

Why do Buddhists meditate?

Video transcript for: What is Buddhist meditation? Narrated by Bettany Hughes

In this frantic, hurly burly world, there is a quiet, steady revolution going on. An ancient, sacred practice is enjoying a period of unprecedented popularity amongst both religious and non-religious people alike.

Meditation is making its way back onto the agenda of the 21st Century.

From corporate executives who swear it helps them become more effective leaders, and school children in classrooms, to ordinary folk who find meditating gives them the tools to better deal with the stresses of modern life.

But what exactly is meditation and what are its religious and philosophical roots?

Well, it's a tricky word to define but at its very simplest it means living purely in the moment, paying attention to what you are doing, as you are doing it.

Now there's a vast and bewildering array of meditation techniques to achieve that state, but generally what they all aim to develop are the qualities of self awareness, of focus and compassion – and ultimately of insight and wisdom.

Most spiritual traditions include forms of meditation, perhaps involving quiet introspection or religious contemplation.

But it's Buddhists who have placed meditation at the very heart of their philosophy and belief system. For them meditation is an important component of their path towards spiritual awakening, enlightenment.

Over the centuries a huge diversity of meditation practices have been developed within the various Buddhist schools.