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## Meditation Q&A with Guo Gu

*Guo Gu*

8-10 minutes

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### [Trike Daily Meditation Month 2021](#) Meditation & Practice

In our final Meditation Month offering for 2021, teacher Guo Gu offers suggestions for choosing the right amount of time to practice and dealing with discomfort, and discusses the differences between creative and meditative absorption.

With [Guo Gu](#)

Mar 31, 2021





Photo by Myosen Sprott

Congratulations on making it to the last day of Meditation Month! We're more than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, so we hope that this year's articles, resources, and discussion pages offered helpful tips for reinvigorating, sustaining, or kickstarting your practice.

This month, teacher Guo Gu hosted multiple live meditations online and answered participants' questions in two informal Q&As. We hope that his advice can provide extra guidance and help you carry the daily practice that you cultivated throughout the month into our ever-changing world.

**You hear different things from different teachers about how long to sit in meditation: 10 minutes, an hour, twice a day. How long should I practice for?** As you continue to build a foundation and practice [progressive relaxation](#) and [somatic integration](#), half an hour is ideal. The more you practice, the faster you'll be able to relax and cultivate awareness, and the more you'll

be able to engage in the method of [silent illumination](#). Sitting for half an hour helps you to build a routine and serves as a great container for a grounding practice. If you don't have half an hour, practice for however long you can—even if it's just for ten minutes.

If you don't have 10 minutes, I suggest something I called “[one-minute Chan](#).” Integrate meditation into five one-minute periods throughout your day. Choose five things that you already do every day: maybe it's a stroll down the same street, climbing a flight of stairs, gardening, washing dishes, or whatnot. For the first minute of those routine tasks, notice the bodily sensations at three different points: the eyes and eyebrow region, the shoulders, and the abdomen. Access the sense of presence, ground yourself in those sensations, and then engage in whatever you're doing. This practice is a good one even if you've already dedicated 30 minutes to sitting practice. Right from the beginning, you're learning not to separate meditation practice, that is, “practice” from your daily life.

**I'm confused about the concept of embodiment. When I become more aware of my body, I feel like I am reifying it and become more attached to it. I go around in this little loop where I try to *not* feel my body so I can feel an expansive awareness. What should I do? This question points to our discursive thoughts, our thinking mind, which tend to reify things**—it's normal to make everything into a “thing,” and when we relax, we can automatically make the body into a thing, too. This is why I teach relaxation of the body through focusing on the actual, lived sensations of the skin, muscles, and tendons. Forget about the body as one, solid thing; just focus on different areas of bodily experience. When the body is truly relaxed, you don't actually *feel*

the body. What you do feel is an embodied experience of groundedness and connection, a far cry from “my body” as an idea.

Once the body is grounded, put it aside. See if you can access the undercurrent feeling tone of your experience. Maybe it's a feeling of grasping or contentment. (If you can access that contentment, allow yourself to resonate to take it in and merge it with your sense of groundedness.) Many people are so disconnected with the body that they run from it, and turn to mindfulness or another method. That may help temporarily, but without integrating the fullness of our experience, we participate in grasping and rejecting, two of the [three poisons](#) of the mind (craving, aversion, and delusion; grasping and rejecting stem from craving and aversion). The point of relaxation is to let go of the mechanisms we use to block access to our experience, in order to tap into the feeling tone and the freshness of the present moment.

In the wakeful experience of moment-to-moment awareness, notice these worries you have about reifying the body. Even those thoughts have the quality of freshness. What did they come from? Where did they just go?

**I feel numbness and pain when I sit in meditation. Is this a problem?** It's quite common for our legs, feet, and hands to go numb when we sit. If you start to tense up and worry about your numb limbs, practice grounding and relaxing. Then, again and again, access your undercurrent feeling tone. There are multiple reasons why we might experience discomfort or numbness. Check in with your [posture](#)—make sure that when you're sitting on a round cushion, you're using it to prop up your buttocks so that your abdomen can relax. Before you sit, do some light stretching, yoga,

or tai chi. After you sit, try gently massaging the parts of your body that feel pain or numbness. If you stick with this regime, many of these issues should lessen.

**I'm a writer and I often get distracted by ideas for my work while I'm meditating. What's the relation of the concentration of meditation and the concentration of making art? The poet and translator [Red Pine](#) has said that they are the same.**

Concentration is not black and white, not a matter of having it or not. There is a mental continuum, from complexity to simplicity. Concentration means that you have fewer discursive thoughts—the mind becomes simpler and focused. When your mind is like this in seated meditation, time will fly by very quickly. But with writing or making art, there's a lot of cognitive processing happening. You're drawing upon knowledge you have—thinking about the composition or adding this or embellishing that. Time may still go by quickly, but it's incomparable to [meditative concentration](#), where discursive thoughts are few and you're not reaching into the well of knowledge you use to make things. In creative concentration, you may be able to get into a “flow” state, where coarse discursive thinking subsides and your writing or art happens smoothly, spontaneously. The mind is not burdened with words and language. However, subtle cognitive thought processing is still active.

In seated meditative concentration, by using the method, the subtle undercurrent thoughts (cognitive processing) are exposed and dissolved, leading to a deeper, simpler kind of concentration. If the meditator is practicing correctly, this concentration will also be embodied. This would be a deeper kind of “flow,” wherein the mind, the present moment, and the method become one. Oneness



is not awakening, but it is a necessary ingredient.



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