

Meditation Practice Diary

Name:

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How to Use the Practice Diary

Aim. The main aim of this diary is to help support you in setting up a regular and effective meditation practice.

Diary structure. The diary explores a particular teaching per week (e.g. 'breath and body') and each day suggests a particular way of approaching that teaching in your meditation practice. Space is left for you to fill in how you got on. The diary has 6 sessions per week, so you can take a day off should you wish!

At the end of each week there is space for you to review your week of practice.

As the course progresses there are more teachings to supplement what you are learning in the class, as well as reminders about the stages of the meditation practices.

How best to make use of the diary.

- **Fill in your diary each day**, saying how you got on with the suggested approach and including any other comments you might like to make. This will help you become clearer about what is happening in your practice.
- **If you do not meditate, cross that day out** in your diary (just so you become aware of not meditating, not as a condemnation!) You may want to come back to the suggested approach of that day's practice later after the course has finished.
- **Come along to the class a little early, so that you can fill in your review of the week.** This will help you get more of a perspective on how your practice is going (it is all too easy to over-identify with the fact that you have missed some sessions, or that you felt a particular practice didn't go very well).
- **Come to the class with questions.** Meditation is a very subtle matter and can be easily misunderstood. Also, what helps one person may not always help another. Hopefully, filling in the diary will give you a sense of what you need to know more about.
- **Approach the diary, your meditations and the course with an attitude of exploration.** It is easy for some people at least to become overly self-critical or to think in terms of 'succeeding or failing' at meditation. If you have these common tendencies, try to put them aside and think in terms of learning and exploring. The key is to become benignly curious about your experience.

Meditation Diary (Week One): Breath and Body

Try to 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. *Please insert the date each day.*

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

First practice week

Our mind is often elsewhere, fantasizing 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 be 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 any 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.

<p>Stage one</p>	<p>Counting <i>after</i> each out-breath.</p> <p>Breathe in, breathe out – say 1. Breathe in, breathe out – say 2. Breathe in, breathe out – say 3. And so on up to 10, then start again at 1.</p> <p>If you lose count or go beyond the count – don't worry, that's just what the mind does – just go back to 1.</p>
<p>Stage two</p>	<p>Counting <i>before</i> each in-breath.</p> <p>Say 1 – breathe in, breathe out. Say 2 – breathe in, breathe out. Say 3 – breathe in, breathe out. And so on up to 10, then start again at 1.</p> <p>If you lose count or go beyond the count just go back to 1.</p>
<p>Stage three</p>	<p>Dropping the counting and watching the whole breathing process.</p> <p><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.</p>
<p>Stage four</p>	<p>Watching where the breath first enters and last leaves the body.</p> <p>This is usually just inside the nostrils or on the top lip. No longer follow the whole breath, just watch this particular, subtle sensation. Again, if you get distracted, just come back to the breath at this point in the body.</p>

Points to bear in mind

1. **Try to 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, has 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 to now. You don't need to breathe 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 to keep the counting short, light and crisp – it is a mindfulness of *breathing*, not of counting!

Date	Practice	Your Comments
	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>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>

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	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Working with deeper habitual tensions</p>	<p><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></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Body and discomfort</p>	<p><i>Notice any physical discomfort without reacting to it. Practice just being aware of the tension, sitting still and breathing, relaxing into it. How did it go?</i></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Body energy</p>	<p><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></p>

First week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your first week of practice

1. Did you meditate – if not, why not? (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 Two)

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.

Second 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. the 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	Your Comments
	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	
	Broad awareness	<i>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 the mind	<i>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 patten, (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>

Second week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your second week of practice.

1. Did you meditate – if not, why not? (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 you develop concentration?

'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 a base of experience.'

Kamalashila

*Meditation: the Buddhist
Way to Tranquillity and
Insight*
Windhorse Publications

Meditation Diary (Week Three)

Positive Emotion

From now on alternate the two practices of Mindfulness of Breathing and Metta Bhavana.

Third 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). Nor 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	<p>Self</p> <p>Start by developing feelings of loving kindness towards yourself by silently saying 'May I be well. May I be happy. May I be free from suffering. May I make progress,' then waiting for a response.</p>
Stage two	<p>Friend</p> <p>Bring a close friend to mind and wish them well. The Buddhist tradition suggests you choose a close friend that is</p> <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 not dead. 4. Someone of the same sex (even if you are attracted to members of the same sex). <p>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).</p>
Stage three	<p>'Neutral' person</p> <p>This needs to be someone you see fairly often (e.g. someone you work with), but whom you don't have <i>particular</i> feelings for, one way or the other.</p>
Stage four	<p>'Difficult' person</p> <p>This is someone you dislike – either at the moment or in general. It includes someone you get irritated by or whom you find annoying. Buddhist tradition suggests that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You don't choose someone whom you really <i>loathe</i>, as this would probably counteract any metta you have developed. 2. You choose someone you actually know, not a public figure that you love to hate.
Stage five	<p>All four people, and then all beings</p> <p>Bring all four people together – yourself, your friend, the neutral person and the enemy. 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.</p>

Date	Practice	Your Comments
	Metta Bhavana	
	Emphasize 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 to 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	
	Emphasize the second stage	<i>Spend more time on the friend stage. You could start by reflecting that you are <u>their</u> 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>

Third 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 Four)

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.

Fourth 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 overly 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 too narrow and forced an 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 counter-productive.
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. (**remember: 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	Your Comments
	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	

	<p>Activity and receptivity in Metta Bhavana</p>	<p><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 to notice any subtle response. What did you notice?</i></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Persistent and patient</p>	<p><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></p>
	<p>Metta Bhavana</p>	

	<p>Sympathy</p>	<p><i>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).</i></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Prepare and bring the breath to the distraction</p>	<p><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></p>
	<p>Metta Bhavana</p>	

**Working
directly
with
feelings**

Concentrate on the 'enemy' stage. Try to actually feel your feelings towards them (do not pretend to yourself, or try to feel things you 'should'). Try to work directly with your felt response to them, feeling the irritation and letting go. Did you notice a difference?

Fourth week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your fourth week of practice.

1. How did you get on with your exploration of mature effort? Did you remember to work with your effort in the practice? Did you notice any difference to the equality of your experience?
2. In exploring mature effort, did you notice any habitual effort patterns? Do you habitually push to get what you want (e.g. a 'good' meditation) or do you tend to be rather half-hearted and uncommitted?
3. Were you able to work in the metta practice in a patient, flexible and creative way?

'The message of the Buddha was very clear. He was telling us that we had a real choice about the state of our own minds. What was needed was a clear intention to become more aware and more loving, and the application of the effort necessary to become so – effort within meditation, above all.'

Paramananda
Change Your Mind
Windhorse Publications

Meditation Diary (Week Five)

Hindrances

Now that we have begun to explore breadth and focus, the kind of effort we need to make in meditation and the importance of positive emotion and creativity, we can start to look at the contents of our mind in more detail. We can begin to become more aware of what gets in the way of concentrated meditation.

Fifth practice week

Part of the art of meditation is learning how to work effectively and creatively with the mind's tendency towards distraction. Firstly, we need to know the mind in order to change the mind. One traditional Buddhist way of doing this is to learn about the five hindrances

According to Buddhism the mind is endless, expansive and deeply mysterious — the source of the greatest profundity and deepest fulfilment. However, we tend to habituate towards the more superficial aspects of the mind characterized by the five hindrances. These hindrances *cover up* the profound depths of the mind. To have deeper experiences of the mind we will need to work sensitively with these tendencies. The hindrances are: **sense desire, ill will, anxiety and restlessness, sloth and torpor, and doubt indecision.**

In this fifth practice week concentrate on getting to know the five hindrances; acknowledging them and working creatively with the antidotes to overcome them.

1. **Mindfulness of breathing – noticing, acknowledging, developing positive regard.** It is tempting to ignore what is happening in your mind in order to 'meditate'. During this week inhibit that tendency and use distractions as a cue to learn about your mind. Name which hindrance you are in and take full responsibility for it; then cultivate positive regard. This means not getting frustrated with the hindrances, bringing a warm awareness to them and working creatively with the antidotes (see handout).
2. **Metta Bhavana – use this week to acknowledge what is happening in the practice.** What hindrances are you prey to? Can you find a way of working with them? Try to become interested in what happens in your mind and find ways of working with it. For instance, if you find you don't have any metta for a friend, ask yourself why not, explore it with interest. Develop a willingness to be honest with yourself whilst at the same time developing a faith in your potential. Bring a kind awareness to all your experience.

Key words: **name, acknowledge, positive regard**

Know Your Mind

Now that you have some experience of meditation, it might be helpful to apply this traditional list of five hindrances and antidotes to your meditation practice. This will help you learn to know your mind better and discover ways of working with it.

How to work with energy	The Five Hindrances
<p>High Energy</p> <p><i>Sit still. Attention down. Engage more with practice.</i></p>	<p>1. Sense desire</p> <p>This is when we crave something outside our actual experience – it includes everything from cream cakes and sex to ideas and ‘good’ meditation experiences. We want to pull desired things towards us. Our mind, not finding pleasure within experience, tries to find it outside itself in thoughts, memories, fantasies – this <i>is</i> discontent and creates discontent.</p>
<p>High Energy</p> <p><i>Relax. Calm the body. Attention down.</i></p>	<p>2. ill will</p> <p>Wanting to push away anything we do not want in our experience or which we feel threatens us (e.g. other people, sounds, discomfort). This only makes matters worse – the person you dislike and whom you wish to push away is actually as close as they can ever get: right in the centre of our mind. The sound you wish would go away feels as if it gets louder, etc.</p>
<p>High Energy</p> <p><i>Sit still. Relax. Attention down.</i></p>	<p>3. Restlessness and anxiety</p> <p>Physical restlessness and mental anxiety and worry. We are ‘speedy’ and cannot settle and concentrate our mind. Anxiety may also be to do with something we have done or not done which is troubling our conscience.</p>
<p>Low Energy</p> <p><i>Wake up! Open eyes. Attention high.</i></p>	<p>4. Sloth and torpor</p> <p>The opposite of the above. Physical tiredness and heaviness (sloth) or mental sluggishness or dullness (torpor). Can be due to simple tiredness, unresolved emotional conflict or resistance. Can alternate with restlessness and anxiety.</p>
<p>Low Energy</p> <p><i>Reflect. What are your doubts? Decide to commit.</i></p>	<p>5. Doubt and indecision</p> <p>Doubting yourself, the teacher or the practices in such a way that you never really commit yourself – a state of undermining unresolvedness. This is not genuine questioning but an undermining lack of conviction.</p>

Change Your Mind

The Five Antidotes	What and How
<p>Cultivate the Opposite</p> <p>This is an instinctive first port of call. We cultivate the opposite of the state we are in:</p> <p>Anxiety – calm Ill will – patience Sloth – wakefulness Sense desire – contentment/peace Doubt – commitment</p>	<p>This is good to use on any hindrance. You can work through the body, (e.g. in anxiety), relaxing the body and softening the face, the mind, thinking calm thoughts, imagination, breathing out anxiety.</p>
<p>Considering the Consequences</p> <p>This is as much outside of meditation as in it. It includes such thoughts as, ‘Where does ill-will lead me? How does it make me feel? Do I want to carry on arguing over things in my mind? Does it make me happy?’ Bring reflection into meditation.</p>	<p>Again, this can be used on all hindrances. It is also a general life reflection. Where are your states of mind leading you and do you <i>really</i> want to go there?</p>
<p>Sky-like mind</p> <p>Here we do not invest in what is happening in our mind – we notice it but do not get involved in it – we see thoughts and distractions drift across the mind like clouds across a blue sky – neither pushing them away nor grasping hold of them.</p>	<p>Sometimes our attempts to work on our minds make matters worse. Here we have tried 1 & 2. A good antidote for mental anxiety – not for sloth. Also good if you are fairly concentrated.</p>
<p>Suppression</p> <p>Simply saying ‘no’ to the hindrance, acknowledging it and, as it were, gently pushing it aside and getting on with the practice. Best used if hindrance is fairly weak. Not the same as repression, i.e. denying it exists</p>	<p>Not applicable to sloth and torpor, or anxiety.</p> <p>Best used only when concentrated.</p>
<p>Breadth of perspective</p> <p>If all else fails.... This means putting the particular meditation practice into the perspective of your overall intentions (to change and grow), as well as of your broader experience of meditation generally. It is an antidote to absolutizing difficult experiences into ‘I can’t do it’ and losing heart.</p>	<p>This is when you feel you have got nowhere with the meditation, or been completely distracted. You put it into perspective, identifying with your aspiration rather than your expectation.</p>

Date	Practice	Your Comments
	Metta Bhavana	
	Exploring without condemning	<i>Today, explore what happens in your mind when you try to develop metta in each stage. Acknowledge any hindrances and be honest about how you feel in each stage, (e.g.. disinterested, ill will, or positive feelings of love.) What did you notice?</i>
	mindfulness of Breathing	
	Noticing and naming	<i>In today's practice really concentrate on naming the five hindrances. Each time you get distracted make a conscious effort to notice which of the five hindrances is taking you away from the meditation. Write down the ones that seemed most persistent.</i>

	Metta Bhavana	
	Faith in ones potential	<i>In this practice make a special effort to develop faith in your potential to grow and change your mind. This means noticing your hindrances and consciously bringing a kind attention to them – bringing to mind the fact that you are trying to change and cultivating faith in that. Were you able to do that?</i>
	Mindfulness of Breathing	

	<p>Naming and owning</p>	<p><i>Carry on naming which hindrances you get into and bringing a kindly attention to them (not simply wishing they weren't there!) Develop this by owning them more, trying to see more clearly that they are your hindrances, and that others are not to blame. Notice what each hindrance feels like. How did it go?</i></p>
	<p>Metta Bhavana</p>	
	<p>Cultivate the opposite</p>	<p><i>See if you can cultivate the opposite to any hindrances you are feeling in the meditation, (e.g. if you feel disinterested in the neutral stage, try to cultivate interest; if you feel angry in the enemy stage, try to cultivate patience, e.g. feel how anger actually hurts you). Did that make a difference?</i></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Cultivate the opposite</p>	<p><i>This is a good simple method for starting to work creatively with the antidotes. Notice if you have a particular recurring hindrance and emphasize cultivating the opposite to that (e.g. calm stillness if you are anxious, opening your eyes and sitting up if</i></p>

you are falling asleep). What did you do?

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Fifth week practice review

Spend a few minutes reviewing your fifth week of practice.

1. Were you able to name, acknowledge and own the distractions? Did you remember? How did you get on with it? Did it help?
2. Were you able to start creatively applying the antidotes to the hindrances? Did you find that you tended to get lost in the distraction or were you able to notice it with warm regard and then work with it?
3. Did the idea of cultivating the opposite help with your meditation, or did you find it got in the way?

'The first principle is acknowledging that the hindrance is actually there. It's no good carrying on meditating regardless, trying to ignore it and wishing it would go away.... You should accept that for the time being this is your hindrance and that you need to do something about it.'

Kamalashila
Meditation
Windhorse Publications

Meditation Diary (Week Six)

Fruitful Attitudes to Meditation

Meditation is not primarily a technique; it is not a set of hard and fast 'rules for concentration' or a recipe. For an effective meditation practice you'll probably need regular teaching (this course has only been the beginning of our exploration of meditation), inspiration and the chance to go on retreat to have a deeper experience of the fruits of practice. Carry on using this workbook for this week but **start thinking of what conditions you'll need to continue meditating.**

Sixth practice week

In order to make progress in meditation it is important to develop **fruitful attitudes** towards meditation practice. Fruitful attitudes are **realistic, flexible, effective** and **progressive**. **Unfruitful attitudes** are **unrealistic, over-idealised, unsustainable** and **rigid**. 'Pressing on regardless' is an unfruitful attitude, as is meditating only when you feel like it. Looking for peak experiences is an unfruitful attitude, as is the idea that meditation should always be pleasurable.

In this sixth practice week concentrate on developing fruitful attitudes to meditation as well as continuing to explore the hindrances and antidotes

1. The art of life is the art of learning from our experience. We need to approach meditation with the **attitude of learning**. So in this week's practice, notice what works and what doesn't or what no longer works. At the end of meditation ask yourself **what have I learnt?** At the beginning of the meditation try to bring to mind what you learnt last time and build on that. In this way self-knowledge grows, as well our understanding about what helps us progress in meditation. Especially apply this to learning about how to work with the different antidotes and seeing what works. You could ask yourself, 'What am I feeling? How do I go just a little bit deeper? What is missing in my practice just now?'
2. Meditation is more like an art than a technique (even though refinements of technique can be extremely fruitful). What can happen once we have meditated for a while is that **we get stuck in working in the practice in habitual ways** (for instance approaching metta in the same old way). This is quite natural, but needs to be worked with if we are to keep our meditation alive. **We need to experiment from time to time with new approaches and angles**, changing the metaphor of practice (e.g. from 'developing metta' to 'finding the metta that is already there') and finding new inspiration.

Key phrase: **cultivate an attitude of learning and exploring**

Fruitful Attitudes (Continued)

<p>'Owning' our experience</p> <p>And...</p> <p>Working creatively with the hindrances</p>	<p>To make progress we need to know and name the state of mind we are in and take full responsibility for it, (e.g. not just 'knowing' that you are having an argument in your head but <i>feeling</i> that you are in the hindrance of ill-will, and acknowledging that (not making excuses for it), accepting it as yours and not as somehow created by someone else). This is surprisingly hard to do. We need to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledge and name the hindrance, own it as 'mine'. 2. Bring a benign curiosity to it. 3. Work creatively and sensitively to change it. <p>All this means abandoning any guilt feelings, which might arise if we start to feel hatred, lust or envy, etc.</p> <p>We need to work creatively with the state we are in, not condemning ourselves but not indulging ourselves either. Working creatively involves warm attention, sensitivity, reflection, intuition and will...the question is pragmatic: what helps us change from a negative to a positive state of mind?</p>
<p>Adjusting your expectations in relationship to your experience</p>	<p>We cannot help but have expectations of meditation. We need to make sure that they are realistic and sensitive to what is actually happening in our practice (e.g. if you are very sleepy, you need to lower your expectations and try just to stay awake, working on your posture etc. — that is enough). Consciously examine your expectations when you begin the practice and try to assess objectively how the practice went at the end. You may have unhelpful expectations, such as 'I bet I won't get anywhere with this'. All this is part of an attitude of learning.</p>
<p>Finding new (imaginative) approaches to practice – changing the metaphor.</p>	<p>Meditation is more like an art than a technique (even though refinements of technique can be extremely fruitful). What can happen once we have meditated for a while is that we get stuck in working in the practice in habitual ways, (for instance approaching metta in the same old way.) This is quite natural, but needs to be worked with if we are to keep our meditation alive. We need to experiment from time to time with new approaches and angles, changing the metaphor of practice (e.g. from 'developing metta' to 'finding the metta that is already there') and finding new inspiration.</p> <p>No one method will work all the time. At the same time, searching for mere novelty misses the point. Reading about meditation can help, but classes and retreats can be especially helpful – often you find a new angle, a new approach, which revives your practice.</p>

Date	Practice	Your Comments
	Mindfulness of Breathing	
	Learning	<p><i>Start your practice by bringing to mind either what you learnt in your last practice or something you felt you learnt at the class. Try to build on that. At the end ask yourself, 'What have I learnt?'.... It could be anything from an antidote that helps, or an unhelpful attitude, such as, 'I start to lose patience near the end of the meditation'. What have you learnt?</i></p>
	Metta Bhavana	
	Changing the metaphor	<p><i>In today's metta practice, instead of trying to develop metta, take it for granted that it is already there (though perhaps beyond your conscious awareness). Bring each person to mind and imagine that metta for them is already there and all you need to do is picture them and relax back into your deeper feelings of well-wishing.</i></p>

	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Freeing yourself from habitual ways of meditating</p>	<p><i>Today, develop concentration with the first two stages, then in the last two, try to notice more deeply what is preventing you going further in the practice. Are you leaving something out of your awareness (e.g. positive emotion)? Is there a lack of interest? Are you not making enough effort, or habitually pushing? Ask yourself, 'How can I go just a little deeper?' Write down what happened.</i></p>
	<p>Metta Bhavana</p>	

	<p>Reflecting</p>	<p><i>Instead of doing all the sentences, try taking a more creatively reflective approach. Perhaps just concentrate on one sentence (e.g. 'may I be happy'). Spend your time reflecting: when am I really happy? What is it like to be really happy? How do I become happy? Reflect like this for a while and then rest in the body, allowing any deeper responses to emerge. How did it go?</i></p>
	<p>Mindfulness of Breathing</p>	
	<p>Sky-like attitude</p>	<p><i>Today, experiment with developing a sky-like attitude. Sometimes when we resist particular mental states, they seem to get stronger. So don't try to change them or get involved with them, just notice the hindrance, observe it drift across the mind like a cloud. Watch whatever arises without getting involved. How did it go?</i></p>
	<p>Metta Bhavana</p>	

	Find your way	<p><i>Today, drop the sentences and try to find your own way of cultivating metta. Perhaps using memory (e.g. time with a good friend) or images, imagination. Go through the practice a little quicker and spend 5 minutes or so at the end sitting completely still without trying to do anything – just rest and let go. What did you do?</i></p>
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Last Words

<p>Setting up a daily practice</p>	<p>To make progress in meditation we need to develop the healthy self-discipline of a daily meditation practice. This means:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building meditation into your daily routine. 2. If possible, finding a regular time of day to meditate. 3. Perhaps making a shrine to meditate in front of, or setting aside a place in your room that feels comfortable. 4. Being realistic about how much time you can give to meditation and learning to use your wrist-watch to time each stage. 5. Finding support from others who are also trying to meditate (e.g. by attending classes). <p>Setting up a daily practice can take time. Part of a healthy self-discipline is not making too big a deal of it if you miss a day, but trying, through trial and error, to build up a positive habit of daily practice.</p>
<p>Meditation equipment</p>	<p>If you feel that you want to make meditation a part of your life, it is worthwhile investing in the right equipment to help you feel comfortable. If you sit astride the cushions, you might like to try a meditation stool (many people prefer them to cushions), or you might like to get some meditation cushions (most household cushions are too soft and don't give enough support). You can buy cushions, mats and meditation stools from most Buddhist centres.</p>
<p>Classes</p>	<p>Most people find that they need to go to a regular class if they want to maintain and develop their meditation practice. At a class you can get to know others who also value the practice of meditation, as well as</p>

	having the chance to explore your meditation with people who have meditated for a long time.
Periods of intensification (retreats)	For your practice to carry on being effective and fulfilling you will probably need to go on retreats from time to time (even fairly regularly) to re-charge your batteries and to re-inspire your practice. Most meditators need periods of more intensive practice in good conditions in order to continue making progress.
Progress in meditation	Meditation is not something you 'learn' and then can 'do', like riding a bicycle or driving a car. It is an ongoing exploration; it involves discovering new approaches and finding ways to keep motivated. Also, meditation does not simply improve on a day-to-day or even month-to-month basis. Sometimes meditation seems hard or not productive and sometimes it goes well. The main thing is to stick at it and find the supports you need to do so. Meditation is not primarily a technique; it is not a set of hard and fast 'rules for concentration' or a recipe; it is more like an art that can be constantly developed.

Where Do I Go From Here?

www.lbc.org.uk	
Follow-up courses	<p>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.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Living Practice</i>. This course focuses on how the principles of meditation can be applied to our everyday life, at home and at work. 2. <i>Mind and Mental Events</i>. This course explores Buddhist ethical psychology, looking at what happens in our mind from moment to moment. 3. <i>Wisdom Practice</i>. This course explores meditation in terms of wisdom, of 'seeing things how they really are'. 4. <i>Introducing Buddhism</i> <p>All these courses are 6 weeks long and are suitable as a next step if you want to go deeper in meditation or Buddhism.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please look at our programme for more details</p>

Retreats	<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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Day retreats.</i> We run regular day retreats at the LBC. 2. <i>Weekend retreats</i> (a minibus takes you from the LBC to the retreat centre on Friday at 6.30pm and returns on Sunday at 6pm). 3. <i>Open retreats.</i> We run open retreats for newcomers to meditation in spring, summer and over the Christmas break. These retreats range from one week to two weeks and give a very positive experience of meditation. <p style="text-align: center;">Please look at our programme for more details</p>
Drop-in classes	<p>Evenings: Monday*, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 7. 15pm – 9.40pm, LBC. * This drop-in class is especially for people who do not need basic instruction and want to explore Buddhism.</p> <hr/> <p>Daytime: Wednesday 10.30am – 12.30pm. Weekday lunchtime class 1pm – 2pm. Saturday lunchtime class 1pm – 2pm (8 Hope Gardens, off St Martin's Lane).</p>

Books 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</i> Paramananda Windhorse Publications £8.99
	<i>Wildmind: A Step-by-Step Guide to Meditation</i> Bodhipaksa Windhorse Publications £11.99
	<i>Metta: The Practice of Loving Kindness</i> Nagabodhi, ed. Windhorse Publications £4.99
	<i>Thicker than Blood: Friendship on the Buddhist Path</i> Maitreyabandhu Windhorse Publications £8.50
	<i>Introducing Buddhism</i> Chris Pauling Windhorse Publications £4.99
All available at the LBC	

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

Ven. Sangharakshita