



Mindfulness and Meditation

teacher's notes

In this section teachers can find materials on how to explain to their students how Buddhists meditate, and what the benefits of meditation are from a Buddhist perspective. There are also guided meditations available both in a written version as well as on video. In addition, songs, stories, and activities around the topic of "mindfulness and meditation" can be found.

From the Buddhist point of view, meditation is a way of working with our human mind.

Working with one's mind, "training" one's mind, can be seen in all forms of meditation. Meditation can help us to better understand our thoughts, feelings and emotions and to get to know ourselves better.

The importance of meditation in Buddhism is based on the Buddha's personal experience of its benefits. Samatha meditation (in Pali, or shamatha in Sanskrit) develops mental concentration and focus and brings about peace of mind. The word means 'calm abiding' and so samatha is sometimes called 'tranquillity meditation'; it allows all our busy thoughts to settle of their own accord until we can rest spaciously, peacefully, and at ease with ourselves.

The first step in samatha meditation is the cultivation of 'mindfulness,' which means awareness of ourselves and our state of mind.

There are four main types of mindfulness practice: mindfulness of body, feelings and sensations, mind, and mental states.

One of the very first methods often taught to beginners is breathing meditation, which can be part of the mindfulness of body. The idea is to rest the mind solely on the breath and not let it get carried away by distracting thoughts and emotions. The object of the breath can be replaced by other objects of concentration, such as a candle, a flower, a picture, or a statue.

Primarily meditation has a spiritual purpose, not a worldly purpose. It is key to freeing oneself from suffering and its causes and thereby to attaining nirvana. Even though meditation can help people relax and feel less stressed, these are considered secondary benefits and not the main point. Buddhist meditation is not a way of escaping from life or papering over difficulties, rather it gives us the strength and confidence to face them better and to live life well.

There are social benefits of meditation, too, for example meditation has been introduced on a voluntary basis in prisons in several countries with positive results.