

## ***How to Make Daily Practice Happen***

If you're reading this, something has given you the impression that meditation and awareness might be beneficial for your life. It can be a big leap between that idea and concrete practice (sitting meditation, yoga, *Loving Kindness* or other cultivation practices). Below I've outlined some thoughts that might be helpful. Some you may resonate with immediately. Some may not feel like they apply to you at this moment. As a whole, I hope they will support you to integrate regular practice in your days. Prioritizing daily practice, formal and informal, will allow you to discover more ease and peace right in the midst of your daily life.

- **Start with a sense of humor.** When we pivot our attention inward, we notice our minds are a circus! Cultivating a clearer mind and open heart is both serious and comical. Holding ourselves and the *whole cartwheeling circus* with lightness can help us maintain stamina and patience, one step at a time.
- **Remember and attend to the physical body. Observe self-sabotage with curiosity and kindness.** Our bodies need to be cared for. How do we prioritize adequate sleep? How about eating patterns that cloud rather than nourish the mind? What is the role of alcohol and drugs? How about physical movement and exercise? Just here, as you're reading, can you connect more intimately to the body; the eyes reading, the feet resting on the ground. Consider how choices one day influence the ability to follow through with awareness and mindfulness practice the next day.
- **Daily is easier.** Establishing a ritual and rhythm of daily practice, just like brushing your teeth, is easier than doing every few days. Consider the same time or in the same routine (ex. Before breakfast, plugged into the Outlook calendar as a mid-morning break, as a pause between the work day and home). How can we stay on track even if plans get derailed? When we miss morning meditation, we can fold in a mid-morning break, or a period of mindful walking in the afternoon. Using a device or app can be so helpful in cuing us back to our intention for a more wakeful life (Insight Timer, Headspace or one of many others).
- **Create a place for practice.** As we develop concentration, we can learn to sit anytime, anywhere. To begin, having a set place really helps establish a new, wholesome habit. When we sit consistently, quietly in the same spot, our body begins to remember and calm in response without us having to think. It can be a corner of a room, a single chair (in or outside), a corner table with a candle. Our *practice space* can also be a visual cue, 'Oh, there's my cushion, just waiting for me.'
- **Keep it simple.** Start with 5-10 minutes of sitting. You can also add in one of these gestures during your day, touching in again to intention, pause: a single stretch; awareness of breath for three long exhales; read and allow a single poem into your heart; light a candle and offer incense; breathe *Tonglen* throughout your day.
- **Explore different practices. And, watch the mind's tendency to skip around.** It's valuable to set an intention for what we're doing at the beginning of practice (Breath Awareness, Noting, Tonglen, Loving Kindness). This goes *for however we're doing practice*: sitting, standing, walking, lying down, and in action. There's a real value in sticking with the same practice regardless of how bored

### **Amy C. Darling**

Acupuncturist, Herbalist and Health Educator

Medical Dental Building

509 Olive Way, Suite 1358 • Seattle, WA 98101

amycdarling.com • amylac@amycdarling.com • 206.920.9929



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or impatient our minds become. When we stick with it, we can really *experience* a practice inside and out. Discussion with a group or teacher can also help you discern if/when it can be skillful to change gears, right in the middle of a period of meditation.

- **Seek Support.** It might seem like we're sitting by ourselves. Ultimately, we can't do it alone. Just to begin, who made the chair or the cushion we're sitting on, the bell we ring, the candle we light? And support from others can really help us sustain regular practice and with roadblocks along the way. How about seeing if there's a room at work where you can sit once a week and invite others. Ask for support from those most dear in your life. Explore a weekly sitting group, a weekend or week long retreat, read some inspirational texts, attend a public talk (see Seattle Area Mindfulness Resources) or seek out a teacher who can support you.
- **Notice resistance and stay the course.** Our lives are so full. It's so easy to convince ourselves we don't have time or we aren't doing it right. Support from others (fellow meditators and/or a teacher) can be so helpful at these times. And come home to the earlier encouragements: daily is easier, notice self-sabotage, laugh at your own resistance.
- **Question what is true.** From one meditation student, "I used to believe my mind 100% of the time. Now I believe it maybe 20% of the time." Increased awareness supports us not being so swept away by the chatter and turbulence of our own minds, this can include our hunger for *progress* or *pleasant experiences* while meditating. Right when you think 'this isn't working' or 'why can't I go back to that blissful meditation I had a few days ago,' right there we can notice our own aversion, our desire, engage some humor, some humility and return to the breath and the body.
- **Celebrate growth and change.** Truthfully, we can't ever know all the factors influencing change. And, we really can't measure our growth in a linear way. Sometimes our earliest indication that something is changing is the reflection we receive from others, 'You seem more patient these days, not so stressed,' or, 'Wow, you remained so calm and grounded in that Board meeting. That was inspiring!' We notice that something that used to irritate us doesn't seem like such a big deal. We notice we aren't tearing ourselves apart from the inside out quite so much. These are changes to quietly celebrate.

While making time for meditation or yoga, *Loving Kindness* or *Tonglen*, we still have to balance family, work and community commitments. It's valuable to remember the practices support us to breathe wakefully in our lives: in our habitual patterns, in our relationships with those dear to us, in our working environment, with everything around us. Each one of us has to discern the balance. And I hope these suggestions will support you to gently *knead* a bit of practice into your every day.

*Inspired by-adapted from Tim Burnett.*

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