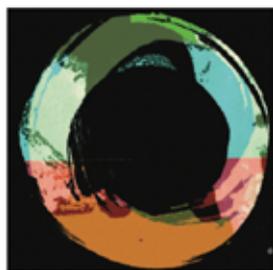


ESSENTIAL BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

A Practice Guide



HEARTLAND ZEN PUBLICATIONS

St. Louis, Missouri

©2019

*Special thanks to Xianyang Carl Jerome of
Chicago, Illinois, who originally conceived of this project
and participated in the early drafts.*

Essential Buddhist Teachings

*is an outreach project of
Heartland Zen.*

*To order additional copies, send an email to
heartlandzenSTL@gmail.com*

© **Heartland Zen**
9648 Olive Blvd. #364
St. Louis, MO 63132
2019

***The only way to make your dreams come true
is to wake up!***

—Chinese Fortune Cookie

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The Three Refuges	6
The Three Pure Vows	8
The Three Marks of Existence	10
The Three Poisons	14
The Four Heavenly Abodes	17
The Metta Sutta	22
The Four Noble Truths	23
The Five Aggregates	25
The Five Hindrances	28
The Five Precepts	33
The Six Paramitas	35
The Noble Eightfold Path	39
1. Right View	40
2. Right Intention	40
3. Right Speech	40
4. Right Action	41
5. Right Livelihood	41
6. Right Effort	42
7. Right Mindfulness	42
8. Right Concentration	43
Instructions for Mindfulness of Breath Meditation	44
Dependent Origination	47

INTRODUCTION

Siddhartha Gotama, who became known as the Buddha, lived and taught in northern India over 2500 years ago. He said repeatedly that his message was about the causes and conditions of human suffering and methods that lead to liberation. The *dharma*, which the teachings of the Buddha are often called, provides tools to respond skillfully and in ways that will benefit others, express wisdom, compassion, and ethical conduct, and deal effectively with afflicted and painful emotions when they arise.

Practicing the dharma involves diminishing our self-centered ideas and behaviors, and developing a life of lovingkindness, wisdom, and compassion. How to do this is reflected in the **Three Pure Vows**, the **Four Noble Truths**, and several other teachings listed in this book.

The dharma also provides us with practical guidelines for choosing unselfish options over those that originate in greed and delusion. These guidelines may be found in the **Five Precepts**, the **Six Paramitas**, and the **Noble Eightfold Path**. Upon closer examination, you will see that these are actually embedded in all of the teachings.

In addition, the teachings delineate methods for dealing effectively with negative emotions and mental states. These appear most directly in the various right efforts of the Noble Eightfold Path, but look for their wise directives in all of the interconnected chapters of this book.

Together, these essential teachings provide a comprehensive picture of how the Buddha described the nature of reality and the remedies he presented to the world. These practices were always intended to reduce human suffering and point to a more skillful way to live.

Each teaching is associated with a list.

Following a description and commentary, you will find practice notes and suggestions that illustrate how to apply the teachings as you move through your day and your life.

The word *buddha* means *awakened one* or *the enlightened one*. The man known as the Buddha never claimed to be a divinity or to have received his insights through some sort of intermediary or revelation. His teachings were transmitted from India to China, then to Japan and other parts of Asia, always taking on the cultural characteristics of the society that adopted them. As Buddhism reaches Europe and other Western countries, the process is encountering various, sometimes contrary, traditions and beliefs. We can only hope that the original teachings remain intact, since our world could truly benefit from the non-aggressive wisdom and compassion that they have always offered.

Buddhism is not pessimistic.

It is not optimistic.

Buddhism is realistic.

It shows us how to remove the fog
that clouds our thinking.

THE THREE REFUGES

I TAKE REFUGE IN BUDDHA.

I TAKE REFUGE IN DHARMA.

I TAKE REFUGE IN SANGHA.

Life is difficult. Often we need shelter from the storm of daily events, from the ordinary frustrations and disappointments as well as the occasional catastrophe. We also need balance and composure in good times. That is the purpose of the Three Refuges, to provide stability and comfort amidst ever-changing circumstances.

How can the Buddha, a historical figure who lived and died 2500 years ago, provide comfort? In this case Buddha refers to the **potential for human awakening**, for the full fruition of compassion and wisdom, and the historical Buddha is an example of what this looks like. Maybe there are other examples: friends, relatives, teachers, or other historical figures. This is taking refuge in Buddha, the human potential for clarity and love.

Narrowly, *dharma* refers to the Buddha's teachings, to those life lessons that have been carefully passed down over many generations so that we may benefit from them today. More generally dharma can refer to orderliness in the universe, to cause and effect. **Because this arises, that comes to be. And because this ceases, that no longer exists.** Taking refuge in dharma is appreciating the teachings of the Buddha and the traditions that have evolved from those teachings. And it means accepting the universe as it is.

Sangha originally referred to the community of monks who followed the Buddha and to this day, in a narrow sense, refers to a community of Buddhist monastics. In a wider sense, it refers to those who give support and sustain us in our practice. It is those, near or far, who share the commitment to deepening awareness and being of benefit to self and others. Your sangha may include those who know nothing about Buddhism, but value wisdom, compassion and the full awakening of human potential. The Three Refuges are sometimes referred to as the Three Treasures.

PRACTICE NOTES

CREATING REFUGE

Buddhist practice may be described as taking good care of your life. This includes our personal surroundings and our possessions. With full awareness that all things are impermanent, the objects that we use, our toiletries, clothes, books, tools should be cared for and kept in order. This creates a more comfortable and less distracting environment. Even if the only personal space you have is the size of a cot, treat that space with respect. Make it a sanctuary.

THREE BOWS

Bowing plays a central role in many Buddhist ceremonies and can be used as a personal practice as well. The three-fold prostration bow found in many Buddhist ceremonies is often in appreciation of the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Buddha is the historical person who awakened to full understanding of the human condition and devoted his life to sharing that understanding. It is also the buddha, or awakened being, in each one of us that is acknowledged.

Dharma refers to the teachings of the Buddha and also to the fundamental order of the universe, things as they are. Sangha refers to the community of practitioners. More broadly, it refers to all those who support our efforts along the way.

The three bows remind us of these three gifts. They signify appreciation, remembrance, respect and dedication to the practice. They indicate that there is much more to our lives than satisfying desires and avoiding pain. They do not signify obedience to a deity. So, if space and your comfort-level allow, bowing can be a meaningful daily practice as a physical expression of commitment. As you bow you might say, "I take refuge in Buddha. I take refuge in Dharma. I take refuge in Sangha."

Some people have found that bowing up to 108 times daily can be an effective way to cope with depression.

THE THREE PURE VOWS

I VOW TO DO NO HARM.

I VOW TO BE OF BENEFIT.

I VOW TO CLARIFY THE MIND.

These three vows appear in various forms among the different sects of Buddhism. They are deceptively simple. It could be said of them that a child of eight could understand them, but an eighty year old may not yet be able to practice them. A reference to the Three Pure Vows is found in the *Dhammapada*, a collection of some of the Buddha's earliest recorded teachings:

*Doing no evil,
Engaging in what is skillful,
And purifying one's mind:
This is the teaching of the buddhas.*

Of course, we don't always know in advance what actions will lead to harm and what actions will be beneficial. So these vows have to do with our intentions, our sincere effort to bring long-term benefit to others as well as to ourselves. The vows provide a framework for all of our actions (body, speech, and mind) and all of our social interactions. They don't require a particular religious belief; they are universal guideposts regardless of our cultural background or tradition.

Sometimes, the third vow is stated, "I vow to save all sentient beings." This may seem a lot different from clarifying the mind. But when we see things clearly, we understand how interconnected and dependent upon one another we really are. And when we act according to that understanding, we benefit ourselves and all beings.

The Three Pure Vows permeate, inform, and connect all of the teachings found in this book.

PRACTICE NOTES

When you apply the Three Pure Vows to your life, in earnest and with diligence, then every moment and every decision becomes a question of how beneficial you can be to yourself, to others, and to our planet.

1. **Commit to living a life of benefit.** To practice with these vows we need to establish our intention to live by them; our intention will then set our attention. Every morning, before getting out of bed, recite the vows; every night, before going to sleep, recite these vows. Recite them out loud if you can, which is much more powerful than just saying them in your head.

Once the habit of reciting the vows morning and evening has been established, add this to the practice: recite the vows to yourself, calmly and mindfully, before each meal and whenever you need to make a significant or difficult decision.

2. Here is a simple exercise to incorporate the Three Pure Vows into your daily life: **Make yourself the smallest person in any room or situation.** Consider yourself the least important person there; make yourself completely and unselfconsciously modest and humble. This will allow you to see the needs of others more clearly, and to act appropriately and in response to what's in front of you.

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

1. Do no harm. Then, if possible
2. Be of benefit.
3. If you can't be of benefit, do nothing.
4. Be morally disciplined and follow the rules.
5. Establish a meditation practice.
6. Cultivate wisdom.

THE THREE MARKS OF EXISTENCE

IMPERMANENCE SUFFERING (DUKKHA) NO-SELF

The Three Marks of Existence are sometimes known as the three characteristics of all conditioned things. Ultimately, as we deepen our understanding of the dharma, these teachings inform our practice and encourage a letting go of such limiting concepts as ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ **Better to befriend these three marks than attempt to navigate through life in denial of how they operate.**

IMPERMANENCE

We can gain a meaningful glimpse of impermanence through meditation. As we observe the breath, we notice that it constantly changes. Each inhalation and exhalation is comprised of a beginning, middle and end, and has its own character. No two breaths are the same.

We may notice that we are not the same person that we were last year; we are ever-changing. We have grown older, matured physically, developed psychologically, and so on.

An extension of this insight is that all phenomena are impermanent. When we try to find an example of something permanent, we can't.

Once we recognize and understand impermanence, we begin to see the world differently, and we can begin the real work of reshaping our conditioned and habitual responses to our experiences and relationships. We begin to wake up!

SUFFERING (DUKKHA)

Dukkha is a difficult word to translate from the original scriptures. Some would say that there is no equivalent word because ‘suffering’ does not convey the unsatisfactoriness that we associate with the ever-changing nature of our experience and of the world.

Dukkha applies to the pervasive condition that arises as a result of The Three Poisons (page 14.) It shadows everything we do. Dukkha is the sense of stress, anxiety, disturbance, irritation, dejection, worry, despair, depression, fear, dread, anguish, uneasiness, discomfort, frustration, insufficiency, and uncertainty that pervades our experience when the mode of operation is based on attachment, aversion, and delusion.

It is through coming to terms with the contingent and impermanent nature of all phenomena that we can become free of the delusion and misunderstandings that keep us stuck. It is through practicing with The Four Noble Truths (page 27) that we begin to recognize how our conditioned, habitual reactions operate, and thus they start to loosen their grip on our lives.

NO-SELF

We might hear ourselves saying, “It’s a dependable car,” but then when it breaks down, we become upset because dependable cars shouldn’t break down. We all know who we are and have ways of identifying our self: I am a lawyer, for example. But I won’t always be a lawyer. I may retire or be unable to practice for some reason. When that happens we may say: “My life won’t be worth anything if I can’t be a lawyer anymore.” The belief in a permanent, fixed identity is one of our biggest stumbling blocks.

Rather than one fixed, permanent self, the teachings tell us that all phenomena, including those that are human and sentient, are constantly changing and only appear as the result of interacting causes and conditions. The self is empty of permanence and a fixed identity.

Paradoxically, this understanding leads to more stability and compassion, as we respond more skillfully to our daily experiences.

PRACTICE NOTES

PRACTICING WITH IMPERMANENCE

Dedicate some time to observing impermanence. For about an hour, look for signs of impermanence, signs of change: a crushed blade of grass, a yellowing leaf, a broken branch on the ground. Notice moisture evaporating or the body of a decaying insect. Observe that everything can be seen as in transition: as arising, running its course, and then ceasing.

Notice where the sidewalk is worn down, where it is dirty, where it has chipped and changed. Notice people in motion. Notice things that are torn or damaged. Look into a trash container. Consider that everything inside had recently been serving a function, but now it may be recycled, or more likely, be taken to a landfill.

PRACTICING WITH DUKKHA

Practicing with dukkha is really a practice of noticing the source of the dukkha, letting go of it, (in the same way we let go of a thought when watching the breath during meditation).

Here's a simple way to develop this practice. Set a timer when you start for the length of time you normally meditate. Once you settle into your upright position, strongly commit to not moving, to sitting like a mountain. Every time you want to move, let go of the impulse and replace it with a calm, patient mind. Watch the tricks your mind plays to get you to move. Notice especially how it exaggerates and intensifies a sensation, such as an itch.

And, notice how you can always bring your attention back to patience (the antidote for anger), even though it sometimes takes a while for the distraction to disappear.

Doing this over and over, as a deliberate and focused practice for a meditation period, will help to establish the habit of letting go of defilements and cultivating a calm mind.

PRACTICING WITH NO-SELF

Try spending a day without using these four words: I, me, my, or mine. If you hear yourself using these words, just stop and try again. This can be very difficult, but well worth the effort. This exercise can lead to a significant change in how the world is viewed and who you are or aren't.

Another no-self practice is to go for an entire day in which you tell yourself that everyone around you is right. With no opposing opinions, (or any opinions for that matter) it's easier to observe what's really going on and what others may be trying to express.

THE FIVE CONTEMPLATIONS

Consider writing these Five Contemplations on a card and reciting them daily. Sometimes known as the Five Remembrances, the translation below is by Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Discourse of the Five Contemplations for Everyone from the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha

There are five facts, oh monks, which ought to be often contemplated upon by everyone, whether man or woman, householder, or one gone forth as a monk. What five?

I am sure to become old; I cannot avoid aging.

I am sure to become ill; I cannot avoid illness.

I am sure to die; I cannot avoid death.

***I must be separated and parted from all that is
dear and beloved to me.***

***I am the owner of my actions, heir of my
actions. Actions are the womb from which I have
sprung. Actions are my relations. Actions are my
protection. Whatever actions I do -- good or bad
-- of these I shall become the heir.***

THE THREE POISONS

ATTACHMENT AVERSION DELUSION

The Three Poisons drive our suffering. Sometimes they are translated as greed, hatred, and ignorance. The Buddha identified the poisons as the root cause of human suffering. The most common delusion, the one that all humans experience to some degree, is that we possess a permanent, separate self. Furthermore, we tend to believe that if only this self can get what it wants and avoid what it doesn't want it will achieve happiness, once and for all. The key phrase here is "if only." **Whenever you hear yourself saying "if only," you can be pretty sure you're setting yourself up for future problems.**

ATTACHMENT/GREED

Anything you can imagine desiring, craving, or clinging to can give rise to attachment -- weak or strong, persistent or transient. It may be the desire for wealth, or fame, prestige or power, or take the form of an addiction. Or it could be relatively low level, like an impulse to eat snack foods. A common characteristic is that enough is never enough. Any satisfaction is temporary and soon replaced by more desire. Avoiding attachment does not mean sacrificing all joy and pleasure. **It means fully experiencing joy when it comes and letting it go when it leaves.** It means leaving alone those things that you know give rise to addiction or harm.

AVERSION/HATRED

The first response to our own suffering or that of others is often to create a distance, to push it away or not look. Aversion is associated with an emotional response that varies in intensity -- all the way from impatience or mild irritation through anger to all-out hatred. Some individuals seem to spend most of their waking hours in a state of irritation or anger.

But such resistance or aversion usually tends to make things worse. Acceptance of the way things are can be a starting point. Resignation or reactivity can bring you to a halt. A container big enough to hold everything inevitably leads to compassion and more effective problem-solving. Once we stop resisting the impermanent and contingent nature of the world, it's possible to adopt a more peaceful and accepting stance towards our situation in life, whatever it may be.

DELUSION/IGNORANCE

Ignorance or delusion refers to our inability to understand the nature of reality and accept interconnection and causality. The most common delusion, and the most damaging, is self-centeredness -- a narrow focus on what I like and what I don't like. It is a viewpoint that fails to take into account the needs of others. It fails to recognize how closely we are connected to, and dependent upon, other people and our environment. Rather than stepping back and looking at the big picture, it is retreating into the small self that often seems to be at war or on the defensive. This is delusion, and it is a painful way to live.

ANTIDOTES

For attachment, we learn to cultivate selflessness, generosity, and contentment.

For aversion, we cultivate patience, loving-kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

For delusion, we cultivate wisdom, insight, and right understanding.

PRACTICE NOTES

1. To see how these poisons pervade your life, try this experiment: For a whole day, examine everything that disturbs you. Do this either when it is happening or as soon as possible thereafter. Examine the incident in light of the Three Poisons. In every situation where you are upset or in conflict, ask: Was there something here I wanted and didn't get? Am I upset or angry because I didn't get it, or because I got something else, or because it wasn't as good as I thought it would be? Would getting it have made me happy or just desirous of more? **What am I resisting?**

2. Ultimately we need to recognize and understand our greed so we begin to live from a different paradigm. That new paradigm, which is expressed as the Three Pure Vows, (page 8) is to make decisions based on doing no harm and being of benefit, **with no expectation of a reward.**

Look at your habitual everyday behaviors, big and small, and contemplate how all-pervading greed and attachment can be. **Can you see how often thoughts and actions originate in a preference that things be other than they are?** Practice being present and non-reactive with whatever is occurring before you take any action. It can be mentally, with responses to even small things that only you know about.

3. Notice how often you want things to be different. Recognize the signs of these poisons at work. Start using the Three Pure Vows as the basis for decision-making and action. Practice with patience and without believing that you have all the answers. **You don't have to believe everything you believe!**

Noticing and investigating small incidents and events can make it easier when major disturbances come along. Use standing in line or annoying music as an occasion for returning to the breath and generating a wider perspective on the situation.

THE FOUR HEAVENLY ABODES

LOVINGKINDNESS (METTA)

COMPASSION

SYMPATHETIC JOY

EQUANIMITY

At first, because we see the great value in these four wholesome mental states (sometimes called the Four Immeasurables), we practice with them so that they become a first response to everyday challenges. As we move along the path, they begin to arise on their own from deep within us. They don't need to be summoned up; they just appear naturally as we notice more opportunities to be of benefit.

These four states support each other and can be cultivated through meditation. They promote harmony and peace regardless of our circumstances or surroundings, and assist in overcoming The Three Poisons (page 14.) They can reliably be applied to any social situation.

LOVINGKINDNESS

Lovingkindness is a wish for the well being and happiness of others. Ideally, it is offered without expectations or a desire for something in return. We are kind when kindness is called for by what's in front of us. Since human beings often seem to need assistance in expressing this quality, there are many methods of cultivating this wholesome state of mind.

A student once described a time when he was living in abject poverty -- hungry, tired and despairing, feeling he was completely worthless and an utter failure. He said he had never begged, but was feeling desperate, so he started asking for money. Being naturally shy, this was particularly difficult. He said that he tried his best for three hours with virtually no success. He walked home more desperate and depressed than when he had started, and felt like he was even a failure at begging.

By applying lovingkindness we might understand much more profoundly that if someone asks, they are in need. We are able to give if we can without asking why they need the money, without evaluating what they look like and without expectations.

COMPASSION

Compassion is a strong, empathic feeling that urges us into action for the benefit of others. When informed by wisdom, compassion is the underlying foundation of our practice.

Unfortunately, compassion is not automatic. It takes considerable diligence and effort to overcome the defilements and hindrances that arise from our attachments to self, things, and our notions of meaning in everyday life. But as those attachments are loosened, compassion arises spontaneously and skillfully.

SYMPATHETIC JOY

Sympathetic joy is a pure feeling of happiness that arises in us when we see someone else who is happy, who is successful in moving forward on their chosen path.

By rejoicing in another's progress, we are supporting them and at the same time establishing a wholesome mindstate in ourselves.

Sympathetic joy replaces jealousy, envy, competitiveness and the desire to win with contentment and wisdom. To abide in sympathetic joy we are encouraged to stop thinking of ourselves as the center of the universe. It can be a relief.

EQUANIMITY

Equanimity arises when we **respond without preferences** or long-held opinions. It comes about when we refrain from assigning our ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, wanted and unwanted. It is the stability that results from greeting each situation with an open mind and heart.

Compassion keeps us engaged; it is equanimity that allows our engagement to be selfless and effective.

Letting go of opinions and preferences is a profound practice.

You don't need to believe everything you think!

The great way is not difficult

For those without preferences.

—Opening lines of *The Xinxinming* (Trust in Mind)
by the Third Patriarch of Chan, Seng T'san, 6th-century

*When you understand one
thing through and through you
understand everything.*

— **Shunryu Suzuki**

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

The thought manifests as the word.

The word manifests as the deed.

The deed develops into the habit.

The habit hardens into the character.

The character gives birth to the destiny.

So, watch your thoughts with care

And let them spring from love

Born out of respect for all beings.

—**The Buddha**

PRACTICE NOTES

PRACTICING WITH METTA (LOVINGKINDNESS)

The Metta Sutta may be found on page 26. Many practitioners chant this short sutta regularly as part of a ceremony or as their personal practice. You can also use your own words and make a chant that is shorter and easier to remember. It might be simply, *May all beings be safe. May all beings be at peace. May all beings be liberated.* You might say your metta chant at the beginning or end of your daily sitting practice. It can serve as reminder that your practice is not for your benefit alone but also for the benefit of everyone you encounter...and everyone they encounter.

PRACTICING WITH COMPASSION

As you encounter people throughout the day, try to remind yourself that their life is short, that they also suffer as you do, and that they are trying, however skillfully or unskillfully, to relieve their suffering. Remind yourself that they also once had hopes and dreams and have known disappointment and loss. Ask yourself: “How can I be of benefit in this encounter?”

PRACTICING WITH SYMPATHETIC JOY

The Buddha considered joy to be a nutriment, something to nourish, replenish and sustain us. Even in what would seem to be a joyless environment there are joyful moments for those who notice them. Often we miss them because our mind is preoccupied with other things. In practicing with sympathetic joy make an effort to notice the satisfaction that others feel when things go well for them. Notice when people are fully engaged in an activity or are exercising skill in what they do. It may be a plumber or an electrician or a housekeeper. Notice the sounds of birds in the early morning or after a rain. Notice plants sprouting new leaves or insects going about their business. Appreciate the joy you experience when your day is going smoothly or when you can make a positive difference in some way.

PRACTICING WITH EQUANIMITY

Equanimity, like the other Heavenly Abodes, can be cultivated. One exercise makes use of the skills you have developed in daily meditation practice. Sometime when you are upset, whether angry, fearful, resentful, or remorseful, try finding a private place and sitting still with that strong emotion. Adjust your posture and bring attention to the breath. Notice how your breath is affected by the emotion. Now notice the physical sensations that accompany the emotion. Notice tightness and discomfort in the throat, chest, or belly. Notice how the emotion is felt along the midline of your body. You'll observe that the sensations change with time. They are not fixed and permanent. Try to sit still through it no matter how uncomfortable it feels and no matter how strong the urge may be to distract yourself. After a while you may notice some distance from the sensations and from the emotion. This distance is equanimity. It is the space you need to see the bigger picture and respond more wisely under stress. With practice you can develop this space more quickly, perhaps by simply taking three slow breaths. The result is more clarity, among many other benefits.

Here is a version of the Buddha's *Five Contemplations*, offered by Thich Nhat Hanh in *The Plum Village Chanting Book*. Consider memorizing and reflecting on them often.

***I am of the nature to grow old.
There is no way to escape growing old.***

***I am of the nature to have ill health.
There is no way to escape ill health.***

***I am of the nature to die.
There is no way to escape death.***

All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.

***My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.
My actions are the ground upon which I stand.***

THE METTA SUTTA

This is what should be accomplished by the one who is wise, who seeks the good and has obtained peace:

Let one be strenuous, upright and sincere,
without pride, easily contented and joyous.

Let one not be submerged by the things of the world.

Let one not take upon oneself the burden of riches.

Let one's senses be controlled. Let one be wise but not puffed up.

Let one not desire great possessions even for one's family.

Let one do nothing that is mean or that the wise would reprove.

May all beings be happy. May they be joyous and live in safety.

All living beings, whether weak or strong, in high or middle or low realms of existence, small or great, visible or invisible, near or far,

born or to be born, may all beings be happy.

Let no one deceive another, nor despise any being in any state.

Let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another.

Even as a mother at the risk of her life watches over and protects her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all

living things, suffusing love over the entire world,

above, below and all around without limit.

So let one cultivate an infinite goodwill toward the whole world.

Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all one's waking hours let one practice the way with gratitude.

Not holding to fixed views, endowed with insight, one who achieves the way will be freed from the duality of birth and death.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

TRADITIONALLY STATED:

1. The truth of suffering
2. The truth of the cause suffering
3. The truth of the ending of suffering
4. The path to the ending of suffering

IN OTHER WORDS:

1. *There is dukkha (suffering) meaning we are inclined to make our experiences stressful and unsatisfactory.*
2. *This unsatisfactoriness arises from our attachment and identification with phenomena that are inherently impermanent and transient.*
3. *Ending the cycle is possible, meaning we are capable of living peaceful, unselfish lives.*
4. *The way to end our suffering is to follow the guidance provided in The Noble Eightfold Path.*

We might notice during meditation that every thought or sensation causes us to be a little uncomfortable, because, in fact, everything is transient. We attach words and labels to what we are experiencing with the hope that they will provide solidity or security. This false notion of reality, in turn, produces more suffering.

This is the process that the Buddha saw through. His insights prompted him, for the rest of his life, to teach the nature and causes of suffering, the way to end it, and how to live more skillfully -- teachings which can be summarized as the Four Noble Truths. This was the mission of his life, and all of his teachings originated from his awakening to this process.

PRACTICE NOTES

1. The First Noble Truth tells us that suffering is part of the human condition. Practicing with this means that we respond with compassion when someone does or says something to us that we don't like, rather than becoming annoyed or disturbed. Most harmful actions originate as an attempt to relieve hurt and suffering. Knowing this, and using wisdom, we can often diffuse a confrontation before it escalates.

2. The Second Noble Truth says that the source of our suffering is clinging and attachment. To practice with this truth of the cause of suffering, try doing this: when you are uncomfortable or unhappy about something, look at it carefully. Notice that the unease often is the result of wishing for things to be other than what they are.

3. The Third Noble Truth tells us that there is a remedy. Maybe we can't always dwell in a state of nirvana, but we can learn to pay more attention to the feelings of peacefulness that arise when we are mindful. Practice with something as simple as brushing your teeth or walking. Try this: every day for a week, set your intention to walk very mindfully. Pay close attention to what you are doing and the sensations and feelings that arise from placing one foot on the ground after the other. Notice that being present with this experience may generate a sense of peacefulness.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth is also known as the Noble Eightfold Path. See Page 39 for more details and suggestions for how to apply these interconnected teachings in your daily experience.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES

FORM

FEELING

PERCEPTION

VOLITIONAL FORMATION

CONSCIOUSNESS

In Buddhist psychology, the Five Aggregates are experiential factors that make up what we think of as the self. Meditation and inquiry can show us that our understanding of who we are, what we would call our 'self,' is **an elusive composite of everything that we have ever seen, heard, tasted, touched, felt and thought.** The understanding that the Five Aggregates operate seamlessly and often involuntarily to create the sense of a single 'self' helps us to see through the pervasive illusion of solidity. In traditional Buddhist teachings, the Five Aggregates may be thought of as the formula by which this entity is constructed. Freedom from suffering is realized by seeing the empty nature of these aggregates, and relinquishing our attachments to them. At the same time, the causes and conditions that give rise to phenomena become more apparent.

WHAT EACH TERM MEANS

1. Form refers to physical objects, which we experience through sensory contact, whether it is our eye seeing an object, our ear hearing a sound, our nose smelling an aroma, our tongue tasting something sweet, our hand touching a rough fabric, or our mind coming up with an idea. (According to Buddhist teachings, mind is the sixth sense.)

2. Feeling is the physical or mental sensation that we experience as a result of making a sense contact. At this stage, we decide if the contact is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, which may then start the process of craving, clinging, and aversion. With practice, our responses become less habitual or conditioned and more deliberate and thoughtful.

3. Perception is the simple labeling or naming that arises from our first awareness of a sense contact. It recognizes and categorizes things by associating them with memories and past experiences.

4. Volitional Formations are the stories we concoct about our sense contacts; these are our ‘seeds,’ our memory fragments, the neuro-pathways that influence our actions. .

5. Consciousness is identification and appropriation with the sense contact and its story. It may be stated as “I am the kind of person (identification) who does such and such when that kind of thing happens (appropriation).”

Here’s a simple version of how it works: As soon as we experience something (Form), sensations arise (Feeling) that are either positive, neutral, or negative, causing us to feel either an affinity or an aversion for that contact. This leads to labeling or naming what’s happening (Perception) and then sends us into our mental storehouse (Volitional Formations), looking for a similar previous experience. Having found what we believe to be an appropriate response, we let that memory of a past experience define who we are in this new moment and we then tell our new self that we know the best course of action under the circumstances (Consciousness).

*Meditation is not to escape from society,
but to come back to ourselves and see what is going on.
Once there is seeing, there must be acting.
With mindfulness, we know what to do and
what not to do to help.*

–Thich Nhat Hanh

PRACTICE NOTES

Familiarity with the workings of The Five Aggregates reveals how we construct our clinging and attachment, allowing us to respond in fresher and more appropriate ways.

To practice with this teaching, learn how to see the Five Aggregates in action. Take notice when you feel yourself becoming disturbed and see if you can catch the process while it is happening, ending or diverting the reactivity, and responding in a more creative way.

What set off the reaction? Does it seem familiar? Maybe next time you will see it coming, and identify triggers or reactions earlier in the process.

Learn to identify emotions, impulses, and thoughts as part of a complex process rather than isolated events or experiences.

Are you able to respond to the current situation with fresh eyes, without injecting old habits and expectations into the scenario?

*The point of meditation practice
is to enjoy your old age.*

— **Suzuki Roshi**

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

SENSUAL DESIRE ANGER AND ILL WILL SLOTH AND TORPOR RESTLESSNESS AND WORRY SKEPTICAL DOUBT

Hindrances and distractions interfere with progress along the path. They often appear during meditation, but they can also be understood in the broader context of our lives. The section on **Right Effort** (page 46) provides more ideas and antidotes for dealing with various hindrances.

1. SENSUAL DESIRE relates to the non-stop activity of the five senses. It manifests as a craving for sense pleasures or comfort through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thoughts. Such disturbances keep us from the deeper levels of absorption that are available to us when concentration proceeds without interference from the hindrances.

Antidote: *Focus the attention on the breath. The distractions of sensual desires tend to take us away from the object of meditation, not to mention being present with our daily activities. Make an effort to notice what's going on, and then returning to the breath or other object of meditation.*

2. ANGER AND ILL WILL agitate us, and in mild forms, leave us a little irritated; but when the disturbance reaches the point of fury or wrath, it aims us toward punishing, harming, and destroying. In meditation, angry and hateful thoughts strongly interfere with our ability to stay with the chosen object of attention. In addition, meditators sometimes become angry at the meditation process itself, which compounds the problem.

Antidote: *Patience, compassion and lovingkindness are the chief antidotes for anger and ill will.*

3. SLOTH AND TORPOR

Sloth is a heaviness of mind that leaves us feeling unfocused, bored, or lacking the energy needed for meditation. Torpor is heaviness of the body that makes us feel like we are swimming in concrete. Torpor often makes us fall asleep even when we aren't tired.

Antidote: *As soon as you start to feel sleepy or bored, see it for what it is. If you can't apply strong determination, then consider shifting to walking or standing meditation, returning the attention back to the breath or other object of meditation. Other options include body scans, counting breaths or opening the eyes wide for a while.*

4. RESTLESSNESS AND WORRY

Fault-finding and anxiety can become habitual tendencies and lead us to restlessness and worry. When we are dissatisfied with things as they are, we tend to jump to a new thought or object that holds the promise of something better. This is sometimes known as 'monkey-mind'.

Antidote: *Use the impulse to move or become agitated as a learning opportunity. Notice the activity that's going on and make an effort to return to the object of meditation. Observe that the disturbances are not permanent in any way and then return to the breath.*

5. SKEPTICAL DOUBT

Gaining insight and putting the teachings into practice take time. Skeptical doubt might suggest an attitude of "I can't do this" or "This isn't working." Lack of inspiration or questions about the effectiveness of the teachings often arise at a time when we should be going deeper and developing confidence.

Antidote: *Learn to have confidence in silence and to be comfortable with stillness. Confidence in silence arises from experience and wisdom, and from the guidance of an experienced teacher. Doubt is also eradicated by investigation, contemplation and study. Make a commitment to persist in your efforts.*

PRACTICE NOTES

PRACTICING WITH SENSUAL DESIRE

Sensual desire includes wanting more of those sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations and thoughts that we enjoy and like, and conversely, desiring fewer of these that we don't define as pleasurable.

Practicing with generosity is one of the best ways to reduce sensual desire. Try the suggestions for practicing with generosity that follow the Six Paramitas (Page 35.)

PRACTICING WITH ANGER AND ILL WILL

To reduce and ultimately eliminate anger, we need to understand it and to cultivate wisdom, patience, and discipline. Here are some suggestions for working with anger:

- Recognize triggers when anger arises.
- Understand that when we experience anger, a story about a perceived injustice often goes along with it. Step back and see if you can get a picture of the whole drama, as if you were watching a movie.
- Acknowledge that acting out of anger is nearly always harmful, rarely beneficial.
- Apply patience as the antidote.
- Recognize the benefits of being patient in the face of difficulties.
- Identify practical methods and techniques to reduce anger and even to prevent it from arising in the first place.

A formula for working with anger may be stated as:
abandon the anger,
refrain from doing things to make it arise again,
develop and maintain patience.

PRACTICING WITH SLOTH AND TORMOR

When you notice sleepiness or dullness, immediately readjust your posture, straighten your back, lift your head. Some tricks to increase alertness include pulling hard on an earlobe, rubbing your tongue against the back of your teeth, or to dramatically tighten and stretch

your neck and face muscles, then release. If those little tricks don't work, switch to walking meditation and exert the energy necessary to walk through the heaviness or sleepiness until it dissolves.

PRACTICING WITH RESTLESSNESS AND WORRY

Both of these hindrances can destroy our ability to be calm and peaceful. Restlessness is the agitation or excitement that drives the mind from thought to thought relentlessly. Worry is remorse over past mistakes (or possible future mistakes) which produces anxiety about their undesired consequences.

Restlessness can sometimes be subdued by exertion. Just tell yourself that no matter what you experience, real or imagined, you won't move. And then just don't move. Be especially alert to your body. The response to even a small itch can be so automatic that your hand is in the air before you're even aware it's happening.

One of the benefits of this practice is learning to tolerate small discomforts so that you'll be more prepared for more serious difficulties when they appear. You need to be able to lift ten pound weights before you can lift one hundred pounds.

Worry and anxiety can be debilitating. On the cushion, though, one simple practice is to focus on observing the physical sensations that arise when you are worried: tense muscles, tingling hands, a queasy stomach, etc. Notice these with equanimity, meaning just observe them. One by one, over and over, let them go. Just as you let go of a distracting thought or an itch, let go of the tension or queasiness. Do this over and over, without judgment.

PRACTICING WITH SKEPTICAL DOUBT

One antidote for skeptical doubt is investigation. Reading more of the teachings and commentary can help deepen understanding and reinforce resolve. Ask yourself, "Overall, has my practice been helpful, has it been beneficial to myself and others?" "What are my alternatives to continued practice?" Working honestly and sincerely with doubt can sometimes be the key to deepening and strengthening your practice.

HERE ARE SOME FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING THE HINDRANCES:

Identify what's going on at the time it's happening. Try not be swept away by these forceful, (or subtle,) impulses.

Without judgment, consider what the consequences would be if the hindrance were to continue.

Imagine your thoughts and emotions as clouds passing across a wide blue sky. No need to try and capture or follow them.

Recognize the gaps between thoughts as resting places.

Apply effort, determination and techniques to resist mental distractions.

*In this very breath we take now lies the secret
that all the great teachers try to tell us.*

—Peter Matthiessen

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

DO NOT KILL

DO NOT STEAL

DO NOT MISUSE SEXUALITY

DO NOT LIE

DO NOT CLOUD THE MIND

- 1. Respect the life of all sentient beings and our planet.**
- 2. Respect the belongings of others;
never take what is not given.**
- 3. Respect sexuality. Only engage in sexual relationships
which are adult, consensual, and relationship-oriented.**
- 4. Respect truthfulness and dependability.**
- 5. Respect body and mind by staying clear-headed,
avoiding all forms of intoxicants and recreational drugs.**

Without these five ethical principles, our ability to live together and form families and societies would not be possible. If our lives were constantly being threatened, if our property were always in danger of being stolen, if our family members were being attacked by sexual predators, if others were fundamentally untrustworthy and undependable and we couldn't rely on verbal and contractual commitments, and if drunkenness and addiction were the norm, we would neither be able to live with any sense of peacefulness nor develop spiritually.

At first glance they seem simple and straightforward; in practice, however, their complexity and moral implications require decisions based on wisdom, clarity, and compassion. These are guidelines; they aren't commandments handed down by a God who will punish us if we disobey them. But there are consequences to violating them, beyond the possible legal penalties. Intention matters.

There may be times when we choose to violate a precept. If that is the case, we should be fully aware that we will have to deal with the consequences of our actions. Sometimes it's unavoidable, but be as mindful as possible of what's going on.

PRACTICE NOTES

Commit a week to practicing with the precepts. Here's a suggested template to follow:

On Monday: Set your intention to take notice every time you encounter killing: dead bugs on the windshield, eating meat or poultry, weeding the garden, slapping a mosquito on your arm, etc. And finally, notice how often the word "killing" appears in every day speech -- fit to kill, dressed to kill, if looks could kill, killing with kindness, making a killing, etc. Ask yourself each time you notice killing -- on whatever level -- was that necessary? What could I have done in each of those situations to show respect for life and to coexist peacefully?

On Tuesday: Look at stealing, in the same way: literally, symbolically, and linguistically. Consider what it take for you to experience more contentment. Certainly stealing would not contribute to a sense of well-being. You would not take from others if you were content.

On Wednesday: Consider how you use your sexuality, not only in an intimate physical relationship, but also in terms of your dress and demeanor and in your speech. Are there ways to be more respectful?

On Thursday: Do the same with telling the truth and in practicing Right Speech. Try not talking about someone who is not present. Doing what you say you're going to do and being dependable is a form of right speech.

On Friday: Consider how you use intoxicants, from tea and coffee to prescription and non-prescription drugs, and also how you become intoxicated by television, the internet, even perhaps by the dharma. Remember, you want to look at both the positive and negative sides of the precept. Incorporating the precepts into our day requires paying close attention to our motives and intentions.

THE SIX PARAMITAS

GENEROSITY
MORALITY
PATIENCE
ENERGY
MEDITATION
WISDOM

Also known as the Six Perfections, when we emulate the Six Paramitas, even if they don't feel spontaneous, we will be heading in the right direction. As we practice with the paramitas, our attachments, especially the strong identification with self, lessen. The paramitas may be viewed as the Three Pure Vows in action.

There is considerable variation in the scriptural lists of paramitas, values we need to cultivate to live more peaceful lives and to reduce and eventually eliminate our suffering. This version is found in the Chan tradition, but there are lists of ten paramitas as well. In one list of ten, patience is replaced by renunciation, and honesty, determination, lovingkindness, and equanimity are added. In the end, we will benefit from the wisdom and practice of them all.

1. **GENEROSITY** is the basic principle of enlightened living -- giving without discrimination and without expectation of a reward.
2. **MORALITY** is leading a virtuous life as found in following the precepts, and practicing skillful means in every situation.
3. **PATIENCE** is the antidote for anger in its various forms, ranging from mild irritation to hatred. Patience is cultivated when we stop wishing for things to be other than what they are.
4. **ENERGY**, or zeal, generates the courage to develop our own character through spiritual training, and then to direct our efforts towards the wellbeing of others.
5. **MEDITATION** is a practice of concentrated focus upon a sound, object, visualization, the breath, or attention itself in order to increase awareness. (See page 44 for meditation instructions.)

6. WISDOM On the deepest level, wisdom is the direct and intimate realization of of emptiness: **the teaching that all phenomena are without self-essence or a fixed permanent identity.** The results of this understanding can be profound.

How are we supposed to attain freedom from suffering, to reach the understanding of emptiness, to walk steadily on the middle path? According to the Diamond Sutra, just be generous. Generosity, is often used in the context of making monetary offerings. But in daily life, generosity is meant in a much larger context. Generosity appears when our own self-cherishing and self-centered needs diminish. As we practice with the paramitas, our attachments, especially to our self, weaken and exert less of an influence on our daily interactions.

Generosity involves the gift, the giver and the receiver. Ideally, the giver should give simply because there is a need, with no expectation of personal gain, reward, or benefit; and the gift should be given without regard for the recipient's character or qualities. Finally, the gift can be material, money or things, or it can be spiritual, meaning the gift of the Dharma.

Another form of gift is the gift of no-fear, of assuring others that they are safe in your presence, that you will do them no harm.

When we decide to give something of our own to someone else, we reduce our attachment to the object; making this a habit weakens our craving and clinging, primary causes of the distress in our lives.

The Buddha was not an idealist and he was not a moralist. He was not trying to condemn anything. He was trying to awaken us to truth so that we could see things clearly.

— Ajahn Sumedo

PRACTICE NOTES

Practicing with any of the Six Paramitas (sometimes called the Six Perfections) involves practicing with all of them.

Deliberately make generosity an everyday practice.

Do at least one random act of generosity each day, with no expectation of even a thank you. If you see someone in need, just help them. This can be as simple as slowing your car so someone can cut in front of you, with no expectation that they should even wave in appreciation.

Generosity can be used as an antidote for all of our defilements. When a defilement has taken hold, just do something generous to shift your mindstate. The stronger the defilement, of course, the weightier your generosity should be. One student, when he becomes upset at work, walks down the street and starts a conversation with one of the homeless people who spend their days on the sidewalk near his office. Sometimes he buys them lunch or groceries. He says no matter how disturbed he had become at the office, this calms him down.

Patience is the antidote for anger. Ideally, it becomes automatic in every situation, not just a fallback position to use when emotion fails to accomplish our goal.

Being patient means welcoming wholeheartedly whatever arises next. It is always possible to be patient; any situation can be accepted patiently, with an open, accommodating, and peaceful heart.

You're always breathing, so you can always return to your breath, even when someone is yelling at you.

Being patient doesn't mean that we shouldn't do something to improve the situation. If it is possible, then of course we should do so, but to do this we do not need to become angry or reactive. **Simple awareness will often reveal a solution.**

To practice with patience, try adopting a humble, modest approach. Choose a time when something is happening, a family gathering or networking function. For the length of that event, consider yourself to be the most insignificant person there. No matter what anyone does or says, you remain quiet and subdued. Consider your opinions and ideas to be the least important at the event.

Another way to practice with patience requires strong determination. Decide on a set amount of time for your meditation: 20 minutes, 40 minutes, or an hour. Tell yourself that once you begin, you will not move under any circumstances, not a wiggle of the nose, not the shifting of your backside, not even a finger will budge until the allotted time is over. This exercise teaches us to be patient with ourselves and our environment.

The point of Buddhist meditation is not to stop thinking, for cultivation of insight clearly requires intelligent use of thought and discrimination. What needs to be stopped is conceptualization that is compulsive, mechanical and un-intelligent -- that is, activity which is always fatiguing, usually pointless, and at times seriously harmful.

— **Alan B. Wallace**

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

WISDOM

1. Right View
2. Right Intention

ETHICS

3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood

MENTAL DISCIPLINE

6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

The Noble Eightfold Path (the Fourth Noble Truth) is a practical set of guidelines for the ethical and mental development needed to free us from attachments and delusions, and to live more skillfully. The eight elements of the path are best understood as interdependent, rather than sequential. For example, we need right intention to speak correctly, which requires right effort, which relates to the mental discipline that results from meditation, and so forth.

The word translated as ‘right’ in English is the *Pali* word *samma*, **meaning appropriate or skillful**. (*Pali* is a language native to the Indian subcontinent, and is the language of many of the earliest Buddhist texts.) In this context, right does not convey the usual meaning of right as opposed to wrong. The Buddha often said that he taught only about the cause of human suffering and its relief. The Eightfold Noble Path reflects the views, behaviors, and training that lead to the relief of suffering for oneself and others.

1. RIGHT VIEW

Sometimes no view is the best view, since it's often our opinions and preferences that lead to problems. Understood as the beginning and the end of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right View means to see things as they really are (impermanent and contingent), to understand the law of causality and to realize the Four Noble Truths.

Obviously, there are right views and wrong views. In this case, right view reflects the true nature of reality, in all of its impermanence and emptiness; wrong views reflect a false sense of the world. Because our views inform our actions and determine our course through life, it is important that we cultivate Right View by the willingness to see things as they are.

As we begin to gain a deeper awareness and understanding of the nature of reality, the skillful means necessary to live selflessly and peacefully become clearer and more evident in our our daily activities.

2. RIGHT INTENTION

While Right View is concerned with our comprehension and ability to think clearly, Right Intention sets in motion actions and their consequences. In this way, these two wisdom factors of the path support and strengthen each other.

There are three right (pure) intentions: the intention to resist and renounce the pull of desire, especially sense desires and the desire for a permanent self; the intention to be wholeheartedly of benefit; and the intention to do no harm. Right Intention requires a commitment to living more skillfully and ethically.

3. RIGHT SPEECH

The Buddha listed five characteristics of right speech. You can ask yourself these five questions before speaking.

Is it true?

Is it timely?

Is it spoken with affection?

Is it beneficial?

Is it spoken with goodwill?

4. RIGHT ACTION

In simple, positive terms, right actions are compassionate, honest, and respectful. They are actions that arise from pure mindstates, like generosity, lovingkindness and compassion, trustworthiness and dependability. They are actions that develop from our desire to be of benefit and to serve others. They are usually stated in the negative in terms of the five precepts: to abstain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. Unfortunately, telling us what not to do doesn't necessarily mean we will know what to do. Right Action is concerned with what to do. We can be guided by the Three Pure Vows (page 12) and to act skillfully from that point of departure.

Right Action implies that our actions have consequences. This is the principle of karma (*kamma*) as stated in the *Dhammapada*, a collection of some of the earliest recorded sayings of the Buddha:

*“What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and
our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow:
our life is the creation of our mind.*

*If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as
the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart.*

*What we are today comes from thoughts of yesterday, and our present
thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our
mind. If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind,
joy follows him as his own shadow.”*

5. RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Right Livelihood means that what we do for a living should be legal, peaceful, honest, and beneficial to others. Right livelihoods demonstrate respect and consideration for employees and customers, where cooperation rather than competition is stressed, where sales are honest and equitable, profits are reasonable rather than greedy, and where honesty is practiced in all internal and external dealings.

The most obvious wrong livelihoods, as listed in the Buddhist scriptures, include occupations such as being in or acting in support

of the military, selling weapons, dealing in human trafficking, pimping and prostitution, producing or selling illegal drugs, and raising animals for slaughter or slaughtering them. Other than blatantly wrong livelihoods, most jobs are neither right nor wrong livelihoods. There are lawyers, for example, whose practices are ethically disciplined and whose work is clearly beneficial, while there are others who bend every rule to their own advantage. **To some degree, Right Livelihood is a reflection of what we do in a job, rather than of the job itself.**

6. RIGHT EFFORT

Right Effort is required to keep ourselves on the path to a more peaceful and beneficial life. It may be described in four words: abandon and refrain, develop and maintain. Abandon defilements and the conditions that would allow them to arise again; then develop wholesome mental states and maintain the conditions that allow them to grow.

This is essentially a process of replacing defilements with their antidotes, then maintaining the conditions for the antidotes, wholesome mental states and activities, to take hold. Right Effort is best practiced by thoughtful examination of common harmful tendencies, and then applying their antidotes.

7. RIGHT MINDFULNESS

For those seeking a more peaceful life, mindfulness is a critical training. It allows us to see clearly. It is not so much about doing as about not doing. We just sit and watch the moment, without floating away into past memories or fretting about the future, without even commenting about what's happening. **The nature of mindful attention is without desire, wanting, clinging, preferring, judging, or attaching.**

We develop Right Mindfulness by paying attention to our body, our feelings, (affinities and aversions) our thoughts, and what's going on around us. As our meditation practice grows, awareness increases. Initially, our major concern is simple: learn to be mindful of the breath during meditation. Later we learn to be mindful throughout the day and this in turn leads to more wholesome states of mind.

8. RIGHT CONCENTRATION

Through the practice of mindfulness meditation, we develop the beginning of single-pointed concentration -- the ability to focus on an object of meditation and stay there with minimal distraction for many minutes at a time. This allows us to calm the mind sufficiently to allow observation of how the mind works. These insights, in turn, lead to less reactivity. We are less driven by habit and become more intentional and skillful in our words and actions.

The usual happiness that common people are interested in is when a particular hunger or want is satisfied. This is the typical understanding of happiness. In the Dhamma sense, however, happiness manifests when there is no hunger or want at all, when we're completely free of all hunger, desire, and want. Please help to sort out this matter right here by paying careful attention to the following distinction: *happiness due to hunger being satisfied and happiness due to no hunger at all.*

Can you see the difference? Can you feel the distinction between the happiness of hunger and the happiness of hungerlessness?

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu
—20th century Thai master

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MINDFULNESS OF BREATH MEDITATION

Begin by sitting on a cushion on the floor, or in a chair, with your back straight and slightly arched if possible. Bring your attention to your breathing and simply observe the inhale and exhale, without trying to control it. Observe it as casually as you would watch a fish swimming in a tank.

With the barest attention, simply notice that when you inhale that your breath is entering your body, when you exhale your breath is leaving your body. Allow the breath to flow naturally. Some people observe the breath as the sensation of the rising and falling of the abdomen. Others observe the breath at the tip of the nostrils. Experiment until you find a place where the sensation is clearly felt.

You can use silent mental labels to guide and sustain attention. “In, out, i-n, o-u-t.” Breathe naturally, without controlling, directing, or forcing the breath. Simply observe. Just notice each breath from the breath, not from the head. Don’t think about your breathing, but rather just be aware of the breath entering and leaving the body.

Notice and experience the full breath cycle from the beginning through the middle to the end. The awareness is a combination of receptivity and alertness. It is an attentive presence without judgment or commentary.

As soon as you notice the mind wandering off, whether to a thought, a sound, or any other distraction, notice you have drifted away and gently reconnect with the breath. The breath anchors us. There is no way to stop all thoughts, so don’t even try.

As thoughts, ideas, feelings, sensations, etc arise and cease, we begin to see their impermanence, transience, and lack of anything substantial. This new awareness begins to untangle our knotted web of attachment, fear, and confusion. We train ourselves to live more from a place of peace, compassion, and wisdom, rather than from stress and anxiety.

PRACTICE NOTES

If there is any question about a decision you need to make or an activity you're considering, ask yourself: will this action make me anxious and stressed or confident and peaceful? If the answer is anxious and stressed, then maybe you should think again.

Here's an alphabetical list of major defilements or sources of stress:

Abuse, Aggression, Ambition, Anger, Arrogance, Avarice, Baseness, Blasphemy, Bravado, Calculation, Callousness, Capriciousness, Conceit, Conceitedness, Contempt, Cruelty, Cursing, Debasement, Deceit, Deception, Delusion, Derision, Desire for fame, Discord, Disrespect, Dissatisfaction, Dogmatism, Dominance, Doubt, Egoism, Enviousness, Envy, Excessiveness, Faithlessness, Falseness, Fear, Furtiveness, Gambling, Gluttony, Greed, Hard-heartedness, Hatred, Haughtiness, High-handedness, Holding a Grudge, Hostility, Humiliation, Hurt, Hypocrisy, Ignorance, Imperiousness, Impudence, Inattentiveness, Indifference, Ingratitude, Insatiability, Insidiousness, Intimidation, Intolerance, Intransigence, Irresponsibility, Jealousy, Know-it-all, Lack of Comprehension, Lecherousness, Lying, Manipulation, Masochism, Mercilessness, Negativity, Obsession, Obstinacy, Oppression, Ostentatiousness, Pessimism, Power-hungry, Prejudice, Presumption, Pretense, Pride, Quarrelsomeness, Rage, Restlessness, Ridicule, Sadism, Sarcasm, Self-hatred, Sexual Lust, Shamelessness, Sloth, Stinginess, Stubbornness, Temper, Torment, Torpor, Tyranny, Unkindness, Unruliness, Unyielding, Vanity, Vindictiveness, Violence, Worry, Wrath.

Circle five defilements that are most prominent in your life. Then match each with its antidote on the next page.

**TRADITIONAL LIST OF ANTIDOTES
(POSITIVE MENTAL STATES)**

Compassion
Equanimity
Generosity
Humility
Modesty
Lovingkindness
Moral discipline
Patience
Sympathetic Joy
Trustworthiness
Dependability

Working with a list like this helps develop awareness of our habitual, conditioned behaviors, and begins to establish techniques for replacing them with more skillful responses.

When you start to feel angry, for example, at any given moment, and with practice, a certain degree of insight and wisdom will develop to prevent our actions from veering into extremes.

It takes courage and persistence to examine our long-held beliefs and habitual responses. They seem to be a part of our identity, and there may be resistance to the idea of looking within and gaining some insight into our behaviors.

But the effort is worth it and is necessary for gaining wisdom and compassion, as well as for seeing patterns as they start taking shape. Liberation starts with oneself and moves outward.

These essential Buddhist teachings point the way to a more fulfilling and peaceful life no matter where our home may be.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

1. *With Ignorance as the condition, Volitional Formations arise;*
2. *With Volitional Formations as the condition,
Consciousness arises;*
3. *With Consciousness as the condition, Name and Form arises;*
4. *With Name and Form as the condition, Senses arise;*
5. *With Senses as the condition, Sense Contact arises;*
6. *With Sense Contact as the condition, Feelings arise;*
7. *With Feelings as the condition, Craving arises;*
8. *With Craving as the condition, Clinging arises;*
9. *With Clinging as the condition, Becoming arises;*
10. *With Becoming as the condition, Birth arises;*
11. *With Birth as the condition,
Aging, Sickness and Death arise;*
12. *With Aging, Sickness and Death as the condition,
Ignorance arises, and the cycle starts again.*

A Shorthand Version from the Sutras

When there is this, that is.

With the arising of this, that arises.

When this is not, neither is that.

With the cessation of this, that ceases.

— **Samyutta Nikaya 12.61**

*In order to bake an apple pie from scratch,
you need to start with the Big Bang!*

The law of causality that is inherent in the teaching of Dependent Origination relates to the Second Noble Truth. The Buddha is showing us that phenomena and experiences do not appear in isolation. He is describing the nature of reality.

Some consider the principle of Dependent Origination to be Buddhism's most important and unique teaching. Scripturally, it was described as a natural law, a fundamental truth that exists independently of our perception of it. **Keep in mind that this teaching is concerned with the issue of human suffering – not the evolution or creation of the universe.** The Buddha at times saw himself as a doctor who diagnoses the disease and prescribes its remedy.

Here are the twelve components, or links, that make up Dependent Origination: ignorance, mental formation, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth and old age, and death.

At first, the teaching looks like a 12-link chain, presenting the sequence of events inherent in each moment and each life, starting with ignorance and ending with death. When we look more deeply, however, we see that Dependent Origination explains how dukkha arises and that the chain can be broken at any point. It's possible to end the sequence of events that inevitably ends in suffering.

On an even deeper level, this is a description of the casually conditioned nature of all phenomena and a far more profound explanation of impermanence and emptiness than in any of the other teachings.

When we understand Dependent Origination beyond its linear appearance, as an event beyond words, we have penetrated emptiness. That's why the Buddha said, "to understand dependent origination is to understand the Dharma."

*I am conditioned by other people and things.
Other people and things are conditioned by me.*

HEARTLAND ZEN provides a location for meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings. Members also participate in activities such as sending books to prison inmates and supporting re-entry efforts.

For more information visit:
www.HeartlandZen.org