

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Homework Week 5

- Practice mindfulness formally for 45 minutes every day for at least 6 days this week using Sitting Meditation CD and alternating every other day with the Body Scan CD or one of the Yoga CDs.
- Practice mindful sitting meditation for at least 15-20 minutes on Body Scan and Yoga CD days.
- Read and reflect upon “Insight Dialogue” article
- Complete the “Communication Worksheet” focusing on interactions you have during the week with significant others in your life.
- Continue to cultivate your intention to increase your level of awareness during daily activities such as: eating, showering, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, reading to the kids. . . and especially during interactions with others.... These relationship dances can teach us a lot about ourselves 😊

Reflections

Each step is life, each step is joy and peace. - Thich Nhat Hanh

It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.
- St. Francis of Assisi

When we walk slowly, the world can fully appear. Not only are the creatures not frightened away by our haste or aggression, but the fine detail of fern and flower, or devastation and disruption become visible. -Joan Halifax

Insight Dialogue

Developed by Gregory Kramer

(Note: This material comes from the website of the Metta Foundation (www.metta.org). It is hoped that the reader will find this brief overview intriguing and will investigate this powerful practice further through contacting with the Metta Foundation (a non-profit organization, offering workshops and trainings on a Dana-basis) or through purchasing and reading Gregory Kramer's books on the subject.)

Insight Dialogue is an interpersonal meditation practice. It brings the mindfulness and tranquility of silent meditation directly into our experience with other people. As humans, we are relational beings; as we begin to wake up, clarity and freedom can illuminate our relationships with others.

Insight Dialogue draws from traditional Buddhist wisdom, but it is not a Buddhist practice in the religious sense. There is nothing about the practice that would preclude people of any faith or belief system from participating. In Insight Dialogue we come face-to-face with core human experiences.

Insight Dialogue is based on the Four Noble Truths. Along with the biological and personal components of suffering, suffering has interpersonal components: separation from people you love, being with people who irritate you, unsatisfied longings. Interpersonal suffering is an important aspect of all suffering. The hungers for pleasure in relationships, to be seen or admired by others, and to hide or escape—these are all causes suffering, which is then sustained by confusion and habit.

Release from interpersonal suffering is possible. We can practice letting go of interpersonal entanglements in the same way we got entangled—interpersonally. Insight Dialogue provides a way to do that: an interpersonal form of practice.

In the Buddhist tradition, the foundations of the path are understood to involve morality, tranquility, and wisdom. The same elements can be traced in other spiritual traditions. If we emphasize these elements we will be building on a time-tested foundation.

Because Insight Dialogue works with our relational lives, it also emphasizes mutuality. Morality, tranquility, and wisdom become especially important in their interpersonal aspects.

An interpersonal practice will have different emphases than a primarily solitary practice. Some of the refined states of stillness encountered in traditional silent meditation will be less prominent. Interpersonal practices involve speaking or interacting with others, leaving behind the silence that is the most obvious feature of traditional meditation.

Morality is the foundation of all spiritual progress. An interpersonal path must be founded on morality. Without the human kindness and respect that underlie morality—and without the ease of a clear conscience—all deeper wisdom remains an idea, another delusional attachment.

The three moral components of Buddhism's eightfold path—right speech, action, and living—address our relational lives. Speaking implies listening; the two together describe relationship. Right action refers to actions in relation to others: refraining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Right living refers to making a living in an honest and decent way.

The basics of moral communication are straightforward: abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, and from idle chatter. Speech should also be true, useful, spoken at the proper time, and spoken with lovingkindness. Along with treating others the way you yourself would like to be treated, these moral principles are essential to the smooth functioning of any human system. These are also foundational to Insight Dialogue.

Tranquility is another key element of the eightfold path. A mind at ease and a calm heart are essential to seeing things as they actually are. Tension distorts the lens through which we see the world. We view everything from the perspective of our tension: if we are hungry, for example, we have eyes only for food.

Without tranquility, the mind cannot dwell with any experience long enough to know its nature. Without knowing the nature of experience we are unlikely to abandon self-centered fabrications; we cannot be fully compassionate to others or ourselves.

Wisdom—seeing things as they actually are—is the third element of any path to enlightenment. We can see things as they actually are when the mind is calm and alert. The more calm and alert we become, the more clearly we see the nature of the mind and the nature of the world. Interpersonal practice supports this clear seeing by cultivating mindfulness and calm concentration.

Insight Dialogue also involves inquiry. Wisdom is supported by inquiring into the nature of reality and dwelling intimately with teachings that reveal that nature.

Wisdom grows in interpersonal practice by direct experience of interpersonal suffering, hungers, and freedom. Meditators experience their thoughts and emotions as impermanent, stressful, and impersonal. They experience firsthand the ease that arises when the mind ceases its habitual clinging. No intellectual understanding can replace this direct apprehension of stress and freedom. In Insight Dialogue, these insights unfold in mutual rather than solitary practice.

Much of our contact with people—emotional, intellectual, or otherwise—occurs through language. In Insight Dialogue, verbal communication is a primary medium of practice. Language brings into our practice the force of intellect and the associative power of words. Language also reveals limiting beliefs, desires, grasping, and fears. Because Insight Dialogue works directly with language and relationship, it can bring about profound transformation in individuals and groups.

The impact of a meditative practice should be discernable by the wise, reflected visibly in the human decency of the practitioner. Insight Dialogue is an interpersonal practice that seeks to meet these criteria.

Traditional silent meditation has different forms of practice, each guided by different instructions. Insight Dialogue also has meditation guidelines to support meditators as they change their habitual ways of interacting with others. Each guideline can be used in daily life as a simple reminder to calm down, become aware, and notice and release old habits. In Insight Dialogue practice, the same guidelines work together to point the way toward profound spiritual awakening.

The practice involves discussion and contemplation of profound subject matter—fear, joy, desire, and the inevitability of change, for example. The content of an Insight Dialogue discussion is not

the primary focus, however. Becoming aware of how the heart-mind functions are at the core of this practice.

What habits hold us captive? What is left when these habits fall away?

We can pay attention to our bodies and to the ongoing stories we tell ourselves. We can observe our reactive emotions. It is not easy. The mind is very quick. Reactions feel automatic. But as a result of practice, we can calm down. We discover we can become more alert, better able to notice the movements of the body-mind. The Insight Dialogue guidelines support us as we notice these things, release attachments, and relax out of stresses.

The first steps help us calm down and pay attention to whatever we find in the emerging moment. As we move into dialogue, our spoken exchanges are simply a part of what is emerging in the moment. We become aware of the thinking and emotional processes of our body-minds, even while we engage with each other. As we calm down, our sensitivity heightens and our awareness broadens.

(In this article), each guideline is introduced briefly. The guidelines are easiest to understand when they are read in order. Each contains the seed of all the others, but they do build on each other in sequence. If you read these descriptions mindfully, you will gain some impression of the practice. But Insight Dialogue is experiential in nature. It may be helpful to bracket any conclusions about the practice until you have experienced it—ideally, with the support of a trained Insight Dialogue facilitator. Retreats are offered worldwide (see ID Retreat Schedule at: www.metta.org and click on “events”), and local groups are also available in many places.

To pause is to stop some activity temporarily, to let it go.

The body-mind is astonishingly sensitive. Its habit is to grasp at whatever touches it: sights, sounds, touches, smells, tastes, and thoughts. It grasps to understand: What is this? It grasps to hold onto pleasures, to wrestle with pain, and to obsess about fears. Seeing another person, it grasps to hold her or to push her away, to know him or to be known by him, to touch, to fix, or to adjust.

When we Pause we move from grasping to non-grasping, from clinging to non-clinging. This movement is the pivot point to freedom.

Waking up from habit mind is the first step on any path. **The first instruction in Insight Dialogue is Pause.** Step off the train. Dwell a moment with immediate experience before speaking, or while listening. The pause is mindfulness. It is an interruption of a lifetime of habitual forward pressure. It opens the door to the present moment.

It takes energy to change the momentum of a heavy moving object; it also takes energy to interrupt the habitual push of the reactive mind. The energy needed is called right effort: the intention to calm down and wake up. Just one moment of clarity can open the door to new possibilities.

Strong intention is essential to cultivating greater awareness—but even strong intention needs some way of working with in the habits of the heart-mind. Without the support of a practice, it is difficult to do anything other than what we have always done: live in the trance of conditioned emotions and thoughts.

So we practice. Attending to the breath or to the body pauses the torrent of habit. How is the body, right now? When we get lost in the fabrications of the mind, carried away by emotions, we can pause and become mindful. The body can ground us in mindfulness. Practice and gentle guidance are necessary.

We can observe the pleasant and unpleasant qualities of experience, observe the rising and passing of thoughts and moods—just passing phenomena. We may suddenly notice that we are not, in fact, these phenomena that come and go. Mental phenomena move more quickly than bodily sensations, however; to be aware of them without falling into identification takes agility and practice.

We can Pause before we speak, while we are speaking, or after we are done speaking. The Pause can be long or short according to circumstances. It is not about time; it is about mindfulness.

Generally speaking, when the emotion is strong, the pause is long. This is not a rule, however, only starting point. When mindfulness is well established, the pause takes almost no time.

Without pausing and becoming alert and aware, there is no choice, only habit. Habits of speech, like all relational habits, simply pour forth into the moment. Without choice, there is no change. Without change, we remain—and the world remains—enmeshed in identification, loneliness, fear, and wanting.

The Pause may reveal judgments, anger, stress, fear, or longing. Perhaps we are ready to release these painful reactions. But positive reactions, reactions that feel good, can also overtake us: a reaction of excitement perhaps, or enjoying something in a way that takes into our own automatic story—and out of the present. It's as if some emotional motor that had been switched on.

In Insight Dialogue meditation, meditators are invited into a conversation in which we contemplate together the essential truths of our lives. These contemplations can be stimulating and enticing; they can foster emotional reactivity even as they reveal attachments and fears. When the facilitator interrupts these conversations by ringing a bell, the meditators are reminded to step out of reaction and into awareness. The external prompt to Pause supports the practice while meditators get the hang of it.

When we Pause, two things happen. We stop: we stop our automatic speaking and thinking, and we stop the momentum of our conditioned habits. This is an enormous step. Each time we pause, in the moment we pause, we are creating a new habit: the habit of mindfulness. We are training the mind to dwell wakefully in the moment.

As practice deepens, the power of silence grows. In the beginning, the Pause reveals reactivity: our conditioned responses, automatic and un-free. This changes. The Pause is transformative. Eventually, we do not inhabit the stress, the grasping, and the constructions of the overactive mind; rather, we know these things as they stand side by side with mindfulness, wisdom, and the possibility of freedom. A choice opens: constructions and delusion, or mindfulness and wisdom?

The mindful Pause often finds us in the middle of habit-driven thought or emotional reaction. Stirred by the emotional spike of a recent interchange or by the ongoing rush of thought, the body is agitated. If we do not meet these experiences skillfully, we will be flung back into unaware and identified activity. We need further support.

The second instruction is Relax. When we Pause into awareness, we also Relax the body and mind. This meditation instruction reflects tranquility, an important factor on the path to awakening. At first, it is as direct and simple as it sounds. We bring awareness to those parts of the body where we tend to accumulate tension, and allow that tension to relax.

Pause and Relax establish the traditional meditative framework of mindfulness and tranquility. In Pause, we step out of habit and meet the moment afresh. We awaken out of identification with reaction. We become aware of the body, emotions, and thoughts—without clinging. In Relax, we meet our immediate experience with acceptance, receptivity, and kindness.

Whenever we recognize tension, we can choose ease. There is no other practice, really, than this letting go. We only need to choose. Choosing the ease over and over again is the practice. Our formal support for making this choice—for remembering that this choice is available to us—is one simple word: Relax. This guidance is not offered to the body only, nor to the mind only. The body and mind move together, not two but one. When the body relaxes, the mind calms down. When the mind calms down, the body relaxes.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just tell our bodies to relax, and they would obey? Many headaches and ulcers would vanish; we would be happier, and live longer. But it just doesn't work that way. Tense muscles take a while to release. Adrenaline takes time to be cleared from the blood stream. The reminder to Relax cannot be obeyed instantly, despite our best hopes and intentions. Patience and practice are necessary.

Thoughts and the mental component of emotions also have a kind of momentum; they do not cease their forward push simply because we have become aware of them. The habits of the mind run deep, fast, and with a lifetime of energy; stopping and settling into the moment with ease does not always come easily.

We can meet our disordered thoughts and feelings with acceptance. We need not run away from discomfort, confusion, fear, unhappiness, or judgments. Accept is to the mind as Relax is to the body.

When we notice the signs of tension in the body—a tightness in the belly, or the sinking feeling of sadness—awareness can remain soft and present while the feeling unfolds. The tendency to fly backwards in aversion to the unpleasant sensation is replaced with the conscious reminder to Relax, to accept. In this change, old habits of continuing or amplifying tension are replaced with new habits of ease and acceptance. In this way, Relax heals what the Pause reveals. Thoughts rise and fall as excitements come and go during interpersonal engagement, but the mind does not identify with these reactions.

When thoughts are met with acceptance, we are free to respond appropriately instead of reacting habitually. This acceptance, when fully ripe and unconditional, is love. This is not emotional love, but the simple lovingkindness of total non-aversion (*adosa*, in Pali). It is the heart-mind that is receptive to experience and activated in natural kindness, or *metta* (the Pali word for lovingkindness that is the namesake of the Metta Foundation).

When thoughts and emotional reactions are met with acceptance, with Relax, with *metta*, they lose their motive power. There is no clinging to the thought or emotion, and no judgment. This simple kindness, to ourselves and others, is the doorway to transformation and freedom.

Now we come to the third interpersonal meditation instruction: Open. With Open, awareness extends to everything around us. Pause and Relax could be instructions for internal

individual meditation, but Open invites us to extend this accepting mindfulness beyond the boundaries of our skin to encompass the external world. This extension opens the door to mutuality, and is the basis for interpersonal meditation.

When we extend awareness beyond the skin-encapsulated self, our meditation grows to include other people and our surroundings. We meet other people with the same mindfulness and calm acceptance with which we are learning to meet our internal experience. If we are meditating in dialogue with one other person, we meet this person with wakeful acceptance. If we are meditating with a room full of people, the awareness opens wide to receive the whole. With mindfulness of both the internal and external, we are aware of the ever-changing relational moment.

We can begin to explore Open by becoming aware of the body sitting, just as it is. With a focused inward awareness, we find some place where attention is drawn because of a sensation, perhaps the touch of the body upon the chair or cushion, or a point of discomfort in the hip or knees. By bringing full awareness to that area or point, mindfulness becomes stabilized there. Now, right at that point, we meet this sensation with acceptance. This awareness is very precise, but very kind. We then begin to expand that kindly awareness to the rest of the body, until the entire body is saturated with receptive mindfulness.

Now we simply do not stop there. In Open, we allow awareness to extend beyond the body. We may first notice the expansive quality of the wider sense of hearing. If our eyes were closed, we might open them and notice that the entire room is in our field of awareness. We may notice that the person (or people) in front of us are also in our field of awareness. We are simply and fully present with others. The same kindly, accepting, mindful awareness that was touched by internal phenomena of the body-mind is now touched by the other. In Open, awareness encompasses the external as well as the internal. It is wider, more spacious.

While some traditional meditation practices encourage a wide open awareness, most do not include awareness of the specific humans we are with—they do not open the door to encounter in co-meditation. In Insight Dialogue, we open this door.

With non-clinging, the mind learns to move freely between internal and external experience. This pliable mind state is important to all meditation practice, but it is especially important in Insight Dialogue. When someone speaks, awareness may open outward in hearing. Emotions or ideas may momentarily pull us into identification and reaction. Aware of our reactivity, we can Pause, stabilizing awareness in the body. Opening again—perhaps as our partner is still speaking—awareness may now include both our body and the other's voice. In the silence that follows, awareness may turn inward, noticing delicate reverberations of thought. As we practice, we become able to move more easily between internal and external awareness. These inner and outer shifts can be known by mindfulness without grasping and identification. Pleasant or unpleasant, we remain aware—not caught up, but aware.

When something touches awareness, the fundamental experience is one of contact and of consciousness arising from this contact. It makes no difference whether the awareness is of an internal thought or of something external, such as hearing another speak. It is still “me” experiencing this. But right at the point of contact, in the moment of contact, this subject/object relationship vanishes. It is no longer experienced as “me knowing.” The once rigid boundaries of self and other soften; both are known simply as experience.

The open mind is receptive and non-clinging. As self-concern quietly drifts away, opening becomes more complete. In fullness of opening there is no boundary between the internal and

external. There is nowhere to go; there is only awareness. The only boundary was the sense of self, which we find is an illusion.

We have established the core of the practice:

**mindfulness—Pause;
calm acceptance—Relax;
and mutuality—Open.**

This is how we meet the moment: awake, loving, and spacious. But what do we do when we find this moment is changing uncontrollably? Or conversely, when the predictable, habit-driven world hardly seems to be changing at all?

The fourth meditation instruction in Insight Dialogue is Trust Emergence. With this instruction we are invited into the numinous but observable impermanence of all experience.

Trust Emergence is rooted in wisdom. That is, it supports seeing things as they are—unstable, and far more complex and fluid than the mundane glance can ever know. The dynamic quality of experience demands a robust practice; it also provides the object of that practice: change itself. Trust Emergence invites us to dive headlong into the tumbling moment by guiding us in relating to each other and to the totality of experience.

Pause-Relax-Open establish the mind state for being fully present in the mutual, emergent moment. In this vibrating and aware moment, we listen and speak. In this vivid state of mind, we communicate. The Insight Dialogue meditation instructions that directly address this are Listen Deeply-Speak the Truth; we will focus first on Listen Deeply.

Listen Deeply opens the senses, heart, and mind to receive the moment fully. To Listen Deeply is to listen with mindfulness, surrendering fully to the unfolding words and presence of our co-meditators. Grounded in clear awareness and sensitive to the speaker's offering, we are a receptive field touched by the words, emotions, and energies of our fellow human beings.

Up to this point, we have been exploring how we can dwell in meditative awareness with others. As we Pause, we can Relax and accept what we find, and Open our awareness to encompass external as well as internal experience. We Trust Emergence, resting in the flux of experience; we meet the delight and the insecurity of change without knowing what the next moment will bring. Listening Deeply to our inner voice and to the voices of others, we come to the precipice of outward action.

Attuned to the moment, we Speak the Truth. Communication inevitably arises in any moment of emergent interpersonal contact. Seeing and being seen yield an emotional interchange, with or without words. Bodily proximity generates a flow of energy between people. It is uniquely powerful, however, to meet each other through the power of language. Whenever we speak, some bit of the heart-mind is revealed; every day, through the mystery of language, we touch each other mind to mind, heart to heart. The guideline Speak the Truth grounds this mutuality in morality and mindfulness.

Keeping in mind the six Insight Dialogue meditation instructions as separate elements provides a strong support for practice. This is especially true at the beginning, when we need the support of particular instructions to counter our abundance of interpersonal habits. It is also true whenever greater energy or clarity is called for.

The individual guidelines are also easier to bring into ordinary daily practice. For example, we can remind ourselves to Relax or to Trust Emergence at any time. When our minds are scattered, or our hearts agitated, a specific, clear focus can help us find the meditative moment. Pause can help us step out of the preoccupations of a frenzied mind, calling up the clarity of prior practice and transforming agitated energy into wakefulness. When emotional attachments arise, a reminder to Relax can help us calm the body and meet pain and grasping with acceptance and love. Some times are better than others for the spaciousness of Open—perhaps our distracted state would only become more diffuse.

Trust Emergence may enable us to ride a wild wave of agitation as a fresh and adaptable foundation for clear awareness. Listen Deeply may open us beyond shrunken patterns of self-concern and receive the words—and the humanity—of family members, friends, and coworkers. As six individual instructions, the guidelines provide touch points or reminders for integrating practice into our daily living. When we use them, everyday life can become an opportunity for real insight. Insight Dialogue groups sometimes discuss these experiences as a part of their practice time.

Pause—call forth to slow down, to drop ignorance, to see more deeply, and to brighten the mind.

Relax—call forth in the face of stress or challenging truths, and to bring ease to the body-mind.

Open—call to move out of isolated practice, loops, and selfish patterns, to be out of contraction.

Trust Emergence—call forth for energy, to end doubt, and to ride the moment.

Listen Deeply—call into inquiry, receptivity, and to extend the heart.

Speak the Truth—call forth to end stasis, to enhance generosity and courage, to bring meditative interaction.

Now that you have an understanding of the Insight Dialogue process, you may be interested in looking at ways of furthering or embracing this practice.

The Metta Foundation offers a number of ways to guide you including retreats, online programs and international groups that meet regularly. For more information, please (visit our website) **www.metta.org**

COMMUNICATION EXERCISES

Describe the communication. With whom? Subject?	How did the difficulty come about?	What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?	What did the other person(s) want? What did they actually get?	How did you feel during and after this time?	Have you resolved this issue yet? How?
MONDAY					
TUESDAY					
WEDNESDAY					
THURSDAY					
FRIDAY					
SATURDAY					
SUNDAY					