

Life with Full Attention – Teacher’s Notes

These course notes aim to give a simplified structure and content for an 8-week Course Leader to use.

These notes are designed to help Triratna teachers run an 8-week intensive mindfulness course based on my book Life with Full Attention. My aim has been to create a simple course that is easy to lead, using my book as a guide and workbook. Obviously this course outline is based on my experience teaching at the LBC to fairly large groups of people – up to 60 – and may well need to be tailored for other centres.

The notes are structured as follows:

- Introduction
- Week 1: Day-to-Day Mindfulness
- Week 2: Mindfulness of the Body and its Movements
- Week 3: Mindfulness of Vedana
- Week 4: Citta - Mind
- Week 5: Dhammas – bringing the teaching to mind
- Week 6: Art, Objects and Nature
- Week 7: Other People
- Week 8: Mindfulness of Reality
- Appendix 1: Confirmation Letter
- Appendix 2: End of Course Review
- Appendix 3: Data from End of Course Reviews

Introduction

Ethos of the course

Most of our courses act as a kind of top-up. People come along, feel inspired and refreshed and then that inspiration gradually dwindles during the week, so they come back again for another inspirational top-up. That’s perfectly fine. The aim of this course is the opposite: to use the class as a focus for setting aims and intentions for mindfulness during the coming week and to review how our previous week of mindful practice went. The focus is on how to put mindfulness into practice in the actual conditions of our day-to-day life.

Who is it aimed at?

The course is suitable for complete newcomers as well as those with experience of meditation. However, I point out to newcomers that we can only introduce and teach meditation practice to a limited extent and they should go along and learn meditation properly after completing the course.

The Book

We make the book part of the cost of the course – i.e. we add £10 to the cost of an 8-week course. I ask people to write in the book and use it as a workbook. I also suggest people keep a journal for the course that they can make little notes as they go along. Having the book as back-up and source material, as well as something participants can read during the week to continue exploring the weekly theme, means that the teachers do not need to teach everything in it – I have limited the Home Practice in the course to one or two suggestions per week (see week by week guide below). There is a lot in the book and participants can explore that if they want to, but it is best to give a couple of simple instructions/ suggestions each week. You can suggest that they come back to some of the other Home Practice suggestions after the course.

Also in the confirmation letter I say that unfortunately we cannot subtract the cost of the book from the course fee, so if they already have a copy they can give the one they get on the course away ! (With up to 60 bookings I wanted to reduce the possible and complex admin issues of ending up with different charges.) It might be worth mentioning that the royalties for the book don’t go to me but go straight into the LBC account.

Basic Weekly Programme (approximate timings)

- 6.50 Arrive and fill out your practice review, then lie down in semi-supine to relax and make a space between day-to-day life and the class
- 7.15 Class begins, brief intro to the theme of the week
- 7.30 Led meditation (based around the theme)
- 7.55 Home Groups to discuss last week’s Home Practice – plus gathering feedback from the room
- 8.15 Tea break
- 8.35 Presentation of this coming week’s mindfulness theme
- 9.05 Home Groups to teach and explore Home Practice for coming week – plus gathering feedback from the room
- 9.30 Restatement of Home Practice and short meditation
- 9.45 Class ends

Meditation

Most of the meditations on the course are only 15- 20 mins and are led through exploring the principles of mindfulness e.g body awareness, vedanna etc. By week 3 the book has day-to-day guidance in meditation and you can suggest that people simply follow that in their meditations at home.

Home Groups

My classes have tended to be big so I use Home Groups – that is I assign people to a group that is on-going for the whole course. I also assign a mitra or OM to lead each group. That mitra/OM teaches the Home Practice to their group (rather than the Course Leader). For instance, they take their group through what we are going to do for the mindful walk – they make sure every one has understood what is being suggested, and at the end of the group get people to say what they are taking on to do, helping them make sure that their intentions are realistic, achievable and they can know if they achieved them. I stress keeping it simple and realistic. I often also suggest that the Home Groups are further broken down into pairs or 3s to review how the week went or to set this week’s intentions otherwise the groups can take too much time. Also at the end of the home group slot I ask for some examples from the floor of what they are going to do to practice mindfulness in the coming week e.g. ‘I’m going to have my lunch in the park rather than eat at the desk’, ‘I’m going to turn my walk to the bus stop into a mindful walk’.

I organise the Home Groups before the course – mainly making sure that the spread of men and women in each group is as even as possible. I then use a register and sign people in (only on this first night) and let them know what group they are in.

What I ask of attendants

I suggest they come early for the class to fill in their practice review – reviewing how they have got on with putting mindfulness into practice and what they have learnt (stressing exploration and self-learning rather than condemnation if they haven’t managed to do it). This gives them

a timetabled time to review each week, which means it’s more likely that people will fill-in their practice review. I suggest they might think of teaming up with a mindfulness buddy on the course to check in with during the week with how they are getting on with keeping their intentions – this can be via phone, email or meeting up.

I stress that we will be reviewing the Home Practice each week and that the practice review will help them do this – without some group to report back to, it is far less likely that people will feel motivated to do their Home Practice. I ask people to make sure their intentions for practicing mindfulness are based on what they have already learnt about themselves on the course; that they are realistic and achievable – not some grand hope or pious wish.

I suggest that people then lie down and relax before the class starts so they can get the most from the evening. I also tell them the class will finish at 9.45pm, that we are concentrating on mindfulness in day-to-day life (and that they will need to come back to learn meditation more fully) and that the course will have most effect if you do the Home Practice – but I also say to people to come whether they have done it or not (they can always read chapters for evenings on the course they have missed). I really stress doing the course, engaging with it, and keep coming back even if you miss a week or feel you haven’t put anything into practice.

Presentation

In these teacher’s notes, I have tried to collect the main points from each chapter of the book which I think need to be brought out. More recently I have been using the model from the Honeyball Sutra. I have had my presentations on this filmed and you can find them on the LBC website. www.lbc.org.uk I think the Honeyball model works very well for the course and adds to what I have written in the book. So it’s up to you as Leader which presentation format you want to use.

Week 1: Day-to Day Mindfulness

There is quite a lot to cover in Week 1, so things need to be quite focussed.

Pre-Session Preparation

- Make sure you have ordered all the books you need for those on the course, it would be very embarrassing if someone didn’t get one!
- Put the books on the shrine for the ritual (see below)
- Organise Home Groups – making sure the spread of men and women as even as possible, groups should be between 4 participants and 7 (group can be a total of 8 with Leader)

Session Programme

1. **Short introduction to the ethos of the course:** the overall shape of the course; the book as workbook and guide; come along early (as above); possible mindfulness buddy; emphasis on Home Practice
2. **Short led meditation:** body scan
3. **Introducing Home Groups:** get into Home Groups, introduce names, get them to think what their aims for the course are, what obstacles might arise in meeting their aims and what support they could make use of (see pages 24- 25).
4. **Short ritual to take the book and commit:** I then say we are now going to ritually commit ourselves to the course. I start the Sabbe Satta Suki Hotu mantra saying we are on the course for the good of all (including ourselves), then ask them to go and take a copy of the book from the shrine.
5. **Write their 3 aims for the course:** having talked a little about their aims, ask them to come up with 3 aims for the course and tell them we will review these aims at the end. See page 24
6. **Tea break**
7. **Short presentation on Day-to-Day Mindfulness:** see below for key messages

- **We find it hard to take day-to-day mindfulness seriously** because we fail to understand that actions have consequences. As we explore each new dimension of awareness, we’ll find ourselves trying to learn that actions have consequences – for ourselves, for others, and for the planet.
- **We forget to add up the stress and pain of all those acts of unmindfulness.** We don’t notice their cumulative effect. We fail to realize how much happier we could be if our life ran a bit more smoothly. We often find it hard to see that our lack of day-to-day mindfulness affects other people.
- **Day-to-day mindfulness needs to be practised with patience and a sense of humour.** Getting into a bad mood because we have lost something will only make matters worse. We need to remind ourselves, that whatever it is, ‘it has already happened’.

- **Day-to-day mindfulness means attending to the small things so that we can concentrate on the big ones.** We need to find strategies that help us get on with what's important in life and stop us having to think about what isn't.
- **Day-to-Day Mindfulness is about attending to the small things** so we can attend to what's really important. It's a week of setting up the conditions for mindfulness to arise; a week of looking at how we structure our life – how we pattern it, organize it, order it.

8. Review of Home Practice: Leader explains this week’s Home Practice, see below

1. **Notice every time you feel stressed,** rushed, or bad-tempered, and try to see if day-to-day mindfulness (or rather lack of it) has played a part in that.
2. **Two helpful resolutions:** (see page 35 on ‘cultivate a sense of mastery’) Think of two things you could do this week that will help create an atmosphere of mindfulness. You might decide to (1) clear out your in-tray and file stuff away, (2) tidy your bedroom and throw out clutter (3) to go for a swim, etc. Write your 2 resolutions on page 43
3. **Reduce input** (page 38) Try to think of some specific things you could do (or not do) to help you become more concentrated and less divided. Write 3 resolutions on page 44. For instance, you could decide to have an evening a week where the house is silent. You could choose not to eat and watch television at the same time. You could resist channel-flipping. You could limit the amount of time spent surfing the Internet.

9. Pairs work: to discuss Home Practice for the week

10. Feedback: Leader gathers feedback from the room (if time) and restates Home Practice

11. Class ends

Week 2: Mindfulness of the Body and its Movements

One of the ‘dangers’ of this course is that it is too group- and talking-based, so I tried to come up with practical ways of ‘showing’ the theme rather than always ‘talking’ about it. Ideally each class should have elements of:

1. Explanation – real spiritual content, telling people about mindfulness
2. Exploration – exploring mindfulness e.g. in small groups, practical exercises, Q&A
3. Experience – direct experience of what is being taught, e.g. meditation

Pre-Session Preparation

You will need stones for each group to pass around as an exploration of mindfulness (see below) – the stones should be large enough and heavy enough to feel in your hand.

Home Group Leaders need to have read the instructions for the daily mindful walk and be ready to teach it in their group.

Session Programme

Hopefully people will have arrived early to fill in their review and lie down.

1. **Teach posture:** this is a good time to talk about posture as part of body awareness. Also some of them will not have learnt meditation and will at least need to know how to sit properly.
2. **Body Scan:** lead them through a body scan and end with them watching their breath. Emphasise it is the body that is breathing – the breath is not something apart from body sensations.
3. **Groups to discuss last week’s Home Practice:** gathering feedback with how people go on with their 2 resolutions and reducing input. If time the Leader asks for some examples from the room of how people got on during the week.
4. **Tea break**
5. **Mindfulness exercise:** see below

- Get people back into Home Groups, but break groups up to about four or five people. Each group will be given a stone, and asked to pass the stone around between them.
- Rules for passing stones:
 - stone should be passed at an ordinary passing pace, not terribly slowly
 - don’t stop and examine the stone – it should be like pass the parcel – the stone should just move around the group without stopping
 - don’t pass the stone across the group
 - groups pass the stone in silence and then talk about it.
- Process for the exercise
 1. Give each group one stone

2. Get them to pass the stone to each other and then talk about how that felt.
 3. Ask them to do the same again but particularly feel the weight and texture of the stone in their hand – then talk about it
 4. The same as above but adding becoming aware of the movement of the arm
 5. As above but adding the movement of the arms and upper body
 6. As above but try to stay with awareness in arms and hands even when you don’t have the stone
 7. As above but staying with the direct sensations of the whole body as you pass the stone or wait to receive it, then after a while ask them to include awareness of everyone in their group (they don’t have to gaze into their eyes or anything – just include them in awareness) Then compare how this felt with how the first round of passing the stone felt.
- I am hoping this exercise gives people a real experiential sense of the different mindfulness of the body makes to their experience.
 - Points to draw out:
 - Mindfulness doesn’t take more time: you stretch your arm to get the stone or pick up a kettle and you can be aware of that movement, so we are not adding something to your life.
 - Mindfulness is not about doing things very slowly; you can be mindfulness when running for a bus.
 - You don’t have to try to be *more* aware; it’s just a particular aspect of your current awareness and bringing that out: it’s paying attention in a particular way, rather than paying *more* attention.
 - Mindfulness (hopefully they will have experienced this) enriches your experience of yourself and of the world around you.
 - These points should lead into the next element of the session, a short presentation.

6. **Short presentation of mindfulness of the body:** I am hoping that this can be fairly brief, given that we have just explored it. See below for key messages

- **When we reduce input** we start to notice our experience more, we start to notice the body and our state of mind instead of being ‘distracted from distraction by distraction’.
- **Awareness of the body and its movements is the first of the Buddha’s four spheres of mindfulness.** It is the bedrock of full attention. Whenever we are not sure how to cultivate mindfulness, we can just come back to the body and its movements – that’s all we need to do
- **The principle value of mindfulness of the body is that it allows us to gain a perspective on our mind.** It allows us to step back from our thoughts and rumination, not just step *back* but step *out* of ruminative, repetitive thought into direct physical experience. This in turn helps us to become aware of our thoughts and decide if they are helpful or not. Instead of being stuck in our thoughts and rumination we step into direct awareness of the body and its movements.
- **Body awareness is an antidote to automatic pilot** – automatic pilot is the automatic nature of our thoughts and volitions. For example: we mean to post a birthday card to our mother on the way to the tube station, but we keep walking past the post box and don’t remember the card until we are on the train. Even with the best intentions our mind carries along its automatic ways and habits. It’s not that we don’t care for our mother or want celebrate her birthday – but much of actions and thinking is automatically set. In automatic pilot mode the mind will tend to switch back to it’s habitual setting – e.g. feeling resentful, wanting something, getting into critical dialogues. Much of automatic thinking takes place just below consciousness. Because they are habitual thoughts that are very familiar to us we tend to think they are true. Mindfulness of the body and its movements is stepping out of all that into direct experience.
- **The body is the anchor of our awareness.** Every time, we come back to our body.
- **Mindfulness is about starting again**, and again and again i.e noticing we have got lost in thought and coming back to the body.
- **Tuning in to our physicality is a simple way of escaping toxic mind.** Toxic mind is mind speeded up, stressed out, and compulsively active. In toxic mind, thoughts breed more thoughts; they proliferate into a noisy cacophony. Returning to the body is the first antidote to that.

7. **Home Groups:** break into Home Groups. The Leader of each home group then teaches the mindful walk (page ...)

The Home Group Leader will get a group member to:

1. **Think of a walk they do every day.** It's important, wherever possible, to choose a walk that they already do. If they add a special mindful walk to their daily routine, chances are they won't be able to keep it up. The walk should be no longer than 20 minutes and no less than 5 minutes. Over 20 would be too demanding, less than 5 would hardly be a walk at all! They might like to choose the first 10 minutes of their walk to the train station.
2. **Think of any possible obstacles** in trying to be mindful of your body during your mindful walk. For instance: they might meet people they know in the street, or they might have no set routine. Perhaps their routine is very different at the weekend? Perhaps they are a cyclist?
3. **Think about solutions to those problems.** They could plan a weekday walk to the tube station and a weekend walk to the local park. They could dedicate the first 10 minutes of their bike ride to mindfulness. They could park your car a little further away from work, or get off the bus a stop before your usual.
4. **Be as specific as possible:** one walk per day, for so long, with such-and-such creative solutions to such-and-such possible obstacles.

If the group is fairly big they may need to break into pairs to discuss this, then report back to the group at the end. The Group Leader needs to help people be realistic and specific. Tell them we will be doing this walk for the next 7 weeks and that we review how it goes each week. (Point group members to pages 65 – 68 for suggested ways of doing the walk)

8. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the whole class (if time) on what walk they are going to do and what solutions they have to what obstacles – I often point out that on this course we'll all be practicing the mindful walk but in different places all over London!
9. **Review of Home Practice by Leader:** just very briefly reminding everyone what they have taken on. If there is time, end with a 3 minute breathing space (see page)
10. **Class ends**

Week 3: Mindfulness of Vedana

Pre-Session Preparation

Home Group Leaders need to have read the instructions for the Breathing Space (page 95) and be ready to teach it in their group

Session Programme

1. **Body scan:** lead through a sitting body scan (20-25 mins i.e. a longer meditation tonight) First go through the body in terms of ‘contact’ (sparsa) just noticing each part – remember to stress actual felt sensation not thoughts about the body or mental images such as ‘feet’ etc. Notice the energy of the body (it’s less easy to have a mental image of) Then go through the body again in terms of vedana – feeling how each part of the body feels – pleasant, painful or neutral. Get people to feel this with non-judgemental awareness, just notice and turn toward the vedana in the body. Hopefully this will show people that mindfulness of vedana is a deeper dimension of body awareness
2. **Home Groups to review how the mindful walk went.** Get people to report back about how they got on with the daily walk. Points to bear in mind:
 - **It’s easy to be mindful, difficult to remember to be mindful** – by now they will start to really understand this.
 - **Be encouraging** – help people not get frustrated or disheartened that their mind has gone off so much during the walk. Stress that every time they notice their mind has gone off, that in itself is a moment of mindfulness; try to enjoy that moment rather than focus on having just not being mindful – as soon as you think you are not being unmindful you are being mindful!
 - **Mindfulness is about starting again and again** – just keep coming back, if you get annoyed with yourself it just creates more mental disturbance.
 - **By now they may well have started to notice just how often they are not mindful** – that’s part of the process of learning something, you find out how much you have to learn!
3. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time, so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class
4. **Tea break**
5. **Presentation on Mindfulness:** see below for key messages

- **Vedana is the texture of life:** it is how life feels. Every sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch has vedana. All experience has a 'hedonic tinge'. We are aware of things – a tree, a friend, a summer's morning – and that awareness has flavour, has texture – it will feel pleasant, painful, or somewhere in between.
- **Vedanas are the building blocks of our experience.** They are what we build our moods and emotions out of.
- **Every memory we have, every thought we entertain, every idea we come up with, has vedana.** Traditionally, Buddhism thinks not of five senses but six – the sixth being the mind. From a Buddhist point of view, thoughts and emotions are analogous to smells: they can be as pleasant as perfume or as nasty as the smell of cat pee.
- **We cannot change (unpleasant, pleasant or neutral) vedana in the moment** – it is a karmaviparka, a resultant.

It is a fact of life. Vedana is given. We cannot *not* have it.

- **Pain:** What we can change is how we respond to painful vedana. We can notice that we are experiencing unpleasant sensations and then bring awareness to that. When we do that, when we become aware of vedana as vedana – when we 'feel' and 'know' what we are experiencing – we begin to create a gap between what happens to us and the moods we get into as a result of what happens to us.
 - *The Buddha used the analogy of two darts.* The first dart, he said, is the dart of pain. It is unavoidable. Pain is inevitable –if we practise awareness of vedana we can train ourselves to just feel it, bear it, be aware of it. But usually, the Buddha tells us, we shoot ourselves with a second dart – this time it is the dart of our reaction to the first dart. As soon as we do that we create more pain for ourselves.
 - *Emotional pain threatens our wellbeing just as physical pain does*
 - *It is difficult not to react to painful feelings, but it is possible.* We can train ourselves to notice them and, counterintuitive as this may sound, relax into them.
- **Pleasure:** The first goal of mindfulness of pleasant vedana is relishing it, giving it our full attention. This direct awareness of pleasant vedana is the art of enjoyment. It affirms the spiritual value of innocent delight.
 - *We are distracted from experiencing pleasure by wanting more of it.* Just as when we experience unpleasant vedana we want it to stop, so, when we experience pleasant vedana we want to repeat it. We want more. This instinctual 'wanting more' takes our mind away from the pleasure we are actually experiencing. Our mind focuses on the idea of pleasure in the future, which means we don't fully attend to it now. This is the law of diminishing returns.
- **Neutral:** Much of our life is somewhere in between – neither especially painful nor particularly pleasurable. If asked how we are on this vedana level of experience, many of us would say: sort-of, kind-of, okay-ish.
 - *One habitual response to neutral vedana is to want pleasure instead* – it's that moment when we slip away from our desk and go and buy a Kit Kat! If we have a lot of neutral vedana, we call this boredom. Boredom is more common, and more dangerous, than we usually think.
 - *Part of the reason for neutral vedana is to do with lack of developed awareness.* Our life slips by without our noticing it. We have not trained our mind to pay attention. Of course there is much in modern life that militates against vividness. We are bombarded with information. Life is complex. People's attention span is shorter than ever. All this contributes to a kind of frenetic and unstable energy that is incompatible with noticing nuance, shade, and subtlety. It is difficult to relish things.
- **The key to insight is the gap between vedana and everything else.** Mindfulness of vedana means experiencing pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations without reacting to them.

6. **Home Groups:** break up into Home Groups to set the following week’s Home Practice

1. **Meditation.** Get members of the group to come up with a realistic vision for either a) beginning to meditate, or b) enhancing their meditation. So if a): how many times could they meditate this week coming – twice, three times? – try to get them to come up with a realistic aim, even which specific days, will they need to enlist the help of their partner or flatmates or children? etc. If b), could they do a little more meditation – say instead of 3 do 4? or meditate for a bit longer? For newcomers get them to say how long they will meditate for. Remind them we’ll check in about it the following week. Suggest they use the day-by-day meditation guide in the book and if they can write about it either just after or when they do the week’s review.
2. **Breathing Space** (see page 95). See if participants can do at least 2 of the breathing space each day – especially trying to tune-in to the vedana of their experience. Also they could do a coping breathing space – which is the same as the one described but shorter and in difficult situations, such as a difficult business meeting etc. They don’t need to close their eyes etc, just tune into body, breath then body again. Good to use if stressed, or starting to feel low. Get participant to come up with how they might do the breathing space
3. **Events Diary.** If people have time and inclination try the pleasant and unpleasant events diary.

7. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class. What do people plan to do? What issues can they foresee?

8. **Review of Home Practice by Leader** (these reviews are just short reminders of what we have taken on to do just in case the group wasn’t very focussed)

9. **Breathing Space:** finish with 3 min Breathing Space (as page 95). (The Breathing Space is taken from MBCT if anyone is interested)

10. **Class ends**

Week 4: Citta – Mind

Pre-Session Preparation

Home Group Leaders need to have read the instructions for the Mindful Moment (page 136) and be ready to teach it in their group.

Session Programme

This week introduce the first and third stages of the MOB, especially emphasizing noticing when the mind goes off.

1. **Meditation:** Start with short body scan then let people go into Stage 1. When they lose count get them to notice where their mind is going – is something preoccupying them?, are the thoughts habitual and automatic?, do they have a particular story? Or is it just random thoughts? So notice the mind going off and try to feel how it feels in the body. Notice the vedana of the thoughts if possible. Before starting the counting again turn toward the thoughts you are having with kindly awareness, try to feel the effect of the thought in the body and then start again. Do this as well for the 3rd stage. Really trying to notice where the mind goes, take a kindly interest in that and then see if you can feel how it feels in the body. Emphasize not getting frustrated with yourself when the mind goes off that just makes it worse – the key is to notice where the mind is going then see how the thoughts you are caught up in are affecting your body. Finish with a short just sitting.
2. **Home Groups:** review how the mindful walk went, the breathing space and meditation. Get people to report back about how they got on: did they manage to meditate and if not why (not as condemnation but to learn what happens). Did they set unrealistic expectations. Did they do the Breathing Space etc; did they notice vedana?
3. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class. It’s worth remembering that participants are now half way through the course, they may well be experiencing resistance. So... do they need to step back a bit ?(i.e. they are trying to do too much?) or do they need to find a way of reengaging?, is this a good time to start checking in with a friend about how you are getting on in the course? What do they need to do to stay with it (even if that’s just coming to the class every week!)
4. **Tea break**
5. **Presentation on Citta:** see below for key messages

- **The Pali word for mind is 'citta'.** In English, when we use the word 'mind', we tend to mean 'thought', 'citta' includes heart as well as head. States of mind – cittas – have a thinking component, an emotional component, an action component, and an intuitive component. 'Mind' includes the more and the less conscious aspects of ourselves.
- **Everything we experience, we experience through the mind.** Our relationships with other people, our perceptions of the world, our work life, love life, home life – everything we have ever known and could ever know is mediated by our mind. It is our states of mind that make life interesting or boring or enjoyable,

meaningful or futile. Understanding our mind, cultivating our mind, is therefore the key to happiness.

- **Our mind enchants.** We interpret, distort, even contaminate our experience of the world around us. We do not see things as they are; we unconsciously fit them into pre-existing patterns of belief, expectation, assumption, and prejudice. We cast a spell on life. We call that spell 'our experience' and believe in it as real and objective.
- **At the same time our mind is itself enchanted.** We are under a spell. We cannot tell if our thoughts are our own, or if we've picked them up from friends, workmates, family, or the media. We are mostly in the grips of the current Zeitgeist of opinion.
- **We cannot hope to have much success in working with our mind unless we have already cultivated awareness in the previous two stages of the path,** namely mindfulness of the body and its movements, and mindfulness of vedana. We will also need an ongoing practice of day-to-day mindfulness, so that our life runs smoothly enough for us to practise life with full attention in the first place!
- **How to work with the mind:** drop beneath the thoughts and emotions to how those thoughts and emotions feel in the body. In other words, we go back to vedana. Stay with direct experience rather than spiralling off into thoughts about experience – catastrophe narratives, blame stories, sob stories – with kindly awareness.
- **If we are having particularly negative thoughts** and emotions, we may need to drop back a stage further and re-establish mindfulness of the body.
- **Sometimes, of course, the best thing to do is distract ourselves.** Thinking about something else, doing something else can be an extremely effective tool for overcoming negative thoughts. If you find that you are in no fit state to usefully learn from what's happening in your mind, you do not need to work out what it all means. You can simply watch a DVD, read a novel, or help a friend! – the art is to find a distraction that helps you get into a more positive state of mind (we'll come back to this in the week on art etc)
- **If in doubt, go back to vedana or back to body awareness.** Once you strengthen these first two stages of the path, you will have more perspective on what's happening in your mind. This sense of perspective is especially noticeable after meditation.
- **Noticing narrative.** Mindfulness of citta is about noticing the narratives we tell ourselves. As I said in the previous chapter, we turn vedana into a whole state of being, into citta. One of the ways we do this is by telling ourselves stories. We don't just feel our experience, we extrapolate from it, generalize about it – often in an unhelpful way.
- **We mistake a thought for a fact,** an interpretation for a perception. So the first thing we need to be clear about is that we are dealing with thoughts, stories and narrative not realities. Because our habitual thoughts are so habitual and happen so automatically – because they are familiar to us – we tend to think they are true
- **We can simply ask ourselves is what I am saying to myself really true?** Can I dispute it in some way? Are the stories we tell ourselves true or not. We can ask ourselves questions such as:
 - Did the thought just pop up in my head out of the blue?
 - Can I imagine thinking about the same thing in another way – if I was in a better mood, for example?
 - Is there something about the story I am telling myself that could be questioned?
 - Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
 - Am I blaming others or myself?
 - Am I getting into negative or anxious speculation?
 - Is what I am thinking really as true as all that?
- **One of the most effective ways of escaping from negative narratives is by asking ourselves whether they are true or not.**
- **Rumination.** What seems to happen for most of us is that we ruminate. We turn a problem over and over in our mind. We think we are solving the problem, whereas actually we are making it worse. There is a point when thinking about a particular problem, trying to solve it, becomes counterproductive – when thinking about the problem is the problem.
- **Rumination is to do with the discrepancy monitor.** We become aware of a mismatch between how we feel and how we *think* we should feel. This discrepancy shows up as a problem. We set about solving that problem by going over all kinds of possible solutions in our mind, and then measuring the degree to which those 'solutions' have narrowed the gap between what we experience and what we think we should experience.
- **We do not realize how powerful our thoughts are.** Rumination is a kind of self-hypnosis.
- **Ask yourself: where does such thinking usually lead me?** Have I thought about it enough now? Can I actually just feel how I am now in the body and be ok with that?

6. **Home Groups:** break up into Home Groups to set the following week’s Home Practice.

- The Group Leader needs to teach the mindful moment (so now we have mindful walk, meditation, and the mindful moment).
- Make sure that each person understands what it is and has a clear idea what they could use as their mindful moment: when does it start and when does it end, how will they be able to remind themselves of it?
- Make sure people’s intentions are realistic and achievable. If the mindful moment seems too much people could instead carry on with the breathing space – the key is to help people engage with the material and be realistic about what they can do rather than setting themselves up to fail.

7. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class. Also this gives people ideas of when and how they could do the mindful moment.

8. **Review of Home Practice** (these reviews are just short reminders of what we have taken on to do just in case the group wasn’t very focussed)

9. **Meditation:** finish with short mindfulness meditation again noticing thought and how thought affects the body.

10. **Class ends**

Week 5: Dhammas – bringing the teaching to mind

Pre-Session Preparation

Home Group Leaders need to have read the instructions for taking a personal precept (page 167) and be ready to teach it in their group.

Session Programme

1. **Meditation:** get people to go through the stages of mindfulness – contact with the body (sparsa) then vedana, then getting a feel for what state of mind they are in (chitta) then ask themselves what do they need to do now to help them get into the meditation – do they need to keep coming back to body, is their energy high and needs to focus down in the body, are they restless so need to sit still. What wise choice do they need to make on the basis of their awareness of the body, vedana, and citta?
2. **Home Groups:** review how the mindful walk went, the meditation and mindful moment. Get people to report back about how they got on - did they manage to remember to do the mindful moment? Did they notice what mood (citta) Were they able to notice the habitual narrative the run in their mind? Did they notice this in the meditation and mindful walk? What did they do about it?
3. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class.
4. **Tea break**
5. **Presentation on Mindfulness of Dhammas:** see below for key messages

- **We experience a special kind of pleasure when we do something that brings us into contact with our virtues and strengths.** It exceeds the vedana of ordinary pleasurable activity – the first mouthful of cheesecake, watching a comedy programme on TV. It is a deeper, richer pleasure, which gives a sense of gratification, fulfilment, and self-forgetting. An act of kindness or courage, the experience of learning, the sense of transcendence – they each give us a feeling of satisfaction that is qualitatively superior to ordinary pleasure.
- **When we practise mindfulness of citta we become more aware of our mind.** We notice whether the things we tell ourselves are helpful or unhelpful, productive or counterproductive. We start to notice how our mind feels (vedana) – whether it's the pain of resentment or the pleasure of contentment. Each time we become aware of this, we move from the third sphere of mindfulness to the fourth: from mindfulness of citta to mindfulness of dhammas.
- **Mindfulness of dhammas means training ourselves to notice that when we act out of positive states of mind and emotion we feel happier,** more creative, tolerant, and expansive; whereas when we act out of negative states and emotions we are liable to feel destructive, reactive, constricted, and unhappy. Positive emotions tend to make us feel more connected with other people. Negative emotions tend to lead to isolation. In positive states of mind we are liable to be open to new ideas and experiences, whilst in negative states of mind we tend to stick to what we think we know. If we want to experience authentic happiness, we need to discover ways of moving from negative mental states and emotions to positive mental states and emotions – that journey is mindfulness of dhammas.
- **The Buddha enumerates mindfulness of dhammas after citta.** First we notice the state of mind we are in, and then, whilst we are still in the grips of that state of mind, we cultivate a creative way of working with it. This really is a challenge. All of us have deeply engrained patterns that go right back to our earliest days and, who

knows, even beyond that. By constant repetition we have conditioned ourselves to react along habitual lines – we are quick to feel aggrieved; we blame others or ourselves; we find it difficult to stop working. And our habits are often confirmed by other people. We have built up a massive pressure of habit. We will not be able to shrug that off or disown it – in fact, trying to do so is yet another bad habit!

- **When we practise mindfulness of dhammas, we are trying to get to grips with who we are in the moment of being who we are.** If, for instance, we notice that we are just about to go into yet another 'poor me' monologue, we need to stop and remember that, when we do this, we only make ourselves miserable. By noticing what is happening in our mind, we find a new way of responding: it's the equivalent of changing the subject in a conversation.
- **And just as mindfulness of citta is a more advanced practice than mindfulness of vedana, so mindfulness of dhammas is more advanced again.** If we try and change ourselves without enough self-knowledge, without enough mindfulness of who we are and what motivates us, we can go astray. We need to get to know our mind by practising mindfulness of citta. If we do not know ourselves sufficiently, we run the risk of dampening down our energies in the attempt to be a nicer, more 'spiritual' person. Our desire to change ourselves will be ill-informed. In practice, we will often need to go back a stage: concentrate on becoming benignly curious about our mind before working out how to change it.
- **Full attention of dhammas is a special kind of vigilance.** We notice that our mind is flowing in a particular direction – towards an argument, against a telephone salesman – and we recollect what is really in our best interests. This word 'recollect' says it all really. It has two meanings. Firstly, it means to bring ourselves together – re-collect ourselves; secondly, it means 'to remember'. In mindfulness of dhammas we are remembering what's really going to be helpful and fruitful for all concerned.
- **The Law of desire.** When we strongly want something, we see it in a distorted way. We distort our perception of, say, designer clothes, or exotic holidays, by concentrating on the pleasant aspects whilst neglecting or ignoring the unpleasant ones. We do the same with ideas of success, promotion, fame, money, and influence. Because we are not seeing things as they really are, we cause ourselves, and others, pain. The more we distort things, the more painful the consequences are likely to be.
- **When we edit life in this way, we forget the law of diminishing returns.** We forget that the experience of pleasure will soon wane into the taken-for-granted. Once our pleasure starts to ebb, we'll want to repeat it, we'll want something else, something new, and each time it will take a little bit more to give us the same thrill of delight.
- **The law of Hatred.** Hatred is really frustrated desire. When we react out of aversion and ill will, we tend to stop seeing things as they really are. Just as a wanting state of mind edits the world sunny side up – focusing on what we desire whilst sidelining what we don't – so with ill-will we exaggerate, embellish, and over-focus on what we don't like. We often do this to the exclusion of anything positive about the object of our dislike.
- **A negative state of mind activates a battle-station mode of thinking.** Its function is to isolate a problem then eliminate it. Whilst this can be useful and serve a purpose, the battle-station mode tends to miss out on more creative solutions – it tends to polarize people and be defensive. It often means that we fail to see the positive points that someone is making because we have over-focused on those points that we disagree with – and this will adversely affect our capacity to make informed decisions.
- **In the West, we tend to think about ethics in legal terms:** our actions are judged, punished, or rewarded by some outside agency – an attitude that stems from belief in a creator God. But in Buddhism, the punishment is the crime. When we act out of ill-will, spite, resentment, petty rivalry, and so on, we are causing our own unhappiness. We do not need something or someone to mete out punishment – it happens naturally. It is a natural law, like gravity.
- **Mindfulness of dhammas means recollecting that hatred does not work** and bringing this to mind in the moment we're just about to have a temper tantrum, get the sulks, or become monosyllabic.
- **Mindfulness of dhammas requires us to do three things:**
 1. notice the state of mind we are in;
 2. create a gap of honest self-reflection;
 3. decide how best to act by bringing to mind the teachings that lead to authentic happiness.

6. **Home Groups:** break up into Home Groups to set the following week's Home Practice. The Group Leader needs to teach the personal precept. My suggestion is that they come up with one or two for the week that they can report back on next week: one negative – e.g. stop dodging you train fares, and a positive – e.g. ring you mother. If that seems too much get the group to think how they can be more generous in the following week – generosity

being the basics of an ethical life. Make sure that each person understands what it is they have taken on to do. Make sure people’s intentions are realistic and achievable. If it’s all seeming like too much, just get them to carry on with the breathing space or mindful moment.

7. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class.
8. **Review of Home Practice**
9. **Finish with short metta meditation:** go from body awareness, notice the breath and then just saying ‘may I be well...etc’ and see how that feels.
10. **Class ends**

Week 6: Art, Objects and Nature

Pre-Session Preparation

The basic points of this week are: that we need to exponentially enrich our life, improve our cultural diet, develop a deeper connection with nature and enhance our imagination. So this would a good time to bring something more experiential and creative into the class – perhaps a piece of music to listen to? You might play it at the end for instance.

- Photocopy four or six poems for people to read and have them ready to give out (good poems and not Mary Oliver!) – perhaps some modern like Seamus Heaney or Alice Oswald and some older poems, Keats for instance.
- Group Leaders should read the section on improving your cultural diet (page 202)

Session Programme

1. **Meditation:** lead through the meditation as before from sparsa (contact with body) vedana of the body, to mood (chitta) and bringing to mind the teaching (dhammas) – this week though leave them to do it themselves more so that they learn to guide their own meditation, just give a pointer for each sphere. Read a poem at the start (a good one!) and at the end.
2. **Home Groups:** review the mindful walk, the meditation, mindful moment and their personal precept/s. Get people to report back about how they got on. How did they get on with their personal precept? Were they able to bring the teaching to mind? Were they able to act in their own (and others) best interests? Were they able to make wise choices? What have they learnt?
3. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class.
4. **Tea break**
5. **Presentation on art, objects and nature,** see below for key messages

The main point to stress in this presentation is the need to enrich our imagination – though deepening awareness of nature, art and objects.

- **Two things are missing from the Buddha’s the four spheres of mindfulness: the environment and other people.** Just as mindfulness of the body means caring for the body – e.g. going for a swim, eating vegetables – mindfulness of the environment includes caring for the environment: leaving the car in the garage, not leaving the tap running whilst we brush our teeth. The environment also includes works of art and architecture: the riff of a guitar, the fortissimo of a tenor, the pink triangle on a blue square in a painting by Kandinsky.
- **Cultivate appreciation.** 'Vidya' can be translated as 'analytic appreciative understanding'. It is a kind of 'relishing of things', a purified sense of appreciation without any trace of acquisitiveness. 'Vidya' is also a word for 'wisdom implicit in true appreciation'. When we see with vidya, we see that the world is not a sequence of discrete, material things existing out there. We see that everything fuses with everything else, partakes in everything else – that outside the limits and limitations of self, everything is interconnected.

- **By appreciation, I don't mean** being so hothouse delicate that we can't do a hard day's work, dig a trench, or run for a bus. But I also don't mean a life of activity with the odd evening set aside to watch a DVD or visit the ballet. I mean appreciation as an absolutely central attitude to life.
- **Our aim should be to simply appreciate life**, to stand back and enjoy it all. Yes, we need to work and plan. Sometimes we need to push ourselves beyond the comfort zone in order to grow, do whatever we can to help others or take on projects and responsibilities. But we shouldn't take all this too seriously. There needs to be playfulness, a lightness of touch. If we do everything for a reason then we will take all the joy and spontaneity out of life. We need to remember to enjoy things. Our basic attitude to life should be aesthetic.
- **This 'appreciative mode' has radical consequences**: we become less preoccupied with worldly concerns. We do what we need to do in order to live and make a contribution to the lives of others. But we choose to live a simple, uncluttered life. Appreciation needs quietude to blossom. It needs a kind of spaciousness, a freedom from complexity and over-timetabling.
- **The spiritual value of the appreciative mode** is in its non-utilitarian, non-acquisitive nature.

Nature

- **We need to cultivate interest and appreciation in what is right in front of us, right now**. And we can start with the natural world. As we cultivate life with full attention, we start to experience nature as something valuable in and of itself. This kind of genuine feeling for nature takes time to develop. It is not primarily ideological. It is not 'environmentalism' as a political cause – however needful that may be. It is more akin to love.
- **The German philosopher Immanuel Kant** said that 'The love of nature for its own sake is always a sign of goodness.' The key point here is: for its own sake.

Art

- **The spiritual value of art is to be found in the pleasure it can give us**. That pleasure is (or can be) of a particular quality. It can be innocent – by which I mean not based in egotistic craving or hatred. At best, the arts can give us access to a kind of satisfaction that unites pleasure and meaning.
- **The appreciative mode is an antidote** to the prevailing mode in the West – the acquisitive mode.

6. **Home Groups**: break up into Home Groups to set the following week's Home Practice.

Mainly this week we carry on with the mindfulness we have been developing so far – body awareness and so forth, but try to cultivate this appreciative awareness, especially of the natural world – the park, the trees, the manmade world around us. Emphasize that people can still keep in contact with their body with Sparsa / vedana but include more consciously the sights and sounds around them. The Home Practice to introduce this week is:

- **Ask them to see if they can put aside some time to appreciate nature** – it can be just sitting in the park without their iPod, or just gazing out at the garden or going a walk – get them to think when they could do it and what they could do (even if they have to put something in their diary for a few weeks time!)
- **Improve their Cultural Diet** – again put aside some time to enjoy art a bit more, go to a gallery, read a decent novel, etc.

7. **Feedback**: Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class. Find out a few things that people intend to do.

8. **Poems**: at the end give out photocopies of the poems and ask them to read each poem (I suggest you copy between 4 and 6) 3 times and slowly.

9. **Class ends**

Week 7: Other People

Pre-Session Preparation

In the book I ask people to become more aware of two people (see page 245) so be ready to talk about this if there is time – however I want to keep this week experiential and to do with actual communication rather than talking about it, so the main thing we do this week is the Communication Exercise (the traditional one we have done that Bhante taught with the 5 stages – ie 2 sets of just looking, then one person saying the sentence, then the other, then both saying a sentence and then straight into just looking). This week in on mindfulness of another person, so what better way of exploring that than by doing the Communication Exercise!

Session Programme

1. **Meditation.** Lead people in a body scan – sparsa (the bare contact of the body) then vedana (the inner feel of the body and the inner feel of their state of mind – remember every citta have a vedana), then ask them to feel the vedana around their heart area, in their chest. See what they can feel or not feel (remember even ‘not being able to feel anything’ feels like something...i.e. it is a neutral vedana). Bring their attention in to their heart and get them to wait and see if they can feel something (stress we are not necessarily looking for an emotion here just a sensation – tight or open, sore or nothing-very-much) they may not be able to put words to it at all, and that’s fine. Then drop in the sentences....then if time ask them to bring to mind a friend and notice how it feels around the heart area – just noticing not judging and at this point not trying to develop anything.
2. **Home Groups:** review the mindful walk, the meditation, mindful moment and cultivating an appreciative mode and improving their cultural diet. Get people to report back about how they got on. Were they able to spend some time in nature, how did it affect them, were they able to improve their cultural diet? How is the walk going now, meditation, mindful moment? How can they re-engage with those practices if they have fallen away a bit.
3. **Feedback:** Leader gathers feedback from the room if time – so there is a sharing of experience across the whole class.
10. **Tea break:** get participants to start thinking what they might do after the course is finished. It is worth flagging up at this point that this is the penultimate class and that it would be worth people starting to think what they might do next – how they might carry on with their learning/exploring
4. **Communication Exercises,** see below

- **The way we know if we have made progress on the path of full attention is to ask ourselves whether we have become less selfish.** Have we become kinder and more considerate? Over the last seven weeks we might have missed meditations, forgotten to do our mindful walk, got fed up practising the mindful moment, discovered our ethical life is not up to scratch – but if we can say that we have become a little less selfish, then we have

made progress. The rest is secondary.

- **The danger of Self-Absorption.** There is a danger that is especially evident in anything that encourages introspection- whether that is psychotherapy or Buddhism: it can lead to self-absorption (if taken up incorrectly). Self-absorption is the major symptom of depression. The antidote to self-absorption is mindfulness of others.
- **Mindfulness of others means making a conscious effort to see things from other people's point of view.** It is an act of imaginative sympathy. We often relate to people superficially. We don't really take them in, look at them, listen to them, or trouble ourselves to understand them. If we become aware of another person as a person, we will find that feelings of concern and appreciation naturally arise.
- **So instead of talking about awareness of others** lets actually become aware of someone, try to take an interest in the unique reality of another person.
 1. Get people to pair up in single sex pairs (if possible)
 2. I suggest they pair-up with someone they haven't talked to very much – i.e. not someone in their home group.
 3. Make sure people are sitting close enough to each other and at the same level (not one in a chair and on the floor)
 4. Start the exercise by closing your eyes and coming back again to sparsa vedana as the basic bedrock of mindfulness, notice citta (being asked to look at someone will bring up emotions and thoughts), decide to take the risk of communication and take an interest in the other person (i.e. bringing the teaching to mind).

5. **Home Practice:** the communication exercise needs about 45 mins in total so there may not be much or any time to give Home Practice – certainly there's no time to go into groups again. So the Leader can suggest: Consciously bring in awareness of other people into our walking meditation, our mindful moment and our meditation. If time you can suggest they become more mindful of two people: someone you like (a friend) and someone you dislike (see page 245).

6. **Class ends**

Week 8: Mindfulness of Reality

Pre-Session Preparation

- **Puja book** for transference of merits
- **Postcards** – if you want to give people a postcard (see final home group) these need to be ready to give out
- **The Course Leader** needs to decide if you want to do evaluations forms to give in. If you do you need to photocopy the End of Course Review (I have included it here as Appendix 2). If you do review the course you will need to break up into Home Groups again at the end and give people chance to talk about how the course went before they fill the review itself – otherwise it doesn’t really work. This process takes about half an hour.
- **Group Leaders** need to be clear what the Course Leader is recommending as a next step for people on the course – in a way this is the most important thing about this last evening is getting people to think how they can carry on practicing mindfulness and meditation. If they were new to the course they will need to go and learn the 2 practices. Especially make sure participants are aware of retreats they could go on as this is the main way in which people get a real taste of mindfulness.

Session Programme

1. **Meditation:** getting closer to the true nature of experience. Start, as usual, by scanning through the body. Then notice vedana: the general feeling tone of experience. Move on to mindfulness of citta: are you aware of any internal narratives? What teaching (dhamma) do you need to bring to mind? Then, to develop concentration, lead them in the first stage of the mindfulness of breathing – counting from one to ten at the end of the out-breath. Then... If you find yourself beginning to feel more concentrated, let go of the counting and try to experience the breath more clearly and directly – what does it actually feel like apart from our tendency to sub-vocalize, predict the breath, hold on to it in the body, etc . The breath is not an idea or image, neither does it have any words attached to it like 'breath' or 'breathing'. Notice how much of you is *talking* about experience in your head, rather than actually experiencing it. We use the words 'in-breath' rather than feeling the unique sensations of this particular in-breath. See if you can let go of describing the experience in your mind and try to have a more direct experience of the changing sensations. If you find you start to become distracted, go back to the counting to deepen your concentration.
2. **Tea break.** Congratulate people on getting to the end of the course – whatever they have done or not done this is really good in itself.
3. **Presentation on Insight**, see below for key messages

- **Buddhism affirms the existence of a wholly new way of perceiving.** It is completely different from our everyday mind. This 'new dimension', as I call it, is not me. It is not even me in a very good state of mind – it goes beyond me altogether. But it is not God, or union with the Absolute, or oneness with nature. It is something else – beyond the duality of science and religion
- **This new dimension is commonly experienced as irrupting into consciousness from outside the self.** After all, what we call 'ourselves', is mostly a habit: a 'habit of being me'. This habitual self goes very deep indeed. It is the deep patterning of our psyche. Who we are now is a result of everything we have done, said, felt, or

thought in the past. But what happens if we have experiences, transcending experiences, that don’t fit in to that, that aren’t part of the network of associations and experiences that we have come to identify with and habituate to? We experience them as coming from outside the self.

- **Transcending experiences resolve contradictions and unify opposites.** They feel both personal and supra-personal (nothing to do with the self at all). They are characterized by the feeling that language cannot describe them. Words can only say this or that, external or internal, self or other.
- **Buddhism distinguishes between two levels of transcending awareness:** glimpses of reality and insight into reality. We could call our glimpses 'vision experiences'. They are authentically spiritual and are not the result of wishful thinking, self-delusion, or hysteria. They can be faked, of course, but that is another matter. Vision experiences modify the person who has them: they can be a source of inspiration and a catalyst for change or they can boost one's confidence that there is something worth striving for. But they can also be forgotten, undervalued, or overlooked.
- **Moments of transcendence can be experienced by anyone at any time.** They are characterized by increased perspective, heightened significance, and a wordless sense of meaning. For some, they are the beginning of a spiritual quest. For others, they are gradually forgotten, or explained away. How we interpret them will depend on our background and views. If we consider ourselves to be a Christian, we might feel as though we have been touched by the hand of God; if we are more of a scientific rationalist, we might put such experiences down to peak moments of wellbeing. As a Buddhist, I think of them as glimpses of reality, a window opening – albeit briefly – onto the true nature of things.
- **What we really need is insight.** Insight into reality is more than just a glimpse; it is a shattering confrontation. And what is shattered is our fixed sense of self. If vision experiences modify the self, insight transforms it: we are never the same again. The difference between vision experiences and insight is a matter of degree – a question of how much we can allow the vision to transform us. With insight, a wholly new awareness comes into being. It is the awareness of how things really are, a seeing beyond the limitations of self into a new dimension of consciousness: we break the habit of being me. The emotional component to insight is joy and a feeling of complete freedom. It is said to be like suddenly finding your way out of jail, or putting down a heavy load. It is a feeling of relief, lightness, rightness, and liberation. But most importantly it is a wholly new orientation: a decisive move away from self-orientation towards reality-orientation.
- **Impermanence** The Buddha tells us that the best thing to reflect on, if we want to gain insight, is the fact of impermanence. He says it is *this* reality – this fact of universal change – that we need to bring to mind, turn over in our heart and dwell on. We can only do this effectively if we are emotionally positive, calm, and concentrated. If we reflect on impermanence in a negative state of mind, our mood will bias and therefore distort our reflections. The experience of insight is profoundly positive and life-changing.
- **Buddhism teaches impermanence pragmatically and metaphysically.** Pragmatically it is saying 'things end' – youth, beauty, health, life itself, ceases. This is Buddhism as a wake-up call. It is saying: time is short, wake up to the urgency of your situation; nothing is as certain as death, and nothing as uncertain as when it will happen. Only our love, our strengths and virtues, our moment of awareness have value in the face of death.
- **Metaphysically speaking, Buddhism is saying something incomparably more subtle and profound.** It will take insight to comprehend it. It is alerting us that things change, that there is arising and ceasing. We often like newness and novelty. And we like it when painful things stop, whether it is the end of a toothache, or a pneumatic drill outside our window being finally switched off. Then again, some things arise that we don't like – a credit-card bill, a headache – and some things end painfully: a love affair, or a summer holiday. All of this – good things arising, bad things ceasing, good things ceasing, bad things arising – is impermanence at work. What happens is that we over-identify with one aspect of the arising-and-ceasing nature of things.
- **What we cannot grasp, what we need insight to understand, is that arising and ceasing are happening at the same time.** We can think of the new daffodils poking their heads above the lawn as newly arising or, in the very same moment, already ceasing. This is true of everything. We can't help but attach to one aspect of reality. And this means we do not see things as they really are. In this way, our good and bad moods are metaphysical. We swing from one side of reality to the other – we feel happy because a pleasant thing is arising, then we feel sad because a pleasant thing is ceasing. Insight is standing back and seeing both. Insight is the widest possible perspective on life.
- **We cannot say whether we like or dislike impermanence,** because impermanence embraces the whole arising-and-ceasing nature of things. It's akin to never having tasted ice-cream. If someone asked us if we wanted some, we wouldn't know whether to say yes or no. We'd have to have tasted it to know.
- **Impermanence is like that.** You have to taste it to know it. And you taste it with insight and with insight alone. I stress this because people so often believe that Buddhism teaches that all things end, which is misleading. If

we think that the law of impermanence is saying 'all things end', we are liable to misinterpret Buddhism as pessimistic, even nihilistic – which is not at all what the Buddha is getting at.

Specific factors need to be present for insight to arise.

- **Clarity.** First of all, there needs to be a developed sense of clarity about what spiritual life consists in. Even though the goal is said to be beyond words, we need to use words and concepts to approach it. We cannot hope to gain insight if we are confused about what insight is and how it might be cultivated.
- **Integration.** Clarity of thought is not possible without psychological integration. Thought needs to be complete: it needs to be a physical, emotional, and intuitive experience as much as a cognitive one. Without it, you are likely to end up with an alienated intellect, split off from emotion, sympathy, sensitivity, and nuance.
- **Sustained concentration/absorption.** We can only become deeply concentrated if we are psychologically integrated. We need to be 'a whole person wholly attending'. Sustained awareness – the capacity to rest happily in calm and one-pointed concentration – is a necessary prerequisite to insight.
- **Positive emotion.** Full absorption is not possible without positive emotion; psychological integration is not possible without positive emotion; and clarity of thought is not possible without positive emotion. We are aiming to live more and more fully and vividly, with ever-increasing positivity and awareness. If we try to reflect on impermanence in a bad state of mind, our reflections will be prejudiced by our negativity.
- **Faith or confidence-trust.** But we need something more: we need faith. The Sanskrit word for 'faith' is 'sradha'. We have no straightforward translation for this word in English. It is usually translated as 'faith', but for many people this has negative connotations of blind belief and superstition (both of which are inimical to Buddhism). Faith, or 'confidence-trust', is the capacity within the self to intuit what lies beyond the self. It acts like a mirror: it is within the contents of mind but it reflects something of what is beyond the contents of mind.
- **Single-minded dedication.** This is really an intensification of sradha, which is an experience of being established in confidence-trust. It is the sum total of clarity, integration, concentration, emotional positivity, and faith. It is a clear sense of existential priorities, an emotional commitment to life with full attention. Most importantly, it is the desire to put spiritual practice right at the very centre of your life.

4. **Home Groups.** I’m not proposing Home Practice this week. There is a whole week’s worth of Home Practice suggested in the book. Group Leaders might encourage class participants to read the last chapter and to try to put some of it at least into practice in the following week. The main thing this final group needs to do is give people a chance to share what they feel they have learnt on the course – the things that have most struck and stayed with them. Then to share how they might carry on with their practice.
5. **The postcard** One way of helping people come up with what they want to carry on – their intentions – is to give them a postcard each to write what they have learned and what they could like to carry on with, then address this to themselves. At the end of the class these postcards are collected by the team and then sent to the participant a month or so later to remind people of their intentions. They need to be reminded to put their address on it!
6. **Transference of Merits.** It is important to finish with a short ritual (in the same way as we started with a short ritual). It means that ritual and devotion are at least flagged up as part of the Buddhist path and in the case of the Transference of Merits, makes it clear that the purpose of doing a course such as this one is for the good of all being (including yourself!).
7. **Class ends**

Appendix 1: Confirmation Letter

Dear Friend

You are booked on the Life with Full Attention Course.

We look forward to seeing you on ...

The event will begin at 7:15pm (doors open at 6:50pm) and is due to finish at 9:45pm.

The Life with Full Attention Course is an eight-week course in which we will be concentrating on practicing mindfulness between classes — reviewing how the last week of practice went and setting up the next week of mindfulness. The focus will be on the issues for you practicing mindfulness and meditation in your day-to-day life.

We will use the book ‘Life with Full Attention’ as a guide and I will be asking you to read the book and fill in the weekly practice reviews each week (you may want to come earlier to the class in order to do that).

Please note the cost of the course includes the book. If you already have a copy of the book, we ask you to give the other to a friend. I'm sorry to say that we can't deduct the price of the book from the course.

The event will be held at the London Buddhist Centre. If you have any questions regarding the event then please contact us on 0845 458 4716.

All you need to do is wear comfortable clothing and bring a pen and notebook or paper. We hope that you enjoy the event.

A location map is shown below or can be viewed at: <http://www.lbc.org.uk/lbcmap.htm>

With best wishes

Maitreyabandhu

Appendix 2: End of Course Review

Congratulations! You have finished this intensive course in full attention. However much you did, or didn’t do – even if you only managed to read the book without putting too much of it into practice – you should congratulate yourself. Considering all the other things you could have been doing with your time, spending time focusing on mindfulness and authentic happiness is very positive indeed. I am interested in hearing about how you got on with the course.

1: Reviewing your aims

At the beginning of the course, we asked you to write down three aims for the course. Now it's time to look back at those aims and grade yourself on how well you feel you have done – remember your aims might have changed during the course.

Write your reflections here:

2: Reviewing the mindful walk

On a scale of 0 to 10, how often did you manage to practise the mindful walk? 10 means that you were able to do the mindful walk every day. 0 means you didn’t do the mindful walk at all.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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3: Reviewing the mindful moment

On a scale of 0 to 10, how often did you manage to practise the mindful moment? 10 means that you were able to practice the mindful moment every day. 0 means you didn’t do the mindful moment at all.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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4: Reviewing the meditation

On a scale of 0 to 10, how often did you manage to meditate? 10 means every day. 0 means never.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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5: Five things you have learnt

See if you can jot down five things you have learnt. They might be things that were new to you, that opened up a fresh perspective, or they might be things you learnt about yourself.

What I have learnt	How I learnt it, or further comments
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

6: Which elements of the course have you found most helpful? On a scale of 0 to 10 please indicate how useful you thought each element was. 10 means extremely useful, 0 means not at all useful.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The book											
Home Groups											
The tuition											
Meditation											
Home practice											
Other – please state											

7: Did you feel there was the right balance on the course between explaining/ exploring / and experiencing.

Write your reflections here:

8: Please write any further comments, reflections, and improvements for the course below:

9: Overall did the course help you to practise mindfulness in your everyday life? 0 means not at all, 10 means very much so.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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10: Has the course made you want to explore mindfulness, meditation or Buddhism further? If so what might you do next?

Write your reflections here:

Thank you for filling out the form.

Appendix 3: Data from End of Course Reviews

This section reviews some of the key findings from the data collected in the End of Course Reviews.

Reviewing the Mindful Walk, Mindful Moment and Meditation

How often did you manage to practice (1 = not at all, 10 = every day)	
Mindful walk	5.60
Mindful moment	5.35
Meditation	5.71

Reviewing the usefulness of different elements of the course

How useful were the following? (2 = very helpful, 1 = helpful, 0 = not very helpful)	
Book	1.75
Home groups	1.54
Tuition	1.84
Meditation	1.43
Home practice	1.40

Reviewing how helpful the course was with mindfulness in everyday life

Did the course help you to practise mindfulness in your everyday life? (1 = not at all, 10 = very much so)	7.98
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