

MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

“The secrets of life are hidden on the back of your eyelids.”

-Positively Dave

Your mind is a wild animal. But it can be tamed. *You* are not your mind. Meditation will help you discover this for yourself. A daily meditation practice will help you develop mental fortitude and self-assuredness. And it only takes 5 minutes a day.

What does it mean to meditate? In the simplest terms, it's practicing how to not get distracted.

In this activity you'll spend 5 uninterrupted minutes “focusing” on your breath. Focusing on your breath means directing the entirety of your consciousness on the breath; feeling the physical sensations associated with breathing. With great determination, focus all of your mental capacity on the experience of your body breathing. Imagine you were a researcher tasked with describing all the physical sensations one can feel while breathing. What would you take note of? What physical feelings are most prevalent? Try and discover where you're your breath happening and where you don't. For example, you feel the breathing in your chest,. But if you focus closely you'll feel how breathing impacts even your elbows. Just focus on what it feels like to be a human being breathing naturally.

It is supremely important to note - this activity is not about your breath. It is about choosing a focal point for your attention so you can tell if you've wandered off course (aka gotten distracted). For this activity I have chosen to focus on the breath for lots of reasons that I won't go into here, but trust me that there are many good reasons why the breath has been associated with enlightenment, understanding, and strength for millennia.

ACTIVITY – Set a timer for 5 minutes, close your eyes and focus on all the things you physically feel happening as you breathe naturally and normally. You might feel the coolness of the air passing through your nostrils, the rising and falling of your upper chest, the expansion of the lower belly, any areas of stiffness, or the sensations in your shoulders. We're not here to judge any of these sensations as good or bad. We're just here to focus on something (breathing) so we can tell if we've gotten distracted. Whatever it is that you experience is ok. Just stay in the experience.

That's it. For 5 minutes. Just focus on your breath.

Here is what will happen next - you will close your eyes, and commit yourself to following your breath as I described above, and just as you go to enjoy your first breath you will already be stolen away thinking about something else. You will quickly find it is strikingly difficult to stay focused as automatic as your body breathing naturally, but this is important. Can you stay focused?

At this point, you will realize you're not thinking about your breath at all anymore and so you'll refocus. You'll close your eyes with new determination and take a wonderful breath in, full of your awareness, and then you will exhale with full awareness.

And thought will occur to you, "wow, that felt incredible!" ...and in that moment, you have been hijacked again. Because in that moment that you thought, "wow, that felt great," you lost focus on what you intended to focus on in these 5 minutes - your breath and simply feeling the sensations of breathing. You're not hear to think about anything else other than your breath. So, you must then let go of thinking about how "good this feels" and instead maintain your commitment to focusing all of your attention solely on the physical sensations of your body breathing at its natural rhythm.

You refocus, take a few more breathes in and out, and begin to notice your mind wandering, and you think, "man, this is harder than I thought it would be." And in that moment, you have been hijacked again. You are no longer thinking about your breath. You're thinking about how hard this is. Or you're thinking about how you're thinking. Whatever it is, if it isn't your breath, let that shit go, and focus all your attention on feeling your body breathing.

You refocus, take a focused breath in and out. Then another one.

Eventually you will be hijacked again. That's OK! The goal here is **NOT** to stop getting hijacked. The goal is to begin to **notice** that it's happening in the first place, that you are **choosing** to think about something and your mind is running amuck. This practice is how you become owner of your mind and curator of your own thoughts.

Keeping your mind focused with laser like clarity is exceedingly difficult and cannot be developed quickly. However, the benefits of it will start to be felt immediately and only get stronger with practice.

By choosing to focus all your attention on your breath for a small period of time (5 minutes), you will give yourself the time and place to recognize when your mind has been hijacked off into uncontrolled thought patterns. Remember, if that 5-minute timer is going, and you are not solely focused on simply feeling the sensation of your breath, then you have been hijacked. No worries. Just go back to feeling your breath until the timer goes off.

When you notice you have been hijacked, do not concern yourself with judging why it happened, just refocus your attention on your breath until the timer is off. The only thing to do is to get back to focusing all your attention on your breath until your timer has gone off.

WARNING – Often times we keep so busy during the day that these 5 minutes of meditation will be one of our only opportunities to sit and rest.

Naturally, your mind will want to flood you with thoughts will you're meditating. It will bring up concerns you have, plans you have, and things you need to do. It will want to use the meditation space to think about all the most important issues in your life. This is natural. But while that 5-minute timer is going, you are not going to think about even those things. Even those important things. You will still offer yourself the remaining 23 hours and 55 minutes per day for thinking about those important things, but this 5 minutes is sacred and reserved for you to be in control of what you're thinking about.

Remember, meditation is a practice. You must practice with persistence and consistency. This is important. It is the only way.

It is quite interesting that, while this meditation is all about following your breath, it really isn't about your breath at all. It's about sitting down and CHOOSING what you are going to think about for 5 minutes and then going out and seeing how ridiculously difficult that can be.

You are CHOOSING to think about your breath. The point of meditation is NOT to stop thinking. The point of meditation is to sit down and notice when you have been hijacked, how often it occurs, and how with a little effort you can literally choose WHAT you are thinking about.

As you get comfortable with following your breath for 5 minutes, gradually increase the length of time by 1 minute per week. What is most important is that this remains a part of your daily routine. These several minutes must be kept sacred and will only show their benefits to those who practice regularly.