

Mindfulness in Plain English
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Cultivating the State of Mindfulness: Getting Started

Chapter I – Meditation: Why Bother?

Life is inherently unsatisfactory. We know we're in a mess and periodically make changes but they tend to be unsatisfactory in the long run. Life becomes an emotional roller-coaster. Society is built around providing temporary patches. Life becomes a perpetual struggle.

The root of the problem is that life equals change and we're basically deniers. In many cases the changes are so slow that they are easy to ignore. When we do acknowledge change in life, we label some as good, some as bad and some as neutral. We cherish the "good," reject the "bad," and ignore the "neutral." Our minds are full of criticisms and opinions. We create walls around ourselves and become trapped by our individual perceptions of reality – our likes and dislikes. Life is suffering, the Buddha said, but he also said that there is a way out, a way to bring to an end the cycle of desire and aversion. But to do this we have to come to see the world as it really is.

What we are is what we were, and what we will be is what we are. The agitated, grasping, desirous, or "wanting" mind follows us like a mad dog wherever we go. The peaceful mind follows like our shadow.

Civilization offers us new options for dealing with life's changes that are "out there." Meditation offers new ways of dealing by changing what is "in here," what is inside us.

Chapter II – What Meditation Isn't

1. A relaxation technique
2. Means of going into a trance
3. A mysterious practice
4. Turns us into psychic superpersons
5. Something dangerous to be avoided
6. Something for saints & holy persons
7. A way to avoid reality
8. A way to get high
9. Is selfish
10. Where you think lofty thoughts
11. A quick fix to old problems

Chapter III – What Meditation Is

Meditation trains us to see reality exactly as it is. This is called mindfulness.

We see life through a screen or filter of thoughts and concepts and we mistake this for reality. We view impermanence as permanent. We see that which is impure as being pure. We mistake things that make us unhappy for those that will bring us happiness. We mistake our little selves for our True Selves.

We get caught up in the web of desires and aversions, thinking that impermanent things will bring us permanent happiness. We become ensnared by our own ego falling into the trap of "I-me-mine."

Meditation is experiential, not theoretical or conceptual.

Chapter IV – Attitude

Meditation is participatory observation. What you are looking at is you and what you see depends on how you look. Sort of a Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty applied to ourselves.

1. Don't expect anything. Let meditation teach you what it wants you to learn. Remember that meditative awareness seeks to see reality as it is. Our images, opinions, preconceptions and concepts try to define and limit reality and need to be temporarily suspended.
2. Don't try too hard
3. Don't rush
4. Don't cling to anything. Let whatever comes come, and let it go.
5. Relax physically and mentally
6. Accept what arises without judgment
7. Be gentle and kind with yourself
8. Investigate, question – take nothing for granted
9. View all problems as challenges
10. Don't ponder. Try not to allow discursive thinking to take over. Concepts and reasoning get in the way. Don't think. See.
11. Don't dwell on contrasts. Comparison is a mental habit and leads to ill feeling, i.e., greed, envy, pride, jealousy, hatred.
12. Notice similarities rather than differences
13. Breath is a universal vehicle that can help us realize our connectedness to all life.
14. Don't dwell on sensory objects in the usual egotistical way. Examine the "process of perception."
 - a. Watch what object of meditation does to senses and perceptions
 - b. Watch feelings that arise and mental activities that follow
 - c. Watch changes occurring in own consciousness
 - d. Be aware of universality of what is being seen
 - e. Initial perception is either:
 - i. Pleasant
 - ii. Unpleasant
 - iii. Neutral
 - f. This is a universal phenomenon

- g. Results in various possible reactions – greed, lust, jealousy, fear, worry, restlessness, boredom
- h. Note universality of human response

Chapter V – The Practice

Meditation seeks to see things as they are. Seeing with wisdom means seeing things within the mind/body complex without prejudices, or biases springing from greed, hatred, or delusion.

Watching bodily sensations – try to isolate them as sensations before mental formations begin to embellish themselves and to spin stories around them. Same for emotions arising. If we can dwell on the emotion alone without the overlay of form, feeling, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, we can gain insight into the experience of the emotion. We should see the mind and body separately first, then come to see their interconnectedness. Mindfulness is a practice of 100% honesty with ourselves. When issues as greed, hatred and ignorance arise in daily life we use mindfulness to track down and understand their roots.

The Goal: The goal of meditation is to reach toward perfection of the best qualities in the latent unconscious mind. There are 5 elements:

1. Purification of the mind,
2. Overcoming sorrow,
3. overcoming pain and grief
4. following the path leading to attainment of peace
5. attaining happiness by following this path.

The Practice: Sit with head, neck and trunk aligned with the backs of the hands cupped in the lap or on the thighs.

Keep the mind in the present. Mind needs a mental object to focus on and breath provides that object. Begin by sending thoughts of loving kindness to all, then take 3 long, full breaths and begin noticing the touch and feel of the breath at the bridge of the nostrils without verbalizing or conceptualizing anything. Then begin noticing the entire breath process. As soon as you noticed the mind wander bring it back with mindful gentleness.

1. When the mind wanders off, bring it back using one of the counting techniques. Count each inhale or each exhale, or count each inhale and exhale.
2. When the mind is back recentered, let go of the counting.
3. Observe the transitions between the inhale and the exhale, and try to link them together.
4. Fix the inhale and exhale at the bridge of the nostrils.
5. Maintain focus on the bridge between the nostrils.
6. We now have three “signs” or objects to focus on
 - a. Inhale
 - b. Exhale

c. Bridge between the nostrils

The breath unites the mind with the present moment. We noticed that the breath is the physical aspect and the feel of breath, consciousness of the feeling and the consciousness of the breath at the nostrils is the mental part of the moment of experience. As we watch the breath without desiring calmness or anything else, without judgment, and without resenting tension from breathing in and out, we experience only impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of the breath. Then the mind becomes peaceful and calm. With each breath the mind delves into deeper insights on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

Chapter VI – What To Do with Your Body

Sit with head, neck & trunk aligned, the backs of the hands resting in the lap or on the thighs. This posture promotes stability, balance and the ability to sit for a longer time. Wear loose clothing. If sitting on the floor in one of the cross legged postures, try sitting in a straight backed chair. The feet should rest comfortably on the floor so that there is no pressure on the backs of the thighs. Try and sit with the back away from the chair back, keeping the head, neck & trunk aligned with the hands resting in the lap or on the thighs. Try and strengthen the back muscles in this way.

Chapter VII – What to do with Your Mind

Sit observing the breath move in and out of the nostrils. The mind will tend to wander, particularly when we are new to meditation. It's easy to become trapped, wrapped up and stuck in a train of thought with one thought leading to another.

There is a difference between being aware of a thought and thinking a thought. Deep concentration has the effect of slowing down the thought process and speeding up the awareness viewing it. The breath is used as the object of meditation because it is:

1. portable,
2. cheap,
3. a non-conceptual process,
4. existing in the present only.

Breathing is a nonconceptual process, a thing that can be experienced directly without a need for thought. Furthermore, it is a very living process, an aspect of life that is in constant change. The breath moves in cycles – inhalation, exhalation, breathing in and breathing out. It is a miniature model of life itself.

As we progress we will come face-to-face with the realization that we are completely crazy, as we delve into the latent unconscious. While ignorance may be bliss, it doesn't lead to liberation. This realization is actually a milestone.

In the observation of the breath there are two things to be avoided:

1. Thinking, and
2. Sinking.

Thinking may be obvious, but sinking may not. Sinking is when we fall into a mental vacuum with no thought, no observation, no awareness of anything – sort of like dreamless sleep.

The mindfulness of breathing is a present time awareness. When we do it properly we are aware only of what is occurring in the present. We don't look back or forward. We forget about the last breath, and don't anticipate the next one. When the inhalation is beginning, we don't look ahead to the next one, and we don't skip ahead to the exhale that follows. We stay right with what is taking place – the inhalation, and the exhalation. Just pay attention.

The state we are aiming for is one in which we are totally aware of everything that is happening in our own perceptual universe, exactly the way it is happening, when it is happening.

Chapter VIII – Structuring Your Meditation

Remember that your mental attitude and outlook help create your environment. What you expect is what you are most likely to get.

1. **Where to Sit?** Find a quiet secluded place. Music and talking are not conducive to developing a meditative state of mind. While candles, bells, incense, etc. are nice, they are paraphernalia and not essential to establishing a meditative state of mind. Try to sit at the same time and place. If possible create a space dedicated to your practice. Meditating with others may be helpful, but remember that basically, meditation is a solitary practice, so use group meditation as an aid, not a crutch.
2. **When to Sit?** Best to examine your daily routine and select a quiet time of your day. Early morning after showering and preparing for the day, or in the evening before retiring are considered good times, in general. A person's particular circumstances may dictate some other time. As a new meditator, once a day is fine. With experience and practice, adding other times may be appropriate. Experienced meditators manage 3 or 4 hours of practice a day.
3. **How Long to Sit?** Sit as long as you can, but don't over do it. Twenty or thirty minutes are fine at the beginning. However, for those just starting, 2 to 5 minutes may be enough. Remember that self-mortification is not the goal of meditation. Don't over do it in the beginning, and don't condemn yourself. Decide on the length of time before hand and set a timer of some sort. Discipline is not someone standing over us with a stick, it is discipline we bring to ourselves to create a new habit of behavior. Habit made us to not want to spend the time to meditate, now establishing a new habit of meditating is what we're working to develop. Remember what we are trying to do is to learn to sit still, look within and watch the stuff coming up – restlessness, anxiety, impatience, pain – just watch it come up and don't get involved, then watch it simply go away.

Chapter IX – Set Up Exercises

We have grown up in a mental trap of clinging, greed, hatred, illusion, desires, aversions, and negativity. Rituals, incantations, mantras will not extricate us from our predicament. Only active mental participation will be effective.

1. The Threefold Guidance
 - a. Others have been using these techniques for thousands of years
 - b. Have a support group, a Sangha or Satsang for mutual support
 - c. Set an intention before meditation:
 - i. “I am about to tread the same path that was walked by the Buddha and his followers. A lazy person cannot follow this path. May my energy prevail. May I succeed.”
2. Universal Loving Kindness
 - a. Mindfulness meditation is an exercise in mindfulness, egoless awareness – of being present in any moment. The real problem is to gather enough of these moments to be effective.
 - b. Greed and hatred are prime manifestations of the ego process. When grasping and rejecting (desire [*raga*] and aversion [*dvesa*]) are present, mindfulness will be difficult to maintain. Theravada and Yoga provide a useful tool in dealing with this issue.
 - i. Use one idea to cancel another. Replace a negative emotion or reaction with a positive one. This is more than just thinking happy thoughts, and it is not avoidance or suppression of a negative thought or idea.
 - ii. Start by banishing thoughts of self-hatred and self-condemnation. Allow good feelings and good wishes first to flow to yourself. Then do the same for someone close to you. Gradually expand the circle outward to include your enemies and then all living beings.
3. Loving Kindness Meditation

May I be filled with loving kindness.
May I be well.

May I be peaceful and at ease.
May I be happy as I am.

May I cause no pain or suffering.
May I have the patience, courage, understanding and determination to meet and overcome the inevitable difficulties, problems failures and losses in life.

May my friends & loved ones be filled with loving kindness.
May my friends & loved ones be well.

May my friends & loved ones be peaceful and at ease.
May my friends & loved ones be happy as I am.

May my friends & loved ones cause no pain or suffering.
May my friends & loved ones have the patience, courage, understanding
and determination to meet and overcome the inevitable
difficulties, problems failures and losses in life.

May my enemies & those who would harm me be filled with loving
kindness.

May my enemies & those who would harm me be well.

May my enemies & those who would harm me be peaceful and at ease.

May my enemies & those who would harm me be happy as I am.

May my enemies & those who would harm me feel no pain or suffering
caused by others.

May my enemies & those who would harm me have the patience, courage,
understanding and determination to meet and overcome the
inevitable difficulties, problems failures and losses in life.

Realizing that true peace will come to this world when each of us finds our
own peace, as often as we can until we meet again, let's find time
to say quietly to ourselves, may I be filled with loving kindness.

Freely adapted by Don English from Jack Kornfield's book A Path with Heart

Practice loving-kindness for purification of the mind while practicing meditation to attain peace and liberation from pain and suffering. Compassion is a manifestation of loving-kindness in action. Behavior includes thought, word and deed. Thought is the mother of the deed. If anything in the thought, word or deed is out of alignment, then there cannot be noble behavior. Noble thoughts lead to noble behaviors, and spiteful thoughts lead to spiteful behavior. If all of our enemies are peaceful and at ease, they would not be our enemies.

When we send spiteful thoughts to our enemies, what actually happens is that our bodies generate harmful chemistry that increases our experience of pain, increased heart beat, tension, change of facial expression, loss of appetite for food, deprivation of sleep and appearance of unpleasantness to others. In other words we go through the same things we wish on our enemies.

These things are not magic formulas, but are practices that must be worked on all the time.

Cultivating the State of Mindfulness: Its Early Stage

Chapter X – Dealing with Difficulties

All meditators have problems or obstacles to deal with in meditating. The main thing is to deal with them with the right attitude. We are stuck in our problems

because our natural tendency is to run from our problems and run after our desires. Hassles are really opportunities. They are AFGOs – “Another Fucking Growth Opportunity.”

We need to learn to confront life’s unpleasant aspects. To do otherwise is to avoid growing. Our job as a meditator is to learn to be patient with ourselves, to see ourselves in an unbiased way with all our sorrows and inadequacies. We need to learn to be kind to ourselves. Avoiding unpleasantness is, in the long run, not a kind thing to do.

What would Buddha do? Examine the unpleasantness, observe it mindfully, study it and learn its mechanics. The way out of a trap is to examine the trap and learn how it is constructed. Deconstruct the unpleasantness. Pain is unavoidable in life. We need not try to avoid it, but rather confront it and our fears. Pain is inevitable, suffering is not.

Suffering is pain that we layer our story on. Pain is not decreased or eliminated by avoiding it, but rather by dealing with it.

1. Problem 1 – Physical pain:

- a. leg pain, check tightness of pants, check your cushion – should 3” compressed, loosen waistband. Slouching creates discomfort. Keep head from drooping.
- b. Make pain object of meditation – observe mindfully, firstly simply the pain itself, then secondly your resistance. Resistance is mental & physical. Relax the muscles, then address mental resistance – try to relax psychologically.
- c. Relax mind as you relax body – a 2-step procedure
 - i. Let go of the resistance to pain – resistance creates a barrier between self and the pain – dissolve the barrier and separation vanishes, the suffering is gone.
 - ii. Understand that pain and its attendant suffering is not a distraction, but a mental state
- d. don’t muddy waters of pure experience with concepts or discursive thinking.

2. Problem 2 – Legs Going to Sleep – can’t damage leg tissue by sitting. Your body adjusts with daily practice

3. Problem 3 – Odd Sensations – itching, deep relaxation, lightness, floating, growing, shrinking, rising up – they are just the firings of the nervous system, so just notice, let it go and don’t get involved.

4. Problem 4 – Drowsiness: apply mindfulness to state of drowsiness. Inquisitive awareness is the opposite of drowsiness. Allow 1 hour after a meal, adjust the time of day for meditation

5. Problem 5 – Inability To Concentrate: consider external factors – adjust schedule. If your mentally or emotionally agitated, this will carry over into your meditation – consider a physical activity before meditation. If all else fails, simply put in your time on the cushion.

6. Problem 6 – Boredom

- a. Tactic A: Re-establish true mindfulness – mindfulness is never boring, don't assume you know what breath is. Consider the attitude that attaches the label "boring."
- b. Tactic B: Observe your mental state with mindful awareness

7. Problem 7 – Fear

- a. Fear arises in the unconscious and emotional contents can "leach" through into conscious awareness before the thought itself surfaces.
- b. Fear of the unknown: eventually we realize that we are seeking to meet ultimate truth face to face and this can be a scary proposition. Meet it head on mindfully.
- c. Fear may be self-generated, locking onto your attention that waters it. Don't cling, just watch it rise and grow. Study its effect, see how it affects your body. See the pictures as pictures, and the memories as memories. It's only fantasy, nothing to fear.

8. **Problem 8 – Agitation:** it is often a cover for some deeper experience we're trying to avoid, to bury. Address it mindfully, without judgment, examine it, and let it go.

9. **Problem 9 – Trying too Hard:** relax into the meditation, learn to "go with the flow". Can't meditate if we're tense, striving or taking it all too seriously. Trying too hard leads to rigidity and unhappiness, guilt, and self-condemnation, making our efforts mechanical and defeats mindfulness. Drop expectations, simply meditate with steady and balanced effort.

10. **Problem 10 – Discouragement:** an upshot of pushing too hard it frustration, and its source is striving for unrealistic expectations. Simply observe the mental state clearly without adding to it. Just watch. There is no such thing as failure in meditation. There are setbacks and difficulties, but no failure unless we give up entirely.

11. **Problem 11 – Resistance to Meditation:** Missing one practice is unimportant. The danger is that it will become habitual. Push through the resistance and sit anyway, even if for a minute or two. Meditation is not a ritual conducted in a particular posture. It is not a painful exercise. Meditation is mindfulness, a new way of seeing and ought to be considered a form of play.

12. **Problem 12 – Stupor of Dullness:** This is an unwanted byproduct of deepening concentration. As relaxation deepens, muscles relax and nerve firings slow down, producing a calming affect on the body. While a pleasant state, and may seem that we've reached the goal of meditation, we may notice that our attention has been pulled away from the breath. The cure is mindfulness of the breath. Try observing these phenomena and notice them vanish. Observe feelings as feelings, dullness as dullness. Watch them rise and pass away. Don't get involved.

Chapter XI – Dealing with Distractions – I

Concentration and mindfulness work hand in hand. “Bad” meditation days are characterized by “bad” concentration. Our minds keep floating away and we need a way to bring our attention back.

1. **Maneuver 1 – Time Gauging:** Sometimes we’re caught in some mental vortex and need a way out of the distraction that has taken hold of our awareness. Try gauging the amount of time the distraction has held you. “I’ve been distracted about two minutes,” “...since the dog started barking.” At first we tend to sub-vocalize this, but with practice it will become wordless and quicker. Once free of the distraction, drop the whole thing and go back to the breath. And don’t get hung up on the time estimate.
2. **Maneuver 2 – Deep Breaths:** sometimes when the mind is wild and crazy, a few deep breaths in and out through the nose is enough to make focusing easier.
3. **Maneuver 3 – Counting:** fight distractions by counting breaths. When fully established, let it go. You can count each inhale and exhale, you can count to 10 breaths and then start over. Eventually drop the numbers and just stay with the breath.
4. **Maneuver 4 – The In-Out Method:** Just say “inhalation...exhalation” or “in...out.” When you no longer need it, let it go and just be with the breath.
5. **Maneuver 5 – Canceling One Thought with Another:** If fantasies come along and you can’t let it go, try substituting another fantasy. You can label the thoughts as “skillful” or “unskillful.” Unskillful thoughts are thoughts relating to greed, hatred, delusion, or any negativity. Skillful thoughts are connected with generosity, compassion, wisdom. You can substitute a skillful thought for an unskillful one. Substituting the opposite thought of the distracting fantasy is also useful. If nothing else works, make it the focus of meditation.
6. **Maneuver 6 – Recalling Your Progress:** As fantasies, images, sensations, sounds distract, we can remember that we are not wasting our time, we are here to focus the awareness on the breath, the breath that is common to all living creatures. This may have to be repeated a few times before you refocus on the breath.

The Fully Developed State of Mindfulness

Chapter XII – Dealing with Distractions – II

The distractions are really what it’s all about. Learn to notice them without being trapped by them. If you want to change something, first you have to see it the way it is. By distraction we mean any preoccupation that pulls us away from the breath. Basic way of dealing with a distraction: briefly switch attention to distraction, making it the temporary object of meditation. Wordlessly ask self: what is it? How strong is it? How long does it last, then switch back to the breath. Want to move away from thinking and back to direct, wordless, nonconceptual experience of breath.

Distractions bloom first in the unconscious. By the time they become “distractions” we are already stuck in them. Mindfulness disarms distractions, which are really “paper tigers” – refuse to feed them and they go away.

Key is to be mindful of what is occurring, not to try and control what is occurring. From point of view of mindfulness, there is no such thing as a distraction. They are secondary objects of meditation.

The purpose of meditation is to achieve uninterrupted mindfulness. Mindfulness, and only mindfulness, produces Enlightenment.

1. **Desire:** you're distracted by having had a nice experience in meditation. Notice the thought, notice the mental state as a separate thing, notice the degree of the desire, how long it lasts, when it finally disappears, and return attention to the breath.
2. **Aversion:** you're distracted by fear, a nagging worry, guilt, depression or pain. Notice, gauge, observe its fading, return to the breath.
3. **Lethargy:** various grades and intensities, and this is different from physical fatigue. Mental lethargy is related to aversion, as one of the mental tricks of avoidance. “It is an enforced stupidity pretending to be sleep.” It is the reverse of mindfulness, which is a cure for this state. The steps in dealing with it are the same as above. It is important to catch it early before it fully takes root – it has the capacity to outpace your mindfulness if not stopped.
4. **Agitation:** restlessness, worry are its manifestation, as the mind refuses to settle anywhere. Once you spot this unsettled feeling, note its presence, when it arises, how long it lasts, and watch it fade away. Then return attention to the breath.
5. **Doubt:** become aware of this mental state of wavering as an object of inspection. How strong it is, when it comes, how long it lasts, watch it fade and return to the breath.
6. **Craving & Desire:** difficult to spot in selves: desire to perfect self, craving for virtue, for betterment. Hard to detach from altruistic feelings. They are actually a form of greed, the desire for gratification and a clever way of ignoring the present reality.
7. **Positive mental states:** It's hard to think of happiness, peace, inner contentment, sympathy and compassion for all beings as a distraction, but they do pull us from the present moment and are the most seductive of all distractions. They are mental states that come and go, arise and pass away. Trick is not to become attached to them. Notice how they come, how strong they are, how long they last, watch them disappear.
8. **Mental States in general:** Just as breathing comes in three stages, beginning, middle and end, so too do all mental states. As we become more proficient at mindfulness, we begin to learn to catch the arising mental states before, or soon after the manifest themselves in our awareness. Don't feed them and they'll go away. Concentration slows the arising of all of these mental states, and helps extend our awareness down into the dark cellar of

our unconscious where they arise. We begin to see them slowly bubble up one at a time, stay for a time, and disappear. Best to experience each mental state exactly as it is without adding or subtracting from it.

9. **Pain:** Pain is not a thing, it is an event. Without concepts and associations attached to it, it is nothing more than a flowing pattern of energy – no thought, no rejection, just energy.
10. **Conceptualizations:** For us who have been educated to manipulate mental concepts it can be difficult to suspend our love affair with conceptualizations. In mindfulness meditation we try to temporarily suspend the process of conceptualization and focus on the pure nature of mental phenomena – we seek to experience the mind at its pre-concept level.
11. **I, Me, Mine concepts:** “The pain” is a conceptualization, a label added to the experience. It builds a mental image, a picture of the pain, allowing a visualization of the pain. These are concepts added on to the pain. In the statement, “I have a pain in my leg”, “I” is a concept, something added to the pain experience. I, Me, Mine creates a link, a connection, an identification with the pain experience. Watch for this sort of personal identification with pain, or any other sensation.
12. **General Idea of mindfulness and distractions:** we want to see, experience each sensation (pain, boredom, bliss) as pure and undiluted. To do this our timing must be perfect – awareness must coordinate exactly with the arising, and if you hang on to it too long, you risk dealing with memory, and you miss the arising of the next bubble of pure consciousness.
13. **More on conceptualization:** The mind is very clever about finding ways to conceptualize phenomena. All sensations trigger a burst of conceptual thinking. A sudden sound while meditating brings forth a whole host of images and concepts and the original sensation of pure hearing is lost. We miss the reality and enter a world of fantasy. Anything added to the pure hearing is added chatter. Drop it. Ditto all other sensations. When more than one conceptualization jumps in with a sensation, pick one, any one, preferably the strongest and work with it. Watch it, deal with it, note its duration, and let it go, then return to the breath.
14. **The conundrum of successful mindfulness** – looking for sensations to be mindful of. Go with the breath.
15. **Mindfulness grows with mindfulness:** Every time you practice, you strengthen mindfulness. When frustration, discouragement, condemnation come, just observe, watch it fade and return to the breath. Mindfulness is like mental acid eating away at whatever you put it on.

Mindfulness is a way up and out of the mental quagmire of our desires and aversions. It's easy to apply mindfulness to the nastier side of our mental awarenesses – our fears and depressions – but as important to work on the positive aspects too, which are also mental states and if not dealt with will hold us back.

Chapter XIII – Mindfulness (Sati)

Mindfulness is an activity, it is pre-symbolic, it is not bound by logic. Words are fingers pointing at the moon, not the thing itself. The experience lies beyond words. Mindfulness meditation is a set of mental activities specifically aimed at experiencing a state of uninterrupted mindfulness. It is that split second as we focus on a thing just before we objectify it with a label. That split second of awareness is interlocked with the rest of reality, not separate from it. Mindfulness meditation is how we train ourselves to prolong that moment of awareness. Once found, mindfulness opens a many interesting aspects.

1. The Characteristics of Mindfulness
 - a. Non-judgmental observation. Can't examine something fully if our preconceptions are layered on it. What is, is.
 - b. It is impartial watchfulness, it plays no favorites.
 - c. It is non-conceptual awareness.
 - d. It is present-time awareness. Remembering our second grade teacher is memory. Aware that we are remembering the second grade teacher is mindfulness.
 - e. It is non-egotistical alertness.
 - f. It is goal-less awareness
 - g. It is awareness of change.
 - h. It is an unbiased observer aware of the continuing play of the universe within.
 - i. It is participatory observation – the observer is the observed.
 - j. It is not an intellectual awareness.
 - k. It is objective.
 - l. It is a pre-symbolic function.
2. Three Fundamental Activities
 - a. Mindfulness reminds us of what we are supposed to be doing, it brings us back to the object of mindfulness.
 - b. It sees things as they are, it adds nothing. Conscious thought pastes things on to our experiences and loads us down with concepts and ideas, and plans, fears, and fantasies.
 - c. It sees the deep nature of all phenomena
 - i. Impermanence (Anicca) – All things are inherently transitory
 - ii. Unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha)—Every worldly thing is, in the end, unsatisfying
 - iii. Selflessness – the absence of a permanence, unchanging, entity called Soul or Self (Anatta) – There are no entities that are unchanging or permanent, only processes. *This is a major difference between Yoga and Buddhist teachings. Yoga would say that the Soul or Self (atman) is permanent and that it and Brahman are the same.*
3. Mindfulness (Sati) and Insight (Vipassana) Meditation
 - a. Mindfulness is both the goal and means of meditation. We become Mindfulness by being ever more mindful. Appamada is also Pali for Mindfulness, but means mindfulness in the sense of an absence of

madness. Sati is the wordless knowing of what is and what is not, of what we are doing and how we should go about it. Mindfulness reminds us to apply attention to proper object at the proper time to exert the correct amount of energy needed. As long as this is done, the hindrances can't arise. It is mindfulness that notices our slips in mindfulness and its practice, and it is mindfulness that brings us back.

- b. The mind naturally seeks to repeat pleasant experiences and to avoid unpleasant ones. The natural state of mind leads to those things that through meditation we are seeking to avoid. We seek to avoid them not because they are "bad," but because they are compulsive, because they take over the mind and take our attention in unhelpful directions.
- c. Mindfulness is attention to the reality of now and is antithetical to the dazed state of the mind filled with the hindrances – clinging, grasping, rejecting and avoiding. When we slip out of the mindful state, it is mindfulness that notices and brings us back. Mindfulness is the specific antidote for the hindrances. It is both cure and prevention.
- d. Fully developed mindfulness is total nonattachment and absence of clinging or grasping. Mindfulness is non-superficial awareness, in which we see things below the level of concepts and opinions. This total mindfulness leads to certainty and lack of confusion. But it does not seek to impose its values on those who are less evolved.

Chapter XIV – Mindfulness Versus Concentration

Two separate qualities of the mind – mindfulness and concentration. Ideally they should work together. Concentration forces the mind to one-pointedness.

1. Mindfulness is a delicate function leading to refined sensibilities.
Mindfulness is sensitive and notices.
 - a. Mindfulness does not depend on circumstances of environment.
 - b. It is pure noticing.
 - c. It has no fixed object
 - d. Distractions and interruptions are no barrier
 - e. Cannot be developed by force of will, only by letting go and being present in the moment.
 - f. Cultivated by effortless effort, by pulling the self back to a state of awareness gently.
 - g. It is inclusive
 - h. It is aware of the stone, aware of concentrating on the stone, aware of the shift of awareness from the stone. It is what brings the focus back to the stone.
 - i. It does not react to what it sees. It just sees and understands.
 - j. It is patient with ourselves. Acceptance is the essence of mindfulness.
 - k. It seeks to see us as we are.
 - l. Mindfulness directs the power of concentration
2. Concentration provides power to hold on to one item. It is wholesome one-pointedness that is free of greed, hatred, delusion, lust. It is a tool that brings wisdom, but it has its limits.

- a. A distraction free environment is conducive to meditation.
- b. An emotional environment free of the five hindrances is imperative. This is an environment that monasteries seek to create where these conditions are cultivated and ones physical security is looked out for.
 - i. Greed for sensual pleasure
 - ii. Hatred
 - iii. Mental lethargy
 - iv. Restlessness
 - v. Mental vacillation
- c. It is exclusive
- d. It focuses the mind like a laser beam, but doesn't understand what it sees.
- e. Concentration provides the power by which mindfulness can penetrate the deepest levels of the mind.
- f. Concentration without a balance of awareness leads to "Stone Buddha" syndrome – so tranquilized that the meditator sits like a stone.

Chapter XV – Meditation in Everyday Life

Meditation must be practiced like any attempt to learn a skill. Meditation that is not applied to daily living is sterile and limited. Its purpose is the radical and permanent transformation of our sensory and cognitive experiences. At some point we realize that mindfulness turns on by itself – a window on the future. It won't happen unless it's practiced and we try to move it into aspects of our daily lives. Meditation is awareness, and it must be applied to each and every activity of our lives. Seated meditation in a quiet room is easiest. Meditation in motion is harder, in the midst of intense egoistic activity is a real challenge. Moving meditation into events of our daily lives is not easy, but it will come with practice.

1. **Walking Meditation:** Helps make the transition – helps dissipate restless energy, yet brings clarity. (see old book pages 168 – 169 for instructions)
2. **Postures:** focus awareness in yoga class. Let it become mindfulness in motion. Apply the same principles to other simple activities.
3. **Slow-Motion Activity:** Promote overall habit of mindfulness by doing simple activities at slower speeds and pay full attention. Intentionally slow down thoughts, words, movements. Notice the extent to which we are responsible for our own suffering, miseries, tensions, etc.
4. **Breath Coordination:** coordinate the breath with other activities.
5. **Stolen Moments:** meditate on boredom. Use sitting at traffic lights as a meditation moment.
6. **Concentration on All Activities:** Allow meditation to expand into daily life at its own pace. Let it grow slowly over time as abilities grow. Don't do it sometimes and drop it at others. Do it all the time, not just when in a meditation cocoon-like environment.

Chapter XVI – What’s In It for You

The hindrances are more than just unpleasant mental habits. They are a manifestation of the ego process itself. Ego is essentially a feeling of separation, a distance between self and other. It is held together by constantly practicing it, and that is what the hindrances help to do. The ego is supported by the hindrances. Greed and lust are attempts to get “some of that” for me; hatred and aversion are attempts to place greater distance between “me and that”.

Clear mindfulness inhibits the growth of the hindrances – continuous mindfulness extinguishes them allowing us to share our loving-kindness. Our ultimate essence is holy and good. It has been blocked like water behind a dam. The hindrances are bricks the dam’s built of. Mindfulness dissolves the bricks and allows compassion and sympathetic joy to flow forth.

And in the midst of endless change and motion, there is no watcher, only watching. From this living laboratory we see that life is marked by disappointment and frustration, but now we see the source. We become acquainted with dukkha, the unsatisfactory nature of all existence. We see dukkha at all levels of life. We see that suffering follows clinging (and the hindrances) like day follows night.

Through the illumination of mindfulness, the feeling of a self, an “I” or “being” anything, loses its solidity and dissolves. Carving is dropped and a great burden is lifted.