

What is meditation?
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Surprisingly, the Hebrew word translated most frequently as “meditate” or “meditation” (*hagah*) is a word about making sounds. It is used by the grieving Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:14 (*I moan like a dove*). It can refer to the growling of a lion over its prey (Isaiah 31:4), and to the whispering of an enemy (Lamentations 3:62). It can also be a cry of anguish, as in Psalm 5:1 *consider my groaning* (or *meditation*, NKJV). A second Hebrew “meditation” word (*siach*) is also a vocal word, being translated *speak* in Job 12:8 and *complain* in Job 7:11. Yet, neither word is normally used to indicate conversation or dialogue. They both suggest low, nearly incomprehensible or inaudible vocalizations. We find both these words used in Psalm 143:5 *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your doings; I muse on the work of your hands*. And again, in Psalm 77:12 *I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your deeds*. Knowing the Hebrew love for parallelism, we conclude that the words are roughly synonymous in these contexts.

In the Bible, meditation engages both the mind and the mouth. It is that process you enter into as you walk along engrossed in a consideration. You begin to soliloquize: first, silently, in language or image, but then vocally, as your consciousness is taken up by the object of reflection. Meditation is the mental equivalent of keeping that special piece of something in your mouth a little longer in order to extract its delightful savor to the fullest.

In the examples from Psalms 143 and 77, the Psalmist is engrossed by the mighty works of the Lord. His mind fills with the thoughts of God’s works, and his mouth breathes them out with obvious delight and comfort. Indeed, he wants yet more: *my soul longs for you, as a parched land* (Psalm 143:6). Godly meditation is a choice means of enjoying the presence of the Lord. Meditation becomes a form of prayer, as the soliloquy is punctuated with remarks, with song, with shouts, with cries, groans, or questions addressed to the Lord. It is a practice which fills the consciousness with knowledge of the Lord.

Godly meditation is always guided by what we can know about God through his self-revelation. God commanded Joshua (1:8) to meditate in this way: *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...* The psalmists meditate on God’s works, on God’s law (Psalm 119:48), or on God himself (Psalm 63:6). We know God because he has given us knowledge of himself. We can know him through his works (Romans 1:20; John 10:25) or through his Word. If we go outside the bounds of that revealed knowledge, we step off the platform of truth and sink into the absorbing darkness of (self) deceit. We drift into mysticism. The safeguard against mysticism is to restrain our imagination from becoming the navigator of our meditation (Exodus 20:4, 7).

Meditation was freshly reinjected into our common speech by the popularizing of Eastern religions. Unlike daydreaming, meditation is not an aimless walk through thought. From the yoga meditation trivialized on TV, to esoteric forms of Zen meditation, or to deadly occult exercises, meditation always has a goal. The purpose of meditation is to shape and influence the conscious soul. Godly meditation will impress upon the soul knowledge of God leading to a rich communion with him. Meditative aids such as postures, words, music, sounds, pictures, scents or

“nothingness” developed by the prophets of false religions will impress false principles upon the soul of the meditator and lead him away from God. These things are not harmless.

In Psalm 1:2, we read of the godly man that *his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law he meditates day and night*. In Psalm 2:1, we read: *Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing?* The Hebrew literally reads *meditating an empty thing* (*mutter in vain* JPS). The same grammatical form of *hagah* (meditate) is used in both verses. All men meditate. But the object of their meditation has important consequences on the outcome of their existence.

Meditation comes with strings attached. One begins by pondering and musing, by soliloquizing. But the object of the meditation reflects back on the meditator. Our vocal Hebrew words for *meditation* render this process transparent. Proverbs 6:22 speaks to the child of the teachings of godly parents. *When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you*. The *talking* (siach) is that quiet, pondering voice of the meditation. The *torah* that has been thoroughly contemplated with delight now makes its dwelling in the heart. It becomes the faithful companion softly guiding even the first step out of bed in the morning.

You can enjoy rich meditation when you assure yourself that it fulfills the conditions of Psalm 19:14. In fact, the whole of Psalm 19 is a wonderful meditation on our wonderful God. Try letting it guide you into fellowship with the Lord.