

Meditation and De-Automatization

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Short (500-2,000 words), **Medium (2,000-5,000 words)**, Long (5,000-10,000 words)

Psychological interest in meditation played an important role in the “consciousness revolution” in psychology. Although the Abrahamic religions have their own meditative and mystical traditions (e.g., the Kabbalah of Hasidic Judaism; the contemplative prayer exemplified by Catholic mysticism; and the “Whirling Dervishes” of Sufism), most attention has focused on Eastern religions, particularly the Vedic-Hindu practice of yoga and Zen Buddhism. This emphasis may reflect a degree of Orientalism on the part of psychologists; but it also has to do with the emphasis of both Yoga and Zen on cognitive changes ostensibly brought about by meditative practice.

In America, Yoga was of interest to the 19th-century Transcendentalists: Thoreau practiced the discipline while living at Walden Pond. The official introduction of Eastern meditation was at the Parliament of World Religions held in conjunction with the 1893 Columbian Exposition and World’s Fair in Chicago. Thereafter, both Yoga and Zen were absorbed into American culture -- in the process gradually becoming secularized (dissociated from their religious and philosophical origins) and commodified (taught for a fee). Yoga was popularized by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as Transcendental Meditation (Orme-Johnson, Alexander, & Davies, 1990), and later brought into the clinic