

# Getting started with an experience-based approach to secular meditation

There are many ways to meditate with an open-minded, open-hearted, experience-based approach. You'll find your own way, and over time it will change. And by reflecting on your meditative process, you'll become aware of how meditation supports you, and informs you. To get you started, here are some suggestions.

## STRUCTURING YOUR PRACTICE

- ▶ Choose somewhere you can sit with little disturbance. Then select a time of day to practice, and how often you'll do it. Finally, decide how long you'll meditate. Allow yourself a little flexibility, though.
- ▶ You may choose to start by meditating for 12 minutes, but if that seems too long, try a shorter time. Trying to meditate for too long can be stressful. If time is precious, whatever time you have is enough. Use a timer – Insight Timer has a number of good ending bell selections.

## SETTLING IN

- ▶ Settle into a comfortable position on a chair, or a cushion, close your eyes, and briefly observe the breath coming into and leaving the body.
- ▶ At times during the meditation session, you may want to ground your attention, especially if the mind appears to have become chaotic, or you're finding your thoughts overwhelming. You need not stay where you ground for long, though sometimes you well may be there for a while.
- ▶ Experiment with focussing on the point where the hands are resting, the feet touch the ground, or the body touches the chair or cushion.
- ▶ If you're new to meditation, consider that you may already have a safe, still place that you get to within yourself.
- ▶ If you do have a meditation practice, use a focus object that comes easily to you, such as the breath, awareness of the body, or the sounds around you.
- ▶ Above all, don't force yourself to focus on one thing when something else is calling for your attention.

## MOVING AROUND

- ▶ Minds wander. Yours will too. Allow your thoughts, feelings, emotions and attention to move around. Whatever arises in meditation is okay. Let your attention go to wherever it's drawn. Think of this as another kind of meditation.
- ▶ Try to keep the body still. If you become uncomfortable, move slowly and deliberately until you become more comfortable. Stillness in meditation develops over time.

### After your meditation session

- ▶ Take time to reflect on your experiences while you were meditating; doing this, you will develop a capacity to recall and be aware of what flowed through your awareness.
- ▶ Journalling is a useful support for your awareness, and for memory.
- ▶ Write down or type what's easiest to remember first; fill in the gaps later.
- ▶ Use your own words to describe your experience; if they're not necessarily words other people may use, that's just fine.
- ▶ Stick with what happened. If you find you're adding interpretation, put them in [brackets] or *italics* or perhaps **highlight them**. This will help you discern what happened during the meditation session from what arose afterwards.
- ▶ Consider the content of your thoughts, the feeling tone, your emotions, your relationship to your experience. Did you hear sounds, feel sensations, become aware of thoughts, see visuals? How did you feel about what happened?
- ▶ Whatever you remember will be enough; don't try to remember all of it – it's neither necessary nor possible.
- ▶ Finally, give yourself a proverbial pat on the back. Well done!