

# Awakening to Mindfulness

## *The Self-Transforming Brain*

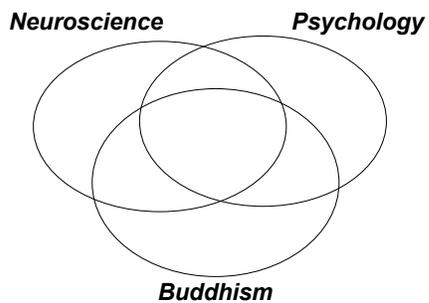
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## Key Topics

- Framework
- The Mind/Brain System
- Your Amazing Brain
- How Your Brain Pays Attention
- Individual Profiles of Mindfulness
- Methods for Improving Mindfulness
- Closing Discussion

## Common - and Fertile - Ground



*We ask, "What is a thought?"*

*We don't know,*

*yet we are thinking continually.*

Venerable Ani Tenzin Palmo

## The Mind/Brain System

- "Mind" = flow of information within the nervous system; mainly unconscious
- Apart from hypothetical transcendental factors, your mind *is* what your brain *does*.
- As your brain changes, your mind changes. As your mind changes, your brain changes. Mental activity - the flow of information - maps to neural activity, the flow of matter and energy.
- Therefore, *you can use your mind to change your brain to change your mind* - to benefit your whole being and every other being you touch.

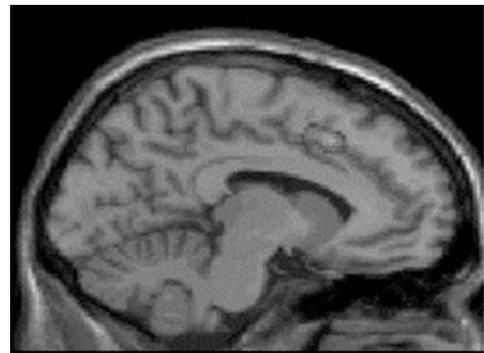
## Mental Activity Sculpts Neural Structure

- What flows through your mind sculpts your brain. Immaterial experience leaves material traces behind:
  - Increased blood/nutrient flow to active regions
  - Epigenetics: experience affects gene expression
  - "Neurons that fire together wire together."
    - Increasing excitability of active neurons
    - Strengthening existing synapses
    - Building new synapses; thickening cortex; from womb to deathbed
    - Neuronal "pruning" - "use it or lose it"
- Your experience *matters*. Both for how it feels in the moment and for the lasting residues it leaves behind, woven into the fabric of your being.

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## A Meditator



## Physical Effects of Meditation

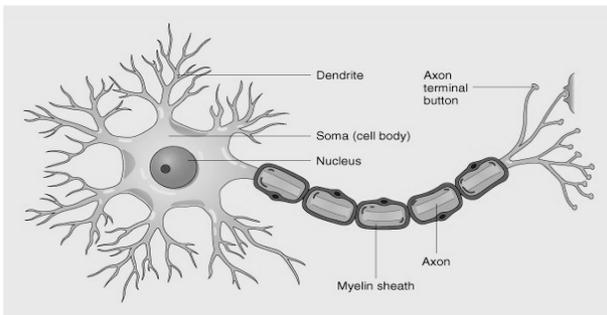
- Thickens and strengthens the anterior (frontal) cingulate cortex and the insula. Those regions are involved with controlled attention, empathy, and compassion – and meditation improves those functions.
- Less cortical thinning with aging
- Increases activation of the left frontal regions, which lifts mood
- Increases the power and reach of fast, gamma-range brainwaves
- Decreases stress-related cortisol
- Stronger immune system

## Your Amazing Brain

### Major Features

- **Size:**
  - 3 pounds of tofu-like tissue
  - 1.1 trillion brain cells
  - 100 billion "gray matter" neurons
- **Activity:**
  - Always on 24/7/365 - Instant access to information on demand
  - 20-25% of blood flow, oxygen, and glucose
- **Speed:**
  - Neurons firing around 5 to 50 times a second (or faster)
  - Signals crossing your brain in a tenth or hundredth of a second
- **Connectivity:**
  - A typical neuron gets inputs from 1000 neurons . . . . .
  - . . . . . and sends its outputs to 1000 more . . . . .
  - . . . . . giving you one hundred trillion synapses.

## One Simple Neuron . . .



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## Your Amazing Brain

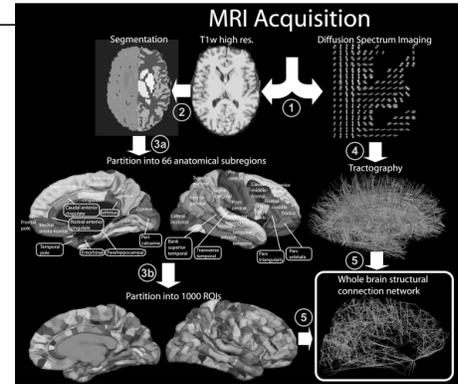
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## Specialization and Teamwork

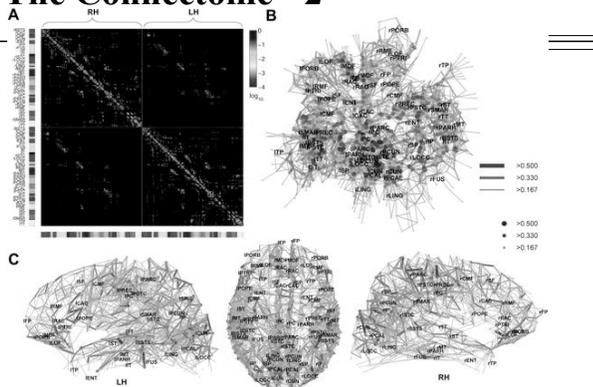
- Specialized functions
  - Speech production differs from comprehension.
  - Face recognition
  
- Working in harmony as a network
  - Network “noise” facilitates individual signals.
  - “Specialization is for insects.” - Robert Heinlein
  - Distributed information - “Holographic”
  - One part can compensate for damage to another.
  
- No localized self -  
 “Self” is in the system, not the cells.

## The Connectome - 1

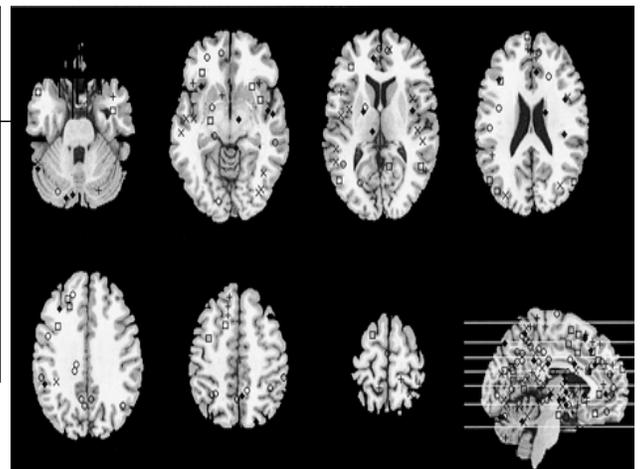


Hagmann, et al., 2008, *PLoS Biology*, 6:1479-1493.

## The Connectome - 2



Hagmann, et al., 2008, *PLoS Biology*, 6:1479-1493.

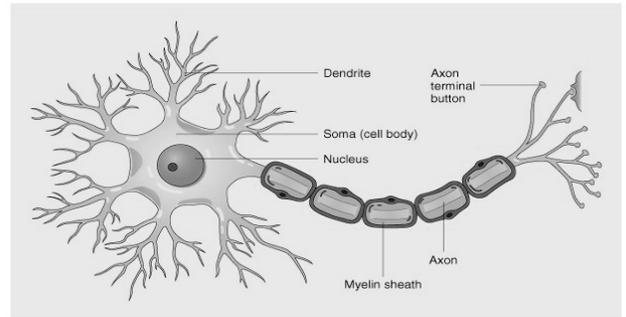


Brain activations of “selfing” - Gillihan, et al., 2005. *Psych Bulletin*, 131:76-97.

## Stability and Instability

- Stasis followed by updating followed by stasis
- Cycles a few milliseconds long. . . or decades
- Forever pulsing: Impermanence
- Fertile openness to creation: Emptiness

## One Simple Neuron . . .



## . . . Multiplied by Billions of Neurons

- 100 billion neurons with 100 trillion synapses
- Possible brain states: 1 followed by a million zeros
- The most complex object known in the universe
- Circular loops:
  - Recursion and self-observation
  - Dynamic, "chaotic" effects: determined, but unpredictable
  - Shared circuitry triggers wandering stream of consciousness
- Overlapping, connected sub-networks: "stream of consciousness"

*The education of attention  
would be an education par excellence.*

William James

## How the Brain Pays Attention

- Holding onto information
- Updating awareness
- Seeking stimulation
- Dopamine and the gate to awareness
- The basal ganglia stimostat

## Individual Differences in Attention

	<b><u>Holding Information</u></b>	<b><u>Updating Awareness</u></b>	<b><u>Seeking Stimulation</u></b>
<b>High</b>	Obsession Over-focusing	Porous filters Distractible Overload	Hyperactive Thrill-seeking
<b>Mod</b>	Concentrates Divides attention	Flexible Assimilation Accommodation	Enthusiastic Adaptive
<b>Low</b>	Fatigues w/Conc. Small WM	Fixed views Oblivious Low learning	Stuck in a rut Apathetic Lethargic

## Supports for Mindfulness

- Have thoughts and feelings of compassion.
- Set intentions.
- Call up a greater sense of safety.
- Evoke positive emotions.
- Have whole body awareness.
- Deliberately look for rewards.
- Consciously “take in the good” of mindfulness.
- Adapt to individual needs.

*Penetrative insight*

*joined with calm abiding*

*utterly eradicates*

*afflicted states.*

Shantideva

## Awakening to Mindfulness

### *Taking in the Good*

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## Key Topics

- Why It's Important to Take in the Good
- The Evolution of Approaching and Avoiding
- The Brain's Negativity Bias
- How to Take in the Good
- Using Memory Machinery to Heal Painful Experiences
- Closing Discussion

## Why It's Important to Take in the Good

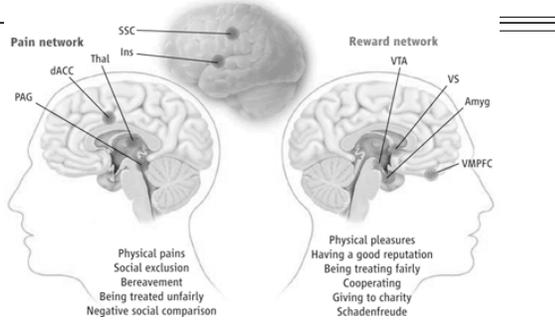
- Freud's "positive introjects"
- Internalization of "corrective emotional experiences"
- Development of internal resources for resilience
- "Learned optimism"
- Increase positive emotions: many physical and mental health benefits

*But how, actually, to do it - especially in light of survival tendencies based in evolution?*

## Evolution of Approaching and Avoiding

- 3.5+ billion years of life
- Crucial functions: approach what promotes survival and avoid what threatens it
  - Motile protozoa will move toward a sucrose gradient and away from a toxic one.
  - Animals approach food, mates, and shelter; they flee from or resist predators and natural hazards.
  - Social animals approach caregivers, allies, and higher social status; they fight rivals, avoid "alphas," and resist lower status.
- Signals and rewards:
  - Pleasure and pain; "hedonic tone"
  - Emotion

## Pain and Reward Circuitry



Pain network: Dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC), insula (Ins), somatosensory cortex (SSC), thalamus (Thal), and periaqueductal gray (PAG).

Reward network: Ventral tegmental area (VTA), ventral striatum (VS), ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), and amygdala (Amyg).

K. Sutliff, in Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2009, *Science*, 323:890-891

## The Negativity Bias

- In evolution, threats had more impact on survival than opportunities. So sticks are more salient than carrots:
  - Amygdala is primed to label experiences negatively
  - Amygdala-hippocampus system flags negative experiences prominently in memory
  - The brain is like velcro for negative experiences and teflon for positive ones.
- Consequently, negative trumps positive:
  - Easy to create learned helplessness, hard to undo
  - People will do more to avoid a loss than get a gain.
  - Takes five positive interactions to undo a negative one
- Negative experiences create vicious cycles.

## One Effect of Chronic Negative Experiences

- Negative experiences are stressful; bodily cascade:
  - Sympathetic nervous system
  - Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis
  - Surges of cortisol and other stress hormones
- Hippocampus forms contextual memories and inhibits the amygdala
- Cortisol:
  - Stimulates and sensitizes the amygdala ("alarm bell")
  - Inhibits and can shrink the hippocampus
- Consequently, chronic negative experiences:
  - Sensitize the alarm bell and take the brakes off it
  - Impair memory capacities

## How to Take in the Good

1. Help positive events become positive experiences.
2. Extend the experience in *time* and *space*:
  - Savor it.
  - Encourage it to expand in your body.
3. Sense that the positive experience is soaking into your brain and body - registering deeply in emotional memory.

## Key Points about Memory

- Schematic storage of selected features
- Recollections are **re-built**, not re-called.
- The emergent brain/mind pattern of the memory also associates to whatever else is in awareness, especially if it is emotionally salient.
- When the memory goes back into storage, it takes with it the other emotionally salient associations.
- Therefore, you can gradually imbue memories with positive emotional associations.
- Explicit, episodic memory will not change, but implicit, emotional memory can.

*The good life, as I conceive it, is a happy life.  
I do not mean that if you are good you will be happy;  
I mean that if you are happy you will be good.*

Bertrand Russell

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These references are for "The Self-Transforming Brain" and "Taking in the Good."  
See [www.WiseBrain.org](http://www.WiseBrain.org) for more.

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# How to Meditate

## The Art of Formal Practice

By Tara Brach

### What is Meditation?

Meditation is commonly described as a training of mental attention that awakens us beyond the conditioned mind and habitual thinking, and reveals the nature of reality. In this guide, the process and the fruit of meditation practice is understood as *Natural Presence*. Presence is a mindful, clear **recognition** of what is happening — here, now — and the open, **allowing space** that includes all experience. There are many supportive strategies (called “skillful means”) that create an atmosphere conducive to deepening presence. The art of practice is employing these strategies with curiosity, kindness and a light touch. The wisdom of practice is remembering that Natural Presence is always and already here. It is the loving awareness that is our essence.

### Part I: How to Establish a Daily Sitting Practice

**Approaching meditation practice:** Attitude is everything. There are many meditative strategies (skillful means) but what makes the difference in terms of spiritual awakening is your quality of earnestness, or **sincerity**. Rather than adding another “should” to your list, choose to practice because you care about connecting with your innate capacity for love, clarity and inner peace. Let this sincerity be the atmosphere that nurtures whatever form your practice takes.

A primary aspect of attitude is **unconditional friendliness** toward the whole meditative process. When we are friendly towards another person, there is a quality of **acceptance**. Yet we often enter meditation with some idea of the kind of inner experience we should be having and judgment about not “doing it right.” Truly -- there is no “right” meditation and striving to get it right reinforces the sense of an imperfect, striving self. Rather, give permission for the meditation experience to be whatever it is. Trust that if you are sincere in your intention toward being awake and openhearted, that in time your practice will carry you home to a sense of wholeness and freedom.

Friendliness also includes an **interest** in what arises -- be it pleasant sensations or fear, peacefulness or confusion. The heart expression of friendliness is **kindness**, regarding the life within and around us with care.

**Creating a container for practice:** It helps to have a regular time and space for cultivating a meditation practice.

**Setting a time** - Morning is often preferred because the mind is calmer than it is later in the day. However, the best time is the time that you can realistically commit to on a regular basis. Some people choose to do two or more short sits, perhaps one at the beginning and one at the end of the day.

Deciding in advance the duration of your sit will help support your practice. For many, the chosen time is between 15-45 minutes. Even fifteen minutes may seem like an eternity in the beginning, but that impression will change with time. If you sit each day, you will experience noticeable benefits (e.g., less reactivity, more calm) and be able to increase your sitting time.

**Finding a space** -- If possible, dedicate a space exclusively to your daily sitting. Choose a relatively protected and quiet space where you can leave your cushion (or chair) so that it is always there to return to. You may want to create an altar with a candle, inspiring photos, statues, flowers, stones, shells and/or whatever arouses a sense of beauty, wonder and the sacred. These are not necessary, but are beneficial if they help create a mood and remind you of what you love.

**Setting your intention:** There is a Zen teaching that “The most important thing is remembering the most important thing.” It is helpful to recall at the start of each sitting what matters to you, what draws you to meditate. Take a few moments to connect in a sincere way with your heart’s aspiration. You might sense this as a prayer that in some way dedicates your practice to your own spiritual freedom, and that of all beings.

**Setting your posture:** **Alertness** is one of the two essential ingredients in every meditation. Sit on a chair, cushion, or kneeling bench as upright, tall and balanced as possible. A sense of **openness and receptivity** is the second essential ingredient in every meditation, and it is supported by intentionally relaxing obvious and habitual areas of tension. Around an erect posture, let the rest of your skeleton and muscles hang freely. Let the hands rest comfortably on your knees or lap. Let the eyes close, or if you prefer, leave the eyes open, the gaze soft and receptive.

Please don't skip the step of relaxing/letting go! You might take several full deep breaths, and with each exhale, consciously let go, relaxing the face, shoulders, hands, and stomach area. Or, you may want to begin with a body scan: starting at the scalp and moving your attention slowly downward, methodically relaxing and softening each part of the body. Consciously releasing body tension will help you open to whatever arises during your meditation.

\*\*\*\*\*

**The basic practice** -- Natural Presence: Presence has two interdependent qualities of *recognizing*, or noticing what is happening, and *allowing* whatever is experienced without any judgment, resistance or grasping. Presence is our deepest nature, and the essence of meditation is to realize and inhabit this whole and lucid awareness.

We practice meditation by receiving all the domains of experience with a mindful, open attention. These domains, called the foundations of mindfulness, include breath and sensations; feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral); thoughts and emotions; and awareness itself.

*In the essential practice of meditation there is no attempt to manipulate or control experience.* Natural Presence simply recognizes what is arising (thoughts, feelings, sounds, emotions) and allows life to unfold, just as it is. As long as there is a sense of a self making an effort and doing a practice, there is identification with a separate and limited self. The open receptivity of Natural Presence dissolves this sense of a self “doing” the meditation.

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### **Knowing the difference between Natural Presence and “Skillful Means” or supports for practice:**

Because our minds are often so busy and reactive, it is helpful to develop skillful means that quiet the mind and create an atmosphere conducive to Natural Presence. These supports for practice help us to notice and relax thoughts and physical tension. They involve a wise effort that un-does our efforts!

You might consider yourself as a contemplative artist, with a palette of colors (supportive strategies) with which to work in creating the inner mood that will most allow you to come home to presence. These colors can be applied with a light touch. Experiment and see what works best for you, and don’t confuse these methods (such as following the breath) with the radical and liberating presence that frees and awakens our spirit. Regardless of what skillful means you employ, create some time during each sitting where you let go of all “doing” and simply rest in Natural Presence. Discover what happens when there is no controlling or effort at all, when you simply let life be just as it is. Discover who you are, when there is no managing of the meditation!

### **Skillful Means: Our supports for practice**

Presence is supported by a calm and collected mind, an embodied presence (senses awake), inquiry and an open heart. The following strategies cultivate these capacities:

• **Establish an embodied presence — senses awake!**

You might take a few minutes at the beginning of the sitting (or anytime during the sitting or day) to intentionally awaken all the senses. Scan through the body with your attention, softening and becoming aware of sensations from the inside out. Listen to sounds and also include the scent and the feel of the space around you in and outside of the room. While the eyes may be closed, still include the experience of light and dark, and imagine and sense the space around you. Explore listening to and feeling the entire moment-to-moment experience, with your senses totally open.

• **Choose a home base — a primary anchor or subject of meditation.**

It is helpful to select a home base (or several anchors) that allows you to quiet and collect the mind, and to deepen embodied presence. Useful anchors are:

- The breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.
- Other physical changes during breathing, e.g., the rise and fall of the chest.
- Sounds as they are experienced within or around you.
- Other physical sensations as they arise, e.g. the sensations in the hands, or through the whole body.
- Listening to and feeling one's entire experience, (i.e., receiving sounds and sensations in awareness).

• **Remindfulness — arriving Here again and again**

Remindfulness means awakening from the trance of thinking and remembering or reconnecting with what is actually here. As with many practices, you can create an environment for remindfulness by: setting your intention for presence; assuming the posture; and relaxing and establishing an embodied awareness.

After this, you might gently bring attention to your anchor. Let your chosen anchor be in the foreground, and yet still include in the background the whole domain of sensory experience. For instance you might be resting in the inflow and outflow of the breath as your home base, and also be aware of the sounds in the room, a feeling of sleepiness, an itch, heat.

Very soon you will probably discover your mind is distracted, and off in thought. This distraction is totally natural -- just as the body secretes enzymes, the mind generates thoughts! There is no need to make thoughts the enemy; just realize that you have a capacity to awaken from the trance of thinking.

The essence of remindfulness is noticing that thinking is happening, noticing the mental commentary, memories, plans and stories. A full, clear, non-judgmental recognition of thinking naturally releases the grip of thoughts. When you realize you've been off in thought, pause. Take your time as you open out of the thought and relax back into the actual experience of being Here. You might listen to the sounds, re-relax your shoulders, hands and belly and relax your

heart. Gently arrive again in presence, senses wide open, letting your home base be in the foreground. Notice the difference between any thought and the vividness of this Here-ness!

• **Practice metta to soften and open the heart.**

Metta practice, also called lovingkindness meditation, cultivates both a loving heart and a collected, settled mind. The practice uses specific phrases to send loving and kind wishes to yourself, loved ones, neutral persons, difficult people and to all beings everywhere, without exception. You might choose three or four of the phrases below, or create whatever phrases resonate for you:

- May I (my parents, you, a difficult person, all beings) be filled with lovingkindness.
- May I feel safe from harm.
- May I accept myself just as I am.
- May I be peaceful and at ease.
- May I be happy.

You can bring in the metta practice at the beginning, end or during any part of the meditation. For some people, it can be beneficial to emphasize metta as a primary practice — especially when there has been trauma or great self-aversion. This skillful means is a beautiful way to awaken the heart.

• **Develop concentration**

Bringing attention to a primary subject or anchor can lead to a concentrated focus that naturally calms and collects the mind. This concentration can be deepened by intentionally aiming and sustaining a focused attention to your chosen anchor. When cultivating concentration, the anchor should be one that has a pleasant or at least neutral feeling tone.

Concentration supports mindfulness and requires a relaxed attention. There is often a subtle (or overt) sense of making an effort to sustain concentration, of striving to control the mind and make something happen. It is important to not become caught in a striving effort. It is easy to be seduced into trying to achieve something, such as staying with the breath for much of the sitting, and then evaluating what is happening as a “good” or “not good” meditation. Mistaking a focus on the breath for meditation is like fixating on the quality of your hiking boots, and not really being awake of the natural world you are inhabiting!

Concentration helps quiet the mind and without some quieting, mindfulness is difficult to sustain. It also can lead to states of rapture and deep peace. Yet without a mindful presence, concentration bears no fruit. The key to concentration is remembering your intention towards presence, and then focusing with a soft, clear and relaxed attention.

## • RAIN — healing emotional suffering

The mindful presence that helps release emotional suffering is summarized by the acronym RAIN.

- **R** Recognize -- notice what is arising (fear, hurt, etc.)
- **A** Allow -- agree to “be with it,” to “let it be.”
- **I** Investigate -- get to know how the body experiences these energies. Inquiry by asking “What is happening? “Where am I feeling this in my body?”  
The “I” is also Intimacy: experiencing difficult sensations and emotions with a direct, gentle, kind attention; and offering compassion to the place of vulnerability.
- **N** Non-identification, or not having your sense of Being defined by, possessed by or linked to any emotion.  
The “N” is also Natural Loving Awareness, the fruit of bringing RAIN to what is difficult.

## • Practice Self-Inquiry

Inquiry (questions like “What is happening?”) can bring attention in a direct way to the changing flow of experience and reveal the truth of impermanence and the empty (self-less) nature of sights, sounds, thoughts, emotions and feelings. Self- inquiry extends this process by turning awareness back on itself. Classical questions include: “Who am I?” “What am I?” “Who or what is aware?” “Who or what is listening to sound” “Who is looking out through these eyes?”

Self-Inquiry is best done when the mind is relatively quiet and senses awake. Ask a question and look back towards awareness, towards that which is aware. After asking, relax with an embodied presence, open, not in any way pursuing an answer with your intellect. By enrolling the natural interest, energy and receptive attention of inquiry, the very nature of awareness is revealed.

## Part II: Common Issues for Meditators

**Getting lost in thought:** At first, you may be surprised at how active and uncontrolled your mind is. Don't worry -- you are discovering the truth about the state of most minds! Accept and patiently "sit with" whatever comes up. There is no need to get rid of thoughts; this is not the purpose of meditation. Rather, we are learning to recognize when thinking is happening so we are not lost in a trance — believing thoughts to be reality, becoming identified with thoughts.

Because we are so often in a thinking trance, it is helpful to quiet down some. Just like a body of water stirred up by the winds, after being physically still for a while, your mind will gradually calm down. To support that quieting, at the beginning of a sitting it can be helpful to relax and practice Remindfulness—gently bringing your attention back again and again to your home base in the senses.

It takes practice to distinguish the trance of thinking - fantasy, planning, commentary, dreamy states -- from the presence that directly receives the changing experience of this moment.

Establishing an embodied awareness and letting your anchor be in the foreground is a good way to become familiar with the alive, vibrant mystery of Here-ness, of presence.

### **The Five Classic Challenges (called “hindrances” in Buddhist texts):**

1. Grasping: wanting more (or something different) from what's present right now.
2. Aversion: fear, anger, any form of pushing away.
3. Restlessness: jumpy energy, agitation.
4. Sloth and torpor: sleepy, sinking states of mind and body.
5. Doubt: a mind-trap that says, "it's no use, this will never work, maybe there's an easier way,"

These are universal body-mind energies experienced by all humans. During sitting practice, if you encounter one of these challenging energies, it may be useful to name it silently to yourself, e.g., "grasping, grasping" or "fear, fear." If it is strong, rather than pulling away, let your intention be to bring your full attention to what is arising. Feel what is happening as sensations in your body, neither getting lost in the experience nor pushing it away. As indicated through the RAIN acronym, investigate what is arising and meet the experience with an intimate, compassionate attention. When it dissipates, return to the primary anchor of your meditation, or to Natural Presence.

Sometimes the energy is too strong, and it is not wise or compassionate to try to stay present with it. This is particularly true if you have been traumatized and are experiencing deep fear or anger. If it feels like “too much,” shift the attention to something that brings a sense of balance, safety and/or love. You might open your eyes, remind yourself of where you are, listen to sounds and relax again through your body. You might bring to mind someone who loves and understands you, and sense their care surrounding you. You might reflect on the Buddha or the bodhisattva of compassion, Jesus, Great Spirit, your grandmother, your dog or a favorite tree. You might offer phrases of lovingkindness to places of vulnerability. Meditate on any expression of loving presence that helps you feel less separate or afraid.

If you encounter these kinds of difficult emotional energies regularly you might ask a teacher or therapist familiar with meditation to accompany you as you learn to navigate what feels most intense.

**Physical pain:** In addition to mental busyness and emotional challenges, it is inevitable that we all experience a certain amount of unpleasant physical sensations. If you are not used to the posture, there may be some discomfort in simply sitting still. In addition, as your attention deepens, you might become aware of tensions in the body that were ignored because of being preoccupied by thought. Or, you might be injured or sick, and become more directly aware of the natural unpleasant sensations accompanying that condition.

The response to physical discomfort is no different to that of working with emotional difficulty. Let your intention be to meet the unpleasantness with a gentle attention, noticing how it is experienced in the body and how it changes. Allow the unpleasantness to float in awareness, to be surrounded by soft presence. To establish that openness you might include in your attention sounds, and/or other parts of the body that are free from pain. Breathe with the experience,

offering a spacious and kind attention. Be aware of not only the physical sensations, but of how you are relating to them. Is there resistance? Fear? If so, let these energies be included with a forgiving and mindful attention.

If the physical unpleasantness is intense and wearing you out, direct your attention for a while to something else. It is fine to mindfully shift your posture, or to use a skillful means like phrases of lovingkindness or listening to sounds as a way to discover some space and resilience. You don't need to "tough it out." That is just another ego posture that solidifies the sense of separate self. In a similar vein, you don't have to "give up." Instead, discover what allows you to find a sense of balance and spaciousness, and when you are able, again allow the immediate sensations to be received with presence.

### **Part III: Sustaining a Practice**

Here are a few helpful hints for sustaining your sitting practice:

- Sit every day, even if it's for a short period. Intentionally dedicate this time of quieting — it is a gift to the soul!
- A few times during each day, pause. Establish contact with your body and breath. Pause more and more — the space of a pause will allow you to come home to your heart and awareness.
- Reflect regularly on your aspiration for spiritual awakening and freedom — your own and that of all beings.
- Remember that, like you, everyone wants to be happy and nobody wants to suffer.
- Practice regularly with a group or a friend.
- Use inspiring resources such as books, CD's or web-accessed dharma talks.
- Study the Buddhadharma (e.g., the 4 Noble Truths, the Noble 8-Fold Path).
- Sign up for a retreat — one day, a weekend, or longer. The experience will deepen your practice.
- If you miss practice for a day, a week, or a month, simply begin again.
- If you need guidance, ask for help from an experienced meditator (IMCW mentor) or teacher.
- Don't judge your practice -- rather, accept what unfolds and trust your capacity to awaken and be free!
- Live with a reverence for life—committed to non-harming, to seeing, honoring and serving the sacred in all beings.

You are traveling a path that has led to clarity, peace and deep realization for many people over thousands of years. May their awakening support and inspire you. May the sincerity of your practice heal and free your spirit.

**Recommended books:** Brach, Tara, *Radical Acceptance*; Ven. Henepola Gunaratana: *Mindfulness in Plain English*; Kornfield, Jack, *The Wise Heart*; Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*.

**Recommended Meditation CD:** Brach, Tara, *Radical Acceptance- Guided Meditations*