

# Begin Again. And Again.

## How Meditation Can Support Your Artistic Practice

By Karen Macklin

Even if you consider yourself a natural born artist, creative work can test your body, mind, and heart. Read on to find out how a daily meditation practice can help your creative efforts in very specific ways from a yogic perspective.



I'm a yoga teacher and a writer, but I was a writer first. I wrote my first poem at seven and my first play at nine. I started writing for magazines at 19, and went on to be a professional journalist, author, and playwright. I have written at times for money and at times for pleasure. I have written out of the desire to grow, the necessity to burn away layers of my past, and the impulse to let others to know they are not alone in this human heartland of tragedy, comedy, and mystery. Words are who I am, and how I am, and what I do.

But that doesn't mean that writing is easy. As any artist knows, creating is challenging—sometimes painfully so. It's hard on the body and it's hard on the mind and it's hard on the heart. It will keep you up at night, in the house on a beautiful day, and living just a little bit closer to the edge of your own soul. Meditation practice helps me stay committed, grounded, and open as an artist, and it offers a stronger sense of intention and meaning to my work.

From a yogic perspective, here's what artists have to gain from a daily meditation practice.

### 1. Meditation teaches us discipline (tapas).

One of the most challenging aspects of creative practice is carving out the time to do it. For most people, their creative discipline is not their primary form of income. This means that the rewards for creating are not external and immediate, but internal and long-term. If no one is lighting a fire underneath us to paint or make music, we have to light that fire ourselves. Daily meditation practice—even for five minutes—can teach us how to light that fire again and again. Slowly, the fire grows stronger, and is not extinguished so easily by mental distractions. We can then translate this skill of discipline to our artistic practice.

### 2. Meditation trains our concentration (dharana).

Distraction has likely been an impediment to artistic practice since our ancestors were pulled away from creating their cave-drawings to run from a woolly mammoth or engage in prehistoric primping. But today, distractions are no longer the interruption; they are the norm. More than ever, we need focus. Without it, we can

sit down with our pens or pianos for hours and still get nothing accomplished. Simply training the mind to come back to the breath again and again is one of the best tools for strengthening our attention, which we can later direct to our art. When we practice deep concentration coupled with silence, we can also access states of emptiness, which are essential for the birth of new ideas.

### 3. Meditation teaches us the art of self-study (svadyaya), which enables us to attain states of clear-seeing (avidya).

Great art arises from a diversity of life experiences, and our ability to grow from them. In the same way we might travel to far flung corners of the globe to gain a deeper external experience of life, we can travel inward to gain a deeper internal experience of what it means to be human. The insights we gain from sitting quietly and reflectively with our own minds and bodies are invaluable doorways into the intricacies and complexities of our own subconscious. And because

meditation shines a light on the clouded parts of our minds, it encourages us to see more clearly. Clear-seeing enables us to create not only from reactionary emotions like anger and fear, but from more refined emotions like compassion and love, which can make our art more empathic, intentional, and meaningful.

### 4. Meditation teaches us the practice of letting go (vairagya).

Some of the hardest challenges for artists happen not during the process of creating, but after the work is complete. We may believe that either our work or the response we receive after sharing it with others is lacking. Whether internal or external, rejection can break our hearts—plunging us into depression and possibly preventing us from continuing to create. Meditation teaches, with each breath, to let go of the last moment and move into the now. With patience and with practice, we learn to continually return to the present moment, where there is always the opportunity to start anew, to begin again.

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