

Keeping attention in the moment

By Adriana Attento
Special to the Acorn

When some people think of meditation, they might think of religion or spirituality.

But while it may sometimes be part of religious or spiritual practices, meditation alone is not a religion. Meditation is simply a practice of keeping your attention in the present moment.

There are many types of meditation.

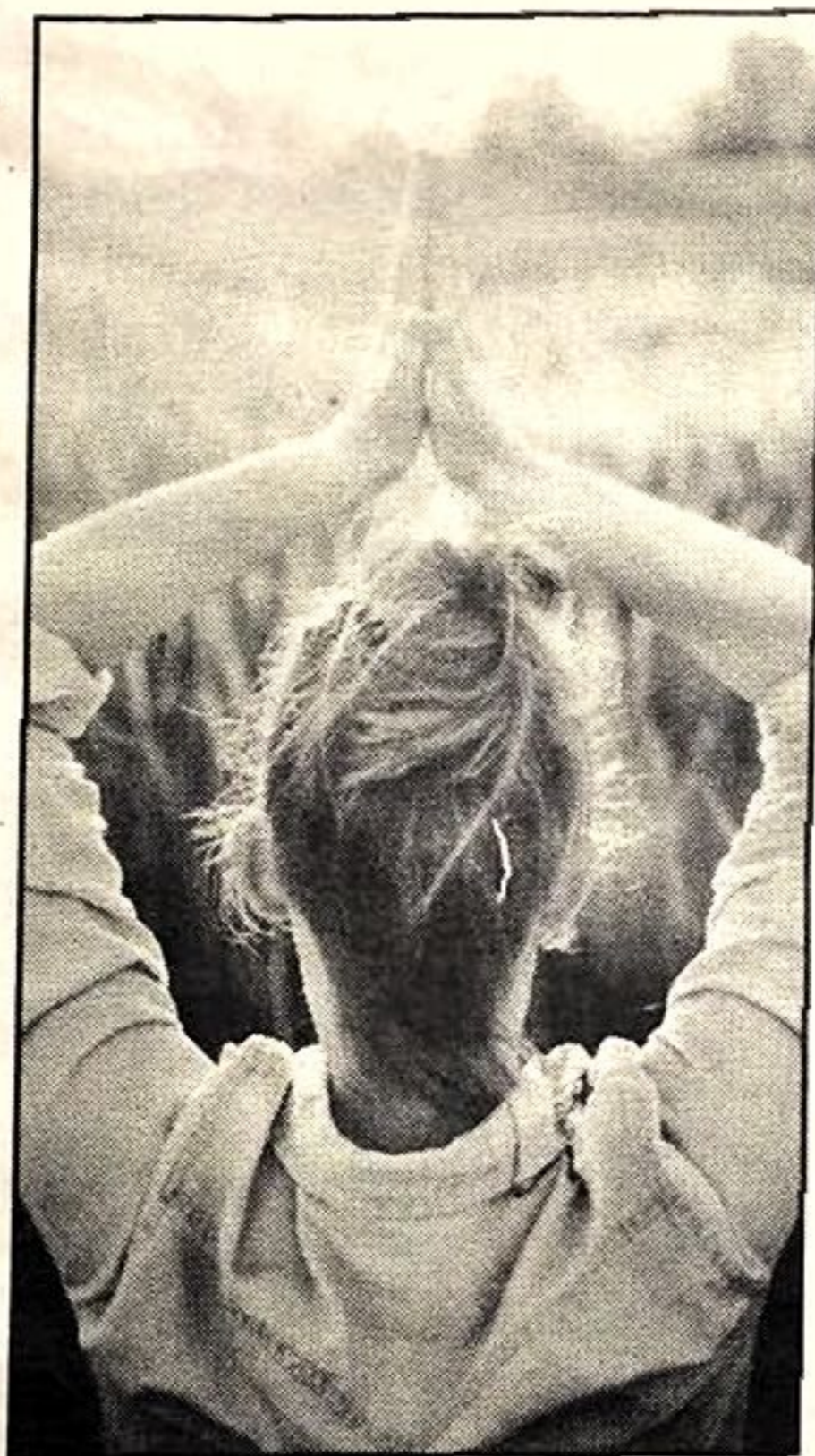
One traditional form invites the practitioner to choose a point of focus (the breath, a set of words, an image in the mind's eye) and keep attention on that point of focus.

Of course, the mind has a strong tendency to stray, getting lost in train after train of thinking. The challenge is to notice when the mind has strayed and gently bring attention back to the point of focus.

There's no question that the mind can run at 150 mph. And for many people, the speed of the mind is precisely what keeps them from being able to relax, get good sleep or listen deeply in conversations.

The speed of the mind can create anxiety, an inability to concentrate and excessive fatigue.

One of the greatest benefits of meditation is that it slows down the mind.



Meditation is like pulling on the leash of a dog that is running away from you. At first it's going to require energy to pull that dog toward you and have it stay at your side. However, in time, your dog becomes trained and knows to walk beside you and do as you say.

The same is true with meditation. Like the untrained dog, at first the busy mind is going to run about all over the place. But each time you tell the mind to stay present in meditation, you teach it to slow down.

You shape your mind to stay still more often. A mind that is relaxed and has a greater relationship with the present mo-

ment results in some incredible benefits. Some of these are:

- Increase in attention span
- Strengthening of the immune system
- Help in achieving a good night's sleep
- Relaxation of the nervous system
- Improved functioning of the brain
- Increase in creativity
- Development of intuition
- Strengthening of the ability to love oneself and others
- Help in appreciating life
- Feeling connection with oneself, others and the world
- Building of self-awareness
- Transformation from reacting to life to consciously responding to life
- Prevention of depression and anxiety

Yoga, exercise and healthy eating can be challenging to put into practice at first, but once they are a part of daily life they bring great benefits.

Meditation can also make a significant difference in well-being once it becomes woven into a daily routine.

Adriana Attento is a marriage and family therapist intern and teaches Meditation Made Easy, a Tuesday evening class offered by the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. To register for the weekly class, which runs June 30 to Aug. 4, visit www.rsrpd.org.