

Mindfulness in Plain English

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Meditation: Why Bother?

- ❑ Just because of the simple fact that you are human, you find yourself heir to an inherent unsatisfactoriness in life that simply will not go away. You can suppress it from your awareness for a time; you can distract yourself for hours on end, but it always comes back, and usually when you least expect it.
- ❑ It is a monster inside all of us, and it has many arms: chronic tension, lack of genuine compassion for others, including the people closest to you, blocked up feelings and emotional deadness — many, many arms. None of us is entirely free from it. We may deny it. We try to suppress it. We build a whole culture around hiding from it, pretending it is not there, and distracting ourselves with goals, projects, and concerns about status.
- ❑ We categorize experiences. We try to stick each perception, every mental change in this endless flow, into one of three mental pigeon holes: it is good, bad, or neutral. Then, according to which box we stick it in, we perceive with a set of fixed habitual mental responses.
- ❑ If a particular perception has been labeled “good,” then we try to freeze time right there. We grab onto that particular thought, fondle it, hold it, and we try to keep it from escaping. When that does not work, we go all-out in an effort to repeat the experience that caused the thought. Let us call this mental habit “grasping.”
- ❑ Over on the other side of the mind lies the box labeled “bad.” When we perceive something “bad,” we try to push it away. We try to deny it, reject it, and get rid of it any way we can. We fight against our own experience. We run from pieces of ourselves. Let us call this mental habit “rejecting.”

- ❑ Between these two reactions lies the “neutral” box. Here we place the experiences that are neither good nor bad. They are tepid, neutral, uninteresting. We pack experience away in the neutral box so that we can ignore it and thus return our attention to where the action is, namely, our endless round of desire and aversion. So this “neutral” category of experience gets robbed of its fair share of our attention. Let us call this mental habit “ignoring.”
- ❑ The direct result of all this lunacy is a perpetual treadmill race to nowhere, endlessly pounding after pleasure, endlessly fleeing from pain, and endlessly ignoring 90 percent of our experience. Then we wonder why life tastes so flat. In the final analysis this system does not work.
- ❑ No matter how hard you pursue pleasure and success, there are times when you fail. No matter how fast you flee, there are times when pain catches up with you. And in between those times, life is so boring you could scream. Our minds are full of opinions and criticisms. We have built walls all around ourselves and are trapped in the prison of our own likes and dislikes. We suffer.
- ❑ The essence of life is suffering, said the Buddha. At first glance this statement seems exceedingly morbid and pessimistic.
- ❑ After all, there are plenty of times when we are happy. Aren’t there? No, there are not. It just seems that way. Take any moment when you feel really fulfilled and examine it closely. Down under the joy, you will find that subtle, all-pervasive undercurrent of tension that no matter how great this moment is, it is going to end. No matter how much you just gained, you are inevitably either going to lose some of it or spend the rest of your days guarding what you have and scheming how to get more. And in the end, you are going to die; in the end, you lose everything. It is all transitory.
- ❑ You can’t ever get everything you want. It is impossible. Luckily, there is another option. You can learn to control your mind, to step outside of the endless cycle of desire and aversion.
- ❑ We are just beginning to realize that we have overdeveloped the material aspects of existence at the expense of the deeper emotional and spiritual aspects, and we are paying the price for that error.
- ❑ You can’t make radical changes in the pattern of your life until you begin to see yourself exactly as you are now. As soon as you do that, changes will flow naturally.
- ❑ You have to see who you are and how you are without illusion, judgment, or resistance of any kind. You have to see your place in society and your function as a social being. You have to see your duties and obligations to your fellow human beings, and above all, your responsibility to yourself as an individual living with other individuals. And finally, you have to see all of that clearly as a single unit, an irreducible whole of interrelationship.
- ❑ “What you are now is the result of what you were. What you will be tomorrow will be the result of what you are now. The consequences of an evil mind will follow you like the cart follows the ox that pulls it. The consequences of a purified mind will follow you like your own shadow. No one can do more for you than your own purified mind — no parent, no relative, no friend, no one. A well-disciplined mind brings happiness.”

- ❑ Meditation is intended to purify the mind. It cleanses the thought process of what can be called psychic irritants, things like greed, hatred, and jealousy, which keep you snarled up in emotional bondage. Meditation brings the mind to a state of tranquillity and awareness, a state of concentration and insight.
- ❑ Throw a stone into a stream. The running water would smooth the stone's surface, but the inside remains unchanged. Take that same stone and place it in the intense fires of a forge, and it all melts; the whole stone changes inside and out. Civilization changes a person on the outside. Meditation softens a person from within, through and through.
- ❑ When you have learned compassion for yourself, compassion for others is automatic.
- ❑ Meditation is a lot like cultivating a new land. To make a field out of a forest, first you have to clear the trees and pull out the stumps. Then you till the soil and fertilize it, sow your seed, and harvest your crops. To cultivate your mind, first you have to clear out the various irritants that are in the way — pull them right out by the root so that they won't grow back. Then you fertilize: you pump energy and discipline into the mental soil. Then you sow the seed, and harvest your crops of faith, morality, mindfulness, and wisdom.
- ❑ Morality is not a ritualistic obedience to a code of behavior imposed by an external authority. It is rather a healthy habit pattern that you have consciously and voluntarily chosen to impose upon yourself because you recognize its superiority to your present behavior.
- ❑ Meditation changes your character by a process of sensitization, by making you deeply aware of your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Your arrogance evaporates, and your antagonism dries up. Your mind becomes still and calm. And your life smoothes out. Thus meditation, properly performed, prepares you to meet the ups and downs of existence. It reduces your tension, fear, and worry. Restlessness recedes and passion moderates. Things begin to fall into place, and your life becomes a glide instead of a struggle.
- ❑ All of this happens through understanding. Meditation sharpens your concentration and your thinking power. Then, piece by piece, your own subconscious motives and mechanics become clear to you. Your intuition sharpens. The precision of your thought increases, and gradually you come to a direct knowledge of things as they really are, without prejudice and without illusion.

What Meditation Isn't

- ❑ This book is specific. We are dealing exclusively with the vipassana system of meditation. We are going to teach you to watch the functioning of your own mind in a calm and detached manner so you can gain insight into your own behavior. The goal is awareness, an awareness so intense, concentrated, and finely tuned that you will be able to pierce the inner workings of reality itself.
- ❑ **Misconception 1: Meditation is just a relaxation technique.** Do it strongly and thoroughly enough, and you achieve a deep and blissful relaxation, called jhana.

- ❑ Most systems stop right there. Jhana is the goal, and when you attain that, you simply repeat the experience for the rest of your life. Not so with vipassana meditation. Vipassana seeks another goal: awareness. Concentration and relaxation are considered necessary concomitants to awareness. They are required precursors, handy tools, and beneficial byproducts. But they are not the goal. The goal is insight. Vipassana meditation is a profound religious practice aimed at nothing less than the purification and transformation of your everyday life.
- ❑ **Misconception 2: Meditation means going into a trance.** If anything, the reverse is true: you will become more and more attuned to your own emotional changes. You will learn to know yourself with ever greater clarity and precision. In learning this technique, certain states do occur that may appear trancelike to the observer.
- ❑ In hypnotic trance, the subject is susceptible to control by another party, whereas in deep concentration, the meditator remains very much under his or her own control.
- ❑ The deep concentration of jhana is simply a tool or stepping stone on the route to heightened awareness. Vipassana, by definition, is the cultivation of mindfulness or awareness.
- ❑ **Misconception 3: Meditation is a mysterious practice that cannot be understood.** Meditation deals with levels of consciousness that lie deeper than conceptual thought. Therefore, some of the experiences of meditation just won't fit into words.
- ❑ Meditation is not a mindless formula that gives automatic and predictable results; you can never really predict exactly what will come up during any particular session.
- ❑ In fact, this is so true that when you do reach a feeling of predictability and sameness in your practice, you can read that as an indication that you have gotten off track and are headed for stagnation.
- ❑ Learning to look at each second as if it were the first and only second in the universe is essential in vipassana meditation.
- ❑ **Misconception 4: The purpose of meditation is to become psychic.** If voices and visions pop up, just notice them and let them go. Don't get involved.
- ❑ **Misconception 5: Meditation is dangerous, and a prudent person should avoid it.**
- ❑ **Misconception 6: Meditation is for saints and sadhus, not for regular people.** Let us propose that there are levels of morality. The lowest level is adherence to a set of rules and regulations laid down by somebody else.
- ❑ This level requires no meditation at all. All you need are the rules and somebody to swing the stick.
- ❑ The next level of morality consists of obeying the same rules even in the absence of somebody who will smack you.
- ❑ There is a third level of morality, which might better be termed as "ethics." This level is a quantum leap up the scale from the first two levels, a complete shift in orientation. At the level of ethics, a person does not follow hard and fast rules dictated by authority. A person chooses to follow a path dictated by mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion. This level requires real intelligence, and an ability to juggle all the factors in every situation to arrive at a unique, creative, and appropriate response each time. Furthermore, the individual making

these decisions needs to have dug him- or herself out of a limited personal viewpoint. The person has to see the entire situation from an objective point of view, giving equal weight to his or her own needs and those of others. In other words, he or she has to be free from greed, hatred, envy, and all the other selfish junk that ordinarily keeps us from seeing the other person's side of the issue.

- ❑ This level of morality absolutely demands meditation, unless you were born a saint.
- ❑ **Misconception 7: Meditation is running away from reality.** Vipassana meditation is not an attempt to forget yourself or to cover up your troubles. It is learning to look at yourself exactly as you are to see what is there and accept it fully. Only then can you change it.
- ❑ **Misconception 8: Meditation is a great way to get high.** Bliss results from relaxation, and relaxation results from release of tension. Seeking bliss from meditation introduces tension into the process, which blows the whole chain of events. It is a catch-22: you can only experience bliss if you don't chase after it.
- ❑ Misconception 9: Meditation is selfish.
- ❑ Misconception 10: When you meditate, you sit around thinking lofty thoughts.
- ❑ Misconception 11: A couple of weeks of meditation and all my problems will go away.
- ❑ You will start seeing changes right away, but really profound effects are years down the line. That is just the way the universe is constructed. Nothing worthwhile is achieved overnight.
- ❑ Patience is the key. Patience. If you learn nothing else from meditation, you will learn patience. Patience is essential for any profound change.

What Meditation Is

- ❑ Zen meditation uses two separate tacks. The first is the direct plunge into awareness by sheer force of will. You sit down and you just sit, meaning that you toss out of your mind everything except pure awareness of sitting.
- ❑ The second Zen approach, used in the Rinzai school, is that of tricking the mind out of conscious thought and into pure awareness. This is done by giving a student an unsolvable riddle, which he must solve nonetheless, and by placing him in a horrendous training situation. Since he cannot escape from the pain of the situation, he must flee into a pure experience of the moment: there is nowhere else to go. Zen is tough.
- ❑ Vipassana is a direct and gradual cultivation of mindfulness or awareness. It proceeds piece by piece over a period of years. One's attention is carefully directed to an intense examination of certain aspects of one's own existence.
- ❑ Through the process of mindfulness, we slowly become aware of what we really are, down below the ego image. We wake up to what life really is.
- ❑ From the Buddhist point of view, we human beings live in a very peculiar fashion. We view impermanent things as permanent, though everything is changing all around us. The process of change is constant and eternal. Even as you read these words, your body is aging. But you pay no attention to that. The book in your hand is decaying. The print is

fading, and the pages are becoming brittle. The walls around you are aging. The molecules within those walls are vibrating at an enormous rate, and everything is shifting, going to pieces, and slowly dissolving.

- ❑ Our human perceptual habits are remarkably stupid in some ways. We tune out 99 percent of all the sensory stimuli we actually receive, and we solidify the remainder into discrete mental objects. Then we react to those mental objects in programmed, habitual ways.
- ❑ The more hours you spend in meditation, the greater your ability to calmly observe every impulse and intention, thought and emotion, just as it arises in the mind. Your progress to liberation is measured in hours on the cushion.

Attitude

- ❑ If you look at an electron in one particular way, it appears to be a particle, a hard little ball that bounces around in nice straight paths. When you view it another way, an electron appears to be a wave form, glowing and wiggling all over the place, with nothing solid about it at all. An electron is an event more than a thing, and the observer participates in that event by the very act of his or her observation.

Rules

- ❑ 1. Don't expect anything. Just sit back and see what happens. Treat the whole thing as an experiment. Take an active interest in the test itself, but don't get distracted by your expectations about the results.
- ❑ 2. Don't strain. Don't force anything or make grand, exaggerated efforts. Meditation is not aggressive.
- ❑ 3. Don't rush. There is no hurry, so take your time. Settle yourself on a cushion and sit as though you have the whole day.
- ❑ 4. Don't cling to anything, and don't reject anything. Let come what comes, and accommodate yourself to that, whatever it is. If good mental images arise, that is fine. If bad mental images arise, that is fine, too. Look on all of it as equal, and make yourself comfortable with whatever happens. Don't fight with what you experience, just observe it all mindfully.
- ❑ 5. Let go. Learn to flow with all the changes that come up. Loosen up and relax.
- ❑ 6. Accept everything that arises. Accept your feelings, even the ones you wish you did not have. Accept your experiences, even the ones you hate.
- ❑ 7. Be gentle with yourself. Be kind to yourself. You may not be perfect, but you are all you've got to work with.
- ❑ 8. Investigate yourself. Question everything. Take nothing for granted. Don't believe anything because it sounds wise and pious and some holy man said it. See for yourself.
- ❑ 9. View all problems as challenges. Look upon negativities that arise as opportunities to learn and to grow.

- ❑ 10. Don't ponder. You don't need to figure everything out. Discursive thinking won't free you from the trap. In meditation, the mind is purified naturally by mindfulness, by wordless bare attention.
- ❑ 11. Don't dwell upon contrasts. Differences do exist between people, but dwelling upon them is a dangerous process. Unless carefully handled, this leads directly to egotism.
- ❑ Rather than noticing the differences between oneself and others, the meditator trains him- or herself to notice the similarities.

The Practice

- ❑ Ordinarily, when we watch the working of our body-mind complex, we tend to ignore things that are not pleasant to us and hold onto the things that are. This is because our minds are generally influenced by desire, resentment, and delusion. Our ego, self, or opinions get in our way and color our judgment.
- ❑ Feeling is one of the seven universal mental factors. The other six are contact, perception, attention, concentration, life force, and volition.
- ❑ Mindfulness practice is the practice of being 100 percent honest with ourselves. When we watch our own mind and body, we notice certain things that are unpleasant to realize. Since we do not like them, we try to reject them.
- ❑ Our goal is to reach the perfection of all the noble and wholesome qualities latent in our subconscious mind. This goal has five elements to it: purification of mind, overcoming sorrow and lamentation, overcoming pain and grief, treading the right path leading to attainment of eternal peace, and attaining happiness by following that path.
- ❑ Once you sit, do not change the position again until the end of the time you determined at the beginning.
- ❑ We should not have a time schedule to attain the goal, for our attainment depends on how we progress in our practice based on our understanding and development of our spiritual faculties.
- ❑ After sitting motionlessly, close your eyes. Our mind is analogous to a cup of muddy water. The longer you keep a cup of muddy water still, the more the mud settles down and the water will be seen clearly.
- ❑ To prepare for this attainment, we should keep our mind in the present moment. The present moment is changing so fast that a casual observer does not seem to notice its existence at all.
- ❑ After sitting in the manner described and having shared your loving friendliness with everybody, take three deep breaths. After taking three deep breaths, breathe normally, letting your breath flow in and out freely, effortlessly, and begin focusing your attention on the rims of your nostrils.
- ❑ Simply notice the feeling of breath going in and out. When one inhalation is complete and before exhaling begins, there is a brief pause. Notice it and notice the beginning of

exhaling. When the exhalation is complete, there is another brief pause before inhaling begins. Notice this brief pause, too.

- ❑ When you focus your attention on the breath, ignore any thought, memory, sound, smell, taste, etc., and focus your attention exclusively on the breath, nothing else.
- ❑ As soon as you notice that your mind is no longer on your breath, mindfully bring it back and anchor it there.
- ❑ Following are some suggestions to help you gain the concentration necessary for the practice of mindfulness.
- ❑ 1. Counting: In a situation like this, counting may help. The purpose of counting is simply to focus the mind on the breath. Once your mind is focused on the breath, give up counting.
- ❑ 2. Connecting: After inhaling do not wait to notice the brief pause before exhaling but connect the inhaling with exhaling, so you can notice both inhaling and exhaling as one continuous breath.
- ❑ 3. Fixing: After joining inhaling with exhaling, fix your mind on the point where you feel your inhaling and exhaling breath touching. Inhale and exhale as one single breath moving in and out touching or rubbing the rims of your nostrils.
- ❑ 4. Focus your mind like a carpenter: A carpenter draws a straight line on a board that he wants to cut.
- ❑ 5. Make your mind like a gatekeeper: A gatekeeper does not take into account any detail of the people entering a house. All he does is notice people entering the house and leaving the house through the gate.
- ❑ As you continue your practice, your mind and body become so light that you may feel as if you are floating in the air or on water. You may even feel that your body is springing up into the sky.
- ❑ As your mindfulness develops, your resentment for the change, your dislike for the unpleasant experiences, your greed for the pleasant experiences, and the notion of selfhood will be replaced by the deeper awareness of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness.
- ❑ When the mind is united with the breath flowing all the time, we will naturally be able to focus the mind on the present moment.
- ❑ Along with the inhaling breath, we experience a small degree of calmness. This little degree of calmness turns into tension if we don't breathe out in a few moments. As we breathe out this tension is released.
- ❑ If we watch our breathing without desiring calmness and without resenting the tension arising from breathing in and out, and experience only the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of our breath, our mind becomes peaceful and calm.
- ❑ The mind does not stay all the time with the feeling of breath. It goes to sounds, memories, emotions, perceptions, consciousness, and mental formations as well. When we experience these states, we should forget about the feeling of breath and immediately focus our attention on these states — one at a time, not all of them at one time. As they fade away, we let our mind return to the breath, which is the home base the mind can return to from quick or long journeys to various states of mind and body.

What to Do with Your Body

- ❑ The purpose of the various postures is threefold.
- ❑ First, they provide a stable feeling in the body.
- ❑ Second, they promote physical immobility, which is then reflected by an immobility of mind.
- ❑ Third, they give you the ability to sit for a long period of time without yielding to the meditator's three main enemies — pain, muscular tension, and falling asleep.
- ❑ The most essential thing is to sit with your back straight. The spine should be erect with the spinal vertebrae held like a stack of coins, one on top of the other. Your head should be held in line with the rest of the spine.
- ❑ Sit light and easy. The spine should be like a firm young tree growing out of soft ground.
- ❑ Your objective is to achieve a posture in which you can sit for the entire session without moving at all.
- ❑ Clothing: The clothes you wear for meditation should be loose and soft.
- ❑ You need a cushion to elevate your spine. Choose one that is relatively firm and at least three inches thick when compressed. Sit close to the front edge of the cushion and let your crossed legs rest on the floor in front of you.
- ❑ There are a number of ways you can fold your legs. We will list four in ascending order of preference.
 1. Native American style. Your right foot is tucked under the left knee and left foot is tucked under your right knee.
 2. Burmese style. Both of your legs lie flat on the floor from knee to foot. They are parallel with one in front of the other.
 3. Half lotus. Both of your knees touch the floor. One leg and foot lie flat along the calf of the other leg.
 4. Full lotus. Both knees touch the floor, and your legs are crossed at the calf. Your left foot rests on the right thigh, and your right foot rests on the left thigh. Both soles turn upward.
- ❑ In all these postures, your hands are cupped one on the other, and they rest on your lap with the palms turned upward. The hands lie just below the navel with the bend of each wrist pressed against the thigh. This arm position provides firm bracing for the upper body. Don't tighten your neck or shoulder muscles. Relax your arms. Your diaphragm is held relaxed, expanded to maximum fullness.
- ❑ Half and full lotus positions are the traditional meditation postures in Asia. And the full lotus is considered the best.
- ❑ Choose a position that allows you to sit the longest without pain, without moving.

- ❑ There is a difference between being aware of a thought and thinking a thought. That difference is very subtle. It is primarily a matter of feeling or texture. A thought you are simply aware of with bare attention feels light in texture; there is a sense of distance between that thought and the awareness viewing it. It arises lightly like a bubble, and it passes away without necessarily giving rise to the next thought in that chain. Normal conscious thought is much heavier in texture. It is ponderous, commanding, and compulsive. It sucks you in and grabs control of consciousness. By its very nature it is obsessional, and it leads straight to the next thought in the chain, with apparently no gap between them.
- ❑ Conscious thought sets up a corresponding tension in the body, such as muscular contraction or a quickening of the heartbeat. But you won't feel tension until it grows to actual pain, because normal conscious thought is also greedy. It grabs all your attention and leaves none to notice its own effect. The difference between being aware of the thought and thinking the thought is very real. But it is extremely subtle and difficult to see. Concentration is one of the tools needed to be able to see this difference.
- ❑ Deep concentration has the effect of slowing down the thought process and speeding up the awareness viewing it. The result is the enhanced ability to examine the thought process. Concentration is our microscope for viewing subtle internal states. We use the focus of attention to achieve one-pointedness of mind with calm and constantly applied attention.
- ❑ The first step in using the breath as an object of meditation is to find it. What you are looking for is the physical, tactile sensation of the air that passes in and out of the nostrils. This is usually just inside the tip of the nose. But the exact spot varies from one person to another, depending on the shape of the nose. To find your own point, take a quick deep breath and notice the point just inside the nose or on the upper lip where you have the most distinct sensation of passing air. Now exhale and notice the sensation at the same point. It is from this point that you will follow the whole passage of breath. Once you have located your own breath point with clarity, don't deviate from that spot. Use this single point in order to keep your attention fixed.
- ❑ From this vantage point, you watch the entire movement of breath with clear and collected attention. Make no attempt to control the breath. This is not a breathing exercise of the sort done in yoga. Focus on the natural and spontaneous movement of the breath. Don't try to regulate it or emphasize it in any way.
- ❑ Every inhalation goes through a process of birth, growth, and death, and every exhalation does the same. The depth and speed of your breathing changes according to your emotional state, the thought that flows through your mind, and the sounds you hear.
- ❑ Mental distractions will happen again. But return your attention to your breath again, and again, and again, and again, for as long as it takes until distraction no longer occurs.
- ❑ Somewhere in this process, you will come face to face with the sudden and shocking realization that you are completely crazy. Your mind is a shrieking, gibbering madhouse on wheels barreling pellmell down the hill, utterly out of control and helpless. No problem. You are not crazier than you were yesterday. It has always been this way, and you just never

noticed. You are also no crazier than everybody else around you. The only real difference is that you have confronted the situation; they have not. So they still feel relatively comfortable. That does not mean that they are better off. Ignorance may be bliss, but it does not lead to liberation. So don't let this realization unsettle you. It is a milestone actually, a sign of real progress. The very fact that you have looked at the problem straight in the eye means that you are on your way up and out of it.

- ❑ There are two states to be avoided: thinking and sinking. The thinking mind manifests most clearly as the monkey-mind phenomenon we have just been discussing. The sinking mind is almost the reverse. As a general term, sinking denotes any dimming of awareness. At its best, it is sort of a mental vacuum in which there is no thought, no observation of the breath, no awareness of anything. It is a gap, a formless mental gray area rather like a dreamless sleep. Sinking mind is a void. Avoid it.
- ❑ Awareness is a bright clean alertness. Samadhi and sati — these are the two faculties we wish to cultivate. And sinking mind contains neither.
- ❑ Don't think about your problems during your practice. Push them aside very gently. Take a break from all that worrying and planning. Let your meditation be a complete vacation. Trust yourself, trust your own ability to deal with these issues later, using the energy and freshness of mind that you built up during your meditation.

Structuring Your Meditation

- ❑ We have spent our entire life developing mental habits that are really quite contrary to the ideal of uninterrupted mindfulness. Extricating ourselves from those habits requires a bit of strategy.
- ❑ In meditation, we set aside a specific time for this clarifying process. When viewed from the outside, it looks utterly useless. We sit there apparently as productive as a stone gargoyle. Inside, however, quite a bit is happening.
- ❑ The best way to clarify the mental fluid is to just let it settle all by itself. Don't add any energy to the situation. Just mindfully watch the mud swirl, without any involvement in the process. Then, when it settles at last, it will stay settled. We exert energy in meditation, but not force. Our only effort is gentle, patient mindfulness.
- ❑ **Where to sit?** Find yourself a quiet place, a secluded place, a place where you will be alone.
- ❑ There are certain traditional aids that you can employ to set the proper mood. A darkened room with a candle is nice. Incense is nice. A little bell to start and end your sessions is nice. These are paraphernalia, though. They provide encouragement to some people, but they are by no means essential to the practice.
- ❑ A special spot reserved for meditation and nothing else is an aid for most people. You soon come to associate that spot with the tranquillity of deep concentration, and that association helps you to reach deep states more quickly.

- ❑ **When to sit?** The most important rule here is this: When it comes to sitting, the description of Buddhism as the Middle Way applies. Don't overdo it. Don't underdo it.
- ❑ Setting up a schedule acts as an encouragement. If, however, you find that your schedule has ceased to be an encouragement and become a burden, then something is wrong. Meditation is not a duty or an obligation.
- ❑ So set up a daily pattern that you can live with. Make it reasonable. Make it fit with the rest of your life. And if it starts to feel like you're on an uphill treadmill toward liberation, then change something.
- ❑ First thing in the morning is a great time to meditate. Your mind is fresh then, before you've gotten yourself buried in responsibilities.
- ❑ You may want to do a bit of exercise beforehand to get the circulation flowing. Do whatever you need to do in order to wake up fully, then sit down to meditate.
- ❑ The evening is another good time for practice. Your mind is full of all the mental rubbish that you have accumulated during the day, and it is great to get rid of that burden before you sleep.
- ❑ Seasoned meditators manage three or four hours of practice a day. They live ordinary lives in the day-to-day world, and they still squeeze it all in.
- ❑ Most beginners start with twenty or thirty minutes.
- ❑ As you grow accustomed to the procedure, you can extend your meditation little by little. We recommend that after a year or so of steady practice you should be sitting comfortably for an hour at a time.
- ❑ There is another word for self-discipline. It is patience.

Setup Exercises

- ❑ You can use one idea to cancel another. You can balance a negative emotion by instilling a positive one. Giving is the opposite of greed. Benevolence is the opposite of hatred.
- ❑ At the beginning of each meditation session, say the following sentences to yourself. Really feel the intention:

May I be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to me. May I always meet with spiritual success. May I also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May I always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May my parents be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties,

problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May my teachers be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May my relatives be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May my friends be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May all indifferent persons be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May all unfriendly persons be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

May all living beings be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May they always meet with spiritual success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May they always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

- ❑ The practical approach toward your enemies is to help them overcome their problems, so you can live in peace and happiness.

- ❑ When you hate somebody, what actually happens is that your own body generates such harmful chemistry that you experience pain, increased heart rate, tension, change of facial expression, loss of appetite, deprivation of sleep, and you appear very unpleasant to others. You go through the same things you wish on your enemy. Also you cannot see the truth as it is. Your mind is like boiling water. Or you are like a patient suffering from jaundice to whom any delicious food tastes bland. Similarly, you cannot appreciate somebody's appearance, achievement, success, etc. And as long as this condition exists, you cannot meditate well.

Dealing with Problems

- ❑ The reason we are all stuck in life's mud is that we ceaselessly run from our problems and after our desires. Meditation provides us with a laboratory situation in which we can examine this syndrome and devise strategies for dealing with it.
- ❑ When you are having a bad time, examine that experience, observe it mindfully, study the phenomenon and learn its mechanics. The way out of a trap is to study the trap itself, learn how it is built. You do this by taking the thing apart piece by piece. The trap can't trap you if it has been taken to pieces. The result is freedom.
- ❑ Pain exists in the universe; some measure of it is unavoidable. Learning to deal with it is not pessimism, but a very pragmatic form of optimism.
- ❑ Look at your state of boredom mindfully. What is boredom? Where is boredom? What does it feel like? What are its mental components? Does it have any physical feeling? What does it do to your thought process? Take a fresh look at boredom, as if you have never experienced that state before.
- ❑ **Agitation:** When this uncomfortable state arises in meditation, just observe it. Don't let it rule you. Don't jump up and run off. And don't struggle with it and try to make it go away. Just let it be there and watch it closely. Then the repressed material will eventually surface, and you will find out what you have been worrying about.

Dealing with Distractions

- ❑ **Maneuver 1: Time Gauging:** Distraction has pulled you away from the breath, and you suddenly realize that you've been daydreaming. The trick is to pull all the way out of whatever has captured you, to break its hold on you completely so you can go back to the breath with full attention. You do this by gauging the length of time that you were distracted. This is not a precise calculation. You don't need a precise figure, just a rough estimate.
- ❑ **Maneuver 2: Deep Breaths:** When your mind is wild and agitated, you can often reestablish mindfulness with a few quick deep breaths. Pull the air in strongly and let it out the same way. This increases the sensation inside the nostrils and makes it easier to focus.

- ❑ **Maneuver 4: The In-out Method:** This is an alternative to counting, and it functions in much the same manner. Just direct your attention to the breath and mentally tag each cycle with the words, “Inhalation... exhalation,” or “In... out.”
- ❑ **Maneuver 5: Canceling One Thought with Another:** Delusion covers everything from daydreaming to full-blown hallucinations.

Mindfulness (Sati)

- ❑ Mindfulness is mirror-thought. It reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases.
- ❑ Mindfulness is nonjudgmental observation. It is that ability of the mind to observe without criticism.
- ❑ It is psychologically impossible for us to objectively observe what is going on within us if we do not at the same time accept the occurrence of our various states of mind.
- ❑ Mindfulness is present-moment awareness. It takes place in the here and now. It is the observance of what is happening right now, in the present. It stays forever in the present, perpetually on the crest of the ongoing wave of passing time. If you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is memory. When you then become aware that you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is mindfulness.
- ❑ Mindfulness is nonegotistic alertness.
- ❑ Mindfulness is awareness of change. It is observing the passing flow of experience. It is watching things as they are changing.
- ❑ In mindfulness, one is an unbiased observer whose sole job is to keep track of the constantly passing show of the universe within.
- ❑ There are three fundamental activities of mindfulness.
- ❑ We can use these activities as functional definitions of the term: (a) mindfulness reminds us of what we are supposed to be doing, (b) it sees things as they really are, and (c) it sees the true nature of all phenomena.

Mindfulness versus Concentration

- ❑ Concentration is often called one-pointedness of mind. It consists of forcing the mind to remain on one static point.
- ❑ Mindfulness, on the other hand, is a delicate function leading to refined sensibilities.
- ❑ Concentration could be defined as that faculty of the mind that focuses single-pointedly on one object without interruption. It must be emphasized that true concentration is a wholesome one-pointedness of mind.
- ❑ Mindfulness grows only one way: by continuous practice of mindfulness, by simply trying to be mindful, and that means being patient. The process cannot be forced and it cannot be rushed. It proceeds at its own pace.

Meditation in Everyday Life

- ❑ Seated meditation is the arena in which meditators practice their own fundamental skills. The game the meditator is playing is the experience of his own life, and the instrument upon which he plays is his own sensory apparatus.
- ❑ The purpose of vipassana meditation is nothing less than the radical and permanent transformation of your entire sensory and cognitive experience. It is meant to revolutionize the whole of your life experience.
- ❑ One of the most memorable events in your meditation career is the moment when you first realize that you are meditating in the midst of a perfectly ordinary activity.
- ❑ The possibility strikes you that this transformation of consciousness could actually become a permanent feature of your experience.

What's in It for You

- ❑ The ego sense itself is essentially a feeling of separation — a perception of distance between that which we call me and that which we call other.
- ❑ Greed and lust are attempts to “get some of that” for me; hatred and aversion are attempts to place greater distance between “me and that.”
- ❑ When a child burns her hand on a hot oven, you don’t have to tell her to pull it back; she does it naturally, without conscious thought and without decision. There is a reflex action built into the nervous system for just that purpose, and it works faster than thought. By the time the child perceives the sensation of heat and begins to cry, the hand has already been jerked back from the source of pain. Mindfulness works in very much the same way: it is wordless, spontaneous, and utterly efficient.
- ❑ As genuine mindfulness is built up, the walls of the ego itself are broken down, craving diminishes, defensiveness and rigidity lessen, you become more open, accepting, and flexible.
- ❑ Our ultimate essence or buddha nature is pure, holy, and inherently good. The only reason that human beings appear otherwise is that their experience of that ultimate essence has been hindered; it has been blocked like water behind a dam. The hindrances are the bricks of which that dam is built. As mindfulness dissolves the bricks, holes are punched in the dam, and compassion and sympathetic joy come flooding forward.
- ❑ Each passing moment stands out as itself; the moments no longer blend together in an unnoticed blur. Nothing is glossed over or taken for granted, no experiences labeled as merely “ordinary.” Everything looks bright and special. You refrain from categorizing your experiences into mental pigeonholes. Descriptions and interpretations are chucked aside, and each moment of time is allowed to speak for itself. You actually listen to what it has to say, and you listen as if it were being heard for the very first time. When your meditation becomes really powerful, it also becomes constant. You consistently observe with bare

attention both the breath and every mental phenomenon. You feel increasingly stable, increasingly moored in the stark and simple experience of moment-to-moment existence.

- ❑ You become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which you miss the true reality, and you gravitate toward the simple objective perspective that does not add to or subtract from what is. You become a very perceptive individual.
- ❑ All of life, every bit of it from the infinitesimal to the Pacific Ocean, is in motion constantly. You perceive the universe as a great flowing river of experience. Your most cherished possessions are slipping away, and so is your very life. Yet this impermanence is no reason for grief. You stand there transfixed, staring at this incessant activity, and your response is wondrous joy. It's all moving, dancing, and full of life.
- ❑ You witness the tensions and conflicts inherent in the very process of everyday living, and you see how superficial most of your concerns really are. You watch the progress of pain, sickness, old age, and death. You learn to marvel that all these horrible things are not fearful at all. They are simply reality.
- ❑ In the midst of every pleasant experience, you watch your own craving and clinging take place. In the midst of unpleasant experiences, you watch a very powerful resistance take hold.
- ❑ You search for that thing you call "me," but what you find is a physical body and how you have identified your sense of yourself with that bag of skin and bones. You search further, and you find all manner of mental phenomena, such as emotions, thought patterns, and opinions, and see how you identify the sense of yourself with each of them. You watch yourself becoming possessive, protective, and defensive over these pitiful things, and you see how crazy that is. You rummage furiously among these various items, constantly searching for yourself — physical matter, bodily sensations, feelings, and emotions — it all keeps whirling round and round as you root through it, peering into every nook and cranny, endlessly hunting for "me."