



Buddhist Council of NSW

Working for the Buddhist Community

Introduction to Meditation

Your mind is normally active, generating a continuous flow of thoughts, sensations and emotions. Meditation practice recognises that this is how the mind functions. It does not try to stop your thoughts, but rather offers techniques for letting them go.

So how does meditation work? We experience everything through our mind, so by training or cultivating this mind, we can change the quality of our experience. Gradually, meditation practice alters the structure of the brain and new neuronal pathways are created which improve whole brain functioning. Meditation increases left-prefrontal lobe activity, which is associated with happiness, compassion and curiosity. It also tends to reduce “neuronal gossip”, i.e. thoughts of anxiety, fear and worry. This is achieved by resting the mind in natural, non-judgmental awareness. Buddhist meditation helps us to be aware of the so-called “mental poisons” of attachment, aversion and ignorance, which lead to harm for ourselves and other sentient beings.

Meditation can help increase our happiness and compassion, allowing us to be more aware of the needs of other beings. Over time, meditation can even make us more aware of the consequences of our own actions, or the actions of others. In this way, we may learn to uncover the illusion of “Self”. In this way, we become less selfish and absorbed in our own thoughts, fears and desires. Gradually, we may start to realise that there is no difference between the mind that thinks and the thoughts that flow in and out of it.

The difference between ordinary meditation and Buddhist meditation is Mindfulness. What is this? It is the link between sitting meditation practice and everyday life. Mindfulness meditation improves our awareness throughout the day, so that we are not on “auto-pilot”, but instead living life fully aware. It’s important to integrate practice into day-to-day life. There is no point in being calm on the cushion but out of control throughout the day. Mindfulness can be applied in every situation: listening to others, cleaning the house, eating your meal, or walking along the street. These are all opportunities for mindfulness and being aware of the present moment.

Practicing Meditation

How do you meditate? Firstly, let go of your expectations about meditation. The Buddha taught many meditation techniques, so there is no single best method. Different traditions have varied methods of practice, but all have the common goal of cultivating mindfulness and awareness to lead a more peaceful and compassionate life. For a beginner wanting to practice Buddhist meditation, it is important to find a good teacher who can guide you through the early stages of practice. Meditation is a process that requires practice, persistence and patience. You cannot expect results overnight. During the early stages of practice, a beginner may face several constraints or mental setbacks that cause them to become distracted or disillusioned and give up. This is where a good meditation teacher is extremely beneficial. A genuine teacher is a trusted person with good



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intentions who can provide guidance, supporting the practitioner through their meditation practice. Below is a basic guide on how to start meditating without a teacher.

Do not hold onto thoughts as they arise, just let them go. Rest the mind in the present moment, allowing thoughts and sensations to pass, noting them without becoming attached to them. Meditation is not a competitive sport and it should not be forced; it is a process of letting go of the thoughts, feelings and emotions that flow through our minds.

In the early stages, the quality and frequency of meditation is more important than the quantity. In other words, it's better to have a few, short, but relaxed sessions of five or ten minutes than to force a 60-minute session each morning. The object (or focus) of your meditation can be your breath, a natural garden scene, a sound, or a wish for others to be well and happy. You can even send compassionate thoughts towards someone you love. Since distractions are inevitable while meditating, even they can be used as objects of meditation, e.g. a particular thought, a sound or a physical sensation can be used to focus the mind with non-judgmental awareness.

Further Resources

Dharma Drum Mountain Sydney is a Buddhist organisation in the tradition of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism. They hold regularly group chanting and meditation sessions on Sundays at their Hornsby centre.

This article from the Chan Centre provides is a guided overview of how to practice meditation in the Ch'an tradition.

The Vajrayana Institute offers regular workshops and meditation sessions in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. They are located in the inner western Sydney suburb of Ashfield.

The Buddhist Library is a centre that focuses on sharing the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings through regular workshops, meditation and yoga sessions. They are located in Camperdown, Sydney.

The Association of Engaged Buddhists are committed to promoting the development of Buddhism in Australia through active social service. They hold weekly meditation and Dharma teachings every Wednesday night at their centre in Lewisham.

Lotus Bud Sangha is a group of practitioners coming together to practice mindfulness meditation in the tradition of Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. They have meditation groups that meet weekly at two locations, one in Camperdown and another in Canley Heights.