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Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Meditation

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The phrases Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced are being used here solely because we are all familiar with this language. There is no intent here to categorize, classify, or label people by the use of these terms. Rather, it should allow you to easily see the universal process of meditation more clearly. You might also find it useful in observing your progress. The six subcategories below are very broad, applying to virtually any system of meditation. This outline attempts to capture the entire process of meditation, from beginning to the height of enlightenment. By understanding this general process, it is much easier to learn and do the practices themselves.

Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
In the Beginning stages of practice, you think that you are meditating, while you are actually still learning methods. This is a pleasant time of learning, as benefits start to come from practicing.	In the Intermediate stages, you have a pretty good grasp of the process of meditation. The practices already learned are being improved upon, and new practices are being integrated with them.	In the Advanced stages, you have a solid foundation in understanding the process of meditation, as well as practicing meditation. You now explore and transcend the subtler aspects of your inner world.
1. Foundation, Lifestyle, Meditation in Action	3. Stabilizing and Refining your Practices	5. Exploring and Purifying the Unconscious Mind
Successfully practicing meditation requires having a well balanced lifestyle and a basic degree of self awareness, as can be cultivated in daily life. In this foundation stage, you cultivate practices and attitudes such as non-harming, lovingness, compassion, and acceptance. Primitive urges for food, sleep, sex, and self-preservation are seen and wisely regulated. Balanced lifestyle and meditation in action brings stability of mind.	During this important phase, determination is developed to stay with the practices, gently learning and growing. It is a time for gaining proficiency in the methods already learned. New methods or alterations of existing methods are learned and integrated into the practices. You are beginning to get a feel for the nature of the whole process of meditation, and how to integrate other practices such as contemplation, prayer, and mantra.	Now you are ready to explore the normally unexamined inner world. The deep unconscious that might have previously been avoided is now invited to come forward for introspection. Principles such as the four functions of mind (manas, chitta, ahankara, and buddhi) are seen quite clearly. The inner process speeds up as more and more of the deep impressions driving karma are seen, examined, and weakened in the depths of meditation.
2. Establishing the Practice of Meditation	4. Training and Calming the Conscious Mind	6. Going Through and Beyond the Mind
Building upon that solid foundation, you can more easily learn the actual practices of meditation, while these first two stages are somewhat done together. You establish a regular time and place for meditation each day, develop your sitting posture, and learn to work with and train the senses, body, breath, and mind. Individual techniques are learned and repeated over and over, coordinating them systematically.	Here, you can easily calm the conscious mind. The days of the "noisy" mind are behind you. You can easily regulate your breath, balance the energies, and find peace of mind. The process of meditation is clear, as you spend your time practicing rather than learning methods. Many people stop here, as if this calmness is the goal of meditation. Actually, it is the prerequisite for true meditation leading to subtler direct experience.	After accepting the unconscious material, you leave behind memories, pictures, and words. You examine and explore the inner instruments themselves, such as the subtle energies and elements, which are the very building blocks of ourselves as individuals. Gradually, you move past even these, traveling into and through even the subtlest channel of light and sound, to the absolute reality of who you really are as pure being or consciousness.