**Episode: 30-minute self-guided meditation**

So, welcome to this exercise! The idea here is to have a simple introduction into a completely self-guided and 30-minute long meditation. This means no interruptions, just you left alone with your own mind. Often, this method of meditation is called “unguided”. But really all it means is that you are guiding yourself from within, rather than with something or someone on the outside. So, it’s not really unguided, it is more that you become your own guide. So, self-guided.

Personally, I have found this method to be simpler after learning some of the basics of meditation. How to notice your thoughts, and even simple things like how to breathe and finding the right posture for yourself. You can think of these things like training wheels for meditation, which can be best learned through a guided or mentored process. Such as, using an app on your phone, recordings, or even an in-person mediator. In externally-guided meditations, I found the guidance to be more of an interruption after a while, and more difficult to enter into and achieve a meditative state. As a solo process, entering into self-guided meditation means that you might be ready to take these training wheels off, and take things to the next level.

Like with any exercise, doing this consistently over time as part of a dedicated ritual or routine is the best way to attain the most benefits. For me, I like to do it first thing in the morning after showering, while allowing myself to dry off naturally. By doing it first thing in the morning, it allows me to start each day with a calm, relaxed state of mind, ready to face any challenges of the coming day.

Another helpful analogy might be to think of an externally guided meditation like having a tour guide. Your mind is like a beautiful, unexplored cavern. Your guide can shine their flashlight and illuminate parts of this cavern for you. They can also show you the different ways of how to look around the cavern. But a self-guided process is like training yourself to see the whole cavern for yourself, by slowly allowing yourself to see better in the dark. You can decide what to explore and what to visualise. Bit by bit, a more complete picture of this incredible space will emerge.

What I found after practice was that self-guided meditation allowed me to get into a free flow state faster. Rather than relying on an external guide, relying on my own mind meant that I had to learn to adapt faster. I also found it to be more intense in training my mind, to notice when it was chattering away into overdrive, and return to that gentle focus on breathing. Because of this, it can be a little more challenging. So do not worry at all if you find your mind wandering more than usual to begin with.

You can do this exercise using meditation music if you like, or in complete silence. For me, I prefer silence, and to situate myself in a place where there is either little or no external sound, beyond just natural ambience. This choice will be simply down to your own personal preference. It might be worth playing with different music or ambiences to see if any of them resonate with you particularly well. Every single person who meditates will experience it differently and have their own preferences. That is just one of the things that makes meditation so unique and valuable.

What I usually find is that for the first 5, 10 or 15 minutes or so, my mind tends to wander quite a bit. Lots of thoughts come in, usually whatever has been most on my mind recently. Spending this time really training that focus on your breathing can be valuable. Exercising those mental muscles. Not too much focus, not too little, just that gentle acceptance that comes with practice.

Often, when my mind is wandering down those different paths, I like to remind myself that often when we think we are thinking clearly, we are not really thinking at all. In fact, we are obscuring doing what feels right with over-thinking or obsession, and it can cloud our true feelings. A light-hearted approach to meditation can be useful, allowing us to practice the process of non-judgemental awareness for what is inside of us.

For me, after that first period, there comes a steadier state of calm. The chattering dies down, the monkey mind begins to rest, and feelings start to gradually replace more reactive thoughts. It feels like sinking below a certain level, where thoughts and feelings become deeper, and easier just to acknowledge and release.

Ultimately, what I have found is a deeper sense of inner peace through self-guided meditation. And I am only at the beginning of my journey. I feel that I am able to be much more in control of my thoughts and emotions in a healthy way throughout the day. As such, self-guided meditation can be powerful if you are going through a particularly emotionally challenging time in your life. It can also help to strengthen and safeguard your mind, should challenging situations arise in the future.

The self-guided process allows you to either set a general focus on contemplation of something specific, like the source of an emotion. Focus on this intention before you begin, and set it in your mind as a goal. Or, you can choose to have a freer exploration of your mind to discover what emerges naturally. The choice is yours. It can be a sort of catch-22 at times, you have to focus on not focusing on something. Makes perfect sense, right? But this is where the simple act of noticing, and being aware of, what is within you becomes most useful. It does take practice, as often we are so quick to criticise and judge internally, especially towards ourselves. Meditation trains us to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go as they please, each time we notice them, returning to that gentle focus on the rhythm of the breath. Like observing the waves of a tide, just gently in, and gently out. Constant, in rhythm, calm and relaxed. Remember, there is no “wrong way” of doing this. It’s all about the journey.

A self-guided journey can also just be an incredibly pleasurable experience to do anyway without any purpose besides the sheer joy of experiencing it. The connection you can have with your deepest emotions during those moments is like that feeling of true love that you sometimes get; for example, when gazing into the eyes of a loved one, or feeling the peaceful caress of the wind and sun on your skin, or seeing the pure joy of being alive from a new-born baby. That feeling of deep intimacy inside and connection within us can emerge during self-guided meditations as a true moment of bliss.

Sometimes, during meditation, I like to place my attention on my heart. And to allow my heartbeat to get into synchrony with my breath. Often, while doing this, I find that a particular person emerges naturally and in immense detail, and a deep sense of compassion comes over me towards them. Sometimes, I find this exceptionally useful for replacing any latent negative thoughts or feelings I might have towards that person with more loving, kind, and empathetic ones.

For now, though, let’s get to it. Remember to start with a few deep, releasing breathes before closing your eyes and settling into yourself.

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So, hopefully after that you’re feeling pretty great. Maybe some emotions crept out, some intentions to fulfil for the day, or even just old memories of fond experiences. Maybe someone came to your mind that you feel the need to speak to. If it was important enough, you will remember to do it. Whatever came to your mind, whatever your felt, whatever you thought, it is all okay. Remember that the key is simply being aware of what is inside you, without any judgement. Trust yourself, love yourself, and focus on what feels right in your heart.

Stretch off, be happy that you took some real time for yourself today. Bear in mind, that by spending this time with ourselves, we ultimately become better for those around us too.