


Practical Instructions

 IF THE THERAPIST, after taking into consideration his/her own therapeutic orientation and belief system, the client's value system, the presenting concern and the relevant empirical literature, decides that meditation would be a useful therapeutic strategy to teach the client, what alternatives are available?

For those therapists who do not want personally to teach their clients a meditation technique, there are two alternatives: tapes or a specific teaching organization. I often recommend individuals to organizations such as the Transcendental Meditation group. This has the advantage of group support, instructors who can check to ensure that meditation is going properly, frees up more time in therapy sessions, and is therefore useful for beginning instruction. However, a caution must be added — any organization has a tendency toward evangelism and promoting a particular type of meditation as the *one* right path. In a sense, we need to separate the Madison Avenue sales pitch from the essence of the technique being used.


As far as taped instructions are concerned, a number are available and several are listed at the end of this chapter. Some therapists may wish personally to teach the client meditation and then use the tape to facilitate the practice as described in Chapter Two. For the therapist who wishes to learn meditation, there are

similar options: taped or written instructions or a specific program/workshop from a "meditation" teacher or organization.

Below is a specific instruction in the practice of Zen Breath Meditation, the technique used in the case studies in Chapters Two and Three. In addition, instruction in a meditation technique for more advanced practitioners is offered (as used in Chapter Three), as well as a way in which formal meditation may be practically combined with behavioral self-management skills (as used in Chapter Two).

The instructions are in three parts: 1) the introduction of the technique to the client; 2) the actual training in and practice of the technique; and 3) generalization of the new response. This model is similar in conceptualization to the one presented by Meichenbaum (1976) on cognitive factors in biofeedback therapy.

4.1 Introductory Talk to Client

 **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this *introductory* talk is to give clients a clear, simple overview of what meditation is, and what are some of the results they might expect. No specific journal articles are cited, and the *introductory* talk is *not* delivered in the structured form *presented here*, although most of the points discussed below are covered in some manner.

Content: In the past fifteen years, a new conception of the individual has begun to emerge within the Western scientific community. This conception has involved a new view of the nervous system, and a new view of the individual's potential for self-regulation. Because of reports from India and the Orient detailing extraordinary feats of bodily control and altered states of consciousness by Zen and Yoga masters, Western science has begun to explore Eastern religions to determine whether some of their techniques, such as meditation and yoga, might have medical and therapeutic value in a Western setting.

Zazen (Zen Meditation) The word *Za* means "sitting" and the word *Zen* comes from the sanskrit word *dhyāna* meaning meditation. This "sitting meditation" is not a passive technique, but rather an active exercise which requires hard work. Its goal is not a contemplative life withdrawn from the cares of the world, but a state of mind which can give renewed strength and calmness to deal with daily events. For example, the samurai

warriors of Japan meditated to gain strength for battle. The Japanese martial arts of fencing, jujitsu, and aikido require the centeredness which meditation can give.

Studies have shown that Zen monks during meditation are significantly more sensitive than ordinary subjects to sounds around them. At the same time, the monks are able to produce both alpha and theta waves (measured by EEG). These waves are thought to be indicative of states of calmness and restfulness. Thus, the monks have attained simultaneously a state of intense awareness of their environment and of deep rest and quiet.

It seems important at this point to clarify some possible misconceptions about meditation. The effects of meditation have been compared to the effects of psychedelic drugs. It is true that often people have images, thoughts, and sometimes even hallucinations while meditating. These images, however, are not the goal of meditation. Second, meditation is nothing magical. It takes patience and practice. You have to work at it; and, all life's problems will not be solved just by meditating.

On the other hand, meditation is potentially a very powerful tool, and it is equally important to suggest what you might expect from meditation if you practice it. Studies have shown that Zen meditation can have an effect within the first two to four weeks and generally does have an effect within four to ten weeks. Some of these effects can be measured physiologically—e.g., slower brain waves, slower breathing, slower heart rate. These all contribute to a state of relaxation and inner calm. Meditation may help you become more aware, both of what is going on outside you and what is happening within you—your thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears. Thus, although meditation will not solve all your problems, it can give you the calmness, awareness, and self-control to actively work on solving those problems.

CLINICAL NOTE:

CULTIC VERSUS NON-CULTIC MEDITATION


It should be clear that these instructions are meant for beginning meditators. A question which is often asked is, "Is meditation a religion? Is the technique you are going to teach me a type of prayer?" This is an interesting question. Legal opinions (e.g., Malnak vs. Yogi, New Jersey, 1977), states that Transcen-

dental Meditation is based on religious doctrine and as such cannot be taught in schools.

For an individual who is interested only in the clinical self-regulation aspect of meditation (Chapter Two) or who has some concern that meditation may interfere with his or her religious beliefs, I emphasize the non-cultic aspect of meditation. I discuss the scientific literature, the actual behaviors involved (e.g., attentional focusing, calm breathing) and point out that we can utilize the technique separate from its cultural context.

For an individual who is interested in the religious or spiritual aspect of the technique (e.g., Chapter Three) this issue becomes less important and may even be an enhancement.

4.2 Formal Zen Meditation Instructions:*

 1. CHOOSING A SETTING: It is best to pick a quiet room, where there will be few distractions. Let the other members of your household know that you would like a few moments to yourself, and ask them to please pick up the phone for you. You may also want to meditate outside, in a place in nature which is special to you. The natural setting can provide a way to remove you from the distractions of daily routine.

2. *Choosing a Position:* Find a comfortable position—probably in a chair, or on a pillow on the floor. Loosen your clothing. Unbuckle your belt if you'd like, take your shoes off, and let yourself relax. It is best not to lie down because in meditation you do not want to go to sleep; you want to be relaxed but alert. Settle in for a second. Let go. Feel the floor or the chair holding you up. Put your legs in a comfortable position. If you are sitting on a chair, let them dangle uncrossed over the sides of the chair. If you are sitting on the floor, you may want to sit cross-legged. Put your hands in your lap so they too feel comfortable. Your back should be straight, but not tightly erect. The important thing is to find a posture that is comfortable for you. Although the research suggests that the full or half-lotus

*Adapted from Maupin, 1965; Weinpahl, 1964; Lesh, 1970; and Kapleau, 1967.

position* is the posture with the least muscle tension for experienced Zen masters, it is usually not the most comfortable for those in the West who are beginning to practice meditation.

Further, the studies of Akishige and his colleagues have suggested that the attitude of the meditator is more important than the actual physical posture or the environment. Alpha brain waves occurred in subjects who had the "right" attitude, even if they were not in the lotus position. Conversely, those who were in the lotus position, but without the right attitude, did not evidence alpha brain waves.

3. *The Process of Meditation: Attaining the Right Attitude.* Take a deep breath. Feel yourself controlling your breathing. In meditation, *you do not want to control your breathing*; you want to let it go—very naturally, just as you have been breathing all day. The only difference between the way you have always breathed and the way you are breathing now is that now you are focusing on your breathing. Yet, at the same time, you continue to breathe naturally. Breathe through your nose, letting the air come in by extending your diaphragm. Do not draw it in, do not try to control it, rather allow it to come to you—slowly—letting your diaphragm expand naturally, letting the breath in as much as you need. Then, allow the breath to go out slowly, letting all the air out of your lungs. As you exhale slowly, count one. Now inhale again, just letting the air come to you. Then exhale and count two. Continue focusing on your breathing, letting the air come in, letting the air go out. Take a few minutes to focus on the breathing, letting the air come naturally, exhaling, and as you exhale, count from one to ten. Do this up to ten, and then begin at one again. Do not pay attention to anything but your breathing. If your attention begins to wander, or thoughts arise, just watch the thoughts, let go of them, and return to observing your breathing. If you get lost and lose count of breaths, just

*Two successive approximations to the full lotus position are the half and the quarter lotus. In the half lotus, the left foot is placed over the right thigh and the right foot is placed under the left thigh, with both knees still touching the mat. In the quarter lotus, the left foot rests of the calf of the right leg, and again both knees are supposed to rest on the mat (After Kapleau, 1967).

return to your breathing and the count of one again.* If you begin to feel anxious, watch this anxiousness. If you feel pleasant, watch this feeling also, while continuing to focus on your breathing. Eventually you will be able to be quiet in both mind and body. There is no goal in meditation, there is nothing you have to do except be in the moment, and let yourself relax.

4. *The End of Meditation Sessions:* As you feel comfortable doing so, gradually begin to open your eyes. Do not rush to do anything, just sit quietly for a bit and notice what you are feeling.

You may want to stop and practice a brief ten or fifteen minute meditation before reading any further. Following is a checklist that may be helpful.

CHECKLIST FOR MEDITATION

1. Find a quiet setting with few distractions.
2. Sit comfortably, with your back erect, but not taut, hands in your lap, legs in a comfortable position and with your eyes closed.
3. Breathe through your nose, letting the air come to you; do not draw it in; exhale slowly and completely, and as you exhale, count one; inhale; exhale slowly to the count of two—up to ten, then start at one again.
4. Keep your mind on the breath and numbers, and do not count absentmindedly or mechanically.
5. If your mind wanders, let thoughts rise and vanish. Do not become involved with them; merely watch them. Relax, let go, and continue to focus on your breathing.
6. At the end, gradually and gently open your eyes, and sit quietly for a few moments.

After you have practiced a brief meditation, notice what

*A device borrowed from behavioral self-observation strategies, helpful in focusing the individual's attention on the task of breathing, is the wrist counter. The individual is told to hold the wrist counter in his palm and is instructed as follows, "Every time you find yourself caught up in some thought or other, punch the wrist counter. Then, continue to relax, let go, and focus on your breathing." In this way the wrist counter becomes a cue for returning to the task of breathing (cf. Van Nuys, 1971). The wrist counter may also help facilitate generalization in learning from formal to informal meditation.

you are feeling. Notice what you thought about, the images you had. There is a space below in which you may want to record your feelings and thoughts. Just quickly jot down a few words or phrases to describe your reactions to your first meditation experience.

At first it may be best to practice meditation for not more than forty minutes a day. Twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening is usually suggested. If you are interested in practicing meditation, it might be worthwhile to take a minute or two to write down where (i.e. home, office, specific site in nature, etc.) and when would be a good place and time to do so.

First Meditation

Where _____ When: from _____ to _____

Second Meditation

Where _____ When: from _____ to _____

It may seem somewhat arbitrary and formal to put down precise times and places to practice obtaining a state of awareness that is not time-oriented. However, my personal experiences, as well as those of clients and students to whom I have taught meditation, suggest that this is important for two reasons. First, it helps us arrange our schedule, thereby preparing us ahead of time for the practice. Second, we often place doing something nice for ourselves, such as meditation, low on our priority list. Therefore, if we are not careful, it may become the first thing to be omitted in our busy schedules. Usually schedules that are

filled with pressing external demands do not provide the time or the reinforcement for our internal demands. This planning of time for ourselves suggests the interrelationship between the two modes of awareness: precise chronological time is used to structure experiences that can help us attain a non-time-oriented altered state.

CLINICAL NOTE

Generally, when teaching this strategy, I emphasize and practice two instructions in detail in the office: 1) abdominal (diaphragmatic) breathing; 2) just letting air come in (rather than forcing it in). Research does suggest that abdominal (as opposed to chest or thoracic) breathing is most highly correlated with a relaxed state (Timmons, et al., 1972), and yet is often difficult for beginning meditators, as is the concept and practice of both being aware of breathing and "letting air flow in."

4.3 Generalization

OVER THE YEARS I have found it helpful to provide a gradual transition from the formal meditation practice back into "daily" life. An effective strategy for this is to have the client engage in a few moments of walking meditation. In a Zen monastery, this involves rising after meditation, and walking in a slow, methodical manner around the sand garden. I instruct clients, after they have formally meditated, to rise, and, keeping the "centeredness" of the meditation practice, to walk slowly around the room. Reports of clients and my own personal experience suggest this is a helpful strategy. It provides a way to generalize the quietness of formal meditation into movement and activity. In the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is to see action in inaction (formal meditation) and inaction in action (walking meditation). Another strategy for enhancing generalizability, "contingent informal meditation," is described later in this chapter.

4.4 Adherence

I REEMPHASIZE often to the clients that the effects of meditation depend on practice. If the clients seem to be having difficulty continuing the practice of meditation, I generally would want to recheck the following:

- 1) Have I worked with them in the office to plan when and visualize where they are going to practice.
- 2) Do they understand the technique.
- 3) If 1 & 2 have been accomplished, I review with them their (our) reasons for learning the technique. Are they still motivated? I stay with this issue until the client says s/he is willing to recommit to the practice. If not, I explore in the therapeutic context the possible resistance to change and/or to the technique itself. As noted in Chapter Two, if clients are not willing to learn the technique, I do not feel any need to "thrust" it upon them.
- 4) If the clients are willing to learn and practice the technique, I have them monitor what they say to themselves when they do not practice. This provides us with a list of "excuses" which can then become part of our therapy process. We can either therapeutically work through the excuses and facilitate continued adherence; or, as may happen, the client may decide that the effort required to change is more difficult than learning to accept the clinical concern they are having.

4.5 More Advanced Formal Meditation Techniques

I GENERALLY BEGIN by having clients focus on breathing and counting breaths, as described, one to ten. When appropriate, and "appropriate" at this point in our knowledge is a function of client interest, and therapist intuition, I instruct the client to just count one. This is usually a more difficult technique for individuals educated in the West because the goal of "reaching ten" is removed. However, it can be more effective in helping an individual center more in the "here and now." Eventually, if the client is quite committed, I teach the Soto Zen's technique of Shikan-taza, or "just sitting," a mindfulness technique where neither breaths nor counting are focused upon.

Each of these techniques represents a successive approximation to a non-goal-oriented living in the moment.

INFORMAL MEDITATION PLUS
BEHAVIOR SELF-CONTROL STRATEGIES:
"CONTINGENT" INFORMAL MEDITATION*

Introduction to Clients: We have been talking about formal Zen meditation, which may be practiced twice a day at specific times. Meditation can also be useful at other times during the day, especially at times of stress. We will work now on ways of understanding what events make us tense during the day, and then on ways to relax once we become aware that we are anxious.

Awareness: List below current problems, difficulties, or concerns which you are having or have had that cause you to become tense and anxious:

(a) _____

*Contingent informal meditation involves training in behavioral self-observation and functional analysis (cf. Kazdin, 1974) which provides as an initial part of the procedure. Then the procedure combines behavioral self-control strategies such as relaxation (Jacobson, 1929), thought stopping (Wolpe, 1969), covert self-modeling (Cautela, 1971), and covert self-instruction (Meichenbaum & Cameron, 1974) with the practice of informal meditation (Weinpahl, 1964; Rahula, 1959). This procedure has been called "contingent informal meditation" because its performance is made contingent upon certain antecedent cues like tension, anger or stress. This process of anxiety management has been conceptualized within a social learning framework as follows (Shapiro, 1978; modified from Homme, 1965, Mahoney, 1971):

1. Target behavior (TB) stimulus occurs which causes tension, such as an argument or an inability to control the external environment. Cues are either external and/or internal.
2. Awareness: Discrimination plus labeling of target behavior as antecedent to maladaptive behavior chain. Accurate functional analysis of environment facilitated by formal meditation.
3. Kwat! aversive imagery, verbal statement or physical action to interrupt maladaptive response, for example, covert self-statement "No! Stop!"; physical action, such as clenching jaws and fist.
4. Contingent informal breath meditation which functions as a competing response incompatible with tension.

(b) _____

(c) _____

Focus on situation (a) now, and see if you can make it as specific as possible. Who is present; where are you; what kinds of things are you doing, saying, and thinking? Now close your eyes and imagine yourself in that situation, and allow yourself to experience the tension that you normally feel. Observe your tension. It is all right to let yourself feel anxious. You are in a safe place here, and the tense scene is not actually happening. Continue to observe your tension, noting where in your body you feel tense: is your heart beating faster; is your breathing more rapid; how does your stomach feel? What kinds of images do you have in your head? What sort of things are you saying to yourself? Are you saying things such as: "I am helpless; I am not competent to handle this situation?" Let yourself go and just experience all that is happening to you.

Interruption of Sequence and Competing Response: Once you have observed these thoughts and actions, say to yourself "Stop!" and clench your fist and your jaw.* Then relax your fingers and your jaw and imagine yourself beginning informal breath meditation: you are closing your eyes and beginning to focus on your breathing. Now, actually take two deep breaths through your nose, and as you exhale let your "center" sink into your stomach.

- Say to yourself:
- 1) Your name: "I am _____."
 - 2) "I am breath," (and take another deep breath).
 - 3) "I am calm and relaxed and am in control," (and take two more deep breaths, letting your "center" sink to your stomach as you exhale).

*In effect, this "Stop!" is an attempt to interrupt the maladaptive behavioral sequence long enough to begin the competing response of informal meditation. In behavioral terms this "Stop!" is referred to as the technique of thought stopping (Wolpe, 1969). In Zen, it can be conceptualized in terms of a symbolic kwat! applied by the individual to him/herself (Shapiro, 1978b).

Now imagine yourself becoming more and more relaxed. Image yourself meditating, feeling calm, and in control. At the count of ten you may open your eyes, and you will feel calm, relaxed, and wide awake.

A final note: Breathing is the most simple and basic action we do. If we did not breathe, we would not be alive. If we were not breathing, we would not be able to get angry or tense or upset. When you get anxious, remember that you are "just breath" and return to that simple behavior.

IN VIVO: AWARENESS PLUS PRACTICE:

In vivo awareness: Before actually teaching the skills of formal and contingent informal meditation, normally one or two weeks are spent in self-observation training. Clients are given a wrist counter (or a similar type of counting device) and asked to monitor the frequency of anxious feelings. They are also given a self-observation form, varying from an unstructured journal to a more structured data collection sheet. They are asked to note on this form the following: a) antecedents to tension: what was happening right before; who was present; where were you? b) behavior of tension: where did you feel tense; what did you say to yourself during the time you were tense; do you get tense in the same way in every situation? and c) consequences of tension: what did you do to relieve the tension; how did you act differently as a result of the anxious feelings? This self-observation usually provides helpful information in making up the list of anxiety-related situations during the awareness component of contingent informal meditation training.

In vivo practice. Clients are normally instructed to practice formal meditation for fifteen to twenty minutes, two times a day. They are instructed to practice contingent informal meditation skills throughout the day whenever they become aware that they are feeling tense, anxious, or stressed.

CLINICAL NOTE: ON EVALUATION

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, therapists should closely monitor the client's practice, including frequency, length, and nature of experience. If the client experiences troublesome

feelings during meditation, these should be discussed in the therapy sessions. If the client has trouble meditating, this can be discussed in terms of the issues mentioned under adherence. Similarly, if in the therapist's opinion the client seems to be meditating too much, this too should be discussed in the therapeutic context. Further, as with any clinical intervention, close evaluation of treatment outcome effects should be evaluated in order to determine whether the technique is beneficial to the client.

FOR MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS:

Books:

Benson, H. *The relaxation response*. New York: William Morrow, 1975. A useful, secular technique for those interested in meditation as a self-regulation strategy.

LeShan, L. *How to meditate*. New York: Bantam Books, 1975.

Shapiro, D.H. *Precision nirvana*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978b. Also includes instructions for meditation.

Tapes:

Goleman, D. *Meditation instructions*. New York: *Psychology Today, Consumer Service Division*, 1976. Provides a useful set of instructions.

Shapiro, D.H. *Instructions for meditation and behavioral self-management strategies*. In C. Franks (ed.) *Behavior therapy tape series*, New York: BMA, 1977. Provides instructions in meditation and behavioral self-management strategies.