

RELEASING SUFFERING: Buddhist Meditations and Insights for Loosening the Grip of Identification with Thoughts, Emotions & Sensations

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What does identification mean from a Buddhist perspective – and how is related to suffering?

The Buddha sought to understand suffering and become free of it. By deeply examining his own mind and the nature of his experience through meditation, he succeeded. He realized that phenomena are impermanent and have no inherent identity, yet our human habit is to concretize and identify with our experience. This actually is the cause of suffering. The Four Noble Truths summarizes the Buddha's most basic formulation of what causes suffering and how to become free from it.

First Noble Truth: There is suffering (dukkha). Suffering is to be understood.

Second Noble Truth: The origin of suffering is craving (greed, hatred, delusion). Craving is to be abandoned.

Third Noble Truth: There is an end/cessation to suffering. The end of suffering is to be directly experienced.

Fourth Noble Truth: The way to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path. This path is to be cultivated.

Craving, which is the origin of suffering, entails a process of identification (usually unconscious) with our experience of thoughts, emotions and sensations as they arise, manifesting as attachment, aversion or misperception. The cultivation of the meditation skills of mindfulness and concentration, two key elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, provide a means to loosen the grip of craving.

Buddhist teachers discuss “dukkha” (translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness)

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

Joanne Friday – First Noble Truth: Cultivating the Courage to Be With What Is

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeHSbk0486g>

The Noble Eightfold Path – article by Walpola Rahula

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

How does Buddhist meditation loosen the grip of identification?

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, clear and abiding in the present moment with a specific chosen object of awareness. Bringing attention to a chosen object breaks our habit of being caught in identifying with unconscious emotions/thoughts/sensations, which then helps to calm the body and collect the scattered mind.

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

https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/01_Breathing_Meditation.mp3 (5 min)

Mindfulness – Insight (Vipassana)

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 together with the clarity and equanimity from calm abiding, can be directed see deeply into the very nature of experience so as to truly understand it and be free from our usual habits of suffering.

Two metaphors for mindful non-identification: “Be the sky, not the clouds.” “Sit by the river, don’t jump in.”

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 gives instructions on insight meditation: <https://www.dharma.org/resources/audio/>

Spirit Rock Introduction to Insight Meditation: <https://www.spiritrock.org/intro-to-insight-2016>

The meditative technique of R-A-I-N: Recognize; Allow (Accept); Investigate; Non-identification.

Jack Kornfield's article: <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-rain-can-nourish-you/>

Article by Tara Brach about [The technique of R-A-I-N](#)

What are some secular reminders and tools that can help loosen the grip of identification?

Make more space

Relax the body – breath three conscious breaths

You are not your thoughts

Warm it with kindness and compassion

Some miscellaneous resources

[Joanne Friday's](#) four questions for Buddhist practitioners regarding our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions

Are you sure?

What are you afraid of?

What are you attached to?

Is what you are thinking or feeling helping you or anyone else?

Free talks and guided meditations in the insight meditation tradition from many years of retreats

<https://dharmaseed.org/talks/>

[Free online MBSR course \(Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction\)](#)