

Finding Refuge in the Storm

A Meditation Handbook

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Parable of Inner Peace

In old China long ago, a sage was sitting under a plum tree. A student approached the sage and said, "Where should I go to find peace?"

The sage said, "What peace are you looking for?"

The student said, "Peace from all the corners of this world. Peace from the Emperor's raids on our religion. Peace from money and food worries. I want to have that kind of peace."

The sage said, "Sit with me under this tree and you will find peace."

The student sat down, and after five days the student said to the sage, "It is peaceful here. You have freedom from all the earthly things because you have placed yourself above them, but I find it boring."

The sage said, "What is boring?"

The student said, "I have nothing to do."

And the sage said. "Then go out into your world until you are ready for peace within. Peace within can only be when you step back and watch the world go by, not when you are involved in it. By watching it go by, you are within it – for you know when to associate, and because of the peace that you have, those that need that peace will stop at your plum tree."

May your plum tree be as peaceful as you desire.

How to Set Up Your Meditation Practice

Create a place in your home, office or studio where you will not be disturbed. Make it comfortable, clean, and uncluttered. Think about how you feel when you go into a temple, church, shrine – any place that represents a form of the Divine, does that sense of sacredness, quiet, solitude, and reverence comes over you? Well, you too can create this for yourself in your home/office/studio, anywhere you are.

As an illustration: I have this very ordinary, yet attractive, and comfortable green chair that I bought at a used furniture store about 10 years ago. Since I had just relocated to the east coast and didn't have much in the way of furniture, this chair became my meditation chair. Every day I would sit in this chair for my practice and soon I began to notice that everyone who came into my home commented on this chair, "Oh, that's such a beautiful chair." "I really like that chair." On and on it went, until one day it dawned on me that this chair, no matter how seemingly ordinary, held the energy of my meditations and this was what drew so much attention to the chair. It wasn't the chair. Rather, it was the energy of the meditation practice. How am I sure of this? Well, I no longer practice in this chair and no one ever comments on the beauty of it. After I realized this, it became my little secret when someone commented on the chair; I would just accept the compliment while secretly knowing what was going on.

We can intuit and feel the energy in different places. Think back on a time and place where you felt most at ease, and peaceful. For some this will be in nature, others, a place of worship, or with someone special, but there is a place where the environment around you helps to activate this sense of peace.

In my office, people often state how they can just breathe easier while in there, that they feel more relaxed than they do anywhere else. It isn't that I have my office decorated in Fung Shui or anything of that nature – it is because of the energy of my meditation practice, and the healing work that I do in my office; my home is the same way. To me it is important they both feel like my own sanctuary. Have you created a space or place for your own personal sanctuary?

There is no wrong way to practice meditation as long as you sit still with pure intention. When I first started my practice I was overwhelmed with my thoughts. I had heard that one was supposed to quiet the mind in meditation, yet my mind was racing this way and that, and my inner critical voice was eager to point out why I couldn't practice. I thought something was wrong with me because of this racing mind, and that I'd never be able to quell it. As I look back to my innocence and naivety in the practice, I see the grace and the beauty of it all. I practiced anyway and was blessed with many gifts in this state of not knowing if I was doing this thing called meditation correct or not. Therefore, I suggest you make the commitment to yourself and enjoy the ride.

Your Daily Practice

Why do I ask you to do daily practice?

It is simple; you know the story about Pavlov's dog, right? Well, Ivan Pavlov was a Russian scientist who in the 1890s mistakenly happened upon what is known today as classical conditioning or conditioned reflexes. He discovered that if feeding a dog while you also provide some other type of stimuli like ringing a bell, you will train that dog to salivate just by using the stimuli – hence, the dog will react as if you are going to feed him by salivating without food being present, just the stimuli. This was first discussed psychologically in negative terms regarding one who reacts to stimuli without thinking, yet just as we too can be trained to react negatively, we can also be trained positively. Therefore, when you set up your meditation practice in a sacred place and you practice in this place daily, or near daily basis your body will react. You will have a big “Ahhh” when you go there as your body and mind will be saying to itself, “Yeah, finally we get to sit still, breathe, listen and give ourselves a much needed break from the chaos of our mind and our life.”

The Bible states, *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”* This quote is also true with meditation, for meditation is an act of releasing that which is not real and aligning with that which is. I invite you to invite another to join you in this commitment and watch the magic happen. It will not only enhance your experience in the practice, it will help you to be accountable to one another in the practice. Celebrate this union to move closer to the true nature of Source Self.

Remember, everything in life is practice and not perfect. If you want to get good at controlling your emotions, reactions, thoughts and thus increase your state of peacefulness and self-awareness, you must practice this state of being.

Meditation has numerous benefits. If you are interested in exploring them all, I encourage you to look at the latest research regarding the benefits of meditation. However, for the purpose of this book we will look at the benefits in terms of understanding the nature of your own mind. With practice, you will become the witness of your mind's patterns of thought. What you are mentally and emotionally attached to, where your mind tends to wander; and therefore create a vast opportunity to not only wield some control over your mind, but to feel empowered in the knowledge that you generate and the ease of manifesting a life that is more aligned with your greatest desires.

Your Posture – How to Sit

Keep your back as straight as possible, feet flat on the ground or crossed legged if this is comfortable for you. Use pillows or cushions to support yourself.

I have learned over the years that if you aren't comfortable, you won't practice. While living and practicing in a Buddhist center, it didn't take me too long to discover how uncomfortable one's body can get. I would practice for 90 min in the morning, spend 8 ½ hours at work daily, and come back to practice for 90-120 min in the evening. This practice was sitting on a Zafu (meditation cushion) that was placed on a blanket that sat on a hardwood floor in the middle of the shrine. About 60 days into this regime, I began to develop an irritation on my back, just below my right shoulder blade. The pain was sharp, the sensation bringing tears to my eyes during practice. I began to dread the practice, I sought out acupuncture and massage to help alleviate it, but nothing worked. I'd sit and cry throughout my meditation – quietly suffering – thinking negative thoughts about myself that something was 'wrong' with me, that I couldn't handle this, and I just couldn't do it 'right', etc. You know, the exact opposite of what a meditation practice is intended for. Until one day I stopped being the victim and decided that I needed back support for these lengthy meditations. Once I was able to get myself seated comfortably, I could continue with my practice.

I know that there are various meditation traditions that require one to sit in certain ways and require you to mentally overcome any pain that arises. I am of the belief system that if you are comfortable, you will more likely practice than if you are not. Therefore, make yourself comfortable, keep your back as straight as possible this helps

breathing and the energy flow. Furthermore, put your feet, legs, arms, legs where they are comfortable which may be different on any given day, but most importantly just do the practice.

Having said that I want you to be comfortable, I'm going to ask you not to lie down. I know, you were hoping to say you practiced meditation when really you practiced taking a nap, so you can go ahead and grumble and grip about this, but I do wish for you to practice meditation and not napping – these are two different things.

The Length of Your Practice

Your practice can be as short as 5 minutes, as long as 60 minutes or even more. It is up to you. Set up a schedule for success, not failure. If you can only do 5 minutes right now, then do that with a goal to advance to 10 minutes in the near future, then 15 minutes and so on.

After practicing meditation for many years (since 1988), and experiencing that blissful energy that washes over me and through me when I sit down to practice, I do want you to realize that it takes about 20-30 min typically to get the mind settled down. Even though I feel the bliss and know I'm connected to Source Self my mind is still doing its thing and it takes me about 10 min to remember what I'm doing – I'm practicing meditation, not planning for the day, worrying about tomorrow, fussing over yesterday, answering the call of hunger, or the phone, etc. I am simply and only practicing meditation which means training the mind. If you are an athlete, a musician, or a singer you will know this, it is the warm up before the work out or performance. So please allow yourself this extra time for the warm up. Your success will be far more beneficial than if you say, "I'm going to practice for 10 min", and then you were no calmer, centered, or at peace than before you meditated. Plus you indulged your thinking mind and your ego mind that says, "Meditation is for the birds, who needs it?"

Imagine that your mind is like a jar of river water that has been shaken up. That river water is full of sediment, organisms, decaying plant matter and any number of other things. Yet, when you allow that jar of river water to sit on the counter top for a little while all the sediment settles to the bottom, and the water becomes clearer. This

is how the mind is. Allow time for the sediments to settle down and the clarity and peace to be present.

If you are a very anxious person or have a difficult time relaxing and letting go, there may be a noticeable discomfort with the experience of having a relaxed body and a calm mind. Not too long ago I was guiding a client who had come to me for issues with anxiety in a relaxation meditation process, about 10 minutes into the practice she just opened her eyes and blurted out, “I can’t do this”. I asked her to give it another try and began to guide her to a relaxed body and a calm mind when she blurted this out again. This time she refused to try again. This experience was so foreign to her that she felt her body and mind couldn’t handle it. Although this happens rarely, it can happen. This is another reason to be very kind and gentle with yourself in this practice. Use a soothing inner voice and be reassuring toward yourself.

Before becoming a counselor, I was a teacher and when I moved to Oregon they didn’t accept my middle school credential and only certified me in elementary grades. I know this may sound strange to some of you, but I’m one of those people who is comfortable with middle school age children and uncomfortable with elementary age. None the less, I found myself teaching a 3rd & 4th grade combination. Don’t get me wrong, I loved these kids, but at the time in my emotional healing and spiritual development I felt overwhelmed much of the time by their needs and their energy. I knew that I needed to change, because these kids were just being 3rd and 4th graders. I decided to practice gratitude and appreciation. The first thing in the morning I did was going around the room and giving a thank you, or an appreciation to each child. Then we would set a timer for 60 min and when the timer went off that meant that we stopped doing whatever we were doing and one of the children would give a thank you or an appreciation to 3 other children. This worked wonders for

me and the children, and we had a very successful school year due in part by this shift. Yet the point of this story is to tell you about one little boy, who was very bright, yet socially not accepted by the other children. He was the only child of a single mother and had very little supervision and very little contact with his father. For the first week of me initiating this process, he would crawl under his desk when it was time for me to compliment him. He couldn't take the positive feedback. He was use to externally getting negative feedback and therefore internally feeding this that he physically shielded himself from it. This is another example of how some of us are so emotionally wounded that even positive feedback and experiences terrify us. If this applies to you please allow yourself the time to move through it and know you are worth loving and especially worth caring for – it starts with you!

The ultimate goal is to let your life, every breath, be the practice.

What this means is that eventually your life will be the meditation practice. You will be more present, clear, mindful, joyful, happy, healthy and loving. You will see yourself and life in a much more positive way. Isn't this exciting?

What to Expect From Your Practice

Expect that your mind will drift off on many different topics. Some researchers say that we have 65 to 80 thousand thoughts a day and very few of them are original. Hence, the same repetitive stuff we've always thought. According to Shad Helmstetter, the author of *What To Say When You Talk To Yourself* states that 77% of these thoughts are negative; always thinking the worst first and the best last. Also, it states that by the time you are 18 years old, you have heard 148,000 no's and maybe a few thousand yes's. This is why we use meditation to help train the mind - with these statistics we surely need it.

I know that even after all the years of practice, all the education and studies I've had and with all the positive experiences due to mindfulness practice, when something happens in my world that isn't to my liking I can still go to a negative place. Now the good news is that I don't do it that often and I do catch myself quickly, yet I do have my weak points and moments where this is definitely my reality. You will too. Your practice will often change daily. Do not judge this, it is natural. Practice loving kindness and nurture yourself along.

Expect that your old mental pattern will push back and create resistance for you. You may hear yourself attempting to talk yourself out of doing the daily practice, talk you into doing it laying down, find other things that you "need" to do before you can meditate, and many other things that can distract you from your commitment to a mediation practice. Your mind, our minds are tricky in this way. I suggest you just take a humorous approach to this and do the meditation anyway. Become the observer of your tricky and often manipulative mental patterns. By doing this, you will experience great benefits.

The Body – How to Communicate With Your Body

Expect that your body will find ways that it isn't comfortable. I mentioned earlier the physical discomfort I experienced while living and practicing in the Buddhist center and this by far has been to date. The most physical distress I've had in my meditation practices. Yet I desire to address a couple of things here. If you have any physical limitations or challenges please do not let this stop your practice and please learn how to modify it to suit you

In my career as a counselor I was blessed enough to work with US Combat Veterans and at the place where I worked I was given the opportunity to teach meditation to these courageous men. It was a small group of men who regularly attended; 8-10. They all expressed that during the 90 min they would feel more relaxed than they had in decades. They were able to let their guard down and enjoy the emotional security and physical freedom that the serenity of the group provided for them. Now in this group was a Vietnam Veteran who physically survived Vietnam only to come home, start a family and a career as an electrician. While working on a building he was electrocuted and lost all of his limbs. Yes, both arms and both legs. For decades he felt phantom pain – burning sensations in all of his limbs and more than likely still does, but this man would come every week to the meditation class and have an experience of comfort free from pain for this 90 minutes. Not only was this great and wonderful news for this person, it exhibits the power of Matthew 18:20: *“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”* We don't have to be a religious person to know and experience that there is power in numbers and in intention and commitment.

On the other hand, those of us who are strong and physically fit and well will also create physical distractions. Here are some I've heard and done myself. I'm too tired, my head hurts, my legs fall asleep, my jeans are too tight, my back hurts, the chair or cushion is too hard/soft, and on and on it goes. When this happens, and it will, I ask you to just be with the story you are telling yourself, be with the discomfort, do this for 1 minute, then 2, then 5 and see if you can use your breath to allow this discomfort to diminish before you decide to shift. Do not give into the impulse to move away from the discomfort immediately. Sit with it, play with it in your mind and see if you can decide that it isn't that uncomfortable after all. You just might surprise yourself and watch it vanish. If it persists and you decide to move, then move or shift your body so that you can continue with the practice. The point here is to decide consciously to make a shift as well as to just explore the mind's trickiness in creating diversions to sitting still.

Many of these different body sensations and mental distractions are just that. Distractions. It is almost like they are testing our commitment. That's why I want you to just stick it out for a couple of breaths and see if you can make a different decision and watch or allow the current experience to change.

Feelings and Sensations in Your Body

In this phase, we notice the feelings or sensations in our body. Just noticing what is in the present moment with your body.

Scan the body from head to toe noticing different sensations. Where do you feel tightness/relaxation; warmth/coolness; tingling/soothing? Do you feel heavy or light? Is your mind dull or alive? Are you open and receptive or closed and defensive? Just allow yourself to notice, without judgment, sensations of the body. Especially that you can have contradictory sensations and emotions going on at the same time.

I have noticed, for myself and others, there is that perceived discomfort let's say in the body like a sore muscle we will tend to put a lot of attention on this one spot. It may be 2 inches where the discomfort is coming from, yet we choose not to notice that, all the other inches on our body feel fine, maybe even great.

This level of practice is very important to understanding and knowing our reactivity to thoughts and events and can aid us in making better choices each moment. Choosing the happier thoughts will always bring us happier outcomes.

The body knows before the mind in many cases how you are reacting in any given moment. Get in touch with the many sensations and feelings that the body gives us and keys to unlock the door to emotional, physical and spiritual freedom.

The Mind – Understanding the Nature of Your Mind

Expect that your mind will attempt to talk you out of the practice of meditation. It will sound similar to this: I can't do this, it isn't for me, my mind won't be quiet, maybe everyone else's will, but not mine, I don't have time, my kids won't leave me alone long enough, I don't know how, and on and on it goes. My dear friend who happens to be a fabulous yoga teacher would say, "It's time to move your big *but*s (excuses) out of the way and sit your *butt* down to do the practice." Do not let the inner critic or ego (false and negative opinion of self or others) win this internal argument. Remember always, and in all ways you are deserving of lasting peace and joy, therefore claim it for your own. This is the time to let the still small voice inside that has been ignored for far too long to rise to the top.

There was a time in my life where I all but lost my meditation practice. A friend of mine was very sick and dying, we didn't know this piece of information until much later. Nevertheless, I committed myself to helping him. At the time I was working and living about 70 miles from where he was and therefore I spent a lot of time traveling back and forth. This went on for about 5 months until he got admitted to the hospital and was there for 3 ½ months until he died. Now I know with all my intellect that I needed to practice meditation at this time more than any, but I didn't. I made other choices and other priorities. After he died I was a mess. I cried all the way to work, home from work, cried myself to sleep. I felt lost; I hadn't created a life for myself in the last 9 months that wasn't surrounded around helping him and being there for him. I didn't know what to do with myself. When I finally sat myself down to just be with the pain and loss, answers came immediately and doors began to open and healing took place, but it

wasn't without one comical experience. The first time I sat in that 'green' chair I mentioned earlier to meditate I literally felt like my butt was on fire and I had this image of myself running as fast as I could, arms flailing, flames on my rear-end, and I couldn't help but crack up laughing. I knew that this was my very strong and very stubborn inner critic attempting to make meditation so uncomfortable for me that I'd not do it. The good news is that I'd been at this long enough to know what was going on and could laugh about it and continue to sit still in during this internal tantrum between my Source Self and my Inner Critical Self. If you have parented or even spent some time with young children you will understand this. It is very similar to when they are so tired that they can't keep their eyes open, yet they are also equally determined to stay up. For adults, it is the same. Our Source Self says come sit down with me, rest, listen, rejuvenate, resonate with me for a while; and our ego self says no, hell no, what are you thinking you need to be doing this and that – don't waste your time. So go ahead and surrender to the practice and watch the comedy of the inner critic do its thing...Remember it isn't true or real.

What are some of the things you tell yourself that keeps you from doing the things that are good and beneficial for you?

Know that you are NOT your mind. Your mind is a thinking aspect of yourself, but it IS NOT YOU. Your mind was made to think. When it is thinking it is doing its job. Is it your brain doing all the thinking or the mind? If it is the mind, where the heck is this thing called the mind? People who asked this question will often point to the head, but is that really the mind, or is that the head? What is the answer to this question? Hmmmm. I know that wherever this thing called a mind is, it IS trainable, and it matters not to me where it is. Now I do know that the mind is a thinking entity, just as the heart is a beating entity. The heart has a job and that job is to beat

and to pump blood; so does the mind have a job and that is to think. We have already established that this mind's tendencies are to think upon negative view of self, others, events, conditions, etc. more often than positive. And we've established that we buy into these negative thoughts and views and actually spend time feeding them. We create groups, organizations, political and judicial systems, and all types of things to support our negative views. What we forget is that they are just and only thoughts. I once had a bumper sticker on the back of my car that read: "Don't believe everything you think". If we would all take the time to evaluate our thoughts and to look honestly at the evidence we have gathered to support these thoughts and beliefs them we may just change our mind. There are very few thoughts that the major population has that are based in ultimate and divine truth. So sit still, hear what you are thinking, what you are saying and challenge this. Do I believe this and think this because it is true and useful, or do I think it and believe it because I've always thought it or believed it, or because someone else told me or implied that it was so. Meditation offers you the time that is needed to do this. I ask you to look within, with curiosity, see what thoughts and beliefs you are engaging and supporting as if they were true and useful. Sincerely ask yourself this: Is it in my best interests to continue to engage with this thought? Will having this thought help me to reach my goals in life? Will it make me a better person, spouse, friend, parent, etc.? If the answer is 'NO', then change it, decide something new, something different, something useful and purposeful and let go of the rest. Do not participate in those thoughts any longer. Find a new one, and positive ones to play with and see what happens.

Meditation is the practice of separating SELF (Source Self, God Consciousness, etc.) from thought and especially from addictive, self-defeating and self-destructive thought patterns.

Our thoughts are simply that, our thoughts. What we often don't recognize is that our thoughts are more often than not very subtle and habitual. They run our life with negative patterns adopted from external influences and experiences and unconsciously agreeing with them. It isn't until we can be still enough to even recognize what the majority of our thoughts are focused on that you can begin to change them. Other cues to negative thoughts are unfulfilled dreams, unhealthy relationships, unfulfilling work, illness and disease. Our behaviors also are direct reflections of our thoughts: acting out verbally or physically, emotionally unstable, addictions to anything - including 'positive' things - anything taken to the extreme. Pay attention and see what you find in your mind.

You are not these thoughts, yet the repetition of this type of thinking changes our neurobiology and we begin to believe these things are true. Yet the truth is that we are all created in the likeness and image of God. It doesn't serve anyone or anything to agree with the negative, protective, judgmental and critical aspects of self or others.

When we take the time to be still with ourselves, we can begin to know and understand our self and allow the healing process to begin. Yet through the media and other external influences like our bosses, our family, friends, etc. we learn to approach the world from a fear based attitude. Seeing everything through the glasses of fear including our own hearts and souls feeling that if we tap into our inner self we will see all the bad things that we think that we are instead of the light and love that we are. This reminds me of the speech that Marianne Williamson wrote for Nelson Mandela's inauguration:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child

of God. You're playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

How does one tap into their SELF (Source Self, God Consciousness, etc.)? This is a very good question and can be answered in many ways, as there are as many paths to the Divine, yet for this purpose I will talk about the path of meditation and what this leads to.

There is a still small voice within us all. Imagine if in your home you have the TV on in more rooms than not, the kids are running in and out with their friends, maybe a radio or stereo is on somewhere, someone is talking on the phone. The dishwasher, washer, dryer all are running, the dogs barking, the cars are driving by and the neighborhood kids are playing out in the street. There is also the hum of the appliances, the ceiling fans, the water in the bathroom and kitchen, the computers, clocks, cell phones, lights, etc. And then the power goes out and EVERYTHING is silent – this is the quiet in meditation. It is in this silence that you can now hear the hum of your heart, the voice that says look at how brilliant you are. It is in this silence that you feel the lightness of heart, the calmness of mind, the perfection of each moment. I see it in my office all the time when I teach meditation to another. They always say, "I don't want to come back" and this is so true. When we sit in the light and love of our own divinity why would we want to experience anything else?

The good news is that we don't have to. With practice we can experience our divinity at all times, in all situations, with all people. We can even experience it in our sleep. Yet it is a practice and very few of us

experience divinity in every breath we breathe. Below is a quote from Albert Einstein which can best describe this journey:

“A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation, and a foundation for inner security.”

Over the years, I have been graced enough to sit at the feet and in the presence of saints and masters whom I know to have achieved liberation from the body and mind and have found the inner security that Einstein is referring to, yet for the majority of us, it has yet to be a constant experience. However, in the striving for this we can achieve great peace, great calm, limitless love, ecstatic joy, restful trust and instant manifestation abilities. Do not be discouraged. Some days you are gifted with the road wide open with no obstacles and other days it appears that there are so many obstacles that your journey is completely blocked. When the former is the case celebrate this and extend the blessing to all that you meet. When it is the latter, this too is the practice. To be calm, stable and surrendered to whatever presents itself and/or whatever you manifest for your teaching that day. It is all the same.

Know that your mind will also attach itself to positive thoughts and fantasies – again it is just doing its job. Some days you may experience excitement with your meditation where your mind is attached to recent event or a future event that you enjoyed or are

looking forward to. This use to happen to me all the time and still does if I allow it. When I was teaching meditation several times a week and I had a topic to teach on I would allow myself to use the whole meditative time to create my class. Now really is this a 'bad' thing? NO, it is not a bad thing, but it is creative play and not meditation. Yet that very strong ego would convince myself that this was a great meditation practice. But what I was doing instead was activating the thinking mind and letting it run rampant on creative ideas. Although the outcome may have been good for my students, for myself it wasn't the practice of meditation. The 'good' ideas I was having and engaging in are no different than the 'bad' or negative thought patterns I could have been having. No matter which way you look at it, it is a 'busy' mind and that is not the goal.

On the other hand, what a great teaching for myself to recognize the patterns of my mind and what I allow my mind to be okay to perseverate or obsess on. In the end it is the ego, because of my attachment to teaching a great class, to be liked by the students, to feel 'good' about me. Attachment to positive thought patterns can also show up at times when you start a new and exciting relationship, get a new job or creative opportunities, have someone pay you positive compliments, have a trip you are looking forward too, etc. Just be forewarned that this is the nature of the thinking. We label it good, bad, excited, etc. isn't the point – noticing the thinking with loving kindness is.

Commitment and Consistency

Know that it is through commitment and consistency to the practice, acceptance of the nature of the mind, compassion, and a knowing that the mind will not be tamed through judgment, criticism, frustration, anger or blame.

This is one of the greatest teachings. Love is the only vibrational energy that heals, that supports, and that creates the scenario for positive change. Commitment and dedication to the practice are essential. This goes with anything. Every athlete has to train. Every musician has to practice. Every singer has to sing. Every actor has to act. Every teacher has to teach. And the list goes on and on. Repetition is the best teacher and thus fare, through repetition you have the pattern habits of an unhealthy mind, and therefore it is through repetition and practice that you gain the pattern habits of a healthy mind. I mentioned earlier in this book, Pavlov's dog experiment, here is one of the aspects of conditioned response. Condition your mind to crave the meditation practice, to do it regularly, to forgive yourself when you don't do it and get back to it. To love your mind for all it has to teach you about the distortions you have about yourself, others and the world around you. To understand that up until now your mind has run the show and due to this it has become very strong, convincing, judgmental, critical and it will take time, effort, commitment and tenderness to retrain it. Have you ever tried to get a toy out of a dog's mouth by pulling? Unless the dog is trained very well it is nearly impossible to get that toy out of their mouth when they are determined to hang on to it. This is the way the mind works. The more you pull, yell and struggle with it, the more demanding and persistent it gets. Yet when you recognize it for what it is, "Oh this is the dog (the ego mind) in a power struggle with me (the higher

self).” When you can let go of the power struggle and let it be, the dog will surrender, when the ‘toy’ loses its power or your interest there is no struggle between the ego and the higher self. So breathe through these times, focus on the breath, allow the mind to quiet down, the body to relax and just be with these moments.

Have you ever been in a yoga class or done fitness training and the instructor tells you that the minute your mind wants to quit they ask you to go deeper or to do 3-5 more repetitions? This is the same practice I am talking about here. Allow this to drive you deeper into the practice, do not let the ego get its way. Then you are doing what you’ve always done and that is to indulge the ego.

The Breath – How to Use Your Breath Effectively

Know that the breath is ALWAYS the link between the body, mind and Source, Higher Self, God, Creator. In Hebrew and in Latin the word for spirit is the same as breath. This subject can't be focused on enough. It is the key, the essence, the foundation, the core, it is the home plate, the safety zone, the time out, the reckoning, and it is the path to SELF, Source or God.

Now I do not claim to know all there is to know about the breath. There are many different ways to practice breathing including an entire yoga practices that focus just on the breath called Pranayama. They are all great and have very expansive benefits and I strongly encourage you to research the various techniques, models and practices. By doing this you will create your own experiences with different breathing techniques. Whichever and whatever you choose, please breathe consciously, consistently, intentionally and regularly.

Two of our most ancient languages use the same word for breath as they do with spirit. They just might have been on to something, right? Let's assume, for this purpose that the breath is our direct route to spirit. It's free, it's easy, it's essential, and it's with us as long as we inhabit this body. Let's put it to good use.

Below are a few ways you can start using your breath in your meditation practice. Try them all and find the one that you find the easiest to use.

- Begin by watching the breath. Noticing that I'm breathing in and breathing out. Watching the sensations as the chest rises and

falls, as the breath comes in and out of the body. Is my breath deep or shallow; rough or smooth? Explore the breath.

- Watch the breath come in and out of the nose (or mouth). How does it feel? Look at it closely and watch with your full attention.
- Imagine the breath like a wave gently coming into shore and going out and follow it with your full attention in and out of your body.
- Imagine your lungs filling completely up with each inhale, filling from the bottom to the top; imagine your lungs as they empty on the exhale from the top down, contracting your diaphragm and squeezing all the air out of them.
- Become fully in the moment watching the body and breath. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring the attention, focus and energy back to the breath and the body.
- Count the breaths. See if you can count to 3 without thinking another thought, just keeping the focus on the breath. Then try 5, 8, 10, 12 and so on. It sounds simple, but you might be surprised.

Manifestation – How You Create

“With one thought, heaven and hell are created.” (Zen saying) Learn to recognize the patterns of the mind. The habitual stories we tell ourselves. Everything is created first in thought and next in form. Be mindful of your thoughts, notice the patterns, check in with yourself on a regular basis and see what pattern habits your mind has.

Thoughts repeated the most, with the most emotionally charged feelings behind them and with the power of words manifest the fastest. When you recognize discomfort, pain or suffering gently embrace this as an aspect of self you can heal. It is the grasping and clinging we have to the thoughts, sensations, and stories that creates the suffering. Notice the mind desires to crave, cling to and attach to concepts. Liberate your mind through your practice. Imagine letting these thoughts go as if they were floating by on a cloud, or a leaf flowing down a stream. Release them from your mental clutches, just for now, just for a breath or two, or three and see what happens. And, please, do your best every day to not pick the things you released in meditation back up once you get going with your day. I know and understand how tempting it is to hang on to, repeat and believe the limiting stories that we tell ourselves.

If you take the time to be with yourself, to understand your own nature and tendencies, to find the path that feels loving and peaceful to you, a place that feels so yummy that you can't wait to get back to it, a state of being that you now have more and more control over and can easily bring forth at will, you will soon see that things are always working out for you, that you are in control and that your most amazing Self can choose happiness, peace, love and joy.

Enjoy, Tracy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tracy Becker is a Licensed Counselor, Coach, Teacher and Healer. She has been practicing and teaching meditation for 30 years (or since 1988). She has studied and trained with teachers, monks and masters from many different traditions around the world. Her goal is to help others find their greatest potential through healing unwanted beliefs and patterns and transforming them into their grandest version of themselves. Find her at www.tracybecker.com or tracy@tracybecker.com.