

Q: This is a question about the different statements in the writings and classes on meditation, and more particularly, about the time given to individual meditations. (12-21-24)¹

A: As you know, I have often said that we should at least have one minute of meditation, or one-and-a-half minutes, and have this many, many times during the day, and even at night if we awaken. Also, you have heard me say that we should have meditation periods of five or ten minutes at a time. Also, you have heard me caution against long periods of meditation.

Now, of course, in all of this, you must remember that I am speaking to those who have not yet accomplished the ability to be immediately in meditation. And to these, I say it is far better to give one minute, one-and-a-half minutes, ten, twenty times a day, thirty times a day, if possible, and automatically let these periods prolong themselves until one day, you're surprised to find that you've been meditating three or four or five minutes. It seems as if it were just a half a minute.

Come into it that way, gradually; come in first, not even by meditation, but by practicing the Presence, by consciously realizing God's presence in all of our activities, and then, later, coming to actual meditation, in which we are communing within without words or thoughts. But you will find that it's really impossible to continue that more than a minute or a minute and a half at first. Now, of course, as you become more and more proficient in being actually in this inner Presence, the periods automatically prolong themselves without any conscious effort on your part. That is when you are in real meditation.

If you have to think thoughts, if you have to force yourself, you are not meditating; you are doing mental work. And it is for this reason that I say that you can only really meditate thirty, forty seconds, a minute, minute-and-a-half, and then gradually build on that.²

Now, once you have the ability just to close your eyes and immediately be in the silence or even to meditate with your eyes open and with no mental strain, no mental effort, no thoughts, no words, just a resting in an Invisible Infinite, then, of course, there's no such thing as time limit. The only time limit is that when you feel yourself beginning to think thoughts again, that's the time to stop. I have, in past years, when the opportunity presented, been able to meditate for eight solid hours without moving off the chair and without a single intruding thought coming into my mind. That doesn't happen anymore because there's too much busyness, and time doesn't permit; opportunity doesn't permit. But I know that it would be possible again. It isn't even necessary now because the waking hours are spent in meditation even while performing other works, as you have seen this week, right here at this table.

Now, no one has to tell you, and no one should be allowed to tell you how long to meditate or upon what to meditate, once you have the ability to meditate. I only

presume to give instruction to those who have not yet attained the ability to commune and be at one, and I give the instruction based on my own experience.

Once meditation is natural to you, you follow it out in your own way because you are entirely on your own. Only I caution you: once you find yourself thinking thoughts or feeling a physical or mental strain, stop it, because that's not meditation; that's mental work. That's in the human realm; it is not in the spiritual realm.

2 Joel does not say it here explicitly, but he is not negating the practice of contemplative meditation, in which we contemplate and ponder a question such as "What is God?" or a spiritual passage from Scripture or some other spiritual writing. As Joel points out elsewhere, contemplative meditation does involve mental work, but we use contemplative meditation as a way to lift ourselves in consciousness to where we can be in the silent receptivity that Joel calls "meditation" (see the [glossary of terms](#).)

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