

## Are you new to the practice of meditation?

So you are interested in meditation, but have a few questions:

- I'm busy with studies, work, family etc, so, how much time do I need to commit to the practice?
- Should I go to a temple to meditate?
- Am I on the right track with my meditation practice?
- What is a meditation retreat?

This document contains useful information for those keen on commencing the meditation practice, require a refresher or find it difficult to access the appropriate resources.



'Information for Beginners' e-document available on:  
<http://www.nissarana.lk/meditate-with-us/useful-resources/>

*Nissarana Vanaya, Mitirigala*

## Getting Started

Meditation practice can be part of your daily routine with minimal effort. A busy lifestyle is no obstacle to making progress in the practice of meditation – but, you must have the right mindset and values.

Guidance from an experienced teacher is important to establish the basic meditation technique and when continuing with the practice. The information and instructions provided here may help you to develop your technique and the practice.

The *Basic Meditation Instructions* formulated by Most Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero, the Chief Meditation Master and Abbot of the *Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya* (forest hermitage) provides useful guidance for those keen on commencing the practice of meditation. Meditation instructions in both written and audio format are available at **[www.nissarana.lk](http://www.nissarana.lk)** under the tabs, *Audio and Publications* and *Meditate with Us*.

The listed resources and information on preparing for a meditation retreat will help guide you through the practice, to develop supportive factors for the practice and in overcoming obstacles faced in the practice.

## Developing the practice

After reading the basic instructions, you may consider the best way to commence the practice. Establishing mindfulness in daily activities is a good starting point that will complement your efforts in sitting and walking meditation.

Being in the present moment is to be gradually harnessed. Without much effort, one could become mindful in daily activities, for example, when you are about to cross a road; or when you are driving in difficult conditions.

It is difficult to retain mindfulness throughout the day as the mind habitually tends to wonder, becoming distracted by pleasant sights and sounds.



Begin with small steps and become mindful as you get out of bed in the morning or as you wash your hands or when you brush your teeth.

Becoming mindful of these brief moments, you can extend your attention to the process of eating, cleaning chores and walking. As you mindfully attend to daily chores, you may begin to mindfully wait in a queue, wait for a train or bus and at times, become mindful amidst busy situations.

Gradually, you will become mindful of many daily activities. Being in the present may become habitual.

## Sitting and walking meditation

Start with an achievable goal. For example, try to spend 10 minutes of walking meditation, followed by 10 minutes of sitting meditation each day. Walking meditation helps to mobilize energy, enabling you to undertake longer periods of sitting meditation.

Try to commence the practice with walking meditation, preparing the body and the mind for the session of sitting meditation that follows. Walking meditation is recommended after meals or when the mind is restless and unsettled due to thoughts or stress.

After a period of walking meditation, you may feel that you are ready for a session of sitting meditation or to continue your day in a calmer and clearer state of mind.

As you become comfortable with the practice and it becomes routine, you could gradually increase the duration of the practice and the time allocated for each session of sitting and walking meditation, to one hour each day and for a longer period during weekends and holidays.

## **Supportive factors for the practice**

A monastic setting is conducive for the meditation practice, although, lay life is not an obstacle for progress. Make use of every opportunity as you undertake daily activities to become mindful. Walking to the bus stop, waiting for an appointment or sitting in the train on your way to work are opportunities to bring the mind to the present moment.

Establishing mindfulness in daily activities and the practice of walking and sitting meditation should be your focus whenever a suitable opportunity arises.

Compliment the practice by regularly listening to the *dhamma* talks (*Sutta Desana*) or reading *dhamma* books to energize your practice. This may also prove useful in clarifying pitfalls in the practice and confusion or doubts that may arise in the early stages of your practice.

Listening to the Question and Answer sessions that form part of the *Sutta Desana* provides valuable guidance for commonly encountered obstacles and queries relating to the practice.

Attending a meditation retreat is an invaluable opportunity to receive guidance and clarification from an experienced teacher. Group meditation sessions in the presence of a teacher, a suitable environment and a period of time on a structured schedule of alternative sessions of sitting and walking meditation are helpful for progress in the practice.

Due to your day-to-day efforts in meditation, you may experience a smoother transition to the retreat routine and be able to consolidate your technique and enhance your practice.

With continued daily practice and by attending retreats, you will progress in the practice of meditation, to cultivate the mind and experience that lends towards insights into the 'way things really are'.

## Recommended Sutta Desana

### Sinhala Medium

*Sālā Sutta* [RET 56 - Mitirigala, 2013]<sup>3</sup>

*Sankathārammana Sutta* [Koggala, 2014]<sup>1</sup>

*Dasuttara Sutta* [Mitirigala, 2015 & 2016]<sup>1</sup>

*Ōgatharana Sutta* [RET 65 - Mitirigala, 2014]<sup>3</sup>

### Sutta – Main

*Sathipatthāna Sutta* [091 - Melbourne, 2006]<sup>3</sup>

*Ānāpānasati Sutta* [003 - New Zealand, 2009]<sup>3</sup>

*Girimānanda Sutta* [032 - Mitirigala, 2006]<sup>3</sup>

### English Medium

*Dasuttara Sutta* [Florida USA, & Mitirigala, 2015]<sup>2</sup>

*Sathipatthāna Sutta* [Brisbane, 2015]<sup>2</sup>

*Girimananda Sutta* [RET 83 – Mitirigala, 2014]<sup>2</sup>

Available at [www.nissarana.lk](http://www.nissarana.lk)

1 – [Audio and Publications / Dhamma Talks Sinhala](#)

2 – [Audio and Publications / Dhamma Talks English](#)

3 [Audio and Publications / Dhamma Audio Archive](#)

Or <http://www.damsara.org>

## Recommended Books

### Sinhala Medium

*Anapanasati Bhavanava* (Most Venerable Matara Sri Gnanarama Maha Thero)

*Anapanasati Bhavanave Anisansa* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

*Sakman Bhavanava* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

### English Medium

*In This Life Itself* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

*100 Questions and Answers* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

*Seven Factors of Enlightenment* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

*The Seven Stages of Purification* (Most Venerable Matara Sri Gnanarama Maha Thero)

*The Power of mindfulness* (Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thero) Wheel Publication No. 121/122; Buddhist Publication Society\*

*Fleeting Moment* (Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero)

Available at [www.nissarana.lk](http://www.nissarana.lk)

– [Audio and Publications / Publications Sinhala](#)

– [Audio and Publications / Publications English](#)

\* <http://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh121.pdf>

## Preparing For Retreats

As you develop the practice you may begin to encounter a few hurdles. Perhaps, there are too many distractions in your life that make it difficult to find sufficient time for the practice, or you may be struggling with a specific aspect of meditation or need a boost to continue the practice.

Attending a meditation retreat is invaluable when faced with obstacles in the practice as it helps to re-focus your efforts and rejuvenate your faith and vigor to strive in the practice.

During retreats, you have the benefit of an experienced teacher guiding you through the practice in a suitable environment with minimal distractions.



## ❖ Are retreats intensive?

Compared to the daily practice, the schedule of practice during retreats is intensive. This may require a slight adjustment at the beginning, but many yogis accustom themselves to the routine very quickly. In preparation for a retreat, try to increase the duration of your practice daily.

The practice involves alternative periods of sitting and walking meditation followed by a *dhamma* talk in the evening.

During retreats, separate time is allocated for Question and Answer sessions with the meditation teacher and also to discuss your practice; to receive clarification on the technique, the approach and any obstacles.

## ❖ Noble silence

During retreats, participants are encouraged to act '*Slowly, Mindfully and Silently*'. Silence is expected from all participants as well as volunteers involved in the retreat. The expectation is to spend your time in solitude and in silence as much as possible.

Noble silence is essential for progress in the practice. If you are silent, act mindfully and slowly, you will not disturb others during retreats.

### ❖ **No mobile phones!**

Retreats emphasize the need to maintain noble silence, to spend time in solitude, without distraction from the use of mobile phones and/or the need to communicate with family and friends. There is no entertainment, no access to television or the internet during retreats. Any urgent messages from your family (or from you to the family) must be communicated via the retreat organisers. This is so that you have the peace of mind for the practice.

### ❖ **How long are retreats?**

Retreats can be from just one day to up to ten days. You could start by attending a retreat of a shorter duration (for example a three-day retreat). Longer retreats are helpful as you advance in the practice and once you have attended at least one or two residential retreats. Gradual practice at home will help you to adjust to a retreat environment quite readily and to maximise your time on retreat.

### ❖ **Do I have to keep the precepts?**

During retreats, you are expected to abide by the eight precepts, which requires you to refrain from taking food after midday (except for certain drinks such as juice, herbal tea and of course, water).

This is not difficult as you will be provided with a well nourished breakfast and lunch. You may even begin to appreciate the benefits of avoiding a heavy meal at night.

### ❖ **Where can I get more information about retreats?**

Please visit [www.nissarana.lk](http://www.nissarana.lk) for information about retreats. Under, '*Meditate with Us*' you will find the on-line Guidelines for retreats, the retreat schedule, timetable and other relevant information.

