

Guide to meditation



Terri Ann's

— 123 PLAN —

- MIND - BODY - NUTRITION -

GUIDE TO MEDITATION

Marcus Aurelius in his composition, *Meditations*, noted that if you are distressed by something external the pain is not due to the external thing but to your estimate of it and that means you have the power to alleviate that pain at any time when you look inward.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is a type of cognitive practice, a technique where you train your brain to focus on a particular object or activity. This type of awareness is both something we do naturally day in and day out and something we have to cognitively train just like any other technique, hobby, tool, or exercise.

Meditation finds its roots in **cognitive defusion**.

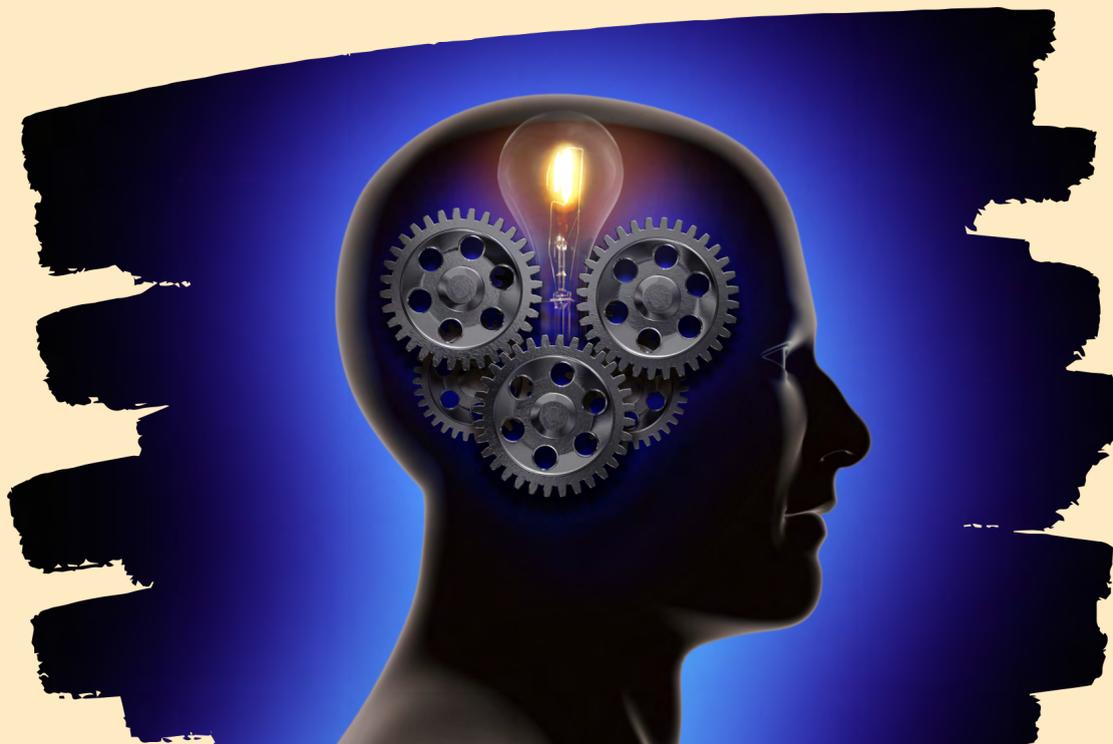
COGNITIVE DEFUSION

Cognitive defusion is a form of meditation or mental practice where you distance yourself from your thoughts, mentally.

This, like most forms of meditation, is something you already do everyday without giving name to it.

For example:

When somebody cuts you off after a long day of work and nearly causes an accident on your drive home, you might think about ramming into the back of their car for payback, yelling something about good manners accompanied by a rude gesture, or even throwing the remainder of your lunch burrito out the window at their windshield.



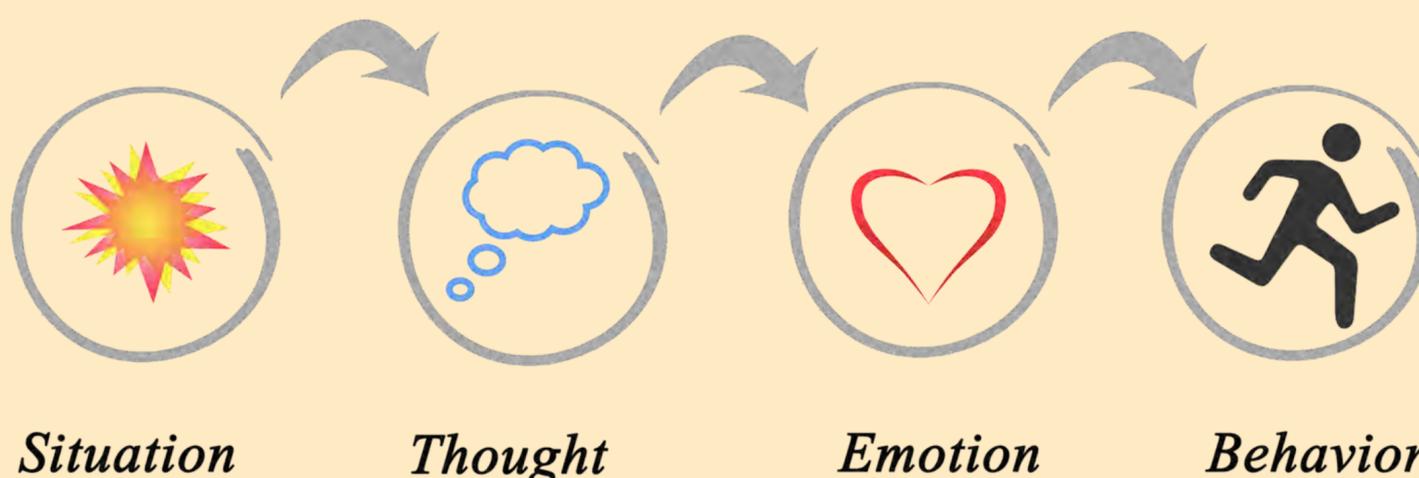
BUT YOU DON'T.

You don't let those thoughts embody who you are and turn themselves into action. Instead, like most people, you just sigh heavily, tighten your grip on the steering wheel a little more, and move on with your day. We practice cognitive defusion in a positive way as well.

For example:

Let's say you are very excited about an upcoming events, and you are so excited about this event that you think about interrupting your boss in the middle of a presentation to tell him all about what activities you have planned or you think about telling a family member who just got diagnosed with cancer all about how excited you are.

Cognitive Model



BUT YOU DON'T.

You have these thoughts but instead of letting them consume you and dictate your actions, there by defining who you are, you meditate a little, you distance yourself from that thought by recognizing the thought as a standalone idea (“I really want to interrupt Auntie Muriel and tell her all about my trip but that would be really insensitive since she is telling me about her diagnosis in order to get emotion” or “I should just ran into the back of his car. That would teach him to cut people off and be such an irresponsible driver”), and adding to the beginning of that thought something like “I am thinking of ramming into their car, but I won't”. As soon as you add something to the beginning like “ I am thinking” or “ I noticed earlier I had the thought that...” you literally add distance between your actions and who you are and that particular thought.

TYPES OF MEDITATION

If you read Health journals or listen to gurus online they will talk about all the different types of meditation practice. You might read about visualization meditation, spiritual meditation, Transcendental Meditation, or mindfulness meditation, among others.

These all build upon the same core concepts and what works best for you is simply based on who you are and what your preferences are.

For example:

If you are God-fearing, your meditation can easily take the form of your morning prayer or your daily scripture reading. Things of this nature act as a time for you to focus your mind on what's in front of you, to ask all your other distracting thoughts to just sit on a shelf for a few minutes and give you that time.

And during your moments of prayer you might be focused meditatively on what it is you are giving thanks for or asking for and then a little thought creeps into the back of your mind reminding you that you still have that report to send to accounting. but you don't let that work I thought completely interrupt your prayer and simply stand up and go back to your desk.

Instead you use cognitive defusion to distance yourself from that thought and mentally put it on a shelf or in a file or in a closet somewhere so that you can remain focused on what's at hand and then come back to that thought.



THE PROBLEM WITH POSITIVE THINKING

The reason this cognitive defusion is so crucial to meditation is that you don't ignore thoughts good or bad, you don't pretend they aren't there or assume they will just go away if you think the “right” way.

Consider the example above about prayer.

When you are mindfully meditating on scriptures, you don't assume that your work thought will go away nor do you want it to. After all, that report has to get to accounting one way or the other.

You don't assume good or bad thoughts will just go away if you think in a different way. The goal with meditation is to control when you have thoughts and to exercise control over thoughts that crop up during activities in which they are inappropriate.



BEING MINDFUL

This is very heavily rooted in mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation, sometimes shortened to just “mindfulness”, is that same act of distancing yourself from your thoughts such that you recognize when they pass through your mind and allow them to continue onward instead of fixating on them or allowing them to control your emotions or cause you to act out irrationally.

This type of awareness, the awareness brought up by any type of meditative practice, helps you to focus inward and recognize what part you have to play.



YOU HAVE THE CONTROL

Let's think back to that meditation by Marcus Aurelius. If you break down his lesson, you, in effect, have control over how external objects affect you internally.

Once again, this is something we do naturally only we don't always realize it and so we don't necessarily apply it to every other aspect of our lives.

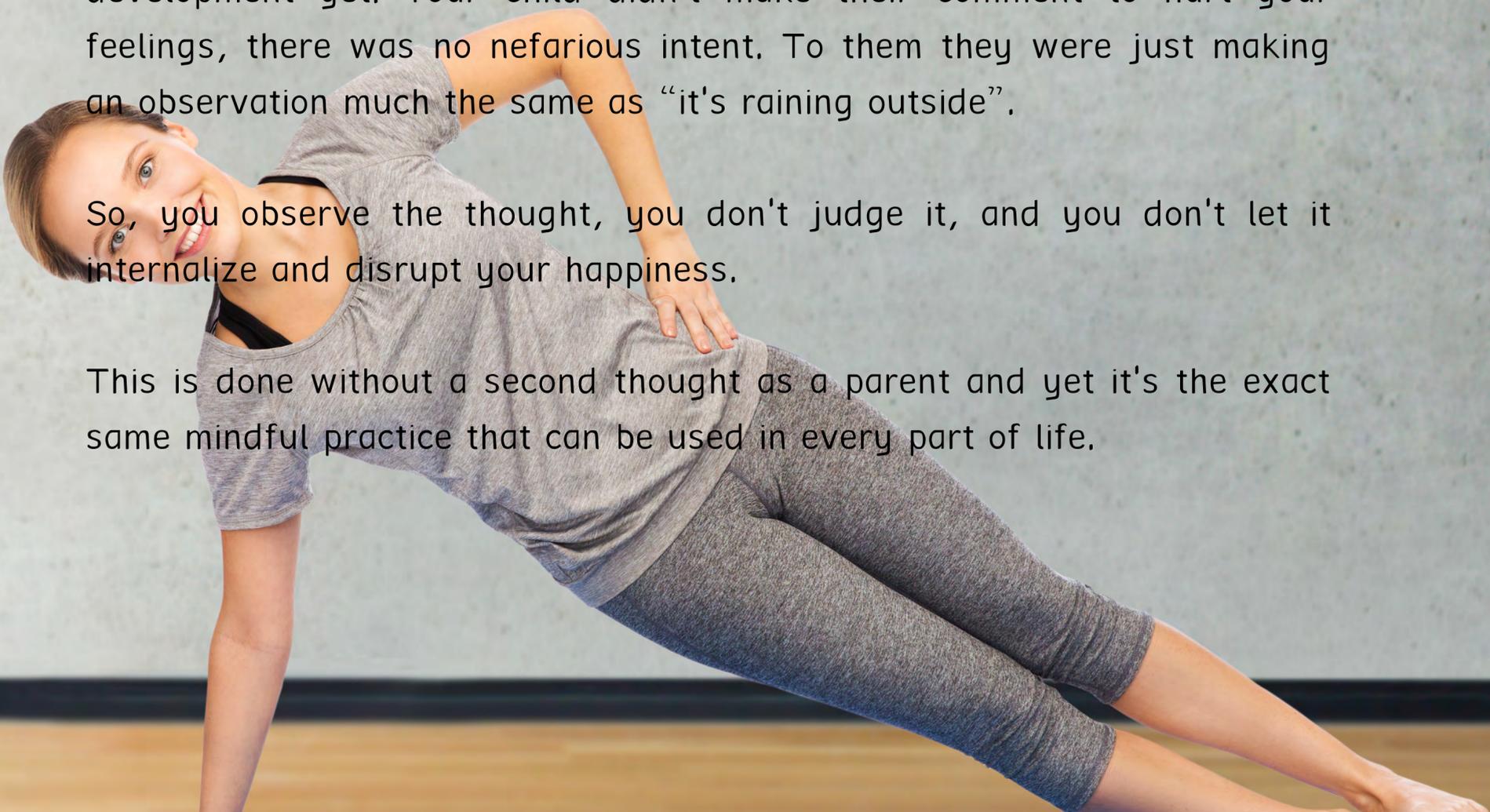
If you are a parent, you have probably heard your child say something that was a little upsetting or hurt your feelings to use the appropriate vernacular. But you know they didn't mean it. Maybe work has been very stressful lately and the change in structure has forced you to work from home a lot where you don't have access to the company gym.

And your six-year-old came to give you a hug the other day, and in so doing remarked to the entire room in a voice that you thought was unnecessarily loud, that they can no longer fit their hands all the way around your stomach, that you have gotten bigger and they used to be able to clasp their fingers around your back but now, as they say, there is “a looooot of space between hands”.

You are mindful of their comments and you know that you control the impact the comments of a six-year-old have on your emotional state or your happiness. You also know that having no real sympathetic development yet. Your child didn't make their comment to hurt your feelings, there was no nefarious intent. To them they were just making an observation much the same as “it's raining outside”.

So, you observe the thought, you don't judge it, and you don't let it internalize and disrupt your happiness.

This is done without a second thought as a parent and yet it's the exact same mindful practice that can be used in every part of life.



APPLYING MEDITATIVE TECHNIQUES

The exact same practices and techniques can be applied to whatever type of meditation you use.

MINDFULNESS

● If you want to use mindfulness meditation, you become mindful of the fact that you might feel a certain emotion or a certain response but then you put yourself in the shoes of the external event or person and recognize that it wasn't done intentionally so you can let go of whatever negative feelings you may have associated with that.



MOVEMENT

● If you want to use movement meditation, you apply the same mindful practices but you simply do it while physically moving, going for a walk, doing gardening, or practicing Tai Chi.



MANTRA

● If you want to use Mantra meditation, you can speak your Mantra to yourself whether it's a word, a sound, or a phrase and focus on the mantra when you want to focus your thoughts away from the distractions and distance yourself.





VISUALIZATION

● If you want to use visualization meditation, you use that same mindfulness but focus yourself on visualizing images or scenes which might include visualizing your happiness, visualizing a sweet and loving smile on the face of the child who just recently insulted you or visualizing finally driving home and being with your family in the moment that you have been cut off.

LOVING-KINDNESS

● If you want to use loving kindness meditation, with the goal of strengthening your feelings of love and kindness not just toward other people but toward yourself, you can let go of anger you might be holding on to because of your self-loathing, the result of gaining weight, as kindly pointed out to you by your six-year-old or let go of the anger from being cut off in traffic by focusing on something more positive. In this regard you can demonstrate love so that you are mindful of positive thoughts and meditate on compassion by checking on a neighbor, volunteering your time babysitting nieces and nephews, sending loving handwritten letters to acquaintances.





PROGRESSIVE

● If you want to use Progressive meditation, sometimes called the body scan meditation, you can scan your body in those moments of hyper excitement or frustration and find areas where you might be tense, like tightening your grip on the steering wheel in traffic and then slowly and meditatively relaxing each muscle group from head to toe.

GETTING STARTED

Rest assured, getting started is easier than reading this article. Meditation doesn't require a large amount of time. It can literally be something that you start off practicing whenever you feel yourself getting tense or angry. It can be something you decide to do intentionally for just five minutes everyday before work.

While Buddhist monks meditate for hours and hours, that is effectively their job whereas your job is very likely something that takes place in a cubicle so you don't have as many hours on hand. But that doesn't mean you can't slowly integrate whatever type of meditation is best for you.

By sitting or moving and meditating for 15 minutes everyday and integrating an additional 2 minutes of active meditation throughout the day when you feel you need it most, you will reap the myriad benefits of meditation.

Remember, too, while today Health journals and gurus online will differentiate between each type of meditation, there is no right or wrong practice. You might choose to scan your body regularly to look for areas where you are holding tension, while going on a walk in your favorite nearby park, while using a mantra and reflecting on the thoughts you are having while you allow them to pass. The goal is to find something that works best for you.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

The benefits you reap from your meditation are really anchored in what type of meditation you prefer and how much you use it.

FOR EXAMPLE:

● If you are practicing spiritual meditation, adding an extra 15 minutes of prayer and meditation over your scriptures every morning might help you to feel more connected to your faith, might help you feel more enlightened and in tune with your scriptures or receptive to the needs of those around you.



● By comparison if you are practicing movement meditation, you might notice that you are getting a lot more of those mundane tasks completed because you meditate while you do the dishes or while you garden. If you meditate while going for a walk in a nearby park you might reap additional benefits of increased vitamin D intake from your sun exposure, increased happy hormones and better blood flow because of the additional exercise no matter how minimal it might be.



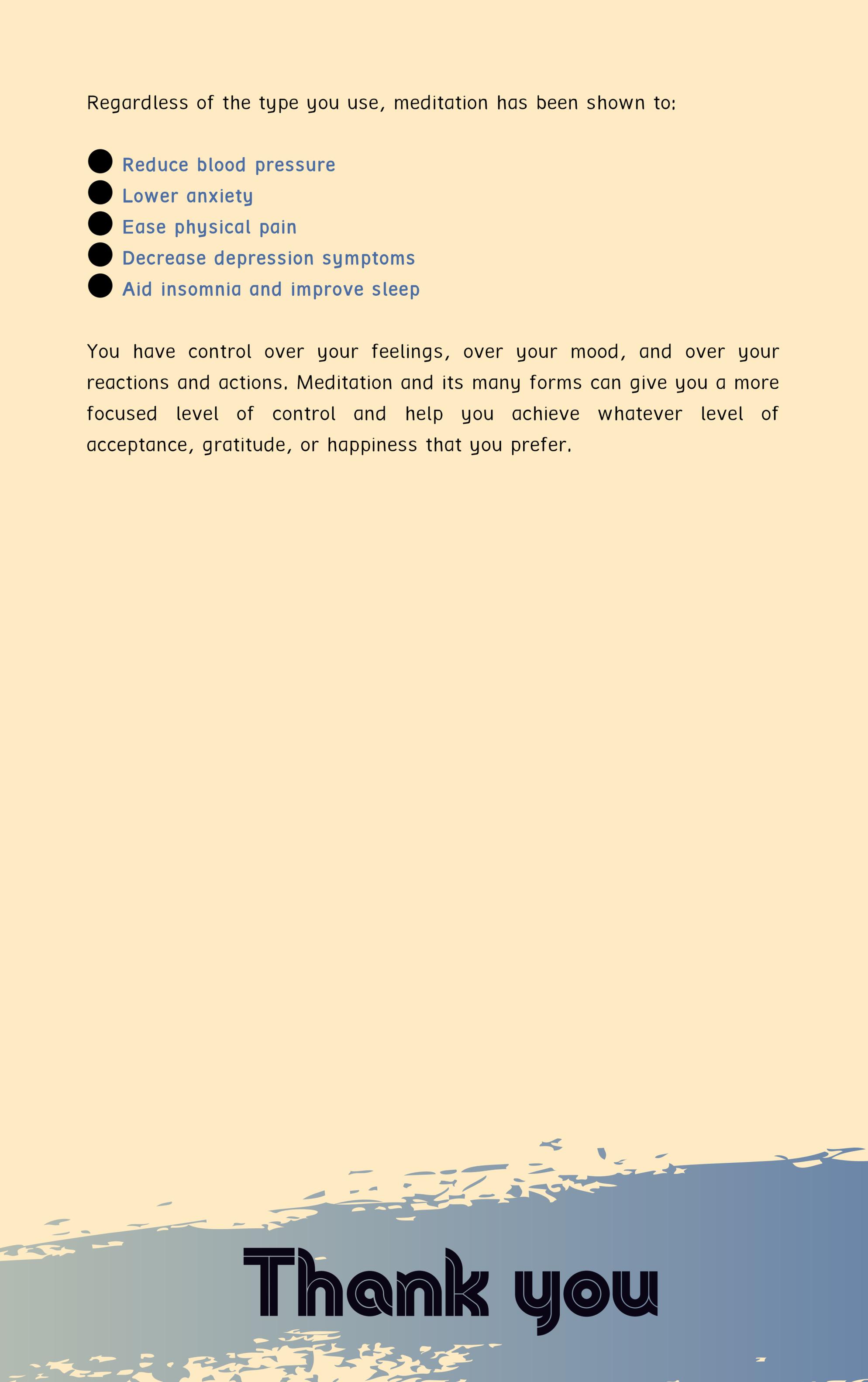
● If you are practicing visualization meditation or Mantra meditation you might simply notice that applying it whenever you feel your blood pressure rising is enough to help you feel calmer throughout the day.



Regardless of the type you use, meditation has been shown to:

- Reduce blood pressure
- Lower anxiety
- Ease physical pain
- Decrease depression symptoms
- Aid insomnia and improve sleep

You have control over your feelings, over your mood, and over your reactions and actions. Meditation and its many forms can give you a more focused level of control and help you achieve whatever level of acceptance, gratitude, or happiness that you prefer.



Thank you