

The following is a collection of emails I sent to participants in a Meditation Class I gave at Arts West in Athens Ohio in the Spring of 2012. You may find it helpful, of course it is copyrighted but you may use it any way you like except by charging for it or claiming as your own.

All of this effort is dedicated to my teacher and Noble Friend, Venerable Sensei KC Daikai Madika WarEagle, bhikkhuni.

Brief directions to begin meditation:

1. choose a location that is relatively safe, quiet and where you can sit comfortably.
2. prepare a timer, turn off the phone, let those who might support your intention know what you are up to so you can minimize interruptions.
3. State the intention: "Peaceful, Happy, Kind, the next xx minutes are meditation time."
4. Have adequate shelter or clothing so that your body temperature is stable. Be hydrated ahead of time. Take care of necessary tasks so that responsibility is not a distraction. Get into a comfortable position you can maintain for the time period, rock side to side a few times, work out any kinks, loosen the belt, be sure you are in a posture that does not impede blood or nerves or strain muscles but is not likely to cause you to sleep.
5. Close the eyes or face a blank wall.
6. Let the kids out. This means the first few minutes on the cushion are the time when the mind is like kids let out for recess, spewing onto the playground. Just watch. Soon the thoughts will settle down. Remember thoughts will come and go as long as we are alive, no big deal. Thinking is what we are going to settle, this is stringing two or more thoughts together. When you notice thoughts just be aware, when you notice thinking return your attention to the chosen 'object of meditation'. If settling seems remote use the short Qigong routine from Ajahn Lee \* to raise the clear yang. There are forty or so different types of objects of meditation, mantras, the breath, a color, an element, counting, etc. A phrase has the additional benefit of entraining the conscious mind, "So Kind" has been my choice for meditation classes for several reasons. "So" is expansive, limitless and inviting. "Kind" is a combination of generosity and compassion, two of the roots of happiness. It is not admonishing it is simply descriptive so it is open ended and yet directs us toward a beneficial state and actions.
7. keep this up until your attention is stable, focused on the object of meditation for 10 - 15 minutes at a time. This stability builds strength of mind.
8. From this stable platform we can step onto some other possibilities, these could be Insight, an epiphany or understanding or investigation of some knowledge or phenomena previously undetected, or an intention - such as the directed sending of compassion, or the dwelling within a state of bliss, delight, or rapture.
9. Following the cessation of the altered state we return to mundane consciousness and evaluate whether the experience was true and beneficial. Both are relative. Typically any insight must be given its grain of salt so to speak and we must beware of pitfalls like attachment or any hint of the hindrances or poisons. Intention is only beneficial if not forced or done for gain or not seated in any of the three poisons (anger, greed or delusion). Dwelling in a measureless state is safe, beneficial and sure to provide positive outcome both in the short and long term, we have the Buddha's assurance of that and our own experience to confirm it.

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Ajahn Lee's QiGong routine to Raise the Clear Yang:

rub palms together briskly and then use PC 9 @ the tip of the middle finger to draw the Qi from spot to spot:

Du 26 on the upper lip below the nose to Yin Tang at the third eye 5 times

Yin Tang to Du 20 at the crown of the head , 5 times  
Du 20 to the pituitary centered behind the eyes and between the ears 5 times  
pituitary to throat chakra behind and below the adams apple 5 times  
throat to heart chakra, Ren 17, middle Dan Tien in the chest 5 times  
chest to lower dan tien one hand below and behind the belly button 5 times  
lower dan tien to universe and back 5 times

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Someone asked when we would begin working with Qi (chi, ki, prajna, wind, breath, etc) at the first meeting. I answered "next week," but we already are.

By meditating, by using this particular mantra;"So Kind," and by remembering: kind, gentle, persistent, we are 'grooming' the Qi, preparing it, being friendly toward it. Qi is the energy that enlivens all beings, that is life, that we know as the electricity that powers our cells and body systems. It is universal, that is- everywhere and in everything, and it is aware. We are it and it is us. When the Qi is moving we are well, happy,kind.

So don't wait for next week - begin with this week's assignment, 10 or more minutes daily meditation with the mantra "So Kind."

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If ever some unpleasant reaction such as irritation, frustration, or anger (which can manifest as tiredness or boredom) arises during or after meditation, you may be trying too hard. Or you might be carrying the habits of daily life into the time for meditation.

If this happens try not meditating. That is- sit down and be there but say to yourself: "I am not meditating, I am not doing anything, I am just here for the next xx minutes." Rouse up kindness toward yourself.

Watch what happens. Some humor might arise, some softening might occur. Sadness might come up - be kind toward it, don't ask why, why would just be a story. Just be with whatever is. That is what these few minutes are for.

Then do the time again tomorrow, same bat time - same bat show. Insight comes with Calm Abiding which means just be there and gradually the clutter and filters come off. Be kind, be gentle and persist.

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Tonight in class we practiced moving energy (Qi, Chi,) through the head, torso and out to the universe in 8 steps. In the coming week we will incorporate this into our meditation to help us settle and gain strength, peace and well-being.

The 8 energy centers we use as a pathway to clear the Qi and help us focus and strengthen the attention are:

1. the base of the nose where it meets the lip
2. the "third eye" between the eyebrows
3. the crown of the head
4. the pituitary, right in the center of the head between the ears and front and back of the skull
5. the throat
6. the solar plexus, where the breast bone ends above the abdomen
7. the dan tien, an energy center about 2-3 fingers below the navel between the spine and gut
8. out to the universe and back to the lower dan tien

we actually use a fingertip to follow the energy as we move or direct it with our intention, holding the fingertip about an inch or two out from the skin and tracing the movement of the energy from location to location, 5 times from nose to third eye, back and forth, then from the third eye to the crown and back 5 times, then from the crown to the center of the head and back 5 times etc etc. On reaching the dan tien we use both hands to sweep the energy in and out 5 times.

For the coming week the meditation assignment is to pre-program the mind with the instruction: "Peaceful, happy and kind the next xx minutes are meditation time." then compose whichever posture you choose to meditate, and initially allow thoughts to flow without intervention or even comment, any thinking that occurs fine, whatever - we used the analogy of letting the kindergarteners out on the playground. After 2-3 minutes of that, initiate the above Qigong routine. When that is completed move to the mantra used last week "So Kind." and finish out the time.

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in the first class we talked a little about how what we do during the day affects our meditation. There are three areas to be concerned with: speech, action and what we do for a living. That last one is fairly easy - most of us are not selling materials that are harmful or being paid to cause harm. But what we say and do throughout the day impact meditation tremendously.

Avoid harsh speech such as name calling or degrading others, even

cursing.

Avoid malicious speech - speaking badly of another, or even yourself.

Avoid lying, be aware that even though you think you know what occurred there are three sides to every story, yours, theirs and what really happened.

Avoid gossip and idle chatter - the blahblahblah of daily conversation.

Eleanor Roosevelt brightly said "small minds discuss people, mediocre minds discuss events, great minds discuss ideas"

We are using a mantra with intention and meaning because words lead the mind and energy into pathways, these pathways can be healthy and freeing or stagnant and burning.

Try watching what you say and make it kind. Do something for another. Consider how the job you have benefits you and others.

This will make a difference in the meditation.

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Even long time meditators continue to go through ups and downs and make discoveries and find revelations in meditation. The development of your ability to achieve stillness with the object of meditation will lead to states of utter bliss and contentment. Some of you may already be doing that. For most people this can come and go and depends the 24/7 of life. When it's there enjoy it, when it's not practice the belief that "this is good enough," whatever it is. Do this off the cushion or outside of meditation time as well, all time is meditation time.

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Beware of striving in meditation. If you are striving to achieve something you are no longer meditating. Mind and body have a subtle strength that resist change with a full frontal approach like striving or demanding or even pleading.

We have to circumvent the doer. Remember that the definition of insanity is to keep doing what we've always done and expect different results.

That is why we approach the practice of meditation with kind and gentle persistence. We merely practice returning to the object of meditation. Along the way we may notice the habits of mind, we may notice how the activities of daily living affect the mind and vice versa, we become familiar and friendly with mind. This is how we nurture serenity and serendipity.

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I hope that all of you value the potential you see in yourself enough to take the time each day to compose, settle and enjoy.

I believe it was this potential that interested you in meditation. When I started at 10 years old I thought it was like a game or a creative activity like painting. I had no hopes or goals. I was more integrated with Being as a child than I am after years of adulthood but I remember how that felt and am re-assimilating the best of both. As adults we tend to project more than children do. What are you projecting?

Whether its a deeper self experience or a better world, meditation is the tool and the key for achievement because it accesses our consciousness without accumulated baggage.

We are a bit like hermit crabs that gather accretions and carry them around. Those accretions give us a sense of security but they really weigh us down. When we take time to meditate we eventually come to realize the benefits and hazards of our baggage so we can sort it out.

Give yourself the opportunity and take the time to care for and train your mind.

Give yourself the kindness and gentle persistent guidance you need.

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Regular practice is much more beneficial than further instruction, we build on what we have done before. We all know whether that has been beneficial or not. Those experiences that were beneficial are like seeds, those that were not are like rocks. The seeds will grow, the rocks create space.

If you had unlimited, fully supported free time to practice and could recognize and overcome the five hindrances by yourself you would be enlightened shortly. Most of us devote our attention to other things.

We will discuss the progress of meditation, the hindrances and how to overcome them in the coming weeks.

Remember "Kind, gentle, persistent," is the way to proceed.

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Developing virtue in the three areas: Speech, Action and Livelihood helps us gather and groom energy (Qi) to increase depth and power of meditation.

Qi is characterized by both quantity and quality. It forms the link between body and mind, between ourselves and others and can be affected by meditation directly and indirectly.

Calm Abiding meditation builds strength. Insight meditation builds discernment. Each have aspects of quantity and quality. Each have yin and yang, and like yin and yang are interdependent, mutually supporting, proportional to one another. Combined they give rise to something else, the unconditioned.

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The initial purpose of meditation is to focus with stillness on an object of meditation - our mantra in this case, building up strength so transition to a deeper state of consciousness can occur.

These deeper states are sometimes called The Measureless Spaces because the measuring, comparing, judging and doing function of mind is allowed to rest while the being, observing, aware and 'connected to wholeness' mind is awake. These states are characterized by sublime contentment, joy, happiness, healing, wholeness, awe, wonder, grace and praise. They are associated with 1. loving kindness or benevolence 2. compassion 3. appreciative or sympathetic joy and 4. equanimity or wholeness, oneness of being with all.

Transitioning to these states takes an integrated, calm sense of serenity which is brought about by the 24/7 aspects of your mental processes. Tolerance, kindness, acceptance, active kindness contribute to this.

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There is a practice, a game, an activity to do all day long, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week - instead of whack-a-mole it's Metta Mole, whenever you see someone, (and you see as many as possible instead of ignoring them,) you say silently in your mind to them "May you be free from suffering and live in happiness." (Metta means benevolence, wishing well.)

Alternatively you can imagine that you have an unlimited supply of the softest, most comforting blankets imaginable and you wrap one around each of the people you see. As you offer it to them you know this blanket is acceptance, caring, comfort and good will toward that person and yourself.

Another alternative is to blow imaginary bubbles, filled with the breath of loving kindness, good wishes, benevolent intentions. The first one you blow surrounds you and lets in and out only kindness, then you blow more and surround others with these same bubbles. It's fun, play with it.

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Meditation time is really important, make the most of it by being aware and kind the rest of the day as well.

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The terrain ahead which is composed of your experiences in meditation will be your design.

You are the author of your own life. In meditation you see cause and effect more and more clearly. "This was what I sensed, this was my perception, this was how I labeled it, this was how I responded, this is where I held on or let go, this is what I did, this is what I could have done."

The tools - calm abiding with a meditation object, virtuous speech, action and livelihood, kindness, (generosity and compassion) are yours now to shape your experience.

Between the start of the trail and the finish - if there is one, there are obstacles and times when you will wish you would quit, there are amazing experiences and mundane ones, what happens is up to you, like any artist you will be surprised and astonished at what comes, Julia Cameron in the Artist's Way says "you provide the quantity, God provides the quality." If you don't like the term God use another. That really doesn't matter as long as you are clear who/what you are talking about.

In meditation the quantity is the time you put in paying attention, being present, not forcing it, being kind, gentle persistent.

You cannot rush it, you cannot get there when you want to, all you can do is be kind, gentle and persistent. That is due to the nature of our medium, consciousness. Which is embedded in your body.

So be easy on yourself and have fun. Relax and see the humor in this and take time to get to the cushion (or chair or walkway). Whatever you do all day long will affect the meditation but only if you do the meditation.

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There is great reason to be optimistic, the problems you imagine are not what you think or as bad as you think and there is great reason for joy. We have so much to be thankful for and so many reasons to be happy and grateful right now. Take that thought into your meditation.

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Meditation is not an intellectual concept. Meditation is a practical exercise. The benefits of meditation (*Relief of depression, obesity, insomnia and headaches by boosting serotonin production. Strengthened immune system. Lower stress and anxiety, deeper relaxation. Lower oxygen consumption. Improved healing process. Lower blood pressure. Fewer trips to the doctor. Decreased hospitalizations. Diminished stress. Increased creativity. Improved memory. Increased intelligence. Increased productivity.*) occur only with application. So just do it.

The first hindrance or obstacle common to all people everywhere, is sloth and torpor, also known as laziness and procrastination. The antidote is persistence, kind and gentle persistence. How do we persist? By cultivating enthusiasm, enjoyment, even excitement. Make the meditation a refuge, something you look forward to, a gift for you, a gift to those you care about. Good luck! Keep it up!

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Four monks were meditating in a monastery, all of a sudden the prayer flag on the roof started flapping. The youngest monk came out of meditation and said: "Flag is flapping." A more experienced monk said: "Wind is flapping." A third monk who had been there for more than 20 years said: "Mind is flapping." The eldest monk said: "Mouths are flapping!"

Speech and meditation work together to strengthen and protect the mind/body. Perhaps you have found the practice of wishing those you see or meet "free from suffering and living in happiness" challenging and enlightening. Perhaps you have noticed attachment to what you would usually say instead of this. Perhaps this practice has helped us see that the verbiage which flows in our minds as if through our mouths reflects and effects our feelings but typically has no value except to maintain habits and fill empty space. Change the habits and fill the space with something wholesome and voila! More freedom to move, less weight to carry.

At first the lessening of tension may make you think you are tired, you may need to rest more. Get the rest you need, please. The energy is simply changing - being used in different ways. Keep up the kind, gentle persistence and have fun.

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Basic rules for effective meditation:

1. kindness, gentleness, persistence are the way to proceed
2. virtue, especially speech- collects and retains Qi, strengthening meditation
3. mind and body, self and other connect thru Qi, are not separate must both be cultivated.

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Success means dropping duality and attaining true meditation.  
obstacles to success – the five hindrances and their antidotes:  
general antidote to all - the noble friend. This is a friend who encourages you toward wholesomeness, kindness and benevolence. One who leads by example and supports your good example. One who ignores failure and does not judge wrongdoing, who is forgiving but not enabling. Persistent, compassionate and generous, tending toward wisdom. Hard to find and requiring maintenance of openness and trust, this friend is a treasure.

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the five hindrances are:

1. laziness and procrastination – countered by scheduling, commitment, assistance, encouragement, persistence, kindness
2. restlessness ( distraction, moving from one thing to the next) is countered by effort, kindness, persistence, wait one minute, ask: is this real or is this diversion? Humor.
3. sensual desire (all senses endure craving, lust, appetite, desires) countered by observation of attachment or how needy these make one, recognition of the harm brought by that attachment. Ask what are you willing to sacrifice to get something you crave - is that wholesome or beneficial? More concretely countered by substitution, this is redirecting the mind to a more wholesome or beneficial thing, allowing the less beneficial object of desire to fade from attachment.
4. skeptical doubt or self sabotage (not the same as critical thinking which remains essential to the practice and is always useful, skeptical doubt is derogatory, and a lack of confidence, distrust) countered by seeing results of meditation, acknowledging any reservations, testing for yourself, seeing it work and coming to rely on your skills and understanding as they grow and develop.
5. ill will – (irritation, frustration, boredom, anger, rage, hatred) countered by kindness, compassion, enthusiasm, enjoyment, excitement. The pleasure in meditation leaves no room for ill will.

Calm Abiding and Insight are foundations of meditation, just the stairs leading up to the diving board, the real deal are the deep states of meditative absorption, what we are doing now is the training, the prep work. It really is possible to eradicate the hindrances and achieve deeper being.

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How to deal with itching, tingling, discomforts, distractions, desires etc:  
wait one minute before responding, then respond appropriately and return to the object of meditation. Appropriately means to acknowledge the body's voice - the sensation, but remind it this is meditation time and return

attention to the object of meditation. However, if the house is on fire, get out and call 911. We must not force the body/mind to endure pain stoically - this unkindness will persist in our daily habits, but respond with kindness to forge the bond of trust and establish loving kindness with ourselves and all beings.

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Music as meditation object:

I recall a very deep meditative state I entered once when listening to "Where Flamingoes Fly" by Gil Evans. This morning I woke with the realization that of course the ear, the sense of hearing, is an avenue into meditation for many people, and whether simple or complex, music like any meditation object would have to be internalized. A mantra is already in your mind, something like a color or element is also but we cultivate the illusion that it is outside of us. So we become the color or element, we internalize it, realize it, fully and deeply allow it to carry the mind to the deep absorptive states.

Having said all this and encouraged you to progress I must remind you that any striving or trying for a goal in meditation is utterly and completely useless and counterproductive. Let go and have fun. We are not gaining anything with this practice we are dropping off accumulated baggage.

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remember what Yoda said - "no try, just do"

Relax and have fun, watching thoughts come and go.

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Ups and downs are normal. Meditation varies each new day, progress is never constant and steady- three steps forward one step back, that's how it goes, the onion has layers and we are like that too, wash or peel off one layer and the next one underneath has its own marvels. This is why "Kind, Gentle, Persistent" is so important to make a habit of. Just keep at it, expect nothing, be present, stay true and the layers peel away. Be glad and be happy that you are on a path, it is a great path, it is you.

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Restlessness:

One of the obstacles we talked about was restlessness, the kind that makes us squirm and wiggle while trying to meditate. This has another aspect we didn't talk about which is remorse. Remorse and regret occur when we see that we have caused harm or hurt to ourselves or others. It can be a very subtle sense, just a tingle along the basement membrane of the skin of consciousness or it can be agonizing. Either way it interferes with meditation -

with the ability to calmly stay with the object of meditation, and interferes with further progress from there.

The agonizing type has led AA and NA to encourage making amends part of their recovery programs. The end result of that approach is release of and from the story, the memory. Because we know the end result is necessary and more beneficial to *all* than the process, we can jump right to release of/from the story which we may have labeled 'memory'.

If this seems like getting out of punishment please give that up. We are all short on time, Life is too short to stay mired in recriminations. Finger pointing, blaming and holding a grudge or guilt are toxic, harmful and a waste of time, Move On. If this brings up a feeling of resistance or irritation, substitute a benevolent thought such as a dog inviting you to play or a cat softly rubbing against your leg or a child laughing or the smell of fresh cut grass.

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Our stories mould Qi to create and sustain our perception of reality. So we can change it.

Thanks to scientific research we know that memories are stories that change with the re-telling. They do not reflect the actual event with any consistency or clarity but instead are colored and shaped by our perspective, our beliefs, our culture, our understanding.

Metta meditation is arguably the most powerful form of meditation available. It goes directly to the root and branch of existence. Thru Metta meditation we can change our stories reliably and safely at the pace best suited for our individual needs.

Metta meditation can be accomplished when the mind is able to remain focused with stability. A mantra such as "may\_\_\_\_be free from suffering and live in happiness," starting with yourself and widening the field to others can be used, or cultivating the sensation of loving kindness by imagining a being or situation that strongly evokes it for you and then sharing that feeling to yourself and others.

It is possible to begin Calm Abiding with Metta meditation, but this can be accompanied by subtle energy drains such as the wouldhacouldhashouldha's." Again, beware of striving, if you are striving you are not meditating.

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Generosity is developed via gratitude. A strong sensation of gratitude provides enough security to develop generosity. Gratitude does not involve payback, there are no strings attached. This is not that kind of gratitude. That is false, a sham. This is the pure thankfulness of spiritual receptivity. From here we can generate a desire to give.

Sometimes stories or injuries or betrayal of trust will twist Qi around and cause it to flow backward against its normal direction, it can be rerouted again, but recognizing the mistaken route is not always clear from the inside.

Some of us have learned that gratitude means obligation, responsibility and threat. I am deeply saddened by this because real gratitude is a wonderful feeling, it is a spiritual freedom. Happiness, trust, affection and respect are the components of this natural gratitude. It is possible that an adult may have to arrange this experience on their own rather than having it provided for them as a child. It can be found in the Jhannas, the measureless states if it is needed.

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Steps to meditation outlined:

1. Begin with location, distraction limitation (turn off the phone)
2. set timer - it helps.
3. Do an Aura Brushdown.
4. Pre-program the mind: "Peaceful, happy, kind, the next xx minutes are meditation time."
5. Settle and watch the mind romp a bit then check in with the body - any pain or strain? if so move, adjust clothing, relax tense areas.
6. Qigong routine: from the base of the nose to the crown to the pituitary to the throat to the solar plexus to the dan- tien to the universe, five times each link.
7. Begin the mantra practice "So Kind" or what ever meditation object you have found that works well for you.
8. After a sense of remaining comfortably with that object of meditation for 5-10 minutes move to:
  - a. contemplate something you are grateful in general for, something you appreciate, such as a location in the body that does not hurt currently, breathing, a companion, recollection of the warmth of the sun. Hold that gratitude. (not the idea associated with it but the actual feeling) Your new meditation object for the remainder of the time you are meditating currently is the sense of gratitude. The feeling, sensation, realization of gratitude. Become familiar with it. It is a happy, pleasant sensation. If you find it located in one part of the body expand it to fill the body, become a mere mote, swimming in this sea of gratitude, of reflective benevolence.
  - b. metta - benevolence
  - c. karuna - compassion
  - d. muditta - joy for others
  - e. upekha - equanimity

Enjoy!

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2 aspects of Generosity and why they affect meditation are:

Giving and Forgiving.

Both are sometimes difficult, uncomfortable, displeasing. This is because of attachment. What is attachment? It's when we can't give something up, a like or a dislike.

Attachment is sticky, clingy, grabby and grasping. What is the actual mechanism of sticking, clinging, grabbing, and grasping? Qi.

When Qi sticks or clings it causes stagnation and/or inflammation, a pileup of energy, electrically charged particles, resulting in illness, either chronic or acute.

When we practice dropping attachment in meditation we also develop and cultivate the ability to drop attachment outside of meditation, and vice versa because the meditation can really leave the ground when this freedom lets us go.

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Trying or striving or wanting or having a goal or expectation will not bring you a deeper meditation. We have to come at it sideways, by improving the virtue of our daily lives and addressing the obstacles in our life as in our meditation. Funny but that is how it works. Kind, gentle persistence. Set up some arrangements with family and friends and self to encourage you to continue. Teach others. Make agreements with noble friends to support meditation.

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Sleepiness:

If there is continuous head bobbing, you may be chronically exhausted or dehydrated. If you have trouble with sleepiness that does not respond to correcting these two conditions it may be mere distraction- there are a few very effective tricks for this but "blame the body first." This is a teaching from a wise and revered old monk (whose name I don't recall) Blame the body first. The mind not working well? Behavior or alertness off? Correct the body conditions. Body houses mind, work with it not against it. Someday mind will be so strong body will not affect it but meanwhile work efficiently.

Get sufficient sleep. Get sufficient exercise. Get sufficient nutrition. Hydrate. Be as Happy as you can be right now.

Acute sleepiness:

Open the eyes wide as possible, move them side to side and up and down as far as possible.

Take some deep breaths, expanding the lower abdomen and perineum on inhalation.

Run the Qi up and down, in and out of the body.

Do reverse breathing: retract the abdomen and perineum when inhaling, expand the abdomen and perineum when exhaling

get up and do walking meditation or Qigong

go take a nap

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Recommended reading: Jane Goodall's Harvest For Hope- a guide to mindful eating. It reminds me of when I first noticed that the Qi in food can be perceived and assessed. It was when eating the first dandelion greens of spring, they were vibrant with Qi from sun and earth and water. Much of what we eat, breath, read or watch today is not wholesome. What we take in via mind and eyes and ears has as much impact upon our being as what we imbibe or eat or breathe. The Buddha taught: "Not one thing do I see that leads to happiness as much as a tamed, trained, guarded and restrained mind."

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Combining Meditation with Qigong fast-forwards us several steps and priming our intention with Benevolence safeguards the direction of our growth.

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With the continued development of Calm Abiding via kind, gentle and persistent application of attention on the meditation object we are allowing baggage and blinders (attachment) to drop away, freeing our native discernment.

By bringing that freedom into our daily lives, our ability to discern wholesome and unwholesome is enhanced.

This discernment is easily obscured by craving but when we learn to recognize craving in meditation it becomes apparent in daily life as well. Gradually it becomes easier to make a rational choice regarding craving. We practice gratitude and develop serenity in Meditation then gradually the choice of more wholesome, less toxic Qi becomes obvious and replaces the desire for instant gratification. Then we naturally choose to consume what benefits all beings, others sense this natural unforced change and follow our example. This is the Ripple Effect at work.

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We are truly amazing beings, all beings are truly amazing. To live and see this is an unbelievable gift. Not one thing is as it seems, not one thing is certain. We are

unlimited potential. Developing and freeing that potential is a gradual path which if taken with benevolent intention, with kindness, gentleness and persistence, can be trusted to make great changes within and around us.

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Discernment is a component of wisdom. The words discernment and wisdom are sometimes used interchangeably. Discernment is cultivated through Calm Abiding meditation which is what is being done when an object of meditation is held with attention. Discernment is how we can tell the difference between what is truly wholesome or not.

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With the addition of support measures such as pre-programming the mind with "Peaceful, happy, kind the next xx minutes are meditation time," and Ajahn Lee's eight step Qigong routine, and by bringing intention in line with Metta (benevolence, loving kindness) we improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our meditation practice. We need to be efficient because although there is always enough time we have no time to waste.!

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Effective meditation helps us uncover the form of consciousness typically overshadowed during daily life. During daily life we often unconsciously rely on habitual modes of action and reaction. Sometimes we are embarrassed to discover we weren't paying attention at all. Sometimes it takes great effort to tune in and perceive what our senses detect. During meditation we strengthen the quantity and quality of our attention. This is a non-intellectual consciousness. We repair the balance between intellect and intelligence.

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During Calm Abiding, when "not doing / just being" occurs, the usual filters, layers of interference are set aside. Our attachments, the solidified blockages are seen and released allowing clarity to arise. When clarity is present Insight or Discernment is possible. Vigilance is needed because craving can color or even overcome insight. Though we may sense toxic or stagnant Qi within a substance or concept we may still choose to take it in if our habitual likes and dislikes, our craving, can be satisfied. Craving presents itself as essential but it's not. When our old dog would stand by the door we used to ask her: "Is this a need or a want?" We can ask ourselves that too.

Patterns of unwholesome habits are possible because of the three poisons: Ill will (and all its family members such as anger, hatred, frustration, boredom) Craving (desire, greed, wanting, lust) and Delusion (denial, confusion, wrong view, ignorance.)

We can substitute or cultivate Benevolence, Generosity and Wisdom to counteract these universal poisons. Doing so encourages others to do as well.

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Meditation does not stand alone. As it affects our entire life so does the rest of our life affect Meditation. A Gatha to end the day of practice urges us with wisdom: "Life and death are of supreme importance. Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost. Awaken to this reality. Take heed, do not squander this moment." Blessed be, Amen.

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Although it is rather obvious a very simple means of coping with the obstacles in meditation is to choose with some discretion and care what we attend to outside of meditation. Whatever we attend to, participate in, watch, choose for entertainment, think about, etc. affects the meditation.

If you suffer from a particular passion or obsession then become aware of how it is tended and kept alive by what you do in daily life and cease feeding it. If you suffer from anxiety do not indulge in suspenseful or frightening media. If you feel there is an overwhelming tendency to dualistic thinking, an us vs them mentality hindering compassionate viewpoint then avoid competition, seek the other side's friendship and understanding.

If you find in meditation that you are obsessing about one passion or another it may be possible to realize that the needle is stuck in a groove like an old stereo with a vinyl record. Sometimes merely acknowledging this is the case is enough to move the needle or release the obsession. Formally acknowledge the obsession by speaking to it so: " I acknowledge and release this obsession, thank you."

Another possibility is to overfeed the obsession, Ajahn Chah, a famous Thai teacher is said to have eaten 27 mangoes at one sitting to overcome his passion for the fruit. I heard the story of a nun who sought the freedom of chastity but wrestled with desire in her meditation decided to go through every sexual fantasy she could with a vengeance and finally was released of it. A monk harassed by fear of a stalker deliberately went step by step in his mind through all the possible horrors that might occur until he exhausted the fear and was released.

Above all continuously make choices that heart and mind approve of as helpful, wholesome, healthy and bettering you in as many ways as possible. There are only so many hours in the day and if we use them to pursue wisdom, healing, benevolence we are not then using them for the opposite. This is the same effort we bring to bear on meditation, kind and gentle persistence. Just keep at it, that is the biggest trick of all.

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Have heard many meditators say that people walking by, construction and traffic noises distract them. One summer at the West Asheville Zen Center every morning a harley davidson would roar by at precisely 06:20 and then the neighbor down the street would leave for work and her dog would start barking and bark for the rest of the meditation.

Each site I have spent time at has these auditory signatures, they fold into the fabric of the carpet or curtains, the woodwork of the building. The quality of the meditation remains clear however. I find looking at memory that the meditation was really deep for me when I began and had very little baggage as a 10 or 12 year old and again when I partnered daily life intentions with meditation.

I think it is possible to leave a mountain of baggage on the train platform and depart with just a small package if you practice in daily life intending and doing virtuous speech, action and livelihood. When we do that we begin to also recognize and counteract the Hindrances 'on and off the cushion' that is, in and outside of meditation.

It is really not hard, just like moving a household of furniture and stuff, we start small, peck away at it, one box at a time, and hold a potlatch give-away whenever the opportunity arises. Gradually, before you know it, you are ready to go.

I went to a job interview once where I was asked what I thought would be my most important accomplishment in the first 3 months. They told me the answer was "to not get overwhelmed." That is your most important accomplishment as well. Keep it fun, enjoy it, arrange your time so that you can approach meditation with enthusiasm, some excitement and pleasure.

Remember the alka seltzer commercial- plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is! Meditation has to feel good, take that anticipation and go sit out of the way in a public space like the green or a park or the baker center and just close your eyes. Set your timer, do the pre-programming and centering exercises then focus on the mantra. Let the noises and voices going by just go on by. Don't identify them, don't label them, know they are outside and you are secure, your place of meditation is inside. I have heard several stories of meditators completely safe in the midst of disasters because they were in that meditative state, that meditation place inside.

There is a story of one disciple of the Buddha seeing another get hit in the head by a monster, being amazed it hadn't killed him. The one who was struck said "oh, I noticed a slight sensation but no more." He had been in a deep meditative state. Getting used to meditating in crowded, noisy places gives you more options and lessens the negative impact such environments has on us. Then the ripple effect passes that on to others.

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I am so thankful for each of you. When I opened my heart and mind to the universe and asked "what should I do?" each of you was a reply. Each and every one of you is beyond remarkable. What great hearts and heroes each of you are. To take the step toward oneness, toward wholeness, toward conscious being is such an act of kindness and generosity it is breathtaking. Thank you so much, how much more happy is this journey knowing there are each of you there.

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Qi is the ground or field of universal energy. It is life, it animates and is animate, it holds us, composes us, reflects us and responds to us. We gong or work/play/direct and move with this energy in Qigong.

"Awakening Stillness" Qigong is a routine created by Venerable Madika and I to improve meditation. It does what pre-programming the mind does, it settles the doer, the thinker, the left brain, the talker, gets that part of mind to settle and support the part we access in meditation but it goes a step farther by sweeping away the tracks, smoothing out the ruts, the habitual reactions, the obsessions of the thinking mind.

There are literally thousands of different Qigong routines. YouTube has many instructional videos, you can put together your own routine. Cultivate Qi regularly to benefit your practice.

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*All the mental activity we do imprints the energy field and chemistry of the body/brain just like our physical activity imprints our bodies and the energy field.*

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Obviously really deep patterns or ruts don't get entirely erased but they can over time, it is these that are healed with Qigong, relieving the ill of dis-ease. The sweeping away of the little daily markings or patterns is what helps us meditate. If you can't do the Qigong routine in action you can do it mentally either lying or sitting, if you can't do it before meditation then use the pre-programming we learned earlier in class: "Peaceful, happy, kind, the next xx minutes are meditation time."

If you cannot recall the Qigong routine, simplify it by pulling the energy up through the soles of your feet and out the top of your head to the universe and then bring it back down through the top of your head, through your body out

through the soles of your feet and out to the universe. Do this up and down sweeping of the energy column several times every day.

Feel free to use Qi to enhance and augment any intention or movement you make. There is a teaching that I believe is often misinterpreted in Christianity (I am Christian, Pagan and a Buddhist, as many are, having been raised in Christian culture, why give up wisdom just because it wears a different hat?) it is "Thou shalt not take my name in vain." To me this is not a rebuke but a promise, ask for help and you will get it. Freely use Qi and be all that your potential promises.

This does not come without promise in return tho. We must make the commitment to integrity, honor, kindness, generosity and humility or lose the ability. The Buddha had a cousin who developed like the other renunciates but could not stop being prideful, greedy and hateful. When he bragged about his accomplishments with Qi he lost them.

Start simply, keep your balance with Qi, envision a column of Qi running up the soles of your feet and out the top of your head as you stand on one leg. If you do yoga make each move a Qigong move, use your Qi to perform it safely. The Qi runs through the universe in through your base out through the movement back into the universe, you are like a bead on a string, and that string has current running thru it.

Respect the Qi and do not cause it to stagnate. Get up and move often, when seated in meditation choose a posture and clothing that does not bind.

Remember that the way to proceed is "Kind, Gentle, Persistent."

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How often do you get to make a fire? Have you ever smothered one by dumping too much on it, closing off the airways? How about a garden? If you have clay soil and add sand to it you get cement- no air in the soil, rather one needs to add compost, light and fluffy stuff to allow tiny air pockets for the plant roots to grow in. Now, if the fire is big and strong, or if the soil has lots of organic matter already with earthworms doing their wonderful work then dumping a lot of small twigs and bark on it or digging sand into the soil won't harm the element you are nurturing.

I have given y'all a lot of stuff on top of the basic meditation instructions. Don't let that information overwhelm your basic meditation practice.

One thing that is good about this information is it takes the place of other less pertinent mental activity. This is known as substitution. We have a finite amount of time and space to gather and retain info. Putting it into practice makes it knowledge. We can keep it on the shelf as an empty cookie jar until we are ready to fill it with the cookies or whatever else you might put in it.

There on the shelf it reminds us that there are such possibilities. So relax, you do not have to put all this information into practice at once, perhaps over the next year you will gradually incorporate this information bit by bit into your meditation. You will know when it is time to add more or to vary your routine, just like you know when to take a breath.

The important thing is to maintain "Kind, gentle, persistent," as you cultivate Calm Abiding. This is returning to the meditation object over and over with gentle kindness. The stability of mind that develops is essential to the benefits of meditation. Just enjoy this.

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Meditation is hard work. But you cannot be goal oriented or strive or try hard at it...what is this, a riddle? Sort of. There are two hard parts: 1. making the time and 2. staying focused on the meditation object.

For number one above, your best resource is that you are a spiritual person. You have a connection to the sublime, a sense of the divine, a wonder at creation, and have known a sense of awe. That brings you enormous energy which we are learning to unburden by lessening attachment and opening our doors to by choosing impeccable conduct.

For the second there is "Kind, Gentle and Persistent" returning the attention to the object of meditation. There are also things like humor, pre-programming the mind, and Qigong that sweep clear the tracks we have left in the wake of our daily habits;and there is the progress you are beginning to see. Usually that progress is not direct but two steps forward three steps back and so on.

The good thing is this is not a job that is impossible. It is hard, but it is well within your capabilities. You are capable of achieving the benefits of meditation. But you have to meditate to get them. When you are able to stay with the object of meditation to abide calmly with the object of meditation, you will begin to gain insight and that insight will bring great happiness because it is not intellectual knowledge it is direct knowledge of *what is*. Direct knowledge is unshakeable, confirmed by your own experience, echoes in your cellular matrix, is transformative and liberating.

You can do this, if you just do it.

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Metta is the Pali or sanskrit word for benevolence/loving kindness.This characterizes the first Jhanna of which there are eight, four mundane and four super-mundane. Knowing this intellectually will do you not a bit of good, but were it ever to be a question on Jeopardy or some other trivia game you could use it.

The Jhanna states are a map of the deeper meditative absorptions that you may not necessarily meet in order but will eventually come to recognize if you persist with kindness and gentleness to develop the ability to remain focused on the meditation object. The Stillness of mind when you have become accomplished at Calm Abiding is needed to transition from the meditation object to the blissful rapture of the first Jhanna. There you are still aware of external stimuli but have no distractions, you could respond to the sense contacts but are able to prioritize and may choose not to.

For a time the Jhannas were not taught among Buddhists, many do not teach it today, some do not even meditate as we are doing, it is a matter of personal choice whether to investigate meditation and to what level or direction to do so.

Interestingly some ancient Christian mystics taught meditation including the Carmelite nuns, today the Carmelite sisterhood is a contemplative order. Teresa D'Avila, Carmelite reformer wrote of the Palace of Seven Chambers - very similar to the different Jhanna states.

Imagine becoming Metta, this benevolent feeling of goodwill toward all, self and others, no self, no others, all one and loving it intensely, completely, ecstatically. This happens naturally when we are able to leave our baggage behind.

Restoration to wholeness is the splendor available to us, keep up your persistence at developing Calm Abiding, contribute to that your continuous intention to do good, avoid unkindness and benefit all beings and you will find the way to the deeper meditative absorptions.

There are many false summits, many times the beginner thinks they have accomplished something, gotten somewhere when inner wisdom or humility might speak up and wag its finger saying "uh oh, keep practicing!" or a teacher who has been there might give you a look and say "just keep meditating." They might also say "yes! you've got it! now keep meditating!" the result is the same: keep meditating.

Remember it doesn't happen in a vacuum. You might plant a garden but if you never weed, it will come to little. Spend your whole day watching what your mind does when you are not meditating. Substitute wholesome acts of body/speech/mind for unwholesome. This isn't a quick fix but it is a great fix. Would you rather slap some paint on a termite riddled house or rebuild it gradually into comfort, inspiration and actual security?

And have fun, there's more and more on the way.

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Labeling can help identify obsessive thinking and/or attachment to unreal concerns. There is no past and no future there is only now (not such a radical

thought anymore.) By labeling thoughts as Past or Future, Retelling or Planning, during meditation and all day long we make a habit of lessening attachment so that we are stronger, clearer and more present.

We are often unaware of what we are thinking to the point of denial. We may think that we are grounded in reality when we actually are repeating some fantastical notion over and over. These fantastical ideas often blind us to the options and potential all around. So label it and drop it. Doesn't mean don't go about your normal daily life, with plans for the day and to do lists, you get the idea.

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I encourage and exhort each of you to put your heart into this practice. Awhile back I read a childhood story of Janice Holly Booth's from her book "Pack Only What You Can Carry," because it was so familiar to me and illustrates the profound perversion of heart/mind found so commonly world over, that is Power Over.

As a child she was strong, independent and had learned leadership from an equine companion. What a marvelous child! Then she was betrayed by deceitful and harsh adults, who isn't, right? I urge participants not to do unto your own minds what the adults in her life did to that child. Discipline is not helpful or wholesome unless it is cooperative, fully participant, alive and present, even with your own mind.

Discipline must be Kind, Gentle and Persistent/Consistent. If the mind or child resists to the point of morose, rebellious misery you must stop and listen to it. Otherwise harm is inflicted on you most of all. In our cultural mythology it seems that the inability to listen is associated with adulthood, those that retain or relearn the talent are the rare birds that odes are written to, that inspire poetry, art, music and non-sensual love.

That is who we are naturally - Listeners, Observers, Witnesses. But we cannot be that wonderful function unless we hush the voices in the mind, unless we stop continuously Doing. And that is what we are achieving with Calm Abiding meditation, detaching from our thinking habits. Learning to pay attention wholeheartedly.

Please, dear friends, persist, kindly and gently. The beauty this creates brings joy to the world.

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Concentration is not meditation. Please use the word Stillness instead, the stillness of a pond is often used to illustrate this meaning. Any agitation,

tension, disturbance stirs the silt of the pond bottom and clouds the water.  
When we are Still, the mind is clear as an unmoving pond.

Stillness is allowed, not achieved. Fallen into, not seized. Accepted, not taken.

That's why when trying to meditate, we find the ability only after we allow ourselves to fail or quit, when we stop following directions and just relax.

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The commitment to meditation time is essential for allowing yourself the pleasure of being.

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Meditation does not have to mean sitting, it can be moving, it can be making a bed, washing the dishes, raking the lawn, walking walking walking. The task must be undirected, simple, to allow the conversation to stop, to settle. When you are enjoying yourself in this emptiness you are your original self, your higher self, the essence, being. This enjoyment is being. It is the right place to be, to become familiar with, to know how to find and cultivate. Take to it as if turning your face to the breeze. This is so simple, what can it possibly do? It is all there is, so it can do anything.

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Becoming a meditator is a personal quest. The motivation and success comes from you, it will provide the benefits science touts only if you do it consistently. This may take time away from your accustomed routines, habits, behaviors, even social contact. It can be a big change, do you want to make a change?

We don't need a computer, our minds are not hampered by internet speed and bandwidth limits. Life itself can be the adventure it should be. Practice meditation to relearn contentment and awe.

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there is a recommended reading list at [www.greatdetermination.com](http://www.greatdetermination.com) with links to some websites where you can download mp3 files or watch a video.

Remember this valuable guideline: If you disagree with something, set it aside, you may feel differently about it in the future. Do not get bogged down in dislike or disagreement, just accept that there are different points of view and move along.

That being said, we agree with most of what was chosen to be on this list.

What is agreement anyway? Try to beware of staying only with what is in agreement with your current understanding, it is comfortable but is it helpful?

Ayya Khema offers the most clear and succinct audio teaching on the why and how of meditation. She lacks only the Qigong, but uses Qi in other ways without identifying it as such.

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