

bija<sup>B</sup>

# Meditations For The Five Senses

By Bija Bennett





# Meditations For The Five Senses

I remember the first time I began to meditate. It was the summer of 1957, outside my house in Highland Park, Illinois. I was six years old, and I could smell the cut grass as I lay on my back, gazing into the majestic branches of an enormous oak tree. It was a grand old tree and I felt protected by its arms. I stayed under the tree for hours — silent, happy, and free — just being there, at peace with myself. I didn't know it, but I was meditating.

Twenty years later, I "officially" learned to meditate. I was initiated and given a mantra. I trained myself to sit upright and still for exactly 20 minutes — twice a day. Then it turned into two hours — twice a day. I would say, "It's time to meditate," whether I wanted to or not. I would never miss a meditation. "Do it, and you'll be enlightened," they said.

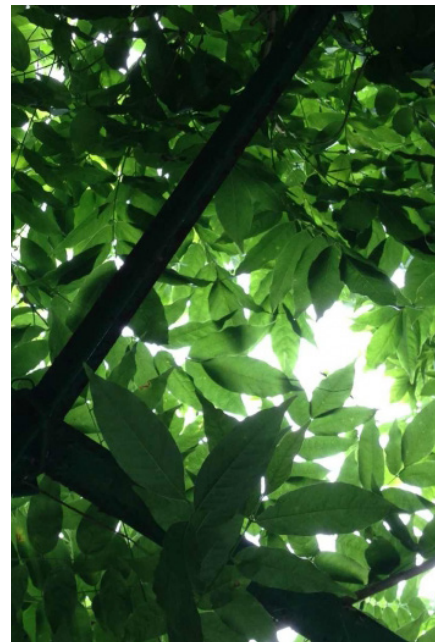
Twenty years later, I am back to the tree.

People often say to me, "I can't sit and meditate, I don't know what to do." I say, "Why do you make meditation more difficult than it really is? Why not just experiment? What would happen if you simply began to direct your attention in one direction, and held that direction?" Making a small shift can yield an astonishing result.

There are many types of meditation. Keeping your mind on your breath is one. Reflecting on an idea, or quietly observing an emotion, is another. In meditation, you can have various starting points, distinct levels on the springboard from which you can dive.

In the end, you are the goal of meditation. If you celebrate that, then you don't have to pigeonhole the experience by saying, "I am sitting to meditate," or, "I found it hard to meditate today." If you simply turn your attention to what is really there and sustain it, even for a few minutes, you will find that same presence in whatever you do, all day long, in or out of meditation.

"I didn't know it, but I was meditating."





## Sensing the Muse

True observation is a very active experience. It involves focusing all of your senses and actively engaging with your environment. Directing your senses is a process of intentionally focusing them toward what you want to do, or feel. In this kind of meditation, your senses act as your mind's focusing tool, keeping your mind free from outside distraction.

Use the following five sensory practices as tools for directing your attention and making your mind stay vividly aware. Practice them separately or use them as themes and intentions at work, or with your family at home, fitting them into your daily routine.

Remember though, you don't need to make these meditations a strict discipline. Rather, appreciate the sensual life all around you and let your senses be your muse. Trust them and they will heal and inspire you.

Make meditating on your senses a refreshing form of relaxation and play.



# I

## I Am All Ears (Sound)

Our eyes see only what is on the surface, but to hear is to be.

Hearing is the purest of the senses. It has the most direct contact with our emotional being. When we learn to use our sense of hearing fully, we can reach a deeper consciousness.

Musician and composer John Cage said, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound." You hear mostly noise. When you ignore it, it will disturb you, but when you listen to it, you'll find it fascinating and emotionally stimulating.

### LESSON ONE: LISTEN (No, Listen Carefully.)

Listen to the sounds of a truck cruising at fifty miles per hour, a mason cutting bricks, the static between radio stations, the rain. Capture and control these sounds and use them, not as sound effects, but as instruments to make you feel deeper. Listen to the wind, your heartbeat, a car motor, a wave lapping on the shore. Discern the difference between stimulating and relaxing sounds, between sounds made by living beings and those made by things.

There is always something to hear. Call it a musical meditation.

### LESSON TWO: EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

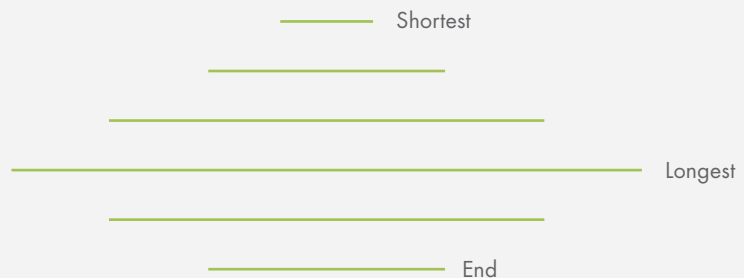
The following is an example of a sound meditation. Use it as a guide. Adapt it, and experiment.

Sit in a comfortable position and breathe 12 times, gradually increasing the length of the exhalations. Then sit quietly for a moment. Repeat the two-syllable sound Ah — Ha mentally, not verbally.

Hold the sound in your mind longer with each repetition. Increase the length of the sound progressively until you get to the longest length of sound, and then progressively decrease it back to the shortest length. Take your time.

Use any number of sounds. For example, use the Hebrew word for love, Ah — Ha — Va. Or try Ra — Ma, or Na — Ma, or Ah — Men. The goal of this meditation is to bring the "sound" deeper within you upon each repetition. Notice that no actual sound is made outwardly.

#### LENGTH OF REPETITION





# 2

## Show me (sight)

Absolute color occurs only in the mind, not in the outside world.

The red of an apple remains in our minds, but think of how different it looks in the moonlight, or on the branch of a shady tree, or under a fluorescent light. What happens when you close your eyes? What do you see?

Have you ever tried to see without looking? Close your eyes and stay awhile behind your closed eyelids. Let a smile be born behind your lids. Detach your attention from the outside world. Arrive in inner space behind

your eyes, and lose your sight. In inner space, you don't see things in the way you are accustomed to seeing them on the outside. Give all your attention to this feeling of seeing.

### A COLOR MEDITATION

Sit quietly and read the following description. Then close your eyes and allow the colors and images to come into your conscious mind.

Picture the freshness of a meadow of young grass after a rain shower. The grass gleams

like a carpet of emerald velvet: bright, tender, and soft. The turquoise-blue morning sky is flushed with white and rosy-gold billowing clouds. Nearby, two tall white birds, pale and slim, walk gracefully in the clear morning light.

Feel the images and colors. Feel yourself surrounded by light and life. Let the images lead you to other feelings, sensations, thoughts. As your vision begins to fade, sit quietly and rest with your eyes closed. Feel the colors embody you completely.





# 3

## Touché (Touch)

In fencing, the word touché means that we've been touched by our opponent's foil.

We also say touché when someone has delivered a point well made, or touched the core of someone's being. Life itself could never have evolved without touch. Without touch, there would be no species, parenthood, or survival. Touch is not only basic to our species, it is the key to it.

Skin is the key organ of our sense of touch, and since skin stretches over our entire body, sensitive touching affects our whole organism. Touching increases tactile stimulation and decreases stress. It makes you feel more alive. So don't lose touch. Make touch a daily emotional-balancing discipline.

### **MEDITATE ON TOUCH**

This Ayurvedic self-massage technique will prepare you for the coming day. Do it before you bathe in the morning, and prior to exercising. According to the classical Ayurvedic texts, a daily sesame-oil massage

rejuvenates the skin, lets it breathe, and promotes youthful luster.

Sit in a comfortable position. Then, begin your massage.

### **HEAD**

Apply oil to your head and massage your scalp vigorously with both hands. Use the flats of your fingers to massage your head with circular motions.

### **FACE**

Move down to your face, neck, and ears. With both hands, massage your face using gentle pressure, making a circular motion over your entire face.

### **NECK**

With both hands, massage the front and back of your neck in long strokes and with a deeper pressure.

### **ARMS**

Using the flat of one hand, make circular strokes at your shoulder joints, repeating the circle anywhere from 2 to 20 times. Then, make straight strokes down over the long bones of your arms, back and forth. Do this on the outsides of your arms first, then the insides, one arm at a time. Create a rhythm of circular strokes and then long back and forth strokes. Finish by massaging the small

bones of your hands and fingers.

### **CHEST AND ABDOMEN**

With both hands, make a gentle circular motion over your chest, heart, and breast bone. Then move to the abdomen, moving clockwise in a circle around the belly.

### **BACK AND SPINE**

With both hands, massage your upper then lower back muscles gently, then go deeper. Massage also the sides of the torso.

### **HIPS AND LEGS**

With both hands, massage each hip using a circular motion, then straight strokes down and up your thighs. Massage your knees, calves, lower legs and ankles with a circular motion around your joints. Spend some time with your feet, ending the massage with a vigorous motion back and forth on your soles.

You can do this oil massage quickly or spend more time. When you are finished, simply take a shower and wash off the oil.

This simple oil massage is powerful in its healing effects, and is both invigorating and calming to your physiology.

Practice this a few times and it won't be long before you decide to make it a part of your daily routine.

"Touch is not only basic to our species, it is the key to it."



# 4

## Eau D'Ambiance (Smell)

Smells are immediate. They have a mysterious power to them, triggering emotions and images: childhood memories of summer family dinners of barbecued chicken and succulent corn, the first day of school, riding horses with your dad on Saturdays. In one moment, unexpected emotional memories explode: the scent of past lovers, houses we used to live in, a church we used to attend.

How do you describe the features of a scent? There are floral, fruity, musky, and acrid smells. There are sour, salty, burnt, putrid, and pungent smells. Odors are hard to describe, but we can detect more than ten thousand different ones.

Hang on to a smell and the memory it induces. This is your meditation.

Be around living things. In the country, you can learn the inner nature of your surroundings through smell. You can have a sense for something sprouting, growing, and coming into being, or something fading and dying away. Go to a farmer's market and pick up a spicy tomato oozing with deep, succulent,

dream-inducing scents. Smells can cultivate satisfying emotional experiences.

Don't let the city stifle you. Maybe you don't have daily access to the country. Try out your olfactory skills in various places. Smell an approaching rainstorm. Sit in a rose garden, a coffeehouse, a pizza parlor, a

chocolate store. Go to a perfume shop, a delicatessen, a bar. Sit down wherever you are and close your eyes. Smell the mélange of sensory delights. Allow the various scents to flood and bathe you. Notice how different smells make you feel and how they affect your emotional state.





# 5

## Slow Food (Taste)

Allowing yourself to be slow means that you govern the rhythms of your life. Today, you might want to go fast. Tomorrow you might want to go slow. This makes the difference.

We all crave a sense of slowness. Ease up on your speed and consciously create islands of slowness during your day. You can practice it

first thing in the morning while having your tea or coffee; at the dinner table, or even while cooking.

### **TRY PRACTICING SLOW FOOD**

Take the time to taste. Eat more slowly. Instead of opting for quick and easy, make the time to prepare your food in the kitchen.

As you cook, taste the food. Drink a cool glass of water with lemon. Chill out. Relax. Enjoy the simple things, like cooking, and eating, and tasting.

### **TRY EATING IN SILENCE**

Don't watch television. Don't read. Chew for a change. Start by practicing slow food for just one meal a day. Make it a celebration for your senses and your soul. Slow down. Sip slowly. Taste deliberately. Is the food spicy and hot? Is it dry or cool? What does the food feel like in your mouth? What is its texture?

### **EVERY TASTE HAS AN EFFECT**

Experiment with all the different flavors. And in the middle of your meal, stop. Put down your knife and fork, and breathe. Let some moments pass in silence. Then pick up your fork again, slowly...while having your tea or coffee; at the dinner table, or even while cooking. Ultimately, slow means to take the time to reflect, to think, or simply to be. Give time to each and every part of yourself. This is impossible with speed. With calm, you arrive everywhere.







## Making it personal.

These meditations can either energize or relax you, depending on your needs. It's up to you to decide the quality of the sensory experience. For example, high-pitched sounds are more energizing and expanding, while low pitched sounds are more calming. Bright colors are expanding, and muted colors are settling. Deep, vigorous touch is energizing, while light, continuous touch is soothing. Spicy, warm smells and tastes are stimulating, and bland, sweet, or cool smells and tastes tend to be comforting.

Now that you have the tools, find out what works for you and what doesn't. Make these meditations personal. Let them be a reference point, where you can go to find wisdom, inspiration, and hope.





Bija Bennett is a Chicago-based author, artist, and filmmaker who is able to convey the tenets of mind-body health in remarkably engaging ways. Founder of the international lifestyle company, YogaAway LLC, she has produced numerous films on health, yoga, lifestyle, and culture that combine the healing and performing arts. As an entrepreneur and public speaker, she shares her insights with diverse audiences, enabling them to live a healthy, balanced, and meaningful life.

[info@bijab.com](mailto:info@bijab.com) | [www.bijab.com](http://www.bijab.com)