

Maintaining Awareness

1. Take care of samatha (*steadying the mind*)
 - Every now and then check if there is clarity, energy, stability in the mind or has distraction or dullness taken over?
 - When you need to, come back to conscious breathing using more of the “control method”
 - Refresh, start over
 - Don’t skip over the conditions that build samatha (sometimes the 4 stage mindfulness of breathing or metta bhavana)
2. Bring in dharma-vicaya (investigation) / Rouse your dharma interest (*focusing on impermanence*)
 - How you are going to approach a particular meditation? Is there a certain thread you would like to investigate (how can I find the direct experience of sensation?)
 - Drop-in a simple dharma principle related to the practice and see how it maps (or doesn’t!) to your direct experience (e.g., this breath is impermanent, meeting this kilesa with sati I stop fueling it). Look to the hand-outs
 - Choose one reflection at a time and explore it (see what arises, you can support the exploration in meditation with writing).
 - Try dropping in questions (e.g., who is meditating? who is thinking? where is the self? what’s its quality?)
3. Actively encourage confidence / *gladden the mind*
 - Where is the dharma starting to come into your direct experience?
 - Take time to reflect on what you are learning (in meditation check-ins, journaling)
 - Ask, how am I changing?
 - Remember why you are practicing and the origin of this method (taught by the buddha, a path to awakening, a means to realize the deepest wisdom teachings in this very breath, body and mind)
 - Investigate your doubts – are they based in conceit? (do you see yourself as worse than everyone else meditating? do you see yourself as hopeless? Do your friends see you as hopeless? Would the Buddha?)
 - Begin to practice knowing what’s happening in you to be what’s happening in you without external confirmation
 - Be confident about working where it’s most useful for you
 - Nurture bodhicitta, the will to enlightenment and altruistic / devotional motivation for the benefit of all beings
 - Why keep going? Dogen said just to sit is an expression of our Buddha nature
4. Recognize Mara
 - Mara attacks when the practice is working (often when you think it isn’t working) and your experience shifts to become more equanimous, more subtle. Just the fact he bothers to attack shows something is working.
 - Practice *sensitive to the mind*
 - Attacks of boredom and doubt (“why bother?”, “OK, enough of this”)
 - Is there a fear that you really can/will change? Bring sati to that fear.

- Is there an old self view you are hanging on to? Bring sati to that hanging on.
 - Practice equanimity and perseverance with the practice without falling into the polarities of hope/fear, gain/loss, good/bad
5. Be skillful in your pacing
 - Pushing too hard can result in fatigue or anxiety or strain
 - Apply balanced effort – letting things be/release method balanced with the control method
 - Know when to drop the effort and just play (go for a walk, enjoy nature, exercise, draw)
 6. Notice if you are blocking out experience
 - Is there any numbness or headiness? (especially check in with the heart center). Come back to *sensitive to the whole body* and a direct experience of the body
 - Is there a pervasive sense of aversion to experience? Can do more metta practice
 - How can you bring in an element of investigation (see #2 above)
 - Are you using bliss as a way of closing down into a protected shell? Break out by rousing dharma vicaya and energy
 7. Give the practice time to “cook”
 - The process of realizing the truth of impermanence, who we really are, our inter-connected will unfold organically with persistence (virya). It’s a life long commitment to the truth (although the Buddha said with sincere effort, 7 years!)
 - It is a dawning awareness, not something we “do” and the tick off our checklist
 - Find the deeper meaning and motivation beyond feeling good in one sit, or having one good sit
 - What are your expectations? Are they appropriate, helpful, realistic?
 - There’s no need to rush on in the practice (“I have to get to the 13th contemplation!”). The full realization is possible in the first instruction alone if we go deeply into it.