

Chapter 2

How meditation transforms you

In this chapter, we're gonna take a closer look at meditation, and how it changes the way you experience everyday life. To start off, let's look at what meditation is in its simplest form. Here's an easy definition.

To meditate is to withdraw attention from thought

As you'll read later in this book, all forms of meditation have one thing in common - they all focus on withdrawing attention from thought. Now, to be exceedingly clear, there is nothing wrong with thinking in and of itself, and the goal of meditation isn't to completely stop thoughts - that's impossible. Instead, you're shifting your attention away from thought to something that is happening right now (like your breathing, sounds you hear, the feelings you experience in your body, etc.). The easiest way I've discovered to do this is through stillness.

The simplest way to meditate is to be still

During meditation, focus on the stillness of your body - not on mental activity. For example, if a thought comes up like "what am I going to have for dinner tonight?", don't answer the question or even think about it. Instead, ignore it and simply pay attention to the stillness of your body.

By doing this you're withdrawing attention from mental activity and, when this happens, a space is created between your thoughts. Now you are fully aware of what's going on in your head.

Fully aware? And that means what?

When you hear the word "aware", what does that mean to you?

Personally, when I started reading meditation books and the monk authors started dropping the word "aware" on me, I was always scratching my head, a bit

confused as to what they were actually talking about. Sure, to “be aware” means to simply know something exists. But what does this have to do with meditation? And why is it so important?

The thing about awareness is that it’s easy to take for granted. Every single moment of our day we’re aware at all times - whether we like it or not. In fact, if you stop reading right now, you can easily be aware of a dozen of different things around you...

So stop, take a moment and ask yourself:

- What do you hear?
- What do you see?
- Where are you?
- What do you smell?
- What do you feel?

If you take the time, you can probably come up with a hundred different answers to these questions. But the real question is, how does this apply to meditation? Let’s take a closer look...

Say you live on a busy street. There’s lots of noise and racket going on outside almost all the time, but during the day you may not even notice it. Maybe this is because you’re watching TV, chatting with friends, cleaning your house, or doing something else. Whatever you’re doing, you’re so focused on what’s going on indoors that you aren’t aware of the noise outside.

So what happens when you slow down? Maybe you decide to plop down on your couch, and just lay back and relax – without any music, TV or other noise to distract you. Suddenly, you’re completely aware of all the noises outside. You hear the dog bark, the cars honking their horns, and your loud neighbors bickering. Now that you’ve slowed down, you are **fully aware** of the outside noise.

A similar thing happens in your daily life with thoughts. During your day, you may be too busy to be aware of any of the racket (aka your thoughts) going on in your head. When you stop, slow down and meditate, all of a sudden you notice a whole world of mental activity you may never have known existed.

Becoming more aware of what's going on around you, both in and outside your body, is the secret to meditation's transformational power. As a newcomer to meditation, one of the first things you'll notice in your initial month of practice is just how often you're actually thinking. And as you become more aware of this, eventually you'll naturally start to create space between your thoughts.

Space between thoughts?

Okay, you may be a bit perplexed by what "space between thoughts" means. But it really is exactly what it sounds like: a space or gap between two thoughts. Many people live their lives thinking non-stop, so an actual space between thoughts may rarely, if ever, happen. Because of this, the idea can be a bit hard to grasp. So to give you a clearer idea of this concept and how it can impact you, let's look at the following metaphor.

Imagine you're having a TV series marathon: you're spending your afternoon plopped down on the couch watching episode after episode of your favorite show. As you watch, the story on the screen sends you on an emotional rollercoaster. You laugh with the characters, grow anxious when they do, and even experience the sadness they feel. Now, after a couple hours into the marathon, you've come to the emotional climax of the story. Your heart sinks, your face begins to flush, and your eyes well up with tears. You can't help but feel the heartache the character is experiencing, and tears begin to stream down your face...

Then, all of a sudden, the power cuts out and the TV turns off. Suddenly you become aware that you're now sitting in a dark room with a blank television screen in front of you. And to your surprise, you realize you'd been so wrapped up in the TV series that you were crying. As you wipe the tears off your cheek in disbelief, you laugh to yourself, amused that you were so moved by the images you were watching.

Then, before you know it, the power returns and the TV series continues to play. You return your attention to the story and characters.

This metaphor demonstrates the impact that space between thoughts can have. Essentially, all your thoughts are like the story that plays on the TV screen. The power outage is the space between them. As you saw in the metaphor, this space can create a temporary detachment from the stream of thoughts. Not only does it put them in perspective, but it also brings calmness, emotional stability,

and common sense to your situation. Over months of consistent meditation practice, these gaps of space will become more and more common for you.