



## CALMING THE MIND THROUGH MUSIC AND MEDIATION

Residents Joe Levoff and Sherlee Banks enjoy the benefits of music and meditation.

Seven Los Angeles Jewish Home residents sit silently in the library with their eyes closed.

*Inhale deeply. Now exhale and release.*

*Release any tension.*

The residents have come to participate in a Meditation and Music session led by Anna Kocis, the assistant activities coordinator at the Jewish Home's Eisenberg Village. Her soothing voice guides them as the sound of rainfall plays softly in the background.

*Notice the feelings of relaxation that are beginning to spread through your body.*

*With each breath, your thoughts become lighter.*

Anna pauses the rainfall soundtrack and picks up her flute. She begins playing a gentle melody of her own creation. She improvises much of the music she plays, creating a mood of peacefulness and relaxation.

*If your mind has wandered, it's not a problem. Gently bring yourself back.*

Anna initiated the program in October of last year after several residents expressed the desire to

learn how to meditate. She herself meditates daily and says it has enhanced her focus and sense of wellbeing. With a bachelor's degree in music performance on the flute, a masters in art therapy and classes in music therapy, Anna realized she could apply her skills in a new way to benefit the Home's residents. The biweekly sessions vary, but always include guided meditations, music and relaxing sounds such as ocean waves.

*Imagine you're standing in a grassy field. You can feel the warmth of the sun and a light breeze.*

*As you walk, feel yourself slipping into even deeper relaxation.*



Anna Kocis shares her musical talent with residents and leads them in a guided meditation.

Studies on music and meditation indicate both have positive effects. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, research has shown listening to music can lower anxiety, blood pressure, and pain as well as improve sleep quality, mood, mental alertness, and memory.

Meditation often reduces stress, which in turn reduces inflammation, says Helen Lavretsky, M.D., a geriatric psychiatrist and Professor In-Residence in the Department of Psychiatry at UCLA. “Inflammation is a common denominator in diseases of aging – like heart disease, arthritis, Alzheimer’s disease – and it’s linked to stress,” she says.

In one of her studies, participants who meditated 12 minutes daily showed lowered levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that can disrupt the body’s normal processes.

Cognitive function also improves with meditation. “Imaging techniques show meditation results in improved cognitive performance and improved brain plasticity,” says Dr. Lavretsky.

While it’s difficult to extrapolate from a biweekly class to the daily practice entailed in many scientific studies, Jewish Home class participants – as well as their instructor – see a difference.

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Eisenberg Village residents Joe Levoff and Shirley Banks have been taking the class since it started.

“I was always interested in meditation and always wanted to try it,” says Joe. “It’s so relaxing, so soothing. I sleep better that night.”

“I really love it. It puts you in a different place,” says Shirley, who has previously done meditation on her own. “The music is so pleasant, and makes it even more relaxing. I think about the music and the breathing comes naturally.”

Anna has seen a change in participants over time. “When they were first learning, they were easily distracted and weren’t always able to sit for so long,” she says. “They have learned how to sit still and quietly.” She also sees how much more relaxed they are when they finish class than when they arrive.

Most importantly, Anna believes, music and meditation provide a non-pharmacological way for residents to feel better by tapping into their own abilities. “This is something seniors can do for themselves to help relax,” Anna says. Her message to residents and all seniors: “You have the power in your own mind to help yourself feel better. You can do that.”



Nancy Sokoler Steiner is a freelance writer and author based in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Westways*, and *The Jewish*

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