

Prayer and Meditation

What's the difference between prayer and meditation?

Prayer is talking to your Higher Power. Meditation is listening to your Higher Power.

For most people, life is frequently fast-paced and stressful. Everyone needs time to sit back and gain perspective on what they are here for and how they are conducting themselves in their daily lives. This reflection and introspection—looking inside oneself—can be done through prayer and meditation.

You may pray frequently, or you may never have prayed. If you don't believe in prayer, try acting as if you do. Start praying and see what happens. Members of Alcoholics Anonymous call this "Fake it until you make it," which means that as you begin to act in accordance with spiritual principles, you will begin to grow spiritually. Whether or not you fully believe in the power of prayer does not matter right now. The important thing is to begin prayer and meditation with an open mind. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Your prayers do not have to be complex. The Serenity Prayer may be as much as you can do:

**God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to
know the difference.**

It's helpful to think of prayer as a conversation—a conversation with your Higher Power. Keep it simple. Just talk about what's on your mind, your concerns and worries. Nothing is too insignificant.

You may also want to explore other kinds of prayer.

What benefits will you get from prayer?

In the past you may have prayed, "God, get me out of this and I promise I'll never drink or use other drugs again." These prayers are self-serving. Instead pray for the courage to change and to confront the things that frighten you, threaten you, or make you angry. Pray for others, even those you don't like. Use prayer to relieve the fears, grief, and anger that could cause you to relapse or return to alcohol or other drug use.

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Prayers will bring you a sense of calm and well-being—a sense that you are part of a greater whole. It's difficult to use alcohol or other drugs when you feel spiritually connected to your Higher Power and other people. But it's easy to use substances when your heart is full of anger and fear.

On one level, prayer is about learning to accept external circumstances that you cannot change. But on a deeper level, prayer points to a fact about your inner life: you cannot directly control your feelings. However, you can influence your feelings through two other factors you can control: your thinking and your actions. Doing this moves you on to another quality described in the Serenity Prayer: courage. Courage allows you to seek spirituality and recovery one day at a time, while not letting fears or insecurities inhibit your spiritual progress.

What is meditation?

Meditation is all about listening to your Higher Power. The object of meditation is to clear your mind of racing thoughts, center yourself, and let go of fears, ambitions, jealousy, blame, and control. When you meditate, you will learn to listen to your inner self. Whenever your mind is racing with too many stressful thoughts of what you should be doing, what needs to be done, and what you should have done two weeks ago, focus on your breathing and make a conscious attempt to slow down and take full, long breaths. Soon, you'll be able to use deep breathing to clear your mind for several minutes, and eventually even longer. When obsessive, stressful thoughts catch up with you, simply refocus your breathing. Keep practicing this, regardless of how many times it takes before you see concrete results.

How can you learn to meditate?

Like most worthwhile things, deep meditation is achieved through practice. With practice, you will learn to customize a method of meditation that's right for you.

As a beginner, you may want to follow these steps to learn the basics of meditation:

1. **Prepare the environment.** Set aside a specific place and time. Consider shutting the door and unplugging the phone. Spiritual practice is about setting up a safe place that is free from distractions.
2. **Enter a state of relaxed alertness.** Many spiritual traditions, such as yoga, emphasize posture. For example, sitting upright with a straightened

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spine promotes attention, alertness, and relaxation, all at the same time. Try different postures that feel comfortable to you and allow you to breathe deeply.

3. **Allow for uninterrupted silence.** Listening begins as you quiet down. Freed from the compulsion to speak, criticize, or justify yourself, you can listen and gain direction for your life.
4. **Listen and give acknowledgment.** Step Eleven uses the term “conscious contact” to describe the state of being tuned in and listening with your deepest wisdom. When you receive guidance, let go of your own preconceptions about what should be and follow the inner guidance of your Higher Power.