

If you believe you access a peaceful, happy, strong centered state through the use of fancy mudras and repeating mantras... then I have failed to explain meditation to you properly. Peace, happiness, strength and feeling centered is your natural state. Your access to this begins by simply closing your eyes and witnessing the rhythm of your breath.

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Mindfulness & Meditation For Beginners



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Living Mindfully

First and foremost, I'd like to congratulate you on your decision to enhance your personal growth through mindfulness. Try to keep in mind that this is something you are doing for yourself and your well-being, so it's important for you to put in the effort and make a commitment to schedule formal times to practice these exercises just as you would other important appointments.

Believe me, I know that sometimes it is easier said than done. It is not uncommon to lose enthusiasm and dedication to a new practice when obstacles arise and daily tasks begin to get in the way; as you continue on it's important for you to figure out what is working and what's not so that you can adjust your practice, as needed.

Before beginning mindfulness practices, it is imperative to understand the concept of mindfulness and what the practice of mindfulness can mean for you in your efforts towards personal growth.

Mindfulness practice often embodies eight attitudes and it's these attitudes below that contribute to the growth and flourishing of your mind, heart and body.

1. **Learner's Mind** – Seeing things as a visitor in a foreign land, everything is new and curious.
2. **Nonjudgmental** – Becoming impartial, without any labels of right or wrong or good or bad. Simply allowing things to be.
3. **Acknowledgment** – Recognizing things as they are.
4. **Settled** – Being comfortable in the moment and content where you are.
5. **Composed** – Being equanimous and in control with compassion and insight.
6. **Letting be** – Letting things be as they are with no need to change them.
7. **Self-reliant** – Deciding on your own, from your own experiences, what is true or not.
8. **Self-compassionate** – Loving yourself as you are with no criticism or self-reproach.

Take a moment to examine these attitudes in regard to your current state of mind. Write down the attitudes you wish to cultivate more of in your mindfulness practice.

Keep in mind that once you begin to recognize the eight attitudes of mindfulness, it will become much easier for you to put these attitudes of mindfulness — learner’s mind, nonjudgmental, acknowledgment, settled, composed, letting be, self-reliant, and self-compassionate — into your activities and with other people.

Choose a task, such as baking a cake, and practice the attitudes of mindfulness during the task. This concept might seem strange at first, but it really will help lead you on the path of mindfulness.

See the example below:

- Begin the task with a learner’s mind, experience the texture of the ingredients as you gather them for preparing your cake.
- Whether you are baking from scratch or from a box, do so without any judgments about yourself, the cake or your cooking ability.
- Acknowledge the fact that you are self-reliant—that by baking this cake you are caring for yourself and others.
- Practice self-compassion by knowing that you are doing your best and do not get discouraged if the cake does not turn out the way you want it to.
- If your mind tries to rush ahead to the next baking step, settle down and realize that you are in the present moment and bring your mind back to the task.
- Watch the cake while it bakes, as the batter rises and forms, and realize you are letting it be, letting the natural course take place and progress without any interference.

Notice the difference in how your mind and body feel when these attitudes are present as opposed to when they are not. Try to expand this practice into other areas of your daily life and see if it makes a difference in your relationships. Write down any changes you notice as you begin to practice the attitudes of mindfulness in your daily life.

It is a personal preference whether you stand, sit or lie. If you stand, comfortable shoes will help you avoid the distraction of aching feet. If you sit, you may choose to sit on the floor, on a cushion or blanket or in a chair, or whatever is comfortable for you. If you choose to lie down it is important that you be fully awake to avoid becoming sleepy.

It is also a personal preference whether you close your eyes or keep them open while you meditate. If you are feeling tired, perhaps it would be best to keep them at least partially opened to avoid becoming sleepy. However, if you choose to meditate with your eyes open, remain focused on the meditation practice and avoid distractions.

Assume a comfortable position to avoid your body becoming tense or rigid, thereby causing you discomfort. This would be a distraction that could possibly keep you from meditation for very long. On the other hand, you do not want to assume a position that is so comfortable that you end up falling asleep while meditation.

If sleepiness is a problem for you during meditation, you may try meditation while standing or keeping your eyes open as mentioned above. Another option would be to take a nap prior to meditation so that you are well rested.

During this next exercise, write down your thoughts about what body position you think will work best for you during meditation exercises, making a checklist of things you may need prior to beginning meditation exercises.

For example, do you think you would prefer to stand, sit or lie? Do you have a position of comfort in mind to try during meditation? Do you have comfortable shoes if you meditate while standing? Do you need a cushion or blanket if you sit in the floor to meditate? Will you keep your eyes open or closed during meditation? Should you take a nap prior to meditating to avoid becoming sleepy during mindful meditation?

The mindful check-up will promote listening to your mind and body and assist in centering and realigning yourself by helping you to realize how you are feeling emotionally, physically as well as mentally. This can be done throughout the day on a daily basis.

Do this practice in a soothing environment with no distractions, such as a television or phone. It can be done either sitting up or lying down, however, if you lie down and find yourself becoming sleepy, you should try a more upright position. Since the main focus point is the inner workings of your mind and body, you may want to try this with your eyes closed, however, if you prefer you may keep the opened partially. Concentrate solely on this practice for about three minutes.

- Begin this mindful check-up by delving into your mind and body and simply allowing any emotion, thought or physical sensation to just be. Perhaps this is the first time you have stopped during your busy day to take a break.
- As you come to the state of being rather than doing, you may become aware of thoughts and feelings you have carried throughout the day. These need no analyzation or judgment, only acknowledgement. Just allow yourself to be in the here and now, in the presence of the moment. Simply check in with yourself for about three minutes.

When you have finished the exercise of mindful check-up for the first time, write down any sensations, feelings or thoughts that came to mind during the exercise.

Mindful Breathing

The first step of sitting meditation is usually mindfulness of breathing. The breath is in a constant state of change as you inhale and exhale with breath coming in and going out, just like the ocean tides. You must realize that everything in life changes and you can choose to go with the flow instead of fighting it because the stronger the resistance, the greater the suffering.

Mindful Sensations

The next step after mindful breathing is mindful sensations. Awareness of physical sensations is different from the body scan. Instead of systematically checking the body part by part, you focus on sensations that are prevalent with each moment. Noticing sensations as they come and go throughout the body makes this exercise more insightful of the present moment experience. The body experiences a myriad of sensations (pain, tingling, burning, warmth, coolness, itchiness, dryness and so on) that may be either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. If you don't feel noticeable sensations, you can instead focus on points of contact, such as your back against the chair or your feet touching the floor — anywhere you feel contact. With mindfulness meditation, instead of analyzing the sensations, you simply acknowledge them.

Mindful Hearing

The next step after mindful sensations is mindful hearing. Mindful hearing can be practiced almost anytime and anywhere because sounds are always coming and going in our environment. If a specific sound is continual and possibly even irritating, such as a loud music, crying babies, or car alarms, simply bring attention to the sound itself without analyzing it. On a more basic level, the mind simply hears sound waves. Auditory phenomena are ubiquitous; you cannot escape them. Even if you isolated yourself in a soundproof room, you'd still hear internal sounds of your heartbeat, your pulse, or ringing in the ears. Whatever you hear in your environment, try not to judge the sounds as good or bad. Simply notice how sounds come and go as transient events.

Mindful Thoughts and Emotions

The next step after mindful hearing is mindful thoughts and emotions. Focus your attention to the mind and the thought process itself. Thoughts and emotions are always changing, just like the breath, sensations and sounds. Rather than getting engrossed in the contents of the mind, just

experience the thought process. As you become aware of the stories you spin and the snares you create, you can begin to disengage from them.

Choiceless Awareness

The last step of this exercise is choiceless awareness, where the present moment becomes your focus goal. Choiceless awareness is being mindful of whatever happens during each moment in the continual progression of present moments—whatever arises in the mind and body, whether a sensory phenomenon or thoughts and emotions. On the surface you may be very still, while internally you are watching an influx of physical and mental experience.

Working together, your mind and body interact through constantly changing mental and physical stimuli such as thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells, and tastes.

With choiceless awareness, observe what is presently forefront in the mind and body. If nothing is especially dominant to draw your focus, remember you can always go back to the breath – or sensations, sounds, or thoughts and emotions to anchor yourself to the present moment.

Now that you understand the steps involved in the process of sitting mindfulness meditation, find a quiet spot free from distractions and then sit in a comfortable position that will allow you to remain alert and then focus your concentration on this exercise.

- As you bring yourself into the present moment, check the mind and body for things you have carried throughout the day – perhaps things that have been going on recently or thoughts from the events of the day.
- Whatever the thoughts and feelings are, simply acknowledge them and allow them to be, without any analysis or judgment.
- Bring awareness to your breathing. Just breathe naturally and normally, without trying to control it; being mindful of the breath rising and falling as you inhale and exhale. As you breathe in focus on breathing in, and then as you breathe out, focus on breathing out. Simply concentrate on the breath, breathing in and breathing out.
- Now gently shift your focus from the breath and bring it to sensations in the body. Observe and acknowledge the myriad of sensations flowing through the body as they change with each moment.

- If you find areas of tightness and tension with your body check try to allow them to soften and relax.
- If you are not able to soften and relax, acknowledge the sensations and allow them to flow wherever they need to go and do whatever they need to do.
- Now draw attention to hearing, observing all sounds without ambivalence. Break the sounds down to basic sound waves that can be heard with the body. Acknowledge the multitude of varying sounds, internal and external, moment to moment.
- Notice how the sounds change with each moment, whether internal or external, the sounds rise and fall. Hear them appear and disappear, just sounds.
- Now gently shut out the sounds in the mind and shift focus to emotions and thoughts. Observe the mind without judgment; simply acknowledge the myriad of mental formations with each moment. Like lying in a field and watching the clouds move and change shape as they float by, watch the mind in the same manner.
- Notice how thoughts rise and form in the mind then recede when another thought takes over. The mind is constantly thinking about this and that, functioning with a mind of its own, analyzing, planning, remembering, comparing, etc. Experience how these thoughts appear and disappear as just thoughts.
- Try to avoid the pitfalls of mind snares and negative habits as you observe and experience your thoughts and emotions. Try to just observe and let them be, knowing they will appear, disappear and recede in time. If you do get caught up in thoughts and feelings, that is okay, this is simply a way of returning to the present moment. Once you realize you are lost in thought, in that very moment you are no longer lost. Simply refocus on mind observation with the clouds of thoughts and emotions floating on and on.
- If you become frustrated with wandering mind, perhaps a short time of mindful breathing would help you center yourself again.
- Once you are again centered, withdraw awareness from mental events and focus on the present moment itself as your primary goal.

Now that you have done your first sitting meditation exercise, revisit your body position journal page and see if your “game plan” worked well for you or are there things you would like to do differently in the future. Write down what did and did not work well for you during your first meditation exercise and things you may wish to do differently in the future.

Mindful Life Design

“I think I have seen the Western mistake. You are very able to distinguish things, but you are unable to put all things together. If you continue in this way, you will never be able to repair this.”

– Hsia Po-Yan, Chinese Physician

The intent in design is an elegant unity of form and function. Please follow this principle as you perform this exercise, and do not allow the linear nature of the work to distract you from viewing your life as a whole.

Please address all the areas listed in the order listed and be open to what the questions evoke. Additionally, it's important to keep integrating later work with earlier work so that your plan is integrated, complete and realistic. Develop action plans, schedules, time-lines, lists of promises, requests, declarations, etc. as needed to design all areas of your life.

Part I - Inventory

A. LIFE NOW

1. What is your life's work?
2. What is the public identity you currently have?
3. Who are the people who are close to you?
4. What are the domains of action in your life now?
5. What are your current, unresolved breakdowns in all areas of your life?
6. What is your basic, day-to-day mood?
7. What specific resources do you have at your disposal? List money, cash flow, lines of credit, tools, expertise, vehicles, residences, education, access to information, insurance, licenses, certificates, clothes and all other useful equipment. Be exact in listing quality and quantity for each item.
8. What's missing for you in your life?

9. What do you have too much of in your life?
10. What conflicts do you experience (or see now) in your life? Review how you spend your time, allocate resources, attend to personal care, respond to the demands of work, and nurture your friends, family and lovers.
11. What is working well for you in life?

B. THE FUTURE

1. What plans do you have (if any) for dealing with potential health problems, retirement, your death, especially as you grow older?
2. What is your career path?
3. How do you keep yourself informed of trends and changes in the economy, local politics, national politics, technology, developments in your industry?
4. What do you want to accomplish in your life? When do you see these accomplishments happening? What resources in addition to the ones you currently have will be necessary to fulfill these accomplishments?
5. Do you plan to have a family? How large? When?
6. How do you want to be known by others?
7. What do you want to learn more about?
8. Describe your life:
 - 5 years from now
 - 10 years from now
 - 15 years from now
 - 20 years from now
9. What is (are) the contribution(s) you want to be sure you make with your life? To whom? When?

Remember, the power of design is in the details and in the unity of the execution. Begin to bring your whole life to mind as you design the individual parts. Don't compromise in your design, and be realistic.

SPECIFIC DOMAINS

1. What would your personal environment look like if it expressed your life design?
Make a transition plan toward this state, if your environment is not already this way. Have your plan be consistent with your design.
2. What would your personal presentation be like if it were consistent with your life design? Include clothes, accessories, hairstyles, how your body looks, in your design. Again, make a transition plan if necessary.
3. What relationships would you have if they were an integral part of your design? What specific people would be part of your life? In what ways? What types of people would be in your life? In what ways?
4. How would you allot your 168 hours each week in order to live your life as designed? Make a month's plan in which you assign the 168 hours each week in a way that fulfills you and embodies your design. Make a transition plan for this if necessary (as in #1 above).
5. Include in your design all of the other matters, concerns, interests and breakdowns that this exercise evoked.

Consolidate all your work into a master plan and a statement of how your life will look/feel when you fully implement your design. Include in your master plan what you may have to eliminate from your life, e.g., tools, clothes, merely distracting activities or destructive/non-contributing relationships.

Cultivating Compassion

Compassion, my friends, is a major part of being mindful.

Can you envision a state of mind where there is no harsh, condemning judgment of yourself or of others? This state of mind does not view the world in terms of good and evil or right and wrong; it sees only “suffering and no suffering.” What would happen if we did not judge any of the things that we see? We would see things that bring happiness and things that bring pain but we would not see fear, guilt or shame. Wouldn't it be remarkable if we saw the world this way? When we only see suffering and no suffering, we feel compassion.

Compassion can lead to forceful action without judgment. For example, if we see a small child reaching for a cup filled with hot coffee, we instantly respond. This response is born out of the compassion we feel; we move to keep the child from harm, without any judgment.

Compassion is the ability to feel someone else's experiences and wish them to be free from pain. To view life compassionately, we have to look beyond the end result of what is happening now, and look at the underlying conditions that caused the end result. If you have insight into someone's history you may realize past events cause them to behave in a certain way. Then you can see the conditions that led up to that situation, not just the end result of those conditions.

For example, two people, a man and a woman, both suffered childhood abuse. The woman grew up to be fearful; the man grew up to be angry. As adults they found themselves working together and the fearful woman disliked the angry man – until she gained some insight to his background and realized he had suffered the same as she had.

This kind of understanding does not mean that we condone a person's negative behavior but it does mean that we can acknowledge the underlying factors that make up that person's life opening us up to compassion and forgiveness. Think of someone that you have had a problem with in the past. Can you look beyond the problem and see that underlying conditions may have caused that person to react negatively – or perhaps underlying conditions caused you to react negatively. Can you view the situation with compassion and forgiveness?

Mindfulness of Breathing

- Mindful breathing is best practiced with no distractions, such as a television or telephone, in a tranquil environment. Mindful breathing can be practiced anytime during the day. It can be done either sitting up or lying down, however, if you lie down and find yourself becoming sleepy, you should try a more upright position.
- Once you have gotten into position, breathe in and out naturally and examine of the act of breathing in and breathing out. Be aware of where the breath is most prominently coming from --- your chest, your nose, your stomach or somewhere else.
- Don't distract yourself with counting the breaths or watching yourself breath, just visualize the breath rising and falling like waves on the ocean, rising as you inhale and falling as you exhale. Focus on the here and now and concentrate on breathing.
- Do not manipulate your breathing in any way, just breathe normally and be aware of each breath as it comes and goes.
- If you notice your attention wandering from the breathing, just acknowledge the distraction and then refocus back on breathing.

Journal for Mindful Breathing

When practicing this technique for the first time, write down anything that comes up emotionally, physically and mentally for you.

Mindfulness of Walking

Walking meditation allows you to feel grounded and leave the stress and anxiety behind. Generally when you walk it is to go from one point to another, being constantly in motion to get somewhere. Mindful walking has a deliberate purpose, with each step you are arriving in the present moment.

We all learn to walk as babies and have probably done it every day since then without a second thought. We take for granted the ability of our feet to balance our body.

Mindful walking develops awareness of your body. You begin to notice the movement of each foot as you go through the motions of walking - - lifting the foot, moving the foot forward and then placing the foot back down with each step. This is a simple process but in the beginning before lifting the other foot, you should finish one step completely. "Lift the foot, move the foot, place the foot. Lift the foot, move the foot, place the foot." Begin this process slowly and become aware of the movement of your body. You will experience many changes during the day. Sometimes you will walk slow and other times you will walk quickly, depending on your circumstances. Focus on the sensation of the movement of lifting each foot, moving it forward and placing it back down. Practice walking meditation throughout your day a few minutes at a time.

Find a peaceful spot where you can walk back and forth undisturbed for about ten minutes no more than ten to twenty feet without distractions. Focus all of your attention to this exercise.

- First begin to walk slowly noticing the sensation on the bottom of your feet, from the tips of your toes to the back of your heel, as each foot touches the ground. Pay attention to the movement of your body as you walk, not only your feet but your entire body – the side to side movements of your hips, the back and forth swing of your arms.
- Pause for a moment and stand still. Notice the feeling of your body standing on the ground.
- Take a look at your surroundings, noticing the sounds, sights, and smells. Acknowledge any emotions or thoughts.
- Now begin to walk again, focusing only upon walking as you place your weight on the right leg and lift up the left foot, moving it forward, and placing it back down on the ground.
- Now shift the weight to the left leg and repeat the above process.

- Slowly begin walking once again noticing the sensation on the bottom of your feet, from the tips of your toes to the back of your heel, as each foot touches the ground. Pay attention to the side to side movements of your hips, the back and forth swing of your arms.
- Be aware of each step until you come to your designated stopping point. Then notice the elaborate process involved with turning and with mindfulness continue to walk back to your starting point.
- Be solely focused on each step.
- One step at a time, continue the process of walking, turning, and returning to your starting point.
- Walk with mindfulness.

Sitting Meditation Instructions

Sit in a comfortable position that will allow you to remain alert and then focus your concentration on this exercise.

- As you bring yourself into the present moment, check the mind and body for things you have carried throughout the day – perhaps things that have been going on recently or thoughts from the events of the day.
- Whatever the thoughts and feelings are, simply acknowledge them and allow them to be, without any analysis or judgment.
- Bring awareness to your breathing. Just breathe naturally and normally, without trying to control it; being mindful of the breath rising and falling as you inhale and exhale. As you breathe in focus on breathing in, and then as you breathe out, focus on breathing out. Simply concentrate on the breath, breathing in and breathing out.
- Now gently shift your focus from the breath and bring it to sensations in the body. Observe and acknowledge the myriad of sensations flowing through the body as they change with each moment.
- If you find areas of tightness and tension with your body check try to allow them to soften and relax.

- If you are not able to soften and relax, acknowledge the sensations and allow them to flow wherever they need to go and do whatever they need to do.
- Now draw attention to hearing, observing all sounds without ambivalence. Break the sounds down to basic sound waves that can be heard with the body. Acknowledge the multitude of varying sounds, internal and external, moment to moment.
- Notice how the sounds change with each moment, whether internal or external, the sounds rise and fall. Hear them appear and disappear, just sounds.
- Now gently shut out the sounds in the mind and shift focus to emotions and thoughts. Observe the mind without judgment; simply acknowledge the myriad of mental formations with each moment. Like lying in a field and watching the clouds move and change shape as they float by, watch the mind in the same manner.
- Notice how thoughts rise and form in the mind then recede when another thought takes over. The mind is constantly thinking about this and that, functioning with a mind of its own, analyzing, planning, remembering, comparing, etc. Experience how these thoughts appear and disappear as just thoughts.
- Try to avoid the pitfalls of mind snares and negative habits as you observe and experience your thoughts and emotions. Try to just observe and let them be, knowing they will appear, disappear and recede in time. If you do get caught up in thoughts and feelings, that is okay, this is simply a way of returning to the present moment. Once you realize you are lost in thought, in that very moment you are no longer lost. Simply refocus on mind observation with the clouds of thoughts and emotions floating on and on.
- If you become frustrated with wandering mind, perhaps a short time of mindful breathing would help you center yourself again.
- Once you are again centered, withdraw awareness from mental events and focus on the present moment itself as your primary goal.
- Choiceless awareness invites you to become mindful of whatever arises in each moment, whether a stream of emotions or thoughts, sensations, sounds or other sensory experiences.

