



Deepening your Meditation Practice

*“When you become stabilized in your Self,
the continuous commentary of the mind will stop.*

*You will become convinced that whatever exists is not separate from yourself
You do not exist without God, and God does not exist without you.”*

Nisagadatta Maharaj

All non-dual teachings remind us that the depth of our being IS love, joy, peace, pure awareness and intelligence itself. Typically this is covered over by adaptive defenses, habits of mind, emotional reactions and internal conflicts that we identify as “me”. That is the human condition asleep to itself. With practice, this can melt, just as a hard block of ice will melt in the warmth of the sun. Meditation is essential if we are to live into ego relaxation. Formal meditation gives us concentrated periods where you relax the constant effort to fix, get, control, become and seek, so you can truly just BE as you are. Over time, this helps you recognize that you always Rest IN God – there ultimately is nothing else.

Over time, meditation trains you to be less identified with the **content** of your experience (the particular thoughts, feeling states, the conditions of your life), and instead to abide as the consciousness that is experiencing it all. This subtle but game changing development supports greater equanimity in daily life, supporting you to be less reactive and more accepting of the flow of life’s inevitable ups and downs.

Most of us begin a meditation practice because we want some relief from our suffering and neurotic patterns. Nothing wrong with this motivation – this is what gets most of us on the path. However, I invite you to consider the fact that EVERYTHING you think, say and do, even your quality of being itself, has an impact on the whole. Your quality of being will either radiate blessings or problematic distortions to everyone around you. What fragrance do you want to give off – a heavenly scent or a bad smell? If you approach each formal practice period with devotion that you are engaging the practice because your deep heart truly wants to be a blessing to others, to be of benefit to our world, to radiate truth and goodness, it helps offset the tendency for ego to co-opt it the endeavour as just another thing to “get” for “me”! Approaching your practice with devotion not only ignites your



deep heart, bringing more juice to your practice, this will also likely make you feel more motivated to meditate. The whole point is that your practice births one slightly less fear-based, self-centered human being into a more beautiful, noble, graceful one. That fact that you are likely to become kinder, happier, more peaceful and fulfilled is a natural by-product.

Five important reminders about meditation:

- 1) **It takes practice!** Just accept this as you would accept it takes your body time to adjust to a new form of exercise you might not naturally be great at. Be patient but persistent and show up for your practice not because you 'should' but from your heart's love for contact with what's real. It is not a competition and you cannot 'fail'.
- 2) **Decide what length of time you will sit** – and put on a gentle timer (or else use a mala (one round of 108 beads is about 15 minutes). This helps keep you honest!
- 3) **While the goal of meditation is 'samadhi'** – dissolving/ non-doing/ abiding in pure being, most wisdom traditions agree that the prelude to this is cultivating one pointed CONCENTRATION. For this you need a clear method. Each meditation I offer concentrates your attention uniquely, which develops your subtle body in a particular way. When concentration becomes more natural and effortless, deepen the practice by allowing time when you relax the focus of concentration (on mt of presence, or breath in heart etc) to just resting, dissolving into silence (samadhi).
- 4) **Sitting still but floating about in your thoughts and feelings** (mentally reviewing the day, planning, analysing, processing feelings etc) **is not meditation!** Even if you need to bring your focus back to the point of concentration every five seconds for the whole practice period, you will gain more benefit than just mind wandering.
- 5) **Meditation is a mystery.** Everyone has some days when their practice just opens up in beautiful ways, and other days when you feel like you are going



through the motions and not making much progress. Let that be, and just keep showing up for your practice anyway. It is not up to you what should happen and on what time frame. The whole point is to put yourself back into the hands of God and let go.

The following pointers are designed to support you bringing more precision and potency to any method of meditation you engage:

Beginning your Practice:

Dis-engage from usual distractions: Sit somewhere comfortable where you won't be distracted (phone or any beeping device off etc).

Light your candle, and bow at your altar/ sacred space, as a way to:

- *Give thanks for the blessing of receiving the teachings/ practices....and all who have played a part in handing them to you...*
- *Invoke Grace* – Ask for support and blessings upon your practice...You can ask an enlightened being you connect with, or any name or face of the Divine. If you have an inner guru or teacher, visualize their hand upon your crown. Pray your short prayer.
- *Dedicate your practice to the benefit of all beings*
- *Check your posture:* Posture is very important so that you can settle and go within, and allow the subtle energy releases that come with deeper meditation to happen. Sit as upright as your body will allow, with your spine erect, neck long and chin slightly tucked in. Either in comfortable half-lotus position on a raised cushion, or else on a chair with good support, your hips square and feet on floor. Never cross your legs and slouch, unless physical limitations demand, as you will likely fall asleep. Let tongue touch roof of mouth lightly. Specific meditations recommend particular mudras (hand postures). If this is not specified, either let your hands facing upwards on your lap, or in the “containment mudra” with one hand over the other.



Cultivating Concentration:

- ***Turn your focus inwards to settle into the present***

Let yourself physically settle into your seat, into your bones, into your breath, in this present moment as it is.

- ***Engage your chosen method of concentration*** – chose ONE method, rather than trying a multitude of different things!
- ***If you drift off, just bring your focus back*** – sitting still but floating about in your thoughts and feelings: analysing, processing, or falling asleep is not meditation! If you find you have wandered, just bring yourself back to the focus of concentration (the same one – not a new ‘method’!) Even if this means you have to bring yourself back many times, you will gain more benefit than letting yourself mind-wander.

Gently shifting from Content to Awareness (advanced only)

Only take up this part of the practice if you find holding the concentration focus for at least 20 minutes fairly easy. Otherwise, you will gain more benefit if you stay with the focus. However, if you are ready, follow these pointers adding another 10 mins or more to your sit.

- ***Gently shift your focus to the AWARENESS that is concentrating. ONLY make this shift if you feel relatively stable in your concentration. ..otherwise stay with the focus of concentration.***
- ***Gently shift attention to the FIELD OF YOUR AWARENESS itself.*** This might feel like you are not limited by the location and shape of the body. Like being stepped back from both body and mind. This can feel like your consciousness becoming as wide as the sky.



- **Rest AS THE AWARENESS ITSELF** aware of itself in this location, this body, this heart, this mind. All content can arise and fall without anything being a problem. At this point, there is nothing to do. You just rest. Just be.

Transitioning back into Activity:

* **Let the eyes very slowly open**, and let the gaze focus on a soft point about 6-8 inches in front of your nose – so that your eyes are not fixating on any particular objects. Let colour and light and form come to you, let sounds come to you, if stretching and movement wants to happen let that unfold as it wants to, but keeping your center of abiding within.

* **Prayer:** this is beautiful time to give thanks, to ask for help with anything in your life, inquire “what’s needed now” and let that move you into the most elegant action for the day. Always dedicate the blessings of this practice to others (or all beings).

* **Journal:** you might like to write anything that came to you, or even write your prayers (this can be exceptionally powerful).

Notice how it feels to then let ordinary activity happen, but while continuing to remain inwardly relaxed. Notice WHO is making tea, sitting at your computer looking at emails etc.

Trouble-shooting:

Whatever method of meditation you use, the two classical problems that arise are *sleepiness/ fogginess/ spacing out*, or else *agitation/ jumpiness/ monkey mind*.

If you get SLEEPY in meditation, increase the volume of your breath, and call forth your prayer (your sincere intention for why you are showing up for meditation). Engaging the heart can bring more dedication and aliveness to your practice.



If AGITATION is more your challenge, sharpen your focus on the concentration, and bring yourself back often. Don't make it mean anything about you that your mind is jumpy. Sometimes that's just how it goes.

As you deepen in your practice over time, your "seat" in meditation becomes more stabilized. It does not mean distractions don't arise, it is that you come back to the practice more easily and rest there longer...It can become unbroken concentration. Unbroken concentration does not mean that thoughts, feelings and memory does not arise, just that you are not pulled out by them. You can witness, and your focus becomes crisp, awake but effortless.

Getting hook on strong emotions while meditating:

All of the stages of meditation are more difficult when we become hooked by a big wave of fear. The best thing you can do when you know you are hooked and getting activated in a reactive pattern is to STOP as soon as you can, and come back to the basic Ego Relaxation practice that welcomes you to just be here as you are on the in breath, and let tension melt on the out breath.

It is important not to push the agitating content away: the busy thoughts, attachments, fearful emotional states. This just brings us into a fight with ourselves that usually does not end well. Nor is it helpful to judge yourself a spiritual failure because we have become caught in an old pattern. Just stop as soon as you can, and turn towards your practice with commitment and kindness. Like everything, some days are easier than others.

This will likely take some discipline because your ego will speak very loudly to you that the solution lies in fixing something 'out there'. While there are many things in life that require our skilful action and attention, if we act from an inner state of reactivity, we simply circle around in more fear. **Make nurturing peace of mind your NUMBER ONE COMMITMENT.** Then you will be more likely to respond wisely to whatever challenges arise.



Grasping for a Spiritual Orgasm:

Many of us take up meditation in search of a powerful “peak experience” of enlightenment or spiritual illumination. However, achieving a specific, ideal state of consciousness is not the point of authentic meditation. In fact, chasing after a spiritual orgasm is actually counterproductive to the flow of Grace finding you authentically in ways that truly bring peace and liberation. So is trying to “hold on” to powerful experiences when they occur. All states come and go, and always will. Better to focus on just showing up with humility and openness to your practice and let The Mystery have its way with you! Letting go of control is the point.

In time, meditation becomes more and more effortless, nourishing, enjoyable. As Suzuki Roshi says:

*“The true practice (of meditation) is to sit
As if you were drinking water when you are thirsty”*