

# Meditation for modern warriors

By George Ryan and Melissa Ryan

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand...

— John Milton

In discussions about professional athletes and professional fighters, we hear several stock phrases bandied about, like “mental toughness,” “mental preparedness” and “90 percent mental and 10 percent physical.” These words convey a sense that great athletes and great fighters are graced with some kind of inherent or God-given gift of mental fortitude that separates them from the pack. But nothing in life is ever that simple.

A quick look back at history’s most famed athletes/fighters shows that such mental strength is a skill that needs to be developed through rigorous training and commitment in the same way that people devote themselves to their physical conditioning. The Spartans, for example, began their journeys in boyhood so that they were prepared to excel in both the mental and physical aspects of combat long before their first battle with an enemy. In fact, the famed battle of the 300 at Thermopylae has been told for millennia because it is the quintessential example of a human being’s ability to push through the body’s limitations with sheer mental strength.

Equally famed for their unparalleled skill, spirit and willpower on the battlefield, the legendary Japanese samurai are also known to have devoted significant training time to both their mental and physical conditioning. In fact, the samurai practiced a very specific form of mental training — the ancient art of meditation. Through this practice, the samurai learned how to calm their minds, a skill that served them well both on and off the battlefield.

Though the Spartan and samurai warrior cultures have been lost to the forward march of time, there is still a need in the modern world for people who are willing to protect their society and to fight for the rights of others. As police officers, sheriffs, agents, correctional officers and military personnel, we dedicate our lives to upholding our laws and protecting and serving society. We are, in a sense, “Modern Warriors.”

However, we are warriors in a culture that, for a variety of reasons, never integrated meditation into daily life although the mental and physical benefits of the practice have been long understood by many other cultures around the world over eons of time. In so many ways, however, Modern Warriors need the benefits of meditation more than any other group of people on the planet. Scientific studies conducted here in the United States have proven that meditation helps to reduce stress-related symptoms, to improve concentration, to release tension, to lower blood pressure, to decrease respiratory rate and to give practitioners a more positive outlook on life. With this list of

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benefits, it actually makes you wonder why law enforcement hasn't made the teaching and practice of meditation a standard part of academy training!

Since it hasn't happened, though, it has to be a choice that you make on your own. If you do make this choice, there is a form of meditation that's free of any negative stigma that people may attach to the practice. It is merely a form of relaxation that is simple to do and that produces great results. In fact, it is very similar to the meditation form that is taught by Paul Wilson in his outstanding book, “The Calm Technique.”

### The technique

Before meditating for the first time, pick a word, sound or a phrase that you'll say quietly in your mind. And, yes, meditation practitioners call this a *mantra*. For us, though, it is not important what we call this word. It is only important that the word has little to no meaning to you and that you do not change your chosen word, sound or phrase unless you determine it truly doesn't work for you. Some practitioners use a word as simple as “one.”

Then, to begin, find a quiet and comfortable place in your home that is free of distractions. The best time to do this is early in the morning before you eat. Turn off your phone and computer and be sure that you won't be interrupted. Sit someplace where you'll feel comfortable sitting upright for a little while and where you can see a clock. Sit down. Gently close your eyes. Place your hands on your lap. Feel your body settle into a comfortable and upright position.

We are the warriors for our society and, as in ancient times, people depend upon their warriors to be both physically and mentally able “to protect and serve.”

As you begin to settle in position, turn your attention to your breathing. Notice your natural breathing pattern as you inhale and exhale. Don't try to control your breathing at all — simply witness your breath. It's not uncommon for your breathing to become a little slower. Do this for one to two minutes.

Now, quietly say your word, sound or phrase in your mind at your own pace. Don't be alarmed if the pace changes or if you begin to hear it more faintly in your mind. This is normal.

As you do this, it is also normal that your mind will wander and various thoughts will enter your mind. This is known as mind chatter. Simply bring your attention back to your word, sound or phrase and let these thoughts pass and leave your mind. It's that simple.

For your first week of meditation, your practice should be no longer than two minutes. This will help you build a tolerance



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for sitting still and for not becoming frustrated when your mind wanders. Then, for the second and third week, try to meditate for five minutes. From there, build up to seven minutes, and then 10 minutes as the weeks progress. Your ultimate goal is to be able to meditate for at least 20 minutes.

Hopefully, with this small investment of your time, meditation can pay you huge dividends. In a very short time, you'll see that meditation is one of the simplest forms of relaxation, and it certainly is the least expensive! Also, don't be surprised if your mental outlook, work performance,

concentration and overall well-being improve. This will benefit you, your family, your friends, the people you work with and the people you serve and protect.

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#### About the authors

**Officer George Ryan** has been a police officer for the Los Angeles Police Department since 1991 and has been assigned to LAPD's SWAT team since 1998. He is the NTOA's

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**Melissa Ryan**, George's wife, was a contributing editor of the NTOA's book "Patrol Response to Contemporary Problems," and editor of Tana Amen's recently published book, "Get Healthy with The Brain Doctor's Wife."

#### Reference and suggestion for further reading:

Wilson, Paul. "The Calm Technique: Meditation Without Magic or Mysticism." *United States of America: Barnes and Noble Books, 1999.*