

Modalities For Mindfulness

- by Brian Baetz

1. Meditation

- i** • Suggest to meditate at least once per day, for 20 minutes, and not after a major meal;
- Take a few minutes beforehand to stretch your body, and perhaps do a few yoga postures;
- Sit in a comfortable chair, fingers intertwined, eyes closed (Open eye meditation is possible, but much more difficult). Before you start, simply ask for protection on your meditation journey. Focus your attention inward, concentrating gently on your third eye (area between your eyes, just above your eyebrows). From this point on, we will follow a Vipassana modality, where we focus on the breath going in and out. When a thought is generated by your mind, simply tell the thought that you will return to it after your meditation is over. Go back to the breath, gently going in and out. When another thought arises, again tell it you are fully occupied with meditation and that you will get back to the thought later;
- Eckhart Tolle encourages us to feel the space inside our bodies and to feel it expand/contract as our breath goes in and out. He goes on to suggest that we also attempt to feel the life within our bodies, the energizing spirit that flows into us and out of us. These practices take us away from our thinking mind or our ego, which desperately tries to upset our meditation and take us back to our day-to-day worries;
- With practice, your mind will get used to your meditation practice and the number of thoughts arising will decrease substantially. You will enter a zone of quiet, of calmness, of your true essence. You will come out of meditation with a feeling of being refreshed and of greater focus. This will build incrementally over time. To achieve this, daily practice is key. Twenty minutes per day of meditation will pay you back with at least an hour of saved time due to increased focus.
- Meditation is fundamentally a spiritual practice. The benefits of increased focus, greater happiness and a deeper sense of well-being come not from you, but from something much bigger than you that you are fundamentally connected to. Immersion in that connection through a regular meditation practice will lead to the many benefits stemming from meditation.

2. Body Mindfulness

- i** • A big part of mindfulness, according to Bhante Gunaratana, is being increasingly mindful of your body. He suggests that you take notice of your breath as you go about your day. We focus on our breath during Vipassana meditation, but it is equally useful to notice our breath when we are under stress or tension. In this way we can modulate our breath back to our normal rhythm and bring ourselves back to a more calm state.
- Another aspect of body mindfulness is mindfulness of posture while we are sitting, standing, walking and lying down. Good posture has tremendous physical benefits but has its spiritual side also as it affects how we root to the Earth and connect to the Divine. This comes into play during our walking meditations and ripples out to all our movement throughout the day.
- The third aspect of body mindfulness relates to an awareness of the individual parts of the body and its systems. This can slow us down in a good way, prompting us to get rest when we need it or some nourishment when our body needs it. A scan of your body can point out where you are holding tension, or if you need some exercise. At the very least, this process will build an appreciation for the complexity of the body, and the need to be mindful of how we can nurture and sustain this amazing bio-structure.

3. Gratitude Attitude

- i** • What if you went about your day, constantly and consistently feeling grateful? For every person whose path you cross, for every piece of food you eat, for every glass of water you drink, for the clothing in your closet, for the opportunity to learn new things every day, for your parents and other elders who have nurtured you to get you to this point in your life? Sounds like a good way to live, and it may differ considerably from the prevailing perspectives that we see in our modern world.
- Holding this attitude is a practice, a form of meditation. For a few minutes each day, for everything you see or experience, have gratitude for it and for the people and systems that create or maintain its elements. Ultimately this becomes a spiritual exercise, because everything that we see is supported by the Earth and the deep Mystery that allows all of this to occur.

4. Deep Listening

- i** • How many times have you felt that you just said something and the person you spoke to did not hear what you said? Or that you are trying to listen to somebody, but are formulating your response to what they are saying while they are still speaking? We're all guilty on both counts, and this points out the need to develop strong listening skills.
 - To aid this, a modality called Deep Listening has you working with a partner with the following algorithm:
 - You speak non-stop for N minutes (where $3 < N < 30$), on any topic(s) of your choosing, while your partner deeply listens to what you are saying. Beyond some head nodding and the odd “hmmmm”, your partner doesn't speak, but simply listens. Deeply.
- Reverse the above, where your partner becomes the speaker for N minutes, and you become the deep listener.
- Practice the above with some classmates/friends, and you will become a better and more engaged listener. And this capacity will serve you very well, both in your downstream personal and professional lives.

5. Silence

- i** • We are surrounded by sound. People talking, music playing, construction pounding, buses rolling—the list is endless. But we often have sound coming to us that we have initiated, through our screen time or through other devices. So try for a few moments each day, to court silence. Turn everything off, and simply sit in silence. This could be done for as little as a minute, or as long as you are able, but will yield tremendous benefits in the recalibration of your internal landscape.

6. Heart of Peace and Joy

- i** • We say things like “This town has heart”, or “Put your heart into it”, to suggest an intangible quality which is pretty important. Our heart chakra, which is close to our physical heart, is linked to the thymus gland and has also been shown to have strong connectivity to our brain and to the Earth. Some mystics have called the heart chakra the window to our soul, and it may be actually more important for meditation than our third eye. One way to experience this spiritual portal connection is to do a heart-based meditation. Judith Orloff suggests doing this with your eyes closed, and with one hand resting on the centre of your chest. Hold this for as long as you have time, while visualizing that you are making a deep, meditative connection with the Divine. This can be very effective on its own, or as a way to jumpstart your normal meditation if you are feeling restless or unable to focus.
- An extension to this meditation modality is to visualize your heart centre expanding, so that it becomes a spherical volume of a metre or more in diameter. Take your awareness to that space, and imagine it being filled up with equal parts of Peace and Joy. Hold the mental concept of Peace for a moment, and then hold the mental concept of Joy for a moment. Then visualize the mixing of these two concepts, and visualize your heart being absolutely full of this peaceful and joyous blending. Stay in that visualization space as long as your schedule allows. And as you go about your day after this meditation, approach every task you do and every person you meet with the knowing that your heart is full of Peace and Joy!

7. Heart Connection

- i** • Your heart is arguably what defines you as an individual. Not your physical heart (although thank goodness for this tireless pump), but your heart centre (that point in the middle of your chest that the yogis refer to as your heart chakra). This is where we emote from, this is where we determine if something is resonant with our purpose, this is where we create from. Given the importance of this centre, we need to be able to access it and connect with it in the blink of an eye. We all spend a lot of time in our heads, but not enough time in our hearts. So for at least a few moments each day, take your consciousness to your heart centre and deeply connect to it. Drop anchor so to speak, and listen to what your heart is telling you. Some say that the heart centre has innate intelligence, and you can pose any question to it and be guided well by its answers. When people say they make decisions “from their gut”, this is what they are referring to, as the heart centre resides just above and overlaps with our stomach. Practice this connection and you will be amazed by what will come to you.

8. Watching the Mind

- i** • The mind is a very active entity, and can skip from topic to topic or thought to thought with lightning speed and opaque logic. Some contemplative practice folks refer to the “monkey mind”, which is constantly swinging from branch to branch in search of the next shiny thing, and this is what we desire to tame and step away from during meditation. But another useful contemplative practice is simply to sit quietly and watch the mind. Watch where it goes, observe what topics it focuses upon, and what things it constantly comes back to. And over time you can be self-reflective, and ask yourself what is driving your mind to move as it does. If you ask yourself basic related questions, such as “why is this a concern?”, “what is the probability of this happening?”, “what am I really fearing here?”, you may come up with some really helpful and fundamental answers. In essence, this is a form of self-therapy, and armed with a general disposition of kindness to yourself and an innate curiosity of what drives your thinking, you may come to some significant realizations. And with these realizations in hand, the mind will hopefully be calmer and more reasoned, and you can move forward in life in a more balanced and directed manner.

9. Walking Meditation

- i** • A walking meditation is simply thoughtful walking, mindful walking. Popularized by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, this modality has gained popularity as a straightforward and convenient way to meditate for those who have problems with seated meditation. Putting one foot in front of the other, slowly and methodically, thinking only about the process of walking. marveling at the kinesthetic beauty of your foot-strike, how the human foot lands on the outside of the heel and then rolls through, pushing off with the big toe on the inside of your foot. Repeating this thoughtfully, over and over, and quickly releasing thoughts that arise so that you can go back to focusing on the act of walking. Do this while going to class or to a meeting as a higher-velocity walking meditation, concentrating on the experience of walking rather than on the problems of the day, and observe how you feel when you arrive at your destination.

10. Mindful Eating

- i** • A big part of your physical health will be tied to what you eat over your lifetime. And while what you eat is very important, how you eat may be just as important. Mindful eating is a contemplative practice around food. Before we put anything in our mouths, we might consider how and where it was grown or raised. If something is non-organic, or factory farmed, or is GMO, you might decide not to eat it. When you do decide to eat something, consider eating it slowly and thoughtfully. Digestion starts in the mouth when compounds in your saliva start breaking down the food, and the thorough chewing of the food breaks it up so that digestion is eased and uptake of nutrients are maximized. Many of us eat our meals while on our laptops or other devices, and at the end of the meal we hardly have the sense of what we have just eaten. Consider shutting off the device and immerse yourself in the experience of eating. Think about how privileged you are to have the food you are eating, contemplate where the food has come from and how many people worked to raise, harvest and transport the food to your kitchen shelf or fridge. And when you eat out, remember to bring a reusable container along and doggy-bag any leftovers for tomorrow's lunch. Food is too expensive, from an economic and environmental perspective, to waste.

11. Radiating Inner Love

- i** • Inspired by John Lennon's lyrics, two Reiki masters from Hamilton came up with an idea to inspire their students. The Love Project, as conceptualized by Ellen Sutherland and Jane Vok, is based on a relatively simple practice. As you encounter anyone on your path in any given day, you take a second and move your consciousness to your heart, and then radiate your Inner Love out to the other person. Not romantic love, but brotherly/sisterly Love [Philos].
- No words need to be spoken (but certainly can be), no smile needs to be given (but certainly can be), just the radiation of the Love that is inside of you. This practice is very simple, but very powerful. And even more powerful, perhaps exponentially so, when done together by a group of people. The recipients will feel the outburst of Love being radiated towards them, so be prepared for an acknowledging smile. This is an absolutely great way to live, simply radiating your Inner Love out to all those individuals you encounter on your path.