



## SESSION 2

### DEFINITION OF MEDIATION & OBSERVATION MANAGEMENT

#### The Real Meaning of Meditation

What is meditation? How does it work? Can meditation help you achieve genuine peace and happiness in today's hectic, often chaotic world?

**1**

: To engage in contemplation or reflection

**2**

: To engage in mental exercise (as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness

**1**

: To focus one's thoughts on : reflect on or ponder over

**2**

: To plan or project in the mind : INTEND, PURPOSE

The act or process of spending time in quiet thought: the act or process of meditating

An expression of a person's thoughts on something



## Full Definition of MEDITATION

1

A discourse intended to express its author's reflections or to guide others in contemplation

2

The act or process of meditating

See meditation defined for English-language learners

See meditation defined for kids



Meditation is a word that has come to be used loosely and inaccurately in the modern world. That is why there is so much confusion about how to practice it. Some people use the word *meditate* when they mean thinking or contemplating; others use it to refer to daydreaming or fantasizing. However, meditation (*dhyana*) is not any of these.

Meditation is a precise technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state. It is the means for fathoming all the levels of ourselves and finally experiencing the center of consciousness within. Meditation is not a part of any religion; it is a science, which means that the process of meditation follows a particular order, has definite principles, and produces results that can be verified.

In meditation, the mind is clear, relaxed, and inwardly focused. When you meditate, you are fully awake and alert, but your mind is not focused on the external world or on the events taking place around you. Meditation requires an

inner state that is still and one-pointed so that the mind becomes silent. When the mind is silent and no longer distracts you, meditation deepens.

### **Turning Inward**

From childhood onward, we have been educated only to examine and verify things in the external world. No one has taught us how to look within, to find within, and to verify within. Therefore, we remain strangers to ourselves, while trying to get to know others. This lack of self-understanding is one of the main reasons our relationships don't seem to work, and why confusion and disappointment so often prevail in our life.

Very little of the mind is cultivated by our formal educational system. The part of the mind that dreams and sleeps—the vast realm of the unconscious which is the reservoir of all our experiences—remains unknown and undisciplined; it is not subject to any control. It is true that the whole of the body is in the mind, but the whole of the mind is not in the body. Except for the practice of meditation, there is no method to truly develop control over the totality of the mind.

The goal of meditation is to go beyond the mind and experience our essential nature—which is described as peace, happiness, and bliss. But as anyone who has tried to meditate knows, the mind itself is the biggest obstacle standing between ourselves and this awareness. The mind is undisciplined and unruly, and it resists any attempts to discipline it or to guide it on a particular path. The mind has a mind of its own. That is why many people sit for meditation and experience only fantasies, daydreams, or hallucinations. They never attain the stillness that distinguishes the genuine experience of deep meditation.

We are taught how to move and behave in the outer world, but we are never taught how to be still and examine what is within ourselves. When we learn to do this through meditation, we attain the highest of all joys that can ever be experienced by a human being. All the other joys in the world are momentary, but the joy of meditation is immense and everlasting. This is not an exaggeration; it is a truth supported by the long line of sages, both those who renounced the

world and attained truth, and those who continued living in the world yet remained unaffected by it.

Meditation is a practical means for calming yourself, for letting go of your biases and seeing what is, openly and clearly. It is a way of training the mind so that you are not distracted and caught up in its endless churning. Meditation teaches you to systematically explore your inner dimensions. It is a system of commitment, not commandment. You are committing to yourself, to your path, and to the goal of knowing yourself. But at the same time, learning to be calm and still should not become a ceremony or religious ritual; it is a universal requirement of the human body.

### **How to Cultivate Stillness**

Learning how to be still is the method of meditation. The process of cultivating stillness begins with the body. In the yoga tradition, you are guided by a competent teacher to keep your head, neck, and trunk straight while sitting in a meditative posture (*asana*). When you have learned to be comfortable in this posture, you should form a regular habit of practicing in the same posture at the same time and at the same place every day.

Find a simple, uncluttered, quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Sit on the floor with a cushion under you or in a firm chair, with your back straight and your eyes closed. Then bring your awareness slowly down through your body, allowing all of the muscles to relax except those that are supporting your head, neck, and back. Take your time and enjoy the process of letting go of the tension in your body. Meditation is the art and science of letting go, and this letting go begins with the body and then progresses to thoughts.

Once the body is relaxed and at peace, bring your awareness to your breath. Notice which part of your lungs are being exercised as you breathe. If you are breathing primarily with your chest you will not be able to relax. Let your breathing come primarily through the movement of the diaphragm. Continue to observe your breath without trying to control it. At first the breath may be

irregular, but gradually it will become smooth and even, without pauses and jerks.

Meditation is a process of giving your full attention to whatever object you have chosen. In this case you are choosing to be aware of the breath. Allow yourself to experience your breathing in an open and accepting way. Do not judge or attempt to control or change it. Open yourself so fully that eventually there is no distinction between you and the breathing. In this process many thoughts will arise in your mind: "Am I doing this right? When will this be over? Perhaps I should have closed the window. I forgot to make an important call. My neck hurts." Hundreds of thoughts may come before you and each thought will call forth some further response: a judgment, an action, an interest in pursuing the thought further, an attempt to get rid of the thought.

At this point, if you simply remain aware of this process instead of reacting to the thought, you will become aware of how restless your mind is. It tosses and turns like you do on a night when you cannot fall asleep. But that is only a problem when you identify with the mind and react to the various thoughts it throws at you. If you do, you will be caught in a never-ending whirlwind of restless activity. But if you simply attend to those thoughts when they arise, without reacting, or if you react and attend to the reaction, then they cannot really disturb you. Remember—it is not the thoughts that disturb you, but your reaction to them.

### **Paying Attention**

When you meditate, you give yourself an inner vacation.

Meditation is very simple. It is simply attending. You can begin by attending to your breath, and then if a thought comes, attend to it, notice it, be open to it—and it will pass. Then you can come back to the breath. Your normal response is to react to all your thoughts, and this keeps you ever busy in a sea of confusion. Meditation teaches you to attend to what is taking place within without reacting, and this makes all the difference. It brings you freedom from the mind and its meandering. And in this freedom you begin to experience who you are, distinct from your mental turmoil. You experience inner joy and contentment,

you experience relief and inner relaxation, and you find a respite from the tumult of your life. You have given yourself an inner vacation.

This inner vacation is not a retreat from the world but the foundation for finding inner peace. You must also learn to apply the principle of attending in your worldly activities, so that you can apply yourself in the world more effectively. Through practicing meditation you can learn to be open to what comes before you in your daily life and give it your full attention.

Ordinarily, you react to the experiences that come before you in much the same way that you react to your thoughts. If someone says something negative to you, you become angry or depressed. If you lose something, you become emotionally upset. Your mood depends on what comes before you, and, as a result, your life is like a roller coaster ride. You react before you have fully experienced what you are reacting to. You immediately interpret what you see or hear according to your expectation, fears, prejudices, or resistances. You short-circuit the experience, and thus limit yourself to one or two conditioned responses instead of responding to a situation openly and creatively.

But if you apply the principle of meditation to experiences that come before you, you can fully attend to what is taking place. You can attend to your initial reaction without reacting to your reaction: "Oh, look how threatened I feel by that." Let yourself be open to experiencing your reaction and it will move through you and allow other spontaneous responses to also come forward, so that you can select the one that is most helpful in that particular situation.

In this way meditation is very therapeutic. It not only leads to inner balance and stability, it also exposes your inner complexes, your immaturities, your unproductive reflexes and habits.

In this way meditation is very therapeutic. It not only leads to inner balance and stability, it also exposes your inner complexes, your immaturities, your unproductive reflexes and habits. Instead of living in these complexes and habits

and acting them out, they are brought to your awareness and you can give them your full attention. Only then will they clear.

### **Signs of Progress**

Have patience and do your practice systematically. Every action has a reaction. It is not possible for you to meditate and not receive benefits. You may not notice those benefits now, but slowly and gradually you are storing the *samskaras* (impressions) in the unconscious mind that will help you later. If you sow a seed today, you don't reap the fruit tomorrow, but eventually you will. It takes time to see results; be gentle with yourself.

Meditation means gently fathoming all the levels of your being, one level after another. Be honest with yourself. Don't care what others say about their experiences—keep your mind focused on your goal. It is your own mind that does not allow you to meditate. To work with your mind, you'll have to be patient; you'll have to work with yourself gradually.

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At first you may see progress in terms of physical relaxation and emotional calmness. Later you may notice other, more subtle changes. Some of the most important benefits of meditation make themselves known gradually over time and are not dramatic or easily observed. Persist in your practice and you will find that meditation is a means of freeing yourself from the worries that gnaw at you. Then you are free to experience the joy of being fully present, here and now.

### OBSERVATIONS MANAGEMENT

#### Meditation and Mindfulness for Stress Management

The NDSU Counseling Center's weekly **Meditation for Stress Management group** offers an opportunity to get together with other NDSU students, faculty, and staff to learn and practice mindfulness meditation for increased awareness,

presence, and well-being, in an informal, friendly environment. All levels are welcome, from absolute beginners to experienced practitioners. If what you read below about meditation and mindfulness interests you, please consider joining us!

### *Basic Definitions of Mindfulness*

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."--Jon Kabat-Zinn

"Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it."--Sylvia Boorstein

### *A Way of Being*

Mindfulness is a way of being which involves bringing awareness to the unfolding of present experience, moment-to-moment, with curiosity, openness and acceptance. It is not a set of techniques to be learned to escape unpleasant feelings, a "relaxation exercise," or a concrete goal to be reached, but rather an approach to life that can help you respond more skillfully even when challenging experiences do occur. It involves a process of becoming more aware and accepting towards all your experiences—including the unpleasant ones. This takes ongoing practice and commitment. It may seem counterintuitive at first, because it involves the idea of allowing and turning towards unpleasant experience, rather than trying to get rid of it control it. This approach is best understood through direct experience, beginning your own practice and trying it for yourself.

## *"Formal" and "Informal" Mindfulness Practice*

Mindfulness is usually cultivated via formal, concentrated meditation practice periods each day, with the idea that we can then carry this mindful awareness with us into in all our daily activities. Mindfulness is most helpful when it becomes a way of being, rather than an isolated experience during meditation or a set of techniques to be learned. The focus in mindfulness is on being, rather than doing.

### *Mindfulness Meditation ("Formal" Practice)*

The approach during mindfulness meditation (also referred to as vipassana, choiceless awareness, or open monitoring) involves fostering a spacious awareness and observing whatever comes up in the mind without judging it or getting caught up in it, welcoming and allowing experience with equanimity and "bare attention." Mindfulness involves pure moment-to-moment awareness: non-judgmental inner listening, silent observation, letting experiences unfold from moment to moment and accepting them as they are. In the ancient Pali language, this type of mindful investigation is called vipassana, or "seeing things as they really are" (literally, "special seeing"). Mindfulness is like a mirror, reflecting the reality of what is there without judgment.

During meditation, it is common for the mind to become either restless and distracted, or dull and sleepy, either of which can temporarily remove us from the present moment. As you notice either agitation or sleepiness of the mind, or your reactions to outside distractions, do your best to just observe and note these processes as they occur, without judgment. With practice, we begin to notice more and more quickly when our attention has wandered; we can then note what took our attention away, and gently bring our awareness back to the breath. There may be a tendency to become frustrated or impatient when we notice that our attention has wandered, but the more frustrated we get about it, the more distracting it becomes. Instead of fighting whatever might occur during meditation, attempt to accept that this is how things are right now. As best you can, have patience with yourself (however, if you do find yourself getting impatient, you can simply observe that reaction with equanimity).

Meditation is a chance to observe the ways in which all phenomena—thoughts, feelings, and sensations—arise and pass away into the stream of consciousness. Meditation offers an opportunity to observe many of the things that are going on in our minds all the time without our awareness, so just starting to become aware of them is important in itself. When we can observe and experience thoughts, feelings, and sensations with equanimity, we realize we are not these; we become less identified with them, and can rest in a calm, spacious awareness. As we do this, the mental activity tends to settle down more and more, like going under the surface of the ocean, beneath the activity of the waves to a deeper, more still place; or like the sky, whose basic nature does not change as the clouds and weather patterns pass through it.

#### *Basic Meditation Instructions*

- Bring attention to the breath
- Give full attention to the feeling of the breath as it goes in and out.
- Dwell in the present, moment by moment, breath by breath.
- Observe your mind with moment-to-moment awareness. When attention wanders, note it and then gently bring awareness back to the breath.
- Continue to watch the breath, accepting each moment as it is.

#### *Deepening Meditation Practice*

Once a measure of stability of attention is attained, you may begin to expand into "choiceless awareness" during meditation, in which rather than guiding the attention back to the breath, whatever object is prominent in your field of awareness at any given moment becomes the primary object of attention. This involves expanding your awareness to observe with mindfulness (present-moment, investigative, nonjudgmental awareness) the arising and falling of each event in your field of awareness as it occurs, allowing the awareness to rest on whatever is most salient in your experience in the present moment, then shifting as that recedes and something new appears. Whenever the attention wanders or feels "lost," you may gently bring it back to the breath as your anchor into the present moment

With longer-term practice observing your mind during meditation, you may begin to develop insights regarding the impermanence of all phenomena, the

dissatisfaction caused by clinging to some aspects of reality and resisting others, and the lack of a solid, stable, unchanging self that is separate from other phenomena. These insights are not verbal or conceptual, but rather involve direct perception of the nature of reality through our immediate experience during meditation.

### *Cultivating Daily Mindfulness ("Informal" Practice)*

- Mindfulness during routine activities (mindful eating, walking, brushing teeth, doing dishes, etc).
- One minute of mindfulness (15 mindful breaths) each hour of the day.
- 5 mindful breaths upon waking and before going to sleep.
- Alertness to “bells of mindfulness” throughout the day (e.g. stop lights, phone ringing, birds singing, waiting in line, etc.)
- Noting how the mind and body feel throughout the day in various circumstances; noticing the body posture, sensations, and areas of tension.
- Awareness of the movement of the breath, particularly noticing if breathing has become shallow or irregular.
- Deeply listening to others, giving full attention, without multi-tasking or thinking about what you are going to say next.
- Speaking mindfully: pausing before speaking, asking yourself “is it necessary? Is it harmful? Is it true?”
- Noticing automatic judgments as they occur (“positive”, “negative”, or “neutral”), and the habitual reactions connected to them: do you contract from the unpleasant, cling to the pleasant, and become bored with the neutral? Begin to develop awareness of the effects that these automatic reactions may be having on you.
- Notice when you are “multi-tasking”, and note the contrast in feeling when you bring yourself to fully attend to one thing at a time.
- 5-minute mindful breathing exercise

### *Potential Benefits of Mindfulness and Meditation*

#### ***Non-Identification, Impermanence***

- Viewing thoughts, feelings and sensations as passing events in our field of awareness, rather than over-identifying with them or becoming attached, repelled, or overwhelmed by them.
- Learning to experience thoughts, feelings and sensations as phenomena moving through our awareness, rather than experiencing them as “me,” or the whole of my reality.

- Knowledge of impermanence allows greater tolerance for unpleasant internal states (e.g., letting feelings come and go like waves).
- Recognizing mental events as passing phenomena contained in our awareness (e.g., "just thoughts")
- Helpful metaphors: sky-like awareness, ocean (stillness beneath the waves), hub of a wheel.

### ***Present-Moment Experience***

- Brings us out of "automatic pilot" mode, allows us to make aware and conscious decisions about responding.
- Turning towards present reality gives us more choices, "degrees of freedom."
- Brings us into our immediate experience can help ground us, helps with rumination and panic.
- Reminds us of our aliveness, our vitality.
- Being centered in the present moment, we become more connected and engaged in our lives, and we may begin experiencing our daily activities and interactions as less mundane and more meaningful.
- Focusing on one thing at a time, rather than multi-tasking, reduces stress and can even improve our relationships.
- Becoming aware and grounded in the present moment allows us to fully engage in the richness of moment-to-moment experience.
- Each moment, each breath, is a chance to begin anew.
- We learn to handle things "one moment at a time." Being present with "just this breath" can be grounding and calming.
- Focuses attention on moment-to-moment experience, and away from ruminative cycles of thoughts that tend to bog us down in negative mood states and can contribute to anxiety and/or depression.

### ***Turning Towards Experience***

- Bearing with our experience, rather than trying to get rid of it.
- Different way of responding to inevitable unpleasant experiences in life.
- Through direct exposure, we learn that our emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations are not so overwhelming and frightening, and that they will eventually pass.
- Allows us to explore and tolerate a broad range of thoughts, emotions and sensations.
- Allows us to be present with our experience rather than avoiding or escaping, contracting or pushing away.

### **Expanded, Clear Perspective**

- Learning to see clearly depends on the ability to dis-identify from automatic patterns and beliefs.
- Affords a different place from which to view the present moment.
- Fosters greater cognitive and behavioral flexibility and less automaticity.
- May help us observe values and choices and reflect on them with greater objectivity.
- Open, intentional awareness can help us choose behaviors that are congruent with our needs, interests and values.
- Helps us to develop acceptance and act with wisdom, intention and perspective rather than in a reactive or knee-jerk fashion.
- Trains the mind to be less reactive and more stable, helps develop patience and acceptance, and builds and deepens the mind's strength and concentration.
- Practicing "bare attention" and maintaining equanimity helps us gain balance and perspective regarding what is going on around and inside us. Slowing down and becoming aware, we see things more clearly.

### **Acceptance, Making Space**

- Softening, allowing, opening
- Acceptance, not fighting against
- "Pain X Resistance = Suffering," "
- The "two arrows"
- "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional"
- It is not as much the pain itself, but our own reaction to it that causes our suffering
- "What we resist, persists"
- Cannot always change or control our external circumstances, but mindfulness can help us relate differently to life's "ups and downs."
- Different than approval or resignation; rather, involves acknowledging our present experience, because it is already here.
- We see that all "problems" come down to the same basic issue: wanting things to be different than they are. Mindfulness helps us to develop the awareness to be able to accept the things we cannot change and to take skillful action to change the things we can.

### **"Getting to Know Your Own Mind"**

- Learning the workings of your mind
- Getting to know the mind's habits and the way it may be causing our suffering
- Recognizing "tapes in the mind"

- Provides a chance to look dispassionately at the reactions and habits of your own mind, at its fears and desires.
- Helps us see through our likes, dislikes, and opinions to experience things as they actually are.
- Helps cultivate compassion, because we recognize that we all have the same basic nature, and that the suffering we experience is, at its core, the same as that experienced by all beings, regardless of superficial differences.

### **“Being” Mode**

- Time to sit quietly and “just be,” rather than actively “doing,” increases our sense of peacefulness and well-being.
- Gives us time to dwell in a state of deep relaxation
- “Being mode” is accepting and non-conceptual, in contrast to “thinking mode” and “doing mode.”
- Trains the mind to be less reactive and more stable, helps develop patience and acceptance, and builds and deepens the mind’s strength and concentration.
- Some problems cannot be “solved” through conceptual or analytical thought.

### **Effects On Brain Function and Structure**

- Neuroplasticity research on effects of regular meditation on brain function and structure, including working memory and contentment

