

# Meditation Guide

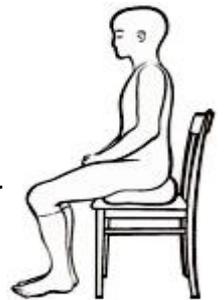
## Posture

A good meditation posture is comfortable, relaxed, and alert. This looks different for different people. Experiment to find what suits you. Regardless of what position you find most comfortable however, here are some things that will help:

- Straight back
- Balanced shoulders
- Supported knees
- Forward tilted pelvis
- Supported hands

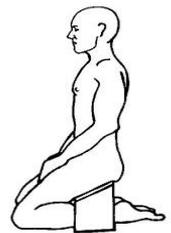
### Sitting on a Chair

It can be helpful to place a cushion in the small of your back, or under the back legs of the chair to help you to sit up straight. If you find yourself slumping forwards, imagine a thread pulling up through your spine and out the top of your head or slightly lift your nose. If your neck is straining, you may be sticking it out, remedy this by tucking in your chin by pulling it back slightly towards your neck.



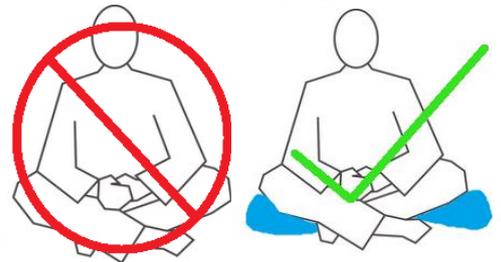
### Kneeling with a Stool/Cushions

If you want to sit on the floor, for westerners, it is often this position which is the easiest to start with. Adjust the height by adding or taking away cushions so you are comfortable and your back is straight, and make sure there is padding between your knees and feet and the floor. If you find it difficult to rest your ankles flat, put extra padding under them.



### Seated - Half Lotus or Lotus

This position can take a while to work up to, particularly if you're not very flexible. If you want to give it a go however, the first things to avoid is the dreaded 'floating knees'! Sitting like a child would sit cross-legged on the floor, means that one or both of your knees are in the air. In this position you will be unbalanced and unstable, and less able to concentrate. To avoid this, tilt your pelvis forward and put your weight on your knees. If only one knee can touch the ground, place a cushion under the other for support.



## Preparation

Before you begin, sit quietly for a minute or two, allowing yourself to settle and relax. Check your body for tension, and become aware of its general level of energy. Check the overall tone of your energy, emotions, and mental activity, acknowledging these as your starting point for this particular session of meditation.

Throughout the practice, keep an overall perspective on how it is going, and look for ways to move into deeper states of concentration. These include adjusting your posture to balance energy that is too sluggish or too excited, consciously developing interest in your experience, and looking for enjoyment in the practice.

## The Mindfulness of Breathing: developing calm and concentration

With your eyes closed (if you prefer your eyes open, use a soft focus gazing at the floor about 2-3 metres away), gradually become aware of your surroundings, then the noises around you, and then the sensations in your body.

**Stage 1:** Feel the physical sensations of the breathing as it flows naturally in and out of the body – in your nose, throat, chest and abdomen. Just after each breath leaves the body, mark it with a (mental) count of 'one', then 'two', etc. Count ten breaths, then start again at one. When (not if!) you become distracted, bring the focus back to the sensations of breathing and restart the count at 'one' – don't get frustrated, catching yourself when you've been distracted is part of mindfulness.

**Stage 2:** Using the same sensations but start counting each breath just before it enters the body, counting in the same way as before and dealing with distractions just the same.

**Stage 3:** Stop counting altogether, and simply follow with your mind the whole flow of your breathing.

**Stage 4:** Direct your attention to the point where you most clearly feel the air entering and leaving the body. Focus your attention on the subtle sensations made by the air stimulating that point.

## Mettā Bhavana: the development of loving-kindness

**Mettā bhavana**, which comes from the Pali language. *Mettā* means friendliness, or 'loving-kindness' for short. It is an emotion, something you feel in your heart. *Bhavana* means development or cultivation. This is commonly practised in five stages.

**Stage 1:** In the first stage, you feel mettā for yourself. Start by becoming aware of yourself, and focusing on feelings of peace, calm, and tranquillity. As you become more fully aware, develop a response of friendliness, interest, and kindness towards yourself. You can use an image (like golden light flooding your body), or a phrase (such as 'may I be well... may I be happy... may I be free from suffering and the causes of suffering') that you can repeat to yourself. Listening for the resonances in your heart.

**Stage 2:** Having developed mettā for yourself, move the focus of your awareness onto a good friend and work creatively to contact, develop, and deepen mettā towards them. Try to choose someone of the same gender and similar age - avoid choosing someone for whom you feel sexual or parental feelings.

Bring them to mind as vividly as you can, feeling your connection with them, your liking for them. You can then encourage these feelings to grow using the same imagery or repeated phrases as in Stage 1 – 'may you be well... may you be happy... may you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering'. You can use these techniques — a phrase or an image — in the next two stages as well.

**Stage 3:** Bring to mind a 'neutral' person, someone for whom you have no clear like or dislike - your feelings are 'neutral'. This may be someone you do not know well but see around (postman, bus driver etc.). You remind yourself that they are a fellow human, with the same hopes and fears as yourself. Try to bring them to life, seeing them clearly before including them in your feelings of mettā. You can use the phrases or image from Stage 2 to develop and deepen mettā for them.

**Stage 4:** Turn your attention to a 'difficult' person or someone you actually dislike. Experience how you actually feel towards them, before repeating the steps of Stage 3 – remember they are a fellow human, see them clearly, and extend mettā towards them using the image or phrases.

**Stage 5:** Lastly, bring to mind all four people and develop mettā equally towards all of them. Take some time over this before broaden out your feeling of mettā to include those around you, in the local area, the country, the world. Include other forms of life. Develop strong, impartial, universal mettā towards all living beings.