

MEDITATION

THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

WHERE DOES THE TERM MEDITATION COME FROM?

Meditation comes from the Pali word “bhavana.” The Buddha lived in an agrarian society. He coined the word bhavana to mean cultivate. Cultivate what: “AWARENESS.” Awareness of what? “THE PRESENT MOMENT.”

WHY MEDITATE?

Is it to reach an altered state? Transcend the ego? Find enlightenment? Have a silent mind? I hate to tell you but the purpose of meditation is to simply develop awareness of the present moment and change our relationship with it.

TYPES OF MEDITATION

One hears about focused breath meditation, TM or transcendental meditation, Insight meditation, Metta or loving kindness meditation, Zen meditation, Yogic meditation etc. There are so many choices. How does one figure this out? It may be easier to look at how the meditation is done rather than what it is. There are 2 main types of meditation. Focused awareness and open monitoring. In focused awareness, there is concentration on one object. One could choose the breath, a saying, sound, body sensation, silence or visualization. No breath, body sensation, sound etc. remains the same. We are bringing our attention to one object that is constantly changing. In open monitoring, whatever object is dominant in one’s awareness is what one brings the attention to. It could be the breath, a sound, thought etc. We are bringing our attention to constantly changing objects. Bear in mind that no one meditation style exists in isolation of the other form. One never has constant attention to an experience in focused awareness meditation as multiple other objects will appear allowing for open monitoring. Open monitoring meditation will develop concentration as one constantly keeps bringing attention back to another object.

WHAT IS THE BEST TYPE OF MEDITATION?

There is no best type of meditation. A form of meditation may resonate better with you than another one. Individual choice is important. However, starting off with focused awareness theoretically may be the best way to begin as it is an initial way to create stability of the mind. There will be less thoughts coming into awareness with greater non-reactivity to them making it easier to focus on what does appear. In starting with open monitoring the multiple changing objects may be difficult to bring awareness to as you feel overwhelmed. It may be better to start with focused awareness and then transition into open monitoring.

WHY IS THE BREATH SUCH A GOOD OBJECT TO LEARN MEDITATION?

As the breath is under unconscious control we have the wonderful opportunity to just bring awareness to what is always there with no effort on our part to create it. Awareness of the breath will always anchor us into the present moment. In examining the breath, we are able to see the true nature of reality. It is always changing and impermanent. No one breath is the same as another breath. Every inhalation and exhalation comes to an end. As it is generally a neutral object we don't tend to personalize our breath and call it our own. It is a great template to practice the nonidentification and nonattachment of mindfulness. Can we also develop the same self-less awareness of the breath for every other object?

EXPECTATION

We always tend to have an expectation of how we should be and what is the outcome we want. We are always trying so hard to get it right! We start off meditating with a goal in mind. I am going to maintain a fixed concentration on the breath. I will develop a constant awareness of the breath that will never waver. There is such striving in our practice. Meditation is all about making an effort without striving for an outcome. One is just trying to bring awareness to the present moment in a concentrated fashion. It is about ALLOWING what will happen to unfold as a consequence of your practice without expectation of outcome.

MY BRAIN IS SET IN ITS WAYS. HOW CAN MEDITATION MAKE ANY CHANGE?

Previously it was felt that brains were fixed and we couldn't change them. We now believe that NEUROPLASTICITY is possible. In neuroplasticity, the brain has the ability to change by forming new neural connections. It is not true that "you

can't teach an old dog new tricks!" There is hope. Meditation can allow for positive changes in how we relate to the present moment.

IF I MEDITATE WILL I STILL HAVE PROBLEMS?

Mindfulness is not about "Freedom from pain and suffering but the freedom to be with pain and suffering." The purpose of the practice is not to eliminate one's problem but to develop the skill to be with one's problems. One will still experience sadness, anger, joy, guilt etc. but with a relationship that lets one see what is happening and be with it with greater acceptance.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION?

Mindfulness is mainstream now. It is on the cover of Time magazine and Scientific American. If it is on those journals it must be good. From a psychological perspective, it has been demonstrated to help with anxiety, stress, depression and coping with cancer. From a medical perspective, it has been demonstrated to be of benefit in hypertension, sleep disorders, hypertension, the irritable bowel syndrome, psoriasis, fibromyalgia and managing pain.

What I have personally discovered is that the practice does you. I started off to relieve stress. Over the years I have been given the gift of greater calmness, loving kindness, compassion, non-reactivity, insight and equanimity. I never intentionally started out to obtain these qualities. Meditate and be open to the unknown possibilities that may develop.

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE BEHIND THIS?

As we develop concentration amazing things happen in our brain. MRI scans have shown that there is an increased activity of the prefrontal cortex, the executive function of the brain and decreased activity of the amygdala, the fear centre of the brain. Thickening of the cerebral cortex has also been demonstrated on CT scans of the brain in meditators. The cerebral cortex is responsible for thinking and processing information.

WILL WE LIVE FOREVER IF WE MEDITATE?

Meditation helps to prolong the tips of our chromosomes called telomeres. As we age the telomeres normally shrink and die. If we meditate will we live forever?

MEDITATION SOUNDS LIKE A CULT!

Meditation has been around for thousands of years. The Buddha helped to formalize the practice. Meditation has been a part of every main religion. However, the practice of meditation is also a secular practice. One does not need to join a religion or cult to practice it. In reality meditation is an exploration of our mind. It is exploring the true nature of reality. How do we create what we believe? What is its truth? What is our relationship to it?

WON'T MEDITATION MAKE ME LESS PRODUCTIVE?

Our society prides itself on multitasking. If we just sit and meditate on our breath won't this dull our drive to be successful? The problem with multitasking is that we do multiple things fairly well but not one thing really well. Meditation will not turn you into a zombie. We normally operate in the world from unconscious conditioned forces that determine what we do. We are the star of our stories but don't recognize what the story is or that we are having it. Mindfulness brings a focused awareness to the present moment and allows us to know what we know! This supports being more productive as we spend less time lost in our thoughts of the past and future.

HOW DO I START TO MEDITATE?

Do I need a teacher? Should I go to a course? Can I learn this from reading a book or video? Meditation is simple but hard! One can start the practice and continue doing it yourself. Guided meditations are helpful. However, it can be very valuable to have a more experienced person guide you and answer your questions. Taking a course or joining a meditation group is a wonderful way to support your practice. There is a power in meditating in a group that is different than doing it alone.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I MEDITATE?

Don't expect instant deep concentration states. Initially one might feel quite frustrated and want to give up as the mind seems to be constantly wondering. It seems as if it is impossible to stay on the breath. For the first time, you are bringing awareness to how your mind functions. Gradually the mind over time will start to quiet down. One will experience longer periods of a stiller mind but it will always wander to a certain degree. It is important to be patient and practice.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF MEDITATION IS WORKING?

The changes that occur happen over time. They don't tend to be sudden. One may notice that slowly there is a greater degree of calmness, non-reactivity, acceptance, non-judgment, loving kindness, compassion, inner happiness and joy.

WHY IS ONE MEDITATION SO MUCH BETTER THAN ANOTHER ONE? IT IS CHANGING ALL THE TIME!

Every meditation seems so different than the last one. It is frustrating when one has a great meditation and you feel: "I have finally got it." Then the next meditation is a disaster. There are multiple factors that influence our meditation. They include the state of our mind, ongoing stressful events, fatigue, intoxicants that we may have used and our current anxiety. Accept the fact that every meditation will be different. The pattern of improvement is not a straight line going up but a gradually undulating pattern that is improving.

SHOULD MY MIND BE SILENT?

Meditation is not about a mind with no thoughts. They say we have 60000 thoughts a day! There are only two ways to have a silent mind, death and coma. That seems a bit extreme for meditation. You may notice that as you meditate your mind settles down there will be less thinking.

SHOULD I MEDITATE WITH RELAXING MUSIC?

This is probably not a good idea as you want a mind that is focused on a particular object that you have chosen. There is the danger that you will become interested and lost in the music without awareness of your designated object.

CAN I DO THIS ALONE?

It can be helpful to support your practice by enlisting a friend that also meditates. An accountability buddy. We become more motivated when we feel accountable. At the end of each day one can email, text or phone and share with the other person how long you meditated that day. This can be a powerful force to support your practice.

WHY IS A GOOD DATA PLAN OR WIFI IMPORTANT?

We have so many wonderful resources to support our practice. There are wonderful video and audio podcasts available. I listen to a podcast on some aspect of mindfulness as I drive to work. I learn something new that I can reflect

on and listening to a talk helps to keep a continuity of practice. Some of my favorite teachers that you can listen to are Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Tara Brach, Rick Hanson and Gil Fronsdal.

NOW THAT I EXERCISE EVERYDAY MY STRESS IS MUCH LESS. WILL IT STILL HELP TO MEDITATE?

One doesn't finally arrive at the "place" of mindfulness or meditation. It is an ongoing process of discovery without a finite end. The more you practice, the greater is your opportunity to discover more about these techniques.

IS MINDFULNESS THE ONLY TECHNIQUE FOR STRESS RELEASE?

There are multiple techniques that one can use for stress release such as yoga, exercise, meditation, Pilates, dance, painting, music etc. You will discover that one may resonate more with you than another. Employing multiple techniques that you like may be more effective than settling with one.

I AM SO BUSY. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO MEDITATE? IS THERE ANOTHER WAY TO DO THIS?

Meditation is a formalized practice of mindfulness. However, if one is too busy to stop and do a sitting practice for even 5 minutes that doesn't mean you still can't meditate. It is possible to choose an activity during the day to focus one's attention on in an intentional manner for a short time. One could choose eating, going to the bathroom, waiting at a red light or a checkout line, walking from point A to B, talking etc. For example, when one eats deliberately bring mindfulness to that activity. You are meditating as you are bringing awareness to the present moment in a deliberate fashion.

SHOULD I GO TO A RETREAT?

Retreats are powerful ways to support your practice. Don't be scared that you will have to meditate for 24 hours. Retreats are structured such that sitting meditation is followed by a walking meditation. There are times for questions and personal interviews. A talk on some aspect of mindfulness is often offered daily. It may be helpful to put your toe in the water first before diving in. Initially it can be valuable to go to a non-residential weekend retreat before embarking on a 7-10 day silent retreat. Don't be worried about the silence! There will be plenty of opportunity to talk to yourself for 10 days.

SHOULD MY EYES BE OPEN OR CLOSED?

There is no right answer for this question. Some practices ask you to close your eyes. Others say have your eyes partly open staring ahead with no fixed gaze. I like meditating with my eyes closed as there is less visual distraction

THE “P’s” OF MEDITATION

PURPOSE

I DON’T FEEL MOTIVATED TO MEDITATE? WHAT CAN HELP?

Why are you reading this information on meditation? Are you happy with your life? Are you stressed? Anxious? In pain? React quickly with no control? Reflect on this. The fact that you are motivated to explore meditation acknowledges your awareness of the truth of life. That it can be stressful, unhappy, depressing and threatening. Your exploration makes you unique as the majority of people feel overwhelmed and hopeless and don’t believe that there are things that one can do to change this. Remembering the underlying core reason WHY you want to meditate should always be kept in your awareness as a potent reminder to motivate you to mediate.

Reflect on the fact that mediation has been a 4000 year old practice. There has to be some benefit if people keep doing this! As you keep practicing you will start to notice some change in your mental and emotional responses. These small personal successes will help to reinforce your practice.

PRIORITY

SHOULD I WATCH ANOTHER EPISODE OF THE BIG BANG THEORY?

Do you know when you are going to die? If you feel that your life could be better and meditation could be helpful then why wait to learn how to meditate? Every day you live with some degree of misery is a day that you can change. Do you want to be on your death bed and say I should have done something to help make my life more peaceful and happy? Think of all the time you spend on watching TV, playing video games, looking at the internet, Facebook, twitter etc. Does this truly make you happier once you finish that activity? What do you turn to, to help you

deal with your stress? Is it alcohol, food, drugs or technology? Ask yourself: “What purpose are they serving? Are they helping in a permanent way to deal with my stress? Would it be more valuable to practice meditation?” What are you waiting for??

PATIENCE

I JUST DON'T NOTICE ANY CHANGE. SHOULD I JUST GIVE UP?

Reflect back when you were learning a new skill. Did It happen instantaneously or did it require hours and hours of practice? Learning how to meditate is no different. Yes, some individuals may be more natural at meditating than others and may be able to concentrate easier and faster. Be easy with yourself! Recognize that it takes time. We all struggle in the beginning. Be patient. Don't give up because you struggle with it and are not noticing immediate results. The changes that initially occur may be subtle and slow to evolve.

PRACTICE

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN LEARNING HOW TO MEDITATE?

When you started to learn a new skill such as playing the piano, tennis, dancing, singing, painting, waterskiing etc. did it happen overnight? Or was there a lot of practice involved to develop the skill to be efficient in what you were learning. Learning how to meditate is no different. It is skill that we are all capable of doing but requires practice to become proficient at it. This doesn't happen in an instant. The single most important factor to support meditation is PRACTICE. Ideally a daily practice will be the most effective. However as often that you can do it is still helpful.

PERSEVERANCE

I KEEP GIVING UP. SHOULD I STILL TRY?

No matter how many times you give up keep coming back. It is possible that the next time may be more successful and motivated. Perhaps the cumulative effects of meditation will allow for a change. One may also have a different insight in the practice that will change the outcome.

PLAN

IT HELPS TO PLAN YOUR DAY BACKWARD!

What does this mean? When I plan my day backwards I make meditation my priority against which everything else is referenced to. I personally meditate first thing in the morning. I ask what time of the day do I need to get up in the morning to be able to meditate for whatever length of time I want to. I want to get 7 hours of sleep. It takes me an hour to shower and eat breakfast in the morning. It takes me 15 minutes to drive to work. OK. What time do I need to go to sleep to be able to meditate? I plan my day around having enough time to meditate.

WHAT TIME OF DAY SHOULD I MEDITATE?

Meditation as a formalized practice can be done anytime of the day. Some of us are morning people and some of us are evening people. I find that doing it in the morning is the best time for me. I do it first thing in the morning right after showering and before breakfast. I am certain that I will always do it if I start my day off with a meditation. How many times have you come home and said I will work out now? However, fatigue, hunger and multiple demands sabotage that. My mind is also the most settled in the morning as I haven't had a full day of thinking.

SHOULD I MEDITATE BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP?

This is all about personal preference. For some individuals meditating before going to sleep can be very helpful. It can lead to a degree of relaxation and calmness that helps promote sleeping.

IS IT BETTER TO MEDITATE FOR A LONGER TIME OR DO MULTIPLE SHORT PRACTICES?

They both have their value. A formal meditation practice for a set time is very valuable to support developing more effective concentration and mindfulness. It also allows one uninterrupted time to begin to create insight in seeing the true nature of reality. Short times throughout the day of bringing awareness to the present moment experience is also a great way of trying to create continuity of practice. It also helps to bring a greater sense of calm and less reactivity in the moment.

PACE

HOW LONG SHOULD I MEDITATE?

Don't expect that you are going to start off and meditate one hour. You will go crazy! It is important to start slow and build up. I would suggest that you start with 5 minutes daily and every week build up by 5 minutes until you reach 30 minutes. Again, the degree of escalation is a personal preference dependent on how you feel you are progressing. Like any exercise one needs to slowly build up one's expertise.

SHOULD I USE A TIMER TO LET ME KNOW WHEN MY TIME IS UP?

If you say that you are going to meditate for 15 minutes how will you know when the time is up? Are you going to constantly be looking at your watch to know how long you have been meditating? That defeats the purpose of what you are doing. I would suggest that you set a timer at the beginning of your meditation for your designated time. You can just allow yourself to sit back and meditate. The other value in setting the timer is that it will help you extend your sit to your chosen time as you have set a goal that is measured by your timer. This will help to gradually lengthen the time you spend meditating.

PLACE

WHERE SHOULD I MEDITATE?

Ideally it is important to meditate in a place that is quiet with no technology! I would suggest having a place that you always use. If you feel it helps you could surround it with some objects that remind you that this is your spiritual place. If there is not much room for a separate space then a corner of the bedroom or office could be designated. Let the rest of the family know that this is your special time and you request that you are not interrupted during your meditation.

POSITION

SHOULD I MEDITATE SITTING ON THE FLOOR OR CHAIR?

It is said that there are 4 positions for meditation including reclining, sitting, standing or walking. The starting standard practice is to do sitting meditation. There is no difference between sitting on the floor or chair! How you sit is not as important as how you cultivate awareness and mindfulness. For some individuals,

it is impossible to sit on the floor. One needs to be in a comfortable physical position so that you are not distracted by pain.

I CAN NEVER SIT IN A LOTUS POSITION!

There are very few of us that can sit in the lotus position. This is not necessary if one is going to sit on the floor to meditate. Simply crossing one leg in front of the other is all that is necessary. It is just important to feel grounded and settled in one's physical position.

IS IT A GOOD IDEA TO MEDITATE LYING DOWN?

I find that lying down is too conducive for sleeping. I would not recommend it as the standard of practice. When you assume an upright position, you have to generate some energy that helps keep you focused and alert. However, some people may have back pain and the only position they can meditate is lying down.

SHOULD I MEDITATE IN BED?

Practicing awareness and mindfulness can occur anywhere and at any time. If one wants to practice meditation in bed that is fine. However, if one has a formal meditation practice it may be more beneficial to do this out of bed. Lying in bed is automatically associated with sleeping and it may be difficult to stay awake. A cushion on the floor or a chair may also be more supportive.

PHYSICAL PAIN

IF I HAVE PHYSICAL PAIN SHOULD I GRIN AND BEAR IT?

This is not about physical torture. If you are distracted with pain then it is difficult to bring attention to the breath. I would suggest that if you are having pain and need to move, do it mindfully. Be aware of your intention to move. Watch carefully how you move your body. It is ok to move.

Using a pillow to sit on the chair can be helpful to elevate your hips higher than your knees and decrease pain. One can also use pillows to support your knees if they don't reach the floor in a sitting position.

PROBLEMS

I HAVE SO MANY THOUGHTS. I JUST CAN'T MEDITATE!

This is normal. We all have active minds. Sometimes I meditate and I feel that I can't even keep my mind focused on the breath for a half of an in breath.

However, when you meditate you will notice that ultimately your mind will say "I am off the breath. Let's get back to the breath!" That is what mindfulness is all about. Awareness of the present moment. Don't criticize yourself for being off the breath but acknowledge the times you remember that you are off the breath!

Don't give up because you have a restless mind. One feels hopeless and quits. I have found that I may start with a restless mind but as I continue to meditate my mind will slowly settle down. Just persevere and do your scheduled practice. As you continue to meditate your mind will slowly settle.

HOW CAN I SETTLE MY MIND?

Counting the breath can be a way to bring attention away from your thinking mind. Say quietly 1 for the first inhalation and exhalation. Then 2 for the next inhalation and exhalation. Continue this to 10 and then start again. The other technique is to say In for each inhalation and Out for each exhalation. Counting or saying in and out may provide an alternate way along with focusing on the breath to enhance concentration.

THIS IS SO BORING? WHAT CAN I DO?

I agree watching the breath can feel boring. We are in such a fast paced society and constantly crave change in our experience. One can help deal with boredom by changing the way one looks at one's experience. The breath is not one constant object. No one breath is the same to another breath. One can create interest in the mediation object by being open to what each breath feels like. Look for its uniqueness and create interest in the breath. Is it smooth or irregular, fast or slow, warm or cool, dry or moist, shallow or deep?

I FALL ASLEEP. IS THIS NORMAL?

Unfortunately, I have done a lot of vertical sleeping in the guise of meditation. If you are tired it is unlikely that you are going to have a concentrated meditation and the best thing to do is go to sleep! If one is drowsy during a meditation one could open your eyes, stand up or pinch your ear. If repeated sleepiness is a problem it may be helpful to meditate first thing in the morning. Don't meditate

lying down. Make sure you have an upright spine and you have not slumped forward. Maintaining an upright spine requires effort that can keep you awake.

POSTURE FOR SITTING MEDITATION

Posture is very important in meditation. A still body leads to a still mind. An upright spine requires effort that helps to support alertness. Let us examine the posture for sitting on a chair.

- *Your feet should be flat on the floor. There should be no crossing of the legs.
- *Your hands can be resting on your upper thighs or folded on your lap.
- *Sit on the chair so that your spine is not leaning against the back of the chair and supported by it.
- *Your buttocks should be higher than your knees.
- *If you are short and your legs don't touch the floor you will need a pillow under your feet. If you are tall and your knees are higher than your hips you may need 2 or 3 pillows under your buttocks.
- *Maintain the natural curve of the lower spine. If one slouches the spine rounds back. Try slouching and then roll your pelvis forward so that you can feel the slight curve of the lower spine moving in.
- *The spine should be lifted and straight. It feels like you are being lifted up from the top of your head. If your spine rounds forward see how it shifts your pelvis and lower spine to roll back.
- *The spine is still but not stiff.
- *As the spine lifts, there is a movement of the chest forward and the shoulders backwards.

*The head is not tilting forward or backwards but level.

*The creases at the base of the skull are removed by slightly pulling the chin in.

THE “S’s” OF MEDITATION

Maintaining sustained awareness can be very difficult. How many times do you wander off the breath to a thought, sound, emotion, physical sensation etc.? What strategies can one utilize to have more concentration? The S’s of meditation may help support your practice.

SPOT

When people learn meditation, they are often instructed to choose the dominant spot in their body where they may feel the breath. This may be the tip of the nostrils, chest, abdomen or whole body. Selectively bringing attention to the tip of the nostrils as the focal point for your attention may be very helpful. The tip of the nostrils is a very localized point and is extremely sensitive to sensations. Breathing through the nose rather than the mouth is very important for oxygen transfer. Using the nose as the spot for attention is a great way to support nose breathing. Take some quick deep breaths in and out and bring your attention to the tip of the nostrils to identify where the breath is felt most directly. I would ask that you try and use this spot for your meditations.

SENSATIONS

The goal of meditation is to bring awareness to the physical sensations at the tip of the nostrils. Our normal attitude is “How can the breath be interesting?” Aren’t they all the same? One needs to bring an attitude of interest and curiosity to the breath. As you bring awareness to the physical sensations you will notice that every breath is different. One may appreciate the breath as warm or cold, dry or moist, tingling, vibrating, smooth or irregular, quiet or loud, shallow or deep etc. Appreciating that every breath is unique as defined by its physical sensation and being open to what each breath feels like can sustain your interest.

SEGMENTS

Is the breath one continuous cycle or is it made up of segments? I would ask that you sit up straight and close your eyes. Bring your attention to the breath and see if there are individual parts to each breath. One will notice that there is an inhalation, followed by a short pause, followed by an inhalation and then a more prolonged pause. It can be very helpful to bring awareness to each of the segments rather than trying to follow the breath in its entirety. One follows the inhalation from the beginning to the end. One might say IN during this segment. There is a short pause between the end of the inhalation and the beginning of the exhalation. One might just notice PAUSE. This tends to be the shortest segment of the breath. Then one will follow the beginning of the exhalation to the end of the exhalation. One might say OUT quietly to oneself during this segment. Finally, there is a more prolonged pause between the end of the exhalation and the beginning of the inhalation. One might say PAUSE.

I would ask you again to sit up straight and close your eyes. Bring your attention to the pause between the end of the exhalation and the beginning of the inhalation. As you bring your attention to this space what happens to it? What also happens to the inhalation that follows the pause?

One will notice that with focused awareness the pause will become prolonged. This results in a decreased oxygen level in our lungs. To compensate for this the following inhalation will be more exaggerated. A shift occurs in the pause and subsequent inhalation.

These effects are occurring without us consciously controlling them. It results from the “observer effect of mindfulness.” Closely bringing awareness to an experience will change it.

One of the main reasons we lose sustained awareness with focusing on the breath is we lose interest in the pause as it does not have the interest of an inhalation or exhalation. Without an anchor our minds wander.

When we are not focused on an object our brains naturally go to a “default mode.” In this space, our minds are focused on the sense of self and how we are

in relationship with our environment. This is where we fantasize, remember and strategize.

Stillness of the pause is not nothingness. I would ask that you close your eyes and bring your attention to the pause. How do you experience it? For me it is the physical sensation of no movement. It is a holding sensation. There is quietness.

One of the key strategies to maintain sustained awareness is to increase the importance of the pause. Consciously focus your attention and explore what it feels like. Bring interest and curiosity to this place!

SPONTANEOUS

Our breath is under both conscious and unconscious control. Our interest in meditation is with sustained awareness of the physical sensation of the movement of the breath at the tip of the nostrils. We are just observers to the natural flow of the breath. Generally, there is no attempt to consciously breathe. When we deliberately focus our attention on how the breath feels this allows us to step out of needing to control how we breathe.

SUSTAINED

Initially when we bring sustained awareness to the breath it may feel quite stiff, awkward, constrained, irregular and somewhat unnatural. It is very important not to quit prematurely. With sustained awareness, the breath will naturally smooth out and feel more comfortable and relaxed. It is important to persevere.

SELF-EXPLORATION

Don't be scared to explore. Don't take everything as the absolute truth. It is important to take what you read and examine for yourself: "Does it make sense? Is there a better way to do this for me?"