



CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS

Beginning or Deepening a Personal Meditation Practice

1. The real meditation is how you live your life.
2. In order to live life fully, you have to be present for it.
3. To be present, it helps to purposefully bring awareness to your moments – otherwise you may miss many of them.
4. You do that by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to whatever is arising inwardly and outwardly.
5. This requires a great deal of kindness toward yourself, which you deserve.
6. It helps to keep in mind that good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, the present moment is the only time any of us are alive. Therefore, it's the only time to learn, grow, see what is really going on, find some degree of balance, feel and express emotions such as love and appreciation, and do what we need to do to take care of ourselves – in other words, embody our intrinsic strength and beauty and wisdom – even in the face of pain and suffering.
7. So a gentle love affair with the present moment is important.
8. We do that through learning to rest in awareness of what is happening inwardly and outwardly moment by moment by moment – it is more a “being” than a “doing.”
9. Formal and informal meditation practices are specific ways in which you can ground, deepen, and accelerate this process, so it is useful to carve out some time for formal practice on a regular daily basis – maybe waking up fifteen or twenty minutes earlier than you ordinarily would to catch some time for ourselves.
10. We bring awareness to our moments only as best we can.
11. We are not trying to create a special feeling or experience – simply to realize that this moment is already very special – because you are alive and awake in it.
12. This is hard, but well worth it
13. It takes a lot of practice.
14. Lots of practice
15. But you have a lot of moments – and we can treat each one as a new beginning.
16. So there are always new moments to open up to if we miss some.
17. We do all this with a huge amount of self-compassion.
18. And remember, you are not your thoughts or opinions, your likes or dislikes. They are more like weather patterns in your mind that you can be aware of – like clouds moving across the sky, – and so don't have to be imprisoned by.
19. Befriending yourself in this way is the adventure of a lifetime, and hugely empowering.
20. Try it for a few weeks – it grows on you.





SUGGESTIONS FOR DAILY PRACTICE

1. A good place to start cultivating mindfulness is in the body.
2. Befriending your breath is a good idea, since you can't leave home without it – and it is so related to our states of mind.
3. See if from time to time you can just feel the breath moving in and out of your body.
4. Locate where the breath sensations are most vivid, and “surf” with full awareness on those breath waves, moment by moment – in the belly, at the nostrils, or wherever.
5. Try lying in bed for a few moments after you wake up, and just ride on the waves of your own breathing moment by moment and breath by breath.
6. Experiment with expanding your awareness around your breath until it includes a sense of the body as a whole lying in bed breathing.
7. As best you can, be aware of the various sensations fluxing in the body, including the breath sensations.
8. Just rest in the awareness of lying here breathing, outside of time, even if it is only for a minute or two by the clock.
9. When you notice that the mind has a life of its own and wanders here and there, keep in mind that this is just what minds do, so there is no need to judge it.
10. Just note what is on your mind if you are no longer in touch with the breath or with the sensations of the body lying in the bed, and without judgment or criticism, just let that be part of your awareness in the moment, and feature once again the breath and the body center-stage in the field of your awareness.
11. Repeat step 10 a few million times.
12. It is very easy to fall into the thought stream and get caught up in the future (worrying, planning) and the past (remembering, blaming, pining) and in reactive and often painful emotions.
13. No need to try to stop any of this from happening when you can just bring a big embrace of openhearted, spacious, accepting awareness to it and, lo and behold, you are once again sitting on the bank of the thought stream, listening to the gurgling but not so caught up in the torrent for the moment.
14. You can cultivate mindfulness in this way lying in bed for a few moments in the morning, or in the evening before going to sleep.
15. You can also cultivate mindfulness sitting, standing, walking, and eating – in fact, in any position or situation, including brushing your teeth, taking a shower, talking on the phone, running, working out at the gym, cooking, picking up the kids, making love, whatever is unfolding in your life in the present moment.
16. It helps to be present for it and for yourself.
17. Remember – the real meditation is your life, and how you inhabit it moment by moment.

