



Peter Sedlmeier

The Psychology of Meditation

Varieties, Effects, Theories,
and Perspectives

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The word 'meditation' has been part of my lexicon for over two decades.
The act? A continual struggle.

I know meditation "works." Clinical studies have shown the mental, physical, and spiritual benefits of daily meditation practice. But what exactly counts as meditation?

Is it mindfulness?

Focusing on mantras?

Detaching from your body and drifting into some unknown energy field?



Photo: Kelly Sikkema from Unsplash

What outcomes can you expect? Is it to awaken? Liberate oneself? Reach a state of enlightenment? Does it lead you down a spiritual path to discover the meaning of life? Or does it help you overcome your problems, a form of self-help therapy?

Once you decide to meditate, what guidelines do you adhere to? Should you lean toward Western meanings and directives or embrace Eastern philosophies and practices? Whose teachings should you follow? Buddha? Jon Kabat Zin? Osho?

While my questions were not explicitly addressed, I did find answers and more in Peter Sedlmeier's (2022) new book, *The Psychology of Meditation*. Noted as a "leading meditation scientist and practitioner," Sedlmeier offers a representative overview of meditation with a scientific slant. Divided into four parts, the text guides readers through varieties of meditation, the effects of meditation, theories of meditation, and concludes with Part 4: Perspectives. He notes that the first 10 chapters build the foundation to support the endpoint, Chapter 11: Perspectives on Meditation Research.

One of Sedlmeier's prime reasons for writing this book was to focus on "future prospects of meditation research" (pg.231):

" . . . I am not aware of any other book that makes so many pains to prepare the argument that meditation research definitely needs to be improved—regarding which, some suggestions will be offered here" (pg.X).

This is an academic read, not a how-to—you will not learn how to breathe or reach a state of equanimity, but you will understand the reasoning behind these states and traits. By classifying this book as a scholastic endeavor, I am not saying it is boring nor implying that it lumbers along, dragged down in heavy data, cluttered with genre-specific language that bogs and boggles one's mind. What I am saying is that readers will receive succinct, articulate, well-written, supportive data (cited) to help them create an expansive picture of meditation—its forms/types, a timeline of origins, and most significantly, clinically and scientifically based perspectives/information that I have not seen gathered in one place before. This was a fresh read.

Sedlmeier builds a solid case to support his assertion that there is "inconsistency in how it (*mindfulness and in my mind meditation, too*) is defined, measured and implemented as a meditation practice" (pg.41). His discussion on research using meditation with healthy-ish practitioners and populations with health issues covers enough ground to be fascinating without being overwhelming. He devotes time expanding on what he classifies as four main traditional meditation approaches, two from Hinduism and two from Buddhism: Samkhya-Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, early Buddhism, and Zen. He notes that these four approaches "should give a good impression regarding what kinds of theories stand behind traditional systems of meditation"; the theoretical presentations are designed to "explain how and why these meditation techniques work" (pg. 174).



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I felt as if readers were invited to reflect beyond commonly held definitions of everyday terms, to experience a perspective of meditation beyond the norm, and to immerse themselves in a scientific sphere of curiosity.

“Peter Sedlmeier is Professor of Psychology at the Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany. He teaches research methods and cognitive psychology. Apart from the psychology of meditation, his current areas of interest include intercultural research, time processing, and computer modeling of cognitive and statistical processes. He has had an ongoing meditation practice for more than 20 years, mostly Zen, interspersed with some extended excursions into the Theravada world, and some experience in Yoga meditation and TM.”

