

LESSON 31

How to Begin a Formal Mindfulness Practice



IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL LEARN

- What mindfulness meditation is
- Proper meditation posture
- A quick and easy mindfulness meditation using your breath

THE WHY — Meditation is a tool that's been in use for thousands of years, because it works! By learning how to focus the mind on a single object, we build new neurons in the brain that make us more resilient to stress, and even more joyful, kind and loving. With as little as 5 minutes a day, we can develop a mindfulness that stays with us, even when we're not meditating.

BOTTOM LINE — If you want meditation to work for you, you have to do it! A little bit every day is more important (and more effective) than one long session once a week.



MINDFULNESS MEDITATION IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE FORMAL PRACTICE OF PAYING ATTENTION. In meditation, we sit still, get quiet, and watch our minds. Once we begin, it doesn't take long to notice that our minds are very busy! Soon after we notice how distracted we are, we notice we're pretty judgmental too, especially when it comes to judging our own seemingly-uncontrollable minds.

In mindfulness meditation, all of this is ok. *The goal is not to control our minds, but to simply notice what the mind is doing, free from judgement.* We learn to act as a neutral witness to the activity and movement in our heads.

Remember Two Keys

1. Thoughts are not the enemy. Thoughts will occur during meditation. The brain thinks involuntarily just like the

heart beats involuntarily. Don't try to stop the thoughts. Simply recognize them and dismiss them matter-of-factly. Allow intrusive thoughts to float away like leaves in a stream.

2. *We don't meditate to get good at meditating. We meditate to become good at life.* An imperfect meditation in which intrusive thoughts keep coming is frequently as good, if not better for you, than a deep meditation. All of those thoughts needed to be processed and a "messy" meditation does just that.

This skill of neutral observation not only helps us in meditation, but with our families, in the office, when we're driving, and everywhere. By placing more space between what it is that we notice, and our reaction to it, we begin to feel more harmony in our lives.

So How Do We Begin?

Find a place to be alone with as few visual and auditory distractions as possible.

- **POSTURE:** To meditate, find a comfortable seat in which you're free from the distraction of the body. You can sit on a cushion, on a chair with your feet flat on the ground, or you can even lie down on your back. It's important that your spine remain neutral and tall. If you're in a chair, sit up instead of leaning back, and if you're lying down, bend your knees and plant your feet.
- **HOW TO MEDITATE ON THE BREATH:** Our busy minds love to be given a job, so we give the mind the job of noticing the breath. *The breath is an easy anchor to work with because it's always with us.* As you breathe in and out through your nose, neutrally witness the breath.

Of course, you'll soon notice how difficult it is to remain focused on the breath. That's ok! Whenever you notice you've become distracted, simply turn the mind around and come back to the breath.



JOY'S PEARL

Meditation is not about never being distracted, it's about not letting distraction pull you away. As soon as you notice you've become distracted, practice a quick return to the breath.

The more you practice, the sooner you'll notice when you've become distracted, and the more quickly you'll return to the breath.

Today's Task • • • • •

Set a timer for 5 minutes, and try the following meditation...

- Sit with your spine tall and neutral.
- Close your eyes or maintain a low gaze, for inward attention.
- Breathe slowly and gently in and out through your nose.
- Watch your breathing with a neutral curiosity.
- Allow your noticing to be spacious.
- Try focusing 25% of your mind on the breath, 25% aware that you're still focused, and the remaining 50% simply resting in effortlessness.
- Each time you notice the mind has wandered from the breath, just come back.
- Repeat this process until our 5 minutes has passed.

Need help? Try this 5-minute guided meditation:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YF5c7Ck0Ao0>