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Stephan Bodian

Coauthor of Buddhism For Dummies

*Foreword by Dr. Dean Ornish, MD,
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by Stephan Bodian

Foreword by Dr. Dean Ornish, MD

Author of Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease



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About the Author

Stephan Bodian has been practicing and teaching meditation for more than 40 years. As the founder and director of the School for Awakening, he offers workshops, intensives, retreats, and classes devoted to meditation, self-inquiry, and spiritual realization. His most recent book is *Wake Up Now: A Guide to the Journey of Spiritual Awakening*.

When he's not writing or teaching, Stephan practices an approach to counseling and mentoring that guides people in using a blend of psychological insight and meditative reflection for inner exploration and healing. A licensed psychotherapist, he's available for phone or Skype consultations worldwide through his website, www.stephanbodian.org.

Stephan first became interested in meditation in high school when he came across the word Zen in a novel by Beat writer Jack Kerouac. After studying Asian philosophy at Columbia University and doing graduate work at Stanford, he went off to a Zen monastery in the mountains near Big Sur, California, where he shaved his head and spent long hours following his breath. Ordained a monk in 1974, he eventually became director of training at the Zen Center of Los Angeles and resident teacher at a small Zen center in San Diego before putting aside his robes in 1982 to pursue a master's degree in psychology — and a more ordinary life.

From 1984 to 1994 Stephan was editor-in-chief of *Yoga Journal*, an award-winning magazine devoted to yoga, meditation, and holistic health. In addition to Zen, he has practiced and studied insight meditation, Tibetan Buddhism, and Advaita Vedanta. His other books include *Timeless Visions, Healing Voices; Living Yoga* (with Georg Feuerstein); and *Buddhism For Dummies* (with Jon Landaw), a comprehensive, user-friendly introduction to one of the world's great spiritual traditions.

Stephan is also the author and narrator of a series of meditation-based audio programs: *Mindfulness Meditation; Freedom from Stress; and Stay Happy*. Produced by Mental Workout and offered online through the iTunes store or www.mentalworkout.com, these programs are available as apps for iPhone, Android, and Nokia platforms and as web-based applications.

For more information on Stephan's workshops, retreats, classes, and phone counseling and mentoring sessions, visit his website (www.stephanbodian.org).

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the great meditation masters and teachers in every culture and age, who continue to show us the way through their wise and compassionate example; and to you, dear reader: May the practice of meditation bring you the peace, health, and happiness you seek!

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Part I: Getting Acquainted with Meditation</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1: Embarking on Your Meditation Journey.....	9
Chapter 2: Why Meditate?	25
Chapter 3: Zen and Now: Where Meditation Comes From	41
Chapter 4: Your Brain on Meditation and How it Impacts Your Life	57
<i>Part II: Getting Started</i>	<i>69</i>
Chapter 5: Laying the Foundation: Motivation, Attitude, and Beginner’s Mind	71
Chapter 6: How Your Mind Stresses You Out and What You Can Do about It	81
Chapter 7: Mindfulness Meditation: Awareness of the Here and Now	101
Chapter 8: Preparing Your Body for Meditation.....	113
Chapter 9: Where to Sit, What to Wear, and Other Practical Stuff.....	129
Chapter 10: Just Doing It: Discipline, Effort, and Letting Go.....	141
Chapter 11: Opening Your Heart with Love and Compassion	153
<i>Part III: Troubleshooting and Fine-Tuning Your Practice</i>	<i>171</i>
Chapter 12: Meditating with Challenging Emotions and Habitual Patterns.....	173
Chapter 13: Troubleshooting Common Roadblocks and Side Effects	193
Chapter 14: Developing a Practice That Works for You	211
<i>Part IV: Meditation in Action</i>	<i>223</i>
Chapter 15: Cultivating Spirituality	225
Chapter 16: Don’t Worry, Be Happy — with Meditation.....	251
Chapter 17: Meditating in Everyday Life.....	271
Chapter 18: Using Meditation for Healing and Performance Enhancement.....	287
<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	<i>307</i>
Chapter 19: Ten Commonly Asked Questions about Meditation	309
Chapter 20: Ten Favorite All-Purpose Meditations	315

<i>Part VI: Appendixes</i>	325
Appendix A: Meditation Resources	327
Appendix B: About the CD	339
<i>Index</i>	341

Table of Contents

Foreword.....*xxi*

Introduction..... **1**

About This Book..... 1
Conventions Used in This Book..... 3
What You're Not to Read..... 3
Foolish Assumptions..... 3
How This Book Is Organized 4
 Part I: Getting Acquainted with Meditation..... 4
 Part II: Getting Started..... 4
 Part III: Troubleshooting and Fine-Tuning Your Practice..... 4
 Part IV: Meditation in Action 5
 Part V: The Part of Tens..... 5
 Part VI: Appendixes 5
Icons Used in This Book 5
Where To Go from Here..... 6

Part I: Getting Acquainted with Meditation..... **7**

Chapter 1: Embarking on Your Meditation Journey..... **9**

Getting an Overview of How the Journey Unfolds 11
 Different paths up the same mountain..... 11
 The view from the summit — and from other peaks
 along the way..... 13
 The taste of pure mountain water 14
 There's no place like home — and you've already arrived!..... 16
Developing and Directing Awareness: The Key to Meditation 17
 Building concentration..... 18
 Opening to receptive awareness 19
 Using contemplation for greater insight..... 20
 Cultivating positive, healing states of mind 21
Making Meditation Your Own 21
 Designing your own practice..... 21
 Troubleshooting the challenges 23

Chapter 2: Why Meditate?	25
How Life Drives You — to Meditate	25
The myth of the perfect life	26
When things keep falling apart.....	27
Dealing with the postmodern predicament.....	29
Four popular “solutions” that don’t really work.....	31
How to Survive the 21st Century — with Meditation	32
Advanced technology for the mind and heart	33
The mind-body benefits of meditation.....	34
A Dozen More Great Reasons to Meditate	35
Awakening to the present moment.....	35
Making friends with yourself.....	37
Connecting more deeply with others	37
Relaxing the body and calming the mind	37
Lightening up!.....	37
Enjoying more happiness	38
Experiencing focus and flow.....	38
Feeling more centered, grounded, and balanced	38
Enhancing your performance at work and at play	39
Increasing appreciation, gratitude, and love	39
Aligning with a deeper sense of purpose.....	39
Awakening to a spiritual dimension of being	40
Chapter 3: Zen and Now: Where Meditation Comes From	41
Making the Indian Connection	42
Classical yoga: The path of blissful union	43
Early Buddhism: The roots of mindfulness meditation	43
Indian tantra: Finding the sacred in the world of the senses.....	45
To the Roof of the World — and Beyond	46
Ch’an (Zen): The sound of one hand.....	46
Vajrayana Buddhism: The way of transformation.....	47
From the Middle East to the Rest of the West	47
Christian meditation: Practicing contemplative prayer	48
Meditation in Judaism: Drawing closer to God	49
Meditation among the Sufis: Surrendering to the Divine with every breath	50
The Americanization of Meditation.....	51
Transcendentalism and Theosophy (1840–1900).....	52
Yoga and Zen prepare the soil (1900–1960)	52
Meditation reaches Main Street (1960 to the present)	53
The Future of Meditation.....	54
Take two meditations and call me in the morning	55
Talking back to Prozac	55
The more you sit, the less you pay.....	55
Spinning, stretching, and sitting	56

Chapter 4: Your Brain on Meditation and How It Impacts Your Life . . . 57

Tracing the Origins of Meditation Research..... 58
 Wiring up yogis and Zen monks..... 58
 Studying TM and the relaxation response..... 59
 Measuring the health benefits of meditation..... 60
 Assessing the limitations of the early research..... 61
 Mapping the Meditative Brain 62
 Shifting mindfulness to center stage: Jon Kabat-Zinn and MBSR..... 63
 Creating a working map of the brain..... 64
 Pinpointing the location of positive emotions..... 65
 Seeing how meditation changes the brain..... 65

Part II: Getting Started..... 69

Chapter 5: Laying the Foundation: Motivation, Attitude, and Beginner’s Mind 71

Beginning (and Ending) with Beginner’s Mind 72
 Exploring What Motivates You to Meditate..... 73
 Improving your life 75
 Understanding and accepting yourself..... 76
 Realizing your true nature..... 77
 Awakenning others 77
 Expressing your innate perfection 78
 Living in Harmony with Your Meditation..... 78

Chapter 6: How Your Mind Stresses You Out and What You Can Do about It 81

Taking a Tour of Your Inner Terrain..... 82
 Sifting through the layers of inner experience..... 82
 Discovering how turbulence clouds your mind and heart..... 86
 The Bad News: How Your Mind Stresses You Out..... 89
 Preoccupation with past and future..... 91
 Resistance to the way things are..... 91
 A judging and comparing mind..... 92
 Learned helplessness and pessimism..... 93
 Overwhelming emotions..... 94
 Fixation of attention 94
 Clinging to a separate self..... 94
 The Good News: How Meditation Relieves Suffering and Stress..... 95
 Developing focus and concentration 95
 Allowing spontaneous release 96
 Penetrating your experience with insight 97

Chapter 7: Mindfulness Meditation: Awareness of the Here and Now	101
Turning Your Attention Inward	102
Relaxing Your Body	103
Developing Mindfulness	105
Focusing on your breath	106
Expanding to sensations	109
Welcoming whatever arises	111
Training Your Puppy: Reining In Your Wandering Mind	111
Chapter 8: Preparing Your Body for Meditation	113
Putting a Snake into a Stick of Bamboo — or the Subtle Art of Sitting Still	114
How to Sit Up Straight — and Live to Tell About It	115
What to do from the waist down — and other fantasies	117
Straightening your spine without rigor mortis	123
Zafus, benches, and other exotic paraphernalia	127
Chapter 9: Where to Sit, What to Wear, and Other Practical Stuff ..	129
What to Wear: Choosing Comfort over Fashion	130
When to Meditate: Any Time’s the Right Time	130
First thing in the morning	130
Before bed	131
Right after work	131
Lunch hours and coffee breaks	131
While waiting for your kids and at other predictable downtimes	132
How Long to Meditate: From Quickies to the Long Haul	133
What to Eat and Drink — and Avoid — before You Meditate	134
Where to Meditate: Creating Sacred Space	134
Why it’s best to stay put	135
How to pick the right spot	136
How to set up an altar — and why you may want to bother	137
Chapter 10: Just Doing It: Discipline, Effort, and Letting Go	141
Discipline Just Means “Again and Again”	142
Making a commitment to yourself — and keeping it	142
Being consistent, day after day	143
Restraining yourself, both on and off the cushion	144
The Right Kind of Effort: Not Too Tight or Too Loose	146
Giving your energy 100 percent	146
Applying yourself earnestly	147
Making an effortless effort	147

Knowing How to Let Go and What to Let Go Of..... 148
 Suspending judgment 150
 Accepting 150
 Letting go 151
 Unmasking 151
 Surrendering..... 151

Chapter 11: Opening Your Heart with Love and Compassion 153

How Your Heart Closes — and How You Can Open It Again 154
 Some factors that keep closing your heart..... 154
 Some good reasons for keeping it open..... 156
 Discovering your “soft spot” 157
 Love begins with you..... 159
 Feeling out the four dimensions of love..... 160
 Generating Love for Yourself and Others..... 161
 Opening the gates 161
 Directing the flow..... 162
 Transforming Suffering with Compassion 163
 Some preliminary exercises for generating compassion..... 164
 Transforming suffering with the power of the heart..... 166

***Part III: Troubleshooting and Fine-Tuning
 Your Practice 171***

**Chapter 12: Meditating with Challenging Emotions and
 Habitual Patterns 173**

Making Friends with Your Experience 174
 Embracing your thoughts and feelings 174
 Naming your experience 175
 Welcoming whatever arises..... 176
 Meditating with Challenging Emotions 176
 Anger 178
 Fear and anxiety..... 179
 Sadness, grief, and depression..... 180
 Unraveling Habitual Patterns with Awareness 181
 Naming your “tunes” 182
 Expanding your awareness..... 182
 Feeling your feelings..... 182
 Noticing your resistance and attachment 184
 Finding the wisdom 184
 Getting to the heart of the matter..... 184
 Infusing the stuck place with being 185
 Working with patterns before you get stuck..... 185

Setting Patterns Aside — for Now	186
Letting go (or letting be).....	186
Shifting attention.....	187
Moving the energy	187
Acting it out in imagination	187
Acting it out in real life — mindfully	187
Choosing a Therapist To Help with Your Patterns	189
Talk is important, but you need to do more	190
Shop around	190
Choose the person, not the credentials.....	190
Decide whether spirituality matters to you	191

Chapter 13: Troubleshooting Common Roadblocks and Side Effects 193

Navigating the Roadblocks on Your Meditative Journey	194
Sleepiness	194
Restlessness	195
Boredom.....	195
Fear	196
Doubt.....	197
Procrastination	197
Hypervigilance	198
Self-judgment.....	198
Attachment and desire.....	199
Pride	200
Avoidance	200
Bypassing.....	201
Enjoying the Side Effects of Meditation without Getting Sidetracked.....	201
Rapture and bliss	202
Visions and other sensory experiences.....	203
Waves of emotion	204
Energetic openings	204

Chapter 14: Developing a Practice That Works for You 211

Fitting the Puzzle Pieces Together	211
Know your motivation.....	213
Play to your strengths and fill in the gaps.....	214
Experiment, trust your intuition, and then settle down	215
Create a regular practice	216
Whenever Two or More of You: Meditating with Others	217
Joining or forming a meditation group	218
Attending your first workshop or retreat	219
Monk for a day: Creating your own solitary retreat	220

Part IV: Meditation in Action 223
Chapter 15: Cultivating Spirituality225

What Does Spirituality Mean, Anyway?	226
The “perennial philosophy”: Where all religions converge	228
From faith to fruition: The levels of spiritual involvement	229
Dissolving or expanding the self: The point of spiritual practice	230
The Path of Devotion: In Search of Union	235
Mantra: Invoking the Divine in every moment	236
The practice of the presence of God	237
Guru yoga: Tibetan devotional practice	238
The Path of Insight: Discovering Who You Are	240
Expanding your boundaries	241
Looking into the nature of mind	242
Asking “Who am I?”	244
How to Find a Teacher — and Why You May Want to Bother	245
Choosing the right kind of teacher	245
Why you may need a teacher	246
What to look for in a teacher	247
How to find a teacher	248

Chapter 16: Don’t Worry, Be Happy — with Meditation251

Checking Out the Hallmarks of Genuine Happiness	252
Recognizing happiness as your inherent condition	252
Experiencing a predominance of positive emotions	253
Accepting what life brings	254
Being in the flow of life	255
Meaning and belonging	256
Understanding an integrated definition of happiness	257
Studying Up on the Art and Science of Happiness	257
Why bother being happy?	258
The Buddhist understanding of happiness	258
The science of meditation and happiness	259
The insights of positive psychology	260
Finding True Happiness with Meditation	261
Savoring the moment	262
Fostering flow	263
Developing gratitude	264
Learning to forgive	265
Cultivating optimism	268

Chapter 17: Meditating in Everyday Life 271

Being Peace with Every Step: Extending Meditation in Action.....	271
Coming back to your breath.....	273
Listening to the bell of mindfulness	273
Repeating a phrase to help yourself be mindful.....	275
Noticing how situations affect you.....	276
Applying meditation to familiar activities	277
The Family That Meditates Together: Partners, Children, and Other Loved Ones	280
Meditating with kids.....	281
Meditating with partners and family members.....	282
Meditative lovemaking.....	283

Chapter 18: Using Meditation for Healing and Performance Enhancement. 287

Meditation Has the Power to Help Heal Your Body, Too	288
What healing really means.....	289
Understanding how meditation heals	289
Embracing the healing power of imagery.....	293
Exploring six healing meditations	294
Meditation Can Enhance Your Performance at Work and Play.....	302
Enjoying past success	304
Rehearsing peak performance	305

Part V: The Part of Tens 307**Chapter 19: Ten Commonly Asked Questions about Meditation . . . 309**

Will Meditation Make Me Too Relaxed to Succeed at Work or School?	309
How Can I Find the Time to Meditate in My Busy Schedule?.....	310
Can I Meditate in a Chair or Lying Down Instead of Cross-Legged on the Floor?	310
What Should I Do about the Restlessness or Discomfort I Feel while Meditating?.....	311
What Should I Do if I Keep Falling Asleep while I Meditate?.....	312
How Do I Know if I'm Meditating the Right Way?	312
Can I Meditate while I'm Driving My Car or Sitting at My Computer?.....	313
Do I Have to Give Up My Religious Beliefs to Meditate?.....	313
What Should I Do if My Loved Ones Don't Support My Meditation Practice?.....	314
Can Meditation Actually Improve My Health?	314

Chapter 20: Ten Favorite All-Purpose Meditations 315

Practicing Relaxation 315
 Following Your Breath 316
 Walking Meditation 317
 Mindful Eating 318
 Cultivating Lovingkindness 319
 Softening Your Belly 320
 Healing with Light 321
 Grounding into the Earth 322
 Practicing a Half Smile 323
 Peaceful Place 323

***Part VI: Appendixes* 325**

Appendix A: Meditation Resources 327

Organizations and Centers 327
 Jewish, Christian, and Sufi meditation 328
 Hindu and Yoga meditation 328
 Zen meditation 330
 Tibetan Buddhist meditation 331
 Insight meditation (Vipassana) 332
 Other organizations 333
 Books 334

Appendix B: About the CD 339

Using the CD 339
 What You'll Find on the CD 339
 Customer Care 340

***Index* 341**

Foreword

The title of this book is a little misleading because learning to meditate was one of the smartest decisions I ever made.

Meditation is power. Whatever you do, meditation can help you to do it better.

For example, my colleges and I demonstrated, for the first time, that the progression of even severe coronary disease often can be reversed when people go on my program of comprehensive lifestyle changes. Although many people believe that this program is based primarily on diet, meditation is actually an equally important part of it.

So — why meditate?

In *Meditation For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, Stephan Bodian helps dispel many of the most common misconceptions about meditation.

Many people view meditation as:

Boring
Esoteric
Ascetic
Unproductive
Difficult
Wimpy

In fact, meditation is:

Interesting
Familiar
Sensual
Extremely productive
Natural
Powerful

Meditation is the practice and process of paying attention and focusing your awareness. When you meditate, a number of desirable things begin to happen — slowly, at first, and deepening over time. As I describe in *Love & Survival*:

First, *when you can focus your awareness, you gain more power.* When you concentrate any form of energy, including mental energy, you gain power. When you focus your mind, you concentrate better. When you concentrate better, you perform better. You can accomplish more, whether in the classroom, in the board room, or in the athletic arena. Whatever you do, you can do it more effectively when you meditate. It is for this reason that spiritual teachers and texts often caution that one should begin the practice of meditation only in the context of other spiritual practices and disciplines that help develop compassion and wisdom to use properly this increased power.

Second, *you enjoy your senses more fully*. Although people sometimes view or use meditation as an ascetic experience to *control* their senses, meditation also can *enhance* your senses in ways that your profoundly sensual. Anything that you enjoy — food, sex, music, art, massage, and so on — is greatly enhanced by meditation. When you pay attention to something, it's a lot more enjoyable. Also, you don't need as much of it to get the same degree of pleasure, so you are more likely to enjoy without excess.

When you keep a wall around your heart to armor and protect it from pain, you also diminish your capacity to feel pleasure. When your life is in a continual rush, you may miss exquisite pleasures that exist from moment to moment. Attention spans get shorter. The need for stimulation continually increases just to feel *anything*. Meditation increases awareness and sensitivity; as such, it can be an antidote to numbness and distraction.

Third, *your mind quiets down and you experience an inner sense of peace, joy, and well-being*. When I first learned to meditate and began getting glimpses of inner peace, this experience changed my life. It redefined and reframed my experience. Before, I thought peace of mind came from getting and doing; now, I understand that it comes from *being*. It is our true nature to be peaceful until we disturb it.

This is a radically different concept of where our happiness and our well-being come from. In one of life's great paradoxes, not being aware of this truth, we often end up disturbing our inner peace while striving to get or to do what we think will bring that same peace to us.

Fourth, *you may directly experience and become more aware of the transcendent interconnectedness that already exists*. You may have a direct experience of God or the universal Self, whatever name you give to this experience.

Meditation is simple in concept but difficult to master. Fortunately, you don't have to master meditation to benefit from it. You just have to practice. No one ever really masters it completely, but even a few steps down that road can make a meaningful difference. It is the *process* of meditation that makes it so beneficial, not how well you perform.

In my research studies, most of the participants reported much greater difficulty practicing meditation than exercising our maintaining their diet. Why? You have to eat; it's just a question of what

you eat. Meditation, on the other hand, is not part of most people's daily routine or experience. Exercise is more familiar to people, and also there is a macho quality to exercise — you're out there really doing something, whereas meditation still has what some of our research participants at first called the "wimp factor." From outward appearances, it looks as if you're not doing anything when you meditate. In fact, meditation is a powerful, active process.

There are many different types of meditation. It is found in all cultures and in all religions all over the world — because it works. Truth is truth. Whereas the forms vary, certain principles almost always are found.

This attitude of paying attention can help transform everything we do into a form of meditation. Whatever we do with concentration and awareness becomes meditation.

As the editor of *Yoga Journal* for many years, Stephan Bodian has had the opportunity to become familiar with many different approaches to meditation and yoga. He has distilled the best of these here and gently leads you step by step to discover a form and style of meditation that works best for you.

Meditation For Dummies, 3rd Edition. Smart. Very smart.

Dean Ornish, MD

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Author, *Love & Survival* and *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*

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Introduction

Everyone seems to want to know how to meditate these days. From anxious teens to their overwhelmed parents, harried construction workers to hurried executives, retired baby boomers to unemployed Gen Xers, more and more people are seeking solutions for the stressful, time-urgent, overstimulated lives we lead. Because the Internet can't provide satisfying answers to all of life's questions, people are turning in increasing numbers to time-honored practices like meditation for proven remedies to life's inevitable ills.

Indeed, according to a recent government survey, more than 10 percent of adults in the United States meditate regularly. That's tens of millions of people! Why do they bother? Because it works. Whether you're seeking greater focus to get your job done more efficiently, less stress and more peace of mind, or a deeper appreciation of the beauty and richness of life, the simple practice of sitting down and turning your attention inward can do wonders for your body and your mind.

The truth is, you can learn the basics of meditation in five minutes. Just sit in a comfortable position, straighten your back, breathe deeply, and rest your attention on the coming and going of your breath. It's as simple as that! If you do it regularly, you'll find that it won't be long before you're feeling more relaxed and enjoying life more. I speak from personal experience: I've been practicing meditation and teaching it to others for more than 40 years.

Simple though it may be, meditation also has tremendous subtlety and depth, if you're interested in pursuing it further. It's a lot like painting: You can buy your materials, take a few lessons, and have fun applying paint to paper. Or you can attend classes at your local education center or community college, specialize in a particular medium in art school, and make painting a central part of your life. In meditation, as in art, you can keep it simple — just get up every day and sit quietly for five or ten minutes — or explore the subtleties to your heart's content. It all depends on your needs, your intentions, and your level of interest and passion.

About This Book

When I began teaching meditation, I was always hard-pressed to come up with a single book that taught the basics, provided a comprehensive overview of techniques and practices, and offered guidance in going deeper. Global surveys generally ignore the nuts and bolts — what to focus on, how to sit, what to do about your crazy mind, and so on. Books that teach you

how to meditate tend to offer just a few techniques. And those that show you how to explore the rich inner world of meditation often have a sectarian spiritual perspective that limits the breadth of their presentation. (In other words, you'd have to be a Buddhist or a yogi or a Sufi to know what they're talking about.)

Unlike those other books on meditation, *Meditation For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, covers all the bases. If you're looking for simple, easy-to-follow meditation instructions, you can find state-of-the-art guidance here that's filled with helpful tips from seasoned meditators as well as time-honored wisdom from the great teachers of old. If you want to get an overview of the meditation field before you zero in on a particular method or teaching, you can catch a glimpse of the primary approaches that are readily available these days. If you've been meditating in a particular way and want to expand your horizons to include other techniques, you'll be pleased to discover that this book features dozens of different meditations for a variety of purposes. They're drawn from a range of sources and traditions. And if you just want to understand why other people meditate — for instance, your partner, your friends, the guy in the office next to yours — and why you may want to join them, jump on board! You can read through whole chapters on how meditation makes you happier (and healthier), what science has learned about the physical and psychological benefits of meditation, and how you can get the most from meditation.

As a special bonus, this book includes instructional tracks, which are available on the CD accompanying this book or online (if you're reading a digital version). With these tracks, I guide you step by step through ten of the most powerful and effective meditations described in the book. When you've had your fill of reading and want something more experiential, you can sit down in a comfortable position, pop in the disc, and let my voice lead you effortlessly through the complete meditation process, from start to finish. What could be more accessible and user-friendly than that?

This book is many things at once: an instructional manual, a survey course, and a guidebook for deeper exploration. Feel free to read it from cover to cover if you want or just browse until you find the chapters that appeal to you. Throughout the book, you find meditations and exercises you can experiment with and enjoy. Some of them are also offered on the CD, so you can discover how to practice them directly without referring to the text.

The best thing about this book, in my humble estimation, is that it's fun to read. Meditation doesn't have to be a dull or somber affair. Quite the contrary: The whole point of meditating in the first place is to lighten up and experience more peace and joy in your life. So forget those stereotypes of the enigmatic Zen monk or the reclusive navel-gazer! You can find out everything you ever wanted to know about meditation and enjoy yourself in the process.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use a few conventions in this book to help your reading go smoothly:

- ✓ When I want to make a topic crystal clear, I break the essential points down into bulleted lists (like this one), so you can follow them easily without getting lost in a sea of excess verbiage.
- ✓ Just as a piece of music may begin with a few opening phrases known as a *prelude*, most meditation instructions in this book begin with a similar directive — to sit quietly, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. When you're accustomed to this prelude, you can naturally begin with it each time you meditate.
- ✓ The first time unfamiliar terms and phrases appear, they're set in *italics* and accompanied by a brief definition.
- ✓ **Bold** text indicates keywords in bulleted lists and highlights the action parts of numbered steps.
- ✓ Web addresses are set in `monofont` so you can easily spot them.

What You're Not to Read

Here and there throughout this book I've sprinkled sidebars (text in gray boxes), which offer extra information, such as stories, examples, explanations, and assorted meditations. Though they're fun to read and intended to spice up the book, they're not essential. So if you're in a hurry to get to the meat of the matter (or the yogurt, if you're a vegetarian), feel free to skip over them — and come back later if you're so inclined.

Foolish Assumptions

When I wrote this book, I made a few assumptions about you, dear reader, that I thought I should share with you before we begin:

- ✓ You're intrigued enough by the topic of meditation to pick up this book, but you haven't yet discovered how to meditate. Or if you have, you still feel the need for more guidance.
- ✓ You want less stress and more happiness and peace of mind, and you're willing to devote a little of your precious time to achieve it.
- ✓ Because you can't afford to spend long hours meditating in a monastery or ashram, you want instruction that you can put to use right now at home or at work.

- ✓ You don't live on a desert island or in some isolated part of the globe; instead, you inhabit the ordinary world and confront the usual stresses, pressures, and responsibilities that most people face.

If these assumptions apply to you, you're definitely in the right place!

How This Book Is Organized

Although I designed this book so you can read it cover to cover — some people still do that, don't they? — I also made sure that you can find what you're looking for easily and quickly by breaking it up into different parts. Each part covers a different phase of your encounter with meditation.

Part I: Getting Acquainted with Meditation

If you don't know a thing about meditation, you probably want to start here. You discover what meditation is (and isn't), where it comes from, why you may want to practice it, what science has learned about it, and how you can use meditation to reduce your stress, improve your health, and enhance your feelings of peace and well-being.

Part II: Getting Started

This part begins by introducing you to the devious workings of your own mind (in case you haven't already noticed) and explains how you can prepare for meditation by adjusting your attitude. Next, you find out how to sit (or lie) down and work with your mind by following my easy-to-follow, step-by-step instructions. I include a separate chapter on all the little details that most meditation books take for granted, such as how to keep your back (more or less) straight without getting uptight and what to do with your eyes and hands. I also include a chapter on preparing your body for sitting. I round out the part with powerful practices for opening your heart with love and compassion.

Part III: Troubleshooting and Fine-Tuning Your Practice

After you start meditating regularly, you'll find that questions and even problems arise from time to time. You may wonder how to put all the pieces together in a way that's uniquely suited to your needs. Or you may encounter