

# Contents

<b>Getting Started: An Introduction to <i>Insight Meditation</i></b> . . . . .	1
An Introduction to <i>Vipassana</i> Meditation . . . . .	3
What You Need to Meditate . . . . .	4
The <i>Kalyana Mitta</i> . . . . .	6
The Story of the Buddha . . . . .	7
The Noble Eightfold Path . . . . .	7
Interview: Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein . . . . .	8
How to Cultivate a Daily Meditation Practice . . . . .	10
<b>Lesson 1: The Power of Mindfulness</b> . . . . .	11
Q & A Session . . . . .	12
The Five Precepts . . . . .	13
Posture . . . . .	14
Breath Exercises . . . . .	18
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	20
<b>Lesson 2: Bare Attention</b> . . . . .	21
Q & A Session . . . . .	22
Walking Exercises . . . . .	24
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	26
<b>Lesson 3: Desire and Aversion</b> . . . . .	27
Q & A Session . . . . .	28
The Five Hindrances . . . . .	29
Exercises for Working with Pain . . . . .	30
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	31
<b>Lesson 4: Sleepiness, Restlessness, and Doubt</b> . . . . .	33
Q & A Session . . . . .	34
The Five Hindrances, Part II . . . . .	35
Encountering <i>Mara</i> . . . . .	36
Exercises for Working with Hindrances . . . . .	37
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	38
<b>Lesson 5: Concepts and Reality</b> . . . . .	39
Q & A Session . . . . .	40
The Myths of Time, Place, and Self . . . . .	40
Eating Exercises . . . . .	41
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	42
<b>Lesson 6: Suffering</b> . . . . .	43
Q & A Session . . . . .	44
The Three Kinds of Suffering . . . . .	45
The Four Noble Truths . . . . .	46
Exercises for Working with Emotional States . . . . .	47
Getting the Most from your Meditation . . . . .	48
<b>Lesson 7: Delusion</b> . . . . .	49
Q & A Session . . . . .	50
Exercises for Working with Thoughts and Images . . . . .	50
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	52
<b>Lesson 8: Karma</b> . . . . .	53
Q & A Session . . . . .	54
The Four <i>Brahma-Viharas</i> . . . . .	54
The Six Realms of Existence . . . . .	55
Exercises for Working with Intentions . . . . .	56
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	57
<b>Lesson 9: Equanimity</b> . . . . .	59
Q & A Session . . . . .	60
The Eight Vicissitudes . . . . .	61
The Six Sense Doors . . . . .	61
Exercises for Working with Pleasant and Unpleasant Feelings . . . . .	62
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	63
<b>Lesson 10: Faith and Wisdom</b> . . . . .	65
Q & A Session . . . . .	66
The Five Spiritual Powers . . . . .	67
Big Mind Exercises . . . . .	69
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	70
<b>Lesson 11: Lovingkindness</b> . . . . .	71
Q & A Session . . . . .	72
Six Categories, Four Phrases . . . . .	73
The Benefits of Lovingkindness . . . . .	74
<i>Metta</i> Exercises . . . . .	75
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	76
<b>Lesson 12: Practice in the World</b> . . . . .	77
Q & A Session . . . . .	78
The Buddha's Lists . . . . .	79
Exercises for Taking Your Practice into the World . . . . .	79
Getting the Most from Your Meditation . . . . .	81
<b>Last Words</b> . . . . .	83
Glossary . . . . .	84
Additional Resources . . . . .	86
In Conclusion (addresses) . . . . .	88
Feedback Questionnaire . . . . .	89



*Getting Started*

## **An Introduction to *Insight Meditation***

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Welcome to *Insight Meditation: An In-Depth Correspondence Course*. This audio program and workbook will take you step by step through a comprehensive training course in meditation. You may also submit questions and completed exercises from the workbook to your personal meditation instructor.

This course is rooted in the Buddhist style of *vipassana*, or insight, meditation – but these fundamental techniques for sharpening your awareness and

releasing painful mental habits are useful no matter what your religious or spiritual orientation. It's not necessary to affiliate with any belief system in order to benefit from *Insight Meditation*. These mindfulness practices can support your existing spiritual path – whether it's a structured practice like Christianity or Judaism, or a more personal sense of your relationship with the great questions of human existence.

## What to Expect

*Insight Meditation* includes 12 audio lessons, this workbook, and correspondence with your personal meditation instructor.

**Part One** of each session features a talk on an aspect of meditative practice. These talks progress from the basic theory of mindfulness (Talk 1) through suggestions on how to infuse all of your life activities with clarity and awareness (Talk 12). Along the way, you'll learn how to work with mental and physical hindrances to meditation; the meaning and implications of *karma* (the law of cause and effect); how to recognize and cut through delusion, and many other aspects of Buddhist psychology and awareness practice.

**Part Two** of each session features a guided meditation. Where the talks cover much of the applied theory of developing awareness and compassion, these guided segments will help you to explore the direct experience of meditation. They're set up to simulate as closely as possible the ambience of an actual practice session at a retreat center like the Insight Meditation Center. Before you listen to them, have your meditation space set up (articles elsewhere in this introductory section will help you design this space) and take your seat, ready to meditate for approximately 45 minutes. Each guided meditation begins with brief introductory remarks. The sound of a gong will cue you to begin following the teacher's instructions. The guided meditations are linked to the accompanying talks. Because of this carefully graduated and integrated syllabus, it's recommended that you listen to the lessons in order, taking as much time as you need in between to assimilate each lesson. Spend at least one week on each lesson before proceeding to the next.

Because daily life provides so many distractions, we encourage you to try to commit to the guided meditations several times a week. (Ideally, you will be able to practice – with or without the guided meditations supplied here – for at least 45 minutes each day throughout the course.) Feel free to return to previous talks and meditations at any point during the

course. You'll find that jumping ahead in either the lessons or the workbook will deprive you of the full benefits of *Insight Meditation's* deliberately structured instructional flow.

**This workbook** contains supporting material for each of the 12 lessons. Typical contents are glossaries, informative articles, question and answer sessions that illuminate aspects of the respective lessons, and exercises for you to complete and return to your meditation instructor.

## How to Use This Workbook

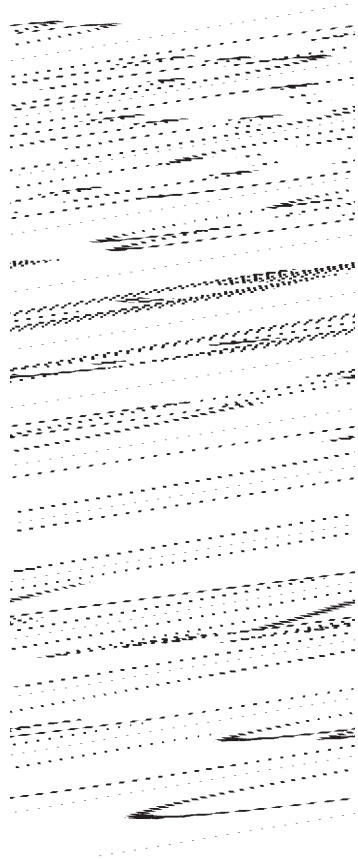
Your *Insight Meditation* workbook consists of 14 sections:

- introductory segment
- supporting information and exercises for each of the 12 lessons
- a wrap-up section to help you make the transition from this course to an ongoing meditation practice

The contents have been carefully matched to the respective lessons, so you'll get the most out of the course by using them lesson by lesson.

If you choose to take advantage of the correspondence element of this course, please complete and submit the registration form on page i. The requested information will help your instructor tailor the most helpful and appropriate responses to your questions. *Your instructor must receive your completed registration form before correspondence can begin.*

Each workbook lesson features exercises linked to the matching talk and guided meditation. Respond to these exercises as legibly as possible, and mail them to your personal instructor. If you prefer, you may record your answers on a standard size audiocassette or transmit them by email. See the addresses at the end of this workbook. *Please don't try to reach your instructor by phone.*



The suggested length of your response to each exercise – such as “150 words/1 minute” – is intended as a ceiling, not a minimum. If you feel you’ve answered the question satisfactorily in just 50 words or 15 seconds, don’t feel obliged to continue writing or speaking. It’s not necessary to produce pages of description about your meditation experience. At the end of each set of exercises, you’re encouraged to report any problems in your practice to your meditation instructor. Use this opportunity to expand on your answers as necessary.

### Plunge Right In

Meditation is a lifelong practice that develops at a rate consistent with the amount of time and effort you devote to it. This course is designed to offer you a graduated path leading to the everyday experience of mindfulness. You’ll find it most fruitful and meaningful when you take it a step at a time, contemplating each lesson and entering into each guided meditation fully before proceeding to the next lesson.

On the other hand, there’s no reason to delay beginning your meditation practice. The profound gifts of awareness, compassion, and direct experience are always available to us; the sooner you discover them, the more deeply you can explore them during this lifetime. There’s a practical reason to get started, too: *your correspondence privileges must be used within twelve months from the date we receive your registration form.*

The Buddha taught the doctrine of the “Middle Way”: a path that avoids extremes and remains centered in the reality of the present moment. In this spirit, we encourage you to find your own pace – neither rushing nor hesitating. As you progress in the course, you’ll learn how to determine what pace is best for you on any given day, and your trust in that understanding will grow.

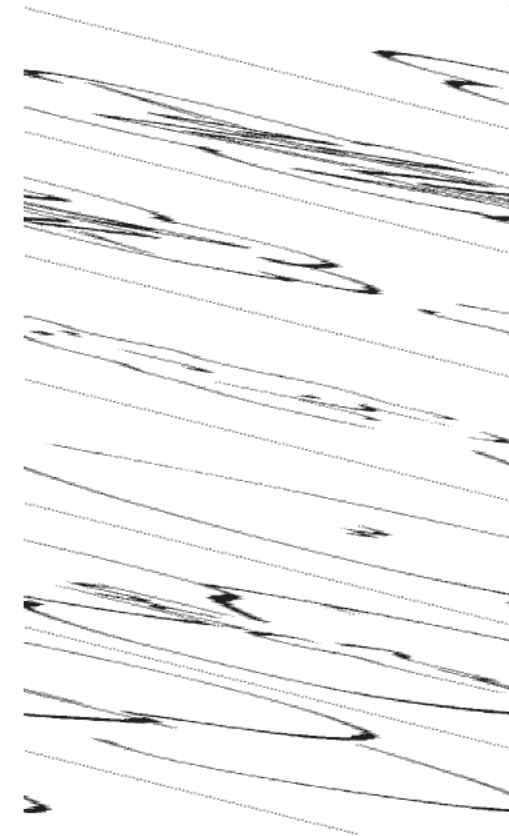
## An Introduction to Vipassana Meditation

People have practiced some form of meditation, or quieting the mind, since the beginning of recorded history. Every major world religion, and many lesser known spiritual traditions, include a contemplative component.

Vipassana, the style of meditation taught in this course, can be traced directly to the way the Buddha himself practiced, and is common to all Buddhist traditions. It is characterized by simplicity, stillness, and attention. Vipassana meditation is designed to quiet the mind and refine our awareness, so that we can experience the truth of our lives directly with a minimum of distraction and obscuration.

*For those of us who are patient and determined in our practice, joy increases; peace increases; the ability to live a beneficial and compassionate life increases.*

— Charlotte Joko Beck



*The mind is its own place,  
and in itself can make  
a Heaven of Hell, a Hell  
of Heaven.*

— John Milton

## What You Need to Meditate

You don't need elaborate equipment or supplies to meditate. Many people simply sit on a chair, or use sofa or floor cushions they already have. The suppliers listed here can sell you various types of cushions specially designed for meditation. We recommend that you experiment with cushions and benches of varying heights and firmness before investing in a meditation support of your own.

### The three most common types of meditation support are:

- *Zafus*. The most traditional and widespread of the meditation cushions, the zafu is a flattened, round cotton case filled with kapok or other soft material. It is generally about 14 inches in diameter and 10 inches in height. The *crescent zafu* is an innovation designed to provide extra hip support. *Inflatable zafus* are also available for traveling meditators.
- *Gomdens*. These firm, rectangular cushions were designed for Western practitioners by a Tibetan meditation teacher. Although only 6 inches thick, their firm foam interior creates a higher perch than the softer zafu.
- *Meditation benches*. These simple wooden benches provide an angled sitting surface – sometimes padded – with room underneath for legs. The meditator sits in a supported kneeling position, rather than in a cross-legged posture.

### You may choose to accessorize your meditation support with one of the following:

- A *zabuton*, or thick mat you can place under your cushion or bench. Zabutons cushion your legs and ankles from hard floor surfaces.
- A *support cushion*. Made in sizes that fit both zafus and gomdens, these small, flat cushions are placed under or on top of the meditation cushion to provide a little more height. Some practitioners also use them to tuck under a knee.

- A *gomden raiser*. These wooden platforms are made specifically for gomdens, raising them a couple of inches off the floor or zabuton. Helpful for tall meditators who use a gomden.

Most manufacturers of meditation cushions offer a range of colors. The following is a partial list of sources. Although no single outlet carries *all* the items listed above, you'll be able to find the item of your choice from one of these merchants.

Carolina Morning Designs  
8110 State Highway 80 South  
Burnsville NC 28714 Ph.(888) 267-5366  
<http://www.zafu.net>

Peter Catizone  
P.O. Box 380495  
Cambridge MA 02238-0495 Ph. (617) 548-4444  
<http://www.catizone.com>  
(Specialized meditation benches)

DharmaCrafts  
405 Waltham Street, Ste. 234  
Lexington MA 02421 Ph. (800) 794-9862  
<http://www.dharmacrafts.com>

Samadhi Cushions  
30 Church Street  
Barnet VT 05821 Ph. (800) 331-7751  
(The only source for gomdens)  
<http://www.samadhicushions.com>

Yoga Mats  
P.O. Box 885044  
San Francisco CA 94188 Ph. (800) 720-YOGA  
<http://www.yogamats.com>

Zen Home Stitchery  
120 East 18th Street  
Costa Mesa CA 92627 Ph. (949) 631-5389  
<http://www.zenhomestitchery.com>

*Everything has mind in the lead, has mind in the forefront, is made by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves.*

— The Dhammapada



*The zafu is the most commonly used meditation cushion among Western practitioners*



*The rectangular gomden (shown here on a zabuton and with a support cushion) is firmer and higher than the zafu*



*Some meditators prefer sitting at an angle supported by the crescent zafu*



*Support cushions are available in various sizes, and can be used with all kinds of cushions and benches to raise the sitting surface*



*Meditation benches offer an alternative to the more traditional cross-legged posture*

*Know thyself.*

— Inscription in the temple  
of Delphi

## The Kalyana Mitta

In this tradition of Buddhist meditation, teachers are referred to as *kalyana mitta*. This is a word in the Pali language meaning “spiritual friend.” The Buddha himself was known as a *kalyana mitta*, in that out of compassion, he pointed the way to liberation.

One of the Buddha’s disciples once said to him: “It seems, venerable sir, that half the holy life is having good spiritual friends.” The Buddha replied: “In fact, the whole of the holy life is having good spiritual friends.” Each of us can benefit greatly from having good spiritual friends.

Some of our own teachers are mentioned in the talks contained in this course. One of them is Anagarika Munindra, a Bengali man who studied and practiced for many years in Burma under the guidance of Mahasi Sayadaw, one of the great masters of this century. Munindra is an accomplished meditation teacher and scholar. Another of our teachers is Nani Bala Barua (known as Dipa-Ma), a Bengali woman who practiced under the guidance of Munindra in Burma. She embodied the qualities of love and wisdom to an extraordinary extent.

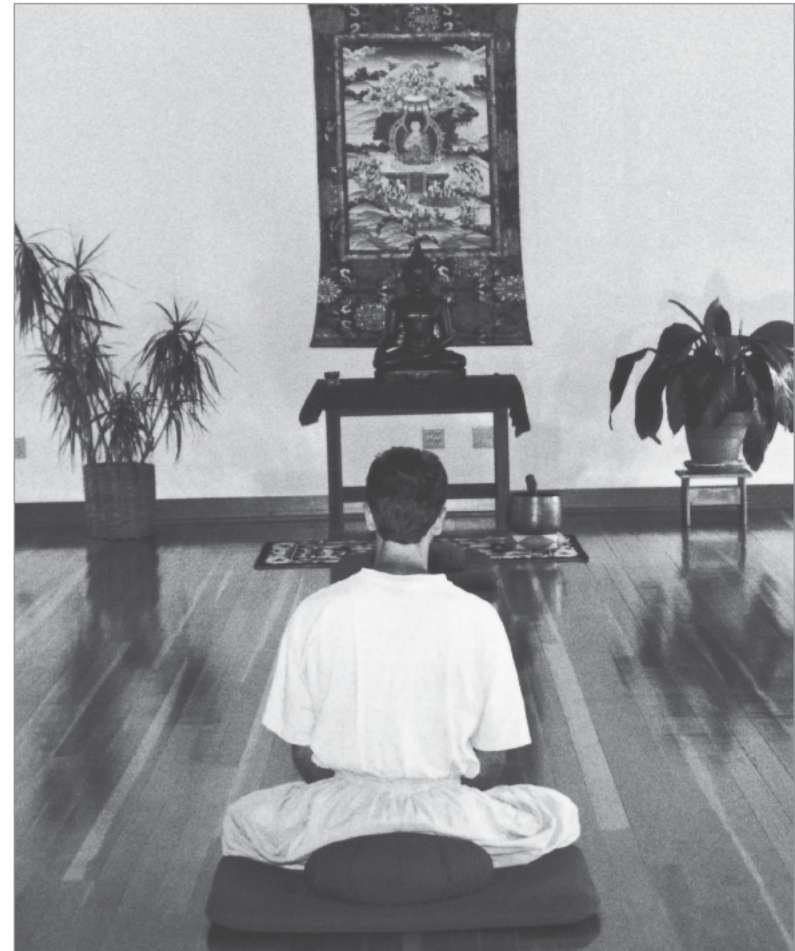
We have also practiced with U Pandita Sayadaw, one of the most renowned Burmese teachers of insight meditation. The great clarity of his teaching derives from his mastery of both study and practice. A book of his talks, *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha*, is available through Wisdom Publications.

Some of the Tibetan teachers with whom we have studied include Kalu Rinpoche, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, and Nyoshul Khen, Rinpoche. They have all been great inspirations in our own practice, and wonderful examples of liberating compassion.

The teachings in *Insight Meditation: An In-Depth Correspondence Course* have come to us from these teachers. May they be of benefit to all beings, that all may come to know peace and freedom.

Sharon Salzberg  
Joseph Goldstein

*A solitary practitioner at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies*



## The Story of the Buddha

The meditation techniques presented in this course were originally taught by the Buddha, four to five hundred years before the birth of Christ. “Buddha” means “Awakened One,” and refers to a prince who is believed to have lived in the Ganges Valley of north-eastern India. He is sometimes called the Gautama Buddha (Gautama was his family name; his personal name was Siddhartha).

Legend has it that when the Buddha was born, astrologers told his father that the child would become either a great king, or – if he witnessed much suffering – a great religious leader. Wanting the young prince to rule in the worldly realm, his father went to enormous lengths to shield the boy from encountering suffering. Siddhartha was lavished with every conceivable pleasure and comfort, but forbidden to leave the palace grounds.

Finally, however, the prince persuaded his charioteer to take him into the city. There, he saw an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and a holy man. These traditional Four Signs led to a protracted inner search for the meaning of life. Siddhartha left his family at the age of 29 to become a homeless spiritual seeker.

After six years of severe ascetic practices, Siddhartha realized that the path of self-mortification was not leading to the enlightenment he sought. This understanding is the basis of the “Middle Way” of Buddhism – a spiritual path that avoids extremes of asceticism and indulgence.

Finally, the aspiring Buddha resolved to sit in meditation under a tree until he attained full realization. While meditating, it is said, he did battle with Mara – known as the “killer of life” and the “killer of virtue” – who tempted and mocked him. But he overcame these obstacles through the strength of his determination, and achieved enlightenment – a state of clear understanding about the nature of reality – under the tree now known as the Bodhi tree in the town of Bodhi Gaya (*bodhi* means “awake”).

Buddhists respect the Buddha as a human being who found a way to break through delusion and find true happiness. Thus, rather than regarding him as a deity with extraordinary spiritual powers, practitioners take heart from the Buddha’s example and commit themselves to emulating his accomplishment through their own practice of meditation.

## The Noble Eightfold Path

In the talks that follow, you’ll hear references to *right effort*, *right action*, and so on. These qualities are drawn from the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path, which he realized at his enlightenment and included in his first teaching. The Eightfold Path delineates the path that leads to happiness. It consists of:

- right understanding
- right thought
- right speech
- right action
- right livelihood
- right effort
- right mindfulness
- right concentration

In each case, “right” means acting in a way that causes no harm, cuts through delusion, and expresses a balanced way of working with each of these factors.

Right understanding and right thought are said to lead to the accomplishment of wisdom. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are associated with ethical conduct, as expressed through the five precepts introduced in Lesson #1. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration describe the mental discipline required to follow the path of meditation.

*What is this Middle Way, the knowledge of which the Buddha has gained, which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to insight, to Nirvana? It is the Noble Eightfold Path.*

— The Mahavagga

### Introductory Glossary

*Each lesson is accompanied by a short glossary that defines some of the words and terms you'll encounter in that lesson. This introductory glossary is designed to clarify some elementary meditation vocabulary.*

**cushion** – a term referring to whatever you sit on when you meditate

**kalyana mitta** – spiritual friend [Pali\*]

**Middle Way** – a spiritual path that avoids extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence, as taught by the Buddha

**mudra** – literally, “gesture” [Sanskrit]; usually refers to particular hand positions used in meditation practices

**practice** – to practice meditation (the emphasis being on repeatedly starting again, which is the essence of meditation)

**sit** – to sit in formal meditation

**vipassana** – literally, “to see clearly” [Pali]; insight; the style of meditation taught in this course

**walk** – to practice formal walking meditation

\* Pali is the language that the Buddha spoke.

## Interview: Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein

*Teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein began meditating more than 25 years ago. What first drew them to the path of awareness? How can their experience help us today, as we begin practicing ourselves? Sharon and Joseph answer some of these questions in this interview.*

**ST:** What motivated you to begin meditating?

**SS:** I was a college student, had become acquainted with Buddhism, and had a deep intuition that meditation was the key to resolving my personal suffering.

**JG:** I was in the Peace Corps in Thailand and started going to some discussion groups at Buddhist temples. After I had asked many, many questions, one monk finally suggested I try meditating. The possibility of a systematic inner journey was tremendously exciting.

**ST:** How did meditation fit with the religious training or understanding you inherited from your family?

**SS:** Meditation wasn't particularly connected to my early family belief systems.

**JG:** There was neither much conflict nor connection. I think I came more from my study of and interest in philosophy. I had a strong desire to understand my life.

**ST:** Did you find your family and friends thought meditation was weird? How did you deal with judgments and other negative reactions to your practice?

**JG:** Mostly, there was support from family and friends. And I was so inspired by my practice, I wasn't much shaken by whatever negative comments did come.

**SS:** Society in general considered meditation weird in 1974, when we first came back from India. The reactions of others never took away the healing and obvious benefit of the practice.

**ST:** At what point did you make a lifelong commitment to meditation? What brought you to that decision?

*The Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts*



**JG:** It's something that has unfolded quite organically, rather than coming from a decision. It quite simply feels to be the most important and rewarding thing in my life.

**SS:** I started practice in 1971, knew from the first moment it was important, and have never stopped. I don't recall "deciding" on a lifelong commitment – it just is.

**ST:** What is the most common misconception you've encountered about meditation?

**JG:** People often think meditation means thinking about something, reflecting on or mulling something over. In mindfulness practice the idea is to be aware of what's arising (thoughts included), but not to particularly think about what's happening.

**SS:** The most widespread misunderstanding I've seen is that the goal of meditation is to cease thinking, or to only have pleasant and wonderful experiences. It isn't that at all, but rather to be free, whatever experience is happening.

**ST:** How has meditation affected you? How would your life be different if you didn't meditate?

**SS:** Not meditating is an inconceivable thing to contemplate – meditation practice forms the basis of integrity, connection, and compassion in my life.

**JG:** It's hard to imagine my life without meditation practice. It provides a context of meaning for my life and an inner spaciousness, peace, and understanding.

**ST:** From your own experience, what is your best advice to a beginning meditator?

**JG:** Whenever your mind wanders, simply begin again. All the rest will follow quite naturally.

**SS:** I will share what my teacher Munindra told me at the beginning: "Just put your body there." The experience of practice will always change, but it doesn't matter – our continued commitment to awareness is what's important.

*Do not look at the faults of others, or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done or not done.*

— The Dhammapada



*SOMETIMES RELAXING WITH A CUP OF TEA IS  
THE MOST BALANCING THING WE CAN DO.  
WE TREAD THE MIDDLE PATH.*

*One can practice meditation simply by being aware of one's body or of one's breathing or of all the sensations that are going on inside oneself, a practice which sounds very easy but is extremely demanding.*

— William Johnston

## How to Cultivate a Daily Meditation Practice

The emphasis in meditation practice is on the word “practice.” It is a lifelong journey. We learn to come back to the beginning – our clear, unobstructed experience – and start again. Touching in *daily* with this profound practice yields the greatest impact throughout our life.

Just as painful habits take time to unravel, helpful habits take time to instill. Here are some suggestions to help you establish a daily meditation habit. None of these ideas is a hard and fast rule. Instead, try using them as tools to support your intention.

- Plan to meditate at about the same time every day. Some people find it best to sit right after they get up, while others find it easier to practice in the afternoon or at bedtime. Experiment to find which time works best for you.
- Establish a meditation corner you can use every day. It could be in your bedroom or living room; in a basement or attic; or on a porch. Wherever you sit, pick a place where you can be relatively undisturbed during your meditation sessions. If you can't dedicate this space exclusively to meditation, make sure you can easily carry your chair, cushion, or bench to and from it each day.
- Sit as long as you can every day. An ideal session will last 45 minutes to an hour (the guided meditations in this course last about 45 minutes each). But even five minutes of sitting or walking will help you cultivate and maintain your awareness as you continue through your day.
- Determine *before* you take your seat how long you'll meditate; likewise, decide beforehand how long you'll walk. This tactic eliminates the potential for discursive decision making during your session.
- You can sit quietly, or use any of the guided meditations in this course. Until you complete the course, it's recommended that you use only the meditations you've listened to so far. This is because each lesson builds on those preceding it, making the meditations much richer when practiced in the context of the course structure.
- Some meditators like to bring inspiring objects to their meditation space: an image, some incense, or possibly a book from which you can read a short passage before meditating. The section called “Additional Resources” at the end of your workbook will give you some ideas of good books to use for this purpose.
- Keep it simple. The purpose of your practice is not to induce any particular state of mind, but to bring added clarity to whatever experience you're having in the moment. An attitude of openness and curiosity will help you to let go of judgments, expectations, and other obstacles that keep you from being present.