



Mindy Newman
Developing a Daily Meditation Practice
Week 2: Setting an Intention
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Hi, my name is Mindy Newman, and I am the guest teacher for Tricycle's Meditation Month. This month, we're focusing on a theme of developing a daily meditation practice. Each week, we're focusing on a particular obstacle that people often face in developing a daily meditation practice. We're using meditation as a tool to hopefully work skillfully with these obstacles so that you feel more comfortable meditating regularly.

For this week, we'll be focusing on setting an intention. Last week, we focused on building the foundation in your body posture of meditation and on the basis of that, hopefully having a comfortable seated meditation posture. We'll focus on how to start going into your mind and setting an intention for your practice. Setting an intention for your meditation practice is extremely important. It's very hard to motivate ourselves to do something unless we have a clear understanding of why we're doing it. If we just have some vague sense that we want to meditate because it's good for us, it's very hard to commit to sitting down on a daily basis and actually doing it.

But if we have a specific intention, and I say intention, not goal, because we want to stay really open to whatever arises in meditation. Having a goal can feel a little bit too achievement oriented. By having an intention, we know why we're doing it, and we can keep reminding ourselves of that on a daily basis. I once heard a teacher say that the benefit that you derive from meditation will be based on what your intention was. He specifically said if you have a secular intention for your meditation, you'll have a secular benefit.

I think some of the secular intentions that people have for mediation are often to feel less stressed, reduce stress in their lives, or to feel that they can focus and concentrate better at work or better control their tempers. All of these intentions are very valuable. There is nothing wrong with having a secular intention for meditation, but it's good to know what it is for yourself.

On the other hand, if you have a spiritual intention for your meditation, you will derive a spiritual benefit. From the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, the intention of meditation is to cultivate our minds so that we're better able to help both ourselves and others. The ultimate intention is to try to be as helpful to as many sentient beings as possible. This is something that we can think about in theory and it sounds like a really great idea. It sounds very heartwarming and, we can all sort of agree, very good. But it's something that is very hard, understandably as human beings, to develop within ourselves.

By using meditation to help us cultivate this intention of a desire to help both ourselves and others, we want to actually feel it. Not just have it as an idea in our minds of something we say to ourselves, but something we actually feel. We can actually use meditation to work with our minds to cultivate this intention more strongly. Every time we sit and we meditate, we can actually try and cultivate it more strongly. One of the practices that's very helpful for cultivating this intention is lovingkindness. Today's meditation will be focused on using lovingkindness to develop a positive intention to use meditation to help ourselves and others. Let's get started.

Begin by coming to your relatively comfortable meditation posture, because we all deal with a little bit of discomfort if you watched last week's video. Really take a moment to build your posture and find a sense of ease knowing that it does not need to be perfect, but that you're trying to find a way to sit where you can be still—as still as you can for the next several minutes.

[Long pause.]

We start to develop this care and concern for others by first developing a sense of care and concern for ourselves. While this can seem selfish, it actually isn't. It's absolutely necessary because it is only when we have our needs met—when we're taken care of—that we have the energy, and strength, and ability to help others. We're going to meditate on cultivating the desire for ourselves to be well, to be happy, and to be free from suffering.

Start by allowing in your mind an event you've experienced recently that was challenging. Don't select the most devastating trauma you've experienced in your life, simply because that would be

overwhelming to meditate on. Choose something that affected you, but that's tolerable to meditate on. For those of us in New York City, we've all experienced having subway traffic make it impossible for us to be somewhere on time, the frustration and even anger and powerlessness that can arise in that situation, and the way that the rest of your day becomes impacted by that lateness that maybe wasn't even really your fault.

Maybe there was a relatively small injustice done to you. Someone said something unkind to you. But if you allow that moment to arise in your mind—and there's no perfect image or perfect moment that's going to arise so try not to get caught up in worry of whether you're choosing the right moment. Just choose one that you can clearly connect with. Really if you can, picture yourself in that situation. Remember what it looked like. You might even allow the feelings you experienced in that situation—the frustration or irritation or sadness—to arise.

[Long pause.]

Then as you take a moment to connect with your breath, notice your breath moving in your body. As you breathe out, imagine that you're sending loving care and attention to the person who's frustrated in that moment. Not in a pitying kind of way or a making too big of a deal out of the situation kind of way, but just a feeling of that was difficult, that was challenging. I'm sorry you had to experience that.

With each breath out, send that care and concern to that you in your memory. With each breath in, gather up your concern for that you in your memory and with each breath out, send it to the memory.

[Long pause.]

As you continue to send care and concern to that memory, with each out breath, remind yourself that you are cultivating care and concern. This way, you can let yourself off the hook from any idea that you're just feeling sorry for yourself. Remind yourself that you're developing care and concern for yourself so that you can send it to others.

[Long pause.]

Next, as you let that memory or image dissolve, just take a moment to think about how all people in the world have had moments like this, moments of frustration or sadness or annoyance or irritation. You might picture in your mind the whole planet, what that looks like. Or picture a crowd of people. Imagine what a crowd of all of the people that inhabit this planet would look like. Then whatever feelings of tenderness or concern you just felt for yourself, imagine that on each exhale you're sending it outward towards all people. If you can, all beings. Not just all people but all beings.

If it's harder to feel or you feel some resistance because you know that there are some people it's hard for you to feel loving kindness towards, it's okay. Just remind yourself that you're practicing developing care and concern for all beings. And you're going to keep trying.

[Long pause.]

Then allow that image to dissolve in your mind. Take a moment to thank yourself for your efforts—that you sat down and tried to do something challenging which is develop the intention to have care and concern for all beings. With that appreciation for your own efforts, as you're ready, open your eyes.

For next week's session, on the basis of today's practice of developing this intention, we'll carry it forward. As we meditate next time, we'll raise this intention in our mind. And as we explore creating space, which will be the theme of next week's session—creating space in our mind—we'll do it with the intention of creating space so we can benefit both ourselves and others.