Meditation Without the Hurry

*– but not without the grit.*

## Contents

1. [Breathing](#breathing)
2. [Cycles](#cycles)
3. [Ocean](#ocean)
4. [Elements](#elements)
5. [Too Much](#too-much)
6. [Boat](#boat)
7. [Bones](#bones)
8. [Heroes](#heroes)

(Use the links above to jump. Ctrl-LeftClick in MS Word, LeftClick in PDF.)

# Breathing

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| I used to think that we are supposed to learn new things by observing the breathing. I sat down and struggled to understand how to do it, and kept thinking and changing how to breathe, expecting that eventually it will somehow work, and some day, doing it in the right way I will start learning new facts about the mind. It was rather painful and mostly fruitless.  The best is when we have to learn something we didn't volunteer to learn. We don't learn new facts from meditation, because there are so few that we need, and we already know them. But we don't stop to stay with them, and unpack their significance for *what to do*, *in what manner to do it*, or in other words *how to be*. A list of facts, if not integrated, doesn't reach deep enough to deal with root causes in the heart and mind, and have no effect on us. Watching the breath stops us and opens the attention which can do that.  The Buddha only has a simple message for us: wake up, stop holding on, you don't have to suffer. We keep unpacking that. | * opening * stop and open attention * simple message: don't suffer |
| 'How can I do it?' That's not the task for you. Rather ask, 'Can I pay attention to it?'  You are only going to know it after the initial faith has allowed you to practice, and you are going to be able to express what is already behind you. That which is ahead, you can't describe it with knowledge, thinking is not sufficient for that.  The sensation of breathing stops us. We are back at the beginning, when we don't know what is going to happen. We are at an empty and spacious place this way, where we are by ourselves and we have time to stop here.  The water pouring from the bottle stops when we put it down straight, and the water in the bottle settles at the bottom because of its own weight. We can see movement through it, but itself is not moving.  The senses turn inward when watching the breathing. The eye sees colors, but the seeing is directed inward, it is not seeking color and forms outside. The ear hears sounds, but the hearing turns inward and is not seeking. The body feels hot and cold, the surface of clothes and the rigid weight of the bones, we watch this while breathing and let the body calm down, let the mind turn inward and grow still.  Feelings and the mind are dependent on the body, we can't add to it or take away from it. It is complete in every breath, it start with the body and is going to end with it. This world, made of feelings, is complete in this, everything we are and everything we can ever become, is contained in this.  When we suffer, we know that there is something we don't understand. We don't understand how one thing was created by another, how one thing is under our control, and another is not.  When we don't see, we repeat the same pattern like a program, and create the same suffering again and again. We complain, 'why does is always happen this way?' We keep doing the same thing, and not see it.  Looking closer, we see that one thing depends on another. Then we are free to stop doing it. We return to a quiet contentment that way. | * attitude, turning inward * complete world of feeling * believe in causes, discover peace * return to quiet * restore right perspective |
| Take the time to adjust the body and find a good sitting or standing posture. The important point is to be upright, in a stable but relaxed posture, with the head balanced and not lulling forward, and to allow the breathing to be open.  Determine that you are putting down everyday activities for this period. 'This is not the right time, I will come back to that at its proper time.' Putting them down not because they are not important, but because if we don't rest, we can't do our work well. It can help to think the thought deliberately. This establishes a clear intention, and communicates to the unconscious processes in the mind, like clearing away clutter from a desk before starting work.  Take a deep breath to test how the body moves. If you don’t feel anything which is obstructing and limiting, if the breath is easy and open, then that will do. You don’t have to sit in a special way.  Pay attention to the sensation of breathing. Let the body regulate the breath, we only watch and notice. Giving attention to what is happening.  Good posture and the happiness of breahing easily is a quiet and pleasant experience, like sitting down on a park bench after a walk. There nothing special to do, and the simple sitting is a joy in itself.  Breathing in, the breath touches the nostril. The cold air is coming down into the lungs. The chest expands as the muscles pull in the fresh air. Breathing out, the muscles relax, the bones of the ribcace contract and the warm air rises through the wind pipe, and exits the body through the nostril.  It takes a few minutes for the body to settle. The beating of the heart will calm down, and the breathing will become even and regular.  Allow the body to regulate the breathing on its own. When we have an opinion, that my breathing should be short, or it should be long, then it becomes forceful. We want to discover our experience, not tell it what it should be.  The body knows how to breathe better than we do. It can do breathing for us very well, if we let it. Rather than trying to figure out if you are doing it right, step back and turn the attention around, and watch the feelings of the body move like clockwork. Breathing in, breathing out, what are the feelings in the body?  There is no specific thing which you have to experience. It is rather to have the time and allow the space to be with your experience.  Centered within itself, knowing the simplicity of the present moment. If you feel that you have to complete, or change something, it is always an extra, something which we create. We create this expectation that we have to change, we have to fix, we have to control. Recognize that compulsion and recognize that you can let it go, you don’t have to do that.  If there is a lot of thinking, determine what to think, instead of letting the mind run in circles. For example, use the mantra BUD-DHO, which means 'the knowing'. On the in-breath, think BUD-, on the out-breath, -DHO. Thoughts can have a lot of momentum, and refuse to quiet down, but this puts down a guard rail and speed bumps on the road, to slow down and stay on track. | * posture * away from everyday activities * aware of the space * sensation of the breath * Bud-dho |
| Breathing in, staying with the simple experience of the moment, and this is enough.  The compulsions and desires which we feel that we need, or the anxieties we feel we have to fulfil, they are something you can observe. Staying with the breathing, you can turn attention to feeling that experience that you have.  If your experience is peaceful, happy and content, stay with that. There is nothing wrong with that. It is a happiness which is not connected to craving, not dependent on having to get or gain something. It is a happiness arising from seclusion of the senses, withdrawing to simplicity, and knowing the present moment. That is an alert, content, and satisfied state of mind. | * simple experience of the present |
| If you find youself in a tense, strict and cynical mood, I recommend shift your posture slightly, quietly rub your ears or massage the face muscles, and recollect generosity. In the monastery, it is frequently the lay friends who come to cook and offer the midday meal for the community. They can be busy while in the kitchen, but they are always relaxed and happy when finished.  Recollecting good actions we have done relaxes the mind which is thirsty for results. Imagine someone gave you a hundred-times-fold of what you need. How are you going to meditate then? Probably much like now, just more relaxed. Grant yourself that richness.  Generosity lets us recognize that we have space, and don't have to push get ahead of others, there is goodness in the world and we can drop the big hurry. Recollecting the generosity of friends and relatives is also joyful, but even seeing a stranger help another stranger brings us to smile. | * generosity relaxes |
| When we have been sitting for a while, we start wanting to complicate it. Where does this come from, that we can't stay with something simple? Notice how belief in the simple changes, there is some point we start thinking about, the doubt and self-criticizing stops everything.  It is comical, how we can be so committed to our self-criticizm, as if it was a transcendental experience to cause ourselves pain. But we feel we should be struggling, we should crush our ego and let go of everything.  Why is it OK to think hostile thoughts to ourselves, but not OK to be supportive to ourselves and trust what is simple? The Buddha's message is simple, but goes a long way. It takes a long time to unpack, and we benefit even from a small bit.  There is kindness to ourselves and flexibility at the beginning, but there is only hardness and judgement at the end. The young tree is pliant and fresh, it bends easily as it grows, the old tree is hard and dry when it dies.  Begin again, where there is kindness to the beginner, where you didn't expect yourself to know. We don't know what is here until we watch and see. That seeing and watching is the fresh knowing. Allow yourself to be always at the beginning. | * closing * towards the end we want to complicate it * begin again, where you didn't expect to know |

# Cycles

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| Meditation teaches understanding through the feelings and experiences in the present.  The instructions are given in steps, but these steps are not the purpose of meditation. The purpose is clear knowing of the present experience, restoring right perspective. We can develop an impression that we should always complete the same sequence of steps, and when the mind doesn't develop according to that sequence, we feel disappointed.  Turn that attitude around and start with experience. If our experience is the base, the way it is, then what understanding does that give us? When painting a wall, we look at the wall first, choose the right paint for it, and *then* follow the advice on the paint can. The wrong paint will just peel off, won't it? We look at the mind first, how we are feeling, what state we are in, and respond intelligently to that.  The steps are a method of learning through imitation, following an example we watch ourselves and see how things work. When we feel pain and suffering, and either we are able to resolve it or wait it out patiently, we will know that was not just imitation, and our confidence in the practice will grow. We have learnt something there, and we are not going to hold on to the details of the first tutorial.  It would be great if our meditation would develop in a linear way. We imagine that we are going to sit down, perhaps a bit unfocused, and after an hour, *if we are good meditators*, we are going to feel stillness and our mind is going to be clear and focused.  Later, when we recollect how the meditation went, we observe that this is not what happens. Our experience doesn't develop in a linear way from shallow to deep, or from distracted to focused. We think this is our fault, because we are not good meditators, or we are not doing the steps right.  As soon as we try to follow steps, everything is different from our expectations. So maybe we are not trying hard enough? We keep pushing and it only gets more painful. This is the feeling of trying to fit an opinion onto the experience.  The mind develops in cycles, and these cycles ignore our goals to develop a meditation career.  Take experience as ground truth and start from there. What is the experience? We can watch how attention moves as an activity. It progresses through cycles rather than linearly. First the mind is content to sit and attention becomes clear and still, then thoughts start coming up and we follow them, then we stop and stay content with the stillness again, thinking might even stop without us noticing that we are not thinking, and then attention starts moving and we notice ourselves thinking again. Memories, desire, restlessness can come up and we notice we have work to do so we deal with them, then the mind is again content and returns to stay with the stillness.  Some knowledge is necessary, but a little is enough. Remembering the teachings of the Budda is a treasure which doesn't run out. But this knowledge doesn't become ours, and we can't save it. Whatever we learn, every time we start again from the begnning, and trust the present knowing from there. | * more technique, what to do, how to do more * steps and techniques * not linear, cycles * these cycles ignore our ideas about progress * not a meditation carreer * the harder we push the more pain we are in * knowledge doesn't become yours |
| The mind would like to say that it is a good meditation, or a bad meditation. It wants to create a distinction and name it. This preference creates dissatisfaction, and we try to improve our experience. We decide how our experience should be, and strive towards creating a state. There is an image, a concept, a named distinction which we decided and from our current state of not being like that, we want to change our state and become like that. This is the dissatisfied mind. It wants to become something, it wants to arrive at a state and have a name.  This would continue, this seeking for a distinction, this seeking for a name, this seeking for a state, this would continue until we notice that it is happening.  When it becomes visible in consciousness, that we are doing this, then it stops. It stops because ignorance, not seeing, was replaced with seeing. Seeing is enough to stop that compulsion from continuing.  This is enough, knowing the mind this way we arrive at a sense of gratitude for being. Not a gratitude for anything in particular, just that there is experience, there is knowing, there is clarity, and the freedom which allows us to stop going towards more and more, or a different thing. | * distinctions * consciousness stops naming * knowing the mind |
| In a balanced posture the feelings of the body are easy to observe. We turn attention inwards, in a curious manner, wanting to discover.  These feelings are often not clear. We experience them but they don’t have clear boundaries. They don’t have an edge, or a definite shape. When we try to find names for it, we struggle, we are not sure what to call it.  All the symbols which could be names are inadequate. In our culture we are trained to trust knowledge, and we like to go back to that security with names and terminology. We are not familiar with the cognition that doesn't use names and symbols. The feelings, the experience itself is not clearly defined, just the fact that we know that there is this experience.  Seeing it this way we can distinguish the naming process. The experience of the body is rather amorphous, it doesn’t have edges. Breathing in, the experience is everywhere at once. Breathing out, the experience is everywhere at once. The whole body is breathing and there is feeling and expereience, but there are no clear names.  The symbols constructed by the mind can only go so far. This is not our fault, every symbol constructed comes with its own limit. Dedication to finding them and trying to identify what kind of consciousness is this, is a limited effort. It is bound by the limits of categories.  We see this limitation and we rather stop doing it. We will rather enjoy staying with the knowing which includes experience without filtering. Dropping the naming process, we recognize we can simply know these feelings. We can know that there is experience, without having to find a name for it. This is on a different level than the symbols themselves, then the words and concepts.  Sitting still, breathing in, breathing out. It becomes easy to recognize the mental states. Recognize the feeling that comes with unwholesome mental states. A sense of heat, restlessness, dissatisfaction and anxiety.  We know that there has to be patience, there has to be endurance with that state. It will cease, it will change. We can wait for it. When we know where we are, then we don’t have to do much more. Conditions in the mind will change on their own. If we are not putting more fuel on it, the fire will burn up and cool down on its own.  The result will be a wholesome mind which understands. Not being compelled, not being forced, we recognize it by the coolness and comfort of being free. | * feelings with no edged * stopping the naming process * symbols of thought are limited * knowing without naming |
| The Buddha had given step-by-step instruction on how to develop mindfulness of breathing. First, it starts with simply noticing the breath, knowing the short and long breath. Then it guides us through contemplating the body, the feelings which arise, the present state of mind and the nature of phenomena, while staying grounded in the breathing.  What is at the end of the instruction? Where does all this develop to? The last step is relinquishment. 'I shall breathe in, contemplating relinquishment. I shall breathe out, contemplating relinquishment.' After mindfully knowing impermanence, dispassion and cessation, the blessing is in letting go.  The great teachers are our examples. They didn't meditate to achieve a special state and then do something else with their life. Meditation doesn't separate out, but integrates into their life. The Venerable Sariputta said he abides in the perception of emptiness, the Buddha said he abides in the signless concentration. They contine to meditate. | * closing * After teaching, Sariputta abides in emptiness. * After teaching, the Buddha returns to concentration on the signless. * They continue to meditate. |

# Ocean

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| Bodily awareness is a different form of cognition. It is not thinking, not seeking solutions, not trying to answer questions, just an awareness which knows.  Remember what it is like, when you are watching the ocean. The thinking stops. The ocean is unfathomable, changing and moving, it cannot be enclosed with fixed thoughts.  This open awareness solves problems not by providing anwsers, but by giving us the perspective that this is happening in a wider space. Happiness and suffering, success and disappointment is happening in this, and by seeing this we know that this not what we are.  We can be grateful for just being with ourselves. For the solitude of being with ourselves in the moment, for having the time to be, for having the space to accept.  The present moment is always interesting. When you feel that it is not interesting, try and inspect it closely – as soon as we look, we start seeing things we don’t quite know. Seeing our own experience, we don’t quite know what is going on. | * different form of cognition * ocean, wider space * grateful for solitude * present is interesting when you look |
| This is like watching the ocean. Do you remember what happens in the mind when watching the ocean? Thinking cannot fix the ocean, so it gives up and stops. Thinking cannot freeze the waves, and say 'this wave is like this, that wave is like that'. By the time we think that, everything has changed.  The ocean is moving. The waves are coming in, the waves are going out. The analytical mind gives up. It gives up, lets go, and allows the open attention to receive the whole picture at once.  With this attention we turn towards our experience. Receiving the whole picture at once, not deciding what is going to happen, let it suprise us.  Feelings are arising. Emotions come and go. Sense of certainty and doubt alternate like waves moving in and going out. 'What should I do? Maybe this is good. Maybe this is not good.' This comes and goes. The heart has space for it, and that space remains empty.  Feelings of hot and cold, pressure, the movement of the air and the ribcage. This the experience from the inside. We have very little control over it. Breathing in, just experience. Breathing out, just experience. There is nothing we can fix, nothing we can change about it.  There don't have to be names and labels. The mind recognizes itself and knows how to stay with that relaxed, wholesome attention, with the coolness of being free to just watch.  Not understanding our experience, we make decisions about it. We decide something is good, something is bad. At that point we create the world and we have to become something. This we can watch, that we are creating that. | * ocean * no labels * we create the world and become something |
| It is not necessary to have a clear verbal theory which we produce. Feelings are ambiguous. They don't have a clear edge. Thinking is not always certain, not determined, and always changes.  When watching the ocean, the mind opens out, thinking stops. Nothing is certain. Everything is changing.  We are interested in that, that we are not certain. We want to see what's there, not only to recall a piece of knowledge from memory. Knowledge is fixed and dead, it doesn't respond. The present is moving, the knowing attention is alive.  The ocean is not something that you can judge, 'the waves should be like this, the waves should be like that'. It is always moving, you can't fix it. So the mind stops the judgement. Stops the analytical process and just watches. This is the open awareness which allows the meditation to stay with a sense of knowing, which doesn't have fixed rigidity of judgement.  Breathing in, breathing out, it moves in its own way. There isn't a lot of precise control that we have over it. | * feelings don't have a clear edge * ocean stops the mind * can't judge the waves |
| When the senses make contact with the world, the feeling is born. When that contact ceases, the feeling ceases.  Feeling, thoughts, emotions are coming in, going out. We didn't create them, we were not the ones in control of creating it. So feeling that somehow this is mine, doesn't seem to be according to reality.  It would be not correct to say that we created it. It would be not correct to say that we can control how it behaves. We had no choice, it was already moving by the time we were conscious of it.  We have to remember endurance and patience. Emotions have their energy of movement, if they had the condition to appear, we can't stop them. If we get involved, we will be swept away. If we step back and watch, they will move on.  Sometimes our emotions are like a screaming child. Telling them to stop is useless, walking away and rejecting them is cruel. A child can't grow up without kindness, we can't grow up without being kind to ourselves. Kindness can stay with the unpleasant without rejecting it, while compassion creates structures which allow beings to suffer less. We contain our actions with the moral precepts and create a safe space for ourselves to be, this way we don't create suffering for others and ourselves.  We can open the mind and have the courage to give emotions a safe space in the heart, allow them to stay as long as they need. Remember that this is happening in a wider context. It is one picture, not beautiful, not ugly, it is both things. It is not easy, not difficult, it is part of the areas of experience.  The open attention can recognize that judgement, in the sense that it should be different, that kind of judgement is out of place. The attention which can see the body as nature, doesn't want to create a judgement, it is just like this.  Like the waves of the ocean. If someone wants to create judgement of the waves, they are going to have a difficult time. | * contact * feelings coming, going * no choice, already moving * endurance * kindness |

# Elements

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| We experience the body sitting, and we tend to think ’I am sitting’, ’This is something which I am doing’. But the experience, what is it?  It is made of the fundamental areas of experience, such as the pressure, the feeling of hard pieces of the body connecting to each other, maintaining the shape of the body. There is a sense of hot and cold. The heat of the floor, cold on the exposed skin, the cold of the air as is comes in, sense of warmth when the air goes out. Rigid bones moving, the ribcage expands and contracts. The solid parts. The heated parts. The moving parts. The flexibility. These make up the experience of the body.  Observing the material part of our experience this way removes ’us’ from the picture. We are not creating the solid, the heat. The body does these things on its own. We are not creating the air, the movement or the flexibility. We experience them but it would be hard to say that we are responsible for creating them. They appear because they are the nature of the body, and they disappear when the body changes.  We take credit for it after the fact, and perceive 'me' and 'mine' in this. But where were 'we' involved in their arising? Can we stop their ceasing in any way?  These are parts of experience, but when seeing the arising and ceasing, it doesn't appear to us that this is ’me’ or 'mine'. It becomes apparent that that perception is superimposed, something we stamp onto it when not paying attention.  This material experience, the solids, the heat, movement, flexibility, this is within a space. There is direction around us, forward, backward, up and down. There is space, as another fundamental area of expereience.  And there is a perceiving consciousness, because we are not statues. Statues would also sit here, like a pile of stones or sand sculptures, but the statue doesn’t have an experience of what it’s like to be a statue. We have this quality which is about what it is like to sit here. This is different from the material properties of the matter, and different from space. It is another fundamental of our experience. This creates the environment, the whole scenery which we call the world, or life. This is the frame in which it happens. | * the elements don't have 'me' and 'mine' * superimposed * consciousness without the 'me' * the frame of experience |
| We see our expereiences to change. There is creation, some of them are happening to us, there is destruction, some of them are ceasing, some pressure appears, some pain dissapears. We become conscious of some experience, some idea pops into our head and disappears. The body changes, even within half an hour of sitting. The body doesn’t feel the same way at the beginning of the meditation than at the end. Pressure and tension accumulates, muscles get tired and sore.  In this we create ourselves. Especially when we are hurt, even a small cut on the finger, immediately the expereience is definetly 'me' and certainly 'mine'. These preferences initiate the ’me’ being born.  The solidity is not concerned with this. The pressure, flexibility, the space and consciousness, are not concerned with being something, being ’me’ or being ’mine’. We know what these things are, but it is something we put onto the fundamentals. This is the birth and death which we create. Recognizing it is sufficient. | * creation and destruction of elements * we're not doing it, just recognizing it * taking credit for it when not aware |
| It is like recognizing that there is a game. We didn’t know that there was a game, but once we understand, we can stop following the rules, the compulsive tendencies, ’you must do this, you must do that’, and there is a freedom from the game.  We stop playing the game that ’I have to be this, I have to be that’. We go back to watching the body, experiencing knowing with awareness, and the sense of freedom that we are not compelled one way or another. There are things which we will do, there are choices which we will make, but there is not going to be a hurry or rush, because we understand the properties of the environment. We understand the properties of the wider sphere that is around us.  Fear also drops with that knowing. When ’me’ and ’mine’ is something constructed, it is no longer the most important thing, and our priorities reorganize themselves. We can recognize it, but also know we don’t have to be afraid when things will change in a way we didn’t want.  And they do change don't they? While we are not looking, something we really like changes, and now we lost it, it is only a memory in the past.  This is the game of the ego, the game of ’me’ and ’mine’. When we are not aware of it, we are elevated when winning, and miserable when losing.  We are not going to build our life on elevated states of emotion, we have more understanding than that. We go into long-term relationships and carry responsibilities for our community knowing that it will be hard work, but satisfying and worthwhile to have done something good.  Nonetheless, 'me' and 'mine' gives us a heartache. We can feel broken and sick when something dear changes. Usually we don't prepare, and we think the pain is just part of the package. Tragedy is sad by its nature, but we also think we should be in pain and suffer. That is the game we don't have to play, but we see very few examples of such excellence. | * standing up from the game * freedom from the rules of 'me' and 'mine' * fearlessness, not holding on to what we can lose * free to stand up and walk away |
| Be conscious, be grateful for having the life that we have. We can give up the craving, give up the dissatisfaction. This way we know that the teaching is something we can use.  We are relieved to find ourselves in a wider space than before. Letting go is the freedom which the heart recognizes and wants to return to. To greater space where there is space for ’me’, space for ’mine’, but it is only a small part of the picture now. | * acting on it consciously * move freely, not driven by dissatisfaction * greater space, we are a small part |

# Too Much

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| We sit down to meditate and turn attention inwards. What is the first thing that we are aware of? We want something, or upset with somebody, or feeling dull and sleepy, or trying to figure out what to do and why. Other people seem to be sitting peacefully. How can they meditate at all?  We meditate because we want to see, and often what we see is that we better tidy up our mind because there is no space to even sit down in there.  We often find that what we have to learn is something we never noticed before. Something we have been doing for a long time, and only now we start to see it. | * what is real will hurt * awareness break compulsions * meditation is medicine * hindrances |
| The meditation object show us where our mind is. A quiet room with nothing to do seems like the perfect place to spend on hour thinking about our some drama or playing out dreams and fantasies, but when the bell rings, do we feel it was worthwhile?  Rather, we feel a bit groggy and disoriented, like waking up from a dream, and now we have something else in our schedule. Remembering the value of the time to meditate lets us keep returning to the meditation object. Remember there was a reason, some sense of lack or suffering why you wanted to meditate.  We know that we are touching something real when it hurts. We have the courage when we look, to develop a welcoming attitude toward difficult feelings, "Oh great, I can finally see something! Finally getting to the bottom of this old thing. It's not pretty but finally I know."  When we experience this, everything is going according to plan. They were caused by our actions in the past, this is the result, and we are doing the best possible thing by becoming aware of them. | * meditation object shows the mind * not for fantasies * hindrances as according to plan |
| The power of awareness is to break compulsions. When we can't see, the mind runs itself in the old program and we only notice when the results are painful. When we see it, then we have the freedom to stop.  Trying to find out who, what and when, is fruitless. Ruminating on the drama only pulls on the hooks and they dig in deeper. These questions don't have a way out. This is not the direction how to contemplate.  Then we look for the right recipe. "What meditation technique should I practice? How can I reach a deeper level? There must be a teacher who can tell me what to do." We can recognize these thoughts, and know that we are in doubt. Stepping back and knowing the mind is experiencing doubt. | * awareness breaks compulsions * which recipe doubt |
| And sometimes there is something we know we have to do. Asking for forgiveness if we made a mistake, or forgiving a mistake and moving on. Acknowledging a situation and resolving the built-up tension in a patient, skilful manner.  Trusting the truth means the trust in cause and effect, that there is an order, a natural law according to which things play out, a truth which we didn't create but we can recognize and trust. Skilful actions result in the best possible outcome, even when that means confronting what is difficult, knowing that avoiding that difficulty will only let it continue longer and create more pain.  But when it comes to the hindrances and defilements of the heart and mind, we are often simply getting in the way with our restlessness to do something.  Awareness breaks compulsions, patient endurance lets the fire burn itself out. Often there is nothing to do. The results are felt, but that is not in our control.  The simple practice of waiting for the fire to burn down is powerful. "Should I say something? This time I really should tell them. I know I am right." We would rather like some action and drama, but that jumpiness created the fire in the first place.  Our intelligence is limited when we are excited or upset. If we can't wait, if we are so compelled and driven that this can't wait until we cool down, then what good can expect to come of it? Maybe we can't think of anything good but we can remember to wait until we see better.  If we can wait, that often solves half the problem already, which was us. Maybe there will be something to do, but often there won't be, because the problem was entirely in our excitement or upset. | * forgiveness * trusting truth and virtue * endurance |
| It makes a difference what we trust and what we believe, even when we haven't yet confirmed it and can can't say for sure.  A sense of trust in the teachings and the good-will of others is essential.  The Buddha said his teachings are only about two things: suffering and the end of suffering. He had given his teachings motivated by compassion, because he believed this was going to help those who wish to understand.  He teaches that results appear from a cause, not without a cause. If there is a cause for something to be there, it will be there. If there isn't a cause for it to be there, it will not be there.  Whatever happens, if it is not in our control, it happened through causes, and this was either a necessary outcome in some way, or we caused it to ourselves in the past, but trust that with patience or skilful actions it will work out in the best possible way, and this is the best thing which we can be experiencing now.  The part which is ours, we can take care of. The rest will work out in whatever way it must. We don't have to create a solution, that is not up to us.  This rests on the foundation of virtue, a wholesome environment and a trust in truth. We examine our conduct, abandon unwholesome habits and develop wholesome ones. We examine our environment, avoid the company of malicious people and cultivate the company of virtuous people. This create a safe environment to live and for going through difficulties.  Ask yourself, "Can I find the space in my heart to be with this, as long as it needs to be here?" You probably can, but you have to ask the question. | * know what you believe * causes * be with it |

# Boat

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| Meditation techniques are useful, they let us learn by doing, but we learn the techniques not for knowing the techniques, but for knowing the mind. Too many techniques, or complicated steps and sequences however are confusing, and lead to a sense of being lost.  Simplify it down to the essence. One breath, one BUD-DHO. On the in-breath, think the first half of the mantra, BUD-, a pause in the middle, and on the out-breath, -DHO. BUD-DHO. Done.  The essence is peace, and the understanding, which stops you.  The peace originates from the senses drawing in and turning inwards. The seeking stops, because what is here is enough, and there is no need to go anywhere. The quiet joy arises from the mind which understands that there is no happiness in the world to be pursued. The values re-organize themselves.  Where is the peace now? Where is the understanding now? There is nothing to solve. BUD-DHO, ten breaths, and the world ends. It is enough, when the question stops to mind. This pause is the listening silence, and the anwser is not necessary.  In an everday situation, simplify it down, until it is clear to recognize. You are completely exhausted, you have no energy, your mind is spinning with the coming and going of the day, but the breath is still available, the silence can be still felt. | * simplify it down to the essence |
| One of the teaching images of the Buddha is bailing out the boat. Imagine when a boat or ship is full of water, or full of goods it has to carry, then the boat moves slowly. It is burdened, heavy and slow, all the water and things are weighing it down.  We would like our boat to go fast, don't we? But at the same time we are holding onto everything that is in it. We have to lighten the boat, give up the self which is the heavy burden. We create ’me’ and ’mine’, we create ’what I have to be’, ’what I should be’, ’what I am’. This is what is holding to boat down, this is the weight.  Emptiness is when the boat is empty. It moves swiftly, because it is light as a feather, not heavy with self, the story and drama of ’me’ and ’mine’. | * bail out the boat * things are empty * bailing out the boat * not heavy with self |
| Often just stopping to look is enough to notice that we are happy where we are. Stop and stay with it. A lot of us think we are never happy.  But when we are suffering, we know that there is something to learn, something to understand, the attachment is hiding somewhere.  Letting go is not always cutting off. Sometimes we are telling ourselves to let go, because we are afraid to open or commit ourselves, and depriving ourselves pleases our self-critical mind. This ill-will and anger toward ourselves is self-destructive.  See through the trick, the judgement that 'this is not ultimately transcendental', which stops you from doing something good, how is that wholesome?  Sometimes letting go means to let go of the fear to pull out all the stops and do your best. Not because it is useful, not because somebody expects it, but because you know it is the right thing to do, and you love doing what you do. | * happy, here * afraid to open |
| One time I was walking in the countryside, and I had sheets of paper maps with me. I had been walking for a few days, and I usually make notes on the map, track which paths I followed, where did I find a good camping spot, where did I receive alms-food in the village and so on, it is a kind of log or journal. When I get back to the monastery, I scan the maps and type up the notes.  This was a rainy and windy day, and I was walking in the middle of nowhere on the muddy roads. I sat down to rest, and I thought, 'let's mark up this last section of the route on the map.' I kept the map sheets in a plastic folder. I take a look, and I can see today's map, but yesterday's map is not there. *I've lost yesterday's map.* With all the notes.  I must have dropped it sometime earlier when pulling out today's map for a look. It could be kilometers behind me, in the mud somewhere, or the wind must have blown it into some corner. *I've lost yesterday's map.* I felt so shaken, it was comically absurd. I couldn't remember the last time I was so disappointed.  The Sun was going to set soon, and I still had a lot of distance to walk. The next morning I had to reach the next town, otherwise I can't go alms-round and I don't eat that day. (The monk's rules don't allow us to store food from one day to the next.)  So I couldn't easily turn around and start tracing my way back. I was sitting there, thinking, 'I should let go. It's just some notes. This is just a state of mind, a good monk should let go.'  But all that didn't sit right. I thought, 'What am I afraid of here? Why is it wrong to like that piece of paper? Why is it OK to be critical, but not OK to like myself? I love doing what I do, and I'm going back for my map.'  I found it about 500m behind me. It was floating in a puddle, soaked, but intact. I lifted it like it was an archaeological artefact.  That day I learnt more than I volunteered for. I rolled it up in a towel and it dried eventually. It was almost dark by the time I found a place to camp but everything was well. Next day I did get to the town in time for alms-round, a man and two ladies offered me food for the day. | * map story |
| What lets the boat sail swiftly without obstruction?  Taking on everything is clearly not it, becuase the boat is going to sink on the way. On one hand, keeping the wish-list short, on the other, deciding the negative space of a work is just as useful, that is, what is it that we are not going to include, what is not going to be our problem to solve.  Setting boundaries to create structures in a way that allows us to suffer less, and allow others to suffer less. If we take on everything around us, the boat will sink even before leaving the port. That can't help us, and can't help others either. | * sail swiftly |
| The Buddha taught the factors which lead to success. The energy to move and do something toward a goal depends on the faith that it makes sense, and the resolution to put effort into it. Doubt and criticism stops everything. We don't have to know it will work, we will only know that after we finished.  It is enough to consider that we invesitaged the situation sufficiently to make a start. The plan will change anyway when we meet the circumstances and recognize what needs to be solved.  If we consider the worst possible outcome that is reasonable to expect and we prepare for it, that gives us enough resolution to start. Investigating the circumstances, we resolve to do it. Determining the tasks which need doing, putting in the effort to keep the momentum going, keeping the sails in the wind. | * [ ] Picking up a responsibility * [ ] self-respect * [ ] hospital care * [ ] carry your weight * [ ] We can't grow stronger if we don't carry our weight, and others can't grow stronger – carry weight is self-respect * road to success |
| There are times when investigation tells us to stop. Things change while we are not looking, not waiting for us. Grateful for having been there, there is a subtle art in gently closing the door behind us when leaving a room, and moving on in silence. | * [ ] not what we think, what we do   If we want a picture of ourselves, we our actions other's actions to us how the world behaves  learn from actions reflect on actions   * closing the door gently * [ ] quote reference |

# Bones

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| The bones are fascinating because they show the core, the fixed part of the body which determines what it is, what it can and cannot do.  It is also frightening because seeing bones reminds us of the suffering of losing what we know, but they also teach us what we don't know – how to not create that suffering with kindness and acceptance, and this is where the meditation on bones open a way.  No matter what we think of the surface, the bones give us a message from beyond our thinking, that there is no ideal state about that surface. | * the bones as the fixed parts * at the core * kindness and acceptance |
| Meditating in the standing posture, it is easy to feel the the bones of the body.  In standing, you have to put in a bit more effort to maintain the posture. Sway the body a bit and feel the weight. Develop that sense that there is something you have to hold. Relax the knees and let them bend a bit. Don’t lock them straight, that stresses the joints and your posture becomes rigid.  Feel out the balance and notice there is a body which you are holding up. There is a pressure on the ground, gravity is pulling it down. Let the hands down on the side if that is comfortable, or collect them in front of the abdoment if that feels better.  Watch the posture. Notice how you are standing. Take a deep breath, watch how the bones move. This is the mechanics of breathing. Is there something limiting it? Notice if you are standing straight, or if the shoulders are hunched, perhaps tired. Watch the balance of the head, find the position where the head sits on top of the spine by its own weight. Pulling in the chin gently, and the crown of the head pushing the sky.  The head controls the shape of the spine to a great degree. Because of sitting on chairs, we fall into a habit of carrying the head in a manner pushed forward. This creates a tension in the back muscles. Experiment, what does it feel like, to pull the head back a bit. The muscles in the back relax. | * standing posture * head balance |
| Feel how the bones connect. There is this perception of an inner structure which supports the body from the inside. Rigid pieces, stacked on top of each other. There is a sensation in the legs, a rigid perception, which are the long leg bones. There is pressure. The hip bone is resting on top of the legs, the torso moves joined on to it. The ribcage expands and contracts with the breathing. The spine is holding the weight in a curve. The head is sitting on top of the spine. The skull bones are streching the skin on the face.  It is made out of pieces. Pieces that in some places hard and rigid, and some places soft and flexible, these give it shape. There is hair on top of the head. Some hair on the hands and other parts.  The habitual perception of the body, of our body and of other people's body, is that we see it as one unit, as one thing. Trom that perspective develops an obsession that it has some ideal way to be. That it has to be a certain shape, height, different qualities.  These are wordly judgements, perceptions which our society drill into us. Advertisements and media messages reinforce these expectations and we believe in them, but when we look closer we see this is a twisted perception, not according to reality.  These social expectations create an anxiety about our appearance, we are concerned about what other people think about our body, and we create opinions about their bodies. | * bones * body made of pieces |
| We can watch how this anxiety is conditioned when parts of the body are separated. We can be concerned about our hair for example, but only when it is on our head. When it is cut off, we are not anxious about a pile of hair on the ground. Similarly, when cutting our nails, what is that point when it is no longer 'me' and 'mine'?  When we contemplate it this way, as something made up of pieces, we can see the body is not one unit, it is made of pieces and parts which have their own nature, and behave according to that, not concerned with our opinions or others. Bones, skin, hair, teeth and nails, they are the way they are. Contemplating this gives us confidence in accepting them with kindness.  The body is a blessing. This meditation is not to develop aversion or negative emotions toward the body. Health is a blessing, it supports us in everything we do. The Buddha called health the greatest treasure. | * hair and nails dropping on the ground |
| Breathing in, breathing out, attention is turned inwards, noticing 'there is a body'. The mind is not seeking anything, not going out somewhere. From the feet, to the legs, abdomen, chest, arms, the skull and the head, you can feel the skin as it is streched against the bone of the skull.  Watching the body like this is like watching the rain, there is nothing to do, nothing to decide, and rain goes on without us having to get involved.  Awareness of the body stops the anger, resentment and inner blaming. There is no escape. Continuing the thinking we only dig ourselves deeper, but we can't see that at the time. Somehow we feel it is important to be angry, although only the time passes painfully with it. We wish for it to be over finally, and let things continue smoothly. | * bodily awareness stops anger |
| We observe the parts of the body and see that they don't carry a story with them. We can breathe a sigh of relief that we are not chained to the stories, we are creating them.  We can always return to this attention, one in-breath and out-breath is enough to remember arising and ceasing, and our problems become like stories in an old newspaper. We get tired of untangling the threads, as if we had to interpret someone else's dreams. What is real, is always here in our present experience. What becomes important is not what the story is, but whether we can give our attention to where we are now.  Awareness of the body loosens the desires and leads us to recognize that we are fortunate to be here.  Where do we want to get to? We can start now. If it is a truly worthwhile thing, it is almost certainly difficult as well. If it is difficult, it is almost certain we don't know what to do. Uncertainty has to be part of the plan.  However, is it probably not complicated to start. We can ask ourselves, if we had a time-machine, would we go back a few years, so that we can start then already? If we had already started a few years agos, we would be glad that by now, at least we have some information about the situation. In the present, we can do this favour for our future self. We can start now, and imagine, that in a few year's time we look back and thank ourselves, to have started to clear the fog.  When we don't set a clear intention, we are just drifting, and *we don't particulary mind* being here, but the mind is a gray with no life, almost trying to hide itself and be invisible. We do end up being gray and invisible like that. There is nothing wrong happening, but there isn't any brightness in being there.  Looking back on the present with the eyes of our future self, would we come back, because *we want* to be here? We can be cynical and think of the worst, but surprisingly often the answer doesn't start analysing the situation, but instead, like when we travel to a new place, we are grateful that we are fortunate to be here where we are now. There are things to do later, but we can already say 'thank you' for what we could experience until now.  We don't stop often enough to notice when we are happy and peaceful. When the mind is clear and calm, it is naturally grateful for what is here, it is able to say 'thank you' for the blessings we received in our life. The present is good, and whatever way it develops for the rest of our life, we are able say 'thank you'.  We are not creating something, with a clear intention we recognize what is here. It is not a matter of strength or ability, these are bound to time and circumstance. The resolution, the recognizing attention turned inwards, is not bound to a give circumstance. The result is right perspective, in which we can see the right place of things, and what to do with them – or to just stop, give attention and breathe. | * no stories * stories in an old book * interpreting somebody else's dream * time-travelling back to the present * resolution starts * [ ] a scar is not a story * [ ] time travel quote reference |

# Heroes

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| Thoughts don't have a good reputation in meditation handbooks. They are seen as obstructions, some kind of fault, something annoying and unwanted like flies. We come away with the impression that good meditators don't think, and if we are thinking a lot, we can't be good.  Certainly, the distracted mind and obsessive thinking is a painful expereience, but what about wholesome thoughts? Courage, resolution, kindness and gratitude all express themselves in spontaneous thought.  Thoughts are embedded in a story, and the story is a description of the way we see the world. Thoughts have to meet the unknown, become conscious of it and benefit us with a wider perspective. In this way they are like heroes.  Who are the heroes whose example you respect? A person who did something surprisingly good, and you wanted to remember and do likewise? Such as teachers, friends, historical figures.  Perhaps somebody popular, the author of a book? Do you know what they do for a living? What is their life story, how do they live? It can be very different from the show in the book. If their life turns out to be virtuous and reliable, this will strengthen our trust in their work. It it turns out to be full of scandals and suffering, we might want to keep some distance from their ideas.  Our heroes represent our highest values. What are the thoughts which represent our highest values?  "I am a human being who has the capacity for complete freedom from greed, hatred and delusion."  "I have the courage and strength to be with my experience, whether that is easy and happy, or hard and difficult. I have the space and courage to be with that, and I am grateful for the life I have."  What is that, something unseen, which stops us from thinking that, can we expand our view and see it? Thoughts meeting the unknown and trying to make sense of it.  The way the psyche operates, its first response to an unknown, new phenomena is a sense of alertness to possible danger and fear, to determine how to respond. This is described as the orienting reflex, or 'What is it?' reflex. It may determine in a split-second the event to be harmless, but before that there is fear.  In meditation we turn towards the unknown, and an initial sense of confusion and fear is the appropriate response to that.  It is often the fear, sense of danger and suffering which turns on our alertness, and we start to meditate to solve the problem. But the meditation doesn't solve our problems, it teaches us not to fear the problem. Our perspective widens to include the new and unknown. We respond with courage and skilful action, which often have to be improvised on the spot.  We can also find that courage by voluntarily meeting the unknown ahead of time, when we are in a safe position to approach carefully.  Think of the worst possible outcome of a decision, which can be reasonable to expect in an uncertain world, and consider it in detail. Maybe the worst is not that bad, and anything better is only going be beneficial. There are always sacrifices which have to be made. Early on, we are lucky to choose what to sacrifice. Later, as life changes, it will choose the sacrifices without asking us.  Thoughts are determined by what we believe about the world around us. They way we see the world will determine the kind of thoughts our mind creates. Or the reverse, we can't think or imagine something that isn't in our world view. When that view expands, we are struck with new thoughts which are astonishing to us.  We can discover what our unconscious beliefs are by observing what kind of thoughts and fantasies play out in the mind. They will tell us the stories which we believe, we think them because at that moment they made sense to us. When we reflect on the desire, anger, or some obsessive thought, it may not seem intelligent any more, but this revision of values is the benefit of watching them.  The thoughts are embedded in a story about the world, which only loosely connects to the physical environment. Rather, it describes the world of possible actions, or how to navigate and find a path in life. We are going to act out the views and thoughts we believe in, the results can be miserable if our view was too wacky.  It is comical what kind of thoughts and stories we can be convinced to be correct, so save a smile or two in the side pocket for the time when we look back on the present. At the time we feel we must be right. If our views can change like that, how about the current one? Remembering that this is not sure either stops us from digging ourselves into a hole.  Our thoughts and fatasies are sometimes horrible. They can be violent, full of anger or jealousy. They are the product of the psyche, the mechanics of the mind, they can really muddled and tangled up. This is the underworld of the thinking mind – chaotic, dark and destructive.  what has just flickered through your mind? as if thoughts were the measure. horrible thoughts sometimes. you're not that. | * thoughts |
| We can step back and observe them. Keep other people safe from them, we have the responsibility to keep them under check with self-restraint, and with patience they will pass.  We are not these thoughts, the hero is the conscious awareness which recognizes that they have no possible benefit. The mind will change and there will be better thoughts, we can wait for them.  There is a hero's journey which describes how the story of the self develops. In the Buddha's teaching we can see how this reflects the effort of abandoning the unwholesome and developing the wholesome. | * [ ] the critic is dead, the fantasy is dead, not responding to the persent, just a product of past conditions * [ ] space b/w thoughts, you are still conscios. can you watch that space? |
| The Buddha teaches us about a truth which is greater than the stories of the self. There is a story which is not about how the self develops, but which lets go of the self.  When the Buddha taught groups of people, as we know from suttas, the recorded texts, at the end there is often a summary of how did those people receive the teaching. Were they delighted or upset, and how many of them understood it. And there would be entire groups of people, who, after the Buddha taught, would understand the truth at the same occasion.  In one discourse, they can’t have done a lot of studying. They can’t have all been in the same kind of emotional state, or they can’t have had the same kind of way of thinking. If you have fifty people in a room, they are all different, and some of them will be really uncommon types.  Understanding of the truth is not personality development, it is seeing through the personality as a conditioned process arising and ceasing, and not being blocked or compelled by it. The truth is not in what we create. If we create something, that might be beautiful and interesting, but it is going to end. The personality is not what we trust. | * not heroes of our story * there is a real story, but we didn't make it * the body doesn't have a story |
| When this idea comes up in the mind, that ‘This is beyond me. I can’t do this. This is hopeless.’ Then you can remember that this is not where our refuge is. The Buddha is the awakening, the Dhamma is the truth, the Sangha is the virtuous community. Our refuge is in the awakening, which recognizes the truth and practices virtue in the world. This is what we trust.  Always return to what is present experience. It is never complicated. Present experience is always through the senses. Our world is a world of the senses. Anything which you experience is through the body and its mental impressions.  There is touch through the body, there is vision, hearing, smelling, tasting, and the mental experiences. There is a physical and a mental description of everything that we experience. That is all that the world is.  We create stories throught the perception of time. We tell ourselves a story about something or somebody who I am, who comes from yesterday, but when we look at present expereience, the story breaks up and stops.  Watching experience in the body, it doesn’t have a story. The body doesn’t tell you ’I am this, I am that.’ ’I am going to be this, I am going to be that.’ The body doesn’t tell you that. What it tells you, every time something hurts, that it is not yours, it belongs to nature.  In the moment, present experience doesn’t have a story. Where is your story in the sense of touch? Or in the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting? We can’t find it. Or in the mental experience? We can’t find it.  It is a relief not having to be the hero in a story, because then we are not in a thriller, a drama, a comedy or tragedy.  The body and its senses are just nature. It was born, it grows, it gets old, and it dies. This is what it knows. We catch ourselves sometimes, taking it very seriously, and we look comically bitter as though it was a job given by a film director… so pull out those smiles you saved in the pocket from earlier. Humour helps, it loosens the grip. We step back and laugh how absurd this situation of being alive is.  When the stories are too complicated, return mindfulness to present experience. Know what your experience is now. It gives us the understanding that this, here is changing, we don’t have a lot of control over it, it is not sure, so don't hold on. We're not sure about the rest of the story, but that's not going to be so important any more.  One time I was out on a wandering, walking on foot in the countryside. I was planning to walk from the monastery to the property of a friend, about 300km distance. I was on my own, stopping in the villages to go alms-round and receive food for the day, and then moving on. The walk was quite strenuous, and after 10 days I was already quite tired, but that's all part of it. My tendency in these situations is to just brush it off, telling myself to tough it out, don't complain, keep moving, you can do it.  On day 11, I received alms-food from a man and three ladies, they were very kind. I continued walking, and in the late afternoon I was walking through a eucalyptus plantation, it was a dirt road with a lot of cut branches lying around. At one step, a branch got caught in my sandals in just the wrong way and peeled off some skin from the ball of the foot. I bandaged it and the bleeding stopped, it was a minor injury, but right on the ball of the foot, and I couldn't stand on it. There, walking was over.  Fortunately I wasn't so hard-headed to not have a phone with me, and I texted the monastery with what happened, where I was, and if they could come and pick me up the next day sometime. I wasn't in a hurry any more…  In a few hours, friends who were staying at the monastery arrived, I was glad to see them! Then I was thinking, isn't this better, this way the moral is not about accomplishing a feat, but about being blessed with good friends. The reverse would be sad in fact.  When the story is no longer about us and our achievements, what is left is gratitude and kindness. Recollecting good actions from the past brings back the faith in our own capacity for virtue, and when we look around we find that we are not alone. Putting energy into cultivating these face-to-face relationships is a deep source of happiness. | * [ ] let go of the person is to stay with it, not rejecting it. like with a child |