**(Title Slide)**

Hi, everybody. Today I’m going to be talking about meditation. Let me start by showing you what many people, and perhaps some of you as well, think meditation is.

**(Slide 2-Video)**

The idea that meditation is always peaceful and loving is a myth.

**(Slide 3- blank)**

Meditation can sometimes be calming and relaxing, but it deals with the world that’s right in front of you. One that is, at times, irritating, or boring, or sad. At other times, it can be joyful, and stimulating, and serene. With meditation, you can discover much about yourself and the world around you, but it can be difficult, and, much like performing a speech, requires lots of practice.

I’ve been meditating since I discovered Buddhism at the age of 11. There are many different schools of Buddhism, but all of them use meditation as a form of practice. Currently, I attend a Zen center in Cambridge where the great majority of my time is spent meditating with a group of practitioners. In addition, I always meditate during my lunch hour on a school day to help with my focus, energy, and stress.

In this demonstration, I will tell you a little about the background of meditation and then we will go over the core steps. I will ask you all to join me in a short meditation, and I will finish by telling you about the benefits of this practice. Hopefully, you will learn something new and perhaps come to appreciate the impact meditation can have on our daily lives.

The earliest known records describing meditation are 3 and a half thousand years old, but the origin of this practice is not known.

**(Slide 4- Definition of Meditation)**

Cambridge Dictionary defines meditation as “the act of giving your attention to only one thing, either as a religious activity or as a way of becoming calm and relaxed”. Meditation is practiced widely all over the world and has many different forms you may not know about.

**(Slide 5- Types of Meditation)**

There are a few different types of meditation.

**(Spiritual)**

There is spiritual meditation. This includes meditation practiced by many Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, but it also includes Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, in the form of prayer.

**(Movement)**

Then there is movement meditation, like martial arts, yoga, and Tai Chi. I find movement meditation to be very helpful, and practice something called Qi-Gong every day along with my sitting meditation.

**(Focused)**

There is focused meditation, where an individual does a task single-mindedly and whole-heartedly. You can practice gardening meditation, cleaning meditation, or eating meditation.

**(Mindful)**

Next there is mindfulness meditation. This type of meditation combines your awareness with your concentration, often involving the breath as the object of focus. In mindfulness meditation, you practice simply noticing whatever you are perceiving- thoughts, smells, sights, sounds. Traditional Buddhist meditation is often practiced by giving your attention to your breath.

**(Slide 6- Blank)**

Currently, our society is undergoing a mindfulness movement that is demystifying meditation and is increasing opportunities for the average person to learn how to practice it. Many meditation apps have become mainstream- such as Headspace and Calm. I personally use an app called Insight Timer.

I will be meditating on a cushion and mat called a zafu and zabuton, but you can meditate in literally any position, and any circumstance. Traditional forms of meditation within Zen Buddhism include meditating while sitting, lying down, walking, working, and even eating, but you can informally meditate just about anywhere- there’s not much of a difference. Sitting in the car, lying in bed, walking down your neighborhood street, eating delicious wings or tofu, and yes, sitting in a classroom whose university evidently didn’t want to pay for separate desks.

Now I’ll talk you through the steps of mindfulness meditation, and afterwards, we’ll all try it for a minute or two.

First, you’ll want to find a comfortable position, as if you’re sitting on a couch at home.

You can keep your eyes half-closed, looking downwards 3 to 6 feet in front of you, or you can close them altogether. Whichever you prefer. I personally keep my eyes open.

Take a few deep breaths before settling into a natural rhythm… (pause)…

Gently bring awareness to your breath. Where do you feel the sensation of breathing the most? Do you feel it in the rise and fall of your belly as you breath in and out? Do you feel the little nose hairs in your nostrils move back and forth with the air moving past? I personally feel it at the back of my throat as the air rushes past into my lungs.

Ask yourself what your breath is like. Is your breath quick and shallow? Slow and deep? Somewhere in between? All of these are perfectly alright.

Finally, you will begin counting slowly from 1 to 10- one number for each breath. Once you reach 10, if you’re ready for more meditation, start over at 1. If you lose track of your counting- maybe you start thinking about what you want for lunch, or how much homework you have, or when this speech is going to end- rest your attention back to slowly counting your breaths, starting at 1. This way, you have a mechanism for noticing when you are distracted, and for bringing you back into the present moment.

(pause)

Many people believe that meditation is about getting rid of thoughts, but that is a common misconception. Thoughts are natural to have. They will come and go as they please, on their own.

Don’t beat yourself up if you’re having a lot of thoughts. The point of meditation is to bring mindful attention to your thoughts when they come, take note of them, and then let them pass as you return your attention gently to your breath. Thoughts are like clouds in a bright blue sky. They will come, and they will go, but the sky is always there.

Remember, try your best to be non-judgmental when you notice thoughts, and gently return your attention to your breath, counting steadily.

So, let’s try meditating for a minute.

**(Slide 7- Mindfulness Meditation)**

To summarize: Get comfortable… Lower your gaze or close your eyes… Focus on your breath… When I play this gong, begin counting your breaths. When you lose your spot, turn your attention gently back to your breathing, and begin again at 1. When you hear this gong played again, that will be the signal to gently come back to the classroom.

Ready?

\*play gong\*

(wait 1 minute)

\*play gong again\*

Now slowly open your eyes if they are closed, and bring your attention back to this classroom.

**(Slide 8- blank)**

I’m sure many of you had some very different experiences. What sorts of thoughts did you notice? What did you feel? Sometimes when I’m meditating, all I can think about is “When will it be over?”. Other times, I feel calm and centered.

(pause)

So, what now? Knowing how to meditate is great and all, but what’s the point?

There is a massive amount of research, over 3000 articles, that point to the benefits of meditation. Regular meditation has been shown to reduce stress, reduce anxiety, and reduce depression. It improves your ability to focus, pay attention, learn, and be creative. Meditation increases quality of sleep, and reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke. It improves empathy, fosters positive relationships, and reduces feelings of loneliness. I have packets outlining the benefits of meditation that I can pass out after to those interested.

(pause)

Perhaps one of the benefits I value the most is the ability to be in the present moment.

**(Slide 9- The Importance of Mindfulness video)**

Mindfulness is like a muscle. The more we practice it, the greater our capacity becomes for staying in the present. Our lives are filled with so many superficial, impermanent things. Our money will be spent, our material objects will break or lose value, our interests will change. There’s nothing more real and substantial than *right* now, than this very moment. Without it, what are we?