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INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION – WEEK 2

CONCENTRATION AND STILLNESS

As you sustain the attention on the breath, noticing the beginning, middle and end of each inhalation and exhalation the mind begins to withdraw from external sensory impingements and it becomes more calm and focused.

HINDRANCES

When the mind is not able to concentrate on the breath it is due to the presence of the following hindrances:

1. Sense desire

This is the mind grasping at sense objects and sense pleasures. When sitting in meditation the mind may become bored and it begins searching for pleasant distractions through fantasy, imagining or bringing up memories of past experiences.

Antidote for ‘sense desire’

Contemplate how endless desire is and how many problems it causes and how sense desire is never satisfied. Learn to say ‘no’ to desire for the pleasant having seen this endless flow of wanting more and more.

2. Hatred, ill will or annoyance

This is the mind striking against objects that it does not like and wanting to get rid of them. This can be towards unpleasant external conditions (e.g. noise, people or the conditions of one’s own body) and mind (e.g. pain, restlessness, sleepiness etc.)

Antidote to ‘hatred, ill will or annoyance’

Instead of trying to get rid of that which is unpleasant, develop tolerance and patience with it. Investigate the suffering involved in anger and realise that we come to peace as soon as we can co-exist or accommodate these things, not necessary liking them but not creating any problems around them.

3. Sleepiness and sluggishness

The mind is heavy and dull and it wants to sink into sleep. This is a calm state but the mind is not bright and alert as there is a lack of energy.

Antidote to ‘sleepiness and sluggishness’

The most common reason for this hindrance arising is the obvious one; we're tired and low in energy. The most effective way for dealing with this type of sloth and torpor is to accept it and make peace with it, then it usually doesn't last so long. When we've rested a little our mind becomes clearer and we carry on.

4. Restlessness and remorse

The mind is in a state of worry or agitation and is always jumping from one object to another. This is the mind with too much energy and not enough calm.

Antidote to 'restlessness and remorse'

Sit very still and take an interest in the nature of the breath, really trying to experience each breath fully from the beginning to the end, counting up to '10' without losing count. Remember contentment when restlessness is strong, we can even repeat a phrase or mantra to ourselves. A mantra like "good enough", "good enough", "good enough".

Remorse is feeling bad about something we've done. When that kind of feeling comes up apply to the '**AFL formula**': **A**cknowledge what you've done, **F**orgive yourself and **L**earn from your mistakes. Remember, everyone makes mistakes, big and small.

5. Doubt

One doubts what one is doing, how to do it, or one's ability to do it.

Antidote for 'doubt'

If you have any doubt about the method or what you should be doing, ask the teacher. Many of these doubts can be easily resolved.

SWEEPING THE BODY

Sit very still in a good balanced posture. Direct your attention to the top of the head. Experience whatever sensations are present, such as warmth, itching, tingling, throbbing etc. (or lack of sensations). Keep your attention there a few seconds, then move it to the back of the head, again experiencing any sensations. Continue moving the attention through the whole body, part by part, down to the feet. Wherever there is tension or pain, stop and pay attention more closely to that area. If you find this method of sweeping the body useful for concentration and awareness then you can spend more time doing it by sweeping up and down the body quite a few times. You can experiment with this method, such as the speed of sweeping or the size of the area you put your attention. The aim of the exercise is to develop concentration and awareness of the body.