

How to Establish a Daily Meditation Routine



Success in daily meditation and the attainment of inner happiness is often difficult to achieve, even for those who have meditated for a long time. Fedor Stracke presents some ideas on how one can have greater success in one's meditation practice by adopting a few simple principles, together with an analysis of some of the common traps one can fall into.

Mind is a Creature of Habit

The first principle to learn is that *the mind is a creature of habit*. In its bare nature, the mind is neutral and can be trained in anything. That means that it can definitely be trained in single-pointed abiding. Because the mind is a creature of habit, once it has taken on a habit, this pattern will arise effortlessly and can be difficult to eliminate. That is why, as a beginner, it is good to adopt the second principle of *quality over quantity*. From the very beginning, one should take care that the mind is focused with clarity in a complete yet gentle manner on an internal virtuous object, and not worry too much about the length of the session.

It is a common trap to think along the lines of, "If I meditate, it has to be at least a 45-minute session every day," and then if one is not able to sustain this on a daily basis, one ends up not meditating at all. Since there won't be any results from a meditation that is never done, no matter how lofty one's intentions, it is better to meditate daily, even just for five or ten minutes. The mind will soon be able to abide on the object for longer periods of time naturally, if one practices sincerely and correctly.

Here are a few simple points to consider in relation to place, posture, object, and mind:

Place

If possible, it is best to have a separate meditation place in one's house or apartment used exclusively for that

purpose. Ideally, it is a place where one already feels calmer just by sitting down, and it can be decorated to this end.

It is crucial that one's seat is comfortable, and that one does not force oneself into a concept of how one should sit – hard cushion, soft cushion, ground or chair; it does not matter. What matters is that one can sit comfortably upright.

Posture

To this end, it is recommended to have the back of one's seat higher than the front, as this will push one's hips automatically forward and straighten the spine. If one is sitting on a chair, one should not lean back. The hands can be placed in one's lap regardless of whether one sits in a chair or on the ground. The head is leaning slightly forward to discourage mental excitement, and the eyes are kept open, directed downward. If in the beginning it is more comfortable to have the eyes closed, that is also okay, but it is good to work toward having them open.

As much as possible, it is important to be comfortable while sitting in the seven-point posture¹, because one does not want to generate aversion to one's meditation practice.

¹ 1. Sitting in the full or half lotus position. 2. Hands placed at the navel in the mudra of meditative equipoise, right in left. 3. Sitting up straight. 4. Mouth is closed comfortably, not clenched shut or open, with the tip of the tongue on the upper palate behind the upper front teeth. 5. Head is inclined slightly forward. 6. Eyes are looking downward, half open. 7. Shoulders are level, not one higher than the other.

Object and Mind

It is also important that the meditation object is an inner object. Even if the example is an outer object, such as the form body of a buddha, the actual meditation object is the reflection of that form body that arises in the mind. Once the mind is focused on the inner object, one needs to keep it in mind with mindfulness.

To receive the benefits of meditation one needs to develop a complete internal focus, not just a partial one, and not fall into the habit of sitting with a distracted mind. Often one can get easily used to a meditation where an underlying part of the mind continues to think about work and breakfast; here, a complete focus on the internal object is required.

Yet it is crucial to achieve this focus in a gentle manner. One secret to meditation is to have a well-tuned mind and to meditate gently. This brings us to the third principle: *going slowly but surely*. If the mind is too tight, it generates mental disturbance rather than a pacification of the mind. Forcing the mind becomes counter-productive, and focusing on the object does not equal grasping at the object. Rather, by keeping the object gently in mind with mindfulness continually, the mind abides single-pointedly on the object. The stronger one's mindfulness becomes, the stronger one's concentration will be. That is why it is also important to train one's mindfulness in-between meditation sessions.

Of course, one cannot keep a complete focus for a long time as the mind becomes tired and wanders off. To then finish the session after a few minutes would be somewhat embarrassing, so the question arises: If I can meditate in this perfect manner only for a few minutes, what do I do for the rest of the half hour?

One practice is to take a mental rest after a few minutes, without getting up, and then to have another short period of good concentration, then again rest, and so on.

One can also move on to reciting one's sadhana, mantras and prayers, or to doing some analytical meditation. One can also build a few minutes of good single-pointed meditation into one's sadhana, for example on emptiness, during the dharmakaya meditation.

It is important that at least once a day one has a rest from disturbing thoughts, which will subside over time if the mind is focused correctly. The mind is a very subtle and receptive phenomenon. By meditating in the correct manner with the long view, remembering that *the mind is a creature of habit* and adopting the principles of *quality over quantity* and of *going slowly but surely*, one will have success in one's practice over time. ☸

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