



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## Taking The Mystery Out Of Meditation

Many people have misconceptions about the meaning of meditation. Some people think it is a religious practice or having to sit in a difficult yoga position for long periods. Other people think you have to chant a special mantra or stare at a flower for hours. Meditation is a personal thing and what method is effective for some does not suit others. In this world of increased stress more people would benefit from a regular meditation practice.

Meditation is simply being able to quieten the mind but with awareness. Every day thousands of thoughts flow through our minds, many of the thoughts being duplicated over and over again. Very often we become tired just because of these endless thoughts. If we could just keep the mind quiet for a short time it would be so restful.

We all have to start somewhere. I don't claim to be an expert in meditation. Far from it. I've tried quite a few techniques and I'll share some of these with you so you can try them out and gain experience.

**Just sit.** To give meditation a try, sit comfortably with your eyes closed and set a timer for 10 minutes. Commit to doing nothing more than sitting quietly and watching what happens. Don't pick up the telephone, don't answer the doorbell, and don't add another item to your to-do list. Just sit and observe the thoughts that arise and pass through your mind. You will likely be surprised by how difficult it is to sit quietly for 10 minutes. Meditation is a simple practice but that doesn't mean it's easy!

**Use The Breath.** Sit in a comfortable position. Try to keep your back fairly straight. If sitting on the floor cross-legged is a problem just sit against a wall or in a chair. Breathe normally and count your breaths. Count one as you breathe in, two as you breathe out, three as you breathe in and so on until you reach ten. Then return to one and start counting again. By focusing on your breath you stay alert but your mind becomes free of other thoughts. The occasional thought will creep in for sure but try not to pay it any attention and continue with the counting. Do this for ten minutes at first then increase to fifteen, as you get more experienced.

**Stare at a Candle.** Sit on the floor or in a chair. Place a candle flame at eye level. Stare at the flame without blinking for as long as possible. Your eyes may water, which is cleansing for the eyes so don't worry about this. Then close your eyes and focus on the image of the flame until it disappears. Then open your eyes and stare at the actual flame again. Continue doing this for about ten minutes or for however long you can keep your attention focused.

**Active Meditations.** You can meditate by simply going on a walk but not speaking to anyone. Keep your attention on every step you make. I've tried singing mantras with a group of people, which is a wonderful experience. Kundalini meditation using the designated CD for the different types of music involves gently bouncing for fifteen minutes, dancing in your style for fifteen minutes, sitting for fifteen minutes and finally lying down in silence for fifteen minutes. This is a very powerful meditation and your mind becomes almost free of thoughts. I am currently exploring different types of active meditations and I'll let you know the outcome.

It is possible to go much deeper into the subject of meditation and many books have been written about various techniques. I've just given you some ways to get started but notice how refreshed you feel after a period of quietening the mind.

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## Posture of the Month – Trianga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana (three parts of the body stretch)

In Sanskrit, the literal meaning of *Trianga* is “three parts of the body”. In this asana, the “three parts” comprise the buttocks, knees and feet. The back of the body, which is known in Sanskrit as the *paschima* or “west”, is stretched over *eka pada* or “one foot”, and the *mukha* or “face” rests on the leg. Regular practice of this asana makes the whole body supple and agile.

Before starting this posture make sure you have a belt and a block or a folded blanket.

1. Sit down in Dandasana with your back erect. Place your palms on the floor beside your hips, fingers pointing forward. Look straight ahead and take a few slow, steady breaths.
2. Bend your right foot back toward your right hip. Use your right hand to pull the ankle into place.
3. Keep your left leg stretched out, making sure that it rests on the centre of your left calf and heel.
4. Keep your thighs together. Press your right knee down on the floor. The inner side of your right calf should touch the outer side of your right thigh.
5. Balance equally on both buttocks. You may need to **place a block or folded blanket** under your left buttock to prevent you tilting to the left. Make sure that your right buttock rests squarely on the floor.
6. Take a belt and place it around your left foot and then let go of the belt. Raise your arms up toward the ceiling. Extend your torso upward and feel the stretch from your waist to your fingertips.
7. **Beginners:** Inhale and as you exhale bend forward from the waist. Stretch forward as far as you can and then take hold of the belt. Make sure your arms are straight and level and that your hands are equal distance from your foot. This will ensure that your shoulders are level. Hold the posture for 30-60 seconds.
8. **Intermediates:** Inhale and as you exhale bend forward from the waist. Stretch both arms beyond your left foot, with the palms facing each other. Ensure your thighs and knees are pressed together. Rest on both buttocks – the essence of this posture is getting this balance right. Push your torso towards your left foot. Press both your wrists against the sole of your left foot, and then hold your right wrist with your left hand. First, touch your forehead to your left knee, and then place your nose and lips, and finally, your chin, beyond your left knee. Push your left buttock out and rest on the inside of your left buttock bone. Hold the posture for 30-60 seconds.
9. To come out of the posture. Inhale, raise your head and torso and wait for a few seconds. Keep your back concave. Release your hands from your foot or the belt, and then sit up as you exhale.

This month we will now add in the posture **Krounchasana (Heron)** before straightening the right leg. Krounchasana is often done as a continuation of Trianga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana. It gives a full extension to the leg and exercises the muscles of the legs. The abdominal organs are also rejuvenated.

1. **Beginners:** Take hold of the belt around your left foot. Inhale and as you exhale raise the left leg taking your hands further along the belt until your arms are straight. Stretch the left leg fully and keep your back erect. Hold the posture for 20-30 seconds.
2. **Intermediates:** bend the left knee, hold the left foot with both hands and raise the left leg up vertically. Stretch the left leg fully and keep your back erect. After a few breaths in this position, exhale, move the head and trunk forward and at the same time bring the left leg nearer and rest the chin on the knee of the left leg. Hold the posture for 20-30 seconds. Do not lift the bent right knee off the floor.
3. To come out of the posture. Move the head and the trunk back. Lower the left leg, release the hands from the foot or the belt and carefully straighten the right leg.
4. Sit in Dandasana for a few breaths and then repeat both postures on the other side.

### Cautions

Do not practise this asana during, or immediately after, an asthmatic attack. Avoid this asana if you have diarrhoea. Do not twist your torso or allow it to lean toward the outer side of your extended leg, as this could strain your spine or abdominal organs.

### Benefits of this posture

- Tones and stimulates the abdominal organs
- Assists digestion and counters the effects of excess bile secretion
- Reduces flatulence and constipation
- Creates flexibility in the knee joints
- Corrects dropped arches and flat feet.

