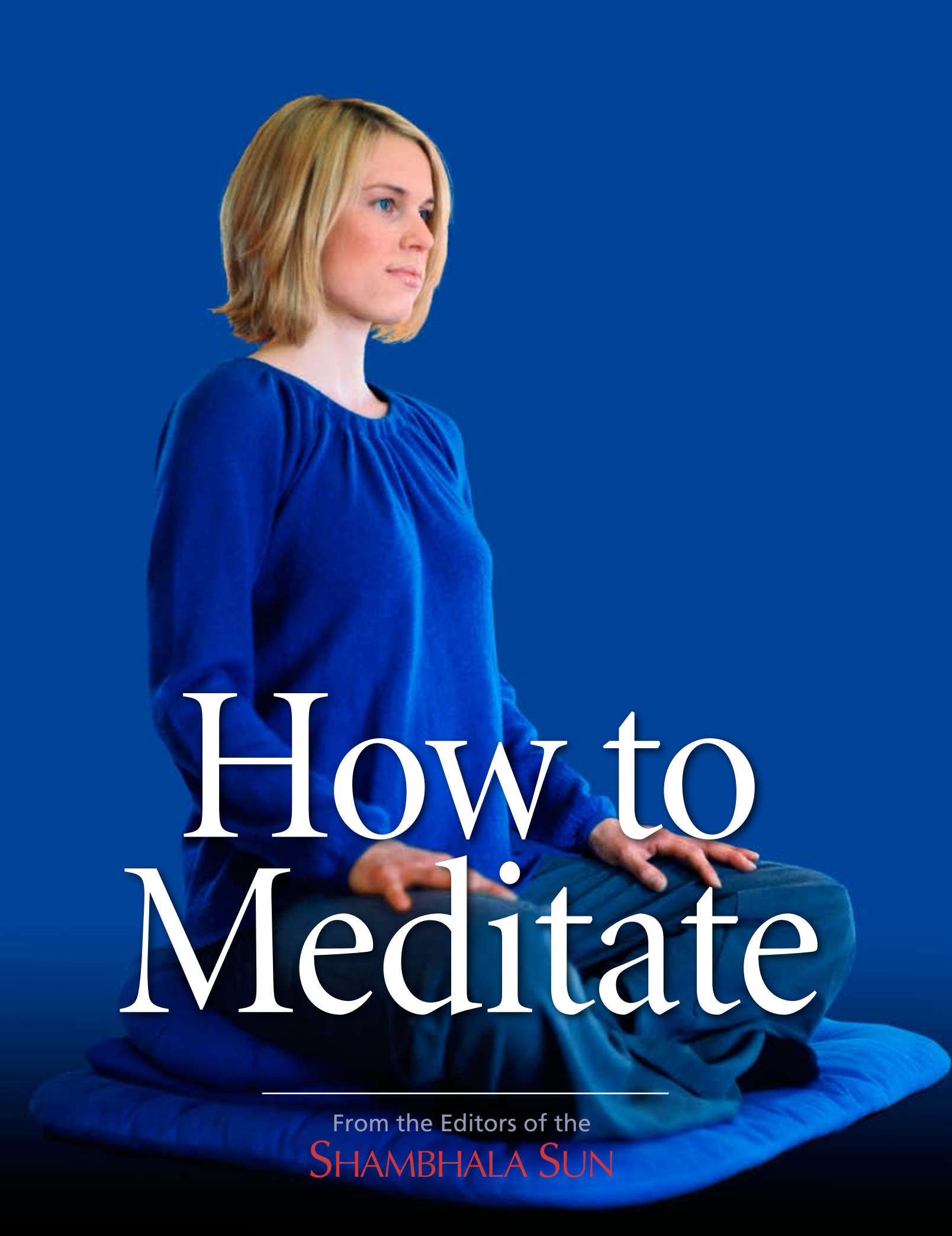


How to Meditate

From the Editors of the
SHAMBHALA SUN

Table of Contents

3 Introduction BY BARRY BOYCE

5 Why Practice Mindfulness BY JON KABAT-ZINN

7 How to Do Mindfulness Meditation BY SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE

10 Going Nowhere BY LEWIS RICHMOND

13 Awakening the Body BY REGINALD RAY

15 Silencing the Inner Critic BY CHRISTINA FELDMAN

17 Making Peace BY PEMA CHÖDRÖN

20 The Whole Way BY JOAN SUTHERLAND

25 A Basic Meditation Library BY BARRY BOYCE

Cover photo by Liza Matthews

Introduction

By Barry Boyce

WHEN I STARTED practicing meditation, it made no sense at all. I was fidgety and confused, not sure I was doing the technique and not sure what was supposed to happen. I quickly abandoned any aspirations of becoming a spiritual person, since I was clearly no good at meditation. But I was drawn forward, nonetheless, by the motivation to get to the bottom of a question that gnawed at me every time I sat down to practice: Why did I find it so difficult to simply rest and do nothing?

Right after I graduated from college, I decided to defeat my restlessness once and for all, so I signed up for meditation boot camp: a monthlong retreat. I was afraid, but I was also determined to succeed. After about a week, as day bled into day and I had seen every form of mental distraction I could cook up parade before my mind's eye, I started to realize that I was bored beyond belief, with a deep hunger for anything to fixate on. My assigned seat was in the second row. Right in front of me sat Sid. I comforted myself with the thought that Sid fidgeted way more than I did and made a variety of internal and external bodily noises. I became familiar with the minutiae of every one of Sid's routines. Every morning at about ten, for example, his head would turn slightly to the left, which was the sign that the milk truck was arriving at the end of the lane. As the truck made its way closer and inclined gradually in our direction, Sid rotated his head slowly

Drawing by André Slob

in unison, like a remote guidance system. His head followed the truck until it passed in front of the meditation hall, then turned seventy-five degrees right to follow the truck as it passed out of view. I repeatedly commented to myself about how undisciplined Sid was, missing entirely the irony that my watching Sid watching the truck was essentially the same as Sid watching the truck.

People started to complain about Sid's gyrations and crepitations, so the authorities moved him to the last row. Not long after, Sid caught a cold, and became even noisier. He began to pull cough drops out of his pocket, unwrap them (which in the stone quiet sounded like a percussion section tuning up), and then start smacking on them. I started anticipating the dissolution of one drop, the reaching in the pocket for a fresh one, the opening of the wrapper, and the ingestion of the next one. It was like a clock. Ticktock. Ticktock. Smack-crinkle. Smack-crinkle.

This went on for a few days. Then, as Sid was unwrapping another drop on a languid midafternoon, Bernice shouted, "There's no eating in the meditation hall!" We were aghast. Looking straight at her, Sid retorted, "Well, who died and made you king?" A beat or two passed. Then we all—Bernice and Sid included—broke into peals of laughter that gave way to belly laughs. The secret was in the open: we were all bored and irritated. Boredom was our way of resisting simply letting ourselves be.

Sid's meditation hall decorum did need some sprucing up. After the incident, he was told to bring unwrapped lozenges in a bowl and ingest them quietly. He was also moved to his own row in the far back of the room. But in truth we were all Sid, fighting for relief. He was merely a little more obvious about it. I learned firsthand that day that meditation gives us a chance to be really honest about who we are and what's on our mind—and to feel fine about that. Meditation humbles us, and when it does, it's great to just let ourselves be humble.

What I like so much about the meditation teachers in this booklet is that they speak from experience, and they are humble and ordinary and have a sense of humor about meditation. When Jon Kabat-Zinn talks about balancing his thinking with awareness, you get the sense that he encountered firsthand his need to do that. When Lewis Richmond tries to sort out for us what it means to "just sit," you feel him speaking not from on high, but engaging the question freshly for himself and us. When Christina Feldman explores how we can let go of our inner critic, she speaks of the critic as a being she knows well. Joan Sutherland didn't pluck her "whole way" out of a book; she came upon it through her own efforts to find out—like all of us do—why it's so hard to relax, whether we're a monk or a manager.

These are gentle voices, humbled by meditation. They are not telling us how to become model meditators. They're sharing with us their journey of learning how to just be. Enjoy. ♦

BARRY BOYCE is senior editor of the Shambhala Sun. He is coauthor of The Rules of Victory *and editor of the Shambhala Sun anthology* In the Face of Fear: Buddhist Wisdom for Challenging Times.

Why Practice Mindfulness?

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction pioneer Jon Kabat-Zinn shares several good reasons for us to make mindfulness part of our lives and our communities.

THE ULTIMATE PROMISE of mindfulness is much larger, much more profound, than simply cultivating our attentiveness. It helps us understand that our conventional view of ourselves and even what we mean by "self" is incomplete in some very important ways. Mindfulness helps us recognize how and why we mis-take the actuality of things for some story we create. It then makes it possible for us to chart a path toward greater sanity, well-being, and purpose.

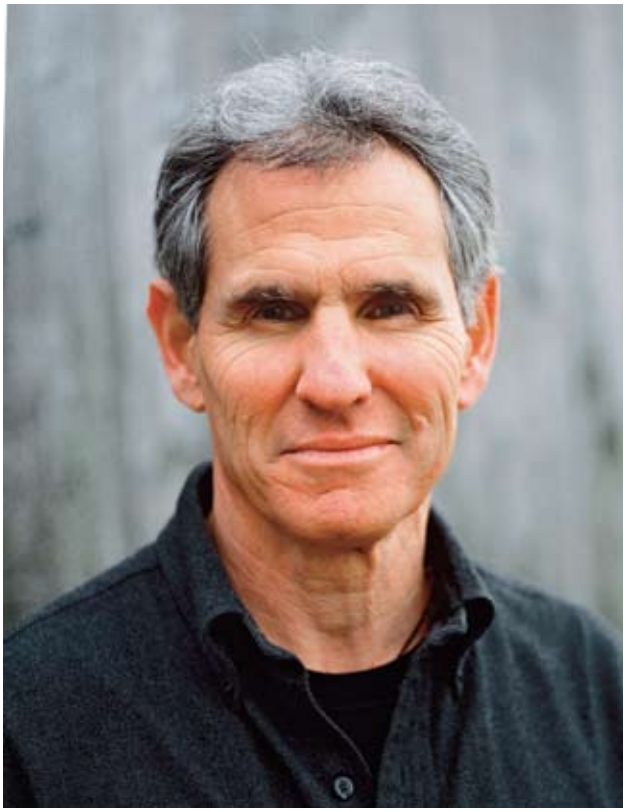


Photo by Liza Matthews

Today, as we bring science together with meditation, we're beginning to find new ways, in language we can all understand, to show the benefits of training oneself to become intimate with the workings of one's own mind in a way that generates greater insight and clarity. The science is showing interesting and important health benefits of mind/body training and practices, and is now beginning to elucidate the various pathways though which mindfulness may be exerting its effects on the brain (emotion-regulation, working memory, cognitive control, attention, activation in specific somatic maps of the body, cortical thickening in specific regions) and the body (symptom reduction, greater physical well-being, immune function enhancement, epigenetic up and down regulation of activity in large numbers and classes of genes). It is also showing that meditation can bring a sense of meaning and purpose to

life, based on understanding the non-separation of self and other. Given the condition we find ourselves in these days on this planet, understanding our interconnectedness is not a spiritual luxury; it's a societal imperative.

Even very, very smart people—and there are plenty of them around—are starting to recognize that thinking is only one of many forms of intelligence. If we don't recognize the multiple dimensions of intelligence, we are hampering our ability to find creative solutions and outcomes for problems that don't admit to simple-minded fixes. It's like having a linear view in medicine that sees health care solely as fixing people up—an auto mechanic's model of the body that doesn't understand healing and transformation, doesn't understand what happens when you harmonize mind and body. The element that's missing in that mechanical understanding is awareness.

Genuine awareness can modulate our thinking, so that we become less driven by unexamined motivations to put ourselves first, to control things to assuage our fear, to always proffer our brilliant answer. We can create an enormous amount of harm, for example, by not listening to other people who might have different views and insights. Fortunately, we have more of an opportunity these days to balance the cultivation of thinking with the cultivation of awareness. Anyone can restore some degree of balance between thinking and awareness right in this present moment, which is the only moment that any of us ever has anyway. The potential outcomes from purposefully learning to inhabit awareness and bring thought into greater balance are extremely positive and healthy for ourselves and the world at large.

Working on our mindfulness, by ourselves and along with others, hinges on appreciating the power of awareness to balance thought. There's nothing wrong with thinking. So much that is beautiful comes out of thinking and out of our emotions. But if our thinking is not balanced with awareness, we can end up deluded, perpetually lost in thought, and out of our minds just when we need them the most. ♦

JON KABAT-ZINN is the founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He is the author, most recently, of Coming to Our Senses: Healing the World and Ourselves through Mindfulness.

How to Do Mindfulness Meditation

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche gives a step-by-step guide in plain language to a simple method of mindfulness meditation practice—the basic technique of the Buddha.

IN MINDFULNESS, OR SHAMATHA, meditation, we are trying to achieve a mind that is stable and calm. What we begin to discover is that this calmness or harmony is a natural aspect of the mind. Through mindfulness practice we are just developing and strengthening it, and eventually we are able to remain peacefully in our mind without struggling. Our mind naturally feels content.

Photo by Liza Matthews

Beginning

It's easier to practice mindfulness when we create the right environment. It is good if the place where you meditate, even if it's only a small space in your apartment, has a feeling of upliftedness and sacredness. It is also said that you should meditate in a place that is not too noisy or disturbing, and you should not be in a situation where your mind is going to be easily provoked into anger or jealousy or other emotions. If you are disturbed or irritated, your practice is going to be affected.

If you force it too much, the practice can take on too much of a personality, and training the mind should be very, very simple. So you could meditate for ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the evening, and during that time you are really working with the mind. Then you just stop, get up, and go.

Posture and Gaze

The Buddhist approach is that the mind and body are connected. The energy flows better when the body is erect, and when it's bent, the flow is changed and that directly affects your thought process. We're not sitting up straight because we're trying to be good schoolchildren; our posture actually affects the mind. People who need to use a chair for meditation should sit upright with their feet touching the ground. Those using a meditation cushion should find a comfortable position with legs crossed and hands resting palm-down on your thighs. The hips are neither rotated forward too much, which creates tension, nor tilted back so you start slouching.

The basic principle is to keep an upright, erect posture. You are in a solid situation: your shoulders are level, your hips are level, your spine is stacked up. You can visualize putting your bones in the right order and letting your flesh hang off that structure. We use this posture in order to remain relaxed and awake. The practice we're doing is very precise: you should be very much awake even though you are calm. If you find yourself getting dull or hazy or falling asleep, check your posture.

For strict mindfulness practice, the gaze is downward, focusing a couple of inches in front of your nose. The eyes are open but not staring; your gaze is soft. You are trying to reduce sensory input—putting the horse of mind in a smaller corral.

Breath

When we do shamatha practice, we become more and more familiar with our mind, and in particular we learn to recognize the movement of the mind, which we experience as thoughts. We do this by using an object of meditation to provide a contrast or counter-

point to what's happening in our mind. As soon as we go off and start thinking about something, awareness of the object of meditation will bring us back. We could put a rock in front of us and use it to focus our mind, but using the breath as the object of meditation is particularly helpful because it relaxes us.

As you start the practice, have a sense of your body and a sense of where you are, and then begin to notice the breathing. The whole feeling of the breath is very important. The breath should not be forced, obviously; you are breathing naturally. The breath is going in and out, in and out. With each breath you become relaxed.

Thoughts

Everyone gets lost in thought sometimes. You might think, "I can't believe I got so absorbed in something like that," but try not to make it too personal. Mind will be wild and we have to recognize that. We can't push ourselves. If we're trying to be completely concept-free, with no discursiveness at all, it's just not going to happen. When we notice that we have been lost in thought, we mentally label it "thinking"—gently and without judgment—and we come back to the breath. When we have a thought—no matter how wild or bizarre it may be—we just let it go and come back to the breath, come back to the situation here.

Each meditation session is a journey of discovery to understand the basic truth of who we are. In the beginning the most important lesson of meditation is seeing the speed of the mind. But the meditation tradition says that mind doesn't have to be this way: it just hasn't been worked with. ♦

SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE is holder of the Buddhist and Shambhala lineages of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He has received teachings from many of the great Buddhist masters of this century, including Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche, and his father, Trungpa Rinpoche. In 1995, he was recognized as the incarnation of the great nineteenth-century Buddhist teacher Mipham Rinpoche.

Going Nowhere

The Zen practice of just sitting, says Lewis Richmond, doesn't help us reach our destination. It allows us to stop having one. But how do you "go" nowhere?

THE PRACTICE OF "JUST-AWARENESS" is the essence of Zen meditation. The Japanese word for this, *shikantaza*, is usually translated as "just sitting," but Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Zen, specifically taught that zazen is "beyond sitting or lying down." Shikantaza is more than the mere physical posture of sitting, although it certainly includes that. Fundamentally it is the practice of just being here, being present—except

Painting by Keith Abbott

that we are not rocks or stones, but aware beings—so I think "just-awareness" more fully captures the essence of the term. But awareness of what? That is the first question.

Most people new to zazen think that it's a skill that can be learned, like *tai chi*. We come to zazen instruction and are told to sit a certain way, hold the hands just so, keep the eyes open, and pay attention to the breath. It seems rather easy; we look forward to becoming more accomplished in it. But Dogen admonishes us, "Zazen is not learning to do concentration." He seems to be implying that our ambitions to improve are not quite on the mark.

When he was young, Gautama Buddha went around to various yoga teachers and learned how to develop trance states and psychic powers. He became very accomplished at these; he "improved." But in the end he felt that all these practices missed the fundamental point. No matter how good we get at something, eventually we grow old, become sick, and die; all our powers come to naught. Gautama's conclusion was that all of these concentration practices really didn't work, because in the end they're just states of consciousness to go into and come out of; they don't really address the ground of being or the cause of human suffering.

Leaving all those practices behind, Gautama recalled a time when, as a child, he sat under a tree and spontaneously felt ease and joy. Remembering this moment, Gautama sat down under a tree again—the bodhi tree—and reentered the natural childlike state of pure awareness. A young child doesn't think much about gaining something, about being different or better. The child just rests in her immediate experience. That's the point of another of Dogen's zazen instructions: "Do not desire to become a buddha." Don't try to get somewhere, to do something. Instead, be like a little child—naturally joyous, naturally aware.

But what does this really mean—naturally aware? In early Chinese Zen, many people thought it meant to clear the mind of all thinking. The Sixth Ancestor of Zen tried to correct this mistake, saying, "Emptying the mind and dwelling in emptiness is not Zen." So stopping one's thinking is not the goal, though many meditators may think that.

Once someone asked my teacher Suzuki Roshi, "What do I do about all my thinking in zazen?"

"What's wrong with thinking?" Suzuki replied.

Dogen's own instruction on this point is the famous injunction, "Think not-thinking." Probably most people who hear that think it means we're not supposed to think, that thoughts are somehow a hindrance, and that the goal is a completely thought-free mind. But Dogen doesn't say, "Don't think." He says, "Think." He uses a verb. We're being asked to think something, to make some kind of effort. But think what? How do we think not-thinking?

Suzuki Roshi used a beautiful phrase in explaining this point; he said that "think not-thinking" was "real thinking." This is an awareness that tracks exactly what's going on. So when you watch a plum blossom, he would say, you exactly track the flowering of the

blossom—no more, no less. That isn't like our usual thinking. Usually we're thinking about some big problem in our life, or what we did yesterday, or are going to do tomorrow.

We're not trying to stop our thinking, but we're also not paying particular attention to it either. Instead there's a kind of deep acceptance or tolerance about everything. Thus we come to rest not in the track of our thinking, but in that which thinks. But who or what is that? We are back to some deep ineffable question at the root of our existence, our just-awareness. In the midst of our childlike ease and joy, there is also some unusual and subtle effort.

Without that effort—that deep questioning that drove Gautama to leave the comfort of his princely position and wander the world as a homeless monk—zazen can quickly devolve into a boring, enervated plopping down on a cushion. One Japanese Zen teacher liked to call this kind of too-passive sitting "shikan-nothing." Shikan-nothing isn't quite it either.

So what is it?

The best, and most sincere, answer is that we actually cannot say. There is something inexplicable about it—not because it is secret, but because our human condition itself is inexplicable. And that's all right. All of us naturally want a spiritual practice we can understand or conceive of, and most of conventional religious practice is like that—prayer, ritual, chanting, visualization, and so on. These are all practices that can be conceived of and understood. Zazen is a different sort of practice—mysterious and yet as simple and familiar as our own hand. ♦

LEWIS RICHMOND leads a Zen meditation group, Vimala Sangha, in Mill Valley, California, and teaches at workshops and retreats throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In October 2008, he started a blog, "Aging as a Spiritual Practice."

Awakening the Body

Reginald Ray, a longtime meditation teacher and scholar in the Vajrayana tradition talks about how what we perceive as an obstacle—our often bothersome body—is the very gateway to realization.

LIKE MANY WESTERNERS, I always assumed that meditation was a "spiritual" phenomenon, which I took to mean that it somehow had to do with realms beyond the physical. For a long time I wasn't aware that I believed this, but in retrospect I see that I did. At the same time, it is also obvious that meditation practice actually tended to lead me in the direction of deeper engagement with the physical. Especially in intensives or on retreat, I would feel a considerable amount of physical discomfort, which I saw as an unfortunate and unnecessary diversion from what I was "really" supposed to be doing. I thought that if I could get rid of my discomfort, I would be able to progress more quickly in my practice. I didn't have a very clear idea of what "progressing" might mean, but it definitely did not include physical distress.

Most meditators suffer from two kinds of physical problems. First, we experience specific weak points such as sore knees, lower back pain, a kinky neck, tightness, tension or pain in the shoulders or upper back, and so on. Second, a general achiness comes over our bodies, particularly when we sit more intensively: everything seems to hurt at once—our legs are aching, our shoulders and neck are sore, our back is on fire. It came as a disappointing realization one day that while I might be able to alleviate or shift the specific "hot spots," the general achiness remained. In fact, it almost seemed that the more I was able to alleviate a specific complaint, the more achy my whole body became. I began to suspect that physical pain was just part of sitting on the cushion, at least for me. I found the prospect of endless physical pain dismal and depressing.

And then, like many who find themselves in just the place I was, I made a surprising discovery. Somewhere in the timeless terrain of a monthlong meditation intensive I had a particularly rough day. My whole body was a mass of pain—my ankles were stiff and crampy, my knees were sore, my legs ached, and I had separate and distinct complaints of

Painting by Tony Matthews

pain in my lower, middle, and upper back. We were in the midst of a long stretch of sitting, and my mind struggled mightily against the prospect of being trapped in this pain for an indeterminate amount of time. My mental state became more and more sore and inflamed and gradually I arrived at a point when I felt that I really could not stand the pain of both my mind and my body another second. I was a nuclear reactor that had attained critical mass and was about to explode.

And then something abruptly shifted. All of a sudden I was utterly free of physical discomfort. I had not dissociated—in fact I was much more fully in my body than before—but somehow I let go of my resistance and struggle. I surrendered to the pain rather than continued to fight against it. My body responded by relaxing. I sat in utter peace, feeling the contentment of having a physical body—enjoying my breathing, feeling the pleasure of my heart beating and blood coursing through my veins, feeling the rich, complex, abundant life of energy going on within, fully present to the other meditators in the room and to the falling night outside.

That moment helped me to understand that the pain in my body was not an independent phenomenon, but was somehow tied up with my mind. When my mind changed, so did the feeling in my body. In fact, it seemed clear that my physical pain was a reflection of my mental state— a mental state characterized by ambition and aggression toward my body.

The body, it turns out, is an ally in meditation practice. Physical distress in sitting calls our mind away from its fantasies of spiritual attainment, and brings it back to the here and now. In Buddhism, this is known as synchronizing body and mind; through practice, our mind attunes itself more and more with the body, the concrete and earthy reality of our situation. This is the meaning of paying attention to the breath in meditation: we cultivate the ability to pay attention and be present to this subtle manifestation of our physicality.

The more deeply one journeys into the world of meditation, the more one finds oneself working with the body. At a certain point, the body seems to be the main thing you are working with. As the great Buddhist tantric yogi Saraha remarked, "In my wanderings, I have visited shrines and other places of pilgrimage, but I have not seen another shrine as blissful as my body." We need to realize that our body is not a beginning point, not a jumping off point to something else. Rather, the body is itself the pathway to realization, and, at its deepest level, the embodiment of enlightenment itself. ♦

REGINALD RAY is founder of the Dharma Ocean Foundation in Crestone, Colorado, where he teaches "Meditating With the Body." His latest book is Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body.

Silencing the Inner Critic

The nagging, negative voice of self-judgment, says Christina Feldman, is a powerful affliction best met with courage, kindness, and understanding.

Unruly beings are like space.
There's not enough time to overcome them.
Overcoming these angry thoughts.
Is like defeating all of our enemies.

—SHANTIDEVA

THE BUDDHA SAT beneath the bodhi tree on the eve of his enlightenment and was assailed by Mara, representing all of the afflictions we meet in the landscape of our minds: worry and restlessness, dullness and resistance, craving, aversion, and doubt. The one affliction that did not make an appearance in this story is the powerful voice of the inner critic—the inner judge that can torment us on a daily basis, undermining our well-being and distorting our relationship with life. The inner critic is the voice of shame, blame, belittlement, aversion, and contempt. To many of us, it is so familiar that it seems almost hardwired into our hearts.

Before exploring the nature of the judgmental mind, it is essential to mark the distinction between the voice of the inner critic and our capacity for discernment and discriminating wisdom. Discriminating wisdom is what brings us to our cushion to meditate and inspires us to act in ways that bring suffering and harm to an end. Discriminating wisdom is the source of every wise act and word. Discernment draws upon ethics, compassion, and wisdom and teaches us moment by moment to discover the Buddha in ourselves and in others.

The inner critic is a creature of a different nature. With the inner critic, we may still come to our cushion but we come accompanied by a story that tells us we are unworthy or inadequate. With the inner critic, we still act, speak, and make choices, yet moment by moment

Painting by Barbara Bash

we feel endlessly criticized, compared, and belittled. The judgmental mind draws not upon all that is wise but upon Mara, the patterns of aversion, doubt, ill will, and fear. Rarely is the judgmental heart the source of wise action or speech, nor does it lead to the end of suffering. The judgmental mind is suffering and compounds suffering. It suffocates ethics—the guidelines of kindness and care—and it wounds our hearts and lives.

The essence of mindfulness is to see, to understand, and to find freedom within everything that feels intractable and clouded by confusion. Mindfulness is a present-moment experience, concerned with embracing and understanding the entirety of each moment with tenderness, warmth, and interest. In the light of this engaged attention, we discover it is impossible to hate or fear anything we truly understand, including the judgmental mind. We begin to see that the greatest barrier to compassion and freedom is not the pain or adversity we meet in our lives but the ongoing tendency to criticize and fear the simple truths of the moment. Instead of just wanting the judgmental mind to go away, we could begin to ask what it is teaching us.

Although it may seem so, we were not born with a judgmental, aversive mind. It is a learned way of seeing and relating, and it can be unlearned. Looking closely at the judgmental mind, we see that it is rarely truthful or able to see the whole of anything. Instead, the judgmental mind is governed by seizing upon the particulars of ourselves and others and mistaking those particulars for the truth. But the path of awakening invites us to understand how this inner critic comes into being, to learn how to loosen its hold and power, and to rediscover all that is true within ourselves and others.

The Buddha taught that what we dwell upon becomes the shape of our mind. We can learn to pause and to listen deeply to the voice of the inner judge, with its endless symphony of blame and shame, and we can surround it with the kindness of mindfulness. We can investigate the truth of its story. We can begin to sense that the inner critic truly warrants compassion, as does any suffering and affliction. Instead of fleeing the painfulness of the judgmental mind we can turn toward it, sensing that everything we are invited to understand in the journey of awakening can be understood within the judgmental mind. Letting go, compassion, the emptiness of self, equanimity, and wisdom are the lessons we are invited to explore with this most powerful of afflictions. We are encouraged to imagine a life free from ill will, blame, and shame—a life and a heart of compassion, wisdom, and peace. ♦

CHRISTINA FELDMAN is a cofounder of Gaia House, a Buddhist meditation center in Devon, England, and a senior teacher in the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. She is the author of Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World.

Making Peace

It's easy to get tripped up by our emotions as we encounter the challenges of our everyday life. Pema Chödrön offers us two simple practices that can bring out our innate awareness and kindness.

Transformation

This is a deceptively simple practice, but it has the power to uncover your fundamental wisdom and intelligence and connect you with your own courage, strength, and insight. The practice works like this. You're walking along and you're in a bubble of your thoughts, which is a pretty widespread experience. Whenever you notice it, you pause, and if it's

Photo by Liza Matthews

practical under the circumstance, you stop, and if you can sit down, you sit down. (If that stopping in the middle turns out to be humorous, fine. Humor is actually better than profound.) At that point, you take three conscious breaths: in and out, in and out, in and out. Then, you just go on with your life.

It's good to do this practice many times for very short periods. There's no need to put a serious expression on your face, grit your teeth, and make yourself be there. Just allow the contrast between your bubble and the open space arise. You will be there, because that's what happens automatically. Don't criticize yourself if you're there for only one of those conscious breaths. The breaths are conscious to serve as a contrast to how unconscious we are most of the time.

It's actually not possible to harm another being with your actions or words or even your thoughts, if you're conscious. It all happens when you go unconscious. Something in you just has to turn off for you to do harm. So, in this little practice, you practice being conscious for these short periods, which connects you with the natural and self-existing openness of your mind and the world. In those moments, insight can arise just like the ringing of a bell. We have the intelligence to know the consequences of action and to see things in a bigger perspective.

Compassionate Abiding

We need to develop toward ourselves the kind of friendship we have with someone we weathered difficult times with. We need to develop unconditional friendship with ourselves, unconditional warmth toward ourselves, even when—or especially when—we are really appalled by what we see. That unwanted place is somewhere we usually don't want to get at, but that place needs to lose its terror for us, because all aggression comes from that place. All prejudice, fundamentalism, terrorism, ability to torture, kill, rape, burn down buildings, and destroy come from that place of being haunted by a feeling of "not okay."

The practice of compassionate abiding helps us cultivate warmth toward the unwanted or the unspeakable parts of ourselves. Natural warmth is something very familiar to us all. It's not necessarily the external warmth of the sun, but an internal warmth, the kind of warmth that comes from deep gratitude or appreciation, a thought of someone we admire, or even from relief, a sweater on a cold day. The practice of cultivating this kind of warmth toward our unspeakable parts doesn't have to be dramatic. It's just a practice to do when you get hooked. The warmth is there already. We are just letting it expand a bit.

Here's how it works. When you are hooked by strong emotions or trains of thought, you breathe in with the idea of feeling completely the hooked feeling. If that hooked quality is

already highly charged, you breathe in the anger, jealousy, loneliness, anxiety, depression, whatever it is. You breathe in deeply with the idea of inviting the feeling in. Then, you relax on the out-breath. You breathe in again and relax on the out-breath.

It's called compassionate abiding because you are abiding with the most unwanted parts of yourself. Normally, if you're feeling jealous or angry or you're suffering in any way, you have a knee-jerk response of wanting to reject, to get rid of that feeling. In the compassionate abiding practice, you have that feeling, but then you do something counter-habitual: you invite it in by breathing it in and then relaxing on the out-breath.

Compassionate abiding is a way to allow your emotional energy not to get stuck but to move. You breathe in very deeply, open to the quality of the experience of "I don't want" or "I hate you" or the quality of panic, hopelessness, resentment, or bitterness of any kind. Instead of making yourself bad and repressing your feeling, which simply justifies yourself and escalates the habitual emotional reaction, you stay present and open without escalating. It's yet another means of interrupting the momentum of your emotional reaction. It opens up the space but it is also very warm. ♦

Renowned Buddhist nun PEMA CHÖDRÖN *is the author of many best-selling books on applying mindfulness and loving-kindness to everyday life. Her latest is* Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves From Old Habits and Fears.

Photo by Antonio Mora Garcia

The Whole Way

We struggle between solitude and practical engagement, thinking that one or the other provides the path we need. The Way cannot be divided like that, Joan Sutherland tells us. Like the water system of the high desert, it flows in every direction and is found wherever we decide to tap into it.

BEING HUMAN is a complicated affair, and Buddhism began and continues to evolve as a response to this challenge. There are many forms of Buddhism and a variety of Buddhist practices, including meditation, ceremony, study, service, art, and devotion. Practice is key, because it bridges idea and embodiment; it helps make the Way real. In the Asian cultures in

which Buddhism first arose, there has been, broadly speaking, a distinction between monastic and lay practice. There's obviously much that they share, but monastics and laypeople have often had different aspirations, which has led them to different forms of practice.

To a larger extent than we sometimes realize, Westerners have inherited this split. It's easier to recognize if you think of monastic practice as including the retreats that laypeople attend, with the perennial end-of-retreat question about how to bring the experience into daily life. So I'll speak of cloistered practice, which is meant to include both monasticism and lay retreat experience, and daily life, which is pretty much everything else.

Many of us take for granted that we're moving from one world into another as we leave the retreat center and head for home. Some of us believe that the truer practice, the one that will lead to enlightenment, is held in the monastery or the retreat, and that anything else is second best. Some would argue that only lay practice and immersion in the world can open the Way.

Last year I moved to the high desert of northern New Mexico, where the presence and absence of water are never far from our thoughts: monsoon rains in the summer, winter snows, water held for a season by rivers or a few hours in arroyos that flood and go dry again, water held for centuries in aquifers, bubbling up as natural springs. And from time immemorial we humans have joined the great cycle of wet and dry with our wells and irrigation ditches. Even with modern reservoirs and sewer lines, there's the strong sense here that life has been sustained by deep wells and a net of acequias, the ditches that run through fields and along the sides of roads, even in some neighborhoods of the state capital.

This is how I've come to think of awakening. It's everywhere—as sudden and complete as the crash of thunder on a summer afternoon, as promising as a distant smudge of cottonwoods revealing the presence of water. There are times of drought, too, when the very idea of awakening seems to have dried up under an unrelenting sky. We might think of awakening as something that happens inside us, but, as with a landscape, we also happen inside it.

Awakening is a force as fundamental and all pervasive as gravity or electromagnetism, and so we try to establish a relationship with it, tap into the resource, coax awakening into causing our particular corner of the world to flourish. We practice, and it's just as though we're digging wells and ditches. At times we concentrate our energy and go deep into the underground sources of water. At others we stand on the ground and open the acequia gates, letting our awareness pour across the land like water, which makes life possible wherever it spreads. Each is essential; neither has power without the other. A well without acequias is a hole with water at the bottom; an acequia without a source of water is a dry ditch.

Both the well of cloistered practice and the acequias of daily life have their mysteries, their beauties, and their difficulties. To be sure, some things happen more readily in one mode or the other, but if our aspiration is for an awakening that leaves nothing outside itself, this seems like an argument for the complementary nature of cloistered practice and daily life.

Photo by Antonio Mora Garcia

Even as we appreciate how they can work together, retreat practice and daily life can still appear to be in conflict with each other. This is probably rooted in a split between a cloistered and a worldly turn of mind that many of us bring to practice. In the midst of one, we long for the other. When we're awake in the early hours doing our taxes, the starlit, pine-scented walk to the meditation hall can sound like heaven. It goes the other way, too: a woman's old sailing buddy calls to say that while she's in retreat he'll be out on the open sea in the yacht she used to crew on, and she wonders for a few moments about the turn her life has taken. Someone wakes up in the city every morning, pierced by a deep longing for silence and solitude; someone else is surprised by the urgency with which she wants to see her young son on the last day of retreat.

The institutions of Buddhism can, wittingly or unwittingly, reinforce this split. Most of the Buddhism that first came to the West in the twentieth century had a strong monastic cast, even when it was being practiced by laypeople. Over time, many established centers have encouraged the development of householder practice, while new ways of

practice have emerged that don't make the monastic assumption at all. But there's still a pretty strong, often unconscious bias toward cloistered practice, with householder practice seen as an adaptation.

Why do many of us assume that this split is inevitable? Why, in point of fact, do many of us experience it that way? What is the nature of longing? Is it just that humans are wired to yearn for the thing that isn't there? Is it instead a deep desire for wholeness? Is it the symptom of something not yet resolved or out of balance in the ways we practice—a symptom that, if we paid attention to it, might lead to greater health? Are we unwilling to accept that true apprenticeship offers a great deal and also asks for sacrifice? How does longing relate to aspiration and to bodhichitta, the desire for enlightenment, so that one can be helpful to others? What about when the longing, the feeling that something is missing, eventually drops away, because, whatever the circumstances, nothing seems to be missing anymore?

The more we don't take the split between the cloistered and the daily for granted, the more a rich field of inquiry opens up. Over time, someone in apprenticeship to awakening is not so buffeted by the movement from cloistered practice to daily life. She becomes aware that there's really only one practice going on, and its location at any given time becomes less and less critical. The pure lands on either side of the boundary are receding, while the border town grows. This unified practice is simpler and more pervading at the same time; it's like breathing. Inhale and exhale. Turning away and turning toward. Down and deep, out and wide. Wells and acequias.

What once seemed like two activities or focuses of attention are now aspects of one. You can't hold your breath forever, and you can't breathe out forever, either. We don't call this inhale-and-exhale, we call it breathing. In the same way, the apprentice begins to experience one whole practice, one whole path under her feet wherever she is. Awakening is the unity, the breathing that is made of inhale and exhale. If at the start the apprentice has a sense that the continuity in her life is provided by the self, a profound shift of allegiance eventually occurs. She sees that the self rises and falls; she climbs into the self when she needs it, and sometimes when she's deeply absorbed in meditation or art or physical exertion it disappears altogether. Underneath it all, awakening unfolds with each new experience, and it won't be complete in this lifetime until she draws her last breath.

What the apprentice to awakening comes to see is that she's not bringing something she gets from formal practice into the rest of her life; she's allowing that practice to change her, to soak in and stain her completely, so that she is now that stained person in every moment of her life. Awakening is also her willingness to be soaked and stained by other things—to feel the caress, to take the hit, to be devastated by a bit of news from the other

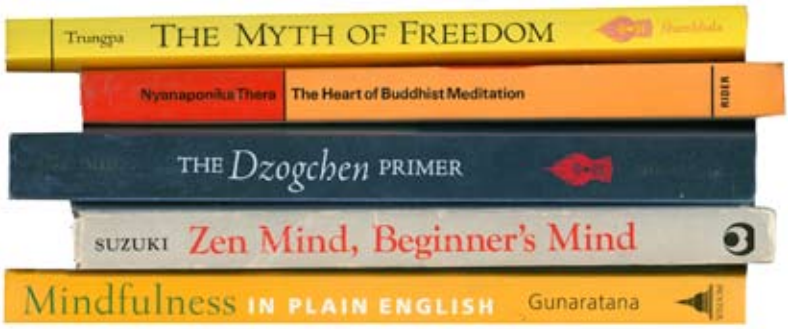
side of the world, to let an encounter with beauty change her mind about everything. Allowing all these things to break open her heart is an essential part of the apprenticeship because, without it, awakening can't be whole.

Sometimes the long arc of awakening is punctuated by great breakthroughs. In an instant, the true nature of things becomes vivid. The apprentice sees the emptiness of everything, meaning that she experiences how big and radiant everything is, and how everything is connected to everything else. People have these experiences in the meditation hall after years of practice, and they have them spontaneously as children, or in the most unlikely of circumstances. Awakening isn't snobbish about where and when it reveals itself, so we probably shouldn't be either. A breakthrough will leak away, though, unless we ground the experience. Without a way to deepen and broaden it, to maintain a living relationship with it, it tends to fade into a fond or frustrating memory of what might have been.

Here's where the practice of daily life can be helpful. Awakening doesn't happen only like a bolt of lightning; sometimes it's a dawning awareness that the sky has been gradually getting lighter for some time. In the midst of our daily lives, we become aware of domestic, local moments of seeing the emptiness of things. A man starts to tell a familiar story whose meaning was set sometime in the last century about some relationship, and he finds that he can't get past the first sentence; suddenly the habitual narrative seems unreal, completely made up, even ridiculously funny. That's also seeing emptiness, just a particular emptiness rather than the emptiness of everything all at once. If we let the floor be pulled out from under us and for a moment fall freely, that moment of falling freely is a moment of breakthrough. With practice, we won't try to catch ourselves too soon, to reconstitute the self that has for a moment vanished. Crucially, if these moments of falling freely are recognized and appreciated, they tend to leak away less readily than the big breakthroughs; they accumulate and cause lasting change, and this can be tremendously encouraging. If the breakthroughs give us the biggest perspective of all, this falling freely shows us what that looks like in any moment of any day.

The fundamental promise of Buddhism is that any of us can awaken. As Buddhism has evolved, it has become clear that awakening is not just an individual matter. We are all in this world together, and we are all awakening together. So a matter of great importance is how we encourage practice that doesn't compromise either the awakening of the individual or awakening in the field that holds us all—that sees both as essential to the uncompartmentalized Way. What an extraordinary, beautiful challenge to be given. ♦

JOAN SUTHERLAND is a longtime practitioner in the Rinzai Zen tradition and founder of The Open Source, a network of practice communities headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

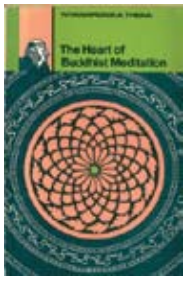


A Basic Meditation Library

IT'S SOMETIMES DIFFICULT for meditation students to decide which meditation book is the best for them among the hundreds now in print. So we came up with eight suggestions for a basic meditation library, including a few classics and some newer books that might someday become classics. None of them is a philosophical text. They all present meditation from the experiential and instructional point of view. You hear stories of books that people have stumbled upon, books that changed their life. These are those kinds of books.

MINDFULNESS IN PLAIN ENGLISH
By Bhante Gunaratana, 2002, Wisdom Publications

Bhante Gunaratana sets the tone of his book on the first page of chapter 1, when he tells us that meditation takes "gumption." This is an extremely up-to-date book written in an approachable, engaging way. The instructions are pithy and practical, and often by the numbers. The book also serves as a very thorough FAQ for new (and not-so-new) meditators.

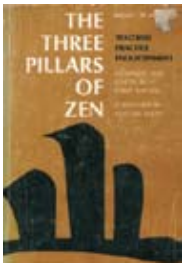


THE HEART OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION
Nyanaponika Thera, 1965, Samuel Weiser

Sri Lankan monk Nyanaponika Thera's classic lives up to its title. It presents the foundations of Buddhist meditation in the simple, lucid, and methodical style that is the mark of Theravada. It begins with an easy-to-grasp description of bare attention and then presents traditional mindfulness practice in meticulous detail. The last half of the book includes material from traditional Buddhist texts that ground the book in the original words of the Buddha and the experiences of early practitioners.

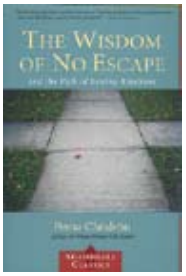
ZEN MIND, BEGINNER'S MIND
Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice
Suzuki Roshi, 1970, Weatherhill

It is said that each student should listen to the teachings as if they are directed personally to them. That's not hard to do so when reading the short segments of informal teachings that make up this book. Suzuki Roshi is so steeped in beginner's mind that you feel he is casually presenting zazen to you as a friend would offer a favorite recipe.



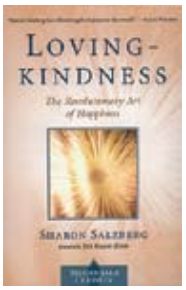
THREE PILLARS OF ZEN
Teaching, Practice, Enlightenment
Phillip Kapleau, 1965, Anchor

Phillip Kapleau opens this classic with his teacher Yasutani Roshi's lectures and interviews, which guide you gently into the intricacies of zazen. Later the book provides first-hand accounts of enlightenment experiences, concluding with the poignant exchange between a dying woman and Harada Roshi, Yasutani's teacher, wherein Harada confirms the woman's enlightenment in the last five days of her life. The excellent supplements at the back include a short text by the great master Dogen Zenji, posture pictures, and a detailed glossary.



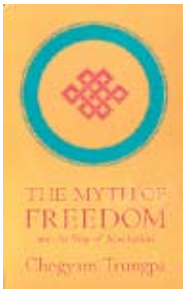
THE WISDOM OF NO ESCAPE
and the Path of Loving-Kindness
Pema Chödrön, 1991, Shambhala

Pema Chödrön delivered the talks that form this book in the mornings during a monthlong group meditation retreat, and they have an easy touch that reminds you of early morning light. They are personal, simple, and encouraging. The technique of mindfulness meditation is laid out concisely in one of the chapters and the Mahayana practice of sending good and taking bad is laid out in another. The spirit of loving-kindness, humor, and groundedness pervades every chapter.



LOVINGKINDNESS
The Revolutionary Art of Happiness
Sharon Salzberg, 1995, Shambhala

This book has a soft yet courageous tone that befits the style of meditation it lays out. Salzburg describes the Buddha's way as a "systematic, integrated path that moves the heart out of isolating contraction into true connection." She gracefully induces us to practice metta—loving-kindness—as a means to deal with the fear that bedevils our lives and our relationships. Each chapter unfolds another aspect of metta practice and concludes with practical exercises to cultivate kindness.



THE MYTH OF FREEDOM
and the Way of Meditation
Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 1976, Shambhala

While the Vajrayana teachings are generally considered "advanced," Trungpa Rinpoche shows how the basic approach to meditation can be tinged with the Vajrayana view of enlightened energy from the outset. Drawn from talks delivered during his first years in America, the language is fresh and conversational, imparting a kitchen-sink level of understanding of the Buddhist teachings. The book's size is deceptive: in a small space it presents the complete path from the truth of suffering to tantra.

THE DZOGCHEN PRIMER
Embracing the Spiritual Path According to the Great Perfection
Editor, Marcia Schmidt, 2002, Shambhala

The teachings of the Great Perfection (*Dzogchen*) are nothing if not sublime. This anthology presents a lovely and spacious view of mind and a tray of appetizers from more than a dozen teachers. It is rich with the similes and metaphors that Dzogchen is famous for, such as when Tulku Ugyen writes "Sentient beings are like the space held within a tightly closed fist, while buddhas are fully open, all-encompassing." How to open the fist and appreciate that vast space is both hinted at and proclaimed on every page. ♦