

Peace of Mind

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- Meditation teaches us how to settle the body and use our breath to calm the mind.
- Meditation is an ordinary mental process that fulfills our inner need for peace and harmony.
- Meditation leads to growth in three main areas:
 1. Getting to know the inner mind – We are able to study our inner feelings, thoughts and emotions.
 2. Training the mind – We will establish awareness, concentration and serenity.
 3. Freeing the mind. Slowly reducing the power of negative thoughts.
 - Meditation is simply a way of training the mind to result in better mental health and well being.
 - The process of meditation is one of gradually calming down, collecting ourselves and settling into the present moment.
 - There is no one time that is best for meditation. However, there are some guidelines for choosing a suitable time.
 1. You can't rush in to a period of meditation. You need to slow down before you begin the meditation. Take a little time to unwind first.
 2. Make the best of what limited time you have available.
 3. How long should I meditate for? An experienced person may easily meditate for an hour or longer. However, you should start with a 10 – 15 minute period. You can gradually increase the time as you get more comfortable with it.
 - Having decided on the length of the meditation you may set a timer so that you don't need to worry about the time.
 - Frequency and regularity of practice are very important. Meditating once or twice a day on a regular basis makes it possible to build up momentum. Irregular or occasional practice may still be beneficial, but won't be as effective in

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developing the necessary skills. You need to find a quiet place in your house where you are least likely to be distracted. This may be a challenge, but with planning and a bit of creativity it is possible.

QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED

1. *Should I meditate at the same time each day?*

There are some advantages to having a regular time. Both the mind and the body seem to respond well to regular patterns. As the mind becomes accustomed to meditating at a regular time it will naturally incline towards a meditative mood at that time. It also makes it more likely that you will meditate, as it will become part of your routine. However, it is far more important to meditate on a daily basis regardless of the time.

2. *How long should my meditations be?*

If you are just beginning meditation and wish to practice regularly it's best to start meditating 10 to fifteen minutes once a day. After a while, you may want to increase that to 20 minutes once a day, or 10 minutes twice a day.

3. *Can I meditate with my eyes open?*

Yes, but closed removes the distraction of visual objects and makes it easier to remain focused.

4. *Is it possible to meditate lying down?*

This gives the wrong message to the mind. It tells the mind "Relax, we're going to sleep" and that's usually what happens.

5. *When I pay attention to the breathing, it feels like I am controlling it. Is this normal?*

When you first start to pay attention to your breath, you may unintentionally interfere with its flow. The breathing becomes unnatural and may feel uncomfortable. This common experience is no reason for concern. We need to develop the skill of observing our breath without interfering in it. So during the meditation keep reminding yourself to breathe, as your body wants to. As you get more familiar with meditation your breathing will find its own rhythm. Achieving this state of being physically comfortable and at ease with the breath while meditating is important.

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6. Should I analyze the thoughts that come into my mind during meditation?

At this early stage the mind is still very noisy with many different thoughts. Generally these thoughts require no special attention, just recognize them and let them go.

7. When I meditate so many thoughts enter my mind. Where do they all come from?

The mind is used to being busy all the time. It is going to take time to teach the mind the joy of resting in silence.

8. More meditation is not necessarily better. Why is this?

Meditation taps into some very powerful inner energies. These energies are very healing and uplifting, but it takes some time to get used to their higher frequency, and it is best done gradually. Also these higher energies tend to result in the release of stored negative energies. This may be quite noticeable when you are first beginning to meditate (during or outside of meditation). If this initial detoxification is accomplished gently, you are more likely to continue the practice of meditation.

Generally the experiences when one begins to meditate are quite enjoyable. People often report feeling more peaceful, positive, loving and centered in daily life. Many experience new insights and greater clarity.

9. How do I know when my meditation time is up?

When you think that your designated time is up, open one eye and peek at your watch or clock. This won't bring you all the way out of meditation. If there is still time left, close your eyes and continue. You can also set a watch alarm, or place wind up kitchen timer next to you.

10. What time of day is best to meditate?

Any time of day is good. At first you might find it helpful to experiment with various times to see if one particular time of day results in more enjoyable meditations.

11. What should I be experiencing when I meditate?

The possible experiences when meditating are unlimited. They can range from extraordinary to ordinary; From blissful to boring; from peaceful to turmoil; from outstanding insight to incredible nonsense; There may be periods of no thoughts and periods of many thoughts; you may feel energy flowing or energy blocked; you may feel

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tired and foggy or quite alert. All of these experiences are alright and perfectly normal. The point is to accept whatever occurs in meditation.

Meditation experiences tend to be based on cycles of "clearing" and "clarity". During periods of clearing – when we are releasing accumulated psychic toxins – experiences tend to be more thought – filled and not seem very deep. At times when there is less clearing, there tends to be more clarity and depth, and fewer thoughts. It is important to remember that both poles of this cycle are necessary and valuable parts of a larger process of profound growth and transformation.

12. At times in meditation I experience a state that feels a lot like sleep, but it's not exactly sleep. What is it?

This state of consciousness has been called "Yogi Blackout" or "Yoga Nidra." You have slipped into a deep state of awareness, but your inner senses are not alert enough at that time to experience this clearly. With continued meditation you will gain more clarity at this level of consciousness.

13. What kind of meditation do I have to do to get into a deep, altered state of consciousness?

Nearly any type of meditation has the potential to shift you into a deeper state of consciousness. Even more important than the technique you use, are factors of timing and attitude. Timing...There will be some days when everything clicks naturally. And your awareness effortlessly shifts into a deeper state...and other days when this simply isn't going to happen no matter what you do. Attitude...It seems that the more you let go of any expectations of what is supposed to happen, and any concerns about meditating correctly, the more easily the deeper states tend to occur. A "relaxed effort" and a willingness to accept whatever happens is the key to results.

14. During this whole meditation process, how do you ensure that you are on the right track, that you are doing it better and better? Are there any landmarks on this journey?

First, it's important to understand that each soul is unique and has its own unique evolutionary plan. Therefore, the signs along the path will differ for each soul. Sometimes we are given a wonderful taste of spiritual grace to show us that we are on track. Sometimes we are given new insights about ourselves, or a deeper understanding about life's mysteries. At times we are given challenging new tasks. Sometimes confirmation

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comes via our quiet inner voice, or through something a friend says or from being led to a particular page in a book that describes our experience. The possibilities are many. If you ask for a sign, you will receive one.

Second, it's better not to approach meditation and spirituality with the idea of "doing it better" Simply doing it is what counts.

15. *During meditation I experience a sinking feeling. What does this mean?*

This sinking feeling is one of the goals of meditation. There are a couple of factors involved:

One is that you are letting go of a lot of tension and sinking into a deep relaxation, and in a very real sense, sinking into the depths of your consciousness.

Another factor is that as you let go of thought, you are allowing a greater amount of spiritual energy to move upward through the spinal canal, from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. As the energy moves upward, it can feel as though you are falling or sinking downward.

16. *I don't see anything when I meditate. I don't think I possess the ability to visualize. Are there some people who just can't do it?*

This is a very common issue. There are three major modes of perception...seeing, hearing and sensing. Most people have a natural tendency to one of these.

Visualization is a rather misleading term, as true visualization really does not require seeing. Many who don't see things describe their experience of higher realms as a sort of sensing/feeling/knowing. Others are able to tune into higher planes through hearing. When you get into the deeper levels of consciousness, the sensed tend to overlap somewhat. These higher worlds are available to you. The key is attention and intention...gently directing your attention to higher realms. Let go of the need to see clearly, then try accessing the higher realms with whatever mode of perception is natural to you.

Why is it that when I concentrate on the breath, I often feel tension in my eyes as if I were staring at something?

It may be that you are using too much effort to focus the mind on the breathing. Spend a little more time relaxing the muscles in your face before you bring your attention to the

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breath. Then encourage the mind to sink into the breath and relax with its rhythmic flow. Avoid forcing the mind too much.

Can I have music playing during meditation?

It is usually best to meditate in a quiet place with no noise or music. However, playing soft tranquil background music may help you calm down and achieve a meditative mood more easily. It also helps to knockout the effects of other sounds.

While meditating I see different colours in my mind. How should I react to this experience?

Unlike the perception of light that meditators experience when they attain deep concentration, the appearance of colours or images in the early stages is due to an active mind. These colours and/or images should be recognized and then let go, encouraging the mind to return to the breath.

Is it true that I should choose a meditation method that is compatible with my character type?

You may find one method better or easier than another. You must gradually discover the most effective approach to guide and teach the mind in order to achieve clarity and concentration. Depending on your personality you may need to adapt the approach regardless of the method being used. For example if you tend to be rigid, stern and controlling, you need to be wary of using too much force in the meditation practice. A more relaxed approach may be more effective. On the other hand, if you are very casual and easygoing, you may need to be a little more strict and firm with the mind when training in meditation.

When I watch TV, I become completely focused on the screen. I don't hear things around me and the time seems to pass very quickly. Is that like a meditation state? And why doesn't the same thing happen when I am focusing on the breath?

It is very easy to become absorbed in things that we find interesting and exciting. However, this type of concentration is not usually accompanied by the qualities of awareness and serenity and is therefore not a meditative state. The mind is not peaceful at these times, nor do we feel refreshed and clearheaded afterwards. The mind is actually full of images, memories and dialogue.

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There are times in normal life when we enter states of concentration that resemble meditative states. For example, watching a beautiful sunset in a state of awe and wonder. The mind becomes completely clear as you enjoy the colours around you. After such an experience, you do feel refreshed, alert and more fully alive, just as you would after a good meditation period.

In answering the second part of the question as to why you can't replicate the concentration whilst concentrating on breath, if you can arouse the same degree of interest in the breath, the mind will become equally as focused. You will need to generate that interest through effort and skill. The reward is well worth the effort.

How is meditation different from relaxation, thinking or concentration?

Relaxation is a common by-product of meditation. Meditation is an active process where the meditator remains fully aware of what the awareness is doing. It also tries to eliminate external thoughts, relaxation generally fails to do this. I.e. taking a bath, watching TV, laying on a couch. Meditation allows the body to relax and can offset the effects of stress both mentally and physically far better than passive relaxation.

Thinking - Constant thoughts tire the mind and even result in headache. Meditation, with practice, eliminates outside thoughts.

Concentration - Meditation starts with relaxation, but with time, thought activity decreases and keeping the awareness focused becomes easier. At this point the person may or may not continue to employ the object of concentration. Meditation deals with contacting something within us that is peaceful, calm, rejuvenating and meaningful.

When I meditate I experience physical pain in my body what should I do?

Sensations (itching, aches, pains etc) can arise in the body when meditating for several reasons:

1. You are in an uncomfortable posture.
2. Sensations are more noticeable in meditation as the body and the mind are calmer and you notice more details. It is interesting to just observe these sensations. Use them as the object of your meditation. They might just go away.

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HINDRANCES TO MEDITATION

1. Not having enough free time. Unless you can find the time to practice on a regular basis, it will be almost impossible to make headway. If we really see the value of something we make time for it.
2. Craving – the thirst for experience particularly pleasurable sensory experience. Craving is something that stirs up the mind. Craving can't be satisfied. We always want more. We need to try and eliminate craving or wanting while we meditate. Surely our lives won't fall apart if we stop chasing after things for such a brief time. if during meditation you see the mind wandering away from the breath, being led towards something else by craving, try to say, "No, not now." By doing this the mind gradually abandons its habit of continually wanting something else and begins to rest. Once we experience the happiness of peace and contentment the power of craving diminishes.
3. Agitation – When the mind is overly stimulated, it often enters a state of agitation and restlessness, jumping from one thing to another very quickly. This makes it difficult to achieve any degree of mental composure in meditation. If you feel restless during meditation, try not to give in too easily. If the restlessness is accompanied by feelings of tension, encourage yourself to calm down and let go of everything. Direct the attention to the various parts of the body, gently relaxing the muscles and releasing all tension. As the body relaxes and the mind slows down, the restless energy will disappear. Even if this release of energy is all that you can achieve during the meditation period, it will have been a valuable experience.
4. Dullness and sleepiness – When the mind is lethargic, we may sink into a dull state during meditation, or even drift off to sleep. Though this state of relaxation may be quite pleasant and restful, it is definitely an obstacle to achieving the clarity and concentration that we are looking for. We must try and overcome this state. If we make an effort to remain awake, alert and mindful, the mind can take the path leading to a clear meditative state of heightened awareness. if the meditation period seems to pass very quickly and you can't recall much of what you experienced, it is quite possible that the mind drifted into dullness without your knowledge. This shouldn't become a habit. A good way of overcoming this is counting the breath.

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The following techniques can also help:

- a. Meditate in a place with some light and fresh air.
 - b. Don't get overly comfortable or warm.
 - c. Establish a good posture, keeping the back erect and the head up.
 - d. Sharpen the precision of your focus (counting, mantra, visualization)
 - e. If the mind keeps drifting while practicing Mindfulness of Breathing, stop trying to concentrate on the breath and direct your full attention to the posture. Try to arouse energy in the body so that the posture remains erect, balanced and still. You will then notice dullness, as the body will lose its posture. The feeling of dullness will pass and you can return to your breathing.
 - f. If you experience dullness often, try meditating with your eyes partly open.
5. Doubt – Doubt manifests as nagging questions such as “Is this the best method for me to use? Am I meditating the right way? How do I go on from here? What does this mean? Should I just give up?” When the mind is stirred up by such questions, we can't apply ourselves effectively to the task of meditation. You must be willing to just start practicing and then to learn from experience.

It is important that we don't meditate in a mechanical way, just repeating the exercise without bothering to learn from the experience. We must carefully reflect on what we experience before, during, and after each session of meditation. Before you begin to meditate take a moment to consider how you are feeling and the state of your mind. What is your energy level? Are you tired or agitated? After the meditation it is worthwhile to contemplate what the experience was like. If you take into account what you tried to do and how it worked, you will learn a lot from each meditation.

When you tell me about these hindrances, I can relate to all of them. I seem to have them all. Am I wasting my time trying to meditate?

The hindrances are common to most people. However, they are not always active in your mind. This means that they are transient states that arise in the mind from time to time and then pass on. It is possible to discourage them from coming and when they do, to encourage them to leave quickly. The hindrances also don't come all at once, therefore they are easier to deal with. It is important to be patient with your meditation, it will all come together in time.

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Is it true that some people meditate for years and are still not able to attain deep levels of concentration?

Yes, it is true. But, this doesn't mean that they get no benefits from their meditation. They still acquire a deeper understanding of the mind and develop more awareness and clarity from their years of meditating. This shows in the way they live their lives, relate to other people, and deal with the problems they encounter.

During meditation, I often find myself reliving the past and questioning whether I should have done things differently. This makes me feel depressed, and I give up trying to meditate? How can I overcome this?

These are very normal feelings when we start to meditate. As we rush through life, our minds are kept so busy that we have very little chance to reflect on what we are doing or how we feel about different experiences. When we meditate, the mind slows down and allows unresolved issues to come to the surface. The past can't be changed. Therefore it is best to acknowledge the past for what it is and use it as a learning experience so that you can make the future better. Encourage the mind to live only in the present. If during meditation your mind starts to wander to the past, ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to make things better?" If the answer is yes, then agree to do it later and put the matter aside for the rest of the meditation. If there is nothing you can do about the situation then just let it go.