

MIDL Meditation System

MIDL for Stress & Anxiety
Softening, Stillness, Attention



Stress & Anxiety as a Path
of Mindfulness Meditation

By Stephen Procter

Introduction to this Meditation Guide Page 1

I have received so many questions regarding the experience of anxiety and meditation that I have decided to put pen to paper to clarify the method.

One of the common barriers to meditating in daily life is the experience of stress and anxiety which have become part of the modern lifestyle. Stress and anxiety create mental agitation which hinders the development of mindfulness and concentration.

A common mistake when meditating in daily life is to focus on the development of concentration in order to settle the agitated mind. While this may work for mild stress, the anxious mind, in a state of hypersensitivity & hypervigilance, can easily develop an addictive relationship to the pleasure of meditation based on avoidance: *"I am feeling really stressed, I need to go and meditate"*. Thereby strengthening rather than weakening the anxious cycle.

The first thing to understand when meditating with stress or anxiety, is that they are simply alarm systems of the mind. They are the survival part of the mind's way of signalling danger. It is important to understand that being a danger signal, they cannot be turned off by trying to suppress or avoid them. *"They are turned off by teaching the survival mind, that right now, is safe"*.

This understanding then creates our meditation path. Of first developing our ability to soften, then the ability to be still, before developing our attention. This order not only brings the experience of anxiety to an end, but it also uses the experience of anxiety as a vehicle for deeper mindfulness meditation practice.

Stress & Anxiety as a Path of Mindfulness Meditation

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For additional information please contact Stephen Procter as above.

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Other books by Stephen Procter:

1. How to Practice Mindfulness Meditation in Your Daily Life.
2. Original Instructions for Training in Mindfulness Meditation.

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Understanding Your Meditation Posture

When practicing mindfulness meditation for anxiety, a basic understanding of the correct postures for meditation is important.

Sitting on a Chair

When sitting on a chair to meditate, it is ok in the beginning to lean against the back rest. Make sure that your buttock is all the way back in the chair or else you may slump in your lower spine causing you to feel discomfort and sleepiness. Once seated, un-round your shoulders by bringing them forward, raising them up, bringing them back and then dropping them down. Also tuck your chin under slightly, extending the crown of your head towards the ceiling to balance your head on your neck.

Once your meditation practice develops it is helpful to start introducing more discipline within your meditation posture. This can be done by sitting towards the front of the chair and slightly rotating the top of your hips forward. Forearms and hands can then sit gently on your legs, creating a balance point.

Sitting on the Floor

When sitting on the floor it is important to take a posture that keeps your back straight and that you can maintain for a period of time without moving. Sitting flat on the floor requires a lot of flexibility in your hips. You can test this now by sitting flat on the floor. If your knees have trouble touching the ground while your back is straight then you should consider using different props to help with your posture. Props such as a firm cushion under your buttocks help to raise your hips off the ground, changing the angle of your legs. This lowers the flexibility needed in your hips for the posture.

When sitting on the floor I recommend trying the Burmese meditation posture. Sit down, on a cushion if needed, and fold one leg into your body so that the sole of the foot is facing the inside thigh of the other leg. Next fold the other leg in front of it. In this way the legs are folded next to each other but not on top of each other. This prevents the pain and numbness that comes from the pressure of one limb pressing against the other.

If this is still difficult you can try a kneeling position on the floor with a rolled blanket or cushion between your legs with your legs folded back under you. If this still isn't comfortable then go easy on yourself, get to know your body and what it can and can't do. Accept it; and then work with what you have. There are other postures just as good like a chair or lying down on the floor.

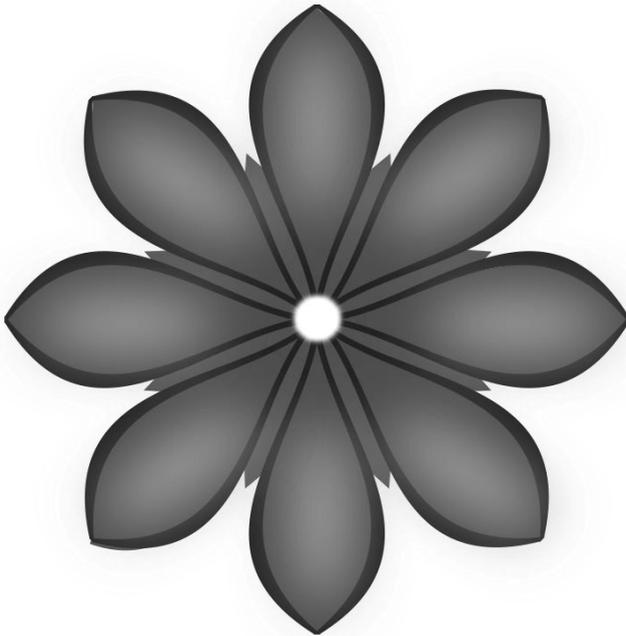
Lying on the Floor

When lying on the floor use a yoga mat or blanket plus a pillow if needed. If you have back troubles slightly bend your knees and place a bolster or rolled blanket under them to help with your backs arch. To keep alertness so that you don't fall asleep, place your arms by your sides with palms facing upwards. If you have back or neck issues you can also lay on your side in the CPR recovery position.

If there is no other option meditation can also be done lying on a bed but there is a higher risk of you falling asleep. You can prop your body upright by using pillows behind you back and head, a rolled blanket under your knees to protect your lower back. When meditating in a bed it is important to focus on proper support or else your body may slump and fall to the side as you relax. With practice an MIDL meditator can meditate lying on a bed while staying fully alert. In the beginning however this is difficult.

Chapter 1

Developing Your Skill in Softening



Softening Skill Development

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Stress, Anxiety & Breathing Patterns

It is helpful to understand that the experience of anxiety is part of the stress response, whose task is to warn and prepare you for danger. Just like a triggered smoke alarm within your home, the alarm itself is not the fire, it is just a warning system.

This warning system however can become corrupted by painful past memories. Since your mind uses your past experiences to interpret safety and danger, now. Past painful or traumatic experiences within your life, can therefore not only change the way that your mind interprets the world, but also the way that your whole-body-system functions. When meditating with stress & anxiety, the first area to be mindful of is any habitual stress breathing patterns.

There is a direct correlation between the experience of anxiety and how we normally breathe throughout the day. If you tend to breathe through your mouth and in your upper chest, then you will be more susceptible to experiencing anxiety. Many of the symptoms of anxiety will lower simply by retraining your natural breathing patterns from stress, upper chest breathing (hyperventilation), to diaphragmatic, belly breathing.

If you practice breathing patterns retraining (page 9), once to twice per day for four weeks, you will start to see a gradual change in your breathing from chest, to diaphragmatic belly breathing. This will bring about some benefits to your meditation practice and daily life.

1. You will experience less stress and anxiety within your life.
2. You will develop sensitivity to your breathing patterns.
3. You will develop mindfulness of breathing more easily.

Retraining Stress Breathing Patterns

Your First Meditation Training in MIDL is to retrain your breathing patterns, over a period of four weeks, in order to make diaphragmatic breathing (breathing in your belly), natural to you. This has three benefits to your meditation practice and daily life. It will lower your experience of anxiety. It will create a basis for the MIDL Softening skill and it will aid in settling your mind as a prerequisite for developing mindfulness of breathing.

****If not sure, check with your doctor before doing this training****

Step 1: Learning to Breathe in Your Belly

Start by lying on the floor. Use a pillow under your head and a rolled blanket under your knees if needed. Place both your palms just below your belly button, fingers touching in the middle, pressing slightly inwards.

Now gently raise your fingers by slowly extending the lower part of your abdomen upwards. Then slowly lower it back down again, letting the breath out. Do this a few times. Notice that when the lower part of your abdomen rises up, air is drawn in through your nose and as your lower abdomen falls, air is expelled out again.

Step 2: Slowing Down Your Breathing

Once you have found the rhythm of breathing in your lower belly, you can start to slow down the in-breath and out-breath. It is the slowness of the movement that increases the range and strength of your diaphragm muscle. Slowing of the out-breath also helps to rebalance low CO₂ levels associated with stress-based chest hyperventilation which is responsible for anxiety symptoms.

Things to Watch Out For

Effort: Be careful of over-effort or strain. Anxiety creates the desire to try to achieve, to control things within our life, including something as basic as breathing. If you notice any struggle or strain then stop what you are doing for a short while and allow yourself to relax before starting again.

Light Headedness: Because you are not used to breathing so deeply, you may experience some light-headedness due to the increased levels of CO₂ being absorbed. Whenever you experience this, stop the exercise and allow yourself to stay still. Generally, after 10 seconds this feeling settles as CO₂ rebalances leaving you feeling calmer & more relaxed and you can resume your training. With regular practice this light-headed feeling gradually lessens.

****See your doctor if light-headedness persists****

Short Breaths: If breathing in your chest is normal for you then it will be natural for your diaphragm movement on your in-breath to be short. Because of the shortness of your diaphragm movement you may feel as if you are not getting enough air. If needed during the exercise you can take an extra breath.

Once the movement of your diaphragm slows down and lengthens, the feeling of needing more air will go away. By paying attention to the very beginning of the in-breath, starting it slowly, and paying attention to the very beginning of the out-breath, starting it slowly, your breathing will naturally deepen.

The most important part to focus on is learning to release the out-breath slowly. This is done to allow the depleted CO₂ levels caused by chest hyperventilation to re-balance and as a vehicle for deep mental relaxation during MIDL Softening Techniques.

Breathing Feels Tight: If when breathing in you feel a tightness of the breath within your lower chest, it is possible that you are breathing in from the top of your chest downwards in an attempt to push your diaphragm down into your belly. This will not work.

The diaphragm is a dome and cannot be pushed down; it needs to be pulled. It can be helpful to think of your diaphragm as an upside-down plunger. When you pull the handle downward the plunger will suck in air, as you push it back up it expels it. To engage your diaphragm, think of pulling it downwards rather than pushing it. Placing your fingertips below your belly button and pressing in slightly to allow you to feel your lower abdomen move is helpful.

Step 3: Breathing Up Into Your Chest

Once you have done 20 repetitions of breathing in your belly, the next stage is to learn to breathe from your belly up into your chest. To do this leave one palm below your belly button and place the other on the top of your chest, just below your collar bone. Start the breath in your belly so that your lower hand begins to lift. Then bring it through your lower ribs to the top of your chest.

It is helpful to push your ribs outwards a little to physically help your chest lift and open. Stress breathing lowers the flexibility of the rib cage through its lack of movement so you may need to help your chest expand in the beginning.

In-breath: *belly – ribs – top of your chest.* Out-breath: *relax your body.* Repeat 10 times with your hands on your body and another 10 with your arms lying by your side.

In-breath: *belly – ribs – top of your chest.* Out-breath: *relax your body.* Next, stop controlling the breathing, allow it to happen naturally.

Step 4: Allowing Autonomous Breathing

At the end of the out-breath, allow the breath to fully go out then relax and wait. It is helpful at this stage to distract yourself from the breathing by becoming aware of the touch of your body on the floor to avoid control. Your brain will then fire a signal and take over the breathing for you. Your diaphragm will re-engage, moving freely and gently within your belly. Allow the breathing to happen autonomously in your belly with bare awareness of it.

MEDITATION: Retraining Stress Breathing Patterns (20 min)

First stage of retraining exercise

- *Lay comfortably on the floor, eyes closed.
- *Hands below your belly button, fingers pressing slightly in.
- *Gently breathe in your lower belly to lift your fingers up.
- *Slowly allow the breath out to lower them again 20 times.
- *Be careful that the breath is in your lower belly, not chest.

Second stage of retraining exercise

- *Bring one palm to the top of your chest.
- *Slowly breathe in from your belly button – ribs - chest.
- *Allow your body to relax with a slow out-breath.
- *Repeat 10 times with slow, gentle breaths; no strain.
- *Be careful that the breath starts in your belly, not chest.

Third stage of retraining exercise

- *Lay both arms loosely by your side on the floor.
- *Continue breathing: belly button – ribs – chest - relax.
- *Repeat 10 times then allow the last breath to go out.
- *Relax & wait for the diaphragm to re-engage in your belly.
- *Lie still and allow your breathing to happen naturally.

Softening with Controlled Breathing

Your Second Meditation Training after retraining your breathing patterns (p9) is to develop your skill in what is called Controlled Softening. Controlled Softening is the skill of intentionally using slow, deep diaphragmatic breathing in order to lower resistance & bring about deep physical and mental relaxation.

Application of Controlled Softening

Once you have learnt the skill of Controlled Softening you can apply it to both seated mindfulness meditation and everyday life. If during seated meditation you are experiencing mental restlessness or sleepiness then use some slow, softening breaths to relax your relationship towards it. Whenever your attention wanders towards a thought, sound or pain, also soften using some gentle breaths. In daily life you can use slow, softening breaths to relax your relationship towards a difficult experience or situation. Controlled Softening in this way will protect you from habitual reaction.

Step 1: Learning to Breathe in Your Belly

Seated, place the tips of your fingers just below your belly button and slightly press in. Gently lift your fingers by slowly extending your lower abdominal muscles outwards; drawing the breath in. Slowly lower your fingers back inwards again by releasing your lower abdominal muscles to let the breath go out. Repeat 10 times.

Step 2: Breathing up into Your Chest

Leave one palm below your belly button and the other at the top of your chest. Start by breathing in your belly then push your ribs out a little and bring the breath into the top of your chest.

Step 3: Physical Relaxation with the Deflation

Allow your breath to go out slowly through your nose. As your body deflates with the out-breath relax your chest, shoulders and upper back. Feel your body become heavy. Abandon all effort with each deflation of the out-breath. Repeat ten times with Step 2.

Step 4: Mental Relaxation with the Out-Breath

On the out-breath focus on the centre of your forehead, between your eyebrows and extend the length of the breath through your nose by slowing it down. With each out-breath make the breath more gentle, slow and calm. Allow yourself to mentally sink.

Step 5: Allow Your Breathing to Calm Naturally

Once the mental relaxation develops focus on allowing your breathing to become calmer and gentler. Relax your breathing until it starts happening naturally and all effort has dissolved. Align your awareness with the gentle deflation of each out-breath, allowing your mind to become settled and still. It is at this stage that you have entered Uncontrolled Softening.

MEDITATION: Softening with Controlled Breathing (*20 min*)

- *Sit with eyes closed, hands below your belly button.
- *Gently breathe in & out with your lower belly 10 times.
- *Bring one palm to the top of your chest.
- *Slowly breathe in from your belly button – ribs - chest.
- *Allow your body to relax with a slow out-breath 10 times.
- *Now bring awareness to your forehead and nose.
- *Slowly breathe in from your belly button – ribs - chest.
- *Slowly breathe out through your nose to mentally relax.
- *After 10 times allow your breathing to calm naturally.

Softening with Uncontrolled Breathing

Your Third Meditation Training is to refine your Softening skill by learning how to mentally ‘borrow’ the deep relaxation associated with the deflation of your body as it responds to breathing. You do this by abandoning control of your breathing and allowing it to happen naturally. The key is to borrow the natural deflation of your body by aligning your awareness with the movement of the out-breath. Abandoning all effort and allowing yourself to physically and mentally ‘sink’ along its length, dissolving mental resistance.

Application of Uncontrolled Softening

During mindfulness of breathing you allow yourself to ‘open’ to all experience with the inflation of your body on the in-breath. On the deflation of the out-breath you ‘abandon’ all effort, softening your relationship towards whatever you are experiencing ‘now’ (p41).

Once understood you can bring this skill of mindful observing and Softening into your daily life. You do this by allowing yourself to be ‘open’ to how you are feeling throughout your day and by Softening any resistance you feel towards it. Once mindfulness of your body breathing has transferred into your daily life, sensitivity to the movement of your breathing will become a barometer for your state of mind. This then creates the means through which you can gently abandon your participation in defensive reactions (p56).

MEDITATION: Softening with Uncontrolled Breathing

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Create your foundation with Controlled Breathing.
- *Allow the breathing to happen naturally free from control.
- *Open to all experience with the inflation of your body.
- *Abandon all participation with the deflation of your body.

Softening by Abandoning Participation

Your Fourth Meditation Training is in the skill of abandoning all mental participation by observing and intentionally relaxing the underlying effort 'to do'. This MIDL skill is called 'Softening Into'. A skilled MIDL meditator will 'Soften Into' any attraction or aversion they experience during seated meditation and daily life.

By becoming aware of the middle of your forehead and breathing out slowly through your nose you can allow yourself to mentally 'sink' in-line with the gentle out-breath. When Softening Into occurs all thinking and mental participation will cease and your mind will enter non-judgemental stillness.

Application of Softening Into

The Softening Into skill leads to maturity within MIDL meditation practice. By Softening deeply into your relationship to whatever you are experiencing 'now', in both seated meditation and daily life, you will start to decondition habitual clinging within your mind. This will create the conditions for equanimity towards the experience of your Six Senses (p40) to arise and establish.

MEDITATION: Softening by Abandoning Participation

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Become aware of any tension behind your forehead.
- *Gently breathe in then slowly out through your nose.
- *Extend the length of the out-breath and mentally relax.
- *Repeat ten times learning to mentally relax any effort.
- *Now bring a thought or memory to mind, holding it gently.
- *Feel any tension underlying the thought or memory.
- *Relax the underlying mental tension with a slow out-breath.
- *Repeat ten times learning how to abandon participation.

Softening Through Forgiveness

Your Fifth Meditation Training is to become fully present by accepting and forgiving your past. Forgiveness acknowledges: "What happened may have been wrong, but it can't be changed and I will not suffer over this anymore."

Step 1: Ask Yourself for Forgiveness

Sit down, close your eyes and bring yourself to mind. Forgive yourself for all the things you have done to bring harm to yourself.

"(your name here), if I have done anything to hurt you in any way, knowingly or unknowingly, please forgive me."

Say this slowly and gently with meaning three times and each time picture yourself gently saying back: "I forgive you."

Step 2: Ask Another for Forgiveness

Now think of someone that you have hurt in some way. Ask for their forgiveness to allow healing by silently saying to them:

"(their name here), if I have done anything to hurt you in any way, knowingly or unknowingly, please forgive me."

Say this slowly and gently with meaning three times and each time picture them gently saying back to you: "I forgive you."

Step 3: Offer Forgiveness to Another

Now think of someone that has hurt you in some way. Offer them your forgiveness to allow healing by silently saying to them:

"(their name here), for any hurt that you have caused me, in any way, knowingly or unknowingly, I forgive you."

Say this slowly and gently with meaning three times and each time picture them gently saying back to you: "thank you."

Softening with Loving Kindness

Your Sixth Meditation Training is to fully embrace your present experience by developing loving kindness towards yourself and others. Loving kindness is the feeling of unconditional caring and friendship which dissolves aversion within the heart and mind.

Step 1: Loving Kindness to a Loved One

Sit down comfortably, make a half smile on your face and bring someone you care for or respect to mind. Gently repeat:

“(insert their name) may you be well

“may you be happy....., may you be peaceful

Keep gently repeating these phrases to yourself, in no hurry, and really mean it. Smile when you say it. The key is to develop the feeling of love that comes from this wish of kindness.

Step 2: Loving Kindness to Yourself

Once you can develop the feeling of loving kindness to your loved one then you can transfer the feeling towards yourself. First start by developing the feeling on your loved one, then bring yourself to mind. The feeling will then carry over. If the loving feeling fades then swap back to your loved one again to recultivate the feeling. Apply the feeling to yourself again until you also are a loved one.

“may I be well

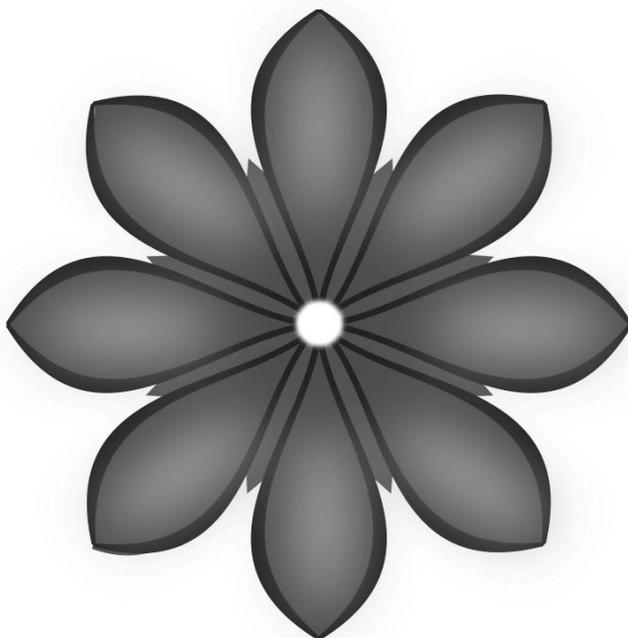
“may I be happy....., may I be peaceful

Step 3: Loving Kindness to a Difficult Person

Once you can develop loving feeling evenly towards your loved one and yourself, you can then start to include someone that you have mild difficulties with. Use the same phrases as for the loved one, carrying over the loving feeling as you did with yourself.

Chapter 2

Developing Your Skill in Stillness



Stillness Skill Development

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Developing Your Skill in Stillness

Your Seventh Meditation Training is the simple practice of sitting still and allowing the functions of your mind to slow down by not adding anything to them. Like a fire that can only survive as long as it is being fed fuel, the fire of your mind can only burn fiercely when fuel is being added to it.

Through not adding to the activity of your mind it will naturally start to settle down and become still. As your skill in Stillness deepens you will notice a gradual lowering of defensiveness and anxiety within your daily life.

Step 1: Create Your Posture for Stillness

For Stillness meditation it is necessary to create a balanced posture that you can maintain for the period of time without moving. This will give you the stability needed to allow your body to relax without fear of slumping forward.

It is helpful in the beginning to un-round your shoulders by bringing them forward, raising them up, bringing them back and then dropping them down again. Also tucking your chin under slightly and extending the crown of your head towards the ceiling helps with balance. Once you have taken a balanced posture for your meditation, the first thing you do is to allow your eyelids to close slowly until they lightly touch.

Step 2: Become Aware of Sounds

If there is any sound present become aware of it; allow the sound to start to anchor your attention. Notice your attention drawn out towards the sound. Focus on its flow, its changing nature. Allow the change within the sound to hold your attention present.

Step 3: Warmth & Coolness

Gently bring awareness to the experience of warmth & coolness within your body as it sits. In a very general way, experience the sensations of warmth & coolness, keeping them gently in mind.

Step 4: Touch of Your Hands

Within the experience of your posture start to include points of touch: The touch of your hands resting within each other. The touch of your body as it rests on the chair or floor and the touch of your feet. Keeping these points of touch gently in mind.

Step 5: Experience Your Whole Body

As your mind settles, open your awareness to take in your whole body: warmth, coolness and touch. Your whole body just sitting here. Start to become aware of the general experience of heaviness that arises as your body starts to relax. Giving up all effort it becomes heavier, so heavy. Allow the chair or floor to take the full weight of your body. Allow your body to relax into this support.

Step 6: Relaxing Your Forehead

Now gently bring awareness to your forehead and allow the muscles in your forehead to relax. Feel them becoming heavier, smoothing out. Experience the sense of ease as it arises.

Step 7: Relaxing Your Eyelids

Allow the relaxation from your forehead to flow down into your eyelids and eyes. Relaxing your eyelids, feel the eyelids droop, becoming heavier. Allow them to become so heavy it feels like you're falling asleep. Feel the mental relaxation arising from this.

Step 8: Relaxing Your Cheeks & Jaw

Feel the relaxation flow down through your cheeks and into your jaw. Allow your jaw to open slightly. Feel the relaxation coming to the whole of your face, filling your face, becoming so relaxed.

Step 9: Head, Shoulders & Upper Back

The relaxation starts to flow from your face around to the back of your head and neck. Slightly adjust your head if needed so that it feels balanced on your neck. Feel this relaxation flowing into your head and release any tension you feel, becoming so relaxed.

The relaxation starts to flow down your neck into your shoulders. Allow them to drop slightly. It then starts to fill your upper chest and upper back. Mentally feel the deep relaxation coming to your whole upper body. The sense of ease within your upper body.

Step 10: Relaxing Your Arms & Hands

The relaxation flows down your arms into your hands. Relax your fingers. Allow your arms to hang loosely from your shoulders.

Step 11: Chest, Belly & Breathing

Relax your chest & belly. Feel the breathing flowing freely within your body. The gentle flow of your breath. Allow your breathing to become calm. To become so relaxed that you can barely feel it moving at all. The sense of ease within your body deepens.

Step 12: Relaxing Your Hips, Legs & Feet

Slightly release your hips and allow the relaxation to flow down your legs into your feet. You can use some gentle Softening breaths until your whole body feels deeply relaxed; so heavy.

Step 13: Creating Your Meditation Object

This deep relaxation of your whole body will become your meditation object for your mind to access Stillness. Allow the chair or the floor to take the full weight of your body. Give up all effort within your body. Feel the effortlessness of it all, the effortlessness of not having to do anything. Feel this deep sense of ease fill every cell within your whole body. Allow the sense of ease to grow.

Step 14: Experiencing Physical Relaxation

Bring full awareness to the deep relaxation and ease within your body and allow them to start to fill your mind. Abandon all mental effort at this stage; just allow. The deep relaxation and ease start to fill your mind. Allow it to sink in. Feel your mind sinking deeper down, deeper as the sense of ease, of effortlessness fills it.

At this stage allow your mind to drift, to float around. Allow thoughts to come and go. You will drift in and out of thoughts. Gradually the thoughts will change from directed thinking with a subject, to random, floaty thoughts without meaning. Allow yourself to bounce in and out of this mental activity.

Step 15: Experiencing Mental Relaxation

Start to become aware of the mental relaxation and ease arising within your mind. Allow this sense of ease to fill your mind until it becomes the experience of the awareness itself. You can use a few gentle Softening breaths as learnt earlier to relax any effort that arises within your mind; to soften any desire to do. Your task at this stage is to not add anything to the processes of your mind, no longer feeding the fire; just allowing the fire to burn itself out. Allowing the processes of your mind to cease and Stillness to arise.

Stillness by Developing Gratitude

Your Eighth Meditation Training is to become fully present by developing gratitude towards your present experience. Where forgiveness (p17) puts down regrets from the past, gratitude removes longing for the future. Between these two, contentment arises, creating the perfect conditions for mindfulness meditation.

Step 1: Reflect on Small Things in Life

Sit down and reflect on small things in your life you have to be grateful for. Your house to keep you dry, clothing, food to eat, water to drink. Simple things that you may have taken for granted.

"Thank you for all that I have in my life"

"Thank you for my (_____)" "I am so blessed."

"Thank you for my (_____)" "I am so fortunate."

Keep gently repeating these phrases to yourself, in no hurry, and really mean it. Smile when you say it. The key is to develop the feeling of gratitude that comes from this reflection.

Step 2: Reflect on People in Your Life

Now reflect on people within your life that you are grateful for.

"Thank you (insert name) for loyalty and friendship."

"I really do appreciate having you in my life."

"Thank you (insert name) for all you have done for me."

"I am blessed to have you in my life."

Keep focussing on them in your mind allowing the feeling to grow.

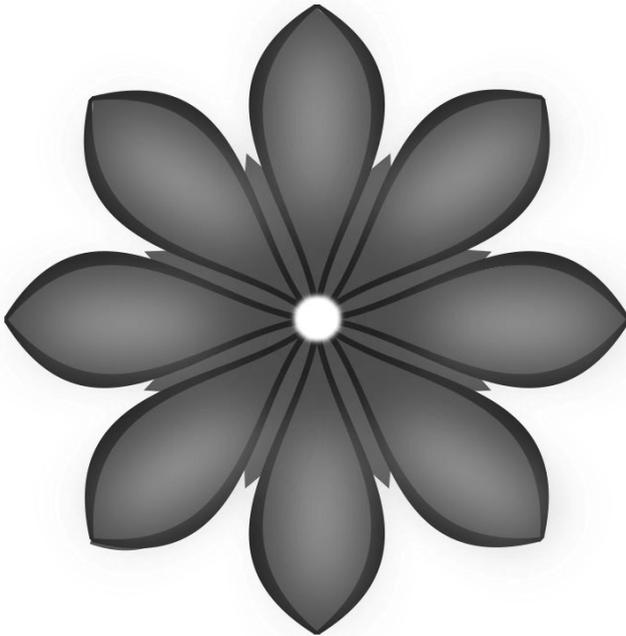
Step 3: Allow the Feeling to Grow Within

Next send your thoughts of gratitude out into your neighbourhood, suburb, city, state, country and beyond.

"Thank you for all that I have in my life, I am truly blessed."

Chapter 3

Understanding Attention in MIDL



Understanding Attention in MIDL

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4. Understanding the Five Characteristics of Distraction [page 32.](#)

Four Factors of Attention Explained

1. Investigation

(Dhamma Vicaya): literally means: *'investigating reality'*.

Investigation is the silent questioning of your present experience by turning awareness towards any of your Six Senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body & mind (p40) to develop understanding.

Investigation can be divided into two areas:

- a. The initial bringing and continued applying of your awareness to your object of meditation in order to develop concentration.
- b. Once some concentration has been developed investigation changes to the questioning mind; the desire to understand the patterns of experience within your body & mind.

2. Mindfulness

(Sati): literally means: *'memory'* or *'to remember'*.

Mindfulness is a particular type of remembering. Not remembering the past but remembering the present, remembering your experience of 'now'.

Mindfulness can be divided into three areas:

- a. Remembering your present experience of 'now' such as your meditation object or the experience of sitting here reading this.
- b. Noticing whenever you forget your present experience, such as when your mind habitually becomes lost within thinking.
- c. Self-reflecting as a basis for morality creating direction in regards to what to abandon or cultivate within your life:

"Well that wasn't a good idea, it led to harm towards myself and others."

"This is a good thing, it led to the welfare of myself and others."

3. Concentration

(*Samadhi*): literally means: *'to unify, to bring together'*.

Concentration is the unification, increased steadiness and clarity of awareness as a result of the continuous mindfulness of the application of awareness towards the meditation object.

As awareness unifies it becomes steady & clear suppressing the Five Characteristics of Distraction: attraction, aversion, mental sluggishness, restlessness and doubt. The temporary suppression of these Five Characteristics of Distraction increases the clarity of awareness and the ability to observe sense experience clearly.

This can be done in two ways:

- a. By keeping awareness on your meditation object and ignoring all distractions (fixed concentration).
- b. By observing whenever mindfulness lapses and awareness shifts from your meditation object to another experience within the realm of your Six Senses (p40) (momentary concentration).

4. Awareness

(*Vinnana*): literally means *'awareness, knowing of an experience'*.

Whenever you experience anything through any of your Six Senses, the 'knowing' of the experience that is present is awareness. During mindfulness meditation your task is to continuously remember your awareness of your meditation object.

Awareness in its essence is pure, clear, still. However, awareness can be coloured by attraction or aversion through reaction to any pleasant or unpleasant feeling (p29) (*Vedana*) present within an experience. This colouring due to attraction or aversion within the mind alters the lens through which you perceive the world.

"Literally your perception of the world you live in changes."

Balancing the Attention Factors

It is important if you wish to create a posture of attention that will transfer into daily life that your attention factors are developed in a balanced way. Think of attention as being like an old fashion scale, with mindfulness as the centre post, investigation on the left and concentration on the right; balancing the focus of awareness.

If Investigation is stronger than Concentration

If you increase your investigation during meditation without deepening your concentration, the balance of the scale will tip. As investigation becomes higher, concentration becomes lower. If this balance change is slight then clarity of awareness can still be maintained and Wisdom can arise. But if investigation is too dominant then concentration will collapse and investigation will turn into thinking about reality instead of experiencing it.

If Concentration is stronger than Investigation

If you increase your concentration during meditation without deepening your investigation, the balance of the scale will tip. As concentration becomes higher, investigation becomes lower. If this balance change is slight then investigation of the Six Senses can still be maintained. But if concentration is too dominant then your Six Senses will start to shut down and investigation will collapse.

If Investigation and Concentration are equal

In MIDL investigation and concentration are developed evenly during seated meditation to create a posture of Flexible Attention. This creates the ability to observe movements of attention within seated meditation and daily life, as well as increasing awareness sensitivity of the Six Senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body & mind.

Four Areas to Cultivate Attention

1. Kaya: Bodily Sensations

The experience of sensations within your body is the first area in which you can cultivate your attention during MIDL mindfulness meditation. These sensations have a quality of presence to them so make a good meditation object in which to 'ground' awareness. This is done by being continuously mindful of any sensations within the experience of your meditation posture or breathing.

Sensations are experienced as a range of Elemental Qualities:

Earth Element: softness to hardness.

Fire Element: coolness to warmth.

Water Element: wetness to dryness.

Wind Element: tension, vibration, expansion, contraction etc.

It is important to make sure that your attention is focussed on these sensations for mindfulness and concentration to deepen.

2. Vedana: Feeling Tone

Feeling Tone is the second area in which you can cultivate your attention during MIDL mindfulness meditation. Feeling tone can be understood as the flavour of pleasantness or unpleasantness found within any experience. It can be experienced any time you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think about, remember something. Feeling tone is one of the most important areas for you to observe in your daily life as it is responsible for all attraction and aversion.

Feeling tone is both the driving force for life and the weak link in the chain that can be broken through learning to soften your relationship towards it. By mindfully observing any pleasantness or unpleasantness present, and using the MIDL Softening skill to relax any attraction or aversion towards it; freedom is found.

3. Citta: Mind

Mind is the third area in which you can cultivate your attention during MIDL mindfulness meditation. Mind is best understood as your experienced mental landscape. When you observe your mind during meditation you may start to notice that it is not something solid that moves around. It is a field of flowing, changing events that flow and change dependant on conditions.

Within the mental landscape of your mind you may experience thoughts, memories, likes, dislikes, judgements. You also may notice changes within the level and clarity of your mindfulness, concentration and awareness itself during meditation.

When observing your mind during mindfulness meditation, your task is to get to know the changing patterns within its mental landscape and most importantly your relationship towards them.

4. Dhammas: Conditional Processes

Dhammas is the fourth area in which you can cultivate your attention during MIDL mindfulness meditation. Dhammas is the investigation of the conditional relationships between the first three areas: Sensations within your body, pleasant & unpleasant feeling and the functions of your mind. Observing how these three areas interact includes developing an understanding of the:

Six Sense Doors: Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body & mind (p40)

Four Attention Factors: Awareness, investigation, mindfulness & concentration (p26).

Five Characteristics of Distraction: Attraction, aversion, mental sluggishness, restlessness, doubt (p32).

Noble Eightfold Path: Right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness & concentration (p48).

The Actual Experience in Meditation

We may find a cosy place within our home to sit in meditation, intent on practicing mindfulness of breathing. Closely observing each breath as it comes in and out, and starting to feel very, very pleasant and peaceful. Then someone in our home suddenly makes a loud sound that jolts our attention away from our breathing. Because of our MIDL training we notice the movement of our attention shift towards the sound. We then observe the instinctive tightening up of our body with interest.

We turn our attention towards this tightness of the resistance within our body and separate it with labels: “tight” “tense” “hard”. Doing this we are observing the First Area of Attention: Kaya: Bodily Sensations (p29). Looking closer we also observe a general feeling of unpleasantness throughout our body. Doing this we are observing the Second Area of Attention: Vedana: Feeling (p29).

We then notice in the background mental aversion, a mental pulling away from the unpleasantness of the experience. We also notice restlessness within our mind. Within this we observe a longing for the nice, peaceful feeling of our meditation. Doing this we are observing the Third Area of Attention: Citta: Mind (p30).

With further investigation we notice a feeling of irritation arise and observe its relationship to the unpleasant feeling within our body and the aversion within our mind. We observe how our body and mind respond by tightening in resistance to the unpleasant feeling, especially the raising and locking of our diaphragm and the shifting of the breath up into our chest. We use some Softening breaths to relax our relationship towards it. Doing this we are understanding the Fourth Area of Attention: Dhammas (p30).

Five Characteristics of Distraction

The Five Characteristics of Distraction are traditionally known as the Five Hindrances to Meditation. They certainly are hindrances to meditation if our focus is on the development of one-pointed concentration. Since the Five Hindrances are the meditation object in MIDL, it is not appropriate to call them hindrances but rather Characteristics of Distraction to be observed and understood.

Your first step is to accept that your attention will wander. Mindfulness meditation and distraction are not separate. Actually it is not possible to practice MIDL without distraction either external or internal. Distraction is not the enemy of mindfulness meditation, it is the content. Habit, not looking, is the real enemy.

1- 2. Attraction & Aversion

During meditation you will experience attraction or aversion towards different experiences. In the beginning this may be the desire to listen to or push away a sound or to engage in a thought about something interesting or painful within your life. Attraction and aversion always appear at the same time, they are two sides of the same coin. It all depends on where your attention is focussed.

Attraction & aversion are observed by noticing points of change within your attention as it moves towards or pushes away an experience at one of your Six Senses (p40). Whenever you notice your attention move, use a simple, silent label such as *“thinking”* or *“hearing”* or *“aching”* etc. (p38) to help to clarify it. Next see if you can experience the quality of pleasantness or unpleasantness (p29) underlying the experience and with slow, softening breaths (p16), relax your participation in any desire to react that is present.

3. Mental Sluggishness

You will at times become mentally sluggish and sleepy during meditation. Mental sluggishness arises when energy levels become too low to support the functions of your mind creating a lowering of the clarity of your awareness. This is experienced as a mental fog that takes away our ability to clearly know what is going on.

Mental Sluggishness during meditation can be caused by:

a. Sleepiness: If your life is overstimulated then you will at times experience sleepiness. When sleepiness is present investigate your experience of it. If sleepiness persists then you need more rest.

b. Over-eating: If you eat big meals, they will affect your energy levels. Meditate between meals or eat less before meditating.

c. Stress Breathing: If you stress breathe in your chest the hyperventilation will cause mental fogginess and sluggishness. Retrain your breathing patterns to increase mental clarity (p9).

d. Lapse of Mindfulness: When your mindfulness is weak then your interest in your meditation object will also weaken and clarity will fade. Stimulate your mindfulness by placing effort into detailed awareness of the experience of your meditation object.

e. Mental Aversion: If aversion is present towards whatever you are experiencing during meditation, then your mind will start to withdraw awareness to the safe, pleasurable place of not being aware of anything at all. Into the dull, sleep like state of not knowing. Observe any aversion present, softening towards it (p16).

f. Over-calming Awareness: When developing concentration by calming the activity of your mind, you may also over-calm the 'knowing' factor of your awareness. Awareness will then start to 'sink'. Put effort into increasing the clarity of 'knowing' experience.

4. Mental Restlessness

Restlessness arises when energy levels become too high, first manifesting mentally then expressing physically. Restlessness can appear as an inability to sit still, continuous obsessive thinking or as a constant sliding of your attention off your meditation object. When restlessness is present, any attempt to settle thinking or focus your attention will only add energy to the restlessness.

To settle restlessness, you need to remove all extra energy from your mind by withdrawing all participation. The easiest way to do this is to widen your awareness. Become aware of your whole body, aware of the room around you, aware of sounds far away. Give your mind as much room as possible to run. Water down the high energy levels by creating space through not-doing. Just be with the restless feeling and soften, relax any desire to participate.

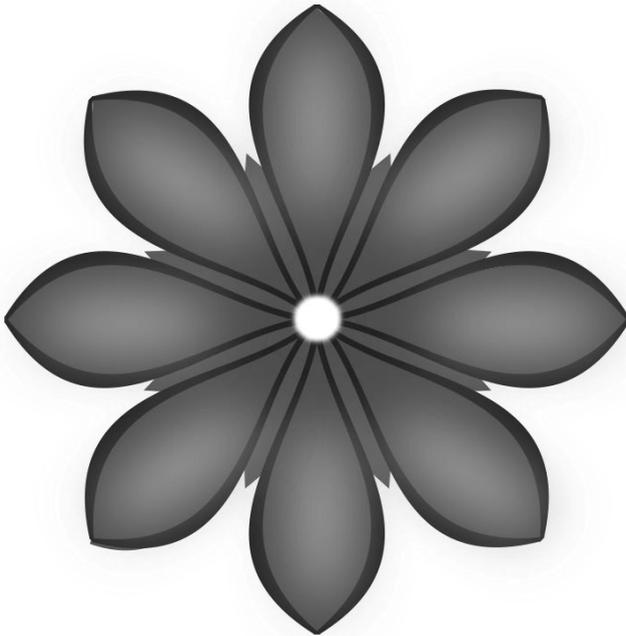
5. Doubt

Until a meditator reaches Sotapanna doubt will be a normal part of their meditation and perhaps one of the most dangerous of the Five Distractions. It is helpful to understand doubt for what it is. Doubt is not personal. It is just a defensive mechanism of your mind trying to protect you by making you push everything away.

Doubt arises as background, aversive thoughts; judging everything within your life. “This isn’t the right time to meditate.” “This technique isn’t for me.” “I will never be able to meditate.” “Am I doing this the right way?” Doubt arises out of a state of not knowing, of mental confusion based on misinformation. Learn to observe doubt and how it sabotages everything by creating mental confusion. Whenever doubt arises within your mind make it your meditation object and investigate its impersonal nature.

Chapter 4

Developing Your Skill in Attention



MIDL Mindfulness of Breathing

1. Mindfulness of Breathing meditation training [page 36.](#)
2. Creating your MIDL meditation Viewing Platform [page 46.](#)

MIDL Mindfulness of Breathing

Your Ninth Meditation Training is mindfulness of breathing.

STEP 1: Grounding Your Awareness

First Take Your Meditation Posture

Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor and close your eyes over gently, keeping your eyelids relaxed. Start to become aware of what it feels like, just to be here, in a very general, untargeted way.

Become Aware of Sound

If there is any sound present become aware of it, allow the sound to start to anchor your attention. Notice your attention drawn out towards the sound, focus on its flow, its changing nature. Allow the change within the sound to hold your attention present. As your mind settles start to bring your awareness within the experience of just sitting here.

Aware of Warmth & Coolness

In a general way start to become aware of the experience of warmth or coolness within your body. You do not need to be specific in where you experience warmth or coolness, just keep them gently in mind, allowing them to anchor your attention. Observe any movements of your attention away from them.

Aware of the Experience of Touch

Within this experience of just sitting here start to include points of touch. Touch of your hands resting in each other. Aware of the touch of your body as it rests on the chair or floor and touch of your feet. Simply keeping these points of touch gently in mind; observing any movements of attention away from them.

Aware of Your Whole Body Sitting

As your mind settles, open your awareness to take in the experience of your whole body just sitting here: warmth, coolness and touch. Also start to become aware of the general experience of heaviness that arises as your body starts to relax. Giving up all effort it becomes heavier, so heavy. Allow the chair or the floor to take the full weight of your body, allow your whole body to relax into this support. Keep your whole body in mind and observe every time your attention moves away from it.

MEDITATION: Creating Your Foundation (10 min)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Gently hold one hand in the other on your lap.
- *Become aware of sounds, the constant flow of change.
- *Becoming aware of warmth & coolness within your body.
- *Aware of the touch of your hands, body & feet.
- *Keeping your whole body gently in mind.
- *Give up all effort, allow the chair or floor to support you.
- *Experience heaviness fill your body as it relaxes.
- *Observe your attention move to thoughts or sounds.

STEP 2: Mindfulness of In & Out Breathing

Bring Mindfulness to the Front

Keeping the experience of your whole body in mind, gently bring your awareness to the front of your chest and belly. Relax any tension you feel in your chest and belly allowing your breathing to flow freely. Wherever the experience of breathing appears to you is ok. Do not try to place it anywhere but rather just be aware of it as it moves within the centre of your body. Keep in mind the experience that tells you if the breath is coming in or going out.

Label In & Out Breathing

To help train your attention during this stage, you can use a silent mental word called a 'label', such as "in" when the breath comes in and "out" when it goes out. When using a label, make sure that you are focussing on the actual experience that the label is pointing towards, such as the experience of the breath moving within your body, and not the label itself which is just a pointer.

When Your Attention Wanders

The first thing to accept as a meditator is that your attention will wander towards thoughts, sounds or sensations within your body. This is a natural function of your mind. During MIDL mindfulness meditation this is not something to be fought against but rather something to be acknowledged and clarified.

Whenever your attention shifts from your object of meditation, such as breathing, your task is to acknowledge it by using another simple label such as "thinking", "hearing", "itching" etc. Once acknowledged, then relax with a gentle Softening out-breath and return to the experience of your breath flowing within your body.

If you continuously become lost within thinking, then make the movements of your attention towards thinking your meditation object. You do this by being aware of your breathing and placing effort towards noticing any movement of your attention away from the breath to cultivate mindfulness and develop understanding.

If a particular thought or memory keeps returning again and again, you can clarify what is feeding it by using a more accurate label such as "planning", "remembering", "regretting" etc. Observe the emotional charge, soften with a gentle out-breath and return to the experience of breathing as it flows within your body.

STEP 3: Mindfulness of Breath Length

Length of Each Breath

Once you become intimate with the experience of your breathing, you can then focus on developing the accuracy of your attention. Do this by increasing the amount of ‘noticings’ you apply along the length of each breath to experience its beginning, middle & end.

To increase your ‘noticings’ first bring your awareness to the beginning of each in-breath and each out-breath. You may now notice that each breath has a beginning, middle and end. You will start to become aware of the full length of each breath.

**Maintain continuous awareness along the length of the in-breath.*

**Maintain continuous awareness along the length of the out-breath.*

As concentration develops you may notice two things:

- a. That you are able to stay with the breath without effort and can clearly notice any distractions.
- b. That the experience of your Six Senses (p40) starts to fade. Sounds become distant. Your body becomes very comfortable and any restless thoughts start to settle down. If you continue on this path one-pointed concentration will develop and the experience of your Six Senses will become very subtle, tranquil and peaceful.

MEDITATION: Mindfulness of Breathing (20 min)

*Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.

*Create the foundation of ‘grounding’ within your body.

*Bring awareness to the front of your chest and belly.

*Experience the movement of each in & out breath.

*Use silent labels “in” and “out” to train attention.

*Become aware of the full length of each breath.

*Acknowledge distractions: “thinking”, “hearing” etc.

STEP 4: Mindfulness of Body Breathing

The Six Senses

Eye: sights / visions. Ear: sounds. Nose: smells. Tongue: tastes. Body: bodily sensations / emotions. Mind: mental experiences such as thoughts, memories, likes, dislikes, judgements etc.

As one pointed concentration develops, awareness of your Six Senses will start to fade and you will become secluded from the experience of them. While this seclusion is very pleasurable it will not cultivate any understanding of your mind's interaction with your Six Senses therefore no Wisdom will develop. In order to practice pure mindfulness meditation, it is necessary to increase awareness of your Six Senses; not decrease it. This is done by changing the way that you observe the experience of breathing.

Whole Body Breathing

Earlier we experienced breathing as a movement of sensations flowing into our body on the in-breath and out of our body on the out-breath. To increase awareness of our Six Senses it is helpful to change the way that we perceive our breathing.

By gently widening your awareness to your whole body, you will start to experience your body expanding as it fills on the in-breath and deflating back inwards on the out-breath. It is helpful in the beginning to be aware of the area of your upper chest, shoulders and upper back. Your body breathing can be felt most clearly here.

**To increase accuracy, align your awareness with the beginning of the expansion of the in-breath, following the breath all the way to its end. Then align your awareness with the beginning of the deflation of the out-breath, following it also all the way to its end.

STEP 5: Mindfulness of the Six Senses

You now use the expansion of your in-breath to experience your Six Senses (p40) and your relationship towards them. By aligning awareness with the expansion of the in-breath you allow yourself to 'open' to whatever you are experiencing now; regardless of what it is. You 'open' with an attitude of acceptance, using the expansion of your in-breath to increase your awareness of what you are experiencing. Allowing yourself to fully feel that experience.

STEP 6: Softening Into all Experience

Once you have allowed yourself to fully experience your Six Senses, you then soften your relationship towards the experience through aligning awareness with the deflation of the out-breath. As the breath goes out and your body deflates inwards, you soften all mental and physical effort along the length of the out-breath.

During this stage there is no need to control the breathing in any way. The expansion and deflation of your body happens naturally. You just align awareness with the deflation of your body and relax all effort along its length. You 'soften' all resistance, all mental activity and deeply relax inward towards your hearts centre.

MEDITATION: Opening and Softening (*30 min*)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Create your foundation of awareness of your body.
- *Create your foundation of mindfulness of breathing.
- *Widen awareness of your body to experience it breathe.
- *Follow the complete expansion; 'open' to all experience.
- *Follow the complete deflation; 'soften' into all experience.
- *Abandon all effort with deflation and soften into stillness.

STEP 7: Mindfulness of Impermanence

Impermanence within Breathing

As you soften inward you will come to the end of the out-breath. There is a pause here before the breath autonomously draws back in again. Sit within this gap. To develop your perception of impermanence, experience the full length of the breath as it draws in. The breath will then change direction, deflating to the end.

Experience the out-breath all the way until its end and notice the gap arise again. Allow awareness to sit within the gap. As the mind and the breath refine, the gap extends, the stillness of the gap starts to fill you. Your mind will become very still. Out-breath - breath ends – gap – stillness - in-breath begins.

Within the stillness of the gap the ending of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath becomes clearer. End – stillness - beginning. You will start to perceive the ending of things. At this stage all you will see is end – still - begin. End – still - begin. The perception of impermanence starts to imprint within your mind.

At this stage the length of the in-breath and the out-breath become less clear. The ending of the out-breath, the Stillness, and the beginning of the in-breath clarify. You just sit in this gap. Refine this perception and allow Stillness to fill your heart and mind.

An Extra Note

If you are experiencing stress, anxiety or difficult emotions then it's important to allow yourself just to be with them. Bring awareness to the expansion and contraction of your body as it breathes. Deeply experience how you are feeling inside and gently soften your relationship towards it with each out-breath deflation.

Impermanence within Distraction

All experiences come and go; distractions are no exception to this natural law. The perception of impermanence can and should be developed by observing it as a characteristic of any distraction. This is helpful in particular for changing your relationship towards any habitual patterns of behaviour that define your life.

From the very beginning of seated MIDL mindfulness meditation you have been asked to observe whenever your attention shifts from your meditation object towards a thought or sound etc. Observing these shifts of your attention is an integral part of MIDL meditation and should be cultivated. In particular it is helpful to place effort into noticing the moment your attention moves, even if at first this does not seem possible.

This is done by using your meditation object, such as the experience of your body sitting or the flow of your breathing as a reference point. Any time your attention moves away from your reference point, simply acknowledge the movement and where it has moved to. This will start to imprint within your mind. The impermanent and uncontrollable nature of experience will clarify.

Impermanence & Letting Go

Continued observing of impermanence starts to imprint within the mind and will change the way that the survival part of your mind relates to experiences. The survival mind starts to understand that it is painful and futile to cling onto that which is subject to change. A natural letting go occurs. Letting go is not something that you do. It is a natural change of relationship that develops through clarifying the perception of uncontrollability & unreliability inherent within that which is impermanent. It is the aspect of uncontrollability and unreliability that is important to observe.

Within the Theravada tradition letting go is known as (Nibbida) disenchantment. It is a natural turning away that occurs within the mind when it understands the futility of holding onto anything that is subject to change. By mindfully observing yourself falling into old patterns of resistance and defensiveness again and again, you will come to the point where disenchantment naturally occurs.

Within your seated meditation and daily life, you will clearly see the relationship between mentally clinging and suffering. Your relationship towards your cycles of resistance and defensiveness will then change. They will no longer fool you. When these old habits arise you may find yourself saying: "Thank you, but no thank you; I am not interested in suffering over this anymore."

Softening Into Impermanence

While we use impermanence to cultivate disenchantment, impermanence within itself is not a problem. It is just a natural law of nature. Actually, without impermanence there could not be life. Life itself requires constant change to exist. Change is necessary for plants to produce food, for children to grow, for life.

The most important aspect to work with as a meditator is not impermanence but rather your relationship towards its uncontrollable and unreliable nature. It is important to see clearly that any attempt to resist change will lead towards pain. The only thing that you can influence is your relationship towards it.

This is where the MIDL skill of Softening comes in. By observing the background narration of your mind in terms of "I like" and "I don't like", you can use the basic Softening skill as trained earlier to relax your relationship towards this judgement. Bringing all likes and dislikes to an end.

STEP 8: Softening Into Stillness

Whenever like or dislike is present within your mind, agitation & separation is the natural expression. By softening all participation and deeply relaxing all doing, you have the effect of combining that which is separated, of bringing to rest that which is agitated.

Stillness arises through the abandoning of all doing, the relaxing of all effort. It is the natural result of Softening. Stillness arises through not adding anything to the mind and allowing it to come to a natural stop. This is accessed through relaxing all effort in the body and Softening all effort within the mind.

Stillness is different to one pointed concentration as in it does not suppress the Six Senses but instead increases awareness of them. In Stillness all mental commentary stops. All judgement and perception ceases. Yet awareness of the senses continues to remain strong. The mind functions in its pure essence, free from control, free from any understanding. It is still.

Stillness Dissolves Defensiveness

Allowing the mind to sit within Stillness has a healing effect. In Stillness the survival part of the mind is able to experience that which it has been avoiding, free from judgement, free from fear. The natural process of healing available within the mind that can only be accessed through not-doing is able to occur.

Using Softening to enter Stillness directly challenges the defensive habits of the mind. The closer to Stillness the mind becomes the more exposed it feels. Your task as a meditator is to observe and gently soften into this process, gradually removing layers of protection by Softening any activity or resistance you feel.

MIDL Viewing Platform

Completing these stages you have now created what we will call your MIDL Viewing Platform. How you use this platform will depend on what you are experiencing during meditation.

The Three Pillars of MIDL

The Viewing Platform is used to refine the Three Pillars of MIDL.

1. *Softening Into Training (p7).*
2. *Allowing Stillness Training (p19).*
3. *Flexible Attention Training (p35).*

How to Use Your MIDL Viewing Platform

Steps 1 to 6 create the foundation from which you will be able to observe your minds interaction with your Six Senses. You can practice individual Steps to develop and refine different skills or you can put Steps 1 to 6 together to create your Viewing Platform.

STEP 1: Grounding Your Awareness

STEP 2: Mindfulness of in & out-breathing.

STEP 3: Mindfulness of the length of the whole breath.

STEP 4: Mindfulness of your whole body breathing.

STEP 5: Mindfulness of your experience at your six senses.

STEP 6: Softening your relationship towards all experience.

STEP 7: Mindfulness of impermanence.

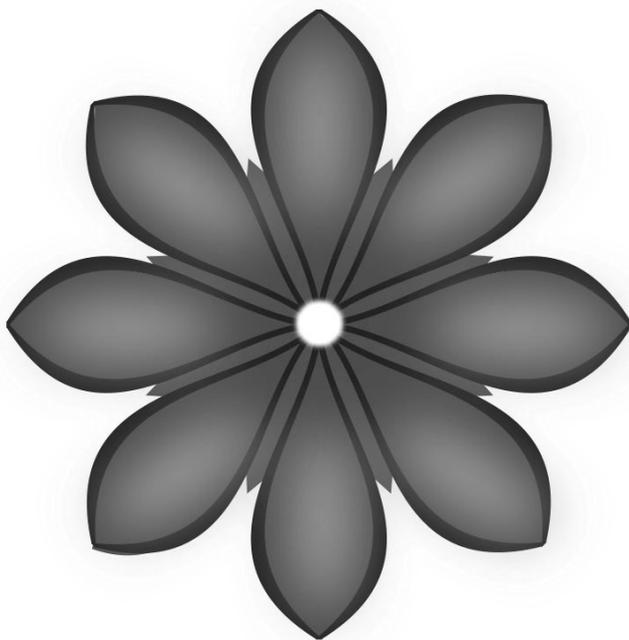
If your mind is settled and not drawn out to the six senses then you can observe impermanence within the experience of breathing.

STEP 8: Softening into Stillness

To desensitise defensiveness and to create a basis for still presence within your daily life then you should practice entering Stillness.

Chapter 5

Bringing Mindfulness Into Your Daily Life



MIDL: Mindfulness in Daily Life

1. The Noble Eightfold Path in MIDL [page 48.](#)
2. Understanding roles for establishing mindfulness [page 50.](#)

The Noble Eightfold Path in MIDL

Your Tenth Meditation Training is to bring your seated meditation skills into your daily life. In the first talk given by the Buddha called the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta he introduced the Noble Eightfold Path. A path of meditation practice that contains eight factors that need to be brought to maturity by the meditator. This path shows that how we live our life and our seated meditation practice are not separate. Both are needed in order to develop Wisdom and to experience harmony within life.

1. Right View

This first path factor is both the entry point and maturity of the practice. We begin meditation with the immature view that: “If I meditate my life will improve in some way”; the desire to escape from suffering within our life. As our meditation practice deepens our view matures into Right View. We begin to understand that everything that we think, say and do has consequences; that our choices within our life either separate or combine. We take full responsibility for our life. We see that freedom from suffering is not found within avoidance but by understanding suffering itself.

2. Right Intention

This second path factor is what we actively do after developing understanding that thoughts, speech and actions that separate always lead to suffering; those that combine always lead to contentment. During seated meditation and daily life we observe ourselves habitually separate and combine. We then actively soften to abandon that which separates within our life and guard against its arising. We soften to cultivate that which combines within our life and establish it as our natural way of being.

3 – 5. Right Speech, Action and Livelihood

These next three path factors are where Wisdom is cultivated. We use the clarity developed during seated meditation to observe the way that we are living our life. We then develop understanding in terms of where we are separating or combining. We apply Right Intention to everything that we think, say and do by abandoning, guarding, cultivating and establishing.

6 – 8. Right Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration

These three mental factors (p26) when developed in balance during seated meditation increase mental clarity by bringing about unification of awareness. This mental clarity then allows us to observe our relationship towards everything that we think, say and do in terms of whether we are separating or combining.

This develops understanding and cultivates the conditions for Wisdom to arise. As Wisdom arises it affects Right View and our view of reality starts to change. This then refines Right Intention. In how we abandon, guard, cultivate and establish within our life. As we become more sensitive to what we think, say and do, our morality refines thereby supporting concentration and increasing mental clarity. Further Wisdom is cultivated, Right View refines and the Eight Path Factors unify towards maturity.

Creating a Posture of Mind

The first thing to understand when meditating in daily life is that mindfulness meditation creates a mental posture, not a physical one. What this means is that when you change your posture from sitting in meditation to standing then walking away, really nothing needs to change mentally. The quality of your attention can still be the same. The skill is to maintain your 'mental posture' of attention even though you are changing your physical postures.

Role of the Meditation Object in MIDL

Seated meditation has a role to play if you wish to bring mindfulness into your daily life. You do this by making any movement of your attention away from your meditation object more important than the meditation object itself. This cultivates a flexible, momentary concentration instead of an inflexible, fixed concentration, allowing the momentum of the practice to continue.

Observing any habitual movements of your attention is a skill that can be cultivated and refined through repetition during seated meditation. This is first trained by 'loosening' your grip on your meditation object and allowing your attention to wander.

At first this may feel like you are losing control and that the experience of your mind is becoming messy. What you are actually observing though is the natural functioning of your mind, free from control, as it drifts between your Six Senses.

With practice you will start to notice that even though the functions of your mind appear messy, your mindful awareness of the flow remains undisturbed. As this skill develops your ability to observe the functions of your mind will become sharper, allowing mindful observation of movements of attention to come naturally to you in your daily life.

MEDITATION: Movements of Attention (*10 min*)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Gently hold one hand in the other on your lap.
- *Mentally feel one hand touching the other.
- *Relax your mental grip and allow your mind to wander.
- *Place effort into noticing where your attention drifts to.

Role of Body Sensations in MIDL

Awareness of the sensate quality of your body during seated meditation also has an important role to play for transferring mindfulness into daily life.

Your body is gifted with a very special quality; the experience of it is always present. You may have noticed during seated meditation that your mind habitually travels between thoughts of past and future, while the experience of your body is always here, 'now'. This can be used to your advantage for mindfulness in daily life.

Through placing effort into continuous awareness of the sensate quality of your body during seated meditation, you will develop the mental habit of awareness immersing within these sensations. Warmth, coolness, heaviness, tension and pressure can all be used in this training by keeping them in your peripheral awareness.

Once developed, you will find that you naturally become aware of the sensations within your body throughout the day. At first this awareness will come and go. Whenever you notice that you have forgotten the experience of your body just gently bring awareness back. This becomes a reference point to 'now' from which you can observe any movements of your attention towards thoughts, judgements or emotional responses during your daily life.

MEDITATION: Awareness of Sensations (*10 min*)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Experience your whole body just sitting here.
- *Start with warmth & coolness, heaviness then pressure.
- *Continuously keep your whole body in mind.
- *Notice your attention move towards thoughts & sounds.

Role of Points of Touch in MIDL

Awareness of the experience of your body ‘touching’ also has a role to play in transferring mindfulness into your daily life. Touch is one of the most immediate and clear senses that you can use to your advantage in daily life since it will hold awareness present.

To cultivate habitual grounding of awareness within touch, first intentionally cultivate it in seated meditation. You are always touching something during seated meditation; the chair, floor, hands touching one another. First cultivate your sensitivity to touch by rotating your awareness of points of touch during seated meditation, taking the time to mentally feel each point.

Once developed, periods of sensitivity to touch will start to appear naturally throughout your day. Use them to become present in whatever it is that you are doing. Of course you will eventually forget. This is part of mindfulness training. Just notice you have forgotten and come back to a chosen point of touch.

You can encourage sensitivity to touch in daily life by picking one point that you will pay attention to. Your feet touching as you walk, hand touching the knob on a door or feeling the steering wheel within your hands as you drive. There are so many. Become creative with this but do not try to keep too many in mind at once.

MEDITATION: Awareness of Touch (*10 min*)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes closed.
- *Place one palm face down on each leg.
- *Mentally feel the touch of your left hand, then right.
- *Feel the touch of your buttocks, left foot then right.
- *Feel the touch of your armpits, lips & eyelids - repeat.

Role of Transitions in MIDL

Transition points within your life have an important role to play in reminding you of a lapse of mindfulness. You should aim to set up a series of transition points that you cross regularly within your daily life as establishment points.

Doorways

An ancient transition point for re-establishing mindfulness is every time you pass through a doorway. Doorways are meant to be points of change. When you enter a village, you pass two pillars with a beam on top. This signifies that behavioural expectations when you cross this threshold have changed.

Whenever you enter or leave your home, car, school, workplace there is a change in social expectations within each. They are transition points. When you move from one room into another such as into the bathroom or bedroom you are also crossing transition points. These are a reminder to re-establish mindfulness.

Water

Contacting water is a transition point; the cup, the shower. Use these not for periods of habitual thinking but for mindful presence.

Posture & Movement

From when you wake in the morning to when you go to bed, you go through a series of transitions within your posture: lying down, sitting, standing, walking etc. Each of these is a transition point in which to re-establish mindfulness. Become sensitive to posture changes and movement by first becoming aware of the process of sitting down to meditate and standing to leave when you finish. Intentionally move in tai chi or yoga by applying awareness to the experience of the movement within transitions between postures.

Role of the Five Senses in MIDL

The experience of your Five Senses: sight, sound, smell, taste & touch are a much-neglected grounding point to 'now'. Within our life we become so immersed within thinking and the narrative it contains that we lose touch with the purity of our senses.

All sense experience in their purity is completely free from judgement and narrative. It is only when the defensive mind interprets the senses through fear-based perception that life becomes as if wrapped in plastic film. We lose direct connectedness with the purity and beauty of each experience.

Learn to increase awareness of sense experience while in seated meditation: sounds, smells, sensations. When finishing your seated meditation, realign awareness with your body and then sounds to create a grounding point. Next be fully present for the experience of sight as your eyelids open to re-engage with the world.

Carry this connectedness with your senses into your life. Smell, taste and feel your morning coffee. Savour the taste and texture of your breakfast. Experience the beauty of water on your body as you shower, the breeze on your skin as you step out the door, and the many sights as you travel down your street. Live within your senses. Become more present to conversations, soften & relax any background commenting of your mind so that you purely listen.

MEDITATION: Purity of Body, Sound & Sights (*10 min*)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor, eyes open.
- *Experience the purity of your whole body just sitting here.
- *Experience the purity of sound, sights coming in to you.

Role of Breathing Sensitivity in MIDL

Sensitivity to the experience of breathing in your belly or chest is like a barometer for the weather patterns of your mind. When the stress response is turned on there is a corresponding tightening or locking of the movement of the diaphragm in the belly and a shift to shallow stress breathing in the upper chest.

During seated meditation and daily life, use this reflection of your mind's resistance within the movement of your diaphragm as a red flag. The process of tightening of your breathing warns you that your stress response has switched on making you more defensive. This means you need to be careful about what you think, say or do.

During the day ask one simple question:

“Where am I breathing now, in my upper chest or in my belly?”

If your diaphragm is moving freely in your belly then you are relaxed. But if your breathing is short and shallow in your upper chest, then the experience of anxiety is not far behind. You can re-engage your diaphragm to turn off the stress response by pressing lightly with your fingertips just below your belly button and taking 3 - 5 breaths by slowly extending and lowering your lower abdominal muscles. (p9. *Retraining Stress Breathing is a prerequisite.*)

MEDITATION: Re-engaging Diaphragm Breathing (2 min)

- *Sit comfortably on a chair or the floor.
- *Place your fingertips below your belly button pressing in.
- *Extend your lower abdomen outwards to lift your fingers.
- *Allow the breath out as slowly as you can to lower them.
- *Repeat 3 to 5 times then allow 10 seconds for rebalancing.
- *Diaphragm will re-engage in belly and calmness will arise.

Role of Habitual Defensiveness in MIDL

Many of us have developed defensive behaviours to protect ourselves from mental and emotional pain. You may also have some defensive behaviour and will experience them whenever things do not go the way that you want them to. Observing any defensiveness throughout the day is an important part of MIDL.

In daily life make it your aim to observe any defensiveness or resistance that arises within you; without judgement. Just as a way of getting to know yourself really well. You may continuously fall into old patterns, reacting by pushing away again and again. This is perfectly ok. It is how it is meant to be. Your only task is to observe and soften / relax your relationship towards this cycle.

Allow yourself to feel any pain within the cycle and deeply soften your relationship towards it. Hold the pain within your heart like you would a suffering child; gently with empathy and compassion. In this way your relationship towards your habitual patterns will start to change. You will start to become disenchanted with them.

This disenchantment is the way out. It is a natural process of maturing, of growing up; of moving on from that which causes pain. This is not 'running away', but rather a total intimacy with our own pain. It is only through acceptance that change can occur.

At first the cycle will keep coming back, this is also ok. But each time, through Softening acceptance, it becomes weaker and lasts for a shorter time. Gradually a gap appears within the cycle and the period in which it isn't there becomes longer than when it is. The habitual cycle becomes shorter, the periods of freedom become longer; it becomes so weak that it no longer defines you anymore.

Meditating with Stress & Anxiety

With the growing interest in practicing mindfulness meditation within daily life and many techniques available there has arisen confusion on how to go about this. The most common being the best way to meditate when experiencing stress and anxiety.

I am often asked:

“How do I practice mindfulness meditation to lower my experience of stress and anxiety?”

It is my intention to answer this question:

“When practicing mindfulness meditation to lower the experience of stress and anxiety it is necessary to change the way that we approach our meditation. Meditation should not be based on developing concentration, but rather on teaching our mind that right now, is safe. This safety is found within the MIDL skills of softness, stillness and flexible attention.”

MIDL Mindfulness Meditation has a flexible meditation system. Through changing the development order of MIDL skills from ‘flexible attention – softness – stillness’ to ‘softness – stillness – flexible attention’, a significant lowering of stress and anxiety can be experienced.