



Week One – Mindfulness and the Mindfulness of Breathing

What is Meditation?

Meditation is a means of transforming and changing our minds for the better. It helps us change the way we relate to ourselves and the world around us. If we experience difficulties, meditation can help us to work creatively with those difficulties. If life is already good for us, meditation can deepen our enjoyment and appreciation of life.

Buddhist meditation techniques offer a way of encouraging and developing positive states of mind. We can use it to cultivate calmness, clarity and awareness, and also can help us to develop emotional positivity. It can help us let go of ways of being that limit us, and allow us to go beyond a limited sense of ourselves. It can even help us to see more deeply the true nature of things.

The main thing we learn when we meditate is that we have a *choice* about what we think and feel. We tend to think of our personality as being fixed. We tend to think that the thoughts and emotions we have are somehow inevitable, and outside of our control. But actually our emotions and thoughts are much more fluid and ever-changing than this. And even though much is beyond our control in life, we can always take responsibility for our own states of mind and choose to change them for the better. Meditation empowers us to make this choice.

Buddhist Meditation

Over thousands of years Buddhist meditation techniques have developed to help people work with their minds. The foundation of all these techniques is the cultivation of a calm and positive state of mind.

The meditation practices we teach cultivate this calm and positive state of mind. They consist of two simple but effective practices drawn from the Buddhist tradition, originally taught by the Buddha himself over 2,500 years ago. The pair complement each other and can be learned by anyone.

The first practice is the **Mindfulness of Breathing**, which cultivates clarity, awareness and calmness. The second practice is the **Metta Bhavana**, or **Development of Loving Kindness** practice, where we develop friendliness and loving-kindness for ourselves and others. (We also do sessions of body awareness, which we call the **Body Scan**.)

Both practices are Buddhist in origin, but one does not have to be a Buddhist to benefit from them. After all, you don't have to be German to drive a BMW! That said, if you're interested in Buddhism, learning these two meditation practices is a great starting point.

Through learning these meditations, we may not find the meaning of life, but we can certainly find ways of living a life with more meaning. They are called foundation practices, but you can go a long way with them! They can profoundly transform your life for the better.



What Meditation is Not

It's worth saying what meditation is *not*. It isn't escapism: if you want to escape try watching lots of reality TV, getting drunk, doing drugs etc. They are more effective ways to escape your experience! When you sit down to meditate what you get is your experience, sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes not, but always very 'real'.

Neither is meditation about controlling your experience; it is about becoming aware of your experience and encouraging it in positive directions. In any case, you can't control your experience; you can only choose how you respond to it.

Finally it isn't about your mind going blank, or going into some trance! When you sit down to meditate, you get yourself, just as you are.

Overview of Course

Week 1	Introduction to meditation Posture workshop Body Scan Mindfulness and the <i>Mindfulness of Breathing</i> meditation practice
Week 2	Exploring aspects of mindfulness The four foundations of mindfulness
Week 3	Exploring friendliness The <i>Metta Bhavana</i> meditation practice
Week 4	Working with the mind: distraction and absorption
Week 5	Taking meditation into the world Keeping your practice going after the course

Mindfulness

Central to meditation is the practice of mindfulness. When we are mindful, we are aware; we notice what is going on around us and inside us.

Mindfulness is something we can practice when we're on the bus, when we're waiting in the queue at the shop, while we're eating. It's not abstract or esoteric – it's simply about paying attention to what's there with an attitude of interest and exploration.

Through being mindful, we learn that small things can have a big effect. Becoming aware of our bodies, our emotional life, our communication with others, helps us to live a life that flows into a rich tapestry of awareness, imbued with beauty and appreciation.

From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness even includes an awareness of 'how things really are' - an awareness of the true nature of things. By being mindful, the Buddha says, we become more wise and more free. It's because of this that he said that 'mindfulness is the direct path to freedom'.



The *Mindfulness of Breathing* Meditation Practice

In this meditation practice, we are, quite simply, mindful of the breath, aware of the breath. We bring more and more of our energies to bear on our experience of sitting here breathing.

Why meditate on the breath?

- It's always with us, it's free, and it's beautifully simple.
- It's internal, so we're less and less dependent on external stimulation.
- The breath offers way into our state of mind. Awareness of it takes us deeper into ourselves and how we are feeling.
- The breath can be a refined, pleasurable experience, which can be very enjoyable.
- The breath offers a meditation on life. It has a poetic quality: to be alive is to breathe. We breathe from our birth continuously until our death, when we 'draw our last breath'.

By focusing on the breath, we become aware of the mind's tendency to jump from one thing to another. The simple discipline of concentration brings us back to the present moment and all the richness of experience that it contains.

But also, by being aware of the breath, our energies will gather around the breath and our deeper energies will unlock and integrate, rather than remain scattered. By practising the Mindfulness of Breathing regularly, we can experience ourselves becoming more free, at deeper and deeper levels of ourselves.

How we do the Practice

We do this practice by simply being aware of the body breathing, being aware of the breath in the body. In other words, we bring this quality of mindfulness to our breathing.

We're not thinking about breathing, but rather *feeling* it. We're exploring the breath, being curious about the breath, being interested in the breath. It's not an idea about the breath, but an experience of the breath itself.

The breath is an organic process, so we don't force it or try to control it. Instead we simply be aware of it, and let it happen in its own way, without trying to change it.

Stages of the Practice

To help us be aware of the breath, and to encourage a deepening and refinement of our awareness of the breath, the practice is in stages.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Stage 1 | Mindful of the breath, with a subtle count <i>after</i> the out-going breath |
| Stage 2 | Mindful of the breath, with a subtle count <i>before</i> the in-coming breath |
| Stage 3 | Mindful of the breath |
| Stage 4 | As you breathe in and out, mindful of the sensations at the point where you first feel the breath enter the body |

The count in the first two stages is a gentle guide to help you stay with the breath – the practice is not mindfulness of counting! In each of these two stages, we count the breaths, up to ten, and then start the count again at one. This also helps us to notice if our minds wander off.

If the mind does wander off, don't worry. This is quite normal! Given our busy lives, it's not surprising that this happens. The main thing here is not to give yourself a hard time, and instead respond with kindness. Accept with kindness that you have wandered off, and then simply return to the breath in the body and resume the practice again. In a way, you should really celebrate when you notice you've wandered off, as you've just moved from unawareness to awareness!

Home Practice

This week practice the **Body Scan** (track 1) & the **Mindfulness of Breathing** (track 2) on alternate days.
(If you're using the CD both tracks are on CD 1.)

www.dublinbuddhistcentre.org/guided-meditations

Meditation Posture Guidelines

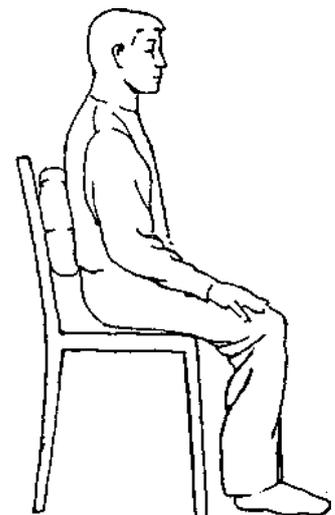
The most important things are:

- To have a firm posture.
- Be comfortable, relaxed and alert.

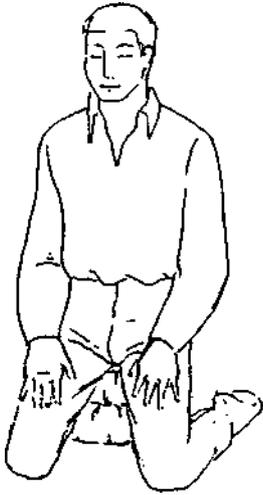
Ways to sit

On a chair

- Use a straight back chair, not an armchair.
- Your pelvis will sit at a better angle and you will be more comfortable if you raise the back legs of the chair by about 2-3cm by using blocks or a piece of wood.
- Do not cross the legs, but plant your feet squarely on the ground. Place a blanket or cushion under your feet if the chair is too high.
- Sitting against the back of the chair may not be ideal. Try sitting a little forward, with a cushion supporting the small of the back.



Kneeling astride cushions or stool



- An easy and popular method.
- Support the arms with a blanket tied around you, or in the pockets of a hoodie.
- Tuck a pair of socks under the ankles if the muscles are tight.
- If your knees get sore, increase the height slightly for future sits.

Cross-legged

- Only do this if your knees can reach the ground, otherwise you risk hurting your lower back.
- Support the arms again with a blanket tied around you, putting them into the pockets of a hoodie, or by resting them on the knees.
- Options include:

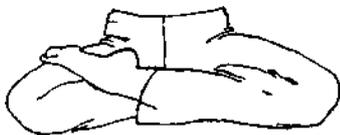
One leg in front of the other



One foot on the calf



One foot on the thigh (advanced)



Lotus posture (advanced)



Never strain to get into these positions! Sitting should be something you can do easily for the full meditation. If you have problems, talk to the class teacher when you're in the centre.



Week Two – The Foundations of Mindfulness

By now, we have hopefully had a taste of the kind of benefits meditation can bring to your life. And, no doubt, we have found that our mind wanders at times, and have seen how easily it is to become distracted and unmindful in meditation. To help us remain more mindful of our experience, both on and off the meditation cushion, we will explore and use two important teachings on mindfulness – *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, and *Continuity of Purpose*, as well as setting up and finishing meditation.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

In our meditation practice, we want to be mindful. But instead of just trying to be mindful generally, it's useful to have a framework, a system, for how to cultivate mindfulness. *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* plays a central part in the Buddha's teaching on mindfulness. It offers a useful framework for tuning into, and becoming mindful of, the different aspects of our experience. We can turn to these foundations at any stage in our meditation to help us be more aware. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are mindfulness of the body, of feeling-tones, of emotions and of thoughts.

1. Mindfulness of the Body

Being aware and mindful of the body generally means maintaining awareness of our body and its movements – being aware of the body's movements as we are walking, sitting, standing, lying down. It is being open to the natural rhythms of the body as we go about our day, and being more deliberate and aware in our physical movements.

In meditation, it means checking that we are aware of the body, how our legs are arranged, how our arms are held, being aware of how our torso feels, etc. Most importantly, it's being aware of the *physical sensations* that continuously arise and pass away in the body.

For example, as we follow the breath, we may also be aware of sensations of tightness in your lower back, then we become more aware of the movement of the ribcage as you breathe, then we notice a texture of sensation in your shoulders which passes as soon you notice it, and so on. Note that we're not aware of the breath to the exclusion of the body – instead, the breath happens *in* the body. We breathe, and are aware of the breath, within the context of all these happenings in the body.

Our body is very important in meditation – it's where meditation happens; it's the context for meditation. After all, the breath is the body breathing, nothing else. Sadly, many of us are quite out of touch with our bodies, and so, for many people, spending time deepening their awareness of the body will be a vital step to maintaining a regular meditation practice. In fact, everyone can probably do with deepening their awareness of their body and the sensations in the body.

Being aware of the body is a good antidote to being lost in your head, anxious or upset. In times like these, it may actually be painful to tune into the body and bring yourself down into it, but it's worth putting up with this discomfort, as the end result will be a more grounded, stable experience of yourself. Also, the pain will usually dissolve in appropriately applied awareness. And being grounded in this way undercuts a lot of the unhelpful stories and thinking that we tend to habitually engage in.

2. Mindfulness of Feeling-Tone



Being aware of feeling-tone means simply noticing whether the sensations we experience are pleasant or painful, instead of getting into unhelpful stories about our experience. So when we're aware of the body, we notice particular sensations, and we notice what feeling-tones those sensations have, i.e. whether they are painful, pleasurable or somewhat neutral.

For example, as we tune into the body and the breath, we may notice a texture of sensation in the shoulders, a certain tightness of held tension. We then ask ourselves 'how does this feel?' – what is the feeling-tone – and we see that it's slightly unpleasant. And by tuning into this feeling-tone, we're more aware of what's actually going in the shoulders, and we find it easier to relax that tension in the shoulders.

Or perhaps we feel some unusual tingling in the abdomen as we are following the breath, and we turn our attention to it. We notice that the feeling-tone is rather pleasant, and are open to this, allowing it into our awareness. By doing this, meditation tends to deepen into a more positive and enjoyable state.

Paying attention to the feeling-tone of our experience is very powerful and rewarding, both on and off the meditation cushion. It may be that we think most of what we experience is rather neutral, but if you really look you'll see more nuance and colour there. One way into opening up to the feeling-tone of your experience is to ask ourselves questions like: 'How comfortable am I right now?' 'Am I at ease in my physical experience?' These kinds of enquiries help us to explore the feeling-tone of what we're experiencing.

An important thing about feeling-tones is to be careful not to push away painful feeling-tones or grasp after pleasurable feeling tones. Simply let them be, be aware of them, and, generally speaking, if they're painful they will dissolve and if they're pleasurable they will deepen.

3. Mindfulness of Emotions

Being aware of our emotions means noticing whether we are happy, sad, dull, or angry. We can tune into these emotions by asking ourselves 'what am I feeling right now, emotionally?' Or we can use metaphors – if our minds were like the sea, what kind of sea would it be? Choppy and agitated, or calm and deep?

Emotions have to be included in meditation; we can't just wallpaper over them. If we're really angry, there's no point in pretending we're not – instead we have to breathe with the anger, allowing it to dissipate. If we're happy, great! Include this happiness in your awareness as we breathe.

The Buddha categorised our emotions according to whether they are based upon negative or unhelpful states of mind, such as greed, hatred, delusion, anxiety on the one hand, and positive or helpful states of mind such as love, kindness, peace, joy on the other. Being mindful of emotions means noticing what the emotion is, and whether it's helpful or unhelpful.

If it's a negative emotion, we firstly try not to add to it, nor to push it away. As long as we're adding to it, we can't do much about it. Then we try to simply be aware of the emotion in an open way. In this way, we can allow the emotion to dissolve in awareness. If it's a positive emotion, we sit with it without grasping. If we grasp after it, we'll most likely destroy it. Simply sitting with it in an open way, as we breathe, will allow it to naturally deepen into something more profound again.

Bear in mind also that emotions too have feeling-tones – i.e. emotions too can be pleasurable or painful. Noticing this is a good way to tune more into the emotion. Negative emotions tend to be painful, and positive emotions tend to be pleasurable, though not always! Destructive anger can feel superficially quite pleasurable and empowering...



By becoming aware of our emotional life we will find that unhelpful emotional states – such as hatred, greed, fear – will tend to be resolved; whereas helpful emotional states – such as love, kindness, peace – will deepen and refine.

4. Mindfulness of Thoughts

Most of the time, we're not really aware of the stream of our thoughts. One thought follows another, and we are 'distracted from distraction by distraction'. This doesn't, however, mean that thoughts, in and of themselves, are bad. Rather, it's our tendency to be unaware of them, or caught up in them, and allow them to proliferate, that's the problem.

So being aware of our thoughts firstly means being open and aware of the thoughts that are already there. As with the other foundations of mindfulness, we open up to thoughts as they are, acknowledge them, and allow them to settle in time by not adding to them.

Not being caught up in thoughts is a very useful and important skill, both in meditation and in life. We can experience times where thought simply ceases in meditation, but much of the time the practice is to simply be aware of them without 'buying into' them, and not getting lost in the content.

Buddhism speaks of our minds in their deepest nature as being like a clear blue sky, and thoughts being simply like clouds drifting across this clear blue sky. So we need to identify with the spaciousness of this clear blue sky, rather than the clouds than can fill it. We need to allow thoughts to simply arise and pass away without getting caught up in them.

Setting up in Meditation

We can use the foundations of mindfulness in our meditation if we feel we've become disconnected from or lost in our meditation sit. But one place that the foundations of mindfulness are particularly useful is when we are setting up our meditation.

Every time we start a meditation, we should take time to set up properly. The setting-up phase is the foundation upon which the effectiveness of the entire meditation session rests, and is a transition from our life off the cushion to a meditation environment. It's important to give ourselves time to set up, even if we're keen to get on with our meditation practice.

In setting up, firstly we become aware of the surroundings we are in. We allow any sounds to be there in the background, without trying to block them out. Be aware of the room, the floor underneath you. And if there are people around us, we become aware of them too.

Then we tune into the four foundation of mindfulness. We might choose to spend up to five or even ten minutes tuning into these carefully. And when we're ready, within this context, we allow an awareness of the breath to emerge. We gradually become aware of the breath, while aware of the foundations of mindfulness. When our awareness of the breath is established, we begin stage one of the practice.

If we get lost in meditation practice, or if it gets 'heady', we can come back once more to the foundations of mindfulness. As we continue the practice, we might find that the foundations of mindfulness are less immediately present in your experience, and we are more deeply focused on the breath. This is quite natural – we are moving from a broad awareness to a more focused awareness. Simply let this happen.

Continuity of Purpose



Mindfulness isn't just about being aware here and now of what's happening – it's also about being aware of what our purpose or intention for meditating. So as we meditate, we are aware that we intend to stay engaged with the breath, and intend to stay mindful of the body breathing.

When we become unmindful in meditation, usually it's because we forget to be mindful. We lose our sense of purpose. Staying in touch with our sense of purpose or intention tends to galvanise our energies and gives focus to the practice, and gives us a sense of confidence in your own potential.

It's particularly worthwhile connecting with this sense of purpose in the setting up stage of our meditation. After we connect with the foundations of mindfulness, we connect with our sense of determination, of purpose, to help our practice stay focused. We could also check in with our sense of purpose regularly throughout the meditation, e.g. at the start of every stage of the practice.

Finishing our Meditation

By the end of the meditation, we will have made quite a bit of effort, and it is important to balance that effort now with a period of 'just sitting'. Simply let go into a broader experience of ourselves. So we try to remain still, doing nothing, for two or three minutes at the end of the meditation, absorbing our meditation.

Just sitting in this way means simply letting go of any formal practice and literally *just sitting*, doing nothing in particular, not making any effort and simply allowing the mind and body to rest and relax. Then we re-introduce movement slowly, e.g. wiggling fingers and toes, taking a deeper breath or two. And when we do move, we do so gently. When we are ready, we can open our eyes and begin to re-engage with the external world.

It is important to be mindful of how we finish our meditation sit. If we jump up straight after meditating we are likely to lose all the calm and concentration that we have built up. It is also likely that we'll find the experience unpleasant. We want to make a smooth transition from our newly focused awareness back to a more broad awareness. We might like to reflect at this point on how we're feeling, specifically if we notice any change in our mental states now as compared to when we began. In this way, we'll see for ourselves how meditation can transform our mental wellbeing and positively change how we see the world.

And Finally...

Remember there is no such thing as a bad meditation! Meditation is about cultivating positive states of mind, so if our mind kept wandering and we kept trying to bring it back, then that is a good meditation. Meditation is about creating a momentum towards positive change and it may take some time for that to bear fruit. In the meantime, we just need to patiently work with our experience and simply enjoy the process.

Home Practice

This week do the **Mindfulness of Breathing** (track 2) each day.
(If you're using the CD this track is on CD 1.)

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Week Three - Metta and the Metta Bhavana

The Metta Bhavana is the second of the two meditation practices we teach at the Dublin Buddhist Centre. Metta can be translated as ‘loving-kindness’ while ‘Bhavana’ means ‘development’. So the Metta Bhavana is the ‘Development of Loving Kindness’. The Mindfulness of Breathing calms the mind down and integrates the energies, and the Metta Bhavana takes that energy and directs it towards the development of positive emotion. This positive emotion can then in turn provide a basis for the further development of mindfulness. The two practices thus form a complementary pair.

What is Metta?

Put simply, metta is the wholehearted desire for the happiness and welfare of another. It consists of wanting the best for someone in their own terms. It includes the qualities of kindness, friendliness, confidence and non-reactivity, and involves having an openness and emotional positivity for ourselves and other people.

Metta, or loving-kindness, is an emotion – a desire in our heart for someone’s well-being and happiness. To cultivate loving-kindness is to develop positivity and warmth, to leave behind harmful emotions, and to connect with people at a deeper level.

Metta is powerfully transformative, and can change how we see and experience the world. To cultivate loving-kindness is to grow out of self-centredness and emotional negativity, and into being able to have harmonious and satisfying relationships with other people, as well as with ourselves.

At its core, metta isn’t very complicated – it begins with simple feelings of friendliness that we experience when we meet people in an open, friendly way. It is important to realise that metta isn’t something alien to our experience, but something you do anyway in much of our lives.

To cultivate it, we become aware of this positive emotion, bring our attention to it, and we allow it to strengthen and deepen, so that we can consistently act out of metta when relating to ourselves and to others.

The Metta Bhavana Meditation Practice

Metta is a quality we can cultivate, just like mindfulness. In the ‘Metta Bhavana’, the ‘Development of Loving-Kindness’, we cultivate metta both for ourselves and other people. This is a powerfully transformative practice, which can radically change how we relate to ourselves and to the world around us. It’s also a particularly good antidote for irritability, ill-will and hatred. It’s also useful for relieving anxiety and stress.

Ultimately, the Development of Loving-Kindness is a wisdom practice. Wisdom, from a Buddhist perspective, means seeing that other people are no different from ourselves, in that they too want happiness and fulfilment, just as we ourselves do. Developing loving-kindness can help us to see this for ourselves.

Stages of the Practice

1. **Develop metta for yourself**

We start the practice with ourselves, simply contacting feelings of acceptance and kindness for ourselves, without any feelings of irrational guilt for doing so. A healthy self-regard is very important for developing metta towards others. Ultimately metta transcends the distinction between self and other, but methodologically we start by developing metta for ourselves.



2. Develop metta for a good friend

In this stage we call to mind a good friend, someone we naturally have feelings of love and kindness towards. Generally our response to a friend is one of metta, so we bring our awareness to this positive emotional response and by doing so allow it to grow and develop.

3. Develop metta for a neutral person

Here we call to mind someone for whom we have no particularly strong feelings. This could be your postman, someone at work you don't know very well, someone you see regularly and can bring to mind but do not have occasion to get to know well enough to have strong feelings about. There are about six billion neutral people out there!

4. Develop metta for a difficult person

In this stage we call to mind someone we find difficult. It is good not to pick your worst enemy here at the beginning, maybe someone a little easier at first! For the duration of the practice we try and put the difficulty aside, and instead see the person behind the difficulty.

They too feel pleasure and pain, have friends and family; they too probably suffer because of the difficulty. So we try and contact feelings of acceptance and openness towards them that in time will blossom as stronger feelings of metta.

5. (a) Develop metta for each person equally

(b) Develop metta for all beings everywhere

In this stage we call to mind all four people and try and let the feelings of metta equalise, so that we feel the same openness and well-wishing towards each person individually. Then we allow our awareness, imbued with metta, to expand and include as many people as possible, starting with those in the room around us, spreading out to include all; the people in the city, and eventually, if we can, including all beings everywhere in 'metta-full' awareness.

Picking People in the Stages

It's best to take some time before the practice to pick suitable people for the stages. If you're picking people during the practice, it is good to choose someone quickly, so as not to waste time in the practice. When choosing people, keep it simple while you are still learning the practice. As you get used to the practice, you can vary the people more, but in the early stages, much of the practice is seeing what metta actually is in your experience, and keeping the emotions involved as uncomplicated as possible.

So don't choose someone to who you are or were sexually attracted. Don't choose people who have died, for the first few weeks at least. Don't pick someone abstract (e.g. a historic figure). For a friend, we would recommend someone roughly the same age and gender as you. For the difficult person, we'd recommend someone you can handle and be able to keep your calm. As time goes on, you can vary the people you choose more.

How to Connect with Metta

There is always some aspect of kindness in our experience that we can get in touch with; some sense of openness, receptivity, connection to which we can bring our awareness. By bringing our awareness to this spark, we can allow it to grow and deepen within us, fanning the flames of our kindness.

We start cultivating loving kindness by connecting with metta for ourselves. This can start with a simple and open kindly acceptance of where we are now – kind acceptance of the four foundations of mindfulness in particular. We can be open and allow our bodies into our awareness with kindness. We can feel a tenderness to the aches



and pains our body has within it. Our body is our oldest friend, you might say, and though it isn't perfect, it does allow us to do so much. We can open with kindness to how we're feeling, to pains and pleasures in the body. We can allow in with kindness our ever changing emotional experience. And we can respond with kindness for whatever thoughts are there as well.

Dwelling in this kind acceptance of ourselves, this intimate tenderness for and receptivity to ourselves, is a great way into metta – in fact, doing this is itself an act of metta. There is nothing wrong with this healthy self-interest, and there is never a reason to be unkind to yourself. And seeing this with metta can really change how we relate to ourselves.

When we're bringing other people to mind, we can simply stay in touch with this sense of positivity in ourselves and hold this with our sense of the other person. This will naturally deepen into a more mettaful connection with the person. Seeing people clearly, with a warm heart, will allow empathy and kindness to flow. We can also simply try to see the person as a person, with likes and dislikes just as we have. When we truly see the person as a person, empathy will usually arise, and love will flow.

Using Phrases to Stimulate Metta

A traditional approach is the use of the phrases 'May you be well, may you be happy, may you be free from suffering, may you progress'. These phrases represent the quintessence of metta.

'May you be well' is simply wishing them good health. For many people, particularly those who are ill or older, this may often be the thing they need most. 'May you be happy' is to wish them happiness in their own terms. The more you know someone, the easier it is to have a sense of what this would mean. Even for neutral people, we probably know one thing that would make them happier, and we can wish them that. 'May you be free from suffering' is to wish that any discomfort or pain in their life may end. With the phrase 'May you progress' we start to see the person not just as they are, but also as they could become. It involves seeing people's potential, the good qualities that they have, and wishing that these qualities come more to the fore for them.

We are not using these phrases in a naive way – we know that people won't always be happy, will in fact suffer, may not realise their potential and will certainly be ill and die. But the act of imagining in detail what they would like in their life helps us see that they are just like us, and empathy can flow.

Practising wanting the best for people means that given the opportunity, you would do whatever you could to help make them well, or happy, in whatever way that would be. We start to learn how to respond appropriately to people, seeing where we can help, and doing what we can, even if that isn't always a lot.

Enemies of Metta

The 'Far Enemy' of metta is ill-will or aversion. It is the polar opposite of wanting the best for someone. It comes in various shades, and particularly in the difficult person stage, we have to acknowledge any feelings of irritation or animosity that arise, and then try and let them go.

The 'Near Enemy' of metta is sentimental attachment, and this arises particularly in the friend stage. It is where we like the feeling that we have in ourselves when that particular person is around, rather than wanting the best for them. It isn't the end of the world to feel this, but in the practice we try and move towards a more selfless love for people.

Sometimes people mistake metta for being 'nice', and think that it is about letting others 'off the hook', or letting people walk over them. Nothing could be further from the truth! Metta is one of the most robust and positive



states you could be in. It is not sentimental at all! Often the kindest thing one can do for someone may not necessarily be pleasant for them. We are developing robust kindness, not 'nice-ness'!

The 'Hidden Enemy' of metta is boredom and indifference. This can particularly arise in the neutral person stage! Sometimes it can be a real trial to just get interested in the person, just to take them in as a human being at all. Engaging our imagination to see them as much as possible, and simply watching out for our mind wandering helps in this stage.

Activity and Receptivity in the Metta Bhavana

There are two poles to the practice of metta, namely, an active pole and a receptive pole. Both are necessary, and in fact, when the metta is flowing, both are present.

Receptivity: Using the Imagination

It is not easy to be really and deeply aware of another person without any of our ideas about them getting in the way. But with time and practice it is possible. The first step in the process is to try and let go of our ideas about another person, to let go of preconceptions, and try and be as open to them as possible, to be as open to who they really are.

We do this through practising awareness of their needs. We can start by imagining them in their own world, without us around. This might mean imagining them in their work place, or in their home. It is almost as if you are a fly on the wall, becoming aware of what it is like to lead their life, from their perspective. You are trying to imaginatively identify with them, taking what you do know about their life and using these details to imaginatively empathise with them.

The more and more deeply aware of another we can become, the more the metta will flow. In a way you don't have to do anything else. It is as if the natural human response, when emotionally engaged with another, is to empathise. You just need to practice becoming aware, using your imagination to flesh out the details of their life that you do know, and waiting for the metta to naturally arise.

Activity: Well-Wishing and Using the Phrases

With a more 'active' approach, we can wish people well directly, and using the phrases can help in this process. The phrases express the quintessence of metta. The thoughts we have can lead our emotions. If you think thoughts filled with metta, you increase the chances of experiencing the emotion of metta.

There are two things to watch out for with the phrases. Firstly, become aware of how 'loudly' you are repeating them internally. The last thing you want is your own voice clanging around your head! Try and say the phrases 'softly' internally. Secondly, become aware of how quickly you say the phrases. Avoid allowing it to become mechanical. One way of doing this is to slow the phrases right down, and savour the effect each phrase has on you. Imagine your mind to be like a still pool, and the phrases, the thoughts of metta, to be like pebbles you are quietly dropping in, allowing them gently float down to the depths. In this way you are suggesting something to your depths, rather than trying to force a response of metta.

As mentioned earlier, once the metta is flowing it unites both poles. Metta is simultaneously active and receptive. It responds appropriately to the person it encounters. Sometimes, though, it can take time for metta to flow. If this is happening, one strategy is to alternate between both these poles in your practice. Firstly, practice becoming aware of the other person using your imagination, and then wish them well in the most appropriate manner, saying the phrases gently and slowly, savouring the effect. Then go back to imagining them



in their world, becoming more and more aware of them, before once again gently and quietly repeating the phrases. If you keep up this process with patience, and without grasping after the metta, it will arise naturally.

All of this depends, of course, on the strength of your own self-metta. If you're continuously having difficulty feeling metta for a friend or a neutral or difficult person, you need to return to the first stage and establish metta, or healthy regard and acceptance, for yourself. Once this is done to some extent you can move on.

Home Practice

This week practice one of the **Metta Bhavana** (track 3) and the **Mindfulness of Breathing** (track 2) each day, in a ratio of two metta sits for each mindfulness sit.
(If you're using the CD both tracks are on CD 1.)

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Week Four – Absorption & Distraction in Meditation

As we meditate, we will notice that, at times, our minds are quite calm and settled, and we're relatively easily able to stay with the breath or with metta. And at other times, we will notice that we get distracted, our mind wanders off onto something else, or we get lost in thoughts and emotions. This week we're going to look at both of these experiences.

Distractions: Ways the Mind Wanders

Our minds do not wander in a haphazard way. In fact, if we can pay attention we will notice that they often travel along familiar grooves. These grooves that our emotions and our thoughts run along are often circular and repetitive, and we may realise that we have been thinking or feeling in these ways for years!

If you do realise this, don't be despondent: it is in fact a great success to become more aware of the many ways in which the mind wanders. It is only through this kind of awareness that change is possible. And the great news is that it is possible to go beyond these distractions and patterns of thought and emotion for the better.

We need to engage and work with our mind when it wanders off the breath or metta, otherwise it'll be difficult to go deeper in meditation. When these distractions are absent, we are left feeling light, joyous, expansive, creative and one-pointed.

The Five Hindrances to Meditation

There are five ways the mind wanders in meditation, as taught by the Buddha:

1) Sense Desire

Sense desire is, at its most basic, a preoccupation with pleasant feeling, especially feeling as experienced through one of the five senses, and the mind, which for Buddhism is a sixth sense organ.

Traditionally it is described as desire for food, sex or sleep. But we could also add in preoccupation with fascinating ideas, pleasant memories or exciting plans for our holidays! These all give us pleasure when we think about them, and seem far more interesting than the boring old breath, or the elusive feelings of metta!

The key to working with sense desire is to notice yourself doing it – be aware of what you're dwelling upon, and make a choice as to whether to engage in this way with the object of desire again. Often when we look at the things we dwell upon, they're not as pleasurable as we think they are; indeed, it can even be rather tedious to keep planning our holiday over and over again! The breath, by contrast, can be very enjoyable indeed to focus upon, though it can be a more subtle pleasure that might take us a while to tune in to.

2) Ill Will or Aversion

Ill will is the opposite of sense desire – here we are preoccupied with unpleasant or painful experience. This might again be something through the five sense organs, such as a pain in our knee we really wish would go away, or that irritating roadwork noises just down the street.

The source of our ill will might not be external – it could be sparked off by replaying to yourself a conversation you had with someone that annoyed you and you can't let it go, what you'd like to say to that person if you had a chance, or wish you had said. Or you might analyse an idea or opinion endlessly, one that you really didn't like when you heard it, and draw out all its shortcomings. Ill will might arise in the fourth stage of the metta practice, or just an experience of grumpiness generally in meditation!



The real trouble here is not in fact the painful experience in itself, but the preoccupation with it. People do actually do things to us that are painful, roadwork noise, car alarms and sore knees are all unpleasant. Though we try, we just can't let go of our preoccupation with the painful experience. We try to push it or the person we associate it with away, and it only returns stronger. We tell ourselves that if we could only give them a piece of our mind, if only they would stop doing that really annoying thing, then everything would be okay!

Unfortunately we can't change people, drills or car alarms, at least most of the time anyway, but we can let go of the preoccupation with the painful experience that adds an extra unnecessary layer of suffering to our experience.

The Buddha said that ill will was like picking up a burning-hot coal to throw at someone: you are hurting yourself first; ill will is corrosive to our wellbeing. So the main thing we need to do first with ill will is to see it as a hindrance, as unhelpful, as corrosive, and then try to let it go. We stop adding to it, at the very least, and then it may be all we can do to sit with it and let it burn itself out.

3) Restlessness and Anxiety

Restlessness and anxiety, or 'worry and flurry' as it's sometimes called, is classically experienced as a speedy, unsettled mind, and a body that just won't sit still. You may find yourself plagued by itchiness or you just can't get comfortable, and the more you move, the worse it seems!

This mental state can be a background mental state for many of us living busy, city lives much of the time. We can be in a state of worry or anxiety about work, about our friendships, about our family. And it can be very difficult to let go of this in meditation, and the stories we tell ourselves when we're in a state of anxiety are very convincing.

Restlessness and anxiety also may arise if we sit down to meditate too quickly and don't allow ourselves enough time to prepare. Or we may have a lot on our mind or even something on our conscience. Whatever it is, our minds simply won't settle, and we don't enjoy sitting there.

When we experience restlessness, the main teaching is to not move! If we move, we risk dissipating any momentum we have built up in the meditation so far. So simply sit still, and investigate the itch or desire to move. Our meditation focus can be not moving until the restlessness goes away. If we have a postural problem and really need to move, then we can move very slowly, so as not to disturb ourselves too much.

If we experience anxiety, the main thing to do is to not get caught up in the stories involved. We should come back to our physical bodies; bring our awareness down into the body to ground ourselves. We can breathe deeply for a moment or two, and with each out-breath try to soften the physical tightness that accompanies anxiety. At the very least, we try to stop feeding the anxiety, so that it can eventually burn itself out.

4) Sloth and Torpor

Sloth and torpor is the opposite of restlessness and anxiety. Our body feels heavy and our mind sleepy and dull. We may even nod off to sleep! This may simply be because we are tired or have recently eaten, but sloth and torpor is an interesting hindrance in that it may often indicate a deeper level of resistance to meditation. We just don't want to do it! We might need to clarify this outside of meditation with a friend, find out what the resistance might be.

Sloth and torpor often arises if we have previously been restless or overly busy. It is as if after all that frenetic mental activity our mind simply crashes and needs to rest. If this is the case, we just have to be patient, and let the mind recover at its own pace.



Sloth and torpor also can arise if we've had a particularly good meditation the previous sit – our mind will need time to absorb this deeper experience.

The main thing to do with sloth and torpor is to try to stay awake! Open your eyes slightly if necessary. Sit more upright. Move your awareness higher in the body. And be patient – it may take some time for the sloth and torpor to break. In the meditation, you might just have to wait. Outside of meditation, look at the conditions of your day and see if you can rearrange your life so it's less frenetic.

5) Doubt and Indecision

Doubt and indecision is where you are paralysed in meditation by questions such as: Is this the right practice? Does that person teaching it know what he or she is talking about? Can I do it? Me, with all these things to think about? Shouldn't I be doing something better with my time instead of all this sitting around? Have I picked the right person here for this stage of metta?

You might recognise some of this. Doubt and indecision is the inability to commit to doing the practice. It is as if we have to be convinced that it will work, without trying it out for ourselves! We end up sitting on the fence, and not meditating at all. This is usually a subtle form of avoiding doing the practice.

Sometimes the doubts may be a manifestation of self-doubt. It may be that you don't have enough faith in your own potential to grow and develop. But any normal human being can use meditation to grow and develop – it's worked for everyone else, why not you?

Doubt and indecision is different from having rational doubts about the practice and what you're doing. But it is best to sort these positive doubts outside of meditation, not in the meditation itself. When meditating, just meditate! So the main thing to do when we experience doubt and indecision is to simply commit to doing the practice.

What to do when the Mind Wanders – General Strategies

- i. The first thing to do is to **turn with kindness towards whatever is going on** in our experience. This is vital. Unless we turn with kindness to our experience, we can't really be effective with regards working with what's going on in our experience.
- ii. **Come back to the body** and investigate / experience where we feel what's going on.
- iii. Recognise how your mind has wandered and **name** it. 'This is doubt.' 'This is sense desire.' Even just naming a hindrance can loosen its grip. In traditional stories in the East and West, knowing the true name of someone gave one a power over them. This is much the same.
- iv. Next we have to **acknowledge** it and allow it. Simply let it be, don't fight it. Remember kindness... You must come back to faith in our own potential to grow and develop, and overcome specific hindrances.
- v. See if you can now simply **let it go**. This doesn't mean stopping it happen; rather it means simply not being emotionally caught up in it. It is possible to watch a distraction arise, hang around for a while, and then dissolve away again, without getting caught up in it. If we can't do this yet, that's ok too. At least we try not to add any more fuel to the flames.

Again, come back to the general awareness, especially the Four Foundations of Mindfulness we looked at earlier in the course: namely awareness of body, feeling tone, emotions and thoughts. We check in with ourselves to see



what is going on in each of these departments of your being. What is going on in our body? What is the feeling tone? What emotions are there (in this case probably the hindrance we have identified already) and what thoughts are connected to it?

This is often enough of itself to work and help with whatever way we've become distracted. But if it's necessary, we can also apply the specific antidote. As ever in meditation, we can't skip stages, so do go through the general strategies before moving on to the more specific antidotes.

What to do when the Mind Wanders – Specific Antidotes

- i. The first antidote is to **Consider the Consequences**. Pay particular attention to what the feeling tone of whatever way our mind has wandered. Often, perversely, we think that to do anxiety or another hindrance is actually more pleasurable than not. Check this out for yourself! Sometimes the fact that these hindrances are familiar makes them feel more pleasurable than they really are. If we can see that it is actually not really enjoyable to do anxiety or ill will etc., we have a chance of lessening its grip on us
- ii. Secondly we can **Cultivate the Opposite**. If we are feeling *sense desire*, we can cultivate contentment with our lot, or try and get more interested in the object of meditation. If it is *ill will* we are experiencing, then we can cultivate metta, or simply look for enjoyment in our experience. For *restlessness and anxiety* we can cultivate calm, especially paying attention to our body, and the weight of it.

If we are experiencing *sloth and torpor* we can open our eyes, open a window, turn on more light in the room. And of course we can clarify any resistance outside of meditation. With *doubt* the opposite is commitment. The trick is to 'just do it'! Forget about whether or not it is the right practice or whether you can do it or not – just do it as taught for the length of the practice. We can clarify any rational doubts afterwards. Recognise any doubts that arise during the sit for what they are – a hindrance.

- iii. The third antidote is to develop a **Sky-Like Attitude**. In Buddhism our minds are often said to be like a vast, beautiful, clear blue sky, and any thoughts or emotions imply clouds that are passing across it. What our mind has wandered to is not permanent – it has arisen in dependence upon conditions, and when those conditions cease it will pass away. Things arise, things pass away. There is no need to feel oppressed by them, feel cowed by them.

So in this antidote, we try to simply allow things arise, and then allow them pass away, trying to develop perspective on them. It might be useful to think in terms of having big mind, and small mind. Your big mind is the clear blue sky, open and creative and free. Your small mind is the intellectual thoughts and emotional habits that manifest as distractions which pass across, and sometimes even cloud over your true nature. But somewhere behind it all is your big mind, just as behind the clouds there is always the brilliant blue sky.

- iv. Fourthly we can **Suppress** it. This really only works if what the mind has wandered onto is weak and you are not much caught up with it. This can be more successful than people think; for example, suppression is actually very good with persistent, low-level sense desire. Deciding to just not think about food in a meditation would be an example of suppression.
- v. And fifthly, we can take solace in the **Bigger Perspective**. This means to take refuge in our potential to grow and develop as a human, to become much more than we are at present, and not to get too overly-identified or concerned with any one particular meditation session we may have. It is especially useful at the end of a sit. Rather than getting despondent about a sit that maybe was not very concentrated, we



can reflect that this sit might not have been easy, but in the long run, you will keep plugging away, and the mind will wander less and we will develop clearer, calmer states of mind.

Absorption: The Deepening Mind

It's worth making a warning at this point: meditation is not all about finding out what's going wrong. When we talk of the hindrances it's easy to focus on the negative. But we should be open to the fact that our experience can go well too!

In some ways meditating is like cycling a bike – when we cycle, we invariably end up cycling up and down hills. Meditation can, at times, require us to work with anger or anxiety, and when we're engaging with and working with distractions, we're involved in the more 'cycling uphill' aspect of meditation.

But the good thing about cycling uphill is that we invariably get to cycle back downhill again at some point. Here we can just free-wheel down the hill, making only the smallest adjustments here and there. There's an effort involved, but it's more the effort of steering things, staying on the road and not crashing into the ditch, so to speak.

Similarly, in meditation, we can have downhill sections, where things are much easier. Here meditation naturally unfolds, almost of its own accord, just as a bike naturally wheels downhill. We don't have to do much when cycling downhill, just keep our hands on the handlebars and steer a little - in fact, it can be quite unhelpful to pedal going downhill, as it can be quite destabilising.

So when meditation is unfolding in this way, our effort becomes much more relaxed, and we need to be much more receptive to that enfoldment. We just relax into it, and enjoy it! Stay with the breath or with metta, and let go into it more and more. We might even get into a state of full absorption, called *Dhyana*, which is very pleasurable and positive. A general rule of thumb is that if our meditation is enjoyable, focused and positive, then trust it and go with it.

Home Practice

This week alternate the **Metta Bhavana** (track 3) and the **Mindfulness of Breathing** (track 2). (If you're using the CD both tracks are on CD 1.)

For the Mindfulness of Breathing, you might also like to try out the longer, less intensively lead track (track 4 online, or track 1 on CD 2.)

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Week Five – Absorption & Distraction in Meditation

External Conditions

There are a number of key external conditions that one can put into place to support a regular meditation practice at home.

The first is to **stay in touch with other meditators**. Through doing so we can learn new tricks, as others also come up against similar difficulties to us in their practice. Even just hearing that this is the case can be a relief – you are not on your own!

As well as this though, it is important to recognise that there will be a pull of inertia for most of us. We haven't been meditating for most of our lives so initially there might well be a resistance to starting something new, even if you know rationally that meditation is good for you. Parts of you may subconsciously know that continuing to meditate will change you and these parts may kick and scream at first! Hanging out with other meditators will support you in your efforts to move against the pull of habit and resistance to the new.

So **stay in touch with the centre**. There are a number of other evening classes that are open to you, as well as weekend events. In particular we recommend coming along to Tuesday nights if you are interested in Buddhism and the ideas behind the meditation course. In addition we run courses on such themes as mindfulness and metta every few months.

See the diagram at the end of these notes for more details on what you can do in the centre after this course. Look at the newsletter which is also included. Do ask to be put on the mailing list so we can keep you informed.

Connected with this is to **go on retreat**. On retreat we set up near perfect conditions for ourselves to meditate. This means it is possible to go a lot deeper in one's practice than one might be able to do back in the city. Away from our usual distractions and environment, we can start to experience ourselves in a new way. Anything can seem possible!

Create a space at home for yourself as well. This might just be the corner of your room or somewhere else in the house. Many people find it useful to create a 'psychic space' that they associate with meditation. You might like to arrange some meaningful objects or images in front of you. What you are trying to do is to create an aesthetic space that puts you in touch with the desire to meditate. You might like to arrange some flowers, light some incense and a candle. The right atmosphere can help a lot.

Alternate the practices. You might feel tempted to just do the one you like. While understandable, it does mean you will only be developing one aspect of yourself. The two practices complement each other – Mindfulness of Breathing gives you the concentration to do the Metta Bhavana, and the Metta Bhavana gives you a certain emotional warmth to take into the Mindfulness of Breathing. We recommend you alternate the practices so that you do the Mindfulness of Breathing one day and the Metta Bhavana the next.

Internal Conditions

It is good to remember that we are always practising something! The types of mental states we habitually generate when not meditating will tend to be the ones we will experience when we sit on the cushion. Particularly if we reinforce these emotions through acting them out or by giving voice to them, we can reinforce these tendencies in ourselves.



So if we have been anxious and restless and a bit frenetic all day, when we sit to meditate we will probably find ourselves anxious and restless and unable to sit still! Or if we were irritable and snapped at somebody, chances are that we will still be grumpy and unhappy when we sit to meditate! Alternatively, if we have been in an open, friendly and creative mood that day, when we sit we will probably find it very easy to concentrate.

Buddhism traditionally recommends five principles on how to act in our lives. These ethical guidelines are not rules, but simply ways of acting, which, amongst other things, will aid our practice of meditation.

Loving-kindness / Not Causing Harm

The main idea here is to act on a basis of metta as much as possible when relating to others and the world around us. This might be as simple as trying to be helpful and friendly in your interactions with others! For some people it can extend to a concern for the environment, or becoming vegetarians.

Generosity / Not Taking Anything Not Freely Given To You

It is often said that the basic Buddhist virtue is giving. Even if you can't meditate, even if you are grumpy and irritable, you can always give! This also means being honest in our dealings with the world around us. Often we are tempted to 'fudge' issues: taking stationery from work, and thinking 'sure they make loads of money anyway, they won't miss these few bits and pieces!' Being generous opens up our world and enriches us with a hidden wealth. Taking the not freely given leaves a bad taste in our mouths and separates us off a little bit more from others.

Contentment / Not Causing Pain Through Our Sexual Activities

Buddhism has no hang-ups with regard to sex, and whether people are married or not, straight or gay, monogamous or promiscuous.

It mainly encourages people to be happy with the state they have chosen. If single, be single, if married, be married. And avoid causing pain to others through your sexual activities.

Truthfulness / Not Lying

Here we are just encouraged to tell the truth. This is a simple one really, but often very difficult in practice. It sometimes requires real courage, e.g. sometimes we are tempted to make up some excuse for being late again. But it is probably better, if not easier, to simply acknowledge that we didn't get it together on time and just apologise and leave it there!

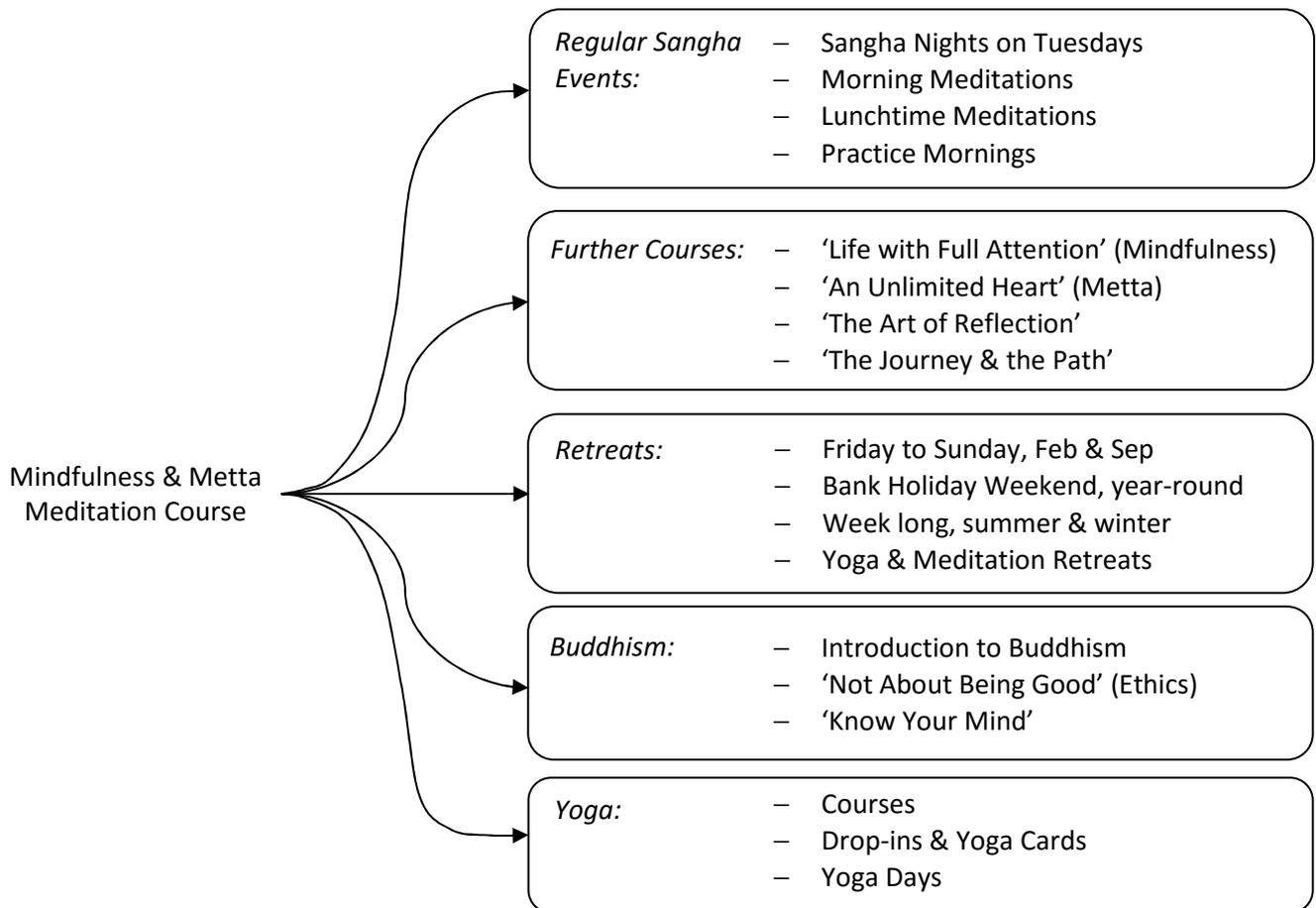
Mindfulness / Not Indulging In Intoxicants

Like all of these principles, there are no absolutes here. Buddhism simply says that if you have too much stimulating input, whether chemical or otherwise, it will affect your ability to be aware and mindful of yourself and others. This will mean different things for different people – for some the amount of television they watch might be the issue, for others it might be getting drunk regularly! The main thing is to watch the effect on your levels of awareness of indulging in too much drink, drugs, TV, endless shopping, computer games...

This principle isn't about circumscribing pleasure – it is actually about noticing that many of these activities aren't that enjoyable, and that we might actually prefer it to be more quiet and mindful, doing something more creative!

Buddhism teaches that if we live according to these principles; being kind, generous, content, truthful and self-aware, we will feel naturally happy and free of regrets. And when we sit to meditate, feelings of joy and rapture will arise of their own accord, without any special effort. Not only this, we will find our minds clearing and calming with ease – for example, concentration on the breath in a one-pointed way will become effortless.

What's next after a Meditation Course?



These are some of the many events and courses we run. See our newsletter or our website for full details of all our events, and to book on. As with all our events and courses, if money is an issue that might prevent you attending, let us know and we can sort something out.

Remember that whatever you choose to do next, the centre exists to give people the opportunity to deepen their practice of meditation and Buddhism, and to help people live a life committed to the qualities of awareness, empathy, loving kindness and wisdom.