

A Simple Guide To Meditation



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Introduction

The practice of meditation has become an important part of many people's lives. People have embraced meditation for a variety of reasons. There are people who practice meditation simply for relaxation, for relief from the heavy traffic of thoughts within. Then there are others who are searching for permanent freedom from all confusion, worries, and the painful fire of negative emotions.

These days so many people wish to learn meditation, and if you really want to learn meditation the first step you should take is to find a qualified meditation teacher. The reason we need a qualified meditation teacher is that we want to meditate correctly from the beginning and not develop any bad habits. There are so many different meditation instructions that it can be confusing without a

teacher to help us practice the correct meditation techniques. If we practice them incorrectly, then we will not derive any benefit from meditation and our efforts will be wasted. So, as a meditator, we should practice correctly right from the start and to do this we should be guided by senior instructors who can assist and advise us in the correct way to meditate.

There are many steps to learn but here in this small booklet I have outlined three steps that I think will help make your meditation practice successful.

Step One: Preparation for meditation

First, you should arrange a quiet place in which to meditate and also a comfortable cushion to meditate on. This creates a conducive environment for your meditation practice.

In the beginning, it is best to meditate for only five minutes and then take a short break, and then meditate for another five minutes and then take a break again, and then finally five more minutes if possible. These short five-minute sessions will help maintain the quality of your meditation. Meditation should not be a competition for how long we can sit. Instead, meditation is about developing good concentration. We are after quality, not quantity.

When you meditate you should neither allow your mind to become too active nor

inactive, since both of these faults inhibit the progress of your meditation. The word meditation in Tibetan means "familiarization," and so we can think of meditation as a getting used to this balanced concentration with less thought traffic going through our mind.

However, one of the important points to remember is that we are not striving to remove all the thoughts that we may have in our mind. Instead we are trying to develop mindfulness and alertness. These are two mental tools that we use when meditating to aid us in noticing and recognizing our thoughts. Mindfulness reminds us of our activity, and awareness watches to make sure that the thieves of thought do not enter our mind and take us for a long detour.

Step Two: How to sit for meditation

For beginners the sitting posture is very important. Our posture affects our mental state and the meditation posture really helps you to meditate because when we sit in a meditation posture, we are able to let all our internal channels relax and strengthen in the right position, and this helps our winds or energy to flow smoothly within these channels. When our inner winds flow smoothly and settle this reduces the flow of thoughts. There are many detailed explanations for how this posture works on our subtle bodies and how this then supports meditation.

However, once we have mastered the practice, then the seated posture is not as important. For instance, there are gurus who able to meditate during their sleep and even while they are walking. They are able to have

heightened concentration even during these times. For beginners, this would be unsuitable, because most likely we would have a nice nap rather than a good meditation.

Let me explain the correct posture, which is called the Seven Point Posture of Buddha Vairochana:

1. Sitting in the vajra position (legs crossed as in full-lotus posture or a simple cross legged position)
2. Right palm over the left with thumbs touching, placed four finger widths below the navel (left palm over right for women)
3. Straight spine
4. Shoulders straight and level
5. Chin slightly pointing downwards
6. Tongue touching the upper palate lightly
7. Eyes focusing at a point in front of the tip of the nose

Of course if you are not used to sitting like this then it can be very uncomfortable at first, however it is the ideal posture to strive for when we meditate.

Step Three: How to meditate

In order to meditate one needs an object of concentration, and that can be either an external or internal object. For beginners, it is advisable that they use an external object, such as a crystal, light, flowers, or an image of the Buddha.

Eventually, when we have developed concentration relying on an external object we can move on to an internal object, which refers to an image we hold in our minds. After we have developed concentration based on an internal object, we can then practice meditation without visualizing anything. In this case, we let our mind rest and we do not

try to manipulate anything to make things better or worse. Importantly though, we should be watching the mind, watching what it does like a parent keeps watch on their children.

It is good if you can spend about a month on each of these three different techniques. It is best to do these meditations in the morning, but if you cannot, it is okay to find another suitable time. A practice I personally like is meditation by counting the coming and going of the breath:

When we first begin this breath meditation, we need to focus our mind by placing our mind four finger widths below our navel and we should think that our mind and breath move upward together and slowly come out of our mouth, travelling a distance of sixteen inches. Slowly it comes back and enters our mouth and finally reaches four

inches below the navel once again. Then we hold our breath for a few seconds, just counting to one. This is one cycle of breath.

You begin by counting the coming and going of seven cycles of breath. Then take a short rest, and count seven more cycles of breath. Again, take a short breath followed by one more round of focusing on seven cycles of breath. This makes three sessions of focusing on the breath.

Then, after several weeks or a month when you have gotten accustomed to this, we can increase the breath count to fourteen, again for three sessions with short breaks between each. Then, we can build up to three sessions of twenty-one breath counts. Eventually, we can reach a count of 100 breaths.

The advice for beginners is that they should practice everyday, starting with five minutes and later working up to one hour. One of the main reasons to keep meditation sessions short in the beginning is that not only are we able to better concentrate for shorter periods, but we are also able to maintain interest in the practice. When we are doing something for the first time, if we try to do it for a long time then we may lose our enthusiasm.

Concluding Remarks

Meditation is not a one-day profession. We can only see the results of meditation when we practice everyday. Also, it is important that we do not focus on the hope for results when we practice meditation. It is very normal that sometimes we will have a good meditation, and then at other times our meditation might not be so good.

During meditation practice sometimes we may feel pleasant and at other times unpleasant. If we are attracted to good experiences or have aversion to bad experiences, then our meditation will lose its strength and power.

Meditation is useful for anyone who is looking for relief from anxiety and worries, and for those who wish to attain calmness in their daily lives. Meditation is also extremely important for someone who wishes to achieve liberation. In order to perfect our practice, we need to practice everyday, and as I mentioned, it is the quality that is most important, not the quantity. Rushing will not produce a good result, but perseverance and right effort will help us reach our goals.

It is very important to create a comfortable place to meditate, to follow the advice relating to the sitting posture, and to use the techniques that were mentioned above.

Failure and success should not be our concern here. Moving ahead without clinging to hopes is the best way to progress in meditation. There is a saying that when you do not stir the pond, then you can see the bottom of the pond very clearly. Similarly, if we are not attracted to all these experiences, then our understanding becomes experience, and experience becomes realization.

About the Author

H.E. Zurmang Gharwang Rinpoche teaches Tibetan Buddhist meditation and philosophy worldwide. Rinpoche was born a prince of the Sikkimese Royal Court and was recognized by H.H. 16th Gyalwa Karmapa as the 12th incarnation of the Gharwang Tulkus.

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