

The Basics of Mindfulness Meditation

MID-AMERICA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION
AUGUSTA, MISSOURI



WELCOME TO THE MEDITATION HALL AT
MID-AMERICA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION MONASTERY

If this is your first time at MABA, or especially if it is your first time at a Buddhist Monastery, you may feel a bit awkward or you may feel totally at home. In either case, knowing about the practice is helpful. This is a short guide to assist in your understanding.

MABA was founded in 1997 by Master Jiru, who is an ordained monk, ordained both in the Theravadin and Chan lineages. We practice and study the original teachings of the Buddha who lived 2500 years ago. We also practice and study methods of the Mahayana tradition known as Chan, which is the Chinese form of Zen. Actually Zen in Japan was derived from Chan. Both terms mean "meditation."

On Sundays Mornings

9:00 Introduction of meditation for first-timers

10:00 Sitting Meditation (People are welcome to come in quietly, bow to Buddha upon entering, and begin their practice at their own pace.)

10:40 Walking Meditation (The gong sounds, followed by a chime which signals that we are to rise, bow with the chime, and begin walking meditation.)

11:00 Dharma talk (November - February, second meditation)

11:35 Chanting (primarily in English).

11:45 Vegetarian Lunch

13:00 Help out the cleaning chores

During the period of November to the end of February next year, the Monastics are in Winter Retreat. People are welcome to come for Sunday meditation. At 10:00 am, you may either go upstairs for 2

All teachings are open to the public
and are free of charge.

Donations are gratefully accepted.
There is a donation box at the foot of the stairs leading up the
Meditation Hall.

MABA is a non-profit organization.
Donations may be tax deductible. Please consult
your tax advisor regarding tax deductions.

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In addition, these are some general rules in most of the temples...

- 1) Always park in designated spaces and observe mindful silence from the moment you have parked the car.
- 2) Do not wear revealing or loud clothing.
- 3) Do not stare at or take pictures of ceremonies in progress or those engaged in worship or meditation.
- 4) Do not speak loudly or otherwise make excessive noise.
- 5) No running or horseplay within temple grounds.
- 6) When meeting a monk, offer a greeting.
- 7) Speak to monks with reserve. Do not be chatty.
- 8) Do not act in such a way as to disturb temple ceremonies or other events.
- 9) Do not spit.
- 10) Do not leave rubbish, tissues, etc. in places other than wastebaskets.
- 11) Do not drink liquor or chew gum within temple grounds
- 12) Pointing, in general, is rather impolite. Pointing with your foot is downright rude.
- 13) Perfumes are distracting and should be avoided.
- 14) Do not enter others' rooms without their permission. Leave valuables and cell phones locked up in your car or ask the monastery staff to place them in a safe place.

In general, just ask yourself: would I behave this way in a church or temple of my own confession? And act accordingly.

sittings, or you may stay downstairs for a quiet discussion on meditation from 10:00-10:35 and then join the walking meditation and second sitting. There will be no Dharma talks during these three months.

BASIC MEDITATION INSTRUCTION

Overall Purpose: mindfulness leads to concentration, which leads to development of insight, which lays the foundation of liberation.

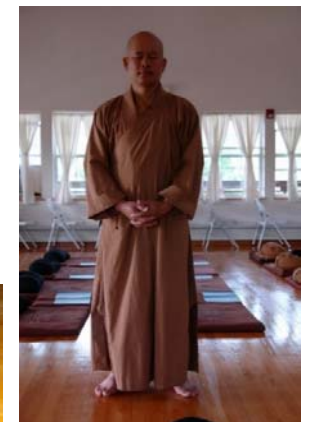
Caveat: a concentrated mind needs still guidance toward wholesome deeds, not the unwholesome ones. So, cultivate your right views in Buddhism before meditating.

Standing Meditation

Why start with the standing posture ?

Purpose: In terms of the four elements associated with the commensurate body functions, the standing posture engenders fire, i.e., produces energy, reinforces the body and refreshes one's spirit, and is beneficial for long-hour meditations

Posture: Stand straight, keep your neck upright but relax your shoulder. Switch to sitting posture after standing for extended period of time and feeling tired.



Sitting Meditation



Purpose: Calming and clearing the mind; generating a compassionate attitude; cultivating wisdom. Chan 禪 is meditation. It is derived from the Pali word 'jhana' and the Sanskrit word 'dhyana', both meaning meditation.

Posture: Sit with the back relaxed, straight, (not stiff), on either a cushion, bench, or chair.

Further suggestions:

- 1) Head is centered above the spinal support as if a silken string is attached to the crown from above; and
- 2) The chin is slightly tucked;
- 3) Jaw and mouth are relaxed with the lips together and the teeth parted, the tongue on the roof of the mouth;
- 4) Eyes are either just slightly open with a soft gaze about two to three feet in front and slightly downward, or the eyes may be gently closed to decrease visual distractions. Usually if the mind is sleepy or prone to laxity, keeping the eyes open is recommended. However, if the mind is busy, distractible, or prone to excitement, then closing the eyes may be more beneficial. This is a matter for individual choice.
- 5) The shoulders and arms are relaxed and loose at the sides.



Offerings

You can make an offering and respectfully leave it on the altar, or if it is money deposit it in the offering boxes.

- *Food*, symbolizes selfless giving.
- *Flowers*, symbolize the changing nature of existence; the Buddha taught that all things in this world are in constant change and nothing is permanent

Foods

Food prepared by the supporting members is primarily vegan, entirely vegetarian. Please take as much as you like but do not waste anything.

Photography

In general, you may photograph anything in the temple, but taking pictures while people are praying is not polite! In our temple we are very flexible but in some countries you should also never, ever have your picture taken with any Buddhist image. On the other hand, some temples, because of their amazing history and importance, are very tourist friendly. The monks may be photographed, but they often do not like it; they just hide when they see a camera aimed at them. But always if in doubt, ask.

Other don'ts....

Avoiding interviewing the monks or nuns alone. This is to better support their practice of solitude and concentration.

You should also never, ever touch the head of a Buddha statue or point with a foot at it, or climb on anything in a temple. Buddha images, no matter how small or old and decrepit, are sacred religious objects and must be treated with the utmost respect. Do not sit next to them for a picture or put them on the floor -- or anyplace "inferior" to a person. (Following an old tradition from Hindu times, the head is sacred because it is closest to heaven, so likewise the feet are therefore the most unclean.)

Bell

We listen to the resonance of the hand bell through to the soundless sound upon which meditation depends. The sounding of the bell has three purposes: to announce the service, to mark different phases of tempos during chanting; to aid in meditation; and to go beyond.

Bowing

A respectful way to greet an ordained person is with a simple bow, with your hands in the gesture of prayer. You are bowing to one who represents the Buddha's Sangha. When a high monk enters the meditation room, you should rise and stand in a slight bow until he is seated. The monks and the students may then offer three prostrations if they wish.

Once you enter the temple, it is customary to bow three times, not to the statue, but to your Buddha nature, to the Dharma and to the sangha. The proper term for bowing is prostration. One prostrates three times facing the Buddha/Bodhisattva, kneeling down, head touching the floor. You can also bow with both palms turned out if making a petition.

Dharma Talk

As a sign of respect for all our Buddhist teachers—Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and monastics—place hands in hezang (prayer-like gesture) and face the middle aisle when Venerable Jiru enters and leaves the hall. As Venerable, or visiting monastics, walk down the middle aisle past you, please give a slight bow.

Restroom Use

If you need to use the restroom during a teaching, just get up, turn towards the shrine and bow slightly if you wish (or simply exit). Prostrations may be offered upon returning, but are not customarily offered when exiting. During certain ceremonies or high teachings, it is best not to have to leave, but of course you can if you need to!

- 6) Hands may assume any one of the standard meditation positions, for example, with the palms facing up at a level 4 inches below the navel, the right on top of the left with the thumbs gently touching, making an open circle facing forward;
- 7) The legs form a solid base, crossed while sitting on a cushion, or with the feet usually flat on the floor while sitting in a chair.

“Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established in mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.” (MN 10)



The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

There are Four Foundations of Mindfulness: 1) The Body, 2) Feelings, 3) Mind 4) Mind-Objects (Phenomena).

1. Practicing Mindfulness of Breath: There are many types of meditation. Most forms suggest a mental object of meditation, a place to focus the mind. **In basic mindfulness practice, the focus is on observing the breath.** We may attend to the breath coming in and going out of either the nose, or observing the breath at the level of the abdomen's rise and fall. Breathing accepted as it is. With practice the breathing may be comfortable and quiet, usually through the nose, with the abdomen rising on the inhales and



falling on the exhales (diaphragmatic breathing).

Awareness of the Body as Body:

There are two *Suttas*, Discourses of the Buddha, that talk about meditation methods. The first is *Anapanasati*, Mindfulness of the Breath. This is what is discussed above. The second source is the *Satipatthana Sutta*, The Four Foundation of Mindfulness. Here the Buddha discusses the awareness of the body as body.

One way of practicing this method is to first focus on relaxing the body as a whole and in parts. Relax even the hand position, and divide the body into five parts as shown. Then it is advised to focus on using the breath to relax five internal organs.



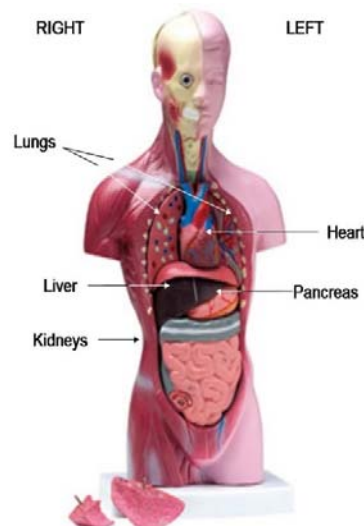
Awareness of the Body as a whole

- 1) Relaxing the head and neck
- 2) Relaxing the shoulders, arms, and hands
- 3) Relaxing the chest and abdomen
- 4) Relaxing the back
- 5) Relaxing the legs

Breathing Awareness of the Organs

- 1) Three Breaths to the Heart
- 2) Six Breaths to the Lungs
- 3) Nine Breaths to the Liver
- 4) Nine Breaths to the Pancreas
- 5) Nine Breaths to the Kidneys

Return to the Awareness of the Body as a whole



Clothing

Modest clothing is required, which means for ladies: a skirt or dress that covers the knees and a top with sleeves that covers the shoulders and is not transparent. For men, modest clothing means long pants and a shirt that covers the shoulders. Shorts will not do! In America, since we also do meditation during our ceremonies, it is acceptable to wear loose comfortable clothing or sweat pants. Simple, monochrome clothes, (hues of gray, dark blue or brown) is a common fashion statement in Buddhist culture. (The philosophy is that you shouldn't wear clothes that might be distracting or stand out.) Before the service starts, as a sign of respect to the Buddha, wear a robe.

Body Language

If you find you need to stretch your legs when you are seated in the temple, please cover your feet. Try not to point your feet towards the Buddha status or the teacher. In many cultures it is considered very rude to show the soles of your feet to the teacher (and the teacher is always present in the temple).

Chant Books/ Prayer Books

Texts, including prayer sheets, should never be placed directly on the floor, not stepped over, or stood upon because of their power to bring liberation and happiness. Please help those who must pass through the shrine room when it is crowded by picking up and holding your text.

Please arrange your schedule so you can stay for the complete teaching session. If you know you must leave before the conclusion, please sit as close to an exit as possible so you can leave quietly and easily. If, for health reasons, you must get up or move around during the teachings, please sit close to the side or the back of the room so others are not disturbed.

BUDDHIST TEMPLE ETIQUETTE

Solemn Space

Temple etiquette is an expression of respect and gratitude for one's own Buddha nature, which is embodied by one's teacher and is reflected by the temple environment. It can also be a source of merit for one is actually aiding others practice by not disturbing one's fellow practitioners.

The core practice of making the temple a solemn space is that we try our best to leave ordinary activities, speech and thoughts outside. Please remove your shoes before entering the temple. By doing so, you can leave the distractions and difficulties of the outside world with your shoes, and you avoid tracking in the dirt from the road. Be sure that you do not leave your shoes in the way of others entering the temple, it is always nice to keep a neat environment!

In the temple we try to offer the most pleasing sights, sounds, and smells and cause the least distraction to the monks and our fellow practitioners. To achieve this, please keep your belongings to a minimum, and neatly contained. Also, please do not eat in the meditation hall during teachings or engage in any other activity that might distract someone who is practicing. This includes talking or answering cell phones. Please do not touch the monks' dharma musical instruments except in their presence with their express permission. Try to keep all ordinary conversation to an absolute minimum, especially if the monastics are chanting.

Please do not smoke in the vicinity of any practice areas, but restrict this activity far away from any possibility of disturbing the monks or the Sangha. Also, there may be practitioners who have taken vows to refrain from smoking; smoking near them may make it more difficult for them to keep those vows.

Please turn off cell phone or pagers. If you are expecting an important call, please set your phone to vibrator mode.

2. *Practicing Mindfulness of Feelings:*

During meditation one observes the rising and falling of the breath, and in addition, one is aware of bodily sensations or feelings. Feelings come in three forms: pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Whenever a feeling arises in the body, an itch, for example, we just observe the itch, and say to ourselves: "feeling, feeling, feeling. We accept the itch as it is and let it go, returning to the breath. If we notice feeling some physical discomfort, we may say: "feeling, feeling, feeling," and then return to the breath. Moving or adjusting the body is fine. Just do it with mindful intention.

3. *Practicing Mindfulness of Mind:*

During the meditation, it is suggested that one observe, along with the breath, the arising and ceasing of thoughts. **When a thought arises, just see it as a thought, accept the thought, and let it go.** One may say: "thinking, thinking, thinking" and then return to focusing on the breath. We may "let go" of individual thoughts or even groups of thoughts, but it is likely that thoughts will continue to arise and cease. The goal of meditation is not to force the mind to stop thinking, only to accept the thoughts and to let go gently without following them or getting caught up in the storyline.

4. *Practicing Mindfulness of Mind-Objects:*

Mind-Objects are the external phenomena that our senses attach to. It is good not to become attached, especially to total silence. During meditation we may hear the sounds of birds, crickets, frogs, etc. We may hear sounds of people or cars. We may smell flowers or food being cooked. All these external phenomena we observe. We see how our sense organs make contact with stimuli, and then we accept these things just as they are, returning to the breath. We may say: "sound, sound, sound," and then return to the breath.

Walking Meditation

Walking Meditation: Just like in sitting meditation, maintain focus on the breath and on movement while doing walking meditation 經行 *jīng xíng*. Observe the mind, recognizing feeling as feeling, thinking as just thinking, mind-objects as mind-objects. Accept thoughts as they come and go without following them. **We focus on the middle way, avoiding the extremes of laxity and distraction.**



Purpose: When we sit for long periods of time, it is good to stretch and move about. This movement helps circulation and physical well-being. It also increases mental stamina and concentration.

Slow walking provides us the opportunity to remain focused during activity. When in motion, keep the mind focused on the point of contact of the foot touching the ground. This will help to maintain mental calmness, clarity, compassion, and wisdom while in

action. **Fast Walking**, by comparison, is intended to energize you again.

Posture: Stand erect, relaxed, and not stiff, with the head upright and chin slightly tucked; **the eyes being open, gazing softly and slightly downward about 3 feet ahead.**



Following the Monastics and senior teachers, we begin walking at a usual pace, then much slower and

1. *Sati* – mindfulness, the power of reference
2. *Sampajanna* – alertness
3. *Atappa* – ardency, focused investigation

When we practice, we benefit from keeping our mind on the object of meditation (e.g., the breath or body). Whenever the mind wanders, we bring it back without criticism or congratulations. We practice with the intention of being awake, clear, and calm 惺惺寂寂.

Whereas at first the mind wanders, sometimes like water falling over the edge of a cliff, as in a waterfall, with practice the mind will become more like a river, then a stream, until it becomes like a calm lake. In a calm lake one can see more deeply into the mind. This clear, special insight is called *vipassana*. The mind is able to join calm abiding, *shamatha*, with insight, *vipassana*.

both a formal and informal way. Formally, we cultivate our awareness in the moment by doing meditation, 禪 *chán*, which in Japanese is Zen. This character on the right side is a picture of a person yelling at you, chasing you with a pitchfork -- not very meditative. The left side is a picture of a person, well-grounded, who is able to see things from above. Meditation is about being able to transcend all worldly difficulties.

We do sitting, standing, and walking meditation, the formal practice, so that in our daily lives we are fully mindful, even when doing the dishes. We keep our mind fully present in the moment, not in the past, not in the future. 1) We observe our experience. 2) We accept experience. 3) We let experience go. If there is a way for us to be of benefit, to help the experience without doing harm, we practice this as well. In formal sitting meditation, we observe our breath (for example, as the object of meditation). We accept what the mind/body is doing, without the judgment of this is good or this is bad. We let go of whatever is distracting us, returning to the breath. This is the formal practice.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10 (*Majjhima Nikāya, Middle Length Discourses*) and its close relative, the *Maha-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22 (*Dīgha Nikāya, Long Discourses*) are two of the three main sources on the practice of mindfulness meditation found in the Buddha's teachings, the third being the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, *Mindfulness of the Breathing Discourse*.

Sati means mindfulness, leading *Satipaṭṭhāna* to be translated as either the *Foundations of Mindfulness* (Bhikkhu Bodhi) or the *Frames of Reference* (Thānissaro Bhikkhu). Since the discourse contains four sections, the title usually is written as *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* begins with the instruction that we should practice mindfully, alertly, and ardently.

more deliberately, for 15-20 minutes, in a clockwise circle around the Hall. In good weather we walk outside on the decking.

Focus of the Mind: Maintain an awareness of the moment.

Mindfulness of the body training requires the practitioner to focus on each step, observing:

- 1) the lifting of the heel and foot,
- 2) the short step, placing the heel down and then the toe,
- 3) transferring the weight and moving forward as the mind remains focused on breathing and stepping.
- 4) feeling the contact with the feet touching the ground.

During our practice we become aware of the tendencies of the mind to stray from our object of mindfulness. We observe, accept, and let go of these distractions. We are gentle and non-judgmental, but firm in our resolve to stay focused.

Further suggestions for those who wish to be more formal with the practice include: Hands being raised to the level of the solar plexus with one palm closed, (usually the right) placed against the abdomen and the other palm placed gently on the back of the right hand, or another option with both hands crossing each other and holding them close to the body.

At the conclusion of the 20 minute walking meditation, a chime will sound. We stop, face the Buddha, and do one half-bow. We return to a normal pace and return to our cushion or chair for the Dharma talk.

The Hindrances: More experienced meditators become aware of the subtle ways in which the mind gets distracted. The untrained mind seeks to grasp onto internal or external stimuli, thereby distracting itself from the here-and-now and from the object of meditation (e.g., breath or body). The Five Hindrances, *nivarana* (Pali), 五障

wǔzhàng, are the main ways the mind tends to lose focus. These five are:

- 1) Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda* 貪欲 *tānyù*): Craving for sense pleasure
- 2) Anger or ill-will (*byāpāda* 瞋恚 *chēnhuì*,, *vyāpāda* 瞋怒): Feelings of malice
- 3) Sloth-torpor or boredom (*thīna-middha* 沈 (睡眠 *shuìmián*): Half-hearted action, drowsiness, sleepiness, laziness.
- 4) Restlessness-Remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca* 掉悔 *diàohuǐ*): Inability to calm the mind.
- 5) Doubt (*vicikicchā*, Pali: *vicikitsā*, Skt. 疑 *yí*): Lack of conviction or trust



The Gong: When the gong rings at the end of the meditation, we rise, by following the hand bell sound, and bow.

Sometimes we bow one time and sometimes we do three bows, honoring our universal Buddha-nature, our intrinsic ability to attain enlightenment (as the Buddha did), being grateful for both the teachings (Dharma), as well as for the community of like-minded and compassionate lay and ordained members (Sangha).

Dharma Talks:

Dharma talks are given most Sundays from 11 am to 11:35 am. Either the Master or one of the senior teachers trained by the Master talks on a relevant topic related to our practice.

Chanting

After the Dharma talk we join together to chant from the Sutras (Discourses of the Buddha). The 10-minute chanting is mostly in English with a few passages in Pali, the original language closest to what the Buddha spoke. We end with a recitation of the Heart Sutra or Diamond Sutra in Chinese. All the verses are found in the Sunday Chanting Book next to your cushion. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have at the end of the chanting.

Bowing

The meaning of bowing in front of the Buddha statue should be properly understood. We are not bowing to a statue, idol or god. Gotama Buddha was a man who lived 2500 years ago. At age 35 he was able to attain the highest state of enlightenment and spent 45 years of his life teaching others how to be free from suffering. The Buddha taught that we all have the capacity to become Buddhas.

We bow to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha

The three bows signify:

- 1) Our respect for Buddha, the great teacher, and also our ability to attain enlightenment ourselves. We are also bowing to all sentient being, acknowledging their Buddha-nature, their ability to become enlightened one day.
- 2) Our respect for the teachings (the Dharma) and our aspiration to put these teachings into practice in our daily lives so as be of benefit to others,
- 3) Our respect to those who have taken ordination vows, the Sangha, the community of Monastics, who dedicate their lives to be a living example of aspiring to the highest practice of morality, compassion, and wisdom.

MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION

Mindfulness is *sati* in the Pāli (the language closest to what the Buddha spoke) and 念 *niàn* in Chinese, meaning being in the here-and-now with our full heart and mind. We practice mindfulness in