

# GENTLY DOES IT

## MEDITATION BASICS

Mindfulness meditation is easy and not at all daunting. It involves sitting in a quiet room and following a few simple guidelines. Whatever experiences you have during your meditation will be valuable to you when you reflect on them afterwards.

A common error made by people who've never meditated before is to enter into it with determination and with a definite aim in mind. In many aspects of life, setting goals – and measuring your progress – is desirable.

It's what propels you forward in your career or other areas of ambition. Meditation is different: holding in mind a goal – a concept of where your meditation will lead – will interfere with the actual experience. Mindfulness is

### ATTENTION AND EXPERIENCE

Being in a mindful state is a novel but liberating experience for most people. When practising mindfulness meditation, you:

- Direct your attention
- Sustain your attention
- Are open to experience
- Accept experience
- Let go of experience.

not goal-driven and reaching a state of true awareness involves complete openness, rather than fixed purpose. Mindfulness meditation is the practice of awareness – in the moment, purposefully, and without judgement.

## Holding in mind a goal – a concept of where your meditation will lead – will interfere with the actual meditation experience.

The exercises that you're about to embark upon are in essence very easy – so much so that "exercise" is not quite the right word, since it implies effort and technique. The only effort you apply is the decision to start and continue, until the time comes to stop; during the meditation, you apply your mind lightly and purposefully to your chosen focus. There are no techniques to learn. If you start to think you're doing it wrong, that's a judgement about yourself – and the point of mindfulness

is to suspend judgement altogether. If you worry that your mind is constantly being pulled away from your meditation, that too is a sort of judgement. In fact, your mind is always going to be pulled away from its focus by all sorts of things – memories, sensations, feelings, speculations – and that's what you can expect to happen when you meditate. It's from that process that you learn important truths: the noticing of distraction and return to focus *is* the practice.

The mindful way to deal with distracting thoughts, feelings, and sensations in a meditation is to be aware of them and then let them go. Awareness is the whole point of the meditation, and opens the door to self-understanding. Letting go is not getting drawn into any of the things that pop into your mind unbidden, not engaging in any kind of dialogue with them. You're the observer, not the critic, and the observer just observes.

### ALLOWING SPACE FOR THOUGHTS

Your first mindfulness meditation will involve focusing on your breathing. As you do this, fully attending to what it feels like as each breath passes through your body, you'll have a clear focus. When you wish to let go of any stray thoughts that enter your mind, you'll have an easy way to do it – gently refocus your attention on your breath. If in addition to conscious breathing you mentally counted your breaths, there would be less space in your mind for those stray thoughts. But mindfulness meditations don't involve counting, because leaving space in your mind for stray thoughts is a good thing: you observe those thoughts and let them go.



Focus on your breathing. Notice the stray thoughts that pass across your mind. Let them go.



### SWEEPING THOUGHTS AWAY

If you find the idea of letting go of thoughts tricky to grasp, here's a metaphor that may help. Imagine you're in your garden, and it's snowing. As the flakes fall and settle, you sweep them gently away with a broom. For as long as it's snowing, you have to keep sweeping to keep the garden clear. Your sweeping is not a fight with the snowflakes, just an act of clearance. You aren't controlling them or denying them – in fact, you're acknowledging them. But you're detached and relaxed about their existence, while not letting them gain a hold.

