

Advanced Mindfulness Practice

In the initial meditation training you received in the Mudrashram® Master Course in Meditation or the Accelerated Meditation Program, you were introduced to Vipassana as one of the Centering Methods.

Those of you who took the Mudrashram® Advanced Course in Meditation and got the companion book, *The Advanced Practice of Meditation*, may have reviewed the Raja-Vipassana meditation that Swami Prem Dayal gave us. If you took the Advanced Vipassana Workshop (one of our paid webinars), you did the guided meditation version of this meditation.

There are several articles in *Meditation for Therapists: Theory and Application* on mindfulness that cover its uses in psychotherapy. I will not rehash that material here in its entirety: if you are interested in therapy, you can obtain this book and read it. But I do wish to excerpt some material from this text that will help you better understand what mindfulness is, and its potential uses.

This will prepare you for the new article first revealed in this webinar, “A Brief Primer on the Hidden Practices of Vipassana,” which will show you the higher octaves of this increasingly common practice. [You know when mindfulness begins to show up in magazines, it is becoming assimilated into our modern culture!]

OK, let’s dive in!



Potential Uses of Mindfulness–Based Meditations in Psychotherapy

Excerpted from *Meditation for Therapists: Theory and Application* ©2012

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the state of inner alertness in which the focused attention is able to recognize, identify and label the contents arising at different levels of awareness. It monitors the contents of awareness arising in the present time.

What is Vipassana?

Vipassana consists of a variety of techniques to bring about the state of mindfulness. This spectrum of techniques aims to

- Focus attention in the present time
- Observe and label the contents of awareness
- Train the meditator to detach and disidentify from the contents of awareness
- View the contents of awareness as an ongoing flow or process

What is process and what is its relevance to psychotherapy?

In the waking state of awareness, the individual experiences personality as a stable structure, whose components work together to accomplish

- Goal oriented or purposive behavior, which appears to be under the control of personal volition
- Relational–based communication, promoting bonding, limit setting, and self–disclosure
- Sequential object oriented operations, as seen in work and recreation

- Definition of rules for living that construct ethical standards and cultivate socially adaptive character traits
- Languaging of experience, with the ability to communicate these lived experiences to others as a story or narrative, through speech, writing, or other media
- Conceptualization of intrapsychic events so that others can know their intentions for behavior; important relationships, vocation and recreational pastimes; the values that guide their behavior; and the important landmarks or life achievements that have meaning and relevance for them
- Construction of a stable self concept or identity state that is embodied, imbedded in lived experience, and capable of communicating feelings, thoughts, values, and personal meanings, and I statements which integrate these intrapsychic events

Beneath this apparent stable structure of personality are a variety of liminal states in which psychic contents appear to arise in a stream of consciousness in the present time. Focusing the attention in different liminal states allows direct experience of the contents of these bands of awareness, and uncovers the moment-to-moment process of sensing, feeling, and thinking that arises outside of the apparent structure of personality. Boyd (1990) identified several liminal states in which this stream of consciousness experiencing may be encountered, which he terms the realm of the Conscious mind.

Band	Boyd's name for this state	Contents
1	Present time awareness of movement	Awareness of life unfolding in the present time, movement or sitting still
2	Present time sensory awareness	A heightened awareness of sensations of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch arising from the environment

Band	Boyd's name for this state	Contents
3	Present time body awareness	Awareness of the sensations arising within the body
4	Present time feeling awareness	Awareness of emotions arising in the present time
5	Present time thought awareness	Awareness of thoughts arising in the present time as behavioral commands, metaphors or analogies, and logical reasoning
6	Present time ego awareness	Awareness of the identity statements and their associated thoughts, feelings and reactions
7	Preconscious	Awareness of impressions and memories arising from yet deeper bands of the mind

This present time experiencing that arises in these altered states of awareness (ASA) has been called *process*. Structured focusing of the attention on different levels of this process with guided interaction with the contents of these ASA plays a role in different styles of psychotherapy.

What is process-oriented psychotherapy?

Process-oriented psychotherapy differs from simply allowing a person to relate from the established structures of personality and to tell his or her story

- It guides the client into an ASA to uncover deeper levels of the mind
- It may analyze the client's projections from these liminal states upon the therapist and help interpret or clarify their meaning
- It focuses on the present time experience of feelings, thoughts, or beliefs beneath these surface structures of personality

- It may ask the client to interact with the content of these deeper strata of awareness
- It may ask the client to observe and report what he or she is experiencing in this present time
- Conceptual models of psychotherapy may direct the therapist to guide the client into a specific ASA and specify effective interventions to use at that stratum of awareness. To facilitate process work requires the psychotherapist have some experience with the types of content that may be encountered at these different strata, and to act as guide to the client to navigate in them. For this reason, many schools of psychotherapy recommend that potential therapists undergo therapy themselves, so they may learn how issues are uncovered, worked through and resolved, and to familiarize him or her self with the contents of these ASA.

Process-oriented psychotherapy differs from other varieties of intervention, each of which may also induce an ASA. While these other forms of intervention may lead the attention into an ASA, they often do so with different aims than those encompassed by process-oriented psychotherapy. Some of these other forms of intervention are shown in the table below.

Method	What It Does
Affirmation or command modalities	Uses affirmations to actively program the deeper mind to carry out specific directions; these may be coupled with evocative exercises to activate commitment, accomplishment of specified goals in a time-delimited framework, and to strengthen will power

Method	What It Does
Hypnosis	Introduces suggestions at liminal states of awareness, which are purported to work in the background behind the structures of personality to bring about a desired result
Cognitive deconstruction	Utilizes logical argument to deconstruct irrational beliefs, which change affective states and modify ineffective behavior
Process Meditation	Asks a repetitive question to elicit earlier incidences of an identified painful issue, aiming to uncover the original incident underlying the issue
Guided imagery	Selects a symbol or image to evoke responses from the client and may guide the client to interact with this image in different ways
Absorptive methods	Trains absorption in the breath to bring about a unitive or mystical union with an inner voidness or state of being in which apparent dualities and conflicts disappear
Dramatic methods	Reenacts traumatic situations by role play or psychodrama

Mindfulness, the cultivation of the ability to observe the content of these inner states of awareness in the present time, may have special relevance to process-oriented psychotherapies.



How does mindfulness effect change?

Mindfulness brings about awareness of separation of the seer (the attention) from the contents of awareness. It allows the meditator to monitor these contents as they arise in the present time. It may promote change in a psychotherapy client the following ways.

- It breaks up identification with symptoms. The meditator does not state, “I am depressed,” but instead, “I observe depressed or sad feelings arising in the present time.”
- It promotes awareness of life as an ever-changing process, which gives hope that dysphoric symptoms are not permanent.
- It may also promote a sense of efficacy, whereby the client gains the ability to focus attention and change how he or she experiences pain or trauma
- It can improve the client’s ability to become aware of intrapsychic content, which improves inner concentration (focus) and alertness (responsiveness).
- By allowing the client to experience a broader range of emotionality, mindfulness provides a template for empathy. By cultivating the capacity for empathy, it can evoke the client’s feelings of compassion for others who may be suffering similarly.
- It develops a tolerant and non-judgmental viewpoint that may collapse negative attitudes.
- It trains the client to be more skillful at entering the ASA in which psychotherapeutic work is carried out...



A Brief Primer on the Hidden Practices of Vipassana

Many people are aware of Vipassana as a practice of monitoring the experience of the present time, and being fully present with whatever arises within the mind or enters the portal of the senses from the environment. Those who have gone to Vipassana retreats are aware that another practice of Vipassana is watching the breath in the present time. But there are additional levels of this practice, and we would like to discuss them.

We can characterize eight levels of Vipassana. These are briefly described below.

Level	Practice	Practice	Bands of the Mind
1	<i>Monitoring</i>	You give your full attention to the present time experience of movement, sensation of the environment, the deep sensations from within the body, emotions, thoughts, I AM (identity) statements, and the content entering conscious awareness from the Subconscious mind.	This level taps the Conscious mind.
2	<i>Laya</i>	You watch the breath and become absorbed in it. Your attention travels to deeper layers of the mind. This method is the bridge to the higher levels of Vipassana. The sustained practice of watching the breath leads to breakthrough, through which your attention moves through a level in which you experienced blockage and obstruction lifts up to a new level.	Depending on how long you enter the stream of breathing, this practice can lift the attention through the Subconscious, Metaconscious, and Superconscious mind.



Level	Practice	Practice	Bands of the Mind
3	<i>Sunyata</i>	This state dawns when the attention lifts up into the Voidness of Being at the deepest level of the Metaconscious mind, and remains spontaneously fixed in this state. At this level, you experience oneness with the environment. You do not sense there is a self; rather, it appears everything spontaneously arises in a state of flow. Stress falls away. Actions become effortless. This is typically the first stage of breakthrough.	This state occurs when attention moves to the deepest level of the Metaconscious mind.
4	<i>Union with the Eternal Now</i>	This is a state that New Age and New Thought groups characterize as a state of enlightenment. It occurs when your attention lifts up into union with the wave of the present time on the Akashic Records Subplane. At this level, you become aware of the Soul's stream of thought (intuition), its choices that guide human life in the present time (intention), its experience of interconnectedness and union with all life (unity), its caring and connection with the lives of others (compassion), and its innate aloofness and perspective on the world as a construction of the mind (detachment).	This state dawns when the attention rises to the Akashic Records Subplane of the Abstract Mind Plane in the Superconscious mind.
5	<i>Union with Eternal Being</i>	This state occurs when attention rises up through the vehicles of consciousness of the Superconscious mind and unites with the Soul on its own Plane. This brings about the experience of eternity. You are united with the presence of the Divine within the Soul, and you experience Gnosis. You experience the unbounded unconditional love of the Soul. You experience its encompassing, vast wisdom. You experience its great power and bliss. This is called Atma Samadhi.	You experience this state when attention unites with the Soul on the Soul Plane in Planetary Band of the Superconscious mind.

Level	Practice	Practice	Bands of the Mind
6	<i>Union with the Universe</i>	You enter this state when attention lifts up into the Cosmic Consciousness nucleus of identity, and you gain full union with it. In this ecstatic state, it feels like you are one with the entire cosmos, which dances within you. The entire world appears unreal; the bliss and joy of this state pervades all creation. Paramahansa Yogananda referred to this state as Self Realization. Vedanta philosophers referred to this state as the Atman.	You enter this state of ecstatic union when attention fuses with cosmic consciousness in the First Cosmic Initiation.
7	<i>Finding the Tao</i>	This profound state of absorption occurs when your attention merges into the seed atom of one of the Buddhist or Taoist Supracosmic Paths. When this occurs, you experience the entire Creation unfolding from the eternal moment in this blissful atom, which Buddhists view as the union of voidness (Nirvana) and the world network of suffering and ignorance (Samsara)—this gives rise to spontaneous compassion. Taoists refer to this as the Way (Tao) and the unfolding of Nature (Teh).	You enter this state when attention rises into the Supracosmic Sphere.
8	<i>Brahma Vidya</i>	When attention moves beyond all states of apparent identification, it merges into the Infinite Consciousness, Satchitananda. In this state, you transcend the worlds of conscious experience and the darkness of the unconscious mind, and abide in the highest state of consciousness. This is a state of infinite bliss and eternal peace. When this essence is awakened, you experience continual revelation as the spirit opens the four channels of the Nada on this Path.	You experience this highest state of consciousness on the Seventh Transcendental Path.

While levels one, two, and three are readily accessible to almost anyone; levels four through eight require breakthrough and progressively deeper absorption of your attention. Swami Prem Dayal gave a practice he called Raja Vipassana in the Advanced Vipassana workshop, which we taught in 1987. This practice is described in our book, *The Advanced Practice of Meditation*. We teach a guided meditation version of this practice in the Advanced Vipassana workshop, which was recorded as one of our paid webinars.

The Seven Stages of Vipassana Practice

The practice of Vipassana appears to move through seven stages. These stages are:

- Collecting attention
- Presence
- Monitoring content in the present time
- Moving into a new state of awareness – shifting
- Processing the content of the mind at that state of awareness through awareness of what arises in the present time at that level
- Breakthrough
- Mystic union

Collecting attention, which is called concentration, occurs when you gather the field of your mind stuff and bring it to a single point. You can do this through directed intention to concentrate the mind (tratakam); or you can use the Han Sa technique, which uses a mantra in coordination with the breath to focus the mind. In classical Vipassana, teachers ask their students to simply pay attention to the breath.

Presence occurs when your mind stuff is fully concentrated. You feel centered. You are completely aware and present to this moment.

Monitoring content in the present time begins to arise after you have become fully present. You notice what arises. As you notice what arises, this material releases; your muscles relax; you let go of the tension you are holding in your body. At this first stage of monitoring content, your attention is still present in the waking state of awareness; you are releasing the first layer of content that holds your attention in this ground state of awareness.

One practice that taps this level is the body scan, where you actively notice what is in your body through monitoring each body part. Another is the lotus visualization, where you imagine that you are abiding in a lotus in the center of a calm and clear mountain lake.

Shifting occurs when you process through the content at the waking state of awareness, and your attention moves upward into another vehicle of consciousness. Your attention becomes aware of the content of a new focal point; you become one with the experience and function at this new level. You become movement. You become sensation. You become one with the physiological rhythms and deep sensations arising in your body.

Processing at the new focal point occurs when you note the content that arises at this level. You can passively access this state through hypnosis, when a hypnotist guides you to a particular level of the mind and asks you to describe what you are experiencing there; meditation teachers call this a guided meditation. You can focus your attention there through *tratakam*, and then notice what you experience arising in the present time—this is the method of Raja Vipassana, which Swami Prem Dayal taught. You can enter that state through absorption in the breath; when you alight into this new state of awareness, your attention alights there, and you notice your experience. A psychotherapist may ask you to focus on your feelings or your thoughts; he or she may give you a symbol that represents that level of the mind, and have you concentrate on that symbol.

Breakthrough occurs when you process all the content that arises at a level of the mind, both that which arises as a result of sensation or suggestion given from without, and the spontaneous content that arises from the unconscious mind when you are no longer holding this out of awareness. Attention leaps upward into a new state of awareness: the state of awareness depends on the level at which you are processing. For example, breakthrough at the level of the deep sensations within the body leads to union with the voidness of being; breakthrough at the level of feelings leads to union with your spiritual heart.

We teach Physical Vipassana, which course participants practice until they can experience breakthrough at this level. This enables them to enter the voidness of being: this practice is used as a Centering technique to quickly unite attention with the core of the personality—the Self, in its active form; the voidness of consciousness, or being, in its passive form. New Age practitioners use holodynamic breathing or rebirthing, in which you breath through the unconscious mind until you breakthrough the other side. You can also experience breakthrough through continually repeating a mantra with your attention; the mantra pulls your attention across the unconscious bands of the mind until you lift up into the next vibrational octave of the mantra.

The first stage of *Mystic Union* is the state of attentional union with the voidness of being (Sunyata). This state is cultivated in Zen Buddhist practice. You can experience it as a result of focusing your attention on your breath, or having a breakthrough experience through Physical Vipassana. There are a variety of other methods to gain union with being, which we discussed in the webinar we conducted on January 21, 2012. [This webinar is part of the Adventures in Pinda series, in which we explore each vehicle of consciousness of the Conscious, Subconscious, and Metaconscious mind.]



Mystic union occurs when your attention is lifted up into higher states of consciousness of levels four through eight. Practices that can produce this state include concentration on one of these higher states; contemplating an evocative image, or a cryptic verbal suggestion (koan) that leads the attention to union with this essence; traveling upon the breath until you reach this level; or using a mantra keyed to that level.

Some meditators find the nearly effortless opening and monitoring of Vipassana is their favored method for meditation. If you enjoy this style, we encourage you to become familiar with each of the seven stages of practice. As you are able to enter the mystic union stage, you will progressively be able to enter the Planetary, Cosmic, Supracosmic, and Transcendental levels of this practice. If you would like a guided meditation version of this journey, we remind you of the Advanced Vipassana workshop, which is available in a webinar format.



Thank you for attending our webinar today!

