

A Brief Guide to
Meditation
by Swami Kriyananda

Excerpts from
Awaken to Superconsciousness

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Excerpts from *Awaken to Superconsciousness*

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by Swami Kriyananda

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What Is Meditation?

I began meditating nearly fifty years ago, in 1948. Since then I haven't, to the best of my recollection, missed a single day of practice. No stern-minded self-discipline was needed to keep me regular. Meditation is simply the most meaningful activity in my life – indeed, the most meaningful activity I can imagine. I seriously wonder how people live without it. Meditation gives meaning to everything one does. As India's best known scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, states, "To the peaceless person, how is happiness possible?" Inner peace is like lubricating oil: It enables the machinery of our lives to function smoothly. Without mental peace, our emotions, and the various demands placed upon us in our lives, grind together and create inner stress, leading eventually to some kind of physical or nervous breakdown.

Psychometric studies have shown that meditation produces a healthy ego, that it expands a person's world view and enables people to cope better with the stresses of life. Meditators, in addition, have shown significant gains in overcoming depression, neurotic behavior, and feelings of social inadequacy.

What, then, is meditation? Here is a good definition: Meditation is listening. It is listening not only with the ear, but with the soul—not only to sound, but to the silent language of inspiration.

It was from a great master of yoga, Paramhansa Yogananda, that I learned the art and science of meditation. I read his *Autobiography of a Yogi* in 1948, and was so moved by it that I took the next bus from New York City to Los Angeles, where he had his headquarters. The day I met him, he accepted me as a disciple, and I lived with him as a monk for the remaining three and a half years of his life. I have been his disciple ever since.

The path of yoga that he taught was not that of the physical postures of hatha yoga, but the ancient meditative path of raja yoga. Of raja yoga, the highest technique, mentioned in several places in his autobiography, is kriya yoga. This present volume is based on the ancient raja yoga traditions and on his teachings. It serves as a preparation also for kriya yoga initiation. My own spiritual name, by which I am known in many spiritual circles, is Kriyananda, meaning "divine bliss through kriya yoga."

The teachings of raja yoga are the best guide to meditation that I know. They are completely non-sectarian, and can be practiced with equal effectiveness by anyone regardless of that person's religious affiliation or lack of affiliation. The goal of these teachings is superconscious realization: the realization of who and what you are in your highest, spiritual reality. It is, as you can see, a very personal goal for each seeker. I have therefore tried to explain it in a spirit of humble respect for your own deepest spiritual needs.

Meditation is the best way to speed up the process of spiritual evolution, regardless of the stage a person has reached on the long staircase to enlightenment. Even those on the "first flight" can benefit from meditation, though the more likely time for taking up meditative practices is on the "third flight," that of ego-expansiveness. The Bhagavad Gita states, "By steadfast meditation on Me, even the worst of sinners speedily comes to Me."

Meditation is, as I have said, a process of ever deeper relaxation. We usually think of relaxation as a sinking downward into passivity and sleep. There is, however, a higher kind of relaxation, which involves a response to the call of the soul. The more consciously we respond to that call, by meditating and offering up our hearts' devotion, the more we find ourselves relaxing, not downward into subconsciousness, but upward into superconsciousness, drawn there by the "gravitational" pull of divine grace.

Asana: Right Posture

The asana that we describe here is a posture in meditation that will prepare the mind for meditative listening. Even in normal concentration, physical stillness is necessary. When a person shoots a rifle, he must hold his hands and his body still. If a shot is particularly difficult, he must even hold his breath. A photographer, when “shooting” a photograph at a slow exposure, must hold himself – his hands, his body, even his breath—completely still. Similarly, whenever we need to listen carefully, especially if the person we’re listening to is speaking very softly or at a distance, we naturally hold our bodies very still, and breathe as little and as quietly as possible.

For meditation, the first requirement is to keep the body motionless – even, as much as possible, to still the breath. How to still the body:

Keep it relaxed. To quiet the body forcibly is to focus the mind on it, instead of on superconsciousness. What we must do is transcend body-consciousness, that our listening become a process of total absorption.

Keep the spine straight and erect. This position may seem counterproductive for relaxation, but the relaxation required in meditation is a relaxation upward, toward superconsciousness, not downward, toward subconsciousness. It permits the energy to flow freely toward the brain and induces a positive attitude, without which it is easy, in the meditative peace, to sink into subconsciousness.

Paramhansa Yogananda recommended an alternative position to the traditional asanas (siddhasana—the perfect pose, and padmasana—the lotus pose) in which Westerners, particularly, can relax more easily:

- 1) Sit on a straight-backed, armless chair (you may prefer one with a padded seat), at a height convenient for placing your feet flat on the floor.
- 2) On the chair, extending onto the floor in front of it and up over the back of the chair, place a woolen blanket. The purpose of the blanket is to insulate your body from certain downward-pulling currents in the earth that are apart from the pull of gravity. If you’d like even better insulation, cover the blanket with a silk cloth.
- 3) Sit away from the back of the chair. Keep your spine straight, your elbows and shoulders back (drawing the shoulder blades slightly together), and your chin drawn slightly in, parallel to the floor.
- 4) Place your hands palms upward on the thighs at the junction of the abdomen.

To relax the body, bear in mind that it may hold many knots of tension of which you are not consciously aware. The way to release those lingering tensions is to increase the tension first, deliberately:

- 1) Inhale. Tense the entire body until it gently vibrates. Then throw the breath out forcibly and relax. Practice this exercise two or three times. Then concentrate deeply on the sense of peace and freedom that permeates your body.
- 2) Next, for even deeper relaxation, inhale slowly counting mentally to twelve; hold the breath counting to twelve. Exhale again, counting to twelve. Practice this exercise six to twelve times. This practice can also help us to achieve release from mental and emotional pain. The stress that accompanies such pain usually produces physical tension. By relaxing the body, as outlined above, then extending the thought of physical relaxation to the release of tension in the mind and in the emotions, we can achieve mental and emotional tranquility with the release of tension in the body.

Whenever you feel anxious or fearful about anything, or distressed over the way someone has treated you, or upset for any reason, inhale and tense the body. Bring your emotions to a focus in the body with that act of tension.

Hold the tension briefly, vibrating your emotions along with the body. Throw the breath out, and, keeping the breath exhaled as long as you can do so comfortably, enjoy the feeling of inner peace. Remain for a time without thought.

When the breath returns, or when thoughts once again bestir themselves in your mind, fill your brain with some happy memory that will provide an antidote to your emotions. Concentrate for several minutes on the happiness of that memory.

Throughout this process, look upward, and mentally offer yourself, like a kite, into the winds of inner freedom. Let them sweep you into the skies of superconsciousness.



Where to Concentrate

Superconsciousness has its bodily center in the frontal lobe of the brain, at the point between the eyebrows. The conscious state operates from the middle part of the brain; the subconscious, from the lower brain. Thus, there is a kind of linear progression of awareness from subconsciousness toward superconsciousness.

To concentrate at the point between the eyebrows, look upward – not crossing your eyes, but converging them slightly as though you were gazing at your thumbnail outstretched above you. The important thing is that your attention, not your eyes, be focused on that point in the forehead. Don't try forcibly to bring your eyes to a focus, but gaze mentally at that point, and let the Spiritual Eye draw you into itself.

One problem people face is not knowing from what position, mentally, to approach that spiritual center. Lahiri Mahasaya, my guru's spiritual grandfather (his guru's guru), said to concentrate the attention first in the region of the medulla oblongata, and from that point to gaze toward the Spiritual Eye.



When to Meditate

The best times of the day for meditation are six a.m. (sunrise), noon (when the sun is at zenith), six p.m. (sunset), and midnight (when the sun is at its nadir). The best times in the year to meditate, from this perspective, are at the equinoxes (March 21 and September 21, approximately) and the solstices (June 21 and December 21, approximately). You should also consider your own convenience, however. Modern life is not always easily adapted to Nature's broader rhythms.

It is good to meditate, however briefly, on first awaking in the morning, or at least to say a short prayer at that time. The subconscious mind is more open to suggestion during that brief span of time when we are

rising up the shaft of consciousness to wakefulness. The same is true, in reverse, as we fall asleep at night, as the mind slips down again into subconsciousness. On waking, the subconscious stands ready to resume its task of influencing the conscious mind in its decisions. That is why we describe someone who seems grumpy by saying “He must have got up on the wrong side of bed this morning.” At the moment of waking, a strong affirmation of will can completely change the direction of subconscious influence on the mind.

It is best to meditate on an empty stomach, or at least an hour or two after a heavy meal. It will be easier to direct the energy upward if it is not being kept busy digesting food.

Meditate, as much as possible, at the same hours daily. Your subconscious will cooperate better with your efforts to achieve calmness in meditation, once it accepts the habit of putting aside distractions at those hours.

And remember, be joyful in meditation. Be peaceful. Bless all the world with your love. And, even walking down a city street, secretly send divine love and blessings to everyone you pass.



Meditation Exercise

Expansion of Light

Sit upright.
Sit very still.
Feel that, surrounding your body, is an infinity of dark space.
Listen intently:
Listen to the whispering silence!

Out of silence was sound born. Out of darkness the light came.
Of that light, suns and galaxies drew their substance.
Light, not form, is the truth that infuses the universe.

Surround your body now with a halo of blue light—
Soft, soothing—a luminous peace.
Light enters you;
It pierces the pores of your skin;
Space lies outside you no longer: It has made you its own.

It reaches deep into your muscles, your bones.
The sense of heaviness has been lifted from you.
You are made of pure light.

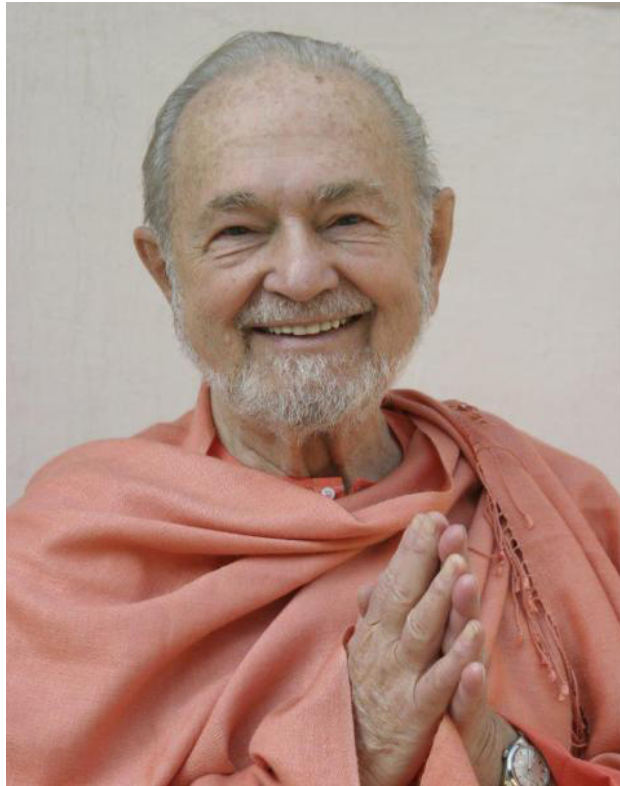
Like a boundless sphere, now, the light has started to grow.
Shining freedom – claim it your own!

Light and joy thrill the air of the room.
The people, the objects nearby –
All these, in the peacefulness of that blue light and joy, are one with you.
See: Light is embracing the house in which you live.
It reaches out to your neighborhood—
To your township.
Like an expanding sail, ever outward
The light swells.
It embraces your country—
Your continent—
The world!
The whole world is basking
In the peaceful radiance of your joy.

Softly, now—
Release your light from the boundaries of this world.
Behold, light rays stream out
To the limits of the solar system—
To distant stars—
To our galactic fringe.
At last, countless galaxies in all space,
Their stars, tiny like the lights of a far-off city,
Glimmer serenely in the vastness of your being.

God's light and you are one!
God's joy and you are one!
O ray of the Infinite! You are not only this little body:
You are more—much more.
Boundless! Eternal!
All the atoms of creation gather,
Like thirsty children,
to drink from the waters,
To play in the fountain spray
Of your inexhaustible peace!

About the Author

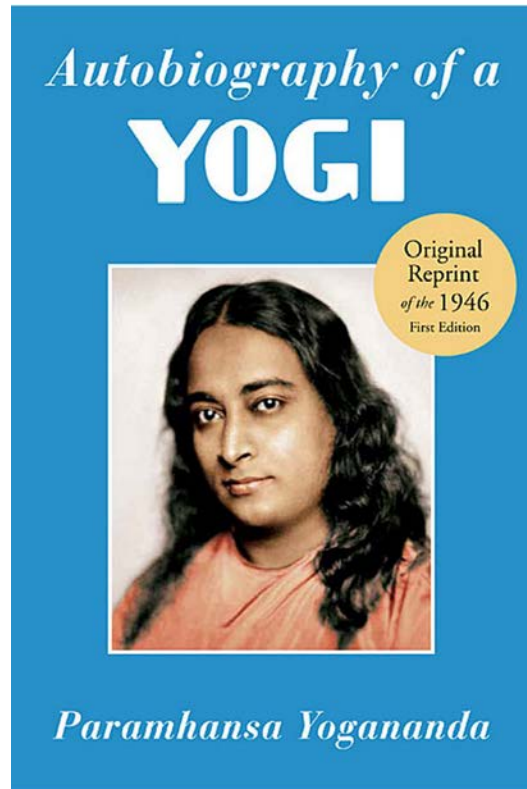


Swami Kriyananda

Swami Kriyananda is a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, trained by the great Indian master to spread the life-transforming teachings of Kriya Yoga around the globe. He is widely considered one of the world's foremost experts on meditation, yoga, and spiritual practice, having authored nearly 150 books on these subjects.

Kriyananda is the founder of Ananda Sangha, a worldwide organization committed to the dissemination of Yogananda's teachings. In 1968 he founded Ananda World Brotherhood Village, the first spiritual cooperative community based on Yogananda's vision of "world brotherhood colonies." Today Ananda includes ten spiritual communities in the U.S., Europe, and India, and over 140 meditation groups worldwide.

Further Exploration



Autobiography of a Yogi *by Paramhansa Yogananda*

Autobiography of a Yogi is one of the best-selling Eastern philosophy titles of all time, with millions of copies sold, named one of the best and most influential books of the twentieth century. This highly prized reprinting of the original 1946 edition is the only one available free from textual changes made after Yogananda's death. Yogananda was the first yoga master of India whose mission was to live and teach in the West.

In this updated edition are bonus materials, including a last chapter that Yogananda wrote in 1951, without posthumous changes. This new edition also includes the eulogy that Yogananda wrote for Gandhi, and a new foreword and afterword by Swami Kriyananda, one of Yogananda's close, direct disciples. Also available in unabridged audiobook (MP3) format, read by Swami Kriyananda.