

Learn How to Meditate

The Basic Meditation Technique of Cessation-Contemplation Practice

*Which is the basis behind Zen meditation,
Buddhist meditation, Taoist meditation,
Christian meditation, vipassana meditation,
japa meditation, yoga meditation,
guided meditation and other meditation or
“spiritual cultivation” techniques and practices.*

By William Bodri

Let's Begin Learning How to Calm Our Minds

Everyone is looking for a way to still their thoughts, shed their worries, and attain mental peace.

That's the purpose of meditation!

There are all sorts of meditations in the world that can help you learn how to cultivate a peaceful mind. There are lots of them!

Basically, from one angle or another they work using different principles of mental pacification but they all equally involve teaching you how to detach from the thoughts and impulses in your head (and in your body) that normally bother you, distract you and impel you.

When you learn how to detach from thoughts and separate from their distracting pull on you, those wandering thoughts in turn will naturally die down.

What you learn to access through meditation is therefore a mind empty of stressful thoughts and impulses that keep you unsettled and impel you down wrong courses of action. The very first step to this process is awareness, and you cultivate awareness by watching your thoughts and your mind.

You cultivate awareness through meditation.

SURPRISE! ...

Confucius was actually one of the people who taught the steps of this process in the most detail. He said the first thing to cultivate, when dealing with every facet of life -- and not just spiritual or character development -- was mental "awareness." When you could finally start seeing your own thoughts because of practicing meditation, then Confucius said you could achieve the next step of the process, which was "stopping."

In other words, awareness of thoughts -- shining a light on them without giving them energy -- eventually causes the on-going mental chatter of ours to have its "volume turned down" to where you reach a mental state of cessation, or stopping, which is a clean mental realm absent of thoughts.

When thoughts aren't there, you aren't impelled by them, and this is the first natural consequence of the practice of meditation. In Confucianism, wandering thoughts were always called "desires" so the idea was to practice meditation, or mental introspection, to detach from desires.

Of course, initially the mental state of peace you reach through meditative watching of the mind is erratic, but with continued practice at meditation it becomes relatively constant and stable

... and you become mentally FREE.

So if you practice reaching and staying in this state of mental resting with continued awareness, an amazing thing will happen. After you learn mental stopping and actually start achieving it, then you can achieve a degree of somewhat stable mental stillness.

This stillness will be an ever-present quietude accompanying all you do because your mental calm is becoming deeper and ever-present. Achieving stillness is therefore the third step of the meditative process.

First you have awareness, then stopping, and then stillness which is almost, but not quite complete. If you keep cultivating this stillness through meditation, it will expand so that you achieve the fourth step of the path, which is a state of true peacefulness.

That's a state that Eastern sages call "samadhi." It's a stage of deep mental quietness or calmness. This is really a state of true quietness and it's one of the things you are after. It's a state of spiritual development and a state of human accomplishment. In meditation, you want to reach a state of samadhi or deep mental calming and quiet.

Taking a mental break or mental vacation, and staying in that state of deep, empty calmness with awareness, will also do something else. It will cause all your vital energies to arise in your body. It's just a natural function of the universe that emptiness, quiet or stillness gives birth to activity (the Chinese say "yin gives birth to yang").

Therefore when you let go of your thoughts so that they calm down to quietness, the vital energies of your body that are normally suppressed will start to rise with activity. When they arise they will start transforming your body so that it feels "blissful," which is similar to the Western idea of Christian grace being bestowed upon someone. It's all a function of cultivating a quiet mind.

Actually, this stage of natural energy transformation refers to a state of body-mind cultivation wherein there is constant physical renewal since your mental

realm is all quiet, your physical energies are all active, and they are transforming your body.

Modern science doesn't describe the results of meditation this way, but the schools of Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, Buddhism, yoga, Tantra, and so forth commonly state that this is what happens. Even Confucianism says that your body will "feel like Springtime" because it is becoming renewed and rejuvenated through meditation.

Various meditation schools say it will become light, peaceful and blissful in feeling ... which are all the same thing.

Modern science has not yet gotten around to investigating this experience, which is commonly reported by many meditators, but only describes the minor effects that meditation produces in the body, such as the following:

- During meditation, oxygen consumption drops by 10 to 20 percent and it produces a deeper state of rest than sleep. In fact, 75 percent of insomniacs were able to sleep normally when they meditated
- Meditation is the only activity that reduces blood lactate, a marker of stress and anxiety.
- Meditation decreases the stress hormone, cortisol, and increases the calming hormones melatonin and serotonin.
- Meditators secrete more of the youth-related hormone DHEA as they age than nonmeditators. Meditating 45-year-old males have an average of 23 percent more DHEA than nonmeditators, and meditating females have an average of 47 percent more. Wow! DHEA is one of those supplements people describe for anti-aging benefits because it lowers stress, heightens memory, preserves sexual function, and helps control weight.
- Meditation has a profound effect upon three key indicators of aging: (1) hearing ability, (2) it lowers blood pressure, and (3) helps close object vision.
- Long-term meditators experience 80 percent less heart disease and 55 percent less cancer than nonmeditators. That's a good reason to start meditating. (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 49 (1987): 493-507).

- 34 % of people with chronic pain significantly reduced their pain medication when they began meditating.
- Meditation is known to produce "spontaneous remissions" in 10% of cancer cases, can help get rid of psoriasis, and is a great way to reduce blood pressure. It also is a critical component of alcoholic anonymous programs and other programs to help people beat addictions.

At first when your vital energies arise because of meditation it will seem as if the bliss-bestowing flow is just a trickle, but eventually so much vital energy will arise that its fullness will give you energy, mental clarity, it will banish depression (because it's the very *antithesis* of depression) and the energies that arise will actually transform your physical body.

Science has already reported that meditation affects the physical nature, so it's no great leap to learn that meditation can help rejuvenate the body and cure disease.

Since these physical transformations happen simultaneously with the cultivation of deep mental peace, or quiet, and it's the fifth stage of the meditation path. This is what many people are after, but it's still only an incomplete result of meditation practice.

After attaining these prior six achievements of meditation practice, Confucius taught that you then reach the sixth stage, which is that your natural wisdom comes out in all situations and you attain "right knowing." Your mind is always disciplined in quiet, and you can understand things naturally and effortlessly know the right course of action and how to react properly for all situations. You're always disciplined in right discipline, and your behavioral response to any circumstances are always correct.

After attaining wisdom, Confucius said you could finally achieve the seventh step of meditation practice, which is attainment or obtainment. Your mental realm will so open up that you will be able to obtain or do or achieve whatever you set your mind out to do. You will be able to achieve any goal you desire in the world but most of all, you will become able to fathom the true nature of your mind.

Confucius called this whole set of meditation steps *the great learning*, which meant learning how to become "the real man," or "real human being." He said there are seven overall steps to this process.

In review, the first and second steps include “knowing” and “stopping.” You have to first know how to stop the mind in order to stop, so we can say that you have to follow some meditation practice to learn how to let go of thoughts and arrive at the mental station of cessation.

The “stopping” Confucius mentioned is described by many meditation schools as the mental cessation of bothersome floating thoughts.

All meditation practices are actually built upon the universal principles of cessation-contemplation wherein you practice watching, observing, awareness or viewing of thoughts to reach a state of cessation (a state relatively absent of thoughts) and once you reach the state of cessation you still have to practice observation, watching or awareness of the empty state that's unveiled. In Christianity, this mental meditative practice is actually called “contemplation.”

From knowing and stopping (cessation and contemplation) you can attain samadhi, so by depending upon these two principles in meditation practice you can reach Confucius' goal of eventually attaining samadhi. With samadhi you will achieve the fifth state of physical peace, bliss, grace or comfort which involves deep transformations of the physical body.

With a peaceful mind and blissful body achieved, you will then have developed a good foundation so that the deep wisdom of being able to know and see things clearly arises. This is *true knowing* or wisdom awareness or transcendental wisdom, and this ability arises when you cultivate samadhi.

Lastly there is the final Confucian step of attainment, which equates with uncovering your true nature and unveiling the real human being, the perfected individual underneath it all.

And it all comes from simple mental resting! It all comes from the practice of meditation.

Will it happen right away?

No. The results of meditation follow the simple formula that applies to any learning or attempted mastery of human endeavor:

Practice Method + Effort + Time + Patience = Results.

People think these seven steps only apply to meditation but these steps readily apply to worldly affairs as well, and thus, the Confucian road of meditation and mental introspection -- of watching thoughts and “letting go of ties that bind” -- is

something that can be used to guide your daily life. It's a habit we should even teach to children, as I have mentioned in my book, Socrates and the Path to Enlightenment.

For instance, most people must learn when and how to stop things when they have gone too far -- such as stopping talking or drinking or moving or whatever -- and this particular skill equates with knowing when and how to stop. Dealing with an addiction or some form of abuse is really learning how to stop.

First you must cultivate awareness, and then you must cultivate the ability to stop. You might need all sorts of assists to help you learn stopping, which is why there are all sorts of methods in the world to assist you with any endeavor, but you still have to master stopping, which you CAN achieve over time.

So of course we have this fundamental problem of actually learning how to stop our thoughts even though we already know of this fundamental need. That's where meditation comes in!

The failure to enter a state of mental tranquility is all because people do not know how to stop their thoughts, or even knowing how to stop, they will not or cannot apply their understanding of cessation to the situations that arise.

They do not learn how to let go of thoughts or concentrate single-mindedly on mental quiet so that nuisance situations can be ignored and bothersome thoughts can be discarded.

They do not know how to stop hanging onto the thoughts and since they never learn how to detach from mental pushes, cannot let them die down so that they can achieve mental peace and natural physical bliss.

People are always supplying their thoughts with extra energy without letting them leave gracefully. It is not so much that thoughts are wrong, per se, but that you should not hold onto them and let this attachment blind you and misdirect you.

It is this clinging to transient thoughts that leads people into all sorts of troubles. Our natural state is to be peaceful and happy until we disturb it. Meditation helps us retrieve that naturally underlying mental state without pollutants.

Only after you learn how to stop the monkey mind can you attain peace and tranquility, as well as the bliss promised by meditation. We can compare this type of stopping to turning off some sort of automatic machine that's always on "GO" and letting it cool off and rest. The first step of meditation is learning how to stop the mind's busyness, which is learning how to stop your miscellaneous wandering thoughts. And as Confucius pointed out, when you start gaining

proficiency in meditation you also gain proficiency in learning how to “STOP” all sorts of other activities as well. That’s why he chose to teach meditation in this way.

For instance, if you must conduct some important business negotiations, you know what you can give and what you need to take as well as when to be firm or flexible. This is an example of “knowing and stopping.” When you cultivate your mind and conquer your mind through meditation, you’ll get really good at this.

The principles of knowing and stopping, or awareness and stopping, contemplation and cessation, are inherent in successful worldly affairs. Meditation bolsters your abilities of awareness and stopping, which is also why learning meditation, and especially the form of meditation called “cessation-contemplation” practice—can and should become an inherent part of your daily life.

From the practice of stopping you can attain mental peace, tranquility and stillness. That’s a big half of the equation.

Going further, it is only through physical and mental stillness that you can reach the state Confucius and other meditators commonly mention wherein you feel that your body is being transformed. In other words, because of meditating to reach a deep peace of mind, your physical body will naturally transform and you’ll be able to achieve a state of bliss that frees you of sickness, suffering and pain.

This result of joy and bliss due to meditation is something that all the spiritual schools commonly mention, including Christianity. In Tibetan esotericism, this experience of peacefulness is called achieving “physical pliancy” or “suppleness,” wherein you achieve a feeling of physical lightness and readiness of high well-being. In Confucianism it’s called “Springtime.” Taoism, yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism describe it differently but they all refer to this phenomena.

When Confucius talks about this state peacefulness or contentment, this actually referred to the Tao school and Esoteric school stage of the opening of all the energy channels (acupuncture meridians) in the physical body due to meditation, which are called “nadi” in India and “chi channels” in Chinese medicine. This is why you can reach a state of perfect physical comfort and well being at this point, which is because the energy channels of the body open due to meditation. That’s what leads to physical healing and mental calm.

When the energy channels open due to meditation, one experiences physical bliss and mental joy and comfort and doesn’t need to rely on drugs or alcohol or other external substances to get those experiences.

Sound mysterious?

Shouldn't be. In every culture that practices meditation as a mainstay of the mental diet, you find the same end results trumpeted over and over again. Science hasn't caught up yet, but science is behind in a lot of things.

The question is, which type of meditation is best?

The Basic Method of Cessation-Contemplation Practice, or “Contemplating Mind”

The meditative practice of watching thoughts without getting involved in them works like a hotel manager who just stands there watching the guests come and go in his hotel without himself participating in all the hustle, bustle and chatter. For a hotel manager who just stands there and watches, after a while all the guests eventually depart the hotel and it becomes empty and quiet. All he does is just stand there and observe the situation without saying a word and soon the lobby quiets down.

It's also like a mother who watches her children use up all their energy playing and running here and there, but who remains unruffled and unconcerned until the children eventually tire, lie down and fall asleep.

In other words, if you just practice awareness and watch your thoughts, eventually they will die down all by themselves. You don't have to do anything except watch them. The mental state of clarity you then start to uncover can be described as a quiet field of peacefulness along with awareness.

Those are the analogies for the meditation practice of cessation-contemplation, but what are the actual steps of the practice?

Here are some basic instructions:

Sit in a relaxed and upright posture, with straight spine, open chest, hands resting naturally on the thighs. To take such a posture already expresses the genuine dignity of being human. To remain in that posture during the ups and downs of our thought and emotional processes expresses the fundamental confidence of trusting in unconditional goodness. The eyes are open [or closed] with soft gaze, slightly down, and we take the same attitude to the other senses—open but not fixed or harshly string to experience something. As we sit there, we allow our minds to identify with the outgoing breath, to go out with it, and then to return to be attentive to the posture as the breath comes in. As thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations begin to pop up, we note them and let them be as they are, not trying to push them away, or holding onto them and indulging them. We begin to become mindful of the precise details

of our thought and perceptual processes and also aware of the relationship between them. A thought or feeling arises, and then it goes away. Where it arises from and whence it goes, who can say? But occasionally we might catch a glimpse of non-thought, of open mind. A glimpse can be tremendously refreshing. It is such a relief to realize that we can afford to let go of our conceptualizing process altogether. (The Craft of the Warrior, Robert Spencer, (Frog, Berkeley: California, 1993), pp.146-147)

When your mind empties through this practice of watching, your vital energies (called “chi” by the Chinese) will begin to rise in your body and enter your head. That stream of ascending and refreshing chi energy will silently pour into your brain to quiet your thoughts just as a stream of clear water that enters a muddy pond will soon push the pollutants away as well.

All you have to do to let it happen is just let go of your thoughts and rest your mind. Then it will happen all by itself. The practice of watching enables you to eventually LET GO of thoughts (you actually hold onto them without knowing so meditation is basically the act of breaking this habit) so that this happens naturally.

That clear energy that also arises... due to your detaching from thoughts that frees or unleashes your vital energies from suppressed restraint... will also begin to clean the tissues of your skin and face. It will produce all sorts of rejuvenations that the sages of various religions have mentioned.

All those transformations, which are called "kung-fu" or “gong-fu,” are kicked off when your chi starts to rise *because you let go of thoughts*. When you let it arise due to your mental resting, and don't interfere any more with your body's natural energy circulations because you refuse to cling to the sensations that arise during meditation, all these wonderful things will happen. It's an honest fact. You just have to learn how to really let go.

As the Zen school says, “Let go of your thoughts and see what everything turns out to be. Empty mind is your natural state, but you have to turn within to realize it. How do you realize it? By dropping thoughts.”

Because you play with your thoughts all day, you are always interfering with your body's normal circulation of energies but you just don't know it. That's why sleeping leaves you refreshed, and letting go of thoughts during vacation breaks helps you look refreshed, too. Let go of your thoughts and concerns for awhile and your natural vital energies will circulate and refresh your body.

In actual fact, you're always attaching to thoughts at a subtle level without knowing it, even while asleep, and only through meditation can you break these invisible habits. Through meditation, namely cessation-contemplation meditation practice, you can finally first notice this habit with all its layers and then can learn how to detach from it or let go of it.

What you want is an effortless mind, a mind free of attachment and clings but the habit of mental attachment is so ingrained that you do it all the time, and cover over your true mind's nature, that you don't notice it or the effort you put into keeping it going.

There are all sorts of meditation methods you can practice in the world, but they are all built around these two principles of watching (observation) thoughts to produce a mental realm of quiet called "stopping" (cessation).

In time these two principles of cessation and contemplation converge into the spiritual principles called samadhi and prajna transcendental wisdom, but we cannot go into those deep teachings here. Even Confucius mentioned those issues, but we tried to stay away from them to make this as simple as possible.

In meditation you watch your thoughts – you "contemplate them" by observing them without pushing them or getting involved with them – and in time they will naturally die down so that your mind becomes clear and empty of thoughts. Some people even say that's a purified mental state that's closer to "God" or your "original nature" because it is filled with less ego notions. All I want to say is that it's a peaceful mental realm of purity and quiet.

Stopping and watching are the basic practices inherent in most meditation methods, and they are all that what I want you to practice this week. There are no special secrets or tips. You just have to get started in watching your thoughts through a form of mental introspection that doesn't comment upon what you observe or feed it energy. That's watching and stopping.

Here's how to do it...

Find a comfortable sitting position, cross your legs, put your hands on your lap, relax your body and then start watching your thoughts. If you can do that for at least 20 minutes a day, twice a day to get you started, that's great.

All you want to do your first week is to form the habit of getting started, so don't worry about doing it or not doing it right. After a few times you'll get it down pat ...

and the problem is to form the habit in the first place of watching thoughts and knowing your mind.

The big hurdle is just getting you started and initiating the practice of meditation, so don't over-impose burdens on yourself initially that will make you want to stop meditating all together. Just find a way to get started and make meditation practice desirable to your own mind. If that means fixing up a small room in your house whose job is to help you get into the practice of cultivating mental quiet, because that makes the process attractive to you, then go for it. Whatever it takes to help you get started with a new beneficial habit, then do so.

The whole process of forming a new beneficial habit takes time, so find a comfortable position, adjust yourself, let go of your body and sensations, and just start watching your thoughts.

Doubtless you'll have many questions on this as you practice, but hold your questions as they'll be covered.

Once again, here are the basic instructions we covered last time for watching thoughts:

Sit in a relaxed and upright posture, with straight spine, open chest, hands resting naturally on the thighs. To take such a posture already expresses the genuine dignity of being human. To remain in that posture during the ups and downs of our thought and emotional processes expresses the fundamental confidence of trusting in unconditional goodness. The eyes are open [or closed] with soft gaze, slightly down, and we take the same attitude to the other senses—open but not fixed or harshly string to experience something. As we sit there, we allow our minds to identify with the outgoing breath, to go out with it, and then to return to be attentive to the posture as the breath comes in. As thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations begin to pop up, we note them and let them be as they are, not trying to push them away, or holding onto them and indulging them. We begin to become mindful of the precise details of our thought and perceptual processes and also aware of the relationship between them. A thought or feeling arises, and then it goes away. Where it arises from and whence it goes, who can say? But occasionally we might catch a glimpse of non-thought, of open mind. A glimpse can be tremendously refreshing. It is such a relief to realize that we can afford to let go of our conceptualizing process altogether. (*The Craft of the Warrior*, Robert Spencer, (Frog, Berkeley: California, 1993), pp.146-147)

If you've got that down, it's time for more details as explained in my book, [Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation](#):

[1] First, sit comfortably to relax your body and your breathing. We call this first step of meditation the "preparatory practices", or physiological adjustments, for tuning the physical nature. Basically, you want to situate yourself so as to lessen any physical disturbances or distractions. Then after your body is calmed, you start quietly observing your inner thoughts and emotions. In other words, you simply watch your internal psychological functions like a third person observer. This third person doesn't interfere with what's going on, or participate in the activities they're observing. He just stays there watching, neither rejecting or clinging to anything; he simply sits there silently observing.

[2] You continue watching your internal process of mentation until you reach the point where you can clearly observe every thought and idea which appears in the mind without any vagueness or ambiguity. Naturally, you are not tightening your body nor mentally straining during this practice. Rather, you always remain relaxed while clearly observing your internal mental processes. After a while, you will eventually be able to distinguish that the process of mentation has three parts: a preceding thought which has gone, a thought which has not yet arisen, and the immediate clear radiance, or mental state of present mind. With continued watching, the separation of these three states becomes quite clear.

[3] With continued observation, you progress a bit further and next realize that the past, present and future thoughts never stay. Since they don't stay they can never be grasped, hence we say that "fundamentally, they have no base to rely upon". Observing the appearance and disappearance of thoughts is called "observing birth and death", for the coming and going of thoughts is a ceaseless, never-ending process of arising and then disappearance, or decay. This is the realm of birth and death.

By observing this stream of birth and death, you will gradually learn how to detach from the mental processes, and you will become more familiar with the false mind of consciousness. In other words, you will be able to drop the illusion that our mental process is a fundamental reality. Rather, you will gradually see that all mental states are ungraspable, transient phenomena which come and go

without end, and they're more like insubstantial bubbles of foam or particles of dust which have no fixity of nature. Because of their ceaseless birth and death and the gap in-between, what we normally imagine as a continuous continuity of thoughts is actually an illusion, like the unbroken wheel of light we see when a stick of fire is spun in the air. Thus through this process of inner watching, you will begin to realize that our mental state is an ongoing process separate from our true self. The true self is what's watching this play scene, so it's like an internal knower who never moves. If you go from here to the North Pole and back, the scenery always changes, but that inner knower never changes--it never moves. In fact, it never leaves, and has never come either. It just is. That's what we're seeking, though on a more profound level than we can explain here.

Now in watching thoughts without adding any energy to the process, you'll begin to understand how dreamlike our consciousness actually is because the reality it gives birth to seems to be there and yet the concreteness of this reality is absent. It isn't real. Phenomena are empty and yet they are conventionally real, but this conventional reality is also empty. So eventually, through observation with detachment, you'll reach the stage where you can mentally relax while "giving birth to the mind without abiding anywhere".

Through continued observation you will notice that thoughts or phenomena ("existence") are born from emptiness (mental silence), and the existence of emptiness relies on phenomena. Existence and emptiness are both manifestations of one nature--its single source, our true self--so on the road of cultivation you don't cling to either side. Both sides are phenomenal constructions, or false relativities, so both sides are not real. Hence in shamatha-vipashyana practice, you start to contemplate the mean between stillness and activity.

In practicing this inner watching, you'll get progressively better at becoming mentally free because you'll stop clinging to or rejecting your thoughts, emotions and sensations. Thus your mental awareness will increasingly "open" and your ability to function in the world will increase as well, so you'll actually be expanding your awareness while saving a lot of energy that you'd normally waste in useless clinging. Furthermore, your internal state of peace and calm will progressively develop with every increase in clarity. Thus if you keep observing the origin and destruction of thoughts while paying particular attention to where they come from and go to, you'll eventually obstruct the stream of consciousness.

[4] With the stream of consciousness disrupted, you will then notice a momentary gap of stillness, or silence, between all your thoughts. In other words, if you practice this method of inner observation for a long time--by wordlessly watching thoughts without injecting energy into the thought stream--the process of silent observation will itself disrupt the stream of mentation. The state of mind in the immediate present will gradually open up to reveal a tiny gap of mental quiet, or emptiness; when a previous thought has disappeared and a subsequent thought has not yet arisen, the mind will seem quiet. This mental silence is not a gap of dullness nor stupor, nor should it be a forced silence or blankness you create through suppressing thoughts. Rather, it will be a lucid, clear and open awareness, and these characteristics will gradually unfold as more time is spent in this state.

In other words, after quietly observing our mental processes for quite some while, one will notice a tiny gap of silent pausation between thoughts which we refer to as "cessation". If we continue observing this state without effort and shine awareness on it, it will gradually expand further and further. Looking into this gap of silence is the process of "contemplation" or vipashyana. It's a quiet realm similar to emptiness, but it still isn't the genuine emptiness of Tao. Nevertheless, this is what we're initially after because we can use this state to begin cultivating prajna wisdom.

[5] If you continue to carry over this state of watching the mind (the process of silent detachment and immediate awareness) during all your normal activities--whether walking, talking, sitting or sleeping--you'll be able to reach the point where thoughts no longer bind you. Gradually their volume will die down, your radiant awareness will expand and you will be able to seamlessly enter into the real emptiness of samadhi.

In other words, if you keep observing the state of cessation by shining awareness on this state, you will eventually arrive at dhyana. Thus the practice of shining awareness on the silence within is commonly referred to as "contemplating mind". If you continue progressing in this manner by reaching further levels of emptiness and shining wisdom awareness on any state of cessation you reach, you will eventually acquire prajna wisdom, or transcendental wisdom. Then you'll climb the various ranks of samadhi and enter into the Tao. (Twenty-five Doors to Meditation:

A Handbook for Entering Samadhi, William Bodri and Lee Shu-Mei
(Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1998), pp. 14-17)

All I want you to be practicing your first two weeks of meditation is this basic practice of cessation-contemplation meditation. Try to meditate twice a day, 20-40 minutes each time. Forty minutes is best, but if that cause you to hate meditation practice and stop doing it, then start with only 15 or 20 minutes and work upwards. You know your own psychology, so work with it rather than against it to get the practice of meditation started and worked into your schedule.

It must become a daily practice!

Eventually, with a lot of meditation practice then in time you can reach a state of mental emptiness that occurs from watching thoughts that is called cessation, stopping, "samadhi" or extinction because all your discriminative thinking has cleared out. But that's not going to happen in two weeks time, so you have to keep practicing. Just keep following the directions and you'll soon be meditating deeply.

Just practice keeping awareness alive of your thoughts, without clinging or attaching to them, and practice letting go of any pushing away from or going towards anything you notice -- thoughts, sensations, emotions, conceptions, impulses, habits, language and so forth.

In time you tend to disassociate with thoughts and realize, "Hey, these aren't me. There's something behind the thoughts that's aware of them, and yet I'm aware of them and their meaning without using thoughts."

Bingo! -- you've started to make progress.

But that comes later, so for your first two weeks when you start meditation, all I want you to do is get into the habit of practice.

Explaining Meditation From Another Angle

Now while the meditation instructions from my book, [Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation](#), explain things, this time I want to explain the steps as my teacher taught them in [The Story of Chinese Zen](#), which he wrote.

I want to keep pounding in the theory or explanation of cessation-contemplation meditation practice because these two principles are the basis within every meditation method in existence.

In the [Sandhinirmocana Sutra](#) of Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha explains that even up to Buddhahood, or complete and perfect enlightenment, there are all sorts of meditation methods you can use that involve the principles of cessation and contemplation practice as their secret basis.

When you practice cessation and contemplation of the mind, in time you can develop samadhi and prajna transcendental wisdom, which are the two foundations of spiritual learning. Most everyone thinks that spirituality is following ceremonies or rules of discipline but true spiritual cultivation is cultivating samadhi and prajna wisdom, and then seeing into your true nature.

In some meditation or spiritual practices you cultivate samadhi first, and then try to cultivate prajna wisdom. Some practices have you try to cultivate prajna wisdom, or clear direct knowing, and then from that want you to attain samadhi. Some want you to cultivate both factors simultaneously. In either case, these two principles of cessation and contemplation, or samadhi and transcendental wisdom, must eventually be unified.

Now that you have that explanations, once again here are the instructions for cessation-contemplation practice according to my own teacher's explanations, Zen master Nan Hua-Chin:

Step One:

First we have to quietly and calmly observe and examine our own inner consciousness and thoughts, and then make a simple analysis in two parts. The first part consists of the thoughts and ideas produced from sensory feelings like pain, pleasure, fullness and warmth, hunger, cold, and so on. All of these belong to the domain of sensory awareness; from them are derived activities of cognitive awareness, such as association and imagination. The

other part consists of consciousness and thought produced by cognitive awareness, such as vague emotions, anxieties, anguish, discriminating thoughts regarding people, oneself, and inner or outer phenomena, and so on. Of course the latter part also includes intellectual and scholastic thinking, as well as the very capacity one has to observe one's own psychological functions.

Step Two:

The next step comes when you have arrived at the point where you are well able to understand the activity of your own psychological functions. Whether they be in the domain of sensory awareness or in the domain of cognitive awareness, they are each referred to generally as a single thought: when you can reach the point where in the interval of each thought you can clearly observe each idea or thought that occurs to your mind, without any further absentmindedness, awareness, or vagueness, then you can process them into three levels of observation.

Generally speaking, the preceding thought (thinking consciousness) that has just passed is called the past mind, or the prior thought; the succeeding thought (thinking consciousness) that has just arrived is called the present mind, or the immediate thought; while that which has yet to come is of course the future mind, or the latter thought. However, since the latter thought has not yet come, you do not concern yourself with it. But you must not forget that when you take note that the latter thought has not yet come, this itself is the present immediate thought; and the moment you realize it is present, it has at once already become past.

Step Three:

Now the next step is when you have practiced this inner observation successfully for a long time. You watch the past mind, present mind, and future mind with lucid clarity and then develop familiarity with the state of mind of the immediate present, when the past mind of the former thought has not yet come. This state of mind in the instant of the immediate present then should subtly and gradually present an open blankness.

But this open blankness is not stupor, lightheadedness, or like the state before death. It is an open awareness that is lucid and clear, numinous and luminous. This is what the Zen masters of the Sung and Ming dynasties used to call the time of radiant awareness.

If you really arrive at this state, you will then feel that your own consciousness and thinking, whether in the domain of sensory awareness or in the domain of cognitive awareness, are all like reflections on flowing water, like geese going through the endless sky, like the breeze coming over the surface of water, like flying swans over the now: no tracks or traces can be found. Then you will finally realize that everything you think and do in everyday life is all nothing more than floating dust or reflections of light; there is fundamentally no way to grasp it, fundamentally no basis to rely upon. Then you will attain experiential understanding of the psychological state in which “the past mind cannot be apprehended, the future mind cannot be apprehended, the present mind cannot be apprehended.”

Step Four:

Next after that, if you really understand the ungraspability of the past, present, and future mind and thought, when you look into yourself it will turn into a laugh.

By this means you will recognize that everything and every activity in this mind is all the ordinary person disturbing himself. From here, take another step further to examine and break through the pressure produced by biological sensation and physical action and movement stimulated by thought, seeing it all as like bubbles, flecks of foam, or flowers in the sky. Even when you are not deliberately practicing self-examination, on the surface it seems like all of this is a linear continuity of activity; in reality what we call our activity is just like an electric current, like a wheel of fire, like flowing water: it only constitutes a single linear continuity by virtue of the connecting of countless successive thoughts. Ultimately there is no real thing at all therein. Therefore you will naturally come to feel that mountains are not mountains, rivers are not rivers, the body is not the body, the mind is not the mind. Every bit of all of this is just a dreamlike floating and sinking in the world, that is all. Thus you will spontaneously understand “enlivening the mind without dwelling on anything.” In reality, this is already the subtle function of “arousing the mind fundamentally having no place of abode.”

Step Five:

Next, after you can maintain this state where you have clarified the consciousness and thinking in your mind, you should preserve this

radiant, numinous awareness all the time, whether in the midst of stillness or in the midst of activity, maintaining it like a clear sky extending thousands of miles, not keeping any obscuring phenomena in your mind. Then when you have fully experienced this, you will finally be able to understand the truth of human life, and find a state of peace that is a true refuge. But you should not take this condition to be the clarification of mind and perception of essential nature to which Zen refers! And you should not take this to be the enlightenment to which Zen refers! The reason for this is because at this time there exists the function of radiant awareness, and you still don't know its comings and goings, and where it arises. This time is precisely what Han-shan, the great Ming dynasty master, meant when he said, "It is easy to set foot in a forest of thorns; it is hard to turn around at the window screen shining in the moonlight." (The Story of Chinese Zen, Zen master Nan Huai-Chin, trans. by Thomas Cleary, (Charles E. Tuttle, Boston, 1995), pp. 94-98.)

From studying how to practice this simple meditation method (which starts with noticing the gap of silence between thoughts, which you finally attain after much practice), and by *actualizing it*, a whole new psychology of transformation can eventually be born. I'm actually giving you the keys for changing your life and fortune and for getting over deep emotional hurts or cravings such as addictions.

If scientists really wanted to perform this type of investigation, the best way to proceed would be to analyze the mind-body changes of people who engage in these shamatha-vipashyana (cessation-contemplation) practices, and who achieve something significant along these lines. If you only study ordinary practitioners rather than accomplished adepts, you'll never get to the true heart of the matter and that's where most researchers have gone wrong in the past.

It's like trying to study ice-skating and focusing on the first-timers rather than the Olympic ice-skating champions. The insights you get for practicing correctly will come from the Olympic champions rather than the hobbyists. That's why I must keep referring to the teachings of sages who have mastered meditation practice and know the stages and results of the techniques.

In China, the shamatha-vipashyana cessation-contemplation practices became the basis of the Tien-tai school of Buddhism that always emphasizes the importance of these "chih-kuan" practices. "Chih" is the practice of stopping the flow of thoughts in the mind. "Chih" means putting to rest the wandering mind

and having it come to a standstill. Therefore “chih” is what results in the state we call cessation, or shamatha.

That particular state of mental stillness, or cessation, is actually samadhi.

Thus chih-kuan or shamatha-vipashyana or cessation-contemplation practices, involve cultivating the state of samadhi, or mental peace. They involve cultivating a state of mind eventually absent or “empty” of thoughts but which is still aware or concentrated.

That state of extinction, peace, or emptiness is samadhi. It's also referred to as one-pointed concentration because your mind is so clear it can concentrate on just one thought.

“Kuan,” on the other hand, is the practice of looking into, watching, witnessing, or observing the mind. “Kuan,” as a cultivation practice, is therefore the embryonic basis of the beginning of transcendental or spiritual wisdom. Since you cannot cultivate prajna transcendental wisdom unless your mind is empty and quiet—for you can't look into the real nature of your mind if it's being screened by all sorts of busyness (just like you can't see into the bottom of a lake if the water is all polluted or the water is turbulent with foaming movement) then you can't succeed in cultivating prajna transcendental wisdom unless you're practicing cessation as well.

In other words, you have to get rid of excessive polluting thoughts, or extraneous mental chatter, to arrive at samadhi and from cultivating samadhi you can give rise to prajna insight. That's why even Hasidism says, “wisdom comes into being out of nothingness [emptiness].”

With prajna wisdom you can detach from thoughts to look into the mind, and by detaching from thoughts you further enable them to settle.

These two principles of samadhi and prajna must be matched together like the two wings on a bird or the two wheels of a bike. One without the other is not enough, for

Yogis cannot eliminate mental obscurations merely by familiarizing themselves with calm abiding [samadhi] meditation alone. It will only suppress the disturbing emotions and delusions temporarily. Without the light of [prajna] wisdom, the latent potential of the disturbing emotions cannot be thoroughly destroyed, and therefore their complete destruction will not be possible. For this reason the Unraveling of the Thought Sutra says, “Concentration can suppress the disturbing emotions properly, and wisdom can thoroughly destroy their latent potential.” (Stages of Meditation, the Dalai

Lama, trans. by Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, and Jeremy Russell, (Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca: New York, 2001), p. 82.)

Once again, the mind at rest is called *chih*, *shamatha*, cessation, peacefulness, stillness, calmness, calm abiding, concentration or emptiness. In time this becomes “*samadhi*” or “*dhyana*”, which is an extremely purified mental state of quiet and concentration.

The mind seeing clearly without mental clinging is called *kuan*, *vipashyana*, *vipassana*, contemplation, watching, observation, the light of awareness or wisdom knowing. In time this becomes “*prajna* transcendental wisdom” that helps you realize your true nature.

Countless spiritual practices have these two meditation principles as their foundation.

Actually, it's not that cultivating *samadhi* gives rise to *prajna* wisdom, or that transcendental wisdom gives rise to *samadhi*, or that *samadhi* and *prajna* wisdom are different from each other. To really change your body, mind, behavior and habits and get to the root source of it all, you must actually reach a point where the two become one, and to get to this point we must use all sorts of initial expedient meditation methods.

You need to cultivation cessation and contemplation to arrive at *samadhi* and *prajna* wisdom, and you need to cultivate a state where the two become as one -- where the mental realm is empty all the way through and yet wisdom knowing awareness still shines, functioning stainlessly and without obstruction from your original nature.

Whether you're talking about the Jewish cultivation system of the Kabbalah wherein you cultivate a state of clarity that is “*witness*” or “*watcher*” of the *Yesod*, or the *chih-kuan* practices of the Tien-tai sect, or the introspection techniques of the early Greek philosophers, the yogic exercise of *antar mouna* wherein you practice becoming a detached witness of all your thoughts and emotions, or the “*self-remembering*” and “*self-observation*” practices taught by Gurdjieff, or the “*recollection*” and “*introversion*” contemplation practices of Christianity recommended by Saint Augustine, or the Hinayana methods of pure *shamatha-vipashyana* practice, or even the “*even-hovering attention*” mindfulness recommended by Freud, or Deikman's “*Witness*” or “*Observing Self*,”

... all these spiritual techniques are based on these two fundamental cultivation principles of cessation and contemplation practice, and the fact that with success they develop into mental samadhi and prajna wisdom attainments.

They are the secret keys to most all the forms of meditation or “cultivation practice” that you can find in the world.

Most religious officials don't know about these two imbedded principles of religious practice, but they are there nonetheless. They are the methods by which you can achieve all levels of concentration, so they are always cultivated together on the spiritual path.

You can find out more on this by reading [The Insider's Guide to the World's Best and Worst Spiritual Paths and Practices](http://www.MeditationExpert.com/bestandworst.html), available at:

<http://www.meditationexpert.com/bestandworst.html>

How Good Is This Meditation Technique?

In terms of rating cultivation schools or techniques, the cessation-contemplation (shamatha-vipashyana) meditation practices are much better than yoga meditation practices, or the unusual meditation techniques often championed in Taoism and Esoteric Buddhism. They are also the cleanest and clearest and easiest to transmit in terms of cultivation theory and analysis.

So all I want you to do your first two weeks of meditation practice is sit there, read these instructions over and over again, watch your thoughts ...and become clear on this process. Later you can refer to these instructions again and again because they only make sense when you get proficient at them and you make some progress. Every time you read them you'll pick up more and more details and understanding.

You cannot speed up your understanding of meditation except by practicing, getting some experience and attainment proficiency, and THEN understanding the instructions. So once again, all I want you to do these first two weeks is start understanding HOW to properly practice.

How?

Watch your thoughts and let go of them.
Anything you can notice, let go of it and see what it turns out to be.

That, in essence, is true spiritual cultivation practice. That's meditation.

All the religions of the world use this basic method. It's the basic method inherent in all spiritual striving, though it's clothed with different words. You access some mental realm of emptiness and watch it, staying aware of it without creating any new mental scenario or holding onto that mental scenario. You empty out while retaining awareness of you mind, and then your mind will expand to encompass everything.

Basically, you let go of excessive mental chatter to regain your original mind called the "Self".

Does modern transactional psychology know about this? See what Ken Wilber has to say about this basic route to spiritual attainment:

This observing self is usually called the Self with a capital S, or the Witness, or pure Presence, or pure awareness, or consciousness as such, and this Self as transparent Witness is a direct ray of the living Divine. The ultimate I is Christ, is Buddha, is Brahman, is Emptiness itself: such is the startling testimony of the world's great mystics and sages...

This Self or Witness was present from the start as the basic form of awareness at whatever stage of growth a holon happened to be—it was present as prehension, as sensation, as impulse, as emotion, as symbols, as reason—but it becomes increasingly obvious as growth and transcendence matures...

The contemplative traditions are based on a series of experiments in awareness: what if you pursue this Witness to its source? What if you inquire within, pushing deeper and deeper into the source of awareness itself? What if you push beyond or behind the mind the mind, into a depth of consciousness that is not confined to the ego or the individual self? What do you find? As a repeatable, reproducible experiment in awareness, what do you find?

“There is a subtle essence that pervades all reality,” begins one of the most famous answers to that question. “It is the reality of all that is, and the foundation of all that is. That essence is all. That essence is the real. And thou, thou art that.”

In other words, this observing Self eventually discloses its own source, which is Spirit itself, Emptiness itself. And that is why the mystics maintain that this observing Self is a ray of the Sun that is the radiant Abyss and ultimate Ground upon which the entire manifest Kosmos depends. Your very Self intersects the Self of the Kosmos at large—a supreme identity that outshines the entire manifest world, a supreme identity that undoes the knot of the separate self and buries it in splendor.

So from matter to body to mind to Spirit. In each case consciousness or the observing Self shed and exclusive identity with a lesser and shallower dimension, and opens up to deeper and higher and wider occasions, until it opens up to its own ultimate ground in Spirit itself.

And the stages of transpersonal growth and development are basically the stages of following this observing Self to its ultimate abode, which is pure Spirit or pure Emptiness, the ground, path, and fruition of the entire display. ([A Brief History of Everything](#), Ken Wilber, (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2000), pp. 179-181.)

Now you know that even modern psychology is recognizing cessation-contemplation meditation practice as the means to “see the Tao,” which means to realize your true nature or fundamental essence. It’s the way to realize your ontological being.

You need to stop identifying with or holding onto thoughts and then you can get closer to a realization of that foundationhead, or fundamental essence or substrate, and meditation is the only way to do this. As the great Hindu sage Shankara said, “Knowledge ... only removes false notions, it does not create anything.” He also said, “Even though the Self is all-pervading, it does not shine in everything. It shines only in the organ-of-wisdom,” which is why we must search for our true Self through meditation and the mind rather than through the road of investigating matter.

As a person, you attach to so many things without knowing it -- so many views and thoughts and perspectives and skandhas -- that you mistake for true reality instead of THAT ONE behind everything. Meditation helps you realize THAT ONE.

Cessation-contemplation practice is therefore the basic meditation technique that gets you oriented to realizing THAT ONE, your true mind, your peaceful fundamental nature. Just give up all your ideas and stay mentally quiet. Forget your thoughts and stay in that peaceful state. It’s always there without agitation so just let go of all your thoughts and ideas and see what is left.

That’s the way to do it! Cessation-contemplation practice just helps you get started.

If you become frightened when you are meditating that’s not a stage where there is a real emptiness of thought, but being frightened means you are clinging to the idea of being frightened. Reject that thought and all known impressions and pictures borrowed from the world of your memory. Let yourself experience the emptiness that is empty of everything. Let everything go and see what everything turns out to be.

When the mind that discriminates disappears, what is left is the original state with awareness and that’s what some people call enlightenment or awakening or prajna wisdom.

Cessation-contemplation meditation practice may seem boring, but that’s usually because you are doing it wrong. You’re clinging to something, such as the thought you are bored, but when you really let go then all your energy will change

in an instant and then a different problem will arise ... you will tend to get excited. Your mind will initially become unclear because all your chi will rush to your brain.

At least that's what happens the first few times you do it *correctly* until, as Chinese medical science and Indian yoga explain it, all the chi energy channels in your brain open up and become transformed. When the chi energies rush into your head they will scramble thoughts (we've all had that type of experience before), so there will be no discriminative clarity at that time and you will KNOW you are unclear. But that's correct knowing!

That knowing, or understanding without thoughts, is the beginning of prajna wisdom. Prajna is a type of wisdom understanding that functions without thoughts. It originates from your true self and you want to cultivate a realization of that Self beneath thoughts that is pregnant with wordless awareness. It just lets whatever is to be born arise ... and never clings so that what must go then perishes naturally.

So it's correct that your thoughts are initially unclear when chi first rushes to your head since that will open up your energy (chi) channels. In a short while that energy rush will all clear out and you'll attain pristine clarity. After the chi channels clear, consciousness becomes even more clear and open.

What is the ultimate state possible from watching thoughts? Just as Ken Wilber said, you can reach the ground state of the Spirit. You can reach the fundamental nature of your true Self and when you access that self, no impulse, emotion, addiction, craving or disturbance of any kind can reach you.

All the spiritual schools say this very same thing, and the basic meditation practice of watching and stopping, called cessation and contemplation," will get you there.

There are all sorts of other meditation methods including mantra, kundalini cultivation, visualization, pranayama and so forth, but to practice them correctly you have to be clear on these basic principles. So keep at this basic practice.

Start meditating twenty minutes or more, twice a day if you can, and soon you'll be a meditation expert (see www.meditationexpert.com for more advanced details). Yes, it takes some time to start the habit of meditation, but it's definitely worthwhile.

Always try to let go of anything you notice you are mentally clinging to. Are you holding onto something? Perhaps you're even holding onto language. Why do

you use English in your head, or French, or Chinese or German? If you were born into another culture in some other life, it would be a different language, wouldn't it? So knowing, real knowing, doesn't depend on the words of language.

Understanding is just wisdom knowing, so let things go and see what they turn out to be. It's safe, you won't disappear, nothing will happen, so these two weeks just try it and see how things go. What do you have to lose except watching a little bit of TV?

Just let everything go and see what it all turns out to be.

Don't form any pictures in your mind or expectations on purpose.

If you really try hard enough, anything you expect or imagine as a preconceived mental state will eventually manifest as a subtle mental state, and you will then enjoy it as an experience. But that's not real emptiness or peace. You're just enjoying a transient thought construction that way and you'll be suffering again after it's over. You want to get down to the root substrate beneath all these experiences that's the ultimate state of peace, bliss and contentment.

What you want to do is really let go of everything that's not IT, and you can get there by watching to see what you're holding onto and learning to let go of that chatter. Just look at how thought arises, how it stays and how it goes away.

When you can separate yourself from thought completely by doing that, you will be your true self. You will be as you truly are. You will reach freedom from all sorts of thoughts, addictions or compulsions.

Don't try to stop, control, suppress, or manipulate thoughts. That's wrong because it's not freedom. See if you can mentally jump off a flagpole or cliff without clinging to any experience that arises or expectation. Do you really think by doing that you'll become annihilated? Of course not, so drop those fears and try it this week to further your practice and see what comes up.

As you get better and better at this, there will still be an impression of events coming and going but you will know that they belong to the body and destiny (what we call interdependent origination or karma) and not to you. Let the body react. Let behavior react naturally. None of those things are you so don't get involved with it.

You might need a short reminder, so once again here are the basic rules of "watching the mind" or "observing thoughts" meditation practice once again:

STAGE 1: First, sit comfortably to relax your body and your respiration. We call this first step the "preparatory practices", or physiological adjustments, for tuning the physical nature. Basically, you want to situate yourself so as to lessen any physical disturbances or distractions. Then after your body is calmed, you start quietly observing your inner thoughts and emotions. In other words, you simply watch your internal psychological functions like a third person observer. This third person doesn't interfere with what's going on, or participate in the activities they're observing. He just stays there watching, neither rejecting or clinging to anything; he simply sits there silently observing.

STAGE 2: You continue watching your internal process of mentation until you reach the point where you can clearly observe every thought and idea which appears in the mind without any vagueness or ambiguity. Naturally, you are not tightening your body nor mentally straining during this practice. Rather, you always remain relaxed while clearly observing your internal mental processes. After a while, you will eventually be able to distinguish that the process of mentation has three parts: a preceding thought which has gone, a thought which has not yet arisen, and the immediate clear radiance, or mental state of present mind. With continued watching, the separation of these three states becomes quite clear.

STAGE 3: With continued observation, you progress a bit further and next realize that the past, present and future thoughts never stay. Since they don't stay they can never be grasped, hence we say that "fundamentally, they have no base to rely upon". Observing the appearance and disappearance of thoughts is called "observing birth and death", for the coming and going of thoughts is a ceaseless, never-ending process of arising and then disappearance, or decay. This is the realm of birth and death.

By observing this stream of birth and death, you will gradually learn how to detach from the mental processes, and you will become more familiar with the false mind of consciousness. In other words, you will be able to drop the illusion that our mental process is a fundamental reality. Rather, you will gradually see that all mental states are ungraspable, transient phenomena which come and go without end, and they're more like insubstantial bubbles of foam or particles of dust which have no fixity of nature. Because of their ceaseless birth and death and the gap in-between, what we normally imagine as a continuous continuity of thoughts is actually

an illusion, like the unbroken wheel of light we see when a stick of fire is spun in the air. Thus through this process of inner watching, you will begin to realize that our mental state is an ongoing process separate from our true self. The true self is what's watching this play scene, so it's like an internal knower who never moves. If you go from here to the North Pole and back, the scenery always changes, but that inner knower never changes--it never moves. In fact, it never leaves, and has never come either. It just is. That's what we're seeking, though on a more profound level than we can explain here.

Now in watching thoughts without adding any energy to the process, you'll begin to understand how dreamlike our consciousness actually is because the reality it gives birth to seems to be there and yet the concreteness of this reality isn't real. Phenomena are empty, and yet they are conventionally real, but this conventional reality is also empty. So eventually, through observation with detachment, you'll reach the stage where you can mentally relax while "giving birth to the mind without abiding anywhere".

Through continued observation you will notice that thoughts or phenomena ("existence") are born from emptiness (mental silence), and the existence of emptiness relies on phenomena. Existence and emptiness are both manifestations of one nature--its single source, our true self--so on the road of cultivation you don't cling to either side. Both sides are phenomenal constructions, or false relativities, so both sides are not real. Hence in shamatha-vipashyana practice, you start to contemplate the mean between stillness and activity.

In practicing this inner watching, you'll get progressively better at becoming mentally free because you'll stop clinging to or rejecting your thoughts, emotions and sensations. Thus your mental awareness will increasingly "open" and your ability to function in the world will increase as well, so you'll actually be expanding your awareness while saving a lot of energy that you'd normally waste in useless clinging. Furthermore, your internal state of peace and calm will progressively develop with every increase in clarity. Thus if you keep observing the origin and destruction of thoughts while paying particular attention to where they come from and go to, you'll eventually obstruct the stream of consciousness.

STAGE 4: With the stream of consciousness disrupted, you will then notice a momentary gap of stillness, or silence, between all

your thoughts. In other words, if you practice this method of inner observation for a long time--by wordlessly watching thoughts without injecting energy into the thought stream--the process of silent observation will itself disrupt the stream of mentation. The state of mind in the immediate present will gradually open up to reveal a tiny gap of mental quiet, or emptiness; when a previous thought has disappeared and a subsequent thought has not yet arisen, the mind will seem quiet. This mental silence is not a gap of dullness nor stupor, nor should it be a forced silence or blankness you create through suppressing thoughts. Rather, it will be a lucid, clear and open awareness, and these characteristics will gradually unfold as more time is spent in this state.

In other words, after quietly observing our mental processes for quite some while, one will notice a tiny gap of silent pausation between thoughts which we refer to as "cessation". If we continue observing this state without effort and shine awareness on it, it will gradually expand further and further. Looking into this gap of silence is the process of "contemplation" or vipashyana. It's a quiet realm similar to emptiness, but it still isn't the genuine emptiness of Tao. Nevertheless, this is what we're initially after because we can use this state to begin cultivating prajna wisdom.

STAGE 5: If you continue to carry over this state of watching the mind (the process of silent detachment and immediate awareness) during all your normal activities--whether walking, talking, sitting or sleeping--you'll be able to reach the point where thoughts no longer bind you. Gradually their volume will die down, your radiant awareness will expand and you will be able to seamlessly enter into the real emptiness of samadhi.

In other words, if you keep observing the state of cessation by shining awareness on this state, you will eventually arrive at dhyana. Thus the practice of shining awareness on the silence within is commonly referred to as "contemplating mind". If you continue progressing in this manner by reaching further levels of emptiness and shining wisdom awareness on any state of cessation you reach, you will eventually acquire prajna wisdom, or transcendental wisdom. Then you'll climb the various ranks of samadhi and enter into the Tao. ([Twenty-five Doors to Meditation: A Handbook for Entering Samadhi](#), William Bodri and Lee Shu-Mei (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1998), pp. 14-17)

The reason we go into these instructions again and again is because you only tend to truly understand them as your own experience deepens. In other words, only when you attain the same stage of gong-fu (kung-fu), or transformative experiences and phenomena, do you truly understand the descriptions of that gong-fu. Until then, it helps to study these descriptions and the methods to attain these states.

When you break mental ruts by letting go of your thoughts and cutting off your almost invisible habits of mental clinging, your chi will start to come up. In fact, any moment you realize some degree of emptiness your chi (vital energies, life force, or "prana") will transform instantly.

What you must do is attain some state of emptiness where you realize how NOT to hold onto thoughts. That's why cessation-contemplation practice is so useful, because it first gets you to realize you're not your thoughts, and then from there you eventually realize how to stop holding on them.

To make "watching mind" or "contemplating mind" more powerful and effective, always ask yourself in meditation if you are forcing something or suppressing something or holding onto something, and if so, try to let it go. Even the concept of knowing you are a person, let it go. The fact you are using English, let it go. The fact you want to know, let it go. The sensation of the body, let it go.

What can you let go of? The experiential realms of appearances, sensations and emotions, thoughts and conceptions, volitions, impulses and motivations, and consciousness. Buddhism calls these things the "skandhas," but just think of them as all the possible dimensions of experience possible in the universe for human beings.

In my book, [How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization](#), you'll find the most detailed manual in the world on all the mental experiential realms (called skandhas) you can let go of via meditation. I only suggest that devoted meditators get it, and to find out more you can go to:

<http://www.meditationexpert.com/measuringmeditation.html>

This advanced meditation manual talks about all the stages of transformation that happen due to meditation and discusses a wide variety of cultivation schools and methods because one method is not suited for everyone. As the [Vimalakirti Sutra](#) says, "Since the minds of those who are difficult to help are like monkeys, various methods of teaching are devised to check them so that they can become tamed."

That's why there are so many different types of meditation techniques available. Everyone has a different mental propensity, and so different methods and approaches to calming the mind were created to appeal to different propensities.

The transformations that occur to your physical body due to meditation only happen when you let go of your body (and thus the circulations of its chi energies, which are malformed or inhibited due to thought-clinging) ... and not when you try to visualize them into happening.

Let go of your thoughts and these transformation will start to occur, slowly at first, but then with more intensity the more you realize emptiness (which means "non-clinging").

Some people, because of incorrect meditation instructions, try to force their "chakras" into forming or healing or becoming balanced. They also try to circulate or spin their chi and vital energies in various circulations, but this sort of practice will get you nowhere.

When you read the historical accounts and autobiographies of people who greatly succeeded in meditation practice, it all happened naturally. They didn't have to do anything except let go of their mind. When you let go of your mind, the mind becomes peaceful and the "extreme of yin gives birth to yang," so the emptiness or stillness of your mind will cause your vital energies to naturally arise without effort.

All your chi instantly changes when you meditate correctly, but then people usually try to suppress that when it happens because they want complete clarity. But complete clarity is recognizing, seeing, understanding, realizing, knowing you are thought-unclear. The knowing is clear, but the thoughts are scrambled.

If you ever did a good deed and felt warm inside because of your selflessness, that emptiness (selflessness) provoked an immediate change in your chi channels. That's the same thing that happens with meditation **BUT ONLY IF YOU LEARN HOW TO LET GO OF YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR BODY.**

If it isn't happening yet it means you haven't let go, so keep watching and letting go, detaching, dis-identifying from experiential realms of the mind. None of them are you. They just arise upon a picture screen of voidness or emptiness, which is your real nature. When you finally realize that, because your chi channels and chi have become somewhat clear and open, that's a big step in progress in meditation.

So then why all the focus on cessation-contemplation meditation practice?

Because this practice lets you see that thoughts aren't you. Then you can dis-identify from them. You also learn you can dis-identify from sensations and emotions and all sorts of things because they ARISE in the mind, but aren't you. They are just what arises in the mind due to karma and the interconnectedness of phenomena.

Whatever arises is an experience state, and all experiences are impermanent. They are states you come into and go out of because they cannot stay. Only what is Real can stay, and that's the substrate upon which thoughts appear. That's the real you that you learn to access through meditation whereas temporary experiences have no real value.

If you practice meditation and learn to let go of whatever arises in the mind, you'll eventually realize how to realize emptiness. Don't try to make ecstasy the object of your seeking because then your mind will oblige you by creating and giving you the experience you desire. It will be a falsity, a temporal unreal experience that cannot stay.

Religious scriptures use all sorts of words and angles to try to help you realize how to let go of these things and access your true mind or true nature, and when you find the way to do it with your mind through cessation-contemplation practice as an initial guide and instructor, then you keep practicing it and you're on your way.

First you have to understand how to practice meditation correctly, and then you do it, and then you develop proficiency at it.

When you learn how to detach from the thoughts and impulses that normally impel you, then you can even change your life, fate, fortune and destiny which I've detailed in my book, [White Fat Cow: How to Change Your Fate, Fortune and Destiny Through Merit and Meditation](#). I've written lots of books and no doubt will write even more before I die, but this one ... which took over 10 years to write ... is the one I think can benefit everyone and offers a new world impulse. You can find out more at:

<http://www.meditationexpert.com/WhiteFatCow.htm>

When you start watching your thoughts you'll see an undercurrent of habits you never noticed before. If you no longer let these impulsive habits impel you, they won't control you any more and you can change your fortune.

You can check the internet for the story of “Liao Fan” and his lessons to see how this is done, or pick up my book, White Fat Cow, to see how Benjamin Franklin, Confucius, Liao Fan, John Climacus, Frank Bettger, and many others did this.

I may sound like a promoter of the many books I've worked on, but I sincerely believe that even if you don't learn meditation you really should look into this book as its lessons are non-denominational and beneficial for an entire family, especially for children. It not only teaches them to be ethical and virtuous but tells them how to be successful in life, handle problems and transform bad situations into good ones.

Cessation-contemplation practice is probably the best way to help you disidentify from the regular monkey mind, wandering mind that isn't you. The monkey mind of impelling impulses and cravings, thoughts, emotions and desires is just a bundle or net or screen of thoughts that appear in the mind but aren't you -- and yet this bundle can impel you if you don't learn how to detach from it. The real you has wisdom and awareness that can detach from it to change the life and fortune, because the real you is not a bunch thoughts, but to access the real you you must definitely learn meditation.

So cessation-contemplation practice, wherein you learn how to let thoughts go so they die down and are extinguished or "reach extinction" and wherein wisdom knowing is born and shines, is the ultimate basis of self-cultivation practice. It's the basis of self-improvement and self-actualization.

Eventually you'll learn how to link the two principles together but for now, you need to learn the foundational basis of meditation practice where you practice watching the mind so that thoughts calm down. So keep reading these instructions and practice meditation for about 40 minutes a day, straight through, and in time this will happen.

The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step, so take those first few steps and then you've started!

Good luck,

Bill Bodri