

SECULAR MEDITATION VERSUS THE BIBLE'S TRUTH

**By Bill Sheppard, DBS Advisory Council Member
Given at the 36th Annual DBS Conference
July, 2014, at Bible Baptist Church, Marietta, GA**

Recently, a visitor in my church told me that she heard things about yoga and meditation that aroused her curiosity. She asked the pastor in her home church if he knew anything about it and if so, what could he tell her. All her pastor could say was that it seems like a good way to relax and calm stress. He couldn't tell her anything about what she was really curious about. Are there any spiritual benefits to meditating? She would keep asking until she got some answers.

There's a lot of talk about this going around in pop-psychology circles, fitness centers, and churches of all kinds these days. Direct and personal experience sound promising, so we naturally feel very hopeful. Could it be that there is a way we can find a deeper and more meaningful spiritual understanding than we've previously suspected? Is it possible that simple, straightforward efforts will produce what we want? The supposed benefits of Eastern meditation, whether of Indian yoga, Buddhism, or sufi, range from stress-relief to spiritual "enlightenment."

The Eastern forms of meditation have been a part of Asian culture for more than four thousand years and have since drawn interest from many people. It was very popular in the west in the 1960s and 70's and was especially popular in the rock and roll culture. The Beatles, the Beach Boys, and other groups popularized meditation. Most of the people who were into meditation thirty or forty years ago don't practice it any more. Like other signs and wonders people, they eventually see through the delusions.

But for now, the interests of many people in our churches are drawn to it without even wondering if there might be some hidden dangers. I haven't heard anyone say anything negative at all about any kind of Eastern meditation. I think this is because most of the people I've questioned know only the most basic things about it. They haven't enough experience to come up with questions about what the techniques of the practice actually reveal. Meditating is believed to be an act that is entirely passive, but actually, it is a discipline that is designed to produce a particular range of results which is entirely "self-centered."

The hidden dangers of this practice are not in the results of meditation, but what is **not** in those results. I will explain this soon, but not right now. Please be patient and continue reading.

I am surprised every time I talk to another Christian and find that that this fellow-Christian doesn't see any conflict between Eastern meditation and what the Bible tells about meditation. Why are so many people missing it?

The truth is, many people don't realize God's Message to us--the Bible--is complete! What God has to say about meditation is definitive. Nothing more is needed, yet many people, even Christians, are looking toward India, Tibet, and China to bring about what they think is "self-realization" and "spiritual enlightenment." There are no Bible quotes in any Eastern literature, no message about God's grace, no concept of any kind of grace, and no guidance from God at all in one's meditation endeavors!

I can understand non-believers being duped by the promises of those Eastern gurus, especially because everything results directly from the students' own efforts (works!)? What I cannot understand is how Christians can suddenly forget everything they've learned from the Bible and seriously consider, and even accept, the false doctrines of Eastern mysticism.

Let's take a look at the practice of meditation the way the yogis do it, then what the Bible says about it.

I'm not going to start by explaining the promises of Eastern meditation because if you are already curious, you've probably already talked about it with someone or read some literature about what it can do for you. Instead, let's examine the actual practice of meditation and see what we find.

First, you find a teacher (guru) or instructor (someone who conducts or teaches at a fitness center or yoga center) in order to get very specific instructions. You naturally seek instruction because how else could you find out what to do?

No matter who you've chosen as a teacher, the method of meditation is the same. The differences are in what is used as an object (sometimes referred to as a "device") of meditation. An object of meditation can be a word or short phrase (mantra) that is pronounced slowly and continuously throughout the sitting, a visualization in the mind with eyes closed--that was my favorite--following the incoming and outgoing breath. There are many other objects as well. Buddhists use koans (problems) as a meditation technique.

Start by sitting cross-legged on the floor. You may want to use a small pillow for comfort. Relax. You cannot force anything. Take a few deep breaths and focus your mind on the now-ness of this time. Close your eyes and continue to relax. Breathe in and out deeply, not too slow, but not too quickly either. You don't want too much oxygen or too little oxygen. Now focus all of your attention on the incoming and outgoing breath. Feel the air entering your nostrils, follow it downward as it travels down your windpipe, into your lungs, pushing gently on your diaphragm. Keep your attention focused on your breath only. As intrusive thoughts enter your mind, re-focus your attention back to your breath. Don't become frustrated by those intrusive thoughts. Just re-focus your attention every time one appears. Follow your breath up and out of your nostrils. At first, you must learn to relax and take hold of your focus of attention.

Once you are comfortable, notice where your focus of attention originates, the "you" inside your head. Now follow the line from the origin of your attention to the object of your attention (breath). Bring all your senses (seeing, hearing, feeling) to bear on what you are meditating on and the "you" that is meditating.

This is what meditation is, according to Eastern authorities. There is more instruction to come in time so that one can meditate while up and in the world and while sleeping, but what I've explained in the above paragraphs is enough for our purposes here.

Not once did I have to refer to Scripture. Not once did I ask the Lord to guide me through this process. After nearly thirty years of meditating, I can tell you that the changes within which eventually happened are not of God! Those changes are like all the signs and wonders produced by man!

All the knowledge of God can come only from God. No amount of human effort can produce what can only come from God. We need to humble ourselves before the Lord and remember that He gave us His Word which is a complete Message, containing exactly what we need to grow spiritually. Maybe you would be surprised to know that the Lord has a lot to say about meditation.

Let's talk about what the Bible has to say about meditation. 1 Timothy 4:13 says:

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

Then, we read in verses 15 and 16:

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

Paul's letter to Timothy is for us also. When we put our Bible aside, we need to remember what

we read and think about those Words and understand all the concepts and how those concepts fit together to form doctrine.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Is this hard to understand? Do we really need a guru to interpret these Words for us? Of course not! We already know how to meditate. If we are genuinely saved, Holy Spirit indwells us. We don't have to suppress our thoughts and focus on just one thing. Instead, our thinking broadens and we are filled with understanding.

When I read a verse that tells me to meditate, I don't need instructions on how to do it. I just do it. There are no secrets being held back from us who are saved. Knowledge is given freely to us when we do it His way.

God's knows us better than we know ourselves. Maybe that's why He said in Jeremiah 29:14:

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

Philippians 4:8 tells us:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

Finally, Joshua wrote about meditation in Joshua 1:8:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”