

# Some Materials Recommended for Mindfulness Education

*Compiled for the Educating for Gross National Happiness  
Principals' Workshops, Paro College of Education,  
January-February, 2010*

## Contents

- Introductory Note
- Part One: Instruction on Mindfulness Meditation
- Part Two: Guided Instruction on Shamatha Meditation
- Part Three: Mindfulness Practices for Primary Level Students

## Introductory Note

It has been scientifically proven that regular practice of meditation increases the ability to concentrate and enhances the well-being of the practitioner.

To give just one example, the following appeared in a BBC article of March 2008: *"In Madison, Wisconsin, (USA), Dr Richard Davidson has been carrying out studies on Buddhist monks for several years. His personal belief is that "by meditating, you can become happier, you can concentrate more effectively and you can change your brain in ways that support that." In one study he observed the brains of a group of office workers before and after they undertook a course of meditation combined with stress reduction techniques. At the end of the course the participants' brains seemed to have altered in the way they functioned. They showed greater activity in the left-hand side — a characteristic which Davidson has previously linked to happiness and enthusiasm. This idea that meditation could improve the wellbeing of everyone, even those not struggling with mental illness, is something that is exciting researchers."*

It is exciting that the Kingdom of Bhutan will be the first country in the world to introduce meditation as part of the daily school curriculum. Through this initiative, the education system of the Kingdom is not only providing future generations with an efficient means to discover inner peace and well-being, but also enhancing the concentration ability of students.

In order for the practice of mindfulness to become an integral part of the national system of education and an effective way of developing students' concentration ability, it is advised to have short 'bringing the mind back' sessions throughout the day — not only at the opening and closing of school. For example, if students are becoming restless or lacking in focus in a math class, the teacher could instruct the students to relax their bodies, take three mindful breaths, and bring their minds back to the present moment. This will help the students regain their vigour and focus, and so enhance their ability to study. However, it is important that this method is not used as a form of punishment or threat. If this happens, students will instinctively oppose the practices, and the potential benefits of meditation will be lost.

There are many methods of meditation, and this short manual is by no means conclusive. However, I hope that it will at least serve as a reference and reminder of the practices undertaken together in Paro in January-February, 2010. I sincerely wish everyone well in their endeavours to teach mindfulness practices to the youth of Bhutan. Your success will be the success of the Kingdom.

Yours,

Shenphen Zangpo, Thimphu, Bhutan

PS. If you have any questions regarding mindfulness practices, please write to me at: [shenphenzangpo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:shenphenzangpo@yahoo.co.uk)

# Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation:

Compiled for School Principals in the Kingdom of Bhutan, January  
- February 2010

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## I. The View of Mindfulness

“Understanding and directing the mind to positive ends is the purpose of our life.”  
*His Majesty, the 4<sup>th</sup> Druk Gyelpo—*

“Happiness can be achieved not only through material well-being resulting in physical comfort, but also through inner peace and contentment.”  
*Sogyal Rinpoche*

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In the Kingdom of Bhutan’s “Educating for Gross National Happiness” initiative, one of the channels for imparting Values Education proposed by Dasho Karma Ura is mindfulness meditation. He speaks of the role of meditation in Bhutanese traditional culture, and suggests that “through regular meditation practice, we can make students aware of their inner world of thoughts and feelings.”<sup>1</sup> In this matter, Dasho Karma Ura is in agreement with the most current trends in American education, which have found tremendous benefit in introducing mindfulness into public education.

It is significant that the rich Bhutanese tradition of mindfulness meditation is now one of the most important trends in western education — cultivating inner knowing as a component part of the learning process. In the west, the power of mindfulness has nothing to do with religious practice. It is the practice of paying attention to the full range of what is occurring in our lives, rather than just our thoughts, plans, or memories. It allows us to become aware of how others feel, rather than being absorbed only in our own preoccupations. It directs attention to the beauty of the world around us, rather than to our personal worries or fears. It delivers a rich and nuanced world of interdependence, rather than a world that revolves around ourselves.

In addition to improving health and wellbeing, mindfulness meditation has been shown to aid student academic performance, teacher and principal effectiveness, and community awareness in the educational process.<sup>2</sup>

In our increasingly complex and overwhelming world of information stimulus, mindfulness meditation has become even more important. Television, the internet, and text-messages demand our immediate attention and acquiescence, and it is difficult for us to remember to connect with our own inner wisdom and discrimination. These media sources tell us to “buy!” “agree!” “react!” and “respond!” without a moment of reflection and inner balance. If this is true for us as adults, it is especially true for our children and young people. A core aim of our Educating for GNH initiative is to affirm that true happiness does not depend on these stimuli. True happiness is found in our own experience in the present moment, without the need for consumption, entertainment, or fashion. Mindfulness meditation introduces us to the happiness inherent in our own

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1 Karma Ura, *A Proposal for GNH Value Education in Schools* (Thimphu: Gross National Happiness Commission, 2009), 55-56.

2 Tobin Hart, “Interiority and Education: The Neuro-Phenomenology of Contemplation,” *Meditation in the Classroom*, Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

minds.

Of course, mindfulness meditation is only one aspect of Educating for GNH—but it is a foundation that powerfully and sustainably supports the other aspects. Mindfulness meditation has developed in Bhutan’s rich cultural and spiritual traditions. It requires no fancy equipment, textbooks, or technology. It can be practised for a few minutes by young children, or for longer by older children and adults. But an effective mindfulness meditation initiative must rely upon principals and teachers really knowing it themselves from the inside out, and practising it daily both during formal sessions and in their lives. Students will then be receiving their own instructions from experienced practitioners — which is necessary for mindfulness meditation to be introduced, practised and valued.

Think of how mindfulness training may help you in your job. Perhaps you are having difficulty with a teacher or a student — you don’t understand this person, and have no idea how to work with him or her. When we are stuck this way, it is often because we have an opinion that has trapped us into a fixed idea of the person, of ourselves, or of the situation. We are creatures of habit, and we don’t know how to break out of this habit. Through mindfulness meditation, the mind is allowed to settle, the body is allowed to relax, and our natural wakefulness, curiosity, and compassion are allowed to shine through. We can then take a fresh look. We may see the teacher or student struggling, and have a greater understanding of their pain. We may see our own stubbornness or fear of failure. Mindfulness allows us to let go of our old habits of thinking, and to listen and explore the difficult situation with a fresh mind. This may allow the situation to open up and for something new to occur.

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“Mindfulness is mirror-thought. It reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases. Mindfulness is non-judgemental observation. It is that ability of the mind to observe without criticism. With this ability, one sees things without condemnation or judgement.” *Ven. Henapola Gunaratana*<sup>3</sup>

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“Do not lose yourself in the past. Do not lose yourself in the future. Do not get caught in your anger, worries, or fears. Come back to the present moment, and touch life deeply. That is mindfulness.”

*Thich Nhat Hanh*<sup>4</sup>

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Recommended for further reading:

Pema Chodron, *The Wisdom of No Escape* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1991).

Matthieu Ricard, *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life’s Most Important Skill* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007).

Chogyam Trungpa, *Shambhala: Sacred Path of the Warrior* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987).

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3 *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002), 139.

4 *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 81-83.

## II. The Practice of Mindfulness: Basic Instructions, from Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche<sup>5</sup>

By taking an upright sitting posture, we enable the body to relax and the mind to be awake. You can use different postures for meditation, but under ordinary circumstances, sitting on either a cushion or a chair is best. If you're unable to sit, it is possible to do this technique while walking or standing or even lying down. However, the most efficient posture for this practice is sitting.

When you sit down, take a balanced, grounded posture to allow the energy in the centre of your body to move freely. If you're on a cushion, sit with your legs loosely crossed. If you're in a chair, keep your legs uncrossed and your feet flat on the floor. Imagine that a string attached to the top of your head is pulling you upright. Let your organs, muscles, and bones settle around your erect spine, like a coat falling around a hanger. Your vertebrae should feel as though they are stacked like gold coins, allowing for the natural curvature of the spine. Slouching impairs the breathing, which directly affects the mind. If you slump, you'll be struggling with discomfort in your body at the same time that you're trying to train your mind. In reality, you do what to be doing opposite: i.e. synchronizing your body and mind.

After you work with getting your spine straight, place your hands on your thighs. They shouldn't rest so far forward that it begins to pull your shoulders down, nor so far back that the shoulders contract and pinch the spine. The fingers are close and relaxed—not spread out in a grip, as if you can't let yourself go.

Tuck in your chin and relax your jaw. The tongue is also relaxed, the tip resting against your upper teeth. Your mouth is ever so slightly open. Your gaze is downward with the eyelids half shut. If the gaze takes in too much, it will be hard to abide peacefully. On the other hand, closing the eyes completely might encourage you to fall asleep or to withdraw your mind from the technique. If your mind feels removed and insular, intense and dark, try raising the gaze and allowing more space into your practice. The eyes aren't looking, by the way; the eyes just see. It is the same with sound—we aren't listening, but we do hear. In other words, we're not focusing with our senses.

The first step of the meditation technique is placement: placing our mind on the object of meditation. One of the Tibetan words for meditation is *gom*, which means "to become familiar with." In meditation we are introduced to an object and become familiar with it. We could use any object—a pebble, a flame, or the body. Our usual object of meditation—and the mind is always meditating on something—is "me."

In peaceful abiding, the object is the simple act of breathing. The breath represents being alive in the immediacy of the moment. Placing the mind on the breath and returning to it again and again is the essence of shamatha. Through resting the mind on the breath we stay present, awake, and mindful. Placement means staying with the feeling of the breathing. The flow of the breath soothes the mind and allows for steadiness and relaxation. It also reduces discursiveness.

This is ordinary breath; nothing is exaggerated. We just breathe. If you're having a hard time staying with the breath—spacing out or losing track between breathing out and breathing in—counting the in- and out-cycles of the breath can be a helpful remedy to bring yourself back to focus. We breathe in, and then out—one. In and then out—two. If you use this method, count seven or twenty-one breaths and then start over. If you become distracted and lose count, start over again at one. Once you are more focused, you can drop the counting.

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5 Excerpted from *Turning the Mind Into an Ally* (New York: Riverhead, 2003), 38-47.

Becoming familiar with the subtle rhythms of the breath is part of the natural development of peaceful abiding. We're placing the mind on the whole breath, and it takes time to feel what that is. We might discover that the breath itself is not as solid as our concept of the breath. We might see that the word *breath* describes something that is not so much one entity as a series of events. Air enters through the nostrils, the abdomen expands, and the breath rests there for a moment. Then the diaphragm contracts and the breath leaves the lungs, gently exits the nostrils, and dissolves into space.

Using the breath as our object of meditation is very good because the air moving in and out allows us to have some kind of steadiness in contrast with our discursiveness. It also allows us to relax. That is the virtue of the breathing. Through placing our mind on this process, we relax our whole being. Tensions begin to dissolve. The breathing soothes the mind and allows it to rest. As our thoughts slow down and we settle into ourselves, the division between mind and body lessens. We start to feel our heart beating. We see the flow of our blood. We can almost feel our bones. We become a whole being, with a synchronized body and mind.

But that's not all that's happening. As we sit and place our mind on the breath, the natural playfulness of the mind continually arises. The movement of thoughts and emotions distracts us. We tend to get lost in the flood. We're thinking about how interesting it is that we're finally meditating, and wonder what our friends will think. We're thinking about where we parked the car. We're thinking about how good a cookie would taste right now. We're thinking that we're sleepy and could use a cup of coffee. These thoughts are little stories we're telling ourselves. Most of them concern the past and future, not the present.

We may become swept away for a while and forget that the breath—not the thoughts and emotions—is the object of our meditation. The technique at this point is that when we notice that we're thinking, we acknowledge it. We can label it if we wish—"Thinking." Whether we label it or not, when we notice it, we bring our minds back to the breath. In acknowledging thoughts, we're recognizing the movement of the mind, the wildness of the bewildered mind. We're training in awareness of who we are as human beings. We're training in being undistracted and focused. We're training in being fully present for our lives.

For example, we're holding a sturdy and relaxed posture and have placed our mind on the breath. We relax into the breathing and are in the midst of peacefully resting our mind when a thought pops up: "I hope I don't have to cook again tonight. Why doesn't anyone else cook dinner? I'm the only one in the house who's really working any more. Who do they think I am, Superman?" Our peaceful abiding has been flooded by a current of thinking that is about to become an emotional torrent. At some point, we see this. "Oh! I'm thinking." Acknowledging it, we allow the thought to dissipate, and we return to the breath. We realize that now we are practicing meditation, so it is not the time to think about those things but to simply pay attention to our breathing. We refocus our attention and say to ourselves, "Now I am placing my mind on the breath."

Beginning to meditate is like learning how to ride a horse: we have to learn balance. We're learning to balance working with the breath, sitting up straight, and recognizing, acknowledging, and releasing thoughts. We feel like we should be able to do this right away, but meditation is relatively subtle, and getting it all coordinated takes some time. As we're learning to peacefully abide, we'll be falling down, getting up, falling down, getting up. It's important to be gentle and allow a bit of a grace period. We'll tend to hold our mind too tight. We're sitting there, a thought arises, and we think, "Oh! Thoughts are bad." We become irritated trying to deal with the thought, so we overreact and squash it. Yet at this stage a certain amount of thinking is inevitable.

Eventually we begin to realize that the breath itself is soothing. We enjoy the breath. It's not some sort of nasty reminder to work harder. We're simply breathing in and out. It's

as if we're discovering for the first time that we are breathing human beings.

The instruction is really pretty simple: when you lose your mind, come back. When the horse runs away with you, bring it back to the trail. Be playful in this. Experiment with tuning in to your sense perceptions, for example, to bring the horse under control, or practice straightening your posture when you see that your mind has gone wild. Practice meeting the eyes of the person you're with and really listening to what they're saying instead of prefabricating your response as they speak. Use the mindfulness and awareness that you developed on the cushion to stay in the saddle of your life. Then see if you can appreciate these fruits of practice without expectation or attachment.

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Overview of mindfulness meditation method:

1. Take good posture with straight spine, arms and shoulders relaxed, hands resting on the thighs. The chin is slightly tucked and the face and jaw are natural and relaxed. While the head is straight, the gaze is lowered, the eyelids half shut. If you are sitting on a cushion, your ankles are loosely crossed; if you are sitting on a chair, your feet are flat on the floor.

2. Place the attention on breathing, with a focus either on the nostrils, the abdomen, or on the sensation of the breath dissolving out into the space of the room. The breath should be natural, not controlled in any way. To focus attention, the breath—in and out—can be counted. When the practice becomes stable, counting can drop away.

3. Whenever thoughts arise and drag us away from attention to breathing, just gently notice this, let the thoughts go, and return to the breath. To support this noticing, it may be helpful to note in one's mind, "thinking." It is important that this be done gently, without judgment or harshness, just noticing and returning to mindfulness of breathing.

4. Periodically check posture and body sensation. If there is pain or discomfort, a subtle adjustment should help dispel it, and then simply return to attention to breathing.

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Recommended for further reading:

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002).

Sakyong Mipham, *Turning the Mind Into An Ally* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003).

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

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### III. Mindfulness in Everyday Life

Before you teach mindfulness in your schools and classrooms, it is important to really know mindfulness in personal experience—and so it is recommended that principals and teachers in the Kingdom of Bhutan practice mindfulness meditation daily for some time. Once that is established, more materials will be available for age-appropriate mindfulness meditation instruction for school children. The goal is to establish short sessions of mindfulness each day in the school schedule, so this requires preparatory practice of short sessions of mindfulness for principals and teachers.

The most effective way to develop mindfulness is to practice consistently, ten to twenty minutes of mindfulness meditation each day. It is better to practice a little bit every day rather than to do a few long sessions of an hour or more and then do nothing for days or weeks. When we cultivate familiarity with the practice on a daily practice, the mind can settle more easily. Adapt your practice to your life, and if you have time for only five minutes, that is much better than skipping practice altogether. Some people find it useful to practice mindfulness meditation for a few minutes after they wake up in the morning and then for a few minutes before going to sleep at night — as the first and last things they do each day.

When you have developed some regularity in your practice, try a few mindfulness exercises in your ordinary life activities. Here are ways to tune into mindfulness while you engage in your lives and your jobs. They are inspired by the mindfulness exercises given by the Vietnamese Zen master, Thich Nhat Hanh, who teaches them to children, teens, and adults.

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#### *Mindfulness in walking:*

When we are walking around our school buildings or outside in the gardens and environment, we can take a moment to let go of thoughts, memories, or plans, and just walk. We can let go of all other preoccupations, and place our full awareness on the soles of our feet as we slowly walk. We can feel the movement of walking in the present moment, the pressure of our foot against the floor or earth, the subtle shifting from heel to sole to toe as we take a step. We can feel the lifting of the opposite foot, the swing of the leg forward, the placing of the heel, sole, and toe as it steps onto the ground. We continue, slowly, mindfully, enjoying the literal simplicity of the gentle and rhythmic movement of our legs and feet in walking.

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#### *Mindfulness in eating:*

As we sit down to our next meal, even if it is in a meeting with our colleagues or teachers, we can take a moment to tune into the flavour, temperature, and texture of our food. It might be a good time to slow down and silently savour at least the first bite. As we scoop up a bite of flavourful rice and curry or of chilli-cheese, we can close our eyes and take the bite into our mouths slowly, experiencing the spread of flavour across our tongue and palate. How does this bite actually taste? How would we describe our actual experience? Sweet, salty, hot, bitter, sharp, smooth? Where does the taste begin, where does it travel, where does it end? How does the texture feel in our mouths? Crunchy, chewy, soft, crumbly, stringy? At the moment we are tasting our food, we are not tied up in preoccupations or worries, we are actually present with our experience of eating, perhaps for the first time since childhood.

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Preview of age-appropriate mindfulness trainings: Young children learn mindfulness best when it is focused on hearing sounds, seeing sights, or through the sensation of touch. Older children do well with mindfulness of breathing, in addition to other sense perceptions. We will be suggesting mindfulness trainings for younger school-aged children through high school teenagers in future materials. We wish you the very best in introducing these simple, yet profound, practices into your own lives and thence into the schools of the Kingdom of Bhutan. What you are doing here will be of great benefit to your students, your country, and the world.

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Recommended for further reading:

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990).

John Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness* (New York: Hyperion, 2005).

## A Guided Introduction to Shamatha Meditation

*By Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche (Vajradhara Gonpa, Kyogle, NSW, Australia, 1999)*

We will talk a little about shamatha meditation and I thought it might be good to try and actually do the meditation as we go along. So I will talk for a while and then you meditate a little, then I talk some more and you meditate a bit more. If you do that, then you know what I'm talking about, the instructions will make more sense. Otherwise perhaps you may not be able to connect the instructions and the meditation.

The actual technique is very simple. In general, all the great meditators of the past advised us that we sit up straight when we meditate. When we sit up straight there is a sense of alertness, a sense of importance, it produces the right atmosphere.

In this particular instruction, I'm going to suggest we don't use an external object. Sometimes we hear shamatha instruction using an external object such as a flower, but here we will use the standard Theravada tradition of using our breath as the object. So we concentrate on our breathing, we simply follow our breath in and out. That's it. Our mind is focused on the breathing, our posture is straight, our eyes are open. Let's just do that for a while and then we will talk a little bit more. That's the essential technique, basically doing nothing.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

We simply sit straight and we watch our breathing. We are not concerned with our distractions, all these thoughts that occupy our mind. We just sit. Alone. Just by ourselves. No reference at all... Us, the breathing and the concentration, that's all we have.

So we sit, we concentrate on the breathing, nothing else. Then some thoughts may come. When these thoughts come, what do we do? We don't do anything. There's only one method here — one single method to apply to every occasion. That method is concentrating on the breathing, that's all.

Any number of distractions may occur, things that you have talked about yesterday, movies that you have watched last week, a conversation you just had, things you need to do tomorrow, a sudden panic — did I switch off the gas this morning in the kitchen? Stuff like that, all of this will come, and when these things come, go back to the breathing. This is the slogan of the shamatha instruction. Just come back. Every time we notice we got distracted, we remember the instructions and we come back. We come back to the breath. Let's do this for a while.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

If we have ambitions, we have fixations toward whatever we are aiming for — even if our aim is enlightenment. Then there is no meditation because we are thinking about it, we are craving for it, we are fantasizing about it, imagining things. That is not meditation.

This is why a very, very important characteristic of shamatha meditation is to let go of any goal and simply sit for the sake of sitting. Here we breathe in and out and we just watch that. Nothing else. It doesn't matter if we get enlightenment or not, or if our friends gets enlightened faster than us. Who cares? We are just breathing. We just sit straight and watch the breath in and out. Nothing else.

We let go of obsessions toward aims and ambitions. This is a very important aspect. This includes even the perfection of the shamatha meditation, trying to do a perfect

shamatha meditation. Even that we should get rid of. Just sit.

The beautiful thing about having less obsessions and ambitions and just sitting straight and watching the breathing is that nothing will disturb us. Things only disturb us because we have an aim. When we have an aim we become kind of obsessed. Say our aim is to go somewhere, but somebody parked right in front of us, blocking our car. If something gets in the way of our aim, it becomes a terrible thing. If we don't have that aim it doesn't matter — noise, itchy feelings here and there, it doesn't matter.

This is important because meditators often have a strong ambition to achieve something and when they get distracted they go through all kinds of hell, they lose their confidence, they get frustrated, they condemn themselves, they condemn the technique. This is why at least during the few moments of meditation, it doesn't matter whether we are getting enlightenment or not, it doesn't matter whether the hot water is boiling in the kettle or not, it doesn't matter if the telephone is ringing and it doesn't matter whether it's one of our friends or not — just for a few moments things don't matter, it's only for a few moments.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

Shamatha meditation doesn't have to be for the sake of attaining enlightenment. If you are not interested in enlightenment or nirvana, you can practise shamatha to be natural — to not be swayed so much by circumstances. Most of the time we are not under the control of ourselves. Our mind is always attracted or distracted with something — our enemies, our lovers, our friends, just everything, hope, fear, jealousy, pride, attachment, aggression, all of this. So, in other words, all these objects, these phenomena, the world controls our mind, we have no control over it. Maybe we can control it a little bit for a split second, but if we are in an extreme emotional state we'll lose it.

Now as I was saying earlier, letting go of our ambition is a bit like the renunciation that Buddhists talk about. If you read the Buddha's life, the Buddha renounced his palace, his queen, his son, his parents, and went out of the palace in search for enlightenment. Strictly from the shamatha point of view, you can say that Buddha was trying to diminish his ambition, or at least trying to see where he was aiming, what he was trying to achieve. He was trying to see also the futile aspect of whatever he was trying to achieve. So he was managing to let go, to achieve the power of letting go. To summarize, the power of letting go is quite important if you want to become a shamatha practitioner. We do shamatha meditation so we can achieve this power to let go or understand the downfall of our obsession, the downfall of our fixation.

In fact, as we will find out, this technique is actually giving ourselves some time or the opportunity to undo the knots that we have. This is why some great meditators say that actually a meditation like shamatha is one rare occasion where we are actually not doing anything.

Usually we are always doing something, we are always thinking of something, we are always occupied. As we occupy ourselves so much, we get lost in these millions of obsessions or fixations. Here when we meditate, by not doing anything, all these fixations will be revealed. Maybe for beginners it might be a little frightening sometimes but slowly you will gain some kind of inner confidence to face these. And you will notice that automatically these fixations will lessen — without doing anything. The classical meditation instruction texts would say it's like a snake uncoiling itself, our obsessions will undo themselves. You will gain that kind of skill.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

There is a difficult point here, thoughts are coming and I'm telling you to go back to the breathing, to concentrate on the breathing. You automatically interpret that as,

"Oh, this means Rinpoche is saying that we should stop the thoughts and go back to concentrating on our breathing." This is not what I meant. I'm not saying that you should stop thinking about these thoughts. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is to concentrate on the breathing. That's two different things. When thoughts come, don't stop them, don't increase them, don't encourage them, don't discourage them, nothing. Your job is to concentrate on the breathing. That's it.

It is important we understand the difference. If I were to say, stop these thoughts and then go back to the breathing — that's one thing — but I'm not saying that. When thoughts are coming, what do you do? Go back to the breathing. That's your job. Stopping the thoughts is not your job. It's not part of this teaching. Thoughts are going to come — all you do is just concentrate on the breathing. That's it.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

Lord Maitreya has some really good advice for shamatha practice. When we are doing shamatha it is important that we remember the antidote. When the mind gets distracted we have to remember the antidote. The antidote here is very simply to go back to the breathing and concentrating on that. That mindfulness has to be there every time we get distracted. We call it applying the antidote. But sometimes we apply the antidote too much. That can cause both dullness and agitation. You got that? If you worry too much, in other words if you keep on applying the antidote — antidote, antidote, antidote — it's almost like applying the antidote when there is no poison and in fact, that becomes a problem. That becomes one cause of dullness or agitation.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

Always do short shamatha sessions, especially those who are beginners — short but many times. Say if you are going to meditate for fifteen minutes, start fresh at least thirty times. Have a short break in between. Slowly we can do longer sessions: — maybe in fifteen minutes, we start fresh fifteen times and have a break in between. And when you have a break, take a real break — walk, stand up, do something else. Don't just linger there half-meditating, half-not meditating. Don't do that. After a while, you can start fresh seven times within these fifteen minutes. Keeping it short is important because if you do too much at the beginning you will get fed up with the technique. We are human beings, we don't like to get bored, we always like to change — changing what we eat, changing our clothes. We like change.

Likewise, the spiritual path is a long process; we need to have a lot of patience. We need to begin to like the path, so keep the meditation short and precise and many times. That way we develop strong habits. Later on it becomes part of us, easy to perform. Like drinking alcohol, when we first start drinking alcohol, we drink a little. We don't drink two or three bottles at one time otherwise we'd get so sick that we'd never touch alcohol again. Do only a short time but many times in many, many different parts. That way you will get habituated and this is necessary. Shamatha should become part of your life and to do that you have to get used to it. To get used to this, do it a little bit, a short time, but many times.

And during the off-sessions also, if it's possible, remember you are breathing. We always forget that we are breathing.

We should also not limit our meditation schedule. You should not limit it to the morning or only in the evening. You should do it any time, all the time. Practise time is always now — it's never in the future. Don't ever leave your shamatha as if you are going to do it next year or next month or next week-end. You do it now. Anyway, it's just about forty-five seconds, especially for the beginners. Easy, you can do this anywhere. It only requires this, to sit straight. And short sessions are quite good. Before our mind gets distracted, we ourselves decided to stop the meditation and that's good — and then we start again. Again, before the distractions are about to

come we stop. We will become comfortable with the technique and there's a sense of victory over the distractions: — Before the distractions come we already are there. So do short sessions.

Generally, the spiritual path practice should be like that, I think. You shouldn't really make a plan that 'This is my practise time' and then completely lose awareness in the off-time. Of course, it helps a great deal that you should set aside a certain time to practise, like at a certain hour in the morning or in the evening. But on top of that one should do shamatha at times whenever it's possible, for just a minute. That's not so difficult. And then gradually we increase.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

As we meditate, we simply sit straight and watch the breath. So what does that do? It creates a space. In fact, the technique itself is just a trick. The main point is to recognize all these bombarding, constant thoughts and distractions that are coming toward us.

We still get angry but we know we are angry so to speak. When we are angry and we know we are angry, that kind of anger has so much humour. We can actually drive this anger toward certain directions — we have more control. The frustrating thing about our life is that there is no control with these emotions. That's why there's no fun. The whole purpose of Buddhism is to have fun, isn't it? And in order to have this you have to have control. If someone else has control over you, that's it, there's no fun.

(SHORT MEDITATION SESSION)

Shamatha involves a lot of discipline. Especially for the beginners, the discipline is quite necessary. Because of this, lamas often advise us to sometimes do meditation together, in a group. Of course we should practise individually, definitely, but group practice can also help us. Because of course we have so much pride, we have ego, and that pride and ego always tell us to have a competitive mind. So when we are doing meditation in a group, we don't want to fall asleep, we don't want to appear to be a bad meditator. We don't really have that courage to say, 'Oh, well, it doesn't matter even if I'm the worst one'. We want to be the best, we want to be fastest. We have that competitive mind. So since we have this competitiveness anyway, we might as well use it as a tool on the path. So when we can, from time to time doing group meditation can be really good.

It is like going to a gym, I think. If you buy the machines at your home you do three to four days and then you don't use them any more. The tools end up in the garage, isn't it? But if you go to a gym, you see the other beautiful bodies and other people who are diligently doing it and it gives you inspiration. What a wrong motivation! [Rinpoche laughs] But at least it will lead you somewhere. Confusion is accepted as a path so it's okay.

Keep it simple, don't make it complicated, shamatha is simple. Concentrate on the breathing, sit straight, that's all you do. When we concentrate on the breathing, the breathing happens in the present, at this moment, not the past, not the future.... This is why I think using breathing is good. Our breathing happens moment by moment — when we breathe out, that's gone, finished, that will never come back. Then we breathe again.

If you can, you should perhaps also do a weekend shamatha retreat. In fact, that's good. Every day, you do a few minutes and on top of that, do it spontaneously, at different places, not just in front of the shrine but everywhere. Then, when you have time, once a month or once a year, you should do an intensive shamatha retreat. You could take a silent vow and then just do the sitting. In fact, there is a tradition in Tibet

called nyinthun or dathun — nyinthun means a day retreat, a day practice. You can take a silent vow, whatever, and then do shamatha that whole day. Maybe break for lunch. You can get used to it. Then you can do dathun, a month long shamatha retreat, so you'll have three sessions of shamatha, just shamatha. That has some effect.

As I said earlier, shamatha can be done to simply gain some control over our mind. That is already very good. But if you happen to be a Buddhist mahayana practitioner, you should begin your shamatha meditation with taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta and end with the dedication of merit. There's so much merit by doing shamatha meditation, especially if you start with refuge and bodhicitta. In fact, you are saying that: "I will sit here and watch my breathing so that I will not be distracted. If I don't get distracted that means I will become powerful. If I become powerful that means I can help a lot of sentient beings." That's what we are doing. There's so much merit just sitting there. Gaining merit does not always involve a lot of action. Here, just sitting and watching the present-ness, the breath, accumulates a lot of merit.

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For further teachings on shamatha by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, please visit: <http://www.siddharthasintent.org/gentle/GV15.htm>

## Meditation Posture

There are many slight variations on the shamatha posture, but a common format is the 'Seven Points of Vairochana'. (*Vairochana* means "what illuminates" or "what makes clear").

- Keep the spine straight. (Pulling up the hair at the crown of the head aids correct alignment of chin and spine). Ensure that the body is not tilting to one side.
- Place hands on lap in meditation pose or rest palms on the knees, elbows extended slightly outwards. Hands should be at equal height.
- Lower chin slightly so that the neck becomes straight.
- Lower the eye lids and keep the eyes focused on a point where the gaze naturally falls. The eyes should be still, but the gaze relaxed and not forced. .
- Raise the tongue to rest against the palate and upper row of teeth. Lips rest naturally without strain. Maintaining a slight gap between the rows of teeth can prevent tension developing.
- Sit in full or half lotus posture.

The posture should be neither too tight nor too loose, and the breath should be natural and not forced. Maintaining these physical alignments stabilizes the body's subtle airs (*lung*), and so helps the meditator enter a calm and clear state.

After assuming the correct posture, either focus the eyes on a simple object (like a stone or coin) or maintain awareness of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. When thoughts arise, neither suppress nor continue them. Just return to the object of concentration.

### *Note on Subtle Airs:*

The body maintains five kinds of subtle airs (*lung*), which are connected to movements of the body and mind. These airs are stabilized through adopting the

seven postures listed above. When this is achieved, the mind becomes still and focused.

- *The subtle air of earth.* This air keeps the body stable and is associated with the posture of keeping the spine straight.
- *The subtle air of fire.* This air generates the body's warmth and is stabilized by slightly lowering the chin.
- *The subtle air of water.* This air prevents the body from dehydrating and is calmed through placing the hands in the lap or on the knees with the elbows slightly extended outwards.
- *The subtle air of air.* This air disperses the warmth throughout the body and is stabilized through stilling the eyes and allowing the lips to rest naturally.
- *The downward eliminating air.* This air aids digestion and is responsible for eliminating waste matter. Keeping the legs in lotus posture stabilizes this air

## Mindfulness Practices for Primary Level Students

Young children are innately attracted to colours and the natural world, and so they may find guided meditations that are visually attractive and that contain simple and familiar images, easier to follow than meditations where the breathe or an object is used as the point of focus.

Below is a list of meditation suggestions that can help primary students concentrate, while at the same time teaching them values of kindness and helping them discover their innate virtues and potentials.

While undertaking the practices, it will help concentration if the students assume the meditation posture. The duration of the practice should not be longer than ten minutes. In the following, the principal or teacher can slowly and gently read these instructions as a “guided meditation” while the children follow along and do as is suggested in the reading. Please give the children time to feel each step.

### Lotus Meditation

Imagine that you are a lotus bud at the bottom of a large lake. The bottom of the lake is very muddy, and you cannot see clearly. As you begin to grow, you are aware of things moving in the water. Perhaps they are fish or even tadpoles. You are not sure. As you reach the top of the lake, the water is clearer and you can see gold sparkling on the top. Suddenly, you push through the water and you find yourself in the air. Above you is a deep blue sky and all around are green mountains. You feel very relaxed and happy. Slowly your petals begin to open. One petal opens, two petals open, three petals open, four petals open, five petals open, six petals open. Finally, all your petals are open.

You enjoy to feel the warmth of the sun on your petals and to be under the deep blue sky. For a few moments you just sit like this. You don't think of what you were doing earlier nor do you think of what you will do later. You just sit peacefully in that moment.

Slowly, you begin to think of all the people and animals in the world, and you realize that not everyone is as happy as you. You think of the old people in the hospitals who are afraid and in pain. You think of the children on the streets of big cities without parents or food. You think of poor animals who have been hurt or are sick. You want to help them. Every time a breeze touches your petals, you send out a bright white light that smells of fresh flowers and contains all your happiness. This light goes into the hospitals and touches the sick old people. Immediately they become happy. The light touches the orphan children on the streets and the sick animals. They become peaceful and relaxed. You are giving them all your happiness. From these people and animals a black smoke that contains all their sadness and pain comes back to your lake. It goes into the water and into your roots, and makes your petals more bright and beautiful.

Sit quietly for a few moments imagining sending out the white light and taking in the black smoke.

In order to know if the students are really concentrating, at the end of the session, the teacher can ask questions such as these: “What colour was your lotus?” “Who did the white light touch first?” Or “What happened when the white light touched the

people and animals?”

## Rainbow Meditation

You feel your body becoming lighter and lighter, and slowly you become all the colours of the rainbow.

Red means strength and energy. You feel your whole body become red and filled with energy and strength. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can have the strength and energy to face their problems and help others.

Orange means happiness and joy. You feel your whole body become orange and filled with happiness and joy. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can have happiness and joy that they can share with others.

Yellow means intelligence. You feel your whole body become yellow and filled with intelligence. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can have the intelligence to benefit their family, friends, and community.

Green means harmony and friendship. You feel your whole body become green and filled with harmony and friendship. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can inspire everyone around them to live in harmony and friendship.

Blue means peace. You feel your whole body become blue and filled with peace. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can create the conditions for all the people in Bhutan and the world to live in peace.

Dark purple means gentleness. You feel your whole body become indigo and filled with gentleness. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can have the ability to treat everyone around them with gentleness.

Light purple means self-respect. You feel your whole body become violet and filled with self-respect. You send out this feeling to every living being with the wish that they can have the ability to treat themselves and all other beings with respect.

Slowly the rainbow dissolves, and you sit quietly in this moment.