

About AWAKENING HEART (Interfaith Mindfulness Ministries)

Awakening Heart, currently based in Dallas, Texas, was founded by Brother ChiSing, M.Div., M.A., as a spiritual ministry inspired by the universal teachings and practices of the contemporary Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, and his "Order of Interbeing" composed of both lay and monastic members worldwide.

Spirituality, meditation, and "The Art of Mindful Living" are the basis of our classes, workshops, retreats, special events and communities. Buddhist spirituality, as it was originally intended by the Buddha, is not exclusively "Buddhist" but universally applicable and beneficial for people of all faiths. The word "Buddha" simply means to be "awake" or "enlightened," which is the potential in every person. Mindfulness is not limited to one religion, it is an ecumenical spiritual practice and a non-sectarian way of life that can benefit anyone and everyone, whether Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, or those of other faiths as well as the non-religious.

We are intentionally very beginner-friendly, and we warmly welcome and affirm people of all ages, religions, genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, abilities, classes and levels of meditation experience. We especially welcome those who have been spiritually abused by religious fundamentalism and who are seeking a safe refuge for inner healing within genuine spiritual community.

Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. "You have arrived, you are home."

AWAKENING HEART Affirmation:

Noble Community, we gather here now
to honor the Way of Peace and Non-violence,
the Way of Wisdom and Compassion,
the Way of Joy and Beauty,
in solidarity with one another,
with all Humanity,
and with all Life on Earth.

Friends on the Path, we gather here now
to deepen our solidity like a mountain
and to renew our freshness like a flower
through mindful sitting and walking,
mindful singing and breathing,
and mindful speaking and listening.

Sisters and Brothers of Awakening, we gather here now
to celebrate the One Light that shines
through many religions, many cultures, many teachers;
to practice the teachings of our ancestral teachers,
including Siddhartha Gautama the Shakyamuni Buddha,
and of our contemporary teachers, including Thich Nhat Hanh;
and to affirm our faith in the capacity within ourselves
and all persons, both men and women
of every race, orientation and class,
to realize full and perfect Enlightenment.

www.AwakeningHeart.org

STARTING A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

Foundational Practices

- 1) Sitting Meditation (daily) – begin with 5 minutes in the morning and/or evening, then gradually add minutes until you are able to meditate for 30 minutes or more.
- 2) Walking and Eating Meditation – practice this anytime you think of it; you can also practice hugging meditation, washing dishes meditation, etc.
- 3) Spiritual Reading – when doing spiritual reading, read slowly and reflectively; this is not about speed reading or the collection of mere data, it is about listening to the Great Wisdom of the Universe finitely expressed through human words.
- 4) Nature – take time out at least one day a week to get in touch with the beauty of Mother Earth – the green grass, trees, flowers, lakes, hills, sky, animals, birds, etc.
- 5) Loving and Being Loved – give and receive kindness with an open heart everyday; service is "karma yoga."

Supplemental Practices

- 6) Journal-writing – write from the heart, in stream-of-consciousness style, without judgment or the need to write perfectly.
- 7) Creative Arts – express yourself through music, painting, dance, gardening, cooking, or whatever form of creative arts that resonates with you.
- 8) Ritual – create an altar at home, light candles, burn incense, pray, chant, bow, or do whatever form of ritual that most helps you to open your heart to the Divine.
- 9) Yoga, Tai Chi, etc. – get grounded in an embodied spirituality through physio-spiritual exercise practices such as yoga or tai chi, etc.
- 10) Spiritual Counseling – develop spiritual relationships that are nurturing; this can be individually with a therapist, minister, friend, meditation coach or spiritual counselor; and it can also be in a group context as well, such as a support group, sangha, church or other spiritual community.

MEDITATION TIPS (part 1)

~ by Brother ChiSing

Meditation is not just about Focus (Concentration).

A common by-product of prolonged intensive Focus is peace, joy, bliss... also known as "Samadhi" or Oneness Consciousness. But this is not the goal of Meditation, not an end in and of itself. We need to be careful, or we may end up as "Samadhi junkies" only meditating to get the next spiritual high or the next spiritual fix.

Of course, peace, joy and bliss are nice, and they have their place, and they are inevitable in the course of meditation practice, but to cling solely to this by-product is to stunt spiritual progress and stop short of true enlightenment.

Meditation is not just composed of Focus. It is also comprised of Awareness (Mindfulness). So, if you are not feeling particularly focused (on the breath/body or mantra/gatha or here/now reality), yet you are aware that you are not particularly focused, that is still Meditation, for you have Awareness. So you can smile and feel encouraged. It's not all about Focus.

And let's say you aren't feeling very focused or aware, but you persist patiently in the practice of meditation and commit to the amount of time you have allotted to yourself. This diligent effort or Patience is another aspect of Meditation which, as you continue to cultivate it, will bring great power to your practice and life, sometimes in very unexpected ways. This is also Meditation, even if it isn't feeling always focused or aware, blissful or insightful. Just doing it anyway, regularly, is very powerful, as you will see later.

But perhaps you have skipped a day or even a week of Meditation (or even more!). Simply take a deep breath and start over. Begin anew. Commit to regular practice once again. Every moment is a fresh start. So, forgive yourself, love yourself, give kindness to yourself and simply just start over again. For Lovingkindness is the fourth and perhaps greatest component of Meditation. Love is the foundation and the heart of our true life and practice.

To summarize:

MEDITATION =

Focus (*Concentration*)
Awareness (*Mindfulness*)
Patience (*Diligence / Effort / Discipline*)
Lovingkindness (*Forgiveness*)

Another way of labeling these four qualities (**the 4 C's**) =

Calm **Concentration**
Cognitive **Clarity**
Commitment
Compassion

"Wandering Mind"

Wandering mind. Is it a problem? You say it is difficult to meditate because your mind wanders so much. Thoughts begin to race in all directions. Concentration and focus are hard. And yet, is it not true that your mind is usually in this state of affairs? And when you sit down on your meditation seat, now you have the opportunity at last to see what is really going on. Meditation is not the cause of your wandering mind. Meditation simply allows you to see what is already there. Meditation is a way of stopping and observing. And what you most often see at first may not be pleasant, but if you do not face the reality of what has been going on for so long — namely, a mind that is out of control — you will not be able to transform yourself and awaken to your True Nature.

What is needed is courage of the Heart to face the current situation of the untransformed mind. Courage to sit with it as it is. And faith enough to trust that awareness itself is already transformative. So, instead of resisting and resenting the wandering mind during meditation, simply watch without judgment the tangled workings of the mind. Your anchor is mindfulness of the present moment, perhaps of the body sitting here and now, breathing in and breathing out.

Aware of a thought, noting the kind of thought it is, and coming back to the breath, in the body, to this present moment. ...

Aware of a sound, noting the tonal quality of the sound, and coming back to the breath, in the body, to this present moment. ...

Aware of a sensation on the skin or in the body, noting the details of the sensation without adding thoughts and interpretive judgments onto it, and coming back to the breath, in the body, to this present moment. ...

Aware of a feeling or emotion, noting whether it is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, perhaps labeling the feeling without getting pulled into the mental and emotional drama of it, and coming back to the breath, in the body, to this present moment. ...

Aware of planning mind, aware of memory mind, aware of worry mind ... aware of judging mind, drowsy mind, hyperactive mind, daydreaming mind ... and each time coming back to the breath, in the body, to this present moment in the here and now, again and again.

Eventually, you will notice certain patterns, certain mind-habits, certain connections between thoughts and feelings. You will begin to realize how impermanent and insubstantial your thoughts are, how your feelings are multi-layered and malleable, how you constantly identify who you are with your ever-shifting mind-states and life dramas when, in fact, **YOU ARE NOT YOUR MIND.**

And furthermore, you are not your addictions, you are not your accomplishments, you are not your self-esteem (high or low), you are not your I.Q., you are not the victim and you are not the victimizer. **YOU ARE NOT YOUR STORY.**

Much of your suffering stems from the false identification of your thoughts and feelings (your human story) with your True Nature. The body and mind are impermanent, they are not Who You Ultimately Are, and to believe and act otherwise leads to suffering. Who, then, are You?

YOU ARE A BUDDHA.

To know this and live in this realization is Nirvana. And when you awaken to the Truth of Who You Are, mind is no longer simply mind but is the Mind of the Buddha ("Bodhicitta"), and body is no longer simply body but is the Body of the Buddha ("Buddhakaya"). Both body and mind, then, are understood in their true light as tools of exploration, vehicles of expression, skillful means ("upaya"), not ends in and of themselves.

*-- inspired by the Buddha in you,
as written through Brother ChiSing*

THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS (Awakening Heart version)

The Five Mindfulness Trainings were developed during the time of the Buddha to be the foundation of practice for the entire practice community, including monastic and lay members. The basis for the trainings is mindfulness.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings protect our freedom and make life beautiful. As guidelines for our daily lives they are the basis of happiness for individuals, couples, families and society.

1. The First Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking and in my way of life.

2. The Second Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I vow to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on earth.

3. The Third Mindfulness Training (AH version):

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual irresponsibility, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without mutual understanding, care, respect, and a loving commitment to the long-term wellbeing of ourselves and others. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual irresponsibility.

4. The Fourth Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord; or words that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

5. The Fifth Mindfulness Training (AH version):

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use any intoxicants or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body and my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self transformation and the transformation of society.

BEGIN ANEW

Begin anew. . . .
It has been a long time since last we spoke.
It does not need to be so long.

In every moment,
the here and now --
the eternal and timeless --
is always present.

It does not take a special feat
to touch the here and now.
You only need to awaken to
this very breath, this very step.

In just one moment of mindfulness,
everything is made new,
moment to moment.

Enlightenment, peace, wisdom, joy --
these are only one breath away,
one step away.

But the question is:
Are you really there, my dear?
Are you really there in your breath, in your step?
Or are you only daydreaming, sleepwalking?

Whatever you think you've done wrong,
whatever penance you believe you must perform
before you can awaken,
I invite you now to let that go.

Take a slow, deep breath.
And remember the Greater Reality
which holds you,
which supports you,
which nurtures you.

Let there be a moment of awakening,
let there be several moments of awakening,
every time you rest into this Greater Reality,
the Buddha Nature, your True Self.

And as you begin to rest in your true vastness,
a healing takes place
organically and naturally --
forgiveness takes place,
understanding takes place,
reconciliation takes place --
effortlessly.

In the eternal and timeless
here and now,
you can always begin anew.

You can always find refreshment and rejuvenation
for your earthly body and human mind
as you awaken to
your Universal body and Divine mind.

Yes,
you can do it.
It is your birthless birthright.
It is your deathless inheritance.

So, my beloved,
can you drop the story,
drop the delusions?
Can you let go of
self-hate, shame and unworthiness?
Are you willing to relax your hold
on control and manipulation?
Are you willing to loosen your grasp
on false securities from false fears?

It only takes one breath,
one step,
in mindfulness,
my dear.

In just one moment of enlightenment,
you can awaken from the illusions of time,
pressure, guilt, failure and regret.

You can awaken to
the eternal and timeless
here and now --
to peace and love and wisdom,
to true strength and true joy and true beauty,
to the Buddha that I am in you and in all beings,
to the Ultimate dimension of all things --
the Divine All in all:

Dew drops on an autumn leaf . . .

*~ inspired by the Buddha in you,
as written through Brother ChiSing
(March 16, 2007)*

www.AwakeningHeart.org