
Sources to Ponder

Developing a Meditation Collection

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Meditation practices date back thousands of years to the forest-dwelling rishis of Asia who viewed it as a way to achieve spiritual growth leading to enlightenment. Meditation has today become an increasingly popular practice in mainstream western culture. News media continually churn out stories about the latest scientific results showing the physical, mental, and social benefits of meditating. Celebrities and athletes from the Beatles to David Lynch to LeBron James talk about how meditation has influenced their life and work. Meditation is practiced in corporations and boardrooms and is used in military training programs. Meditation has become commodified and commercialized, with meditation studios springing up in major cities, books about meditation hitting bestseller lists, and Silicon Valley engineers producing meditation apps by the dozens.

With all the attention being paid to meditation, library users will want to know more about what meditation is, the different kinds of practices, and how it can benefit them. There are various traditions and schools of meditation that emphasize concentration, while others emphasize a more open approach known as choiceless awareness. The objects of concentration can vary widely as well as the frequency and length of practice. Some traditions utilize frequent brief meditations of twenty minutes or so and others recommend longer durations. There are traditions of meditation, like Tibetan Buddhism, with rich and colorful pantheons of gods and goddesses and others, like Zen, that are stripped of most religious trappings and can have a more secular feel.

There are thousands of books that have been written about meditation, both popular and scholarly. The works included in this column are a small number of the many titles available. These titles were chosen because they were written by well-regarded authors, researchers, and teachers in the meditation community. Undoubtedly there are other worthy titles that may have been left out, as it is simply not possible to include everything. Some of these titles may no longer be in print but should be available in the used book market for librarians looking to build a collection in this area. There is an important experiential aspect to meditation, and books can be supplemented with recordings available through web resources that offer talks, lectures, and guided meditations by experienced and knowledgeable teachers. These audiovisual resources provide a useful adjunct to books, and they can enhance and accelerate the learning

process for anyone trying to understand meditation and develop a practice.

REFERENCE SOURCES

With the exception of bibliographies and handbooks, there are relatively few reference works that have been written about meditation.

Brown, Kirk Warren, J. David Creswell, and Richard M. Ryan, eds. *Handbook of Mindfulness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Guilford, 2016 (ISBN: 978-1-4625-2593-5).

In the last century, scientists have begun studying meditation practices and subjecting them to the experimental method. Common to all of them is mindfulness. This handbook looks at how scientists have been studying mindfulness in the lab and in the clinic. Research on the neurobiological aspects of meditation, as well as cognitive and emotional benefits, are covered. There are also chapters on using mindfulness to reduce stress and improve positive functioning and its role in the treatment of psychological disorders.

Masuda, Akihiko, and William T. O'Donohue. *Handbook of Zen, Mindfulness, and Behavioral Health*. Switzerland: Springer International, 2017 (ISBN: 978-3-319545-95-0. E-book available through SpringerLink).

Although this is a scholarly work, it includes basic instructions in Zen meditation such as posture and the use of koans and mondo (an exchange between a Zen teacher and disciple). The book looks at psychological aspects of meditation such as desire and attachment, the role of self and personality, quieting the mind, and the role of forgiveness in supporting equanimity and healing. The role of Zen in applied health practices such as psychotherapy is examined, including cognitive behavioral therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

Although there are not many books covering the history of meditation, there are many biographies of meditation adepts and some of their more famous followers.

Engel, Klaus. *Meditation: Vol. 1 History and Present Time; Vol. 2: Empirical Research and Theory*. Peter Lang, 1997 (ISBN: 3-631-31600-3; 3-631-31690-9)

The first volume surveys the development of meditation in eastern and western cultural and religious traditions. It examines key figures in contemporary times from various schools of yoga, Buddhism and Christianity, and highlights where their paths converge and diverge. Volume two

provides an in-depth look at empirical research in meditation with a particular emphasis on physiology and mental states.

Johnson, Willard L. *Riding the Ox Home: A History of Meditation from Shamanism to Science*. Boston: Beacon, 1982 (ISBN: 0-807013056).

In this work, meditation is traced back to its earliest origins in prehistory and shamanic tribal practices. The work is scholarly but accessible and documents the emergence of meditation in civilizations around the world. The author draws on classic works of philosophy, religion, and literature, as well as modern scientific findings, and looks at practical applications and benefits of meditation and its potential to transform the human psyche and spirit.

Mason, Paul. *The Maharishi: The Biography of the Man Who Gave Transcendental Meditation to the World*. Rockport, MA: Element, 1994 (ISBN: 1-85230-571-1).

The author was a follower of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the guru who introduced meditation to the Beatles and became the subject of mass media attention and popular culture. Beginning with his early years in India, the book follows the Maharishi to America and Europe and chronicles his efforts to create a worldwide movement centered around the practice of transcendental meditation. The author attempts to provide a critical assessment of Maharishi that includes both his accomplishments and shortcomings.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. *At Home in the World: Stories and Essential Teaching from a Monk's Life*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 2016 (ISBN: 978-1-941529-42-3).

This is an autobiographical collection of essays that recounts a lifetime of experiences by a Zen monk who was instrumental in introducing mindfulness to America. The book contains many stories and anecdotes told from the perspective of an experienced meditator who approaches life as a kind of meditation. Throughout the book, he uses his experiences to illustrate points about meditation and mindfulness that students of meditation will find valuable and instructive.

Thondup, Tulku. *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet*. Boston: Shambhala, 1999 (ISBN: 1-57062-113-6).

Meditation is a central practice in Buddhism, and reading about the lives of adepts in the Buddhist tradition can teach one a lot about contemplative practice. There are many different meditation concepts and practices within the multiple traditions that comprise Buddhism, and this book focuses mainly on those originating in India and Tibet. This scholarly work may be of more interest to those who have some experience with meditation and want to delve deeper into its history and origins.

THE ALERT COLLECTOR

Williamson, Lola. *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion*. New York: New York University Press, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0-8147-9450-0).

Much of the meditation literature is focused on Buddhism, and this book looks at some of the meditation practices that have emerged from Hinduism. It delves into the inner workings of influential meditation movements in America including Self-Realization Fellowship, Transcendental Meditation, and Siddha Yoga. It describes their meditation practices and places the movements in historical and social context. The author exposes both the positive and negative aspects of the large organizations that develop around popular meditation practices.

DEVELOPING A MEDITATION PRACTICE

There are many works devoted to establishing a meditation practice. Most of these are free of jargon and should be easy to understand.

Bays, Jan Chozen. *Mindfulness on the Go: Simple Meditation Practices You Can Do Anywhere*. Boston: Shambhala, 2014 (ISBN: 978-1-61180-170-5).

This book will help readers to think of mindfulness not as a separate practice apart from the rest of life, but as a continual way of being in the world. The reader is advised to add a new meditation exercise each week. They consist of things like using one's non-dominant hand for activities to enable us to experience life freshly and focus our attention on the present. Eating is another activity that the author encourages readers to try without multitasking.

Chodron, Pema. *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Making Friends with Your Mind*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2013 (ISBN: 978-1-60407-933-3).

Meditation beginners who have basic questions about how to find the time, calming the mind, proper sitting posture and breathing will find them addressed in this book. There is much emphasis on the psychology of meditation, focusing the mind, managing distractions, and how to handle thoughts and emotions. There is also a section on working with the senses and perceptions. The author is adept at expressing complex mental processes with clarity.

Goldstein, Joseph. *Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom*. Boston: Shambhala, 2003 (ISBN: 1590300165).

The author begins the book by explaining central Buddhist concepts like dharma, enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths. The book includes a chapter on how to practice meditation, emphasizing the importance of effort and surrender, acceptance, and coping with feelings related to progress or lack of progress. Things that hinder practice, including judgment and emotions, are addressed. Other chapters touch on ego and selflessness, karma, and how to remain in a meditative state when the formal practice of meditation ends.

Goleman, Daniel. *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience*. New York: Putnam, 1988 (ISBN: 0-87477-833-6).

In this work, the author examines a variety of meditation traditions including not only Buddhism and Hinduism, but Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and esoteric sects. Out of this survey, commonalities are identified and an outline of the process of meditation emerges. The book concludes by emphasizing the essential unity of all meditation paths, the health benefits of meditation, and practical suggestions for how to begin practicing.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hachette, 2014 (ISBN: 978-1401307783).

This book outlines the basics of meditation, common forms of meditation, and how to extend meditation practice informally in day-to-day living activities such as cleaning the house, feeding pets, and parenting. The book also addresses meditation-related topics such as wholeness, interconnectedness, karma, and ahimsa (Sanskrit: "noninjury" or "nonviolence"). The chapters are brief and straightforward and the writing is clear.

Monaghan, Patricia, and Eleanor G. Viereck. *Meditation: The Complete Guide*. Revised Edition. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2011 (ISBN: 978-1-60868-047-4).

This encyclopedic work addresses many common questions that meditators have, including which technique to use, obstacles to meditation, and how to manage problems. The book looks at over forty meditation practices in different traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The practices are covered in more depth than usual and include drumming, bodily positions, singing, painting, and poetry as forms of meditation. The authors also address contemporary practices such as free-form meditation and journaling.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. Boston: Beacon, 1999 (ISBN: 978-0807012390).

This is one of the first books to popularize the practice of mindfulness and bring it to the attention of a wider audience. It makes the practice accessible by showing how to mindfully conduct everyday activities like walking, eating, drinking, and breathing. The book is full of stories and anecdotes from the author's experience that help to illustrate the concepts of Buddhist philosophy and concludes with a series of exercises that anyone can do to deepen their understanding of mindfulness.

Nhat, Hanh, Thich. *Making Space: Creating a Home Meditation Practice*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 2012 (ISBN: 978-1-937006-00-6).

How to create a space for meditation is one of the concerns that those undertaking a meditation practice often

raise. To help to slow down from our busy, hectic lives, the author recommends placing notes at strategic locations throughout the house that will remind us to pause and be mindful. He discusses how to design a meditation space that is simple, peaceful, and conducive to meditation. Instructions for how to perform common meditation practices like Metta (Sanskrit: “lovingkindness”) are included.

Osho. *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*. New York: Saint Martin's, 1999 (ISBN: 978-0312336639).

This book is notable for its unconventional approach to meditation. What sets the book apart is the extensive collection of techniques and guided meditations. There are unusual meditation practices that involve laughing, crying, dancing, and whirling as well as more conventional ones. This work includes meditations focusing on the heart, on light, raising life energy, death, and love. There is also a section on meditation obstacles and answers to questions that practitioners commonly ask.

Ricard, Matthieu. *Why Meditate? Working With Thoughts and Emotions*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2010 (ISBN: 978-1-4019-2663-2).

Many of the basic questions that beginning meditators have, such as finding a teacher, choosing a suitable place to meditate, establishing the right posture, maintaining the appropriate attitude, and the frequency and duration of meditation practice, are addressed. Important issues having to do with finding the motivation to meditate are also covered. The author offers guidance in some of the more common forms of meditation. The book discusses dealing with obstacles such as boredom, thoughts, emotions, and the ego.

Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Boston: Shambhala, 2011 (ISBN: 978-1-59030-850-9).

This short work features brief chapters that cover the basics of meditation practice such as breath and posture. The simplicity of the book is deceptive, as subsequent chapters address complex issues like managing mental distractions, including thoughts and feelings, coping with errors in practice, and maintaining the proper attitude. Deeper philosophical aspects like non-duality, emptiness, and nirvana are discussed. The author emphasizes the practical aspects of meditation and the importance of making it part of one's everyday routine.

MEDITATION AND HEALTH

Meditation has many health benefits and these books document the scientific research conducted to investigate the effects of meditation on mind and body.

Fraser, Andy, ed. *The Healing Power of Meditation: Leading Experts on Buddhism, Psychology, and Medicine Explore the*

Health Benefits of Contemplative Practice. Boston: Shambhala, 2013 (ISBN: 978-1-61180-059-3).

Among the topics covered are meditation as a form of medical treatment, the role of meditation in controlling emotion, how meditation affects the brain, and the neuropsychology of meditation. A separate section looks at the growing importance of mindfulness in psychiatry and medicine. It includes mindfulness to treat depression and in hospice care, as well as in the training of doctors, nurses, and prison guards to improve how they relate to those they serve and manage their work demands.

Goleman, Daniel, and Richard J. Davidson. *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*. New York: Avery, 2017 (ISBN: 9780399184383).

The effects of meditation are not temporary but much more enduring. Numerous scientific studies suggest practitioners can better handle stress and endure pain, reduce reactivity, and recover from trauma. Psychological studies show that meditation makes one more empathetic, compassionate, and charitable, and others indicate meditation improves attention and concentration. Meditation helps in treating fibromyalgia, psoriasis, hypertension, as well as anxiety and depression. Intensive, prolonged meditation turns meditative states of attentiveness, contentment, and compassion into prolonged traits that spill over into everyday life.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Bantam, 2013 (ISBN: 978-0-345-53693-8).

This book is one of earliest to bring attention to the relationship between mindfulness and health. It is based on the author's program, called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, which he created at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The book outlines the basics of meditation and describes how to apply mindfulness in daily life. There is a discussion of the role that thoughts and emotions play in a person's overall health and how to work with stress and pain.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon, and Richard J. Davidson. *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation*. Oakland, CA; New Harbinger Publications, 2013 (ISBN: 978-1-57224-968-4).

The Mind and Life Institute invited the Dalai Lama to participate in a series of conversations with leading scientists in the field of meditation research. Their conversations are contained in this book and focus on how meditation helps to heal the mind and body. The role of meditation in treating stress, depression, cardiovascular disease, is discussed. The dialogues touch on many different subtle and sophisticated aspects of meditation, science, spirituality, and health.

THE ALERT COLLECTOR

Kingsland, James. *Siddhartha's Brain: Unlocking the Ancient Science of Enlightenment*. New York: William Morrow, 2016 (ISBN: 978-0-06-240387-2).

Written by a science and medical writer, this work focuses on the health benefits of meditation and highlights the research of Herbert Benson, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and other well-known researchers who study meditation. He describes their research on the cardiovascular and psychosomatic benefits of meditation, the usefulness of mindfulness in managing stress and pain, and the utility of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in treating depression. Included are a series of guided meditations for practice.

O'Connell, David F., and Deborah L. Bevvino, eds. *Prescribing Health: Transcendental Meditation in Contemporary Medical Care*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015 (ISBN: 978-1-4422-2626-5).

Stress has reached epidemic proportions in contemporary life, and chronic stress affects both physical and mental health. Coping mechanisms can include overeating and substance abuse. The book looks at how transcendental meditation can be useful in the treatment of anxiety, depression, addictive disorders, the health of children and the aged, and its role in preventive health and treating social problems.

Plante, Thomas G. E., ed. *Contemplative Practices in Action: Spirituality, Meditation, and Health*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0-313-38257-4).

This scholarly collection of articles investigates meditative practices from Eastern and Western spiritual traditions and how they influence the well-being of practitioners. The practices explored in this work include mindfulness-based stress reduction, passage meditation, mantram repetition, and centering prayer. The authors show how these practices can be applied to daily living. Scientific studies measuring their effects on health are included. The book looks at these practices in the larger contexts of the spiritual traditions from which they emerged.

Singh Khalsa, Dharma, and Cameron Stauth. *Meditation as Medicine: Activate the Power of Your Natural Healing Force*. New York: Atria, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-7434-0065-7).

The author, who is a physician and yogi, has developed a form of meditation designed to balance the mental and physical energies and harness them as a healing force. This is accomplished through a combination of breath work, posture, finger movements, and mantra, and detailed practices are described for each of them. Medical meditation affects the chakras or energy centers in the body by stimulating the endocrine system and nerve plexuses to raise energy and bolster immunity.

Weiss, Gabriel S. *The Healing Power of Meditation: Your Prescription for Getting Well and Staying Well with Meditation*.

Laguna Beach, CA: Basic Health, 2008 (ISBN: 978-1-59120-246-2).

This book examines the role of meditation in treating cardiovascular disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, gastrointestinal illnesses, infectious diseases and mental illness. Principles of Zen Buddhism and how they can be applied to meditation and healing are explained. This is followed by meditations for managing anger, controlling pain, treating insomnia, and coping with stress. Meditative arts like calligraphy, haiku, and the tea ceremony can heal. A detailed description of the neurobiology of meditation and how it can help in healing is provided.

MEDITATION AND SCIENCE

The emphasis of these works is on the science of how meditation effects mental and physical states, including physiological and neuropsychological processes that underlie and contribute to meditative states.

McMahan, David L., and Erik Braun, eds. *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017 (ISBN: 978-0-19-049580-0).

In recent years, mindfulness meditation has shed its eastern religious trappings and become secularized and is now the subject of numerous scientific studies. This work examines how meditation is currently viewed and conceptualized in a variety of scholarly disciplines. In the process, many of the assumptions of current scientific approaches to the study of meditation are questioned. These include neuroscientific studies of the brain during meditation, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and culturally relative conceptions of self and happiness.

Murphy, Michael, and Steven Donovan. *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation*. Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, 1999 (ISBN: 0-943951-36-4).

This work reviews the scientific literature on the physiological and psychological effects of meditation. Review chapters are followed by an extensive bibliography of scientific meditation studies cited in the review chapters. Topics covered by the chapters include the cardiovascular system, the cortical system, blood chemistry, and metabolic and respiratory systems. The behavioral effects addressed are perception and cognition, including a chapter on subjective accounts on topics like bliss, hallucinations, dreams, synesthesia, and extrasensory experiences.

Wallace, B. Alan. *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014 (ISBN: 978-0-231-14731-6).

The author documents the scientific evidence that suggests that meditation practices can significantly affect the

mind and behavior in positive ways. Each practice is followed by a historical survey of how the practice has been used in both eastern and western traditions. This work is notable for its ability to balance practice with theory, and to give the reader a sense of the transformative potential of meditation, its historical depth and scope, and its universality in human experience.

Wright, Robert. *Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017 (ISBN: 978-1-4391-9545-1).

Using evolutionary psychology as a framework, the author examines the scientific aspects of meditation. Primitive fight-or-flight emotions like anger and fear can be better managed using meditation practices like mindfulness. Subtler emotions can similarly be observed rather than identifying with them. Meditation may not necessarily lead to enlightenment, but it can make one more enlightened incrementally, resulting in moments of clarity and insight that make the daily effort worthwhile.

Young, Shinzen. *The Science of Enlightenment: How Meditation Works*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2016 (ISBN: 9781591794608).

The author possesses a deep understanding of the psychological processes involved in entering and maintaining states of meditation. He provides interesting techniques and insights for advancing one's meditation practice, including how to break down mental and physical sensations experienced while meditating to make them more manageable. Phases or levels of practice that progress from relaxation and clarity to deeper insight are outlined. Those looking for a structured way to approach meditation practice will find this book offers a useful blueprint.

WEB RESOURCES

Many interesting resources on the subject of meditation can be found online and can be useful for those who want to experience meditation firsthand in the form of guided

meditations, along with lectures and videos related to meditation and meditation practice.

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (<http://marc.ucla.edu/>)

This website offers information about classes, events, and research on mindfulness, and free guided meditations and weekly podcasts. They include basic meditations on the breath, sound, and bodily awareness.

Mind and Life Institute (<https://www.mindandlife.org/>)

The Mind and Life Institute is a useful resource for finding information about the science of meditation and contemplative practices. There are videos of conversations between scholars, scientists, and meditation teachers, information about books and videos, and an archive of full-text papers on meditation and science.

Omega Institute for Holistic Studies YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheOmegaInstitute>)

The Omega Institute's YouTube Channel includes many videos related to meditation. It encompasses a wide variety of meditation traditions and practices. Many of the practitioners featured are leading names in the field.

Spirit Rock Meditation Center (<https://www.spiritrock.org/>)

Spirit Rock offers classes, courses, and workshops on meditation. Their website features free videos on meditation by well-known teachers. There is also a larger collection of audio recordings on meditation and personal growth. The website includes a collection of full-text articles and a series of interviews with meditation teachers.

Insight Meditation Society (<https://www.dharma.org/>)

The Insight Meditation Society (IMS) has a website that offers audio recordings of teacher talks on meditation and Buddhist philosophy. It provides guided meditations and a reading list of works by IMS instructors. There is also a glossary of terms and a list of outside resources that features podcasts, meditation communities, and retreats.