

## Ten-Step Meditation Practice



**1. PLACE AND TIME:** Find a private and relatively quiet place where you will not be disturbed by people, children, telephones, etc. Choose an amount of time you are going to meditate. Set a timer or keep a clock close by. Begin with ten minutes and work your way up slowly, to ½ hour.

**2. SEAT AND POSTURE:** Assume a comfortable posture sitting cross-legged on a pillow on the floor or on a straight-backed chair. Keep the spine straight and let your shoulders soften and drop. Do a brief scan of the body, relaxing parts that are tight. Relax your jaw. Choose a hand position and gently hold it. Sit tall and relaxed in the saddle, as if you are riding a horse through your kingdom.

**3. BEGINNING:** Close your eyes (or keep your open eyes focused gently on a spot on the floor.) Take a deep breath in and let it out with a sigh. Do this three times. As you sigh, release anything you are holding onto. Remind yourself that for these few minutes you are doing nothing but meditating. You can afford to drop everything else for the time being. The pressing details of your life will be waiting for you at the end of the session.

**4. BREATH:** Bring your attention to your breathing, becoming aware of the natural flow of breath in and out of the body. Observe your chest and belly as they rise and expand on the in-breath, and fall and recede on the out-breath. Witness each in-breath as it enters your body and fills it with energy. Witness each out-breath, as it leaves your body and dissipates into space. Then start again, bringing your attention back each time to the next breath. Let your breath be like a soft broom, gently sweeping its way through your body and mind.

**5. THOUGHTS:** When a thought takes you away from witnessing your breathing, take note of the thought without judging it, and then gently bring your attention back to your chest or your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out. Remember that meditation is the practice of “unconditional friendliness.” Observe your thoughts with friendliness and then let the breath sweep them gently away. Return to your posture.

**6. FEELINGS:** When feelings arise, do not resist them. Allow them to be. Observe them. Taste them. Experience them but do not identify with them. Let them run their natural course and then return to observing your breath. If you find yourself stuck in a feeling state, shift a little on your seat, and straighten your posture. Get back in the saddle and gently pick up the reins of the breath.

**7. PAIN:** If you feel pain in the body—your knees for example, or your back—bring your awareness to the pain. Surround the area in pain with breath. Witness yourself in pain, as opposed to responding to the pain. If the pain is persistent, move gently to release tension, and return to your posture and breath. You may need to lean against a wall or the back of your chair, or you may want to straighten your legs for a while. Avoid excess movement, but do not allow pain to dominate your experience.

**8. RESTLESSNESS AND SLEEPINESS:** If you are agitated, if you cannot sit still, or if you are bored to distraction, come back to your breath and your posture again and again. Treat yourself gently, as if you were training a puppy. Likewise, if a wave of sleepiness overtakes you, see if you can wake up by breathing a little more deeply, keeping your eyes open, and sitting up tall. Sleep and meditation are not the same thing. See if you can be as relaxed as you are during sleep, yet at the same time, awake and aware.

**9. COUNTING BREATHS:** A good way to deal with all of the above impediments is to count your breaths. On the in-breath, count “one,” and on the out-breath, count “two.” Continue up to “ten.” Then begin again. If you lose count at any point, return to an in-breath, and start over at “one.” As thoughts and feelings, pain and discomfort, restlessness and sleepiness arise, allow your counting to gently override their distracting chatter.

**10. DISCIPLINE:** For one week, practice meditation each day, whether you are in the mood or not. Even if for only five minutes, commit to a regular practice. See how you feel. If you notice a difference (or even if you don’t) commit to another week. Then consider joining a meditation group or taking a retreat and receiving more in-depth instruction and support in your practice.