

## The Joy of Mini-Meditations

Do you regularly sit down to meditate for say 20 – 30 minutes at a time? I used to do this virtually every day for many years, but I have to confess that recently I have not been meditating so much for longish periods of time. These days, I seem to prefer taking several 1-2 minute mini-meditation breaks throughout the day. So this month, I thought I might share with you all the benefits of this less common meditative practice.

Most of the time, many of us are wandering through life in a bit of a daze. Our body is in one place, but our mind is somewhere else because it habitually wanders off to get lost in memories about the past or worries about the future. So we are basically lost in a trance about '*my life*'. I tend not to dwell in the past so much, but I definitely spend too much time either worrying about something that just might happen in the future or fantasising about a perfect future - which of course never actually happens. What a waste of my precious time!

But please do not judge yourself if you begin to notice just how much time you spend in a dream-like state rather than being fully present here and now. As I have emphasised many times before, the human brain is biologically biased towards worrying in order to keep us safe from physical danger. But we do not have to spend the whole of our lives being imprisoned by our fearful, egoic thought system. At the very least, we can learn to take regular mini-breaks from being lost in an endless nightmare of egoic anger, fear and judgement.

Taking several mini-meditative breaks each day is really easy and fun to do. You just set your intention to take a break from your endless thinking maybe three or four times each day. The key is to make sure you remember that you are going to do this. Then, you simply stop whatever you are doing for just a minute or two. You take a few slow, deep, whole body breaths to calm yourself down a little and then you simply spend maybe 30 or 60 seconds gazing at something beautiful in your immediate environment: a picture on your living room wall, a tree outside your kitchen window, or a vase of flowers on your dining room table.

As you gaze at this beautiful object, gently set your intention to embrace it in a wave of love and gratitude. I know it may sound a little crazy sending a wave of love energy to a tree or a flower. However, I promise you that once you get used to doing this, you will get addicted to it because it is so pleasurable!

This morning for example, I went for a walk around Fletcher Moss Park in Didsbury and toward the end of my walk, I took a little mini-meditative break under a spectacularly beautiful autumn tree – but please don't ask me what type of tree it was. As I gazed at the tree's golden leaves fluttering in a gentle autumn breeze, the sun began to pour its light down on me through the leaves and for just a moment or two, I really felt as though I was in heaven.

Of course, your mini-meditations do not have to be focussed on looking at something beautiful. If you love any kind of music, your mini-meditative breaks might be listening to one track of your favourite CD and cultivating a heart-centred feeling of being in love with the music. Another wonderful way to take a mini-meditative break might be slowly and mindfully to eat a delicious biscuit or chocolate with a meditative, here and now focus on the wonderful taste of each mindful bite.

Although these mini-meditations can sometimes feel blissful, you should definitely avoid striving for bliss or any other particular feeling as you do them. Moreover, not all mini-meditations need to be focussed on experiencing some kind of joy. If by any chance you do have the occasional awful day sometime this November, your mini-meditations might focus on sending several waves of compassionate energy to the part of yourself who is struggling in any way that day. I have been doing this 'compassionate break' meditative practice for some years now and it really is extremely calming and even therapeutic.

Whenever we find ourselves lost in fearful thoughts or feelings, rather than struggling against them, it is so comforting to simply allow them to be there like honoured guests in our guest house, without inadvertently encouraging them to stay by ruminating on them or fighting against them. These two common responses to fearful or angry thoughts or feelings tend to make the whole situation even worse, whereas bathing ourselves in the life-supporting high energy of self-compassion usually makes things seem a lot better.

So there you have it. The heart of this month's message is that simply pausing our hyperactivity several times each day to bring a wave of joy, gratitude or compassion into our mind and body is a wonderfully easy and effective way to enhance our overall well-being day in and day out. Moreover, enhancing our own well-being usually helps others too, because we all benefit from associating with calm, joyful, compassionate individuals who are fully present with us rather than being lost in some egoic fantasy about their past or their future.

So this November, please don't drift through 30 precious days lost in fearful thinking or caught up in far too much rushing about. Just commit to taking several mini-meditation breaks day in and day out and then notice how much calmer and more joyful you feel despite the dark nights closing in as we move into another somewhat gloomy winter season.

I will conclude this month with a wonderful quote from the world-renowned Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron writing about the benefits of what she calls 'pause practice' and I have called 'mini-meditations'

*Pause practice can transform each day of your life. It creates an open doorway to the sacredness of the place in which you find yourself. The vastness, stillness and magic of the place will dawn upon you, if you let your mind relax and drop the storyline (of your separate egoic existence) that you are working so hard to maintain.*

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