

Meditation 101

naadayoga

500 hr Teacher Training



Meditation 101

Opening to Awareness

OVERVIEW

*Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the world earth revolves- slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future;
Live the actual moment. Only this moment is life. - Thich Nhat Hanh*

Meditation means awareness. In some ways, whatever you do with awareness is meditation. Observing – and more importantly, resting – with the breath is meditation. As we do this, we come more into awareness of our bodies, our thoughts, emotions, and of what is around us. In this way, whatever we do during the day can be done meditatively.

Topics include:

- Understanding meditation as it relates to Yoga and Buddhism
- The story of the Buddha
- The Eightfold Path
- How to begin a meditation practice
- Meditation postures
- Techniques for practice
- Difficulties faced in meditation
- 6 week practice outline

Objectives

Upon completion of this module you should be able to:

- Understand meditation as it relates to Yoga and Buddhism.
- To better understand the practice of meditation and its relationship to breath, movement and stillness
- To explore sitting meditation to understand stability (shamatha) and insight (vipashyana)
- To explore moving meditation in walking practice and within the yoga asanas
- To explore our own patterns of emotional reactivity and understand how to work with these
- To understand the difference between attention, mindfulness and awareness, and how to cultivate these qualities.
- To examine how one can integrate meditation principles in a teaching setting and in everyday life.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition a distinction is made between “formal” and “informal” practice. Formal practice is what we commonly view as meditation: seated in awareness; and informal practice is what we do with the rest of our lives. A complete practice is viewed as a blending of these two approaches, where both support the other and neither can be neglected.

From this perspective, meditation is not a technique, but a way of life that extends into and continually informs our lives – it is, in fact, our lives. It describes a state of consciousness where we are intimately involved in our lives and more aware of the repetitive thoughts and reactive patterns that keep us from fully engaging in our experience.

Zen Buddhist teacher Steven Hagen states: “Meditation is not a self-help program, a way to better ourselves so we can get what we want. Nor is it a way to relax before jumping back into busyness. It’s not something to do once in awhile, either, whenever you happen to feel like it. Instead, meditation is a practice that saturates your life and in time can be brought into every activity... In practicing meditation, we go nowhere other than right here, where we now stand, where we now sit, where we now live and breathe. In meditation we return to where we already are: this shifting, changing ever-present now. If you wish to take up meditation, it must be now or never.”

Hagen’s words echo the second line of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: *atha yoganuaasanam* “Now, the practice of Yoga.” This present moment is where the practice begins and this present moment is the practice.

The word meditation, is derived from two Latin words: *meditari* (to think, to dwell upon, to exercise the mind) and *mederi* (to heal). Its Sanskrit derivation, *medha*, means wisdom. Traditionally, the classical yoga texts describe that to attain true states of meditation, or true wisdom into the nature of being, one must go through several stages. After the necessary preparation of inner and outer “ethics” (yamas and niyamas), physical discipline (asana), and experience of breath (pranayama), come the more advanced stages of concentration (pratyahara), contemplation (dharana), and then meditation (dhyana), and ultimately non-dual realization (samadhi). But that does not mean that one must perfect any one stage before moving onto the next. For example, in Sri Arubindo’s Integral Yoga approach, each stage is a simultaneous application of all stages.

Today, people may be referring to any one of these stages when they use the term meditation (although less so the term “yoga”). Some meditation approaches only teach concentration techniques, some relaxation, others teach free-form contemplative activities, and still others “stress-reduction” techniques, which leads to even more confusion.

MEDITATION, YOGA, BUDDHISM: WHERE DOES IT ALL FIT IN?

There is often confusion and overlap with Yoga, Buddhism, Hinduism, meditation and the various schools in these traditions, and the scope of such a discussion cannot be encompassed in this manual (or in any one text), but it can be helpful to situate some of this to have a clearer picture of what fits in where in the realm of study and practice.

Boccio explains that Yoga can be seen as encompassing various Indian philosophies and practices. Yoga is what scholar Georg Feuerstein calls, “the psychospiritual technology specific to the great civilizations of India”, the purpose of which is to liberate the practitioner from suffering, illusion (of duality) or *dukkha*. Out of this Yoga tradition emerged the three major yogic cultural traditions of India: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. For this reason, many key terms and concepts will be echoed in each of these traditions and the practices associated with them. (Tibetan Buddhism developed in relative isolation until fairly recently, and its practices differ slightly and tend to be much more ritualized.)

Although Hatha Yoga has come to be associated with asana practice, what we now know as yoga “poses” developed relatively late in the yoga tradition. “For much of Yoga’s history, practice meant meditation, chanting, selfless service, and study,” states Frank Jude Boccio, a Zen Buddhist teacher in the tradition of Thich Naht Hanh. “This broader understanding of Yoga makes it clear that whenever a Buddhist takes her seat in the meditation hall, she is practicing Yoga.” The same could be said of a dedicated yogi, as they fully enter into a pose: they can do so meditatively, noticing breath, body, thoughts, sensations, etc.

Hatha Yoga as a complete system involved the regular practice of a balanced series of various techniques, enabling the energy of the body and mind to be worked with systematically and in a unified way to allow consciousness or awareness to be expanded, to include all aspects of one’s experience. This “awakened” state is the essence of a complete yoga practice. It is compassion: the ability to be completely present with what is, as it arises and to respond (not react) accordingly, as the situation requires. This ultimately means that one must confront and release all that impedes that ability, the most common “impediment” being our sense of self and our habituated reactive patterns around this “self”. If we view yoga as part of a complete system that includes meditation, it is a most demanding practice that will challenge us to experience life to its fullest.

In many ways, since meditation is so experiential any attempt to explain it can, in subtle ways, move us away from fully understanding what it is. We can try to explain it, in order to clarify some points and to situate it in the very broad field of practices and traditions, but to fully understand it, one must practice it.

WHERE TO BEGIN

A good place to begin any discussion on meditation is to go back to its roots, over 2500 years ago with Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Siddhartha, in his own way, dealt with very similar challenges and struggles (what is termed “suffering” in Buddhism) as what each of us face now, what humanity itself has struggled with for centuries. Through this, he developed a way to meet life, engage fully with it, and release struggle or suffering.

At the core of any Buddhist or meditation practice is this notion: that there is struggle, confusion and suffering, and that we all have the same capacity inherent in us as the Buddha did: to engage fully in this life and to find freedom from struggle by rediscovering our ability to meet challenges directly. We use various means to meet these challenges and experience life, most of which bring us back to the very vehicle where experience arises: our bodies and our minds. All aspects of a complete yoga practice also offer us this potential: asana, pranayama, meditation, the yamas and niyamas, etc.

So, meditation is offering ourselves the conditions in which awareness can develop. We begin with our posture to establish attention. We focus on our breath as an object of attention. We engage the mind and body to observe, feel and rest with the breath as the object of attention. To build capacity and to keep cultivating these conditions, we return (again and again and again) to what’s most available: our bodies and our breath – trusting that our hearts and mind inherently know how to rest and how to return to what is their true nature.

THE BUDDHA’S STORY

Siddhartha Gautama was born into royalty over 2500 years, a young prince in Northern India. He knew only great wealth, luxury and beauty. His father, King Suddhodana, was the leader of Shakyas clan (which is why Buddha is sometime referred to as Shakyamuni Buddha, or “sage of the shakyas”) had heard it predicted that his son might become a great teacher or saint, and he did not want this path for him, since he wanted Siddhartha to succeed the throne. So, the king forbade that his son should leave the palace, providing him with every distraction and fulfilling whatever desire he had, hiding anyone who was old or sick from his sight, effectively sheltering him from the world and the experiences of pain, suffering and death.

Although his father ensured that Siddhartha was provided with everything that he could want or need, Siddhartha sensed that material wealth was not life’s ultimate goal, so at 29-years-old, he ventured past the palace walls with an attendant. In his first experience of the world outside the limited confines of the palace, he saw a decrepit old man, a diseased person, a corpse being cremated, and a sadhu (a holy man). On that day, Siddhartha realized that there is old age, sickness, and death, and that people ultimately have little control over their lives. His encounter with the sadhu, however, was pivotal. Here was an old man, with little in his life, yet he radiated

peace and ease in this world of suffering and pain. This intrigued Siddhartha and made him question his life and the life he now saw, and sparked his quest to discover the cause of suffering.

This mirrors any spiritual enquiry: we come to practice because we are struggling, questioning or confused about something. We have an idea of what life was, what it is, and maybe of what practice can offer us. Instead of continuing how we were, or shutting down and numbing out, or trying to control our situation, we begin questioning how things are. And so we begin any quest or deep practice by feeling dissatisfaction, then questioning how things are, then setting out on a quest to find out what this life is about for us. And, if we can cultivate a spirit of genuine commitment and curiosity in this quest, our experience of practice – and of life – begins to open something up in us.

Siddhartha had seen wealth and poverty, well-being and suffering, youth and old age, life and death. And in the midst of this, he saw someone at peace and became curious about that: how was this possible? This is what meditation can offer us: the possibility to momentarily feel that opening; where how we thought things were and how they are meet. We're often too busy to notice such moments and we lack the skill and capacity to either notice, or to be in that experience for very long. What we cultivate in meditation is this capacity for awareness and presence, so that we can see how things really are, and be in that experience, and then act from there, instead of reacting based on our ideas of how things are or how we wish they would be.

That very evening, Siddhartha left the palace and began his quest, seeking out religious teachers, philosophers, meditators, whomever he could learn from. He learned techniques, theories, practices, and ethics. Still, he felt he wasn't finding the answers to his questions. So, he realized that he had to turn deeply to his own experience with these teachings and practices. The understanding had to come from deep within him.

At this point, Siddhartha's journey shifted. Since he had known only wealth and could not understand suffering, he decided that to understand suffering one must enter into it fully. So, he and five companions adopted a life of extreme asceticism for six years, with little or no money, housing or clothing, and subsisting on what is traditionally said to be one grain of rice, a sesame seed and a drop of water daily (although what is being communicated is that they lived a life of extreme austerity).

After six years of denial and near-starvation, Siddhartha's health and mental focus were severely compromised, and he collapsed in a river while bathing and almost drowned. Then, he remembered a moment in childhood when he had been watching his father start the season's plowing. This helped him attain a concentrated and focused state that was blissful and refreshing (*jhana*), and he realized that he could no longer keep his mind clear if he continued his current path.

After realizing that meditative *jhana* was a path to awakening, but that extreme asceticism didn't work, Siddhartha discovered what Buddhists call the Middle Way, a path of moderation, away from the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial.

In a famous incident, after becoming starved and weakened, he is said to have accepted milk and rice pudding from a village girl named Sujata, and from then on, continued to eat and drink normally.

As he regained his health, Siddhartha vowed to sit under a bodhi (pipal) tree in Bodhgaya, and meditate until he understood the source and nature of suffering. His companions felt he had abandoned his search, criticized him and left.

Siddhartha, however, was no longer going to one extreme or the other. He was simply being with what was, where he was. He was able to rest with this breath, not focusing on any one thing, not trying to make anything happen, not denying what did arise in his thoughts but not distracted by it either. In effect, he was opening to his complete experience in that moment, resting with the question that began his spiritual quest: What is the source of suffering?

After a reputed 49 days of meditation, Siddhartha moved into deeper meditative states. Traditional texts describe his experiences in these states metaphorically, as he encountered the demon of obsession, Mara, who tried to distract him with various visions and temptations to bring him into the realm of confusion and reaction.

Siddhartha stayed in attention, as one does in meditation, allowing experience to come and go, to rise and fall as the breath does. As Mara's onslaught continued, Siddhartha simply watched experiences come and go, without reacting to them but deeply feeling what arose. He then understood: the source of our suffering is our emotional reaction to that experience. More so, that this reaction is based on the idea that we (or the sense of "I", the *ahamkara* or "I-maker" that Patanjali refers to¹), are separate from our experience. In fact, we are actually creating it (i.e. our suffering and struggle) and so therefore we can also end it. In that instant, the visions vanished and Siddhartha was "awakened". He became the Buddha, at the age of 35, one who has woken up from confusion and reaction, one who can relate to life and experience as it is and respond to whatever arises as it arises.

Still, Mara had one final challenge for the newly-awakened Siddhartha, wanting him to validate his internal experience externally. The Buddha simply smiled, touched the earth with an open palm, and said, "The earth is my witness." The ground of awareness supported his truth. That was all there was, and all that was needed, to support his experience: the very ground and path that we walk upon. There is nothing else to trust – and nothing that can challenge that. In that instant, Mara disappeared. In that instant of complete awareness, our habits and patterns no longer run the show. We are in life completely, ready to respond to whatever arises and trusting our experience without any need for external validation.

¹ According to Patanjali, the mind (*citta*) is made up of three components: *manas*, *buddhi*, and *ahamkara*. *Manas* is the faculty that receives impressions gathered by the senses from the outside world. *Buddhi* is the discriminative faculty that classifies these impressions and reacts to them. *Ahamkara* is the ego-sense that claims these impressions for its own, and create a sense of "I" having the experience, further separating us from our experience.

*What is awakened mind? The mind that is intimate with all things.
- Dogen (13th century Japanese Zen master)*

WHAT IS MEDITATION? A SECOND LOOK

As the Buddha's story shows us, meditation is about waking up. First, though, we have to realize that we're asleep. With that realization, the journey begins. Then, we start to notice the times when fall back asleep, or out of awareness. Meditation helps us notice that more and more. When do we fall out of attention? When do we not notice the breath or how our body feels in certain situations? And so we practice, we build capacity to keep noticing. As we notice more – about our bodies on the meditation cushion or in a yoga pose, about ourselves in certain situations or relationships – we notice how we react to that experience, how we react to life, and what patterns keep running. Then, we find ways to work with, not against those patterns, so we no longer fuel them, so they no longer run – or run us.

These ways of reacting and thinking are what contribute to our confusion and struggle and create what Buddhism refers to as suffering. Meditation is a tool to notice these patterns, confront them, dismantle them. In Yoga terms, they are simply movements of our mind, the *citta-vrittis*. As we still ourselves, we still them. We see them, through them, and perhaps touch what was underneath them, driving them and us, keeping us asleep and apart from our experience, keeping us from responding fully. Sometimes we think that by reacting more we are feeling our experience more, but as we sit in meditation we realize that the reaction is actually keeping us away from feeling something deeply.

Meditation is developing our ability to pay attention to our immediate experience. “We are often pre-occupied with thoughts about the past or the future or with fantasies,” explains Gil Fronsdal, from the Insight Meditation Centre. “While sometimes such pre-occupations may be innocent and harmless, more often they contribute to stress, fear and suffering. Mindfulness practice is learning how to overcome pre-occupation so that we can see clearly what is happening in our lived experience of the present. In doing so, we find greater clarity, trust, and integrity. Mindfulness relies on an important characteristic of awareness: awareness by itself does not judge, resist, or cling to anything. By focusing on simply being aware, we learn to disentangle ourselves from our habitual reactions and begin to have a friendlier and more compassionate relationship with our experience, with ourselves and with others.

At the time of Siddhartha's awakening, he realized complete insight into the cause of suffering, and the steps necessary to eliminate it. These discoveries became known as the Four Noble Truths, which are at the heart of Buddhist teachings and practice. Through understanding these Truths, a state of supreme liberation, or Nirvana, is believed to be possible for any being. The Buddha described Nirvana as the peace of a mind that's free from habituated patterns (or

kleshas). Nirvana is also regarded as the "end of the world", in that no personal identity or boundaries of the mind remain. We are free to be who we need to be, as the situation requires.

After his awakening, Buddha spent a few weeks reflecting on his experience. He wasn't sure how he could communicate this to others and wondered whether or not people were so overpowered by ignorance, greed and hatred that they could never recognize the path, which is subtle, deep and hard to grasp. Still, he felt a responsibility to teach this path, so he committed himself to making this experience accessible to others and went to Benares (now Varanasi).

In the village of Sarnath, not far from Benares, Buddha met his former five companions who had begun the journey with him. At first, they ignored him, but then they began to sense how he had changed and were curious about what had happened, asking him to explain. Buddha began his discourse, what became known as the Four Noble Truths (ref. next section).

As with any moment of "awakening", we feel a bit lost, not sure what to do, but knowing we can't go back to what was. We don't quite have our bearings, but have more confidence and trust in our experience; we feel as if we must do something, but aren't sure what. As Buddhist teacher Ken McLeod says, "At first, we have no idea what to do or how to function, but we are still breathing. Life goes on, but now what? Our natural human impulse is to share our knowledge and understanding with others. This impulse manifests in life as compassion, which is a response to the circumstances of the moment."

In a deeper sense, this is what all meditation and yoga teachings are offering: an opportunity to wake up, which eventually expresses itself as compassion, when we wish the same for others. That doesn't mean we "force" our views or experiences on others, but rather we act from a new place, from a new view of our world – and the world responds differently to us. One instruction from a Tibetan Buddhist text advises practitioners to "Change your intention, but behave naturally". So, we change how we were, becoming more responsive and less reactive, opening more to life, but we don't make a big fuss about it. In fact, we may act even more like ourselves when we're not reacting from a place of habituated patterns or trying act like how we think an "enlightened" person would.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS & THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

When other spiritual teachers and philosophers asked Buddha to describe his teaching, he usually answered, "I teach one thing and one thing only, suffering and the end of suffering." This takes us to the heart of the Buddha's teachings, which in many ways forms the foundation of most meditation traditions, the Buddha's discourse on the Four Noble Truths and the path to liberation:

- 1) There is suffering.
- 2) We create this suffering.
- 3) If we create it, then we can also end it.
- 4) There is a path to follow to end it (what Buddha eventually termed the Noble Eightfold Path, which in many ways echoes aspects of the *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*)^{*2}.

Or, as Ken McLeod phrases it: "Buddha's way to presence was through the question of suffering: What is it? How does it arise? Can it be ended? How do we end it? [These Four Truths] are, in fact, based on a simple problem-solving model, a model that dates far back in Indian philosophy and medicine:

- 1) What is the problem?
- 2) What is the root of the problem?
- 3) Is there a solution?
- 4) How do you put the solution into effect?"

Zen teacher Frank Jude Boccio further states that, "The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path offer a complete and coherent model of yogic theory and practice. In fact, it is one of the earlier such models, predating Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* by over 500 years. Like all authentic Yoga, it is *moksha-sastra*, a liberation teaching designed to free us from *duhkha*."

² Note that Patanjali wrote the *Yoga Sutras* almost 600 years after the Buddha's death, indicating a very clear influence from the Buddha's teachings, in particular Patanjali's path begins, as does the Eightfold Path, with ethical principles as the foundation for any practice.

The Four Noble Truths & the Eightfold Path

By Ken McLeod

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Suffering

Suffering or struggle is still the central issue for us today. The Sanskrit term is *dukkha*, a term that refers to the unsatisfying quality of experience. It is a general term that covers everything from vague feelings of unease to extreme physical and emotional anguish. Suffering, as it is used in the first noble truth, refers to any sense of discomfort. We all experience discomfort, whether it is the slight uneasiness of embarrassment or the intense pain of bone cancer. When discomfort arises, our first impulse is to put an end to it, to stop it any way that we can. We are, in effect, trying to separate ourselves from what we are experiencing and, by doing so, separating ourselves from life and from the mystery of being. The first noble truth is basically an injunction not to ignore or dismiss what we experience.

The first noble truth says that suffering is pervasive. It invites us not to ignore or avoid it, but to look at it, know what it is, and understand how it arises.

Creating Suffering

Buddha Shakyamuni's second insight involves the origin of suffering. Suffering comes from emotional reactivity. All experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The three fundamental emotional reactions to experience are attraction, aversion, and dullness or indifference. Attraction is the emotional reaction to what is pleasant. Aversion is the reaction to what is unpleasant. Indifference is the reaction to what is neutral. The three reactions are called the three poisons because they poison our experience of life. They are often symbolized in Buddhist iconography as a rooster, a snake and a pig.

The second noble truth tells us that the origin of suffering is emotional reactivity. What do we do to end this suffering? We dismantle the patterns of emotional reactivity.

Ending Suffering

Is it possible to disengage from reactivity? The third noble truth is Shakyamuni's powerful answer, yes. He saw that the sense of self, of "I," is the basis of emotional reaction, and that "I" as a real entity doesn't exist. In other words, when the conditioning that underlies the sense of separation, the false duality of subject and object, is dismantled, suffering ceases.

We cannot and do not end pain, but we can and do end suffering. We end suffering by ceasing to identify with what we are not: a pattern that interprets experience as separate and other and then strives to justify its own imagined existence.

In the account of Buddha's awakening, Mara, the demon of obsession, and his army represent patterns and conditioning. Buddha Shakyamuni rested in attention, undistracted and undisturbed by the ploys and attacks of Mara. His attention penetrated Mara and his army, so that he saw them and experienced them for what they are: movements in mind. They fell apart and

ceased to function. The fetters of conditioning fell away. All that remained was original mind, pristine awareness. When Mara, the sense of "I," demanded an external authority for pristine awareness and direct experience, Buddha knew none was necessary, so he simply touched the earth, saying, in effect, "Here's your authority. That's it."

Buddha Shakyamuni could say unequivocally that there is an end to suffering because he developed such a high level of attention, diamond-like attention, that he could rest in the mystery of being, the experience of not existing as a separate entity, with no fear and in complete clarity. At that level of attention, the experience of not existing as a separate entity is known for what it is and ceases to be a basis for fear and emotional reactivity. The key effort in the third noble truth is to come to this understanding ourselves. Suffering ends when we have sufficient ability in attention to be present in all experience - even the experience of not being a separate entity.

The Path

In the fourth noble truth, we are introduced to the path, the way of life, that leads to freedom from suffering and the reactive patterns that generate it.

Reactive patterns have been in place for a long time. Much of life is the product of their operation. To dismantle these patterns we must take apart our lives. Attention works to dismantle patterns the way the energy of the sun melts ice. The directed energy of attention dissolves the structure of patterns, releasing the energy locked in them. We experience the freed energy as awareness and presence.

To cultivate and apply attention, we travel the Eightfold Path [ref. Appendix B]: Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Attention, Right View, and Right Cognition. In the context of the eightfold path, "right" does not mean right as opposed to wrong. The path is not a prescription for behavior that is deemed "right" by any authority. An action is right, in terms of the Eightfold Path, when the action comes from attention and presence rather than from reaction.

The Three Disciplines

Fundamentally Buddhism is not a system of beliefs; instead, it is a set of instructions for entering the mystery of being. In the Buddha's original formulation, these instructions are the Eightfold Path. The three disciplines (morality, meditation, and wisdom) show how the different elements of the Eightfold Path interact and provide a clear view of the key elements of practice.

1) *Morality*. The first three elements (Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood) constitute the discipline of morality. The practice of morality has two aspects. First, by bringing attention to the ways in which we speak, act, and live, we create the conditions needed in order to practice. Second, the way we live is the expression of what we understand through practice. Therefore, in Buddhism, morality is not a matter of observing rigid moral principles, but of giving expression to the wisdom of original mind.

2) *Meditation*. Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Attention constitute the discipline of meditation. In this context, meditation actually means stable attention. We begin with the effort of resting with the breath. We develop mindfulness first, then stable attention. Attention is the

heart of Buddhist practice. Although we use formal meditation to cultivate attention, the real practice is to live in attention all the time.

3) *Wisdom/Understanding*. The third discipline, wisdom or understanding, involves Right Cognition and Right View. Right Cognition means that we bring attention to the thinking process. We use cognitive processes to uncover and correct problems in our practice and in our lives. Right View is seeing things as they actually are. By bringing attention to how we see things, we step out of the projected "realities" of conditioning.

Walking the Path

How, for instance, do we practice Right Speech? Right Speech does not mean saying "the right thing." Ideas about the "right" thing usually come from conditioning. As a teacher, I field a lot of questions from students about different aspects of practice. Many are repetitive. I can easily fall into the habit of giving stock answers. If I give a stock answer, however, I am operating out of habituation, not presence. I am not really paying attention to the student, how he or she is asking the question, or how the question arises in the context of the student's practice. A stock answer is not the practice of Right Speech, even though the answer may be "right" in a technical sense. To cultivate Right speech, listen as you talk so that you hear, with your own ears, exactly what you say and how you say it.

To travel the Eightfold Path, we make the same effort in each of eight areas. In addition to bringing attention to how we speak, we bring attention to how we act and behave, to what we do for a living, to the way we direct our efforts in practice and in life, to how we practice mindfulness and cultivate attention, and to how we look at the world and how we think.

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING: OVERVIEW

Much of the Buddha's teachings can be found in The *Satipatthana Sutra* (*Foundation of Mindfulness*). This is considered the definitive text in the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism. The Pali Canon is the standard collection of scriptures in the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Southeast Asia, as preserved in the Pāli language. It is the only completely surviving early Buddhist canon, and one of the first to be written down, and has been embraced by contemporary Mahayana practitioners such as Thich Nhat Hanh.

These discourses, or sutras, provide a means for practicing mindfulness in a variety of contexts with the idea that mindfulness becomes a way of life. Famously, the Buddha declares at the beginning of this discourse:

"This is the one and only way..., for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the extinguishing of suffering and grief, for walking on the path of truth, for the realization of nibbāna...[nirvana]."

The meditation techniques mentioned in this sutra can be practiced individually or successively, or in an interwoven fashion. In this sutra, the Buddha identifies the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipatthana*): the body, sensations (or feelings), mind (or consciousness), and mental formations (qualities of mind).

The *Anapanasati Sutra (Mindfulness of the Breath)* covers this material in a more condensed manner, using the breath as the foundation of the practice. Although the Buddha used different approaches and teachings based on who was in front of him, the basis of all his teachings was the Four Noble Truths and all else stemmed from there.

For our training, we are focusing on the breath practices outlined in the *Anapanasati Sutra*, as we explore how breath allows more awareness to come to body, mind, feelings and spread into our whole life.

The word “*anapanasati*” is composed of three Pali words: *prana-apana-smrti*, which loosely translated means: “remembering [to be aware of; *smrti* is “that which is remembered”] energy flowing up and down.” It outlines a practice of noticing the movements of the breath and the movements of mind – and realizing that they are not different. And as we remain in the present moment of the breath, we still the fluctuations of the mind (*yogas citta-vritti nirodah*, the second line of the *Yoga Sutra*s; and the Third Noble Truth: the cessation of suffering).

The *Anapanasati Sutra* is divided into 16 contemplations, representing a natural process of how awareness develops in meditation. It is not so much instructional, as descriptive of what happens when we commit to a practice of being mindful of the breath. The 16 contemplations are divided in groups of four (tetrads), each with four instructions.

The translation below is by Buddhist monk, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, considered one of the foremost experts in the Pali language and of the Pali Canon. [Note that the word “monk” is a translation of the Pali word “bhikkhu”, which Buddha used to address his listeners. Now, it generally refers to any dedicated practitioner, whether a layperson or a monk.]

Anapanasati Sutra: Discourse on the Mindfulness of Breathing

Now in what way does the monk develop and frequently practice mindfulness of in-and-out breathing so that it bears great fruit and great benefits?

There is the case of a monk who, having gone to a forest, to the shade of a tree or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and keeping mindfulness to the fore.

Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

First Tetrad (Body)

1. Breathing in long, he discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, he discerns that he is breathing out long.

2. *Or breathing in short, he discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, he discerns that he is breathing out short.*
3. *He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body, and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body.*
4. *He trains himself to breathe in calming the bodily processes, and to breathe out calming the bodily processes.*

Second Tetrad (Feelings)

5. *He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to rapture, and to breathe out sensitive to rapture.*
6. *He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to pleasure and breathe out sensitive to pleasure.*
7. *He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to mental processes, and to breathe out sensitive to mental processes.*
8. *He trains himself to breathe in calming mental processes, and to breathe out calming mental processes.*

Third Tetrad (Mind)

9. *He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the mind, and to breathe out sensitive to the mind.*
10. *He trains himself to breathe in satisfying the mind, and to breathe out satisfying the mind.*
11. *He trains himself to breathe in steadying the mind, and to breathe out steadying the mind.*
12. *He trains himself to breathe in releasing the mind, and to breathe out releasing the mind.*

Fourth Tetrad (Wisdom)

13. *He trains himself to breathe in focusing on inconstancy, and to breathe out focusing on inconstancy.*
14. *He trains himself to breathe in focusing on dispassion (literally, fading), and to breathe out focusing on dispassion.*
15. *He trains himself to breathe in focusing on stopping, and to breathe out focusing on stopping.*
16. *He trains himself to breathe in focusing on relinquishment, and to breathe out focusing on relinquishment.*

It is through developing and frequently practicing mindfulness of in-and-out breathing in this way that it bears great fruit and great benefits.

MEDITATION: POSES & SET-UP

How we sit in meditation is how we relate to the body. How we breathe is how we relate to the mind. These postures can help support the body and breath in meditation. They help in calming the nervous system as well as in attaining physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual stability. While these are traditional postures, they in no way denote an “ideal” meditation pose. A key point is that we don’t impose an idea of “straightness” on the body, just as we don’t impose an idea of “attention” in the mind. Allow your body to shift and adjust as needed, without distraction or agitation, returning each time to the breath. Sit on a higher support or a chair if you need to, support your back with a cushion at the wall if required. Eyes can be open or closed. If you feel sleepy, open your eyes, keeping the gaze slightly down and in front; if open eyes are a distraction, allow them to gently close. The idea is to cultivate ease in body and mind, so that you can sit with what arises in your experience without distraction.

Padmasana (Lotus Pose)

In the seated position, first carefully place the right foot onto the left thigh. Then take hold of the left foot and place it onto the right thigh. Keep the body erect with both knees touching the floor. Hands or wrists can be resting on the knees, elbows gently bent so the shoulders remained relaxed; or the hands placed between the heels, the right hand resting in the left hand. Note that this is an advanced pose and in no way should one force one’s body to conform to it if there’s pain in the knees, ankles or hips.



Siddhasana (Adept’s Pose)

From the sitting position, first bend the left leg and place the heel at the perineum. Then, bend the right leg and place the heel against the pubic bone, or just above the genitals. The body is kept erect with the hands placed as in Padmasana. As with Padmasana, this is an advanced pose and in no way should one force one’s body to conform to it if there’s pain in the knees, ankles or hips.



Mukthasana or Guptasana

First sit with the legs stretched forward. Bend the right leg at the knee, and place the right heel against the pubic bone, now bend the left leg and place the left heel above the right heel and close to the pubic bone. In this position, both the perineum and genitalia are free from pressure. Rest the hands on the knees.

Swastikasana (Ankle lock Pose)

The word 'Swastika' means prosperous in Sanskrit, and is said to bring prosperity, success, and good health to the practitioner. It is done in the following manner: Stretch the legs in front of you. Bend the right leg at the knee, and place the right heel against the groin of the left thigh so that the sole will be lying in close contact with the thigh. Now bend the left leg and place it against the right groin. Insert the toes of the left foot between the right calf and thigh muscles. Now both feet can be seen to lie between the calves and thigh muscles. The hands are placed in Padmasana.



Sukhasana (Easy Pose):

This asana is achieved by simply crossing the legs and keeping the head and trunk erect. The hands are placed as in Padmasana.



Vajrasana

Sit upon the heels, keep the trunk, neck and head straight. Keep the knees together with the palms of the hands resting upon the knees, or with the right hand resting in the left hand upon the lap.



DIFFICULTIES DURING MEDITATION

Thoughts wander

If the mind is not disturbed, it is spontaneously at ease, just like a clear lake. It is, by nature, transparent and clear. The mind in meditation can be compared to a jar of muddy water: the more we leave the water without interfering or stirring it, the more the particles will sink to the bottom, letting the natural clarity of the mind shine through. So take care not to impose anything on the mind. When you meditate there should be no effort to control or to achieve a desired result (e.g. to “be peaceful” or to “be” anything). Just sit with what is, as it is. Yes, this is easier said than done.

Body becomes restless and back becomes sore

It becomes difficult to sit for a long duration in the same pose if the body is not used to it. This is where yoga comes in, where we can build capacity to remain with a pose and the breath in a particular pose for the desired duration of time. Again, the idea is to create ease; find the pose that works best for you, where you can focus on the breath and body without strain or stress.

Expectations are too much

If you think meditation means instant peace, or that it will clear all your problems and a racing mind in minutes, that isn't going to happen. Meditation does not mean a warm, fuzzy feeling and a mind full of loving thoughts. The first thing about meditation is that you should not have any expectations. Every person comes with a different mind-set. What we expect may or may not be what we get. There is no goal (and therefore no "success" or "failure"); only a purpose: to return again and again to what is going on, because this is practice and this is life – we continually fall out of attention and then come back into attention. This is why it is called a practice: we practice coming back to attention and commit to that again and again.

WHAT MEDITATION IS NOT

Meditation is not hypnosis or autosuggestion

In hypnosis, a suggestion is made to the mind: there is an attempt to program, manipulate or control the content of the mind. When you meditate, you simply observe the mind and let it become quiet and calm, exploring and experiencing deeper levels of attention.

Meditation does not identify with religion

Meditation does not belong to any culture or religion. It is a simple method of exploring the inner dimensions of life. Some religions employ meditative practices as part of their rituals, meditation itself is far removed from any set of beliefs or the distinctions of class or creed.

Meditation does not mean instant peace

"Meditation is not a quick cure-all," states Ken McLeod. "We are used to quick fixes: ten ways to better communication, the five magic steps for better relationships, the eight things every manager should know, etc. The trouble is that all of this good advice is useless if we aren't sufficiently present to implement it. Meditation cultivates just that presence, so we could regard it as a foundational skill."

When you meditate, you think lofty thoughts

This misconception probably derives from Western notions of contemplation. Buddhist meditation is a constant returning of attention to the breath, stepping out of the thinking process over and over again. Lofty thoughts, base thoughts, brilliant thoughts, stupid thoughts, kind thoughts, mean thoughts, they're all thoughts. Back to the breath!

MEDITATION TECHNIQUES: DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

There are a number of meditation techniques for effective meditation. Different cultures have different meditation techniques, and different techniques are suited to different personality types, or to what is happening in our lives and practice at the time. Some approaches use mantras or specific repeated sounds (japa), others involve gazing steadily at an object (trataka), others involve cultivating specific qualities (e.g. loving-kindness).

What follows is an outline of one specific approach to meditation based on mindfulness of body and breath. It can be used in various situations (sitting, walking, standing, lying down), while expanding awareness out. It is an introduction to *samatha-vipassana* meditation in the Theravadan tradition (adapted with minor amendments from the Bung Wai Forest Monastery, Thailand).

Introduction to Insight Meditation

The purpose of Insight Meditation is not to create a system of beliefs, but rather to give guidance on how to see clearly into the nature of the mind. In this way one gains first-hand understanding of the way things are, without reliance on opinions or theories - a direct experience, which has its own vitality. It also gives rise to the sense of deep calm that comes from knowing something for oneself beyond any doubt.

The term Insight Meditation (*samatha-vipassana*) refers to practices for the mind that develop calm (*samatha*) through sustained attention and insight (*vipassana*) through reflection. A fundamental technique for sustaining attention is focusing awareness on the body; traditionally, this is practiced while sitting or walking.

Reflection occurs quite naturally afterwards, when one is 'comfortable' within the context of the meditation exercise. There will be a sense of ease and interest, and one begins to look around and become acquainted with the mind that is meditating. This 'looking around' is called contemplation, a personal and direct seeing that can only be suggested by any technique.

Sustaining Attention

Focusing the mind on the body can be readily accomplished while sitting. You need to find a time and a place which affords you calm and freedom from disturbance. A quiet room with not much in it to distract the mind is ideal. Timing is also important. It is not especially productive to meditate when you have something else to do or when you're pressed for time. It's better to set aside a period - say in the early morning or in the evening after work-when you can really give your full attention to the practice.

Begin with 15 minutes or so. Practice sincerely with the limitations of time and available energy, and avoid becoming mechanical about the routine. Meditation practice, supported by genuine

willingness to investigate and make peace with oneself, will develop naturally in terms of duration and skill.

Awareness of the Body

The development of calm is aided by stability, and by a steady but peaceful effort. If you can't feel settled, there is no peacefulness; if there is no effort, you tend to daydream. One of the most effective postures for the cultivation of the proper balance of stillness and energy is the sitting posture.

Use a posture that will keep your back straight without strain. A simple upright chair may be helpful, or you may be able to use the lotus posture. These postures may look awkward at first, but in time they can provide a unique balance of gentle firmness that gladdens the mind without tiring the body.

If the chin is tilted very slightly down this will help but do not allow the head to loll forward as this encourages drowsiness. Place the hands on your lap, palm upwards, one gently resting on the other with the thumb-tips touching. Take your time and get the right balance.

Now, collect your attention, and begin to move it slowly down your body. Notice the sensations in each part of your body. Relax any tensions, particularly in the face, neck and hands. Allow the eyelids to close or half close.

Investigate how you are feeling. Are you expectant or tense? Then relax your attention a little. With this, the mind will probably calm down and you may find some thoughts drifting in - reflections, daydreams, memories, or doubts about whether you are doing it right. Instead of following or contending with these thought patterns, bring more attention to the body, which is a useful anchor for a wandering mind.

Cultivate a spirit of inquiry in your meditation attitude. Take your time. Move your attention, for example, systematically from the crown of the head down over the whole body. Notice the different sensations - such as warmth, pulsing, numbness, and sensitivity - in the joints of each finger, the moisture of the palms, and the pulse in the wrist. Even areas that may have no particular sensation, such as the forearms or the earlobes can be "swept over" in an attentive way. Notice how even the lack of sensation is something the mind can be aware of. This constant and sustained investigation is called mindfulness (*sati*) and is one of the primary tools of Insight Meditation.

Mindfulness of Breathing: Anapanasati

Instead of "body sweeping", or after a preliminary period of this practice, mindfulness can be developed through attention on the breath.

First, follow the sensation of your ordinary breath as it flows in through the nostrils and fills the chest and abdomen. Then try maintaining your attention at one point, either at the diaphragm or - a more refined location - at the nostrils. Breath has a relaxing quality, steady and relaxing if you don't force it; this is helped by an upright posture. Your mind may wander, but keep patiently returning to the breath.

It is not necessary to develop concentration to the point of excluding everything else except the breath. Rather than to create a trance, the purpose here is to allow you to notice the workings of the mind, and to bring a measure of peaceful clarity into it. The entire process - gathering your attention, noticing the breath, noticing that the mind has wandered, and re-establishing your attention - develops mindfulness, patience and insightful understanding. So don't be put off by apparent "failure" - simply begin again. Continuing in this way allows the mind eventually to calm down.

If you get very restless or agitated, just relax. Practice being at peace with yourself, listening to - without necessarily believing in - the voices of the mind.

If you feel drowsy, then put more care and attention into your body and posture. Refining your attention or pursuing tranquility at such times will only make matters worse.

Walking and Standing

Many meditation exercises, such as the above "mindfulness of breathing", are practiced while sitting. However, walking is commonly alternated with sitting as a form of meditation. Apart from giving you different things to notice, it is a skillful way to energize the practice if the calming effect of sitting is making you dull.

If you have access to some open land, measure off about 25-30 paces' length of level ground (e.g. a clearly defined pathway between two trees), as your meditation path. Stand at one end of the path, and compose your mind on the sensations of the body. First, let the attention rest on the feeling of the body standing upright, with the arms hanging naturally and the hands lightly clasped in front or behind. Allow the eyes to gaze at a point about three meters in front of you at ground level, thus avoiding visual distraction. Now, walk gently, at a deliberate but 'normal' pace, to the end of the path. Stop. Focus on the body standing for the period of a couple of breaths. Turn, and walk back again. While walking, be aware of the general flow of physical sensations, or more closely direct your attention to the feet. The exercise for the mind is to keep bringing its attention back to the sensation of the feet touching the ground, the spaces between each step, and the feelings of stopping and starting.

Of course, the mind will wander. So it is important to cultivate patience, and the resolve to begin again. Adjust the pace to suit your state of mind - vigorous when drowsy or trapped in obsessive thought, firm but gentle when restless and impatient. At the end of the path, stop; breathe in and out; 'let go' of any restlessness, worry, calm, bliss, memories or opinions about yourself. The 'inner chatter' may stop momentarily, or fade out. Begin again. In this way you continually refresh the mind, and allow it to settle at its own rate.

In more confined spaces, alter the length of the path to suit what is available. Alternatively, you can circumambulate a room, pausing after each circumambulation for a few moments of standing. This period of standing can be extended to several minutes, using 'body sweeping'.

Walking brings energy and fluidity into the practice, so keep your pace steady and just let changing conditions pass through the mind. Rather than expecting the mind to be as still as it

might be while sitting, contemplate the flow of phenomena. It is remarkable how many times we can become engrossed in a train of thought - arriving at the end of the path and 'coming to' with a start - but it is natural for our untrained minds to become absorbed in thoughts and moods. So instead of giving in to impatience, learn how to let go, and begin again. A sense of ease and calm may then arise, allowing the mind to become open and clear in a natural, unforced way.

Lying Down

Reclining at the end of a day, spend a few minutes meditating while lying on one side. Keep the body quite straight and bend one arm up so that the hand acts as a support for the head. Sweep through the body, resting its stresses; or collect your attention on the breath, consciously putting aside memories of the day just past and expectations of tomorrow. In a few minutes, with your mind clear, you'll be able to rest well.

Cultivating The Heart

Cultivating goodwill (*metta*) gives another dimension to the practice of Insight. Meditation naturally teaches patience and tolerance or at least it shows the importance of these qualities. So you may well wish to develop a more friendly and caring attitude towards yourself and other people.

Focus attention on the breath, which you will now be using as the means of spreading kindness and goodwill. Begin with yourself, with your body. Visualize the breath as a light, or see your awareness as being a warm ray and gradually sweep it over your body. Lightly focus your attention on the centre of the chest, around the heart region. As you breath in, direct patient kindness towards yourself, perhaps with the thought, "May I be well", or "Peace". As you breathe out, let the mood of that thought, or the awareness of light, spread outwards from the heart, through the body, through the mind and beyond yourself. "May others be well".

If you are experiencing negative states of mind, breathe in the qualities of tolerance and forgiveness. Visualizing the breath as having a healing color may be helpful. On the out-breath, let go of any stress, worry or negativity, and extend the sense of release through the body, the mind, and beyond, as before.

This practice can form all or part of a period of meditation - you have to judge for yourself what is appropriate. The calming effect of meditating with a kind attitude is good for beginning a sitting but there will no doubt be times to use this approach for long periods, to go deeply into the heart.

Always begin with what you are aware of, even if it seems trivial or confused. Let your mind rest calmly on that-whether it's boredom, an aching knee, or the frustration of not feeling particularly kindly. Allow these to be; practice being at peace with them. Recognize and gently put aside any tendencies towards laziness, doubt or guilt.

Peacefulness can develop into a very nourishing kindness towards yourself, if you first of all accept the presence of what you dislike. Keep the attention steady, and open the heart to whatever you experience. This does not imply the approval of negative states, but allows them a space wherein they can come and go.

Generating goodwill toward the world beyond yourself follows much the same pattern. A simple way to spread kindness is to work in stages. Start with yourself, joining the sense of loving acceptance to the movement of the breath. "May I be well." Then, reflect on people you love and respect, and wish them well, one by one. Move on to friendly acquaintances, then to those towards whom you feel indifferent. "May they be well." Finally, bring to mind those people you fear or dislike, and continue to send out wishes of goodwill.

This meditation can expand, in a movement of compassion, to include all people in the world, in their many circumstances. And remember, you don't have to feel that you love everyone in order to wish them well!

Kindness and compassion originate from the same source of good will, and they broaden the mind beyond the purely personal perspective. If you're not always trying to make things go the way you want them to: if you're more accepting and receptive to yourself and others as they are, compassion arises by itself. Compassion is the natural sensitivity of the heart.

APPENDIX A

Five Mindfulness Trainings (the Buddhist Precepts)

by Thich Nath Hanh; www.plumvillage.org

First Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

Second Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am committed to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

Third Training

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

Fourth Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

Fifth Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I am committed to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of

my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

APPENDIX B

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path describes the way to the end of suffering, as it was laid out by Siddhartha Gautama. It is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development, with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions; and it finally leads to understanding the truth about all things. Together with the Four Noble Truths, it constitutes the essence of Buddhism. Great emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of existence and finally reach Nirvana. The eight aspects of the path are not a sequence of single steps, instead they are highly interdependent principles, each in relationship with the other.

1. Right View

Right view is the beginning and the end of the path, it simply means to see and to understand things as they really are and to realize the Four Noble Truths. As such, Right View is the cognitive aspect of wisdom. It means to see things through, to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects and ideas, and to understand the law of karma and karmic conditioning. Right View is not necessarily an intellectual capacity, just as wisdom is not just a matter of intelligence. Instead, Right View is attained, sustained, and enhanced through all capacities of mind. It begins with the intuitive insight that all beings are subject to suffering and it ends with complete understanding of the true nature of all things. Since our view of the world forms our thoughts and our actions, Right View yields Right Thoughts and Right Actions.

2. Right Intention

While Right View refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom, Right Intention refers to the volitional aspect (i.e., the kind of mental energy that controls our actions). Right Intention can be described best as commitment to ethical and mental self-improvement. Buddha distinguishes three types of right intentions: (1) the intention of renunciation, which means resistance to the pull of desire, (2) the intention of good will, meaning resistance to feelings of anger and aversion, and (3) the intention of harmlessness, meaning not to think or act cruelly, violently, or aggressively, and to develop compassion.

3. Right Speech

Right Speech is the first principle of ethical conduct in the Eightfold Path. Ethical conduct is viewed as a guideline to moral discipline, which supports the other principles of the path. This aspect is essential, because mental purification can only be achieved through the cultivation of ethical conduct. The importance of speech in the context of Buddhist ethics is obvious: words can break or save lives, make enemies or friends, start war or create peace. Buddha explained Right Speech as follows: (1) to abstain from false speech, especially not to tell deliberate lies and not to speak deceitfully, (2) to abstain from slanderous speech and not to use words maliciously against others, (3) to abstain from harsh words that offend or hurt others, and (4) to abstain from idle chatter that lacks purpose or depth. Positively phrased, this means to tell the truth, to speak friendly, warm, and gently and to talk only when necessary.

4. Right Action

The second ethical principle, Right Action, involves the body as natural means of expression, as it refers to deeds that involve bodily actions. Unwholesome actions lead to unsound states of mind, while wholesome actions lead to sound states of mind. Again, the principle is explained in terms of abstinence: right action means (1) to abstain from harming sentient beings, especially to abstain from taking life (including suicide) and doing harm intentionally or delinquently, (2) to abstain from taking what is not given, which includes stealing, robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty, and (3) to abstain from sexual misconduct. Positively formulated, Right Action means to act kindly and compassionately, to be honest, to respect the belongings of others, and to keep sexual relationships harmless to others. Further details regarding the concrete meaning of right action can be found in the Precepts.

5. Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. The Buddha mentions four specific activities that harm other beings and that one should avoid for this reason: (1) dealing in weapons, (2) dealing in living beings (including raising animals for slaughter as well as slave trade and prostitution), (3) working in meat production and butchery, and (4) selling intoxicants and poisons, such as alcohol and drugs. Furthermore any other occupation that would violate the principles of Right Speech and Right Action should be avoided.

6. Right Effort

Right Effort can be seen as a prerequisite for the other principles of the path. Without effort, which is in itself an act of will, nothing can be achieved, whereas misguided effort distracts the mind from its task, and confusion will be the consequence. Mental energy is the force behind right effort; it can occur in either wholesome or unwholesome states. The same type of energy that fuels desire, envy, aggression, and violence can on the other side fuel self-discipline, honesty, benevolence, and kindness. Right Effort is detailed in four types of endeavors that rank in ascending order: (1) to prevent the arising of un-arisen unwholesome states, (2) to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen, (3) to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen, and (4) to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.

7. Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness is the controlled and perfected faculty of cognition. It is the mental ability to see things as they are, with clear consciousness. Usually, the cognitive process begins with an

impression induced by perception, or by a thought, but then it does not stay with the mere impression. Instead, we almost always conceptualize sense impressions and thoughts immediately. We interpret them and set them in relation to other thoughts and experiences, which naturally go beyond the facility of the original impression. The mind then posits concepts, joins concepts into constructs, and weaves those constructs into complex interpretative schemes. All this happens only half- consciously, and as a result we often see things obscured. Right Mindfulness is anchored in clear perception and it penetrates impressions without getting carried away. Right Mindfulness enables us to be aware of the process of conceptualization in a way that we actively observe and control the way our thoughts go. Buddha accounted for this as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: (1) contemplation of the body, (2) contemplation of feeling (attraction, aversion, indifference), (3) contemplation of the state of mind, and (4) contemplation of the phenomena.

8. Right Concentration

The eighth principle of the path, right concentration, refers to the development of a mental force that occurs in natural consciousness, although at a relatively low level of intensity, namely concentration. Concentration in this context is described as one-pointedness of mind, meaning a state where all mental faculties are unified and directed onto one particular object. Right Concentration for the purpose of the Eightfold Path refers to concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions. The Buddhist method of choice to develop Right Concentration is through the practice of meditation. The meditating mind focuses on a selected object. It first directs itself onto it, then sustains concentration, and finally intensifies concentration step by step. Through this practice it becomes natural to apply elevated levels concentration also in everyday situations.

APPENDIX C

Meditation Exercises: 6-Week Training

(Courtesy: The Insight Meditation Centre, Redwood, CA; Gil Fronsdal)

For those interested in a specific practice outline, what follows is a 6-week sequential practice, each week building on the previous one, plus detailed instructions on walking meditation. The first week focuses on the basics of meditation and on mindfulness of breathing. The second week discusses mindfulness of the body and expands the area of attention to include all our physical experiences. The third week introduces mindfulness of emotions, the fourth week mindfulness of thinking, the fifth week mindfulness of mind, and the sixth week focuses on the role of mindfulness in daily life and in deepening one's practice.

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 1

Mindfulness of Breathing

This is an awareness practice, not an exercise in breathing; there is no need to adjust the breathing in any way. We simply attend to the breath, getting to know it as it is: shallow or deep, long or short, slow or fast, smooth or rough, coarse or refined, constricted or loose. When we get distracted by thoughts or emotions, we simply return to the physical sensations of the breath.

Because of the mind's tendency to be scattered and easily distracted, we use the breath as a kind of anchor to the present. When we rest in the breath, we are countering the strong forces of distraction. We train the mind, heart, and body to become settled and unified on one thing, at one place, at one time. If you are sitting in meditation and your mind is on what you did at work today, then your mind and body are not in the same place at the same time. Fragmented this way, we all too easily lose touch with a holistic sense of ourselves.

Mindfulness of breathing is a powerful ally in our lives. With steady awareness of our inhalations and exhalations, the breath can become an equanimous constant through the ups and downs of our daily life. Resting with, even enjoying, the cycles of breathing, we are less likely to be caught up in the emotional and mental events that pass through us. Repeatedly returning to the breath can be a highly effective training in letting go of the identification and holding which freeze the mind and heart. It also develops concentration.

Mindfulness Exercises for the First Week

You will get the most benefit from this course if you engage yourself with the practice during the week between our class meetings. During the first week please try the following three practices:

- 1) Sit one twenty-minute session of meditation each day. For this first week, focus on staying aware of your breath as described in the next section of the handout. Begin and end each sitting with, a minute of conscious reflection: At the start, clearly remind yourself that you are about to devote yourself to being mindful and present. Consciously let go of any concerns, remembering that you will have plenty of time to take them up again later. At the end, reflect on what happened during your meditation session. There is no need to judge what happened; you just want to strengthen your mindfulness through a brief exercise in recollection.
- 2) Choose one routine physical activity that you perform most days and experiment with doing it mindfully. This means doing just this one activity while you are doing the exercise – not listening to the radio at the same time, for example. It is also best to let go of any concern about the results or in finishing quickly. Remain in the present as best you can. When the mind wanders, simply come back to the activity. Activities you might choose include brushing your teeth, washing the dishes, or some routine act of driving or walking.
- 3) For one half-hour period during the week, maintain some regular attention of your posture as you go about with some normal activity. Without straining, assume a posture that is alert and upright. Notice what happens to your mood, thoughts, feelings, presence, and degree of mindfulness as you do this exercise.

Meditation Instruction: Mindfulness Of Breathing

Sit in a comfortable but alert posture. Gently close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths, and, as you exhale, settle into your body, relaxing any obvious tension or holding. Then, breathing

normally, bring your awareness to your body, sensing for a short while how the body presents itself to you. There is no particular way to be; just notice how you are at this moment.

Then, from within the body, as part of the body, become aware of your breathing, however it happens to appear. There is no right or wrong way to breathe while doing mindfulness practice; the key is to simply notice how it actually is right now. Let the breath breathe itself, allowing it to be received in awareness. Notice where in your body you feel the breath most clearly. This may be the abdomen rising and falling, the chest expanding and contracting, or the tactile sensations of the air passing through the nostrils or over the upper lip. Wherever the breath tends to appear most clearly, allow that area to be the home, the center of your attention.

Keep your attention connected with the inhalations and exhalations, sensing the physical sensations that characterize them. Let go of the surface concerns of the mind. Whenever the mind wanders away, gently come back to the breath. There is no need to judge the wandering mind; when you notice that the mind has wandered, simply return to the breath without evaluation.

To help maintain contact between awareness and the breath, you may use a label or mental note. Softly, like a whisper in the mind, label the in-breath and out-breath, encouraging the awareness to stay present with the breath. You can label the inhalations and exhalations as “in” and “out,” or perhaps use “rising” and “falling” for the movement of the abdomen or the chest. Don’t worry about finding the right word, just use something that will help you stay connected.

There is no need to force the attention on the breath; to strengthen your ability to become mindful and present, use the gentle power of repeatedly, non judgmentally returning and resting with the breath.

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 2

Mindfulness of breathing is a wonderful beginning to cultivating awareness. It strengthens our ability to concentrate and steadies the attention on our present moment experience. It also weakens our tendency to get lost in reactive emotions and mental preoccupations. With time, attention to the breath helps us to develop a clear, non-reactive awareness that can then be turned to the full range of our human experience. As mindfulness develops, we begin to bring this awareness to other areas of our lives.

Mindfulness is an embodied practice. By practicing mindfulness, we learn to live in and through our bodies. Learning to be mindful of bodily experiences is one of the most useful aspects of mindfulness. It is much easier have a balanced, healthy awareness of the rest of our lives when we are in touch with our immediate physical experience.

During this week we expand the practice to include the body. Many people ignore their bodies. The busier a person’s life, the easier it is to discount the importance of staying in touch with how the body feels. Many people may be attentive to their body, but it is from the outside in; that is, they are concerned about body image and appearance. Mindfulness of the body is attention from

the inside out. We notice what the body is feeling, in and of itself. We give a generous amount of time to be with the felt sense of the body. Not only does this help the body relax, remaining mindful of the body is a safeguard from getting wound up with mental preoccupations.

Benefits of Mindfulness of the Body

Mindfulness of the body has several benefits. First, cultivating mindfulness of the body increases our familiarity with our bodies and with how the body responds to our inner and outer lives, to our thoughts and emotions, and to events around us. The Buddha saw the human mind and body as unified. When we suppress or ignore aspects of our emotional, cognitive, and volitional lives, we tend also to disconnect from the body, from the physical manifestations of our experience. Conversely, when we distance ourselves from our physical experience, we lose touch with our inner life of emotions and thoughts. The awakening of the body from within that comes with mindfulness can help us to discover, not only our repressed emotions, but also, more importantly, a greater capacity to respond to the world with healthy emotions and motivations.

Second, in cultivating mindfulness we are developing non-reactivity, including the ability to be present for our experience without turning away, habitually seeking or resisting change, or clinging to pleasant and avoiding unpleasant experience. All too often, our automatic desires, aversions, preferences, and judgments interfere with our ability to know what is actually happening. Learning to not respond automatically and unconsciously makes possible a deeper understanding of the present moment and our reaction to it, and gives us more freedom to choose our response. Being non-reactively present for our physical experience goes a long way in learning to do so with the rest of our lives.

Last, but not least, mindfulness of physical sensations helps us both to relax tension and to understand its causes.

Mindfulness Exercises for the Second Week

- 1) Continue your daily 20-minute meditation session.
- 2) In the midst of your regular activities, devote two 1-hour periods during the week to being mindful of your body. During this time, perhaps using a timer or some other cue to remind yourself, periodically check in with your body, maybe every five minutes or so. Notice, in particular, your shoulders, stomach, face, and hands. If you find tension in any of these places, relax.
- 3) Devote one meal to eating slowly and mindfully, paying attention to the tastes, textures, temperature, and other qualities of your food, and to the experience of your body eating. (When does your body tell you that have had enough?) If possible, take the meal in silence, with no other activities to distract you. You might want to put down your spoon or fork between bites. Whenever your mind wanders, or whenever you get caught up in reactions to what is happening, relax and come back to the simplicity of eating mindfully.
- 4) Start noticing when, how and by what, your attention becomes distracted or fragmented. Are there any common themes or patterns in the kinds of thoughts, feelings, activities, or pre-

occupations where your mindfulness disappears? If you discover any, discuss what you find with somebody: a friend, relative, or colleague.

Meditation Instruction: Mindfulness of the Body

During meditation, center your awareness primarily on the physical sensations of breathing. With dedication, but without strain, keep the breath in the foreground of attention. The idea is to be relaxed and receptive while alert and attentive. As long as other experiences such as bodily sensations, sounds, thoughts, or feelings are in the background of your awareness, allow them to remain there while you rest your attention with the sensations of breathing.

When a strong physical sensation makes it difficult for you to stay with the breath, simply switch your awareness to this new predominant experience. The art of mindfulness is recognizing what is predominant and then sustaining an intimate mindfulness on whatever that is. When the mind wanders and you lose the mindful connection with the sensation, gently and without judgment return your attention to the physical sensation.

As if your entire body was a sensing organ, sense or feel the physical experience. Simply allow it to be there. Drop whatever commentary or evaluations you may have about the experience in favor of seeing and sensing the experience directly in and of itself. Carefully explore the particular sensations that make it up – hardness or softness, warmth or coolness, tingling, tenseness, pressure, burning, throbbing, lightness, and so on. Let your awareness become as intimate with the experience as you can. Notice what happens to the sensations as you are mindful of them. Do they become stronger or weaker, larger or smaller, or do they stay the same?

As an aid to both acknowledging the physical experience and sustaining your focus, you can ever so softly label the experience. The labeling is a gentle, ongoing whisper in the mind that keeps the attention steady on the object of mindfulness. You should primarily sense directly the experience and what happens to it as you are present for it.

Be alert for when the focus of your attention moves from the physical sensations to your reactions to the sensations and your thoughts about them. If this happens move your attention back to the felt-sense of the sensations. Try to keep yourself independent of whatever thoughts and reactions you have. Relax.

Once a physical sensation has disappeared or is no longer compelling, you can return to mindfulness of breathing until some other sensation calls your attention.

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 3

In mindfulness practice we keep our attention on the breath, unless some other experience is so strong as to pull us away from the breath; then we turn our attention to that other experience. One kind of experience that can pull us away is physical sensations, which we talked about last week; another is emotions.

No emotion is inappropriate within the field of mindfulness practice. We are not trying to avoid emotions, or to have some kinds of emotions and not others. We are trying to allow them to exist as they arise, without the additional complications of judgement, evaluation, preferences, aversion, desires, clinging, resistance or other reactions.

The Buddha once asked, “If a person is struck by an arrow, is that painful?” Yes. The Buddha then asked, “If the person is struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful?” Of course. He went on to say, that as long as we are alive, we can expect painful experiences – the first arrow. Often the significant suffering associated with an emotion is not the emotion itself, but the way we relate to it. If we condemn, judge, hate, or deny the first arrow, that is like being struck by a second arrow. The second arrow is optional, and mindfulness helps us avoid it.

An important part of mindfulness practice is investigating our relationships to our emotions. Do we cling to them? Do we hate them? Are we ashamed of them? Do we tense around them? Are we afraid of how we are feeling? Do we measure our self-worth by the presence or absence of an emotion? Can we simply leave an emotion alone?

Mindfulness itself does not condemn or condone any particular emotional reaction. Rather, it is the practice of honestly being aware of what happens to us and how we react to it. The more aware and familiar we are with our reactions, the easier it will be to have, for example, uncomplicated grief or straightforward joy, not mixed up with the second arrows of guilt, anger, remorse, embarrassment, or judgment. Emotional maturity comes, not from the absence of emotions, but from seeing them clearly.

Mindfulness helps us to be as we are without further complications. If we can be accepting of ourselves in this way, then it is much easier to know how to respond appropriately with choice rather than habit.

How To Attend Emotions

Generally, during meditation, keep yourself centered on the breath. If there are emotions in the background, leave them there; keep the breath in the foreground of awareness as if it were the fulcrum for your experience.

When an emotion becomes compelling enough to make it difficult to stay with the breath, then bring it into the focus of meditative awareness.

There are four aspects to the mindfulness of emotions. You don’t have to practice all four each time you focus on an emotion. At different times, each is appropriate. Experiment to see how each can help in developing a non-reactive attention to emotions. The four are:

1) *Recognition*: A basic principle of mindfulness is that you cannot experience freedom and spaciousness unless you recognize what is happening. The more you learn to recognize the range of your emotions, including the most subtle, the more you will become familiar and comfortable with them, and the less you will be in their thrall.

2) *Naming*: A steady and relaxed labeling of the emotion of the moment, e.g., “joy,” “anger,” “frustration,” “happiness,” “boredom,” “contentment,” “desire,” and the like, encourages us to stay present with what is central in our experience. Naming can also help us become calm and less entangled with the emotion, less identified with it or reactive to its presence.

3) *Acceptance*: This does not mean condoning or justifying certain feelings. It means simply allowing emotions to be present, whatever they may be. Many people frequently judge and censure their feelings. Formal meditation practice offers us the extraordinary opportunity to practice unconditional acceptance of our emotions. This does not mean expressing emotion, but letting emotions move through you without any inhibitions, resistance, or encouragement.

4) *Investigation*: This entails dropping any fixed ideas we have about an emotion and looking at it afresh. Emotions are composite events, made up of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, motivations, and attitudes. Investigation is not analysis, but more a sensory awareness exercise of feeling our way into the present moment experience of the emotions. It is particularly useful to investigate the bodily sensations of an emotion, letting the body be the container for the emotion. In a sense, the body is a bigger container than the thinking mind which is easily exhausted, and which tends to spin off into stories, analysis, and attempts to fix the situation – away from acceptance of the present moment experience.

Mindfulness Exercises for the Third Week

1) Lengthen your daily meditation session to 25 minutes. When you first sit down, notice the main concerns, feelings, physical sensations that may be pre-occupying you. Acknowledge them and remain attentive to any tendency to become lost in your thoughts concerning these experiences. Meditation proceeds easiest when we are willing to suspend – for the duration of the meditation – the need to think about anything.

2) At least once during the week “ride out an emotion.” Sometime during the week when you are feeling a strong desire, aversion, fear, or other emotion, don’t act on the feeling. Rather, bring your mindfulness to the feeling and observe the changes it undergoes while you are watching it. You might choose to sit, stand or walk around quietly while you do this study. Things to notice are the various body sensations and tensions, the changes in the feeling’s intensity, the various attitudes and beliefs that you have concerning the presence of the emotion, and perhaps any more primary emotion triggering the feeling. If after a time the emotion goes away, spend some time noticing what its absence feels like.

3) Spend part of a day making a concentrated effort to notice feelings of happiness, contentment, well-being, joy, pleasure, and ease. Even if your day is primarily characterized by the opposite of these, see if you can identify even subtle and seemingly insignificant moments of these positive states. It can be as simple as appreciating the texture of a doorknob or a flash of ease in your eyes as you notice the blue sky after the fog has burned off. This is not an exercise for manufacturing positive states but rather discovering that these may be much more a part of your life than your preoccupations allow you to notice.

4) Spend part of another day noticing which feelings tend to pull you into a state of preoccupation. Sometimes there are patterns in the kinds of feelings that lead to becoming lost in thoughts. Common sources for distraction are desire, aversion, restlessness, fear, and doubt. Are any of these more common for you than the others? What is your relationship to these feelings when they appear? As you notice the patterns, does that change how easily you get pulled into their orbit? By clearly noticing their presence, can you overcome any of the ways in which these interfere with, or inhibit, whatever activities you need to do?

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 4

Sometimes people think that the point of meditation is to stop thinking – to have a silent mind. This does happen occasionally, but it is not necessarily the point of meditation. Thoughts are an important part of life, and mindfulness practice is not supposed to be a struggle against them. It's more useful to be friends with our thoughts than thinking them unfortunate distractions. In mindfulness, we are not stopping thoughts as much as overcoming any preoccupation we have with them.

Mindfulness is not thinking about things. (It is not “meditating on” some topic, as people often say.) It is a non-discursive observation of our life in all its aspects. In those moments when thinking predominates, mindfulness is the clear and silent awareness that we are thinking. I found it helpful and relaxing when someone said, “For the purpose of meditation, nothing is particularly worth thinking about.” Thoughts can come and go as they wish, and the meditator does not need to become involved with them. We are not interested in engaging in the content of our thoughts; mindfulness of thinking is simply recognizing we are thinking.

In meditation, when thoughts are subtle and in the background, or when random thoughts pull you away from awareness of the present, it is enough to resume mindfulness of breathing. However, when your preoccupation with thoughts is stronger than your ability to easily let go of them, then direct your mindfulness to being clearly aware that thinking is occurring.

Strong bouts of thinking are fueled largely by identification and preoccupation with thoughts. By clearly observing our thinking, we step outside the field of identification. Thinking will usually then soften to a calm and unobtrusive stream.

Sometimes thinking can be strong and compulsive even while we are aware of it. When this happens, it can be useful to notice how such thinking is affecting your body, physically and energetically. It may cause pressure in the head, tension in the forehead, tightness of the shoulders, or a buzzing as if the head were filled with thousands of bumblebees. Let your mindfulness feel the sensations of tightness, pressure, or whatever you discover. It is easy to be caught up in the story of these preoccupying thoughts, but if you feel the physical sensation of thinking, then you are bringing attention to the present moment rather than the story line of the thoughts.

When a particular theme keeps reappearing in our thinking, it is likely that it is being triggered by a strong emotion. In that case, no matter how many times you recognize a repeated thought or

concern, come back to the breath. If the associated emotion isn't recognized, the concern is liable to keep reappearing. For example, people who plan a lot, often find that planning thoughts arise out of apprehension. If they do not acknowledge the fear, the fear will be a factory of new planning thoughts. If there is a repetitive thought pattern, see if you can discover an emotion associated with it, and then practice mindfulness of the emotion. Ground yourself in the present moment in the emotion itself. When you acknowledge the emotion, often it will cease generating those particular thoughts.

Thoughts are a huge part of our lives. Many of us spend much time inhabiting the cognitive world of stories and ideas. Mindfulness practice won't stop the thinking, but it will help prevent us from compulsively following thoughts that have appeared. This will help us become more balanced, so our physical, emotional and cognitive sides all work together as a whole.

Mindfulness Exercises for the Fourth Week

1) For the remaining two weeks of this class, extend your daily meditation session to 30 minutes. For at least the first ten minutes, keep your meditation simple – focus on the breath. To the best of your ability, when some other experience gets in the way of being with the breath, simply let it go and come back to the breath. After this 10-minute warm-up period, switch to more open mindfulness. This means continuing with the breath until something else becomes more compelling. When physical sensations, emotions or thinking predominate, let go of the breath and focus your meditative awareness on these. When nothing else is compelling, come back to the breathing.

2) Spend some time reflecting on the assumptions, attitudes and beliefs you have about your thoughts. Do you usually assume that they are either true false, right or wrong? Do you identify with your thoughts? That is, do you think that what you think defines who you are? Do you believe that your thinking will solve your problems or that it is the only means to understand something? After you have reflected on this on your own, have a conversation with someone about what you have discovered.

3) Once during the next week, spend a two-hour period tracking the kinds of things you think about. Find some way to remind yourself every few minutes to notice what you are thinking. Are the thoughts primarily self-referential or primarily about others? Do they tend to be critical or judgmental? What is the frequency of thoughts of “should” or “ought”? Are the thoughts mostly directed to the future, to the past, or toward fantasy? Do you tend more toward optimistic thoughts or pessimistic ones? Do your thoughts tend to be apprehensive or peaceful? Contented or dissatisfied? This is not an exercise in judging what you notice, but in simply noticing. Most people live in their thoughts. This is a two-hour exercise in regularly and frequently stepping outside of the thought-stream to take up residence, albeit briefly, in a mindful awareness that is bigger than the thinking mind.

4) Once during the next week, spend a 2-hour period giving particular attention to your intentions. Before we speak or act there is always an impulse of motivation or intention. Notice the various kinds of desires and aversions that fuel your intentions. For this exercise, you might choose a period where you can go about some ordinary activity in a quiet and mostly undisturbed

way. You might even slow your activities down some so that you are more likely to notice and evaluate your motivations.

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 5

Now that we have practiced with mindfulness of the breath, body, emotions and thoughts in previous weeks, the new instruction is to turn the attention around and notice the mind itself. Not just the content of the mind in terms of particular feelings or thoughts, but the quality of the mind; the mood of the mind; the state of the mind.

Sometimes it is not easy to notice the overall state of the mind because we are focusing so much on the details of what is happening during mindfulness practice. This often can be the case in daily life as well, especially when we are preoccupied with what we want or don't want. It is like focusing on the details of driving while noticing neither how dirty the windshield is nor the strain of looking through the dirt. Part of mindfulness practice is to step back from the details of what we are experiencing in order to notice the subjective feeling of being aware. So, for example, does our awareness or our mind feel contracted or spacious, tense or relaxed, scattered or focused?

States of the mind are closely connected with our mood or attitude. Whether subtle or strong they have a pervasive quality that is more lasting than particular thoughts or impulses of the mind. For example, angry thoughts sometimes may appear briefly without affecting our mood. In contrast, an angry state of mind can shape our entire demeanor. While in an angry mood, not all our thoughts may be angry. However, the mood can linger as a background for whatever we are experiencing, sometimes significantly coloring our perception of things.

For some people, this background attitude is at the heart of what motivates their life. All too often it is closely connected to people's suffering. When they are not aware of the influence their attitude has, people can feel trapped in their suffering. An attitude or mood can create a bias in how we see our experience. Moods of desire or aversion can influence us one way, moods of generosity or friendliness another way. When we are clearly aware of our mood we are less likely to be unduly influenced by it.

If we do not notice the underlying attitude it can fester and build up stress and tension in our lives. The attitude may only cause relatively mild tension or stress in any given moment, but if it is chronically reinforced, then the tension can become great and lead to greater suffering.

In becoming mindful of attitude it is useful to distinguish between what is happening at any given moment and what our relationship is to what is happening. Mindfulness practice helps to tease these apart so that we can be more discerning about how our opinions, judgments, attitudes and feelings may or may not accurately represent what is happening. The space between what is happening and our relationship to what is happening is a door to peace.

The suffering and stress that mindfulness practice is meant to help address is less about how things are and more about our relationship to how things are. Fortunately freedom is not as much

about what is happening in the world or within us, but more about how much freedom we have in relating to what is happening.

Meditation Instruction: Mindfulness of the Mind

During meditation periodically ask yourself what is your relationship to what is happening. For example, you may feel some discomfort. Be mindful of your relationship to the discomfort. Are you clinging or resisting? Are you relaxed, generous, or kind towards the discomfort? Once you notice the relationship, hold it in the warmth of your attention. Once you have done this, you can investigate some of the present-moment elements of how you are relating. How does it affect your breathing? Are there any physical sensations or emotions associated with it? What are your beliefs behind it? Also, as you notice the relationship, ask yourself if that relationship or attitude represents a way you want to be or whether it contributes to a sense of dissatisfaction or dis-ease. Also, remember that there is no need for judging, criticizing or being upset with what we see when we look at our relationship to the present moment, even if what we see is unfortunate or difficult. Similarly, there is no need to praise or get involved with fortunate or preferred attitudes. In either case, the practice is to be mindful of the relationship or attitude without being for it or against it. This practice then allows the relationship or attitude to settle or relax.

Periodically notice the general state of your mind. Does it feel tired or alert, contracted or expanded, calm or agitated, fuzzy or clear, resistant or eager, pushing forward or pulling back? Putting aside whatever commentary or judgments you might have about the state of your mind, use your mindfulness to become more aware of the state. What emotions come with it? What is its felt sense? What relationship is there between your mind state and how your body feels? What does it feel like to step back and observe the state of mind rather than be in it? What happens to your state of mind as you are mindful of it?

Mindfulness Exercises for the Fifth Week

- 1) Choose an activity you do on a daily basis. This can be driving to work, preparing breakfast, reading email, etc. For one week each time you do this chosen activity become aware of your state of mind. How does your state of mind influence how you relate to the activity? Keep a log of your changing states over the week and compare the role your mind state has on how you do the activity.
- 2) Consider what ordinary activity you do that helps you have a good state of mind. During this week, do this activity more often and become more mindful of what this state of mind is like physically, emotionally and cognitively. Explore how you might realistically maintain this state of mind after you have finished the activity that tends to bring it on.
- 3) Have a conversation with a good friend (or complete stranger if that is easier) about what might be the most common attitudes that you operate under. How do these attitudes influence what you do, how you see life, and how you relate to yourself? How do you tend to relate to people who have similar attitudes to your most common ones?

Mindfulness Meditation Homework: Week 6

Sometimes a metaphor can be useful for clarifying and reinforcing the instructions for mindfulness meditation. A classic Buddhist metaphor for a human being is a one-room house with five windows and a door. The windows and door represent the six senses posited by Buddhism: the five primary senses we have in the West plus a sixth sense which perceives what goes on in our minds, our thoughts. Imagine that you are in the middle of the house sitting in an easy chair, relaxed and at ease with nothing to do. The windows are open and the door is open. A cat peeks its head in the door and then goes away. Soon a bird lands on the windowsill and then flies away and then a squirrel runs by.

Various animals come and go. Rather than getting up to follow the animal outside or closing the doors and windows, you could stay in our easy chair and simply watch what comes and goes. The instructions for mindfulness meditation is to just stay in the easy chair of awareness and let sensations, emotions, thoughts or attitudes simply appear at the door or window of our sense perceptions. We notice them come and go. The emphasis is on being at ease. We are not trying to force our meditation to become anything. You are encouraged to remain focused on breathing but when compelling experiences come to awareness, neither get involved with them nor close your awareness to them. Explore how to be aware with ease.

Developing mindfulness is a way of living a skillful life. Life can then unfold a lot better, with a lot less stress, and more sense of freedom and wisdom. Once the basic instructions for mindfulness are understood, one can build on this foundation. The two primary ways of doing this are:

- 1) Practicing mindfulness in daily life
- 2) Developing more concentration with the mindfulness.

Mindfulness in Daily Life

As in meditation, it is possible to develop greater presence and awareness in our daily lives. Some people find it useful to have cues throughout the day that remind them to notice what is happening in the present, i.e. what they are doing, feeling, or thinking. A common cue is the phone ringing. Rather than rushing to immediately answer the phone, the ringing is a prompt to be mindful. This is also a great way to prepare for the phone conversation.

Some people use walking through doorways as a mindfulness cue. Whenever they walk through a doorway into a different room they notice and pay attention to what is happening with themselves and in the new room. Waiting for traffic lights to turn green can be another cue for a bit of mindfulness.

It can also be useful to bring a heightened mindfulness to particular daily tasks. Some people do this by choosing to eat one meal a day in silence without doing anything else besides eating. Others will do mindfulness while walking – some people will park in a distant parking place so to have a short period of walking meditation. Cleaning can also be a great time to cultivate mindfulness.

A fascinating area for mindfulness is during a conversation. Much can be discovered by listening more actively and tracking one's internal responses and impulses during the conversation. The qualities needed to listen well are the same qualities needed to meditate well.

Concentration

The second way to build on the foundation of our mindfulness is to develop greater concentration. Concentration helps provide steadiness and strength to mindfulness. If mindfulness is a telescope then concentration is the tripod that gives stability to the telescope so we can see more clearly.

One way to develop concentration is with regularity of practice. One of the most important things is just practicing every day, day after day. Just as young children benefit from routine and repetition in learning, the mind benefits from regularity of practice.

Another way to develop concentration is going on meditation retreats. This allows us to step out of our lives so we can get a better perspective and perhaps better let go of the regular concerns that often entangle us. Retreats are a time to meditate frequently throughout the day and so get more settled than meditating once a day at home. To be really present and not have the mind be murky, foggy or distracted is one of the great delights of life. This happens slowly over time if we practice everyday at home, but it happens quicker and deeper when we go on retreat.

If we're new to meditation we don't necessarily want to go on retreat right away, but to start doing a regular practice. If we meditate regularly at some point we will probably feel that we would like to do more and then we might consider a retreat.

Wisdom

Mindfulness coupled with concentration helps with the unfolding of what Buddhism calls wisdom. Wisdom happens when we are present for our lives and see through our concepts, ideas or judgments and instead understand the bigger picture and context of what's happening. Some of the concepts or judgments we use are innocent and appropriate enough. However, some concepts bring with them much suffering. Part of the function of mindfulness is to help us cut through all the concepts, interpretations, and "shoulds" so we can see more clearly. And the more clearly we see, the more choices we will discover for living a wise and satisfying life.

Another function of mindfulness is to reveal the difference between the stress of clinging and the peace of releasing that clinging. An important part of wisdom is then learning how to act with this knowledge so that we become more peaceful and more free.

Instructions for Walking Meditation

Most people in the West associate meditation with sitting quietly. But traditional Buddhist teachings identify four meditation postures: sitting, walking, standing and lying down. All four are valid means of cultivating a calm and clear mindfulness of the present moment. The most common meditation posture after sitting is walking. In meditation centers and monasteries, indoor halls and outdoor paths are often built for walking meditation. On meditation retreats,

regular walking meditation is an integral part of the schedule. In practice outside of retreats, some people will include walking as part of their daily meditation practice—for example, 10–20 minutes of walking prior to sitting, or walking meditation instead of sitting.

Walking meditation brings a number of benefits in addition to the cultivation of mindfulness. It can be a helpful way of building concentration, perhaps in support of sitting practice. When we are tired or sluggish, walking can be invigorating. The sensations of walking can be more compelling than the more subtle sensations of breathing while sitting. Walking can be quite helpful after a meal, upon waking from sleep, or after a long period of sitting meditation. At times of strong emotions or stress, walking meditation may be more relaxing than sitting. An added benefit is that, when done for extended times, walking meditation can build strength and stamina.

People have a variety of attitudes toward walking meditation. Some take to it easily and find it a delight. For many others, an appreciation of this form of meditation takes some time; it is an “acquired taste.” Yet others see its benefits and do walking meditation even though they don’t have much taste for it.

To do formal walking meditation, find a pathway about 30–40 feet long, and simply walk back and forth. When you come to the end of your path, come to a full stop, turn around, stop again, and then start again. Keep your eyes cast down without looking at anything in particular. Some people find it useful to keep the eyelids half closed.

We stress walking back and forth on a single path instead of wandering about because otherwise part of the mind would have to negotiate the path. A certain mental effort is required to, say, avoid a chair or step over a rock. When you walk back and forth, pretty soon you know the route and the problem-solving part of the mind can be put to rest.

Walking in a circle is a technique that is sometimes used, but the disadvantage is that the continuity of a circle can conceal a wandering mind. Walking back and forth, the little interruption when you stop at the end of your path can help to catch your attention if it has wandered.

As you walk back and forth, find a pace that gives you a sense of ease. I generally advise walking more slowly than normal, but the pace can vary. Fast walking may bring a greater sense of ease when you are agitated. Or fast walking might be appropriate when you are sleepy. When the mind is calm and alert, slow walking may feel more natural. Your speed might change during a period of walking meditation. See if you can sense the pace that keeps you most intimate with and attentive to the physical experience of walking.

After you’ve found a pace of ease, let your attention settle into the body. I sometimes find it restful to think of letting my body take me for a walk. Once you feel connected to the body, let your attention settle into your feet and lower legs. In sitting meditation, it is common to use the alternating sensations of breathing in and out as an “anchor” keeping us in the present. In walking meditation, the focus is on the alternating stepping of the feet.

With your attention in the legs and feet, feel the sensations of each step. Feel the legs and feet tense as you lift the leg. Feel the movement of the leg as it swings through the air. Feel the contact of the foot with the ground. There is no “right” experience. Just see how the experience feels to you. Whenever you notice that the mind has wandered, bring it back to the sensations of the feet walking. Getting a sense of the rhythm of the steps may help maintain a continuity of awareness.

As an aid to staying present, you can use a quiet mental label for your steps as you walk. The label might be “stepping, stepping” or “left, right.” Labeling occupies the thinking mind with a rudimentary form of thought, so the mind is less likely to wander off. The labeling also points the mind towards what you want to observe. Noting “stepping” helps you to notice the feet. If after a while you notice that you are saying “right” for the left foot and “left” for the right foot, you know that your attention has wandered.

When walking more slowly, you might try breaking each step into phases and using the traditional labels “lifting, placing.” For very slow walking, you can use the labels “lifting, moving, placing.”

Try to dedicate your attention to the sensations of walking and let go of everything else. If powerful emotions or thoughts arise and call your attention away from the sensations of walking, it is often helpful to stop walking and attend to them. When they are no longer compelling, you can return to the walking meditation. You also might find that something beautiful or interesting catches your eye while walking. If you can’t let go of it, stop walking and do “looking” meditation. Continue walking when you have finished looking.

Some people find that their minds are more active or distractible during walking than during sitting meditation. This may be because walking is more active and the eyes are open. If so, don’t be discouraged and don’t think that walking is thus less useful. It may in fact be more useful to learn to practice with your more everyday mind.

You can train your mind to be present any time you walk. Some people choose specific activities in their daily routines to practice walking meditation, such as walking down a hallway at home or at work, or from their car to their place of work.

In our daily lives, we spend more time walking than sitting quietly with our eyes closed. Walking meditation can serve as a powerful bridge between meditation practice and daily life, helping us be more present, mindful and concentrated in ordinary activities. It can reconnect us to a simplicity of being and the wakefulness that comes from it.

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