



46 Meditation Tips & Answers To Common Questions

As a beginner or intermediate meditator, you may have many questions about how to meditate, how to integrate it into your life, and how to deal with some common obstacles that come your way. Or perhaps you are a mindfulness instructor and are looking for a resource to help you answer some of the common questions about meditation that people have.

In this post I have compiled “meditation tips” in the form of 43 answers to questions about meditation, mindfulness, and the “meditation lifestyle”. These are answers that I have given to meditation students in other forums. The questioner’s names have been omitted, and the answers were expanded upon, to make them more universal.

Whether you are doing meditation for stress relief or spiritual enlightenment, you will likely find some interesting information and advice here. Instead of writing several articles on meditation, I decided to briefly cover all these questions in one huge FAQ post.

1) HOW TO

What is meditation about?

Different things for different people. For some people, it's about a specific benefit (better health, performance, creativity, etc.), or about personal growth and healing. For others, it's about spirituality, awakening, and transcendence.

Whatever motivates you to start meditating, is good. Your goals may change by time.

How to get started? How to start meditating? How long until I see some results?

That is actually a very good question, and one that many people have.

There are four essential points about how to make meditation a permanent part of your life.

(1) JUST START. There is no preparation needed. You can start today.

Choose a time of the day and a place in your home to do your meditation. Make any small changes you need to make to your schedule and lifestyle, so that this habit is encouraged and has its place. For example, setting up an alarm clock for the meditation time, or preparing a [cushion](#) and corner of the room for the practice. Commit to practicing every day. Starting even with one minute per day is ok, as long as it's every day.

Check out the post on how to practice meditation according to [different techniques](#).

(2) HAVE NO EXPECTATIONS. Expectation is the antithesis of meditation. If you learn to do meditation for meditation's sake, its [wonderful benefits](#) will come to you in time (not in one week though). Think of meditation like taking a shower, or sleeping. Simply something you need to do every day.

There are some results from meditation that are immediate. You immediately feel better, more at ease, after most practice sessions. Other results come in a few months – actually research shows that with daily meditation, even after 8 weeks you already have some noticeable results. And some deeper results may come as years pass by.

(3) DEPTH. Don't worry about this until you have already built in the habit, otherwise you might end up being discouraged or building expectation.

But, in general, *depth* means to have the attitude, during the meditation session, that the object of meditation is the most important thing in your life. At that moment, have the attitude that it's the only thing that exists in the universe – your whole life.

Meditate as if your head was on fire – that would get your full attention wouldn't it? That

type of attitude.

Yet, don't worry about succeeding at it. Just keep building it. This is the practice.

(4) INTEGRATION. How to take the space you find during meditation and integrate it in your daily life? Well, one activity at a time.

A Zen Master (Heyla Downey zenafrica.blogspot.com) once taught me: pick one new activity every week (like walking, eating, talking, dressing, etc.) and focus on bringing the meditation energy to that activity, whenever it happens, during the whole week. Then, in the following week, you keep doing it but add a second activity. Do this for 20 weeks, and mindfulness will have impregnated your life.

Finally, if you like to build motivation around your practice, consider going through the [value discovery process](#) . Once you know your top life values, make a list of 10 ways that you think meditation empowers you to live and fulfill your life values.

The less you expect of your meditation practice, the more benefits you will get.

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Finally, check out also my 5-Week Meditation Course, [Master Your Mind](#), for a step-by-step program to help you get started with meditation, choose the right technique for you, and integrate your practice in daily life.

When to meditate? Is it better to meditate in the morning or night?

It depends on the person. I personally started meditating at night, and after a few years moved into the morning, which I now prefer.

All things being equal, however, meditating in the morning is better. The main reasons are:

- You can focus better – you are more well rested, refreshed, and probably have fewer things going on in your mind.
- You also set a better tone for the rest of your day.
- You make sure it gets done. Leaving it for the night can be a sure recipe for postponement.

On the other hand meditating at night does help you have a better sleep. Also, if you are a night person, you may find yourself more alert for practicing at night.

Where to meditate? Should I always meditate in the same place?

Meditating always in the same place and time is a good help in focusing the mind. Your brain associates that place with the practice, so it is easier for you to focus. There is less distraction involved.

I usually find it easier to focus when I meditate in my preferred spot. Yet, at times I felt a different freshness in the practice when I sat on different places at home and in nature.

So, to sum it up: have your favorite meditation place in your house, but from time to time try different places. You should not be limited to finding your inner peace only in one or two places.

Session length

How long should I meditate for? What's the ideal session duration?

You can start with anything – even 1 minute a day is good. The most important thing is that it be every day. After one week you can then increase to 3 minutes, then increase 2 minutes per week until you arrive at your desired length – I suggest 20 minutes for beginners.

If you have good discipline and willpower, you can start with 20min straight away. As long as you do it every single day, and increase it little by little, it doesn't matter how you start.

There is no “maximum time” for meditation. However, in any case, don't meditate longer than your motivation – or you may get tired of the practice. Don't stretch your motivation. Protect it. This is very important.

I personally started with 20 minutes, several years ago, and nowadays I meditate for 50 minutes.

It is also very important to have a few mini “mindfulness moments” during the day. Just taking a couple of mindful breaths during your day can make a big difference.

Remember that consistency is the most important. 1min every day is better than half an hour once a week.

It doesn't matter how slow we walk, so long we keep on moving. – Confucius

What are the best postures to meditate? Is it okay to meditate in bed to build habit?

The body and mind are VERY connected, so they influence each other. The posture you take can help concentration, or can act as a distraction.

The ideal position to meditate is seated down, without leaning your spine. You can sit on a cushion on the floor or, if that is too hard, on a chair (more info on meditation seats [here](#)). By time, however, I would encourage you to use seated positions. The key element of this posture is having the spine fully erect and unsupported (from the pelvis to

the neck), and your arms and legs relaxed. As we are not used to being with our backs unsupported, this may take a bit of time to get use to and to develop the back muscles.



Having said that, it is definitely possible and good to meditate laying down also. Especially if you are in your first weeks of practice, or if you are doing guided meditations, I would not worry much about doing it laying down. Whatever is comfortable for you and get you started, is great.

The monks and yogis spent *centuries* trying different postures, and found that sitting in what we now know as “meditation posture”, is one that helps us focus the most. That is the reason why we sit down in a specific posture – your mind affects your body, but also your body affects your mind.

If you want more details about posture, have a look at this [comprehensive PDF](#) and [this page](#).

Should I keep my eyes open or closed?

Meditating with closed eyes has the advantage of helping you move into deeper states of meditation. However, beginners may find that the mind wanders more if the eyes are closed, or is more likely to fall asleep. Meditating with eyes open helps your mind be more present and alert, and may make integrating the meditation state in your daily life a bit easier.

So both are possible. In some traditions the eyes are closed during meditation (mostly the Hindu based practices); in others the eyes are kept half-open, with the gaze resting in a place in front of you (usually in Buddhist and Chinese traditions).

Which meditation technique should I do? Should I stick to one or try many?

There are several types of meditation, some quite different from each other (learn more [here](#)). Most of these techniques you can learn for free (through the internet or in a center).

In the beginning it is a good idea to go and try all the ones you feel attracted to, but make sure to practice each of the ones you like for a few days at least, to have a real taste for it. Once you've found one that matches you well, then you will grow more by sticking to it, instead of jumping around to other practices. Otherwise it will be like moving one inch in ten directions (instead of ten inches in one direction).

Is there a form of meditation that is better than others?

Yes – the one that works for you.

All authentic forms of meditation will yield a certain set of common benefits, common results – such as greater focus of mind, stress reduction, increase of will-power, etc. That being said, some types of meditation will give certain types of results better than others. For increasing compassion, loving-kindness may be more effective than Vipassana; to learn to be more in the present moment, mindfulness may be more effective than mantra meditation; to transcend the ego, self-enquiry is probably the most direct.

There is no reason for you to force upon yourself a certain type of meditation. Try different ones, explore, and stick to what works for you. By time you may also change practice, as your needs change.

Any tips to start off my session on the right foot?

What I have found that works is having a very clear start in your practice, with a strong intention. I now make it part of my routine that, when I sit down, I have three very long breaths, where I breathe in through the nose (filling my lungs to the brim) and out through the mouth (emptying them fully). Then I say to myself, in my mind: *“At this moment I’m not interested in anything else in this universe. I’m not interested in any thought, memory or feeling. I’m only interested in the meditation. During this time, there is nothing more for me to think or do – only this!”*.

“Starting with the right foot” like this, the distractions are usually less than before.

Start meditation on the right foot: take three deep breaths and remember that there is only now.

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What is the best breathing method for meditation?

Most adults move their upper chest (not their belly) when they breathe. For meditation and yoga, the best is diaphragmatic breathing, which¹ better oxygenates the blood and calms the mind. Once you get used to having diaphragmatic breathing your default breathing pattern (for your whole day, not only meditation session!), if you then try to do “chest breathing” again, you will see the big difference it makes.

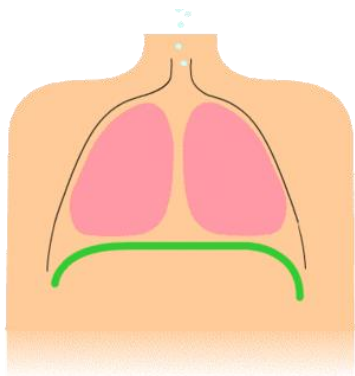


Image from [Wikipedia article](#). More information on diaphragmatic breathing, see [this video](#), [this article](#) and [hthis also](#).

Both abdominal breathing and diaphragmatic breathing (which are not the same thing) are better than breathing through your upper chest. Yogis have known this for thousands of years, and lately science has been catching up as to the health benefits of this practice.

For more elaborate breathing patterns, take a look at *Pranayama* (Hindu tradition) or *Qigong* (Chinese tradition).

2) OBSTACLES AND DISTRACTIONS

I sometimes catch myself falling asleep while meditating. When that happens, should I fight it off or drift deeper?

This is a very common question. It depends on why you are falling asleep. Some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you sleep deprived?
- Are you trying to meditate for longer than what I naturally feel like doing?
- Is your body exhausted due to intense physical work or exercise?
- Is your stomach full when you meditate? Is your meditation right after a meal, especially a large one?

- Are you laying down, or in any other setting that doesn't promote alertness of mind?
- Is your mind trying to run away from something that you are about to experience in meditation?

If you haven't had enough sleep, or are physically exhausted, then it is probably not the best time to meditate. Have some rest first. (This is one of the reasons why it's better to meditate in the morning – after a night's sleep).

However, if you are reasonably well rested and the mind is dozing off to sleep, then stick to it. It's the mind trying to *escape meditation*. The mind knows how to be busy thinking, or how to sleep – but is not used to being *aware but "empty"*. So when we try to meditate, the mind tries to either get distracted, or fall asleep.

If that is the case, then stick to it. Keep refocusing on the object of meditation. It will strengthen your will power, and eventually you will not have this problem anymore.

Falling asleep can also happen if your sessions are too long. If that is the case, then diminish the length to what is natural to you. You should not force them to be longer than you are motivated to do. Don't be too ambitious – grow step by step.

Finally, another cause of sleepiness may be to attempt meditation right after a meal, especially if you have eaten a lot.

Practicing meditation after some light exercise, or a shower, can make you be more awake during the session.

Those who eat too much or eat too little, who sleep too much or sleep too little, will not succeed in meditation. But those who are temperate in eating and sleeping, work and recreation, will come to the end of sorrow through meditation. – Bhagavad Gita

What to do when the body itches during meditation? Or when my mind keeps playing songs?

Feel the itches and hear the songs. Label it mentally "body itching" or "memory of songs"; or simply, "sensation", "memory". Then guide your attention back to your meditation object.

One of the beautiful gifts of meditation is training not to react. Showing us that what we perceive is one thing, what we think/feel is one thing, and what we choose to do with it is another.

When it happens, see that you have a choice. And exercise your power. Your awareness will get more acute, and your self-control will be more powerful.

Your body and mind are trying to distract you from the practice. Hold firm. You are the master of the house here.

How do you sit with emotions without narrativizing them? Without being pulled away in thoughts and analysis about them?

I can think of basically two approaches. The first is gentle; the second is hardcore (for more advanced meditators).

(1) Instead of following the train of thoughts, or dialoguing with them, simply place a label and let it be. For instance: “anger is here”; “past images arising”, “fear”, “tiredness”. If you got distracted, place a label on that: “distraction has happened”. Pay attention to the language used. It does not say “I’m angry”, “I have anger”, or “I’m feeling angry”. These are all concepts and attachments we superimpose on the simple and bare phenomenon: “anger has arisen”.

(2) Meditate *as if your head is on fire*. Or as if the effort to keep the attention on its object is like the effort needed to keep yourself from falling, when hanging from a tree branch. This means that the attention is exercised second-after-second, moment after moment, like a pulse. Any slip of effort, and you fall. This is by no means easy, but I found that having this attitude in mind deepens meditation considerably.

Keep practicing seeing everything as a simple temporary movement in your consciousness. Eventually there is the realization that you are the moveless consciousness behind it. When that happens... Congratulations, you have found your true Self. Things that show up inside your mind will have less power over you.

What do you think about micro-correcting your posture?

Correcting your posture is a good thing. The posture is there to support your practice – the body affects the mind, so sitting in the meditation posture will help you keep focused and alert.

I would just be careful of not being too obsessed about it (I have been there...), as that will simply bring you more distraction. After you have sat for a few weeks, your body will likely find the right posture more quickly, and will feel more comfortable to stay with it.

If your nose is running during meditation do you wipe it or let it run?

It can be an interesting practice to just observe the feeling. Resist the temptation to act upon the impulse immediately. Create a space between the perception and the reaction.

On the other hand, if you have a flu or something, it can be more distracting (and messy) to keep feeling the nose running than to actually clean it up. It can be a good idea, in these circumstances, to have some tissues near you, so if you do need to wipe your nose, you do so mindfully, and with the least amount of movement.

What percentage of the time does your mind wander during meditation? How much is “normal”?

This varies from person to person, and depending on how long you have been practicing. More important than the amount of time you are distracted is how many seconds it takes you to get back to your focus.

In general, however, do not think much of quantifying the quality of your meditation practice. I know it's hard, because we always want to know “how well we are doing”, to then either feel proud, or bad about ourselves. This is not helpful, and this is not meditation. Simply follow the practice to the best of your ability. Keep your interest and your effort alive. Practice every day. This is enough for you to reap most of its benefits.

With time your ability to stay with the meditation object, undistracted, increases.

I can't seem to focus on the breath without trying to control it. Any tips?

This is a very normal thing to happen in the beginning. Let it be. Give it some time. Just keep observing without the *intention* of changing it. If it changes as a result, that's fine, but don't do it intentionally. Be aware of the breath changing. That is enough.

It is so hard to breathe! Any ideas for an asthmatic girl?

[Disclaimer: I'm not a health professional and I'm not giving you any medical advice. Just some thoughts from a fellow meditator.]

A [study](#) made by neuroscientists of the University of Wisconsin-Madison points out that mindfulness techniques were more effective in relieving asthma than other activities that promote well-being, such as exercise and music therapy. So this is very good news for you.

It is not easy to observe the breathing without changing its rhythm. You have basically two options:

(1) Keep on with the breathing, and don't dwell so much on how uncomfortable it is. You may find this to be a deeply liberating experience, where your breathing is allowed to be whatever it is, and it doesn't affect your mind much. You remain as the observer of the breathing and of any discomfort it produces.

(2) Alternatively, you can pick another object of meditation. Instead of focusing on your breathing you could focus on a mantra or a chakra (see other meditation techniques [here](#)). In this case, just stick to your object of focus and forget the breathing – let it be as it may.

By what criteria should I do assessment of quality of meditation session?

You should resist this impulse of evaluating your sessions (refer to the question *How much do you wander?*). But here is a tentative answer.

For beginners: by the amount of times you caught your mind wandering (and brought it back to the meditation object), and also how many seconds it was wandering before you became mindful of it (the shorter the better). For long-term meditators: by the amount of time you keep at your meditation object without distractions and mental chatter. Your state of mind after your meditation finishes is also a good indicator of “how good was your meditation”.

But again, I wouldn't encourage you to keep accessing your meditation sessions. It's just more mental movement, and it doesn't need to be there. It often creates more problems than insight.

Don't attempt to evaluate your meditation practice. Just sit. It's enough.

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My motivation to meditate swings, and it's hard to keep at it...

It's absolutely normal to feel your motivation for meditation swing. It will happen many times. Each time it happens, you have a choice: to “follow” the motivation swing and give up, or to keep doing it no matter what.

Sit every day, even when you don't feel motivated to do so. Sit even when you are busy, tired, angry, or messed up — actually, *especially* in those cases. Have it in your mind that

meditation everyday is not an option, it's just an essential part of your day. Think of meditation like taking a shower, or sleeping. Simply something you need to do every day.

The stronger is your resolve to continue meditating no matter what, the less these mood swings will have any impact on you.

If you decide that you will do meditation 100% of the days, no matter what, then motivation swings will not matter to you at all. And don't question your determination, once made. This is the way to iron will, and it will serve you greatly in other aspects of your life as well.

Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm. – Winston Churchill

It also helps to be accountable to somebody – like a friend or coach, that knows you are in this process. That will help you stick to it more.

Finally, you may wish to review the [benefits of meditation](#) to boost up your motivation. Or read some [meditation quotes](#).

3) DAILY LIFE

What are some hacks to integrate mindfulness in your day-to-day life?



Image from www.mindingthebedside.com.

It is essential to integrate mindfulness in your daily life. Your “formal sitting” will make your practice deeper; but bringing mindfulness into moments of your life will make your practice wider.¹

Both seated practice and “daily life practice” are essential; one is incomplete without the other. It's like the two wings of a bird.

Here are moments of your day when you can stop, look inside, and take a deep breath:

- While commuting
- When you stop at the traffic light
- While waiting for an elevator
- Before unlocking your phone (when a notification beeps or call rings)
- Before opening up your email inbox
- Before starting a meal
- Before you open the door of your house
- When you start your car
- Next time someone asks you a question or says something that bothers you
- When you hear the alarm clock in the morning
- [When flying](#)

Try these. After a few days you will see that these “tiny moments” of mindfulness will make a real difference to the quality of your day, of your mind.

Seated meditation sessions and mindful moments during your day are the two pillars of Meditation.

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Should I meditate then work out, or work out then meditate?

If your exercise makes you exhausted, then meditate first. Because with your body exhausted you may fall asleep during meditation.

Otherwise, I feel it is better to exercise first, then meditate. Practicing meditation after some light exercise can be very soothing. You may find that your mind is more vigilant and less busy with thoughts. Just make sure you give yourself enough time to calm down the breathing and heart rate after the exercise, so your body is more relaxed and calm.

Any tips for integrating meditation while at work?

Try to bring tiny mindful moments to your day. You can set an alarm beep or notification on your phone, and meditate one minute every hour. That will probably give you more results than 10 minutes of meditation once a day (although both are good and necessary).

If you work in front of a computer, for example, nobody will even notice if you stop for one minute and bring your awareness to your body and breath. Sometimes even just having three deep, mindful breaths, can make a big difference.

Any tips for carving out meditation time when your partner doesn't meditate?

Try waking up earlier than him or her, and doing your practice first thing in the morning. If waking up earlier does not work, I would suggest clearly explaining to your partner that you are building up this habit of meditation, and that you need his/her support. You can explain that it's only going to be a few minutes per day that you will be "unavailable" and it would mean a lot to you if he/she helps you with that.

Should I share with other people the insights I get through meditation? Or write them down?

Having a like-minded friend or partner on the same journey can be empowering. If you do, it can be great for you both to share these things; you will grow. This is one of the reasons why practicing in a community (*sangha*) is useful.

If you don't have "meditation-minded" people among your friends/family, then you may feel that it's better to keep your insights to yourself, rather¹ than to expose yourself to the misunderstanding of others. These insights are deeply "personal".

Meditation for Anxiety Relief

There are many techniques that are useful here, and in order to give you the real answer, I'd need to get to know you better, so I can recommend the right techniques based on your personality (which is part of my [anxiety coaching](#) program).

As a general guideline, however, I recommend trying first techniques that are a bit more dynamic by nature: such as [walking meditation](#), [mantra meditation](#), pranayama breathing, and [Trataka](#). This is helpful because your mind is already agitate, and you need a meditation that meets you where you are.

Having said that, overcoming anxiety is a complex problem. Meditation is key part of the solution—but not enough. For a complete approach on overcoming anxiety mindfully, check out my [Limitless Life](#) program.

4) OTHER PRACTICES

Is meditating and guided visualization the same thing?

No, they are not the same thing. Guided visualizations are good, especially for a start. But in terms of benefits they are like the little sister of meditation.

In guided visualizations you are keeping quiet in body and mind and focusing only on one thing. So in this sense it is similar.

The difference is that instead of focusing on something that naturally exists in you (like your breath), you are focusing on something that is directing you from outside. And you are actively using your imagination (unlike meditation).

It's a good way to start. But I encourage you to move to meditation practice when you feel ready.

Learn more about Guided Meditations [here](#).

Is it ok to combine meditation with an affirmation exercise? Or should I keep them separate?

I would definitely keep them separate, as they are different exercises and have different purposes. Do your normal meditation practice and, at the end, practice your affirmations. They will be much more powerful once your mind gets quieted by the meditation.

Can skiing/painting/cycling/running (etc.) be a form of meditation? Is taking extra time in the shower a form of meditation?

This is a fairly common question, and can be tackled from different angles. Here is my take on it.

On the highest level, meditation is our *true nature*; therefore, it is *effortless*. However, our habitual mental patterns cast a cloud of noise above it, and we don't perceive nor live that reality. In this sense, we call *meditation* the technique(s) that we use to free ourselves from these patterns – to see through them and reach a deeper level in our being/consciousness. That requires effort.

Being in the present moment is one of the requirements of meditation – but it is not the *whole* of it. When you are doing bungee jumping, for example, during those few seconds your mind is definitely not paying attention to anything else, and you are in the present

moment. But that is not meditation, that is just *being in the present moment*. Meditation also brings you to the present moment, but takes you deeper.

When you are doing something (for example, running), and you are completely focused on that activity, in the present moment, not wondering in your mind but aware of what's going on in your body and senses, this is part of what the Buddha called *Right Attention*. We can call it mindfulness. It is a state of flow.

When your attention is quiet and introverted, concentrating/absorbed on one object to the exclusion of all else (including your environment), and is maintained in that state for a certain period of time, this is meditation. This is also a state of flow, but deeper.

We can say that *being in the present moment* is one of the main effects of meditation in your daily activities. And also one of the main practices you can have, along your day, to help maintain and deepen the meditation "state". It is not, however, all there is about meditation. Meditation helps you be in the present moment for your other activities, and striving to be in the present moment in your other activities also helps meditation. You need them both.

By time, as your practice becomes deeper and wider, the separation between "meditation" and "other activities" start to become thinner and thinner. For some people, it eventually disappears.

Being in the present moment is needed for meditation – but it is not the whole of meditation.

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Does Yoga or Tai Chi count as meditation?

Doing Yoga *postures* or Tai Chi is not meditation in itself (see answer above). But these activities can indeed help meditation by relaxing and cleaning your body.

5) FOR THE MORE ADVANCED

I feel I've reached a plateau in my practice. I'm stuck and can't seem to go forward.

You are in a plateau when you just keep sitting every day but there is not much intention or intensity in the practice. You get distracted a lot. These plateaus will unavoidably happen. And, still, meditation is beneficial even in those conditions.

From here, if you give up or stop, that is decay. If you continue, that is good. If you continue and find renewed motivation and focus, that is "progress". Like with any other human undertaking, keeping at it with the "fire" alive is the greatest challenge.

When you are in a plateau, you need to find renewed motivation and drive. Something needs to change, otherwise your practice becomes stale. That new fire can come through a new book you read, a person you meet, an inspiring movie you watch, a visit to a spiritual center, anything. Or it can also come when life pulls the carpet under our feet and suffering knocks at our door.

Meditation helped me get perspective on one of my biggest compulsions. Now how do I end it entirely?

[Disclaimer: I'm not a psychiatrist and this is not medical advice. Simply sharing my personal learnings as an experienced meditator.]

I'm happy to hear that meditation is helping you get perspective on your compulsions. This is one of the powers of the practice – understanding yourself better.

Now answering your question, bringing the "state" of meditation into the compulsion when and where it happens. Since you have been practicing meditation for a while, you know the "feeling" of it, you know how different the mind is during meditation. So, during your day, when compulsion appears, bring in that meditation feeling. Then watch the difference in your body and mind before bringing the meditation and after it.

On the flip side, practice bringing your compulsion triggers inside your formal meditation practice. One day when you sit in meditation and feel your session is going deep, start bringing to mind the several triggers for your compulsion. Observe the effects of it in your body, in your nerves, in your mind. Learn to refine your attention to catch the "triggers" (external and internal) that produce that state. And observe how there is a space between you and the feeling – and the ability to choose to identify with it or not. To follow it or not.

With that experience you can feel the power that you have. The power to deal with your compulsion from a state of clarity, of sanity, of calmness.

Learn to find the space between the trigger for the compulsion and the compulsion itself. This is a space of power and freedom.

You can do the same with other emotions that trouble you.

What to do when strong emotions come up in meditation, or in everyday life?

[Disclaimer: I'm not a mental health professional and this is not medical advice. Simply sharing my experience and insight as an experienced meditator.]

This is a very important question, because you need to take your meditation into your daily life. It is not meant to stay on the cushion.

Once you are in meditation, bring in, mentally, all the triggers for your aggression. And then be there. Keep breathing. Notice what happens to your body, to your muscles, to your nerves. Notice what is going on in your mind. Feel it deeply – but keep seated in meditation. Relax in it. Breathe into it.

Don't move. Don't try to push this experience away. Let it be whatever it wants to be. You are experiencing everything from a neutral space, without reacting.

Now notice how you are the observer of all this. How you are capable of letting it all be there in your system, without you acting upon it. You are observing from a quiet place, a place of awareness. This is power.

I used to do something similar, but with other emotions. Once in meditation, I visualize my deepest fears happening to me. I felt it very vividly, in my body and mind. Intensely. And then I would allow this image to subside and just go back to my breathing. I did this with fear, attachment, sadness, and other negative emotions. I must say that, as a result of this meditation exercise, they never again had the same power over me.

This may not be advisable for beginners, or if you have a strong trauma to work through. In this case, stabilize yourself in your practice for a while, before you start gradually bringing in strong emotions. Also, Yoga and Pranayama (breathing exercises) can be a stepping stone.

Read the post on [negative emotions](#) to learn more.

How to deepen my practice

If you have already built up the habit, and now wish to deepen your practice, here are a few things you can do:

- increase the *length* of practice (if you were doing 20 min, try now 30, 40, or 1h)
- increase the *intensity* of the practice (by [increasing the focus and the intention](#))
- increase the *breadth* of your practice (by bringing meditation more and more to your daily life, via mini mindfulness moments during the day)
- participate on some meditation retreats
- read more about meditation, meet different [meditation teachers](#) and practitioners
- implement these [7 hacks](#).

You can also try [other techniques](#) as well.

Finally, pay attention to your first moments after you finish your meditation. How you transition from meditation to activity greatly influences how much of the “meditation feeling” you will take into your day. Transition smoothly; do not hurry into the next task.

How to know when you reach a deeper level in meditation?

Signs that you are in a deep meditation session:

- one-pointedness of attention
- lack of distractions
- absence of discursive thinking
- body and mind feeling one
- deep sense of quietude
- feelings of joy, bliss, or deep pleasure in the body and mind
- forgetting about time
- body gets immovable like a mountain
- you forget about your body and everything else

Different traditions point out different signs, but these seem to be common to many.

Regarding Self-Enquiry, does asking “Who am I?” or “Who is observing?” produce an infinite regression? When trying to observe the mind, I see myself going backwards endlessly.

This is a really good question – and also a product of a misconception. Inside your self there is ultimately only **one** subject, which is your consciousness (yourself!). Everything else, however subtle, is simply phenomena being observed by you. Let's say there you are observing your breath. Breath is the object, and you, consciousness, is the subject. Now let's say you ask yourself "who is observing this?". Or, by any other means, you turn your attention to the fact of observing itself. What has happened now is that the *phenomena* of observation of breath is now the object of your observation – and you, consciousness, are still the subject.

At this point, if you contemplate further, "but I'm also observing this", this may give you the impression that you are "moving deeper", but actually what you are doing is simply repeating the previous step. It is like a cat trying to "grab" the light beam from a laser pen. He puts his paws on top of it, on the floor, and immediately the beam of light is above his paws. Then he removes them and covers it again – only to find the beam of light still on top of his paws.

This is a trap. Like an "infinite loop" in computer science. A "vicious circle". So what is the way out? You have to turn the attention (which is the "light" of consciousness) onto its source (pure consciousness), the subject, without objectifying it. The "virtuous circle", here, would be:

- (1) I pay attention to my breath (objectified attention on something external)
 - (2) I realize the phenomena of observation itself, which is subtler than the breath, and pay attention to it (objectified attention in an internal perception)
 - (3) I turn the attention to the *source of the attention*, which is the source of observing – my consciousness. This consciousness simply "shines" inside as "being", as "I am", without anything attached to it. And I let it rest there, moment after moment.
- (By the way, step 2 is optional).

This is roughly the process of Self-Enquiry (*atma-vichara*) taught in Advaita Vedanta and, especially, by Sri Ramana Maharshi. Once your attention is in the self (consciousness), just keep it there, "rest" it there. After some time, a reality that is behind the "I Am", behind consciousness and the subject, reveals itself. This is Awakening.

6) RESOURCES

Any advice on books about starting meditation?

Here are some recommendations for books on Mindfulness:

- [Practical Meditation](#) (my book)
- [Mindfulness in Plain English](#)
- [The Miracle of Mindfulness](#)
- [Mindfulness for Beginners](#)
- [Meditation and Its Practice](#)

For recommendations on books about other types of meditation, see links [here](#) and [here](#).

For more beginner resources on mindfulness, check out this [great list](#).

7) MISCELLANEOUS

What to do when brilliant thoughts and insights come during meditation? I don't want to miss them, but don't want to interrupt the practice either.

This is a very interesting question.

Meditation helps clear the mind. So it is natural that creativity will flow better. Many meditators know that they have their best ideas or insights when they are meditating. I also feel the same.

You don't want to interrupt the meditation, but also don't want to lose the insight. So, what to do?

It's not a good idea to "keep thinking it" in fear that you will forget. On the other hand, I wouldn't necessarily advise interrupting the practice and taking note of it (although it's better than to keep thinking about it).

What I nowadays do and works for me is to repeat that thought once inside my mind, strongly, with the intention of not forgetting it. I do that and then leave it aside. After finishing meditation, I then think "what was that thought again?", and it usually comes back. You might need a bit of training to do this, but it's definitely possible. And it will make your mind stronger.

Let me know in the comments if this has worked for you or not.

What is the difference you see in yourself as a result of meditation?

This is very personal, so if you ask 10 long term meditators, you may get 10 different answers.

For me, it is inner freedom. Not being a slave to any feelings, thoughts, or self-talk anymore – which is a result of realizing the true nature of my self and the mind. Being able to quieten my mind at will, and to dissolve any thought simply by looking at it.

I shared a bit more about my experience [here](#).

How do you know if you are actually meditating vs. just sitting quietly?

If during your whole session you were distracted with your thoughts, and were just physically there, you were *not* meditating. On the other hand, if you were exercising some control over your attention, bringing it back to your object of focus, and noticing when you get distracted, then you were meditating. As simple as that.

What does it feel like to meditate regularly?

Highly subjective, but here are my feelings.

BODY: the immediate effect of meditation on your body is a feeling of relaxation, ease, and comfort. You will feel this in some level from the first time you meditate. As the months (and years) pass, this becomes a skill that you are able to tap at will at any moment during your day. There are also several [benefits](#) to your nervous, respiratory and circulatory systems, that you may feel or not, but that nevertheless happen.

MIND: meditating is like giving a break to your mind – or taking a break *from* your mind. In the first months/years you may feel the mind gets more active during meditation. In fact that is not necessarily true – it is only that now you are paying attention inside, instead of outside, so you see better what was already going on. If you continue practicing regularly, however, you will see that meditation become a space of refuge and nourishment. You will feel it improving your clarity of thought, memory, power of concentration, and resilience.

SPIRITUAL: for those that are into these type of things (like I am), meditating regularly is by far the best thing you can do on your spiritual journey, and, in many traditions, is almost the whole journey on itself.

This daily practice will enable you to achieve more of anything you seek in my life – be it health, wealth, performance, spirituality, etc. For all these things, your mind is the most essential tool, isn't it?

Why, in your opinion, is there such a stigma attached to meditation from those that don't practice?



There is not much stigma anymore. When I started with meditation (1999) I was seen as a weirdo by my friends and family. But now people see it as an admired habit and personal quality.

Each time more high profile people are practicing meditation, and admitting it publicly. From celebrities to Fortune 500 executives, high performing athletes and notable scientists – people from all walks of life are finding the [benefits](#) of this ancient practice.

Now, that doesn't mean that everybody you personally interact with will have a positive view on meditation. The reason for this is really simple: some people are still attached to a dogmatic “face value” opinion of meditation, and are not open-minded enough to try it out or even read about it.

Their opinion might come from a more fundamentalist religious path, which would see any eastern practice as something dangerous for their faith or at least suspicious. That is not true, as most meditation practices require no religious belief, and therefore do not fight with any belief you may have (or lack of it).

Or maybe they have a fundamentalist view of society and culture, which would see meditation as a pointless waste of time or something that “hippie people do to feel happy”. Not the case anymore – meditation [is now mainstream](#).

Finally, they may come from a fundamentalist view about science, though with the [research available](#) nowadays this is hardly justifiable.

Be as it may, I would say: don't let their point of views bring you down. Stick to what you believe in, and hang out with people and online communities that are dedicated to personal growth and have a more forward thinking mindset. This is what I'm building here in this blog.

[Image copyright of Time Magazine]

Is meditation dangerous?

Most scientific studies found only [benefits](#) for meditation. However, some people – which had latent psychotic or bipolar disorders, or strong PTSD – have reported that certain types of meditation practice increased their symptoms. Other people report other types of

problems (such as social alienation, dissociation, repression of sexual desires, etc.), although they are usually only present in people that intensely practice meditation as part of a spiritual path, or in a cult.

We can hurt ourselves with basically any activity, so using common sense is important (although not always enough). Just like physical activity is excellent for health and promotes well-being, but can also cause injury depending on how it is done, meditation is also great for you, but needs care and attention.

Some meditation techniques – like [mindfulness](#) and [loving-kindness](#) – seem to be safe for basically everybody. Other styles, such as [kundalini meditation](#), and some types of intense energy work, are probably not as safe for many people.

This is a huge topic, and one for which there is very little research or consensus. In the future I intend to do some research in this area and write a longer post. For now, if you are unhappy with any effects of meditation in your life, I suggest you talk about it with your meditation teacher.

In general, however, meditation is pretty safe, and brings positive effects to your body, mind and heart. I believe that, for anybody out there, there is always a type of meditation they can safely do and benefit from.

What is your favorite meditation?

In my case, it changed over time.

- In the first two years I didn't have a clear technique, so I was just sitting and trying to quiet the mind
- Then for three years I was practicing [Zazen](#) (focusing on the breath).
- After that, for almost 10 years, it was the [Self-Enquiry](#) as taught by Ramana Maharishi and Mooji (focusing on the feeling of "I am", or consciousness).
- Now the technique I use is focusing on the "third eye chakra" (from the Yogic tradition).

In 2015 I also went through several meditation experiments, and discovered a few more meditations that I'm fond of. You can read about those experiments [here](#).

The best meditation is the one that works for **you**, at **this moment** in your life. You can try different ones, and see the ones that work.

Take a look at the post on the [different types of meditation](#).

Do you believe we create ourselves, or discover ourselves? Why?

We create ourselves as person, as ego and personality – this is a power few are aware of.

We discover ourselves as Self, as Consciousness – this is a journey few are attracted to.

We create ourselves as personality; we discover ourselves as consciousness.

[CLICK TO TWEET](#)

PARTING WORDS

Do you have any question that is not answered here? Ask in the comments, and I'll see if I can help. If it's a recurring question, I'll add it to the post. Or, if the question is too personal, contact me directly via the form on this site.

Let's make a more mindful world. If you have learned something from this post, please **share** this.

Your Next Steps

Meditation is a wonderful practice that improves your well-being, sharpens your mind, and opens many doors. It allows you to *master you mind*, and thus *master your life*.

Meditation can help you transform yourself. It is a powerful path for overcoming anxiety, stress, and mental noise. It empowers you to be **calm**, **centered**, and **focused**.

But for that to happen, we need the **Three Pillars of Meditation**:



How are your three pillars going?

Figuring out and practicing these three pillars on your own can be very hard. It requires dedication, time, effort, self-discipline and patience.

But it doesn't need to be that hard. You don't need to do this all on your own.

Over the past several years I've helped *thousands* of people start, deepen and integrate a meditation practice. And I have created an online program that helps you build those three pillars gradually, with the support of a community. Check it out: [Limitless Life](https://liveanddare.com/meditation-tips-and-answers/).

