

MEDITATING – 1



You will be pleased to know that it is a commonly propagated misconception that to meditate we must sit, as shown above, cross-legged on a hard floor with one's fingers pointing at the ceiling. Or in any other particular position. It might be the way millions of Buddhist monks are taught to do it, but it is not necessary, nor is it necessarily useful. I use this photo simply because it shows ordinary people that are clearly dressed for work and we spend most of our waking lives at work.

Meditating might be relaxing but it is not rest – it is work.

There is much material available on the internet and elsewhere that might help you in your meditative endeavour. The *Headspace* or *Calm* materials and apps are very good. My eldest daughter is a heavy user and strong advocate of the former. Though these sorts of materials can be very useful, they are often focussed on the pursuit of personal wellbeing and spiritual matters, rather than on the seemingly mundane but crucial attainment of cognitive discipline. I am a pre-app dinosaur, and for sure not spiritual, so I have not gone in this direction BUT the apps do help many people to drive in the habit of meditating and facilitate its practice.

Below I lay out a guide of how I suggest you attempt, possibly for most of you, your first meditation.

It's very simple but far more difficult than it looks on paper!

- **Prepare** – sleep well –
 - do not try to meditate when you are sleepy/very tired
 - unless you are using it to help you get to sleep
 - if you are a beginner you should not use it for this purpose as you start out
 - Meditating might be relaxing but it is not rest – it is work!
- **Plan** – put a time slot in your diary – a frequent regular slot in your diary
 - make an appointment with yourself
 - maybe send yourself an invite to a meeting with yourself
 - put a daily 10-minute slot in your diary every day
- **Place** – find somewhere you will not be disturbed.
 - It should be somewhere quiet – but it does not have to be totally silent
 - Traffic noise is fine – any sort of white noise like air conditioning is OK
 - Avoid, in your early practices/attempts, places where you will continuously hear clearly audible voices and/or overhear conversations. Rooms alongside busy corridors/walkways are therefore not a good place to start.
 - As one works on one's practice one can/should slowly place oneself in more and more meditatively challenging circumstances – even set it up that something will impinge upon your attempt.

- **Posture** – natural is best!
 - Sit so that you are comfortable
 - Sit on a chair, one which ‘fits’ you – where your feet properly reach the floor
 - Sit with both feet flat on the floor, your legs and arms uncrossed, and with your arms resting on your lap/legs – as if your arms were heavy.
 - Keep your back reasonably straight – sit up – do not recline in any way.
- **Practise**
 - Switch your mobile phone off or put in ‘do not disturb’ mode – take the landline ‘off the hook’
 - Set an audible timer/alert on your phone for the end of your 10 minutes – start it just as you close your eyes
 - Close your eyes
 - Breathe, in and out, steadily and normally, through your mouth
 - As you breathe in, count from 1 to 10 in your head
 - As you breathe out, count down from 10 to 1 in your head
 - As you breathe **focus all your attention** on the sensations of breathing
 - Focus on the feeling of your chest expanding, and your lungs filling with air as you inhale – feel the way your body softens as you breathe out
 - Sense the cooler air passing over your teeth as you breathe in, the warmth of the air as you breathe out.
 - Hear the sound of the air as you breathe in and out.
 - Smell the air you breathe
 - We are striving to have nothing ‘in our heads’ other than the ‘physical’ sensations and the numbers 1 to 10.
 - We want no words in our minds other than the words One Two Three Four Five Six Seven Eight Nine and Ten
 - We want no images in our mind
 - We want our attention to be wholly on our sensations
 - If an image or word/thought other than the numbers comes into your mind, do not attend to it – simply let it leave your mind – bring your full attention back to the numbers and the sensations of your breathing.
 - If you find it difficult, do not be concerned – most people really struggle when they start out on this path. Meditating is a practice – the only way one learns is to practise and it is the practising that counts in the pursuit of the cognitive discipline we need to be wise.

Remember – Meditating might be relaxing but it is not rest – it is work!



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