

The Purpose and Aim of Buddhist Meditation

Calm and Insight

There are two great stages of Buddhist meditation, which we can call Calm and Insight, or Serenity and Clarity.

Calm:

In the first stage we calm the mind, quieten it, bring it to stillness. We do this by concentrating our attention on something, allowing our mind to become concentrated or absorbed. Another aspect of this stage is the cultivation of positive emotions, specifically of goodwill or friendliness towards oneself and others.

Insight:

With this basis of tranquillity, concentration, and positive emotion, we reflect on our experience in order to see or understand more clearly how things work. For instance, a classic Buddhist meditation is to reflect on impermanence – to see how everything in our experience changes over time. However, there are many things you can reflect on, as we'll see towards the end of the course.

The two meditations you'll learn on this course

You'll learn two meditations on this course, the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Development of Loving Kindness. Both of these come under the heading of the first great stage – Calm. (You need to have a thorough and deep basis in the first stage before moving onto the second stage). However, they can also be used as reflection as Insight practices, as we'll show towards the end of the course.

Practice

Meditation only works if you do it. This may seem an obvious point, but it's worth making because many people attend these courses wanting to make their lives better in some way, and hoping that meditation will help them to do that. But then they don't get round to doing it very much, if at all. This is a great pity, and we're keen that you do get the most from the course, which means practicing.

It's better to do a little every day rather than trying to meditate for longer periods every now and then. We recommend that you begin your practice with 10-minute meditations, and extend that period – to 15, and then to 20 minutes, over the duration of the course. We also hope that you'll continue to meditate once the course ends, and one way of ensuring that will happen is if you practice during the course.