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INTRODUCTION



Welcome to *Insight Meditation*. Your compact discs and this workbook will take you step by step through a comprehensive training course in basic meditation. The cards included in the box list various helpful teachings that are explored throughout this workbook.

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 simply a personal sense of your relationship with the great questions of human existence.

What to Expect

Insight Meditation comprises two compact discs, this workbook, and a set of informational cards.

This workbook contains:

- ▮ information on meditation resources
- ▮ suggestions for setting up a meditation space and a daily practice
- ▮ Buddhist teachings about meditation and life
- ▮ Q&A sessions that clarify practical issues new meditators tend to encounter
- ▮ exercises to help you deepen your understanding and experience of

meditation (and space to respond to them)

- ▮ tips for taking your meditative awareness into the world and for troubleshooting problem areas in your practice
- ▮ glossaries of Pali, Sanskrit, and other terms
- ▮ a list of books and tapes you can use to further your study of meditation

Each lesson elaborates a facet of developing awareness, using different objects and emphases. Taken together, they constitute a complete description of a path of meditation.

The workbook progresses from the basic theory of mindfulness (Lesson One) through suggestions on how to infuse all of your life activities with clarity and awareness (Last Words). 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 find peace in the midst of life's challenges; and many other aspects of Buddhist psychology and awareness practice.

Each compact disc features three guided meditations, which 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 Society.

Every lesson in the workbook includes a guided meditation that you can record yourself for playback during solitary sitting or read out loud at group sessions. Six

*I have discovered that all
human evil comes from this,
man's being unable to sit
still in a room.*

—BLAISE PASCAL

of these meditations also appear on the CDs. The text versions are somewhat longer than the recorded ones, so you can also use them to gradually increase the length of your sessions.

Before you listen to the guided meditations, have your meditation space set up (see page 6 for suggestions). Take your seat, ready to meditate for approximately twenty minutes. You'll notice that each meditation begins and ends with the traditional sound

of a gong. If you have one, you may find it helpful to use a gong to begin and end any meditations you record yourself.

The cards feature helpful references to some of the Buddha's famous "lists." These lists – the five precepts, the eight vicissitudes, and so on – serve to summarize profound teachings, making them easier to memorize and apply in your everyday life. Some lessons encourage you to display a particular card that week in order to support your practice. You might also select cards, systematically or at random, to

remind yourself of the respective teachings. Each card bears a page or lesson reference that will take you to an in-depth discussion of the list it features.

How to Use This Workbook

Each meditator has her or his own pace, logistical needs, and level of connection with the practice. However, there are general guidelines that will help you get the most out of this course. We recommend that you:

- ▮ establish your meditation space and schedule before beginning to read and work with Lesson One
- ▮ read each lesson in sequence
- ▮ explore the related guided meditation and exercises for at least a week before moving on to the next lesson

Insight Meditation has been carefully structured to take you progressively deeper into the practice of meditation. Although it's a good idea to go back and review previous lessons, you'll find yourself missing crucial information and experiences if you skip lessons to jump ahead. It's important to remember that the purpose of meditation is to deepen your awareness of your own reality. This course is designed to lead you, step by step, in that direction.

Each lesson includes a set of exercises. The spaces provided for your responses are intentionally short. The point is not to produce pages of description about your meditation practice, but to go to the heart of your experience. If you choose to respond to the exercise questions, you'll find that doing so helps clarify both your intellectual and heartfelt understandings of the meditative process.

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 the accompanying 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. Should you let your practice lapse during this course, just return to the last lesson you remember reading (or, if you like, to the beginning)

and start again.

Ideally, you should work your way up from the twenty-minute guided meditations supplied here to daily sessions of at least forty-five minutes. But meditation is not a coercive activity – it’s something we do with interest, a sense of exploration, happiness, and joy. If forty-five minutes seems daunting or undesirable in any way, shorten your sessions. It may be that, on a given day, it’s more appropriate for you to sit for fifteen minutes, or even just for five.

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, 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) includes a contemplative component.

Vipassana (pronounced vuh-pah-suhn-a), 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 concentration and mindfulness. 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.

The practice of Buddhist meditation can be said to be nontheistic – that is, not dependent on belief in an external deity. Buddhism simply reflects back to us that the degree of our own liberation is dependent on the extent of our own effort. So the Buddha’s style of meditation is compatible with any spiritual path, whether theistic or nontheistic. The practice of mindful awareness is an invaluable tool to anyone seeking spiritual awakening, mental clarity, or peace of mind.

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. Appendix A (page 209) describes the full range of commercially available meditation cushions and benches. It also gives you some contact information for vendors. Review this information and acquire an appropriate support before starting to work with the

materials in this course. We recommend that you experiment with varying heights and degrees of firmness before investing in a meditation support of your own.

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 northeastern India. He is sometimes called Gautama Buddha (Gautama was his family name) or Sakyamuni Buddha, the “Silent Sage of the Sakyas” (his tribe). 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 mighty king, or – if he witnessed much suffering – a great religious leader. Wanting his son to rule in the worldly realm, Siddhartha’s father went to enormous lengths to shield the young prince from encountering suffering. He 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 twenty-nine 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 the Buddha 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

*There is no savior in
Buddhism. You have to do
it for yourself. No one else
will meditate for you.*

—ROSHI JIYU KENNETT

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.

HOW TO CULTIVATE A DAILY MEDITATION PRACTICE

The emphasis in meditation practice is on the word "practice." It's a lifelong journey, a process of learning to come back to your clear, unobstructed experience. Touching in daily with this profound practice will yield the greatest impact through-out your 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. Try using them instead 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 what 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.
- ▮ 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 resource list at the end of this workbook (page 224) will give you some ideas of good books to use for this purpose.
- ▮ Sit as long as you can every day. An ideal session will last forty-five minutes to an hour (the guided meditations on your *Insight Meditation* CDs last about twenty 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 workbook, it's recommended that you use only the meditations you've worked with 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.
- ▮ 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.

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 friends who genuinely support our spiritual journey.

Some of our own teachers are mentioned in the talks contained in this course. One of them is Anagarika Munindra, an accomplished Bengali meditation teacher and scholar who studied and practiced for many years in Burma under the guidance of Mahasi Sayadaw (one of the great masters of this century). 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. We highly recommend a book of his talks called *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* (see resource list, page 226).

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* have come to us from these teachers. May they be of benefit to all beings.

Sharon Salzberg
Joseph Goldstein

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN AND SHARON SALZBERG

Teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein began meditating nearly thirty 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.

Sounds True: What motivated you to begin meditating?

Sharon Salzberg: 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.

Joseph Goldstein: 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 my interest in meditation came more from my study of philosophy. I had a strong desire to understand my life.

ST: Did you find your family and friends thinking 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?

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?

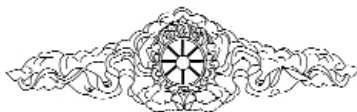
SS: Not meditating is an inconceivable thing to contemplate – meditation practice forms the basis of integrity, connection, and compassion in my life.

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 beginning meditators?

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 is what's most important.



THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

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.

— WILLIAM JOHNSTON

In the lessons that follow, you'll see 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 course of conduct 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. The steps are sometimes referred to as “wise understanding,” “wise thought,” and so on. 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 One. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration describe the mental discipline required to follow the path of meditation.