

## Establishing a Daily Practice

### A Mellow Elephant Guide

#### 1.) No “Real” Rules

Like everything in meditation, what follows on this sheet is more of a recommendation than a rule. As you practice, you'll figure out what works best for you, and ultimately, there are only two things you *should* adhere to while meditating: first, you should be comfortable, and second, you should sit for the amount of time you say you're going to sit. Everything else? Up to you.

#### 2.) How to Sit

Generally speaking, meditation should be done sitting down with your eyes closed. Some people choose to meditate cross-legged on the floor or in a traditional yoga posture, but that's certainly not a requirement. If it's more comfortable for you to sit in a chair or on the couch, then you should sit in a chair or on the couch. Don't sit in a way that requires constant shifting to alleviate pain or that creates discomfort, which steals your attention away from the practice. Use a posture that makes you want to meditate again, and employ pillows, cushions, and blankets as needed.

When meditating, it's best to have your back, head, and neck straight(ish), with a posture that reflects our attitude: restful awareness. Unless you have a physical problem that precludes you from sitting up, it's not advised to meditate lying down, as it invites sleep. (Of course, if you do have a physical issue, lying down is *exactly* how you should meditate). If you fall asleep while meditating, that's okay--in that moment, meditation is showing us what's already there, in this case, that we need more rest. However, we want to train our physiology to recognize the difference between meditation and sleep. After a week or two of practice, our body should know, “Just because my eyes are closed doesn't mean I'm going to sleep.”

There's also no need to be statuesque when you meditate. Moving is fine, and adjustments are necessary, especially at the beginning of practice. However, it's best to be mindful to whatever movements you make. Move nonjudgmentally, and remember that any movement--mindful or not--beats the unnecessary distraction of pain.

As Sharon Salzberg says, “meditation is the ultimate mobile device” if you can sit with your eyes closed, you can meditate wherever you are--an airport, at work, or in (parked) a car.

#### 3.) When

To receive the maximum benefits from meditation, it's best to meditate twice a day, for 10-20 minutes each sitting. Our minds benefit from consistency, so this repetition of practice will give the deepest benefits most quickly. However, for many people, this isn't realistic, and it certainly doesn't mean that you can't receive the benefits of meditation from shorter, less frequent sittings. In fact, studies show that 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a week will deliver meditation's proven benefits. Ultimately, it's all about *your* schedule, how meditation fits into *your* life, and serves *you*, not the other way around.

Many people find the morning to be an ideal time to practice. As the great Davidji says, “think R.P.M. - rise, pee, meditate.” Personally, I wake up, splash some cold water on my face, brush my teeth,

and practice--a routine that lets my body know that it's time to meditate. Morning meditations are not only a great way to start your day, but also a natural transition point where meditation can be added.

A second meditation is best done in the late afternoon or early evening--as it's best not to eat heavily before you meditate, after work but before dinner is an ideal time. However, this is all a person's choice, based on your routine - if this time doesn't work, just ensure that you've given yourself enough time to digest before sitting.

If you have an atypical schedule, our advice is to look for natural transition points during your day: *I'll meditate for 10 minutes at the beginning of my lunch break, I'll meditate for 10 minutes before picking the kids up from soccer, I'll meditate for 10 minutes before going on my run.* You know your schedule better than anyone, so look for the pockets of time where, and let meditation serve you.

It's also not best to meditate right before bed, as it's your mind may become too alert to fall asleep. Meditation is restful awareness--relaxing, but "on"--whereas sleep is more like "restful dullness"--relaxing, but "off." If you meditate too late or when you're particularly tired, you'll most likely fall asleep and miss the real benefits of the practice.

#### **4.) Where**

As with everything in meditation, consistency is key: if it's possible to meditate at home in the same space everyday, do it. Of course, that's not a requirement. So long as you can sit with your eyes closed--on the plane, in a hotel, at work--you can meditate. Don't let the fact that you're not in your favorite chair, in your favorite space, at your favorite time be an obstacle to consistent practice.

Whenever possible, meditate in a disturbance-free area. If that's at home, you may want to put pets in another room (although some people love meditating with their pets), give the kids something to do, and tell people not to come looking for you. We also don't recommend meditating in your bedroom, as it's a place associated with sleep. You may also like to create a special meditation space, with plants and candles, your favorite pictures and objects, whatever you like to be around, really. Again, it's not necessary, simply a personal choice.

It's also usually better to meditate inside than outside, as you can control the environment and minimize disturbances. If you do meditate, however, (and it should be noted, I **love** to meditate outside) try to find a shady spot, rather than somewhere in direct sunlight.

#### **5.) Odds and Ends**

Any scents--candles, incense, essential oils--are a matter of preference. If you enjoy it, go ahead. And, on the plus side, your body will begin to associate the smell with meditation and begin to settle.

Music is not advised while meditating on a mantra, as it has a tendency to pull our awareness back from our desired object of focus. Outside of mantra, music without lyrics or ambient sounds (i.e. nature sounds, Tibetan bowls, binary beats) are fine, so long as they don't become distracting.

After exercising, let your body cool and your heart rate normalize before sitting. Light stretching or yoga before meditation are welcome, as they will loosen your body and allow sitting without pain.