

Meditation

The discipline of focussed attention

by Rebekah Blake

Reading an article on meditation may be a meditation session in itself for some. For me, the task of reading has always had this dis-appeal.

Meditation had become a catchword, a fashionable phrase to explain how 'chilled out' and self-controlled you are. Whatever your motivation is, I can assure you, what you are seeking to move forward in your 'true self', requires stillness, self-control and focus. It is the birthplace of transformation and the breeding ground of potential

If you say to kids "bedtime!" they hear "lie down in the dark for hours and don't move". Meditation is not "being bored, empty your mind and do nothing". We have 60,000 thoughts a day. Our goal is to create some distance between our thoughts and emotion.

Beginning as a Solo Meditator encourages independence, insight, clarity and expanded awareness. But you may be more suited to a group, who can help motivate and stimulate with a collective energy. A facilitator of the group requires you to trust innately in them, demanding your presence to turn up and to stay the course. Not focussing on responsibility and self brings clarity because you lessen your response and increase your ability to be more aware and sensitive.

Excuse #1 "I can't sit in a yoga posture"

What is your meditation style? You may choose a setting where it is dark with a dim lamp to take visual distractions. You may have a symbolic picture, item, table with a few memoirs. Whatever it is, keep it simple. However you assume a meditation seat, whether it is in a chair, lying down, on a cushion, cross legged, the important part is your back is supported straight to encourage your body to be open. Make sure you are comfortable and that the space you create reflects your intention.

Excuse #2 Seated in the self – find your throne

Often when you are deeply settled, the thoughts slow but the mental static remains. It is the open plane where your thoughts do drift across your screen of awareness. The mind's proper seat is the place where it can be satisfied, in the abode of the conscious self. The mind is restless as it searches for its throne room of the temple. It is looking for its rightful place in the grandeur of consciousness. Our job in mediation is only to direct and keep it focussed toward this place. The mind is not the brain and the emotional heart is not the physical heart. Likewise, consciousness governs more than the senses and generates more than thought and feeling.

Excuse #3 "This is boring"

To begin your meditation journey, give yourself a realistic goal. Be inventive! After all, meditation is about the true self. As a beginner, I would recommend 5-10 minutes. I remember my first introduction to meditation. 1 hour!! Yes, try talking an addict of physical movement and an inventive visual mind and sit for an hour – unguided. It was torture! I remember the tiny aches, the craving for a coffee, the fly, the cold draft, the curiosity of how my neighbour was going. The wonder of what we were going to eat on the break. I was contemplating using that time to think of song lyrics and what my time was better being utilised by and most of all – never doing it again! This awful experience which had me craving anything of the monotony of life I was desperately running from. It became my fuel. I was meditating. Yes, that busyness of thoughts and the memories of that blanket of 'space' became the very reason of my intention. For you, allow yourself to become fascinated with your own mind.

Excuse #4 “My mind is busy”

Focus is a kind of mental muscle. It seems a thousand times over we bring our attention back. Gentle, softly, without strain. It is boring and frustrating in practice but the reward comes – the mind begins to listen to you. If you train a dog by beating it, it will become obedient, inflexible and neurotic. If you train the little guy with kindness and firmness, your pet will learn confidence and trust. We strengthen it by learning to hold our attention in one place. Practising this over and over increase your ability to hold these subtle states to find the inner pathways and lead you deeper. Our focus increases to affect our whole life.

Excuse #5 “I'm not getting anywhere”

The mind doesn't require to be completely still for you to experience the state of meditation. We try to hold on to the feeling of openness. It seems when we do this, the thoughts come quickly or slowly like a floodgate or just trickling through – endless! There is nowhere to go. “Is this meditating? Am I meditating? Why is nothing happening?” It is in this process however, that we learn how to move through our thoughts and into meditation. One of the game changers is with the realisation that meditation can go on, even when there are thoughts in the mind.

Excuse #2 “My mind is negative and self-critical”

Normally we are not aware of our inner dialogue. The mental and emotional tenancies, the residual habitual thoughts and feelings, have created deep seeded pathways in our brains and trace into our consciousness. We need mental burn-off! Their experience blocks our experience of pure light, clean water that is our real sustenance. When these things come up in our meditation, it is a sign of untangling the beliefs and emotion of the memory web.

As you practice becomes more stable, you develop the strength to decipher the feelings and become a witness of the process of purification – the state, peace and rest. In turn we learn to 'detach' our thoughts, feelings and desires that normally hook our attention.

Can Meditation affect my personality?

Ultimately yes, we want to let go of the deep-seated false identification we have through what is like the octopus tendrils of the belief system. Our attachments are aversions that reinforce our sense of separation and isolation in the appearance of permanence. We begin to untangle and free ourselves

from the trained 'cultured' person, unravelling into the authentic self we were first born to as unified newborn.

This takes us to letting go of desire. The natural offspring of hope, expectation, fear and worry. When we sit in meditation, we give ourselves the opportunity to come face-to-face with all the disguises that desire takes and with the power that even a simple desire has to throw us off track. Basically, *desires fill the mind with wonderful reasons why you should follow their siren song*. And any time you drop one of those desires, you lessen its grip on you – teaching you detachment.

Excuse #5 “Feelings come up”

Learning to let go of identification with the thoughts is letting go of the attachment to being the thinker. The watcher of thoughts is simply a matter of shifting your perspective. The 'cloud' meditation in the breathing meditation below is a fantastic practice for 'addicted thinkers'.

Why Meditate? How would it benefit me?

Meditation involves breath and body awareness in its early stages, and moves us toward our goal. Awareness opens the doors to authenticity to manage and heal all addictions. Our ability to resist an impulse determines our success in learning a new behaviour or changing an old habit. It is probably the single most important skill for our growth and development. It reduces cortisol, targeting reducing the stress hormone of the body, adrenaline, the fight or flight reaction hormone, lowers the heart rate, respiration rate and blood pressure. Other benefits include, boosting the immune system, pain management and stimulates new brain cell growth. If you are dealing with stress, or the possibility of long term stress damage, memory loss is another area which can be restored. Meditation improves our ability to learn and reason. To be focussed and not distracted. It refreshes us, helps us settle into what's happening now, makes us wiser and gentler, helps us cope in a world that overloads us with information and communication, and more. But if you're still looking for a business case to justify spending time meditating, try this one: Meditation makes you more productive.

How? By increasing your will power and capacity to resist distracting urges. Your urges won't disappear, but you will be better equipped to manage them. And you will have experience that proves to you that the urge is only a suggestion. You are in control.

Research shows that an ability to resist urges will improve your performance, enhance your relationships, and dependability. In a nut shell, if you can resist your urges, you can make better, more thoughtful decisions. You can be more intentional about what you say and how you say it. You can think about the outcome of your actions before following through on them. We become 'mindful'.

Create a presence that you task is mindfulness. The quietness and stillness will become a plane of emotions, feelings, thoughts and reality. Mindfulness requires compassion and authenticity. Truth cannot be manufactured – see through your mind and don't believe in its game.

Dr Craig Hassed, Deputy Head of General Practice at Monash University and long term meditator says, “meditation is a relation state where you're not ruminating on the past or worrying about the

future, but properly training your attention on the present...Meditation is a mental discipline that helps you deal with negative thoughts”

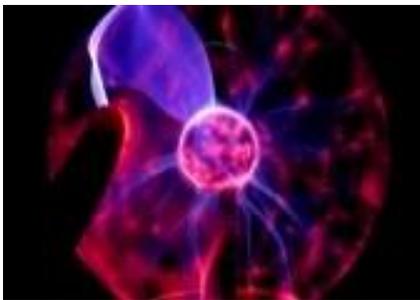
Your worry is like express trains that charge through your mind. You have two choices

1. Stand in front of the train and take the full impact, or
2. Sit on the platform and watch the negative thoughts pass through.

There are several techniques to meditation and you just need to find what suits you.

All meditations should begin with a preliminary scan of the body. There is no rule if you should have your eyes open or closed. As long as the focus is kept within. The point is to train the mind to go where you want it to go. When you find tension through the awareness of breath, we discover that each physical tension has its counterpart.

- Scan the body meditation - Ask yourself: What tension do I feel? Where is there pain? As you move through the body, observe any sensations and warmth, coolness, tingling, dullness, compression and spaciousness. Notice your relationship when you experience the thoughts, images and feelings. This practice is not to judge the body but to experience what is there.



- Imagine your mind is an electric ball. Each thought is a pulse that radiates from the source of your mind. Emanating, waiting to be harnessed, required and utilised. As you allow the energy of your thoughts to be valued and touched with your mindful intention, you direct these undisciplined paths toward one focus.
 - Breath meditation – Sit in a comfortable seated position and begin by observing the natural breath. Notice the rhythm, temperature, texture, and length of the breath as it flows in and out. Take note of the pauses between the breaths. When thoughts arise, take notice of them as if they were clouds in the sky drifting past. As vast as the sky is, the perspective of a passing cloud is just that – a thought that seems to cloud the vastness of your natural mind. The clouds don't touch the sky, and the sky is not affected by the clouds that race across it. When these clouds pass through, bring the attention back to the natural breath.
- Another useful visualisation could be laying on your back. Close your eyes and relax the entire body. Now, imagine you are on the ocean floor, sinking in the sand around you. Feel your body heavy on the ocean floor. Feel the gentle current of the water circulate around you and through you, removing any tension and impurity, feeling fluid. Any time a thought arises, see it as a water bubble, removing itself and floating away from your body to the surface. Observe as the bubbles float away from you.

- Sound meditation - Choose a mantra (a sacred word or syllable to you) to repeat. It may be a scripture, a word, or a sound. Sound meditation is particularly beneficial to soften the critical mind and transform the energy of your internal dialogue. Couple this sound with the breath as you inhale and exhale. This will have a unifying effect to usher transformation. When the thoughts arise, concentrate on the sound and the vibration of the sound in your body.

Final thoughts

“...Seek (and keep on seeking) and you will find, knock (and keep on knocking) and the door will be opened to you.”

Meditation opens the doors to Spiritual growth. For me a favourite truth came to mind, “be still and know that I am God”. Enlightenment is permanent inner peace. It is these times of surrender that we let go of the expectations we have on ourselves to have the answers and allow the space for the wisdom of the Universe/God to flood our understanding with light.

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