

How To Choose The Right Meditation Technique For You

by Kelvin Chin

Executive Director & Founder, Turning Within Foundation

When cultural icon Oprah Winfrey can't even decide which meditation technique is the "best in the world" to stick with, how can we mere mortals be expected to assess and choose — especially with so many different types of meditation in the marketplace?

Well, I'm going to give it a shot. At least I'll give you some key issues to look for.

I've been meditating for 46 years and have been exposed to many forms of meditation. Over the past four decades, I've taught thousands worldwide how to "turn within" and reduce their stress and anxieties, and increase their self-confidence and self-awareness through meditation. Many of them had tried other meditation techniques before finding me.

So, out of the hundreds of meditation techniques in the world, how do you know which one you should do?

Group or Independence?

First, ask yourself: "Are you into groups, or do you prefer being more self-sufficient?" That is a threshold question to ask yourself because many encourage you to join their organization and meditate regularly with their group, or do it online with them, often through a subscription plan. Personally, I prefer to learn things that I can do on my own without having to schedule my life around other people's desires. But you may be different. Just ask and find out upfront.

Difficult or Easy?

The next question to ask yourself when choosing a meditation technique is "Do you prefer difficult or easy?" Most meditation techniques involve focus, control, concentration, or clearing the mind of thoughts. Those are guaranteed to be difficult. And often impossible.

A 10-year-old interrupted me in a lecture once and said, "Yeah, every time I try to clear my mind, I still have the thought that I'm not thinking any thoughts...which is a thought!" Brilliant. *Message:* don't waste your time with that type of meditation. I'm into easy, and meditation can be effortless.

Waking State Metrics

I'm often asked, "Why do so many meditation techniques involve focus or control?" I think it's because those meditation teachers have gotten confused.

They've taken what I call "waking state metrics" and applied them to meditation. Of course that makes no sense because that would be like applying a dream state "yardstick" to waking state. So, applying dreaming rules to being awake, we would then expect elephants to turn into flowers, or hallways to sometimes never end. But they don't. Because we know better than to mix yardsticks.

So why do so many meditation teachers mix them up in meditation, applying waking state rules to meditation? Simple: somewhere along the line they got confused.

Redefining "Meditation"

Thus the need for what I call the "Redefinition of Meditation." Whenever I teach meditation classes, a huge part of what I do is undo much of the confusion that many people have about meditation.

In addition to incorrectly thinking that meditation involves clearing or focusing the mind, many think that it somehow has to be religious. Not so.

Many meditation techniques are rooted in religion. Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and others. But there are meditation techniques that are not associated with religions. After I learned Transcendental Meditation (TM) in 1970, studied with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and taught it for 10 years, I removed all religious and cultural trappings and made the process even easier. I now just call the meditation I teach "Turning Within" or sometimes I just call it "learning how to let go." I like to keep it simple.

Any meditation technique can and should be easy and effortless if the teacher knows how the mind operates and knows how to get the student "from point A to point B." That is a key issue to look out for when assessing the marketplace of meditation techniques. Most meditation teachers do a very good job at describing point B (where the student wants to get to), but few have the expertise to get the student from point A (where the student is starting from) to point B.



"I tried other types of meditation — I found them frustrating to learn and hard to stick with. Kelvin's approach was simple to learn. He is a patient, perceptive, skilled instructor. I've maintained a regular meditation practice for nearly two years, despite living a busy and sometimes stressful life in a big, fast-paced, hectic city."

— Zannah Marsh, New York, NY

Different Techniques, Different Results

We've all heard the basic health benefits of meditation — relaxation and stress reduction being the most commonly cited. However, are all meditation techniques the same in terms of results?

Not so, according to a number of scientific studies — several compiled in a recent 2016 article, and a 2016 study published in *Psychological Science* indicating that Mindfulness meditation made meditators' memories less accurate. These are important studies because they show that not all meditation techniques produce desirable results. See <http://www.turningwithin.org/research-articles/>

In one 2013 study published in the journal *Brain, Structure and Function*, scientists showed that directing or focusing the mind does not have the same effect as a technique that allows the mind to experience what the researchers call “silence.” Regular periods of silence seem to create new brain cells in the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning.

I interpret their use of silence as “not directing the mind, not focusing it,” because they contrast silence with techniques that focus the mind. Those focusing techniques do not create new brain cells. Interestingly, in a study published in the journal *Heart*, even listening to relaxing music — while it may feel relaxing — was measured to be not as relaxing as two minutes of silence. So, even listening to relaxing music seems to be experienced by the mind as “focus” and “directing the mind” and therefore less relaxing than not listening to anything.

Do Other Techniques Interfere — Can You Do More Than One?

We have discussed the differences among the many techniques, including the significant gap in results between techniques involving focus and directing compared to an easy, effortless technique that allows more silence. But can you practice more than one technique?

Sure.

I have taught many students who continue to do other techniques afterwards. For example, I've instructed Buddhist monks to meditate. Of course, they meditate using their Buddhist meditation as well — that's what they do in the monastery all day. Yet what they say is that they get more out of their meditation after learning mine since they say they feel mentally more relaxed and stronger afterwards. So, there is no conflict.

And I have taught clergy from all religions, including priests, nuns, rabbis, ministers, as well as Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, and atheists. There is no conflict because I've removed all religious and cultural trappings from the meditation teaching and technique.

Noisy or Quiet Place

You should be able to meditate anywhere. Literally. If your meditation teacher suggests that you should meditate in a certain place or under certain conditions — incense, candles, altars, no noise, certain background music — then just understand that they are speaking to you from a belief-based place, not a practical place. Those are trappings, i.e., stuff. Meditation involves your mind experiencing itself, albeit in a different way than it normally does when it's awake. But everything else is extraneous, not necessary. It's baggage.

So, whether you are in a noisy or a quiet place, you can meditate equally effectively. I've even taught meditation 30 feet down the hall from a rock band in a Rec(reation) Center when I was teaching in the U.S. Army on the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) in Korea. That was noisy! But the meditation worked regardless.

Meditation should be portable. You should be able to meditate as easily in noisy airport terminals, hotel lobbies, planes, trains, buses, and restaurants as you can at home.

Final Thoughts

While there are many different types of meditation techniques in the world to choose from, you need to pick one that works for you. That fits your lifestyle. That meets your life objectives and delivers the results you are looking for.

Don't just blindly follow your friends or family to the meditation teacher they chose. Ask questions first. Get answers to the types of questions raised in this article. Do this upfront. Don't find out later that you joined a group that does not align with your values and how you expected meditation to be taught.

Be a wise consumer. It will serve you well in your life journey.

Kelvin Chin has taught meditation for 40 years to thousands worldwide from all walks of life, all religions and cultures. He teaches his effortless technique on Skype, phone and in person to individuals and groups of all sizes — sports teams, businesses, schools, and professional organizations. He taught the first meditation classes at West Point Military Academy and in the U.S. Army, has taught at Raytheon, Dartmouth and Yale, and was one of the first test subjects in scientific experiments on the health benefits of meditation in 1970. He can be reached at www.TurningWithin.org, a nonprofit he founded to teach meditation.