

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS MEDITATION?

By Sonia Moriceau

A friend of mine was telling me that his aerobic training sessions were for him "his meditation", he asked me what is the difference with what I do.

As a teacher of mindfulness meditation with over twenty years of practice it is clear that there are many different ideas and expectations about what meditation is.

Meditation, a not very satisfactory translation of the pall word *bhavana*, means mental development where one has to distinguish two kinds, development of Tranquillity and Concentration and development of Insight, liberating the mind.

The word meditation evokes in each of us a response based on one of the three basic human characteristics i.e the acquisitive, the averse, the confused. Each one of us tends to have one predominant way of responding to events, objects and people though all three characteristics can manifest at different times.

The acquisitive type will tend to find that "the world is all beautiful", so meditation is seen as a beautiful, serene and peaceful activity filled with love, light and a sense of perfection.

The averse type on the other hand tends to see the world as "an unkind, painful and cruel place to be". So meditation is used to withdraw from the world and to isolate oneself from it in a rather harsh way.

The confused type tends to swing between the two states of the acquisitive and the averse and is filled with restlessness and anxiety, a sense of not belonging and no place to rest. Meditation is seen as a means to calm and pacify the strong feeling of unease and therefore becomes the one and only reliant point of reference.

Meditation is primarily a mirror that reflects who we are without distorting the picture. Ideally one needs to be instructed and guided by someone who has been trained and who is practising. Teaching oneself meditation is not the best and surest way, since we tend to see life through one of the three main characteristics our view is not whole but already distorted. A teacher will help see the whole picture while knowing how to guide you based on your characteristic.

Students at first often believe that meditation or a meditative state is something that one day will strike them as though leaving it to luck or a happy accident.

Mindfulness meditation is a training, a method, one could even say a technique. So like any other technique one needs to be taught the instructions, how to apply them and then lots of practice

The method is first of all to develop the skill of observing the body in the four basic postures, standing, walking, sitting, lying down, and to link this awareness of the body to all life activities.

The meditation starts with the awareness of the body as it is slower and denser than mind and so can be more easily observed. Through the repeated and consistent observation of the body and its activities, the practitioner will not fail to become more aware of the mental states that accompany the bodily activities.

From the observation of the body and mind one goes on to the training or taming of the body and mind. This means for example that if you perform a certain activity like answering the phone or opening a door your attention (mind) is with the body movement, not ahead of it or behind it. How often while one is doing a simple daily activity like switching on the kettle, the attention is on what has just taken place or on what is about to happen? Training the body and mind means teaching the attention to come back to what is happening at that moment, here in this body, *now* in this moment, no matter how many times one needs to call the attention back.

It is a simple, not always easy, but simple method. Again this is practised in the four basic postures and in all daily life activities.

The next part of the training is liberating, freeing mind. The practitioner will now have realized or at least touched on the experience that suffering or dissatisfaction in one's life is totally linked to the sense of self-identity, me and mine, my views and my needs, "wanting what I do not get, and getting what I do not want".

The meditation practice will help us release our grip, our hold onto "this is me, this is mine" condition. With patience and kindness to this "me", we will gradually become less dominated in our response to the world by the acquisitive, the averse or the confused characteristic.

Over time with lots of dedicated practice and lots of good-will the four sublime abodes, Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity will become our true refuge.

A Zen master was reported saying that "if sitting was all that was required for enlightenment

then surely all frogs would be enlightened!"

Mindfulness meditation is a training therefore available to all, it is not a gift therefore not the privilege of the few. All that is required is an honest intention to look into the mirror again and again with a sense of humour and kindness.