

## Intro to Buddhist Meditation Techniques and Insights

Week #1 Notes: **The meditative technique of “calm” & why can’t things be perfect?**

### Motivation/Intention/Aspiration:

*Motivation/intention/aspiration are regarded as a tangible type of action in Buddhism which influences what happens on many levels. We usually are on automatic pilot about awareness of our motivation, intention or aspiration.*

*Thus we are unconsciously enacting motivations, often unexamined ones conditioned by our culture and/or families. You are invited to become aware of your motivation/intention/aspiration. Connect more deeply to your heart and mind, and decide on your intention. Then consciously make it bigger, brighter, and closer to the way you truly want to be as a human being in the community of life. Then remember it daily and keep coming back to it.*

*”May I.....” This is a form of spiritual practice.*

### The Buddha’s Story

Siddhartha Gautama, a man who lived about 2600 years ago, was called a “Buddha” because that is the Sanskrit word for “awakened one” which was applied to him after he recognized the nature of suffering and true happiness. The Buddha represents and embodies the potential for awakening from suffering and into true happiness and peace that all of us have. Meditation practices are an essential part of the path to awakening. Modern neuroscience is now ‘proving’ that it is possible to change the mind/heart through meditation.

The Buddha taught his insights and methods for 45 years after his awakening, attracting to him a large following of monks and lay people who practiced and applied his teachings. Over the centuries his teachings spread to countries throughout Asia, changing in some ways over time and in some cultures. Buddhist meditation practices are very new to the West (past 40-45 years). Secularized meditation practices, such as mindfulness based stress reduction, are not Buddhist per se, but utilize aspects of meditative techniques.

Brief intro to the Buddha’s story and Buddhism from Spirit Rock Meditation Center (Vipassana tradition founded by Jack Kornfield)

<https://www.spiritrock.org/intro-to-buddhism>

### First and Second Noble Truths

The Buddha’s fundamental insights are summarized in the Four Noble Truths. They center around a characteristic of the nature of reality called ‘dukkha’ (Sanskrit), which has been inadequately translated into ‘suffering’ in English.

“...the term dukkha in the First Noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of ‘suffering’, but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as ‘imperfection’, ‘impermanence’, ‘emptiness’, ‘insubstantiality’. It is difficult therefore to find one word to embrace the whole conception of the term...”

--Excerpt from What the Buddha Taught (p. 17) by Walpola Rahula.

When the Buddha looked deeply into the ways things are, he saw that there was a basic unsatisfactoriness that is an inevitable part of human life in both overt and subtle ways. Through meditation he understood the underlying mechanism and causes of that unsatisfactoriness, which he summarized as ‘thirst’ or craving, as well as the way to end it. He formulated this into a method that could be practiced by anyone. What the Buddha taught is called the Dharma, also meaning “the way things are.” Another common Buddhist formulation of different forms of craving are the categories of: attachment, aversion, ignorance (or misperception).

Ten modern Buddhist Teachers talk about suffering (dukkha) and what it means

<https://www.lionsroar.com/what-is-suffering-10-buddhist-teachers-weigh-in/>

### Meditative Techniques of Calm

Calm abiding (shamatha) refers to the foundational meditative qualities of concentration, one-pointed focus, unifying with the chosen object, which includes present moment awareness. Through this practice the mind becomes collected, steady, undistracted, abiding in the present moment with a specific chosen object. Bringing attention to a chosen object breaks our habit of being caught in unconscious emotions/thoughts/sensations, which helps to calm the body and collect the scattered mind. This can lead to a natural ease, peace, centeredness, and focus that allows (together with mindfulness and good heart) for deepening of insight, wisdom, and compassion. The most common objects of awareness for beginning meditation are sensations of the body and/or the breath. In some traditions, sounds, mantras, or visualizations are also used as the primary object of attention.

Instructions: the quality of attention is relaxed and open. Allow the chosen object of awareness to be in the foreground, gently resting the attention over and over again with the chosen object, letting everything else to come and go. When you realize the mind has wandered or become lost, simply relax, return gently and kindly to the breath or body. Recognizing wandering is a part of practice.

Doing it on your own (optional): try 5 – 15 minutes of body/breath meditation; and/or briefer motivation/aspiration practice

Links to brief guided breath/body meditations online:

<https://www.tarabrach.com/meditation-coming-home-breath/> (15 min)

[https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/01\\_Breathing\\_Meditation.mp3](https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/01_Breathing_Meditation.mp3) (5 min)

Link to brief written guidance for sitting at home:

<https://www.lionsroar.com/thich-nhat-hanh-sit/>

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**Intro to Buddhist Meditation Techniques and Insights (November-December 2018)**  
**Week #2 Notes: The meditative technique of “clear” & seeing things clearly – just as they are**

**Motivation/Intention/Aspiration:**

*Motivation/intention/aspiration are regarded as a tangible type of action in Buddhism which influences what happens on many levels. We usually are on automatic pilot about awareness of our motivation, intention or aspiration; or we think of them in short-term practical ways. Thus we are unconsciously enacting motivations, often unexamined ones conditioned by our culture and/or families. You are invited to become aware of your motivation/intention/aspiration. Then consciously make it bigger, brighter, and closer to the way you truly want to be as a human being in the community of life. Connect more deeply to your heart and mind, and decide on your intention. Then remember it daily and keep coming back to it. "May I....." This is a form of spiritual practice.*

**The Buddhist meditative path is a first person experience of direct experimentation with the mind and heart.**

It is not a cognitive process, although reflection and study can support it. It is not a matter of faith.

Bhavana – Sanskrit for meditation means “mental cultivation.” Gom - Tibetan for meditation means “familiarization.”

**The Four Noble Truths**

There is suffering (dukkha)

The origin of suffering is craving (greed, hatred, delusion)

There is an end/cessation to suffering

The way to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path

**What to do in relation to them**

Suffering is to be understood

Craving is to be abandoned

The end of suffering is to be directly experienced

This path is to be cultivated

**Third Noble Truth – There is an end to suffering – end to craving (tanha) – end to greed, hatred and delusion**

The absence of greed/attachment is generosity

The absence of hatred/aversion is loving kindness

The absence of delusion/misperception is impartial wisdom and compassion

The practices of mindfulness, concentration and altruistic intention allow us to experience calm, clarity, equanimity, and insight that ends greed (attachment), hatred (aversion), and delusion (ignorance). The complete realization of these capacities is called liberation, enlightenment, nirvana, Buddha Nature, primordial wisdom (different meanings in different traditions). This experience is beyond concepts and expresses itself as great spaciousness, wisdom and compassion. From the beginning of meditation practice, it is possible to experience moments of this kind of freedom, ease, non-attachment, and openness, which help us to lead happier, wiser and more peaceful lives. We can experience it because it is already present right now in each of us. Each moment without greed, hatred or delusion is a moment of freedom.

<https://www.lionsroar.com/nirvana-now/> Nirvana Now by Ajahn Sumedho

**The Buddha’s motivation for sharing what he had realized was to promote happiness and compassion.**

It was summarized in an instruction he gave to the first 60 monks who practiced and realized his teachings:

“Wander forth, O bhikkhus, for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans.” The Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya 4.453)

**Meditative techniques of “clear”- mindfulness, equanimity, insight**

A mental environment of kindness (good heart) and relaxation supports concentration, mindfulness and insight.

In the Buddhist context, mindfulness includes present moment awareness that continuously knows experience without identifying with it, engaging with it, or changing it. When it becomes more stable, mindfulness and equanimity can be directed deeply and directly to see the very nature of experience so as to truly understand it and become free of the misperceptions that lead to suffering. This insight (vipassana) is the basis for wisdom, freedom and compassion.

“Be the clouds, not the sky.” “You are not your thoughts.”

Three marks of existence: impermanence (anicca); absence of independent self (anatta); unsatisfactoriness (dukkha)

Mindfulness can be practiced both in formal meditation sessions and throughout our lives. We can cultivate mindfulness of bodily sensations, breath, mind, emotions, thoughts, intentions, as well as walking, eating, typing, etc.

Thich Nhat Hanh on the Practice of Mindfulness

<https://www.lionsroar.com/mindful-living-thich-nhat-hanh-on-the-practice-of-mindfulness-march-2010/>

Joseph Goldstein on the Buddha’s teaching about Four Foundations of Mindfulness

<https://www.lionsroar.com/the-four-foundations-of-mindfulness-2/>

Doing it on your own (optional): try 10 – 20 minutes of mindfulness or vipassana meditation or walking meditation

[https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/03\\_Complete\\_Meditation\\_Instructions.mp3](https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/03_Complete_Meditation_Instructions.mp3) (19 min)

<https://jackkornfield.com/guided-meditation/> Meditation starts at 4:00 to 13:30 (10 min)

<https://www.tarabrach.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Walking-Meditation-Instructions.pdf> (written instructions)

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## Intro to Buddhist Meditation Techniques and Insights (November-December 2018)

### Week #3 Notes: The meditative techniques of “kind” & what’s love got to do with it?

#### Motivation/Intention/Aspiration:

*You are invited to become aware of your motivation/intention/aspiration. Then consciously make it bigger, brighter, and closer to the way you truly want to be as a human being in the community of life. Connect more deeply to your heart and mind, and decide on your intention. “May I.....” This is a form of spiritual practice.*

Connection to one’s really strong intention is a kind of love. (Sharon Salzberg)

**Bodhicitta** – “*Bodhi* (Sanskrit) means our ‘enlightened essence’ and *citta* means ‘heart’ or ‘mind’, sometimes translated as ‘the heart of enlightened mind’ or ‘mind of awakening’. Bodhicitta includes the compassionate wish/aspiration to awaken completely for the benefit of all beings. This means both 1) developing compassion within while acting externally toward all sentient beings with compassion, and 2) following a meditative path to realize complete enlightenment.

One who is motivated by bodhicitta, and who makes this altruistic motivation the basis for their meditation practice, is called a **Bodhisattva** or is said to be following the Bodhisattva Path. Among the three major schools of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana) the latter two have many prayers, practices and formal ceremonies for practicing bodhicitta, as well as taking a Bodhisattva Vow. In all three schools, cultivating the **Four Immeasurables**, also known as Four Brahma Viharas (divine abodes) is common for the development of these aspects of the awakened heart-mind.

**Four Immeasurables: Metta (loving kindness); Karuna (compassion); Mudita (sympathetic joy); Upekkha (equanimity)**

**Four Immeasurables Prayer of Bodhicitta** – can be used as an aspiration or a dedication

May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness;

May all be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow;

May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless;

And may all live in boundless equanimity, without attachment and without aversion.

**Longchen Nyingtik Ngondro Prayer of Bodhicitta**

Ho! Mesmerized by the sheer variety of perceptions, which are like the illusory reflections of the moon in water,  
Beings wander aimlessly astray in samsara’s vicious cycle.

So that they may be at ease in the luminous expanse of the true nature of their own minds,

I generate the immeasurable love, compassion, joy and equanimity of the awakened mind, the heart of bodhicitta.

Pema Chödrön - on Bodhicitta

<https://www.lionsroar.com/bodhichitta-the-excellence-of-awakened-heart/>

Bodhisattva Vow – what does it mean in practice?

<https://www.lionsroar.com/awakening-the-bodhisattva/>

Sharon Salzberg on why loving kindness is strength, not weakness - including the four immeasurable qualities of love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br3yxCs623U>

**Connection – Openness – The Noble Heart – Genuine Human Heart**

Nyingje, (Tibetan) from the heart: “Although generally translated simply as compassion, nyingje has a wealth of meaning. It connotes love, affection, kindness, gentleness, generosity of spirit and warm-heartedness. But most importantly nyingje, denotes a feeling of connection with others.” –His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

Cultivating qualities of openness, warmth, well-wishing for self and others – all this helps us gradually develop confidence in the natural radiance of our own heart-mind, which is vast, clear, and compassionate. Sharon Salzberg speaks of connecting with something within that is not broken or shattered by the circumstances of our lives. It doesn’t come from the outside. No one gives it or takes it away. It is an ability, innate, to connect with, tend, nourish.

Doing it on your own (optional): try 10 – 20 minutes of some type of “kind” meditation

Giving and receiving loving kindness meditation (metta)

[https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/05\\_Loving\\_Kindness\\_Meditation.mp3](https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/05_Loving_Kindness_Meditation.mp3) (9 min)

Guided meditation: deeply receiving loving energy by letting be with the “benefactor moment” by Lama John Makransky

<https://foundationforactivecompassion.com/media/listen/deep-receiving/> (18 min.)

Guided loving kindness/compassion meditation by Christopher Germer, teacher of mindful self-compassion

<https://chrisgermer.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Compassion-for-Self-and-Others-16-min.mp3> (16 min.)

Translations of the Metta Sutra as spoken by Buddha: <http://leighb.com/mettasuttas.htm>

Modern scripts for some version of loving kindness practice:

[https://www.fresno.va.gov/docs/Transcript\\_Lovingkindness\\_Meditation\\_.pdf](https://www.fresno.va.gov/docs/Transcript_Lovingkindness_Meditation_.pdf)

<https://palousemindfulness.com/docs/lovingkindness-med.pdf>

## Intro to Buddhist Meditation Techniques and Insights (November-December 2018)

### Week #4 Notes: The meditative path of “wise” & A blueprint for living wisely

#### Motivation/Intention/Aspiration:

*You are invited to become aware of your motivation/intention/aspiration. Then consciously make it bigger, brighter, and closer to the way you truly want to be as a human being in the community of life. Connect more deeply to your heart and mind, and decide on your intention. “May I.....” This is a form of spiritual practice.*

#### The Fourth Noble Truth: The Eightfold Noble Path

The Buddha identified eight factors/qualities/activities that are a path and guide for living wisely right now, and which when followed, can lead to complete wisdom, freedom, happiness, compassion, and the end of suffering. They fall into three categories: ethics, mental cultivation, and wisdom. These eight factors do not have to be cultivated in any particular order; they are synergistic and all are needed to support each other. For example, ethical conduct supports meditation, wise view supports ethical conduct, etc. The Pali word “samma” is part of each factor, often translated as “right.”

The word Samma means 'proper', 'whole', 'thorough', 'integral', 'complete', and 'perfect' - related to English 'summit' - It does not necessarily mean 'right', as opposed to 'wrong'. However it is often translated as "right" which can send a less than accurate message. –John Allan on <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/8foldpath.htm> (“samma” is translated as “wise” in this handout.)

**Ethics** (applied to external activity to promote a happy and harmonious life both for the individual and for society)

- Wise Speech – is it true, kind, necessary? Does it abstain from: false speech; slander or speaking in a way that causes disharmony/enmity; rude, impolite, or abusive language; idle talk or gossip?
- Wise Action – does it cause harm? Does it abstain from destroying life, stealing, dishonest dealings, illegitimate sexual intercourse? Conversely, does it help others to lead a peaceful and honorable life in the right way?
- Wise Livelihood – does it abstain from making one’s living through a profession that brings harm to others?

**Mental Cultivation – Meditation** (applied to activity of the mind and heart)

- Wise Effort (also translated as “resolve” or “diligence”) – includes four kinds: 1) to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states; 2) to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen (hindrances); 3) to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; 4) to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.
- Wise Mindfulness
- Wise Concentration

**Wisdom** (overview applied to all of the other path factors and to all of one’s life)

- Wise Intention (also translated as “thought” or “aspiration”) – includes 3 types of intention: the intention of renunciation counters the intention of desire; the intention of good will (loving kindness/compassion) counters the intention of ill will; the intention of harmlessness counters the intention of harmfulness.
- Wise Understanding (also translated as “view”) – understanding the nature of reality, the first three noble truths.

Article: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/noble-eightfold-path/>

Article: <https://www.lionsroar.com/mindfulness-and-the-buddhas-eightfold-path/>

Free ebook from a Buddhist monk: <https://accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/waytoend.html>

#### Following one’s personal spiritual path – Shana’s two cents

Whether the Eightfold Path resonates for you or not, I hope it may in some helpful way inform how you follow your own spiritual unfolding. Whatever your path, my advice is to regularly cultivate a sincere spiritual aspiration and then follow your intuition, inclinations and heart connections about how to fulfill that aspiration. In addition, there is no doubt that inner and outer freedom is greatly supported by both ethical conduct and some kind of regular practice of cultivating the mind or heart that is aligned with one’s motivation and aspiration. May your path unfold with ease; may you realize your innate human potential for wisdom, love and true happiness; and may all beings benefit!

#### Some Buddhist meditation resources, groups and teachers that Shana has personally experienced

RI Community of Mindfulness led by Joanne Friday: <https://joannefriday.com/> or <http://www.mindfulnessri.org/>

Providence Zen Center in Cumberland RI: <https://providencezen.org/>

Foundation for Active Compassion group RI: <https://foundationforactivecompassion.com/meditation-groups/providence/>

Shambhala Meditation RI: <https://providence.shambhala.org/the-view/>

Insight Meditation Society retreat center in Barre MA: <https://www.dharma.org/>

Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre MA: <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/>

Cambridge Insight Meditation Society in Cambridge MA: <https://cambridgeinsight.org/>

Dza Kilung Rinpoche – author of *The Relaxed Mind*: <https://www.pemakilaya.org/>

Tsoknyi Rinpoche, - author of *Open Heart, Open Mind*: <https://tsoknyirinpoche.org/>

John Makransky – author *Awakening Through Love*: <https://foundationforactivecompassion.com/>

Free Dharma Talks and guided meditations in the Insight Meditation tradition: [www.dharmaseed.org](http://www.dharmaseed.org)

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