

# The Janki Foundation for Global Health Care

## ‘Values in Healthcare; a spiritual approach’

### Module on Meditation

Introduced by Dr. Sarah Eagger

#### **What is it?**

Meditation is both an ancient art and a modern-day skill. There are many meditation techniques and methods from various philosophies and disciplines, but the essence of all of them is to quieten and focus the mind.

Whatever we think about influences how we feel. We use the understanding of this connection as the method of creating positive feelings in meditation. In fact, the word meditation itself has the Latin root *meditare* – to think or ponder. With meditation, it is possible to direct thoughts to a desired state of feeling, such as being peaceful, contented, silent in the mind, calm, light, happy, more accepting and less angry.

In the **Values in Healthcare** programme of learning, the tool of meditation is used as a method of directing the mind so that a peaceful or positive state of awareness results. Some of the meditations use visualisations or time for reflection as part of the process, so there is some overlap with the other tools.

#### **Why should we do it?**

Meditation is perhaps the most important tool to help us develop our spiritual skills. It produces a wide range of effects on the mind, such as improved capacity to concentrate and increased clarity of thinking, which, in turn, simplify decision-making. It also improves health and general well-being, reducing anxiety, stress, pain, and depressive or obsessive thoughts. It is useful in clearing out the mind at the end of the day, for relaxing and improving sleep.

On a deeper level, meditation is a journey of rediscovery of our inner selves, in particular the good about ourselves. This discovery of inner strength can be especially useful at times of crisis or illness. As the power to become calm and to experience deep peace within us develops, we become able to allow this calming and healing energy to reach the body as well as the mind. By connecting to this inner peace, we are then able to become more effective in working with our patients’ suffering and distress. This includes helping them face terminal illness and the fears that attend the process of dying.

Meditation helps keep us peaceful and positive and therefore, less susceptible to being unduly influenced or overwhelmed in difficult situations. Inner peace is the key to developing a more positive attitude towards ourselves. It strengthens us

psychologically, bringing about an enhanced sense of well-being and meaning to life.

Our sense of self-worth shifts from being dependent on what others think of us and on our status and roles, and rests instead on the experience of our own goodness and inner quiet. We draw on our inner strengths and so become more self-reliant, creative and fulfilled. Importantly, these foundations of self-respect are tangible and enduring, not artificial or temporary.

Often we are caught up in everyday distractions and demands, preoccupied with what we are doing. Consequently, we are seldom in touch with that deep sense we have of ourselves as spiritual beings. The more we meditate, the more our sense of identity gently shifts to that part of us which is more stable, lasting and clear, the part of us that we know to be our true selves.

Meditation can also be a practice that connects us with a source of higher energy, which we may call the 'universal spirit' or 'supreme being'. In fact, the quest to know or connect to the highest spiritual energy comes because of recognising the depth of our own inner being. The qualities of this energy are often described as 'an ocean of peace', 'unconditional, pure love', and 'light, joy and strength'. Through meditation and for some, through prayer, it is possible to connect to this light and to experience these qualities within our inner being.

A few of the exercises in this text refer to this supreme energy. It is a matter of choice for you and your group how you identify and label this 'source' and whether you wish to experiment with the opportunities provided.

### **How is it done?**

The most effective methods of meditation are those that also offer a clear understanding of how the mind operates, that is, how thoughts arise and can be managed in the mind. This understanding allows us to choose what and how we wish to think, and so brings the energy of thought under our conscious control. It is not necessary to attempt to blank or suppress the mind in meditation. In fact, many methods of meditation suggest particular themes or concepts to focus the mind. The *Values in Healthcare* approach encourages the creation of positive thoughts to harness our natural power to think.

Thoughts arise from many external sources – it is natural to begin to think about what we see or what we hear. We tend to react involuntarily to the stimuli we receive through our senses. Thoughts also arise from past memories stored within us. To lift us out of the involuntary turmoil that such thoughts often create, it is vital to focus on something positive and uplifting. The most powerful focus for meditation is the self and, in particular, the peaceful, positive qualities and goodness at the core of the self, which is our inner being. For example, by *thinking* deeply about our original nature as beings of peace, love and wisdom, we begin to *experience* those qualities that may have been latent or hidden. The thoughts we create of the self as a positive and peaceful being move us towards the calm and silent centre of our conscious self.

A powerful sense of wonder accompanies the discovery of that peaceful place within. It takes time to explore this. With practice, this inner peaceful world will become familiar, like a sanctuary, a safe home or retreat.

This inner space is not a place of passive emptiness. Rather, it is a place filled with treasure. Here, it is not necessary to battle with negative thoughts or feelings. In fact, it is easier, and preferable, to simply stand back and refocus on inner peace, or actively to replace negativity with positive and powerful thoughts. This method also naturally enables us to let go of negative feelings and to allow very positive feelings such as love, peace and happiness to grow.

Meditation is something you can do at any time, in any circumstances, preferably sitting upright in a comfortable position on a chair or on the floor. It may take time to gain control over your thoughts, and to feel at ease with this practice. Through it, it is possible to become the master of your mind and to develop a very positive attitude towards yourself and as a consequence, to others around you. (All the modules in the *Values in Healthcare* programme include opportunities to practise short meditations. In particular, the series of exercises in Module 2 *Peace* is a useful progressive introduction to meditation practice. Module 3 *Positivity* develops the theme of positivity further).

### **A simple meditation exercise**

We know our thoughts in an instant can take us anywhere, from the hustle and bustle of a busy street to a secluded beach where waves gently ebb and flow upon the shore. Here we feel an atmosphere of peace. When we think of people we love, such thoughts create a positive feeling in the mind. So, the thoughts we think create feelings in us. This principle underlies the experience of meditation. During meditation, we can feel the inner quiet and stillness filling us with strength. We may become aware of the pure love within and realise that peace, love and strength are part of our nature. These qualities belong to everyone. By always being busy in activity, we forget that these qualities are deep and natural; only we lose the ability to find them. Meditation reminds us how to regain them. By thinking of ourselves as peaceful beings, we can learn to take ourselves to a very peaceful place. In this peaceful place, we may experience a sense of connection with the universal supreme energy.

This is a simple meditation exercise. Either play the CD track no. 22 *Simple meditation* or speak these thoughts to yourself, pausing at ... to allow yourself time for reflection.

*Sitting comfortably I begin to withdraw my attention from the outer world, the world of my senses, and gently focus my attention within...I can create thoughts of peace... 'I am a peaceful being' ... and peaceful feelings follow... I become immersed in a feeling of peace and my thoughts gradually slow down... My mind begins to become quiet... The quiet feeling in my mind grows... I become more aware of the silence that lies behind all the usual chatter of my thoughts... In this silence, I begin to experience a deep sense of peace... peaceful thoughts arise... As I focus on my inner self, I begin to feel very relaxed and light... I am just flowing peaceful energy... I am very still... floating away... like a tiny star in a sea*

*of peace... Waves of peace wash over me and through me... This feeling leads me to a very peaceful place... This place is like a beautiful, silent room where I can just slow down, be myself and be free... This is a very special room because it has no walls, ceiling or floor... it is just light and peace... This is my home where there is no fear, just peace... my inner sanctuary... As I become comfortable reaching here with my thoughts, I may become aware of a tranquil presence... a benevolent, loving presence that is filling me with beautiful feelings and refreshing my tired thoughts... I come to know this supreme energy as my friend... a constant source of comfort and strength in an ever-changing world... This being emanates peace, love and bliss... I enjoy basking in these qualities... Slowly I return, just like a feather floating gently to the ground.*

### **In conclusion**

By observing the thoughts in our minds we come to realise that they are the energy that takes us into an experience. By creating positive thoughts, we can lead ourselves naturally into an experience of peace, inner strength and love. Peace is something we can create within our own minds. With practice, we realise this process can change the quality of our lives, our relationships, our behaviour and the way we experience the world. We understand ourselves to be peaceful beings and know we have constant access to a dimension of silence where we can find the supreme source of all positive qualities. This source fills us and helps us on this journey of self-discovery.

For further details about the **Values in Healthcare** programme, including availability and information about piloting and training the trainer events, please contact:

Joy Rendell  
The Janki Foundation for Global Health Care  
Administration Office  
449/451 High Road  
London NW10 2JJ UK  
Tel ++44 20 8459 1400

Email: [values@jankifoundation.org](mailto:values@jankifoundation.org)  
[www.jankifoundation.org](http://www.jankifoundation.org)

See also: Spirituality SIG Newsletter No. 15 for full description of VIH curriculum

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