

# **The Top 10: Prevalence and Popularity of Basic Meditation Practices in Different Spiritual Traditions**

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## **Background and Objectives**

Meditation is an umbrella term for many different meditative practices in different traditions and schools. The vast amount of existing practices makes it difficult to investigate “global” effects of meditation. Moreover, it remains unclear what people actually do when they say they meditate. Recently, meditation research has started publishing studies that compared different meditation practices or proposed theoretical models and classification systems. However, the present study was the first attempt to capture all existing meditative practices and examine their prevalence and popularity among experienced practitioners from all different kinds of spiritual traditions.

## **Methods**

We collected an exhaustive list of 250 meditative practices through literature search and interviews with 20 experienced meditators from diverse traditions. Then, we reduced them to 50 basic, comprehensible practices and sent a survey to 100 meditation centers in Europe. 661 experienced meditators with a mean meditation experience of 15.0 years responded and provided data on how much experience they had with each of these 50 practices.

## **Results**

Responses were analyzed using descriptive and factor analytic techniques. This poster reports the effects of age, gender, meditation experience and affiliation to specific traditions on the acquaintance with different meditative practices, provides TOP 10 lists for ten major meditation traditions and descriptively reflects changes taking place during “contemplative careers”. There appear to be certain basic practices that are employed equally by “beginners” and “experts” in meditation, and these basic practices vary slightly across traditions. Several practices are utilized equally by meditators of all traditions. Four traditions stand out as they prefer some rather “special” practices specific to their tradition. The majority of practices could be allocated plausibly to seven main groups of meditation practices.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Some practices stand out as “general” practices known and utilized in almost all spiritual traditions, others are rather tradition-specific. We conclude that there is no “meditation” in general, but that there are rather different practices that might exert diverse effects. Research on the effects of meditation should take into account this diversity.