

## *Are you ready to learn how to meditate?*

I used to live in a world of anxiety that used to rule much of my life, where my inner-critic defined me, my expectations for myself were unattainable, and my fear of what others thought held me back.

Despite my fears, I took the courageous Journey Forward into an unknown. I had no working model for what my life was going to look like, but I didn't let that stop me. I was able to start my path to being my authentic self, where my happiness now resides.

So to change your future, you have to begin with learning how to be in the present -- how to slow down your mind, not believe or react to every thought or emotion, and how connect to your breath and your body. This will allow you to observe your habits and patterns, see which ones aren't working for you, and more importantly, learn how to respond differently in a way that's in alignment with your future self.

This is easier said than done, but it is possible. So, how can you start your Journey Forward to being your happiest self?

In one word: meditation.

The more you create the space to observe and increase awareness of your inner and outer world - your thoughts, emotions, sensations, and distractions - you will become more aware of your triggers and reactions, and where you are getting most stuck. From there, you can learn how to respond and not react.

When you do this, you are literally rewiring your brain to create new habits and patterns, which is the starting point for creating lasting change.

People always ask me for the formula, so here it is! The following practices, mindsets and steps are the foundations to help you in building a meditation practice, and ultimately in living a fuller, more fulfilled and authentic life...

Are you ready to get started?

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was greater than the risk it took to blossom.”

*~ Anais Nin*

# 3 foundations of meditation

## 🌀 **Focal Point During Meditation**

Most often, your breath is the foundation of a meditation practice, as it will help to calm your brain and your body. To stay with your breath, I find it helpful to say the words “breathing in, breathing out” as you breathe, as it gives your mind a task to focus on, rather than letting the mind get carried away in thought. The breath is not the only focal point of attention you can have during a meditation, and sometimes, if you have anxiety or trauma, the breath may not be appropriate to focus on. Additional focal points can be any one of your 5 senses; focus on something you see, hear, touch, taste or smell.

## 🌀 **Observe What is Arising**

In meditation, the intention is to be the observer of what arises: your thoughts, emotions, sensations or distractions, without needing to do anything about it. You observe it then come back to your focal point. To do this, it's helpful to "name it;" for example to say, “this is anxiety” or “this is sadness” or “I’m worrying about \_\_\_\_\_.” When you can stay in observation of what is arising, you are not being sucked into reaction, fixing, solving or letting it take over. You can stay objective in your experience. This gives you the ability to create space and in that space you have the power of choosing how you want to respond to whatever is arising. This is true freedom! Each time you practice this in meditation, you are rewiring your brain to create new habits and patterns for how to respond and not react.

## 🌀 **Practice Self-Compassion**

The opposite of compassion is judgment, and we often have a habit of judging ourselves and others. When practicing meditation, we are practicing observing any judgments, and choosing to not let them take over, and instead work on being more self-compassionate. There are 3 components of self-compassion: mindfulness (being present without having to change what's happening), being kind to yourself (turning down volume on inner-critic) and to connecting with the common humanity of your experience. When you can be your own best friend and advocate for yourself, rather than be harsh and critical, you are more likely to build a meditation practice, rather than being thrown back into patterns of judgment, distraction or ignoring what is painful.

# 4 tools to support your meditation practice

## 🌀 Set Your Intentions

What is your WHY for wanting to meditate? Is it to feel more peaceful? Less reactive? More present and less distracted? Envision the future you want to be living. Ask yourself, or journal on, the following questions...What do you need to be truly happy? What habits or patterns do you need to change for you to have greater ease or peace? What does happiness in your relationships look like to you? What can you let go of that keeps causing you pain? What do you need to feel in alignment with your mind, body and soul? Knowing your *why* helps you to build a meditation practice.

## 🌀 Check Your Mindset

Our mindset is super powerful. Your thoughts hold immense impact so pay attention what you believe in. If you don't think meditation will "work," it likely won't have a big impact in your life. If you don't think that change is possible, it won't be. If you don't believe that you are worthy of being happy and fulfilled, you likely won't get there. So check your mindset around your expectations and hopes for creating change, as well as your hopes for what a meditation practice will bring into your life.

## 🌀 Be Realistic

Set attainable goals for yourself. Don't try to set a routine that you won't be able to stick to. Start small and let yourself organically grow towards something you can maintain. Be open to how your meditation practice can look. Just make the commitment that you're ready to try something new to achieve a new outcome. Don't follow just what other people do, or what works for them. Trust that you can make it your own practice. Even one minute a day of pausing and breathing will help!

## 🌀 Be Open to What Meditation Looks Like

Meditation can have all different forms, and they are all "valid." I view meditation simply as *creating the space for stillness and silence, to connect with your breath and body, and to observe whatever arises*. Whether that means you are doing a sitting meditation, a walking meditation, yoga, focusing on your breath, focusing on sounds you hear, meditation through writing, movement or art, or even doing the dishes or folding the laundry...it can all be a meditation. Meditation has no strict form. It's simply the practice of being aware, fully present and in the moment. It's noticing without judgment when your attention wanders and bringing it back to what you're doing now, rather than letting it reside in the past, future or on a distraction.

# 3 mindsets of meditation

## 🌀 Equanimity

To have equanimity means to not instantly label your experience as "good" or "bad," or "positive" or "negative." To practice equanimity means to see things as they are, with radical acceptance. We are often categorize our thoughts, emotions or experiences, or other people, which contributes to having greater judgments or reactions. Equanimity allows us to experience everything as it is. I like to say to myself, "*It is what it is.*" This may sound like it's dismissing, when in fact it's not. It's allowing less judgment and more acceptance.

## 🌀 Anchor to the Present Moment

Every time your mind wanders, it goes to a place of distraction, negativity, reactions or judgments; to break that habit, try grounding yourself back in the present moment. Anchor to the *here and now*. Use your breathe, a sensation in your body, the placement of your hands or feet, the sounds you hear, the touch of the clothes against your skin, what you see (either literally what's in front of you, or what you see in your mind's eye)...any sensory experience will bring you make to this moment. This is key in meditation.

## 🌀 Let Go of Expectation

Don't expect anything to come from your meditation practice. Just keep practicing. Having an attachment to an outcome of meditation takes you out of the intention of meditation. You will experience change over time. Trust the process. Trust yourself. There is no right or wrong. There is either doing it or not doing it. So just do it.

Remember, you are working on building a meditation *practice*, not a meditation *perfect*, so remember to see it as a practice. The "success" resides in simply showing up with the mindset to breathe, observe and let go.

Meditation has been shown to improve your overall health, wellness, sleep, mood, energy, focus, attention, depression, anxiety and more. Every time you practice, you are creating positive changes in your brain; you may not tangibly see the changes, just know it's happening.

# 10 easy steps to meditate

1. Find a place to **sit comfortably**, in an upright position, one that inspires wakefulness in your body (if you lie down, you'll likely fall asleep).
2. **Close your eyes** or focus on a stationary object in front of you and bring awareness to your body, noticing where your hands and feet are resting; this will help to bring attention out of your head, to root and ground you into your body and into the present moment.
3. **Bring attention to your breath** and notice where in your body you feel yourself breathing (you may feel your shoulders or chest rising up or down, your diaphragm expanding/contracting, or the air pass through your nostrils).
4. **Practice holding your mind's attention on your breath** by saying the words "breathing in, breathing out" inside your mind - or you can count your inhalations and exhalations (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...).
5. While continuing to breathe in and out, **notice any thoughts** coming into your mind, without judging them or "jumping on board" with them; then bring your attention back to your breath.
6. **Increase awareness of any sensations in your body**; acknowledge them - with compassion, not judgment - and then bring attention back to your breath.
7. **Notice any emotions** you are experiencing; allow them to exist without judgment of why you're feeling what you're feeling; continue to breathe.
8. **Increase awareness of distractions** around you without getting pulled into the distraction; let your breath continue to anchor you in the present.
9. **Pay attention to the experience of slowing down**, and how it feels to create space for stillness and silence. (Remember, there is no particular goal for this...)
10. **Set an intention** for something you'd like to carry with you throughout your day. Perhaps it's an intention to remember to breathe, or pause, or to not judge what you are experiencing.

Be grateful to yourself for having taken the time to slow down, to breathe and connect with yourself, with compassion and acceptance. I invite you to find moments to practice - it can anywhere from 30 seconds to 30 minutes. The more you practice the easier it becomes.