



GETTING STARTED

with Meditation & Mindfulness



WELCOME

Thanks for downloading my Super Quick, Super Simple Getting Started Guide to Meditation & Mindfulness.

I imagine you're probably fairly short of time and also keen to get to the juicy bits. Here's the good news. This really is a super quick, super simple guide.

You should be able to read it from start to finish in one sitting.

In it, I'll present just the stuff you **NEED TO KNOW**. I'll keep it clear, concise and straightforward.

And I'll make sure it's practical and useful. And even though it's short, it's not just a teaser. It's packed full of helpful ideas. By the time you've read it through you'll know how to begin a meditation practice that's easy, enjoyable and fun.

Because I'll be keeping things brief, I won't be able to cover everything in detail. But don't worry. There will be links scattered throughout if you want to explore further, or to try things out.

INTRODUCTION

G'day! My name is Matt. I'm the founder and Director of the Melbourne Meditation Centre; a place where thousands of people have come to learn about meditation and mindfulness.

I've spent the last couple of decades developing ways to meditate that are simple to learn, easy to do, enjoyable and beneficial. I've adapted and customised meditation so that it suits the needs of our busy, over-stimulated contemporary world.

That means that meditation is something that you can do, even if you are super-busy, super-stressed, anxious, overtired, overwhelmed, unable to slow down, sure that you can't stop thinking, highly strung, fearful of negative thoughts and buffeted by unwanted emotions.

This guide is for anyone interested in learning about meditation and mindfulness but confused about where to start, and also for anyone who has tried to meditate previously, but found it hard, frustrating, impossible, or just not that effective.

Within, you'll find what I believe are — and my students have found to be — some of the most helpful ideas and information on meditation available.

That doesn't mean that my way is the only way. But the methods outlined below are tried and tested, simple and safe. They've transformed the lives of thousands, in both small and profound ways.

Of course, if you're hoping for instant gratification you'll probably be disappointed. Meditation is not a quick fix.

But if you are looking to get your inner life in shape, to relate to your thoughts and emotions in healthier ways and to find better ways to manage stress, anxiety, insomnia and other common problems*, then you're in the right place.

A more calm, focused and relaxed version of you is possible. Patience and persistence will be required, but things will get easier every step of the way, and there will soon come a day when mental and emotional calm are accessible whenever you want.

So let's get started!

* Hundreds of studies point to the many benefits of meditation, however, it is not a substitute for medical or psychological treatment. For serious health concerns please consult the appropriate health professional.

MY STORY

I was travelling around India when I was first introduced to meditation.

I had no interest in religion or spirituality at the time. I was just there to see the sights. In fact, I was waiting to catch a train to Agra, to see the Taj Mahal, when a random guy told me that I should take up yoga.

I thought he was mad. Why would I want to do that?

This was in the 90's, and yoga wasn't as popular as it is today. I thought it was something contortionists and circus performers might do, but nothing I'd be interested in.

But what the hell, I thought. I'm in India. I may as well do something Indian. I ended up spending three months at the yoga school of a guy called Raju, doing five hours of yoga every day. And each afternoon we'd do thirty minutes of meditation. The instructions were simple.

After our yoga session Raju would say "sit," then "stay." Then he'd disappear downstairs for half an hour!

So we sat. On our butts. We were on the top floor of a three-storey building and around this time kids would be coming home from school, and fathers from work. Families would be preparing meals in the rooms downstairs, pots and pans clanging amid shouts and arguments. Other kids would be yelling from the rooves of buildings nearby, flying their paper kites, and occasionally a troop of monkeys would leap across the tin roof overhead, screeching and clattering noisily.

These probably don't seem like ideal conditions for meditation, but I had some interesting experiences nonetheless.

For one, I found it almost impossible to sit.

My back hurt. My knees hurt. Everything hurt.

But Raju had told us to sit. And to stay.

So I did.

But my body began shaking. Uncontrollably.

And although it was quite cool I felt hot.

A lovely afternoon breeze drifted across my skin, keeping the kites aloft. But it did nothing to cool me down. I sat sweating. And shaking.

On the second day, things worsened.

On the third, I actually felt like I would spontaneously combust, literally.

I can't remember what happened on the fourth day, but it must have been better, because I did stay there for three months!

Those initial experiences were also very intriguing. What was going on? Why was sitting still so hard? Why did my body start shaking like it did?

The search for answers to these questions kept me interested in meditation for the next decade, as I explored every type of meditation practice I could find. I learnt a great deal, but I had to admit that a decade of study probably left me none the wiser.

Wrapped up in the trappings of Buddhism and Yoga, or in strange, arcane, occult, new age or esoteric teachings, meditation remained unfathomable.

The experience was interesting but the techniques and explanations were often weird, flaky, illogical, simplistic, nonsensical or just plain strange.

Then I came across a book by Eric Harrison.

Eric explained meditation very simply and clearly.

Instead of using the arcane languages of the East, he used plain English.

He described exactly what went on during meditation and his descriptions matched my experiences.

He talked about the physiological changes meditation induced and the mechanisms by which physical relaxation and mental calm came about. And he shared a range of very effective techniques; skills one could develop and principles that helped one to appreciate and understand what went on in one's brain and body during meditation.

My meditation practice took off, and for the first time I felt like I actually knew what I was doing.

I went and studied with Eric at the Perth Meditation Centre and eventually, I began teaching meditation myself, having noted that there were many people like me, who had been exposed to meditation but were struggling with it despite years of diligent practice.

And of course, there were many more people who figured they couldn't meditate, or just dismissed it out of hand, on account of its association with hippies or weirdos of one kind or another.

That seemed ridiculous to me.

I knew that meditation didn't have to be difficult.

And I knew that it didn't have to have anything to do with Buddhism, or yoga, or mantras and chakras, or anything else that might put some people off.

It was a skill that could be learnt like any other.

Like learning to walk, or talk.

Everyone can do those things, and that's the message I want to share with you below.

Let's dive in.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Every book you read — or teacher you come across — will probably define meditation differently.

Sometimes the definitions will even contradict one another.

Ultimately, you'll want to come up with your own definition, based on your own purposes and preferences.

For now, just think of meditation as any technique that allows you to:

Relax your body,
Calm your mind, and
Balance your emotions

THERE ARE HUNDREDS, IF NOT THOUSANDS
OF DIFFERENT WAYS TO MEDITATE.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are styles of meditation in which you are encouraged to think freely.

Surprisingly, many people find such techniques an effective way to quieten the mind.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Surprise, surprise. There's no agreed upon definition for mindfulness either. So let's keep it simple.

To be mindful just means to deliberately pay attention.

You could pay attention to your breath or body, to the sounds around you, to your thoughts and emotions, or to whatever it is that you are doing (walking, eating, talking).

The key point is that you are choosing what to pay attention to, rather than allowing your attention to be drawn around randomly.

Basically, you are paying attention to your thoughts and feelings in order to become more aware of them, less enmeshed in them, and better able to manage them. In other words, so you can respond, rather than react.

FOR A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT MINDFULNESS
IS AND WHERE IT CAME FROM, GO GRAB A COPY OF
THE FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS
BY ERIC HARRISON.

WHY MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS?

Meditation and mindfulness are complementary, interconnected skills.

You could think of meditation as a formal practice, and mindfulness as 'meditation-on-the-go'.

You'll get more out of meditation if you practice mindfulness and more out of mindfulness if you practice meditation.

Learn more about the differences between meditation and mindfulness in this **short article**.

WHERE DOES MEDITATION COME FROM?

I think of meditation as an instinct, an innate human capacity. We've all experienced meditative moments, though we haven't all learnt how to cultivate them.

Some people assume that meditation is a spiritual, religious, or even specifically Buddhist practice — and it's certainly true that the monks and yogis of India and Tibet refined and documented the practice over many centuries.

Meditative states, however, are accessible to anyone, and probably have been experienced — and perhaps even deliberately cultivated — from times immemorial. The caveman, mindfully tracking or hunting, or entranced by the flames of a fire or the stars in the night sky, may have been the first meditator.

Suffice to say, no one person, culture or tradition has a monopoly, or trademark, on meditation. It's a capacity that has been developed and practised to some degree in every culture on earth, and one accessible to every person on the planet (and cats too)!

WHY SHOULD I MEDITATE?

Some traditions suggest that meditation has one true purpose (e.g. enlightenment) but people meditate for all sorts of reasons. You might meditate:

To declutter your head

To regulate your emotions

To better understand yourself

To help work through anxiety or depression

To improve your relationships or health

To manage chronic, unrelenting pain

To be more effective, efficient and productive at work

To think more clearly, creatively or imaginatively

To fall asleep

For the sheer pleasure of it

WHAT DO I NEED TO MEDITATE?

Nothing.
(Okay, a brain might help).

HOW MUCH TIME WILL I NEED?

None. Meditation doesn't require time. It requires prioritisation.

Okay. That's a bit glib. But bear with me while I explain.

Nearly everyone I know says they don't have enough time to meditate.

Some people even say they get stressed just thinking about it! "Where am I going to find an extra twenty minutes a day to do nothing?"

But they watch hours of TV, and waste days looking at crap online.

The truth is, everyone has time to meditate. You may not yet have the motivation, or inclination, or the necessary trust in its effectiveness, but you definitely have the time, or the capacity to make the time.

You don't need to spend an hour each morning and evening meditating, as some traditions suggest, nor even the twenty minutes that is frequently recommended. Just twenty seconds can make a difference, especially if you meditate for twenty seconds half a dozen times a day.

If you're smart about it, you can incorporate meditation into a day quite effortlessly.

You could meditate:

On the train, tram or bus on the way to and from work.

In your car, whilst waiting to pick up your kids from school, or soccer.

At a specific, dedicated time and place each day.

In bed, as you go to sleep each night.

At 4 am, before the rest of the family gets up, or not.

At 2 am, because you're damn well awake anyway!

And you could be mindful:

While walking or talking

While working out, running, swimming or exercising

At your yoga or pilates class

While cooking

Anywhere!

Note that to be mindful doesn't need any time at all. You just apply a mindful attitude to whatever it is you are doing. You could even take a mindful dump!



“The degree to which you do not believe you have time to spend even ten minutes sitting quietly is the degree to which you desperately need to spend ten minutes sitting quietly.”

— Donna Farhi

DO I NEED TO SIT CROSS LEGGED?

Sitting cross-legged is a great way to look cool and wreck your knees.

You can do that if you want, but I don't recommend it.

You can meditate in any posture you like.

You can even meditate standing up, or lying down.

The most important point is to make sure that you are as comfortable as possible.

Here's a helpful article on **what you need to know about posture**.

DO I HAVE TO SIT STILL?

No. You can move all you like. Many people find sitting still impossible, especially at first. If you're one of these people, you'll probably find it easier to meditate if you permit yourself to move.

The same applies to those with back pain or injuries.

On the other hand, some people just think that they can't sit still. Once they've found a way to meditate that they find engaging and enjoyable, they'll often be surprised at just how still they become.

Stillness, however, is not something you need to impose upon yourself. You'll become still, quite naturally, when you're comfortable and content. You don't have to force it.

My recommendation: if you are desk-bound for much of your day or find it hard to sit still, begin with **mindful movement**.

Yoga, tai chi, qi gong and Feldenkrais all fit the bill. You can even walk, run, swim, cycle or play sport mindfully, as many athletes do.

WHEN SHOULD I MEDITATE?

Now.

There is no optimal time to meditate, though many people recommend starting the day with a twenty-minute 'sit'.

It that works for you, great. If it doesn't, that's great too.

Just find a time that does work for you. Perhaps you could meditate in your lunch break, on the way home from work, or just before bed?

Mindful walking or exercise can be incorporated into almost any day, and (though often neglected), half a dozen daily 'spot-meditations' may be the most useful of all.

The trick is just to commit to doing it.

If you need help with discipline or commitment keep an eye out for my **100 Days to Meditation Mastery Course**, in which I'll lead you through the process of developing a consistent meditation practice, step by step, through short daily lessons delivered via email.

HOW LONG SHOULD I MEDITATE FOR?

Go for quality over quantity and start small.

Five minutes might be a good place to start, and even one minute can be useful.

Got a few moments to spare? Try out this **two minute meditation** and see what effect a short pause can have.

DO I NEED A SPECIAL MEDITATION ROOM?

No. You can meditate anywhere.

I enjoy meditating in my car and in my local park. I meditate every time I take a flight, and frequently when I'm required to wait.

A quiet, peaceful place is helpful, especially when you are beginning, but you'll want to develop the ability to meditate in any environment.

IF YOU CAN'T MEDITATE IN A BOILER ROOM, YOU CAN'T MEDITATE

— ALAN WATTS

And yes, you did read that right. I meditate in my car — and not only while it's parked!

In other words, meditation doesn't have to be done with your eyes closed, and it doesn't have to be all about relaxing or zoning out.

I CAN'T STOP THINKING

Good! You don't have to.

You can think almost continuously as you meditate and still benefit from the practice. In fact, giving yourself quality time to think — to process and reflect upon what's going on in your life — may be one of the most valuable parts of any meditation practice. This dedicated 'thinking time' is often what allows your mind to slip into states of deep rest.

I've been meditating for over two decades and the most important and useful skill I've developed is the ability to be equally relaxed whether I'm thinking or not. That means my peace of mind is not dependent on inner quiet. That's a useful and achievable aim to have in meditation.

Trying to stop yourself thinking, on the other hand, is close enough to impossible, not especially useful, and likely to result in a great deal of struggle.

See: **12 Good Reasons to Let Yourself Think in Meditation**
More articles on thinking

WHAT TECHNIQUE SHOULD I USE?

There are thousands of different meditation techniques. You may have heard of Transcendental Meditation, the trademarked, celebrity endorsed mantra-based practice. Or you might be familiar with Zen, Vipassana or the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program.

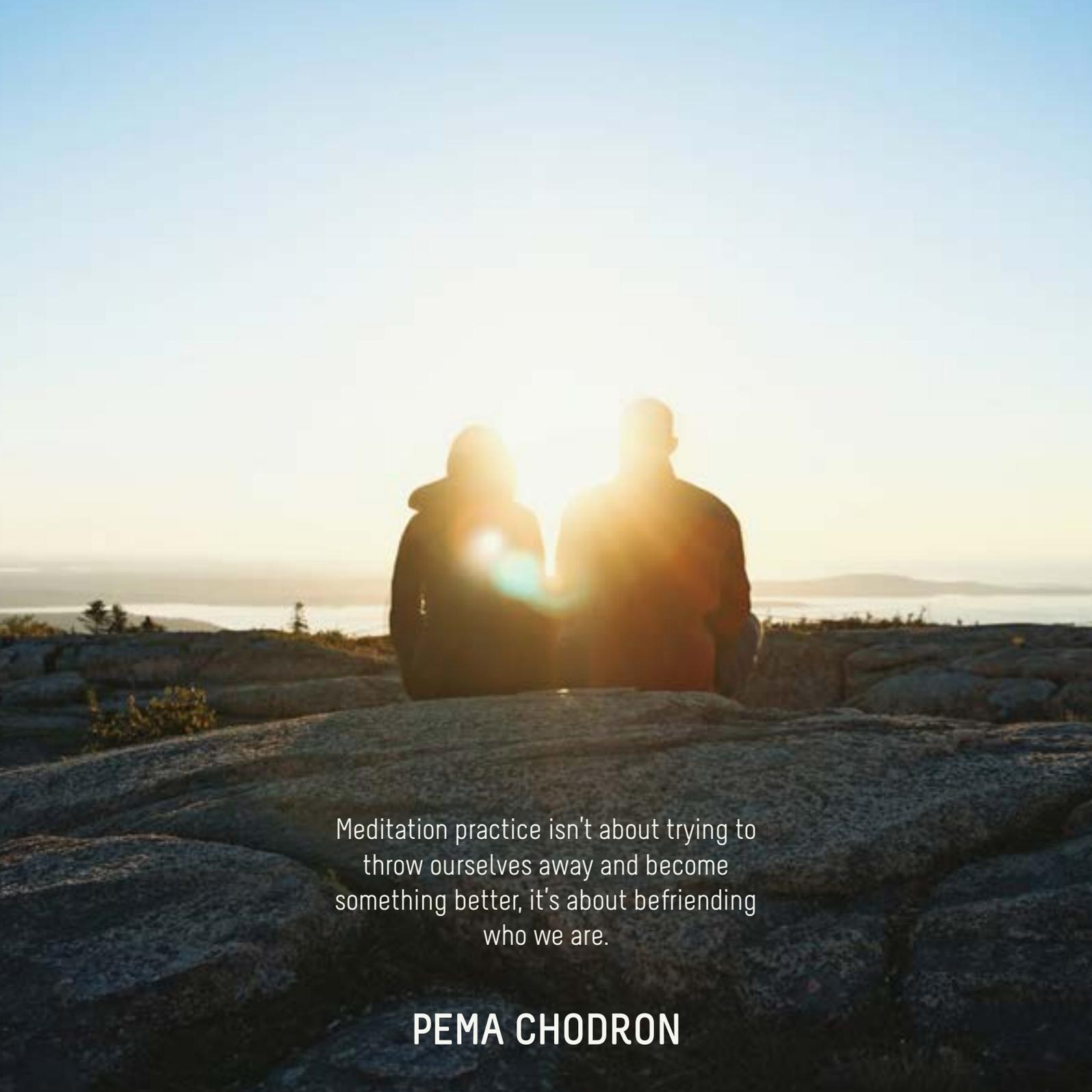
Many people get sucked into thinking that they need to practice one of these popular approaches, perhaps after hearing about them in the media or reading about them online.

But that would be a bit like buying a pair of shoes on the recommendation of someone with feet four sizes bigger or smaller than yours.

You'll probably need to try out a variety of meditation practices before you find one that suits. As your skills develop you'll probably also find that you outgrow certain techniques or approaches.

There are different meditation practices for different purposes.

Just as high heels aren't so good on the basketball court, and gum boots aren't great in the ballroom, there are meditation techniques that serve some purposes better than others.



Meditation practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better, it's about befriending who we are.

PEMA CHODRON

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I MEDITATE?

Many people think that success comes when you can reach the same quiet, calm place every time you meditate. In fact, trying to reach the same meditative 'state' all the time is a recipe for disaster.

Let each meditation be unique. The secret is to go with the flow.

Meditation should — and will — include an infinite variety of ever-changing thoughts, feelings, sensations, imagery and noise.

One moment you'll be deeply relaxed and quiet, then suddenly you'll be adding things to your to-do list.

One moment you'll be deeply focused, then suddenly you'll feel sleepy, scattered or bored.

This doesn't make you a bad meditator. It just means you're human.

COMMON EXPERIENCES

Here are just some of the things you might experience as you meditate:

a busy mind

thoughts about your day and what you need to prepare for
relaxation and relief

tension, pain and fatigue

worries and their accompanying emotions

ideas, insights and realisations

memories, mental images, shapes and colours

moments of deep quiet and inner peace

boredom, impatience, restlessness and annoyance

near sleep and dreamlike states of mind

feeling heavy, light, numb or still

warmth, tingling and subtle vibrations

In other words, meditation is a microcosm of daily life; but you are able to witness and feel all it's flavours in greater depth and detail.

FIVE MISTAKES TO AVOID

There's not really much you can do wrong in meditation, other than to think that you are doing it wrong!

You'll probably find meditation much easier and more rewarding if you don't set your expectations too high, and don't buy into all the rules that you may have heard about.

Remember:

It's okay to nod off, dream or fall asleep

You don't have to sit up straight

You can think non-stop for the whole meditation

You don't have to push yourself to stay still or meditate for twenty minutes

Here's what not to do:

Don't beat yourself up for not being able to stay focused

Don't beat yourself up for getting distracted

Don't beat yourself up for thinking continuously

Don't beat yourself up for feeling agitated, restless, annoyed, bored, frustrated, angry, sad, anxious, fearful, tired, upset, sore, or anything else.

Don't beat yourself up for getting so relaxed that you fall asleep.

THREE HELPFUL ATTITUDES

What technique(s) you choose are not nearly so important as the attitudes you bring to them. An unhelpful or unrealistic mindset will ruin any technique, whilst a helpful and realistic mindset will ensure that whatever meditation you choose will go as well as it can.

With this in mind, if you find yourself struggling in meditation, ask yourself whether you can apply any of the following three attitudes.

Permission

Welcome, accept, or tolerate, to the best of your ability, whatever it is that you are experiencing; whether that's a torrent of thoughts, a highly distracted mind, stressful emotions or physical discomfort.

Curiosity

Investigate and explore your thoughts and feelings instead of making efforts to repress or get beyond them.

Kindness

Give yourself a break. Take it easy.

Set realistic, rather than idealistic or perfectionistic standards for yourself.

Treat yourself gently, kindly and humanely.

WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE ANYTHING YOU'VE SAID?

You shouldn't.
In fact, I'd prefer you didn't.

Try out and test everything for yourself.

Compare what I've said with what you're read or heard elsewhere
and (most importantly) see how it works for you.



So what is a good meditator?
The one who meditates.

ALLAN LOKOS

OKAY, I'M READY TO GO. HOW DO I DO IT?

Meditation involves deliberately directing and redirecting your attention.

Most meditation techniques are just suggestions on what to direct your attention towards. Usually, you'll be asked to focus on the breath, body, sounds, a mantra (that's just a simple word or phrase you repeat to yourself), or your thoughts and feelings, but there are countless ways to focus, and things to focus upon.

A useful framework might be:

1. Adopt a comfortable posture
2. Settle in, by noticing what you can see and hear
3. Check in with yourself, by noticing what's on your mind, and how you feel
4. Deliberately relax your body, by scanning and / or tuning into the breath
5. Be open to exploring whatever arises
6. Make use of your three 'allies': permission, curiosity and kindness

WHERE TO NEXT?

You now know what meditation is and what kind of attitudes you'll need in order to learn, enjoy and benefit from the practice. Now you'll need to do it!

If you're completely new to meditation, or new to the approach described here, listen to **Your First Meditation**.

If you want to explore a variety of unique meditations that emphasise the user-friendly approach described in this guide, there are dozens freely available **on my website**.

If you want a complete understanding of what meditation is, how it works and how to do it, try the six-week online course at **learn-to-meditate.com.au**

If you want an easy, step-by-step introduction, just wait for my next email (presuming you've signed up for it). It should arrive within two days.

Finally, if you've got any questions, comments or problems email me and I'll write an article, record a guided meditation or post a video addressing what ever it is you need.

THANKS FOR READING!

This is the first ebook I've published. I'd love to know what you thought.

Too long? Too short? Just right?

Was it useful? What could be done better?

Please feel free to email matt@melbournemeditationcentre.com.au with your thoughts and suggestions.

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