TRICYCLE

TRICYCLE TEACHINGS

Five Practices to Change Your Mind

A Tricycle E-Booklet

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Introduction

When the world spins out of control, we don't have to spin with it. We can choose to come home to the breath and the body. To find moments of joy and gratitude. To care for others. And to be the still point in the turning world.

The Buddha taught 2,500 years ago that while we may not be able to change what's going on around us, we can always change our own minds. With practice, we can train ourselves to act from a place of calm awareness rather than one of fear and reactivity.

Buddhist practices can help you do this. In this e-book, our editors present five introductory meditations—from mindfulness to loving-kindness—to steady your mind in turbulent times. You can use these practices for immediate relief or as a regular practice to cultivate long-term positive change.

May these practices be of benefit to you, your family, and your community!

– The Editors

1

LEAVE YOURSELF ALONE!

Zen teacher Barry Magid describes the practice of just sitting.

Barry Magid

Imagine sitting down in front of a mirror. Your face automatically appears. There is no effort required; the mirror is doing all the work. You can't do it right or wrong. The Zen Buddhist practice of "just sitting" is like that. When we sit, our mind automatically begins to display itself to us. Our practice is to observe and experience what appears moment after moment. Of course, just as when we look in a real mirror, things don't stay that simple for long.

We notice how our faces or our bodies look in the mirror, and we immediately have an emotional reaction and form judgments about what we see. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that Paul Cezanne was capable of painting a self-portrait with utter objectivity, of looking at his own face with no more reaction than "a dog which sees itself in a mirror and thinks, 'Here is another dog.'" For the rest of us, it's not so easy to simply observe who we are. Looking in the mirror, we are tempted to use it as a makeup mirror to touch up the parts of our self-image we don't like.

Our minds are never what we want them to be. That's part of why we sit in the first place. We are uncomfortable with ourselves as we are. The greatest dualism we face is the split between who we are and who we think we ought to be. Sometimes that gap fuels our aspiration to follow Buddhist teachings, sometimes it simply fuels our self-hatred, and all too often we confuse these two notions of self entirely.

Just sitting means sitting still with all of the aspects of ourselves that we came to Buddhist practice in order to avoid or change—our restlessness, our anxiety, our fear, our anger, our wandering minds. Our practice is to just watch, to just feel. We watch our minds. Minds think. There's no problem with that; minds just do what they do. Ordinarily we get caught up in the content of our thoughts, but when we just sit, we observe ourselves just thinking. Our body's most basic activity is breathing: No matter what else is going on, we are breathing. We sit and breathe, and we feel the sensation of our breath in our bodies. Often there is tension or even pain somewhere in our bodies as well. We sit and feel that too and keep breathing. Whatever thoughts come, come. Whatever feelings come, come. We are not sitting there to fight off our thoughts or try to make ourselves stop thinking.

When we sit, we realize how unwilling we are to leave anything about ourselves alone. We turn our lives into one endless self-improvement project. All too often what we call meditation or spirituality is simply incorporated into our obsession with self-criticism and self-improvement. I've encountered many students who have attempted to use meditation to perform a spiritual lobotomy on themselves—trying to excise, once and for all, their anger, their fear, their sexuality. We have to sit with our resistance to feeling whole, to feeling all those painful and messy parts of ourselves.

Just sitting means just that. That "just" endlessly goes against the grain of our need to fix, transform, and improve ourselves. The paradox of our practice is that the most effective way of transformation is to leave ourselves alone. The more we let everything be just what it is, the more we relax into an open, attentive awareness of one moment after another. Just sitting leaves everything just as it is.

Barry Magid is a psychoanalyst and dharma heir of Charlotte Joko Beck. He teaches at the Ordinary Mind Zendo in New York City.

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MAY WE ALL BE HAPPY...

Metta meditation instruction from author and teacher Gil Fronsdal.

Gil Fronsdal

May all beings be happy.
May they live in safety and joy.
All living beings,
Whether weak or strong,
Tall, stout, average, or short,
Seen or unseen, near or distant,
Born or to be born,
May they all be happy.
—*From the Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata I.8*

Metta, or lovingkindness, is one of the most important Buddhist practices. Simply stated, metta is the heartfelt wish for the well-being of oneself and others. When describing metta, the Buddha used the analogy of the care a mother gives her only child. Lovingkindness is also understood as the innate friendliness of an open heart. Its close connection to friendship is reflected in its similarity to the Pali word for friend, *mitta*. However, metta is more than conventional friendship, for it includes being openhearted even toward one's enemies, developed from insight

into our shared humanity.

Metta practice is the cultivation of our capacity for lovingkindness. It does not involve either positive thinking or the imposition of an artificial positive attitude. There is no need to feel loving or kind during metta practice. Rather, we meditate on our good intentions, however weak or strong they may be, and water the seeds of these intentions. When we water wholesome intentions instead of expressing unwholesome ones, we develop those wholesome tendencies within us. If these seeds are never watered, they won't grow. When watered by regular practice, they grow, sometimes in unexpected fashions. We may find that lovingkindness becomes the operating motivation in a situation that previously triggered anger or fear.

To practice lovingkindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long, and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest in the area of your heart.

Metta is first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases: *May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.*

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Lovingkindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness. However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind's eye. This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing lovingkindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you.

Then slowly repeat phrases of lovingkindness toward them: *May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease*.

As you say these phrases, again sink into their intention or heartfelt meaning. And again, if any feelings of lovingkindness arise, connect the feelings with the phrases so that the feelings may become stronger as you repeat the words.

As you continue the meditation, you can bring to mind other friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, animals, and finally people with whom you have difficulty. You can either use the same phrases, repeating them again and again, or make up phrases that better represent the lovingkindness you feel toward these beings.

Sometimes during lovingkindness meditation, seemingly opposite feelings such as anger, grief, or sadness may arise. Take these to be signs that your heart is softening, revealing what is held there. You can either shift to mindfulness practice or you can—with whatever patience, acceptance, and kindness you can muster for such feelings—direct lovingkindness toward them. Above all, remember that there is no need to judge yourself for having these feelings.

As you become familiar with lovingkindness practice during meditation, you can also begin to use it in your daily life. While in your car, or at work, or in public, privately practice metta toward those around you. There can be a great delight in establishing a heartfelt connection to everyone we encounter, friends and strangers alike.

Gil Fronsdal teaches at the Insight Meditation Center and at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. He has practiced extensively in the Soto Zen and Theravada Buddhist traditions. He is the author of *The Issue at Hand: Essays on Buddhist Mindfulness Practice* and the translator of *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic*.

3

WISDOM ARISING

Sri Lankan monk Bhante Henepola Gunaratana on training the mind's eye with Vipassana meditation.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

Vipassana, or Insight meditation, is a way of training the mind to see things in a very special way as they happen. Seeing without using eyes is a special way of seeing. We train the mind to use our innate wisdom without using words, concepts, logic, or interpretation. In this training, concentration and mindfulness are united. Then wisdom arises and disintegrates what appears to be integrated. Our wisdom eye registers the constant flux of events that is taking place in every moment in our lives. Although this unbroken flux of events is what life is, one cannot be fully aware of this truth without paying attention to what is happening to one's mind and body every waking moment. With developed insight, our mind can be fully aware of the evolving, processing, and dissolving of everything that happens to us.

So we train the mind to see things as they happen, neither before nor after. And we don't cling to the past, the future, or even to the present. We participate in what is happening and at the same time observe it without clinging to the events of the past, the future, or the present. We experience our ego or self arising, dissolving, and evaporating without leaving a trace of it. We see how our greed, anger, and ignorance vanish as we see the reality in life. Mindfully we watch the body, feelings, sen-

sations, perceptions, and consciousness and experience their dynamic nature.

Watching impartially opens the mind to realize that there is no way that we can stop this flux even for a fraction of a second. We experience the freshness of life. Every moment is a new moment. Every breath is a fresh breath. Every tiny little thing is living and dying every fraction of a second. There is no way that we can see these momentary existences with our eyes. Only when the mind is sharp and clear, without the clouds of craving, hatred, and confusion can our mind be fully aware of this phenomenon. When we don't try to cling to these experiences, we experience great joy, happiness, and peace. The moment we try to cling to any part of our experience—however pleasant or peaceful—joy, peace, and happiness disappear. The very purpose of Vipassana meditation is to liberate the mind from psychic irritation and enjoy the peace and happiness of liberation. Nevertheless, if we cling to peace or happiness, that instant that very peace and happiness vanish. This is a very delicate balance that we should maintain through the wisdom that arises from Vipassana meditation.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana is a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka and the author of *Mindfulness in Plain English*. He is president of the Bhavana Society in High View, West Virginia, an organization that promotes meditation and monastic life.

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AWAKENING, STEP BY STEP

Insight Meditation teacher Peter Doobinin introduces walking meditation.

Peter Doobinin

Walking meditation is a practice through which we develop concentration and mindfulness. We learn to cultivate mindfulness of the body while the body is moving. We learn to be awake. Walking meditation is a particularly important practice in that it enables us to make the transition from sitting meditation to being awake in our daily lives, in our work, and in our relationships. In the end, that's what it's all about.

Walking meditation is a simple practice. You choose a straight path—indoors or outdoors—roughly fifteen or twenty steps long. You walk from one end of the path to the other, turn around, and walk back. You continue in this fashion, walking back and forth, focusing your attention on your feet. Your posture is upright, alert, and relaxed. You can hold your hands at your sides, or clasped in front or behind. Keep your eyes open, cast down, and slightly ahead. You can experiment with your pace, perhaps walking quite slowly or at a more regular speed, in an effort to find the pace at which you're most present. As you walk, direct your attention to the sensations in the feet, to the bare experience

of walking. Try to feel one step at time. Be fully, wholeheartedly aware of the physical sensations involved in taking each step. Feel your foot as it lifts, moves through the air, places down against the ground. In particular, pay attention to the touching down of the foot, the sensations of contact, and pressure. Remember that you're feeling each step, you're not thinking about the foot, or visualizing it.

You'll find, of course, that it isn't always easy to stay focused on the meditation object, the sensations in the feet. The mind wanders, drifts. Your job is to notice when you've strayed, when you're lost in thought. Be aware that you've wandered. And return gently to the physical sensations, the lifting, moving, placing of the foot. Just keep bringing your attention back.

As you walk, cultivate a sense of ease. There's no hurry to get anywhere, no destination to reach. You're just walking. This is a good instruction: just walk.

As you walk, as you let go of the desire to get somewhere, you begin to sense the joy in simply walking, in being in the present moment. You begin to comprehend the preciousness of each step. It's an extraordinarily precious experience to walk on this earth.

You can start by practicing walking meditation for ten minutes a day. Gradually, you can expand the amount of time you spend on this formal walking meditation.

In addition to this kind of formal practice, you'll want to practice walking meditation in "real life" situations. You can practice "informally" just about anywhere, walking along a city sidewalk, down the aisle in the supermarket, or across the backyard. As always, the objective is to pay attention. Pay attention to your feet. Or pay attention to your whole body—the felt experience of your body as it's moving. In this informal context, you're aware, to some extent, of what's going on around you,

but your focus is on your walking. Practicing in this way, you begin to live more mindfully. This is when meditation practice takes hold and assumes a new relevancy. Being awake is no longer reserved for the times you spend in formal sitting meditation; it is the way you live.

Peter Doobinin is the Guiding Teacher of Downtown Meditation Community. A co-founder of New York Insight Meditation Center, he has been teaching the dharma in New York City for 20 years. He is the author of *The Skill of Living*.

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HOT AND HEAVY, COOL AND LIGHT

Naropa University's Judith Simmer-Brown on the Tibetan Buddhist practice of tonglen

Judith Simmer-Brown

Tonglen, literally "giving and taking," is a Tibetan practice for cultivating compassion, the Mahayana path of the bodhisattva. The great master Atisha brought Tibetans this practice from India in the eleventh century. Tonglen reverses the pattern of self-cherishing that is the knot of our personal suffering. Using breathing as the basis, tonglen opens our hearts to those things we would rather avoid and encourages us to share what we would rather keep for ourselves. The practice shows that there are no real boundaries between living beings—we are all interdependent.

We begin tonglen by taking our seats in meditation with good posture, very simply and naturally. We ask, why would we want to do this practice? Fundamentally it is vast and choiceless. We recognize that the purpose of our human life is huge, to grow larger hearts and open minds, and we celebrate that we can do this in this moment. We are ready for transformation. Glimpsing this motivation begins the practice.

Then we become aware of our breathing, in and out, and establish the flow of the practice. On the in-breath, we breathe in thinking,

"heavy, thick, hot," and on the out-breath, we breathe out thinking, "light, bright, cool." At first it seems only like words, but it is good to develop a literal sense of this. My teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, suggested that we think of ourselves as air conditioners. We breathe in the stale, smoky, fetid air of the room around us, and we breathe out fresh, clean, cool air. We gradually purify the room. When we breathe, we are breathing with every pore of our bodies, in with "heavy, thick, hot," and out with "light, bright, cool." Do this for roughly one-third of the twenty-minute session, or until the texture is established.

Next, we breathe with a continuing sense of the texture we have established. But now we open our thoughts and emotions to all of our personal material. It is good to start with those who spontaneously arouse our compassion. Is there someone we know who is sick or in emotional turmoil? We begin with that person's face before us and breathe in their heavy, thick, and hot suffering, sharing with them our own light, bright, and cool energy. Be quite tangible with the texture. Whatever suffering we see in them, we breathe it in; whatever sanity and kindness we see in ourselves, we breathe it out to them. When we are ready, extend beyond our loved ones to more difficult people. Are there people we see as threatening or as problematic in our lives? We allow their faces to come to us and then breathe in their suffering and extend to them our sanity and kindness. We are practicing embracing what we would normally avoid, and sharing what we would normally hoard. Do this part of the practice for seven to ten minutes.

We conclude the practice by extending it out beyond our familiar world. One way to do this is to move geographically. We begin in our immediate neighborhood, with the family next door with the two babies, to the college student on the other side who takes terrible care of her lawn, to the elderly woman across the street who recently lost

her husband. We move to those people we encounter on our daily routines—our coworkers and our boss; the grocery checker and stock boy; the employees at the cleaners, the gas station, and the video store. Then we extend through our community, to the hospital, the shelter, the jail, the nursing home, including everyone suffering there. And we extend to our state, region, country, and world, our minds going to the painful situations there that are described in the newspaper—the wars, famines, epidemics. We also include the CEOs, the political leaders, and the people of privilege. We extend this practice until the twenty-minute session is over. Then we conclude with a simple session of meditation again.

Judith Simmer-Brown is a prominent Buddhist scholar and has been a professor of religious studies at Naropa University since 1978. She has practiced Tibetan Buddhism for more than 40 years and is an Acharya senior dharma teacher of the Shambhala Buddhist lineage.