

A Breath of Fresh Air: Meditation and Visualization Techniques for Positive Attitudes

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Here is a take-home guide that has the highlights of my workshop including the step by step guides to meditation and visualization (with tips). If you came to my workshop I hope you enjoyed it and if you did not here is a present for your loss! ;-)

We as humans have a survival mechanism which compels us to have a negativity bias, but with the power of suggestion we can start to undo this evolutionary programming and start to look at our lives more positively. Meditation allows our brain to become more receptive to positive thoughts that we can visualize before we begin our day.

The meditation I taught is called breath meditation or *anapanasati* in Buddhist teachings and it is a very basic first step into the world of meditation. The visualization technique is something I personally came up with and is an example of how you can visualize positive attitudes that you want to incorporate into your day. I use meditation to help control negative emotions such as sadness and anger by allowing me to acknowledge these emotions but not dwell on them and let them cause me further suffering. I then use visualization to help prepare my mind to make subconscious positive decisions throughout my day that I have already visualized before the day has even started.

Positive Attitudes:

Happy, Loving, Caring, Friendly, Kind, Grateful, Generous, Genuine, Helpful,
Compassionate, Patient, Creative, Accepting, Selfless, Honest, Productive, Playful,
Curious, Excited

How To (Meditation):

- 1) Pick a meditation spot, when you begin learning how to meditate it is recommended that you meditate in the same place every time if possible. I sit at the end of my bed and face the same direction every time. Preferably your spot will be comfortable, quiet and free of distractions (no music playing or TV program on). I would also recommend wearing comfortable clothes.
- 2) Think about your posture. You can meditate in the traditional Lotus position with legs crossed or any beginner variation of it or if you do not know what that is or cannot sit cross legged you can just sit normally. Sit on a chair, bed or couch with both feet flat on the floor, back naturally upright (no slouching but not stiff either) and neck relaxed. If you are in a chair or on the couch do not use the back rest. Put your hands in your lap

palms facing upward with your left hand under your right hand. Once in this position you can close your eyes or just gently cast your eyes downward gazing at your palm with eyelids relaxed.

- 3) To begin meditating take one deep breath in and one deep breath out and then continue breathing as you normally would. First start by counting each complete breath (one inhale and exhale). You will count your breaths until you reach the number 10 and then you will start back at 1. Once you have completed a few rounds of counting bring your attention to the point of contact between the air and your body. For most people this is the tip of the nose but it can also be the upper lip or back of the throat. Concentrate on that point while counting your breaths 1-10. Continue this for however long you can keep your focus.
- 4) When you are finished meditating bring your palms up to cover your eyes, gently massage and warm up the eyelids. Open your eyes and stare into the palms of your hands and then slowly bring your hands away from your eyes. Once you have adjusted to the light you can take your focus off of your palms and come out of your meditation.

How To (Visualization):

- 1) It is important to visualize immediately after your meditation. I recommend doing it before you open your eyes at the end of the meditation (in between step 3 and 4 of meditation).
- 2) Pick a specific positive attitude you want to focus on for the day; this can be happiness, productivity, compassion, sincerity, etc. Remember to only pick one so that you can make your goal more realistic and easier to focus on.
- 3) Visualize yourself going through an average day with this positive attitude. For example if you picked 'helpful' as your positive attitude visualize yourself in 'helpful' situations. What does a helpful you look like? Maybe it looks like you offering a coworker a hand with some heavy books they are carrying. What does a helpful you sound like? Maybe it sounds like you asking a student who is having trouble in class if there is anything they want further clarification on.
- 4) Think about these scenarios for about 5 minutes and then finish your meditation (step 4 in meditation).

Tips (Meditation):

- 1) Meditation requires focus, drink tea or coffee before you start! This will make sure that even though you are relaxed, you won't fall asleep
- 2) Refrain from meditating right before you go to bed or right when you wake up for the same reason (you will fall asleep). If you want to add meditation to your wake up routine or bed time routine make sure there is something in between meditating and sleeping. For

example in the morning brush your teeth and wash your face before you begin meditating and at night brush your teeth and wash your face after.

- 3) Do not try to meditate hungry. The Buddha did it but he was a professional, you are not; you will find yourself thinking more about your next meal and not your breathing. On the other hand, do not meditate after a big meal because you will probably fall asleep.
- 4) Most of these tips are about how not to fall asleep while meditating but here is one that's not (woohoo): if your mind keeps wandering do not try to concentrate "harder" you will only give yourself a headache. When thoughts come into your head acknowledge them and then let them go, and start counting back at the number 1

Tips (Visualization):

- 1) Visualizing is a very personal experience and can be done anyway you want! My How To section is just a base guideline or example of one of the many ways you can visualize positivity
- 2) If you have trouble visualizing in your mind how about drawing it? Draw, paint or sketch whatever comes to mind when you think about the positive attitude you want to accomplish that day. Not artistic? Write or speak out loud sentences that come to mind when you think about your positive attitude.
- 3) Speaking positive affirmations out loud is a great way to help visualize! Here are some examples:
 - a) I will have a great day today!
 - b) I am happy
 - c) I am helpful
 - d) I will be compassionate to others
 - e) Creativity is important!
 - f) I am valued by the people around me
 - g) I am worthy of praise!
 - h) Just happy to be here
 - i) Gratitude is attractive!

Wow I could honestly write so many of those. Make up your own positive affirmations, it's very enjoyable!

- 4) Just have fun with it

I suggest trying to make meditating and visualizing a habit in your daily life but do not beat yourself up if you cannot do it every day. When I get home from school I eat a light snack, workout, shower and then meditate and visualize how I want my next day to look like with my one positive attitude. You can work on a different positive attitude everyday or go on a weekly schedule (Mondays are happy days, Tuesdays are creative days etc). Or you can focus on one positive attitude that you really want to perfect like productiveness or selflessness.

Breath meditation or *anapanasati* is just one form of meditation and provides a baseline for many other types of meditation like mindfulness meditation and loving-kindness (*metta*) meditation. I encourage you to research into these types of mediation once you find you can focus on breath meditation with complete concentration for 20 minutes or longer.

I think meditation is so ingrained into Japanese culture and it really is a tool available for everyone here, you don't have to search long or hard to find resources and inspiration. These techniques have really helped me through a lot of hard times and I hope they can do the same for at least one person reading this!

Other Resources:

Here is a list of other resources that may be of use to you!

- 1) If you are still confused after reading my How To (meditation) section, try: the WikiHow page on "How to Practice Breath Meditation (anapanasati)"
[https://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Breath-Meditation-\(Anapanasati\)](https://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Breath-Meditation-(Anapanasati))
- 2) If you struggle with finding time to meditate every day or you want to turn it into a good habit try reading: "The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business" by Charles Duhigg
- 3) If you struggle with positive thoughts try checking out Jay Shetty's Instagram page, you can follow him and his positive content at: @jayshetty
- 4) If you think you want to try Mindfulness meditation try watching: the Tedx Talk entitled "How mindfulness meditation redefines pain, happiness & satisfaction | Dr. Kasim Al-Mashat | TEDxSFU" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVwLjC5etEQ>