

BY CHRISTINE VAN DUSEN

# managing + meditating

Not just for hippies and yoga addicts – *meditation has become a powerful tool for powerful women.*

**HER THROAT BURNED AND** her breath was short. This, Ranjana Clark decided, was not convenient.

She had just moved her husband, 9-year-old daughter and two dogs from Winston-Salem to Charlotte, N.C., to oversee a new and bigger Treasury Services division at the new and bigger – due to a merger with First Union – Wachovia Bank. Clark was working obscene hours and traveling regularly to meet with new clients.

None of this was terribly out of the ordinary for Clark; she'd always been a hard-charging executive. But the fire in her throat and the gasping for air – *this* was new.

So Clark squeezed a doctor's appointment into her busy schedule and was treated for acid reflux disease. The medicine didn't help. Her husband, an optometrist, suggested propping up her pillow with her empty Ferragamo shoe boxes. When that didn't work, Clark went for an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy, allowing the doctor to view her digestive tract. Perfectly normal, she was told. Her esophagus wasn't inflamed at all.

"I was advised by my physician that the symptoms were probably a result of stress," Clark says now. "And I thought it was all hoey."

The doctor's prescription: Try meditating. Take time each day to be quiet, relaxed and focused on your breathing. Not an easy order to follow for Clark, leading a team of 700 treasury profes-

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**CAMILLE MAURINE** CO-AUTHOR, *MEDITATION SECRETS FOR WOMEN*



sionals at a banking company with \$700 billion in assets. "I didn't believe him," she says. "But I started meditation and yoga, and it went away."

That was nearly six years ago. Since then, it's not only Clark's physical health that has improved. She soon began feeling and functioning better at work. Before meditation, Clark would multi-task in her head while having a conversation in a meeting. Now, she says, "I think that my co-workers and teammates would say I appear to be more present."

Though meditation has existed for eons – as part of ancient religions and, later, evolving to draw in nonreligious practitioners in search of inner peace – the practice has become an increasingly popular way for busy women to find balance in a world abundant with personal and professional stress.

Women have strived for success for so long against the odds, and now that they're finding it, they realize it doesn't give them peace and serenity, says Karen Glatzer, founding president of life-coaching company GH Consulting and a founding partner with Portable Wisdom for executives who want to focus more on their internal lives.

"What we're seeing now is a deeper spiritual hunger, a deeper search for meaning and a great desire for purpose," she says. "The more that we have around us in terms of prosperity and health and good jobs, the more we realize that none of that, at the end of the day, is truly what it's all about."

By turning inward, women are slowing down their lives – and, in more and more cases, experiencing powerful results.

Studies show that focused breathing and relaxation may help prevent high blood pressure, heart disease, migraine headaches and diseases like diabetes and arthritis. Meditation also has "proved helpful in reducing obsessive thinking, anxiety, depression and hostility," according to research from Rutgers University.

"Women are tuning into the demands of the outer world, holding life together – errands and accounting, and everything they do in the course of a day," says Camille Maurine, co-author of *Med-*

## ohmmm...now!

**Not everyone has the freedom or the discipline to set aside chunks of time for meditation. Here are some thoughts from Camille Maurine, co-author of *Meditation Secrets for Women* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), on incorporating meditation into a busy careerperson's lifestyle:**

- >> **Pause before entering an important meeting or talking with employees, and anchor yourself with a few conscious breaths.**
- >> **Take a minute in the car before driving and establish relaxed alertness.**
- >> **When drinking water, tea or coffee, imagine taking in some needed quality.**
- >> **While waiting in a lobby or standing in line, trade any impatience for spacious breaths, feel the ground providing support.**
- >> **In the privacy of the office or even the bathroom, take a moment to place your hand on your heart, breathe into your chest and soothe yourself.**

*itation Secrets for Women* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001). "Consequently their nervous systems are on a kind of alert. That can become a habitual state. They need to complement that with an internal sanctuary."

To create such a sanctuary, some practitioners modify meditation to suit their schedules. Consider Kimberly Fowler. Meditation is a "to-do" on her long daily list. For 20 or 30 minutes every day at 5:30 a.m., she sits in the comfy chair near her bed and centers herself through deep breathing and repeating a mantra.

Fowler first tried meditation in 1982 as part of her physical therapy after a biking accident. Then, in 1983, she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. As part of her treatment and recovery she continued meditating. More than 20 years later, she is cancer-free. Today she owns YAS, a yoga and indoor-cycling studio in Venice, Calif., and serves as a spokeswoman-athlete for Nike. "When I start my day [with meditation], it holds me through," she says, "and when things happen and I start to get a little edgy, I can calm myself down."

Meditation doesn't have to occur at a

set time; there's benefit to catching quick moments throughout the day, says Lynette Lewis, author of *Climbing the Ladder in Stilettos* (W Publishing Group, 2006). "It's very important for women that they find their spiritual journey to be a real component of work," Lewis says. "Meditation is a way for women to remind themselves of what really matters and why they're really working. They're looking for more meaning in what they do."

Clark – named one of the most influential women in finance by *Treasury & Risk Management* – meditates whenever and whenever possible: standing at the water cooler between meetings, jogging with her dogs and, of course, during weekend sessions of yoga.

"I use the insights I have gained during those times to really force myself to become much more mindful about living in the present," Clark says. "The change is remarkable." ■

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