

Introduction to Insight Meditation: Background Materials & Readings

PART I: BACKGROUND MATERIALS

• Meditation Room Decorum	2
• Six Points of Mindful Speech	2
• Giving and Receiving Feedback	3
• The Art of Communication from <i>Insight Meditation</i> by Joseph Goldstein	4
• Definition of Vipassana	5
• Is Vipassana the same as Theravada?	5
• Satipatthāna Sutta and The Four Foundations of Mindfulness	6
• The Five Hindrances	7
• Vipassana Glossary	8-9

PART II: READINGS

• <i>What is the Right Attitude in Meditation?</i> U Tejaniya's, <i>Right Attitude of Meditation</i>	10
• <i>Right Mindfulness, My Father & Raiders of the Lost Ark, It is Easier Than You Think</i> , Sylvia Boorstein ...	11
• <i>Beginning Our Practice</i> by Rodney Smith, Guiding Teacher, Insight Meditation Community, Seattle	12
• <i>Mindfulness: A Contemplative Practice for Being in the World</i> by Steven Smith	13
• <i>Meditation Instructions from Insight Meditation</i> by Joseph Goldstein	14
• <i>Walking & Standing Meditation: Introduction to Insight Meditation</i> , Amaravati Buddhist Centre	16
• <i>Instructions for Walking Meditation</i> , talk by Gil Fronsdal	17
• <i>Vipassana Meditation</i> by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana	18
• <i>Sit and Getting Started: Questions I hear most frequently</i> by Sharon Salzberg	22
• <i>Some Core Concepts relating to Basic Meditation</i> by Sandra Hammond	25
• <i>Staying Present from Insight Meditation</i> by Joseph Goldstein	27
• <i>Meditation In Everyday Life</i> , from <i>Mindfulness In Plain English</i> by Bhante Gunaratana	28

PART I: BACKGROUND MATERIALS

Meditation Room Decorum

Decorum refers to guidelines on behavior or “good manners”. They traditionally included the precepts, as well as ways for handling the details of one’s body, speech, and environment on a literal physical level. For example shrine etiquette and how to eat properly were included. The purpose of such procedures is to train the mind, so that one creates a clear environment that encourages ongoing mindfulness and gives immediate feedback of one’s neurosis.

Some basic guidelines (exceptions are always possible):

1. *In general, maintain a silent practice environment in the meditation room (once it is set up as such). There are exceptions such as announcements, discussions, talks, etc.*
2. *Do not lie down in the meditation room during practice, except for physical reasons. Maintain a good sitting posture.*
3. *Do not stretch out your legs in the direction of the “shrine”, except momentarily to rest.*
4. *Do not put dharma books or texts, such as chants, directly on the floor. Placing them on a cushion is fine, however.*
5. *Generally no shoes, except in the case of teachers or when setting up and taking down space.*

Six Points of Mindful Speech

1. Speak Slowly

Slow down the speed of your speech so that it does not contain aggression. You don't rush along or slow down too much. The attitude is to regard words as precious. Appreciate the potency and power of speech.

2. Enunciate Clearly

Enunciate; speech is well composed with a beginning, middle and end.

Have some kind of cohesiveness as to how you speak to others so that their mind is not disturbed, or perturbed. Words have power. Speech can be a precious jewel that you give to another person for their benefit, or it can be pollution.

Important to know to pronounce words: (caps show emphasis)

Sangha: SAHN-gah. Theravada: terra-VAH-dah. Vipassana (Pali) or *vipaśyanā* (Sanskrit): vi-PASH-ah-nah

3. Be Concise

Simplicity of speech that isn't simple minded communicates more powerfully than elaborate and overly complex sentences and words. You are not on stage. There is a particular art of not excessively vomiting words—being functional, ideal and good.

Functional talking at programs is not just to make people quiet, but to bring out the power of words.

4. Listen to Yourself

Listen to oneself without judgment or fixation. Listen to: How we use words, jargon, the slurring, how loud, soft, fast and slow.

Notice the impulse to speak and where it comes from, perhaps wanting confirmation from others.

5. Listen to Others

Listen to the words of others: what does it tell you about who they are; what are they communicating with body, speech, and mind. Listen not only to what they say but what they don't say, how they communicate with body language and emotional tone.

6. Use Silence as a Part of Speech

Regard silence as an important part of speech. Put space around your words. As mind opens to more and more space one begins to appreciate what is communicated by silence, unadorned with words. Silence is not necessarily a sign of cowardice.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Definitions of Feedback

Feedback is not disapproval, criticism or a personal attack, but it is given so that we can improve and learn. When feedback is constructive and consistent and is given by someone wisely, in a respectful and supportive manner, it is very useful. We may find feedback difficult to receive and difficult to give – that is why we practice it.

Giving Feedback

- Offer feedback on observed behavior, not on perceived attitudes
- Give information, not opinion.
- Offer descriptions of what you saw and how you felt, rather than judgments.
- Choose the aspects which are most important, and limit yourself to these.
- Keep the messages simple.
- Allow the receiver to reach his/her own conclusions.
- Comment on things that an individual did well, as well as areas where they might improve.
- The receiver must be empowered by the process.
- Too much feedback can overload people.
- Clarity - be clear about what you want to say.
- Be descriptive rather than evaluative.

Receiving Feedback

- Listen to the message.
- Try not to react by becoming defensive or launching a counter-attack.
- Do not over-react.
- Do not infer that the critic has some ulterior, hostile motive.
- Convey to the other person that you understand their points.
- Accept praise graciously - don't deny it.

Negative Ways of Receiving Feedback

- Defensive: Defends personal actions, frequently objects to feedback given.
- Attacking: Verbally attacks the feedback giver, and turns the table.
- Denies: Refutes the accuracy or fairness of the feedback.
- Disrespectful: Devalues the speaker, what the speaker is saying, or the speaker's right to give feedback.
- Closed: Ignores the feedback, listening blankly without interest.
- Inactive listening: Makes no attempt to 'hear' or understand the meaning of the feedback.
- Rationalizing: Finds explanations for the feedback that dissolve any personal responsibility.
- Patronizing: Listens, but shows little interest.
- Superficial: Listens and agrees, but gives the impression that the feedback will have little effect.

Positive Ways of Receiving Feedback

- Open: Listens without frequent interruption or objections.
- Responsive: Willing to hear what's being said without turning the table.
- Accepting: Accepts the feedback, without denial.
- Respectful: Recognizes the value of what is being said and the speaker's right to say it.
- Engaged: Interacts appropriately with the speaker, asking for clarification when needed.
- Active listening: Listens carefully and tries to understand the meaning of the feedback.
- Interested: Is genuinely interested in getting feedback.

The Art of Communication from *Insight Meditation* by Joseph Goldstein

When we live our daily lives, we are in active communication much of the time. What proportion of your life do you spend talking or writing? Notice how much impact your words have on others, and theirs on you. Because speech is so predominant in our lives, and because our words are so consequential, learning the art of skillful communication needs to be a significant aspect of our Dharma practice.

The Buddha emphasized the importance of this when he included right speech as a distinct part of the path to awakening. Although there is great elaboration of right speech in the texts, it all condenses into two general principles: Is it true? Is it useful? Practicing these principles in our speech fosters increasing sensitivity. We become attuned to subtleties of truth and falsehood. Are there times when we shade the truth, or exaggerate in some way? And are there times when our words may be true, but it is not the right time, place, or situation for them to be useful.

The practice of communication is the great art of relating to another person, of being open, of listening so well that you can see where you can actually make contact. Can you let the other person in? What is the right vocabulary? Can you speak to what is really important to that person? We learn to listen and speak from a feeling of metta, basic goodwill. Wise discernment and metta enable us to connect.

There are always two parts in any interaction. One part is to learn how to speak effectively, and the other is to learn how to listen effectively. Remembering to listen seems especially important in times of difficult communication, when there is tension or conflict. Other people always have their own point of view. If we want to truly connect with and understand others, we must also listen.

When you are in a confrontation with someone and you are each very attached to your own perspective, ideas, and feelings, see if you can find a moment to take a mental step back and say, "Okay, let me try to understand this from another vantage point." This helpful change requires a great ability to listen. From there genuine communication may begin to happen. This does not mean that you do not express your own understanding. You can, but from that space of openness where it becomes much easier to speak without aggression. If you are able first to listen, already the ground between you and the other person has changed.

Sometimes we take that step, but the situation proves out of our control. Sometimes the space does not open up despite our efforts, and the lack of communication does not change. That is when we really need to stay centered in ourselves, in our bodily awareness, so that we do not become caught again in our reaction to what is happening. At such difficult times we can draw on the wisdom of our meditation practice: to see that it is possible to open to unpleasant feelings, to see that it is okay simply to feel them instead of reacting with defensiveness or aggression.

As you soften and make space around these feelings, the reactions of mind come and go more easily without your staying locked in them. This skill takes a lot of practice. If you have not practiced it before, in the midst of an intense communication you will at first find it difficult to do. So our job in practice is to look at how we relate to our feelings. Anger comes, annoyance comes, fear comes—both in sitting and in our daily communications these feelings come. Can you be mindful of them all? Or is there a strong identification with those emotions?

The truth that anger and fear are not inherently tied to external situations runs counter to our "commonsense," conventional conditioning. But look closely for yourself to see if it is true. We feed these unwholesome feelings by blaming. The more we blame, the more we strengthen anger and resentment in ourselves. But if mindfulness and investigation are strong enough, we can unhook from the identification. If we practice such unhooking, it then becomes much easier to communicate from the place of our own mental ease and compassion, our communication becomes much more effective. Can something be changed through communication? Can the person with the boom box play it down the block? Is it possible to say to somebody coming on too strong that what they are doing does not feel right? Can we be firm without anger or blame?

People sometimes confuse acceptance with a wishy-washy way of being in this world: letting anybody do anything, and never taking a stand. That's not it at all. Acceptance means taking responsibility for our own mind states. With mindfulness, it is possible to take a strong stand, to initiate effective communication, yet to do it without getting caught in reactive judgments. The energy with which we communicate is the key.

Definition of Vipassana

Buddhist Insight Meditation (known as Vipassana) 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" or "clear seeing," Vipassana, is analytical meditation that focuses on the natural passing of all events within the mind and the body. Through Vipassana one can gain direct experience of the fundamental Buddhist principle of Impermanence, which is the changing nature of all mental, physical, and emotional occurrences. It arises out of the discipline of shamatha – calm abiding.

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.

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.

The term is also used to refer to the Buddhist Vipassana movement modeled after Theravāda Buddhism which employs Vipassanā and ānāpāna meditation as its primary techniques and places emphasis on the teachings of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Vedanā (sensation/feeling) is the primary initial subject of investigation.

Today, the term "Vipassanā" also refers to a series of meditation techniques used by many branches of modern Theravāda Buddhism, for example in modern Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Thailand, and to a specific branch of Buddhism popularized by the Indian businessman S. N. Goenka and his mentor U Ba Khin as a nonsectarian form of Buddhism, and also by Americans Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and Jack Kornfield (who were inspired by the monks Mahasi Sayadaw and Ajahn Chah) under the rubric "insight meditation."

Is Vipassana the same as Theravada?

No. The Pali word vipassana — often translated as "insight" — has a variety of meanings. First, it refers to the flash of liberating intuitive understanding that marks the culmination of Buddhist meditation practice. In the Pali discourses vipassana also refers to the mind's ability to witness clearly as events unfold in the present moment. In this sense it is a skill that a meditator develops using a broad arsenal of meditative tools and techniques. With practice, this skill can bring the meditator to the threshold of liberating insight. In its third meaning, one that has become especially popular in the West in recent years, "Vipassana" (usually with a capital "V") refers to a system of meditation — vipassana bhavana, or "Insight Meditation" — that is based on an interpretation of the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha's concise "how-to" guide to the development of mindfulness (sati).

Followers of the popular Vipassana movement often cite the Satipatthana Sutta as the essence of the Buddha's teachings; some even claim that the instructions it contains are the only ones necessary for achieving liberating insight.

Theravada Buddhism, by contrast, embraces the thousands of discourses of the Pali canon, each highlighting a different aspect of the Buddha's teachings. In Theravada each discourse supports, depends upon, reflects, and informs all the others; even a discourse as important as the Satipatthana Sutta is seen as but a single thread in the Buddha's complex tapestry of teachings.

In Theravada, the path to liberating insight does not boil down to a single meditation technique or to being continuously mindful. The path to Awakening is full of surprising twists and turns but, thankfully, the Buddha left for us an assortment of tools to use and skills to learn to help us safely make the journey.

Satipatthāna Sutta

The Satipatthāna Sutta (or Sutra) is the *Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness* which explains how to systematically cultivate mindful awareness. These discourses (Pāli: *sutta*) provide a means for practicing mindfulness in a variety of contexts and potentially continuously. Famously, the Buddha declares at the beginning of this discourse:

"This is the one and only way [Pāli: *ekāyano ... maggo*], monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the existing of suffering and grief, for walking on the path of truth, for the realisation of *nibbāna*...."

The Satipatthāna Sutta and the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta are two of the most popular discourses in the Pali Canon, embraced by both Theravada and Mahayana practitioners. (These two discourses are identical except that the latter includes extended exposition regarding mindfulness of the Four Noble Truths).

In the Satipatthāna Sutta, the Buddha identifies four references for establishing mindfulness (*satipatthana*): body, sensations (or feelings), mind (or consciousness) and mental contents. These are then further broken down into the following sections and subsections:

Body (*Kāyā*): Breathing (also see the Anapanasati Sutta); Postures (Walking, Standing, Sitting, Laying Down);

Clear Comprehending; Reflections on Repulsiveness of the Body; Reflections on Material Elements; Cemetery Contemplations
Sensations/Feelings (*Vedanā*): pleasant or unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant (neutral) feelings, worldly or spiritual feelings

Mind/Consciousness (*Cittā*): passion or without passion; aversion or without aversion; delusion or without delusion; restricted or scattered; enlarged or not enlarged; surpassed or unsurpassed; concentrated or not concentrated; released or not released

Mental Contents (*Dhammā*): The Hindrances; The Aggregates of Clinging; The Sense-Bases and their Fetters

The Factors of Enlightenment; The Four Noble Truths

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness or the four categories from within which mindfulness can be approached:

1. contemplation of the body 2. contemplation of feelings 3. contemplation of the mind 4. contemplation of mental objects.

Contemplation of the Body : The most widely practiced technique in this category is the breathing meditation known as *anapanisati*. This involves the meditator watching over the in and out breathing: "When making a long inhalation, he knows: "I make a long inhalation"...when making a long exhalation, he knows: "I make a long exhalation". This process is conducive to calm, but this isn't the primary objective. The aim is to come to a realization of the impermanence of the body and the absence of a permanent self. Another technique is to bring attention to one's postures: 'when walking, he understands: "I am standing"; 'when standing, he understands: "I am standing"; 'when sitting, he understands: "I am sitting"; 'when lying down, he understands: "I am lying down". Other practices include focusing on the 32 parts of the body (and their foulness) and on corpses in various stages of decay. The aim is to see the body objectively, as something prone to change and to decay and ultimately lacking a permanent self.

Contemplation of Feelings: The process of watching and noting is the principal activity. Here the meditator focuses on his feelings and determines whether the feeling is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The idea is to observe feelings objectively, in a detached manner - to see them as fleeting and passing and not part of what could be considered a permanent self.

Contemplation of Mind: Here the meditator observes his state of mind, whether it is affected by lust/attraction, by hatred/aversion or by delusion. Again, just like feelings, these states of mind are seen as transient, features not permanently embedded in one's psychological make up.

Contemplation of Mental Objects: This category covers the meditator's ability to become aware of the five hindrances within him. These are obstacles - namely sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt - which are obstructive to the attainment of blissful states known as *jhanas*. He will also note that what we normally designate 'the self' is made up of five 'aggregates' or *khandhas* - corporeality, perception, feelings, mental formations, and consciousness. He will come to an understanding of the senses, factors which are conducive to enlightenment (such as energy and rapture) and the four noble truths.

Five Hindrances or Obscurations or Difficulties of Mind

Called hindrances because they obscure clear thinking. Like a sandstorm or a fog, these are mind energies that hinder us from reconnecting with the peaceful self that is our essential nature. They feel like a trap. The hindrances are referred to as energies of the mind. As humans, our mind is stirred by confusing energies. Every single person experiences all the different mind energies, these predictable storms of mind. It is helpful to recognize them for what they are - mind energy and not a demand to action. Mind constantly moves toward a place of balance and equanimity; we are constantly shifting and changing in response to what's going on. They are natural energy shifts of the mind on its way to greater and greater balance.

General Antidote: mindfulness and awareness; recognizing them for what they are and not reacting, simply recognize when desire arises or anger arises, for example and be curious rather than react. They are not you.

List of the Five Hindrances

1. Desire: energy of wanting, neediness of mind

Forms: greed, grasping, lusting after sense pleasure, wanting that seeks happiness through the five senses

Traditional similes: Like being in debt, taking out a loan that must be repaid through the unpleasantness of separation. Mind like water dyed with bright enticing and alluring colors so cannot see clearly.

Antidotes: Recognize and acknowledge it for what it is. Restraint. Also concentration in formal meditation practice. When the mind is strong enough to stay on a single object, there is no danger of falling into the trap of desire.

2. Aversion: energy of pushing away, getting rid of something.

Forms: ill will, hatred, resentment, annoyance, irritation, remorse, attachment to painful, negative experiences

Traditional similes: Like having an illness since can't enjoy anything, all has a bitter quality. Mind like bubbling, boiling water.

Antidotes: Develop metta (lovingkindness) towards yourself and objects of ill will.

3. Sloth and Torpor: low energy mind

Forms: falling a sleep, sluggishness, dullness, heaviness, boredom

Traditional similes: Like imprisonment in a dark, small cell unable to move around. Mind stagnant pool, choked with weeds.

Antidotes: Arouse energy. Many ways such as opening your eyes for a while, walking around, exercising, getting rest.

4. Restlessness: high energy mind

Forms: fidgety mind and body, worry mind, remorse, agitation, impatience, monkey mind jumping from one thing to another

Traditional similes: Like being a slave, continually having to jump to the orders of a tyrannical boss. Mind like waves on the water's surface whipped up by the wind.

Antidotes: Be persistent – understand it will pass and keep returning to the practice. Develop contentment, be satisfied with whatever comes up rather than always wanting more. Be grateful for this moment.

5. Skeptical Doubt: self doubting energy

Forms: demoralizing thoughts, no sense of direction, distrust, perplexity, second guessing oneself, indecision, lack of confidence

Doubt is subtler than the other four energies that have strong body sensations.

Traditional Similes: Like being lost in a desert, not recognizing any landmarks. Mind like water clouded with mud.

Antidotes: Name it, be clear about your purpose, make a provisional commitment. Gather clear instructions and nurture self-confidence with a good teachers / teachings.

General Principles for Working with the hindrances

1. Recognize and acknowledge the hindrance.

2. Consider the consequences but be non-judgmental. Simply consider where this will go.

3. Cultivate the opposite - eg loving kindness or metta for ill will, mindfulness for wandering, calm for anxiety, stimulation for sloth, clarity for doubt.

4. Cultivate a "sky like" attitude ie imagine thoughts are like clouds passing across an empty blue sky. Look for the gaps between thoughts and rest there a while.

5. Apply effort to stop it. Pause and don't react.

Vipassana Glossary

Anatta: Selflessness [Pali]; egolessness; no self; insubstantiality.

Aversion: Hatred; anger; the tendency to push away unpleasant people and experiences. Aversion typically manifests in two primary forms: outward anger or introverted fear, depression and guilt.

Awareness is the sense of being a silent witness, accepting and nonjudgmental. It, however, does not imply resignation to abuse or injustice. It teaches acknowledgment of the moment-to-moment reality and prepares those who use the technique to respond to that reality less impulsively and more effectively. It's more about shifting your emphasis when you meditate from focusing to watching, from spotlight consciousness to floodlight consciousness. You become a spectator.

When practicing awareness, you still have a focal point but most of your attention goes outward, "just watching" the passing thoughts and sensations. It means that you are not focusing your attention exclusively on the breath. In basic breath awareness, you had an object of concentration. You focused your full attention on the quality, sound, and feeling of your breath. With this meditation, you are expanding your awareness to allow yourself to also notice your thoughts. That is the main difference between breath awareness and awareness meditation.

What does it mean to notice your thoughts? Simply notice every time your mind starts to wander. You may find yourself planning your day, or recalling a memory, evaluating how "well" you are meditating, or even having an imaginary conversation with someone. At first, we fail to notice our thinking because it is such an unconscious habit. We simply follow our thoughts as if our thoughts are all there is. We think we are our thoughts, and that there is no way to distance ourselves from them. But awareness meditation cultivates an awareness that transcends the push and pull of our habitual thoughts.

Beginner's Mind: A mind that is open to the experience of the moment & free of conceptual overlays, 1st used by Zen teacher Suzuki Roshi.

Bodhisattva: Enlightenment being [Sanskrit]; someone known for an unbounded readiness and availability to help all sentient beings; the Buddha's title before he became enlightened.

Brahma-viharas: Best abode [Sanskrit, Pali]; the four mind states said to create an ideal quality of existence, also called the Four Limitless Ones: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Buddha: Awakened One [Sanskrit]; specifically the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, who lived and taught in India 2,500 years ago. A perfectly enlightened being, believed to have attained complete wisdom and universal compassion.

Buddha-Dhamma: [Pali]; The teachings of the Buddha.

Dana: The practice of giving, one of the three acts of merit that includes moral conduct and meditation. Dana is also the act of making gifts to teachers and dedicated practitioners of the Dharma in support of their efforts.

Desire: Greed; addiction; the tendency to grasp at and try to prolong pleasurable experiences. Desire involves a quality of attachment or holding on in the mind.

Dharma: Carrying, holding; that which supports [Sanskrit]. Dharma denotes the teachings of the Buddha, the "truth" or the "way," and the practice of those teachings.

Dukkha: Suffering [Pali]; a law of nature related to the pain that arises out of the ungovernable nature of events. A sense of the fleetingness of things; sorrow, discontent, disease, unsatisfactoriness, that which is difficult to bear. It also means hollowness and insecurity.

Ego: The pattern of conditioned habits that we mistake for a solid self.

Enlightenment: A state of clear understanding about the nature of reality. The state of complete spiritual awakening of an individual. Sanskrit *bodhi* "awakened" or "knowing" the true nature of things as they are. Bodhi is the ultimate goal of Buddhist life. It is achieved by observing the eightfold path, the development of the Paramitas (virtues) and profound wisdom into the dependently arisen nature of phenomena. There are different degrees of the experience of enlightenment. The process can be pointed out by showing the process of breaking through a wall from a tiny hole in the wall to the complete annihilation of the wall and all the degrees in between. Note that the enlightenment is not an object that one as a subject perceives. In profound enlightenment, the ego is annihilated, it dies. As said in Zen, *you have to die on the cushion* resulting in a life of freedom and peace.

Equanimity: The ability to maintain a spacious impartiality of mind in the midst of life's changing conditions. A state of balance or poise; a radiant calm of mind or spacious stillness of heart.

Feeling tone: The pleasant, unpleasant or neutral tone that colors every experience.

Hindrances (5): Called hindrances because they obscure clear thinking. Referred to as mind energies that hinder us from reconnecting with the peaceful self that is our essential nature. 1. Desire, energy of wanting, neediness of mind; 2. Aversion, energy of pushing away, getting rid of something; 3. Sloth and Torpor, low energy mind; 4. Restlessness, high energy mind; 5. Skeptical Doubt, self doubting energy.

Insight Meditation Society and Community: The founding of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in 1975 heralded a fresh expression of Theravada Buddhism among lay practitioners in the West. Today this flourishing tradition offers a path to liberation suited to people of our own time and place, amidst our own families and communities.

Kalyanamitta: Spiritual friend [Pali]; In Buddhist meditation tradition, teachers are referred to with this term, in that they, like the Buddha, point the way to liberation.

Karma: Action, deed [Sanskrit]; the law of cause & effect. Intentional action that impacts the doer's development & evolution.

Mental noting: A technique used in meditation to help direct the mind to the object of meditation.

Merit: The spiritual benefits we derive from practicing generosity, ethical conduct, and meditation.

Metta: Kindness, gentle friendship [Pali]; A practice for generating lovingkindness first taught by the Buddha as an antidote to fear. The nature of metta is to dissolve all states associated with the fundamental error of separateness: fear, alienation, loneliness, despair, and feelings of fragmentation. Metta is one of the four Brahma-Viharas (cultivation of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity) likened to a gentle rain that falls impartially upon the entire earth, neither selecting nor excluding where it will land. This practice of lovingkindness is revolutionary because it has the power to radically change our lives, helping us cultivate true happiness in ourselves and genuine compassion for others.

Middle Way: A spiritual path that avoids extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence, as taught by the Buddha.

Mindfulness: The state of being fully present, without habitual reactions. Mindfulness means fully experiencing what happens in the here and now. It is the art of focusing our minds on what's happening in and around us at this very moment. Mindfulness helps you turn down all the noise in your head - the guilt, anger, doubts, and uncertainties that upset us moment to moment.

Nirvana: Extinction of suffering [Sanskrit]; a state of freedom that is attained through fully apprehending the nature of reality.

Object of meditation: The activity (like the breath) or event (like sound) to which one directs attention during meditation.

Path: A term widely used in Buddhism to signify a process of development and transformation over time.

Precept: A principle that defines a certain standard of conduct.

Samsara: Journeying [Sanskrit]; the ocean of worldly suffering; the state of being governed by the five hindrances.

Sangha: The term sangha refers alternatively to the community of practitioners of the Buddhist path; and those beings who have attained direct realization of the nature of reality, one of the three jewels of refuge.

Skillful means: Wise action. Action based on kindness, compassion and wisdom.

Theravadan: Path of the elders [Pali]; the form of Buddhism found through most of SE Asia. Vipassana meditation is central to this tradition.

Three Jewels: The three jewels of refuge in Buddhism are the Buddha (the example), the Dharma (teachings) and the Sangha (community).

Vipassana: To see clearly [Pali]; insight; the style of meditation characterized by concentration and mindfulness. A practice designed to quiet the mind, refine awareness and generate a direct experience of life with a minimum of distraction and obscuration. Insight meditation, or Vipassana, is one of the central meditation teachings of the Buddha. Vipassana has been practiced and passed on within the Theravadin Buddhist tradition for the past 2,500 years. The core of insight meditation is the practice of mindfulness, the quality of awareness that sees without judgment. Sitting and walking meditation, the first steps in formal practice, become the foundation and the continuous inspiration for meeting all aspects of life with a greater openness and willingness to learn. As we practice, it becomes possible to use the challenges of daily life to increase our capacity for mindful living.

Wise attention: A way of seeing that relies on awareness; the opposite of delusion.

PART II: READINGS

What is the Right Attitude in Meditation? Adapted from U Tejaniya's, Right Attitude of Meditation.

1. Meditating is watching and allowing with relaxed attention whatever pleasant or unpleasant experience is happening.
2. Meditation is learning from everything we encounter. We learn whether we desire, fear, or have no interest in each experience that arises.
3. It is staying present and alert, free of the past or future.
4. Relax, observe, and allow everything that is occurring.
5. Stay soft without rigidity, focused without straining, and sit straight without tension.
6. Neither try to create nor encourage any experience. Be with things just as they are.
7. Practice without expectation, and with the courage to open to every experience.
8. Meditation is not waiting for something to occur or waiting for something to go away. It is being patient with all things.
9. Meditation is being present for both pleasant and unpleasant experiences.
10. Know the attitude with which you meditate: are you resisting or wanting something? If so you are inducing stress into meditation.
11. Don't be disturbed by the thinking mind. You are not practicing to prevent thinking but to recognize thinking when it arises.
12. What is the mind doing? Thinking or being aware?
13. What story is the mind promoting right now?
14. The object of attention is not as important as the observation. If the observing is done with the right attitude, the object will be the right object.

Right Mindfulness: My Father and the Raiders of the Lost Ark: It is Easier than You Think, Sylvia Boorstein

Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is without either clinging to it or rejecting it. There are three ways, I think, to understand the purpose of mindfulness practice.

The first way is to see how it leads to wisdom. As a person is increasingly able to stay alert and balanced from moment to moment, the fundamental truths of life experience will present themselves as insights. As insight grows, the teachings promise the habitual tendency of the mind to continue to cling to what is essentially ungraspable diminishes, the suffering lessens.

The second way to understand how to practice works in that the very practice itself deconditions the mind from its habitual pattern of running from discomfort. One sits (or stands, or walks or eats or whatever), hour after hour, *practicing* remaining calm and alert through the whole range of body and mind states that present themselves-all the while *not doing anything* to change experience but rather discovering that experience is *bearable*. Thus one comes to see that the practice itself is an antidote to the usual flurried reaction of the mind to each new moment.

The third way is to think of mindfulness practice itself as freedom, rather than *leading to* freedom. Any moment of clarity undisturbed by the tension of judging or preferring, rejecting or desiring, in a moment of freedom. We have only moments. Now is the only time we ever have. Cataloguing and stockpiling moments of freedom now for comfort in the future might be good reminders, but they don't guarantee freedom forever. Anticipating future freedom may condition Right Aspiration or Right Effort, but it creates striving in the mind now or a sense of neediness or incompleteness in the mind now, there is no freedom now.

Probably many meditators, Buddhist and otherwise, know the story of the monk being chased by a tiger toward the edge of a cliff. He leaps off the cliff, grasping a vine that has grown over the edge. Below him is a long drop to certain death, above him is the snarling tiger. As the monk swings in midair, a mouse begins gnawing at the vine above him. His position is one of utter precariousness. Growing out of the cliff in front of him is a wild strawberry, which he picks and eats. He says, "This strawberry is delicious."

My father died of multiple myeloma, a cancer that can be treated but not cured. During the seven years of his illness, he managed his diminishing vigor and increasing pain with steadfast stoicism. He accommodated his disability with cane, then walker, then wheelchair-all the while keeping up his vigorous social life. We talked openly and often about the inevitability of his death in the near future, and he seemed reconciled to it without being hopeless or desperate. We joked about which of his grandchildren's households seemed to him the most congenial in terms of choice of rebirth for him, if it turned out that he really got to choose.

One day, when his illness was quite advanced, his spirits seemed particularly flagging. The day loomed long before us, and I said, "Let's go to a movie." He looked at me, seemingly incredulous, and said "You know, I'm dying." I said, "Yes, I know, but not today." We saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. We both loved it. We had dinner at the Pacific Café, his favorite restaurant. The next day he developed pneumonia and needed to be hospitalized. A few weeks later he died.

Beginning Our Practice by Rodney Smith, Guiding Teacher, Insight Meditation Community of Seattle, WA

When we begin to practice meditation, it is useful to reflect on what we expect the meditation to do for us. What is our motivation for wanting to learn to meditate? This is important because we will judge the meditation according to the goals we set for the practice. Our tolerance for doing this hard work will last only as long as we experience some expected result. Our expectations around meditation come from what we have heard or read about the process from other meditators. We begin on the faith of what others have experienced for themselves. We hear these stories and think how we too would like to bring more calm into our lives. Given all the confusion we feel, calmness of being will make us a better person. So we begin practicing to see if we can also experience this calm. We give it a reasonable length of time. If nothing happens we give it up.

When we hold the meditation to a specific result, we may miss all the other benefits the process is bringing because our particular goal is not being met. We may miss the enhanced feelings of well being, the clarity of thought, the simplicity of being, the directness of conduct, and the growing sense of self integrity. We may miss the greater affection we feel for life and our increase ability to obtain intimacy and listen to others. We can become so set on achieving the one quality we are focused on obtaining, we miss the forest for the trees.

Meditation frequently works on us very differently than we think it will. The one quality we most strive to obtain seems to remain distant even as our efforts increase towards that goal. It is a little like a cat chasing its own tail. The tail is always out of reach no matter how fast we seem to be pursuing it. If the cat were to stop, the tail would be within easy reach. So it is with meditation. Much of what we learn in meditation is to simply stop. The traits we strive so hard to acquire are qualities which are inherent in the stopping itself. We never have to acquire anything at all in spiritual practice. It is all present when we learn to free ourselves from ambitious pursuit which has kept us off balanced.

This is the real secret of meditation. There are no others. There are no guarantees in this practice except this one. If we can learn this in the beginning we can save ourselves unlimited difficulty throughout the unfolding of our spiritual lives. 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.

Mindfulness: A Contemplative Practice for Being in the World by Steven Smith

Steven is a guiding teacher at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA, the Kyaswa Valley Retreat Center for Foreigners in Sagaing Hills, Upper Burma, the Blue Mountain Meditation Center in Australia, & is a founder of Vipassana Hawaii.

What Is Mindfulness?

Insight meditation is the practice of seeing clearly, seeing things as they truly are. The primary tool of insight meditation is mindfulness, the art of moment-to-moment awareness. Mindfulness is a pre-verbal, non-judgmental quality of mind that is aware of what is happening in and around oneself in the present moment. It does not anticipate the next moment or reflect back on the previous moment. That would be thinking. Mindfulness is not thinking, interpreting, or evaluating experience. It is the pure awareness of experience. With mindfulness, our thoughts become more clear, healthy, and skillful. Mindfulness of breath begins both a calming process and a collecting of the heart/mind from distraction to unification. From simple breath awareness, we open up to include all physical and mental processes in the field of awareness.

Sitting Practice

Begin by sitting in a chair or on a cushion on the floor, with your back straight. Relax into your sitting posture with a few deep breaths. Allow the body and mind to become utterly relaxed while remaining very alert and attentive to the present moment. Feel the areas of your body that are tense, and the areas that are relaxing. Just let the body follow its own natural law. Do not try to force or fix anything. Let your mind be soft, and allow a spacious awareness to wash gently through your body. Simply feel the sensations of sitting, side-stepping with your mind the tendency to image your body, to interpret, to define or think about it. Just let such thoughts and images come and go without being bothered by them, and attune to the bare sensations of sitting.

Feel your body with an awareness that arises from within your body, not from your head. Awareness of body anchors attention in the present moment and helps you to inhabit your body. Gently sweep your awareness through your body, feeling the sensations with no agenda, no goal. Allow your body to anchor awareness in the present moment by just staying mindful of these sensations. After some time, shift your awareness to the field of sound vibrations. Awareness of sounds creates openness, spaciousness, and receptivity in the mind. Be aware of both the pure sound vibration as well as the space or silence between the sounds. As with body sensations, incline your awareness away from the definition of the sound, or thoughts about the sound, and simply attune to the sound just as it is.

After some minutes of awareness of body and sounds, bring your attention to your natural breathing process. Locate the area where the breath is most clear and let awareness lightly rest there. For some it is the sensation of the rising and falling of the abdomen. For others it may be the sensations experienced at the nostrils with the inhalation and exhalation. You can use very soft mental labels to guide and sustain attention to the breath. "Rising/falling" for the abdomen and "in/out" for the nostrils. Let the breath breathe itself without control, direction, or force. Feel each breath from within the breath, not from the head. Feel the full breath cycle from the beginning through the middle to the end.

The awareness is a combination of light, open spaciousness and receptivity, like listening, and alert, attentive presence, touching the actual texture, shape, and form of sensations. Let go of everything else, or let it be in the background. Just let the breathing breathe itself. Rest in a sense of utter relaxation, in that mindful feeling, with the sensations of the breath. As soon as you notice the mind wandering off, lost in thought, be aware of that with non judging awareness, and gently connect it again to your anchor [the breath]. Just feel from within the stream of sensations.

Toward the end of your sitting, not striving or anticipating, not pouncing on sensations in the present, not bending back to what was just missed or reflecting on what just happened, keep inclining to the totality of the present moment. Keep anchoring easily, deeply, restfully. Just one breath at a time. Mindfulness of breath begins to collect and concentrate the mind so that the initial distractions of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and sounds soon become objects of awareness themselves. Insight is gained into the true nature of the body and mind.

As concentration grows, mindfulness opens to the entire "flow" of body/mind experience through all the sense doors--sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental/emotive. Seeing things as they are begins to untangle the tangles of attachment, fear, and confusion. One is able to live more from a place of joy, compassion, equanimity and wisdom. Very simple. Now please just begin, and never stop being aware.

Meditation Instructions from *Insight Meditation* by Joseph Goldstein

Sit comfortably, with your back straight but not stiff or tense. Gently close your eyes and feel the sensations of the breath as the air passes the nostrils or upper lip. The sensations of the in-breath appear simply and naturally, Notice how the out-breath appears. Or you might choose to feel the movement of your chest or abdomen as the breath enters and leaves your body.

Wherever you choose to follow the sensations of breathing, whether the in and out at the nostrils or the movement of the chest or abdomen, train your awareness to connect clearly with the first moment of the beginning in-breath. Then sustain the attention for the duration of just that one in-coming breath. Connect again at the beginning of the out-breath and sustain your attention till the end.

It is important not to become overly ambitious. We all have the capacity to feel one breath completely. But if we try to do more than that, if we have the idea that we are going to be mindful of our breathing for half an hour, then that is much too much. To sustain unbroken attention for that amount of time is far beyond the capacity of our mind, and so we quickly become discouraged. Connect and sustain for just one breath. . . and then one more. In this way you can work well within your capacity, and your mind will begin to concentrate simply and easily.

At times other objects will arise - physical sensations, thoughts, images, emotions. Notice how all these appearances arise and change in the open awareness of mind. Often we become distracted, lost in the display of experience no longer mindful. As soon as you remember come back to the simple state of awareness.

It can be helpful in the beginning to focus primarily, although not exclusively on the breath. Focusing in this way helps stabilize attention, keeping us mindful and alert. Bringing the mind back to a primary object, like the breath, takes a certain quality of effort, and that effort builds energy. It is like doing a repetitive exercise to develop muscular strength. You keep doing it and the body gets stronger. Coming back to the primary object is mental exercise. We come back to the breath, again and again, and slowly the mind grows stronger and more stable. Our level of energy rises. Then when we open to a more choiceless awareness, we perceive things in a more refined and powerful way.

If at times you feel constriction or strain in the practice, it helps to settle back and open the field of awareness. Leave the breath for a while and simply notice, in turn, whatever arises at the six sense doors (the five physical senses and the mind): hearing, seeing, pressure, tingling, thinking. Or you can rest in an open, natural awareness, paying attention only to sounds appearing and disappearing. Widening the focus of attention in this way helps the mind come to balance and spaciousness.

You can also use the technique of mental noting to strengthen mindful awareness. The art of mental noting, as a tool of meditation, requires practice and experimentation. Labeling objects of experience as they arise supports mindfulness in many different ways.

Noting should be done very softly, like a whisper in the mind, but with enough precision and accuracy so that it connects directly with the object. For example, you might label each breath, silently saying *in*, *out* or *rising*, *falling*. In addition, you may also note every other appearance that arises in meditation. When thoughts arise, note *thinking*. If physical sensations become predominant, note *pressure*, *vibration*, *tension*, *tingling*, or whatever it might be. If sounds or images come into the foreground, note *hearing* or *seeing*.

The note itself can be seen as another appearance in the mind, even as it functions to keep us undistracted. Labeling, like putting a frame around a picture, helps you recognize the object more clearly and gives greater focus and precision to your observation.

Mental noting supports mindfulness in another way, by showing us when awareness is reactive and when it is truly mindful. For example, we may be aware of pain in the body, but through a filter of aversion. Without the tool of noting, we often do not recognize the aversion, which may be a subtle overlay on the pain itself. The tone of voice of the mental note reveals a lot about our minds. You sit and note, *pain*, *pain*, but perhaps with a gritted-teeth tone to the note; the tone makes obvious the actual state of mind. Quite amazingly, simply changing the tone of the note can often change your mind state. Noting refines the quality of mindfulness, that very particular, nonreactive awareness.

Mental labeling also strengthens the effort-energy factor in the mind. Because noting does take a special effort, some people find it difficult to do in the beginning. But effort overcomes sloth and torpor; the very effort to softly note each arising object arouses energy which keeps the practice developing and deepening.

The skillful use of mental noting keeps us energized, accurate, and mindful. Try this technique in your next sitting, even if only for a short period of time at first. Simply note each arising appearance as you become aware of it: *rising, falling; thinking, thinking, pain, pain; rising, falling*. Frame each moment of experience with a soft mental note, and observe the difference in the quality of your attention,

Be patient in learning to use this tool of practice. Sometimes people note too loudly, and it overshadows the experience. Sometimes people try too hard, becoming tight and tense with the effort. Let the note float down on the object, like a butterfly landing on a flower, or let it float up with the object, like a bubble rising. Be light, be soft, have fun.

Experiment with the technique of noting to find the most skillful way to use it. At one time in my walking practice, as I took each step slowly and mindfully, I abbreviated all the notes to the first letter. Instead of noting *lifting, moving, placing*, I started noting *l, m, p. l, m, p*. The notes seemed to slide effortlessly along right on top of each movement of the step. Yet the purpose of the noting—to keep the mind fixed and steady for the entire duration of the step, or the breath—was served.

Investigate the technique for yourself. If at times you find that noting interferes too much, or is too slow for the rapidity of change, stop labeling for a while. See what happens. Play with the volume, play with abbreviating it. Understand that it is a tool, and learn for yourself how best to use it. Observe whether it helps keep a sustained attention or not. See for yourself how the noting functions. Be flexible, and enjoy the exploration.

Walking and Standing Meditation: Excerpt from Introduction to Insight Meditation - Amaravati Buddhist Centre, U.K.

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

If you have access to some open land, measure off about 25-30 paces' length of level ground (or a clearly defined pathway between two trees), (or in a room) as your meditation path.

Stand at one end of the path, and compose your mind on the sensations of the body.

First, let the attention rest on the feeling of the body standing upright, with the arms hanging naturally and the hands lightly clasped in front or behind.

Allow the eyes to gaze at a point about three meters in front of you at ground level, thus avoiding visual distraction. Now, walk gently, at a deliberate but "normal" pace, to the end of the path. Stop. Focus on the body standing for the period of a couple of breaths. Turn, and walk back again.

While walking, be aware of the general flow of physical sensations, or more closely direct your attention to the feet. The exercise for the mind is to keep bringing its attention back to the sensation of the feet touching the ground, the spaces between each step, and the feelings of stopping and starting.

Of course, the mind will wander. So it is important to cultivate patience, and the resolve to begin again. Adjust the pace to suit your state of mind -- vigorous when drowsy or trapped in obsessive thought, firm but gentle when restless and impatient.

At the end of the path, stop; breathe in and out; "let go" of any restlessness, worry, calm, bliss, memories or opinions about yourself. The "inner chatter" may stop momentarily, or fade out. Begin again. In this way you continually refresh the mind, and allow it to settle at its own rate.

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

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

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

Instructions for Walking Meditation *adapted from a talk by Gil Fronsdal, 2003*

Most people in the West associate meditation with sitting quietly. But traditional Buddhist teachings identify four meditation postures: sitting, walking, standing and lying down. All four are valid means of cultivating a calm and clear mindfulness of the present moment. The most common meditation posture after sitting is walking. In meditation centers and monasteries, indoor halls and outdoor paths are often built for walking meditation. On meditation retreats, regular walking meditation is an integral part of the schedule. In practice outside of retreats, some people will include walking as part of their daily meditation practice—for example, ten or twenty minutes of walking prior to sitting, or walking meditation instead of sitting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

After you’ve found a pace of ease, let your attention settle into the body. I sometimes find it restful to think of letting my body take me for a walk.

Once you feel connected to the body, let your attention settle into your feet and lower legs. In sitting meditation, it is common to use the alternating sensations of breathing in and out as an “anchor” keeping us in the present. In walking meditation, the focus is on the alternating stepping of the feet.

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

Vipassana Meditation by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, known affectionately as "Bhante G," was ordained as a Buddhist at age twelve in his native Sri Lanka. He is founder of the Bhavana Society and abbot of its monastery in the Shenandoah Valley, WVA.

Meditation is not easy. It takes time and it takes energy. It also takes grit, determination, and discipline. It requires a host of personal qualities that we normally regard as unpleasant and like to avoid whenever possible. We can sum up all of these qualities in the American word gumption.

Meditation takes gumption. It is certainly a great deal easier just to sit back and watch television. So why bother? Why waste all that time and energy when you could be out enjoying yourself? Why? Simple. Because you are human. Just because of the simple fact that you are human, you find yourself heir to an inherent unsatisfactoriness in life that simply will not go away. You can suppress it from your awareness for a time, you can distract yourself for hours on end, but it always comes back, and usually when you least expect it. All of a sudden, seemingly out of the blue, you sit up, take stock, and realize your actual situation in life.

There you are, and you suddenly realize that you are spending your whole life just barely getting by. You keep up a good front. You manage to make ends meet somehow and look okay from the outside. But those periods of desperation, those times when you feel everything caving in on you—you keep those to yourself. You are a mess, and you know it. But you hide it beautifully. Meanwhile, way down under all of that, you just know that there has to be some other way to live, a better way to look at the world, a way to touch life more fully. You click into it by chance now and then: You get a good job. You fall in love. You win the game. For a while, things are different. Life takes on a richness and clarity that makes all the bad times and humdrum fade away. The whole texture of your experience changes and you say to yourself, "Okay, now I've made it; now I will be happy." But then that fades too, like smoke in the wind. You are left with just a memory—that, and the vague awareness that something is wrong.

You can't make radical changes in the pattern of your life until you begin to see yourself exactly as you are now. As soon as you do that, changes will flow naturally. You don't have to force anything, struggle, or obey rules dictated to you by some authority. It is automatic; you just change.

But arriving at that initial insight is quite a task. You have to see who you are and how you are without illusion, judgment or resistance of any kind. You have to see your place in society and your function as a social being. You have to see your duties and obligations to your fellow human beings, and above all, your responsibility to yourself as an individual living with other individuals. And finally, you have to see all of that clearly as a single unit, an irreducible whole of interrelationship. It sounds complex, but it can occur in a single instant. Mental cultivation through meditation is without rival in helping you achieve this sort of understanding and serene happiness.

The Dhammapada, an ancient Buddhist text, says: "What you are now is the result of what you were. What you will be tomorrow will be the result of what you are now. The consequences of an evil mind will follow you like the cart follows the ox that pulls it. The consequences of a purified mind will follow you like your own shadow. No one can do more for you than your own purified mind—no parent, no relative, no friend, no one. A well-disciplined mind brings happiness."

Meditation is intended to purify the mind. It cleanses the thought process of what can be called psychic irritants, things like greed, hatred and jealousy, which keep you snarled up in emotional bondage. Meditation brings the mind to a state of tranquility and awareness, a state of concentration and insight.

Meditation is called the Great Teacher. It is the cleansing crucible fire that works slowly but surely, through understanding. The greater your understanding, the more flexible and tolerant, the more compassionate you can be. You become like a perfect parent or an ideal teacher. You are ready to forgive and forget. You feel love toward others because you understand them, and you understand others because you have understood yourself. 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. An accomplished meditator has achieved a profound understanding of life, and he or she inevitably relates to the world with a deep and uncritical love.

The purpose of meditation is personal transformation. The "you" that goes in one side of the meditation experience is not the same "you" that comes out the other side. Meditation changes your character by a process of sensitization, by making you

deeply aware of your own thoughts, words and deeds. Your arrogance evaporates and your antagonism dries up. Your mind becomes still and calm. And your life smoothes out.

Thus, meditation, properly performed, prepares you to meet the ups and downs of existence. It reduces your tension, fear and worry. Restlessness recedes and passion moderates. Things begin to fall into place, and your life becomes a glide instead of a struggle. All of this happens through understanding.

Meditation sharpens your concentration and your thinking power. Then, piece by piece, your own subconscious motives and mechanics become clear to you. Your intuition sharpens. The precision of your thought increases, and gradually you come to a direct knowledge of things as they really are, without prejudice and without illusion.

Vipassana is the oldest of Buddhist meditation practices. The method comes directly from the Satipatthana Sutta, a discourse attributed to the Buddha himself. Vipassana is a direct and gradual cultivation of mindfulness or awareness. It proceeds piece by piece over a period of years. The student's attention is carefully directed to an intense examination of certain aspects of his own existence. The meditator is trained to notice more and more of his own flowing life experience.

Vipassana is a gentle technique, but it also is very, very thorough. It is an ancient and codified system of training your mind, a set of exercises dedicated to the purpose of becoming more and more aware of your own life experience. It is attentive listening, mindful seeing, and careful testing. We learn to smell acutely, to touch fully, and really pay attention to the changes taking place in all these experiences. We learn to listen to our own thoughts without being caught up in them.

The object of vipassana practice is to learn to see the truths of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the selflessness of phenomena. We think we are doing this already, but that is an illusion. It comes from the fact that we are paying so little attention to the ongoing surge of our own life experiences that we might just as well be asleep.

Vipassana meditation is inherently experiential, not theoretical. In the practice of meditation you become sensitive to the actual experience of living, to how things actually feel. You do not sit around developing subtle, aesthetic thoughts about living. You live. Vipassana meditation, more than anything else, is learning to live.

There are a variety of methods within the vipassana tradition, but the method we are explaining here is considered the most traditional and is probably what Gautama Buddha taught his students. The Satipatthana Sutta, which was the Buddha's original discourse on mindfulness, specifically says that one must begin by focusing the attention on the breathing and then go on to note all other physical and mental phenomena which arise.

So we sit, watching the air going in and out of our noses. At first glance, this seems an exceedingly odd and useless procedure. The first question we might ask is: why have any focus of attention at all? We are, after all, trying to develop awareness. Why not just sit down and be aware of whatever happens to be present in the mind?

In fact, there are meditations of that nature. They are sometimes referred to as unstructured meditation and they are quite difficult. The mind is tricky. Thought is an inherently complicated procedure. By that we mean that we become trapped, wrapped up, and stuck in the thought chain. One thought leads to another which leads to another, and another, and another, and so on. Fifteen minutes later we suddenly wake up and realize we spent that whole time stuck in a daydream or sexual fantasy or a set of worries about our bills or whatever.

There is a difference between being aware of a thought and thinking a thought. That difference is very subtle. It is primarily a matter of feeling or texture. A thought you are simply aware of with bare attention feels light in texture; there is a sense of distance between that thought and the awareness viewing it. It arises lightly like a bubble, and it passes away without necessarily giving rise to the next thought in that chain. Normal conscious thought is much heavier in texture. It is ponderous, commanding and compulsive. It sucks you in and grabs control of consciousness. By its very nature it is obsessional, and it leads straight to the next thought in the chain, with apparently no gap between them.

The difference between being aware of the thought and thinking the thought is very real. But it is extremely subtle and difficult to see. Concentration is one of the tools needed to be able to see this difference.

Deep concentration has the effect of slowing down the thought process and speeding up the awareness viewing it. The result is the enhanced ability to examine the thought process. Concentration is our microscope for viewing subtle internal states. We use

the focus of attention to achieve one-pointedness of mind with calm and constantly applied attention. Without a fixed reference point you get lost, overcome by the ceaseless waves of change flowing round and round within the mind.

We use breath as our focus. It serves as that vital reference point from which the mind wanders and is drawn back. Distraction cannot be seen as distraction unless there is some central focus to be distracted from. That is the frame of reference against which we can view the incessant changes and interruptions that go on all the time as a part of normal thinking.

The next question we need to address is: Why choose breathing as the primary object of meditation? Why not something a bit more interesting? Answers to this are numerous. A useful object of meditation should be one that promotes mindfulness. It should be portable, easily available, and cheap. It should also be something that will not embroil us in those states of mind from which we are trying to free ourselves, such as greed, anger and delusion.

Breathing satisfies all these criteria and more. Breathing is something common to every human being. We all carry it with us wherever we go. It is always there, constantly available, never ceasing from birth till death, and it costs nothing.

Breathing is a nonconceptual process, a thing that can be experienced directly without a need for thought. Furthermore, it is a very living process, an aspect of life that is in constant change. The breath moves in cycles-inhalation, exhalation, breathing in, and breathing out. Thus, it is a miniature model of life itself.

The first step in using the breath as an object of meditation is to find it. What you are looking for is the physical, tactile sensation of the air that passes in and out of the nostrils. This is usually just inside the tip of the nose. But the exact spot varies from one person to another, depending on the shape of the nose. To find your own point, take a quick deep breath and notice the point just inside the nose or on the upper lip where you have the most distinct sensation of passing air. Now exhale and notice the sensation at the same point.

It is from this point that you will follow the whole passage of breath. Once you have located your own breath point with clarity, don't deviate from that spot. Use this single point in order to keep your attention fixed. Without having selected such a point, you will find yourself moving in and out of the nose, going up and down the windpipe, eternally chasing after the breath which you can never catch because it keeps changing, moving and flowing.

Make no attempt to control the breath. This is not a breathing exercise of the sort done in yoga. Focus on the natural and spontaneous movement of the breath. Don't try to regulate it or emphasize it in any way. Most beginners have some trouble in this area. In order to help themselves focus on the sensation, they unconsciously accentuate their breathing. The result is a forced and unnatural effort that actually inhibits concentration rather than helping it. Let go and allow the process to go along at its own rhythm. This sounds easy, but it is trickier than you think. Do not be discouraged if you find your own will getting in the way. Just use that as an opportunity to observe the nature of conscious intention. Watch the delicate interrelation between the breath, the impulse to control the breath, and the impulse to cease controlling the breath. You may find it frustrating for a while, but it is highly profitable as a learning experience, and it is a passing phase. Eventually, the breathing process will move along under its own steam, and you will feel no impulse to manipulate it. At this point you will have learned a major lesson about your own compulsive need to control the universe.

Breathing, which seems so mundane and uninteresting at first glance, is actually an enormously complex and fascinating procedure. It is full of delicate variations, if you look. There is inhalation and exhalation, long breath and short breath, deep breath, shallow breath, smooth breath, and ragged breath. These categories combine with one another in subtle and intricate ways. Observe the breath closely. Really study it. You find enormous variations and a constant cycle of repeated patterns. It is like a symphony.

Don't observe just the bare outline of the breath. There is more to see here than just an in-breath and an out-breath. Every breath has a beginning, middle and end. Every inhalation goes through a process of birth, growth and death and every exhalation does the same. The depth and speed of your breathing changes according to your emotional state, the thought that flows through your mind, and the sounds you hear. Study these phenomena. You will find them fascinating.

This does not mean, however, that you should be sitting there having little conversations with yourself inside your head: "There is a short ragged breath and there is a deep long one. I wonder what's next?" No, that is not vipassana. That is thinking. You will find this sort of thing happening, especially in the beginning. This too is a passing phase. Simply note the phenomenon and

return your attention toward the observation of the sensation of breath. Mental distractions will happen again. But return your attention to your breath again, and again, and again, and again, for as long as it takes until it does not happen anymore.

When you first begin this procedure, expect to face some difficulties. Your mind will wander off constantly, darting around like a bumblebee and zooming off on wild tangents. Try not to worry. The monkey mind phenomenon is well known. It is something that every advanced meditator has had to deal with. They have pushed through it one way or another, and so can you. When it happens, just note the fact that you have been thinking, daydreaming, worrying, or whatever. Gently but firmly, without getting upset or judging yourself for straying, simply return to the simple physical sensation of the breath. Then do it again the next time, and again, and again, and again.

Somewhere in this process, you will come face to face with the sudden and shocking realization that you are completely crazy. Your mind is a shrieking, gibbering madhouse on wheels barreling pell-mell down the hill, utterly out of control and hopeless. No problem. You are not crazier than you were yesterday. It has always been this way, and you just never noticed. You are also no crazier than everybody else around you. The only real difference is that you have confronted the situation; they have not. So they still feel relatively comfortable. That does not mean that they are better off. Ignorance may be bliss, but it does not lead to liberation. So don't let this realization unsettle you. It is a milestone actually, a sign of real progress. The very fact that you have looked at the problem straight in the eye means that you are on your way up and out of it.

As your concentration deepens, you will have less and less trouble with monkey mind. Your breathing will slow down and you will track it more and more clearly, with fewer and fewer interruptions. You begin to experience a state of great calm in which you enjoy complete freedom from those things we called psychic irritants. No greed, lust, envy, jealousy or hatred. Agitation goes away. Fear flees. These are beautiful, clear, blissful states of mind. They are temporary, and they will end when the meditation ends. Yet even these brief experiences will change your life. This is not liberation, but these are stepping stones on the path that leads in that direction. Do not, however, expect instant bliss. Even these stepping stones take time and effort and patience.

Mindfulness of breathing is a present-time awareness. When you are doing it properly, you are aware only of what is occurring in the present. You don't look back, and you don't look forward. You forget about the last breath, and you don't anticipate the next one. When the inhalation is just beginning, you don't look ahead to the end of that inhalation. You don't skip forward to the exhalation which is to follow. You stay right there with what is actually taking place. The inhalation is beginning, and that's what you pay attention to—that and nothing else.

This meditation is a process of retraining the mind. The state you are aiming for is one in which you are totally aware of everything that is happening in your own perceptual universe, exactly the way it happens, exactly when it is happening: total, unbroken awareness in present time. This is an incredibly high goal, and not to be reached all at once. It takes practice, so we start small. We start by becoming totally aware of one small unit of time, just one single inhalation. And, when you succeed, you are on your way to a whole new experience of life.

Sit by Sharon Salzberg

The emphasis on caring for ourselves is certainly not limited to Buddhism; it is found in any true spiritual understanding. It is the foundation of our ability to connect with ourselves and with others from a basis of love and respect rather than from fear and aggression. Spiritual life gives us methods to make self-love real rather than abstract.

When I went to India, I wasn't interested in dogma or in rejecting one religious identity to assume another. I also felt that merely studying a religion as opposed to practicing it was like studying someone else's experience-and I was compelled to transform my own. So when I found an introductory meditation course in Bodh Gaya- that sounded right for me, I was happy to begin the process.

I was less happy to discover that meditation wasn't as exotic as I had expected. I had anticipated a wondrous, esoteric set of instructions, delivered in a darkened chamber with a supernatural atmosphere. Instead, my first meditation instructor, in the full light of day, launched my practice with the words, "Sit comfortably, and feel your breath." Feel my breath! I thought in protest, I could have stayed in Buffalo to feel my breath. But I soon found out just how life changing it is to learn to be simple, to fully connect to my experience in a loving way, to sit comfortably and feel my breath.

In a similar vein, I have found that the daily benefits of meditation are less dramatic than I had imagined. Yes, I have undergone profound and subtle changes in how I think and how I see myself in the world. I've learned that I don't have to be limited to who I thought I was as a child or what I thought I was capable of yesterday, or even an hour ago. My meditation practice has freed me from the old, conditioned definition of myself as someone unworthy of love. But in contrast to my initial fantasies, I haven't acquired a steady state of glorious bliss. Meditation hasn't made me happy, loving, and peaceful every single moment of the day. I still have good times and bad, joy and sorrow. But I can roll with the punches more, with less sense of disappointment and personal failure, because I have seen how everything changes all the time.

Meditation has taken me under the disguises we wear in the world to touch an essential truth-we are all alike in wanting to be happy, and alike in our vulnerability to change and suffering. Once I learned how to look deep within, I found the vein of goodness that exists in everyone, the goodness that may be hidden but is never entirely destroyed by the conditions of our lives. Glimpsing this goodness, I've come to feel, to the bottom of my heart, that I deserve to be happy, as does everyone else. Now when I meet a stranger, I feel less afraid, knowing how much we share. And when I meet myself in meditation, I find I am no longer a stranger.

The three keys to meditation

There are numerous forms of meditation practice-some done in silence, others using voice and sound. The techniques I am most familiar with are from one tradition-vipassana, or insight meditation-but the same elements are found in many traditions: concentration, awareness, and lovingkindness.

Concentration

On a daily basis, we can notice that our minds tend to be scattered. We might contemplate making a phone call and end up subsumed in regrets about a phone call we wish we'd made three years ago. Or we can be paralyzed by worry about a situation that might never come to pass. Distraction wastes our life's energy.

Imagine gathering all that energy back into yourself, so that it empowers you, so that it becomes available for you to use consciously. This is what concentration does. Concentration is steadiness of mind, the mental skill we exercise when we are focused. In meditation we focus on a chosen object (the breath, a visualization, a phrase) and practice repeatedly letting go of distractions to return our attention to that object.

Awareness

Through meditation we come closer and closer to the actual, living reality of our bodies and minds. We refine our ability to connect fully and directly to our experience in the moment, no matter what it is. We see ourselves as strong and cowardly, proud and ashamed, confused and clear. We recognize these aspects of our inner world for what they are-passing thoughts and feelings-without becoming lost in the vortex of habitual reaction. For instance, we might have the habit of concluding, "If I feel anger, it means I'm a bad person," and try to deny the anger churning inside. Or our automatic tendency might be to lash out. With awareness, we can draw close to our feelings in a skillful way so we can learn more about them and make conscious choices about how to respond.

Lovingkindness

Spending time paying careful attention to our experience opens our hearts to genuinely loving ourselves for who we are, with all our foibles and imperfections. Devoting some time to meditation is in itself an act of caring for ourselves. If we are accustomed to primarily taking care of others, this is a bold move. We discover that our renewal transforms how we relate to the people in our lives.

The calm and openness we develop through meditation enables us to see others more clearly and lovingly. We might then be more inclined to step forward and deepen our connection to someone, to let go of hurts of the past, or to offer a friendly gesture to someone we might have previously ignored. Loving ourselves is the gateway to loving others.

Getting started: Here are answers to the questions I hear most frequently:

How do I do it?

Sit comfortably, with your back erect. It is fine to sit in a chair or on an arrangement of cushions on the floor. If necessary, you can lie down. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, feeling the breath as it enters your nostrils and fills your chest and abdomen; then release it. Allow the breath to become natural, without forcing it or controlling it. Let your attention rest on one breath at a time.

If your mind wanders, don't be concerned. Notice whatever has captured your attention, then let go of the thought or feeling, and return to the awareness of the breath. In this way, meditation teaches us gentleness and an ability to forgive our mistakes in life and to go on.

I recommend sitting for a 20-minute session if you are just getting started and increasing the time gradually until you are meditating for 30 or 45 minutes. At the end of your meditation period, lovingly acknowledge others in your life—your family or your community, maybe the whole planet. This forms the bridge between our inner work and our resolve to act with more awareness and love in our daily lives.

How do I find the time?

If you can pick a set time and place to meditate each day, it will enhance the sense of sacredness. But if you're not able to sit regularly, you can still benefit. Even the ordinary activities of daily life can be times of meditation when you free yourself from the strictures of habit and the tendency to be only half-alive. Take a walk or eat a meal with full attention. Break the momentum of rushing and busyness in your day by stopping to meditate for just a few minutes; you'll rediscover a deeper sense of yourself and what is most important to you.

What will happen to me when I'm meditating? What will I experience?

Sometimes you will tap into a wellspring of peace. Other times you might feel waves of sleepiness, boredom, anxiety, anger, or sadness. Images may arise, old songs might replay, long-buried memories can surface. Instead of feeling discouraged if you get sleepiness when you want peacefulness, remember that the core components of meditation are concentration, awareness, and lovingkindness. Meditation reveals how continually all the elements of our experience change. It is natural to go through many ups and downs, to encounter new delights and newly awakened conflicts from the subconscious mind. Success in meditation is measured not in terms of whatever may be happening but rather how we are relating to what is happening.

If you feel overwhelmed by thoughts or feelings, use awareness of your breath to anchor your attention to your body. If, for example, you find yourself thinking "I will always be this way" or "If only I were stronger (more patient, smarter, kinder), I wouldn't feel this way," return to the simple truth of the moment—sitting and being aware of your breath.

What do I do when my thoughts just won't stop?

Some people have a mistaken idea that through meditation all thoughts disappear and we enter a state of blankness. There certainly are times of great tranquility when concentration is strong and we have few, if any, thoughts. But other times, we can be flooded with memories, plans, or random thinking. It's important not to blame yourself. Notice that you don't invite your thoughts. You haven't said, "At 6:15 I'd like to be ruminating about the past." Thoughts come and go without our volition, but we don't have to be ruled by them.

Exploring the emotions that fuel obsessive thinking can begin to diminish their power over us. For example, when we look at what lies behind relentless planning, we may see that we hope somehow to control the future, and we fear that without continual planning, what we want will never come to pass. As we relate to such emotions with lovingkindness, we begin to release the worry, restlessness, and remorse that take us away from the present moment both in meditation and in our daily lives.

Can meditation help me deal with physical pain?

What you learn about pain in formal meditation can help you relate to it in your daily life. In meditation, one of the first things you may notice about pain is that when you start to feel it in one part of your body, the rest of your body tenses up. This can increase the pain. Consciously take a deep breath and relax your muscles. As you relax physically, you will discover greater ease of mind.

You can also use the skills of meditation to distinguish physical pain from emotional associations you may have about it. You might find yourself thinking, "I'm a bad or weak person because I have pain, or pain is something shameful that should be hidden. Such attitudes can only make the pain worse. Likewise, when your thoughts leap into the future and you think "This will always hurt, and it will probably get worse," you are burdening yourself with anticipated pain, which in fact may not come. Like all experiences, pain is easier to be with when seen directly, without emotional overlays.

The simple act of sitting for 20 minutes can cause discomfort in your knees or back. If you feel a lot of pain when meditating, it is wise to shift position. If the discomfort is tolerable, you might use the meditation session as a time to learn how to relate to it in a new way: Can you decrease the intensity by accepting it rather than mentally fighting it?

Can meditation help depression?

Depression has many causes. While it is important to investigate its possible biochemical basis and seek out psychotherapeutic help if necessary, meditation may also be useful. Dedicating some time to meditation is a meaningful expression of caring for yourself that can help you move through the mire of feeling unworthy of recovery. And developing the skill of concentration can free you from the trap of obsessive thinking. To be obsessed is to be in bondage to the compulsive repetition of a fixed idea or emotion. As your mind winds tighter and tighter, your identity constricts around that limiting fixation. Learning how to concentrate, you are able to focus gently on a chosen object with increasing ease of mind. As your mind grows quieter and more spacious, you can begin to see self-defeating thought patterns for what they are, & open up to other, more positive options.

You begin to see that the cloud of negativity that we know as depression is made up of many parts, including anger, loss, and guilt. Even though the feelings may be painful, once you see that depression is really many changing states and not one inert, overwhelming entity, it becomes more manageable. Lovingkindness enables you to regard whatever you discover within, even if it's disturbing, with greater compassion. If your depression is persistent or severe, I would strongly encourage you to work with a qualified meditation teacher and seek other professional help.

How do I know if I'm doing it right? Do I need a teacher?

There are many different ways to practice meditation; it's good to experiment until you find one that seems to suit you. If you feel confused about the techniques, it's useful to consult a teacher, speak with more experienced meditators, read a book, or listen to a tape. Success in meditation is not based on accumulating wondrous experiences. You are not in a contest to see how many conscious breaths you can tally up. You are transforming your mind, gently and with compassion for yourself, by beginning again each time your mind wanders and you get lost in thought. You might see changes in your daily life more clearly than in your formal practice. In fact, others may notice the changes before you do, as your conviction that you are capable of loving yourself and others grows stronger.

Some Core Concepts relating to Basic Meditation by Sandra Hammond

Sandra Hammond began the Prairie Sangha (in Illinois) for Mindfulness Meditation in 1990 and she is a graduate of the first Community Dharma Leaders program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

1. Mindfulness Meditation (MM) was taught by the Buddha about 2600 years ago and has been practiced around the world ever since.
 - a. This Buddha, the Awake One, is not the first teaching Buddha; there have been others before who have “turned the wheel of the Dhamma” and each turning is said to last 5,000 years. We are now about half way through this turning of the wheel and the teachings of Gotama Siddhartha, the Buddha, are still available to us.
 - b. It is considered an auspicious condition in our lives that we are in a place and a time where the Dhamma is being taught.

2. Mindfulness is direct, preconceptual awareness and balanced acceptance of the present experience. MM is practiced in formal sitting periods, walking and standing meditation as well as in daily life.

3. 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.
 - a. Over time practice becomes familiar and stable. As practice matures the individual techniques which you learned in the beginning become integrated into a powerful whole just as your fragmented, jumpy mind becomes unified, clear and whole. But first the baby steps, the training wheels.
 - b. Our mentors have all used these “training wheels” and can guide you through the process, which takes 5 weeks, one meeting per week.

4. M M is initially about calming, collecting and taming the mind, not controlling it.
 - a. Meditation is not about following a new set of rules or perfecting a particular state such as being emotionless or thoughtless.
 - b. Once the mind becomes calm practice is about becoming aware of and investigating the nature of the mind as it experiences the sensate world as it produced by the six senses.
 - c. As our minds open we can perceive the nature of impermanence, the natural arising and passing away of all phenomena. Clinging to (or pushing away) what is impermanent is the cause of suffering and dissatisfaction that “things should not to be this way”.

5. MM is a practice used to liberate the mind.
 - a. What are we liberating? We are unharnessing the conceptual mind from fixation with and clinging to experiences as if they were absolutely real, substantial and independent from the mental and sensory process that produced them.
 - b. Ordinarily we use our conceptual mind in collaboration with our senses to produce the experiences we have as human beings. However the mind is boundless - much greater than the cognitive functioning itself. This greater mind is called chitta - it is heart- mind located not in our neurology, but in the heart center.

6. In MM we cultivate bodhichitta, the awakened mind, the enlightened heart. How do we liberate chitta?
 - a. First we train the conceptual mind to calm down and learn stillness, tranquility. This quieting of the mind is necessary to establish each time we meditate until it easily establishes itself in tranquility.
 - b. Then we train the mind to remain in more sustained direct contact with sensation, the basis of the mental constructs we are continually forming.
 - c. With such sustained contact we are in a position to recognize the conceptual mind at work as it constructs “fabrications” which are the mental concepts we use.
 - d. With increasing clarity insight emerges into the nature of all phenomena - including ourselves.
 - e. Finally we liberate the mind into its own free nature. Mind can know itself. This is the awakening of the enlightened mind - Bodhichitta, Buddha Mind - unfabricated, clear and unafflicted.

7. None of this means we stop thinking or feeling, seeing or hearing - we are just no longer bound by the senses, thoughts and emotions.

8. Mindfulness meditation is a technology and when properly applied it yields a particular outcome - the capacity to know the real nature of experience.
- It brings us into direct contact with our experiences, which is not how we usually relate to the world.
 - This directness yields a “knowing” (satisampajanna) that is free from concept but is done initially by harnessing the power of the conceptual mind itself.
 - It puts us in the position of knowing for ourselves the nature of reality beyond appearances and concepts.
9. Central to the Buddha’s teaching is the awareness of a Middle Way in life.
- It is a life in balance between extremes.
 - It is learning to live with a balanced mind, open in all circumstances.
 - As our minds opens the heart of wisdom and compassion, bodhichitta, arises as well. This is a kind, nonjudgmental state of acceptance of ourselves and others.
 - It is the path to liberation from suffering of clinging.
10. Ehi passeko means “come see for yourself” and is at the center of this practice.
- In MM we are asked to inquire into and investigate the nature of experience and the mind itself by ourselves, using MM as our technology and Dhamma as a guide.
 - This radical activity is accomplished by establishing mindful awareness of moment to moment experience. This knowing (through experience) of the phenomenal world as it appears and disappears is the basic outcome of meditation.
 - Once we have established continuity of mindfulness, we can come to know the true nature of phenomena with the penetrative aspect of practice called vipassana, insight.
11. For the practice to come to fruition it is essential to open our hearts and lives to the experience of refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. It is worth contemplating what refuge means and to chant the refuge chant at the beginning of each sitting.
12. Dana means generosity (that which is freely given) in Pali the language used to record the teachings a few hundred years after the death of the Buddha. It was considered by the Buddha to be the foremost basis of spiritual life and is integrated into our practice by offering dana each time we receive a teaching and in supporting the sangha.

Staying Present from *Insight Meditation* by Joseph Goldstein

How can we remain present and mindful when we move from a meditation sitting or a meditation retreat to our other activities in the world? Making that crucial transition from awareness on the cushion to awareness of daily activities fundamentally affects our freedom. Practicing mindfulness of the body is one of the easiest ways to stay present in daily life. This mode of awareness works so well that the Buddha devoted many teachings to it. He said that mindfulness of the body leads to nirvana, to freedom, to the unconditioned. So though this practice is very simple, it is in no way trivial or superficial.

Our body is quite obvious as an object of attention, not subtle like thoughts or emotions. We can stay aware of the body easily but only if we remember to do so. The remembering is difficult, not the awareness. Remember to use your body as a vehicle for awakening. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this book, What are the sensations in your body at this moment? When you put the book down and stand, feel the movements of standing, of walking to the next activity; of how you lie down at the end of the day. Be in your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn, it is as simple as that.

Staying present in the body is one reason that walking meditation has been so helpful to my own practice. After doing it for thousands of hours over many years, it actually becomes quite natural to feel the movement of my feet and legs as I walk. That habitual presence with the sensations of walking grounds my awareness in other parts of everyday life.

You do not have to practice walking meditation, or any other mindfulness of the body for hundreds or thousands of hours to feel the benefit. Just patiently practice feeling what is there—and the body is always there—until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?

It is very simple. Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.

Another way to develop a strong investigative mind outside of sitting practice and meditation retreats is to pay particular attention when your experience becomes intense or difficult. Some of our most incisive moments of opening and insight can come at times of difficulty, physical pain, illness, emotional turmoil, danger, any of those moments of heightened experience that come to us all.

Simply because an event is strong, because it naturally rivets our attention anyway, we have a good moment to look carefully, precisely. We bring investigation to bear on what is happening and on our response to it. Am I getting caught? How am I getting hooked? What is skillful means in this situation? Where can I open more or let be?

A legend says that long ago a Buddhist monk was caught by a tiger in the jungle. His fellow monks were unable to help him physically but from a distance they yelled encouragement to him: "Stay aware! Pay attention!" It is said that, in the extraordinary intensity of being mauled, pulled down, and eaten, this monk attained all the stages of enlightenment in rapid succession before he died. I do not particularly recommend that you go into the jungle looking for hungry tigers in order to advance quickly on the path! All too often, in one form or another, the tigers come to us.

Then it is simply a question of whether we will use them to spiritual advantage or not. If we do not, we may condition ourselves more deeply in habitual patterns that keep us in bondage. If we do, then strong experiences can serve as boosters that propel us to liberation.

Meditation In Everyday Life, excerpts from Mindfulness In Plain English, Chap. 15 by Bhante Gunaratana

.... Meditation that is not applied to daily living is sterile and limited. The purpose of Vipassana meditation is nothing less than the radical and permanent transformation of your entire sensory and cognitive experience. It is meant to revolutionize the whole of your life experience. Those periods of seated practice are times set aside for instilling new mental habits. You learn new ways to receive and understand sensation. You develop new methods of dealing with conscious thought, and new modes of attending to the incessant rush of your own emotions. These new mental behaviors must be made to carry over into the rest of your life.

Otherwise, meditation remains dry and fruitless, a theoretical segment of your existence that is unconnected to all the rest. Some effort to connect these two segments is essential. A certain amount of carry-over will take place spontaneously, but the process will be slow and unreliable. You are very likely to be left with the feeling that you are getting nowhere and to drop the process as unrewarding.

One of the most memorable events in your meditation career is the moment when you first realize that you are meditating in the midst of some perfectly ordinary activity. You are driving down the freeway or carrying out the trash and it just turns on by itself. This unplanned outpouring of the skills you have been so carefully fostering is a genuine joy. It gives you a tiny window on the future. You catch a spontaneous glimpse of what the practice really means. The possibility strikes you that this transformation of consciousness could actually become a permanent feature of your experience. You realize that you could actually spend the rest of your days standing aside from the debilitating clamoring of your own obsessions, no longer frantically hounded by your own needs and greed. You get a tiny taste of what it is like to just stand aside and watch it all flow past. It's a magic moment.

That vision is liable to remain unfulfilled, however, unless you actively seek to promote the carry-over process. The most important moment in meditation is the instant you leave the cushion. When your practice session is over, you can jump up and drop the whole thing, or you can bring those skills with you into the rest of your activities.

It is crucial for you to understand what meditation is. It is not some special posture, and it's not just a set of mental exercises. Meditation is a cultivation of mindfulness and the application of that mindfulness once cultivated. You do not have to sit to meditate. You can meditate while washing the dishes. You can meditate in the shower, or roller skating, or typing letters. Meditation is awareness, and it must be applied to each and every activity of one's life. This isn't easy.

We specifically cultivate awareness through the seated posture in a quiet place because that's the easiest situation in which to do so. Meditation in motion is harder. Meditation in the midst of fast-paced noisy activity is harder still. And meditation in the midst of intensely egoistic activities like romance or arguments is the ultimate challenge. The beginner will have his hands full with less stressful activities.

Yet the ultimate goal of practice remains: to build one's concentration and awareness to a level of strength that will remain unwavering even in the midst of the pressures of life in contemporary society. Life offers many challenges and the serious meditator is very seldom bored.

Carrying your meditation into the events of your daily life is not a simple process. Try it and you will see. That transition point between the end of your meditation session and the beginning of 'real life' is a long jump. It's too long for most of us. We find our calm and concentration evaporating within minutes, leaving us apparently no better off than before. In order to bridge this gulf, Buddhists over the centuries have devised an array of exercises aimed at smoothing the transition. They take that jump and break it down into little steps. Each step can be practiced by itself.

Stolen Moments

The concept of wasted time does not exist for a serious meditator. Little dead spaces during your day can be turned to profit. Every spare moment can be used for meditation. Sitting anxiously in the dentist's office, meditate on your anxiety. Feeling irritated while standing in a line at the bank, meditate on irritation. Bored, twiddling your thumbs at the bus stop, meditate on boredom. Try to stay alert and aware throughout the day. Be mindful of exactly what is taking place right now, even if it is tedious drudgery. Take advantage of moments when you are alone. Take advantage of activities that are largely mechanical. Use every spare second to be mindful. Use all the moments you can.

Concentration On All Activities

You should try to maintain mindfulness of every activity and perception through the day, starting with the first perception when you awake, and ending with the last thought before you fall asleep. This is an incredibly tall goal to shoot for. Don't expect to be able to achieve this work soon. Just take it slowly and let your abilities grow over time. The most feasible way to go about the task is to divide your day up into chunks. Dedicate a certain interval to mindfulness of posture, then extend this mindfulness to other simple activities: eating, washing, dressing, and so forth. Some time during the day, you can set aside 15 minutes or so to practice the observation of specific types of mental states: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings, for instance; or the hindrances, or thoughts. The specific routine is up to you. The idea is to get practice at spotting the various items, and to preserve your state of mindfulness as fully as you can throughout the day.

Try to achieve a daily routine in which there is as little difference as possible between seated meditation and the rest of your experience. Let the one slide naturally into the other. Your body is almost never still. There is always motion to observe. At the very least, there is breathing. Your mind never stops chattering, except in the very deepest states of concentration. There is always something coming up to observe. If you seriously apply your meditation, you will never be at a loss for something worthy of your attention.

Your practice must be made to apply to your everyday living situation. That is your laboratory. It provides the trials and challenges you need to make your practice deep and genuine. It's the fire that purifies your practice of deception and error, the acid test that shows you when you are getting somewhere and when you are fooling yourself. If your meditation isn't helping you to cope with everyday conflicts and struggles, then it is shallow. If your day-to-day emotional reactions are not becoming clearer and easier to manage, then you are wasting your time. And you never know how you are doing until you actually make that test.

The practice of mindfulness is supposed to be a universal practice. You don't do it sometimes and drop it the rest of the time. You do it all the time. Meditation that is successful only when you are withdrawn in some soundproof ivory tower is still undeveloped. Insight meditation is the practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness. The meditator learns to pay bare attention to the birth, growth, and decay of all the phenomena of the mind. He turns from none of it, and he lets none of it escape. Thoughts and emotions, activities and desires, the whole show. He watches it all and he watches it continuously. It matters not whether it is lovely or horrid, beautiful or shameful. He sees the way it is and the way it changes. No aspect of experience is excluded or avoided. It is a very thoroughgoing procedure.

If you are moving through your daily activities and you find yourself in a state of boredom, then meditate on your boredom. Find out how it feels, how it works, and what it is composed of. If you are angry, meditate on the anger. Explore the mechanics of anger. Don't run from it. If you find yourself sitting in the grip of a dark depression, meditate on the depression. Investigate depression in a detached and inquiring way. Don't flee from it blindly. Explore the maze and chart its pathways. That way you will be better able to cope with the next depression that comes along.

Meditating your way through the ups and downs of daily life is the whole point of Vipassana. This kind of practice is extremely rigorous and demanding, but it engenders a state of mental flexibility that is beyond comparison. A meditator keeps his mind open every second. He is constantly investigating life, inspecting his own experience, viewing existence in a detached and inquisitive way. Thus he is constantly open to truth in any form, from any source, and at any time. This is the state of mind you need for liberation.