

A large illustration on a light blue background. In the center, a flock of approximately 25 grey birds is flying in various directions. Surrounding the birds are several stylized, golden-yellow clouds with a spiral or marbled texture. The clouds are positioned in the top right, middle left, middle right, and bottom left corners.

Mindfulness


Live in the moment and enjoy life to the full

Gill Hasson






Beginner's Mind



Begin doing what you want to do now.

We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand, and melting like a snowflake.



FRANCIS BACON



Beginner's mind



Usually, what we do and how we think is based on our past experiences, thoughts and beliefs. We think about things, ourselves and other people the same way as we've always thought about them, and we do things in the same way as we always have.

But thinking and doing things in the same old ways keeps us out of the present and forces us to live in the past. Responding to other people, situations and events in familiar, established ways limits how we act in, and respond to, the world around us. It makes it likely that we'll miss out on all sorts of possibilities and discoveries, new ideas and ways of seeing and understanding.

It's different for young children. Experiencing so many things for the first time, they approach even the most ordinary of events with interest and curiosity. For them,

every day brings learning and surprises. How might our own life be different if we let go of our preconceptions?

Rather than thinking and behaving in ways that are based on the past, a **beginner's mind** encourages you to start afresh and to respond to things as they are right now, in the present. With a **beginner's mind** you free yourself from your assumptions, expectations and preconceived ideas about someone or something and you engage with other people, events, objects and activities as if for the first time.

The more you approach life with a **beginner's mind**, the more you will experience life in the present moment.



Standing meditation

Qigong (pronounced ‘chee-gung’) is a Chinese practice that tunes and integrates the body, breath and mind so that they are in harmony with one another. Although there are many styles of *qigong*, they are all based on a standing meditation – *Zhan Zhuang* – which means ‘standing like a tree’. This standing meditation is a simple practice you can use to start your day.

Tuning your body

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Imagine your feet rooted to the ground like a tree. Use a minimum effort to stand but stand tall.

Now, hold your left hand in your right hand, and place both hands on your abdomen. As you breathe in and out your hands will feel your belly moving and enable you to focus on your breath more easily.

Tuning your breath

Breathe in and out through your nose. Just allow the air to enter and leave effortlessly; slow, long and continuous.

Tuning your mind

Once your posture is balanced and your breath is calm, your mind can become calm; thoughts can settle by themselves in harmony with your posture and breathing.

Stand like this for a minute or two, for as long as is comfortable and for you to feel present in your body, connected with the Earth, and to feel calm, centred and balanced.

Now, approach your day as a beginner.

Not only can a standing meditation be used to start your day, it can be used whenever you feel the need to ground yourself, feel more balanced and to start again with a **beginner's mind**.



Awareness and acknowledgement

As well as encouraging us to have a **beginner's mind** – to be more **aware** and experience things anew – mindfulness also encourages us to **acknowledge** and appreciate the world around us.

Are there objects, places, people, activities or situations that are so familiar that you no longer notice them or appreciate their worth and value in your life? After the initial thrill of acquiring something or being able to do something for the first few times, the good feelings have worn off. Now, you simply take it for granted; you give it little thought, you assume you'll always have it or be able to do it. But you *can* be more mindful.

Choose three objects in your home. Remember how you felt when you acquired each one. Remind yourself of what it was about each object that you found useful or that you liked or that made you happy.

Now think of something you can do. Can you, for example, remember when you first learnt to ride a bike; how thrilled and excited you were with your newly acquired skill.

The more you pause to be aware of, acknowledge and appreciate what you can do and what you have, the less you will be reaching for the next thing and the more in the moment you become.



Being aware of nature

The elements of the natural world – the trees and plants, the animals, the hills and mountains, rivers and other features of the Earth – offer so much for your senses to be **aware** of, to **acknowledge** and appreciate.

Feeling the warmth of the sun on your face, recognizing the smell of recent rain, watching the wind blow through the trees, sensing the power of the sea, gazing at the enormity of a star-filled sky; these are

the kinds of moments in
which we can easily
experience being
connected to
and part of
something




bigger, more eternal
than both the physical
and ourselves.

Nature connects the
past, present and future. It
can anchor you and give
perspective; enable you to be
aware of where you are and
how you are connected to the greater scheme of things.




There is so much to be **aware** of. Step back to look at
the big picture: the hills and valleys; the landscapes and
the views; the rivers and seascapes. Look at the small
details – a leaf, a flower, a blade of grass, a shell, a feather,
an insect, a spider's web. Examine them in greater detail.
Look for colours, patterns and symmetry.

Be **aware** that nature doesn't just exist in the
countryside, parks and gardens. It is all around, in the
streets and buildings in the towns and cities. Listen, for
example, to the birds, or look for the grass and moss
growing through the cracks in the pavement. Wherever
you are, nature is always there.




Five senses meditation

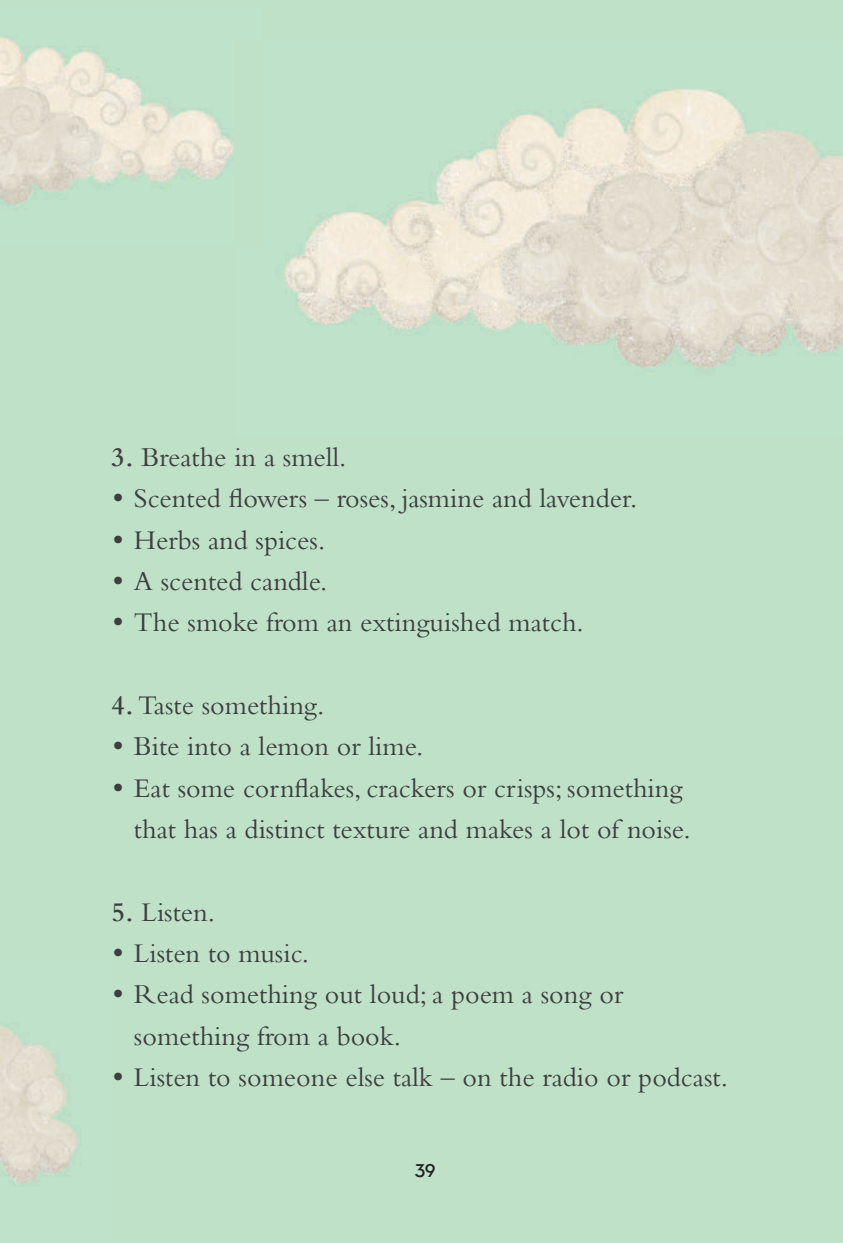


Whenever things feel off balance and out of your control, the five senses meditation can connect you immediately with the present moment, allowing you to feel grounded, no matter what's going on around you.

1. Look – really look – around you and notice what you can see. Search for something that you don't normally notice, like something tiny or something up high. Notice colours shapes and patterns.

2. Be aware of something that you can feel. Notice the texture – how rough or smooth, hard or soft, or warm or cold something is.

- Put your hands under running water.
 - Take a hot or cool shower.
 - Pop some bubble wrap.
- 



3. Breathe in a smell.

- Scented flowers – roses, jasmine and lavender.
- Herbs and spices.
- A scented candle.
- The smoke from an extinguished match.

4. Taste something.

- Bite into a lemon or lime.
- Eat some cornflakes, crackers or crisps; something that has a distinct texture and makes a lot of noise.

5. Listen.

- Listen to music.
- Read something out loud; a poem a song or something from a book.
- Listen to someone else talk – on the radio or podcast.



Mindful listening

The idea of this exercise in being **non-judgemental** is to listen to some music from a neutral position with a present awareness that's unhindered by preconceived ideas or past experience.

Find a piece of music you've not heard before. You could do this by going to a music-streaming service and picking something at random. Or you could ask someone else to pick something they think you might not have listened to before: folk, blues, jazz, punk, classical or opera.

Try not to get drawn into judging the music by its genre, title or artist name before it has even begun. Instead, just listen. Whether the music is or isn't to your liking at first, let go of your judgement and give acceptance a chance.

Don't think. Don't judge. Just listen.

Try to separate out and listen to the sound of each instrument. Listen to the vocals; the sound of the voice, its range and tones. If there is more than one voice, see if you can separate out each voice.

Don't think. Don't judge. Just listen.



Letting go of self-judgement

Many of us are familiar with our inner critic: that disapproving voice in our head that is quick to judge and is ready to give us a hard time. But how can we let go of self-judgement and self-blame when we've made a mistake or done something we believe to be wrong?

First, try to become aware of judgements arising in your mind. Whenever you feel guilt or regret, notice the thoughts you have about yourself. More often than not you won't even notice when you're berating and reprimanding yourself. But when you do, ask yourself, 'In what way is it helpful for me to think like this?'

Know that all the time you are unable to forgive yourself for something that happened days, weeks, months or even years ago, you're living in the past; you're letting the hurt and pain burden you by holding onto it.

Think about how you will view your mistake, what you did wrong or failed to achieve a year from now, in two years or five years? That's not to say that you don't take responsibility for whatever you did or didn't do. Taking responsibility means you accept what you did or didn't do. Nothing can change what happened. But what *can* change is what happens next. Learn from it – act differently next time.

Acknowledge that you're continuing to grow into the person you're becoming, and that the person you are right now also deserves kindness.

Then let it go and move on.

