



**HOW TO  
MEDITATE.**

# Why meditate?

## February 2012

From the start it is helpful to be clear about your motivation for wanting to meditate. Let's face it, learning to meditate requires patience and perseverance. But if you are well motivated by an understanding of the enormous benefits of meditation, you'll be more inclined to do what it takes to make space for meditation in your schedule so that it becomes a cherished life habit.

Hundreds of studies have confirmed what meditators have known for centuries - that meditation is great for your mental and physical health. It is an effective tool for countering the effects of stress and coping with a busy 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle. Meditation is also being used in the treatment of psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety; and as an enhancement to performance in sport, academia and the workplace.

Is this what the Buddha had in mind when teaching meditation over 2,500 years ago? Not at all. The original purpose of meditation was as a tool for transforming the mind – to develop qualities such as love, compassion and wisdom.

This gives you an idea of the potential scope of your practice. In this eBook, we'll give you the instructions for a simple practice that is ideal for countering stress but which can also become the foundation for a deeper journey.



# What meditation is that?

There is a bewildering array of meditations that are promoted by different teachers, books and religions. Its good to keep in mind that all meditation falls into one of two groups:

**Stabilising meditation:** here the aim is to develop a stable, concentrated mind. This type of meditation is excellent for building concentration, reducing mental chatter and lowering stress. It involves fixing your mind on an object of meditation and developing the skill to hold it single-pointedly. The most common objects of meditation are the breath, a word or mantra and a visualized image.

**Analytic meditation:** this includes a whole range of meditations that you may not even recognize as being meditation at all! The objective is to familiarize the mind with a particular way of thinking. For example, you can help overcome a bad temper by becoming thoroughly familiar with the disadvantages of anger and the benefits of patience!



# How to focus your mind

The mind has been likened to an untamed elephant. In ancient India there was a real danger of death or injury from wild elephants. Whilst we don't face this problem, the analogy is clear – the wandering undisciplined mind is the source of all of our problems!



Meditation is said to be like taming an elephant. In the same way that an elephant is tamed by tying it to a pole or pillar, the mind is tamed by tying it to an object. Let's take as the object of our meditation the breath or, more specifically, the sensation at the tip of the nostrils as the breath enters and leaves the body.

How do you tie your mind to the breath? By the rope of **mindfulness**, which is simply our remembrance of the object. In meditation, we keep bringing our mind back to the breath over and over again whenever it wanders away. With practice, your power of mindfulness will strengthen so that you can spend longer periods observing the breath without distraction.

The final point in the analogy is that the elephant tamer has an iron hook with which he prods the elephant whenever it tries to stray away. This is analogous to our use of **introspection** in meditation to alert us to the fact that our mind is no longer on the breath. This simply means that we check up from time to time with a corner of our mind whether or not we are still on the object – “am I still meditating on the breath or have I wandered away?”

That's all the meditation theory you need to know. Now it is time to put it into practice in three easy steps.

# Step 1: Relax your body and mind

At the beginning of your meditation session, use whatever relaxation technique works for you. Here are some ideas but there is no hard-and-fast rule:

**Take three long, slow, deep breaths.** If it helps, visualize breathing in pure white light and breathing out black smoke.

**Do a mental body scan.** Imagine that the body is hollow. Bring your attention to the crown of your head and slowly work down through your body to your feet. Notice any areas that are tense or where you have pain. With the outbreath, let go of these feelings and relax. Take particular note of tension in the eyes, mouth, shoulders and hips.

**Adopt a meditation posture that enhances your relaxation.** The renowned meditation teacher [B. Alan Wallace](#) recommends using the supine or 'corpse' position, lying on your back with your arms 30 degrees from the body, palms facing up and your legs long, with feet resting outwards. This is a great meditation posture if you are having trouble with relaxation.



## Step 2: Make your mind stable

Next, place your mind on the object of meditation, the breath. Be clear and deliberate that your mind is now fixed on the breath for the meditation session. The aim is to hold your attention on the breath with the power of mindfulness.

We all know that we can hold our attention on an object one-pointedly by sheer effort. Just look at the professional golfer lining up for a putt, the athlete waiting at the starting block or the teenager engrossed in a video game. But concentration through the force of effort is only a short-term strategy because it is exhausting.

In meditation, hold your attention on the object firmly but not tightly. If you hold it too tightly you will fatigue and your mind will scatter. If you hold it too loosely, you will soon lose the object completely. Finding the right balance is like tuning the strings of a violin.

What problems will arise?

The big enemy of stability is **excitement**. This is a scattering of the mind to different thoughts or distractions – remembering the past, fantasizing about the future etc etc.

Most beginners are almost completely overcome with excitement when they begin to meditate. In fact, it is common to think that you have become even more distracted since you took up meditation! But don't worry, it is simply that you are for the first time noticing what is going on in your mind.

**Relax.** Just let go of the thought. Use the outbreath to release thoughts and bodily sensations that are distracting you.

Use one of two popular tricks to help anchor the mind to the breath:

- **Counting:** at the end of each in-breath, mentally count 1, 2, 3 and so forth in sets of 10. If you become distracted start again.
- **Noting:** at the end of each in-breath note to yourself, 'In'. And at the end of each out-breath note, 'Out'. You can also note whether the breath is deep or shallow, or long or short.



## Step 3: Keep your mind clear

Have you had the experience of your child or partner so engrossed in watching television that they are completely oblivious to their dinner going cold on the dining room table despite your loud protestations? Are they meditating? They definitely have the first of the two key qualities of a meditative mind, stability, but they lack the second, clarity.

Clarity refers to a mind that is clear and alert. We all know what it is like to be so absorbed in an exciting novel, or a conversation with an engaging partner, that time seems to pass very quickly. Psychologists call this the mental state of 'flow'. Here in meditation, you are watching your breath intently and with great interest. It isn't boring or dull at all. This is mental clarity.

What problems can arise?

The big enemy of clarity is **laxity** or **dullness**. This is the TV-watching mind. We are watching the show, we even know what is happening, but the mind is sluggish and slow.

For the meditator, once the mind becomes too loose and begins to become dark and heavy, the next step is to fall asleep!

Here's what you can do when you identify that your mind is falling into laxity or dullness or you are falling asleep:

- Make sure you are getting enough sleep.
- Meditate at a time of day when you are most alert. For many meditators, this is first thing in the morning.
- Adjust your posture. If you are sitting, make sure that your back is straight.
- Try meditating with your eyes slightly open. By letting in a little light this may be enough to keep you alert.
- Mentally tighten your apprehension of the object – it may be that you are just holding it too loosely.
- Splash your face with cold water, take a walk, have a cup of tea.



# A simple meditation dialogue and checklist

Over time, you will develop your own inner dialogue to guide you through the meditation process. Here is an example that may be helpful:

- Set a specific length of time for your session. In the beginning, short is good, maybe 10 to 15 minutes. Use a meditation timer or the alarm on your mobile phone.
- Sitting: “am I sitting upright, still and comfortable?”
- Close the eyes, and take three long, deep and slow breaths, consciously letting go and relaxing on the out-breath. “Relax”.
- Bring your attention to the crown of your head and slowly scan down the body, noting and letting go of any tightness.
- Place your mind on the object of meditation, the sensation at the tip of the nostrils as the breath enters and leaves your body: “I am tying my elephant mind to the pillar, the breath, with the rope of mindfulness.”
- When the mind wanders, bring it gently back to the breath.
- Begin mentally counting at the end of each in-breath from one to ten and then start again. When your mind has become stable or if you find it distracting, you can let this go.
- From time to time, mentally check up, “Am I still watching the breath or have I become distracted?”
- At the end of the session, take time to come out of the meditation and rise slowly.





# Resources

## Books

*How to Meditate* by Kathleen McDonald  
*The Attention Revolution* by B. Alan Wallace  
*Mindfulness With Breathing* by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

## eBooks

[Mindfulness in 10 easy steps](#)  
[10 ways to de-stress](#)  
[How to nurture teacher mindfulness in the classroom](#)

## Blog posts

[Pay attention](#)  
[The mindful way through stress](#)  
[It's a mad world](#)  
[Mindfulness really matters](#)  
[The magic of mindfulness](#)  
[Why meditate](#)  
[Mindfulness at work](#)  
[Understanding the mind](#)

## Websites

[Vajrayana Institute](#)  
[Think & Be Happy blog](#)  
[FPMT](#)

*“Meditation is not a way of making your mind quiet. It’s a way of entering the quiet that’s already there - buried under the 50,000 thoughts the average person thinks every day.”*

*- DEEPAK CHOPRA, M.D.*

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# mind & ITS POTENTIAL

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