

Buddhist Meditation: Living Practice

Aims of the course: This course focuses on developing mindfulness and metta in everyday life. The course aims to help you:

1. develop the 'Four Spheres of Mindfulness' in daily life
2. develop the 'Four Dimensions of Mindfulness' in daily life

Your aims for the course

Please write your aims in below	Evaluation. Have you achieved what you hoped for?		
	Yes	Improving	No
1)			
2)			
3)			

What changes have you noticed in yourself since you started the course?

What are the most important things you have learnt?

How useful has the **Practice Book** been to you?

Very useful	Fairly useful	Not useful
Please say why:		

How successful have you been in meditating regularly?

Very successful	Fairly successful	Not at all successful
Please say why:		

Have you been able to explore living practice outside of your meditation practice?

Yes, very much so	To some degree	Not really
Please say why:		

Do you plan to carry on exploring meditation / Buddhism? if so, how; If not, why not?

--

1. Body

Awareness of the body and its movements (*kaya*)

Mindfulness begins by developing awareness (or recollectedness) of *kaya*, i.e. the *body and its movements*. This makes us calmer, more effective and gives our movements dignity and grace. Being aware of the body and its movements is also an antidote to anxiety and stress, or to difficult situations, (e.g. conflict.) We can use the body as an anchor to awareness at any time – on the tube home, talking to someone.

In pairs, come up with a *daily practice of mindful walking* - this will be our 'living practice' during the week. **Choose ONE daily walk.**

1) Please describe the regular walk that you will use as practice

Approximately how long is this period of walking? **(It should be no longer than 15 mins. and no less than 5 mins.)**

2)

What issues do you foresee in taking up this walking practice during the week?

3) Please write them down

4) Can you think of any creative ways in which you might work with these issues?

Practice Diary (week 1)

Try to fill out the meditation diary every day. If you do not manage to meditate, cross out the box so that you become more conscious of *not* meditating. (This is simply to aid awareness, not to condemn ourselves)

Walking Practice. Each day see if you can remember to do your period of walking practice and note down that you did. Try to say how it went, and what effect it had, if any. Here are some possible approaches to walking meditation that might be useful:

1. **Bring your attention into your body and its movements** as you walk; each time you get distracted bring your mind back to your body.
2. **Bring your attention into the soles of your feet** (this is especially useful if you are speedy or anxious). Notice the weight of your body dropping through the soles of your feet and be aware of the support of the ground.
3. **Use a counting technique** with the above (i.e. awareness of the soles of your feet) to help you stay with your sensations. After each step count 1 to 8, and then back (i.e. step 1, step 2 and so on up to 8, then back to 1 again, i.e. step 8, step 7, step 6.)
4. **Use words or phrases.** Be aware of your whole body walking and add phrases to help you stay with your experience, (e.g. 'walking mindfully', 'walking peacefully'.) You could try using a mantra.
5. **Walk and let go.** Be aware of your whole body, paying special attention to any feelings of worry or anxiety (either physical or mental). See if you can just let go of those worries and relax your body and mind as you walk.
6. **Pay appreciative attention to your experience.** This means tuning in to any pleasurable sensations coming in through the senses, (e.g. your body moving, the breeze on your skin, feelings of warmth or coolness, pleasant sights, sounds, etc.)
7. **Use your imagination.** Some teachers suggest imagining a lotus blossom opening under each foot as you walk, or imagining the earth beneath you.

Walking meditation is learning to walk again with ease. When you were about a year old, you began to walk with tottering steps. Now, in practising walking meditation you are learning to walk again.

Thich Nhat Hanh. A Guide to Walking Meditation

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Body awareness. Spend most of your meditation becoming mindful of your body. Start by being aware of your toes and then gradually work up your body to your head. Then do just five minutes of watching the breath, keeping your awareness grounded in your physical experience.</i>	
<i>How did it go?</i>		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>What did you notice?</i>		
metta bhavana	<i>Kind awareness. Start your practice by becoming aware of your body (as above). But this time consciously bring an attitude of kind awareness to your experience – not trying to change your sensations whether they are comfortable or uncomfortable. Then sit quietly for a few minutes and notice if there is a quality of metta in your experience.</i>	
<i>Did that make a difference compared to the day before?</i>		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>What did you notice?</i>		

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Awareness of one part of the body affects the whole body. Once again, start by developing mindfulness of the body, but this time concentrate on becoming aware of your hands. Try to be aware of each finger successively. Then do the four stages more briefly, coming back to an awareness of your hands at each stage.</i>
---------------------------------	--

How did it go?

walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
---------------------------	--

What did you notice?

metta bhavana	<i>Letting the body be well. In today's metta bhavana, concentrate on the phrase, 'may I be well'. Start by going through your body (using kind awareness as above), occasionally adding the phrase, 'may I be well'. Come back to this briefly between each stage.</i>
----------------------	---

What difference, if any, did that make?

walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
---------------------------	--

What did you notice?

mindfulness of breathing	Awareness of sound. Start by developing mindfulness of the body, then, continuing that awareness, include mindfulness of sounds. Just notice the sounds around you without naming or judging them. Then go through the four stages more briefly, coming back to an awareness of the body and sounds between each stage.	
<i>Did noticing sounds change your experience in any way?</i>		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>What did you notice?</i>		
metta bhavana	Wellness. As before, concentrate on the phrase, 'may I be well'. Start by going through your body (using kind awareness as above), occasionally adding the phrase, 'may I be well'. Then go through the five stages, wishing that each person be physically well. Leave time to come back and rest in your body at the end.	
<i>Did you notice any difference in the quality of your experience?</i>		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>What did you notice?</i>		

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Breath affects the whole body. Today, just do a three-stage practice. Start with the two counting stages. In the third stage explore how your breath affects your whole body. You might take your awareness through your body and notice the subtle effect that your breathing has on each part of the body (e.g., legs, feet, even the finger tips) or you might want to stay with a broad awareness of your whole body.</i>
<i>Were you able to tune in to the subtle effects of breath in the body? What effect did it have?</i>	
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
What did you notice?	

Review of first practice week	
meditation	<i>Were you able to meditate regularly? If not, what stopped you? Were you able to develop more awareness of your body in meditation, and did that make a difference?</i>
walking practice	<i>Did you remember to do your walking practice? How did it go? Were you able to work creatively (as you had planned) with the issues of doing your walking practice?</i>

2. Walking Meditation

In the box below draw a map of the walk you have chosen for your living practice walk. Draw as many things about the walk as you can remember, e.g. the bank you walk past, the trees, the steps leading down to the tube station, etc. (5mins)



Remembering. Much of the art of mindfulness is simply remembering to do it. The Pali word *sati* is related to the verb *sarati*, which means ‘to remember’, (i.e. remembering to hold the object in mind.)

By now you will probably have tried and then forgotten. It is easy to become disheartened. Mindfulness usually starts *after* the event – i.e. when we remember we have forgotten. Our aim is to remember more quickly and to work back to our *present experience* as it actually happens. Drawing our ‘practice walk’ like this will help us to remember to practise walking meditation.

2. Feelings

The second sphere of mindfulness is *vedana*. This is a Pali term derived from the verb *vedeti*, which means both 'to feel' and 'to know'. The word *vedana* does not include 'emotion' as we understand it (we will come on to that next week). What is being suggested here is that we become aware of our basic *feelings* about something. These feelings are **pleasant**, **painful** or **neutral** (i.e. you can't decide if it is pleasant or painful – it is sort of nondescript). In this second week of living practice try to develop awareness of feelings.

Think of a situation in which you experience unpleasant feelings. Think of something that happens to you frequently - if possible, daily (e.g. commuting to work).

1) Describe the situation and write down some of the feelings you experience.

Think of a situation in which you usually experience pleasant feelings. Think of something that happens fairly frequently - if possible, daily.

2) Describe the situation and write down some of the feelings you experience.

2. Daily Life Practice

Mindfulness in a simple daily activity. Choose one simple daily activity to develop mindfulness / awareness. It could be your morning shower, your afternoon coffee, or your preparations to go to bed, etc.

If possible try to choose a daily activity where you are alone, as this will make it easier to be mindful. Use this simple daily activity throughout the course (though you may find that you need to change the particular mindful activity depending on how it goes). Each week we will endeavour to use this 'daily life practice' as a cue to developing mindfulness.

What simple daily activity ('daily life practice') do you plan to use?

Write it down here

This week concentrate on mindfulness of feeling (*vedana*). The art here is to learn to notice *in the body* what feelings (pleasant, painful or neutral) actually feel like. This means not following the inner narrative about those feelings, (e.g. 'I'm going to be late for work *again*') but just noticing the feeling of anxiety that the narrative arises from.

Feelings are not emotions - feelings are what we *work up* into emotions, so that if we get enough unpleasant feelings (*vedana*), we feel in a bad mood and vice versa. By becoming more aware of the feelings that underlie our emotions, we start to become free, (i.e. we are not so much at the mercy of the feelings that our experience happens to provoke - whether it is a computer crashing or a late train.)

2. Walking Meditation

In this week's 'practice walk' pay especial attention to your *feelings*, i.e. pleasant, painful (uncomfortable, unpleasant, etc.) or neutral. You could try to

1. **Be aware of physical comfort or discomfort as you walk.** Notice pleasant or unpleasant feelings in your body without reacting to them, (i.e. wanting the pleasure to continue or reacting with aversion to discomfort.)
2. **Become more aware of your environment and its effects on your state of mind.** As you walk, notice more fully what is around you - people, billboards, traffic, trees. Try to become more attuned to your *feeling response* to them, (e.g. the feeling of discomfort caused by traffic noise, the pleasure at the sight of trees in bloom.)
3. **Tune in to pleasant feelings (*vedana*).** Pay particular attention to pleasant feelings coming through the senses (body, eyesight, hearing), (e.g. the breeze on your hands, the sight of children playing, an appealing poster.)

Special practice walks. Each week see if you can do a special practice walk. (It might be the only walk you remember to do!) On this walk make more of an effort to be mindful. You may need to give a little bit more time for it. Each week there will be a particular suggestion for your special practice walk.

This week's 'special practice walk'. *Slow your pace right down*, see if you can pay more attention to your body and your feelings.

Spend some time writing about how you experienced this walk.

Overload warning! By now you might be feeling that it is all too much: daily meditation diary, daily walk, daily mindfulness practice, special walks...it's all a bit overwhelming! Too many things to become aware of can increase the feeling of stress rather than reduce it. If you feel like this, try dropping one of the areas of mindfulness practice, not writing the diary so fully, or taking the whole thing more lightly (It is not an endurance test!). Try to find the balance between what works for you and learning about and developing mindfulness.

metta bhavana	Noticing feelings in metta. Start by becoming mindful of your body once again. Give particular attention to how your body <u>feels</u> , (i.e. pleasant, painful or neutral.) In each stage of the practice, try to get more sense of how you feel in each stage, (e.g. does your friend bring pleasant feelings? Does your enemy cause unpleasant feelings?)		
<i>How did it go?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Body and its feelings. Spend most of your practice becoming aware of feelings that arise in the body. Start with your toes and work up to your head. Notice where you experience pleasant feelings, unpleasant or less pleasant ones, and where they are fairly neutral or feeling-less. Try to notice without reacting. Then spend five minutes watching the breath.		
<i>Write down some of your pleasant, unpleasant and neutral sensations.</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			

metta bhavana	Noticing what we do <u>not</u> want to change. Spend longer in the first stage. Bring to mind what you do <u>not</u> want to change about yourself and your life. For instance, you may be happy where you live, with your relationship with your family, or partner; you may value your sense of humour – then, more briefly do the other stages.		
<i>How did it go?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Pleasant feeling. Emphasize pleasant feelings (vedana) in your experience. Start scanning through the body; when you notice a pleasant feeling, (e.g. the warmth of the body, etc.) dwell on that for a while (remember the feeling of pleasure might be quite mild). Then see if you can take pleasure in the breath, feeling how it calms and comforts the body.		
<i>Did that make a difference?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			

metta bhavana	Allowing metta to arise out of pleasant experience. Start with your physical experience. See if you can find any pleasant sensations in your body, (even if only mildly so), and let your mind dwell on those with kind awareness. Keep coming back to pleasant sensations, and resting in them, during the practice.		
<i>Did that change the quality of your experience?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Kindly experience of unpleasant feeling. Today become aware of an <u>unpleasant</u> experience, (e.g. physical discomfort.) At the start and between each stage, come back to that, trying to experience it more directly and letting go of the words around it, (e.g. 'I wish it would go away'.) See if you can experience it without reacting, (and thus creating emotional pain).		
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			

metta bhavana	Letting go of the narrative of dislike. Spend more time on the 'enemy' stage of the metta. Particularly focus on your feelings. Try to get in contact with your feelings of dislike but letting go of the <u>narrative of dislike</u> , (e.g. 'he/she is like this or that'.) See if you can feel the unpleasant feelings and, as it were, bear them. When you go back into narrative, keep coming back to the feeling of aversion.
How did it go?	
daily life practice	Did you remember to do it? Yes No
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it? Yes No
What did you notice?	

Review of second practice week	
meditation	Were you able to meditate regularly? Were you able to get a more direct experience of feeling (vedana)? Was it useful for you?
walking practice	Did you remember to be aware of vedana in your walking practice? How did it go? Were you able to do the special walk?
daily life practice	Were you able to remember to use your daily activity to be aware of feelings? Could you be aware of them without reacting? What did you notice?

3: Review – Unpleasant Feeling (*Vedana*)

Draw how your body feels when you have unpleasant sensations. Do this very quickly without thinking about it very much. (5mins)

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing or sketching the body's feelings during unpleasant sensations.

Staying in touch. Much of the art of mindfulness is staying in touch with our experience. When we have unpleasant experiences, we often do one of four things:

1. Distract ourselves
2. Blame others or the situation
3. Fall into self-pity
4. Catastrophize (i.e. predict that the unpleasant experience will end in a catastrophe)

These tendencies are spiritually fruitless. Distraction means that we do not change our responses or ourselves; blame (even if someone *is* responsible) usually leads us nowhere; and self-pity is both painful and a form of laziness (i.e. to meet the issues of the situation). We need to:

- Stay open and receptive to our experience (and keep doing this).
- Keep in contact with others. (When things are difficult our world closes in around us a bit, isolating us from others, which only makes things worse).

3: Review – Pleasant Feeling (*Vedana*)

Bring to mind a pleasant sensation or experience. Draw how your body feels when you have pleasant sensations. Do this very quickly without thinking about it very much. (5mins)



Not squeezing the pleasure out of experience. One traditional understanding of pain and pleasure is that as soon as we experience pain we want it to go away, as soon as we experience pleasure, we want to repeat it. This desire to repeat (or prolong) pleasure actually vitiates the pleasure we seek (the law of diminishing returns). The more we try to hold on to pleasure, or try to squeeze as much pleasure out of our experience (or out of our weekend!) as possible, the more we find that what we are holding on to is pain.

One of the arts of life is to learn to enjoy pleasure without grasping it (which only destroys it anyway). We could try to:

1. Hang loose to pleasure a bit – be fully mindful of it, enjoy it, but practise not going with the urge to repeat it, or get more of it.
2. Enjoy pleasures that are less caught up with the craving to repeat them; pleasures that are more refined, non-addictive, and, as it were, innocent (e.g. painting a picture, enjoying nature or gardening, meeting a friend.)
3. Taking pleasure in the simple things of life (e.g. a pleasant meal, a good book.) Slowing down and making time for simple pleasures.

3: *Citta* or Mind-Heart

The third sphere of mindfulness is *citta*. This is usually translated as ‘mind’ in the volitional and emotional sense, (i.e. our mood, or ‘state of mind’.) It includes thoughts, emotions and volitions. *Citta* arises on the basis of *vedana* (feeling). So when you have a dinner party, for example, you try to create as many positive feelings as possible: nice food, pleasant lighting, hospitality. You hope by doing so that people will be more likely to get into a good mood and that the evening will be a success.

One good way of developing awareness of *citta* is by focusing on how we turn *vedana* (the basic feeling of something being pleasant or unpleasant, etc.) into ‘moods’ and emotions. We do this, very often, with a self-justifying narrative, (e.g. we tell ourselves that the reason we are feeling bad is because so-and-so never listens to us, or whatever.) This narrative may or may not be true, (often it is a mixture); however, we often take our narratives *extremely seriously* – we believe in them.

In this practice week, focus on becoming more aware of your inner narratives, especially ones that lead you into negative mental states, ‘bad moods’. Become aware of the inner narrative, and with a *kind awareness* ask yourself:

1. Is what I am thinking true?
2. Am I confusing a thought with a fact?
3. Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
4. Am I blaming others or myself?
5. Is this leading me anywhere (i.e. is it useful)?
6. Have I thought about it enough now (i.e. am I *really* trying to resolve it)?
7. Am I getting into negative or anxious speculation?
8. Will this narrative actually help me in the situation I am thinking about?
9. Am I catastrophizing?

In pairs, come up with a habitual narrative that we tend to tell ourselves (perhaps involving work, home life, or our attitude to ourselves)

Spend some time writing about that narrative – perhaps asking some of the questions above.

3: Notes on Awareness of *Citta* (Mind-Heart)

Mindfulness of our states of mind (*citta*) is more difficult to practise than the first two spheres of mindfulness - thoughts are so very elusive. So it is important to explore the practice in **a warm, relaxed kind of way** – still in touch with your body and feelings. Not worrying about it if it feels you aren't getting anywhere – you probably are.

Look out for:

1. **Making matters worse!** Sometimes, if our mindfulness is not strong enough, noticing our inner narrative will make matters worse, thereby actually *feeding* our bad mood, (e.g. you notice you feel 'hard done by', and then you start to think, 'Yes, I *am* hard done by, and here are some of the reasons why!'). If that happens, try
 - a. coming back to your body and relax
 - b. distracting yourself! (by looking at the trees or reading a book)
 - c. seeing how this way of thinking is making matters worse, noticing the physical discomfort it causes, etc.
2. **Getting into self-condemnation.** Part of developing ourselves in any area of life is the capacity to be positively self-critical: healthily assessing how well we have or haven't done. However, this faculty can shade over into self-condemnation, which rubbishes our desire to change, our potential or our abilities. We need to see how this tendency (if we have it) is fruitless and self-defeating.
3. **Alienation.** Being aware of *citta* (states of mind) is not the same as 'positive thinking'. You are not trying to re-program yourself. You are trying to be more aware of the states of mind you get into and to find ways of working creatively with them. It is not about becoming alienated from what you actually think and feel.

Mind precedes world. The narrative we have about a situation has a strong effect on that situation. So if we go into a meeting expecting, for instance, not to be understood, or expecting to be (unfairly) criticized, then that in itself *will help set up the negative scenario we are anticipating*. So an important part of this practice of awareness of *citta* is about being aware of our **anticipatory narratives** and seeing what effect they have on others and the world around us.

3: Walking Meditation

This week, use your 'practice walk' to pay attention to your *inner narrative*, (i.e. what you say to yourself.) What we tell ourselves can be true or false, constructive or destructive, directed or associative. Keep an awareness of your body and feelings as before whilst you try and do this. Can you notice a particular narrative (e.g. are you rehearsing how you are not appreciated, or are misunderstood, or over-burdened, etc.)? Ask yourself:

1. **Is this true?** In a kind, *explorative* way, become more objective about the story you are telling yourself.
2. **Can I think of narratives that contradict it?** We often tell ourselves stories, which suit us in some way, (e.g., that we are the passive victim.) Try to find other narratives that contradict or don't fit in with your story.
3. **Where does this usually get me?** What we tell ourselves may be true (or have truth in it), but *not* be fruitful or constructive – it leads us nowhere, (e.g. it might be true that we have too much work on our plate, but thinking about it in this habitual and repetitive way only makes things worse).
4. **What is the underlying view?** Our inner narratives (especially our negative ones) have strongly held views or assumptions behind them. These views can be acquired unconsciously from our surroundings or from childhood, (such as, 'I never get what I want', 'things will always turn out for the best / worst'.) Try to see the view, the expectation or assumption that underlies your inner narrative.

Special walk.

Once again try to make time for a 'special walk'. Try slowing your pace down and concentrating on **enjoying your sensuous experience**, (i.e. sight, sounds, body and working with your inner narrative to do this.)

How did it go?

Daily life practice. This week use your daily life experience (whether it be brushing your teeth or turning your computer on) to be aware of *citta* – of your whole state of mind and your inner narrative. You don't need to change your state of mind as yet, just notice the sorts of things that you tell yourself.

mindfulness of breathing	Building up mindfulness. Start with a body scan (bringing kind awareness to your experience); then notice your experience of vedana (pleasant, painful, neutral); then become aware of your state of mind - are you in a particular mood, what state of mind are you in? You can get clues about your state of mind from the sensations in your body. Come back to this at the end of the practice.		
<i>At the end, did you notice any difference from the beginning?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What was your inner narrative?</i>			
metta bhavana	Working directly with inner narrative. Start by building up awareness of body and feelings (as above), then work directly with your inner narrative. Use reflection, rather than the sentences such as, 'What is it that makes me happy? Am I happy now? If not, am I telling myself a negative self-story?' In the other stages, try to create a positive inner narrative about your friend, neutral person, etc.		
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What was your inner narrative?</i>			

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Awareness of 'distraction'. Again, start with your physical experience, but emphasize awareness of what distracts you in the practice. Notice if you are telling yourself stories, and reflect on those stories, (are they true, useful, productive?), before coming back to the body and the breath. Try to do this fairly frequently.</i>		
<i>Were you able to do that with a kind curiosity? How did it go?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What was your inner narrative?</i>			
metta bhavana	<i>Letting go of unhelpful narratives. Today, try to become aware of an <u>unpleasant</u> experience, (e.g. physical discomfort or mental unease.) Notice the narrative you tell yourself about it, (e.g. 'this pain won't go away, it'll get worse', etc.) Then see if you can let the narrative go and just experience the feelings with kind awareness. Come back to this at every stage.</i>		
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What was the inner narrative?</i>			

3: Exploring Negative Self-Talk

See if you can make some time during the week to do this short exercise. (If this feels too much, you might use this page to write down some of the narratives you notice in the daily life practice.) Explore one of your habitual negative narratives. Think of this as a writing exercise; that is, don't think about it too much, just write.

1) *'Something I often tell myself is...*

Question. *Is this true?*

Question. *Is this fruitful?*

Question. *Where do such thoughts usually lead me?*

Question. *How could I work creatively with it?*

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Letting go. In this practice, just keep letting go. So notice your feelings (vedana) and relax into them, whether they are comfortable or uncomfortable. Notice your inner narratives and just keep letting them go, relaxing in the body, and letting go of body, feelings and thoughts.</i>		
<i>Did that change the quality of your experience?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>What did you notice?</i>			
metta bhavana	<i>Going free form. Today, instead of doing the stages as suggested, find your own way of doing the practice. This practice is about developing positive citta (states of mind). Have a go at creatively exploring how to do that.</i>		
<i>What did you do?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>Did you notice an inner narrative?</i>			

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Being blue sky. In today's practice, move more quickly through the four stages, and then at the end just sit very still – mindful of your body, feelings and mental states. Notice any inner narratives that arise, but do not get involved in them, just notice them and let them go, like clouds across a blue sky. Try doing this for 10 minutes</i>		
<i>Did that make any difference to how you felt when you finished the practice?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
What did you notice?			

Review of third practice week	
meditation	<i>Were you able to meditate regularly? Were you able to get a more direct experience of your states of mind (citta)? Could you find ways of working with them?</i>
walking practice	<i>Did you remember to be aware of your inner narrative in your walking practice? How did it go? Did you do the 'special walk'?</i>
daily life practice	<i>Did you notice some of your habitual inner narratives? Were you able to begin to work creatively with them?</i>

4: *Dhammas* (bringing the teachings to mind)

The fourth sphere of mindfulness is *dhammas*. This is best translated (in this context at least) as **being aware of your experience in the light of what you have learnt**, or, bringing to mind the teachings. It means looking at your experience in the light of what you are trying to do with your life overall.

For example, you notice that you are getting frustrated whilst driving in traffic. Mindfulness of *dhammas* means recollecting *in the moment* what you have learnt about patience. You remember that you are just winding yourself up, you take responsibility for that and you work directly to develop patience.

Mindfulness of *dhammas* means bringing to mind your ideal (e.g. happiness, etc.) and using what you have learnt to cultivate that in your experience. Traditionally it means bringing to mind the teachings of the Buddha, such as the *five hindrances* and the *five antidotes*. Every time you are mindful, (e.g. of the body,) you are, in effect, recollecting what you have learnt.

Hindrances

sense desire (<i>kamacchanda</i>). Wanting something outside our actual experience – cream cakes, sex, new ideas, ‘good’ meditations.
--

ill-will (<i>byapada</i>). Wanting to push away anything we do not want in our experience or which we feel threatens us, (e.g. other people, sounds, discomfort.)
--

sloth + torpor (<i>thanamiddha</i>). Physical tiredness and heaviness (sloth) or mental sluggishness / dullness (torpor).
--

restlessness + anxiety (<i>uddhaccakukkucca</i>). Physical restlessness (fidgeting, unable to sit still) and mental anxiety and worry.

doubt (<i>vicikiccha</i>). Doubting ourselves, the teacher or the practices in such a way as we never really commit ourselves.

Antidotes

<p>cultivate the opposite. sense-desire = contentment, relaxation ill-will = metta, patience restlessness and anxiety = calm, stillness sloth = wakefulness doubt = commitment</p>
<p>consider the consequences “Where do these thoughts usually lead me?” “Am I enjoying thinking like this?” “Where is this leading me?” “How is this affecting other people?”</p>
<p>sky-like mind This is when the hindrance is too strong for the above antidotes. You just watch it take its course without getting too involved in it</p>
<p>suppression (not repression) Only to be used when already quite concentrated</p>
<p>seeing your experience in perspective of your <i>whole practice</i> (not absolutizing). Not over-identifying with one not very pleasant meditation or day or week.</p>

Of course you may find other antidotes to the ones listed above. One of the arts of life is finding out what works for you, which means noticing what gets you into negative states in the first place and learning how best to avoid them.

Things to bear in mind

- Catch them early. The more deeply we get into negative states, the more difficult it is to come out of them.
- Stay in contact with others. When we experience physical or mental suffering, our world tends to close in around us. Staying in contact with others helps prevent this.
- Try doing something else. Sometimes the best we can do is positively distract ourselves...or turn off the computer!

4: Mindfulness of *Dhammas*

(Developing creative strategies for difficult situations)

Many difficult situations (e.g. a tough business meeting, an argument with a friend, cycling through traffic,) have three aspects:

1. **anticipation** (we think about the difficulty beforehand, often unhelpfully)
2. **situation** (we might react in the situation itself - e.g. become physically tense or defensive)
3. **recall** (we often re-rehearse what was said or done in our mind, reliving what we *should* have said or done)

Mindfulness of *dhammas* means bringing to these 3 phases a helpful and productive attitude, calling to mind what we have learnt and what outcomes are really in our best interest, (e.g. it is never in our best interest to hate someone).

How?

Anticipation	Situation (encounter)	Recall
<p>1. Be present and receptive to your experience (<i>sati</i> and <i>vedana</i>).</p>	<p>Be present and receptive to your experience (<i>sati</i> and <i>vedana</i>). Especially work at staying with any <i>discomfort</i> (physical and mental) and not reacting on the basis of that, (e.g. feeling hurt.) Sometimes this is as much as you can do.</p>	<p>Be present and receptive to your experience (<i>sati</i> and <i>vedana</i>). Notice what it feels like physically to re-rehearse an argument (or whatever). Don't condemn yourself for it, but try to notice any defensive narrative.</p>
<p>2. Be aware of the inner narrative that you have about your experience (<i>citta</i>). Is it creative or reactive? <i>Consider the consequences</i>.</p>	<p>Be aware of the inner narrative. Ask yourself, 'Is what I am thinking true? If so, how can I communicate it effectively? What is subjective reaction and what is objective truth?'</p>	<p>Be aware of the inner narrative you have about your experience (<i>citta</i>). <i>Consider the consequences</i> of this story, is it helpful, does it get you anywhere?</p>
<p>3. Rehearse a more creative strategy. Think more creatively about how to work with the situation, or a more useful way of communicating your point (<i>dhammas</i>).</p>	<p>Stay connected. It is tempting in difficult situations to cut off from others. This diminishes your awareness; listen, connect, try to be generous.</p>	<p>Decide what to do. If you are resenting something or somebody you need either to let it go (and keep letting it go) or rehearse a creative strategy.</p>

4: *Dhammas* (bringing the teachings to mind)

In pairs, try to think of a difficult situation that you might well encounter during the week. We will review this in the class next week.

Describe the situation

'In this situation my body feels...'

'I have these feelings' (*vedana*)

'I tend to say to myself' (*citta*)

Rehearsal of creative strategy (mindfulness of *dhammas*)

'I could cultivate the opposite by...'

'If I were to consider the consequences, they would be...'

'Could I let go a bit (sky-like mind) and just notice without getting too involved?'

'Could I change the conditions in which the situation arises?'

'What would I like to achieve in the situation and what would be a realistic goal?'

4: Walking Meditation

In this week's 'practice walk' *cultivate the opposite*. This means being clear what hindrance you are in (if you *are* in one) and finding an opposite to that, (e.g. if you are angry the opposite is patience, if you are tired, wakefulness, etc.)

Let's take the example of anxiety:

1. **Cultivating the opposite through the body.** Bring your attention down in the body. Anxiety has a lot of energy tied up in it; this energy spins about fruitlessly in the mind / head. So bring your attention down to the soles of your feet.
2. **Relaxing the body as you walk and letting your breath soften and deepen** (occasionally consciously lengthening the outbreath).
3. **Becoming aware of *vedana*** (e.g. the physical feeling of discomfort and tension associated with anxiety), trying not to react to it, just noticing it and, with kind awareness, letting it go.
4. **Developing an inner narrative** that cultivates the opposite, (e.g. walking calmly and peacefully) or **considering the consequences** of anxiety.

Special walk

In one of your walks, try to notice things that you do not normally see, (e.g. the particular design of a house above a shop-front, the type of trees in your road, the play of sunlight.) Basically, try to cultivate appreciation of your environment. (This has the affect of cultivating the opposite to mindless hurry, anxiety.)

What did you notice?

Daily life practice

This week in your daily practice, notice what state of mind you are in and try to cultivate the opposite; or, see if you can bring to mind what you have learnt and try to practise on the basis of that – just becoming mindful of your body is bringing to mind the teachings. Very often we simply fail to recollect what we need to do to make ourselves feel happier.

metta bhavana	Acknowledgment / acceptance. In today's practice notice what happens in your mind (especially your inner narratives) and try to acknowledge and accept them. A self-condemning or impatient attitude in meditation is counter-productive. Just notice what happens with kind awareness, and then let it go.		
<i>Were you able to bring a kind awareness to what happens in your mind?</i>			
daily practice	life Did you remember to do it?	Yes	No
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it? Yes No		
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Cultivate the opposite. Today, emphasize noticing any hindrance (with benign curiosity) and then seeing if you can cultivate the opposite of that hindrance, (e.g. sleepy = wake up, open your eyes; anxious= sit still, calm, bring your awareness down; ill-will = calm down, develop patience...and so on.)		
<i>Were you able to a) notice and name the hindrance? b) cultivate the opposite?</i>			
daily practice	life Did you remember to do it?	Yes	N
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it? Yes No		
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			

Write down a difficult situation that has occurred

If you have the time, spend some time thinking about a difficult situation that has occurred (perhaps the one you discussed at the class).

1. Try to remember what you **anticipated** about it (what you said to yourself would happen)
2. What happened in the **actual situation** (in your body, your speech, your mind)?
3. Did you dwell upon it **afterwards** (e.g. running through it over and over in your mind)?

Write about it

metta bhavana	Using reflection. In today's practice, try using a more reflective approach to the practice. For instance, 'love alone can overcome hatred' - reflect on how this is a truth in the world and in your own experience; 'love is an indestructible force' – no one can take away or destroy our capacity to love; as long as we can love, we have access to greater strength; 'all beings seek love' ...and so on		
<i>Did you find that using reflection in meditation was helpful?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Breath is change. Today, try to go deeper in your practice by experiencing more vividly the constantly changing nature of the breath. The breath is not a <u>thing</u> ; it is not something we can grasp. In this practice, (esp. in the last two stages), try to let go of inner commentary about the breath, and experience its constantly changing, and therefore, mysterious nature.		
<i>Were you able to do that? Did it deepen your experience of the breath?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes	No
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			

metta bhavana	Gratitude. Start your practice by bringing to mind people that you feel grateful to. This might be your parents, your teachers, your partner or your friends. Spend ten minutes on this and then go through the stages more quickly. (Traditionally, metta arises out of gratitude.)		
<i>Traditionally, gratitude is seen as the antecedent cause of metta – did this approach seem to help?</i>			
daily practice	life Did you remember to do it?	Yes	No
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it?	Yes	No
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			
mindfulness of breathing	Reviewing mindfulness. Today, try dropping the usual structure of the practice and break it instead into three parts. In the first stage scan through your body (mindfulness of body); in the second, just sit in your body and when you mind goes off, notice the <u>feeling tone</u> of the thoughts (vedana). In the third stage watch the breath (without counting) and just notice where the mind goes (citta).		
<i>Did that make a difference when you got the third stage?</i>			
daily practice	life Did you remember to do it?	Yes	No
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it?	Yes	No
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			

metta bhavana	<i>Appreciation. In today's practice, concentrate on appreciation. In the first stage you could contemplate what you already have, (e.g. your health, that you are able to practise, that you live in a relatively safe country, that you enjoy aspects of your life and so forth) Then bring to mind what you appreciate about your friend. Then go on through the rest of the practice.</i>		
<i>How did it go?</i>			
daily life practice	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Were you in a hindrance? Could you cultivate the opposite?</i>			

Review of fourth practice week	
meditation	<i>Were you able to meditate regularly? If not, what is stopping you from meditating regularly? What views underlie it?</i>
walking practice	<i>Did you remember to be aware of cultivating the opposite in your walking practice? How did it go? Did you do your two special walks?</i>
daily life practice	<i>We will review this in more detail in the class</i>

*The thought manifests as the word;
The word manifests as the deed;
The deed develops into habit,
And habit hardens into character.
So watch the thought and its ways with care,
And let it spring from love
Born out of concern for all beings*

Sangharakshita

5:Review of a 'difficult situation'

1) Were you able to be aware of and work with **anticipation** (mind-rehearsal) of the difficult situation?

Can you say what happened? (If you were not able to work with it, say why.)

2) Were you able to work with the **actual encounter** (situation).

What happened? What did you do? (Think of body, feelings, mental states.)

2) Were you able to work with **recalling the situation** (i.e. going through it again in your mind)?

Did it come back to your mind? Were you able to be mindful of it?

5: The Four *Dimensions* of Mindfulness

5: *Dimensions* of mindfulness

Our *actual* experience is whole, indivisible. To think *about* our experience however we have to break it down into parts, (i.e. body, feelings, mental states, etc.). This is to help us become more mindful of our experience. But it is not to be taken literally, (it is 'method' not philosophy). Any system appears to leave things out.

The four spheres of mindfulness mean being mindful of our whole experience (inner and outer) all of the time. The Buddha would have taken it for granted that this includes the **natural environment** and **other people**. However this has got lost in time – so the *dimensions* bring out these other aspects of mindfulness.

Daily life practice

During this week, instead of having a set activity as your daily life practice, see if you can practise being more aware of your environment and other people; if this seems too broad, just concentrate on developing awareness of one other person (see below). Otherwise you might use this week to send a postcard to a friend, ring your mother, help a friend do something, tidy your room, finish a chore that you have been putting off, tidy up your computer files...in some way pay more attention to others and to your environment.

How are you getting on with this practice book?

By now you may be getting a bit fed up with filling all this in. Sometimes having too many things to do – especially 'self-improving' things to do – can cause reactions or lead to feeling hemmed in. You may have simply not used the book very much. Review how you are getting on with the book and see if it is still helpful, or how you could engage with it more, or make it more helpful.

5: *Dimensions* – other people

If it is true that hell is other people, then so is heaven. Metta, loving kindness, is the awareness of another person, (i.e. if we become aware enough of another person, we will find that metta will naturally arise.) Often, our conflicts with others are to do with not being aware enough of them, or with relating to them superficially in terms of like or dislike, rather than in terms of trying to gain a deeper understanding of them, trying to empathize with them.

In pairs, come up with one person you could develop more awareness of in the coming week. He/she could be a friend or a work colleague – whoever it is, choose someone you see *every day*. **Be careful not to be obvious about it**, (it is not very pleasant to feel experimented on!) - just give them a little more attention.

As a writing exercise, write down a day's diary entry for *that person*, including all the spheres of mindfulness, and what they do, where they go, how they feel, etc.

'I woke up this morning feeling....

5: Other people (continued)

How can you become more aware of the other person in the coming week? (In pairs, brainstorm how you will do this). You might include what they do, when you meet them, whether they have children, where they live, etc. Basically you are trying to develop mindfulness of *them* and *their* life. Together, try to be clear *who* you will choose and *how* you will go about developing awareness of them.

Write down what you come up with below



Ways of bearing them in mind. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Put them in your metta practice.
2. If you are talking to them, *listen* to them more; try to become more interested in *them*.
3. Actually take them in more, (we might be in the habit of not looking at people when we talk to them).
4. If possible and without making too much of it, see if you can *do* something for them, (e.g. make them a cup of tea!)

5: Walking Practice

Carry on with your daily walking practice. (Perhaps you will want to look back at the list of ways of approaching it to refresh your memory). This week, whilst staying *in* your body, *aware* of your body and its movements, your feelings and your inner narrative, put more of your awareness on your environment.

1. **Try to see things as they are.** Notice pleasant, unpleasant or neutral experiences, but without reacting, just noticing. Include sound, (e.g. bird-song.)
2. **Notice the extent to which our environment conditions our mental states** (*citta*), (e.g. sunshine makes us feel happier, an advertising billboard invokes craving.)
3. **Be more mindful of the people around you.** We very often relate to people in a superficial way, (e.g. we are attracted to people we find attractive; repelled, (or often enough simply not noticing), people we do not find attractive.) Make an effort to notice people we may not normally notice.

Instead of a 'special walk', this week try to make time to do one of the following:

Spend 5-10 minutes, looking at the natural environment, (e.g. just looking out of your window or sitting in the park.) Do not *do* anything, just become gently aware of what you are seeing. Also, include the sounds around you.

Or:

Choose some music you find very beautiful and just listen to it, without doing anything else. Try to listen deeply and undistractedly.

What did you do? How did it go?

mindfulness of breathing	Mindfulness of sounds. Start with developing awareness of the body, (working through the body systematically), then just listen to sounds. Sounds do not have labels attached, (e.g. traffic noise, bird-song.) So try to just notice sounds without attaching labels. Come back to this at each stage (spend 5 minutes with sound).	
<i>How did doing that effect your meditation?</i>		
Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>What did you notice? Did you notice your environment?</i>		
metta bhavana	Metta for the other. Today, concentrate on the person that you are using to develop greater awareness of others. Bring him/her vividly to mind, and try to empathize with them and their life. Try to see how they feel and think and act. Spend longer on this stage than the others.	
<i>Were you able to become more aware of them in the practice?</i>		
Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	Yes No
<i>Did you notice your environment?</i>		

Shrine

As part of your awareness of ‘things’, you could spend some time this week making a shrine.

The word for ‘shrine’ in Japanese means ‘a place of peace’. The idea is to create an environment that you find aesthetically pleasing and which helps you cultivate the kind of mood and atmosphere that you are trying to develop in the meditation practice.

You might for instance

- Spend some time tidying your room, making it feel like somewhere you could sit and develop peacefulness
- You could create a shrine using traditional objects such as
 - **Candles** (symbolizing the wisdom of the Buddha) *Buddha*
 - **Flowers** (symbolizing impermanence, the essence of Buddhist teaching) *Dharma*
 - **Incense** (symbolizing the positive, perfuming effect that men and women, in harmony with each other and trying to live a good life, can have on the world) *Sangha*
- You might also have a picture or statue of the Buddha (they are called *rupas*)
- Of course, you may not want to do any of the above; in which case perhaps create a place that is pleasing to you and where you can put things of value to you, (e.g. pictures, photographs, etc.)

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Sight and sound. Start your practice with your eyes open, becoming more aware of your environment, (i.e. the room you meditate in.) Then, close your eyes and become aware of sounds (as before). Then include your body and finally come to your breath. At the end of the practice, come back to sounds and then sit with your</i>
---------------------------------	---

	<i>eyes open without moving for a minute or so.</i>
<i>Did that change the quality of going into and coming out of meditation?</i>	
Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?	
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
<i>What did you notice? Did you notice your environment?</i>	
metta bhavana	<i>Awareness instead of cultivation. Once again spend longer on the person you are cultivating awareness of. This time think of developing more awareness of them (rather than cultivating metta). Try to bring to mind the whole person, strengths and shortcomings, joys and sorrows, the light and the dark side of them. Do this (more briefly) with each stage; just cultivating more awareness of each person.</i>
<i>How did it go?</i>	
<i>What did you notice about others?</i>	
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
<i>Did you notice your environment, other people, how your environment affects you?</i>	

mindfulness of breathing	Just being aware. In this practice have a holiday from mindfulness of breathing. Start with awareness of sight, then (with eyes closed) sound, then include smell, taste, touch (the body and its sensation – e.g. the warmth of your legs), then feeling tone (vedana), inner narrative (citta). Then just sit and relax in full awareness.	
How did it go?		
Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?		
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it?	Yes No
What did you notice?		
metta bhavana	Broadening your awareness of others. Today, spend more time on the last stage of the practice. Bring to mind all the people who are around you, and all the different states they are in, (e.g. with a body that is well or unwell, in positive or negative states, being born, dying...and so on.) Try to extend your mindfulness (and so your empathy) for others.	
How did you find that?		
Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?		
walking meditation	Did you remember to do it?	Yes No
Did you notice your environment?		

mindfulness of breathing	<i>Taking the breath to the 'hindrance'. In today's practice, instead of trying to bring the mind back from the hindrance to the breath, think in terms of taking the breath to the hindrance. Notice that you are thinking about something, that your interest is caught up with that thing; and without trying to stop thinking about it bring the breath to it – let yourself think about whatever but keep some attention on the breath.</i>	
<i>Did you find that that made a difference?</i>		
<i>Were you able to be more aware of the other person or persons, environment?</i>		
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i>	<i>Yes No</i>
<i>Did you notice your environment?</i>		

Review of fifth practice week	
Meditation	<i>Were you able to meditate regularly? Did you cultivate an awareness of the other person in metta? Did you become more mindful of sounds / environment?</i>
Walking practice	<i>Did you remember to be aware of your environment and of other people in your walking practice?</i>
Daily life practice	<i>How did you get on with remembering to be more aware of your environment / other people?</i>

6: The Nature of Reality (*Dhammas* revisited)

The 'goal' of Buddhist spiritual practice is insight into the nature of reality; all genuinely Buddhist practice leads to this goal. The Pali word *dhamma* means both teachings and practices (*dhammas*), as well as the True Nature of Reality – often formulated, very simply, as 'all things are impermanent'.

How the path of mindfulness leads to insight

- We start by becoming aware of the most obvious and tangible aspect of our experience, (i.e. the **body** and its movements.)
- Then we become aware of how our raw experience **feels** (*vedana*: pleasant, painful, neutral)
- Then we start to be mindful of the **states of mind**, the moods, (*citta*), that we get into, (i.e. that we develop out of our raw experience of pleasure and pain.)
- We try to see all of that **in the context of what we have learnt** (*dhammas*), (e.g. hindrances and antidotes).
- Within all that, we are aware of objects, the natural environment, and other people
- Taken together, this describes someone in a very aware, very awake state of mind – *on the basis of that we can cultivate insight*

Insight into the true nature of reality. To develop insight into the nature of experience you need to be:

1. **Concentrated** – our mind needs to be able to dwell in happy, concentrated states, free from hindrances and distractions.
2. **Emotionally positive** – we need to be 'big enough', so to speak, to absorb the impact of reality. Our mind needs to be flexible and our heart positive, interested, emotionally engaged and vigorous.
3. **Receptive** – we need to be receptive to the true nature of our experience. This means being open to what happens to us, present to our experience and willing to learn from it (which includes the experience of *not* knowing).
4. **Reflective** – insight has a cognitive (thought) element. Part of cultivating insight is learning how to reflect deeply on our experience.

The nature of reality is mysterious and profound, it can never be adequately put into words: it is an experience that changes our whole orientation to life. We become 'reality' centered instead of 'me' centered. There are many conceptual formulations for the nature of reality, including

- **All conditioned things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and insubstantial**
- **All things arise in dependence on conditions**

***This being, that becomes;
from the arising of this, that arises;
this not being, that does not
become; from the ceasing of this,
that ceases***

***Majjhima-Nikaya ii.32; Samyutta-Nikaya
ii.28; etc.***

6: Insight

Insight into the nature of reality is *not* primarily a mental or conceptual matter, it is a total experience – mind, body, heart, volitions – it is like the experience of growing up but taken to new depths and profundity. For instance, a child will cry if their ice cream melts or if the sea washes their sandcastle away, because they do not understand that all things change. We understand that such things change, but we don't *fully* understand. Insight is complete knowing.

All of us have some degree of insight.

Write down one experience that connected you with a deeper reality - it might be what brought you to meditation, it might be an experience that made you ask deeper and more searching questions of your life.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write down their experience.

6: Actions Have Consequences (the law of conditioned co-production)

All profound truths can be boiled down into simple, practical teaching. Wisdom is not to do with the words, it is to do with the *experience* that the words are pointing to. Conceptual knowledge is important, and it is important to be clear and unconfused about the true nature of spiritual life, but the main thing is to put it into practice, to *realise* the truth, not merely *think* about it.

One approach to reality is to more deeply understand that *actions have consequences*; that all the time – by our thoughts, words and deeds – we are creating ourselves. **One way of starting to be aware of this is by thinking of important turning points in our lives.**

Write down one turning point in your life – try to see the conditions that led up to it and the consequences that led away from it.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write down a turning point in their life and its consequences.

6: Walking Meditation

In this week's 'practice walk', make a special effort to reinvigorate the practice. Often when we start something – swimming lessons, drawing classes – we are very keen at first and feel we are making immediate progress, but with daily repetition the novelty wears off. This is also true of meditation / walking meditation. This is quite natural and to be expected. In a way it signals the point where serious spiritual practice begins and where early enthusiasm and, quite possibly, naivety ends.

To reinvigorate the practice you may need to

1. Find ways of more deliberately remembering to do it
2. Find new ways into the practice that recapture your interest
3. Learn how to develop a healthy self-discipline
4. Consider the positive benefits of the practice
5. You may well find that talking to other people who are also trying to practise mindful walking helps – perhaps you could ring someone on the course occasionally, or review your meditation together when you meet
6. Find ways of enjoying / valuing mindfulness more, (e.g. reflecting that when you are mindful you are truly alive (or at least trying to be), rather than off in some cerebral fantasy that very often you can't remember even a minute or two later)

Special walk

Try going for a short walk somewhere pleasing, and consider (keeping dropping in the thought), 'Everything I see is impermanent, everything is changing, arising and ceasing'.

What effect did that have?

Daily life practice

In this week's daily practice, see if you can bring more reflection into your experience. You might reflect, 'I know that one day I will die, I do not know when or how, or even what death *really* is, but I *do* know that I am alive now. To be alive now is to appreciate life as it happens – the beauty around me.' Try using existential reflection to aid being alive to the moment.

6: The Challenges of Perseverance

One of the most challenging aspects of spiritual practice is learning how to *persevere*, how to stick with the practice. This is a very important life-skill to develop; anything of value usually requires perseverance – from playing the piano to maintaining friendship.

Often we want to continue with something – whether it is meditating every day or going to the gym – but the business of life seems to get in the way. So part of perseverance means finding ways to keep focused on the important things of life rather than be dominated by the apparently urgent or immediate day-to-day activities of life.

Supports to practice.

Most people find that in order to continue meditating and developing mindfulness they need external supports to help them do this. These might include:

- Maintaining contact with other people who value what you are doing and are trying to do it themselves, (this is part of the value of going along to classes).
- Having periods of time when you have a more intensive and satisfying experience of meditation / mindfulness practice, (e.g. retreats.)
- Reading about meditation / Buddhism in order to stimulate inspiration.
- Availing yourself of further meditation / Buddhism instruction from people who have more experience.
- Meeting up regularly with a friend (or phone/email) to talk about your practice.

This practice week

This week try to persevere - find your own ways of doing the practice if needs be; use what you have learnt over the last six weeks, either from your own practice or from what has been taught.

metta bhavana	<i>Actions have consequences.</i> In today's metta, try to see more clearly that actions have consequences, (e.g. think of a time you were happy) and try to bring to mind what conditions led to this and how you affect things when you are happy, (e.g. the impact you have on
--------------------------	--

	<i>others.) Do this for each stage. If you are very distracted, try reflecting on the consequences of <u>that</u>.</i>
<i>How did it go?</i>	
daily life practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it? Yes No</i>
<i>Any comments – were you able to persevere?</i>	
mindfulness of breathing	<i>The ‘magic moment’. In today’s practice, see if you can discover the ‘magic moment’. When you notice you have been distracted (and distraction is simply the mind doing its thing), you are actually very aware – it is a moment of pure awareness. See if you can notice this moment and relax more and more into it. Instead of thinking of distraction as a problem, focus on the ‘magic moment’ of realising you have been distracted.</i>
<i>How did it go?</i>	
daily life practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it? Yes No</i>
<i>Any comments?</i>	

metta bhavana	<i>The consequences of ill will or negative states of mind. Pay especial attention to the fourth stage, the 'enemy'. Try to feel the negative consequences that ill will and aversion have on your life, think of the time and enjoyment it wastes, see how futile, for instance, resentment is. Try to contact the feeling of ill-will and actually see, in your experience, how painful the state of mind is.</i>
How did it go?	
daily practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
<i>Any comments?</i>	
mindfulness of breathing	<i>The changing breath. Start by cultivating interest in your breath and then see if you can intensify that interest, committing yourself to staying with it (without forcing). Pay especial attention to the changing nature of the breath, (i.e. that it never stays the same.) It is the same with everything else – all things arise and cease. Try to experience this more directly and immediately with the breath (not as a thought but as an experience).</i>
<i>Were you able to stay with the changing breath?</i>	
daily practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
<i>Any comments?</i>	

The Human body, at peace with itself
Is more precious than the rarest gem.
Cherish your body, it is yours this one time
only.

The human form is won with difficulty,
It is easy to lose.

All worldly things are brief,
Like lightning in the sky;
This life you must know
As the tiny splash of a raindrop;
A thing of beauty that disappears
Even as it comes into being.

Therefore set your goal;
Make use of every day and night
To achieve it.

metta bhavana	<i>Using the breath in metta. In today' practice try using the breath to keep you more anchored in the present. In the first stage as you breathe in, imagine accepting the inevitable suffering in your life (this is not the same as breathing in suffering), and as you breathe out, imagine the happiness and joy in your life – the things you like, etc. So in this way consciously become aware of the light and darker side of life. With the friend, breathe in accepting their suffering and breath out your warmth and well-wishing to them. Carry on through the stages like this.</i>
<i>How did it go?</i>	
daily practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> <div style="text-align: right;"> Yes No </div>
<i>Any comments?</i>	
mindfulness of breathing	<i>Letting go of thought. Much of our experience is an internal commentary on our experience. With the breath we are often <u>talking about the breath</u> (if we are not simply distracted from it) and subtly <u>doing the breath</u>. Today, see if you can notice this subtle internal commentary and any subtle physical holding, and try to let them go. Just experience the breath as changing sensations with no words. If you get distracted, take the breath to the distraction.</i>
<i>Were you able to let go of thought, at least to some extent?</i>	
daily practice	<i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> <div style="text-align: right;"> Yes No </div>
<i>Any comments?</i>	

metta bhavana	Free Form. In today's practice, take a holiday from the formal practice and try going 'free form'. Just be still, and when people come into your mind, cultivate metta towards them; then, as someone else comes to mind, do the same for them. Keep dropping in self-metta – all in no particular order. Then, at the end, just sit for 5 minutes without doing anything.
<i>How did it go?</i>	
daily practice	life <i>Were you able to reflect?</i>
walking meditation	<i>Did you remember to do it?</i> Yes No
<i>Any comments?</i>	

'An ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory'

Sangharakshita

6: Last Words on Mindfulness

Mindfulness practice is a 'life practice' in two senses: it takes a lifetime to master; and when we practise mindfulness we are actually *alive* to our experience right now, rather than being away somewhere in a fantasy.

The aim is to have experience suffused with awareness (or mindfulness). What commonly happens when we try to learn to become mindful is that first of all we notice that much of time we have experiences – cooking a meal, sending an email, commuting to work – without awareness; our life is lived in a partial sleep. Sometimes when we try to become more aware in our day-to-day life we go through a phase of having awareness without experience: we practise mindfulness in a rather too self-conscious, slow and alienated way. What we are looking for is the experience of living more vividly *and* being aware of that in the moment. To do this, our awareness needs to be infused with positive emotion, interest, engagement and so on. Clearly this is a simple but demanding practice.

Aspiration leads to the experience of failure. As soon as you aspire to something whether it be learning to ski or practising mindfulness you open yourself up to the experience (or at least to the *feeling*) of failure. Actually this is an important part of the learning process; certainly there is no learning without it. So it is important not to take 'failure' too seriously and lose heart. Actually mindfulness practice is not at all like learning to ski: it is not something you *learn* and then can *do*. Mindfulness is an ongoing exploration in how to be truly and fully alive. When you explore something, ideas of success and failure do not apply.

This course is only the beginning. The qualities of awareness, appreciation, non-reactivity to unpleasant stimuli, wholehearted engagement, fully absorbing ourselves in what we do, working with our inner narratives creatively – all qualities that enhance our life – cannot be exhaustively explored in a six-week course. Life is not something that can be made into a system of practice; we can only live with the awareness, love and wisdom that we have developed and try to learn from our experience as it happens. The course has not touched on things such as working with physical pain or illness, using computer technology with awareness, mindfulness in very difficult situations, and so on. We have only made a start on a great journey of discovery.

"The way to become mindful, therefore, is to learn to enjoy mindfulness for its own sake. Humdrum everyday activities such as eating, walking, and sleeping can give deep satisfaction. Paying attention to how things look, sound, and feel makes them more enjoyable; it is as simple (and as difficult) as that."

Sangharakshita: *'Living with Awareness: a Guide to the Satipatthana Sutta'*

What Next?

<p>classes</p> <p>all at the LBC, 7.15pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday night Dharma class. This would be a very good way of continuing your involvement with meditation, Buddhism and with other people on this course. The idea of this evening is to teach Buddhist practice (Dharma) in an experiential and exploratory way. There will be meditation and the chance to experience ritual. • Drop-in night (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) • Friday night ritual and meditation evening. This evening at the Centre concentrates on meditation and Buddhist ritual. It is perhaps less of a social class than the others and has more of a purely meditation / ritual emphasis. • Wednesday Daytime class from 10am – 12.30pm
<p>courses</p>	<p>Mindfulness and meditation are an art – they are not something we can learn in only a few weeks. At the London Buddhist Centre we have developed a whole range of courses to help you continue your exploration of meditation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mind and Mental Events</i> – this course explores a Buddhist ethical psychology, looking at what happens in our mind from moment to moment. 2. <i>Wisdom Practice</i> – this course explores meditation in terms of wisdom, of ‘seeing things how they really are’. 3. <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> <p>All these courses are 6 weeks long and are suitable as a next step if you want to go deeper in meditation or Buddhism. If you have not yet done a foundation course it might be worth your while doing that. Please see our programme for more details</p>
<p>retreats</p>	<p>A retreat is a very good way of going deeper into meditation. Many people find that it is on retreat – away from all the stress and strain of urban life – that they really get a taste of what meditation can do. Our retreats are run in a purpose-built retreat centre in beautiful Suffolk countryside. They are led by experienced meditators and follow a daily structured programme. Please see our programme for more details</p>
<p>books</p>	<p><i>Living with Awareness: a Guide to the Satipatthāna Sutta</i> By Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications)</p> <p><i>A Deeper Beauty: Buddhist Reflections on Everyday Life</i> By Paramananda (Windhorse Publications)</p>