



## Introduction to Mindfulness & Meditation Session 1 Handout

### Home Practice

- Create a place for sitting – a room or corner of room. A place that is relatively quiet and where you won't be disturbed. You may want to make it special by including something that feels sacred to you—a picture of a spiritual leader figure or of nature; a flower or a candle— whatever is meaningful for you.
- Decide the time of day you will sit—e.g. first thing in the morning or before bed. Try to be consistent in sitting at the same time each day.
- Decide how much time you want to sit every day and then sit for the entire pre-determined period (say 5, 10 or 15 minutes). You may want to use a timer.
- Begin to make sitting a priority. This week focus on following the breath, at the belly, nose tip or nostrils, or the flow of the breath, and do it every day.
- Choose one routine activity that you do each day – brushing your teeth, showering, washing the dishes, driving, or walking, and practice doing it mindfully all week.
- Select a gatha (poem) from the final section of this handout and practice reciting it with one of your daily activities. You can also write your own gathas.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply knowing what's occurring. Being present to what is in front of you this moment – not past, not future – being aware that you're walking (rather than lost in thought about your destination), brushing your hair, going to the bathroom, listening deeply in conversations.

There are two kinds of mindfulness practices: formal and informal. **Formal** is what we would normally call "meditation," for which we set aside a specific time to sit silently with mindful awareness of our breathing, or to walk slowly and silently with mindful awareness of our breath and our walking. The **informal** practice involves mindfulness of our daily-life activities, and is just as much "meditation" as the formal practices are. The heart of mindfulness practice is the enactment of mindfulness in everything in our lives, so both the formal and informal practices are equally important. Each supports the other.

Life is more vibrant when we're present and alive to what is right in front of us. We have less stress since we stop ruminating about the past and worrying about the future. We can simply enjoy our friends, the sunset, the yoga class, cooking a healthy meal.

## **Mindfulness of the Breath**

The foundation of all mindfulness practice is conscious breathing-- bringing out attention to our in-breath and our out-breath. This is called mindfulness of breathing. Paying attention to our in-breath and out-breath brings our minds back to our bodies, and suddenly we are there, fully present. As we breathe in, we really feel the air flowing in, filling our lungs, feeling our belly rising, our chest expanding. There is no need to control our breathing; we want to feel it as it actually is, and as we bring mindfulness to it, it naturally becomes slower and deeper. Conscious breathing is key to uniting the body and mind, and bringing us into the present moment. Regardless of our internal weather--our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions--our breathing is always there for us. Whenever we get carried away by our thinking about the past or future, or sink into unpleasant emotions, we can return to our breathing as an anchor to the present moment. Just awareness of one breath brings our mind and body together and we are truly present.

## **Sitting Posture**

The goal is find a posture on a cushion, chair or meditation bench that is stable; that allows us to sit still for the meditation period without undo discomfort. We want to sit in comfort; relaxed, alert, without tension or drowsiness.

Posture: should embody dignity; the back should be straight; spine lengthened; navel slightly tucked in and back; chin slightly tucked (back of neck lengthens); head/chin/navel in straight line, as if string from head pulling up; shoulders relaxed, not rounded.

Hands: on knees, folded in lap, or at navel.

Eyes: preferable to keep eyes open, soft, relaxed, unfocused, gaze 3-4 ft in front.

Tongue: relaxed, tip on upper palate.

Half smile.

Experiment with postures to find one that works for you. Posture is representative of attitude. Openness (vulnerability), dignity, and a relaxed alertness are important. We've created a new attitude. When we sit we want to be as open as possible. Whatever is here is fine to show itself to me.

## **Meditation Instructions**

Set intention at the start of your meditation. "I will sit in relaxation, keep my attention on my breath and bring my attention back to the breath when it strays." Release yourself from day's activities. Clear your mind of the conversations yet to be finished, work yet to do, thoughts of past, future. When you take your posture on your cushion or chair, feel a sense of newness, release, presence.

RELAX. Keep bringing yourself back to relaxation. Soften your eyes, loosen your jaw, drop shoulders away from neck and open your chest area. Straighten your back, lengthen your spine.

Rest your attention on the sensation of your breath, either at the nostrils, the belly or the chest. Locate where it is that you're most comfortable resting your attention and leave it there. Don't move from one place to another. Focus on the sensation of the breath.

When thoughts arise, which they will repeatedly do, recognize them, acknowledge that thinking has occurred, let go of the thoughts/thinking, relax physically, and return the attention to the breath. Just do this over and over, whenever the mind gets lost in thought.

If it's helpful you can give yourself a soft mental label to help yourself focus on the experience. You can use "rising/falling" if you're focusing on the belly or "in/out" if your focus is on the nose tip/nostrils or the flow of the breath. Feel the physical sensations of breathing. Definition of meditation is knowing what's occurring. Know this sensation of the in-breath and the out-breath.

### **Thinking**

We are not trying to stop thoughts or thinking. Thoughts will always arise; it is the nature of the mind to think! We are training our minds so that we will not be swept away by our thoughts. We can learn to stop letting our thoughts act like a runaway train. We can stop chaining them together and becoming lost in them. We simply learn to notice when thoughts are leading us away, and bring ourselves back, to our breath.

We spend most of our daily lives living in our thoughts—planning, daydreaming, thinking about the past or the future, rather than actually connecting with our lives. To live mindfully is to simply be aware of what is occurring around us—what we are doing, what we are seeing, what we are hearing etc. It is being present to what is in front of us at this very moment.

In meditation we're learning to establish a new way to focus. So the first thing we have to do is to realize very clearly how difficult it is for us to focus, to consciously direct our attention and awareness. Retraining the mind takes practice. We need to have great patience and kindness with ourselves.

### **Practicing Mindfulness in Everyday Life ("off the cushion")**

- When you wake up in the morning, allow yourself some slow, mindful breaths before you get out of bed. See if you can be aware of your breathing and of making the transition from sleeping to waking. Be aware of the sound, the quality of light, or the darkness. Feel each in-breath calm your body and mind, and with each out-breath release any tension or thought you're holding. Try smiling and see what happens.
- As you rise from bed, be aware of your feet making contact with the floor. Notice how different your body feels in the lying-down, sitting, and standing postures. Be aware of your weight on your feet, of the floor supporting your body, and of the motion of your feet and legs as you begin to walk.

- Try eating breakfast without reading the newspaper or watching TV. If possible, eat silently for all or part of your meal. Before you eat, allow yourself to breathe in and out three times and bring your awareness to the food in front of you and/or recite a gatha.
- Brush your teeth in total mindfulness. Pick the toothbrush up slowly, add toothpaste, notice the taste of the toothpaste, the feel of the water as you rinse your mouth.
- Take a few minutes, either at home or on your way to and or from work, to notice something enjoyable about the morning: perhaps the sunlight or the rain or the face of a child or a flower or the sounds of birds or the wind. See if you can allow yourself and your surroundings to inhabit the same space.
- If you drive a car or ride a bike, use a few mindful breaths to calm yourself and bring your body awareness in line with your vehicle and the act of driving or riding before you turn on the ignition or right after you mount your bike. Notice how you're holding your body, and let your breathing help you relax your shoulders, soften your face. See if you can break the pressure of rushing to get where you are going and simply enjoy the process of getting there.
- When you get to work or school, or wherever you go on your daily tasks, practice some mindful breathing when you arrive and before you begin your work. Try sitting down and taking some mindful breaths before taking out your work, turning on your computer, or talking with your fellow workers or students. Allow your body to relax before you begin, and see whether a smile is possible.
- Several times during the day, allow yourself to become aware of your breathing and re-center yourself. Use these occasions to become aware of your body and to let your breath quiet your mind. See if you can allow a smile to bloom. Going through a doorway can be a signal to slow down and breathe.
- When you walk somewhere, try to be aware of your breathing and your steps. Are they peaceful steps or harsh ones? Can you allow yourself to slow down and make a trip to your car in the parking lot an occasion for walking meditation?
- Many things happen every day that you can use as bells of mindfulness: the doorbell, the telephone, sounds on your computer, turning on a light, and so on. Let each one be an occasion to notice your breathing and allow some mindful in- and out-breaths. When the telephone rings, let it ring two or three times before you answer it. This is a great contradiction to our conditioning of responding immediately.
- Approach your lunch and/or dinner with the same mindfulness with which you approached breakfast. A few mindful breaths before you start eating might be helpful. During the meal try to be aware of chewing your food. Pause between swallowing one bit of food and picking up the next one. Spend at least five minutes of your meal in silence, if possible. If you do have a conversation, keep the topics light and supportive; especially try to avoid arguments or angry exchanges.
- When you are ready to leave your day's activities, take a moment to appreciate what you've done that day in being mindful in your work or school or day's tasks. Consider how you can build on that the next day.

- Try being aware of your feelings and thoughts as you approach home, and take a few mindful breaths before you open the door. Make this transition a conscious one, and notice what it feels like to be home and how that feels different from being at work or school or at your daily tasks.
- While cooking, chop vegetables or engage in other food preparation in a slow, soft, grateful and mindful manner.
- When washing dishes, just wash the dishes.
- Whatever your evening activities are (TV, reading, listening to music), try stopping occasionally (every 30 minutes or so) and bring your attention back to your breath; become more aware of the room and the noises or silence of your home. If you're with your family, try giving yourself some mini-occasions to breathe mindfully and relax.
- If you have a bell of mindfulness in your house, you can encourage it to sound several times during the evening to slow yourself and your family down.
- As you go to bed and prepare for sleep, take some mindful breaths, become aware of the bed supporting you, and allow yourself a smile. Feel the muscles of your body relaxing as you sink into your bed. Try letting go of the past day's activities and of your anticipation of tomorrow. See whether you can end the day with a smile.

## **GATHAS FOR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES** from *Happiness*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

### **BREATHING**

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.  
Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out.

Breathing in, I enjoy my in-breath.  
Breathing out, I smile at my out-breath.

Breathing in, I calm my body.  
Breathing out, I feel at ease.

Breathing in, I smile.  
Breathing out, I release.

Breathing in, I know I am alive.  
Breathing out, I smile to life, in me and around me.

Breathing in, I have arrived.  
Breathing out, I feel at home.

Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.  
Breathing out, I enjoy my solidity.

## **WALKING**

The mind can go in a thousand directions.  
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.  
With each step, a gentle wind blows.  
With each step, a flower blooms.

*Or*

I have arrived. I am home.  
In the here, in the now.  
I am solid. I am free.  
In the ultimate, I dwell.

*Or*

Peace is every step.

## **WAKING UP**

Waking up this morning, I smile.  
Twenty-four brand-new hours are before me.  
I vow to live fully in each moment  
and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.

## **SHOWERING**

Water flows from high mountains.  
Water runs deep in the Earth.  
Miraculously water comes to us  
and sustains all life.

## **BRUSHING YOUR TEETH**

Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,  
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.  
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,  
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.

## **MINDFUL EATING**

### **The Five Contemplations**

1. This food is the gift of the whole universe: the earth, the sky, and much hard work.
2. May we eat in mindfulness so as to be worthy to receive it.
3. May we transform our unskillful states of mind and learn to eat with moderation.
4. May we take only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.
5. We accept this food to realize the path of understanding and love.

### **Food Contemplations For Young People**

1. This food is the gift of the whole universe: the earth, the sky, the rain and the sun.
2. We thank the people who have made this food, especially the farmers, the people at the market, and the cooks.
3. We only put on our plate as much food as we can eat.
4. We want to chew the food slowly so that we can enjoy it.
5. This food gives us energy to practice being more loving and understanding.
6. We eat this food in order to be healthy and happy, and to love each other as a family.