

## **HELLO – WITH LOVE & OTHER MEDITATIONS: THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS & LOVINGKINDNESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

*by Visu*

Are you in the habit of leaping to answer the phone every time it rings? Do you get a little tensed-up, agitated, excited, nervous, apprehensive, distracted, unfocused, absent-minded, thinking about something, being far away, not present, or whatever, as you reach for the phone?

Leap no more – why not try a more soothing, beneficial and meaningful way of answering the phone? Why not try the mindfulness and lovingkindness way?

This is what you do: The next time the phone rings, don't pick it up immediately. Relax. Take it easy. Come back to the present moment. Let the phone ring a few more times. What's the point of rushing? Surely it is good too for the person on the other end of the line to slow down a little, to collect himself or herself together, to relax and come back to the breath, to the present moment. Buddha knows all of us need to slow down more than a little, considering that we are all really going much too fast these days, spinning out of control and heading for a mental and bodily breakdown.

So, acknowledge the sound of the phone ringing by making a mental note of "hearing, hearing." Then radiate lovingkindness to the person on the other end of the line. Think: may this person whoever he or she is, be well and happy. May he/she be free from harm and danger, free from mental suffering, free from physical suffering, and be able to take care of himself/herself happily. Think along those lines. Send loving thoughts of goodwill and good wishes to that person. Imagine your thoughts flying through the air and sailing right to that person even though you don't know yet who he or she may be.

Then, even as you are radiating thoughts of goodwill, be somewhat mindful of your intention to pick up the phone. Be aware as you stretch out your hand, as it touches the phone, and as it (the hand) lifts it (the phone) to your ear. Be aware of the sensation of touch between the phone and the ear, the sensation of hardness or pressure, as you press the phone onto your ear.

Be totally absorbed and mindful. Be totally present in this act of answering the phone. Drop everything else from your mind – all the thinking and planning, that is to say, all other extraneous thoughts. Be fully present for the person on the other end of the line. This is, in fact, your gift to the person – the mental waves of good wishes you are sending to him/her and your full presence and attention. What more could he/she ask for? Isn't he/she one lucky caller?

Say 'hello' and be fully present as you say it. Say whatever you normally say or deem fit to say, such as 'Good morning.....Yes, can I help you?' Be totally absorbed in your conversation. Don't be distracted by extraneous thoughts. Answer and respond naturally. Be concentrated, focused, but relaxed. Speak from your heart. Speak gently, kindly, calmly, sincerely, truthfully.

If you fumble and cannot find the right words sometimes, it is okay. This is natural. How can we be smooth and perfect in our speech all the time? So, when you are stuck, just try to recollect yourself and say whatever you deem fit in whatever way you know how. Don't get upset. Learn to shrug off your slips and to laugh at yourself. Have a good sense of humour. Nevertheless, if you feel embarrassed for whatever slip you made, then note embarrassment, that is, be aware of this feeling of embarrassment. Mindfulness is about acknowledging whatever is there, and keeping going as best you can. If you feel you are going too fast, talking too fast, then slow down

a little and try to re-compose yourself. You can do so by coming back to your breath, being aware of your breathing in and out, or being aware of some sensation in your body.

As you speak, even as you are fully or quite absorbed in your speaking, you can be aware from time to time of bodily sensations, such as of the phone pressing against your ear, your hand on the phone, the buttocks on your seat, etc. You can even send quick flashes of good wishes to the caller, thinking: “May he/she be happy.”

You may be wondering how you can (1) be absorbed in your conversation, (2) be aware of your bodily sensations and (3) radiate good wishes all at the same time. How can you do three things at the same time? You may be surprised but yes, this can be done. Maybe not at exactly the same time, but very close to it – what we call in Buddhist psychology “the serial present.” This is because the mind is very very fast – faster than even the speed of light. It just takes less than a fraction of a second for it to flit now and then to your bodily sensations, radiate goodwill, and even notice the thoughts that arise even as you speak. The mind can also notice its own state – whether it is concentrated or distracted, calm or excited, happy or sad, annoyed or unannoyed and so on. It can go so fast that it appears that it is all happening at the same time. Just like when we are seeing and hearing. We think they are occurring at the same time, but actually they are occurring at different times, i.e., when we see we don’t hear, and when we hear we don’t see; but because the mind is arising and passing away so fast - first a seeing consciousness arises and passes away, then a hearing consciousness arises and passes away, then back to seeing, then hearing, so fast that we think it is all going on at the same time. And this is what is called the serial present – a series of events occurring so fast one after another that they can be considered practically to be happening in the present moment, like well within the duration of a second.

You may ask what is the purpose of being aware from time to time of your bodily sensations as you speak. Why can’t you just focus on the conversation only? Why purposely distract yourself by noticing bodily sensations? What good can this achieve? Again, you’ll be surprised to find that bringing your mind back to body awareness is helpful. It enables you to stay more composed and centred. You’ll be more steady, collected, and calm. Try it and find out for yourself whether this is true or not.

For example, even now as I’m typing on my computer, I can be aware of my fingers typing away on the keytops, my feet resting on the slightly cold parquet floor, and a slight discomfort in my back. So even as I type I can be aware of bodily sensations that are occurring – not all the time, of course, but some of the time. In fact, in everything that I do, it is my practice to be aware of bodily movements and sensations as much of the time as possible. For example, if I bend down to pick up something, I will notice my intention to bend and the bending of the body that follows. If I were to get up from my seat, I will notice my intention to get up and then get up mindfully, aware of the body raising up. Similarly when I sit down I’m aware of the intention to sit and the lowering of the body that follows. There are a thousand and one things that I try to be mindful of as I do them, such as when I open or close a door – any door including car door, room door, bathroom door, toilet door, main house entrance door, fridge door; when I switch on and off a light, turn on or off a tap, wash a plate or cup, slip on a slipper, sweep the floor, eat, drink, bathe, wash face, brush teeth, urinate, defecate, change, scratch, etc. In fact, everything and anything one does can be done with mindfulness, can be turned into an exercise in mindfulness. Even if one is seated not doing anything, one can still be mindful of the sensations that are always present in the body, such as the contact between the buttocks and seat, the arms on the arm-rests or on your lap, your back on the back rest, your feet on the floor, your inbreath and outbreath, the state of your mind, and so on.

Now, I must make it clear that I'm not saying that I'm *always* mindful, that I'm *always* aware as I do all the aforementioned and other things. What I'm saying is that I try to do everything with mindfulness as much of the time as possible. But there are, no doubt, many lapses on my part, many times when I forget, many times when I'm just on automatic pilot. But because I'm now and then making an effort to remember, I do often regain my mindfulness. So whenever I remember, I have at that time effectively re-instated my mindfulness. You, too, can do the same if you make an effort to remember to be mindful now and then. Believe me, it is not too difficult, it can be done if you keep trying, keep making a habit of coming back to the present and being mindful of something or other – your body or your mind.

Back to the question: how does being mindful in this way help? Well, most of the time our mind is flitting about here and there as we go about our daily chores. A lot of random thoughts arise and pass away. The mind gets caught in worry, anxiety, frustration, tension, strong craving, anger, aversion, envy, jealousy, delusion, and various unwholesome states. Now, if we can be more aware of our body movements and sensations, the tendency of the mind to run all over the place and be caught in unwholesome states is checked or reduced. In this way we'll be conserving a lot of mental energy that is dissipated when we are thinking unnecessarily or excessively or when we are caught in unwholesome mental states such as worry and anxiety. There will then be more quality in our planning or thinking which will be more focused and purposeful. Also, as we are with the body, when the mind runs, we can notice that too, and bring the mind back to centre. We can notice the kind of extraneous thoughts and activities that occur in the mind. We can come to understand ourselves better this way, and we can choose which train of thought to pursue and which not to.

Also, as we become more mindful of our body movements, we find that we become more composed and graceful. There is an over-all calming effect on both mind and body and this, in turn, is good for both our bodily and mental health. We'll become more relaxed, our heart rate will slow down, our blood pressure will go down, our immune system will be boosted, and we won't suffer from stomach ulcers and other ailments that are caused by worry and anxiety. In fact, mindfulness is an antidote for stress. It is especially helpful for our modern and hectic lifestyle. It helps to slow us down and to reduce stress.

So these are some of the benefits that can be gained from practising mindfulness of the body and mind. The proof of the pudding is, as they say, in the eating. So the best thing is for one to give it a try, i.e., practise mindfulness for a period of time, and see whether it is helpful as claimed.

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Now coming back to telephone meditation, you can also be aware as you are speaking, whether you are practising right speech or not. You can see whether you are speaking with honesty and sincerity or not, whether you may be mis-representing or deceiving or slandering, whether you may be speaking harshly with anger, malice or illwill, or whether you are speaking nonsense or frivolously. So if you feel your speech is not wholesome, skilful, or beneficial, you can rein in and correct yourself accordingly.

After the conversation, you can put the phone down mindfully, being aware of the sensations in your arm or hand as you place the phone back on its holder. In life we always want to encourage, comfort, help, inspire and uplift. So it is good if you can end every conversation feeling that you have done just that for the person who called.

Just as you are mindful when you answer the phone, you can do the same when you make a call. The same principles apply, being aware of all the movements involved – stretching out the hand, picking up the phone, pressing the buttons, radiating goodwill (May she be happy) to the person you are calling, and so on.

Perhaps you might say you have too many phone calls to attend to, and you just can't be mindful in this way for every call. But then how do you know if you don't try? You'll never know, you know. If you practise at it often and diligently enough, you'll find that it might just become your second nature to respond in this way. You might find it more difficult to be unmindful than to be mindful! And wouldn't it be wonderful then? But okay, even if you can't remember to be mindful all the time, can't you, at least, be mindful some of the time? Surely you can! So you can, at least, practise being mindful some of the time, if not all the time. But as we have said, if you practise mindfulness consistently, it will become a habit. You'll find that you can't help but be more and more aware. So it's a matter of re-conditioning the mind, replacing a mindless habit with a mindful one.

## **TRAFFIC JAM MEDITATION**

Let's look at more instances where mindfulness can be applied. When you are caught in a traffic jam, instead of getting uptight and tense, apply mindfulness. Be aware of your mind and body. Observe the sensations in the body. Notice your breath – both in and out. Be aware of your sitting posture, feel the contact between buttocks and seat, and between back and backrest. Sensations of warmth and pressure in those areas of contact can be felt and noted. Feel your hands on your steering wheel. Observe your mind, too, and notice its tense, edgy, impatient, agitated, disturbed, or whatever state. You'll be surprised that such simple awareness can produce a calming effect. You'll feel a little bit more relax, a little less tense. Then, if you maintain your mindfulness, observing say your inbreath and outbreath, you'll loosen up further and will relax even more.

Then you can also radiate loving-kindness which you must remember is something you can practise anytime anywhere. So here in the traffic jam, you can radiate thoughts of goodwill to all around you. You can think any wholesome thoughts you like such as, "May all beings be happy. May they be peaceful. May they be healthy. May they be wise, enlightened, free from suffering, live in peace and harmony, free from such traffic jams, not get angry, and so on." You can keep repeating and radiating such thoughts to all those people who are caught in the traffic jam, to all those people around you out there, and to the passengers that may be in your car. And to anybody else you may think of, such as your loved ones or friends. Or just to all beings at large throughout the whole universe. And, of course, you can also direct those thoughts to yourself, wishing the same for yourself.

Such wholesome thoughts are healthy for both your mind and body. One should never underestimate the power of the mind. Studies have shown that such thoughts can have a soothing and calming influence not only on us but even on people out there, for our mental vibrations do have an effect on others whether we realize it or not. Remember also that distance is no barrier to the mind. Those persons out there, even though they may be far far away across the ocean, might be receiving your good vibes, might be feeling or picking them up. Besides, you are also putting yourself in a good frame of mind when you radiate loving thoughts.

## **EATING MEDITATION**

Ever heard of eating meditation? Now for those of you who are unfamiliar with the mindfulness practice, I can imagine you saying, “What is he coming up with now?! First it was telephone meditation, then traffic jam meditation, and now eating meditation! What else will be next? It’s getting more and more preposterous!” But really, this shouldn’t come as a surprise anymore. Anything and everything can be meditated upon, can be turned into an exercise of mindfulness, an object of mindful attention.

So, how can you be mindful when you eat? First you can notice the food that is laid before you and mentally say or label “seeing, seeing,” as you look at it. This means you are acknowledging the act or process of seeing. If you don’t wish to label and prefer to just know that you are “seeing” without making a mental label, you may do so, too. Though labeling is optional you will find it very useful sometimes: it can help to focus the mind on the object. After noting “seeing, seeing,” you can observe your mind – the desire to reach for the food, the craving perhaps for pleasant taste. Then you can note the intention to stretch out your hand and you can stretch it out mindfully, aware of the sensations that are arising and passing away in the stretching of that hand. You can be mindful as you scoop up the food with your spoon and bring it to your plate, or as you bring the food from the plate to the mouth. You can be mindful as you put the food into your mouth and as you taste and chew. You can be mindful as you chew, noting as “chewing, chewing”, and you can be aware of the taste as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Usually the food is pleasant to you, so you can note as pleasant. If you happen to taste something unpleasant, you can acknowledge accordingly as unpleasant. Or if you find the taste neither pleasant nor unpleasant, you can note it as such, a neutral sensation. Usually as you chew, you might notice the taste becoming more and more neutral. You can also take note of the mental reaction towards the taste. You can notice the craving and attachment to pleasant taste and aversion towards the unpleasant taste. And you can try to be more equanimous and composed – to neither crave for the pleasant or be averse towards the unpleasant. This is, however, a rather difficult thing to do, to maintain equanimity, but it is challenging and can be done.

What should be our attitude towards eating? Why should we not crave for delicious food? Because craving is a cause of suffering. Because we don’t want to be addicted to sensual pleasures, or to be enslaved by sensual craving. Because we want to seek a higher and more noble state of mind, one that is freed from sensual craving. So our attitude is one of eating to live, not living to eat. Thus we eat to salve hunger, to stay healthy, so we can live a more useful and beneficial life. So we should eat wholesome food suitable for our health rather than food that may be tasty but harmful to our health. Having said this, we do acknowledge that all of us still have craving for taste, and it is not easy for us to check or cut off this craving. So what we can do is to try to, at least, weaken or moderate the craving even if we can’t cut it off completely. You’ll be surprised too that when you apply mindfulness to eating, there will be instances when you find your craving abating. With the right attitude and intention, we will gradually weaken our craving and it is possible that there will come a time when we will cut it off completely. Buddha and arahants\* have no more craving whatsoever, either for sensual pleasures or for being. They have no fear of death and they do not cling even to life. Furthermore, they know that when they die, they will make an end of suffering, because for them there will be no more rebirth.

[Footnote: \*Arahants are those who, following the teaching of the Buddha, have uprooted greed, hatred, and delusion.]

Coming back to eating, when you chew, you can note as “chewing, chewing,” and be aware of that chewing process, of the movements of the teeth, mouth, and tongue. And as you swallow you can note as swallowing, swallowing, and feel the food going down your gullet or esophagus tube to the stomach. You can be mindful of your intention to get more food, and once again you can be

aware of all the movements and sensations involved in stretching out the hand for the food, and in bringing it to the mouth. You will try to slow down a little rather than eat in a great hurry. Eating as people normally do in a hurry because they are rushing to do something else, or because they are eager to taste more of the food, is really not good for the digestion. Because of inadequate chewing, it is harder for the stomach to digest the food. So slowing down to chew, and chewing more mindfully, purposefully, and thoroughly, will aid digestion and contribute to one's bodily health and comfort.

Also while eating or doing something one can catch oneself and ask the question, "With what mind am I doing this? With what mind am I eating?" Is there much greed for the food, craving for and attachment to taste? Or is the mind thinking about something else while eating? Then if there is craving or greed, we can try to correct ourselves, to eat more calmly and mindfully, with less greed. And if the mind is busy thinking, planning, or day-dreaming while eating, we can bring it back to the present moment and try to be more mindful of the eating processes.

Then there is also the question of gratitude. Especially for me as a monk who is dependent on others for my food and other requisites. There is that sense of indebtedness and gratitude for the kindness and support one receives. This will spur one to practise more diligently in order to be worthy of the support of the people. Furthermore, if one is able to, one will try to teach or share with others what one knows of the Dhamma. And one can also radiate thoughts of lovingkindness towards one's benefactors, wishing that they may be always well and happy.

Laypersons too can feel gratitude and appreciation for the food they receive and for the many blessings that come their way in life. They can resolve in return to practise the Dhamma to purify their minds and to serve the community in whatever way they can. As one is eating too, one can radiate thoughts of goodwill (May he/she/they be happy....) to all those that may be around one.

Most people take three meals a day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner – besides tea or some snacks in between. So there is much opportunity to apply mindfulness when eating. It is a good practice for reasons we have already mentioned above. Whenever we eat unmindfully and greedily, it is more like the food eating us than we are eating it! So sometimes we ask, tongue in cheek, are you eating the food or is the food eating you?

## **AND DRINKING, TOO**

Yes, and the same goes for drinking. We can be mindful as we stretch out the hand to bring the cup or glass to our lips, as the hand touches the cup, as we lift and bring it to the lips, as we tilt the cup and drink, as we taste the drink, and as we swallow. And as we take more sips and as we put the cup back on the saucer or table. Of course, as regards drinks, one should avoid alcohol which is harmful to both mind and body. We should strive to keep our mind pure, clear, alert, mindful and unconfused as much of the time as possible.

## **SLEEPING AND WAKING**

Just as you try to be mindful throughout the day, it's good to close the day with mindfulness, too. Thus as you prepare to retire at night you can be mindful. Be aware of whatever preparations you may make before going to bed. As you are preparing or arranging the bed, be aware too. And finally as you lay your body down, be especially mindful of that act. It is a significant act as it signifies your intention to sleep – your last act of closure for the day. So note the intention to lie

down and then lie down mindfully, aware of the body lowering itself onto the bed and the head as it touches the pillow. Remember that the Buddha's attendant, Ananda, was said to have attained enlightenment as he was lying down for the night. It seemed he became an arahant just or even before his head touched the pillow!

Of course, we know we can't become arahants just like that, we are not Ananda, but then again, who knows?, perhaps one of these days we, too, might attain some special insight as we mindfully lie down. It is said that when the fruit is ripe it will drop, so we'll never know when enlightenment might strike, when we are spiritually mature for some such insight or wisdom to arise. All we can do is to prepare the ground, to be mindful, and though we may not realize it, day by day, the plant of knowledge is growing from the soil of mindfulness.

So after having lain down mindfully, you can continue to be mindful of your state of mind and body. You can know the sensations in the contact between your body and mattress and your head and pillow. You can know your breath as you breathe in and out or you can know the rising and falling of the abdomen which occur as you inhale and exhale. You can be aware of your mind and the thoughts that may arise. You can stop your thinking and planning and allow yourself to drift into sleep. If you toss about in bed or intend to turn to the side or from one side to another, you can do all this mindfully, too, noting your intention to turn and then turn. Also you can radiate lovingkindness to specific persons and to all beings until you fall asleep. So you have the option of just being mindful of the body and mind, or radiating lovingkindness, or both, before falling asleep.

This is a really wholesome way of going about your sleep. If a person is suffering from insomnia, radiating lovingkindness and practising mindfulness during bedtime might help by way of cutting down on mental agitation and discursive thinking and planning which may be the cause of the inability to sleep. Also, even if the insomnia persists one can be consoled that at least the mind is kept in a wholesome and meditative state rather than one of agitation and anxiety.

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Again just as we close the day with mindfulness we must begin it with mindfulness, too. So have you thought about how you wake up in the morning? Isn't it important to wake up on the right side of the bed? So here waking up on the right side means waking up in a good state of mind. Be aware that you have awakened. If possible try to be aware that you have awakened even before you open your eyes. Then open your eyes mindfully, noting even the intention to open the eyes before you open them. This may be rather difficult, that is, to be mindful even before you open the eyes, catching the awakening moment – but it is rather challenging and interesting – is it not? – to see how alert and mindful you can be at the moment of awakening.

But if you can't catch that awakening moment and you found you have already opened your eyes, it is okay, you can still be mindful. Notice your state of mind. Are you fresh, alert, wide awake, or are you still sleepy and wanting to sleep some more? If you feel the latter way, you can notice the desire to linger in bed, how you turn from one side to another, not wanting to get up. But you know you have to get up, so try to summon that intention to get up and try to get up mindfully, with as much awareness as you can muster. Then go about what you have to do mindfully, walking to the bathroom door, opening the door, and being mindful of all the activities that follow – urinating, uncapping the tooth paste, applying the paste on the toothbrush, brushing your teeth, rinsing your mouth, soaping and washing your face, wiping it with the towel, and so on.

Then be mindful as you walk back to your bed, fold your blanket, make your bed, change, and so on. If possible it is good to do an hour of sitting meditation after you have washed your face. But if you can't find an hour, how about 45 minutes or half an hour? It is good to start off the day with meditation which can help you to be more composed for the rest of the day. And needless to say, it is good also to do some meditation after you get back from work; it helps to clean or purify the mind after a day of activity.

## TALKING

In the discourse on mindfulness, the Buddha says we can be mindful while talking or keeping silent. What does he mean? Of course, talking involves thinking and verbalizing, that is, moving of our mouth and tongue to produce sound and words. So we can be mindful of our lips moving and the thoughts that arise in our mind as we speak. But I think what is most important here is to be mindful of whether our speech is wholesome or not, whether it falls within Right Speech of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Right speech is speaking the truth, not lying, misrepresenting, misleading, or deceiving. A good motivation when speaking is important. This means one should speak with goodwill, not ill-will. One should be honest and sincere in what one says.

Right speech is not slandering or speaking maliciously. As far as possible one should try to promote concord, understanding and friendship between two parties rather than cause misunderstanding, discord and animosity. Right speech is not speaking harshly, in anger, or with intent to hurt. Remember that though sticks and stones may break our bones, words can do far worse: they can break our hearts. So one should take care to speak gently, kindly, with the best of intentions, considering the sensitivity and "hurtability" of others.

Right speech is not gossiping and taking delight in speaking ill about others. It is not speaking frivolously and nonsensically about things which are of no benefit to the hearer. Right Speech is speaking about things which are important and beneficial. It is about giving wise counsel and reminding each other of the need to practise the Dhamma in order to gain liberation from *samsaric* suffering.

Right speech is not speaking with envy and jealousy but with magnanimity, being able to rejoice over and be happy for the wholesome deeds and accomplishments of others.

Right speech does not mean we cannot criticise or admonish or point out the faults of others. But it does mean that we must be careful to do so with objectivity, fairness, sincerity and good intentions. We must be careful to speak without anger, hatred, illwill, malice, and prejudice. We must be careful not to become overly critical, judgmental or fault-finding. We must be able too, to see the good in others, to be balanced in our judgment or assessment of others.

Having said all this, we do agree it is not easy to practise Right Speech all the time. Many a time we may speak unskillfully or frivolously and unnecessarily. Many a time we may lose our cool and speak in anger or irritation, snapping or hitting out at another. Many a time we may be speaking just to fill the void of silence. And many a time, **too**, it may have been better for us to keep noble silence and maintain our mindfulness and equanimity in that silence.



Practising Right Speech is a great challenge; it is something we have to constantly practise and improve upon.

### **MORE TIPS: NOTE THE INTENTION**

It is good to make it a habit to note the intention before doing anything. Even in simple actions such as getting up and sitting down, we can note the intention. How many times a day do we get up from a chair or sit down on one? So there are many opportunities to note that intention. All you have to do is to pause and note the intention before getting up and so too before sitting down. Noting the intention will help you to follow up with more precise awareness of the getting up and sitting down. You will be able to follow and feel more closely the sensations and movements involved in getting up and sitting down.

The same goes for many other simple actions such as opening or closing a door, switching on or off a light or fan, turning on or off a tap, bending down to pick up something, slipping on a shoe, getting up in the morning, lying down at night and a thousand and one other things – you can practise noting the intention and the action that follows. No doubt it would not be possible to notice every intention that arises but we can practise noting some of those intentions from time to time. As in all practices, at first it will be difficult to catch the intention but as you keep practising, keep making an effort to note the intention, it will in time become easier.

Why, you may ask, should you note the intention? Well, first it is a good and interesting exercise. It trains your mind to become more alert. Thus you'll be surprised that there may come a time when you can't help but notice your intention when you about to do something. You'll be pleased that you could now be aware of your mind to that extent – that even the intention can now be noticed and observed. This ability will also help you to be more mindful and aware of whatever you do.

Also such noting will give you a slight pause or interval between intention and deed. And in that gap or pause, you can decide whether to go ahead to do something or not. For sometimes you might be about to do something unwholesome and if you can catch the intention before doing it, you have an opportunity to apply the brakes and abort the action. For example you might notice your intention to raise your hand to smack a mosquito which has landed on some part of your body. Then because of wanting to keep the first precept of not-killing or wanting to practise compassion and spare life, you might decide instead to just brush the insect away without hurting it. Or, to give another example, you could notice, while angry, your intention to snap at somebody, to say something harsh or hurtful. Then you might just check that urge and keep noble silence. Yes, we can exercise restraint in many ways through awareness of our intention.

On the other hand, if you notice your intention is a good one, such as to spare life, to practise compassion or generosity, to help somebody, then you can go ahead and do it. You can encourage your mind to act upon it, to not hesitate but to perform the good deed with enthusiasm and joy. Thus, the Buddha has said that mindfulness is helpful everywhere: it can restrain the mind from doing something unwholesome or spur it to do something good.

### **CHANGING MOODS**

In the course of the day, do be aware of the changes in the landscape of your mind. Notice the various thoughts that arise and pass away; moods, emotions, and various states of mind – sad, happy, depressed, cheerful, bright, clear, light, alert, sleepy, dull, lethargic, heavy, lazy, diligent,

disinterested, bored, listless, enthusiastic, excited, calm, peaceful, tranquil, disturbed, worried, anxious, hating, loving, kind, forgiving, envious, jealous, rejoicing, happy for others, doubts, lust, desire, craving, greed, miserliness, selfishness, meanness, generosity, equanimity, wisdom, understanding, moral shame and moral fear or the lack of it, mindfulness, awareness, etc.

Awareness of our mind states can help us to understand ourselves better and can bring about a gradual change and improvement in us. The first step is to see ourselves as we are – warts and all – and the rest, i.e., changes for the better, will follow eventually. For example, we will find unwholesome states such as anger, envy, and jealousy, painful and we will want to give them up. This can be done through awareness of those unwholesome states when they arise, effort to check and dispel them, and wise reflection and reminders to oneself that can help one to overcome those states or prevent them from arising. Thus, when we notice the faults of greed and lust, the pain of craving and addiction, those unwholesome mental factors may gradually lose their hold over us. We may crave less and become more content. Furthermore, as we take up meditation, and find joy through caring and service, we will enjoy more and more wholesome states of mind.

Do notice, too, that ultimately we are just mental states. Where is the solid “I” here? Are we not just made up of mind moments, one thought after another, a series or a stream of thoughts? Is not the thought the thinker? One moment we think we would do something and another moment we find we have changed our mind. One moment we are happy and another moment sad, one moment cheerful and the next depressed. So where is the permanent “I”? When we can see how we are thus conditioned by our thoughts, that we *are* our thoughts, we won’t take this self as something permanent or unchanging. We know that just thoughts, moods and states of mind, come and go, that they arise and dissolve according to various conditions, such as our propensity sometimes towards greed, anger, and delusion and sometimes towards non-greed, non-anger and non-delusion. Our task, therefore, is to become more mindful of thoughts and mental states as they arise, as they stay, and as they pass away. Through such mindfulness we can gradually steer and condition our mind towards cultivating more wholesome than unwholesome states. We can become more joyful and happy than sorrowful or depressed. Through such wholesome conditioning we are actually taming the mind.

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## **A SPECIAL NOTE ON ANGER AND SORROW**

What we have highlighted in the beginning part of this booklet is body awareness. But there is also lot to observe with regard to the mind which, when uncontrolled, is a great cause of suffering. As the saying goes, the mind can be our best friend or worst enemy. When tamed it can be a friend and bring about happiness, but when wild and unrestrained, it can wreak great havoc and suffering. It is not within the scope of this booklet to go into an in-depth analysis of the nature of mind and how it gives rise to suffering via craving, attachment and delusion. For that one has to read other good books on the subject.

But here we can briefly examine two particular mind states which cause suffering to most people and they are anger and sorrow. As a monk I have often been asked as to how we can control anger. Many people want to control anger, they don’t want to get angry, they know that their inability to control anger is a cause of much suffering both to themselves and others, but they just can’t help it, just can’t help losing their cool. So they want to know how to control their anger.

Of course, mindfulness helps. Whenever you are angry you should quickly be mindful of your anger. Try and see whether you can be aware of your anger at the incipient stage, that is, at the

stage when it is just about to begin. Observe that tightening in the chest and various other bodily sensations that may arise together with the anger. Observe also that angry state of mind – how does it feel like? – the feeling of rage, of wanting to crush or snuff out somebody. As you turn your attention away from the person you are angry with to the emotion of anger itself together with its attendant bodily tension, you'll find that your anger instead of increasing will decrease. It will dissipate and subside. On the other hand, if you were to continue to focus your attention on the person who had angered you, your anger is liable to increase than decrease.

To give a simile, when your house is on fire, is your immediate priority to put out the fire, or to go after the person who set it ablaze? So turning your intention inward is like putting out the fire in your house. Going after the provocateur is like chasing after the arsonist. By the time you catch him, your house would have burnt down! In this case, your mind would have been burnt up or consumed by your anger. In which case you have actually become the victim!

Thus the thing to do is to try to get a hold of yourself, to calm down. Besides observing your anger and the body sensations, you can also be mindful of your breathing. Mindfulness of the breath can produce a calming effect on both the mind and body. So you can come back to your breath and be aware as you breath in and out. Taking a few deep breaths and exhaling mindfully can also help. Or you can use auto suggestions, words like "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I relax."

When you are angry, try not to say or do anything because whatever you say or do in that frame of mind is liable to be harsh and counter-productive. Better then to hold your tongue and not say or do anything until your anger has passed. Otherwise you might say or do something which will hurt and which you might regret later. Another option, if you still find it difficult to contain your anger, is to walk away. Take a walk somewhere, especially in a garden or a park if there is one nearby. Looking at plants, flowers, trees, and hills can be soothing. Nature has a healing effect on the mind and body.

Besides mindfulness, you can also use wise reflection to calm down the mind. Think about the many disadvantages of anger and the advantage of self-control and your anger will subside. For example, consider: "What good does getting angry do? Am I not hurting both myself and others? Is anger the only response? Is anger the response of a mature or wise person? Is there no other skilful way of responding to this situation?"

"Why should I allow another person to upset my mind? By getting angry, won't I be allowing him to penetrate my mind which by right should be my own domain over which I should exercise the fullest control? Won't I, by becoming angry, be allowing him to (if one may put it in a crude way) enter and shit in my mind? And won't I be the one who is a fool to allow this to happen? And further, if it has been his intention to provoke me, won't I by becoming angry, fall into his trap?"

And if you are thinking along the line of overcoming and defeating him, you could check yourself and consider: "Won't it be better to tame and conquer my own mind than to conquer that of another? Did not the Buddha say that self-conquest is the highest conquest – that though one may conquer a thousand men a thousand times in a battlefield, yet he who conquers himself is a greater conqueror?" And was it not Santideva who said: "How many evil men could I kill? There number is as boundless as the sky. But if the thought of anger is killed, all enemies are killed."

You can consider also how your anger might be perceived by the other person. "Will she not lose respect for me or think less of me for losing my temper? And even if I were to apologise to her

later, what if she cannot forgive me or, if she does, what if she cannot forget? Will our relationship be irreparably damaged because of these few moments of anger, because of my not being able to control myself at this moment, because of my losing my temper?"

Or you could try another tact: Think about the good qualities of the other person, how he may have helped you before. Or even if he may not have helped you much, you could think about his kindness to others – perhaps he has helped a lot of other people, too. When you consider his goodness, you might think less badly of him and you might then cool down. To give an example, if a person is annoyed with his parents, if he were to think of all his parents' love and kindness for him, all the sacrifices they have made for him, he would surely want to overcome his anger and cultivate love for his folks.

There are other wise ways of reflecting. Consider what you look like when you are angry. If you were to whip out a mirror and look at your face when you are angry, you will be horrified to see how wild and terrible you look! Consider that according to the law of kamma, anger is a cause for ugliness in future rebirths. And why should this be surprising when you consider that even in this very life, anger has the immediate result of distorting one's features.

Thinking about death, too, can be very effective. Consider: Life is too short for us to get upset in this way. If we know that we are going to die tomorrow or in a few hours' or few minutes' time, would we still want to get mad in this way? Is it not better to live at peace with oneself and others?

Consider why anger arises? Is it not because of our identification with a self or an ego? Is it not pride that makes us think we are somebody, so how come this person does not respect us/how dare he insult us? Realizing that conceit, pride and ego are the roots of our anger, we might learn to let go of our attachment to the ego and learn not to get so upset when we are offended. Really, sometimes it is good to be insensitive in certain ways, such as not being able to be angry, no matter what.

Consider the virtue of patience. Patience means not getting angry. Whenever we are provoked or tested, we can tell ourselves this is the time for us to practise patience. The person taunting us is our tester. Will we pass the test or not? If we lose our temper, then we have failed. If we don't, we have passed the test of patience. Make non-anger your priority, such that you rather not succeed in something and keep your cool, than accomplished something but vented your anger in the process.

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### *Sorrow*

Nobody's life is free of sorrow. As human beings we do get sorrowful and depressed at times – for all and various kinds of reasons. How can mindfulness help?

First, we can be aware of this sorrow, this pain or feeling of unhappiness in our heart. How is it like? How do you feel it as a sensation in the body? Does it feel like a sharp or searing pain in the heart? Or is it more like what they call a heartache, that is, a sort of aching pain varying from dull to acute in the heart? Or would you describe it as a feeling of heaviness, a feeling of dis-ease in the heart, a tension, a knot, a disquietness? Or does it feel like something gnawing or biting away in the heart? Or whatever? You'd find that ten people would have ten different ways of describing their pain, each using different metaphors and imagery.

And as for that state of mind itself, how would you describe it? How is that mental feeling like? Which word might best characterize it – sorrow, sadness, grief, pain, woe, lamentation, mourning, regret, remorse, melancholy, depression, malaise, dis-ease, a feeling of emptiness, hollowness, meaninglessness, gloom, desolation, despair, agony, vexation, anxiety, anguish?

Observing the pain helps because as you do so you'd find that it is not something impregnable. It is not something as solid, permanent or lasting as you might have thought it to be. Both the physical sensations and the mental state can be found to be impermanent, as phenomena that are arising and passing away. This ability to observe in an objective or detached manner can help alleviate the pain. It is a little like in the case of observing the anger where instead of focusing on the person you were angry with, you turn your attention inwards onto the anger itself. And as you do so, you may find the anger lessening rather than increasing. Similarly, the pain too may lessen as you observe it. Initially, however, you may feel it is becoming stronger, but as you observe you'd find that it subsides. It is like a wave which has its ebb and flow, rise and fall.

On the other hand, if you do not acknowledge or observe the pain, you might get more and more sucked into that vortex of sorrow. It might just overwhelm or smother you. It may totally pin or weigh you down.

Acknowledging the pain can also help you to see things in a proper perspective. As you observe it, you can also reflect on how the pain has arisen. For example, you can remind yourself that pain normally arises because of craving and attachment. So you can ask yourself, how or in what way have I craved or become attached so as to now feel this pain? There are many forms of attachment – attachment to persons, to possessions, to the status quo, that is, to things remaining as they are, not wanting any change, but how can that be possible when it is in the nature of things to change and transform into something or other, which could be better or worse. There is attachment to name, to one's status, ego; to one's job or career; to sensual pleasures and pleasant sensations, to a thousand and one other things. Attachment is insidious and furtive: it develops without our realizing and before we know it we have become deeply attached.

Attachment leads to aversion. When we lose something we have become attached to, there is anger, pain and grief. Because we can't get something, we get upset and depressed. Expectation, too, leads to disappointment. So we can consider how the pain had arisen because of our grasping or clinging. In understanding the causes, we can be liberated; for once we understand, we can begin to let go since we know it is the clinging that is the cause of suffering. Also, adopting various wise and skillful attitudes can help to greatly reduce our suffering, for most of the time the pain is ultimately of our own making and it is better not to blame others or external conditions so much, for finally it is how we respond that counts.

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## **THE PRACTICE OF LOVINGKINDNESS**

It's good to incorporate the practice of mindfulness and lovingkindness in our everyday life. This means we try to be mindful in everything that we do or for as much of the time as possible, try to watch this mind and watch this body, follow the body movements, notice the sensations that arise and pass away in the body, notice the intentions and thoughts that arise and the state of the mind. Then every now and then we can radiate lovingkindness to all beings by simply thinking and wishing in our mind: "May all beings be happy. May they be free from harm and danger. May they be free from mental suffering. May they be free from physical suffering. May they take care

of themselves happily.” It doesn’t take long to mentally recite these lines; it takes a minute or less to repeat a few rounds of these lines.

Developing lovingkindness is simply the radiation of such good wishes. As we fill our mind with such wholesome thoughts and suffuse the world with love, we’ll find a gradual change coming over us. We’ll find that we’ll be happier, get angry less often, and have more goodwill towards others. Eventually the goodwill that we have for others will be translated into words and deeds. How can it be otherwise if we are genuinely cultivating lovingkindness, if we are sincerely wishing well for others?

As we transform ourselves in this way, we’ll find that people also change in their attitude towards us. They become more friendly and well-disposed towards us. Even animals may show their friendliness and heavenly beings, too, it is said, will protect those who are kind and virtuous. As our lovingkindness develops we’ll find that we don’t want to hate anybody, that we don’t subscribe to hatred anymore. No matter what we believe that love is the answer, not hate, not anger. Consequently we’ll be able to forgive easily, we won’t keep or nurse grudges, and we won’t seek revenge.

Other benefits of lovingkindness practice are that we’ll be able to sleep more easily, dream pleasant dreams, can concentrate more easily, and have a radiant complexion. Furthermore, when death comes, he (or she) will have a peaceful death and a good rebirth on account of his having lived with much love and goodwill.

Radiating lovingkindness is a practice strongly recommended by the Buddha. During his time he urged his monks, nuns, and lay disciples to radiate lovingkindness daily and frequently. In Pali, the language in which the early teachings of the Buddha were recorded, the word for lovingkindness is *mettā*. This word *mettā* is now often used by Buddhists. We would say practise metta, develop metta, show metta. And we also often sign off our letters with the words, With metta. In addition to lovingkindness, other pseudonyms for metta are love, goodwill, friendliness. But here we should differentiate metta from the normal worldly concept of love which may be mixed up with lust, desire, craving, longing, possessiveness, and attachment. Metta in the Buddhist context is none of these things. It is purely wholesome, a pure goodwill, a sincere wish for the well-being and happiness of others; it is also unconditional in that it does not expect anything back from the recipient of one’s metta. Perhaps the word, metta, should be included in the English dictionary as a kind of love, goodwill, friendliness which is strictly dis-associated from sensual desire, lust, craving, longing, possessiveness, and attachment.

Now there are many ways in which you can radiate metta. As we have said you can do it anywhere and at anytime even when you are doing things, working, eating, shopping, walking on the road, standing in a queue, lying down at night before falling asleep, etc. All you have to do is to radiate thoughts of goodwill to the people around you – anybody and everybody. For example, you may be seeing a doctor – as he is treating you, you can radiate metta to him and the nurse or nurses that may be assisting him. All you have to do is to wish in your mind, ‘May he be happy, May she be happy,’ and so on. You can repeat the five lines’ formula we have already mentioned above over and over again in your mind or you can use any words you like, your own wishes, like May he be peaceful, joyful, healthy, wise.

You can radiate good wishes to your parents, grandparents, spouse, children, brothers and sisters, relatives, loved ones, friends, neighbours, teachers, bosses, colleagues, subordinates, workers, etc. You can radiate to persons who are dear and close to you. You can radiate to neutral persons, i.e. persons you hardly know or feel for, such as an acquaintance, a casual friend, or someone you

know only by sight. You can radiate to so-called enemies, i.e. if you were to consider anybody as your enemy. Of course, it is better not to have any enemies or to consider anybody as one. In which case you can radiate to persons who may be hostile towards you, who dislike you, or whom you feel hostile or averse towards, whom you dislike. You can radiate to persons you are having a difficult time with, having conflicts with. This could even be your own dear and close ones! Or you can radiate to persons who have had conflicts with you in the past. You can wish them well, that they may be happy and so on. You can even throw in some forgiveness exercise, by thinking, “I forgive you (i.e. for whatever he or she had done to you), and may you forgive me too (i.e. if you had done anything to hurt the person or if the person had felt hurt by whatever he thought you may have done or not done.)”

And of course, you can wish for yourself, too, “May I be happy. May I be free from harm and danger, may I be free from mental suffering, may I be free from physical suffering, may I take care of myself happily.” Or you can put it in whatever way or words you like. It seems that some times we tend to think badly of ourselves, we tend to berate ourselves, have a low self-esteem, and can even be harsh and unkind to ourselves. And some people even hate themselves! So it may be a good idea to radiate metta to yourself too, to learn how to love yourself, how to accept yourself as you are, warts and all. Somebody (Ashley Brilliant) once said “I may not be perfect but parts of me are excellent!” And this is very true – we may not be perfect but we have some excellent or good qualities, too. And then again, who is perfect? – all of us have our flaws, don’t we? So we shouldn’t be too hard on ourselves, shouldn’t judge ourselves too harshly.

Accepting ourselves as we are, appreciating our own goodness or good qualities and accepting our faults and limitations, does not mean that we will be complacent and not try to improve ourselves. No doubt we will keep trying to improve ourselves, keep trying to change in areas where we feel we ought to change, keep trying to purify our mind and weaken and uproot the mental defilements of greed, anger, aversion, delusion, etc. But as we are trying we should also be patient and love ourselves, too. Just as other people deserve love or goodwill, so do we. Thus, we should forgive ourselves our lapses, remembering the saying, “The glory is not in never failing, but in rising again every time you fall.”

Beside human beings, there are animals, ghosts, *asuras* (Buddhists believe these are some kind of hot-tempered, violent or aggressive spirit beings), and heavenly beings of which there are two kinds, *devas* (those dwelling in the sensual plane and enjoying sensual pleasures) and *brahmas* (those dwelling in the non-sensual plane enjoying a kind of mental bliss that is devoid of sensuality). So we can also radiate metta to all these beings wishing that they may be well and happy. You can even radiate metta to your departed ones\* thinking and wishing that may he (or she) wherever he has taken rebirth be happy, be free from harm and danger, and so on.

(Attention Hock Eng: Footnote\* In the Visuddhimagga, a manual on meditation, it is stated that one does not radiate metta to a dead person. But in this case we are thinking along the line of wherever that person has been reborn, so we are radiating to that living reborn person and not to a dead being anymore.)

Now in radiating metta there is the formal radiation and the informal one. By formal we mean sitting down, say in the formal meditation posture with folded legs on the floor, and radiating metta intensively for say 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 minutes or even up to an hour. In this case we’ll be repeating those metta lines again and again in our head and generating an intense or fervent wish for the welfare and happiness of all beings or specifically named beings. In this kind of meditation we can gain deep concentration and absorption. We can become very calm, peaceful

and tranquil. And a lot of joy and happiness can arise as we develop the skill in radiating and gaining concentration.

The informal radiation is what we have already mentioned above, just making sporadic wishes now and then as you go about your work, as you walk about, as you answer the phone, etc. In this case, the concentration is not so intense but the benefit is still great because you are constantly programming or conditioning your mind to be full of goodwill. It will also bring about the many benefits we have already mentioned above, such as a reduction in or lack of anger and illwill, a smiling or cheerful disposition, and an ability to make friends easily.

So you can do these two kinds of metta meditation – informal and formal. For the formal one you could start off your day with metta radiation as the Buddha himself did. You can sit down in the meditation posture or on a chair if you can't manage the formal meditation posture, and radiate lovingkindness for as long as you like. Or you can do it in the evening or night before going to bed. Or in the middle of the day or whenever you feel like it, you could close your eyes and radiate lovingkindness, even while seated in a chair in your office or while travelling in a bus, train, or plane.

Besides lovingkindness please remember the mindfulness practice. Being mindful now and then, as much as possible, of our daily activities, body movements and sensations, thoughts and mental states. As regards mindfulness, there is also the formal mindfulness or insight meditation which is done seated with legs folded on the mat or cushion on the floor. After having seated comfortably one then observes (feel or become aware of) the breath going in and out of the nostrils, or one observes the abdominal rise and fall that occur in unison with the breath, or one observes the sitting and tangible sensations at the back, buttocks, legs, hands, etc. It is not within the scope of this booklet to explain the formal insight meditation procedures and its aim which is to gain calm and tranquility and to see the impermanence, suffering (unsatisfactoriness) and egoless nature of this mind and body. For that you could read books such as *Insight Meditation* by Joseph Goldstein, *The Experience of Insight*, also by Goldstein; *Essentials of Insight Meditation* by Ven. Sujiva, *Practical Insight Meditation* by Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera, and *The Posture of Meditation* (which explains the sitting posture) by Will Johnson.

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## WISE REFLECTION

In Pali there is a very important term called *yoniso manasikàra* which has been translated as wise reflection and wise attention. The Buddha often emphasized the need for the application of wise reflection and attention in life. Wise reflection means to reflect or think in a wise way. And we need a lot of that, don't we? In life so many things go wrong (as they do go right, too) and we must know how to reflect in such a way as to be able to keep our mind afloat and buoyant. By afloat here I mean not to let the mind sink into depression, or if it does become depressed, then not to let it stay that way for too long. This means that we should try to keep our mind either cheerful, happy, or calm, peaceful and equanimous. And for that, we need (besides mindfulness) to know how to reflect in such a way as to lift our mind out of the quagmire. There are many ways of reflection such as counting our blessings, look on the bright or positive side (that is, see the full half as opposed to the empty half), see how things could have gone worse (cheer up, for the worse is yet to come, ha! ha!, or cheer up, for soon we will all be dead anyway, so why worry so much?), compare ourselves with those that are worse off so as to appreciate that we are still quite fortunate, inject a sense or dose of humour (he who laughs at himself never ceases to be



amused), understand the nature of life – the facts of impermanence, suffering and not-self (egolessness or the uncontrollability of events) and so on.

Now wise reflection also involves wise attention which means paying attention in a wise or proper manner. This means seeing or observing how the suffering has arisen. For example, we can notice how our unskillful attachment and grasping has contributed to our suffering. Through such understanding and realization we can begin the work of letting go, of relaxing our grip on our hold of things and people, of living lightly and happily. Life offers us a lot of lessons: there are lots of opportunities for us to learn – the question is do we learn or do we keep making the same mistakes? Expectations, for example, lead to disappointments. Can we, therefore, expect less and be less disappointed? Can we be content with little and find happiness in the good old fashioned values of caring and loving, of giving and serving?

Life has a lot to teach us but we have to pay careful attention in order to learn. Look inside yourself and look around – there are lessons to be gleaned everywhere. I like the way inspirational writer Dr Rachel Naomi Remen puts it. She said: “We are all here for a single purpose: to grow in wisdom and to learn to love better. We can do this through losing as well as through winning, by having and by not having, by succeeding or by failing. All we need to do is to show up openhearted for class. So fulfilling life’s purpose may depend more on how we play than on what we are dealt with.”

How true! Is it not how we play that counts, how we respond towards a certain situation, towards life, and all the things that happen to us in life? Sometimes *kamma-vipàka* (that is, the results of actions we have done in this or previous lives) may deal us certain blows or sufferings in life. But it is how we respond that can make a difference. For example, if we must or have to suffer we can choose to do so cheerfully or calmly, or we can choose to be depressed or angry. What we wish to emphasize here is we *do* have a choice as to how we respond, and how we make that choice is up to us. What’s important is to realize that what counts is the learning and growing, that is, whether we are growing wiser and kinder. If we are then we are doing fine, we are actually being successful, because ultimately that’s the success that counts – the loving better and becoming wiser and kinder.

Paying attention is also a form of mindfulness. It means observing the mind and body states that are arising and passing away in us all the time. Through such observation we will come to understand not only the specific characteristics of those states but also their impermanent nature – how they are just fleeting mind moments and material qualities which are constantly arising and passing away. We are not something fixed and unchanging but something flowing like a river. We are something changing and we can change for the better or worse depending on our choice. Of course having chosen to change for the better, we also need effort to bring about that change.

Seeing impermanence will lead us to understand the suffering or unsatisfactory and not-self nature of phenomena. All this understanding will lead to or culminate in a letting go of craving, anger and delusion. We will end up living more lightly, wisely and happily. For the Buddhist, however, living happily is not the ultimate goal of this practice of mindfulness: there is something further to strive for which is the attainment of Nibbana, the end of all rebirth and suffering.

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What we have shared here are only some aspects of the practice. There’s a lot more that can be written about mindfulness and the teachings of the Buddha. For us to live a more happy, peaceful, meaningful and fulfilling life, we need to cultivate the right values and attitudes. The Buddha’s

Noble Eightfold Path is a complete and holistic path that includes the factors of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. We need to study all aspects of these path factors if we are to live meaningfully and exit from *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death.

We hope, however, that the little we have written here has whetted your appetite and that you will be inspired to read more books on the subject of mindfulness and meditation and various other aspects of the Buddha's teachings.

May you find the peace and happiness that you seek in life. May all beings, too, be happy. May all be liberated from suffering.

In conclusion, may we offer this prayer for the well-being and happiness of all sentient beings in the universe:

*May penetrating light dispel the darkness of ignorance.  
May all kamma be resolved and the mind-flower of wisdom bloom  
in Nibbana's eternal spring.*

*May all those who are afflicted be affliction-free.  
May they be serene through all their ills.  
Even if bodily afflictions do not subside,  
may we all be healed in heart and mind.*

*May all beings live in peace and harmony.  
May they have health & wealth & comforts & friends that are true.  
May they have skills, talents, & knowledge  
& sweet success in all that they do.*

*May they have joy & happiness in abundance.*

*May all beautiful, great and noble virtues of – generosity, love, kindness, compassion, patience, fortitude, tolerance, forgiveness, honesty, courage, strength, energy, determination, resilience, perseverance, consideration, humility, gratitude, contentment, composure, serenity, wisdom, understanding and equanimity – be theirs.*

*May they attain full wisdom and enlightenment.  
May they be liberated from all suffering.*

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About the author: Visu was born in Penang, Malaysia, in 1953. He has been practising meditation since 1982 and has studied with various teachers including the Myanmar Meditation Master Sayadaw U Pandita. He had been a journalist for 12 years and a Buddhist monk (Bhikkhu Visuddhacara) for 17 years before he resumed the lay life in 2003. He and his wife, Barbara,

travel to teach the Dhamma in various countries. Visu has led retreats in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Italy and Czech Republic. He is the author of several books including 'Curbing Anger Spreading Love,' 'Loving and Dying,' 'Hello with love and other meditations' and 'Metta – the practice of lovingkindness for a happier life.'