



MEDITATION IN CORRECTIONS

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NEWSLETTER

WISE WORDS

Whatever an enemy might do to an enemy, or a foe to a foe, the ill-directed mind can do to you even worse.

Udana 4.33



CALM THE MIND AND BECOME MORE ALERT

Question: I really enjoy running, but am concerned it might impact my meditation. Is it okay to keep up my running routine? I usually run about three miles per day.

Answer: For a Vipassana meditator, there is no restriction on running or any other healthy physical exercise. (Of course this means outside of meditation times, and outside of courses.) During the 1-hour meditation, we restrict our physical activity to allow both the mind and body to become quieter, in order to help us feel all the sensations that may be there. Outside of meditation periods, give your full attention to whatever activity you are doing. While running or taking part in any other activity – if it does not demand your full attention – rather than let your mind wander or day-dream, refocus on what you are doing. When and where it is easy to do so, you can also be gently aware of your breath and/or body sensations, with equanimity. This will help keep you mentally alert and balanced, even as you are aware that you are running and watching out for obstacles and so forth.

Question: My understanding is that during Vipassana meditation I should not focus on breath. Sometimes, however, I am aware of my breath as I do part-by-part scanning of my body. I tend to scan a body part along with a breath and the next part with the next breath. This happens involuntarily. Am I doing it wrong? If so,

it wrong? If so, how do I correct it? I also notice that my focus is better when I scan with the awareness of breath.

Answer: It is fine, and good for holding your attention as you have found, to have the breath connected with the movement of the attention through the body. It may also facilitate being able to move through the body with one breath, feeling sensations everywhere. So no need to stop.

Question: How do we know when we feel a particular sensation that may be a signal of a serious condition that may require the attention of a doctor?

Answer: When in doubt, always consult a doctor! But while you're in the process of seeking medical care, you can still work with the sensation as sensation. Observe it, understanding its changing nature. Strive to develop equanimity with it.



‘MEDITATION ACTS LIKE A TEACHER, A COACH...’

Doing Vipassana meditation means to sit still with eyes closed, to cultivate awareness of the physical sensations of which our minds and bodies consist. It also means to try to retain full awareness of experiences as they are – without avoiding or editing any out, and without embellishing or relishing any. This neutral, hovering, nonjudgmental attention, focused on bodily sensations, brings along with it the vast aggregations of thoughts and feelings that we carry inside our minds and bodies. Once this kind of meditative awareness has been established well enough, the true activity of meditation becomes the cultivation of inner peace, of equanimity – evenness of mind, especially under stress. We gain this by not reacting to all the mental states that pass through us.

This is all very beautiful; it has inspired me for a lifetime. It still does. Every day, twice a day, I look down the long winding road of my unfolding life and try to reestablish equanimity in my mind and body. But it is also very hard. Many things in our lives are not at all like meditation, and do not lead us in a similar direction. For example, almost all people have some fears about their body. At some life stages, these fears may be related to body image and social acceptability, while at other stages these fears may be related to high blood pressure, cancer, dementia, and death. One reason why the ancient traditions of meditation favoured awareness that was focused simultaneously on body and mind is because we need to gain a peaceful and friendly relationship with our body, even though it is ultimately the process by which we die.

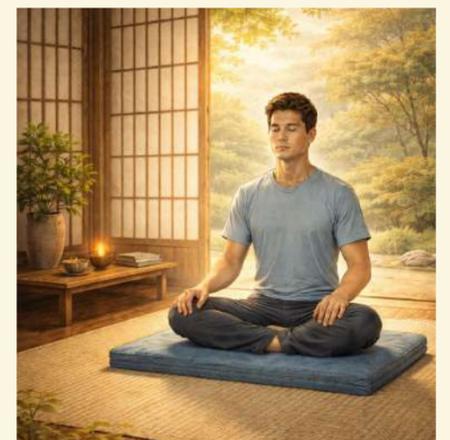
For this reason, any meditation that focuses your mind upon mind-and-body sensations is also inevitably

This is an excerpt from the book *“The Power of Small Changes – Vipassana Meditation Through the Lens of Biology, Psychology, and Culture,”* by American Vipassana teacher Dr. Paul R. Fleischman. Pariyatti Publishing released the book in September 2024.

a meditation upon impermanence, upon the constantly changing nature of everything by which we define ourselves. Typically, in most moments of mundane living, we experience ourselves to be an entity, a thing, an essence, a hard reality. But in fact, we are all transient aggregates of atoms, molecules, cells, and tissues that undergo numerous micro-transformations in every second, that never rest, and are in constant change. Meditation brings its practitioner into confrontation with the unstable nature of everything. In order to establish equanimity as we meditate upon the sensations of our minds and bodies, we also have to establish some degree of equanimity with the transformational...

One of the reasons that more people start meditation, and fewer people continue with it, is that the insights we gain about ourselves can be optimistic and promote the best in human nature, but they can also be unflattering. In meditation we often have to sit still, aware of our previously repressed selfish, libidinous, and retaliatory urges. Simple, soft meditations, practiced for comfort for moments at a time, can retain our flattering self-deceptions. But classical meditation, like a 10-day Vipassana retreat in the tradition of S.N. Goenka, reveals a full spectrum of self-knowledge, with plenty of room for modesty and growth. Meditation allows us to see ourselves as we are: a mixed bag.

For this reason, meditation is not for everyone. It should be clear that I am not blindly encouraging



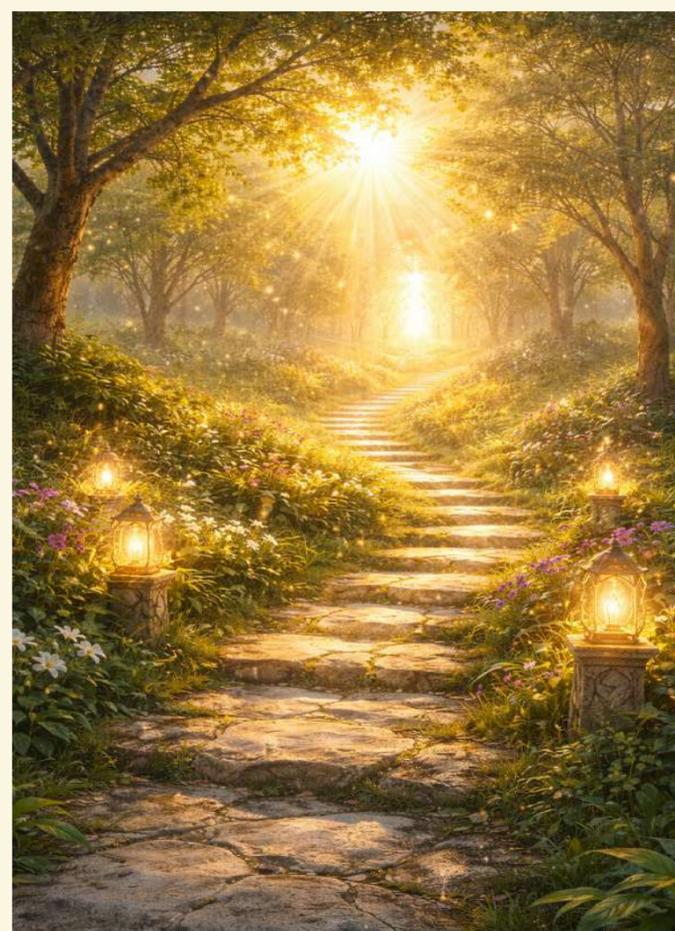
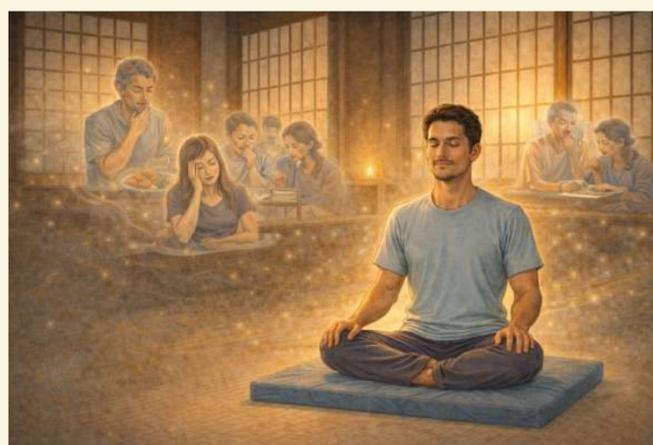
everyone to do any one thing. Sometimes deeply introspective practices like meditation are troubling to some people. If you don't feel drawn to it, there is no reason to practice it. For some, meditation is best left alone. But for a large number of people, maybe a majority, the broad- spectrum awareness, stimulated by meditation, provides an inspirational opportunity to grow and change. Meditation acts like a teacher, a coach, a college degree that helps you get rid of past ignorance and add new wisdom.

Meditation is a good friend to have when you are feeling well and life is going well, because it serves as an inspiration towards positive ways of living in the world, towards activities and interactions that make you peaceful and make those around you peaceful. This simple, logical paradigm, focusing upon calm, peace, and well-being, points a good life in a steady direction. Meditation is also a good friend to have when life is not going well, and problems seem to surround and overwhelm you. This is because meditation teaches equanimity in the presence of change, loss, time, and erasure.

But meditation is not a substitute for active problem-solving in one's personal life, nor for active skill, nor is meditation intended to encourage people to turn a blind eye to the problems of society. Meditation is not in any way a cure for social justice, income inequality, climate change, nuclear weapons, or other vast problems. We cannot expect one single activity in our life to solve every problem. We can only ask that it help makes us more equanimous, ie. even-minded, as we engage in other necessary, active solutions. Similarly, meditation is not

a treatment for any disease. Meditation is not a substitute for care and treatment of clinically significant anxiety, depression, or any other illness, mental or physical.

As you become increasingly attuned to the sensations of your own mind and body, you will also become sensitized to how your surroundings impact you. Meditation will make you more determined and more capable of being true to yourself in spite of outside pressures. Meditation may help turn you into a more determined and authentic person, and keep you struggling in the direction you want to go, even when there are social forces pushing you in the opposite direction. One of the nice things about meditation, as compared to other helpful activities, such as exercising, hiking, swimming, or bike riding, is that meditation is always available to you. You can use it when you feel a need for it. It's like a private cell phone that you always make sure is in your pocket, from which you receive messages from yourself. Vipassana meditation is an ancient path, a deeply rooted method of experiencing directly for yourself who you are, and what makes your heart feel good. It is as relevant today as it has ever been.



HOW TO CREATE HAPPINESS DEEP INSIDE

It considers the question of sila, i.e. morality. Goenka asks, why should each of us be moral? His answer: because it makes us happy. At the intellectual level one may understand, "I should not do this, it is unwholesome. I should do that, it is wholesome." And yet in daily life we keep performing unwholesome actions. Going deep inside you start to understand, "I cannot kill anybody unless I generate negativity in my mind – anger, hatred, ill will, animosity, some negativity or the other." And you also realize, "As soon as I generate negativity in my mind, nature starts punishing me. I become miserable then and there." The seed of the unwholesome action you have planted makes you suffer here and now, and it will grow and give very bitter fruit.



If you take a rope and twist it repeatedly the rope will become tighter and tighter. Every time you break sila you twist that rope further, and you become tense deep inside. The tendency to react in the same way becomes a habit, and you twist it again and again. Thus your misery continues to grow. Yet quite possibly, at the surface level of the mind, you don't know you are creating tension inside. How can you be unaware of this? If you look at a burning ember covered by a thick layer of ash it appears as if the charcoal is not burning, as if there is no fire. In the same way, ninety-nine percent of your mind is burning while the one percent at the surface might be distracted by enjoying this or that sensual pleasure. Because you have not seen inside, you do not know you are burning.

This is an excerpt of a talk by Vipassana teacher S.N. Goenka at Dhamma House, California, on Aug. 26, 1989. It appears in the book "For the Benefit of Many," published in 2016 by the Vipassana Research Institute.

Every time you break sila, morality, you justify it, and at the surface level feel perfectly all right. You say to yourself, "I killed that fellow because he was bad." Or you may say, "Why should he have that? What was wrong with me taking it? I'm quite happy now." Or you say, "I had sexual relations but I didn't harm anybody; it was not a rape, we both consented. What is wrong with that?" A wise man will smile and say, "Mad fellows. They are happy with the layer of ash covering the truth. They don't know that they are burning deep inside and keep giving fuel to this burning." Every time you break any sila you give more and more fuel to this fire – and become more and more miserable.

This cannot be understood by arguments or discussions. Only when you go deeper into meditation can you realize that every vocal or physical action that breaks the law of nature simultaneously causes harm to yourself. Start performing wholesome actions, and the fire burning inside dies down and you start feeling peaceful. All actions, physical or vocal, made with a morally pure mind, cause happiness. Not the happiness of the ash covering a burning ember, but happiness at the deepest base of the mind.

