



BUILDING A MEDITATION PRACTICE

By Kelsi Plante

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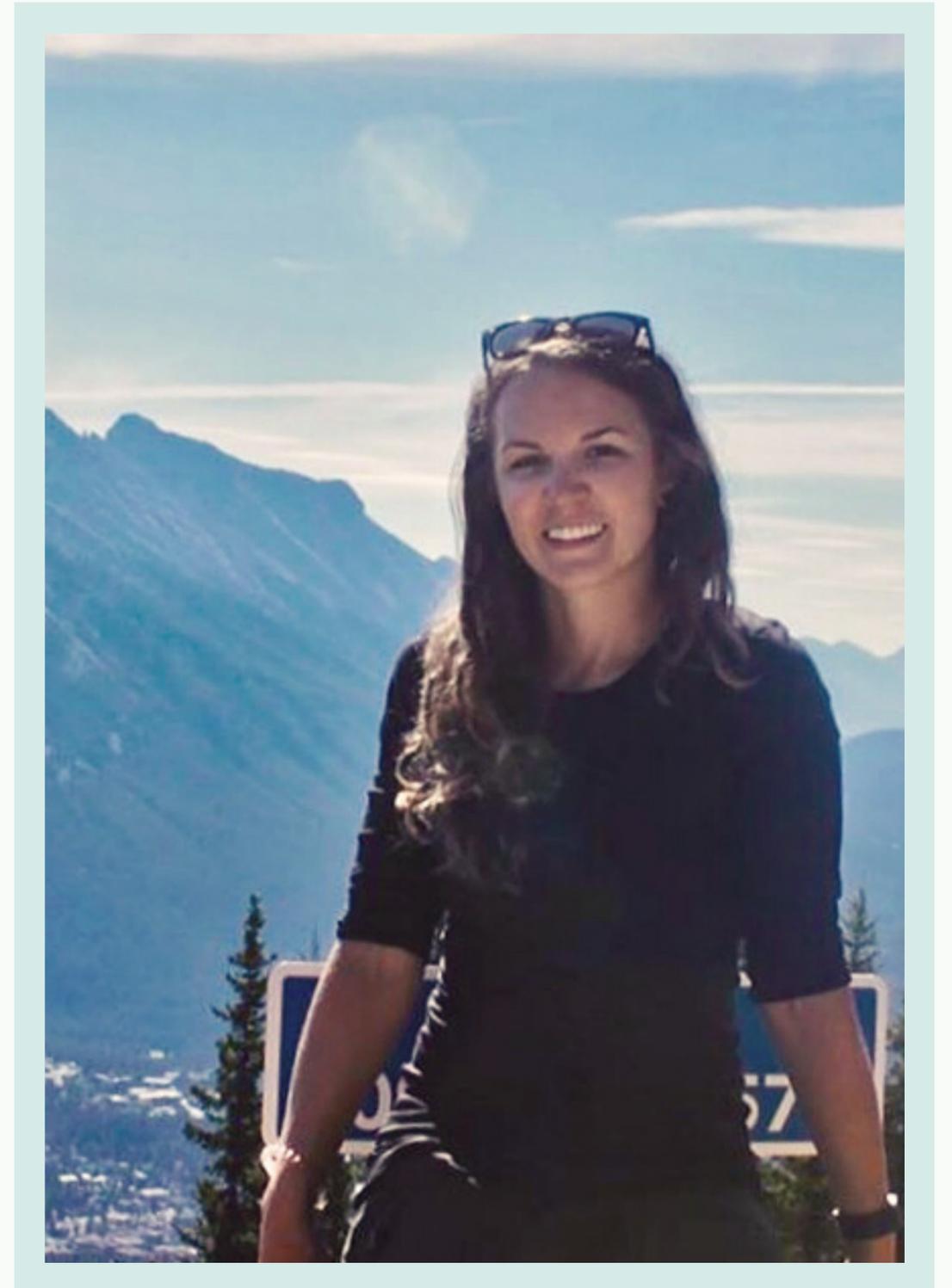


KELSI PLANTE

MEDITATION + YOGA TEACHER

A LITTLE ABOUT ME

I'm passionate about living consciously, finding meaning in life, and sharing ways of doing so with others. I am a certified 200-hour yoga teacher and find a sense of fulfillment in helping people live with awareness, realize their innate healing and creative power, and remember who they really are. I love connecting with people and exchanging ideas and aim to bring people together to create a more conscious community.



WHAT IS MEDITATION?

IF YOU ASK 100 PEOPLE
WHAT MEDITATION IS,
YOU'LL LIKELY GET 100
DIFFERENT ANSWERS.



THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO GET INTO A MEDITATIVE STATE.

Athletes and artists often talk about being in “the zone” where everything seems to flow naturally and with less effort. This state happens when we’re doing activities we enjoy, with limited distractions to pull us from the moment.

THIS STATE ALSO HAPPENS WHEN WE PRACTICE INTROSPECTION AND SELF-REFLECTION.

When we get curious about who we really are, we start to shed all the external labels and ideas that are really not us until we uncover our center. Resting in this center with complete contentment is meditation.

When we look past all the different methods,

WE FIND THAT MEDITATION IS SIMPLY A STRESS-RELIEVING TOOL.

Science has shown that the benefits of daily meditation are all results of removing a lifetime of old stress from your cellular memory. This practice activates the whole brain and over time it strengthens the corpus callosum, which can increase creativity.



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

MINDFULNESS IS A HOT TOPIC
IN WELLNESS THESE DAYS.

BEING MINDFUL MEANS PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR PRESENT EXPERIENCE, NOT REPLAYING THE PAST OR WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE.

It means being aware of the information coming through each of your senses, being aware of your thoughts as simply ideas moving through your mind, being aware of emotions as they arise but not necessarily acting on them, and being aware of the movement of breath and your body. With practice, this awareness expands to all parts of your life and you begin to notice the subtleties that are normally blurry or ignored altogether as you operate with tunnel vision for most of the day.

MINDFULNESS IS NOT THE SAME AS MEDITATION.

Most guided meditations out there are actually teaching mindfulness practices. Why? Because mindfulness helps us bring our focus back to the present, which helps us forget about the things stressing us out, even just momentarily. As beginners, we usually focus on noticing our thoughts, emotions, and sensations, but not being hooked by them or letting our thoughts spiral off on their own.

WE'RE TRAINING OUR "MONKEY MIND" BY GIVING IT SOMETHING TO FOCUS ON.

By directing our focus, we activate a small part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex. With consistent practice, this can improve clarity and focus, which helps when it comes to entering and sustaining a meditative state.



WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T MEDITATE?

IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW DANGEROUS (AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE) IT IS FOR US TO LIVE WITH AS MUCH STRESS AS WE DO.

Doctors are referring to stress as the Black Plague of our century, which makes sense once you realize just how many health conditions are related to stress.

Meditation teacher Emily Fletcher says it well:

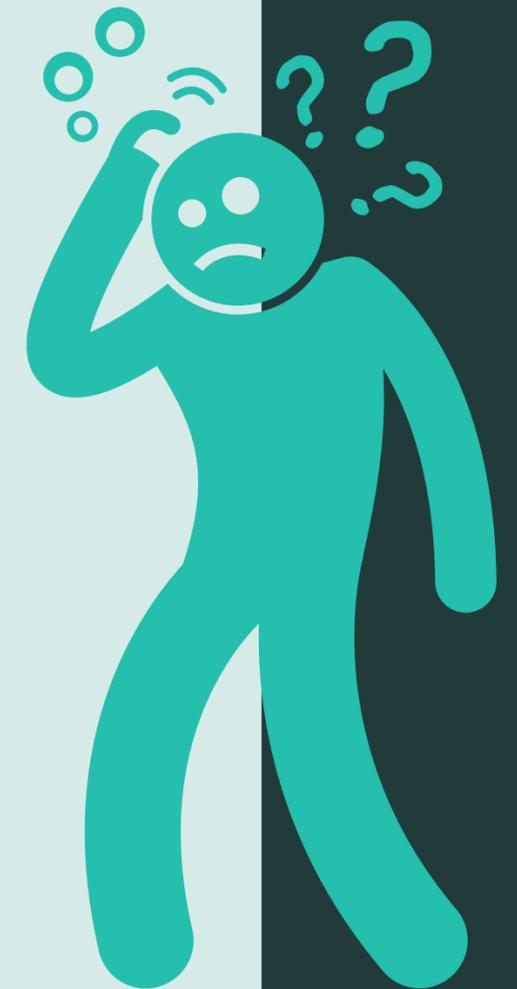
**STRESS MAKES YOU
STUPID, SLOW, AND SICK.**

HOW?

STRESS SUPPRESSES OUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CREATIVITY. BUT MEDITATION ACTUALLY GROWS THE GRAY MATTER IN PARTS OF THE BRAIN THAT CONTROL THOSE THINGS.

WHEN YOU'RE ALWAYS STRESSED, YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM KEEPS YOU IN THE "FIGHT OR FLIGHT" MODE WHERE YOUR SURVIVAL BRAIN IS THE MAIN DRIVER OF YOUR DECISIONS.

This is great when your life is truly in danger but not so great when you need to interact with others, process emotions or find solutions for issues.



STUPID



RESEARCH HAS REPEATEDLY
SHOWN THE DESTRUCTIVE LINK
BETWEEN HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS
AND REDUCED PRODUCTIVITY.

IN ONE STUDY, EMPLOYEES AT AETNA WHO TOOK
MEDITATION CLASSES GAINED 62 MINUTES OF PRODUCTIVITY
PER WEEK — A SAVINGS OF \$3,000 PER EMPLOYEE PER YEAR.

Instead of lighting a fire under us to get things done,
stress just causes us to burn out.

RESEARCHERS AT
HARVARD ESTIMATE THAT
80% OF DOCTOR'S VISITS
ARE STRESS-RELATED.
LET THAT SINK IN...

STRESS CAUSES YOUR BODY TO SHUT DOWN
THE FUNCTIONS THAT AREN'T NEEDED FOR
SURVIVAL IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

Reproductive functions, hormone production and regulation, digestion and metabolism, immunity, detoxification, and a large portion of brain function are all examples of processes negatively affected by chronic stress.



SICK

According to the American Institute of Stress, stress-related ailments cost **\$300 billion annually**, more than twice the medical cost of the obesity epidemic.

THE FOLLOWING ARE ALL LINKED TO STRESS:

- HEART ATTACKS
- HYPERTENSION
- DIABETES
- ASTHMA
- ALLERGIES
- CHRONIC PAIN
- HEADACHES
- BACKACHES
- INSOMNIA
- SUICIDE
- DEPRESSION
- ANXIETY
- SUPPRESSED IMMUNE FUNCTION
- AUTO-IMMUNE CONDITIONS
- SKINS DISORDERS
- CANCER
- IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME AND OTHER DIGESTIVE DISORDERS
- WEIGHT GAIN AND OBESITY

People who physically train their body know that rest and recovery are just as important as the hard work you put into building a stronger, healthier body.

The same goes for our mental and emotional health.

IF YOU'RE ALWAYS THINKING, WORKING, AND FOCUSING ON SOMETHING ELSE, EVEN IF IT'S JUST YOUR PHONE OR THE TV, YOU'RE NOT ALLOWING YOUR MIND TO REST AND RECOVER FROM ALL THE ACTIVITY OF THE DAY.

WHEN WE MEDITATE, WE'RE ABLE TO GET INTO A STATE OF BEING THAT IS 5 TIMES MORE RESTFUL THAN SLEEP.

WHEN YOU GIVE YOUR BODY THE DEEP REST IT NEEDS, IT KNOWS HOW TO HEAL ITSELF.

HOW DOES MEDITATION CHANGE THE BODY & MIND?



HOW DOES MEDITATION CHANGE THE BODY?

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES IS BREATH AWARENESS.

In this practice, we observe the breath and slow it down. When we focus on breathing deeply through our nose, filling our lungs fully and slowly exhaling (something we rarely do when we breathe unconsciously), we activate the vagus nerve.

THE VAGUS NERVE CONNECTS OUR BRAIN AND OUR BODY AND SWITCHES US INTO THE “REST AND DIGEST” STATE, WHICH BRINGS ALL THOSE PREVIOUSLY SHUT DOWN FUNCTIONS BACK ONLINE AND HELPS THE BODY RECOVER FROM STRESS.

HOW DOES MEDITATION CHANGE THE MIND?

WHEN IT COMES TO THE MIND, MOST OF OUR DAILY ACTIVITY IS OPERATING IN THE BETA BRAINWAVE STATE. IN THIS STATE OF MIND, WE HAVE LIMITED PERCEPTION AND FOCUS PRIMARILY ON THE EXTERNAL WORLD. WHEN WE START TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION, WE SHIFT DOWN INTO A STATE REFERRED TO AS ALPHA.

THIS OPENS OUR AWARENESS TO MORE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT AND ALSO ALLOWS US TO FOCUS ON OUR INTERNAL EXPERIENCE (NOTICING THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS, BODILY SENSATIONS, ETC).

ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING BENEFITS OF MEDITATION IS ITS EFFECT ON NEURONS.

When we repeat a thought (and resulting behaviors) enough times, we strengthen connections between certain neurons, causing them to “wire” together. This wiring makes it easier for the mind to know what to do without requiring much conscious thought. This can be helpful when it comes to daily tasks like brushing your teeth or commuting to work.

BUT OUR HABITS CAN HOLD US BACK AND MAKE IT HARDER FOR US TO CHANGE.

The good news is that by practicing mindfulness and choosing to think and behave in a different way, we can cause different neurons to connect and, with repeated practice, those connections begin to wire together and the old ones start to weaken.



HOW DOES MEDITATION CHANGE US SPIRITUALLY?

SOME PEOPLE ARE UNSURE OF MEDITATION BECAUSE OF ITS ASSOCIATION WITH VARIOUS RELIGIONS.

While it does exist in some form within many religious and spiritual traditions, meditation itself does not require you to be religious or change your current spiritual beliefs.

ONE OF THE BENEFITS THAT COMES WITH CONSISTENT PRACTICE IS ACCESS TO HIGHER STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS, MEANING THE ABILITY TO

CONNECT WITH THE VERY THING THAT MAKES US ALIVE.

For some, this state is associated with their religious or spiritual beliefs and for others it's simply a better understanding of how life works.



SO GIVEN ALL THE BENEFITS,
**WHY AREN'T MORE
PEOPLE MEDITATING?**

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE PRACTICING MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION IS GROWING EACH DAY, BUT THERE ARE STILL SO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE 2 MAIN EXCUSES FOR NOT DOING IT.

WE TELL OURSELVES WE'RE "TOO BUSY"

BUT LET'S BE REAL--HOW MANY MINUTES WILL YOU WASTE TODAY SCROLLING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA OR WATCHING TV?

If you want to get really honest with yourself, start tracking your phone and computer usage just like you would track your finances. Make the most of your time by budgeting it just like you'd do with any other resource in your life that you want to get the most from.

MANY HIGH-ACHIEVING PEOPLE LIKE CEOs AND PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES MEDITATE DAILY.

They're not meditating because they have tons of free time, they're meditating because they know the less stressed they are, the more clarity they have and the faster they accomplish their goals. If they have time to meditate, you do too.

THE TIME YOU INVEST IN MEDITATION WILL COME BACK TO YOU EXPONENTIALLY IN THE FORM OF:

- Better, deeper sleep
- More energy
- Increased productivity
- Sharper decision-making ability

MANY PEOPLE TRY TO MEDITATE BUT GET
FRUSTRATED AND QUIT BECAUSE THEY

CAN'T GET THEIR MIND TO "TURN OFF."

But guess what? The mind thinks involuntarily just like the heart
beats involuntarily. You can't stop your mind from thinking
anymore than you can stop your heart from beating.

**THE THOUGHTS AREN'T THE PROBLEM.
IT'S OUR REACTION TO THEM THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE.**

With practice, the thoughts will become less frequent
and less distracting, so be patient and persistent!

READY TO MAKE A CHANGE?

HERE'S OUR 6-
WEEK TRAINING
PLAN TO GET YOU
FROM ZERO TO
MEDITATING



WEEK 1

Learn the Basics/Build the Practice

WEEK 2

Awareness of the Breath

WEEK 3

Awareness of the Body/Grounding

WEEK 4

Acceptance/Processing Trauma

WEEK 5

Loving Awareness

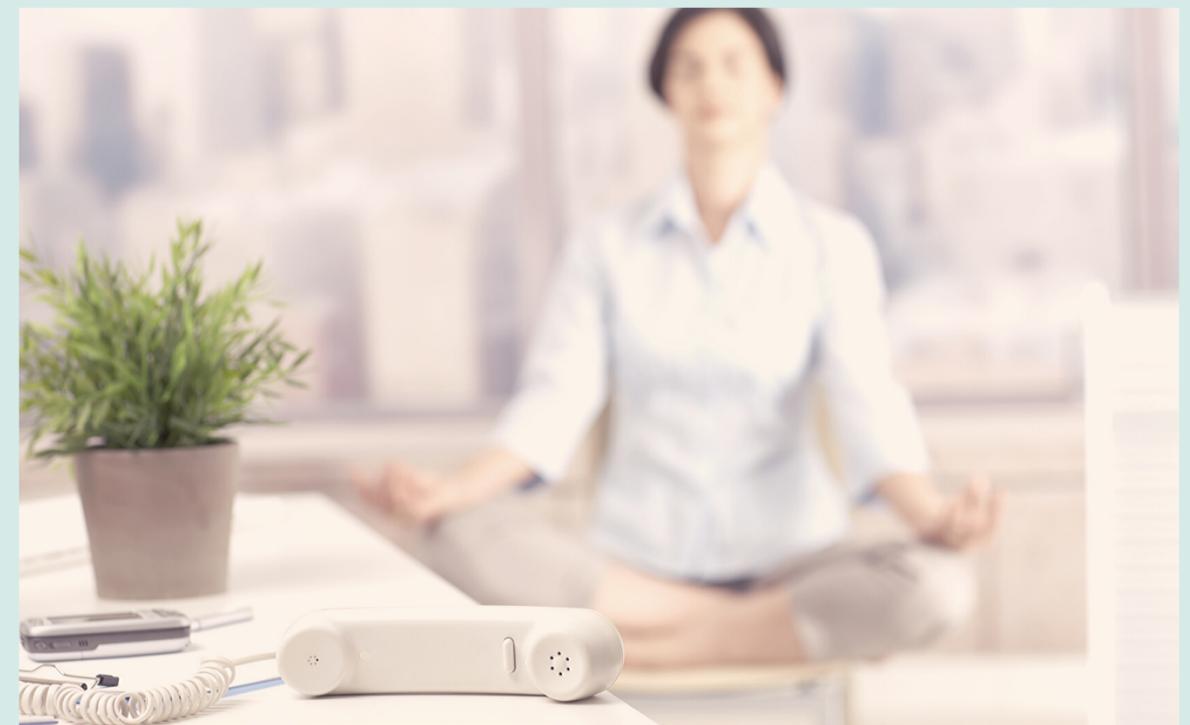
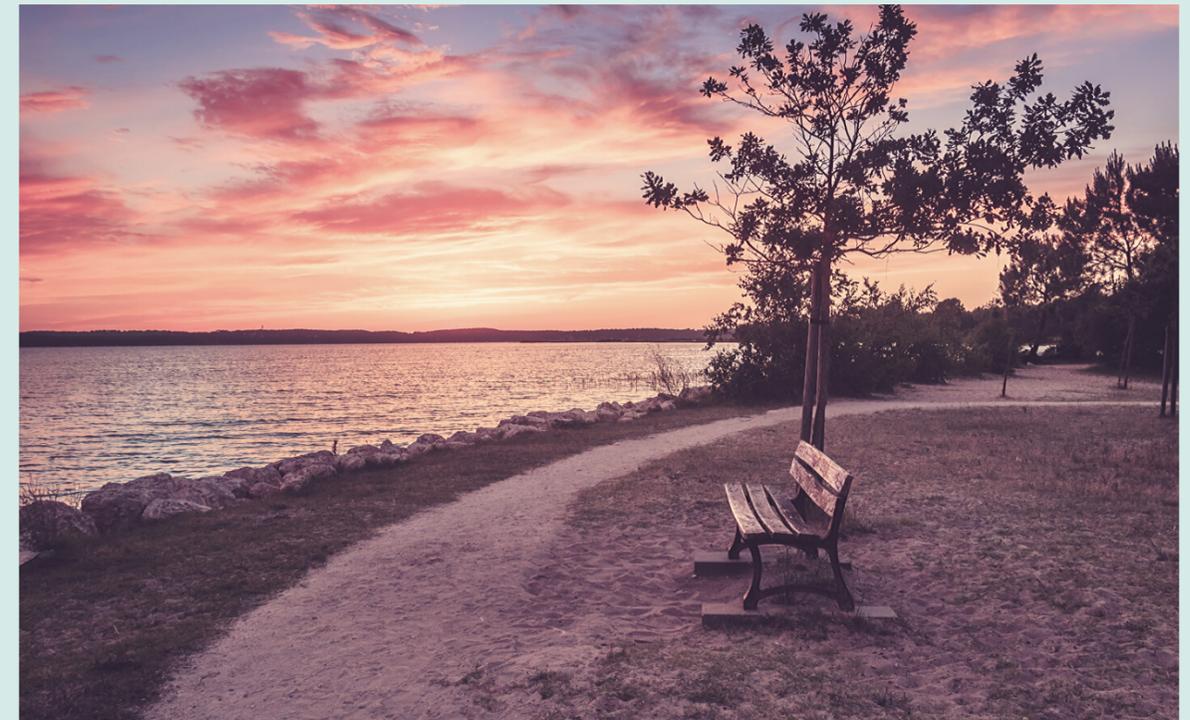
WEEK 6

Visualization/Awareness of the Higher Self

WEEK 1

LEARN THE BASICS/BUILD THE PRACTICE

One of the major barriers to beginning a meditation practice is feeling like we don't know enough. If we just read one more book about meditation or watch a few more Youtube videos, maybe then we'll know enough so we're not wasting our time. In this section, we're going to review the essentials and give you all the information you need to start building your meditation practice. By the end of week one, you'll feel empowered to start practicing every day.



THE KEY TO EXPERIENCING THE NUMEROUS BENEFITS OF A MEDITATION PRACTICE IS CONSISTENCY.

You have to prioritize your wellbeing and commit to a daily practice, otherwise old habits will start to take over again. Many traditions like Yoga and Buddhism recommend 40 days and many training programs (including this one) suggest 6 weeks of consistency to really create lasting change. Make a commitment right now by scheduling time each day for the next six weeks to do your meditation practice. This could be in the morning before you start your day, a break in the afternoon, or in the evening as you're winding down. It may be tempting to practice as you're laying in bed, but often this results in falling asleep instead of actually meditating. If you struggle with insomnia, meditating in a quiet space before you get in bed can be especially helpful.

AFTER YOU'VE FIGURED OUT *WHEN YOU'LL DO IT*, YOU'LL HAVE TO THINK ABOUT *WHERE YOU'LL DO IT*.

A quiet space away from people and animals and free from distractions is best for beginners. Think about where you'll be during your scheduled meditation time. Will you already be in a quiet space or will you have to find another place? Figuring out the when and where ahead of time will make it easier to focus on the how.

THERE IS NO SINGLE RIGHT ANSWER TO HOW TO PRACTICE, BUT HERE'S SOME BASICS:



Sit in a chair with your ankles directly over your knees, knees slightly below your hips, your spine erect but relaxed, your chin parallel to the ground, your hands resting comfortably and your eyes open or closed. This position can be modified in any way that helps you. There are lots of different meditation positions that you should try. But if you're just getting started, this is a good one to try first.



Turn off and put away all distractions. Phone, computer, TV—anything around you that may try to grab your attention while you're meditating.



If you need to be done by a certain time, you can use a kitchen timer or a timer on your phone as long as you won't be tempted to look at it. There are also many meditation apps out there that have timers as well as guided meditations. A free app that we love is Insight Timer.

NOW THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR MEDITATION, YOU'RE GOING TO PRACTICE JUST BEING INSTEAD OF DOING ANYTHING SPECIFIC THIS WEEK. FOR MOST OF US, THIS IS CHALLENGING ENOUGH.

PRACTICE TIME: 1 MIN

SETUP:

- Turn off and put away all distractions.
- Set your timer for a minute if you're using one. Start with one minute every day until you want to add more time to each session. Build slowly and don't be afraid to go back to one-minute sessions.
- Sit in your comfortable meditation position.

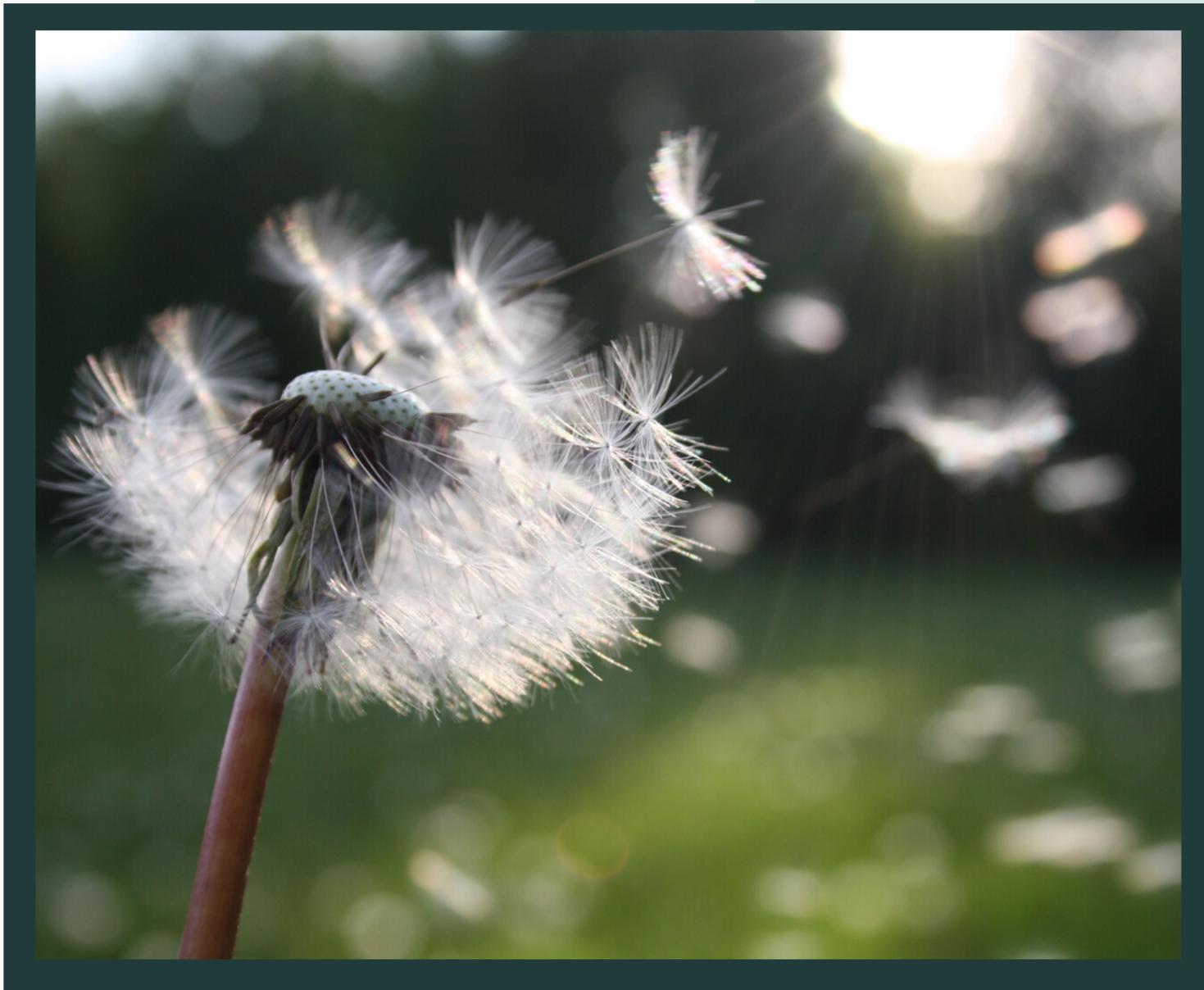
THE PRACTICE:

- Once you feel like your body is positioned right, bring your attention to the space around you.
- Notice all the **colors**, the various **shapes**, the **smells** surrounding you, **sounds** nearby and further away, the **temperature** of the air on your skin. See if you can sense any **movement** in the air.
- Just take it all in, letting your awareness move around on its own.
- Notice if you're getting caught up in thoughts but don't judge yourself for it (we all do it).
- As long as you're sitting attentively without distracting yourself with other things, you're doing the exercise correctly.
- When the time is up, you've finished your practice! If you feel like continuing for longer you can, but only if you're not forcing it.

WEEK 2

AWARENESS OF THE BREATH

The most fundamental style of meditation is becoming aware of the breath. What does that mean and why do we do it? In this section, you'll learn how to bring your awareness to the breath. You'll learn why the breath is a common focal point in meditation and why a focal point is so important. We'll provide instruction on how to get started with breath awareness and how to continue building your practice. By the end of week two, you'll feel secure that your practice is heading in the right direction.



IN THIS PRACTICE, YOU OBSERVE ALL THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING AND SLOW THE BREATH DOWN.

You already learned that when we focus on breathing deeply, filling our lungs fully and slowly exhaling, we activate the vagus nerve, which helps our body recover from stress.

ISN'T JUST SITTING THERE BREATHING PRETTY EASY?

Focusing on the breath is simple but it's most certainly not easy. There are hundreds of different meditation techniques and many of them use a different focal point such as the heart, or a candle but it's not really important which focal point you use. A focal point is just a tool to help calm your thoughts and focus your mind. When the body is still and the mind isn't actively engaged in thinking, the sensation of breathing becomes front and center in our awareness.

THE BREATH IS ALSO A TOOL THAT'S ALWAYS WITH US.

That's why we talk so much about the breath and recommend it as a focal point to get started.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE USES THE BREATH TO HELP US FOCUS AND BUILDS ON WHAT YOU'VE BEEN PRACTICING FOR THE LAST WEEK.

PRACTICE TIME: 2 MINS

SETUP:

- Turn off and put away all distractions.
- Set your timer for a minute if you're using one. Start with one minute every day until you want to add more time to each session. Build slowly and don't be afraid to go back to one-minute sessions.
- Sit in your comfortable meditation position.

THE PRACTICE:

- Move your awareness through the exercise from Week 1.
- After you've observed your space and feel more centered, inhale deeply through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Envision breathing in cool, refreshing air and letting go of anything you brought to meditation with you today. Let go of tension in the forehead, jaw, throat, and shoulders.
- Check your position and make any adjustments you need.
- Gently direct your focus to wherever you feel the breath most strongly. This might be the tip of your nose, your throat, your chest or your belly—wherever you feel it most strongly.
- Practice being aware of your breath from the beginning to the end, just noticing all the qualities you feel. Notice the qualities of hot or cold.
- Notice how your body feels. Observe the rising and falling of the chest and the stomach. Notice where the breath seems stuck. Notice it all and return to the breath when you find yourself thinking.
- Continue focusing on the breath until your timer sounds or you have done at least two minutes.

WEEK 3

AWARENESS OF THE BODY/GROUNDING

You'll notice in weeks one and two that you often get trapped or dragged away from the practice by your mind. We will build on the previous two weeks' learning and show you how to direct your awareness out of the mind and into the body. We will use our breath to break us of the cycle of unconscious thought and direct our focus into our bodies, where our emotions live. By the end of week three, you'll feel grounded in your body and less attached to the stories playing out in your mind.



WEEK 3:
AWARENESS OF THE BODY/
GROUNDING

THIS WEEK YOU'LL BRING YOUR AWARENESS DEEPER INTO YOUR INTERNAL EXPERIENCE.

You've already been practicing how to anchor yourself to the present moment by noticing all the subtleties of the world around you that you probably tune out in day-to-day life.

LAST WEEK YOU LEARNED HOW TO USE THE BREATH TO FURTHER FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION AND YOU STARTED TO COME INTO YOUR BODY MORE BY NOTICING THE SENSATIONS OF THE BREATH AS IT MOVES THROUGH YOU.

We're going to build on that now and bring awareness to all parts of our body. In doing so, we start to remember what it was like to come into a body as a baby with curiosity and awe.

PRACTICE TIME: 10 MINS SETUP:

- Turn off and put away all distractions.
- Set your timer for a minute if you're using one. Start with one minute every day until you want to add more time to each session. Build slowly and don't be afraid to go back to one-minute sessions.
- Sit in your comfortable meditation position.

THE PRACTICE:

- Notice your surroundings and take everything in with your senses. You may be tempted to skip over this process but give yourself a couple minutes to really settle into the space you're in. Once you feel like you've pulled your attention back into this moment, close your eyes and start to observe the breath for a few cycles.
- Then, as you follow the breath in and out, start to visualize the breath moving to specific areas of your body.
- As you inhale, watch and feel the breath moving up your spine from your tailbone. As you exhale, visualize a wave of calming light washing over the top of your head, down your face and ears, relaxing the muscles of your face as it moves.
- The next inhale brings new air in and the next exhale spreads it down the throat and back of the neck to your shoulders, relaxing all the muscles along the way.
- Inhale again and on the exhale sense the energy of the breath moving down your chest and upper back, noticing any places that feel stuck, tense, or painful. When you come across one of those sensations, continue visualizing the calming light relaxing that area as you breath.

THE PRACTICE (CONTINUED):

- Next, move your awareness to your left arm, letting the wave wash down from your shoulder to your elbow to your wrist and all the way to the tips of your fingers. On the next exhale, watch it move down your right arm. Remember to continue breathing into any areas of tension as you work your way down.
- Next, you'll let the breath relax your abdomen and lower back and down into your pelvis. This area may require a few more breaths than the others if you usually sit for most of the day.
- After that area feels free, let the wave of energy relax the hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles and feet, all the way through each of your toes.
- Let go of the visualization now and just sense your whole body. You may notice subtle sensations like tingling, pulsing, or vibrating. It's also okay if you don't feel anything new.
- Allow yourself to sit in the awareness of your entire body until your timer sounds or until you feel that your practice is complete.

WEEK 4

ACCEPTANCE/PROCESSING TRAUMA

By this point, we've built the foundations of our practice, we've learned to get out of the past or future and into the present moment, out of our minds and our bodies and into our emotions and now it's time to do the deep. **Warning: this is powerful medicine.** Not everybody will be ready for this meditation and it should not be attempted by someone who isn't ready for it. Everybody who does attempt it, should have the proper support system in place.

This week we are going to talk about past trauma and how we play that out in our lives until we process it. To do that, we will expose those parts of ourselves that we least want to look at, hold it with compassion and start to transcend it. If you're ready to take this meditation on, you might spend a lot of time crying this week but after the tears comes the joy of opening more fully into our best lives.

IN THIS PRACTICE, YOU OBSERVE EMOTION TO CONNECT WITH AND ACCEPT PAST TRAUMA.

When we get stressed, it's for a reason. It's our mind's way of telling us there is a threat in our environment and we'd better be ready to handle it. When and why we experience stress is informed by our past trauma.

ISN'T RELIVING PAST TRAUMA SCARY?

Yes. It's one of the scariest things in the world but it's also the most direct route to identifying the patterns of thought that have kept us from our higher self, from our freedom. The processing of our traumatic past is how we let go of who we think we are and become more connected to who we really are. In order to process trauma, we have to understand it, accept its role in our lives and the only way to do that is to go straight through it. This is what this meditation is designed to do.

THIS MEDITATION SHOULD BE PRACTICED WITH EXTREME CARE

I can't emphasize this enough - this is a powerful technique that can cause extreme emotional responses.

PRACTICE TIME: 15 MINS

SETUP:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable meditation position.
- Make sure you won't be interrupted and you're able to experience any emotion that might come up.
- Take a few deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Notice where your breathing is hung up, notice where your body is tight and return to the breath

THE PRACTICE:

- Call to mind a recent stressful experience, one where you were hit with a strong wave of emotion. Maybe it was an interaction with someone in your life, maybe it was someone cutting you off in traffic.
- Let yourself go back to that stressful moment. How did it feel? What were you thinking? Where were you? What did it look like? What stories are you telling yourself about the significance of this event?
- Come back to the breath and notice where you experience any changes in sensation in the body. Are your shoulders stuck up by your ears? Is your face tense? Do you feel heat in your chest? Electricity in your hands? What exactly do you feel and where is that in your body right now?
- Resist the urge to tell a story about why it feels that way and simply ask yourself if you can accept that it's there right now and you feel it.
- See if you can name it with an emotion. Is it fear, sadness, guilt, shame, anger, surprise, disgust, happiness, love?
- Ask if you can accept that you're experiencing that emotion in the body right now. Let go of the stories your mind tells about why it's there.

THE PRACTICE (CONTINUED):

- Gently place your hand over the area where you feel the sensation and say to yourself silently, "I accept that I feel [this emotion] here in my body and it feels like [this sensation]."
- Keep your focus on this spot. Breathe deeply into it. Notice how the sensation ebbs and flows, changes and moves around the body. Notice how the emotion might be a mix of several different emotions or the emotion might change once we notice it.
- When it does, simply accept its presence in the body in this moment. Accept the stories as they arise in the mind and let them pass.
- Continue in this way without expectation. Just noticing and accepting. Sending that area that's experiencing the sensation love and acceptance. Not trying to change anything about your experience. Simply noting what is there and accepting its presence.
- If you practice this enough, you might notice...

THE PRACTICE (CONTINUED):

- A thought will eventually arise from somewhere deep within you. It will sound different than the others. It won't be a story, it will be the truth. This thought will likely be about some time in the past when you experienced this kind of emotion before.
- You'll be instantly transported back to that time. You'll feel the same emotions and sensations run through the body. You'll realize you still exist here and now but the quality of that experience, how you feel in this present moment, is totally flavored by this past experience.
- This thing, this past event, is trauma. It's something that colored your experience of reality long ago. It still hurts you. Take some time to just rest in the experience of that fact.
- When you're ready and if you can, send acceptance to this thing. Accept that it happened, that it had an impact on you. Accept that you're living out the same patterns you developed to cope with this thing long ago and they don't really serve you anymore, they hurt you.

THE PRACTICE (CONTINUED):

- Where does this memory live in the body? Where is it stored? Bring your awareness to this place and gently place your hand over it. Visualize what this place looks like and feels like from the inside. Ask yourself, what does it need?
- With each breath, envision breathing in love or acceptance or compassion or whatever this thing needs and sending it to that spot in the body where you experience it most strongly.
- You might notice you hit a point where you can't accept whatever you're experiencing. That's okay. Can you accept **that you can't accept** whatever you're experiencing?
- You may notice thoughts or sensations that come up in layers. Feel free to continue this practice for as long as it is useful to you or disengage from the practice at anytime.
- When you feel ready, start to widen your awareness to your whole body, to where the body contacts your seat, to the sounds in the room. This completes your practice.

WEEK 5

LOVING AWARENESS

You may have ended last week feeling like you ripped a hole open inside yourself. It will be painful, it will be challenging. Now, it's time to fill that space you created within yourself with love, kindness, empathy and acceptance. You may make peace with your busy mind. You may feel like you've been given the keys to the universe. We will get to the root of our disconnection from others and from ourselves and begin to cultivate the ground for deeper connection in our lives. By the end of this week, you may notice an ability to live more fully, connect more deeply and find a well of inner strength that has no bottom.



LOVING AWARENESS MEDITATION, ALSO KNOWN AS LOVING KINDNESS OR METTA MEDITATION, HELPS US CULTIVATE COMPASSION.

Compassion helps us reconnect with others and improves our emotional intelligence and well-being. Compassion is said to be the foundation for kindness and selflessness. It doesn't require a strong form of love that we might associate with family and friends, which makes it especially useful when we're trying to loosen the grip of negative feelings towards another.

PRACTICE TIME: 15 MINS SETUP:

- Turn off and put away all distractions.
- Set your timer for a minute if you're using one. Start with one minute every day until you want to add more time to each session. Build slowly and don't be afraid to go back to one-minute sessions.
- Sit in your comfortable meditation position.

LOVE IS ONE OF THOSE INCREDIBLE THINGS WE EXPERIENCE MORE OF THE MORE WE GIVE IT.

Increase the amount of love and compassion in your life by giving more of it. After you do this practice, set the intention to take this feeling with you throughout the rest of the day. If you start to get frustrated or angry with someone, come back to the sensations you felt during this exercise.

THE PRACTICE:

- We'll begin this week's practice the same as the last four weeks. After you've sensed your surroundings and feel more settled, take 5 deep, slow breaths through your nose.
- Bring to mind someone you love very much. Usually the first person who comes to mind is the most powerful, so don't worry about choosing the "right" person. If you can't think of anyone right now, you could even use your pet for this exercise—anything or anyone that inspires a sensation of love.
- Notice where you feel this sensation of love and allow it to spread and radiate through your entire body as you breathe.
- On an exhale, imagine spreading this love to the person you thought of, filling every cell of their body.
- With each inhale, you're fanning the flame of this love sensation in the core of your body, and it gets bigger and stronger and brighter. As you exhale, imagine this love as a light radiating out from your body, or as an actual wave of love washing over others.
- Start to bring other loved ones to mind, and even people whom you have neutral feelings for. Let the love spread to them all and, with each inhale, continue to build the feeling of love inside you.
- Eventually, let the sensation of love spread to everyone in the world, including your enemies. Share the immense feeling of love you have with everyone and everything in the world.
- If you start to lose that feeling, come back to the person whom you love very much. Rekindle the flame of love inside of you and allow it to grow brighter again.
- Allow this love to pulse in and out of you for as long as you'd like or until your timer runs out. Slowly come back to the room, keeping the feeling of love with you for as long as you can.

WEEK 6

VISUALIZATION/AWARENESS OF THE HIGHER SELF

Now that we've begun to heal from our past and created a loving space within ourselves, it's time to set a vision for the future. This is what we all hope to get from our meditation practice--a future that is more connected, more loving, holds more space for ourselves and others, aligns us mind, body and soul and connects us with the best possible version of ourselves in the future. You'll learn to connect with your higher self and live with a higher purpose. By the end of this week, you'll have a method of contacting that higher self and the strength to live from that place.



THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE MAY BE MORE ADVANCED FOR SOME BUT IT'S WHERE A LOT OF MAGIC CAN HAPPEN!

Most of us forget the power we have to create the life we really want, but through meditation, we start to understand the infinite possibilities. Visualization and affirmations are two common techniques used to draw in the types of experiences you'd like to have. Seeing things in your mind and repeating certain words to yourself are not enough on their own though. When we engage all of our senses in envisioning what we'd like to experience and imagine what we would feel like in that situation, it starts to seem more real in the mind.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT THE BRAIN DOESN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REAL EXPERIENCE AND AN IMAGINED ONE.

Your body, picking up on the signals your brain is sending, starts to make changes based on the experience going on in your mind. What's going on in your mind starts to change your physical body. If you keep your visualization in mind throughout your day, just think of all the changes your mind could tell your body to make! All of these little changes start to add up and with consistency, your vision becomes real. There is some fascinating research out there on the power of visualization in sports performance, healing, changing thoughts and behaviors, and improving mental skills.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE WILL REQUIRE SOME MORE TIME AND FOCUSED EFFORT AT THE START. THE MORE CLEAR YOU CAN BE ON WHAT IT IS YOU WANT TO EXPERIENCE, THE MORE POWERFUL THE VISUALIZATION WILL BE.

PRACTICE TIME:

20+ MINS

SETUP:

- Turn off and put away all distractions.
- Set your timer for a minute if you're using one. Start with one minute every day until you want to add more time to each session. Build slowly and don't be afraid to go back to one-minute sessions.
- Sit in your comfortable meditation position.

THE PRACTICE:

- Have a notebook and pencil or computer (in offline mode) beside you, then lead yourself through the practices from weeks one and two to calm and center yourself.
- Next, take some time to write out, in as much detail as possible, something you'd most like to experience. Remember to use all your senses and emotions to make your visualization seem more real.
- After you're done writing it all down, read through it and visualize it in your mind as you go. Spend as much time as you want in this process, fully engaging your senses and emotions to make the vision as vivid as possible.
- Use your written description each time you sit down to practice your visualization this week and try to imagine that scenario as much as possible throughout each day.
- During each day's practice, reflect on how the previous day went and write down any changes you noticed. As you keep doing this, you'll start to realize just how much is changing.



THANKS FOR READING

Need some help getting started? Join our 6-Week
Workshop Series: Building Your Meditation Practice

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