

Handout #3

Meditation on Mindfulness of Thoughts

Introduction

In this meditation on mindfulness of thoughts, we give mindful attention to the different kinds of thought arising during the meditation. To facilitate this process, we make use of our breath sensations as a support or an anchor for our attention during the gaps between thoughts or when we find ourselves feeling dull and drowsy. We return our attention to the breath to steady it and as a point of reference to help us discern our thoughts without getting caught up in them. We can regard the breath as a companion that accompany us on this mindfulness journey without feeling that we must constantly focus on it at all times.

To facilitate the process of discernment, we can start with making a note in our mind, such as “thinking,” when we become aware that thoughts have arisen in the mind. We repeat this process, working on refining our awareness of thoughts and may even start to discern what they are about.

When we become more proficient in this process of recognize thinking as thinking, we can refine our power of discernment by differentiating the types of thinking our attention is involved in. We can replace the simple label of “thinking” with others that better reflect their contents. Thoughts about the past could be noted as “remembering,” those on planning as “planning,” those involved in fantasies as “daydreaming,” and so on. In this way we can become more mindful and wiser in regards to the types of habitual thinking we tend to engage in.

The following can be used as a meditation script to guide ourselves and others into meditation.

Motivation

We bring forth an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that we are meditating not just for our own individual benefit, but we are taking the time now to meditate and develop our mind to become a wiser and kinder person, able to be of benefit to all beings.

The main body of the meditation

We begin by adopting a suitable meditation posture, either sitting or lying down. We can sit on a chair, cross-legged on the floor, or lay down on our back...

We allow our spine to be in its natural and comfortable position. We rest our hands and arms on some physical support to allow our shoulders to be relaxed. We are free to close our eyes or leave them open.

We return our attention to our own body, to be in touch with the simple sensations here in order to settle our body into meditation.

Notice areas of softness, ease and relaxation with comfortable feelings. Can we welcome these feelings and allow ourselves to enjoy them while they are here?

Also notice areas of tension or tightness with uncomfortable feelings. Can we simply acknowledge them for the time being? Don't feel that we have to change them immediately for the better. Just let them be.

We check in with the sensations at our face. Are we tensing up any of the facial muscles? Those at the forehead, around our eyes or at the jaw? Can we gently relax these muscles and let in a different feeling, one of softness, ease and comfort into our face?

We can allow this softening and relaxing to spread on its own to the rest of our body, helping our body to settle into meditation in its own time.

Among the different bodily sensations, see if we can highlight those sensations associated with breathing. Some of us will notice subtle sensations around our nostrils, where we can feel the air flow in and out of the body. Others may notice the movement of the chest, expanding and contracting with each breath. And still others may detect the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

We rest our attention on some of these breath sensations, allowing ourselves to fully experience our in-breath and out-breath.

Rest our attention here with our breath. Each time we notice ourselves breathing out, let's use it as an opportunity to release... Releasing anything unhelpful and unwanted, just like the way we breathe out to let go of the stale air in our lungs.

Regard our breath as a resting place for our mindful attention, a place we can always come back to at any time to steady ourselves.

When our introspection alerts us to the presence of thoughts or that we are already involved in thinking, we turn our mindful attention to those thoughts and recognize that we are engaged in thinking. We might want to mentally make a note "thinking" to be clear about what we have discerned.

Without getting entangled in the contents of those thoughts, we can gently return our attention to the breath and release those thoughts on the out-breath.

When we recognize that our attention is drawn into thinking, take note of that as "thinking" and come back to the breath.

[Long pause... till end of meditation]

Dedication

Finally, dedicate our positive energy and insights to the well-being and happiness of all living beings.