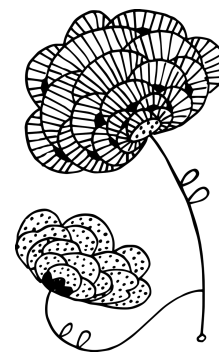


# Some Thoughts on Beginning a Meditation Practice (Part 1)

We all know that meditation is a good idea but, like a lot of things that are good for us, we don't necessarily find it an easy practice to embed into our daily lives. It's also common when beginning with meditation to become frustrated and to lose heart. We worry whether we're 'doing it right' or maybe give up because, once we sit quietly, our heads feel too busy.

I am far from being an expert but have found these ideas helpful as I've tried to develop my own routine.



## How to meditate

- **Find a quiet space where you can sit undisturbed for the duration of your meditation session.**
- **Set a timer.**
  - I use an app I downloaded to my phone called Insight Timer - it lets you use nice bongs to mark the start and end of your session. You can also set some interval chimes - I find this helpful as it stops me fixating on how long I've been going or how long I have left.
  - How long you sit for is up to you. Between 10 and 20 minutes seems to work best for most people. Even a minute can feel like a long time when meditating but be wary of setting too short a time - when you first sit down your mind can be very busy but it will settle - if you finish too quickly you might not experience that settling.
- **Make yourself comfortable and sit up straight.**
  - In order to better focus on our breath, we sit upright, trying not to slouch, so that the chest is open and breathing is easy and unencumbered.
- **Lightly close your eyes**
  - Or, if closing the eyes makes you uncomfortable or anxious for whatever reason, you can focus on a candle, a helpful image, or some other prop.
- **Focus on your breathing.**
  - Make the breath a little deeper but still comfortable and unforced.
  - Let each exhalation take as long as the inhalation that preceded it.
  - It might help to count the breaths to begin with, for example:  
Breathe in = 1, Breathe out = 2, Breathe in = 3 etc. up to 10.  
When you reach 10 you start again.
  - Next you can lengthen the count:  
Breathe in, breathe out = 1, breathe in, breathe out = 2 etc.  
Again, go up to 10 and then start again.
  - You might be surprised how hard it is to keep count as the mind wanders! If you lose the count or suddenly realise you've gone way past 10 just return to the beginning again and don't be frustrated.

- After a few rounds of this you might leave the count behind and instead aim to keep a steady, quiet focus on breathing. Again, when you notice the mind wandering, bring your attention back to the breath.

And that's it. Hopefully it leaves you feeling just a little calmer and helps to keep the anxieties we're all feeling just now at bay. As with so many things, perhaps the hardest aspect is to commit to doing it in the first place. So be pleased with yourself if you get past that point!

One more thing - don't think too much about 'clearing your mind'. Minds create thoughts - it's what they're supposed to do, just like hearts beat and eyes see. The Zen Buddhists have a saying though: "Thoughts occur, but you don't have to serve them tea." It's the idea that thoughts will arise while we meditate but we try not to pursue them - if you like, we can notice the threads but we try not to pull on them.

I hope this serves as a useful guide if you are new to meditation, or an encouragement to return to the practice if you've fallen out of the habit.

Best wishes,

Chris