



Seven Secrets to Stop Interruptions in Meditation:

*How to Concentrate and Focus on
Your Meditation and Deal with
Distractions*

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Dedication

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY WIFE, MALA AND MY DAUGHTER, RACHAEL, WHO HAVE HAD TO PUT UP WITH MY INCESSANT TIME ON THE COMPUTER TO GET THIS BOOK WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED.

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Invocation

This life is the gift of the whole universe – the earth, the sky and many generations.

May we learn to live in mindfulness in order to enjoy the wonders of life.



Introduction

I am very pleased that you decided to purchase this book, *Seven Secrets to Stop Interruptions in Meditation: How to Concentrate and Focus on Your Meditation and Deal with Distractions*.



In my many years of practicing and teaching meditation, I have found that that more people either don't take up a meditation practice or abandon meditation because they get interrupted and distracted.

They get interrupted by thoughts, feelings, emotions, plans, images, bodily sensations,

dreams, sleep, and many other mental, emotional and physical phenomena.

This book will guide you in such a way that interruptions and distractions won't deter you from meditating. You will learn that these are normal occurrences for even the long time practitioners.

Of course, if you are a Tibetan monk in a cave in the Himalayas in the middle of a three year retreat without the benefit of all that modern society has to offer, you may never get distracted!

I am joking, of course, because such a person would not be reading this book.

This book is designed with you, the reader in mind. I know how difficult it is to not do anything but sit there! I know how the mind can wander from here to there like the flow of a never ending river.

But that's just the point! We know our minds flit from one thing to another, seemingly without purpose. It happens because we are anxious or worried or fearful or stressed out or overweight or _____. (You fill in the blank!)

With meditation, we can learn to observe the river of our thoughts, feelings, emotions,

sensations and other objects of mind and not get carried away.

All it takes is practice!

Let me use the example of a professional athlete to illustrate the point. Can you think of a single athlete that has not practiced or worked out practically every single day of his or her life?

If you go to the gym, you know how important it is to have a regular workout schedule. Once you stop working out, your body loses some of its conditioning. Then you feel guilty and because of that, you continue not to go to the gym – in spite of your New Year’s resolution!

To change your life, you have to change yourself. The best way I know to change your self is to practice meditation.

In the exercises in this book, you will learn to be mindful of your breathing. I will guide you through some simple exercises that you can do in just nine minutes a day or more if you are so motivated.

You could consider the meditation practices that you will learn in this book to be your mental exercises. In doing so, you will be improving your mental fitness, just like with

physical exercise you improve your physical fitness.

One of the leading experts in the field of affective neuroscience, Dr. Richie Davidson, has done a lot of research on the effects on meditation on the brain.

His research shows undeniable evidence of beneficial effects on the brain due to meditation practices.

He has also stated that the positive effects can wear off if the mental fitness exercises are terminated. This is exactly like what happens to your muscles and physical fitness when you stop doing your workouts.

It is truly astonishing to me that with all the scientific evidence for the benefits of meditation or mental fitness or mental exercises that more people are pounding on my door for instruction.

I am a professional mental trainer! By reading this book, you will gain much of the benefits of having a personal mental trainer.

Background

We begin with two questions: What is meditation?

When I think of the word, meditation, I think of sitting quietly, calming my mind and relaxing my body. Meditation is the process of withdrawing yourself into yourself and paying attention to what is going on for you in the present moment, moment by moment.

You purposely become aware of your breathing or some other object of meditation. For example, you may also choose to focus on a *mantra* – a word or phrase that has special meaning for you.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the act of deliberately paying full attention to what is going on in the present moment without judgment. I'm sure you have experienced moments of mindfulness sometime in your life.

These moments of mindfulness can come when you see a beautiful sunset or gaze down on your infant child in awe or in many other common circumstances. You know where you are and what you are doing.

The only difference between mindfulness and what you do in everyday life is the quality of awareness. If you are eating something from a fast food restaurant on the run, this is not mindfulness. If you are carrying on a conversation with someone and your attention is on what you will be doing next, this is not mindfulness. But if you are listening to someone with your full attention as if there were nothing else going on in that moment, this is mindfulness.

I am reminded of the Japanese poem:

Sitting quietly,
Doing nothing,
Spring comes,
And the grass grows all by itself!

As the poem states, mindfulness in sitting quietly implies "doing nothing!" In order to achieve this, all you do is sit there and follow the instructions described below.

When we are mindful, we know what we are experiencing in or body, feelings, mind and the contents of the mind.

When we pay attention to what is going on in our body, we recognize the life force pulsating throughout our whole being. We recognize the miracle of being alive, which we usually take

for granted. Even so, the miracle is still here, nonetheless.

At any moment, we can become aware of our breathing, whether at our nostrils, in our chest, or in our belly. When we do so, we return to the present moment.

When we feel our heart beating in our chest or notice our pulse in our feet, legs, torso, arms, or head, we return to the present moment.

When we are out in nature and notice the green leaves, flowers, birds, insects, rocks, yes, and even dog poo, we can return to the present moment.

Our feelings are also gateways to being present.

Most of the time, we spend a lot of energy avoiding our feelings by watching TV, eating when we are not hungry, going shopping, or simply denying them.

However, if we can experience our feelings in our feelings, they too, can be a doorway to being mindful in the present moment.

You may ask, "What does it mean to experience our feelings in our feelings?" It means to simply experience our feelings directly, without adding our thoughts, opinions,

judgments, criticisms, notions, or anything else to them.

We have to let go and allow our inner wisdom to feel what we are feeling. From this, compassion for ourselves develops and we find more freedom of expression.

Our thoughts consist of images, impulses, feelings, memories, opinions and judgments, plans, worries, fixations, mental constructions, and self-talk (the constant chatter that goes on inside our minds).

We also have moments of creativity and insight when we are concentrated on something we love or experience awe at a truly wonderful sight in nature.

Our thoughts can get the best of us as they circuit around through our brain. However, with mindfulness, we can bring our mind back to our breath or our body and return to the present moment.

Interruptions and Distractions in Meditation

Anyone who has ever meditated before knows that interruptions in meditation are quite common. Experienced meditators are aware of many different kinds of distractions and hindrances.

For example, you may be just sitting there watching your breath or repeating your mantra. A moment later, you are thinking about what you have to do when your meditation session is over.

The next moment, you are thinking about breakfast or lunch or dinner or ice cream or any other food products to satisfy your wandering mind.

One thing that happens is that you just can't wait until the bell rings and you keep looking at your watch or timer.

Even in the most comfortable positions, there is likely to be some pain or sensation somewhere in your body that will interrupt your meditation.

You might have a thought about how much work you have to do or how you have to get your work done.

Or is it time to pick up the children and take them to soccer practice?

Some people feel bad about last night's fight or yesterday's conflict with their boss.

A "meditation" session often turns into a planning session. You plan all the activities in your day either at home or at work. In fact, sometimes you are at work and don't even know it. You think you are meditating but you are actually working.

Believe me, this has happened to me on many occasions, and I have a regular meditation practice!

Has this ever happened to you: "I can't wait to get off this cushion [or chair or bed] to text my girlfriend or read my email or call my friend!?"

You might feel that now is the time to connect with Linda or Chris. Then you start to feel a little anxious. This little piece of anxiety interrupts your meditation practice.

The types of interruptions in meditation include preoccupations, memories, plans, feelings, thoughts, ideas, emotions, desires, cravings, sensations, sounds, smells, images, tastes and perceptions. And the list goes on!

I have encountered every one of these in my own practice, and, in many cases, they have become objects of my meditation.

How do these interruptions arise? How do they navigate through the brain? How do they cease?

All of these questions can be answered by saying that each of the interruptions has a beginning, middle and an end. In other words, interruptions in meditation are impermanent, just as all things in life and the universe.

When we recognized that the interruptions are impermanent we can sometimes return to our object of meditation without further effort.

Sometimes, the interruptions are so strong that we don't even have the opportunity to realize that they are impermanent. Our minds are trapped.

This can be the case when our mind is restless or we are worried about something. It keeps cycling through the same set of thoughts, feelings or plans. Dealing with this takes a lot of courage because we just want to get up and walk away.

Maybe that is the right thing to do! Take a short break from your meditation to write

down the thoughts that are bugging you and get right back on the cushion!

Another way to handle restlessness is to do a little walking meditation or some other activity not related to the cause of your restlessness. Then come right back to sitting meditation.

Some people find that they are unable to concentrate for very long. This gives rise to boredom and a half-hearted attempt to meditate. This may be a result of laziness.

The cure for laziness is to set an achievable goal and be content with just being where you are. Try to develop enough energy to recognize where you are and plan to take more action before it is too late.

You may simply want to affirm in your mind that tomorrow's meditation practice will be better.

Then the best thing to do is to just recognize that we are trapped in our minds and let it go at that. Taking a few deep breaths may help train your mind, at least for a while.

Another mechanism for dealing with interruptions is to take a break for a few minutes. Maybe get up and do a little walking meditation around your room.

The most important thing that you can do is to have a little compassion for yourself and not beat yourself up for being interrupted in your meditation.

In the dialog for the instructions below, I provide some coaching techniques for dealing with distractions. They should help you through the exercises and provide ample training for when you meditate on your own.

If you begin to doubt whether you are doing it correctly simply return to the simple instructions. Just bring your attention back to your breath in your body.

Your particular way of doing meditation will be unique to you and there is nothing you can do that can be considered “wrong.”

Obviously, if you are feeling angry with someone or feel ill-will towards someone, you will have difficulty meditating. Anger is a hindrance that is especially hard to deal with.

My advice for someone dealing with anger or ill-will towards another is to hold the anger something like a mother holds her new born baby. Bring the anger close to you and say to yourself, “Hello, my little (or big!) anger. I know you are there and I am here for you.”

In this way you will learn to invite the seed of anger to back into your subconscious so you can enjoy your meditation. Embracing your anger can really help to heal it and make it go away, at least temporarily.

Recognize the impermanence of the feeling of anger and allow it to gently subside. Then return to your meditation practice.

Finally, I must say a few words about sensual desire. At times, the craving for pleasure of the senses can be quite overwhelming. Sexual desire, food cravings, and pain may creep into your meditation at any time.

Here, the best practice is to return to mindfulness of breathing as described in the rest of this book. Allow the wisdom of impermanence to help you calm the sense desires, at least while you meditate.

Benefits of Meditation

The benefits of mindfulness practice and sitting silently are without limit. In the first place, you will begin to experience peace within you and around you.

Peace may not come all at once, but if you practice for at least nine minutes three weeks in a row without missing a day I bet you will find a little more peace in your life.

Next, you may experience your heart opening to the people you love and who love you and begin to enjoy the wonders of life around you.

You develop compassion for yourself and this manifests as compassion for others.

You may see more clearly how the earth we live on is really a wonderful place to be. You probably will find more enjoyment in flowers, birds, trees, animals, and other life forms recognizing that they too want happiness and avoid suffering.

Your own feelings about yourself may reach a point where you are happy most of the day.

Next, you may experience a glimpse of the beauty and radiance of your own true nature.

You may be able to answer such questions as, “Who am I”, or “What is my purpose in life?”

In any case, the increased knowledge of your inner self will inspire you to keep on practicing for many years to come.

Many practitioners find that their health improves drastically as stress is reduced or eliminated from their lives.

In my way of thinking, stress is the extra suffering we put on ourselves over and above the challenges that life brings.

Mindfulness is the path to lessening the hold of our addictions and increased wellness.

For example, one of my favorite activities is playing tennis. I incorporated tennis into my mindfulness practice in 1991, after having virtually forgotten about it for twenty years.

Just recently, I noticed that I had an uncomfortable feeling on the tennis court when one of my balls went into a neighboring court and I was uncertain whether the players over there would recognize that it was my ball and send it back.

Being mindful of this made me realize that there was no reason to stress out about not getting the ball back right at that moment.

Recognizing a moment like this is the fruit of the practice. Hopefully, that was the last time I will feel that way about a wandering ball.

Another example occurred for me at a retreat in Vancouver.

I had two unpleasant rebuffs from another attendee in the space of two or three hours. In both cases, my first reaction was to retaliate. I felt that the other person had no idea of who I was and had treated me unfairly.

Upon inner investigation, also known as deep looking, I was able to calm my feelings and wait for a more appropriate time to respond.

What eventually happened is that I took the comments of the other person to heart and followed the advice I was given.

This simple act of mindful looking enabled me to participate in the retreat with no regrets and no hard feelings.

Quite often, mindfulness practitioners experience a degree of happiness far above their normal state.

This happiness comes from the freedom experienced during sitting quietly and recognizing that one can be content with one's own life situation just as it is.

This freedom provides an insight into taking life in the present moment, without putting anything extra on it in the way of stress or extra effort to get things accomplished.

Life seems to be experienced “in the zone” – not just on the tennis court, but also in playing, exercising, working, creating, loving, eating, sleeping, dreaming, and other aspects of the whole wondrous experience.

As you continue to practice, you may find that your addictions have less hold on your mind.



Suppose you feel addicted to caffeine in one form or another, e. g., Starbucks or Peet’s coffee, chocolate, TV

shows, and the like.

In the past, you would not stop a moment to think about getting that extra cup of coffee or having that additional piece of chocolate or watching that TV show.

However, with mindfulness practice, you start to become aware of these kinds of urges as seeds before they reach the level of mind consciousness causing you to act impulsively.

You then notice, "My little coffee addiction – I know you are there and I am here for you. Please remain a seed for a little while longer and I will take good care of you."



Personally, I go through this quite often with chocolate. I go so far as to put chocolate chips in my granola each morning, along with chia seeds, fresh fruit and almond or soy milk.

While this doesn't have much effect on my desire for chocolate for the rest of the day, I go through periods when I want chocolate after and between meals.

When I feel the least bit fatter than I like, I go on a chocolate semi-fast and manage to control my intake of that wonderful substance until my waist shrinks back to my desired level.

But this is a *Seven Steps to Eating Healthy Foods* book coming soon to a web site near you or your inbox.

A benefit that people experience out the gate is that of relaxation. Mindfulness practice brings on the relaxation response in most people, even the very first time they practice.

The feeling of relaxation that comes with sitting silently can make you feel like you have slept peacefully for some length of time. You may come out of your session being quite refreshed and ready to take on your abundant life.

Another benefit that sitting quietly brings is the possibility of insight into various aspects of your life. Insight is the process of recognizing something important in just about any phase of existence.

As you practice, sensations arise that give you a new understanding of your life situation. For example, I woke up early this morning and started my daily mindfulness practice. I found myself pondering what to do now that my career as a software engineer is ebbing.

Then it dawned on me that I am qualified to write books that can help people improve their lives simply by starting to practice mindfulness. This insight continues to blossom as I find more and more mindfulness topics to introduce to people like you.

Long time practitioners begin to notice a fondness and reverence for life. Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, they commit themselves to cultivating compassion and finding ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals.

They also try to minimize the amount of killing in the world and are dedicated not to kill, even be it a tiny spider, or to let others kill.

Also, long time practitioners become aware of the challenges caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, and they commit themselves to practice generosity by sharing their time, energy and material resources with those in need.

They cultivate loving kindness and compassion for all beings and respect their rights and property.

Along the same lines, experienced practitioners regard the sanctity of sexual conduct of prime importance and experience sexual relationship in situations when there is love and a long-term commitment.

They do everything possible to protect children from sexual abuse and try to keep couples and families together.

Experienced practitioners cultivate deep listening and loving speech. They listen with full attention and try not to judge what they hear. They speak their truth as much as possible in order to help resolve conflicts and protect their families and communities from harm.

Furthermore, experienced practitioners are mindful in what they consume.

They avoid alcohol and other intoxicants and ensure their well-being by eating properly and not over spending.

They work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in themselves and in their environment.

There are several attitudes adopted by mindfulness practitioners that trigger skillful behavior when it comes to life situations.

These qualities of the heart, as they are known, include generosity, morality, patience and determination, among others. These qualities provide incentives for mindfulness in daily life.

There is so much that can be said for the scientific basis of mindfulness practices it could take a whole book. Recent studies indicate that

meditating even as little as nine minutes a day can affect constructive changes in your brain.

With so much scientific evidence for the benefits of meditation, I am surprised more people aren't doing it.

You probably know that when it comes to physical exercise, it is important to maintain a steady schedule.

The same is true of meditation. Just as you would go to the gym multiple times in a week, you will want to schedule a routine for meditation practice.

Just as with physical exercise, without which your fitness will decay, so it is with meditation. The peace and serenity that you can achieve with meditation will also decay.

Enough of the benefits! Let your own experience be your guide. So let's begin!

Instructions

I recommend that you follow these instructions without judging them or thinking about them very much. They provide you with a step-by-step process to unlock the secrets to stop interruptions in meditation and concentrate on the practices.

Your experience will be unique to you and you should just follow them and take whatever you get.

The most important advice I can give is to accept whatever happens, just as it is.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. You'll find my contact information in the chapter, "About The Author."

The format of the instructions for practice consists of statements, comments, and ellipses (...).

Statements are generally highlighted with a light background as in this sentence.

Each statement should be thought of as something that I said directly to you in a

calming voice as if we were in the same room together.

The comments are in brackets ([]), which provide additional information to supplement the instruction.

The ellipses indicate a pause for the period of an in breath and an out breath or slightly more, perhaps even five minutes.

These instructions are virtually identical to instructions I give to clients who come to *Mindfulness in Healing* classes as well as private clients.

When I train people I follow along with them. The words below are typical of what I say.

I recommend you first read each step of the instructions all the way through, then read one statement at a time, and then you can proceed on your own pace.

Do not worry if you don't think you are doing it right – there is really no right or wrong way to do it.

With practice, your mindfulness will become a lot easier.

Do not worry if you lose the sense or meaning of the current instruction because of thoughts, feelings, plans, images, sounds, or emotions.

Remember that these are just interruptions in meditation and are impermanent. Do not beat yourself up for them!

Just simply acknowledge what is going on non-judgmentally and return to the instruction.



In the beginning, try sitting quietly for just nine minutes a day. After mastering abdominal breathing follow these steps:

1. Begin with optionally inviting the bell three times and then do "Step 1: Deep Breathing."
2. Continue with "Step 2: Withdrawing Inward."
3. Next, do "Step 3: In – Out" for the rest of the nine minutes and optionally invite the bell three times to end the session.
4. Do this sequence for one to three weeks or until you get the hang of it.

5. Repeat items 1 – 3 substituting “Step 4: Deep – Slow” in step 3.

6. Repeat steps 1 – 3 substituting “Step 5: Calm – Ease” in step 3.

7. Repeat steps 1 – 3 substituting “Step 6: Smile – Release” in step 3.

8. Repeat steps 1 – 3- substituting “Step 7: Healthy – Free” in step 3.



Now you should be ready to gradually increase your time to twenty minutes or a half an hour.

Some of the instructions in other books in this series may easily take you up to half

an hour to do, so build up your practice and have a lot of fun with it.

Don't be too serious and enjoy!

Personally, I set the meditation timer on my cell phone to go off after thirty minutes, and you may eventually want to do the same.

I also follow the basic instructions below, but customized for what's going on in my life and what object of mindfulness I wish to choose. Be sure to turn off the TV and your cell phone ringer before you start!

Make sure you won't be disturbed during the time you are meditating.

A good time to practice is in the morning when you wake up.

Perhaps set aside nine minutes before you get out of bed, or mosey on down to your living room and sit quietly.

Another good time to do it is in the evening before you go to bed. Again, you might want to sit quietly in your living room before you go to bed so you don't fall asleep.

But any time you have a minute or two, you can practice wherever you happen to be.

On the audio download that you can order with this book, we begin with the invocation (above) and invite the bell to sound three times.

These little rituals mark the transition from ordinary life to moments of practice.



Also, at the end of the sessions, we invite the bell to sound three times. You are welcome to try this, if want.

Begin by finding a comfortable position to sit, preferably with your back straight and your hands comfortably

placed on your thighs.

Traditional practitioners sit on a cushion on the floor and keep their back erect. They often place the fingers of their left hand on top of their right hand four finger widths below their navels, with their thumbs lightly touching.

You can also lie down, so long as you won't fall asleep with doing the practice.

Preliminary Step: Abdominal Breathing

In order to improve the quality of your practice sessions, it is important to relearn abdominal breathing – also known as diaphragmatic breathing.

If you watch a newborn, as I did when my grandnephew was born, you would notice that her or his belly rises with the in breath and falls with the out breath.

You can determine if you are breathing abdominally by lying on your bed or on the floor with your hands just below your navel.

If you can feel your hands rise when you breathe in and fall when you breathe out, you are breathing correctly, as far as these instructions are concerned.

If your hands don't rise on the in breath, you are probably breathing into the upper part your chest.

You can train yourself to breath diaphragmatically by learning to expand your belly on the in breath and contract your belly on the out breath.

I remember that when I relearned to breathe abdominally how much better I felt. Once I retrained myself, I began the long process of

learning to relax, and reducing stress. I will continue to work with this kind of breathing for the rest of my life.

The benefits of abdominal breathing are numerous. In addition to inducing relaxation and relieving stress, it benefits the circulation, heart and lungs.

As you breathe in deeply and breathe out fully, you eliminate more carbon dioxide than when you have shallow breathing.

I strongly recommend that you practice abdominal breathing throughout the entire session.

As you practice, you will not only become more comfortable with it, but moments of mindfulness in your life will start to crop up when you find yourself remembering to breathe abdominally.

Step 1: Deep Breathing

We begin by taking several deep breaths.

When you breathe in..., breathe in completely and deeply..., filling your chest and abdomen as fully as possible... When you breathe out..., simply let go of all the air and tensions you are holding... [Repeat a minimum of six times.]

Breathe in completely and deeply... Hold your breath for a count of three... Let go and release all the air in your lungs...

Breathe in deeply again... Hold for a count of three... Let go...

Breathe in again to your full capacity... Hold for a count of three... Breathe out and release...

In... in... in... One... Two... Three... Out... out... out...

Breathe in deeply again... Hold for a count of three... Let go...

Breathe in again to your full capacity... Hold for a count of three... Breathe out and release...

Now discontinue breathing deeply... and allow your breath to naturally return to normal... Take your time... Take it easy...

Step 2: Withdrawing Inward

Now that your breathing has become normal...

Withdraw yourself... into yourself...

Become aware of your body...

Feel the life force in your head and face...

Invite your head and face... to relax... to let go... to breathe...

Continue to breathe...

Now invite your neck and shoulders... to relax... let go... breathe...

Allow your shoulders... to simply drop another quarter of an inch...

Let the feeling of relaxation... descend down into your torso and upper body...

Encourage your upper body... to relax... let go... breathe...

And now down into your abdomen...

Invite all the muscles and nerves... in your abdomen to relax... let go... breathe...

Now moving gently down... feel the life force in your pelvis and hips... and invite your pelvis and hips to be at ease...

To relax... let go... breathe...

And now... as you become aware... of the life force in your legs and feet... invite your legs and feet... to relax... let go... breathe...

Now experience this relaxation... to be present... in your whole body...

Continue to breathe...

Be aware... of no other spaces... but these spaces...

Be aware... of no other times... but these times...

Be here... Be now... Be here, now...

[Now continue being aware of your body until you are ready to move on.]

Step 3: In – Out

Now settle back into your breathing...

When you breathe in..., know that you are breathing in...

When you breathe out..., know that you are breathing out...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself...,
“Breathing in, I know I am breathing in”...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
“Breathing out, I know I am breathing out”...

Try this several times...

“Breathing in, I know I’m breathing in...
Breathing out, I know I’m breathing out...”

If a thought comes into your mind..., just acknowledge it and return to your breath...

You can shorten these, if you want...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself, “In”...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself,
“Out”...

Continue to pay attention to your breathing...

“In... [in breath] Out...” [out breath]

If a feeling comes into your body..., just allow it to be there..., and return to awareness of breathing...

“In... Out...”

If a sensation grabs your attention..., feel it..., accept it..., and return to your breathing...

“In... Out...”

If that errand you need to run... keeps cycling through your mind... let it be there for a while..., and then in your own time..., return to your breathing...

“In... “Out...”

If you notice a disturbing feeling... coming into your awareness..., acknowledge it..., and return to your breathing...

Continue this practice for at least five minutes, letting go of thoughts, feelings, etc., as above. You will most likely begin to notice that your in breath becomes deeper and your out breath becomes slower. This is a good time to move on to Step 4.

When you do so, remember to handle interruptions and distractions as in step 3. Notice what comes up for you. Allow it to be

there for a while. Then return to your awareness of breathing.

Step 4: Deep – Slow

As you continue to focus on your in breath...

And as you continue to focus on your out breath...

You will begin to notice that your in breath becomes deeper...

And you will begin to notice that your out breath becomes slower...

This happens naturally... as you continue to be mindful of your breathing...

When you breathe in..., now say to yourself...,
"Breathing in..., my in breath is becoming deeper"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
"Breathing out..., my out breath is becoming slower"...

Try this several times...

If a thought interrupts your awareness..., recognize it..., and let it go...

"Breathing in..., my in breath is becoming deeper"...

"Breathing out..., my out breath is becoming slower"...

You can shorten these, if you want... -

When you breathe in..., say to yourself,
"Deep"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself,
"Slow"...

If you notice a feeling... creeping into your
mind..., say "hello" to it..., and let it go... Return
to your breathing... in your own time...

"Deep..." [In breath] "Slow..." [Out breath]

If an image impedes your awareness..., allow it
to be there... then let it go... and return to your
breath...

"Deep... Slow..."

"Deep... Slow..."

"Deep... Slow..."

Continue this practice for at least five minutes.
You may begin to notice that you are starting
feel calm and at ease. Allow this to happen in
your own time. Don't force it. It will happen
naturally.

Remember to handle interruptions and
distraction as in step 3.

Step 5: Calm – Ease

Now that your in breath is deeper...

And now that your out breath is slower...

You will begin to notice... that you become calm when you breathe in...

And you will begin to notice... that you become at ease when you breathe out...

This happens naturally... as you continue to be mindful of your breathing...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself...,
“Breathing in, I feel calm”...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
“Breathing out, I feel at ease”...

Try this several times...

“Breathing in, I feel calm”...

“Breathing out, I feel at ease”...

Regard any distractions... as a leaf... falling from a tree... in the early autumn...

They fall gently to the ground... to nourish the tree... as time goes by...

You can shorten these..., if you want...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself,
"Calm"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself,
"Ease"...

"Calm..." [in breath] "Ease..." [out breath]

"Calm... Ease..."

"Calm... Ease..."

Continue this practice for at least five minutes, letting go of thoughts, feelings, etc., as above. As you do so, you may notice a slight smile breaking on your lips – some sort of "mouth yoga!" Allow it to develop and proceed to the next step.

Remember to acknowledge and let go of any distractions or interruptions that interfere with your mindfulness of breathing.

Step 6: Smile – Release

Now that you are feeling calm when you breathe in...

And now that you are feeling at ease when you breathe out...

You will begin to notice... a small smile begin to appear on your in breath...

And you will begin to notice... a sense of release on your out breath...

This happens naturally... as you continue to be mindful of your breathing...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself...,
"Breathing in, I smile"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
"Breathing out, I release"...

Try this several times...

"Breathing in, I smile"...

"Breathing out, I release"...

Handle any interruptions... that impede your breathing... just as before...

You can shorten these..., if you want...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself...,
"Smile"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
"Release"...

"Smile..." [in breath] "Release..." [out breath]

"Smile... Release..."

"Smile... Release..."

Continue this practice for at least five minutes,
letting go of thoughts, feelings, etc., as above.

Remember to handle interruptions as you have
done so in the previous steps.

Step 7: Healthy – Free

Now that you are smiling on your in breath...

And now that you are releasing on your out breath...

You will begin to notice... that you are feeling healthy as you breathe in...

And you will begin to notice... that you are feeling free when you breathe out...

This happens naturally... as you continue to be mindful of breathing...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself...,
"Breathing in, I feel healthy"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself...,
"Breathing out, I feel free"...

Try this several times...

"Breathing in, I feel healthy"...

"Breathing out, I feel free"...

Breathing in... I notice distractions... Breathing out... I let go of distractions...

You can shorten these..., if you want...

When you breathe in..., say to yourself,
"Healthy"...

When you breathe out..., say to yourself,
"Free"...

"Healthy ..." [in breath] "Free ..." [out breath]"

"Healthy ... Free ..."

"Healthy ... Free ..."

[Continue this practice for at least five minutes, letting go of thoughts, feelings, etc., as above]

Now it is time to begin to return to the room...

Once again..., bring your attention to your body...

And in your own time..., come back to the room...

Open your eyes...and say to yourself:

May the benefit of our practice benefit all beings and bring peace!

Variations

The above instructions, if followed cheerfully, may take up to thirty minutes. For beginners, this may be less easy than beginning to sit for just nine minutes.

Here are a few ideas of how you can ease yourself into a mindfulness practice:

1. Try spending three days to three weeks on the first three practices – deep breathing, withdrawing in, and breathing “in – out” for about 9 minutes a day.
2. Next, try variation 1 but add “deep – slow” for about 12 minutes.
3. Next try variation 1, but add “deep – slow” and “calm – ease” for about 15 minutes.

I’m sure you get the idea. Start with small steps and gradually increase your practice time until you reach a comfortable limit.

In my own personal experience, I worked up to forty-five minute periods. However, after several months of practice, I was still a little uncomfortable. So I reduced my practice time back to thirty minutes, and now I feel very comfortable.

Pebble Meditation

Pebble meditation is a practice for children from about 4 to 104. It is so simple that young children really love it.

Here are the steps for pebble meditation using what you have learned so far.

1. Find five nice pebbles to practice with.
2. Put the pebbles in a small pile on your right.
3. Invite the bell to sound.
4. Pick up the first pebble and hold it in your hand while you do the "in : out" step.
5. After two to three minutes, invite the bell to sound again.
6. Put the first pebble down on your left.
7. Repeat steps 3-6 for the second pebble using "deep : slow".
8. Repeat steps 3-6 for the third pebble using "calm : ease".
9. Repeat steps 3-6 for the fourth pebble using "smile : release".
10. Repeat steps 3-6 for the fifth pebble using "healthy : free".
11. Invite the bell to sound three times.

Don't Just Do Something, Sit There!

Hopefully, by the time you read this section, you will have tried the steps at least once.

If you did, congratulations! If you didn't, why didn't you? Why not start today?

I want to encourage you to practice at least nine minutes a day for at least twenty-one days.

The benefits you will give yourself doing this practice will surprise you greatly.

Sitting silently, doing nothing produces benefits without number.

You'll be surprised what kinds of insights come to you.

Even bad sessions have value because you are creating new pathways in your brain and these lead you on the path to well-being.

Please do not get discouraged if you feel you are not doing it right.

Right mindfulness will come with practice.

As long as you take the time to practice every day, you will begin to notice when your attention is away from your breathing.

This will enable you to bring your attention back to your breathing.

In the process, you will learn that the thoughts and feelings that take you away from your breathing are just temporary.

And, like a puff of wind or a passing cloud, or a falling leaf they disappear once you bring your mind back to your breathing.

About the Trainings

These trainings were designed to introduce you to the benefits of meditation and set you on the path to well-being.

They are a result of more than thirty years of experience with imagery, movement, study, meditation, and many hours with masters in many disciplines.

The invocation at the beginning of this book is offered at the beginning of our *Mindfulness in Healing* sessions each week, introduced by inviting the sound of three bells.

These sessions began around the summer solstice in 2009 and provide much of the inspiration for this series of books.

People of all ages and all types of ill-being, including care givers, drop in for compassionate listening and loving speech each Wednesday evening.

The changes that we've observed can also be seen in you, the reader.

The *Mindfulness in Healing* group triggered a skill which has allowed these wonderful trainings to come to you.

People come to the group with all kinds of issues and together with my co-facilitator; we listen deeply and talk with loving speech each week.

With these mindfulness practices, we are able to tune into the state of our members and provide guided practice sessions that leave us all feeling like we can't wait until next Wednesday.

One client, who has been with us for more than eight months, has been known to say, "Thursday is my best day because of coming to the group on Wednesday nights!"

My goal is to bring to you in the form of this book and the accompanying guided practice a small taste of our Wednesday sessions.

If you are in the neighborhood, please feel free to drop in any time on Wednesday night at 7:00 PM at the Pine Street Clinic, 124 Pine Street, San Anselmo, CA. 94960.

We offer these sessions free of charge, but donations for the Pine Street Clinic are greatly appreciated.

If you are unable to attend the live sessions at the Pine Street Clinic, I invite you to send me an email with your questions. I'd also love it if

you would share you accomplishments as well as your apparent failures.

Mentoring

Consider me to be your mentor in the field of mental fitness!

If you need more help than a simple email question and answer can provide, I'll be happy to mentor you by phone. Fortunately, a forty minute phone consultation will only cost you \$57.

It all starts with an email to jerome@mountainsangha.org.

Another resource for you to consider is the Meditation Practices blog at <http://mountainsangha.org>. Please sign up for the email list so you can get weekly updates and special offers for my list only.

Parting Words

We know that you have enjoyed practicing with the *seven steps to stop interruptions in meditation* and continue to do so. Please do not be hard on yourself if you miss a day. It is completely fine to come back to the practice the next day.

The main thing is to try to adopt mindfulness practices into your daily life. It is just like in the practice session when a thought or feeling comes into your mind. You simply notice it and return to your breathing! The same thing here – notice that you missed a day and return to your practice as soon as you can.

Let me end with a wish for your success.

May you be safe and protected from internal and external harm.

May you have a calm, clear mind and a peaceful, loving heart.

May you be physically strong, healthy and vital.

May you experience love, joy, wonder and wisdom in this life, just as it is!

About The Author

Dr. Jerome Freedman is a long time practitioner in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and a member of the Order of Interbeing. He is also a certified teacher of the Enneagram.

He currently leads *Mindfulness in Healing* at the Pine Street Clinic in San Anselmo, California and writes daily on his blog, <http://mountainsangha.org>.

His recent article in *The Mindfulness Bell* titled "Healthy and Free" touched many people. He has published one book titled *The Enneagram: Know Your Type! Awaken Your Potential!* and is in the final editing stages of additional books, *Stop Cancer In Its Tracks: How YOU Can Grow Healthy Cells*.

He can be reached by email by writing to <mailto:jerome@mountainsangha.org>.

Medical Disclaimer

The information in this book is provided for educational and entertainment purposes only and is not intended to be medical advice. The author is not a physician and is not providing any kind of medical advice whatsoever.

Please consult your doctor if you have any medical concern about the practices in this book before beginning.

Call 911 if you have a medical emergency.

You may, however, be surprised about how good you feel when you embark the life-long journey of a daily mindfulness practice.