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# Demystifying Meditation

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## What is Meditation?

Meditation is an ancient spiritual practice that quietens the mind, expands consciousness and improves balance and wellness at every level of our being. It is the practice of bringing the mind's attention to one focal point, and the point of focus differs between techniques. It can be the breath, a candle, an image, a mantra, or even the thoughts that are arising!

It's not so important which one you practice. What is important is that YOU DO IT, and you do it REGULARLY. And by regularly, I mean (pretty much) on a daily basis.

**But it's hard!!!**

It's not really. I practice, and teach, mantra meditation. And the practice itself is really, really simple. BUT, people do find a couple of things difficult:

- 1) Putting aside the time
- 2) Believing they are doing it right

However, these are far from un-surmountable obstacles. And the benefits are immense. People come to meditation for all sorts of reasons. Some are "on the spiritual path" and are seeking one-ness. Most are looking for a means to manage their stress levels. Others are looking for measurable improvements to their physical wellbeing.

Regardless of what your motivation is, the benefits are there to be experienced on every level by everyone who practices. So, from Holy Joes to Joe Soaps - this is for you. All you need to do is decide not to let those two little obstacles named above get in your way. And I hope to help you do that with this little booklet.

I'm going to tackle these issues in reverse order...

## Don't Judge your Meditation Practice

There is a widespread perception out there, that meditation requires you to reach a still mind state - no thoughts. This is a *mis*perception that leads many beginner meditators to abandon the practice because a still mind is not what they experience. Consequently, they conclude that either they are not doing it right, or that it isn't working for them.

They read or hear about people having the most profound experiences during meditation, and judge their own practice as ineffective because it is different. *This is not the case!*

For most people leading busy lives, a busy mind is perfectly common during meditation. *This does not mean that it's not working.* The key to meditating successfully is to bring your mind back to whatever focal point you're using every

time you become aware you have drifted off to other thoughts. Just let go of the thoughts and return to your mantra, your breath, your candle.

The more “stuff” you have going on in your day to day life, the more likely it is that your mind will be very busy during your meditation. BUT as long as you remain alert enough to notice that your mind has become busy with thoughts, and redirect it back to your focal point, then you are meditating correctly.

AND, eventhough it doesn't feel like anything profound is happening, at a subconscious level changes are taking place. Stress is being released in your physical, mental and emotional bodies. Just give it time, and you will likely notice improvements in the symptoms of various ailments you've been experiencing.

You may also notice that you feel less stressed than before. And as for the thoughts you experience during the meditation itself, you might notice they have a different quality to them - less engaging, less upsetting, less stressful.

So, if you are judging your experience of meditation then stop doing so. Just accept that whatever you experience at the time is the experience that is right for you right now. And keep going back to your focal point.

## Meditate at a Regular Time

Now let's turn our attention to the more practical issue - that of making time.

The benefits of meditation accumulate over time, and so a daily practice will yield results more quickly than an ad-hoc experience. The ideal is to practice twice a day, for twenty to thirty minutes per session. And for most people leading busy lives, this presents a challenge. Where to carve out the time to practice?

We are talking the ideal here, but it is important to bear in mind that *no effort is wasted - five minutes here and there will make a difference to you.*

But let's look at the ideal scenario, as it will yield the optimum results in terms of your wellbeing... if you're going to meditate on a daily basis then it needs to become a habit. You need to build it into your normal daily routine.

So, take a look at your lifestyle and identify periods in your day where you could possibly devote time to yourself - temporarily turning away from everything else that is pulling at your attention.

If you can, the best thing would be first thing in the morning and again in the early evening. If your current morning routine is too hectic to allow this, then would it be possible to take this time at lunchtime?

If you work outside of the home, do you drive yourself to work? If so, could you take fifteen minutes in your car before you eat your lunch? If you use public transport, then could you use the commute time to meditate?

If you're at home with the kids all day, could you request half an hour to yourself as soon as your partner comes home?

If you cannot find any window in your current daily routine, then there is just one solution: get up half an hour earlier in the mornings! You're probably wincing right now, if not totally stiffening with resistance. I can empathise. I'm not a morning person, but when I made the decision that I was finally going to stop toying with the idea of meditation and get serious about it, I had to get up half an hour earlier in the mornings to do that. But very quickly I was ok with it and now it is simply part of my morning routine.

For the majority of people, if you're committed to having a meditation practice, this is probably what will be required of you. BUT first thing in the morning is a great time to meditate - it sets you up for the day. And, you get such a deep level of rest during meditation that it more than compensates for the sleep you've sacrificed.

Chopra Center recommendations for your meditation ritual go like this:

Mornings - RPM (Rise, Pee, Meditate)

Evenings - before your evening meal if possible, otherwise one hour afterwards  
(once your meal is digested)

As I said, these are recommendations for the ideal practice. If they don't work for you, experiment until you find out what does. And when you do, make it part of your daily routine.

## *Keep it Simple*

Remember that meditation is a simple practice. It doesn't require sacred spaces with candles, incense or geometric images. (All of these are optional aids, but not at all essential)

You don't need to sit cross-legged on the floor either. In fact, don't do that unless/until you can do so comfortably for the duration. Sitting upright on a chair with good back support is perfectly fine.

You don't need to wear yogi, flow-y, monk-like garments. Whatever you're wearing today is perfect.

Don't over-analyse it. Don't attach any labels to yourself because you practice it. Don't be deterred by all the whacky stories you hear, or the profound experiences other meditators relate. That's just their experience. Yours is your own.

Just do it. Develop a practice that suits you and your lifestyle and stick with it. As long as you do it, you will reap the benefits.