



Mindy Newman
Developing a Daily Meditation Practice
Week 4: Dedication
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Hi, my name is Mindy Newman. Welcome to Week four of Tricycle's Meditation Month. The theme for this month has been developing a daily meditation practice. We've been focusing each week on a different obstacle that people often encounter in trying to meditate on a daily basis and how we can use meditation to skillfully try to work with those obstacles so that we're better prepared and equipped to try to meditate regularly.

This week, we'll be focusing on dedication. Dedication really is interested in what happens after we meditate. We've talked throughout the month about creating a stable foundation and a comfortable foundation in our body in order to meditate. We've talked about setting an intention for our practice, which is related to dedication. And we've also talked about reducing the harsh self-criticism that we encounter as meditators by creating space for whatever arises in our mind.

With dedication, we're really focusing on thinking about where we want our meditation practice to take us after we're done. It's similar to intention. But when we're setting an intention, we're often thinking about the immediate meditation practice. What am I trying to cultivate in this particular moment? Now when we talked about intention, we did talk about the Mahayana Buddhist intention overall to use meditation to develop ourselves so that we can help ourselves and others.

It is true that we're trying to cultivate this larger intention all of the time. But a lot of time, when we sit down to meditate, we really are thinking about the specific practice we're doing and how that's going to help us cultivate our mind. With dedication, we do it at the end of our meditation practice. What we're doing with dedication is opening our minds up to what we want to happen, what we want the ripple effects of our meditation practice to be.

When we're thinking from a Buddhist perspective, we don't want the ripple effects to be only within our lives. Our hope is that by sitting and cultivating ourselves, that it will actually create benefit for other people as well. A lot of times this is talked about traditionally in terms of

cultivation of merit—cultivating merit by dedicating the benefit of our meditation to others. But another way to think about it is thinking about the impact that it has on us that we take to the rest of the world.

An everyday example would be when we meditate on a given day—even if our meditation felt challenging or difficult—at the end of it, we might notice that we feel calmer, or that we feel more equanimity. Then we might notice that throughout the day, we're able to encounter other situations with more calmness and equanimity than we usually would. This might mean that we're kinder to other people because we're less agitated and less reactive, which might mean that they have a more pleasant experience of dealing with us, and that improves their mood, and they in turn treat someone else with more kindness.

This might sound a little bit like wishful thinking. But really what we are trying to cultivate with meditation is this ripple effect that benefits not just us but other people too. I can say from personal experience as a psychotherapist that when I meditate in the morning, before I see my clients, I see a noticeable impact in terms of my ability to listen and to be thoughtful and to be mindful in my responses.

I also tend to notice that the sessions that I have with clients on those days are much more productive. The client seems to open up more. They seem to be able to be more insightful and more self-reflective about what's happening. In a way, you can really think of dedication as kind of energetic exchange. What kind of energy did we cultivate with meditation that we're trying to send out into the world?

When we engage in the meditation for today's lesson—at the end—we'll be focusing on the dedication. In this way, we'll be bringing together everything we've talked about over the past four weeks, into a dedication where, hopefully, all of the practice that you've been doing will continue to benefit you and the other people around you.

Why don't you come into a comfortable seated posture for meditation, especially starting to, as we talked about in the first week, notice the relaxation of the muscles. Really take a moment to

scan the body. Notice any places where you're feeling imbalance. You might need to readjust your seat to feel more balanced. Find an intentional place for your hands. But also scan for any places of discomfort or tightness. As you discover a place that's holding some tension or tightness, start by bringing your awareness to that place, and then see if you can breathe into it a little bit to help it soften.

By attending to your physical posture, and taking this time to bring mindful awareness and gentle breath to places of discomfort, we're trying to create a position that you're able to sit in as much stillness as possible for the next several minutes.

[Long pause.]

On the basis of this stable posture, go inside your mind and set an intention for your practice. There's something specific that you're trying to accomplish with your meditation. Maybe you have an everyday goal, like you want to reduce anger, improve stress management, or focus more. You can identify that for yourself. If you're a spiritual practitioner, set your spiritual intention. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, we set the intention of, may my motive, my meditation, help me cultivate myself so that I'm able to help all others.

In fact, we even say, may I achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, which is really another way of saying may I cultivate myself and my mind to the highest level so that I am best able to help myself and others. It can be helpful here to think of a time recently that you've struggled, or of a loved one that you know is struggling. Allow your wish for them or yourself to be relieved of suffering, to have what they need. See if you can allow those feelings to arise. Then remind yourself of the intention to eventually develop those feelings towards all beings.

If you're having a hard time feeling the feelings arise, that's okay. On some days, it's easier than others. Just remind yourself in words, I am meditating to develop my mind so that I am able to help myself and others. It's also very important to plant seeds with words. From there, become aware of the sensation of breath moving in your body. And begin to create space in you for whatever's occurring by giving your breath permission to be exactly how it is—shallow, deep,

soft, labored. There's no need to change it. However, your breath is right now, just feel it moving at its own rhythm and pace.

[Long pause.]

As the inevitable thoughts, memories, distractions, sounds, or other things arise in your mind, acknowledge that they're there. They're really just a sign of your humanness. Human minds think and get distracted. That's what they do. As soon as you find an opening to reconnect with your breath, take it.

[Long pause.]

Again, again, it doesn't matter how many times, when your mind goes away from your breath, just notice what's happening. Look for an opening and return.

[Long pause.]

Every time you redirect your breath, just remind yourself that this is an act of compassion, that by looking at and tolerating what's in your mind, you're going to be better able to tolerate the challenges other people are facing and be better equipped to be helpful to them.

[Long pause.]

If you notice that harsh criticism rising, that's okay too. See if you can find an opening. Just return back to the breath. You might even really acknowledge that that self-criticism is there and say hello to it. It's most likely been around for quite a while. Just keep looking for that pathway back to your breath.

[Long pause.]

As we come towards the end of this meditation, shift to thinking about the ripple effects that you hope will emerge from meditating. How do you hope that it can help your relationships with other people? How do you hope that both you and other people will be positively impacted by it? Hope is really essential. How can we possibly sit to do something regularly if we don't have the hope and the desire for it to create benefit, to know what we want those benefits to be?

[Long pause.]

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, they talk about how dedicating the merit or the benefit of our meditation to others multiplies the benefit we receive. By thinking of others and how we'd want them to be impacted, we're also helping ourselves.

[Long pause.]

As you're ready, slowly open your eyes. We want to thank you for being a part of this four week series on developing a meditation practice, which is really quite a challenging thing to do. I truly hope that by participating in these lessons, you've gained some tools and some ideas for helping you motivate yourself, be consistent, and to work with yourself when challenges arise. Because the thing about meditating regularly is that challenges will absolutely arise. It is a messy journey to be on, and the best that we can do is to try and be with ourselves and work with the messiness arises, so that we can keep going, and keep cultivating ourselves. Thank you very much.