

Building Acem Germany from scratch

How one instructor brought Acem Meditation to Europe's most populous country.

One grey morning in April 2001, a Norwegian who had taken some days off from work was observed in the grounds of Hamburg University distributing leaflets announcing a course in Acem Meditation. The initial response was far from encouraging: only one person turned up.

Now, three years later, the same Norwegian is in charge of a vast array of Acem activities in Germany, with courses being held in about 20 German cities. Courses are often overbooked. Several hundred Germans learnt Acem Meditation during the past year. Many also participate in long meditations and weekend retreats. In Hamburg, for example, groups of meditators meet regularly, and long meditations are arranged 4-5 times a year. This summer the first one-week retreat will be held in Germerode in central Germany. The retreat is open to all German-speaking practitioners of Acem Meditation. Germany is the fastest growing country in the Acem family.

Cultural trend

"I had never believed the interest in Germany would take off like this," says Ole Nygaard, the Norwegian in charge. A senior political correspondent by profession, Mr. Nygaard has taught Acem Meditation on a voluntary basis since 1975. With the help of other instructors, he is spreading knowledge of Acem Meditation to large parts of Europe's most populous country.

This rapid growth led Norway's leading newspaper, *Aftenposten*, to publish a two-page article about Acem's expansion outside Scandinavia, concluding that Acem courses had become a notable Norwegian export to a number of countries around the world.

Hamburg is Germany's second biggest city, with 1.7 million inhabitants. From the autumn of 2002, Acem's courses appeared regularly in the programme of

the city's Volkshochschule, a kind of college of adult education. The Volkshochschulen of most other major cities followed suit, as did the sports programme of universities in Hamburg and elsewhere. Relaxation, fitness and well-being feature prominently in their course catalogues, and Acem's neutral and non-religious approach fits well with these goals. The trend is spreading to other German-speaking countries: this autumn will see the first Acem courses in Austria.

"Germans are quick at picking up new and serious cultural trends," comments Mr. Nygaard. "The country has an exceptionally strong philosophical and cultural tradition. Just think of Goethe, Kant, Heidegger and Beethoven. This is probably part of the reason why people



Roland Schäfer and other Acem meditators from Germany

take an interest in an existentially oriented meditation technique. And the Germans are good at recruiting. They often bring friends and family members along to the courses. And as soon as they have learnt to meditate, they recommend Acem Meditation to friends."

Quit smoking

"I feel less stressed now," says Roland Schäfer, a director in a pharmaceutical

company from Karlsruhe, who learnt Acem Meditation a little more than a year ago in his home town. He has taken a great interest in the meditative process. Last summer, he attended both the First World Retreat of Acem Meditation and the following international deepening retreat in Oslo. He plans to participate in this year's summer retreat in Germany, as well as Acem's tour of South India in January next year.

"The World Retreat made me understand better the simplicity of Acem Meditation. Before I went, I was tangled up in concern about what to do with my breathing during meditation. At the retreat, I learnt to handle it in a more natural and straightforward way. My understanding of the meditation process changes steadily. The retreats gave me a deeper experience of what meditation can be."

His daily life was affected in a very concrete way: he quit smoking. And he did not find it difficult to stay away from cigarettes even after he returned to his everyday activities.

How did he, as a foreigner, experience coming to a retreat in Norway?

"I did not feel like a foreigner. The atmosphere was international. The activities of such a retreat touch upon the core of the human condition. Meditation transcends culture. Whether you come from India, Taiwan or Europe, everybody has the basic meditative experience in common. There were lots of opportunities for contact: going for a walk, making food together, doing yoga, and participating in guidance groups, seminars and workshops. In addition, I was surprised by how much Norwegians know about German culture and language."

Mr. Schäfer now contributes to the growth of Acem in Germany, especially through the translation of articles on Acem Meditation. For him and other contributors to the project, the goal is to have an Acem book in German within a year or so. Acem Germany is clearly here to stay.

Personality Development and Acem Meditation

by Are Holen MD PhD

*Acem Meditation develops inner strength and expands our inner freedom.
But psychological changes do not come without resistance.*

Personality changes resulting from Acem Meditation are incremental, yet fundamental. They include perceptual, emotional, bodily and behavioural modifications that will benefit the life of the practitioner. The transitions go beyond the "feel good" levels so often promised by many growth-oriented schools. The development is not just smooth and straightforward; it may also involve resistance and confrontations with essential aspects of our selves and our basic existential assumptions. To harvest the best of Acem Meditation requires a long-term perspective. Acem Meditation is a technique that develops inner strength and makes it possible to more fully pursue deeper existential longings.

The free mental attitude in Acem Meditation brings deep relaxation both to mind and body. Deeper relaxation starts processes towards change: in due course, unresolved existential issues may be activated which interfere with our normal ways of meditating. Parts of the practice may be temporarily distorted. Blinded by the unconscious, the meditator may assume that his practice is correct, even though there is less relaxation and less satisfaction. However, the meditator who interprets this experience correctly will know that deeper changes are imminent and that discussing the experiences will foster further development.

Psychological changes do not come without resistance. In Acem

Meditation, concentration of any sort is wrong. Meditators may unknowingly resist change, either by starting to concentrate or by not meditating regularly (or both). If the problems are discussed, explored and corrected, the free mental attitude of Acem Meditation will prevail and gradually restructure underlying issues of the personality.

The practice of Acem Meditation involves deeper aspects of our existence. Working with the practice expands our inner freedom. Progress starts whilst we meditate and subsequently spreads to our everyday lives. Regular meditation and the readiness to work with one's practice are essential to support the process of transition.

During Acem Meditation, the contents of our spontaneous mental activities often appear disjointed. There are, however, emotional and cognitive patterns in the "chaos". In due course, thoughts and feelings tend to converge towards basic themes in our existence.

If we continue to meditate regularly and work with our practice, pockets of hidden anxiety, anger, sorrow, restlessness or depression may surface and be resolved. Occasionally, images and fragments from the past may appear. Frequently, however, the meditator may become judgmental towards his own meditation: "I am no good. I should pull myself more together!" The superego is activated, often in reproachful and derogatory ways, re-enacting forgotten and implicit

child-parent conflicts still lingering in the mind.

Change may result from our daily half-hours at home, but is intensified considerably if supplemented by retreats with time for long meditations and guidance. Psychological structures of the past are activated, as mentioned above, not as episodic, emotional memories, but rather within the practice itself through a tendency to concentrate, or by not meditating regularly. Concentration and/or irregular practice weaken the push and pull towards change. Note that few people experience phases of change as clearly as indicated here without clarification, guidance and long meditations.

One of Acem's important contributions has been to develop a systematic psychology of meditation, which includes principles of guidance that help meditators further their own growth processes.



Dr Are Holen founded Acem in 1966 and is the International head of the organisation. He is Chairman of the Department of Neuroscience at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Reader's query

It is not so easy to keep up the practice without the benefit of friends who share my interest. How can I keep in touch with Acem and get input to develop my meditation?

Abdulsamed Abubakar, teacher, Ghana, learnt Acem Meditation two years ago in The Gambia.

Although Acem Meditation is most often done alone, many find it beneficial to join a study group to discuss and share the experience with others. In this way you can clarify your meditation performance and learn from the experience of others. Taking part in a study group is also an inspiration, making it easier to keep up regular meditation practice.

If you already have 4-8 participants who practice Acem Meditation and who want to take part, just get in touch with Acem (see acem.com for your country or area) and ask for study material.

If you do not know whether there are enough participants, get in touch with Acem. Your name will then be put on a list, and you will be notified when there are enough participants.

If you are the only person in your area who practises Acem Meditation, you may find it beneficial from time to time to listen to Are Holen's CD *Inner Strength*. It contains a wealth of insight and advice on how to improve your meditation. You may also contact Acem and inquire about receiving guidance from an instructor by telephone or e-mail.

An International Calendar of Acem Retreats

International Summer Retreat of Acem Meditation 2004 with Dr. Are Holen, founder of Acem

Saturday 17 July–Sunday 25 July
Funen, Denmark



This retreat is for all who have learnt Acem Meditation, both beginners and experienced meditators. It also provides the opportunity to learn the technique. The course language is English, with translation into Scandinavian, Dutch, Spanish and Mandarin. The programme includes 3–4 hours of meditation every morning; guidance groups; afternoon group meditation; evening talks; social interaction; yoga.

Retreat fee: EUR 605, full-time students of less than 30 years of age: EUR 425 (accommodation in double room).

For information and registration, see www.acem.dk/retreat.

International Deepening Retreat of Acem Meditation 2004

Sunday 25 July–Sunday 1 August
Acem Retreat Centre Lundsholm, Sweden

This retreat is for Acem meditators who want to practise sittings of more than six hours. A deepening retreat will provide a good opportunity to explore aspects of meditation that are not easily available in other contexts. Meals and lifestyle are designed to intensify the meditative process. Participants must have practised Acem Meditation regularly for at least three months before the retreat starts. They must have recent experience (from the past year) of long meditations of three hours or more. Earlier participation in overnight retreats in Acem Meditation is highly recommended. The course language is English, with translation into Scandinavian and other languages as needed.

Retreat fee: EUR 715 (with single room/private bath accommodation in new building); EUR 640 (accommodation in old buildings); students below 30 years of age: EUR 500 (accommodation in old buildings).

Information and registration: acem@acem.com.

Summer Retreat of Acem Meditation in Germany 2004

Saturday 14 August–Sunday 22 August
Germerode, close to Eschwege, west of Kassel

This retreat is open for all Acem meditators who speak German.

International Weekend Retreat of Acem Meditation 2005

Friday 22 April–Sunday 24 April
Charney Manor,
close to Oxford

This retreat is open to anyone who has learnt Acem Meditation. If you wish to learn Acem Meditation during the retreat, please contact Acem UK.

International Summer Retreat of Acem Meditation 2005 with Dr. Are Holen

Saturday 16 July–Sunday 24 July
Acem Retreat Centre Halvorsbøle, Norway

The Second World Retreat of Acem Meditation 2006 with Dr. Are Holen

Saturday 15 July–Sunday 23 July
Oslo, Norway

Acem courses across the world

The following is a list of countries and cities where Acem has recently arranged introductory courses, or plans to do so in the near future. If your city is not on the list and you wish to help Acem arrange courses in your area, please contact acem@acem.com.

Austria (acem.deutschland@acem.com)
Wien, Salzburg, Linz, Graz.

Brazil (acem@acem.com) Rio de Janeiro.

China (acem.china@acem.com)
Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou.

Columbia (acem@acem.com) Bogota

Denmark (acem@acem.dk)
Copenhagen, Esbjerg, Frederikshavn, Haderslev, Hjørring, Horsens, Kolding, Maribo, Nakskov, Nykøbing, Falster, Odense, Randers, Silkeborg, Sorø, Svaneke, Varde, Vejle, Viborg, Vordingborg, Aalborg, Århus.

Dominican Republic (acem@acem.com)
Sosua, Puerto Plata.

England (acem.uk@acem.com)
London, Oxford, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Birmingham, Manchester.

France (acem@acem.com)
Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, Lille, Dijon, Nancy, Nice, Cannes, Antibes, Saint-Tropez, Strasbourg, Caen.

Gambia (acem.gambia@acem.com) Banjul

Germany (acem.deutschland@acem.com)
Hamburg, Berlin, Essen, Dresden, Chemnitz, Heidelberg, Eberbach, Karlsruhe, Freiburg, Bamberg, Nürnberg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Lübeck, Frankfurt, Rostock, Schwerin, Leipzig, Chemnitz.

India (acem.india@acem.com)
Delhi, Chennai, Tiruchirappalli (Trichy), Chandigarh, Mumbai, Varanasi.

Italy (acem@acem.com) Rome.

Japan (acem@acem.com) Tokyo, Sendai.

Latvia (acem.latvia@acem.com) Riga.

Malaysia (acem.malaysia@acem.com)
Kuala Lumpur

Netherlands (info@acem.nl) Groningen, Leeuwarden, Amsterdam, Amersfoort.

Norway (acem@acem.no)
Oslo, Bærum, Asker, Lørenskog, Lillestrøm,

Ås, Eidsvoll, Drammen, Jevnaker, Hønefoss, Skien, Sandefjord, Tønsberg, Moss, Krækkja, Hamar, Gjøvik, Ørsta, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Sola, Sandnes, Bryne, Bergen, Trondheim, Tromsø.

Russia (acem@acem.com) Moscow.

Scotland (acem.uk@acem.com)
Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Inverness, Glasgow, Perth.

Singapore (acem.singapore@acem.com)
Singapore.

South Africa (acem.southafrica@acem.com)
Cape Town.

Sweden (acem.stockholm@acem.se)
Stockholm, Uppsala, Umeå, Göteborg, Arvika.

Switzerland (acem.deutschland@acem.com)
Zurich, Bern, Basel.

Taiwan (acem.taiwan@acem.com)
Taipei, Pali.

Thailand (acem.thailand@acem.com)
Bangkok, Chiangmai.

USA (acem.usa@acem.com)
Big Island, Hawaii; San Diego, California; Ithaca, New York.

Contact Acem to enrol or to obtain a free information brochure

Join Acem Travels to South India 2005

17 days: Meditation retreat and round tour

Thursday 13 January–Sunday 30 January

II A C E M
travels

The aroma of spices and the endless ocean...exotic beaches and fantastic nature...house boats on rivers, canals and lakes...ancient temples and rituals...shopping and friendly people.



Enjoy meditation and culture: an Acem retreat and exciting contact with Indian meditators. This will be a highly varied tour, rich in experiences, to most exotic locations—Kerala and Tamil Nadu in South India.

For some reason this part of India is relatively undiscovered by tourists. Nonetheless, South India has much to offer. You will find a fascinating blend of modern life and age-old traditions. From here India supplies the world with some of our most skilled IT experts, and here also traditions flourish which are as different from Anglo-American culture as is imaginable.

I can promise you a tour you will never forget.

Torbjørn Hobbel



Thursday 13 January

Departure from Oslo Airport (Gardermoen) to Chennai in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. See below for other points of departure.

Friday 14 January

Departure from Chennai to the Indian city of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) in the Indian state of Kerala. 45 minute bus trip to the site of the retreat in Betsaida.

Friday 14 January–Thursday 20 January 6 day Acem retreat in Kerala

The site of the retreat—Betsaida lies in the foothills above the Arabian Sea, 10 km south of Kovalam, one of the world's legendary beaches. You will find hundreds of species of flowers, coconut palms, hammocks swaying between the trees, a private beach with the sun setting over the ocean. Here you are far removed from mass tourism, and conditions are excellent for inner deepening processes. Many will live in traditional Kerala huts with modern facilities.

The daily programme of the retreat consists of 4 hours of silence for meditation in the morning, and 45 minutes in the evening. There will be guidance groups and lectures on meditation every day.

Thursday 20 January–Friday 21 January

We travel early in the morning by bus to Kanniyakumari in Tamil Nadu. On the way we visit Padmanabhapuram, a centuries-old palace of the rajas of Travancore.

Kanniyakumari is a very holy place in India. Here the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea meet. Every day throughout the year, thousands of pilgrims come to greet the sun as it rises from the Indian Ocean, and bid the sun farewell as it disappears in the Arabian Sea in the evening.



We travel by boat to Vivekananda Rock—an island with a monument to the Swami Vivekananda who was the first Indian yogi to travel to the West.

It is said that in 1892 he swam to the island and meditated, where he had a vision of travelling out of India to spread the knowledge of yoga and meditation.

Saturday 22 January–Sunday 23 January

After sunrise we travel by bus to the city of Alappuzha (Allepey) north in Kerala. Here Vasco de Gama first set foot on Indian soil after discovering the sea route to India.

We then board large refitted rice transportation vessels for a three-day tour of the Kerala Backwaters. Some years ago National Geographic wrote that a tour of the Backwaters was among those experiences that one should have in life. The Backwaters are vast inland areas of rivers, canals and lakes, where people have lived for generations with a unique culture and lifestyle. We sleep on board and eat delicious vegetarian food prepared by our own cooks.

Monday 24 January

We travel by bus to the Western Ghats—the mountains which divide Kerala and Tamil Nadu. On the way we pass vast rubber, cardamom, pepper and tea plantations established by the British before they left in 1947. We travel to the town of Thekkady, where we stay at a hotel. We visit a spice garden where all of the spices we know are grown—pepper, cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, allspice, etc. This is the place to buy spices!

Tuesday 25 January

Early in the morning we travel by boat to the lake of Periyar—one of India's best-known nature reserves—famous for its tigers, elephants and bison. This is the only place in India where one safely can observe wild elephants from a boat. The morning mist creates an unforgettable, magical atmosphere.

After the boat trip we travel to Tamil Nadu, which is very different from Kerala. Here we find innumerable Hindu temples. We travel by bus to the city of Madurai, where the main temple (Shri Meenakshi) is said to contain over 33 million stone figures!

Wednesday 26 January–Thursday 27 January

We travel by bus to the city of Tiruchchirappalli (Trichi), where we visit fascinating temples and witness ancient ceremonies said to promote peace and harmony. We can also shop in the bazaars.

Friday 28 January

We travel by night train to Chennai—quite an experience in itself! (Everyone has a bunk).

Saturday 29 January

We arrive in Chennai in the morning, where we may either rest or go shopping (quite a place for bargains!)

Sunday 30 January

We fly back to Oslo—or to wherever we are headed.

Price: USD3550 including airfare from Oslo, all meals (lactovegetarian menu), lodging (double rooms), transportation and sightseeing. If you wish to travel from other cities, the price is USD1995—not including the airfare from your country to Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) and from Chennai back to your country. Single rooms may be arranged for an additional fee of USD800.

Who can take part: Anyone who has learnt Acem Meditation. Meditating parents may bring children (from 9 years).

Tour guide and instructors

Your tour guide will be Torbjørn Hobbel, who founded Acem India and lives in India for long periods each year. Acem meditators from South India will also take part, as well as initiators and instructors from Acem International.

Language: English. Guidance groups will be in English, Scandinavian and Mandarin.

Registration and further information:

see acem.com or contact acem@acem.com.

II A C E M
School of Meditation

is a non-profit organisation which helps people develop existentially by means of a mindful, reflective process known as Acem Meditation.

Head office: Postboks 2559 Solli, N-0202 Oslo, Norway
Tel. +47-23118700 Fax +47-22831831
acem@acem.com www.acem.com

Go to www.acem.com/info/centres.html to locate addresses in other countries.

Contributors: Trygve Fridstrøm (layout),
Halvor Eifring (ed.), Eirik Jensen

Learn Acem Meditation now - and recommend it to someone you care about