

Get Started. Stay With It.

Instruction & inspiration
for your meditation practice
from Mayu Sanctuary.



Calm in the Center

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Congratulations!

You want to start a meditation practice.

Looking inward may, or may not, come naturally to you. On a daily basis we're surrounded by countless ways to check out of our life, to avoid or deny or distract ourselves from what is really happening. Spending time on the meditation cushion is at exact odds with conventional values of escape, comfort and entertainment. You won't find a lot of support or encouragement for your meditation efforts in the modern world.

But the truth remains that no one has really found freedom from life's challenges without significant and consistent inner exploration. Meditation, no matter the form it takes, is how humans have always discovered the depths of love, purpose and reality.

This resource guide is meant to help you meditate: to introduce you to a daily practice, keep you motivated through challenging times, and open your eyes to the preciousness of your unique human life.

Included are a variety of resources to meet you wherever you are in your practice and to push you a little further. Whether you're coming to meditation for stress relief, medical benefits, emotional stability, mental clarity, spiritual exploration, or any combination of these, this booklet will help you lay the foundation for your personal practice.

A gentle reminder: meditation is much like diet and exercise – its benefits multiply with consistency. As long as you meditate only on your own terms (whenever you feel like it) you will only realize a fraction of its benefits. Cultivate the attitude that you'll make time to practice even when it doesn't seem convenient or comfortable. Celebrate the lessons that can only be learned by sitting through difficulty. This is the sole way to develop the resolute heart of a devoted practitioner.



3 Myths of Meditation

Do any of these sound familiar?
Have you used any of them to avoid meditating?
With a bit of commitment you'll see for yourself how mistaken these myths are!

Meditation is difficult.

I can't sit still. My mind is too noisy and distracted.

I don't have time.

Meditation is difficult.

Meditation is the most natural mind state in the world. We experience it spontaneously whenever we're struck with a sense of wonder and curiosity. Meditation only appears difficult because we live in a society that discourages slowing down, getting quiet, and listening to our inner voice.

I can't sit still. My mind is too noisy and distracted.

Sitting still and having a quiet mind aren't prerequisites for meditation – they're the skills that are learned by meditating. Over time your body will naturally become less restless, as will your mental state. Whatever condition your body and mind are in today are the perfect states to begin your practice.

I don't have time.

You haven't yet made time, and you need less time than you think. Meditation techniques can be employed anywhere, anytime, and for any duration. If you have a strong desire to practice you'll find pockets of time emerging where you previously thought you had none. Gradually these pockets of time will grow as former unnecessary, time-consuming habits fall away.



Principles of Meditation

There are innumerable teachings and techniques for meditation, you may have already heard about or studied several of them. This booklet is not a guide describing techniques you should perfect, or teachings you should pursue. Rather this section is intended to summarize core principles of meditation and attitudes of practitioners that will fortify whichever technique you employ.

- The “goal” of meditation is to explore the breadth and depth of your complete being, and to discover the freedom that arises from that exploration.
- Expectations of feeling better will hinder your practice, as will avoiding or ignoring the inevitable challenges of meditation.
- Don’t wait until you feel calm or “in a good place” to meditate. Develop the attitude that no matter what your life is presenting in any given moment it is worth bringing to your meditation session for exploration.
- Don’t judge any session as “good” or “bad” and don’t compare one meditation session to any other. Doing so only strengthens habits of the critical, judgmental mind which makes neutral observation and exploration that much harder. You may find that meditating with a turbulent mind brings insight that couldn’t possibly be learned from a serene mind.
- Patience with your practice and kindness with yourself are prerequisites for meditation. Meditation isn’t an instant “fix” - it isn’t always easy and it’s not meant to solve ordinary problems. If you must measure your progress do so in terms of years, not minutes. Have faith.
- Finally, the purpose of meditation isn’t to stop thinking. A peaceful or empty mind may be experienced, but it will be a temporary state. Your ability to allow the empty mind to return to chaos without self-criticism is an indication of proficiency in your practice. Likewise, your ability to allow a chaotic mind as eagerly as you allow an empty mind shows a true understanding of the principles of meditation.

Time of Day & What to Wear

There is no right or wrong time of day to meditate, although some hours of the day are more conducive than others. Common times for meditation are in the morning, and in the evening. These are natural transition times – periods of time between the activities of daytime and the stillness of nighttime. The mind often has a natural quietness at these moments in the day.

Some people get a long lunch break at work which becomes their perfect time to sit. Other people have a window of time at home before the kids come back from school, and before their spouse comes home from work. You're invited to experiment with sitting at different times of day.

If you can find a time of day that's especially conducive to your practice, a time that's consistently free of obligations and distractions, that's a big step in creating a daily meditation habit. When meditation becomes part of your daily ritual, like brushing your teeth, when you miss it you really feel its absence!

But more important than sitting at different times of day, is sitting with different mind qualities. Often our search for the perfect time of day is really more an attempt to find a perfect mind state.

For instance, you may decide that you can't sit in the morning. "I'm just too rushed, I can't sit still." After work you may say "I'm too hungry, I can't focus." And right before bed you may say "I'm too sleepy, I'll just nod off." So even though it seems like the problem is the time of day, the real issue is often the quality of your mind.

In reality, all of these mind states can happen at any time of day, so being able to work with them is one way of giving yourself more flexibility for when you can meditate. If you understand how to meditate with sleepiness and how to meditate with hunger and how to meditate with irritation, it'll be far less important what time of day you choose to sit.

Tight clothes, particularly tight pants in fabrics that don't stretch, like jeans, will put an added level of frustration into your meditation.

If you're at home and can wear whatever you'd like, find the most comfortable clothes you own – pajamas are perfect. You can actually help set the tone for your meditation in little ways like this – when you loosen a necktie, or take off a tight pair of socks, or remove your watch and belt, you're setting the stage. It's like a declaration to yourself that this will be a time of comfort and ease.

So, explore sitting at different times of day, and with different mind qualities. Whenever possible get out of the tight restrictive clothing, and make yourself comfortable!



Where to Meditate

In a nutshell, there are no rules. It can be helpful to find a quiet room, without foot traffic or likelihood of being disturbed, somewhere with soft lighting or a water feature, but by no means are these things necessary. If you're just starting out on your meditation journey it will help if you can practice in a place that feels peaceful and safe. But as teachers often say, the real work happens when you're forced to sit with distraction – internal and external distraction.

Plus, it's bound to happen that at some point there'll be a breach in your perfect environment. The quiet, empty office next door will have an impromptu meeting with loud conversation; or the road crew outside will begin tearing up the street with jackhammers; or the pump in the beautiful water fountain in the corner will start to gurgle and buzz... all of these things can happen at any time to shatter your calm, serene environment. But don't abandon your meditation!

Don't use any of these situations as an excuse for why you can't practice. Because as you'll see, meditation isn't about starting from a peaceful place and ending up in pure bliss. It's about starting where you are, and learning to find peace within those exact circumstances.

Be kind with yourself in the early stages of your meditation practice, but also be realistic. Be resilient. Bring a sense of light-heartedness to it. In this way you'll find that the perfect meditation environment has less to do with external circumstances, and everything to do with your internal approach.



Creating Sacred Space at Home

It's important to choose a place in your home where you can practice consistently, without having to move around from room to room. It's helpful to find a space that has few distractions, is relatively quiet, and has a sense of safety and peace. Such physical qualities of your meditation space will translate to similar qualities in your state of mind.

However, even in a crowded apartment next to a noisy intersection in the city you can train in meditation. In fact, if you can practice in the midst of chaos (both internal and external) it will make meditating in a tranquil environment that much easier.

Two main components of a private meditation space are the Seat and the Altar.

The Seat

Your seat can be anything from a dining room chair or back jack on the floor, to a traditional meditation cushion or bench. The most important consideration is that it provides you with a stable, comfortable, ergonomic posture. Keep in mind most western-style chairs and home-made seating arrangements aren't designed for prolonged upright sitting and will eventually cause unnecessary discomfort. There are many simple and affordable ways to remedy postural problems, simply ask for a consultation from a seasoned meditation instructor.

The Altar

The "altar" is any structure that acts as a point of focus during meditation, and that has spiritual or sentimental significance for you. It could be a simple box covered with a sheet holding two candles, or a window sill decorated with flowers and gemstones, or a formal shrine with photos of your teacher, spiritual texts, incense and ritual objects. The key is that it both delineates your special area of practice, and displays objects that are meaningful to you on this inner journey. You may want to research traditional altars from various lineages for inspiration. Or you could choose to spend time gathering objects from nature, or even making your own unique items of reverence.

Our favorite book for creating personalized altars at home is
Altars: Bringing Sacred Shrines into Your Everyday Life
by Denise Linn



Posture

Everyone has questions about posture, and you'll get many different answers depending on who you ask. We encourage you to experiment with different postures to find the one(s) that work best for your unique body considerations.

There are 4 types of recognized postures: sitting, standing, lying and walking. We'll only be discussing seated postures here.

In every posture, whether on the floor or in a chair, we want to find a balance between strength and grace. Strength is often associated with the back of the body, in a sense of solidness and stability in the spine. Grace is typically associated with the front of the body, in the softness, tenderness, even vulnerability of the torso, neck and face.

Strength comes from a straight, well-aligned and supportive spine, and grace comes from allowing the abdomen to be soft, allowing the neck to relax, letting the face be soft. We tend to have a lot of difficulty in allowing ourselves to be soft, to invite a sense of gentleness or tenderness. Exploring vulnerability in our posture is one way to begin working with the mental and emotional vulnerability so critical to meditation.

Basics: Straight Spine

If you're in a chair try not to lean into the back of it. Chairs are designed for slouching, with the pelvis tilted backward and the spine in a convex curve. If your back is rounded you can't feel its strength. You can't feel the softness or expansion of the diaphragm. You can't feel the natural flow of air from the nostrils to the belly, and in general you have a distorted sense of yourself.

Try sitting closer to the edge of the chair, or placing a pillow or rolled blanket between your lower back and the back of the chair, as a way to foster a sense of strength and straightness.

If you're sitting on the floor, the best way to ensure a straight spine without straining is to keep your knees lower than your hips. If you're kneeling your hips will always be higher than your knees. But in cross-legged postures you may need to use props and bolsters (such as blankets or pillows) in order to get your hips above the level of your knees.

Note: Don't assume that just because your posture is uncomfortable, that it should be changed. Don't tell yourself that just because lying down is easier, that it's better. If your posture is always pain-free you'll never learn the life-changing lessons associated with working through discomfort. As a rule, we don't look for the easiest posture, we look for the most conducive posture: the posture that let's us work with physical, mental and emotional agitation equally.



Posture cont.

Monitoring Throughout Your Meditation Session: Not too Tight, Not too Loose

Often, after a period of time, we find ourselves straining too much with our posture. Throughout your meditation check to see if your muscles have become tight. Tension usually occurs in the face (around the mouth, jaws, eyes & forehead), neck, shoulders, back and abdomen. Soften these areas by feeling and/or visualizing them, then 1) using the natural or exaggerated exhale to imagine opening space into them, or 2) picturing a waterfall, healing stream of light, or warm hands melting or massaging away the tension.

Equally common, our posture can become too soft – the back slouches, the head hangs forward, the shoulders become rounded. When you notice your body becoming too loose simply re-establish your upright posture. Be careful not to overcorrect, don't add tension where it doesn't belong. Often focusing on the natural or exaggerated inhale will invigorate a lazy posture and a tired mind.

Refinements: Personalizing Your Posture

There are endless adjustments you can make to your posture, with noticeable or subtle results. Feel free to explore how your body responds to these common adaptations:

- Eyes open vs. eyes closed
- Breathing through the nose vs. breathing through the mouth
- Hands separate vs. hands together
- Palms up vs. palms down
- Tongue touching the roof of the mouth vs. tongue touching back of teeth vs. tongue resting in the bottom of the mouth

Remember

- Flexibility isn't an indication of meditation proficiency
- Some degree of physical discomfort is expected
- Restlessness is a starting point – physical stillness develops naturally as your mental stillness improves
- Your posture will evolve as your meditation practice evolves



Formal & Informal Meditation Practice

Formal practice

Formal practice is meditation done for a specific time, in a specific posture, with a specific technique. The timing, posture and technique may change (even within a period of formal practice) but it involves practicing “outside” of our normal everyday activities.

Formal practice may include:

- sitting on a cushion with concentration techniques for 10 minutes
- performing walking meditation in your living room for 20 minutes
- lying down with breathing exercises for 45 minutes before bed
- sitting in a chair listening to a guided meditation podcast for 1 hour

Informal practice

Informal practice is mindfulness performed in the midst our regular lives. It is the intention to bring the skills and mind-state of formal meditation into everyday activities.

Informal practice may include:

- mindful eating, showering or dishwashing
- taking 3 breaths with a mindfulness bell on your computer throughout the day
- silently repeating a mantra before answering your phone when it rings
- pausing to offer gratitude whenever you touch a door knob, walk under a doorway, get into the car, open your email, etc...

Formal practice helps us develop a deep understanding of ourselves and our world by providing a controlled and simplified environment for our explorations. Informal practice gives us real-world situations in which to practice patience, peace and compassion. Each type of meditation supports the other, and both are necessary for developing the life skills of a seasoned meditator.



Formal Practice: The heart of meditation

There are countless meditation techniques that constitute “formal” meditation – some help with concentration (keeping your mind from wandering), some develop particular mental-emotional states (such as generosity or forgiveness), some guide a meditator into states of deep inner inquiry (“What is my true nature?”). But what they all have in common is the aim of getting us to peer deeply into our lives to answer life’s biggest questions.

Most of us live the majority of our days lost in our heads, reacting unconsciously to the random thoughts that blow through (or have permanent residence!), and responding habitually to their resulting emotions. Formal meditation creates the ideal conditions to allow us to see our mental processes more clearly. Once we learn our mental habits they lose their power over us. Becoming free from unconscious thinking allows us to interact with the people and events in our life in an immediate and genuine way. Many would say this is the seed of lasting peace and happiness.

Types of formal meditation practices

Concentration – one-pointed focus on an object to the exclusion of all else.

- Why? Steadiness of mind leads to calmness. A sense of deep serenity emerges when the separation dissolves between the actor and the action.
- Examples: breath awareness, focusing on a candle, syllable, etc...

Cultivation – intentionally fostering a particular mind/body state.

- Why? To change your “default” attitude by encouraging skillful states and discouraging unskillful states; to learn to identify with your “higher potential.”
- Examples: Metta practice (loving-kindness), mystical union, deity yoga, etc...

Contemplation/Inquiry – prolonged period of intentional inquiry about a specific topic, or earnest questioning for profound answers.

- Why? It’s a powerful, sometimes immediate, way to reach a new level of awareness. This type of questioning often “short-circuits” the conceptual mind, with answers arriving that make little sense intellectually, but which carry a deep level of meaning and truth to the questioner.
- Examples: contemplative prayer, Zen koans, meditative inquiry (asking “What is the nature of reality?,” “Who is the observer?,” etc...)

Receptive Awareness – opening through direct experience to whatever phenomena is arising.

- Why? To relate to the world based on what is really happening, rather than on habit, preference and prejudice.
- Examples: listening meditation, gazing meditation, eating meditation, body scan, etc...

Adapted from Meditation for Dummies by Stephan Bodian



Informal Practice: Bringing meditation into your daily life

Your thoughts, words and actions “off the cushion” have consequences – they can either help or hinder your formal meditation practice. Just like watching a violent movie before bedtime can disturb your sleep, unskillful behavior (vengeful thoughts, gossip, aggressiveness, etc...) will affect your meditation.

Informal meditation practice asks us to work with our thoughts, speech and actions all day, every day, because they have a direct impact on our formal practice, as well as on our life in general. (As an experiment you might choose to sit in formal meditation immediately after having an argument, after listening to your favorite album, after spending time in nature, after watching an intense sporting event, etc...)

By bringing compassionate awareness to our everyday thoughts, words and actions we greatly increase the benefits of our meditation... and become kinder and more patient in the process!

The intention behind informal meditation is much the same as it is for formal meditation: to cultivate periods of rest, quietness, focus and peace. In contrast to formal meditation however, most informal practice involves some degree of activity. Maintaining a meditative mind-state while being active will bring your practice to a new level.

Examples of daily centering/relaxation practices

Silent walk in the park

Creating art and handcrafts (painting, knitting, woodworking, etc...)

Gardening

Listening to relaxing music

Taking a warm bath

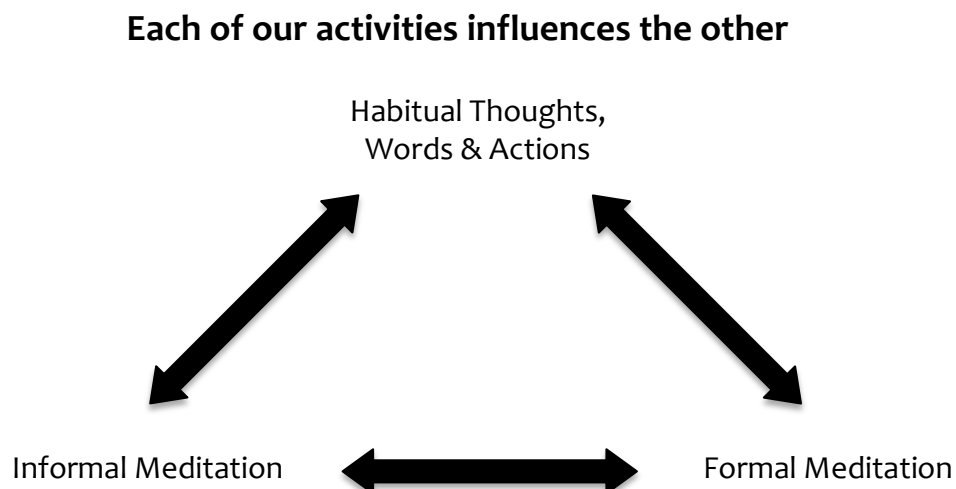
Reading poetry or a spiritual book

Examples of informal mindfulness practices

Repeating a prayer while driving

Counting your breaths while taking a shower

Deliberately eating slowly, with full awareness of the taste, texture and emotional response toward the food



Intention: Fuel for your journey

Your meditation journey is just like any other journey – without a roadmap you’re more likely to get lost. Setting an intention will go a long way toward keeping you on track.

Goals answer the questions HOW, WHEN, & WHERE (i.e., I’m committing to recite my mantra for 30 minutes every day at lunchtime for 2 weeks). By contrast, intentions answer the question WHY. Why is meditation important to me? Why am I on this inner path?

The best way to stay committed to your meditation practice is to remind yourself why it is valuable to you. When you read over your own words of encouragement your level of dedication increases dramatically.

Give the questions below time and consideration before completing. The answers you write will be the best form of support throughout your growing practice.

1. What does meditation represent for you?
2. What is your motivation for meditating? What qualities do you want to cultivate by practicing?
3. What are your calendar goals for formal meditation? (i.e., hours per wk, hours per day, sessions per day, etc...)
4. What will be the biggest roadblocks to your commitment?
5. How will you overcome or negotiate these roadblocks?
6. Where will you find extra motivation? (i.e., books, CD’s, websites, meditation groups, etc...)
7. Words of encouragement for yourself.

Personal Notes

Fill in this page after each meditation session, or on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis as you see fit. Remember, meditation is not about making progress or feeling better. It's about learning the nature of reality and your relationship to it. Be honest and kind with yourself as you fill in these notes.

What I learned:

How I felt:

What I sense is true:

Shifts I notice in my daily thinking:

Shifts I notice in my daily speech:

Shifts I notice in my daily behavior:

Tracking Your Goals

Goals are a tricky concept in meditation. Commonly, we think of goals as results-oriented, while meditation is a process-oriented endeavor. We need to be very careful with how we talk about goals in relation to meditation.

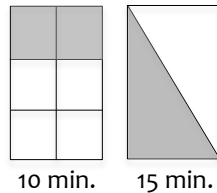
Goals regarding expectations for the results of our meditation practice aren't helpful (i.e., I want my headache to be gone after my meditation). Goals regarding our commitment to meditate, however, are very helpful (i.e., I plan to meditate every day this week). Combining goals with intentions can be a powerful motivator (i.e., My intention for meditation is to open my heart toward my spouse, and I'm committing to sit 25 days this month).

Charting your meditation on a calendar helps keep you accountable. Below are a few ideas for logging your sessions.

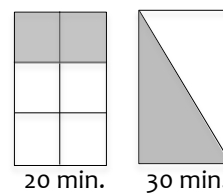
****Rectangles represent a single day on the calendar.****

Rectangles can be divided & shaded in many ways to denote various lengths of time. You decide the length of time each rectangle represents, and what your meditation goals are.

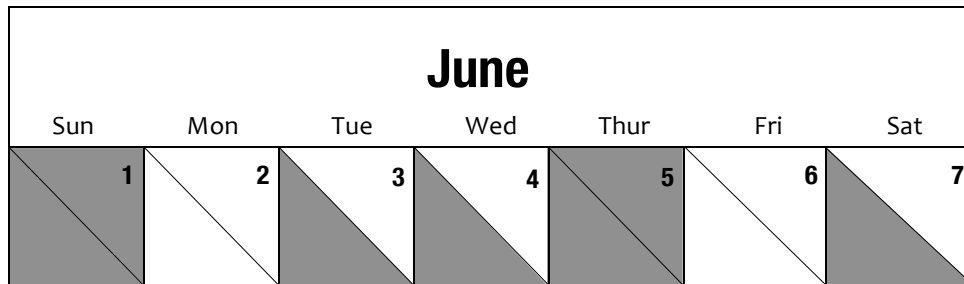
30 min. rectangles



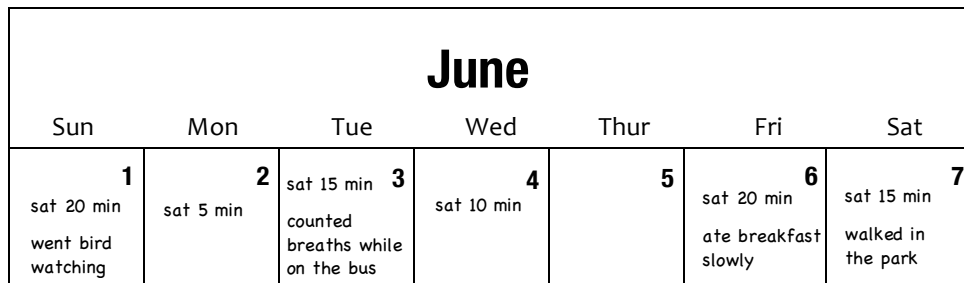
60 min. rectangles



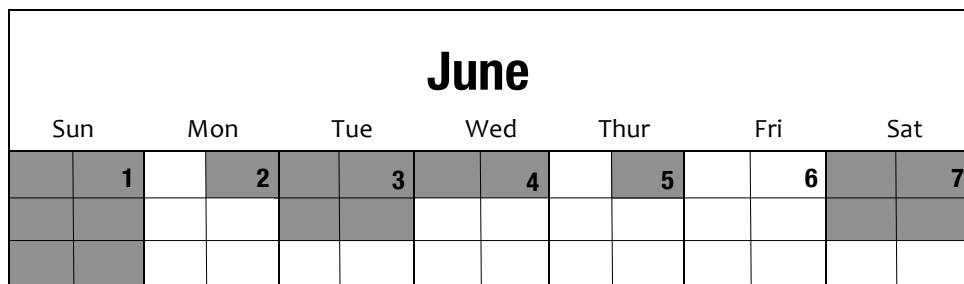
Examples:



Rectangles representing 30 min. = 3.5 hrs/wk



Formal & informal practice 6 days/wk



Rectangles representing 30 min. = 1.5 hrs in 6 days/wk

What are your goals and intentions for meditation? Write them down... and follow through!

My Intention:

My Informal Meditation Goal:

My Formal Meditation Goal:

Blank calendar to photocopy

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat

Additional Resources

Smartphone Apps

Meditation Instruction

Headspace



Calm



Mindfulness Meditation



Timers

Insight Timer



Lotus Bud



Publications & Websites

Mindful Magazine
mindful.org
wildmind.org
rickhanson.net
tinybuddha.com

Books

Mindfulness for Beginners, by Jon Kabat-Zinn
Meditation for Beginners, by Jack Kornfield
Buddha's Brain, by Rick Hanson
How to Meditate, by Pema Chodron
True Meditation, by Adyashanti
Quiet Mind: A Beginner's Guide to Meditation, by Salzberg, Sakyong Mipham, Tulku Thondup & Rosenberg



Final Thoughts

You've probably read the Everything I Needed To Know I Learned In Kindergarten list. Below is our version, pertaining to meditation. Of all the countless meditation techniques, from the elementary to the esoteric, several common threads weave through each. Remember these, and any meditation technique you do will be solid.

Principles for Meditation

- Don't strain
- Be patient
- Become curious
- Drop the storyline
- Don't expect anything, make no assumptions or conclusions
- Accept everything that arises, view all problems (discomfort or distraction) as opportunities
- Be gentle with yourself

In the West, our approach to meditation is colored by our approach to life. The skills we're praised for in our daily world (critical thinking, multi-tasking, expertise and strong opinions) are of little help in meditation. In fact, they're obstacles. Our comfort with our meditation journey (we avoid saying "success" or "progress") comes in direct proportion to our willingness to let go of our discriminating, analytical, judgmental mind.

Why Meditation is Difficult in the Modern World

- we are addicted to distraction
- we are overly self-critical
- we expect immediate results
- we avoid anything that doesn't feel good

Many people approach meditation the way they approach medicine – they're looking for a quick and easy remedy to make themselves feel better. But meditation doesn't work that way. Sometimes meditation "feels good" and we say "it worked!" Other times meditation feels like a battle, and we say "it failed," or worse, that "I failed."

As you continue with your meditation practice you'll begin to see that you can't possibly fail – there is no way to do it wrong. The only way to do it wrong, is to not do it at all! Likewise, there is no mastering meditation, we remain perpetual students. Take comfort in knowing you'll never be expected to become an expert. Rest in your practice exactly as it is today. Let it be exactly what it will become tomorrow.

Requirements

- A curious, open mind
- A willingness to practice
- Patience
- Acceptance

Finally, meditation is by nature a personal journey; a solitary endeavor. No one can do the intimate work of opening your heart and mind, except you. Yet everyone else on this path understands. That's why it's important to balance your private meditation time with involvement in a meditation community.

Find classes, find teachers, find fellow meditators. Face-to-face interaction is best, but the internet allows you to connect through podcasts, webinars, Skype and email groups, to like-minded people around the world. Explore it all, and enjoy the journey!

Mayu Meditation Cooperative

The meditation center as unique as your inner journey

Meditation Supplies

Colorado's largest selection of meditation cushions and benches
Specializing in posture analysis and ergonomic solutions
Unique pieces for creating sacred space at home
Locally-made items

Drop-in Meditation

Choose from three serene meditation spaces
Stay half an hour or half a day
Listen to audio guided meditations and teachings

Foot Baths

Return to your body, slow your mind
No appointment needed, stay up to 2 hours
Enjoy guided meditations and complimentary tea

Mind-Body Therapies

Bodywork, energywork and talk therapies
Relax the body to calm the mind
Combining therapies with meditation propels your healing

Private Retreat Room

Rent by the hour for undistracted personal time
Deepen your practice
Rest and reconnect with yourself

Meditation Classes & Retreats

For beginners and advanced practitioners
Techniques from a variety of traditions
Weekly classes, workshops and daylong retreats

Private Instruction

For individuals or small groups
Personalized assistance to help with your unique life circumstances