

SOWING SEEDS OF PEACE

*Mindfulness Meditation for
Finding Peace Within*

BY VEN. KABOGGOZA BUDDHARAKKHITA

Sowing seeds of Peace:

Mindfulness Meditation for Finding Peace Within

Ven. Kaboggoza Buddharakkhita

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Dedication

This book is humbly dedicated to my beloved Preceptor, the late
Venerable Sayadaw U Silananda
Of Dhammananda Vihara, Half Moon Bay, California, USA,
who ordained and encouraged me to learn and spread the
Dhamma.

May he attain final liberation!

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Foreword

In this beautiful and lucid guide, Ven. Buddharakkhita offers gentle anecdotes and practical exercises as a means to learning the skills of mindfulness—being awake and fully aware. The book offers insights on mindfulness meditation such as awareness of breathing, dealing with emotions and thoughts, mindfulness of eating, walking, sitting and lying down, forgiveness, cultivating divine virtues and ultimately mindful of death.

He reminds us that each moment embraces an opportunity to develop greater self-understanding and peacefulness. Mindfulness and psychology have been wonderfully interwoven. Mindfulness is about being present or at peace with your inner experience and outer environment, including other people.

If you are an educator, counselor, psychologist, or social worker, this book you're holding has the potential to transform your life, the lives of your students, and the institution itself.

Mindfulness helps people from all walks of life by supporting emotional management, reducing stress, and focusing the mind. These skills are essential for professional success and personal satisfaction. Persistent awareness, as cultivated through mindfulness, helps one to focus attention, promote academic achievement, reduce problem behaviors, and increase enthusiasm for learning. Tapping into the potential of mindfulness begins when people learn to be aware of whatever is occurring in the present moment, allowing everything to be just as it is.

This book is a much needed, extremely well thought out, and beautifully constructed, practical piece. It is commonsensical, user-

friendly, and straightforward to implement. Most importantly, it engages the reader in developing your own mindfulness practice so that you can share these useful skills with other people, that you have actually explored and experienced yourself. Honing your personal mindfulness practice can provide great benefits in terms of your well-being, sense of ease, and presence in your work. It can enhance embodied self-awareness and the potential for greater self-understanding, self-confidence, and emotional intelligence. By cultivating attention, awareness, self-compassion, and kindness toward others, these innate capacities within us all can be strengthened through mindfulness training. Such highly beneficial life skills form the basis for building successful relationships, beginning with one's own self.

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Introduction

At the end of mindfulness meditation retreats, people often wonder if it is possible to practice mindfulness meditation in the modern world, asking me a very important question: “What do I do after the retreat? How can I practice mindfulness meditation in daily life?” Many desperately want to bring what they’ve been practicing back home with them from retreat, but they’re afraid that mindfulness meditation won’t fit in a high-tech world of computers, cars, smart phones, and countless other modern trappings.

This fear is understandable. Most of us live a busy life full of constant melodrama. We have to earn a living, maintain a household, and deal with people who are both friendly and rude. We watch what we eat and drink. We may be compulsive shoppers, spending hours in the mall, in front of the TV or internet, checking out the latest products for sale. In today’s world, we deal with a million little things throughout the day. It’s no wonder so many of us have a hard time believing mindfulness meditation can be relevant in our lives today and have great difficulty making time to find out.

Luckily, when we really examine ourselves, we’ll see that the mind is the same for us now as it was for those who lived so many years ago in ancient times. We may have new fancy distractions and addictions, but our struggle is no different from the struggles of ancient people.

Meditation is at the heart of this path to freedom. Gender, race, age, religion, income, nor anything we’ve done before this moment, none of these matter. Meditation is not about

the content of our lives; it's about how we relate to our daily experiences, whatever they may be. Meditation is about waking up and seeing clearly how we're doing, what we're doing, and why we're doing it. Meditation is a reality check.

Someone once asked the wise person, "What do you and your disciples practice?" and he replied, "We sit, we walk, and we eat." The questioner continued, "But Sir, everyone sits, walks, and eats." The wise person responded, "But when we sit, we know we are sitting. When we walk, we know we are walking; and when we eat, we know we are eating."

Meditation is about breaking through our greed, hatred, and delusion; seeing the world with bare attention; seeing the silliness of our desires, the pointlessness of our aversion, and the bewilderment of our delusion. This is true happiness. This is inner peace. This is ultimate freedom. You don't need to go anywhere to find them. Just look deep into your mind and see that they're already there.

Despite the beautiful simplicity of this approach, many of us still face the temptation to ignore mindfulness meditation until we have more time. Some of us with families may put it off until our children graduate from college. Some of us with demanding jobs will wait until we retire. Some attempt to deal with such a time crunch by reducing meditation to a single technique to be practiced sporadically during occasional retreats, or merely once per day. Eventually, many give up the idea of meditation altogether, or limit their practice to certain techniques. Before we know it, we're meditating in a shallow way, with little or no result.

Instead of turning this life-changing meditation into another task on our “to do list”, or a distant goal we pursue and give up in frustration, let us embrace our mindfulness practice as an essential, yet gradual process of mental cultivation and purification.

Meditation is not merely one on a list of chores; meditation is the way to cultivate a generous, loving, compassionate, steadied, wise, and joyful mind.

This booklet demonstrates how to practice meditation in daily life. Those who diligently follow the steps laid out here can begin walking the path towards freedom.

May all beings attain true happiness, inner peace and ultimate freedom!

Venerable Buddharakkhita

Chapter 1: What is Mindfulness Meditation?

THEORY

In English “mindfulness” means to remember or recollect. In meditation practice, “mindfulness” has a more specific meaning: to be aware in the present moment of everything going on within us and around us. Mindfulness is the “observing power” of the mind that clearly and simply experiences an object without reacting to it. Mindfulness is like a mirror, revealing experience without adding or subtracting anything. When mindfulness is lacking, thoughts quickly become impulsive and habitual, leading to harmful words and actions, and later to regret. With mindfulness, we can overcome and control our sensations, thoughts, and emotions. We can be aware of anger, greed, or delusion, even in their subtlest forms. By allowing us to objectively see, with bare attention, the many different experiences we are having at any given moment, mindfulness can lead us to recognize the true nature of our experience and guide us on the path towards peace, happiness and freedom.

Mindfulness Meditation Requires Patience and Focused Attention on the Present Moment

Patience is a wise, understanding, acceptance that allows us to endure both the desirable and undesirable. It is the coming together of tolerance and endurance. Neither rushing nor postponing, but confidently persisting, patience allows us to enter any situation with gentle kindness and strength.

Patience is really just mindfulness practiced over and over. Concepts and habits lead us to suffer, while mindfulness allows us to abide in the present moment, see things as they really are, and wisely accept our circumstances with grace and serenity. Whether we are dealing with a pain in our body or an unpleasant co-worker, patience is the key to responding in a healthy way to the problems we face, both in the world and within ourselves.

During our daily activities, we should learn to be patient. In this harried, hurried, lightning-fast society, we need to pace ourselves by settling into the present moment and relaxing. Instead of rushing back and forth, without resting or taking a breath, break this habit.

Practice pausing before frantically reacting to situations. When a phone rings, don't throw yourself across the room to answer it; settle in and compose yourself during the first few rings. When someone says something hurtful, don't snap back; take a few breaths to mindfully examine how you feel.

It is a great idea to do "nothing" for one minute every hour. Relax the body and mind. Suspend any activity that is not absolutely crucial for just a moment and take a quick snapshot of where you are. Breathe in and breathe out. Let go of the past and the future. Say to yourself, "Breathing in, may I be well, happy, and peaceful." After a moment, say, "Breathing out, may all beings be well, happy, and peaceful." These moments of mindfulness, awareness and loving-kindness can fill your day with joy. Remember M&Ms, those little sugar-coated chocolate candies so many of us love to snack on? Think of these as 'mini meditations' that you can take any time for a quick treat.

Regularly pausing in this way will help to slow down the neurotic push into the future we can so easily get caught up in, and help us to release the stress that builds up throughout the day. With patience and slow, deliberate, mindful actions, we can reach home refreshed, even energized enough to do another round of meditation. Meditation before bed can help with deeper, more rejuvenating sleep. With better sleep, we can wake up fresh and ready to set out on a new day. This makes us even more likely to keep a morning meditation practice. The benefits of being mindful for a few minutes each day cannot be overstated. Mindfulness each moment keeps suffering away.

Mindfulness Meditation Requires Determination to Embrace the Present Moment

Determination is the fuel that keeps our practice moving. Without willpower and resolution, spiritual growth and development never leave the station. Mindfulness meditation is easier than you think. What is difficult is remembering to be mindful. In order to overcome this difficulty, discipline and a strong determination to be mindful in the present moment are necessary.

Maintaining mindfulness in our daily activities requires determination. We can engage in meditation practice while vacuuming, eating, walking, or speaking. With effort, any of the myriad of little activities throughout our day can become our daily practice. This sort of mindfulness may not be as intense as our daily meditation, but being determined during relaxed, moment-to-moment attention can make a huge difference. Our determination should be practical and realistic. Some people decide after a

meditation retreat that they are lazy if they don't meditate for one or two hours a day. But soon they're exhausted; in just a week or two, their daily practice dwindles from 60 minutes to 50, 40, 30, 20, 10, 1, 0 minutes. Please don't let this happen. Be humble and set up a realistic approach for yourself. It is advisable to start with 10 minutes of daily meditation, then continue building up each week, by adding 5 minutes to daily meditation. At the end of one month, meditation time could increase to 20 minutes. Determination is about endurance and dedication, not superhuman promises that we can't possibly fulfill.

We must be diligent in promoting these constructive and wholesome mind states with consistent work and energy.

BENEFITS

The Five-fold Benefits of Mindfulness Practice

The purpose of practicing mindfulness is to attain ultimate liberation. Therefore, it is very important to plant the right seeds. Right mindfulness is a direct way to:

- Purify one's self from greed, hatred and delusion;
- Dispell pain and grief;
- Overcome sorrow and lamentation;
- Achieve happiness and realize ultimate peace.¹

PRACTICE

Preparation for Mindfulness Meditation

- ***Begin Meditation with Affirmations or Aspirations:***
 - “May I be fixed and unshakable in my determination to practice meditation, without ever turning away due to laziness, fear, or doubt.”
 - “May the practice of moral conduct, concentration and wisdom be a cause and condition for attaining inner peace, true happiness, and ultimate freedom.”
- ***Postures:*** One can meditate in any of the four postures: sitting, walking, standing, and lying down. It is recommended to maintain a balance of walking and sitting postures. While people associate sitting meditation with the lotus posture (sitting cross-legged on the floor), it is not a strict necessity to assume the lotus posture for meditation. One can practically sit anywhere so long as the posture is not too strenuous or uncomfortable. You can try different postures until finding one that suits you. Whether sitting on a cushion, chair, or stool, whatever posture you assume, make sure you sit up straight, without strain. Your eyes can be open, closed, or half-closed.
- ***Food:*** A balanced diet is highly recommended which provides the four foundations of health: nutrition, digestion, circulation, and immunity. Keep the diet simple.
- ***Weather:*** The best weather is neither too hot nor too cold. However, if the weather is not ideal, you can be mindful of the heat or coolness. Usually, the heat or cold is not as disturbing as we think.

- **Persons:** It is good to have a guide or companion who is experienced in meditation. This is a person who has a wide knowledge about the theory and practice of meditation. Such people serve as inspiration and role models. They can teach or correct us when we are going astray during meditation practice.
- **Places:** Ideally, choose a place where you will not be interrupted or have distractions. For instance, a quiet part of your house, or under a tree. In other words, select a place that is conducive for maintaining peace. Such a place should support physical seclusion, free from the bustle and hassle of everyday life.
- **Clothing:** Wear loose clothing which is comfortable and not too tight in order to avoid distraction.
- **Time:** Basically, one can meditate anytime. However, it is prudent to set aside a suitable time for meditation when you can detach from all daily engagements.
- **End Meditation with Dedication of One's Happiness to All Beings:**
 - "May the fruits of my practices be shared by all beings. May all beings be well, happy and peaceful. May they be free from suffering and its causes."

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to be mindful during our daily activities. Be mindful of our thoughts, sensations, and emotions. Do not react to them, just watch them.

How long can you stay mindful? What do you observe?

Chapter 2: Mindfulness of Breathing

THEORY

Why Breath is used as an Object of Mindfulness Meditation

- Breath keeps us alive.
- It is easy to observe for an extended period of time without getting tired.
- It requires no training to observe.
- It is available all the time.
- It does not have any religion. Everyone can observe it.
- It does not provoke anger or desire. It is a neutral object.
- It has a calming effect, physically and emotionally.
- Psychologically it leads to gladness, joy, calmness, happiness, and concentration when mindfully observed.
- It is universal because everyone is breathing.
- It reminds us that all beings are connected.

BENEFITS

- Mindfulness of breath leads to calmness, happiness, and concentration;
- Helps to establish proper breathing patterns;

- Reminds us to turn our attention to the present moment (avoiding distraction by thoughts of the past and future) since breathing always happens in the present moment; and
- Leads to psychological benefits such as gladness and joy, calmness, happiness, and concentration.

PRACTICE

Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation²

- Take a seat on a firm cushion or chair.
- Keep the body erect and relaxed (legs can be crossed, but not necessary).
- Open, close or half-close the eyes.
- Rest hands on the lap, with one hand on top of the other.
- Direct the attention to the whole body; be aware of any area of tension, tightness, or stiffness. Try to relax and release any tension.
- Take a couple of slow, deep breaths and release them. Taking deep breaths helps to oxygenate the blood, settle and relax the body and mind.
- Focus mindful attention on the breath as it goes in and out of the nostrils.
- Mentally notice the inhalation and exhalation of each breath.
- When breathing in a long breath, be aware of a long breath.

When breathing out a long breath, be aware of a long breath.

- When breathing in a short breath, be aware of a short breath. When breathing out a short breath, be aware of a short breath.
- One trains oneself thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body,” that is the entire breath. One trains oneself thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body,” that is the entire breath. From the beginning to end of the inhale is a whole breath, and beginning to end of the exhale is another whole breath. When breathing in, be aware of the whole breath. When breathing out, be aware of the whole breath.
- Breathe normally, not vigorously; do not lengthen or shorten the breath. Mindfully observe the beginning, middle and end of each breath. When observing breathing in this way, mental factors such as effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom will help you to be aware of the whole breath. No physical effort is needed.
- When breathing in, one calms the activities of the body. When breathing out, one calms the activities of the body.
- As one observes the breath, it becomes more subtle. Meditators should be ever more mindful of the breath as it becomes increasingly more subtle and almost imperceptible. Do not deliberately calm down, inhibit, or still the breath.

Simply breathe naturally.

- Mindfully observe the breath and settle your attention in the present moment.

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to be mindful of your breath.

How do you feel?

Chapter 3: Practicing Formal Mindfulness-Insight Meditation

THEORY

One can spend years in the classroom learning how to drive a car, but unless we actually get behind the wheel and start driving, we'll never arrive at our destination safely. In the same way, it's all well and good to know about mindfulness meditation theoretically. However, in order to realize its benefits on a deep, direct level, we must engage in formal meditation. The daily practice of meditation is the single most important exercise of mindfulness practice.

This practice is known specifically as insight meditation which means to see, observe, discern or contemplate. Insight meditation is about understanding experience, free from distortions created by the mind. We begin to see conditioned things as they really are, by realizing that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal. Things are impermanent because they are constantly changing. We wish for life's circumstances to be different than they actually are, therefore we find them to be unsatisfactory. Everything is impersonal (without a personality, self-identity, or ego). The object of insight meditation is to realize ultimate reality, rather than believing and getting caught up in conceptual apparent reality.

PRACTICE

- Take a seat on a firm cushion or chair.
- Cross the legs or sit in any way that is comfortable while keeping the body straight and relaxed.

- Open, close, or half-close the eyes, while resting hands on the lap with one hand on the other.
- Take a moment to direct attention to the body; be aware of any areas of tension, tightness, or stiffness and try to relax them gently.
- Once finding a position that is relaxed but steady, take a few slow, deep breaths.
- Find a place in the body where the inhale and exhale or rising and falling of the breath are most clearly felt. For many people this is either the abdomen (right above the belly button), or the tip of the nostrils.
- Focus attention on the area of the body where you feel the breath most noticeably, as previously mentioned (i.e., abdomen or nostrils).
- Be mindful of breathing in and out while gently turning attention to the abdomen or nostrils until you feel fully aware of the sensations there.
- Let the breath be as easy as possible. There is no need to control anything. We are just being aware of what is happening naturally. Mentally note these things in the present moment, not thinking about the past or future.
- Observe the breath mindfully. Note the coolness or warmth you may feel while inhaling and exhaling, or the slight pressure felt as the abdomen rises and falls. Pay attention to the full range of sensations felt at the point of observation you have chosen.

- We are not trying to control or alter the breath by making it longer or shorter.
- We are not trying to create any thoughts or concepts.
- We are simply being mindful, by observing the breath and the reality of our experience in the present moment.

Should a sensation, such as pain, discomfort or cold arise, treat it as you did the breath. Guide attention mindfully to the sensation, noticing whatever is occurring, what you are feeling. While observing the sensation, examine its impermanent nature, its dissatisfactory nature, and its impersonal nature. In this way, we can learn to see all experience objectively, without attachment or aversion. This is the way to freedom from suffering.

Daily reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to observe your body sensation.

Do you observe the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal nature in your sensation?

Chapter 4: Mindfulness of Emotions and Thoughts

Mindfulness of Emotions

THEORY

While mindfully focusing on the breath, one's emotions, thoughts, and feelings will likely arise when beginning a mindfulness practice. If this happens, don't criticize yourself. Even seasoned meditators deal with such random thoughts. Just treat them as you would any other arising sensation. Notice them, mindfully examine them, and abandon the destructive false notions you may have about them.

BENEFITS

- Mindfulness of emotions increases emotional intelligence, that is our ability to perceive and understand our emotional life;
- Decreases or eliminates the possibility of emotional hijacking, or being derailed by difficult emotions;
- Helps to develop continuity of mindfulness
- Helps to develop concentration; and
- Leads to peace, happiness, and freedom.

PRACTICE

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.

- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Mindfully observe any emotions as they arise.

In the beginning, you might have trouble dealing with difficult emotions; if so, *True Refuge: Finding Peace & Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*, by Tara Brach, lays out the acronym “RAIN”³ to help.

- **R = Recognize** what is happening.
- **A = Allow** life to be just as it is.

I = Investigate experience with kindness.

- **N = Non-identify:** We must never say “I am sad” or “I am thinking too much.” Do not make your thoughts into an identity who you believe yourself to be. Realize that like a pain in your back or a breeze on your face, thoughts are simply arising and ceasing. You are not an angry person; anger has simply arisen.
- By observing all things objectively, we will begin to fully realize the true quality of our experience – impermanence, dissatisfaction, and impersonal nature. Even during a simple breath, we can feel discomfort, restlessness, or frustration, still these feelings are not who we are.

Between breaths, as our concentration grows and our defilements fade away, we can temporarily taste the freedom that comes from the cleansing of the mind. We realize directly that we are peaceful, happy, and free from suffering when we cling to nothing.

As our practice develops, we begin to fully realize the true nature of our experience. Consequently, right concentration will organically develop.

To sum up, we should put into practice the six C's:

- ***Commitment*** – determination to develop and maintain mindfulness practice in daily life;
- ***Character*** – build moral values and integrate them into daily life;
- ***Concurrence*** – the object of observation and the observing mind occur concurrently;
- ***Continuity*** of mindfulness – maintain focused attention on activities throughout the day;
- ***Concentration*** – maintain focus and avoid distraction;
- ***Competence*** – develop discernment and understanding of body and mind processes.

Mindfulness of Thoughts

THEORY

Challenges of Unwholesome Thoughts

During meditation, we cannot stop unskillful thoughts from appearing in our thought process. When this happens, we shouldn't beat up ourselves. Instead, be ever more aware of

unwholesome states which inevitably dissolve in this awareness, restoring our inherent state of mind and its peaceful nature. The effort to overcome unskillful thoughts, vigilantly introspecting in this way serves to remove unwholesome states of mind that we discover inside ourselves. We endeavor to remove these negative feelings by cultivating firm but gentle consistent attention through mindfulness practice.

The pattern of destructive or useless thoughts arising day in and day out is certainly familiar to most of us. Sometimes we feel energetically drained and our minds seem driven crazy with endless unproductive thoughts. In Psychiatry, repetitive, intrusive, anxiety-producing thinking is called Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Luckily, there are tools to help us handle our thoughts to avoid compulsive thinking. We must think positively and selectively instead of letting a cascade of unhealthy thoughts overwhelm us.

BENEFITS

- Mindfulness of thoughts increases the ability to perceive and understand our thought process;
- Decreases or eliminates the possibility of being derailed by distracting thoughts;
- Helps to develop continuity of mindfulness;
- Helps to develop concentration; and
- Leads to peace, happiness, and freedom.

PRACTICE

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Mindfully observe any thoughts as they arise.
- Focus on one of the following methods or Thought Management Techniques.

Removal of Distracting Thoughts⁴ – “Thought Management Techniques”

There are five “Thought Management Techniques” (TMT) for overcoming unintended, unwholesome thoughts.

- ***Replacement Method:*** First, we can make an effort to replace unwholesome states of mind with wholesome states of mind. For instance, we can replace thoughts of greed with thoughts of non-greed (generosity); thoughts of hatred or anger with thoughts of non-hatred (loving-kindness); thoughts of cruelty with thoughts of non-cruelty (compassion); and thoughts of delusion with thoughts of wisdom and understanding. By exchanging these harmful thoughts with their opposites, we can go a long way towards banishing them from our minds. However, if unskillful thoughts still arise, then try the next technique.
- ***Reflection Method:*** We can reflect on the fact that unwholesome states of mind lead to unhappiness while skillful states of mind lead to joy. We can envision the negative results of our greed and anger and couple those with the positive effects of our generosity and compassion.

- ***Redirection Method:*** We can temporarily abandon the present meditation object and direct our mind to a wholesome object of attention. Whenever disturbing thoughts arise, redirecting our mind to wholesome thoughts can help to dispel them. Simply focusing on our breath can help to chase away anger and frustration. Once anger or other disturbing emotions subside, we can return attention to a wholesome thought.
- ***Retracing Method:*** In this approach we trace back to the causes and conditions that led to the arising of the disturbing thoughts. For instance, when fear arises, try to trace it to its origin – aversion to the present danger. We might ask ourselves where lust comes from and trace it back to an attachment to a particular person, thing or situation. If we feel anger towards someone, we may retrace the reason for this anger back to a desire, attachment, or need to have things go “right,” or differently than they are now. By retracing a particular thought from its origin, we can unearth its cause and weaken or eradicate its result.
- ***Resolution Method:*** Here, we make a strong determination to get rid of distracting thoughts. We should use every ounce of our effort to overcome them, refusing to let them control us. John Forsyth recommends that we avoid buying into our thoughts without examination⁵; and The Awakened One advised us to “use the mind to crash the mind.” This can be accomplished by directly applying awareness and mindfulness to that specific negative mind state. Mentally noting difficult mind states can be very useful in confronting the issue at hand and eventually

banishing the negative thought for good. When our mind is free from distracting thoughts, we can experience greater happiness as we continue to tread the path to final freedom.

It is powerfully transformative to clear negative thoughts while also making the effort to develop wholesome states of mind. When thoughts of generosity, loving-kindness, and compassion arise we can try to develop them so that our expressions of these mental qualities become more spontaneous and refined. As each positive thought comes into being, we nurture it until reaching its full potential.

Similarly, we must exert effort to prolong these wholesome states of mind. This is the effort to maintain. When wholesome states of mind have already arisen, we try our best to make sure that fleeting glimpses become sustained thoughts for longer periods of time. So whenever thoughts of loving kindness or compassion arise, we try to maintain them, not allowing opposite mental states such as anger or hatred to take their place.

Daily reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to be mindful of your distracting thoughts. Use one of the five thought management techniques to overcome them. Are you managing your thoughts better?

Chapter 5: Mindfulness of Eating

THEORY

Mindfulness of eating is the intentional awareness of the sensations and activities of ingesting food and drink. This involves mindfulness of the six senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking) as well as mindfulness of the properties of the four elements of fire (hotness/coldness), water (cohesiveness/fluidity), air (expansion/contraction), and earth (hardness/softness).

BENEFITS

- Through mindful eating one cultivates continuity of mindfulness;
- Cultivates understanding of the nature of change;
- Realizes the purpose of eating is to sustain the body/mind in order to practice the teaching of freedom;
- Reduces attachment or aversion to food;
- Improves and cultivates wholesome eating behavior;
- Avoids stomach disorders;
- Avoids over-eating;
- Experiences good digestion;
- Maintains healthy weight; and
- Experiences taste of the food more profoundly;

PRACTICE

- Sit comfortably while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Mindfully eat a bite of food while examining the experience in the following manner.

Eating One Groundnut: A Taste of Mindfulness

- ***Holding:*** Hold a groundnut in the palm or between the finger and thumb. Focus on it as though seeing it for the first time.
- ***Seeing:*** Take time to inspect the groundnut carefully, giving it your full attention. Explore every part of it, examining the color, feel, texture, and unique features.
- ***Touching:*** Turn the groundnut over between the fingers, feeling its texture, maybe with eyes closed if that enhances the sense of touch.
- ***Smelling:*** Holding the groundnut beneath the nose. With each inhalation imbibe any aroma that may arise. While doing this notice changes or movement that may occur in the mouth or stomach. For example you may begin salivating.
- ***Placing:*** Slowly bring the groundnut to the lips, noticing that the hand and arm know exactly what to do. Gently place

the object in the mouth, without chewing, noticing it enter the mouth. Spend a few moments exploring sensations of touch in the mouth, exploring the object with the tongue.

- **Tasting:** Prepare to chew the groundnut, noticing how and where it needs to be for chewing. Consciously, take one or two bites into it and notice what happens in response, experiencing any tastes that arise while chewing. Without swallowing, notice sensations of taste and texture in the mouth and how these change, moment to moment, as well as any changes to the object itself. Be aware of pleasant or unpleasant feelings, and emotions such as craving or aversion, as they arise.
- **Swallowing:** When ready to swallow the groundnut, first detect the intention to swallow as it arises, experiencing this thought consciously before actually swallowing the groundnut. After swallowing pause to observe how the whole body feels after completing this exercise in mindful eating.⁶

Daily reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to be mindful during eating.

Are you able to observe your thoughts, sensations, and emotions during eating?

Chapter 6: Sitting, Standing, Walking, and Lying Down Meditation

Someone once asked a sage, “What do you and your disciples practice?” He replied, “We sit, we walk, we stand, and we eat.” The questioner continued, “But Sir, everyone sits, walks, stands, and eats.” The sage responded, “But when we sit, we know we are sitting. When we walk, we know we are walking. When we stand, we know we are standing; and when we eat, we know we are eating.”

Sitting Meditation

THEORY

To sit and know that you are sitting sounds simple but it requires understanding. Simply put, the body is sitting and the mind knows from moment to moment that the body is sitting.

BENEFITS

- Sitting meditation helps to develop continuity of mindfulness;
- Helps to cultivate concentration; and
- Helps to cultivate understanding of the mind and body.

PRACTICE

- Take a seat on a firm cushion or chair.
- Cross the legs or sit in any way that you find comfortable while keeping the body straight and comfortable.

- Take a moment to direct attention to the body. Be aware of any areas of tension, tightness, or stiffness, and try to relax them gently.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes, while resting hands on the lap with one hand on the other. Once establishing a position that is relaxed and steady, take a few slow, deep breaths.
- Focus the attention on the area of the body where you feel the touch points most clearly. For instance, when sitting on the chair, you may observe the touch points at the left and right foot on the floor, left and right buttock on the seat, left and right hand resting on the thighs or folded on the lap. If sitting on a cushion with legs crossed, you might feel the left and right ankle and knee also.
 - Be aware of the sensations at these touch points. Sometimes, you might experience them as softness, hardness, heat, pain, numbness, and so on. What happens to sensations when paying attention to them? Do they pass away or stay the same?
 - Furthermore, be aware of the sitting posture. Sometimes you may experience tension in the back. What happens to the tension? Does it remain the same or disappear?
- Settle your attention in the present moment.

Standing Meditation

THEORY

When standing, the whole body rests on the feet and thus exerts a lot of sensation, pressure and tension. How often do you pay attention to these experiences? The body is standing and the mind knows from moment to moment that the body is standing.

BENEFITS

- Standing meditation helps to develop continuity of mindfulness;
- Helps cultivate understanding of the mind and body;
- Helps to boost energy when feeling sleepy; and
- Improves blood circulation.

PRACTICE

- Stand up comfortably and straight, relaxing the knees.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Take three deep, slow breaths in and out and relax. Then, breathe naturally, without controlling the breath. Leave the breath in the background and focus on the entire body.
- Be aware of the whole body from the top of the head to the toes.

- Starting from the head, pay attention to any part of the body where tension is felt.
- Be aware of the eyes, ears, mouth, neck, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, hips, knees, ankles, and toes. Sweeping attention throughout the body in this way helps to be more aware of different parts of the body and to release tension.
- Finally, rest awareness on both feet where they touch the ground.
- Practice mindfulness of the sensations that arise when the whole body is resting on the feet. What happens to sensations? Do they decrease, stay the same, or disappear?
- Settle your attention in the present moment.

Walking Meditation

THEORY

Walking meditation can be a rewarding experience especially after practicing sitting meditation for a long time. There is a difference between walking exercise and walking meditation. The former usually occurs without any attention to detail, while the latter requires moment to moment mindful attention to every facet of body movements and sensations.

BENEFITS

- Walking meditation helps develop continuity of mindfulness;
- Helps cultivate understanding of mind and body;

- Mindful movement helps to boost energy level when faced with sleepiness and dullness;
- Enhances good digestion;
- Helps improve blood circulation, especially in lower limbs; and
- Increases awareness of intention.

PRACTICE

- Choose a place where there is enough space to walk 10 paces back and forth without any interruption.
- Stand up gradually, take three deep, slow breaths and relax. Then, breathe naturally, without controlling the breath. Leave the breath in the background and focus on the whole body.
- Stand with weight evenly distributed on both feet. Notice sensations throughout the body.
- Focus on one step at a time while gently lifting, shifting, and placing weight on each foot/leg; gradually alternating from left to right, right to left, and so forth.
- Be aware of the movement of the entire foot and leg while walking slowly and deliberately. Continuously observe sensations as the foot leaves and touches the ground, while lifting, shifting and placing the left and right foot/leg consecutively.

- As they arise, notice any intentions to stand up, walk, change direction, sit down, or move on to something else.
- Be barely aware of thoughts as they occur, then kindly return attention to focus on sensations and movement of the body while walking.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.

Lying Down Meditation

THEORY

The lying down posture can be on the back, sides, or stomach. The most recommended posture is the “lion’s posture” where the body faces the right side. However, one can meditate in any of these positions.

Meditating while lying down helps one to calm down when feeling upset or restless, but can lead to sleep if one is tired. So it is better to meditate while sitting, standing, or walking if you’re tired and wish to remain alert while meditating. When going to bed at the end of the day, meditating while lying down easily leads to peaceful sleep.

BENEFITS

- Lying down meditation helps to develop continuity of mindfulness and concentration;
- Helps cultivate understanding of the mind and body;

- Helps to reduce excess energy when feeling restless; and
- Helps one to relax.

PRACTICE

- Take three deep, slow breaths and relax. Then, breathe as naturally as possible, without controlling the breath. Leave the breath in the background and focus on the entire body.
- Keep the eyes open and be aware of the whole body from the top of the head to the toes. Starting from the head, observe any part of the body where tension is felt. Be aware of the eyes, ears, mouth, neck, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, hips, knees, ankles, and toes. Sweeping attention across the body helps to increase awareness of various parts of the body.
- Release any tension.
- Rest awareness on the points of whole body that touch that on which you're lying. Mindfully note "lying down" and be aware of sensations in the areas touching the surface. Is there hardness or softness?
- When delight or joy arises, mentally note it.
- When thinking, or feeling pain, sleepiness and dullness, mindfully observe these mind states and sensations.
- What is the emotional background as you observe the body-mind in a lying down posture?
- Settle your attention in the present moment.

Daily reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day on sitting/standing/walking/lying down meditation. Focus your attention on the touch points.

Can you describe the sensations at these touch points?

CHAPTER 7: MEDITATION ON FORGIVENESS

One who forgives is wise

- The Awakened One

THEORY

Forgiveness doesn't mean condoning others' unwholesome behaviors; and it is not the same thing as approval. Forgiveness means letting go of the emotion commotion of feeling hurt and wounded. Forgiveness is not weakness, it is strength. One who forgives first is the first one to be off the hook.

It helps to mindfully reflect on the following phrases every day:

- "May I be patient under all circumstances, no matter how difficult and challenging."
- "May I be forbearing and forgiving towards all beings, even those who revile, abuse, or harass me."

BENEFITS

- Forgiveness meditation nurtures freedom from regret, remorse, guilt and self-hatred;
- Cultivates freedom from anger;
- Heals old emotional wounds; and
- Promotes gladness, calmness, joy and happiness.

PRACTICE

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Mindfully reflect on the following forgiveness phrases.

Forgiveness Phrases

- ***Forgiveness for Myself:***
 - “Just as I have caused suffering to others, there are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself. I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times in thought, word, or deed knowingly or unknowingly.”
 - “For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain, greed, anger, and confusion, I now extend full and heartfelt forgiveness.”
 - “I forgive myself; I forgive myself; I forgive myself.”

- ***Forgiveness for those who have hurt or harmed me:***
 - “There are many ways I have been harmed or abandoned by (name) knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed.”
 - “I remember the many ways (name) has hurt and wounded me, out of fear, jealousy, pain, greed, anger, and confusion. I have carried this pain in my heart and mind long enough. To the extent that I am ready, I offer you forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness now.”
 - “I forgive you; I forgive you; I forgive you.”

- ***Forgiveness from Others:***
 - “There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of pain, fear, greed, anger, and confusion. I ask for your forgiveness now.”
 - “Please forgive me; please forgive me; please forgive me.”

- This is the formal practice. Forgiveness meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.

Four Components of Forgiveness Practice

Forgiveness practice has four components, which I give the acronym “RAID”:

- **R = *Recognize*** that other’s want to be forgiven like oneself;
- **A = *Accept*** that all beings want happiness and no one wants to suffer;
- **I = *Incline the mind toward forgiveness***;
- **D = *Develop forgiveness*** in thoughts, words, and actions to reduce or remove anguish, hatred and anger.

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to mediate of forgiveness using RAID technique.

How do you feel after the mediation? What do you realize?

Chapter 8: Meditation on Divine Virtues

*You sow a thought, you reap a word
You sow a word, you reap an action
You sow an action you reap a habit
You sow a habit, you reap a character
You sow a character, you reap a destiny.*

- The Dalai Lama

The divine virtues are qualities of mind such as loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. Contemplating these virtues helps to cultivate wholesome states of mind which lead to happiness and peace.

BENEFITS

The Eleven Benefits of Practicing Meditation on Divine Virtues

- ***One sleeps well:*** When practicing virtues such as loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity one enjoys restful sleep. Nowadays, people do not get enough sleep. They take a pill to sleep, a pill to wake and a pill or coffee or both in order stay awake. Many accidents are caused by lack of sleep.
- ***One awakens well:*** As a result of sleeping well, one awakens with a serene face and feels fresh, ready to begin the day's work.

- ***One has good dreams:*** Dreams happen in half-awake, half-asleep state of mind. A peaceful mind will yield good dreams and not bad dreams. Nightmares arise due to an unsettled mind.
- ***One is loved by other human beings:*** People like to associate with happy beings. People who have hated you may even develop affection for you.
- ***One is loved by non-human beings:*** The different animals or non-human beings in the world may respond to you with affection rather than fear and aggression.
- ***The heavenly beings protect one:*** There are invisible beings that protect people filled with these virtues.
- ***One is not harmed by “fire,” “poison,” or “weapon” of greed, hatred and delusion respectively:*** Greed, hatred and delusion will not affect someone who practices these virtues perfectly.
- ***One obtains concentration easily:*** Practicing these virtues makes us feel happy. Happiness is the proximate cause for the arising of concentration.
- ***One’s complexion brightens:*** Mind and body are interconnected. A peaceful mind produces good hormones that will make you look young and beautiful. There is nothing that makes one more ugly than anger and other mental defilements such as greed and delusion. Try looking in the mirror when you get angry. You will see many distortions

in your face that will become contour lines on your face as you age.

- ***One dies without confusion:*** The moment of death is very important. If one dies with a clear mind, filled with these virtues, one might reappear in heavenly states of existence. Dying with a confused or guilty mind, one might reappear in unhappy states of mind. On contrary, if one dies with a clear mind, one may reappear in heavenly states of existence.
- ***If one does not attain ultimate happiness in this life, one goes to the heavenly world:*** In this level of heavenly existence one enjoys extraordinary long life.⁷

Contemplating the virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, supports one in developing wholesome states of mind such as gratitude, loving kindness, compassion, happiness, peace, wisdom, and concentration - especially when wishing that others experience these virtues. All these benefits will not manifest for everyone at all times, in all places. However, we should maintain a high standard of divine virtues with mindfulness in order to enjoy the beauty of these virtues whenever possible.

Meditation on Loving-Kindness

THEORY

Loving-kindness is a quality of mind and heart that wishes peace, happiness and welfare for all beings.

What we think is what we become. Our daily life is filled with plenty of opportunities to practice loving-kindness, especially when the mind is inclined towards other wholesome thoughts. We can react to difficult situations with anger and hate, but this will only bring misery upon ourselves. Instead, please try and respond with understanding and compassion. Remember the bright spots and wonderful qualities in ourselves and in others, rather than focusing only on weaknesses and faults. Many people do hundreds of great things, but once they do one single wrong thing, we blow up. They might forget to take out the trash or say one mean word, and without mindfulness, we can instantly feel anger and hate. This is a perfect time to practice loving-kindness. With it, we can learn to forgive others and give them another chance. We can always forgive others. Loving-kindness practice is by far the easiest to put into use in our daily life. Try to foster loving-kindness while driving, waiting in the line at the mall, or having simple conversations.

It is quite easy to practice loving-kindness at home with our family members. For instance, we can schedule some of our meditation sessions around a communal activity such as dinner time. Once the whole family has gathered, we can begin to radiate loving-kindness, beginning with ourselves.

PRACTICE

LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.

- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Reflect on the positive aspects of your nature; maybe it is honesty, generosity, virtuousness, or trustworthiness. If you do not find any virtues, remember, loving-kindness is the wholesome intention to be happy and peaceful. Try to genuinely wish yourself to be happy and peaceful. Allow yourself to sow the wholesome seed of peace. Remember loving-kindness is about affirming our connection with all beings.
- Begin this practice by sending feelings of loving-kindness to yourself, then move gradually to friendly people, to neutral people, to unfriendly people, and finally to all living beings. If you find it difficult to send loving-kindness to any of these people, please bypass them until sending loving kindness to them is more comfortable. Repeating the phrases below in your own language might be helpful. These are suggestions; use any phrases with which you resonate.
- Focus mindful attention on the following loving-kindness phrases;
 - “May I be safe and secure (freedom from inner and outer harm).”
 - “May I be happy (mental happiness).”
 - “May I be healthy (bodily happiness).”
 - “May I live at ease and in peace.”
 - “May my relationships with others be harmonious.”

- After saying, “May I be safe and secure,” or “May I be healthy,” say “May my parents and relatives be safe and secure,” or “May my parents and relatives be healthy,” before moving on to friends or acquaintances, people you barely know, enemies, and finally to every being. It is delightful to start dinner having just wished, “May all beings live at ease and in peace.”
- This is the formal practice. Loving-kindness meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.

When I think of loving-kindness meditation, I am reminded of my woodstove during the cold winters in West Virginia. During one winter season, I was provided with wood that was half soaked and difficult to ignite. I tried many different ways to keep myself warm but it was always a challenge to get the fire going. Finally, I decided to light the stove by first putting in a small scrap of paper that would catch fire easily. Then I would place kindling over that, followed by a big hunk of dry wood. Only after the fire started going strong, would I add the wet wood. This is how loving-kindness works. The small paper is the loving-kindness we send to ourselves. The kindling represents loving-kindness to friendly and neutral persons. The big wood represents all beings. Finally, the wet wood is like the unfriendly person; while it was difficult at first to set it alight, I could do so with the support of the dry wood. In the same way, by radiating loving-kindness towards yourself, your friends, and neutral people first, it becomes possible to have the same feelings toward those who are unfriendly.

Loving-kindness doesn't have to end when you get up from meditation. We can practice these wholesome thoughts while driving. Practice generosity by yielding to other drivers. Practice loving-kindness towards all beings in a traffic jam by not reacting with anger towards your fellow drivers. Practice patience at stop lights. When someone drives recklessly and cuts us off, practice compassion rather than getting angry. The Buddha said that when the mind is free from unskillful states of mind, it becomes gladdened, joyful, tranquil, and focused. With continuous practice of loving-kindness, we can experience a greater degree of freedom in the heart and mind.

Four Components of Loving-Kindness Practice

Loving-kindness practice has four components, which I give the acronym "RAID":

- **R = *Recognize*** that other's want to be happy like oneself;
- **A = *Accept*** that all beings want happiness and no one wants to suffer;
- **I = *Incline the mind toward loving-kindness***;
- **D = *Develop loving-kindness*** in thoughts, words, and actions to reduce or remove anguish, hatred and anger.

Meditation on Compassion

THEORY

Compassion is a quality of the heart and mind that arises when faced with the suffering of others.

Thoughts of compassion involve opening our hearts and minds to all beings that are suffering in the world and cultivating awareness that all beings are interconnected. Through compassion meditation one can be kinder towards all beings as well as oneself. Compassion is empathizing with other peoples' dissatisfaction. It arises when we mindfully notice the pain and helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. Some people tend to turn a blind eye when seeing people who are dissatisfied. They do not see their own suffering, much less the suffering of others, failing to accept or acknowledge the truth, instead living in denial.

Compassion is looking at life with generosity, not greed; with loving-friendliness, not hatred; with understanding, not delusion; and with courage, not fear. Compassion is letting go, rather than holding onto the things that cause us suffering. If we let go of our selfish desire, we will be practicing great compassion for both ourselves and others. As desire loses its grip on us, we begin to respond mindfully and not react unskillfully to situations. We can respond to suffering with kindness and respect, instead of reacting blindly with aversion and anger.

Compassion means the courage to face suffering; it is not coupled with fear. Real compassion does not shrink away, but instead meets the challenge head-on. If we lack mindfulness,

we can be overwhelmed by grief or sadness and find ourselves paralyzed. This behavior is dangerous; while it may seem like a natural result of compassion, in reality it prevents us from exercising true effort to improve the situation. Just as aversion and apathy stifle compassion, so too can unmindful empathy.

As we slowly learn to let go of our attachments and love others with bravery and honesty, compassion will lead us to understand life in its fundamental nature. We will no longer deem experiences to be “good” or “bad”, but instead face both joy and suffering with an open heart.

Many people become confused when faced with suffering, unable to accept difficulties that we tend to ignore. Sickness, aging, death, and pain are all unfortunate but unavoidable aspects of living in this world. To ignore them leaves us unable to fully love and embrace others as well as ourselves. If we don't break out of a lifestyle where we run from seemingly “bad” experiences and chase the things we label “good,” compassion will always struggle to arise. We will continue to suffer as our unhealthy, idealized worldview clashes with the realities of life.

PRACTICE

Compassion is empathizing with other peoples' suffering. Compassion arises when we notice the pain and helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering such that they do not understand their own suffering much less that of others. They live in denial, failing to accept or acknowledge the truth of suffering.

To whom should we send compassion? There are endless numbers to choose from. People being born or who are aging or dying; beings experiencing sorrow, physical pain, despair, association with the hateful, separation from the beloved, and who are not getting what they desire are worthy of our compassion.

Compassion is closely related to loving-kindness. While loving-kindness is directed towards the welfare and happiness of all living beings, compassion is directed explicitly toward beings that are suffering. Compassion opposes the negative emotion of cruelty, which might lead to the destruction of oneself, others, or both.

Compassion Meditation

When practicing compassion, begin by sending feelings of goodwill to a person who is in pain or experiencing dissatisfaction.

Continue to radiate thoughts of compassion to all the categories of persons following the same order as in loving-kindness meditation (to ourselves, friendly persons, neutral persons, unfriendly persons, and finally to all beings)

Loving-kindness and compassion practices lead to healthier inter-personal relationships with friends, children, co-workers, family, and all beings we may meet in life. By cultivating such wonderful mind states, we can bring joy and happiness to our self as well as others.

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.

- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Start this practice by sending compassionate thoughts to a person who is suffering or in pain.
- Focus mindful attention on the following compassion phrases.
 - “May (*name someone who is suffering*) be free from inner and outer harm.”
 - “May (*suffering being*) be free from physical and mental suffering.”
 - “May (*suffering being*) be free from suffering and its causes.”
 - “May (*suffering being*) be free from craving or attachments, hate or anger, delusion or confusion, fear or sadness.”
 - “May (*suffering being*) be free from pain.”
- Continue radiating compassion to all categories of people (yourself; friendly, neutral, and unfriendly persons); end by sending compassion to all living beings. This is the formal practice. Compassion meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.
- This is the formal practice. Compassion meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.

Four Components of Compassion Practice - "RAID"

- **R = *Recognize*** that others experience suffering and pain, like one's self, and that no one wants to suffer;
- **A = *Accept*** that suffering and pain are part of life;
- **I = *Incline the mind toward empathy***, but not reacting with apathy, aversion or ardor;
- **D = *Develop compassion*** in thought, word, and action to reduce or remove suffering or pain.

Meditation on Appreciative Joy

THEORY

Appreciative joy is a quality of the heart and mind that rejoices at the success of all beings. Appreciative joy is one of the divine virtues or wholesome attitudes of gladness for others' success either materially or, even, better spiritually. Our world has turned into a competitive society. Industrialization seems to increase fierce competition between individuals, organizations, and nations in the world. When hearing about another's success, some people may feel envious. Since childhood we are conditioned to be better than others. While this approach serves as a motivation to work hard, it breeds envy and jealousy toward people who achieve more than us. Appreciative joy reverses this attitude into a healthy and positive energy in which we can take joy in others' successes. The good news is that we feel happier than before.

PRACTICE

Appreciative Joy Meditation

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Start this practice by sending feelings of appreciative joy to a very dear close friend experiencing success or happiness.
- Focus mindful attention on the following appreciative joy phrases.
 - “May (*my dear friend*) continue to have happiness;” or
 - “May (*my dear friend*) continue to have good fortune;” or
 - “May (*my dear friend*) continue to always have good fortune” or
 - “May (*my dear friend*) continue to always enjoy happiness and success.”
- Continue to radiate appreciative joy to all categories of people (one’s self; friendly, neutral, and unfriendly persons), ending with all living beings.
- This is the formal practice. Appreciative joy meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.

Four Components of Appreciative Joy Practice - “RAID”

- **R = *Recognize*** that all human beings want to be successful and happy just like oneself;
- **A = *Accept*** that all beings want to be successful and no one wants to fail;
- **I = *Incline the mind toward appreciative joy***;
- **D = *Develop appreciative joy*** in thought, word, and action to reduce or remove envy, jealousy and aversion.

Meditation on Equanimity

THEORY

Equanimity is a quality of the heart and mind that remains balanced, centered and grounded when facing difficult situations. Equanimity is seeing and responding to things, beings, and circumstances with an unprejudiced, impartial mind, free from emotional triggering. To have a balanced mind is to see all people and all situations impartially, without condemning or judging the things we dislike. Life is punctuated by a series of ups and downs; sometimes we face pain and sometimes we face pleasure. An equanimous mind can see all the peaks and valleys of life objectively without clinging to or rejecting anything. A balanced mind simply observes things mindfully and lets them pass without reacting.

By cultivating equanimity, we can maintain objectivity in daily life when faced both with agreeable and disagreeable circumstances, especially when it comes to what are called the eight worldly winds: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and

blame, honor and dishonor. These winds, like the winds blowing outside, cannot be sped up or held back. Rather than letting them blow us to and fro, we can simply cultivate a stable mind. Holding onto pleasure and our favorite things, or keeping things we dislike at bay, causes suffering which can leave us feeling exhausted, bitter, numb, and shallow. This cycle of clinging to what we love and running from what we hate is a life lived on eggshells, where joy is smothered lifeless while pain haunts us like a ghost. A life lived with equanimity by being mindful of both pain and pleasure allows us to come to peace with our pain while reaching deeply into the true beauty of our experience. Equanimity is not whitewashing our lives by repressing emotion; quite the opposite, a balanced mind penetrates deep below the surface of greed, hate, and confusion to find the pure reality we so rarely glimpse of our true nature.

PRACTICE

Begin by reflecting: “May I develop a mind of perfect equanimity, a mind that is just and objective towards all beings, without bias or preference; a mind that cannot be shaken by the four pairs of worldly winds (gain and loss, fame and defamation, praise and blame, pleasure and pain).”

Through meditation on equanimity we can cultivate a balanced mind that responds skillfully towards the ups and downs of life. By cultivating equanimity we can transform anger or resentment into loving-kindness towards all beings.

Equanimity Meditation

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Start the practice by sending thoughts of equanimity to yourself.
- Focus mindful attention on the following equanimity phrases.
 - “I am the owner of my intentional actions; my happiness and sorrow depend upon my actions, not upon anyone else’s wishes.”
 - “I am the heir of my actions; my joys and sorrows depend upon my actions, not upon anyone else’s wishes.”
- Then radiate equanimous thoughts to friendly persons, neutral persons, unfriendly persons, and finally to all beings.
 - “You, (or *name a person*) are the owner of your intentional actions; your happiness and sorrow depend upon your actions, not upon my wishes.”
 - “All beings are the heirs of their actions, their joys and sorrows depend upon their actions not upon my wishes.”

- This is the formal practice. Equanimity meditation can be practiced informally in any posture, any place, at any time.

Four Components of Equanimity Practice - “RAID”

- **R = *Recognize*** that all beings want to have a balance mind, like oneself.
- **A = *Accept*** that the results of one’s intentional actions are neither a reward nor punishment, but a universal law of cause and effect.
- **I = *Incline the mind toward equanimity.***
- **D = *Develop Equanimity*** in thought, word, and action to reduce or remove attachment, anger and indifference.

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to meditate on loving-kindness/ compassion /appreciative joy /equanimity.

How do you feel after the mediation? What do you realize?

Chapter 9: Meditation on Death

THEORY

Death occurs when the heat, consciousness and life-faculties separate from the body-mind. All mortals will die one day. Death is a natural process for all beings just like birth.

When mindfully facing death, one can experience this transition without fear, even with a clear mind, dignity, and ease.

Grief is a common response to death of a loved one. Still, it is possible to cultivate mindfulness and equanimity such that one is genuinely happy and peaceful, while free of grief and depression when a loved one makes this transition.

BENEFITS

- Meditation on death helps one to gradually release fear and anxiety of death;
- Inspires one to practice meditation diligently due to the spiritual urgency caused by understanding the brevity and changes of life;
- Arouses effort (overcoming laziness) to practice meditation;
- Helps one to easily overcome grief when faced with loss of or separation from people;

- Helps to overcome anger when remembering that one day we will die;
- Helps to overcome pride, conceit and arrogance of youth, strength and health; and
- As we understand death, we are inspired to live life more tenaciously.

PRACTICE

- Take any seated or standing posture while relaxing the body and mind.
- Open, close, or half-close the eyes.
- Settle your attention in the present moment.
- Mindfully reflect on the following phrases.
 - “My life is uncertain. Death is certain. I am subject to old age, disease, and death.”
 - “The lives of my parents are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
 - “The lives of my brothers and sisters are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
 - “The lives of my relatives are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
 - “The lives of my teachers are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”

- “The lives of my friends are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
- “The lives of neutral people are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
- “The lives of difficult people are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”
- “The lives of all sentient beings are uncertain. Death is certain. They are subject to old age, disease, and death.”

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to meditate on death.

How do you feel after the mediation? What do you realize?

Chapter 10: Mindfulness of the Five Hindrances: Turning Stumbling Blocks to Meditation into Stepping Stones to Personal Growth and Development⁸

THEORY

During my first winter at Bhāvanā Society Forest Monastery and Meditation Center, USA, in 2001, we had plenty of snow. I was assigned to a *kuti*, a small room for monks that had no water or electricity. Because we had to heat our *kuti* with a wood burning fire, it used to be very dry inside. One monk advised me to keep a container filled with water to increase humidity. Although this seemed like a great solution, soon I realized that it meant carrying a heavy jar of water every day from the main building to the *kuti* and back. For the first couple of weeks, I struggled back and forth daily. Once, it snowed hard and I had to shovel and shovel to create a small path to my *kuti*. Eventually, a blizzard struck and the snow was knee-deep. I used to push through step by step, carrying water all the while. It was hard work.

I did this for a few weeks until I realized a solution. Instead of shoveling snow aside, I decided to collect it in a big container and put it on the wood stove. Soon I had more water than I would ever need to keep my hut from drying out.

When meditating and cultivating mindfulness, we will still come across roadblocks like this. Although most of us don't wake up to a doorway blocked by snow, no one can dedicate themselves to meditation practice without occasionally hitting such rough patches. There are five hindrances which are mental afflictions that throw us off the path toward true happiness and enlightenment. These five hindrances are: sensual desire; ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness and worry; and doubt.

Anyone who has meditated for even a few minutes has experienced these five hurdles. Just as I first pushed myself to the point of exhaustion to plow through them, we meditators often adopt a “grin-and-bear-it” attitude that results in frustration and fatigue. Luckily, there is a way to take the unfortunate situations resulting from these hindrances (stumbling blocks) and transform them into solutions (stepping stones).

BENEFITS

- Mindfulness of the hindrances to meditation helps to cultivate continuity of mindfulness;
- Helps to gain concentration easily;
- Helps to gain understanding; and
- Leads to peace, happiness, and freedom.

Five Hindrances to Meditation

Sensual Desires

Sensual desires are the cravings we have for the five strands of sense pleasure, or for pleasant forms of sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, and thoughts. Some desires may be subtle while others may grip us intensely. Either way, remember that they are just emotions and observe them without judging or reacting. We all like to taste good food, listen to nice music, look at beautiful things, and dream up big ideas about people and places. These things

aren't evil or perverse; there is no problem with sense objects *per se*. However, our attachment to these things can delay progress in cultivating mindfulness. There's nothing wrong with looking out the window on a scenic drive, but if we stop every twenty yards to soak up the scenes, we'll never reach our destination.

The way we work with desires is to be mindful of desire itself. Earlier, we discussed the three characteristics of existence – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and impersonal nature. It turns out that desire bears those same three characteristics as well. We may not be able to banish our attachment immediately, but we can come to realize that like all things, it will pass.

When wanting a nice big slice of cake, be mindful of the feelings that cause your mouth to water. When lusting, be mindful of the feelings that cause you to heat up inside. Do the same for everything. Too often we think that meditation should be an easy, fun activity; when meeting challenges in meditation, we find ourselves disheartened, thinking we're practicing incorrectly. Don't be discouraged. The greatest breakthroughs in meditation come when examining these rough spots and seeing their true nature instead of being sidetracked by selfish desire.

III Will

Whenever someone or something stops us from realizing our desires, a sense of frustration arises. We develop aversion and distaste for anything that separates us from what we want. Anything that turns our desire on its head is liable to bring up resentment and bitterness. When we find ourselves caught in a traffic jam while rushing to an appointment; when we spill something on our favorite piece of clothing; when anything keeps us from getting what we want when we want it; resentment can arise. Being filled with anger is like holding the gas pedal to the floor and speeding down the highway; you find yourself moving far too quickly to maneuver skillfully, and before you know it you've crashed.

Like desire, these feelings can differ in intensity, from mild annoyance to overpowering hatred. Sadly, the original problem - whether it's a dent in our new car or wayward thoughts in our meditation - is responsible only for a small portion of the anger. The rest comes from the way we handle the situation. We try to justify our anger and begin to indulge it; we feed the flames with unguarded thoughts instead of extinguishing them with mindfulness.

We can think of our minds like a pack of matches. The surface of the matchbox and the matchstick have the potential to ignite a flame once struck. Both factors contribute to creating the flame. In the same way, the person who makes us angry may be the matchstick striking us, but unless we have the potential for anger and hatred inside us, we won't make a flame. You can't bring about a flame by striking a match on a piece of cloth. Next time someone triggers anger inside you, take a moment to be thankful

that they've revealed a spot on your mind where a match can be struck, so that spot can be eliminated.

If we don't acknowledge the many roots of our anger, we can become bitter and resentful, seeking revenge and inflicting hurt. How many violent acts occur every day because people cannot see that they have a hand in their own anger? A wise one said: "The only thing worth killing is our anger."

We must deal with anger as it is inside of us, only arising with our consent. We cannot stamp anger out with physical things or with more anger. We must cut it off in the mind itself. Contemplate what brings about anger and be mindful of ill will itself, not the object it is directed towards. Pay attention to the effect of anger on the body and mind. When we observe the emotion in our mind objectively without getting caught up in it, it loses any power it had. As emotions subside into mindfulness and loving-kindness, a strong dose of wisdom can do wonders for purging unskillful emotions and thoughts completely.

Restlessness and Worry

Restlessness is any excitement, agitation or disquiet in the mind, whereas worry is any sense of regret we have over our unskillful actions or the wholesome things we've neglected to do. Both distract the mind, driving it off-track like a car taking a wrong turn while the driver is busy texting or listening to music. Not only does the driver take longer to get to their destination, but the tires wear down quite a bit. In the same way, we exhaust ourselves when following tangents of unwholesome thoughts, giving rise to restlessness and worry.

As always, the way to overcome restlessness is to be mindful of restlessness itself. Like all other hindrances, make restlessness the object of your meditation. If you still have trouble calming down, try turning your attention to the physical body instead of the mind for a moment. Be mindful of your sitting posture or the sensation of the body touching the cushion. Once restlessness has subsided, return attention to your primary object, the breath.

Sloth and Torpor

Sometimes we might feel heaviness in the body or fogginess in the mind. Much like driving in the fog, we can't see things as they pass by us, even while others can see us just fine. Many refuse to meditate if they feel like this, afraid that they will make no progress. Instead of abandoning the trip due to fog on the road, we need to be especially mindful until the fog clears spontaneously.

Sloth and torpor (or sleepiness and dullness) may arise for different reasons. It is very important to identify the cause of your sleepiness. This will help you to skillfully address the problem. If you find yourself sleepy after a large meal, it might help to take a brisk walk or to meditate before eating. If you find fogginess is coming from daily fatigue, try being mindful of your body. If that does not work, make sure to get more rest. Without proper sleep and relaxation, any activity, especially meditation, can be a challenge.

As for sluggishness that has no physical cause, but is caused by a tired mind, mindfulness is the solution. Sometimes, without a proper object to investigate, the mind can grow bored and begin to shut down. Make sure to keep the mind active with a healthy dose of concentration. If feeling physically tired, mentally dull, or unfocused, try mindfulness meditation in different postures, opting for walking or standing meditation instead of sitting or lying down.

A few years ago, I went to Burma to learn meditation. During the two months of silent meditation, I saw a Chinese monk who was struck with intense sleepiness. He nodded off constantly. Halfway through the retreat, he solved his problem by sitting right in front of a large pillar in the meditation hall. Each time he began to nod off, he would catch himself just before he hit the hard concrete. He never once bruised his forehead. While this is a bit extreme, we have to remember to be creative. Although a foggy mind can really derail your practice, it's not hard to find your own way to disperse the clouds.

Doubt

Even with a mind clouded by anger or tiredness, we can still find our destination eventually – but if we stop at a fork in the road and refuse to take either direction, we'll never reach our goal at all. Uncertainty and doubt in regard to our practice, training, or instruction can throw us off track fastest of all.

Doubt is difficult to cure because its root is ignorance. At its heart, doubt arises when we cannot discern between what is skillful and unskillful, blameworthy and not blameworthy, or wholesome

and unwholesome. For example, during meditation, we may start to wonder if mindfulness can really help us to overcome our problems. We stop watching the breath and get lost in a million little questions: “Should I practice meditation or not?” “Is this person a good teacher or not?” This is not healthy skepticism, but rather second-guessing that helps no one, least of all ourselves. We may even begin to doubt our ability to practice meditation or our ability to be truly happy. Self-doubt is the worst of all.

The only cure for this vicious cycle is confident faith – not blind faith, but an assuredness based on practical experiences that foster understanding and wisdom. Trust and confidence develop through meditation when we see the truth directly through mindfulness practice and realize the benefits here and now. If we question, investigate, and study, we can come to a full, rich, real experience.

Daily Reflection

Spend 5 minutes per day to be mindful of the five hindrances to meditation.

Are you aware of the five hindrances? Are you able to reduce them?

Chapter 11: Benefits of All Kinds of Meditation

Exploring meditation is an extensive but rewarding undertaking. Here is a quick summary of the benefits of meditation. A consistent meditation practice helps one to:

- ***Gain right understanding***, which allows us to know the true nature of our existence and embrace all aspects of life, even the difficult experiences of sickness, ageing, and death. By seeing our reality as it truly is, we can call upon a newfound security and peace, free from delusion and fear;
- ***Cultivate right thought***, which allows us to be more generous, contented and kind, leading to greater personal happiness and improved relationships with those we love;
- ***Engender right speech***, which allows us to deal openly and honestly with others, even in difficult situations. We can delight in forging trusting bonds with those we love and never fear the repercussions of deceit.
- ***Activate right action***, which allows us to offer the gifts of freedom, safety, and fearlessness to all creatures throughout the world. We can live purely and above reproach, embodying kindness and respect for everyone with whom we interact.
- ***Engage in right livelihood***, which allows us to support ourselves through beneficial and rewarding careers, enriching the world around us while helping maintain dignity and self-reliance;
- ***Sustain right effort***, which allows us to let go of unskillful mind states while nurturing skillful ones. When combined with mindfulness, we can protect ourselves from the influence of

negative thoughts, feelings and emotions while developing a strong, untainted mind;

- ***Develop right mindfulness***, which has many benefits such as purifying the mind from greed, hatred, and delusion and cultivating virtues such as generosity, compassion, and wisdom. Moreover, mindfulness fosters: overcoming sorrow and lamentation, dispelling grief and pain, attaining happiness, and realizing ultimate peace. Mindfulness empowers us to weather life's hardest moments and to fully understand the root causes of suffering. You could say that one mindful thought a day keeps the suffering away;
- ***Cultivate right concentration***, which allows us to attain deep states of concentration. Concentration or mental focus is very important in daily life. It boosts memory. With concentration, one can score high on tests. Moreover, when the mind is concentrated, there will be less errors, mistakes and accidents. When concentration is coupled with mindfulness, insight is developed and the path to wisdom is assured.

In conclusion, to get the most out of your mindfulness practice, remember the acronym “SPACE”:

- **S = *Slow down and pause***;
- **P = *Patience*** – be patient with the unfolding of your practice as well as with yourself, other people, and all circumstances;
- **A = *Attention*** – Pay attention to everything in life (be aware of your breath, sensations, thoughts, emotions, and actions);
- **C = *Continuity of mindfulness***; and
- **E = *Expectation-free*** – don’t be attached to the results of your practice.

Overall, keep your practice interesting, real, and simple (IRS). Through meditation and mindfulness practice in daily life, we can realize so many benefits (mentioned throughout this text) right here and now that propel our evolutionary self-discovery. Finally, we can experience true happiness, inner peace, and ultimate freedom.

Endnotes

¹Bodhi, Bhikkhu; Ñanamoli, Bhikkhu (2009), *A Translation of MajjhimaNikāya: Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness (Satipatthana)*; Boston, Wisdom Publication, p. 145.

²Ibid, p. 145-146.

³Brach, Tara (2013), *True Refuge: Finding Peace & Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*, Bantam, p. 62.

⁴Bodhi, Bhikkhu; Ñanamoli, Bhikkhu (2009), *MajjhimaNikāya: Vitakkasaṅṭhānasutta 20*; Boston, Wisdom Publication, p. 211

⁵Forsyth, John & Eifert, Georg (2008), *The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*; California, New Harbinger Publications, p. 193.

⁶Williams, Mark; Teasdale, John; Segal; Zindel; and Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*; New York, Guilford Press, p.55-56.

⁷AN 11.16: Metta (Mettanisamsa) Sutta — Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness/Good Will {A v 342; BJT calls this the MettanisamsaSutta; Thai, Burmese, and PTS call it Metta Sutta.} [Piyadassi|Thanissaro].Eleven benefits arising from the practice of metta (loving kindness, or goodwill) meditation, p. 1573-74.

⁸Buddharakkhita, Bhikkhu (2013), *Drop by Drop: The Buddha's Path to True Happiness*; Kandy, author, p. 62

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