

A Checklist for What Meditation is Not

Although meditation has been practised in Asian cultures for hundreds of years, it is still relatively new to the West. It is easy to be unclear about what meditation is and how it works.

The left column states what meditation is *not*. The column on the right is for your comments and notes.

<p>A religion</p> <p>Although it is possible to practise meditation as part of a religion or spiritual path, it is also of great benefit to people who simply wish to use it to help themselves in their lives and to better understand their minds.</p> <p>Something for people with special skills</p> <p>You don't need to be an especially quiet or contemplative person to learn meditation. It is useful for everyone. You do not need any special skills in order to start.</p> <p>A way of blocking out thoughts</p> <p>People will often say to me that they just cannot block their thoughts while meditating. This is an important misunderstanding – meditation is neither forcing, nor indulging thoughts, but simply allowing them to come and go without commentary, neither pushing them away nor chasing after them, just letting them rise and fade.</p> <p>A way of emptying the mind</p> <p>This is slightly different from the blocking thoughts. We can have the misunderstanding that meditation is about relinquishing control of the mind and allowing it to go into a blank, passive state – like being in a neutral gear, perhaps. Again, this is incorrect. Meditation is all about uncovering and working with the mind's natural dynamism and power, not about dumbing the mind down, or numbing it.</p> <p>Going into a dream, or zoning out</p> <p>Sometimes people will say that they already know how to relax the mind and when I ask how they do it, they describe how they may drive home from work and simply allow their mind to switch off from all the worries of the day and go into a pleasant dreamy state without any focus. Again, this is not meditation but a kind of daydreaming – a way of being on automatic pilot. It may have a short-term relaxing effect, but it does not help to train the mind.</p>	
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