

Obstacles in Meditation and How to Overcome Them

Every person who learns to meditate will encounter obstacles. My experience is that for many newcomers it is often during the second or third week of practice when the rational mind becomes bored with being out of the spotlight and tries to distract us from our meditation by putting obstacles in the way. This is completely normal. Below is a list of obstacles and suggestions for solutions that work. If you have any other difficulties or want to clear up any doubts, do not hesitate to get in touch with me,

Boredom: Everyone gets bored at some time while meditating. It's not surprising if we consider that we are accustomed to busy lives full of distraction and action. We always feel that stuff should be happening. We like to feel that we are getting somewhere. The most important thing is to see boredom for what it is. If you get too involved in it, it is easy to lose interest in meditation. But, if you use meditation to explore your boredom and discover what is really happening, the thoughts and feelings associated with it, then things will be interesting again.

Feeling Sleepy: We live in a sleep deprived society thus we are all tired at some level. It is not strange that it is so easy to fall asleep while meditating. Most of us do not sleep enough and we use stimulants such as caffeine to keep going. Many people live in a state of constant sleep-deprivation. If you feel sleepy, don't fight it. Just try and keep your attention fully in the present. Try mediating in the mornings when you first wake up. If necessary, have a cold shower to properly wake yourself up. It sounds like torture but it is actually quite invigorating! If it happens very often, try another time in the day or sit a little straighter.

Being afraid: Sometimes the mind can be a dark place that is scary. Sometimes, it may seem too difficult to have to sit down and face difficult thoughts and feelings. As we meditate we cut down noise and perhaps connect with hitherto unexposed/hidden feelings. Feelings are always better visible than hidden. While a feeling goes unseen or unrecognized, it still sits there in the back of the mind - an invisible motor of our "autopilot". Allowing it to surface is the first step to be able to let it go and move forward with your life.

Feeling "insecure": "Is this meditation resilience practice really working? Am I doing it correctly? Maybe I should try something else?" It is inevitable that doubts creep in. What happens many times however, is that we begin to believe in these doubts which are no more, nor less, just part of our constant mental chatter. We forget that no matter what the thoughts are - they are only thoughts. The important thing is to realize that you have been distracted and nothing else - the content of the thoughts does not matter - and turn your attention gently to the object of your meditation (breathing/senses).

Feeling restless: You will be relieved to know that practically everyone feels uncomfortable or fidgety at some time during their meditation. It is usually because the person is trying too hard to be still. If you need to adjust your posture or scratch yourself, feel free to do so but try not to move too much because movements can become a distraction too.

Feeling sad: Meditation as we continue to practice over time will cultivate in us and get us settled in a deep and essential sense of feeling "OK". But do not fear that you are doing something wrong if you are not jumping for joy. Sadness is a natural human emotion and it is not unusual to drop a tear during meditation. In fact, there is something almost pleasant about it - a feeling of letting go of something perhaps.

Feeling alone: This constant distraction from "having to do something" often prevents us from seeing how we truly feel. When you stop and meditate - even if it is for a short time - feelings, hitherto invisible, can rise to the surface. The feeling of being alone is one of the most common - even if we are not alone. Simply give the feeling the space it needs and observe it. Where in your body do you feel the feeling? What is the feeling?



Feeling angry: Call it impatience, frustration, irritation - even anger; it's all the same thing actually - only with different intensities. It is usually because we are trying too hard. Notice what you are trying to force, what are the associated thoughts and feelings. It may also occur when you touch anger related to something else in your life. Anger is not a very positive emotion; therefore, we tend to suppress it - but the more firmly we suppress it, the more insistently it returns. (Remember, what you resist persists). So, as much as possible, allow anger to be present, be aware of it with open curiosity. Give it the space and time it needs to unravel and dissipate.

Feeling desire: Desire can manifest itself in different ways - from a soft but persistent little voice that whispers in the back of the mind to mental "shrieking". "I have to have it right now!" Remember that desire is the mind trying to flee from the here and now. But, as we continue to flee from the here and now, we will never find inner peace. So, let the desire have its moment under the sun, whilst you look at it with open curiosity, kindness to yourself and a sense of humour. If you adopt this attitude then it won't drag you away.

Author: Geoffrey Molloy

You can contact me here:
geoffrey@esfacilsisabescomo.com

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