



MEDITATION AN OUTLINE

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Meditation - An Outline
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Preface

What follows is a guide to meditation in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism. In order to achieve breadth while remaining manageably concise, it is an outline, rather than a detailed exposition. Nevertheless this book follows the themes in the Buddha's discourse on mindfulness (*Satipatthanasutta*).

This is a manual rather than a book to read once from cover to cover. To keep it brief, I've added no anecdotes or examples. It's like a map of the terrain of meditation, and readers are strongly recommended to seek out teachers and other meditators to flesh this out with tailor-made guidance and supportive fellowship. The following pages however, are something that you can take with you. I advise you to give each exercise plenty of time, and return to earlier ones often. The practice will develop at its own pace.

This book has been shaped through feedback from the Lotus Volunteer Group of Amaravati; from Deborah Bayer, Sandra Berman, Jonathan and Paul Tyman in Michigan, USA; and from John Teire and friends in Gloucestershire, England. To them, much gratitude.

Ajahn Sucitto

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Welcome

‘Meditation’ is a term that covers the range of skills needed to develop inner clarity and mental peace. In the following pages you’ll find some guidelines on how to meditate by giving attention to your own body and mind. Although this is the approach advocated by the Buddha, it doesn’t require the adoption of a system of beliefs, but rather asks you to pay attention to what’s happening for you now and offers guidance on putting that in clear perspective. Doing just this will help you to undo stress and suffering, and understand how to prevent their arising. The result is that you find clarity as well as a greater capacity for a warm and peaceful heart.

This guide is structured in terms of three stages: the first is on BASIC THEMES, to help you get started; the second is on CULTIVATING AWARENESS, to use when you are familiar with the basics; the third is on THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSIGHT, for when the mind has greater access to clarity and calm. Each of these stages presents a few exercises, each of which you may decide to stay with for a period of days or weeks before moving on to the next one.

Each exercise has several components: a keynote that summarizes the theme of the exercise; then a series of ways to cultivate attention, along with accompanying remarks; and finally a ‘reflection’, a point to consider as one’s mind

abides in that deeper attention. Reflection is the skill of holding an idea in your mind and lingering over it in order to dwell on what meaning it has for you, personally. It is strengthened when the mind finds an image or **impression*** that captures the meaning of the idea and brings it straight to the heart. In the following exercises, I'll offer suggestions on these, but your own and more effective images may arise spontaneously.



Let's start wherever we are now, with being here.

- ✿ Take a few moments, up to a minute, to sit quietly and be here. Keep your eyes open but in soft focus, with the gaze resting on a wall or something neutral. Relax your shoulders and jaw and take a full slow out-breath.
- ✿ Let thoughts and impressions arise and pass, and settle back for a few moments of consciously allowing things to be the way they are. Notice when you are tensing up and soften around that.
- ✿ Then consider: How is it that you can witness all this? What is the 'here' that you are settling into? Maybe right now it's your body – solid, warm, and breathing. Acknowledge and settle into that. Put aside the past and future, planning what to do next, even how to meditate. Just be aware, here and now – bring your **awareness** to your body and keep unplugging the reactions to and engagement with thoughts and impulses.

Give this exercise some careful thought. First of all the emphasis is on ‘unplugging’, on conscious and calm **disengagement**. Obviously, we can look at something and get excited or critical or bored by it, and we can shift our attention elsewhere.

But we can also adjust our engagement with what we’re seeing and mentally ‘step back’ to get the experience in perspective. We can be aware that we are looking, or of how we’re focusing or whether we’re enjoying what we see. And we can also be aware of what we think about what we see. So that ability to step back or disengage allows for a natural settling and fuller self-awareness. With that, our potential for understanding increases.

This ability to disengage, while remaining alert and present, is the crucial first step in meditation. It is a foundation that keeps us calm and clear, but as this will have to meet strong feelings, habits and impulses, it needs development. This is what the following meditation exercises offer.

* Words in bold are those that have equivalents in Pali, a language of classical Buddhist texts; these are annotated in the Glossary.

PLACE

You'll need to find a place where you can be free from disturbance. A quiet room with little in it to distract your attention is ideal; a setting with light and space has a brightening and clearing effect, while a cluttered and gloomy room causes the opposite.

TIMING IS ALSO IMPORTANT

Your life probably has duties and routines, so you'll need to set aside a period – say, in the early morning or in the evening after work – when you can give undivided attention to the present in stillness. If you can find five to ten minutes to just sit and be in your body, that's a good start. Later you may feel like lengthening the period further into meditation.

ENERGY

You'll feel more wakeful and alert if you don't have a full meal immediately before you meditate. At the other end of the energy spectrum, moderation in terms of tea and coffee will help your mind calm down. Alcohol should be avoided altogether.

ATTENTION

Give your attention as fully as you can within the limitations of time and available energy. Remember this is quality time for yourself, not another work project. Regard it as a skilful kind of play, like playing an instrument or

practising yoga. Don't strain and don't lose track. Supported by curiosity and care and the wish to gain perspective on life, meditation will develop naturally and reveal useful and wonderful things.



Basic Themes

MINDFULNESS OF THE BODY

KEYNOTE

Grounding - Get into your body and inhabit it, as if you're coming into a room, looking for, and finding, a good place to sit.

Staying with what you're doing in an attentive way, or bearing it in mind, is an important skill called '**mindfulness**'. Mindfulness is initiated by bringing to mind a sight, sound, touch, smell, taste or idea. Often you do this with a thought, such as: 'What does my body feel like, now?' Or, 'How do I know I'm breathing?' Or, 'Patience...' However, more than just thinking of something, mindfulness means that you take in the touch, sound, or meaning; you really 'get it'. You bear it in mind. Naturally it's easier to bear something in mind if it's simple, comfortable and relatively still. So we develop mindfulness around the body, and practise getting it comfortable and balanced. In a nutshell, the

right kind of effort is one of simplifying and steadying: to put aside what you don't need right now (including ideas of achievement), and to make more of what is good and helpful. In the following exercise, this comes down to being fully aware of the body sitting still.



SITTING

One of the most effective postures for the cultivation of mindfulness is that of sitting. The upright posture supports clarity and alertness, and with careful attention you can develop it so that it keeps your back straight without strain. A straight-backed chair may be helpful, but you should avoid leaning back in it. Even better, you may be able to use one of the cross-legged 'lotus' postures.

For this, you'll probably need to wedge a small cushion under your tailbone to help support the lower back. In either case, good posture is that which provides a firm but supple balance that allows vitality to circulate through the body. When firmness and vitality blend, the body feels good and the mind settles down.

✿ To get comfortable in an upright way, draw your lower back in and let your shoulders drop. Draw the lower tips of the shoulder blades into your back. Let your arms rest, hands lightly clasped in your lap, or palms down resting on your thighs. Keeping your eyes lightly focused, bring your head in line with the spine. Imagine your chin is resting on a soft ball about the size of a large orange, so that the head is tilted very slightly downward, but the neck

remains upright. Allow the spine to straighten by imagining the crown of the head is suspended from above. This will help to relax your neck muscles. Above all, don't allow the head to tilt forward as this encourages drowsiness. Take your time, and aim for balance.

✿ Take an interest in how your body feels. Collect your attention, and begin to move it slowly around your body. Notice sensations. Relax any tensions, particularly in the face, neck, and hands. Allow the eyelids to close or half close. Take some long slow out-breaths and adjust: whatever you can relax, relax; whatever needs to be alert, wake it up. Get comfortable. Then hold the body in its entirety in your awareness without focusing on any point in particular.

✿ Can you feel the regular rhythm of breathing? If so, learn how your body holds itself to facilitate the breathing. This is a good guide for attuning your posture.

✿ Bring your awareness to the skin, the boundary of your body. Imagine sitting in warm and comfortable space, sensing your body within that space. Feeling the energy and warmth of your breathing, imagine those qualities gently radiating out through your skin.

DIFFICULTIES

✿ If you are feeling tense about all this, relax your attention, and soften around your mouth, eyes and forehead.

✿ It's quite normal to experience both drowsiness and a hyperactive mind. These are the two extremes that the mind swings between when it is temporarily detached from normal social engagement. The simple way to counter these is to keep bringing attention to your body and its posture. If you're feeling drowsy, keep your eyes open and bring attention to the upright posture through drawing the lower back in and keeping the neck and head in line with the spine. If restlessness and hyperactivity are the problems, sweep your attention over your body as if you're gently brushing it, picking up the sensations and energies in the skin. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply.

✿ If you find yourself brooding or worrying, it's best to open your eyes and change your posture to one of those in the next exercise; or spend some time in reflection, as below.



REFLECTION: GOODWILL

The first reflection I'd suggest concerns enhancing your own well-being.

Take a few moments to remember what it felt like when someone was generous, supportive or grateful to you. Be mindful; linger in that. Notice when considering this, that there have been many acts of goodwill and courtesy showed to you. Some probably happened today. Try to stay with how that feels, to the extent that your body feels relaxed by it.

Then remember someone to whom you feel grateful, or whom you respect or feel gladdened by. If no one always

evoked these attitudes, bring to mind those occasions when they did and things clicked in a positive way. Get the feel of that.

To support this, a useful image to bring to mind may be of a kind friend, or even a beloved pet, giving you attention. Try to embody this perspective and feeling: how it feels to be in a warm and welcoming space. Then try offering this space to others. How does it feel?

Following any or all of the above is a healthy way to spend fifteen minutes. By grounding yourself in your body, you allow your mind and nervous system time to refresh and regenerate. If you cultivate this on a regular basis, you'll notice that you tend to be with what you're doing in a fuller and more enjoyable way. Also, the steady cultivation of goodwill will make you feel more warm-hearted towards yourself and others. This gives rise to respect for self and others, forgiveness and compassion: all of which are invaluable.



OTHER POSTURES FOR MEDITATION

KEYNOTE

*Connect and Integrate - Sustain the Attitude:
Take things steady, one moment at a time.*

STANDING

A good way to settle into your body is to stand still with the focus on the balance of the whole body rather than on any specific part. Standing is best done without shoes, to allow your feet to feel free and alive.

✿ Stand with your legs coming straight down from hips, and soften in the knees. Focus on the soles of your feet. Wriggle your toes a little (and even lift your body up and down with your feet) in order to activate your feet.

✿ As you return to stillness, come into a balanced standing posture. Relax your buttocks and let the weight of your body be transferred down through your legs and feet and into the ground. Draw your lower abdomen in and avoid leaning your upper body on your hips.

✿ Let your arms come away from the sides of your body, just enough to let the chest feel open and for the arms to hang freely. Hands can be lightly clasped in front or by your sides.

✿ Sensing your spine, attune to balance while remaining relaxed. The body will feel like one unit rather than a series of parts. Centre your attention on the spine, and then gradually widen the focus to include the skin- boundary of the body.

✿ Reflect: ‘Immediately in front of me is open and non-intrusive.’ Check that out and bear that in mind. Then similarly the back. Sense the firm support beneath the feet and the open space above your head. Invite the mind to enjoy this balance and freedom from tension.

WALKING

If you have access to a garden, some open land, or even a corridor, measure off about twenty paces’ length of level ground (or a clearly defined pathway between two trees), as your meditation path. In more confined spaces, alter the length of the path to suit what is available. As an alternative, you can circumambulate a room, pausing after each circumambulation for a few moments.

✿ Stand at one end of the path and compose your mind on the sensations of the body. First, let the attention rest on the feeling of the body standing upright, with the arms hanging naturally and the hands lightly clasped in front or behind or resting by your sides. Keeping your neck in line with your spine, allow the eyes to gaze at a point about three meters [ten feet] in front of you at ground level. Keep your eyes lightly focused but still.

✿ Explore how the body walks. Notice that the movement begins in the hips and lower back. Walk from your hips, slightly lifting each leg as you swing it forward. Let the hips turn a little with each step. Notice that the movement of the hips synchronizes with a slight turn in the shoulders. As one leg swings forward, its corresponding shoulder counterbalances by turning backward. Don't exaggerate this movement, but attune to it as a sign that the body is walking in a relaxed way as one unit rather than as a head rushing forwards with a body underneath it. Let the world come to you, rather than have yourself pitching forward into it.

✿ Walk gently, at a deliberate but normal pace, to the end of the path. Stop. Focus on the body standing for the period of a few breaths. Bring up the attitude of starting afresh, then turn, and walk back again.

✿ While walking, be aware of the general flow of physical sensations, or more closely direct your attention to the feet. Keep bringing attention back to the sensation of the feet touching the ground, the spaces between each step, and the feelings of stopping and starting.

✿ Adjust your pace to suit your state of mind: vigorous when drowsy or caught up in thought; firm and steady when restless and impatient. Walking brings energy and fluidity into the practice, so keep your pace steady and let things pass through your awareness. Contemplate the flow of thoughts, sensations and feeling as a flow, rather than get involved with the topic. When

your mind does get involved, your attention gets stuck on a topic and adds a lot more detail and narrative. Notice that **‘snagging’**, and also notice where it takes you – into the past, future, other people, or concerns about yourself. Consider: right now, how much of this discursive thinking is useful or relevant to our well-being? Is it OK to let go of these topics for a few minutes? Then try to re-establish your focus on the body walking. Begin anew every moment. This brings the renewal that keeps the mind fresh.

RECLINING

This can be a helpful posture when the back feels strained. Also at the end of a day when you take a rest, it’s good to spend a few minutes meditating before going to sleep. There are two reclining postures: lying on one side, and lying flat on your back.

✿ When lying on one side, keep the body quite straight and bend one arm up so that the hand acts as a support for the head. Put a cushion under the hand as is suitable. If you’re lying on your back, bring your knees up to form the legs into an arch with the soles of the feet flat on the ground. Relax your pelvis and widen your shoulders onto the mat or whatever you’re reclining on.

✿ Sweep through your body, resting its stresses from the soles of the feet up to the crown of the head. Keep your eyes open; it’s easy to fall asleep. Collect your attention on the breath, consciously putting aside topics of thought. Can you be aware of the ‘space’ of the mind – that is the awareness through which thoughts and moods move?

✿ It's likely that you can only manage this for ten minutes or so before losing mindfulness. If your mind gets dreamy, either slowly sit up, or go into complete rest with the resolve to pick up mindfulness when you wake up.



REFLECTION: INTEGRITY

Integrity means that one's inner life is integrated with one's activities and behaviour. It's important to be of one piece and going in one direction. Obviously, we all have inner conflicts, angry thoughts, and impulses that aren't our best features. However, reflection helps us prioritize what our most reliable intentions and attitudes are.

For example, although I may get irritable at times, the standard that I would like to live by is one of non-abuse. Similarly I would like to feel that I am worthy of trust and friendship – and that means I don't lie, gossip, manipulate or steal. Keeping clear-headed rather than being given to drinking or drugs is also something that I would hold as an important standard.

Return time and again to your values, and get a feel for them. Can you name guidelines that make sense to you in your relationships with other people? They should be those by which you'd like others to relate to you.

Do such values give you clarity and calm? Can you note where you let yourself down, and how that feels? Make a point of learning from the mistakes and beginning again.

Through this we understand the challenges of being human and we feel more self-respect. With this comes respect for others, as well as clarity and compassion.



Cultivating Awareness

KEYNOTE

Gather and Collect. Collect what helps you to be alert and steady; fully receive and enjoy that.

It's good to begin a session of meditation practice with a few minutes of careful reflection, building up and integrating the themes we've mentioned previously. Dwell also on other themes that provide support. For example, reflection on teachers and spiritual guides can be a source of inspiration and gratitude.

MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

We've already referred to breathing in the section on sitting, but as you get more grounded in your body you're able to focus on breathing in a sustained way. As breathing with mindfulness benefits both body and mind, here are some guidelines on its further cultivation.

✿ Settle into and inhabit your body. Getting grounded is essential. Be prepared to wait for the breathing to show up as a series of sensations that flow in a regular rhythm. Ask yourself:

‘How do I know I’m breathing? What gives me the impression of breathing in and out?’ Notice how the breathing swells in your body and also subsides. Explore the whole body – abdomen, chest, throat, nose. You may even feel the faint tingle that the breath causes in the palms of the hands and around the eyes.

✿ Attune to the rhythm of breathing: allow a pause to develop at the end of the in-breath (when the breath hovers) and at the end of the out-breath. Be particularly attentive at the ends of each breath, as these are places where the mind slips off into plans and memories.

✿ Working between thinking and breathing is a major part of what mindfulness of breathing is about. So every time you’re aware of being on a train of thought, pause, notice where it’s taken you and get off the train. Pause and wait for the next out-breath, then pick it up and let it take you back into the body.

✿ As you get more familiar with the process of disengaging, firm up your return to the breathing by finding one point in the body to return to – the usual ones are the solar plexus in the diaphragm, or at the nostrils, or in the main passages of the nostrils or within the bridge of the nose where the in-breath hovers as a slightly glowing energy. Investigate the sensed impression in those places: is it cool, brushing, or vibrant?

✿ Imagine that whatever part of your body you’re focusing on gently but thoroughly draws the breath to it. Make no conscious effort to do so. Just feel the natural pull at the focal point of your in-breath. Also feel the energizing effect that the

breath has. Then on the out-breath imagine that the nostrils or diaphragm, etc. are releasing the breath, like having the string of a balloon drawn through your hand as the balloon rises on a breeze. Follow it as it trails away, and with that sense of release, release the past, the future and any tension or staleness that you may be feeling. Let the out-breath go to its own conclusion. Wait for the in-breath to come in its own time. Feeling the energy of release and refreshment, let each breath be like the first and last, always freshly arising, always completely released.

❁ As you learn to sensitize to the energy that accompanies breathing, attune to that throughout the entire process of inhalations and exhalations. When this becomes clear, feel the flow of that energy through a wider extent of your body – into the eyes, the temples, the fingers and the soles of the feet.

In this exercise, mindfulness of body gives the mind access to the grounded vitality of the body, and backs it up with **investigation** and quiet **joy**. This provides an insight: the awareness of thinking is the same as the awareness of breathing; awareness brings body and mind together. By gathering attention on breathing, the energy and attention that would normally go into discursive thought is transferred into easeful embodied awareness.

As you dwell in that awareness, a stilling of thought-energy happens by itself and your awareness becomes firm and peaceful. This is **meditative concentration**.

TRANSFORMING THOUGHT

In meditation, the mind often seems overactive and full of unnecessary thoughts. This state can feel unpleasant and cause agitation. However, the advice is to not fight your thoughts, but to manage them skilfully. Then the energy of thinking can calm down without a loss of thoughtful intelligence. Here are some practices that assist with this transformation.

- ✿ Acknowledge and disengage. At the moment that you realize your mind is wandering, acknowledge that, disengage and ask, ‘How is the breathing now?’ Don’t get involved with or criticize the topic of thinking. If a topic seems important, ask yourself: ‘Can this wait for a few minutes?’

- ✿ Add a simple word to the experience of a breath – you might stretch the syllable ‘Bud’ over the inhalation and ‘dho’ over the exhalation. Alternatively you can count the breaths one to ten and back again, adding ‘one’, etc. to the outbreath and returning to ‘one’ every time you lose count.

- ✿ Use the body. Bring more attention to posture; thinking will tend to make you lose alert uprightness. If so, draw your lower back in and keep your eyes half-open. Explore the sensations in your forehead, temples and eyes. Imagine breathing through these. You can also set up a system of ‘check-points’ in order to keep mooring attention to the breathing. That is: at the end of the out-breath flash your attention to one knee, then return to the in-

breath; at the end of the next out-breath, flash to the other knee, then return to the in-breath. In this way, add other touch- points: hips, shoulders, and hands.

✿ Investigate: where does a train of thought take you? Is that useful or conclusive? Acknowledge the stirred-up and sometimes congested mind-space that accompanies thinking. How does it affect your body? Do your eyes tighten? Do your hands tense up or go slack? How about your back? As you notice these effects, notice also what happens when for a few moments you let go of the future and past, who's right or wrong, how things should and could be, and so on. Linger in that letting go.

✿ Respond to the underlying theme of thought. While not getting entangled in the topic of a thought, sum up in one word the main theme, mood or energy of a train of thought. For example: 'busy', 'irritated', 'worried'. Reflect: whatever your mind is doing, everyone's mind does at some time – otherwise there wouldn't be a word for it. So it's not uniquely you or yours. Contemplate how a theme 'sits' in you, just as if it were happening to someone else. Respond from the heart. Wise guidance – a calm clear friendliness, or a firm touch – is needed.

✿ Contemplate the energy and the process of thinking. Slow down a train of thought by deliberately thinking it, then explore its 'voice' or mood. Notice how a thought comes to be, how it passes. Linger in the moment after it has passed.

The aim of the above is not to stop thinking, but to stop getting lost in it. Take an interest in feeling the movement of

mind in the thinking process, and the awareness of all that. Allow thoughts to arise and pass, noticing the ones that catch hold. By attending to the awareness of thought, the grip of thought softens and a more receptive intelligence becomes apparent. Feel the ease of that. As you find this sense of ease, pick up how the breathing feels in this state and let your awareness steadily return to that theme.



AFTERWORD

You can extend the principle of gathering and collecting to other postures and practices: mindful walking, substituting each step for the in- or out-breath, fits really well – as does any chore or action that is done calmly and repeatedly. Note that ‘collecting’ doesn’t mean hoarding, but rather allowing collectedness – a mix of mindfulness, wise alertness and enjoyment – to build up. Breaths and footsteps and happy states come and go; what is increased is spiritual depth.

Sometimes the mind settles, sometimes it’s disturbed and unruly; we can’t ignore the effects of everyday life. But as these exercises become a mainstay in your meditation practice, you will learn to use them wisely as a support and not get flustered by thoughts and feelings. What develops is steady serenity, the lasting benefit of this practice.

REFLECTION: TIME

Do I move through time, or does time move through me? A common notion that hinders concentration and supports worry, regret and impatience is the sense of time. We're haunted by the past and get anxious or impatient for the future, even if that future is two minutes ahead of us. The emotions are real enough, but the future is actually uncertain and the past is a memory and a matter of opinion.

Notice the feeling that accompanies any impressions and ideas that are marked by time. Can you feel the mood and the energy – flurrying or pushing – in the feel of any thoughts concerned with past or future? Try to relax and reset the energy in your body by grounding, and work with the mood through goodwill and calm breathing.

Balance in the present. The present can't be based on a sense-object, because impressions that come through the senses are always changing. Instead, the present is an open, disengaged and attentive state of attention that allows sights, sounds, moods and energies to roll through without getting involved in any way. In that present, without dismissing concerns about next week, can you address the underlying moods and issues that such an impression carries?

A useful image here may be the gleam of light on a wave or a ripple of water. The point of light may dance, but it remains in the same place even as the water moves. The light remains at the same place, not through being fixed but through not being fixed to the water. Can your mind be like that?



CLEARING AWARENESS

KEYNOTE

*Let awareness widen and softer around experience.
Be with your feelings rather than caught up in them.*

With this exercise, we focus more fully on the contents of awareness. Awareness has an inner seeing that can notice the way the mind works. Sometimes people refer to awareness as ‘heart’, because it’s not the intellect. But it’s also not just emotion.

Awareness gets affected by feeling, stores up impressions and memories, and brings forth a range of responses.

Some we would call emotions – such as affection or malice – but the responses also include patience, receptivity, determination, and letting go. All these impressions and responses, the ‘contents’ of awareness, seem to be who I am. However although the content affects us deeply, it changes and we don’t have much say over it. So, it’s not really ‘me’ or ‘mine’.

Why do we have these moods, impressions and reactions? And how to get them straight? Well, what you can know is that when there is identification with mental content we get confused as to who we are and why we’re like this. The aim of meditation is to disengage, to dis-identify, and to let that confusion clear. With this, what comes to light are wisdom and inner happiness, and the content clarifies by itself.

PHYSICAL FEELING

Cultivating a calm awareness of physical feeling is a pressing topic, as, even without illness or impingement, the body soon gets uncomfortable just sitting here. Pain and the avoidance of it is a big issue in our lives, and so meeting and coming to terms with it is one of the reasons to cultivate steady awareness.

As with thought, the aim is not to overcome pain but to transform the agitation that it engenders into a calm and focused awareness. However, it's always good to exercise and stretch the hamstrings and tissues around the hip joints with suitable bodywork in order to lessen unnecessary discomfort.

✿ Ground your attention in the body and steady the mind with breathing. Integrate awareness into the breathing.

✿ For a few minutes, cultivate an interest in the movement and manifestation of pain. Is it pulsing or flaring? Try to visualize what it would look like. How much is in the body and how much is in the mind? Can you distinguish the physical feeling and sensations from the mental contraction and agitation?

✿ Bring integrated, breathing awareness onto the area of pain and breathe into the pain. Widen the focus of your attention to include the area around the pain and in a widening circle, the entirety of your body. At the same time, relax your mind's reaction to the pain. Breathe out through the soles of the feet, the palms and the temples. The intention here is to relax the nervous energy

and resistance around pain. It's rather like sunlight warming the rippling surface of a pond. After a few minutes, add another minute and then relax and shift your body.

✿ Notice the psychological effect of such practice: that one's mind becomes more patient and equanimous, and complains less. This is what pain can teach us.

What we can learn from physical pain and discomfort is that what we call 'feeling' has three components: **feeling** itself (the quality of pain, pleasure or neutrality); the psychological and emotional **impression** of that ('fiery', 'annoying', 'unbearable', 'delightful', 'boring') and the '**activity**', the response to that impression – such as resistance or clinging to it. Can you discern these three? The first is how things are in the body right now, and the latter two are mental additions. These mental additions are what we can most directly adjust. And in so doing, we can become more steady and equanimous around discomfort or pleasure.

MENTAL FEELING

Mental (that is, psychological and emotional) aspects of discomfort and delight direct, oppress or uplift our lives. Therefore mental feeling is an important topic to be clear about.

Mental feeling may be triggered by a sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch; or by a mind-object such as a memory, mental impression or a thought.

As such input makes contact, it is registered as a feeling, and as an impression – beautiful, disgusting, friendly, offensive, urgent, unimportant, and so on. This contact impression then acts as a trigger for a mental activity – which may be of holding and wanting, or of resistance, ill-will, anxiety, excitement, relaxation or tension. Also, just as painful emotions make us feel defensive or aggressive, pleasure can have a soporific or an addictive effect. So the impression and activity around pleasure is also something to pay attention to.

Pleasure and pain are part of life, but we need to meet them with clear awareness in order to maintain balance. In the following exercise we therefore learn to check and steady mental activity. Then, as we stabilize our awareness, we can investigate the triggering impression.

✿ Acknowledge and disengage. Note the quality of the feeling without dismissing it or getting involved. Instead, get interested in how you can know, sense and be with a pleasant or unpleasant feeling. If you feel tense, disengagement comes not through trying to relax the tension but through widening your awareness to include a non-tense area and bringing goodwill into that focus.

✿ Use the body. Stabilize and ground your awareness through referring to the whole body. Avoid engaging with the feeling. First get it in perspective so that you can acknowledge the impression and the activity. Use attention on breathing to steady the mind.

✿ Investigate. Where does mental activity take you? Do you find yourself caught up in aversion, desire, anxiety or regret? Notice

that. Then how does all that affect your body? Is there a rush in the nervous system, or a tension, or a whirl? Note the effect in your hands, soles of the feet and face. Refer back to the mental impression: what is the essence of this trigger? Is there a sense of threat, or of reward? How do you feel when that's occurring? Are you elated, guilty, or threatened? How does that compare to how you were before this impression took hold?

✿ Contemplate. Feelings, impressions and activities are subject to constant change. They happen to you, they're not who you are. So you don't have to act upon, hold onto, resist or judge that feeling. Free of those reactions, you can investigate further: how valid is the impression 'ugly', 'offensive', 'delightful', 'urgent'? What's worth acting upon?

✿ Respond. What is helpful now? Respond to the contact, thought, sight and so on with wise awareness. Avoid trying to figure it out; just act in a way that feels right.

As we practise in this way, we learn that awareness, the basic 'knowingness' or 'sensitivity' of mind has an unmoving view and a responsive energy. The view is wisdom, that which maintains an overview. Wisdom's response is imbued with clarity and compassion. Responding wisely allows awareness to clarify and skill to develop. Responding without clarity leads to passion and suffering. We can also learn that any wise response – whether that is to let go, to be firm or to patiently endure – has a subtly pleasant feeling. This feeling comes not from contact but from skilful intention. It's the most reliable source of happiness, one that has no harmful side-effects!

REFLECTION: WHAT BELONGS?

What's wrong with the present moment? Who says how it should be? How satisfying is pleasant feeling?

The image here is of holding an open bowl, and allowing the wind to blow things in and out of it. Who do any of these belong to?

Try to remember the subtle but pleasant feeling associated with intentions and responses such as generosity, compassion, forgiveness and honesty. Set the intention to develop and contemplate these positive intentions in your life.



BRIGHTENING THE MIND

KEYNOTE

If it comes and goes, it isn't yours. Make use of the skilful visitors; leave the crooks outside the door.

We've become aware of how thoughts and feelings can lead awareness and direct its responses. With investigation, we can notice that where they lead us to isn't always that good; and yet the default is to follow our feelings. We can find ourselves getting angry when someone or something isn't going our way, or wanting and consuming stuff that

doesn't bring us the happiness that it promised. Through the above exercises we're learning how to disengage from such habits, and thereby note that feelings and impulses pass. This simple realization – of **changeability** – is a key insight that we can build upon for liberation.

Also, we can acknowledge the mystery around the agent of thoughts, feelings and impulses. It seems like 'I' am doing all this, and yet if I were, surely I would be able to deliberately feel happy or peaceful, I wouldn't get caught by sudden impulses and I would be able to stop pointless and depressing thoughts. The fact is the mental stuff arises dependent on contact, attitude, and reaction. It's not really mine.

Rather than question why some invisible and capricious 'I' is doing all this, meditation teaches us to investigate the process as a process, to get to the triggers and dismantle or adjust them. This is vital, as the mind gets habituated to faulty responses. As we see, not only do malice or attachment cause unhelpful actions, but they also become the source of prolonged mind-states that nestle in and get adopted as 'myself'. A few moments of being irritated can settle into a sad, fiery or cynical state of mind that persists and becomes the basis for action. Reading about an attractively packaged gadget leads to feeling we need one. Sexual imagery generates passion that runs through the nervous system and switches on hormones; thus aroused, we feel tense and frustrated and seek gratification. In this way, mental impressions have lasting effects on mind- states and bodily energies.

We've begun to work on that process, and what follows continues in the same vein. It offers guidance in terms of

dealing with the ‘Five Hindrances’, mind-states that obstruct awareness. It also presents the ‘Factors of Awakening’, mental factors that contribute to clarity and peace.

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

The Five Hindrances are obstructive mental patterns that affect everyone. They are: **sense-desire and envy; ill will; indolence and lethargy; restlessness and worry; and doubt and wavering.** Their common quality is to make the mind feel unpleasant and to generate imbalances (such as agitation, tension or dullness) in the body.

The common solution to all of these is to address the mental trigger and activity, and to bring the body into a calm and bright state. Consequently, through working with these hindrances, awareness becomes more discerning and more deeply grounded than before.

Perhaps the first thing to establish is confidence: these hindrances don’t mean that there’s anything especially wrong with you; they can be cleared. Secondly, it’s important to investigate wisely: the hindrances often hide under a smoke-screen of thoughts and narratives. So look out for the following clues:

- **Your mind suddenly jumps like a frog, so that you feel impelled to act.**
- **Your mind shrugs off a concern or goes numb.**
- **Your attention is riveted to vivid impressions that are either infuriating or luscious.**
- **You are convinced that there is something important and urgent to think about, or do.**

The common feature of all these experiences is that they deprive you of choice and perspective. This is why they hinder freedom. Therefore your response has to be one of pausing, investigating and reclaiming that freedom. However, because the mind gets deluded by these, it's good to refer to their bodily effect, which is less masked. I'll explain this below.

SENSE-DESIRE AND ENVY. These can be recognized by the mind's repeated returning to images that inflame desire – for material things, for entertainment and sex. Handling these topics forms part of most people's lives, so it is the obsession with sense-objects and the consequent mental inflammation that we deal with. Sense-desire disguises itself as a lingering relaxation into a pleasant object – for just a little longer. Isn't that how addiction works?

✿ WORK ON THE TOPIC:

- a) regard an inanimate object of desire as getting old and breaking up. For how long will this year's fashion be attractive?
- b) when dealing with sexual desire, consider the unattractive aspects of the body – its fluids, viscera and odours – as well as the drugging effect that such desire has on the mind.

✿ WORK ON THE BODY:

Sense-desire causes over-excitement in the nervous system. This can feel pleasant, for a while; but notice the effects in the hands, feet and around the eyes and mouth where agitation and tension occur. Breathe through and relax these areas. Bring ease into the body.

ILL-WILL. Ill-will can be recognized as a repeated return to impressions that stimulate bitterness, anger and hard-hearted indifference, a return that the mind constantly justifies. It disguises itself as righteous indignation, or the urge to set someone or something straight, once and for all. Ill-will towards yourself – hostility – is the specific or nebulous sense that others don't like you, or that you are unworthy and flawed. This is often accompanied by a depressive sense that you have to try harder to win others' approval. It disguises itself as the urge for perfection, a striving energy, and the inability to relax. This deprives you of self-respect.

✿ WORK ON THE TOPIC:

- a) Acknowledge the harm and displeasure that holding a grudge is causing you. Acknowledge that your mind is picking on one or two isolated aspects of a person's behaviour, not the entire person. Imagine that person asleep, sick, enjoying their family, or suffering – just like you. They're imperfect, subject to ignorant habits, seeking happiness – just like you.
- b) With hostility, reflect on the acts of goodwill that others have manifested towards you. Remember that they didn't have to. Spend time valuing your own actions of integrity. Remember that you could have done a lot worse.

✿ WORK ON THE BODY:

Ill-will and hostility cause the body to harden: to tense up with aggression or defensiveness, or to sink with indifference. Be aware of the skin-boundary of the body and open into the space

around you. Imagine sitting in bright warm space. Can you sense that space as your home?

INDOLENCE AND LETHARGY. This can be recognized as a distaste for effort, and a fuzzy state of mind.. It disguises itself as calm.

✿ WORK ON THE TOPIC:

Cultivate a focus on specific points in the body, aiming to note the quality of the sensations. Can you put a one-word description – say, ‘pulsing’ or ‘cool’ – on a sensation?

✿ WORK ON THE BODY:

Keep returning to and firming up the posture. Keep the eyes open. Adopt the standing or walking postures.

RESTLESSNESS AND WORRY. This can be recognized as the mind’s inability to settle. It disguises itself as the need to plan and organize. It can pair with ill-will or sense-desire.

✿ WORK ON THE TOPIC:

Ask yourself: can this matter wait for ten minutes? Reflect that you might die tonight – if this is the last day, how important is this issue?

✿ WORK ON THE BODY:

Widen your attention to include the entire body. Imagine the skin steaming off the excess energy. Standing is a good posture for this.

DOUBT AND WAVERING. This can be recognized by the mind's obsessive speculation and inability to commit to a meditation object. It disguises itself as curiosity and inquiry.

✿ WORK ON THE TOPIC:

Acknowledge that speculative thinking doesn't arrive at a conclusion. Focus on the energy of the thought and disengage from the topic. Can you relax into unknowing?

✿ WORK ON THE BODY:

Open to appreciation and enjoyment of breathing. Direct your receptivity towards knowing through sensation and feeling rather than through abstract thinking.

SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING

There are seven factors that are conducive to clarifying and strengthening the mind. These are: **mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquillity, meditative concentration and equanimity.**

Like skills learned through meeting a challenge, these factors come to the fore through meeting the hindrances. When these seven factors are developed, they provide a resource that overcomes the hindrances: a resource that we don't know we have until the hindrances make us bring them forth.

The first three factors concern what you do as you meditate. The fourth, joy, describes the first sign of coming to a happier and freer place; and the last three factors represent the ease and steadiness of that place. Tranquillity,

meditative concentration and equanimity deepen by themselves as you stay in touch with them. So there's a balance here between what we do and what we receive, and joy comes at the hinge point.

We've already seen the use of mindfulness and investigation in the previous exercises. Mindfulness dispels the agitation and the distracting effect of a hindrance. As the mind lingers attentively on one theme, mindfulness cuts off the proliferations and complications of runaway thinking. Investigation keeps checking the impressions that hindrances rest upon: 'Is so-and-so really that bad, or is that my bias?' 'Is such a thing so desirable and necessary, or is that a delusion?' 'What assumptions do these biases rest upon? What is the origin of all this?' Through investigation we both reveal any hindrance that's in the mind, and also realize that we can step back from it and let it pass. The relief that investigation brings is that we don't have to follow or even identify with every energy, mood or thought that arises in the mind.

Energy is the factor that accompanies any degree of mental application. Deciding to pick up a meditation theme, or carefully thinking things over, or giving measured attention to the body in the here-and-now: all these make good use of energy. Energy can be gentle and steady (as in generating goodwill and investigation) or determined (as in tackling indolence and lethargy). Gentle or firm, wise energy supports and is furthered by confidence. Confidence in one's aspirations and in the practice is the necessary requirement for an energy that is devoted to a spiritual Path. This confidence may be supported by reflection on spiritual

friends and teachers who model that Path. It is furthered by mindfulness and investigation (not blind willpower); their confident application gives rise to joy. Joyful effort is then the hallmark of good practice: it's work, but it has the feel of a challenging sport or game. The result is that as one's awareness moves out of the grip of the hindrances, there is a lift of heart and of bodily energy. This is spiritual joy.

To experience joy means that you enjoy what you're doing. The significant feature of enjoyment in meditation is that it isn't based on some enthralling story or piece of music, but on working the mind into an open and attentive state. This state, when the hindrances are in abeyance, is by itself enjoyable. So the memo is: don't meditate in a grim way! Orient around being receptive to the spirit of goodwill and take an interest in how the body and mind are. Be someone who is keen to learn. Flex attention, reflect and begin anew from time to time. The hindrances are not crimes, but confused tangles, and our practice must work like a masseur to undo their knots, spasms and stiffness.

Joy will come in small waves, as the mind comes out of the hindrances. Take note of it – there's a release from pressure, a sense of clarity and a quiet happiness. Joy is refreshing and dispels any dullness or negativity from the mind. Investigate to see what kind of effort, attention and attitude gave rise to joy, or where and how you were focusing. Then continue in that vein.

If the joy is too sudden or destabilizing, step back from the mind a little and refer back to the body. Use the grounding exercise of being in the entire body, feeling the space around you and sweeping attention down the body.

This, and perseverance, will have a tranquillizing effect. With tranquillity, the memo is to keep the energy bright and mindfulness and investigation well-tuned. We don't drop initial factors but add to them. It's often the case that when the mind is tranquil, the breath seems to fade out altogether; so if you're focusing on the sensations, you may feel there's nothing to be mindful of. This is why it's good to learn to focus on the energy that accompanies in- and out-breathing, as this becomes brighter as the breath and the mind calm down. The mix of breath-energy, joyful heart and bright mental attention becomes a sign that you can focus on. Then, through letting go of any other energy (such as worry, speculation and distracted thinking) the mind unifies. This unification of mind and body is meditative concentration. The mind firms up and stays on track. Such unification supports the steady state of equanimity. Equanimity means that you are in touch with a still centre that doesn't go up and down, is not elated or dejected. Backed up by the other factors of Awakening, a mind endowed with equanimity can see things in an unbiased way. It allows us to keep clear and fresh. Awareness experiences what was a familiar sense of self as a changing mood or atmosphere or energy. But this is not a fixed and lasting person. It's nothing to be stirred up by or downcast about. Free of these additions, the mind can act clearly as is necessary, rather than out of restlessness and habit. This is why these factors are associated with Awakening.



REFLECTION: CHANGE, PASSING AWAY AND DEATH

Imagine looking out of the rear window of a car or a train and seeing the world constantly unfolding and slipping away behind you. Despite jolts and changes of landscape, allow the events of the day and concerns of the present to roll on. Bring up images and faces from the past: where have those people gone? In fact where have you gone, over the years?

Eventually let the image of your own body be seen in that way, younger and then ageing. Imagine it passing away, and the familiar landscape going through more changes. Let it all go with a mixture of gratitude and ease.

Spend some time reviewing the present from that perspective. Stand back from what interests and concerns you now: this too will pass. As you recognize that you don't have anything, and that you are really just the coming together of body and mind in the present moment – what attitude is there to settle into? The future is a mystery, and the past is a memory. If you have to leave this world now, what is worth taking with you? What is best to leave behind?

Use this reflection to stay awake to your life rather than take it for granted and waste its opportunity. Also reflect on death every day to dwell in gratitude and to prioritize what really counts for you. Knowing impermanence helps us to forgive and not carry burdens from the past.



The Development of Insight

KEYNOTE

*What is present-moment awareness?
Releasing ideas, find the balanced awareness
that doesn't attach and doesn't reject.*

To return to the opening inquiry: How is it that you can witness your body and mind? What and where is the 'here' that you are settling into? Can you enjoy that?

So far we've been working with specifics of what arises in the body and mind; the cultivation of disengagement and wise response has strengthened our awareness. Now we can turn our attention to awareness, that 'knowing' that offers more than 'knowing' normally implies. Awareness also offers a sense of presence and balance, and that can be a helpful reference point. With this reference, we experience a sense of perspective and freedom from what arises. This perspective is void of judgement and itself needs no affirmation, sense of progress or positive feeling. Yet from this basic ground, intuitions and guidance arise. Our practice then is to bring the active mind into contact with this awareness, and then 'read' what arises through the senses and the mind. It's a

matter of stepping back and witnessing the mind with clarity and compassion.

For this exercise, it might be best to practise with eyes half-open or with downturned gaze. This will lessen the tendency to get absorbed in mental states.

✿ Encompass the totality of your body with awareness, centring on the energy and rhythmic flow of the breathing. Remember to include the experience of space: that is, be aware of the body sitting in, or standing in, or walking through, space. If you're standing, orient around balance, flexing your knees a little if things get tense.

✿ Allow the energy of the breathing to settle and merge with awareness.

✿ Be with the flow of any mental images and sensations just as they arise, without engaging in criticism or praise. Don't give attention to every detail; instead focus on the overall flow and speed of what's coming up, as: 'This is mind.' Listen to the music of what's happening without speculating about the musician or the score.

✿ Notice the snagging or speeding or circling around a thought or sensation, or a sight or sound. Notice where that takes you, and begin to get a sense for the energy – the 'charge' at the moment of snagging, and the mind's movement (whirling, scattering, sinking or rushing on) – and the hindrance that underlies it. With the understanding based on practising with the hindrances, shelve the topic, and release energy from the hindrance. Curtail

speculation, frustration or doing too much; release is based simply on an emotional withdrawal of interest, and a shift of energy. This shift is often best facilitated by returning attention to the breathing body.

✿ As the shift takes place, practise resting where it takes you; there is an ‘enough’ moment. By noting that and dwelling in the peace of that ‘enough’, the sense of balance and free presence is sustained and open.

✿ As the mind will tend to cling to that sense of balance, speculation and attachment will take place. Notice this snagging as before and allow the shift to release, returning more fully to the breathing to regain balance. As you sense balance, trust and enjoy it. Let the blending of awareness and breath-energy hold your attention.

✿ Through ongoing practice, the snagging habit of the mind loses its power, shrinks in terms of the range of phenomena that it attaches to, and is more immediately released. Enjoy that.

VIEWS AND CHARACTERISTICS

This process keeps releasing three fundamental views that cause snagging, and restores a sense of open, calm presence. The views (or assumptions) are:

- that phenomena have a continuing and fixed existence;
- that there is some phenomenon – a feeling, mood or idea that can be fulfilling or conclusive;
- and that there is a state of being, health or mind that we can own or are.

We don't necessarily think this way, but the instinctive movement of the mind is based on these views. That is, the mind is constantly looking for the right state to adopt, or dismissing unsatisfactory experiences. At other times it gets involved with managing, or fighting with, thoughts or issues that yet keep returning in an intrusive way. And in all this seeking and rejecting of phenomena, the underlying assumption is that there is a 'right one'. But for how long is anything 'just right'? And doesn't this searching invite more unsatisfactory stuff into the mind?

However, with wise awareness the assumptions are dropped. Then what becomes evident is that thoughts, feelings and so on aren't satisfying. This way of seeing things is called 'insight-knowing'. It reveals three fundamental characteristics that are fundamental in all phenomena.

First there is **changeability** – that all phenomena are moving from beginning to ending. They don't continue, they're constantly changing. Like the wind, they can't be said to have a finite, solid existence – yet they still arise.

Secondly, there is a persistent, sometimes subtle sense of **unsatisfactoriness**. Unpleasant sensations easily evoke that sense, but even a lovely experience creates a lurch in the heart when it ends. At the best of moments there is still an inconclusive quality in what the mind experiences and an unsatisfied aftertaste.

Finally, as the constant arising and passing of experiences becomes familiar, it also becomes clear that – since there is no permanence in them – none of them can be owned or adopted. This is the characteristic of **'not-self'** – nothing is 'mine'. Furthermore, the agent of owning and controlling,

the ‘I am’ that latches on to thoughts and feelings, is a habit, not a person. As it’s a habit of reaching out, it can’t own anything. So life based on this habit is bound to be frustrating.

However, by relinquishing the assumptions that these characteristics reveal as deluded, awareness is freed. Habits such as clinging, guilt, pride, fear, aversion, over-responsibility or irresponsibility can cease. The mind, free from these undercurrents, is at peace.



REFLECTION: WHAT IS THIS?

Reflect on the sense of ‘I am’. Notice how it is always associated with some state (I am tired) or notion (I am from Singapore) or action (I am going to New York in the summer). How does your particular ‘I am’ feel when it’s associated with a state, notion or activity? Sometimes positive, sometimes negative, sometimes confident and sometimes uncertain? In summary, it’s changeable. Can you have any ‘I am’ that is independent of a changeable state or activity? If not, your sense of self is always changing. What then is your ‘I am’?

So ‘I am’ sits on very uncertain ground. Yet that’s the place where responses and decisions arise; and it is the target that everything strikes. Therefore without clear understanding, ‘I am’ is always prone to uncertainty, to being offended, to false assumptions and to impulsiveness.

Pause now around what is happening to your sense of self. Try to bring calm awareness to that experience, rather than grasp or reject it. Does this make the ‘me’ sense less vulnerable? Also, notice what responses give you clarity, self-respect and warm-heartedness. Notice that they too come from a full awareness rather than a habitual ‘I’. With time, you can affirm such responses and trust full awareness. Then perhaps there’s less need to make an ‘I am’ out of anything. Does that offer more peace of mind?



SHARING AND INCLUSION

KEYNOTE

Awareness is generous. Include everything in it.

This section may help to extend the meanings and in- sights of your meditation practice to a wider range of impressions and activities. The main theme is not to block this mental stream, but to meet it steadily. Allow awareness to transform snags, triggers and assumptions.

Some of the following will be a review and summary of the previous exercises. Central to this is the view that comes with understanding the three characteristics: that what comes into awareness is transitory, inconclusive and not

a true statement of oneself or another. With this insight-knowing we're not hanging onto, hunting for, defending or asserting some state; there is a free and stable knowing. All our practices encourage us to return to this knowing.

When insight-knowing is not completely ripened, the three characteristics are not properly integrated. That is, although changeability means that things arise and pass, there can be an unwillingness to allow impressions and thoughts to arise; they disturb us and threaten our confidence. On the other hand, 'passing away' can feel barren rather than easeful. The characteristic of unsatisfactoriness can cause us to dismiss or respond unwillingly to what arises.

Finally the characteristic of 'not-self' can be held in a way that blocks open awareness and understanding of the various self-impressions that arise. In these ways, the flowering of awareness is limited by attachment to views, and to the idea that there is or needs to be a self who is beyond these characteristics.

To encourage a full flowering, it should be recollected that the ground of insight-knowledge allows the mind to be spacious and the heart to be peaceful and unrestricted by fear, doubt or ill-will. Unrestricted, the heart operates in terms of empathy and goodwill. The consequent union of groundedness, spaciousness and empathy is the sensed balance that we can return to time and time again in our ongoing lives.

✿ As always, begin with grounding the mind in the here and now of the body, and in the heart of goodwill. Beginning in this way, we're not coming from a memory or a teaching of

insight, but from its practical foundation. Remember to include the entire body and the space it is sitting in. Right here, above, below, in front and behind, there is a space that is unobstructed and free from intrusion. Throughout the following process, return to this awareness when it feels right to do so. This might be: if you're feeling overwhelmed and unable to be spacious around mental content; if you're losing specific awareness and becoming spaced-out; or if you can't get the hang of the following instructions.

✿ Bring awareness to mental content, so that you can sense what is arising in the mind right now, both as specifically present and felt, and also as an aspect of the flow of mind. Get the details but get out of the drama that this one is the big one, the impossible one, or the one that only you have. Allow what arises to arise, and sensing how it is affecting you, be the light that rests on its flowing water. Let it 'speak' and present its feeling, impression and activity, along with its pang, wobbles and surges. Extend awareness to that process as if you are helping someone who is unsteady to get to their feet.

✿ Extend awareness to the points where you feel stuck in what arises. Notice the impression of self that is created: that I am responsible for this stuckness and clinging; that I shouldn't feel this way; that she or he is like this, and so on. Whoever that self seems to be, meet that impression with an open awareness. Feel the energy of that in the body. Stay with it, but not in it: get grounded. Widen the span of awareness to include awareness itself: be spacious. Soften the agitation and pressure that the

mind is experiencing. Can you reveal and release stress rather than let it gather around what arises?

✿ Bring clear goodwill to these stuck places, without trying to overwhelm them with benevolence or to change them. Extend that non-interfering empathy through the body and the mind. Can you include the images of what you, he, they are or should be, and whatever isn't enough? Notice: 'It's like this, now.' Can you allow the wave of that difficulty to pass through you? Acknowledge the openness at the end of the process, and sustain that through the next wave. If your mind tries to cling to the openness, or claim it as 'me', acknowledge the feel of that. Try to extend grounded spacious awareness to that clinging as to anything else that arises.

✿ Conclude the session with inviting impressions of others, near and far, alive or dead, liked or disliked, into the mind. Invite and welcome them to be as they are. Allow yourself to be affected, and also to welcome that. Let these affects pass through and notice what state you eventually settle in.



Ongoing Advice

DO

✿ Practise regularly. Regular practice builds up resolve towards and understanding of the many changes of mind. You might use a standard of one meditation session per day, but also consider using several five-minute periods throughout a day to train awareness. It isn't necessarily the case that a long sitting is going to be either possible or helpful; if we find ourselves caught up in thoughts and moods rather than disengaging and relating to them, it's best to mindfully change posture or to adopt a useful reflection.

✿ Practise with other meditators. Meditating together builds up resolve, and useful conversation after a meditation period can be encouraging and refreshing. Find some time to go on a meditation retreat led by an experienced teacher.

✿ Begin afresh each time, or even better, with each breath or footstep. If you don't practise with an open mind, you may find yourself trying to re-create a past insight, or unwilling to learn from your mistakes.

✿ Support your mental well-being by living responsibly and morally. Generous and compassionate action is a support for yourself and others.

- ✿ Support your physical well-being with exercise. The back and the legs offer the main physical support for your meditation – flex and strengthen them with care.
- ✿ Use reflections throughout the day, when waiting or unoccupied for a few minutes. Read any instructive literature carefully, and pick one or two ideas that you can put into practice.
- ✿ Try to be mindful and reflect, no matter what you are doing: routine housework, driving the car, having a cup of tea. Collect awareness, rest it steadily on what you are doing and attend to the mind in the midst of activity. This turns mundane tasks into foundations for insight.

DON'T

- ✿ Don't be discouraged by rough patches and seemingly slow (or no) progress. A lot of meditation time is just about staying steady in the midst of difficulties.
- ✿ Don't be idealistic about yourself or expect perfection in others. If you seek perfection, what you'll empower is a fault-finding mind.
- ✿ Don't try to be like someone else, but reflect on those you admire for examples and encouragement. Don't gorge on too many ideas.
- ✿ Don't buy into any 'quick-fix' solutions. Bringing forth and sustaining your own effort is itself empowering and instructive. Joyful energy is a plus, not a chore.

Glossary

As a reference, here are the Pali words for some of the terms that I've used in the text. After the slash (/), I've added other common translations for the sake of conformity and clarity.

Activity / formation – *sankhāra*

Awareness / mind* / heart – *citta*

Changeability / impermanence – *anicca*

Disengagement / withdrawal, seclusion – *viveka*

Doubt and wavering – *vicikicchā*

Envy – *abhijjhā*

Feeling – *vedanā*

Ill-will – *vyapadā*

Impression / perception – *saññā*

Indolence and lethargy / sloth-torpor – *thīna-middha*

Investigation / investigation of phenomena – *dharmavicaya*

Joy / rapture – *pīti*

Meditative concentration / concentration – *samādhi*

Mind* / intellect – *mano*

Mindfulness – *sati*

Not-self – *anattā*

Restlessness and worry – *uddhacca-kukkucca*

Sense desire – *kāmacchanda, kāmarāga*

Snagging / clinging, grasping – *upadāna*

Unsatisfactoriness / suffering, stress – *dukkha*

* There can be confusion around the word ‘mind’, as both Pali words point to the same base of intelligence. However, *citta* refers to the subjective sense, where ‘I am’ is based, and *mano* refers to the focused intelligence that picks out a distinct mental object. Through attention and thinking, *mano* brings sense-data and ideas to *citta*’s awareness for a response. *Citta* feels, is affected, is the storehouse of impressions, and is the generator of responses and mental activity. *Mano* translates *citta*’s moods and movements into notions and ideas, but it doesn’t feel. *Citta* is the boss, *mano* the secretary. *Citta* can be confused, but when the secretary brings good advice, it can experience great clarity and release.



Further Reading

If you'd like to follow meditation in more detail, there are many books that can guide you. I'd recommend looking into the following:

Meditation: A Way of Awakening – by Ajahn Sucitto

Purity, Peace and Radiance – by Ajahn Amaro

Simple Kindness – by Ajahn Candasiri

The Sound of Silence – by Ajahn Sumedho

These can be downloaded for free from:

www.fsbooks.org

A good array of Dhamma texts is hosted at:

www.accesstoinight.org

Enough audio material to last a lifetime can be downloaded from:

www.dharmaseed.org

For suitable places for retreat and ongoing instruction, there are a list of monasteries that offer free accommodation at:

www.forestsangha.org



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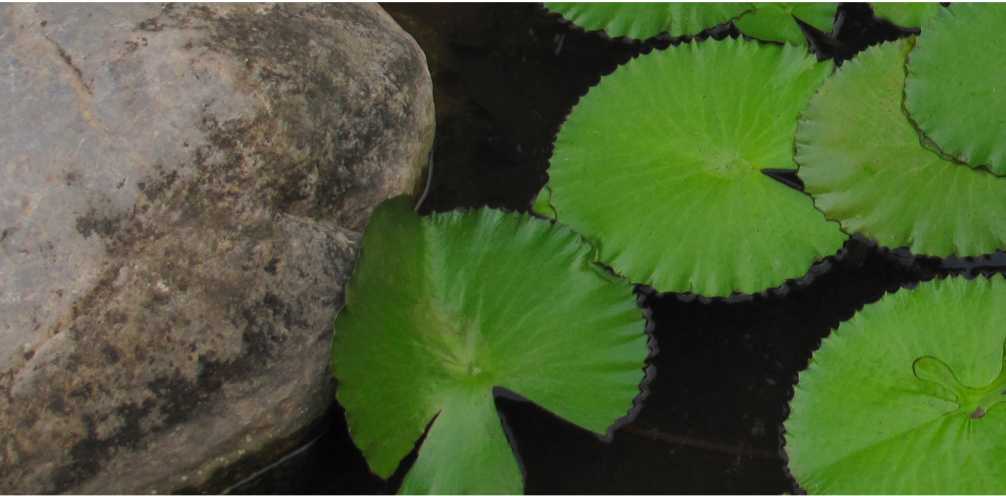
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