

Practical Meditation

STUDY MATERIAL

Practical Meditation

Gentleness with yourself is essential in the practice of meditation. Act as if you would take a child by the hand to lead her out of dangerous paths. The experience of peace and clarity can be encouraged through a practice of gentle mind training. Awareness of the content of our thoughts--without suppression of thoughts—can be learned with the practice of calm abiding meditation. A focused mind is a relaxed mind.

Opening & Sharing

When we open and close a meditation moment it is good to generate a sense of gratitude, appreciation and sharing:

May all of us find happiness and the cause of happiness.

May all of us be free from suffering and the cause of suffering.

May all of us not be apart from well-being and joy.

May all of us remain impartial in our love.

Appropriate Posture

1. When sitting on a chair make sure that you feet are firmly resting flat on the ground to create a sense of stability.
2. Your hands can be open, face down on your thighs.
3. It is important that your spine be completely straight but without unnecessary tension. This keeps the central part of the body very straight and it is the ideal posture for meditation. A slight inward curve of the lower back (tilted sacrum) may facilitate uprightness without rigidity.
4. Your abdomen is relaxed.
5. Your chin is slightly tucked in towards your chest, but your head shouldn't be

bent.

6. To enhance a straight central torso, your shoulders should also be balanced and straight, slightly outstretched.

7. Your eyes are half open, looking ahead and cast slightly downward.

8. Your mouth should neither be open nor pressed firmly closed. Your lips should be relaxed in a very natural position.

9. Breathing is mainly through the nose.

Breath

“Once you are set properly in your posture, you can feel the breath coming in and going out of you. Attend to its rhythm, become the breathing. Try to identify with it completely rather than watching it. You are the breath; the breath is you. Breath is coming out of your nostrils, going out, and dissolving into the atmosphere, into the space. You put a certain energy and effort towards that. And then, as for in-breathing, should you try to breathe in and deliberately try to draw things in? That's not recommended. As your breath goes out, let it dissolve, just abandon it. In-breathing is just space. Physically, biologically, one does breath in, obviously, but that's not a big deal. If you hold onto your breath, you are holding onto yourself constantly.” Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

“When we follow the movement of our breathing in and out, it should be left quite natural, just as it is. We should not force either the body or the mind in any way at all but remain completely relaxed and simply let the mind become aware of the coming and going of the breath, without any distraction, any other thoughts, or anything else catching our attention. Let the mind merge with the movement more and more until it is completely absorbed in it. Do this first for 5, 10 or 21 breathing cycles, without distraction, and then for a greater number, all the time staying attentive.

Staying attentive does not mean concentrating fixedly on the breathing while saying to yourself, “ I mustn't lose the movement, I must stay concentrated...”. If

we start this kind of discursive thinking, it will create a level of mental agitation which will disturb the natural movement of the breathing and of the meditation. We are no longer meditating, we are commenting on the meditation. We lose our sense of being absorbed in the meditation. What we have to do is simply be aware of the breathing, feel it, experience it physically and mentally. We should follow it without doing anything else, without comment, without trying to change it or modify it in any way. For that we have to be very relaxed, very quiet, and practice gently, regularly. Doing this, we wait for the calm that will allow us to penetrate more deeply into the meditation to develop.” Gendun Rinpoche

Mindfulness

“We could use the phrase *touch and go*. You are in contact, you're touching the experience of being there, actually being there, and then you let go. That applies to awareness of your breath and also to your day-to-day living awareness. The point of *touch and go* is that there is a sense of feel. The point of *touch* is that there is a sense of existence, that you are who you are. When you sit, you feel you are sitting and that you actually exist. You don't need too much encouragement to develop that kind of attitude. You are there, you are sitting. That's the *touch* part. And the *go* part is that you are there, and then you don't hang on to it. You don't sustain your sense of being, but you let go of even that. *Touch and go*. There's a sense of individuality, a sense of person. Actually, we are here, we exist.” Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

How Long?

The time you spend on the exercise should always be long enough to settle down, but not so long that tension creeps in. If you sit for 20 minutes you can break up the session in shorter cycles interspersed with moments of recess, still sitting but not so precisely following the breath's movement. You shouldn't go too far and strain your body, your leg, your back or something. Rearrange your posture if it is necessary; at some point it's good to do that.

Doing Vs Being

We often make the mistake of thinking of meditation as another task. Meditation is about BEING, not doing. It is about giving yourself space. When you appreciate it in this way, you will want this stability all the time. You progressively come to be familiar with the beautiful moment where your body, breath, and mind are right HERE.

You look past the restlessness, drowsiness, and other clouds. You use them to see what is going on in your mind. The training is to come back to the breath when you see your mind is going off in some direction. Don't scold yourself for being gone or praise yourself for being back. It just prolongs the distraction.

Be HERE with your breath and strive to be present for a while. Now and then make a pause and start afresh.

A Life Project

Maintaining an ethical attitude in life should not feel like an outwardly imposed constraint. Instead, it is a support for calm abiding and will help you to cool down the agitation of your mind and enable you to choose appropriate actions.

One, of course, needs to learn how and when to help. When you are about to help, because of your habitual patterns, you immediately think : “What might I lose, and what could I gain ?” This is the first confrontation with your self-centered concern. When you genuinely act for the good you will have to let go of a lot of things. This will initiate a transformation. New ways of doing things will be developed.

Endless needs and desires lead you to be possessed by the things you own. Even plenty is never enough. Rejecting everything is not the solution either; it is a reverse form of desire. You need to find the balance that will bring peace in your being, and calm down the restless frustration of your mind.

It is hard to sit down and meditate when you are restless; any little thing will break your focus. Often, you don't meditate at all because you are preoccupied with too

many plans, obligations and so forth (lots of excuses).

You will progressively gain the capacity to hear and see people as they really are, and not through your filters and veils. To truly help others, as well as yourself, you need this clarity in your mind.

Suggested readings

One Dharma: The Emerging Western Buddhism

Joseph Goldstein

ISBN-10: 0062517015

ISBN-13: 978-0062517012

Boundless Awakening: The Heart of Buddhist Meditation

by Shamar Rinpoche

Bird of Paradise Press

ISBN-10: 0988176211

ISBN-13: 978-0988176218

Meditation for Beginners

Jack Kornfield

ISBN-10: 1591799422

ISBN-13: 978-1591799429

Seeking the Heart of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation

Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield

ISBN-10: 157062805X

ISBN-13: 978-1570628054

Commit to Sit: Tools for Cultivating a Meditation Practice

ISBN-10: 1401921752

ISBN-13: 978-1401921750

Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha

Thich Nhat Hanh

ISBN-10: 0938077260

ISBN-13: 978-0938077268

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