

INTERMEDIATE COURSE IN MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

3. TRACKING

Two key aspects of mindfulness practice are the "initial application of attention" and the "sustained application of attention." The first refers to clearly placing or directing our attention on what we are going to attend to with awareness. The second refers to our capacity to then sustain the attention on that object. Both are important. The first insures that we clearly and intentionally bring our attention on an object, e.g. the breath. The second helps us to look deeply at into our direct experience. The first connects attention to some object; the second stays with the object to notice what happens to it over time.

Vipassana practice develops with our capacity to distinguish our direct experience from the concepts we have of our experience. Through practice we can learn to recognize when we are under the sway of ideas, interpretations and value we overlay on experience. Ideas of future of past, possession, identification, I, me, and mine, judgement, meaning, good and bad, all can be a barrier to being able to see clearly what is going on. As we learn to see the concepts and either drop them or look behind them, it is the task of sustained attention to keep the focus on the direct experience.

With sustained attention begin to track how your particular experiences changes over time. In other words, notice what happens to something when you sustain your attention on it. How does it change? What does it change into? If it doesn't change into anything else, look at it deeply to see if there is any aspect of the experience that is impermanent, in flux, or seems to arise and pass in rapid succession. Try to put aside any concept you might have of the experience in favor of sensing or watching it in and of itself.

At the end of your sitting write down a record of your ability to clearly apply the initial application of attention and the sustained application of attention. Write down some of the prominent things that you were aware of during the sitting and what happened to those experiences as you tracked their changes. This requires remaining alert enough during your meditation that you can track the changes during your meditation.

In addition write down some general notes about how you meditation unfolded. What subjective changes did you experience in terms of the five faculties? Did they get stronger or weaker during the meditation session? Which of the hindrances came into play during the sitting?