

The Core Practices

- from "The Way of Liberation" by Adyashanti (to download a free copy of this 53-page book go to www.adyashanti.com)

Truth is not OVER THERE, wherever OVER THERE is. Truth is neither housed in religious rituals nor secret doctrines, nor in a guru's touch or beatific smile, nor in exotic locations or ancient temples. Truth is quite literally the only thing that DOES exist. It is not hidden but in plain view, not lacking but abundantly present.

Absolute Truth is not a belief, not a religion, not a philosophy, not a momentary experience, and not a transient spiritual experience either. It is neither static nor in motion, neither good nor bad. It is other than all of that, more other than you can ever imagine. Truth cannot be touched by thought or imagined by the mind. It can only be found in the heart of universal BEING. TO KNOW THY SELF IS THE KEY. TO BRING FORTH YOUR BEING IS THE WAY.

In The Way of Liberation teachings there are three Core Practices that work in conjunction with the Five Foundations to assist in bringing forth and realizing timeless Truth. While these Core Practices may seem simple, do not be deceived—when combined and applied wholeheartedly they can be extremely powerful.

Our minds may believe that we need subtle and complex spiritual teachings to guide us to Reality, but we do not. In fact, the more complex the teaching is, the easier it is for the mind to hide from itself amidst the complexity while imagining that it is advancing toward enlightenment. But it is often only advancing in creating more and more intricate circles to walk around and around in.

The indispensable element of any spiritual teaching does not lie in the teaching but rather in the sincerity and fearlessness of the person who applies it. Even though at times you may feel quite lost in your own foolishness, as William Blake said, "A fool who persists in his folly will become wise."

Think of spiritual practice as a sort of "applied folly."

The Core Practices are something that you need to GET THE FEELING OF, somewhat like getting the feel of balance when learning to ride a bicycle. They need to become a part of you to truly work. The attitude with which you apply them is as important as the practice itself—which is a way of saying that you need to find a way of applying the Core Practices that suits your temperament and personal style. No one can tell you exactly how to do this. You simply discover it by trial and error. And the way that you utilize the Core Practices will evolve as your level of realization evolves.

You should not apply the Core Practices too willfully or with a great amount of struggle. They should be applied prayerfully; that is, with great sincerity and openness of mind and heart. While you may at times find yourself being very challenged by what these teachings reveal and at other times struggling with your own confusion and doubt, just remember that the element of grace is all-important and ever present. And it is often darkest just before the dawn.

All of our greatest breakthroughs seem to come by surprise, when we least expect them. Suddenly we are gifted, the clouds of confusion part, and we see with an uncommon clarity and freedom. Such grace is never held in abeyance, never earned or deserved. It is not given to some and not to others. Grace is ever present; it is only our openness to it that comes and goes. In one sense, THE WAY OF LIBERATION IS A MEANS OF OPENING UP TO GRACE. The three Core Practices are meditation, inquiry, and contemplation.

Meditation

In the various forms of esoteric spirituality, meditation is often either overemphasized or underemphasized. When meditation is overemphasized as the sole means to enlightenment, there is often too much focus placed on trying to attain a specific meditative STATE. Ultimate

Reality is NOT a certain state of consciousness, no matter how wonderful or blissful. Reality is the ground of all BEING, unborn and undying eternity. It is as present in one experience or state of consciousness as in any other. Reality, or Truth, is that which is ultimately true in all states, at all times, in all locations.

On the other extreme are those teachings that underemphasize the value of meditation. The thinking is that since Reality is ever present in all situations at all times, there is nothing to attain by meditating. In fact, this thinking asserts, meditation will only emphasize the belief that one is separate from Reality and needs to do something to attain it. While there is logic in this viewpoint, it can lead to a type of fatalism and purely intellectual understanding that is counterproductive to true awakening. While there is no path or practice that leads directly to awakening, it is also true that what you DO is vitally important in determining the course of your spiritual life. Balance is the key, effortless effort is the Way.

Meditation is neither a means to an end nor something to perfect. Meditation done correctly is an EXPRESSION of Reality, not a path to it. Meditation done INCORRECTLY is a perfect mirror of how you are resisting the present moment, judging it, or attaching to it. Meditation acts as a perfect mirror, which reflects your relationship with yourself, life, and the present moment. By becoming intimately aware of how you are resisting or attaching to the content of the present moment, and how futile it is to continue to do so, you may discover what it means to truly DROP ALL OF YOUR RESISTENCE TO THE PRESENT MOMENT.

In The Way of Liberation, meditation has a very specific definition, purpose, and application. Meditation is the art of ALLOWING EVERYTHING TO SIMPLY BE in the deepest possible way. In order to let everything be, we must LET GO OF THE EFFORT TO CONTROL AND MANIPULATE OUR EXPERIENCE—which means letting go of personal will. This cuts right to the heart of the egoic make-up, which seeks happiness through control, seeking, striving, and manipulation. Many forms of meditation are based on learning to control one's experience as a means of attaining peace. Such methods often lead to a dead end, where one only attains peace of mind as long as the ego is being constrained by meditative technique.

THE SILENCE AND STILLNESS OF MEDITATION IS THE BEDROCK UPON WHICH THIS TEACHING RESTS. It fosters an inward stability, objectivity, non-attachment, and depth of understanding unknown to the conceptual mind. Formal meditation is done best while sitting (or lying down if absolutely necessary) in a location where you will not be interrupted. The attitude conducive to meditation is one of surrender, effortlessness, and openness.

Meditation is more a form of silent prayer than a technique to master. When new to meditation, you may want to start with ten to fifteen minutes dedicated to being silent. When this amount of time feels comfortable, you may want to extend your meditation periods in five-minute increments until you can sit comfortably for thirty or forty minutes at a time. But even sitting in silence for fifteen to twenty minutes a day will begin to form an inner composure of stillness and stability within you.

It is important to understand that when doing meditation, you are MAKING A COMMITMENT TO SOMETHING OTHER THAN YOUR RESTLESS MIND. Meditation is not the time to be figuring things out or analyzing your experience. Neither should you be fighting your mind or trying to make it quiet. Just watch thoughts as you would watch clouds passing by in the sky. There is nothing personal about your thoughts. They are just phenomena passing through awareness. Meditation is not a technique to master; it is the highest form of prayer, a naked act of love and effortless surrender into the silent abyss beyond all knowing.

Meditation is not something restricted to times of formal seated meditation; it is most fundamentally an ATTITUDE OF BEING—a resting in and as BEING. Once you get the FEEL of it, you will be able to tune into it more and more often during your daily life. Eventually, in the state of liberation, meditation will simply become your natural condition.

Below is a description of what I call True Meditation. Read it and let it reveal to you its true meaning by putting it into practice. Over time you will get a deeper and deeper understanding of

what True Meditation is. You may want to read “True Meditation” each time just before you sit down to meditate until you feel that you have internalized the instructions.

True Meditation

True Meditation has no direction or goal. It is pure wordless surrender, pure silent prayer. All methods aiming at achieving a certain state of mind are limited, impermanent, and conditioned. Fascination with states leads only to bondage and dependency. True Meditation is EFFORTLESS STILLNESS, ABIDANCE AS PRIMORDIAL BEING.

True Meditation appears in consciousness spontaneously when awareness is not being manipulated or controlled. When you first start to meditate, you notice that attention is often being held captive by focusing on some object: on thoughts, bodily sensations, emotions, memories, sounds, etc. This is because the mind is conditioned to focus and contract upon objects. Then the mind compulsively interprets and tries to control what it is aware of (the object) in a mechanical and distorted way. It begins to draw conclusions and make assumptions according to past conditioning.

In True Meditation all objects (thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, etc.) are left to their natural functioning. This means that no effort should be made to focus on, manipulate, control, or suppress any object of awareness. In True Meditation the emphasis is on being awareness—not on being aware of objects, but on resting as CONSCIOUS BEING itself. In meditation you are not trying to change your experience; you are changing your RELATIONSHIP TO your experience.

As you gently relax into awareness, the mind’s compulsive contraction around objects will fade. Silence of BEING will come more clearly into consciousness as a welcoming to rest and abide. An attitude of open receptivity, free of any goal or anticipation, will facilitate the presence of silence and stillness to be revealed as your natural condition.

As you effortlessly rest into stillness more profoundly, awareness becomes free of the mind’s compulsive habit of control, contraction, and identification. Awareness returns to its natural condition of CONSCIOUS BEING, absolute unmanifest potential—the silent abyss beyond all knowing.

Some Common Questions about Meditation

Q. It seems that the central instruction in True Meditation is simply to abide as silent, still awareness. However, I often find that I am caught in my mind. Is it OK to use a more directed meditation like following my breath so that I have something to focus on which will help me to not get lost in my mind?

A. It is perfectly OK to use a more directed technique such as following your breath, or using a simple mantra or centering prayer, if you find that it helps you to not get lost in thought. But always be inclined toward less and less technique. Make time during each meditation period to simply rest as silent, still awareness. True Meditation is progressively letting go of the meditator without getting lost in the mind.

Q. What should I do if an old painful memory arises during meditation?

A. Old memories, hurts, fears, angers, resentments, etc., can arise in meditation. Simply allow them to arise without resisting, analyzing, judging, or denying them. Just watch them without getting involved. See that they do not define who you are. They are pockets of unconsciousness arising to be purified in the light of awareness and released from your system. Allow the light of *being* to set suffering free.

Q. When I meditate I sometimes experience a lot of fear. Sometimes it overwhelms me and I don’t know what to do.

A. It is useful when experiencing fear in meditation to anchor your attention in something very grounding such as your breath or even the bottoms of your feet. But don't fight against the fear, because this will only increase it. Imagine that you are the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, or Christ in the desert, remaining perfectly still and unmoved by the body-mind's nightmare. It may feel very real, but it is really nothing more than a convincing illusion. In absolute effortless stillness, fear will pass away of its own accord.

Q. What should I do when I get an insight or sudden understanding of a situation during meditation?

A. Simply receive what is given with gratitude, without holding onto anything. Trust that it will still be there when you need it.

Q. I find that my mind is spontaneously forming images, almost like a waking dream. Some of them I like, while others are just random and annoying. What should I do?

A. Focus attention on your breathing down in your belly. This will help you to not get lost in the images of the mind. Hold the simple intention to rest in the imageless, silent source prior to all images, thoughts, and ideas.

Q. I am experiencing a lot of energy surging through my body when I meditate, and even when I am not meditating. Sometimes it is very pleasant but at other times it makes me feel agitated and keeps me awake at night. What is it?

A. It is not uncommon that at some point in your spiritual life you will experience various forms of intense energy. Do not become fascinated by the energy and do not try to suppress or control it, because doing so will only tend to intensify it. Root your attention in that state which is prior to all forms of energy. Rest in silence, stillness, and emptiness, prior to the energies of body and mind. Root your attention in the lower abdomen. This will help ground and integrate the energy. It may also be useful to do some very grounding activities. Take quiet walks in nature, exercise, massage the bottoms of your feet, etc. Anything that feels grounding and energetically calming will help. It will take some time for your body and nervous system to adapt to a greater volume of energy flowing through you. Be patient. It often takes months or years for the nervous system to adapt to the new influx of energy.

Q. Sometimes I feel a depth of silence where all intention falls away and even the instruction to allow everything to be or to rest as awareness feels unnecessary. Is it OK to let all intention and technique fall away?

A. At times, even the most subtle intention or technique will naturally drop away on its own when your meditation reaches a certain depth of stillness and simplicity. When you can let go of all intention and technique and not get lost in the mind or fall into a foggy or dull state of awareness, True Meditation is spontaneously happening. The ultimate form of meditation is when the meditator falls completely away.

Inquiry

The sacred dimension is not something that you can know through words and ideas any more than you can learn what an apple pie tastes like by eating the recipe. The modern age has forgotten that facts and information, for all their usefulness, are not the same as truth or wisdom, and certainly not the same as direct experience. We have lost touch with the intuitive wisdom born of silence and stillness. To hold a question inwardly in silent and patient waiting is an art rarely mastered these days. Inquiry is a bridge between the ego and the soul, and beyond to the Infinite. (I am using the term SOUL here to mean THE ESSENCE, PRESENCE, OR BEINGNESS THAT YOU ARE.)

Inquiry is not in any sense anti-intellectual or anti-rational; it is trans-rational. That is, it has the power to take you beyond both the conceptual mind as well as conditioned egocentric thinking. Although rooted in stillness, inquiry is the dynamic counterpoint to True Meditation. Meditation is soft, allowing surrender, while inquiry demands bold and fearless questioning.

Inquiry is a way of addressing the deepest existential issues confronting every human being: Who or what am I? What is life? What happens after death? What is God? What is the absolute Truth of existence? Or simply, Do I know with ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY that this current thought, belief, opinion, interpretation, or judgment is true?

The common element to inquiry is Truth. What is Truth?

The Truth question does not arise from, or pertain to, the various agendas of the ego. It is of the utmost importance that inquiry not become subject to the ego's various drives and motivations. The underlying drives of the ego are to feel better and to survive. But inquiry belongs entirely to the realm of the soul, that dimension of BEING born of stillness and light that seeks Truth FOR ITS OWN SAKE.

The first focus of inquiry centers on BEING. *Being* is the key that unlocks the kingdom. Who or what am I? Apart from body, mind, belief, occupation, gender, role, memory, or history, what am I? Exactly what is "I"?

Remove all that the I is not. Strip the I of ALL the masks it wears. What's left? Something? Nothing? What's aware of that? In your DIRECT EXPERIENCE, is some-THING aware, or is no-THING aware? Is someone aware or is no one aware?

Trace the thread of inquiry SILENTLY AND PATIENTLY back through all of your identifications, all of your beliefs about yourself, all of your hidden judgments and assumptions about who and what you are. Take your time. Look deeply into each of these questions. Let the questions remove all that you are not. Let them undo all that you ever imagined yourself to be, all that you thought you should be, all that anyone ever told you to be. Trace the thread of inquiry back through all of your imagined identities. Follow the thread back through all that is imagined, clung to, or run from. Then BE STILL. Rest in the contemplative silence and let the unknown workings of grace run their course.

The realization of Truth and Reality can never be created by the mind; it always comes as a gift of grace. Inquiry clears away misperceptions and illusions, making one available to the movements of grace.

The question of BEING opens the doorway to Reality and Truth, but is by no means the only question for inquiry. Question everything! Leave no stone unturned, no assumption unexamined, no form of denial left intact.

Investigate each question slowly and deliberately. Place each question into the stillness of your being. Do not grasp for quick answers. Don't jump to conclusions. Instead, let each question reveal your hidden beliefs and opinions. Let it reveal whatever you are holding on to and believing that is at odds with WHAT IS. Look for all the ways that attaching to your mind causes you and others to suffer. Bring each question the mind poses into the ground of stillness. Meditate on it, ponder it; take your time. Don't answer it with your mind. Be still with only the question. Be very, very still.

Filled with the love of Truth, don't be surprised if inquiry begins to consume all of your hidden assumptions, all of your beliefs, all of your opinions, all of your judgments, all that you have learned secondhand from others. And don't be surprised if most of your spiritual ideas are consumed as well, for it is our spiritual ideas that most effectively protect us from the truly spiritual experience.

Your greatest aid is your sincerity and desire for Truth above all else. You may be shocked over and over again by the depth of illusion that you find and uncover within yourself, but never fixate on it or judge yourself. Accept, forgive, and move on, for your true BEING is infinite and absolute. It exists as much now as it ever did or ever will. Stand still in the sacred conflagration

of inquiry and let it open you to the seat of all wisdom born of spirit. Only Truth will survive; all else will perish.

It is a sad thing that so few give the full measure of their lives to Truth. Most only go so far, and then settle for less than a total surrender of all separation. In the end we all get what we value most, and if we don't like what we have gotten, we had better take an honest look at what we are valuing.

But never for a moment is Truth lacking. Never is there more or less Truth present, or more or less availability. Truth is in abundant supply at all times, in all situations. It is simply awaiting recognition. And it has all of time on its side.

Question your thoughts. Question your stories. Question your assumptions. Question your opinions. Question your conclusions. Question them all into utter emptiness, stillness, and joy. The keys to freedom are in YOUR hands. Use them.

Some Common Questions about Inquiry

Q. Inquiry often feels very intellectual to me and I just tend to get lost in my mind. Is there a way to inquire without it becoming so lost in the mind?

A. Yes. There are two aspects of inquiry, and it's very important to understand both of them.

The first aspect of inquiry is what I call "taking the backward step." The purpose of the first aspect of inquiry is to remove or STEP BACK from prior conditioned thinking. You are not looking for answers as much as you are revealing and removing prior conditioned thoughts, ideas, and beliefs TO MAKE WAY FOR a deeper realization. For example, through such observation you can come to see that you are not the thoughts in your mind. By removing the false belief that any thought can tell you what you are, you make space for a deeper understanding to reveal itself.

Having revealed and cleared out the false ideas of mind, you are now ready to rest in the stillness of BEING.

In the second aspect of inquiry, you are endeavoring to access the intuitive clarity and wisdom that is housed in stillness at the root of consciousness. I call it the REALM OF GRACE because the wisdom that flows out of it is always received as a gift, as an "aha" of pure understanding.

Having revealed and cleared out the false ideas of mind, you are now ready TO REST IN THE STILLNESS OF BEING, without imposing thought or seeking in thought.

Q. Sometimes inquiry feels very alive and vital to me, but at other times it feels more mechanical because my heart isn't into it. Is inquiry something I need to be engaged in all the time?

A. In order for inquiry to be authentic, you need to feel like it is of vital interest to you. So no, you do not need to be inquiring all the time. It is a tool that is there whenever a vital question arises for you. But inquiry is also much more than a technique; it is an ATTITUDE.

Inquiry is an attitude of curiosity that lives within you, and it is a reflection of your desire to know Truth and the nature of Reality. Inquiry also takes a type of courage that is willing to ask big questions that may shake up the very foundations of your life and put you face-to-face with issues you might rather avoid.

So while you won't always be using the technique of inquiry, it is vitally important to live with the attitude of curiosity and courage that is at the heart of inquiry.

INQUIRY IS THE ART OF QUESTIONING ALL OF ONE'S ASSUMPTIONS, BELIEFS, AND INTERPRETATIONS as a means of opening up space in the mind for intuitive wisdom to arise. Once space is opened up, simply rest the question in the stillness of conscious BEING.

Watch. Keep faithful vigil with the unknown. The vital moments of breakthrough come when you least expect them.

Contemplation

We have long ago forgotten what it means to contemplate something. With the click of a computer mouse we can get the answer, or what promises to be the answer, to almost any question we can imagine. All of the world's most ancient spiritual teachings are but a click or download away, and yet we remain so lost to ourselves, so cut off from what nourishes the soul, that we are collectively suffocating under the weight of our ignorance and alienation from the sacred dimension of Life.

The modern age has forgotten that facts and information, for all their usefulness, are not the same as wisdom—and certainly not the same as the direct experience of Reality. We have lost touch with the intuitive wisdom born of silence and stillness, and we are left stranded in a sea of information that cannot deliver on its promise of ever-increasing happiness and fulfillment. Contemplation is the art of holding a word or a phrase patiently in the silence and stillness of awareness until it begins to disclose deeper and deeper meanings and understandings. Contemplation has the power to transcend beyond (not regress back from) the limits of analytical thought and logic, and open consciousness up to an order of wisdom and Truth that can only be described as revelation.

I have included some useful short phrases in this section, but any part of this book can be used as an object for contemplation. Take A SHORT PHRASE as your object of contemplation and simply hold it in your awareness for some time. Do not analyze or philosophize about it. And do not get lost in your imagination either. Just hold the phrase in awareness. Then be still. Let its meaning germinate within you. Then bring the word or phrase back into awareness again. Hold it there for some time, and then let it go and be still again. With a little practice you will get the hang of it and find your own rhythm.

While contemplation may seem quite simple, it can be very powerful. In the Zen tradition, phrases, questions, or short teaching stories called KOANS are used as objects of contemplation and meditation to great and powerful effect in sparking awakening, revelation, and enlightenment. In fact, most esoteric systems of spirituality have used various forms of contemplation to elicit moments of revelation.

Below are some phrases to use as objects of contemplation. They begin with phrases designed to spark certain psychological insights and progress to phrases designed to bring about deeper and deeper realizations and revelations of a more fundamental or spiritual nature. The final series of phrases pertains to the absolute nature of Reality, the Infinite.

Contemplations on Thought and Freedom from Suffering:

There is no such thing as an absolutely True thought. (This doesn't mean that some thoughts are not truer than others, only that no thought is absolutely True.)

WHAT IS is what's happening BEFORE you have a thought about it. (*Notice the difference between what your mind thinks about this moment, and this moment as it is before you have any thought about it.*)

Suffering occurs when you believe in a thought that is at odds with what is, what was, or what may be. (*Experience this moment free of your mind's interpretations of it.*)

YOU are not your story. THEY are not your story about them. THE WORLD is not your story about the world.

Suffering is how Life tells you that you are resisting or misperceiving what is real and true. (*It is the way Life suggests that you are not in harmony with what is.*)

Deeper understanding and insight flow forth from a quiet mind.

To be happy is to live as the unknown.

All true knowing arises out of the unknown and is an expression of the unknown.

Contemplations on The Nature of BEING:

To look within and not find yourself as a self is the beginning of finding yourself as a presence (BEING).

BEING (or spirit) is universal and exists prior to all conditions, all points of view, all objects of consciousness, and all subjects as well.

BEING is the true nature of everything.

BEING the nature of everything, there is nothing outside of BEING.

BEING is self-cognizant and aware. Right now!

BEING doesn't explain everything; BEING is the true nature of everything.

The only thing that realizes BEING is BEING itself.

There is only BEING living itself through you, as you, and as all that exists.

BEING is unborn and uncreated—the source and substance of all.

BEING is our original condition, prior to all egoic antics, prior to all thought, prior to all description, prior to past, present, and future.

That BEINGNESS which is prior to the world of space and time is here, now, and always. It is a single drop of rain, a leaf falling from a tree, a single heartbeat. It is the world-less world, the substance of emptiness.

I AM is pure BEING. It is the ultimate confession of Reality echoing throughout eternity.

Contemplations on The Infinite:

Beyond ego is universal BEING; beyond BEING is the Infinite.

The Infinite is pure formless potential, prior to BEING and NON-BEING, life and death, form and formlessness.

The Infinite is neither one nor many, neither dualistic nor non-dualistic, neither worldly nor spiritual, neither self nor other.

The Infinite knows itself through a simple intuitive regard it has for itself in every aspect of itself.

Thus it knows itself as utterly unknowable and absolutely present.

To realize the Infinite is to lose your inner world.

To lose your inner world is eternal silence. It is to become the shining.

All is well, and more well than can be imagined.