



Cultivating the heart-mind with mindfulness. A workshop for therapists.

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Pre-workshop reading

The Four Noble Truths

The “four noble truths” are the principles on which Buddhist psychology and meditation practice are based, and can give us a way of understanding life’s difficulties and ways to cope with them. The primary aim of Buddhism is the realisation of the four noble truths. The four truths are, in essence, two cause and effect relationships: anguish and its’ causes, freedom from anguish, and the causes of this freedom. These truths are:

1. There is un-satisfactoriness, discontent, anguish, suffering or stress.
2. Discontent has causes.
3. There is freedom from anguish.
4. There are ways or paths to freedom.

The term noble is used to signify refined and profound realisations and actions based on these realisations. The four truths represent relational patterns between experience regardless of the whether it is refined or basic.

“Friends, just as the footprint of any creature that walks can be placed within an elephants footprint, and so the elephant’s footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size, so too, all skilful principles can be included with the four noble truths” (The greater discourse on the simile of the elephant’s footprint. Sutta 28 in the middle length sayings of the Buddha, according to Sujato, 2003, p.8).

The four noble truths can be adapted and applied to the basic patterns that may be observed with psychopathology and principles of helpful therapy or treatment used with these psychopathologies. Using medical model analogies the truths could be explained as:1) disorder; 2) aetiology; 3) health; and 4) treatment or remedy.

The Four Noble Truths			
First truth	Second truth	Third truth	Fourth truth
There is anguish	Anguish has causes	There is freedom from anguish	There is a way to freedom
Dukkha: that which is difficult to bear	Interdependent cycles driven by tendencies driven by craving, aversion and not knowing	Nirvana: when there is no cause for anguish, it does not arise.	The eight fold way that involves wisdom, wise actions and mental development or training.
There is disorder or illness	Illness has an aetiology	There is a state of health	There is a path of treatment

Table 1: The Four Noble Truths

The first truth can include all possible stressful emotional difficulties that people may experience. It can include emotional pain, anguish and despair. The second truth points to how many of the emotion difficulties can be caused by emotional, behavioural, and thinking patterns, often cyclic, that are unpleasant and lead to further distress. The third truth shows that it is possible to find emotional freedom from or with life's difficulties. When there is no cause for stress, it does not arise. The fourth truth is that there are ways or paths to freedom. That is, there are ways to know, be aware, think, act, still our minds and be present. Using meditation to cultivating wisdom, and acting in accordance with wisdom serves to short circuit and exit from negative cyclic reactions.

The First Noble Truth

The Pali term *dukkha* is used to describe the Buddhist first truth of suffering. This term literally translates as a badly fitting axle in a wheel. The sense of a "difficult grind" helps to provide meaning to this translation.

Dukkha can be understood in three ways: 1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering, 2) *dukkha* as produced by change, and 3) *dukkha* as a characteristic of clinging to oneself as lasting, solid, independent and separate. (Rahula, 1959; Sole-Leris, 1986).

The first type of *dukkha* encompasses the difficulties associated with birth, old age, sickness and death. Also included in this first category is the inevitable fact that individuals often get what they do not want, do not get what they want, and are, sometime or other, parted from what they like. Pain, grief, sorrow, lamentation and despair have also been explained as being part of this type of *dukkha* in texts. This first type of *dukkha* also includes mental distress such as confusion, anguish, worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, and alienation (Rahula, 1959). The mental and emotional distress experienced by those suffering with disorders described in psychiatric classification systems such as the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association, 1994), could also be described as *dukkha*.

The second type of *dukkha* involves the paradox of living in happy and pleasant states and yet knowing these beautiful moments are transient and must inevitably change and disappear.

The last type of *dukkha* involves the suffering produced from clinging to the belief that transitory manifestations of sensations, thoughts, feelings and emotions, are a solid and concrete self which is usually labelled, by each of, us as "I", "mine", or "myself" (Rahula, 1959).

Thanissaro (1996) considers that the contemporary term “stress” most succinctly captures the meaning of the *dukkha* and defines stress as “that which is difficult to bear”.

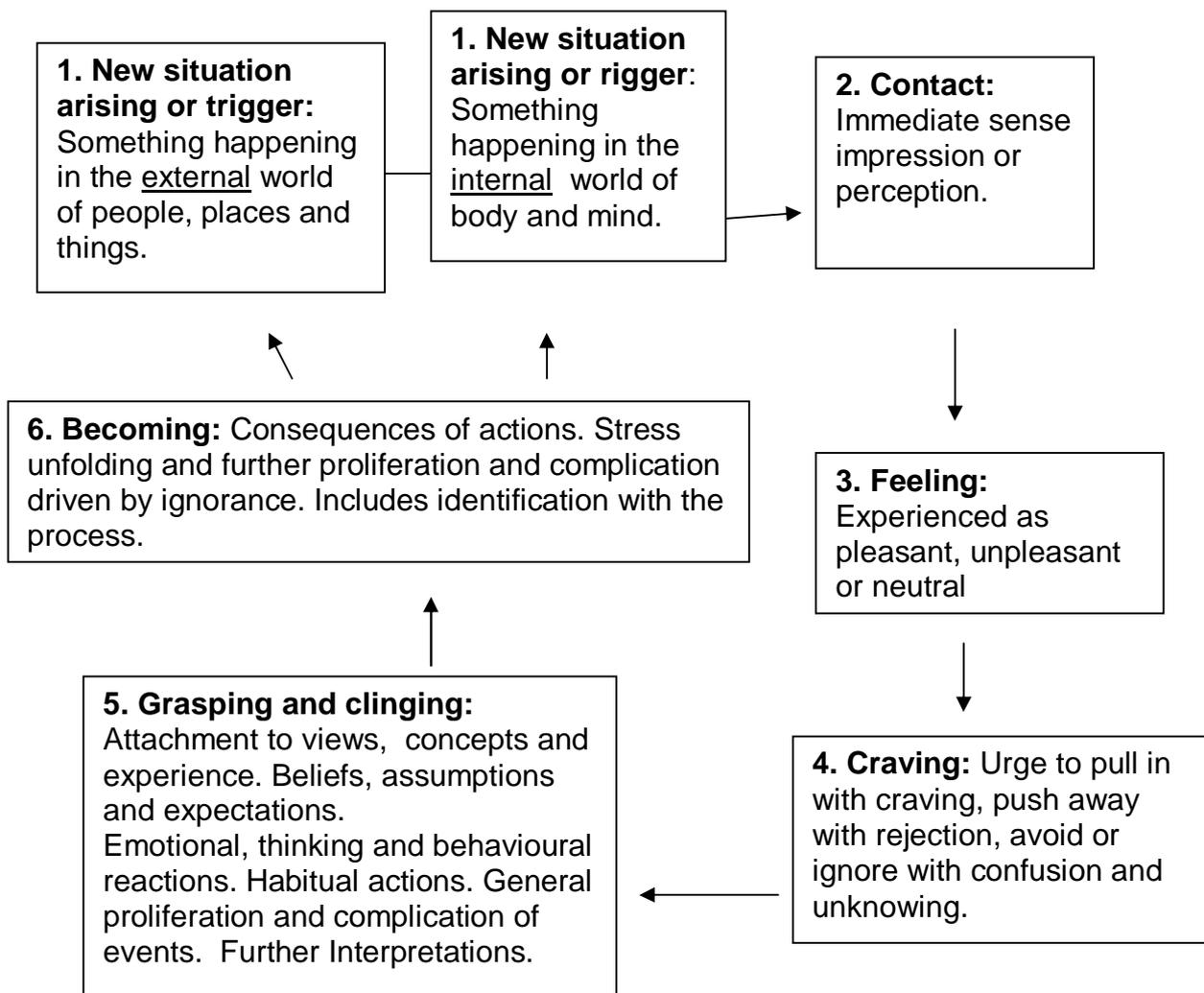
The Second Noble Truth.

The Second Noble Truth can be considered as a broad general explanation about the causes of mental-emotional imbalances. The Buddhist second truth is based on natural relationships, principles and irrefutable facts of life. With a Buddhist perspective, *dukkha* arises because of interdependent interactions between external (objective) events in the environment and/ or internal (subjective) responses or reactions.

The *paticcasamuppada* or dependent arising is central to the Buddhist second noble truth. In Buddhist texts, dependent arising has 12 interdependent factors, each factor depending on another for its arising. For example: dependent on contact/impression with experience feelings (the hedonic quality of pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutrality) arises, dependent on feelings, craving arises, dependent on craving, grasping and clinging arises, dependent on clinging, action occurs, dependent on action rebirth arises and so on.

Sometimes dependent arising is considered as being cyclic. The reference to dependent -arising being cyclic may be easier to understand and more practical especially in contemporary psychotherapeutic settings. Reactive cycles can occur over a wide range of time frames. Cyclic and reactive patterns may occur over split seconds and moments or they may take minutes, days, months, years, or be evident the whole of one’s lifetime.

Figure 1. Example of dependent co-arising as cycles.



From a Buddhist perspective, the tendencies of greed, hatred and ignorance are the driving forces behind the dependent arising of anguish and the root causes of suffering. In summary:

- Greed or attachment involves addiction to pleasant feelings, or craving and clinging. This includes an insatiable emotional hunger and the tendency of the mind to seek out and grasp on to something. This tendency can range from subtle attraction to overwhelming fantasy and desperate addictions.
- Hatred or aversion involves rejection, fear, avoidance, struggle with, resistance and condemnation of unpleasant feelings, or aversion. This can range from subtle discontent and avoidance to being consumed with hatred and a drive for desperate escape from situations, which may not need to be avoided.
- Ignorance or misapprehension involves not knowing or ignoring and being unconscious. Misapprehension can range from a lack of clarity about something to total confusion, misunderstanding and gross delusions.

In Buddhism, mental emotional and behavioural tendencies or inclinations are divided into wholesome/helpful or unwholesome/unhelpful depending on whether or not they lead towards being bound in cycles of anguish or exiting the cycles towards freedom.

Everyone is different but the types of affective, cognitive and behavioural patterns that are may be unhelpful include: distorted misperceptions, addictive neediness, aggression, jealousy, gloominess, sadness, worry and rumination, impulsive recklessness, guilt, confusion, avoidance, mental dullness, cruelty, hopelessness, self hatred and so on.

Table 2. Examples of helpful and unhelpful tendencies.

Unhelpful	Helpful
Ignorance	Insight (wisdom)
Confusion and mental dullness	Mindfulness, awareness
Lacking remorse about harmful actions	Modesty, compunction
Recklessness	Discretion
Agitation	Composure and calm
Greed	Non-attachment
Aggression	Love and goodwill
Envy and jealousy	Sympathetic joy
Worry and restlessness	Equanimity
Anxious fear	Calm acceptance
Sadness	Joy
Cruelty	Compassion
Hopelessness	Faith, confidence or trust
Guilt	Equanimity or acceptance
Narrow mindedness	Emotional flexibility

The Third Noble Truth

Dalai Lama (2007) believes that the purpose of life is to be happy and every being wants happiness and does not want suffering. But, what does it mean not to suffer? What is freedom from disorder? What is mental and emotional health? What is well-being and happiness? What does it mean to be free from anxiety and depression?

According to World Health Organisation definitions (www.who.int) mental health is "...a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully is able to make a contribution to his or her community". This definition has mental and emotional health as more than just the absence of illness. Keyes (2007, p.21) suggests that

mental health, is a positive state of well-being or flourishing. This state of well-being could also be called happiness. Ricard (2006, p.19) wrote that happiness is “a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind. This is not a mere pleasurable feeling, a fleeting emotion, or a mood, but an optimal state of being. Happiness is also a way of interpreting the world, since while it may be difficult to change the world, it is always possible to change the way we look at it”. Thus, happiness or emotional freedom involves a way of seeing and being that is free from mental-emotional disorder.

Wallace & Sharpiro, (2006, p. 691) wrote “the goal of Buddhist practice is the realization of a state of well-being that is not contingent on the presence of pleasurable stimuli, either external or internal”. Further to this “a fundamental premise that underlies this well-being is that mental suffering is due in large part to imbalances of the mind. On the other hand, just as a healthy, uninjured body is relatively free of pain, so is a healthy balanced mind is relatively free of psychological distress even in the face of adversity”. (Wallace and Sharpiro, 2006, p. 693.)

Several constructs described in contemporary psychological allude to this flexible way of being and seeing. For example, Emotional Intelligence is referred to as: “the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships”. (Goleman, 1998, p.317).

Psychological flexibility, a goal of ACT (Hayes et al, 1999) is another example. With ACT psychological flexibility refers to being fully aware of, and in contact with the present moment. It also involves changing behaviours that do not serve our chosen valued directions and/or persisting in those that do.

In Theravada Buddhism *Nibbana* (a Pali term) or *Nirvana* (a Sanskrit term) is used in reference to the third truth. The Buddha often used analogies, similes and metaphors to describe the nature of experiences, as elaborate verbal descriptions were often inadequate. This was especially the case with Nirvana, which he was reported to have said: (this truth is) “profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise” (Majjhima Nikaya 26:19 in Bodhi and Namamoli, 1995, p.260). A metaphor he used for *Nirvana* was the extinguishing of a fire. According to one translation, the word literally means Un (*nir*) + binding (*vana*) (Thanissaro, 1993). Thus, freedom is defined not in terms of what it is but in terms of what it is not. Here, freedom means that one is unbound by patterns and habits that lead to *dukkha*. *Nibbana* is the result of exiting from the cycles of interdependent co-arising and no longer being bound by tendencies associated with craving and clinging, aversion and not knowing. According to Ajahn Brahm (2006) another way the Buddha described *Nibbana* was also as the highest happiness.

The Fourth Noble Truth: The Noble Eight Fold Path.

The search for a way to freedom usually begins with the experience of being trapped, bound or feeling stuck. There are many pathways to freedom away from *dukkha*. A pathway implies that there is a direction and that it is well worn by those who have travelled before. The Buddhist eight-fold path is towards psychological freedom and it remains open and clear by all those who have travelled and continue to journey on this way.

The eight-fold path is called the middle way because it is balanced with moderation and does not incline to extremes of self-indulgence or self-denial. The Buddha's eight-factored path is a way to balance any cognitive, affective and behavioural imbalances. The eight-fold path is in essence the practice of Buddhism. Just as an elephant's footprint can contain within it all the footprints of other animals, the eight fold path contains within it all possible healing, therapeutic and awakening principles. The eight-fold path contains factors that are in opposition to the patterns driven by craving/clinging, aversion/hatred and confusion/ignorance. The eight fold path is a general framework which has within it numerous sub-systems, all of which work together in a manner that inhibits or uproots the types of mental, emotional and behavioural patterns that cause and perpetuate psychological suffering. The eight-fold path and its sub-systems also nurtures what is best by cultivating optimal ways of seeing and being such as psychological ease and wellbeing, compassion and wisdom. In summary, the eight-fold path, as a framework of Buddhist practices, is a process of relinquishing the unhelpful and cultivating the helpful. According to some scholars the path has two levels (Bodhi, 2000a; Thanissaro, 1996). The first, fundamental or mundane level leads to the alleviation of severity of *dukkha*. When a certain degree of freedom with stress has been realised, a more refined and noble level of the path can be followed, leading to complete liberation. Contemporary psychotherapies are generally about promoting mental-emotional health and balancing mental-emotional imbalance. The strategies and approaches used in these approaches could be considered as fitting within the broad framework of a fundamental eight-fold path, and thus Buddhism.

The eight factors on this way are divided into three basic trainings or components, which are interdependent. These are: wisdom (right understanding or conceptualisation and right intention, thought or vision), ethics or lifestyle (right action, speech and livelihood or occupation or upkeep), and heart-mind cultivation (right effort, mindfulness and concentration).

Each factor on the path starts with the word right. "Right" is a translation of the Pali term "*samma*". Other ways *samma* could be understood include: complete, fully, skilful, appropriate or correct. The eight factors on the path are not followed in a sequential manner, one after the other. More accurately they are interdependent

components “comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all the strands for maximum strength” (Bodhi, 2000a). Right mindfulness is the seventh factor on the path and though it is crucial, it is equally as important as the other factors on the path.

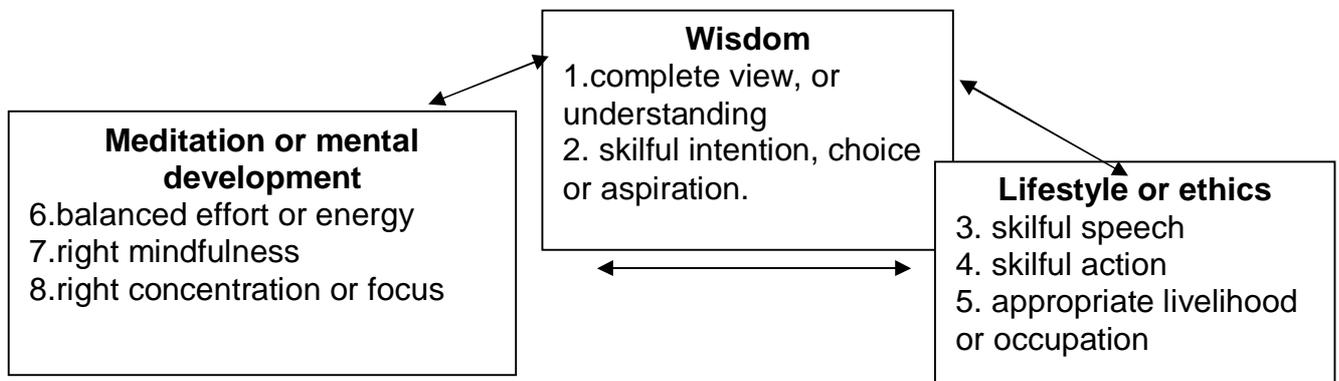


Figure 2. The Eight Fold Way.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness generally refers to attention. It can also refer to remembering. In the psychotherapeutic literature mindfulness is referred to as a coping skill, a mode of being and a meditation practice. There is, however no consensus about its definition.

The most common definition of mindfulness in therapy is: “**paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally**” (Kabatt-Zinn, 1994, p.4).

An operational definition of mindfulness offered by Bishop et al, (2004) describes mindfulness as the ability to regulate attention with a particular orientation.

Regulating attention skills include:

- Sustained attention-focus
- Attention switching-flexibility
- Inhibition of elaborative processing

The orientation includes:

- Curiosity
- Experiential Openness
- Acceptance

A therapeutic definition of mindfulness offered by Germer, Siegel and Fulton (2005) includes :

1. Awareness
2. Of the present moment
3. With acceptance

The traditional Buddhist approach to mindfulness involves a combination of remembering, discernment, circumspection, discernment and retention. According to Bikkhu Bodhi mindfulness is: **“to remember to pay attention to what is occurring in one’s immediate experience with care and discernment”**. Other Buddhist definitions include **“remembering to purposely be attentive to present moment experience in a receptive open minded manner”**. According to Wallace (2008, p. 60) the remembering component of mindfulness “includes retrospective memory of things in the past, prospectively remembering to do something in the future, and present-centred recollection in the sense of maintaining unwavering attention to a present reality”. Mindfulness has also been described **as remembering where we are, what we are doing and who we are with** (Hahn, 1999). Another way of describing mindfulness is **presence**. That is, being present for the experience of life.

The four domains of mindfulness

There are four foundations mindfulness. These are:

1. **Contemplating Body:** Mindfulness of the body and tangible bodily experience. This includes, among other aspects, being aware of posture, physical sensations as well as the breath.
2. **Contemplating feelings:** “Feelings” refers to the hedonic tone of experience as it manifests as pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant or unpleasant. Feelings arise in relationship to both bodily and mental experiences.
3. **Contemplating the heart-mind.** This domain refers to awareness of the quality of our state of mind or consciousness. This includes being mindful of the states of mind that may colour the mind such as a distracted mind, an angry mind, a wanting mind, a generous mind, a happy mind, a guilty mind and so on. Being mindful of emotions and thoughts, as we normally understand them could be included in this domain.
4. **Contemplating phenomena or Dharma.** This domain includes being mindful of the content of mind and general experience. Also included in this domain are thoughts and being aware of how some mental, emotional and behavioural tendencies may perpetuate mental distress while other tendencies alleviate or uproot mental-emotional distress.

Ethics, the foundation of meditation

In traditional Buddhist meditation, ethics are considered as the foundations of the practice. Just as a house without foundations is vulnerable to toppling, meditation without ethics can be very fragile.

Causes have effects and actions have consequences. Our actions and our motivations have an impact on the world around us and on the way we feel. The

context in which the practice of mindfulness becomes a healthy coping skill also includes integrity with our actions or ethics. Ethical integrity includes the understanding that our present situation is very often “the fruition of former choices” (Batchelor, 1997, p.47). When we are not intentionally harming ourselves or others it is less likely that our minds will be plagued with hatred, guilt or fear. When we avoid harmful speech, actions and occupations our conscience is more likely to be clear and our minds easily able to focus on the present moment. If we lie, deceive and use abusive speech, much of our mental energy may be spent worrying about being exposed or ways to defend ourselves against counter attacks. For most of us, blatantly unethical acts such as unnecessary killing, stealing or sexual behaviour that hurts someone rarely leaves our minds free of disturbance. Further to this, the unwise use of alcohol and non-prescription drugs can cloud our minds and lead to a range of harmful and regretful behaviours. The basic message is that intentionally harmful actions have consequences. The more we allow harmful intent to dominate our action the harder it is to have the type of mental composure conducive to cultivating focus, awareness and wisdom.

When we act skilfully and ethically, we are more able to bring focussed attention to our lives and be present for it. When we bring attention to our lives and the events in our lives we begin to understand how these events change and interact. This understanding is a form of wisdom.

Meditation

The Pali word for meditation is *bhavana*, which means “bringing into being” or cultivating (Namamoli and Bodhi, 1995). Buddhist meditation is generally directed at the cultivation of serenity and/or insight.

Insight Meditation

Generally insight meditation and practicing the four foundations of mindfulness are the same. Thus, insight meditation is the practice of remembering to be aware of the changing nature of mind and body experiences, and observing the connections between these experiences. Like changing gears, the dominant mode or domain of mindfulness varies depending on the context of circumstances and what is happening. Unlike serenity meditation practices where one chooses one object of attention over another, mindfulness (insight) meditation does not exclude objects of attention. Rather, there is an opening up to the wide and full spectrum of experience, so that all experiences pleasant or unpleasant, wanted or not wanted are including in the domains of awareness. Some schools of insight meditation instruct practitioners in establishing mindfulness in primary objects of attention so that the breadth of awareness is slowly developed. Primary objects of attention are those objects, which are chosen, and that are easy to bring attention to. Physical experiences are often chosen as primary objects because they are more tangible than more insubstantial mental experiences such as thoughts and emotions.

Since mental and bodily phenomena are constantly changing, it is normal that many objects will come into our sphere of awareness with insight meditation. If objects, other than the chosen primary one, become so strong that they draw our attention away, we then make those objects “secondary” objects of attention. We stay mindful of secondary objects until they no longer dominate, and then return our attention to our primary object. Primary or chosen objects can become an anchor or a resting place for our attention. Physical sensations, sound and the breath are common primary objects of attention in insight meditation practice. With practise, it is possible to practice “choice-less” or open awareness where the primary object is the flow of changing experience.

With insight meditation enquiry or investigation is emphasised. It is as if we go *inside* an object to *sight* or see what is happening. It is as if one asks about the nature of the object of attention with the question “what is happening here?” or “how should this object be seen or *insighted*?”

With insight meditation we usually remember to bring attention to present moment experience without resistance or avoidance or attachment and clinging and be open to experience it is. As we bring attention to the present moment we notice one or all three of the characteristics of existence: change/impermanence, interdependence/not-selflessness/emptiness/contingency and uncertainty/ambiguity. We notice the characteristics by remembering to bring detailed and penetrating awareness to experience. In the beginning, we may only notice how everything changes. However, as individuals vary, one of the other characteristics may predominate. The basic instructions for insight meditation are: bring precise and investigating attention to present moment experience, do not get lost in stories but be allowing, stay present, and notice the three characteristics of existence, in particular change. Also notice the interconnection between experiences. That is, notice what leads to what and how things arise and pass away.

Serenity Meditation

Calm or serenity meditation sooth and quell emotional and physical disturbance. They help us to feel at ease, relaxed, happy, peaceful and serene. With calm or serenity meditation practices one chooses an object to focus on, and then places single-minded attention on that object. Sometimes the focus with serenity meditation is considered like a funnel or tunnel like narrowing of attention. Often however, concentration is more experienced like a stilling, stabilising, centring and settling of mind. In this way serenity meditation serves to collect attention and create a sense of composure and integration. When attention is collected, some activities of mind fall away and one’s attention centres on one thing. Of course other object may come to mind. However, as interest in the object of attention grows, concerns, worries, hankerings or desires about other things lose significance and attention becomes absorbed into the object of interest. The progressive sequence with serenity

meditation is firstly 1/relaxation then 2/stability then 3/vividness or seeing the details of the object.

There are many objects one can choose to focus on, including: visualisations, mantras, particular states of mind, reflections, tasks that one is doing, bodily experiences, the breath and so on. The basic instructions for serenity meditation are: choose an object of attention, stabilise attention on that object, use whatever helps attention stay focused, work through and eventually let go of that which blocks the flow or obstructs attention and allow absorption into the object. Apply soft and gentle energy to return attention to the object repeatedly. Notice the pleasantness, happiness, peace and single pointed attention related to the practice.

Serenity meditation stills, unifies, composes and concentrates the mind. Insight meditations develop insight or wisdom. Calm and insight meditations often overlap so that insight meditation also develops calm and calm meditations can develop insight. Sometimes meditation practitioners consciously develop serenity meditations first, so that their minds are stilled and when they investigate the nature of an object of attention it is seen clearly and distinctly with insight. Sometimes, meditation practitioners find that they can't concentrate well yet they can remember to cultivate moment-to-moment attention (or mindfulness) and this eventually builds the power of concentration and the ability to sustain attention for calm meditations. Some experienced meditation practitioners like to switch back and forth between calm and insight meditation practices (sometimes within the one meditation session sitting). The insight practices help to provide understanding that can uproot negative stressful patterns and the calm practices help to keep the negative patterns at bay and provide some peace.

Wisdom: Wise views and kind and compassionate intentions

According to one Buddhist monk called Thanissaro Bhikkhu “the Buddha had a simple test for measuring wisdom. You're wise, he said, to the extent that you can get yourself to do things you don't like doing but know will result in happiness, and to refrain from things you like doing but know will result in pain and harm.” (Thanissaro, 2006).

Wisdom directs choices about our actions and ethical integrity with our actions including speech and our livelihood. Wisdom is manifold and includes components of seeing and volition, view and intention. Wisdom directs strategies to abandon the thinking, emotional and behavioural patterns that lead to being bound up in *dukkha*. The seeing aspect of wisdom can refer to knowledge, understanding or insight about how suffering arises and how it is abandoned. The intentional aspects of wisdom include the interpersonal and intrapersonal correlates of insight, which are loving-kindness and compassion. Wisdom arises from heart mind training (effort,

mindfulness and concentration). It can also arise from hearing or reading wise advice and reflection or thinking clearly and realistically. Thus, wisdom may include the helpful thinking processes encouraged by therapies such as Cognitive Therapy (CT). Wisdom, however, is not limited to this type of verbal and logical thought as it can include a non-verbal “knowing” that is described by some as intuitive (Pandita, 1992).

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