

# MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS:

A Comprehensive Guide

How to relax, renew,  
and discover your  
best life through  
meditation



**DHAVAL PATEL**  
CREATOR OF ZENFUL SPIRIT



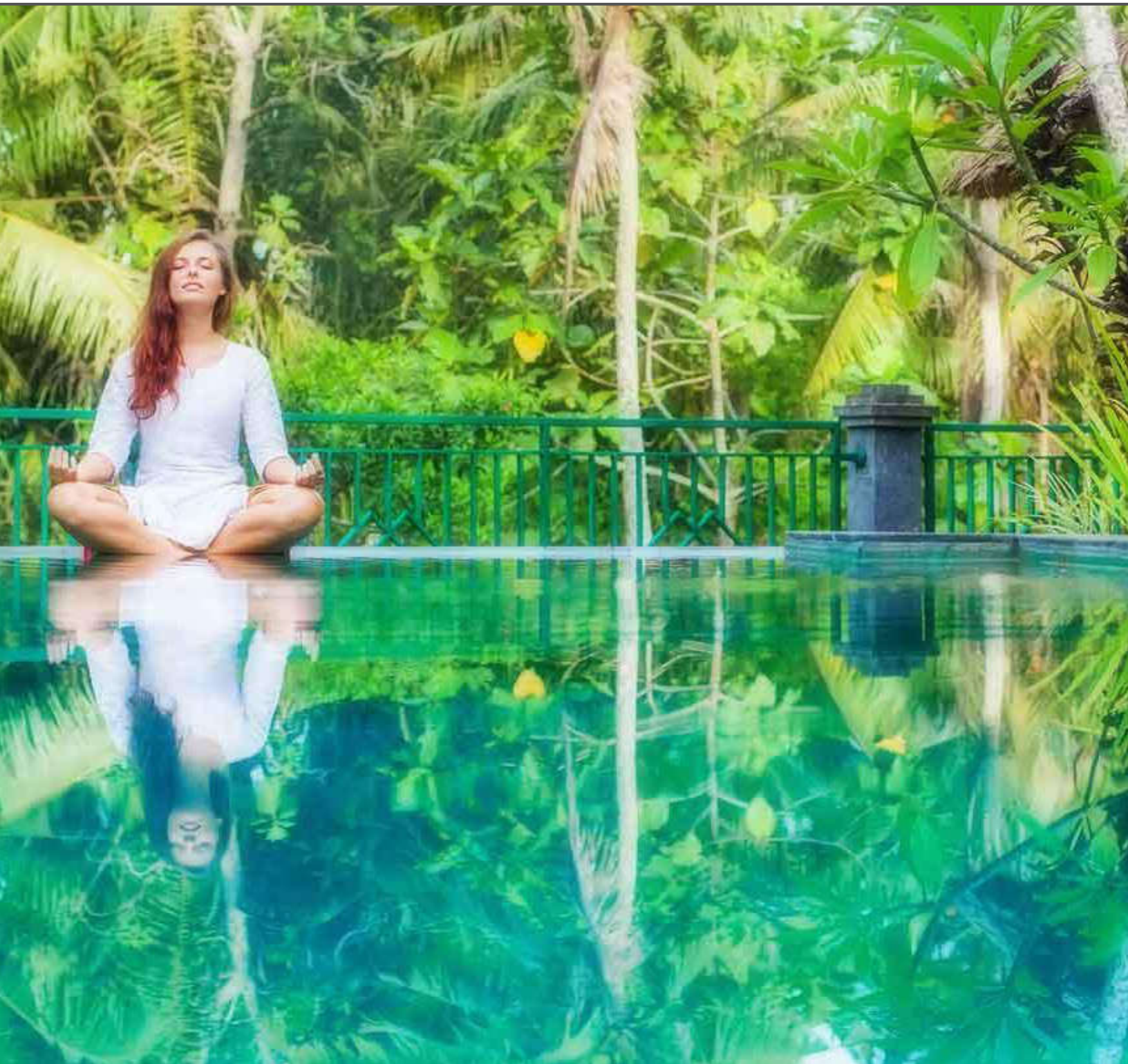
# Table of Contents



added last

INTRODUCTION:

# What is Meditation?



*When you hear the word “meditation”, what do you think? Do you think of a bearded Tibetan monk sitting on a mountaintop? Or perhaps a serene yogi sitting in a candlelit room chanting “om”?*

Well, those are certainly ways that you could meditate, but there’s a whole lot more to it than that.

Meditation can mean many different things to many different people. Perhaps an easier approach to start with is to clarify what meditation is *not*. It is not exclusive to one sector of society or a specific type of person or culture. Meditation is open-ended, free, available to anyone, and offers great benefits.

Far from being meant to empty your mind, meditation is really meant to connect you to the infinite source, beyond the mind. It’s a beautiful practice that can enrich your life, bring you closer to others, and improve your health.

Why not see what benefits this practice can offer you? This guide is intended to introduce meditation in a way that is accessible to everyone, so that you can explore this gratifying practice in a way that will nurture your life and connect you to others.



PART 1:

# Meditation 101



# Why Meditate?

If you're serious about personal development (and I'm assuming that is why you're here!), sooner or later you've got to get serious about meditation.

You can work hard to be physically fit and healthy, to reach your career and financial goals, and achieve all the trappings of worldly success—but the fact is that if you don't find peace within yourself, you'll never be truly happy.

To the untrained mind, nothing is ever good enough. The ego will always demand more.

That's where meditation comes in the picture.

Through meditation, you realize that you are not your ego, your mind, or your personality. You are the limitless ocean of pure awareness behind it. This realization is the key to experiencing true joy and contentment, and reaching your highest potential in all areas of life.

The purpose of this book is to provide a broad answer to the question “why meditate?”. In this book, I'd like to share with you some of the insights I've gained from years of practicing meditation. Whether you're a newbie, or have been at it for some time, I'm sure these tips will help you to deepen your practice, and experience new levels of inner peace and freedom.

# Getting Started: Meditation Basics

*Congratulations! If you've read this far, that indicates that you are ready to embark on the journey of a lifetime, into a meditative practice. Welcome!*

But before we get too deep, let's go over the basics to make sure we're all on the same page.

Getting started with meditation can be an intimidating prospect. There are literally dozens, maybe hundreds, of different ways to meditate—from transcendental meditation to tai chi. But for many, the easiest and most recognizable way to get started with meditation is silent, seated meditation. It's a great introduction to the practice, and simple to get started. Here's how, in 5 easy steps.



# How to Get Started With Seated Meditation in 5 Easy Steps



## Step 1: Prepare Your Space.

First things first: select your spot. Find somewhere quiet and peaceful, where you won't be disturbed during your meditation. This might be your bedroom, home office, or anywhere that you can close the door and find uninterrupted solitude. As you practice meditation, it will become easier to practice anywhere, but as you are first getting started, quiet and solitude are very beneficial.

Once you've settled on a location, make sure that your meditation spot is neat and clean. A messy, cluttered space can make it harder to relax and focus. While not required, you might also find it helpful to set the mood by lighting a candle

or stick of incense, or playing some soft, ambient music—whatever helps you get “in the zone.”

## Step 2. Set a Goal.

Starting a meditation practice can be challenging to people, especially in our fast-paced world. I find that it is extremely helpful to decide in advance how long you are going to practice, so that you have accountability from the beginning. I recommend 20-40 minutes per session, depending on how comfortable you are in your practice; adjust as needed.

It’s important to note that distractions are inevitable, and that is okay. Do what you can to minimize them (turn off your phone, let your roommates / family know what you’re up to, etc). If you are interrupted for whatever reason, just sit back down and finish your session as soon as you can.

The biggest hurdle by far, especially in the beginning, is not distractions, but your own mind and restlessness. The ego can’t stand sitting quietly, doing nothing, and it will come up with an endless list of things you should or could be doing instead. Don’t give in. Set a timer, or a stopwatch, or an alarm on your phone, and don’t dismiss your meditation until your settled-upon time has been reached.

## Step 3. Get Comfortable.

When I say “get comfortable”, I am speaking in the literal sense. Posture is important in meditation, for many reasons. It helps you breathe easier and deeper. It helps the flow and circulation of blood and energy. Perhaps most importantly, sitting properly will help to minimize aches, pains and discomfort.

There is not one correct way to sit; this depends on your body type, bone structure, and constitution. You can sit on the floor, on a cushion or a bench. You can sit in a chair, or even stand up if that’s easier. The important thing is not to slouch, or lean against anything. You should be relaxed yet poised, loose yet balanced, comfortable but alert.

Pay attention to any pain or discomfort in your back or your legs, and make adjustments as necessary. It takes time, but eventually you will find the “sweet

spot,” where your spine is erect, but not rigid; straight, but not stiff. The perfect balance of effort and ease.

## Step 4. Follow the Breath.

Bring your attention to your breathing. Focus on the sensations: the air flowing in and out of your mouth and nostrils; the rise and fall of your chest, the filling and emptying of your belly.

Don't try to control your breathing. No need to deliberately breathe slow or deep (although this will often happen on its own, as you become aware of your breathing). Just pay attention, and feel the rhythm, the ebb and flow. There are breathing exercises which we will explore later on, but for now, just observe.

## Step 5. Just Relax.

Easier said than done, right? But relaxing *is* possible, and the first step is awareness. Start by becoming aware of any places in your body where there is tension or discomfort. We have a tendency to store stress in our bodies, particularly in the legs, shoulders, back, neck and face.

Each time you breathe out, imagine that tension flowing out of your body. With every breath, release and relax, until you feel entirely comfortable and at ease. This can take some time, especially as you are first getting started. Generally, the more often you practice, the quicker and easier it will be to let go of stress and sink into a state of peace and relaxation.

## Refining Your Practice



*Okay, so you're sitting still, with your spine straight, eyes closed, totally relaxed...now what?*

First of all, congratulations! Not many people even manage to get this far. Sitting still for any length of time is an accomplishment in and of itself. It requires real discipline and willpower to overcome the restless mind, and just be still. Bravo.

Now, it's time to refine your practice so that you can really get to the real work: training the mind, and cultivating patience, inner peace, compassion and true happiness. Here are seven tips and methods you can use to refine and take your practice to the next level:

## 1. Focus Your Attention.

Every kind of meditation and inner work requires a certain degree of mental discipline, focus, and control. It's one of the simplest aspects of meditation, yet one of the most difficult to master.

Start by focusing your attention on a single thing: usually a mantra, a candle flame, or your breath—and hold to it. When your mind wanders (and it will), simply notice what distracted you (an itch, a noise, a random thought) and then gently bring your awareness back to the object of focus.

In the beginning, this seems like an exercise in futility. Your attention strays every few seconds, and it feels hopeless, frustrating, not to mention boring. But keep at it; you'll see progress sooner than you think.

Your fickle mind becomes more steady. Thoughts and other distractions fade into the background, where they come and go without pulling you away. Your mantra (or your breath, or whatever you choose) becomes an island, a sanctuary, a calm refuge that you can retreat to at anytime.

## 2. Expand Your Awareness.

Besides concentration, the other essential discipline is mindfulness. In Buddhism, these two are sometimes referred to as “the two wings” of meditation—and like wings, they work together. Opposite, but complementary. Where concentration is narrow and focused, mindfulness is expansive. Where concentration is one-pointed, mindfulness is relaxed and open, taking in all things at once.

To practice, simply let your awareness expand and grow. From feeling the breath, let it spread throughout your body. Then to your other senses. And then to your mind, your thoughts and emotions. When a thought or sense object arises that pulls you in and absorbs your attention, just notice it and let it go. Return to free and open awareness.

Learn to observe the present moment, and all it contains, without grasping at any of it. Eventually, you'll learn to rest in that state, calm and at peace, as thoughts and other phenomena rise and fall, come and go, in an eternal ebb and flow.

### 3. Practice Non-judgment.

Meditation is about cultivating pure awareness. As thoughts, and memories, and feelings flow through your awareness, try not to judge them as good or bad, right or wrong.

Simply observe the activity of the mind, without labeling it. Most importantly, don't judge yourself based on what you think. You aren't a good person for having "good thoughts," or a bad person for having "bad thoughts."

You don't get to choose or control what comes into your head. You are not your mind.

Listen to your thoughts like you'd listen to the birds, or the sound of the wind, or the ticking of the clock. Watch your memories and fantasies unfold like you'd watch a group of kids playing in a field. It's just mental words and movies. It doesn't define you. It doesn't mean anything.

### 4. Make Friends With the Mind.

In spite of popular belief, the goal of meditation is *not* to silence the mind. The mind is not an enemy to be overcome, but—with the right attitude and training—can be an ally, and a powerful tool.

Whether you are practicing concentration or mindfulness, the ceaseless stream of thought will distract you, hypnotize you, and capture your attention again and again. But if you watch closely, you will see many of the same thought patterns keep repeating, over and over.

Pay attention, for there are lessons to be learned in these patterns. These recurring thoughts (or memories, dreams, fantasies, etc) are here to teach you. They hold the keys to your mental prison—the deeply held beliefs, crippling fears, and subconscious programming that keeps you from realizing your infinite potential.

Don't resist your thoughts, even the unpleasant ones. Don't fight your mind; rather, befriend it. Welcome each thought as it comes, and invite it to reveal whatever it has to teach you. Get to know your inner workings, why you do what you do, why you are the way you are.

Look within, into the deep, dark corners of your mind, and bring them into the light. Make the unconscious, conscious.

## 5. Let Go of Your “Stories”.

Your fears, judgments, and limiting beliefs—all those recurring thought patterns you uncover during meditation—form your most basic concepts of “self” (who you think you are) and “other” (the rest of the world, the way it works, what it wants or expects from you). They literally shape your life, and how you behave and relate to others.

But they aren’t true.

They’re just stories. They seem true because you believe them. They color and distort your perception of reality, affecting how you see yourself, others, events... basically, everything. If you really want to be free, to cast off your doubts and fears, to break through your barriers and limitations, you’ve got to stop believing in them.

Again, that doesn’t mean denying them, resisting them, or fighting to make them go away. When these old stories come to your attention, simply smile and silently say, “I don’t believe you. That isn’t true.”

Then let it go. Repeat as needed.

## 6. Shift Your Identity.

Most people go through life believing that they *are* their ego, their mind, their personality. They identify with the voice (or voices) in their head, that’s constantly talking, analyzing, judging, labeling, worrying, planning, remembering...rinse and repeat, it goes on and on.

But it isn’t true.

Meditation offers us a way to free ourselves from that great lie. We can learn to stop identifying with the scared little ego, and realize the empowering truth of who and what we really are.

Again, this doesn't mean that you have to stop thinking, or silence the ego. All you have to do is make a tiny shift, from being the "thinker" of all those thoughts to simply being a spectator, an observer.

Don't say to yourself, "I think" or "I'm thinking." Thinking is happening, that's all. You don't have anything to do with it. The thoughts aren't *yours*; they are just thoughts.

When you truly realize this, you will feel a tremendous sense of freedom, like a huge weight has been lifted off your shoulders. You are not limited or defined by the thoughts and stories that are swimming around in your head.

You are not your mind, or your ego. You are the vast, pure ocean of awareness that witnesses the whole charade. You are free. You can do anything.

## 7. Surrender.

The highest, most subtle and difficult meditative skill you can learn is the art of surrender.

Meditation is about letting go; surrendering your fears, your beliefs, and ultimately surrendering your so-called "self." We have to give up what we think we know in order to realize the truth. We have to surrender who we think we are, in order to realize all that we can be.

Every time you sit down to practice, surrender every idea you have about what meditation is, what you should do, how it should feel. Even the wisest teachings, the most brilliant advice and instruction must eventually be set aside—like a raft, after you've crossed the river.

When you sit down to meditate, give yourself to the silence, to the stillness, to the unique experience of this moment, with no expectations. Be open to whatever arises. Don't measure your progress against anyone else's.

Let your practice take you where it will. Surrender.





PART 2:

# Exploring Different Methods of Meditation

# Cultivating Compassion: a Primer on Metta Meditation

Metta meditation is a specific type of meditation which I strongly believe is worth exploring. Once you've established the routine and "dug" a little deeper through the past chapters, you can begin to refine your practice. Metta meditation is accessible to everyone, and is universal. It's one of the most popular types of meditation.

In a nutshell, metta meditation is designed to help you cultivate compassion.

One of the central aims of Buddhist meditation is to cultivate compassion, or loving-kindness—and metta meditation is designed to do just that.

Metta is a word from ancient Pali (the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures) which does not translate easily into English. It is a term which conveys warmth, friendliness, non-violence, benevolence, goodwill, compassion and fellowship. The term "loving-kindness" was coined as an English equivalent.

The philosophy and practice of metta has its roots in the Buddha's Karaniya Metta Sutta, the "Hymn of Universal Love." In it, the Buddha instructs a number of his disciples how to achieve liberation and spiritual perfection by contemplating and cultivating universal love and compassion.

But before we take a look at the practice of metta, let's get a better understanding of exactly what compassion means—and the many ways that it can transform your life for the better.

## Empathy Versus Compassion

Compassion is closely related to empathy, but they are not necessarily the same thing.

Empathy is the ability to feel the suffering of another, as if it was your own; to identify with them, and put yourself in their shoes. This is certainly a necessary

component of compassion, and it might even be said that compassion is born out of empathy, is an extension of it.

The problem is, simply feeling another's suffering is not enough. We can get stuck in empathy, in that feeling of suffering, and become paralyzed. When we empathize with others, we are suffering ourselves. It can be stressful, and draining, and not conducive to our well-being—or theirs.

Compassion takes empathy to the next level. We not only feel the suffering of others, and identify with them, we also feel warmth and love for them, and a desire to alleviate their suffering.

Studies reveal that empathy and compassion actually stimulate different networks in the brain. The neural networks underlying empathy are associated with negative emotions (pain and suffering), while those underlying compassion are associated with positive feelings (warmth, connection, love and kindness).

Compassion is proactive. It motivates us to help, to serve, to make a difference. Compassion is taking our feelings of empathy, and putting them to good use.

And it turns out that helping others has tremendous benefits for us, too.

# The Science of Compassion

In recent years, a number of research studies have been conducted investigating the effects of compassion training—particularly loving-kindness meditation. These studies have documented numerous benefits in mental and emotional well-being, physical health, and social interaction.

## **Health Benefits:**

- Reduces stress
- Reduces signs of aging
- Relieves migraines
- Relieves chronic pain
- Positive changes in the brain

## **Mental & Emotional Well-being:**

- Reduces symptoms of depression
- Helps treat mental disorders (PTSD and schizophrenia)
- Improves emotional intelligence
- Improves emotion and mood regulation
- Curbs self-criticism
- Increases positive emotions

## **Social Benefits:**

- Reduces prejudice and bias toward others
- Increases feelings of social connection
- Makes you more helpful and cooperative

As you can see, compassion-based meditation brings with it many personal and interpersonal rewards. As Buddhist teachers like the Dalai Lama have long taught, compassion is an essential part of human health and well-being, and a necessary ingredient in healthy relationships—as well as a more just and humane society.

# How To Practice Metta (Loving-Kindness) Meditation in 7 Steps



*By now, you've probably been "sold" on the incredible benefits of metta meditation. Now let's take a look at how to practice loving-kindness (or metta) meditation, in 7 simple steps.*

## **1. Assume Your Meditation Position.**

Find a quiet place, where you can practice undisturbed. Assume your favorite position for meditation, whether it be sitting cross-legged on a cushion, or upright in a chair, even standing or lying down. The important thing is that your back is straight but relaxed, your spine erect but not rigid, and that you are comfortable and free from pain.

## 2. Breathe and Relax.

Metta meditation is best practiced when in a relaxed and meditative state. So start with a few minutes of simple breathing meditation. Breathe in deep, and as you do, scan your body for any stress, pain or tension. Breathe out slowly, and with each exhalation, release any stress or tension that you feel. Adjust your posture and position as needed, in order to be stable and comfortable. Keep your attention focused on your breath. With each breath, let yourself sink deeper and deeper into total relaxation.

## 3. The Metta Chant: Start with Yourself.

This is the foundation of metta practice.

**Once your body is relaxed, and your mind is serene, begin your metta practice by silently chanting these words to yourself:**

*May I be peaceful.*

*May I be happy.*

*May I be safe.*

*May I be free from suffering.*

*May I awaken to my true nature.*

The practice of metta begins with cultivating loving-kindness toward ourselves. Why? Because we cannot give what we do not have. We cannot be truly loving and compassionate to others, unless we can be truly loving and compassionate to ourselves, first.

As you chant these words, imagine yourself smiling, happy, totally free and at peace. Visualize a state of complete safety and well-being. Imagine that you are perfectly at home in a benevolent universe, at one with all creation, with no threat, no danger, and absolutely nothing to fear...

Let this chant conjure up a vision of perfect joy and serenity. Really see it, and feel it in your bones. Realize that you, as much as anyone else in the universe, deserve

love, peace and happiness. Be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself. Love and accept yourself for who you are, exactly as you are.

After 2-3 minutes, or whenever you feel ready, move on to the next step.

#### 4. Send love To Your Loved Ones.

Now it's time to turn outwards, and direct loving-kindness toward others. Start with those closest to you; your partner, your children, your parents and siblings, maybe your closest friends. The people in your inner circle, the ones who mean the most to you.

**One by one, call them to your mind, as you chant these words:**

*May you be peaceful.*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you be free from suffering.*

*May you awaken to your true nature.*

As you recite this chant, really see each of your loved ones whole and well, happy and free. Visualize them as having overcome every challenge, obstacle and hindrance. See them safe on the “other shore,” liberated from the suffering of the ego, and awakened to their true, divine, infinite Self.

The aim of metta is cultivate this vision, this desire and wish for all beings—but it is easiest to start with the ones closest to you, the people you already care deeply about.

## 5. Widen The Circle.

Now extend your practice beyond your loved ones, to include those you don't know so well.

This might be your co-workers, neighbors or other casual acquaintances, even random people that you see on the street or in the grocery store. Don't try to control this too much.

**Just relax your mind, and chant the metta blessing for whoever comes into your thoughts:**

*May you be peaceful.*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you be free from suffering.*

*May you awaken to your true nature.*

Again, as you recite these words, be conscious of their full meaning. Whoever comes into your mind, even if it's a total stranger, realize that they are a spiritual being, just like you. They deserve happiness and safety and well-being, just like you.

Cultivate a sincere desire for their health, peace of mind, and—most of all—their spiritual liberation.

## 6. Include Those Who Have Hurt or Offended You.

This might be the most challenging part of metta practice: loving your enemies.

Okay, maybe “enemies” is too strong a word—but you know what I mean. I'm talking about those people who have hurt you, wronged you, betrayed you, intentionally or unintentionally. The people that make you tense up a little bit whenever you see them or think about them. You know who they are.

**Call each one of them into your mind, one at a time, and silently chant:**



*May you be peaceful.*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you be free from suffering.*

*May you awaken to your true nature.*

As you recite these words, be aware of any resistance that you feel. Is there a part of you that doesn't mean it? Are you holding onto any trace of anger, pain, frustration or resentment?

If so, you will need to do some forgiveness work as a part of your metta practice. Read our post, [How to Forgive](#), for detailed directions. Practice forgiving those who have hurt you until you can wish them well—and really mean it.

## 7. Include All Beings.

Next, widen the circle as far as your imagination can stretch. Extend your metta practice to include all of humanity, all plants and animals, and all living things on Earth and throughout the cosmos.

**Chant the following silently to yourself:**

*May all beings be peaceful.*

*May all beings be happy.*

*May all beings be safe.*

*May all beings be free from suffering.*

*May all beings awaken to their true nature.*

As you recite these words, let your heart and mind open like a lotus flower in full bloom.

In your mind's eye, see the Earth as it spins through the vastness of space; see the countless trillions of living beings that share this beautiful planet. Imagine all seven billion people blessed with peace and safety and freedom; people of every land and culture living together, happily and harmoniously.

See every living thing as a part of the infinite whole, a sacred spark of the One Light, the One Life, the One Consciousness. Hold that vision, see it and feel it and make it real.

With practice, the words of the chant may just fall away, as you simply sit and radiate loving-kindness to all creation.

Do this for a few minutes, then conclude your meditation. The whole process should take about 20 minutes, or longer if you want. I recommend practicing twice a day, once in the morning and again in the evening.

# Off The Cushion, And Into The World

Metta meditation isn't over just because you get off of your meditation cushion.

It isn't just something to visualize and contemplate, while you're sitting on your meditation cushion. You've got to put it into action. The most important part of metta practice is what happens when you get up off the cushion, and go out into the world.

Carry that vision of peace and happiness with you throughout the day. Hold onto that feeling of love and warmth and kinship with all beings.

Every person that crosses your path, gives you an opportunity to practice metta. Give them a smile, look deep into their eyes, and wish them well. Show them some small kindness, whatever is possible given the circumstances. See them healthy and happy and free.

Ultimately, the goal of metta practice is more than cultivating compassion. It is to transcend the ego, and the sense of separation, and actually become the living embodiment of compassion.

To widen the circle of your love and caring to include everyone you meet, every creature, big and small, every tree and flower, every blade of grass. To spread peace, happiness and kindness with your every thought, word and action.

Ultimately, the goal is to simply be love. What higher aim or purpose could there be?

# Can't Sit Still? 8 Types of Moving Meditation



*One of the biggest roadblocks or reasons for not meditating that I hear is some variation of this phrase: “But I can’t sit still.”*

For many (those diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, for example), it’s a simple fact: they cannot sit still. For these folks, sitting quietly with their eyes closed for more than a few seconds is not merely a struggle—it can be outright torture.

Luckily, there are some great alternatives to traditional sitting meditation, including ways to tune into your inner stillness through movement and activity. So no one has to be left out!

If you're one of those people who think that "you just can't meditate," then you'll definitely want to check out this list. Try them all and see which one is right for you—and start enjoying the benefits of meditation in your life today!

## 1. Tai Chi

Tai Chi is a popular meditative discipline developed in China. While its exact origins are shrouded in mystery, it evolved from the ancient system of knowledge which also gave rise to Taoism, acupuncture and Kung Fu.

The formal name, tai chi chuan, loosely translates as "supreme ultimate force." It is designed to enhance and balance the flow of energy in the body (the cosmic life force called chi or qi).

Learning the art of Tai Chi begins with learning a series of simple movements, most of which are inspired by Nature—including the names, such as "grasp the bird's tail," or "eagle attacking prey." These graceful, circular motions seamlessly flow together into groups called forms or sets.

While many of these motions are similar to martial arts, in Tai Chi they are performed slowly, gently, deliberately. The emphasis is on breathing and mindfulness, becoming calm, centered and balanced—and entering a meditative state.

With time, the practitioner goes deeper into the movements, learning ever more subtle and intricate details. Going beyond movement and breath altogether, he or she learns to still the mind, to feel the flow of energy and surrender to it, and be moved by it.

Eventually Tai Chi takes you beyond duality altogether, where there is no longer any difference between stillness and motion, active and passive, self and other.. no difference between you and the rest of the universe.

You realize that you are the Chi, the ultimate supreme force.

## 2. Yoga (Asanas)

When we in the West talk about yoga, we are usually referring to asanas, or physical postures.

Yoga is so much more than that. It's actually a diverse system of practices—including meditation, self-inquiry, and breathing exercises, to name a few—all designed to help the practitioner achieve union with God (yoga literally means “to yoke” or “bind”).

Practicing asanas is just one form of yoga—but it's an excellent path for the more kinesthetic among us.

Ancient yogis developed the asanas as a way of preparing the body, developing the strength and endurance needed for long periods of fasting and meditation. Yoga is not just about getting fit and limber, as nice as that is—it's a path to self-realization.

As with Tai Chi, great emphasis is placed on mindfulness, using breath and movement to unite mind and body in the present moment. The practice not only tones and stretches the body, it makes you aware of your thoughts and your inner world in a much deeper way.

Much like good, old-fashioned sitting meditation—only you get a hell of a good workout while you're at it.

If you're one of those who can't sit still, you might want to trade your meditation cushion for a yoga mat. Start with a simple series of poses, like the “sun salutation” sequence, that you can do at home. Set aside a time every day to practice, and stick to it.

Don't worry about what you look like, or whether you're getting the poses perfect. Just focus on your breathing, on being aware of your body. If you keep at it and just do your practice, eventually that inner critic, the ego, will shut up and leave you alone.

### 3. Martial Arts

If yoga and Tai Chi are too soft and gentle for you, martial arts might be your thing.

While the martial arts are, first and foremost, disciplines for self-defense and hand-to-hand combat, they have all the elements of an active and engaged meditation practice. While training your body, you can also train your mind.

While learning the postures and movements, you can also learn to be mindful.

In fact, meditation was an important part of classical martial arts, and the cultures in which they developed. The samurai or the Shaolin monk is legendary not only for their skill in combat, but for their mastery of the mind and senses, and super-human powers of perception and concentration.

One advantage of martial arts is the sheer number of traditions and styles to choose from—from Aikido to Taekwondo, Karate to Kickboxing. With such a dizzying variety of options, you are bound to find a technique and training style that is right for you.

Whatever martial art you choose, the important thing is to set aside time to practice, and treat that time as sacred time. Prepare a practice space, and enter it reverently, with the intention to not only master a set of movements and skills, but to achieve mastery of your mind, your life, your self.

During your practice, try your best to focus on your breath, your body. Let your whole attention be absorbed by your practice. Be totally in the moment, and lose yourself in the motions.

### 4. Running

Have you ever heard of the “runner’s high”?

It’s a state of consciousness reached by athletes and long distance runners, where all mental chatter and inner turmoil falls away, leaving them feeling intensely alive and awake and present in the moment. Sounds good, right?

The runner's high is, without doubt, a meditative state. Which means that running can be so much more than just exercise—it can be meditation in motion.

Elevating your daily jog from a fitness routine to a spiritual discipline is easier than you might think. It starts with simply deciding to do it. Commit to running at the same time each day, and set it aside as sacred time.

When you're out there on the track (or the road, or the beach, wherever) begin to consciously work with your attention. Bring your mind and body together by focusing on your breath, on the rhythm of your feet, the cool rush of air upon your skin.

Expand your awareness to take in the sights and sounds around you, the sunrise or sunset, the clouds in the sky, the sound of the wind and the birds in the trees, the smell of freshly cut grass... Get out of your head, your thinking mind, and into your senses, the felt experience of the present moment.

That is mindfulness meditation. That's all there is to it.

With time it becomes easier and more enjoyable. You will start to look forward to your run as the highlight of your day, if you don't already.

## 5. Mindful Walking

On the other hand, maybe just the thought of running makes your joints ache and your stomach turn. Maybe it sounds more like a punishment than a gateway to inner peace. Hey—I get it.

Lucky for both of us, there's an easier, gentler, less painful way to meditate on the move.

It's called mindful walking, or walking meditation, and it has been popularized in recent years by Vietnamese poet, author and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

To practice, simply go for a walk (preferably outside), and focus your attention on each step, and each breath. Instead of letting your mind wander, and spending



the whole time lost in thought, bring your attention fully into the moment, to your body, your breath and your senses.

(Are you starting to notice a pattern yet?)

This is perhaps the easiest way to practice active, moving meditation. You can do it anytime, anywhere, even walking between classes at school, or to and from meetings at work. Just bring your full awareness to where you are, to this step, right now. Relax into this moment.

Nothing could be simpler.

## 6. Drawing / Painting

Ask any artist and they'll tell you that their craft keeps them sane.

It gives their life meaning, purpose and direction. For some, art is like a religion. When they're in the studio, brush dancing across the canvas, they're "in the zone," in another world, in a meditative state of mindfulness and surrender.

In the far East, they have long viewed drawing, painting and even writing as a way of meditation, a way of mindfulness and peace. The artist seeks not only to create beautiful shapes and forms, but to achieve a state of Zen—being fully here and now, spontaneous and free.

You don't have to be a professional artist to get a taste of this experience. You just have to be willing to try something new; to loosen up and relax and be willing to play.

Pick a medium—pencil or paints, even crayons will do. Prepare your space. Select a place where you can be left alone, and enjoy some peace and quiet, some uninterrupted focus. Arrange and organize your materials so everything is within easy reach.

Choose something you want to create—it can be a flower, a landscape, a bowl of fruit, or just abstract patterns of shape and color—and then just give it a try.

Don't let your ego judge and critique, and run the show. Relax. Be open and spontaneous and playful. Try and feel what wants to emerge. Let the brush or the pencil go where it will.

Have fun with it.

## 7. Playing an Instrument

Playing music is a fun and effective way to meditate.

Whatever you play, whether your fingers are fretting the strings of a guitar or skipping across the keys of a piano, it demands your complete attention. You become intensely aware of the present moment, aware of your body, your breath, your mind and emotions.

The real art of playing music goes way beyond just playing the right notes. You have to bring those notes to life with your performance. You have to play with more than just your fingers, you have to play with passion, with feeling, with soul.

Learning to do this is an introspective journey, one without end. The musician constantly seeks to get out of their ego, and become one with the song, to get out of the way and let the music flow through. When you can do this, it is a blissful experience of surrender and wholeness, connection to something greater than yourself.

If you don't know how to play an instrument, that's okay too! You can start today.

Learning to play—putting in the time and effort, the commitment to daily practice—will help you to develop the patience, focus and devotion necessary for a deep and transformative meditation practice.

## 8. Singing, Chanting or Dancing

If playing an instrument doesn't appeal to you, or just seems impossibly out of reach, don't worry. You can still use music as a way of meditation.

You can use your body and your voice as your instrument. You can sing and move along with the music, lose yourself in the rhythm and melody. You can achieve a

meditative state of relaxation, mindfulness and surrender...and you can have fun doing it!

There are many ways to do this. You can sing along with traditional Indian kirtans or Gregorian chants, or dance your heart out to a funky jazz band or electronic dance music.

Follow your heart. Do what feels good.

The important thing is not to let your ego pass judgment on how you sing, or how you dance. As with the other methods we've discussed, you've got to get out of your head and into your body. As Eminem put it, "You've gotta lose yourself in the music, the moment..."

In the end, meditation is about much more than sitting still, with eyes closed. Meditation is the inner discipline of being present, in the moment. You can practice anywhere, anytime, whatever you happen to be doing.

Just relax, and breathe, and be here now.

---

PART 3:

# Advancing Your Practice

---



# Cultivating Mindfulness

Mindfulness is all the rage these days. It's been featured in countless publications, and it's being enthusiastically embraced by everyone from therapists and CEOs to rappers and Hollywood celebrities.

But what exactly does “mindfulness” mean? Even more importantly, how do you practice mindfulness, and why should you bother? Mindfulness has risen to popularity in the West along with the practice of meditation, and the concept has its roots in the Far East, and Buddhism. But that doesn't mean that it's exotic, or difficult to understand.

It can be described very simply as the act of paying close attention to the present moment, without judging or labeling it. Or, even better: it's the pure awareness that precedes thinking, categorizing and other cognitive activity.

You practice mindfulness by simply observing your surroundings, without analyzing or over-thinking any of it. When thoughts and judgments do come up (and they will, believe me) then you simply observe your own thinking with the same calm impartiality.

The state of mindfulness, or pure awareness without thinking, puts us directly in touch with the world and our senses, instead of perceiving everything through the filter of our own mind, our own judgments. We can then see things as they really are—vibrant, alive, full of richness and variety. Food tastes better, music sounds better, and just about everything becomes more colorful and interesting.

The mindful state not only sharpen our senses, but it can also help us to free ourselves from the destructive thought patterns that cause depression, anxiety, and other common ills. Sounds pretty good, right?

But wait a minute. You might be wondering, “Do I have to be a Buddhist to practice mindfulness, or meditate for hours every day?” Good news! You don't have to be a Buddhist. And you don't have to sit and meditate in order to practice mindfulness (although it certainly doesn't hurt).

# Mindfulness From Morning till Night



*Here are 12 incredibly easy ways that you can add a little mindfulness to your day. This exercise is meant to incorporate mindfulness into the things you normally do anyway throughout the day.*

## **1. Wake Up Mindfully.**

You can practice mindfulness anytime, anywhere, but it's especially important to practice in the morning. How you start your day sets the tone for everything that comes after, so be sure to get started on the right foot.

You can practice mindfulness the instant that you wake, before you even reach over to turn off your alarm. Just bring your awareness to the here and now. What do you sense? How do you feel?

Actually listen to the tone of your alarm, the noise of your air conditioner, the sounds outside your bedroom window. Feel the heaviness of your eyelids, the tension in your back and your legs. Give your muscles a long, slow, gentle stretch. Notice all the subtle little sensations that go on as you transition from sleeping to waking.

Take it all in without running any mental commentary about it (or try to at least; it's easier said than done).

## 2. Practice In the Shower.

You can take mindfulness right into the bathroom with you, as you prepare yourself for the day ahead. The shower in particular is a perfect place to practice. Pay close attention to the temperature of the water, and how it feels as it pours over your skin, and cascades down your body. Be aware of the scent of your soap, your shampoo, conditioner, lotion, etc.

Feel the softness of your robe and your towel, the way your damp hair clings to your skin, the contrast between wet and dry. Be mindful of the taste of your toothpaste, and the feel of the bristles on your gums. Again, just practice being aware of all this with minimal mental chatter.

## 3. Be Mindful Of Your Habits.

I don't know about you, but one of the first things I do every morning is make coffee. I'm usually only semi-conscious at this point (no caffeine yet, you see), and I can accomplish the entire job completely on autopilot—from grinding my beans and starting the machine, to raising the cup to my lips for that first, magical sip.

Or, I can slow down, pay attention, and practice mindfulness. I can bring my awareness to each step of the process, how I feel as I do it (tired, cranky, craving caffeine), the thoughts making their way through my groggy head (usually just one thought: need coffee), to the aroma of fresh ground beans.

And then, the cherry on top: the first sip as it hits my tongue; the glorious, heavenly taste that awakens my mind and body, and signals the official start of my day. Aaaahhh...

The same general principle applies to any habit or routine. You can use even the most mindless habit as an opportunity to wake up, to be aware, to practice mindfulness.

## 4. Mindful Eating.

They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day. That makes it the most important time to practice mindful eating.

Start in the kitchen. Be mindful of your selection; listen to what your body is craving. Do you really need to start the day off with a heaping plate of bacon, or biscuits and gravy? Or would be better off with lighter fare, like fruits and oatmeal? Be mindful as you prepare your meal, giving your full attention to each and every step.

And lastly, be mindful as you eat. Chew slowly, and pause between mouthfuls. Savor the flavor and texture of your food, feel it as it makes it's way down to your belly, be aware of when you've had enough.

## 5. Mindful Driving.

How many times have you gotten in the car, started the engine, cranked up your stereo, and pulled out onto the road... and the next thing you know, you're at your destination.

Where did the time go? You drove the whole way, miles across town, on autopilot—lost in thought, daydreaming, zoning out, whatever you call it, you were barely paying attention to the road, and what you were doing. It's alright. It happens to all of us.

But not today. Today you are going to practice mindfulness behind the wheel.

Turn the stereo off. You don't need music or talk radio or any kind of entertainment (otherwise known as "distraction"). Just pay attention to the road, and all that there is to see. Be aware of your hands on the wheel, your feet on the peddles, the hum of the engine, the roar of the wind. Let the mental monologue go on, but don't get wrapped up in it. Stay present, in the moment.



## 6. Mindfulness While Waiting.

Speaking of driving, don't you love a good traffic jam? Nothing takes a calm, sane and friendly person and turns them into an angry, raving maniac quite like bumper-to-bumper, gridlock traffic.

But it doesn't have to be that way. You can use that time stuck in traffic to practice mindfulness. Put your car in park, sit back and close your eyes. Take a deep breath and relax. Bring your awareness to your body, your emotions. Feel any tension, frustration, boredom or anxiety as it arises.

Take another deep breath. Now let it go. Getting angry, tense or frustrated won't help you. Being in a hurry won't get you there any faster. Release it. Let it go. Just relax, and be here now.

This same principle also applies to time spent in waiting rooms, or long lines at the supermarket or the DMV. Whenever you find yourself stuck, waiting, and powerless to move things along...

Don't get mad. Be mindful.

## 7. Mindfulness At Work.

You can practice mindfulness in your office or workplace by simply focusing on one thing at a time, and giving your full attention to the task at hand.

Put your phone away, close your email, and let yourself become absorbed in what you're doing. Don't think about it—lose yourself in it. Even if your job requires you to juggle many different tasks, that just means switching rapidly from one thing to another. You can only really do one thing at a time, and the more you can zero in on in that one thing, the more productive you'll be.

And you'll also feel more peaceful, and less stressed out. Who couldn't benefit from that?

## 8. Random Mindfulness Moments.

One super effective way to be more mindful is to program random “mindfulness moments” throughout your day. Think of it as a mindfulness life hack.

The easiest way to do this is to set a timer on your watch or your phone to go off every hour or two (bonus: there’s an app for that). This alarm is your reminder to pause for a few seconds, and take a deep breath, relax, and check in. Become aware of your surroundings, notice how you feel. Spend a few moments just being mindful, before you go back to what you were doing.

If the idea of setting an alarm seems crazy or impractical, then you can use certain “mindfulness cues.” For instance, anytime someone asks you, “How are you doing?” Instead of giving an automatic answer, pause for a mindfulness moment, and then respond.

## 9. Take Time to Unwind.

When you come home at the end of the day, don’t head straight for the TV or the refrigerator. Take a few minutes just to relax and unwind, to sit and be mindful of the present moment—without reaching for comfort or distraction of some kind.

This is a great opportunity to take stock, to process the events of the day, to sort out your feelings and release any lingering stress or frustration. This way you can leave the past in the past, and go about your evening calm, clear, and present to the now.

## 10. Practice Active Listening.

When you’re with the ones you love, be it your partner, your children, your family or friends, this is a great time to practice mindfulness. Give them your undivided attention. Actively listen to what they have to say, instead of tuning them out, or just composing your response in your head.

Being present in this way not only helps us to become more mindful, it enriches our relationships, and deepens our intimacy and connection with those dear to us.

## 11. Turn Household Chores Into Mindfulness Practice.

Just like you can practice mindfulness at work by giving your complete attention to the task at hand, you can do the same thing at home, while doing the laundry, or the dishes, etc.

Don't let your mind convince you that it's boring, that it's a burden or a drag. Just be present to what you're doing, one movement, one moment at a time. Let yourself be absorbed in the repetition of it, paying attention to the tiniest details, giving no thought to what you could be doing instead.

Just be mindful, be present, and you can turn your daily chores into a meditation!

## 12. Go Unplugged.

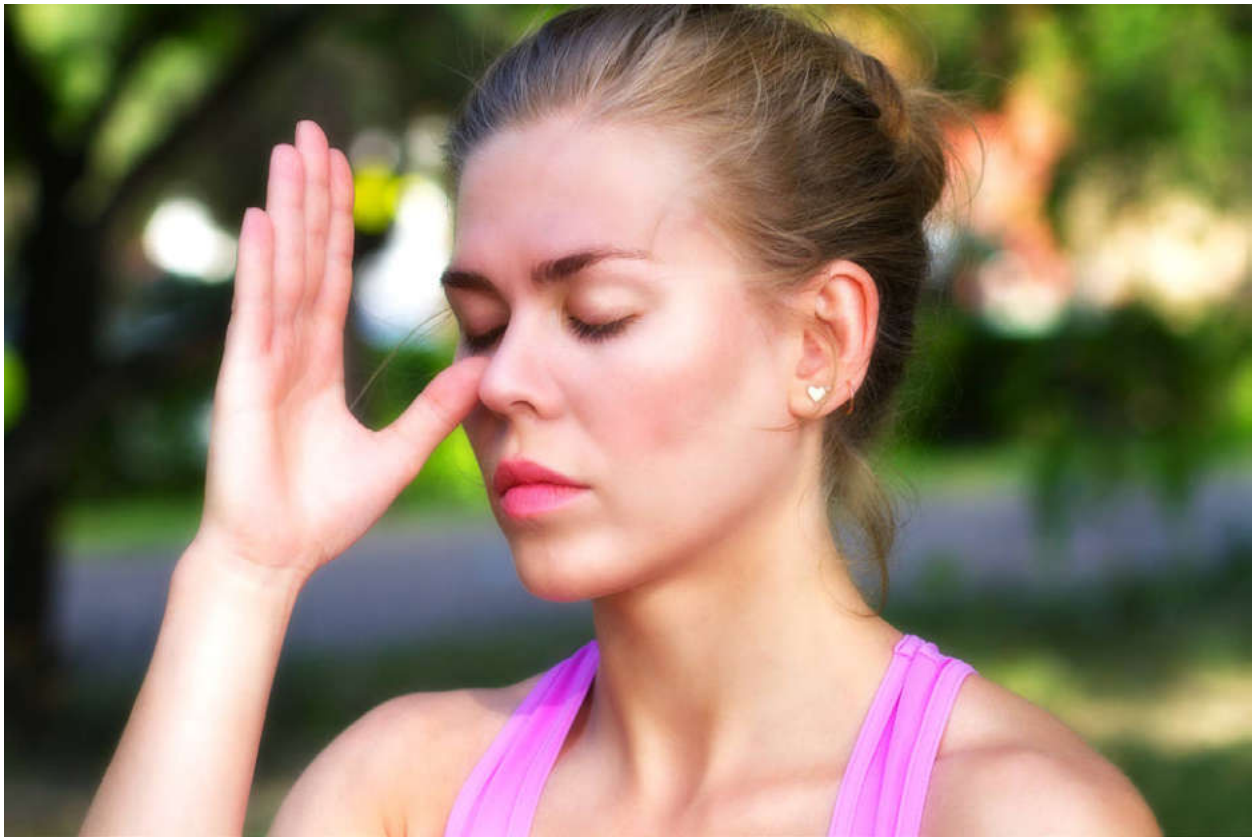
One of the best ways to practice mindfulness is to turn off all devices—TV, stereo, laptop, phone, everything—at a certain time in the evening, at least an hour or two before going to bed. This frees you from the endless distractions of electronic media, and forces you to be mindful of the present moment.

If the idea of going unplugged every night terrifies you, see a therapist. Ha, ha—just kidding! (But seriously though, people can be addicted to their devices. Don't let it happen to you!)

You can start out with just one night a week, and work your way up. Be mindful of how you feel when you've been staring at a screen for hours, vs. how you feel when you go unplugged. If you're anything like me, the difference is staggering—and more than enough to make you want to unplug more often!

Give these 12 mindfulness tricks a try, and see what a difference it can make in your life.

## The Importance of Breath



*Did you know that the English word “spirit,” has its roots in the Latin word spiritus—which means “breath”?*

We find a similar connection between breath and Spirit in many other languages. The Hebrew word ruach means “spirit, wind, breath, and/or mind.” The Greek pneuma, as well, means “air, breath, soul, vital force.”

The Sanskrit word prana refers to both the breath and the cosmic life force that permeates the universe. The ancient Hindu sages developed the yogic discipline of pranayama (“breath extension”), a series of breathing exercises designed to work with this Divine, life-giving energy.

And they aren’t the only ones. Many other cultures, like the Tibetans, the Sufis, and shamanic societies around the world, developed their own sacred breathing techniques, as a way to enter visionary states, and access spiritual dimensions.

What is this primal connection between breath and Spirit? How can breathing exercises help us to deepen our meditation practice, and experience spiritual awakening and transformation?

**Let's take a look.**

## Meditation & Breathing

In any meditation training, one of the first things the instructor will do is bring your attention to your breath. It's the primary focus to which you return, again and again, whenever the mind strays. Indeed, some methods of meditation consist of nothing but observing the breath.

**Breathing is central to meditation practice for several reasons:**

- It engages both mind and body
- It gives you an immediate and tangible object of focus, an anchor to keep you centered
- It develops focus and concentration
- It keeps you rooted in the present moment
- It relaxes your body
- It calms the mind and emotions

These last two are not as simple as they appear. That simply breathing can change our heart rate and metabolism, our mental and emotional state, offers us a significant clue.

If we can understand this, we are one step closer to understanding the power of the breath, and its important role on the spiritual path.

## Breath & Consciousness

Breathing is one of the only automatic functions of the body that we can consciously control. For instance, we cannot will our heart to beat, or control the function of our glands, or our digestive system. But we can control our breath, make it faster or slower, even stop it altogether for a time.

Yet, when we stop focusing on it, our lungs keep breathing just the same.

That's because breathing is run by the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which also regulates those other important, but unconscious, vital functions (glands, digestion, circulation etc.) that we cannot control. Here's the key: because our lungs are hardwired to the ANS, we can affect all those automatic, unconscious functions by controlling the breath.

For example, we know that taking slow, deep breaths helps us to calm down. The reason it works is because those slow deep breaths expand the bronchial tubes in your lungs, which in turn triggers the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), whose job it is to constrict them again.

The PNS is the part of your nervous system designed to conserve energy. When activated, it not only constricts those bronchioles, it decreases your heart rate, increases blood flow to the digestive tract, and generally makes you feel safe and mellow.

But the power of conscious breathing goes far beyond mere relaxation. By accelerating your breathing, and increasing your air intake, you induce changes in your body chemistry. Your blood becomes heavily oxygenated, as carbon dioxide levels drop. This often causes tingling sensations and other physical symptoms.

It can also induce powerful altered states of consciousness.

These altered states vary tremendously, based on the individual, the method, the set and setting, and other factors. But they are often deeply healing and therapeutic, and involve processing repressed emotions and traumas, confronting addictions, problematic behaviors, and other personal issues.

Life changing epiphanies are not uncommon.

Occasionally, these breathing exercises can produce visionary states, spiritual experiences of profound meaning, beauty and connection—up to and including the ultimate mystical experience of union with God, being at one with the universe.

Now the ancient connection between breath and Spirit is starting to become clear, eh?

# 7 Breathing Exercises to Enhance and Advance Your Meditation Practice



*Using breathing exercises in order to achieve personal healing or visionary states is often referred to generally as breathwork.*

And it can be the perfect aid to your meditation practice.

I have put together these 7 breathing exercises, from sources both ancient and modern, which you can learn to do at home.

Some are easy and gentle—others are extremely powerful. Try them all and see what works best for you!



## 1. Alternate Nostril Breathing

While sitting in meditation, raise your dominant hand up in front of your face, and rest the other hand on your knee. Place your thumb against the side of your nose; gently, but firm enough to block the airflow on that side. Then breathe in through the open nostril.

Now remove your thumb, and use your forefinger to close off the opposite side. Exhale, then breathe in again. Remove your finger, and block the thumb side again. And exhale.

The idea is to breathe in one side of your nose, and breathe out the other, and keep alternating. Your breathing should be easy and natural, not forced.

This practice is very effective at calming the mind, doing away with random thoughts, and bringing your attention fully into the present. It is an excellent way to begin your meditation session, or a perfect way to warm up and prepare for another, more demanding, breathing exercise.

## 2. Breath Observation

This method is perhaps the simplest of all—deceptively simple.

To practice, all you do is observe the breath without altering it in any way. Close your eyes and focus all your awareness on your nose. Breathe in and out naturally, through your nostrils, and feel each inhalation and exhalation as it passes in or out.

Don't count your breaths, don't hold your breath, don't try to breathe any slower, or faster, or deeper than normal. Just watch.

That of course, is the challenge. The mind will wander this way and that, and you will constantly catch your attention straying from the breath. But the more you practice, the steadier your focus, and the easier it becomes.

If you stay with it long enough, eventually all your thoughts will fall away, and you will experience the profound silence and stillness of pure consciousness—your true nature.

### 3. Ocean Breath

This is another easy, gentle exercise, inspired by a yogic breathing technique.

To practice, take long, slow, deep breaths through your nose. With each inhalation, fill your lungs to capacity, expanding your belly and diaphragm to take in as much air as possible. Then slowly exhale, gently contracting the muscles in your abdomen to remove every last bit of air.

When done correctly, each breath should make a sighing or hissing noise, like ocean waves rolling and crashing into the shore, and then receding. You can even visualize this in your mind, if you like. Or simply focus on your breathing.

This exercise quickly creates a state of deep relaxation. If practiced for a greater length of time, your sense of self can fall away completely, as you feel the prana, the cosmic energy of the universe flowing through you, ebbing and flowing like the tide... and realize that you are one with it.

### 4. Relaxing Breath

This practice, developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, is also called “4-7-8 Breath.” You’ll see why in a moment. He calls it “a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system,” and an effective way to deal with all sorts of stress, anxiety and tension. It even helps you fall asleep!

It’s easy to practice. Start by placing the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, just behind your front teeth. Now inhale quietly through your nose, while silently counting to four; hold your breath to count of 7; then exhale noisily through the mouth to a count of 8.

How fast or slowly you count isn’t as important as how steady you count. It’s the ratio of 4:7:8 that’s important. When you first start, you might wish to count

somewhat quickly. As you become more comfortable, you can count more slowly, taking fuller breaths and holding them longer.

## 5. Cleansing Breath

Close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose. As with the Ocean Breath method, you want to fill your lungs to capacity, expanding your chest and belly.

But this time, as you breathe in, visualize the air you breathe as a pure, white, life-giving energy. See it filling you up, from head to toe. Feel it flowing through your body, bringing new life and energy to every cell.

When you've taken in all the air you can, hold your breath for as long as it's comfortable—anywhere from 3 to 10 seconds should do it (or longer, if you're a professional swimmer, or a pearl diver, or something).

During that time, imagine that this pure white light is healing and cleansing your mind and body. Wherever there is any pain or tension, any blockage, any illness or imbalance, any fear or negativity, feel it cleansed and purified by your breath, by the pure prana energy.

Now exhale slowly through your mouth, and visualize it as a dark cloud of toxins and painful emotions. All your stress, anger, frustration and sadness, everything you want to release and let go of, it all comes spilling out with every exhalation.

See it. Feel it. Make it real.

Repeat this process as long as necessary, until you see yourself healthy and radiant and filled with pure love. This exercise can leave you feeling tremendously rejuvenated, peaceful and happy and light as a feather.

## 6. Fire Breath

This powerful technique is inspired by different yogic breathing practices from both the Hatha and Kundalini yoga traditions.

It's easy enough to begin. Breathe in and out through the nose, quickly and forcefully. Allow no pause between breaths, but rather a fast, steady, unbroken rhythm. When done properly, you should feel the muscles of your diaphragm working quickly in and out, like a bellows.

It sounds simple, but it can be very challenging to maintain this technique for any length of time. Your diaphragm may start aching, you may feel short of breath, you might just feel silly or bored and want to quit.

That's okay. Listen to your body, and don't push yourself too much, too fast. Working with this technique for even a short time will leave you feeling alert, energized, and ready for anything.

But with time and discipline, you can learn to break through that resistance, and ride the Fire Breath into powerful altered states of consciousness, where healing, and rebirth, and mystical union with the Divine, and all that good stuff happens...

## 7. Shamanic Breathing

Inspired by various modern methods of breathwork, this technique is easier to do than the Fire Breath, but just as powerful—especially when accompanied by shamanic drumming, or other high-tempo, rhythmic, trance-inducing music.

Find a safe and comfortable place, preferably an inner room where you can turn off the lights and enjoy deep darkness. Cue the music, lie down, and close your eyes. Breathe in and out through both your nose and mouth, to maximize air intake. Breathe deeper and faster than you normally would. Exactly how fast is up to you. But the faster your breath, the quicker you will start to feel the effects. What effects, you ask?

Well, tingling for starters. Then perhaps some mild trembling or muscle contractions. You might also feel a sudden, powerful and unexplainable surge of emotion—anger, sadness, pain, etc.—that can be overwhelming. Or you might start to tune out, get bored and sleepy.

All of these are different forms of resistance.

Resistance to going deeper into the psyche, and facing buried memories. Resistance to letting go of the ego, letting go of control, and surrendering to something bigger, something beyond. This resistance can be so intense that many people need a trained coach to guide them through it.

But once you break through, you enter a whole new world, of infinite possibilities.

I can't tell you exactly what you'll experience, or even whether it will be pleasant and enjoyable, or painful and frightening. But I can tell you this:

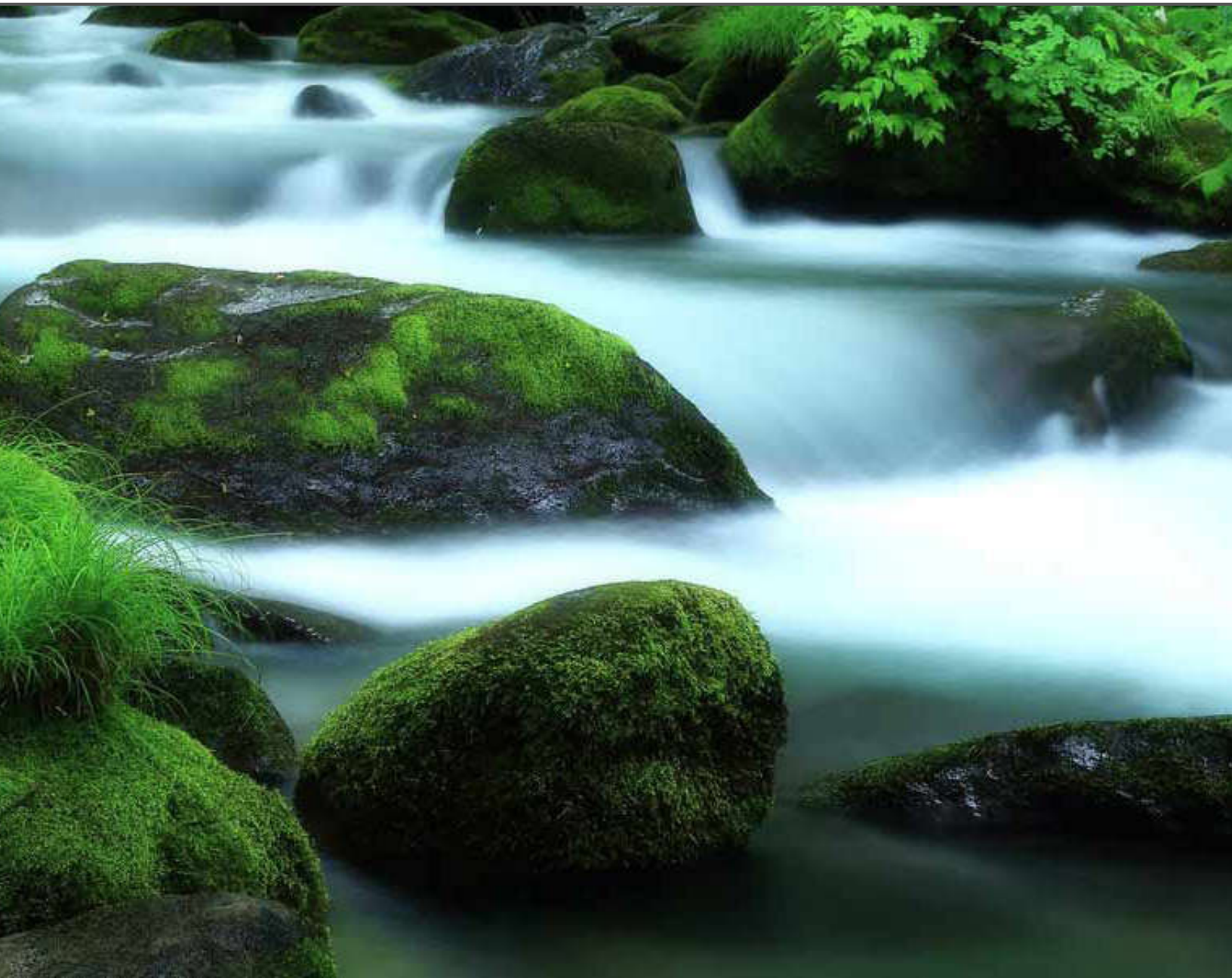
It will be exactly what you need for your healing, personal growth and spiritual awakening.

Because your soul knows—and it won't let you down.



PART 4:

# The Meditative Life



# Contemplating Impermanence and Practicing Non-Attachment

One of the central concepts of Buddhist philosophy is the notion of attachment, or clinging.

Upadana is a word from ancient Pali and Sanskrit, which is usually translated as attachment, grasping, or clinging—but its literal meaning is “fuel.”

This relates to the metaphor of the mind as being like a fire: burning, consuming, constantly in need of new experiences and sense objects to feed upon in order to sustain itself. Our attachment to the fleeting pleasures of the senses is the fuel which feeds the fire of the ego-mind.

Whereas the state of enlightenment is called nirvana—which means “to blow out.” It is in extinguishing the fire of the mind, that we experience spiritual liberation.

And just as a fire will burn out if deprived of fuel, we can silence the mind by dissolving our cravings and attachments. One of the methods the Buddha prescribed for dissolving these attachments, was the contemplation of impermanence.

## What Is Impermanence?

According to Buddhist teachings, impermanence (*annica* in Pali) is one of the three marks of existence, the fundamental qualities of life as we know it (the other two being *dukkha*, “suffering”; and *anatta*, “no-self”).

In simple terms it means that nothing lasts forever; everything is always changing.

In his famous discourse, the *Upajjhatthana Sutta* (“Subjects for Contemplation”), the Buddha gave his disciples Five Remembrances, facts of life to be reflected upon often.

### **They are:**

1. I am sure to grow old, I cannot avoid aging.
2. I am sure to get sick, I cannot avoid illness.
3. I am sure to die, I cannot avoid death.
4. I must be parted from all that is dear and beloved to me.
5. I am the owner and the heir of my actions. I will reap the rewards of my actions, for better or worse (the Law of Karma).

Everything is subject to dissolution and decay; our goods and possessions, all that we have and enjoy, even our physical bodies.

Each one of us will grow old, get sick and die. Along the way, experiences come and go—jobs, relationships, homes, possessions, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain—and we cannot hold onto any of it. They slip through our hands like sand through an hourglass.

And in the end, at the moment of death, we have to say goodbye to everything, and let go of it all.



## Why Contemplate Impermanence?

Pretty depressing stuff, right? So why should we dwell on such uncomfortable thoughts, which fill us sadness, fear and gloom?

The Buddha gave his followers the Five Remembrances as an “antidote,” to help them overcome pride, conceit, greed, lust, laziness, and other obstacles to our spiritual practice.

The first three Remembrances are designed to dissolve our youthful pride, the naïve assumption that bad things will never happen to us. When we fully realize that life is fleeting, that youth, health and vitality are short lived, we stop taking life for granted. We are more able to live in the present, to savor each moment as it unfolds.

The fourth Remembrance is designed to destroy our cravings for worldly pleasure and sensual experience. When we realize that “all things must pass,” then we stop wasting our time and energy pursuing material things—wealth, fame, status, comforts and luxuries, etc.—and instead we devote ourselves more fully to finding the lasting peace and joy of spiritual liberation.

The fifth Remembrance is designed to shake us out of our laziness and complacency. When we fully realize that each of our thoughts, words and actions bears karmic fruit, in this life and the next, then we’re no longer content to cruise through life on autopilot. We become more conscious of the consequences of our decisions, no matter how small.

Ultimately, contemplation of impermanence is meant to remove the cravings and attachments that keep us bound to Samsara (the wheel of death and rebirth). It is meant to help us to let go of ignorance and illusion, and awaken to the boundless freedom and bliss of our true nature.

# Levels of Impermanence

There are several ways we can think about impermanence, each of which can be thought of as a practice in and of itself, with many levels of meaning and insight to be uncovered...

Here are 4 different ways in which you can engage this practice.

## 1. Death

The first, and perhaps the most morbid, is the contemplation of death. Everyone that is born, is bound to die. We don't know how, we don't know when—but we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our time will come.

Think about all the different ways that people die unexpectedly: car accidents, plane crashes, diseases, heart attack or stroke, a simple trip and fall, a stray bullet... Any of the tragic stories you hear on the nightly news, could happen to you or me, at any time.

None of us is guaranteed another day of life, or even another hour or minute.

This might be depressing—at first glance. But the more we meditate on this truth, the more our fear of death falls away — and we're left with a greater appreciation of the present moment.

Ask yourself, “What if today were my last day? What would I do? Where would I go? Who would I call, or visit? What would I say?”

And the most important question of all: Why wait?

## 2. Time

We can't stop time. Good or bad, bitter or sweet, every moment, every experience, passes away. We can't hold onto it, no matter how bad we want to.

Most of us have the feeling that there isn't enough time. That the hours, the days, the weeks, the seasons pass too quickly. Here we are approaching the end of

another year, and yet it seems like only yesterday this year began. Remember those New Year's resolutions? What ever happened to them?

Meditating on the nature of time, and the transient quality of every experience, every mood and feeling, increases our ability to appreciate the present. It can help us to live in the now, to savor each moment, and make the most of life's little joys.

### 3. Change

Each one of us is constantly changing, growing and adapting. Time flows over us like water flows over the stones in a riverbed—shaping us, molding us, and changing us in ways big and small.

You are not the same person now as you were ten years ago. We think and feel quite differently at age 20 than we do at age 70. It's easy to look back on our lives and see how much we have changed over the course of years, or decades. It's harder to see all the ways we change from day to day, even moment to moment.

Think back over the course of your day. How did you feel when you woke up this morning? The ache in your back, tension in your legs, the foul taste of morning breath in your mouth... what happened to those sensations? How many thoughts, feelings, moods, ideas, insights and experiences have come and gone, just in the last 24 hours?

Now ask yourself: How much of it did you really take in? How many of those fleeting experiences were you truly, deeply present to?

### 4. Flux

It's more than our thoughts and moods that are changing. If we could look closer, we would see that the very cells of our body are constantly changing, dying and being replaced by new cells.

If we looked deeper still, down to the quantum level, we would see that infinitesimal particles are constantly emerging from—and dissolving back into—the field of potentiality. We would see that the atoms that make up the entire universe are composed mostly of empty space.

This level of contemplation helps us to see that nothing that we perceive is permanent. Everything is in a constant state of change and flux. What we think of as “solid” matter is really a kind of stabilized vibration, a flow of energy.

Or as the Buddha said, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.”

Realizing this, we can let go of our attachment to our physical bodies, to the world of form, and seek to tune into the inner dimension, beyond time and space, death and decay.

# 8 Steps to Contemplating Impermanence



*You don't have to be in a formal, sitting meditation to contemplate impermanence.*

You can reflect on these things anytime, anywhere, while doing anything. But, like most practices, it helps to set aside time to focus on it exclusively.

To get the most out of this practice, follow these 8 steps:

## **1. Sit and Relax.**

Find a quiet place to sit, and assume your favorite meditation posture. Take a few minutes to simply relax and breathe deeply, releasing any tension or stress you feel in your body.

## 2. Watch Your Breath.

Focus your attention on your breathing. Feel your chest rise and fall with each breath; feel the air as it flows in and out of your lungs; feel the brief pause between breaths, the moment of rest and stillness. Consider how each breath comes and goes, ebbs and flows like the tide.

Every breath is an exercise in impermanence.

## 3. Follow the Sensations.

Now expand your awareness to take in all of your five senses. Notice each sight, sound, smell, taste and feeling. See how fleeting they are, how quickly they arise and pass away.

Such is the nature of all phenomena in the universe.

## 4. Watch Your Thoughts.

If there's anything more subtle and slippery than physical sensations, it's the thoughts that pass through the mind like clouds through the sky.

Spend a few minutes watching as ideas, memories, moods and emotions come and go. See how they take shape, as if from nowhere; then see how they dissolve, and fade away like mist...

## 5. Contemplate All You Have Left Behind.

Look back over the course of your life, at all the things you have seen and done, the places you have been, the people you've known. Where are they now?

Think back to your younger years—the things you thought you knew with such certainty, which have since been revealed as naïve and foolish. See how the years have changed you.

What happened to the young dreamer you used to be?

## 6. Look Forward Into the Unknown.

Now, cast your thoughts forward in time. Where might you be in one year, two years, ten years? What will your life be like? How many people will come and go? How many things, great and small, good and bad, will happen to you in the years to come?

How might those experiences change you? What convictions are you so sure of now, that tomorrow will be shattered?

The world will never look or feel the same to you again as it does right now. As sure as the sun will set, and night will fall, the person you are today will pass away, and you will become someone new and different.

## 7. Embrace Your Own Death.

Now look ahead as far as you can, to the inevitable conclusion of your life's journey. You know how this story ends. No one gets out of here alive.

Everyone you know, everything you love and cherish, eventually you will have to say goodbye. All the cares and concerns of the world, which occupy so much of your thoughts, your time and energy, one day it will all mean nothing. You'll have to let it all go.

Imagine that. What does it feel like to let everything go? To sever all ties, to be freed and released even from this body that holds you, the name that identifies you, from all that you think of as you?

Sit with that feeling—scary, sad, lonely, liberating, depressing infuriating, whatever. Embrace it. Explore it at depth. Make peace with it, if you can.

## 8. Come Back to the Present.

When you bring your awareness back to the present, to the here and now, how is your perspective changed? In the cold, clear light of impermanence, what in your life is most important? What doesn't really matter at all?

Knowing that death is looming over your shoulder, an inevitable fact, what will you do with the time that you have? What if this moment were your last act, your big finale? How would you want to show up, if this moment was all that you had?

Guess what? It is.



## Enrich Your Life by Helping Others



*There are many ways in which the ego can sabotage our lives.*

Right now, I'd like to dig a little deeper, and get the heart of what the ego really is, and how exactly it keeps us from being happy and content.

And, as always, some practical advice; some action steps that you can take to help shift your thinking, and open your heart to happiness and fulfillment.

But let's start by taking a look "behind the scenes," at the inner workings of the mind, and the ego. When we say "I" or "me," what exactly do we mean?

## Who Are You, Really?

When we are born, we are given a name. From that time on, we are taught to identify with that name, and how it fits into the larger story of our culture, our family history, our gender, race, religion, economic class... the list goes on.

All these things inform our sense of “self,” our identity, our concept of who we are. But the operative word here is concept. It’s not reality, it’s just an idea, a belief.

And that’s what the ego is—a concept, a thought form. It’s not real. It’s not you.

We go through life believing that’s what we are: a name, a personality, a being separate from all other beings, from the rest of the universe. But it isn’t true. Your true self is deeply connected to the Earth, the cosmos, the great web of life. We are not separate, we are intertwined and interdependent.

What you really are is much more vast and mysterious than you have been led to believe. It can’t be defined, because it’s totally beyond words and ideas. But it can be felt, and experienced. You can realize that empowering truth directly.

But I digress.

Back to the subject of happiness, the real reason we find it so elusive is that we don’t even know who we are. We believe in a lie, a false identity. We spend all of our time and energy trying to make the “self” happy—but that self doesn’t even exist!

It’s an illusion.

The ego can never be happy, it’s desires are endless. As soon as one is satisfied, another arises to take it’s place. Like a black hole, it swallows all that you give it—money, pleasure, entertainment, thrills—and still it wants more, more, more...

## The Science of Happiness

Now, what happens when you turn the tables, and start putting others first? Well, in addition to simply being a good person and uplifting everyone around you, you also become healthier and happier, too.

**Researchers have found a number of physical and psychological benefits associated with charitable giving, volunteering, and other selfless behavior, including:**

- Lower blood pressure
- Better weight control
- Relief from chronic pain and depression
- Release of “feel good” neurotransmitters, resulting in what’s called “Helper’s high”
- Personal development & learning new skills
- Improved confidence and self-esteem
- Sense of belonging and community engagement

According to studies, people who regularly give their time and resources for a charitable cause are 25 percent more likely to be in excellent health, and more than 40 percent more likely to be happy and fulfilled in their lives.

So, as you can see, helping others just make sense. It not only makes the world a better, kinder place, it’s also a proven pathway to happiness and well-being.

## A New Way of Looking

The ego sees the world as a kind of pyramid, with the people above controlling and directing those beneath them, and reaping the benefits of their labor. The ones at the top have all the wealth and fame and power, and the ones at the bottom are stuck in poverty and servitude.

So naturally the goal is to fight and claw your way to the top. Nobody wants to be a servant or a slave—they want to be one getting served.

But as we've already seen, this way of looking is all wrong. The system is broken. It just doesn't work. Those at the bottom are miserable because they're not at the top—and those at the top aren't happy either! No amount of money or material luxury can ever satisfy the longing we feel in our souls.

We need a new way of looking at the world...

Not as a pyramid, where the many are exploited for the benefit of a few; but as a great circle, where each one plays a valuable role in supporting his neighbor, and sustaining the whole.

No one is exploited, because we are all serving each other—with joy and with dignity. The goal is not to get to the top, but to find where you fit in. To find your purpose, to be of service, to give of your time and your talent in a way that benefits the world and everyone in it.

Sounds pretty good, right? The question is: How?

# Making the Shift to Selflessness: 5 Simple Steps



*How do we make the shift? Well, it starts with you and me.*

It starts with each one of us looking within ourselves, and changing what motivates us, changing how we think and how we live our lives.

We need to stop seeing the world through the distorted lens of the ego. Stop chasing after our own desires, seeking pleasure and gain from every experience, trying desperately to fill that void that can never be filled.

We need to make the shift from our head to our heart, from ego to Spirit. Because that's who we truly are, and that's where peace, freedom and happiness is found.

Are you ready? Here are 5 ways you can start making the shift right now, today:

## 1. Look For Ways To Be Of Service

That shift in perspective begins with asking yourself one simple question.

Although we usually aren't aware of it, the ego looks at every situation and wonders, "What can I get? What's in it for me?" You can start to free yourself from the ego's clutches by asking instead,

"What can I give? What does the world need from me?"

Every change starts with awareness. To begin with, you must simply become aware of the needs of others around you, and the many opportunities you have each day to help someone, in some way.

From the moment you wake, til you close your eyes to sleep, ask yourself, "How can I help? How can I be of service?" This will retrain your mind, and help look at your life, and the world, differently.

Stop looking for ways to entertain yourself, little amusements to pass the time. That does nothing but distract you momentarily, from the boredom and the emptiness you feel. Deep down, you know that.

Give meaning to those idle moments. Look for ways that you can make a difference in the lives of those around you. You'll find that this is endlessly more fun and fulfilling than watching TV or scrolling through your Facebook feed.

I promise.

## 2. Do Something, No Matter How Small

Opportunities to serve are all around us, every moment of every day. Practicing step #1 will prove that to you in no time. The more you look for them, the more you will see.

Step two, of course, is to act on it. When you see someone who could use some help, help them.

This doesn't mean you have to become some sort of crime fighting superhero, and single-handedly solve all the world's problems. You don't have to do everything—just do something.

No matter how small.

Give your partner a foot rub, or a back massage, after a stressful day at work. Give a total stranger a smile and a compliment. Buy a cup of coffee for the homeless guy you pass on the way to work.

If someone is in crisis—in the middle of a divorce, or eviction, for instance—you can't solve that problem for them. But you can sit and listen to their story, show them some kindness, give them a word of encouragement. It can mean the world to them.

### 3. Expect Nothing In Return

We've all been the victim of a gift “with strings attached.” Sometimes kindness is little more than a thin disguise for outright manipulation. You know how that feels, and it sucks.

Other times, it's much more subtle. Like when we give with the best of intentions, and our act of kindness is not met with gratitude, but with entitlement, or even scorn. The sadness, disappointment, or anger that we feel in that situation is a result of a hidden expectation...

We expected them to be grateful.

“Expect nothing in return,” means exactly that: nothing. Not even thanks or acknowledgment. If you expect others to react a certain way to your kindness, you are setting yourself up for a let down. Some people are too hurt, too angry, too proud, or too bitter to say “thank you.” They're more likely to curse or spit at you.

Help them anyway. Help them especially—they're the ones who need it most.

Be kind just for kindness sake. This is perhaps the hardest to put into practice, but it's essential to cultivating the spirit of true generosity and selfless giving.

And enjoying the happiness and freedom that comes with it.

## 4. Be Mindful.

Probably the biggest obstacle we face when trying to make the shift, or make any change in our life, is our tendency to go through life on autopilot.

You know what I mean. We do the same thing all day, drive the same roads, talk to the same people about the same old things... it's so repetitive, that pretty soon we stop paying attention.

We zone out, drift off in our own thoughts and daydreams. I would say that we are "asleep at the wheel" more often than not!

Every once in awhile something shocks us, grabs, and pulls us back to our senses, back to the present, back to reality. But usually just for a few brief moments, then we're gone again.

But in order to help others, and be of service, you've got to be awake and paying attention.

Practice mindfulness throughout the day. Not only will you be more aware of others, ready and able to lend a hand, you'll also be more aware of the depth and richness of life, and all the incredible beauty that surrounds you.

You'll be more present in your relationships, more focused at work, more alert to opportunities for learning, growth, fun and adventure.

The world is a wondrous place—when you're paying attention.

## 5. Meditate.

Remember when I said there was a way for you to transcend the ego, and realize your true self; that you can know and experience that for yourself? I promised I would come back to that, and I'm a man of my word.

You want to get past all the ego's petty fears, and discover who you truly are, deep down? I'll tell you how:



Meditate.

Meditation is the key to unlocking your inner world, realizing your spiritual perfection, and unleashing your highest potential. Do it every day, twice a day or more. If you can't sit still, look into moving meditations.

Meditation is the path that will take you beyond the ego, beyond your little "self," and show you a new and boundless perspective, a new way of living and being in the world.

It will help you remember that we are all connected. What happens to other people (and plants and animals, and all living things) matters because they are a part of you. Your true self encompasses all beings. Their well-being is your well-being.

When you live from that place, happiness comes easily and naturally.

PART 5:  
**Staying on Track**



# Moving Forward Meditatively

Life can be hectic.

Most of us have our hands full just trying to keep it all together. We do what we have to just to get by, from day to day. We seldom stop to ask ourselves, “Why am I here? Where am I headed? What’s it all about?”

But it’s exactly this kind of inquiry we must do—and do often—if we want to live a life of purpose. It’s all too easy to fall into a comfortable routine, and just go through the motions, while days turn into weeks, turn into months...

And before you know it, years of your life have passed you by.

Don’t let that happen to you. Get clear about your passion, your dream, your vision. Set specific, achievable, step-by-step goals. Most importantly, take time every day to stop and reflect on your life, your progress, and the things most important to you.

By setting up a meditation practice, exploring breathing exercises, and observing mindfulness, you are taking proactive steps to living a quality life. However, this doesn’t mean that there won’t be times when you feel that you have lost your path. I’ve come up with this list of 14 powerful questions to ask yourself every day, to help you keep your vision in focus and keep your life on track.

# 14 Questions to Ask Yourself Every Day to Stay on Track



## Set Your Intentions In The Morning

Mornings are perhaps the most important part of each day. It sets the tone for everything that follows. Ever notice how when you oversleep, and have to rush around like crazy, you end feeling stressed and frazzled the rest of the day? Some people do that every day!

Don't be that person. It's essential to start the day of right. Make time to meditate, clear your head. Think about your life, get clear about what you want, what's most important—what you need to do to take care of business.

## 1. Who Are The Most Important People In My Life?

Life isn't just about you—your career and your personal goals. Real happiness is found in relationship, in deep, heartfelt connection to each other. This is question #1 because your loved ones are more important than your job, more important than money, more important than anything.

So keep the first things first. Take time every day to remember those closest to you, and how much they mean to you. Make sure you tell them, and—even more importantly—show them how you feel.

## 2. What Would I Do If Money Didn't Matter?

This question can really help you hone in on your passion, your purpose, your *joie de vivre*. What would you do today if you didn't have to worry about paying your bills? What would you do with the rest of your life?

Whatever the answer, that's what you should be doing anyway. That's your calling. It's why you're here. You can make it your livelihood, and you won't really be satisfied until you do.

## 3. What Steps Can I Take Today?

It's wonderful to have a dream, to have a vision, to have long term goals. But a dream is just a dream until you make it real. It doesn't mean a thing unless you act on it today.

So get real, get practical. What small steps can you take today? Write it down. Make a to-do list, an action plan. If you don't know what to do, or where to begin—find out. It can be as simple going to the library and checking out a book, or doing some research online. But do something, at least one small thing, every day.

Keep that dream alive.

## 4. How Do I Want to Show Up?

Sometimes what you do isn't as important as how you do it. It's great to have a plan, an agenda for the day. But now it's time to ask yourself, "How do I want to show up? Calm, confident, caring, assertive, charming, kind, inspiring?"

This question can apply to any situation. You probably embody different qualities at work than you do at home. But ask yourself, "How do I want to meet the world today?" Get clear about that. Feel it. Own it. Be it.

### Check In Throughout the Day

We humans are creatures of habit.

We have our daily routines, things we do so often we can do it in our sleep—and we do. We go through most of the day on autopilot, and we are asleep, in a way.

Our minds wander, we get lost in thought, and we barely pay attention to what's right in front of us. We forget all about our big plans, all those good intentions that we set this morning, and we just drift through the day in a semi-conscious state. No change, no growth—just same old, same old.

These questions are designed to wake us up, and bring us back to the present moment; where life happens, where choice happens, where change and growth and joy happen.

## 5. Where Is My Attention Right Now?

This is one to ask yourself over and over, as often as possible. In fact, it can be helpful to set an alarm to go off at random moments (there are even apps for just this very purpose). Whenever that bell rings, it's your signal to stop and ask, "Where is my attention? Am I here, now, in the moment? Or am I daydreaming?"

The more you catch your mind wandering off, the more you will realize just how often it does—and how little time you actually spend being present here and now, enjoying life.

## 6. What Am I Holding Back?

Is there something that you want to say—to your partner, your parents, your boss or coworker—but you just haven't been able to bring yourself to say it?

Is there something you've been longing to do, but you never get around to it? It doesn't have to be anything grand. Maybe there's a cute barista that you've been wanting to ask out. Or a quaint little shop you drive by every day, and wonder what's inside...

## 7. What Am I Afraid Of?

Whenever you find yourself holding back, the obvious follow up is, "What's stopping me? What am I afraid of?"

This isn't meant to be a time to self-criticize, but an opportunity for self-awareness. Seek to identify your fears and hang ups, but don't beat yourself up over them. Simply become aware of your internal process, especially the fears and doubts that stop from doing what your heart longs to do.

Awareness is the first step to freedom.

## 8. If Not Now, When?

This question is the final step in disarming the fear trap. Whatever is you're holding back, ask yourself, "If not now, when?"

This question is deeper than it appears. At first you'll probably rationalize, and make excuses. "I'm too busy right now. Maybe later, when I have more time." But you're always busy. You'll never have more time. "Later" is an illusion.

The truth is, the opportunities you let pass by today may never come again. So don't hold anything back. Say what you want to say. Do what you long to do.

If you don't do it now, odds are you never will.

## Reflect & Give Thanks In The Evening

At the end of the day, when our work is done and we're exhausted, both mentally and physically, many people just want to check out. Just collapse on the sofa and watch TV till they fall asleep.

It's the American way, right?

But not you. You've got dreams and goals; you're going places. You don't have time to watch TV. For you, the evening is a time to rest, yes—but not zone out. It's a time to reflect on the day, on what you've learned and accomplished, on what you can do better tomorrow.

It's a time to release the events of the day, and let go of any stress you might be carrying. It's a time to give thanks for all that you have, and focus on what you'd like to cultivate in your life.

## 9. What Did I Learn Today?

Never stop learning. Make it a point to expand your knowledge and broaden your horizons in some way every day—whether it's learning a second language or a new instrument. Read voraciously. Reading is food for the mind. Don't let a day go by without it.

And pause at the end of the day and look back to appreciate what you've learned. You'll be surprised at how fast and how far you've come.

## 10. What Did I Accomplish Today?

Take out your list from this morning, and see what you can cross off. Did you stick to your plan, and put forth your best effort? Or did you set your list down, and forget all about it?

Notice how it feels, good days versus bad days (you're gonna have both, we all do).

We often put off what we should do in favor of what we want, feel like doing. But if you reflect on it honestly, you'll soon realize that doing whatever you feel like leaves you feeling empty and dissatisfied. Whereas doing what you need to do, what you



know, deep down, that you should do, gives you a feeling of accomplishment, joy and contentment.

How would you rather feel? I thought so. Me too.

## 11. Did I Take Time to Relax?

Life is about balance. It can't be all work and no play. Don't overwhelm yourself with a to-do list so long you can never get it done. Set reasonable, bite-sized goals, and leave plenty of time for relaxation and recreation.

Make it a priority, not an option. It's essential for your health and happiness, so treat it that way. Look back at the end of each day and ask, "Did I relax and enjoy myself? Did I stop and smell the roses?" Hold yourself accountable.

This is your life—enjoy it!

## 12. What Did I Do For The Ones I Love?

As I said, the most important things in your life aren't things at all—they're the people who love and support you. Your relationships are the single greatest source of strength, joy and meaning in your life. Don't neglect them.

Don't let a day go by without telling the people you love how you feel about them. Don't let a day go by without doing something to show them that you care. It's the little things that we do each day that keeps love alive down through the years.

Ask yourself, "Did I take time today to nourish that love and connection?"

## 13. What Do I Need To Let Go Of?

Have you ever heard the old saying, "Don't go to bed angry"? That applies to more than just couples—it applies to any grudge or resentment you might be carrying.

At the end of each day, ask yourself, "What do I need to release?" Look for any stress or tension in your body. Search your memory for situations that left you feeling frustrated. Practice forgiveness, and letting go of that burden of anger. Forgive yourself. Let go of guilt and shame.

This question could also apply to any habits or vices you have that are hurting you or holding you back. Just take a few minutes to review your day, your life in general, and ask, “What isn’t serving me anymore? What do I need to let go of?”

## 14. What Am I Grateful For?

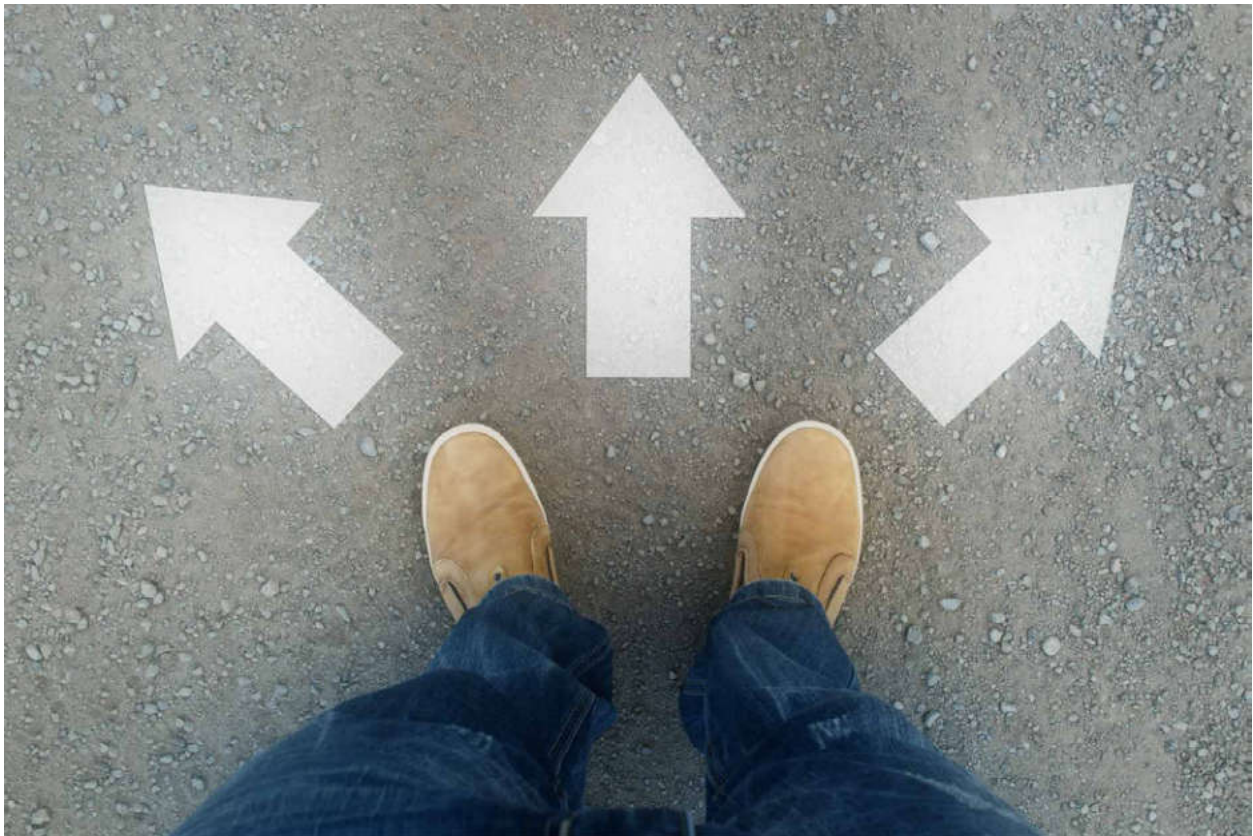
I think it’s best to end the day on a positive note. After all of the soul-searching questions above, it’s time to shift gears, and look on the bright side.

Ask yourself, “What am I grateful for?”

Before going to bed, take time to give thanks for the roof over your head, the food in your belly, the warmth and safety and comfort in which you live. Give thanks for the people in your life who matter most, for all the opportunities, chance encounters and happy accidents that have got you this far.

Remember that every day, every moment, is a gift to be grateful for. Try and make the most of it.

## In Closing



*There are all sorts of reasons why people are drawn to meditation.*

For some, the goal is to “quiet” the mind or relieve anxiety. For others, it’s to increase well-being and positivity.

No matter what brought you here, I’m glad that you came. And I’m also fairly certain that regardless of what brought you here, your journey is going to go deeper than you ever imagined.

One of the most fascinating aspects of meditation is that the longer you practice, the deeper you go. There’s literally no limit to how far you can expand on this beautiful journey. Embarking on meditation is not merely the journey of a lifetime—it is a journey that transcends lifetime and connects you with something far more vast.

This practice has the power to make your life bigger, better, and more beautiful than you ever imagined; I'm honored to have acted as your guide as you begin your journey.

*Enjoy!*