

MIDL Insight Meditation Retreat Instructions

<https://midlmeditation.com/midl-meditation-system>

MIDL Insight Meditators use the development of samatha relaxation and calm during mindfulness of breathing as a foundation for vipassana insight into the hindrances to relaxation & calm. By taking an interest in anything that hinders their ability to experience relaxation and calm during mindfulness of breathing, they develop insight into the anicca (impermanent) and anatta (autonomous) nature of their mind and body, thereby training their heart & mind to let go.

This process of calm and insight yoked together, rewards the mind with the enjoyment of letting go, and teaches it to incline towards this enjoyment in daily life. By practicing traditional Buddhist Insight Meditation in this way, attraction and aversion are weakened in daily life, and any cycles of self-created suffering come to an end.

The meditation structure on your MIDL retreat is divided into three areas:

1. Walking meditation or mindful movement.
2. Seated meditation: mindfulness of breathing.
3. Mindfulness in daily activities.

1) Walking Meditation.

Before each seated meditation session, I recommend practicing 30 minutes of walking meditation or mindful movement (such as stretching, yoga, or tai chi). This practice helps balance your energy, settle your mind, and enhance the continuity of mindfulness. Walking meditation involves being mindful of your body's movement and recognising when your attention wanders.

Step 1: Mindfulness of Standing. Begin your meditation by standing at the end of your walking path, such as a hallway, 12-20 small steps long, with your feet side by side and your hands linked in front or behind.

- To bring awareness to your body, silently say: "standing" and mentally feel your body as it stands.

These silent words (labels) are used during meditation to help to direct your attention. When using a label, do so slowly with no rush or hurry to remain relaxed. Mentally tune into experiences in your body, such as its heaviness, the touch of your hands, and your feet pressing against the floor as you stand.

Step 2: Mindful Walking. Once you feel mindfully aware of your body, you can begin to walk along your walking path. Walking in meditation is done in a slow yet relaxed way while being aware of the general experience of your body as it walks.

- To bring awareness to your body as you walk, silently say: "walking" and mentally feel the movement of your body walking.
- At the end of your track, you stop and silently say: "standing". As you turn around silently say: "turning" until you are ready to begin walking again.

What this looks like so far:

1. Silently say: "standing, standing" while feeling your body stand.
2. Begin slowly walking, silently saying: "walking, walking" as you feel your body walk.
3. At the end of the track, silently say: "standing, standing", then "turning, turning", as you turn.
4. Begin slowly walking, silently saying: "walking, walking" as you feel your body walk.....

Mindfully walking in this way, will bring awareness into your body and withdraw your mind from the world around you.

Step 3: Mindfully Aware of Each Step. As you become more aware of walking, you can gradually increase your observations. We will begin by moving from just "walking" to noticing two parts to each step.

Two parts per step: Begin each step by lifting your foot slightly off the floor, letting it swing, and then placing it on the ground in preparation for the next step.

- As your foot lifts and swings, silently say: “Lifting.”
- As you place your foot down, silently say: “Dropping.”

These two silent words (labels) will direct your awareness to the experience of these two movements. Walk up and down slowly in this way, taking your time with standing and mindfully turning at the end of your path, increasing your noticing to develop mindfulness.

What this looks like so far:

1. At the beginning of the track: “standing, standing”.
2. Begin walking: “Lifting, lifting”, “dropping, dropping”
3. At the end of the track: “Standing, standing” then “turning, turning”.
4. Then begin walking again: “Lifting, lifting”, “dropping, dropping”

Four parts per step: You can increase awareness of each step by silently saying: “lifting” as your foot lifts, “pushing” as your foot swings, and “dropping” as you lower it, “pressing” as your foot presses into the floor. To increase mindfulness, slow right down and mentally feel the difference between each phase: lifting, pushing, dropping, pressing.

What this looks like so far:

1. At the beginning of the track: “standing, standing”.
2. Begin walking: “Lifting, lifting”, “pushing, pushing”, “dropping, dropping”, “pressing, pressing”
3. At the end of the track: “Standing, standing” then “turning, turning”.
4. “Standing, standing”
5. Then begin walking again: “Lifting, lifting”, “pushing, pushing”,

After walking meditation, move slowly and deliberately to your seated meditation spot while remaining mindful of your body's movement. As you sit for meditation, continue to be aware of your entire body and arrange yourself comfortably.

When Your Mind Wanders

It is normal for our minds to wander during walking meditation, and learning to accept this as a natural part of meditation is a first step in lowering mental suffering. To aid in returning to mindfulness, you can use a silent label, such as “wandering, wandering,” whenever you notice that your mind has wandered.

Purposefully developing an attitude of being happy whenever you notice that your mind has wandered is beneficial.

“There you are, wandering mind, I see you (smile)”.

Enhancing this noticing by relaxing and smiling as you begin to walk mindfully again will teach your mind that there is a positive reward in being mindful and letting go of distraction.

This is the core of MIDL insight meditation: to develop a deep familiarity with your meditation object and to cultivate curiosity about any distractions that arise.

2) Seated Meditation: Mindfulness of Breathing.

In MIDL, we follow a 30-minute walking meditation with 30 to 60 minutes of seated meditation. Feel free to adjust these durations to what feels comfortable for your mind and body. Once you choose a duration, commit to it throughout your meditation session, regardless of your experiences. This commitment fosters resilience and insight, as every experience during meditation—comfortable or uncomfortable—opens the door to greater understanding and more profound calm.

As you settle into your meditation posture, relax and let go of any interest in the outside world. You can achieve this by taking slow, gentle breaths, relaxing different body parts, or releasing all effort in your body and mind. The key is to experience that relaxation and enjoy how nice it feels. As you relax, shift your awareness from external stimuli and thoughts to the experience of your body as it relaxes. This will help you to feel more grounded and establish a foundation for calm and insight.

As your body relaxes, you may notice the natural stages of relaxation that create the foundation of mindfulness of breathing. In MIDL, mindfulness of breathing is not something you actively do; rather, it's an experience you observe as your experience of relaxation and calm, with clear comprehension, deepens.

The natural development of samatha-calm.

MIDL employs a step-by-step approach to mindfulness of breathing, focusing on creating the conditions for relaxation and calm, with a clear comprehension of it. This process begins with establishing mindfulness of our body, then progresses to mindfulness of breathing, ultimately creating the conditions for the maturity of samadhi (unification of mind) in jhana (wholesome absorption). Anything that hinders the natural development of relaxation and calm during mindfulness of breathing is viewed as an opportunity for vipassana insight.

It's essential to recognise that these stages of samatha relaxation and calm are accompanied by clear comprehension and enjoyment; they are not tasks you actively perform. Be cautious of your mind as it seeks complexity in an inherently simple and natural process. This subtlety may be difficult to grasp initially.

Seated Meditation Instructions.

Each walking meditation session is followed by a seated mindfulness of breathing that develops by developing relaxing & calm while being curious about anything that hinders it for insight in anatta (its autonomous nature).

The first 6 stages of mindfulness of breathing are quite simple:

Seated meditation begins by reflecting gratefully and then opening your awareness to all your senses, acknowledging and accepting the experience of the world around you. This will sweeten your mind and arouse initial mindfulness. You then gradually go through a process of relaxing & letting go to develop calm in mindfulness of breathing while being mindful of the experience and process of relaxing & letting go.

1. Let go of interest in the world by relaxing your body and enjoying it.
2. As your body relaxes, your mind will relax (tip: find enjoyment in it).
3. As your mind relaxes, you will become more aware of your body (tip: find enjoyment in it).
4. As you become more aware of your body, you will become more content and happy sitting in meditation (tip: find enjoyment in it).
5. As you become content and happy with sitting in meditation, your body will completely relax, and you will become more aware of your breathing (tip: find enjoyment in it).
6. As you become aware of your body breathing, finding enjoyment in it, your mind will wander less, and you will naturally become aware of the whole of each breath without effort.

Hindrances: At some stage during meditation your mind will experience an imbalance in effort or attention that will hinder relaxation and calm from deepening. In MIDL these imbalances, known as hindrances, are seen opportunities for insight. You may experience hindrances as restlessness, sleepiness, forgetting, striving, dullness or doubt ([full list here](#)). The path of insight unfolds by being curious about the conditions for hindrances to calm arise and weakening them to bring balance back to your effort or attention during mindfulness of breathing.

Distractions: At some stage during your meditation, you will become distracted by sounds, thoughts, fantasies, itches etc. All of these are natural habits of mind that can be weakened by applying and gradually refining this simple formula ([full article on GOSS here](#))

GOSS Formula: When your attention wanders use this simple formula.

1. **Ground** = develop mindfulness of your body by enjoying relaxing & letting go.
2. **Observe** = observe whenever your mind wanders from this reference point.
3. **Soften** = soften & relax effort in your body and mind to let go of the distraction.
4. **Smile** = smile & enjoy how nice it feels to relax/let go of effort to reward your mind.
5. Repeat if needed.

How mindfulness of breathing for calm & insight unfolds.

When calm & insight are combined in mindfulness of breathing, based on the momentum of finding pleasure in letting go, mindfulness of breathing unfolds to Sotapanna Insight (Stream Entry) in this way.

1. Let go of interest in the world by relaxing your body and enjoying it.
2. As your body relaxes, your mind will relax (tip: find enjoyment in it).
3. As your mind relaxes, you will become more aware of your body (tip: find enjoyment in it).
4. As you become more aware of your body, you will become more content and happy sitting in meditation (tip: find enjoyment in it).
5. As you become content and happy with sitting in meditation, your body will completely relax, and you will become more aware of your breathing (tip: find enjoyment in it).
6. As you become aware of your body breathing, finding enjoyment in it, your mind will wander less, and you will naturally become aware of the whole of each breath without effort.
7. As you increase in finding enjoyment in the whole of each breath, relaxation & calm will increase, and you will become aware of changing sensations in your breathing (nose/belly).
8. As you become intimate with these sensations: coolness, warmth, pressure, movement, etc, a feeling of calm will increase, and your attention will become stable on just these sensations.
9. As your attention becomes stable on one point of changing sensations, your feeling of tranquillity will grow, and your attention will become effortless and sustained with little wandering.
10. As your attention no longer habitually wanders, your mind will become still you will gradually become aware of the subtle movement of your whole body as it breathes and how nice it feels as it shifts to the foreground of your awareness.
11. As the pleasure of your whole-body breathing grows, the border of your body and all body sensations will fade, leaving piti (pleasant feeling) and sukha (joy & happiness) within your awareness.
12. As you mind is enchanted by and falls in love with this wholesome experience, awareness of your five physical senses will fade, background awareness and attention will unify, becoming steady and firm, all hindrances will cease, and your mind will unify in access concentration.
13. First pleasure jhana: wholesome object: blissfulness of piti. As your mind unifies in access concentration, due to increasing seclusion, piti will become your dominant experience. Enchanted by it, your mind will create a pleasure feedback loop that it will flow with and absorb into to enter the first wholesome absorption of the First Pleasure Jhana.
14. Second pleasure jhana: wholesome object: joy & happiness of sukha.
15. Third pleasure jhana: wholesome object: happiness of contentment.
16. Fourth pleasure jhana: wholesome object: equanimity.
17. As your mind becomes familiar with the contentment of third jhana and eventually equanimity of fourth jhana, they will continue out of seated meditation and continue to mature in all activities. Contentment and equanimity will increase your minds clarity and insight into subtler variations of anicca (impermanence, unreliability) and anatta (autonomous nature) found in all experiences and experiencing as they arise and cease. This will increase your mind's sensitivity to the impersonal & conditioned nature of all experience and experiencing, and nibbida (disenchantment) will grow in your heart and mind. With disenchantment and equanimity, saddha (verified faith) will mature. Noticing of anicca & anatta will happen autonomously, become very refined, effortless, rapid, and the conditions for Sotapanna (Stream Entry) will arise, that when mature, will create a momentary gap in the habitual mind stream uprooting the conditions for doubt and the perception of an independently abiding self.

3) Mindfulness in Daily Activities.

One of the most important parts on your retreat will be maintaining a thread of mindfulness with clear comprehension of what you are doing from the first moment of waking up until the loss of awareness of the world when you fall asleep at night.

Full Retreat: To enhance this continuity of mindfulness I recommend moving about slowly and taking your time with everything that you do. You truly have nowhere to go, nothing to do, nowhere to be. Take your time experiencing everything, enjoying it like it was the first time you have ever done it. Starting from noticing your mind become aware of your surroundings as you wake up. The urge to hop out of (or stay in) bed. Moving around the house, savouring a drink of water, enjoying going to the toilet and beginning your first walking meditation for the day, to having a nice meal.

It is important to mindfully feel all transitions between different postures, from walking along your track, to sitting down to share a group meditation. Transition means to feel the changing elemental sensations of kaya (bodily sensations) in all parts of your body as you move around. All done mindfully with clear comprehension of the experience of it. This will create a foundation from which you will develop sensitivity to the next two satipatthana vedana: feeling tone and citta: heart & mind. The foundation for this is the GOSS Formula. Develop mindfulness of your body by softening & relaxing, enjoying the increased awareness of your body, how nice it feels, and observing whenever your attention wanders away from it. Ground, observe, soften, smile to return to mindfulness of your body, in this way the Awakening factors will develop and insight into anatta will deepen.

As your samadhi develops in daily activities, begin to pause before actions. Pause before moving your body after sitting. Pause before walking. Pause before reaching for a doorknob or to pick up food. This pause will reveal the intention to move and the desire that powers the movement therefore revealing the fourth Satipatthana: specific conditionality. I will insert a note of caution here, observing the conditioning intentions and desires before each action can not be forced, they will increase in clarity as relaxation and calm, accompanied by mindfulness with clear comprehension begin to transfer from formal practice into everything you think, say and do. Therefore, take your time on your retreat, enjoy the holiday, the break from concerns with the world, enjoying what presents itself to you now, with kindness, openness and caring, allow the experienced world to reveal itself to you, gradually opening your heart to its beauty and wonder.

Working Retreat: A working retreat develops the same as a full retreat, except it is important to acknowledge that hindrances of desire and aversion will be stimulated throughout the day so samadhi (unification of mind) will not be as deep and your mind will incline more toward vipassana insight than samatha calm. The retreat will cover one weekend and one long weekend over Easter. If you can, commit to joining the retreat during these weekends and increase your formal walking and sitting meditation time. During the working week wake up earlier before your household. I like to meditate at 5am each day as this sets up my viewing platform of mindfulness of body throughout the day.

Your focus in daily life should be toward simplicity. While you need food, water and air to live you do not need to watch tv, listen to the news, scroll on your phone or post to forums. Focus on simple activities like sitting in the sun, going for a walk or swim, spending time with your family or friends: completely present to what you are doing at that time. At work I enjoyed, a short meditation at morning tea and lunch time. Others around me thought I was having a nap, but I was enjoying a short meditation.

The foundation for meditating in activities in daily life is the GOSS Formula. Whenever you remember, develop mindfulness of your body by softening & relaxing, enjoying the increased awareness of your body as you relax and how nice it feels. It is important to develop mindfulness of your body throughout the day, not by effort, but by enjoying relaxing your body and mind, letting go of interest in the world beyond what you are doing now. It is the enjoyment of how nice it feels to be present in your body that will increase how long these periods of mindful presence last, not to effort to try to be mindful.

From this viewing platform you will clearly observe two things: the autonomous, by itself nature of functions of your mind, and your relationship towards yourself, others and what is happening throughout the day. Simply Ground, observe, soften, smile to return to mindfulness of your body, in this way the Awakening Factors will develop and insight into anatta will deepen in your daily life.

Retreat Interviews

Interviews with a teacher are an important part of your retreat that will give you an outside perspective of what you are currently experiencing in your practice.

Full Retreat

Approved applicants of a full retreat will be offered 3 X 15-minute private interviews on Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. As best we will allocate a teacher from a similar time zone. There is also two daily meet up groups for sharing in which guidance is offered on the schedule with Monica and Stephen.

Working Retreat

Approved applicants of the working retreat will have an opportunity to join 3 x 1-hour group interviews on Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. In group interviews meditators often answer each other's questions through group sharing. There is also two daily meet up groups for sharing in which guidance is offered on the schedule with Monica and Stephen.

How to Interview

Interview times are short and need to be respected, this means learning to efficiently describe your meditation experience to the teacher.

1. Describe the deepest experience of relaxation & calm that you experienced and how long you access it for.
2. Describe the dominant hindrances you have been experiencing and your ability to calm them.
3. Describe your observation of anicca (impermanence) and anatta (not self) during your sittings.
4. Describe your relationship towards what you have been experiencing: attracted, adverse, indifferent, content, equanimous.
5. Describe the continuity of your mindfulness and noticing in walking meditation and in all daily activities.