



# Just Being:

A Pagan Guide to  
Meditation

by Shanddaramon



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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my long time friend and meditation partner Sydney. He was a cat who lived with me for 19 years. He would often sit next to me during my meditation sessions or jump in my lap while I wrote on the computer and would stay there for hours offering love, support, and guidance. I will miss him every time I sit down to meditate or write.

*Just Being*

# Acknowledgments

The experiments and experiences that led to the writing of this book have come from years of studying and practicing meditation. They have also come from years of teaching meditation to a variety of students. I wish to take this opportunity to thank those students for their patience and for sharing their thoughts with me.

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# *Preface*

## Why I Wrote This Book

 "I can't meditate." I've heard this phrase being spoken countless times by my students and by many others. The ongoing rush of daily life that calls out for our attention at every turn makes it difficult to slow down our thoughts and to quiet our minds. Yet, few would disagree that meditation is an important part of most any spiritual practice. This is especially true for those of us who call ourselves Neo-Pagans (or just Pagan with a capital P for short). Modern Paganism embraces mysticism and the beauty and wonder of Nature. Both of these things call us to meditate – to soften the critical mind in order to get in touch with the greater mystery of life and with Spirit. But, that fact often does not make it any easier to still a busy mind. It is for my students and all other Pagans who feel a calling to listen to Spirit, the mystery of Nature, and to their inner selves that I have written this book. This text will be a guide on how to meditate but, more than that, it will reflect upon the unique way in which meditation can strengthen and deepen the study and practice of Paganism.

I once taught a college course on meditation. I saw first hand how meditation can change people and their outlook on life. The course encouraged students to explore different meditation techniques from different religious perspectives and, in the process, provided ways for them to delve deeply into themselves. Through the study of many forms of contemplative spiritual practices, engaging in group meditation, and keeping a meditation journal, students often awakened a part of themselves rarely touched before in other studies. It was rewarding for me to see those young people, many of whom eschewed anything religious, find their individual spiritual nature through meditation. Having taught the class for several years, I was able to test out several different methods and ideas and, thereby, hone my teaching

of the class. Much of what I learned from teaching that class has been put into this book.

Meditation has been an important part of my own practice as well. I first became interested in the subject as a child because of my asthma. As a young boy I became convinced that health was intimately related to the condition of the whole body and mind. Medication was able to help me when I had asthma attacks but it was less effective in preventing the attacks from happening in the first place. Asthma can be triggered by many things including allergic reactions, airborne irritants and particles, exercise, and extreme weather conditions, just to name a few of the many challenges. It can also be caused by emotional conditions such as fear and worry. In order to try and prevent those life-threatening asthma attacks from coming on, I needed to try and avoid both environmental and emotional triggers. The former threat involved physical remedies but the latter required mental control – control that I learned could be sought through the practice of meditation. It was through this practice that I was able to experience a state of peace and tranquility. My meditation practice gave me a place of emotional respite in my mind where I could go when the outside world seemed threatening. Later, I began to study Eastern religions, many of which make meditation a central part of spiritual development. It was then that I was able to begin to understand the relationship of meditation to a connection with the higher self and beyond. Those lessons stayed with me when I discovered modern Paganism.

In some religions, spiritual development is encouraged by the teachings of a mentor or church official. Students of Paganism can also learn by studying with a mentor but it is not necessary. Direct training and experience is often sought in Pagan spiritual development and meditation can be an important part of that experience. I started my Pagan studies with a High Priestess who taught me many things but I soon found out I needed to branch out on my own. A critical part of my personal development as a solitary practitioner came through my own meditations. I began to develop my own five degree system for learning and growing which became the focus of my first book *Self-Initiation for the Solitary Witch*. Most of the lessons for the higher degrees of that book include some type of meditation. I learned that studying with a teacher can be very helpful but I also learned to trust

my own heart and body. When the meditation was going well, my body felt it. It just felt right.

Another reason I wanted to write this book was because there are many meditation books but none that I found that are focused on modern Pagan spiritual principles. Paganism is a growing spiritual tradition in the world and one that I believe can offer the world a truly religious alternative. If meditation is an important part of Pagan practice then there needs to be a meditation book that can address the specific spiritual needs of Pagans. You can read generalized books on meditation but there will come a time in your practice when you will want to connect your meditation practice to your own spiritual practice. I believe that spiritual meditation is about connecting to that place that is deep within us but which is the same as the mystery that is beyond us as well. If you find that place to be full of the gods or sacred cosmic energies or your higher self or whatever higher concept you may embrace, then you have found where Pagan spiritual principles and good meditation practice converge.

## A Description of the Chapters

In the first chapter we will attempt to understand the general meaning of meditation. We will do this by exploring various definitions. Then, we will explore the reasons that people often begin a meditation practice and ask if those reasons are realistic by comparing them to the actual benefits of meditation. Next, we will go deeper by understanding how meditation relates to various states of mind and different meditation practices. Finally, I will share with you what I believe to be the four stages of meditative practice which will become a major focus of the remainder of the book.

Chapter Two begins our exploration of how one learns to meditate. You will learn how to prepare yourself to begin a meditation practice and then study specific procedures you can use to develop a successful practice. The development of these preliminary practices is what I call *The Outer Procedure*. We will discuss those things which may cause your practice to be less effective including the variety of things that can distract your mind away from its goal. Part of every good developing meditation practice is learning to be able to review what has been done and how well it worked. You will learn how to do

just such a review. This chapter will also include a great number of exercises that will help you develop specific skills you will need to begin and continue a deep and effective practice.

While Chapter Two focuses on developing an overall Pagan meditation procedure, Chapter Three looks at specific goals for meditation – the central focus of a meditation practice. This is where the truly challenging but ultimately meaningful work will begin. This chapter will explore my theory of the four stages of meditation: relaxation, concentration, acceptance, and absorption. Each stage will be examined separately in detail and exercises will be provided to develop your skills in each. The culmination of these practices will be to develop what I call *The Inner Procedure*.

Chapter Four will provide some meditations specifically designed for Pagans. We will explore meditations that use Pagan spiritual principles to develop the self and one's connection to the universe and its many cycles.

The final chapter, *Beyond Meditation*, will explore things related to meditation such as keeping a meditation journal and items that can be purchased or made to help with your practice. This chapter will also discuss how meditation can become an important part of your everyday life and will include some final exercises.

In the Appendices you will find scripts that can be used to create your own meditation tapes.

## Developing Meditation Skills

Meditation is both simple and complex. It is both easy and challenging. In essence, meditation is just sitting in a state of pure awareness but, for many people, just sitting for any great length of time is a great challenge. The image that most people have of meditation is that someone sits down in a full lotus position (both legs crossed with feet resting on each knee) and then begins to enter a deep meditative state. On the surface, it seems like that is all a meditator is doing but that is not always the case. Practicing meditation is a skill. In fact, it is a combination of many skills each of which needs to be learned, developed, and practiced. Like any complex activity, it helps to learn and master each specific skill separately and then combine those skills to create a complete and deep meaningful meditation

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practice. Please do not let the idea that you are developing a skill send you packing, however. Learning to meditate is a joyful and pleasurable experience and developing the skills to do it well does not have to be a difficult and unwieldy process.

Think back to when you first learned to drive a car (or learned some other complex activity). You had to first learn to do develop separate skills such as reading traffic signals, applying proper pressure to the pedals, using turn signals, negotiating the road, and so on. Later, as you mastered each of these skills, you then began to put them all together into one activity. As you gained experience in driving, the small tasks began to be much easier than when you first learned them. The same is true for learning how to meditate. So many times I have heard people exclaim that they have tried to meditate but they were unsuccessful. Well, if you knew nothing about driving and just got in a car one day and tried to take off down the road, I expect you would have just as much trouble learning to drive as you would trying to learn to meditate. Meditation is a complex task. It involves doing something very different than what you do throughout most of your busy and hectic days. Through meditation you must learn to relax and concentrate – no easy task for the modern person. This is why I have provided for you in this book a set of skills for you to learn separately and then put together into short easy routines. Once a solid meditation practice has been developed you should be able to go through your procedures and meditate on your chosen goal in about 20 - 30 minutes. But first, you will need to take the time and energy to learn the separate skills that will lead to the development of your complete meditation procedure. In other words, learning to meditate will take time, energy, and patience. You can find quick methods on any number of websites, magazine articles, and books but if those methods do not work for you, I encourage you to take some time to truly learn the art of meditation.

In this book I have divided the separate skills into four operations that can be learned separately and then put all together. The first operation is the Preparation. In this stage, you will create your meditation space and schedule so that you can create a regular meditation practice. The second operation is what I call The Outer Procedure. In this phase you will prepare yourself to enter into a meditative state. This step includes stretching and centering yourself

so that you can begin the work of meditation. The next operation is The Inner Procedure which includes steps to prepare yourself deeply within to be ready for inner work. The final operation is the focus of meditation itself. This may sound overly complex for something that is supposed to be quite simple but doing each of these things will strengthen and deepen your practice. Each part of each procedure is a meditation exercise on its own and should be approached in that way but as you proceed through the exercises you will begin to develop a procedure that will successfully carry you from the everyday world of passing thoughts and information overload to a deep seated place of peace and inner joy. As you continue further, each operation will go from being a set of separate exercises into a complete exercise in and of itself until each operation lasts under a minute and you move quickly to a state of deep meditation.

## How To Use This Book

There are several ways in which you can effectively use this book. If you are a beginner, it might be best to read through the entire book and go through the exercises sequentially. If you have some experience with meditation then you may want to look over the book and determine where you are in terms of your experience and then begin reading and working from that point. People who are experienced with meditation in general but not with Pagan meditation specifically may want to begin with the Pagan meditations in Chapter Three. Others may want to pick and choose from the exercises and the meditations provided in the text. I encourage you to discover for yourself what you need by first skimming through the book and then concentrating on the areas that may be of the most interest to you. By pursuing your own interests, I think you will eventually find yourself wanting to incorporate as much as you can into your own practice. Though the book itself describes a complete meditation procedure, not all things work for all people. As you learn and practice meditation it is my hope that you will come to develop your own procedure that works best for you. I have found, though, that it often helps to begin with a model already designed by someone else and then work from there to craft one that works for you. I offer this book to you as an example of one such model. Wherever you may choose to begin, I

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suggest that you do all the exercises from that point in the book at least once. If a particular exercise feels right for you then I suggest you practice that one at least two more times before moving on to the next one.

There are many different exercises and meditations in this book. They can be done by one person or by a whole class together. Most of the meditations in this book are put together in the form of a guided meditation. Each exercise lists a goal, a suggested amount of time, a suggested location, a list of needs, and a list of detailed steps. These lists help you to organize yourself before you begin the actual practice. It also helps those who may wish to lead meditation study groups.

If you plan to use this book in a group practice it will be necessary for at least one person to lead the group so that the others can just concentrate on what they are doing during the meditations. If one person does not want to do it all the time then people could switch leading the group. The leader should read through the exercise that is chosen for that session beforehand to be familiar with it and its goals. Then the leader should encourage each person to prepare themselves and take any previous steps needed to be ready for the meditation session. The leader should always remember to read aloud slowly and fully but with a soothing and calming voice. Be sure to leave time between steps for people to process what is being said and to do the activity.

This book will progress from the simple to the complex and then return you to simplicity. In the following chapter, I will introduce some very simple introductory meditations so that you can measure your current ability. Be honest with yourself in doing these exercises. If you find them easy because you have some previous experience with meditation or because you are a naturally calm and composed person then you may be able to skip some of the preparatory exercises but if you find these first few exercises difficult, then I suggest you go through all the exercises in the book. There is no shame in being an inexperienced meditator. Our society is not designed for the quietly content and joyous person. You are asked to be dissatisfied at every turn because this sense of lacking that creates a need in you. That is the need to go out and buy something that will fill that hole in your soul. We live in a capitalistic society whose purpose is to get you to

buy things so that the economy will remain in growth. At every moment you are being conditioned to desire things and services so that you will spend money. Meditation is a way of breaking that conditioning. We also live in a time that is filled with constantly oncoming information. Everybody wants your attention and wants you to know their message. It is only natural that the people of such a society would have a difficult time resisting those messages and, instead, find time to be in a state of quiet and blissful peace. But, that is the purpose of meditation – to set aside a time to be at peace with yourself and the universe.

A note on the use of spiritual terms in this book: be flexible. There are as many views on the divine as there are Pagans out there and it is impossible for any author to use the specific theological language of each individual person so I hope you will translate the things I say into your own personal spiritual language and understanding. Feel free to change the words I use to represent theological concepts into the words or names that are most comfortable to you.

## When Things Are Not Going Well

All developmental practices include times when things do not go well or when you feel you may not be advancing. Development is not a single straight line like a driveway. It is more like a slowly arching spiral that occasionally has dips in it. You could say it is like riding a mostly circular roller coaster. It is the same for meditation practice. As you practice, you find that you make some progress and then the progress seems to slow down or even dip a little. If you do not get too frustrated and can stay motivated then you keep practicing. Eventually, you start to make some more progress until the road turns again. What is even more crazy is that you often find the end of one path leads you back to where you started. That is the nature of a spiral – you never really get too far away from where you started. It is just that each return brings you to a slightly higher level than you were before so that you have gone nowhere and somewhere at the same time. (Spirituality is full of paradoxes.) You will have to practice for a while to experience what I mean.

All development requires having hope, faith, and love. Hope

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begins the journey. You have to believe that the end of one road is a slightly better place than where you are right now. Faith gives you the strength to keep going though you are not always sure you are going in the right direction. If you walk, you will eventually get somewhere but you have to put your faith into that journey to keep going. Only when you stop will you go nowhere. Love is the journey's end. After doing all the exercises and exploring all the roads what you find at the end is the same thing that teachers and mystics have been saying for centuries. Love is where you must begin and love is where you will end. They sound like nice words but only by having the experience of pure love gained through meditation will you come to know the deep truth of those words.

If you find you are having great difficulty, then you may want to seek out a teacher or mentor. This text assumes that you do not have a mentor and that you are exploring on your own but a mentor can be useful for helping you find out where you may be stuck. I also suggest that you allow yourself to move slowly and take breaks. There is no easy and quick change to be had here; inner development takes time and patience. After doing several of these exercises I encourage you to take some time off of your practice. Mostly I suggest that you tune into what your body says. Deep inside, your body knows what is really right for you.

## EXERCISES

I would like to introduce some very simple meditation exercises for you to try. If you find them easy to do then you may be able to skip ahead to the next chapter. If not, you should take some time to work through the exercises in this chapter.

### Preliminary Exercise 1

You will need a timer with an alarm for this exercise. Begin by sitting comfortably any way that you like. Set your timer for 30 seconds and just sit. That's all – just sit. Be still and quiet until you hear the alarm go off. If that was easy try the next exercise.

Preliminary Exercise 2

Set your timer for 1 minute and do the same thing – just sit quietly. This time notice your thoughts as you sit. What did you think about in that minute? Did you feel a need to move or get up? How many different kinds of thoughts did you have? If you were able to sit for 1 minute then try the next exercise.

Preliminary Exercise 3

Set your timer for 5 minutes and sit. This time, imagine that your mind is like a small child in a museum or other place where it is necessary to be quiet. Every time a thought comes into your mind politely ask the child to be quiet. Do not get upset if the child continues to make noise or even throws a fit. Remember that you love this child and would never want to hurt it. Instead of being angry, try to quietly ask the child to be silent then continue with your sitting.

