

Scottish Interfaith Week

8-15 November 2026

Journey into Meditation & Stillness



Interfaith
Scotland

Journey into Meditation and Stillness

What is meditation?

Meditation is a practice of becoming still and paying attention to the present moment. People of any faith, or no particular religious tradition, can use meditation as a way to find greater calm, clarity and connection with themselves and the world around them.

Meditation is practiced in many religious traditions. The earliest records of meditation are found in the Upanishads, and meditation plays a role in the contemplative practices of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Paganism. Meditation-like techniques are also known in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism, in the context of remembrance of and prayer and devotion to God.

The Benefits of Meditation or Stillness

1. Management of challenging situations

Helping to regain a sense of balance or perspective when there is some sort of immediate, challenging issue. It could be physical or psychological pain, for example. Particularly through awareness practice, one can often recognise mental or physical aspects of what is happening or has happened, and stay with simply observing thoughts and sensations.

One common example is a leg falling asleep during meditation -- it is asleep, there's a feeling of pins-and-needles, but one can often come to a place where it is simply how it is in the moment, and it's not a problem. The shift is one from something being a huge problem to grasp onto / try to get away from, to something where the grasp loosens or lets go completely, and what remains is acceptance of how things are.

2. Increasing resilience

Meditation is not a state of relaxation but rather one of quiet awareness that has a quality of gentle alertness. This state can be immensely restorative for mind and body. 10-20 minutes of meditation practice a day could improve the baseline resilience in one's system, or put 'ballast in our boat', so that the winds of life don't throw us about so much.

With more resilience, one can take things in one's stride more easily. Life happens, problems arise, but they can be met with more steadiness of mind and heart.

3. Cultivating positive states

Through practices like loving-kindness meditation, the meditator can actively create positive mind states. This helps create or strengthen neural pathways, helping us heal old wounds and helping us rewire our brains.

Find a place

It can be good to find a quiet place for meditation, whether in a quiet room or outside in nature. You could dedicate a special place in your home for quiet contemplation. Perhaps have a candle, and/or a religious object in that space as a focal point. It is not always easy or possible to find a dedicated space that is quiet and sometimes stillness has to be found amidst the noise of daily life. If there are outside noises where you have chosen to be still, acknowledge them as a part of your practice, rather than getting irritated by them, then let them flow through you.

Posture

The best posture is one that leads you to be both attentive and relaxed at the same time. Examples of these are:

- Sit on a chair, back straight, with both your legs placed, uncrossed, on the floor, with your hands on your lap or upper leg, palms faced either up or down
- Sit or kneel on the floor, on a cushion if you wish, back straight, legs crossed, hands either on your lap or your upper leg, palms faced either up or down

Focus

Some people journey into stillness with their eyes closed, some prefer to have their eyes open. A focal point helps to avoid distractions and aids meditation. Some options are below.

- With eyes open, gaze at a focal point such as a candle or nature, or a space a short distance ahead of you. Let your gaze soften.
- Close your eyes and focus on a point between your eyebrows. This is known as the 'third eye' and is seen as a centre of wisdom in some traditions.
- Simply close your eyes and sit quietly

Breathing

A focus on your breath helps to calm both the mind and the body. The mind can get distracted with so many things. When it begins to wander, gently bring it back, without reprimanding it, to focus on the breath. Some breathing exercises are below:

Take three deep breaths. With each in-breath fill up your lungs with air, then on the out-breath, breathe out in a big sigh.

Breathe in for five seconds, hold the in-breath for five seconds, breathe out for five seconds. Repeat a number of times until you have relaxed into this rhythm.

Gently pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath, letting it become slower and deeper. You can count your breaths if this is helpful.

Imagination

It could be helpful to use different imaginative techniques as a focus in the stillness. These may differ depending on your belief system. Here are some examples below.

- Imagine yourself surrounded by the presence of unconditional love or divine white or golden light encircling you and/or coming from above
- Imagine yourself as a part of nature or looking out into nature. What do you identify with or what gives a sense of peace for you - a tranquil lake, a sturdy tree, a beautiful flower?
- Imagine divine hands resting on your shoulder
- Imagine you are a statue and God is looking at you with unconditional love and acceptance as you rest in the stillness. What does God say to you? How do you respond?
- Imagine God coming and taking you on a journey. What would God say to you?
- Where would God take you? What would you say to God?

Relaxing the body

Below is an exercise to relax the body. You could read this out to a group or try the exercise for yourself. This exercise can also be done in reverse order.

“Allow a feeling of relaxation to flow from the top of your head into your forehead. As you breathe out, breathe away any tension in your forehead.

“Let the feeling of relaxation flow into your face, into the small muscles around your eyes, nose and mouth. Let your jaws relax.

“As you breathe out, breathe away any tension in your face. Let that feeling of relaxation flow into your neck and across your shoulders.

“Breathe away any tension down your upper arms and lower arms to your fingertips.

“With every breath that you take, let the tension ebb away and allow yourself to become relaxed.

“Continue down through your body, relaxing the muscles, down into your chest, tummy muscles, the trunk of your body, down the front of your legs, into your ankles, into your feet, into your toes.

“Then from the top of your head down the back of your head into your neck, down your back, the back of your legs and into your feet, gently and slowly breathe away tension”.

Metta Meditation

'Metta Bhavana' or Loving-Kindness Meditation is a meditation practice taught by Gautama Buddha over 2,500 years ago to develop a mental habit of selfless and altruistic love. In Theravada tradition, loving-kindness is towards all sentient beings, while in Tibetan Buddhist tradition the monks practice 'tonglen' whereby one breathes out and 'sends' happiness and breathes in and 'receives' suffering.

'Metta' means a feeling of love, friendliness, or kindness. 'Bhavana' means development or cultivation. Metta meditation is used to develop four qualities of love: Friendliness, Compassion, Appreciative Joy and Equanimity.

The most common form of the practice is in five stages, each of which last about five minutes for a beginner:

1. In the first stage, you feel metta for yourself. You start by becoming aware of yourself, and focusing on feelings of peace, calm, and tranquillity. Then you let these grow into feelings of strength and confidence, and then develop into love within your heart. You can use an image, like golden light flooding your body, or a phrase such as 'may I be well and happy', which you can repeat to yourself.
2. In the second stage, think of a good friend. Bring them to mind as vividly as you can, and think of their good qualities. Feel your connection with your friend, and your liking for them, and encourage these to grow by repeating 'may they be well; may they be happy' quietly to yourself. You can also use an image, such as a shining light from your heart into theirs.
3. Then think of someone you do not particularly like or dislike. Your feelings are 'neutral'. This may be someone you do not know well but see around. You reflect on their humanity, and include them in your feelings of loving-kindness
4. Then think of someone you actually dislike. It could be someone you are having difficulty with. Trying not to get caught up in any negative feelings, you think of them positively and send your loving-kindness to them.
5. In the final stage, think of all four people together - yourself, the friend, the neutral person, and the person you dislike. Then extend your feelings further - to everyone around you, to everyone in your neighbourhood; in your town, your country, and so on throughout the world. Have a sense of waves of loving-kindness spreading from your heart to everyone, to all beings everywhere into theirs. Then gradually relax out of meditation and bring the practice to an end.

Find out more at www.thebuddhistcentre.com/text/loving-kindness-meditation