

On-line Course in
Meditation:
Session One

Training in Meditation



Meditation Theory

Benefits of meditative calming An undisturbed mind



Disturbed mind

What happens when our thoughts are distracted?

- Emotions focus attention (e.g. anxiety)
 - The thoughts are distracted
- Amygdala reacts to perceived threats
 - Freeze/fight/flight response (hormones)
 - Psychological stress (cortisol) is linked to diseases (diabetes, heart)
- Negativity bias: the body reacts more intensely to negative stimuli than to positive ones (survival)
 - Increased sensitivity to stress
 - Tendency toward pessimism, regret, and resentment
 - Painful experiences result in vigilance and wariness



Disturbed mind

What happens when our minds are not paying attention?

- Default mode:
 - The human brain is highly active when supposedly doing nothing—oxygen consumption is constant
 - E.g. the default circuits must be curtailed in order to pay attention
- Wandering thoughts tend to focus on the self
 - Rumination reinforces the sense of self
 - It also is filled with regret and anxiety
- A wandering mind is an unhappy mind



Gather the scattered mind

- Eliminate distractions
- Calm the passions



Lay the foundations for correcting your thinking and ridding yourself of illusions

- Root out habit energies, ignorance



Silence, serenity, quiescence, stillness, nirvana

▶ Calming the mind—what it will do



According to Tsongkhapa (1357–1419)

More detailed outcomes of meditative calming

Insight

Ultimate reality cannot be known unless the mind is established in quiescence

To gain insight is the chief purpose of cultivating quiescence

Quiescence and insight together prepare the mind for liberation

Habituation

Meditation can become a habit—effortless, natural samādhi

No more effort and striving in meditation

The natural balance of the mind can maintain itself without interruption

Afflictions are reduced and controlled

Three Poisons

1. Desire, attachment, greed, lust
2. Hatred, aversion, malice
3. Ignorance, delusion

Six Afflictions

1. Sensuality
2. Anger
3. Pride
4. Ignorance
5. Skeptical doubt
6. Wrong views

Real changes occur

Vital energy (*qi*)

- Just prior to quiescence there is a breakthrough
- A radical shift in one's nervous system

Pliancy

- Physical: buoyancy and lightness to one's actions
- Mental: ability to direct attention without resistance



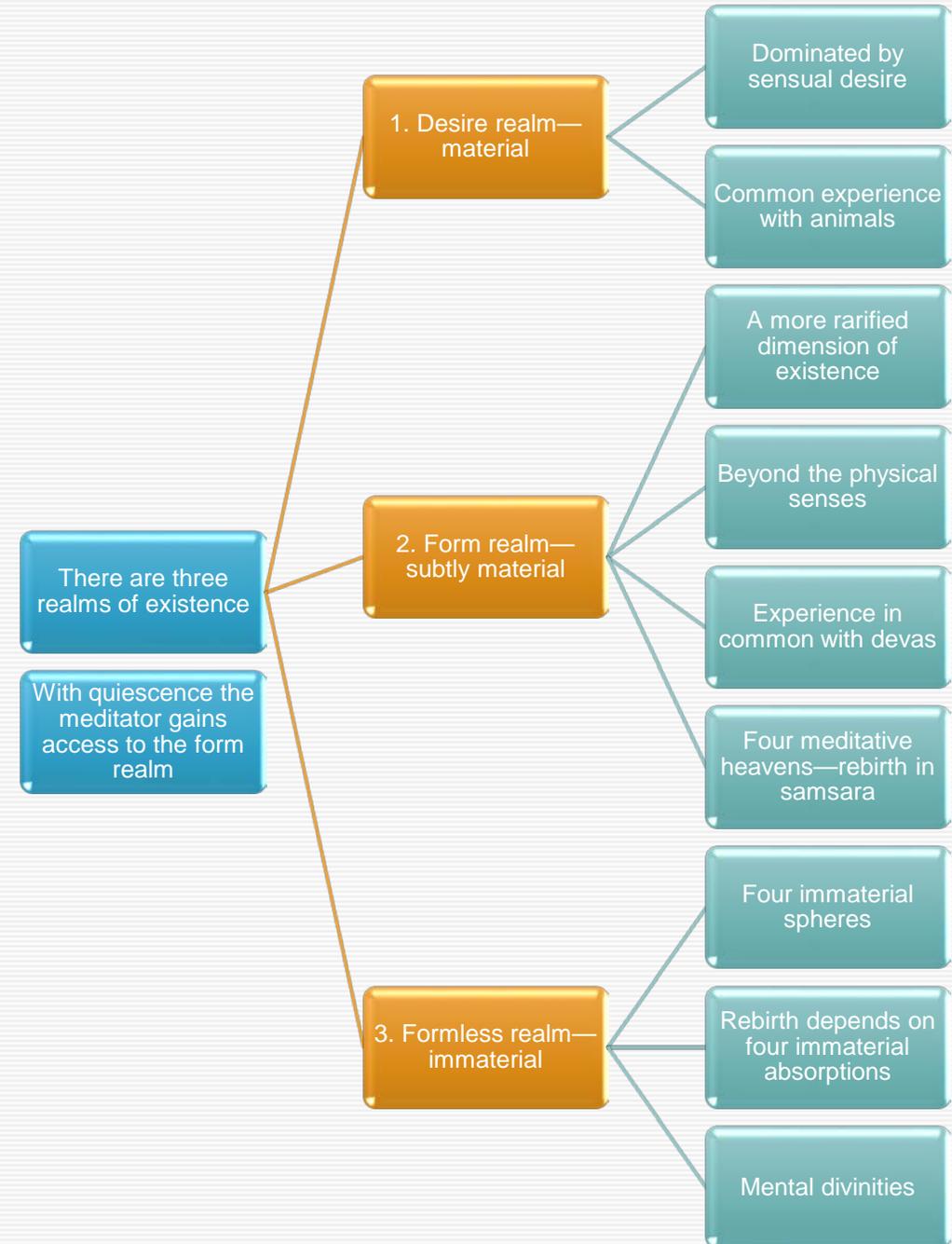
Joy

*If quiescence is accomplished,
pleasure fills the mind and joy
saturates the body,
so here and now you dwell in
joy.*

Powers

- Quiescence leads to extrasensory perception and paranormal abilities
 - e.g. the five clairvoyances
- Powers are to be exercised for your needs and, principally, the needs of others

Form realm— a higher dimension of reality



Methods to calm the mind

Qigong

Mindfulness of thoughts

Left-Right Lotus

Counting the breath

Mantra



Meditation Practice

▶ Sitting Meditation: Mindfulness of Thoughts

Basic meditation skills

Posture

Relaxation

Bodily
awareness

Alertness

Posture for seated meditation in a chair

- Sit toward the front of the chair so that your back is free of the back of the chair. The shins should be perpendicular and the feet flat on the floor.
- Make sure the height of your hips is slightly above the knees—a slight tip in the pelvis is useful in keeping the back restfully erect.
- Gently raise the crown of the head to elongate the neck and simultaneously pull the chin in toward the neck.
- The hands can be placed face-down on the backs of the knees. Or, you can adopt the “cosmic mudra” with the hands cupped in the lap. To do this place the right hand face-up against the lower belly with the back of the hand resting on the legs, Place the left hand face-up on top of the right with the fingers overlapping. Allow the tips of the thumbs to barely touch.
- Place the tip of the tongue on the ridge of the palette behind the upper teeth. Relax the jaw and allow the teeth to hang apart slightly.
- The eyes can be closed or half-open. If open, allow them to rest at a downward thirty-degree angle with a gentle, soft gaze.
- Relax deeply and “sit like a mountain.”

Eyes open or shut?

Open

- Can help in avoiding drowsiness and fantasizing
 - Wandering thoughts, day-dreaming and distractions will still arise—it is not the eyes but the mind that matters
- Soft gaze, half open. Do not focus—this means attaching to thoughts
- Become engrossed in your method and remain detached from all phenomena

Shut

- Can help exclude distractions in the environment
 - Wandering thoughts, day-dreaming and distractions will still arise—it is not the eyes but the mind that matters
- Do not disregard internal phenomena (e.g. light) but remain detached
- Become engrossed in your method and remain detached from all phenomena

Sitting meditation: mindfulness of thoughts

- Observe each thought as it arises
 - Without judgement
 - Without analysis
 - Without reacting to the thought
 - Pay attention to what the thought does to the body—e.g. tightening or discomfort
- Do not participate in the thoughts—don't “think” the thoughts
 - Do not follow the story or develop the argument. Do not recite the words. Do not get pulled into an emotion and allow it to magnify.
 - It may help to give each thought a name e.g. “remembering,” “angry,” “sad”
- Permit the thought to leave without your holding onto it—let go of it



Concepts

Mind training

Moral discipline

Compassion and the bodhisattva

To train the mind

*All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind,
Made by mind.*

*Speak or act with a corrupted mind,
And suffering follows
As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.*

*All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind,
Made by mind.*

*Speak or act with a peaceful mind,
And happiness follows
Like a never-departing shadow.*

The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations. Translated
by Gil Fronsdal. Shambhala: 2006

Five precepts

1. Abstain from the destruction of life.
2. Abstain from taking what is not given.
3. Abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. Abstain from false speech.
5. Abstain from wines, liquor and intoxicants which are a basis for negligence.

▶ Bodhi

Bodhi = enlightenment, awakening

Buddha = awakened one

Bodhicitta = aspiration to enlightenment, the awakening mind

Bodhisattva = a being intent on achieving enlightenment for the sake of others

Bodhicitta: the awakening mind

*For as long as space endures and
for as long as the world lasts, may
I live dispelling the miseries of the
world.*

Shantideva.
Bodhicaryavatara.

- The bodhisattva desires enlightenment but for altruistic reasons—to eliminate the sufferings of others
- Cease to consider yourself as more important
- Consider all sentient beings to be extremely important
- Be willing to devote yourself to helping others

Compassion

I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings just as I am a sentient being.

If the suffering of many disappears because of the suffering of one, then a compassionate person should induce that suffering for his own sake and for the sake of others.

All those who are unhappy in this world are so as a result of their desire for their own happiness. All those who are happy in the world are so as a result of their desire for the happiness of others.

Chapter 8: The Perfection of Meditation. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life: Bodhicaryavatara* by Shantideva. Translated by Vesna A. Wallace and B. Alan Wallace. Snow Lion: 1997.

Why compassion is important

The awakening of the mind toward enlightenment starts with compassion and is dependent on compassion at every stage.

Sutra of Perfection Enlightenment

Compassion builds bodhicitta

Bodhicitta leads to the practice of the six perfections

Practice of the perfections leads to enlightenment

Self-compassion



Course in self-compassion

- When people become more compassionate toward themselves they are more compassionate toward others
- Refer to the *Supplement to Session One: Short Course in Compassion Training*
 - Self-guided mini-course

Bodhisattva commitments

I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.

I vow to cut off endless vexations.

I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma.

I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.

Six virtues of a bodhisattva

1. Giving
2. Moral discipline
3. Patience, forbearance, endurance
4. Vigour, effort
5. Meditation
6. Discernment, wisdom, insight



Manjushri, bodhisattva of wisdom

▶ The two wings of meditation

1. Calming the Mind

- **Calm abiding, quiescence**
- **Stilling the mind**
- **Reducing afflictions**
- **Tranquility, peace, serenity (nirvana)**

2. Discernment

- **Insight, wisdom**
- **Investigating the mind**
- **Direct understanding of reality**
- **Enlightenment, realization (bodhi)**

To study the self

To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

Dogen. *Genjo Koan*.

Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen. Translated by K. Tanahashi. New York: North Point Press, 1985.