



## Living Mindfully

Living Mindfully is the third section of Skillful Living which is based on the three practice steps of the Eightfold Path, the Buddha's prescription for the cessation of suffering. This section is about the practice of living mindfully. The three practice steps of the Eightfold path are Skillful Effort, Skillful Mindfulness and Skillful Concentration. We will start with an overview of the three steps and then proceed to describe a number of practices for you to use as you follow the path to peace and happiness.

### **An Overview of Skillful Effort, Skillful Mindfulness and Skillful Concentration**

The Buddha stated in the Fourth Principle of Suffering (Fourth Noble Truth) that the way to end suffering is through the Eightfold Path: *"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.*

[Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion](#) These eight steps are translated as "right" which means skillful. "Right" and "skillful" will be used interchangeably. The three steps which address the practice of living mindfully are Skillful Effort, Skillful Mindfulness and Skillful Concentration.

#### **Skillful Effort**

"And what, monks, is right effort? (i) There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (ii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandonment of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. (iii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (iv) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort. [Magga-vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path](#)

The Buddha is referring to thoughts that arise in the mind. These thoughts are either unwholesome ("evil, unskillful qualities") or wholesome ("skillful qualities"). Skillful effort is how we can embrace the wholesome thoughts and address the unwholesome ones. The Buddha noted that the factors of skillful effort include the desire to do so, the endeavor to do so, the persistence to do so, and the intent to do so.

As the Buddha noted, we should direct our effort in four ways:

1. Prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts.
2. Overcome unwholesome thoughts which have arisen.
3. Strive for wholesome thoughts to arise.
4. Maintain those wholesome thoughts which have arisen.

“At every moment we choose whether to embrace wholesomeness or unwholesomeness.” EMSTH (p. 149). Practices to direct our effort in these four ways will be described in the practices section.

## **Skillful Mindfulness**

In this step, the Buddha defines mindfulness and offer specific areas in which to apply it for benefit.

"And what, monks, is right mindfulness? (i) There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (ii) He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (iii) He remains focused on the mind in & of itself — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (iv) He remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. This, monks, is called right mindfulness. [Magga-vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path](#)

The Buddha describes skillful mindfulness as being focused on what is by being ardent, aware, and mindful putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. Bhante Gunaratana (ESTMH) defines this as paying attention moment to moment to what is. The Buddha described techniques for practicing mindfulness in one of his most famous teachings, the [Satipatthana Sutta](#), The Four Foundations of Mindfulness. He recommends for reflection and meditation to focus on four foundations (satipatthanas): the body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities.

At the beginning of the sutta, the Buddha tells us the purpose of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: **“Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.”**

In his words, he defines the four satipatthanas: “What are the four? Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to feelings he abides contemplating feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to the mind he abides contemplating the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.” Goldstein, Joseph. Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 365-366)

In the body of this sutta, the Buddha describes a number of reflections to practice, some of which will be described in the practices section.

At the end of the sutta, the Buddha stated his promise: “Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. Let alone seven years . . . six years . . . five years . . . four years . . . three years . . . two years . . . one year . . . seven months . . . six months . . . five months . . . four months . . . three months . . . two months . . . one month . . . half a month . . . if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. So it was with reference to this that it was said: [DIRECT PATH] “Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.” That is what the Blessed One said. The monks were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.” Goldstein, Joseph *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* (p. 375).

This is a very powerful statement that promises the end of suffering. The reflections recommended by the Buddha are integrated into the practices recommended in the practice section. It is also possible to read the [Satipatthana Sutta](#) and practice it this way.

### **Skillful Concentration**

"And what, monks, is right concentration? (i) There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. (ii) With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. (iii) With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' (iv) With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, monks, is called right concentration." [Maggavibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path](#)

The Blessed One said: “Now what, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness—is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions. [Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta](#)

The Buddha describes skillful concentration in the two suttas above. The first describes four levels of concentration known as the jhanas and the second refers to concentration being singleness of mind on the other seven factors of the Eightfold Path. The jhanas are increasingly deeper levels of

concentration. The jhanas will not be addressed in detail as the practice of concentration described later will be sufficient.

To increase our mindfulness, we first develop our concentration so that we can observe our mind without distractions. Skillful concentration has three characteristics:

- It is always wholesome (skillful)
- It goes into very deep and powerful levels of one-pointed focus
- It incorporates the use of mindfulness to develop wisdom.

Developing skillful concentration takes training. This means sitting practice so that you can bring up skillful concentration easily and at will.

Concentration practice will be described in the practice Section.

## The Practices

The first two steps of the Eightfold Path (Skillful Understanding and Skillful Wisdom) direct us to lead a to gain wisdom by understanding the causes of suffering and adopting the intentions to let go and connect with others through loving-kindness and compassion. Living mindfully requires us to put these intentions into practice and develop our practice of concentration and mindfulness to truly live a life of freedom and joy. In this way, to paraphrase the Buddha, we can surmount of sorrow and lamentation, see suffering and discontent disappear by acquiring the true method, for the realization of awakening (freedom and joy).

As noted before, the Buddha's basic method of teaching was threefold. He wanted his listeners to:

1. hear his discourse
2. reflect on it to understand
3. experience it to know if it is beneficial for them.

The practices are about experiencing what the Buddha prescribed in the Eightfold Path. This is the only way to determine if these practices are beneficial to you.

As noted in *The Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide*, the components of living mindfully include **daily reflection, daily meditation practice, daily life practices, having a teacher and being part of a sangha.**

### Daily Reflection

Daily reflection on the teachings keeps you connected with the practice and provides motivation for keeping on the path. If you attend a sangha, review the presentations between sessions. You can also read relevant sections from a book or website. The important thing is to do this daily to keep connected. There is a list of references at the end of *The Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide*. You can also ask your teacher for suggestions.

## Daily Meditation Practice

It is recommended that you practice meditation daily. With meditation, we take the time and situate ourselves to totally focus on the mind. Just as the best benefits of physical training come from daily workouts, a daily meditation practice of 10-30 minutes can work wonders.

There are three meditation practices that can be practiced together in 30 minutes or less. To increase our mindfulness, we first develop our concentration so that we can observe our mind without distractions. This is called **concentration practice**. Next, we practice observing what arises in our mind without getting caught up in it with judgements, commentary, or decision-making. This is called **Insight** or **Vipassana** practice. Lastly, we wish ourselves and other beings well as we face the challenges of life. This is called **loving-kindness practice**. **Compassion practices** can be used as well depending on your needs and preferences. Three compassion practices are included below.

## Meditation Practices

### Setup

With all meditations, keep a straight posture (either on a cushion, bench, or chair) in a quiet place, if possible. Make a commitment not to move – except to straighten up the back. If you do have to move, do so with intention rather than automatically moving your body. Keep your eyes closed and hands folded in front of you. There is no need to time your meditation or set an alarm as this can be a distraction. Just follow the directions below and you will know when to stop the meditation.

### Concentration Practice

Concentration meditation is based on the Buddha's teaching, the [Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing](#). The Buddha noted: "*Mindfulness of in and out breathing, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit.*" Thich Nhat Hahn has written an excellent commentary on this sutta, *Breathe! You are Alive: Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*.

Your object of attention is the breath, the inbreath and the outbreath. Focus on the touch sensation of the breath going in and out through your nostrils, placing your attention where the sensation is strongest (take deep breath and discover that spot). Usually this will be at the tip of the nostrils. Or you can use the rising and falling of the chest or abdomen. Merely observe your breathing; do not attempt to control it either by making it faster, slower, deeper or shallower. During your concentration practice, when your attention leaves the breath and moves to another object (a sensation, thought, memory), gently but firmly go back to the observation of the breath.

Stay present with the breath at all times. You can count at first to assist your concentration. Count one on the inbreath and one on the outbreath and count up to 10 and back to 1 two or three times. Next, without controlling your breathing, on each inbreath, think, "I am breathing in deep" and on each outbreath, I am breathing out slow." After a few repetitions, think, "As I breathe in, I am aware of the body" and on each outbreath, "I am calming my body."

If at any time, you are distracted, just gently go back to observing the breath without remorse.

After 10 or 15 minutes, when your mind is sufficiently quiet, you can transition to Insight Practice.

### **Insight Practice**

Insight practice is a form of mental training that will teach you to experience the world in an entirely new way. You will learn what is truly happening to you, around you and within you. It is a process of self-discovery, a participatory investigation in which you observe your own experiences while participating in them, and as they occur. The practice must be approached with this attitude. From Gunaratana, Bhante [Mindfulness in Plain English](#).

As you transition from concentration practice, experience the impermanence of the breath – from breath to breath and within each breath (as opposed to merely sinking into the breath). Rest in the space between each breath. Leave the breath as your object of attention and just observe, without judgment, whatever phenomena (sensations, thoughts, memories) arise in the mind.

With insight meditation, you can observe and investigate.

Observe for yourself the three characteristics of all phenomenon: impermanence (because it will go away), unsatisfactoriness (because it cannot give lasting satisfaction or dissatisfaction.) and selflessness (because it is not you and you have no control over it). When one phenomenon passes away, another will arise; keep observing.

You can also investigate experiences by contemplating the feelings, perceptions and mental formations that arise. See the steps below in daily life practice.

If your mind gets too busy or you get caught up in a sensation, thought or memory, just go back to paying attention to the breath and then return to insight practice.

After practicing insight meditation, go to loving-kindness practice before you conclude.

### **Loving Kindness (Metta) Meditation**

Loving-kindness practice is wishing yourself and others well. Make an intention to come from your heart and to be as open as possible. Offer joy and happiness to yourself and others by repeating a series of phrases. Start with yourself and then move to a loved one. Shift to a neutral person (someone about whom you have no positive or negative feelings. Then shift to someone with whom you feel ill-will. Finally, gradually expand your loving-kindness to all beings. You can also wish loving-kindness to beings in a small geographic area and expand to the universe.

There are many phrases that you can use, or you can create a set of your own, all with the intention of wishing happiness and peace to yourself and others. Below is an example you can use (the blanks are for you to fill in for whom you are offering loving-kindness).

May \_\_\_\_\_ be happy and peaceful.

May \_\_\_\_\_ be safe and protected.

May \_\_\_\_\_ be filled with contentment.

May \_\_\_\_\_ be free from suffering.

### **Compassion Practices**

This practice of intentionally reflecting on suffering—our own as well as that of others—is the basic form of Buddhist compassion meditations. (Tara Brach p. 226) Several practices: self-compassion and compassion for others are described below:

#### **Self Compassion**

This practice has been adapted from the work of Kristin Neff, one of compassion's foremost researchers. First calm the mind through a brief concentration practice. Then continue with the following four reflections:

- Mindfulness: We are mindful that we are experiencing difficulties.
- Investigation: We investigate through mindfulness the thoughts and bodily sensations that have arisen.
- Loving Kindness: We respond with kindness and understanding for ourselves rather than being harshly self-critical.
- Connectedness: We realize that what we are going through is commonly experienced by all human beings and that everyone goes through difficult times.

#### **Compassion for others**

This practice has been adapted from the work of Barbara Fredrickson, a noted researcher on love.

First calm the mind through a brief concentration practice. Then bring your awareness to the subtle rocking of your heart with each in-breath and each out-breath. Call forth your intention for this practice session. Perhaps it's to slow your pace and soften your heart so that you can be a true friend to someone who suffers, a source of comfort and reassurance. Know that all people, everywhere, suffer adversity from time to time. Just as all people yearn to be free of suffering. In this moment, as you sit relatively free from your own suffering, you yearn to be a ready resource to others.

Throughout this session, keep bringing your awareness to your heart. Witness how this practice affects your body. Know that your body sensations deserve your awareness as much as the phrases or thoughts that emerge from your mind.

Gently call forth an image of someone who is currently facing ill fortune or otherwise suffering. Without getting mired in these difficulties, explore their scope. Then, lightly remind yourself of this person's good

qualities, and how much you would wish to ease his or her pain or lighten his or her load. Say the following classic phrases, or your own versions of them, slowly and from your heart.

- May you find safety, even in the midst of pain (or misfortune, difficulties).
- May you find peace, even in the midst of pain.
- May you find strength, even in the midst of pain.
- May you find ease, even in the midst of pain.

Repeat these ancient wishes one by one, with each breath you take. Let each phrase infuse and soften your heart. Visualize yourself simply standing beside this person, recognizing his or her courage in the face of whatever difficulty life now delivers.

As your practice deepens, experiment with new ways to soften and expand your heart's capacity. Shift your focus to new people who are suffering, whether they're people you know well or not. Keep in mind that your aim is not to make this or any other person's pain or adversity magically disappear. Rather your aim is to condition your own heart to move in toward others' suffering when you see it, to open up to it a bit more, so that you may offer comfort and strength, rather than to turn away in self-protection.

If you find that the words of this practice stand in the way of your ability to call forth true tenderness, try simplifying your focus. Draw on images. Visualize before you the difficulty that this other person faces, whether it's physical or emotional pain or uncertainty. Imagine what this difficulty might look like. Give it a color and a shape. Where do you see it in relation to the person on whom you focus? Next, visualize your own heart as it yearns to be compassionate. Imagine that this is your well of healing positivity. Imagine its color, shape, and movements. Is it bright or golden? How much does it expand? Now, with these visual details painted in your mind's eye, imagine that as you breathe in, you inhale the other person's ill fortune, lifting a portion of it away from him or her. As you inhale, let this ill-fortune enter in and be transformed by your steady, loving heart, pausing for just a moment before you exhale to witness this change. Then, as you breathe out, imagine that you are giving some thread, however small, of good fortune to this person, relief from his or her pain or suffering. Visualize this process of hope and change with each breath you take. Breathe in pain. Add your own compassionate wishes to the mix and breathe out a small infusion of comfort. Breathe in threats, softening them by adding your love into the mix, and breathe out safety. Breathe in despair; breathe out peace. Breathe in feelings of being overcome, and breathe out strength. Breathe in the suffering person's difficulties and breathe out ease.

As you end this practice session, know that you can access this growing supply of compassion anytime you wish. Fredrickson, Barbara. *Love 2.0: Finding Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection* (pp. 149-151).

## Other compassion practices

This way of practice is beautifully expressed by Shantideva in his great classic “Guide to a Bodhisattva’s Way of Life.” Shantideva was an 8th century Buddhist monk and one of the most esteemed figures in Mahayana Buddhism. He was born into a royal family, and like the Buddha, he left his father’s kingdom for the wilderness and became awakened.

Here are a few stanzas from his work that reflect the practice of service which can be memorized and repeated during meditation.

For all those ailing in the world,  
Until their every sickness has been healed,  
May I myself become for them  
The doctor, nurse, the medicine itself.

Raining down a flood of food and drink,  
May I dispel the ills of thirst and famine.  
And in the ages marked by scarcity and want,  
May I myself appear as drink and sustenance.

For sentient beings, poor and destitute,  
May I become a treasure ever plentiful,  
And lie before them closely in their reach,  
A varied source of all that they might need.

My body, thus, and all my goods besides,  
And all my merits gained and to be gained,  
I give them all away withholding nothing,  
To bring about the benefit of beings.

Like the earth and the pervading elements,  
Enduring like the sky itself endures,  
For boundless multitudes of living beings,  
May I be their ground and sustenance.

Thus, for everything that lives,  
As far as the limits of the sky,  
May I provide their livelihood and nourishment  
Until they pass beyond the bonds of suffering.

(Goldstein, Joseph. Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (p. 332)

## **Tonglen: Awakening the Heart of Our Compassion**

There is a meditation practice from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition known as Tonglen that supports the development of compassion. It is translated as “Sending and Taking.” It is a powerful process designed to undermine our self-absorption (which blocks the arising of compassion) and to support us in filling our hearts with compassion towards others.

Normally we choose those things in life that build up our ego or sense of self, and reject those things which threaten it. In the practice of Tonglen, we learn to take into ourselves that which we have typically rejected, and to send out to others what we have always desired for ourselves

This practice “rides with the breath.” With our in-breath we breathe in the sufferings of other living beings, and with our out breath we send forth our healing thoughts of compassion with deep feelings of health, happiness, and good wishes.

This practice can feel very threatening for some people since it feels like we are taking in physical, psychological, and spiritual poisons, and at the same time breathing out our own source of good health and joy. Paradoxically, this powerful and effective process actually increases our inner well-being as our hearts learn to transform misery or suffering into a profound experience of compassion, love and peace.

This practice is not a show of our personal bravery since ultimately, because of the interdependent nature of the universe, it is our own suffering and joy that we are breathing in and out. The experience of Tonglen should be free-flowing where we release and accept without any strain or effort. In effect it is like rubbing two sticks together. One stick is our habitual self-centeredness. The other stick is our other centeredness that comes from exchanging self with others. As we rub these two sticks together they both catch fire. We are left with emptiness, free from attachment, and with a heart as open as the sky.

### Tonglen Practice

Begin by sitting quietly and allowing the mind to settle.

Place your attention on your breath.

Feel your breath in the area of your chest, as if you could breathe in and out of your heart.

With each in-breath we are going to breathe in all the pains and sorrows of all those who are suffering.

This will be visualized as hot, black, grimy smoke or tar.

With each out-breath, we will breathe out deep compassion that reaches the innermost hearts of those individuals who are suffering. This will be visualized as rays of white light.

When the suffering enters our heart through the vehicle of the breath, our heart will act as a transformer, changing the suffering and sorrow into the warmth of compassion, which we will then be breathing out.

Imagine in front of you, as vividly and poignantly as possible, someone you deeply care for. Try and imagine every aspect of that person’s pain and distress.

As you feel your heart opening to their pain, imagine that all their suffering is gathering together as a

great mass of hot, black, grimy smoke.

As you breathe in, visualize that mass of smoke coming into the very core of your heart.

Experience your heart transforming both the suffering of that other being, and your own self-grasping attitude.

Now breathe out rays of the cooling and healing white light of compassion, joy, peace, and well-being.

Visualize that white light of compassion touching their inner-most heart.

Deeply feel that the suffering of your loved one has been abated through this process.

Now imagine in front of you, as vividly and poignantly as possible, someone with whom you are having difficulty. Try and imagine every aspect of that person's pain and distress.

Once again, as you feel your heart opening to their pain, imagine that all their suffering is gathering together as a great mass of hot, black, grimy smoke.

As you breathe in, visualize that mass of smoke coming into the very core of your heart.

Experience your heart transforming both the suffering of that other being, and your own self-grasping attitude.

Now breathe out rays of the cooling and healing white light of compassion, joy, peace, and well-being.

Visualize that white light of compassion touching their inner-most heart.

Deeply feel that the suffering of that individual has been abated through this process.

Follow the same procedure for the following categories of people:

Breathe in the sorrows of those who are hungry, and breathe out compassion for their pain.

Breathe in the sorrows of those who are caught in war, and breathe out compassion for their terror

Breathe in the sorrows of those who are very ill, and breathe out compassion for their feelings of weakness and despair.

Breathe in the sorrows of those who are dying, and breathe out compassion for their fear.

Breathe in the sorrows for all the pain you have caused in the world, and breathe out compassion for all you have hurt

With each in-breath, let the suffering of all living beings touch your heart, and with your out-breath, feel the healing force of your compassion touching them.

Adapted from Brach, Tara Radical Acceptance

### **Daily Life Practices**

Mindfulness is something you can do as you go about your day. When you are truly being with an experience, practicing mindfulness does not come into play. However, when you encounter yourself having an unpleasant feeling and/or suffering with the mental formations of frustration, anger, inconvenience, dissatisfaction and/or in general wanting life to be other than it is, this is a **break in being** and time to be mindful and investigate (self-inquiry). Begin by observing your breath for one or two minutes as in concentration practice, then either practice mindfulness by reflection (or actually doing insight meditation practice) by paying attention moment to the "what is", the experience that triggered your suffering. Review "See Why We Suffer" and "How We Experience Life" in the Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide.

At the earliest stage, when we are aware of an unpleasant feeling, we can take action to prevent or overcome the potential suffering. Even at a later stage, when we have a reaction, we can take steps to prevent a recurrence or proliferation. In the Skillful Effort step of the Eightfold Path, the Buddha noted that we should direct our efforts in four ways:

1. Prevent the arising of unwholesome states of mind.
2. Overcome unwholesome states which have arisen.
3. Strive for wholesome states to arise.
4. Maintain those wholesome states which have arisen.

Each of these ways is described below.

### **Prevent the arising of unwholesome states of mind**

“Your first line of defense is to prevent negative or unwholesome states of mind from arising in the first place. How? By maintaining unremitting mindfulness. Just that.” (EMSTH p. 161) When you are being mindful, you are experiencing the present preventing unwholesome thoughts from arising. This is called “paying wise attention.” Wise attention means that you experiencing the experience rather than the perceptions that that condition the experience. For example, on hearing a sound, the mind wants to check with your memories and cause you to identify it with something specific you have heard before such as a bell, a gunshot, or a handclap. With wise attention, you are just hearing the sound and no more.

Also, with wise attention, with non-urgent sensations, you stay with the experience rather than trying immediately to do something about it. For example, if the room is cool, you notice the changes in your physical discomfort and your mind’s changing reactions to it rather than quickly change the thermostat.

Other measures include associating with spiritual friends, those whom you want to emulate and avoid those who might lead you astray. Guard your sense doors by avoiding external stimuli that can lead to unwholesome mind states. For example, food buffets can be a temptation for overeating.

Breaks in being can occur. What to do? For example, you may have experienced a break in being after a long and relaxing vacation or when you return from a spiritual retreat. “While you were away, your anger, impatience, jealousy, and fear were inactive, and you felt peaceful and happy. But the moment you came home, you got an upsetting phone message, or you saw a bill you forgot to pay, or someone stepped on your toe, and all your anger rushed back. In an instant, your peace of mind was gone. Then you wondered, “How can I maintain this happy vacation feeling or retreat feeling in everyday life?” The everyday answer is mindfulness. You must remember that it is not some other person or some difficult situation that is causing your problems. **It is your own past conditioning.** In addition to trying to maintain continuous awareness, learning to recognize the particular weaknesses in your mental habits can help you prevent unwholesome responses from arising. EMSTH p. 164

“If you are able to maintain continuous mindfulness, nothing will upset you. You will not become angry or agitated. You can be patient no matter what anyone says or does. You can stay peaceful and happy.

An unwholesome or negative state of mind cannot arise at the same moment as a moment of mindfulness.” EMSTH p. 163

**Overcome unwholesome states of mind which have arisen**

Suffering is caused by the arising of unwholesome states of mind and it is critical that your effort be directed at overcoming them. Overcoming does not mean resisting as this will just entrench the unwholesome thoughts more. The way to overcome is to apply mindfulness and investigate with energy. This process is the application of the first three factors of the seven factors of awakening described in the Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide.

Unwholesome thoughts arise as a result of one of one of the five hindrances obscuring the mind. This is described in The Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide The first step of investigation is to identify the hindrance that has caused the unwholesome thought to arise: desire, aversion, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry or doubt.

Next, investigate the following:

1. What was the thought **actually sensed**?
2. What was the **feeling** like in the body? (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral)
3. What was the mind’s **perception** (mental impression)?
4. Is this perception **true**? What evidence do you have that this is coming from other than your memory and beliefs?
5. What was the **mental formation** (emotion) that arose and how was it experienced in the body?
6. Can you see that this suffering came from an **internal conditioning process** and not from the actual experience?

Having identified the hindrance and completed the above investigation, simply being mindful may overcome the unwholesome thought. If the unwholesome thought is deeply entrenched, other measures as noted in the table below may be applied.

<b>Overcoming the Hindrances</b>	
<b>Hindrance</b>	<b>What to Apply After Identification</b>
Desire	Mentally dissect the object to which you are attracted and note its impermanence and decay
Aversion	Remember the impermanent nature of emotions, be patient, consider a different perspective, apply Loving-Kindness
Dullness/Drowsiness	Apply energy by visualizing a bright light, move the body, take a short rest and then re-investigate
Restlessness/Worry	Reflect on peace and calmness, practice concentration of the breath, be aware of your body
Doubt	Confirm confusion, reflect on the Buddha’s nature, drop speculative thinking

Remember that the process of overcoming unwholesome thoughts that have arisen is an active endeavor and should be applied to each unwholesome thought. By doing this, you will gradually experience less of these thoughts.

### **Strive for wholesome states of mind to arise**

“Most people have a tremendous amount of work to do before they can hope to achieve enlightenment. Overcoming the hindrances and suppressing the fetters is a necessary first step. But even when your efforts at temporarily overcoming negative states of mind have been successful, the mind remains vulnerable. It may sink back down into painful, obstructive states, like an airplane descending into clouds. Once you have temporarily cleared the mind of all unwholesome states, you must use Skillful Effort to gladden, uplift, and energize the mind in order to make progress.

When an unwholesome state has been overcome, the mind goes into a neutral state. But it does not stay neutral for long. It’s much like the transmission on a car. You’ve got reverse gear, neutral, and drive. You cannot go directly from reverse to drive without passing through neutral. From the neutral position, the gears can shift in either direction. Similarly, the mind cannot shift directly from wholesome to unwholesome states or back; it must go through a neutral state in between.

You can use this interval of neutrality to cultivate positive states of mind. Let’s say you are sitting in meditation, and a negative state of mind arises. Your mindfulness clicks in, and you recognize the unwholesome state. You overcome it, perhaps by seeing the danger in it, and return to the breath. Since the breath is a neutral object, your mind remains neutral as you watch it. But soon your mindfulness lapses, and another painful state of mind arises. Again, mindfulness snaps to attention. You overcome the unwholesome state of mind and return to the breath with a neutral state of mind. This sequence happens again and again.

Finally, you say to yourself, “This is ridiculous!” Mindfulness makes you aware that you need to stop this pattern of repetitive negativity. As you pay attention, you begin to see the sequence of your mental activity. You realize that rather than allowing negativity an opening in which it can take hold, you must take advantage of the time when the mind is neutral to arouse a wholesome state of mind. You go back to the breath and relax. You take a few deep breaths and then begin to cultivate a wholesome state of mind.” EMSTH p. 178-9)

There are many ways to bring up wholesome states of mind:

- Remember any skillful act (good deeds) that you have done in the past and the pleasant (positive) states of mind that went with that action. Use that memory to encourage positive feeling to arise.
- Recall your past successes in battling greed, hatred, or delusion. Remember how good you felt and how you became peaceful.

- Figure out for yourself what actions you can apply to bring up wholesome states of mind that will give you peace and happiness. “For example, while washing dishes you can cultivate thoughts of loving-friendliness for those who will use the dishes. When starting a conversation you can stay on your toes by being mindful of possible results of positive or negative speech. This is called a “well-started” conversation. By relaxing and bringing every ounce of patience, loving-friendliness, compassion, and insight into the conversation, you make it go more smoothly, benefiting yourself as well as others.” (EMSTH p. 181)
- Know your own unskillful tendencies and be mindful of the unskillful outcomes if you are not prepared. For example, “When a challenging situation arises, such as a visit from an irritating executive of your company, you can remind yourself of possible pleasant or unpleasant outcomes of your actions. Then you make a determination to remain relaxed and filled with loving-friendliness. If the executive says or does something annoying, you get to enjoy your pleasant state of mind instead of engaging in a painful display of anger. (EMSTH p. 181)

“It’s a self-taught skill. The more we deliberately bring up enjoyable states of mind, the more interesting it becomes, and the better we get at it. Every day, every moment, we can cultivate unbounded loving-friendliness, sympathetic joy, deep compassion, and profound equanimity. These four wholesome qualities bring the mind into such a wonderful, high feeling that they are called “divine abidings.” Someone who knows how to bring them up can enjoy heaven on earth anytime.” EMSTH p. 180-181

### **Maintaining those wholesome states of Mind which have arisen**

It is admittedly not easy to maintain wholesome states of mind. “How often have you made wonderful promises to yourself? Remember the New Year’s resolutions or the wedding vows you made in front of the priest or friends? Remember how many times you made hopeful wishes on your birthday? How many of them did you keep? You may have promised yourself: “I will never touch another cigarette, never take another drink, never lie, never speak harshly or insult anyone. I will never gamble again, never steal, never kill any living being.” Or after one good meditation session or an inspiring spiritual retreat, you may have thought, “This retreat was wonderful. I never thought meditation was so easy. Oh, how calm and peaceful I have been during this retreat! This is what I will do in the future.”

All these are positive thoughts. But how many of them do you continuously put into action every day? These thoughts arise in your mind like the bubbles in a glass of soda water. After a few hours, the water goes flat. You lose your enthusiasm and return to your old habits. In order to maintain your initial effort, you must develop strong mindfulness.

“Remember that nothing important can be perfected by doing it only once. You have to repeat a positive thought or action again and again until your practice becomes perfect. We marvel at the skills of Olympic athletes— did they perfect these abilities in a day? How many times did you fall from your bicycle when you first tried to ride? Perfecting good thoughts is just like that. You have to practice very diligently. Whenever your effort slackens, recall occasions when you applied continuous effort until you achieved your goal.” (EMSTH p. 182)

There are many ways to maintain wholesome states of mind:

- Associate with good friends.
- Study the dharma.
- Meditate.
- Remember the big picture, maintaining perspective.
- Ask yourself, “What, in this moment, am I cultivating?”
- Remember the Buddha’s words: “Do good, do no evil, and purify the mind.”

### **Having a Teacher**

This is addressed in *The Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide*

### **Being Part of a Sangha**

This is addressed in *The Practice of Mindfulness: A Guide*

**Note:** Many of the quotations are from *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path* by Bhante Gunaratana (Bhante G.). The citations will be abbreviated as EMSTH.