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EXPERIENCE

## How Will I Know If I'm Really Meditating?

After struggling for years to learn to meditate with traditional techniques, the author was so discouraged he gave up. Then he tried neurofeedback.

By JOHN S. ANDERSON

I HAVE SPENT more than 20 years studying various forms of meditation. Sometimes I studied from books, but mostly I studied directly with reputable teachers. I recited mantras, I practiced breathing techniques, I paid attention to my breathing, and I observed the thoughts in my mind. I practiced yoga asanas. I stood on my head! I practiced meditating once a day, twice a day, and three times a day. I repeated the gyatri mantra 125,000 times in 30 days (at least I think so, I lost count so many times, I'm not sure!). I meditated early, I meditated late, and I meditated in the middle of the day. I went to intensive retreats. I stayed up with the sacred fire all night (I fell asleep! Luckily, I was sitting with a more devoted student who kept watch while I was snoring). I gazed at candles, I listened to tones, and I practiced bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga (not too much of this, my left brain was not working well in those days!), and hatha yoga.

I even lived in a yoga ashram for more than a year. Up at five in the morning every day for an hour of hatha yoga and an hour of meditation and breathing techniques. We also did breathing exercises and meditation before lunch, and then another hour or more of meditation and breathing before bed. I did jala neti, sutra neti, dhoti, and lots of other cleansing and purifying exercises. All this was combined with a large dose of selfless service (or at least as selfless as I was able to manage at the time), as in the proverbial carrying of water and cutting of wood (although we had running water and gas heat, so we did dishes and cleaned toilets instead).

All this was valuable experience, I learned a lot and the practices probably set the stage for later developments. However, as far as meditating was concerned, I don't think I got very far. Oh, I could sit for an hour without moving too much. However, my mind was wandering all over the place, my legs hurt, and I would often fall asleep. I had no clue about whether I was close to meditation or in meditation or on the other side of the planet from meditation. There were no guideposts! My teachers would tell me "keep practicing -- you'll get it sooner or later" or "the harder you try to get it, the less likely you will be to find it." Of course "it" wasn't "something to be found" anyway according to all the philosophy I was learning at the time (probably true

information, but frustrating nonetheless).

I gave up all that meditating for a while. I was discouraged. I had worked hard. I had believed that meditation was good for what ailed me, that it was good for the soul and would help me find true happiness, contentment, and enlightenment. However, I didn't know if I was close or a million miles away. My teachers were not forthcoming with an analysis of my meditation practice. What I usually heard was "keep practicing, when you are ready you will be initiated into a higher practice. You must prepare yourself first." After 20 plus years, I was ready to move on.

### **Discovering Brainwave Biofeedback**

Several years later I discovered brainwave biofeedback. I had been doing biofeedback as my profession since 1974 but had not done much with brainwave biofeedback (neurofeedback). Neurofeedback was unique in its ability to identify states of consciousness and then give that information back to me in a form I could use. What I used it for was to refine my ability to reach specific, identifiable, desirable states of awareness. I could sit and close my eyes and listen to a variety of tones that told me where I was along the spectrum of consciousness. Was I moving closer to a meditative state? If I was, I heard a lower tone. If I moved farther away from a meditative state, then I heard a higher tone. If I was falling asleep, the tones stopped altogether, creating just enough of a change to help me move back up out of sleep, but not so much that it took me out of meditation.

Since I have been practicing meditation using neurofeedback equipment, I have a much better sense of how to let myself reach deeply meditative states of consciousness. I have found these states to be intrinsically healing. I can also bring healing imagery with me into these states, where I am more receptive. These healing states also facilitate access to my own spontaneous inner healing imagery. I sometimes experience intuitive leaps and I often have a better perspective on my life, my relationships, and my work when I have regular access to these states.

How exciting it has been for me to finally experience some of the wonderful things that were promised when I began to practice meditation! Of course, when I meditated in the past, I did have some sessions where I felt I was in a peaceful state. I was relaxed, my mind was calm, but it only lasted for a few moments. With neurofeedback technology, I can remain in this meditative state for a much longer period. Neurofeedback doesn't "put me there;" it just lets me know when I'm closer or farther away. Certainly, I move in and out of that state, but I am more aware of where I am in the process.

Many teachers of meditation would like us to believe that this is a complex process and in some ways, it is. The [Yoga Sutras](#) of Patanjali talk about "stilling the modifications of the mind" and that certainly takes time and practice. The difference is that this technology makes the practice significantly more effective. Studies done by several researchers have shown that six months to a year of practice with neurofeedback technology results in the same control of brainwave states that 20-year meditators exhibit (see [The High Performance Mind: Mastering Brainwaves for Insight, Healing, and Creativity](#) by Anna Wise).

Now, it is highly probable that my early practice with meditation was a good foundation for my later refinement of that practice with neurofeedback technology. However, why not start right away with neurofeedback technology, to make the time spent much more productive?

Some might say that long years of practice builds character and prepares the student for the changes that will take place in the mind, body, and personality. Maybe that is true. However, this is the dawning of a new millennium and maybe we are at a point where we are ready for a faster and more effective way to access these meditative, healing states of consciousness. Things happen for a reason.

We are given gifts to use if we are able to accept them. In the past, the luxury of pursuing the spiritual path was the privilege of a selected few. This was mostly because few could or would persist with the training. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone had access to these healing states without having to spend a lifetime of intensive practice to learn them?

There are other neurotechnologies that complement neurofeedback. Audiovisual entrainment is one. Various audio tapes that use a variety of techniques to induce an altered state of consciousness and certain types of auditory and visual training can also have beneficial effects. This is not to say that all of this comes easily. Much of what we have to struggle with in any spiritual pursuit is our own fear of letting go. This fear also gets in the way when using neurotechnology. With neurotechnology, however, we can more easily identify the blocks and learn to move beyond them.

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Our main reference page about technology that helps achieve meditative states. Includes an overview, book recommendations, and links to articles and other sites.

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