

### 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 mitra** – 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.*