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Benefits of Meditation

Posted: Aug 17 2015

Over the years, we have heard plenty of people remark that whilst meditation might very well have countless scientifically proven benefits it simply isn't for them. Their reason? That their mind is too active and they personally could never think of nothing.

This is a very common misconception about meditation that we would like to help clear up.

There are two problems with this line of thinking. First of all, let's get something straight here...we *all* have a monkey mind jumping erratically from thought to thought – up to 70 000 of them per day! It is simply the human condition, and it is a fallacy to think that you are unique in this way. The second thing to realise is that the aim of meditation is *not* to think of nothing. In fact, thinking of nothing is contradictory in and of itself. The very act of thinking implies that your brain is actively engaged in cognitive processes, so how could we possibly 'think' of 'nothing'?

Think rather of meditation as a game of sport, but with a twist:

- On Team A, you have your thoughts.
- On Team B, you have the focal point of the meditation (be it your breath, your facilitator's voice, a mantra, etc).
- The ball represents your attention.
- You are the referee.

The only goal of this particular game is to simply realise when your thoughts have your attention, and then to simply return your attention back to the focal point of the meditation. There are no penalties, no yellow cards and no score boards. In fact, you aren't even that *concerned* with who it is that has the ball. You are the referee, and your role is simply to keep one eye on the field.

Many different situations might arise, and they are all very normal:

1. Thoughts dominate the game

Thoughts are expected in meditation. As you begin to relax, your para-sympathetic nervous system is triggered. This is your body giving itself the opportunity to rest and digest. Like dreams during REM sleep, thoughts during meditation (often abstract and nonsensical) are your body's way of dissipating stress that has been built up in your physiology over time.

2. The focal point of the meditation dominates the game

Don't get fooled; The aim of the game is not for your mind to be intently focused on the object of meditation the entire time. This might result in concentrating too hard and ending up with a mild headache. Let go of all control.

3. Your attention oscillates between thoughts and the focal point of the meditation throughout the game

During meditation, it is extremely common for your mind to consistently go between thoughts and the focal point of the meditation the entire time.

4. The ball (your attention) is neglected

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You might fall asleep during meditation. This is probably because you are over-tired and your body simply needs to rest. If you would prefer not to fall asleep, ensure that your head is upright during meditation and not leaning against anything. That way, if you do fall asleep, your muscles in your neck will release causing your head to jolt forward which will usually wake you up in the process. Having said this, sleep might be precisely what your body needs most at this particular moment, so don't fight it too much. If you find yourself consistently falling asleep during every meditation, it could be an indication that you need more sleep at night.

5. The ball is thrown off the field

This refers to when your attention isn't on your thoughts, or on the focal point of the meditation. It is what we have termed 'effortless awareness': the experience you have (often without realising it) where both your thoughts *and* the focal point of the meditation is left behind. Some people call this the 'gap', others describe it as an inner stillness. The only thing that matters is that this is a potential by-product of meditation, and NOT the goal. Don't get attached.

The key is to remember that you are simply the referee in this game, so you don't particularly care who it is that has the ball. And the rules aren't complicated. Your goal is not to win or lose, your goal is simply to blow the whistle and let the game be played!

Article by: Centred Meditation

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