How To Meditate:
A Beginner's Guide to Peace

Yuttadhammo Bhikkhu

Table of Contents

Introduction.....iii
Chapter One: What is Meditation?.....1
Chapter Two: Sitting Meditation.....8
Chapter Three: Walking Meditation.....14
Chapter Four: Fundamentals.....19
Chapter Five: Mindful Prostration.....26
Chapter Six: Daily Life.....31
Appendix: Illustrations.....41

Introduction

This booklet is taken from a six-part video series on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/yuttadhammo). It was originally intended for use in the Los Angeles Federal Detention Center, where it was impossible to distribute teachings by video, but has since become my preferred means of introducing the meditation practice to newcomers in general. While the videos provide a useful visual guide, this booklet contains much updated and expanded information that is not in the videos.

The lessons are laid out according to how I would expect a new-comer to learn meditation step-by-step. It may seem odd that chapters two, three, and five are presented in the opposite order in which they are to be practiced. The reasoning is that sitting meditation is easiest for a beginner to appreciate. Once one has become comfortable with the concepts involved in meditation, they may expand their practice to include walking and even mindful prostration if they are so inclined.

My only intention in completing this task is that more people may benefit from the meditation practice. It seems proper that if one wishes to live in peace and happiness, one should work to spread peace and happiness in the world in which one lives.

I would like to thank all who have helped to make this book possible: my parents and all of my past teachers, my current teacher and preceptor, Ajaan Tong Sirimangalo, and those kind beings who originally transcribed the teachings from the YouTube videos.

May all beings be happy.

Yuttadhammo

Dedicated to my teacher, Ajaan Tong Sirimangalo, who is to me a living reminder that the Buddha once walked this Earth.

Chapter One: What is Meditation?

This book is meant to serve as an introductory discourse on how to meditate for those with little or no experience in the practice of meditation, as well as those who are experienced in other types of meditation but interested in learning a new meditation technique. In this first chapter, I will explain what meditation is, and how one should go about practicing it.

First, it is important to understand that the word “meditation” means different things to different people. For some, meditation simply means the calming of the mind, the creating of a peaceful or pleasurable state as vacation or escape from mundane reality. For others, meditation implies extraordinary experiences, or the creation of mystical, even magical, states of awareness.

In this book I'd like to define meditation based on the meaning of the word itself. The word “meditation” comes from the same linguistic base as the word “medicine”.[1] This is useful in understanding the meaning of meditation since medicine refers to something that is used to cure bodily sickness. As a parallel, we can understand meditation as being used to cure sickness in the mind.

Additionally, we understand that medicine, as opposed to drugs, is not for the purpose of escaping into a temporary state of pleasure or happiness and then fading away, leaving one sick as before. Medicine is meant to effect a lasting change, bringing the body back to its natural state of health and well-being.

In the same way, the purpose of meditation is not to bring

1 According to etymonline.com, both words come “from PIE base *med- 'to measure, limit, consider, advise'”.

about a temporary state of peace or calm, but rather to return the mind suffering from worries, stresses and artificial conditioning back to a natural state of genuine and lasting peace and well-being.

So when you practice meditation according to this book, please understand that it might not always feel either peaceful or pleasant. Coming to understand and work through deep-rooted states of stress, worry, anger, addiction, etc., can be at times quite an unpleasant process, especially since we spend most of our time avoiding or repressing these negative aspects of our mind.

It might seem at times that meditation doesn't bring any peace or happiness at all; this is why it must be stressed that meditation isn't a drug. It isn't supposed to make you feel happy while you do it and then return to your misery when you are not. Meditation is meant to effect a real change in the way one looks at the world, bringing one's mind back to its natural state of clarity. It should allow one to attain true and lasting peace and happiness through being better able to deal with the natural difficulties of life.

The basic technique of meditation that we use to facilitate this change is the creation of clear awareness. In meditation, we try to create a clear awareness of every experience as it occurs. Without meditating, we tend to immediately judge and react to our experiences as “good”, “bad”, “me”, “mine”, etc., which in turn gives rise to stress, suffering, and mental sickness. By creating a clear thought about the object, we replace these sort of judgements with a simple recognition of the object as it is.

The creation of clear awareness is effected through the use of an ancient but well-known meditation tool called a

“mantra”.

A mantra refers to a word or phrase that is used to focus the mind on an object, most often the divine or the supernatural. Here, however, we use the mantra to focus our attention on ordinary reality, as a clear recognition of our experience as it is, free from projection and judgement. By using a mantra in this way, we will be able to understand the objects of our experience clearly and not become attached or averse to them.

For example, when we move the body we use a mantra to create a clear awareness of the experience using a mantra that captures its essence, as in, “moving”. When we experience a feeling, “feeling”. When we think, "thinking". When we feel angry, we say in the mind, "angry". When we feel pain, we likewise remind ourselves silently, “pain". We pick a word that describes the experience accurately and use that word to acknowledge the experience for what it is, not allowing the arising of a judgement of the object as good, bad, me, mine, etc.

The mantra should not be at the mouth or in the head, but simply a clear awareness of the object for what it is. The word, therefore, should arise in the mind at the same location as the object itself. Which word we choose is not so important, as long as it focuses the mind on the objective nature of the experience.

To simplify the process of recognizing the manifold objects of experience, we traditionally separate experience into four categories.[1] Everything we experience will fit into one of these four categories; they serve as a guide in systematizing our practice, allowing us to quickly recognize what is and what is not real, and

1 These four categories are called the four foundations of mindfulness in Buddhism, and are explained in greater detail in Buddhist texts. Here, a simple outline is enough for our purposes.

identify reality for what it is. It is customary to memorize these four categories before proceeding with the meditation practice:

1. Body – the movements and postures of the body;
2. Feelings – bodily and mental sensations of pain, happiness, calm, etc.;
3. Mind – thoughts that arise in the mind – of the past or future, good or bad;
4. Dhammas – groups of mental and physical phenomena that are of specific interest to the meditator, including the mental states that cloud one's awareness, the six senses by which one experiences reality, and many others.[1]

These four, the body, the feelings, the thoughts, and the dhammas are the four foundations of the meditation practice. They are what we use to create clear awareness of the present moment.

First, in regards to the body, we try to note every physical experience as it happens. When we stretch our arm, for example, we say silently in the mind, "stretching". When we flex it, “flexing”. When we sit still we say to ourselves, "sitting". When we walk, we say to ourselves, “walking”.

Whatever position the body is in we simply recognize that posture for what it is and whatever movement we make we simply recognize its essential nature as well, using the mantra to remind ourselves of the state of the body as it is. In this way, we use our own bodies to create a clear awareness of reality.

Next are the feelings that exist in the body and the mind.

1 The word “dhamma” means “realities”, and it includes several sets of realities that are of interest to the meditator. Here we will limit the discussion to the first set, the mental hindrances, which are most important to the beginning meditator.

When we feel pain, we say to ourselves, "pain". In this case, we can actually repeat it again and again to ourselves, as "pain ... pain ... pain", so that, instead of allowing anger or aversion to arise, we see it merely as a sensation. We learn to see that the pain and our ordinary disliking of it are two different things; that there is really nothing intrinsically “bad” about the pain itself, nor is it intrinsically “ours” since we can't change or control it.

When we feel happy, we acknowledge it in the same way, reminding ourselves of the true nature of the experience, as "happy, happy, happy". It is not that we are trying to push away the pleasurable sensation. We are simply insuring that we do not attach to it either, and therefore do not create states of addiction, attachment, or craving for the sensation. As with the pain, we come to see that the happiness and our liking of it are two different things, and there is nothing intrinsically “good” about the happiness. We see that clinging to the happiness does not make it last longer, but leads rather to dissatisfaction and suffering when it is gone.

Likewise, when we feel calm, we say to ourselves, "calm, calm, calm", clearly seeing and avoiding attachment to peaceful feelings when they arise. In this way, we begin to see that the less attachment we have towards peaceful feelings, the more peaceful we actually become.

The third foundation is our thoughts. When we remember events in the past, whether they bring pleasure or suffering, we say to ourselves, "thinking, thinking". Instead of giving rise to attachment or aversion, we simply know them for what they are – thoughts. When we plan or speculate about the future, we likewise simply come to be aware of the fact that we are thinking, instead of liking or disliking the content of the thoughts, and thus avoid the fear, worry, or stress that they might bring.

The fourth foundation, the “dhammas”, contains many groupings of mental and physical phenomena. Some of them could be included in the first three foundations, but they are better discussed in their respective groups for ease of acknowledgement. The first group of dhammas is the five hindrances to mental clarity. These are the states that obstruct one's practice: desire, aversion, laziness, distraction, and doubt. They are not only hindrances to attaining clarity of mind, they are also the cause for all suffering and stress in our lives. It is in our best interests to work intently to understand and discard them from our minds, as this is, after all, the true purpose of meditation.

So when we feel desire, when we want something we don't have, or are attached to something we do, we simply acknowledge the wanting or the liking for what it is, rather than erroneously translating desire into need. We remind ourselves of the emotion for what it is, thus: “wanting, wanting”, “liking, liking”. We come to see that desire and attachment are stressful and causes for future disappointment when we cannot obtain the things we want or lose the things we like.

When we feel angry, upset by mental or physical experiences that have arisen, or disappointed by those that have not, we recognize this as “angry, angry” or “disliking, disliking”. When we are sad, frustrated, bored, scared, depressed, etc., we likewise recognize each emotion for what it is, “sad, sad”, “frustrated, frustrated”, etc., and see clearly how we are causing suffering and stress for ourselves by encouraging these negative emotional states. Once we see the negative results of anger, we will naturally incline away from it in the future.

When we feel lazy, we say to ourselves, "lazy, lazy" or “tired, tired”, and we will find that we are able to regain our natural energy in this way. When we are distracted,

worried or stressed, we can say, "distracted, distracted", "worried, worried", or "stressed, stressed" and we will find that we are more focused. When we feel doubt or are confused about what to do, we can say to ourselves "doubting, doubting" or "confused, confused", and likewise we will find that we are more sure of ourselves as a result.

The clear awareness of these four foundations constitutes the basic technique of meditation practice as explained in the following chapters. It is therefore important to understand this theoretical framework before beginning to undertake the practice of meditation. Understanding and appreciating the importance of creating a clear awareness about the objects of our experience as a replacement to our judgemental thoughts is the first step in learning how to meditate.

Chapter Two: Sitting Meditation

In this chapter, I will explain how to put into practice the principles learned in the first chapter during formal sitting meditation. Sitting meditation is a simple meditation exercise that can be performed sitting cross-legged on the floor or even on a chair or bench. For people unable to sit up at all, a similar technique may be employed in the lying position.

The purpose of formal meditation is to limit our experience to the fewest number of objects in order to allow for easy observation without becoming overwhelmed or distracted. When sitting still, the whole body is tranquil and the only movement is when the breath enters and leaves the body. When the breath enters the body, there should be a rising motion in the abdomen. When the breath leaves the body, there should likewise be a falling motion. If the movement is not readily apparent, you can put your hand on your abdomen until it becomes clear.

If it is difficult to perceive the motion of the abdomen even with your hand, you can try lying down on your back until you are able to perceive it. Difficulty in finding the rising and falling motion of the abdomen when sitting is generally due to mental tension and stress; if one is patient and persistent in the practice, one's mind and body will begin to relax until one is able to breathe as naturally sitting up as when lying down.

The most important thing to remember is that we are trying to observe the breath in its natural state, rather than forcing or controlling it in any way. In the beginning, the breath may be shallow or uncomfortable, but once the mind begins to let go and stops trying to control the

breath, the rise and fall of the abdomen will become more clear and allow for comfortable observation.

It is this rising and falling motion that we will use as our first object of meditation. Once we are able to observe the motion of the abdomen without difficulty, it will serve as a default object of meditation for us to return to at any time.

The formal method for sitting meditation is as follows:[1]

1. Sit with the legs crossed if possible, with one leg in front of the other, neither leg on top of the other. If this position is uncomfortable, you can sit in any position that is convenient for observation of the abdomen.
2. Sit with one hand on top of the other, palms up on the lap.
3. Sit with the back straight. It is not necessary for the back to be perfectly straight if it is uncomfortable; as long the movements of the abdomen are clearly discernible, any posture is okay.
4. Close the eyes. Since the focus is on the stomach, having the eyes open will only distract the attention away from the object.
5. Send the mind out to the abdomen; when the abdomen rises, give rise to the clear thought, silently in the mind, "rising", and when the stomach falls, "falling". Repeat this practice until your attention is diverted to another object of awareness.

Again it's important to understand that the clear thought, “rising” or “falling” should be in the mind, which should be

1 Please see illustration 41 in the appendix for two traditional sitting postures.

focused on the abdomen. It is as though one is speaking into the abdomen. This practice may be carried out for five or ten minutes, or longer if one is able.

The next step is to incorporate all four foundations into the practice: the body, the feelings, the mind, and the dhammas.

Regarding the body, watching the rising and the falling is sufficient for a beginner meditator. At times, one might wish to also acknowledge the position of the body as “sitting, sitting”, or “lying, lying” if it is more found to be more conducive for clear observation.

In regards to feelings, when a sensation arises in the body, one should fix one's attention on it, discarding the abdomen and focusing on the sensation. If a feeling of pain should arise, for example, one should take the pain itself as a meditation object.

Any one of the four foundations may serve as a meditation object, as all four are aspects of reality. It isn't necessary to stay with the rising and falling of the abdomen at all times. Instead, when pain arises, one should observe the new object, the pain, in order to clearly understand it for what it is, rather than judging or identifying with it. As explained earlier, the meditator should simply focus on the pain and create the clear thought, "pain, pain, pain, pain..." until it goes away. Instead of getting upset about the pain, one will see it for what it is and let it go.

When happiness arises, one should create the clear thought, "happy." When one feels peaceful or calm, one should create the clear thought, "peaceful," or "calm" until that feeling goes away. Here, the object is to avoid clinging to the feeling, which would create a dependency on it. When one clings to positive feelings, one will be

inevitably dissatisfied when they are gone.

Once the sensation disappears, one should return to the rising and falling of the abdomen and continue observing it as “rising” and “falling”.

In regards to the mind, if thoughts arise during meditation, one should acknowledge them as “thinking”. It doesn't matter whether one is thinking about the past or future or whether one's thoughts are good or bad; instead of letting the mind wander and lose track of reality, bring the mind back to the reality of the thought with, "thinking". Then return to the rising and falling and continue practice as normal.

In regards to dhammas, when the mind gives rise to liking, pleased by a certain experience, create the clear thought, “liking, liking”. When disliking arises – anger, boredom, frustration, etc. - create the clear thought, “disliking, disliking”, "angry, angry", “bored, bored”, or "frustrated, frustrated". When laziness or drowsiness comes up, create the clear thought, “lazy, lazy”, or "drowsy, drowsy". When distraction or worry arise, "distracted, distracted" or "worried, worried". When doubt or confusion arise, "doubting, doubting" or "confused, confused" and so on.

Once the above hindrances subside, bring the mind back again to a clear awareness of the present moment by focusing on the rise and fall of the abdomen.

Formal meditation practice has many benefits,[1] the first being that the mind will become more happy and peaceful as a result. By cultivating the habit of clear awareness of reality, the mind will become happier, lighter and more free from stress and suffering that come from judgement and clinging. Most meditators will experience states of bliss and happiness after a few days of meditating if they

1 The following four benefits are taken from the Saṅgītisutta, Dīgha Nikāya (DN 33).

are diligent and systematic in their practice. It is important, of course, to recognize that such experiences are simply a fruit of the practice and not a substitute for proper practice itself. One must acknowledge them as one would any other experience, as in “happy, happy”, or “calm, calm”. Nonetheless, such feelings are a true benefit of the practice that one can see for oneself even after a short time practicing meditation.

The second benefit is that one will begin to understand oneself and the world around in ways that are not possible without meditation practice. One will come to see clearly how one's own mental habits cause one to suffer; how external stimuli are not really a cause for suffering or happiness until one clings to them.

One comes to see why there is suffering, even while one wishes only for happiness; how objects of desire and aversion are merely ephemeral experiences, arising and ceasing incessantly, not worth clinging to or striving for in any way.

Further, one will come to understand the minds of others in the same way. Without meditation, people tend to immediately judge others based on their actions and speech, giving rise to liking or disliking, attraction or hatred towards them. Through the practice of meditation, one comes to understand how others are a cause for their own suffering and happiness, and so one is more inclined to forgive and accept others as they are without judging them.

The third benefit of the practice is that one becomes more aware and mindful of the world around. Without the support of meditation practice, one might go through most of one's waking day automatically without being clearly aware of one's own actions, speech and thoughts. After

cultivating meditative awareness, one will become more aware of one's day-to-day experience of reality. As a result, when difficult situations arise one will be able to respond to situations with clarity of mind, accepting one's experiences for what they are instead of falling prey to likes and dislikes, fear, anxiety, confusion, and so on. One will be able to bear conflict, difficulty, sickness, and even death, much better than one would have without the practice of meditation.

The fourth benefit, the true aim of the meditation practice, is that one will be able to rid oneself of the evils in one's own mind that cause suffering for oneself and others; anger, greed, delusion, anxiety, worry, stress, fear, arrogance, conceit, and so on. One will see all mental states that create unhappiness and stress for oneself and others clearly as they are and discard them as a result.

This is an explanation of basic, formal meditation practice and the benefits it brings. At this point, I would ask that you begin to practice according to this method at least once before going on to the next chapter or back to your daily life. Practice for five or ten minutes, or however long is convenient, for the first time, right now, before you forget what you have read in this chapter. Rather than being like a person reading a menu, taste the fruit of the meditation practice for yourself like one who actually uses the menu to order a meal.

Thank you for your interest in meditation, and I sincerely hope that this teaching will bring peace, happiness and freedom from suffering to your life.

Chapter Three: Walking Meditation

In this chapter, I will explain the technique of walking meditation. As with sitting meditation, the focus of walking meditation is on keeping the mind in the present moment and aware of phenomena as they arise, in order to create clear awareness of one's reality.

Given its similarity to sitting meditation, one might wonder what purpose walking meditation serves. If one is not able to practice walking meditation, one will still be able to gain benefit from sitting meditation, but walking meditation has several unique benefits that make it a good compliment and precursor to sitting meditation. I will enumerate the five traditional benefits here.[1]

First, walking meditation provides physical fitness. If we spend all of our time sitting still, our bodies will become weak and incapable of exertion. Walking meditating maintains basic fitness even for an ardent meditator and can be seen as a supplement for physical exercise.

Second, walking meditation cultivates patience and endurance. Since walking meditation is active, it doesn't require as much patience as sitting still; it is a useful intermediary between ordinary activity and formal sitting meditation.

Third, walking meditation helps to cure sickness in the body. Whereas sitting mediation puts the body in a state of homeostasis, walking meditation stimulates blood flow and biological activity, while being gentle enough to avoid aggravation. It also helps to relax the body, reducing tension and stress by moving slowly and methodically.

1 These five benefits are taken from the Anguttara Nikāya, Caṅkamasutta (5.1.3.9).

Walking meditation is thus useful in helping to overcome sicknesses like heart disease and arthritis, as well as maintaining basic general health.

Fourth, walking meditation aids in healthy digestion. The greatest disadvantage to sitting meditation is that it can actually inhibit proper digestion of food. Walking meditation, on the other hand, stimulates the digestive system, allowing one to continue one's meditation practice without having to compromise one's physical health.

Fifth, walking meditation helps one to cultivate balanced concentration. If one were to only practice sitting meditation, one's concentration may be either too weak or too strong, leading either to distraction or lethargy. Because walking meditation is dynamic, it allows both body and mind to settle naturally. If done before sitting meditation, walking meditation will help ensure a balanced state of mind during the subsequent sitting.

The method of walking meditation is as follows:

1. The feet should be close together, almost touching, and should stay side-by-side throughout the meditation, neither one in front of the other, nor with great space between their paths.
2. The hands should be clasped, right holding left, either in front or behind the body.[1]
3. The eyes should be open throughout the meditation and one's gaze should be fixed on the path ahead about two metres or six feet in front of the body.
4. One should walk in a straight line, somewhere between three to five metres or ten to fifteen feet in

1 Please see illustration 40 in the appendix for an example of suitable walking posture.

length.

5. One begins by moving the right foot forward one foot length, with the foot parallel to the ground. The entire foot should touch the ground at the same time, with back of the heel in line with and to the right of the toes of the left foot.
6. The movement of each foot should be fluid and natural, a single arcing motion from beginning to end, with no breaks or abrupt change in direction of any kind.
7. One then moves the left foot forward, passing the right foot to come down with the back of the heel in line with and to the left of the toes of the right foot, and so on, one foot length for each step.
8. As one moves each foot, one should make a mental note just as in the sitting meditation, using a mantra that captures the essence of the movement as it occurs. The word in this case is "stepping right" when moving the right foot, and "stepping left" when moving the left foot.
9. One should make the mental note at the exact moment of each movement, neither before or after the movement.

If the mental note, "stepping right", is made before the foot moves, one is noting something that has not yet occurred. If one moves the foot first and then notes, "stepping right", one is noting something in the past. Either way, this cannot be considered meditation, as there is no awareness of reality in either case.

To clearly observe the movements as they occur, one should note "step-" at the beginning of the movement, just as the foot leaves the floor, "-ping" as the foot moves

forward; and “right” at the moment when the foot touches the floor again. The same method should be employed when moving the left foot, and one's awareness should move between the movements of each foot from one end of the path to the other.

Upon reach the end of the walking path, turn around and walk in the other direction. The method of turning while maintaining clear awareness is to first stop, bringing whichever foot is behind to stand next to the foot that is in front, saying to oneself, "stopping, stopping, stopping", as the foot moves. Once one is standing still, one should become aware of the standing position as, "standing, standing, standing”, then begin to turn around, as follows:

1. Lift the right foot completely off the floor and turn it 90° to place it again on the floor, noting once, "turning". It is important to extend the word to cover the whole of the movement, so the “turn-” should be at the beginning of the movement and the “-ing” should be at the end, as the foot touches the floor.
2. Lift the left foot off the floor and turn it 90° to stand by the right foot, noting just the same, "turning".
3. Repeat the movements of both feet one more time "turning" (right foot), "turning" (left foot), and then note, "standing, standing, standing".
4. Continue with the walking meditation in the opposite direction, noting, "stepping right", "stepping left", as before.

During walking meditation, if thoughts, feelings, or emotions arise, one can chose to ignore them, bringing the mind back to the feet in order to maintain focus and continuity. If, however, they become a distraction, one should stop moving, bringing the back foot forward to

stand with the front foot, saying to oneself, "stopping, stopping, stopping," then “standing, standing, standing,” and begin to contemplate the distraction as in sitting meditation, "thinking, thinking, thinking", "pain, pain, pain", "angry", "sad", "bored", "happy", etc., according to the experience. Once the object of attention disappears, continue with the walking as before, "stepping right", "stepping left”.

In this way, one simply paces back and forth, walking in one direction until reaching the end of the designated path, then turning around and walking in the other direction.

Generally speaking, one should try to balance the amount of time spent in walking meditation with the amount spent in sitting meditation, to avoid partiality to one or the other posture. If one were to practice ten minutes of walking meditation, for example, one should follow it with ten minutes of sitting meditation.

This concludes the explanation of how to practice walking meditation. Again, I urge you not to be content with simply reading this book; please, try the meditation techniques for yourself and see the benefits they bring for yourself. Thank you for your interest in the meditation practice and again I wish you peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering.

Chapter Four: Fundamentals

In this chapter, I will explain four fundamental principles that are essential to the meditation practice.[1] The practice of meditation is more than just walking back and forth and sitting still. The benefit one gains from meditation practice depends on the quality of one's mind at each moment, not the quantity of practice one undertakes.

The first important principle is that meditation must be practiced in the present moment. During meditation, one's mind should be focused on the experience occurring at each moment, never dwelling in the past or skipping ahead to the future. One should avoid thoughts about how much time one has been sitting or how much time is left. One's mind should always be noting the objects as they arise in the present moment, not straying even one moment into the past or future.

When one is out of touch with the present moment, one is out of touch with reality. Each experience only lasts a single moment, so it is important to note experiences at the moment they occur, recognizing their arising, persisting, and ceasing, using the mantra to create a clear awareness of their essential nature. Only in this way can we come to understand the true nature of reality.

The second important principle is that meditation must be performed continuously. Meditation practice, like any training, must become habitual if it is to help one overcome bad habits of clinging and partiality. If one practices meditation intermittently and is unmindful between sessions, any clarity of mind gained from the

1 These four important qualities of meditation were passed on by my teacher, Ajaan Tong Sirimangalo.

practice will be weakened by subsequent distracted mind states, making the meditation practice seem useless. This is often a cause for frustration and disillusionment in new meditators until they learn to be mindful throughout their daily activities and continuously from one meditation technique to the next. Once they are able to be mindful continuously, their concentration will improve and they will realize the true benefit of the practice.

One must try to practice continuously from one moment to the next. During formal meditation, one should keep one's mind in the present moment through the whole of the practice as best one can, using the mantra to create a clear thought from one moment to the next. When walking, one must be careful to transfer one's attention from one foot to the next without break. When sitting, one must pay careful attention to the rising and the falling, noting each movement, one after the other, without break.

Moreover, after practicing walking meditation, one should maintain awareness and acknowledgement of the present moment until one is settled in sitting position, noting “bending”, “touching”, “sitting”, etc., according to the movements required to change position. Once sitting down, one should begin immediately contemplation of the rising and the falling of the stomach for the duration of the sitting meditation. At the end of the sitting meditation, one should try to continue meditating on the present moment in daily life, carrying on noting to the best of one's ability until the next meditation session.

Meditation practice is like falling rain. Every moment one is clearly aware of reality is like a single rain drop. Though it may seem insignificant, if one is mindful continuously from one moment to the next, clearly aware of each moment one at a time, these moments of concentrated awareness will accumulate and give rise to strong

concentration and clear insight into reality, just as minuscule drops of falling rain accumulate to fill a lake or flood an entire village.

The third important principle of practice is in regards to technique of creating clear awareness. Ordinary awareness of experience is inadequate, as it is present in non-meditators and even animals, and does not produce insight into the nature of reality to the extent necessary to overcome bad habits and tendencies. To create the sort of clear awareness of ultimate reality that will facilitate such a state, three qualities of mind must be present, as follows:[1]

1. Effort - in order to make a proper acknowledgement of an experience as it occurs, one cannot merely say words like “rising”, “falling” and expect to gain any understanding about reality. One must actively send the mind to the object and keep the mind with the object as it arises, while it persists, and until it ceases, whatever object it may be. In the case of the rising and falling of the abdomen, for example, one must observe the abdomen itself, sending the mind out to each moment of rising or falling. Rather than repeating the mantra in the head or at the mouth, one must send the mind to the object and make the note at the location of the experience.

2. Knowledge - once one has sent the mind out to the object, one must direct the mind to becoming aware of the object. Rather than simply saying “rising” and “falling”, while forcing the mind to focus blindly on the object, one must observe the motion as it occurs, from beginning to end. If the object is

1 These three qualities are taken from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya (MN 10) .

pain, one must strive to observe the pain unflinchingly; if it is a thought, one must observe the thought itself, rather than getting lost in the content, and so on.

3. Acknowledgement - once one is aware of the object, one must make an objective note of the experience, establishing clear and accurate understanding of the object as it is, avoiding partiality and delusion. The acknowledgement is a replacement for the distracted thoughts that lead one to extrapolate upon the object, seeing it as “good”, “bad, “me”, “mine”, and so on. Rather than allowing the mind to give rise to projection or judgement of the object, one simply reminds oneself of the true nature of the object as it is, as explained in the first chapter.

The fourth important fundamental quality of practice is the balancing of ones mental faculties. The mind is traditionally understood to have five important faculties beneficial for spiritual development. These are:

1. Confidence
2. Effort
3. Mindfulness
4. Concentration
5. Wisdom

These five faculties are of general benefit to the mind, but if they are not properly balanced, they may actually lead to one's detriment. For example, a person might have strong confidence but little wisdom, which can lead one to cultivate blind faith, believing things simply out of self-confidence and not because of any empirical realization of the truth. As a result, one will not bother to

examine the true nature of reality, living instead according to faith in beliefs that may or may not be true.

Such people must examine their beliefs carefully in contrast with reality, in order to adjust their faith according to the wisdom that they gain from meditation, rather than prejudging reality according to their beliefs. Even should one's belief be in line with reality, it will still be weak and unsteady if not supported by true realization of the truth for oneself.

On the other hand, one might have strong wisdom but little faith, and so doubt one's path without giving it an honest trial. Such a person may refuse to suspend their disbelief long enough to make adequate enquiry, even when a theory is explained by a respected authority, choosing to doubt and argue rather than investigating for oneself.

This sort of attitude will make progress in the meditation practice difficult, due to the meditator's lack of conviction, rendering one unable to focus the mind properly. Such a person must make effort to see their doubt as a hindrance to honest investigation and try their best to give the meditation a fair chance before passing judgement.

Likewise, one might have strong effort but weak concentration, leading one's mind to become distracted often and rendering one unable to focus on anything for any length of time. Some people truly enjoy thinking or philosophizing about their lives and their problems, not realizing the stress and distraction that come from such activity. Such people are unable to sit still in meditation for any length of time because their minds are too chaotic, caught up in their own mental fomentation; if they are honest with themselves, they should recognize this unpleasant state as resulting from habitual mental

distraction, not from the meditation itself, and patiently train themselves out of this habit in favour of simply seeing reality as it is. Though some mental activity is unavoidable in our daily lives, we should be selective of what thoughts we give importance to, rather than turning every thought that arises into a cause for distraction.

Finally, one may have strong concentration but weak effort, which will make one lazy or drowsy during meditation. This will keep a meditator from effecting clear observation of reality, as the mind will incline towards drifting and nodding off to sleep. People who find themselves drifting off in meditation should practice standing or walking meditation when they are tired so as to stimulate their body and mind into a more alert state.

The fifth faculty, mindfulness, is another word for the acknowledgement or clear awareness of experience for what it is. It is the manifestation of a balanced mind, and so it is both the means of balancing the other faculties and the outcome of balancing them as well. The more mindfulness one has, the better one's practice will become, so one must strive both to balance the other four faculties and recognize reality for what it is at all times.

Mindfulness is, in fact, the best means of balancing the other faculties; when one has desire or aversion based on over-confidence, one should acknowledge, “wanting, wanting” or “disliking, disliking” and one will be able to see through one's attachment to partiality. When one has doubt, one should note “doubting, doubting”; when distracted, “distracted, distracted”; when drowsy, “drowsy, drowsy”, and the condition will correct itself naturally without special effort, due to the intrinsic nature of mindfulness as balancing the mind.

Once one has balanced the faculties, the mind will be able

to see every phenomenon as simply arising and ceasing, without passing any judgement on any object of awareness. As a result, the mind will let go of all attachment and overcome all suffering without difficulty. Just as a strong man would easily be able to bend an iron bar, when one's minds is strong, one will be able to bend and mould and ultimately straighten the mind, freeing it from all crooked, unwholesome states. As a result of a balanced mind, one will realize for oneself a natural state of peace and happiness, overcoming all kinds of stress and suffering.

So, this is a basic explanation of the important fundamental qualities of meditation practice. To summarize:

1) One must practice in the present moment.
2) One must practice continuously.
3) One must create a clear thought, using effort, knowledge, and acknowledgement.
4) One must balance the mental faculties.

This lesson is an important addition to the actual technique of meditation, as the benefits of meditation come from quality, not quantity. I sincerely hope that you are able to put these teachings to use in your own practice, and that you are able to find greater peace, happiness and freedom from suffering thereby. Thank you again for your interest in learning how to meditate.

Chapter Five: Mindful Prostration

In this chapter, I will explain a third technique of meditation used as a preparatory exercise before walking and sitting meditation. This technique is called mindful prostration. It is an optional practice, and may be omitted if desired.

Prostration is a practice common to followers of various religious traditions around the world. In Buddhist countries, for example, prostration is used as a means of paying respect to one's parents, teachers or figures of religious reverence. In other religious traditions, prostration may be used as a form of reverence towards an object of worship – a god, an angel, or some saintly figure, for example.

Here, the prostration is a means of paying respect to the meditation practice itself; it can be thought of as a means of creating humble and sincere appreciation for the practice, reminding one that meditation is not just a hobby or pastime, but rather an important training worthy of respect.

More importantly, though, mindful prostration is a useful preparatory exercise, since it involves repetitive movement of various parts of the body, forcing one to focus on the activity at each moment.

The technique of mindful prostration is performed as follows:

1. Begin by sitting on the knees, either on the toes (A)[1] or on the tops of the feet (B).
2. Place the hands palm down on the thighs (1), with

1 Parentheses indicate a corresponding illustration in the appendix.

back straight, and eyes open.

Begin by turning the right hand ninety degrees on the thigh until it is perpendicular to the floor, keeping the mind focused on the movement of the hand. As the hand begins to turn, note ‘turning’. When the hand is halfway through the turning motion, again note ‘turning’, and when the hand completes the movement, note a third time ‘turning’ (2). The word is repeated three times in order to create awareness of the motion throughout all three stages of motion - beginning, middle and end.

Next, raise the right hand to the chest, stopping right before the thumb touches the chest, noting ‘raising, raising, raising’ (3). Then touch the edge thumb to the chest, noting ‘touching, touching, touching’ (4), while the thumb touches the chest. Then repeat this sequence with the left hand: ‘turning, turning, turning’ (5), ‘raising, raising, raising’ (6), ‘touching, touching, touching’ (7). The left hand should touch not only the chest, but also the right hand, palm to palm.

Next, bring both hands up to the forehead, noting ‘raising, raising, raising' (8), then 'touching, touching, touching’ when the thumbnails touch the forehead (9). Then bring the hands back down to the chest, noting ‘lowering, lowering, lowering' (10), 'touching, touching, touching’ (11).

Next comes the actual prostration; first bend the back down to a forty-five degree angle, noting ‘bending, bending, bending’ (12). Then lower the right hand to the floor in front of the knees, saying ‘lowering, lowering, lowering' (13), 'touching, touching, touching’, still keeping it perpendicular to the floor (14), this time with the edge of the little finger touching the floor. Finally, turn the hand palm down to cover the floor, noting 'covering, covering,

covering' (15). Then repeat this sequence with the left hand: ‘lowering, lowering, lowering' (16), 'touching, touching, touching’ (17), 'covering, covering, covering' (18). The hands should now be side by side with the thumbs touching and approximately four inches between index fingers.

Next, lower the head to touch the thumbs, saying ‘bending, bending, bending’ as you bend the back (19) and 'touching, touching, touching’ when the forehead actually touches the thumbs (20). Then raise the back again until the arms are straight, saying ‘raising, raising, raising’ (21). This is the first prostration.

Once the arms are straight, start from the beginning to repeat the entire sequence a second time, except starting with the hands on the floor, noting ‘turning, turning, turning’ as you turn the right hand (22), then ‘raising, raising, raising’ (23), ‘touching, touching, touching’ (24). Then the left hand, ‘turning, turning, turning’ (25), ‘raising, raising, raising’ (26), ‘touching, touching, touching’ (27). As you raise the left hand this time, you should also raise the back from a forty-five degree angle to a straight upright position. It is not necessary to acknowledge this movement separately; simply straighten the back as the left hand comes up to the chest (see 26).

Then raise both hands up to the forehead again, noting ‘raising, raising, raising' (28), 'touching, touching, touching’ (29), and down to the chest again, ‘lowering, lowering, lowering' (30), 'touching, touching, touching’ (31). Then bend the back again, ‘bending, bending, bending’.[1] Finally, lower the hands again one by one, ‘lowering, lowering, lowering', 'touching, touching, touching’, 'covering, covering, covering', ‘lowering,

1 From here, the technique is exactly the same as illustrations 12 to 31, performed for a second and third time.

lowering, lowering', 'touching, touching, touching', 'covering, covering, covering'. Again, touch the thumbs with the forehead, 'bending, bending, bending', 'touching, touching, touching', and back up again, 'raising, raising, raising'. This is the second prostration, after which a third prostration should be performed in the exact same manner, repeating the above one more time from 22.

After the third prostration, come up from the floor starting with the right hand as before, 'turning, turning, turning', 'raising, raising, raising', 'touching, touching, touching', and the left hand, 'turning, turning, turning', 'raising, raising, raising', 'touching, touching, touching'. Then bring the hands up to the forehead again as before, 'raising, raising, raising'. 'touching, touching, touching', and back down to the chest, 'lowering, lowering, lowering', 'touching, touching, touching'. This time, however, instead of bending to do a fourth prostration, bring the hands down one at a time to rest on the thighs, returning them to their original position; starting with the right hand, note 'lowering, lowering, lowering' (32), 'touching, touching, touching' (33), 'covering, covering, covering' (34), and the left hand, 'lowering, lowering, lowering' (35), 'touching, touching, touching' (36), 'covering, covering, covering' (37).

Once one has completed the prostrations, one should continue on with the walking and sitting meditations in that order. It is important that as one changes position one should maintain mindfulness, not standing up or sitting down hastily or unmindfully. Before beginning to stand up, one should note 'sitting, sitting' (38), and then 'standing, standing' as one lifts the body to a standing position (39). Once standing, continue immediately with the walking meditation so that clear awareness of the present moment remains unbroken. In this way, the mindful prostration will

act as a support for the walking meditation just as the walking meditation will act as a support for the sitting meditation.

During an intensive meditation course, students are instructed to practice all three techniques in this manner; upon completion, they are instructed to rest for a short time and then start again from the beginning, practicing round after round for the duration of the lesson, normally one twenty-four hour period. Once this period is over, one would meet with the teacher to report and receive the next lesson, including more intricate walking and sitting techniques.

Since this book is aimed towards giving the basics of meditation, advanced lessons will not be discussed here. Once one has mastered these basic techniques, one should seek guidance from a qualified instructor if one wishes to pursue the practice further. If one is unable to enter a meditation course, one may begin by practicing these techniques once or twice a day and contacting a teacher on a weekly or monthly basis to obtain new lessons at a more gradual pace, according to a regimen agreed upon between teacher and student.

This concludes the explanation of formal meditation practice; in the next and final chapter I will discuss how to incorporate some of the concepts learned in this book into one's daily life. Thank you again for your interest, and again I wish you peace, happiness and freedom from suffering.

Chapter Six: Daily Life

At this point, instruction in the basic technique of formal meditation practice is complete. The teachings in the previous chapters is enough for a new-comer to begin on the path towards understanding reality as it is. In this final chapter, I will discuss some of the ways in which the meditation practice can be incorporated into daily life, so that even when one is not formally meditating one can still maintain a basic level of mindfulness and clear awareness.

First, it is necessary to discuss activities that are harmful to one's mental clarity; activities one must avoid in order for the meditation to bring about sustained positive results.

As I explained in the first chapter, “meditation” is the mental equivalent to “medicine”. When taking medicine, there are certain substances one must avoid; substances that will either nullify the positive effects of the medicine or, worse, combine with the medicine to create poison. Likewise, with meditation there are certain activities that, due to their tendency to cloud the mind, have the potential to nullify the effects of the meditation or, worse, pervert one's understanding of the meditation, causing one to cultivate unwholesome mind states instead of wholesome ones.

Meditation is meant to cultivate clarity and understanding, free from addiction, aversion, and delusion, and therefore free from suffering. Since certain bodily and verbal acts are intrinsically tied to negative qualities of mind, they are considered 'contraindicative' to the meditation practice; they have an effect opposite to what is desired, cultivating defilement instead of purity. Meditators who insist on

engaging in such behaviour will face great difficulty in their practice, developing habits that are detrimental to both meditation practice and personal well-being. To ensure the mind is perfectly clear and capable of understanding reality, certain behaviours must be taken out of one's "diet", so to speak.

First, there are five kinds of action from which one must refrain completely, as they are inherently unwholesome:[1]

1. *One must refrain from killing living beings.* In order to cultivate one's own well-being, one must be dedicated to well-being as a principle, refraining from killing any living being, even ants, mosquitoes and other living beings.
2. *One must refrain from theft.* In order to find peace of mind, we must grant it to others as well; stealing is a denial of this basic right to security. Further, if we wish to be free from addiction, we must be able to control our desires to the extent of respecting the possessions of others.
3. *One must abstain from committing adultery or sexual misconduct.* Romantic relationships that are emotionally or spiritually damaging to others, due to existing commitments of the parties involved, are a cause for stress and suffering and based on perversion of the mind.
4. *One must refrain from telling lies.* If one wishes to find truth, one must avoid falsehood; intentionally leading others away from the truth is harmful both to oneself and others and incompatible with the goals of meditation.
5. *One must refrain from taking drugs or alcohol.* Any

1 These five behaviours correspond with the five Buddhist moral precepts.

substance that intoxicates the mind is obviously contraindicative to meditation practice, as it is the antithesis of a natural, clear state of being.

Complete abstention from these activities is necessary if one wishes for meditation practice to be successful, due to their inherently unwholesome nature and the invariably negative effect they have on the mind.

Further, there are certain activities that must be *moderated* or they will interfere with meditation practice. These are activities that are not necessarily unwholesome in and of themselves but will nonetheless inhibit clarity of mind and lessen the benefit of the meditation practice when undertaken in excess.[1]

One such activity is eating; if one wishes to truly progress in the meditation practice, one must be careful not to eat too much or too little. If one is constantly obsessed with food, it can be a great hindrance to progress in meditation since not only does it cloud the mind, over-eating leads to drowsiness, both in the body and mind. One should eat to stay alive rather than stay alive simply to eat. During intensive meditation courses, meditators eat one main meal per day and suffer no negative physical consequences as a result; whereas the positive effects of such moderation are clarity of mind and freedom from obsession over food.

Another activity that interferes with meditation practice is entertainment – watching movies, listening to music, and so on. These occupations are not inherently unwholesome but can easily create states of addiction when undertaken in excess.

---

1 The following is in accordance with the eight meditator precepts normally taken by Buddhist meditators on holidays or during intensive meditation courses, adding the three precepts below to the five above and undertaking total celibacy.

Addiction is a form of insobriety in a sense, since it involves chemical processes in the brain that inhibit clear thought and clarity of mind. Since the pleasure that comes from entertainment is momentary and unsatisfying while the addiction and obsession carry over into one's life, a serious meditator should determine to make the best use of their short time in this life by cultivating peace and contentment, rather than wasting it on meaningless activities that don't lead to long term happiness and peace. If one wishes to find true happiness, one must therefore moderate one's engagement in entertainment. Socializing on the Internet and similar activities should be undertaken in moderation as well.

The third activity one must moderate is that of sleeping. Sleeping is an addiction that is often overlooked; most people don't realize how attached they are to sleep as a means of escape from reality. Still others become insomniac, obsessed with the thought that they are not getting “enough” sleep, leading to increased stress levels and further difficulty in falling asleep.

Through the meditation practice, one will find that one needs less sleep than before since one's mind will become calmer. Insomnia is not a problem for meditators since they are able to meditate even in the lying position and keep their minds free from stress. People who have difficulty falling asleep should train themselves to watch the stomach rise and fall, noting “rising”, “falling”, all night if necessary. Even if they are not able to fall asleep (which is unlikely, given the calm state of mind while meditating) they will find themselves as rested as if they had slept soundly through the night.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that to truly gain results in the meditation practice, a meditator should set aside at least a period of time to remain entirely celibate, not just

avoiding immoral sexual activity, since all sexual activity is invariably intoxicating and will be a hindrance towards attainment of mental clarity and peace.

Once one has put aside activities that interfere with clarity of mind, one can begin to incorporate meditative awareness into ordinary life. There are two ways in which one can meditate on ordinary experience, and they should be practiced together, as follows.

The first method is to focus one's attention on the body, since it is the most clearly evident aspect of experience. As in formal meditation, the body is always available for observation, and thus serves as a convenient means of creating clear awareness of reality in daily life. Since the body is generally in one of four postures – walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, one can simply become aware of one's posture as a meditation object to bring about clarity of mind.

When walking, for example, one can note either “walking, walking, walking, walking” or “left, right, left, right” as one moves each foot. When standing still, one can focus on the standing position and note “standing, standing”; when sitting, “sitting, sitting” and when lying down, “lying, lying”. In this way, one can develop clarity of mind at any time even when not practicing formal meditation.

Further, one can apply the same technique to any small movement of the body – for instance when bending or stretching the limbs, one can note “bending” or “stretching”. When moving the limbs, “moving”. When turning, “turning”, and so on. Every activity can become a meditation practice in this way; when brushing one's teeth, “brushing”; when chewing or swallowing food, “chewing, chewing”, “swallowing, swallowing” and so on.

When cooking, cleaning, exercising, showering, changing

clothes, even on the toilet, one can be mindful of the movements of the body involved, creating clear awareness of reality at all times. This is the first method by which one can and should incorporate the meditation practice directly into ordinary life.

The second method is the acknowledgement of the senses – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. Ordinary sensory experience tends to give rise to either liking or disliking; it therefore becomes a cause for addiction or aversion and ultimately suffering when it is not in line with one's partialities. In order to keep the mind clear and impartial, one should always try to create clear awareness at the moment of sensory experience, rather than allowing the mind to judge the experience according to its habitual tendencies. When seeing, therefore, one should know it simply as seeing, reminding oneself “seeing, seeing”.

When hearing a sound, one should likewise note “hearing, hearing”. When smelling pleasant or unpleasant odours, “smelling, smelling”. When tasting food or drink, instead of becoming addicted to or repulsed by the taste, one should note “tasting, tasting”. When feelings arise in the body, hot or cold, hard or soft, and so on, one should note “feeling, feeling” or “hot”, “cold”, and so on.

Practicing in this way, one will be able to receive the full spectrum of experience without compartmentalizing reality into categories of “good”, “bad”, “me”, “mine”, “us”, “them”, and so on. As a result, true peace, happiness and freedom from suffering is possible at all times, in all situations. Once one understands the true nature of reality, the mind will cease to react to the objects of the sense as other than what they truly are and be free from all addiction and aversion, just as a flying bird is free from any need for a perch on which to cling.

This then is a basic guide to practice meditation in daily life, incorporating the meditation practice directly into one's life even when not formally meditating. Beyond these two methods, one can also apply any of the objects discussed in the first chapter – pain, thoughts, or the emotions. The techniques discussed in this chapter should be thought of as an additional means of making the meditation practice a continuous experience whereby one is learning about oneself and about reality at all times.

This concludes the basic instruction on how to meditate. Remember that no book, no matter how detailed it may be, can substitute sincere and ardent practice of the teaching itself. One may learn by heart all wise books ever written and still be no better off than a cowherd guarding the cattle of others, should one not practice accordingly.

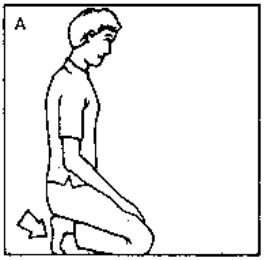
If, on the other hand, one accepts the basic tenets included in a book like this as sufficient theoretical knowledge and practices sincerely in accordance with them, one is surely guaranteed to attain the same results as countless others have likewise attained – peace, happiness and true freedom from suffering.

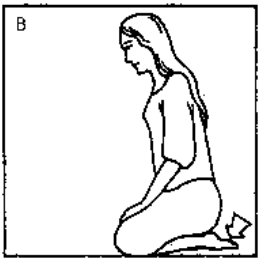
Thank you one last time for taking the time to read this short introduction on how to meditate, and once more I sincerely wish for this instruction to bring peace, happiness and freedom from suffering to you and all of the beings with whom you come in contact.

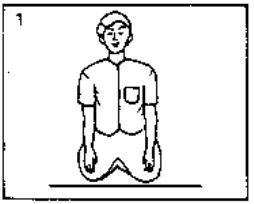
Should you find anything lacking or unclear in these pages, or if you would like more detailed or specific instructions in the practice of meditation, you are welcome to contact me through my weblog:

http://yuttadhammo.sirimangalo.org/

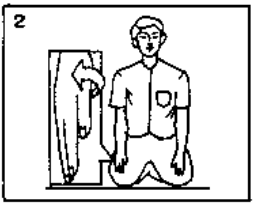
Appendix: Illustrations



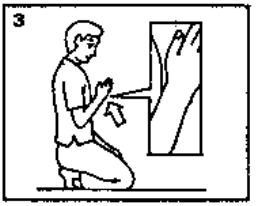




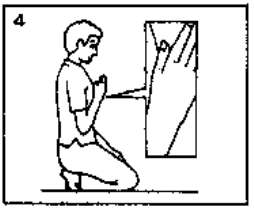
Sitting



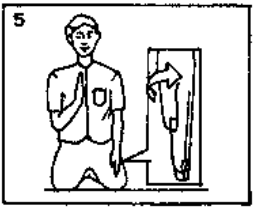
Turning



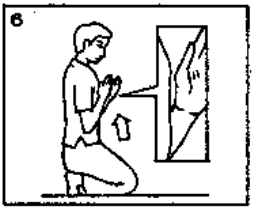
Raising



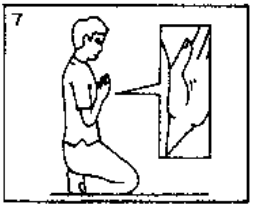
Touching



Turning



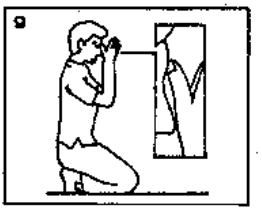
Raising



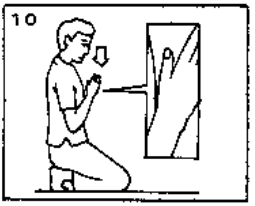
Touching



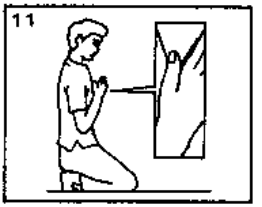
Raising



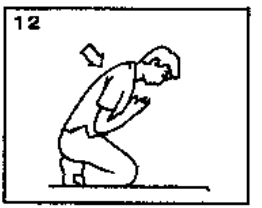
Touching



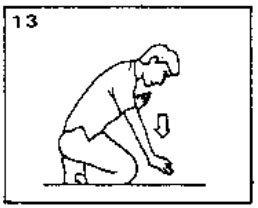
Lowering



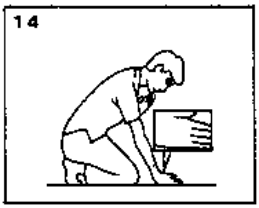
Touching



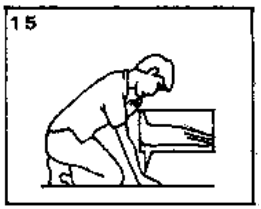
Bending



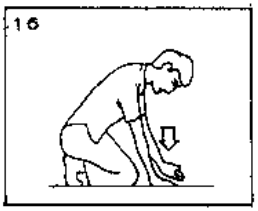
Lowering



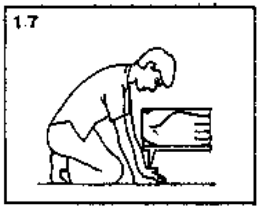
Touching



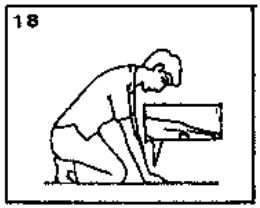
Covering



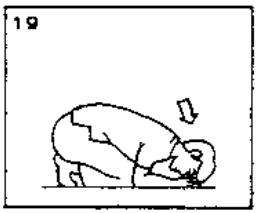
Lowering



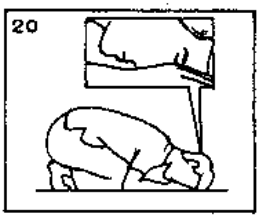
Touching



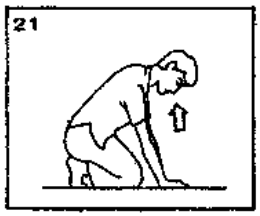
Covering



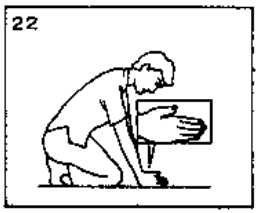
Bending



Touching



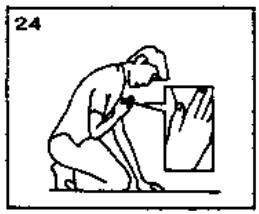
Raising



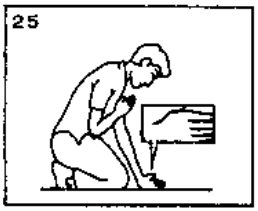
Turning



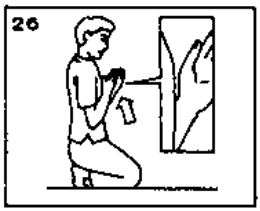
Raising



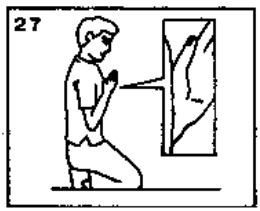
Touching



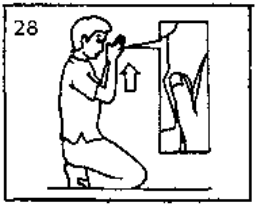
Turning



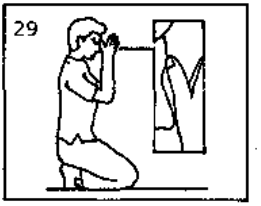
Raising



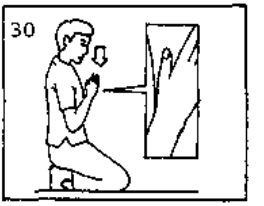
Touching



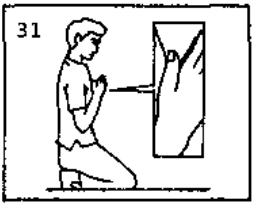
Raising



Touching

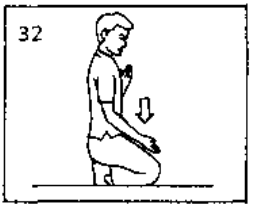


Lowering

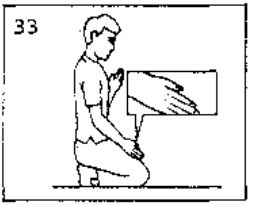


Touching

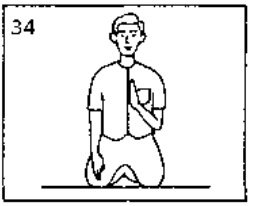
Repeat 12 to 31 two more times, then continue, starting with 32.



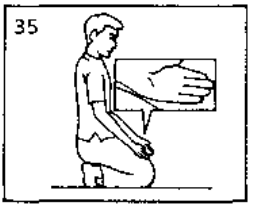
Lowering



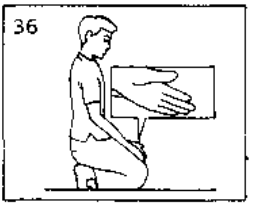
Touching



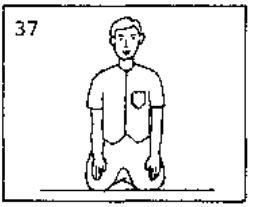
Covering



Lowering



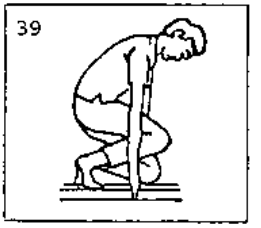
Touching



Covering

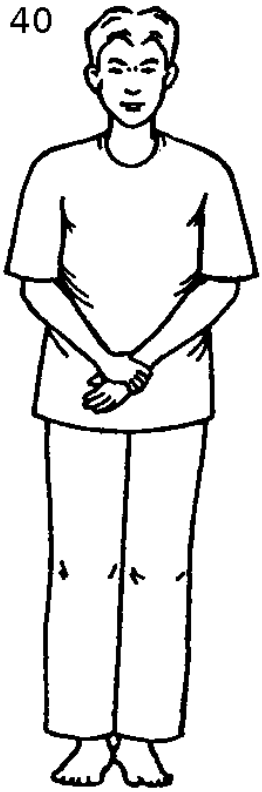


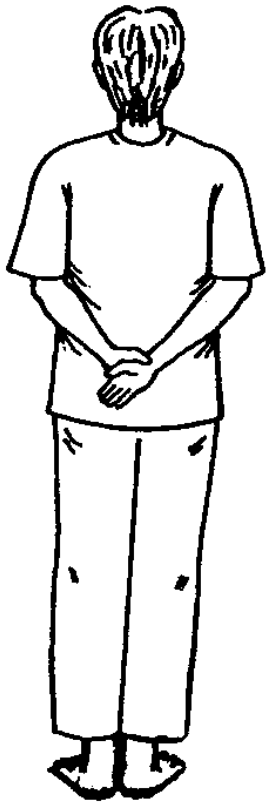
Sitting



Standing

40





41





Sirimangalo International
www.sirimangalo.org