

MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS 22-DAY COURSE

By Vern Lovic, M.A.

Meditation for Beginners – a 22 Day Course

(Meditation without Religion)

Published at Smashwords.

©2011 Vern Lovic. All rights reserved.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be resold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Welcome to this easy to follow meditation course!

It's as simple as following day to day. You can go all out and meditate 10 hours per day. You might sit 5 minutes once a day. Or 5 times for 5 minutes each day. As we say in Thailand, "Up to you!"

You might want to light incense. You might want to sit or stand or lie down. Up to you.

Short Description of this Meditation Course:

This short e-book meditation course is for anyone. You are probably a beginning meditator, but advanced meditators that are stuck can find the key to progressing here.

You don't have to sit in a certain posture. You don't have to fold your legs in back of your head. It isn't Yoga. It isn't Yogi. It isn't Yoda. It's just sitting. If you can't sit, you can stand. If you can't stand you can walk. If you can't do any of those you can lie down on your back. If you can't do this, can you lie on your side?

It's that flexible. Like I said, it's for "anyone".

Why did you decide to create this course?

In 1997 I began to meditate. I didn't start because of any religious practice. I wasn't Buddhist, Hindu, or anything else. I didn't have a belief in any "ism" (Buddhism, Catholicism, Deism, Theism, Christianity, Muslimism, Hinduism). None of those or any other. I was not anti- any of these religions, but I found that I was more of a "free thinker" so to speak. Not believing in a certain God and yet not at all sure there isn't one.

So, I sat and focused on the sensations of my breath.

I watched it go in.

I watched it go out.

I sat in an empty bedroom on the floor, on the rug. Though I hadn't followed Buddhism and its beliefs I had read some books about it. I read some books on meditation. I read a book on Vipassana. I read some by Buddhadasa Bhikku and Ajahn Chah in Thailand. I read many things and it seemed that when "authorities" started talking about meditation, they had many rules about what one had to do and not do during it. They were very concerned about posture, length of time sitting, knowing all the vocabulary pertaining to it, and many other things that I wasn't at all concerned with.

In my life I try things. I keep what works and throw out what doesn't. Life in the USA is quite stressful at times and I decided to try meditation to see if I might gain some peace... some calm... some relaxation when it was called for... I wanted some way to relax when upset. Relax when worried. Relax when anxious. I wanted some way to remain calm in the face of anxieties.

I found all of these things in meditation.

If you are looking for what I was looking for, meaning, some peace of mind... you may well find it here in this simple meditation course. Some of you may find more. Some of you may go someplace in your consciousness that is unexpected... in fact, some of you may find something deeper...

In my own journey I began by meditating for about 10 months in total back in 1997-1998 timeframe. I sat a few times a week. Sometimes 5 times per week. Sometimes 3. Sometimes 7. Sometimes 10.

At some point there began a revolutionary change occurring inside the mind. At the time, I was in the USA and I hadn't the slightest idea what it meant... I asked Thai Buddhist monks there in America and wasn't given any good answers to my questions about what process was going on. It was only after I moved here to Thailand that I began to understand what was happening... The abbot of a western style forest wat (Buddhist temple) here in Thailand as well as some monks there told me that I was experiencing what they called, "Jhana". Apparently there were 8 levels of Jhana, and I had been through them all.

Jhanas, as defined by Buddhists, are very tightly defined states of consciousness that have certain qualities that are best described by Buddha himself.

Is Jhana necessary for enlightenment? Who's to say. They are unique (bizarre) states of consciousness that are indescribable with words. If you're lucky enough to experience any of the states, even the first Jhana, you'll realize that you felt something that was nothing like your ordinary states of consciousness. They're rather *magical* states, for lack of a better term.

Continuing the story... The abbot of the temple (Wat Pah Nanachat in Warin Chamrap near Ubon Ratchathani) asked me to stay and continue the "process" there at the temple for as long as I wished. He said that the monks staying at the temple were all trying to reach the various states of Jhana I had, and that I was welcome to stay and continue...

Well, after some thought I decided not to stay. I came to Thailand for the answers about what the states were, but I was not ready to enter into those

states again. Jhana and the road to nirvana are filled with fulfilling and blissful experiences. Even though I chose not to continue or to complete the journey right now, I know that someday I will sit again and see where it all leads. Even though I stopped meditation years ago, the process continues inside...

Meditation at the level of Jhana is an all or nothing process... it will create an incredible amount of turmoil inside you if you are one of the ones that *gets there*... Turmoil arises when you are faced with a decision about "going the whole way" or not. Conflict arises between the you that you were before the process began and the you that you are now (or are not now, might be more accurate).

The ego slowly dissolves... wants, desires, 'needs', go away gently... unnoticed sometimes... the process is sometimes very slow or sometimes happens in large jumps... what was important one day becomes nothing as it is let go... non-attachment and the realization that things are impermanent, non-self, not worth attaching to - comes naturally as a result of the state of mind that is present. It is not because it is "Buddhist" or Hindu or anything else. It is the natural state of the mind after meditation at or around the Jhana states.

Those looking for "magical" or other worldly experiences may interpret the experiences he or she has during this course, as just that. Others will interpret it in the name of their religion. Others will not experience anything. And, as I said, some may experience something that is so beyond words that they couldn't possibly even attempt to explain the experience in words. For me, I believe that anything I've ever written about the Jhana states is tremendously incomplete. To write something and put into words the feeling of the state is so ludicrous that I should never attempt it and yet I'm drawn to tell others about it so that I can share the experience on some level.

I could say so much more, and then, what's the point? I'd only be talking around the actual feeling and experiences and it's such a worthless pursuit.

I will tell you what I did. I'll outline it in this meditation course. I think that what has occurred in me can happen within ANYONE. I'm not special. I simply did a few things consistently. Then the process started in me. I didn't do something so wonderful that I earned it... what I did was not difficult. I don't think you need to be some place special - at the top of a mountain temple, or in a cave in Thailand. You don't need to be someone special either.

You don't need to do things exactly as I tell you I did them. You don't need to follow books on exactly how to meditate. You just need to...

do.

That's it - just do, and see if life changes. If not, go back to whatever you were doing before.

If you do find that something has happened... some process begins for you that is similar or even vaguely similar to what I describe in this book would you please write me an email and let me know what happened for you?

It may be a long process or it may come to you almost immediately. There are monks that spend 40+ years meditating. Here's a secret, it doesn't take that long if you don't add the extra fluff of religion on top of the experience. Religion adds additional challenges to "getting there". In fact I think that the reason there are thousands of monks in Thailand that have not had Jhana yet is because they have the fluff of Buddhism coloring their experience, piling layers of unnecessary rules and tradition on top of what can be a physical process – not religious.



Why meditate?

The photo above is from one of my favorite places in Southern Thailand. It is very close to large caves and a freshwater spring one can kayak through at one's leisure, but there is more to the place than that...

This pool of fresh water is special. It is special because it's a bit like our consciousness. If you try hard you might be able to see very small waves or ripples on the right side of the top of the water. They're very slight. They might not really even be there, I'm not sure. The surface of the water is like the surface of your consciousness. The part that you are aware of.

When it ripples – when it is interacting with the world around you – it is obvious and you will have ripples. The surface ripples are what you are usually aware of. When you think, listen, speak, shout, engage in something physical or stressful, the waves are created.

With meditation - that all stops. Your mind can be totally still, unmoving. It's very possible. It has happened to me and many others that have meditated. When the surface of the mind calms and becomes still, we start to see and feel what is underneath. We wouldn't know there is anything much underneath our consciousness except what we can see from the surface.

This pool is just like that. You can see into the water maybe a foot, or at the most a meter deep. If you stumbled on this pool while walking through the forest you might guess it was about 2 meters (6+ feet) deep. I guessed that when I first saw it, and actually for the first few times I saw it.

Another way your consciousness is similar to this pool is because there is more to it than you might imagine. If you are studying your own consciousness without meditation you can see that you have a waking state, a sleeping state, and maybe daydream states and dreaming states while you sleep. That's about all we know about ourselves upon first inspection.

This pool, like your mind, has another dimension to it that you don't realize. Would you believe me if I told you a 10-story building would go underwater if we dropped it into this pool?

What about a 50 story building?

Yes, it's true... this pool is deeper than 500 feet. It's actually 200+ meters deep! That's over 600 feet deep. There is little to give the secret away until someone explores it by diving down deep and seeing how far it goes.

Your consciousness is just like this. It's deep. Really deep. It might make this hole in the ground with water seem like a *pothole*, your mind is so deep and filled with things to discover.

Meditation is a process of discovery. It's like you're exploring something that has never been seen before. In truth, it hasn't. It's you. It's all that is under your consciousness. Some people believe that under our surface consciousness is a universal-consciousness through which we are all connected. I can't agree or disagree with that, but it's an interesting way to look at things. People that meditate in a simple way by focusing on the breath until the mind stops and then just experiencing a non-moving mind tend to have similar experiences but they are probably not always the same, they are unique to the person somewhat.

Even so, they are also similar enough that when we share them with each other – we can usually identify similar experiences and feelings and say we've experienced that *too*.

I have never met anyone that shared all of the experiences I've had, nor have I met two people that explained Jhana levels or other experiences in the exact same way. We all interpret the experience a little differently.

I guess I felt a need to prepare you a little bit for what you'll experience if you happen to be a 'natural' and quickly progress through quieting the mind and having it stop. Once it stops the most amazing things happen. I'll not describe them much in these pages but I'll share a few things, as I can't usually keep the cat in the bag for long. Most of you will be following the steps outlined in the following pages – and becoming more peaceful, finding

relaxation through these simple steps. There is no need to go further into Jhanas – unless you want to. Either way, this is a good start.

Day 1: Sit. Observe.

Let go of *ANY* expectations about what will happen as you meditate.

I'll repeat that... don't think that you will have some experience of heaven... nirvana. Don't think that you will have an empty mind. Don't think that you will stop thought today or next week. Don't think anything. If you are attached in any way to the idea that you are going to "get" something from sitting today, let it go. The reason for this is that the focus during every time you sit and meditate is just doing it. That's it. If you're sitting, you're *doing it* and that is the goal for the day, nothing else.

If you are concerned about getting something every time or *ANY time* you meditate, you will be disappointed. If you are disappointed you will likely not continue for long. You'll be happier if you continue.



Find a place to meditate for this course. Try to sit in the same place each time. Find a place that is quiet. A place where you cannot hear a TV, music, dogs barking, people talking, or cars driving by, is best. This might be very difficult for you. You may need to go somewhere outside your home to find a quiet place to meditate. You may need to find a meditation group listed in your local paper that meets in a quiet place regularly.

Finding a quiet place is at first very important because many distractions can prove too much to handle and you may stop meditation as quickly as you start.

You'll need to find a place that has a comfortable, pleasant temperature - not too hot - not too cold. Fan, air conditioning, or wind blowing directly on you is not conducive to meditation.

Find a place free of or relatively free of insects that will be flying around you, landing on you, biting you, etc.

Again, at first these things can greatly distract you. Later they may not matter at all.

Over the last two years I've found I can meditate even in the middle of chaos around me. I sometimes test it in an especially noisy area and see - can my mind be still in this environment? It can! This was not possible early on.

Before I meditate I usually drink some unsweetened tea or coffee to ensure that my mouth won't be salivating too much as I sit and meditate. To me it is disturbing to swallow endlessly as I meditate. The bitter tea or coffee always does the trick for me. It's not necessary, and some strict Buddhists don't drink anything with caffeine, but I'm not "Buddhist" and anything is permissible. Do it if you like.

I also used to burn sandalwood incense sticks in front of me on the floor. I'm not sure why except that I was able to smell it and more easily focus on my breath. I also found that watching the smoke come off it was very relaxing. Sometimes if my mind would not quiet and the 'circus of thought' was in full swing I'd open my eyes and watch the smoke curl and it served as a good focal point to relax me on occasion.

Once you've found a quiet place that you can sit undisturbed for up to an hour, you'll need to find a comfortable position to sit. You will be sitting for 5 minutes, or 50 minutes later (maybe, again up to you) so you'll need to find a posture that works for you.

The easiest posture for me was to sit cross-legged with my right foot on top of the crease created by my left calf and thigh. In Thai or Indian writings this is almost a half-lotus position. If your back is straight you'll probably have less pain and be able to sit for a longer period.

There is no reason to sit any longer than an hour. For me the longest I ever sat was just over 2 hours. I usually sat for 20-40 minutes.

So, your back *should* be straight. Put your hands in your lap. Your fingers will naturally curl inward if you are relaxed so just let them do that.

You are trying to find a comfortable posture in which you can remain alert, not get sleepy, and not fall over when you are relaxed... and yet you should be as relaxed as possible.

You will not find a painless position at first, though you can try if you wish. You can sit on a pillow or meditation cushion. I've tried soft pillows and they seem too soft - they tend to throw off my balance and once I really relax I tend to be leaning or compensating for them by tensing up certain muscle groups. You can lean back against a wall, a couch, a bed, anything to help support your back, if you have back pain.

Posture is not that important. Though Buddhists and others will stress the importance of perfect posture, I've found that it matters little. What matters is that you are comfortable and can relax completely in the sitting position. I have had the highest states of mind come whether I was sitting in the middle of a concrete floor, leaning against a wall, leaning back in an executive office chair, or sitting on a straight backed chair. No difference. Don't believe you're going to get nowhere if you don't adhere to a specific posture someone is preaching.

If you are limber you might want to try the full lotus or the half-lotus positions, as they are very stable and some people can meditate for hours and hours without too much discomfort.

I don't recommend reclining on your back to meditate, though you might find that you are one that can do it without getting sleepy. Me? I get sleepy every time I attempt it - so I just don't try anymore.

So, practice finding a sitting posture and sitting with your eyes lightly closed.

There will be many things going on in your mind... in your body. Your body will be trying to adjust to the position that it is in. You may feel pain. You may feel hot. You may feel cold.

Your breathing may be fast. Or it may be slow.

Your mind may be filled with thoughts. So many thoughts that you can't possibly focus on any one thought in particular. You may feel an emotion. You may have questions forming, and even conversations taking place in your head.

Just watch the "circus" of perception going on inside your head and body.

This is the first step. Watch all the turmoil your body and mind is experiencing even as you sit, relaxing in one spot with your eyes closed.

Why is there turmoil when you are doing nothing really, just sitting?

The mind appears to be just running on constantly, doesn't it?

Meditation involves watching this mind circus going on... As you watch it you will notice many things. You can look at feelings. Physical sensations. Fear. Love. Thoughts. You will understand more about memories and what part they play in your thoughts. You may be watching your thoughts, hearing them for the first time and in a different way.

Do you hear thoughts or see them - or both? Do you feel them?

The first part of this meditation course is focusing on just watching everything going on. Watch. Don't take part... just watch and focus on the various things. See how your "attention" to something can isolate it from everything else going on. Also see how things link together. One thought provides a springboard for a chain of linked thoughts that might end up going completely away from the original thought.

You might get caught in a daydream that goes for a couple minutes - or 20 minutes!

It is this attention (watching) that you'll later use to focus on breathing as you watch it come into and exit the body.

So for the first day - sit as long as you feel like - maybe 20 minutes and watch. Do nothing more. You can change position if your legs are hurting, your foot is hurting, your back is hurting... but before you change position - watch the discomfort - the pain for a just a little while.

What is pain? What is discomfort? What are its qualities?

Think of yourself as a scientist or a student. You are a student of your consciousness. Of your body and mind. You are going to see what makes YOU tick. You're going to learn a lot about yourself in 22 days. Keeping a short journal might be something you'll enjoy looking back on in a few weeks or months. I have journal entries I wrote 10 years ago that still bring me back to that place as if it was happening right now.

So, do that if you feel inclined – keep a short journal after each meditation session about what you experienced.

Ok, that's Day 1 of your Meditation Course...

Do come back tomorrow.

Namaste...

:)

Day 2: Observe Physical Sensations

Don't worry if day 2 is not the day after day 1. No matter. Sometimes you will feel like sitting, and sometimes you won't. But, assuming you feel like it today...

Get yourself a cup of unsweetened tea - or coffee if you drink it - or something else bitter. You want something bitter because it works best for quieting your mouth down. So, with your coffee or other bitter, sugarless liquid - swish it around in your mouth. I used to suck on a tea bag because I could usually find a used one in the sink... In a minute I was ready to go! Ha-ha - I know it seems silly, but whatever works for you - use it.

Find the same spot that you were at for day 1. Sit down and find that comfortable position... It's OK to move around for the first few minutes until it feels comfortable enough. The first few minutes - maybe 2 or maybe 20 - depending on you - is for calming the physical and emotional body... It really is easier for you to sit for a longer period of time if you keep a straight spine and neck. Though a straight spine doesn't mean vertically straight and perfect. You might lean forward a little - I always do. No matter, find a position you can hold for 20-30 minutes.

Close your eyes and focus on the physical sensations your body is producing. Look at the pain that you feel. Is it in your foot? Adjust it. Is it in your back?

Watch the pain for a second and notice what pain *is*... pain is a firing of some neurons in your brain telling you that some part of the body is uncomfortable. If you watch the brain do this - focus on the pain - the uncomfortable feeling, then what happens?

Anything? Does the pain lessen or grow worse? Stay the same? Over time notice this... does it change from time to time or from session to session? We usually think of pain as a constant thing... is it?

So just sit and watch the body... If you were 'ready' to sit then the body is more cooperative... the circus might be toned down a bit... but if you weren't ready to sit, the circus can be in full-swing.

If you notice before you sit that you are frazzled and cannot relax at all - maybe meditation at that time is not the best time. Just go lay down and relax. The un-ready mind will throw countless thoughts out there - and the body will manifest various things that will inhibit your meditation session. If you constantly sit when you're not ready, you may stop meditation because you don't progress...

Everyone needs to see some progress to continue – or what's the point?

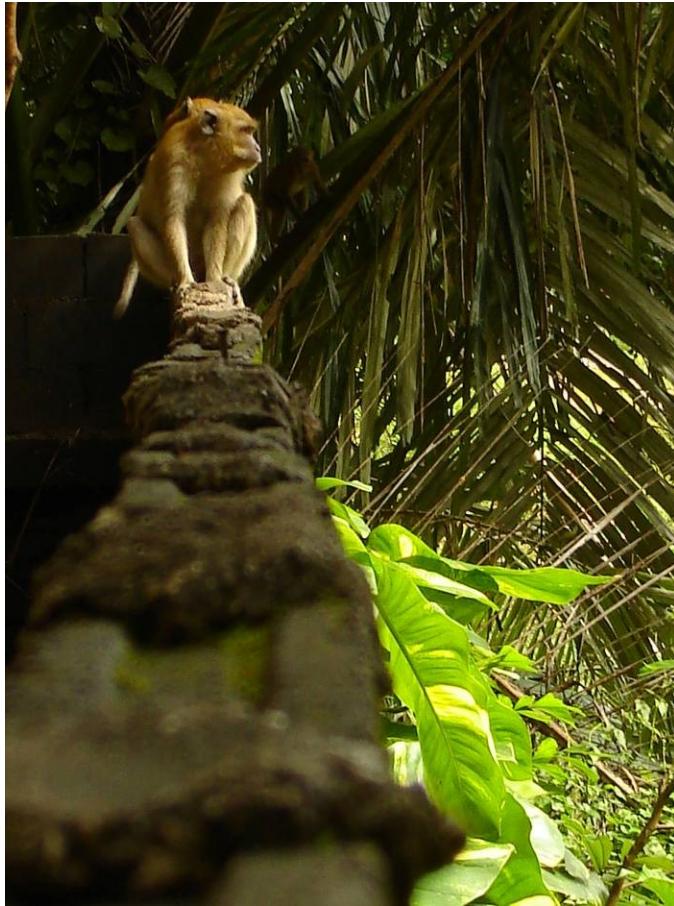
During your sitting and watching the body you may notice various things... pain, hot, cold, anxiety, muscles stretching, your nose whistling, excess saliva and swallowing, ear ache, headache, stomach ache, restroom urges, fast breathing, irregular breathing, your pulse moving your body, you may hear your heartbeat... many, many things can be observed.

As you first sit down – each time – notice the physical sensations your body produces... if you focus on them what happens? The first part of sitting for me is always to 1.) Get comfortable 2.) Focus on relaxing and listening to body and mind, and then when I'm sufficiently relaxed I can go forward...

So, that's it – for second day of this Meditation Course – just focus on the various physical sensations that are produced as you sit, and notice what happens to them when they are focused on. In what ways do they change?

:)

Day 3: Observing the Breath



Again, don't worry if day 3 is not the next calendar day. No matter...

Last time you focused on the physical sensations present as you sat. On this third day, try focusing completely on the breath.

There are a couple physical things going on in your body all the time – one is the breath. It is a great subject to focus on, and the basis of this meditation course.

When you watch the breath there are many things to notice...

The pace of breathing... the consistency of the pace of breathing – does it always stay same as you sit?

The smoothness of the breath – or the irregularity of it...

The depth or shallowness of breath... and, does it change over time, or is each breath a carbon copy of the last?

Where do you feel the breath? Your nose? Your throat? Your mouth? Your lungs? Your stomach? Do you notice your diaphragm muscle beneath your ribs contracting and relaxing to enable you to breathe?

Usually people keep their mouths closed and breathe through the nose – but if you have a cold or a nasal condition that prohibits you from doing so then breathing through the mouth is fine... however, your mouth may become very dry with sitting a long time.

So watch your breath... at what point does it enter and exit the body? What physical sensation does it produce? Where exactly is that sensation? Some of us feel it at the tip of the nose... some further up the nose... where do you feel it?

Look at the breath for the duration of this session. You can extend this to many days of looking at the breath, before going further - if you wish.

:)

Day 4: Observe the Breath at the Tip of Your Nostrils

Last time you focused on all the sensations present with the breath. The breath is the focus of this meditation course. Today you will do the same, but add something more... Really, only two things are needed for great changes to take place inside your mind... a focus on the breath and mindfulness during the day when not meditating.

Start your usual sitting session with getting comfortable in your sitting posture and watch all the things going on with your body and mind... See if you are able to relax and calm the mind down...

Notice the physical sensations going on...

Notice the breath.

Watch the breath.

Notice where the breath enters and leaves the body at the nose.

Try to narrow down your focus to just a small place in the nose where the breath can be felt entering and leaving the body.

It is this tiny area of focus that is important to meditation.

Once you find the spot to focus on, continue to do so.

Your mind will likely still be filled with other thoughts and you may occasionally feel your body crying out for attention – a cramp, some back pain, some foot pain, muscle pain...

And that is what is going to happen... it is supposed to happen. You will know that, at this point, you are on the right track. You are doing what you need to be doing...

Focus on the breath at that small point in your nose. Watch that spot for the entire in-breath and the entire out-breath.

Can you focus just on that tiny spot of sensation of the air coming in and out at your nose - for one complete breath?

Try it.

Does something else – some bit of mind-candy interrupt and stop you from focusing?

If not, try two breaths.

Most people cannot focus their entire consciousness on that tiny spot of sensation in the nose for even one entire in- and out-breath.

As you notice that the attention of your mind has switched from the sensation of the breath on your nose to whatever thought interrupted it, re-focus on the breath at that small spot in your nose.

That is all... That right there is a big key to meditation success.

That is the major effort of meditation in this style. Focus on the breath – your entire attention is on the breath for the in- and out- breaths. When a thought interrupts, you simply note (or realize that you caught attention drifting) that your attention has changed, and change it back to re-focus on the breathing. Over and over and over and over you must do this.

Anger may arise when you realize you cannot do it well at first. It is not a competition to do it correctly. You're a student, studying yourself. You're learning about yourself. It's fun!

It is quite impossible for anyone to focus on the breath with complete attention soon after starting meditation. Even after meditating a year or so – almost daily, you will probably find that it takes some time each time you sit before your mind is quiet enough to focus only on the breath. Your mind will *still* interrupt with thoughts about pain, some emotional issue, some memory from years ago... but, the point is – just keep re-focusing on the breath.

Eventually, and it might take you days, you will reach a point where you can watch in full attention, one entire breath without interruption.

When you do that, and it may even take a week, it may take a month... it may take 3 months. But, when you do that – one important part of the process has been accomplished.

The next "goal" would be to be able to count 10 full breaths in complete attention – in succession, one after another. This goal may take a year or 3 years, or if you are lucky it may take a month. Everyone is different...

:)

Day 5: Observe Breath. Observe the Present Moment.

Last time you focused on the breath. Today you will do the same. In fact, for the rest of the course you will do the same... The breath is the focus of this meditation course. I mentioned before, only two things are needed for great changes to take place inside the consciousness... a continued focus on the breath, and mindfulness during the day when not meditating.

Start your usual sitting session with getting comfortable in your sitting posture and watch all the things going on with your body and mind... Try to relax and calm the mind down... this is usually done by 'letting go'. Let go of anything bothering you. It might be there later when you are done sitting, but for now just tell it 'never-mind' and let it go.

Notice the physical sensations going on... pain? Discomfort? Emotions? Fatigue?

Again, find the place at the tip of your nose or the spot where your upper lip meets your nose. The same spot you focused on yesterday – find it now and focus on it.

It is this tiny area of focus that is important to meditation.

Once you find the spot where you feel the air of the breath entering and exiting your nose – focus right there.

Your mind will likely still be filled with other thoughts and you may occasionally feel your body crying out for attention – a cramp, some back pain, some foot pain, muscle pain...

Focus on the breath at that small point in your nose. Watch that spot with your mind, with your attention. Observe it for the entire in-breath and the entire out-breath.

See if you can focus – entirely focus *ONLY* on that one in- and out-breath.

When you find your attention has shifted from the breath to whatever other thought interrupted, re-focus on the breath at that small spot in your nose.

For this entire session - focus on the breath. When your mind wanders, re-focus on the breath. That is the major effort of this meditation. And you will need to do it many, many times to be able to concentrate for one full breath. It seems like it should be easy to focus your mind entirely on something so simple. It is not. It is deceptively difficult!

When you are finished with your sitting session there is something else to do today, and every day from this point forward. It has to do with "mindfulness". To be mindful means to be aware. Specifically, being aware of the present. Not the past or future, the *present*.



In the present is where we are living. Every moment that goes by we are only living in the present. We can only experience what is real in the present. The past is filled with memories which are selective, incomplete, and as studies show us - sometimes even completely false. The future is filled with unknowns even more than the past. The present is all we have in which to "know" reality. It is all we can do – watching our consciousness to see what it is doing in the present.

When you find yourself living in the present you are empowered to act in a way that can instantly change everything.

Catching yourself aware of the present moment is sometimes tricky. When you play a game or when you play a sport... doing something active... gardening, raking, shoveling, or climbing a ladder – you are likely IN the present moment. Your mind consciousness, your mind is focused just on that experience without past or future intruding. You're *doing*.

When you are playing a game – you ARE the game. There is little intruding thought about the past or future... But, when we are quiet, the mind sifts through its mind-candy and tosses some out for our thought processes to chew on a bit. If we don't have external mind-candy like the TV, radio, computer, conversations, books, magazines, IPods, cell phone, etc... then the mind will regurgitate some of its own for you to analyze and replay in

your mind. The mind is a candy producer. It produces thoughts about the future and past *constantly* – and that are entirely unnecessary, but that fill each and every one of our minds with trash to keep our minds active. Though our bodies don't like to be active all the time we're awake - our minds seem to love it!

The mind isn't accustomed to being quiet, so what it does is relive the past or play out the future in scenarios that may or may not happen. The mind is a recorder of the past and an odds-maker and analyst of the future.

But, neither of those is where meditation is. Meditation and mindfulness is NOW. It is exactly *this* moment.

Try to be aware of the present moment as you go through your day. Catch yourself realizing that *THIS* is the present moment.

See how many times you can do this. At first it will be hard, you'll forget many times – whole days or a week may pass!

Think up creative ways to remind yourself to notice the present moment.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Mahayana Buddhist monk from Vietnam, now living in Plum Village in France, has some excellent books available on mindfulness. "*Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*" is one of the best books I've ever read on the subject.

:)

Day 6: Observe Present Moment while Meditating

How did you do with the mindfulness exercise?

I really believe that mindfulness is half the equation when meditating. It may come about naturally as a result of meditation, even if you don't purposefully practice it - not sure. I used the two together, so I cannot say.

But, try them together. When you are sitting and watching the breath, you are in the present moment. You are being mindful of the present. When you stop meditating and are going through your day, your work... try to notice the present moment at times. Catch yourself thinking about the future, the past. Bring yourself into the present.

I set my watch alarm to sound every 15 minutes. When it went off I was mindful. So, I was mindful 4 times per hour at minimum. After that I noticed that I was becoming mindful much more throughout the day.

This meditation course, separated by days, is only for the sake of presenting a clear way of going about things. Feel free to take what you've learned in the past 6 days of lessons and apply it whenever you like. There is no need to follow each day exactly as prescribed here. Some days you can focus on physical sensations. Some days concentration on the breath might come easily... do it then! Remember that the point is that you eventually are able to focus on the breathing – giving your entire attention to the breathing over 10-30 minutes or more.

You should begin to lengthen your periods of mindfulness during the day also. Each time you become mindful of the present – see how long you can extend this state. You can be mindful of repetitive tasks easily... washing dishes, eating, gardening, or some other activity. If you are having trouble putting yourself into the mindfulness state – the books by Thich Nhat Hanh have some simple exercises you can follow.

The goals then, are to lengthen your period of mindfulness of breath while meditating, and lengthening your periods of mindfulness of the present moment during the day when not meditating.

If you can do just the few things mentioned in this book already, you may experience a level of peace that is so beyond words... it's as if heaven has reached down and showered your consciousness with magic dust for that time... Sorry, I don't know of any good, or better way, to explain it!

:)

Day 7: Observe the Body. Observe Pain.

Sit and watch the thought-circus. If there is pain - watch the pain. Don't change position - just watch the pain.

What is pain? If you focus on it - does it change? Does it worsen? Does it get less? Does the sensation rise and fall? How does pain make you pay attention to it? By rising and falling? If you must change position - change, don't give too much thought to it, just change. Don't call it a good change or a bad change.

Throughout your meditation you can eliminate judging everything you do as OK or not OK. Everything is OK. More rightly, everything is neither OK nor not OK. There is no right or wrong way. Everything is as it is.



Buddhadassa Bhikku, a Theravada Buddhist monk from Thailand that created Suan Mokkharam in Chaiya, Thailand, really enjoyed this saying. "It is as it is..." or, "Just as it is." Here is a concrete mold by an artist at Wat Suan Mokkh in Chaiya, Thailand depicting the saying in Thai language.

Continue to watch any pain until it is gone. If it doesn't go - no matter, it will go sufficiently enough that you can continue this course. It may take a month! I never sat too long if the pain was too intense. Never for more than 30 minutes.

Meditation shouldn't be filled with suffering, otherwise you will not continue. Take some aspirin before you meditate... I did on occasion and it was a welcome relief and didn't interfere with the meditation at all (that I know of)

...

If after 1 month you are still having too much pain, then change your meditation position to something more relaxing and pain-free. If you run out of possible sitting postures on the floor, use a chair. Use a plastic chair, padded leather chair, reclining chair – no matter. If you cannot sit in a chair at all – try reclining on your back on a hard surface or hard cushion. Don't

lay on your bed because likely you've conditioned your mind to assume it's OK to sleep if you're in your bed. You're not sleeping - you're meditating.

Once you find a good position, just watch the circus go on until your body starts to calm down. You can try focusing on the breath at different times when you first sit down but when you first start meditating – for the first few weeks and even months it will take some time for the body and mind to calm down. You'll see though that the mind comes to a period where it's slowing down the rate of mind-candy it's churning out. Try then to focus on the breath. It will be easier. It's a losing battle before that point and no point doing it. Up to you though... maybe someone told you that attempting to focus on your breathing even at that point is "the way" to do it... no matter, and up to you...

As the mind quiets and you can focus on the breath a bit - do you notice that you have a sense of feeling in your arms, legs, chest, hands, neck? Do you actually feel the parts of your body as you're sitting there absolutely still? Look at that occasionally and ask yourself. Maybe at some point you won't feel much. Maybe you won't feel anything. Maybe at some point your entire body will be numb to any awareness of feeling... Or, maybe you always feel your body? Study yourself. Find out.

How long were you able to sustain attention on your breathing today?

Don't be discouraged... I knew a Buddhist monk here in Thailand that had come from England. He was ordained as a monk and for 3 years and he followed the strict regimen of a Buddhist monk at a forest temple in Northeastern Thailand (Wat Pah Nanachat). He confided to me that he was able to completely focus on breathing for "no longer than 3 minutes".

I personally think that the monks have a *harder time* than the rest of us do. I think that when we add religion to the equation we will have a much harder time progressing through meditation.

Why, do I think so?

Buddhists have hundreds of rules and beliefs about meditation and what it means. *Hundreds*. Rules about what to focus on. How long to focus on it. When you've experienced this, then do *this* to reach *that* level... They have a hierarchy of steps and levels to attain. There is an order that must be followed. There are strict positions to be followed. There are scripts to be studied, abbots to be consulted... all about the individual's own meditation practice.

The Buddha that originally sat and attained enlightenment didn't come with all this fluff. There was very little of the rules in place and he was free to experiment on his own to find what worked. He was a student of his own mind. You should be too. He simply sat and focused on the breath.

I think we can do the same. In fact, I'm sure we can...

:)

Day 8: Three Levels of Knowledge

Sit and watch the show... the thought parade, thought circus. If there is pain watch it. When the pain eases - focus on relaxing. Feel each part of your body and ensure that it is relaxed.

Are you comfortable? Can you sit like this for another 30 minutes if you chose to?

When the mind has calmed and the body is comfortable, then watch the breath. Your eyes are closed and you are focusing on - paying attention to the breath - the air of the breath entering your nostrils and exiting your nostrils. Can you focus right there on that small space and watch the sensations as the breath comes in and the breath goes out?

Each day or each week it might get a little easier to focus on the breath... you may find that you can focus your full attention on the breath for 1 or 2 breaths as time goes on. The mind is quite serious about taking you away from attention though and progress may be slow going. The mind has been creating things for you to think about every moment since you were born - it doesn't give this up easily.

I wonder if the natural state of the brain is to be quiet, to be focused... some will tell you that it IS the natural state. I'm not sure about it - and wouldn't claim to know. There are many self-appointed authorities about these things - and none is more credible than any other.

Listen, but don't believe until you verify it with your own practice. What is true for one person, might not be true for the next.

I like to think that there are a few levels of knowledge or truth... I like to live my life by the 1st level. Though as always, "up to you".

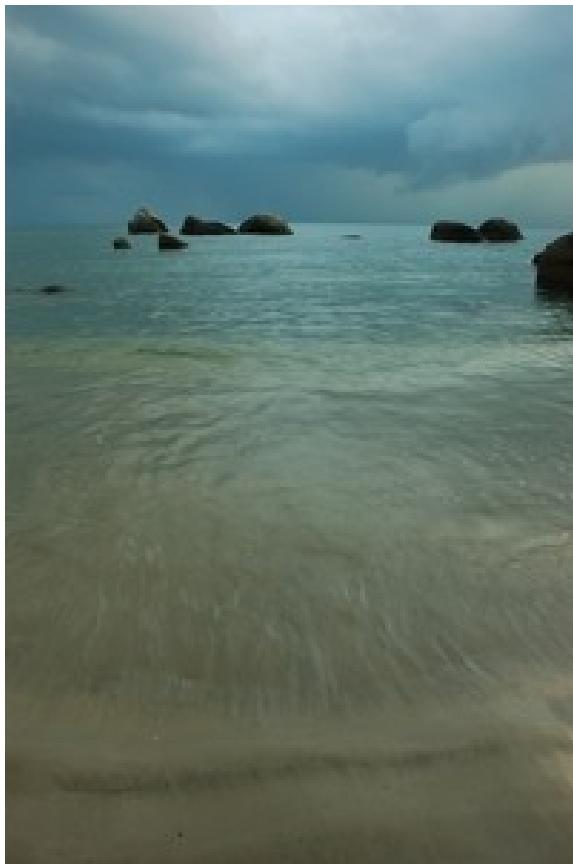
Here's my idea...

The 3rd, and lowest level of knowledge, is that which we hear from 3rd parties... from books, magazines, radio, TV, computer, and other people we don't know directly or that haven't earned our trust over years of association.

The 2nd level of knowledge is that which is told to you by people you love and trust. Some people believe this knowledge; they base their lives on it... Sometimes people trust this level better than the 1st level.

The 1st level of knowledge is knowledge that is experienced directly and first-hand by the individual. Caution must be taken to thoroughly examine

each situation to ensure that real knowledge has taken place... and for this, wisdom is essential. One event does not mean that the truth has been found. Repeat "testing" or experiencing is required...



Meditation falls within the 1st level of knowledge... however, with all that people who are meditating are reading and finding on the internet and hearing from others... the knowledge gets tainted by knowledge levels 2 and 3.

A person may believe that she is getting level 1 knowledge when in fact it has been tainted heavily by reading about and listening to others about meditation and what should happen, what will happen, what must happen... If the person is one that believes level 2 and 3 knowledge routinely, then she is likely to have experiences during meditation that lean toward these other areas of knowledge...

If a person does not have pre-conceived ideas about what is going to happen, or the order in which steps must happen or the goals or ideals that go along with meditation, then one is going to have a more natural experience of it.

I believe that - and yet I could be completely wrong. I do know that when I came to meditation - I was skeptical about everything I had read and heard through level 2 and 3 channels. I didn't give much, or any credence to it at all. After about 10 months I was having experiences that were similar and yet different from some people that either claimed to have been enlightened or individuals that were said to be enlightened by many other people.

I am not enlightened, or if I am I am not aware of having reached the point... it would depend on how enlightenment is defined I think... I don't have a definition of it I'm comfortable with, nor am I very sure a definition I agree with even exists.

I reached a point where my entire life changed... my ego dissolved... and I had surreal experiences that cannot be put into any kind of words that could describe them... and that was 10 years ago... but the person I was back then didn't allow it to go further... I stopped meditation and piled on the ego-building activities out of fear that a "runaway train" had been started...

Well, I was able to rebuild the ego to a point... and yet there is a part of the mind or self or consciousness that has been changed or added or opened up - or whatever words or phrase one chooses to use to describe it... maybe I'll attempt to explain somewhat more later in this course – or maybe not. Sometimes I think that my experience is not important in helping you also reach something like it. You won't duplicate my exact experience, so why tell you before you get there? You might be expecting something different that happens for you.

:)

Day 9: Focusing Entirely on 1 Breath. Then 2, 3...

Sit and watch the thought parade go on until it starts to die down.

If you haven't sat as long as 20 minutes yet - try it soon. There are different things that happen the more that you sit... the longer you sit - up to a certain point. Like I said, I rarely went beyond 1 hour of continuous sitting.

I don't think there is a point really to sitting for 4 hours unless you are in the later stages when the process is going so strongly that it is not really a conscious decision to sit for so long, it just happens... it's almost decided FOR you... the body just continues to sit because there's no desire or want for anything different... no reason to get up.

For some reason I never went too many times beyond an hour because it just wasn't planned to go for longer than that. I didn't see the point in regularly sitting for 2-4 hours. Many meditators do it, and monks can sit for hours on end. To me there's no point, but, up to you. If you have the time, sit all day if you like.

I can see, if you're at that point where your mind is fine with it, you might sit there for 2 days and it would be just because you did... not any conscious decision to do it as a goal or something.



Focus on pain if pain is there. Focus on relaxation once the pain is gone. Watch the breath come in and out. Feel it... don't visually watch it. Just focus on the quality of the breath. Watch all the factors that involve breathing... and then focus only on the point where the breath enters and exits your nostrils. If you are a mouth-breather or if you are sick - I think it is fine too - just focus wherever you feel the breath enter and exit the body.

If you can focus for one breath, try for two. If you can do two, try for three. If you can get to five or eight – that is a nice place to be. You should be quite relaxed and free of most thoughts and interruptions at that point...

The entire "goal" if you want one, is to focus on breath and count 1-10 breaths in TOTAL awareness of the complete cycle of the breath, without having a thought distract you or break your attention and concentration on the breath.

If you reach the point of being able to focus on 10 consecutive breaths, you will then be able to go much further and concentrate on 100 breaths with some ease. The first 10 are pretty elusive... :) If you can get to 1 you are doing very well because even 1 is incredibly hard to attend to for the few seconds of no thought required.

Soon after you can focus on 10 breaths in complete attention, you may start to experience the first hints of "Jhana". There are odd happenings when in these states. I hesitate to tell you what happened to me because you may then project the experiences as goals for yourself or feel incomplete if you don't experience what I did... I did not experience many physical things like some other meditators, especially meditators that followed the "Kundalini" line of thought... I didn't read much about Kundalini and wasn't expecting to get anything Kundalini-like, but I did have some similar experiences.

The experiences that may or may not occur during meditation that I think are 'normal' and not cause for alarm, include but are not limited to:

Sensations

- Slow breathing.
- Very, very slow, shallow breathing for extended times.
- Stopped breathing... the breath may become so shallow that you believe it has stopped.
- Numbness in your hands... not feeling your hands... but, unlike pins and needles of "falling asleep". If you wiggle your fingers or move your hand in this state you can feel things – though the feelings are a bit muted... not quite as sharp.
- Numbness like above, in arms, legs, feet, chest, body.
- A feeling as if there was no body at all.
- A feeling of fatness or expanded body, head, mind, consciousness.

- A feeling of greatly expanded consciousness whereby one might feel consciousness fill the room or expand to room size or world-size, universe-size dimensions...
- A feeling of being at "one" with everything. To not see any distinction between anything and your own consciousness...
- A feeling as if your face, skull, forehead, brain, everything responsible for concentration is focused so intensely that the shape of the parts mentioned is forming a point... like an arrow or like your entire face is transforming into a pointy stalactite type shape moving forward into this shape... it was entirely shocking to me the first time it happened, but beyond that point I had the most incredible uninterrupted concentration on whatever subject I chose.
- During waking hours – at anytime, not just while meditating, one may begin to feel meditative like states. Walking around, upon waking, while eating... one may become aware of a blissful, alive, mindful state that is accompanied by a "light" feeling – the body is light or absent... and the mind is just experiencing without naming in human terms using the stored memory about what it is experiencing.

Mental Activity and Other Changes that May Take Place

- A belief begins to surface that things are not opposite... there are no dichotomies... there is no right and wrong... there isn't any judging... things just "are" as they are... and it's OK... it's "correct" or the way that it "should be"...
- A gradual loss of importance or meaning associated with physical 'things' or material things. Disenchantment with things, goals, events, people.
- A gradual loss of importance or human importance to other things that were important prior to meditating... (work, friends, talking, general conversation, love, sex, responsibilities).
- Things that were humanly seen as "beautiful" or ugly don't seem as either... they just are.
- There may be a feeling of intense emotion – as if love was pouring forth from your very soul... an extremely blissful, ecstatic state in which you experience such pure joy that it is the most incredible state you've ever imagined... and more so than you could have ever imagined.
- There may be periods of no conversation for days at a time... weeks... months.

- Conversation is 'known' to be not-needed. You might feel there's no point in speaking.
- You may meet someone and 'know' or feel that you know about them... their personality, their true drives or motivations... this may happen within seconds of meeting them.
- While meditating, or later, while going through your day, you may hear a noise – a dog bark, a plane pass overhead... and you may 'know' or feel that the sound was or is *you*... because you are not separate from anything... it was *you* that you heard... and the dog is *you* that is looking at you and you are it... and etc... everything is inter-linked... interlaced... interwoven... and it's all as it 'should be' for whatever reason.

Hmm, that's all I can come up with as I sit here thinking about it. There are many, many experiences that occur that just aren't remembered well... the above happened many times and so were easy to remember, though not at all easy to explain.

So, you may have some of the above or you may not... your experience may be entirely different, more animated or more subdued... no matter... don't get caught in the experience... just let it happen and when nothing is going on – focus on the breathing with all your attention.

Day 10: 30 Minutes, and Finding a Rhythm or Schedule

Sit and watch the circus. When the circus calms down to just a few acts then focus on the breath.

Maybe by now your body will be able to get comfortable sitting as you meditate... maybe not. It took me a month before my back could endure it. There was nearly always pain of some sort though. Eventually on some days I started to lean my back against something - a wall, a pillar, a couch, or a bed - and that helped quite a bit. Jhana doesn't care what you're doing at the time it comes... it is like heaven touching you and you could be walking down the street or standing on your head I think... make yourself comfortable.

See if you can go for 30 minutes sitting this time. Spend the first part of every meditation session watching your body - the physical sensations. The emotional... the thought parade... Some days you may decide that there are other things to be doing - and not meditating. No matter. Go do them. Only meditate when you are ready to meditate. Don't make meditation a chore... something that you beat yourself up over if you miss it. It's a gift, it's not a chore... It's a reward, a bonus at the end of the day, is how I always looked at it.

Many times I sat and if I reached 20 minutes or so of not feeling calmed down, relaxed, and able to focus a bit, then I simply got up and went about doing other things. I didn't berate myself for the inability to complete it that day - I didn't care. I wasn't trying to gain points with my meditation teacher or from any group. I wasn't in a race.

Sitting and realizing the mind isn't in a state to calm down in 20 minutes was valuable information and a valuable experience in its own. I just went about other things.

If you're ready that day, you're ready. If not, no worries... maybe you'll feel like it in 2 hours. Maybe you won't feel like it for 2 days. Really, no matter. As far as I can see there is no regression if you don't meditate on a regular schedule.

There's no good reason to insist that you do it daily. At first - the first couple weeks - I did it nearly every day. Though it was never a "must do". There were times I went 3 days without meditating... even a week.

As time goes on you may want to start meditating in a spot different than your usual meditation spot. You might be on a plane, a bus, a train, in a

place where you have a free 10 minutes or 5 minutes and you decide to focus on your breath... either that or mindfulness would be good practice.

I have this idea that the more you meditate and the more you practice mindfulness, no matter the external circumstances, the more quickly you will progress.



I guess it needs said here that if you are just looking for a simple way to relax and free the mind of distractions then perhaps you should only be doing the meditation without the mindfulness during the day. The mindfulness is a powerful part of taking you further toward jhana. That is something for you to decide whether you want to pursue or not.

Read something about Jhana. Read something about enlightenment. Read something about the state of the ego in a person that has entered Jhana many times... be sure that you want to become similar because it is a very serious undertaking.

For the individual without ties it is a remarkable thing. For the individual with responsibilities of family or other things... it can be devastating. The pull of the process when Jhana type experiences start occurring is nothing to be played with really. It is intent on changing the individual radically... and once it starts it sort of has its way with you whether you want it or not.

It's kind of funny to say this, but it "had its way with me".

I was able to slow the process down a bit once it started - and yet it is always there, pulling me to finish what was started... and I will finish someday... perhaps someday soon. I haven't meditated regularly for over 9

years now since I spent time in Jhana and yet the part of my psyche that it changed is still there and regularly makes itself known with blissful tastes of heaven-like tranquility and being in the moment (the present)... I never know when, it will just come on its own.

So, be sure you want to go the distance if you start... as it may progress with you faster than it did with me.

:)

Day 11: Intentionally Slow Breathing to Enter Jhana

Sit and watch the thoughts parade through your mind like ropes that branch off and connect to new ropes. For me, thoughts are like sound clips that are visual. I watch them as they branch off and go different directions. With my attention I can follow them and see what new thought pops up or I can re-focus on something until my mind gives up running around.

Watch physical and emotional sensations that arise. Watch thoughts as they come up. When settled a bit, watch the breath.

If you find that you are very relaxed and able to watch a few breaths in succession, you may want to try something that I noticed happened to me after I reached this point. I noticed that my breathing noticeably changed and became very shallow and slow during some meditations that were going well for 15 minutes or so. So slow that I could hardly believe I was getting enough air to continue sitting there conscious. I actually felt fear about it - some anxiety that crept up as I realized that my air intake was now 1/3-1/6th what it was normally.

Anyway, you can try to do it yourself through a conscious effort and reach the same state... it may not happen every time you want it to - but I was able to do it sometimes and it enhanced my ability to focus on breathing and also facilitated the start of the Jhana states.

What I did was this... when I had sat at least 15-20 minutes and the mind and body were very calm and relaxed, I just slowed my breath intake down to be very shallow and slow.

I watched to see if the sensation of being out of breath - or needing more oxygen came up. Sometimes it did and I changed back to regular breathing. No problem. Don't get upset. Don't put any expectations on your experience. Just try. If it works and you're able to continue with the shallow breath and slow breathing rate - then go ahead.

Sometimes I would enter a different state shortly after doing this... sometimes not. Sometimes I hovered between entering the state and not. When this happened and I had even one thought that I'd *like to* go into the state - the state disappeared. Sometimes it did not return for that session.

Other times the chance to enter the state would come again - but if I 'wanted' the state - it would go away... that is consistent with just about every experience that I had during meditation. If I *wanted it* - on whatever level - it would go away.

If I was experiencing an advanced state – jhana or other, and was in the middle of it – the midst of it – and I had the slightest idea that I wanted to KEEP the state or remain in it – it would usually go away.



On the other hand... if you are ambivalent about the experiences – as I usually was, the states and experiences seem to come one after the other. I reached the point to decide to stop meditation because the 'process' was going much too fast for me. When I stopped, the process came even stronger... strangely, when I didn't want it at all – it got much stronger and continued anyway.

I started to have long periods of this feeling of "one-ness" with all that exists... just walking around I'd be in the present moment for hours at a time and in another world so to speak... yet fully able to respond to people and hear what others are saying... but there was this peace... this calm inside that was unlike anything I've ever read about or since heard about.

There was a complete absence of the old person that used to exist... there was an immense understanding of all that is... on a level that is impossible to describe. And yet, here I am trying again to describe it.

It is almost ridiculous to try to describe the experience - I wish I could just give it to you with a secret technique or a whisper in your ear or something. Failing that, I have to keep trying to tell you that it exists so you continue to try to see it too.

I know that some of you will get it... as I said, I wasn't deserving of it because I was an ascetic, a monk, or because I was anyone great. I wasn't any of those, I did nothing beyond sitting and mindfulness.

I don't believe in the reincarnation idea and that I was born ready to have these experiences. Maybe it's true, but I wouldn't have any knowledge about that... I just continue on like it isn't true and that anyone can have these experiences.

OK, back to slowing down the breathing -

Now, please don't think that you should be able to experience anything like this by day 11. I think it took me a month before I noticed my breathing was slowing down naturally and another 2 months before I got the bright idea of trying to slow it down myself to see what happened.

I don't know how fast you will progress. If you are progressing very quickly - perhaps you are a student of meditation of some other form in the past and now you are progressing quite rapidly with this simple course. I don't know, so I'll just throw it out to you and if you can use it - use it. If not, it's not something that you should be expecting anytime soon. :)

So, sit and watch the breath... focus on the small sensation of the breath entering at your nostrils... exiting at your nostrils.

Practice during non-meditative hours to find ways to make yourself mindful of the present moment if you decide you want to progress deeply into this...

:)

Day 12: Don't Scratch

Sit and watch the circus until it fades away...

Try sitting outside somewhere when you meditate. On a sidewalk... on the porch... in a tree house? I've gone to many temples here in Thailand to try to find a very quiet place to meditate and it's been hard to find somewhere even in Thailand! Caves are the quietest places but there are snakes, spiders, centipedes, bats, and dogs that think they own the cave.

Once you find a quiet place you'll be glad you did. I used to sit in the guest bedroom at my home, and before I went to sleep it was quiet enough for an hour. That's all you need – someplace quiet for twenty-minutes to an hour.

If you are itchy at any time while meditating, try not scratching the itch. Yes, it's torture of some sort. But, it is torture that will teach you something about the arising and cessation of sensation.

I would sometimes meditate in my garage when I lived in Florida. Yes it was hot. Yes it was filled with mosquitoes in the evening. Yes, there were spiders in my garage.

I would sit up off the ground on the pad of an old un-used Jacuzzi left there from the owners of the house before me. I would meditate there and hear a mosquito in my ear and not move away or swat at it. I would feel something crawling on me and sometimes not look to see what it was. I would feel the itch of the mosquito bite and sometimes feel the mosquito land. The mosquitoes are *big* in Florida. I cannot usually feel the small mosquitoes here in Thailand when they land, but in Florida – I often *felt* them.

Watching pain until it just goes away is one thing – there are some pains you'd want to stop watching and want to start fixing after a minute or so. But, with itches they are great because there is no NEED to scratch them, to rub them. But, the feeling they produce in the mind is that something MUST be done immediately. Often times when I was concentrating on the itch – I'd have little problem just watching it and not scratching it... but, if I went back to focusing on breath and forgot just for an instant that I wasn't going to scratch the itch - sometimes I would unconsciously just scratch it! Funny – right?

It's amazing how the mind can just order the body to do something as a reaction and it takes place quickly and efficiently. I used to be quite surprised that I had just scratched the itch I was trying to ignore sometimes...

If you are sitting in a hot place... and the sweat is running down your back, stomach, leg, arm, face, neck, etc... it will tickle. It may tickle enough that you think you'll go insane... just one drop of sweat has that power. Watch the feeling. It won't kill you... and you'll learn more about the arising and cessation of sensation...

It's funny to think about - but, probably you have never in your life *not* scratched an itch when it arose.

To stop yourself from scratching might be one of the most difficult mind experiments you could do to yourself. Seriously. You must try this...

:)



Oahu, Hawaii near Makapu'u

Day 13: Breathing In, Breathing Out

Sit and watch the mind circus.

If you are still having quite a bit of trouble focusing on the breath, and only the breath, you might try this...

I tried it for a while and it was a little bit helpful, but I soon discarded it after my concentration started coming more easily because it is a bit of *extra* that I think takes away from attention to the tiny part of the nose that is feeling the sensations of the breath entering and leaving the nose...

This came from a book by Thich Nhat Hanh. He is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk over 80 years old. He has many books on meditation, lovingkindness, and mindfulness if you'd care to read some of them. I mentioned this earlier, the name of the book I thought was so powerful was, "*Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*". I really think you should get it – the book helps immensely.

He had many exercises for helping one stay focused on the breath... he did the exercises during the day and during meditation.

One exercise was simply to say this in your mind with each inhalation:

"Breathing in, I notice the breath."

And this with each exhalation: "Breathing out, I relax."

Or something to this effect. Now this can help you focus and may help you to get past the hump of not being able to focus at all... but, I believe that thinking of a sentence each time you breath in and out takes the focus off the sensation of just the breath on your nose and also opens a doorway for other thoughts to come into your mind easily since you're using words in your thoughts and the words are from memory – and you really want to quiet your memory.

I used short phrases like this for a couple weeks when I first started and they did help. But, I quickly discarded them when the mind calmed enough that I didn't need them.

Try it and see if it helps you...

:)

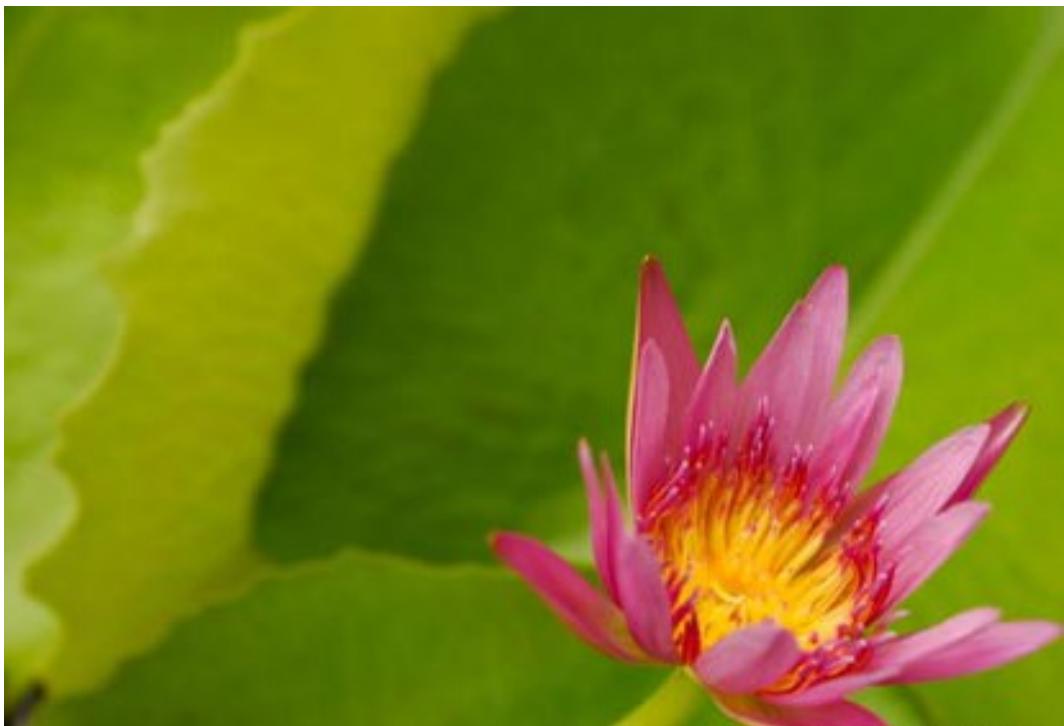


Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, Thailand

There are 10 day silent meditation retreats each month at this large, yet simple Buddhist temple. Sometimes over 100 people join the retreat.

Day 14: No Rules.

Sit and watch the circus go on for a while... five minutes... 15 minutes, whatever it takes before it slows and allows you some quietness of mind... your mind will likely not be very quiet at this point if you are new to meditation and haven't done this much. By 'quiet' I mean that you will have less thoughts bombarding you at any given moment... you might be able to focus on one complete breath with full mindfulness or full attention and focus - or you may not.



There aren't any benchmarks to go by... no standards that you should be living up to. No accomplishments. Just sit for a while when you feel like sitting and eventually, at some point, your mind will quiet enough that you can focus on your breathing for longer periods of time.

Again, if you can think of meditation as a reward for having gone through another busy and stress-filled day it will be so much better for you and easier for you to continue it.

Today as you sit and after the mind calms down... if you're able to be mindful of your breathing without too many distractions... try opening your eyes. Just look at whatever is directly in front of you and lower than your eyes so you're not straining the muscles in your eyes to look. Pick a spot that is void of anything interesting like text or something that would provoke a lot of thought - a book, a soccer ball on the floor, a broom, etc. Pick a spot

on the wall or on the floor – the rug, wood, whatever. And continue to focus on your breath.

Most meditation teachers suggest that you close your eyes as you focus on the breath, but, there aren't any hard rules. I found that I could still maintain concentration with my eyes open for long periods of time – but that sometimes I felt a need to blink or that my eyes were drying quickly. If you have air blowing on your face you may notice that your eyes dry out and you're constantly blinking which may or may not distract you from focusing on the breath.

As you sit, you may see things... patterns or visions of things that the mind creates... the mind will take something very boring – like a rug, and make some mind-candy for you to keep the mind churning. You may see simple things or complicated things – just return to the focus on your breath and see if you can count some breaths in full attention.

For some reason I can do this rather easily. At this point I can be standing at the top of a mountain I visit often and looking out over the limestone karsts and I'll snap fully into the present. It is a nice experience when it happens spontaneously like that.

Ok, that's day 14.

:)

Day 15: Meditation Course

Sit and see what the mind presents to you.

What do your thoughts look like? Sound like?

Re-examine the nature of your thoughts. Watch them and listen to them and see what they are.

Are they real? Where do they come from? How long do they last? Can one thought continue indefinitely or do others interrupt? Do all thoughts grow from the one before or do some just pop up without a prior thought spawning them?

Do thoughts compete for attention? Are there more than one of them sometimes at the same time that are all trying to get you to pay attention to each one?

Are thoughts only visual? Only heard? Seen and heard? Seen sometimes and heard other times? Or, are they felt?

Do any thoughts make you feel something physically?

What happens when you notice you are giving some attention to a thought and you change your focus to be on breathing? Does the same thought come again? Does it change a little bit to make it more interesting or present a different angle so you'll follow it again?



The mind is very, very, very crafty... The mind knows how to get you to *think*. That's what it is programmed to do – keep you busy with thoughts. If you are able to notice that you are following a stray thought, and bring your attention back to the breath, the mind might change the thought just a little bit to make it more enticing and get you to follow it again! Or, it might change the thought all together. It is quite amazing to watch the process as your mind works.

Meditation is a way to stop that process... gradually slow it and then STOP it completely. I should say, it stops completely. It happens naturally – you're not proactively stopping thoughts. By training the attention to keep returning to your breathing you are becoming the master of your mind. You are going to be able to watch the thought process later and be much more in control of it. First you need to provide the right context for the mind to begin stopping for short periods of time – a second, a few seconds, a minute.

There is a state in which there is no thought. None. There is no thought, there is no you, there is no mind... the part of the mind that you used to think of as 'you' can stop and you will experience an absence of ego... of self.

You can do this... I don't believe it is out of reach for you... it is not something out of reach for anyone that simply follows the process: Watch

breath. Pay attention to breath – count them to see can you extend attention on the breath. Once you can get to 8-10 or 15 breaths in complete mindfulness then you can stop counting the breaths and even focusing on the breath because the mind is blank. If you notice thoughts coming again, re-start focusing on the breath until you again have a blank mind.

So, focusing on the breath is not the entire point of meditation. It's a tool. Once the mind stops, you can continue to focus on the breath and refine the focus that exists. Your focus might become so sharply defined that it is like your head is coming to a point in front of your face – your entire energy is focused on one very small point. It's something you won't soon forget. Memory still operates in these states.

You may choose to always focus on the breath – up to you. Some Buddhist teachers claim that it's necessary to stay in mindfulness of breath for 100-500 breaths at a time in order to go further. It is not essential, as I've never done such a thing. I've not been mindful of more than 100 or so breaths in succession. Try and see what you think.

The experiences that happen after this point (the mind stopping) are sometimes heavenly... but always radically different from anything you've ever experienced in your thought-filled life. There is something beyond thought... something deeper than a 200 meter freshwater pool in southern Thailand.

Your consciousness.

Meditation and mindfulness during your non-meditative hours will reveal it to you...

:)

Day 16: Emotions. Attachment.

What are emotions?

One thing that meditation will do over time is get you to notice that you are thinking thoughts all the time. When you are walking around conscious during the day your mind is presenting thought after thought to you... and emotions are rising and falling with some of those thoughts.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to be absolutely in control of all your emotions?

See if you can notice when you are angry sometimes. Anger is one of the easiest emotions to notice and become mindful of because hopefully it isn't often, and it is a very strong emotion that is easy to watch.

What happens when you're angry?

Usually there is an expectation that hasn't been met... You didn't get something that you wanted, needed, thought you were going to get, etc.

A child becomes angry when you take away some candy from her because she was expecting to be able to continue eating that candy and the expectation ground to a halt. Adults can become angry for any number of things... the computer that you're using locks up and doesn't allow you to type, use the mouse, or get to the start button to close it down. You become angry because the expectation that you had about being able to use the computer uninterrupted has just ended. Expectations are illusions. We think of them as fact... and yet they are full of falseness and uncertainty.

A couple things that Buddhism teaches that seem to go along well with meditation, and the states that come with it, is that we should not become "attached" to anything. We shouldn't become attached to: ideas, friends, money, computers, gadgets, papers, reading, music, CD's, watches, jewelry, or even the ones that we love... Now that isn't saying that we don't have good feelings for those that we love... but we should not become *attached* to them – which is different.

Attachment is about expectation... expectation that something will continue to give us pleasure for eternity. It's easy to see that gadgets and other material items will not give us pleasure forever... they become scratched, lose their color, get lost, lose their value, get destroyed, etc.

Why attachment to people is not such a good thing is a bit harder to explain...



People do not consistently do what we want them to or expect them to do. We like people because we have expectations about their behavior and that it will continue to bring us pleasure or take away pain.

But, people are full of changes. Look at how much one person's life changes over the course of a lifetime... how many 80 year olds have had the same best friend for the past 70 years?

First of all, many have died... Second of all, they all change drastically over the course of a lifetime. The person you know now and love now – your girlfriend or boyfriend - will change too. It's inevitable. It's life. Meditation helps you to see life as it really is.

Attachment to anything is not going to bring happiness... it's temporary at best. Meditation helps you to lose attachment for things... in some cases the change is drastic and fast – as you notice the truth of those words, attachment to everything begins to die away... you become disenchanted with everything that you were attached to in the past.

Your anger and other emotions that were dependent on things you had expectations about in the past - will slowly die away also.

Your innate good nature does not go away though!

You may "become love" if that's possible for you to imagine... you may develop such an equanimity as a result of meditation and disenchantment that you are full of joy, and in a supreme state of peace that cannot be shaken.

There is a state where *nothing* has the power to cause you pain... pain which used to be caused by thought... attachment. It is a heavenly state that words cannot do justice to, and so I'll stop with that.

It is available to you... and to you, and you and to you too...

:)



Wat Nong Pah Pong – another Ajahn Chah temple.

Day 17: Micro Focusing

As you sit, watch the circus for a while until things calm down a bit and you can focus on your breathing. See if you can do something today...

Just notice what happens when focusing on your breathing...

For me, and you might be different, I notice that paying attention to the in-breath and out-breath – while there is a lot of air moving is easier than when the air is weak or stops.

When exhalation has finished, there is a pause of time... the pause is short - less than a second... and even less than a half second I think... and yet during that $\frac{1}{2}$ second a thought can come in very quickly and steal the attention away from the breath!

Have you experienced that already maybe?

Try it today while you sit. When the mind has quieted a bit and you're ready to start focusing on the breath – see where it is that the thought comes most often... is it during the in-breath? Out-breath? Or, is it during the pause after the inhalation or the exhalation? For me, I noticed that the pause after the inhalation is shorter than the pause after the exhalation and so a thought sneaks in after my out-breath most often.

If you can really focus on keeping your attention at the pause in breath you can get through it without having a thought interrupt. It is not easy to focus on 3 or 5 breaths in succession without thought dragging you away from it. It is really not easy!

Practice catching the thought as quickly as you can... before it takes you away into an involved thought that might last 20-30 seconds... see if you can catch it IMMEDIATELY as it steals your concentration... and then re-focus on the breath. Sometimes, even if you catch the thought immediately and bring your focus back to the breath, the thought will also play "hardball" and re-take your attention away from breathing immediately too!

It's a game that you will eventually win through patiently bringing your focus back to the breathing. Remember not to get upset or tired of the game. Look at it as a game – the point of which is to teach you something more about the mind operating inside your head. The point is not to win, the winning comes naturally, and later. If you become upset then focus on that – on the anger that came from getting upset. What is anger?

The point of meditation is to focus on the breath – but, if you are having other distractions – like anger, pain in your leg, an itch, a tickle, or something else... you should focus on that until you see the result it has – and then you are ready to go back and focus on the breath.

:)

Day 18: Initial Jhana & Other Experiences

I thought I'd talk about something today that may happen to you in the early stages of meditation, or possibly not for quite a while.

You sit for a while... your mind calms a bit... the body calms a bit... no major distractions are vying for your attention... pain... itchiness... tickling... emotions... heavy breathing... you are fairly calm and you begin to focus on the breath...

When the focus on the breath has become pretty consistent and you can count 1 breath in complete attention... and another breath maybe after a thought about something... you are having pretty consistent moments of concentration on the breath... then maybe you can pay attention to 3 or so complete breaths.

There may arise a feeling of something in the hands... or the feet... or the chest... or the stomach... or somewhere within the body.

And it is impossible to describe with words but what it might feel like is like some numbness or very faint tingling... I've become very aware of what it is and when it comes I am 50% sure of what it is... but, it is not always what I think it is... occasionally my hands, arms, legs, feet, toes... DO fall asleep because of lack of proper circulation and if I don't change position soon it will be very uncomfortable... If I'm unsure about whether it is the good tingling or the "falling asleep" tingling I move the part that is affected – just a little bit.

I move it just to see – does it REALLY tingle then? If so, it is probably going to be the "falling asleep" tingling and I move again to check – maybe rub the area with my fingers. If it is – I change positions immediately for a while until circulation comes back to the area. No sense sitting through that... it's not going away even if you focus all your attention on it – you need to move around!

If the tingling becomes lighter or stays the same – or feels more like an "energy" or a "force" of some sort, I will re-focus on the breath for a while. Often times the feeling becomes stronger... sometimes it dies away... no matter. If you are attached to the idea of having the feeling – it goes away, almost invariably... better to just let it go like everything else during meditation and continue to watch the breath.



When the feeling becomes stronger - and it is almost like a force field feeling of some strange sort - I will stop focusing on the breath and instead just focus on nothing. I will just sit and feel the force but I am not really concentrating on the force. I am concentrating on nothing... and there are usually no thoughts during this time... it is as if the mind has stopped... the 'force' feeling is still there and sometimes it will be expanding to affect other parts of the body... it starts to become like a numbness that grows over the body.

For me if it starts in the hands it usually goes up the arms through the chest and into the legs and feet... if it starts in the feet it travels upwards to legs, stomach, chest, shoulders, arms and hands.

No matter how it goes for you. But, you might find yourself in a state like this sometime... there is no thought – or little thought... the body feels numb... meaning – it feels as if there is not really a body... if you find your attention resting somewhere – then let it go... just sit as you are.

Once this state comes... you may be “visited” by it occasionally in the future... it's a sign that your meditation is progressing and you may start to experience incredible Jhana, and other states, shortly.

The key to the meditation after this point, I believe, is to keep coming to this point... where there is no thought... where there is no body... no awareness of body or self... come to this point many times and just have “nothing”.

It sort of goes on its own from there... it comes "to" you... you are not reaching something – it is coming TO you... remember if you think you are pursuing something... in control of this... if you think that you are becoming something... someone great... if your head swells... your ego swells... it does not come to you.

The point of the meditation is to see the experiences that happen during these times.... See them and when they fade – let them go... don't attach to them! There is nothing worth attaching to – either the mind-candy or the state of nothingness that you've entered... not the numbness... not the feeling of a force. This is one crucial idea to keep in mind.

Every time you sit to focus on the breath – that is the whole goal at that time. Don't sit with the intent to "get somewhere" with this meditation.... Just sit and focus on the breath – that is the whole goal... what comes later is a by-product of attention to breath... and not worth attaching to...

:)

Day 19: Mindfulness

Today we'll talk a bit more about mindfulness...

Mindfulness during the day, while you're not meditating can really speed things along... You can be mindful of *anything* that is happening during the present moment... "Present moment" means, now. It's being mindful of what you are doing now. You can be mindful of your breathing... or doing the dishes... or playing the piano or a sport... you can be mindful of gardening... cutting paper... just about anything.

Being mindful means spending some time in the present... we are so rarely in the present! The mind is constantly re-hashing the past and future with thoughts about it... it's a never-ending activity for the brain – until we end it.

The combination of meditation and mindfulness has an incredible effect... gradually one begins to be able to have moments of non-thinking... moments of living in the present... maybe eventually you'll have minutes of being in the moment... hours... days?

Eating meditation is something I found useful... useful because you are in the present while eating... you have probably never eaten a meal in the present... and you have no idea how incredible it can be... you must try this.

Sit at your table, or on the floor – or whatever you choose... be conscious of every part of the eating process... if your mind wanders, bring it back to the focus on eating... focus on exactly what you are doing... if you are spooning the rice from the pot – then that is what you're doing. If choosing vegetables for your plate, choose them... if you are cutting your food – cut it. There's no extraneous thought.



The entire meal is spent in the present and it's quite nice... the nicest part is that when you are eating the food – you are ONLY EATING IT! You have never fully tasted your food until you have eaten it in mindfulness... the textures, flavors... are incredible and really enjoyable.

When you are mindful of each bite of food – there is no rush to finish... as you chew each bit of food you chew it properly on instinct... slowly... chewing enough that you break the food down properly for your stomach... and tasting each bite so thoroughly that you may never eat any other way again!

The experience is something that takes an ordinary event and with mindfulness, turns it into one of the most enjoyable and simple experiences life has to offer... usually we are so distraught about past and future thoughts during eating that the eating is just secondary.

Try mindfulness with many things throughout your day... I especially enjoy eating meditation (mindfulness) and doing-the-dishes meditation (mindfulness)... but, there are many other opportunities for practicing mindfulness during the day... used in combination with an hourly watch alarm it's a great way to be 'present' many times throughout the day.

:)

Day 20: Alternative Postures



Today I wanted to bring up alternative postures for meditating that I've used. When I first started, I thought I should be sitting like everyone else. I sat in the half-lotus position with one foot up on the crease between my calf and thigh. A 'weak' half-lotus...

There was a lot of pain in that position... as the muscles and ligaments stretched to accommodate sitting like that. There was pain in the foot that was underneath and touching the hard concrete or carpet over the wooden floor... The most pain was felt in the back and I don't really remember a pain-free meditation session...

I do think that something is learned... or gained by sitting through the pain occasionally. If there is a great amount of pain that you can't seem to sit through – change position – no matter. Sit through the small inconvenient

pains and change position for anything that might hurt more in the long-run (when your foot falls asleep for instance).

If sitting cross-legged in a half or full-lotus position isn't working for you, then experiment with other positions. You can put a cushion under your butt to raise it up a few inches... this gives some more stability for some people. You can also put a sock or folded shirt under your ankle if it's pushing on the hard floor. You could lean back against a couch or a bed for some added back support... I did this during times when the back pain was intolerable. If the pain was still intolerable, I stopped and tried again next time.

One time I was sitting in my office chair at home and the "feeling" came over me... It just comes when it wants to now... there is the feeling of a force in the hands usually... an energy... and I decided to meditate there on the chair... I leaned back in the swivel chair, put my forearms up on the supports and put my feet on the desk.

What the Buddhists call "Jhana" came quickly and I sat for nearly an hour with a Jhana experiences parade... I don't know that being with Jhana or not being with it, is any better. During Jhana there is no attachment to it... afterward there is a bewilderment about what just happened... some attempt to make sense of it – and of course there can be no sense made of it. It is mysterious and mystical... and 'fun' – but only afterward as one remembers... if you attach to Jhana you will lose it and often it doesn't return. The Vipassana retreats are full of people that initially experience their first taste of Jhana - and then they attach to it with their minds so strongly that it never returns.

I think there are many people that are stuck in the early Jhanas and don't go further... it is *addictive*... more powerful than any drug's effects... the experiences will be nothing short of phenomenal... and yet they are uncontrollable... unattainable.... They just come when they want to come. Just sit, watch, and don't attach... once there you'll have enough – it's not like it goes away on its own – unless you attach to the idea of it sticking around.

You could try lying on the floor to meditate. Lay flat on your back... arms to your side, palms up, neck straight... this position was really the most pain-free position for me but, as I said, I found that I became tired most often. I didn't tend to attempt this posture at night time because I haven't had much success meditating at night this way... the meditation seemed to last 5-7 hours or so... ;)

You could lay sideways... put a thin pillow under your neck so your neck is aligned with your spine... and put your arms out in front of you – you could

put your hands together as if you are sitting and meditating... I also found this position to be pain free – but again, if I did it in the evening – I lost the sleep battle half the time.

There is walking-meditation. Some people only do meditation in this way... I did it in my garage sometimes when the mosquitoes and spiders and other bugs were too much to let me relax fully. I just walked diagonally back and forth – maybe 8 steps each way. Each step is slow and deliberate... done fully in the present... and instead of focusing on the breath, I focused on the movement of the legs and feet. My arms were at the side. It was also a very pleasant way to meditate and with a slim chance of falling asleep while standing up...

Those are things I've tried... you should feel free to try anything you like... there must be many positions that you'd feel comfortable in. I don't believe you must sit like the Buddha or how someone else tells you. Do whatever allows you to remain alert, relatively pain-free, and focus on your breathing.

:)

Day 21: Jhana, Enlightenment, Non-Attachment

Once Jhana starts in a few weeks or months or years... it will introduce all sorts of novel experiences that will be a bit like morphine for your mind. Your mind at that point will not be getting much of the usual mind-candy to feast on and so it will take anything it can get. Jhana is what I imagine morphine might be like.

One of the basic Jhanas is said to be occurring when you become aware of an overwhelming sensation of pure joy. You are actually overwhelmed with joy. Joy like you've never known before... it is joy from the inside moving outward and it is like a volcano eruption of joy building and wanting to explode outward. This is a common occurrence among Vipassana meditators after their practice has brought them some levels of sustained calm of the mind.

The joy is such that you don't feel love, you *are* love... it is pure and untainted... it is such an overwhelming feeling and you might not be prepared for it – you may cry actually because it is so strong and you do not know what is happening.

When it happened to me the first couple of times I was sitting there as usual and I felt it come on gradually... and the feeling built up inside... and welled up inside until it was ready to spill over... my face was smiling so exaggeratedly that I thought my whole face would tear and form a new face that could do nothing but smile bigger... it was a very, very intense feeling... Some call it "ecstasy" and, some call it "bliss".



Like everything that happens as you sit and meditate... watch it... note it... can you refocus on breathing? If not, no matter – watch it. Don't get attached to it. Don't attach to the good feeling that you have. Don't attach to the colors you see... the feeling... nothing. The many levels of Jhana have fooled many into thinking they are "there". They reached nirvana.

The bookshelves are full of accounts of meditators that describe having experienced some stage of the Jhanas and then claim to be enlightened.

I don't believe that enlightened people are inclined to tell others about what happened... I may be wrong... but, I've been to a place where I had no wants or desires... and no thought... and seen Jhana – supposedly all the levels according to the senior monks I've spoken with here in Thailand... and you know what? I'm not enlightened. I'm in quite a different place than I was before I started meditating... but I sort of "stopped" myself from going any further after that point out of fear for what was happening.

As I said earlier in this course, when I started meditating I didn't know about what the Buddhists call "Jhana". I talked to Buddhist monks in America at the time I was experiencing it – and they didn't seem to understand what I was going through. They had not been there themselves... It seems that many Buddhist monks sent from Thailand to America are just sort of going through the motions... there are many that are more concerned about attending college and obtaining the latest electronic gadgets than meditating and enlightenment.

So, in 1997 after about 10 months of meditating on and off – a few times per week – sometimes 2 and sometimes 10, I stopped meditating completely out of fear I was losing my marbles.

When Jhana comes in its various forms – it is so bewildering that a sane person might think himself insane. It touches your soul when it comes... it is so powerful and overwhelming in its simplicity and power that it defies everything I understood with a rational mind.

Had I been in a place where Vipassana practitioners or Buddhist monks that understood what was happening, and could help me – then it would have been a little less frightening... a lot less, I imagine. I just needed someone to tell me that the experiences were normal and that others had experienced them. I didn't find that out for many years – until right before coming here to Thailand in 2004.

Even when I stopped meditating the meditating did not stop me... the Jhanas continued to come during anytime they chose – without meditating. I was walking around during the day, working, driving, riding a bicycle, talking to

someone, doing the dishes, listening to music, or literally doing anything and Jhana would come.

For the first few months and year or so it came regularly and often. It comes even now – on average maybe a couple times per month or in a week sometimes. It just comes and stays a little while – sometimes seconds and sometimes an hour or more and gives me this reminder that it is there and that I started something that cannot be stopped.

It is an incredible feeling of peace... of oneness with all that is... of being in the moment and in a state of no mind- no thoughts, no emotion, no attachment to anything. I am not afraid of it at all anymore and I've considered starting Vipassana again to see if there is anything else after this. It is as if, by coming to me, it is pulling me to meditate more... and it's been like a gravity – pulling me to do that since I stopped 9 years ago.

So – as I was saying... enlightened folk – if there are any, and I don't believe I've met or even heard of any – are probably not inclined to tell anyone or talk about it at all. I believe I experienced a glimpse of it... and continue to on occasion, and in the state there is nothing that is desired. All is as it is... there is no need, want, desire, hope, inkling, or ambition to change anything about what is. It is as it is and that is the way it is "supposed" to be for whatever reason. There is no right and wrong in that state.

To write a book or have a web site or start a church as a result of having been enlightened is not really what would happen – I'm guessing. There would be no motivation to do so.

The Buddha talked about being in the Jhanas and that it's a good place to spend time... it may be so or it may be that it's also something that should be noted, watched, and then not attached to.

I think that if you continue to be unattached to *anything* – even the pursuit of enlightenment – then it will come to you. I think that when I stopped meditating because I no longer cared about enlightenment – then it started to come anyway. I think that's the key, attach to nothing... but of course if you are consciously telling yourself you don't want it or need enlightenment and yet you really do – then these are mind-games and who knows how it turns out.

I think that once you meditate and are well into the Jhanas and if you are not attached to them – to having them continue – then it will start to happen for you too. You may not feel the need to meditate anymore – there will be no ego – no desire to meditate anymore and be something different from what you are and so there will be no attachment to enlightenment... and

then maybe when you reach that point, it comes... not at all sure, but that's what appears to have happened to me...

;)

Day 22: Meditation without Religion

I'm not very big on the religion side of meditation. I think that it really hinders the meditation process that takes place naturally inside without adding religion.

Religion *demands* more thought. Meditation is gradually eliminating thought of the past and future. Religion is based on the past – hundreds, thousands of years ago. Names of the states of meditation are spoken of with great respect by Buddhists. The name, the state, monks that have experienced Jhana are revered and thought to be special.

There are hundreds of rules for Buddhist monks to follow when they decide to don the robes and become monks at a temple here in Thailand. The rules are about eating, sensual desire, respect, and many topics. The temples are strict... the senior monks are strict... and yet there are so few of them actually going anywhere with meditation that it makes me think that the religion – Buddhism – is inhibiting the process for them.

There are thousands of monks here in Thailand... tens of thousands... there are many that have spent 10+ years following the regimen of a Buddhist monk... 20+, 30, and 50+ years... and they are not enlightened.

Why is that? I must ask myself.

It didn't take the Buddha all that long to become enlightened. He eventually reached a point where he just sat and focused on breathing. During non-meditative states I think he was more aware of the present – and seemed to be practicing a mindfulness of sorts.

If you follow this, or something like this program, I think it is likely there will be some real progress within a year or so – if you are sitting daily give or take some days, for 20-40 minutes.

I told you earlier about a monk I know that stayed at a forest wat here in Thailand for three years. He had never experienced Jhana and was quite disillusioned with life at the wat after 3 years. He left and became an English teacher in a nearby city – disillusioned with life as a monk.

I think the equation, for having Jhana visit – is:

* Be as mindful of the present-moment as possible during non-meditating times.

* During meditation, focus on the breath at the tip of your nose, your upper lip – wherever you feel it. Re-focus as your attention is taken away by thoughts.

* If you feel something strange, let it go. If you see something strange, don't attach to it – let it go. If you are very concerned about reaching some level of Jhana or having some unique experience, just let it go.

It comes later.

That's it.

If you follow a religion about it, there will be steps and processes to follow, mantras to chant, things to stretch, respect to pay, books to read, verses to understand, dhamma talks to sit through, understand, and take on faith. There are so many things that take one away from just meditating.

There is a natural state of morality that takes place as one meditates and the ego starts to dissolve. One naturally comes to a state of being in which there is no harm done to anyone through thought, speech, or action. There is no desire, no attachment to anything and so one is generous, unselfish, caring.

One in this state doesn't propagate negativity in any manner. There is no living in the past or the future anymore and so no disappointment. There aren't any promises made to others that turn out unfulfilled. There isn't any self-serving conversation.

The person in this state is very much alive and aware of the present moment and so can live spontaneously and vibrantly. Each moment is experienced fully. Nothing more is needed, or craved. You may get a taste of it when you become aware of the present moment sometime. You might notice that there is no craving for something else – no need for something other than what one has right there at that moment.

I am not at all sure that something called "enlightenment" happens at all. I am not at all sure the Buddha was enlightened any more so than anyone else that has felt Jhana. It matters little. Once Jhana comes it is really enough to change your entire life. Once you've experienced the absence of the ego and thought... and the mind has stopped... you'll exist in a state that so few others even know is possible. It's as if being touched by heaven... really...

So today have you sat and focused on the breath?

This course is finished!

Thanks so much for reading this ebook, I do hope you get something good out of it. At the moment I have few reviews at Amazon – if you enjoyed it – would you please let me know by reviewing it there?

If you didn't enjoy it at all – will you write me and let me know too – so I have a chance to review the book and possibly change something that should be changed?

Have a great day!

Vern
AimforAwesome@gmail.com

Links

Videos

I am considering starting a video series explaining religionless meditation. If you'd like to see it I'll have information in the right side column of this site:

(<http://www.jhana8.com>)

Free Audio files

My personal experience with meditation:

Free download - <http://www.jhana8.com/audio-files/>



The sun turned into a headless Buddha during sunset in Thailand.