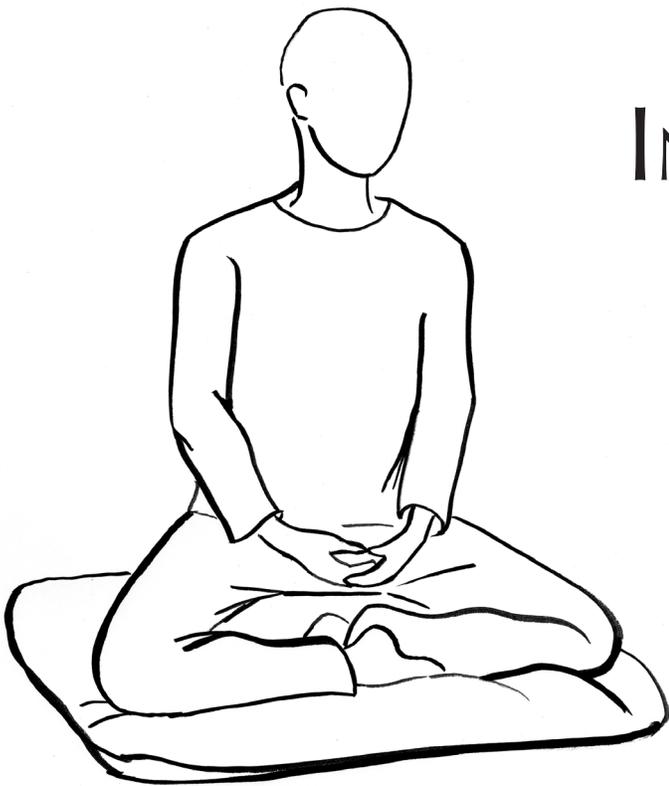


MEDITATE WITH EASE

A HOW-TO GUIDE
FOR DYNAMIC,
COMFORTABLE &
INJURY-FREE SITTING
MEDITATION



BY **CHRIS MOFFETT**

Meditate With Ease:

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR DYNAMIC,
COMFORTABLE & INJURY-FREE
SITTING MEDITATION

BY CHRIS MOFFETT

This publication is protected under the US Copyright Act of 1976 and all other applicable international, federal, state and local laws, and all rights are reserved. No part of this document or the related files may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher.

CONTENTS

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter Two: SITTING BASICS	7
Chapter Three: SUPPORT	19
Chapter Four: FINDING EASE	25
Chapter Five: THE WHOLE	30
Chapter Six: CONCLUSION	45
Appendix: LOTUS POSITION	48

CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION



“This isn’t so Simple!”

No doubt, you turned to meditation to improve the quality of your life. Something spoke to you. The simplicity, the stillness in a hectic world, the sense of participating in something meaningful or healthy. Whatever the reason, you chose to act to better yourself.

And so you sat down to meditate. And if you are like many, what seemed simple and relaxing turned out to involve difficulty and frustration. It’s not so easy! It is no doubt the case for any serious endeavor that it will ask something of us.

So you sit.

But to add injury to insult, you may have also found that after just a few minutes of sitting still, you started to become acutely aware of your body. Tingling, numbness, soreness, pain. Something in your neck, or shoulders. Your back or legs. How could doing nothing much at all be so challenging?

A great deal of this difficulty can be traced back to having grown up in a chair-sitting culture, which

in turn encourages an incomplete apprenticeship in moving well and fully. At a relatively young age, we were corralled into school chairs that *nobody* could humanly sit well in. And we were given few options other than to make do and give up on pursuing true dynamic comfort. It became so normal that we hardly recognize what we were asked to give up.

Until, that is, we try to do something crazy like sit on the floor (or even sit upright in a chair for any length of time!). Then we may begin to be acutely aware of the cost of this decision made for us about our bodies. But by then, it might be so normalized that we can hardly imagine how things could have been otherwise.

What was relatively direct and simple in the dawn of meditation—to just sit down so that you can attend to something—has become something of an esoteric, and impressive feat.

The new meditator, facing the difficulty of learning to meditate, runs instead into the challenge of merely learning to sit comfortably.

Unfortunately, there is very little advice available on how to do this well. To make matters worse, the little bit of sitting advice offered is often misleading, incomplete, erroneous, or frankly, downright dangerous. Not a few people have done serious and permanent injury to their knees from trying to sit the way they are “supposed to,” or from struggling to hold their shoulders just so, despite the mounting personal evidence that it’s quite literally a pain in the neck.

The result is that new meditators, if they last at all, too often become “old meditators” well before their time, just managing to get by by sustaining the hit to their body and well being. They are all the while pursuing the benefits of meditating, but at the cost of a vibrant practice that truly sustains the whole person.

And so we trade comfort for effort. Body for mind. Sustainability for endurance. Regress for progress.

Which brings us to this book.

The guidance you find here starts from the assumption that you don't need to make such bargains. You can have both. Discovering how to sit well is within the grasp of anyone willing to spend the time. What at first seems impossible can become possible. And what is possible can become effortless and pleasurable.

Whether you are new to meditating or a seasoned meditator, exploring the conditions for dynamic sitting posture can make all the difference. More than just getting yourself a cushion or bench, or following some sort of postural advice, what is most required is focused and curious attention to your own experience. Rather than being something that gets in the way of meditating, spending the time to learn how to sit well and comfortably can itself be a form of meditation.

“These forms are not a means of obtaining the right state of mind. To take this posture itself is the purpose of our practice. When you have this posture, you have the right state of mind.”

—Suzuki Roshi

From this perspective, the practice of learning to sit well *is* the practice of meditation. This doesn't mean you need to leave behind other approaches to meditating. But it does mean that bringing your attention to your sitting, with the proper attitude, is an act of meditating.

Meditating is profoundly an act of observation. While it may seem to involve tuning out, or detaching, this is accomplished by rigorously practicing tuning in and noticing what you do. It is a practice of refining our responses to what we feel and observe. We do this, not by ignoring our thoughts and feelings, but by acknowledging them and practicing how we react in order to arrive at a more appropriate response.

There is no quick fix for sitting comfortably and dynamically. Like meditating itself, it is a practice; it requires sustained attention and refinement.

To overcome the feeling of not knowing what to do about your own posture and comfort requires consistently exploring your own sensations and experiences. Often it seems simpler and easier not to bother with this, and “just get on with the meditating” as it were. But to truly experience the pleasure and effectiveness of sitting well will likely require more than a small bit of persistence. The difference is in *what* you persist in, and *how* you go about it.

This brings us to the issue of focus. Not getting distracted. For many, this is the reason for turning to meditation in the first place: a sense of too many things competing for attention and the feeling of being overwhelmed as a result. If only things could

be simpler. And in fact they can. That is one of the beauties of meditation. By continuing to return yourself to a simple state, you can attain a familiarity and skillfulness with attending to what matters and letting the rest go. And this is an important lesson for your own posture and comfort. It's not just a matter of learning the "proper posture" and getting on with things. It requires sustained attention and focus – only, in an exploratory, curious fashion.

Perpetual vigilance is exhausting, and counter productive. Monitoring your body for its correct adherence to a perceived notion of good posture presupposes that you know in advance of actual experience what is right. Instead, I will encourage you in what follows to continue to focus on what you actually experience as you explore strategies for sitting. The more you can focus on what you feel – in ways that allow you to explore and act on your options – the easier it will be for your body and nervous system to arrive at something that makes sense for real, rather than as an abstract idea.

So, putting it all together, we can arrive at the following premise: persistent, exploratory focus on what truly matters leads to improved function. What the Buddha showed us is that the path to enlightenment itself must be enlightened. Persisting *intelligently* to explore your experience is the productive path.

Learning to sit well and comfortable, then, is one of the best things you can do for yourself. Not only will it provide a strong foundation for your meditation practice, but it will also serve you in your overall

physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The practice of learning to sit well is *already* good meditation practice.

So read on, and invest in a sustainable and enjoyable meditation practice.

CHAPTER TWO | SITTING BASICS

THE BEST MEDITATION POSITION

OK folks, here it is, without further ado, the best position for meditation is...

drum roll...

The one that is most comfortable for you!

Seriously, if you stick with this one thought, you are well ahead of most of the suffering sitters of the meditation world. Of course, anyone who has sat without moving for a long period of time can tell you, figuring out just what is comfortable can be a tricky business. What seemed comfortable twenty minutes ago may be excruciating now.

The trick is to start somewhere that feels easy, and keep refining it to make it more and more sustainable. Don't turn yourself into a painful pretzel thinking that eventually you will get used to it. You won't. It doesn't work that way. You'll just be cultivating discomfort and courting injury.

It's somewhat paradoxical, but the path to enlightenment is to practice being enlightened. So rather than persisting in difficulty, it is important to allow your practice and attention to seek out openness and subtlety.

So be nice to yourself, and let's explore.

There are three main positions that we will investigate: sitting cross-legged (Burmese style, with the feet on the floor), kneeling (*seiza*), and sitting in a chair. We'll go into why you might choose one over the other, but they are all excellent choices for your practice. It's worth reading through, and playing with them all, even if you already have a preference. Use your own comfort as a guide.



SITTING CROSS-LEGGED

The most common meditation posture is the Burmese position, also known as Indian style. In this position the legs do not so much cross as pass each other. Sitting on a cushion (*zafu*), your knees and lower legs rest on the floor, with one leg in front of the other.

The beauty of sitting Burmese style for meditation is that, if done well, it provides a nice stable base of support while allowing the spine to align in a natural position.

Getting Started

First, it's important to realize that one of the things that makes sitting Indian style work is having the right thing to sit on. While you can sit directly on the floor, most people will find that they have to work hard pulling to keep themselves forward and upright. But if you place a cushion, *zafu*, pillow, or some kind of support under

your pelvis, it can make a huge difference in the comfort and sustainability of this meditation posture. Play with the height until you find something that works for you. A *zabuton*, or floor cushion, can also make the knees and feet more comfortable. We'll look at how to find the right support and height in more detail in the next chapter.

So, once you have something under your pelvis, just bend one leg, tucking your foot comfortably in front of your pelvis. The ankle should be open, with the toes pointing to the side. Then bend your other leg and rest it in front of the first. Now your lower legs are resting parallel to each other, facing in opposite directions.

It's a good idea to vary which leg is forward to ensure balance in your posture. As you first start out, you'll want to go with what feels the most natural. But eventually start playing with putting the other leg forward and noticing the difference. Eventually this too will start to seem normal.

You can rest your hands on your thighs if you like, either palms up or down. Or resting naturally in your lap. Or place them in your lap, palms up, one resting on the other with the thumbs lightly touching. (Sometimes, placing a support under your hands can help your shoulders find a more neutral position.) There is no "proper" hand position. You especially want to avoid feeling that you are holding your arms in position, or locking your wrists either inward or outward. Find a place that feels restful for you.

There you have it. Simple. Now for fine tuning it...

Settling In

It is important to make sure that you don't strain your knees, and that they make contact with the floor. Think of it as resting on a sort of tripod formed by your butt and your two knees.

If your knees don't naturally rest on the floor, it is critical that you don't force them. Instead, play with raising your pelvis a little higher with a cushion. If you still find it difficult to open your hips wide enough for the knees to settle, try putting under your knees some support such as a folded up towel or thick piece of fabric. (A number of small support cushions are available that can come in handy. See the companion report to this eBook, [The Meditator's Resource Guide](http://www.themeditatorsseat.com/dwld/MeditatorsResourceGuide.pdf), for more information: <http://www.themeditatorsseat.com/dwld/MeditatorsResourceGuide.pdf>)



Just be careful to put support under the knees only *after* raising the pelvis; otherwise lifting the knees can wind up rolling you back a bit, and then you have to work in the front of your legs and abdomen to keep upright.

A good sustainable Burmese position shouldn't feel like you are holding it. It should feel like you are balanced and free to move in any direction. You may feel a slight swaying as you breath. If you are holding on with muscles to hold or force the position, you will find that no matter how you hold yourself, it is not sustainable or comfortable for long.

Instead, see if you can find a place where you can gently and easily roll your pelvis forward and back; then just let it settle into a neutral position somewhere in the middle.

If you explore letting this rolling feel easy and gentle, it will provide a nice fluid base for your spine and head to align freely. If you feel yourself tensing in the shoulders, neck, or jaw, don't try counteracting it. Just return to finding a dynamic sense of movement in the hips and pelvis. Then explore balancing the spine and head gently on top of this fluid base.

You will often hear advice about the proper position of the head or shoulders, the angle of the eyes or jaw, or how to pull the whole thing up, as if from above. This all sounds helpful and great, but it is actually counterproductive. To micromanage these changes without finding the support from below requires excess muscular effort and force of will. This willfulness is not sustainable for long and will only distract you from the true task of finding what works. This involves sensing and exploring, not dictating abstract postures to yourself. That said, it's not easy. You may need to be persistent.

Years of chair sitting tend to encourage holding in the neck and shoulders, so be prepared to play and explore over time to find a more balanced and easy posture. Take your time, and don't force things. Sit for only as long as you are comfortable. Then come back to it. Slowly, but surely, it will get simpler and easier. Just remember that forcing it is counterproductive.

In later chapters I'll show you how to explore this further. So keep reading.

If you find this position difficult or feel strain in your knees or hips, you might also look into sitting *seiza*



(kneeling). Kneeling does not require rotating out the hips, and thus avoids the difficulties that go with sitting cross-legged.

SITTING *SEIZA*: KNEELING MEDITATION

Seiza, or kneeling, is a great way to sit, in general, and for meditation. However, if you grew up sitting in chairs, kneeling for any length of time is likely to present a few quirky challenges. So why bother? For meditators, there are several reasons to consider it.

One, sitting *seiza* has some benefits over sitting in a chair. It tends to place the pelvis in a nice natural position to support your spine. This can feel open and balanced, and reduce discomfort in your shoulders or neck.

Two, you may find that sitting with legs crossed in Burmese style is uncomfortable. If you have difficulty opening your hips to the side, it can be challenging to settle into a sustainable cross-legged sitting position. By placing your legs parallel under your body, in kneeling, you can avoid this difficulty.

Three, in Japanese culture it is considered the proper way to sit formally and is a matter of etiquette.

And finally, it's a beautiful, stable and dynamic sitting position, so who needs more reason than that to try it?

How to sit in *seiza*

From standing, lower your left knee to the ground, keeping your toes standing on the ground for the moment. Then bring your right leg down and under

you as well. Then slowly, one foot at a time, extend your ankles and toes to point behind you, resting the tops of your feet on the floor. (Go slowly. If you rush to flatten your feet, rather than letting them settle, you are more likely to get cramps in your feet.) The toes can rest next to each other, or the big toes can touch or even overlap. Bring your buttocks down to rest on your heels.

You can rest your hands in your lap, or palm down on your thighs, with the fingers comfortably together.

While the traditional expectation is that women keep their legs relatively parallel while men may separate their knees, generally speaking, separating the knees will result in a more stable posture for anyone. Play with what works for you. I'll leave the cultural etiquette for you to decide.

The length of your spine and head should balance easily over your pelvis. Don't try to force things to "be straight." The spine has naturally counterbalancing curves. So instead of aiming for "straight," gently explore finding a neutral position where nothing is being held or fixed.

Simple, right?

Well, for anyone who isn't accustomed to sitting on their own heels, just getting into this position can present challenges, never mind the tingling and sleeping legs, or aching knees that can show up quickly. There are several things you can do to help with this.

The first is to only maintain the *seiza* posture for as long as it is comfortable. Notice I said "as long as it is

comfortable,” not “as long as you can bear it.” The latter is counterproductive. So be patient and gentle with yourself. Take a break and come back to it again. Don’t strain – you will only hurt yourself. If you go gently, over time it will become easier.

The same advice for finding comfortable alignment in the Burmese position holds for sitting *seiza* as well. Finding dynamic support and movement from below allows each part to stack nicely on top of the next. Remember to roll your pelvis, looking for an easy neutral position. Again, we’ll go into this in more depth in a later chapter.

It is particularly worth noticing whether you are restricting your range of movement in the pelvis in order to protect your legs from uncomfortable forces. For example, it is common to hold the pelvis a bit up and forward, perhaps arching the back in order to keep from bearing weight through ankles or straining the knees. If you can let everything settle down to the floor, then do so. If not, don’t force things.

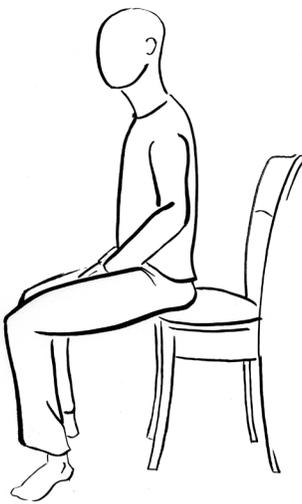
The second thing you can do is to use a *seiza* bench or cushion to take some of the pressure off of your knees, ankles and feet. You can also play with placing a small towel or cushion under your ankles if this is more comfortable. Sometimes straddling a *zafu* is also recommended, but personally, I find that this interferes with finding a dynamic place for the feet under the pelvis. To help, you can place the *zafu* on its edge if it is narrow. This is a little better for the foot position, but it tends to exert awkward forces on the pelvis, and I don’t find it particularly comfortable or sustainable. In general,

a *seiza* bench is the way to go if you want to take some of the strain off the legs.

You may find that hard floors are on the unpleasant side. Try sitting on a tatami mat, carpet, *zabuton*, or something else to give you a bit of padding. A little bit can make a huge difference.

Above all, take the time to find what works for you. Done right, the *seiza* position can be a great way to sit.

The benefit of sitting Burmese style or kneeling in *seiza* over chair sitting is that they both promote a more natural alignment of the body. This creates a vibrant and dynamic sensation that not only supports meditation, but just feels good. This is only the case, however, if you are not experiencing difficulty in the hips or legs. Sitting in a chair places less demand on the lower body, and can provide not only a stepping stone into these other positions, but a nice functional position in its own right.



CHAIR SITTING

Odds are you've spent a fair amount of time sitting in a chair. This might be the easiest way to get started. If you feel like this is cheating, keep in mind that, historically, meditation positions developed out of the ways people sat normally. It's *supposed* to be simple, not convoluted. So if you are most comfortable in a chair, start there.

Even for a pro, however, sitting still in a chair over time can create a difficult position for the upper body, and can result in shoulder and neck pain, and a confused lower back. This is part of our Western legacy. For that reason,

it's worth looking into the Burmese or *seiza* positions. But even if you do look at these positions, knowing how to sit well in a chair is likely to be indispensable.

The Chair

The first challenge is to find a decent chair. Take the time to get this right. You'll thank yourself for it.

Get yourself a firm stable chair, high enough that you don't find yourself slumping back. As a general rule of thumb, this will be the height at which your upper legs are parallel to the floor. You should fine-tune this using the same strategy as for the *zafu* that I will describe in a later chapter, but a simple parallel is a good starting point. (Keep in mind that shoes will influence this. I recommend going shoeless if you can.)

You can use a wide cushion or some other support to get the best height. Foam pads work nicely. Odds are you will need to do some adjusting. Chairs by their nature are built for everyone, and thus for no one.

Sit on the edge rather than using the back rest if you can. Most chairs are designed, well, terribly. I can't go into it in depth here, and frankly, you don't want to get me going. But if you are interested, Galen Cranz's book [The Chair](#) is a good place to start, and a fascinating read.

For now, the thing to note is whether your chair interferes with finding a neutral position for your pelvis. The biggest offender, after improper height, tends to be seat tilt. Almost all chairs have a seat that tilts towards the back. (This is to keep you from sliding out of it, since using the backrest pushes your *derrière* forward. Try it,

you'll see.) If you are lucky, there is a flat area towards the front where you can perch in a way that is neutral without being precarious. If not, find another chair. If you find yourself sliding or rolling back, slumping in the lower back, it may be due to long habit, but it may also be due to a tilted seat. (That's where the habit came from in the first place!)

Here's the test: if you can roll your pelvis forward and back without subtly feeling that you are protecting against either falling into or out of the chair then you are good to go.

Sitting

Once you have found a neutral place for your pelvis, you are mostly there. Find a comfortable place for your feet, flat on the floor, with the legs gently spread. About shoulder width apart is a good place to start, but play with what works for you. (The same thing is true here as for sitting in *seiza*: keeping your legs together may seem more polite for some, but it is also less stable and functional.) Your feet should be more or less directly under your knees, and you shouldn't feel like you have to hold your legs from falling together or apart.

You can rest your hands on your thighs; just avoid cocking your wrists back and holding them there. Let your hands gently follow the line of your lower arm. You can place them in your lap palm up, if you like, one resting on the other with the thumbs lightly touching. As with the Burmese position, placing a support under your hands may help your shoulders find a more neutral position.

And surprise, surprise, it's the same game as the other positions. Look for a neutral and easy place for your pelvis and let the rest of you stack on top. Again, we'll go into this in more detail in a later chapter.

CHAPTER THREE | SUPPORT

GETTING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

The Zafu

A *zafu* is indispensable for sitting cross-legged in Burmese style. A *zafu* is just a cushion to place under your pelvis. Elevating the pelvis helps the spine find a more neutral position, closer to that of standing. It's as simple as a tool gets. So when you are bombarded by all the choices of color, material, and all the other ways in which manufacturers try to differentiate their products, don't get too overwhelmed. The whole point is to provide a bit of elevation.

I *highly* recommend that you spend the time to adjust your *zafu* to your own ideal height.

Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, it is more or less a one-size-fits-all market. And if you are anything like me, you got yourself one and just sat on it. That, after all is what they are for. What else is there? But the odds that it is automatically the right size are slim.

The good news is that any decent *zafu* should be adjustable. This usually entails a slit in the side that allows you to get to the stuffing.

If you don't have a *zafu* yet, you'll want to choose the stuffing. If you already have a *zafu*, and you don't know what it is stuffed with, this is the first thing to discover. Just find the opening and see what's inside. It'll be either buckwheat or kapok.

Buckwheat stuffing consists of hulls; it provides a sort of beanbag effect that shift as you sit on it. Kapok, on the other hand is a silky fiber and tends to be a little firmer to sit on. It comes down to personal preference. If you can, try out both for a while to see what you like.

Either way, you'll need to know what you have if you want to adjust the height or firmness upward. You can buy extra buckwheat or kapok to do this. (If you find that you want to adjust the height or firmness down, then all you have to do is take some out.)

Great, so how do you get the height where you like it? Here's what I recommend. Get yourself a stack of books, large enough to sit on stably. (Children's books and coffee table art books are good.) Get more than you think you'll need, and include a few thin ones for fine adjustment. A towel or something to put on top can also make this more comfortable. Start with a medium size stack, and sit on it. Give yourself a moment to settle in, and then ask yourself if you think you would be more comfortable by adding or removing a book. Then test this out. Compare and contrast. Keep adding or removing books until you find your neutral.

As you get closer to your ideal height, give yourself a little bit more time sitting in each variation to allow yourself to really adjust and feel the difference. Notice whether one height lets your knees rest more comfortably on the floor. Then roll your pelvis a little bit forward and back. Which height allows this to feel the easiest? At some point the differences may be too subtle to tell exactly. This is exactly what you want. Go with your intuition.

That's your height. The reason for the books is just that it is a lot easier and faster to run through different options. Now, grab your *zafu* and see if you can stuff or unstuff it to match.

Here is where you may run into the next challenge. A *zafu* can only take so much adjusting. And you may find that in order to get the height you need, it starts getting too stuffed and firm. You also want to avoid doming, where the top bulges up. This can create pressure on your tailbone, where you don't want it, as well as subtly push out the sides of your pelvis rather than letting them just be supported. It's generally easier to lower a *zafu* than it is to raise one.

So what do you do if you need more height? Well, remember the books? There's a cushion version, usually called a support cushion, that you can put under your *zafu* to make changes in the overall height. You can also try another thin *zafu* instead. Just be careful when stacking *zafus* that they don't become unstable or start to lean. A support cushion avoids this by providing a flatter, broader base of support for the *zafu* that will go on top.

Keep playing with it until you get something you like. This is where it pays to be persistent. Think of all the time you'll be sitting. Taking the time now to get it right will pay off in the long run. Once you have something you like, try it out for a week. Let yourself settle in with the cushion. Then revisit the exploration. Has the cushion dropped a little? Add a bit of stuffing back in. Are you happy with the height? Experiment until you are.

Both you and your cushion will be constantly adjusting over time. This is a good and beautiful thing. Just check in now and then to see if anything needs refining. As you are starting out, do this more often. Eventually it will become a habit, and you'll just naturally keep an eye out for any adjustments that might serve you.

Zabutons

A quick word on the *zabuton*, the large mat that goes *under* the *zafu* to give you a wide support for your knees. This choice tends to be a bit simpler. Just be sure to get one large enough to comfortably fit your knees with room to spare. If you feel any lumps or pressure under your knees, don't tolerate it. Adjust the filling, and if that doesn't work, find another option.

Meditation Benches

If you sit in *seiza*, a meditation bench can help distribute the pressure and keep from putting too much force on the knees, ankles and feet. Basically, it is a bridge that goes over your ankles, providing a seat for your pelvis. You can find different heights, and in general the higher

the bench the more gentle the bend of your knees will be. (And the more weight you will bear through your knees.) You can also adjust the height by placing a cushion or pad on top of the bench.

The other thing to look at is the tilt of the seat. Because of the nature of the position, a slight tilt tends to feel more comfortable. I find that many benches tilt a bit too much, however, and begin to force the pelvis forward. This might feel like it assists in sending the message not to slump, but really it is interfering with your ability to choose a neutral and balanced position. The best way to avoid this is to find a bench with rounded legs, sort of like a rocking chair. Because of the position, it doesn't really rock. Instead, what happens is that it naturally adjusts to the forces of your pelvis and settles into an appropriate angle for you rather than dictating what that angle will be.

Kneeling Chairs

If sitting even with a meditation bench is too much, but you would like a more neutral alignment for your spine than you can find in a regular chair, you might want to try a kneeling chair. These support you at a more upright, chair height, but by supporting you under both the pelvis and the knees. It's sort of halfway between kneeling and standing.

Personally, I tend to find that you have to sort of insert yourself in a way that makes it difficult to get up, or adjust yourself. It also puts more pressure on the knees. But if you don't mind those things, it also can also allow

you find a nice, balanced, poise. It's definitely worth playing with.

For More Information...

Be sure to check out the companion report, [The Meditator's Resource Guide](#), for more information and recommendations on supports as well as links to where you can find them:

<http://www.themeditatorsseat.com/dwld/MeditatorsResourceGuide.pdf>

CHAPTER FOUR | FINDING EASE

Now that you have a sense of your options when it comes to posture, we can begin the game of refining things. While this may seem like it would entail recognizing any deviations from the ideal posture and correcting them, in fact, learning to sit with ease involves quite the opposite. Just as with meditation proper, the biggest challenge is learning to let go. Truth be told, many of the difficulties arise from our efforts to hold onto an ideal that doesn't match our own needs, and perhaps isn't so ideal anyway.

THE PROBLEM WITH GOOD POSTURE

You know, of course, that you shouldn't slump. Or perhaps you are long acquainted with that pain in your neck or your back. If only your posture were better.... It's a long way from here to there though. Maybe if you just had more willpower, or were more vigilant....

This is where most of us find ourselves, with some sense of where our body parts should go, and with the frustrating challenge of them never seeming to want to go there and stay for any length of time.

It is so much easier to be aware of what doesn't work than to be able to access what does. To complicate matters, we often have only the vaguest sense of what "good posture" is in the first place. So any efforts to arrive at it are likely to be misguided and lead to losing the very things that we wanted in the first place.

But it's not just that we aren't clear on what is proper. The problem has more to do with the idea of posture in the first place. We tend to imagine posture as a fixed thing, something you "hold," or put yourself into. You strike a pose. "The shoulders should be here in space. The head should be here, your hands here." And if it is uncomfortable, it's because you haven't yet found the right posture. There are at least two problems with this approach.

The first is that life isn't a photograph or a sculpture. Posture is an ongoing and fluid event, a process of meeting ever-changing needs. We are never so much *in* a posture as *moving through* a momentary organization. Posture is an activity more than a fixed state. So the search for "the perfect posture" is a departure from reality and from our presence in the moment.

The second and related problem is that posture is extremely complex, involving one of the most complicated structures you are likely to find; vast parts of your nervous system are designated to coordinate these structures. The idea that you could just put your shoulders here or there is hopelessly simplistic. Any one thing you could isolate is only part of an overall organization that is intricately interrelated. If you pull your shoulders back, for example, without thinking

that they may be there because of something that is happening in the rest of you, you will only do so with effort. And eventually that effort will cause problems elsewhere. So you try to address those new problems and in the process forget about your shoulders, or you chase the difficulty to a whole new part of yourself. . . .

You might imagine that if only you could get everything into its proper place *at the same time*, you would be good to go. But good luck with that, because as soon as you change one thing, it changes another, and you are off in pursuit of your own tail. Even if you could somehow whip everything into shape simultaneously, it would likely be a sort of Frankenstein version of posture, everything in its place and nothing your own. A simulation of life.

Aside from the overwhelming complexity of what is trying to be controlled, there is no indication that this is the way things work best or even at all. The idea of mind over matter, that the path to enlightenment involves merely overriding your physical needs with an intellectual or spiritual act of determination, is precisely, as we saw earlier, what the Buddha learned didn't work. It is the same, whether you are trying to deny those needs or trying to meet them. Taking care of your comfort shouldn't be one more excuse to boss your body around. It doesn't work, and it dishonors what is.

HONORING WHAT IS

The good news is that your body is beautifully intelligent, and it has a huge stake in figuring out what works for it. The trick is to figure out how to support

these natural processes. To do so, it is important to recognize things like discomfort and pain as something more than merely distractions to be overcome. They are part of an overall experience of sensations that are beautifully designed to give you feedback about what IS. The more you look to your own sensations, the more you will be able to respond to and align with what they are telling you.

This means not just acknowledging pain, but being willing to attune to those things that feel good, as well as more subtle differences. The more you tune into your own subtle sensations, the more likely you are to find meaningful and sustainable solutions to sitting well. This means not only being willing to look at and play with your physical sensations, but also to align yourself with your own situation rather than attempting to jump to assumptions about what should work in general or in some imaginary, idealized world. Just as scratches, itches, and aches can serve to distract you from sustained attention, so too, leaping out of your sensations or overriding them can serve as distractions from the sustained work of attending to your experience.

In other words, the goal is to use your own experience, sensations, and attention to discover your own comfort and a dynamic posture that works for you, rather than trying to conform to an external idea of how things should be.

THE MOVEMENT IN STILLNESS

Meditation is often thought of as being about stillness. You quiet yourself down and let go of the restless flitting

from one thought, desire, or activity to another. The very act of sitting can be seen as a practice of stillness. Perhaps you've even heard the advice, "sit like a mountain."

You might reasonably think, then, that the point is to avoid movement. But not so fast. If it were truly an either/or choice, we'd be in trouble. Movement, after all, is life. If we stop moving, we stop living. In that light, we might think of the stillness of meditation as a particular *kind of movement*.

Even mountains move, after all. And the erect posture of humans is absolutely predicated on movement. Learning to sit well, in balanced alignment, involves finding the movement within stillness. Indeed, balance, for the dynamic organism that we are, is not a static state, but a constant process of swaying and adjusting. Balance is not the moment when everything stops, but an activity in which everything is always in motion. Paradoxically, learning to be still involves learning to move well.

CHAPTER FIVE | THE WHOLE

So now let's begin exploring the sensations and dynamics of effortless meditation sitting. Take your time as you go through this chapter, and really explore the feelings and relationships so that they make sense for you. Rushing through, or just understanding "in theory" won't get you very far. You have to allow your body the time to really feel what makes the sense for sitting well.

Let's get started.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MOBILE PELVIS

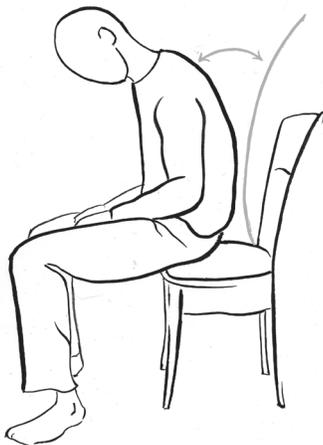
Your pelvis is a large bony structure that supports your whole spine. It goes from the bony ridges that you can feel if you place your hands on your hips to the sits bones that are the two bony protuberances that you can feel pressing into whatever you happen to be sitting on at the moment. You can imagine your sits bones as sort of like the rockers of a rocking chair (your pelvis) such that if you roll your hips forward with your hands, you rock onto the front of your sits bones. And likewise, if you roll your hips back, you rock onto the back of your sits bones.

You might notice that as you do this, you can't help but move your whole spine. There are at least two general strategies for doing this:



One is to keep the length of the spine relatively still, and just arc it through space, sort of like an upside down pendulum with your pelvis acting as the fulcrum. As you go forward you do a sort of straight and formal bow, and as you go back at some point you will feel like the leaning tower of Pisa, about to topple if you lean any further. And in the happy middle you will be balanced, leaning neither forward or back.

The other strategy is to bend and arch your lower back as you roll your pelvis. As you roll your pelvis to the back, you round your lower back, and as you roll your pelvis forward you arch your lower back.



These two strategies are not mutually exclusive, and in fact at any point you are doing something of both. The trick to finding an effortless sitting posture is to find the balanced position for both at the same time.

To get a sense of what I mean, try this. Sit in a chair and arc the top of you forward and back, without bending in your lower back.

Gradually reduce the swaying until you find a nice neutral position where you feel balanced in gravity. And then, keeping this sense of balance rock your pelvis again, but this time, gently let your lower back round and arch as you roll.

You'll notice that if you keep a sense of the neutral balance from the first rolling, this second version can be

nice and simple. But if you lose the sense of the vertical axis, it gets harder. You can check this by trying the extreme: arc back and forth with the spine again straight, and this time stop, not in neutral, but leaning backwards. You might feel the muscles in the front of your hips kicking in to keep you from falling over. Then from this tilted back position, roll your hips a little bit forward and back, letting your lower back round and arch. Notice how this is more difficult. Return to sitting upright and feel the difference.

A good, balanced position for sitting will be neither leaning forward or backward, nor arching or rounding. (Note that this doesn't mean that the lower back is "straight." I'm just talking about finding the minimum of muscular effort, where you are not actively arching or rounding. We'll discuss the curves of the back soon.) As you can see, by finding and using mobility, it is much easier to sort out the sensations of effort that are involved in holding yourself upright. Many of us hold all kinds of extra muscular effort in order to compensate for less than ideal organization, *without really realizing it*. This unnecessary effort means that while we may be "still," we are also working hard to hold this stillness.

Finding the movement *within* stillness is what leads to finding an effortless sitting position. And this, in turn, starts with finding your mobile pelvis. As we've seen, the activity of the spine is intimately connected to the pelvis. If you try to "sit up straight" without finding the dynamic support of the pelvis, you will only wind up layering effort on top of effort. We'll go into how you can use the movement of your pelvis to effortlessly

stack your spine shortly. But first let's look at one of the big pulls on the pelvis that often dictates its ability to move...

“THE LEG BONE IS CONNECTED TO THE HIP BONE . . .”

Some of the most massive muscles of the body connect your leg to your pelvis and spine. And not for no reason. The hip is a ball and socket joint that allows for an incredible range of motion, but also must bear a great deal of force for us to be able to walk, run, and jump, and keep ourselves together in the process. Our hips thus play large role in keeping us upright and generating movement. So the leg/pelvis connection is a big factor in finding a neutral position for the pelvis, and hence for the whole length of the spine as well as the head and shoulders.

Sitting in a chair, or in *seiza*, tends to be a relatively easy task for the hip joints. But sitting with the legs crossed is a whole other challenge. If you've grown up in a chair-sitting culture, sitting cross-legged can be a daunting task. Not only can turning out the hips be difficult, but this in turn makes it difficult for the pelvis to find a neutral and mobile state and leads to many of the challenges found in meditation sitting.

Try this to see what I'm talking about. Sit on the edge of a chair with your feet comfortably shoulder width apart. See if you can really just let your knees balance over your feet without holding them there. Play with the position of your feet to find a place where you can feel balanced.

Now, begin to roll your pelvis gently forward and back. Notice how this affects the balance of your knees. As you roll the top of your pelvis forward, you may notice your knees pressing out to the sides. If you aren't holding your legs fixed, your knees are likely to move out in space. And if you *are* holding, you may nevertheless feel that they *want* to spread.

Likewise, if you roll backwards, there is a tendency for the knees to want to move towards each other. Slowly, gently, and without going very far in either direction, roll forward and back, and see if you can feel the coordination between your knees and pelvis. Don't be in a rush.

Next you can try the opposite: Slowly open and close your knees a little bit and see if you can feel your pelvis wanting to roll in response. Don't worry if this seems hard to feel. It can be subtle. But subtle is good. Don't force it or get frustrated; just listen for subtle inklings of a connection.

You can now try the whole experiment sitting on the floor cross-legged. Sitting on a cushion with your legs crossed, roll your pelvis. If your knees are already on the floor, you will feel it as a change of pressure, with the knees pressing more and then less into the floor. If your knees are in the air, they will tend to move closer and further from the floor.

As you can see from all of this, the position of the pelvis has an influence on where the legs want to be, and vice versa.

So what do you do with this knowledge? The most important thing is to recognize the importance of neutralizing the pull of your legs on your pelvis. If you can put your legs in a position where the leg muscles aren't strained, over time they will learn to settle into an easier position. If you are straining to get them into the proper position, you just interfere with this process. But if your legs are resting and relaxed, they won't be pulling on your pelvis, and it will be able to settle into a neutral and balanced position.

If your knees can easily rest on the floor, you'll find that your pelvis can settle into a dynamic neutral position relatively easily. If they can't, then the most important thing is to adjust your cushion height if you haven't already (see Chapter 3). If you want to see why this helps, with your legs crossed just lean back on your hands and gently lift your pelvis up in the air. You'll notice that raising the height of the pelvis also tends to bring your knees down. (If you still find your knees up in the air while you sit, play with putting some support under them. If after making whatever adjustments you can, you still find yourself straining in the legs or with your knees in the air, you may want to try sitting in *seiza* or in a chair. You can always revisit this position later.) Finding a neutral position for the legs will make all the difference in allowing the pelvis to support the full length of your spine with ease and comfort.

BALANCING THE SPINE

The spine is often associated with straightness. But it is perhaps more useful to think of it terms of

“uprightness.” It is what allows us to bring our head up high above our pelvis. In fact, you can think of the pelvis and the skull as the last vertebrae of the spine at either end. But there is nothing particularly “straight” about it. Otherwise, one long, rod-like bone would have done the job.

Instead, the spine is a highly flexible curving structure, evolved for the purpose of articulation. This is what allows us to have our head and pelvis assume any number of different relationships to each other. It comes in handy for navel gazing, as well as looking for your own shadow. Even when the head is poised nicely above the pelvis, as in sitting meditation, this is best achieved by a graceful series of curves that are constantly adjusting in relationship to each other, up and down the length of the spine.

You’ll recall how rocking your pelvis earlier involved arching and rounding the lower back. You may have also noticed that the whole length of your spine (including your head) responded. Let’s see if we can refine and clarify this a bit.



First, let’s see how the whole spine can curve together. Gently roll your pelvis and lower back so that you slump a little bit. Allow your head to fall forward as you do this, as if you were checking out your own navel. The whole spine curves in a “C” shape. This is also possible in the opposite direction. If you arch your back and let your head and eyes look up, the whole length of your spine arches backwards. You can see that where the pelvis goes has a direct influence on where the head and eyes go.

Most of the time, however, we do something a little more complex than that, and for which the spine is uniquely suited: it curves in more than one direction *at the same time*. Try this. As you roll your pelvis back, keep your eyes and head facing more or less forward. As you can see, it is possible to sort of “elevator” your head down, bringing it closer to your pelvis without changing its forward orientation. Now instead of a “C” curve, you have created something closer to an “S”; your neck is curving forward as your pelvis curves back. (If this is difficult to find, imagine jutting your jaw forward as you go down.) You can “elevator” up and down a few times, and see if you can make it smooth and coordinated, like a well tuned elevator.



So how does this happen? Clearly your spine isn't getting any shorter. Hopefully you haven't removed any vertebrae in the process. Instead, you are just taking advantage of the spine's natural tendency to coordinate complimentary curves. As your lower back rounds, your upper back, particularly your neck, arches, and vice versa.

Notice that as your lower back passes through “straight,” your neck is likely to be curving; as your neck passes through vertical, your lower back will have a curve to it. This is a good and beautiful thing. Don't worry if you have trouble following this. All it means is that your spine is always curving somewhere. And these curves are built into the very function of the spine. If you try to create one long vertical, you will likely feel the muscular effort required to achieve this odd configuration.

You may have heard the advice, “imagine your head being drawn up from above.” While this image can often help pull someone out of an excessive slump, it also tends to subtly kick in the attempt to create one long vertical. While you might be able to do this for a few minutes without too much trouble, over time you can probably already feel how it might be a difficult proposition.

There’s a much better way.

Rather than trying to lift the head by imagining things that don’t exist, it is far better to work with what actually happens: each vertebrae serves to support, or “push up” the ones resting above it. It is sort of like a tall stack of dishes. Well utilized muscles work to balance the stacked dishes/vertebrae, rather than trying to hold each dish up. The end result is a balanced structure with the big muscles and vertebrae at the bottom doing the majority of the work, providing a balanced support for the structures above. (Again, doing it backwards--trying to erect the larger lower structure by pulling up from the head, with its smaller, more refined muscles--is inelegant, and impractical.) So how do you do this?

Remember that mobile pelvis of yours? You’re already most of the way there. All you have to do is put it all together. Instead of trying to “correct” different parts of your spine, putting them in position one at a time, you let the natural wisdom of your spine tell you what it wants.

Get settled into a sitting position. And gently look for a little forward and back roll of your pelvis. And as you

come through the middle each time, imagine the whole chain of vertebrae being pushed up towards the sky. Don't go for height at any cost. Just feel for a nice place in the middle where your head feels gently buoyed up by the whole movement of your spine. Look for a sense of ease, like you could stay there forever without having to hold onto it. If you start straining and get uncomfortable, please, please, please, don't succumb to the pressure to tough it out. And don't try to work it out while persevering in holding yourself up. Just notice your strain and then let your holding go. If this means slumping for a few breaths, or straightening your legs for a moment, then by all means do so. This isn't a break, though. Keep your attention on what you are feeling. Think of it as the equivalent of noticing your thoughts and letting them go. Once you feel like the holding pattern has had a chance to dissipate, just gently start over, letting your pelvis press up through to your head again.

That's all there is to it. Make a habit of looking for this sense of balance and comfort every time you sit down to meditate. Check in now and again, and release any holding or discomfort. You'll find that this practice will get simpler and simpler, more and more intuitive.

BREATHING TO FREE YOUR NECK

The middle region of the spine is often a bit of a mystery. You may be able to feel the movement and pressing up of the lower back, but eventually lose the connection as you enter what seems like a Bermuda Triangle in the upper back, especially between the shoulder blades. If not,

that's great. But this area can often feel a bit blockish, as if it were all of a piece. The place that often feels the consequence of this, however, is further up, in the neck. If you are feeling tension or pain in the neck, or feel your head being held in an awkward position, it's time to give it some more dynamic support from below.

The first thing you can do is to continue with the gentle rolling and pressing up, from the pelvis. Go slowly and feel the movement of your spine pressing up until you lose the sensation. Each time you do this, see if you can feel just a little bit more. If you're not sure what exactly you are feeling, that's the point. It's subtle. Don't try to force things. The gentler and smaller the better. If you find yourself holding your breath, you are being counterproductive. If you do this gently, your breathing will feel easier and lighter.

This brings us to the second thing you can do. Your rib cage is somewhat unfortunately named. But for many it does operate as a sort of cage and prisoner, at the same time locking down movement. It is, however, much more mobile than you might imagine. As your lungs breath in and out, the ribs shift and move to follow suit. If the ribs are held more tightly than they need to be, they not only make it more work to breath, but they also wind up tugging on the spine to which they are attached, much the way the legs can pull on the pelvis. The converse is luckily also true. The more freely the ribs move, the more mobile and balanced the spine can be.

Try this. Balance your spine in sitting, then take a fairly deep breath and hold it. Still holding it, see if you can move as if you were shifting the air down into your

belly. Then up into your ribs. Alternate gently. Create a sense of slowly sloshing the air between your lungs and your belly. Let it go and breath a few times whenever you need to, and then try again. Notice how your spine adjusts to follow the movement. You may also feel your weight shifting gently where your pelvis makes contact with your chair or cushion.

Now here's the game. Gently and easily breathe into different parts of your lungs. Don't hold your breath or strain. Just breath naturally, but see if you can guide it to different areas of your torso. As you do this, feel that area of your torso expanding. Then see if you can feel the way your balance shifts as a result. For example, as you breathe into the area between your shoulder blades, you may feel your weight roll back. Picture as much of your spine as you can, and see how the breathing causes it to adjust. Take your time, and explore looking for areas that you haven't thought of yet. Some will feel more unusual than others. Don't force things. Just gently bring your attention to these areas, breathing caringly into them. After you've explored a bit, see if you can put it all together and breath (gently) into everywhere equally. See if you can do this while keeping your balance unperturbed, but not fixed.

Do this for a few moments, each time you sit to meditate. Then come back to the rocking and pressing up of the pelvis and spine, settling into a nice neutral balance. Not only will you breathe more easily, but your neck will thank you.

LEAVE YOUR POOR SHOULDERS ALONE

For many, it is the shoulders—the greatly feared pain in one shoulder or another that sets in after a few minutes of sitting. Or it's that burning knife right between the shoulder blades, the one that comes from hauling the shoulders back, consciously or unconsciously. What can I say? Just cut it out already.

OK, I'm being glib. But if it's not such a great idea to use the head to lift up the weight of your torso, it's doubly true for the shoulders. In fact, the shoulders are one of the modern wonders of the world, able to produce an extraordinary range of movement by resting on, and sliding over the rib cage. They're great for swinging through the trees, and hurling balls, and swinging your partner round and round. But they're not so great for holding your spine upright. Let them rest already.

Easier said than done, right? "If I let them go, they just hunch and slump." I hear you. This used to be my problem too. But years of being told to "straighten my shoulders" and "stop slouching" didn't get me any closer to a solution. Why? Because it's in your arm's nature to hang. And it is in realizing this, and not fighting it, that the solution lies. The trick is to give them a nice balanced support from which to do their hanging. So rather than trying to muscle your shoulders around, get your spine and ribs under them.

You'll notice, in all this pelvis rocking, that as you round and arch, your shoulders follow suit. As you round your lower back, your shoulders naturally pull forward, and as you arch, they roll back. If you find yourself hunching

your shoulders, treat it as a symptom of not yet being clear on the pelvis/spine relationship or on breathing.

Rather than getting distracted by the symptom, you need to return to the foundations. So get your arms and shoulders as comfortable as possible, resting in your lap, or slightly raised on a pillow or something. If you feel tension in your hands, arms or shoulders, see if it is as simple as just letting it go. (Check to make sure you aren't cocking your wrists, or pulling your elbows subtly back and in. These are common habits.) If you have difficulty just letting it go, this is perfectly normal. Instead of fighting to relax, you can go with it instead. Try slowly exaggerating the effort a few times. See if you can match exactly what you are doing and then intentionally do it. You will likely find that after a few times, the habit is weakened and you can let it go a bit more. The trick is to go slowly and mindfully. Discover something about your habit. It is only in "knowing what we do" that we can "do what we want." Then, once you've got things resting as best you can, go back to exploring pushing up the length of your spine from your pelvis, and balancing your breathing.

THE FACE KNOWS

Our faces are born communicators, from the sounds we string together with our mouths to the eyes that are the windows to our soul. The muscles of the face may not be particularly built for holding us up, but they can certainly tell us a lot about the extra effort we may be exerting to do so.

Next time you are meditating, take a scan of your face muscles. They have a lot to tell you about whether you have found a good and balanced position for the length of your spine. Are you clenching with your jaw? Straining in your eyes? Your lips? Your forehead? What about your tongue?! Just gently notice, and let it go as best you can. (You can try gently exaggerating whatever you discover first, just to get a sense of it.) Don't dwell on it though. Instead, return to finding dynamic support from the bottom up. Get your legs comfortable, your pelvis mobile, and your spine balanced. Then, if you'd like, smile just a touch.

CHAPTER SIX | CONCLUSION

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

There is no quick fix for sitting comfortably and dynamically. Like meditating itself, it is a practice. The more you attend to it, the more your sitting practice will grow. But notice, I said “attend.” Just sitting, without awareness and curiosity, is not likely to get you far. But if you continue to bring your attention to exploring how you sit, and insist on your own comfort, the reward is a lifetime habit that will continue to support your mental, physical, and spiritual well being.

Here are some tips for integrating what you have learned here into your practice so it can continue to serve you.

Start every meditation by checking in and looking for a balanced and effortless position. After a while, this will become second nature, and you will find it easier and easier to settle in. If you feel discomfort, strain, or pain: stop. Readjust, and start again, checking in just as you did in the beginning. Be rigorous with your comfort, and don't allow yourself to slip into “tough it out” mode. If you have to stop frequently, that is just a good indication

of where your learning needs to be for the moment. If a short rest and resettling in doesn't really work, then you've just discovered your maximum meditation time. Maybe it's twenty minutes. Maybe it's five. If it is not as long as you would like, sit more frequently, and see if that is sustainable. But don't try to tough it out.

If after sitting in one position for a while, you start to feel uncomfortable, gently and mindfully switch to another position. Or try alternating with walking meditation.

This is a good rule in general: change it up. Don't do the same thing every time. If you always sit in *seiza*, have you tried the Burmese position? Or vice versa. What about a chair? If you haven't explored your breathing recently, take a week to play with it. If you sat with one leg in front last time, place the other one in front this time. If it feels odd, this is exactly the kind of natural stimulant your attention can use. It's easy to slip into rote habits and routines. Over time, we may hardly recognize that we have a choice.

Here's an example: interlace your fingers for a moment. Stop reading for a second and do it.

Feel how normal this gesture is?

Now interlace them the other way.

Odd, huh? And if you're not even sure what I mean by the other way, that's exactly my point: habit shapes awareness. (Notice how one of your index fingers is on the outside? Just switch it, and let the other fingers switch their order as well, until they are all alternating again.)

It's only by continuing to look for what we may be overlooking that we expand our options. Meditation is a practice of continuing to modify and refine your awareness. So explore the different ways in which you can sit and bring your attention to your sensations.

Rote practice in the face of discomfort leads to injury. If you hurt yourself, look for what you are persisting in and stop. Find another option. Remember, there is no "proper" way to sit, only what works for you. And there is no neutral position in the abstract, only *your* neutral. And even that will change from day to day, moment to moment. Honor what IS.

And finally, keep in mind that the path to enlightenment is itself enlightened. If you want to end with ease, awareness, and wellbeing, then practice ease, awareness and wellbeing. If you take care of yourself, your practice will take care of you.

Here's to your practice!

APPENDIX | LOTUS POSITION

A WORD ON THE LOTUS POSITION

The one meditation posture that I actively don't recommend is the lotus position. This entails sitting cross-legged with both feet resting on the opposite thigh (or just one foot in the simpler variation of the half-lotus). The Lotus Position is, of course, a classic position, and often treated as the holy grail of meditation postures. *Très* esoteric. But frankly, just because something is difficult to attain doesn't make it a worthy goal.

The Lotus Position is often described as the most stable posture, but even if you do have the flexibility to sit in it, I find that it is the wrong kind of stability. It's sort of like locking yourself down by tying your legs in a knot. Actually, it is *precisely* like that. Since sitting flat on the floor tends to roll the pelvis out of a neutral upright position, the legs are put into an extreme, locked position in order to force the pelvis upright. Personally, I prefer to feel more dynamic in my life. Like if I needed to stand up, I actually could. Without untying myself first. Call me crazy. This dynamic balance, however, is true stability. And this book is all about how to look

for dynamic, functional stability. For that, the positions suggested here are much more suitable.

But the main reason to avoid the lotus position is that the odds of injury are particularly high, even for the very flexible. Even if you are able to avoid active pain and discomfort, the cumulative effect of the forces at work in this contorted position has a way of sneakily building up over time and surprising you later. And one day you find that your knees don't work any more. Frankly, there is little reason to risk it. Better to spend your time cultivating a more dynamic position.

So, if you are already using the lotus position, great. You should find that the positions we discussed here help you find something that can be elusive in the lotus position. And as you explore them you will likely find yourself comfortably within your range of movement. And if my take on the lotus position offends your yogic soul, no worries, you don't have to leave it behind, or even agree with me. Think of the alternative positions and approaches that we explored here as giving you an even greater appreciation of the distinctions between positions. Then you can select for yourself what it is you are after in any given moment.

And if you haven't looked at the lotus position, great too. The positions we looked at here are what you should focus on.