

**Insight Meditation Community
of Lewes, Delaware**



**MEDITATION
INFORMATION PACKAGE**

Contents

- **How to Meditate: The Basic Steps**
- **Vipassana / Insight Meditation:** Instructions & Tips
- **How to Meditate: Art of Formal Practice by Tara Brach:**
Steps to Establish a Daily Practice; Natural Presence & Four Foundations of Mindfulness; Skillful Means - Supports for Practice; Common Issues for Meditators; Sustaining a Practice
- **Article on Meditation Practice by Charlotte Joko Beck**
- **Traditional Meditation Postures: Standing, Walking and Lying Down**
- **Meditation Cushions and Benches with Postures**
- **Recommended Books & Web Sites with Readings and Videos**

www.imc-lewes.org --- info@imc-lewes.org

rev 2011

How to Meditate: The Basic Steps

There are many ways to meditate. These instructions are based on the Buddhist Insight Meditation tradition practiced in Asia for over 2500 years and currently practiced throughout the world today.

1. *Aspiration - Set your intention*

Bring to mind at the start of each sitting meditation why you are doing it. For example, do you hope for less stress or reactivity, perspective, balance amidst intense emotions, insight into your motives and behaviors, energy?

2. *Posture - Set your posture*

Sit as straight and tall as possible. Around this straight-back position, let the rest of your skeleton and muscles hang freely. Let the hands rest comfortably on your knees or lap. Your eyes can be open resting a few feet in front or your eyes can be closed. Bring the attention inward. Alertness is an essential ingredient in meditation practice.

3. *Relax – Relax Deeply*

Breathing through the nose, loosen the face, neck, hands, and stomach area. Beginning at the top of the head, methodically relax and soften each part of the body. Openness is the second essential ingredient in every meditation. Consciously releasing body tension will help you open to whatever arises during your meditation.

4. *Focus - Choose an object of meditation*

The Breath: To steady the mind, choose a place to pay attention to the breath, such as: air flowing in and out of the nostrils or the rising and falling of the chest or abdomen.

By trying to stay with the breath, you will become aware of the mind being distracted by other thoughts. It's good news to be aware of thoughts. Simply make note of this when it happens, maybe saying to yourself, "thinking...thinking," or "planning" and gently lead your attention back to the breath.

At first, you may be surprised at the number of thoughts you have and how often you forget about paying attention to the breath. Don't worry – this is natural. Don't try to force the mind to stop thinking. Again and again, patiently and gently bring your attention back to the breath. Remember to be both alert and relaxed.

Meditation is called the Great Teacher... The greater your understanding, the more flexible and tolerant, the more compassionate you can be... You have looked deeply inside and seen self-illusion and your own human failings, seen your own humanity and learned to forgive and to love. When you have learned compassion for yourself, compassion for others is automatic.

--- "Mindfulness in Plain English" by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana (Bhante G)

We are learning to pause each time we sit to meditate simply drop what we are "doing" and just be.

--- Tara Brach, Guiding Teacher, Insight Meditation Center of Washington, DC

We learn to meditate by receiving basic instructions. It is like learning to ride a bike with training wheels - the initial instructions are our training wheels. Over time practice becomes familiar and stable. But first the baby steps, the training wheels. Meditation is initially about calming, collecting and taming the mind, not controlling it... it is not about perfecting a particular state such as being emotionless or thoughtless.

--- Sandra Hammond, Founder of the Illinois Prairie Sangha (in Illinois) for Mindfulness Meditation.

Simply to stop and be with ourselves as we are, opens all the spiritual doors we desire. Happiness and joy are in the recognition of this truth. To be truly content we need not be anything other than what we have always been.

--- Rodney Smith, Guiding Teacher, Insight Meditation Community of Seattle, WA

Vipassana / Insight Sitting Meditation

Instructions

Find a quiet place and time to practice where you will not be interrupted. Sit in a way that feels comfortable and balanced. The posture is erect, with a tall and upright back. AND at the same time relaxed.

In assuming the sitting posture, it is helpful to use cushions to elevate the hips while (sitting cross-legged) or a kneeling bench (sitting on your heels). The optimal sitting posture is one where there is a sense of dignity and an alert and relaxed body/mind.

Take the first moments of sitting to sweep through the body with the intention to relax. Soften and let go around areas of tightness and contraction. Let all the senses be awake...aware of physical sensations, mood, sounds and space in all directions. Then, become aware in a very soft yet clear way of the movement of the breath.

Your awareness can rest in the breath wherever the sensations of breathing are most predominant. For most people, this is either the inflow and outflow at the nose, or the rising and falling movement at the chest or abdomen. One you decide where to be with the breath, let this be an anchor, the place you return to again and again.

Bring a full mindfulness to the breath: making no effort to control the breath, discover what it is actually like, moment to moment. If the attention gets too tight or tense, relax your body again, soften back into the breath. If the attention becomes spacey, difficult to focus, then intend to bring a real precision and clarity to the awareness of the breath.

The purpose of meditation practice is to bring a mindful attention to the changing flow of life, without either clinging to experience or resisting what is happening. Let your attention rest mindfully in the breath. When a strong emotion or sensation arises let go of the breath as a primary area of attention and open the awareness to include the waves of experience that are arising. Notice what they are like as sensations in the body, feelings in the body/mind...and notice how they change. Let your intention be to neither resist what is painful or grasp at pleasure. Rather, bring an unconditional caring presence that allows life to unfold without interference.

To be truly present means to be aware of thinking, not lost in trains of thought. Typically the mind will contract and move off into thought forms repeatedly. This is natural and when it occurs, simply recognize that thinking is happening by mentally noting "thinking, thinking." Without any judgment, open out of thought and relax back into the breath.

Often our thoughts are repetitive and strongly driven by emotions. When this happens, rather than returning to the breath, recognize and note the thinking and then open the awareness into the body and heart to sense what is asking for attention. Often there is fear or longing that needs to be included in awareness. Until we touch this directly, the mind will keep contracting off into thought forms and disconnecting from the present moment.

Misconceptions about Meditation

- Not simply a relaxation technique (although you may feel calmer).
- It is not about controlling or emptying your mind and stopping all thoughts. Thoughts are natural and part of our nature as human beings.
- Meditation is not going into a trance, having a blank mind, creating some lofty state or creating a specific state of mind. It is simply being with whatever arises.
- Meditation is not a self-improvement project, not about being better.
- It is not about being a good meditator who can sit for hours without moving or a thought arising. It is about being in the present moment with whatever arises without judgment; no condemning, no congratulating oneself but just allowing whatever comes up and seeing it, be aware of it.

A Few More Tips

For many people, noting or naming what is happening can be helpful in connecting the awareness directly with moment to moment experience. For instance, when a strong sensation arises you might not “tension,” “tightness” “hot,” “cold,” “pressure,” “ache,” “tingling” ... and if there is much pain or pleasure.. “unpleasant” or “pleasant.” Similarly emotions can be labeled - “sadness,” “happiness,” “fear,” “grief,” etc. Let the noting be soft and in the background, with most of your attention *directly experiencing what is happening*.

The quality of care or friendliness (metta) towards our experience is an essential foundation for mindfulness. Kindness allows us to open, de-conditioning the tendency of our minds to resist and contract away from life. It is helpful to reflect on the intention of relating to experience in a gentle and kind way at the beginning of each sitting (and day).

For some people, listening to sounds is a useful alternative to using the breath as an anchor. Open to awareness to include the space within which sounds arise, and listen without controlling anything. Simply let sounds happen, noticing how they arise, change, dissolve. While you may find it valuable to use sounds as an anchor for attention in this way, it is important to also learn to concentrate and develop mindfulness around the breath. So after the attention has opened and relaxed by resting in the awareness of sounds, once again practice by being with the breath.

Remember that we can start our meditation fresh at any moment. Simply take a few conscious breaths, open out of thoughts, relax the body, and come back to rest in the breath or in listening to sounds.

We all have preconceived notions and preference regarding “good meditation.” It helps to recognize that this is a liberating but challenging path: Our nature is to get lost in thought, be reactive to our experience, get restless, sleepy, doubtful... Try not to judge your experience. Rather, trust that you are truly an awakening, loving being. Practice love by accepting whatever arises. Gradually the practice of mindfulness and compassion will free you to express your true nature and live each moment fully.

How to Meditate: The Art of Formal Practice by Tara Brach, Guiding Teacher, Insight Meditation Community of Washington, DC (IMCW)

Insight or Vipassana Meditation

Buddhist Insight Meditation (known as Vipassana – pronounced vih-PASH-na) is a comprehensive approach to awakening of the heart and mind. This body of awareness training has been practiced in Asia for over 2,500 years and, because of its simplicity and power, is now being embraced by people from diverse spiritual orientations around the world.

Insight meditation cultivates our natural wisdom and compassion. The practice develops concentration, which allows us to calm and steady the mind. The subject of concentration is usually the movement of the breath, or the appearing and disappearing of sound. As the mind quiets down, it is possible to experience whatever arises in the present moment in an accepting and open way. This present non-judging attention is called mindfulness, and comprises the heart of Buddhist meditation.

Mindfulness can be maintained throughout our daily activities. We can be mindful of the movement of our body, the sensations in walking, the sounds around us, or the thoughts and feelings that come into the mind. As mindfulness deepens, there is increased capacity for intimacy with the life within and around us. We are able to see through our conditioned behaviors and thoughts, and discover compassion, equanimity and freedom in our lives.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is commonly described as a training of mental attention that awakens us beyond the conditioned mind and habitual thinking, and reveals the nature of reality. In this guide, the process and the fruit of meditation practice is understood as Natural Presence.

Presence is a mindful, clear recognition of what is happening — here, now — and the open, allowing space that includes all experience. There are many supportive strategies (called “skillful means”) that create an atmosphere conducive to deepening presence. The art of practice is employing these strategies with curiosity, kindness and a light touch. The wisdom of practice is remembering that Natural Presence is always and already here. It is the loving awareness that is our essence.

Part I: How to Establish a Daily Sitting Practice

Part 1A: The Basic Steps

Before You Sit

- **Attitude:** Approaching meditation practice: Attitude is everything. There are many meditative strategies (skillful means) but what makes the difference in terms of spiritual awakening is your quality of earnestness, or sincerity. Rather than adding another “should” to your list, choose to practice because you care about connecting with your innate capacity for love, clarity and inner peace. Let this sincerity be the atmosphere that nurtures whatever form your practice takes.
- **A primary aspect of attitude is unconditional friendliness toward the whole meditative process.** When we are friendly towards another person, there is a quality of acceptance. Yet we often enter meditation with some idea of the kind of inner experience we should be having and judgment about not “doing it right.” Truly -- there is no “right” meditation and striving to get it right reinforces the sense of an imperfect, striving self. Rather, give permission for the meditation experience to be whatever it is. Trust that if you are sincere in your intention toward being awake and openhearted, that in time your practice will carry you home to a sense of wholeness and freedom. Friendliness also includes an interest in what arises -- be it pleasant sensations or fear, peacefulness or confusion. The heart expression of friendliness is kindness, regarding the life within and around us with care. Creating a container for practice: It helps to have a regular time and space for cultivating a meditation practice.
- **Setting a time:** Morning is often preferred because the mind is calmer than it is later in the day. However, the best time is the time that you can realistically commit to on a regular basis. Some people choose to do two or more short sits, perhaps one at the beginning and one at the end of the day. Deciding in advance the duration of your sit will help support your practice. For many, the chosen time is between 15-45 minutes. Even fifteen minutes may seem like an eternity in the beginning, but that impression will change with time. If you sit each day, you will experience noticeable benefits (e.g., less reactivity, more calm) and be able to increase your sitting time.

- **Finding a space:** If possible, dedicate a space exclusively to your daily sitting. Choose a relatively protected and quiet space where you can leave your cushion (or chair) so that it is always there to return to. You may want to create an altar (shrine) with a candle, inspiring photos, statues, flowers, stones, shells and/or whatever arouses a sense of beauty, wonder and the sacred. These are not necessary, but are beneficial if they help create a mood and remind you of what you love.

Every Time You Sit

- **Setting your intention:** There is a Zen teaching that “The most important thing is remembering the most important thing.” It is helpful to recall at the start of each sitting what matters to you, what draws you to meditate. Take a few moments to connect in a sincere way with your heart’s aspiration. You might sense this as a prayer that in some way dedicates your practice to your own spiritual freedom, and that of all beings.
- **Setting your posture:** Alertness is one of the two essential ingredients in every meditation. Sit on a chair, cushion, or kneeling bench as upright, tall and balanced as possible. A sense of openness and receptivity is the second essential ingredient in every meditation, and it is supported by intentionally relaxing obvious and habitual areas of tension. Around an erect posture, let the rest of your skeleton and muscles hang freely. Let the hands rest comfortably on your knees or lap. Let the eyes close, or if you prefer, leave the eyes open, the gaze soft and receptive.
- **Relax:** Please don't skip the step of relaxing/letting go! You might take several full deep breaths, and with each exhale, consciously let go, relaxing the face, shoulders, hands, and stomach area. Or, you may want to begin with a body scan: starting at the scalp and moving your attention slowly downward, methodically relaxing and softening each part of the body. Consciously releasing body tension will help you open to whatever arises during your meditation.

Part 1 B: The Basic Practice -- Natural Presence: Presence has two interdependent qualities of recognizing, or noticing what is happening, and allowing whatever is experienced without any judgment, resistance or grasping. Presence is our deepest nature, and the essence of meditation is to realize and inhabit this whole and lucid awareness.

- We practice meditation by receiving all the domains of experience with a mindful, open attention. These domains called the foundations of include breath and sensations; feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral); thoughts and emotions; and awareness itself. Note: These are traditionally referred to as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of body; mindfulness of feeling; mindfulness of mental objects; mindfulness of all dharmas or all phenomena.
- In the essential practice of meditation there is no attempt to manipulate or control experience. Natural Presence simply recognizes what is arising (thoughts, feelings, sounds, emotions) and allows life to unfold, just as it is. As long as there is a sense of a self making an effort and doing a practice, there is identification with a separate and limited self. The open receptivity of Natural Presence dissolves this sense of a self “doing” the meditation.

Knowing the difference between Natural Presence and “Skillful Means”

- Because our minds are often so busy and reactive, it is helpful to develop skillful means that quiet the mind and create an atmosphere conducive to Natural Presence. These supports for practice help us to notice and relax thoughts and physical tension. They involve a wise effort that un-does our efforts!
- You might consider yourself as a contemplative artist, with a palette of colors (supportive strategies) with which to work in creating the inner mood that will most allow you to come home to presence. These colors can be applied with a light touch.
- Experiment and see what works best for you, and don’t confuse these methods (such as following the breath) with the radical and liberating presence that frees and awakens our spirit.
- Regardless of what skillful means you employ, create some time during each sitting where you let go of all “doing” and simply rest in Natural Presence. Discover what happens when there is no controlling or effort at all, when you simply let life be just as it is. Discover who you are, when there is no managing of the meditation!

Part 1C: Skillful Means: Our supports for practice

Presence is supported by a calm and collected mind, an embodied presence (senses awake), inquiry and an open heart. The following strategies cultivate these capacities:

- **Establish an embodied presence — senses awake!**

You might take a few minutes at the beginning of the sitting (or anytime during the sitting or day) to intentionally awaken all the senses. Scan through the body with your attention, softening and becoming aware of sensations from the inside out. Listen to sounds and also include the scent and the feel of the space around you in and outside of the room. While the eyes

may be closed, still include the experience of light and dark, and imagine and sense the space around you. Explore listening to and feeling the entire moment-to-moment experience, with your senses totally open.

- **Choose a home base — a primary anchor or subject of meditation.**

It is helpful to select a home base (or several anchors) that allows you to quiet and collect the mind, and to deepen embodied presence. Useful anchors are:

The breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.

Other physical changes during breathing, e.g., the rise and fall of the chest.

Sounds as they are experienced within or around you.

Other physical sensations as they arise, e.g. the sensations in the hands, or through the whole body.

Listening to and feeling one's entire experience, (i.e., receiving sounds and sensations in awareness).

- **Remindfulness — arriving Here again and again**

Remindfulness means awakening from the trance of thinking and remembering or reconnecting with what is actually here. As with many practices, you can create an environment for remindfulness by: setting your intention for presence; assuming the posture; and relaxing and establishing an embodied awareness.

After this, you might gently bring attention to your anchor. Let your chosen anchor be in the foreground, and yet still include in the background the whole domain of sensory experience. For instance you might be resting in the inflow and outflow of the breath as your home base, and also be aware of the sounds in the room, a feeling of sleepiness, an itch, heat.

Very soon you will probably discover your mind is distracted, and off in thought. This distraction is totally natural -- just as the body secretes enzymes, the mind generates thoughts! There is no need to make thoughts the enemy; just realize that you have a capacity to awaken from the trance of thinking.

The essence of remindfulness is noticing that thinking is happening, noticing the mental commentary, memories, plans and stories. A full, clear, non-judgmental recognition of thinking naturally releases the grip of thoughts. When you realize you've been off in thought, pause. Take your time as you open out of the thought and relax back into the actual experience of being Here. You might listen to the sounds, re-relax your shoulders, hands and belly and relax your heart. Gently arrive again in presence, senses wide open, letting your home base be in the foreground. Notice the difference between any thought and the vividness of this Here-ness!

- **Metta: Practice metta to soften and open the heart.**

Metta practice, also called lovingkindness meditation, cultivates both a loving heart and a collected, settled mind. The practice uses specific phrases to send loving and kind wishes to yourself, loved ones, neutral persons, difficult people and to all beings everywhere, without exception. You might choose three or four of the phrases below, or create whatever phrases resonate for you:

May I (my parents, you, a difficult person, all beings) be filled with lovingkindness.

May I feel safe from harm.

May I accept myself just as I am.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I be happy.

You can bring in the metta practice at the beginning, end or during any part of the meditation. For some people, it can be beneficial to emphasize metta as a primary practice — especially when there has been trauma or great self-aversion. This skillful means is a beautiful way to awaken the heart.

- **Develop concentration**

Bringing attention to a primary subject or anchor can lead to a concentrated focus that naturally calms and collects the mind. This concentration can be deepened by intentionally aiming and sustaining a focused attention to your chosen anchor. When cultivating concentration, the anchor should be one that has a pleasant or at least neutral feeling tone.

Concentration supports mindfulness and requires a relaxed attention. There is often a subtle (or overt) sense of making an effort to sustain concentration, of striving to control the mind and make something happen. It is important to not become caught in a striving effort. It is easy to be seduced into trying to achieve something, such as staying with the breath for much of the sitting, and then evaluating what is happening as a "good" or "not good" meditation. Mistaking a focus on the breath for meditation is like fixating on the quality of your hiking boots, and not really being awake of the natural world you are inhabiting! Concentration helps quiet the mind and without some quieting, mindfulness is difficult to sustain. It also can

lead to states of rapture and deep peace. Yet without a mindful presence, concentration bears no fruit. The key to concentration is remembering your intention towards presence, and then focusing with a soft, clear and relaxed attention.

- **RAIN —Healing Emotional Suffering**

The mindful presence that helps release emotional suffering is summarized by the acronym RAIN.

R: Recognize -- notice what is arising (fear, hurt, etc.)

A: Allow -- agree to “be with it,” to “let it be.”

I: Investigate -- get to know how the body experiences these energies. Inquiry by asking “What is happening? “Where am I feeling this in my body?” The “I” is also Intimacy: experiencing difficult sensations and emotions with a direct, gentle, kind attention; and offering compassion to the place of vulnerability.

N: Non-identification, or not having your sense of Being defined by, possessed by or linked to any emotion. The “N” is also Natural Loving Awareness, the fruit of bringing RAIN to what is difficult.

- **Practice Self-Inquiry**

Inquiry (questions like “What is happening?”) can bring attention in a direct way to the changing flow of experience and reveal the truth of impermanence and the empty (self-less) nature of sights, sounds, thoughts, emotions and feelings. Self-inquiry extends this process by turning awareness back on itself. Classical questions include: “Who am I?” “What am I?” “Who or what is aware?” “Who or what is listening to sound” “Who is looking out through these eyes?”

Self-Inquiry is best done when the mind is relatively quiet and senses awake. Ask a question and look back towards awareness, towards that which is aware. After asking, relax with an embodied presence, open, not in any way pursuing an answer with your intellect. By enrolling the natural interest, energy and receptive attention of inquiry, the very nature of awareness is revealed.

Part II: Common Issues for Meditators

Getting lost in thought: At first, you may be surprised at how active and uncontrolled your mind is. (Note: Sometimes referred to as monkey mind.) Don't worry -- you are discovering the truth about the state of most minds! Accept and patiently "sit with" whatever comes up. There is no need to get rid of thoughts; this is not the purpose of meditation. Rather, we are learning to recognize when thinking is happening so we are not lost in a trance — believing thoughts to be reality, becoming identified with thoughts.

Because we are so often in a thinking trance, it is helpful to quiet down some. Just like a body of water stirred up by the winds, after being physically still for a while, your mind will gradually calm down. To support that quieting, at the beginning of a sitting it can be helpful to relax and practice Remindfulness—gently bringing your attention back again and again to your home base in the senses.

It takes practice to distinguish the trance of thinking - fantasy, planning, commentary, dreamy states -- from the presence that directly receives the changing experience of this moment. Establishing an embodied awareness and letting your anchor be in the foreground is a good way to become familiar with the alive, vibrant mystery of Here-ness, of presence.

The Five Classic Challenges (called “hindrances” in Buddhist texts):

1. Grasping: wanting more (or something different) from what's present right now.
2. Aversion: fear, anger, any form of pushing away.
3. Restlessness: jumpy energy, agitation.
4. Sloth and torpor: sleepy, sinking states of mind and body.
5. Doubt: a mind-trap that says, "it's no use, this will never work, maybe there's an easier way,"

These are universal body-mind energies experienced by all humans. During sitting practice, if you encounter one of these challenging energies, it may be useful to name it silently to yourself, e.g., "grasping, grasping" or "fear, fear." If it is strong, rather than pulling away, let your intention be to bring your full attention to what is arising. Feel what is happening as sensations in your body, neither getting lost in the experience nor pushing it away. As indicated through the RAIN acronym, investigate what is arising and meet the experience with an intimate, compassionate attention. When it dissipates, return to the primary anchor of your meditation, or to Natural Presence.

Sometimes the energy is too strong, and it is not wise or compassionate to try to stay present with it. This is particularly true if you have been traumatized and are experiencing deep fear or anger. If it feels like “too much,” shift the attention to something that brings a sense of balance, safety and/or love. You might open your eyes, remind yourself of where you are, listen to sounds and relax again through your body. You might bring to mind someone who loves and understands you, and sense their care surrounding you. You might reflect on the Buddha or the bodhisattva of compassion, Jesus, Great Spirit, your grandmother, your dog or a favorite tree. You might offer phrases of lovingkindness to places of vulnerability. Meditate on any expression of loving presence that helps you feel less separate or afraid.

If you encounter these kinds of difficult emotional energies regularly you might ask a teacher or therapist familiar with meditation to accompany you as you learn to navigate what feels most intense.

Part 2 A: Physical pain: In addition to mental busyness and emotional challenges, it is inevitable that we all experience a certain amount of unpleasant physical sensations. If you are not used to the posture, there may be some discomfort in simply sitting still. In addition, as your attention deepens, you might become aware of tensions in the body that were ignored because of being preoccupied by thought. Or, you might be injured or sick, and become more directly aware of the natural unpleasant sensations accompanying that condition.

The response to physical discomfort is no different to that of working with emotional difficulty. Let your intention be to meet the unpleasantness with a gentle attention, noticing how it is experienced in the body and how it changes. Allow the unpleasantness to float in awareness, to be surrounded by soft presence. To establish that openness you might include in your attention sounds, and/or other parts of the body that are free from pain. Breathe with the experience, offering a spacious and kind attention. Be aware of not only the physical sensations, but of how you are relating to them. Is there resistance? Fear? If so, let these energies be included with a forgiving and mindful attention.

If the physical unpleasantness is intense and wearing you out, direct your attention for a while to something else. It is fine to mindfully shift your posture, or to use a skillful means like phrases of lovingkindness or listening to sounds as a way to discover some space and resilience. You don't need to “tough it out.” That is just another ego posture that solidifies the sense of separate self. In a similar vein, you don't have to “give up.” Instead, discover what allows you to find a sense of balance and spaciousness, and when you are able, again allow the immediate sensations to be received with presence.

Part III: Sustaining a Practice

Here are a few helpful hints for sustaining your sitting practice:

- Sit every day, even if it's for a short period. Intentionally dedicate this time of quieting — it is a gift to the soul!
- A few times during each day, pause. Establish contact with your body and breath. Pause more and more — the space of a pause will allow you to come home to your heart and awareness.
- Reflect regularly on your aspiration for spiritual awakening and freedom — your own and that of all beings.
- Remember that, like you, everyone wants to be happy and nobody wants to suffer.
- Practice regularly with a group or a friend.
- Use inspiring resources such as books, CD's or web-accessed dharma talks.
- Study the Buddhadharma (e.g., the 4 Noble Truths, the Noble 8-Fold Path).
- Sign up for a retreat — one day, a weekend, or longer. The experience will deepen your practice.
- If you miss practice for a day, a week, or a month, simply begin again.
- If you need guidance, ask for help from an experienced meditator or teacher.
- Don't judge your practice -- rather, accept what unfolds and trust your capacity to awaken and be free!
- Live with a reverence for life—committed to non-harming, to seeing, honoring and serving the sacred in all beings.
- You are traveling a path that has led to clarity, peace and deep realization for many people over thousands of years. May their awakening support and inspire you. May the sincerity of your practice heal and free your spirit.

Web resources

Insight Meditation Community of Washington: <http://www.imcw.org/>

Access to Insight: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/>

On Meditation Practice by Charlotte Joko Beck

Don't begin a sitting period without considering why you meditate. Know your intention. Know there is "nowhere to go, nothing to achieve." Be aware of ambitious thoughts.

Check your posture. No matter how you sit, the body should be erect (but not stiff), balanced, and at ease. The sitting place should be neat and pleasant. (But we can sit anywhere and in any position—even lying down if ill or exhausted.)

Sit every day. Try not to miss more than one day in a week. If resistance arises (it is a normal part of practice), be aware that it consist of thinking like all thought, it need not dominate you. Just observe it. Feel it in the body. And do not bully yourself, ever.

One a week, sit 10-15 minutes longer than you want to sit.

Don't become obsessed by sitting. In no case should one's work or family responsibilities be neglected in order to sit.

When upset, don't avoid sitting. Hard as it may be, it is crucial to sit when difficulties arise.

Know that sitting is simply maintaining awareness of body and mind. Be aware of any desire to turn sitting into an escape from life by entering peaceful, trance-like states; such states can be seductive but they are of no use.

Be aware that the honeymoon period for new sitters is often followed by resistance, possibly turbulence, and emotional uprisings. Just continue practice with particular emphasis on feeling your bodily sensations.

Be aware that "achieving something" in sitting such as special clarity, insight, calmness of mind, is not the point. That may occur but the point is your awareness of whatever is happening, including confusion, discouragement or anxiety.

Keep your practice to yourself. Don't attempt to teach others; do not proselytize. Leave your friends and family alone. This is an old saying, "Let them ask three times..." What you can give others is how you live.

Don't spend your sitting time in planning. Nothing is wrong with planning per se, but set up another time for it. If you hear planning thoughts when you sit, label them.

In daily life, be acutely aware of the desire to gossip or complain, to judge others or yourself, to feel superior or inferior.

All practice can be summed up as (1) observation of the mental process, and (2) the experiencing of present bodily sensations. No more and no less.

And finally remember that real practice is not about the techniques or koans or anything else as ends in themselves, but about the transformation of your life and ours. There are no quick fixes. Our practice is about our life, and we practice forever.

Charlotte Joko Beck (born 1917) is a Zen teacher in the United States and the author of the books *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* and *Nothing Special: Living Zen*. She began Zen practice with Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi in Los Angeles, and later with Yasutani Roshi and Soen Roshi. She commuted for years from San Diego to the Zen Centre of Los Angeles. Having received Dharma transmission from Taizan Maezumi Roshi, she founded the Ordinary Mind School of Zen and opened the San Diego Zen Center in 1983, serving as its head teacher until July

Traditional Meditation Postures: Standing, Walking and Lying Down

Traditional Buddhist teachings identify four meditation postures: sitting, walking, standing and lying down. All four are valid means of cultivating a calm and clear mindfulness of the present moment. The most common meditation postures are sitting and walking. We learn to observe without judgment, without preference whatever is happening in body and mind, and we will grow in wisdom and compassion.

Standing and Walking Meditation are both traditional mindfulness and awareness practices. They are formal practices as well as informal ones. As part of a formal meditation session, standing meditation can be done before and after you begin sitting meditation or walking meditation or as a separate practice. Walking can be done between periods of sitting practice or as a separate practice. They can be done indoors and outdoors. Standing can be done informally while you are waiting in line or before you take a walk or at any opportunity and walking can be done the same way.

Standing Meditation

- Begin by standing with your feet parallel and about shoulder-width apart. Stand straight.
 - Take a couple of deep long breaths.
 - Bend your knees just slightly, just enough to feel a softness at the backs of your knees.
 - Let your arms hang down next to your sides and relax your hands and fingers
 - Relax: Let go of any tension you find in your body, scanning and seeing your body from your head, face, shoulders, neck, face, torso, arms, legs, toes and the bottom of your feet.
 - Simply let it “melt” away. Feel your energy, your awareness, settling into your feet & legs & hips & belly, connecting you strongly to the earth.
 - Eyes may be closed or open. If open, choose a gazing point, eight or ten feet in front of you. Rest your eyes very softly on that point (or area).
-
- So now that you’re in Standing Meditation position, stay here, for awhile.
 - Once you’ve arranged yourself in this way, there’s nothing much to “do.”
 - Simply notice what’s it’s like being here, in this position.
 - Experience the presence of whole body from soles of feet to top of the head. Then experience stillness of posture, the vibration of life and sense of being.
-
- If you’re new to the practice, hold the position for a couple of minutes.
 - You can make small adjustments to it, as this feels necessary for your comfort, but the idea is to do as little moving around as possible.
 - Once you’ve got the correct alignment of the pose, holding it in a fairly “motionless” way will support internal movements which will be very pleasant, and healing.
 - As you continue this practice, over weeks or months or years, you’ll be able to hold the position for longer periods of time (30 minutes, a hour).
 - But in the beginning, a couple minutes is wonderful.

Walking Meditation

- Feel your body, check your posture so it is straight from head to feet, the head is not bent but aligned with your torso.
- Hands can be at your sides, clasped in back of you, or folded in front of you at waist level.
- Your eyes are cast down and without looking at anything in particular, not wandering around the space
- Find a pathway about 30 to 40 feet long, and simply walk back and forth. (Adjust the pathway as needed for the space you are in.) When you come to the end of your path, come to a full stop, turn around, stop again, and then start again. Some people find it useful to keep the eyelids half closed.
- We stress walking back and forth on a single path, slower than normal walking, but you may vary the pace. Walking in a circle is a technique that is sometimes used
- Let your attention settle into the body and settle into your feet and lower legs.
- In walking meditation, the focus or anchor is on the alternating stepping of the feet.
- Whenever you notice that the mind has wandered, bring it back to the sensations of the feet walking.
- As an aid to staying present and when thoughts arise, use a quiet mental label for your steps as you walk. The label might be “stepping, stepping” or “left, right” or “placing, placing”
- When walking more slowly, you might try breaking each step into phases and using the traditional labels “lifting, moving, placing.”

Lying Down or Reclining Meditation

- You can do it anytime but the perfect opportunity is taking a few minutes before you get up or before you go to sleep.
- Spend a few minutes meditating while lying on one side (or your back if more comfortable). Keep the body quite straight and bend one arm up so that the hand acts as a support for the head. Sweep through the body, resting its stresses; or collect your attention on the breath, consciously putting aside plans and /or memories.

Meditation Cushions and Benches with Postures

In order to sit effectively, it is of primary importance to create the foundation of the proper curve in your lumbar or lower spine. This is done by tilting the pelvis forward slightly. Since the tendency is to tilt the pelvis back when sitting, it helps to have support to maintain the forward pelvic tilt.



A meditation cushion called zafu (za' - foo) (literally, sewn seat), is designed to give the hips enough lift so that the knees are lower. Zafus come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors and fillings. A yoga bolster or one or two folded blankets may also work. One day three inches might feel fine and another day five, and sometimes nothing feels comfortable.



Gomden is a rectangular firm foam core in a zippered cotton cover. The Gomden keeps its height (6" off the mat) in sitting meditation. Suitable for a simple, "knees up" cross-legged sitting posture--reducing the strain on your legs and ankles. 12" x 18", available in 4 heights starting at 6" (standard). Use a Support Cushion to add extra height to the Gomden.

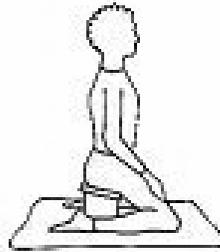
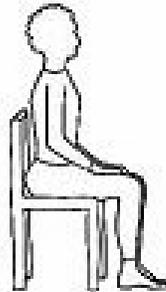


The mat underneath the zafu or bench is called a Zabuton (za' - bu - ton) (literally, floor cushion). These have been used for centuries in Asia as meditation mats. The zabuton is a rectangular mat used under the Zafu for cushioning knees or legs. This is particularly important when sitting or kneeling on a hardwood floor.



For those with knees that need extra support or if your legs fall asleep easily, a Meditation Bench is may make sitting more comfortable. Meditation Benches are known as Seiza (pronounced say'-zah or kneeling position). They aid in sitting in a kneeling position. Meditation benches, placed on a Zabuton just like the other cushions, are helpful as an alternative to cross-legged sitting when flexibility is limited. The seat is slightly slanted forward allowing you maximum comfort while maintaining good posture.

Sitting in a chair is a perfectly acceptable way to practice meditation. Most important is to keep a straight back and neck with your feet straight in front of you on the floor or on a cushion or blanket. Accessory cushions may be used for comfort and to adjust posture such as a support cushion at the small of the back and under your feet.



Sources to Purchase Cushions & Benches: All may be purchased by telephone or on-line as well as an array of other objects and supplies. Ask for specials and seconds for cushions etc. It is best to call to discuss the best selection for you.

Carolina Morning Designs

PO Box 509; Micaville, NC 28755 - www.zafu.net or 1-888-267-5366

DharmaCrafts

405 Waltham St, Suite 234; Lexington, MA 02421 - www.dharmacrafts.com or 1-800-775-8639

Samadhi Cushions

30 Church St; Barnet, VT 05821 - www.samadhicushions.com or 1-800-331-7751

Recommended Books

This is a small sampling of books about meditation practice and the core teachings of the major Buddhist traditions in the West – Insight / Mindfulness or Vipassana, Tibetan Buddhism, and Zen. It is not meant to be a required list or an all inclusive list – enjoy choosing what appeals to you. In each section, books are listed alphabetically by author.

Books may be purchased on-line at: Amazon Books <http://www.amazon.com>; Shambhala Publications <http://www.shambhala.com>; Snow Lion Publications <http://www.snowlionpub.com>; Wisdom Publications <http://www.wisdompubs.org>.

Dharma web talks and videos: Dharma Seed: dharmafeed.org; Access to Insight: www.accesstoinight.org; Audio Dharma: <http://www.audiodharma.org>/Vipassana Meditation Videos: www.meditationvideos.net

Introductory - Vipassana Meditation:

- **Sylvia Boorstein:** *It's Easier Than You Think; Don't Just Do Something, Sit There*
- **Joseph Goldstein:** *Insight Meditation; Experience of Insight*
- **Joseph Goldstein & Jack Kornfield:** *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation*
- **Richard Hart:** *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka*
- **Bhante H. Gunaratana:** *Mindfulness in Plain English; Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*
- **Nyanaponika Thera:** *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*
- **Sharon Salzberg & Joseph Goldstein:** *Insight Meditation: A Step-by-Step Course on How to Meditate*

Understanding Buddhist Thought (Theravada, Tibetan, Zen, Western)

- **Karen Armstrong:** *The Life of Buddha*
- **Stephen Bachelor:** *The Awakening of the West; Buddhism without Beliefs*
- **Charlotte Joko Beck:** *Everyday Zen; Nothing Special: Living Zen*
- **Tara Brach:** *Radical Acceptance - Embracing Your Life With the Heart of a Buddha*
- **Ajan Chah:** *Food for the Heart; Being Dharma: The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings*
- **Lama Surya Das:** *Awakening the Buddha Within; Awakening the Sacred; Awakening the Buddhist Heart*
- **Dalai Lama:** *The Art of Happiness-A Handbook for Living: Ethics for a New Millennium; as well as his other books*
- **Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche:** *It's Up to You: The Practice of Self-Reflection on the Buddhist Path*
- **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse:** *What Makes You Not a Buddhist*
- **Joseph Goldstein:** *One Dharma -- The Emerging Western Buddhism*
- **Thich Nhat Hanh:** *Being Peace; Peace Is Every Step; The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings; The Long Road Turns to Joy -- A Guide to Walking Meditation; The Miracle of Mindfulness; as well as his other books.*
- **Ayya Khema:** *Be An Island; Being Nobody, Going Nowhere; Who is My Self-A guide to Buddhist Meditation*
- **Jack Kornfield:** *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry-How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path; Path with Heart-Guide through the Perils & Promises of Spiritual Life; The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness & Peace; Teachings of the Buddha; Buddha's Little Instruction Book*
- **Pema Chodron:** *Comfortable with Uncertainty, The Places That Scare You, Start Where You Are, When Things Fall Apart; The Wisdom of No Escape; as well her other books*
- **Walpola Rahula:** *What the Buddha Taught (one of the best books on Theravada Buddhism)*
- **Larry Rosenberg:** *Breath by Breath (on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness)*
- **Sharon Salzberg:** *Faith; A Heart Wide as the World; The Force of Kindness: Change Your Life with Love & Compassion; Lovingkindness- The Revolutionary Art of Happiness (on metta); Voices of Insight*
- **Shunryu Suzuki:** *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind (the Zen classic)*
- **Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche:** *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism; Myth of Freedom*

About the Authors

- **Karen Armstrong** is an author who writes on Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Armstrong is a former Catholic nun. She is considered one of the foremost commentators on religion in North America and Europe.
- **Charlotte Joko Beck** was a student of Maezumi Roshi, a renown Soto Zen teacher. She founded the Ordinary Mind School of Zen and opened the San Diego Zen Center
- **Tara Brach** is the founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington DC where she is the guiding teacher.
- **Sylvia Boorstein** is a longtime teacher of vipassana and metta meditation as well as an author. She is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and a psychotherapist.

- **Ajan Chah** (1918-1992) was one of the most respected Thai meditation masters of this century in the Ascetic Forest Tradition. Known for his informal & direct style, he was a major influence on Theravada Buddhism around the world.
- **Pema Chödrön** is a fully ordained nun, practicing in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Her teachers include Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. She is known for her unique style in presenting Buddhist teachings.
- **Lama Surya Das** is one of the foremost Western Buddhist meditation teachers and scholars he has spent nearly thirty years studying Zen, vipassana, yoga, and Tibetan Buddhism with many of the great old masters of Asia
- **Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche** is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher trained in the Nyingma school and rime movement. He is known for defining what it means to be a spiritual person in modern times and mixing practice with everyday life.
- **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse**: also known as Khyentse Norbu is one of the young contemporary Tibetan Buddhist. He is also a filmmaker (The Cup and Travelers and Magicians).

- **Joseph Goldstein** is cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA, where he is one of the resident guiding teachers. He helped establish the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and is developing The Forest Refuge, a new center for long-term meditation practice.
- **Bhante Henepola Gunaratana** (Bhante G) is the founding abbot of the Bhavana Society, a Theravadan monastery in West Virginia. Born in Sri Lanka, he has been a monk since 12 and he is a recognized author and meditation teacher.
- **Thich Nhat Hanh** is a well known teacher, author, and peace activist and a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk. He created the Order of Interbeing teaching mindfulness meditations and engaged Buddhism, and established monastic and practice centers around the world. His home is Plum Village Monastery in France.
- **William Hart** has studied and practiced vipassana meditation for many years and served as an assistant teacher to S.N. Goenka, an industrialist and leader of the Indian community in Burma renown for his non sectarian vipassana courses.

- **Ayya Khema** (1923-1997) was a Buddhist nun, who established Wat Buddha Dhamma, a forest monastery in the Theravada tradition and set up the International Buddhist Women's Center as a training center for Sri Lankan nuns.
- **Jack Kornfield** trained as a Buddhist monk in the monasteries of Thailand, India, and Burma. He is one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practice to the West. He is a founding teacher of the Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock Center.

- **Walpola Rahula** (1907-1997) was a Buddhist monk, scholar and writer. He is considered to be one of the top Sri Lankan intellectuals in the 20th century and his book
- **Larry Rosenberg** practiced Zen in Korea and Japan before coming to vipassana. He is a guiding teacher of the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center.
- **Sharon Salzberg** is one of America's leading spiritual teachers and authors and is co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA. She has played a crucial role in bringing insight meditation to the West.

- **Nyanaponika Thera** (1901-1994) was a German-born Sri-Lanka-ordained Theravadan monk, author of numerous Theravada books, and teacher of contemporary Western Buddhist leaders.
- **Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche** (1939–1987) is credited for bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the West. He established many retreat and meditation centers (Shambhala), taught and wrote extensively, and was an artist, poet, scholar and meditation master.