

# Aberdeen Unitarian Church

## THE CHALICE SCHOOL OF CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATION



### SESSION No. 3

## GETTING RID OF STRESS THROUGH MEDITATION (Introduction on Healing)

### Introduction

**Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.**

(Words from the hymn **Dear Lord and Father of mankind** by John Greenleaf Whitier.  
1807-92)

### Welcome to our School of Meditation.

Although meditation is considered to be 'deep thought', or 'the consideration of spiritual ideas and ideals as a spiritual exercise', there are other benefits which are to be gained as a natural outcome of regular meditation practice. It would appear that if you do indeed seek the highest, certainly in meditation and contemplation, all the other things we need in life would be added. That is, the things that will make our lives more manageable and hopefully more meaningful.

In a previous session we looked at the process of meditation - what it was, and just as important, what it was not. We gave an easy breathing exercise to help us become more relaxed - basically as a preliminary to meditation proper. We also outlined the kind of thinking that should naturally follow from regular meditation practice - **positive thinking and a positive mental attitude** to life in general. Positive thinking, we stressed was 'not denying the negative, but rather refusing to dwell on it'. There is a difference. Positive thinking we said was a change of attitude, a change of perspective - seeing things from a different viewpoint. All this can be achieved through meditation - and the method used was the repetition of affirmations and then entering the silence in order to let it sink into the subconscious. Briefly then, this is what we have done in our sessions so far. However there are other benefits from meditation, and this is where it becomes more interesting - and a bit more detailed. Meditation however should always be a simple process.

### GETTING RID OF STRESS

By breathing steadily and easily, and becoming at peace, by a change of thinking so as to see more of the positive things in life, we then learn to be more in control of our life. In this session we take this a step further. Indeed, this is just one of the many benefits of meditation, and that is **getting rid of stress**. This in itself can have several additional benefits, such as becoming more ordered in all that we do, our thinking becomes clearer, we are able to cope with the many demands that life places upon us, we don't get so upset with things. In short we are more in control of our lives.

The more we practice meditation and make it a regular part of our lives, the more we will see all these other things beginning to unfold - and without us necessarily trying to make them happen. Everything starts to fall into place without effort or trying to make things happen - they just do. Being at peace with our inner selves and the outer world is a real step forward in living a peaceable and happier life. It is being relaxed from an inner level of being, and this is achieved when we enter the silence of meditation. (It should be pointed out that this can also be seen as a spiritual exercise in its own right. Pythagoras is reputed to have said that 'It is better to be silent, or to say something better than silence.')

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But first a personal word. It is so easy to let things disturb us. The various things that can happen to us in the course of our lives, all the trials and tribulations we have to face can overwhelm us at times. They tend to cloud our thinking and get us down, so that basically we just don't know what to do or where to run. The pace of living is so fast these days, that we are all caught up in it to a certain degree - and some more than others. But this can take over - we become depressed, irritable, and we can easily make ourselves ill. What are we to do? This is where meditation can be a great help to us.

### **BRAIN WAVE ACTIVITY**

I would like to touch upon a subject that we don't always hear about - its not new, but it has a direct bearing upon some types of meditation practice and the getting rid of stress. It is to do with the various brain wave activities that has been measured by scientists. The TM (Transcendental Meditation) researchers, to back up their case for Mantra Meditation, have used this. Various experiments have been done on this, especially during sleep and dream states where REM (rapid eye movement) is produced.

Achieving a certain brain wave pattern in meditation is one thing, however, carrying that level over into our everyday lives is something quite different. As was said in a previous session, if meditation does not lead us to become better people, then we have to look again at what we are doing. And this applies equally with our meditation in order to get rid of stress, or any thing else that we would like to achieve -but let us attempt to explain.

According to researchers there are certain levels of brain wave activity that have been measured by an electroencephalograph (EEG) when one is involved in doing certain things in the course of our every day lives. The one, however that we are directly concerned with is called **Alpha**. (All these terms are from the Greek alphabet.) We have **Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta** - these are terms used when certain brain wave activity are measured in cycles per second (CPS). To explain, the EEG is an apparatus that uses wires, which are placed on the scalp and forehead. Basically it tells you if you are asleep, unconscious or having a good dream. There have been experiments conducted on Zen monks while in meditation, and it was discovered that the monks who meditated with their eyes half open showed a predominance of Alpha activity. Also, similar experiments have been done with yogis during their meditations - again a heightening of alpha activity

was noted. The measurements noted are as follows:

**Beta** - about 14 cycles and up - at this level you are wide-awake; it is also called the "G4 outer consciousness". Our everyday wakeful state - consciousness.

**Alpha** - about 7-14 cycles - at this level you are daydreaming or on the edge of sleep (not quite asleep). Sometimes called the "Ginner- consciousness" (REM (rapid eye movement activity at this level.)) We could say that it is more of a subconscious state, in as much that it is below conscious activity, to a certain degree at least. It is certainly a bridge to a more subconscious level.

**Theta** - 4 to 7 cycles - you are asleep. We are at the subconscious level at this stage.

**Delta** - 4 and below - deep sleep. A state of unconsciousness or coma. When we are about to drop off to sleep we will normally be in Alpha. And when one dreams most people will have REM. This is also a sign that we are at an Alpha level of mind. That is why, in PMA books, it is recommended that we give ourselves positive affirmations at this time - the mind is more open and less critical. After this you certainly will be in Theta or Delta.

Now according to research that has been done, the Alpha state is a more creative level of the mind; it is also a more relaxed and less stressful level. As was said, it is a level where we can directly communicate with our subconscious mind. It is also a level that we enter when we start going into meditation - at a deeper level - when we feel more relaxed and at peace with ourselves - almost like the Zen monks and yogis.

In a previous session we mentioned hypnotism, and said that true meditation was not really a hypnotic state. The hypnotist does however use the Alpha level to create the hypnotic condition, however, the main difference for us in these sessions is, that when we enter this level of thought during meditation we do it in full consciousness - and we do not hand our wills over to someone else. We have complete freedom of will. In meditation we go to this Alpha level of mind, but we are in control - we are awake. It is not an open invitation for any outer suggestion that may come along. We are the ones in charge. And we choose whether or not we give suggestions to our own minds or not. As was said, it is like hypnosis in as much we are dealing with the subconscious, but it differs from it because we are fully conscious in what we are doing. It might however be claimed that it is a form of self-hypnosis, but we would have to differ in this when it comes to meditation and contemplation in depth.

So the question is, how do we get rid of stress through meditation in this way? What is the process?

If we follow the procedure of breathing steadily, and saying to ourselves, 'peace-be still', and then, as the words drop away, enter the silence and remain there, we will automatically be at the level of Alpha. Now the more we enter this level, the less stressful we become on a day to day basis. (It doesn't happen over night.) The trick however is to carry this peace into any activity that may have previously upset us, and we do this by a simple process of memory - that is we remember the peace and stillness of the meditation experience, and we try to re-capture the feeling of what it was like. It may be all right for some authors in their books to say that we must lie flat on the floor and mentally command all the parts of the body to be relaxed. However, it is rather obvious that you cannot do this if you are caught up in your day to day routine, or rushing your way through the crowds, or driving a car and experiencing road rage. But we can bring back

the memory of how we felt during the meditation period - and this is important. (Again please note the importance of the mind in all this.)

There is also another simple procedure one can follow to enhance this, and that is, when starting to feel stressful or upset about anything, to say to ourselves, 'peace-be still' several times, together with breathing steadily and slowly - but not straining. These simple techniques, together with the actual memory of your meditation experience, will greatly help to reduce any kind of stress we may have. It's such a simple procedure but it does work. However, and this is important, it is more likely to work if we make a simple daily routine for ourselves - putting a few minutes a day aside to sit down and relax - using the breathing and the affirmation 'peace-be still'. You don't even have to be able to do meditation in any depth to benefit from this. This exercise is complete on its own.

(There is however one more additional thing we can do to help ourselves - and that is the use of a simple manta. And we can add this on to our exercises, however, it is important that we find one that we feel is right for us. This will be the subject of the next session. We will go into this in more depth, looking at different types of mantra, and making suggestions on how we can find the right one for ourselves.)

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Now if you add all this together - our breathing exercises, mentally saying to ourselves 'peace-be still', remembering what it was like when we were at peace during the actual meditation, and a simple mantra to help us - all this can greatly reduce the stress of every day living.

### **AN INTRODUCTORY WORD ON HEALING**

We thought we should bring up the subject of healing in this session because it is closely related to how we feel. A lot of the illnesses that we encounter is psychosomatic - not all I grant you, but quite a lot. This is not to say that we are imagining them. They may be quite real. But what we do say is, that their root, or beginning, may be psychosomatic in origin, and this in turn can affect us physically, so the pain or disease may be very real. So if we think of it, in removing as much stress in our lives as we possible can, we will be going a long way in helping ourselves to achieve a greater sense of well being and health. The two really go together. And this is where achieving the Alpha level can be an enormous help to us. It is that part of our mind where we can directly communicate thoughts and feelings of health and well being. As was said, it is a direct link to our subconscious. And the more we can relax and just try to be at rest when we are at this level the more likely we will be able to build a bridge between the Beta and the Alpha level of consciousness. As far as I understand, in some studies, it is possible to go even deeper than the Alpha level so that healing can take place - that is by communicating certain healing thoughts while at Alpha so that it sinks more to a Theta level where the body is more predisposed to healing - that is where it can heal itself In effect we are in more control of the natural healing process so that healing can take place a faster pace. This then is the idea behind the healing process at this level. Previously we may have been slowing the healing process down by the kind of thoughts we may have been holding on to, but at this deeper level we are actually guiding the body to achieve its rightful healthy condition.

The body of course already heals itself in a natural way - when given a chance to. In this procedure, we are actually speeding the process up by directly communicating health thoughts - together with creative visualization. The body should be - and this is our main

point - it should be the servant of the mind. James Allen writes: 'Disease of health, like circumstances, are rooted in thought. Sickly thoughts will express themselves through a sickly body. Thoughts of fear have been known to kill a man as speedily as a bullet, and they are killing thousands of people just as surely though less rapidly. The people who live in fear of disease are the people who get it. Anxiety quickly demoralizes the whole body, and lays it open to the entrance of disease; while impure thoughts, even if not physically indulged, will soon shatter the nervous system.' (As a Man Thinketh - pp33-34)

The whole subject of Alpha and brain wave activity is a fascinating area on its own - together with the whole field of Mind Dynamics, however, we bring it up here because all this can take place through regular meditation practice.

In our guided meditation we can try giving ourselves positive affirmations, but always keep them in the present tense. For example, there is a well-known one that still works very well: 'every day, in every way, I am getting better and better' - and I can highly recommend it.

I will guide you through the meditation - and at the points where you feel most relaxed and at peace you can try some very simple affirmations - such as 'nothing disturbs me', 'I am peaceful and calm, I feel well and healthy'. Don't worry about this. You don't have to use them at this point. At the end of the session I will give several examples of affirmations that we can use privately. This is the same exercise that we used at the last session - called 'Bringing the Light Down'. The only difference here is that we can also add our own positive affirmations.

### **GUIDED MEDITATION - BRINGING THE LIGHT DOWN**

- 1. We begin as usual by breathing slowly - by paying attention to our breath.**
- 2. Now as you breath in, mentally say 'peace', and as you breathe out mentally say 'be still'. Don't force it. Keep it simple. Breathe in, say 'peace', breathe out, say 'be still'.**
- 3. As your breathing gets deeper, with each breath in, say 'peace', 'peace', 'peace'; and as you breath out say, 'be still', 'be still', 'be still'.**
- 4. Keep breathing this way for a few minutes to help us to wind down and mentally relax.**

**PAUSE**

**We still breathe slowly, and easily.**

- 5. Now focus our attention just above our heads - still breathing slowly. Visualize a hall of glowing white light just over and above your head. And with each inhalation, breathe the light down over your body. And with each breath out we mentally circulate the light around the body. We breathe in - focusing our attention above your head - and breathe out, circulating the light round the body.**

**Do this for a few more minutes.**

**PAUSE**

**6. Now go back to your breathing again - nice and slowly, but without straining, 'peace - be still', 'peace - be still'. Breathing deeply, 'peace-be still'. We can add at this point any positive affirmations we care to use. Feel at peace, breathing steadily. (Now add your own positive affirmations).**

## **PAUSE**

**7. Now focus on your breathing again - take a few deep breaths. Think of where you are. Take your time, and start becoming aware of your surroundings. Breathing deeply, and when we are ready we gradually focus on our surroundings and open our eyes. Do this in your own time.**

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These exercises are but a preparation for a more involved type of meditation and contemplation, which we will go over at a latter stage. In the meantime they will be a great help in reducing stress, and creating the right mental attitude for greater health and peace of mind.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

When we say that something is all in the mind, I think that there is a great deal of truth in that statement. However, what most people mean by this is, that things are imaginary - something not really real. But if we think of it, the mind is a most wonderful thing - it can literally make or break us. We can make ourselves healthy by how we think - we can also make ourselves ill by the same process. That is not to say that we should not go to the doctors - we should. However the mind is a most wonderful tool - if used properly. It was for this reason why it was stressed at the very beginning of the sessions that meditation had a lot to do with thought - albeit directed thought along a series of thought ideas.

In our next session we will be discussing the Mantra method of meditation - that is the repetition of a word or phrase that we can use for meditation - a word that we can make our own to help us to become more in control of our lives. We will also discuss how we can choose our own mantra.

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