

Session 1:

Training the Mind

THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS

The Path of Trouble is a place you might know well and find yourself in over and over again. It's a path of unwanted thoughts and feelings that can lead to impulsive reactions and unskillful behaviors that can end up a big mess for you and everyone involved.

The Path of Freedom takes you on a different journey with a different conclusion. Step by step along the way, you recognize the habits and patterns that might have driven you on your own unique Path of Trouble. The Path of Freedom will teach you how to shift, change and ultimately transform your path.

Mindfulness is the core tool that supports the Path of Freedom. By slowing down your mind and developing awareness, mindfulness practice will help you work more skillfully with your thoughts, feelings and reactions, and create a "gap" where genuine choice and true freedom arise.

Why Meditate? & What is Mindfulness?

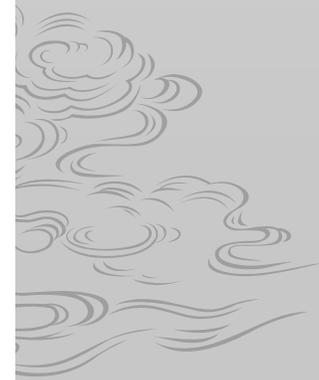
Meditation and mindfulness practices are powerful tools you can use to create peace and calm in your life. Meditation helps you see things more clearly, reduces stress levels and helps you live life more fully awake and alive. Practicing mindfulness will help you with controlling habitual impulses and reactions that might lead you into further problems. These practices are the foundation of the **Path of Freedom**.

Meditation and mindfulness are about training the mind to be awake, stable, peaceful, reflective and grounded in the present moment. It can be helpful to consider training your mind as you would train your muscles. Both take time and practice, and can be hard. If you grip something, the muscles in your hand and arm tense. If you continue to grip, your entire body tenses. Relax the hand and the tension leaves. Similarly, the mind might grab at thoughts and worries. The longer you grip onto these thoughts and stories and make them into 'Big Deals,' the more tense and agitated your mind becomes. Meditation will help you relax that tendency and allow you to experience your life from a more centered and peaceful place.

The Los Angeles Lakers and the Chicago Bulls have used meditation to improve player performance. Coaches have found that meditation helps

"Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart."

~ Marcel Morin



“It’s not so much what happens as it is how we are with ourselves regardless of what happens –that makes the difference in our lives.”

~ Cheri Huber,
Meditation teacher

players be more centered, focused, and aware—qualities which result in their game being much more effective.

Meditation and mindfulness practice helps on the path to inner freedom. It allows one to catch the moments where we have the choice and freedom to not react in a habitual or mindless way. Instead, we will be able to choose to act or not to act from a strong, clear and centered place in ourselves.

Thinking . . . Thinking . . . Thinking . . .

In every moment of the day, the mind is thinking, thinking, thinking. Thoughts come and go, racing around our heads endlessly. Sometimes one small anxious thought will capture all of our attention and we are off and running, making a huge disturbing story out of it. We might believe this story is absolute reality, even though it began with a simple thought that may or may not be based on reality.

Most of us race through life endlessly building our lives around the stories we create from one single thought. Our minds are rarely calm and quiet. Meditation is a tool we can use to calm our minds and create space around thoughts and stories so that our thinking is clear and useful. Meditation is not a way to become thoughtless—thoughts are a necessary and natural part of being human. It’s all the anxious stories, confusion, reactions, and worries we create from thoughts that turn into the problem. Meditation helps us with this by creating more spaciousness and clarity in the mind.

What did you have for breakfast two Thursdays ago? You might find it hard to remember unless you eat the same thing every day. But even if you could remember, you most likely wouldn’t remember the specifics. For example, you may not remember any of the details or you may remember the breakfast was cold or under cooked. Sometimes many of us take our thoughts of the past to be reality, when in fact, memory is fuzzy and colored with interpretations. On the other hand, do you ever think about the future, and worry about a reality that hasn’t happened, wondering, “What will happen to me?” It’s important to remember, you have no way of knowing what the future will be, any more than you can be sure of recalling the past exactly as it was. The only thing you can know for certain is the present moment, which is your window into reality. Meditation will help you see and experience your life as it really is, in the present moment, with clarity and focus.

“You are so impulsive & out of control!”

Have you ever heard that? Being impulsive means you're acting so fast you don't have time to consider the results of what you're doing. Meditation is a powerful tool that will help you slow down so that you have space in your head to think and consider all the choices, before you jump into action.

Meditation: What It Is... & What It Isn't...

Meditation is...

- A way to transform your life and find peace
- A way to deal effectively with stress and tension
- A tool you can use anywhere, anytime... in any situation

Meditation is NOT...

- A quick fix
- A way to become thoughtless or a brain dead zombie

Stress & Relaxation

When we meditate, we use our breath to relax. The breath can be a powerful and direct route to relaxation. When you are tense or stressed, have you ever noticed that your breath is fast and shallow and your muscles are tight?

By learning to meditate, you will become aware of how you are breathing, and you will learn how to achieve a state of deep and calm relaxation. Your breath will slow down and your muscles will relax. Simply by breathing deeply and evenly, you will become quieter and calmer. Your breath is a tool that you can use to create peace inside yourself.

We will be exploring many different types of meditation and mindfulness in this workbook—most will involve working with the breath in different ways to achieve relaxation and clarity.

Try this now:

Stop. Shut your eyes. Take four deep, slow, breaths . . .
. . . What happened?

How to Practice Meditation . . .

First we will explore formal meditation, sometimes called “sitting practice.”

The first thing we will work on is our meditation posture.

“There can only be one state of mind as you approach any profound test; total concentration, a spirit of togetherness, and strength.”

~ Pat Riley,
L.A. Lakers coach



“All too often people come to meditation in the hope of extraordinary results, like visions, lights, or some supernatural miracle. When no such thing occurs, they feel extremely disappointed. But the real miracle of meditation is more ordinary and much more useful...”

~ Sogyal Rinpoche,
Author

The Six Points of Good Posture

1. Seat: Sit comfortably on the floor or on a chair. Have a strong sense of being solidly on the earth. Your posture is regal, alert and awake (as opposed to slumping). If you sit cross-legged, your knees shouldn't be higher than your hips (use a folded blanket or pillow to raise your seat if necessary).

2. Legs: Cross your legs comfortably at the ankles. If you are in a chair, don't cross your legs; instead plant your feet firmly on the floor, hip-width apart.

3. Arms: Let your arms hang loosely from relaxed shoulders. Rest your hands comfortably on your thighs, palms down.

4. Strong Back/Soft Front: Your torso is upright and dignified as if you are a king or queen on a throne with your spine straight. Your back feels strong and your chest is soft and open.

5. Eyes: Your eyes can be open or shut. If they are open, gaze softly downward about three to four feet in front of you.

6. Mouth: Relax your face and jaw. Open your mouth slightly. If it's comfortable place your tongue on the roof of your mouth.

If you sit cross-legged and your legs cramp, it is okay to stretch them out or briefly bring your knees up. Not everyone can sit cross-legged, so it's fine to use a chair or sit on the side of a bed; just make sure to have your feet firmly planted on the floor and your back straight. Lying down is also an option (although you might fall asleep if you get very relaxed . . . if so . . . enjoy your moment of rest!). Overall, awareness of the body provides a very helpful foundation for your meditation practice. You may want to take a minute or two at the beginning of each session to scan through your body from head to toe, cultivating awareness of all the internal and external physical sensations that make up the experience of being alive in your body. This will also help your mind settle into the practice.

Your Breath

Put your attention on your breath (breathing either through your mouth or nose). Take a few deep breaths, exhaling fully. Let your breath settle into its natural rhythm.

Sit still and keep your focus on your breath. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the breath again...and again...and again.

You might bring your attention back to the breath 1,000 times—that is the practice of meditation—constantly bringing your mind back to the peace and simplicity of the present moment, over and over.

Why put attention on your breath? Because the breath is a portable tool that is always with you. You can focus on your breath any time, in any situation, and use it to calm yourself. By practicing sitting meditation in a more focused ‘formal’ way you will remember to use the breath as a tool when you need to calm down.

Labeling Thoughts

When you notice your mind racing with thoughts, emotions, or sensations, simply return to your breath and continue putting your attention on the breath coming in and out of either your nose or mouth, or both.

You don’t have to push away your thoughts—the point is not to get rid of thoughts and be thoughtless—the point is to simply not make a big deal out of them. You are learning to take a ‘No Big Deal’ approach to thoughts by simply returning your focus to your breath.

Labeling is one way to work with thoughts. When thoughts arise—and when you notice you are thinking, especially if you have been lost in thought,—simply say to yourself (silently) “Thinking.” Then return to the breath.

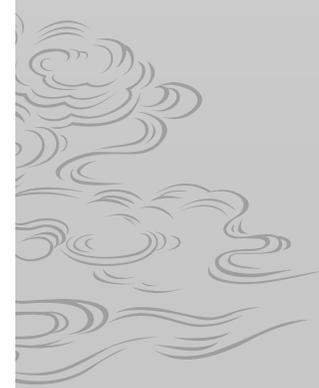
Labeling is not meant to get rid of thoughts or sensations. It is a training tool that will show you what these thoughts really are—simply thoughts—nothing more, nothing less. Many times we get carried away with our thoughts and stories. The labeling tool will help you not get so taken.

Labeling thoughts is done with a light touch—we aren’t beating ourselves up by screaming or shouting internally, ‘THINKING!!’ over and over! Just gently say, “Thinking” when you notice you are caught up in your thoughts—and return to focusing on your breath.

So-called ‘good’ and ‘bad’ thoughts are all the same—you could be having a thought about hitting someone or about playing with a puppy—both are

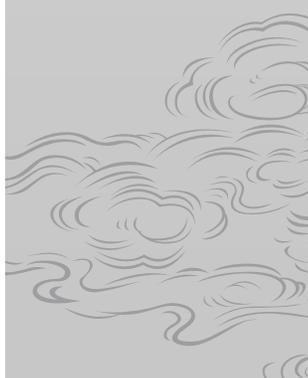
“Nothing can bring you
peace but yourself.”

~ Ralph Waldo
Emerson, poet



“People say you have to travel to see the world. Sometimes I think that if you just stay in one place and keep your eyes open, you’re going to see just about all that you can handle.”

~ Paul Auster, novelist



just thoughts. Simply label them ‘Thinking’ and return to your breath. Train your mind like this and you will soon realize that you don’t need to act on every thought that appears. You’ll see that thoughts come and go and you don’t need to latch on to them or make a big deal out of them. Thoughts are natural. Simply let them come and go.

Practice Tips

Willingness

Be willing to try. You will only know if meditation works if you give it a shot. Start slow, 5 or 10 minutes a day. Notice if you are calmer, more centered, or less angry.

Why?

Take a moment—just a few seconds before you meditate—to ask yourself why you want to meditate. Do you want less stress? To be calmer? To be less reactive? To be less angry? To sleep better? Whatever it is—just take a few seconds to reflect on ‘Why?’ Setting an intention such as “I’m doing this to be less stressed,” just before meditation can really help us clarify our motivations.

Resistance

If you find you are resistant to your meditation practice, well—that’s normal! Consider your resistance as just another thought—don’t let it dominate your life. Let it go. Meditation is mind training; it takes work, and embracing, working through and/or leaping over resistance is part of the work.

Doing it as a “Chore”

Try to avoid ‘should-ing’ yourself into meditation or making it into something you dread doing because you ‘must.’ Meditation is not something you should do or dread doing—it is something that will transform your life in many positive ways if you choose to practice it. The choice is yours.

How Long?

Meditate for as long as you feel comfortable, even if it is only five minutes a day. As you practice more and see that it helps—you will find yourself wanting to do it longer.

I’m Too Emotional To Sit Still . . .

When you are agitated or emotional, don’t avoid practice. It may seem hard, but these are the times meditation can really help. Don’t miss the opportunity to test this and see if it helps.

N.B.D. (No Big Deal)

Resistance, agitation, boredom, sleepiness, dreams, fantasies, schemes, plans, and emotions (such as anger, depression or anxiety) are normal things that come up during meditation. Your mind slows down when you meditate. Sometimes old or buried pain can surface when the ‘noise’ of daily thinking quiets. When this occurs, try to take a ‘touch & go’ attitude toward these feelings without resisting them or getting totally swept away by them. Feel them fully, and let them go, and return to your breath. Resisting or getting lost in the feelings will only make them a bigger deal. Take a “N.B.D.” (No Big Deal) attitude about feelings that arise—experience them fully, let go and return to the breath.

Do I Need a Special Cushion or Quiet Place To Practice?

Sometimes it is suggested you use a meditation cushion and sit in a quiet place. Yes, these are supportive conditions for meditation, but life doesn’t always work like that. A folded blanket or pillow can be just as helpful as a meditation cushion. You can also sit on a chair or on the side of your bed. If you find you are bothered by noise, let sound happen without commenting on it and if thoughts arise simply label them thinking.

What is Mindfulness Practice?

Mindfulness involves paying attention to whatever is going on right now. Right now you are reading this sentence. Does your mind wander as you read? You turned the page a second ago—can you remember what you just read there? Being able to stay focused and present is the practice of mindfulness.

We might spend our time so absorbed in thoughts, fantasies, schemes, plans, worries, etc.—that we miss what is actually happening in our life. Minutes, hours, days, weeks or even years can pass, and we are so distracted that our life slips by without us even knowing it.

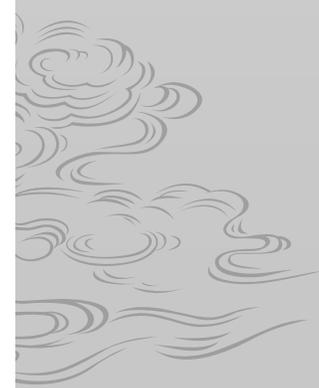
Mindfulness practice trains us to wake up to our life, to see it as it really is and appreciate it. It will help us relax and be more open, alert, focused, and clearheaded. When we develop the skill of mindfulness, we will make choices and decisions from a place of calm and clarity, rather than reactivity, fear, or impulse.

Witness Quality of Mindfulness

Mindfulness means we are not completely absorbed or lost in what is happening inside or outside of us. Some part of our mind remains a neutral observer or witness—aware, in an objective way, of what is going on.

“Whether we sit with our arms folded this way and our legs crossed that way is of little consequence. But it is extremely important to check and see if whatever meditation we do is an actual remedy for our suffering.”

~ Lama Thubten Yeshe



“With gentleness and precision, meditation practice will bring us joy.”

~ Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

For instance, right now I am typing at my computer; I know at the same time I am sitting in front of my desk, hearing the conversation from a TV program, feeling hungry, aware of noises from the street outside and so on. I am mindful, clearly aware of the various things happening around me without getting caught by any one thing. I am able to take in whatever is happening with awareness and interest.

The relaxation, presence, and clarity you achieve through meditation and mindfulness practice will put you in charge of your life. You have a choice—either take charge of your life through practicing mindfulness, or let random thoughts, impulses, fear, and reactivity run your life.

What choice will you make?

General Mindfulness/Awareness Practice

1. First focus attention outside yourself...“I am aware of ...”
2. Then focus on your own body and your physical sensations...“I am warm, my stomach hurts, my neck is tense, etc.”
3. Then relax, let go and return to whatever you are doing.

Walking...

When I walk the mind will wander.

With each sound the mind returns.

With each breath the heart is open.

With each step I touch this earth. ~ Thich Nhat Hahn

We spend a good part of our life moving. Walking meditation is a way to practice mindfulness while we’re moving. During walking meditation you put your attention on your feet rather than your breath. When you notice you are thinking or distracted, simply bring your attention back to your feet and their movement—up and down.

You don’t need to look at your feet—just simply be aware of how your feet feel one step at a time as they lift and move through the air: heel, sole, toe, heel, sole, toe. In particular, pay attention to the point when the foot touches the ground, and the sensations of contacting the earth. Remember

to feel each step, not just think about it or visualize it. Keep your posture upright, alert, and relaxed. You can hold your hands at your sides, or clasped in front or behind. Keep your eyes open, cast down, and slightly ahead. Experiment with how fast you walk, perhaps slowly or at a more regular speed. Find the pace where you feel most present and aware.

You are here, walking on the earth. It's good to be alive. ☺

Cell Practice *(homework)*

Meditation:

Try sitting in basic meditation using the instructions in this chapter at least once a day for 5 minutes every day this week.

Contemplation:

Contemplate “Freedom.”

How To Do Contemplations:

Each chapter in this book will have a contemplation and a meditation as “Cell Practice” (homework). The name “Cell Practice” was suggested by the participants who took part in a pilot program of this curriculum at the Rhode Island ACI.

Directions:

- Meditate for a few minutes to stabilize your mind.
- Then bring to mind the phrase or word you are contemplating.
- Repeat this word or phrase (silently) over and over.
- Notice and be present to what arises: images, memories, associations, and/or feelings. Stay present.
- As you begin to really experience the quality or meaning of the word or phrase you are contemplating such as ‘Freedom’ simply rest in that quality, meaning or feeling.

“Walking is a blessing.”

~ Henry David Thoreau

