

## Meditation: The Candle

### Description

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Consider some quiet music or nature sounds for the background. Traditional meditative methods sometimes advise music such as from "[Living Meditation – Guided Meditations With David Harshada Wagner](#)" and is available on iTunes. There are many similar albums available from many sources. Not everyone will appreciate or feel comfortable with the droning of the music, and that's fine. You are not obliged to use this music, or any music. Some prefer recorded sounds of streams, or other nature sounds like thunder or frogs croaking – whatever will calm you and help you to focus. Again, you are not obliged to use any sound for meditation. What you must do is to focus on your breathing at all times – breath in and out, observe your body's natural breathing rhythms, and occasionally drawing a deep breath. You can see how this technique can work well for beginning meditators: No words, it's repetitive and natural, and with very little emotional overtone.

### 'The Candle'

Most of this presentation discusses why we meditate and how the candle helps this process. We will discuss the details of the candle meditation at the end.

You cannot stop your thoughts, like water in a river, they keep on flowing on and never seem to run out. Any meditative approach that advocates that you learn to 'silence' your mind will ultimately lead you to frustration. You simply cannot stop thinking so long as you are alive. It's like the rolling river, breathing or the beating of your heart, it simply happens. With breathing, when you force it to go too hard for too long, eventually you will lose consciousness and your breathing will normalize. Thought is somewhat similar in that if you push it too hard for too long, you will also crash – and this can take a variety of forms such as simple fatigue to full on clinical depression and neuroses. Many gurus will teach their students to TRY to stop their minds from thinking, which they dutifully do only to find it's impossible. And this is the whole point.

Your ego (that is, your thinking self) is an artifact of being human, carbon-based, alive, with a functional brain – it is not WHAT you are. Your thoughts, and emotions for that matter, are transient and therefore elusive and ungraspable, like the weather.

Thought is a tool that arises spontaneously when required to solve problems in daily life, but it can also be called upon by you when you need it. We have, however, managed to convince ourselves, in Western culture, that thought is a prized activity and that we should keep our minds constantly busy – you only have to watch children and adults alike in a non-stop frenzy to feed their minds with new information and distraction through a variety of electronic devices.

Using a simple candle you will learn to stop searching for new distractions and input, and simply listen to your own thoughts as you would listen to music, or birds singing, or watch a river roll by. You will learn to identify what is relevant and important, what is optional, and what leads you into trouble. By letting go of unnecessary thinking, we open up more resources for the things we must accomplish. We allow ourselves to ‘detach’ from the regrets of the past and the worries of the future in order to dedicate the energy and resources to more pragmatic things, like building community, strengthening personal relationships, or honing a craft.

Like a carpenter will only reach for his hammer when there’s a nail to deal with, thinking is a tool to be used if and when required. Thinking then, especially of the negative kind, is always optional. Meditation should lead you to realize this and to stop identifying yourself with your thoughts, for they are only a small part of what you are. You are in no way obliged to hang on to any thought pattern you are currently using, including regret for religious, moral, or legal reasons, or worry about tomorrow. Then again, don’t give yourself new reasons to regret or worry – and this is the whole purpose of meditation, to clear your mind of bad mental habits so you can benefit from a richer, more colourful and productive life, free of unnecessary burden.

When you realize your thoughts are not you, you get a sense of opening up to the world around you. Given the realization that your thoughts are simply a part of reality – or if you like, a ‘symptom’ of it – and not the entire reality, you get a sense of unburdening, of relief that perhaps other things are possible. The sense of unburdening is a sign you are now in closer contact with reality and therefore better able to use it, adapt to it. It’s almost funny when you realize it; like living in a tranquil forest but with your head in a noisy box, then suddenly removing it to realize that there is great peace right within you and around you. This is meditation.

The goal of this exercise is first to realize that you are a thinking being and to observe your thoughts, but to realize that your thoughts are only one element in your larger environment. Secondly, that furthermore by becoming aware of your thoughts you become more able to control what happens in your mind. This leads to better appreciation of the present moment, clarity of thought and in decision making, and a sense of joy in one’s life. This joy then becomes apparent to those around you and is truly a healing force, for yourself and your community.

‘The Candle’ is the simplest means of quickly obtaining and then practicing a prolonged and joyful meditative state. There is a definite feeling of warmth and joy that emanates from within when we allow ourselves to get lost in the security and reality of the simple flame.

Like a true meditative state, the candle simply is what it is without forcing itself. You must strive to be

this way, in that even though you have thoughts, you are satisfied to simply know that a) your thoughts are only one part of reality, b) you can think when you need to, c) YOUR THOUGHTS ARE NOT WHAT YOU ARE, and d) you do not have to think all of the time.

The following method is only a suggestion. It begins with a simple exercise to become aware of yourself in the room, then this leads to the meditation proper. There is a pause near the end so don't be alarmed – simply sit quietly during the pause and wait for my voice to return.

Begin by becoming aware of your body, starting with your feet. Feel them with your hands if you wish. Move your attention up your shin to your knee, stop there and move your leg at the knee. Feel how this movement activates your muscles. Stop moving your leg now and move your attention to your thigh, then hip and lower back. Take your time, but try to remain focused and not let your mind stray. Think about your belly how it feels inside and outside. Move your attention upwards to your chest and feel your heart beating for a moment. Put your hand on your heart and feel it: Are you making your heart beat? Is your heart separate from your body? Is your brain separate from your body? Your thoughts are inside your brain and so they are a part of your body, inasmuch as your heart is. Pay attention to your shoulders, move them around to feel the muscles moving. Let your attention drop down your upper arms to your elbows, and move the arms at the elbows for few seconds. Now clench your fists and feel the muscles in your forearms tighten up. Feel your fists as they tighten. Open your hands wide and press them together, fingers spread wide like a starfish on a mirror. Now lay your hands gently upon your face and feel how it feels in your hands. Feel the rest of your head, become aware of it.

Rest your hands in your lap, or upon an arm rest if you have it. Sit straight, but don't force it.

Now look around the room. You're not looking for anything in particular, simply become aware of the various shapes, colours, and objects in it.

You should be comfortable. Now simply stare at the flame. Let your mind become aware of everything in the room, but only look at the flame. Allow your mind to reconstruct as much of the room in your head as you can, but don't worry if you can't get all the details, don't force it. Become aware, now, of yourself in the room, how far you are from the walls, the floor, the ceiling. Visualize yourself on your chair, as though viewing yourself from different angles in the room. Again, you should only be looking at the candle. Visualize your own head, as though again you were someone else observing you sitting there. Realize that inside that head, there is thinking going on.

Keep on looking at the flame. Now, imagine you are climbing inside that head you are observing. Allow yourself to listen to your thoughts, but try not to engage them, or go off thinking about any one thing in particular. Keep your thoughts in your awareness, but no more so than the objects in the room. Keep on looking at the flame.

You will get a sense of how easy it is to get off track and lose focus, but don't worry about this. Just start over, and reset your attention. In time, you will be able to maintain this focus for longer periods. Just be patient with yourself.

Just look at the candle while remaining aware of the environment around you. Do not expect anything to happen. Let your mind calm, like a lake on a calm night, just let the waves of thought settle out. Do this now for a minute ....

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This is the basic process. When your mind is calm, you become aware of your thoughts and your thought habits as they emerge like waves on the still lake. Use your new awareness to shine a light on how your mind works. This will allow you to identify areas that are either unnecessary (things that make you dwell on the past or future, or think negatively about yourself) or ill-advised, such as with addictive patterns.

When you use this technique, I recommend that you take a moment to locate yourself in the room and become aware of your body, such as we did at the beginning. You do not, however, have to do it as I described and you may follow whatever method you like.

You are encouraged to work on this and to extend your focus to several minutes at a time, but this does take time, practice, and patience. You can spend a few minutes with the attached recording of the candle with music to practice right now if you like. Remember, do not be discouraged if this takes time for you to master.

Finally, it is important to note that it is the state of awareness that is important – this is what you are striving to achieve with the candle. The candle itself is only one possible tool to help you achieve this mental focus. Once you are good at it, you can call upon it regardless of what you are doing or where you are, or whether you have a candle or not.

### **Category**

1. Uncategorized

### **Tags**

1. activity
2. meditation
3. self-awareness
4. self-control
5. the candle

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