

Introduction to Meditation Class 44
Sunday, May 11, 2014

1. Welcome & Check In
2. Review & Description of today's activities
 - a. *Like last week we'll jump right into a practice session (Review 6 points of posture; 10 minutes Formal Practice including the 4 foundations of mindfulness; 5 minutes Walking Meditation; 10 minutes on mindfulness & dedication). Then we'll spend some time sharing and exploring the areas we want to cover in class.*

3. Guided Practice: Settling the Mind in its Natural State III - *Attend to the space of the mind & its contents - observing arising, abiding & dissolving*

- a. Begin by reviewing the 6 points of posture - option to lie down

- b. Formal Meditation

- i. Begin by Reviewing the Six Points of Posture

- ii. Formal Resolve

When you hear the Bell 3 X, formally resolve "I am meditating now."

- iii. Entrain with the object of your meditation

Let our practice together be: good at the beginning, good in the middle & good at the end. I invite you to bring to mind your highest aspirations for the benefits you would like to receive from the practice. How would you love to enrich & transform your life, your mind, your engagement with the world?

You can release the inquiry by dissolving all question & thought: simply resting your awareness in its own conceptual nature - sheer luminosity . . . perception . When you hear the bell formally resolve to yourself "I am meditating now."

Begin by settling the body in its natural state, imbued with the 3 qualities of relaxation, stillness, vigilance. You can round this off with 3 deep breaths.

Focus your attention on the field of the body & whatever sensations arise within it; attend without distraction or grasping . . . Let your awareness permeate the field of tactile sensations . . . Be present with the earth element, grounding your awareness, while attending to the sensations of breathing . . . observing without distraction or grasping.

Relax progressively with each breath, releasing muscular tension on the out-breath. Release any thought, image or memory . . . letting everything go with each out breath. Allow your breathing to settle naturally . . . As your relaxation deepens, you may become aware that the body is effortlessly breathing itself.

Now direct your attention to the field of the mind & whatever arises within it. Sustain an unwavering flow of mindfulness . . . Attend to the space of the mind & its contents without preconceptions, simply observing whatever arises in this domain. Maintain relaxation, stability & vividness . . . qualities that are the platform from which you can observe the nature of mental events.

Notice immediately as a mental event arises. Observe closely the factors that influence the origination of thoughts, images, memories & all other mental processes. How & from where do these phenomena emerge?

Relax deeply & let go with each out-breath. With each in-breath, gently arouse your attention & take a fresh interest . . .

Sustain an ongoing flow of unwavering mindfulness, remaining luminously present with whatever arises . . . awareness as still as space, your body as still as a mountain.

Ending Bell 2X

c. Walking Meditation

Get up slowly. Make a smooth, slow transition from seated to standing. Stand in front of your cushion and wait in gassho. You will hear a series of clacks with a wooden clacker in the following sequence:

Clack! Turn to your left with your hands remaining in gassho.

Clack! Place your hands in shashu (Left hand wrapped around thumb, right hand wrapped around left hand with right thumb on top of left thumb.) and begin to walk slowly, starting with your left foot. One step, one breath. Inhale, raise your foot. Exhale, place it down. At this point you may bow and leave the line to go to the bathroom, walking at a normal pace.

Clack! (after 10 minutes): Bring your feet together and pause (hands remain in shashu). Begin walking quickly back to your seat, following the person in front of you and completing a full circle around the zendo.

Stop in front of your seat face the center of the zendo in gassho. The jiki-do will strike the bell once. Bow, sit down, and prepare for the next zazen period.

Ending Bell 1X

d. Closing Meditation

Returning to settling body . . . settling speech . . . settling mind . .

Bring your awareness back to the mental domain, the mental field . . .

With body & mind relaxed from the core & breathing effortlessly, naturally, sustain mindfulness of the space of the mind & whatever arises within it. Observing this domain . . its

contents . . . without distraction or diversion . . . not straying to other senses or grasping, holding on to anything.

Maintain a deep sense of ease in body & mind as you focus your attention on the mental domain. . . . attending closely to the space of the mind & its contents with each in-breath & then relaxing deeply with each out-breath.

All mental events eventually come to an end . . . witness their demise. Do they suddenly disappear or gradually dissolve & fade away?

You might find yourself caught up in a thought . . . Without rejecting it, let that which entangles you become your object of meditation. Simply relax, release your grasp & maintain your awareness of it. Observing without grasping . . .

Now rest your awareness in its own nature, witnessing sheer luminosity of awareness itself . . . awareness of awareness.

Let this meditation flow in a spirit of ease, remaining present while releasing everything & relaxing more deeply with each out-breath. . .

You can release everything & rest in pure awareness . . .

To end our practice I invite you to bring your most meaningful aspirations for your own well being and for the well being of friends, family, & all fellow beings. Arouse a yearning inside that what we do here together will support others' most meaningful aspirations.

Ending Bell 3X

4. Sharing
5. Discussion - Questions, Observations

Minding Closely - the Four Applications of Mindfulness by Alan Wallace

Relinquishing Control

There is a close relationship between shamatha & vipashyana. Developing physical & mental relaxation, stability & vivid attention of shamatha is an essential prerequisite for . . . mindful probes of the body, mind & other phenomena.

Shamatha is indispensable in the investigation of the human need for control. In vipashyana, a central theme is deeply probing the nature of personal identity: How do we conceive of, grasp on to, & reify our "selves"? Is there any basis in reality for our concepts of identity? In addition to self-conceptualizing, there is an active sense of ego that declares: "I am." This reified sense of self often manifests as the need for control. . . . Some people seem intoxicated with power, expressing the drive to validate themselves: "I have control & power over others . . . so I am worthy." We all would like to think of ourselves as being of value - not worthless. Control is central to this self-concept. Feeling helpless & out of control is most unpleasant.

In shamatha, especially in mindfulness of the breath & settling the mind in its natural state, we deliberately give up control. . . . The human tendency is to control whatever we can, especially when we are attending closely. Instead, in this practice we are developing a nonfluctuating flow of clear attentiveness to something that is readily controllable - without deliberately influencing it.

We are all massively overqualified for the practice of following the breath. No problem-solving skills, imagination, or artistic abilities are needed to relax the mind, release thoughts, attend closely to the breath. Nevertheless, it is quite challenging to release all vestiges of control when full attention is focused on the eminently malleable respiration. The breath is influenced by the subtlest of preferences & expectations.

In shamatha mindfulness of the breath . . . we do not actively probe into our sense of personal identity, challenge the existence of an independent self, or eradicate reification, but our usual sense of being in control is 95% unemployed. In attending to the breath without controlling it, we still

control something: we constrain our attention from roving . . . deliberately releasing thoughts & distractions.

When introspection deters dullness, we exert control by arousing fresh attention. The ego's role is limited to selecting the object of attention, maintaining the selection & countering excitation & laxity.

Ego Unemployment

The practice of mindfulness of the breath is deceptively simple . . . To a large extent, we are practicing agelessness by relinquishing control of everything except the focus & quality of attention. We are deliberately seeking not to influence the object of our attention.

This skill can be useful in daily life . . . When we attend to friends, colleagues or strangers simply because we want something in return, we are manipulating & controlling them for our gratification as if they were objects.

On the other hand, the ability to give someone the full quality of attention . . . close, stable, vivid attention without control . . . can be very helpful. . . . "The greatest gift we can give to another person is our attention."

If we give our attention, there is the possibility of exercising wise judgment. What would be of greatest benefit? This is a personal choice that will not even be considered if attention is not given first. When we attend to a person or situation skillfully & closely, with no urge to control, sustaining awareness of what is actually present with clarity & stability, we can penetrate the reality of the situation. We will not react habitually by thinking of how to benefit ourselves.

In the practice of settling the mind in its natural state, the object of attention is also something over which we can exert some control. . . . The mind is under our control to a certain extent, at least in terms of thoughts & our focus of attention. Nevertheless, in this practice we relinquish control over the mind & its contents, just as we did with the breath. We are simply present with whatever appears.

Shamatha is being developed as a foundation for efficient & effective vipashyana. We are selectively attending to mental events from among six domains of experience. This is an act of will, so our reified sense of self is still employed. As we settle the mind in its natural state, observing mental events & the space in which they arise, if attention starts to slip . . . the remedies are the same. The primary remedies for all shamatha practices are to relax when we detect excitation & arouse attention when we detect laxity. . . . We are exerting our will to balance the attention - but nothing more.

Attending closely to the space of the mind & its contents . . . is not easily accomplished. The challenge is even subtler than attending closely to the breath without modifying it, allowing the body to breathe itself with no sense of being in charge. Bring to the mental domain this same quality of awareness, utter nonattachment, non grasping & non preference & simply attend to whatever comes up . . . it is the quintessence of the practice. Attend luminously discerningly . . . observe with such a loose sense of relaxation that they continue to arise unhindered.

The space of the mind is wide open . . . you are simply present with whatever manifests in this space. The ego, the reified sense of "I am," is quick to jump in & reassert control, starting with preferences: "This thought needs a bit of editing . . . that one's not appropriate . . . "

Observation without preference is not achieved by trying harder to eliminate preferences but by releasing more completely & relaxing more deeply, deactivating habitual grasping at progressively subtler levels. Whatever appears has no owner or controller; it manifests, plays itself out, dissolves back into the space of the mind.

Our practice is one of egolessness. . . . the sense of "I am" has been virtually idled. At the same time, we're developing stability & vividness of attention, along with the important faculty of metacognition.

Bashful Maidens & Circling Ravens

We try to observe without influencing, but every time we inspect something it seems to disappear. The phenomena we seek to observe are being overcome by the intensity of our inspection.

The solution is to relax more deeply . . .

When you become very relaxed & attentive in this practice, you can clearly observe a thought's genesis, emergence, culmination, stimulation of another thought & dissolution back into the space of the mind.

In this practice it becomes clear that thoughts just happen, they do not require an active agent. When there are no phenomena, observe the space from which thoughts arise, in which they manifest, into which they dissolve. This is a robust foundation for the close application of mindfulness to the mind itself.

6. Information on the Benefits
7. Meditation postures: What Works for You?
8. Basic Meditation Instruction
9. Setting Up a Home Practice
10. Staying Connected - Meditation Buddy

Homework

a. Consider this reflection from Alan Wallace: Genuine Happiness

If feelings aroused by sensory stimuli, thoughts, memories always arise relative to a context, then what constitutes genuine happiness? What is a true source of happiness?

A clear distinction can be drawn between mundane, hedonic happiness and genuine happiness. . . . In Buddhism, there are 8 mundane concerns: material acquisition & loss, sensual pleasure & pain, praise & blame, fame & defamation. All such mundane concerns arise due to sensory stimuli.

The Buddha described 3 sources of genuine happiness. The first is due to ethical blamelessness. This pertains not what you get from the world but to the quality of life & conduct that you bring to the world. If you know that you've done your very best not to injure people, your intent is to treat others decently, respectfully, & honestly, then there arises a sense of well being &

blamelessness. The Buddha called this happiness 16 times more valuable than mundane happiness derived from sensory stimuli.

The 2nd dimension of genuine happiness & well being is one that arises through developing exceptional mental balance. . . . as in the practice of samadhi. When you achieve samadhi, with the deeply focused attention of shamatha, a sense of well being arises. Over extended periods of cultivating loving kindness, samadhi will arise increasingly spontaneously, with fewer people excluded. This will lead to a sense of well being that does not derive from the world but from the quality of awareness one brings to the world. Cultivating the qualities of the heart, emotional balance & attentional balance create the conditions leading to samadhi & sense of well being.

The third aspect of well being & happiness that arises from gaining insight into the nature of reality. The bliss of knowing reality - a sense of well being comes from knowing the truth.

As you go through your daily living observe your experiences of happiness. Which sources are mundane? Which sources are true?

- b. Give yourself a daily allowance of 5 minutes of relaxed “body breathing” either sitting or lying down. Body breathing is simply rotating your awareness through your body as you are aware of breathing. You can start with your feet and scan up or start with your head and scan down.*
- c. Once your body is relaxed and your mind is calm, take some time to think about the most important benefits you’d like to realize from practice - your heart felt aspirations. Then let go of your questioning & begin stilling your mind.*
- d. Practice 10-15 minutes of formal sitting meditation. Be guided by the themes we used in class: Intentionally settle your body, speech and mind while focusing on the tactile sensation throughout the body. Once you’ve established this foundation of calm, narrow your attention to the sensations of breathing in your belly. Attend to the entire length of the in-breath, the entire length of the out-breath. Arouse your attention with the inhalation. Release thoughts with the*

exhalation. When your mind wanders simply notice, relax, come back to sensations in the belly and attend to the each in breath; each out breath.

- e. *Incorporate of period of settling the mind in its natural state. Intentionally shift the focus of your attention away from physical sensations and observe whatever is arising in your mind. As in class, when you find yourself caught up in a thought or memory, simply notice and relax. Return to the mental field and noticing whatever arises there, moment to moment.*
- f. *As you conclude your practice bring to mind your most meaningful aspirations & envision their actualization with the yearning: May these wishes be filled by the value of this practice, with great benefit for all.*
- g. *Try checking in and journaling - make this fun! Consider how your practice is benefiting you and your relationship to others.*
- h. *Suggested reading, listening & viewing*
 - i. *Read this heartfelt interview with author, meditation teacher, cofounder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Jack Kornfield in this week's Huffington Post "On Gratitude, The Mindful Revolution, And Learning To Embrace Suffering" at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/05/buddhist-teacher-jack-korn_n_5249627.html?utm_hp_ref=third-metric*
 - ii. *Listen to On Being interviewer, Krista Tippett interview physician, author (of the Wisdom of the Body & How We Die) Sherwin Nuland on "The Biology of Being" I recommend the unedited interview at: <http://www.onbeing.org/program/biology-spirit/184>*
 - iii. *For more guided meditations and talks you can peruse the audio library at Dharma Seed <http://www.dharmaseed.org> and or D.I.Y. Dharma <http://www.diydharma.org/about-us>*