

Reflective Meditation Practice

This document is intended as a vehicle for teachers and teachers-in-training to reflect on their dharma practice and work. Its purpose is twofold: to place our orientation to Buddhist meditation in context with other meditation methods, and to set out some basic principles for those of us who teach, lead meditation and reflection groups, and/or work with individuals.

The hallmark of our orientation is to support students just where they are in their understanding, and to help them grow naturally in insight and self-compassion/calm. Our students, like ourselves, come from a wide range of previous experience with meditation and dharma study through reading, listening to talks and meditation practice. While this approach is an outgrowth of insight meditation practice, all approaches to Buddhist meditation are intended to lead in the same direction: the reduction of suffering. Although it is grounded in and based on the Buddha's teaching, this approach to meditation also includes principles of Western psychology and neuroscience that help ground and support teachers and their students in leading ethical and internally congruent lives.

Three things distinguish Reflective Meditation. The first is our emphasis on allowing our naturally active minds to be as they are during meditation - to include in meditation our thoughts and emotions, along with awareness of our breathing, body, and feelings. Second, when the sitting period ends, rather than consider the meditation finished, we take additional time to reflect upon both the experience and the content of our meditation. We then put into our own words what we can remember of the experience, usually by recording our sittings in a meditation journal.

The third distinction is the co-creation of an environment where student and teacher can explore together the meditator's sitting. Whether meeting individually or in a small group, the meditator is encouraged to describe in their own words what occurred in the sitting. The teacher asks further questions to expand the meditator's experience. The process of being listened to and gently questioned offers an opportunity for a trusting and caring connection to

develop, adding depth to the meditator's experience. If the setting is a small group where others are present, the dialogue fosters a shared experience for the whole group. Finding language for often elusive experience can help others see their own experience mirrored and enlarged.

This approach to meditation is an evolution of Recollective Awareness (RA) practice, originated by Jason Siff and taught for many years by Jason and other teachers. Following a split in the RA community, a group of teachers and practitioners came together with the intention to carry forward a receptive, experienced-based, and interactive method of practice. Linda Modaro and Nelly Kaufer, the current lead teachers of Reflective Meditation, have identified certain fundamentals to clarify and understand their own way of teaching, and to provide a starting point for discussion, clarification, and development among current and emerging teachers. These fundamentals will be uniquely expressed by each teacher according to their own understanding of the dharma and the needs of their students.

This, and all such documents, are provisional and works in progress.

Fundamentals of Teaching Reflective Meditation

Learning to meditate--learning from what comes up in meditation--through the awareness, recall, and reflection.

- Permission to do any meditation practice and invitation to do our method.
- Inviting your life into your meditation practice integrates your meditation practice into your life.
- Allotting time after meditation for reflection, journaling and the explorative dialogue.
- Learning about/from meditative processes and the content of what's experienced.

Meditation practice develops through experimentation and choice.

- Being curious about a wide range of mind states. How they develop, how they function, and their “side effects”.
- Allowing different kinds of experience to go on longer-- to learn about them without interruption, to know them in their more “natural state”.
- Calm states develop idiosyncratically and can be hard to detect and validate by the meditator. Gentleness and calm are mutually dependent.
- Questioning and investigating high ideals about meditation and life. Recognizing how any high ideal can lead to self-building, feeling bad about oneself when one can't sustain ideal states.

Learning the dharma through discovering it in experience.

- Seeing all experience as a place for observation or exploration.
- Learning about Conditionality / Dependent Arising and other Dharma teachings through getting fuller and more detailed descriptions during the inter/view.
- Knowing Dukkha as the first truth / task. Allowing personally painful situations into meditation, being interested in them, erodes the belief that our misery and hurt is because there is something inherently with self or others. Developing kindness in the face of Dukkha.
- Presenting Dharma teachings “lightly” and in sync with student's experiences and interests.

Exploring views embedded in experience, not to find the “correct” view but to see how specific views function and when they rigidify.

- Respectful interest broadens and transforms views.
- Reflecting upon and supporting experiences and views that are onward leading/ freeing.
- Seeing narratives and proclivities that support or fuel views and how they function.
- Seeking wider spectrums of views instead of fixed positions.

Support and Accountability for teachers

- Allowing and reflecting upon old practices or using generative practices with changed goals and intentions.
- Becoming your own teacher and being inquisitive about the effect of your choices.
- Deliberately challenging old assumptions and practices or not.
- Being a support for and being supported by others.
- Using spiritual friends as another vehicle to see into parts of your experience that you may miss or ignore

6/28/19

5/8/21 - minor edits