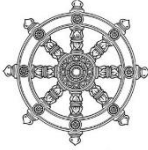
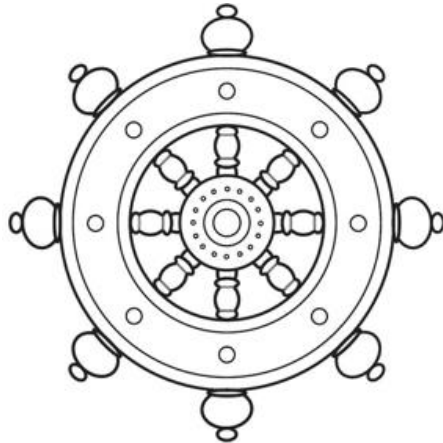
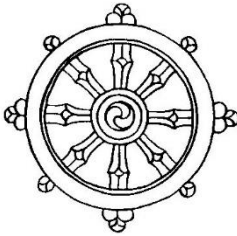


New Buddha Way



STARTING MINDFULNESS PRACTICE



Booklet No. 1
January 2015 Geoff Hunt
Guildford 2nd Edition

“Peace through self-understanding”

Starting Mindfulness Practice

The Buddha said: *‘And how is a monk skilled in knowing the ways of his own mind? It is just as if a woman or a man, young, youthful and fond of ornaments, would look at their face in a clean, bright mirror ... If they then see any dust or dirt, they will make all effort to remove it’.*

NEW BUDDHA WAY BOOKLETS, No. 1

January 2015 – Geoff Hunt - Guildford – 2nd Edition

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www.newbuddhaway.org

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1 STRESS & WORRY OR PEACE & WISDOM?

Jane asked Pete why he looked rather glum. Pete said, 'Three weeks ago I won £500 in a raffle'. Jane asked, 'So why are you glum!' Pete said, 'Two weeks ago a distant cousin died and left me £10,000 in her will'. Jane asked, 'Really! So why are you glum?'. Pete said, 'One week ago, I won one million pounds in the national lottery'. Jane said, 'Wow! So why are you glum? Pete replied, 'Well, this week ... I got nothing at all'.

Never satisfied? How much are you like Pete in this story? Aren't we all a good deal like this? How far is your perennial dissatisfaction a product of your own making? To find out you would have to examine yourself. But how? How can self-understanding be attained? Is there a path to greater wisdom, compassion and peace?

2 ATTENTION

Attention is the first step. It is at the heart of mindfulness, and mindfulness is at the heart of self-understanding. So, begin to strengthen the power of your attention, and notice how it is an inexplicable power that you depend on yet do not really harness. Begin to harness it now.

2.1 Exercise: noticing the unnoticed

Expand the depth and scope of your attention to sights and sounds, regardless of how aimless it might seem or how insignificant the newly noticed objects are. Whether walking, talking, waiting, driving or eating, begin to notice just that little bit more than you usually would. Sitting at my laptop I now notice what I had not noticed: the distant sound of a lawnmower, occasional chatter of starlings on the roof, the local bus passing by, a fine cobweb in the corner without a spider, a slight blemish on the carpet. Do this from time to time as an elementary exercise in 'awakening'.

2.2 Exercise: attentive strolling

If you are fortunate, you have five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. These are the instruments of your ability to pay attention to anything.

Let's say you are walking down a leafy lane or urban back alley. For the first two minutes, put your sense of vision into hyper-drive and notice everything and anything around you, e.g. leaves, stones, grasses, wood, insects, and so on. Do not just note them in general, but one at a time, taking note of the particular features of each item. Also note the unpleasant things, but in a neutral way if possible. Do not try to analyse, explain or judge; just observe closely.

Next, turn up your hearing capacity and for the next two minutes attend to all the sounds around you. For example, wind rustling, rain pattering, dog barking, bird tweeting, aeroplane passing overhead, a car door closing, someone shouting in the distance. Again, there will be pleasant and unpleasant things, but take it all in your stride.

Next is touch, and for two minutes touch whatever you can. Touch the grass, the leaves, the branches, a mouldy stick, a passing black beetle, a puddle, a pebble or sand. There will be some things you would not wish to touch, so just for a moment imagine you are touching them and watch your own rejecting reaction.

Next, be like your dog: sniff everything. For example, the damp earth, some flowers or vegetation, the neighbour's cooking or some indefinable whiffs. You might even like to try smelling a leaf, a grass or piece of bark.

Finally, there is taste. What on earth could we do with that while on a stroll? If you have access to the countryside or park there would be a lot. When I was a boy in Wales I discovered that clover petals were sweet at the roots, that a thistle head had a nutty bit in the middle and that fresh grass was quite tasty. Lots of wild plants are edible, of course. (This is not a health and safety manual, but please be careful about what you put in your mouth.)

Concerning taste: when you get home and have your next meal, slowly and deliberately eat the food, paying close attention to the taste and texture of each morsel.

If you are in a pleasant place then obviously this attentive stroll will be a pleasantly awakening experience. You might even feel quite exhilarated and begin to feel you have been missing a lot. The next thought might be that not all the sense experiences were pleasant, but they were there in your world and many of them may have been put there or left behind by other human beings. You might now feel sad or irritated. Note such feelings.

2.3 Exercise: attention to your palm

Hold up the palm of your hand in front of your face and examine the lines on it. When did you last do this? Have you *ever* done this carefully? Follow the lines in your hand. Where do they start and end? Which is thick and which thin? Which are long, which short and which very short and fine? Where does the skin fold when you start to close your hand? Do new lines appear?

Can you now close your eyes and remember the main pattern of lines? How many times would you need to do that before you could draw the pattern on a piece of paper without looking at your hand? Try it.

Maybe your power of attention is beginning to develop. Now we need to fine-tune it and transform it into 'mindfulness' by turning it inward.

3 MINDFULNESS AS REFLEXIVE ATTENTION

What is meant by 'turning attention inward'? That is, how do we make attention reflexive? The world is not really divided into an inner 'mental world' and outer 'material world', but it certainly seems that way. We now awaken ourselves by starting from how things seem, and gradually work towards how things really are. The inner is the mental. Here is an exercise to illustrate the point.

3.1 Exercise: mental arithmetic

Close your eyes and, starting with the number 1, keep adding three, in your mind. So the series starts like this: 1, 4, 7, 10... Now go on purely in your mind, not speaking, not using your fingers or anything to count. Continue until you get to a figure over 50 or 60.

Questions: where was this counting going on? Was it in a place with a size and shape? Could anyone else see this place? Indeed could *you* see this place? As you sat there with your eyes closed would someone who came into the room know immediately what you were doing? If they asked and you said, 'mental arithmetic', would they be able to check independently to find out if that were true? Could they know if you were lying?

Anyway, it seems reasonable to say 'the counting was in my mind', so let's go with that idea on the first part of the path.

If you had a pain in your body, say in your knee, where is the experience of pain? Could someone else feel your pain? Perhaps they could see you walking with a limp, but how could they check on your experience of your pain? Again, let's say the experience of the pain is in your mind.

It's initially helpful to consider mindfulness as paying *inner* attention, attention to that space we call 'the mind', even if it is not really a space, since one cannot measure it or locate its boundaries. I notice that adding three to the previous number becomes more difficult after about 31, and also notice that as I go higher I feel increasingly unsure if I've got it right. This kind of noticing is very close to 'being mindful' in the meditational sense. You have taken the first step.

3.2 Exercise: mindfulness of hearing

Sit comfortably and alertly with your eyes closed and pretend that you are a kind of satellite dish. You cannot transmit anything, but you are very sensitive to any sounds around you. Without discrimination or judgement note how many different sounds you are picking up. It does not matter whether they appear important or trivial, pleasant or unpleasant, near or far, just note each one carefully and then be receptive to other sounds. You may focus for a while on one particular sound, and note how it is made up of several different sounds or how it is changing. You may also note some other things about how your mind wants to work with these sounds by identifying, explaining and judging.

Remember, you are not really concerned with the source or meaning of the sound. It does not matter where it is coming from or what is making it. You are a satellite dish, so you cannot think or interpret or pass judgement. The sound is just a ping in your mental space, rather like adding 3 to 7 is a ping in your mental space.

After five minutes of this you should take a pen and paper and question yourself about the details of this experience. The questions might include the following. Was it a calming exercise? How many different sounds were there, such as a car passing by, someone coughing, a pigeon cooing, aeroplane passing overhead, rain falling, your tummy rumbling or a chair creaking? Did your attention shift to a sound that was louder or more 'important' or 'interesting' to you than another one? Did your ability to listen

and pick out different sounds improve with time? Did you find yourself becoming absorbed or 'losing yourself' in the sounds and, if so, was that calming? Did you notice how the sounds continually shift and flow and are never the same at any point in time? Did you also notice that it was hard to be completely non-judgemental, in the sense that every sound was not *just* a sound but a sound *of something* – that is, you found yourself trying to *identify* the sound so as to weigh it up?

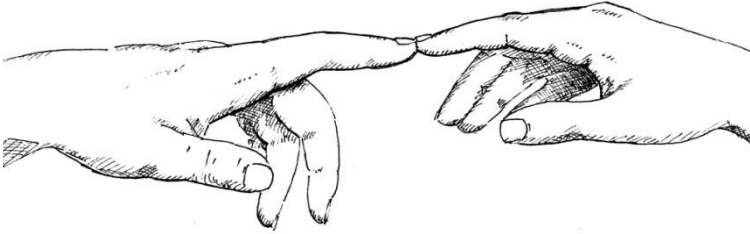
A very important question is how many of these sounds you would have noticed had you not been asked to notice them? You will probably find that only a small fraction, and maybe none at all, would have been noticed. We could repeat this exercise with sights, tastes, smells and touches, and we might then conclude that if we could add up all the things we could potentially notice at any point in time they are far greater than the number of things we do actually notice at that point. If you are worrying about some matter then you notice almost nothing at all, even if you are in a novel or beautiful environment.

Another important question, then, is: On what basis am I selecting what I pay attention to? That is, how or why did I come to be attending to it? Indeed, am I *selecting* at all or am I driven or guided by some inner forces I do not acknowledge or understand?

3.3 Exercise: finger-tips

Adopt a recommended posture, and close your eyes. Meditate on your breathing for a few minutes.

Now, lift your hands up in front of you and bring your two index fingers into contact with one another and press them together. Now focus on the sensation of contact. Do this for 10 or 15 minutes or more, trying to let go of any imagery of your fingers and hands and arms and of any thoughts about what you are doing. Stay entirely with the sensation of the finger contact.



I shall now make some comments about this, but it is better for you to do the exercise before reading those.

You may find that the finger-contact takes on a life of its own. Because it is a part of the body touching another part of the same body, it is easier to let go of the divided sense of 'me' touching 'it'. In this contrived situation the mental is the material and the material is the mental, in a way. It is as though the finger-contact is just there by itself, suspended in isolation, albeit undergoing some subtle changes. It is real; it is there. Perhaps it is 'me' and 'not me' at the same time?

4 LIMBERING UP FOR MEDITATION

Meditation is not easy if the body and mind are not in the right condition for it. If you are tired you may just fall asleep.

And your body may be uncomfortable, there may be tension in it. You may be stressed or anxious. You may not be fully aware of that.

Often we need to do a little pre-meditation first. Pre-meditation exercises come next.

4.1 Exercise: The sigh of letting go

Sometimes following a period of anxiety or worry something good happens or we get some good news and we feel relieved. The body might express that as a sigh, or as a smile. It works the other way around too. Smiling, even if you don't feel like it, can help you. Particularly helpful is the sigh. As you

settle into meditation take a deep breath and then sigh deeply, saying to yourself ‘This is a relief!’ This is a form of letting go.

4.2 Exercise: body-scan

Sit in one of the recommended postures and close your eyes. Imagine a special kind of body scanner is slowly passing through your body from head to toe. Do not miss any part of your body, whether inside or on the surface, as the scanner passes down through your forehead and brow, nose, tongue, jaw muscles and so on, and eventually down through your back, knees, calves, ankles, feet and toes. This should take about 3–5 minutes, so you may find yourself scanning too quickly, which will bring no benefit. Try it a few times until you can do it slowly, and paying close attention to what your body is doing at the scanning point.

You may detect tension or discomfort in some places, such as brow, jaw, tongue, neck, shoulders, back, belly, hips, knees or ankles, which you had not noticed before the scan. When you notice any tension, gently release it by imagining it draining down through your body into the ground, rather like a lightning conductor. Continue with the rest of the body scan. Habitual tension may be difficult to detect and release, which is why you must scan slowly and pay close attention. The more often you do it the more you will notice.

4.3 Why Posture?

There are some specific ways in which posture facilitates meditation:

Optimal Breathing: Any posture should facilitate breathing. In other words, a posture that inhibits or distorts regular breathing will generally be a hindrance to meditation. This is because, as we shall see below, a certain kind of breathing is critical to developing meditation.

Having said that, it is a matter of breathing optimally for your personal circumstances, whether you are young, old, healthy or sick.

Sustainability: Any posture should not eventually undermine itself because it is straining against gravity and/or the body’s anatomy and physiology. It should be a posture that can continue long enough for meditation to do its work. A posture is unsustainable if, for example, it induces pain in the lower back, neck or knees.

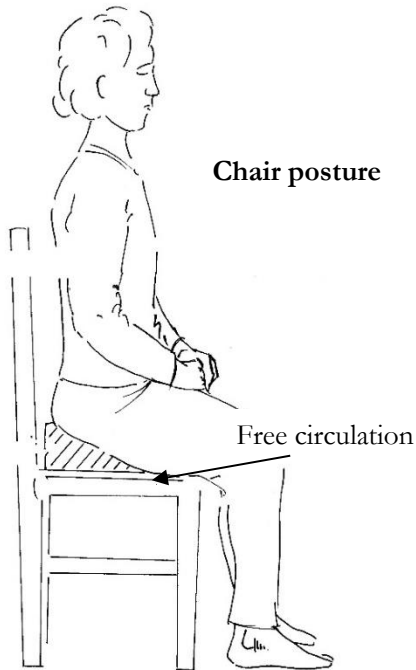
Still, you might have to overcome short-term discomforts in the legs in learning to adopt a good posture. A real hindrance to meditation is slouching in any position, as encouraged by Western-style armchairs.

Discipline: Meditation requires self-discipline. The work involved in adopting a good posture and staying with it in stillness and alertness supports the mental discipline required for growing attention, mindfulness and concentration, with the benefits they bring.

4.4 Exercise: Chair posture

You can meditate perfectly well on a chair. But a soft armchair or divan of any sort is unsuitable.

The chair should preferably be quite hard, something like a plain dining room chair.



As shown in the drawing, the front edge of the chair should not cut off the circulation in your thighs. So a cushion under the feet may help to raise the thighs sufficiently.

There are also firm wedge cushions available to place on the chair, and these tilt the body forward slightly in a way that assists both the spine and the thigh circulation. Your legs should not be crossed, and the soles of your feet should be squarely on the ground, about a shoulder's width apart.

In most circumstances it is not advisable to lean back in the chair, but to sit in self-supporting fashion with an upright posture. Slouching is definitely unhelpful. Your head should be ever so slightly tilted forward and your shoulders gently held back.

Enclose your left thumb in your right hand and rest both hands clasped together in your lap. There should be no unnecessary tension anywhere in the body, such as neck, shoulders, arms or knees. Do not allow the weight of your arms and hands to pull your shoulders and back forward.

You may prefer simply to place your palms on your knees. Your hands should rest palms down on the knees, not face up in the air.

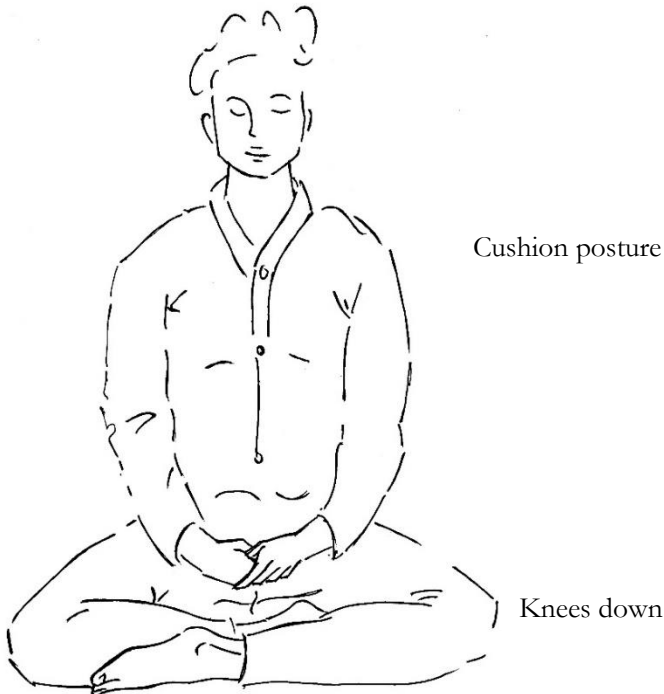
Should your eyes be open or closed? It is best to begin with eyes closed, which will help to calm the mind. After a while you may choose to open them and rest your eyes on the ground at about 45 degrees. Do not stare at or examine anything. If you are sleepy then keep the eyes open from the start.

All I am describing here would have to be qualified in cases of sickness, physical challenges and infirmity. Since I cannot run through all of these possibilities here, and in any case I am not competent to do so, supplementary advice may be needed from a doctor or therapist.

4.5 Exercise: Cushion posture

You could also try using a meditation cushion, and it is important to choose one that is supportive for your body proportions. Depth, width and firmness are all important. Household cushions are generally not suitable as they are too soft to support the body's weight. Taller or less flexible people usually find they need a deeper cushion. It is best to try out several shapes and sizes before purchasing one. If you wish to try this, then the position

recommended by NBW is the ankles-down one as shown in the drawing. There is a technique for moving into this position, as follows.



Sit on the front half to one-third of the cushion, which is placed a little towards the rear of the meditation mat. Lean forward. Put the outside of the left ankle on the ground, with the side of the knee on the ground too. Put the outside of the right ankle on the ground, with the side of that knee on the ground too. The right foot will now be in front of the left foot. You have to lean forward to be able to get the legs into this position. As you lean forward, pull the cushion under you, so that it is comfortably positioned to hold you in an erect posture. You will now be sitting on the front half to one-third of the cushion and you may need to wriggle a little to establish a firm, comfortable and erect posture.

The knees *must* be on the ground, because sitting with knees raised will eventually cause backache and is not suitable for meditation. After some time in this position, you could change the legs around, so that the left foot will be in front. The instructions for the position of back, hands and eyes are the same as for the chair posture.

5 FIXED MINDFULNESS (CONCENTRATION)

What will happen if you fix your mindfulness on one object, not deviating from it, and letting go of 'distractions' as they arise. Gradually the mind will become tranquil and concentrated i.e. the very opposite of agitated and scattered. So let us now try this in some exercises – what is sometimes called 'concentration meditation' or 'tranquillity meditation'.

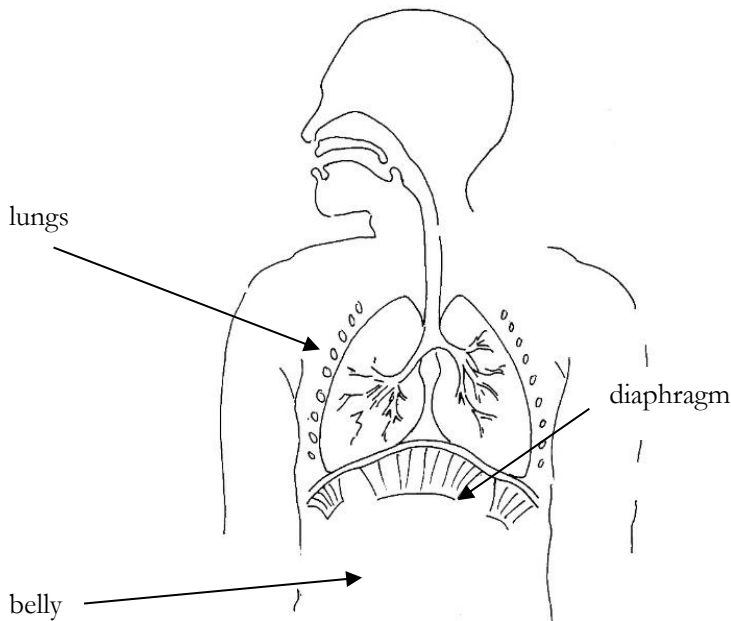
5.1 Exercise: nose-breath concentration

Here is the first concentration meditation exercise. You focus on one small aspect of breathing: the sensation of breath around the nostrils. Again, adopt a meditation posture, close the eyes, and breathe normally. Now locate and then follow the 'touch' of the air at the nostrils or just inside them. You may need deliberately to snort in and out a couple of times to locate this sensation, since you will not be used to attending to it. Now spend about ten minutes watching this sensation of breath. Count each out-breath, counting from one to four, and then repeating. If, after a while, you do not feel the need to count in order to maintain focus on the breath, then let it go.

This will now form the basis of a deeper meditation technique called belly-breathing.

5.2 Exercise: belly-breathing concentration

Now look at the diagram which is a grossly simplified diagram of the chest and belly regions. You will see that there is a sheet of muscle, almost dividing your insides into two 'halves'. This muscle is called the diaphragm and it is like a flexible wall between the lung and the belly areas. It is this sheet of muscle



that largely controls the inflation of the lungs, although you will not be aware of it, but only of its effects.

Other muscles are involved in breathing: the small muscles between the ribs and the belly region as a whole. The contraction of the diaphragm pulls the ribcage down and draws the air in, pushing down on the belly. There's a brief moment of tension and then the diaphragm lets go so that the ribcage moves up to its previous position while pushing out the air. Then there is another pause, when the lungs are inactive, but the need for air starts the cycle again, and this is repeated roughly about six hundred million times in a life-time of 70 years.

Now the exercise: Once again in your meditation posture with eyes closed, pay attention to the rise and fall of your belly. At first, you may not notice that the belly is rising and falling slightly when breathing. To develop your awareness of this motion, place your hand on your belly just under the ribcage, and deliberately breathe in and out quite deeply. Once you have acknowledged the belly-motion, return your hand to the position

recommended, and continue to breathe normally, spending about five minutes being aware of your belly rising and falling. Count each pulling-in of the belly as breath goes out, counting from one to four, and then repeating.

You should find that exhaling takes longer than inhaling. If, after a while, you do not feel the need to count in order to maintain focus on the belly, then let it go.

You will have already noticed that if we try to stay mindful of just one experience then the mind keeps wandering off. For example, if we try to keep the mind resting in the ongoing experience of air touching the nostrils as we breath, and nothing else, we shall find that we can hardly go a couple of seconds without a 'distraction'. This could be a thought, hearing something, a desire to sneeze, a pain in the back, a memory, or curiosity about what my fellow meditator is doing or what the time is. However, just keep returning to the observing of the object of meditation e.g. breath-sensation or belly-motion.

5.3 Exercise: mental image concentration

We could take a purely mental object as our object of concentration. The easiest one is a ball of light or a coloured disc. This is not a real object, but one that you conjure up in your mind. So, close your eyes and imagine you see before you a ball of light. It is a helpful ball, one that is bringing light into your mind, into your life. Keeping your eyes closed just keep 'watching' the ball. Of course, we know by now that the mind will wander away from it, so we have patiently to keep returning to fixing our inner gaze on the light or colour. Do this for at least ten minutes. Note how you feel when you stop.

6 GOING DEEPER INTO MINDFULNESS

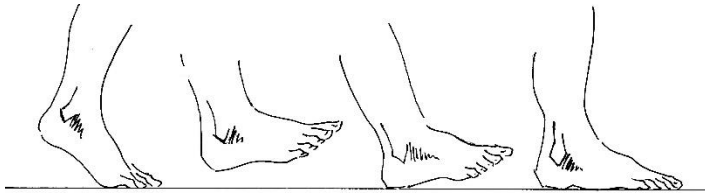
6.1 Exercise: Walking mindfulness

Before you try the exercise in walking mindfulness you need precisely to understand the instruction. You need to be mindful of the motion of the left foot only (or right foot only). It is best to focus on one foot because it encourages the mind to stay in one place and be calm, as opposed to switching attention from one foot to the other as you walk.

Preferably having removed your shoes (and your socks if you wish), you should walk very slowly, with short steps. It is well to remind yourself as you start that 'I am not walking, I am meditating'. This is because familiarity is the enemy of mindfulness. Also, if you *think* you are walking then you pay attention to all the wrong things, such as: 'Am I walking properly?' or 'Am I catching up with the person in front of me?' Pay close and continuing attention to the real-time *experience* of the motion of the left foot.

It may help to settle your mind in this experience if you say to yourself the following words as your left foot goes through four phases of the gait cycle: 'lifting', 'moving', 'placing', 'pressing'. Say 'lifting' as the foot takes off from the ball and toes; say 'moving' as the foot goes through the air; say 'placing' as the foot settles on the heel; say 'pressing' once as the foot takes the weight on the heel and the ball of the foot; and then say 'lifting' again and repeat the motion. After a while you should be able to drop the words.

There may be a tendency to shift the attention to the other foot as it begins to lift, but resist this and keep the attention on the pressing of the left foot. (Of course, one could do all of this with the right foot, if one prefers.)



Lifting moving placing pressing-pressing

The mind will, inevitably, wander onto thoughts, anxieties, shoes, and ships, and sealing-wax, cabbages and kings, and why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings. Persistently, gently and without frustration, bring the mind back to attending to the foot-motion in all its detail.

So, find a quiet place where you can walk in a circle or up and down. In a meditation room you would do this with others, but you could also do it alone at home. Take off your shoes and either in bare feet or socks stand

with a straight back and your eyes directed straight ahead. You might like to put your left hand in the middle of your chest and your right hand on top of it. Start walking very slowly with only a few centimetres between one step and the next. If you are walking in a line of meditators then you will need to maintain a sense of space in relation to the others as you walk. As you begin, remind yourself that 'I am not walking, I am meditating'. Then pay close and continuing attention to the motion of one foot only, in fact to the experience and not to 'the foot'. Try not to ask yourself: 'Am I doing this right?' Just do it with all your attention on the motion and sensations. Breathe deeply and regularly. When the mind wanders immediately bring it back to the motion-experience. Continue with this for at least ten minutes, but a 20-minute period is more effective.

6.2 Exercise: Standing mindfulness

This exercise develops a more refined ability to attend to subtle changes. These are changes in the pressure in the soles of the feet and in the tension of muscles around the feet and legs as balance is maintained in standing. Again, due to familiarity, we adults take for granted the small and fluid adjustments we must constantly make just to stay upright.

Find a quiet place. Take off your shoes and either in bare feet or socks stand with a straight back and about 25 cm (ten inches) separating the big toes. The head is tilted ever so slightly forward, with the eyes resting on the ground at about 45 degrees. The arms should either be hanging at the sides or you can place the right hand over the left hand in the dip of the chest. As you begin, remind yourself: 'I am not standing, I am meditating'. Then pay close and continuing attention to the changes in pressure in the soles. Also note changes in tension in the muscles of the feet and ankles. Breathe deeply and regularly. When the mind wanders, immediately bring it back to the experience of sensations in the sole and ankles. Continue with this for at least ten minutes, but a 20-minute period is usually more effective.

6.3 Exercise: bodily discomfort and pleasures

This exercise should only be tried after you have got used to walking and standing meditation.

Find a quiet place and adopt a recommended posture. Do a body-scan as mentioned earlier. For about 20 minutes just watch your own breathing. After this period the mind will probably be much calmer and ready to attend to subtle sensations in the body. Pay close and continuing attention to 'discomforts' in the body. I am not speaking of serious pains. There may be an itch, a desire to cough or sneeze, a slight ache in the knees or in the lower back, wind in the stomach or elsewhere. Note each sensation, look into it, inwardly saying 'sensation ... sensation'. Investigate its character. Maintain a deep and regular breath. Continue with this for at least another ten minutes, but a 20-minute period is usually better.

Then there is the opposite: comforts and delights. Now, try the same with a piece of chocolate, a grape, an olive – something you like – observe the 'smiley' feeling in your mind as you taste the item.

Awareness is crucial. Be a 'Buddha', for that is what 'Buddha' means: 'Aware One' or 'Awakened One'.

6.4 Exercise: mental quality

Now you can try to observe your changing states of mind, or the general drift of it, in a detached way, without rejecting it or clinging to it.

Examples of states of mind are: Greedy, relieved, hateful, angry, violent, deluded, joyful, ignorant, narrow, scattered, immature, resentful, depressed, humiliated, sense of worthlessness, fearful, kindly, lusty, grateful, generous, magnanimous, concentrated, grieving, smug, sceptical, cynical, absorbed in fun, absent mind, conceited, inquisitive, expectant, frustrated, suspicious, equanimity... and many more.

Every so often you could look at your own state of mind. You will notice that this is difficult to do when you are swept up in the normal course of domestic or office events. It will be easier to observe your state of mind when you have a moment to yourself, such as waking up in the morning, going to the shops, having a shower, sitting on the loo, or settling down on arriving at your workplace.

I emphasise that this is not an opportunity to pass comment on encounters with other people or to express particular aspirations or disappointments. It is an attempt to capture your general state of mind at a particular point. You do not say, 'I feel X state of mind', and you do not say,

'I feel X state of mind because of Y'. No 'I' and no 'because'. You simply say the name of the state of mind. If you cannot pinpoint the 'right' word, still note the state, without analysis and without judging yourself.

Remember that it should be more than a fleeting mood in order to count as a state of mind, but fleeting moods might be noted too. Watch how long the states last – very short, short, moderate, long, enduring. And how deep or shallow are they?

6.5 Review: early benefits?

Once you have tried practising these exercises many times over several weeks, let us say eight weeks, it will be time to review the benefits and obstacles. Questions to ask yourself so far are:

Am I paying more attention to what is around me? Am I starting to notice things I would not have noticed earlier? Am I noticing more things going on in my body than I used to? Am I able, now and then, able to catch myself just before I react in a negative or silly way to something or someone? Am I more aware than I used to be of my quality of mind: wanting, rejecting, calm or agitated?

Also, of course, ask yourself what is in your mind or attitude that may be hindering the practice of these exercises. Could it be desire, ill-will, laziness, worry or doubt?

7 YOUR MEDITATION ROUTINE

7.1 How do the exercises fit together?

You have now overviewed quite a few exercises here. You may ask: how do they fit together? Do I do all of them any time I like? Here is the answer:

To begin with, try out *all* the exercises over a period of some weeks. That would be just a trial run, or a familiarisation tour.

Some exercises are more important than others. Some are introductions or easing into mindfulness (or 'getting into it') especially for complete beginners, some are for limbering up or warming up before meditating with effort, and some are fundamental and should be regular. Looking back at the table of contents at the beginning of this booklet:

- 1) Getting into it: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.
- 2) Limbering up: 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.
- 3) Regular effort: 5.1 or 5.2 or 5.3; 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5.

The concentration exercises are generally more suitable for doing in the meditation room with others, and probably in short bursts at home. The mindfulness exercises - in which one is observing a process such as changing sensations of walking, hearing, tasting, discomforts – can be observed in the meditation room but also whatever you are doing wherever you are.

7.2 Start meditating at home now

- 1) Make a Still Point for yourself. This is a place at home where you would have an opportunity to be alone at some time during the day. The best time for many people would be when getting up in the morning, having just finished with the bathroom.
- 2) The Still Point would be a personal place with perhaps a candle and/or flower and/or some peaceful and inspiring image and a small bell. Some Still Points are simple and some elaborate. It's up to you. (See NBW website for suppliers.)
- 3) Unless you wish to stand, you should place your chair, stool or meditation cushion in front of the Still Point.
- 4) Let anyone else around know that you are meditating. Adopt one of the recommended postures. Look at your Still Point and give a deep sigh of relief. Now scan your body. Invite (gently ring) the bell to mark the start of your meditation period.
- 5) Next, close your eyes, and closely and continuously watch the whole motion of your breathing in and out, including the gentle rise and fall of the belly as you breathe normally.
- 6) As thoughts, feelings and sensations arise, acknowledge them and at once gently and repeatedly let them go and return to watching the breath.
- 7) Do this for at least ten minutes. Twenty minutes is better. Invite the bell to close the meditation session and let everyone know you are ready to begin another day.
- 8) Do this again before you go to bed. Once settled into this daily practice, you could perhaps do this practice with your partner and family.

9) During the day, whatever you are doing, you should practise mindfulness in short bursts, until one day it becomes second nature to you.

7.3 Entering the meditation room

When you go through the door into the meditation room you are entering a special room. You let go of chatting and looking at others and you turn your mind inwards. Bow at the door and walk slowly to your seat. Think of it as going into a 'mindfulness observatory', the place where you are wholly devoted to observing the motions of your own mind. You try your best to be mindful continuously for the whole session. A typical one hour Community Session will appear to be divided into seven parts:

- 1) Entering the meditation room
- 2) An opening observance
- 3) Breathing meditation
- 4) Walking/standing meditation
- 5) Breathing meditation again
- 6) A closing observance
- 7) Leaving the meditation room (followed by a tea break & Dhamma talk)

However, your mindfulness in the room is not really divided at all. When following the meditation routine you are also now and then fleetingly observing your own so-called 'distractions' or passing fascinations. That is, you are intermittently observing your own mind: bodily sensations, bodily movements, the rise and fall of thoughts, pleasures and discomforts, emotions, mental images, memories, worries and so on.

So while you try to stay with your object of meditation you also briefly observe distracting thoughts, sounds etc. But just note them as something in your mind and let them go. Even when you are getting up to stand or starting to sit down again you don't take a break from mindfulness and casually look around, but observe your body moving and the sensations. You could say to yourself 'body getting up, getting up' or 'body sitting down, sitting down' as you observe.

In the Community Sessions there are brief routines – which we call ‘observances’ – which present an outline of the whole teaching (The Dhamma) and helps to remind us why we are attending.

These observances also help to put us in a mindful frame of mind and meditate together in an orderly, peaceful and mutually supportive way.

7.4 Opening observance

A Facilitator will get up and kneel at the centrepiece (large bell, flowers, etc.) to perform the ‘opening observance’. This is not a time for you to start thinking about the centre-piece items or the facilitator, but simply to be ‘absorbed’ in the motions of the Facilitator and the sound of the bell. Listen carefully to these words.

The large bell is invited four times with these words:

“We invite the bell four times

To remind us of the Four Noble Truths:

1 There is abiding human dissatisfaction, bewilderment and conflict

2 This has its condition or cause in our misunderstanding our reality and forever craving and rejecting

3 Peace is possible

4 And that is by following the Noble Eightfold Path of mindfulness of body, speech and mind, gradually leading us to greater wisdom, compassion & peace.”

7.5 Closing observance

At the end of the meditation period, a Facilitator will get up and kneel at the centrepiece to perform the ‘closing observances’. These words are said:

“We invite the bell again four times. This time to remind us of four selfless actions we should engage in each day.

1. Kindliness towards all people and all living things

2. Compassion towards all people and all living things

3. Generosity towards all people and all living things

4. Gratitude towards all people and all living things.”

The little 'walking bell' will be invited and all will stand and bow to show each other respect in our human equality. Remaining mindful, everyone leaves the 'mindfulness observatory' by walking around the edge of the room to the door.

Next, regular attendance at the free NBW sessions is important if you are serious about this life-change.

7.6 What's Next? Living in mindfulness

In NBW, the Newcomers' and Beginners' Class – supported by this Booklet - is your gateway to following a long and enlightening path to greater wisdom, compassion and peace. Once through the gateway you are invited to attend the weekly Community Sessions and learn a lot more – free of charge, of course.

Mindfulness cannot work fully if it does not colour everything about you, helping you to be wiser, more compassionate and more peaceful. It's not a quick fix. So far, we may have grasped it as a technique, using simple exercises. That's a good start. But there is a lot more. There is mindful speaking and listening, mindful acting and not-acting, mindful working, mindful effort, all contributing to your development of understanding of the human condition and gently bringing about your own 'change of heart'. Mindfulness is one aspect among eight. Together, these are 'The Noble Eightfold Path':

1. Right Understanding (View)
2. Right Attitude (Intention)
3. Right Speaking & Listening (Communicating)
4. Right action and non-action (Relationships)
5. Right Work (Livelihood)
6. Right Effort (Endeavour)
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

You have now worked on the basics of Nos. 7 and 8 of the Path. By attending the Community Sessions regularly and some Retreats and Study Workshops you will learn about 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The follower of the Path ...

'...abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.'

Majjhima Nikāya, p 394

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