

MINDFUL RESILIENCE – 8-week distance learning course

Your meditation/mindful practice: Each week you will receive an email with detailed instructions regarding both formal and informal meditation for that week. Below are some notes which will help refresh some of the basic ideas.

Formal Meditation: You are your attention

Formal meditation is the meditation in which we stop other activities in order to become fully present and practice managing our attention. Our attention in mindful meditation is intentionally and fully in the present moment. Typically, we anchor our attention in the present moment using one of the following: the breath, the senses (sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell) or bodily sensations. Formal meditation is usually done sitting or lying down.

Think of your formal meditation as a “sacred” space in which you take care of yourself through the practice of managing your attention in a proven beneficial way. If you want to see some benefit then you should practice formal meditation daily, for at least 15 minutes a day. As you progress in your practice you should, if possible, increase this time spent meditating up to forty minutes a day.

Before we start, some common traps and misunderstandings which can sabotage your meditation.

1. **I cannot concentrate:** The main trap for people learning to meditate is the belief that successful meditation means a mind empty of thoughts. It doesn't. Your job is simply to keep your attention on, for example, your breath. It is inevitable that you will at some time lose yourself in your thoughts. Some days - a lot of thoughts, other days - less. Think of your mind rather like an “autovía/motorway/freeway” and your thoughts like cars, like traffic. Sometimes there are a lot of cars; other days - hardly any. What does this mean? Simply that today my mind is more active or today my mind is less active. Accept the state of your mind with open curiosity and attitude of kindness towards yourself.
2. **“I don't have the time; I'm far too busy to meditate every day.”** This is the most common excuse for not meditating. If we meditate every day then we start the day with our minds and bodies better prepared to respond appropriately to the tasks and challenges of the day. We save more time than we spend meditating because we are less likely to make mistakes, less likely to have to apologise for losing our patience and less easily distracted. Thus - more productive.
3. **“I keep forgetting.”** You will have a day or even some days (usually in the beginning) when urgent events take over (even though this is when a bit of formal meditation would really be useful - in these busy moments). You forget everything and you simply get dragged along by your autopilot. It may be later, as you are getting ready for bed, that you realize that you haven't done anything, been mindful once during the day. The tendency, when you realize this, is to listen to the Rational Mind: “This isn't for me,” “I'm useless at this.” Instead of disappearing in a mindless diatribe, remember, the fact that you have realised that you have been mindless the whole day means that you are now back to the present. So take advantage of the moment to bring yourself fully to the present. Make a meditation of getting ready for bed, for example.
4. **Feeling frustrated, irritated during a meditation:** This means that you are trying too hard. It means that you are trying to get a result, (eg, feeling more relaxed or being thought-free).



Remember that meditation is not about getting a result; it is simply practicing, keeping your attention where you want it (in the present moment). Your attitude is one of open curiosity, kindness to yourself and with a sense of humour. We do it simply to do it. It may be that some days we find great peace; others, we simply notice how active the mind is. The following story illustrates the attitude to adopt:

A student went to his meditation teacher and said, “My meditation is horrible! I feel so distracted; my legs ache or I’m constantly falling asleep. I feel irritated. I can hardly keep still. It’s just horrible!”

“It will pass,” the teacher said matter-of-factly. A week later, the student came back to his teacher. “My meditation is wonderful! I feel so aware, so peaceful, so alive! It’s just wonderful!” “It will pass,” the teacher replied matter-of-factly.

Do not get attached to any result: Remember that whatever happens, whatever arises is just fine. We will always see the information the meditation contains, so long as we remember to observe what is happening with open curiosity, kindness to ourselves and a with a touch of humor.

Main points for Formal Meditation

1. **Where?** A quiet place where you can be without interruptions. At home I have two places I meditate according to the weather. One is outside on the porch; the wonderful views fill my heart with joy. When the weather is too bad then – indoors.
2. **When?** I recommend first thing in the morning. It will help you with your day. As an example I give you my routine. I Wake up. Before getting up I take a few deep breaths and do a rapid body scan (just a few minutes). Then I get up, go to the toilet, shower (with cooler water if required to make sure that I am sufficiently awake). Then straight to my meditation. Once I finish the meditation, as best I can, I prepare my breakfast mindfully bringing to it the peace of my meditation. First thing in morning is not always possible. We each have to find the moment that works best for us.
3. **General:** Once you have established the best place and time, try to establish your meditation ritual by going through the same steps in the same order each day. This helps to establish the right attitude at the beginning.

Meditation - the steps for establishing your formal meditation:

1. **Posture:** Assuming you have taken care of the where and when, then the next step is to adopt a dignified posture. For the sitting meditation, this means back straight and shoulders back. Imagine your spine a pile of golden coins perfectly stacked one on top of the other. Your legs should be uncrossed, your hands on your thighs palms down or palms up - whichever feels more comfortable for you. I also suggest that your mouth be slightly open. This makes sure that you don’t clench your jaw. It also helps to place the tip of your tongue on the gum in your palate at a point immediately above and behind your upper front-teeth.
2. **Dedication:** Now with all your heart make the following dedication: “I dedicate any benefit or merit that might accrue from this meditation to all beings. May they enjoy happiness and the causes of happiness. May they be free of suffering and the causes of suffering.”
3. **The breath:** Now is the time to take three deep breaths: inhale counting 4 seconds; then hold counting 2 seconds and exhale counting 6 seconds. You may want to reduce or increase the time according to your lung-capacity. Start with 4:2:6 which in my experience, is a good place for most students to start with. These breaths are slightly exaggerated to give you sounds and

sensations on which to focus. Your attention should be on the sensations you create: the sound, the feeling in your ribs, mouth, throat etc. Also notice the null point between the exhale and inhale; it is that moment of no air-movement between the out-breath and the in-breath. Once you have done this then return to breathing naturally.

4. **Coming Home:** We now create that feeling of returning home after being away. Coming home is an agreeable feeling: coming back to your home where you can be who you are; where you don't have to do anything; just be. In this case, your mind is the traveller and your body is the home. When we "come home" we bring our mind and body to the same place. To centre ourselves a little more, we bring our attention to the sensations in our feet (eg.in our socks and shoes pressing against the ground, bottom pressing against the chair and the sensations related to our breathing).
5. **Calmly abide:** Now just enjoy calmly abiding, allowing everything to settle for a few minutes.

Now you are ready to begin your meditation.

Informal Meditation – being present in your life

Informal meditation is the intentional act of bringing your attention to what you are doing in the present moment - whatever that might be: washing the dishes, brushing your teeth, driving your car, taking a pee, taking a shower, listening. There are only two ways to be: Mindful or Mindless. The Mindless state is the state in which we are lost in our thoughts. It is the default setting for most people. In this state we do not respond to situations directly - just to our thoughts, concepts and models about that situation. Because we are mindless in this moment, it is most likely that we will respond in "autopilot mode", unconsciously responding as we always do. By gently and kindly training ourselves, we can start to develop the habit of being more present/mindful in our lives. When we do this with an attitude of open curiosity (rather than judging) then we see and respond to what is there, rather than to our thoughts/models about what is there. This gives us greater flexibility in our perception and opens the door to a more appropriate response. A useful way to develop this is to program your mobile phone to sound every hour. When the alarm sounds stop and adopt a dignified posture. Simply notice the sensations of your feet pressing against the floor and your bottom pressing against the chair. Take a deep breath. Notice: "What am I thinking? What are my thoughts? What do I feel? What are my feelings? What physical sensations are present in my body?" Really notice all of this with open curiosity, kindness towards yourself and a sense of humor. Then take two or three deep abdominal breaths and return to whatever you were doing.

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