

12-Step Meditation Practice

*Those interested in practicing as a group can refer to the italicized instructions on each page.
Facilitators, see last page for group format.*

Introduction:

Facilitator reads at beginning of meeting.

This 12-step practice is a simple set of tools for anyone who wishes to effect positive change in their lives and the lives of others.

With roots in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, it provides a secular ethical framework to help us bridge the gap between our actions and our values. Mental habits drive our actions and our actions lead to outcomes. If we find the ways we've looked for happiness haven't produced the outcomes we wanted, we must change our mental habits. Meditation is a means to produce that change.

Meditation can be defined as the process of repeating something over and over again in the mind. What we repeat affects our experience. These practices use contemplative meditation to examine and address what it is we are repeating. The contemplations help us cut the root of negative thoughts and habits and replace them with beneficial ones by challenging our belief that happiness requires us to place our own needs above those of others.

Disentangling ourselves from deeply engrained habits takes time and is accomplished in proportion to how often and sincerely we practice. We can sit in formal meditation alone or in a group, practice informally throughout the day, or both.

Ultimately, the purpose of this training is to help us become more compassionate and responsive as we face the many challenges life presents. We have all dealt with difficult circumstances in the past; we will all experience more in the future. Loss and pain are universal. These contemplations strengthen and encourage us to move beyond self-importance, to skillfully face obstacles as they arise, and to enrich the world through consideration and concern for others.

Check-In begins for group practice. One minute per person.

Meditation Instructions:

Read aloud to group.

There are many different forms of meditation. These meditations are of a contemplative nature and can be practiced alone or in a group.

To meditate formally, sit in a comfortable position with a straight back, allowing your gaze to rest in the space in front of you. Bring to mind the contemplation you're working with, reflecting on what it means to you in the context of your life experience. Thoughts and emotions may arise, the mind may drift. This is not a problem. Just apply the contemplation to those very thoughts and emotions again and again, until you experience a shift in perspective - a change not just of concepts, but a change in the way you experience the situation you're contemplating.

If, or when, the mind becomes agitated, rigid or dull, or the contemplation no longer feels fresh and impactful, rest the mind. Let go of effort and allow the shift in perspective to sink in less conceptually. Allow this state of rest to continue until it is no longer restful and then begin the contemplation again, as time allows.

Facilitator chooses three meditations for group. Five minutes per meditation. The fourth and final meditation is always "Give It Away."

The Meditations:

1. cause and effect.
2. i, me & mine.
3. what's my motivation?
4. altruistic accountability.
5. let it go.
6. just like me.
7. anger.
8. not harming.
9. helping.
10. everything changes.
11. happy for you.
12. give it away.

1. **Cause and effect.** For every action, there's a reaction. We accept this law in the natural universe, yet rarely look at cause and effect as it pertains to our own choices.

This contemplation asks us to explore the short and long-term consequences of the choices we make - how do our thoughts, emotions, words, and actions impact our lives and the lives of others?

2. **I, me and mine.** It can be instructive to watch how frequently we're self-absorbed in daily life. Even when trying to help others, we may notice that we like, or dislike their point of view, and think we know what is right. This tightness around what we think is best can make us less receptive to other's needs.

In this contemplation, we reflect on where our minds have been throughout the day. We replay our interactions and notice the ways we've judged others. How would the interactions change if we considered the views and needs of others as important as our own?

3. **What's my motivation?** This contemplation asks us to consider the needs of others, their challenges, their joys and sorrows as being equal to our own.

If we find that this positively alters our experience, we can begin each day, each meditation session by re-establishing this motivation.

4. **Altruistic accountability.** This contemplation asks us to take an honest and fearless look at the contrast between what we say we value and how we actually behave. Do our actions reflect our ethics? Do they produce the outcomes we want?

5. **Let it go.** When we look at the gap between our actions and ethics, we can sometimes experience immense regret. This contemplation asks us to give rise to compassion for ourselves and others trapped in cycles of self-centered action and reaction. We own and regret our anger, negativity, and harmful actions, commit not to fuel or repeat them, then let it all go within the framework of compassion.

6. **Just like me.** It's easy to see faults in others and not so easy to see our own. We all just want to be happy. This contemplation asks us to reflect on the actions of someone we view critically, and to recognize elements of their behavior in ourselves.

7. **Anger.** If we're angry and spiteful, always criticizing and blaming others, our world quickly fills with enemies. This contemplation asks us to explore our anger and our habit to blame others for our experience. What are the short and long-term consequences of anger, blaming and holding a grudge - does it create enduring, positive outcomes?

8. **Not harming.** Compassion is the wish that others not suffer. This contemplation asks us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, a family member, a neighbor, a stranger. If we truly glimpsed another's pain, would we ever do anything to create more misery?

9. **Helping.** Love is the wish that others find happiness. How would our own lives and the lives of others change if we saw every interaction as an opportunity to help? This contemplation asks us to consider how kindness could change the dynamics of our relationships, our workplace, our community, the world.

10. **Everything changes.** We are born, we grow old, we die, seasons and relationships change. Nothing is permanent, yet we live our lives trying to create stability, taking for granted what we have and acting as if we have all the time in the world. This contemplation asks us to try to find something, *anything* that is permanent and unchanging. If we fully accepted that everything changes, how would we live our lives differently?

11. Happy for you. Being happy for others can be a joyful experience. It can antidote the envy we may feel at another's good fortune and counteract feelings of negativity.

This contemplation asks us to rejoice in the positive; another's good fortune, the kind and virtuous acts happening all over the world, anything that uplifts, or inspires, and then make the wish that such kindness would only increase, until we all know unbound joy.

12. Give it away. It takes courage to look into our minds and to begin the process of change. At the conclusion of each meditation session and at the end of each day we take a moment to reflect on these efforts. We can then imagine these efforts as an offering to others, taking the form of whatever they need, fulfilling them completely as it expands throughout time and space. By giving away even the smallest acts of kindness, we gradually build momentum that further supports our process of change.

Final Group Check-In. One minute per person.

At this very moment for the people's and the nations of the earth may not even the names disease, famine, war and suffering be heard. Rather may their excellent conduct, merit, wealth and prosperity increase and may supreme good fortune and well being always arise for them.

- H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche

Group Practice Instructions:

Group meetings are about practicing the meditations together, rather than engaging in personal processing or storytelling. It's helpful to work the following steps in sequence at first, but once we have familiarized ourselves with them, they can be used interchangeably.

The layout for the meeting might be as follows:

- Designate a facilitator and a time keeper.
- Facilitator begins by reading the introduction.
- Optional Community Check-In
 - one person, one check-in, one minute per person
 - no back and forth discussion among the group
- Read meditation instructions for group.
- Choose three meditation practices based on the Community Check-In
 - five minutes per meditation

While it is supportive for the facilitator to have some experience with the contemplations, the sole criteria for being a facilitator is the sincere wish to be of service to others. The facilitator is not a meditation instructor, or a teacher. Rotating facilitation among group members will help avoid any one person becoming identified with the role.

At the end of the group practice, we “Give it Away” – see number 12. This visualization is read aloud to the group, no time keeping necessary.

To conclude there is a final check-in.