

Meditation: Stopping and Being Present

The goal of meditation is to get to know our minds better, to cultivate insight and peace, and to become calmer and more focused. People think of meditation as some kind of special activity, but this is not exactly correct. Meditation is simplicity itself. As a joke, people sometimes say: "Don't just do something, sit there." But meditation is not just about sitting, either. It is about stopping and being present, That is all.

Try to stop and be present for one minute. (One minute pause)

Mostly we run around doing. Are you able to come to a stop in your life, even for one moment? Could it be this moment? What would happen if you did? A good way to stop all that doing is to shift into "being mode" for a moment. Think of yourself as an eternal witness, as timeless. Just watch this moment, not trying to change at all. What is happening? What do you feel? What do you see? What do you hear?

Try meditating this way for three minutes. (Three minute pause)

The thing about stopping is that as soon as you do it, here you are. Things get simpler. In some ways, it's as if you died and the world continued on. If you did die, all your responsibilities and obligations would immediately evaporate. Their residue would somehow get worked out without you. No one else can take over your unique agenda. It would die or peter out without you just as it has for everyone else who has ever died. So you don't need to worry about it in an absolute way. By taking a few moments to "die on purpose" to the rush of time while you are still living, you free yourself to have time for the present.

Try: stopping, sitting down, and becoming aware of your breathing once in a while throughout the day. It can be for three minutes, like you just did, or even five seconds.

Try it for three more minutes. Let go into full acceptance of the present moment, including how you are feeling and what you perceive to be happening. For these moments, don't try to change anything, just breathe and let go. Breathe and let be.

You can continue this practice in three-minute sessions until you have spent the amount of time you allocated for your meditation practice today.

Meditating in a Noisy Environment

The key to meditating in a noisy background is to change the way you reckon about noise. Rather than letting the external sounds distract you from your meditation, use them in your meditation.

Try this: Sit calmly and just listen to the noise around you. Let the sounds fill your head. Focus on the tones and vibrations of the sound rather than their origin.

All sound—whether distracting like a television, someone yelling, a fight going on—or calming like ocean waves or a running stream—are just vibrations. If you break the noise down to its gears, you can focus on the deep underlying vibrations and enhance your meditative state. If a sound is a sound is a sound, then this sound could easily be comforting rather than annoying.

Acceptance – You can't make the noise go away. You could try ignoring it but this is usually futile. You could try blocking it out with music but you will find lulls in the music allow the outside noises back in. The intermittent scenery of this can prove to be even more distracting. You may even find yourself dreading the soft parts of the music or the silence between songs.

In order to meditate in this kind of background, you have to acknowledge the unwanted sounds in your space and accept that you must coexist. If you can acknowledge them and are determined to meditate "with" them, not in spite of them, they lose the power to control your life.

Patience – Give yourself a break. Don't expect to be able to do this aptly away or 100% of the time. Be patient with yourself and realize that ALL meditation is about catching the mind wandering and bringing it back to your "object of meditation." If you feel you're getting frustrated with yourself because the sounds are still annoying you, pat yourself on the back instead and acknowledge that you are only human. Just smile and focus on your meditative mind, you will eventually succeed and—believe me—it will be worth the effort.

Perseverance – Don't give up. There will be times, especially at first, when you just can't help being annoyed by the unwanted sounds. You're non-meditative mind will "know" these sounds are distracting and it will naturally want to be distracted. Just focus as best you can for your meditation session and come back tomorrow and try again. You'll find that the meditative mind will start to learn that these sounds are part of the process and it will become easier to reach your meditative state.