



Four Part Vipassana Course (Extract)
with
Michael Kewley

Preliminary Instructions

Vipassana Bhavana (Insight meditation) and Metta Bhavana (Loving Kindness meditation) is a very powerful practice and with it we can change everything about our life. However, we must understand that the effects experienced are in direct relationship to the effort applied.

It is as though we wish to start a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together. If we rub furiously for two minutes, rest for five minutes and then rub again for another minute we will soon become discouraged as the wood never shows the slightest sign of igniting. However, if we rub the two pieces of wood together with a consistent and determined effort, soon we will be able to enjoy the benefits of a beautiful flame. The heat and light from this flame will not only benefit ourselves but ultimately all beings.

Before we can begin the first part of practice, we should look at the preliminary instructions.

Determination.

It is necessary for you to be determined in your approach to this course and follow the instructions to the best of your ability. It must be stressed that you should learn each of the techniques properly in order to fully benefit from it. This course has been designed to progress week by week, and each section must be understood and practised before moving on to the next. There may be many times during the course when you feel there is just not enough time to meditate, or there is something else you would rather do, but here, I ask you to remember what you are hoping to achieve and to be resolute in your undertaking.

Do not try to find the time to meditate, rather, make the time.

This practice must take priority over other less important events in our life such as watching television or reading the newspaper. Once or even twice a day for the next four weeks and longer, make the time to meditate. At the end of the course reflect upon the changes in your life, and any new understanding that may have arisen. If you feel then that you no longer want to continue with the practice, you can of course let go, but you will have at least given yourself the opportunity to experience it fully.

Many people have a limited meditation experience, and perhaps you will feel inclined to add something extra to the practices that you are learning.

Here, I ask you to resist. The techniques that you will learn during this course all work very well and have been tried and tested by hundreds of thousands of people since the time of the Buddha himself. None of them need enhancing by the addition of visualisation or mantras.

Please only follow the instructions as they are given.

Posture.

In Vipassana practice, posture is not considered to be as important as in some other forms of meditation. The purpose of this meditation is the development of insight itself, complete understanding of the nature of our own reality, and not the ability to sit for hour upon hour in the same posture.

However, we should try to develop a posture that we can maintain for the prescribed period, and then not change it until absolutely necessary.

At the beginning, we will sit for twenty minutes each session, and you may wish to experiment with posture before we begin.

In order to sit well the body should be balanced, that is in a good steady posture, not leaning forward or back, and with the spine reasonably straight. The hands should rest easily in the lap. The head should not fall forward and the chin should be gently tucked in so that the slope of the nose runs straight down to fall. This gives a good indication of balance and whether you are sitting cross-legged on the floor, kneeling on a meditation stool or simply using a straight back chair, a good posture will help you to focus the mind and stay alert.

If the posture is too relaxed it will encourage day dreaming and even sleep and if the posture is too rigid and tense will bring pain. As with all things in life, balance is everything.

To find a good posture may take practice and some experimentation, but it is always a worthwhile endeavour.

As already said, for the first week of the course we will sit each time for only twenty minutes. Gradually during the course this will be increased to thirty five minutes. This may sound daunting at first, but in time it will come naturally and easily.

So be patient and find the posture most suitable for your body.

There is a common misconception that meditation is about sitting like the Buddha in the full lotus posture. This is absolutely not true, so find the posture that suits you, and that you can maintain initially for twenty minutes without moving.

Location.

As we begin our daily sitting practice at home, we will find that certain conditions need to be fulfilled in order to be successful. The first condition is that of a suitable location.

The location for meditation practice needs to be quiet, warm, dry, draught free and somewhere where you won't be easily disturbed. For most people, this means the bedroom, but it is for you to discover the best place in your home yourself. Try to use the same place every day and make it your special meditation place. There is no need to decorate the walls with spiritual paintings or set up a Buddhist or Christian shrine but just keep a special area for your daily practice. Solitude or at least privacy is the best condition.

Sitting of time.

At the beginning of the course we should learn to sit well for not less than twenty minutes. This means that we should allow ourselves at least half an hour overall, taking time at the beginning to settle ourselves on our cushion or chair and time at the end to be still and quiet and to continue to experience the peaceful effects of the meditation.

It is not a good idea to try to squeeze the practice in between frantic burst activity such as running up the stairs at meditation time and twenty minutes later, rushing back downstairs to watch the news on television. We have to allow ourselves time. This practice is important, and we should have the right attitude to it.

It is also necessary to understand that whatever length of time we decide upon the beginning of our sitting practice, we should try to our best to accomplish. No matter how badly we think our practice is going we should resolve to maintain our posture until the end, and not finish until the allotted time is past.

We must not allow the mind trick us into giving up.

This is very important, so at the beginning learn to sit well for twenty minutes and don't be impatient to increase the time too quickly.

These, then are the preliminary instructions for Vipassana (Insight) and
Metta (Loving Kindness) meditation.