

meditation diary (week 1)

breath and body

Try and fill out this meditation diary every day. Write one positive thing about the practice (even if it is just that you managed to do it!) and one thing about the body.

If you do not manage to meditate, cross out the relevant boxes and see if you can practise body/breath awareness at other times of your day – i.e. on public transport and so on.

1st practice week

Our mind is often elsewhere, fantasising about the future or reliving the past. **Our body is always present** – the more we anchor our awareness in the body the more we become more vividly aware of our experience instead of living in some kind of cerebral fantasy.

If you are *very* distracted in meditation, coming immediately back to the breath may not very effective. **The body can be a bridge between the very distracted mind and the subtlety of the breath** – so when you see you are distracted first of all relocate yourself in the body, especially the weight of the body on the ground, and from that physical awareness include your breath once again.

In this first week of practice concentrate on the body and its sensations. You can do this in any way you choose. You could

1. **Start each meditation with a short body awareness exercise** – scanning through your whole body from your toes to the top of your head – noticing what your body feels like. Do this even if it means only doing three stages of the Mindfulness of Breathing.
2. **At each stage relax your awareness** from the breath for a minute **and become aware of your body again**, i.e. the weight of the body on the ground, your posture and so on. Make subtle corrections to your posture and then go back gently to the breath.
3. **Make a special effort to sit still. Use feeling of discomfort as a cue to relax the body more.**

Key Phrase ANCHOR YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR BODY

mindfulness of breathing

This is reminder of the stages should you forget them

stage one	Counting <i>after</i> each out-breath breath in, breath out – say 1 breath in, breath out – say 2 breath in, breath out – say 3 and so on up to 10, then start again at 1 If you lose count, or go beyond the count – don't worry that's just what the mind does – just go back to 1.
stage two	Counting <i>before</i> each in-breath say 1 – breath in, breath out say 2 – breath in, breath out say 3 – breath in, breath out and so on up to 10, then start again at 1 If you lose count, or go beyond the count, just go back to 1.
stage three	Drop the counting and watching the whole breathing process <i>Feel</i> the breath coming in and out of the body. If you get distracted gently and patiently come back to the experience of breathing.
stage four	Watching where the breath first enters and last leave the body This is usually just inside the nostrils or on the top lip. So no longer follow the whole breath but just watch this particular, subtle sensation. Again if you get distracted just come back to the breath

Points to bear in mind

1. **Try and let go of success and failure.** When we do anything – cook a meal, draw a picture – we can easily be over-concerned with success or failure. This attitude, whilst being completely natural, is nothing to do with meditation. Meditation is not something you can *succeed* or *fail* at. What you are trying to do is explore and learn. Being *too* concerned about success, blocks progress.
2. **Don't force the breath.** You have been breathing quite naturally up till now. You don't need to breath in a special 'spiritual' way. Just notice the breath you have. If you can hear your breath, you may well be forcing it.
3. **Try to *feel* the breath.** This practice is about feeling the breath; it is a sensuous experience, not an idea or an image. Also try and keeping the counting short, light and crisp – it is a mindfulness of *breathing* not counting!

Date	Practice	Positive Factor
	mindfulness of breathing	
	body scan	<i>Begin your meditation by scanning through your body. What did you notice about your body as you prepared?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	posture awareness	<i>Today pay especial attention to your posture – making subtle corrections at each stage (not just jolting yourself back into a ‘correct’ posture). What happens to your posture as you go on?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	preparation	<i>Again spend longer preparing. First become aware of your body, then your general mood or feeling tone (e.g. happy, tired, slightly numb) thoughts (are you preoccupied by something?) Then develop a clear intention to meditate.</i>

	mindfulness of breathing	
	working with deeper habitual tensions	<i>At the beginning and at each stage of the practice, cultivate physical intelligence – try noticing the more habitual and sub-conscious tensions; take your awareness into them and try to let go. What did you notice?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	body and discomfort	<i>Notice some physical discomfort without reacting to it. Practise just being aware of the tension, sitting still and breathing, relaxing into it. How did it go?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	body energy	<i>Today try using the body to help balance your energy levels – take your attention to the breath low in the body if you are speedy and high if you are tired. Do you notice any effect?</i>

1st week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your first week of practice

1. Did you meditate – if not why? (NB. Just for interest's sake not for self-condemnation!)
2. Have you noticed any changes in your state of mind/body during this week?
3. What have you noticed/learnt about the body?

'When we focus on the breath we are focussing on the life force. Life begins with our first breath and will end with our last. To contemplate breathing is to contemplate life itself.'

Larry Rosenberg
'Breath by Breath'
Shambhala Publications

meditation diary (week 2)

breath and breadth

Each day suggests a particular emphasis of practice – this will help you develop a deeper experiential understanding of what is taught at the class.

2nd practice week

We are trying to enter into and abide in a state of relaxed concentrated awareness. One important way of doing this is the principle of **focus** (on the meditation object, i.e. the breath) **supported by breadth** of awareness (our whole experience). To intensify our awareness of the breath we need to build on a general awareness of all aspects of our experience.

In this second practice week concentrate on developing a broad awareness of your whole experience – body / feelings / thoughts. This will help you develop a more organic and less forced or over goal-orientated approach to meditation.

1. **Start by including all your experience in your awareness**, e.g. sounds around you, your body, if you are preoccupied by anything (*breadth*). The idea is not to get too caught up with any of these things (which will lead you off into distraction) but just to notice them and 'sit easy' to them. Then intensify this awareness into an awareness of the meditation object, i.e. the breath.
2. **At each stage come back to *breadth*** – establish a relaxed, broad awareness that *includes* all your experience without condemning any of it. Just notice without getting too involved, then gently come back to the focus once again.
3. If you find you keep getting distracted **use the distraction as a cue to broaden your awareness**. Especially become aware of what distracts you, taking responsibility for that and feeling it, (not simply '*knowing*' what you are thinking but feeling where the thoughts are arising from e.g. anxiety or boredom) then re-contact your body and come back to the breath.

Key phrase FOCUS SUPPORTED BY BREADTH

Date	Practice	Positive Factor
	mindfulness of breathing	
	breadth and rhythm	<i>Pay attention to the rhythm of practice. e.g. focus, distraction, re-focus. Before you re-focus notice what was distracting you. What were some of your distractions?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	emphasising broad awareness	<i>Use this practice to emphasise broad awareness. At each stage broaden your awareness to include body, thoughts, feelings, sounds, etc. Did you notice a difference in your quality of awareness?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	learning about our mind	<i>Make a particular effort to use distraction as a cue to broaden your awareness. In a non-condemning way, notice what your mind is being drawn to. Is there any particular pattern e.g. anxious thoughts, etc?</i>

	mindfulness of breathing	
	body and feelings	<i>Try becoming aware of the subtle physical counterpart of your distractions e.g. what does it feel like to be anxious, angry, wanting something? What do you notice?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	sound and non-reactivity	<i>Spend some time at the start of the practice being aware of the sounds around you. Notice them without labelling them e.g. sounds of traffic, etc. Try not to react to sounds with aversion. How did it go?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	ending	<i>At the end of the practice just sit still and relax your concentration for a minute or two. This helps you absorb the effects of the practice. Did you notice any difference?</i>

2nd week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your second week of practice

1. Did you meditate – if not why? (If you have *not* meditated during the week what are the issues for you?)
2. Were you able to explore broad awareness? Did you remember to put it into practice?
3. What have you noticed/learnt from your practice of broad awareness? Has it helped or not?

'Think of your ability to focus as being supported by the breadth. It's like the topmost peak of a great mountain – a very small piece of ground – stands on such a huge volume of rock at its base...You focus on the breathing process...but if the focus is to lead to full concentration, it has to be supported by broad base of experience.'

Kamalashila 'Meditation: the Buddhist Way to Tranquillity and Insight', Windhorse Publications

meditation diary (week 3)

positive emotion

From now on alternate the two practices of mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana.

3rd practice week

What metta is. Metta is not foreign to us. All of us from time to time feel good about ourselves and are concerned for others. At times we have a positive outlook on life and are more flexible and creative (and less impatient and irritable) in our relationships with other people. Metta is a state of mind we have all experienced; it includes positive emotion, a positive outlook / attitude and a desire to contribute to the welfare of others. The metta bhavana practice simply makes these positive states of mind more conscious and more frequently experienced. It also can develop them into a profound love and concern for all beings.

What metta isn't. Metta is not the same as feeling good (though it has that aspect). It is possible, even quite common, to feel good for fairly selfish reasons. It is not self-deprecating self-sacrifice (metta includes appreciation of self *and* genuine concern for others). Neither is metta pretending to yourself or others that you do not feel negative emotions: papering over them with 'niceness'. It is not a question of denying your experience but working intelligently and creatively to transform it.

In this third practice week concentrate on developing an emotionally positive, appreciative approach to meditation. This includes exploring the metta bhavana practice and infusing mindfulness of breathing with appreciative warmth.

- 1. In the mindfulness of breathing practice, consciously develop a sense of benign curiosity** about whatever distracts you from the breath. Notice your distractions and own them as 'mine' (this will mean abandoning guilt feelings which might arise if we notice feeling hatred or lust, envy etc) distractions and negative emotions are not evils to be annihilated, but immature aspects of the psyche that we need to learn to work with and transform.
- 2. In the metta bhavana practice make a particular effort to approach the practice with an attitude of exploration, experimentation and learning.** One of the blocks to meditation is having too high expectations of what can be achieved within a single meditation session and then feeling disappointed and losing heart. Approach this week's metta with sensitivity, deciding not to *squeeze* loving kindness out of yourself – just trust that the practice is having its effect.

Key words EXPLORATION, APPRECIATION, WARMTH

metta bhavana

This is reminder of the stages should you forget them

stage one	Self Start by developing feelings of loving kindness towards yourself, saying silently – ‘May I be well. May I be happy. May I be free from suffering. May I make progress’ – then wait for a response.
stage two	Friend Bring a close friend to mind and wish them well. The Buddhist tradition suggests you a close friend that is <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. About the same age as you (i.e. not very much older or younger)2. Not someone you feel sexually attracted to (not that that is a bad thing, you just don’t need to develop it)3. Someone alive.4. Someone of the same sex (even if you are attracted to members of the same sex.) All the above keeps the practice as simple as possible – you are trying to choose someone very <i>like you</i> i.e. a friend of the same gender who is very roughly the same age.
stage three	‘Neutral’ person Needs to be someone you see fairly often – e.g. someone you work with – but who you don’t have <i>particular</i> feelings for one way or the other.
stage four	‘Enemy’ This is someone you dislike – either at the moment or generally speaking. It includes someone you get irritated by or who you find annoying. Buddhist tradition suggests that <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. You don’t choose someone who you really <i>loathe</i>. As this would probably counteract any metta you have developed.2. That you choose someone you actually know, not a public figure that you love to hate.
stage five	All four people then all beings Bring all four people together (yourself, your friend, the neutral person and the enemy) and imagine feeling metta equally for all four. Then, cultivate loving kindness for all beings. You may do this geographically, spreading out from where you are now, or in terms of the states of mind, e.g. happy, unhappy, etc, that surround us.

Date	Practice	Positive Factor
	metta bhavana	
	emphasise self-metta	<i>Concentrate on the first stage. Try reflecting on how your actions show you that you already love yourself e.g. you enjoy pleasant food, you like to be liked, you are important to yourself. Try and make this more conscious and felt. Write down some ways you cherish yourself.</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	confidence In one's potential	<i>Develop a sense of confidence in your potential. This means acknowledging hindrances, owning them and bringing benign curiosity to them. At the end of the practice notice the positive effort you have made.</i>
	metta bhavana	
	emphasise the second stage	<i>Spend more time on the friend stage. You could start it by reflecting that you are their friend – that they like you and enjoy spending time with you. Try to feel the reciprocal nature of the friendship. How did it go?</i>

	mindfulness of breathing	
	warm awareness	<i>Watching the breath is not a cold analytical experience. Make an effort to bring an appreciative awareness to the breath – your breath is your life as it actually happens. Did you notice any difference?</i>
	metta bhavana	
	gladdening the heart	<i>Spend some time at the start of the practice bringing to mind what you already have in your life; what you appreciate and are happy with or enjoy – try doing this and keeping some awareness of your breath at the same time. Did that then change your experience of the practice?</i>
	mindfulness of breathing	
	enjoyment	<i>In today's practice cultivate enjoyment. This might mean promising yourself not to get frustrated – that 'I can't do it' or such like –try to find enjoyment or pleasure in the body or breath. How did it go?</i>

3rd week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your third week of practice

1. How did you get on with the metta bhavana practice – did you do it? Were you able to approach the practice creatively?
2. Were you able to cultivate a sense of benign curiosity and appreciation? If so what effects did you notice?
3. What have you noticed/learnt from your practice of trying to cultivate positive emotion during the week in your day-to-day life?

'Be patient. It may take time to attune yourself to the effects of the meditation, but as you strengthen and deepen your awareness you'll be able to feel the effects on your emotions every time you repeat 'May I be well.'

meditation diary (week 4)

mature effort

Often people find that their initial enthusiasm for meditation starts to wane. Either that or they get frustrated with their apparent inability to concentrate or 'get anywhere' in meditation. These are very common issues. Try to use your workbook to work with these issues if or when they occur.

4th practice week

The success of meditation is dependent on the kind of effort we make. We need mature effort, an effort that is appropriate, flexible and responsive to the actual contents of our mind at any given moment. **Mature effort is:**

- **Appropriate.** You are actually working creatively with the experience you are having. This implies a commitment to self-knowledge, guilt-free self-honesty and warm curiosity about how to work effectively with your mind.
- **Sensitive and flexible.** You are able to respond to your experience creatively, changing the quality of your effort as needs be. You are **patient, persistent** (in generating effort), you **don't lose heart** and you are **gentle**

In this fourth practice week concentrate on refining the kind of effort you make in meditation. Meditation requires us to make effort – but the kind of effort we make is vital to whether or not we make progress.

1. **Mindfulness of breathing – explore the art of mature and appropriate effort.** In meditation we often oscillate between an over goal-orientated forcing and passive wool-gathering. If we don't make effort we just drift around and do not get anywhere in the practice. If we make a too narrow and forced effort we do not become concentrated. In your mindfulness practice this week concentrate on developing a flexible, patient and persistent effort. Impatience with oneself is counterproductive.
2. **Metta bhavana – continue exploring your practice, making a particular effort to try different approaches and see what works for you.** Approach this week's Metta with a creative and exploratory state of mind. Try out the different suggestions in the diary and see what works for you. **NB no one approach will work all the time.** Make a clear effort to learn from your experience and to keep investigating your mind in a

patient and sympathetic way.

Key words PATIENT, PERSISTENT, SENSITIVE

Date	Practice	Positive Factor
	mindfulness of breathing	
	exploring mature effort	<i>Today, explore mature effort by alternating between active focussing on the breath and a receptive openness to your experience. This means making an effort to watch the breath and then relaxing, effort then relax...and so on. What did you notice?</i>
	metta bhavana	

	activity and receptivity In metta	<i>In today's practice, use the four sentences as taught but leave a pause after you say each sentence to feel your response (or to allow one to emerge). It is like throwing stones into a well. Say the sentence and then wait; try and notice any subtle response. What did you notice?</i>
--	--	--

	mindfulness of breathing	
	prepare and bring the breath to the distraction	<i>Spend more time today preparing. Start by checking your body posture, how your body feels, thoughts and feelings. In the practice itself, instead of taking the attention away from distractions and onto the breath, try bringing the breath to the distraction. Did that make a difference?</i>
	metta bhavana	
	working directly with feelings	<i>Concentrate on the 'enemy' stage. Try to actually <u>feel</u> your feelings towards them (do not pretend to yourself, or try and feel things you 'should'). Try and then work directly with your felt response to them, feeling the irritation and letting go. Did you notice a difference?</i>

--	--	--

	mindfulness of breathing	
	persistent and patient	<i>In this practice make a special effort to be persistent and patient in your efforts to watch the breath. This means not losing heart or forcing. Keep coming back to the breath. Did you manage to be both patient and persistent?</i>
	metta bhavana	

sympathy

Concentrate on the third (neutral) stage. Imagine the neutral person and how their life feels to them. Try to see that they are broadly the same as you: they want to be happy, etc. Spend longer on this stage fleshing them out and developing imaginative sympathy (but don't expect too much)

Where do I go from here?

**follow-up
courses**

Meditation is an art – it is not something that can be learnt 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.

- 1. *Living Practice* – this course focuses on how the principles of meditation can be applied to our every day life, at home and at work.**
- 2. *Mind and Mental Events* – this course explores a Buddhist ethical psychology, looking at what happens in our mind from moment to moment.**
- 3. *Wisdom Practice* – the course explores meditation in terms of Wisdom, of ‘seeing things how they really are’.**
- 4. *Introducing Buddhism***

All these courses are 6 weeks long and are suitable as a next step if you want to go deeper in Meditation or Buddhism

Please look at our programme for more details

<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.</p> <p>We run</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Day retreats. We run regular day retreats at the LBC 2. Weekend retreats (a minibus takes you from the LBC to the retreat centre on Friday at 6.30pm and returns on Sunday at 6pm) 3. Open retreats. We run open retreats for newcomers to meditation in spring, summer and over the Christmas break. These retreats range from a week to two weeks and give a very positive experience of meditation. <p style="text-align: center;">Please look at our programme for details</p>
<p>drop-in classes</p>	<p>Tuesday and Wednesday</p> <p>7. 15pm – 9.40pm. LBC.</p> <p>This is an excellent way to carry on your involvement in meditation</p>

books <i>It can be very helpful to read books on meditation to inspire you to want to meditate</i>	Change your Mind A practical guide to Buddhist meditation Paramananda 8.99
	Wildmind A step-by-step guide to meditation Bodhipaksa 11.99
	Metta The practice of loving kindness 4.99
	Introducing Buddhism Chris Pauling 4.99
All available at the LBC	

'The object of meditation is to transform oneself, not to have good meditations.'

Ven. Sangharakshita