

5 MIN AND 5 STEPS YOU TO KICKSTART YOUR PRACTICE.....

1. *Start purposefully and with an intention*

Own your practice. Begin each meditation purposefully, ring a bell, play a sound, sit comfortably, make a purposeful start. Then say a small intention; tell yourself what you intend to practice here to help you do it. Some examples, “I am going to practice self-awareness in these 5 minutes”, or “I am going to practice being calm”. This doesn’t mean you expect to be calm or aware during the session or by the end of it, it means your session is a practice with no expectations that you will get to a special state. All you need is a small short statement that motivates you to practice.

2. *End with a motivation for your day*

Create some positive energy for your day. At the end of each session rather than just rushing off to do the next task, recall what your intention was as you started the session and declare to yourself that you have already put energy into fulfilling this intention. Then, take the experience of the meditation into your daily life with a brief motivational statement for the day, e.g. “Today I will try to carry this inner awareness with me” or “Today I will try to practice a mindful pause.”

3. Time yourself for just 5 minutes

Find a timer so you can continue sitting in meditation until the timer goes and you won't be thinking constantly about how much longer it will be. If 5 minutes is too long for you at the start, try a half way interval chime at 2.5 minutes so you'll know you're at the half way mark. If you like checklists and charts, there are apps that can record your daily number of minutes and watch your progress grow (Insight Timer — is free and the chimes and daily count are wonderful). I use my iPhone set to flight mode and the Insight Timer app's chime function. I can set it with a nice peaceful chime at the half way interval and at the end, plus it records each day so I see a nicely growing tally and feel good about my efforts.

4. Create a dedicated place and an agreed time

Let's face it, a lot of the problem with meditation is that we just forget to do it. We plan to, we intend to, and then each day slips by and we've forgotten it - again. To overcome this, make two decisions, (1) where will you do it and (2) what time each day. Where is your meditation spot? You don't need an out of the way meditation room that you'll never go to, just create a peaceful little corner in any room, and put a few reminders for visual cues that this is your meditation space (a cushion, or bell, a candle, a book, anything really). This will set a nice habitual space for peace. It will also double as a reminder because whenever you walk past it that cushion/chair will be calling out to you. Set a time every day. Mornings are ideal but they don't suit everyone's life. If you do choose morning, try not to meditate when you get straight out of bed because your awareness won't be sharp enough. When we meditate we are practicing focusing attention, it's like super concentration, if you are too sleepy you'll just doze off. Start with a cup of tea, a walk in the garden, or have your shower. If you choose another time in the day, use a routine task to remind you (e.g. just before dinner) or set a reminder in your phone. Bedtime isn't great because you'll likely be tired and fall asleep, that's the opposite of practicing awareness. It's all about finding a time and place and sticking to it.

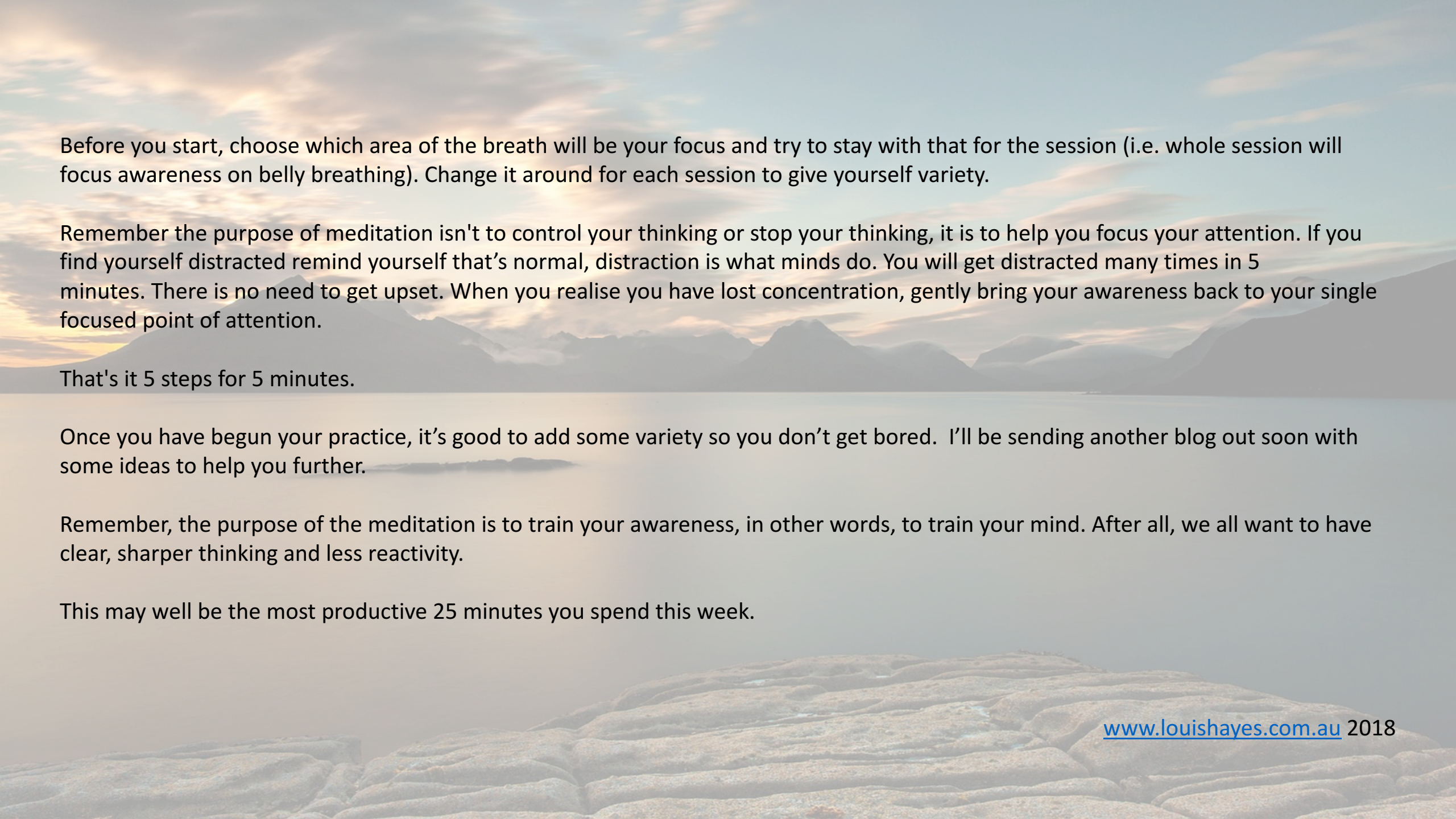
5. Try practice single-pointed awareness instead of a voice

There are many resources out there with pre-recorded meditations, but for some, a voice can interfere with focusing attention. Many of my clients say they either don't like the voice, or it becomes boring. My suggestion is practice 5 minutes of silence.

To do this, focus your attention on one thing, usually your breath, and do this in silence. After all, it's just 5 minutes alone with yourself and it's a nice contrast to our loud world. Remind yourself, you will be training your brain to be focused on one thing for 5 minutes and that is where the benefits of meditation come from.

It's common to use the breath as the awareness point, here are some ideas on how to do that:

- Focus your attention on your belly rising and falling (no need to change your breathing, breathe normally)
- Focus your attention on your breath coming in and out through your nostrils (close your mouth)
- Count 3 breaths, and then restart over and over
- Focus your attention on your breath coming in through your right nostril and going out through your left nostril (R-L - 3 times), and then coming in through both nostrils (both - 3 times), and then in through your left and out through your right (L-R 3 times).



Before you start, choose which area of the breath will be your focus and try to stay with that for the session (i.e. whole session will focus awareness on belly breathing). Change it around for each session to give yourself variety.

Remember the purpose of meditation isn't to control your thinking or stop your thinking, it is to help you focus your attention. If you find yourself distracted remind yourself that's normal, distraction is what minds do. You will get distracted many times in 5 minutes. There is no need to get upset. When you realise you have lost concentration, gently bring your awareness back to your single focused point of attention.

That's it 5 steps for 5 minutes.

Once you have begun your practice, it's good to add some variety so you don't get bored. I'll be sending another blog out soon with some ideas to help you further.

Remember, the purpose of the meditation is to train your awareness, in other words, to train your mind. After all, we all want to have clear, sharper thinking and less reactivity.

This may well be the most productive 25 minutes you spend this week.