

TOOLS FOR MEDITATION



Farside Prayer Ministry
Imago Dei MCC

Tools for meditation are just that - tools. All the ability is within you. You just need to be willing to take the journey. Meditation itself means awareness, to join together. The word meditation is derived from two Latin words: meditari (to think, to dwell upon, to exercise the mind) and mederi (to heal). Its Sanskrit derivation 'medha' means wisdom. Meditation describes a state of consciousness when the mind is free of scattered thoughts and various patterns. The observer (one who is doing meditation) realizes that all the activity of the mind is reduced to one.



Meditation can bring about healing of both the body and the mind. There are various physical benefits that can be experienced when meditation is made to be a part of daily life. Some physical benefits of meditation include a decrease in blood pressure and an improvement in breathing due to the increase of airflow that gets to the lungs.

Those who use meditation regularly also find that their resting heart rate is lower as well, which takes some of the stress off the heart. Chemicals in the body that are associated with stress are lower as well, which leads to less anxiety. Meditation also promotes youthful skin and a youthful appearance.

Meditation is a practice that brings about not only physical benefits, but psychological benefits as well. Bringing oneself to a state of rumination through meditation has amazing effects on a person's psyche. Relaxation and stress reduction are rather obvious benefits, but many people do not realize that meditation can also improve moods and memory and decrease moodiness and depression.



The Bible is one of the best things we can use in meditation. When we read the Bible we can pick out a verse and contemplate how that relates to our lives today. We can also use the Bible for a Jesuit meditation technique called Composition of Place. First you need to pick your favorite story from the Bible and read it aloud. Then re-read it silently to yourself. After that you relive the story, but not in the time that it originally took place. Relive it as though it was happening now and let the main character tell you how the story relates to you in your life at this time.

Prayer Beads come in many forms and are used by many people. You may know them as rosaries, malas, chaplets, prayer ropes or simple prayer beads. Prayer beads are simply used to keep count of the repetitions of prayers, chants or devotions. In Christianity we use the rosary, chaplet, prayer rope or Pearls of life.

The rosary is linked to Mary and is a combining of prayer and meditation in sequences (called "decades") of an "Our Father," ten "Hail Marys," and a "Glory be to the Father," as well as a number of other prayers (such as the "Apostle's Creed" and the "Hail Holy Queen") at the beginning and end.



Traditionally a complete Rosary involved the completion of fifteen decades, but John Paul II added an additional five



.The term Chaplet is used commonly to designate Roman Catholic prayer forms that use Prayer beads, but are not necessarily related to the Rosary. Some of these chaplets have a strong Marian connotation; others are more directly related to Jesus or the Saints. Chaplets are considered "personal devotionals"; there is no set form and therefore they vary considerably. Often they have fewer beads than a traditional Rosary, and a different set of prayers.

Eastern Christians use loops of knotted wool. Among Russian Old Believers, a prayer rope made of leather, called *lestovka*, is more common. In the mid-1980s Anglican prayer beads or "Christian prayer beads" were developed in the Episcopal Church.

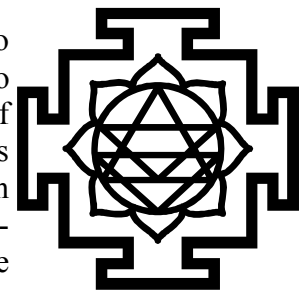
The contemporary Pearls of Life, invented by Martin Lönnebo, Bishop Emeritus of the of the Swedish Lutheran Church, is a set of 18 beads, some round and some elongated, arranged in an irregular pattern. Each one has its own significance as a stimulus and reminder for meditation, although they can also be used for repetitive prayer

Buddhist Prayer beads, or Japa malas, are also used in many forms of Mahayana Buddhism, often with a lesser number of beads (usually a divisor of 108). In Pure Land Buddhism, for instance, 27-bead rosaries are common.

In China such rosaries are named "Shu Zhu" ("Counting Beads"); in Japan, "Juzu." These shorter rosaries are sometimes called "Prostration Rosaries," because they are easier to hold when enumerating repeated prostrations. Tibetan Buddhists use larger malas, with 111 beads. When counting, they calculate one mala as 100 mantras, and the 11 additional beads are taken as extra to compensate for errors.

Other faiths and peoples that use prayer beads are Bahá'ís, Hindus, Islamists, Sikhs and the Nazorean Gnostics.

Mandala meaning "circle" or "completion," is a term used to refer to various meditative objects or practices. It is of Hindu origin, but is also used in other Indian religions, such as Buddhism. In the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism, they have developed into sand paintings. In various spiritual traditions, mandala may be employed for focusing the attention of aspirants and adepts, as a spiritual teaching tool, for establishing a sacred space, and as an aid to meditation. Its symbolic nature can help one to access progressively deeper levels of the subconscious mind, ultimately assisting the meditator to experience a mystical sense of oneness with the ultimate unity from which the cosmos in all its manifold forms arises.





The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again, out into the world. Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. Labyrinths and mazes have often been confused. When most people hear of a labyrinth they think of a maze, but a labyrinth is not a maze. A maze is like a puzzle to be solved. It has twists, turns, and blind alleys. A labyrinth has only one path; it is unicursal. The way in is the way out. There are no blind alleys. The path leads you on a

circuitous path to the center and out again.

With a labyrinth there is only one choice to be made. The choice is to enter or not. A more passive, receptive mindset is needed. The choice is whether or not to walk a spiritual path.

At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the center of your deepest self and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are.

Prayer shawl The prayer shawl, also known as A Tallit, is Jewish in origin and came from the decree God set forth in Numbers 15:37-41. In Judaism the prayer shawl is worn during the morning prayer service, during the Torah service, and on Yom Kippur and other holidays.



There is much confusion among the masses as to the origins of the Tallit. The actual four-cornered garment began with no relevance whatsoever to Jewish practice, but gradually became linked to the wearing of Tzitzit (tassels). The Torah explicitly commands that Tzitzit be added to the four corners of your garment.

Traditionally the wearing of Tzitzit began with this commandment, though biblical scholars consider it to be much older, and argue that the commandment reflected an already existing practice.

In early Judaism, Tzitzit were used for the corners of ordinary everyday clothing; most Jewish people at the time wore clothing which consisted of a sheet-like item wrapped around the body, comparable to the abayah (blanket) worn by the Bedouins for protection from sun and rain, and to the stola or toga of ancient Greece and Rome. As recorded in the Talmud, these were sometimes worn partly doubled, and sometimes with the ends thrown over the shoulders.

After the 13th century, Tzitzit began to be worn on new inner garments, known as Arba Kanfos, rather than the outer garments. This inner garment was a three-foot by one-foot rectangle, with a hole in the center for the head to pass through; the modern Tallit evolved from this medieval item. By modern times, the four-cornered sheet-like cloth fell out of fashion, and became regarded as impractical compared with alternatives. Since most modern western clothing does not have four clear corners, the rule essentially became obsolete in daily life.

Within the Christian community there has been a resurgence of the prayer shawl lately. Church groups and ladies' auxiliaries make prayer shawls or prayer cloths to be given to the sick, the grieving or those in desperate need of prayer. These prayer shawls or cloths are prayed over with special entreatments for the one receiving it while it is being made and before it is given to the person receiving it.



An icon is an image, picture, or representation; it is a sign or likeness that stands for an object by signifying or representing it. An icon is generally a flat panel painting depicting a holy being or object such as Jesus, Mary, saints, angels, or the cross. Icons may also be cast in metal, carved in stone, embroidered on cloth, done in mosaic or fresco work, printed on paper or metal, etc.

In Christianity it is believed that the immaterial God took flesh in the form of Jesus Christ, making it possible to depict in human form the Son of God. It is on this basis that the old proscriptions against images were changed for the early Christians. Also, the concept of archetype was redefined by the early church fathers in order to better understand that when a person shows veneration toward an image, the intention is rather to honor the person depicted, not the substance of the icon. As St. Basil the Great said, "The honor shown the image passes over to the archetype." He also illustrates the concept by saying, "If I point to a statue of Caesar and ask you 'Who is that?' your answer would properly be, 'It is Caesar.' When you say such you do not mean that the stone itself is Caesar, but rather, the name and honor you ascribe to the statue passes over to the original, the archetype, Caesar himself." So it is with an icon.

Icons are used as focal points to meditate upon how certain people lived, how we can also live like them, and what can we learn from them and thus be closer to God by the way they lived their lives.



Candles as a source of light, have been used for centuries. Before the mid 19th century candles were frequently made from tallow or animal fat. Today they are made of some type of wax, be it from bees, soy, paraffin or from vegetable products. In the Christian faith the candle represents Jesus Christ as the light of the world and is typically represented by the paschal candle.

Many people light candles to honor a loved one that has passed on, to send a prayer to God or venerate an Icon with special prayer intent.

Many people also use candles as a focusing point during meditation. They will gaze upon the flame of the candle to help them enter into a meditative state.



Singing bowls are a type of bell, specifically classified as a standing bell. Rather than hanging inverted or attached to a handle, standing bells sit with the bottom surface resting. The sides and rim of singing bowls vibrate to produce sound. Singing bowls were traditionally used throughout Asia as part of Tantric Buddhist Sadhana. Today they are employed worldwide both within and without these spiritual traditions, for meditation, relaxation, health-care, personal well-being and religious practice.

Singing bowls were historically made in Tibet, Nepal, India, Bhutan, China, Japan and Korea. Today they are made in Nepal, India, Japan and Korea. The best-known type is from the Himalayan region and is often called "Tibetan singing bowls."

In Buddhist practice, singing bowls are used as a support for meditation, trance induction and prayer. For example, Chinese Buddhists use the singing bowl to accompany percussion instruments during chanting, striking it when a particular phrase in a sutra, mantra or hymn is sung. In Japan and Vietnam, singing bowls are similarly used during chanting, and may also mark the passage of time or signal a change in activity.

Singing bowls are "played" by rubbing a wooden, plastic, or leather-wrapped mallet around the rim of the bowl to produce overtones and a continuous 'singing' sound, as a result of the friction created. Genuine antique singing bowls produce complex chords of harmonic overtones. Singing bowls may also be played by striking with a soft mallet to produce a warm bell tone.

Traditionally, antique singing bowls were made of Panchaloga (literally meaning "five metals" in Sanskrit): an alloy of bronze, copper, tin, zinc and other metals. Antiques often include silver, gold, iron and nickel.

Antique singing bowls produce multiphonic and polyharmonic overtones, which are unique to the antique instruments. The subtle yet complex multiple harmonic frequencies are a special quality of the high quality bronze alloy.

The art of making singing bowls in the traditional way is considered a lost art. New singing bowls are made from industrial quality metal, mainly copper. They are exported widely from Nepal and India. New singing bowls and crystal bowls do not produce the warm and complex tones of fine antiques. They sound like clear and simple bells, without the warm undertones and bright harmonic overtones for which antiques are famous.

Both antique and new bowls are widely used as aids to meditation and as tools for trance induction. They are also used in yoga, music therapy, sound healing, religious services, performances, and for personal enjoyment.

Incense is composed of aromatic biotic materials. It releases fragrant smoke when burned. The term incense refers to the substance itself, rather than to the odor that it produces.



Many religious ceremonies and spiritual purification rites employ incense, a practice that persists to this day. Incense is also used in medicine and for its aesthetic value. The forms taken by incense have changed with advances in technology, differences in the underlying culture, and diversity in the reasons for burning it.

Use of incense in religion is prevalent in many cultures and may have its roots in the practical and aesthetic uses, considering that many religions with not much else in common all use incense. One common motif is of incense as a form of sacrificial offering to God.

Incense is one of the oldest and most unifying tools still used today by all religious groups, whether it be for purification, sending off of prayers, an air freshener or an aid to instill a meditative state. The scents of incenses have soothed us, help transform us and transport us to different times in our lives so that we may grow as spiritual beings.



A mezuzah is a piece of parchment (usually contained in a decorative case) inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah. These verses comprise the Jewish prayer "Shema Yisrael," and begin with the phrase "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One." The Torah instruction can be found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21

A mezuzah is affixed to the doorpost of Jewish homes to fulfill the mitzvah (Biblical commandment) to inscribe the words of the Shema "on the doorposts of your house." Many families place a mezuzah on the front door only, but observant Jews fix one on every doorway in the home apart from bathrooms, and closets too small to qualify as rooms. The parchment is prepared by a qualified scribe (a "sofer stam") who has undergone many years of meticulous training, and the verses are written in indelible black ink with a special quill pen. The parchment is then rolled up and placed inside the case.

The commandment to affix a mezuzah is one that is widely practiced in the Jewish world, even by Jews who are not religiously observant. While the important part of the mezuzah is the "klaf," or parchment, and not the case itself, designing and producing mezuzah cases has been elevated to an art form over the ages. Mezuzahs are produced from an endless variety of materials, from silver and precious metals, to wood, stone, ceramics and pewter. The mezuzah keeps one's mind on God. Traditionally only used in the Jewish faith, the mezuzah is becoming more widely used in the Christian faith as a reminder of Christian roots in Judaism. Also, to understand more of how God is in our lives today, in every room we enter.



Art be it pottery, painting, weaving, writing, or the many other forms of art, is a valuable tool for meditation. When you put your mind to a task and concentrate on that task, you allow yourself to be open to the possibilities that God has for you. Solely concentrating on one thing helps you clear your mind, leaving yourself open for answers to questions that you have been asking.

There is something very peaceful about working in the garden, planting, weeding or harvesting your crop. Just the sheer pleasure of being in natural surroundings is a relaxing experience in itself.

Writing is one thing we can all do to some extent that helps us get rid of our excess baggage. When we write we can take all of our anger and hatred and put in on paper. Then after a day read whatever it was, and (carefully) burn it. This gives us our power back and stops us from allowing our anger to control us. This in itself is a very strong meditation and truly a learning process of our selves.

Weaving involves a conscious understanding of how textiles used to be made. It involves a high level of singular concentration used to achieve the end result. It is a link to past and present, with the end result being a beautiful piece of fabric that was made the same way thousands of years prior to present day. It is a way to understand how life perhaps in some ways was easier in the past.

These are just a couple examples of how you can take yourself out of frustration and place yourself in a very healthy meditative state of mind. Meditation is a very powerful and sometimes life-changing experience if you have the correct tools and are willing to get to know your self and God.



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A Tibetan Lama was being monitored on a brain scan machine by a scientist wishing to test physiological functions during deep meditation. The scientist said - "Very good Sir. The machine shows that you are able to go very deep in brain relaxation, and that validates your meditation." "No," said the Lama, "This (pointing to his brain) validates the machine!"



Farside Prayer Ministry

The Farside Prayer Ministry is Imago Dei MCC's prayer ministry. We strive to spiritually strengthen ourselves and others. One of the ways we do this is through meditation. Meditation is how we get to know God through ourselves. Meditation is offered every Sunday at 12:15 in the chapel.

On the third Sunday of each month the Farside ministry teaches how to weave prayer cloths. These prayer cloths are then prayed over and sent to people in need of intercessory prayer. The goal is not only to keep the person or persons in prayer, but to also let them know that they are not alone and that they do have friends who are thinking of them and praying for them.

The Farside Prayer Ministry has also set up an online prayer chain. If you are in need of prayer or know someone that is in need, all you have to do is send an email to Chuck Bickert at Far-SidePrayer@aol.com. Your prayer will then be sent to everyone who has signed up for the prayer chain. Not only will one person be praying for those in need but many.

Also, if you would like to join the prayer chain all you need to do is send an email to Chuck Bickert at FarSidePrayer@aol.com. You will then be added to the prayer chain and will start to receive prayer intentions as they come in.



At Imago Dei our vision is Growing With Christ! Lifting Up Community! Spreading Gods Love! The above are just some of the ways we do that. My hope is that you will strongly consider making a difference in one or all of these ways. One of the healthier things we can do is to pray, be it for others, for ourselves, or both. It can put us in a scary or uncomfortable position. Understand that whenever - and I do mean whenever - you have asked God to be in your life to help you - in whatever honest request that may be - then you are truly safe.

Chuck Bickert, Imago Dei MCC
Farside Prayer Ministry

Reference

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