



MEDITATION OVERVIEW

The two components of Buddhist meditation are:

1. Tranquility meditation for calm and stillness
2. Insight meditation for understanding and wisdom

These two components work together like the two wings of a bird.

In this course we will use a BASIC METHOD OF MEDITATION. The stages are called:

- Present moment awareness
- Silent present moment awareness
- Silent present moment awareness of the breath
- Full sustained attention on the breath

Without expecting instant results, one is willing to patiently train the mind. One is ready to invest some time and be prepared to learn from whatever difficulties one encounters.

METHOD

For tranquillity meditation our primary aim is to calm the mind by learning to sustain our attention on one thing. Here we use the natural flow of the breath as the object to focus our attention.

1. Set a definite time for the duration of the period of meditation, for example 20 minutes.
2. Sit with a comfortable posture.
3. Close your eyes and resolve to sit still for the duration of the period of meditation, letting go or all other concerns.
4. Then direct your attention to what is going on right now, in the present moment. This is present moment awareness.

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION – WEEK 1 cont'd...

5. Let go of everything around you and allow a feeling of solitude and silence to arise, just as if you are alone surrounded by empty space. This is silent present moment awareness.
6. Now focus the attention on the natural flow of the breath, experiencing the sensations of the breath, taking interest in each inhalation and exhalation, from beginning to end, knowing the quality of breath, whether it is short or long, coarse or fine, regular or irregular. But do not control the breath. Fully experience one breath at a time. This is silent present moment awareness of the breath.
7. Next, we experience the silent present moment awareness of just the breath. We are there in the present moment with the breath throughout the entire breathing cycle, from the very first moment of the in breath to the very last moment of the out breath. This is full, sustained attention on the breath.
8. One way to help the mind to stay with the breath may be to count at the end of each inhalation and exhalation. When the mind becomes calm and is staying with the flow of the breath then one can dispense with the counting.
9. Whenever the mind forgets the breath and becomes preoccupied with some other activity or object (such as remembering the past, planning the future, daydreaming etc) then just know what the mind is being distracted by, stop, and gently re-establish attention on the breath. Continue to do this with patience and alertness whenever distracted.
10. When the time for the period of meditation is over, sit still for awhile and reflect on what you did during the meditation and what you experienced, so that you can learn how to bring the mind to peace more easily and quickly next time.



THE FIVE HINDRANCES

Stillness

As you sustain the attention on the breath, noticing the beginning, middle and end of each inhalation and exhalation, the mind begins to withdraw from external sensory impingements, and it becomes calmer and more focused.

Hindrances

When the mind is not able to focus on the breath it is due to the presence of one of the following hindrances:

1. SENSE DESIRE

This is the mind grasping at sense objects and sense pleasures. When sitting in meditation the mind may become bored and it begins searching for pleasant distractions through fantasy, imagining the future or bringing up memories of past experiences.

Antidote for Sense Desire: Contemplate how endless desire is, how many problems it causes and how sense desire is never satisfied. Learn to say 'no' to desire for the pleasant having seen this endless flow of wanting more and more.

2. HATRED, ILL WILL, OR ANNOYANCE

This is the mind striking against objects that it does not like and wanting to get rid of them. This can be towards unpleasant external conditions for example noise and people, or the conditions of one's own body and mind for example pain, restlessness and sleepiness.

Antidote for Hatred, Ill Will, or Annoyance: Instead of trying to get rid of that which is unpleasant, develop tolerance and patience with it. Investigate the suffering involved in anger and realise that we come to peace as soon as we co-exist with, or accommodate, these things, not necessarily liking them but not creating any problems around them.

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION – WEEK 2 cont'd...

3. SLEEPINESS AND SLUGGISHNESS

The mind is heavy and dull, and it just wants to sink into sleep. This is a calm state, but the mind is not bright and alert as there is a lack of energy.

Antidote to Sleepiness and Sluggishness: The most common reason for this hindrance arising is the obvious one, we are tired, low in energy. The most effective way for dealing with this type of sloth and torpor is to accept it, make peace with it. Then it usually doesn't last that long. When we've rested a little, our mind becomes clearer and we carry on.

4. RESTLESSNESS AND REMORSE

The mind is in a state of worry or agitation and is always jumping from one object to another. This is a mind with too much energy and not enough calm.

Antidote to Restlessness and Remorse: Sit very still and take an interest in the nature of the breath, really trying to experience each breath fully from the beginning to the end, counting to 10 without losing count. Remember contentment when restlessness is strong, we can even repeat a phrase or mantra to ourselves. For instance, a mantra like 'good enough, good enough, good enough'.

Remorse is feeling bad about something we've done. When that kind of feeling comes up apply the **AFL formula:** **ACKNOWLEDGE** what you've done, **FORGIVE** yourself, **LEARN** from your mistakes. Remember, everyone makes mistakes, big and small.

5. DOUBT

One doubts what one is doing, how to do it, or one's ability to do it.

Antidote for Doubt: If you have any doubt about the method or what you should be doing, ask the teacher. Many of these doubts can be easily resolved.

SWEEPING THE BODY EXERCISE:

Sit very still in a good balanced posture. Direct your attention to the top of your head. Experience whatever sensations are present, such as warmth, itching, tingling, throbbing etc (or lack of sensations). Keep your attention there for a few seconds, then move it to the back of the head, again experiencing any sensations. Continue moving the attention through the whole body, part by part, down to the feet. Wherever there is tension or pain, stop and pay attention more closely to that area. If you find this method of sweeping the body useful for sustaining your awareness, then you can spend more time doing it by sweeping up and down the body quite a few times. You can experiment with this method, such as the speed of sweeping or the size of the area you put your attention on, to find what suits you best.



Introduction to Meditation - Week 3

In meditation we develop two important mental qualities that are inter-related and support each other, developing one helps to strengthen the other.

1. SUSTAINED ATTENTION

This is the ability to sustain the attention on one thing for a long period of time.

2. AWARENESS OR MINDFULNESS

This is the quality of knowing, or presence of mind.

WALKING MEDITATION

Walking meditation is often alternated with sitting meditation as a form of practice. To begin, measure a path that is about 20 paces in length. Stand at one end of the path and let the attention rest on the feeling of the body standing upright. The hands can be clasped in front of the body. Allow the eyes to gaze on the ground about two metres in front of you. Now walk mindfully to the end of the path. Stop. For a couple of breaths, focus on the body standing. Turn, and walk slowly 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 movement of the feet, the sensation of the feet touching the ground and the feelings of stopping and starting.

MEDITATION IN ACTION

Sitting meditation is very good for developing stillness and more refined states of mind. However, it is important to be able to incorporate meditation into one's daily life so that ordinary activities also become a form of meditation.

If our daily life is full of hectic confusion, with the mind scattered, then it will be very difficult to focus the mind when we come to sit in meditation. On the other hand, if we are able to be more mindful during the day then the mind is already quite calm when we come to sit, and it will easily become focused.

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION – WEEK 3 cont'd...

For meditation in action, we do not expect to achieve a refined focus on one thing only, but instead develop greater awareness around whatever activity we are involved in. Washing dishes, sweeping, bathing, dressing etc can be acts of meditation, provided they are done with awareness. To be aware is to be meditating.

Two examples:

1. **Eating** – when eating, just eat. Do not daydream. Notice the food and what it looks like, be aware of the physical action of eating, lifting the food, putting it into the mouth and chewing, experience the taste and texture. If any thoughts of liking or disliking arise, just know them as thoughts and feelings. The physical act of eating is our point of reference so that we can be more aware of these movements of the mind.
2. **Brushing your teeth** – when brushing your teeth, just brush, do not daydream. Fully experience the physical action of brushing, knowing what area has been brushed and what remains. If any thoughts, plans, or memories come into the mind, just know them as thoughts and feelings and come back to the present reality of brushing.

What we do in our meditation practice affects what we do in our daily life and what we do in our daily life affects our meditation. By being fully present and giving attention to what we are doing we begin to know ourselves more fully because we notice the nature of the mind with its habitual tendencies. If these habitual ways of reacting to situations cause problems, or suffering, for ourselves or others then we can change them.

A DISHWASHER'S GUIDE TO LIFE:

While washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes. If while washing the dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way, as if they were a nuisance, then we are not alive during the time we are washing dishes.

The fact that we are here washing these bowls is a wondrous reality, a miracle of life.

If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands.

Thus, we are sucked away into the future, and we are incapable of living one minute of life.

Thich Nhat Hanh.



Introduction to Meditation - Week 4

LOVING KINDNESS OR METTA

Loving kindness is a state of mind that encompasses feelings of friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness, and non-violence. It is easy to confuse metta with the romantic notion of love, however with metta we aim to extend this feeling of well-wishing without sensual thoughts of what we can obtain from the other person. We aim to extend this feeling to all beings, small or great, far and near, and not just those who are pleasing to us.

We can practise loving-kindness in formal meditation.

- We start by directing thoughts of loving-kindness to ourselves. We reflect upon the fact that all living beings want to be happy, and consider that this impulse unites us. We reflect in a way which is meaningful to us, eg ‘Just as I wish to be happy and free from suffering, so may that being. May all beings be happy and free from suffering’.
- After ourselves, we extend the thought of loving-kindness to a person for whom we have a loving respect, eg a teacher or parent.
- Then it is extended to dearly beloved people, to indifferent people, and finally to those people we may find difficult.

Since this meditation is concerned with the welfare of the living, one should not choose people who have died, one should also avoid choosing people towards whom one may have feelings of sexual attraction.

Sometimes it can be difficult to give loving-kindness to ourselves first. In this case we can begin by extending Loving-Kindness to dearly beloved people first and then to ourselves, then indifferent people and finally those people we find difficult. We can also recollect some of the good things we have done and acknowledge that we deserve to be happy.

Instead of considering these different groups of people, we can extend or expand our visualisation spatially, beginning with beings in this room, then all beings in this city, all beings in this country, this world and finally all living beings in this universe. As we visualise these beings, we can repeat a phrase such as ‘**MAY YOU BE HAPPY, MAY YOU BE WELL, MAY YOU BE FREE FROM SUFFERING**’. While this helps as a kind of mental prompt, it is not the ultimate aim of the meditation, we really want to try to evoke a feeling of well wishing and project it mentally to the beings we are visualising. With practice, it becomes easier to bring up that feeling, and we find that it grows in strength. In fact, we may find that it grows in strength to the point that we can let go of the subjects of our loving-kindness, and transfer our attention to the feeling itself.

In addition to the formal practice of loving-kindness, we can also employ it in our everyday life to bring about a change in the way of looking at things. Doing this supports our formal practice, in the same way that mindfulness practice in daily life supports our formal breath meditation. After doing formal loving-kindness practice a few times, and developing a little mindfulness of our states of mind, we may become aware of situations in our everyday life when we experience negative or selfish thoughts. When we recognise these, we can make a conscious effort to let go of the negative thoughts and consciously bring about a thought of loving-kindness. By doing this often, we find that our old habits of mind are gradually chipped away and that we experience states of greater happiness.

THE METTA SUTTA

The Buddha's words on Loving-Kindness

This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness
And who knows the path of peace
Let them be able and upright
Straight forward and gentle in speech
Humble and not conceited, contented, and easily satisfied
Not busy with duties and frugal in their ways
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skilful
Not proud and demanding in nature
Let them not do the slightest thing that the wise would later reprove
Wishing: In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease
Whatever living beings there may be
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small
The seen and the unseen
Those living near and far away, those born and to be born
May all beings be happy
Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state
Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another
Even as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child
So with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths
Outward and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill will
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection
This is said to be the sublime abiding
By not holding to false views, the pure hearted one
Having clarity of vision
Being freed from all sense desires, is not born again into this world

(This teaching on love has been chanted by Buddhists for over two and a half thousand years)