

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation and Overview of the Teachings of the Buddha

Lesson Two: Mindfulness of the Postures of the Body Lying Down Meditation Standing Meditation Walking Meditation

In the first lesson, we were introduced to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The first Foundation is mindfulness of the body. So far we have covered mindfulness of the breath and mindfulness of the posture of sitting. In this lesson we will cover mindfulness of the other postures of the body.

In the words of the Buddha, “And again bhikkhus, a bhikkhu knows, 'I am going,' when he is going; he knows, 'I am standing,' when he is standing; he knows, 'I am sitting,' when he is sitting; he knows, 'I am lying down,' when he is lying down or just as his body is disposed, so he knows it.”

A bhikkhu is a monk but the instructions are relevant to anyone who is practicing the teachings of the Buddha. The female form of bhikkhu is bhikkhuni.

“___ or just as the body is disposed” means we are to be aware of all the movements and postures of the body.

Mindfulness of going (moving) includes being aware of our intention to initiate a movement.

Lying Down Meditation

The Buddha did not give specific instructions on how to practice mindfulness of the postures. So any specific instructions have come from teachers who have tried to devise ways to help us become mindful of our postures. I have been taught two different methods for lying down meditation. As mentioned in Lesson One, there are two aspects of meditation, calming and insight. In this lesson we will use the body postures to focus on the calming aspect of meditation.

First method:

Lie down. Then set your intention as taught in the first lesson. For example, “I intend to be aware of where my body touches the ground, noticing my breath in the background; I will use right effort to prevent the arising of restless thoughts and I will do this in an atmosphere of loving friendliness.”

After becoming aware of your whole body lying down and aware of your breath in the background, feel where your head touches the ground. Stay with the sensation of

touch at this location for a few breaths and then feel where your shoulders touch for a few breaths, then your hips and then your heels. More touch points can be added. Once you have felt each touch point for a few breaths, return to the first one and repeat the sequence. Continue to repeat for the time you have allotted for the meditation. Keep about 75% of your attention on whichever touch point you are at and about 25% on your breath. After a couple of breaths, become aware of your intention to move to the next touch point.

Then move your attention to the new point with continued awareness of your breath in the background. This is step 1. Should a distraction pull your attention away from the touch point, gently and non-judgmentally notice the distraction (step 2) and then let it go by gently returning your attention to the touch point (step 3).

Second method:

In this method, which Jon Kabat-Zinn describes in his book, “Full Catastrophe Living”, you will be “bringing” your breath to various points on your body, starting with the crown of your head. Once you are at a point, you rest your attention there for another 2 breaths, and then “bring” your breath to the next chosen point on your body.

Lie down. Set your intention: “I intend to feel my breath and whatever sensations arise at the chosen points on my body, to use right effort to prevent the arising of restless thoughts, and to do this in an atmosphere of loving friendliness.”

Feel your whole body lying down. Feel your breath coming and going. Then follow the in-breath to the crown of your head. Leave your attention at your crown for another 2 breaths and notice any sensations at your crown. If there are no sensations, then that is of what you are mindful. Follow the next in-breath to the middle of your forehead. Remain mindful of this area for another 2 breaths, noticing any sensations that arise. Continue this routine for the following points, noticing each point for 3 breaths:

- throat
- heart chakra (middle of breast bone)
- right shoulder, elbow, wrist, thumb, index, middle, ring and little finger - return via little, ring, middle, index finger, thumb, wrist, elbow, shoulder, heart chakra
- left shoulder, elbow, wrist, thumb, index, middle, ring and little finger - return as on the right side
- heart chakra
- solar plexus (bottom of breast bone)
- sexual chakra (just below the belly button)
- root chakra (base of your body between your legs)
- right hip, knee, ankle, big toe, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th toe
- return
- root chakra
- left hip, knee, ankle, big toe, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th toe
- return

- root chakra
- sexual chakra
- solar plexus
- heart chakra
- throat
- middle of forehead
- crown

The above instructions are step 1. When your mind becomes distracted, as soon as you become aware of being distracted, gently and non-judgmentally note the fact that you are distracted (step 2) and then gently let go of the distraction by returning your attention to the body point you were on (step 3).

This sequence can be repeated until the time you determined for meditation is up. It is also a good meditation to use at bedtime. Normally, we want to be alert when meditating and oppose the hindrance of drowsiness. But at bedtime you can allow drowsiness to arise and take you into sleep.

Standing Meditation

Stand. I have never been given any particular instructions on how to stand from my meditation teachers. But in the Taoist tradition one is encouraged to stand in the “horse stance”. This is with your feet shoulder width apart, weight on the front 1/2 of your feet, arms hanging at your sides or resting on the lower abdomen and knees flexed as if you were riding a horse - thus the name. A friend of mine, visiting Vietnam, noticed a fellow meditating in this posture for several hours!

Some teachers advise you to keep your eyes open while doing standing meditation. Others feel it is fine to close your eyes. As long as your balance is good, you can choose to close your eyes. Set your intention. For example, “I intend to focus on points of my body with awareness of my breath in the background and use right effort to prevent the arising of restless thoughts, in an atmosphere of loving friendliness.”

Feel your whole body standing and then feel your feet on the floor. Remain mindful of your feet for a few breaths and then shift your attention to your knees. Experience the sensation of your knees for a few breaths and then shift your attention to your hips, then your shoulders and then the crown of your head. Then return to your feet and continue the cycle for the time you’ve allotted for the meditation. You can add in other points or pick different points to focus on.

An alternative is to focus on your breath as you did in the sitting posture, the only difference being that you are standing.

The above instructions are step 1. Follow the usual steps 2 and 3 when distractions arise.

Walking Meditation

There are numerous ways that have been taught to do walking meditation. The instruction that has been most helpful to me is to walk at a speed that supports my mindfulness. Therefore, if you are restless or angry, you will likely need to walk at a brisk

pace or perhaps even jog. But if you are feeling very calm, you may want to walk at a very slow pace.

Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching is to walk at the pace you choose, feel your feet touching the ground and count how many steps you take while breathing in and how many steps you take while breathing out. There is nothing magical in this instruction. It is just that by putting all your attention on feeling your steps and feeling your breathing and counting your breaths, there is no space for your mind to wander or agitate. Thus you become calm.

This meditation follows the usual 3 steps described in Lesson One for breath meditation. For step 1, focus on your steps and breath. If your mind wanders from this focus, step 2 is to gently and non-judgmentally notice the distraction and then step 3 is to let the distraction go by gently returning your attention to your steps and breath. Some teachers instruct you to pause in your walking if a distraction arises and only start walking again when your focus is back on your breath and steps.

The Burmese method of walking meditation is excellent if you feel calm. This method will not disturb your calm and will support your mindfulness. In this method, each footstep is broken down into its components. Typically you start with 1 component, placing your foot on the ground. Next, you break the step into 2 components, lifting your foot and then placing it on the ground.

Co-ordinate these steps with your breath. For example, while walking with a one component footstep, you can step with one foot on the in-breath and then step with the other foot on the out-breath. With the 2 components, you can lift your foot on the in-breath and place it on the out-breath. Once you have mastered this, you move to 3 components: lifting (in-breath), moving the foot forward and then placing the foot (out-breath). Next is 4 components: raise the heel, lift the foot (in-breath), move the foot forward, place the foot (out-breath). Then 5 components: raising, lifting (in-breath), moving forward, lowering the foot, placing the foot (out-breath). Finally, 6 components: raising, lifting, moving forward (in-breath), lowering the foot, touching the toe to the ground, placing the foot on the ground (out-breath).

As mentioned, this is a wonderful way to do walking meditation when your mind is very still as it would be disturbed by brisk movements. In summary:

1. Placing
2. Lifting, placing
3. Lifting, moving, placing
4. Raising, lifting, moving, placing
5. Raising, lifting, moving, lowering, placing
6. Raising, lifting, moving, lowering, touching, placing

And, as usual, follow steps 2 and 3 when distractions arise.

At your home you can pace back and forth across a room or back and forth along a hallway or your yard or somewhere out in nature. At meditation retreats you usually do walking meditation in a space about 20 paces long. At the end of the 20 paces, you turn

around and pace back. You are not going anywhere. You are just enjoying the movement of walking. You are not looking at the scenery; you are just focusing on your steps and breath.

At this point, we are using walking meditation as a calming meditation. Mindfulness of the body postures can also be used for insight meditation. We will discuss this next session. As you come to the end of your walking lane, notice the arising of the intention to turn and the decision of which way to turn. You can make an immediate turn or you can pause and feel your body standing briefly, with your breath in the background, before initiating the turn. After the turn, you can immediately start walking back or you can pause again and feel your body standing, with your breath in the background, before taking off.

These instructions for walking meditation are a “practice meditation.” They are a practice for all walking and moving that we will be doing during the rest of the day, after we finish our formal meditation practice. Remember that our goal is to be mindful all the time, not just while we are in formal meditation practice. So throughout the day, we are mindful of which posture our body is in, and mindful of the intention to change our posture. When we are taking a walk during the day we can “just walk”, focusing only on our footsteps with our breath in the background. But remember to have clear comprehension present....the awareness of where we are going, so we don't walk out into traffic unawares and so we reach our destination.

Another possibility is to walk with a shifting focus of attention, depending on what draws our attention. So at one moment we may be aware of a bird singing, at another, the shape of a cloud, at another the sensation of our body moving and our feet touching the ground, etc. All this is happening with awareness of our breath in the background. When a thought comes up, that pulls us away from the experience of the moment, we just notice the thought and then return our attention to the present moment.

You may wonder if there is space for thinking in mindfulness practice since the instructions, so far, have been to "let go of thoughts that arise". The answer is, "Yes, there is a role for thoughts". They help us discern if we are being unskillful and if so, how to skillfully return to our meditation object or our task at hand. And we use thought when we need to plan for the future, solve problems etc.