

Meditation for Health



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The Science Behind Meditation

Abundant research in the last few years has demonstrated that a regular meditation practice contributes not only a way for us to physically relax, but also serves as a detoxification method for our minds and emotions. This occurs due to the brain shifting into other frequencies, known as brain waves, during certain activities.

An excellent article (excerpted below) describing this is found at <http://www.finerminds.com/mind-power/brain-waves/>

‘It’s important to understand how your brain contributes to the state of your mind. While most of us focus on looking at our emotions in an attempt to become happier, more spiritual beings, our brains waves and our subconscious mind also play a key part in our quest for fulfillment. In this article, we’ll be looking at our five brain wave frequencies and how they affect our state of mind.

Are We The Controllers Of Our Reality?

We easily forget that we are the controllers of our reality – and that “our reality” is not made up of outside influences, but that it actually consists of our thoughts, beliefs and mindset. Therefore, by learning about the deeper states of consciousness, you can open your subconscious mind and create your reality at will, and with precision. To do this, the first step is to understand your different brain frequencies. Did you know that we all have five (Beta, Alpha, Theta, Delta and Gamma), and each frequency is measured in cycles per second (Hz) and has its own set of characteristics representing a specific level of brain activity and a unique state of consciousness? Smart, eh?

1) Beta (14-40Hz) – The Waking Consciousness And Reasoning Wave

Beta brain waves are associated with normal waking consciousness and a heightened state of alertness, logic and critical reasoning. While Beta brain waves are important for effective functioning throughout the day, they also can translate into stress, anxiety and restlessness. The voice of Beta can be described as being that nagging little inner critic that gets louder the higher you go into

range. Therefore, with a majority of adults operate at Beta; it's little surprise that stress is today's most common health problem.

2) Alpha (7.5-14Hz) – The Deep Relaxation Wave

Alpha brain waves are present in deep relaxation and usually when the eyes are closed, when you're slipping into a lovely daydream or during light meditation. It is an optimal time to program the mind for success and it also heightens your imagination, visualization, memory, learning and concentration. It is the gateway to your subconscious mind and lies at the base of your conscious awareness. The voice of Alpha is your intuition, which becomes clearer and more profound the closer you get to 7.5Hz.

3) Theta (4-7.5Hz) – The Light Meditation And Sleeping Wave

Theta brain waves are present during deep meditation and light sleep, including the all-important REM dream state. It is the realm of your subconsciousness and only experienced momentarily as you drift off to sleep from Alpha and wake from deep sleep (from Delta). It is said that a sense of deep spiritual connection and unity with the universe can be experienced at Theta. Your mind's most deep-seated programs are at Theta and it is where you experience vivid visualizations, great inspiration, profound creativity and exceptional insight. Unlike your other brain waves, the elusive voice of Theta is a silent voice.

It is at the Alpha-Theta border, from 7Hz to 8Hz, where the optimal range for visualization, mind programming and using the creative power of your mind begins. It's the mental state which you consciously create your reality. At this frequency, you are conscious of your surroundings however your body is in deep relaxation.



4) Delta (0.5-4Hz) – The Deep Sleep Wave

The Delta frequency is the slowest of the frequencies and is experienced in deep, dreamless sleep and in very deep, transcendental meditation where awareness is fully detached.

Delta is the realm of your unconscious mind, and the gateway to the universal mind and the collective unconscious, where information received is otherwise unavailable at the conscious level. Among many things, deep sleep is important for the healing process – as it's linked with deep healing and regeneration. Hence,

not having enough deep sleep is detrimental to your health in more ways than one.

5) Gamma (above 40Hz) – The Insight Wave

This range is the most recently discovered and is the fastest frequency at above 40Hz. While little is known about this state of mind, initial research shows Gamma waves are associated with bursts of insight and high-level information processing.'

Health Benefits

Current research demonstrates a multitude of benefits to health with a regular practice of meditation. Seven health benefits of meditation are described in the article below:

<http://foodmatters.tv/articles-1/7-health-benefits-of-meditation>

It's a piece of advice yogis have given for thousands of years: take a deep breath and relax. Watch the tension melt from your muscles and all your niggling worries vanish. Somehow we all know that relaxation is good for us.

Now the hard science has caught up: a comprehensive scientific study showing that deep relaxation changes our bodies on a genetic level has just been published. What researchers at Harvard Medical School discovered is that, in long-term practitioners of relaxation methods such as yoga and meditation, far more "disease-fighting genes" were active, compared to those who practiced no form of relaxation.

In particular, they found genes that protect from disorders such as pain, infertility, high blood pressure and even rheumatoid arthritis were switched on. The changes, say the researchers, were induced by what they call "the relaxation effect", a phenomenon that could be just as powerful as any medical drug but without the side effects. **"We found a range of disease-fighting genes were active in the relaxation practitioners that were not active in the control group,"** Dr Herbert Benson, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, who led the research, says. The good news

for the control group with the less-healthy genes is that the research didn't stop there.

The experiment, which showed just how responsive genes are to behavior, mood and environment, revealed that genes can switch on, just as easily as they switch off. "Harvard researchers asked the control group to start practicing relaxation methods every day," says Jake Toby, hypnotherapist at London's BodyMind Medicine Centre, who teaches clients how to induce the relaxation effect. **"After two months, their bodies began to change: the genes that help fight inflammation, kill diseased cells and protect the body from cancer all began to switch on."**

More encouraging still, the benefits of the relaxation effect were found to increase with regular practice: the more people practiced relaxation methods such as meditation or deep breathing, the greater their chances of remaining free of arthritis and joint pain with stronger immunity, healthier hormone levels and lower blood pressure. Benson believes the research is pivotal because it shows how a person's state of mind affects the body on a physical and genetic level. It might also explain why relaxation induced by meditation or repetitive mantras is considered to be a powerful remedy in traditions such as Ayurveda in India or Tibetan medicine.

But just how can relaxation have such wide-ranging and powerful effects? Research has described the negative effects of stress on the body. Linked to the release of the stress-hormones adrenalin and cortisol, stress raises the heart rate and blood pressure, weakens immunity and lowers fertility. By contrast, the state of relaxation is linked to higher levels of feel-good chemicals such as serotonin and to the growth hormone which repairs cells and tissue. Indeed, studies show that relaxation has virtually the opposite effect, lowering heart rate, boosting immunity and enabling the body to thrive.

"On a biological level, stress is linked to fight-flight and danger," Dr Jane Flemming, a London GP, says. "In survival mode, heart rate rises and blood pressure shoots up. Meanwhile muscles, preparing for danger, contract and tighten. And non-essential functions such as immunity and digestion go by the wayside." Relaxation, on the other hand, is a state of

rest, enjoyment and physical renewal. Free of danger, muscles can relax and food can be digested. The heart can slow and blood circulation flows freely to the body's tissues, feeding it with nutrients and oxygen. This restful state is good for fertility, as the body is able to conserve the resources it needs to generate new life.

While relaxation techniques can be very different, their biological effects are essentially similar. "When you relax, the parasympathetic nervous system switches on. That is linked to better digestion, memory and immunity, among other things," Toby says. "As long as you relax deeply, you'll reap the rewards." But, he warns, deep relaxation isn't the sort of switching off you do relaxing with a cup of tea or lounging on the sofa.

"What you're looking for is a state of deep relaxation where tension is released from the body on a physical level and your mind completely switches off," he says. "The effect won't be achieved by lounging round in an everyday way, nor can you force yourself to relax. You can only really achieve it by learning a specific technique such as self-hypnosis, guided imagery or meditation."



The relaxation effect, however, may not be as pronounced on everyone. "Some people are more susceptible to relaxation methods than others," says Joan Borysenko, director of a relaxation program for outpatients at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre in Boston. "Through relaxation, we find some people experience a little improvement, others a lot. And there are a few whose lives turn around totally."

7 Health Benefits of Deep Relaxation

The next time you tune out and switch off and let yourself melt, remind yourself of all the good work the relaxation effect is doing on your body. These are just some of the scientifically proven benefits

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1. INCREASED IMMUNITY

Relaxation appears to boost immunity in recovering cancer patients. A study at the Ohio State University found that progressive muscular

relaxation, when practiced daily, reduced the risk of breast cancer recurrence. In another study at Ohio State, a month of relaxation exercises boosted natural killer cells in the elderly, giving them a greater resistance to tumors and to viruses.

2. EMOTIONAL BALANCE

Emotional balance, means to be free of all the neurotic behavior that results from the existence of a tortured and traumatized ego. This is very hard to achieve fully, but meditation certainly is the way to cure such neurosis and unhealthy emotional states. As one's consciousness is cleansed of emotionally soaked memories, not only does great freedom abound, but also great balance. As one's responses then are not colored by the burdens one carries, but are instead true, direct and appropriate.

3. INCREASED FERTILITY

A study at the University of Western Australia found that women are more likely to conceive during periods when they are relaxed rather than stressed. A study at Trakya University, in Turkey, also found that stress reduces sperm count and motility, suggesting relaxation may also boost male fertility.

4. RELIEVES IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

When patients suffering from irritable bowel syndrome began practicing a relaxation meditation twice daily, their symptoms of bloating, diarrhea and constipation improved significantly. The meditation was so effective the researchers at the State University of New York recommended it as an effective treatment.

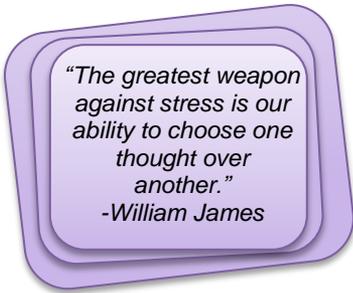
5. LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE

A study at Harvard Medical School found that meditation lowered blood pressure by making the body less responsive to stress hormones, in a similar way to blood pressure-lowering medication. Meanwhile a British Medical Journal report found that patients trained how to relax had significantly lower blood pressure.

6. ANTI-INFLAMMATORY

Stress leads to inflammation, a state linked to heart disease, arthritis, asthma and skin conditions such as psoriasis, say researchers at Emory University in the US. Relaxation can help prevent and treat such symptoms by switching off the stress response. In this way, one study at McGill University in Canada found that meditation

clinically improved the symptoms of psoriasis.



7. CALMNESS

The simple difference between those who meditate and those who do not, is that for a meditative mind the thought occurs but is witnessed, while for an ordinary mind, the thought occurs and is the boss. So in both minds, an upsetting thought can occur, but for those who meditate it is just another thought, which is seen as such and is allowed to blossom

and die, while in the ordinary mind the thought instigates a storm which rages on and on.

Technique

How to switch off stress?

How can you use relaxation's healing powers? Harvard researchers found that yoga, meditation and even repetitive prayer and mantras all induced the relaxation effect. "The more regularly these techniques are practiced, the more deeply rooted the benefits will be," Jake Toby says. Try one or more of these techniques for 15 minutes once or twice a day.

Body Scan: Starting with your head and working down to your arms and feet, notice how you feel in your body. Taking in your head and neck, simply notice if you feel tense, relaxed, calm or anxious. See how much you can spread any sensations of softness and relaxation to areas of your body that feel tense. Once you reach your feet, work back up your body.

Breath Focus: Sit comfortably. Tune into your breath, follow the sensation of inhaling from your nose to abdomen and out again. Let tension go with each exhalation. When you notice your mind wandering, return to your breath.

Mantra Repetition: The relaxation response can be evoked by

sitting quietly with eyes closed for 15 minutes twice a day, and mentally repeating a simple word or sound such as "Om".

Guided Imagery: Imagine a wonderfully relaxing light or a soothing waterfall washing away tension from your body and mind. Make your image vivid, imagining texture, color and any fragrance as the image washes over you.



Formal vs. Informal Practice

Meditation can be done in the more traditional sitting poses, or as a walking activity. Some find that sitting cross-legged on a mat or floor is too difficult due to knee or back problems. In this case, sitting on a chair is perfectly fine.

Many people find that after finding a meditation style that works for them, they are able to slip into a meditative state just by taking a few breaths, or by beginning to chant a mantra that they find soothing or meaningful. The sections below about Loving-Kindness and Ho'oponopono meditation are examples of types of meditation where certain phrases are repeated over and over again.

Group vs Solitary Practice

Although I very much enjoy being led in meditation in a group setting, I often find that the issues that come up when I am meditating make me feel somewhat emotional, and for this I prefer meditating in solitude. I often find myself walking in nature and my mind naturally begins to recite the mantras that are familiar to me. It is felt that most individuals benefit from two meditation periods per day, and using my nature walking time to fulfill one of the two daily sessions is convenient and practical.

Two Types of Meditation

Although mantras and visualizations are powerful meditative exercises, I often find it easier to “stay on track” when my meditation is purposeful. Two types of meditation that I have found to help me in this regard are called “Loving-Kindness” (or “metta”) meditation, and the Ho’oponopono meditation (or prayer). Links to the articles are included if you’d like more information.

Loving-Kindness Meditation

http://www.buddhanet.net/metta_in.htm

An Overview of Loving-kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation can be brought in to support the practice of 'bare attention' to help keep the mind open and sweet. It provides the essential balance to support your insight meditation practice.

It is a fact of life that many people are troubled by difficult emotional states in the pressured societies we live in, but do little in terms of developing skills to deal with them. Yet even when the mind goes sour it is within most people's capacity to arouse positive feelings to sweeten it. Loving-kindness is a meditation practice taught by the Buddha to develop the mental habit of selfless or altruistic love. In the Dhammapada can be found the saying: "Hatred cannot coexist with loving-kindness, and dissipates if supplanted with thoughts based on loving-kindness."



Loving-kindness is a meditation practice, which brings about positive attitudinal changes as it systematically develops the quality of 'loving-acceptance'. It acts, as it were, as a form of self-psychotherapy, a way of healing the troubled mind to free it from its pain and confusion. Of all Buddhist meditations, loving-kindness has the immediate benefit of sweetening and changing old habituated negative patterns of mind.

To put it into its context, Loving-kindness is the first of a series of meditations that produce four qualities of love: Friendliness (*metta*), Compassion (*karuna*), Appreciative Joy (*mudita*) and Equanimity (*upekkha*). The quality of 'friendliness' is expressed as warmth that reaches out and embraces others. When loving-kindness practice matures it naturally overflows into compassion, as one empathises with other people's difficulties; on the other hand one needs to be wary of pity, as its near enemy, as it merely mimics the quality of concern without empathy. The positive expression of empathy is an appreciation of other people's good qualities or good fortune, or appreciative joy, rather than feelings of jealousy towards them. This series of meditations comes to maturity as 'on-looking equanimity'. This 'engaged equanimity' must be cultivated within the context of this series of meditations, or there is a risk of it manifesting as its near enemy, indifference or aloofness. So, ultimately you remain kindly disposed and caring toward everybody with an equal spread of loving feelings and acceptance in all situations and relationships.

How to do it . . .

The practice always begins with developing a loving acceptance of yourself. If resistance is experienced then it indicates that feelings of unworthiness are present. No matter, this means there is work to be done, as the practice itself is designed to overcome any feelings of self-doubt or negativity. Then you are ready to systematically develop loving-kindness towards others.

Four Types of Persons to develop loving-kindness towards:

- a respected, beloved person - such as a spiritual teacher;
- a dearly beloved - which could be a close family member or friend;
- a neutral person - somebody you know, but have no special feelings towards, e.g.: a person who serves you in a shop;
- a hostile person - someone you are currently having difficulty with.

Starting with yourself, then systematically sending loving-kindness from person to person in the above order will have the effect of breaking down the barriers between the four types of people and yourself. This will have the effect of breaking down the divisions within your own mind, the source of much of the conflict we experience. Just a word of caution if you are practicing intensively. It

is best if you choose a member of the same sex or, if you have a sexual bias to your own sex, a person of the opposite sex. This is because of the risk that the near enemy of loving-kindness, lust, can be aroused. Try different people to practice on, as some people do not easily fit into the above categories, but do try to keep to the prescribed order.

Ways of arousing feelings of loving-kindness:

1. Visualisation - Bring up a mental picture. See yourself or the person the feeling is directed at smiling back at you or just being joyous.

1. By reflection - Reflect on the positive qualities of a person and the acts of kindness they have done. And to yourself, making an affirmation, a positive statement about yourself, using your own words.

3. Auditory - This is the simplest way but probably the most effective. Repeat an internalized mantra or phrase such as 'loving-kindness'.

The visualisations, reflections and the repetition of loving-kindness are devices to help you arouse positive feelings of loving-kindness. You can use all of them or one that works best for you. When the positive feeling arise, switch from the devices to the feeling, as it is the feeling that is the primary focus. Keep the mind fixed on the feeling, if it strays bring it back to the device, or if the feelings weaken or are lost then return to the device, i.e. use the visualisation to bring back or strengthen the feeling.

The second stage is Directional Pervasion where you systematically project the aroused feeling of loving-kindness to all points of the compass: north, south, east and west, up and down, and all around. This directional pervasion will be enhanced by bringing to mind loving friends and like-minded communities you know in the cities, towns and countries around the world.

Non-specific Pervasion tends to spontaneously happen as the practice matures. It is not discriminating. It has no specific object and involves just naturally radiating feelings of universal love. When it

arises the practice has then come to maturity in that it has changed particular, preferential love, which is an attached love, to an all-embracing unconditional love!

Loving-kindness is a heart meditation and should not to be seen as just a formal sitting practice removed from everyday life. So take your good vibes outside into the streets, at home, at work and into your relationships. Applying the practice to daily life is a matter of directing a friendly attitude and having openness toward everybody you relate to, without discrimination.

There are as many different ways of doing it as there are levels of intensity in the practice. This introduction is intended to help you familiarize yourself with the basic technique, so that you can become established in the practice before going on, if you wish, to the deeper, systematic practice - to the level of meditative absorption.

Ho'oponopono Prayer

<http://www.wanttoknow.info/070701imsorryiloveyoujoevitale>

Simple Steps to Healing: Ho'oponopono: I Love You, I'm Sorry, Please Forgive Me, Thank You
by Dr. Joe Vitale

Two years ago, I heard about a therapist in Hawaii who cured a complete ward of criminally insane patients – without ever seeing any of them. **The psychologist would study an inmate's chart and then look within himself to see how he created that person's illness.** As he improved himself, the patient improved.

When I first heard this story, I thought it was an urban legend. How could anyone heal anyone else by healing himself? How could even the best self-improvement master cure the criminally insane?

It didn't make any sense. It wasn't logical, so I dismissed the story.

However, I heard it again a year later. I heard that the therapist had used a Hawaiian healing process called ho'oponopono. I had never

heard of it, yet I couldn't let it leave my mind. If the story was at all true, I had to know more.

I had always understood "total responsibility" to mean that I am responsible for what I think and do. Beyond that, it's out of my hands. I think that most people think of total responsibility that way. We're responsible for what we do, not what anyone else does. **The Hawaiian therapist who healed those mentally ill people would teach me an advanced new perspective about total responsibility.**

His name is Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len. We probably spent an hour talking on our first phone call. I asked him to tell me the complete story of his work as a therapist. He explained that he worked at Hawaii State Hospital for four years. That ward where they kept the criminally insane was dangerous. Psychologists quit on a monthly basis. The staff called in sick a lot or simply quit. People would walk through that ward with their backs against the wall, afraid of being attacked by patients. It was not a pleasant place to live, work, or visit.

Dr. Len told me that he never saw patients. He agreed to have an office and to review their files. While he looked at those files, he would work on himself. As he worked on himself, patients began to heal.

"After a few months, patients that had to be shackled were being allowed to walk freely," he told me. "Others who had to be heavily medicated were getting off their medications. And those who had no chance of ever being released were being freed."

I was in awe.

"Not only that," he went on, "but the staff began to enjoy coming to work. Absenteeism and turnover disappeared. We ended up with more staff than we needed because patients were being released, and all the staff was showing up to work."

This is where I had to ask the million dollar question: "What were you doing within yourself that caused those people to change?"

"I was simply healing the part of me that created them," he said.

I didn't understand.

Dr. Len explained that total responsibility for your life means that everything in your life – simply because it is in your life – is your responsibility. In a literal sense the entire world is your creation.



*"I love you"
"I'm sorry"
"Please Forgive Me"
"Thank You"*

Whew. This is tough to swallow. Being responsible for what I say or do is one thing. Being responsible for what everyone in my life says or does is quite another. Yet, the truth is this: if you take complete responsibility for your life, then everything you see, hear, taste, touch, or in any way experience is your responsibility because it is in your life.

This means that terrorist activity, the president, the economy – anything you experience and don't like – is up for you to heal. They don't exist, in a manner of speaking, except as projections from inside you. The problem isn't with them, it's with you, and to change them, you have to change you.

I know this is tough to grasp, let alone accept or actually live. Blame is far easier than total responsibility, but as I spoke with Dr. Len, I began to realize that healing for him and in ho'oponopono means loving yourself. If you want to improve your life, you have to heal your life. If you want to cure anyone – even a mentally ill criminal – you do it by healing you.

I asked Dr. Len how he went about healing himself. What was he doing, exactly, when he looked at those patients' files?

"I just kept saying, 'I'm sorry' and 'I love you' over and over again," he explained.

That's it?

That's it.

Turns out that loving yourself is the greatest way to improve yourself, and as you improve yourself, you improve your world. Let me give you a quick example of how this works: one day,

someone sent me an email that upset me. In the past I would have handled it by working on my emotional hot buttons or by trying to reason with the person who sent the nasty message. This time, I decided to try Dr. Len's method. I kept silently saying, "I'm sorry" and "I love you." I didn't say it to anyone in particular. I was simply evoking the spirit of love to heal within me what was creating the outer circumstance.

Within an hour I got an e-mail from the same person. He apologized for his previous message. Keep in mind that I didn't take any outward action to get that apology. I didn't even write him back. Yet, by saying "I love you," I somehow healed within me what was creating him.

In short, Dr. Len says there is no out there. It would take a whole book to explain this advanced technique with the depth it deserves. **Suffice it to say that whenever you want to improve anything in your life, there's only one place to look: inside you.**

And when you look, do it with love.

Note: This article on ho'oponopono is edited from the book *Zero Limits* by Dr. Joe Vitale and Dr. Len.

Dr. Len's message may be quite hard to believe, yet it's amazingly simple. He states that we are all responsible for everything that we see in our world. By taking full personal responsibility and then healing the wounded places within ourselves, we can literally heal ourselves and our world. As related by Joe Vitale in the radio interview, **Dr. Len suggests a four-stage process for this ho'oponopono work.** Whenever a place for healing presents itself in your life, open to the place where the hurt resides within you. After identifying this place, with as much feeling as you can, say the below four statements:

- **I love you.**
- **I'm sorry.**
- **Please forgive me.**
- **Thank you.**

Even if you are skeptical, consider giving this simple healing method a try to see what happens. Many have found it to be incredibly profound in their lives. Thanks for taking the time to read this story and may your life open to ever more healing and miracles. I love you. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you.

Tools to Enhance Your Practice

Many meditators find that using music, candles, incense, and other tools helps them to focus and to enhance their overall experience. My personal routine includes putting on relaxing music, lighting candles and incense, and sometimes performing a smudging blessing before sitting down to meditate.

Music

Most people find relaxing music to be helpful to their practice. If you have internet access, try Pandora radio. There are multiple new-age genre stations available that work well for meditation. If you'd like to create your own, try creating a station based on a musician such as R. Carlos Nakai, an instrumentalist specializing in the native American flute.

Although music can be played over speakers, using stereo headphones can be very effective in assisting the brain to shift frequencies. Music composed using **binaural beats** is especially useful.

Smudging

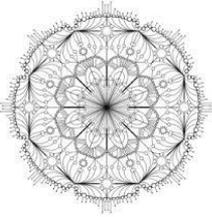
Smudging is a Native American tradition which calls on the spirits of sacred plants to drive away negative energies and restore balance. Sage and sweetgrass are the most commonly used herbs. The herbs are placed in a stone bowl or large shell and lit, and a large feather is used to waft the smudge. Some people use crystals and essential oils in conjunction with their smudging to help purify the energy in their space. Candles are also a useful adjunct.

Always remember to use common sense and observe good fire safety when using candles, incense, and herbs.



Meditative Art

Research shows that our brainwaves shift when we are being creative, and that participating in a creative endeavor such as art or music can help us gain the same benefits as during meditation. Two types of art that I enjoy working with are *Mandalas* and using the *Zentangle*® technique.



The **Mandala** (Sanskrit: 'circle') is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the universe. Meditating on and drawing or coloring mandalas is a spiritual practice that is often used therapeutically. Check out these websites to download, print and color your own mandalas:

<http://www.printmandala.com/>

<http://www.mandala-4free.de/en/index.htm>

<http://www.colormandala.com/>

The **Zentangle** Method is an easy-to-learn, relaxing, and fun way to create beautiful images by drawing structured patterns.

Almost anyone can use it to create beautiful images. It increases focus and creativity, provides artistic satisfaction along with an increased sense of personal well being. The Zentangle Method is enjoyed all over this world across a wide range of skills, interests and ages.

