

*Question: Can you tell me how to meditate?*

*Answer: In meditation practice, we put the mind on one object, just one object and let it stay there without allowing it to drift off. Once the mind is willing to stay on one object, it will automatically become contented and calm, and if it is very calm it will enter samadhi. All the activities that we do in the world lead to restlessness, and the more we follow them the more restlessness there is. The simple activity of putting the mind on just one point reduces the restlessness and leads to calm. There are two basic methods that I teach, and the first is anapanasati or mindfulness of breathing, fixing the attention on the breath and knowing it as it comes in and goes out. The second method, for people who think a lot, is the mental repetition of a parikamma word, usually buddho but dhammo or sangho can also be used. If people find either method difficult on its own, they can combine them by thinking “bud” on the in-breath and “dho” on the out-breath while keeping their attention on the movement of the breath at the tip of the nose. To develop sati (awareness), it is essential that we have a point of reference – buddho or the breath – so that we know when the mind is wandering off. The moment we notice the mind is going off the object of meditation, we should pull it back. Don’t ask yourself why the mind is going out, for that is its nature. Just keep pulling it back, no matter how important the thought seems to be. The aim is to maintain sati on the object of investigation.*

*Meditation can be done sitting or walking, but it’s sometimes easier to concentrate the mind while walking rather than sitting because the citta (heart–mind) is involved in controlling walking whereas sitting meditation requires all the focus of the citta to be on the object of investigation. For walking meditation, find a path about 15–20 metres long and walk up and down at a normal pace, although if the mind is restless you can also walk fast. The faster you walk, the less effort is needed to concentrate the rest of the citta, but don’t run, just do fast walking. When the mind gets concentrated, your pace will slow down, but don’t get too slow because then you will become dreamy and the mind will drift off. Just keep your attention on the breath or buddho while walking, and fix your eyes about one metre ahead of you without looking left or right. The moment you turn, reflect on how long you have been aware of the buddho or the breath, and then determine to be with the buddho or the breath for the next one path length. Then when you next turn, reflect again (without condemning yourself if your awareness had drifted off) and repeat the process. While being with the buddho or the breath, you can also be aware of the movements of the body, but that only comes when a certain level of concentration has been reached. Using these techniques, it is very easy to get the mind calm. Think about what the other people in the world are doing to find contentment. They work and work like mad, but they either never find contentment or find it only in snatches. However, putting the mind on one object of attention is a simple way of reducing the restlessness that makes the monkey mind run here and there.*