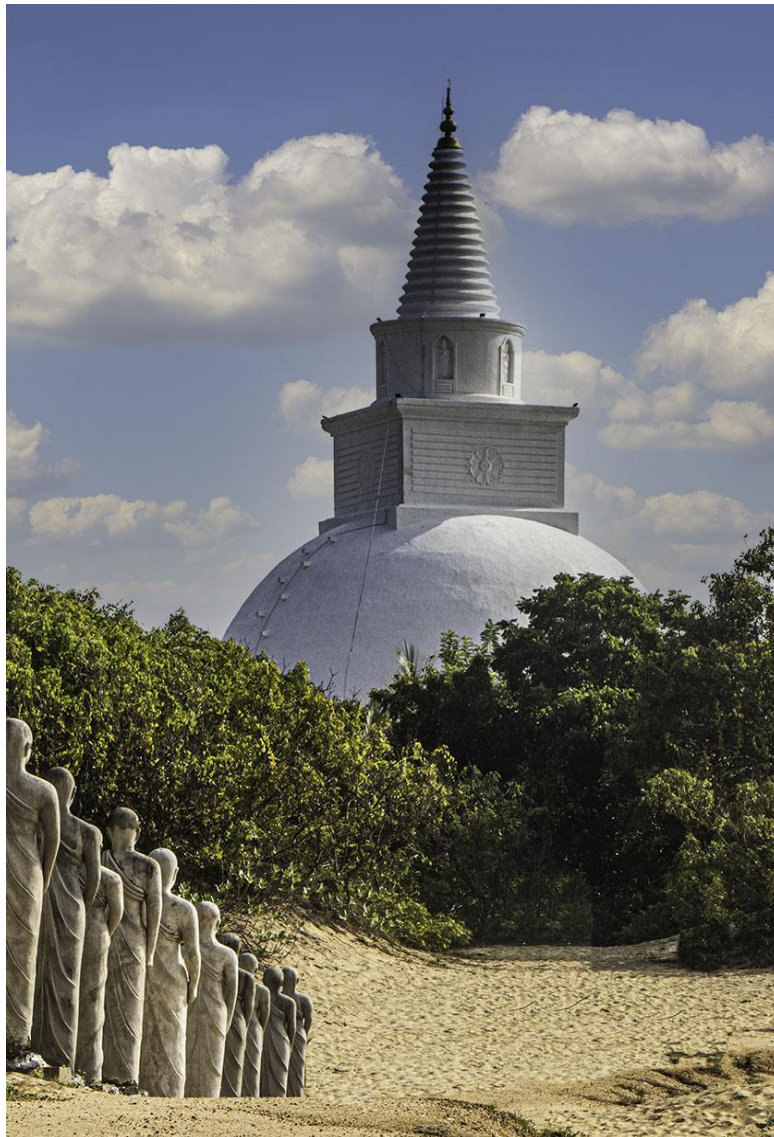


Mindfulness – The Art of Living

A Meditation Guide



Based on the Teachings of Acharya Godwin Samararatne

Based on the teachings of Acarya Godwin Samararatne's
Published and Recorded talks

**Cover: Muhudhu Mahā Vihāra
Pottuvil, Sri Lanka**

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Godwin Samararatne

Acharya Godwin Samararatne was a well-known lay Mindfulness Meditation teacher in Sri Lanka. During his teaching career he was based at his meditation Centre in Nilambe, located in the central hill country of Sri Lanka near the City of Kandy. After his passing away in 2000, tributes poured in from devotees all over the world attesting to the positive impact of Acharya Godwin and his teachings on their lives.

Godwin based his teachings on his own practice and the understanding he gained of the teaching through his practice. He also often discussed the teachings with experienced monks, scholars and meditators. Acharya Godwin's reputation spread in Sri Lanka and overseas. In the mid-1980's he was invited to teach in Europe and South Africa and later his visits and talks extended to Hongkong and Singapore. Before long Acharya Godwin became an Internationally acclaimed much loved teacher in Sri Lanka and many countries around the world including the United Kingdom, Germany and Holland.

Acharya Godwin is well-respected and appreciated for his ability to translate the Dhamma into a language relevant to people's everyday lives and concerns. What was so special about Acharya Godwin was that he lived what he taught – his life and his teachings were seamless. He has the ability to put the Buddha's teachings of suffering and the way out of suffering into his own simple words which were relevant to the everyday lives of Buddhist and non-Buddhists. His deepest concern was to help people free themselves from suffering. Having realized the Fruits of the Path himself, he brought great wisdom and compassion to his teachings of the Dhamma to others. He also brought lightness and humour to his teaching and day to day interactions with people.

Acharya Godwin did not see mindfulness meditation as a special experience. He saw it as a spiritual path, a way of life that met all the challenges and difficulties of everyday life. He encouraged finding out the simple truths of the Dhamma by incorporating awareness, and compassion into our everyday life so that we could experience an unfolding of our inherent capacity for wisdom and compassion. He believed that we could find a lightness and joy and contentment in our lives just the way it is by practicing and consistently applying the tools and techniques he taught. Not only was he a living example of his teachings but many meditators who took his teachings to heart were able to experience the benefits of the practice. Acharya Godwin's simple but profound meditation techniques and teachings are still available to all interested persons for their own spiritual journey at the Nilambe Meditation Centre in Sri Lanka.

Nilambe Meditation Centre
Kandy, Sri Lanka
<http://www.godwin-home-page.net/>

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Editor`s Note

I first heard about the teachings of Acharya Godwin in January 2017 during a personal meditation retreat I attended at a monastery. A guest introduced me to Acharya Godwin's teachings by giving me a much-used copy of one of his talks that inspired me to preserve the tattered copy by typing out the first chapter of this book as an article which I shared with some of my family and friends.

However, it was three years later in 2020 in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, lock downs and social distancing that I found the article I had written, and decided to pursue his teachings and document some of them as Mindfulness – The Art of Living to target busy young adults in the West. This book is directed to all persons interested in developing a happy, calm and peaceful state of mind that leads to contentment in one's daily life. But also, to those that want to work towards freedom from stress and suffering by experiencing insight into the reality of impermanence, stress/suffering and the reality of not-self. Special focus is given to the challenges faced by busy modern-day adults with demanding careers and many obligations. Accessing the True Dhamma and attending retreats at monasteries and Meditation Centres may not be an option for many who are juggling careers and the needs of children. This book gives you a very strong foundation by incorporating mindfulness, kindness and compassion in your daily routine and sharing the opportunity to practice "knowing your mind, molding or shaping your mind and working towards release of the mind" as per the Establishment of Mindfulness (*Satipathāna Sutta*) of the Buddha.

The book is based on Acharya Godwin's teachings found on the internet and other teachers recommended by him. Readers who are inspired by the teachings should explore all Acharya Godwin's teachings available online. They should also visit the monastery in Nilambe Sri Lanka and others recommended by Acharya Godwin, as required. There are many organizations that teach mindfulness meditation where the goal is calm and tranquility, but it is a challenge to find teachers that use simple language and techniques of awareness, kindness, and compassion where the goal is contentment and joy in their daily life, and freeing themselves from suffering (Awakening).

It is hoped that this introduction to Mindfulness -The Art of Living will inspire you to work towards Full Awakening. With this goal in mind, this book was compiled and edited with great care and effort. Any omissions and errors in the material are due to the inadequacy of the editor. Your forgiveness for any shortcomings is appreciated.

May all beings be happy and peaceful

Radhika Abeysekera
January 03 2021

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Homage to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully Awakened One!

Homage to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully Awakened One!

Homage to the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully Awakened One!



Chapter 1

The Foundation for Mindfulness Meditation

*The not-doing of evil
The performing of the skillful
The cleansing of one's mind
This is the teaching of the Awakened.*

Dhammapada 183

Bhāvanā

The Pali word Bhavana is translated to English as meditation. The literal translation of Bhavana is translated as development, purifying or the cleansing of the mind. Meditation Centres are now available all over the world in many countries in many religions and all kinds of mind training are taught under the name of meditation. In the context of the teaching of the Buddha, Bhavana is a daily practice that is performed in three stages¹.

1. Knowing your mind
2. Shaping or molding your mind
3. Releasing your mind (from stress and suffering).

1. Knowing your Mind

The Blessed One had the ability to read and know the mind of others. He would assess the mind of his monks and nuns and select the appropriate discourse and teachings based on the spiritual readiness of the yogi. The Buddha is no longer with us and there are very few monks and nuns who have the ability to do this. As such, we have to constantly observe our minds, experiment and get to know our minds so that we can select the appropriate teachings for our spiritual growth.

An easy and effective way to begin is to observe your mind whenever you are experiencing stress and suffering (*dukkha*) and when you are feeling joy, happiness and peace of mind (*suka*). No one wants suffering. We all want joy, happiness and peace of mind.

¹ The Analysis of The Establishment of Mindfulness. (*Satipatthāna Vibhanga Sutta*)

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Stress, Suffering and Regret

Let us take an example. The stress and discomfort are a result of anger resulting from something unpleasant that someone said or did to you. Or take an example when you felt stress and discomfort because of the arrogant and bossy ways of a coworker. Evaluate and look for the cause of suffering. Examine your emotions and evaluate by asking questions such as:

How close are you to this person? Is it someone you know well or a total stranger?
Do you get angry with every one or is it with just those that are close to you, that you refer to as 'mine'?
Is this an isolated incident or a recurring event? Are you quick to get angry over trivial things? Does it happen often?

Observe your mind over a period of time. What happens when you think about this incident a week later?

With constant observation of the mind, you may see the following trends:

Thinking of a stressful event over and over again results in sustained anger. In fact, it escalates the anger and the event is at times exaggerated and coloured.

Most people take out their anger on those that are close to them. In fact, the cause for the anger may be something that a co-worker or associate said or did at work that was percolating in your mind, but the outcome or result was harsh words directed at your spouse or your son for some trivial un-related incident.

People often control their anger with strangers and colleagues at work because it is not acceptable and not professional but take it out on those who are close to them. A calm and poised image is important in your professional life but your family will love you no matter what!

A parent or role model used anger and harsh language on you. As such this is acceptable behavior!

Anger flares up when a person does not behave the way you want. Your expectations have not been met.

More often than not you regret the outburst of anger later.

The person who hurt you has forgotten all about the incident and may be even unaware of the effect of their words or actions. You are still suffering and harbouring anger many years later.

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Before long, you will be watching your mind more often. You will see the slight change in breath before the onset of negative emotions that lead to suffering. Through the practice of letting go, restrain and the sublime states² you will over time be able to reduce and eliminate the states of mind that lead to stress, suffering and regret.

Happiness and Peace of Mind

Recently I had the good fortune to stay at a monastery for a long-term self-retreat. I also had the opportunity to observe and speak with many others who stayed as guests during this period. As they were visiting from many different countries and very diverse religious backgrounds, I was curious to find out as to why they had come to the monastery. What was their spiritual goal and what were they working towards? Many answers were given.

One answer stood out. Coming from an affluent developed country the yogis were on their way to visit their parents. They had taken a week off their vacation to visit and meditate at the monastery because of the happiness and peace of mind they felt each time they came.

This is what you should look for in your mind. Begin by watching your mind for events that triggered happiness and a sense of peace in your mind.

Evaluate and look for the cause of joy and peace of mind. Let us take an example. Let us focus on the joy and happiness you felt after an act of genuine kindness of a stranger. You could also take an example when an act of generosity or kindness that you did left a lasting sense of goodwill and happiness.

Question and evaluate as before. Then develop the skillful thoughts deeds and action that lead to joy and happiness. Thoughts of letting go, good-will and harmlessness will result in speech and actions which will lead to joy, happiness and peace of mind. Observe the changes in your daily life. Cultivate the states of mind that lead to joy and happiness and reflect on these actions.

2. Shaping or Molding your Mind

You have already begun to shape and mold your mind. The Buddha recommended generosity, virtue and meditation to shape and mold (develop) your mind to states of joy and happiness. Now through experimentation and observation of the mind you have seen for yourself that generosity or letting go and virtue which begins with restrain and leads to the practice of the sublime states leads to joy, happiness and peace of mind. Use every opportunity you get to seek out acts of kindness and use words that will bring joy and

² Practices of kindness, affection, goodwill, compassion, joy in others happiness and equanimity that result in joyful and peaceful states of mind.

happiness to others. Observe others just as you observe yourself and look for the impact of your kindness. At times a smile or a gentle clasp of your hand says more than words. Seek out opportunities for the practice of goodwill and loving kindness. Volunteer your services and help those in need. Then continue to observe your mind. Make this a daily habit that happens naturally and constantly in the waking hours. You will notice that you are well liked by all and that you now have genuine friends with similar interests. Like you, they are interested in the welfare and wellbeing of all persons and beings.

3. Releasing the Mind from Stress and Suffering - Awakening

You have now begun the process of cleansing your mind. You now also have a strong foundation for the formal training of releasing the mind from suffering. By observing your mind and seeing for yourself that thoughts, speech and acts of letting go, goodwill and harmlessness lead to joy and happiness you have changed your lifestyle. The formal training of tranquility and insight meditation will lead to the elimination of the roots that lie deep within your mind. Sitting and walking meditation together with the daily practice of observing the mind (mindfulness) will lead to the release of the mind from stress and suffering.

Every discourse that the Buddha dispensed leads to the Awakening of his disciples. The discourses were chosen carefully based on the needs and the spiritual maturity of the devotees. The discourse on the Establishment of Mindfulness (*Satipatthāna Sutta*) was dispensed by the Buddha as a comprehensive teaching for all persons to use for Awakening.

This deep teaching which was given in the city of Kuru which had many monks, nuns and a population of highly developed men and women was in the Buddha's words "The Direct Way to Awakening". He claimed that if practiced in the appropriate manner as directed, that it could lead to awakening in seven days or seven weeksor, seven years." You have now learned how to observe and get to know your mind. You will be learning the application of the *Satipatthāna Analysis*, gradually over the next few chapters. It is up to you to use the appropriate Meditation at the appropriate time. Observe and watch the mind constantly and experiment and look for the results. You are seeking the end of suffering.



Chapter 2

The Importance of Mindfulness

*Let not a person revive the past,
Or on the future, build his hopes.
For the past is left behind -
And the future has yet to be reached.
Instead with Insight, let him see
Each presently arisen state.
Let him know that and be sure
Without doubt, unshaken.*

Bhaddekaratta Sutta - Majjima Nikāya

In this chapter and the following few chapters, we will be discussing the importance and application of mindfulness in your daily life. You have now had the opportunity to be aware of your feelings and emotions and to experiment with molding the mind by changing your lifestyle away from thoughts, speech and action that result in unhappy mind states towards thoughts, speech and actions that lead to happy mind states. We will continue this process with real life examples.

The Absence of Mindfulness

Let us begin with what will happen to us if we do not have mindfulness. We will become like robots and do things habitually, automatically and mechanically like machines. This is the technological age where everything is done quickly with automation and more and more gadgets are available to save time, and we humans are responding to this mechanized world by becoming more and more like machines. By doing this we are forgetting the art of living.

This is unfortunate because in becoming like machines, humans are losing the sense of the importance of feeling. When human beings don't experience the very important aspect of feelings in themselves, then they cannot feel love for themselves and others. Also, they cannot feel warmth for themselves and others. Perhaps this explains why there is such a lot of violence in the modern world. We become more and more violent towards ourselves, and more and more violent towards others. All this is related to an absence of awareness, to not

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knowing what is happening in our mind and body. Therefore, this is the first point I want to make about the importance of mindfulness or present moment awareness of your body and mind.

Experience the Present Moment

A very important aspect of mindfulness is that it helps us to experience the present moment, the here and the now. Mindfulness is often defined as non judgemental present moment awareness of one's body and mind. It is funny to think that most of the time during the day we either live in the past, thinking about what has happened, or we live in the future, dwelling on what is going to happen. But the past and the future are not real - only the present is real. Therefore, it is clear that human beings, because of their lack of present moment awareness, are living in an imaginary (unreal) world which does not correspond to reality.

Let me give an example, to make this clearer. Physically you may be present here, you may even see me, but mentally you may be somewhere else completely. To be completely present, and to know what I am saying, you have to be in the present here and now. Otherwise, as I said, physically you will be present but mentally you will be elsewhere. A meditation master described his practice as: When I eat, I eat; when I walk, I walk; when I sleep, I sleep. The words sound very simple, but this means that he was being present with what he was doing, most of the time.

An interesting question arises from this statement. What did the meditation master mean when he said "when he sleeps, he sleeps"? One interpretation of this is that with the dreams that we see, even when we are asleep, we are in a half-awake state. We do not really experience a deep sleep. However, for most of us when we are awake during the day, the opposite happens. We are half-asleep! This is what we call living! If you really want to start living, then you have to develop this very important quality of being present, alert, and awake. That is why the Buddha is called the Fully Awakened One. The whole practice of meditation and practice of mindfulness is a way of awakening our mind and awakening the Buddha-nature in us. And when we awaken the Buddha-nature within, the quality of living becomes very different.

Now please realise that being in the present doesn't mean that we don't have to use thoughts about the past and the future. Sometimes we have to plan about the future. If you did not plan about the future, you would not have come here. And if you forget the past you will not be able to go back to your home! Therefore, what is important for us is, through present moment awareness, to see for ourselves how we are using the past and the future.

Psychologists say that sometimes depression and sadness are due to the way we are relating to the past, and that anxiety is due to the way we are relating to the future. With awareness, we need to understand how to use the past and the future consciously and deliberately, and then at other times we need to be present in the here and now.

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A Guided Meditation in Mindfulness

To begin with, we try to feel happy. Feel happy that you came here early morning to listen to a talk and that now you are practising mindfulness meditation. Let us spend a few minutes just feeling happy with ourselves, that we have this opportunity to learn to meditate. Feel happy that you are trying to develop this quality of mindfulness, awareness, and of being awake to the present moment. Let us now feel grateful that we have got this opportunity to meditate. Others in your family may have supported your decision and given you this opportunity. Let us be grateful for their kindness and generosity.

Feeling grateful is a very important spiritual quality that you may develop. Can we feel grateful that we can sit completely still? Can you become conscious, aware that your body is sitting completely still and that it is completely relaxed?

Let us now experience what it is to be in the present moment. Can you be with the peace and stillness in this room? Can you feel it now? Not thinking about the past, not thinking about the future but feeling the peace in this room, now. The past is gone, we cannot change the past. The future has yet to come. Let us experience the joy of the present moment.

If thoughts about the past and thoughts about the future arise in your mind, gently let go of them and come back to the present moment, the here and the now. What are you feeling?

With awareness you are learning to let go of your thoughts, you are learning to develop mastery over your thoughts by learning to just let go of them, and then to come back to the present moment. Just feeling, just knowing the stillness, just feeling the peace in this room. Maybe it is so quiet that you do not even hear any sounds.

Now please open your eyes slowly, consciously and mindfully. And as you change your posture, please do it slowly, consciously, and mindfully. Please do not think that the meditation is over. Just continue to know what is happening in the mind and body.



Chapter 3

Mindfulness or Present Moment Awareness in Everyday Life

*Meditation is related to ordinary things, not extraordinary, special things.
Some people have the wrong idea,
that meditation is about having some special, extraordinary experience.
But when you consider some of the meditation techniques,
they are ordinary things, simple things.
Like being aware of the breath, being conscious of walking, and
being aware of daily activities.
Then, these ordinary things become extraordinary!*

The Buddha instructed us to be aware and mindful in our daily activities. We have become so used to doing these daily activities that we are like machines. However, if you can really learn to practise mindfulness, present moment awareness, in everyday life then meditation becomes a way of life.

This is very important. We will begin with small repetitive things that we do daily like eating, drinking, brushing our teeth, combing our hair, studying or working. Today we are going to learn how we integrate our ordinary, daily life, with mindfulness meditation. Otherwise, what happens is the daily life is one thing, and mindfulness meditation is another. If you are really serious about the practice of meditation it has to be a way of living. You may be surprised to hear that the Buddha said to be mindful even when you go to the toilet.

We will begin with mindful eating. A very important aspect of life is eating. We work in order to have a roof over our head and to put food on the table. But do we really eat with awareness, consciously? Are you conscious of what you are tasting? Are you conscious of what you are chewing? Chewing is a very important aspect of eating. If you can make an effort to consciously chew your food, you will realise a difference when you are eating.

When you see the food on the table just spend a few minutes trying to see it as if for the first time. It can be fruit, rice, bread, fish, meat or vegetables. It can be anything. Look at the plate of rice and curry or meat, vegetables and bread very closely and note the different aspects of what you see on your plate. Notice the presentation, the colours, and the spices like chilli flecks, black pepper, or even the chopped parsley used for decoration.

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Smell the aroma that comes from your plate and taste every morsel. Eat consciously by identifying the flavours of salt, sugar, sourness and the content of chilli. Notice the blend of the flavours.

When you eat your meals take your time and consciously chew your food, eating very slowly and consciously. There is a saying among the First Nations People in Canada that they drink their food. What they mean is that they chew their food until it becomes liquid. You may be surprised to realise that when you chew your food slowly, and consciously that you do not require as much food; this is a very important discovery that you might realize when you are eating mindfully.

Another very important point that the Buddha has told meditators about eating is to avoid the two extremes. One extreme is eating too much, and the other extreme is eating too little. How do you know if you are eating the right quantity? This is a very interesting question. You do this by listening to the body while eating. If you are listening to music or watching television while you are eating, you will not be able to listen to your stomach or your body. If you are talking while eating, you will not be able to listen to your body. Instead get to know your body and mind so that you can ‘hear them talk’. Observe and listen to your body, thoughts and emotions. They will tell you when you have eaten enough, but it will be in their own language.

Another very beautiful practice in traditional Buddhist countries is to be grateful before we eat for those who have prepared the meal, or to feel grateful that you have food to eat. There are people in this world who do not have any breakfast in the morning. Some, even children, go to bed hungry. Starting your day with gratitude for what you have will soften and change your frame of mind.

If you can eat your meals in this way it becomes a wonderful boost to your mindfulness or awareness. You start the beginning of the day with mindful eating of breakfast, and then during the day you can have this kind of awareness at every meal. Also, try as far as possible, to have moments of awareness like this during the other activities of the day. Maybe not the whole time, but if you can have moment-to-moment awareness, that is even better. Then during the day, you will be living not as machines but as human beings.

When you are comfortable with mindful eating, add mindful brushing of your teeth to your daily routine. This is a repetitive action that is done twice a day. Be with the process from start to finish. Notice every detail like opening the lid of the tooth paste, the squeezing of the tooth paste into the brush, the colour of the tooth paste, the taste, the movement of your fingers and arm, and the feeling of the brush against your gums, teeth and mouth.

One day a student approached his Zen master and told him that he did not have time to practice mindfulness in his daily life. The Zen master advised the student to practice mindfulness all the time. You do not have to add any special activity to your daily life. Just

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follow your daily routine with moment-to-moment awareness from the moment you get up until you go to sleep. Slow down and be aware of whatever you are doing mindfully. It could be walking, driving, or going in the bus to work. It could be listening to a person at a meeting or preparing a report at work, or playing a game of badminton in the evening. Little by little make an effort to be more aware of your routine, ordinary, daily activities. Then you will notice that these ordinary activities become extraordinary.

When you consider all of these activities, you'll realise that meditation is related to ordinary things, not extraordinary, special things. Some people have the wrong idea that meditation is about having some special, extraordinary experience. But when you consider some of the meditation techniques, they are ordinary things, simple things like being aware of the breath, being conscious of walking, and being aware of eating. Mindfulness meditation is doing the simple, practical, ordinary things in life consciously, and then these ordinary things become extraordinary. If you can learn to do these ordinary things with awareness, you will realise that even with ordinary things, you can do them with a fresh outlook as if it is your first time.

When you look at others can you see them as if you are seeing them for the first time without past judgements? Can you relate to yourself as if you are relating to yourself for the first time, without past images and past judgements about yourself? Can you see a tree or flower or Buddha image as if for the first time? Please try that and you'll find that the quality of seeing is so different, it becomes so alive, it becomes so fresh, it becomes so innocent. Just like how a little child experiences the world for the first time.

In the *Dhammapada*, it is said that if you are not aware, if you are not mindful, you are not awake, you are like a dead person. Being like a dead person and like a machine are similar.



Chapter 4

Mindfulness for Understanding Unpleasant Experience

*When you inquire as to why you are feeling this way,
you will realise that you have this sense of ownership.
This is mine; it belongs to me.
Only acceptable things should happen -
in regard to persons and things that belong to me;
for others anything can happen.*

We often experience unpleasant experiences in our daily life. Therefore, another very important aspect of mindfulness is learning how to explore and investigate our unpleasant experiences with awareness. There is a beautiful simile which I like in one of the Buddhist texts. It compares awareness to the investigation of a surgeon who is about to operate. The surgeon has to find out exactly where he makes the first incision, the first cut to the body. To do this effectively, he has to investigate the body to find the root cause. Let us take an example of a tumor. Once he has investigated and identified the problem and its location, then he cuts into the body in the exact location, and begins the operation and takes out the tumor. Then the body begins to heal.

We can use this simile of the investigation of the surgeon to awareness. With awareness we can find out, we can explore, we can investigate and we can identify or discover the problem. Then with wisdom we can work with the problem that we have discovered to reduce or eliminate the problem.

In everyday life we have problems like anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt - all of these emotions create suffering for us. As with the surgeon's investigation, we can find out the root cause. Using awareness, we can learn, we can discover, we can explore, we can experiment with such problems. And then when you explore like this, you will realise that 'you yourself' are creating the problem. The root cause is 'you'. When you see this, you can use wisdom to free yourself from the problem. You can use wisdom to understand what is happening in your mind and body. Through this understanding you can bring about a change, or continue working with the problem, investigating and exploring for better understanding. The unpleasant experience itself becomes an object of meditation.

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Therefore, please realise that meditation is not always about having pleasant, positive experiences. Actually, unpleasant experiences do not create any problems for us unless we identify ourselves with them. The real challenge we have is learning how to work with these unpleasant experiences. In other words, how to work with physical pain and mental pain. This is much more important than simply experiencing pleasant, positive experiences.

Who is Causing and Observing this Anger?

This is the beautiful thing about this quality of knowing or awareness. With this quality of awareness, we can know that now I am angry, and now I have fear, and now there is no anger and now there is no fear. This is the point I am trying to make. If you do not have awareness, you don't know what is happening in your mind. But with awareness, and this knowing we can understand and develop wisdom and develop mastery over what is happening in our mind.

The question you want answered is about who is observing the anger. This itself is a very important area to investigate. An inquiry like this can be a very powerful technique. When we are angry, when we have fear, when we have doubts, ask the question: who is experiencing this? And when you really inquire into it deeply you will realise that there is no one apart from what you are experiencing. Then you will realise that these states of mind arise and pass away due to certain conditions; but we have a sense of ownership and say: this is *my* anger, *my* fear, *my* joy, *my* sadness. Therefore, this questioning: who is causing and observing the anger? helps us to realise that there is no owner of the emotion, but just conditions arising and conditions passing away. This is the deepest aspect of the Buddha's teaching. You will learn more and experience this as you progress in meditation.

Taking Ownership

Let us observe the effects of ownership with some examples. When we see our own children doing something wrong, we get angry, but if we see other people's children doing the very same thing, we don't get angry, and the same applies to our wife or husband. Why is this? Why are we affected by the 'bad or unacceptable' behaviour of some and not others?

This is a very good question. You realise that you are angry only when *your* child behaves in a particular way, or only when *your* wife behaves in a particular way, but others' children can behave in the same way or worse and you do not get angry. You have had a very important realisation. And the important realisation is, as I said earlier, that the people with whom we identify ourselves, people whom we think we own and call 'mine', they should behave in one way (acceptable to you) and other people can behave in any old way. We can

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elaborate on this point further. When your son comes home drunk, it is a big problem. But when an unknown child in your son's class comes home drunk it is not a problem. When your son becomes sick you become worried and sad. When the neighbour's son becomes sick, it does not affect you as much. When your mother dies, there is grief and sadness. When your neighbour's mother dies, it is not the same. Aren't we funny?

When you inquire into this: why am I feeling this way? - then you will realise that you have this sense of *ownership*. This is *mine*, it belongs to *me*. And only acceptable things should happen in regard to persons and things that belong to me; for others anything can happen, there is no problem! Therefore, the real practice, the really deep practice is, can we see everything as far as possible without a sense of ownership? Can we relate to suffering in whatever form it arises without differentiating between mine and others? It can be with your son, it can be with the neighbour's son, it can be with anyone. Can we understand and relate instead to their needs and suffering with affection and kindness? This feeling or technique is known as loving-kindness.

The Buddha said, "Just as a mother cherishes and protects her child, her only child, one should cherish all beings with affection and kindness". Boundless good-will, affection and kindness to all beings, what a beautiful way to live.



Chapter 5

Mindfulness for Dealing with Consumerism

People are not clear and cannot differentiate between – what they actually need and what they want.

This is just a manifestation of their greed.

Furthermore, people are being manipulated by society and big corporations, and they are not even aware of this.

Most people believe that material things are important and that happiness lies in material things. In fact, the more material things you get, the more dissatisfied you are; and the more dissatisfied you are, the more material things you want to get! Buddha has given a very powerful simile to describe this condition. He compared it to a dog with a bone. The dog won't let go of the bone and is just holding on to it without eating. It is still hungry, dissatisfied, and still suffers from fear of losing the bone.

Related to this serious problem of materialism is another aspect, another manifestation known as consumerism. It's a real challenge for people to live in consumer societies and not be affected by the consumerism around them. Consumerism has many aspects, but I see two dangerous aspects in consumerism.

The first is that people are not clear and can not differentiate between what they actually need and what they want which is just a manifestation of their greed. The second is That people are being manipulated by society and big corporations and they are not aware of this.

According to the Dhamma we need certain things for living: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine - they are called the four requisites. The four necessary things are things that human beings really need. There is a place for material things, but when we make it our goal to maximise our possessions and when we are confused between greed and need, it can lead to dissatisfaction and suffering.

the danger of consumerism is that the society that you live in starts manipulating you, and the problem is that you do not know that you are being manipulated. You become like puppets in the hands of a society that creates desire and greed, that eventually leads to greater frustration. This is a sad situation. Human beings have the potentiality of becoming free, of becoming Awakened, and instead we become victims of the society that we live in. We have

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the Buddha-nature in us, but this aspect is not recognised. We are unaware of this inherent potential.

One of the greatest challenges we face is learning how one can live in a materialistic society where there is such consumerism and still not be affected by it. I will try to offer some practical suggestions.

One suggestion that I would like to offer shows the importance of awareness. When you see things which you think you need, catch yourself and to ask the question, do I really need this? Also ask the very profound question of, “why do I need this”? Generally, when this obsession to possess something overcomes us, we never ask the question: Do I really need it? And why do I need it? When you are living in a consumer society and when you raise this question, you realise that often it is because others that you know and associate have these things. You want it because others are using them and you want to be like them. Therefore, without your knowledge you get caught in the rat race. Your whole life becomes a competition. You are constantly competing with others.

Another practical suggestion I would like to offer is to learn to say “yes” to some things; and to learn to say “no” to certain other things. We have got used to pampering ourselves. Pampering is always saying “yes” to whatever the body or the mind wants. What is important in the practice is both finding out that you're pampering yourself, and then learning to say “no” in a very gentle, friendly way. Learning to say “no” to certain things is very important in life. This is the only way to work with letting go of things that we have become dependent on.

The third suggestion I would like to offer is in a way an indirect one. With more practice, when you have made a connection with yourself and learnt to be your own best friend, then naturally you don't have to make an effort to let go of material things that you do not need. Then you can live in a consumer society but you are not affected by the environment.

In this connection there is a beautiful Buddhist symbol. The Buddhist symbol is being like a lotus. The lotus grows in muddy water. The beautiful lotus flower is able to grow in that muddy water without being affected or soiled by the muddy surroundings. This is the importance of the Buddha's teaching. You live in a society, within the consumer environment. However, you have learnt the technique and are steady and not affected by what is happening externally. This is because with practice of mindfulness, a paradigm shift has taken place inside you.



Chapter 6

Mindfulness to Become Your Own Best Friend

When you have loneliness and boredom, don't try to escape from it. Instead, go through the loneliness and the boredom. In the beginning it will be very unpleasant, but this shows the importance of the practice.

You have to go through the unpleasant experience, and then from loneliness you move on to experience aloneness, which is entirely different from loneliness; thereby learning to enjoy your own company.

When you are your own best friend, we slowly realise how we affect ourselves in an unwholesome, unskilful way with our attitudes and behaviour. When you make this connection with yourself there is a change that takes place. A transformation takes place, so that whatever you do, your words and your thoughts, will always be related to the skilful, and the wholesome.

With Meditation you Become Your Own Toy

This is in a way a continuation of the previous chapter. It is elaborating on becoming your own best friend to deal with consumerism and not be affected by the environment. The simile that has come to my mind about this situation of obsessive buying is that though we are grown up, we have become dependent on what I call 'toys'. I am interested to know what toys human beings go after in this culture, in this country. What I mean by toys are external things that you want to consume that you think will lead to happiness, joy, and peace of mind. You start acquiring toys, and then you change one toy for another better one, and your whole life is spent on getting toys and yet, you are still dissatisfied. Can you tell me some toys that you are interested in acquiring?

Some examples that you have given are housing, cars and computers. In a way a house is a necessity. But you are not satisfied with a small house, so you want a bigger and better house, then that house can become a toy because you are still dissatisfied. You have a beautiful new house but you are not happy. Maybe you should move into an even bigger house? In such instances housing can be a problem. A car may be a necessity in some cities where public

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transportation is not available. But often people have two or three cars in their garage and driveway. Some rich people collect cars. I call these toys. Computers, have become toys and that toy has become common place even in Sri Lanka! The big companies that make computers keep coming out with newer and better models. Anyway, we can draw up a long list of toys. An interesting question then is: is meditation also a toy? Is there a relationship between these toys and meditation?

I would suggest that with meditation, you become your own toy. This is the importance of the Dhamma. This is the importance of the Buddha's wonderful teaching. When you become your own toy you can be happy, contented, and peaceful with yourself. The need for external toys or external things drops away because you find the joy and happiness from within.

A very important aspect of this is learning to enjoy your own company. When meditators come to the centre where I live in Sri Lanka, I tell them to spend some time alone and see what happens when they are alone with themselves. It is quite interesting. Some of the people who come have never spent any time completely alone with themselves, without any toys. Therefore, they become lonely and bored. What does this behaviour tell you about us? We cannot stay with ourselves for more than 10 or 15 minutes without a mobile phone or a computer. We want to escape from ourselves!

Often students inform me that they feel bored when they are alone. They ask me for actual examples or experiences of how I enjoy life alone. Generally, what most people do when mind states such as loneliness and boredom arise is that they give in to them, and try to change them by doing something interesting.

The simple answer is, hereafter when you have loneliness, when you have boredom, do not try to escape from it. Instead, go through the loneliness, go through the boredom. In previous chapters we discussed that a very important aspect of meditation is learning to go through unpleasant experiences, both physical and mental. In the beginning it will be very unpleasant, but this shows the importance of the practice. You have to go through the unpleasant experience and then from loneliness you move on to experience aloneness, which is entirely different from loneliness, thereby learning to enjoy your own company.

The importance of the Dhamma is that you realise that you can work through that boredom and loneliness. You learn to be your own best friend. You learn to be self-contained, and contented with yourself. Such a person is described in the Dhamma as someone who is at home wherever he is. Such a person can be happy with himself while being alone, and such a person can be happy with others.

Mistakes are Opportunities to Learn

I would like to touch on another aspect, which shows the importance of mindfulness. With the application of mindfulness in all the situations you face in life, you come to see the Dhamma (Truth) in any situation. As we have discussed before, even unpleasant experiences will become learning experiences.

Mindfulness is defined as non-judgemental present moment awareness. I know in this culture that people are afraid to make mistakes because of the emphasis on perfection. With this model of perfection, what happens is that when we make a mistake, we beat ourselves, hate ourselves, lose our self-confidence, and see ourselves as worthless. You become very judgemental. In my language, you see only ‘minuses’ in yourself; and when you see ‘minuses’ in yourself, you see ‘minuses’ in others too. You can create a hell with only ‘minuses’.

The importance of the Dhamma is that it enables us to not create suffering in this way because of our mistakes. Instead, we learn to ask the question; what can I learn from my mistake? What does it indicate about myself? This kind of inquiry has to be done in a very friendly, gentle, understanding way, without judgement or giving any ‘minuses’. Then our mistakes help us to grow in the spiritual path. Isn't that a beautiful way of living? Learning from your mistakes; and then when you see mistakes in others you also learn to relate to the mistakes of others in an entirely different way. We learn to appreciate our humanness, not the idea of perfection. Then we learn to appreciate the humanness of others.

The importance of the teaching is that we see clearly how we create our own suffering, and through that realisation it becomes clear that only we can free ourselves of the suffering that we create. Then we become self-reliant. We learn to have self-confidence that whatever arises, we know how to manage it with the help of the Dhamma. Then you learn to be your own teacher. And as the Buddha said, you learn to be a light unto yourself.

Life Becomes Your Teacher

I would like to make one last point on this topic. I have had the good fortune to meet many masters, gurus, and teachers from many traditions. Do you know which master, which guru has most inspired me? It is life itself. Life is our best teacher. When you realise the importance of the Dhamma, life becomes your teacher. Sometimes life can be a very hard teacher, but it a good teacher. It can indicate to us what we really are.

The Buddha always taught his students to be their own island. The last lesson the Buddha gave his devotees, just before he passed away, was to be an island to yourself. We should always learn from ourselves. We should also learn from life. This means that all these

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experiences we have in life, can be used for our spiritual growth. If you are sensitive and open, and if you are practising the teaching, then you learn how to relate everything that happens to you in life in relation to others, to the teaching.

There's a teacher who said that they are compost! Compost contains organic things, which are considered useless, which are considered as dirty, and which we tend to throw away. All this rubbish, this compost, can be used as manure to grow vegetables and fruits. I would say that what we learn from life, even from our mistakes, could be seen as compost. Our life experiences and even our mistakes can be used for our own spiritual growth. It is only then that, as the Buddha said, you can be an island to yourself. Then, you can rely on yourself.

However, it is important to note that if you have the pre-conceived notion that you know everything, then, that is the end of learning. It is very necessary to have this inquiring mind, whereby we can learn from anything and we can learn from anyone. This is something very important in the Buddha's teaching.

Be Your Own Best Friend

It is interesting that for various reasons, that at times, we become our own enemies. However, we think that the enemy is outside ourselves! We are trying to find the enemy outside ourselves without realising that the biggest enemy is inside ourselves. One aspect of being your enemy is, as I said, seeing only your mistakes, seeing only your shortcomings, seeing only your 'minuses'. This can be a very self-destructive aspect where you become your own worst enemy.

Another aspect, which relates to this same point, is when you don't see the good or positive in yourself. You do not see the good things that you have been doing. I meet many good people and they are following the spiritual path, but because of this self-destructive tendency, they do not see their own worth. They do not see their own value; they refuse to see the Buddha-nature in themselves. When you realize that at times you are your own enemy, then you learn to work on this condition. This is the importance of awareness, which we discussed yesterday. With awareness you get to know yourself, you catch yourself, and you realise what you are doing to yourself. You realize that you are becoming your own enemy!

A solution to this destructive habit is this very beautiful meditation of loving-kindness. I emphasise this meditation very much. It is psychologically very interesting that meditation of loving-kindness begins with oneself. Loving-kindness shows us that we cannot be friendly to others unless we are friendly to ourselves. Meditation on loving-kindness helps us to be our own best friend; it helps us to make a connection with ourselves.

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Another benefit of meditation on loving-kindness is that it helps us to forgive ourselves. It helps us to accept our humanness; and when we learn to accept our humanness, then we learn to accept the humanness of others. This meditation helps us to be friendly with ourselves and friendly to others.

Furthermore, being your own best friend is that we slowly realise how we affect ourselves in an unwholesome, unskilful way with our attitudes and behaviour. When you make this connection with yourself there is a change that takes place. A transformation takes place, so that whatever you do, your words and your thoughts will always be related to the skilful, and the wholesome. This will help you in your spiritual path.

Guided Meditation

Please sit in a comfortable position, because it is very important not to move while you are meditating. Have your spine erect but relaxed.

Allow the mind to do what it likes. If thoughts are arising, let thoughts arise: thoughts about the past, thoughts about the future. Let any kind of thoughts arise. Let us learn to make friends with thoughts, and just know from moment to moment what types of thoughts are arising in our mind. It is very important to be alert and to be awake from moment to moment for this.

Now, allow any emotion to arise, especially emotions that we do not like, that we push away, repress, and try to control. Can we allow such emotions to arise? If they are arising, can we just allow them to arise? If you are having any unpleasant experiences, can you learn to make friends with them, can you learn to relate to them without being judgemental and giving yourself a ‘minus’?

However, if there are no unpleasant emotions, just know that there are no unpleasant emotions.

In summary, when thoughts, emotions, or sensations arise, learn to see them just as they are, in a mirror-like mind. No ‘plus’, no ‘minus’. No judgement. Just being with whatever is happening. Be alert and awake.

Learn to feel friendly towards your thoughts, learn to feel friendly towards your emotions, and learn to be friendly towards sensations, irrespective of the quality of the thoughts, emotions and sensations.

Now open your eyes slowly and when you change your posture, do it slowly, consciously. And please don't think that the meditation is over. Just continue to know what is happening in the mind and body from moment-to-moment.



Chapter 7

The Importance of Meditation on Mindfulness of Breathing

Does this technique help us in everyday life? Or, does it only help us when we are sitting on a meditation cushion?

I would suggest that we gain insights, whilst sitting on the meditation cushion. However, we develop and enhance these skills, the present moment awareness and a non-reactive, equanimous mind, with our daily life practice.

In the last few chapters, you have incorporated mindfulness in your daily life and learnt how to deal with common problems. We are now moving to our formal training of mindfulness, or non-judgemental present moment awareness. Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation is about focusing our attention on our in-breath and our out-breath in the sitting posture in a quiet place. This is one of the most well-known and popular meditation techniques in all Buddhist traditions. It is also said that the Buddha became enlightened with the help of this technique.

We will begin by reflecting why the Buddha chose the breath as an object of meditation. We are breathing all the time and therefore the breath is with us all the time. *Ajahn Chah, one of great meditation masters in Thailand said, “If you have time to breath you have time to meditate”*. The breath is readily available to any one to meditate at any time during waking hours. It also happens automatically or naturally. Let us see why this technique is so important. This technique is important because it lets us:

1. Know What Is Happening:

In this meditation the whole emphasis is on developing awareness and developing mindfulness. As we know, breathing takes place automatically. Therefore, we are trying to develop mindfulness, awareness concerning what is happening automatically. As the whole emphasis is on mindfulness, it is very important for you to remember that irrespective of whatever is happening in your mind and body, we should learn just to be mindful, just to be aware and know of what is happening naturally. When we are practising this technique, our job is just to be conscious of what is happening.

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When you have thoughts please don't consider them as a disturbance or as a distraction, but rather be aware that you are having thoughts. If you are hearing sounds just know you are hearing sounds. If you are feeling different sensations in the body, whatever sensations you are experiencing, just know that you are experiencing those sensations. You know these things are happening, you become mindful of these things and then just come back to your breath.

There is no need to have a battle when you are meditating using this technique. I often say that you have enough battles in life, please do not make meditation into another battle! The whole idea of meditation is to experience freedom, to experience joy, to experience lightness, to be free of suffering, but if you make it a battle, meditation itself becomes a source of suffering. Therefore, please remember this. Please realise that the whole emphasis of this technique is on just knowing or just being mindful or just being conscious of what is happening. Then spend more and more time with your breath, without a battle. Get to know your breath slowly, gently and intimately.

2. Experience the Present Moment:

Another very important aspect of this technique is that it helps us to experience the present moment, even for a few minutes. Because breathing is always taking place in the 'here and now', it is always happening in the present moment. If we are mindful or conscious of breathing even for a few minutes we can experience what it is to be here and to be present. Otherwise, most of the time we are lost in either the past or the future. We do not even know whether we are in the past or the future. There can be lots of confusion and chaos in our minds, but this technique helps us to experience being in the present, even if only for a few moments.

3. See our Breath as our Friend:

Another important point to remember is that we need to make a connection with our breath, and the way we can make a connection with our breath is to see our breath as our friend. Let us see in what way the breath is our friend. One thing is that our breath is the only friend who is with us all the time. I don't think we have any other friend who is with us all the time. The breath is the only friend who is with us all the time - when we are sick, lonely, or with pain. If we make a connection with our friend, the breath, then whenever we are with the breath and aware of our breath we are in the present moment. When we make the connection with the breath it will be of great benefit to you.

4. To Recover from Runaway Thoughts:

We all have at some time or other been affected by thoughts. In fact, most of the time the thoughts control us. Our friend, the breath can teach us how to let go of our thoughts. By being with the breath we can let go of thoughts of the past and the future because when we

are with the breath we are in the present moment. Maybe for the first time we can learn how to control thoughts rather than allowing the thoughts to control us. It is a very simple technique. All we have to do is to remember to be with our breath.

5. To Recover from Stress and Anxiety:

Some times thinking can create emotions. Therefore, there is a strong connection between our thoughts and our emotions. Another reason why our breath is our friend is, because it helps us to recover from stress and anxiety. The moment you experience the present moment, those moments are moments of freedom. Whenever you are having an emotion, if at that moment you think of your friend - the in and out breath, then there is an immediate recovery from that emotion. Then you can experience some space because you have come back to the present moment. That space can help us to recover from whatever emotion we are feeling. Please try this technique in your meditation.

A friend of mine told me yesterday that when he is waiting at the traffic lights, he becomes impatient. I think we can all relate to this situation, especially when you are late for an appointment and you see the red light. Poor red light! You can be angry at the red light, you can be impatient about the red light, but if you do, this can create a lot of suffering for you. I told my friend that the next time he finds himself in such a situation to, just relax and spend some time with his breath. Please experiment and try this technique. Earlier you hated the red light, but now you can feel grateful for the red light because thanks to the red light, you can be with your friend, the breath! You can use this opportunity to get to know your breath better. Next time observe how your breath pattern changes when you have to stop at a red light.

I would like to repeat that whenever you are having any unpleasant emotions - it can be stress, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, or any unpleasant emotion that creates suffering will fade away when you think of your friend and spend some time with the in-breath and the out-breath. Experiment with this technique and see what happens to that painful emotion?

I will tell you the simple reason why we can find relief in such a situation. The simple reason is that when we are having an emotion, what makes it bigger, what makes it worse is our thoughts. If you can spend a few minutes with your friend, the breath, in such a situation, then there is no room for thoughts to arise and there is an immediate recovery.

6. Shows us our State of Mind:

Another important aspect is that our friend, the breath can show us our state of mind. We all know what happens to our breath when we have strong emotions like anger, fear, excitement, stress or insecurity. There is a change in the pace or pattern of our breath. It moves very fast. The breath can be a very useful and reliable signal to show us what is happening in our mind. If we have anger in our mind the breath will change and signal to us

that we have anger in the mind. If you heed to the signal of the changing pattern of breath and get to know your friend the breath you can recover from that anger or what ever emotion you are feeling quickly.

Similarly, when our mind is calm and relaxed our friend, the breath will also become calm. Therefore, if we make a close connection to the breath, it will always tell us what is happening in our mind. The breath is also a very reliable friend! Your other friends may be right at times and wrong at times. However, once you get to know your breath well, it will always right.

Our breath can also show us about the state of our body. Here again the way we breathe - our breathing pattern, changes and can indicate to us the state of our physical well-being and also our mental well-being. Breathing can be deep, shallow, fast or slow. Experiment and get to know your friend, the breath, and its language. Shallow breathing is a sign that indicates you have tension in your body.

If you observe your breath closely and make a close connection you will notice how the tension in the body also affects the emotions in the mind. It will indicate the connection between feelings or sensations in the body and how they affect emotions in the mind. A relaxed body leads to a calm mind. A tense body leads to an anxious or agitated mind. In fact, taking a few slow deep breaths can relax both the body and the mind. Experiment and experience this for yourself.

7. Be Peaceful at the Time of Death:

Another very important moment when our friend can help us is at the time of death. In fact, the Buddhist texts claims that if you learn, practise and master this technique and if you are conscious at the moment of death you can make a connection with your breath at the time of death. Then your attention can come to the breath immediately. I am very interested in the work people do with terminally ill persons. Helping people to die peacefully is a compassionate service. It is interesting that one of the techniques they use is focusing on breathing. Isn't the breath really valuable? Our friend, the breath helps us to live peacefully and helps us to die peacefully.

8. Experience Calmness/Tranquility & Wisdom/Insight:

There are two aspects of Buddhist meditation. One is the aspect of experiencing calm, tranquility and stillness. This is known as *Samatha*. The other aspect is the aspect of experiencing insight or wisdom. This is known as *Vipassana*. Our friend the breath helps us to experience both tranquility and insight. Therefore, it is very important that you make this connection with your friend the breath.

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This technique of meditation known as Breathing Awareness Meditation, has the characteristic of experiencing tranquility and calm, and it also helps us to experience some insights and wisdom. When we are aware of the in-breath and the out-breath, if we can learn not to get involved with or react to whatever is going on in our minds, then the mind becomes calm and tranquil. The breath too becomes calm.

This is a very beautiful aspect of our friend the breath. When we are with our friend even for a few minutes all our identifications, that we are Chinese, Sri Lankan, German, English, all this is forgotten. In this world there are these different divisions based on race, religion, gender, colour, etc. Some of the problems in the modern world arise because people emphasise these divisions. When you are with the breath, all these identifications drop away and then it is just the in-breath and the out-breath. Therefore, breathing is just breathing, whether it is a Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or a Hindu is immaterial– the breath is just the breath.

An important insight to realize is that we are all interconnected. Although we separate ourselves from others by nationality, gender, ethnicity etc., we all have this common fact of breathing. Breathing is common to all beings. We are breathing the same air. This should enable us to have a feeling of oneness and interconnectedness of all beings. We cannot separate the air we breathe and say this air that I breathe is mine.

When the mind is calm, the technique of Breathing Awareness Meditation, helps us to see thoughts as just thoughts, it just mirrors our thoughts. It also lets us experience sensations, sounds, etc. just as they are, so that we can have these very important insights by learning to see things just as they are.

One important aspect of Vipassana is to experience the fact of impermanence or the truth of change. When we are aware of the breath, we realize how whatever is happening in the mind and body (including the breath) changes from moment to moment. If you are having thoughts you will immediately realize how thoughts are arising and passing away. The same thing becomes very clear with the breath. It is arising and passing away and each new breath is not the same as the one before.

If we can be aware of the sensations, we will realize how from moment to moment there are a variety of sensations taking place. We will also realize that the sensations are changing from moment to moment.

This insight, which we develop through being open to change and impermanence internally, will help us to be open and accepting of the fact of impermanence externally. We become aware that just as sometimes we have no control over what is happening inside us that sometimes we have no control over what is happening external to us. Suffering arises when we resist this change or impermanence. This is a very powerful way of overcoming suffering. By seeing this for ourselves we develop this very important insight: how suffering is created

by resisting change and how we can overcome suffering by being open to change and understanding of impermanence.

Another important insight that can arise in relation to the breath is that there is just breathing taking place. The rise and fall of the breath are just happening. There is no “I or me” that is breathing. Instead, there is a process of breathing from moment to moment.

9. Develop and Enhance our Skills in Daily Life:

An interesting question is, does this technique help us in everyday life or does it only help us when we are sitting on a meditation cushion? I would suggest that we gain insights, whilst sitting on the meditation cushion. However, we develop and enhance these skills, the present moment awareness and a non-reactive, equanimous mind with our daily life practice. Therefore, it is important to have such a mind in everyday life. Then you will have a very strong foundation for the formal practice of breathing awareness. They are like two sides of a coin. They go hand-in-hand. The benefits are reciprocal.

What I have tried to do in this talk is to present some points, some aspects about the importance of this technique of being aware of our breathing. To summarize, what has to be done is something very simple. Just feel what happens when the body is breathing. Using the sensations and the movements in the body, try and be conscious, be aware. I would like to repeat that you don't have to do anything special. It is just being conscious of your in-breath and your out-breath and getting to know your breath, your best friend really well³.

Guided Meditation

Sit in a relaxed position. It is very important to sit with a relaxed body. Please realise we are not going to do something special, so you can just relax.

Let us begin by spending some time with the body. Just feel the body. Feel the different sensations, the different movements in your body.

If there are thoughts, just let go of the thoughts and come back to the body. Feeling the body is one thing, thinking about the body is another, please see the difference. Here we are learning to feel the body.

³ With time we may observe different characteristics of the breath. We may observe a short breath or a long breath. We may also observe the pattern of breathing being fast or slow, deep or shallow. Get to know the language of your friend, the breath.

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Let us learn to feel friendly and gentle and kind towards our body. Let us spend a few minutes allowing the body to do what it likes.

Let us now feel what it is to sit with our body completely still.

Please allow the body to breathe naturally. There is no need to control our breath or to manipulate our breathing. We are not trying to manipulate our natural breathing.

Now just feel what happens in the body when the body is breathing. Feel the different sensations, the different movements in the body when the body is breathing.

Do you feel any sensation in the area of the nostrils? Do you feel any sensation in the area of the chest? Do you feel the rise and the fall of the abdomen?

Experience the present moment with the help of the sensations and movements in your body because they are happening now.

When the body is inhaling you know that the body is inhaling. When the body is exhaling you know that the body is exhaling.

Not thinking about the past, not thinking about the future, experiencing the joy of the present moment with the help of the in-breath and the out-breath.

Please do not try to stop thoughts or control thoughts. If thoughts are there, just know that you are having thoughts and come back to your friend, the breath. Just relax with the breath.

Now open your eyes slowly and when you change your posture; do it slowly, consciously. And please don't think that the meditation is over. Just continue to know what is happening in the mind and body from moment-to-moment.



Chapter 8

Some Challenges and Solutions - Mindfulness of Breath

Those who have been listening to me carefully will notice, I have not used the word concentration at all, but rather than concentration, the words I use are present moment awareness, mindfulness, just knowing.

I purposely avoid the word concentration. This is what is creating the problem. This is what is creating the suffering. Instead, if the mind is concentrated, just know that the mind is concentrated; and if the mind is not concentrated, just know the mind is not concentrated. Then there is no problem.

In this chapter we will discuss some of the challenges that yogis may face when they practice mindfulness of breath meditation. We will also discuss some solutions that you can experiment with.

1. Being with the Breath When Drowsy and Tired:

One suggestion is, to just open your eyes for a few minutes. Another is to ensure that your spine is erect. If you can have your spine erect then you do not normally feel sleepy or drowsy. Another suggestion is, that you are welcome to stand up for some time or change to mindful walking. However, if you are genuinely tired or in need of sleep, then take a short nap and get back to your sitting meditation in 20-30 minutes.

2. Being with the Breath when One is Sleeping:

What is interesting about our friend is that there are times when we can ignore it. We have to have awareness and consciousness in order to be with our breath. This is generally not possible when we are dreaming and sleeping. If you are a very advanced meditator, you can have some element of awareness while you are sleeping and dreaming. My response is, this is a situation where you can just leave your friend alone and he or she would not mind it at all! You can, however, use this technique to calm yourself when you are restless and cannot

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sleep. It will be very beneficial to your practice if you can practice mindfulness of breathing early morning as you get up and just before you go to sleep.

3. Being with the Breath During our Busy Daily Life:

How can you take care of many different things and also be aware of your breath? The answer is that you cannot. As I said, to be aware of your breath, your friend, you have to first stop your work and be in a quiet place. This is why I said that when the traffic lights are red, when you are just doing nothing, just be conscious of your friend, rather than being impatient and frustrated with the red light. You can also be with your breath when you are standing and waiting for the bus. However, when you are having an unpleasant emotion and when you are bothered by that emotion, at that moment you will not be trying to do different things. Therefore, as soon as you are aware of the unpleasant emotion, just bring your awareness back to the breath. Being in the present moment with the breath will immediately reduce the intensity of the emotion.

Now I would like to respond to the question of what we might try to do as meditators when we are very busy and have to do many different things. When we have to do many things, and have tight deadlines, we might be concerned about making a mistake. This creates tension. As I said yesterday, in cultures where the emphasis is on doing things perfectly, correctly, you always want to do everything perfectly. In such situations, it will be very helpful if you can just let go of this idea of perfection. This is one suggestion.

Another interesting point is that although we have to do different things, we can, only do one thing at a time. If we can prioritize and learn to be conscious of whatever we are doing in any particular situation, then one can develop what is called moment-to-moment awareness in relation to what has to be done. This will get the job done rather than worrying about all that you have to do.

Maybe one last suggestion, which can be very helpful, is that when you are working, when you have to do many different things, as I said earlier, what is important is to become conscious of your state of mind. Are you anxious, are you stressed, are you insecure, or are you relaxed? It is very important for those of you who are really interested in everyday practice to constantly check your state of mind. Whether you are working or whether you are not working, try to develop this practice of constant watching, or awareness of what is happening in your mind.

After becoming aware of the state of your mind examine if it is reacting or responding to the state of mind? These are two very interesting words: reacting, responding. Responding is doing what is necessary without reacting. Reacting is getting anxious, fearful, stressed, etc. Remember, you are only human and you are still practising. It is human nature that one may start to react in certain situations without responding.

If you are not able to be conscious at the time you are reacting, at least later on, when there is space, when there is clarity, when you have recovered from that emotion, can you look back and find out: why did I react? Why couldn't I have responded in that situation? Then as I said previously, we can learn from our mistakes. In truth, we can learn even from our reactions.

This kind of inquiry has to be done without judgement or giving yourself a 'minus'. You do have to do this kind of inquiry in a very friendly, gentle, playful way. And then you can experiment with it. Please try this technique when you next go to work, and see what happens. Go prepared to observe yourself and your mind. Will I react, will I respond? And with any reaction, how long will it last? Keep an open mind to see what is going to happen. These are very interesting, beautiful aspects of meditation. See it as an experiment on yourself. When you try an experiment, you do not take up a position before hand. Without taking up a position, you are just learning, finding out, and exploring the possibilities. We can experiment, explore, and learn from any situation.

4. How to Cope with Runaway Thoughts:

When we have unpleasant emotions thinking generally makes it worse. If you have some space in your mind to watch your thoughts you will realize that thoughts come so quickly that at times you can create a big story about what is happening. Some times a small emotion can really blow up, just by the process of thinking.

The problem is that one can make a habit of story telling and constructed thoughts. At the beginning it was not that serious: just some angry thoughts about some person. But then a flood of past incidents flow into your mind and overpower you like a torrential rain that causes floods.

Let us take an example. A person is rude and critical of you and you observe that anger has arisen in your mind. May be your breath pattern changed and it is more rapid, or maybe you felt a tightening in your stomach or a clenching of your hands. Immediately thoughts about that person and how that person has behaved in the past come to your mind. Your whole attention is on that person and all the negative things he has done to you. More and more negative thoughts arise and your anger gets worse and worse.

In such a situation we can easily lose control and lash back at the person. The emotions and the constructed thoughts are in control. We are overwhelmed. If one has been making a connection with the breath and mindfulness, you may be able to bring the awareness of the in-breath and out-breath back to your mind. Then the fermenting of the emotions can be reduced. One can also release the tensions in the body by conscious deep breathing. Being with the breath or the sensations on the body can have some effects of reducing the run-away thoughts because then you are in the present moment. An interesting experiment is to observe how thoughts and emotions cause tension in the body.

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Let us take an example of a person who is afraid of dogs. Maybe she has been bitten by a dog in the past or had some negative experiences with dogs in general. When such a person sees a dog the possibility of the dog biting her immediately comes into her mind. Very quickly that thought gives rise to emotions of fear, anxiety and insecurity. That in turn gives rise to tension in the body. One may just freeze and tighten up in fear.

It will be very useful if we can see this process with meditation. If not, the process goes further. We react to the tension in the body with more thoughts and past experiences with dogs and that leads to stronger emotions. It really becomes a vicious cycle.

How can we break this vicious cycle? The most powerful way is to be mindful and spend more time with your friend the breath. Then when such a situation happens one can come to the present moment and calm yourself so that you can respond to the situation without reacting to it.

5. Mind and Body does not Settle Down in Meditation:

Please don't have any expectations when you sit for meditation. Do not have expectations of what should happen or what should not happen. Instead, without expectations just know what is happening in the body and mind. What is important is that we do not judge our experience with pluses and minuses. Just know what is happening in your mind and body with some openness.

The idea of meditation is to experience freedom from suffering. But with all these expectations we create suffering. If we expect our mind and body to be calm, we are happy and give ourselves a 'plus'. Then we hold on to it and want to have the same experience or better, in the next meditation sit. If we do not have calm in the next sit, we are unhappy. This creates suffering. Just accept and be friendly with whatever is happening. If body is calm know that the body is calm. If body is restless know that the body is restless. Have the same openness with the mind. What is important is moment to moment mindfulness. This is known as a beginner's mind. Not knowing what is going to happen in your next sit. If you practice like this you will not have any suffering related to your experience. You will also have some insight as to impermanence.

I would like to take the next question, as it is a common concern of yogis.

6. When one meditates on the in-breath and out-breath, and one is aware of the passing thoughts (at that stage) one is okay, one can still concentrate; but when one is aware that he/she is aware of the passing thoughts, then that affects one's concentration.

This is a very important point that we have to think about, this word "concentration". Those who have been listening to me carefully will notice I have not used the word concentration

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at all, but rather than concentration, the words I use are present moment awareness, mindfulness, or just knowing. I purposely avoid the word concentration because this is what is creating the problem. This is what is creating the suffering. What I would suggest is: if the mind is concentrated, just know that the mind is concentrated; and if the mind is not concentrated, just know the mind is not concentrated. Then there is no problem.

It is very important when we sit for meditation not to have an expectation, an idea, or a model of what should happen or what should not happen. *In the Zen tradition there is a beautiful word for it, to have a beginner's mind, or a don't-know mind.* Expectation is what creates suffering in our life. When we have expectations in life and when things do not correspond or go according to our expectations, we suffer. This too is how suffering is created in meditation. It is very interesting. Therefore, when we meditate without having any expectations, we will just try to know what is happening from moment-to-moment.

It is also very important not to be judgemental and give 'plusses and minuses' when we are meditating. For example, one is expecting to concentrate and then when you think you are concentrated you give yourself a big plus and hold onto the concentration - that's how tension is created! And when the mind is not concentrated, we give a big minus! In meditation also we are rating ourselves, giving plusses, giving minuses, giving plusses, giving minuses. This is what we are doing in ordinary life, so at least in meditation please learn just to be open to whatever is happening. What is important is to develop this quality of alertness, of vigilance, of being awake, of knowing what is happening; this is what is important.

Guided Meditation

Let us start our meditation with a beginner's mind and no expectations. We are looking for awareness and acceptance of whatever is happening in the present moment. If breath is short just know that it is short. If it is long, just know that it is long. If it is rapid just know that it is rapid and if it is slow just know that it is slow.

Sit in a relaxed position. It is very important to sit with a relaxed body. Please realise we are not going to do something special, so you can just relax.

Let us begin by spending some time with the body. Just feel the body and the different sensations, and the different movements in your body.

If there are thoughts, just let go of the thoughts and come back to the body. Feeling the body is one thing, thinking about the body is another, please see the difference. Here we are learning to feel the body.

Let us learn to feel friendly and gentle and kind towards our body.

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Let us now feel what it is like to sit with our body completely still.

Now please allow the body to breathe naturally.

No need to control or manipulate our breathing. We are not trying to manipulate our natural breathing.

Let us spend a few minutes learning, to allow the body to do what it likes.

Now just feel what happens in the body when the body is breathing. Feel the different sensations, the different movements in the body when the body is breathing.

Do you feel any sensation in the area of the nostrils? Do you feel any sensation in the area of the chest? Do you feel the rise and the fall of the abdomen?

Experience the present moment with the help of the sensations and movements in your body because they are happening now, in the present moment.

When the body is inhaling you know that the body is inhaling. When the body is exhaling you know that the body is exhaling.

Do not think about the past. Do not think about the future. Experience the joy of the present moment with the help of the in-breath and the out-breath.

Please do not try to stop thoughts or control thoughts. If thoughts are there, just know that you are having thoughts and come back to your friend, the breath. Just feel relaxed with the breath.

Let us feel friendly and gentle towards our mind and body.

No judgement. No plusses or minuses to what is happening. Just knowing whatever is happening.

Now open your eyes slowly and when you change your posture, do it slowly, consciously. And please do not think that the meditation is over. Just continue to know what is happening in the mind and body from moment-to-moment.



Chapter 9

The Importance of Mindfulness in Walking

Walking meditation enhances the quality and practice of mindfulness and leads to clarity of mind and clear comprehension. It is like experiencing a mirror image of your mind. You can now observe the quality and nature of the mind clearly.

The mindfulness realized in walking meditation also carries over to one's sitting meditation as it lasts for a longer duration.

Many people walk as a form of exercise. You can now buy a watch or FitBit to count how many steps you take in a day. The recommended number of steps by health professionals is ten thousand steps a day. I have seen many people go for walks during the lunch breaks and in the evenings. Most of them are listening to music with earphones or talking on their mobile phones. Some are walking mechanically like robots but their mind is not on walking they are thinking of the past or the future. They are totally unmindful of their walking and unaware of the benefits that they are forgoing.

In the Buddhist tradition, mindful walking is very important as it leads to many benefits. It is also something that most people do in their daily life and therefore easy to incorporate in their daily mindfulness activities. The Buddha has a discourse on the benefits of mindful walking. Well-used walking paths are a common sight in Meditation Centres and Forest Monasteries.

Enhanced (Clarity and Clear Comprehension) and more Durable Mindfulness

The most important benefit, and the reason that walking is included in formal meditation, is because mindful walking leads to a complex, enhanced form of mindfulness. There are many opportunities for various sensory contact or sense impingement when walking. For example, unlike in sitting meditation, our eyes are open. We are also engaged in bodily movement. One also has to stop; turn and walk back at the end of the walking path. This results in a more complex form of mindfulness. Walking Meditation requires moment to moment mindfulness of a process as opposed to penetrating mindfulness deep into one single object

such as the breath in sitting meditation. Therefore, one needs to be more vigilant as there are many opportunities for distraction.

Walking meditation enhances the quality and practice of mindfulness and leads to clarity of mind and clear comprehension. It is like experiencing a mirror image of your mind. You can now observe the quality and nature of the mind clearly. The mindfulness realized in walking meditation also carries over to one's sitting meditation as it lasts for a longer duration. Alternating one's sitting meditation with walking meditation also helps with pain and stiff limbs resulting from sitting. Therefore, your overall mindful experience and spiritual progress is enhanced by a combination of sitting and walking meditation.

Developing Endurance for Walking Long Distances

Endurance in walking was very important in the days of the Buddha. Most people travelled by foot. The Buddha himself used to walk from city to city often walking up to about 16 km a day spreading the teachings (*Dhamma*) to the masses. Monks and nuns also walked from house to house for their alms food. Therefore, mindful walking developed fitness and endurance for the life style at the time of the Buddha. In the Western world people often go to the gym and have exercise machines at home for fitness. Walking outdoors in the fresh air however, is far more relaxing and better for one's relaxation and fitness. Hiking, jogging and mountain climbing are common forms of leisure activities. Mindful walking meditation enhances the endurance and quality of these activities.

Energizes and Overcomes Drowsiness

Sitting meditation often tends to make one drowsy, especially as calm and tranquility develops. Sitting meditation can turn into dullness and sloth and torpor if one is not alert with mindfulness and awareness. Alternating sitting meditation with mindful walking meditation energizes the yogi and is especially beneficial in a residential retreat or at a monastery where one practices longer hours of sitting meditation. However, even in your daily sit, starting with walking meditation is better as mindfulness gained in walking meditation is carried over to your sitting meditation.

Improves Overall Health

The Buddha claimed that mindful walking meditation leads to good health. In lieu of modern-day power walking we can use mindful walking which is good for the mind and also for the circulation and stiff limbs after long hours of sitting meditation. As most Meditation Centre's

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have outdoor walking paths it is a pleasant relaxing opportunity to be with nature. If you have the space and opportunity, try walking meditation outdoors and experience this benefit.

Good for Digestion of Meals

The last benefit of mindful walking is that it is good for digestion of meals. Most monastics and retreatants have one or two meals a day. There is a natural tendency to feel drowsy after a heavy meal. Walking meditation is often scheduled after mealtime as it helps with digestion. This also applies to lay meditators practicing at home. Going for a mindful walk after a heavy meal is good for your digestion, physical wellbeing and an opportunity to cultivate the mind. Research shows that it is far better than taking an afternoon nap or going to bed at night after a heavy meal.

Guided Meditation - One

Choose your meditation path carefully. It must be a flat area of about 25 to 30 steps long. Outdoors is preferable but make sure it is a secluded area as it is easy to get distracted. A long indoor corridor works just as well. Barefoot or thin-soled foot ware is recommended for mindful walking. This formal walking meditation can also be modified for daily walking to the bus stand or corner store.

Stand erect at one end of the path and place your hands in front of you with the right palm over the-left. Relax, you are not doing anything special. Then bring your awareness to the body and observe your posture.

Let us begin by spending some time with the body. Just feel the body and the different sensations, the different movements in your body.

If there are thoughts, just let go of the thoughts and come back to the body. Feeling the body is one thing, thinking about the body is another, please see the difference. We are learning to feel the body.

Keep your eyes down cast about 1 ½ meters in front of your feet. Then walk slowly but naturally taking normal steps. Keep your awareness on your feet. Focus on the sensations on the sole of your feet as you walk slowly down the walking path.

Feel the softness or hardness of the walking path. The coolness or warmth as the foot touches the floor. Feel the new sensations arising and passing away with each step.

Observe the change in feeling when you lift the foot and place the foot down.

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Observe the change in feelings between the left foot and the right foot.

Observe the weight of the body shift from one foot to another.

Relax and walk naturally. Observe your feet wherever sensations arise. May be at the knees when they bend, may be at the sole on contact with the floor, and may be on the foot when you move it.

Walk slowly to the end of the path. Stop. Observe your body in the standing posture.

Turn to the right, one foot at a time. Observe the sensations on the sole of your feet as you turn.

Observe your mind to see if it has wandered off or if it is still with the sensations on the sole of the foot. Bring the mind gently back to the foot if it has wandered.

Turn again and observe the sensation as you turn. You are now facing the walking path. Keep your eyes down cast so as not to get distracted. Reestablish mindfulness if mind has wandered. Let go of thoughts that may have arisen.

Walk back slowly, feeling the sensation on the sole of each foot. If required, you may identify the left foot as left and the right foot as right⁴. Continue down the path observing sensations. Stop at the end of path. Repeat as before until the gong sounds.

Guided Meditation - Two

Practice as instructed in guided meditation – one, described above for a short time. Then enhance your mindfulness by observing the movement and sensations of the foot when you lift, move and place the foot. You can begin with silent noting such as lifting, moving and placing if required. Continue up and down the path observing the sensations on your lower body and feet. Place your mindfulness firmly on your foot and observe the various sensations such as the roughness, softness, heat or cool of the walking path. Observe the feeling of the weight of the body shift from foot to foot when you walk. Observe the stretching at the knee when the knee bends.

You are practicing mindful walking. Be aware of sensations as they arise and pass away. Just observe whatever is happening in the present moment. Walking meditation enhances moment-to-moment awareness. Have no expectations.

⁴ Sayadaw Mahasi Thero, the renowned Meditation Master from Myanmar introduced silent noting to assist yogis with mindfulness.



Chapter 10

Meditation on Loving Kindness

*Just as a mother,
Protects her child, her only child.
Cherish all living beings,
With boundless kindness and compassion.*

Metta Sutta - Sutta Nipata

The Pali word *metta* is translated to English as loving-kindness. It is sometimes translated as, goodwill or as compassion, and it literally means friendliness. Loving-kindness Begins with ourselves

It is psychologically very interesting that the meditation of loving-kindness has to begin with oneself. It is extremely important to learn to be friendly to oneself. The phrase I like to use is: learning to be your best friend in a most friendly way. To make this very important connection with oneself; to feel at ease with oneself, feel at home with oneself. In other words, to feel as if you are coming home to yourself.

It is only when we make this connection with ourselves that we can really feel friendly to others. It is only then that we can really open our hearts to others. If we do not make this connection with ourselves, what happens is we start to hate ourselves, we start to dislike ourselves. It becomes a habit to give ourselves ‘minuses’. In doing this, in a way, you learn to become your enemy. This can create a lot of suffering for yourselves and others.

Therefore, this is one very important aspect of loving-kindness, learning to be friendly to oneself, learning to open your heart to yourself, and learning to open your heart to others. Please relate what I am saying to your own experience. Please make an effort to do that, and then my talk will be a meditation in itself.

Forgiveness and Wounds in Our Heart

Another important aspect of loving-kindness is forgiveness. Human beings carry what I call wounds; wounds created by what you have done to others, and wounds created by what others have done to you. I think everyone here, including myself, can relate to this. What happens with some human beings is that they continue to carry these wounds within themselves. If you carry these wounds within without healing them, you can create suffering

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for yourself and suffering for others, without knowing that the suffering is in relation to the wounds you are carrying.

They can also affect our body in a number of ways. We can have certain tensions in different parts of our body that are related to these wounds and repressed emotions. These wounds can also create certain illnesses. Another way they can affect us is that they can disturb our sleep. Do we have fearful dreams, do we get angry in our dreams, or do we cry in our sleep? Another way these wounds can affect us is that we can be overcome by emotion suddenly, and we do not know the cause. Suddenly, we feel like crying; suddenly there is fear or sadness. And the reason for these sudden emotions cannot be found.

Another way they can affect us is that these emotions, the wounds, can come up at the time of death. It is interesting to find out why they should surface at the time of death. When we are living, we may repress them, push them away and not look at them. But these wounds can surface at the time of death, when our minds and bodies are weak.

This shows us that we cannot live peacefully with these unhealed wounds. We also cannot sleep peacefully, and we cannot die peacefully. Therefore, it is extremely important to learn to heal these wounds. Meditation of loving-kindness can help us to heal these wounds by learning to forgive ourselves and learning to forgive others. Forgive ourselves by realising that we are only human. Forgive others by realising that they too are only human. Also learn to let go of the wounds by realising that they happened in the past. We cannot change the past, so why should we carry the past as a burden to create suffering for ourselves and others in the present?

Make Friends with Unpleasant Situations

Another very important aspect of loving-kindness is learning to use loving-kindness to relate to unpleasant situations and unpleasant emotions when they arise. We do not like having unpleasant emotions, physical pain and mental pain. Therefore, we tend to avert and resist them. When you observe your mind and its feeling and are faced with an unpleasant situation, you may observe that you are trying to push them away. Unfortunately, by doing that we give them more power and energy. In such situations we can use meditation of loving-kindness to learn to make friends with these unpleasant emotions. One very simple way of making friends with them is by learning to say to yourself: it is okay not to be okay - that is, to say okay to unpleasant situations.

See the Positive Elements in Us

Another aspect of loving-kindness is learning to see the positive elements in us, to see the goodness in ourselves, to see the Buddha-nature in ourselves. One way of being our own enemy is by seeing only our mistakes, seeing only the negative things, only giving minuses to ourselves. Therefore, it is extremely important to learn to see the positive nature in

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ourselves. It is very important to learn to give plusses to ourselves. Learn to appreciate our goodness and see the Buddha-nature in ourselves. When we learn to do this, we also see the positive elements in others. We learn to give more and more plusses to others; we see more and more the Buddha-nature in others - and then you will come to a stage where you won't see a difference between yourself and others.

Be Kind to Others

Another very important aspect of loving-kindness is learning to do kind and compassionate things for others. When you develop loving-kindness within yourselves, then your actions, speech, and words are naturally related to this positive aspect of loving-kindness. When you learn to be friendly and kind to others, you learn to feel empathy for others. This can also bring lots of joy, and lightness to yourself because you see and know that others are happy because of your own actions.

Do not Allow Others to Exploit You

But having loving-kindness is not about allowing others to exploit you. It is not about allowing others to do what they like to you. It is very important to learn that there are times when you have to assert yourselves and learn to be firm with others. In this connection I would like to relate a story that I like very much.

The story is about a cobra that was practising loving-kindness. There was this cobra in a forest practising loving-kindness, saying: May all beings be well, may all beings be happy, may all beings be free of suffering. There was an old woman who could not see properly. She was collecting firewood, and when she saw the cobra. She thought it was a rope. She used the rope to bundle the firewood she had collected. As the cobra was practising loving-kindness, the cobra allowed the old woman to do this. The old woman carried the bundle of firewood home. Then, after some difficulty the cobra escaped with lots of pain and wounds on its body.

The cobra went to meet his meditation master, and told the master that he had adopted the practice of loving-kindness, but that it had resulted in wounds and great pain in its body! The master very gently and calmly told the cobra that it had not been practising loving-kindness, it had been practicing foolish loving-kindness. You should have just hissed and shown her that you are a snake! Therefore, it is very important that we learn and apply what the cobra should have learnt in our everyday life.

Does giving us pluses and seeing the good side in ourselves all the time, result in conceit?

In this instance, we are talking about persons who have wounds and grievances and got used to giving ‘minuses’ to themselves. Such persons have got used to seeing the unpleasant elements in people, and are relating to themselves and at times others as an enemy. How do we work with this situation? This is the important issue. In such a situation we need to realise: I'm only giving minuses to myself; aren't there good things that I've done? Therefore, we are learning to see the good things, factually, objectively, without, of course, being conceited about it, but simply as a fact. As the Buddha said, we learn to see the goodness, we learn to see the positive side, and we learn to see things as they are. This is the important thing. Then, we learn to see the goodness in others which helps us to appreciate them. When you see goodness in others, you learn to rejoice in their goodness and happiness. In this way you develop very important spiritual qualities which help your practice.

I would like to ask a question from the audience. I ask this whenever I visit a foreign country.

Which is easier to do: to forgive oneself or to forgive others? Please reflect on this and give an answer from your heart.

There was a mixed response from the audience. Some agreed that it was harder to forgive oneself. Some felt that it was harder to forgive others.

This indicates that those who find it difficult to forgive themselves, are very hard on themselves. They are stonehearted towards themselves saying: I do not deserve to be forgiven. Those who find it difficult to forgive others, are being very hard on others. You can now see the importance of developing softness. You realise the importance of being gentle and feeling tender to oneself and others. When you develop these qualities, naturally you can forgive yourself and you can forgive others.

Therefore, what we have to learn, and I think it is extremely important, is to accept our humanness. To accept that we are imperfect human beings and that we still have shortcomings. In the same way we have to realise that we are living in a world where other people are imperfect, where other people are only human. Then we are bound to see the shortcomings and human frailties, arising in others and in ourselves with kindness and gentleness.

According to the Buddha's teaching there is greed, hatred, and delusion both in us and in other people. Therefore, because of greed, hatred, and delusion, we all have shortcomings and make mistakes. Only someone who is completely enlightened will not have these shortcomings; but as long as we are not fully enlightened, we will continue to make mistakes. Therefore, we are imperfect. I feel that it is extremely important to realise this, to accept this

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and learn to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. When you can see things in these terms, you will be able to forgive yourself and forgive others.

As discussed in previous chapters, human beings are losing these qualities of the heart. Therefore, it is very important for us to know this and make an effort to open our hearts to ourselves, and to others.



Chapter 11

Thoughts, Emotions and Sensations

When we try to repress thought, we give them more power.

One has to see this in one's own meditation.

When you invite them either they do not arise or they are not as strong.

When these thoughts that you do not like are friends

That you have explored and know of as just thoughts,

Then if they come or not does not matter.

However, in life we only like angels not monsters. This creates a dichotomy. It is a battle during meditation. We resist the monsters and desire the angels. Please go beyond the pleasant and unpleasant. This is an important breakthrough. Work towards a mirror like mind. That is a mind that is free.

Experiences in Relations to Thoughts

You may have observed that when we are focusing on breathing and do not want thoughts to arise, that they come anyway. But when we focus on the thoughts and want thoughts and invite them, then they do not come. Why is the mind always acting in opposition to us? Is this the natural state of the mind or is this something we have done to the mind? Why is it that when we invite and allow thoughts to come, they are not forthcoming? But when we do not want them to come, and want to control and resist them, they keep coming. In fact, this is also true of emotions. When we invite emotions especially what we refer to as negative emotions, and ask them to arise in our mind, they seem hesitant and shy to arise. However, when we fight them, fear them and want to avert and control them they appear in full force.

Mindfulness Meditation is all about understanding the mind. It is about making friends with the mind, being gentle with the mind, and not controlling the mind. The mind is like a little child. If you ask a child not to do something they want to go ahead and do it. Then parents say that their children are stubborn. It is the same principle. Our minds behave just like stubborn children. We judge our minds similarly saying our mind will not do what we want. Yogis often tell me that: their mind is tough; their mind is agitated and defused; they cannot meditate successfully.

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First make friends with the mind and body. Make time to understand the mind and body the way it is. Make space for the mind. Meditation is about exploring and discovering the nature of the mind and how the body responds to the mind. Then it becomes fun and interesting. We can make discoveries. If you are only concerned with a particular state of mind, the ones you refer to as “good”, then we miss this wonderful opportunity to get to know the mind. Instead, we get involved in techniques and achieving certain states of mind.

We tend to judge our thoughts as positive or negative, beautiful or ugly, good or bad, important or unimportant etc. We judge them based on past conditioning. Then we repress and try to control thoughts that we judge as negative or “not good” thoughts. We control them and deny them. In this mindfulness or awareness technique, we just relate to thoughts as thoughts without any value judgment. We do not try to control and repress them. Then you will not have this unruly childlike mind.

When you do not judge them, and accept them just as thought with no ownership as my thoughts and good or bad thoughts they continue to arise but you do not get involved with them. You just observe them arising and passing away. It is by judging them that we get involved with thoughts and further thinking. Just see thoughts as thoughts, emotions as emotions and sensations or feelings of the body as feelings of the body. Then these thoughts emotions and sensations will fade away automatically.

There is a Tibetan saying: *Relate to mind as you would to the clear, spacious, sky and relate to thoughts as to the passing clouds. The clouds do not affect the sky, and the sky does not affect the clouds.* They let them be together. Just observe the thoughts like how one observes the clouds in the sky and just let them be. Then the thoughts do not affect the mind like the clouds do not affect the sky.

In the Zen, Theravada and many other traditions, they compare the mind to a mirror and its reflection of objects to the sensations, thoughts and emotions. A mirror is not affected by the objects it reflects and the objects it reflects are not affected by the mirror. You can only do this if you learn not to judge the sensations, thoughts and emotions that arise as being good and bad, beautiful and ugly, important and unimportant. Then the mind remains like the spacious sky or a clear mirror unaffected by thoughts and emotions. Many people confuse meditation with the idea that it is all about stopping thoughts. Over time thoughts do fade away. But the focus is a mirror like clear mind.

When you learn to make friends with thoughts and emotions, and learn this technique, you do not have to confine and limit it to your sitting meditation. As you know, thoughts arise all the time. You can observe the thoughts and investigate and learn from them any time, any place. From the time we get up, to the time we go to sleep, our faculty of the mind is a vessel for an endless relentless mental chatter. Therefore, if we can relate to thoughts and emotions like this, we can investigate and play with our minds and it becomes interesting. It becomes a way of life.

How Thoughts Relate to Stories and Day Dreaming Relates to Fantasies

Let us take an example. There was a western meditator who came to our monastery in Sri Lanka. One day she was bitten by a mosquito. She started thinking about the possibility of getting malaria, and what would happen to her if she got it. She thought about how disruptive this would be to all at the monastery and imagined that she would have to be taken to a hospital. Then she thought that this would mean that she would miss her flight back home and would have to cancel her ticket and rebook for a later date. Then someone would have to inform her mother as she was expecting her back on the scheduled date. This call of course would be very stressful and worrisome for her mother who may then get depressed. I see that you are amused by this story. But you know that we have all done this and continue to do this. We make up stories based on what has happened in the past and fantasize what may happen in the future. That is how we create suffering. We create our own suffering.

The stories and daydreams are triggered by an incident. Then, past conditioning and habit take over. The trigger may be a smell, taste, sound (something that was said), sight or an experience such as a mosquito bite that brought to mind a story about a person who caught malaria from a mosquito bite. Her story would have been coloured by what she had heard.

If she had experienced malaria herself previously, or even experienced a Sri Lankan hospital in the past, then the story will unfold based on that experience. But if it was just hearsay then it would be based on what she heard and is just a total fabricated fantasy. Either way, it is an involuntary unfolding of a stream of thoughts that result in anxiety, stress and suffering because she never got malaria.

Stress and Suffering without Thinking

Can there be suffering without a thought? When we try to repress thoughts, we give them more power. One has to see this in one's own meditation. When you invite them either they do not arise or they are not as strong. There is a game we play on the last day of the retreat. I call it inviting of the "monsters". Invite all the monsters (thoughts) that you do not like. Then observe the thoughts that arise. They do not come! However, when you repress, small monsters, become bigger. We create our own suffering by making larger than life monsters. Make space in the mind for our monsters get to know them for what they really are, then become friends with these monsters. When these thoughts that you do not like are friends that you have explored and know of as just thoughts, then if they come or not does not matter.

However, in life we only like angels not monsters. This creates a dichotomy. It is a battle during meditation. We resist the monsters and desire the angels. Please go beyond the pleasant and unpleasant. This is an important breakthrough. Work towards a mirror like mind. That is a mind that is free.

Human beings give so much powers to negative emotions, that when they are not there, we do not know that we have an equanimous, peaceful mind and do not appreciate it. We have given such energy to overcoming defilements that when we do not have defilements, we do not know that they are not there. Both situations, the arising of monsters and angels, should be addressed in the same way with a mirror like mind. This leads to the fading of thoughts, stress and suffering.

Dealing with Emotions that Arise in Everyday Life

Anger, fear, depression, and jealousy come up in unexpected situations. How does a meditator work with this situation in daily life? We have learned to dislike unpleasant experiences like anger. As a child we learn to repress anger to get approval from our mother. A meditator who came to our monastery told us that when she was a child that her mother told her not to get angry because it made her face look ugly. Therefore, we learn to repress and control anger or to pretend and hide our anger. This is a very strong condition we have learnt and developed from a young age. Sadly, in our spiritual life too, we do the same thing. The expectation is that meditators should not get angry. This is an unrealistic expectation. Yogis are normal human beings in mindfulness training. First accept the fact that it is normal for such emotions to arise.

We should not, however, react to them, express them and cause pain and suffering to others. We should also not repress, control and hide them and cause pain and suffering to ourselves.

We have already taken a position and said that these thoughts are “bad or negative” or that “I am bad” without learning about them. Instead, just observe and be aware that they are just thoughts or just emotions. First learn about these emotions by letting them arise fully, then investigate and explore the thoughts.

1. We have to realize that emotions are normal and will be felt from time to time. How do we change this deep-rooted perspective that certain emotions are bad and that they should be hidden, repressed or controlled? The problem is we have already taken a position that they are bad. Even before we have learnt to understand them. *A well-known psychiatrist said the biggest problem for modern man is fear of emotions.* We do not experience them fully because we have taken a position that they are bad and must be hidden controlled or suppressed. The first point is that we have to realize that emotions are normal and will be felt from time to time.

2. We must learn to investigate and experiment with thoughts. We cannot experiment with thoughts and emotions when you have taken a position already. A scientist has to be objective when he is undertaking an investigation. When we have these emotions, we do not express them fully because of our past learning. If we can learn to be completely aware of the emotion, be with it and learn about it, then we will realize that it is normal to get angry. We should not express our anger neither should we repress our anger. Instead, we should just be

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aware and explore with questions when we are calm and collected by reflecting on this incident.

You know that you cannot work with this state of mind. Maybe you have to wait until you are calmer. May be a few days, a week or one month. This is the second point. Look at oneself rather than the object that triggers your anger. You cannot control others. How can you, when you cannot even control your own anger.

Let us begin by questioning why do we get angry? We get angry because we have an expectation an ideal model how another person should behave and how we should behave. But you cannot change another. Can we achieve happiness if our happiness is dependent on others behaviour? Then, when you realize that the problem is with yourself, you know that the solution is with yourself. Then we learn to look at ourself and take responsibility for our anger.

3. Another aspect about anger is that there are physiological changes that take place in your body when you get angry.

Heart beat gets faster, stomach gets tense, face gets dark and with anger, breath comes faster. Various people may have various signals that indicate the onset of anger. However, the rapid breathing is common to all. Experiment, let the emotions arise and see for yourself that this change in breath applies to other emotions too.

4. Apply, investigate and experiment, rather than control and pretend. Make space in your mind for emotions and learn about them. Are we taking ownership of this anger as my anger and my fear? Can we relate to it as just anger? If you can do this in everyday life, then they become valuable learning experiences. Then we are prepared and looking for and waiting for such experiences to learn from them. Rather than beating yourself up for getting angry, relate to your thoughts and emotions as a friend and a learning experience. Then you can see and experience this state of mind when the angry thoughts are there and when they are not there.

Once you can differentiate an angry mind and a calm mind, then you start to appreciate the times when your mind is not angry. When it is free of these emotions that lead to rapid breathing stress, anxiety and regret. You may even realize that if you can be completely in the present moment, then you can be free of anger. However, this is not a realistic expectation. Instead, you reflect that the event that has happened has happened in the past. Then the story loses power. Or you realize that what you are fantasizing may never happen. Then the fantasizing loses power.

Repress and control, pretend and hide, or indulge and express; all of these options have problems. Ideally, we do not take any of these options. we make space to observe and investigate. Then you will relate to thoughts and emotions in another way.

5. The natural reaction to provocation is anger. Don't take up the position that you do not or will not get angry. Instead see how fast you can get over it. It is ok when you get angry, so

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long as you do not express it and hurt another person. But sometimes it happens. Then use it as a learning experience. Reflect when one is calm and try to understand that behaviour that you now regret. I reacted; how should I have responded?

How will I respond the next time when I am criticized or belittled? Maybe you can let them know how it makes you feel. But if you fear to make mistakes then it is a different situation. It is human to react and make mistakes. He gave me one slap. Maybe I should give him two slaps!

If one is a meditator you start reflecting on where does this slapping stop. Make an effort to understand this behavior. To see what it does to oneself. How it generates suffering to oneself. Then you will realize the differences when the mind is with anger and without anger. You will recognize how the mind is when you have these emotions and how mind is when you do not have these emotions. Then a natural transformation takes place that is not a forcing of yourself. These emotions just fade away.

Achievements and Ambitions in Spiritual Life

Do not be concerned about results and accomplishments of meditation. We are so involved in goals in our ordinary life that we have brought it into our spiritual life. Ambition is ambition. There is no difference if it is in your home life or spiritual life. Enjoy the journey. It is better than the achievement. When we want the results and focus on the achievement, we miss the fun of the journey. It is the journey that is interesting.

It is like the adventure of climbing a mountain. If your sole focus is getting to the top you miss the fun and interesting things that you experience on the journey. The process of climbing and the adventure of climbing is lost. The practice is the journey. Learn to see that what you are doing is interesting, playful and fun. That is freedom. It is freedom in living.

Undertake this spiritual journey with a group of likeminded friends or family. Then the group will support each other. Your spiritual friends know that you are working towards mindfulness as a way of life. Make the journey joyful and interesting without fear. A shared experience with like-minded friends brings out kindness and compassion. Others in the group will know and understand that you are in training and trying even if you make a mistake. They will support your efforts. You need spiritual friends (*kalyana-mitta*) in this journey. Friends who will understand the importance of being non-judgmental to the success of the practice.

Your practice is the most important aspect. Not the result. If you have ambitions and unrealistic expectations, then it will result in stress, both in your home life and spiritual practice.

Sensations

Working with meditators for many years, I have realized that some people carry repressed emotions in their body. Humans can carry unpleasant memories in certain parts of body by holding on to unpleasant emotions. They manifest as tension or unpleasant sensations in the body.

Sometimes, the feelings that occur in the body are due to repressed emotions. They could also be the effect of certain painful memories lodged in some parts of body. There could be psychological emotions which manifest as results in the body. Therefore, when they come out, we do not realize or know that they are a result of repressed part hurt. We go to the doctor, physiotherapist etc. looking for a cure. We spend a lot of money because we do not understand the cause.

When tension or strong sensations arise in the body, instead of suppressing them just observe and let them arise in full. With this objective observation, in this way, you can bring up repressed emotions stored in body and by doing this you can reduce this tension in the body.

For example, Repressed fear often manifests as tension in the stomach. When you are aware of breathing and tension in the stomach arises, then there is a battle between the mindfulness and the tension. You want the tension to go away so that you can be with the breath. Instead, don't focus on breathing focus on the tension in the stomach. Let them come up in full, be with the tension. Observe them, make this tension your meditation.

Some traditions use yoga, tai chi and other physical exercises to help with repressed emotions. Often, we see meditation centres combining these mindful exercises with mindfulness meditation. These mindful exercises also bring up and let go of repressed emotions

Another aspect of this technique is that at present, we are working at a gross level. You can experience a subtler level of awareness. You may have a glimpse of thinking without a thinker. You realize that there are only thoughts no thinker. Some of you may have glimpsed that there is only thinking, and realize that we have constructed a thinker.

Similar situations may be experienced with sensations and emotions. There is no feeler. Only feeling. It is the same with hearing. There is no hearer separate from hearing. With this knowing, my fear, my anger, my pain drops away. This is a non-dualistic experience where boundaries drop away. You may experience a glimpse of this if you keep practicing in this way. Then you will not take ownership of phenomena as, “me”, “mine” and “myself”.



Chapter 12

The Concept of Not-Self

In sitting meditation, we learn to observe the pain objectively, with no ownership and expectations. Once we develop these skills and understandings, we need to put these new skills into practice in our daily life.

In Buddhist terms it is known as the second arrow. The first arrow is the physical pain resulting from the wound. The second is the mental anguish and anxiety that we create by unrealistic expectations and thinking.

This expectation or model is based on ego. Every time you suffer, you see that it is due to your ego. Then you will realize that it is my ego, my expectations, and my model rather than how the other person behaves that is the cause of my suffering.

One of the most difficult teachings of the Dhamma is the doctrine of not-self (*anatta*) also referred to as selflessness or ego lessness. I will do my best to communicate something about this concept, and follow up with further discussion using examples. Let us begin with the question, “Why is it difficult to understand the doctrine of not-self?” One important reason is because we can be conditioned by language itself. As children we have been conditioned to use words like I, me, and mine. This is my mother, my brother, my body my toy. With this conditioned use of language from a very young age there is a sense of ownership. We assume that people and things belong to us. It is interesting and profound that the Buddha realized that we could be misled by this conditioned language.

He said, “I use language but am not misled by language”. When we use language, such as me and mine, we are misled by the conditioning and the concepts of language. Perhaps this is the most important reason as to why we cannot understand the concept of not-self. We use language such as I, I am, me, and mine every day, consistently reinforcing these conceptual words.

Another reason is the feelings that we have. For example, when you listen to me give a Dhamma talk, you have the feeling that I am listening to a talk, I am seated at the moment and I am feeling pain in my leg. Therefore, the feeling of I and I am, comes naturally to us and results in very strong conditioning.

Some meditation techniques and concepts in Dhamma that helps us to work with this strong concept of ownership caused by language and feeling are as follows:

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1. Breathing Awareness Meditation or (*Anapanasati Bhavana*) - Focusing on the awareness of the in-breath and out-breath. How does this technique help to work with an independent, non-dualistic knowing of I, me and mine? Breathing Awareness Meditation has many aspects and implications. In this chapter we will only touch on its application to the understanding of not-self (*anatta*).

There are two aspects of Buddhist Meditation. Tranquility/Calm meditation (*Samatha*) and Insight meditation (*Vipassana*).

Tranquility or *Samatha* meditation leads to the experiencing of calm and tranquility where you may have a glimpse of realization that though we say one is observing breathing that the observer and the observed eventually become one. You may have a glimpse that there is only breathing taking place. In that moment, all other past identifications, concepts such as I am a Sri Lankan, I am a Buddhist, and I am a man or a woman can disappear. For a moment you have a glimpse that only breathing is happening or taking place. This non-dualistic experience, where artificial dichotomy drops, makes one aware that you have had a momentary glimpse of the experience of complete oneness.

2. Since I moved to a Meditation Centre, which is isolated, simple and primitive, (we do not have electricity), all we have are the sounds of nature, such as the sounds of birds and wind. Often there are moments of complete silence. Since going there, I discovered the meditation technique of just listening to external sound on my own. I am happy to say that some meditators can now experience a non-dualistic technique by listening to sound.

Usually, we listen to sound with past concepts or associations such as this is the sound of a car, a bird or a person speaking. Can you listen to sound without words? Can you listen to sound without past associations? If you can, you may experience that the listener and listening separation drops away. When there are no words you may have a glimpse, a moment when you hear it as one sound and there is only listening and the notion of a listener drops away. It is these words, these concepts that create this separation.

3. Another meditation technique I use often is choice less awareness, undirected meditation or objectless meditation. Initially you focus on a subject such as the in-breath and out-breath. Initially it is required, in order to achieve present moment awareness and a certain amount of calm or tranquility. But once it is achieved, you can focus your attention on whatever arises. You allow thoughts, emotions, sensations, etc. to arise. Then, because you have a calm and clear mind you can allow your thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc. to arise and just observe them.

Initially you will have the duality of the experience of the observer of feeling and the feeling, the observer of thinking and the thinking. However, with more practice and time, you may observe, as said in the Dhamma, that in feeling there is only feeling, in thinking there is only

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thinking. This is known as thinking without the thinker. It is just a pure knowing. This may give you a glimpse of not-self (*anatta*).

4. There is a technique in Burma taught by the great meditation Master, Mahasi Sayadaw known as the technique of noting or labeling. If thoughts are arising you note silently as thinking, if sounds are heard as hearing, if pain is felt as pain, sensations as just sensations, etc. You are not interested in the contents; just note without getting involved. The idea is that there is only feeling, or only thinking or only hearing. You are not evaluating and identifying as pleasant or unpleasant. This way too, over time with practice, you slowly drop the separation or duality.

5. There is also an important technique taught by the well-known Vietnamese meditation master Thich Nhat Hanh that all beings are interrelated. He coined the new word “interbeing” and emphasized this new word as an achievable experience. When you experience this interbeing, then you have a glimpse of an experience that you are not separate from others. You have a sense of connectedness or interbeing. When you do not have this sense of interbeing you build a wall around yourself and those you call mine. This duality of that which is mine and not-mine (or other) results in racial, religious and gender walls or boundaries. When you experience this interbeing with nature and human beings you penetrate this interbeing, which is also a glimpse of the doctrine of not-self.

6. In my teaching I emphasize the teaching of boundless compassion and loving kindness or friendliness. Also known as compassion and kindness without boundaries. A person who has glimpsed the letting go of boundaries using compassion and loving kindness, also has this sense of oneness or no separation due to religion, language, creed, colour, gender, etc.

After we finished chanting, I thought of the remarkable discovery of Prince Siddhartha. The problem he faced was the universal disease of sickness, old age and death; the problem resulting from uncontrollable change. What was his simple but profound discovery? It was the realization of not-self. When you observe, realize and accept that the body and mind does not belong to you, then you realize that you have very limited control over the ever-changing body. With this realization and acceptance of old age, sickness and death, there are no distorted expectations of permanence and self; then there is no suffering.

Ownership in Relationships

It is natural to feel and have this ownership of “mine” in relationships. Language promotes this with terms such as my girlfriend, my boyfriend my husband, my wife and my children. How can one have a relationship and still have no ownership?

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There is an inherent problem of ownership in relationships. With ownership comes the building of walls or boundaries around us to enclose those that we view as “mine”. Anything can happen to those who are not mine (other), and it would not be a problem. However, nothing bad or unpleasant should happen to those who are mine. This wall building results in a possessive form of jealousy, anxiety, anger, hatred and suffering. My girlfriend should not look at others. When jealousy arises what we consider as love can easily turn to anger, anxiety and stress. My son should not get into drugs. Despite the effort of caring and loving parents, kids may experiment with drugs. If they do, this possessive love often turns to anger.

Anyone can die, but not my mother or my child. But death is common to all beings. And when it happens it leads to great suffering and possibly even anger and questions such as why me? Why did this happen to my child, he was so good?

If you have loving kindness without ownership you can have deep warmth and caring without suffering. This loving kindness can also be extended to your body. You look after your body with care ensuring proper nutrition, exercise and medical attention when required. But you do so with this important realization that nothing belongs to you. You are a caretaker of your body and family for an unknown short period of time. You perform these duties with warmth and caring and the knowledge that you are not the owner.

When we die this becomes very evident. When we die, we leave behind this body and all our wealth and possessions. We leave behind all our family and friends. We leave behind this mind and our titles. If you can penetrate this experience of not-self when living, then the quality of living becomes very different. It becomes a beautiful way to live and a beautiful way to die.

Ownership and Control

Ownership is related to control. We assume that we can control “ourself”, those that we call mine and our environment. However, when we meditate, we realize that we have very little control over our mind and body. We cannot control our thoughts, feelings and sensations. If we have difficulty controlling our body and mind, then how can we control those that we have taken ownership of as “mine”? Surely, we must have even less control over others. Therefore, disappointments in those that we call “I, me or mine” not meeting expectations is inevitable. But when the inevitable happens, we are anxious, angry, and frustrated that our expectations have not been met.

The Buddha realized this. He realized that it is only at the point of wanting something that we can have some control. He realized that we have limited control over ourselves and even less control over others. When we can control something or someone it gives a false sense of ownership. When you realize that this is an illusion, you are open to this insecurity and vulnerability and you can surrender this control over what you perceive as mine. You can

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live in a beautiful stress free, way. If you can surrender to insecurity, change, and uncertainty, then there is no stress and suffering. Learn to surrender to the way it is. Accept with wisdom that some things just cannot be controlled. You cannot stop a loved one who is addicted to smoking. You may be able to support and influence them. They have to take responsibility and want to do it, and then do it on their own. When you can accept this Truth, then the stress and worry fall away.

Responsibility, Accountability and Not-self

If there is no sense of “me and mine”, then what is the place of responsibility? When one gets angry, we assume that the anger has been created by the “other” person. We do not take responsibility for the anger and do not take responsibility to what happens within ourselves. By observing our minds and investigation we have to realize that suffering is self-induced. It has nothing to do with the environment or others. We create our own suffering.

In the Meditation Centre we get up early morning at 4.45.am, when the gong goes off. You can just imagine the reaction of the yogis, when it is raining and they have not slept well. However, the same gong is rung for lunch and all the yogis are very happy to hear the gong at lunchtime. It is the same gong. It is the same sound. It is very important to realize that we create our own problems. If the suffering is within us then we can take responsibility, be accountable and reduce and overcome the stress and suffering. If the “other” person is responsible for our suffering, it is impossible for you to control or eliminate it.

Meditation is the attempt to find the medicine for the problem or sickness that we create within us. This is the biggest responsibility we have. By helping ourselves we start to help others as well.

Dealing with Pain (and Thought) in Meditation and Daily Life.

In formal meditation we work with pain (and the resulting thoughts) to realize the nature of expectations on pain. The natural tendency is to avert the pain that arises from long sits. We want to push it away, so we change our position. In sitting meditation, we learn to observe the pain objectively, with no ownership and expectations. Once we develop these skills these understandings, we need to put these new skills into practice in our daily life. Whether we are in sitting meditation or doing something in our daily life, suffering/pain happens. When we resist the present moment happenings, we create more suffering. In Buddhist terms it is known as the second arrow. The first arrow is the physical pain resulting from the wound. The second, is the mental anguish and anxiety that we create by unrealistic expectations and thinking.

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Generally, we have expectations and a constructed model of how things should be. Frustration and suffering arise as a result of this pre planned expectation or model. Whether you are in sitting meditation or daily life. If you do not have a model then, how can one suffer?

One might ask, is it realistic and possible to live without a model? Penetrate that model and see it for what it is. Models are expectations or plans that we have constructed. It is the nature of models (that we have created) to be met at times, and to fail at other times.

Let us take an example of an examination that your child is preparing for. Understand the nature of examinations. Then give your full support to the child making sure he has prepared well in advance, and tried his best. You know the nature of expectations. It may work or it may not. Now let go and learn to accept the result which may or may not be exactly what you expected. Then you will not be plagued by stress and suffering while you await the results. You will also be able to support your child if the results are disappointing.

In life we have a choice. The choice is, that we can choose to suffer or we can choose to not suffer. Stress and suffering are natural occurrences in life. When you have an experience of suffering, reflect on this. Why am I suffering? As an adult you realize that everyone has to die. You may not know when or how death will occur but you know that it is a fact of life. Have you constructed an unrealistic model on these lines? If you have not, then you can heal from this grief. Have you created an unrealistic model that others may be faced with untimely, unexpected deaths, but not members of your family? Constructed models are uncertain and vulnerable. Therefore, one must be realistic and prepared for this uncertainty.

You can understand what I am saying theoretically. How can you understand it practically? Any time you are hurt, examine and investigate your mind. You will realize that the suffering is due to a model; an expectation that it should be different for issues, which are mine. This model is based on ego. Every time you suffer you see that it is due to your ego. Then you will realize that it is my ego my expectations, my model rather than how the other person behaves that is the cause of my suffering.

Dealing with Suffering that Arises from Compassion

We must first understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is when we feel pity or sorry for someone who is suffering or in pain, but do not respond to their need. Instead, we may tell them about a similar incident that we or someone else experienced. It does not reduce or help the person's situation. In sympathy you have generally considered the person as 'other'. We do not feel the suffering, and we are removed from the other person's pain. Empathy is when we feel compassion for some one's suffering and respond to it by supporting them and doing whatever we can to reduce or eliminate their suffering.

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We must also understand the difference between reaction and response. If we are not stable, and not calm we tend to react to a situation. Response is entirely different. Often there is an immediate need to do something about this unexpected situation. When we are calm and aware of this, we can respond to the situation without reacting. We can call 911, take the person to the hospital or administer first aid. This is responding to an emergency. Crying, getting frustrated or paralyzed with fear is reacting to the situation.

However, we are only human. There will be times when we will react to a situation. To achieve a mind to respond in all circumstances requires practice and calm. To respond with empathy and compassion to strangers as one would for someone one that one refers to as “mine” one must feel and experience the oneness of all beings.



Chapter 13

Are we Progressing in our Meditation?

*The direct path for purification of all beings.
For the tranquilizing of sorrow, lamentation, stress and suffering.
For the fading away of aversion, frustration, anger –
Delight, desire, lust.
To be seen and experience by one, within oneself
One must observe the mind and see - this fading of defilements.
This is not something that one can delegate to another.
One must do it by oneself, for oneself.*

This practice leads to calm and tranquility, insight and wisdom and more importantly, freedom from stress and suffering. It also leads to independence and unleashes the power within. It empowers all persons, to experience the benefits of the practice and breaks down the man-made barriers of religion, social status, gender, age, skin colour physical appearance and race. One experiences the oneness of all beings, oneself.

Satipatthāna Sutta – Dīgha Nikāya 22

In Chapter One, we defined *Bhāvanā* or meditation as Knowing the Mind, Molding the Mind and Releasing the Mind (from suffering). Using mindfulness, or non-judgmental present moment awareness, you have now learnt and experienced The Art of Living.

This book, “Mindfulness - The Art of Living”, provides a strong foundation for busy adults to practice mindfulness or non-judgmental present moment awareness. This practice leads to calm and tranquility, insight and wisdom and more importantly, freedom from stress and suffering. It also leads to independence and unleashes the power within. It empowers all persons to experience the benefits of the practice, and breaks down the man-made barriers of religion, social status, gender, age, skin colour physical appearance and race. One experiences the oneness of all beings.

In the modern world, expectations are very high and people often strive for perfection. Young adults are juggling the demands of higher education with part-time jobs to avoid huge student loans. Young parents are coping with shortages of quality day care, preschool children, and developing careers. The sandwich generation is troubled by the dual responsibility of caring for their ageing parents and challenges faced by their teenagers. Growing concerns of drug overdoses, gun violence, climate change, and racial divisions are rampant. There is an

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overload of information provided by social media, and hardly any time for processing of the data or fact checking. We live in a fast pace world with troubling concerns that at times seem to be insurmountable. In the West, mindfulness-based stress reduction has become as common as a household name and an antidote for elimination of suffering.

By shaping and molding the mind to states of happiness, through experience, you have gradually incorporated the teachings of the Awakened in you daily life. You have let go of unwholesome states of mind that lead to unskillful thoughts, speech and actions that leads to suffering. You have developed wholesome states of mind that leads to skillful thoughts, speech, and action that lead to states of joy, happiness and calm. You are shaping and cleansing or purifying the mind by experiencing, “Mindfulness – The Art of Living”. This chapter is a summary of what we have learned. However, it is important to realize that this knowledge will be just book knowledge if it is read and just stored in memory. This must be experienced for yourself again and again in your daily life. It must be incorporated as ‘an art of living’ for release from suffering.

Knowing the Mind – Knowing the mind is practiced both in daily life and in formal sitting and walking meditation. We get to know the mind by observing the mind to ascertain the nature or quality of one’s mind. We get to know ourselves better by observing the mind and body and by developing the skills and clarity of mind required to know our mind. We also learn how to become our own best friend by getting to know ourselves. With practice, and direct experience we have learnt to be accepting of present moment happenings that we cannot control.

Non-Judgmental Present Moment Awareness

We may observe qualities or emotions such as anxiety, anger, stress, frustration, sadness, grief, hatred etc. that lead to suffering. We may observe qualities or emotions such as joy, calm, peace, compassion, kindness, goodwill, generosity etc. that lead to happiness. We may also observe neutral or equanimous qualities which are balanced such as a calm acceptance, qualities which are hard to define which are neither pleasant or unpleasant but joyful in an ethereal sense.

Whatever the nature or quality of the mind, we do not judge or react to our observation. We accept the nature of the mind and respond to it as required with appropriate action or we just observe and let go with wisdom. Practice and discernment are required to determine if they should be let go or responded to with calm action. We apply that which we learnt in our formal sitting meditation to our daily life. We reflect and make this choice in daily life.

In formal meditation one lets go of thoughts, emotions and sensations. This is a higher form of generosity to oneself. We are working towards tranquility, insight and freedom from suffering. We have set aside this time for our practice. We do not interrupt our meditation and respond with kindness to our neighbour by baking a cake because we just remembered

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that it is her birthday, neither do we interrupt our meditation and phone our son or daughter because they have not called us for some time. However, in daily life we respond to such thoughts as required with calm, right effort and appropriate speech or action.

Investigating the Mind for the Causes

One also investigates and examines the mind to determine the causes of the various states of mind. This helps to determine the course of action required. One soon realizes that thinking feeds the state of mind and enhances stress, anxiety and suffering. Mindfulness or nonjudgmental present moment awareness results in calm and joyful stress-free states of mind. Therefore, we learn to just observe and let go of constructed thoughts of the past and the future.

One realizes that thoughts resulting from greed, lust, ill-will, anger and hatred feed and enhance suffering. It also leads to regret of reactive speech and action that you may have taken. Ownership such as me, and mine enhances suffering. In other words, the setting of boundaries and the building of walls between what we perceive as mine and other leads to enhanced suffering. Unrealistic expectations and constructed models lead to suffering. Thoughts of generosity or letting go, kindness, compassion and harmlessness enhance or promote peace of mind and happiness. We gradually learn to respond as opposed to reacting as it leads to peace of mind and tranquility.

One also realizes that this knowledge is experiential wisdom. It is not book knowledge or borrowed knowledge. These are insights that one has experienced for oneself. We are gradually incorporating the observation and investigation of the mind in our living experience. We are open and learning from life. This gives rise to insights or experiential wisdom that leads to the shaping or continued molding of the mind.

We now know when the mind is calm and when it is restless; we also know when the body is calm and when it is tense. We now know when there is desire or lust in the mind and the effect it has on our body and breath; we also know when there is anger and hatred in the mind and the effect it has on our body and breath. We have gradually learned how to respond to the various states of mind as required without reacting.

Molding the Mind

Once we know the mind, we mold the mind with appropriate thoughts speech and action to ensure states of peace, joy and happiness. We use restrain, avoidance and letting go of inappropriate thoughts, speech and action to eliminate states of mind that lead to stress and suffering. This requires great effort. It also requires consistency and patience. we can also observe the thoughts and just let them pass without feeding our emotions and bodily sensations. Just as lessons and daily practice over a period of time is required to learn to play

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the piano, mindfulness meditation requires formal training and practice in daily life to learn “The Art of Living”.

We are now using the formal sitting meditation, walking meditation and mindfulness in daily life to mold the mind. We have selected the meditation techniques that are right for us. We have also realized that we may need to change the technique as we progress in the practice. We have unleashed the power within because we can now observe the mind and body and select what is appropriate for our progress. Some of the techniques we practice may include:

Mindfulness Meditation on Kindness and Compassion – The molding of the mind to enhance the qualities of kindness and compassion is often used if anger and ill-will are present in the mind. It is also used to heal old wounds. This may not be required later as we progress in the practice as these qualities are now well embedded in our daily life. However, some may find so much joy in this practice that they make it a formal part of their practice.

Mindfulness Meditation on the Four elements and 32 parts of the Body - This has not been covered in this book but is generally used for molding the mind to reduce desire for sensual possessions and strong lust.

Mindfulness Meditation on Breath - Breathing Awareness meditation that leads to tranquility and insight was used by the Buddha for releasing of the mind. It is the most commonly used mindfulness meditation for the release of the mind - Awakening. We first establish mindfulness and calm the mind with tranquility meditation. This provides the platform or mirror like image to see the mind clearly. The mind can be clouded by desire/lust, anger/hatred, sloth/tope, regret/ restlessness and doubt. When the mind is tranquil and clear we can see deep into the mind where dormant, latent defilements lie buried. As these subtle thoughts arise and pass away insight arises from within and we see the real nature of all phenomena – Impermanent, suffering and not-self (*anicca, dukka, anatta*).

Mindful Walking Meditation – Was introduced in the book as a daily practice. It is used to enhance mindfulness as it is a more complex form of mindfulness that leads to clear comprehension of the mind. It is also required when practice moves to longer hours of sitting meditation.

Mindfulness in Daily Activities – Is required to ensure that mindfulness becomes an “Art of Living”. The formal sitting meditation of about one hour is not sufficient, we need to incorporate mindfulness in daily life. If not, mindfulness meditation will take us in one direction and our daily life may take us in another direction. This will slow your progress. When mindfulness becomes the Art of Living one progresses smoothly to a stress-free calm, joyful and happy life.

Releasing the Mind – Awakening

If practiced consistently, this book takes us to the experience of a glimpse of not-self or oneness. It breaks down the barriers of “I”, “me”, “mine” and “other” and leads to the experience of the oneness of all life. It leads to boundless compassion and kindness and a more forgiving and compassionate outlook in life. We move from selfishness towards selflessness with discernment. Some of you may have experienced a fading away of anger and anxiety and a calmer approach to the acceptance of the vicissitudes of life. Some may have glimpsed the oneness of humanity and the joy and happiness of kindness, compassion, good-will and generosity.

Some of you may also have glimpsed the experience of impermanence, not-self and the freedom of emptiness. The most well-known discourse of the Buddha for the establishment of mindfulness is the *Satipatthāna Sutta*. This discourse has 21 instructions on establishment of mindfulness that leads to Awakening. The yogi must experiment and find the methods that are suitable for themselves. This book has outlined some methods that lead to the experience of oneness and the experience of impermanence and not-self. The bibliography at the back of the book provides further reading.

You have now, through direct experience learned to accept the things that you cannot change, respond to and change the things that you can with courage, compassion, kindness and goodwill and developed the insight to know how to discern which is which. By establishing mindfulness as the Art of Living. You have with insight glimpsed impermanence, not-self and the resulting stress and suffering, of that which you cannot change. You can now observe and see your mind objectively without entanglement. You have now been empowered by the Blessed One, to mold your mind, through your own power, insights and discernment towards release from stress and suffering.

This book is a strong foundation on Mindfulness - The Art of Living. It is directed to persons interested in developing happy, calm and peaceful states of mind and insights that leads to freedom from suffering. Special focus is given to the challenges faced by busy modern-day adults with demanding careers and many obligations. Over time, some of you may be ready for a higher level of practice and working towards Full Awakening. I recommend attending a residential meditation retreat in a serene and peaceful setting such as a monastery. One now needs to increase daily sitting meditation to 1 hour, and incorporate at least ½ hour of daily walking meditation. The practice of Mindful Breath Meditation, Walking Meditation and Mindfulness in Daily Life that one requires for further development are consistent with what you have learned and experienced from this book. You need a stronger commitment and formal practice with training and interviews with a Meditation Master to work towards full release - Awakening.

May you have the serenity to accept that which you cannot change, the courage to change that which you can, and the insight and discernment to know and recognize which is which.



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