**Super beginners guide to meditation**

Welcome to this super beginner’s guide to meditation. When I first started meditating, many years back now, I was quite lost. I did not know really what it was for, how to do it, or what the history or context of it was. I was simply told to do it because it was good for me. There are many things I wish I had known at the beginning, and that is what this now is for.

In the book, The Little Prince, it is written “*It is only in the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*” What this is telling us is that our senses can be deceptive, and only see things that are superficial, and instead it is our heart or what is inside of us that we should use as our moral compass.

This is what meditation is, in essence. It is a method for overcoming the physical and emotional obstacles associated with our senses and our mind, and instead connecting with our hearts. Often, this can be referred to as connecting to the self, your spirit, or your soul. Meditation does not necessarily require us to believe in all of these things, or adhere to any specific theology or ideology, and especially not to still enjoy its benefits.

This passage from The Little Prince is trying to tell us is that our emotions do not always have to make logical sense. What matters most is what they imply, and also our understanding and awareness of those things. There are countless different types and variations of meditation that all can help us with this, as well as a number of other complimentary medical or psychological methods.

Meditation can be most easily described and thoughts of as “intentional concentration on a selected focus.” That is it. All other applications are really just secondary interpretations within this, and all part of our own journey as we descend into ourselves.

When I first heard about meditation, I did what perhaps many of us do, and dismissed it outright. It is just sitting down quietly, what good could it possibly do for anyone. Spiritual mumbo jumbo, I thought. Trained as a scientist, I was dogmatic in my belief that only that which was tangible and could be measured was real and of value. It was not until many years later that I realised just how naïve I had been, and began to take it more seriously.

It took me many failed attempts to get to grips with meditation. Like any skill, it takes commitment and practice to learn. I feel that often those who say that meditation “doesn’t work” are perhaps confused about two things. First, they might expect it to be a magical cure all for all their mental distress and problems in life. Meditate the pain away. Second, they might expect to see results right away. Neither of these things are really true. Instead, the effects of it are often more difficult to see, as they are inside. And they accumulate more gradually over time, such that when we look back over a long period of time, we might notice a big difference to how we feel compared to when we first started our journey. If we think we might not be doing it the right way, the best thing to do is be patient with ourselves.

Another little hurdle is that we might become impatient during meditation because our minds are busy and distracted, and therefore we feel that it is not working. Having our mind bouncing all over the place or getting lost in thought is perfectly normal, and happens to everyone. Especially when we are starting out. The most important thing is not to consider these things as failures, but to practice being aware of these moments, learning to let go, and then returning to your point of focus. Our breath.

Over time, what we might start to notice is that you gain an increasing sense of observational awareness. Both for emotional and physical stimuli. But gradually, we are able to become less and less emotionally engaged with those stimuli. This can be exceptionally powerful in helping to deal with negative feelings, such as victimisation, anger, fear, shame, or helplessness, instead allowing ourselves to cope with the stress much more easily. Many of us probably have at one point in our lives turned to alcohol, smoking or other substances that we feel help us to deal with these emotions and stresses. They might help to numb the pain for a short while, or distract or occupy the mind. But these things are quite distinct from actually understanding, accepting, and ultimately trying to deal with and learn from these experiences. Every time we make a choice to suppress our emotions, we lose a chance to really grow from them.

Meditation allows us to patiently engage our emotions and work through them internally. They can gradually become the focus of our meditation. Acknowledge our feelings, and let them go, refocus on the breath. It comes back up? Repeat the process. Through this, it is possible for us to gain new insights into our feelings, and we can deal with them appropriately after our meditation, when our minds are clearer. If it is something important, we will remember it.

Just some of the potential benefits of meditation can include greater memory recall, a blossoming creativity, a deeper understanding of our minds, and increased wisdom and intuition about the world. It can help us to overcome any doubts and fears that might have us stuck in past or future moments. Through this, meditation acts as a sort of psychological release, and it can enable a very therapeutic healing process, and compliments regular psychotherapy.

Meditation also engages natural healing processes within our bodies. For example, decreased heart rate, breathing rate, and oxygen consumption, along with an increase in alpha wave patterns in the cerebral cortex. Herbert Benson and Keith Wallace referred to this state the “wakeful hypometabolic state”, or “the relaxation response.”

Something else meditation can guide us through is with noticing the ego. The ego is the part of each of us, the self, that believes it is absent from the whole. Some branches of meditation believe that the main goal for it is the destruction or death of the self in order to attain connectivity with all others, and even the divine and universal spirit. It is up to you whether or not you entertain these beliefs as part of your journey.

Here though, it must be emphasised that, for all the good it can do, meditation does not change the environment around us. If we live in a hostile environment, meditation will help us to deal with it better. But we also will need to make more physical changes to make things healthier.

OK, so with that introduction in mind, here are the 5 simple steps to meditation.

**STEP 1: Getting the right setting**

When meditating, it helps to be in as a relaxing environment as possible, without distractions. This will be down to our own personal preference for what you find mentally and physically comforting. Usually though, sitting in a quiet, comfortable space creates the right atmosphere. This can be a specific space inside or outside. And you can design it to however you like. Whatever helps you to ease into that calm, focused, relaxed state of mind. For example, you might want to include photos or other objects that invoke particularly fond memories and experiences, and bring a sense of joy.

**STEP 2: Release and let go**

Meditation is an exercise, and like physical exercises, we start by stretching! If you feel physical tension inside of you, stretch, give it a little wiggle maybe, and release the stress. When you feel ready, close your eyes. Take a few long, deep breathes, filling your lungs as much as you can. With each exhale, feel the release and the body relaxing as you let go. Finding the best posture for yourself is all a matter of preference and experience too. You might want to sit cross-legged, or in lotus position if you’re a little more flexible. Whatever enables you to sit still and in comfort for periods of time. Try and keep your back straight, and sit upright and proud. You can rest your arms on your knees if it helps, or gently in your lap. You can also use something to support your back too if needed, as long as you are not in pain or feeling discomfort when beginning.

**STEP 3: Connecting to a different state**

Virtually all meditation practices describe some form of interplay between the self, as in the ego, and the higher self, or the spirit and the divine. The soul. There are many words to describe the duality. There will be moments during your meditation where you drift between these two states. Those who meditate describe the experience as feeling a blissful state of inner peace and love. Compassion, gratitude, awe, joy, all attributed to a connection with a different state. Some call this state God, or a divine spirit. I don’t think it matters so much what you call or identify it as, just so that you get to experience it and be present with it.

**STEP 4: Having a sacred word**

This step is optional, and can be helpful for different forms of prayer or meditation. Different words, chants, and mantras all are designed to help guide meditation or provide a focus for centering of prayer. This can be anything you want, but short words are best. Peace, love, joy. Focusing on this word can help to re-anchor your presence within a higher state.

**STEP 5: Practice, practice, practice**

Yep, sorry folks, this is not something you can do every now and then and expect to work miracles. It requires habit, routine, and commitment. Just like any sport, exercise, or hobby. You can’t expect to become a professional athlete if you do not train. It is the same for training your mind too. The more you train, the more you will learn and develop. The best way to achieve this is through a routine. Establish a schedule of repeated, daily practice until meditation becomes a second nature to you. For example, having a specific time of the day, duration, and type of meditation for set periods of time helps. The longer you can meditate for, the better. Usually at least 15 minutes is best to give your mind time to quieten down, but even 5 or 10 minutes is better than zero minutes. The more you practice, the more you experience. For those who feel they don’t have the time, consider it like an investment in your time. Just a short time meditating can help you be more focused, more aware, more relaxed during the day, and ultimately end up saving you time and energy.

What you might begin to notice after a while is that you feel like you enter a purer meditative state more often throughout the day. It can be when doing anything in which you enter that heightened state of awareness. Because that is really all meditation is at the end of the day.