

SITTING MEDITATION

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. It has recently entered our everyday Western world as a form of mindfulness practice. Meditation is presented with all sorts of benefits, from reducing stress to improving concentration, sleep, and stamina, you name it. There are many different forms of meditation, primarily guided meditation, where someone provides a narrative; there may even be a sound background or music. With smartphones came hundreds of apps to help you meditate, and a whole industry offers technology to improve your meditation. There is no need to enhance your meditation, mainly because there is no improvement to be had. The meditation presented here is the most basic, simple form that does not need apps, music, narrators, images, or other implements. This, of course, also makes it the most challenging and beneficial as there is nothing to gain from it. The less you want to achieve, accomplish, improve, or get out of it, the more valuable the meditation will be. A senior meditation teacher and practitioner was asked about his over 30 years of practice and what he got out of it. He responded: "Nothing, absolutely nothing." Practice with no expectations and you will gain the most of your practice.

WHAT IT IS

1. Sitting is simple, and because of that, it can be challenging to do.
2. It is impossible to do wrong – if done with sincerity. It is very tempting to assess and criticize ourselves continually, but there is no black belt to be gained or another accomplishment to be reached.
3. Sitting is a practice in observation, in acceptance, compassion, stillness, in discovering our true nature.
4. You do not have to believe anything to do sitting – it does not exclude any religion. The 13th c Zen master Dōgen said: "Zazen is not learning meditation. It is simply the inner gate to repose and bliss, the practice-realization of total presence. It is the manifestation of ultimate reality."

HOW TO DO IT

1. Sit up straight in a chair with your feet flat on the floor or cross-legged on a cushion on top of a mat on the ground. When sitting cross-legged, ensure that the knees touch the mat. If needed, add support.
2. Gaze at a spot on the floor 3 – 5 feet (1 m) in front of you with your eyes half-opened. With your eyes closed, your mind tends to wander more, and you may fall asleep.
3. Bring your awareness to your breath. Do not change your breathing; begin to observe it.
4. Say quietly to yourself "in" when you inhale and "out" when you exhale. Alternatively, you can count your breath when you exhale to 10 and start again with 1.
5. Between breaths, bring your attention to the points where your body and your feet touch their support.
6. Focus all of your attention on your breath. Notice the exact moment your inhalation starts, the pause, however short, before your exhalation starts, the precise moment of exhalation, ...

PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

To re-connect with your ability to travel your own life path, especially towards embodying your personal and professional calling.

1. You will be more able to step into your own way of being and less concerned about external issues that trigger your inner critic.
2. You will be more flexible in creating new opportunities for yourself in your life and your relationship with others.

You may want to get a meditation cushion or stay on a chair. Eventually, explore sitting with a group or working with a teacher. Start with a few minutes and slowly get to 20 minutes. These are some brief instructions on to get started. Explore and keep an open mind. There are no goals, and you cannot get "better."

More information, additional texts, and opportunities to practice meditation together at brody.org/zen.