

Music Meditation

Are there any negative effects?

[Previously published as fb200511 Piya Tan]

(1)

BEGINNERS to meditation, if they have difficulty starting, may find INSTRUMENTAL flowing music helpful. You have to decide whether you want music or meditative peace. Test the musical piece or set or style. Use the one that allows you to feel just the peace of the music and nothing else.

(2)

Music listening for meditation works better in UNDIRECTED MEDITATION, such as the perception in impermanence. You watch the rise and fall, the soft and the loud, the sounds of the different instruments, even noticing the SILENCE in between the notes. Should any thought arise, you note them simply as "IMPERMANENT."

(3)

Oddly, if you are musically trained and critical about music (such as being a conductor), you may have difficulty with music meditation. Of course, you can WILL yourself not to be judgemental, and this may help you on a different level!

(4)

Music is, as a rule, unhelpful and unnecessary in DIRECTED MEDITATION, such as breath meditation. We either watch the breath or the music. In fact, when you find the music distracting, it is a sign that you don't need it, and you do better in natural silence.

(5)

If you are attached to the music, and cannot meditate without it, then, use it. Choose a short piece, or select a movement, or short passage to launch you off into the joyful SILENCE of meditation.

(6)

If you are by nature, an EXTRAVERT, you may find certain kinds of music soothing, but more importantly, you need CALMING sounds, to focus on so that you can let go of sense-processing and learn to focus fully on the mind. This may take some time; so be patient.

VIPASSANA MEDITATION (as taught today) is generally unsuitable for extraverts. Hence, if you plan to go for the Vipassana of U Ba Khin/Goenka method (which starts with the 10-day SILENT retreat) [below], it's best you practise first with simple directed meditation [4].

Also note that such Vipassana retreats are NOT safe for those with emotional or psychological issues, even those under medication. Breakdowns are common for such people who attempt it. However, the U Ba Khin/Goenka Vipassana system is now 40 years old and has evolved a system of interviews to help the meditators. As a rule, they will interview you before you sign on. If not, ask for an interview with one of their qualified instructors. [Below]

(7)

In any case, notice the effects of music on your meditation. Work to lessen the negative effects, and focus on the positive effects. For example, LESSEN the duration of the music, until you comfortably do NOT feel the need for it. This means that you have also received some useful working instructions in a meditation useful for you, especially BREATH MEDITATION, which is the most universal and safest. Remember, true Buddhist meditation is about spiritual RENUNCIATION.

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<https://medium.com/@mattangriffel/what-happens-during-a-10-day-silent-vipassana-retreat-43eded56e4e5>

Side-Effects of Music on Meditation

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When we are talking about meditation side-effects there are three important points to consider:

First, there are different types of meditation and not every type would be suitable for everyone. For example, Buddhist Vipassana meditation is very difficult practice for extrovert types, A type personality or hyperactive people. But "Yoga Nidra" meditation which follows quick pace moving the focus through different body parts would work very well in such cases. Many clients tell me of their failed experience with meditation. Most of the time it is due to applying one specific meditation technique in a group set-up and as a result some people would enjoy it and do well while others may experience frustration and feeling of failure.

Second, in meditation you connect to your internal space and depending on what you stored in your internal space meditation may release emotional and mental blockages, from abuse and traumatic images to unprocessed anxiety, grief or anger. Several researchers described this side-effect of meditation:

1. Kutz et al. (1985a,b) described meditation side-effects such as sobbing and release of hidden memories and themes from the past: incest, rejection, and abandonment.
2. Other adverse effects described (Craven, 1989) are uncomfortable kinaesthetic sensations, mild dissociation, feelings of guilt and, via anxiety-provoking phenomena, psychosis-like symptoms, grandiosity, elation, destructive behaviour and suicidal feelings.
3. Shapiro (1992) found that 62.9% of the subjects reported adverse effects during and after meditation and 7.4% experienced profoundly adverse effects. The length of practice (from 16 to 105 months) did not make any difference to the quality and frequency of adverse

effects. These adverse effects were relaxation-induced anxiety and panic; paradoxical increases in tension; less motivation in life; boredom; pain; impaired reality testing; confusion and disorientation; feeling 'spaced out'; depression; increased negativity; being more judgmental; and, ironically, feeling addicted to meditation.

During retreats that I have been guiding for years, meditation and silence most times cause a release of stored emotional, mental, physical or spiritual stuff. The fact is that we have too busy lives and make very little time for processing of emotional and mental content resulting in a huge number of unprocessed "files". The moment we slow down, became quiet and connect to our inner space material from these "unprocessed files" may come out. In my experience, if one gets no help with processing of that material it can do more harm than good.

Third, meditation practice is often misunderstood and romanticized. Some people think of meditation practice as a way to get relaxed and some as a way to focus. Even though relaxation or focus may be some of the benefits, "goal" in meditation is nothing to do with these. Meditation or dhyana is a process of raising spiritual energy and reaching spiritual enlightenment. In yoga, meditation or dhyana, the process of spiritual awakening is not considered an easy or pleasant one. Hence, on our spiritual journey we need a "guru". Word "guru" translates as "dispeller of darkness" - reflecting how risky and dangerous that road may be.

In conclusion, meditation is a very powerful practice that can induce unpleasant or even harmful effects if not practiced under the guidance and if "material" released is not processed in a meaningful way.

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