



On Meditation

Meditation changes our life when we implement it. Learning to meditate will change your life completely for the better. It is easily learned and has no adverse side effects. There is no reason not to meditate. The benefits of meditating are too numerous to list. Health will improve, finances will become manageable, you will have better, closer, deeper, and more intimate relationships with everyone including yourself and you will organize time in such a way you will feel as though you have more time.

The only reason everyone does not meditate is there is no biological drive forcing us to meditate. We are not able to stop breathing or to stop our heart from beating. Many people, over time, destroy their lungs and hearts with bad habits such as smoking or easily becoming angry. These people can stop harming themselves if they learn and practice meditation. We have to go to the bathroom to relieve ourselves at least eventually. We are unable to stay awake forever. Biological drives ultimately take over our worst intentions and force us to do the things absolutely necessary to stay alive. Meditation has no such drive but it is as important as all these others.

Perhaps remarkably, meditation is very easy. It is the easiest thing you will ever learn to do. It is easier than going to the bathroom. It is easier than eating. It is even easier than sleeping especially for people who find sleeping problematic at times. It improves our ability to sleep too. There are three basic steps to meditation: get in a physically comfortable and relaxed position, mentally place your mind in a safe and pleasant place and systematically greet and relax each part of your body. The time spent doing this may range from 10 minutes to a half hour or more. Ten minutes seems to be the minimum effective length.

There are numerous other types of meditation. If you are currently doing a different type continue to do it and add this meditation. Every major religion in the world strongly advocates or commands its members to pray at least daily and usually more often. Along with the spiritual reasons for this, there are clear physical and mental health reasons to pray that often provide some of the same benefits meditation produces. It helps people to gain a different perspective on life that has more balance and depth. Often people who do not belong to a religious community also do not meditate because they feel uncomfortable doing it. Anyone can use this meditation. It is ecumenical and not based on any theological point of view. While it is compatible with any theology it does not require the adherence to one.

To start meditation, get in a comfortable posture where you need a minimum of effort to remain in that posture. Preferably lay back with your head slightly higher than your body. As you continue through the meditation you will be relaxing each body part. This is more difficult to do if you are sitting. The space should also be as free from distractions as possible. Turn off televisions, telephones, pagers, or other noise generating devices. If silence disturbs you, it is fine to listen to quiet music that has no words. You can meditate anywhere. If you are a traveling salesperson, park the car, lean your seat back, turn the radio off and get in a comfortable position. If you are a construction worker, and cannot lay down, find somewhere you may sit for ten minutes with a minimum of distraction. If worst comes to worst go to a toilet, shut the door and sit there. You are least likely to be disturbed by others there although it is not the most pleasant space to be in!

Once you are comfortable think of a place where you usually feel relaxed. This place may be a memory from childhood, a memory of a place you went to on vacation, a place you saw in a book or at a movie, or a place you found in a dream. It may even be your bed at home. The place just needs to be quiet, safe and peaceful. Put your mind in that place. It is fine to have several different places you visit depending on your choice for that meditation. Once you have placed your mind there, check out your five senses. What does the place look like, what are the smells you associate with that place, what are the sounds you are hearing, what are you feeling on your skin, face and back as you are laying there, and what tastes do you associate with that place? Spend a little time paying attention to each sensory image as you check it out because it will intensify the feeling of being in that place.

Once you have placed yourself in a comfortable place, start greeting and checking out each part of your body starting with your feet. Be as detailed as you are able to be. For example starting with your little toe on your right foot feel the nail, the top, the bottom, the joints and the inside then move to the next toe. It may take a little concentration to pick out one toe from the next but in time it becomes easier. Once you finish both feet, continue to your legs, knees, thighs, hips, guts, hands, forearms, arms, shoulders, abdomen, lungs, heart, neck, face, nose, ears, eyes, hair, scalp and the inside of your head. When you pause your attention at each aspect of your body really try to feel or sense it. Welcome each part and then say goodbye assuring it you love it and will care for it. This may sound silly but it is important to increasing your sense of well being and relaxation overall.

Usually once you have finished your body attention you will be out of time. Your attention will wander off to all sorts of other thoughts while you are checking your body. That is normal and fine. Let the drifting thoughts go and return to the body check. You do not need to finish your body check by the end of the meditation period. If you have more parts of your body to pay attention to then start there the next time. If you have an urgent thought, “Oh no I forgot my brother’s birthday!” while you are meditating, continue to meditate anyway. If the thought is really important it will return when you are finished.

We have many resistances to meditating which is remarkable for something that helps us so much. We will feel we don’t have the time. We may feel it is silly. At first we may feel awkward about taking a break from family or a work group to spend 10 minutes alone. Once we start meditating these resistances will decline. Consistency is important. When you first start meditating make yourself meditate everyday for seven days. Most people start, stop and start again over the first weeks or months of meditating.

As meditating becomes a habit you will find you are able to enter a peaceful state of mind very quickly. Derivatives of meditation become useful in many daily situations. It can be used to help us calm down to go to sleep at night especially if we are in a new place or not feeling normal. If we notice we are becoming angry or anxious we have a place we can mentally retreat to calm ourselves down before the disruptive feeling can dominate us or our response. In sports we can use it mentally to relax and function better. If we are somewhere upsetting to us, the doctors, the dentist, the tax auditors, in court and other places we can use meditation to remain calm and focused on what we need to be doing rather than become flooded by anxiety or anger.

Please try to meditate. Once you have tried it for a while you too will become devoted to meditation as a key to happiness in your life.

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