



## **MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS**

**By Phil Golding**

### **Meditation versus Mindfulness**

Is there a distinction between meditation and mindfulness? From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is the everyday state of cultivated awareness established through the more formal practice of meditation. From an academic point of view, anything to do with meditation tends to be called mindfulness. In general, academia prefers to distance itself from the term “meditation” due to perceived religious connotations. As a result of extensive research, mindfulness has become an important psychotherapy and personal development approach, due to its effectiveness in many areas of human behaviour. I have used mindfulness as a cornerstone in my own psychotherapy practice over the past fourteen years, influenced by my own meditation training and personal healing experiences. Mindfulness/meditation helps to alleviate stress, anxiety and fear. It also enhances self-acceptance, loving kindness and compassion. It is a central feature in any advanced yoga and martial art and is commonly practiced in some form or another by high level sports people.

### **Find a Teacher**

For anyone to gain significant long-term benefits from meditation, it is important to train under a skilled meditation teacher, because the mind has a thousand tricks to play on us and without the guidance of someone who has deep and broad experience, we can quickly become disillusioned and give up. We are also unlikely to sufficiently understand the potential of meditation and the nature of our human mind due to a lack of knowledge and unhelpful expectations.

### **Purpose of Meditation**

A purpose of meditation is to bring the potential of our consciousness into a state of cultivated awareness that is able to penetrate deeply into our human mind. In so doing, we are able to learn to distinguish what is real from what is illusion, or to put it another way, discover the ways our habitual thoughts cause us to suffer. A challenge of meditation is the subtleness of consciousness compared to the constant noise of the mind. In reality, consciousness is far more powerful than the mind, but it has to be awakened and trained.

### **Meditation is Trial and Error**

Consciousness is a natural phenomenon. It has its own physics which can be intellectually understood. Like learning anything, we need to understand something enough to put it into practice. But intellectual understanding on its own is never enough. We must apply what we know – we must act to test out that knowledge. This testing out of the knowledge is always an experiment, because our understanding is never perfect and our skill of applying the knowledge is always evolving. Therefore, learning meditation, like learning anything, is an ongoing process of trial and error.

### **Assume You are Already Consciously Aware**

Wanting to learn meditation is the same as making a commitment to yourself to be consciously aware – to reside in your consciousness and from there explore the nature of your mind while learning to care for it. In order to do this it is helpful to know what consciousness is in comparison to what your mind is. For example; consciousness has a quality of completeness, a non-physical sense of wholeness that needs nothing from the world to be itself. It does not need to chase after anything (attachment, grasping) and it does not need to escape from anything (fear, hate). This gives consciousness an added quality of permanent peace and tranquillity. This sense of wholeness or oneness is also experienced as a deep, all-pervading universal love. In contrast, the human mind, being attached to the body, is always needing something, whether it is love or food or security and as a result it is in a state of fear and reactivity if it does not get what it needs or wants. The peace and calm of consciousness gives us the ability to more effectively manage our needs and wants by responding with awareness and clarity. We have a body, we live in our body, but we are more than our body. By focussing on the breath and “assuming” a state of calm tranquillity that needs nothing - that is always full, we can observe the contrasting sensations of the mind. By assuming that you are already centred in the power of your consciousness, you are drawing on the qualities of consciousness that are always within you. In short time though, the noisy, insistent mind sweeps you away into one of its many agitated states or seductive distractions. You have lost consciousness, but not completely. You have made a commitment to be conscious. You are learning that being conscious means being calm, at peace, and needing nothing. Sooner or later you realise that you are no longer in this state of peace. Back to the breath and assuming your state of aware consciousness. With practice and right knowledge, we learn to accept the noisy mind and its tendency to sweep us away. This is just a natural part of the process. Each time we “re-position” ourselves into our state of conscious-awareness, we strengthen our ability to find our way back to our “centre” while at the same time learning a little bit more about

consciousness and our mind. With practice, we are able to be “mindful” about being conscious, while at the same time being compassionately accepting of our humanness. We are developing a process that continues to develop our conscious-awareness.