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A Flash of Light

By

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Stress is a choice that we make to a situation, we do not have to make that choice and can decide to follow a different path. This is a guide to that path.

Introduction

We all have experienced some level of stress at some stage in our life. This could be mild frustration at not getting what we want, when we want it, such as standing in a long queue at the supermarket or experiencing a computer crash just as we have completed a long email. Stress can also manifest as anger and even rage. Some people manage to overcome these events and quickly return to a calmer state of mind. Others cannot seem to let go of the stress and always feel on edge, or annoyed most of the time.

When we feel frustrated, annoyed or in a bad mood we can very quickly descend into anger and despondency. This is because we are already stressed and any adverse event will trigger an even more stressful state of mind.

The definition of stress is a physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. Therefore, stress is a mentally originating phenomenon, which will also have an effect upon the physical body and can manifest in many forms such as: Tension, frustration, anger, weakened immunity, ill health, and poor concentration.

Prolonged exposure to stress will inevitably have an adverse effect upon the immune system. A fully functional immune system may only be minimally affected by stress. However, major stress events such as; a death in the family, change of job, redundancy, or moving house, can severely compromise immunity, and an already weakened immune system can be further damaged by even small causes of stress.

It does not have to be that way and there is an alternative. This handbook will explain how stress develops and how anyone can train their mind to follow a different pattern of behaviour to become more calm and open minded and ultimately a happier person. **So is stress inevitable in all of us? Why do we experience stress at all? Is it possible to avoid stress so that we can become more calm, happier and less agitated?**

So is stress inevitable in all of us?

As we have already discussed stress is a physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. What does this actually mean?

We perceive the outside world through our senses, our visual faculty sees objects, our auditory faculty hears, our olfactory sense smells, our sensory faculty senses through touch and physical sensation and our taste faculty experiences flavour. These are all physical organs and have no ability to discern. For example; the eye sees a tree, the physical organ of the eye can not discern if it is a nice tree or unpleasant tree, the eye can not experience emotion and “feel” if it is a beautiful tree or not. This is experienced through the mind. A baby seeing a tree for the first time does not necessarily have the memory of a tree and therefore sees the tree purely as it is, a tall green thing. It is only after repeated exposure that the mind will begin to have an emotional response. Another example, again using a young baby, would be the experience of hunger. Initially the child does not know that the discomfort they experience is “hunger” it just experiences discomfort through its senses. When it latches to its mother’s breast and feeds, the discomfort is replaced by satisfaction. Discomfort causes crying and satisfaction creates calm and smiles. As time progresses the baby learns that through the act of crying it can communicate its discomfort to the mother and gain satisfaction.

This pattern develops and sometimes if the child always gets what it wants through crying and complaining we use the term, “spoiled” what we mean is that the child has learned that it can get its own way through being disruptive. In Tibet children were sometimes tied to a tree and just left for a few hours so that they learned that crying did not get them what they wanted. Maybe a little harsh by Western standards perhaps

but effective. The point being is that we develop habitual responses to external phenomena and very often these habits rule our lives.

As we think so we become

Dhammapada - The Buddha

Therefore as we experience the world through our senses, it is our mind and the habitual responses that we develop that eventually determine our mental state and the way that we respond to events. As such **NO** external event can actually cause us to be stressed. Just as they eye itself cannot have an emotional response, external phenomena such as money, houses, cars, relationships cannot in and of themselves be the cause of happiness or sadness, calm or stress. It is the mind that creates these emotional experiences.

To give an example. If we think that money can give us contentment then it must follow that everyone who is rich must be content. If money had the inherent ability to cause happiness then everyone who had lots of money would be happy. This is actually ridiculous, as we all know, every day we see rich and famous people going into rehab or suffering from severe depression. The point being made is that external objects and events do not of themselves cause us stress, it is our mind that does that.

So in answer to the question, “is stress inevitable?” the answer has to be no, it is not inevitable, we chose through our habitual response to become stressed. Sometimes our habits are so strong however that our response becomes almost instantaneous and it feels as though we have no control whatsoever. But, these are habits and habits can be changed.

➔ Remember, stress is a choice that we make through our habitual response, it is not something external over which we have no control.

Why do we experience stress at all?

When we experience events that we do not like our normal response is to try to remove ourselves from them or become annoyed and frustrated. The more frequently we experience similar events the more the habitual response is embedded in our mind.

For example, perhaps we are an impatient person. Through life's experiences we have developed the mind-set that is impatient. We do not like waiting for things and get impatient when we do not get what we want immediately. This may have started in our childhood and through habitual patterns of behaviour this impatience has become our usual response. So we buy our shopping as usual in the local supermarket. Our mood is good and we have completed our shopping having bought everything we needed. Then we see a huge queue at the check out. Perhaps the check out person is chatting away to a customer oblivious to the growing line of people. The feeling begins in the pit of your tummy as an uncomfortable churning. The habitual response has begun. The mind recognises what's going on as the habit kicks in. You start the inner dialogue, "why is this person chatting so much when there are so many people in the line? Why can't they open more checkouts, surely they can see there are so many people waiting? I'm going to be late now."

So the inner dialogue continues, the habit is now made just that bit stronger. The mild churning now begins to become very uncomfortable as the mind continues its ranting. Now your mood descends into anger and frustration especially as you forgot to buy eggs and you have to leave the line and go back again. By the time you eventually leave the supermarket you are angry, uncomfortable and stressed. This stressful state causes the body to produce specific hormones, such as adrenaline, which further exacerbates your deteriorating mental and physical state. As anger develops you will experience shaking and agitation and then every negative experience will seem far worse than they really are. This is stress. What brought it on? Your habitual response did, can you change it? Yes of course, habits can be changed, much as a smoker can quit, so can the habits of impatience and anger.

➔ Remember that the stress experience begins in the mind, and so the antidote to stress must also exist in the way we think.

Is it possible to avoid stress so that we can become more calm, happier and less agitated?

If the habits that we have created cause us to behave in a particular way then once those habits are recognised, we can begin to make changes to our behaviour that will

lead to a different way of thinking. As such we can begin to recognise the signs that cause our stressful response to develop and change the way we respond. Let us take the above example of the supermarket and change the way that we behave.

Example, we now recognise that we are an impatient person. We know that certain things will make us impatient. Now we have completed our shopping as before, but this time we remind ourselves that we are impatient and try to think of things that will reduce any potential frustration. "Ah, I forgot to buy eggs," so now you go and buy the eggs before you check out. You remind yourself that as an impatient person there might be a queue. As you approach the check out indeed there is a long line of people. The usual churning in the tummy begins and you start the inner dialogue as usual. This time however you again remind yourself that this is impatient behaviour so you stop thinking about what should be, or what you would like it to be, such as the check out person chatting away, and think about what actually is!

Now you can ask yourself some questions, "Does my frustration and annoyance actually benefit me? No." Can I actually do anything about the length of this line? No. Can I stop the check out person chatting? No. Can I start to relax a little and perhaps look around and see if other people are getting annoyed too? Yes." Can I people watch and see if there are people who are not getting annoyed. Yes. There are people smiling and laughing as you look around, so now you begin to realise that being frustrated and annoyed is not actually benefitting you at all. When you leave the supermarket you are more relaxed, open minded and calm. This has been a change of the way we behave. Is it easy to do, of course not, no deeply seated habit is going to be easy to change, they have been developed over a lifetime so will take time and effort to change. Yet they can and will change as new habits form.

Therefore in answer to the question, "Is it possible to avoid stress so that we can become more calm, happier and less agitated? The response is yes it is possible, with effort and training it is guaranteed that we can change the way we respond to external events that appear to cause us stress.

➔Remember that it is not the event that causes us to become stressed but the way in which we behave towards it.

How can we begin to change the habits that cause stress?

Having now established that stress is not something external but is caused by our own behavioural responses we can now look at the ways in which we can begin to develop new strategies to recognise the signs and causes of stress before it takes a hold.

The key to changing habits is MINDFULNESS. Being aware in the present moment allows us to be aware of what is happening around us and within us. Habits only become automatic when we are not aware of what we are doing. A good example is when we drive a vehicle using the same route on a daily basis. We know the road, the particular turns and one-way systems. We know how to drive the vehicle instinctively, and indeed a part of our mind is aware of the traffic, when to change gear, brake, etc. However at the end of the journey there are occasions when we do not remember actually driving the route at all. We have all experienced reading a page of a book and having to go back to the first sentence again because we cannot remember what we have read. That important introduction when we are told the name of the person we meet, only to almost instantly forget. These are all good examples of a lack of mindfulness.

The majority of our lives are spent ruminating over the past, what could have been, what should have been, what you should have said when that person was unpleasant to you. We spend hours going over past events, wishing things were different, yet we can't change the past. We can however learn from experiences, but unless we have a time machine, we cannot go back and change them to be any different to what they were. So is it useful to go over past events, of course not, all it does is to reinforce negative patterns of behaviour, stressful behaviour.

We also spend an almost equal amount of time anticipating the future. Hoping things will work out, planning, scheming and wishing for things that have as yet not happened. Again we have to ask, is this useful behaviour. Of course not. The future has not happened so there is little point becoming agitated over what has not yet occurred.

Very little time is actually spent in the present and as a result we fall back on old habits and patterns. By not being in the present we miss so much of life's experience.

That car journey when we are thinking about past and future, we are missing the beauty of the surroundings. When we spend so much time in the past and future we miss what is going on around us. The reason we do not remember the name of the person to whom we are introduced is because we are too busy thinking of something else. The page of the book we can't remember reading because we were thinking of what we are going to eat.

The present is where things are happening now and it is where we should be focussing our attention. By living in the present moment we can see what we are doing, we can identify clearly what we are thinking and we can be fully aware of the actions we are about to take. Invariably this is not the case and we respond almost subconsciously to our environment falling back on old patterns of behaviour. Taking actions that inevitably will not have been carefully considered, which then result in a negative outcome.

→ *Remember, being fully aware in the present allows for considered thought, considered actions and positive outcome.*

How can we become mindful?

In our busy life our mind is full of thoughts, hardly a nano-second goes by during our conscious awareness that we are not thinking about something. It sometimes seems unnatural not to think after all it's what the mind does. Even during sleep, we dream and dreams are composed of thoughts as well, so in fact we are actually thinking 24/7.

Imagine the mind as a river. The nature of the river is actually pure clear water, yet as it flows downstream it gathers impurities, objects, chemicals, insects and even fish, and by the time it flows by us it is so full of additional things we can hardly see its clarity at all. This is like the mind, so full of thoughts and images there is hardly any space for clarity and calm. The real nature of the mind is clarity and spaciousness and it becomes clouded with thoughts, fears, delusions and negative emotions. It is therefore hardly surprising that when we take actions with these states of mind that the outcome of those actions is not always what we wish. Therefore the key to mindfulness training is MEDITATION.

Meditation is an ancient practice dating back many thousands of years. It is a method by which we look internally rather than externally for the causes of our well-being and happiness. We search outside for the things that we think will bring us happiness and contentment, but inevitably if we are not happy within ourselves, then nothing external will provide us with any long lasting satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential that we must look at ways of achieving an inner peace, a calmness and rational behaviour that leads to intelligent decision making and at the same time, allows us to enjoy life to the full. Meditation has been proven to reduce the effects of stress, increase concentration, and focus as well as having positive effects on the immune system. It also enhances a feeling of contentment and induces a sense of calm and space allowing us to make intelligent and well-conceived actions, rather than simply 'reacting' through our normal repetitive habitual responses.

What is the point of meditation?

Everyone wants to be happy and no one wakes up with the intention to spend their entire day being miserable, stressful, confrontational and difficult. If we had total control over our own mind then we would not wish to be unhappy and discontent. Yet our minds often seem to have a will of their own. Even if we were to start our day with the intention of being calm and collected, we will inevitably encounter a situation where this does not happen. The reason for this is that we have not developed the habit of a disciplined mind. Our own minds are often confused, scattered, and lack concentration. Rarely do we focus in the present moment and concentrate 100% on what we are doing. Hence we are driven by our habitual tendencies and simply 'react' to situations rather than 'act' based upon a rational and intelligent view of the reality of the situation.

Our minds have developed habits since birth and tend to revert to those same habits when encountering similar situations. This gives rise to negative emotional responses and ultimately this affects our actions, causing many problems such as stress, discontent, relationship issues and even our own health.

Through meditation we can train our minds to be calm, more open and spacious. This leads to better concentration and focus that allows us to avoid falling into negative habituation and repeating the same errors we make time and time again. Usually our

mind is full of many different thoughts that arise through stimulation from our senses. This vast array of continual thought process does not allow us the space we need to make well considered responses and we are simply drawn into emotional turmoil that can be very gross such as anger and frustration, or it can be very subtle such as a general feeling of dissatisfaction and ill at ease.

A regular practice of meditation a few minutes every day we can learn to re-program our minds and develop a more positive attitude and a better understanding of how things really present to us rather than the fantasy of how they seem to appear. We are often deceived by appearances. Ask ten people who witness an accident and you will get ten different answers. The truth is relative to the observer and we cannot always trust how things appear. This can result in misperception and negative emotional responses. Meditation allows us to be more aware and respond accordingly. The techniques that will be described in this book are not necessarily dependent upon any belief system and can be practiced by anyone.

Meditation also has a profound effect on the immune system thereby decreasing the risk of illness. Clinical studies have shown that through a regular practice of meditation techniques certain pathways in the brain can be altered allowing old habits and thinking processes to be changed. Many athletes now meditate as part of their training, this allows for better concentration and more focus. Even meditation in the workplace is becoming more popular and helps to reduce stress, increase performance and motivation as well as enhancing inter-personal relationships both in the office and at home. Conflicts are either avoided or reduced and a more calm, creative and stable environment is promoted.

→ Remember, meditation is a method to train the mind from its habitual patterns of thinking. Much as the body needs exercise to stay healthy, so does the mind.

Consciousness

To understand how to meditate it is useful to understand the role of consciousness. It is not difficult to understand that the body is composed of matter, molecules, atoms, sub-atomic particles, etc. However the mind is non-matter and as yet science has not identified the energy or structure of mental consciousness. Aspects of scientific

research such as neuro-chemistry, psychology and neuro-science has made substantial discovery into how the mind behaves and interacts with the body but as yet these discoveries are limited mainly to behaviour and neuro-chemistry.

Is the mind purely a result of electrical and chemical activity in the brain? Many scientists now dispute that this is the case and that consciousness is more than simply chemical reaction. When we feel an emotion we often place a hand over our heart. For centuries philosophers have maintained that the centre of consciousness is the heart channel and not the brain. The brain may control bodily function and mind certainly influences brain activity but is the brain necessarily the seat of consciousness? Certain observations such as Para-normal activity observed when twins appear to know when one is in trouble or dying despite being many thousands of miles apart. There are also instances of people remembering previous lives, especially very young children.

Therefore we can perhaps assume that consciousness is not simply brain activity but something more that as yet science has not been able to measure. This is the case with Quantum Physics. Initially science thought that the electron was the smallest particle, but in the last 100 years there have been substantial developments as technology has become more accurate and refined in detecting sub-atomic particles such as the quarks and more recently the Higgs Boson.

We understand that it is essential that we exercise our body to maintain our health and well-being but we rarely exercise the mind. Meditation can be seen as an exercise for the mind. Through regular meditation practice we can learn how to become more calm and ultimately more happy.

Happiness

All living beings strive to be happy, this is a consistent feature of every living being from insects to humans. None of us want to suffer, feel stressed or want to live in fear and we all want to be content, happy and calm. The very nature of our mind is to be aware. Like a pure spring its nature is clear and knowing yet our minds are filled with impurities, bad habits, poor thinking patterns, lack of awareness. This leads to our mind becoming emotionally turbulent as soon as we encounter problems or things that

we do not like. Equally we also undergo high's and low's that become exaggerated and cause emotional upheaval.

For example, we constantly wish for new experiences. This relates to jobs, relationships, even to simple things like a new computer, or fashion, or a new house, or car. We exaggerate the positive attributes of phenomena thinking that these external things can make us happy. We think the new job, house, or relationship will bring us happiness and we exaggerate the qualities to suite our desires. Yet after time we realise that the qualities we attributed to these things did not exist as we thought they did and we then become disillusioned and disappointed. Then the exaggeration of the negative qualities of phenomena begins as we seek something else to satisfy us.

The same process happens with all phenomena, we think that external things will bring us happiness and contentment but unless we are happy within, they can never live up to our expectation and so we move through life like a roller coaster of emotional turmoil. Happiness may come about temporarily but eventually we will seek some new experience to satiate our constantly craving mind-set unless we change the habitual patterns of thinking.

Therefore only true happiness can come about through internal change and there is nothing external that can provide us with contentment. We see this with people who are millionaires and have fame and prestige and they can buy anything they desire; yet they commit suicide, take drugs, turn to alcohol and cannot find contentment in their lives. Why is this? Because the mind does not look inwardly for peace and contentment and the exaggeration and fantasy we develop results in disturbing emotions, which in turn create actions that have negative consequences.

It is only through meditation that we can change the habitual patterns of behaviour that rule our lives. By looking inwards and calming the mental chatter we can gradually train our mind to view the world as it really exists and not how we think it should be.

➔ Remember, happiness does not come from anything external. If our mind is dissatisfied and not content then nothing that we desire externally can make us happy in the long term.

Impermanence

Everything changes. There is not a single phenomenon in the universe that does not undergo change and does not depend on something else for its existence. This is an undisputable fact of science. Physicists constantly see in their research the interdependence of all phenomena. A tree depends upon the seed, the seed depended upon the tree and its growth depends upon sunlight, nutrients and oxygen. Everything is dependent and therefore subject to change. We only have to look into the mirror to see that the person we are now is not the person we were twenty years ago, or will be twenty years in the future. Every single atom in our body changes approximately every year. If we were our 'body' then it would have to be said that we could not be the same person every year. This may be another factor in determining consciousness to be non-physical because we clearly have memory and experience and habits.

Yet we do not behave as though things change, we actually do the opposite! We behave as though nothing changes at all. We dislike change. We do not like it when the things to which we have become accustomed and comfortable undergo change. Intellectually we realise that things do change but emotionally we do not behave in that way.

Ageing is perhaps a classic example. We hate it when we get older and we spend billions of pounds trying to keep our youthful looks, plastic surgery, pills, potions and lotions are sold with the promise of eternal youth, yet despite the claims we get old and die, nothing can stop it, yet we behave as though we will never die. It is perhaps the single most disturbing phenomena to our calm mind.

We crave what we desire and have aversion to what we don't want. Yet because things change, in reality it is difficult to understand how we are so set in our thinking. The loved one can become our worst enemy, look at divorce? And our enemies can become our friends. Nations that we once embraced as friends suddenly become enemies and we go to war with them. It is through this habitual thinking that we become unhappy and unstable. Craving, aversion, hatred, addiction are all negative emotions that afflict us causing depression, stress, ill health and psychological

disorders. If we viewed the world as it exists, that of interdependence and change then we would be less emotional in our responses to change when it inevitably happens.

Cause and effect

From the above we can begin to establish that our minds make our world. Everything that we experience comes through the mind. Our senses simply present our mind with data and it is our mind that interprets this data as good, bad or indifferent. The image or sense itself has no quality other than what it is. It is only our mind that interprets the sensory input that we receive. This is why no two people are the same and they will have the differing likes and dislikes. Some people like red, others like blue, some like sour taste some sweet and so on. It is our mind that creates these habitual patterns of like and dislike and then we exaggerate their qualities to fabricate our world.

The process is something like the following: We see an image with our eyes. ⇒ The image is then transferred along the optic nerve to the brain. ⇒ The actual image no longer has an influence but the mind then interprets the image internally and we build our own projection. ⇒ We then interpret the image as either pleasant or unpleasant or indifferent. ⇒ If we like the image we then begin to build an internal perspective such as craving, attachment or aversion and we will then fantasise about the qualities that the image will bring to us, such as happiness, sadness, etc.

This is the way our minds work with all our senses and unless we develop a method by which we can truly see what is happening then we shall always experience suffering, even though it appears as happiness, eventually it will come to an end and we shall experience suffering once again. The relationship that lasts a lifetime eventually ends in suffering as death causes separation.

Thus everything is subject to cause and effect. If we hold a brick above our bare toes and drop it, the forces of gravity will determine the brick's descent to our foot and it will cause pain upon impact. A tree will grow given sunlight and sufficient nutrient. Living beings will grow old and die. Every action we create has an effect. The effects may be extremely subtle or very gross depending upon the action. Our thoughts therefore determine our actions and these actions give rise to effects, which in turn

give rise to another cause. If our thoughts are negative and our intentions harmful then the effects will be similar.

If we do not control our mind then we have little control over the effects we produce. If we eat too much we will get overweight. If we smoke or drink too much then our body will respond with disease or organ failure. So the mind must be subject to the same cause and effect sequence. Our very happiness depends upon our ability to transform our mind. A calm, content and happy mind-state not only brings about well-being but also has a very positive effect to those around us. No one wants to be in the presence of a grumpy, miserable, negative person. Yet we love to see a happy smiling face, and we want to be in the presence of a calm and kind person. This is the natural state of things. Therefore we have to develop meditation to transform our mind. There are no pills or drugs that can do this; only the mind can transform itself.

Ancient philosophers called this process of cause and effect, Karma. The word Karma has been misinterpreted in the West giving it the meaning of fate or destiny. This is not the meaning at all. Karma simply means action. A given action gives rise to an effect. Negative actions will inevitably have negative effects and positive actions will have positive effects. When we create Karma, we are simply creating effects as a result of our actions. Sometimes the effects are immediate and sometimes the effects can take many years to manifest depending upon the circumstances.

We are constantly creating Karma, or action. Everything we do, every action we take will have an effect. It is therefore not hard to understand that when we take action based upon an impulsive response, the outcome may not be as we would wish. A good example is when we get angry, we often will do things or say things when we are angry that we regret later. Therefore it is essential we tame our mind and try to take positive action. This can only be done with a calm mind. Not a mind that is agitated and driven by negative emotions.

➔ Remember, that everything is subject to causation and change. Knowing that all things eventually change prepares us mentally and as such allows for a more calm and stable mind.

Meditation and Mindfulness

Practicing meditation every day will allow the mind to become more open and flexible rather than tight and intractable. We will learn to view our sensory experiences with more impartiality. This in fact allows us to actually enjoy such experiences fully rather than with our usual narrow expectation and limited perception. When we go about our daily activity we will do so with more mindfulness because the mind is less cluttered, we do not have to constantly fill the silent spaces with busy thoughts.

Meditation has two aspects:

Calm abiding – This first aspect is calming the mind from its daily turbulent pattern of thought. Calming the mind allows us to develop more clarity. It is more about quality than quantity. Our thoughts determine our actions. First we have a thought, this thought then gives rise to a feeling (either good bad or indifferent) and based upon the feeling we develop craving or aversion and then act accordingly. If our thoughts are uncontrolled and subject only to sensory responses then our actions will only have a similar outcome. If we only respond to our habitual thinking and repetitive behaviour, then we will never control our emotional turbulence and resulting actions that can only give rise to more disturbing emotions and so on.

Through calm abiding we are like the person sitting on a riverbank watching the river go by. We shall see all sorts of things pass by on the river, boats, weeds, animals, logs, etc. However, we do not have to jump into the river and grab everything that passes, or we shall never experience the beauty of the river itself, we shall only experience the constantly moving bits and pieces, grabbing some, letting go when we are bored and grabbing something else and we shall eventually drown in the river that is our uncontrolled mind.

Calm abiding is practiced by sitting quietly and observing the most natural phenomenon that the body can do. Breathing. We do not have to breath consciously, it is a natural part of life, we do it whilst sleeping, even if we are knocked unconscious, we can still breath. Therefore observing the breath is a very natural way to calm the mind. We sit and we observe. Thoughts will arise naturally, it is the nature of the

mind to have thoughts, and we should not try to force them back but simply observe them and let them go. As they arise so they will fall back, it is only when we follow the stories that we get caught up in the thoughts and create the fantasies that cause our emotional turbulence.

Initially this is a difficult practice, we are used to an untamed mind, and we have allowed it to run rampant for years so it will want to go its own way, running from one thing to another. Yet through practice of sitting and watching the breath, gradually our minds will become more relaxed and spacious. As the spaces between the thoughts grow, we shall become calmer, and we will find that even our breathing will become more relaxed and harmonious. Practicing like this for a few minutes at a time every day is essential. The mind will resist initially but gradually as the time we sit is extended the mind will become used to meditation. This technique can then be adapted to any situation. Once we are away from our sitting practice we do not have to forget it and fall back into our normal pattern of behaviour. Even at work we can take a few minutes sitting at our desk to observe the breath and calm our mind. The body too will follow suit. The blood pressure will drop slightly, our senses will become more alert and our concentration enhanced.

If we encounter a stressful situation, rather than responding in the usual way, we can practice observing the breath for a few minutes and relax. We do not have to follow our normal habitual responses; it is a choice after all. We chose to respond to situations the way we do, it is not necessarily pre-programmed, and even if the habits are so strong, they can change, as we have discussed previously, everything is subject to change, everything is inter-dependent.

→ Remember, meditation is not some strange exotic or mystical practice. It is a scientific method by which we can train our untamed mind.

Insight meditation – insight meditation is another way of saying discursive meditation. Once we have stabilised the mind through calm abiding we can now turn the mind to discursive meditation. This is more advanced and requires guidance but essentially the mind focuses on a subject such as compassion or loving kindness. We then internally discuss the benefits of a compassionate nature or a kind heart. We look at the advantages and disadvantages and eventually when we have reached some

conclusion, we then concentrate upon the feeling generated and enhance our understanding. Normally to do this we receive an instruction or discourse on a subject and then we can enter into a discursive meditation to deepen our understanding of the subject. This can only be done once our mind is tranquil otherwise we will be subject to scattered thoughts and not be able to concentrate.

How to meditate and the different types of meditation

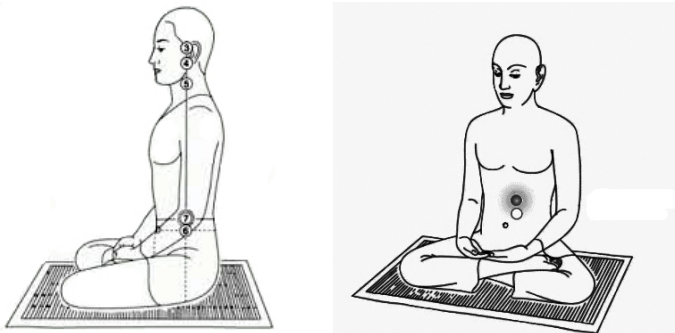
Sitting meditation – observing the breath

Walking meditation – following the instruction of teacher using walking meditation is a wonderful way to observe the feelings generated through our senses.

Lying down meditation – this form of meditation is suitable for people who have back or knee problems and again following correct instruction can be used to observe the breath. All of the above use the same technique and the following description can be applied to all three.

Sitting Breathing Meditation Technique (this technique can also be used for the lying down meditation the important factor to consider is a straight back)

It is best to adopt the SEVEN POINT posture for this meditation as follows:



Point 1 - Straight Back - Begin by sitting comfortably, you can sit cross-legged on a cushion or sit on a chair. Make sure your back is straight. If sitting on the floor in a cross-legged position, make sure that you have a cushion under your backside to raise you seat from the floor. Make sure that your hips are slightly above your knees, this take the pressure from your knee joints. If you sit in a chair make sure your feet are planted firmly onto the floor and that your back is straight.

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