

## Meditation

Meditation is an ancient, time honored way of becoming intimate with your own life. There are many ways to meditate, and the suggestions that I offer here represent techniques that have worked well for me. There is no wrong way to do this, and ultimately you will settle into what works best for you. Don't be afraid to try things on, to experiment, and to make them your own. The most important points are that you are simply with the moment, just as it is, without arguing with it or trying to change it. Just be present. Now that takes some practice!

## Posture

Start by finding a comfortable position to sit in. If you sit in a chair, let your feet be flat on the ground (or on a cushion), and your spine straight. If you sit in the traditional cross-legged positions, sit on a cushion. When using a 'zafu'<sup>1</sup> (a small round meditation cushion), sit on the forward third of it rather than dead center on top of it. Legs can be crossed in front of you in various ways<sup>2</sup>. A third position for sitting is on a meditation bench or higher cushion that allows you to bend your legs back behind you – a sort of semi-kneeling position. In any of these postures, find the alignment that you can hold most effortlessly – spine straight with the small of the back slightly curved inwards, shoulders relaxed, head resting comfortably. It may help to picture a string pulling up from the center of the top of the head to the ceiling. The eyes are traditionally half-closed and soft focused – but is also okay to close them. Hands can rest in the lap (the left hand resting in the right, thumbs making soft contact at the tips) or on your knees. There is a gentle dignity to being seated in this way. It is not important to 'do it right', it does help to find what is comfortable.

## Focus

Counting the breath is a common starting practice for meditation. The in-breath is drawn in simple appreciation of breathing; the out-breath is silently intoned with the number 'one', the next out-breath will be 'two'. Count to ten and then begin again. When your mind wanders, just bring it back and begin over again with one. Over and over again, bring your attention back to your breath.

You can also focus on your breath without counting. You can focus on sounds, without trying to label or understand them; just let the sounds themselves wash through you. You can notice thoughts and feelings that arise, or the sensations in the body, just sitting with them and noticing rather than engaging with them.

For the time of the meditation, be in the moment just as it is. You don't need to change anything, you don't need to 'do it better'; you just are attending to the moment. You listen. You feel your life. All that is necessary is to notice. There is no need to achieve any special state of mind. You don't need to clear the mind of thoughts. While there is a deep stillness, it doesn't happen in the way we may expect. For most of us, thoughts don't go away. We begin to notice them without getting hooked into them. Or not. Sometimes we sit with the thoughts. Sometimes we sit with pain in our bodies, or in our hearts. Sometimes we sit with great joy. We sit with whatever is there. Slowly, imperceptibly, something shifts in us, and we experience our own lives more intimately.

## The Practice

Do mediation as often and as long as you can. An established practice is often 30 minutes most days. Start with what works for you. Try sitting with a group<sup>3</sup> – it can be a wonderful way to deepen your practice and most people find it easier than sitting by themselves.

## Resources

- 1 [www.dharmacrafts.com](http://www.dharmacrafts.com) is one of many online sources of sitting cushions.
- 2 [www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-966.html](http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-966.html) has good photos of seated positions
- 3 [www.pacificzen.org](http://www.pacificzen.org) is a group that sits both in Santa Rosa and Oakland: Roshi John Tarrant

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