

How To Meditate

Do not expect to do well at it, to be able to succeed for more than a couple of seconds at a time in being aware only of your counting [or other meditation focus]. That takes long practice. Simply do your best.

Now begin!

The road of meditation is not an easy one. The first shock of surprise comes when we realise how undisciplined our mind really is; how it refuses to do the bidding of our will. After fifteen minutes of attempting only to count our breath and not be thinking of anything else, we realise that if our bodies were half as unresponsive to our will as our minds are, we would never get across the street alive. We find ourselves thinking of all sorts of other things rather than the simple thing we have just decided to think about. Saint Theresa of Avila once described the human mind as an “unbroken horse that would go anywhere except where you wanted it to.”

Plato also wrote of this problem. He likened the human mind to a ship on which the sailors had mutinied and locked the Captain and the Navigator below in the cabin. The sailors believe themselves to be perfectly free and steer the ship as they feel like each moment. First one sailor steers for a while, then another, and the ship travels in erratic and random directions since the sailors can neither agree on a goal nor navigate the ship toward it if they could agree. The task of a human being, wrote Plato, is to quell the mutiny, to release the Captain and the Navigator so that there can be the freedom to choose a goal and to steer (work) consistently and coherently toward its attainment. Only in this situation when one is free of the tyranny of the whim of the moment can there be real freedom.

How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery by Lawrence LeShan, p.23-4