

Week 4 — Developing your meditation practice

Meditation is a skill that needs to be practiced to be of use, and be developed. So ideally it is something we do every day. In fact, if you have to choose between doing meditation every day for a short time and occasionally for a long time, the first will be more beneficial. And of course, thinking about meditation but not actually doing it, is of no value at all and is simply a form of self-guilt – so it's less than worthless.

This week we are going to think about establishing a daily meditation place and routine.

Duration

Make a decision about how much time you want to devote to a daily meditation practice. If you only have 10 minutes, that's OK. The ideal period would be 20 or 30 minutes. As a beginner, I would not recommend more than 30 minutes, but it's really up to you. Whatever amount of time, make a commitment to do this every day, up to the end of this course. At the end of the course, you can then re-evaluate and make an ongoing commitment, if that is what you want to do.

Time of day

Every person needs to work out when the best time to meditate is. I find the very first thing in the morning is best, but others find lunch time or in the evening is better for them. A lot depends on what your routine is already, that you need to fit meditation into. When you work out when best suits, put it in your calendar.

Now inevitably something comes up every now and then, that makes this time impossible. In this case, try to set an alternative time for that day. But if the end of day, you have not been able to do your daily practice, take a moment to reflect on the day, what led to the situation, how not getting to do your session makes you feel (recalling the pleasure of meditation) and perhaps think up some tactics to overcome these little obstacles. Most of all, don't beat yourself up – that's just a negative emotion that damages your inner peace.

Location

It is extremely beneficial to have a designated place where you meditate. At home, choose somewhere that brings you pleasure, and which is as free from distractions as possible. If at work, find a quiet nook near where you work that is peaceful and calm. When travelling, select somewhere on the first day and use that each day.

The reason for using the same place each day, where possible, is that you can set up the space to be positive to meditation.

Setting up your meditation space

How you set up your meditation space will very much depend on your own spiritual beliefs. You will want it be rich in symbolic meaning **for you**.

I know some people who meditate on their veranda that overlooks a lush rainforest garden. Here they sit in a chair.

People with a religious belief, may wish to have a powerful symbol of that belief on a reserved space – a home altar.

Here is an example of an altar used by a Buddhist nun in the Mahayana Buddhism.



Each object on this altar has a specific significance to them: their guru, statues of buddha, bodhisattvas, lotus flowers, and the 8 water bowls. She would sit on a cushion in front of this low altar for her hours of personal meditation.

A Christian could have a simple altar with a crucifix or an icon.



If none of this has meaning for you, try having a small vase of flowers on a table or on a shelf.



Entering your meditation space

As you enter into your meditation space about to meditate, bring your attention to what you are about to do.

Take your seat. Remove any distractions. Set an alarm to let you know when you have completed your allocated time, or have a watch or clock you can check.

The Meditation Session

Dedicate this time to develop your meditation for your benefit, and for the benefit of others.

Begin by watch the breath, and then once settled, become aware of the arising thoughts, feelings and emotions.

At the end of the session, express your gratitude that you had this time to meditate, recalling all those people who do not have such opportunity.

Exercise – Planning your daily meditation

For how long do I want to meditate each day?

When will I meditate?

Where will I meditate?

Is there anything about the space that I would like to prepare so I can meditate?