

David Johnson

Meditation Tips for Introverts and Highly Sensitive People



Crossing The Threshold

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Introduction

Meditation has been a part of my life for over 25 years. Initially I came to it through my interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and while I use it for and in the context of my Buddhist practice, I also look on meditation as a set of tools that I can use to help me navigate the challenges of everyday life. No one need know that I am carrying that tool box, but it is with me for whenever I need it. Added to that, with sincere and constant practice it is a box whose tools are always getting better, bit by bit.

My name is David Johnson. I am an Introvert and a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP). This book will not go into the specifics of those character traits, but for those interested I would recommend two books,

1. "Quiet, The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking" ~ *Susan Cain*
2. "The Highly Sensitive Person" ~ *Elaine Aron*

This book works on the premise that Introverts and HSPs have a lot of mental activity. This activity is the source of Introverts and HSPs strengths, but these strengths go unrecognized in some circles. We live in a highly extroverted world, especially in the West, and though things are changing, introverts can be overlooked or find themselves in environments that are less than supportive to them. The lack of recognition as well as too much mental activity can be a struggle for introverts and HSPs. This book seeks to present meditation as a tool to manage the over thinking and the struggles that introverts and HSPs encounter.

I first became interested in meditation during a journey across Asia in the late 1980's. During that time away I came across Tibetan Buddhism and on my return to England became involved with a Tibetan Buddhist community. With time I moved to their retreat community in the rolling countryside of South Wales. I lived there for 7 years and next door to that community for a further 10 years in an ecological house that I designed. During that time I was fortunate to study and travel with the community's resident Tibetan Teacher, Geshe Damchö Yönten. I consider that time as the most rich and influential time of my life. Although I live in a different country now, that community and my Buddhist practice is still a very important part of my life.

For all that my background is from a particular spiritual tradition, meditation itself is not a specific spiritual practice, but a set of tools that can be used for training the mind - and heart, I say that as when my teacher spoke about the mind, he would place his hand on his heart. Look on it as taking what we learn (in our mind) and integrating it into our being (our heart).

As I stated, meditation has helped me navigate the ups and downs of life, giving me a sense of freedom and space from whatever has been taking place around me. I still have much to learn, but since recognizing that I am an introvert and HSP, I have used meditation to help me with the challenges that being a person with those personality traits brings to my life. Through this short book I would like to share some ways in which meditation has helped me, in the hope that there is something that you can take into your own life.

Look out for these boxes

Through out the book you will see text boxes such as this one. In these boxes I will take some of the lessons introduced in the preceding pages and offer a context of relevance for those practices as it specifically relates to introverts and HSPs. Look on these contexts as a starting point. Feel free to take the ideas introduced and adapt and make them relevant to your own life.

Enjoy the meditation journey!

** Though I have mentioned Introverts and HSPs in this introduction, you will find that I mainly refer to Introverts alone through the text of this book. This is more for the sake of convenience in writing. Individuals can be Introverts and not HSPs. Similarly some HSPs are extroverts. Please substitute as you feel appropriate as you read through the book.*

1

Laying The Foundations

"You can feel light when someone else is heavy. You can feel confident when things go sideways." ~ Daniella LaPorte



i. What Meditation can Offer Introverts & HSPs

We introverts already spend a lot of time in our heads. For HSPs it is the depth of sensing and feeling that takes us inside. Quiet and solitude are our allies and our go to place for rest and recharging. Why should we consider adding meditation, an introspective, quiet activity to our reflective time? I will suggest three reasons here:

1. **Letting go of Stories** - One of my favourite quotes from Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* is,

"...I also believe that introversion is my greatest strength. I have such a strong inner life that I'm never bored and only occasionally lonely. No matter what mayhem is happening around me, I know I can always turn inward."

However, for all that we do have this wonderful resource that we can turn to at almost any time, there is a shadow side to our introspection, a flip side that does not serve us well - we can spend too much time there. We start overthinking and over analyzing the situation that we find ourselves in. The protracted thinking becomes an obstacle to making decisions and moving ahead with action. That to which we turn for respite and perspective traps us in its own thinking.

We need to find a way to break through this block, to keep with our quiet strength of stopping and reflecting, but not coming to a complete halt! Meditation, specifically mindfulness meditation, can offer a way through.

Mindfulness meditation offers us a method for quiet observation without getting involved in the story that is unfolding. We choose an object to focus on, most commonly the breath is suggested, and when other thoughts arise in our mind to distract us we acknowledge their presence and then gently return to the breath. With time we start to experience those stories that we get caught up in as having an ephemeral nature, they are just passing thoughts, they come and they go. The degree to which we choose to engage with them is ultimately of our own choosing.

2. **An anchor** - As we go about our daily lives, it is not unusual for introverts to find themselves in situations that overwhelm them. The volume has been turned up. As many online posts have attested to, we live in an extroverted world where our

introverted qualities - because that *is* what they are, "*qualities*" - are called into question. Unless we are sure of ourselves, this constant questioning and the clamor of excited voices calling from all directions can become too much to take in and in that moment there can seem to be nowhere to escape to...except that we do have ourselves.

Being introverts we are probably the quieter ones in the room, listening more than talking, and that gives us a real opportunity to utilize our quiet presence for our own benefit. If the mind is starting to feel frazzled, and overwhelm and burnout are creeping upon you, return to focusing on the breath. We are always breathing. Just be aware of the breath entering and leaving the nose. Don't focus on the stories in your head that are yelling, "Get out of here!!"

As you focus on the breath so the focus on your struggles in that moment will subside. This does not mean that you still don't want to go home and recharge, but it will buy you some time...and with practice the time that you are able to stand the unfavorable situation will increase. The breath becomes your anchor, stabilizing you when the external world feels as though it is plotting against you.

3. **Treat ourselves more gently** - If we lived in a world of introverts where extroverted characteristics were in the minority, surrounded by like minded people, acceptance of our traits would be easy...indeed we probably wouldn't even notice them, let alone question them. But that is not the case. The demands of an extroverted world can give our self esteem a severe dent. We start listening to the challenges that are thrown at us and wonder if we have what it takes.

However if you sit quietly with yourself, you know that what others question in you are your superpowers. It is from your quietness that your skills and what you have to offer the world come from. Time spent in quiet meditation can help us smooth over the punches that we inflict upon ourselves. We see the critical voices that we throw at ourselves come up as thoughts in our mind and we let them go. We label them as *"thinking"* and then return to our breath. We bring to mind our qualities, our superpowers and hold them strongly in our mind, reminding ourselves of who we are and what we can do.

We don't belabor the negative voices, we don't give them the juice that they so desperately need in order to survive. Rather we notice the discomfort that these voices cause us, wrap them in our heart while labeling them *"thinking,"* and then let them go on their way.

Take aways from Chapter 1 - "Laying the Foundations"

As introverts and HSPs meditation is a tool that can help us by:

- Giving space to our over thinking, allowing us to let go of stories and move forward.
- Giving us an anchor when we feel overwhelmed, grounding us and enabling us to think more clearly as to our next steps.
- Enabling us to treat ourselves gently when challenged and to maintain our sense of self esteem when we feel challenged.

2

Developing a Meditation Practice

*"There is nothing that does not grow light,
Through habit and familiarity." ~ Shantideva*



i. What Meditation Is and Isn't

At the outset I would like to put to rest any misconceptions that we might have about meditation, and to explore with you any misunderstandings that might exist about what meditation is and isn't. Laying these foundations of understanding at the beginning will

make sure that we do not travel down any blind alleys in our meditation journey and are laying the base for developing a good practice.

Meditation is not...

- **a way to remove all your thoughts from your mind.** We are human beings and human beings have thoughts. While there are meditation methods for developing concentration and a highly focused mind (the Tibetans say that you can be so focused that you don't even jump when a boulder lands with a "thump" beside you!), meditation is not about doing away with our thoughts. We are training the mind in the same way that you might train a dog. So relax with your thoughts, and as we progress we will learn methods for handling them.
- **a spiritual practice.** By this I mean that there is no need to sign up for any belief system in practicing meditation. Yes, meditation is used by religious traditions (Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc), but meditation itself is a technique for stabilizing and training the mind. It is a tool that can be used removed from spiritual traditions.
- **a way to 'space out'.** Meditation can lead to experiences with the mind that feel like *spacing out*, but those are not the aim of meditation practice. Look on them as a by product, if you have them at all. What use are you to yourself or anyone else for that matter, if you are spaced out? Meditation practice is about enabling us to better step out into the world, not being pulled around so strongly by the vagaries of our mind.
- **not about trying to change ourselves.** It is really about becoming friends with ourselves. We might approach meditation with the thought that "I want to be more patient," or "I want to be more calm," or "I want to be more loving." All of these are valid and noble aspirations and certainly things that you can gain from meditation.

The danger here is how you are approaching these goals. What if you do not see the results that you are looking for? What if you are just experiencing more of the same in how you are? The problem is not the **hoping for benefit** to come from your meditation practice, but **the expectations** that come with your hopes. It can actually turn into a subtle form of aggression against yourself, which then ends up feeding into your relationship with others. All in all, counter productive. So approach meditation with the wish to make friends with yourself as you are now. Start from that point and work from there. That is an unconditional acceptance of ourselves and working from that place.

Meditation is...

- **a way to become familiar with our mind.** For all of its closeness to and integral part of us, we spend very little time familiarizing ourselves with our mind. Our mind is the origin of all of our actions, both conscious and unconscious actions, and getting to know our mind can allow us to realize so much more of our potential. (See also the last point above.)
- **standing more comfortably in our own shoes.** Following on from the item above, by familiarizing ourselves with our mind, we become more comfortable with it. For example, people who we do not know can create uncertainty in us simply by virtue of the fact that we do not know them. In a similar way if we are unfamiliar with how our mind reacts to situations, uncomfortableness can ensue. Meditation allows us to develop acceptance and understanding of how *our* mind works. We don't react against the mind, we sit with it....we look to make friends with it regardless of what is present.
- **a way to develop the mind.** Training and developing the mind might not be something that we think of doing, but as we deepen our meditation practice we

start to see the mind's pliability. The potential for growing and maturing the mind become apparent. Here I am talking about increasing qualities like patience, love and compassion while lessening our propensity for anger, jealousy, impatience and the like.

Just Follow The Instruction

Giving ourselves the space of no expectations in our practice, no goals to achieve, allows our mind to rest more easily and for us to rest more easily with our mind as it is. Having goals creates more anxiety in our mind and resistance to how our mind is. Yes, we can approach meditation with the wish to become more calm or more patient, but keep that as the big picture. Our day to day practice is to simply follow the instruction. Allow curiosity to arise as to what your mind might bring to the table today - quietness, or a jumble of thoughts? Focus, or a fast moving, agitated mind? There is no right or wrong, just being present with and bringing our awareness to what is.

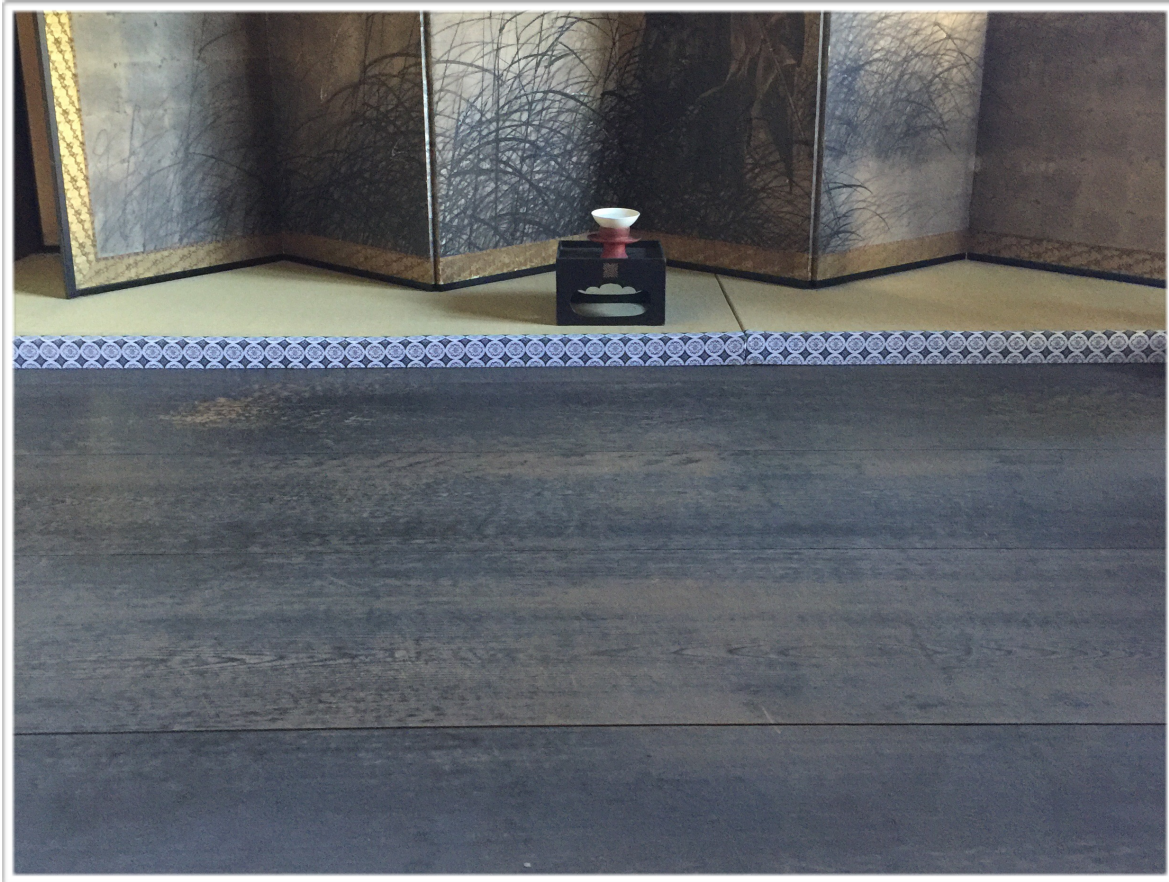
Managing a mind that is feeling tired or is struggling to keep up.

As introverts or HSPs we can find ourselves in situations which make us uncomfortable,

- the party we are at and have now had enough and are ready to go home.
- a meeting where we feel as though we are being left behind by the louder people present, not allowing us to get a word in.

Before we know it we are feeling overwhelmed, not by the issue itself but by the noise of our mind feeling as though it is not keeping up - the angry or critical mind. We want to leave or are criticizing ourselves for not keeping up. ***Don't resist*** that complaining mind. Don't fight it. Let it be. Observe the thought and as best you can, let it go.

ii. Developing a Meditation Practice



To gain most benefit from a meditation practice it should become a regular part of your life, something as regular as cleaning your teeth each morning. For that to happen you have to create a situation to which you look forward to return to each day. If your meditation practice becomes a chore or is uncomfortable, you will soon start creating excuses for yourself to miss your sessions and get on with the more “pressing” things that have to be done. My own teacher said that if my meditation practice was causing me to think negatively, to get angry and irritable, it was time for me to change my practice to something that did work.

The purpose of meditation practice is to develop a positive mind. I believe three things contribute to creating a conducive environment,

1. **The environment that you create for sitting.** I like to say that just to think of that space, even in the middle of a hectic day, will cause your mind to settle.
2. **Your posture.** Put simply, you need to be comfortable. If you are uncomfortable, you are not going to want to sit, certainly not for very long. There are a few recommended do's and don'ts, but the priority should be comfort.
3. **The length of your practice.** You might hear of people sitting for long periods of time, or many times during the day, but in the same way that endurance athletes build up to greater distances or heavier weights, meditators start sitting for short periods of time and build on their developing practice. Look on the mind as a muscle and like any muscle it must be developed before it can lift more.

Let's look at each of these individually, and include a few other ingredients in the discussion.

1. **Environment** - In creating a place to meditate, we are looking to develop an environment which naturally brings your mind to rest just by being there - indeed just by thinking about it. Don't worry about setting measurements for yourself about what a mind at rest looks like, just see your mind as quieting down, something that we have all experienced when everyone leaves after a party, or we close the door on a busy day. That place can be a shed at the end of the garden, a room in our home, or a corner of the bedroom. There is no right or wrong place and give yourself the freedom to experiment with different locations - nothing will be perfect, but trust your intuition that when you find *that* place, you'll know.

Within that space place some objects that inspire you. Perhaps images of people who you find inspiring. As you feel inclined, include a candle or small light and burn some incense or essential oils to help create a conducive atmosphere. You might want to include some flowers and have at hand some books with inspiring words to dip into from time to time. Place these objects on a table that you can comfortably see when you sit.



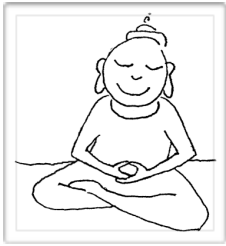
2. **Posture** - The list below might seem overwhelming initially, but always come back to the advice that the important thing is to be comfortable. These posture suggestions have been developed over the centuries that meditation has been practiced and so are there for good reason, but if it all appears too much, take baby steps, reminding yourself to be comfortable....and to keep that mind at ease.

A. You might have seen people sitting in the full lotus yoga pose while they meditate, their feet resting on their thighs. That is wonderful if you can do that, but definitely not necessary if you want to meditate. Indeed feel free to sit on a chair if your knees are bothering you, or if sitting cross legged is very uncomfortable. Another option is to kneel with cushions or a stool under your bottom. However the most common position is some form of cross legged posture.

B. The most important factor is a straight back. If you are sitting in a chair, I would encourage you to keep your back away from the back of the chair. A straight back enables the energy to flow freely up and down the back, preventing us from feeling sluggish and sleepy. Imagine that you have a thin thread tied to the crown of your head and someone is pulling it lightly taught, causing your back to become straight like a pile of stacked coins. Relaxed but straight.

C. Your hands can rest on your thighs, palms down, or in your lap, left palm up with the right hand (also palm up) resting in it, the thumbs gently touching.

D. Keep the eyes open, though you will find some people teaching to close the eyes. Meditation is ultimately an inner directed practice and by keeping the eyes open we don't develop the tendency to use meditation as a practice for escaping. Ultimately we want to bring our experience from meditation into our daily lives. Practicing with our eyes open will help incorporation of our practice in our lives post meditation. The eyes should be directed down the bridge of our nose to a point a few feet in front of us.



E. Allow your jaw to hang naturally, just open, with the tongue resting just behind the top teeth. This will help to keep the mouth moist while sitting and at the same time stop a build up of saliva - hopefully not too many details, but meditation is nothing if not practical!

3. ***Length of Practice***

I would counsel to start with a short meditation, maybe 2 minutes, and if you can sit each day build on that with a minute or two every two weeks. If you feel confident and ready, start with a longer sitting period - 5, 10, 20 minutes. However the

important thing is the quality of your sitting not the time that you have sat for.

Try and sit early in the morning, before the day has started, when your mind is still quiet from a night's sleep and before people and electronic media invade the morning stillness of your mind. Sitting at the end of the day allows you a quiet reflection before going to bed, and has the added benefit of resting the mind after a busy day...and that helps sleep! zzz

4. **Journal**

While we are not looking to *work things out* during our meditation session, instead just focus on the breath, something might come up that won't leave you alone. That thought that pops back into your head a nano-second after you have returned to the breath and has made your meditation session really quite exhausting - yes, meditation can sometimes feel exhausting. If that happens, I have found it helpful over the years to have a journal at hand just to process my thoughts. When I have finished my meditation session I start by writing out the thought or thoughts that were plaguing me for their attention during the meditation and then to start exploring what those thoughts were about, what I need to work out or what they were trying to tell me by just free writing, by just letting the thoughts in my head guide my pen. I have found this at times a cathartic and helpful process that sometimes, for reasons I have not been able to pinpoint, have enabled me to just put the subject down altogether.

Giving yourself regular alone time.

I believe for everyone that some regular, daily alone time is essential. Time to just be with ourselves, to touch in with ourselves and see how we are doing. For introverts and HSPs who get exhausted by the busyness of life, such alone time can be the fuel and cushion that help them get through the rest of the day.

Whether it be your meditation time or another space in your day, look to make regular alone time a part of your day. Not only will this give you time to recharge, but also when life is getting too much for you will know that you have given yourself permission to take time off at some point.

Finding that place.

Your alone space might just have to be where you can take it - a quiet bookshop, sitting quietly on the train, even time on the toilet - but if you can create a space in your home that is *your* quiet space, the place where you can go to and know that you will be alone, just bringing that space to mind in the middle of a busy day will help to calm your mind.

Telling others.

If you have a busy household and it is appropriate (and helpful) you might want to tell your family or roommates about your quiet time and place so that you won't be disturbed. When others know and respect your alone space, you can relax into your private time much more easily.

iii. The Practice



There are many meditation practices available, but the one I will talk about here is awareness of the breath. The purpose of this meditation is two fold,

1. Develop a more focused mind,
2. Develop an awareness of the nature of our mind, through time spent familiarizing ourselves with our mind.

As you approach this practice, see the instructions below as like a wheel. You can constantly return to each instruction as need be. Perhaps you need to check in with your position, if you are feeling less grounded try a few deep breaths...but always return to that steady, natural breath that we are always breathing. Nothing forced.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Once you have settled into a comfortable sitting position, start with taking a few deep breaths - in through the nose and out through the mouth. This helps to ground us at the start of our practice.
- After three or four such deep breaths, just allow the breathing to return to its natural state. No forcing. Just breathe.
- Now draw your awareness to yourself, your body, slowly become aware of your seated position - your feet on the floor or cross legged, your bottom on the chair or cushion, your straight back. Feel the weight of your body as it sits, and that sense of the ground or chair supporting you.
- Next bring your awareness to the breath as it enters and leaves the nose. If you find that difficult to concentrate on, allow yourself to become aware of the rising and falling of the belly. The belly can also be helpful if your mind is feeling scattered - focusing lower down on the body has a grounding and stilling effect.
- And to remind you....just breathe naturally, do not force it. In the same way that an usher standing at the door of a theatre just watches people enter and leave without getting involved with the people, you are just watching the breath as it does what it does - enters and leaves the nose.
- To aid concentration, count each in and out breath as "1," in and out "2," until you reach "10," then return to "1" again. If you lose your count, do not berate yourself, simply start again back to "1."
- At the end of your allotted time, as the timer goes off, become aware of the sounds and smells around you.
- Take a moment to reflect on what you have accomplished before getting up to carry on with the rest of your day.

~ Some thoughts to bear in mind

Very quickly you will find your mind distracted by thoughts. There is nothing wrong with that. It is quite normal. This is what the mind does - it thinks and create stories. Do not allow yourself to be caught up in ideas you might have that to meditate *well* you need to have *no thoughts*. (See the section in Chapter 4 on Goals/No Goals) What we are looking to do here is build awareness that we are thinking. To catch ourselves before we act on the thoughts in our head. To catch ourselves before we get lost in the stories running through our head.

Just catching our thoughts is increased awareness. That is meditation. Most of the time we do not bring that awareness to our lives and are pulled this way and that by the chatter in our heads. Sometimes you will spin off on a long story but once you catch yourself, do so with no judgement, say to yourself "*thinking*," and come back to the breath, including the counting if that is proving helpful.

Non-judgement is the key. The instruction is to simply notice the loss of awareness and come back to the breath.

Motivation/Direction & Dedication - It is very easy to just sit down, do your practice and get up and go. While I would not suggest that you will not derive any benefit from this, I would encourage you to create a bit of space either side of your practice.

1. At the start take a moment to reflect on the reason that you are sitting (*i.e.* to quieten your mind, *or* to be able to help others through getting more control over your mind, *or* to be a more confident person, *or* something else... You will have your reason for meditating and that as well might change and develop with your practice.)

2. At the end stop and reflect on what you have just accomplished. Appreciate the effort and progress that you have made - and that progress need be no more than you showing up and meditating. Then see these accomplishments as contributing towards the goal that you set yourself when you sat down. If you wish to do this through a small prayer, a short ritual that is fine, but just a quiet mental reflection to yourself is quite sufficient. This short practice will help give you direction and will embed your efforts.

And that for now is it. Just bringing your awareness to the breath. Loosening your hold on your thoughts. Training yourself to not identify so strongly with the struggles and the over thinking that can intrude on our lives. As we'll see below, look on your meditation time as a preparation and training for your everyday life.

Actual Meditation Session & Post-Meditation Session - Unless you have the time or inclination to be a full time meditator, locked away on retreat for days and weeks on end, most of us will spend more time away from formal meditation practice than engaged in it. However, this does not mean that our meditation ends as soon as we leave our cushion. With a little practice and, yes, awareness, meditation can seep into your daily life even if it does not have the quiet quality of our formal sessions. Because of this, some time spent looking at the relationship between our actual and post-meditation sessions can be beneficial. The dance between the two is self-reinforcing, each strengthening and deepening what you have learnt and gained from the other.

One might liken it to formal dog training classes, an hour or so spent in a controlled environment with your dog and instructor, versus trying out what you learnt when you are

out walking your dog. One is a practice and rehearsal for the other, but the walk in the park is where that training gets put to the test and at the same time still gives you an opportunity to deepen your training.

- **Actual Meditation Session** - This is the time that you spend formally meditating. This is time that we have put aside to engage in genuine practice. We have our altar setup, the phone is off, the fragrant incense is burning, we have made sure that we will not be disturbed - or however you choose to set the space. This is our time. We sit and engage in the practice that we choose. We are being with our mind. We are working familiarizing ourselves with and starting a process of transforming our mind. There is focus, free from external disturbances.

The Actual Meditation Session is important and a time when much transformation can take place. It sows the seeds for later change. To the degree that you are able to focus on the object of meditation, for example the fleeting nature of thoughts, you are holding the mind in constant familiarization with an idea. The more that the mind focuses on that idea, the more that that becomes the basis from where the mind operates. You are training to not only think differently, but *be* different.

- **Post-Meditation Session** - The post-meditation, that time when we are up and about leading our daily lives, is where the rubber meets the road for our meditation. To the degree that you are able, try and bring to mind what you gained from your formal meditation practice. Don't hold this tightly. Don't castigate yourself if you fall into old habits that you are trying to change...change takes time. Here are some ways that you can do this, get creative to explore what will work for you:

- Resolve to grab two, three, four times a day when you bring awareness to your actions - when you close a door, chewing your food (chew only and don't read from you phone), cleaning your teeth.
- Put small post-it notes in strategic locations - on a mirror, on your computer - to remind you to take three mindful breaths.
- As you walk, instead of focusing on the breath focus on the feet touching the floor, or the feet leaving the floor.
- Look for opportunities to return to watching the mind, focusing on the breath and letting go of thoughts. Find a quiet spot to sit down at lunch time. Nothing as formal as your meditation sessions, just a quiet moment. Perhaps you are standing in line at a store checkout or in a bank. Is that impatience arising? Bring your awareness to your breathing, and as you do let the impatience go. Do you have an important meeting coming up about which you feel nervous? If so, take advantage of a quiet five minutes beforehand and rest your mind on the breath, watching those nervous thoughts and letting them go even if they are back bothering you half a second later; let them go again.

Finding quiet amidst the hustle and bustle of life.

As introverts and HSPs we all know our limits. That point where the noise and activity of everyday life and the way that we process it all become too much, and we just want to retreat to a quieter space to recharge for a moment. We are not being antisocial, we are just in over our heads with all that hustle and bustle and just need to be quiet and take a time out.

However, there are times when a quiet space is not available to us. We are in the middle of a meeting or social event and getting away is not an option in that moment. What can we do in such situations?

What we are yearning to do is to come back to ourselves, and meditation gives us that opportunity in the busyness of life. It does not mean that we push aside our wish to be alone, that wish is still there, but it can buy us time and help us to remain present. Indeed with time, meditation can help us build up resilience such that we find ourselves staying with the noise for longer than we might have done so in the past.

So when we start to notice your energy sagging, when you feel yourself craving to be alone, first ground yourself.

- Feel your feet on the ground. If you are sitting down, feel your bottom on the chair, the chair's back supporting you.
- Next take a few, quiet deep breaths. Again to help ground yourself, be aware of your belly rising as you take those breaths.
- As you start to feel more settled, especially if you are not engaging in the chatter and noise in that moment, use your quietness to focus on the thoughts, not the noise. Watch those thoughts come, go and change. Don't engage with them, just notice them, lightly touch them with your observation and let them go. By not participating in their call you are lessening their hold on you.
- And as the mind quiets through lessening its hold on those thoughts, allow an awareness of your breathing to hold, steady and quieten you.

This might sound like a lot to do in a busy environment, but you'll find with practice that you can move quickly through the steps. Try it, and if necessary I invite you to experiment and adapt this exercise to the situation that you find yourself in. Prune some pieces out if they do not help or are too much - perhaps go straight to the breath and skip the body grounding. There is no right or wrong here, just what works for you.

More on this in the next chapter....

3

When You Are Not On Your Cushion

*"We have to walk in a way that we only
print peace and serenity on the Earth." ~*

Thich Naht Hanh



When we think of meditation it is probably of someone sitting on a cushion or chair in a quiet space, engaging in a silent practice of which we know not what. However, for most of us our time is spent off the cushion in the business of our lives. In order to build on our regular practice and also to bring the benefits of meditation into our lives, we need to find

ways of touching into the experience of meditation in life. To put it another way, ideally we need to find a way to *continue* our practice in our daily lives.

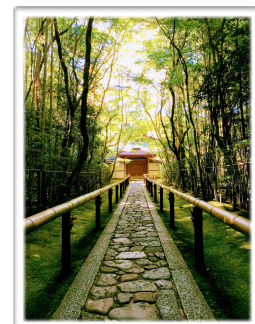
As I touched on earlier, managed well time away from our meditation sessions can feed our formal meditation time, building on what we have learnt, and at the same time our daily lives benefit from our time spent meditating.

There are many ways to approach the subject of time spent off the cushion (as I like to refer to it), for example look at a specific task and see how we can bring a meditative approach to that - washing the dishes might be an example, eating a meal another, or standing in line at the bank. All of these, and the multitudes of other activities that we engage in on a regular basis, offer the opportunity to deepen our meditation practice.

However, here I have chosen to look at what I am calling boundaries. The building of boundaries into our lives. These are limits, fences that we put in place to limit what we allow into our lives. Actions that we choose to engage or not engage in. Let me explain...

i. Vows - Boundaries

The aim of meditation practice is to train the mind. Within the Buddhist tradition meditation is one tool that Buddhists use, one might say the main one, but there are others. All of these tools integrate together to build a game plan to help you develop the positive and wholesome qualities of your mind.



Within the Buddhist tradition that I studied there are the Five Lay Precepts, or Pratimoksha Vows. These form the basis, the ground on which other Buddhist training builds. Before I go any further, I wish to talk a little bit about vows.

When I first heard of vows my idea of them were something that I *should* do, or something that I was being made to do. There was a sense of coercion about them, and so I would either be resisting them or forcing myself to do them so that I would feel good in myself - "I'm calling myself a Buddhist now, and so I better take these vow things" - though in all honesty my heart wasn't completely engaged with them. Truth be told, I really didn't understand what they were about.

But then there was a trick that I learnt, a thing about taking vows that I had not thought about before,

they are voluntary, you don't have to take them

- how about that?! The decision to take them and the reason why you wished to take them was up to you. You did not have to take them because you have decided to practice the Buddhist path. Rather, like many decisions in life you chose to take the vows if you felt that you could benefit from doing so. You chose to bring in some rules for how you lived your life because you saw that they would make your life better.

But how do vows help make your life better? Aren't you putting unnecessary restrictions on your fun and enjoyment?

ii. Boundaries

In this book I want to refer to vows as boundaries. I understand boundaries as what we are saying "yes" to and what we saying "no" to - what we are allowing into our lives and what we are closing the gates on. Boundaries are about protecting our minds from those things that pull us away from the fruits of our meditation practice and from deepening our practice. They guard our mind against our tendency to develop bad habits, and pull us toward that which supports us.

But first, before we set those boundaries, reflect for a moment on why you are setting them. What is your reason for saying "no" to some habits that you have built in your life, and saying "yes" to building new habits? What are these boundaries supporting in your life? What world do you wish to create for yourself? Within the context of this book I would like to suggest that you are looking to build a rich and resilient inner world developed through your meditation practice, but that is supported and given strength through the strong foundations that you are going to build on the outside.

So before you look into creating boundaries in your life, stop and ask yourself why are you choosing to develop a meditation practice? There is no right answer. You will have your own personal reasons and they could change and develop as your own practice develops. Perhaps to develop peace of mind? To be more patient? To expand your loving heart? These? Others?

iii. What Boundaries Should I Set In My Life?

If you are struggling to think of what boundaries to set, let me offer some ideas. You might want to choose one that I suggest here, or use these ideas as a springboard to set your own. Like your meditation practice make those boundaries ones that you believe you can realistically keep. Start with simple, easily manageable boundaries and build to bigger or different ideas if and when you are ready to do so. Remember, the boundary or boundaries need to feed your meditation practice, not create obstacles for it.

- ***Guard what you take in through your ears and eyes.*** Perhaps you watch a lot of news, but the news upsets you. Hearing and seeing the problems that are happening around the world might make you sad. Or a politician stating his or her opinion sends you into a rage that carries on way past the news broadcast. Indeed just to bring the story to mind later in the day makes you angry. If this is true for you, regulate how much and how often you watch the news. By watching these disturbing stories you are essentially meditating on and cultivating anger and frustration. Perhaps you cut news out of your life completely on certain days of the week, or only listen to 15 minutes each day. Maybe delete those news apps from your phone?
- ***To borrow from the Pratimoksha vows which I mentioned above, the first one asks us to make a commitment not to harm anything.*** You might say that that is not in your nature anyway, but the act of making that statement, of making a commitment to yourself, has a deeper effect on your mind. It represents a deeply rooted, never-ending commitment. It allows us to ask deeper questions of ourselves such as “*what does harm look like?*” We can hurt others in more ways than physically. The spoken word can cut deep.
- ***So feeding off that last suggestion, we can make a commitment to guard our speech.*** To be mindful of the words that come out of our mouth, mindful of how words can

build bridges as well as destroy them. This boundary calls on us to slow down and be aware of what we are about to say. Perhaps at times it is better to say nothing, or maybe at times it is better just to acknowledge that we heard the other.

iv. - The Effects On Your Meditation Practice Of Having Boundaries In Your Life

By having an awareness of the boundaries (or maybe singular boundary, there is not right or wrong here, it must work for you) that we set ourselves, we bring mindfulness into our lives. As our mind moves towards an action that might break a boundary, we catch ourselves and pull back. Maybe we have chosen to limit our consumption of news, but catch ourselves reaching for that news app on our phone, or about to turn on the television news at a time that we have told ourselves that we won't. We stop, we pull back and we don't cause ourselves to get caught up in activities that will disturb our mind.

With time that pulling back becomes second nature, becomes who you are and what you do. The Boundary becomes you.

As you integrate the boundary more into your life, your mind starts to become more present. You are less caught up in the triggers that excite the mind. The mind is being pulled around less by the distractions and enticements of the world around you.

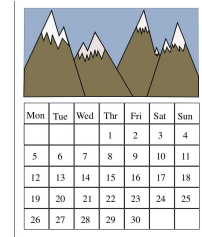
THIS IS THE MIND THAT YOU BRING TO THE CUSHION.

Not only are you more still and present in daily life, but the enticements of life that distracted and agitated your mind are no longer, or are less of a bother to you and so don't

keep in popping into your mind during your sitting sessions - you will probably find that some of which does arise in a mind during meditation is related to your vices.

v. - *A Daily Practice*

Like any new practice, it can take a little bit of reminding and familiarization before it becomes second nature. I would like to suggest a small practice to do each day to remind yourself of the boundaries that you are choosing to bring into your life. I'll call this practice a ritual. Why a ritual? Because these boundaries, these guards are sacred. You are putting them in place in order to benefit your life, and that is sacred, special, important. So here is what to do,



- **Find a time early in the morning**, perhaps just before you get out of bed, or just before your morning meditation. You will need no more than a minute or two.
- Just before you start your meditation or just before you get out of bed, remind yourself of *your* reasons for setting boundaries and recite those boundaries or boundary to yourself, reflecting on each boundary as you recite it.
- Take a moment to reflect on what you have just said before getting on with your day.
- **Then at the other end of the day**, just before going to bed, again recite the boundaries to yourself.
- In addition, in the evening reflect on how successful you have been in keeping your boundaries. Where you have been successful, congratulate yourself, recognizing the benefits of having done so and resolving to keep up the good efforts. Where you have slipped, do not berate yourself, rather recognize that despite your best intentions, you let something slip today. Try and identify the mistake, what caught you out, and recommit to holding yourself to that boundary next time.

It can also be helpful to share with a close friend what you are trying to do and why. This friend becomes an ally in your new efforts, someone with whom you can share your celebrations and accomplishments, and also someone to whom you can turn to when you need support in your endeavors.

Boundaries For Introverts

Just as creating boundaries in our daily lives can help to strengthen our meditation practice, so as an introvert or HSP, creating boundaries for ourselves is us standing up and making a statement about what we are saying “yes” and “no” to in our lives. We are taking ownership of our needs, not in a selfish way, but in a way so that we are better able to be present in the world for ourselves and ultimately others. Here, boundaries might look like:

- Saying no parties always, all but once a month, or every other week.
- Telling family that you will be taking an afternoon a week to yourself.
- The solitude of your weekly bicycle ride.
- Some quiet time before going to bed, i.e. stepping away from the television or busy discussions.

Like our meditation boundaries, we are creating a fence around what we are prepared to do so that we benefit ourselves, not in a selfish way, but in a way that nourishes our being so that we can be there for others....and not become overwhelmed ourselves. Again you might want to create a ritual around the keeping of these boundaries until they become second nature and accepted by those around you. If you stumble in your keeping of some of these boundaries, ask yourself what went wrong? Did you stand your ground for what you wanted? Was there just too much going on for you to be able to stand by what you wanted? Ask yourself, what can you learn for next time.

And of course sharing with a good friend your intentions can be helpful in giving you the strength of knowing that you have an ally.

4

Working with Meditation

*"Do let the behaviour of others destroy
your inner peace." ~ Dalai Lama*



In this chapter I'd like to look further at some ways that we can incorporate meditation into our daily lives.

Initial Experiences - It is not unusual to hear people say that their minds are getting worse when they start to meditate. That there is more noise and confusion taking place in their

head. Despite that experience, this is not what is happening. Instead, as a meditator you are starting to pay close attention to what is actually going on in your mind. Many people do not spend time doing that and so when you actually start looking at the mind, you become aware of all the chatter that is present. Don't worry, just keep practicing.

Boredom - Sitting and watching the breath is not the most stimulating of exercises. To do it day in day out can very easily lead to boredom, which correspondingly can stimulate the mind into thinking of other things that it would rather have you do. When boredom arises - it is more likely to be a "when" rather than an "if" - see it as another thought arising in the mind. Note it, label it, and come back to the breath.

...

Now this is all well and good, but boredom can have another quality about it. It seems to eat into our bones, giving us a sense of dryness, a barrenness, a sense of looking out across a vast, dry, hot desert that we know that we have to cross. It quickly becomes uncomfortable and difficult to manage. Our aim is still to not deny that we are bored, but to become familiar with what boredom is. In our everyday life if we are bored we might drop into a funk, or find ourselves fritting from one meaningless activity to another. In this case boredom becomes our object of meditation. We sit beside it and get to know it. If just labeling the thought, "*boredom*," and returning to the breath becomes just too much, lightly look at the boredom. Ask yourself questions like:

- What does my boredom feel like?
- Is it static or changing?
- What color is the boredom?
- What shape is it?
- Does this boredom have a smell?

No rights or wrongs here, just be curious and ask what questions you would like in order to get to know it...and just allow the answers to come back in their own time. No rush here. We are building a relationship with boredom. With time, familiarity breeds an ease with the feeling of boredom. This is similar to building a relationship with another person. The better that you know this new person, the easier it is to be with them. The boredom might still arise, but you are no so put off with it and the ease of letting it go or just being with it becomes easier. It's like sitting with that person who irritates you. They might still do things that you do not like, but those things don't stick now and instead brush over you.

No Intellectualizing - It is very easy to over think what you should be feeling as you meditate, what is going on in your mind, what the practice should be doing for you. In short it is very easy to start intellectualizing the process of meditation. But the meditation practices that I am sharing with you in this book are coming from the place of being, feeling, observing. So watch out for when you start analyzing and relax back into observing and being.

Goals/No Goals - Do not set yourself goals, they can act as an obstacle to your practice. By goals I mean for you not create an image of how quiet you think your mind should be. Do not get into a habit of saying that was a good meditation, that was a bad meditation. What we are practicing is awareness of the mind. Sometimes you will feel as though you are battling downtown New York at rush hour, other times you are sitting alone on a peaceful hill top. Simply be aware of both. It's that awareness that is meditation.

Good days/Bad days - This follows on in some way from the concept of goals...or no goals. We all experience good and bad days in our lives. Similarly on some days you will get up

from your meditation session feeling clear and refreshed, on others you might even question why you sat at all. Do remember this though - the results of meditation come with time. They arise out of steady and constant practice, each session incrementally building on the last, regardless of the *good* or *bad* label that you put on your meditation time - and also remember, the *good* and *bad* labels simply come out of expectations that we put on our own practice. So accept what happens, whatever the experience is on any given day, be patient and keep sitting. The results will come.

Finding the time - If time is short, find an opportunity to “grab” your practice time. Sit somewhere, maybe even the toilet, and wait for one round of in and out breath. Make that two if time allows. What we are trying to do is build a habit. But also do not bother yourself if life is just not allowing time for you. Remember the advice that I received from my teacher. If your meditation practice is causing you anxiety, change your practice. Meditation is meant to work for you, not against you.

Daily life & Inner life - The Tibetan word for meditation, *göm*, means to familiarize. Through your meditation practice you will start to familiarize yourself with your mind....and as you do so you might notice a similarity between your mind and external life. As you find yourself developing a bit more patience with some of your states of mind, letting go of others, these new habits will creep into your daily life. Space starts to edge into your life and you are able to catch yourself that little bit earlier before you react. For example:

- More patience with others through patience with your own mind.
- Through not judging your own thoughts, you catch yourself in judgement of others.

- More compassion for yourself through recognizing how your thoughts pull you this way and that, so more compassion for others as you see people stuck in the same struggle.

Bringing the fruits of meditation into our lives

Initial Experiences - Allow the benefits of meditation to seep naturally into your life. You are developing a new habit and so don't be hard on yourself if you are not seeing results that you hope to see. Remember that those results are of your own making, over thinking, analyzing. So let them go and return to your practice. The key is constant practice.

Goals/No Goals - Following on from above, be wary of setting yourself goals. You are obviously exploring meditation as you are hoping that it will bring some benefit in your life and that is a good and helpful perspective to hold. But hold it lightly in terms of what you are hoping those benefits will look like. Some days you will feel moved to label your meditation as *good*, other days as *not good*. Allow yourself to let go of those labels and simply congratulate yourself on the awareness that you are cultivating.

Finding Time - For Introverts and HSPs meditation can help us to disassociate from a busy, noisy mind. When we find ourselves overthinking a situation, our meditation practice can allow us to hold more lightly the thoughts coursing through our heads. We let go of thoughts and find more space in our mind to navigate the situation that we find ourselves in. Look for those opportunities in the middle of a busy day when you can bring awareness to your life:

- A walk in the park, or even a walk down the street to the grocery store. Bring your awareness to each foot as it touches the ground.
- Drive without the radio on or music playing.
- At a stop sign? Watch your breath.
- Standing in line? Watch your breath.

Building the habit to watch the breath will build your awareness and your ability to quieten your mind - just be patient with yourself and your meditation practice and with time you will experience the benefits.

5 Follow Up



I hope that you have found helpful this introduction to meditation and how it can be of service to Introverts and HSPs. Meditation is a long term commitment, but from my own experience the benefits have and continue to be well worth the effort. The word that comes to mind is *liberating*.

If you have any questions or are interested in working with me further, please do get in touch. My website, contact and various social media details are below.

Thank you for reading.

David.

- Website: www.crossingthethreshold.net
- Email: info@crossingthethreshold.net
- Micro.blog: microblog.crossingthethreshold.net
- Twitter: [@David_w_J](https://twitter.com/David_w_J)



Some Closing Thoughts

Introverts and HSPs need their quiet place of refuge. Meditation can be offer that space and at times I will use it as such. I liken the experience to a glass of muddy water. My mind (and body) can feel exhausted and tired as though that glass has been shaken up and there is dirt and mud swirling around. My meditation practice causes that dirt to settle and my mind and body to feel refreshed. I get up afterwards feeling clearer and ready to tackle whatever is next.

While I recommend using your meditation for that when you need it, I would caution against it being your sole reason for sitting. The reason is that there is a danger that meditation can then become an escape. It is the place that you go for quiet. The place where you can close the door on the rest of the world. But remember that ultimately meditation is about enabling you to come back into the world through familiarizing yourself with your mind.

Meditation is a tool for re-integration.

The danger is that one can start to build a habit of pushing the world away. So please do use meditation for that *time out* when you need it, to help you recharge and rest. But also remember the bigger picture that meditation offers you - that of building a relationship with your mind, find stability, clarity and peace in your mind and through that help you manage the ups and downs of daily life.

Thank you for reading. Here's to your meditation practice.