



**Sarah McLean**, director of the Sedona Meditation Training Company, inspires people to “take time out for time in” through meditation. She’s meditated for 19 years, resided in a Zen Buddhist monastery, lived in an ashram in India, taught English to Tibetan Buddhist nuns, bicycled along the Silk Road through Pakistan, and meditated in temples in Thailand and Japan. McLean has also served as the education director for Deepak Chopra’s Center for Wellbeing. She leads retreats and classes in Sedona, AZ. Visit [www.sedonameditation.com](http://www.sedonameditation.com), or call 928-204-0067.

## Get Your Groove Back

Do you want to feel better and find peace in your day? Perhaps meditation is the answer. We’ve all heard how meditation lowers blood pressure, increases immunity, improves sleep, and reduces anxiety. People also credit meditation with improving relationships and helping them find meaning and purpose in their lives.

More than 20 million Americans meditate, some of whom say they can’t live without it. But others believe they can’t meditate because they can’t quiet their minds. Here’s a secret: Thoughts are actually a part of meditation. And it’s an exercise in frustration to try and stop thinking by thinking about it.

Whether religious or secular, most meditation techniques require you to focus your attention on something: it could be a sound like a prayer or word you say or think (sometimes called a mantra), or an object like a flower or candle flame, or a sensation like the feel of your breath.

Once you decide what to focus on (you could start with your breath), turn off your phone, TV, and music. Sit rather than lie down. Ideally you’ll choose 10 to 20 minutes twice daily. Whatever you choose, stick with it. Do your first meditation when you wake up and the second in the afternoon before you eat. Time yourself, but don’t use an alarm that you have to jump up to shut off. When time is up, sit quietly for a few minutes, eyes closed, before getting on with your day.

At some point during your meditation, you’ll realize your attention has drifted off onto a thought, or a sensation in the body, or a sound in the environment. Once you realize this, refocus. *Gently*. It doesn’t matter how many times your attention drifts away. Each time, however, make the choice to come back to your focus, and be kind to yourself. Don’t try too hard; you’ll get a headache.

Maybe you’ve read about experiences people have had during meditation and you want the same ones. This is a trap. Experiences in meditation aren’t as important as what happens after you’ve meditated. Let’s talk about them anyway. Sometimes you’ll have only a few thoughts and sometimes many; perhaps you’ll feel a deep peace or an emotional release; or you’ll experience boredom, frustration, or even fall asleep. Time can seem to stand still or 20 minutes can seem like an instant. Each experience you have is the right one for you, and usually indicates the release of stress.

If you want to know if your meditation is “working” don’t decide by your experiences in meditation—instead, take a look at your life. Are your relationships better, do you feel calmer, happier, more fulfilled? Those are the measures I use.

— Sarah McLean