



How to Meditate

Our minds usually jump wildly
from thought to thought.

We replay the past; we fantasize about the future.

In meditation we take an upright posture,
place our mind on an object, and keep it there.

In mindfulness meditation,
the object is the simple act of breathing.

The breath represents being alive
in the immediacy of the moment.

Sakyong Mipham

Saturday morning. The sound of chimes pierces the air. Meditation practice is about to begin. People set down their coffee cups and notebooks and assume an upright sitting position. Within seconds, an intense but peaceful energy envelops the group. Tim's voice is soft as he guides them in this meditation session.

The wonderful thing about meditation is that it includes your busy mind, your restlessness, and, in fact, all of your experience. With meditation, you cultivate a bigger mind of awareness and gentleness to work with yourself just as you are.

We do not practice meditation to become good meditators. We practice meditation to transform our lives, and to access the full potential of our humanness. If you spend five to ten minutes a day practicing, you will begin to gradually bring the increased mindfulness and awareness of meditation into your daily life.

To begin the practice of meditation, pay close attention to these three basic aspects of your life: body, breath and mind. You begin by being very attentive to your posture and your bodily sensations and then bring that same deliberate attention to the experience of breathing. Finally, bring that same mindful attention to the experience of mind.

The meditation posture here assumes that you are in a chair because that is what most people use in our retreats. However, if you prefer to sit cross-legged on a small cushion on the floor, or to kneel that is fine. You can adapt the instructions to suit your particular posture.

The meditation begins with guidance about posture, moves to following the breath, includes practice bringing the mind back to the breath, and ends with a visualization of loving kindness.

You can

- (a) read this slowly to yourself or out loud;
- (b) have a friend or family member read it out loud for you; or
- (c) listen to it for free on an audio file available at www.healingandcancer.org

If you or someone else is reading it, proceed very slowly, pausing at each line, and taking the time to follow the instructions as they come.

Enjoy this journey...



*Sitting in your chair feel the weight of your body
pressing against the seat
Place your feet flat on the floor and feel the sensations there
Feel what it is like to make contact with the floor below
Rest your hands gently on your knees or thighs
Feel the sensations of contact there in your hands and legs
Tune into your body, feel the sensations in your body
Notice whatever part of your body calls, then listen
Feel your connection to gravity, your connection to the energy
of the earth below
Now lean a little further forward to arch the lumbar spine slightly
Then come back up straight
Take an upright and dignified posture in the chair
Keeping a little arch in the lower back to lift you up a bit
Your lower body is solid and grounded to the earth
Your upper body and spine are rising upwards out of the pelvis
Now open up your heart and chest area
By lifting your chest up and forward, just a tiny bit*

*Now feel the crown of your head
Feel as if it were being pulled up, gently, by a string
As if there were a string coming down from the sky
Gently pulling at the very top of your head
This will bring you to tuck your chin just a little bit
So the back of your neck is long*

*Now that you have a nice straight spine
Let yourself completely relax on that structure
Relax your belly, relax your shoulders, relax everywhere
Let your spine support you, let go of all tension
Just as the structure of a building needs no muscles to hold it up
You can relax on the structure of your spine and
 the structure of your bones
Let it hold you up straight and natural, easily balanced without effort
You can leave your eyes open, if you like, resting downward
Three to six feet ahead on the floor in front of you
With eyes open, you stay awake and alert in your meditation,
If you need to, you can briefly close your eyes to rest them
Staying mindful and alert to the sensations in your body
Lastly, you can also rest your tongue on the upper palette
Just behind your upper teeth
This connects an important energy loop in the body
And gives your tongue a place to be still and quiet*

*Now bring your attention to your breathing
See if you can feel the breath in your nostrils,
In your throat, in your lungs
Feel the muscles that go to work on the in-breath
And feel them relax on the out breath
Be present to the sensations of the in-breath
And present to the sensations of the out-breath
Breathing in... and out... is the rhythm of life
Expansion...contraction,
Receiving... giving
See if you can breathe down into the lower abdomen just a bit
Breathe down into your belly
Then as you breathe out, let your attention go out as well*

*Allow yourself to relax with the outgoing breath
As you breathe out, relax and let go
Let your mindful attention dissolve with the breath as it goes out
Tune into your body and presence as you breathe in
Honouring this good body, not taking it for granted
If you're here and breathing
Then there are a million things working right with your body
And you can celebrate that right here and right now
With each breath celebrate the life energy that
 courses through your body
Do you notice a sense of aliveness
Honour your aliveness, here in this present moment
Feel the earth below supporting you
A sense of firmness and solidity grounding you here and now
Then feel the fluid moving and spaciousness of the breath*

*If your mind wanders off into thinking about something else,
bring it gently back to this very moment
Bring your attention back to the breath
And back to the sensations in your body
Come back to the sensation of being here breathing
Come back to the actual sensation of each breath as you breathe it*

*If there's a feeling of restlessness or irritation
Just acknowledge that
Normally through the day we keep ourselves so busy
Now in this silence and stillness of meditation
That engine of busyness may still be running
There is a lot of busyness momentum there
It has been built up over your entire life
Try to breathe into that restless, busy momentum and soften to it
Let go with the out-breath, expand into space
Make friends with that feeling of restlessness and let it be
Let it unwind itself in the space of your breath
Sometimes we call this restlessness 'anxiety' or 'worry'
For now let's just investigate that energy carefully
Without judging it, without labelling it
Just be present to that raw energy of restlessness*

*Because that is your life energy
And it has a tremendous healing power
Hidden within it*

*As you work to be mindful of each breath
Sometimes thoughts will pull your mind away
As soon as you notice that
Simply bring your attention back to breathing
Back to being present in your body
Present to feeling body
Present to feeling breath*

*Each time you notice that your attention has strayed from the breath
Strayed from being present, here and now,
Whenever attention is pulled completely into thoughts
You can actually label those thoughts as “thinking”
Simply say silently to yourself, “thinking”
At this very moment,
Then let go of the thought
And come back to the experience of breathing*

*By labelling your thoughts in this way
You gradually grow wise to that moment of waking up
That moment of being awake to the here and now*

*Notice that thoughts will come and go
It is the nature of your mind to give rise to thoughts
That is not a problem
You don't need to get rid of your thoughts*

*Thoughts come and go like puffy clouds in a clear blue sky
The clouds shift, move and change and then they dissipate,
They dissolve back into their nature
Which is the openness of the clear blue sky
If you find yourself off on a cloud, lost in thinking
Simply say to yourself, “thinking”
Then gently bring your attention back to your breathing
Back to your presence*

*Back to feeling the life force pulsing in your body
Enjoy the feeling of being alive, breathing, awake and present*

*Now you will do a brief meditation and visualization of loving kindness
To begin this tune into your own good human heart
There is your physical heart on the left side
And then there is your energetic heart center
In the middle of your chest
Tune into that energetic heart center
And let it warm up just like turning on a burner on the stove
It begins to glow with radiant warmth
Merely by bringing your attention here
You can begin to ignite the fires of loving kindness
If you like, you can think of someone you love
Think of someone you love very much and send them that love
Notice how that feels
There is a subtle sensation
The natural radiant love shines out from your heart
Now send that loving light to every cell of your body
Every part of your being
Loving yourself exactly as you are here and now
Flood your body with this healing light
This is the energy of loving kindness
It is always there, always available
When you bring your attention to it
When you remember it, you cultivate it, you enhance it
You can enhance this good loving heart with your attention
You can use it to heal
Use it to reclaim your already existing wholeness
And to connect with others in the wholeness of our healing circle
Allow your heart to open and radiate
As if your heart was the shining sun itself
Radiating the light of loving kindness
Love yourself and heal back into wholeness*

*Letting go now of the image of radiant love
Letting go of the practice of loving kindness
Come back to being fully present*

*Come back to basic mindfulness meditation
Feel each breath again just as it is
Relax and let go as you breathe out
Mindful of body
Mindful of breath
Connect now with the space around you
Maintain this sense of being present
Awake and aware here and now
With an open heart
As you go forward into life*



You might find that there is a lot to coordinate here to follow the instructions fully. The first time you do anything it can feel awkward or difficult. This is not a problem in the least.

When people are first learning to meditate on the weekend retreats, some will seem restless, shifting uncomfortably in their chairs. Others will tell us “I just couldn’t settle.” Or even “I couldn’t meditate because my mind was so busy.” This is a normal reaction when people first learn to meditate. That is why we call it a practice. Meditation requires consistent effort over an extended time.

You may have a profound experience one time and then feel completely distracted and unfocused with a “monkey mind” the next. This is a normal and natural experience of meditation practice. What matters is making the effort and following the instructions consistently. Gradually, over time, meditation begins to work on you.

Many people are hard on themselves and are driven to be perfect. Meditation is learning to make friends with yourself. When you befriend someone, you learn to listen with patience and a non-judgmental attitude. With time you develop a deep appreciation for your friend. With meditation, you can cultivate this loving-kindness towards yourself.