



Introduction

Meditation – the art of relaxing the body quickly and calming the mind – is based on simple principles and is remarkably easy to do. By learning to meditate, we reclaim a skill often lost since childhood: the ability to relax at will and return to a state of balance at any time in the day.

People meditate for many reasons:

- to relax, de-stress and fall asleep;
- to improve their health;
- for stillness and peace;
- to be centred and aware all day long;
- for mental clarity and focus;
- for inspiration and vision;
- to cope with pain and sadness;
- to find beauty and meaning in life.

Meditation can show us who we are and how to act intelligently in a less than intelligent world. It has been at the centre of my life for thirty-five years now and I can't imagine anything more valuable.

So why don't we all do more of it? Most people will say they haven't got the time. Since 1987, I've taught meditation to some 25,000 people from all walks of life, mostly in courses of seven weeks duration. I've taught business executives, housewives, tradesmen and children. I've trained doctors, psychologists and teachers to share this skill with others. I've taught athletes and performers, and also the ill and dying.

Typically they say they can't find the time to meditate, even the retired and the seriously ill. If you think of meditation as thirty minutes

of sitting still and ‘doing nothing’, you may well feel you’re too busy or too stressed to do it. The common refrain is ‘I know I should do more of it but...’

In fact, meditation is easy to integrate into almost any day, once you know how. Over the years, I’ve taught what I call ‘spot-meditations’ that are very short and can be done anywhere and anytime. You can easily relax while walking, eating or doing exercise or housework. You can use the ‘waste’ time, when you’re waiting, or in public transport or trying to fall asleep at night. I personally do twenty to fifty spot-meditations a day.

I developed these meditations as much for my own sake as for my students’. Twenty years ago, I spent eighteen months in retreat in the Southern Alps of New Zealand, and in the wilds of New South Wales. This experience proved to be the great turning point in my life, yet at the time I was afraid that my clarity of mind would disintegrate once I returned to earning a living and relating to the opposite sex. I seriously wondered if tranquility was only possible in seclusion and was quite unattainable in the city.

I found that spot-meditations gave me the answer. By relaxing rapidly for a minute or two, many times a day, I can stop the daily challenges overwhelming me. I think more clearly and am more attuned to what I am doing. Since spot-meditations also enhance sensory awareness, I am often ‘ambushed by beauty’ and ‘surprised by joy’, even during the most pedestrian of days. By keeping the substrata of my mind clean, they even make my long meditations more satisfying.

People who meditate regularly know the good results percolate somewhat through the hours that follow. However the effect of the previous night’s long meditation is vanishingly faint compared to what a spot-meditation can do for you right now.

By meditating ‘on the spot’, I find I don’t need stress-free surroundings and an introverted life for a good quality of mind. These modest little exercises have far exceeded my expectations and have taken me in directions I never imagined possible. The Buddha got it wrong when he said that a secluded, celibate life is essential. I’m now a far more sophisticated meditator and a wiser person than when I lived in the wilderness.

JUST BE HERE

Spot-meditations have an ancient history. The Buddha himself said 'Be calm and aware while walking, eating, dressing, urinating or lying down to sleep.' He exhorted us to make use of each day and whatever situation we find ourselves in, good or bad. He also gave remarkably lucid instructions about how to do this although few people, even serious Buddhist meditators, know what they are or follow them systematically.

On the other hand, the idea of 'being present', or 'doing what you are doing' is quite familiar to many. Those trained in Buddhism or Yoga know it under the name of 'awareness' or 'mindfulness'. In hippie times it was encapsulated in the slogan 'Be Here Now'. It is a commonplace idea, even in Western thought, that to be happy you should 'live for the day'. Gurus of various persuasions often take the idea to absurd lengths by saying that the past and future are illusions, and enlightenment is all about 'the now'.

I've found however, that the idea of 'being present' usually remains just an idea. People use it as a slogan, but it hardly ever affects their behaviour. Even people who do ten-day 'Awareness' retreats or practise Zen still tend to think of meditation as the long, silent sittings in seclusion and rarely apply the principle to their ordinary lives.

Two-minute meditations, even if you do dozens of them, have nothing like the prestige and glamour of a long sitting. When you sit, you can feel and look like the Buddha or a great yogi. This has all the appearance of a 'spiritual' discipline, even if you're just falling asleep or worrying about money.

When you're eating, however, you're just eating, like everyone else. Nothing special at all, really. You can see why people dismiss the idea of spot-meditations. They seem like second-rate options for people who aren't serious.

Or are they? The reality is that relaxing a little many times a day is much more valuable than relaxing deeply just once. A long meditation is a wonderful and useful escape, like taking a holiday to Bali, but spot-meditating can keep you balanced and clear-minded in the midst of the turmoil. Moreover spot-meditations are actually possible in our

complex lives. We can't wait for our next trip to Bali whenever we feel stressed.

Spot-meditating is unspectacular but the long-term effects are incalculable. If you eat with awareness, you're likely to eat less and enjoy it more, and to eat the food that is good for you. On the other hand, if you eat mechanically, you're more likely to be overweight and miserable.

If you walk consciously, you can walk with ease, shedding the tensions of the preceding minutes and enjoying the world around you. If you walk consumed in thought, however, you could be reinforcing the muscular rigidity of a lifetime.

If you relax a little whenever you can, you'll pace yourself well and feel you have the space and time to enjoy your life. Alternatively, if you push yourself relentlessly, you'll feel harassed and tired most of the time. Spot-meditations will soften the daily stresses and refresh your day much better than long meditations.

WHAT IS A SPOT-MEDITATION?

To make the idea of 'being here' come to life, it has to be done as a conscious exercise. You can't just think, 'be here', while you do the dishes and expect much satisfaction. This book will give you a huge range of spot-meditations to experiment with, but first let me explain what I mean by this term.

A spot-meditation is any meditation between ten seconds and ten minutes long, done under any circumstances. It is when you meditate 'on the spot'. Many of the exercises here are only a minute long, while some naturally stretch out to ten minutes or so. I call this book *The 5-Minute Meditator*, because five minutes is a good compromise length between short and long.

There are two main types of spot-meditations. With some, you relax rapidly for a short time – while in a waiting room or a queue for example – by giving them full attention. In other words, you stop what you are doing in order to meditate. The other kind is where you meditate while also doing something else. If you aim to be relaxed and aware while walking or doing housework, you can easily continue for several minutes.

All of these exercises are easy to understand. Small children could do most of them. So why does meditation often seem so hard to maintain? Why do so many people start full of inspiration, and then let it slip away?

Being able to do an exercise once to your satisfaction doesn't mean that you've learnt it. Like any skill, meditation needs more practice than we assume. We now know from sports psychology that any skill needs 100–200 repetitions, and 3–6 months to consolidate in memory. It doesn't take any special aptitude or intelligence. It all comes down to repetition, and a willingness to fumble along until it feels familiar and natural. There are 42 exercises in this book. Thoughtful repetition, week after week, is the magical ingredient that will bring any of them to life.

If you want to pursue meditation further, you could aim to make your meditations longer, particularly those relating to the breath and the body. Longer meditations can take you into profound states of stillness, silence and control that most people can't even imagine. The easiest way to do this is to use my sets of guided meditation CDs. **There is more information on these at the end of the book.**

You could also develop your repertoire of spot-meditations. If you set yourself the goal of being relaxed and clear-minded in everything you do, that will keep you busy for a year or two.

I've always done spot-meditations, but in recent years they've become the cornerstone of my practice. Long meditations were always easy for me to do, but to be calm and clear-minded in the midst of an ordinary life was more of a challenge. Paradoxically this means that spot-meditations are both the entry level for new meditators – they're so easy to do – and they're also the graduate level, capable of endless subtleties and unexpected rewards. Spot-meditating is where you start, but it is also what skilled meditators do when they get off their cushions.

I love these rewarding little practices. They de-stress me rapidly and bring beauty and intelligence into my working day. Physical exercise keeps my body healthy; spot-meditations revitalise my soul. These modest and self-effacing practices can eventually give you results that are almost miraculous. I've seen them transform the lives of people who never do long meditations, and I know this can happen for you. I would love to see you pick up this skill and make it your own. Please try them

out and be playful with them. Your imagination can be your own best guide. May you get as much satisfaction from them as I do.

Eric Harrison

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