



Section 4b: How to Meditate

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In this subsection, we will learn the basics of practicing meditation, such as the common misunderstandings about meditation, why we should meditate, and certainly also how to meditate. Now, buckle up!

The Common Misunderstanding?

Seriously, as a human being living in a highly civilized world today, I guess most of us have heard about the word 'meditation'. However, not all of us understand what it really means. How many of you think that meditation is just about sitting there for a while with cross legs and the namaste, or in my gesture in the green jacket?

This definition is not 100% wrong, but it's not complete at least. These gestures are forms of meditation which can help us to sit firmly, preventing us from shaking our body to break the stillness during our meditation. Another advantage is that these gestures are proven by the Buddha to be efficient for our body energy reservation which is very important for the high

level meditation results. What do I mean by **high level meditation**? It means we start **exploring our potential wisdom of enlightenment, which does require a lot of energy** since we may need to sit in stillness for hours, or even days! Remember that the Buddha was in meditation for 7 days and nights before he got enlightenment, without food and water. Is it possible? Yes, it's possible. We will soon explain why.

However, things always come with pros and cons. Besides the advantages those traditional meditation gestures bring to us, they are challenging for beginners to get relaxed entirely. But, **relaxing entirely is one of the secrets to entering the meditation state.**

Actually, We can meditate on any gestures, even during our sleep. I guess it might be the most relaxing gesture for beginners to have some good taste of meditation. I do get my first meditation breakthrough during a nap. So, I would suggest anyone who has trouble with the sitting gestures give it a try. Why does it work? **Because meditation is not about gestures or forms, it's about getting you to a state by which your body is extremely relaxed and your mind is highly focused.**

Why Should We Meditate?

During this meditation state we describe above, you might lose the awareness of your body but with very sharp consciousness. If you are an experienced practitioner, you may even meditate during your work, hobbies, and even every second 😊 when you are 100% dedicated and reach the meditation state at work, you probably will achieve the state of a flow, and perform extremely efficiently and tirelessly. In the long term, continuous practice will make you energetic, peaceful, and joyful constantly.

For more details about why we should meditate, please read our handout for this lesson and watch the **optional video “Spiritual Reality Power of Meditation”** (Quang Cong 2013) and the optional video **“Zen master thich nhat hanh explained why meditating”** (Plum Village App 2014).

Let's ask a question, when do we feel tired? Do we feel tired because we have too many things to do, or life is too challenging? No, if you are in the flow state, even though the work is challenging, you are still excited and confident to overcome any problems. Why? Because you have great energy, you are energetic. We feel unhappy, irritable, frustrated, small, or even depressed when we don't have enough energy.

As I mentioned before, **meditation is a great way to conserve our energy.** Let me explain why. Where do our energies leak? From our sensations and consciousness processes. Remember that, human beings have six sensors, namely our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, to perceive signals from the world outside, which will be translated by our cerebral cortex to sensations as form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and things that are considered as the first six consciousnesses which will be processed further by the deeper ego consciousness (7th consciousness) and store consciousness (8th consciousness) (Buddhist Temple 2015)

Those sensations and consciousness processes are all thieves of our energies. Besides the obvious sensory energy costs, have you ever experienced that when you think too many negative things, even though you have done nothing heavy during that day, you still felt so tired. Yep, that thief is your negative thoughts, namely by the sixth consciousness. How about the 7th consciousness, your ego? What is ego? What you identified as part of you. If someone said something that upsets your ego unintentionally, you will probably still think very much about it and hold on to this hurting feeling again and again. Would you agree that your ego, namely your 7th consciousness, also steals your energy away?

Because our deeper consciousness processes depend on the sensations, the Buddha taught us to analyze our sensations in an extremely fine-grained manner in order to understand their casualties so that we can set up filters to control our sensation inputs for the deeper consciousnesses instead of the original autopilot mode, and eventually achieve a joyful and peaceful living state without any thought-obstacle or emotional disturbance.

How to Meditate

Have you ever observed your breath? In Buddhism, life is in our breath. If we don't have breath, then we probably don't have a life, right? It's an astonishing truth that a huge amount of us ignore our breath all the time because it's so natural. We are born with it and we are never grateful for our breath which keeps us living.

The easiest meditation is just observing our breath. Befriend with our breath, without disturbing it at all. Just observe it, how long is it? Is it cold or warm? Like, the breath is a friend of you, you will respect it and let it be itself, but you are extremely interested in understanding it. The moment we start observing our breath, we start understanding our own life. Not anyone else's life, but your own precious and unique life (Plum Village App 2021).

What is meditation ultimately? It's a way for us to find the truth about our own. We will become the one who understands ourselves very well, then we may start to understand the rest of the world. Without a truly deep understanding of ourselves, we don't have the coordinates to understand the real world. Remember the Ancient Greeks said, "know thyself"? Meditation is the key to answering this extremely hard philosophical question.

If you practice this breathing meditation daily for 20 minutes in stillness, do nothing, and just observe your breath, you will soon understand what I mean. This is probably the most simple but also very powerful meditation which is so helpful to release our pressures and recover our body energy.

A great mindfulness breathing practice suggested by the world's well-known Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh is "The First 8 Exercises of Mindful Breathing" (Plum Village App 2021) is more than great to watch. With it, you will have a solid start to your contemplative practice journey!

If you want to try sleep meditation, then just observe your breath the same way as introduced above in bed. And you will fall asleep very soon and even meditate in your dreams! I provide great meditation music. Enjoy it!

References

Buddhist Temple. (2015). *[English] The Heart Sutra - Lecture 1 - Ven. Guan Cheng*. Retrieved September 4, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUjqAajuvZk>.

Plum Village App. (2014). How do I love myself? | Thich Nhat Hanh answers questions. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMoRtJhVoxc>.

Quang Cong. (2013). Spiritual Reality Power Of Meditation. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpCjZEikUGs>