

MID-MORNING DAY THREE

FURTHER BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

I would like to compliment you on the effort you are making. It is not easy. Transforming the mind and our inner reactions to experience is not a small task. But it can be done, little by little, bit by bit.

Continue to make the effort to come to all of the sits and all of the walks. It is O.K. if you have to move during the sits, relax for a short while and then begin again. Just by coming, making the effort, you are building Patience, Endurance, and you are helping to strengthen the mind.

For many, beginning this practice seems a bit like starting out to train your body so that you can run in a marathon. It is hard going but after a while, after a bit of training, your body becomes fit and running long distances becomes easier and easier.

I would like to explain a little more about being mindful of your breathing. Try to pay attention to the energy of your concentration. Try to make it a "light" awareness, not a forced or strained awareness. If you focus in too much, then you may be forcing your breath rather than watching it, just as it is. This can build tension.

If you find this is happening, try to relax a little, "settle-back," and watch the breath as it is. This may mean a constant adjusting of the fineness of the awareness, as the breath goes through many changes.

An image that may be of help to you is that of a seashore. You are standing at the seashore watching the waves come in and go out. You are standing with your feet near the edge, watching the waves lap in and recede. Some flow in farther than others and take longer to recede. Some do not quite make it to your feet and then recede quickly. You are simply watching -- seeing the waves come in and go out.

The same applies to the breath: some breaths are short, some are long, some are deep, some are shallow. Try to watch them just as they are. Try to be aware of the whole of the in-breath, the rising, from the beginning to the end. The whole of the out-breath, the falling, from the beginning to the end.

Some meditators may be more aware of the in-breath/rising and tend to wander, let their awareness slip, during the out-breath/falling. Often this is because the in-breath is more predominant and their out-breath is more fine and subtle. These meditators often build tension through strong awareness of the in-breath, with subtle holding of the breath, and then little or no awareness of the out-breath. If you tend to do this, try to make an extra effort with the awareness of the out-breath. Try to flow the tension out with the out-breath.

If there seems to be a pause between the out-breath and the in-breath, or vice versa, just try to wait. Don't worry, it will come again in its own time. At those times, you can try to be aware of sitting until the breath comes again. If you are focusing on the rising/falling, you could add the feeling of the buttocks on the pillow or mat during the pause. With the in/out, you could rest the awareness in the area of the upper lip or feel the whole body sitting.

A little more instruction concerning walking meditation which may be of help to you.

First; concerning the posture in the walking. Try not to have the head bent down too far forward. This may cause tension in the neck. If you find a lot of tension coming in the neck and shoulders, this may be the reason for it. You may be trying to watch the feet, rather than bringing the awareness

down through the body and feeling the legs and feet. Try to have the head just slightly tilted forward and the eyes focused about two meters in front of you.

Another reason tension may come in the shoulders of some people is if you clasp the hands together behind the back. Sometimes this causes the shoulders to be pushed forward and the back to bend. If you put your hands this way, or have tension in the neck and shoulders in the walking meditation, we suggest the following position for the hands. First bring the hands forward; roll your shoulders up, around, and back, and settle them completely down. Let the arms hang loosely beside you, so that they are parallel to the body. Bend your elbows, bringing your hands up around the rib cage. Loosely interlock the fingers, and have the thumbs just touching. Make sure that you don't pull the hands in towards the body, as this forces the elbows back and the shoulders to bend forward. We are holding them out a little, and it's as if we're holding something very fragile in our hands. This helps the shoulders to go back, and helps you to support the back with the lower back. With this you may find less posture-related tension arising.

Here are some special hints about dealing with some of the hindrances in the walking.

If you are focusing on the movement of the legs and feet in the three phase walking; lifting, moving, placing; and you find the mind becoming sleepy, tired or feeling restricted: first, note that sleepiness is there "sleepy, sleepy," "tired, tired." Then quicken the pace, go back to the two phase walking or to the simple touch of the feet on the ground "stepping, stepping."

If need be you can broaden your awareness even more. You have been focusing in on the movements and sensations of the feet and legs. This can be similar to the close-up of a camera lens and can build concentration. When the mind is sleepy or feeling restricted, the mind needs to develop more energy. Rather than continuing with the "close-up," you can broaden the awareness for a while to energize the mind.

It is similar to using the wide-angle lens of a camera. Try to bring the awareness to the whole body moving through the air. Feel the air against the body, the feeling of the whole body moving, the vision of things advancing toward you, the "flow."

If you wish, stop and stand at the end for longer than usual. You could bring the attention to the whole body just standing or perhaps simply the feeling of the feet touching the ground. This may strengthen the awareness and concentration, and help you when you begin walking again.

If you start to feel restless, or the mind is thinking, thinking a lot, you can try focusing in your awareness. Walk more slowly, trying to see the subtle changes in the sensations of the feet or legs. Try to mentally note the action more precisely and more continuously. This helps to bring forth concentration. The mental noting may also help to replace the thoughts more easily, helping you to let go.

If you start to feel frustrated or angry, try to note this when it has arisen. Then try to observe how you are walking. Have you ever observed how an angry person walks? The footsteps often are heavy, pounding the anger, frustration, worry into the Earth. How much anger, frustration, worry has been pounded into the Earth?

If you are stepping heavily in this way, consciously try to step more lightly on the Earth. At that moment, try to be as graceful, light and flowing as you can. Try to care for each step, "arriving" in each footstep. It is very difficult to hold onto the anger and frustration when you do this.

As we focus our awareness on walking, we begin to see more clearly the mind states that pull us away from the moment. We can begin to see the nature of their energy and characteristics. We can begin to soften around our habitual clinging; noting, investigating, and letting go of attachment, with Compassion. We can try to work with what arises, seeing what is needed to balance the mind and help us to let go; broadening out our awareness, focusing in our awareness, making our awareness light and compassionate by stepping lightly, gracefully on the Earth. We can see what is appropriate and in this way, we work with the body and mind, seeing their interrelationship.

A few words now about Awareness or Mindfulness of other objects arising in the body and mind.

We have asked you to make mental notes such as; wandering, thinking, hearing, smelling, feeling, etc., whenever these contacts occur. That is, either when you are distracted away from the awareness of the breath, or when these objects become more predominant than the breath. You may have increased your mental noting in order to aid you in being aware of your activities, such as; in the walking, in opening and closing doors, in eating, etc.

Last night I talked in depth about the Five Hindrances. So now when you are aware that the wandering thought is aversion, you can try to note "aversion, aversion" and then gently return to the breath. Whatever the mind states, or contacts that occur, if you can recognize it, try to make more precise noting. It will help you in becoming more objective towards these mind states. Similarly, if the mind goes to the future, you can note "planning, planning", or if it goes to the past, you can note "remembering, remembering". Whatever the mind states, or thoughts that arise, if you can make more precise noting, try to do so. At times, our awareness is not so clear, and you may find it difficult to recognize them. At these times it's quite O.K. to leave the noting as "thinking", or "wandering". As the awareness increases, you'll be able to recognize them more clearly.

This is quite an important part of the practice, the noting of the mind. In this way we include the mind in our awareness. We usually consider ourselves to be the body and the mind. If we are going to understand the nature of who and what we are, we have to include the mind in our awareness. As we learn to note the hindrances when they arise, we build the ability to observe thoughts objectively. As we learn to observe objectively, it gives the opportunity for understanding to arise. In the beginning, many meditators tend to push the thoughts away, rather than noting them objectively, running back to the breath or the steps. This may build concentration, but it also may build a tendency to avoid looking at the mind. It can also develop aversion, judgment, suppression of the thoughts. That is, running away from the mind, instead of observing it objectively. With this fear, aversion, suppression, or judgment of the thoughts, there is no objective awareness, and the ability to understand the characteristics of the body and the mind, whether they be pleasant or unpleasant, may not arise.

Our main objects of concentration so far are the body, the breathing, and the footsteps. This helps to strengthen concentration and mindfulness, helping to develop a strength and clarity in the mind. Also, because we're trying to stay with one object, we begin to see more clearly what draws the mind away from these objects, and how the mind reacts to these contacts.

In this way we begin to see the different patterns of our thoughts, clingings, aversions more easily. If we can build a more objective awareness, we may begin to understand the energies in the mind that cause us to fall into stress and suffering. This helps us understand more clearly the Law of Cause and Effect in the mind. We can also learn to let go of these attachments, either by objective awareness, or by investigating how these energies affect the body and the mind, developing Compassionate Understanding.

We are trying to develop a moment-to-moment Awareness, to bring ourselves into the actual moment ... trying to let go of the past, let go of the future, and experience what is actually happening in the thoughts and in the actions ... trying to not get caught in the content of the thought but instead observe their energies ... trying to get to know and understand who and what we are.

In this way we can be developing Compassionate Understanding toward ourselves and toward others.

We will now do sitting meditation. As we have been instructing you, please settle into the posture, if you have not already done so. Run your attention through the body, relaxing into the posture. Perhaps a few deep breaths, then allow the breath to become natural. Breathing in and breathing out, rising and falling. Settling back and just watching ... like the waves at the seashore.