

Why Meditate?

Matthieu Ricard answers everyone's first question.

TAKE AN HONEST LOOK at yourself. Where are you in your life? What have your priorities been up till now and what do you intend to do with the time you have left?

We are a mixture of light and shadow, of good qualities and defects. Are we really the best we can be? Must we remain as we are now? If not, what can we do to improve ourselves? These are questions worth asking, particularly if we have come to the conclusion that change is both desirable and possible.

In our modern world, we are consumed from morning till night with endless activity. We do not have much time or energy left over to consider the basic causes of our happiness or suffering. We imagine, more or less consciously, that if we undertake more activities we will have more intense experiences and therefore our sense of dissatisfaction will fade away. But the truth is that many of us continue to feel let down and frustrated by our contemporary lifestyle.

The aim of meditation is to transform the mind. It does not have to be associated with any particular religion. Every one of us has a mind and every one of us can work on it.

IS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

The real question is not whether change is desirable; it is whether it is possible to change. Some people might think they can't change because their afflictive emotions are so intimately associated with their minds that it is impossible to get rid of them without destroying a part of themselves.

It is true that in general a person's character doesn't change very much over the course of their life. If we could study the same group of people every few years, we would rarely find that the angry people had become patient, that the disturbed people had found inner peace, or that the pretentious people had learned humility.

But as rare as such changes might be, some people do change, which shows that change is possible. The point is that our negative character traits tend to persist if we do nothing at all to change the status quo. No change occurs if we just let our habitual tendencies and automatic patterns of thought perpetuate and even reinforce themselves, thought after thought, day after day, year after year. But those tendencies and patterns can be challenged.

Aggression, greed, jealousy, and the other mental poisons are unquestionably part of us, but are they an intrinsic, inalienable part? Not necessarily. For example, a glass of water might contain cyanide that could kill us on the spot. But the same water could instead be mixed with healing medicine. In either case, H₂O, the chemical formula of the water itself, remains unchanged; in itself, it was never either poisonous or medicinal. The different states of the water are temporary and dependent on changing circumstances. In a similar way, our emotions, moods, and bad character traits are just temporary and circumstantial elements of our nature.

A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This temporary and circumstantial quality becomes clear to us when we realize that the primary quality of consciousness is simply knowing. Like the water in the above example, knowing or awareness is neither good nor bad in itself. If we look behind the turbulent stream of transient thoughts and emotions that pass through our minds day and night, this fundamental aspect of consciousness is always there. Awareness makes it possible for us to perceive phenomena of every kind. Buddhism describes this basic cognitive quality of the mind as luminous because it illuminates both the external world through perceptions and the inner world of sensation, emotion, reasoning, memory, hope, and fear.

Although this cognitive faculty underlies every mental event, it is not itself affected by any of these events. A ray of light may shine on a face disfigured by hatred or on a smiling face; it may shine on a jewel or on a garbage heap; but the light itself is nei-

ther mean nor loving, neither dirty nor clean. Understanding that the essential nature of consciousness is neutral shows us that it is possible to change our mental universe. We can transform the content of our thoughts and experiences. The neutral and luminous background of our consciousness provides us with the space we need to observe mental events rather than being at their mercy. We then also have the space we need to create the conditions necessary to transform these mental events.

WISHING IS NOT ENOUGH

We have no choice about what we already are, but we can wish to change ourselves. Such an aspiration gives the mind a sense of direction. But just wishing is not enough. We have to find a way of putting that wish into action.

We don't find anything strange about spending years learning to walk, read and write, or acquire professional skills. We spend hours doing physical exercises to get our bodies into shape. Sometimes we expend tremendous physical energy pedaling a stationary bike. To sustain such tasks requires a minimum of interest or enthusiasm. This interest comes from believing that these efforts are going to benefit us in the long run.

Working with the mind follows the same logic. How could it be subject to change without the least effort, just from wishing alone? That makes no more sense than expecting to learn to play a Mozart sonata by just occasionally doodling around on the piano.

We expend a lot of effort to improve the external conditions of our lives, but in the end it is always the mind that creates our experience of the world and translates this experience into either well-being or suffering.

If we transform our way of perceiving things, we transform the quality of our lives. It is this kind of transformation that is brought about by the form of mind training known as meditation.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is a practice that makes it possible to cultivate and develop certain basic positive human qualities in the same way that other forms of training make it possible to play a musical instrument or acquire any other skill.

Among several Asian words that translate as "meditation" in English are *bhavana* from Sanskrit, which means "to cultivate," and its Tibetan equivalent, *gom*, meaning "to become familiar with." Meditation helps us to familiarize ourselves with a clear and accurate way of seeing things and to cultivate wholesome qualities that remain dormant within us unless we make an effort to draw them out.

So let us begin by asking ourselves, "What do I really want?"



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out of life? Am I content to just keep improvising from day to day? Am I going to ignore the vague sense of discontent that I always feel deep down when, at the same time, I am longing for well-being and fulfillment?" We have become accustomed to thinking that our shortcomings are inevitable and that we have to put up with the setbacks they have brought us throughout our lives. We take the dysfunctional aspects of ourselves for granted, not realizing that it is possible to break out of the vicious cycle of exhausting behavior patterns.

From a Buddhist point of view, the traditional texts say every being has the potential for enlightenment just as surely as every sesame seed contains oil. Despite this, to use another traditional comparison, we wander about in confusion like a beggar who is simultaneously rich and poor because he does not know he has a treasure buried under the floor of his hut. The goal of the Buddhist path is to come into possession of this overlooked wealth of ours, which can imbue our lives with the most profound meaning.

TRAINING THE MIND

The object of meditation is the mind. For the moment, it is simultaneously confused, agitated, rebellious, and subject to innumerable conditioned and automatic patterns. The goal of meditation is not to shut down the mind or anesthetize it, but to make it free, lucid, and balanced.

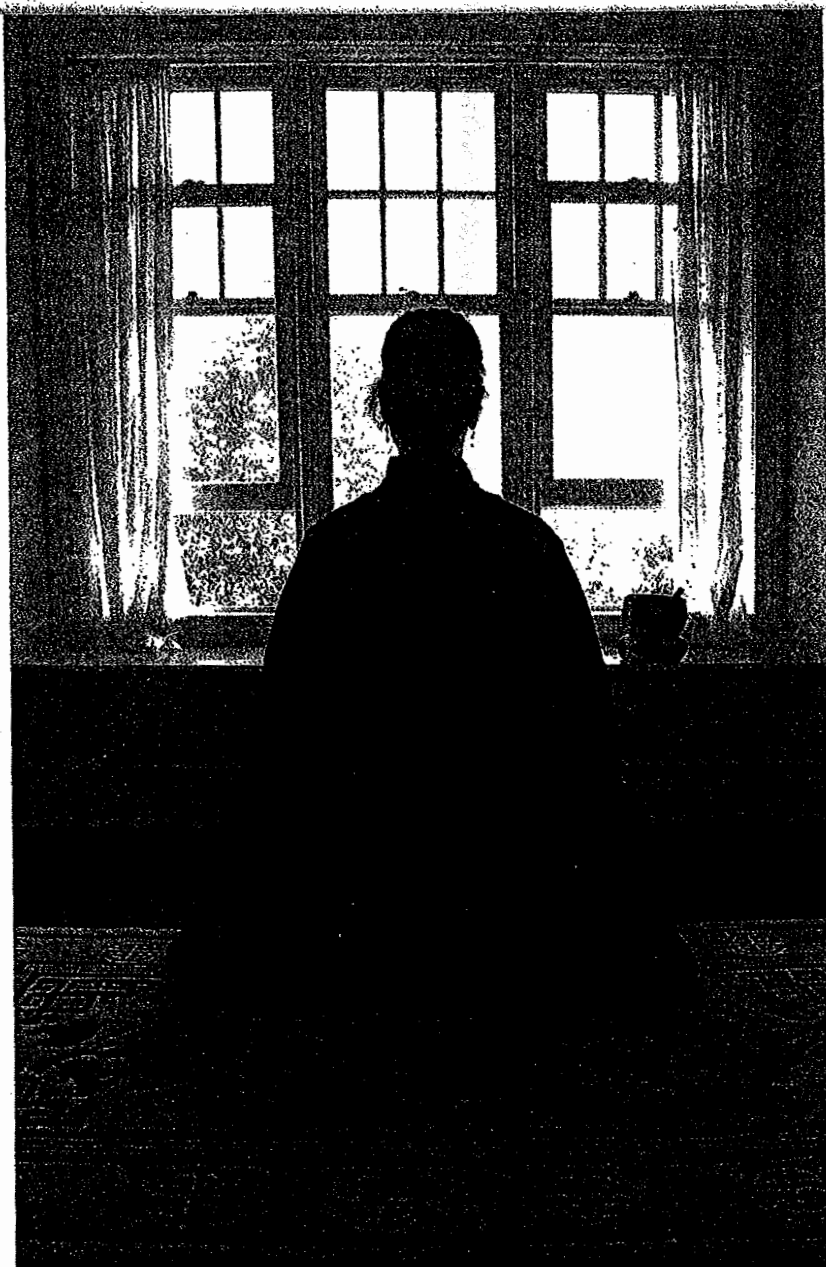
According to Buddhism, the mind is not an entity but rather a dynamic stream of experiences, a succession of moments of consciousness. These experiences are often marked by confusion and suffering, but we can also live them in a spacious state of clarity and inner freedom.

We all well know, as the contemporary Tibetan master Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche reminds us, that "we don't need to train our minds to improve our ability to get upset or jealous. We don't need an anger accelerator or a pride amplifier." By contrast, training the mind is crucial if we want to refine and sharpen our attention; develop emotional balance, inner peace, and wisdom; and cultivate dedication to the welfare of others. We have within ourselves the potential to develop these qualities, but they will

not develop by themselves or just because we want them to. They require training. And all training requires perseverance and enthusiasm, as I have already said. We won't learn to ski by practicing one or two minutes a month.

REFINING ATTENTION AND MINDFULNESS

Galileo discovered the rings of Saturn after devising a telescope that was sufficiently bright and powerful and setting it up on a stable support. His discovery would not have been possible if his instrument had been inadequate or if he had held it in a trembling hand. Similarly, if we want to observe the subtlest mechanisms of our mental functioning and have an effect on them, we absolutely must refine our powers of looking inward. In order to do that, our attention has to be highly sharpened so that it becomes stable and





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clear. We will then be able to observe how the mind functions and perceives the world, and we will be able to understand the way thoughts multiply by association. Finally, we will be able to continue to refine the mind's perception until we reach the point where we are able to see the most fundamental state of our consciousness, a perfectly lucid and awakened state that is always present, even in the absence of the ordinary chain of thoughts.

WHAT MEDITATION IS NOT

Sometimes practitioners of meditation are accused of being too focused on themselves, of wallowing in egocentric introspection and failing to be concerned with others. But we cannot regard as selfish a process whose goal is to root out the obsession with self and to cultivate altruism. This would be like blaming an aspiring doctor for spending years studying medicine before beginning to practice.

There are a fair number of clichés in circulation about meditation. Let me point out right away that meditation is not an attempt to create a blank mind by blocking out thoughts—which is impossible anyway. Nor is it engaging the mind in endless cogitation in an attempt to analyze the past or anticipate the future. Neither is it a simple process of relaxation in which inner conflicts are temporarily suspended in a vague, amorphous state of consciousness. There is not much point in resting in a state of inner bewilderment.

There is indeed an element of relaxation in meditation, but it is connected with the relief that comes from letting go of hopes and fears, of attachments and the whims of the ego that never stop feeding our inner conflicts.

MASTERY THAT SETS US FREE

The way we deal with thoughts in meditation is not to block them out but to

indefinitely, but to let them arise and dissolve by themselves in the field of mindfulness. In this way, they do not take over our minds. Beyond that, meditation consists of cultivating a way of being that is not subject to the patterns of habitual thinking. It often begins with analysis and then continues with contemplation and inner transformation. To be free is to be the master of ourselves. It is not a matter of doing whatever comes into our heads, but rather of freeing ourselves from the constraints and afflictions that dominate and obscure our minds. It is a matter of taking our life into our own hands rather than abandoning it to the tendencies created by habit and mental confusion. Instead of letting go of the helm and just allowing the boat to drift wherever the wind blows, freedom means setting a course toward a chosen destination—the destination that we know to be the most desirable for ourselves and others.

THE HEART OF REALITY

Meditation is not, as some people think, a means of escaping reality. On the contrary, its object is to make us see reality as it is, right in the midst of our experience, to unmask the deep causes of our suffering, and to dispel mental confusion. We develop a kind of understanding that comes from a clearer view of reality. To reach this understanding, we meditate, for example, on the interdependence of all phenomena, on their transitory character, and on the nonexistence of the ego perceived as a solid and independent entity.

Meditations on these themes are based on the experience of generations of meditators who have devoted their lives to observing the automatic, mechanical patterns of thought and the nature of consciousness. They then taught empirical methods for developing mental clarity, alertness, inner freedom, altruistic love, and compassion. However, we cannot merely rely on their words to free ourselves from suffering. We must discover for ourselves the value of the methods these wise people taught and confirm for ourselves the conclusions they reached. This is not purely an intellectual process. Long study

of our own experience is needed to rediscover their answers and integrate them into ourselves on a deep level. This process requires determination, enthusiasm, and perseverance. It requires what Shantideva calls "joy in virtuous ways."

Thus we begin by observing and understanding how thoughts multiply by association with each other and create a whole world of emotions, of joy and suffering. Then we penetrate the screen of thoughts and glimpse the fundamental component of consciousness: the primal cognitive faculty from which all thoughts arise.

LIBERATING MONKEY MIND

To accomplish this task, we must begin by calming our turbulent mind. Our mind behaves like a captive monkey who, in his agitation, becomes more and more entangled in his bonds.

Out of the vortex of our thoughts, first emotions arise, and then moods and behaviors, and finally habits and traits of character. What arises spontaneously does not necessarily produce good results, any more than throwing seeds into the wind produces good harvests. So we have to behave like good farmers who prepare their fields before sowing their seeds. For us, this means the most important task is to attain freedom through mastering our mind.

If we consider that the potential benefit of meditation is to give us a new experience of the world each moment of our lives, then it doesn't seem excessive to spend at least twenty minutes a day getting to know our mind better and training it toward this kind of openness. The fruition of meditation could be described as an optimal way of being, or as genuine happiness. This true and lasting happiness is a profound sense of having realized to the utmost the potential we have within us for wisdom and accomplishment. Working toward this kind of fulfillment is an adventure worth embarking on. ♦

Adapted from Why Meditate?: Working with Thoughts and Emotions, by Matthieu Ricard.

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Eating Mindfully

A few years ago, I asked some children, "What is the purpose of eating breakfast?" One boy replied, "To get energy for the day." Another said, "The purpose of eating breakfast is to eat breakfast." I think the second child is more correct. The purpose of eating is to eat.

Eating a meal in mindfulness is an important practice. We turn off the TV, put down our newspaper, and work together for five or ten minutes, setting the table and finishing whatever needs to be done. During these few minutes, we can be very happy. When the food is on the table and everyone is seated, we practice breathing: "Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile," three times. We can recover ourselves completely after three breaths like this.

Then, we look at each person as we breathe in and out in order to be in touch with ourselves and everyone at the table. We don't need two hours to see another person. If we are really settled within ourselves, we only need to look for one or two seconds,

T H I C H N H A T H A N H

and that is enough to see. I think that if a family has five members, only about five or ten seconds are needed to practice this "looking and seeing."

After breathing, we smile. Sitting at the table with other people, we have a chance to offer an authentic smile of friendship and understanding. It is very easy, but not many people do it. To me, this is the most important practice. We look at each person and smile at him or her. Breathing and smiling together is a very important practice. If the people in a household cannot smile at each other, the situation is very dangerous.

After breathing and smiling, we look down at the food in a way that allows the food to become real. This food reveals our connection with the earth. Each bite contains the life of the sun and the earth. The extent to which our food reveals itself depends on us. We can see and taste the whole universe in a piece of bread! Contemplating our food for a few seconds before eating, and eating in mindfulness, can bring us much happiness.

Having the opportunity to sit with our family and friends and enjoy wonderful food is something precious, something not everyone has. Many people in the world are hungry. When I hold a bowl of rice or a piece of bread, I know that I am fortunate, and I feel compassion for all those who have no food to eat and are without friends or family. This is a very deep practice. We do not need to go to a temple or a church in order to practice this. We can practice it right at our dinner table. Mindful eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding that will strengthen us to do something to help hungry and lonely people be nourished.

P E A C E I S E V E R Y S T E P

In order to aid mindfulness during meals, you may like to eat silently from time to time. Your first silent meal may cause you to feel a little uncomfortable, but once you become used to it, you will realize that meals in silence bring much peace and happiness. Just as we turn off the TV before eating, we can "turn off" the talking in order to enjoy the food and the presence of one another.

I do not recommend silent meals every day. Talking to each other can be a wonderful way to be together in mindfulness. But we have to distinguish among different kinds of talk. Some subjects can separate us: for instance, if we talk about other people's shortcomings. The carefully prepared food will have no value if we let this kind of talk dominate our meal. When instead we speak about things that nourish our awareness of the food and our being together, we cultivate the kind of happiness that is necessary for us to grow. If we compare this experience with the experience of talking about other people's shortcomings, we will realize that the awareness of the piece of bread in our mouth is much more nourishing. It brings life in and makes life real.

So, while eating, we should refrain from discussing subjects that can destroy our awareness of our family and the food. But we should feel free to say things that can nourish awareness and happiness. For instance, if there is a dish that you like very much, you can notice if other people are also enjoying it, and if one of them is not, you can help him or her appreciate the wonderful dish prepared with loving care. If someone is thinking about something other than the good food on the table, such as his difficulties in the office or with friends, he is losing the present mo-

T H I C H N H A T H A N H

ment and the food. You can say, "This dish is wonderful, don't you agree?" to draw him out of his thinking and worries and bring him back to the here and now, enjoying you, enjoying the wonderful dish. You become a *bodhisattva*, helping a living being become enlightened. Children, in particular, are very capable of practicing mindfulness and reminding others to do the same.





Simple but Not Easy

While it may be simple to practice mindfulness, it is not necessarily easy. Mindfulness requires effort and discipline for the simple reason that the forces that work against our being mindful, namely, our habitual unawareness and automaticity, are exceedingly tenacious. They are so strong and so much out of our consciousness that an inner commitment and a certain kind of work are necessary just to keep up our attempts to capture our moments in awareness and sustain mindfulness. But it is an intrinsically satisfying work because it puts us in touch with many aspects of our lives that are habitually overlooked and lost to us.

It is also enlightening and liberating work. It is enlightening in that it literally allows us to see more clearly, and therefore come to understand more deeply, areas in our lives that we were out of touch with or unwilling to look at. This may include encountering deep emotions—such as grief, sadness, woundedness, anger, and fear—that we might not ordinarily allow ourselves to hold in awareness or express consciously. Mindfulness can also help us to appreciate feelings such as joy, peacefulness, and happiness which often go by fleetingly and unacknowledged. It is liberating in that it leads to new ways of being in our own skin and in the world, which can free us from the ruts

we so often fall into. It is empowering as well, because paying attention in this way opens channels to deep reservoirs of creativity, intelligence, imagination, clarity, determination, choice, and wisdom within us.

We tend to be particularly unaware that we are thinking virtually all the time. The incessant stream of thoughts flowing through our minds leaves us very little respite for inner quiet. And we leave precious little room for ourselves anyway just to be, without having to run around doing things all the time. Our actions are all too frequently driven rather than undertaken in awareness, driven by those perfectly ordinary thoughts and impulses that run through the mind like a coursing river, if not a waterfall. We get caught up in the torrent and it winds up submerging our lives as it carries us to places we may not wish to go and may not even realize we are headed for.

Meditation means learning how to get out of this current, sit by its bank and listen to it, learn from it, and then use its energies to guide us rather than to tyrannize us. This process doesn't magically happen by itself. It takes energy. We call the effort to cultivate our ability to be in the present moment "practice" or "meditation practice."

*

Week 2 – Home Assignments

	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
20 minute stretch and mini-body scan*	√		√		√		√
20 minute sitting		√		√		√	
2-minute chill out*							
Awareness of pleasant & unpleasant moments							
Awareness of what we take in (food, drink, sights, sounds)							
readings							

*mini-meditation CD

Comments, questions and concerns about any of the meditations:

Pleasant moments – Describe the experience. What did you see, hear or do that felt pleasant to you? What did it feel like in the body? Can you savor that moment?

Unpleasant moments - Describe the experience. What did you see, hear or do that felt unpleasant to you? What did it feel like in the body? Can you let go of that moment?

Using the breath to slow things down – Describe experiences or circumstances that came up this week that you were able to use breath awareness to slow things down?

Things that I take in – Observe and write down things that you consume such as food and drink, and other things that you take in visually such as movies, TV show, what you read. Also what do you hear, intentionally and unintentionally?

The point of this is to become more and more mindful of things we consume on automatic pilot. When we see this, we have an opportunity to decide whether it is helpful to us or not. If not, maybe we can choose not to take in certain foods, drinks, sights and sounds. Only when we're paying attention in real time, do we have that opportunity to make decisions to help ourselves.

Thoughts on Thoughts
Scott L. Treatman, DO, MPH

- Can we differentiate the stories we tell ourselves from the direct experience of life
- Step back and observe the "waterfall" of thoughts that cascade down. Or, do we drown in our thoughts
- Observe the true nature of mind
- When we don't examine or question our thoughts, we believe them.
- There's a whole drama department in our head. See if you can catch the play
- Notice when unhealthy repetitious thoughts arise. Be mindful of these patterns and how it impacts our perception
- Be curious about your "top ten tunes". Is it time to let them go?
- Use the breath. It's not just for oxygenation any more!

Disentangling

- Apply mindfulness to the stories we spin. Can we step out and just observe?
- Continued mindfulness of thoughts makes them more tentative, less solid and not so believable
- Consider the connection between suffering and our thoughts. Suffering is tied to how tightly we hold onto our beliefs.
- When we work with thoughts, we can:
 - acknowledge the content
 - not buy into them, and let them go
- Use discernment to decide whether some thoughts are worthwhile and skillful vs. not helpful
- Mindfulness creates space to see if our thoughts stem from fear, aversion, clinging, ego, aggression, and anxiety. These seeing/knowning provides insight and opportunity.



Doing Non-Doing

Non-doing has nothing to do with being indolent or passive. Quite the contrary. It takes great courage and energy to cultivate non-doing, both in stillness and in activity. Nor is it easy to make a special time for non-doing and to keep at it in the face of everything in our lives which needs to be done.

But non-doing doesn't have to be threatening to people who feel they always have to get things done. They might find they get even more "done," and done better, by practicing non-doing. Non-doing simply means letting things be and allowing them to unfold in their own way. Enormous effort can be involved, but it is a graceful, knowledgeable, effortless effort, a "doerless doing," cultivated over a lifetime.

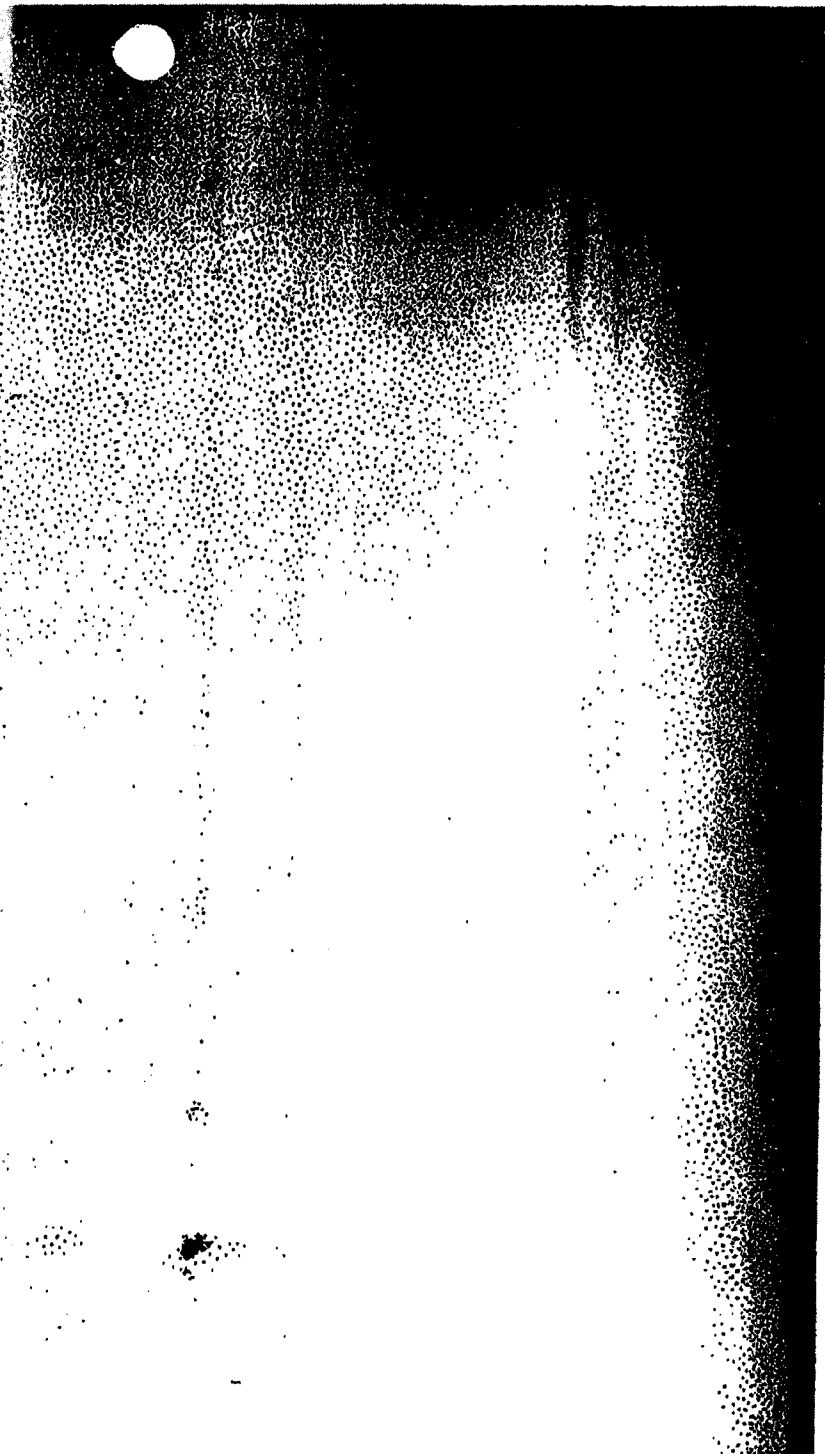
Effortless activity happens at moments in dance and in sports at the highest levels of performance; when it does, it takes everybody's breath away. But it also happens in every area of human activity, from painting to car repair to parenting. Years of practice and experience combine on some occasions, giving rise to a new capacity to let execution unfold beyond technique, beyond exertion, beyond thinking. Action then becomes a pure expression of art, of being, of letting go of all doing—a merging of mind and body in motion. We thrill in watching a superb

performance, whether athletic or artistic, because it allows us to participate in the magic of true mastery, to be uplifted, if only briefly, and perhaps to share in the intention that each of us, in our own way, might touch such moments of grace and harmony in the living of our own lives.

Thoreau said, "To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts." Martha Graham, speaking of the art of dance, put it this way: "All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment vital and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused."

No meditation masters could have spoken truer. We can apprentice ourselves to this work, knowing full well that non-doing is truly the work of a lifetime; and conscious all the while that the doing mode is usually so strong in us that the cultivating of non-doing ironically takes considerable effort.

Meditation is synonymous with the practice of non-doing. We aren't practicing to make things perfect or to do things perfectly. Rather, we practice to grasp and realize (make real for ourselves) the fact that things already are perfect, perfectly what they are. This has everything to do with holding the present moment in its fullness without imposing anything extra on it, perceiving its purity and the freshness of its potential to give rise to the next moment. Then, knowing what is what, seeing as clearly as possible, and conscious of not knowing more than we actually do, we act, make a move, take a stand, take a chance.



Some people speak of this as flow, one moment flowing seamlessly, effortlessly into the next, cradled in the streambed of mindfulness.



TRY: During the day, see if you can detect the bloom of the present moment in every moment, the ordinary ones, the "in-between" ones, even the hard ones. Work at allowing more things to unfold in your life without forcing them to happen and without rejecting the ones that don't fit your idea of what "should" be happening. See if you can sense the "spaces" through which you might move with no effort in the spirit of Chuang Tzu's cook. Notice how if you can make some time early in the day for being, with no agenda, it can change the quality of the rest of your day. By affirming first what is primary in your own being, see if you don't get a mindful jump on the whole day and wind up more capable of sensing, appreciating, and responding to the bloom of each moment.



Meditation: Not to Be Confused with Positive Thinking

Our ability to think the way we do differentiates our species from all others and is miraculous beyond compare. But if we are not careful, our thinking can easily crowd out other equally precious and miraculous facets of our being. Wakefulness is often the first casualty.

Awareness is not the same as thought. It lies beyond thinking, although it makes use of thinking, honoring its value and its power. Awareness is more like a vessel which can hold and contain our thinking, helping us to see and know our thoughts as thoughts rather than getting caught up in them as reality.

The thinking mind can at times be severely fragmented. In fact, it almost always is. This is the nature of thought. But awareness, teased out of each moment with conscious intent, can help us to perceive that even in the midst of this fragmentation, our fundamental nature is already integrated and whole. Not only is it not limited by the pot-pourri of our thinking mind, awareness is the pot which cradles all the fragments, just as the soup pot holds all the chopped-up carrots, peas, onions, and the like and allows

them to cook into one whole, the soup itself. But it is a magical pot, much like a sorcerer's pot, because it cooks things without having to do anything, even put a fire underneath it. Awareness itself does the cooking, as long as it is sustained. You just let the fragments stir while you hold them in awareness. Whatever comes up in mind or body goes into the pot, becomes part of the soup.

Meditation does not involve trying to change your thinking by thinking some more. It involves watching thought itself. The watching is the holding. By watching your thoughts without being drawn into them, you can learn something profoundly liberating about thinking itself, which may help you to be less of a prisoner of those thought patterns—often so strong in us—which are narrow, inaccurate, self-involved, habitual to the point of being imprisoning, and also just plain wrong.

Another way to look at meditation is to view the process of thinking itself as a waterfall, a continual cascading of thought. In cultivating mindfulness, we are going *beyond* or *behind* our thinking, much the way you might find a vantagepoint in a cave or depression in the rock behind a waterfall. We still see and hear the water, but we are out of the torrent.

Practicing in this way, our thought patterns change by themselves in ways that nourish integration, understanding, and compassion in our lives, but *not* because we are trying to make them change by replacing one thought with another one that we think may be more pure. Rather, it is to understand the nature of our thoughts *as thoughts* and our relationship to them, so that they can be more at our service rather than the other way round.

If we decide to think positively, that may be useful, but it is not meditation. It is just more thinking. We can as easily become a prisoner of so-called positive thinking as of negative thinking. It too can be confining, fragmented, inaccurate, illusory, self-serving, and wrong. Another element altogether is required to induce transformation in our lives and take us beyond the limits of thought.

Week 3 – Home Assignments

	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
Alternate 20 minute "Metta" meditation with any other 20 minute meditation	√		√		√		√
Other 20 minute sitting (write down which one)		√		√		√	
2-minute chill out*							
Observe difficult encounters or communications – see below							
Continued awareness of food and drink consumption							
readings							

*mini-meditation CD

Communications – Observe:

- Reactivity while communicating
- Stories that we spin based on what is seen or heard
- Physical reactions during a conversation
- Try using breath awareness to reduce reactivity and stay centered

Food and drink consumption – Observe:

- Labels for nutritional value – make healthy choices
- If making an unhealthy choice, ask yourself, why? Write down reasons for unhealthy choices
- Eat food mindfully, try slowing down
- Alcohol & substances – observe the urges to drink, smoke or use other substances. Try just experiencing the urge without giving in. See if you can moderate usage. Write down the experience of the urge; the types of thoughts, the physical sensations, and what you did about them.

Comments, questions and concerns about any of the meditations:

Comments and observations about communications:

Comments about food and drink intake:

Using the breath to slow things down – Describe experiences or circumstances that came up this week that you were able to use breath awareness to slow things down?

Cultivating Self-Compassion
Scott L. Treatment, DO, MPH

Self-compassion may sound a little selfish. Here we are spending time and effort learning and developing ways to be more OK with ourselves and perhaps not feel so bad when we are down for whatever reason. What appears to be selfish is really a selfless quality. When we can tolerate feelings like fear, shame, and failure in ourselves, we set the stage for empathy and compassion for others. Opening our heart to ourselves is a major step towards having an open heart to others, even some of the "jerks" in our lives.

The practice of self-compassion allows us to weather the criticisms (self and by others) and is a stable way to regulate our emotions. We don't need to build ourselves up with faux affirmations. We can relax into the truth of our experience with some softness and kindness. This isn't about positive thinking.

Some ways to cultivate self-compassion:

- Physical
 - How do we care for our physical body?
 - What is our physical experience under stress?
 - What ways can you think to release your own physical tension that builds up in the body?
- Allowing
 - Thoughts – distinguish between thinking vs. just having thoughts and allowing them to come and go
 - Noting
 - Consider a phrase or mantra to say to yourself
 - Visualization – waterfall or sky metaphor
 - Contemplate your mortality
 - Befriend feelings
- Emotions
 - Stop fighting them
 - Acceptance
 - Observe all the stories that you make up
 - Which emotions do you feed?
- Connecting with others
 - Be aware self-isolating
 - Be with loved ones
 - Service to others
- Spiritual growth
 - Sense of gratitude
 - Cultivate ways to get/stay grounded in own reality
 - Take yourself more lightly
 - Letting go of ego, or at least recognizing when ego takes over

Week 4 – Continue down the Mindful Path

- **See local resource sheet**
- **Booster classes - TBD**
- **Set up formal practice schedule for yourself**
 - **For the next month, choose from your list of formal practices and schedule them on your calendar**
 - **Try to make it a routine rather than squeeze it in**
 - **Consider attending a regularly scheduled sitting at SU's Hendricks Chapel or the Zen Center**
 - **Form a weekly or monthly sitting group with others who meditate**
 - **Use mini-meditations often**
- **Informal practice**
 - **Mindfulness of everyday activities**
 - **Remember to pay attention to the 5 physical senses, observe any judgments that arise or stories that are spun. Observe your relationship to pain; can they be felt just as sensations without the aversion that usually gets in our way of functioning.**
 - **Remember the distinction between having thoughts and thinking. Use your skills to observe thoughts and let go of thoughts that are not helpful.**
 - **Remember not to believe everything you think.**
 - **Suffering = pain x resistance. Pay attention to all the resistance that arises, especially to many of the circumstances beyond our control. See if you can loosen your grip on how you think/want things to be and relax into how things really are.**

Mindfulness & Mastery at Crouse Hospital

Scott L. Treatman, DO, MPH

- Set an intention each day to be mindful
- Use a variety of cues to remind yourself:
 - The ring of the phone
 - Each time you log on to your pc
 - Sitting down at a meeting
 - Walk mindfully down the halls or on stairs
 - A poem or a note on your desk
- 'Stop & check' in with yourself, frequently:
 - What's happening in this moment?
 - What am I feeling?
 - Am I on automatic pilot?
- Conversing with others:
 - Am I really listening?
 - Am I judging?
 - Am I practicing right speech?
- In the midst of (what seems like) chaos:
 - Use the breath to slow things down – experience the inbreath and outbreath
 - Be aware of reacting vs. responding
 - Use mindfulness to see the grasping and aversions that pull you off center
 - Stay focused on top priority issues
 - Relate to others with fairness, respect, empathy and compassion
- Balance
 - What really matters in your life?
 - Does work define you?
 - Maintain awareness of what you take in:
 - Ingestion
 - Eyes – violence, news, beauty
 - Ears – noise pollution, gossip, insults
 - The mind – self talk
 - Physical activity
 - Exposure to nature
 - A conscious relationship

boston.com

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

Stress relief through meditation gains focus

The Boston Globe

By Maggie Jackson | April 9, 2006

Joanne Graham felt so stressed recently at work that she was having trouble prioritizing and could feel a headache coming on. Graham, a benefits analyst at Dunkin' Brands in Canton, didn't really feel like going to a lunchtime seminar that day on meditation that she'd signed up for. But she and a colleague dragged each other there, and returned refreshed after an hour of learning to settle and focus their minds.

"It was amazing how focused we were when we got back," says Graham, who'd never tried meditation before the session last month. "When we came back, the two of us were so calmed down and pumped to get back to work."

Ancient meditation techniques are finding new appeal among employees who have grown tired of the frazzled, pressured tenor of work today. More than half of employees say they typically have to work on too many tasks at once, and nearly 30 percent often or very often don't feel they have the time to process or reflect on their work, the Families and Work Institute reported last year.

Statistics on workplace meditation aren't available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it's catching on as an antidote to stress and burnout, especially because companies are more open in general to cost-saving alternative health practices. More than 60 percent of companies offer wellness programs, up from 53 percent in 2001, and one-third of workplaces offer acupuncture or coverage for this treatment, up from 18 percent five years ago, according to the Society for Human Resource Management.

Along with Dunkin' Brands, local companies such as Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, Reebok International Ltd., Delta Dental Plan of Massachusetts, and Flir Systems Inc., a maker of thermal imaging cameras, have offered meditation classes to their employees.

"Meditation just doesn't sound so weird anymore," says Iris Sokol, the president of Fitness Works at Work, a Sherborn firm that operates fitness and wellness programs for Dunkin' Brands and other companies. "Meditation is now looked at as another tool to deal with stress."

About 20 employees — from a security guard to a manager or two — gathered at noon in a nondescript Dunkin' conference room to hear Richard Geller, an eerily calm workplace meditation consultant, teach ways to concentrate and be "mindful."

Some at first joked nervously, but then grew attentive as Geller slipped off his shoes, played lilting Native American flute music, and talked them through simple techniques such as focusing on their breath or the energy between the palms of their hands.

"Forget about this room and the person sitting next to you," said Geller, a former software developer who heads MedWorks Corporate Meditation Programs of Brookline. "Focus on your breath like your life depends on it."

When Kathy Scurti, an associate brand manager, fretted that she couldn't stop a flood of thoughts from distracting her and was getting a headache from the effort, Geller gently corrected her. The aim is not to empty your mind, he said, but instead to focus on one thing and then placidly watch intruding thoughts drift by. Trying to stop your thoughts completely by meditating "is like trying to put out a fire with gasoline," he said.

Other employees noted the experience was "hard work," but many found it soothing and there were requests for more classes.

It's hard to say whether one or more meditation seminars will make the 600 employees at Dunkin' Brands'

headquarters more productive, but the company's 18-month-old fitness center, as well as a greater emphasis on employee wellness, is apparently helping keep healthcare costs down, says Melinda DelCioppio, the benefits manager. Health insurance premiums at the company rose just 6 percent this year, one of the smallest hikes in recent years, she said.

For individuals, too, even a small dose of wellness can have an effect. In the two weeks since attending a meditation seminar taught by Geller at Harvard Pilgrim, employee Jeri Bryant has been meditating daily for half an hour in a darkened room before bedtime. She says the technique is helping her sleep through the night more often.

"It has worked and I have noticed," says Bryant, an asthma health educator who is using meditation to combat the stresses of a long commute and an intense work day.

Graham, meanwhile, is hoping to meditate regularly, perhaps at her desk or at home on Friday afternoons. "Maybe we should do this every other day, stop for a minute and slow down," says Graham, a few days after the class. "Fifteen minutes of meditation made me able to do hours worth of work."

Maggie Jackson's Balancing Acts column appears every other week. She can be reached at maggie.jackson@att.net. ■

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Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2006

How to Get Smarter, One Breath at a Time

By Lisa Takeuchi Cullen

At 4:30, when most of Wall Street is winding down, Walter Zimmermann begins a high-stakes, high-wire act conducted live before a paying audience. About 200 institutional investors—including airlines and oil companies—shell out up to \$3,000 a month to catch his daily webcast on the volatile energy markets, a performance that can move hundreds of millions of dollars. "I'm not paid to be wrong—I can tell you that," Zimmermann says. But as he clicks through dozens of screens and graphics on three computers, he's the picture of focused calm. Zimmermann, 54, watched most of his peers in energy futures burn out long ago. He attributes his brain's enduring sharpness not to an intravenous espresso drip but to 40 minutes of meditation each morning and evening. The practice, he says, helps him maintain the clarity he needs for quick, insightful analysis—even approaching happy hour. "Meditation," he says, "is my secret weapon."

Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress. But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory.

One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain's cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of 20 men and women who meditated for just 40 minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not. Unlike in previous studies focusing on Buddhist monks, the subjects were Boston-area workers practicing a Western-style of meditation called mindfulness or

insight meditation. "We showed for the first time that you don't have to do it all day for similar results," says Lazar. What's more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age.

The forms of meditation Lazar and other scientists are studying involve focusing on an image or sound or on one's breathing. Though deceptively simple, the practice seems to exercise the parts of the brain that help us pay attention. "Attention is the key to learning, and meditation helps you voluntarily regulate it," says Richard Davidson, director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin. Since 1992, he has collaborated with the Dalai Lama to study the brains of Tibetan monks, whom he calls "the Olympic athletes of meditation." Using caps with electrical sensors placed on the monks' heads, Davidson has picked up unusually powerful gamma waves that are better synchronized in the Tibetans than they are in novice meditators. Studies have linked this gamma-wave synchrony to increased awareness.

Many people who meditate claim the practice restores their energy, allowing them to perform better at tasks that require attention and concentration. If so, wouldn't a midday nap work just as well? No, says Bruce O'Hara, associate professor of biology at the University of Kentucky. In a study to be published this year, he had college students either meditate, sleep or watch TV. Then he tested them for what psychologists call psychomotor vigilance, asking them to hit a button when a light flashed on a screen. Those who had been taught to meditate performed 10% better—"a huge jump, statistically speaking," says O'Hara. Those who snoozed did significantly worse. "What it means," O'Hara theorizes, "is that meditation may restore synapses, much like sleep but without the initial grogginess."

Not surprisingly, given those results, a growing number of corporations—including Deutsche Bank, Google and Hughes Aircraft—offer meditation classes to their workers. Jeffrey Abramson, CEO of Tower Co., a Washington-based development firm, says 75% of his staff attend free classes in transcendental meditation. Making employees sharper is only one benefit; studies say meditation also improves productivity, in large part by preventing stress-related illness and reducing absenteeism.

Another benefit for employers: meditation seems to help regulate emotions, which in turn helps people get along. "One of the most important domains meditation acts upon is emotional intelligence—a set of skills far more consequential for life success than cognitive intelligence," says Davidson. So, for a New Year's resolution that can pay big dividends at home and at the office, try

this: just breathe

this: just breathe.

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