



The Practice of Mindfulness

A Guide

Introduction

Mindfulness is a term in common use today. What does it mean? How is it practiced? What are the benefits? What are the obstacles?

This guide was developed by White Hall Meditation to give you the information and tools to practice mindfulness according to the Buddha's teachings. Most of the information is derived from three of his most noted teachings: the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion), the Satipatthana Sutta (The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) and the Anapanasati Sutta (Mindfulness of Breathing).

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What is the problem to be solved with mindfulness?

Before getting into mindfulness and the practice, we need to explore the problem we face in life. Although there is a lot of enjoyment in life, we often have experiences that we think cause us to suffer, get frustrated, angry, inconvenienced, and dissatisfied. In these circumstances, we want life to be other than it is. Often, we do not know what suffering is about because we are immediately seeking happy alternatives rather than acknowledging and investigating our unhappiness

The term suffering can be interpreted in many ways. In this guide, it will be used as a general term for all forms of dissatisfaction. As noted in the The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism: "Suffering thus not only includes the suffering that will invariably be associated with ordinary life, such as birth, aging, disease, and death, but also subsumes a full range of mental, emotional, and spiritual dissatisfactions,

and ultimately is seen to be inherent to life itself.” Suffering will be used as a term for a range of unhappiness that can go from mild irritation (dis ease) to anguish and despair.

Is the suffering and frustration just a part of life or can we reduce the amount of suffering?
There is a saying, “Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.” Is this really true?

The Buddha pondered this and developed a way to end suffering through mindfulness. The Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) was born 2600 years ago in eastern India. He was a prince whose father kept him within the palace confines so as to provide him with every luxury in life and to shield him from experiencing suffering. However, once when making a trip outside of the palace, the Buddha saw suffering in the forms of birth, aging, disease and death. Struck by this, he left his wife and son to explore the way to end suffering. Having been exposed to luxury, the Buddha tried the opposite, asceticism, and discovered that this did not end suffering either. The Buddha then discovered the “middle way” achieved through mindfulness.

Regarding his teachings, the Buddha gave many talks over his lifetime. These talks or discourses are called suttas (in the Pali language of his time). It was over 500 years after his death that his talks were written down and preserved in the Pali language. “The Pali canon is the collection of primary Pali language texts which form the doctrinal foundation of the Buddha’s teachings. The Pali canon is a vast body of literature. In English translation, the texts add up to thousands of printed pages. It is important to note that the English translations vary depending on the translator.

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 Buddha said in the Kalama Sutta that if the teaching isn’t beneficial, abandon it. You must be the judge.

The Buddha said in the Alagaddupama Sutta: “What I teach now as before, O monks, is suffering and the cessation of suffering.” His approach was like that of a physician. A physician when seeing a patient recognizes the symptoms (for example, productive cough, fever), makes a diagnosis (pneumonia), knows the cause (e.g. bacteria), and prescribes the treatment (antibiotics). Similarly, the Buddha specializing in the disease of suffering, recognized symptoms of suffering, diagnosed the cause, and gave the prescription for the cessation of suffering. This was stated in his teaching of the Four Noble Truths (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). The prescription for the cessation of suffering is following way of the Eightfold Path.

Practicing mindfulness to end suffering is a part of that prescription. In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha said, “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of Unbinding (non-attachment).”

Bhikku Bodhi, a noted monk and translator, said that the Buddha gave the “*fullest instructions on the system of meditation unique to the Buddha's own dispensation. The practice of Satipatthana meditation centers on the methodical cultivation of one simple mental faculty readily available to all of us at any moment. This is the faculty of mindfulness, the capacity for attending to the content of our experience as it becomes manifest in the immediate present. What the Buddha shows in the sutta is the tremendous, but generally hidden, power inherent in this simple mental function, a power that can unfold all the mind's potentials culminating in final deliverance from suffering.*” Thera, Soma The Way of Mindfulness: The Satipatthana Sutta and Its Commentary
<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wayof.html>

Why we suffer

The cause of suffering is that we want life to be other than it is. Our desire for life to be different turns into attachment, greed, grasping, craving. To look at it another way, suffering occurs when you are attached to an outcome different from what life hands you. For example, you may be frustrated striving for a promotion which never comes.

Where do these outcomes that you are attached to come from? They originate from you! They arise from your genetic disposition, your cultural upbringing, your beliefs and your memories.

Some examples of beliefs that we hold causing suffering include:

- For life to be happy, we must strive for pleasure, gain, praise and repute and avoid pain, loss, criticism, and disrepute. This takes a lot of energy and does not allow us to deal with the inevitable pain, loss, criticism, and disrepute that are a part of life.
- Good things can be permanent and provide lasting satisfaction. We suffer when they are not.
- Our beliefs are the truth and we suffer when the reality conflicts with them. In other words, when we are dissatisfied, we want life to be other than it is; we get firmly attached to outcomes that are consistent with what we perceive to be the truth.
- We are in control. Since we are not, we get frustrated when life doesn't go our way.
- We can have certainty in our lives. Since there is no certainty, we consequently get frustrated with change.

How is life really experienced?

The Buddha formulated how life is really experienced. Today, scientists are confirming his findings through their investigations.

To begin, we have **six sense organs** (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). These organs contact **sense objects** (tangible objects, visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and mental objects: thoughts/memories). This interaction is called **form**. All of our experiences come via one or more of these sense organs. However, although our sense organs are constantly sensing, we are not aware of this interaction until our **consciousness** makes contact with the sense organ and the object sensed. When all three factors are connected, we become **aware** of what we can call an experience.

The mind conditions that awareness by comparing it with stored **memories and beliefs**. Out of this comparison arise a series of three conditioning factors: **feelings, perceptions** and **mental formations**.

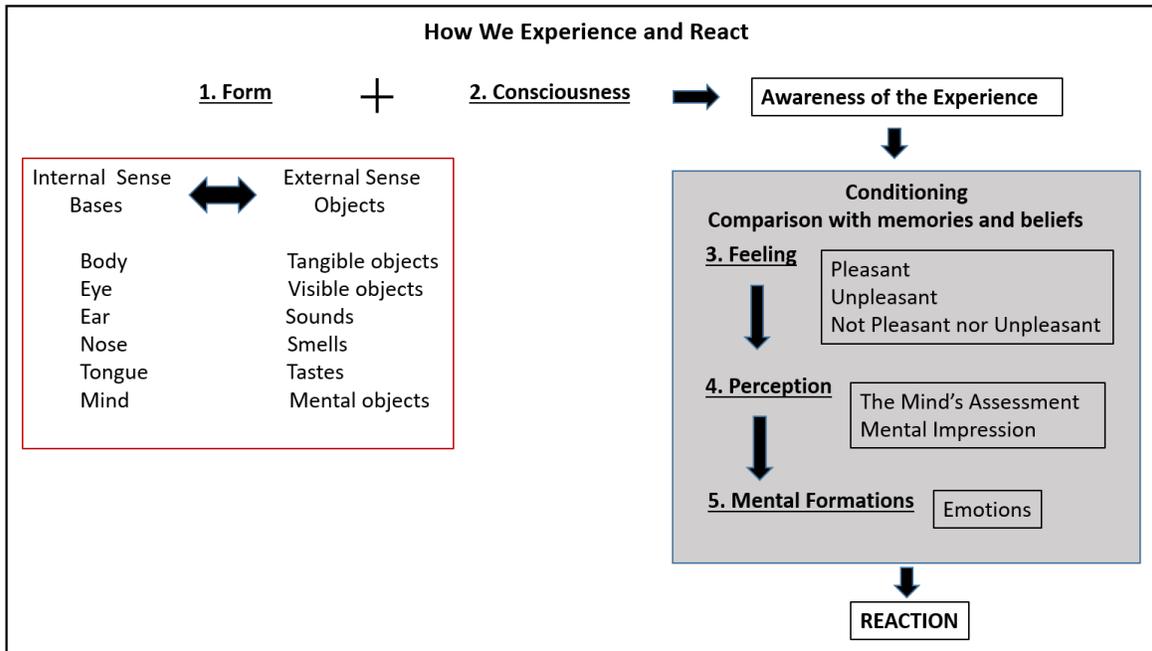
Feelings are what is sensed in the body about the experience. These feelings are not emotions. (Emotions are mental formations as noted below.) Feelings occur instantly after awareness and are either pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. After a feeling arises, a **perception** (mental impression, identification, recognition, discrimination, assessment) of the experience arises in the mind. Note that the perception is dependent on memory for identification. If we have no previous memory of what we have originally sensed, we can't identify it. Next, **mental formations** (emotions) arise as a result of the feeling and the perception. Depending on the intensity of the mental formation, a reaction might occur.

For example, if your eyes make contact with a person for whom you have negative memories, an unpleasant feeling in the body may arise. The perception that arises may be that of an unpleasant person because of the comparison with past memories. Next, the mental formation that may arise might be anger or ill-will.

Without an understanding of the internal conditioning process, you may only be aware of the anger and therefore blame this emotion on the person you just saw. You might even say, "This person made me angry." Yet, the anger actually arose from your internal processing of associating the image of this person with your internal memories and beliefs. Another person seeing this person might experience a different emotion.

In summary, suffering is caused by the conditioning that arises after our awareness of the experience. It is not what we sense externally that causes suffering, it is the internal processing.

The diagram below shows this process.



By being aware through mindfulness of how we experience life, we can reduce our suffering because we realize that the cause is within us, not the external experience that triggered it. When you say, “That makes me angry,” it really is the “that” triggered something within you to cause anger to arise.”

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention moment to moment to what is. Aren't we always paying attention moment to moment to what is? No! Because the difference is in the “**what is**” we pay attention to. When we experience something, we usually only pay attention to the “what is” of the mental formation or emotion that arises. For example, you see a person with whom you recently had an argument that ended badly. You feel angry when you see them again. We suffer because we are only paying attention to the uncomfortable emotion of anger that has arisen wishing for it to go away. The “what is” that we can pay attention to through mindfulness is the experience that we first became aware of (seeing that person) before our mind started processing it through feeling, perception, and mental formations. This is the “what is” of what really is! By paying attention to the original experience, we realize that the arising anger was triggered by an external experience and that our conditioning process created our suffering. Then we can investigate our conditioning. Realizing this “what is” allows us to be with the anger in a non-judgmental way, which lessens our attachment to it and causes it to dissipate. Mindfulness keeps us aware of “what is” and the role of our conditioning.

Unlike a computer that we can scan for malware and correct the problems, the mind is such that we can only deal with our conditioning as we become aware of each experience that arises. That is why it is so important to investigate through mindfulness as experiences arise.

Without mindfulness, the mental formations such as anger persist because we cling to them as justification for our reactions. Bhante Gunaratana (Bhante G.) notes that through mindfulness “we allow sensations, feelings, and thoughts to pass through the mind without holding on to any particular thing, no matter how pleasant or beautiful. When unpleasant, painful, or unbearable states surface, we let them pass without becoming upset. We just let things happen without trying to stop them, without succumbing to them or trying to get away. We just notice things as they are.” Gunaratana, Henepola. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha's Path* (p. 197). Wisdom Publications.

Further, Bhante G. notes that mindfulness:

- Allows us to observe our mental formations (emotions) without getting caught up in them.
- Leads to insight, clear and undistorted, “inner seeing” of the way things really are (the inner eye of wisdom)
- Purifies our mind from the emotional attachments of greed, hatred and delusion
- Grants us insight into the real nature of all things: impermanent, inability to give lasting satisfaction or dissatisfaction, of selfless nature (not “us”).

How do you practice mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice or tool that you can employ when you realize you are suffering. Practice is required to develop mindfulness just as you would need to with physical body training or learning a new skill. **Mindfulness is not a passive process.** It requires investigation and energy as will be discussed later. Fortunately, we have many experiences from which to practice mindfulness! In time, mindfulness will become a part of your daily life as an awareness to prevent suffering from arising.

The full practice of mindfulness consists of reflection, meditation practice, daily life practice, having a teacher and being part of a sangha.

Reflection

Reflection on the teachings of mindfulness gives us wisdom. It is very beneficial to re-read sections of this guide periodically and reflect on them. There are references at the end of this guide to read and study for a deeper understanding of mindfulness. Reading and reflecting on mindfulness each day helps to keep you focused and will provide motivation for practice.

Meditation Practices

There are three meditation practices that are beneficial to develop mindfulness. These 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 struggle with our practice. This is called **loving-kindness practice**.

With meditation, we take time and situate ourselves to totally focus on the mind. Just as with physical training, a daily meditation practice of 10-30 minutes can work wonders. Below are simple instructions on how to practice all three meditations in one sitting.

To begin, 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: impermanency (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.

Daily Life Practice

This is the heart of mindfulness practice; 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 in the form 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.

Investigate these questions:

1. What was **actually sensed**?
2. What was the **feeling** like in the body?
3. What was your **perception** (assessment)?
4. Is this perception **true** or is this a story that comes from your memory and beliefs?
5. What was the **mental formation** 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?

Avoid making judgments, commentary or decisions. Just be with the investigation.

As De Mello states: *“Try it out now, identify the negative feeling that this event aroused in you. Was it anxiety or insecurity, jealousy or anger or guilt? What does that emotion say to you about yourself, your values, your way of perceiving the world and life and above all your programming and conditioning? If you succeed in discovering this, you will drop some illusion you have clung to till now, or you will change a distorted perception or correct a false belief or learn to distance yourself from your suffering, as you realize that it was caused by your programming and not by reality; and you will suddenly find that you are full of gratitude for those negative feelings and to that person or event that caused them.”* De Mello, Anthony. *The Way to Love: Meditations for Life* (p. 119)

When finished, just continue to live life!

Teacher

Seeking the support of a teacher can be a beneficial way of supporting your practice. A teacher cannot do the work for you. You must do this alone by being mindful and investigating. Life is your ultimate teacher. Be prepared to learn from many people as each can contribute to your growth.

Sangha

A sangha is a group of like-minded individuals who have a mutual dedication to serve the spiritual life and development of all in the community.” Caplan p. 331. “Taking refuge in the sangha is ...being in a community, where there is a kind of natural feedback, where there is a sense of reality, support, mirroring, building trust and of encountering difficulties in your experience with others and being able

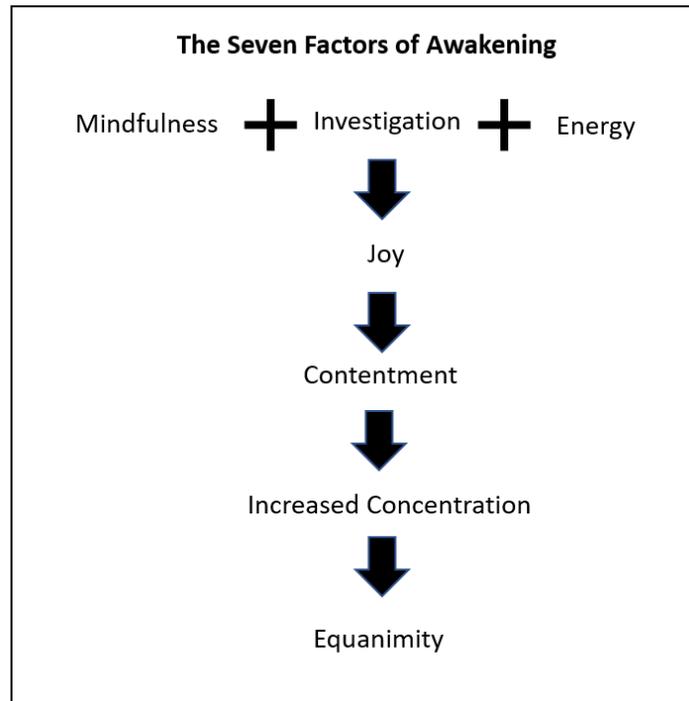
to sustain a relationship that will transform those difficulties into compassion and trust.” Joan Halifax (Halfway Up the Mountain p. 330) There is a great deal of benefit to joining a sangha if one is available. Or gather with friends on a regular basis to meditate together and reflect on the teachings.

What are the benefits of practicing mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the first factor leading to the cessation of suffering. In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha taught the contemplation of the seven factors of awakening; the factors which if practiced can lead to the cessation of suffering. These seven factors, in order, are mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, contentment, concentration, and equanimity. Joseph Goldstein notes: “And, as we will see, these seven factors form a progression, each one leading to the next. So if we prime the pump of the enlightened mind and practice the first of the awakening factors, all the rest follow along.” Goldstein, Joseph, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* (p. 200)

The progression of factors is as follows: As you cultivate your **mindfulness** (paying attention from moment to moment to what is), it becomes an established form of practice. Your mental object of mindfulness becomes mindfulness. You learn that with strong mindfulness, you investigate all phenomena (sensations, thoughts, memories, etc.) also discovering that they all share the same three characteristics (impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and selflessness). Thus, the mental object of mindfulness becomes **investigation**. With investigation, you exert more energy (effort, persistence) and shift your mental object of mindfulness to **energy**. With these three powerful factors in action, you feel **joy** which leads to **contentment**. With contentment, restlessness disappears, and you are able to cultivate powerful **concentration**. When all of these six factors (mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, contentment, and concentration), you feel that your life is in harmony and balance. When this occurs, you are experiencing the seventh and final factor, **equanimity**. **With equanimity, the desire ends for things to be other than they are.** You don’t wish for permanence, lasting satisfaction, or for a self. As Anthony De Mello states “....., your heart will be flooded with peace and gratitude and love and acceptance of every single thing. And you will have discovered what people everywhere are searching for and never find. Namely, the fountainhead of serenity and joy that hides in every human heart.” De Mello, Anthony. *The Way to Love: Meditations for Life* (p. 120)

The seven factors of awakening are noted in the diagram below:



In summary, once you practice the first three factors, mindfulness, investigation and energy, you can realize the remaining four factors: joy, tranquility, increased concentration and equanimity. What more could you ask for!

There are other benefits that many have realized by practicing mindfulness:

- Having less reactivity
- Staying more in the present rather than dwelling on the past or anticipating the future.
- Having better relationships because we see others with fresh eyes:
*What we know of other people
Is only our memory of the moments
During which we knew them. And they have
Changed since then
We must
Also remember
That at every meeting we are meeting a
Stranger. (T.S. Eliot)*
- Sleeping better
- Experiencing less mental proliferation (chatter)
- Being less judgmental
- Not making decisions based on reactivity.

Scientific Investigations have started to confirm specific benefits of mindfulness practice. Susan Bauer-Wu lists some of these studies in four areas: positive changes in the brain, increased quality of life and symptoms, positive effects on the body, and better mental health. (Bauer-Wu, Susan Leaves Falling Gently: Living Fully with Serious & Life-Limiting Illness through Mindfulness, Compassion & Connectedness)

You will discover as Bhante G. notes “Thus the more you focus on mind itself, the less solid it seems. Like everything else that exists, it is always changing. Moreover, you discover, there is no permanent entity; no one is running the movie projector. All is flux, all is flow, all is process. **In reality, who you are is simply this constant flow of changing moments of mind.** Since you cannot control this process, you have no choice but to let go. In letting go, you experience joy and you taste for an instant the freedom and happiness that is the goal of the Buddha’s path. Then you know that this mind can be used to gain wisdom.” Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path (p. 216)

What are some of the obstacles to practicing mindfulness?

As we react to experiences by suffering, we can recognize our reactions fall into several categories of states of mind that we slip into and which negatively affect our mindfulness. These states, called hindrances, obscure the mind making it difficult to truly be mindful and investigate the suffering. The five hindrances are:

- Desire
- Aversion
- Dullness and Drowsiness
- Restlessness and Worry
- Doubt

Just as we investigate an experience with mindfulness, we can do the same when the one or more of the hindrances arise. Analayo states, “By turning a hindrance into an object of meditation, the mere presence of awareness can often lead to dispelling the hindrance in question.” (Analayo. Perspectives on Satipatthana, p. 193). Our investigation includes examining the process of conditioning: the feeling, perception and mental formations that arise with the presence of each hindrance. Each hindrance will be discussed below including a description, what happens in the process of conditioning and how mindfulness can be used to dispel it.

Desire

The Pali word for desire in the Satipatthana Sutta is chanda which means “willingness to have sense pleasure.” As we experience sensual pleasurable experiences (such as that which gives us happiness in terms of pleasure, gain, praise and fame), the hindrance of desire arises when we get attached to getting more than what is needed. Instead of enjoying what we have, we focus on the anticipation of getting more. We cannot be satisfied. For example, when eating, strong desire may cause us to eat quickly because we are focusing on the next bite rather than enjoying the one that is in our mouth.

The process of conditioning includes:

Feeling – pleasant

Perception – gain, praise, fame, sensual pleasure

Mental Formation – transient happiness

Mindfulness helps us to recognize that we have slipped unconsciously into wanting. For example, we are in a buffet and are influenced by the attractive appearance and smells of food. We feel compelled to eat regardless of our need for food. We are deluded because we assume that eating will lead to lasting happiness. To prevent future arisings of desire, we can strive to be more mindful and as the Buddha noted, guard our sense doors by not exposing ourselves to conditions that will lead us into wanting. As with the buffet, we anticipate desire and take mindful steps to avoid it controlling our behavior.

Aversion

The Pali word for aversion is *patigha* which means “striking against.” Bhikkhu Bodhi notes it as the attitude of resistance, rejection or destruction. These condemning states can include violent rage and hatred, anger, ill will, animosity, annoyance, irritation, fear, sorrow and grief. The chief perceptions of aversion are:

- Physical pain
- Unpleasant thoughts
- Unpleasant situations
- Being the victim

The Buddha noted that aversion arises because we aren’t getting what we want, or we are getting what we don’t want. Or we fear that we won’t get what we want in the future or that we will get what we don’t want in the future. We want life to be other than it is.

The process of conditioning includes:

Feeling – unpleasant

Perception – physical pain; unpleasant thoughts of pain, loss, criticism, disrepute; unpleasant situations;

I am the victim

Mental Formations – transient unhappiness, anger, rage, etc.

Mindfulness allows us to identify that we have slipped unconsciously into aversion. The ultimate preventative measure for aversion is practicing loving kindness (*metta* in Pali). This practice of generosity wishes that all beings including ourselves be happy and peaceful. This act focuses on the potential good rather than the faults. “It’s important to realize that all aversion does not fall away with our first loving wish. The Bodhisattva spent years, and whole lifetimes, cultivating and purifying this quality. But as we practice it, recognize it, and become more familiar with it, *metta* (loving-kindness) begins to arise more and more spontaneously in our lives. It becomes the way we are, rather than something we do. As loving-kindness grows stronger, both for ourselves and others, we feel more

tolerance, are a little less judgmental, and slowly and gradually start to live in a growing field of benevolence and goodwill. Here is where mettā as a dissolver of aversion also becomes the ground for wisdom. The more loving and patient we are with difficulties and disturbances, the less lost we are in reactivity. Our choices and actions become wiser, which in turn leads to more happiness, more mettā, and greater freedom.” (Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* p. 119)

Dullness and Drowsiness

Dullness is mental laziness and drowsiness is physical laziness. When dullness arises, our mind is sluggish, dull and confused. When drowsiness arises, we feel a lack of energy that can come from withdrawing from experiences with resultant feelings of discontent, boredom or depression, over indulging such as with eating and drinking, or over exercising. We lack drive and energy and just want to lie down and nap. We lack the will to investigate our experiences.

The process of conditioning includes:

Feeling – unpleasant

Perception – sleepiness, lack of mental and physical energy

Mental Formation – withdrawal, denial, procrastination

Mindfulness allows us to realize that we have slipped into dullness and drowsiness as a way of withdrawing from the investigation of suffering. Goldstein notes dullness and drowsiness can be the tendency to withdraw from difficulties. He compares it to keeping a car in reverse gear, never going forward but always pulling back. Dullness and drowsiness can occur when we meditate and get so relaxed that we slide into it. This state can be very relaxed and comfortable, but it is not insight meditation. We lose our concentration and fall into laziness. Insight requires energy, vigor, and sharpness. (Gunaratana, *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, p. 130)

Dullness and drowsiness arise from an imbalance of concentration and energy with energy being low. When we feel drowsy, lazy or dull, we need to investigate the cause. We can ask, “What is this experience I’m calling sleepiness or dullness?” and pay mindful attention. If we aren’t mindful, we might just withdraw further and further. With mindfulness, we can often experience a surge of energy or take steps to increase our energy.

Restlessness and Worry

The Pali word for restlessness is *uddacca* which means agitation, excitement or distraction. Restlessness is literally “without rest.” The Pali word for worry is *kukkucca* which is the mind state of regret (remorse) or anxiety. We worry about what we did or did not do.

Restlessness manifests in the body as a physical sensation described by many as “jumping out of one’s skin. The mind is distracted with various kinds of thoughts. It is truly an inner turmoil with the mind tossed about by agitation. Restlessness can be more subtle posing as distracting thoughts during tasks or in meditation. Worry can manifest as general anxiety about the future. Worry is a form of fear,

anticipation or uncertainty about what might happen in the future. Worry can also manifest as guilt, regret or remorse about what we might have done or not done in the past.

The process of conditioning includes:

Feeling – unpleasant

Perception - fear

Mental Formations – agitation, anxiety, worry, turmoil

The cause: an imbalance of concentration and energy with concentration being low. Concentration focuses our energy. Insufficient concentration means that the excess energy can lead to distraction and restlessness. We pay undue attention to our thoughts. In other words, we tend to think too much (mental proliferation).

“Whenever we feel the mind is not settled on the object, not at rest, we can become mindful of the restlessness itself. Notice the physical energies in the body. Notice the difference in the emotional tone between restlessness and worry, so that you can distinguish one from the other. Restlessness feels more scattered; worry feels more anxious. As we become mindful of these states of mind, rather than being lost in them, the mindfulness itself starts to bring the factors of concentration and energy into balance.” (Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*, p 137)

Use your mental zoom lens. “Focus the mind more precisely on a particular object like the breath, or we become quite precise in moving about, strengthening the quality of composure in our movements. Both actions help to calm all the obsessive thinking in the mind.” (Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*, p. 137)

Doubt

There are two kinds of doubt. The first is a skepticism that leads to inquiry and investigation. In the case of the teachings, this kind of doubt is wholesome. The Buddha encouraged all to investigate for themselves and to discard what was not true for them. The second kind of doubt is the unwholesome mind states of uncertainty, wavering and indecision that immobilize us. With these mind states, we don't have the motivation to inquire and investigate. Instead we remain stuck and our practice can be at a standstill or even abandoned.

Doubt can arise in three areas regarding our practice. We might doubt the relevance of the teachings, the path of practice, and our ability to practice.

The process of conditioning includes:

Feeling – unpleasant

Perception – confusion, uncertainty

Mental formations – indecision, uncertainty

We practice mindfulness so that we can know when doubt is present. Knowing that uncertainty is present, we can begin to remove doubt is by investigation.

The diagram below summarizes the hindrances:

Hindrances to Mindfulness			
Hindrances	Feeling	Perception	Mental Formations
Desire	pleasant	gain, praise, fame, sensual pleasure	transient happiness
Aversion	unpleasant	physical pain; unpleasant thoughts of pain, loss, criticism, disrepute; unpleasant situations; I am the victim,	transient unhappiness, anger, rage, etc.
Dullness/Drowsiness	unpleasant	sleepiness, lack of mental and physical energy	withdrawal, denial, procrastination
Restlessness/Worry	unpleasant	fear	agitation, anxiety, worry, turmoil
Doubt	unpleasant	confusion, uncertainty	indecision, uncertainty

When we are stuck in our practice, one or more of the hindrances has arisen. Using your knowledge of the conditioning process, you can identify which hindrance to be aware of and investigate.

In Conclusion

We hope that this guide has been and will be helpful to get you started and to sustain your mindfulness practice. If you need any assistance, please contact us at whitehallmeditation.org.

Bhante Gunaratana sums up nicely:

Mindfulness meditation *“is a form of mental training that will teach you to experience the world in an entirely new way. You will learn for the first time 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: “Never mind what I have been taught. Forget about theories and prejudgments and stereotypes. I want to understand the true nature of life. I want to know what this experience of being alive really is. I want to apprehend the true and deepest qualities of life, and I don’t want to just accept somebody else’s explanation. I want to see it for myself.” If you pursue your meditation practice with this attitude, you will succeed. You’ll find yourself observing things objectively, exactly as they are—flowing and changing from moment to moment. Life then takes on an unbelievable richness which cannot be described. It has to be experienced.”*

Resources and References

Websites

www.whitehallmeditation.org

www.accesstoinsight.org

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Further study for reflection (references in bold are recommended as a start for beginners)

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