

Mindfulness in Plain English
Bhante Gunaratana
Chapter 8 “Structuring your Meditation”
Selected Quotes

“First of all, you need to establish a formal practice schedule, a specific period when you will do Vipassana meditation and nothing else.....in an environment with a minimum of distraction.....This is not the easiest skill to learn. We have spent our entire life developing mental habits that are ... contrary to the ideal of uninterrupted mindfulness.Our minds are like cups of muddy water. The object of meditation is to clarify this sludge so that we can see what is going on in there. The best way to do that is just let it sit. Give it enough time and it will settle down.....The very act of sitting still and being mindful causes this settling....Any effort on our part to force this settling is counterproductive. That is repression, and it does not work. Try to force things out of the mind and you merely add energy to them....We exert energy in meditation, but not force. Our only effort is gentle, patient mindfulness.

During normal activity, you get so caught up in the press of events that the basic issues with which you are dealing are seldom thoroughly handled. They become buried in the unconscious, where they seethe and foam and fester....All of this material comes forth in one form or another during your meditation. You get a chance to look at it, see it for what it is, and let it go. We set up a formal meditation period in order to create a conducive environment for this release.

Where to sit? .. a quiet, secluded place....where you will be alone. It should also be a place where you won't feel on display. Try to pick a spot that is as quiet as possible... Music and talking are about the worst.....sit in the same place each time.....You soon come to associate that spot with the tranquility of deep concentration, and that association helps you to reach deep states more quickly.

When to sit? The description of Buddhism as the Middle Way applies. Don't overdo it. Don't underdo it.You set up a practice schedule and keep to it with a gentle, patient tenacity.Medication is not a duty, not an obligation...It is a psychological activity...it is an activity which is very sensitive to the attitude with which you approach each session. What you expect is most likely what you will get. Your practice will go best if you are looking forward to sitting. If you sit down expecting drudgery, that is probably what will occur. So set up a daily pattern that you can live with. Make it reasonable. Make it fit with the rest of your life. [If it doesn't work with your life] then change something.

First thing in the morning is a great time to meditate. Your mind is fresh then....Be sure you are thoroughly awake, though....The evening is another good time for practice. Your mind is full of the mental rubbish that you have accumulated during the day, and it is great to get rid of that burden before you sleep. Your meditation will cleanse and rejuvenate your mind. When you first start to meditation, once a day is enough....Don't overdo it...Don't burn yourself out. Make haste slowly. Make your effort consistent and steady. Give yourself time to incorporate the meditation practice into your life, and let your practice grow gradually and gently.

How Long to Sit? Sit as long as you can, but don't overdo it. Most beginners start with twenty or thirty minutes.As you grow accustomed to the procedure, you can extend your meditation little by little. Vipassana meditation is not a form of asceticism. Self-

mortification is not the goal. We are trying to cultivate mindfulness, not pain.....Just determine what is a comfortable length of time for you at this point in your life. Then sit five minutes longer than that...Even 10 minutes of meditation can be very beneficial...You decide on the length of your session before you meditate. Don't do it while you are meditating. It's too easy to give in to restlessness that way, and restlessness is one of the main items that we want to learn to mindfully observe. So choose a realistic length of time, and stick to it.....Don't peek at your timer to see how you're doing.....If you haven't predetermined a minimum, you'll find yourself prone to short sessions. You'll bolt every time something unpleasant comes up or whenever you feel restless....These experiences are some of the most profitable a meditator can face, but only if you sit through them. You've got to learn to observe them calmly and clearly.....When you've done that enough times, they lose their hold on you. You see them for what they are: just impulses, arising and passing away, just part of the passing show. Your life smoothes out beautifully as a consequence.

Self-discipline....is the skill of seeing through the hollow shouting of your own impulses and piercing their secret. They have no power over you. It's all a show, a deception. Your urges scream and bluster at you; they cajole...but they really carry no stick at all. You give in out of habit. You give in because you never really bother to look beyond the threat. It is all empty back there. There is only 1 way to learn this lesson, though.Look within and watch the stuff coming up—restlessness, anxiety, impatience, pain—just watch it come up and don't get involved.it simply goes away. It rises, it passes away. As simple as that. There is another word for self-discipline. It is patience.”