



HOW TO PREPARE

for

MEDITATION

the

DOING

that leads to

NON-DOING



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Preparing thoroughly for meditation can transform your meditations so that they become consistently deeper and more impactful. The aim of these preparatory tips is to balance the three gunas or underlying principles in nature and our own minds, rajas (activity and dynamism), tamas (dullness and inertia), and sattva (balance and harmony), by reducing rajas and/or tamas. When sattva dominates, you will easily go deep into meditation.

Although meditation is effortless, paradoxically, for most of us, some effort is required to enable us to be effortless! Just like you need some effort to board a plane, but once you're seated you can just relax and let go.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar once said that the purpose of the Sudarshan Kriya breathing technique is to help those who can't be effortless in meditation. Simple, innocent people would not need these tips, but most of us have very busy minds.

For some, even after years of regular practice, consistently experiencing deep peace and silence in their meditations may seem like a distant goal. However, the good news is that there are simple preparatory procedures and pointers that can make a huge difference to the quality of our meditations.

So take on board the strategies outlined below lightly and playfully, not to "get somewhere" in meditation, but to enjoy the peace that is always available in this moment.



1. Listen to Meditation wisdom and apply it in your life


Apply the knowledge points you have learned on Art of Living courses during your day-to-day activities and keep returning your mind to the present moment.

These points are aimed at enabling the mind to rest more in the present moment, with an unshakeable peace and equanimity. If your mind is constantly racing between the past and the future during the day, it will be harder for it to settle when you meditate, particularly later in the day. Much of your meditation time will be spent neutralizing the impressions acquired through allowing the mind to vacillate between the past and the future. Conversely, if you spend most of your day in a state of awareness and clarity, deep meditation will happen automatically.

Watch Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's discourses on the Ashtavakra Gita, read An Intimate Note to the Sincere Seeker, and also the more advanced text, the amazing Yoga Vasistha.

Entertain the notion that everything is in a constant state of flux, that life is short and that from a wider perspective most of our problems are very small.





2. Clear up any doubts about your meditation technique

Whatever your technique, make sure you are clear on the procedure. Otherwise doubt will prevent you from going deep.

3. Do not mix techniques from different traditions

Each meditation tradition has its own set of techniques that are part of an integrated approach to spiritual evolution. Practices that are part of one approach may retard progress on another path.

If you mix techniques from two or more traditions, you will end up getting confused and it will be harder to sink deeper into meditation. The desire to practice techniques from different paths indicates that you do not have full faith in any one path. This lack of faith and commitment will work against your progress. So choose one path and stick to it while respecting other approaches.

4. Get sufficient sleep everyday

While in the long run the effect of regular deep meditation is reduction in the need for sleep, do ensure that you get as much sleep as your system requires. If you don't, you will tend to sleep during your meditations. You will less be able to go from the unconscious layer of the mind (achetana) to the subconscious layer (avachetana), where the deeper impressions are stored, and so your meditations will be less effective.

5. Meditate at least twice a day



While some meditation is always better than no meditation, giving your system two opportunities a day to swing between deep rest and activity will refine your nervous system much more effectively than doing it once daily. Gradually, the mind will gain the ability to maintain that peaceful, alert state of awareness even during dynamic activity.






6. Be of selfless service to others

One of the by-products of doing seva (selfless service) is that a shift happens from the preoccupation with the “me” and all its attendant problems, to a genuine desire to be useful. That shift and the “merit” from selfless service will deepen your meditations. Service is more a reflection of an evolution in understanding that happens spontaneously on the spiritual path, rather than a volitional practice. So do not do seva to gain personal benefits, simply do it!



7. Create a sense of sacredness in your practice

Establish a place in your home where you meditate regularly. If you meditate in that place regularly, it will develop a vibration that will help you to go into the meditative state easily. Also, some ritual, performed before your meditations, will help you honor the practice with gratitude and awareness, preventing it from becoming just another item on your “to-do” list.



8. Make sure you meditate on an empty stomach

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has said that the best time for meditation is when you are slightly hungry and slightly tired. Meditation lowers your metabolic rate and gives deep rest to the system, while the process of digestion uses a lot of energy and increases the metabolic rate; so, having a big meal less than a couple of hours before meditation means deep meditation is unlikely to happen.



9. Consult an Ayurvedic doctor to restore balance

Sluggish digestion and constipation can definitely affect the mind and generate more mental activity. Toxins in the system from undigested food dull awareness and contribute to mental disturbance, making deep meditation more difficult.

See a qualified Ayurvedic doctor to have your constitution assessed and to ensure your system is balanced. Certain herbal medicines are very helpful to restore balance to the system, adding to mental clarity.



10. Do not be concerned about time while meditating

Many of us are habitually in a hurry and that carries over into our sadhana. Even a little concern over time can be enough to keep the mind from settling. Notice without judgment any tendency to want to quickly finish a part or all of your sadhana. Maybe, for example you may be late for work and so are conscious of that through your practice.

The key here is the understanding that it is not so much the length of time spent in sadhana that is important. It is the quality of awareness that you bring to your practice that matters (please don't take this as an excuse to regularly shorten your sadhana to less than the recommended time!).

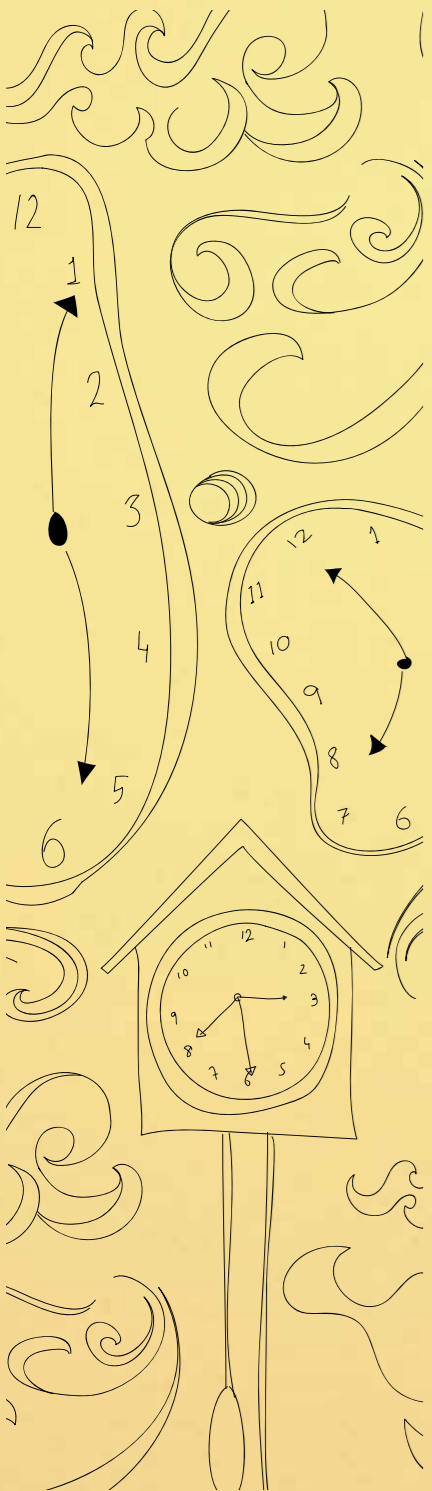
Sometimes, while meditating, if the possibility of running over time is a concern then you can download meditation apps that have gentle chimes to bring you out of meditation, or use a very soft, pleasant-sounding alarm on your phone.


11. Utilize the power of asanas

A slow, mindful sequence of asanas, such as the Padmasadhana sequence, taught on the Art of Living Part 2 and DSN courses, combined with smooth, long ujjayi breaths will work wonders to calm the mind and prepare for deep meditation. You may need to do something more active, such as Surya Namaskar (Sun salutations), jogging, cycling, or swimming, if you are in the grip of strong negative emotions or your mind is extremely active. This also applies if you are feeling dull and lethargic.

12. Utilize the power of chanting

Slow chanting of mantras such as Om Namah Shivaya for 5 to 10 minutes or Om up to eleven times (never use Om mentally), will settle the mind and allow you to go deep within. In effect, chanting is a form of pranayama with very long exhalations.






13. Utilize the power of the breath

Following your asana or exercise, prepare for meditation with some pranayama. If time is limited, pranayama should be your priority prior to your meditation, as it is the single most useful tool to prepare for it.

Find the pranayama that settles your mind most effectively. It could be Nari Shodhan, Mudra or Brahmari Pranayam. If you haven't already, learn the Sudarshan Kriya and the advanced pranayamas taught on the Art of Living Part 2 Course.

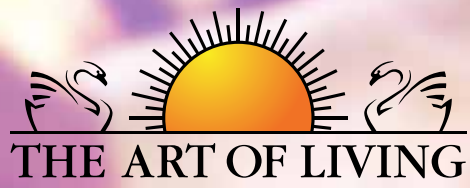
Sudarshan Kriya takes the mind into the fourth state of consciousness, where it is completely settled but aware. Effortless meditation enables you to linger in and go deeper into that silent state of pure awareness. After Kriya don't be in a hurry to start any other technique. If your mind is quiet, just rest in that silent state. If the mind becomes active, you can effortlessly take the mantra and relax and gently start your chosen technique.



14. Utilize the power of intention

Even if you do some asanas and pranayamas, your mind may still be spinning when meditation time comes—unless you make a conscious decision to let the world go before you start. Decide that you are not interested in thinking about anything, working anything out, planning, or daydreaming prior to your practice of asanas/pranayamas. Why exchange this beautiful living moment for a bunch of dead thoughts?

Resolve to keep gently bringing your mind back to body and breath (that is, the present moment) again and again. Gradually, with that intention, your asana and pranayama practice will release the body contractions and restricted breathing patterns that accompany a disturbed or distracted mind.



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