

# BEGINNERS GUIDE TO MEDITATION



**HERSHA YOGA**

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## Hello and Namaste!

First and foremost, I wanted to congratulate you for taking the first step in investing in yourself.

I'm Hersha Chellaram and I'm a normal person who loves to meditate. (More on that below.)

I'm here to share with you essential information on how to begin a meditation practice that you can enjoy.

This is a beginners guide designed to provide you with the basics and useful resources to help you get started on the journey of meditation.

I first learned how to meditate when I was eight years old. Yes, that's right. I was given a mantra by my family Guru, Sri Swami Satchidananda. When I was bored, I would just sit in the corner and recite the mantra in my head. Meditating without really realising it.

Years later, I received formal training at my Guru's ashram during my first yoga teacher training and practiced monastery-style meditation for a year after at his South Indian ashram — one hour, three times a day. I was disciplined and austere.

Then life took a turn. I got married, started work as a freelance consultant and yoga teacher, had two children and now run a yoga school of teacher training and a non-profit organisation. Life is busy! Monastery-style meditation was no longer attainable (time-wise) and so I had to get creative. I've learned how to make it work for me through life's ups and downs. It's been 15 years and I'm still going, and I still love it, even on days when the mind struggles to be quiet.

**I'm committed to sharing the teachings as authentically as they have been passed down to me. This guide gives you tips and resources to get started!**



**Let's start at the beginning.**

In my opinion, anyone can meditate. You just need the right guidance to make it work for you. There is so much information out there about meditation, which makes it confusing. This guide is meant to boil it down to the simplest and most essential information.

**DEFINITIONS BY GREAT MASTERS**

**"Meditation is total focus of the mind, one-pointedness. Meditation starts with concentration. Meditation actually begins when the mind is well-focused and it learns to become totally still. Don't think that only when you close your eyes, you are meditating. Anything that you do with total attention is meditation."**

**— Yoga Master Sri Swami  
Satchidananda**

**"Meditation is the process whereby we gain control over the mind and guide it in a more virtuous direction. Meditation may be thought of as a technique by which we diminish the force of old thought habits and develop new ones"**

**— HH Dalai Lama**

**"Mindfulness is the capacity to be aware of what is going on, what is there. The object of mindfulness can be anything. You can look at the sky; you breathe in. And you say, 'I know I am aware of the blue sky.' You are mindful of the blue sky."**

**— Zen Master  
Thich Nhat Hanh**

**On meditation: "It allows you to empty yourself of the endless hyperactivity of the mind, and to attain calmness. It teaches you to be peaceful, to remove stress, to receive answers where confusion previously reigned."**

**— Dr. Wayne Dyer**



## WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MEDITATION?

Write down your thoughts:

## A SUMMARISED DEFINITION OF MEDITATION

**Meditation is a process of concentrating and stilling the mind.** Our minds work constantly. The process is a gradual learning to intercept our habitual thinking process and allowing space for the mind to pause. This leads to a heightened state of awareness.

**Meditation means turning our awareness within.** Most of our lives are focused on what goes on around us: responsibilities, relationships, etc. Meditation is a process of observing what goes on in the mind. It's not the easiest thing to do, but with regular practice, we can see what we think about all the time, whether it's helpful or harmful, and we can decide what to do about it.

**Meditation is not linked to a religion although many religions teach it.** It's a contemplative practice that is used by Buddhists, Hindus, Yogis and many other religions, as well as atheists and agnostics. Each style or tradition come with their own set of meditation techniques. Finding one that suits you is key to enjoying the practice.



## WHAT YOU CAN GET OUT OF MEDITATION: BENEFITS

<b>Physical Benefits</b>	<b>Meditation reduces:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blood pressure</li> <li>• Heart rate</li> <li>• Lactic acid</li> <li>• Stress levels</li> </ul>
<b>Energetic Benefits</b>	<b>Meditation improves:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• Circulation</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Benefits</b>	<b>Meditation develops:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive attitudes</li> <li>• Adaptability and resilience</li> <li>• Deeper relationships</li> <li>• The ability to release suppressed emotions</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Benefits</b>	<b>Meditation enhances:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concentration and focus</li> <li>• Ability to learn</li> <li>• Perception of self and others</li> <li>• Discrimination and decision-making</li> </ul>
<b>Spiritual Benefits</b>	<b>Meditation encourages:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being compassionate and non-judgemental</li> <li>• Acceptance and forgiveness</li> <li>• Humility</li> <li>• Connection</li> <li>• Self-realisation</li> </ul>

## WHY DO YOU WANT TO MEDITATE?

Write down your answers:



## SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO MEDITATE

Okay, now you know why you want to do it, but where to start? Searching on Google can be overwhelming. There is so much information on meditation, styles and techniques (some conflicting information too). Although each style is different, they fall under these **four basic categories**:

### Concentration

Techniques to train the mind to focus on one thing: an object, form, breathing, sound, phrase or idea.

The object is important because what you focus on expands and you eventually develop the qualities of your object of meditation.

Usually practiced seated in a quiet place for a set amount of time and can be guided or unguided.

### Observation

The art of witnessing the mind without personal identification.

Monitoring all aspects of our experience without attachment or judgement.

Rather than trying to control thoughts, you detach from them

Can be guided or unguided and practiced seated in a quiet place for a set amount of time or while moving / integrated into daily life.

### Self-Inquiry

Taking thought patterns and dissecting them to release emotional attachments to them.

Asking yourself "Who am I" and let go of personal identifications.

Can be guided or unguided.

Common to practice seated in a quiet place for a set amount of time, can be integrated into resting states or even while journaling.

### Being Present

This category involves redirecting your attention to the present moment and surrendering to the bigger picture of life.

It's accompanied by an opening of the heart and sometimes rooted in faith. Teaches to cultivate kindness.

Can be guided or unguided and practiced seated in a quiet place for a set amount of time or while moving / integrated into daily life.



# SCHOOLS OF MEDITATION

Here are some common schools of meditation and what they offer:

Tradition	Essential Information
<b>Integral Yoga by Sri Swami Satchidananda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional Yoga meditation technique</li> <li>Seated meditation / integrated into daily life / movement</li> <li>Includes formal methodology with mantra and pranayama</li> <li>You choose your object of concentration: mantra, breath, idea, etc.</li> <li>Recommended to start small and build up slowly to twice per day</li> <li>Taught by Integral Yoga teachers around the world</li> </ul>
<b>Transcendental Meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yogic meditation style</li> <li>Seated meditation</li> <li>No formal ritual / methodology</li> <li>Emphasis on a specific mantra meditation</li> <li>Recommended twice a day, 15-20 minutes per meditation</li> <li>Only available from licensed instructors</li> </ul>
<b>Vipassana Meditation by S.N. Goenka</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional Buddhist meditation technique</li> <li>Seated meditation (recommended unsupported)</li> <li>No formal ritual / methodology</li> <li>Emphasis on 'mindfulness of the breath'</li> <li>Available in 3-10 day retreats</li> <li>Available everywhere</li> </ul>
<b>Mindfulness Meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zen Buddhist meditation technique</li> <li>Seated meditation / integrated into daily life / movement</li> <li>No formal ritual / methodology</li> <li>Emphasis on present moment awareness and breath</li> <li>To be cultivated at all times: walking, eating, drinking tea, etc.</li> <li>Available by Mindfulness Teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Chinese Qi Gong Meditation from Taoist Tradition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meditation from Taoist tradition</li> <li>Generally moving meditation</li> <li>Follows a set routine of movement and breathing</li> <li>Emphasis on breath and awareness of energy</li> <li>To be practiced daily</li> <li>Different styles of Qi Gong teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Christian Meditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on teachings of Holy Bible</li> <li>Prayer-based contemplative practice</li> <li>Emphasis on moral code of conduct</li> <li>Daily contemplative reading or prayer</li> </ul>
<b>Art Of Living's Sahaja Samadhi Meditation by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional Yogic meditation style</li> <li>Seated meditation</li> <li>Follows a methodology of breathing exercises (Sudarshan Kriya)</li> <li>Emphasis on a mantra</li> <li>Encourages daily practice</li> <li>Qualified Art of Living teachers around the world</li> </ul>
<b>Guided Meditations &amp; Visualisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern meditation techniques</li> <li>Seated meditation / integrated into daily life / movement</li> <li>No set routine or methodology</li> <li>Different awareness for each style</li> <li>Usually available with online apps</li> <li>Different teachers around the world from various traditions</li> </ul>





## ESSENTIALS CHECKLIST: ALL YOU NEED TO START

- ☐ **The right attitude:** Don't have any expectations or preconceived notions about how your meditation experience should be and definitely don't compare your experience to anyone else. Be non-judgemental about the whole experience.
- ☐ **Schedule a regular time:** It helps to have a regular time to meditate. Look through your daily routine and see the best times to fit in a meditation. Start with a realistic time.
- ☐ **Find a suitable space:** Having a space that is quiet, has the least amount of distraction and where you can perhaps permanently set up a cushion or chair, and place any objects of meditation that you find inspiring is ideal. Talk to others that share your living space and have them help you find the right space.
- ☐ **Set an intention:** Take a moment to remember why you choose to meditate everyday and set a small and realistic goal for a set amount of time (e.g., I will meditate for two minutes daily for the next seven days).
- ☐ **Find the right posture:** If sitting, then make sure you are comfortable enough where your body will not be a distraction. You can sit on a chair, cushion, meditation bench where your spine can be upright but the rest of the body is relaxed. You don't want to be too relaxed where you fall asleep and you don't want to be too upright where you get aches and pains after a period of time.
- ☐ **Have all the props you need:** Make sure you have everything you need to avoid losing the concentration (e.g., for sitting meditation, have cushions, tissues, a shawl, guided meditation track, etc. / for walking meditation, make sure you have a hat, umbrella, headphones, etc. / for yoga or qi gong, make sure you have your mat, blocks, etc.)
- ☐ **Choose the right object to focus on:** What you choose to focus on should be uplifting and something that you want to see every day.
- ☐ **Commitment to the process:** Your mind will move all over the place the moment you decide to keep it still. Stay committed to the whole process with a light-hearted view. The moment you start to struggle or fight with the mind, the more difficult and unpleasant the experience.





## PERSONALISING THIS PROCESS: FILL IN THE BLANKS

☐ Your chosen attitude towards meditation:

☐ Possible regular times to meditate:

☐ Suitable places to meditate:

☐ Intentions:

☐ Most comfortable positions to meditate:

☐ Props that I would like with me:

☐ Possible objects of meditation:

☐ What is your commitment to the process?



## MY PERSONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Here are some of my favourite things to use when meditating:

### My Permanent Meditation Space:

- ☐ Jade yoga mat (<https://new.iydistribution.com>)
- ☐ Sun & Moon Buckwheat meditation cushion (<https://new.iydistribution.com>)
- ☐ Pine meditation bench (<https://new.iydistribution.com>)
- ☐ Picture of the Integral Yoga Yantra & Sri Swami Satchidananda (my objects of meditation) (<http://shakticom.org>)
- ☐ Shawl for when I feel cold
- ☐ Box of tissues

### Favourite Meditation Apps:

HELPFUL HINT: When using your iPhone / smartphone for meditation, make sure you remember to turn on your DO NOT DISTURB setting before meditation, and to turn it off afterwards.

- ☐ The Daily Guru: A Collection of selected quotes from the many lectures and books by Swami Satchidananda, a prolific and enlightened teacher.
- ☐ Insight Timer: Meditation timer
- ☐ Headspace: Meditation app for when you want a guided meditation

### When meditating outdoors or on vacation:

- ☐ Beach towel (can use it as a mat, a cushion, a shawl or sunblock)
- ☐ Young Living Essential Oils: Tea Tree or Lavender for insect repellent ([https://www.youngliving.com/en\\_US](https://www.youngliving.com/en_US))

### When sick in bed:

- ☐ CD: Guided Relaxation & Affirmations for Peace by Swami Satchidananda
- ☐ Box of tissues
- ☐ Young Living Essential Oils: Thieves or Purification ([https://www.youngliving.com/en\\_US](https://www.youngliving.com/en_US))



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The most common questions that my students have asked over the years:

**QU: How can I meditate? I have tried but failed.**

**A:** I'd like to offer some insights as to why there is no such thing as a bad (or failed) meditation. Every meditation experiences enhances your awareness. Body discomforts, outside distractions, whizzing thoughts, remembering things and noticing your monkey mind all demonstrate that you have enhanced your awareness to things that have always been there but your attention was elsewhere. This is one of meditation's great benefits and happens to everyone. If you have been extremely distracted during meditation, you have had a very successful first meditation practice. It's just the first step though, keep going!

**QU: What are some tricks to meditate everyday?**

**A:** Here is what helped me restart my practice after giving birth to my second child: I set a very specific and attainable goal (e.g., "I'm going to meditate for two minutes daily as soon as I sit up in bed for the next seven days). Then after seven days I renewed the same goal. Then again after another seven days, the same goal. 21 days = a habit! Only after the habit was established, then I expanded on it. Start small and remember, slow and steady wins the race.

**QU: What should I be thinking of when I meditate?**

**A:** Choose something inspiring! You need to love it enough to want to focus on it every single day for the rest of your life. Something that reminds you of the infinite, something uplifting or heart-opening. Many people like to focus on the breath (easiest to do and goes with you everywhere), others choose a religious symbol or form, angels, a candle, a sunset, a flower, and many others. It can be anything you like. Remember, what you focus on expands. As you think, so you become. Over time you begin to imbibe the qualities of your object of meditation, so choose wisely.



**QU: How do I know if meditation is benefiting me or not?**

**A:** Most of the time, you have no idea whether your meditation practice is benefiting you or not. If you meditate regularly and suddenly forget to do it, that day you will realise exactly how your meditation benefits you because your mind will be all over the place. Other times its the people around you that notice the difference, but not you. Meditation's benefits are so subtle. It's like trying to watch a tree grow. Only after some time you will notice the difference above ground, but just like the tree you only see what is above ground. You don't know the growth that happens below the ground.

**QU: How can I take my meditation deeper?**

**A:** There are many ways to deepen your meditation practice. Start by spending more time in meditation practice and increase the frequency of practice (e.g., instead of 5 minutes once a day, try 10 minutes twice a day). Stick to one technique only, as it allows your mind to go very deep. Journalling allows you to keep track of the thoughts in your mind and the space to process thought patterns that no longer serve you. Finally, getting initiated into a tradition or lineage allows for some transmission of wisdom from Master to Disciple and really enhances the practice.

**QU: Do you offer any guided meditations to learn it properly?**

**A:** I offer live trainings and a series of online courses. Many people have found both very useful in learning how to meditate. I teach the Integral Yoga meditation method and am committed to sharing the teachings as authentically as they have been passed to me. I come from the perspective of a beginner who wants the best experience possible. The live trainings are based in Hong Kong of course, but the online training offers you more detailed instruction delivered at your convenience, wherever you are in the world. Please visit [hershayoga.com/online](https://hershayoga.com/online) for details.

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**THANK YOU!**

