

Why meditate? Simply put, living life with an untrained mind creates an unimaginable amount of unnecessary suffering. A meditation practice allows us to train our mind to think about what we want it to think about. In another way of saying it, we teach our mind how to focus in a useful way.

Most of us spend a significant portion of our lives being led around by the thinking of our minds. An untrained mind is all over the map with thoughts, judgements, and reactions. It recoils from pain and tries to rationalize emotions. Imagine trying to reach a destination on foot. Thoughts from an untrained mind are like taking one step east, then another step west, and yet another step north. We are doing a lot of thinking, but never getting anywhere we want to be. Meditation trains the mind to move in the direction of our choosing instead of all over the place.

This offering is about creating a meditation practice. It is perhaps the most personal, powerful, and enduring skill one can possess, the ability to meditate. A meditation practice can never be taken away, will always serve you, and will be a place to find solace within yourself when the chaos of the world visits you.

Notice what you think when you hear the word *meditation*. For many people who have not yet found a reliable practice, imagery of cross-legged, mind racing, tense body, clock watching misery often appears. Maybe the shangri-la that

some people promise never happened when we tried it and we assume we are not 'doing it right'. Others find it impossible to get their mind to think about nothing (which actually *is* impossible). Perhaps you've never tried to meditate. No matter how new, discouraged, or seasoned you are with meditation, this simple practice will be helpful to you.

Begin by sitting crossed legged on the floor or seated in a straight-backed chair. Place relaxed hands on the lap, shoulders back and down and spine erect. Imagine a string attached at the crown of the head, gently pulling directly to the sky.

With eyes closed, take three deep breaths. The belly should push out during the inhale and should move inward during the exhale. Breathe through the nostrils, for both the inhale and the exhale.

As the meditation begins, continue breathing through the nose. The duration of the inhale should be the same as the duration of the exhale, with a brief pause at the top of the breath and the bottom of the breath. Place your attention on the movement of the belly, the sound of the breath, or the sensation of the nostrils as the air moves in and out.

With each inhale/exhale cycle, count 1,2,3... silently in your mind. The practice is to count from 1 to 10 and then back down from 10 to 1 without the mind straying from the breath.

Each time we notice our mind stray from the breath, we gently bring our attention back to the sensations of the breath and start again at 1. It is very uncommon, especially in the beginning of a meditation practice, to stay with the breath all the way to ten and back. This is not the point anyway. The counting gives the mind just a morsel of a task.

When the mind wanders during our breathing- when we notice the thoughts, worries, distraction, discomfort, we gently bring the attention back to the breath. Much like training a puppy to sit, it is not useful to hit or yell at the puppy. Similarly, we let go of any frustration or harshness with self and simply start the count again.

Meditation is the practice of noticing when the mind wanders off and bringing it back to placing attention on the breath. Any ideas that meditation is about clearing the mind completely, thinking about nothing, or being in some blissful happy place is not realistic. Sitting for a meditation session is quite challenging and can leave us fatigued. That is not to say we will not experience profound breakthroughs, deep serenity, and a sense of great wellbeing whilst meditating, but these states ought not be the goal.

We notice the progress we are making in our meditation practice during regular life. We naturally find ourselves more able to task our mind with focus. We can usefully choose what we want to focus on and not the meaningless thought

cyclones that cause so much unneeded suffering. We can be more present in our relationships, our work, and our leisure time. Depression and anxiety will begin to fade away. Our physical health improves as we are more regularly connected to our breathing. As the mind develops under the training of a regular meditation practice, we have a much greater capacity (more bandwidth) to maneuver life and thrive.

Begin with a 15 minute meditation session 3 times a week minimum. As one's practice develops, add more time to the session and increase the frequency. Let the time spent sitting in meditation be what we measure, not the completion of breath counting cycles.

The most important meditation session is always the next one.