



Mindy Newman  
*Developing a Daily Meditation Practice*  
Week 3: Creating Space  
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Hi, my name is Mindy Newman. Welcome to Meditation Month at Tricycle. Throughout this series, we've been focusing each week on a different obstacle that people encounter in developing a daily meditation practice, because that is the goal of this month's theme is developing a daily meditation practice.

In week one, we talked about the body's foundation in terms of working with the aches and pains and discomfort of sitting in meditation. In week two, we talked about the challenge of developing an intention because oftentimes, when people meditate, if they don't really know why they're sitting down to do it, they can find it very difficult to motivate themselves to do it on a daily basis. This week we'll be talking about creating space. And by that, I mean creating space in the mind for whatever is occurring.

I would have to say that in my experience as a meditator, the greatest obstacle that I've faced is really harsh self-criticism about what I was experiencing in my mind. So often, people are taught with meditation—with very good intentions on the behalf of teachers—that when they know things are arising in their mind, they should just bring their awareness back to their breath, or they should let things go. The truth is most of the times, we're horrified by what we're encountering in our own mind—our own distractibility, our jealous thoughts, our memories of feeling embarrassed, our angry thoughts. These are all things that will arise when we sit in meditation and it can be extremely upsetting to encounter.

I once heard a meditation teacher say something that was very helpful to me: Meditation is courageous. It takes courage to sit down and take a look at your mind. I really want to encourage all of us this week to really make a commitment to be gentle with ourselves and really create space. Whatever's happening in our mind is totally permissible. It's totally okay that is there, and it's just something to work with.

Oftentimes what happens when people come to Buddhist practice is that they're caught up in a cycle of trying to fix themselves. What happens is they just become harder and harder on themselves when they feel like they're not fixing themselves in the way that they're supposed to be fixed. Meditation is not intended to be a form of harsh self-flagellation. It's intended to be a tool to help us work with and cultivate ourselves in a positive way.

Today, when we mediate, we're going to do so with an open heart, and an openness to what's occurring in our mind. I invite you to come to a comfortable, seated posture. If you were able to watch the first week's video, use the basis of that practice to help you find a way to sit that's both alert but relaxed. If you weren't able to, that's okay. Just take a moment to find a way to be in your body that you can be still for the next several minutes.

On the basis of this stable posture, commit to trying to be still for the next several minutes. Allow your intention for this mediation to form in your mind. Last week, we talked about the Mahayana Buddhist motivation—that the purpose of meditation is to develop our minds so that we can help ourselves and help all other beings. Today, we're really going to particularly focus on helping ourselves by working with our own minds, with gentleness, and with kindness. You might even say to yourself now, today I give total permission for whatever occurs in my mind.

With that, openness is your intention. Bring your awareness to the sensation of your breath. Notice where in your body you're feeling your breath. It's okay if it moves around. You'll likely find, over the course of this practice, that it'll deepen, slow down. But if it doesn't, that's totally okay. See if you can connect with a particular place, a particular location where the breath is moving.

*[Long pause.]*

You can begin cultivating active acceptance and openness to your experience, creating that space that we were talking about by directing it towards your breath. It's okay if your breath is shallow. It's okay if your chest feels tight. It's okay if your breath is fast or uneven. Rather than changing,

or trying to make your breath be a certain way, see if you can just allow your awareness to rest on it just as it is.

*[Long pause.]*

As the natural obstacles arise, you find yourself distracted by sound, or thinking about something else. As you recognize that that has happened, remind yourself it's okay. The mind thinks. That's what it does. This doesn't mean continuing off on a train of thought. You want to come back to your breath. That's the object of meditation. But just let whatever distraction has arisen be totally fine. It's there. Then just choose to come back to your breath. Make an empowered choice.

(long pause)

If there's a distraction that really grabs you, that feels really challenging to let go of, like a physical pain or a sound, make that the object of your meditation for a while. Really give yourself permission to go into it. When there's an opening to return to the breath, see if you're able to take it. This includes thoughts too. If there's a repetitive thought that keeps coming up again and again, let yourself rest on that thought. Really think it. See what happens. When you discover an opening, a way to find your way back to the breath, see if you can take that opening.

*[Long pause.]*

If your mind is feeling really active, you could try counting the breath. On the inhale say to yourself, one. On the exhale, two, and so forth. Up to ten. And then start back over from one, going up to ten. Occasionally, you'll find that you've slipped past ten. You've made it up to a much higher number and that's fine. Just come back to one.

*[Long pause.]*

As long as you're taking a look at what's happening in your mind and doing your best to return to the object of meditation, you are meditating. Even if you have to redirect yourself every two seconds, you're still meditating.

*[Long pause.]*

As we come to the end of this meditation, it's important to remember that we often don't know the benefit of meditation until much later. Despite the relative ease or difficulty of a given session—we may feel like meditation's going terribly—but we still may notice, in our day to day life, ourselves feeling calmer after a meditation, feeling more focused, feeling less irritated.

It's important to end by recognizing the efforts that you've made to sit and do something really challenging. The harder you found the practice, the more important it is to recognize your efforts. By doing so, you can keep encouraging yourself to keep coming back, to keep opening to your mind, to keep creating more and more space for what's happening in your mind. In that way, you can cultivate more space for other people and their experiences and their concerns as well.