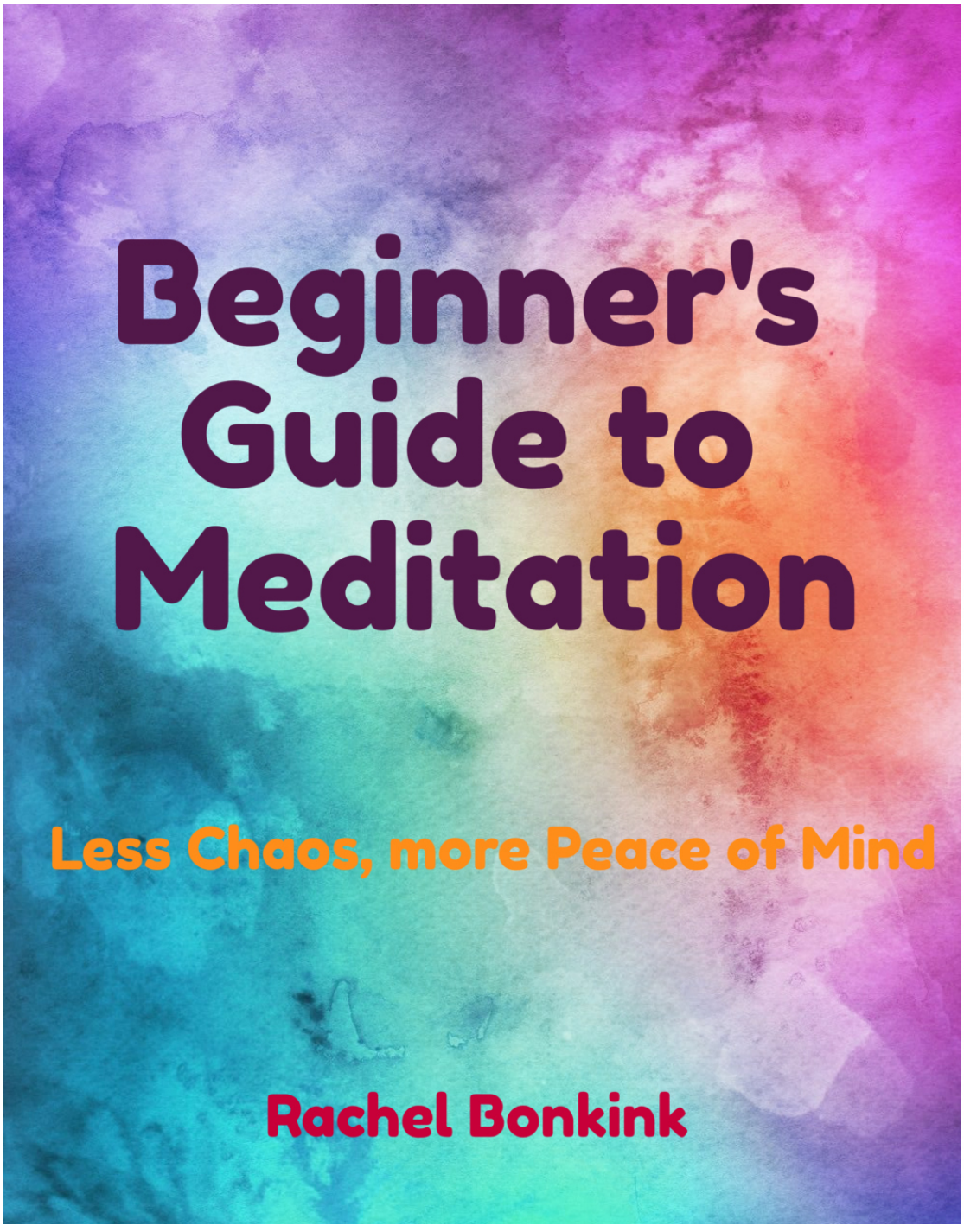
Beginner's Guide to Meditation
Less Chaos, more Peace of Mind
Rachel Bonkink

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MEDITATION

Let me start by stating that meditation is not hard, impossible or time consuming. Your mind is not too busy and, there is hope.

I know that YOU HAVE TRIED and that YOU CAN'T STOP YOUR MIND FROM THINKING... I also know that you realize that meditation could be the answer for your anxiety and stress.

In this guide, I will show you how to master meditation, using very clear and easy to achieve steps.

How I got into 'it'...

Back in my corporate days, I was hyper stressed. Deadlines, too many projects - not enough staff, intense travel and presentations; to just name a few of the things that caused me sleepless nights.

At a certain point, someone told me to do some *yoga*, as that would supposedly be a way to get rid of stress.

Never done yoga before, I found myself a couple of months later on my very first yoga retreat in Bali. It was an *ashtanga* retreat… (fyi, that's the hard core, power yoga kind).

Of course, I was too busy being busy to check what I had booked. After all, yoga was yoga, no?

Being very unfit, extremely inflexible, overweight and not feeling too well because I smoked my last cigarette at the gate of the venue (and I had a 'tiny' hangover) I was in for a nice little surprise!

I suffered in every single class, but at the same time, I was intrigued. Very intrigued, as I wasn't thinking during the classes. I had no time to think as I was so physically challenged and that took all of my **concentration**.

I was hooked on the spot, not to the practice of *ashtanga yoga* in particular, but rather to the practice of **being mindful in motion**.

Ever since, I have been exploring the path of mindfulness and meditation and I'm sharing this information with you today because I have noticed the profound effects of meditation in my own life.

A regular practice of meditation calms my mind, enhances my productivity and boosts my confidence. It allows me to become the very best version of myself.

This makes it a non-topic on whether or not I want to meditate in the morning. Of course I do! As, I want to be the very best version of myself and meditation is one of the methods to get there, for me.

MY QUESTION TO YOU IS: WHY DO YOU WANT TO MEDITATE?

- Because H.H. the Dalai Lama does it and he looks very peaceful?
- Because '*they*' say it's good for you?
- Because there's all these health benefits?
- Because you can't open any of your social media and not have someone preach about the benefits of meditation?

I'm sorry to say that these reasons will not make it very easy for you to find your 'way to the cushion' or to engage in a regular practice.

Very likely, this is what will happen:

You will have the full intention to meditate, to stick to it and to do the work.

And then… after a couple of days, a week maybe longer, you just stop.

Other things to do, too busy, you forget, life steps in.

- Be real, how many times has that happened to you?

Damn! And you started so well!!!

Don't worry; we have all been there.

The underlying problem is that your reasons for meditating need to be **crystal clear** in order for you to not want to skip a day! In order for you to want to meditate as much as you can.

Having it crystal clear why you want to meditate will be the key that will get you to meditate and, stick with it.

Before you dive into the technique, let me give you some inspiration on why you may want to meditate. Again, this is a crucial step before you even settle in for your very first meditation session.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Scientists are constantly studying the benefits of meditation.
Many studies are not significant enough but these are some of the well-established benefits:

- Reduced physical symptoms and feelings of **anxiety**, as there will be more ease, stillness and clarity in your daily life.
- Improvements in how you deal with **stress**, at work, and at home.
- Better athletic **performance**.
- More restful **sleep**, including a reduction in the time taken to fall asleep.
- Greater resilience when dealing with chronic **pain**.
- An enhanced ability to put things into **perspective**, dismissing unimportant things and focusing on what matters.
- A more well-defined **sense of purpose**, which informs relationships, career choice, and daily life.
- A feeling of **unity** between body, mind and spirit.
- Enhanced ability to **concentrate**.
- More sharpness and **alertness** of mind
- Improvements in **depression** symptoms.
- More emotional **intelligence**.
- Increased self-knowledge and **insight** in your own thoughts.

SO…

Meditation develops your **mental balance** so you can stop sabotaging yourself.

You can see it as a form of psychological hygiene to understand what goes on in your own mind.

If your goal is to strive for a better world, putting in the effort to have exceptional mental health and mental wellbeing is the first step. It will enable you to react more appropriately.

You will be able to choose your reactions wisely instead of mindlessly reacting because you have created **an undercurrent of peace of mind**.

If you are serious about unlocking your true potential, let's dive into this manual right now and check out the ways you can get into your meditation routine.

HOW TO JUMPSTART YOUR DAY WITH MEDITATION: PREPARATION

A lot happens during our busy days so a morning routine works best for most people. Not for all, for most people so you might give it a try.

1. STAY AWAY FROM THE PHONE

Let the phone be your alarm clock and timer but nothing else in the morning.

You can check, double check and scroll around all day long. Just not before meditation, as we don't need any external input at this point.

If you don't feel like investing 15 minutes per day in yourself (out of 24 hours!), you can stop reading, as you don't have a life. Tony Robbins said this once on a seminar that I attended. It resonated, as it is so very true.

I give you the same message today that he gave me and I share it with kindness and compassion, just to wake you up. Too many people are getting completely addicted to their phones, which are wonderful devices and brilliant technology, but it should not be the most important thing in the world.

2. HYDRATE

The very first thing to do is to have at least one glass of water when you come out of bed. Whether you spice it up with lemons and whatnot is not that important, just have the water before anything else.

3. STRETCH

At night, you body is lying down for hours on end. Therefor, in the morning it might be asking too much to immediately sit like a statue for meditation.

Performing some easy physical postures can help you out here. Just stretching a bit to get your systems going.

If you're not used to this, start with just a couple of minutes.

You could start with arching and rounding the spine, very gently rotating the neck and shoulders, maybe even throw in a sun salutation of some kind.

Whatever feels good. It's not about doing it correctly; it's about the stretching itself and being safe.

Lay out your mat or meditation cushion, props, etc. the night before! In the morning, just sit on your mat and be proud of yourself when you do. You said you would do it and hooray, you have indeed started your meditation practice!

4. BREATHE

If you're familiar with *Pranayama* or yogic breathing techniques, go for those. If you're not quite sure what this is, take some very conscious long deep breaths in and out.

I can only encourage you to familiarize yourself with breathing techniques by following training with an experienced teacher. Reading about pranayama and self-experimenting might not be the best of ideas.

"We all breathe, even when we sleep so how difficult can it be?"

It's not about it being difficult or not, it's about an incredible potential for you to discover. *Pranayama* in itself can improve blood circulation and concentration and reduce stress and anxiety.

ACTUAL MEDITATION PROCESS

5. SET YOUR TIMER

You could try 24 minutes, or what they call a *ghatika* in ancient Indian texts. Alan Wallace, an authority when it comes to meditation, finds this period *neither too short, nor too long*.

But, anything goes really; 5, 6, 9 or 12 minutes, it's all good.

Most important is that you get into a habit of meditation in the beginning. And, that your mind doesn't get bored or slips into a half awake/half sleeping or dreaming state.

6. RELAX

Before anything, you need to learn how to relax and to be comfortable with what is. Let's start with settling the body, speech and mind in their natural states.

The body rests in comfort and ease.

The speech rests in effortless silence.

The mind is aware.

Taking three deep breaths in and out. Very consciously and very aware.

7. OBSERVE

Once you have found that tiny bit more of relaxation, you can move on and start observing your reality. Simply listening to what you can hear and becoming deeply still. Observing if there are many thoughts or not so many.

And finally, observing your breath. You don't have to change anything about your breathing, you just observe. As if it's the very first time that you are aware of your breathing.

You check what is moving when you inhale; you zoom in on what's moving in your body when you exhale. And you keep doing this for a while, whilst you try to not interfere with the breath.

8. CONCENTRATE

Your next step to mastering meditation is to start concentrating.

As you were already becoming more aware of the breath, counting your breath in rounds of 10 works really well for most people.

Every combo of an inhale and an exhale is one count.

The next inhale/exhale is another count, and so on.

9. RELEASE

Whilst you are counting your breath, there will be many thoughts coming by.

Instead of being frustrated or giving all kinds of unnecessary mental comments about being unfit for meditation, be happy!

Yes, be happy ☺ as you have a good functioning brain that produces thoughts!
This means that you are intelligent and creative!
Olé!

The trick is to not get caught in any of the thoughts. You see or hear the thoughts, recognize that they are there but you do not zoom into anything.

My own reaction to thoughts used to be the following sentence:

"Oh, how interesting that this comes up, what else is there?"

Again, and again, and again.

At a certain point, you can release the counting and only focus on the breath. You keep following the breath and only the breath. Every single breath is different and therefor, the breath can never be boring.

10. CLOSING

After your timer goes off, Alan Wallace proposes the following:

"*To conclude each practice, I invite you to bring forth you most meaningful aspiration or your own flourishing and fulfillment, embedded in your wishes for the world around you.*

Arouse the yearning that the time and effort you have devoted to study and practice will lead to the realization of your own and others' most meaningful aspirations. This is known as dedicating the merit."

A classic metaphor says that the breath is like a horse, and awareness is like a rider trying to stay on the horse throughout the ride – a stable union of rider and horse.

In a similar fashion, you mount the breath and maintain a face-to-face encounter throughout the entire course of the inhalation and the exhalation. (Alan Wallace, Minding Closely).

SUMMARY OF HOW TO GET INTO A MEDITATION PRACTICE

Settling in for your meditation with some very practical preparations like not checking your phone before your practice, having some water, stretch and breathe a bit.

The actual meditation process is a continuous cycle of Relaxing, Observing, Concentrating and Releasing.

A couple of meditation sessions will not bring you depth or insight as a couple of gym sessions will not give you a super fit body.

Just like training our bodies, training the mind takes a bit of time. And 'a bit' is a bit of an understatement.

The results however of having a more balanced and healthy mind are so beneficial for yourself, and others that I can only encourage you to give it a try!

TROUBLES IN MEDITATION PARADISE

Why can it be so incredibly hard to get yourself to spend just a few minutes each day to actually continue with the practice on a regular basis?

Let's check some very common (it's not just you!!!) barriers on the road to meditation paradise.

1. FEAR OF MEDITATION

There is a genuine fear with a lot of people that when you start meditating, you automatically need to give up something else.

That it is needed for you to trade in your precious free time for meditation. When you add in some doubt about whether or not meditation actually works or not, you are in trouble.

And, in this case, you will need a whole lot of will power to get you to the cushion!

Another possible fear is the fear of what we might discover in our meditation.

I hear people talking about shadow sides, dark sides, and 'loosing it' as possible negative aspects of meditation.

Of course, there are stories, the Internet is full of them but, seriously?

You are not going to 'loose it' when you start meditating for 10 minutes a day.

Contact a qualified teacher and have a chat about your resistance and fears.

2. EVEN MORE FEAR

Our ego will tell us that we have far better things to do than sit and observe the breath.

Why? Because it's afraid!

What if there's nothing else than restlessness, sadness, boredom and anxiety?

These are all symptoms that our minds cannot be quiet and that there's a lack of trust and self-confidence that **there is more**.

When we are overly bombarded with all kinds of stimuli, we don't need to be with whatever is there. And that is just a lot easier.

Trusting that whatever is there is worthwhile is key.

SO, HOW TO OVERCOME THESE BLOCKAGES?

What to do about these blockages and overcome what keeps you from meditating?

1. I DO NOT NEGOTIATE!

This has been one of my personal mantras when it comes to meditation.

A long time ago, I made the intention to meditate every day.

I realized what the benefits could be, had been meditating on and off for years and I was ready for more depth. So, the plan was for every single morning to start with 24 minutes of mindful breathing.

Knowing myself and my inner rebel, who instantly needs to resist any firm rule and agreement, I came to terms with myself to not negotiate about this new habit.

I would just do it for a while and evaluate later.

The simple fact that there was no room for negotiation, even when tired, when rushed, when not in the mood, made me stick with it. There was no room whatsoever to postpone the meditation to the evening.

There was no reason to moan as I had agreed with it before.

We're now years later, I still don't negotiate about my morning routine.

2. RELEASE ANY AND ALL EXPECTATIONS

Expectation is the foundation of failure.

We are so goal oriented that we are eagerly looking forward to seeing the results of meditation. So eagerly that we seem to know in advance already that the mind is too busy and that it won't work.

"*Oh, I have tried to meditate once, my mind is just too busy, I need to be active."*

We all agree that it takes months or even years and some serious effort to build up bombproof muscles and get fit when we're out of shape.

However, with meditation, you try it once or even 21 days and you seem to just know that it will not work.

Wouldn't it be crazy fun if people got a bit less physical fitness obsessed and a tad more conscious about their mental health and emotional stability?

With a regular practice, there will be results.

You will shift, your environment will shift and you will see positive changes all around you.

Stop looking for the next thing and be content with what is.
It will be impossible to not encounter more love and kindness in your life, more empathy and joy once you start practicing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDITATION

HOW DO I AVOID BEING SLEEPY DURING MEDITATION?

My answer to this question: Are you sleeping enough?

Lots of people are sleep deprived and this is not the best condition to be in to meditate of course. If you can find the time, have siestas! Little naps after lunch to rejuvenate you and get you going again.

How about your diet? If you just had burgers and fries and you want to meditate right after, maybe not.

Other things you can check and do:

- Check if your room is not too cold or not too warm.
- How about keeping your eyes open for a while?
- Go for a walk, do some stretches or other cardiovascular activity before you sit.

I GET VERY EMOTIONAL DURING MEDITATION. HOW DO I DEAL WITH ANGER AND VIVID MEMORIES?

If anger arises, we usually zoom into it. We zoom into the person we are angry with. Unfortunately, this only aggrevates the whole situation. In other words: we add drama.

And, we completely identify with all these thoughts, and that's mainly what makes us suffer.

Important to know now during your practise is that the trauma is not happening again. It has no power now. **It's only appearances**.

If you let the anger just be there. If you invite it even to be there, without zooming into it, it can simmer. There's a time and space for the drama, just not now.

Side note: If the anger keeps occurring in your meditation, you might want to zoom into it, outside of your meditation. The mind can heal itself but it might need the help of a good teacher, mentor, coach or psychologist.

CAN RUNNING BE MY 'MEDITATION'? OR COOKING?

Whilst yes, these activities can be very relaxing but they do not equal meditation.

During meditation, we are accessing a different state of consciousness. A consciousness that is different than when we are sleeping, eating or exercising.

Other activities can be relaxing and soothing, however, they do not have the aspects of mental hygiene in them. There is no inquiry on why these thoughts keep coming back or any deeper questioning about what's going on.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION?

Many people tend to use these terms as synonyms, which they are not.

Mindfulness is bringing your awareness into the present moment.

You can practice mindfulness anytime, anywhere, and with anyone by showing up and being fully engaged in the here and now. Mindfulness is the simple act of paying attention and noticing and being present in whatever you're doing.

When you're mindful, you are actively involved in the activity with all of your senses instead of allowing your mind to wander.

To be a little more precise, mindfulness is also the seventh step in the Buddhist Noble Eight-fold Path. In recent years, Jon Kabat-Zinn brought it to our attention and mindfulness as such became 'popular'.

Meditation is a state of consciousness, different from sleeping, different from dreaming. Meditation is an intentional practice, where you focus inward. Meditation typically refers to formal, seated meditation practice.

Where meditation is usually practiced for a specific amount of time, mindfulness can be applied to any situation throughout the day. Mindfulness techniques are often used as a pathway towards meditation to calm the mind.

HOW DO I KNOW THAT I'M DOING IT CORRECTLY?

When you're focusing on following the breath for example, and you're not being hijacked by every single thought, pain, itch or irritation that comes by, you are focused.

This focusing process should feel easy and effortlessly. You sit and you concentrate. What we want to develop is a sharpness of mind and more clarity but this requires inner relaxation and focus first.

If you wonder off and you bring your attention back, in the most non-violent and loving way you can imagine, you are doing your meditation correctly.

HOW DO I GET BETTER AT MEDITATION?

By doing it.

I'm sorry if this is not what you wanted to read but doing it, is the only way.

Hearing others talk about it might inspire you and trigger you to get to the practice but you really have to do a little effort yourself to experience it.

If you have the desire to have more ease, stillness and clarity in your life, meditate. Sit on that chair, cushion or even lie down for 2, 10, 24 minutes or 3 hours per day and explore your mind.

Learn to relax, observe, concentrate and release. Slowly become more and more aware of who you really are.

Retreats where you fully emerge and get guidance from an experienced teacher are a brilliant way to deepen your meditation practice.

You don't need a teacher as such, but it can save you a whole lot of time if you do have someone who can guide you further.

CONCLUSION

Set your timer for 6, 12 or 24 minutes - or anything in between - and get yourself into the habit of meditation.

Over time, you will notice that you want to meditate a little longer. Maybe even meditate several times a day. That is a natural process.

And, if there's really no time for a morning meditation because you travel for example? Why not meditate in the plane, train, metro or bus?

Whenever you have a couple of minutes. Instead of looking at your phone and checking up with things, just follow the 10 steps that you have learned here.

Prepare and dive into the continuous cycle of Relaxing, Observing, Concentrating and Releasing.

It can only make an even better and more awesome version of you.

Enjoy the unfolding!

ABOUT RACHEL BONKINK

Rachel Bonkink is a recognized yoga and meditation teacher.

For many years now, she travels the world to coach, teach and inspire people from all walks of life on how to create more peace of mind.

Rachel has hosted over 70 of her own Revealing Vajra Retreats.

Her aspiration is for lots of people to feel more happy, less anxious, more confident and relaxed and her retreats are often the first step in achieving just that.

With her strong corporate background, she brings a unique perspective to her classes. She still remembers what it is to have insane stress levels, to juggle with enormous budgets and responsibilities and to be incredibly busy.

On top of that, she loves to get inputs from many different angles and share these. After her yin training with Paul Grilley last year for example, she went straight into a 3 Day Tony Robbins management seminar, which can be labeled as the exact opposite of anything yin.

She finds it fascinating how similar the messages were in both environments. Wrapped and packed very differently, but in the core, very alike. Every year, she goes on several teacher trainings and (silent) retreats herself, to learn, experience and get different perspectives and ideas.

Rachel lives in Essaouira most of the year, a tiny fishermen's village in Morocco.

For more information on Rachel, her retreats, blogs and free goodies, please visit: www.revealingvajra.com