

## Before You Meditate A Mellow Elephant Guide

### 1.) How to Sit

There are no real rules as to how to sit during meditation, besides, first, being comfortable, and next, sitting for the amount of time you say you're going to sit.

If you're not comfortable, you're not going to continue to meditate--and we really want you to continue to meditate. If you want to sit cross legged on the floor, sit cross legged on the floor, but that's not a requirement. If you prefer to sit in a chair, that's where you should be. Be comfortably, practice comfortably, and let the benefits flow naturally.

You shouldn't, however, sit in a way that invites sleep. Unless you have a physical problem, it's best **not** to meditate lying down. Instead, you want a straight(-ish) spine, neck, and head, so oxygen can find its way to your brain with ease. But what we're really after is a posture that reflect our attitude: restfully aware.

It's also okay to move during meditation, if you need be--no need to be a statue, or try to force some stoic, holy person exterior. Meditate in a way that makes you want to meditate again, however that looks.

### 2.) Stopping Thoughts

The most common misconception about meditation is that it's about stopping our thoughts, and falsely, people think, "I can't stop my thoughts, so I can't meditate."

As nice as it would be to stop our thoughts (we have about 60-80,000 thoughts a day, which comes out to about 48.6 thoughts per minute), that's an impossibility, and the more we try to stop our thoughts, the more thoughts will come. So rather than struggling with that, we allow thoughts to come and go--and, over time, we learn to see our thoughts more clearly.

In the end, thinking is actually a **requirement** of meditation: if you can think, you can meditate. No need to overthink about thinking about not thinking.

### 3.) Distractions

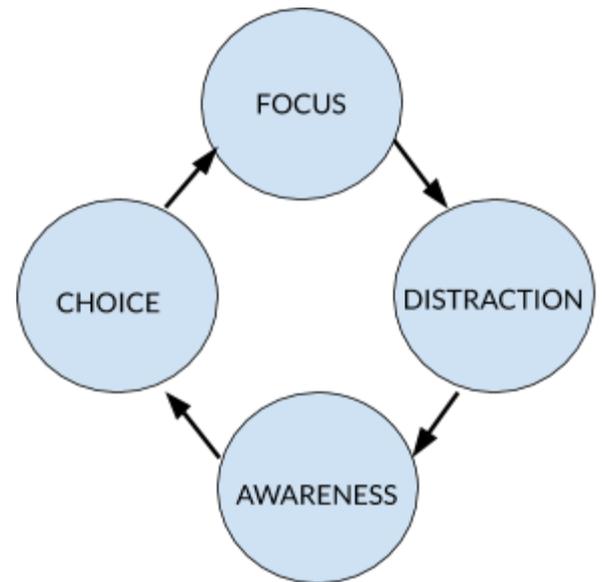
When we meditate, we **will** get distracted. We'll get distracted many, many, many times, and that's exactly what's supposed to happen.

All distractions fall into one of four categories: either a sound in the external environment, an emotion we feel, a thought in our mind, or a sensation in our body. We call these our "S.E.T.S.," and soon after we start any particular meditation, the S.E.T.S. will come.

We shouldn't judge or fight with distraction. The fact is that we *need* distractions to remind us that we're not focused. So whenever you become aware that your mind has wandered, all you need to

do is briefly acknowledge the distraction, then gently bring your attention back to your object of focus (usually the breath, a mantra, a body scan, a visualization - whatever, really).

Follow the rather crude diagram to the right to become more familiar with this the carousel ride: we begin with focus, we fall into distraction, and eventually, we become aware of what's distracted us. Then, we have a choice: we can either return to the object of focus, or remain distracted. We recommend taking option 1.



It doesn't matter how long you've been distracted: whenever you *realize* you've been distracted, return to your object of focus--and in that moment, you'll have become a better meditator.

#### 4.) Effort

As strange as it may sound, when we meditate, we're not trying to "do" anything. We're actually shifting off the mode of doing, relaxing into the mode of being.

When we meditate, our effort should be light, easy, and playful. We don't need to apply force or effort. Instead, we accept that--unlike other areas of our lives--in meditation, the less you do, the more you do.

It sounds like a paradox, but it's actually "The Law of Least Effort," and the Mellow Elephant philosophy: do less, gain more.

#### 5.) Religion

They say that all bourbon is whiskey, but not all whiskey is bourbon, and the same is true for meditation: all religions have meditative practice, but not all meditative practices are religious.

While it can be used for religious practice, meditation is inherently secular, with benefits applicable to anyone, regardless of their beliefs. At the Mellow Elephant, we like our meditation secular--sometimes pragmatic, sometimes spiritual, sometimes a little "woo woo" for some, but always unaffiliated with dogma.

So, if it's a concern, know that you can meditate and still be a good whatever you already are; in fact, meditation will probably make you a better whatever you already are.

#### 6.) Enjoyment

While there are many reasons to meditate--and even more potential benefits--the practice can be simply enjoyable. While practicing, try to let go of the reasons why you meditate and the potential gains, and see if you can just enjoy the practice: be easy, be gentle, be kind to yourself. It's all love.