

A Beginners Guide to Meditation

The following instructions provide a short overview for beginners of *one* method for how to meditate. These instructions should not be taken as *the correct way* or *the only way*, as there are many different techniques and ways of meditating. Serious practitioners of meditation will want to explore different approaches to the practice in order to find out what works best for them. Further, meditation is a skill that requires practice and diligent effort. No one would expect to be proficient at shooting three-pointers after playing basketball for only 10 minutes, and continuing to be a skilled basketball player requires continued practice and exercise. The same is true with meditation. Those who do seriously practice meditation will eventually experience the benefits.

Preparing to Meditate

Setting: Anywhere you are able to sit undisturbed for the duration of your meditation period (no phone calls or texts, no requests from anyone, etc.).

When: The best time to meditate might be in the morning before you begin your day. But if you are unable to meditate in the morning simply find another time in the day that works for you.

How much: This depends on your experience. 10 minutes of meditation a day is a great goal for beginners. You do not want to over-challenge yourself by doing too much too fast, as that could create a negative experience and make it more difficult to realize the benefits of the practice. Eventually working up to sitting for longer amounts of time will be beneficial. Ultimately, it is up to you to decide how long you want to sit, based on your inclination and availability. Less than 10 minutes is likely not enough to do much good, while more than 40 minutes may be too much for beginners.

Body Position: Any relaxed sitting position that allows you to sit comfortably, quietly and awake for the duration of your practice. You can sit on a chair, couch, on the floor or wherever. What is most important is that you are comfortable, that you can hold the pose easily, and that you are able to stay awake – meaning you don't want to get so comfortable you fall asleep. When you first start learning how to meditate, you may wish to sit with your back and head supported. If you are able to do so comfortably, you may find you more easily stay awake if you sit with your head unsupported, leaving your back still supported. Better still, but again only if you find it comfortable and easy to do so, is to sit on the edge of a chair with your back straight and your head balanced in alignment over your shoulders. The best position for meditation sessions that are longer than about 20 minutes or so is one of the traditional postures for sitting on the floor. Again, however, you should only adopt a posture that is comfortable and easy to maintain.

Starting a Meditation Session

- Having taken a comfortable, relaxed sitting position, close your eyes and take a few moments (about half a minute to a minute) to relax any obvious tensions in your body.
- Now, opening your eyes, take a moment to feel your body position and to get a sense of your immediate surroundings (within a few feet of your body).
- Close your eyes, continuing to feel your body position and immediate surroundings.
- Allow yourself to experience the feeling of simply sitting, doing nothing else but being relaxed and aware.

Meditating

- When you first start experiencing this relaxed feeling of simply sitting, begin observing your breath. Simply and directly pay attention to your breath as it flows in and out of your nose. Or you may want to pay attention to the way your lungs fill with and release your breath, or the way your abdomen moves. Remain aware of the breath. If focusing on the breath alone is challenging, you may want to count your breaths as they flow in and out. Count your breaths from 1 to 10. If you make it all the way to 10 without becoming distracted or thinking about something else, then count back down to 1. Each time thoughts distract you from counting or simply observing your breath, non-judgmentally acknowledge that you were thinking about something else and simply refocus back on your breath. If you get distracted while counting breaths, simply start counting again at 1.
- By doing this, you are associating the breath or counting the breath with the relaxed state of simply sitting doing nothing else but being aware. This association will help you to easily recall this feeling when you begin to get distracted by thoughts and sensations.
- Now just sit, experiencing the feeling of simply sitting and doing nothing else but remaining aware of your breath and any other sensations.
- Of course, you will have various experiences of sounds, feelings (maybe pain in your legs), brief thoughts, perhaps even sights (the blankness behind your eyelids or even soft colors caused by the natural activity of your retinas). Just accept these experiences and sensations, doing nothing with them. Just hear, feel and observe them as they come and go.
- Eventually you will start thinking about something. You will start becoming distracted away from observing your breath. This is fine. It is to be expected. It is very natural for the mind to become involved in its experiences – that is what the mind does.
- When you realize you are thinking about something and becoming distracted, simply and kindly move your focus back to your breath. Don't criticize yourself or get impatient. Simply remember your breath. If you were counting, simply start back at 1. Repeat this process as many times as you need. This is part of the practice.
- This is the entire process of this style of meditation. It is sitting relaxed but aware, becoming distracted, remembering the breath, recalling the feeling of relaxed and aware sitting, then sitting relaxed and aware again until you again become distracted. It is a circular movement – at first. Soon, it becomes more like a spiral that leads you ever more deeply into the feeling of relaxation and awareness or mindfulness. Each time you remember the breath – which recalls to you the feeling of relaxed and mindful sitting – each time you become a little more mindful.
- Repeat the cycle for the duration of the meditation period.

Finishing

- When you are ready to end your meditation, you may want to take a moment to say silently to yourself: "May we be well. May we be happy. May we be free from suffering." Mean and feel each statement as profoundly as possible. By doing so, you experience love and honor for all sentient beings, including yourself, which is the foundation for having true love and honor for all life and dedicating yourself to living in a way that makes life better for all.
- Lastly, spend 2 or 3 minutes just relaxing with your eyes open, enjoying the feeling of having meditated and allowing yourself to gradually return to an active state of mind.