

# A Guide to Introducing Mindfulness to Youth



## Foundation

The foundation for meditation is virtue. I recommend taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and observing the *Ajiva Attamaka Sila* as found in the section on *Sila* in the Noble Eightfold Path before one begins the practice of meditation. As a Seeker of Truth we are working towards freedom from suffering. It is important then to ensure that we do not intentionally cause suffering to any living beings. When observing these precepts one expands right speech to ensure restraint in harsh speech, slander and gossip. One also includes right livelihood. Some feel that restraint from intoxicants and harmful drugs is excluded in these precepts. This is not the case. One can not begin the training of the mind with an intoxicated or drugged mind. This is a pre requisite and included in each of the eight precepts that we observe daily. While observing the precepts incorporate the practice of the sublime states, loving kindness (*metta*) compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*muditha*) and equanimity (*upekka*).

## Posture

The Buddha recommended 4 postures for meditation. Sitting, walking, standing and lying down. From these the most commonly used form of meditation is sitting meditation. This is interchanged with walking meditation for purposes of physical comfort. Moving from one posture to another especially during a meditation retreat enhances the meditation practice as it is conducive to longer periods of mindfulness. One does not change the meditation, one changes the posture. One retains one's mindfulness while changing the posture and object of concentration.

The quality of the meditation is more important than the duration. As such a 15 minute sit for a beginner, where one is mindful, is of greater value than a 1 hour sit where one's mind is agitated and restless. Begin with a duration of time that is right for you. At this stage consistency is important and a short sit is more conducive to a daily practice.

## Sitting posture

Any one who has seen a Samadhi Buddha statue will agree that it is one of the most noble, peaceful, serene and beautiful statues in the world. When one is meditating one is sitting in this noble posture of the Buddha. As such during the meditation sit we will remember the Samadhi Buddha statue and sit in this noble manner. We will not be restless, looking for comfort, constantly changing our posture. Instead we will be poised and calm just like the Buddha with noble bearing. A still body leads to a still mind.

You can sit in the lotus posture as seen in the Buddha statue, half lotus posture or as I sit in the Burmese style of meditation. I do not cross my feet at the ankle as I find that this causes pressure and pain at the ankles. I tuck my right foot close to my body and place the left foot adjacent to it without the feet crossing. I use a small meditation cushion as it helps to keep my back straight and I can then sit comfortably for longer periods. You must experiment and find the posture that suits you best. Sit comfortably with your back straight and your body relaxed. I keep my eyes closed as it reduces distractions. Then place your hands on your lap, the right hand over the left.

### **Meditation on Loving Kindness**

One begins the practice of meditation with loving kindness. This is important as it softens the hearts and opens it to love and forgiveness. Through the practice of virtue we have emphasized right speech and right action. We are now working on the mind to complete the practice of virtue. Starting with your self one spreads loving kindness to one's parents, teachers, loved one's, the neutral one's and those that have caused us pain and hurt. Or alternatively as the practice deepens we spread loving kindness to all beings in all directions. One practices loving kindness to others in the same manner as one does for oneself because like one self all beings want happiness; all beings want freedom from suffering.

It is also important to ensure that past hurts that has resulted in resentment are not lying dormant or active in the mind. If not these hurts will dominate the mind and hinder progress. Similarly it is important to forgive yourself for hurt you may have caused others. *Metta* meditation for self for past hurt and *metta* to those that have hurt you (or you have hurt) will over time lead to forgiveness. If one placed a red hot coal on your palm you would drop it instantly. You would not let it burn your palm. Yet we continue to harbour grudges and resentment against those that have hurt our minds. These resentments are burning our minds and causing as much or greater suffering than the red hot coal you dropped instantly. Loving kindness, overtime, reduces these resentments and hurts. A resentment and anger free mind is important for the results of meditation to blossom. So, begin your practice of mediation with thoughts of loving kindness to your self and all beings.

### **Meditation on Breathing Awareness**

The purpose of mindfulness of breath is to achieve one pointedness, concentration or *Samadhi* so that insight can arise. Tranquility and calmness are a by-product. As such Samadhi meditation is also known as *Samatha* or tranquility meditation. One needs a concentrated mind to see things as they are. A scattered agitated mind is not conducive to insight or wisdom.

There are many methods of focusing the mind on the breath. Some teachers advocate using a word such as *Buddho*, noting of the in and out breath or counting to keep the mind on the breath. Any of these methods are acceptable and lead to concentration. I recommend sensation of breath at the entrance, near the tip of the nose, upper lip and nostrils. While this method is more challenging for the beginner it is preferable as the transition to insight or *Vipassana* meditation is easier. When one feels the breath and can experience the difference between the in and out breath one has moved to insight.

When one meets a new class mate one begins by getting to know the person. As you get to know the person better you form a friendship. From now on your best friend is going to be your breath. You will observe the breath, play with the breath and learn everything about your breath by observing your breath mindfully. Your breath is with you all the time. So it can be done very easily as time permits. You will be surprised to find how much you can find out about your self by the nature of your breath. Observe your breath when you are calm, now observe it when you are angry or agitated. Observe the breath when you are rested now observe the breath just after you have run up the stairs. With time you will know the state of your mind by just observing the changes in your breath.

We will begin our practice by taking three long hard breaths and focus our mind on the area between the upper lip, nostrils and tip of the nose. Then let the breath come naturally. As the breath goes into your body and out of your body it leaves it mark - A very soft subtle sensation which at the beginning may not be felt at all. But over time one will feel the caress of the breath. Focus your mind on this point. The place the breath touches as it enters the body and the place the breath touches when it leaves the body. Do not follow the breath into the lungs. Just as a gate keeper watches the gate and does not follow the entrants into the building one must keep ones mind at the entrance. Let the breath come naturally. Do not force it or change it. Then examine the breath.

Is it a long breath or is it a short breath? Where does it touch? Does it touch on the tip of the nose, the upper lip or in the nostrils? How does it feel? Is it warm or cold? How does the in breath differ from the out breath? Get to know your breath, your best friend. You will be with the breath for a long time. This life giving breath which you have taken for granted for so long will soon be your best friend. This breath, your best friend will slowly but surely lead you to concentration, tranquility calm, and peace. The Buddha used mindfulness of breath for Awakening.

It is just seconds into the practice and ones mind has wondered. How can this be? You may be disappointed, even angry with your self. It is the nature of the mind to wonder. This is quite normal. Bring it gently back to the breath. No agitation, no judgement. With compassion to yourself just bring the mind back to the point where one feels the sensation of breath. Your job is to catch the wondering mind as soon as possible. Each time it wonders catch it and bring the unruly mind back to your breath. Overtime you will recognise a change in the quality of your breath. It may be slower, calmer and more subtle. End your practice with *metta* to your self and to all beings. Then share the merit of your practice (*patipatti puja*) with all beings.

To enhance your practice you can include mindfulness in your daily life. Whether you are eating, reading, playing or studying try to be mindful. That is, give all of your attention and focus to the one thing that you are doing. Do not multitask. Specially be mindful to reduce and eliminate the inner chatter in your mind. When you are reading you should be only reading. When you are listening you should be only listening. Watch your mind and see if it wonders away from your primary task at hand. If it does, bring it back to the primary task.

As you move to longer periods of meditation you can alternate sitting meditation with walking meditation. Select a clear strip of land about 15 feet long. Walk slowly back and forth in this area. Begin by mindfully noting the left and right foot. When you turn be mindful and note the stopping and the turning. Then as you get more experience note the lifting and placing of the foot.

**Note:** do not over exert your self. The duration of your practice should be right for you. Balance your studies, extra curricular activities and social activities with your meditation.

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