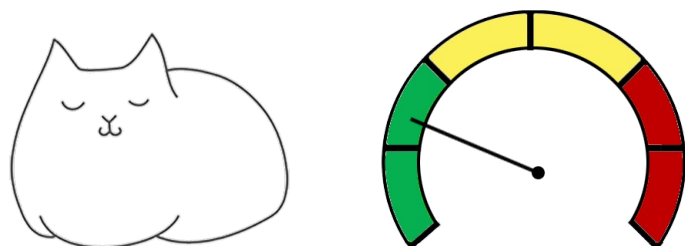
It will probably take many more reminders like this to motivate him to see small changes he could make to better care for himself.

To receive the full benefits of meditation, it is necessary to make room for it in your life.

Your breath is an indicator of the state of your system

Your breath is an indicator of the state of your system. Your breath shows how balanced you are in this moment.

When you are more calm, content, and relaxed your breath tends to be long and smooth. Your system is in balance.



cat feeling calm, contented, and relaxed—in the green zone

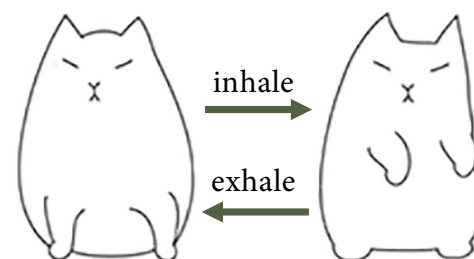
When you are more agitated, upset, and stressed out, your breath is more rough and shallow. Your system is out of balance.



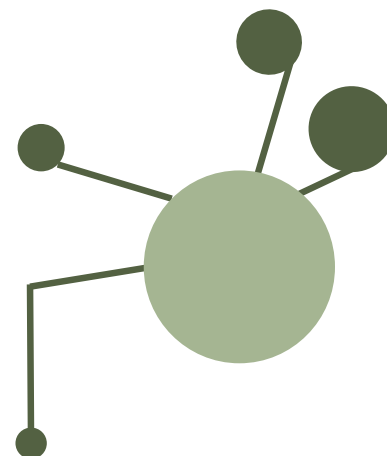
cat feeling agitated, upset, and stressed out—in the red zone

Bringing attention to your breath changes your breath

- Directing attention to your breath changes your breath.
- In life, stopping to focus on your breath can help calm your system.
- In yoga, aligning breath and movement is another way to move the state of your system toward balance.



cat directing attention to aligning movement with inhale and exhale



Yoga helps you move toward balance. —CH

yoga



When you ask your system to behave
as if it is in balance

—such as by asking the breath
to be somewhat slow and smooth—

this tends to move you in the direction
of being in balance.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

try this

- Bring your attention to your breath right now.
- Notice the quality of your inhale. How long is your inhale? How deeply do you inhale?
- Notice the quality of your exhale. How long is your exhale? How deep or shallow is your exhale?

Patricia visualizes movement and breathing to move towards balance

After doing 10-minute meditations several times a week for a few weeks, study participants often tell me they visualize doing the movement and breathing while they're at work.

Like Patricia describes below, their human system has had repeated experiences with the practices.

When doing a meditation is not possible and they notice they are agitated, they visualize or imagine doing some of the steps—to help come back toward balance.

“

It's better when I do one of your [Yoga Mind Tools] meditations from beginning to end.

But now that I've done them quite a bit, I've learned that when I don't have time to do a 10-minute meditation, I can just visualize or even do some of the movement and breathing from a meditation.

I set my timer for five minutes. I sit up straight. I check in with how I am feeling and then I either visualize or actually do some movements from the meditations, aligning the movements with my breath.

I visualize or do movement and breathing throughout the day. I do it in the steam room at the gym. I do it when I need to breathe. I time the movements with my breath. I don't think about anything else. It's a moment where I can be present with my body.



Patricia McDaniel, MBA, Hospice of Michigan, Meditation champion

”

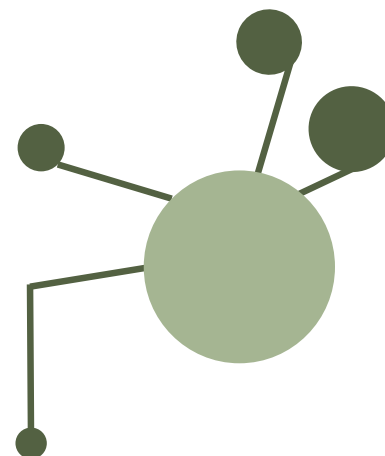
Doing yoga requires attention and bodily awareness

Doing yoga requires a lot of attention to your present-moment bodily sensations.

- Yoga movements rely on coordination and ability to control, maintain, and track your body's position in space.
- You pay attention to interoceptive and exteroceptive information to perform the movements.
- For each new step you need to learn the movement sequences, adapting the instructions to how doing that movement and breath works in your body.
- You need to remember the sequence of movement and breath for the current step—and then learn the sequence for the next step.

Attention to present-moment sensations interrupts mind wandering and other thoughts. Attention to present-moment sensations helps bring you toward balance.

Yoga meditations incorporate these same processes.



Patricia noticed that yoga classes gave her a little bubble of peace

“

I can not tolerate a lot of stress and just keep going. What I have done is find things that help me metabolize the stress and move past it. Where meditation started for me was 20 years ago. My life had gotten really stressful. I was going through a divorce. Both of my parents were sick and in their last years. My stress was at an acute level over about a five-year period.

I was trying everything I could find to help. I started to notice that when I would go to yoga class, when I would leave class I would have a little bubble of time where I felt very free and very grounded and present. It didn't last that long, so you have to go to yoga again and again, but there would be this little moment.

I remember walking out after a yoga class and getting in my car. Instead of driving home, I drove to the lake we were close to. I remember watching the water for a few minutes and feeling like, no matter what is going on, right now I'm fine. I'm safe. I feel okay. All these things are going on—my mom's dying, my dad's dying. I'm probably getting a divorce, but none of that's happening right now.



Patricia McDaniel, Hospice of Michigan, Meditation champion

”

Patricia noticed a short bubble of time right after yoga classes of feeling free and grounded and present.

Doing the yoga practice regularly and her self-awareness enabled her to notice and to make the most of that feel-good yoga afterglow.

Regularly attending a weekly yoga or meditation class influences the way your mind and body function.

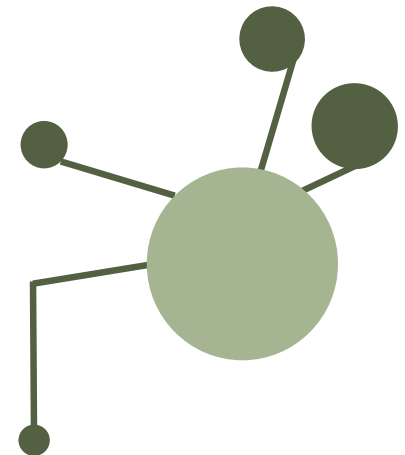
The teacher chooses and sequences particular movements, breathing patterns, and meditation objects to influence the state of your system in beneficial ways.

You focus attention on bodily sensations—movement and breathing as well as how you feel, how the practice is feeling. There is less attention to external events. There is less room for self-talk.

During class, you probably are aware of how doing the practice is making you feel. And afterwards—like Patricia—you may notice a welcome change in the state of your system.

You've been training your human system to direct attention to present moment sensations—to how you feel.

As you continue to attend classes your capacity to notice how you are doing during yoga and in life grows.



Isn't this cool? –CH

yoga



Meditation is a tool you can use
to change how you feel.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

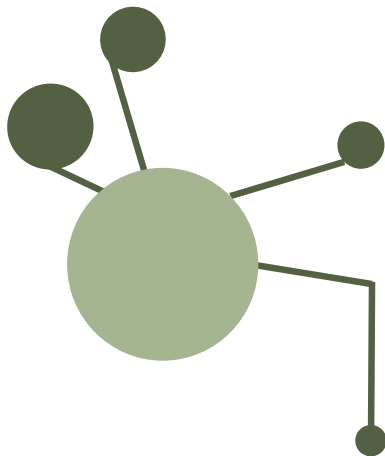
Here are more details about ways meditation
can be used as a tool. –CH

yoga



Meditation is a tool you can use to support
daily life:

- To de-stress. To quiet a busy mind.
To calm down.
- To prepare your mind and body
for a challenging situation or event.
- To get in touch with how you are feeling.
To listen to your self.



Patricia uses meditation as a tool to optimize her effectiveness at work

“

I use the 10-minute Yoga Mind Tools movement meditations more in the morning or before I'm going to do something that I maybe don't feel super excited about, or I'm concerned about.

I did your Calming Meditation right before a challenging conversation with a nurse, because I had this premonition that it was going to be a difficult conversation. I thought she was going to complain about some things and I wanted to be in the mindset where I could receive it without getting defensive or without trying to solve her problems. I wanted to be able to listen to her.

And then I had the call. I think it is what enabled me to be present enough to hear her. My listening allowed her to say some things that maybe she didn't even plan on saying. She really told me how she was doing. So that I could help.



Patricia McDaniel, Hospice of Michigan, Meditation champion

”

Patricia is always looking for new and effective tools that help her manage the state of her system.

We worked together on the Movement Meditations to Combat Burnout project (described in chapter 22). She has experienced each of the sixteen 10-minute meditations from that project multiple times.

She uses these meditations to manage her mental outlook—to prepare for a challenging meeting—or to let go of a stressful day.

Chapter 6

Meditation changes you

Science shows that meditating regularly changes how your mind and body function.



We are so accustomed to believing we are in control, it can be hard to accept that we don't even need to know that healing is happening. -CH

yoga



Healing is happening.

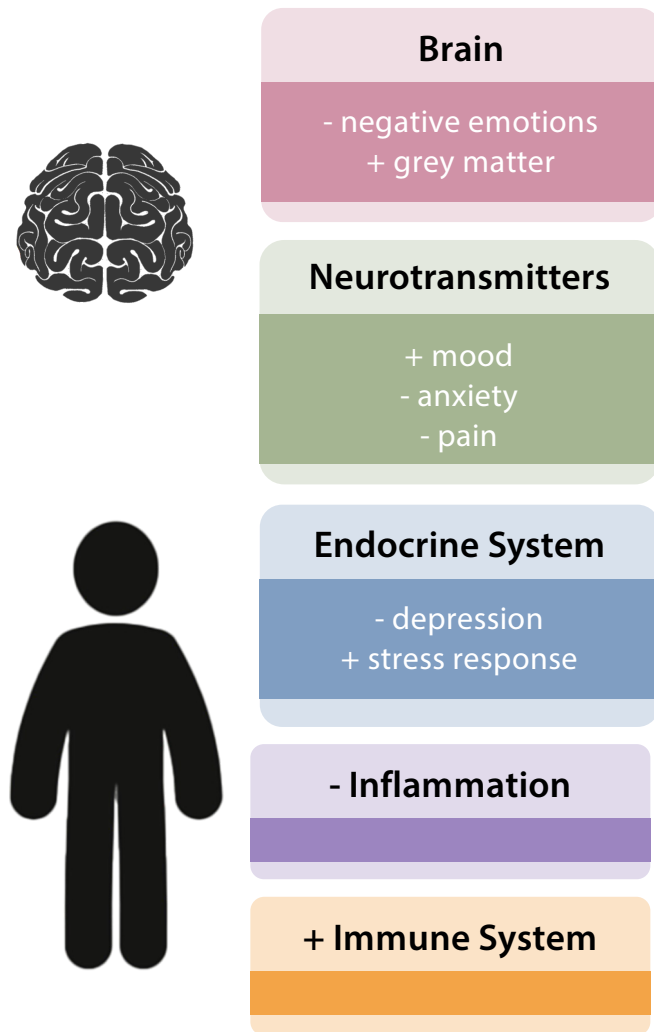
You don't need to know.

Your system is doing it.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

Meditation changes you

some aspects of your human system that change with regular meditation



Scientific studies document beneficial changes in the mind and body from regular meditation over time.

Meditating regularly changes how your mind and body function

A scientific review of research on various forms of meditation identified five domains where meditation has been linked to beneficial changes in how the mind and body function.

These biochemical and neurological changes can be measured. They influence how we feel and act, but are outside of conscious experience.

Brain structure and function: Effects of meditation associated with brain structure and function include things like reduced activation of the limbic system associated with negative emotions, better emotional regulation, increase in the amount of grey matter, and changes in the activation of different regions of the brain.

Neurotransmitters: Neurotransmitters are involved in movement, attention, learning, reward processing, mood, memory, and much more. Neurotransmitter effects of meditation have been found for things like improved mood, reduced anxiety, less pain sensitivity.

Endocrine system: Endocrine system effects of meditation have been associated with things like improved mood and decreasing stress hormone levels.

Inflammation: Meditation over time is associated with lower levels of inflammation.

Immune system: Meditation over time is associated with improved immune system functioning.

These are only a few examples of the changes that have been found to be associated with meditation.

Adapted from Kasala, E. R., Bodduluru, L. N., Maneti, Y., & Thipparaboina, R. (2014). Effect of meditation on neurophysiological changes in stress mediated depression. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 20(1), 74–80.

Science shows that meditating regularly changes you. –CH

science



Doing these things enhances well-being and changes how your human system functions:

- Noticing how you feel—checking in,
- Directing attention toward meditation,
- Suppressing mind wandering,
- Moving toward balance.

Science reveals that meditating changes mind wandering. –CH

science



Long-time meditators' minds wander less during meditation and in daily life than novice meditators.

Regular yoga/meditation over a long period of time changes self-awareness during mind wandering—making it a more meditative state.

The mind wanders yet is also observing itself.

This is the tip of the scientific iceberg

More than 20,000 peer-reviewed articles about meditation have been published in scholarly journals, as have more than 9,000 articles about yoga.

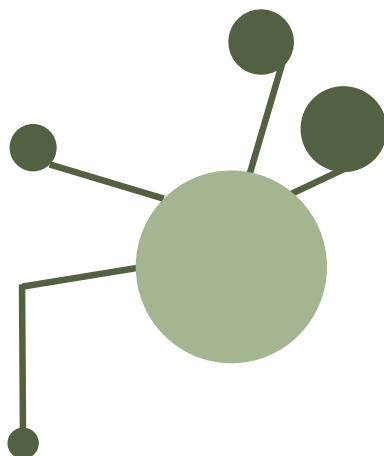
This chapter gives a few examples from a gigantic amount of scientific research on the process and outcomes of meditation and yoga.

The key takeaway regarding yoga, meditation, and you is that practicing meditation and yoga regularly brings about myriad known and unknown systemic changes in how your brain and body function.

Most of the changes science measures are not changes you can perceive. For example you will not notice if the grey matter in your brain becomes thicker, or if the length of the telomeres at the end of your DNA strands gets longer.

There are also brilliant theoretical scientific models about how and why yoga meditation changes you. I have conducted scientific research and published peer-reviewed articles where I discuss some of these models of meditation and mind-body integration.

But that's a different story.



You may notice beneficial changes in how you feel during and right after you meditate. Meditating regularly over time results in systemic and sustained change. –CH

yoga



Doing meditation changes you.

Doing meditation regularly
changes you more.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

Section 2

Designed experiences

Chapters

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is a
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experience

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Section 2: Designed experiences

Let's go deeper into essential aspects of viniyoga meditation.

Chapter 7. Meditation is a designed experience. One or more tools of yoga are arranged in a series of steps that typically begin with movement and breath to help prepare your mind and body for meditation.

Chapter 8. A meditation object is the place where you put your attention. Choosing an appropriate object for someone depends on the person and the goals of the meditation.

Chapter 9. What matters is how the person who is meditating makes sense of and the connection they form with a meditation object.

Chapter 10. Some meditations are designed to be done once or a few times. Viniyoga practitioners also engage in long-time meditation, connecting with the same meditation object every day for weeks, months, or years.

Chapter 11. Three example one-time ocean meditations illustrate surprisingly different ways of framing an ocean meditation, each with its own reasons why and how it might be useful.

Chapter 12. The experience of doing long-time meditations using the moon as a meditation object is unique to each person.

Chapter 13. Notes from my first 21 days doing a long-time spaceship meditation offer a taste of the day-to-day experience of repeatedly connecting with the same meditation object.

Chapter 14. Yoga facilitates and promotes self-observation. You notice how your system is doing and where your mind goes during meditation. In daily life you begin to notice your patterns.

Chapter 15. Meditation sparks insights. Unexpected connections arise. You may see old patterns—and thus have the chance to make different choices. And you learn to listen for intuition.

Chapter 7

Meditation is a designed experience

The possibilities for how to design a practice are limitless.



Viniyoga meditations are designed experiences

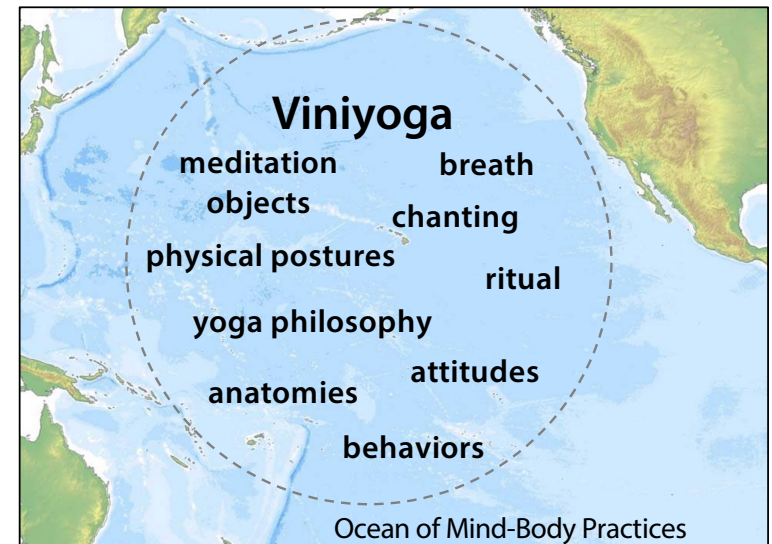
Viniyoga meditations can involve an astonishing variety of meditation objects.

Viniyoga meditations are designed for specific individuals or groups to address particular goals related to healing, support, insight, personal transformation, coping with challenges, and other objectives. Here too the possibilities are boundless.

Some meditations are done every day over a period of days, months, or even years. Other meditations are intended to be one-time experiences.

Viniyoga meditations can be designed for meditation novices or experts.

some aspects of viniyoga



Entering and leaving a meditation
is part of the experience. –CH

yoga



Meditation is an experience
that is separate from everyday life.

A meditation often begins
by closing your eyes and checking in.
Closing the eyes for meditation can signal
to your human system that you are entering
a sacred or special space.

When meditation ends the final step
is to open your eyes
and leave that sacred space,
getting ready to return to daily life.

Meditation experiences happen outside of everyday life

comparing meditation, games, and movies

enter sacred space



Prepare space.
Close eyes.

Meditation



leave sacred space,
return to daily life

enter magic circle



Gather.
Set up game.
Review rules.

Game



leave magic circle,
return to daily life

go to movie theater



Find your seat.
Popcorn?
Previews.
Opening credits.

Movie



go home,
return to daily life

Designing yoga meditations requires expertise in yoga

Throughout this book I mention movement and breathing steps.

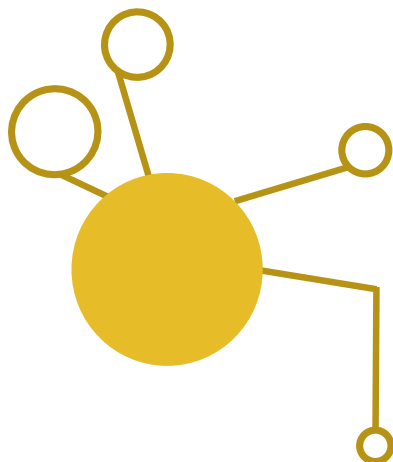
I do not explain or elaborate—not because they are unimportant—but because the topics are beyond the scope of this book.

Each yoga posture is chosen for a reason, including the experience and capabilities of the person who will be doing the posture and the effects that posture can have on the human system.

There are strength and flexibility requirements for each posture and modifications that help make a posture doable, safe, and effective for an individual body. There are counterposes to reduce possible strain and guidelines for sequencing postures.

Yoga breathing techniques are chosen for their intended effect on the human system with consideration of the experience and capabilities of the person.

Designing yoga meditations requires expertise in yoga.



Meditation and experience design

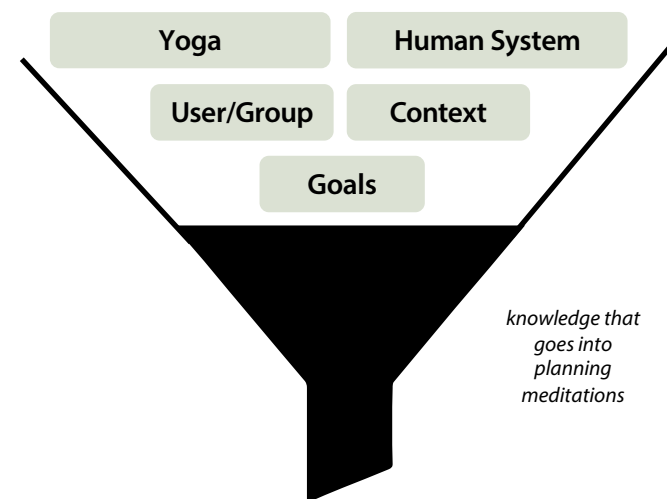
I teach graduate classes in user experience design. So it is natural that I apply design thinking when I design a meditation.

My designs are grounded in my understanding of yoga and how the human system operates, including the ideas presented in Section 1.

I research my target audience—my users. How much prior experience do they have with yoga and meditation? What needs or goals are motivating them to try meditation? How much time do they have?

I try to learn as much as I can about my users. When I was working on meditations for family members of hospice patients, I researched grief to help me understand the experience and process of grieving. I read articles and books, talked to experts, and talked to people who were experiencing grief.

I consider the context—when and where will participants be meditating? Will they be gathered together in person or online? Will they be at home or in their office, in a park or at a yoga studio?



With my users in my heart and my own recent meaningful experiences percolating, I meditate—asking the milieu of yogis who have come before for inspiration. What should this meditation be about?

Our meditations typically begin with preparation of mind and body

The first three steps of the Calming Meditation by Marcel Allbritton shown below are examples of preparation. Doing these steps helps move your human system toward a state of balance and helps settle your mind.

Stick figures are like musical notation for yoga. We use them to represent starting and ending positions of movement. Inhale and exhale arrows indicate how the movements align with the breath.

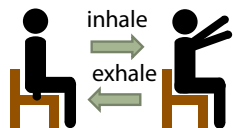
The Calming Meditation is done seated in a chair.

1



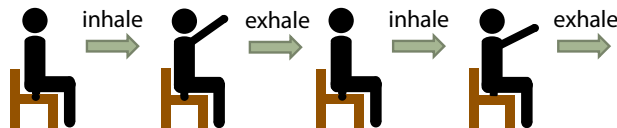
Sit comfortably in a chair with eyes closed, your hands resting in your lap. Check in with your body, breath, and mind.

2



Have your arms down by your sides. As you inhale, raise your arms up from the front. As you exhale, lower your arms down. Continue this.

3



As you inhale, raise one arm up from the front. As you exhale, lower that arm down. Inhale, raising the other arm up. Exhale, lowering that arm down. You're alternating arms.

Movement and breathing steps help make yoga meditations accessible

“

I've practiced Zen meditation for decades. In Zen, your mind becomes the object of meditation. You're not directing your mind anywhere else.

To be directed in meditation to imagine a river—or imagine the moon—made me wonder what's going on? Why is everyone talking all the time? I had a little resistance to that.

But after more experiences I saw that the yoga approach was far more accessible to people than asking someone to sit still for 35 minutes and count their breath. So that seemed like a good thing.

In yoga we invite people to bring certain qualities into their own system by connecting with a meditation object. Then they have their own experiences with the object and its qualities.

There's some preparation of the body and the breath which is, in my opinion, sadly lacking in Zen. In Zen you have to do a lot of work to get yourself settled.

Whereas in yoga, preparation is very explicit. Part of the whole experience is, okay, let's move in an intentional way. Let's bring in some breath, which settles our system.

And then by the time you're introducing the object or the direction of the meditation, the person is already ready for it in some way.

For a lot of people yoga is much more accessible. And there is the idea that the teacher can select the object of meditation with an eye to what qualities they want to invite into the student's experience.

That's fascinating and the potential feels quite endless.



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

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Amanda teaches yoga classes with a meditation element

Yoga classes may incorporate meditation. Amanda describes a yoga class she taught using the feeling of devotion as a meditation object.

“

I teach yoga classes with a meditation element.

A large part of what we do is explore movements and postures with breathing. But often the meditation object leads. There's an idea or a feeling. To begin I may guide students to this idea or have them call to mind a certain object in nature.

In one of the classes I'm teaching this month, we're talking about the feeling of devotion. The class starts with some breathing and then closing the eyes and letting the feelings associated with that word be there.

The idea carries through the rest of the practice. How do you breathe with devotion? There are moments throughout the class punctuated with a reminder of calling that feeling of devotion to mind. There's a lot of quiet and a lot of stillness and it's guided. Then we do some breathing. At the end, there's a sometimes brief, sometimes longer meditation and a way of interacting with or having an experience with this feeling of devotion.

The month of weekly classes focuses on devotion, each in different ways.

It's been really interesting to hear how the set of feelings of devotion has shown up for people in their lives throughout the month.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

”

Grazia teaches meditation classes focused on yoga philosophy

Grazia teaches weekly online meditations that are inspired by yoga philosophy texts. She also has taught yoga philosophy classes through university continuing education. Responding to a suggestion from her students, she started offering yoga philosophy meditations.

She and her meditation students have profound interest in yoga philosophy. Grazia designs yoga meditations to enable her students to deeply experience and reflect on yoga.

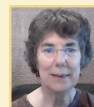
“

I have a small group of meditation students that have been with me for a long time—some as long as five years. They have all taken yoga philosophy classes that I occasionally teach on campus. So they are interested in and familiar with some of those concepts.

I try to stick with a topic for a month at a time. We do a little bit of movement and we do breathing. Then I'll often do some simple chanting.

Chapter 1 of the Yoga Sutras talks about perception. One form of perception is direct observation. In the first meditation that month I guided students to pay attention to the parts of the body as you move them, as you breathe. To be aware of and to observe the body.

The next week I took them back to the idea of perception and added another question. I introduced the idea that we use inference when direct observation is not possible. What was an example or a set of circumstances when your perception of someone changed? You saw someone behaving a certain way. And your perception of their behavior changed over time.



Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy, yoga, and meditation teacher

”

SPOILER ALERT

Throughout this book I share examples of my Yoga Mind Tools meditations like the Therapy Dog Meditation (on the opposite page).

If you have done guided yoga meditations before—or if you teach yoga meditations—you can imagine some of what the experience of doing the Therapy Dog Meditation might be like by reading the description.

There is art and science to sequencing and timing exactly what words to say and what movement and breathing patterns to interweave. None of that is conveyed in a brief synopsis.

When you read the synopsis your human system—your mind, body, and breath—have not been prepared for meditation. The synopsis is not at all the same as doing the meditation.

Like movie reviews that give away plot twists, reading the synopsis may color the meditation for you if you do it in the future.

Knowing what is coming before you do this meditation can tempt your planning mind to pre-plan what kind of therapy animal shows up. Knowing what is coming could interfere with the spontaneity of how your human system responds when you encounter each step during the meditation.

The synopsis does convey some of what the experience is like.



Here's another example: I designed the 10-minute Therapy Dog Meditation to help university students ease their finals week stress. No meditation experience is required. –CH

(interwoven with seated movement and breath steps)

Therapy dogs love to lend comfort and affection.

Imagine a therapy dog showed up just for you to lend you comfort and affection. Or perhaps a therapy cat or a therapy stuffed animal is what you need today.

There is no hurry. Just allow an image or a sense of some kind of therapy being to show up.

As you inhale, inhale comfort from your therapy being. As you exhale, affection from your therapy being spreads throughout you.

Inhaling comfort.
Exhaling, affection spreads throughout your system.

Meditation objects

A meditation object is the place where you put your attention.

yoga



stories
“ ”

A meditation object is the place where you put your attention

So far I have mentioned 15 meditation objects:

a tree, feeling supported by the earth, a golden bed of light, the sky, a mountain, the moon, the rising sun, canoe day, your breath, how you are feeling, devotion, a therapy dog, your mind, perception, and calming

So, can anything be a meditation object?

Basically yes.

An object of meditation can be almost anything, including but not limited to:

- **objects in the natural world**—such as the moon or a lake,
- **tangible and subtle qualities**—such as vastness or stability,
- **ideas**—such as freedom or kindness,
- **aspects of the body**—such as the breath or the spine,
- **aspects of our self**—such as our habits or activities of our mind.

Connecting with a meditation object gives your mind a new experience. Your mind takes on qualities of what it connects to and, as a result, operates in a different way.
—CH

yoga



Our actions arise from previous experiences—

or from something fresh and new in our system. Then the mind gets used in a different way.

Mind is the ultimate chameleon.

The mind takes the color and form of what it is connected to.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

A meditation object can help you cultivate a quality in yourself

Meditation objects are often chosen for their qualities. Here are a few example qualities that might be desirable for a meditation.

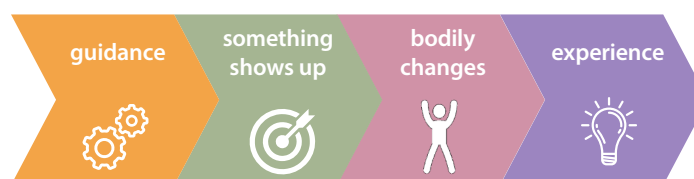
peaceful	stable	safe	strong
flexible	calm	expansive	connected
joyful	optimistic	vibrant	open

example qualities

When you meditate on an object that is associated with a supportive quality your human system experiences feelings associated with that quality. Changes occur in your body, breath, and mind as you experience those feelings and thoughts.

Remember from Chapter 3 how thoroughly your body is involved in experiencing thoughts and emotions. Your brain and gut confer and assign meaning to what is being perceived and then cause changes throughout your human system which you experience. Meaning is expressed and experienced by your body.

Something similar happens when you remember or imagine an emotion, an experience, or an idea. Changes happen throughout your human system which you then experience. This happens in meditation. When you connect with what stable or safe feels like during meditation, you embody that feeling.



*in meditation we embody emotions, thoughts, and memories
in the process of experiencing them*

Staying with the experience during meditation is like marinating in that quality—letting it spread. Changes happen throughout your human system that feel like that quality. There is a shift. Your mind and body take on some of the the color and form of what you are connecting to.

Why cultivate a quality?

Here are two examples of why meditation objects associated with specific qualities could be beneficial.

Perhaps there are a lot of changes happening in your life. Growing your **sense of stability** would be helpful. In meditation you might call to mind a large, vibrant tree. The meditation guide might direct your attention to the stability of that large, vibrant tree. Then you bring that feeling of stability into yourself.

Rather than simply meditating on the quality of stability, connecting with an object in nature such as a large tree helps make the feeling of stability tangible. When you connect with a tree in meditation and notice the qualities of the tree, it becomes easier to imagine and feel the quality of stability than simply grasping for that abstract concept.

Perhaps you are confused or uncertain about choices you need to make. Doing a meditation on a **calm, clear** lake could help you feel more calm. In the meditation you have the sense that you can see into the clear water. You spend time connecting with calm, clear water. Imagining physical feelings of seeing clearly may gradually activate a feeling in you of seeing calmly and clearly—of **clarity**. It might even bring some sense of clarity to your situation.

Like stability and the large tree, a calm, clear lake can be a more effective vehicle than the abstract concept to help you connect with the quality of clarity. Initially you connect with the sense of that calm, clear lake. As you continue to connect with the quality of clarity, you may see things differently.

What shows up in meditation is like a gift

The form of yoga meditation I work with values meditations that are open. There should be room in the introduction of the meditation object for what shows up to come from you.

Suppose I guided you to allow to come to mind a time when you felt a sense of wonder. It can be from long ago or recent. There is no hurry. Allow to come to mind a time when you felt a sense of wonder.

Some moment in your life may come to mind. And with that moment will come a taste of the feeling of wonder you felt.

I believe that when your mind is settled and you invite something to show up in meditation, what shows up comes from a larger, deeper part of you than the part of your mind that talks to yourself.

You listen. You wait. You allow. In my yoga community, we refer to allowing as “not driving the bus”.

In some way what shows up for you shows up for a reason. Your human system supplies it. A connection to self is happening.

Something is offered—the general instruction in the meditation. And something is given—your experience.

For me things that show up in meditation feel like gifts. They are almost magical. Why did that particular moment of wonder show up for me?



what shows up for you in meditation is like a gift

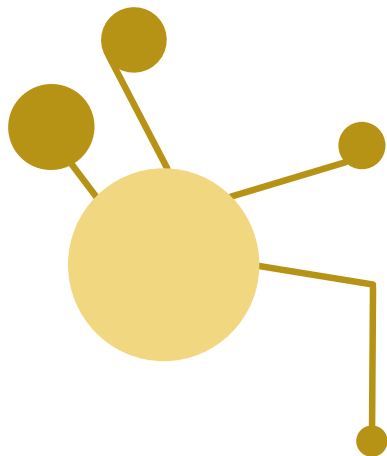
Meditation objects can be metaphors

Some meditation objects are metaphors that symbolize a process or an idea.

- In a meditation you may be guided to imagine yourself beside a river. You bring water from the river into yourself. At the end of the meditation you return the water to the river.

Bringing water in and then bringing water out is a metaphor for cleansing. Your human system constructs your experience—including what is being cleansed. The instructions do not specify what is being cleansed. The instructions may not even mention cleansing. Perhaps your meditation experience includes a sense of cleansing—or perhaps not.

At some level there may be an understanding of metaphor. At a conscious level you may simply be having an experience of bringing water in and bringing water out. You may have a sense of relief, a sense of some negative emotions or physical tensions loosening.



Metaphors can be implicit or explicit

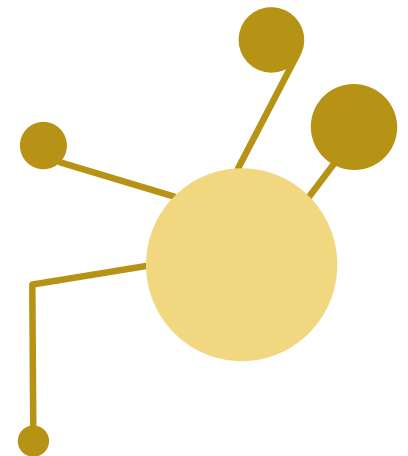
- A flower bud can be a metaphor for maturation or development.

Often when there is a bud during a meditation experience it will open. When there is a seed it will grow. When there is an egg it will hatch.

Sometimes the meditation instructions explicitly cue maturation. Other times the meditation introduces a bud or seed or egg. Over the course of the meditation, maturation may happen for those who are ready to bloom.

The meditation designer may intend to have the bud represent some part of yourself or your life. Perhaps the instruction is direct. Imagine yourself—or a relationship, or your heart—as a flower bud.

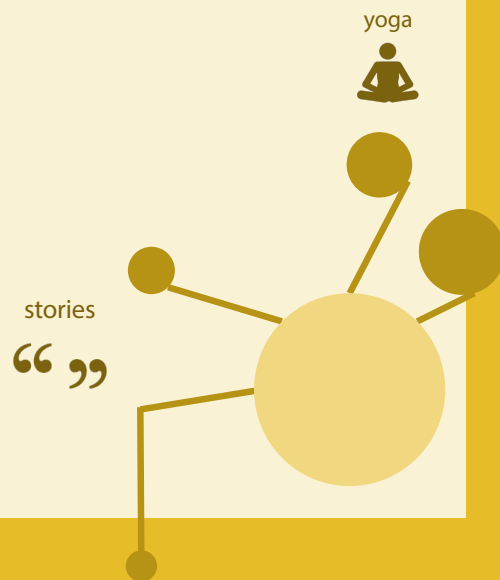
Or the instructions may only talk about a flower bud. Any associations you make with the bud relating to your life come from you. You may just connect with a flower bud. It's still a nice meditation. Some of us tend more toward taking things literally.



Chapter 9

How meditation objects work

There has to be a seed.



For a meditation object to be effective for you, it has to already have meaning for you. That meaning is like a seed. –CH

yoga



Meditation objects resemble or seem like something else in your life.

Your experiences related to a meditation object make it meaningful to you.

If you have no connection with a meditation object the meditation is unlikely to be effective.

There has to be a seed.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

It matters that your experience comes from you

Meditation objects are like portkeys in the fantasy world of Harry Potter. Any object can be turned into a portkey with magical properties. When someone touches a portkey, they are instantly transported to a specific place.

Like touching a portkey, focusing attention on a meditation object can transport you to a meditation experience.

I am enthralled with the art of designing engaging, effective, personalized portkeys. I'll show you why.

I taught a 25-minute Peaceful Feeling Meditation to my weekly meditation adventure group. I started with a peaceful place because I thought it would be easier for people to connect with a familiar place than with a generic peaceful feeling.

After some initial movement and breathing, I guided participants to allow to come to mind a very peaceful place. Notice the sights. The sounds. The feelings. Notice what peaceful feels like.

Later, I guided participants to invite an activity that feels peaceful to come to mind. Don't go searching. Just wait and allow an activity that feels peaceful to show up. Notice what peaceful feels like.

I moved from a very peaceful place to an activity that feels peaceful to broaden the exploration of peaceful feelings. Then toward the end of the practice I guided them to connect with a feeling of inner peace. Noticing what inner peace feels like.

Many participants commented that all three experiences of peaceful feelings—a very peaceful place, an activity that feels peaceful, and inner peace—felt the same. This discovery surprised, delighted, and fascinated me. Throughout the meditation they connected with the essence of feeling peaceful.

The opposite page reveals what showed up for four of my participants. Their experiences demonstrate the beauty and effectiveness of using open instructions. For each individual a very peaceful place and an activity that feels peaceful from their life showed up and served as their personal portkeys to peaceful feelings.



Your personal portkeys are specifically yours

As you read participant experiences below consider whether their places and activities would work as portkeys for you.

Had I guided participants to imagine being in a comfortable chair reading a good book with good light, many might have felt somewhat peaceful—though not as peaceful as Darcy felt since it is an activity in her life that makes her feel peaceful.

Had I guided participants to imagine walking in a deserted wild refuge in 20-degree-below-zero weather, only Chris would have felt peaceful.



a peaceful place and a peaceful activity

Marcia Heeter

Place: running along the beach, stepping into the waves a little bit

Activity: laying on the ground after canoeing—nothing is demanded of me other than to lay there and take in what's around me

Darcy Drew Greene

Place: on the roof watching the sun set over the ocean horizon, hearing waves

Activity: in a comfortable chair reading a good book with good light

Fred Goldsmith

Place: June Lake near Yosemite in the off-season—it's completely deserted—something about the withdrawal of activity that I know once was there gives me a peaceful feeling

Activity: rowing—once I'm out on the lake I can rest and stop rowing for a while, meandering on the water

Chris Heeter

Place: the desertedness of walking in the wild refuge with my dog at dusk when it's 20 degrees below zero—I have the gear I need to feel comfortable—I have what I need

Activity: canoeing in the Boundary Waters with my best buddy—once we get all the stuff packed and just start to paddle we feel the tension dripping off—we got here and how good it feels—I have what I need



Viniyoga teachers and yoga therapists seek to understand the individual (the soil) and design a practice (the rain) that supports the individual. –CH

yoga



Think of a meditation like the rain,
and the individual like the soil.

If rain falls on the ocean, not much happens.
Rain falling on rock or dry hardened soil runs off.
Rain on saturated soil may destroy crops.

On freshly tilled soil, rain may provide
needed moisture for seeds to grow.

We prepare the individual so their system
can be receptive and choose meditation objects
that are appropriate for them.

Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar
In Search of Mind

Certain meditation objects are appropriate for you now

A peaceful feeling is not an accessible meditation object for everyone. If your mind is occupied with ruminating about something difficult that is happening to you—or if your mind is filled with dread about an upcoming event—it's possible that nothing will show up when you invite a very peaceful place to come to mind.

Water in a river can be used as a metaphor for cleansing—washing away troubles and tears. But what if floods destroyed your neighborhood last year? A meditation about a river would be colored by your devastating experience with flooding. A river is probably not an appropriate meditation object for you.

The tradition of yoga I study advises that I should not choose my own meditation object for meditation I plan to do daily. My mentor or teacher who knows me chooses for me.

This is because we naturally want more of what we like. We naturally want to avoid what we don't like.

I love meditations that let me feel vast and free. I don't like limitations or rules. However I am already good at feeling vast and free. Doing a meditation about a mountain might be less fun but more helpful for me. The mountain might help ground me and give me stability.

Someone who is rigid and stubborn might love how it feels to meditate about a mountain. Doing this regularly could have the effect of increasing their rigidity. For this person doing a meditation on the vastness of the ocean might be less fun but more helpful for becoming more open and flexible.

The kinds of meditation objects that are appropriate for us change as we change.

Connecting with a meditation object is like surfing

Connecting with a meditation object is a little like waiting for a good wave, then riding the wave. It doesn't always pan out. You might start with a wave and realize it isn't working. You can abort and wait for a new wave. Or a wave may not come. You can just hang out, focusing on your experience of the movement and breathing.

I taught a Breeze Nymph Meditation to my meditation adventure group. My intention was for them to experience a sense of freedom and lightness. I wasn't sure if it would work to imagine a physical breeze that wasn't really happening, or to be the breeze.

My participants in this group have been doing weekly meditations with me for three years. They are skilled at surfing—at waiting for hints of a meditation portkey to show up and then riding the wave.

Near the beginning of the meditation I guided them to imagine or have a sense of a gentle breeze. There's no hurry. Just allow a sense of a gentle breeze to show up. It's the perfect temperature.

About halfway into the meditation I shifted my instructions to being the breeze: In Greek mythology, there are gods of the winds and there are breeze nymphs. Imagine that you are the breeze or that you are gliding on the breeze. Perhaps you are a breeze nymph.

The adjacent page describes four participants' meditation experiences. Imagining a breeze didn't do much for Darcy. A good wave didn't show up. But then in the second half of the meditation she found herself gliding with a flying squirrel.

What showed up for Fred took him in a different direction than what I had in mind but aligned beautifully with things happening in his life now. He chose to ride that wave instead of trying to control his experience and follow instructions to connect with a breeze.

For Andrea and Carol, waves showed up that worked well right away. Andrea became the breeze even before I gave that instruction. Throughout the practice lightness and cooling showed up for Carol.

These examples demonstrate skillful surfing—what can happen when you let connections show up and experiences unfold.

*connecting with a
meditation object is
like surfing*



Experiencing the gentle breeze meditation

“

Darcy Drew Greene

I couldn't feel the breeze at first, but I was able to hear wind chimes. Then when you said to be the breeze or glide on the breeze, all of a sudden I was a flying squirrel. I was feeling the breeze and having fun gliding. The movements sort of added to that flight. I was moving and breathing and gliding. Little things at the beginning of the meditation didn't work, but all of a sudden my experience became huge.

Fred Goldsmith

Instead of breeze nymphs all I could think of were sirens and cyclones. So I went with that. Walking around San Francisco you're much more likely to have your face smacked with the wind, rather than a gentle breeze. It was invigorating chaos.

Right now my mind is in a bit of chaos over a project I'm working on that's just forming. Often at the beginning of a project where I haven't focused yet on exactly where I want to go or what I want to do. I have all these ideas coming in and coming at me. I know eventually it will settle down and take form. Right now it's the exciting part because I don't quite know what's happening and there's all these choices before me. So I think that's part of why I got into being wild wind.

Andrea Rundgren

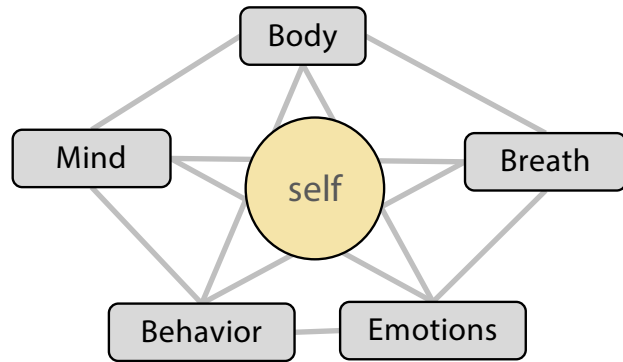
I felt closely aligned with this meditation. I truly was the breeze. The movement enhanced that feeling so much so that right before you described the breeze nymph, I had thought to myself as I was exhaling, that I was the breeze. In San Francisco we have a summer unlike any place on earth. The past few weeks have been cold and foggy and windy and there's no end in sight. Any breezes I've been experiencing have been very unwelcome. To be able to imagine a perfect-temperature gentle breeze and have that comfort and ease felt quite wonderful.

Carol Jones

I was out on my deck right before we started and there was a fabulous breeze. I have COVID right now, so my body has been feeling pretty hot and heavy. The meditation was light and cooling. The lightness and coolness were astounding. At first, I was feeling the breeze and then I started being absorbed by and being the breeze. It felt so light. My body feels much better.

”

Five interlinked dimensions of the human system show how meditation works



an Indian philosophy model of the overlapping interlinked dimensions of the human system

Yoga philosophy names five interlinked dimensions of the human system: body, breath, mind, behavior, and emotions.

Changes in one dimension affect all of the other dimensions.

When your **mind** is thinking about an overdue project, your muscles may be tight, your stomach may feel queasy (**body**). Your **breath** may be shallow. You probably feel anxious (**emotions**). You may snack or procrastinate or overreact to something else that happens (**behavior**).

When you go for a walk in the park (**behavior**), your **body** relaxes. Your **breath** becomes smoother. Your **mind** grows quieter. You feel more peaceful (**emotions**).

We can use this model to talk about how yoga and meditation work

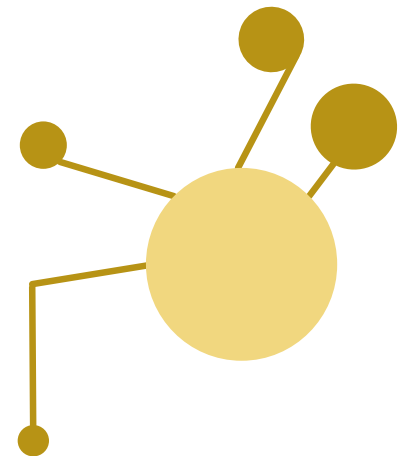
We can use this model to talk about how yoga works.

Aligning movement with breath during yoga helps quiet your mind. Your breath becomes longer and smoother. You feel more calm, more balanced. Whatever you do immediately after yoga (behavior) will be influenced by the state of your mind-body-breath-emotions.

We can use this model to talk about how meditation works.

Meditation objects can target any one or any combination of the five dimensions. Changes in one dimension impact all dimensions.

For example, connecting with being in a favorite place in nature through meditation can elicit many of the same body-breath-mind-behavior-emotions benefits of actually being in that place.



One-time and long-time meditations

One-time and long-time meditations serve different purposes



One-time and long-time meditations are different

One-time and long-time meditations involve the same underlying process of meditation. The distinction is not about how long the meditation lasts while you are meditating. The distinction is how often you do the meditation.

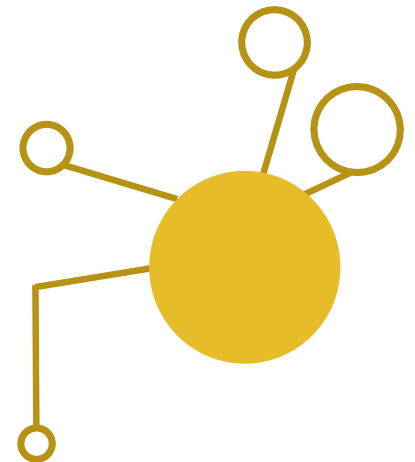
One-time meditations

One-time meditations are designed to be done once or a few times. They can be part of a group class, guided by a teacher. The teacher chooses the object and designs the meditation experience. The meditation object is different every week or every month.

Recorded one-time meditations can also be found on meditation apps and in some online yoga and meditation sites.

Long-time meditations

Long-time meditations are usually part of a daily personal practice. You focus on the same meditation object every day for weeks, months, or longer. In my tradition of yoga you work with a mentor or teacher or yoga therapist who selects an appropriate meditation object for you and supports your experiences over time.



Comparing one-time and long-time meditations

One-time and long-time meditations serve different purposes

One-time group meditations were not created specifically for you. They may not be right for you to do repeatedly over time.

one-time	frequency	long-time
once or a few times		daily for months (or more)
audience		
group class or app users		just you
design		
Movement and breathing steps are interwoven with the meditation into a coherent experience.		Movement and breathing steps are customized to your needs. Meditation happens at the end of the practice.
support		
There may be a group teacher who knows and interacts with students. Or there is just a recording by an expert teacher you do not know.		A yoga therapist, yoga teacher, or mentor designs your personal practice and supports you over time.

some differences between one-time and long-time meditations

Carol loves one-time meditations

One-time meditations can be designed for people who are new to meditation, or for those who attend weekly classes. People like Carol who have a personal daily yoga and meditation practice also enjoy and benefit from one-time meditations.

“

I love one-time meditations. They're so useful.

They give me the opportunity to explore parts of myself. Sometimes they affirm parts that I know. Sometimes they lead me into a curious area about myself that I would like to know more about. Sometimes they evoke all kinds of wonderful memories of a time in the past, like a time when I was near a body of water or whatever.

To be able to go back to a memory that gets evoked and let my body and mind re-experience that memory has so many benefits. They can be very powerful experiences with many different levels. I never know what's going to show up.

I'm always interested and surprised. I don't have an agenda. I just let it come and trust that whatever comes is exactly what needed to. Sometimes one-time meditations are amazingly profound. Sometimes what shows up is a subtle, sweet thing. A nice color that I'm surrounded by, that feels so good to wallow in and breathe.

There's no expectation because they aren't ever the same. Sometimes I'll find myself back in one of my favorite places that consistently beckons to me, like my cabin up in the Georgia mountains that carries rich emotion in my life.

A one-time meditation can set a tone for the day or the week. If I pay attention and stay aware of it, that one-time experience becomes much more profound.



Carol Jones, The Infertility Counselor

”

For Anina, sometimes there are fireworks

Anina loves doing one-time meditations when unexpected, delicious imagery or ideas show up. She is careful not to drive, not to try to control what unfolds in the meditation.

She thinks of these special meditation moments that sometimes show up as fireworks.

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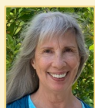
I go to the weekly online Yoga Well meditations because it's one way to stay connected to my teacher and to hear the experience of others. For me, I don't get big “fireworks” very often, not great big experiences. But I get a calmness and some instructions or some insight of how to lead my life. Sometimes an image will come.

We do a little bit of yoga movements. Something that gets the body moving. And then Chase might say, bring to mind something. Towards the end, if it's a really good meditation for me, there's some fireworks. Something cool happens.

One example of fireworks happened a long time ago with a substitute teacher. I think the instruction was to bring to mind somebody that you have a problem with, or miscommunication with. My oldest daughter came to mind and I saw us walking hand in hand. At one point it was like vines came through both of our arms and criss-crossed, so we were intertwined. That was really nice. It just happened. I didn't direct that at all.

Another time the meditation had to do with friendship. The instruction toward the end was to see your friends. I was looking at this group of my friends and all of a sudden I saw myself in that group. I thought, hey, what are you doing there? So that was really nice.

Even though the fireworks don't come very often, having something like that happen can get me through months without fireworks.



Anina Hutchison, Yoga and meditation teacher

”

Amanda always learns something from one-time meditations

Being a student is a great way to become a better teacher. Being guided in weekly meditations reconnects Amanda to the pace and feeling of being guided.

Weekly meditations are a useful complement to a long-time daily personal meditation. The variety is refreshing. Amanda talks about some of the ways things that show up during the weekly meditation interact with her daily practice.

“

I do so much yoga alone in a room by myself. Going to the weekly online meditations feels like being in community with other people and their practices. The connection to my teacher feels really important. And I'm reminded of the pace and the intention of yoga.

I feel like with those meditations, I'm learning to be guided. Sometimes with my own practice, I get into a little bit of a rhythm or my life gets harried. My practice might speed up or slow down and I might be more or less present. The connection with being guided is a nice way to touch reset.

I always learn something, which keeps yoga interesting. Every single month I learn something new. I think it makes me a better teacher and I think it enriches my own personal practice.

There's the thing that I'm doing every day in my personal practice. And then in the online weekly meditations, there's a new idea or a feeling or some other meditation object.

Somehow what shows up interacts with what's happening in my personal practice. It can be enriching or can even reveal something about the object, the thing I'm meditating on in my own practice. It can highlight a different aspect of it.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

”

Does your meditation teacher know you?

The way you access meditations impacts whether your teacher knows you and whether you have a community of fellow students.

- Ongoing live or online classes offer community and a connection with the teacher.
- One-to-one personalized guidance is central to private yoga, yoga therapy, and mentoring.
- Recorded meditations on an app or online usually lack a personal relationship with the teacher.

Relationship between teacher/mentor and students

Group



Ongoing live or online
yoga/meditation classes

One-to-one



Private Yoga
Yoga Therapy
Mentoring

No relationship between teacher who guided the meditations and students who use them

Group, recorded



Groups use a recorded
online or app meditation
program

Solo, recorded



You use recorded online or
app meditations on your own

No teacher/mentor

Solo, unguided



You meditate on your own

the spectrum of meditation relationships

Long-time meditations bring deeper change

In upcoming chapters I share many of my own and others' stories with long-time meditations.

Connecting with a meditation object day after day requires commitment and dedication.

Doing long-time meditation on the same object can be fun and transformational. As Carol explains, it is not always easy.

“

For me the deeper benefits of meditation come from consistently exploring an object and exploring myself in relation to the object.

Real change requires consciousness and attention. It takes practice and it takes a wrestling with every emotion.

To do that is not always easy. Sometimes it is easy. Other times the last thing I want to do is to sit. My mind cannot focus and I'm like, just let it be. If my mind has to chatter I let it chatter. And then maybe the chatter will pass or maybe it won't that day. Maybe I'll get to a really good focus.

It's that consistency of doing the practice that I love about this lineage.



Carol Jones, The Infertility Counselor

”

One-time and long-time meditations
both contribute to discovering
and transforming who you are
and how your mind and body function.
–CH

yoga



Meditation is a process of personal growth.

Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar
What are We Seeking

Reflecting about a meditation deepens your experience

Reflecting on your meditation experiences—perhaps keeping a meditation journal or sharing reflections with your community or your mentor—deepens your experience and your perspectives.

When I teach live classes, we stay connected after the meditation to reflect on each person's experience. For my meditation circles, you do the recorded meditation and then post your reflections online.

The comments below by some of my meditation students and meditation circle participants express the value of sharing their meditation reflections.

“

I like hearing about others' experiences that are different from my own. It expands and deepens my own understanding and feelings.

• • •

There is significance in sharing my own take. Expressing what happened for me, not just have the experiences, gives me new insights.

When I describe what happened for me I understand differently how the meditation relates to me. I make associations with my past.

• • •

The discussions afterwards help deepen the experience, which often feels ongoing even after we open our eyes.

While it might be distracting to do too much articulating while meditating, articulating afterwards can lead me to clarify and be more fully in touch with a lot of what I experienced.

• • •

I love reading all the comments and shares.

• • •

I love Carrie's delight, expertise, and curiosity about our experiences.

”

Shifts that occur from long-time meditation are gradual

Robyn describes her two year (long-time) meditation experience with a Zen Buddhism breath meditation.

Shifts and insights from long-time meditations are gradual and we are often not aware of the shift from day to day. Then something happens in life or in the meditation that helps us notice.

“

The beginning practice in Zen Buddhism is counting your breath. So you count inhale one, exhale one, inhale two, exhale two, up to 10, and then you start over. Sounds easy, but you don't make it to 10 most of the time because you get interrupted with other thoughts. And then at some point you realize you've lost your count and you come back.

The instruction is to notice the thought that took you away. You notice the thought and then come back to the counting of breath. You're beginning a process of seeing the patterns of your thoughts.

The timeline is very slow. Excruciatingly slow. Coming from my lifetime of patterning, I'm someone who picks things up pretty quickly.

After two years of doing the breath meditation every day for 35 minutes, I said to my teacher, "I've sort of got the whole breath thing down. So what's next?"

He replied, "there is nothing else."

I thought, okay...

You ask why did I stay?

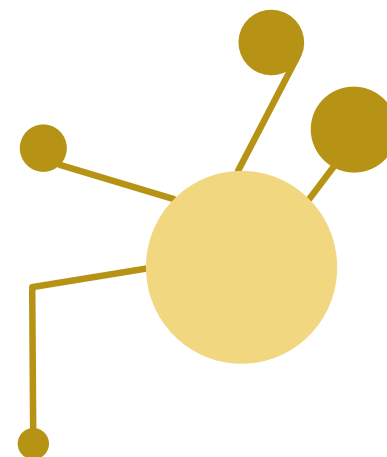
I had a feeling his "that's it, there is nothing more" was to help me see something about myself.

Why am I in such a rush? What's the rush about?



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

”



Example one-time ocean meditations

Three variations on using oceans as a meditation object sparked personal experiences for each participant.



Three example one-time ocean meditations

Here are three example meditations from the application of meditation classes taught by Yoga Well Institute director Chase Bossart, all from the same month in 2014. They are part of an ongoing course where every week there is a new meditation and every other week Chase guides a discussion about the two most recent meditations.

The overall meditation object for the month was oceans. Each week's meditation focused on a particular quality of the ocean. That quality was chosen for a therapeutic reason.

1. Calm Ocean Depths
2. Cleansing and Nourishing Ocean Tides
3. The Essence of the Ocean

I briefly summarize the structure of the meditation and highlight some of the experiences participants described.

- It's fascinating to see how the identical meditation results in deeply individual experiences for each participant.
- It's useful to me as a meditation teacher to be reminded that I can't know how someone will respond to a meditation.
- It's useful to me as a meditation teacher to be reminded that even meditations taught by an expert do not always "work" as intended for everyone.
- It's useful to me as a meditation teacher to remember that what participants glean from a meditation can be meaningful even if it is not what was intended and even if the meditation "didn't work" for them.

After the structure and participant reactions, I discuss how and why yoga therapists might use a meditation like this with a client.

These examples appeared in: Heeter, C., Allbritton, M., & Bossart, C. (2019). Beyond Scientific Mechanisms: Subjective Perceptions with Viniyoga Meditation. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2019, 16(12), 2200.

Calm ocean depths meditation

by Chase Bossart

PREPARATION

Set an intention “I am calm”.

Seated: Gradually introduce an intricate sequence of breath control, finger movements, arm movements, and forward bends, one step at a time.

After each breath in the sequence, pause after exhalation and mentally repeat “I am calm”.

MAIN MEDITATION

Have the sense of deep ocean: very still.

Allow attention to rise to the surface where a giant storm is coming.

Cycle through two or three rounds of still deep ocean to stormy surface to have a sense of the contrast.

RE-VISIT

Which part of you is the deep ocean and which part of you is the surface? Answer with an experience.

What experiences did different participants have?

“

It became very personal and was easy to feel where the storm and calm are in my body.



It was reflective of my life and experiences. I was in, but detached from the storm.



Each time I came up to the surface, the storm was less threatening.



There was turbulence but no storm. I am less affected by turbulence in my life now.



My mind came up with a safe place (Gaudi Park) that was like the deep ocean and storm.



I became the storm, loving its power and intensity. Deep calm was OK but not as fun.

”



Why and for whom might this meditation be beneficial?

Chase began this meditation by seeding the feeling of “I am calm” at the end of each breath. Then he introduced the sense of the deep ocean, very still, implicitly mapping calm onto the metaphor of the deep ocean.

Using the deep still ocean as a metaphor for the feeling of deep calm can help generate an experience of deep calm that is more tangible and accessible than simply trying to feel deeply calm.

His next instruction was to allow attention to rise to the surface where a giant storm is coming, and then to cycle through two or three rounds of still deep ocean to stormy surface to have a sense of the contrast. Doing this part of the meditation gives people an experience of shifting their attention from storm to deep calm.

For some participants, doing this meditation may transfer to daily life. They may make a connection between what they do when they encounter challenges in daily life (storms) and staying in touch with their own deep inner calm.

One of Chase’s goals was to give students learning about meditation an experience with complex instructions. In this example, steps in the meditation involved intricate sequences of breath control, finger movements, arm movements, and forward bends.

Complexity can be very helpful for some people for keeping their mind engaged. Complexity can be unnecessary or frustrating to others who find following those detailed instructions distracts from the intensity of their focus on the meditation object.

Following all of these instructions takes a lot of attention. Preparation involving this level of complexity would not be given to people who are not experienced with yoga. Meditation instructions that ask someone to do something beyond what they are capable of will not be effective.

Cleansing-nourishing tides meditation

by Chase Bossart

PREPARATION

Call to mind: The ocean tide rises. Water comes in. So nourishing.
The ocean tide goes out, so cleansing.

MAIN MEDITATION

Seated, then with arm movements, then standing with movements: On inhale, the tide comes in. On exhale, the tide goes out.

Seated again: Inhale, the ocean tide comes in. Pause after inhale. Feel high tide. Exhale and the ocean tide goes out. Pause after exhale. Feel low tide.

(An option is offered: if you prefer, the tide can come in and go out over several breaths rather than in each breath.)

TRANSITION

Chant (honoring the ocean).

What experiences did different participants have?

“

Tides changing each breath confused me. It started out great until I wondered what was nourishing about a wave.



My mind was crowded so I just linked nourishing and cleansing with my breath instead of visualizing the tide.



I appreciated the cleansing and nourishing. But the instructions distracted me.



At the beginning, little fish visited me. Then they went out with the next wave.



The ocean water was not clean, so I skipped feeling nourished by the incoming tide and focused on the cleansing part.



I would tentatively inhale nourishment, then enjoy the respite of cleansing on exhale.

”



Why and for whom might this meditation be beneficial?

Chase maps the metaphor of incoming tide bringing nourishment and outgoing tide bringing cleansing onto inhale and exhale throughout the meditation. Cleansing of the body is necessary to sustain life. Cleansing happens physically with the exhale (releasing CO₂).

Cleansing of the body and mind is associated with elimination of waste—washing away dirt or unpleasant events or memories we are holding onto. Metaphorically linking each exhale with the idea of cleansing can help rid the body and mind of unwanted physical tension or emotional residue.

Remember the idea that the body and mind are interconnected. What you do with your mind affects your body.

A meditation where each exhale is associated with a cleansing ocean tide going out is likely to be more effective than telling someone to just stop worrying about something that is really bothering them.

You can't perceive all the ways your body is holding onto a painful or stressful life event. Meditation, like the ocean tides, allows the human system to feel cleansed, without specifying particular aspects of the body or mind to cleanse. For a cleansing meditation to have a sustained impact, you would need to repeat the meditation over a period of time.

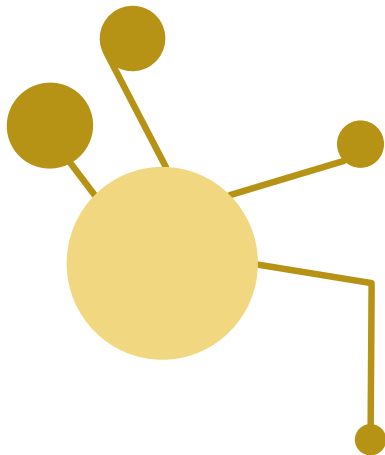
Like cleansing, nourishment of the body is necessary to sustain life. Inhaling is physically nourishing—it brings oxygen into the body. In the meditation, linking each inhale with feeling nourished lets you practice allowing the feeling of being nourished to come in.



Early developmental experiences can teach you that being nourished is dangerous. Perhaps it was not safe to accept nourishment. Or perhaps there is a feeling of not being worthy of nourishment.

For someone who has issues around nourishment, a meditation that involves being nourished can get sabotaged in some way. Perhaps the water appears dirty. Perhaps there are dangerous objects in the water. The water may actually have blood in it in the extreme. When that happens it is a sign that the metaphor needs to be changed in the meditation.

In yoga for healing, meditation is customized and adapted for the individual. One size does not fit all.



Essence of the ocean meditation

by Chase Bossart

PREPARATION

Chant (honoring the ocean).

Standing: forward bends, pausing after inhale and exhale.

MAIN MEDITATION

Seated: call to mind an ocean.

On inhale, reach for the ocean. On exhale, draw in the essence of the ocean while chanting.

Stay with the feeling.

TRANSITION

Chant (honoring the ocean).

What experiences did different participants have?

“

It was very pleasant, but hard not to be distracted.

• • •

I just absolutely loved it.

• • •

The qualities of the ocean were clear. I shifted between observing and experiencing..

• • •

At first it was about vastness. Later it was beautiful and calm.

• • •

The chanting worked. I had a peaceful, beautiful experience.

• • •

I was the entire Pacific Ocean, interacting with the earth, moon, and life.

”



Why and for whom might this meditation be beneficial?

This was the final meditation in Chase's series of weekly meditations that used some aspect of oceans as their meditation object. (Two of the other meditations were described in the preceding pages). This last one was the most open-ended and least complex meditation of the series.

There were only two steps of preparation: a Sanskrit chant honoring the ocean (referred to as a mantra in the participant comments) and some simple forward bends. The majority of time (steps 3 through 7) involved being seated with eyes closed, calling to mind an ocean, drawing the essence of the ocean inside, and staying with the feeling. This happened first with some movement and again later with only breath.

Who might this meditation be good for? The short preparation phase leaves more time in a half hour practice for the main meditation. But short preparation can be insufficient for someone whose mind is initially busy or scattered.

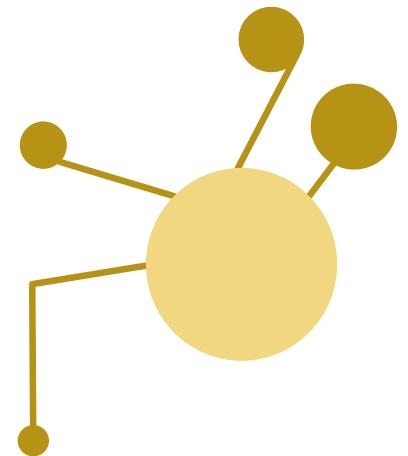
Simple steps (in this meditation, chanting and then standing forward bends) can be ideal for some people, but other people are more able to keep their attention focused during meditation when they are doing movement and breathing. One size does not fit all.

No details about the ocean are specified (such as vastness or calm, waves or tide). Just call to mind an ocean. Chase did not say "imagine you're seated in front of the ocean." He did not say "call to mind a particular positive experience of the ocean." He did not say "call to mind that you're on the ocean." It just was "call to mind an ocean." What comes to mind will be partially determined by each participant's prior experiences with oceans, what is going on in their lives, and the state of their system that morning. The individual's prior experiences with the recent vastness of the ocean meditations will also color their experience with this week's meditation.



Chase introduced the chant three weeks ago at the very end of the meditation, where it was used to bring out the vastness of the ocean. Then two weeks ago, he used the same chant. The sense of vastness will color the feeling of this chant regardless of whether people are aware of it, because their recent experience of that chant was associated with vastness.

Why might this meditation be beneficial? No specific quality of the ocean is prompted. There can be positive qualities associated with oceans such as beautiful, calm, vast, or deep. There can be negative qualities associated with oceans such as chilly, destructive, or dangerous. Because the meditation is so open, the potential benefits will depend upon what comes up for the person when they do the meditation.



Chapter 12

Example long-time moon meditations

What is it like to meditate on the moon as part of a daily practice?



stories
“ ”

The moon has many associations for me



Moon reaching for the moon

The moon has many associations for me, some of which are peculiar to me. My cat's name is Moon. One night I noticed Moon reaching for the moon and snapped this photo.

My partner has also named our internet router Moon. And he named our robot vacuum cleaner Moonie.

My other associations with the moon are more universal.

You have your own associations with the moon. What comes up for you?

How you respond to a meditation object and what objects are right for you depend upon your lifetime of experiences and current circumstances. –CH

science



Your collective experiences with an object, person, or action shape and enrich how your brain will represent it.

Rebecca Schwarzlose
Brainscapes

try this

What comes to mind when you think about the moon?

Close your eyes for a minute. Sit quietly as you allow images, thoughts, and feelings related to the moon to arise.

The moon has many different qualities that might arise during a moon meditation

Moonlight can be cooling and soothing. Moonlight can be romantic.

Moonlight helps us see.

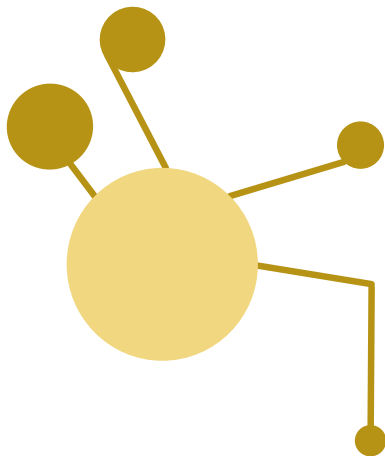
The moon goes through phases, from full moon to new moon and back again. What we see changes every night.

The moon orbits the earth, its gravitational pull causing ocean tides.

The moon reflects light from the sun. It does not generate its own light.

One side of the moon always faces the earth, the other side always faces away. This so called dark side—the unseen side—carries mystery.

Moon is associated with the night, with the feminine, with enlightenment and illumination, with the subconscious.



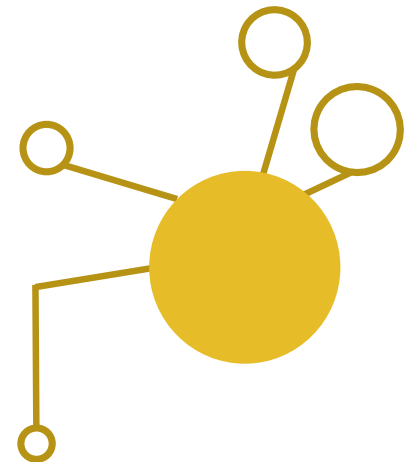
What unfolds in a long-time moon meditation is different for each person

Here are short summaries of the experiences of four meditators whose mentors gave them the moon as a long-time meditation object to focus on in their daily practice.

For three of us (Robyn, Anina, and me), the moon meditation was left open, not specifying any particular quality of the moon.

Carol's mentor initially gave her the moon as a long-time meditation for its cooling qualities. Her human system had a lot of heat. So cooling was helpful.

These brief synopses of months or years of daily moon meditation experiences focus on some of the memorable changes participants experienced. They do not capture the day-to-day experience of a long-time meditation.



Robyn's moon meditations



"Water and the moon are my faves. Light is very appealing to me."

- Robyn

“

Meditations that have a lot of talk around them can be too complicated. And it's much harder for me to relate to earthy meditations. Fire is too hot. Even sunrise gets too hot for my system. Water and the moon are my faves. Light is very appealing to me.

The moon has many qualities that my mind enjoys.

With the moon there's a coolness, and the changeability. The moon changes and yet it's always there. Even if you can't see it, it's always completely there.

I'm someone who feels tuned into the cycles of the moon. I'm always pretty aware of which cycle we're in. So I notice it in the sky.

I have a friend who does tarot and connects it to the cycles of the moon. She has talked a lot about the new moon as a generative time.

When I'm feeling like it's a fallow time, instead of seeing it as a negative, I'll think about, oh, could this just be like a new moon time where things are happening, but it's out of sight.

So those are some of the ways that doing moon meditations over time show up in daily life.



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

”

Anina's moon meditations



"I acknowledge that here I am and there's the moon and make a connection."

- Anina

“

When I meditate on the moon I like to do chanting first. Then breathing, I reach for the moon and bring the moon in, letting it fill me or circulate in me. I acknowledge that here I am and there's the moon and make a connection. Then I sit for a while.

In my meditations it's like I'm sitting somewhere and looking out over a really nice vista or a really nice view. I'm not really thinking of anything. I'm looking at the view. And if I start to think about my to-do list or something, I take my attention back to the moon.

Along with the moon comes a setting. The setting is more or less the same all the time. The moon sort of moves around in the sky.

Sometimes it's full, sometimes it's half, something like that. But what I noticed right away was there's other beings in the area. I think that's my posse, that's my support group.

And they're not always there. I don't want to drive the bus. They can be there. Or they can not be there. It's not up to me.

Recently I've had to call for them a bit and I'm not absolutely positive whether or not I'm directing this. But they do show up.



Anina Hutchison, Yoga and meditation teacher

”

Carrie's moon meditations



*"Yay! My first long-time daily meditation object! Oh. The barren, airless, frozen moon surface is so depressing."
- Carrie*



Meditation objects can trigger unexpected, unintended associations. My yoga therapist did not know that I worked with NASA on space exploration and astrobiology games. Or how bummed I am that earth's moon has no atmosphere or chance of harboring extraterrestrial life.

I took these notes while meditating on the moon that first week, in 2014.

- My perspective is disembodied but in orbit above the moon, so close to the surface that the surface completely fills my viewpoint. I feel intense gravitational pull.
- This morning I beamed my awareness to the surface of the moon—barren, lifeless, dusty, low gravity. Neil Armstrong level, but no need for a space suit. I'm on the bright side of the moon for now, but I know I will venture to the dark side someday.
- I woke up this morning feeling weirdly moody and depressed. (That's a first. I'm never depressed.) The surface of the moon is just so cold and distant and empty. It's not a life-giving place for a life force. I sat in the yoga chair and cried for five minutes before beginning the practice, wondering how to break out of the solitary confinement sensory deprivation bleakness of this visualization.
- Instead of human scale on the moon's surface this morning, I became the moon. That feels better. My focus ended up being on feeling a sense of wholeness, feeling solid and contained.



- Last night and today, the visualization is eclipsing the yoga practice, dominating. I wish I did not know so much about space science.
- Later that same morning, I had another crying jag, sobbing for three minutes while taking a bath. Bleak, barren, cold, empty, lifeless, moody. That's the bright side of the moon. And then I'm fine. Then there is a bleak darkness in my heart. Then it's gone.

Being the moon is adding distance, sadness, and moodiness to my spirit.



I emailed Marcel and he replied right away.

Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools



Carrie,
Sounds like the meditation has run its course. Please no longer do the moon meditation. Just do the movements but with no visualization - focus on the breathing and movement.
Let's check in by phone - when are you available?
Kindly,
Marcel



This is why we work with a teacher. Marcel's intention in giving me a moon meditation was some cooling to help with MS inflammation, and to connect with something outside of myself to get some distance from my intense engagement with my work. (I know this now. At the time, I was just happy to get to meditate on something fun. Telling me the reasons would have unduly influenced my experience.)

I have learned so much about meditating since that early experience. Now I love moon and moonlight meditations.

I know that I have some agency. I allow rather than direct what shows up when a connection is established. If what shows up is disturbing, I can choose to explore that direction in future meditations. I can stop doing that meditation. Or I can reframe it. For example, in the case of the moon I can reframe my assumption of isolation—as a celestial object the moon is not lonely. It is part of a solar system with a companion planet and sun.

Carol's years of moon meditations



*"The practice started becoming me and how I live my life."
- Carol*

“

When I moved to San Francisco I started working with Chase as my mentor. I was experiencing a lot of body heat. Part of the goal was to get a practice to help lower the heat. I started doing a moon meditation as part of my daily practice. I would draw the moonlight into me, feel the moonlight go everywhere within me, and let it become a part of me.

As we continued to work with moonlight, it moved into, what are the qualities of the moon that I'm really bringing in? The moon itself could mean anything. I started diving into qualities of the moon.

I would go out at night and look at the moon and notice what qualities drew me in, especially with the full moon. It was cooling energy and calm energy. It was steady and very consistent energy.

No matter what would happen, even when the clouds would go over it, the moon was always steady and consistent. Those were the main qualities that I started bringing into my body. Not just the image of the moon, but what does that really mean? I started going to a deeper level of cooling qualities. The idea was to cool my body heat, I love the cooling light of the moon.

I'm surrounded at night by the cooler air. So it's easy to start imagining that coolness and think of it as being opposite from the sun energy, which is so intense. I always have loved that time of day when the sun is going down and the energy totally shifts. That's what I started bringing into my body.



I would breathe in as I let that energy go through me and exhale letting it become a part of me. Breathe in the calm and let the calm move through me. Breathe in the coolness and stay with that energy.

I could see the moon visually, and I could really feel those qualities going through my body and then my head. It was a very physical thing. As I got more relaxed and cooler and calmer and felt consistent during the meditation, that energy started playing out in my life during the day, too.

It wasn't separate. It wasn't an experience that only happened when I was sitting in meditation. It was happening throughout the day. That calm feeling and that cool feeling.

The fire didn't feel like it was so much in me. The meditation even calmed my personality. I have a lot of fiery energy in me and it can be high. I've always felt like if I didn't balance that with the yoga, I don't know what my life would be. But I don't think it's a life that I would desire to live in the same way that my life is now.

So those qualities were coming through. My body was feeling calmer. My fiery energy was cooler. The effects seep in when I'm not even aware of it and all of a sudden I notice. I've spent years working on being a softer person, calming my very fiery energy. And this practice of the moon has led me, unconsciously rather than consciously to have softness, to become softer.

I've made conscious changes; to lower my voice, to have relaxation or do yoga in between my high energy times. But the meditation was different. It changed me in a subtle, unconscious way, working on every level.

I don't think I was aware of it on a daily basis. The change was over time. Rarely do changes happen like that.

I wasn't waking up in the night hot anymore. I was sleeping better and my energy was calmer. That meditation had gone on for four years.

I feel like the moon really has its power living in me now.



Carol Jones, *The Infertility Counselor*

”

21 days of a spaceship meditation

What is the day-to-day experience of a long-time meditation like?

yoga



stories

“ ”

The day-to-day experiences of a long-time meditation intersect with life and self

To offer a window into the day-to-day experience of a long-time meditation, I share my diary of the first 21 days meditating on myself aboard a spaceship traveling in space.

My mentor's goal in giving me this meditation object was containment. I love being vast and diffused. I love becoming the object of meditation. I don't like having to be Carrie. I don't like feeling limited or confined.

Marcel and I have gone back and forth on this for years. I still don't understand what he wants me to experience.

An idea came to him. He is aware of my love of outer space. He proposed the idea of me on a spaceship. So I get to be in space, but I am contained in a ship.

I was excited to try the meditation.

When you begin a long-time meditation, initially your prior experiences with the object often dominate the meditation. There is a period of what I think of as discovering an effective long-time portkey. Eventually I recognize part of the experience that I can tap into to transport me to that starting point in future meditations.

I was not surprised when science fiction, movies, and scientific knowledge influenced my early meditations.

I was not dismayed that there were good days and bad days. It's all part of the exploration.

My transformation to appreciating feeling contained and embodied is one I will need to repeat over and over, not just in this long-time meditation, because my patterns are so deep.

Carrie's 21-day spaceship meditation



*"I was becoming more solidly Carrie."
- Carrie*

“

Day 1:

Prior to meditating, I was thrilled by the prospect of meditating on a spaceship. I expected that it would take some time (multiple meditation sessions) to let Star Trek and Avatar and other sci-fi spaceships work their way through my meditations before I got to experiences that were less colored by Hollywood special effects.

Then as I began the first meditation, I was struck by how effective my mentor's plan was at containing me. I wanted to "be" the universe. I wanted to feel vast and diffused. But I was inside a spaceship. It felt like I was pulling my essence into myself. I was becoming more solidly Carrie.

Then the laws of physics and my background in projects working with NASA showed up. Outer space is vast. Space travel takes forever. Just getting to Mars would take 9 months. Getting to Saturn would take 8 years.

OMG, I have signed up to meditate on traveling through empty space alone in a giant tin can.



Days 2 and 3

Day 2:

Even though toward the end of yesterday's meditation I felt stuck in a tin can floating endlessly in space, I didn't want to abort the spaceship as a meditation object by complaining to my mentor and calling it quits.

As I entered the spaceship meditation on Day 2 I began to notice attributes of a spaceship that might be fun or useful. My ship probably has shields that can protect me from danger. My ship can have a transporter allowing me to beam down to a planet and then back up to the ship. (Then I'm not trapped anymore!) Why not be able to travel faster than the speed of light? It's a meditation. Maybe my ship is organic. Maybe it is alive. My ship and I have a telepathic connection. We help each other.

My ship is a means of transportation. It's also a partnership. My ship and I are in this meditation together.

Maybe my ship can shrink down to microscopic size or grow to be as big as a planet.

Maybe I can use the ship to support my memory. I could store and organize ideas in different rooms of the ship.

My planning mind was very involved in the meditation today. I know I'm supposed to allow, not try to drive. But I'm grasping for ways not to be boxed in. I'm trying to make the meditation work in certain ways. And I am seeing ways the spaceship can become a helpful tool in daily life. Maybe I can raise imaginary shields in daily life when I need them.

Day 3:

Today my space ship meditation is hopeful and exciting.

I have everything I need.

I am going places.

I can go anywhere in the universe.

I am safe.



Days 3 and 4

I experienced an inkling of feeling containment. It's intriguing to feel even just a hint of how containment could be a good thing.

I feel like a neutron at the nucleus of an atom.

Meditating in a spaceship feels richer regarding where things could go than meditating on a dragon. [I meditated on a dragon for a couple of months. It was cool, but pretty much all we did was fly, sleep, eat, love, and take care of each other. My spaceship is better.]

We fly (my ship and I).
We take care of each other.
There is love.
We are powerful companions.

Day 4:

I am stuck in the middle of this thing (my ship) and I can't feel anything. It is just like being in my office. I am not immersed in outer space. I don't get to feel sensory experiences of space or the universe.

Containment feels like a prison to me.

In life, I often don't have a normal sense of self. I don't feel like I am in my body. My mentor keeps wanting me to meditate as Carrie rather than becoming the meditation object (the earth, the ocean, a star).

I think something in my sense of self may have disassociated when I came down with severe multiple sclerosis decades ago. At that time, I became numb from the waist down, blind, had no sense of balance, and I lost feeling in my hands.

Gradually a lot came back. I found ways to compensate and cope and keep on living. But I didn't remember what normal was and I am not sure whether what I experience is the same as how it feels to other people to be human in a body.



Days 4 and 5

That's a weird thought after all these decades.

But back to containment. I feel like a caged animal, so distracted by the cage I don't experience other things.

Day 5:

This morning I realize that my spaceship, like me, is a shapeshifter.

I strongly identify with Odo, the character from the Deep Space Nine spinoff of Star Trek that aired in the early 1990s. Odo is a being made of water who can take on the form of a human (or any other being or object). It takes a lot of energy to shape shift, so he needs to regularly return to water form to regenerate in the bucket he keeps in his office. For me taking on human form requires a lot of energy. I need quiet alone-time to regenerate before I go back out into the world as Carrie.

So my spaceship and I are both shapeshifters.

As soon as I have that realization, the room I was in on my spaceship shape shifts into the form of a 6 x 6 x 6 foot stone hut covered with cow dung.

I am taking a 20-month course on the ancient text, Hatha Yoga Pradipika from Yoga Well. Last week's class covered the section of the text that described the ideal structure for meditation—a 6 x 6 x 6 foot stone hut liberally covered in cow dung, with plentiful alms available outside. The cow dung prevents insects and mice from entering and serves as a disinfectant.

The point of the hut is to minimize distractions to be able to focus attention on meditation.

I like to do meditations that support my learning in these classes. It seemed like a great opportunity to spend time in the meditation hut on my ship for a while.

I (my awareness) am inside of the hut. I do not pay attention to the texture or temperature of the walls. That would be a distraction.

In my spaceship meditation in the stone hut, I start by spending time releasing the residue of what I had just been doing before the meditation and releasing the residue of what I am going to be doing after the meditation. I also release various worries that are swirling around.



Days 5 through 15

I end up just being there, in the hut.

Days 6-8:

Over the weekend and today, entering the meditation space of being in the stone hut means letting go of things I've got to do. Releasing that takes some time.

And then, "I" am there.

It is not that my body is sitting or lying in a stone hut. My awareness is there.

I am not at all tempted to be the hut. (Well, I became it for a little while, just to taste what that was like. But I did not do so for long.)

I am not tempted to explore the contradictions of the metaphor. (Why would there be a stone hut in a spaceship?) Delving into that would be a distraction.

Mostly there is peace. I feel a connection to the infinite, overlaid with the tiniest spark of Carrie existing.

I wonder about the mystery of containment. I wonder what my mentor is trying to get at.

Day 15:

I stopped taking daily notes because there was a lot of sameness day to day and a shortage of words.

But I noticed that I no longer had to release residue of doing or needing to do or worries when I start the meditation.

Now I just port into the hut.

I also notice that more of me, not just my awareness, is beginning to show up in the experience.



Days 15 through 21

When I am out in the world, not in the meditation, I notice that part of me is still in a spaceship—safe and contained, and present and strong.

Day 18:

I am in my body lying in the stone hut on my spaceship in today's meditation. I am in my body!!!! Cool.

I nurture the novel feeling of being embodied.

I am a mindbody Carrie unit.

Day 21:

My meditation experience starts moving into scent attributes of the stone hut. I am not making this happen. I observe that it is happening.

There is a comfortable feeling of being surrounded by stone. There is incense. I have a sense that the hut is like the cave of the Oracle of Delphi that I visited in Greece. The cave is located right above a volcanic vent that released a gas believed to have given the oracle her visions.

I realize I am straying from the meditation and return to being in my body lying in the stone hut that is part of a spaceship.

I become aware of the presences of countless ancestors within me experiencing the life of Carrie as I live it. I feel crowded inside. It is a bit like a movie theater and my body and life are the screen. There are so many ancestors. They are diverse, seemingly going back to the beginning of life on earth with one-celled organisms.

There is so much more to all of us than we can perceive or understand.

I feel large and strong in response to this little window into the so-much-more-ness. The feeling carries over into daily life.



Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools



Observing yourself

Why might you want to observe yourself—
and what is there to see?



Your mind is much less in control of your behavior than it thinks it is

As I pondered how believing we are in control of what we do is basically an illusion, I noticed that my right hand scratched my cheek.

Soon my left hand reached out and adjusted the position of the lined purple notepad next to my computer, straightening it so my desk looked more orderly. That was weird. My planning mind was not involved.

I can direct attention to my breathing. I can notice how it feels as I inhale, and whether the inhale is deep or shallow. Soon my attention goes somewhere else but fortunately my body continues to breathe.

Awareness of the breath is optional for staying alive. However, noticing your breathing gives you information about the state of your system.

Consider the activity of going for a walk. If your body was a robot, the operator would need to give commands for every movement. Stand up. Raise and lower right foot then left foot, repeating to walk to the door. Open the door and step outside. Close door. Continue stepping.

Your human system handles this. Your human system goes for a walk.

Instead of walking on autopilot, you can choose to walk and focus attention on present moment experiences. The job of the mind in this scenario is to be aware, to be present.

Now imagine going for a walk in a new location, some place you have never walked before. Now you need to decide where to turn. Now interesting new sights and sounds and unfamiliar dangers may attract your attention. Because you don't have established patterns, autopilot is less of an option. You pay more attention to where you are going and what is happening around you.

You constantly make big and small choices. Your thinking mind is sometimes involved. Experiences and feelings beyond your awareness influence your choices and behaviors.

Most of the time, your thinking mind is less involved in your behaviors than it thinks it is.

Doing yoga provides a constant opportunity to practice awareness

You can do yoga on autopilot. Once you figure out how to do a particular step your mind could go elsewhere. Your mind could go back to planning your day or fretting about that upsetting thing that happened.

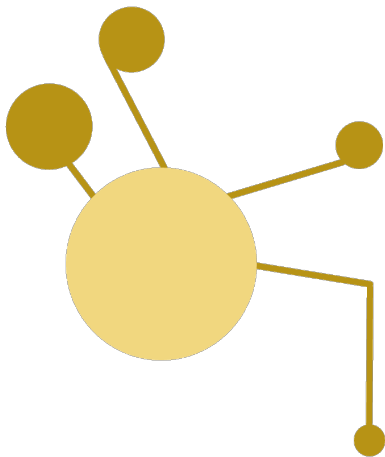
But your yoga experience will be more effective and the benefits greater if you practice keeping attention focused on breath, body, and mind in the present moment.

Notice when your mind wanders and your body and breath shift to autopilot. Notice where your mind goes.

Remember it is completely natural for attention to go elsewhere. Noticing your mind has wandered, then returning attention to the meditation is a recurring part of the process.

You are practicing noticing when you are operating on autopilot and when you are operating with present moment awareness, during yoga.

This skill of noticing where your attention goes seeps into daily life. You start to notice other times and ways that you're on autopilot.



try this

- Try this simple seated yoga movement. As you inhale, raise your arms up from the front toward the ceiling. As you exhale, lower your arms down.
- The speed of each movement should map to the length of each breath. When the inhale starts, the movement starts. When the inhale ends, the movement ends.
- Try this, repeating about 10 times. Observe how you do this. Observe what your mind and body do. Observe what changes as you repeat the pattern.
- Notice what you notice.

Science calls thinking about thinking metacognition

Science defines metacognition as consciously observing your own mental processes and behaviors.

Metacognition is paying attention to what your mind and body are doing.

In the activity on the previous page you observed your body, breath, and mental processes while you raised your arms up toward the ceiling during inhalation and lowered your arms down during exhalation. You were engaging in metacognition.

Metacognition is central to meditation. To begin a meditation, you prepare the mind and body to be ready to concentrate. Preparation steps often involve metacognition in the form of paying attention to body and breath. Then you focus attention on a meditation object.

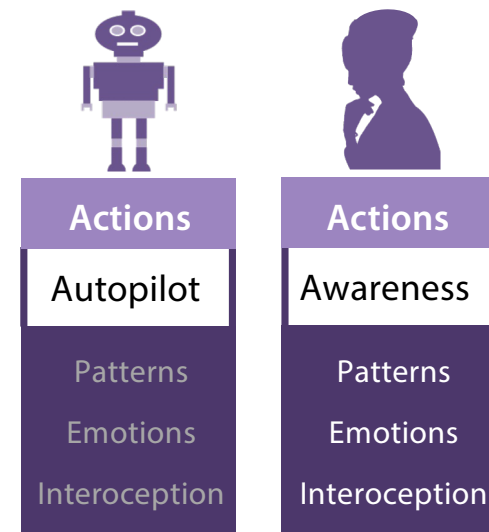
When the connection feels stable, you take a step back, becoming more of an observer of the experience that unfolds. Becoming an observer of your experience is a form of metacognition.

Metacognition is self-observation.

When you observe yourself you get to know yourself. With practice over time you become able to notice when you are operating on autopilot—and thus not engaging in metacognition. Your actions are reactions. There is no reflection on how your emotions or state or prior experiences may be influencing what you do or say.

With practice you become more able to act with awareness. Your actions are responses. There is at least some self-observation. You begin to notice ways your emotions, the state of your system, and prior experiences influence your emotions, thinking, and actions.

Operating from autopilot or awareness



patterns, emotions, and feelings are hidden when actions are on autopilot

Throughout your lifetime you develop a complex tapestry of patterns that keep you alive and enable you to survive and thrive.

An infant figures out how to use their body to lift their head, to roll over, sit up, crawl, stand, and walk. They experiment with ways to get the attention of their caregiver to get needs met.

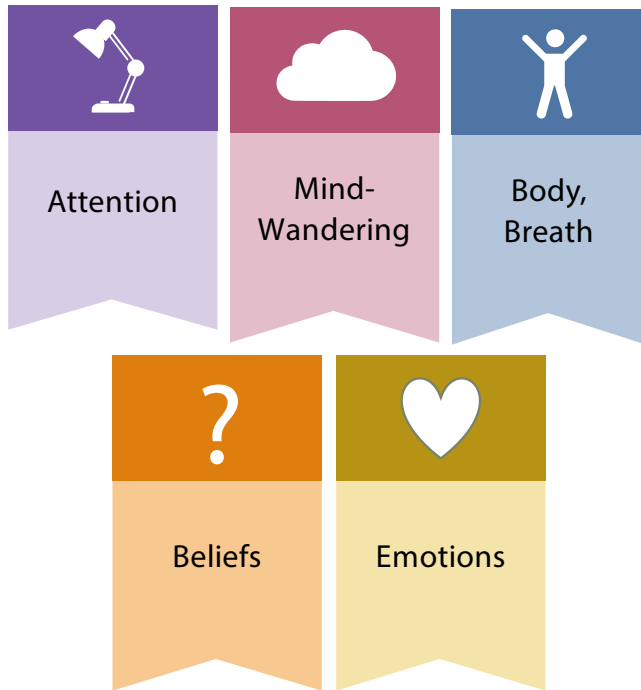
Starting in childhood and continuing throughout the lifespan you develop patterns of noticing or ignoring how you feel. You develop patterns of hypervigilance or trust.

Patterns are necessary. They free up your limited attention.

When a pattern forms it does so because it worked for you at that time. Later in life that unconscious pattern may persist even though it no longer serves you.

Yoga says you can operate from pattern—or you can operate from awareness. Science says metacognition—thinking about thinking—is involved in recognizing your patterns.

Some metacognition domains



metacognition domains

These are some of the many aspects of yourself that you can observe.

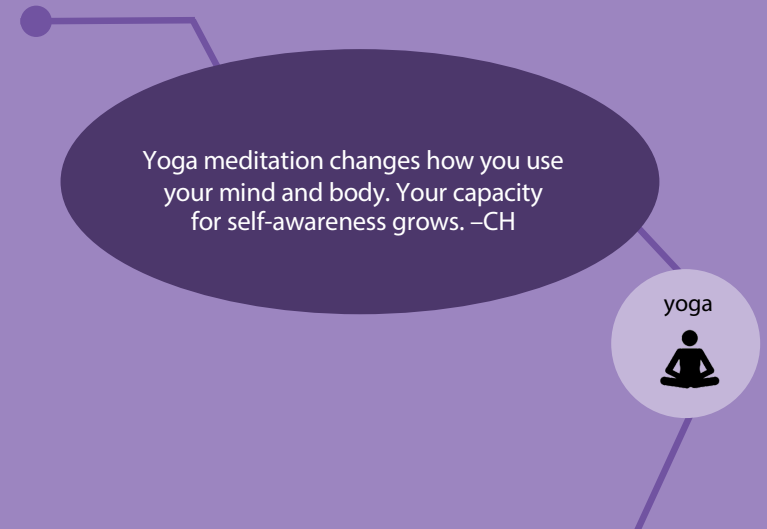
You can pay attention to the activities of your mind in the moment. You can notice where your attention is focused.

You can reflect on patterns. For example, you can notice whether you place most of your attention on how other people are feeling. You can notice how and how often you judge or criticize yourself.

You can notice how you hold your body—erect or slouched, tense or relaxed. You can see patterns of how you walk, stand, or breathe.

You can observe patterns of beliefs and values—such as honesty or compassion. You can observe patterns of emotions that recur or linger.

Once you start becoming aware there is so much to see.



Yoga and meditation encourage self-observation.

In experienced practitioners engaging in self-observation extends beyond meditation.

A pattern of self-awareness grows.

Yoga meditations help you move toward balance. Early steps prepare the mind and body to be able to operate from awareness rather than from patterning. –CH

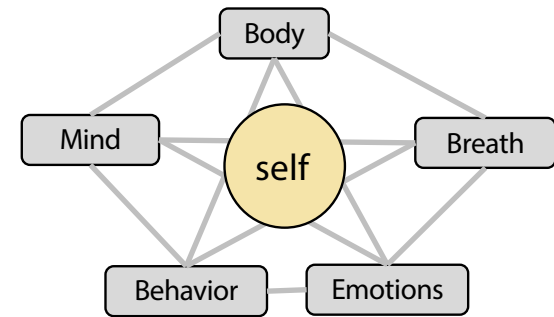
yoga



When our system is out of balance
we are much more likely
to operate from patterns.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

You are embedded in an earth suit—you are embodied



overlapping dimensions of your human system

My curiosity about the mind-body connection drew me into yoga and meditation. I learned there is no separation.

Your self is embodied in an earth suit—your container.

You experience life from the perspective of being in a body.

Your senses show you the present moment external world from the perspective of your body.

Interoceptive bodily sensations show you your feelings and emotions and the condition of your body's interior in the present moment.

Although our experience of the present moment constantly changes, what persists is the sense that you exist in the present moment in the world in this body.

The self exists in its body.

The entirety of your experiences happens in and through this body.

For many or perhaps even most people, this is self evident. For me it is a revelation that I keep realizing again and again.

According to neuroscience, feelings show you that you live in a body in the world. Feelings confirm that you exist. –CH

science



Feelings generate a perception of ownership.

My body.

The external world and actions are happening to and by me.

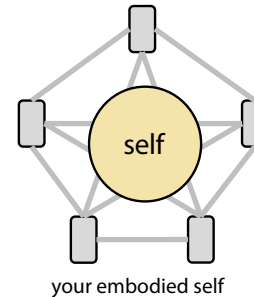
My mind.

My body.

Feelings generate our sense of self.

Antonio Damasio
Feeling and Knowing

Gut feelings help guide decisions and keep you alive



Your human nervous system includes a two-way connection between your brain and your gut. The phrase “gut check” describes that relationship. Communication between brain and gut is ongoing, usually below the level of conscious awareness.

Your brain has a built-in security system, constantly monitoring everything around and within you. Your security system watches for things that may need attention. It scans for threats and opportunities.

When your security system detects something potentially important, your brain reaches out to your gut for an opinion. If the gut agrees it is important, your conscious mind is made aware of that thing. Stronger gut reactions garner more of your attention.

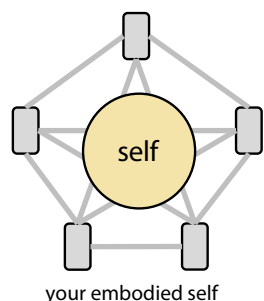
This scanning and gut checking goes on all the time, below your conscious awareness. When you do become aware of something, it is because the gut told the brain to pay attention.

You also can intentionally call upon gut feelings to help you make important decisions. Listening to your gut is a thing.

Meditation increases your capacity and tendency to bring attention to interoception. You become better able and more likely to pay attention to subtle signals in the body that give you information about how you are doing.

You become more able to notice what your gut is communicating. Your brain checks in with the gut all the time.

Authentic self as explained by yoga and neuroscience



- How you are feeling, now, changes from moment to moment.
- Perhaps you have a core, essential, authentic self.
- Aspects of that authentic self are consistent regardless of life and world events.

Neuroscience explains that you can bring your attention to the “global emotional moment”, a kind of mash-up of all the vivid feelings you are currently experiencing.

The feeling of your global emotional moment is different every moment.

You can compare global emotional moments. You can compare how you feel now to how you felt on that special day, or on that horrible day.

Even though the global emotional moment constantly changes, it contains an image of continuity—a sense of “I”, of your sentient self across time.

Yoga also posits a core, unchanging, authentic self. Self-observation— noticing your patterns—helps you discover and become more of your authentic self.

The idea of your authentic self is a huge topic in yoga, beyond the scope of this book. My long-time meditation experiences with a spaceship—intended to help me move toward feeling more embodied—are examples of meditation and self.



I designed the 10-minute Authentic Selfies Meditation to help people explore how they feel when they are being their most authentic self. –CH

(interwoven with somewhat playful movement and breath steps)

In this meditation I play off the idea of taking selfies, but instead we take “authentic selfies”. Here is how I begin the meditation.

“Taking selfie photos can help build a sense of identity. Who you believe you are and who you want to be. Rather than taking a photograph, meditating on the times when you really feel like your authentic self lets you explore and strengthen your authenticity.

So allow to come to mind an activity, or a behavior, or a moment when you really felt like you. When you felt like you were being your authentic self. Just wait for a time of really being you to show up.”

A colleague asked to use this meditation in her “Design your Research Destiny” workshop for advanced researchers at her university.

Meditation and insight

When observing yourself becomes a habit insights show up more often during or after meditation.

yoga



stories

“ ”

People meditate to receive insights

With just a little encouragement, it's easy to become an insight junkie when you do yoga meditations. Insights bubble up all the time. I encourage participants in the meditations I teach to notice and revel in what shows up.

Unexpected connections are revealed. Or you become aware of patterns of thought or behavior you had not previously noticed. Insights show up.

You can also meditate to seek particular insights, such as in the domains listed here.

Understanding

Insights during meditation can help you better understand an event or person or circumstance in your life.

Input

You can meditate to invite input on a task or activity. For example, I meditate about what the meditation I am going to teach will be about.

Digestion

Meditation can help you deal with loss, trauma, or even success. Mild disturbances are usually safe in a one-time, group meditation. I would do meditation around serious disturbances with a mentor or yoga therapist's support and guidance.

Direction

Life presents you with big decisions. What should you do? Should you stay or should you go? How do you be your most authentic self? In meditation you can ask for direction.

Intuition

The yoga tradition I study values listening to your intuition. In meditation you can practice paying attention to gut feelings. You can explore how intuition may feel different from your likes and dislikes. You can learn to cultivate and develop intuition.

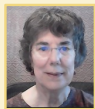
When self-observation becomes a habit, insights show up often

Meditation provides fertile ground for self-observation. When noticing and being curious about yourself become a way of life, there is so much to see.

Even when the goal of the meditation is something other than insight, insights show up. For example, Grazia was doing a meditation about size, that sparked an exploration of the idea of impermanence.

“

For me meditation often serves as an emitter, something that sparks something else. For some reason I had all of the pieces but never connected them on my own. The spark may not have been intended at all. But there it is, and it leads me to understand a whole bunch of other things that I have been grappling with. One meditation Chase taught very recently was about our size. What came up for me was effervescent like champagne bubbles that are here for a second and then disappear. Those are ideas that are creative to me. This sparked me to explore the idea of impermanence.



Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy and meditation teacher

”

The insights aren't limited to the focus of the meditation. Patricia made time to do a 10-minute meditation, pushing through resistance that she did not have time for it. After completing the meditation, she was aware of how much it had benefited her to take the time.

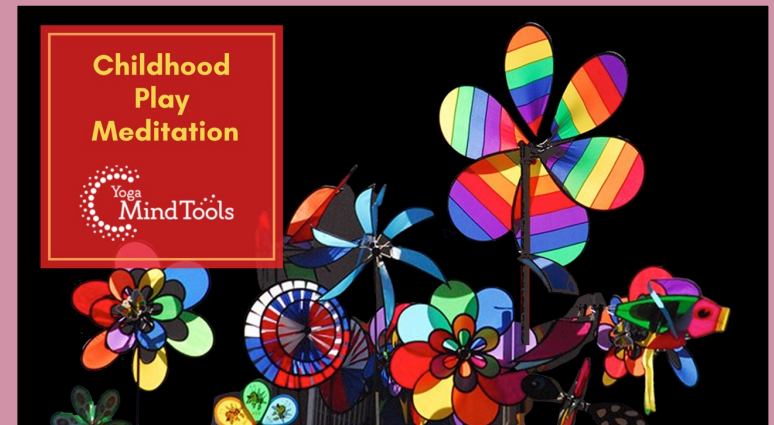
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When I sat down to do the meditation today my mind was active with all the reasons I don't have 10 minutes to do this. This is pretty common for me and I find it fascinating that my mind holds on to this story day after day. Now, post meditation, I know that what I need in those moments of “I don't have time” is to slow down instead of speeding up. I have exactly the time I need to do the things most important to me.



Patricia McDaniel, Hospice of Michigan, Meditation champion

”



I created the Childhood Play Meditation to help game design students connect with what they loved about play as a kid. –CH

(interwoven with somewhat playful movement and breath steps)

Game designers and game design students work with the idea of play all the time—from the perspective of their adult self.

I have my graduate students do the Childhood Play Meditation, to remind them, on a deep emotional level, of the feeling of play.

You call to mind something you loved to play when you were young. Just allow something to show up. It might be a game. It might be some other kind of play. Or just the feeling of playing.

Later in the practice: Come back to what you loved to play when you were young. Remember what it felt like to play. Remember the sights. The sounds. The smells. Remember how it felt.

Unexpected insights inspired Grazia's childhood play meditation explorations

When my students do the childhood play meditation, the change of perspective from adult self to child self offers a different lens for thinking about what game to make. And taking time in meditation to reconnect with what it was about play that they loved—what that felt like—becomes a useful presence throughout the sometimes arduous game design and development process.

I was amazed to discover that Grazia, a meditation teacher and not a game designer, had been doing my childhood play meditation for nearly 2 months. Her first time doing the meditation yielded some interesting realizations—so she continued her exploration.



“

Doing the Childhood Play Meditation got me to feeling right away how I felt as a child. I followed up on that meditation in my daily practice for quite a while.

What I enjoyed doing as a child was playing tiddlywinks. That can't be a group activity, but it was really enjoyable by myself.

What I got out of the meditation was realizing that what I really liked to do as a child was something by myself. That showed me a pattern. I'm an introvert essentially, and the meditation pointed it out. That became an entry into deeper exploration.

So there was the feeling that I recognize now as something that was satisfying just for myself, with no one else around. It's not that I was lonely. I enjoyed being by myself.

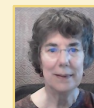
For later meditations, that feeling was the starting point. The meditations brought me to an examination of my patterns—details like why did I feel that way.

Well, because it was something I could master on my own. I didn't have to ask for help. And so took me to, why is that important? Because I was an only child and so there was no one else around to help me.

From there I went to what other times or circumstances did I feel that way? Well, when I was a teenager and there was no one around to ask. Or to even care about what I was feeling,

Over time my exploration built like that.

Eventually in my practice I would reach out to that feeling of childhood play. I stopped asking questions and would just wait for what showed up.



Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy and meditation teacher

”

Insights that arise during meditation tend to linger and percolate

Here is an example of a series of one-time meditations that were designed with the goal of eliciting insights.

Indeed, realizations arose for me during the meditations. Throughout the week those realizations stuck with me. I considered what I could do differently.

“

Chase taught a meditation that involved bringing attention to breath in the upper torso—my back and ribs. Noticing if there were any areas that felt restricted.

My chest felt tight. Too tight to inhale fully.

Then, he guided us to ask that area if there is anything it has to tell you.

I heard a voice in my head say, “Until you finish the book and your company is successful, I’m not going to let you breathe.”

Later that day and week, I sat with that insight. Obviously breathing fully would be far more supportive of writing, working, and living than unconsciously beating myself up.

The next week Chase’s meditation was similar.

I noticed that pain in my shoulder—from how I sit and hold the mouse all day—actually extended down my back.

When he guided us to ask that area if there is anything it had to tell us, I was a bit disappointed. I assumed my insight would simply be that I should stop sitting that way. (I know, I know.)

We returned to the question later in the practice.



I became aware of how the formal constraints of writing peer-reviewed academic journal articles felt as if I had been holding myself in an awkward position for decades.

It was uncomfortable to realize how long the requirements of formal academic writing had been restricting me, how much pain the restrictions had caused, how much they had limited me.

As the week went on, I knew that I had to and wanted to “sit differently”. I knew that my writing needed to cast off those constraints now.

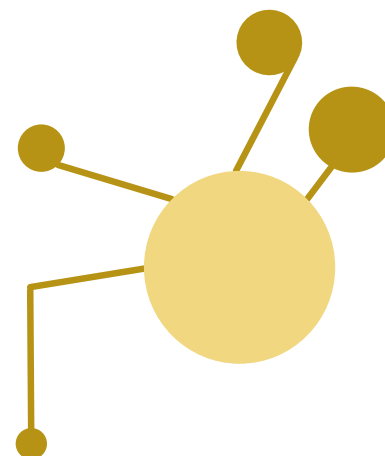
I did not know how else to write. But I felt ready to find out.

It’s been so helpful and freeing.



Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools

”



Meditation facilitates and encourages self-observation. –CH

yoga



Memories are not linear.
They are organized by groups.

Things that have a particular feeling
are organized together.

Through meditation, something can be shown.

Memories related to feelings associated
with a meditation object can be unveiled
during a meditation practice
or later in the day or week.

Other events arise.

What arises can be unpleasant, undigested.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

Amanda asks for guidance (a form of insight) in her daily practice

“

My practice is designed by Chase, my mentor. I do movement and breathing. The breathing is a reminder that there is all this stuff happening inside of me. The temptation is to believe that it's all happening out there. Life happens out there.

But breath and movement remind me my body is holding a lot. All my experiences are mediated through my body. When I'm breathing and I'm moving, my world gets very small. It becomes expansive at the same time. I get to be with my inner experience. There's a whole world inside.

As I do movement and breathing I feel the presence of something bigger at work. God is sort of the shorthand term for that for me. Not a guy in the sky God. A sort of energy and presence. It's an invitation. Okay, I'm here and I'm present. I'm listening. I want to be in connection with you. This is the time that I'm setting aside to remember and be in connection with you.

That's how my practice starts. Next I sit and do some breathing. That's a chance to just watch the coming and going of my breath.

Each of these elements is a facet of understanding how the divine operates. They are subtle expressions of that. At this point I usually am comfortable and still. I'm ready.

Then I work with my meditation object. I observe what shows up as a result of where I am and what's been happening in my day or my night or my week. What happens in my meditation is like a reflection. It's not something that I'm generating. Something is being put there and reflected back for me to see. I spend time there.

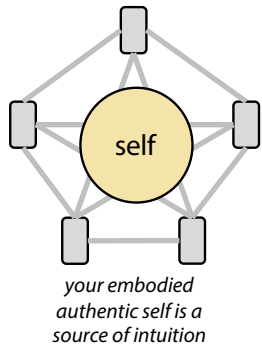
Then I come out or I am sort of brought out and do a closing movement.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

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Yoga and intuition



- Yoga talks about intuition as a way you connect with your authentic self.
- You can listen for that special voice.
- You can listen to “your knowing”.

Intuition is a special kind of present moment feeling. Sometimes something just feels right, or something just feels wrong.

Unlike gut checks, you can’t make intuition happen.

You can listen for it.

When you notice your intuition, you can pay attention.

Neuroscience also studies intuition. Research suggests that intuition is a present-moment feeling. You can experience a feeling of knowing.

I am not certain what this means, but I appreciate how it turns typical assumptions upside down. This statement would be a great meditation object for an insight meditation. –CH

yoga



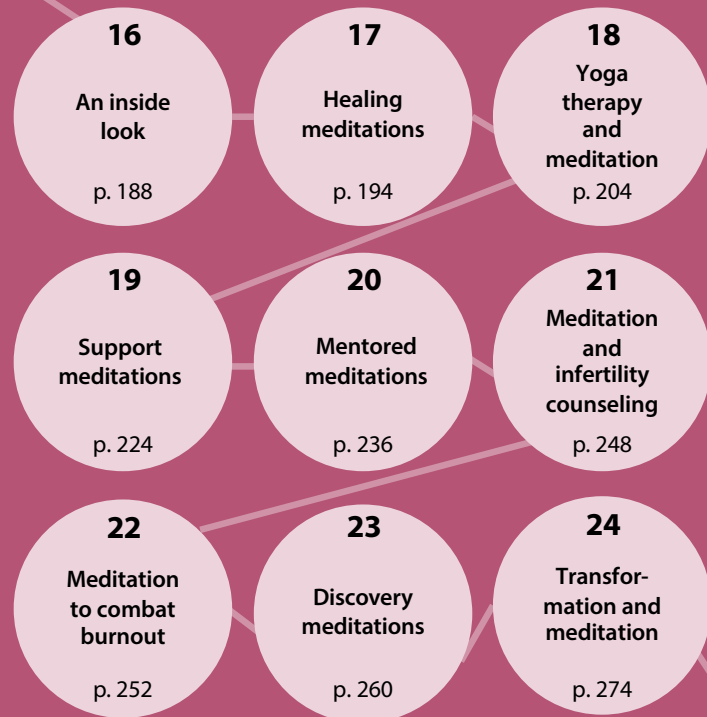
We are spiritual beings
having a material experience.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

Section 3

Meditation stories

Chapters



Section 3: Meditation stories

Here you will find delicious examples and stories of meditation for healing, support, and discovery.

Chapter 16. The boundaries between meditation for healing, support, and discovery are porous. Everything affects everything.

Chapter 17. Twelve example one-time meditations for healing include tapping into healing qualities from nature, healing at a societal level, and current events, as well as meditations for honoring and remembering.

Chapter 18. Yoga therapists share their thinking about using long-time meditation with their clients. Clients share their stories of meditation for healing.

Chapter 19. Twelve example one-time support meditations include tapping into healing qualities associated with changing seasons, self-care meditations, and other supportive qualities in nature.

Chapter 20. Mentees share their stories of support meditations they were given by their mentors.

Chapter 21. An infertility counselor who is also expert in yoga and meditation shares how she uses imagery to support her infertility counseling clients.

Chapter 22. Marcel and I designed, implemented, and studied a meditation program to help hospice professionals combat burnout.

Chapter 23. Twelve example one-time meditations for discovery include noticing your patterns, play, who am I, and feast on your life meditations.

Chapter 24. Long-time meditations supported by a mentor and a willingness to change become pathways for personal growth. Six stories illuminate different facets of transformation.

Chapter 16

An inside look

Section 3 groups stories about meditation into three categories—healing, support, and discovery.



The distinctions are porous

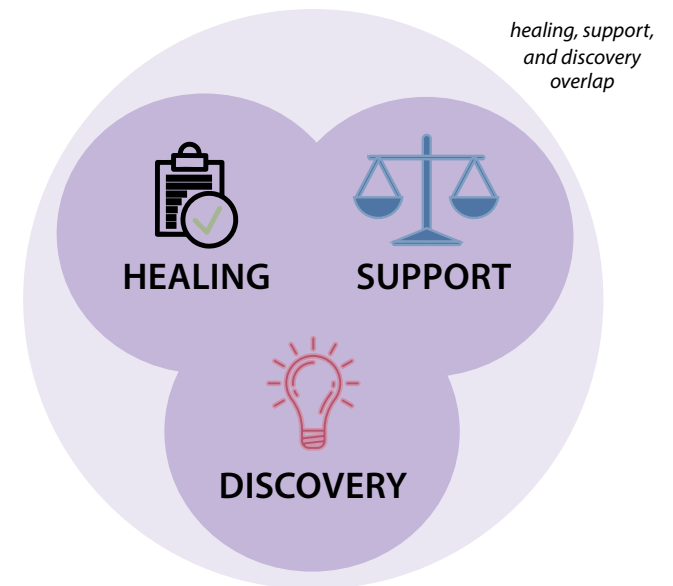
The chapters in Section 3 organize stories about meditation into three categories—healing, support, and discovery—based on **the general direction of outcomes intended** by the meditation designer, teacher, mentor, or therapist.

Those distinctions are porous.

The person meditating has their own reasons for meditating and their own experience doing a meditation.

Chapter 6 described some of the beneficial ways meditating changes you. Those general benefits happen whether the meditation you do was intended for healing, support, or discovery.

- Even if you are not seeking discovery, insights may show up.
- If you are seeking support, that support may address something that needs healing.
- The same meditation object may be given to different individuals or under different circumstances to promote healing, support, or discovery.



Meditation changes your human system

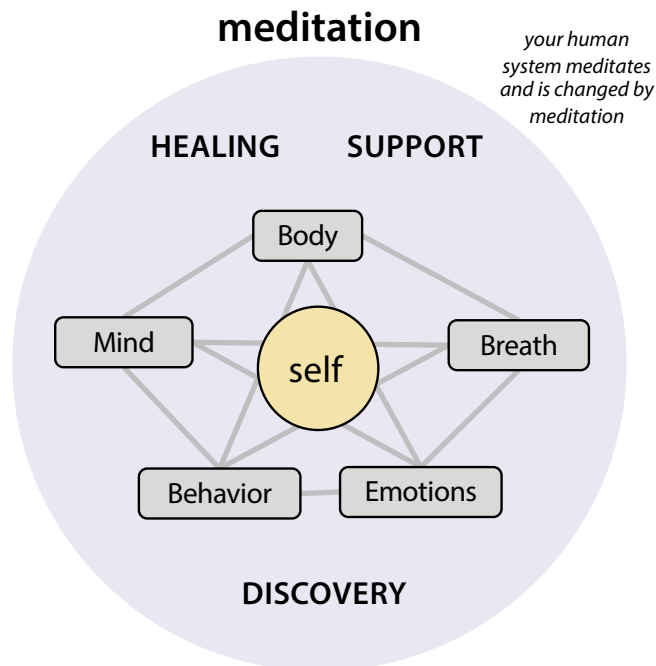
Your human system meditates and, as a result, your human system changes.

Everything about your human system is interconnected.

Meditation can target breath, body, mind, emotions, or behavior and the other dimensions will be influenced.

This interconnectedness is central to how and why meditation for healing, support, and discovery works.

Healing, support, and discovery are interconnected.

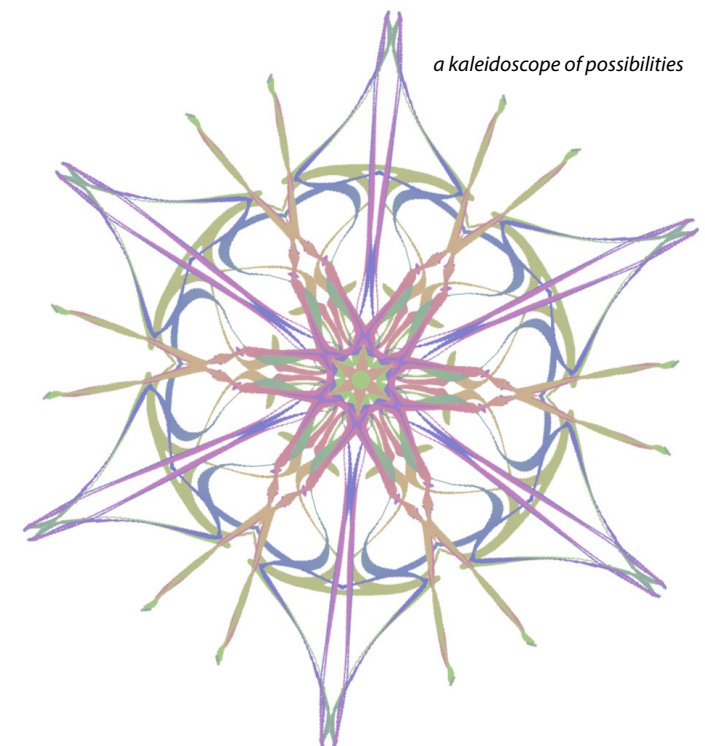


Example meditation objects celebrate a kaleidoscope of possibilities

In Section 3 I describe 36 example meditation objects related to healing, support, and discovery from the kaleidoscope of hundreds of one-time meditations I have taught.

Some of my meditations are fun, others are serious. Some are what you expect in a meditation. Others may surprise you.

I hope my examples enliven your imaginings of what meditation can be and inspire you to want to try them.



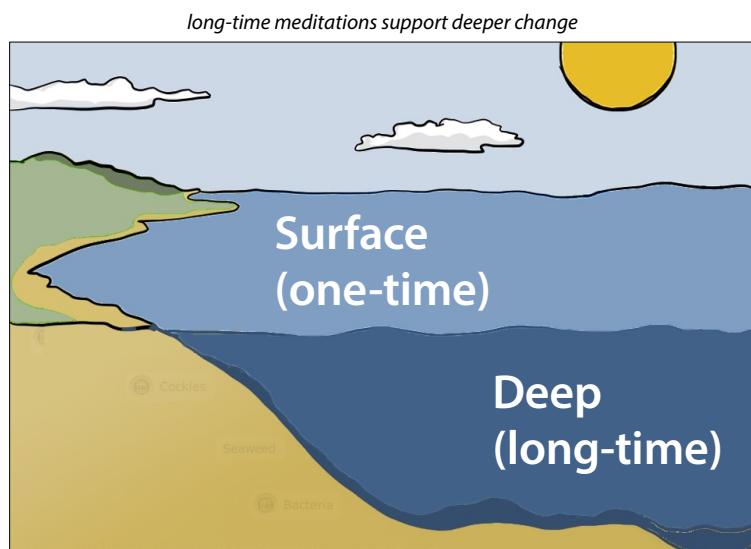
Stories bring meditation to life

The meditators I interviewed courageously shared private experiences of times and ways long-time meditation has helped them.

Long-time meditations can be used to support deep change.

We rarely talk about these experiences. They unfold slowly over weeks or months in the privacy of our personal daily practice, working with a mentor or yoga therapist.

The stories in this section and those in earlier sections are both ordinary and remarkable. They are ordinary because these kinds of experiences happen regularly for me and for people I know who are on this path. These stories are remarkable because they reveal intriguing lived experiences of yoga meditation in action.



Each of us wears many hats

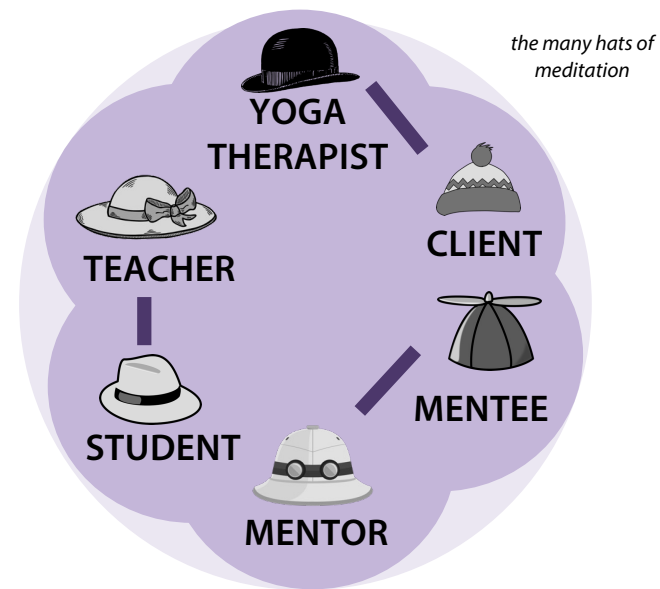
In this tradition of yoga, personal mentorship provides support and a caring outside perspective for beginners and experts alike.

In yoga and meditation classes, teachers teach students. In yoga therapy, therapists work with clients. Teachers and yoga therapists are supported by their mentors.

In my yoga and meditation trainings along with the class teacher, students have a personal mentor who supports and personalizes their learning. A mentor-student relationship can last a lifetime.

For example, when I met Marcel, I was his yoga student. I became his yoga therapy client. Then I got interested in studying meditation and he became my mentor. Now I teach meditation. Marcel continues to be my mentor.

Each of us wears many hats. Marcel and I are both students in some of Chase's classes. Marcel is Chase's mentee. The stories in this book reflect my many hats and the many hats of others who share their stories.



Healing meditations

What meditation experience might help my students heal today?

yoga



stories

“ ”

Why share these examples?

Meditations oriented toward healing aim to ease physical or mental suffering. For a one-time group experience, the hope is that the meditation will help participants feel physical and mental ease—or gain a new perspective about themselves or an experience in their life.

This chapter introduces three flavors of meditation objects related to healing that I have taught as one-time meditations.

- Healing qualities in nature
- Healing from—or inspired by—current events
- Honoring and remembering as healing

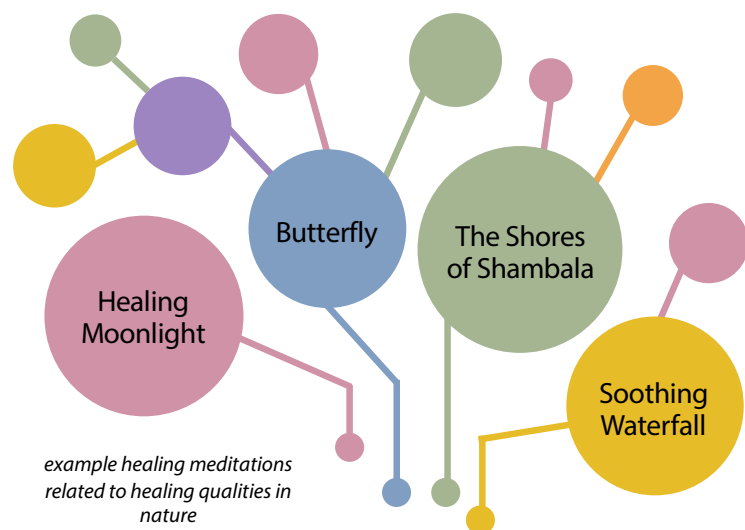
I taught these meditations to general groups of people interested in meditation.

If I were teaching meditations for healing to a group comprised of members who share a particular life situation or physical or mental health challenge, that group characteristic would factor into my choice of meditation object.

READER DISCRETION ADVISED

These meditation descriptions are like summaries of a movie plot. Reading a movie plot is not at all the same as watching that movie. Likewise, reading meditation descriptions lacks the magic of you personally experiencing the meditation as it unfolds, artfully designed to prepare and engage your mind, body, and emotions.

Healing qualities in nature



Nature provides a bountiful repository of powerful, accessible meditation objects.

Nature is tangible, visceral, coherent, pervasive, pure, and natural. Our human system evolved to respond to nature. We have a lifetime of experiences with fire, water, earth, air, the sun, the moon, dawn, a stream, an ocean, a tree, a flower...

Things in nature have qualities. A meditation using an object from nature does not need to explain much to enable participants to access those qualities. Perhaps the teacher adds description to restrict or focus what shows up for meditators—such as a *full* moon, or a *large, vibrant* tree—to increase the likelihood the meditation experience unfolds in an intended direction.

Of course, nothing works for everyone. A tree may have just fallen on someone's house. Someone else may be allergic to flowers. Life can get in the way of meditation. But in general meditation objects from nature tend to be accessible and powerful.



Like others who have experienced lots of moon meditations, the moon and moonlight are heavenly for me. When I bring moonlight inside and invite it to become part of me I feel as if the cells in my body and the connections in my brain shift into proper alignment.

I taught a **Healing Moonlight** meditation to share some of that experience. Imagine you are surrounded by healing moonlight. LATER: Bring healing moonlight into what needs healing.

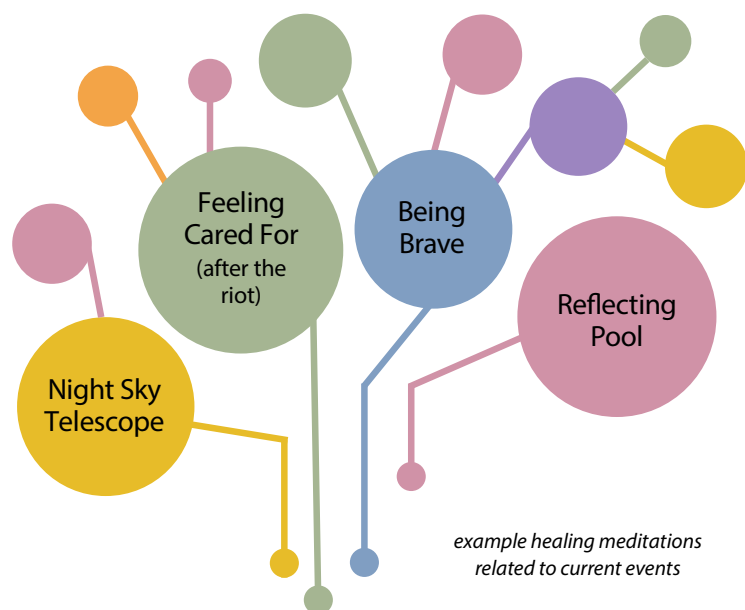
Why might a **Butterfly** meditation be healing? Perhaps because so often we feel stuck. Imagine that you are a butterfly perched on a leaf. It's a beautiful day. LATER: Stretch your wings. LATER: Imagine yourself as a butterfly. Free to be still, or to walk, or to fly. (Repeat.) LATER: Check in with your body. Pick a word that describes how your body is doing today. Check in with your mood. Pick a word that describes your mood right now.

My oldies satellite radio channel reminded me of the song "**Shores of Shambala**" by the 1960s band Three Dog Night. I listened to it again about 10 times. A cousin of one of my students was in the band, so I knew they would appreciate the song.

I played audio of the refrain "wash away my troubles, wash away my pain/ with the rain in Shambala". Then I guided a practice, linking breath with incoming and outgoing ocean waves that washed away your troubles, washed away your pain.

I spent a luxurious hour beside a soothing waterfall at the Japanese Garden in Golden Gate Park. That special feeling inspired the **Soothing Waterfall** meditation.

Current events



In meditation you disconnect from the outside world and connect with your inner world. Sometimes outside world events loom so large it would be weird not to address them in my weekly class.

Current event meditations become outdated quickly. They may only be appropriate for a day or a week. Here are some by-now-ancient-history examples of one-time meditations I taught to help participants appreciate, heal from, or digest current events.

- The \$10-billion-dollar-20-years-in-development James Webb Telescope debuted stunning images of the universe—providing a first look at celestial objects 100 times dimmer and much further back in the history of the universe than any prior telescope. That week I taught a **Night Sky Telescope** meditation. See the image and the meditation on the adjoining page.



This telescope image served as inspiration but the meditation object—the portkey—was people's own experience of the night sky. –CH

(interwoven with movement and breath steps)

I showed the first image from the James Webb Telescope and explained what participants were seeing. Imagine you are looking at the night sky. Imagine you hold up a grain of sand at arms length, looking toward the sky. This image represents that little speck of the sky. All of those little blurs within that speck are other galaxies.

Close your eyes. Call to mind an experience of the night sky from your own life or from pictures. Allow an experience of the night sky to show up.

In movement and breathing guidance I referred to reaching toward the sky, catching starlight, opening to the universe.

LATER: Reflect on the night sky. THEN: Bring starlight into yourself. Spread starlight.

Be with the night sky.

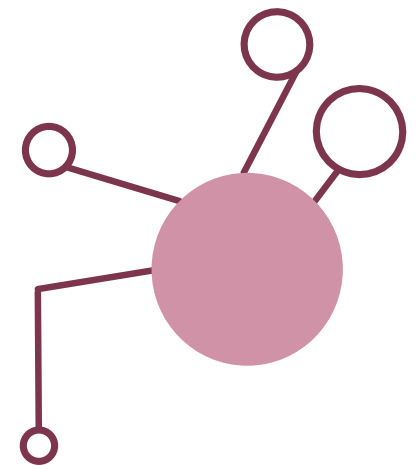
● The timing of my meditation class often coincides with emotional national moments. The day before my class met newly elected President Biden was inaugurated amidst unprecedented security, concern about violence, and COVID-19 protocols. I taught a **Reflecting Pool** meditation.

There is a reflecting pool in Washington, D.C. at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial. Maybe you've been there. Imagine you are standing beside a reflecting pool in Washington, D.C. Allow to come to mind a time when you were aware of being an American. Reflect on your experience. LATER: Release anything you are holding onto that you no longer need. Perhaps things came up in this meditation you are ready to release. Or perhaps just general releasing.

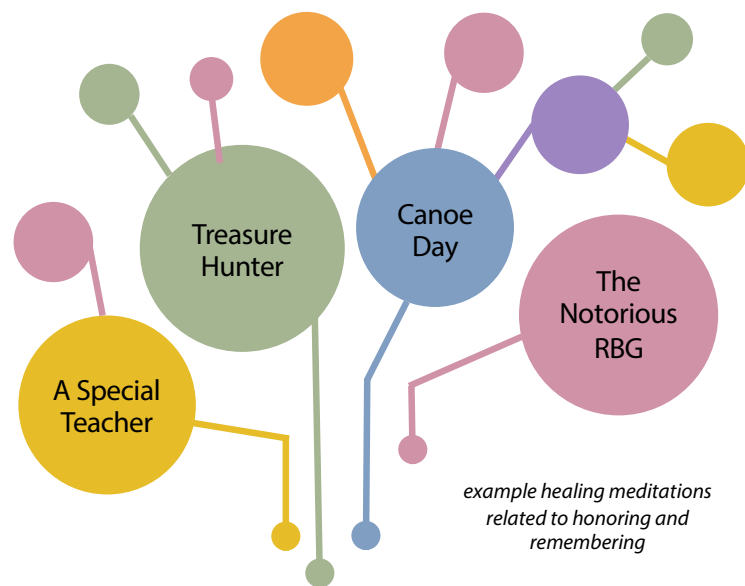
● At the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the president of Ukraine released a video saying he had declined offers from the west to evacuate to a safe place. He said he needed weapons, not a ride. He said this may be the last time we see him alive because he was Russia's number one target.

I taught a **Being Brave** meditation that week. What does it mean to be brave? How is it done? How does brave feel? I never mentioned President Zelensky or Ukraine. I didn't need to. During the discussion after the meditation, every participant said Zelensky had come to mind.

● Meditation class met the day after the January 6, 2020 riot at the US capitol. The meditation that felt helpful in that moment was **Feeling Cared For**. We were in shock, in need of solace. Allow to come to mind a time when you felt cared for. LATER: Explore the feeling of feeling cared for, without using words. THEN: Bring more of feeling cared for inside.



Honoring and remembering



I read a newspaper article about a beloved 4th-grade teacher, accompanied by photos of joyful and engaged students. The meditation I taught that week was **A Special Teacher**. We've all had lots of teachers. One or a few stand out as extra special.

Reflect back on teachers from your past, almost like a slide show. Allow a teacher to come to mind. Notice what you notice. Then shift to another teacher. LATER: Now allow a particularly special teacher to come to mind. LATER: Returning to your special teacher, how did you feel around that teacher?

The week my father Philip Heeter died, I searched for ideas of what meditation to teach. It occurred to me that I could teach a meditation to honor him. My students didn't know him. I have taught meditations to honor public figures who died, but this was the first time I found a way to honor someone only I knew.

I realized they could benefit from connecting with one of his special qualities. I called this meditation **Treasure Hunter**.



My father loved to search for treasures in nature—morel mushrooms in the woods or Petoskey stones on the shores of Lake Michigan. He perfected his ability to see treasures that others walk by without noticing.

Imagine you are in a favorite place in nature. LATER: Returning to your place in nature, allow your attention to be drawn to some thing or object. Appreciate the treasure.

It was healing for me to plan and share the meditation.

Meditation can be a therapeutic tool to help remember, re-experience, and explore a special time.

Chapter 3 described my **Canoe Day** meditation. Chris Heeter's Wild Institute organized day-long canoe trips for healthcare workers to help them heal from the perpetual personal risk, difficult working conditions, and patient suffering they faced throughout the pandemic.

Canoe Day went by quickly, and then it was back to the front line. Doing the **Canoe Day** meditation allowed healthcare workers to reflect back on that day—recalling and elaborating on memories. Participants might even notice aspects they were too busy to appreciate at the time. The guided day on a river only happened once, but they could revisit it by doing the 10-minute meditation.

Feminist and cultural icon Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died at the age of 87. As a lawyer she argued and won Supreme Court cases for women's rights and equality of the sexes. Ginsburg was 5 feet tall and physically frail, surviving five bouts of cancer. She also worked incredibly hard and lifted weights with a trainer. Known for her powerful dissents, she embraced her nickname, **The Notorious RBG**.

The meditation I taught the week she died began like this: Imagine or call to mind the notorious RBG, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Allow aspects of your experience of her to begin to take shape. There is no hurry. It's not a Wikipedia article about her life, it's your personal sense or experience of her.

I worried grief was too strong, that it was too soon after her death for this meditation. It turned out to work well, supporting participants' reflections on this remarkable, notorious person.

Yoga therapy and meditation

Yoga therapy uses meditation for healing.

yoga



stories
“ ”

Yoga therapy uses yoga for healing

Yoga therapy adapts the tools of yoga to help individuals with health and well-being challenges. Yoga therapy is personalized—tailored to the individual.

A trained yoga therapist assesses a client's needs and designs a personal daily practice for the client to do, selecting and sequencing appropriate tools of yoga—such as movement, breathing, meditation, and mantra—for that person.

The yoga therapist observes and supports the client over time, adapting the practice as the client's capacity, progression, and needs change.

The range of physical and mental health issues yoga therapy can address is about as vast as the range of physical and mental health issues a person can have.

Yoga therapy was pioneered by Sri Krishnamacharya and further developed by Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar. Mr. Desikachar founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in India in 1976 as a premier center for yoga therapy and yoga.

Yoga therapy in the west has recently been formalized and accredited. Amanda, Carol, Robyn, and Marcel—whose stories appear in this book—are accredited yoga therapists. To become yoga therapists they completed yoga teacher training followed by an intensive yoga therapy training program that was certified by the International Association of Yoga Therapists. The credential C-IAYT reflects that training.

Questions of what is healing and how and why yoga therapy works are immense topics beyond the scope of this book.

Instead here is a tiny peek—a handful of poignant stories of yoga therapy, meditation, and healing in action.

Meditation is sometimes used in yoga therapy

Yoga therapy makes use of the tools of yoga. Sometimes those tools include meditation, depending on the client's interests, capacity, and what is appropriate in their healing progression.

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In yoga therapy, I generally use meditation when a client's stability and capacity have developed to a certain point. Then the meditation will be more effective. Before that, movement and breathing are often more effective.

When I use meditation, there's usually a quality that I am trying to help the person develop in themselves.

They do the movement and breathing for about 15 minutes and then they're much more receptive to the meditation.

I give them a meditation related to a quality that's supportive for them. That quality can be something about their growth, but it could also be something that's an antidote to some challenge they're currently experiencing in their life.

It needs to be something they've already developed a bit of, something that is already somewhat present.

The meditation helps feed that quality. The meditation helps that quality grow, so they have more of it inside.



Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”

The yoga therapist chooses a meditation object they feel will work for that client

Robyn and Marcel describe some of their thinking and process around choosing a meditation object for a client. After the client has started doing the meditation in their daily practice, the yoga therapist checks in to assess how the meditation is working.

“

If a client is willing to do a visualization, I think about what qualities would be useful for them to bring in.

I work with them to find something that I think would have those qualities, and that they also have some personal attachment to.

I love the idea that you can select the object of meditation with an eye toward the qualities that you want to invite into the experience. For me, that's fascinating and the potential feels really quite endless.



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

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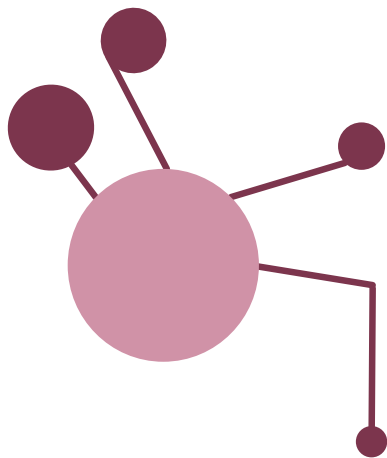
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When I ask a client or a mentee how their meditation is going, I observe their nonverbal reaction. It's as if their body answers. If their answer is just words, if it's just their intellect that answers but if their body doesn't light up or change when they answer, the meditation may no longer be having an effect.



Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”



Yoga therapy is a little weird

Section 1 of this book explained some of the systemic health and well-being processes and effects of meditating regularly. Section 2 showed how meditation objects can be selected to activate or bring in more of certain qualities and how self-observation begins to spark insights during and outside of meditation.

My first encounter with yoga therapy was as a client—sort of—as you will see on the next few pages.

The proposition—that someone could observe me, design a personal daily yoga meditation practice for me, and through that help me heal—initially had no place in my belief system.

I wasn't skeptical. I wasn't trying to prove or disprove yoga therapy. I wasn't seeking to be healed.

I just wanted to learn about the mind-body connection.

The experience of yoga therapy is beautifully weird.

Dentists mostly work on your mouth. In yoga therapy your whole self is involved even if the goal is to help with a toothache. Yoga therapy is holistic. Yoga therapy recognizes that everything affects everything.

Within the holistic approach yoga therapists do consider symptoms and causes. In my story about MS brain fog you'll see that the practices Marcel gave me addressed what he immediately sensed was a root cause of many of the issues I was dealing with.

Brain fog is one story from a decade of healing and learning about the mind-body connection. Somewhere along the way, I realized personal transformation had eclipsed learning as my primary goal.

Healing Carrie's brain fog



"I did yoga therapy to learn about the mind-body connection."
- Carrie

“

After I had been attending a Saturday morning gentle yoga class Marcel taught—long ago!—for several months, he handed me his business card. He suggested I might want to do yoga therapy with him because it could help with MS.

I got home and threw the card away. I don't need any help with MS. I've been living with it for decades. I'm managing just fine.

A few weeks later I overheard him telling another student he was starting a mind-body foundation. That sounded amazing.

When I expressed interest, Marcel suggested I do yoga therapy with him to learn about the mind-body connection.

I did not come to yoga therapy to be treated for anything. I just wanted to learn. Yoga therapy clients are supposed to come in with a goal. The night before the first session I considered goals to suggest.

I ended up mentioning that in my work as a university professor I always feel like there is a gun pointed at my head. More is expected of me than is humanly possible to get done, despite working 80+ hours a week. Oh, and secondarily—though I doubted anything could be done—to perhaps help me slightly reduce the disabling effects of MS.



But mostly, show me how this mind-body connection works.

At the end of my initial intake session, Marcel guided me through the personal practice he had just designed for me to do every day. On the long drive home across the Bay Bridge I felt different. My body emphatically explained this was very good for us. I was hooked.

I've done a personal daily practice ever since.

We continued to meet every 2 weeks, to review and revise my practice and talk about how and why mind-body practices work.

Any time a movement or breathing step in the practice was painful, or even just a little bit challenging, Marcel took it out.

Carrie: I can figure out how to make it work. I don't mind pain.

Marcel: No, it's out.

I was annoyed every time he simplified my practice. I am capable of facing challenges to make things work. I can push through pain.

I never get to do that in my daily practice. Doing my practice feels good. But it is so easy.

Marcel kindly explained that doing this practice was giving my human system small experiences of not pushing.

His explanation didn't satisfy or motivate me at the time. I went along with the easy practice because I was there to learn through experience about yoga therapy. And I did it because I could feel small ways that doing the practice seemed to be changing how I felt and thought.



We did not focus on MS symptoms. Even if we had it would not have occurred to me to mention brain fog as a symptom. I assumed it was permanent. Pretty much every intellectual thing I've done in my adult life I've accomplished by pushing through the pain and the fog.

That includes getting a doctorate, starting the communication technology laboratory, all of the research articles, book chapters, and grant proposals I have written.

Our culture values hard work and getting things done. We all have challenges. I'm grateful that I am able to push through and accomplish things—no matter how I feel while I do them.

I have come to understand more fully why not pushing in my daily practice matters for me.

Expressed in financial terms, I consistently live beyond my means. I push my body beyond its capacity all the time to do important and trivial activities.

My body has every reason not to trust me. My body knows "I" won't listen to loud and clear messages about how it feels.

I am afraid that if I listen to how I feel, my life will collapse. If I allow myself to do less, I will never get anything done.

Part of how this yoga therapy stuff works is that I constantly encounter my own ridiculousness. This happens not in the privacy of my thoughts, but with a witness (the yoga therapist) who sits there nodding. There is no need for him to say anything. He had done his work by setting the stage and then waiting patiently for weeks, months, or years for me to see myself.

Perhaps I could sometimes push less without transforming into a useless sloth. But I am not very sure about that. What if I like how it feels to push less? What would become of me?



Baby steps is also how healing works. One small step forward, half a step back.

During the day when I noticed my brain was foggy and thinking was hard I began to experiment with not pushing. I started sometimes pausing for a 10-minute nap or going for a walk if there was time to do so but still meet the deadline.

The quality of my thinking improved when my brain wasn't foggy. It took less time to write and the writing was better.

Brain fog was a tiny aspect of what my yoga therapy was about. The theme of not pushing is broad. It is one of my deepest patterns.

About 2 years into the yoga therapy journey during our check-in Marcel happened to ask "how's your brain fog?"

I realized I could not remember the last time it was an issue. I listen to and manage my brain in a friendly effective partnership. During the many months of writing this book, I've never pushed through fog to write. Doing so would mess up the writing. If I'm feeling out of it I wait a few hours or even until the next day to come back to writing.

Cool! I've got this. All healed now.

Which—unfortunately—is also not how this works. As I was going over in my head what to write about brain fog I realized that I have been treating my left leg the same way I used to treat my brain.

Every step I take my foot or calf or knee or thigh hurts. I limp badly. It gets worse with each step I take. But I walk every day to stay healthy and to retain my mobility no matter how bad it feels.

What if I dared to risk walking differently—maybe sometimes walking a little less, listening a little more? Would I become disabled and homebound? Or would I begin a new relationship with my left leg?



Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools



Is he a Yoda therapist or a yoga therapist?
I think he means it's less about having brain fog
and more about my relationship
with a brain that gets foggy. –CH

yoga



Healing is more about how you are relating
to what is happening
than it is about what is happening.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

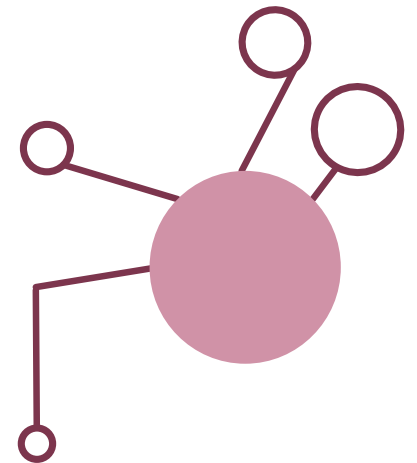
Amanda shares part of her superhero origin story

Amanda is a yoga therapist. She teaches yoga, meditation, and chanting through her company, Innermost Yoga. She is a teacher in Yoga Well Institute's yoga therapist training programs.

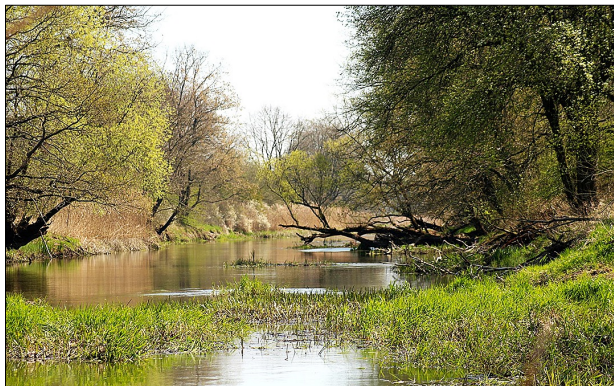
Here she shares part of what I think of as her Marvel comic superhero origin story. We have life changing experiences that are so awesome that they define the direction of our life. Experiences like this draw us to become yoga therapists—or meditation designers.

Amanda describes a sequence of three meditation objects she was given to help support her through a difficult time in her life.

Remember, like all of the long-time meditation stories in this book that it is meditation integrated with a regular practice of movement and breathing that enables the progress, healing, and clarity that Amanda moves toward.



Amanda's stream meditations



*"I was
very
reluctant
at first."
- Amanda*

“

I came to individual yoga at a time of great duress. My partner and I had separated. There was drama around the separation. I had really tiny kids. We had just moved across the country. I needed it but I also didn't want someone telling me what to do. I didn't want to turn over some of my power to somebody else.

I didn't know how individual yoga was all going to work out. I felt very vulnerable. I also knew that if I continued doing what I was doing it was not going to work. I'd had experiences in group yoga classes that spoke to what was happening to me.

So I decided all right, I'm willing to give this a try even though I'm very reluctant.

One of my first meditation objects was working with water. Bringing water in and taking water out.

There had been all of this hurt, all of this dishonesty. When I did the meditation it was as if washing was happening. It was remarkable because as I took the water out, I could feel things that needed to leave were able to leave.



There was plenty to process about what happened and actions that needed to take place to heal. But the feeling of not being so burdened by carrying all of that difficult, painful, hurtful stuff created space for me to do the conscious work.

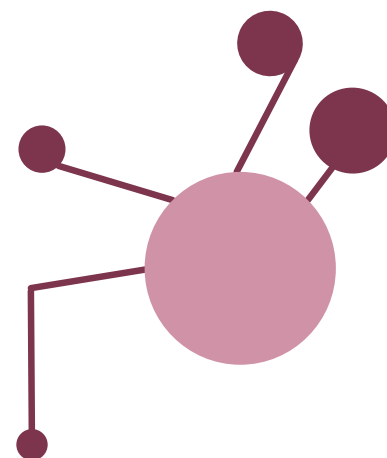
At the time I don't think I realized that the meditation provided sort of a back door to being able to let something move. That was really critical. Staying with the practice long enough eventually allowed some things to move and some feelings to shift. I gained some capacity to organize my thoughts.

It was such a tangible experience.

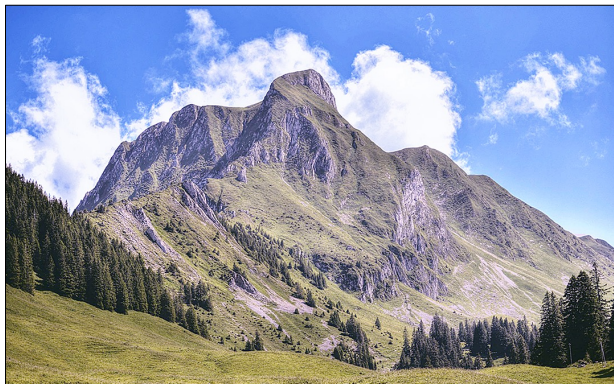


Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

”



Amanda's mountain meditations



*"I became
attached to
the
mountain."
"*

- Amanda

“

After doing that stream meditation for quite some time, so much was changing in my life as a result of being separated. Where I lived changed and what I did changed and how I parented had to change. There was all this disruption.

One of the early meditation objects that came after the stream was a mountain.

I got really attached to the mountain. The mountain gave me stability and groundedness. I felt like I had substance.

At first I was with the mountain and then before long the mountain and I became sort of the same. The qualities of the mountain became my qualities. I started feeling like I was not being pushed around by outside forces, but that I had some center of weight. I had the strength to do what needed to be done.

In my life I've always traveled. What happened was, as I was working with the mountain, I became quite attached to it. While I was meditating and having experience linking to the mountain, becoming mountain I didn't go anywhere.



I didn't leave town for a year. I was invited to one of my best friends' wedding. I was like, I'm sorry, I can't go. I missed my cousin's wedding. Again my reaction was sorry, I just can't get on a plane and go anywhere.

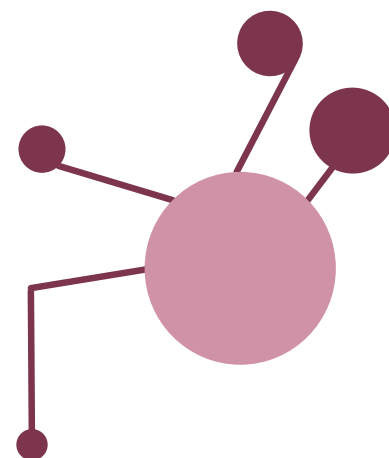
Eventually I realized I'm unwilling to relinquish this experience of feeling grounded and perhaps I needed to feel that way. But it struck me looking back that the meditation had such an effect on my willingness to move or shift.

That was surprising to me. That something you can do privately on your own could have such a huge impact.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

”



Amanda's petal meditations



"The meditation was about being able to express and also uncover my deeper truths."

- Amanda

“

The separation felt like the rug was pulled out from under me. It was difficult not so much to get through the day as to know what to do. There was no more usual. Everything had to be recreated. And there was a lot of hurt.

Another long-time meditation I did at this time was with rose petals. The meditation was about being able to express and also uncover my deeper truths.

I'd had an experience with river and the river was still with me. It stayed with me through the mountain meditation and came back during this flower petal meditation.

There are so many layers. Because you're angry that something happened. And then you're hurt. But the anger is sometimes too loud and then the hurt is there. Even underneath the hurt, how did this happen?

There's confusion. And there's also maybe asking what was my role in it? Oh, I had a role in this too.

With this meditation on flower petals, you take one petal and say what you feel. You say the thoughts that sort of play on repeat in your mind. You say what you feel to the person and then you make an offering of the petal. It felt sacred. It felt like expressing my feelings was being held in this sacred container.

There's something so soft and so special about the petals. The petals are glistening and soft. The flowers are so perfect. Like so much of nature the flowers feel connected to the divine. In a way there was an invitation for God to be present or the divine to be present in the midst of sharing the feelings that were there.

In the meditation my feelings could come up and through. I could take them seriously and not feel ashamed or not feel embarrassed or not feel like I shouldn't be having these feelings. There was some way that the container of the meditation allowed expressing to be a kind of honoring.

The petal was another way of softening, of reminding me there's beauty in my experiences. And then letting the petal go. This gesture and willingness to let the petal go. To say the words out loud and for it all to be held in this sacred space.

The meditation allowed for digestion and uncovering of layers. Day after day this happened until I got really clear about what I am really like. What's really at the root of all this pain and suffering and heartache? There was a lot of grief. There was disconnection between us about what one of us wanted and the other wanted, but somehow we weren't able to do that for each other.

After clearing some of the air, clearing out of what was making it hard to sort through my thoughts, after becoming grounded and stable, I was able to go through this process of saying what needed to be said. Honoring what needed to be said and what I was feeling.

And then I got to a place where the feelings were revealing something. I felt like I could get to the nugget that was at the heart of all of it. And then, still interacting with my partner at the time, trying to sort through what does this all mean.

There was clarity around the next thing to do together or apart or for our children. Even when it got hard to do the things that needed to be done, I didn't have to go back and ask, well, is this the right thing? Did I come to this conclusion from the right place?

Because I had worked through so much of it. These meditations early in my experience when things were changing so quickly had a huge impact on my ability to parent and be with myself and sort through what needed to happen.

It gave me some space and permission. I was able to enjoy this new way of being, this new relational way of being with myself and with other people and with my children.

Eventually I was clear about what I needed, what needed to happen in order for my husband and I to be able to reconnect.

I knew if it was happening. I knew if it was or wasn't right.

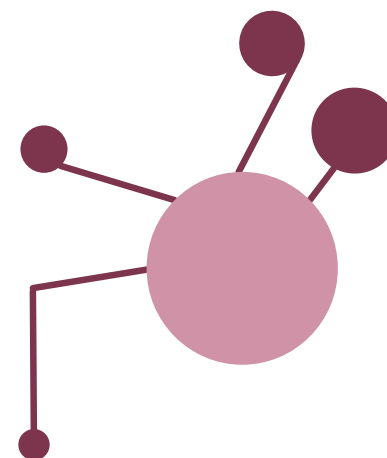
After a couple of years of practice and a lot of communication and personal work we were able to repair and connect and move forward.

Our marriage is so much better. It's like part two, so much better than part one.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

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Chapter 19

Support meditations

I want the support meditations
I teach to feel like a breath of fresh air.

yoga



stories
“ ”

Support meditations help you feel balanced

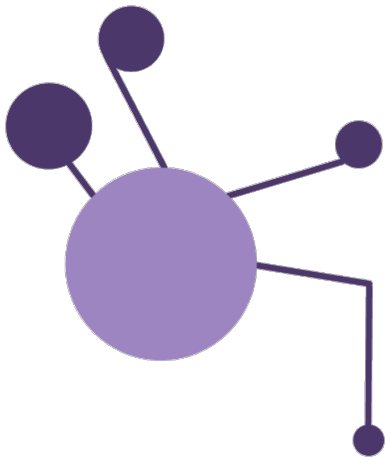
Support meditations help bring you toward a state of balance, recalibrating your mind, body, and breath. They can help you quiet outer noise and connect with your inner self. They help you feel good or strong or refreshed or peaceful or some other supportive feeling.

Here are three flavors of meditation objects I have taught as one-time meditations that could be considered support meditations.

- Seasonal inspirations
- Self-care
- Supportive feelings

READER DISCRETION ADVISED

These meditation descriptions are like summaries of a movie plot. Reading a movie plot is not at all the same as watching that movie. Likewise, reading meditation descriptions lacks the magic of you personally experiencing the meditation as it unfolds, artfully designed to prepare and engage your mind, body, and emotions.



Support meditations are a little like power-ups in video games. They give you a boost. They help you play better. –CH

yoga

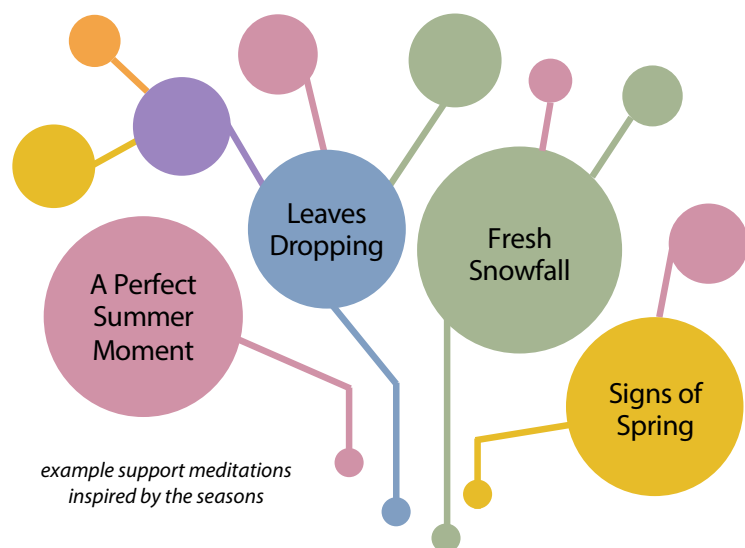


A power-up is an object in a video game which instantly adds to the life, armor, strength, or score of a player.

Power-ups can be an individual object or a group of objects specifically designed and placed inside a game for the player to win.

Technopedia

Seasonal inspirations



Meditation objects related to qualities of the seasons tap into the intense impact seasons exert on living things.

Seasons are a big deal. For better and for worse, seasons influence your mood, your activities, your clothing, and even how your mind and body function. Life unfolds embedded in nature's cycles—temperature, amount of daylight, growing seasons, mating seasons, and other cycles of plant, animal, and human life.

In early fall, I taught a **Perfect Summer Moment** meditation. Summer vacation is over, school is starting, days are getting shorter and colder, gardens have been harvested. Why not leverage wistfulness for summer and bask in luxurious memories?

Invite a memory of a perfect moment from this summer or from a summer long ago to show up. There is no hurry. Just allow a moment like that to show up. Remember the sights, the sounds, the smells, the physical sensations. Remember how that moment felt.

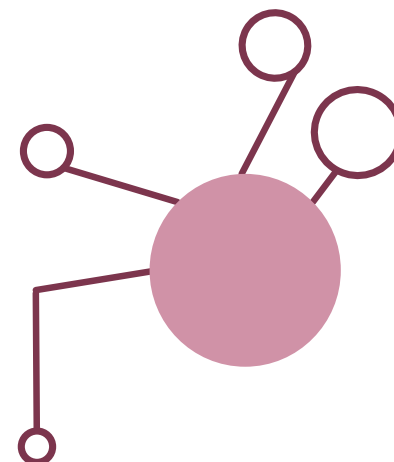
I chose perfect summer moment rather than perfect summer day because feelings happen quickly, whereas days can be complicated.

Sometimes science plays a part in my meditations.

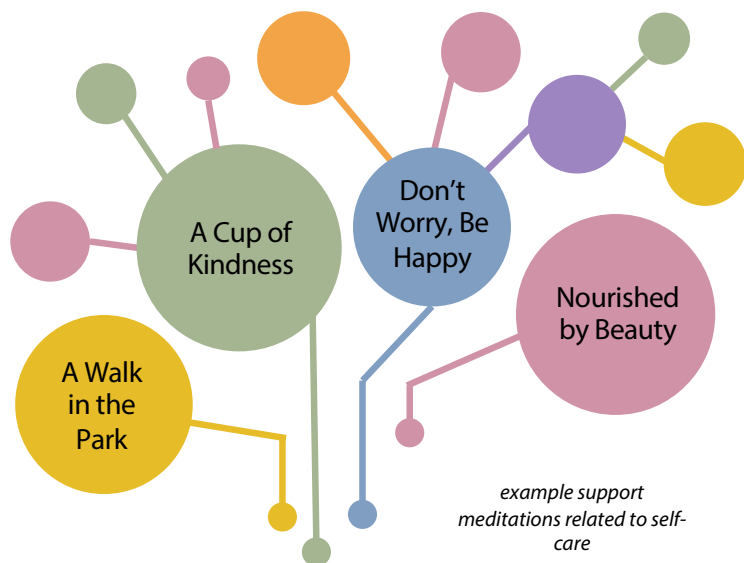
In the fall **Leaves Dropping** meditation you imagine or just have a sense of a tree whose leaves are changing color in fall. Maybe it's a tree you've seen recently. Or a tree from your past. Or a tree you imagine. LATER: Your colorful tree responded to shorter days and cooler temperatures by stopping the chlorophyll production that made its leaves green. Keeping the leaves would lose water and waste energy. So your tree shut down its leaves and is pushing them off to conserve energy for spring. LATER: Have a sense that you are pushing off your own leaves that you no longer need. You can be pushing off specific things or just generally pushing off things you no longer need.

Winter has breathtaking moments. In my **Fresh Snowfall** meditation you imagine or have a sense of what it's like to wake up to fresh snowfall. Yesterday the world looked like it usually does. Today everything looks different—covered in a layer of fresh, soft snow.

The first hints of changing of the seasons can feel exhilarating and hopeful. In my **Signs of Spring** meditation, you invite a sign of spring that matters to you to come to mind. What is something that reminds you spring is on its way? LATER: Connect with how signs of spring make you feel.



Self-care



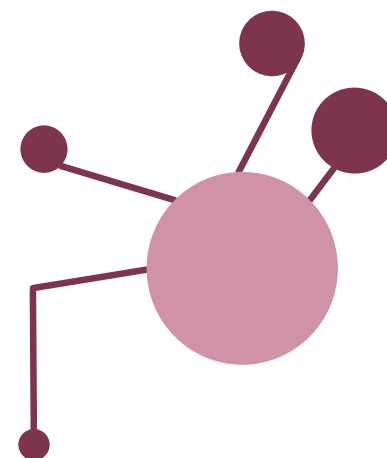
These four example one-time meditations resemble how I feel when I take care of myself. Connecting with these experiences in meditation provides some of the same benefit.

A Walk in the Park meditation involves being in as well as walking in a park. Imagine that you are sitting in a park you would enjoy visiting. It can be an actual park or an imaginary park. How does it feel to be there? LATER: Notice something about your park that feels nourishing. Bring nourishment from the park into yourself.

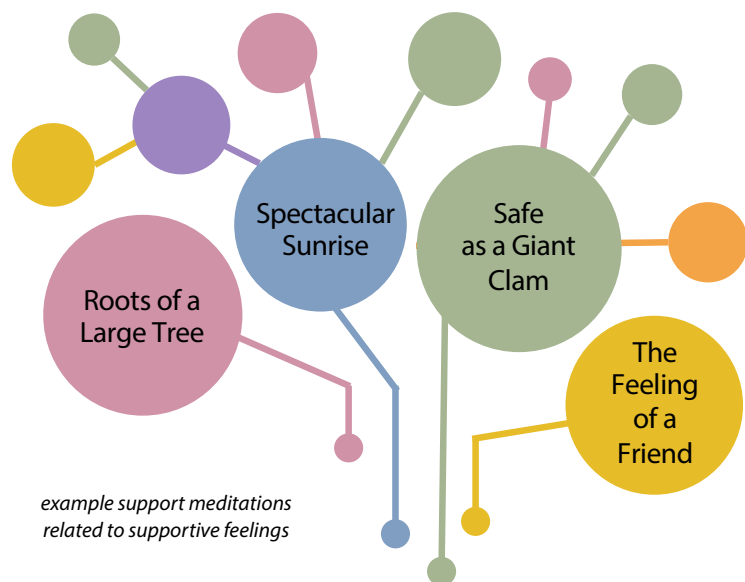
To begin the **Cup of Kindness** meditation, imagine you are holding a cup filled with kindness. It's the perfect temperature. Notice how it feels to hold a cup of kindness. LATER: Notice what kindness feels like. LATER: Bring kindness into yourself.

The ironically uplifting Bobby McFerrin song "**Don't Worry Be Happy**" inspired my meditation by the same name. Imagine that you are worried about something. What happens inside? Don't actually worry about anything. Keep it abstract and general. Just notice your process. What goes on in your mind and body and emotions? Explore your worry process. LATER: Invite something you are worried about to come to mind. Don't go into that thing. Each time you exhale, allow more of that worry to leave. LATER: Now release your process of worrying. Let it go.

In the **Nourished by Beauty** meditation, you imagine a garden filled with flowers and butterflies. A butterfly garden. Butterflies usually eat nectar from flowers. But these butterflies are special. They get their nourishment from beauty. LATER: Imagine yourself as a butterfly, feasting on beauty. LATER: Bring the feeling of beauty to any part of yourself that needs it.



Supportive feelings



What if doctors prescribed feeling pills? Take one “feel grounded” pill and one “feel safe” pill every 4-6 hours. How boring would that be? And think about the side effects. I would rather meditate.

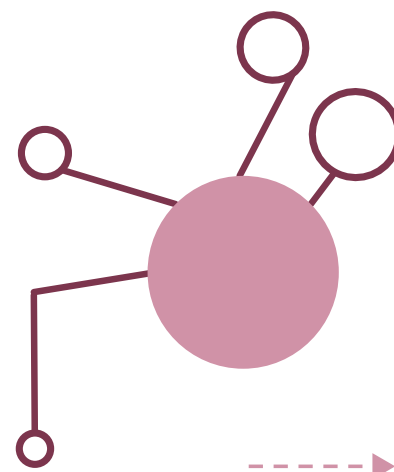
The **Roots of a Large Tree** meditation begins with your shoes off, feet resting on the floor. Feel the floor or the ground beneath your feet. Invite an image or a sense of a large healthy tree to come to mind. Perhaps it is an actual tree you are familiar with. Perhaps it is a tree you imagine. Have a sense of the tallness of your tree. The branches. The trunk. The roots. LATER: Bring your attention to the roots of your large tree. LATER: Connect with the roots of your tree. LATER: Connect with the roots that help stabilize and nourish you.

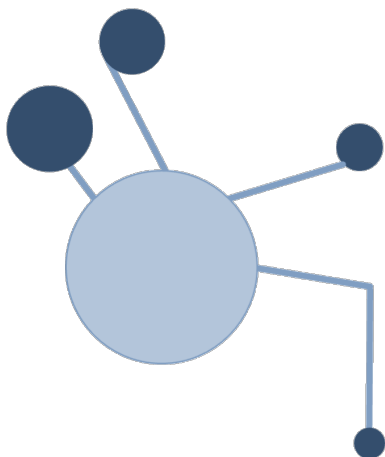
In the **Spectacular Sunrise** meditation, you connect with something vast and awe-inspiring. You connect with light from a spectacular sunrise. Light can be nourishing, or enlightening, or just help you feel lighter. Every morning the sky begins to fill with light and then the sun comes up above the horizon. Imagine or just have a sense of a spectacular sunrise.

LATER: Imagine you're doing this in the presence of a spectacular sunrise. LATER: Movement and breathing align with bringing light from a spectacular sunrise into yourself. LATER: Be with the light.

I taught the **Safe as a Giant Clam** meditation during a week when several of my participants were preparing for stressful events. I wanted to give the group a dose of feeling safe. The idea of a giant clam flowed from there. The summary is featured on the next page.

The **Feeling of a Friend** meditation progresses from friendly stranger to close friend. Think back to a recent friendly interaction with a stranger or an acquaintance, not someone you know that well. Remember the sense you had of that person. LATER: Remember how you felt when you were interacting with that person. LATER: Allow a close friend to come to mind. Have a sense of that close friend. LATER: Notice how you feel when you're with that person.





The Safe as a Giant Clam Meditation offers an accessible way to connect with feeling safe and protected. –CH

(interwoven with movement and breath steps)

This meditation is inspired by giant clams. Most of the day their shells are open. They have hundreds of little “eye spots” that enable them to sense light and detect danger. When a giant clam senses a threat it quickly closes its shell so it is safe, protected, and comfortable.

When you notice feelings of being overwhelmed, your body is trying to get your attention. Your emotions are doing their job, which is to motivate you to do something.

What often happens for me is that I grab onto feeling overwhelmed and magnify the feeling. What if instead I close my shell and let myself feel safe and protected? What if overwhelmed is just a signal to close my shell for a bit?

Imagine having your inner clam always with you. Imagine being able to close your shell, to go into a safe comfortable place. And then in safety, maybe ask what do I need?

Mentored meditations

Mentors give their mentees meditations to help them with life's challenges.

yoga



stories
“ ”

A mentor supports their mentees' yoga journeys

Yoga teacher and yoga therapist trainings are led by teachers in group online and in-person classes. In the tradition I study, every student is also matched with a personal mentor. Conversations with the mentor personalize learning.

The foundation of the mentor-mentee relationship is to support the mentee's learning and personal development. The foundation of a yoga therapist-client relationship is to help the client heal.

Despite the different foundation, the role of a mentor resembles the role of a yoga therapist. A mentor meets with the student one-on-one, creates a personalized practice. The mentor gives the mentee experiences, and then guides the evolution of their practice as they progress.

The customized personal practice supports the person and their learning and—like yoga therapy—helps them navigate physical, mental, and life challenges.

This description sounds and is vague because what comes up depends on each individual's life patterns, personality, and current circumstances including experiences in the training.

Two meditations in this chapter illustrate supportive meditations given by a mentor to a mentee.

Students in the long-term classes and trainings I attend have a personal mentor. Learning is personalized and supported. –CH

yoga



Personal mentorship is critical to implement yoga in one's life.

A mentor meets with the student one-on-one, creates a personalized practice, and then guides the evolution of their practice as they change.

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute

There is room for mystery and doubt

In Chapter 18 Amanda described a river meditation she was given to help with wrenching challenges in her marriage. When she brought water in, then out, she sometimes could feel things that needed to leave were able to leave.

Robyn is a yoga therapist, mentor, and yoga teacher who studies and practices yoga. She is also a student and practitioner of Buddhism.

The first meditation Robyn was given to do in her daily personal yoga practice was the river meditation.

When Robyn did the river meditation, she wasn't sure what the point was. Uncertainty or even skepticism is a recurring theme in meditation stories throughout this book. Is this meditation working? Why I am doing this? Where did what showed up for me come from?

Mystery accompanies meditation in general and mentored meditation. We go along with the plan—sometimes trusting, sometimes rebelling—to get to have an experience.

Part of how Robyn (and I) make sense of the world is to question everything. We will, of course, question meditation experiences.

Meditations can be done with doubt or with unquestioning trust. One way is probably easier. But there is plenty of time to do some of each in a years-long teacher-student relationship.

Students have agency. Meditation objects are negotiable. And mentors check in to see how a meditation is working.

We often don't perceive how a long-time meditation is shaping us



I did my practice only half convinced there was any benefit to it.

- Robyn

“

The first time I worked with a meditation object was when my teacher gave me the meditation: imagine yourself sitting next to a river and the water is moving. I imagined the water to be just sort of a little bit cool, but not cold. Bring the water in. Then let the water back out.

I did my practice only half convinced there was any benefit to it.

And then I was at the monastery participating in a week-long intensive. Once a day you can have a one-on-one meeting with your teacher. You're in a big hall with a lot of people and the teacher's attendant would announce, "This row can get in line."

People walk briskly to get in line as a sign of respect to the teacher. I had something to say, so I was anxious to get in line. I sat down in line and someone came and sat in front of me.

We're in silence. I haven't spoken for three days. So there was a lot in my head. I remember getting all worked up about this very simple situation. (One purpose of doing these intensives is to help you see your patterns including patterns of getting all worked up.)



I remember sitting in the line and found myself imagining bringing water in and letting it go out. Bringing water in and letting it go out. It was miraculous how I went from mental crazy to imagining this cool water just flowing over me and through me.

The whole situation was diffused and then I was totally fine.

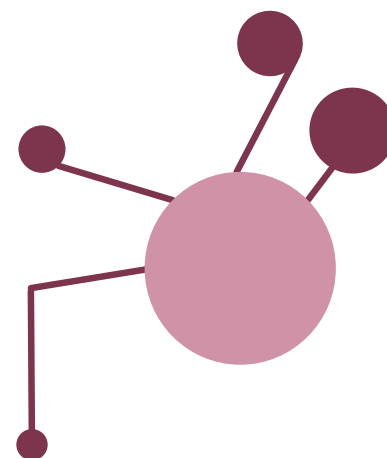
And I realized, oh, that's what that meditation is for.

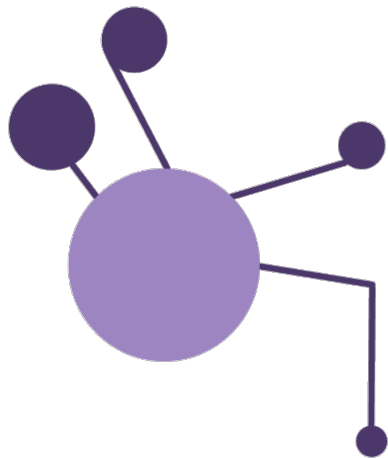
It was very liberating to discover I had access to it, not just during my practice, but any time I needed it.



Robyn Love, Atha Yoga School

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It is also not necessary or possible
to know all the effects
a meditation is having. –CH

yoga



It is not necessary to understand
how or why a meditation works
for it to have an effect.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

Meditation has side effects

Scientific research reveals general ways meditation can change how the human system functions in beneficial ways. Some researchers are also doing important work studying unwanted effects of meditation.

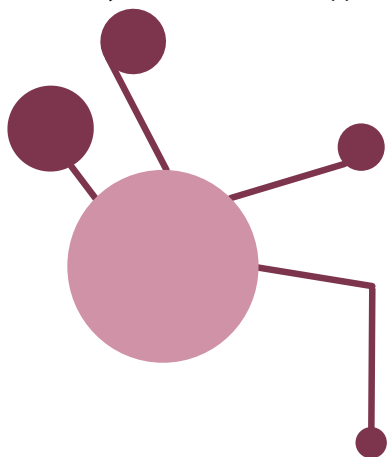
Western scientific methods are not well suited to understanding individualized, subtle effects of how a meditation impacts someone's feelings, thought patterns, and life choices outside of meditation.

Science is poorly suited to studying beneficial and adverse effects the alluring universe of meditation objects can have on unique individuals. The effects are influenced by each person's past and present circumstances, their capacity and skill in yoga and meditation, and myriad other factors.

What happens when you meditate on a mountain? You may begin to take on some of the qualities of a mountain. You may become harder to move. That can be good or bad.

When you bring water in then move it back out, things may change inside. Maybe you reconcile, or break up. Maybe you change careers, or simply respond differently to stressful events. Perhaps you start to say "no" more often.

I notice that I change when I start working with a new meditation object. I sense my thoughts and behavior shift. Surely what I am aware of is a tiny fraction of what is happening.



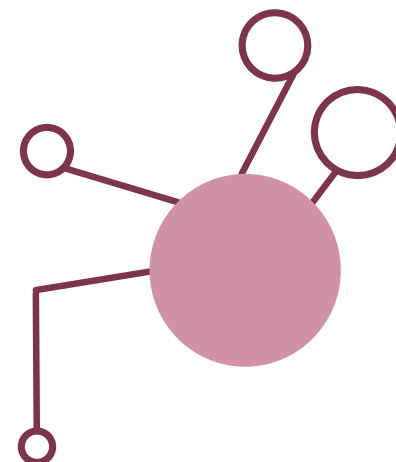
Sometimes meditation support involves coming face-to-face with sadness

Anina is a yoga and meditation teacher. She was an assistant at the yoga teacher training where I was a student. She is a Yoga Well Institute mentor and offers private yoga sessions.

Decades of practicing and studying yoga do not prevent tragedies from happening. But a regular daily personal practice, love of meditation, and mentor relationship provide a framework to support grieving.

In fact, our lives supply a personalized curriculum for learning and practicing yoga.

Anina describes a meditation her mentor gave her, where she goes into the grief. She has a long, trusting relationship with her mentor. They meet to talk about how the meditation is going. And she is always free to go back to a previous meditation—like the moon—on days when going into the grief would be too much.



Meditations help Anina with grief



Doing this meditation feels something like facing the dragon and feeling the heat.

- Anina

“

The meditation I was given most recently has to do with personal tragedies that are going on in my life. That's hard because it's going to a sad place—going to an uncomfortable place and staying there because there's no place else to go.

Doing this in meditation is valuable because that's the way it is. When it feels like too much I turn back to the moon, a previous meditation object where I've found a lot of support. The moon meditation helps me go on with life instead of being overwhelmed with grief.

Sometimes I cry and it makes me kind of mad, because I don't want to cry. I want to sit and be comfortable. But the grief is there and you either go with it, or you fight against it.

Sometimes the grief just stays and that's that. And then, eventually, I get up and everything's gone. The meditation is over. Other times in the meditation the grief will just kind of pass.

For me dealing with grief in daily life can be paralyzing. It can be don't eat. Don't wash your hair today, wash it tomorrow. And don't leave the house. Grief can be paralyzing for me.



Doing this meditation feels something like facing the dragon and feeling the heat. Letting it consume me. And then it's gone. It's not boom, boom, but it subsides, and well, okay. I'm still here. I can still do all these other things that I like to do.

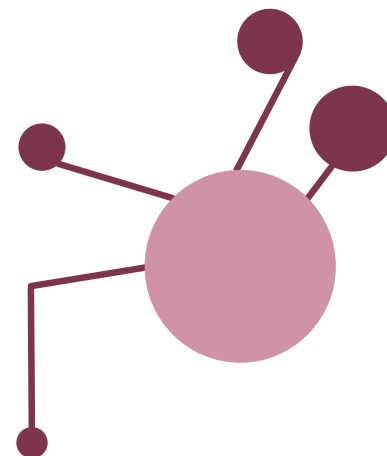
The intensity of the grief during the meditation has lessened a lot. It's not as intense as it was when I first started doing the meditation.

Something in my experience of doing the meditation reminds me what to do to get my head out of being stuck in “there's only grief, there's only sad.”



Anina Hutchison, Yoga and meditation teacher

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Chapter 21 Meditation and infertility counseling

Carol's use of imagery as an infertility counselor is a form of meditation.

yoga



stories
“ ”

Meditation helps her clients manage the stress of infertility

Carol's expertise in counseling and yoga therapy enabled her to develop approaches to help her clients manage the stress of infertility. She helps clients learn to balance their emotions, get support, and deal with painful social situations.

All of Carol's clients are experiencing stress related to infertility. Each person's situation is unique, but there is a common thread.

She describes what she does as working with imagery, rather than meditation. She guides clients to let an image of fertility come to mind.

Here, the client's image of fertility is like a meditation object. Whatever imagery comes to mind comes from the person.

Once imagery has shown up, that imagery becomes the meditation object. Carol guides and supports the client as they continue to connect with and work with, integrate, and expand upon their personal fertility imagery.

Carol uses imagery for infertility counseling



*“The way I use imagery with my fertility clients is similar to what we do in yoga.”
- Carol*

“

As a therapist, the way I use imagery with my fertility clients is similar to what we do in yoga in terms of integrating it into your life and practicing it regularly.

When we move to imagery, I'll tell my client to let an image of fertility come to mind. I talk about the different forms imagery can be. I tell them not to have a preset expectation, just let an image come to mind. You never know what the images are going to be. They're always surprised by what shows up. And I'm always delighted.

The fertility imagery clients come up with is all over the place. It's just like yoga meditations. The imagery could be a little bunny rabbit that jumps in their lap. It could be a color, or a Hindu goddess. It could be an image of their heart getting big, or a tree. It could be a baby growing in their body, or an image of a sperm puncturing the nucleus of the egg. It could be them dancing with their partner.



When they have an image, we'll talk about it. Does it have a size or a shape or color? Is it in a certain part of your body? If it had a message for you, what would it say? Would you like to get closer to that image? Would you like to bring it into your body or surround yourself with it?

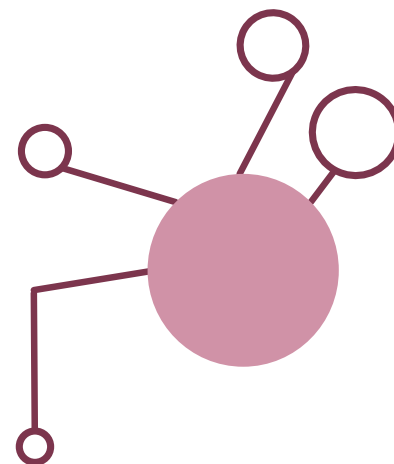
My clients start noticing changes pretty quickly. They notice they are feeling calm or feeling less anxious.

We work with their imagery week after week. Did you pay any attention or think about the image this week? What was it like? How can you bring the imagery in? Can you draw a picture of it? Can you print out a picture of it? If it's a blue, soft color, can you wear that color? Do you need a post-it with a mantra that came to mind all over your house to remind you of it? The point is to bring the imagery in and use it and let the power of the imagery begin to work.



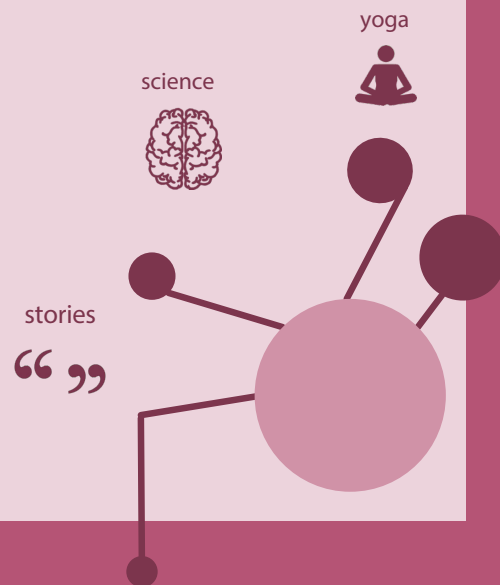
Carol Jones, *The Infertility Counselor*

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Meditation to combat burnout

How might meditation support hospice professionals at a large organization?



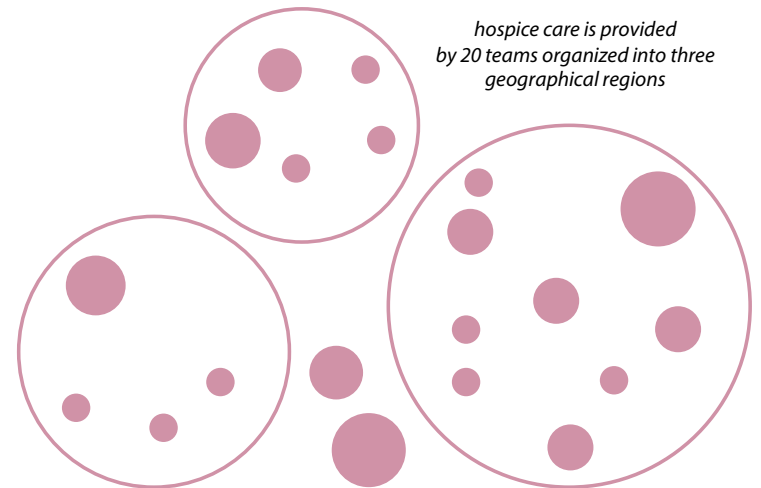
Meditation helps support hospice professionals

Our own and others' research shows that doing meditation regularly helps hospice professionals pay attention to their emotions and to how they are doing. Meditating regularly can help change how hospice professionals' human systems respond to stressful events.

My colleagues and I at Michigan State University and my company, Yoga Mind Tools, collaborated on a grant-funded feasibility project to bring yoga meditation to Hospice of Michigan.

Our challenge was, how might we offer meditation to a hospice organization in a supported, accessible, appealing way that encourages hospice professionals to meditate?

Hospice of Michigan is a very large hospice organization. Hospice care is provided by 20 teams organized into three geographical regions. Each team has its own operations manager, nurses, hospice aides, social workers, and chaplains/spiritual care professionals. We delivered the 6-week program separately to each team.



This research was partially funded by a grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

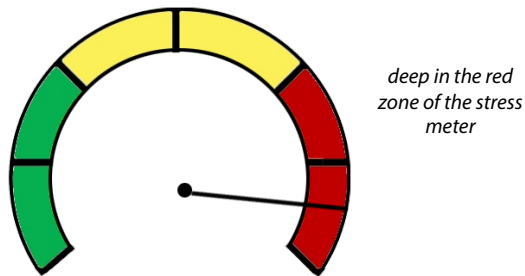
Meditation can help prevent burnout

Our interviews revealed that hospice professionals notice when they feel burnout coming on.

For some workers the emotional strain of caring for patients and families is what tips the scale. Others realize they are approaching burnout when they start to dread going to work. Overload and exhaustion can begin to compromise the ability to do the work of providing compassionate care. Hospice professionals learn to recognize when they are “hitting that wall” and need to take a break.

Among the hospice professionals we studied, burnout was rarely permanent. For the vast majority burnout arises or perhaps they start to notice symptoms of burnout coming on. Then the hospice worker takes preventive or remedial actions. They return to being able to manage stress and feel engaged with the work of providing hospice care.

If a hospice professional is already deep in the “red zone” and they try meditation for the first time in that highly stressed state, there may be a small short-term benefit. They might feel a little calmer.



The long-term value of meditation to combat or prevent burnout comes from meditating regularly. Doing so gives hospice workers experiences with quieting their mind and noticing how their mind and body are doing. They get better at listening to themselves and at making choices that help prevent burnout.

Our meditation intervention was designed to support hospice professionals and help counteract or prevent these symptoms of burnout. –CH

science



Two dimensions of healthcare worker burnout are:

- feeling physically and emotionally exhausted at work
- feeling less empathy for patients and co-workers, less connected with patients, and less sensitive to others' feelings

Making meditation easy to do and easy to access

We adapted our 6-week meditation program to the needs and goals of hospice professionals. The design of the meditations, the ways we structured support for the program, and the different ways hospice professionals could access the meditations made the experiences easy to do and easy to access.

DESIGN

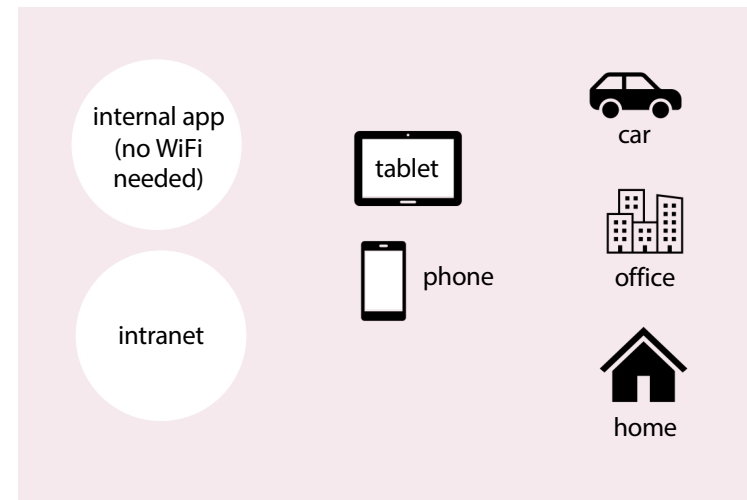
- 10-minute duration
- Done seated in a chair
- No yoga or meditation experience needed
- We called them “movement meditations” to communicate that these were different than just “focus on your breath” meditations
- For variety, there were six meditations—one per week for six weeks—each featuring a different meditation object

SUPPORT

- We introduced the 6-week program at each team’s monthly all staff meeting
- We did the meditation with the team at that meeting, so everyone could have a sense of what the meditations were like
- Weekly emails were forwarded by the team operations manager to motivate and introduce each week’s new meditation
- Doing the meditation could be counted as work time
- A meditation expert was available to answer questions about meditation

ACCESS

- Hospice professionals use tablets and smartphones to access electronic medical records before, during, and after home visits
- An app that included audio of all six meditations was placed onto hospice workers’ tablets and smartphones
- Hospice professionals could access the meditations from their car (not while driving), the office, or their home, even when internet was not available



meditations can be accessed by tablet or phone from any location



Patricia McDaniel and Rachel Derry demonstrate meditating at work

Adapted from Heeter, C., Allbritton, M., Lehto, R., Miller, P., McDaniel, P., Paletta, M. (2021). Feasibility, Acceptability, and Outcomes of a Yoga-Based Meditation Intervention for Hospice Professionals to Combat Burnout. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, 2515.

We raised awareness and interest in meditation

The program helped those who meditated.

- Two-thirds did one or more meditations on their own after the first meditation with their team.
- One-third of hospice professionals did not meditate on their own.
- Half wanted to use the meditations after the program ended.
- Meditators were more able to actively listen to their body for insight, to direct attention to bodily sensations, to notice how they were feeling, and to use that awareness to manage distress.

After the research project, Marcel and I continued to work with Hospice of Michigan. We designed nine more custom-made meditations.



these were the meditations in the original 6-week program



Patricia McDaniel, our Hospice of Michigan meditation champion, organized a weekly “meditation oasis” via Zoom where hospice professionals could log in and do one of our meditations together, with the option to stay on and discuss their experiences.

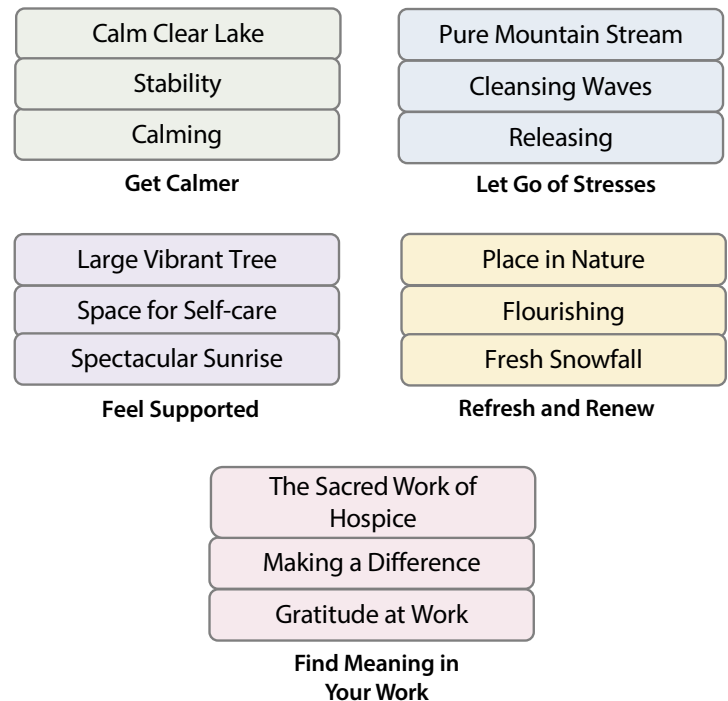
Hospice of Michigan’s intranet home page links directly to all 15 Yoga Mind Tool movement meditations for hospice professionals. (See the diagram below.)

The organization continues to explore ways meditation can help employees, patients, and family caregivers.

Which movement meditation should I do today?

Ask yourself, how do I want to feel?

What do I want to connect with?



support meditation menu on the NorthStar Care Community intranet

Discovery meditations

Doing discovery meditations often feels good, but that is not the only goal.



In discovery meditations the goal is to learn and grow

In discovery meditations the primary motivation is to learn and grow.

For example, discovery meditation objects offer portkeys to:

- Become more authentically you
- Be playful and curious
- Get to know your fascinating self
- Grow your awareness
- Learn to listen to deep parts of your self
- Have different experiences
- Gain insights

I teach one-time discovery meditations to groups of meditation students. There is not a mentor or yoga therapist relationship. Therefore I don't dive deeply into delicate topics. I use a light touch, but the meditations are not exclusively sweetness and light.

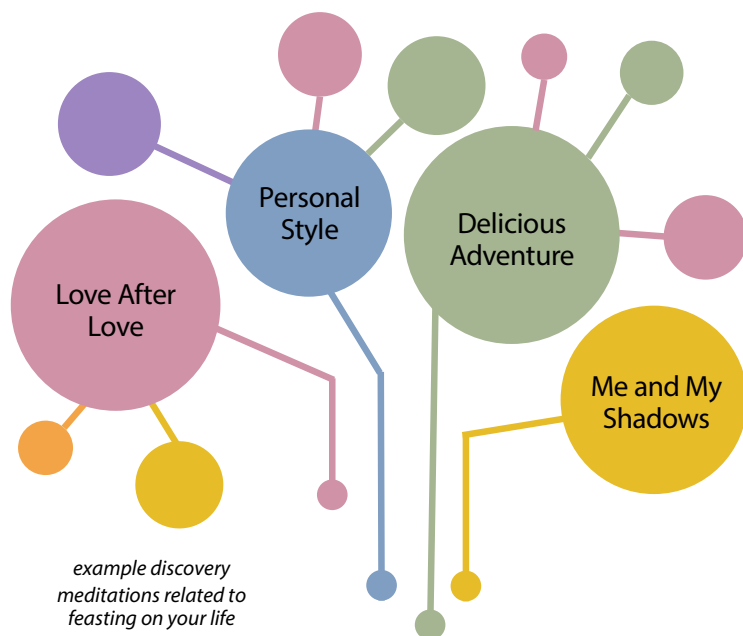
Here are three flavors of meditation objects I have taught as one-time meditations that could be considered discovery meditations.

- Feast on Your Life
- Play
- Notice Your Patterns

READER DISCRETION ADVISED

These meditation descriptions are like summaries of a movie plot. Reading a movie plot is not at all the same as watching that movie. Likewise, reading meditation descriptions lacks the magic of you personally experiencing the meditation as it unfolds, artfully designed to prepare and engage your mind, body, and emotions.

Feast on Your Life



Pausing to remember and appreciate special—perhaps long-forgotten—moments from your life can be grounding, satisfying, and healing. It helps you remember and connect with who you are. Meditation is an ideal medium for self-exploration, self-discovery, and self-appreciation.

The name for this category of discovery meditations, feast on your life, comes from a **Love after Love** meditation I taught. I began by reading Derek Wolcott's compelling poem inviting you to feast on your life.

I gave a little time for the poem to sink in, then I guided participants to bring their palms together at heart level. Holding your life, holding yourself. As the meditation continued, I repeated special lines from the poem. LATER: Loving the stranger who was yourself. LATER: Give back your heart to the stranger who has loved you all your life. THEN: Sit. Feast on your life.

Bruce's personal style



To begin the **Personal Style** meditation, I showed this selfie of my brother Bruce Heeter wearing a pandemic facemask printed with the snout of a dog holding a cheeseburger in its mouth.

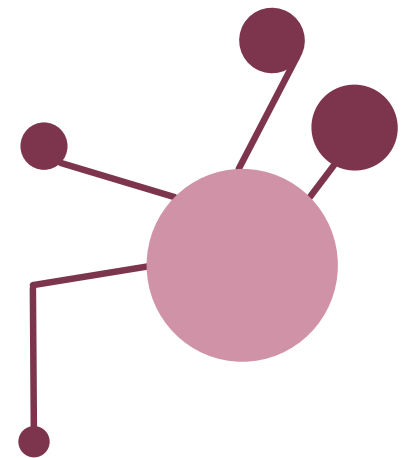
I started with a goofy example of personal style to diffuse resistance from down-to-earth participants who might otherwise bristle at the concept. THEN: We develop our own personal style. How we dress, wear our hair, other signature touches of self-expression. Allow something to come to mind that expresses you (past or present). We'll do several, so don't worry about trying to pick the best one.

The **Delicious Adventure** meditation was inspired by my sister Chris's dogsledding and Galapagos Islands trips. TO BEGIN: I thought we could explore the feeling of an adventure and how those feelings enliven and nourish you. Call to mind or imagine an adventure—one you experienced or one you imagine. Call to mind an adventure.

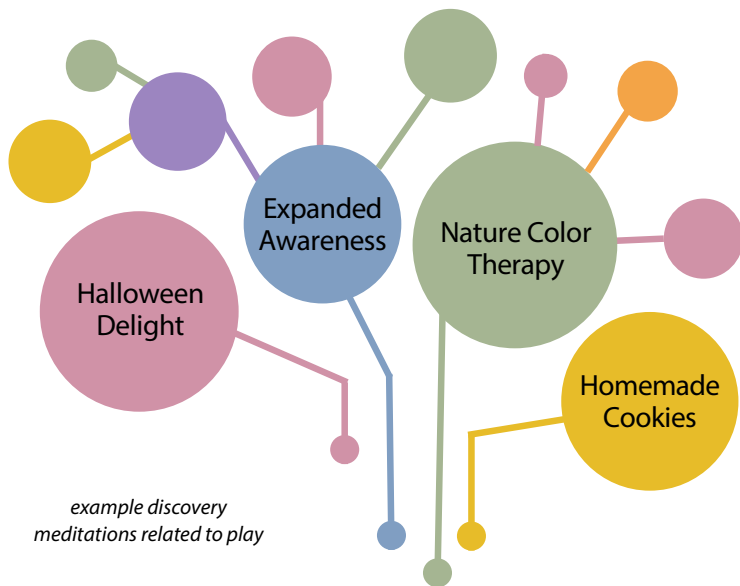
Me and my Shadows was inspired by an image that had gone viral of Vice Presidential candidate Kamala Harris in profile, wearing a suit and walking along a white wall. We see a shadow not of Kamala but the much smaller shadow of child activist Ruby Bridges walking alongside Kamala. I showed that graphic.

To begin notice light and shadows in the room around you, keeping your eyes closed. THEN: Your lifetime of experiences make you who you are now. Your experiences are not visible to others. Sometimes they are not visible to you. Imagine your past as a shadow walking with you. Supporting you. LATER: As you move and breathe your shadow moves and breathes with you. LATER: Allow a shadow that represents you at a younger age to show up. Appreciate that shadow. LATER: Allow a shadow of yourself at a different age to show up. Appreciate and be with that shadow. FINALLY: Be with your shadows, appreciating them.

When participants reflected on their experiences after the meditation, everyone's experience of shadows supporting them was positive. It's possible that cueing people to reflect on their shadows could activate negative or intense thoughts. For meditations that are potentially risky like this you want to be working with a mentor or teacher. I would only teach this discovery meditation to participants I know and can follow up with.



Play



A majority of American adults and most kids play video games. Very few (other than me) meditate to play or have fun.

I founded and ran Michigan State University's serious game design graduate certificate program. In games and in meditation I carefully integrate elements of fun in ways intended to support serious goals.

Occasionally I teach meditations where the goal is not to heal or to transform. It's just to play.

To be honest, I also have ulterior motives. I could write an essay or give a TED talk about what's going on in addition to play for each of the four examples here. But let's focus on play.

Halloween has always been my favorite holiday. I love the costumes, candy, and getting to be something other than myself for one night. On Halloween I taught a **Halloween Delight** meditation. TO BEGIN: Our minds are accustomed to thinking they're in charge, talking most of the time and presuming they are running the show. Today we will practice having the mind be more of a passenger than a driver. We'll practice allowing.

18 forms of fun

BEAUTY	IMMERSION
PROBLEM SOLVING	COMPETITION
SOCIAL	COMEDY
THRILL OF DANGER	PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
LOVE	CREATION
POWER	DISCOVERY
ADVANCEMENT	COMPLETION
MASTERY	ALTRUISM
FANTASY	EXPLORATION

Play and fun are massive topics for game design. Here are a few example forms of fun game designers consider while crafting a game. (It's not an exhaustive list.)

Invite memories of the fun of dressing up on Halloween or some other occasion to come to mind. Just allow memories to arise. We're not picking just one right now. Just inviting memories of dressing up to come to mind. LATER: Invite one costume that delighted you to show up. Remember what it was like to be wearing that costume. To be in costume.

I propose that spending time in meditation going back in time to how you felt as a child wearing a favorite Halloween costume could be healing or transformational. And fun. It temporarily moves you out of being stuck in your usual circumstances and patterns.

Chapter 3 of the Yoga Sutras gives many examples of meditation objects and outcomes of meditating on that object over a long period of time. During a 2-year course studying that chapter, I did meditations on my own to explore the ideas we were talking about. In the **Expanded Awareness** meditation I tried to share part of one of my experiences. TO BEGIN: Keeping your eyes closed, bring your attention to the part of the room you would see if your eyes were open. LATER: Bring your attention the room behind you. Feel the room behind you.

I developed the experience of 360 degree awareness of the physical world, and then generalized to subtle information our sensory system provides, that is easy to ignore.

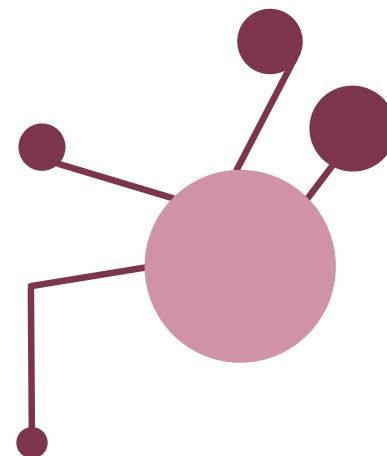
Nature Color Therapy seemed like a fun idea—to be drawn to a color in nature. My inspiration came from days of working with graphics. I was adding words on top of photographs of nature. A secret for choosing a color for letters that fits nicely with a photo is to grab a color from the scene. An “eyedropper” tool in the software lets me isolate individual colors from the leaves or sky or the water.

In the meditation, I first needed to give participants the equivalent of a nature scene to work with. TO BEGIN: Allow a time you were recently in nature to show up. Connect with that place. Remember what it looked like. LATER: Allow a color from that place to catch your attention. One particular color you are drawn to right now.

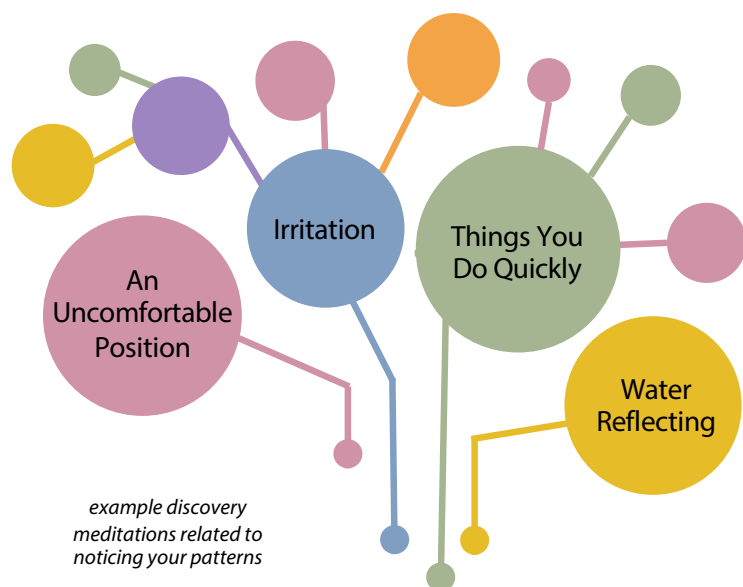


LATER: Connect with, experience, and explore that color. FINALLY: Bring that color to some part of your life or yourself.

Cookies get complicated as we get older. But meditating on **Homemade Cookies** does not involve any sugar or butter or rules about not eating raw cookie dough. I taught this meditation during December holidays and it served as a visceral portkey to childhood memories of special recipes and special times, smells, and tastes.



Notice Your Patterns



Meditation objects need to be appropriate for the context. This chapter talks about one-time meditations for discovery and the next chapter will talk about long-time meditations for transformation.

These discovery examples are meditations I have taught in a context of groups who are not coming to me to engage with big issues in their lives. They are not coming to me because they want to transform. But even for them, noticing their patterns can be useful and interesting.

Notice your patterns is a flavor of meditation that I occasionally teach to these groups.

In chapter 15 I described a meditation Chase taught about noticing restrictions in the upper chest and then inquiring about the source of the restriction. I noticed that tightness in my upper back and breathing stemmed from how I sit at my computer. Then a connection arose for me of how the restrictions of academic writing were constricting my approach to writing this book.

I taught an **Uncomfortable Position** meditation hoping participants might gain that kind of insight. TO BEGIN: Remember how you usually sit when you use the computer. How you sit in the chair (or on the bed). How you hold your body. The position of your head and neck. Allow parts of your body to complain if they want to. Listening. Sending care and comfort. LATER: Invite something else you do frequently, the same way every time, to show up. A pattern, like using the computer, that might sometimes be healthy to do differently.

During our discussion, participants talked about how uncomfortable they felt trying to meet their own or others' expectations.

The **Irritation** meditation begins in a place in nature, so that we start from a good feeling place. LATER: Allow to come to mind a time you felt irritated by a person or by something that happened. LATER: See if you can separate the feeling of being irritated from the story about why you were irritated. Notice what the feeling of being irritated feels like. LATER: Release that feeling into nature.

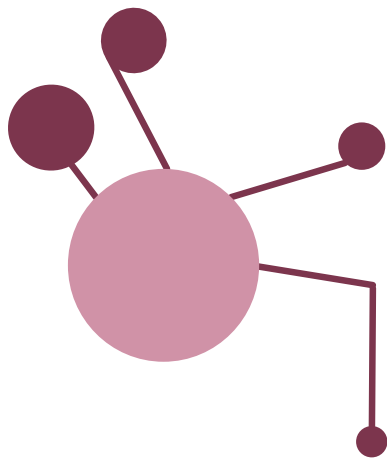
My goal was for participants to recognize that irritation is a feeling with a life of its own. They have the experience of separating the feeling from the story. To reflect on how quickly they become irritated. How the feeling influences their behavior.

A Yoga Sutra in chapter 3 suggests meditating on the actions that we do quickly versus the actions that we put off doing. This meditation felt useful for me. It helped me see some of my patterns. So I shared the experience in the **Things You do Quickly** meditation.

TO BEGIN: Have an intention to compassionately observe yourself. The yoga I study emphasizes a practice of observing your patterns as a path to insight and personal growth. LATER: Notice things you do right away and things you put off doing. Don't judge, just notice. LATER: Reflect on things you do right away and things you put off doing.

A big idea in yoga is that where we place our attention affects us. The adage 'you are what you eat' applies not just to food but to experiences. Waking up and watching or reading the news (which somehow is always distressing) will influence your human system including how you perceive events in your life. Going for a walk in the park will influence how your human system functions. My messy desk has a different impact on me than an orderly desk might have. It's horrifying and exciting to fully consider that how we spend each moment of our attention impacts everything else.

The **Water Reflecting** meditation shares a gentle peek into the idea that what we spend our time on affects us. It is described on the next page.



What you spend time doing affects you, for better and for worse. How you spend your time matters. –CH

(interwoven with movement and breath steps)

Imagine or just have a sense of a lake or a pond with a very smooth surface. The surface is so smooth it reflects everything around it.

Have the sense you are skimming that smooth surface of water with your hands as you move and breathe.

Imagine what it feels like to be the surface of water, reflecting everything around you.

In life we are like water. What we do, what we place our attention on, what we spend time with affect us. We reflect those things.

Allow to come to mind something you devote a lot of attention to.

And notice how that thing is reflected in you—how that thing you spend time with affects you.

Chapter 24 Transformation and meditation

Meditation is a tool for transformation.



Pulled by the vision of transformation

Transformation is a process, a practice, and a new habit of becoming.

Transformation stems from a desire to become ever more authentically you. The motivation is to live an increasingly authentic life.

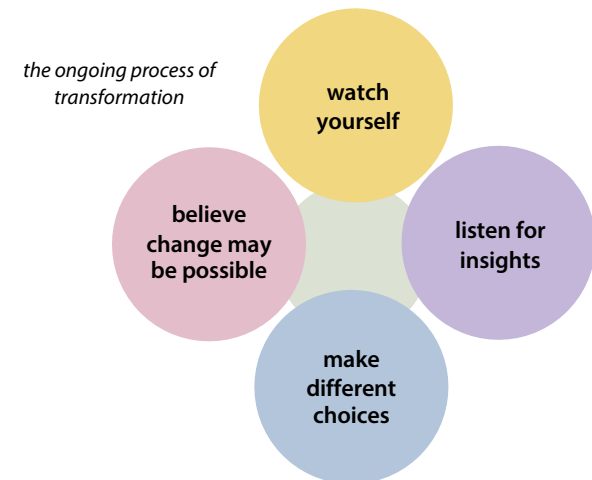
Chapter 17 talked about self-observation—noticing when you are acting from awareness and when you are acting from unexamined patterns. Chapter 18 talked about insights that arise from meditation and self-observation.

Transformation is the next step. When you notice you are behaving or reacting or making decisions on autopilot, pause and reflect. When an insight shows up, explore it in meditation and in life.

One-time meditations are fertile ground for those of us on a quest for transformation. Insights show up that shine a light on patterns we might explore and understand more fully or change. Experiences arise that hint at new ways of feeling or being or doing.

Transformation means you work with what shows up. You dig deeper.

The diagram below represents steps in an ongoing process of transformation. Believe that change may be possible. Watch yourself, noticing your patterns. Listen for insights, experiences, and intuition. Be willing to make different choices that are outside of those patterns.



Once you see a pattern, you can't unsee it



It occurred to me that I might not need to lie awake afraid every night.
– Carrie

Here is a small personal example of transformation that does not tie to a specific meditation. My decade of yoga and meditation practice is the reason I noticed my pattern and realized I could change. This story illustrates the role of becoming aware of patterns, realizing change might be possible, and making different choices.

“

Almost every night of my adult life worrisome noises wake me up. I get up to investigate, then go back to sleep.

When my cat Moon started sleeping nestled against me I got up less often because I didn't want to disturb him. Noises still woke me. Instead of getting up I lay in bed awake—worried about a possible imminent threat, straining to hear more outside noises.

Patterns are like that. I never thought to question my vigilance and fear in the night. It's just part of who I am. My reactions to outside sounds in the night had always felt normal and rational.

My cuddly cat and a spate of nearby home invasion robberies led me to twist the original pattern of waking up, checking out the sound, and falling back asleep into behavior that extended how long I experienced fear and kept me awake for longer.



In conversation with a friend I mentioned my nightly cycle of fear—assuming I was normal. As I spoke I realized I was kind of crazy.

Once you see a pattern, you can't unsee it. I became self-conscious when noises woke me. As I lay in bed awake not getting up and straining to hear other sounds, I was also aware of myself doing that.

It occurred to me I might be able to change this pattern. I might not need to lie awake afraid every night.

The next night I woke up when a car parked in front of the house at 3am. I had a conversation with myself. Was this the night—after 16,000 nights of false alarms—that the danger was real? Or was it an acceptable risk to suppress my outside noises vigilance and turn attention toward how comfortable I felt being in bed?

My worrying self negotiated with my wanting-to-change self. We came up with criteria that would warrant getting up—someone screaming, car alarms going off, noises that could be the sound of breaking into the house. And otherwise I would let it go, direct attention inward to pleasant feelings of being in bed and go back to sleep.

Changing required conscious effort for a couple of months. Now my new pattern is easy. I get up to check on a suspicious sound about once every 3 weeks. I'm more rested because I get better sleep.

Becoming aware of my pattern allowed me to consider different, more appropriate choices.

I am no longer someone who lies awake most nights for an hour straining to monitor sounds of outside activity. Now I am someone who wakes up when I hear noises, but usually decides to ignore them.



Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools

”

Occupy your space

“

I have a client who grew up in an abusive environment. To cope, they learned to place all of their attention on the external environment, not on themselves, not to inside. They had a pattern of seeing externally instead of internally.

One of the meditations I had them do at the end of their practice was to feel the space they are in. And over time, to feel themselves occupying the space they're in. So feel the space you're in and feel yourself occupying the space.

This was helping them develop a new pattern of connecting with themselves.



Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”

Patterns of behavior you adopted in childhood because those patterns served you are often still present in some way in your adult life.

Those patterns are not necessarily still helpful. You do them out of habit—without even realizing their origin or questioning whether behaving that way still makes sense.

In the example above Marcel uses meditation to help a client develop new patterns. Rather than simply saying “don’t do that old pattern”, Marcel gives them a meditation of feeling themselves occupying the space they are in.

Marcel’s client discovered how to pay attention to their internal environment. They learned what directing attention inward felt like. They practiced the skill of directing attention inward over and over again, across months of meditations.

They were developing a new pattern in meditation that would gradually start showing up in daily life.

Recognizing that past events in your life shape your current patterns opens a door to healing and transformation. –CH

yoga



How your past influences your present determines your future.

Paul Harvey
Centre for Yoga Studies

Feeling safe enough to allow yourself to be seen

“

I talk with the people I work with about their life patterns. There's a client who has two very deep patterns, that we've been calling "the doer" and "the helper" that protected them when they were young and gave them value in life.

The helper pattern is "I help everybody around me. I am the person that's always the good friend, always the gracious help. I always put my own stuff second and help people around me."

And the "doer" pattern is "I am organized. I am effective. I get stuff done." These are a big part of who that person is in their most beautiful form, but they are also the source of their biggest difficulties.

An underlying issue for them was safety. Safety in allowing themselves to be loved. Avoiding letting others help them to keep from becoming indebted to anyone.

We started with meditations to help grow the quality of feeling safe.

The succession of meditations for this person moved into allowing themselves to be seen.



Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners

”

How nice that Marcel's client helps people. And that they are super organized and efficient. No problem there, right? Those great qualities are central to their authentic, beautiful self.

But how useful to also heal the fear—to heal the sense of being unsafe that originally motivated their patterns of doing and helping.

How appealing to feel safe enough to allow yourself to be seen and to "help" or "do" when that is your authentic choice, not just your habit.

My mentor challenges my assumptions, helping me see patterns I wouldn't notice on my own. Being grounded and clear matters as much as getting stuff done?! –CH

yoga



It's not just about getting stuff done.
It's about your ability to be present
and work with the energetics
of the situation—to be grounded
and clear.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners



Garuda by Raja Ravi Varma, 1925

Amanda is exploring a symbol of Garuda

“

Garuda is a giant eagle. He's the vehicle of the Indian god Vishnu. A vehicle of the divine. An animal that moves through space and carries out the will of the divine. I've come to understand that Garuda is known as the enforcer. He's the preserver. An aspect of the divine that is preserving the divine.

I've been with this object for five or six months. It started as a visual. There was a feeling that this giant eagle was there with me. It was a visual, but also feeling the presence of this animal.

The animal is oriented in a certain way. There came to be a relational quality to it. I considered what are my impressions of what this eagle is like. How do I feel in the presence of this kind of animal? It was visual and experiential. I had a sense of a special relationship.

Over time, many months into meditating every day on Garuda, there has been less of a sense of the tangible bird being there. Ideas and language have become a big part of the meditation. Now I'm curious about why would there be an animal vehicle? It's a sort of magical animal. It's superhuman or supersize. But why an animal? What does that mean? How does that animal behave in the natural world? What are its qualities?

The ideas sort of come to me in waves. What does it mean? Why is it? Just by staying with the idea of Garuda as a giant eagle vehicle of the divine. There's a relationship with the divine.

I start to wonder, not even actively, but more as a result of being in the meditation again and again, what does this mean about how the divine operates? How does this relate to my own experience of me in relationship to the divine and me in relationship to the world?

What if I were in this role of vehicle? I think over time, I've come to see myself in that same role. So what does that mean? There's a rising of insights or possibilities. I experience a feeling that precedes the words and then the words show up. It's active.



Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga

”

Meditation for transformation

What purpose is served by meditating on a giant mythological eagle, occupying your space, or feeling safe enough to let yourself be seen?

These are meditation objects chosen by a mentor for their mentee to support that person's ongoing transformation towards becoming ever more themselves.

The mentee has their own goals, dreams, and challenges. The mentor develops a sense or a feeling of their mentee's possibilities and barriers through ongoing conversations and observation.

Mentors give mentees different meditation objects depending upon the person's interest in and capacity for meditation, their needs, passions, and progression.

It is a relationship and a negotiation. Mentees don't simply do whatever the mentor tells them. (Maybe some do. I require and appreciate a much more collaborative process.)

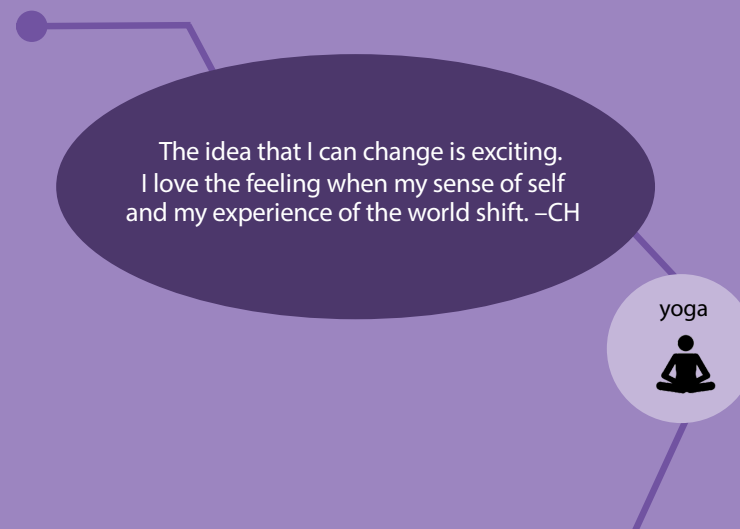
Amanda's giant eagle meditations have drawn her to explorations of the divine and her relationship to the divine every day for 5 or 6 months. Her mentor did not assign her to meditate on that relationship. Her mentor suggested she meditate on a (divine) giant eagle. Look what happened!

In the upcoming meditation stories, a mentee had a fruitful experience with a meditation object and wanted to bring that object into their daily practice for deeper exploration.

Carol's tree meditation ended up continuing for years.

My river meditation is new this week. We'll see where it takes me and how Marcel feels about it as an ongoing daily meditation for me. I like not knowing. The conversation is part of the fun of having a guide.

Meditation is a means for having different experiences and for shifting your sense of self.



The idea that I can change is exciting. I love the feeling when my sense of self and my experience of the world shift. -CH

yoga



When we have the same experiences,
we have the same sense of self.

When we have different experiences,
we have a different sense of self.

When we have a different sense of self,
our self functions differently
and we have a different experience
of the world.

Marcel Allbritton
Yoga for Practitioners

Carol's transformative tree meditations



"I was sobbing during the tree in winter meditation. It was a powerful experience I wanted to explore."

- Carol

“

At a weekly one-time meditation we were guided to see ourselves as a tree in all the different seasons. When I came to winter season with no leaves, no sunlight, I felt alone and cold and in a survival mode.

I called my mentor (Chase) to say I don't know what's going on, but I was so activated by that meditation. We talked about my early childhood. It was a time of feeling very alone in my family because my parents were busy caring for my brother with polio for years.

This alone feeling has been a theme in my life. I realized I really needed to release it. We designed a new daily practice for me and shifted my meditation to the tree.

I chose a maple tree (or it chose me). In the beginning the maple tree went through the seasons. I saw myself in the spring growing the leaves. In the summer, getting nourishment and stability. In the fall, leaves changing colors and falling off. And then in the winter, just alone.

At first when I was doing it I cried through every meditation. When I got through the whole cycle of the year, when I got to the winter part, I used to always be crying. I am this tree in the cold weather. By myself. My leaves aren't touching any other trees.



There's not a bit of sunlight nourishing me. There aren't any people around me in winter like there are in the summer when everybody's outside.

So I was seeing a maple tree in front of me and observing what that tree looks like in the seasons. Then the meditation shifted to be more about what would that tree feel like? What are all the possibilities here? I would imagine how the tree felt in each season. I did that for many months.

Then I began to ask myself, why am I observing the tree? What if I get closer to the tree, sort of hug the tree, merge with the tree. Then I could feel what the tree feels, not just observe what I think the tree is feeling.

That became a very different experience. I started saying, well, okay, so it's winter. Even though all those other things are still happening with this winter tree, I am the tree and I feel pretty strong. I'm really solid here. All the wind and the snow and the elements are really not affecting me.

I've got a good trunk here and I'm not just surviving. I'm pretty steady through the winter. It's important that I am steady because the spring can't happen otherwise.

Then I wondered, where's my nourishment coming from? My roots had to start going down a little bit more. They were quite shallow, and there was very little rainfall. So I started growing my roots. I would begin by going into what I call my upper spiritual realm. Feeling snow and some of my branches in the sun. I could feel it in me rather than observing it in my tree.

Crying every day at the end of my meditation got me into reflecting a lot about my story that I'm alone in my life. In my childhood, I didn't get a lot of attention and nurturing. And I had a husband who wasn't able to be nurturing either. When I got out of the stories I tell myself about how I am this person who is alone, my years of yoga brought me into the idea that I am connected to a far greater source.



I began to genuinely experience that connectedness, not just say maybe that's true. I embraced as truth that I'm not alone. I am connected to the source. I am connected to all these other beings. There are people in my life I'm deeply connected to. I am connected to trees and plants. I love to garden and feel that deep connection to the earth when I'm digging. When I started experiencing myself as a connected being, the alone feeling became minuscule because that story didn't have any more truth.

Initially I felt like the roots weren't that deep. I was just aware that there were roots. And then during one of my meditations the voice that comes to me said, follow the roots deeper.

I thought, okay, there is some wisdom there. I have to listen when I get my wisdom coming in. I felt like I've got the upper spiritual part of myself pretty accessible, but if I don't have good roots, then it's not flowing and not all connected. So in my next session with Chase, I said my meditation told me to follow my roots deeper. And he said, well, it's time then.

At first I was observing roots in the ground, not my roots. Just what would roots look like. If roots went deep, what do they connect with? I had the image of a root with all the tendrils coming out of it, and then the root started going deeper. It first went to the soil, the leaves, then the fungus and the bugs, and then it went down further. I wondered, could it even hit the lava? How deep can this go down? What would that be like if they got so deep that I have a hard time even imagining it?

I played with imagining roots for a while. And then at some point, it wasn't like a specific defining moment, the roots started to be coming out of my body. I do my meditations sitting on a cushion and the roots were coming out of my lower chakra, my whole lower spine rooting down into the ground.

I would just sit with my roots and I would think, I am so connected to everything down here. It's all connected. *(continued on next page)*



The meditations are affecting me. They're nourishing me. The feelings are accessible and there is no more aloneness. As I've been working with this, I've really become the tree. Now it's like the tree is sort of a little middle section of me, a tiny conduit that connects my roots quickly through my body and up to the spiritual world.

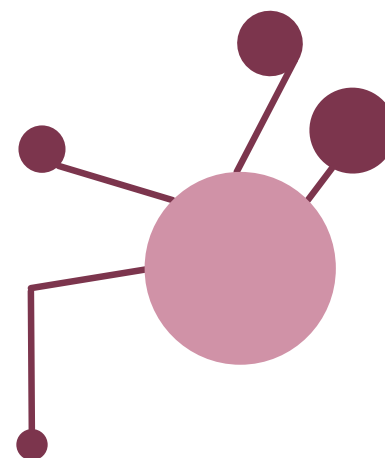
I've even experienced images of liquid gold flowing way down to my roots and all the way up through my branches and beyond, bringing that liquid gold through me.

But the bigger piece is that everything is very connected. That connectedness has become really easy to access in meditation and in my life. Feeling that connection has also allowed me to open up to more wisdom coming through.



Carol Jones, *The Infertility Counselor*

”



Carrie experiences going with the flow



“Being water in a river felt like I was flowing through time. I felt flexible and alive.”

- Carrie

“

Carol taught our yoga group a practice where we imagined being beside a flowing body of water. At first I felt my body in a shallow river, the water gently flowing all around me. I was not moving. I felt flexible, free, and alive with the water flowing over and around me.

Later I became the water. I became one small swath of water, flowing downstream. Flowing around rocks and branches. I had no idea what I would encounter from moment to moment. I had no idea where the river was going. I felt a sense of complete surrender. I felt a sense that I (the water) would experience whatever showed up and that would be fine. Being flowing water felt glorious, playful, and liberating.

My mind started making a connection with time. Carrie as my body in the river, with time flowing around me. Carrie as water, flowing through life, through the unknown into the unknown.

That evening I complained to my partner that his dining plans for us would require seven more miles of driving than usual to get to the same food trucks we've been to before.

Sheldon suggested that normal people drive more than 7 miles to go out to eat and that I should be more open to having fun.

I knew what I had said was dumb before I said it. I was being dramatic and wanted to complain.

I realized I had been uncharacteristically crabby lately. I'm usually upbeat. But complaining had been feeling good.

And now I am complaining about complaining. It is not who I want to be.

I was reminded of the river meditation. I was reminded of the exhilarating, gutsy feeling of going with the flow into the unknown.

I started meditating on those experiences of water flowing over me and of being water flowing downstream as part of my daily practice. I love how it is helping me become or return to a joyful, curious self.

I welcome the flowing river as part of me.



Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools

”

Being water flowing in a river feels like who I want to be.

You might say it's a great metaphor. For me it is not intellectual. It is a feeling that grows and spreads, causing subtle but tangible shifts throughout my body and mind. I transform.

I conjure up that feeling by porting back to my meditation experience—imagining feeling like flowing water while I am stuck in traffic or feeling put upon by situations in my body or in my life.

Connecting with this feeling brings a subtle shift in openness and joy.

The river is just one of a cast of characters that are part of me—moonlight, Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury, a powerful storm... I conjure up helpful meditation objects as I navigate daily life.

One reason I interviewed colleagues about their meditation experiences for this book was because I did not know whether anyone else weaves meditation objects into life like I do.

Meditation becomes a way of life

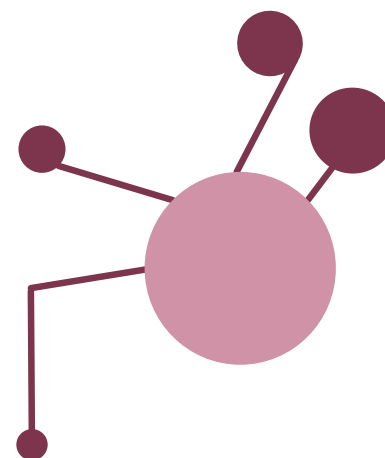
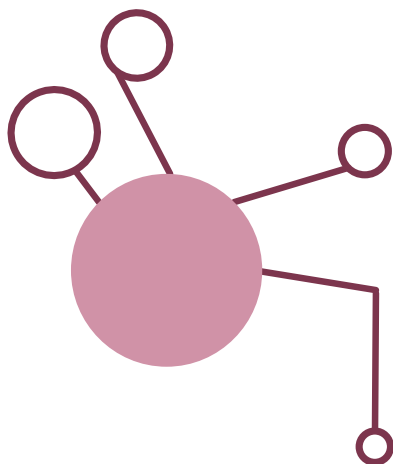
As you can see from reading the stories in this book, I am in good company. Meditation is an extraordinary, serious, playful tool for transformation. Meditation is my way of being and becoming.

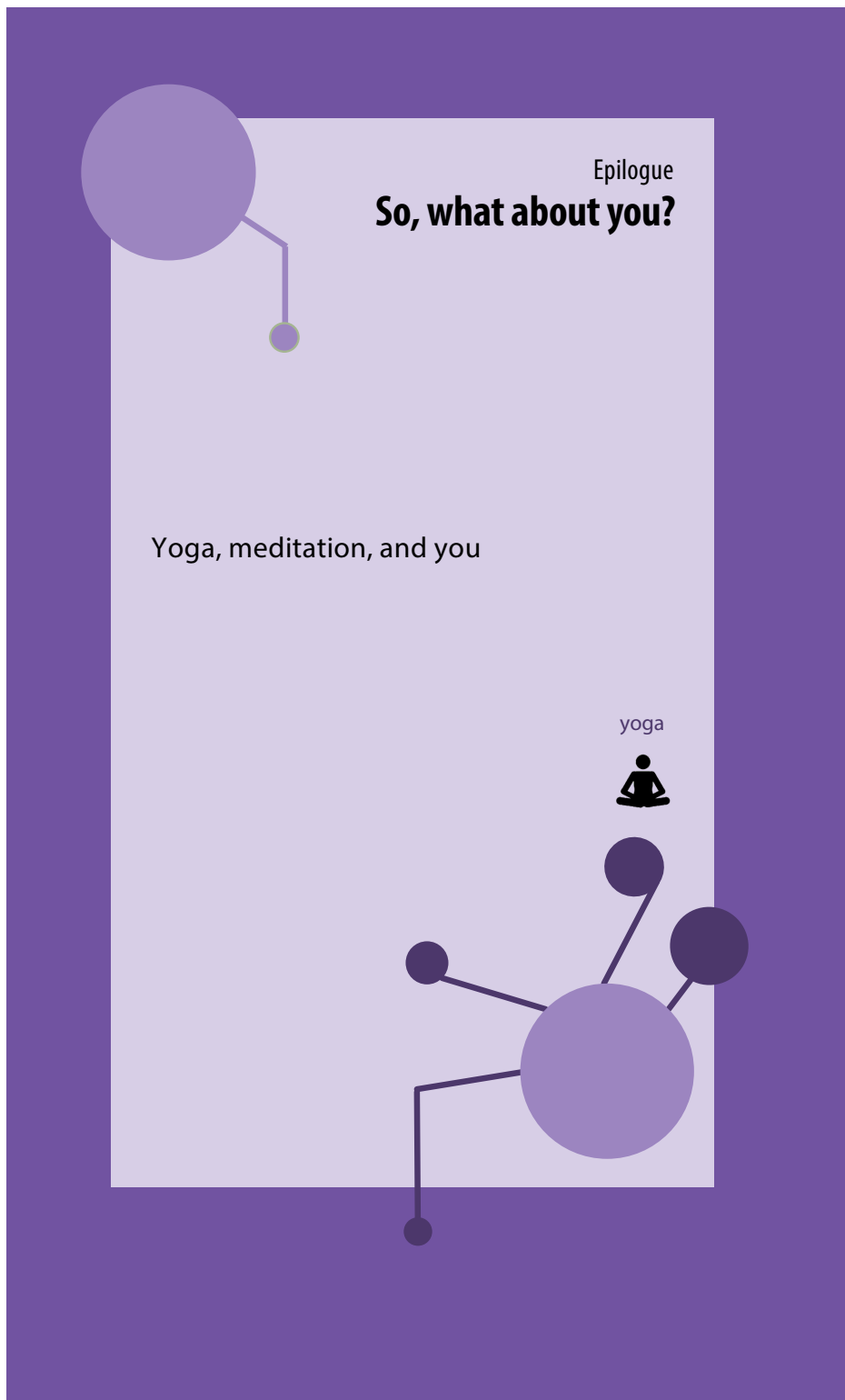
Meditation has become a way of life for me and people whose stories appear in this book. Consistent, regular meditation changes how our human system operates.

We are passionately engaged with yoga and meditation as parts of our process of healing and personal growth.

We do one-time meditations to gain insights and to learn more about meditation and ourselves. We meditate about situations and challenges. We meditate to understand something or someone in a different way.

Moving toward balance, listening to our deeper self, and cultivating awareness become habitual. The veil separating meditation and being in the world becomes thinner in fascinating and transformative ways.





So, what about you?

This inside look at meditation celebrates participant experiences with one-time and long-time meditations. I have explained some of how and why meditation works from scientific and yoga perspectives. I've revealed some of the logic and magic of meditation objects for meditation designers and meditators.

I hope you have enjoyed reading our stories and perhaps come away with subtle new understandings and ideas for your own meditation practice.

- If you've never experienced this kind of meditation, perhaps I have piqued your interest or given you a new reason to meditate.
- If you have a yoga teacher, ask your teacher about meditation.
- If you teach yoga or meditation, I hope my playful joy sparks ideas for your own meditation designs.

You can try three of the 10 minute meditations described in this book (Water Reflecting, Therapy Dog, and Authentic Selfies) on my yogamindtools.com web site.

Go deeper

Remember that meditation is yoga.

In fact, the first 11 steps in my daily personal practice are yoga movement and breathing. The final step is connecting with a meditation object.

This book does not elaborate on the Yoga Sutras—but meditation in this tradition and my explanations are grounded in yoga philosophy.

- Yoga Well Institute offers yoga philosophy courses, Deepen Your Yoga training, and Yoga Therapist training. (yogawell.com)
- Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in Chennai, India offers online yoga programs and workshops. (kym.org)

Advice from Marcel for finding a local yoga or meditation class

“

Here are the things I share with people who are looking for some kind of class or teacher to support their practice of yoga, movement, breathing, meditation, or spirituality.

Your focus should be primarily on the teacher and how you feel about that person—how you connect to them, how comfortable you feel with them. Your experience of the class is key—what happens, how useful you find it, how aligned it feels for you and your personality.

You'll want to try different teachers, try different experiences to figure out if you relate well to the person and you like the experiences. What matters is that you relate well to the instructor and the experience and it's useful and helpful to you.

You'll probably have to go to a couple of classes to figure that out. But sometimes you go to one class and know it's a good fit.

I went to a couple of yoga classes that were awful before I went into one that I liked. And the one I liked was where I met my first teacher in this lineage.

I resonated with yoga, but it took me a while to find the right kind of yoga class for me. You may resonate with meditation, but it might take you a while to find the right kind of meditation that works best for you.

I wouldn't get super absorbed in form. We say meditation, but you might take a class labeled yoga that is more of a meditation class and more powerful for you than a class that's labeled meditation.

A tricky thing with meditation is that meditation is often not advertised as what the class is about. Classes that involve meditation might be listed as a yoga class, a class in Buddhism, or a mindfulness class.



Marcel Allbritton, *Yoga for Practitioners*

”

Chase Bossart's classes and the Yoga Well community enabled me to write this book

An Inside Look at Meditation would never have been written without the classes and trainings Chase Bossart teaches, the students and mentees he works with, and the community he has created through Yoga Well Institute.

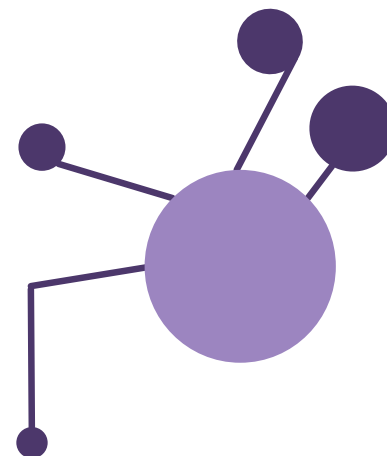
I have taken classes from Chase continuously for 9 years.

I have met many incredible people through the Yoga Well community from different walks of life—each of us sharing a passion for learning and practice, each bringing our distinct backgrounds and perspectives to these experiences.

Chase is Marcel's mentor.

Chase is Anina's and Amanda's and Carol's and Grazia's and Robyn's mentor. I met them and so many others through Yoga Well classes and we have become friends and colleagues.

So yes, I very highly recommend Chase as a teacher and I highly recommend Yoga Well Institute classes.



Marcel's one-on-one mentoring is the foundation of my understanding of meditation

In ancient times a student of yoga would live in retreat and study with their yogi for years.

Modern times work differently. Much of the teaching of yoga happens in group teacher training programs. Yoga Well Institute holds onto the idea of a mentor-student relationship even in group trainings.

My own experience has been privileged. I asked Marcel to teach me about the mind-body connection. He took me on as teacher-yoga therapist-mentor. I have studied with him one-on-one for what is now more than ten years.

What a gift.

You can tell from my stories how important Marcel's mentoring has been in tempting or nudging me to experience and learn. You can see how much fun I have had learning from him—bumping up against instructions and realizations that challenge my expectations.

My experience of getting to work this closely with a teacher is rare. But my experience is consistent with the long tradition of studying with a master yogi.

If this kind of journey appeals to you, look for a teacher. Perhaps reach out to a teacher of yoga or meditation whose classes resonate with you, asking if they are open to one-on-one teaching or mentoring.

Check out Marcel's bio and his web sites on page 306.

Reach out to Marcel. He is awesome. (marcel.allbritton@me.com)

I hope the stories in this book inspire you

Perhaps—like me—you have found that reading these stories inspires new ways you want to approach or appreciate your own meditation practices.

I appreciate **Anina's** fireworks, her resolve as she faces the dragon of grief, how she starts her moon meditations by telling the moon "I am here." I want to try that! (everybodysyoga@comcast.net)

Amanda reminds me to approach every step of my practice with reverence and to invite insights to arise—not just to hope for insights or to look for them, but to invite them. Gorgeous. And the places she goes, what shows up for her—wow. (amandagreenyoga@gmail.com)

When **Carol** encounters something in meditation that is upsetting, rather than running away she goes after that thing, often spending years transmuting and transforming and discovering. The places she goes! I am reminded how valuable an uncomfortable meditation experience can be if you have an attitude of growth and a mentor. (caroljones767@gmail.com)

Grazia's quest for uncovering and exploring her patterns inspires me to follow her lead. Her classes using meditation to deepen explorations of the Yoga Sutras sound fascinating. (gjaroff@comcast.net)

Patricia has uncanny self-awareness, including how meditations impact her and how to use meditation to support her life and hospice workers' lives. (pmcdaniel@hom.org)

I am enthralled by what **Robyn** notices—her wry, deep, juicy, brilliant insights. Her realizations remind me to watch myself. (robbyn@athayoga.ca)

If you are interested in these experts' stories, check out their bios in the Who's who section on pages 306 to 309. Consider reaching out to them about classes or mentoring.

Yoga and meditation teachers may want to recommend this book to your students

If you teach meditation as part of your classes or would like to do so—invite your students to read this book.

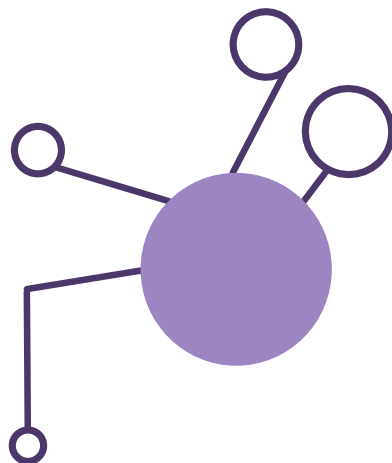
It could move your conversations and your students' experiences to a new level.

My meditation adventure group engages with the exploratory practices I teach every week and reflects on their experiences.

This intimate group of family and friends has been with me for 3 years. They are ever more skilled at observing their experience of movement and breathing and meditation steps.

They have also been helping me with the book. Darcy Drew Greene, a professional designer, is designing the book. Fred Goldsmith and Andrea Rundgren, professional copy editors, offered detailed feedback about language. Carol Fulwiler Jones shared her stories.

Their involvement in creation of the book has amplified their knowledge about this thing called meditation. I benefit every week from their more nuanced, explicit feedback. It feels like the class has moved to a higher level, as my students learn more about the ideas and logic underlying the meditations I teach.



try this

- Reflect on your experience as you read this book.
- What are some of the ideas and stories that attract your interest?
- If you already practice meditation, how does reading this book relate to your practice? Reach out to me to share what you notice.
- If you are a teacher, please use what you read here in your classes. If you are interested but unsure how to incorporate meditation in your teaching, reach out to me.
- If you are a scientist interested in studying meditation, reach out to me.
- I would love to hear about and support YOUR stories.

—Carrie (carrie@carrieheeter.com)

Online Yoga Courses and Trainings

Master teachers who studied with Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar

(there are others in the U.S. and internationally—I am personally most familiar with the people I list here.)

Chase Bossart
Yoga Well Institute
<https://yogawell.com>

Paul Harvey
Centre for Yoga Studies
<https://yogastudies.org/>

Gary Kraftsow
American Viniyoga Institute
<https://viniyoga.com/>

Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (co-founded by Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar and A.G. Mohan)
<https://kym.org>

A. G. Mohan & Indra Mohan (studied with Sri Krishnamacharya)
Svastha Yoga
<https://svastha.net/>

International organizations involved in mind-body research, conferences, and publications
(not in my tradition)

Mind and Life Institute (Buddhism)
<https://mindandlife.org/>

International Association of Yoga Therapists
<https://iayt.org/>

Some interesting related readings

An in-depth overview and great place to start
(I have read and re-read this book many times.)

Desikachar, T. K. V. (1999). *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a personal practice*

If you're curious about more technical details and research

Viniyoga philosophy and anatomy article

Bossart, C. (2007). Yoga bodies, yoga minds
<https://yogawell.com/blog/yoga-bodies-yoga-minds/>

Scientific articles related to viniyoga and meditation

Allbritton M. & Heeter C. (2018). Meditation as an Intervention for Health: A framework for understanding meditation research. *OBM Integrative and Complementary Medicine*, 3(4):025.

<http://iidsen.com/journals/icm/icm-03-04-025>

Heeter, C., Allbritton, M., & Bossart, C. (2019). Beyond Scientific Mechanisms: Subjective perceptions with viniyoga meditation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(12), 2200.

<https://mdpi.com/1660-4601/16/12/2200/htm>

Schmalzl, L., Powers, C., & Henje Blom, E. (2015). Neurophysiological and Neurocognitive Mechanisms Underlying the Effects of Yoga-based Practices: Towards a comprehensive theoretical framework. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.

<https://frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00235/full>

Somewhat related popular press science books

Damasio, A. (2021). *Feeling and Knowing: Making minds conscious*.

Goleman, D., & Davidson, R. (2017). *The Science of Meditation: How to change your brain, mind and body*.

Mahler, K. (2015). *Interoception: The eighth sensory system*.

Schwarzlose, R. (2021). *Brainscapes: The warped, wondrous maps written in your brain*.

Appendices

Thank you
Who's who
Image credits
About the author

Thank you (acknowledgments)

Thank you Marcel Allbritton for your steadfast care. In addition to sharing your stories and pearls of wisdom, you offered detailed content and style feedback. Often your feedback was positive reinforcement. Sometimes you pointed to problems or additions. During months of revisions I carefully considered every comment—usually adapting the content in the suggested direction. It has been a luxury and an honor for my teacher to so carefully review the entire first draft of the book.

I'm also so grateful to my other interviewees—Amanda Green, Anina Hutchison, Grazia Jaroff, Carol Fulwiler Jones, Patricia Van Pelt McDaniel, and Robyn Love. Meditation experiences are deeply personal. Your willingness to share your stories was key to my being able to offer this inside look at meditation.

Thank you beyond words to lifetime friend and book designer Darcy Drew Greene. You taught me what is a book and then collaborated with me—for 9 months—to define, refine, and implement our elaborate visual style.

I delight in my meditation adventure group—Andrea Rundgren, Carol Fulwiler Jones, my wild, sweet sister Chris Heeter, Darcy Drew Greene, Fred Goldsmith, and my precious mother and biggest fan Marcia Heeter—you keep showing up every week to have an experience and share detailed reactions to each practice. Big thanks also to the many participants in my meditation circles.

Fred Goldsmith and Andrea Rundgren contributed copy editing expertise—Andrea poured through two complete drafts and Fred three—with exquisite attention to detail.

The Michigan State University Department of Media and Information and College of Communication Arts and Sciences had the openness to appreciate and support my 10-year deep-dive into meditation. And you allowed me to dedicate part of my consulting year to writing.

Last and most important, thanks to my beloved partner Sheldon Axler—international best selling author of advanced math textbooks—for decades of love, support, and fun.



*and our cat Moon—
did I mention Moon?*

Who's who



Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT
Yoga for Practitioners
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doingdifferently.com
coreresonanceworks.com
marcel.allbritton@me.com

Marcel is a Clinical Yoga Therapist who also mentors students in the study and practice of Yoga.

(www.yogaforpractitioners.com)

He has been mentored by Chase Bossart of Yoga Well Institute since 2005. Before he discovered Yoga, Marcel received a PhD in Organization Development. Marcel brings his work in healing and yoga and his expertise in organizational development together to create Core Resonance Works.

(www.coreresonanceworks.com).

Core Resonance helps individuals and organizations work from and with their core alignment. The foundation of his work is helping individuals and organizations apply, practice, and integrate principles of healing. Marcel has a podcast called Doing Differently about healing and transformation. (www.doingdifferently.com)



Amanda Green, C-IAYT,
E-RYT 500
Innermost Yoga
www.innermost-yoga.com
amandagreenyoga@gmail.com

Amanda has been a student of yoga for over 20 years. In that time, she has studied āsana, prāṇayāma, meditation, yoga sūtras, Vedic chant and yoga philosophy. She has gone on to guide individuals seeking personal transformation through the tools and teachings of yoga.

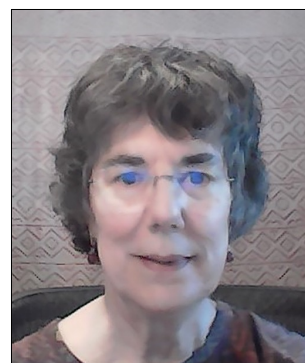
Amanda is on the faculty at Yoga Well Institute and an IAYT- certified yoga therapist. You can reach Amanda at www.innermost-yoga.com.



Anina Hutchison
Yoga and meditation teacher,
Indigo Yoga, Pleasant Hill, CA
myindigoyoga.com
everybodysyoga@comcast.net

Anina has been teaching yoga since 2001. She completed yoga teacher training followed by years of practice and an advanced studies program. She feels fortunate to have been trained by devoted teachers in the principles of physical practice, sequencing and manual adjustments. In 2013 she completed a multi-year course focusing on yoga philosophy, linking breath with movement, and living yoga off the mat.

After many years of pretzel poses, Anina now believes yoga has a broader definition than physical postures. She has come to value sustained focus more than putting her foot behind her head.



Grazia Jaroff
Yoga, meditation, and yoga
philosophy teacher
gjaroff@comcast.net

30 years ago, Grazia was a systems engineer when she first heard Mr. Desikachar's lectures. She soon became a yoga student, first with Ann Rogers, with whom she started teaching. Grazia now studies with Chase Bossart.

She continues to teach individual and group classes in postures, meditation and classic texts, locally, online and through UC Davis Continuing Education Program.





Carol Fulwiler Jones, MA,
C-IAYT
TheInfertilityCounselor.com
caroljones767@gmail.com

Carol is a renowned expert in the field of infertility counseling, coaching, and consulting. She has presented over sixty speaking engagements to medical and patient audiences, has written newspaper and journal articles, and has been featured on tv and radio shows.

She is the author of *Managing the Stress of Infertility: How to balance your emotions, Get the support you need, and Deal with painful social situations*.

Carol has studied and taught Viniyoga in the tradition of T. Krishnamacharya and T.V.K. Desikachar since 1983 and has been a Certified Yoga Therapist since 2017.



Robyn Love, C-IAYT, E-
RYT500
Atha Yoga School
www.athayoga.ca
robyn@athayoga.ca

Robyn has two decades of personal practice, over a dozen years of teaching and thousands of hours of training.

All of that is good and important but it doesn't really convey her passion for sharing the profound wisdom of yoga, particularly as it is presented in Patanjali's Yoga Sūtra and other foundational texts.

Robyn believes that the ongoing study and practice of yoga deeply rooted in abhyasa (daily discipline) and vairagyam (acceptance) honors yoga's roots in India and takes up its invitation to explore what it means to be alive in a human body.

See what she is doing over at www.athayoga.ca.



Patricia Van Pelt McDaniel, MBA
Associate Vice President
Marketing and Client Services
at Hospice of Michigan
pmcdaniel@hom.org
hom.org

Patricia's passion is helping leaders become the best version of themselves while reaching their personal and professional goals.

Her mission is to build better leaders who build better leaders and end workplace misery! Areas of expertise include coaching for behavior change, building high performing teams and emotional intelligence.

Patricia served as the Hospice of Michigan liaison and project coordinator for the meditation for burnout prevention research intervention. She continues to champion meditation as a tool for hospice professionals, caregivers, and patients.

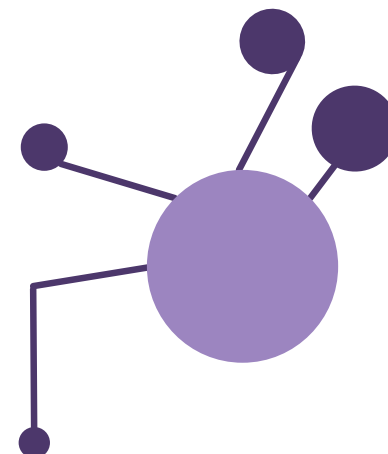


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About the Author



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Throughout her life Carrie has ferociously followed her passions for learning new things and creating experiences that matter.

She designed and directed development of more than 50 interactive experiences including meditations, games, online learning systems, virtual reality, and patient empowerment software. Her many awards include Discover Magazine's Software Innovation of the Year and Meaningful Play's Most Innovative Game. She has published more than 100 scholarly books, chapters, articles, and proceedings about meditation, individual and social impacts of interactive technology, virtual reality, and serious games.

Ten years ago Carrie encountered life-changing hints of the wonders of yoga and meditation. She aligned her professional and personal life toward learning more and digging deeper.

What could be more awesome than designing transformational meditation experiences that are unique to each person, using the technology of their human system—their mind and body?

She recently retired from a long career as professor of Media and Information at Michigan State University to be able to devote more time to her work with meditation.

She begins this new phase of her journey by writing this book.