

Beginning Meditation

Becoming Aware

Meditation is a way of discovering and changing ourselves. People come to meditation from a variety of different starting points. Some want to just become a little more relaxed, others want to use meditation as a tool for changing themselves. Meditation does both of these things and more. Most of all meditation helps us change by letting us become receptive to who and what we really are.

We can change ourselves because we can notice ourselves. We can notice what is good and useful in our own minds and behaviour and develop it. We can notice what is unhelpful and limiting and overcome it. Meditation is a way of doing this very directly by working with our minds on our minds

Having said that I would also say that there should be no forcing of the mind in meditation. We can allow our awareness to take care of the transformation without us needing to do anything in a very conscious way. We may work consciously in meditation, but only to stabilise and deepen our concentration and receptivity. This concentration and receptivity will start a gentle process of transformation.

All meditation practises are founded on awareness. We start by learning to be aware of ourselves in a very rich and engaged way. This rich and engaged awareness of what our experience actually is in the present moment, accompanied by a sense of purpose and direction we call mindfulness. All meditation practises are mindfulness practises.

We start by noticing our bodies, are they comfortable is our posture useful and appropriate for what we are doing or is it wasting energy and causing us discomfort? Then we notice our feelings and emotions, just acknowledging our mood, being receptive to how we feel. And then we can ask ourselves what our mind is like are we appropriately concentrated or is our mind wandering off making it difficult for us to do what we are trying to do?

We can also be aware of our surroundings and how they affect us, and other people. We are not static we are changing all the time reacting to our environment our thoughts and feelings, very often more or less unconsciously. However we can guide our physical mental and emotional energies in directions that are more useful and enhancing to others and ourselves. This constant guiding of our energies can produce profound and lasting positive change. The true aim of meditation is to be always working with our minds in this way, constantly guiding and directing them to more potent and creative states. Our minds create the world that we live in so the benefits are clearly very great.

The foundation for this process of continually transforming life and mind is formal sitting meditation practise. This is for most of us completely indispensable. The two practises you will be learning will give you a very solid base to work from.

The first practise the mindfulness of breathing is designed to develop a calm and clear engaged awareness of ourselves. This awareness will help us to become more integrated with a clearer stronger sense of who we are and what our purpose is. The second practise "the development of loving kindness" helps us to become friendlier to ourselves and others. Indeed it is the basis for developing a powerful and disinterested love for ourselves and others. This universal loving kindness becomes more and more a force in our live, informing and directing all our relationships with those we love and those we find ourselves in conflict with

Both of these practises are founded on mindfulness. To begin with we need to learn to just sit with awareness. The more regularly we can do this the more effective our practise will be. It takes time and patience to train the mind to establish a meditation practise. But gentle persistence will bring great rewards.

Practise 1 Sitting with Awareness

Having set up your position comfortably (see posture sheet) we begin by just noticing our physical presence. Perhaps noticing the weight and warmth of our limbs. Allowing the eyes to close softly we can begin to be open to whatever sensations we find letting go of any uncomfortable sensations, being guided by our intuition as to the best way to do this. We could for example just imagine unwanted sensations draining away into the cushion or chair. or imaginatively let go of them with the out breath. Notice the breath coming in and out of the body.

Establish a firm connection of your awareness with your body, turning your attention in turn to your feet and ankles, lower legs knees, thighs and buttocks, the general area of the pelvis. The stomach lower back, chest and the whole torso, the arms and shoulders head and neck. Allow the face to be soft. Just greeting each part of your body with awareness. Respectfully acknowledging whatever sensation you find whilst being open to a process of relaxing, developing in its own way. On this basis notice your emotions. How are you feeling, again just respectfully acknowledging. Now just take a little time to just be with your experience, nothing to do, or achieve. In this context just become aware of the breath, perhaps a little more deeply now, aware of its sensations as it flows in and out.

You may continue to be aware of some elements of your surroundings, traffic noise etc., just allow them to be there. All there is to do is just sit with awareness allowing the body breath and mind to become still clear and calm.

There is an ancient metaphor for describing meditation "body like a mountain, heart like the ocean, mind like the sky"

Continue for 10 -15 min. End the practice by allowing your awareness to become broader and broader. Take a few moments to notice any difference in yourself that may have occurred during the practice.

Try to do this practise for a week or two and then try the next practise on the download page