



Editor's Note: Welcome to the **Department of Meditation**, where you are treated to the ageless wisdom and inimitable wit of our very own meditation guru, Constance Wilkinson, psychotherapist and card-carrying Buddhist.

Constance welcomes your feedback and questions about meditation at triptych2@gmail.com

Department of Meditation

by Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA

Unconditional Engagement

Reader Jackie asks the [Department of Meditation](#) for advice: "I live in a small house with a busy family. At times I find it hard to meditate."

Dear Reader Jackie:

Many (if not most) people find it hard to meditate.

Many people find it hard to meditate at all, and most (if not all) meditators certainly find it hard at times. This is so regardless of specific conditions – whether living in a small house or a large one, with family or without family, with a busy family or an un-busy family or a proud couch-potato family; whether meditating in the whirlwind West or the mysterious East, whether home alone or practicing in a group, whether healthy or flu-ish, in a good mood or a horrid one.

But there certainly are conditions conducive to meditation, especially for people just beginning to develop this habit, and especially when doing more formal sitting meditation, as we've been discussing here.

Arguably, one can develop mindfulness in all circumstances, save for general anesthesia or the unexpected swoon, but sitting meditation requires some, well, actual sitting. Doing sitting meditation while next to a shrieking fire alarm is certainly do-able, but would really be missing the point.

So finding a relatively quiet place seems like a good notion. It need not be perfect; indeed, if it were perfect, one might become suspicious! But quiet enough, or quiet-ish, will do.

Reader Jackie has a busy family, no doubt making demands, as families (in my experience) tend to do. One strategy to overcome this obstacle might be: wait until they're asleep or away. If you go to bed five minutes later than everyone else, you'll create a five-minute PM meditation window. If you get up five minutes earlier than everyone else, you've made a five-minute AM meditation slot.

Times two, morning and night, aiming for consistency, and you're well on your way to making meditation practice an ongoing support for your life. Once a day would be fine, if that works better, but pick either AM or PM and make that five minutes an ongoing habit. And everyone does have five minutes, do they not?

So much for the quiet part.

Now, as for the challenge of finding a physical space in a small house: try the living room, unless someone's living there. You don't need a perfect room or a separate room or a shrine, you just need a space that's available and workable.

When the family's in bed, at night, or still sleeping, in the morning, or off at school during the day, turn off your computer and your phone and sit down comfortably in front of the TV or next to it or in some other comfortable place.

Locate your object of focus, as we've discussed before, place it about five or six feet away, and let your eyes and your awareness rest there on it. Your eyes should be pointed downward at about a 45-degree angle, sort of like the slope of your nose.

Follow the technique: breathe naturally, don't try to suppress thoughts, let your attention rest gently on the object of focus. When you notice that you've strayed from the object of focus, which will happen, label it, by saying to yourself, "thinking, thinking," and then return your attention to the object of focus—a flower, a statue, a marble, a rock. Lather, rinse, repeat. For five minutes. (And everyone has five minutes, do they not?)

That's it, and that's do-able. So much for outward circumstances. One can create circumstances conducive to meditation.

Anyone can. Busy, not busy, small house, big house. Anyone can. You can.

But will you? (And I mean you who are reading this article).

That's a different question.



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Let's take another look at what Reader Jackie had to say: At times I find it hard to meditate. Logically, this means that sometimes she finds it easy to meditate. That's great. Looking beyond physical circumstances, which we've considered already, are there other things that can make it hard to meditate?

Not really. No real obstacles. Mental obstacles, you betcha! The backstory to "hard-to-meditate" is a flurry of thoughts created by mind. The content of these thoughts is important to identify, but not important to take seriously.

The thought-flurry goes something like this: I can't I'm too busy my elbow hurts this rooms a mess the kids'll wake up I'm just too jangled I don't have time for this stuff I don't feel in the mood I have real stuff to do I'll do it later I'll do it tomorrow I'll do it someday I can't really do this it's too much of a pain today I'm much too tired I'm much too busy I need to have a nice quiet space before I can practice I'm hungry I need to wash some clothes first I need to call my uncle I need a vacation yada yada yada Om.

Recognizing this thought-flurry is sort of like meeting old friends. You've seen them before. You know they're there. You know what they're all about. Because they're familiar, familiar thoughts, familiar patterns, you become free to not fall under their spell.

You don't have to do what they tell you to do, put off practicing, minimizing, hypnotizing. You don't have to be distracted away from practice. You can just say, hi, right, I remember you, thought-flurry labeled [Wah! I don't want to practice right now!], how're ya doing?

And you don't listen, you start doing your practice anyhow, you just jump right in, it's only five minutes, and you keep on doing your practice. You keep on, day after day. Recognizing thoughts is part of the practice. Five minutes, five minutes. Each session like threading another pearl on a string. This is how you do it. The more you do, the easier it gets.

Working with the mind means working with awareness, and training in mindful awareness is the whole point. We're working to accustom ourselves to remaining present, undistracted, grounded, unmoved and undistracted by passion, aggression, obliviousness. It's not hard, although lots of our automatic discursive thoughts try hard to convince us otherwise.

Just sitting. Easy. Available. Free.

Any questions?

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