

Complete/proper mindfulness or *samma-sati* is one of eight key components of the Buddhist path.<sup>2</sup> Later adapted by Burmese Buddhists to form the basis of a counter colonialist movement led by maverick teachers Ledi Sayadaw and Mingun Sayadaw in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this new interpretation was then extracted from its Buddhist context and recompiled as a secular practice by American innovators such as Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield. Together with yoga, this reconstituted “mindfulness” was then transformed into a billion-dollar meditation and wellness industry<sup>3</sup> led by the likes of molecular biologist Jon Kabat-Zinn, Chade Meng-Tang, an early Google employee, and investor/author Tim Ferriss.<sup>4</sup>

One of the core mindfulness systems adapted by this movement is the Satipatthana method popularized by Mahasi Sayadaw. This “Progress of Insight” (as Mahasi termed it) was developed to help busy lay practitioners achieve stages of enlightenment, particularly *sotapanna* or “stream entry,” but to do so, the practice must generally be approached with the same intensity as one would apply to winning an Olympic medal or earning a Ph.D. The Progress of Insight has been seen to produce, in its early stages and for those who do not pursue it intensely, remarkable benefits such as enhanced performance, stress reduction, and psychological wellbeing. These effects are in fact the chief goals of commercial and clinical “mindfulness” practices such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Interventions.<sup>5</sup> However, once the Progress of Insight has been triggered, there is no way to prevent some practitioners from advancing through their mindfulness practice to later stages of insight that share core characteristics with dissociative and psychotic states of mind. Without a level of proficiency in and beyond these *dukkhañana* or “dark night” stages—which are not even touched upon in many mindfulness-based protocols—permanent psychological damage and even suicide can result.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is another core set of practices in the Buddhist teaching which is both highly compatible with “mindfulness” and at the same time specifically designed to prevent and/or ameliorate negative states such as fear, paranoia, stress, and conflict. This is the set of wholesome, idealistic mind/energy states collectively known as the *Brahma Viharas* (Divine Abidings) in the Theravada tradition and the Four Immeasurables in the Mahayana:

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is adapted from the work submitted to Dr. Garrett as part of RLG492H1F.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati\\_\(Buddhism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati_(Buddhism))

<sup>3</sup> <https://blog.marketresearch.com/1.2-billion-u.s.-meditation-market-growing-strongly-as-it-becomes-more-mainstream>

<sup>4</sup> <https://medium.com/@marcodpatricio/how-mindfulness-became-a-billion-dollar-industry-61acb50fd436>

<sup>5</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-018-1063-4>

<sup>6</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266080805\\_The\\_Stages\\_of\\_Insight\\_Clinical\\_Relevance\\_for\\_Mindfulness-Based\\_Interventions/link/547554f40cf29afed6126b9d/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266080805_The_Stages_of_Insight_Clinical_Relevance_for_Mindfulness-Based_Interventions/link/547554f40cf29afed6126b9d/download) (p. 6)

*metta/maitri* or “loving-kindness”, *karuna* or compassion, *mudita* or empathetic joy, and *upekkha/upeksa* or equanimity.

In conversation with popular psychologist Daniel Goleman, His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV stated that practices found within the Buddhist tradition should be adopted by secular wellness programs in cases where they might be helpful in relieving suffering, regardless of whether such practices were traditionally shared only with those who had committed to a lifetime of exclusive Buddhist spiritual training.<sup>7</sup> It is my intention with this material to explore and present a handful of these practices that I have found particularly useful for people with little or no meditative experience, as well as helpful to seasoned practitioners in bringing creative flexibility to their contemplative practice regimes.

Specifically, I will offer a guided practice in the Brahma Viharas I learned from Ven. Namgyal Rinpoche (1931-2003), born Leslie George Dawson and a remarkable teacher recognized by all four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Mahasi Sayadaw himself, and many other meditation masters. The method is outlined in the book *Altruism* by Sonam Senge, a student of Namgyal Rinpoche, and I have adapted it for the purposes of this presentation.

I have intentionally reworked this and several other practices from this vast body of teachings to make them more accessible to people who might have little interest in religion or spirituality, but who could easily benefit from these simple, practical exercises.<sup>8</sup>

I have termed these Kindness Practices, and the first of these (based on the Brahma Viharas) the Beautiful Minds meditation. For its four modes, I use the words Caring (*metta*), Helping (*karuna*), Celebrating (*mudita*), and Stillness (*upekkha*). These translate the import and intent of the practices in more accessible and possibly accurate ways than the traditional translations provided by Christian missionaries some two centuries ago.

It should be noted that the methods outlined here are introductory. While they are designed to promote well-being and happiness, they are not therapy and should never be construed to replace professional medical or mental treatment.

Here is an outline of the practice, to accompany the video/audio presentation.

### *Beautiful Minds – A Kindness-Based Wellness Practice*

#### *1. Caring (Love and Kindness)*

- a. Hold the aspiration/intention to imagine or feel a pleasantly warm pink or apricot-coloured glow or blooming rose-like image in your heart area.*
- b. Smile.*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/ZnNZ59VbfGY?t=61>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/flourish/200912/seeing-is-believing-the-power-visualization>

- c. With breath and smile, silently repeat words or phrases that evoke love in you, such as: "Love and Kindness" or "May we be happy, healthy, safe, and free."*
- d. Allow the pink glow and warmth to fill your heart, body, the space around you, and as far beyond that as is comfortable.*
- e. When it touches all beings, the light comes back as gratitude to you and is gathered into your heart as more Love and Kindness.*

## *2. Helping (Compassion)*

- a. Form and hold the intention to experience a warm glow or blooming rose-like image in the throat area.*
- b. Smile.*
- c. With breath and smile, repeat phrases that evoke the desire to alleviate suffering in yourself and others, such as "Compassion" or "How can I help?"*
- d. Allow the turquoise glow and warmth to fill your throat, body, the space around you, and as far beyond as is comfortable.*
- e. When the light and warmth of compassion touch all beings or as many as feels comfortable, the light comes back as gratitude to you and is gathered into your throat area, filling it with Compassion or caring for oneself and others.*

## *3. Celebrating (Joyful Resonance)*

- a. Generate a warm glow or flower in the tonsil area at the back of your mouth where your jaws and tongue come together.*
- b. Smile.*
- c. With breath and smile, repeat phrases that evoke the sharing of joy, such as "Joyful Resonance" or "Good for you!" You might find yourself salivating as you enjoy the sweet taste of success. Feel free to celebrate by swallowing the joyful ambrosia.*
- d. Allow the yellow glow and warmth to fill your throat, body, the space around you, and as far beyond as is comfortable.*
- e. When the light and warmth of joyful resonance touches all beings or as many as feels comfortable, the light comes back as gratitude to you and is gathered into the tonsil area at the back of the mouth, filling it and you with Celebration at the happiness of others and yourself.*

## *Stillness (Resting in Balance)*

- a. Experience a beautiful white glow or rose-like image in the center of your head, filling it with Stillness and Balance that accepts all phenomena with equipoise and gentle interest. This is a love so deep and caring that it considers all beings and all phenomena (from a chocolate to a headache) as equally worthy of love and interest.*

- b. Smile.*
- c. With breath and smile, repeat phrases that deepen the sense of stillness and balance, such as "Stillness and Balance" or "Equipoise."*
- d. Feel the white glow and warmth fill your head, body, the space around you, and as far as is comfortable.*
- e. When the light and warmth of Stillness and Balance touches all beings or as many as feels comfortable, the light comes back as gratitude to you and is gathered into the center of your head, filling it and you with Stillness and Balance at the basic love and harmony that is experienced to pervade and supersede the vicissitudes of life.*

This is one of dozens of meditation methods I am in the process of adapting from my decades of contemplative training in Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhist spiritual practices. It is my hope that more people will benefit from the profoundly helpful technologies of the heart, giving us all more resilience and fortitude to navigate the challenges we face as individuals and communities, and as a species reaching a critical turning point in the history of this planet.

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