

Beginning Meditation Guide

Body, setting, stages and closing

Use it	Based on	Pages
Starting a sitting practice	Hsing Yun	Two

Every body is different. Take what fits and adjust the rest so you feel steady and comfortable.

Posture

Body	Sit in a steady, comfortable position: cross-legged, half lotus, lotus, or in a chair.
Hands	Rest them in your lap, the back of one hand in the palm of the other, thumbs lightly touching as if holding an egg.
Back	Upright but not rigid. Let the spine feel natural.
Shoulders	Relaxed and slightly back, chest open, so breathing is easy.
Neck and head	Stacked above the torso in a way that helps you breathe.
Mouth	Jaw and lips relaxed and lightly closed, tongue resting behind the front teeth.
Eyes	Slightly open with a soft gaze about three feet ahead, or lightly closed.

Setting

Space	Peaceful and comfortable: temperature, sounds, sights and smells that help you settle.
Clothing	Loose and comfortable. Take off a watch or jewelry if it distracts you.
Seat	A cushion, a chair, a folded blanket: whatever supports good posture.

Getting started

Clearing breaths	Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, slowly. Imagine letting go of tension with each exhale. Three times, or until you feel settled.
Settle in	Gently twist left and right a few times until you feel at home in your seat.
Face	Soften and relax.
Breath	Let it become natural, quiet and easy.

Stages of settling

Traditional descriptions of how the mind may settle with practice. They're a map, not a test.

- 1 Turning inward.** Attention moves away from the outside world.
- 2 Wandering.** Attention jumps around. Let thoughts flow until they settle.
- 3 Calm.** The mind gradually grows peaceful. Notice and appreciate it when it comes.
- 4 Clearer stretches.** Moments without distracting thoughts.
- 5 Steadiness.** Noticing distracting thoughts as they arise.
- 6 Deep calm.** A sense of great peace.
- 7 Ease.** The mind feels natural and free.
- 8 One-pointedness.** The mind gathers into a single point.
- 9 Equanimity.** Balance that holds without effort.

Places to rest your attention

Crown of the head	Can help with drowsiness and sharpen attention.
Where hair meets scalp	The feel of skin meeting the air builds body awareness.
Inside the nostrils	Brings awareness to the breath.
Navel	Lets you feel the belly rise and fall.
Where you meet the ground	Brings awareness to your body, posture and the earth.

Closing

- 1** Turn your attention to what's around you.
- 2** Breathe out slowly a few times, letting go of tension.
- 3** Gently rock and twist your upper body, then move your arms and legs.
- 4** Rub your hands and arms to warm them, then your face and scalp, and open your eyes.
- 5** Give your body a moment to return to everyday awareness.

Adapted from Hsing Yun, Only a Great Rain (Wisdom Publications, 1999).