

Meditation

I'm under just a little bit of stress right now, to say the least. Job hunting, packing, a few large projects at work, and staying on top of normal life is not working well for me right now. My allergies decided to flare up (I can't wait to move because I'll have a break from allergies for a while!) and my doctor, in addition to a few other ideas, told me that I need to meditate.

Holding still and not thinking are far from my strong suits. I like moving, being busy, and my brain is always going. Since the nonstop brain activity is the problem, I'm now supposed to hold still and let my brain empty out.

Meditation is much harder than it sounds like it ought to be.

I cannot sit with my legs crossed for very long yet due to my hip still getting a bit achy at times. I can sit against a wall or I can lie down to meditate. A friend of ours also mentioned walking meditation, which I will be trying soon. I have mostly just been working on the traditional "hold still and focus on your breathing" version and I'm finding that quite challenging.

My perception of meditation is probably part of the issue here. I think of it as actually making your mind be peaceful, having nothing in your head, and letting go of everything, a state of deep peace and stillness. I am learning that it is more about acceptance of what is, a state of thoughtless awareness, which is a phrase I'm still working on understanding.

I am learning to accept my brain's constant jumping from one subject to another when I don't have a specific focus. I've tried holding an image in my head, such as a word or a shape, and that helps a little, but I constantly have to refocus. If I don't have a focal point, I end up on tangents and start

thinking hard about all aspects of some problem I'm working through. I understand that using a focal point is not ideal, but I think it's where I have to start.

I sit or lie down. I think about all of my muscle groups in turn and try to relax them. This is not just for relaxation but also because it gives me a pattern to begin. I always do this, so it prepares me for meditating and makes it a little easier to let go of the world. It's rather like my warm up exercises before running. I know that once I start warming up I'm going to be running soon, so my focus shifts to running-related thoughts rather than all of the normal flotsam and jetsam in my head. Relaxing muscle groups triggers me to start letting go, at least a little bit, of everything that has happened that day.

Once I have relaxed everything, I let my mind drift. This is where I'm struggling most. If I just let my brain run, I end up thinking of something, seizing it, and then working on it while I'm supposed to be meditating. I am learning to let thoughts slide through my brain without catching my attention, though that's not easy. The same friend mentioned above described meditation as having to pull back your attention over and over from getting tangled up in specific thoughts. She sat at the kitchen table and said "I start by having a focus at the end of my nose" and mimed a clown nose on the end of her nose. "Then I do this..." and she sat still for a moment, then her eyes wandered, she grabbed at the air to her left and put the nose back on. Another few moments of stillness, then somewhere down by her foot got grabbed and replaced. It made me laugh. It also made me feel better about not being able to keep my brain empty; clearly I'm not the only one for whom this is a challenge.

I was also getting frustrated with muscle aches, itching, and fidgeting. I felt like I should be able to overlook these things, but I get distracted by them and then focused on them and then I lose any semblance of a calm, empty mind. Accepting

what is my reality right now makes that a little better. Yes, I have an itch. Scratching it won't kill the meditation; it's just another place my attention drifts, another reason to bring it back again. It's okay to not be able to hold peacefulness for very long.

This challenge has been difficult for me, but I am still working on it. I'm listening to people who are capable of meditation but also pragmatic about it. This is a way to calm down my brain and make life easier for me in the long run. It requires practice, like any new discipline. I can still work at it and I think, over time, it will help.