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Newsletters



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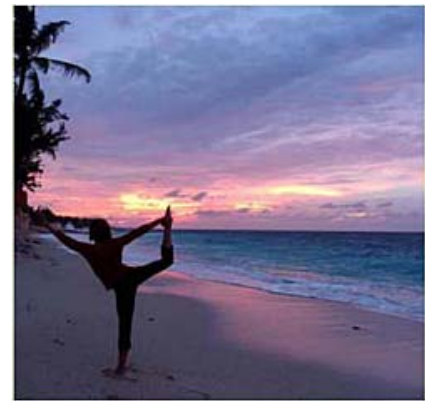
I'm Back!

Do you want to bring peace and clarity into your everyday life, regardless of circumstances? We often think getting away will allow us to do that. I have just returned from a wonderful vacation and yoga retreat. That's me to the right, enjoying the sunset.

I realized on this retreat, that we don't actually have to get away to find peace. Read below for how incorporating meditation into your life can bring peace and clarity into each day. Then check out the suggestions for starting a meditation practice of your own. You'll be amazed at the results!

To your journey,

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Retreat and Meditation

"Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart" --unknown

Agony. I wanted to cry at this situation, not knowing what to do. My chest seemed about to explode from trying to hold back these screams. Nothing seemed fair. There was nowhere to run, no way to escape this

horrible reality.

Can you imagine what I was going through?

Perhaps I should continue this story, give you a bit of the setting. The clouds were lit up by the full

moon. Stars twinkled in multicolored brilliance. I sat beneath them on the softest, powdery white sand. Turquoise water shimmered in the moonlight as it rhythmically lapped at the shore.

Huh?

Probably not the scene you were imagining, given the struggles of the beginning of the story. Perhaps you were imagining some sort of torture chamber. In essence, you would be right.

I recently returned from the yearly retreat I make to an ashram in Paradise Island, Bahamas. This is a quiet place, that one has to travel by boat to reach. Yogis live year round meditating and studying yoga in this idyllic setting.

So why was I so tortured - in Paradise, of all places?

I was without an external care in the world and yet my internal cares continued to plague me- things I felt I needed to figure out, concerns over what others thought of my actions, what to do for my next step of the future and the unfairness that decisions I didn't want to make were being thrust upon me. Even though I had retreated, and nothing of the situation was around, my brain had become so adept at thinking these thoughts that it continued to do so, leading to me to feel the torture I described.

Being alone with my thoughts in this perfect retreat setting allows me to see the thoughts that are present and feel their impact. Without taking some time to get away from the busyness, those thoughts can be boiling beneath the surface, causing all sorts of problems. They drain our energy, making us feel like we need to get away.

Luckily, one thing encouraged at this retreat center is meditation. Meditation is a practice that's more necessary as our modern technology means that we can always be busy, never having to live in the present moment, never taking the time to reflect. How many of us take the time to just stop and do nothing, when we're not on vacation? Would you sit in a waiting room without reading a magazine? Or stand in line without checking your phone or to do list?

In meditation, we give our brain a rest. We learn to focus our minds on one thing so that we notice how it goes off in so many directions of thoughts. Noticing troublesome thoughts is the first step to being able to release them. Which, eventually, is what I was able to do at the retreat. The so-called problems that 'needed' my thinking were still there and yet I was able to just observe them, without feeling the need to give them more attention or energy. The thoughts subsided for longer and longer periods of time and I was able to enjoy the magnificent surroundings. The breaks in thinking allowed new ideas to emerge and I gained the clarity to deal with the situation in a new way. In my daily life, I have found meditation to provide this same sort of 'retreat' function. Like a mini retreat for the mind.

What is meditation exactly?

It is taking time to be present in our surroundings. We notice what is going on without attachment. That means we observe our external surroundings and what is occurring within the body and mind without judging it. We just allow what is happening.

How does one get started in meditation?

There are many different techniques to get your mind to observe, rather than react. One way of doing this is to learn to focus your mind on something so that the thoughts and sensations become like background noise. Read the "Meditation Technique" below for one example.

Why is meditation helpful?

According to neuroscience, meditation has an abundance of benefits. Brain imaging studies of people in meditation have shown that the areas of the brain involved in attention and control of the stress response, become active. Therefore, meditation is almost like a workout for the brain, strengthening your ability to focus and decreasing your vulnerability to stress. Moreover, one of these areas is also associated with positive emotional states. The more active they are, the more positive you may feel overall. This has benefits for health, as well. Studies have found immunity to be enhanced and even better response to vaccines in those who meditate.

You don't need to go to the Bahamas to have these benefits of a retreat. Try the meditation technique to incorporate a retreat into each day.



Meditation Technique

Here is one type of meditation technique to train your mind to focus and give it a retreat from compulsive thinking. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Light a candle and put it on a table at eye level. If you are in a place where you can't light a candle, use a picture with a light object on a dark background or a dark object on a light background. You can even use the photo of the flower here. Gaze steadily at the flame or picture. Just try to have a relaxed gaze. If thoughts come up, focus once again on every detail of that flame, without allowing the thoughts to take you off course. Hold your eyes open for as long as you possibly can, until they are burning and must close. When you close your eyes, try to see every detail of the candle flame in the after-image that appears.

Notice what peripheral details have crept in. When the image fades, open your eyes again to gaze at the candle. Continue to do this for the entire 5 minutes- opening your eyes for as long as possible and studying the after-image. When the 5 minutes are up, notice how you feel. Did you notice any thoughts coming up or did you have a break from them? Did the thoughts feel further away as you were able to focus more deeply? Do you feel more focused? More relaxed? You may not notice too much from this first time. The important thing is consistency.

Use this technique or any other and do it each day, preferably at the same time and in the same place each day. The time and place will cue your mind that it's time to meditate so that it goes into the meditative state more quickly. Even if you can only find 5 minutes each day- do it. I started with just 5 minutes per day for the first month and then slowly built it up. It may take time, but the results will come- feelings of peace and inexplicable joy.



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