

# ***Doing Your Time with Peace of Mind***

A Meditation Manual for Prisoners



by Doug Booth

This booklet is dedicated to all prisoners and  
all victims of crimes.

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What is meditation? Can it help me with my stress? Will it interfere with my religion? Will I have to join a group? How much time will it take? Is meditation running away from life's problems?



These are typical questions everybody asks about meditation. In the following pages we provide the answers. Then we explain meditation in clear, easy-to-read language so that you can start your own meditation practice. In this manual we present several styles for you to choose from. All of these meditations will bring deep relaxation and clear thinking. You just have to decide which one is best for you, then give it a good try and enjoy the peace of mind that will follow. But first, let's answer those questions.

### What is meditation?

Meditation is, first of all, the calming of the mind through concentration. You've probably noticed how scattered your mind can be, constantly jumping from one thought to another all day long. Meditation calms and focuses your thoughts so you can enjoy some tranquility. As you know, tranquility isn't easy to find in prison or jail, but it can be found—in fact, it's inside you at this very moment! Many prisoners meditate daily and receive great benefits from their practice. Meditation also provides insights into who you really are at the deepest levels and what life is all about.

### How can meditation help with my stress?

Meditation gives you access to that still place at the eye of the storm—that calm center within us all that remains cool even in the midst of chaos and turmoil, that place of understanding and clarity amidst all the confusion. It's a place you can go any time to find renewed strength to deal with life's many challenges. The meditation tools you learn on the inside can be useful on the outside as well. As a friend once said "we're all doing time" unless we learn how to find freedom—freedom from the need to constantly make things different than the way they are. Meditation cools us out so we can carry on with our lives with more serenity and do what needs to be done. Meditation smooths out our rough edges and our knee-jerk reactions, while building and fortifying our core of inner strength and stability.

### Will meditation interfere with my religion?

**NO WAY!** Meditation is not a religion, so it can't interfere with your personal faith. In fact, it can only deepen and enhance your spiritual life. The Centering Prayer technique described below is one way of integrating your faith into a meditation practice.

Meditation is like pumping iron with the mind and heart. It strengthens your ability to see, and then overcome the barriers that separate you from your basic goodness, helping you to reconnect with the best parts of yourself.

## Do I have to join a group?

No. Meditation can be done on your own if you like. It is good to meditate alone, but it is also beneficial to meditate with others. The friendship in a group can be very supportive in your meditation practice. It's up to you. Other meditators can answer questions by sharing their own experiences, just as you will eventually be able to guide others with your own knowledge. It's also helpful to have a teacher who's been down this road before you, although a teacher isn't absolutely necessary. A good meditation teacher won't tell you what to believe or what to think, just how to do the practice, so that you can discover your own truths from your own life.

## How much time will it take?

Again, it's up to you. A good way to start is to meditate twice a day in a relatively quiet and safe place. Try beginning with 10 minutes per session. Before everyone wakes up and after "lights out" are good times to meditate. Meditating first thing in the morning is a good way to start your day with a clear and calm mind. Meditating in the evening is a fine way to end the day and relax before bed. Once you've established a meditation routine, gradually increase the time periods and enjoy the results.

If there is **no** time when it's quiet, meditate anyway. Your power of mind will grow even more quickly. Just like wearing ankle weights when you run, meditating in a noisy dorm will enhance your concentration and improve your ability to meditate peacefully anywhere!

## Is meditation hiding from life?

Not at all. People who don't meditate sometimes say it's withdrawing from life, like hiding in a cave or going up on a mountain top, but people who meditate know better. Meditation is a direct, full-on engagement with life that is done quietly. We experience our emotions and feelings "to the max" in meditation, but we do it in a gentle way—in a way that allows us to handle them and work with them. Through meditation we get to see how our emotions arise, in order to better understand ourselves and the world we've been thrown into. Nothing is suppressed or hidden in meditation. Meditation practice lets us live our lives more fully and passionately than ever before.



## “What style is right for me?”

If the shoe fits, wear it! Several styles are described in this manual. Choose the one that appeals to you and give it a good try. Experiment with different styles if you like. Just like learning a new sport or a musical instrument, or anything else that’s worthwhile, it takes dedication, commitment, and practice. In this case your **mind** is the instrument which you learn to fine tune and play. Meditation is a skill that you will keep with you for the rest of your life. It takes sincere effort at first, but the results can be felt before long. Whatever type of meditation you do, give it your best shot for a month. Think of your practice as an investment in your own peace of mind—it’s an investment in yourself that will yield great benefits to you, your family and your community. It’s a solid investment in your future.

## “Who are you guys anyway?”

This book is published by a group of people who care about prisoners and all those affected by crime. Our goal is to share the meditation techniques that have been such a blessing in our lives. We have no interest in converting you—we have nothing to convert you to. Most of us have been teaching meditation in prisons and jails for several years, and we have seen the good it can do and the lives it has changed. It gives us great pleasure to share with you the peace and joy of meditation.

## First a word about timekeeping, posture, and distractions



### Timekeeping

A watch with an alarm is best. If you have one, set it for the period of your meditation. If you are meditating with others, have one person be the time keeper. Don’t watch the clock while meditating— it will inhibit your concentration. An alarm clock is not preferred as it will end your meditation with a jolt, unless you can adjust the volume.

### Posture

Your posture while meditating is very important. Some styles of meditation have precise instructions regarding posture, but the basic idea for all styles is to adopt a posture that keeps you alert yet relaxed. The spine should be kept fairly straight but not stiff. If you sit in a chair to meditate you can place a rolled-up sweatshirt behind your lower back. This will support your back

and also keep your upper back away from the chair so that you don't fall asleep. Place both feet solidly on the floor and put your hands anywhere that's comfortable.

You can meditate on your bunk either by sitting on the edge or with your back against the wall. You can also sit on a cushion/pillow on the floor and sit cross-legged, or build yourself a small meditation bench, (plans are available on request).

Once you take your seat, try not to move too much. See if you can withstand the itches without scratching. This will help you begin to withstand the really difficult things life throws in your path.

## **Distractions**

Meditating in prison involves distractions; this is a given. The only question is how you handle them. At first they will be aggravating, but with time you will learn to deal with them. When you hear sounds like voices, music, TVs, slamming doors, and loudspeaker announcements, see if you can imagine those sounds flowing in one ear and out the other. Try not to resist the sounds—it won't help. Don't bother trying to identify the sounds; just let them go without clinging to them or getting angry with them. One inmate uses the slamming of the steel doors as a "mindfulness" bell, reminding him to return from his daydreams back to his breath again and again. Be creative and flexible with distractions. They will only be a problem if you allow them to be.

## **The Styles of Meditation**

The five styles of meditation presented here are:

1. The Body Scan
2. Mountain Meditation
3. Centering Prayer
4. Walking Meditation
5. Kindness Meditation

### **1. The Body Scan**

The body scan is a good way to begin a period of meditation. You can also use the scan as the focus for your entire meditation period. See what works best for you. In this meditation you visualize various parts of the body as you slowly focus your awareness from the top of your head to the soles of your feet.

Find a comfortable posture as described in the "posture" section above. Now feel yourself sitting. Feel the pressure against your legs and buttocks. Feel where your hands are touching. Feel your lips touching. Feel the breath going in and out of your nostrils. Let your emotions and thoughts settle in your body the way sediment drifts to the bottom of a pond after a storm, allowing the water to become clear. Let go of your pressing concerns and important questions. Let them all go.

Now bring your awareness to the top of your head—picture it in your mind. Now come down to your forehead. Let go of any tightness you find there—relax the muscles behind your eyebrows. Raise your eyebrows so you can feel where the muscles are. Now come down to the eyes and their muscles. Let them relax and soften, letting go of any tension. You need not hold it any

longer. Now come down to your jaw muscles and relax them, letting go of any tension. Breathe into these areas as you visualize them. This is done by simply imagining healing breath flowing into the area. Breathe out the tension and its toxins. Meditation is called the practice of purification. Allow these areas to be purified by your awareness and your breath.

Keep your breathing easy and natural throughout the body scan. The breath often gets shallow when you concentrate on the body. Remember to let the breath breathe itself naturally without forcing it to be any particular way.

Continue the body scan down into the neck and shoulders, softening the tension if you can. Take your time in these areas as they are usually full of tension and tightness. Try to bring a kind attention to the body as you do the scan. We all have so many issues with our bodies, parts we like, parts we hate. The body scan makes peace with the subtle war we wage against our bodies—keeping your awareness soft and gentle is one way to end this war.

If you reach a place in your body that won't relax, that's okay. Just hold the place in a gentle awareness, letting it be just the way it is.

Continue the body scan going slowly down the front of your torso. Don't rush—this isn't a race. In fact, the slower you go the better. Travel down through the chest and pectoral muscles to your stomach, releasing and relaxing as you go. Feel free to travel back to areas where tension creeps back in. Our bodies have learned to store tension in these areas, and it will take time for it to release. With gentle persistence, you will release an extraordinary amount of tension and stress.

If any emotions arise while you do the scan, such as sadness or happiness—not a problem. Just **notice how the emotion feels in your body** and whether or not it changes. Then continue the body scan where you left-off.

Move on down into the pelvic area, releasing and relaxing—letting go. Then travel back up to the shoulder muscles again to release the tension you find there. Then continue the scan through your arms, the biceps and elbows, forearms, wrists, hands and fingers. Take a moment to marvel at the miracle of your five fingers. Then, travel one last time back up to the shoulders and start the descent down your back—through the shoulder blade muscles, mid-back and lower back.

If you find pain anywhere take your time with that area. Holding it in mercy and forgiveness rather than anger and resentment. A kind attitude will promote your healing, both mental and physical.

Continue on through the buttocks and thighs, paying attention to your breathing from time to time, to see that it is relaxed. Breathe your way into your knees and calves, ankles, feet and toes.

Now that you are relaxed, you can either start one of the other meditations or repeat the body scan as many times as you like, or you can go on about your day. Enjoy!

## 2. Mountain Meditation

Like other meditation practices Mountain Meditation is a way to develop calm and concentration, as well as to deepen wisdom and open the heart. In this meditation we use the imagery of a

mountain to deepen our sense of presence and stability. Mountain Meditation is practiced by focusing on the breath as you envision yourself sitting like a mountain—peaceful and serene. When thoughts arise, briefly notice them and then return to the breath. This centering meditation brings a marvelous calm and clarity to your whole being.

Find a comfortable posture as described in the “posture” section. Now feel yourself sitting. Feel the pressure against your legs and buttocks. Feel where your hands are touching. Feel your lips touching. Feel the breath going in and out of your nostrils. Let your feelings and thoughts settle in your mind and body, the way sediment drifts to the bottom of a pond after a storm, allowing the water to become clear and transparent.

Now picture your favorite mountain, perhaps one you have climbed, or you can just imagine one. Feel your breath at the place where you feel it most clearly, at the nostrils or in the rising and falling of the stomach. Feel the in-breath from its very beginning, all the way through until your lungs are filled. Then feel your out-breath all the way through until your lungs are emptied. Then start again, paying very close attention to the breath. Feel yourself sitting calmly, solidly as if you were the mountain. Sit with the dignity and presence of a mountain. Feel the movement of your breath as wind passing through the trees, moving their branches, rustling the leaves. Feel the trees gently moving in a wave as a wind moves up the mountain. There’s nothing to fear no matter how strong the wind blows. Nothing can harm the mountain. Keep your attention on your breath—the feel of the in-breath and out-breath—the wind blowing through the trees on the mountain.

Now say to yourself silently, “mountain” on the in-breath, and say “peaceful” on the out-breath. After you are established in following your breath, you can let go of these words and just feel the breath—the wind singing through the trees. Again, when thoughts arise just notice that you are thinking and say “later” to the thoughts, and then come back to your breath. Be strong and disciplined. It will pay-off.

The wind may pick up at times. You may think of something that is disturbing: a person who angered you or someone who has hurt you. Perhaps an emotional “storm” is coming. Just let it come. You don’t need to replay the argument you had in your mind. Just sit there in the midst of all the emotions that arise, all the storms of the mind. From your heart-center, from the mountain, you can endure it all. The mountain can withstand forest fires, earthquakes, blizzards, tornados—it’s still the mountain. Simply notice that the feelings are unpleasant and return to feeling your breath. Then continue to sit with the patience, perseverance and the strong heart of the mountain.

### *Riding out the bad storms*

Sometimes our emotional storms are long-lasting or they keep returning, whether we are meditating or not. Feelings of anger and rage, sadness and grief can be painful when they get a strong grip on us. The good news is that meditation is an excellent way to work with the storms, allowing them to do what storms always do—pass on through. While these emotions are certainly unpleasant, the best way through them is directly into them—into the eye of the storm. With familiarity, our difficult emotions become more manageable and less threatening. We are better able to see who we are and how our “buttons” get pushed. This understanding leads to greater



wisdom and peace of mind, and then to kinship with others, as we see that our problems are similar to the challenges we all face.

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is also advisable to seek the help of a counselor in dealing with these mind-storms. Counselors are helpful in not only working with difficult emotions, but also in integrating the insights that arise in your meditation.

Here's a meditation technique for dealing with difficult frames of mind. When the unpleasant thoughts or emotions first appear, just note them as previously mentioned. Name the emotion: "angry," "sad," "lonely," or whatever is up for you, **without** going back into the memory that triggered it. If the unpleasant emotion fades away, return to feeling the breath.

If it doesn't fade, or if it comes back with a vengeance, try this. Stop meditating on the breath. Instead, meditate on the *feeling* of the emotion in your body. Concentrate on your tight chest or knotted stomach or your clenched jaw. Feel the emotion fully wherever it appears in your body. Breathe into the feeling, just as instructed in the Body Scan earlier in this book. Once again, name the emotions as you feel them.

Remember, **it's okay to feel your emotions, whatever they may be!** Feeling our emotions without pushing them away is deeply healing and freeing. When we repress our feelings, or act them out against another person, that's when we get into trouble.

If tough emotions persist it is often wise to give your meditation a rest for a while and do something else. Or, when all else fails try the Forgiveness Meditation as described later in this book. Riding out the storms is some of the most rewarding work of meditation. By working with difficult emotions you are coming to terms with who you are. *Only* with this basic acceptance is growth and transformation possible for us.

By working with tough emotions two things become clear; 1) as we stop resisting our emotions, and allow them to speak their piece they will eventually run out of juice and leave us be, and 2) **our emotions are not who we are**, they are just feelings that come and go. They were conditioned to be present by the lives we've led and, once they are revealed and understood, they lose their power over us. Then we are free to return to the clarity and peacefulness of our true nature.

When the mind-storms subside return to your breath, it will keep you from wandering too far from the mountain. No matter how many times you get lost remember that you can always return to your breath, to your serenity, to your heart-center—the mountain will always be there for you.

### 3. Centering Prayer Meditation (special thanks to Father Thomas Keating, one of the originators of centering prayer)

This meditation is good for those who have a strong religious background, whatever it may be. It can be used if you are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Native American, or any other faith. You simply find a sacred word that has deep meaning to you and let this word invite the divine action of the Spirit to take place within you. This is **not** a passive prayer technique by any means—it is both dynamic and transformative.

Find a comfortable posture as described in the “posture” section above. Now feel yourself sitting. Feel the pressure against your legs and buttocks. Feel where your hands are touching. Feel your lips touching. Feel the breath going in and out of your nostrils. Let your emotions and thoughts settle in your mind and body, the way sediment drifts to the bottom of a pond after a storm, allowing the water to become clear and transparent.

Now allow a sacred word to rise to the surface of your mind. A short word will do, like “Allah,” “Jesus,” “Mary,” “Tunkashila,” “Wakan Tanka,” “Yahweh,” “Buddho,” the name of a child you care about, or any other name that has meaning for you. Saying the word prepares the ground for your meditation and for the healing action of the Spirit.

Take a few deep breaths. Let your awareness rest on your breath—feeling the breath as it passes in and flows out. Feel the breath as it enters your nose and travels into your lungs. Where do you feel the breath most clearly? In the nostrils? In the throat? In the rising and falling of the stomach? Wherever you feel it most, let that be the place you feel the breath throughout your meditation. Feel your breath from the very beginning of the in-breath, all the way through until your lungs are filled, then feel the beginning of the out-breath. Feel the out-breath all the way through as your lungs empty themselves, then observe that moment when the out-breath stops. Now begin again, feeling the sensations of the in-breath where it is most predominant.

After feeling a few breaths, it is time to bring your sacred word into the meditation. Say the word silently from your heart mind as you begin the in-breath, then say it again as you breath out. It’s as if you’re sailing along on quiet waters; your breath is like the gentle wind filling your sails keeping you going. Your sacred word is like the rudder keeping you on course and centered. During meditation there is nothing else to do, nothing to figure out, nothing to achieve, nothing to prove, just sail along feeling your breath and saying your sacred word. Let go of thoughts when they enter your mind. Let them drift in and drift away effortlessly, without stress without strain, saying “later” to them. Let the healing action of the sacred word sink into your heart. After a while, you will feel the sacred word within you and you will no longer need to say it. Continue feeling your breath and letting go of your thoughts, and enjoy your meditation. It is your gift to yourself.

#### **4. Walking Meditation**

Walking meditation is a good alternative to sitting practice. It’s particularly suited to “lock-downs” and other times when you’re in your cell, or out in the yard. It is the same as sitting meditation only instead of feeling your breath, you are feeling the movement of walking. By focusing on the sensations in the feet and legs you are, once again, unifying your mind and body in the present moment. Walking meditation is a perfect complement to the serenity of sitting meditation. It brings a bright energy to your practice.

Some find it easier to concentrate on their footsteps than on their breath, especially when they just can’t sit still. Try it for yourself and see how walking meditation works best for you.

To begin, choose a path the length of your cell. Set a timer for 10 or 15 minutes (increase the time as you like). Now stand quietly. Close your eyes. Feel yourself standing—the pull of gravity on your body, the pressure on your feet. Relax your shoulders. Relax your breathing. There is no

where to go, nothing to do, just enjoy the peace of standing still. Listen to the sounds around you. No need to figure them out, just let them drift in and out of your mind.

Now open your eyes and view your walking path. Make the resolution to keep your concentration on your feet as you walk the length of the path. Now slowly begin walking. Feel the sensations of lifting your foot, moving it forward, and then placing it on the ground. Say to yourself “lifting,” “moving,” “placing” with each movement. Allow your walking to be slow and peaceful. Stay relaxed—you can’t do it wrong as long as you pay attention. Just remember to return your concentration to your feet when you notice that you are thinking thoughts. Let the thoughts go and return to your feet.

You’ll soon realize that, unlike our usual walking, we’re not going anywhere in walking meditation. It’s another means to access the peacefulness of being present. Don’t feel as if you need to accomplish anything. Just imagine that your body is taking **you** for a walk.

Eventually you will notice more of the sensations of walking—the feeling of your clothes brushing past your legs, the feeling of your toes bending, the point when your awareness shifts from one foot to the other, when a step begins and when it ends. Try your best to stay focused. You’ll be amazed at how relaxing and enjoyable walking meditation can be.

## 5. Kindness Meditation

“Kindness” is a loaded word in prison. It’s often confused with weakness or passivity—not particularly healthy traits on the “inside.” But Kindness Meditation is not about being “warm and fuzzy.” It is a practice that actually strengthens our hearts and increases our ability to connect with others at the deepest levels. Kindness Meditation brings out our best nature, helping us to be of service to our brothers and sisters both inside and outside of prison. It also reconnects us with that person whom we so frequently neglect—ourselves.

Kindness Meditation is done by repeating phrases silently to yourself. Use the phrases listed below or invent your own. The idea is to find words that connect you with your heart and the hearts of others. Don’t be surprised if the phrases don’t seem to be working at first. They operate on a subtle level, so even when you aren’t feeling loving or kind, a transformative and healing process **is** going on—you can count on it.

Reserve 5 or 10 minutes a day for either of the two Kindness Meditations. Do it consistently for a month and see how it affects you.

### *Kindness Meditation #1*



Find a comfortable position—a little more relaxed than the other meditation postures. Tune in to the feeling of your breath going in and out of your body. Let all thoughts and concerns settle and fade away. Now picture in your mind’s eye someone whom you love or like a lot. It can be a child, a parent or friend, a mentor, or anyone else you particularly like or respect. Continue to picture the person and feel the feelings that arise. Take your time with the phrases—let them sink in. Repeat them for as long as you like. You can say them for a while towards one person, then change to another person as you wish. Once you know the phrases, say them with your eyes closed. Make the meditation your own.

“May you be happy.”

“May you be safe from harm.”

“May you be healthy.”

“May you be peaceful.”

“May you be loved.”

Before you leave this Kindness Meditation always save some time to direct kindness towards yourself. Simply replace “you” with “I”, so you say, “May **I** be happy,” “May **I** be safe from harm” and so on.

This may well be the most important part of the meditation.

*Kindness Meditation #2 (Forgiveness)*



This next meditation is also very powerful. It’s called Forgiveness Meditation. It’s made up of three parts; forgiveness towards ourselves, forgiveness towards others, and asking others to forgive us.

It is very important to use your good sense in knowing when you’re ready to forgive and when you are not. For example, before you forgive another person, it’s important that you first work through the anger and pain they have caused you. Also, forgiveness of oneself is only appropriate once you’ve come to terms with what you have done that needs forgiveness. It’s important to consider why you did something harmful and make the resolve not to do it again. But, it is the quality of mercy that we are generating here—a quality that the world can surely use more of. In the end, only you know when it’s the right time to forgive.

Like the first Kindness Meditation, Forgiveness Meditation should be done on a daily basis. It’s also very helpful when you’re really down and depressed. Forgiveness Meditation gradually shifts your feelings of guilt, anger and frustration in a natural way. Set a regular time for Forgiveness Meditation and give it a good try.

Here are some phrases for you to use. Choose the ones you like or invent your own. It helps to have a photo of yourself as a child. If you have a photo, place it front of yourself, or if you don’t have one, then picture yourself as a kid—an innocent child. Now turn your attention to the feeling of sitting. Hear the sounds as they arise and pass away. Feel your breath passing in and out of your nose. Now relax. Once you know the phrases close your eyes, while holding the image of yourself as a child.

“I forgive myself.”

“I give myself permission to be a learner.”

“I give myself permission to make mistakes.”

“I will try not to repeat my mistakes. I forgive myself for having made them.”

“Let me earn the right to be forgiven by my efforts not to repeat my mistakes.”

“I’m doing the best I can.”

“I forgive myself.”

“I have carried the burden of this shame and guilt for long enough.”

“I forgive myself.”

When doing forgiveness of others simply address the meditation to them instead of yourself. For example, “I forgive **you**,” and so on. Then modify the words when asking for the forgiveness of others. “Please forgive **me**,” and so on. The repetition of these phrases eventually softens emotions that have hardened over time, allowing a more peaceful attitude towards ourselves and others. Life is too short to carry old grudges—especially the grudges we carry against ourselves.

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. We welcome your comments and questions. You may contact us

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MAY YOU BE AT PEACE