



NEWCOMERS

- WELCOME, GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES



WELCOME TO ALBA

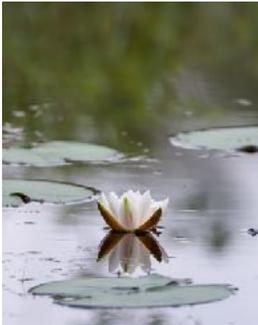
Hello and welcome to ALBA!

We hope you find the following information helpful, whether you are a beginner, have learnt to meditate in another spiritual tradition or within a secular context.

Here is a summary of some of the basic teachings of Buddhism and mindfulness meditation in the context of ALBA retreats and Days of Practice.

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

- In a nutshell



The Buddha's teachings are founded on the realisation that suffering is inherent in human existence. Based on his own experience he formulated the Four Noble Truths, the truth of suffering, that there is a cause, that there is an end to suffering and that there is a path to follow. All his teachings and those that followed in later Buddhist traditions are based on this key formulation. These truths are to be understood individually.

TAKING REFUGE



Making a commitment to this path of practice is reflected in the practice of Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem. This means taking refuge in:

The Buddha

- representing Enlightenment

The Dhamma

- the teachings which point to the truth of the way things are

The Sangha

- the community of practitioners on the path who embody wisdom, compassion and virtue

The formal taking of refuge at our events is optional.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS - WISDOM



There is dukkha
(suffering, stress, dissatisfaction)

There is the origin or cause of dukkha
(craving)

There is the cessation of dukkha - Nirodha
(there is an end to suffering)

There is a way leading to the cessation of
dukkha (The Noble Eightfold Path)

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH



The Noble Eightfold Path is the fourth Noble Truth and the basis on which the Buddha's teachings rest.

The eight limbs or factors of the path are:

Right View, Right Intention i.e. **Wisdom**

Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood

i.e. **Virtue**

Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration

i.e. **Meditation**

The path is often shown in the form of a wheel called the Dhammacakka, a beautiful image which helps demonstrate the interrelationship of the various factors and of the three training principles of **Wisdom, Virtue** and **Meditation** with **mindfulness** being integral to all aspects of the path.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS - VIRTUE



The ethical and moral principles that we live our lives by are seen as fundamental to good practice and the development of insight. In lay life the **Five**

Precepts are encouraged and observed, all of them based on the principle of non-harming. They purify the heart and help develop a harmonious relationship with others and the world.

Harmlessness: refraining from intentionally taking the life of any living creature - practicing loving kindness.

Trustworthiness: refraining from taking that which is not given - practicing generosity.

Responsible sexual behaviour: refraining from inappropriate sexual behaviour - calming the senses.

Right speech: refraining from untruthful speech - speaking truthfully and mindfully.

Sobriety: refraining from taking intoxicating drinks or drugs that lead to carelessness (but do take your medication!) - practicing mindfulness, developing attentiveness and awareness.

MEDITATION



WHAT IS IT?

Meditation is the practice of calming and investigating the mind to enable the arising of insight.

As we begin to understand how the mind creates suffering and how the roots of suffering are caused by the fundamental drives of greed, hatred and delusion, we begin to uncover the path to true happiness.

FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

The best starting point for the practice mindfulness meditation is outlined in the **Four Foundations of Mindfulness** (as described in the Satipatthana Sutta) which encourages:

- Being aware of the **body**, including sensations in different parts of the body as we breathe.

- Identifying the quality of **feelings** and sensations that arise in the body as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

- Knowing the different states of **mind**

- Noticing and reflecting on all **phenomena** that arises in the mind, including the hindrances, the factors of awakening and the Four Noble Truths.

Through developing calm and clarity of mind we come to recognize the three characteristics of existence, **Impermanence**, **Suffering** and **Not self**, thus gaining insight into our suffering and the release from suffering.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR MEDITATION

~ Posture & Breath



It is best to start by adopting a suitable meditation posture, usually sitting upright, one that is both alert and relaxed. With the eyes gently or partly closed and putting all expectations aside, we keep our attention on a neutral object of experience such as the breath. We find that after

a while and with some ups and downs, the mind and body begin to calm and settle down.

We can meditate in a variety of postures, such as walking, standing or lying down, as well as the more familiar sitting postures, which could be on a chair, on a cushion or on a stool. We may choose from a range of objects to focus attention on other than the breath, such as scanning the sensations that arise in and on the body.

~ *Wandering mind*

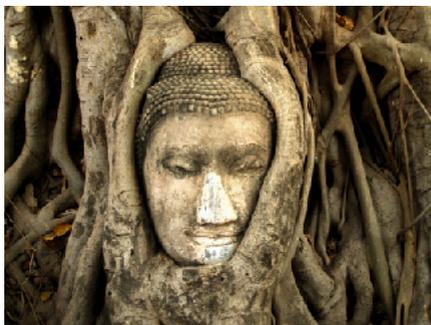


Mindfulness meditation is noticing when the mind has wandered and repeatedly bringing attention back into present moment awareness. If we take the breath as our focus we notice the changing sensations of the in-breath and out-breath. The sensations of breathing may be felt subtly in the movement of air at the nostrils or more deeply in the chest and abdomen.

As we sit, we notice that the mind is very easily distracted. This is not a failure; it is a sign that we are noticing what our minds do most of the time – which is jump from one thing to another.

We develop awareness by sustaining attention on the process of experience with an attitude of kindness, patience, and relaxed curiosity, attending afresh to each new moment of experience.

~ *Our Experience*



We grow to notice how mental and physical phenomena make up all our experience, and how it is driven by longstanding and entrenched habits and patterns of thought and feeling. As we do so we observe that everything we experience is constantly changing and begin to understand how this relates to our suffering.

~ *Virtue*



Virtuous behaviour leads to more peaceful and settled states of mind in everyday life as well as during meditation, allowing us to see more clearly into the cause of our suffering. We begin to see how the training principles of virtue, meditation and wisdom support and condition one another, and how mindfulness is always present whatever our experience.

~ *Qualities of the heart*



Other complementary Buddhist meditation practices cultivate beautiful qualities of the heart, such as loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. These enhance not only our sense of well-being, but also how we relate to others and the world. We find ourselves being kinder towards others and more patient, which improves the quality and harmony of our relationships.

~ *The Hindrances*



The difficulties we encounter when we meditate are part and parcel of our meditation practice. The main hindrances are **craving, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness** and **doubt**. There are several tools that can be applied to help navigate these hindrances to a peaceful state of mind until we are able to stay with and not grasp at pleasant sensations, feelings and thoughts as they arise, or pushing unpleasant ones away. We gradually learn how to relax accepting them for what they are and allowing whatever we are experiencing to come and go. In doing so we gradually weaken the power of our habitual mental and physical reactive patterns, gaining insight as we do so into their impermanent, insubstantial nature.

~ *Right effort*



Maintaining a sense of ease in the face of physical or mental discomfort, supported by reflection and with patient enquiry and wise attention, is key to the arising of insight. Problems arise if we become too forceful, have a strong tendency to self-criticism or become overwhelmed by our experience. It is important to cultivate a sense of kindness towards ourselves as we attend to our experience, maintaining an attitude of relaxed curiosity that refines our reactions and clarifies understanding.

~ *Regular practice*

Meditation is a skill that is best developed through regular practice, not only in our sitting practice but also in our daily lives. Beginning with sitting for a few minutes a day we can gradually increase the time and as we do so we begin to feel the benefits of learning to trust in present moment awareness, simply being with our experience just as it is. We may notice less reactivity, more openness and more kindness.

Sharing our practice with others enhances our practice. ALBA offers Days of Practice and retreats in the company of others together with an experienced teacher. This not only inspires and enhances our practice, but we find that we become more mindful and better able to co-exist in greater harmony with others as we go about our ordinary daily activities.

A short and very helpful introduction to meditation practice is available on page 19.² Listening to recordings of guided meditations can also be a great resource.^{3,4}

~ *When it gets too much*



Should you find yourself experiencing strong physical discomfort, gently adjust your posture. Or if you begin to experience mental or emotional distress, feel free to just stop, open your eyes, and if necessary, stand up and simply stand for a bit. If that is not enough, you may find that going for a walk is helpful. In each case gently give yourself some time to assess how best to proceed.

MEDITATION AND MENTAL HEALTH



Meditation and mindfulness can be extremely rewarding for the practitioner, offering many benefits that improve emotional health and a deeper understanding of one's mind.

Many of these benefits come from challenging our assumptions and understanding. This can ultimately be very enriching but sometimes we encounter challenges that may prove more difficult to work with on our own. Because it can be helpful to talk about them and ask questions, all our events provide opportunities for questions and answers with the leader of the event.

If you are experiencing more serious challenges in your life, meditation alone may well not be sufficient for your needs. Please seek appropriate support when necessary and take the time to read through the accompanying information and advice on meditation and mental health that is offered below.

It is important to know that our events are not intended to offer help or treatment for mental health conditions. So, whilst a pre-existing mental health condition does not exclude anyone from attending a retreat or Day of Practice, if you have any doubts it may be advisable to discuss the idea of attending a silent environment with a mental health professional before attending.

The leaflet "Meditating in Safety" (created independently of ALBA) describes some of the adverse effects that can be experienced when meditating and offers some useful advice.

<https://meditatinginsafety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/A5-Student-Leaflet.pdf>

WISHING YOU ALL
THE GREATEST OF BENEFITS
AND HAPPINESS THAT THIS
PRACTICE CAN BRING



USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

1. Ajahn Sumedho: The Four Noble Truths

<https://amaravati.org/dhamma-books/the-four-noble-truths/>

2. Ajahn Sucitto: Introduction to insight meditation

<https://amaravati.org/dhamma-books/introduction-to-insight-meditation/>

3. Here is a link to a meditation led by one of the senior nuns on one of our days of practice

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14BbkE+DMdYB4HL47dX09TdcQWTbvhv_2s/view?

4. The following is a meditation led by an experienced member of the ALBA team

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SjvwclkgYJMT-db1HS8S-TP1o9FZJ8x/view>

A wealth of material can also be found on the Amaravati and ALBA websites

<https://amaravati.org/>
<http://alba.amaravati.org>

Further suggested reading

<https://forestsangha.org/teachings/books>

PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Courtesy of www.rawpixel.com; www.pexels.com

Page 8: Sitting Buddha Statue at The Gal Vihara, Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka.

Page 11: The Fairy Queen Takes an Airy Drive in a Light Carriage, a Twelve-in-hand, drawn by Thoroughbred Butterflies (1870) by Richard Doyle. Original from The MET Museum.

Page 12: Buddha at Wat Mahathat in Ayutthaya, Thailand.

Page 15: Snow from Momoyogusa—Flowers of a Hundred Generations (ca. 1909–1910) by Kamisaka Sekka. Original from the The New York Public Library.

Page 16: Beach at Cabasson (1891–1892) by Henri-Edmond Cross. Original from The Art Institute of Chicago.

Page 17: Claude Monet's Impression, Sunrise (1872). Original from Wikimedia Commons.

Page 19: Sunflower by Charles Demuth. Original from Yale University Art Gallery.

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