



What is Meditation?

Meditation is a means of transforming and changing our minds for the better. It helps us change the way we relate to ourselves and the world around us. If we experience difficulties, meditation can help us to work creatively with those difficulties. If life is already good for us, meditation can deepen our enjoyment and appreciation of life.

Buddhist meditation techniques offer a way of encouraging and developing positive states of mind. We can use it to cultivate calmness, clarity and awareness, and also can help us to develop emotional positivity. It can help us let go of ways of being that limit us, and allow us to go beyond a limited sense of ourselves. It can even help us to see more deeply the true nature of things.

The main thing we learn when we meditate is that we have a *choice* about what we think and feel. We tend to think of our personality as being fixed. We tend to think that the thoughts and emotions we have are somehow inevitable, and outside of our control. But actually our emotions and thoughts are much more fluid and ever-changing than this. And even though much is beyond our control in life, we can always take responsibility for our own states of mind and choose to change them for the better. Meditation empowers us to make this choice.

Buddhist Meditation

Over thousands of years Buddhist meditation techniques have developed to help people work with their minds. The foundation of all these techniques is the cultivation of a calm and positive state of mind.

The meditation practices we teach cultivate this calm and positive state of mind. They consist of two simple but effective practices drawn from the Buddhist tradition, originally taught by the Buddha himself over 2,500 years ago. The pair complement each other and can be learned by anyone.

The first practice is the **Mindfulness of Breathing**, which cultivates clarity, awareness and calmness. The second practice is the **Metta Bhavana**, or **Development of Loving Kindness** practice, where we develop friendliness and loving-kindness for ourselves and others. (We also do sessions of body awareness, which we call the **Body Scan**.)

Both practices are Buddhist in origin, but one does not have to be a Buddhist to benefit from them. After all, you don't have to be German to drive a BMW! That said, if you're interested in Buddhism, learning these two meditation practices is a great starting point.

Through learning these meditations, we may not find the meaning of life, but we can certainly find ways of living a life with more meaning. They are called foundation practices, but you can go a long way with them! They can profoundly transform your life for the better.



What Meditation is Not

It's worth saying what meditation is *not*. It isn't escapism: if you want to escape try watching lots of reality TV, getting drunk, doing drugs etc. They are more effective ways to escape your experience! When you sit down to meditate what you get is your experience, sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes not, but always very 'real'.

Neither is meditation about controlling your experience; it is about becoming aware of your experience and encouraging it in positive directions. In any case, you can't control your experience; you can only choose how you respond to it.

Finally it isn't about your mind going blank, or going into some trance! When you sit down to meditate, you get yourself, just as you are.

Overview of Course

Week 1	Introduction to meditation Posture workshop Body Scan Mindfulness and the <i>Mindfulness of Breathing</i> meditation practice
Week 2	Exploring aspects of mindfulness The four foundations of mindfulness
Week 3	Exploring friendliness The <i>Metta Bhavana</i> meditation practice
Week 4	Working with the mind: distraction and absorption
Week 5	Taking meditation into the world Keeping your practice going after the course

Mindfulness

Central to meditation is the practice of mindfulness. When we are mindful, we are aware; we notice what is going on around us and inside us.

Mindfulness is something we can practice when we're on the bus, when we're waiting in the queue at the shop, while we're eating. It's not abstract or esoteric – it's simply about paying attention to what's there with an attitude of interest and exploration.

Through being mindful, we learn that small things can have a big effect. Becoming aware of our bodies, our emotional life, our communication with others, helps us to live a life that flows into a rich tapestry of awareness, imbued with beauty and appreciation.

From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness even includes an awareness of 'how things really are' - an awareness of the true nature of things. By being mindful, the Buddha says, we become more wise and more free. It's because of this that he said that 'mindfulness is the direct path to freedom'.



The *Mindfulness of Breathing* Meditation Practice

In this meditation practice, we are, quite simply, mindful of the breath, aware of the breath. We bring more and more of our energies to bear on our experience of sitting here breathing.

Why meditate on the breath?

- It's always with us, it's free, and it's beautifully simple.
- It's internal, so we're less and less dependent on external stimulation.
- The breath offers way into our state of mind. Awareness of it takes us deeper into ourselves and how we are feeling.
- The breath can be a refined, pleasurable experience, which can be very enjoyable.
- The breath offers a meditation on life. It has a poetic quality: to be alive is to breathe. We breathe from our birth continuously until our death, when we 'draw our last breath'.

By focusing on the breath, we become aware of the mind's tendency to jump from one thing to another. The simple discipline of concentration brings us back to the present moment and all the richness of experience that it contains.

But also, by being aware of the breath, our energies will gather around the breath and our deeper energies will unlock and integrate, rather than remain scattered. By practising the Mindfulness of Breathing regularly, we can experience ourselves becoming more free, at deeper and deeper levels of ourselves.

How we do the Practice

We do this practice by simply being aware of the body breathing, being aware of the breath in the body. In other words, we bring this quality of mindfulness to our breathing.

We're not thinking about breathing, but rather *feeling* it. We're exploring the breath, being curious about the breath, being interested in the breath. It's not an idea about the breath, but an experience of the breath itself.

The breath is an organic process, so we don't force it or try to control it. Instead we simply be aware of it, and let it happen in its own way, without trying to change it.

Stages of the Practice

To help us be aware of the breath, and to encourage a deepening and refinement of our awareness of the breath, the practice is in stages.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Stage 1 | Mindful of the breath, with a subtle count <i>after</i> the out-going breath |
| Stage 2 | Mindful of the breath, with a subtle count <i>before</i> the in-coming breath |
| Stage 3 | Mindful of the breath |
| Stage 4 | As you breathe in and out, mindful of the sensations at the point where you first feel the breath enter the body |

The count in the first two stages is a gentle guide to help you stay with the breath – the practice is not mindfulness of counting! In each of these two stages, we count the breaths, up to ten, and then start the count again at one. This also helps us to notice if our minds wander off.

If the mind does wander off, don't worry. This is quite normal! Given our busy lives, it's not surprising that this happens. The main thing here is not to give yourself a hard time, and instead respond with kindness. Accept with kindness that you have wandered off, and then simply return to the breath in the body and resume the practice again. In a way, you should really celebrate when you notice you've wandered off, as you've just moved from unawareness to awareness!

Home Practice

This week practice the **Body Scan** (track 1) & the **Mindfulness of Breathing** (track 2) on alternate days.
(If you're using the CD both tracks are on CD 1.)

www.dublinbuddhistcentre.org/guided-meditations

Meditation Posture Guidelines

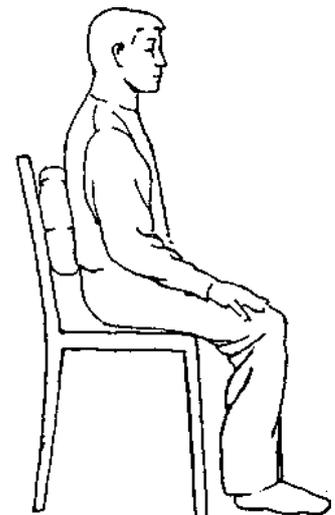
The most important things are:

- To have a firm posture.
- Be comfortable, relaxed and alert.

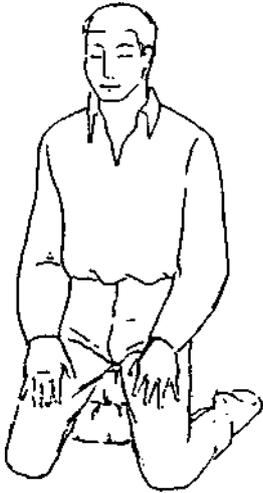
Ways to sit

On a chair

- Use a straight back chair, not an armchair.
- Your pelvis will sit at a better angle and you will be more comfortable if you raise the back legs of the chair by about 2-3cm by using blocks or a piece of wood.
- Do not cross the legs, but plant your feet squarely on the ground. Place a blanket or cushion under your feet if the chair is too high.
- Sitting against the back of the chair may not be ideal. Try sitting a little forward, with a cushion supporting the small of the back.



Kneeling astride cushions or stool



- An easy and popular method.
- Support the arms with a blanket tied around you, or in the pockets of a hoodie.
- Tuck a pair of socks under the ankles if the muscles are tight.
- If your knees get sore, increase the height slightly for future sits.

Cross-legged

- Only do this if your knees can reach the ground, otherwise you risk hurting your lower back.
- Support the arms again with a blanket tied around you, putting them into the pockets of a hoodie, or by resting them on the knees.
- Options include:

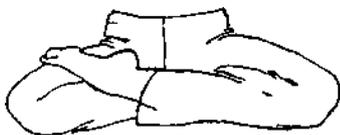
One leg in front of the other



One foot on the calf



One foot on the thigh (advanced)



Lotus posture (advanced)



Never strain to get into these positions! Sitting should be something you can do easily for the full meditation. If you have problems, talk to the class teacher when you're in the centre.