

Notes from James' Introduction to Insight Meditation Six-Week Course

Class I

Welcome

Talk; Q & a

Break

Sitting

Talk: What is Mindfulness?

Joseph's book *Experience of Insight* – see Bare Attention.

1. Seeing things as they are.
2. Being in the present – Thich Nhat Hanh's washing dishes piece. (Peace Is Every Step)
3. When you pay attention to present experience you see everything changes – both pleasant and horrible; as we see the changing nature of things, there's more a sense of trust and ease.
4. Not to judge the judging. We're not going to stop the judging mind, but we can be really kind with it.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

First is insight – our minds are out of control. We don't have to take our thoughts so seriously. We can see all these stories come and go.
We develop compassion for ourselves; extends to others
We develop wisdom life reveals itself when we're paying attention
We can find a place of peace and home that we can return to

This is our laboratory – to see what it means to be human. We can gain some understanding about what it means to be human.

Instructions - Breath as home base. (Perhaps some counting included) After, sitting take questions.

If you find you've wandered, gently come back. *Key moment is when you've noticed you've been wondering. How you deal with wondering is your relationship to meditation.* At the moment of *seeing* that you're lost in thought just take delight in being present and just gently return your attention back to the breath. In that return, you're cultivating kindness, patience and loving-kindness. *The way you bring yourself back will determine your relationship to meditation.*

Suggested practice:

Notice how it feels to be present for experience. Be aware of how much/little of the time you're present.

Class II

Check in 20 minutes; questions from this week's practice.

Meditation instructions: Breath plus body sensations and sounds. 20 minutes of silence.

Talk - The Four Noble Truths (mainly focusing on the first three).

Suggested practice: notice Wanting Mind this week. How does it feel?

Class III

Instructions – breath, body + thoughts and emotions

Talk: Eightfold Path

Suggested practice: Notice Right Speech; especially gossiping; (experiment not talking about people who aren't with you.)

Class IV

Meditation: Review instructions

Talk - The Five Hindrances

Take people through a guided meditation – mindfulness of an emotion. RAIN;
Noticing the
mental atmosphere to a physical sensation.

Recognize what's here

Allow it to be here

Investigate without trying to get rid of, but explore the landscape. The key is when you just look, you're not adding aversion

Not take it personally. (non-identification) You're just exploring the human feeling of anger, or sadness

Check in with people here. Might get stirred.

Suggested practice: Experiment with RAIN when you're feeling strong emotions.

Class V

Check in for 20 minutes

Lead 30-35 minute sitting with instructions

Break

Talk - Brahma-Viharas or Qualities of Heart, learning to open (forgiveness, patience, humor, metta)

Suggested practice: Practice forgiveness and kindness towards yourself/others

Class VI

Check in – 20 minutes

Lead 40-minute meditation with Q & A

Break for several minutes.

Talk – Practice in Daily Life:

Practical tips: sitting regularly, daily activity, sangha, sila, relationships

Larger implications – engagement, service, Bodhicitta; holding a positive vision for self and world.

Suggested practice – next two weeks sit regularly to establish habit (with like-minded friends if possible).

Give booklist

Resource books for your presentation:

Experience of Insight Joseph Goldstein

Beginner's Guide to Insight Meditation Arinna Weisman

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Class I

First week is different than others. Give talk first, then take questions. Take a little stretch of 5-8 minutes – people can go to the bathroom, stretch out in the hall. Then lead a sitting 15-20 minutes, give instructions. If you find you've wondered, gently come back. Key moment is when you've noticed you've been wondering. *How you deal with wondering is your relationship to meditation.*

First week don't even mention the Buddha. After leading the 15-20 minute sitting take questions. Then encouragement and homework. Close with few minute sit.

See Joseph's book *Experience of Insight* – see bare attention.

Talk: What is Mindfulness?

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2. Being in the present –Thich Nhat Hanh's washing dishes piece. (Peace Is Every Step)
3. When you pay attention to present experience you see everything changes – both pleasant and horrible; as we see the changing nature of things, there's more a sense of trust and ease.
4. Not to judge the judging. We're not going to stop the judging mind, but we can be really kind with it.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

First is insight – our minds are out of control. We don't have to take our thoughts so seriously. We can see all these stories come and go.

We can see compassion for ourselves

We can see wisdom that comes with paying attention

We can find a place of peace and home that we can return to

This is our laboratory – to see what it means to be human. We can gain some understanding about what it means to be human.

Why is it so profound? And why would I want other people to know about it?

Tell my own stories.

We begin by being with the breath. Just learning home base – we will be opening up the field to other experiences, but good to know where home is. If you find you've wondered, gently come back. The key moment is when you've noticed you've been wondering. How you deal with wondering is your relationship to meditation.

You might have the experience of being lost in thought, and judging yourself – oh darn I'm lost in thought, or you might notice – oh, I'm lost in thought, let me just go with this, this is interesting or this is important, I'll just keep going. At the moment of *seeing* that you're lost in thought just take delight in being present and just gently return your attention back to the breath. In that return, you're cultivating kindness, patience and loving-kindness. *The way you bring yourself back will determine your relationship to meditation.* This relationship is something we cultivate over time.

(see Arinna's book)

Take Questions

Take 5-8 minute break, and when we come back we'll do a 15-minute meditation, with time for questions again after the sitting.

Guided 15 minute sitting.

Questions after sit.

Encouragement and homework:

Encourage people to sit and not to take my word for it. Best to do it in the morning before the day gets going. Easy to lose it in the busyness of the day.

I'll be asking you next week if you sat, and you'll feel good to raise your hand. This is your window of time to get this habit going. If you just come to hear the talks, the practice won't take hold.

I'll be asking who sat 1 time, 3 times, 5-6 times during the week. You'll feel good to raise your hand. (Don't say who didn't sit? It gives an incentive to sit if you ask who did sit.)

Assignment for the week is to notice when you're really here, and notice when you're not here.

Sit to close.

Class II

Start with closing my eyes, to help me be here – ½ minute of quiet, then ... explain this just helps me be here.

Start the class by asking who sat –1 time, 3 times, 5-6 times? Take time for questions and discussion. Spend sometimes 20-30 minutes on this – encourage questions. *If you might be shy, ask anyway, because it would be helpful for someone else.*

Lead meditation with instructions, 20 minutes of silence. (From 2nd class on build to 30 minutes by 3rd or 4th week.)

After sitting, take questions. 20-30 minutes.

Stretch for 5-8minutes. We'll come back for a talk then questions again.

After Break:

(See Joseph's opening paragraph, page 7, Experience of Insight "... the first step is difficult...so be gentle and persevering through any beginning difficulties.")

Talk

The Four Noble Truths

There is suffering in life

There is a cause for this suffering or unsatisfactoriness in life

There is an end of suffering

There is a path to the end of suffering

A prescription for this kind of freedom, the Buddha gave the eightfold path

Tonight I will talk about the first Three Noble Truths, and start with a little about the Buddha's life and his quest.

.....Buddha's story Keep brief ... more as we go ...

The First Noble Truth

Life is suffering is the usual translation. We might also say, there is suffering in life. There's also love, and music, etc. But the more you understand and aren't afraid of suffering, the more the possibility of being free from suffering, and the more the possibility to have happiness.

The word dukka is used when we talk about unsatisfactoriness or suffering.

Because we live with the reality that everything is changing, there is no lasting happiness. Old age, sickness, and death; natural disasters, war, famine, global threat --- there is suffering or unsatisfactoriness in the mind.

Not getting what you want can lead to suffering. It is painful. And even when you get what you want, is that all there is?

The Second Noble Truth

There is a *cause* of this unsatisfactoriness, there is a *cause* for this suffering.

Most of our suffering comes from the mind – wanting things to be different from what they are, or wanting them to stay the same.

The cause of suffering is attachment, desire, or what we can call -- the wanting mind.

Wanting things to be different or stay the same.

Here's an example of how the wanting mind works. (see [Be Here Now](#))

You're home very content with a good book. The thought comes to the mind – ice cream. You go to the fridge. No ice cream, it's not there. You go get your coat – let's go to the store to get some ice cream – you've got a mission – you get to the store and you order chocolate almond chip. You got it, you have it in your hand and you're not satisfied until you take your first lick. You take your first lick, and your first lick tastes so good. You take the 2nd lick and it tastes okay. The next lick is okay, but not as thrilling. And later the licks are so, so.

We get to believe that happiness is gratifying every desire that comes to mind.

We finish the ice cream. Now we want water. Now we feel bloated and we have to walk it off.

Look at our days – one after another – *what's the desire going to be today?*

Go back to the beginning of the scenario – you're content at home reading a book. The thought of ice cream comes. The thought comes to go get some ice cream – suddenly the phone rings, so instead of getting your coat, you get the phone, have brief conversation, let go of the ice cream, and you're back to the book, at home, and content.

We get to look at how the wanting mind works.

The cause of suffering is attachment.

How does this look in my own life? *Get in touch with my own stories* – *how does wanting work in my life?*

There are four different kinds of attachments.

1. Attachment to sense pleasure
Think of the best meal you've had. Where is it now? It's gone.
2. Attachment to ideas and opinions
Tell a story.
3. Attachment to spiritual materialism, different spiritual forms
I'm a Christian, I'm a Jew, I'm a Buddhist practitioner
Look at how much suffering is caused by people attached to their spiritual forms.

“God defined is God confined.”

4. Attachment to the concept of self and who we think we are.
When you see your thoughts, your moods come and go. The body recycles every few months... Who are you? What are you?

Rather than think of ourselves as a finite thing, complete, unchanging – we each are the process of life expressing itself in its ever-changing form.

Buckminster Fuller said: Instead of thinking of yourself as a noun, think of yourself as a verb, a field of activity and experience.

Notice the difference – when you see you're a flow of experience, there's no separation with the rest of life.

Life is happening through you – Not life is happening to you.

The Third Noble Truth

There is an end of suffering. *There is letting go of attachment. Liberation, freedom, freedom from suffering is letting go of attachment. Liberation is non-clinging.*

So incredibly hard, because we are deeply conditioned to hold on.

The monkey trap story: Monkeys get into the fields. People want to catch the monkeys. So, a trap is set with a coconut and some sweets. The coconut is staked in the ground with sweets in the trap. Monkey comes along and grabs the sweets in the trap. The hole in the trap is big enough to slip the monkey's hand in. But the hole is too small to pull it's hand out with a fist full of sweets. The monkey hears people coming and panics. All it has to do then is let go of the sweets, and pull it's hand out and the monkey can go. It's a very rare monkey that pulls it's hand out. Most monkeys want to hold on to the sweets – but then remain stuck in the trap.

And that's exactly our predicament too. We want to hold on to the sweets. If I get this –no matter whether it fits or not, then I'll be happy. If we can let go, seeing what fits, what works, that's where the peace is, that's where the freedom is.

What was most profound in what the Buddha discovered is awakening – freedom, liberation (or enlightenment).

You can't count on that by the 4th week of the course, but there is awakening in every moment that we are mindful, and it creates the conditions for the profound awakening that uproots those tendencies to hold on to that which causes us pain. Being mindful in every moment creates the conditions that help transform these tendencies.

Here's two simple exercises:

1. Put your arm in front of you right now. Move it back and forth in space. Close your eyes. Right now is there any fear or confusion? Open your eyes. You're just completely here, because there's a fullness of mind with what's happening.

We can do this with sound, or noticing an emotion. We can have that same capacity to be with what's happening whether pleasant or unpleasant. And there is freedom in this.

2. Let's do another exercise with mindfulness of thought. Close your eyes and bring some situation or person to mind that touches off some feelings and let yourself get into it – make a picture or image in your mind. And now become aware that we're all in here in this room making pictures in our minds – with other people. In the moment that you realize that – you can choose to act on that picture or not – and realizing you can choose is a moment of freedom, because you're not lost in your story.

This is easier said than done. So, the Buddha gave this prescription of the Middle Way or the Eightfold Path – the development of wisdom and understanding in speech, actions and thought, a path for training the heart and the mind so that we can more naturally wake up to the truth of life and see clearly. And it all comes down to mindfulness.

There's a story about a monk and the Buddha. This one monk was having trouble remembering all the rules (maybe you can relate) and the Buddha said, can you remember one thing? The monk said, "yes." And the Buddha said, "just be mindful."

Time for questions. Keep within 2 hours for class.

Sit to close.

Class III

Start class with a minute or so of silence, just settling in.

Begin by asking questions about practice during the week – how’s it going? Take 20 minutes, encourage questions.

Lead 30-minute meditation with instructions.

After sitting take questions.

Break for 5 or so minutes.

Talk

Review the Four Noble Truths

There is suffering in life

There is a cause for this suffering in life

There is an end of suffering

There is a path to the end of suffering

The Buddha gave a prescription for the end of suffering, for this kind of freedom – the Buddha gave the Eightfold Path – the path to the end of suffering.

Tonight I will talk about the Eightfold Path.

Follow this path and you’ll find life will open up to you.

Get clear on the essence of what I want people to leave with, my mission for teaching the Eightfold Path, and say so ...

This is a really effective prescription for happiness, for freedom. It’s not – *you’ll be a good boy or a good girl if you follow this path* – see if it works for you. *This is something for you to investigate for yourself.* It’s an invitation.

The Dharma is an open invitation to come see for yourself. (quote Joseph from Experience of Insight: “We have all begun a journey. A journey into our minds. A journey of discovery and exploration of who and what we are.”) (See **Awakening the Buddha Within**, by Surya Das)

“The one who has conquered himself is a far greater hero than he who has defeated a thousand times a thousand men.” *From the Dhammapada, sayings of the Buddha*

Address the word “right” right away.

“Right” means skillful. Another way to say it is wise understanding. Not to let the words trip you up.

And then more than seeing this list, see what happens when you put it into practice.

The Eightfold Path is divided into 3 areas.

Developing Wisdom – right understanding, or right thought, or right intention
Can substitute wise here – wise understanding, wise thought, wise intention

Development of Relationships – right speech, right action, right livelihood

Training of Heart and Mind – right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration
(Again, substituting wise here – wise effort, etc.)

1. Development of Wisdom

Wise Understanding is in some ways the beginning and the end. Initially it takes some understanding to look for another place that happiness can be found. As understanding deepens, the full flowering of understanding the way things happen. There is a perspective that can bring deep peace ... a perspective that can see through confusion.
*(Say this in a way that's accessible. **My faith is a transmission itself.**)*

Happiness is not found where most of us have been told it is – in acquiring either material goods or experiences. Looking for happiness in these places is not quite going to do it.

There's pain in life ... how do we come to terms with that? With some understanding.

Why did you come here? What was it that motivated you? That's your initial understanding, "as you sow, so shall you reap." You practice piano, you get better at it.

If you practice understanding anger, you'll get better at it. The more we practice understanding the more we get better at it.

There are consequences ... there's a lawful unfolding – there's karma.

"Why is life unfair?" The Buddha warned about thinking about complexities too much. He advised *not* thinking about complexities.

He said there are 4 things if you think too much about, you'll go crazy.

There are the 4 imponderables: karma, how it all started, range of concentrated mind, range of Buddha mind.

There is a lawful unfolding – there is karma.

When you're around someone who's generous, how does that make you feel?
When you're around someone who's angry, or anxious, how does that make you feel?
These experiences have energy that come back to us.

Dialogue – look at how your actions have consequences. Look at how energy comes back to you.

Seeing that, peace is possible.

Wise Intention, Wise Thought

There are certain thoughts that lead to suffering and there are thoughts that lead to happiness.

Thoughts of anger and ill will, cruelty have difficult consequences.

Kind thoughts feel really good – to you and others.

Here's the trick, people think *I'm supposed to get rid of all my negative thoughts and have only good thoughts.*

That's not how it works. **We get caught.** We bring wise understanding in *looking at how to work with thoughts.*

Here's an exercise to show the power of thoughts.

Close your eyes.

Hear this word – *trouble* – repeat a few times. Notice any images that come up. How does it feel in the body?

Now keep your eyes closed and hear this word – *kindness* – repeat a few times. Notice any images that come up. How does this feel in your body?

If you're playing a worrisome story see how it affects your whole being.

If you're playing a happy story, see how *it* affects your whole being.

There is a great power to the stories we keep telling ourselves over and over. *We believe them!*

The key is, you don't have to get rid of any of them. Thoughts are as real as you believe them to be, or as empty as you realize them. **Then you can choose which thoughts you want to give energy to.**

One of the main things that is important to communicate is – **Notice the tone of the thought... can you notice?**

The whole meditation process is learning to discern between thoughts based on fear and confusion or alignment and truth.

How does it feel those times when you are making a good decision? Those times when you just know, like a finger raised in an ahaa moment. Those times when you just know.

Learning to feel those cues, these are moments of right thought, or wise thought, so you can hear the truth in you.

If we can learn how to listen to our thoughts and discriminate our thoughts, we can choose which ones we want to give energy to.

It's a given that you don't have to get rid of anything. You can choose thoughts that lead to happiness. Once you see the possibility from right understanding, you can face in that direction – that's when right thought becomes right intention because you're choosing freedom.

2. Development of Relationships

Wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood (or right speech, right action, right livelihood) – all of these have some basic principle of not harming.

The Buddha said – if you want to find peace and happiness, don't cause suffering to yourself or to others.

It's not about being a goody-goody. These are guidelines for inner peace – by being in harmony with the world.

Right Speech

Say what's truthful, and what's useful. And, sometimes it's better not to say something – “you're new outfit is disgusting!” There's nothing useful here.

Why are you saying what you're saying? Is it to be right? Is it to be in control? What is your intention? Is it for greater communication? *“I'm not feeling as close as I'd like to, can we talk about this?”*

Timing is important in speech. Saying something when someone can hear.

Experiment with not gossiping. Take a period of time – an hour, a day, a week – and not talk about anyone who's not there, and see how it affects your mind, because what comes out of our mouths affects our mind.

Right Action

Here we can look to the 5 Precepts, guidelines for skillful action, not commandments. They're also described as the guardians of the world.

Refrain from killing – not even an ant. Unfortunately, we live in a world where killing is glorified.

Refrain from stealing – not taking something that is not given to you

Refrain from sexual misconduct – not causing suffering through sexuality. Intimate experience, but can be a source of pain and suffering

Refrain from false speech – speaking only what is truthful and useful

Refrain from taking intoxicants – not taking intoxicants, not using substances that cause heedlessness. Gotta be conscious, because it's so easy to break all the other precepts when intoxicated.

Right Livelihood

Classic understanding is when something appears to *not* be right livelihood – other than killing, working in weapons or intoxicants, it's really important the *spirit* you bring to your work.

You can be a police person – a protector and not a bully. You can be a check-out person at the supermarket and have no connection with people or you can be blessing people as you wait on them. Homemaker, student...

It's the spirit of service you bring to your work.

Ask people to look at what the wisest possible attitude would be to have your livelihood done with a spirit of service.

3. Training of Mind and Heart

Right Effort

The effort to be present, the effort to be mindful has to be a balanced effort.

The musician tuning the string – there was a monk trying too hard and the Buddha said, “you were a musician before you joined the order – if the string is too tight, there's not the right sound.”

If effort is too laid back, or if effort is too tight, not right effort. Right effort is balanced effort.

Right effort is easy and relaxed, with sincere intention to be here.

Tell stories about my own practice in either too tight or too laid back...

Simply bring effort to be present.

You don't have control over how mindful or concentrated you are but you have some say in the effort to be present. Effort comes from sincerity of heart not macho will.

Right Mindfulness

The Buddha said it's the best way to overcome sorrow, lamentation, grief, or despair and to realize freedom.

Knowing what's happening right now without grasping at what's pleasant or pushing away what's unpleasant.

In mindfulness of breath, sound, thought –there's just that quality of being present without judgment – a moment of freedom.

Moments of mindfulness when built on each other lead to concentration.

Here's a reality check – How many people feel their mind is so scattered?

That's why people go on retreats, to have one moment of mindfulness building on the next and then the next and the next. **For most people it takes about 3 days of just bringing yourself back very kindly and patiently before you land in the present and have stretches of mindfulness.**

Here's the mysterious thing about doing daily practice – just your intention to be present bears fruit in it's own time. That's how it works.

Right Concentration

It often takes a supportive environment, patience, and commitment. You need to be relaxed. If you put a cow in a pasture with a tight fence it gets restless, just like if your mind is in a tight place. Like with the cow in a big pasture, your mind can be in a big pasture – if your mind wanders, it's no big deal – there's more ease the more room we give ourselves. If your mind wanders, again no big deal, just bring it back gently, not forcefully. You start to train your mind.

All the steps on the Eightfold Path help to develop each other – and mindfulness is at the heart of it all.

Homework – practice the exercise with right speech, for an hour, for a day or the week.

Teacher Note: Keep it simple. After 5th step, just stop to breathe and be silent for a few minutes before finishing. See where the energy is, and maybe modify last 3 steps, or abbreviate them. If so, and maybe in either case, engage people in small groups – “What's wise speech for you? Or “What would you say the essence of right livelihood is for you?”

End with *Try a Little Silence* in Awakening the Buddha Within, page 195.

Class IV

Start class with a few minutes of silence to settle in.

Begin by asking questions about practice. Ask if anyone practiced with right speech and noticing gossip. Take 20 minutes for questions.

Lead 35-minute sit with instructions.

Take questions after sit.

Break for 5 or so minutes.

Talk

The Five Hindrances

Read opening paragraphs in Joseph's Experience of Insight, p. 51

We should be encouraged by observing hindrances. As long as people have had minds, there have been hindrances. The more you see them, the less power they have over you, the more possibility there is for waking up from the confusion.

The good news is to see them. That's not the bad news.

A Mullah Nasruddin story –

One day Nasruddin was going across the border with his donkey. He made this trip a few times, and on another day he was going across the border with the donkey having straw on his back. Looking like he was getting richer, a customs official took notice and searched Nasruddin and the donkey. The customs official was puzzled but allowed Nasruddin to continue across the bridge. Six months later, the customs official retires and runs in to the Nasruddin in the market. "Tell me," the customs official say to Nasruddin, "what were you smuggling – precious jewels?" Nasruddin says, "no, I was smuggling donkeys."

The jewels that we look for are often right under our nose.

That's what these hindrances are – they're the riches of practice.

It's the difficulties that help us wake up. *Seeing the difficulties* helps us wake up.

The Five Hindrances are: Craving (desire, wanting, attachment), ill-will (hatred or cruelty), sloth and torpor (spiritual laziness), restlessness, and doubt.

All of these experiences come up in our meditation, but they're all things that come up in life. Meditation is a crucible that helps us see clearly how the mind works.

Hindrances hinder clarity when they're not seen clearly.

First Hindrance

Craving – desire, wanting, attachment

We remember the Second Noble Truth – There is a cause of suffering. The cause of suffering is craving, attachment, desire, or wanting.

The first hindrance is *attachment to desire*.

An example of how attachment to desire plays out in our meditation.

You're sitting there minding your own business, and all of a sudden you think of someone or something you want in your life – and before you know it, you're gone, you're lost.

Or we get tunnel vision in our lives. You're walking down the street and you get hungry and you notice all the restaurants and see nothing else ... or in meditation, you're wanting the meditation to end. You might hear all the different sounds in the room, but there's only one sound you're waiting for – the bell ringing – and no other sound counts.

It's not that desire or wanting is bad.

But it keeps you looking outside of yourself for happiness. So, we keep looking in the wrong place, thinking the next thing will do it.

It's also inherently unsatisfying because it is impermanent.

Tell a story for myself about wanting.

James tells a story about Adam and strawberries. Adam kept wanting one strawberry after another, so James held the bowl out of his reach. Adam keeps reaching out as far as he can, while he has a strawberry in his hand, but he's crying for more strawberries.

Attachment to desire takes us away from the pleasant, present moment.

There is a whole range of craving or desire, or wanting – we can go from having mild interest in something or someone or we can have the experience of burning with desire. Desire can be very painful.

Second Hindrance

Aversion – Here too there is a whole range of experience from irritation, to ill-will, to hatred and aggression.

We talk about someone boiling with anger.

Aversion is not as seductive as wanting because it is unpleasant, *but it can feel alive*, and for some people, they can feel very engaged in this experience.

With aversion there is contraction away from the present moment.

There you are again, on the cushion, minding your own business and you've got pain.

There is contraction, you just want it to go away. You can't see the pain clearly, you just want it to go away. Or, you get lost in stories you're telling yourself about the pain.

This is true for us in meditation and also in our lives –in your body, mind, and heart our whole experience can be one of wanting pain to just go away.

Third Hindrance

Sloth and Torpor – spiritual laziness

We are used to outside energy, outside stimulation or entertainment, just in our daily lives. Interactions with all kinds of people and events even in just one hour let alone a whole day.

When we come to sit in silence, to sit still, it's like someone pulled the plug, 'cause we're so used to the outside stimulation.

It's just the mind being lazy... "I don't want to do it." We can even draw this conclusion and it can be very believable. Procrastination can be a very good example of this – "Well, I'll sit later... or well, I'll do such and such later."

Can we meet sloth and torpor, spiritual laziness as just a hindrance arising and stay with our intention to practice –in our meditation and in our lives?

Fourth Hindrance

Restlessness – agitation

Restlessness and agitation happen on a physical level – you can feel like you're going to jump out of your skin. Or it happens on the mental level. Often restlessness comes from past or future events.

When we think about something in the past that we feel bad about, we can ask ourselves, "where's the past?"

It's a thought that we think about in the present moment.

Then we can find ourselves thinking about something that's never happened, something in the future that's never happened, and can find ourselves getting worried about this thing that never happened.

Worry and anxiety are big components of this hindrance.

Another story about Nasruddin ... Nasruddin was spreading crumbs around his house, and someone came by and asked, "Mullah, why are you spreading these crumbs around your house?" And Nasruddin replied, "Oh, I'm doing it to keep the tigers away." "But Mullah," the person responded, "there aren't tigers for miles." To which Nasruddin said, "Effective isn't it?"

We get to see a habit of the mind that keeps us away from the present moment.

Another story about restlessness, and how it affects the mind.

An artist goes out with a pallet and brush and paints on a cave wall a life size ferocious tiger. And when he finishes it he suddenly gets terrified and throws up his brush and runs out of the cave in a panic.

We do that –we paint pictures in our minds and we frighten ourselves.

Restlessness comes on an energetic level – a whole range here too of mild movement in the body or mind, to feel like we're gonna jump out of our skin or run away in panic.

Fifth Hindrance

Doubt

Doubt is the most debilitating because it can incapacitate the mind. When you have doubt about yourself, about your practice, about the teacher, about the teachings themselves ...

Doubt can plague us, this is true for most everyone.

The thing to remember about all these hindrances is that they're impermanent ... and they are impersonal.

They come on their own. We don't say, gee I think I'll have a little doubt today, or I think I'll have a little rage...

Our moods are like this – sometimes we're stormy, sometimes we're foggy, sometimes we're sunny – just like the weather systems. They come and they go. That's about being human.

All the hindrances are impermanent and impersonal.

So then, the question is how do you work with them?

The primary strategy for all of them is mindfulness, and not just for these hindrances – but mindfulness is the primary strategy for working with any difficult emotion.

We can get familiar with these hindrances in a wiser way.

Take people through a guided meditation – mindfulness of an emotion. Noticing the mental atmosphere to a physical sensation.

Where do we go? We stay in that story. We get freaked out over and over again. But what happens when we go into our body and observe?

Recognize what's here

Allow that it's true

Investigate without trying to get rid of, but explore the landscape. The key is when you just look, you're not adding aversion

Not take it personally. You're just exploring the human feeling of anger, or sadness

Michele McDonald calls this **RAIN**. We can think of RAIN as a reminder of the observing mind, recognize, allow, investigate, and not take it personally.

Check in with people here. They may have an experience they want to talk about. Might get stirred. (for a moment)

When we follow this path, when we do this, we can see that whatever it is that's happening is bearable, it's interesting, and often it changes and we're not feeling it with our aversion.

The big caveat is you can't pay attention in order for it to go away. You can't trick it –it knows!

Our job is just to be with it – *and it might even get worse*. But you're not paying attention in order to get rid of it. We can make an agreement with ourselves, okay, for the next minute I'm going to just feel this fully. We shift our relationship to it.

This is the primary strategy to deal with these hindrances.

And there are antidotes for each of these if the mindfulness is strong enough.

Desire/attachment – First, let yourself feel it. If mindfulness isn't strong, then the reflection can be on impermanence ... what's this going to look like in 6 months or 10 years? Oh, it's gone.... Reflect on the impermanent nature of things. In our daily lives, a classic antidote of desire is moderation of eating, or moderation of sleeping – the power of restraint.

Aversion – First, let yourself feel the aversion, without judging it. Metta or lovingkindness, is an antidote for aversion. **Take 20 seconds, close your eyes and think of someone who opens your heart. When you think of them you feel warmth and**

love. And send them these thoughts – may you be happy, may you be peaceful, may you feel my love for you ... may you be happy and peaceful and may you feel my love. And, notice how it feels inside, in your heart. And if you're feeling really angry with someone, send this person these same wishes ... may you be happy, may you be peaceful... so that the heart is softened... gives some space in the anger for softening.

A classic antidote is to reflect on karma – wow, if he causes suffering, imagine what it's like to be in his mind? Imagine what it's like to be in his life?

Compassion gets elicited. Seeing the karma the person accrues.

Sloth and torpor – If you can be mindful, you can know it's the hardest one because there's not the energy. Antidote for sitting – standing, opening your eyes *I can stand up and demonstrate.* Stand until you're tired of standing or until you feel some energy coming back. Also, when sitting you can take some deep breaths – deep inhalation, deep exhalation.

Key to sloth and torpor, when you realize you've been gone, don't beat yourself up. Just start again, just begin again, with no judgment at all.

One more piece about sloth and torpor, for procrastination especially, a little trick for getting over inertia... if for example you just don't feel like getting out of bed... just get your finger out from the blanket, then let your finger move out from the bed, then the rest of the body will follow. Once you get started, there is momentum.

Restlessness – First be mindful of it. Just let yourself explore restlessness. Let the energy buzz around. Usually you may not move, so be very judicious with movement. Instead of moving a lot –being one big fidget – take nice deep breaths and as you inhale, just get a sense of spaciousness and let your energy field expand and hold the energy. (If when working with an individual and they have a whole lot of energy – in a heightened way – tell him or her to breathe deeply and send any extra energy down to the earth –or open the crown and have the energy come up through you.)

Often restlessness comes with a feeling of guilt. Give a few moments to notice the experience of restlessness. See if this is true for you.

Guilt keeps getting replayed over and over in our minds. The Buddha did not recommend guilt – said it's self-perpetuating, you can just beat yourself up.

The Buddha talked instead about wise remorse, a wise reflection. Look back and see how it felt, to feel guilt, and see another way to work with it, another way you could do it. We can use guilt, or restlessness with guilt as an experience to commit oneself to waking up, to do it another way.

If you're really plagued with guilt, think about something wholesome you've done, it gives us some more space – to see oh, I do skillful things sometimes too.

(Pick and choose what will work. Can't say all this in half an hour or 45 minutes.)

Doubt – If you can't let yourself feel doubt, then reflect on this experience as being a doubting Buddha. But if mindfulness isn't strong, and antidote to doubt is faith.

If you're besieged with doubt, reflect on someone who inspires you. Your aunt, or sister, or friend, or His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or someone who really believes in you.

Sometimes we're seeing ourselves through tunnel vision. It can make a difference to see ourselves through someone else's eyes.

(Powerful role, teaching – when my belief in them really makes a difference. Keep that in mind, that I really do believe that they can get this. That their goodness can shine.)

Same principle with any emotion, any hindrance. First, be mindful and if mindfulness isn't feeling so available to you, then find yourself some space around it, so you're not completely drowning in it – walk, do push-ups, something to discharge the energy, and to look around you.

Main thing is that it's all workable, and all a process in waking up. To see the way that human beings get caught.

Read autobiography piece here. (Autobiography in 5 chapters)

Every time we see the difficulty, we have another option to walk down another street. Not the same old, same old.

Homework and class experience:

Pick a hindrance or a situation where you're tired and you get lost and work with it.

And then, have the intention to work with it this way.

You're going to fall in the hole many times, but every time you fall in and you see that you've fallen in is a time of waking up – and that's a good thing.

Close with a brief sit.

Class V

(Notes also drawn from Arinna's book.)

Start with a few minute sit, settle in.

Begin by asking questions about practice this week. Take 20 minutes for questions

Lead 40 minute sitting with instructions early on.

Take questions after sit – one or two.

Break for several minutes.

Talk

Qualities of heart, learning to open, and the Brahma-viharas

Integrate lovingkindness meditation

Look at qualities of forgiveness, patience, sense of humor with mind, and principles of compassion and lovingkindness. All of these practices are about learning to open, which goes against our conditioning because if we don't like the experience we contract away, and if we do like the experience we can engulf it and contract around it.

If we do like something, we can be with it and not hold on when it goes. Like holding onto a rope. If we hold it too tightly when it pulls away from us it can burn. If we hold it loosely enough it will not burn.

First quality of opening the heart

Forgiveness – The antidote to the complaining mind -- forgive ourselves, as we forgive ourselves, we can forgive others. So many people come into meditation practice wanting to do it right. If you're not doing something right, you feel you've blown it.

That's merciless.

First practice forgiveness with yourself.

How do you feel about your mind when it wonders? Do you forgive your mind? That's what minds do.

And, how do you relate to your body when it's not working? If you get frustrated and angry with our body, when it's been trying to do the best for you for our whole life – give it forgiveness, kindness, and love.

Particularly with ourselves, where forgiveness can come in when we've fallen in the hole – we can understand conditioning about the habits of mind that have been created.

James' story being at IMS on retreat in 1979. He tacked on 2 weeks extra at the end of a 3 month retreat – that's a long time. He was doing walking meditation in the gym and someone came in, and then bolted.

James heard himself say inside, "Oh, she must have thought I am a great yogi." Then immediately the next thought was, "How awful." He then became so upset with himself.

He saw the millions of times he's had these thoughts. He thought this would have ended in 3 months of practice. He had to have compassion for himself. Forgiveness for himself. "Oh look at my conditioned mind."

Tell a story of my own.

Sometimes we're not ready to forgive ourselves. Sometimes, we're not ready to forgive others.

If we're angry with someone, it can feel like we're throwing hot coals – but we're the one getting burned.

Suppose a photo is taken of someone at their ugliest moment. It can be like that, we can keep someone stuck in our image of who they are and just only relate to them through that lens.

People do all kinds of things... sometimes terrible things. But people can change too.

We need to be patient with ourselves in this journey. (Diligence, patience, and generosity bring us the conditions for happiness.) Patience is one of the conditions that brings us happiness.

And allowing for a sense of humor about ourselves. Look, there I am doing this habit again. Walking down the same street.

One of the greatest challenges we face is resisting thoughts that are self-judgmental or negative and at the same time opening to our capacity to offer lovingkindness to ourselves and others.

The Buddha recognized that it is critical for us to make a heart connection so that we can cultivate qualities of patience and love for ourselves and others.

So he taught four formal practices. They are so beautiful that they are known as the **divine abodes**.

The divine abodes we can learn to dwell in are

- Lovingkindness or metta
- Compassion or karuna
- Sympathetic joy, or mudita
- Equanimity, or upekka

Among the blessings we receive as human beings is our capacity to transform ourselves and awaken the qualities of our fundamental human nature.

Through reflection on certain phrases, we can awaken the innate qualities of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, which lie in our heart.

Despite the negative feelings that can arise in all of us, our intention to connect to these positive energies brings about a change in our expression as human beings.

This does not happen in a week or two or six weeks, or two months. It happens slowly over time, because over and over again, we make the choice to awaken our hearts, to change and put our lives in the service of these positive energies.

The Buddha and all the teachers who have followed in this lineage have spoken of our worthiness in deserving the deepest lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

They have stressed consistently that self-judgment and self negation, or shame, are never ever justified.

The intentional cultivation of the divine abodes heal our tendency to distort who we truly are.

For a while we may feel as though we are saying lovingkindness or equanimity phrases as some kind of rote exercise.

But over and over—and it may take years – we come to see that our sense of unworthiness is just an idea inherited from our past and simply is not true.

Such ideas are not an accurate reflection of who we are.

The divine abodes invite us to love and respect ourselves even when we are imperfect and make mistakes. The cultivation of mindfulness and the divine abodes toward ourselves and others deeply transforms our lives, bringing us freedom and joy within each moment.

Lead a lovingkindness meditation here.

Take questions for several minutes.

Close with “the bud stands for all things...” page 18 in Sharon’s book

Sit for a few moments. (“everything flowers from within of self-blessing...”)

Class VI

Start class with a few minutes of silence, just settling in.

Begin by asking questions about practice during the week. Take 15-20 minutes.

Lead 40-minute meditation.

Take on or two questions if time.

Break for several minutes.

A Mini-Talk

What it Means to Practice (the other part of the title for this course)

Open with Joseph's closing words ..."After some time you will find mindfulness ..." p. 165

What does it mean to practice in our lives? Arinna says in her book .. "it is difficult to turn off our automatic pilot and live our lives mindfully – if it were easy, we would all be enlightened.

Although it's not easy, it is possible.

Students of Insight Meditation often have a sense that formal meditation is The Practice and that all things outside of it are not.

We assume that times when we are standing under the shower, opening the door, and going from the sink to the toilet and the toilet to the sink *are not meditations, but that is not the case.*

They can all become meditations.

But just as Joseph said, be simple and easy. It's just about stopping long enough to pay attention.

And it's important to find the time to practice.

We're training our minds and hearts, and that steady, continuous practice is what helps us to strengthen our capacity for mindfulness in everything we do.

This is how we develop the inner muscle of mindfulness so that we can bring awareness to all other experiences of our lives.

Make a time each day, ideally the same time. The morning is a good time before the day gets going.

If you can take 45 minutes, great. 30 minutes, great. If you have 20 minutes this is very good too. And on some days if you have only 5 or 10 minutes, then take the moments to practice, sitting in silence then.

Try to create the circumstances in your life as best as possible to take this time without interruption, away from the activities of your life.

Then notice the ways mindfulness arises all on its own throughout your day – unexpectedly, there to support you.

Each moment that we can remember to connect to what we are doing, we are purifying (cleansing) ourselves – whether it is a moment of speaking, picking up a pen, turning on the computer, walking up and down the stairs.

Each moment we remember we are on a path of freeing our minds and hearts.

Freedom is not some dramatic experience. It can come in the simplest ways in our lives. Just when we see where we're getting caught in some old, conditioned habit.

We can bring clear seeing, compassion and wisdom to our actions, from the smallest private moments, to the larger, more engaged activities of our lives.

Training our minds to remember, moment-to-moment serves our happiness, and the happiness of all beings as well.

Helpful reminders in daily life – use colorful dots and stick one on your computer, or on your bathroom mirror, or the door as you leave and enter your home or office.

And at the moment of seeing the dot, this is a moment to notice what's happening, to take a few breaths in and out, noticing the experience of breathing and then move on.

Can do this at a stop-light, or when answering the phone –letting the phone ring 3 times before you answer.

One of my favorite places to notice what's happening in my life is at the stop-light in the center of Amherst. Invariably I am needing to get somewhere, and that particular light is very long. I really get to practice there and feel my hands on the wheel, noticing the tightness or ease in my body, (and it's usually tightness).

I get to stop and look around at others in their cars. I even bumped my car into someone else's at that stop-light when I wasn't paying attention. I get to feel my patience or impatience and I get to see how I'm entering my day.

This light is such a great reminder and mirror of my mind states.

We can choose an experience each day to stop and notice. Brushing our teeth, washing the dishes, answering the phone, how we're speaking to our colleagues, our children, our friends.

How we're eating our food. Are we inhaling it, or are we tasting it and feeling the body working to nourish itself?

(Perhaps read Thich Nhat Hanh's *Washing Dishes* again.)

Let's practice right here, right now, with **an eating meditation**.

Hand out raisins or nuts and guide people in a mindfulness of eating experience.

What did you notice?

As we reflect on practice, it's important to understand that we practice not only for ourselves, but for all beings everywhere.

It's important to understand that Dharma is service, that we practice to be in service not just for ourselves, but for all beings.

We are each on the path to liberation for the sake of all beings.

This is called being a Bodhisattva.

The Bodhisattva's practice is not only about making merit for ourselves, but it is about practicing to end suffering for everyone.

What it means to practice in daily life is directly linked to the practice of being a Bodhisattva.

The key to becoming a Bodhisattva is the development of *Bodhicitta* – *Bodhi means awakened, and citta means heart or mind.*

So Bodhicitta is the aspiration for an awakened heart and mind.

Having true Bodhicitta is enormously difficult.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says he thinks that maybe once or twice he has experienced this!

He says that even if you have Bodhicitta for one second, it's an amazing and profound experience.

But, we can have the intention for Bodhicitta.

We can recite quietly to ourselves at the end of each sitting – *May the merit of this practice be of benefit to all beings.*"

My friend Diana Winston, also a teacher, says anyone can be an *Ordinary Bodhisattva!*

Our daily lives are full of opportunities to end suffering – a child crying, a stubbed toe, a colleague who's feeling low, an elderly parent who's no longer able-bodied, a pet that's ill.

Thinking in terms of being an *Ordinary Bodhisattva* makes it possible for us to look at the most ordinary experiences in our lives, and realize even there too we can practice with wisdom and compassion for ourselves and all beings.

It's not just someone else who is a *real Bodhisattva*, from some other part of the world, or who's practiced meditation for years in a cave.

This is available to any of us.

The Dharma is service, for the sake of ourselves and all beings everywhere – in our own backyard, in the war in Iraq, in our own home.

(Read piece from internet)

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely.

It's not given to us to know which acts or by whom will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take “everyone on Earth” to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second or hundredth gale.”

What does it mean to practice? This is a question for the rest of our lives, as we continue to practice one day at a time, one moment at a time throughout our lives, right here and right now.

Close with a few moments of sitting and bell.