

Peace, Calm, and Contentment Take Practice: Meditation Basics

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I think we pay too little attention to the value of meditation, a principle of devotion. In our worship there are two elements: One is spiritual communion arising from our own meditation; the other, instruction from others, particularly from those who have authority to guide and instruct us. Of the two, the more profitable introspectively is meditation... Meditation is one of the most secret, most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.

-David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1967

What Is Meditation?

Meditation is the language of the soul. It is defined as "a form of private devotion or spiritual exercise, consisting in deep, continued reflection on some religious theme." Meditation is a form of prayer.

-David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1967

Walsh and Shapiro (2006) define meditation as a "family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and /or specific capacities such as calm, clarity and concentration."

-www.byui.edu/counseling-center/self-help/mindfulness-and-meditation

Why Should We Meditate?

We tend to get stuck in stress response—which limits access to our higher abilities of reasoning, empathy, imagination, and creativity. Even though we don't live with the emergency of being chased by lions we are bombarded by stressors that our nervous systems see as emergencies, one after another, and then we burn out.

Practicing meditation helps us learn how to shift from operating through our sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, freeze) to operating from the parasympathetic (rest and digest) nervous system. It helps us deepen awareness of what is happening inside of us so that we have more power to choose our response.

We often get carried away in our thoughts. We have a consistent and persistent inner dialogue and can get stuck in thought habits that are not helpful. One of the most powerful lessons one can learn from a consistent meditation practice is "I am not my thoughts." We are not defined by the thoughts in our head and not every voice we hear in there is a trusted voice. Our brain is a thinking organ; just like our heart beats and our stomach secretes digestive juices, our brain thinks. Meditation helps us realize that we are not our thoughts. We are the one aware of our thoughts. We don't have to get carried away by them or even believe them if they are not true. This can be so liberating!

Two Types of Meditation

Concentration: Focusing on one thing for an extended period of time to help train the mind to avoid wandering, and to become steady and peaceful. Tools for focus can be the breath, simple, meaningful words—a "mantra" (which means "mind tool"), listening, or walking.

Mindfulness: Emphasizes awareness of the present moment with non-judgmental acceptance of everything that arises. It enables us to see things with clarity and notice thoughts and feelings without attachment. It is an open-hearted state we can carry into all of our daily activities.

Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.
-D&C 6:36

And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.
-D&C 88:67

So, How Do I Do It?

Sit comfortably with a tall, straight spine. You may be comfortable cross legged on the floor, but most likely you will need some support to help your spine be erect without too much effort. You could sit on the edge of some firmly folded blankets so that your knees are at the height of your hips or lower. You could also kneel. If you kneel try straddling a folded blanket so your seat is elevated a bit and your feet don't fall asleep. You could also sit on a chair with both feet rooted on the floor and your spine tall.

Simply follow your breath. This is the foundation of all meditation practice. Notice your breath as it comes in. Where does it enter? Where does it go? Track your exhale as it leaves your body. Let your breath be received into a soft, relaxed belly. It may help to count your breaths or attach a mantra to your inhale and exhale. Try "Be Still", "Jesus Christ," or "Ham Sah" which means "I am That" in Sanskrit—to me in Mormon language it means "I am a child of God."

Your mind will inevitably wander. Notice that you've wandered and then come back to your breath. That is the practice—to *keep coming back*. You cannot be a bad meditator. Thinking doesn't mean you are doing it wrong.

Sit for 3 minutes at first, eventually working up to 10, 15, or 20 minutes.

Resources:

The God Seed: Probing the Mystery of Spiritual Development by M. Catherine Thomas

Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself by Kristin Neff

SeedPod.yoga/guided-meditations - Meditation practices guided by me on my website.

"Abiding in the Stillands: Christ-Centered Meditation" by Gary A. Purse. This is an alumni webcast at video.byui.edu

Mormon Channel Daily episodes 698, 703, 708 found at mormonchannel.org are all about Christ-centered meditation.