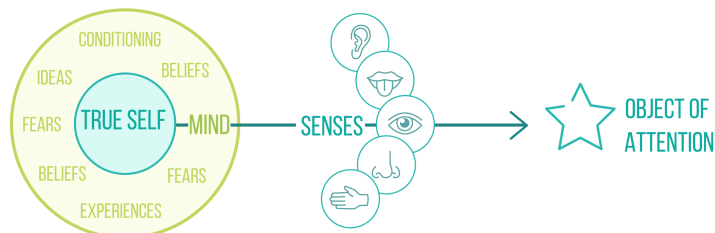


THREE STAGES OF MEDITATION

According to the yoga tradition, our minds tend to fluctuate between the states of attention and distraction. This is a normal pattern that can be called “popcorn mind”, when different thoughts pop in and out, holding our attention for a bit and then switching to something else. There are many different things we are usually concerned with in our daily lives and our thoughts follow those recurring themes.



We perceive the *external reality* through our senses and then filter it through our minds. Because of that filter, we rarely perceive an external object the way it is, it is always wrapped in an additional layer of associations, memories and projections.

We perceive our *internal reality* via interoception, which includes awareness of our bodily functions, like breathing or heart beat and the thought process itself. Those internal perceptions get filtered through the conditioned mind, as well as all its biases.

Either an internal or external object can become an object of meditation. At the beginning it serves an important purpose of training our focus and teaching us to be able to concentrate on one thing for an extended period of time. Later on we can use meditation to begin to differentiate between the object itself and our biases around the object, and eventually question our assumptions and conditioning itself.

There are three stage of meditation: dharana, dhyanam and samadhi.

First step: Dharana



Dharana (-dha- “to hold) means being able to hold attention on an object for progressively longer periods of time without distraction. For example, you can hold your attention on the light of a candle, or the rhythm of your breath for extended period of time.

Second step: Dhyanam



Dhyanam (-dhi- to reflect) occurs when there begins to be a relationship between the mind and the object of attention. It means that you gain some insights about yourself from concentrating on the object. For example, by meditating on an image of fire in your belly you gain insights about your ability to process your experiences.

Third step: Samadhi



In the state of Samadhi the relationship between the object and the mind becomes very close, as if they have merged. At that point the mind begins to shed its conditioning and the object shines forth as it is. For example, if you meditate on a deity, in the state of Samadhi you take on the qualities of that deity.

At that point, according to Patanjali, instead of being clouded by your baggage, the mind becomes like a transparent crystal, able to reflect the object perceived, the instrument of perception (the mind) and the process of perception. When you get to that stage, you are no longer bound by your biases and are able to see the reality for what it is (neither good nor bad) and yourself for what you are (unchanging True Self). So ultimately meditation is about cleansing the filter of your perception.