

## Guided Meditation For Chaplains

“Imagination is more important than knowledge” ~ Albert Einstein

Leading people through guided meditation is one of the important tools chaplains can use in counseling both individuals and groups. Buddhism is often associated with meditation, and Buddhist Chaplains will often be similarly associated with meditation practice. Because of this it can often be an opening for people offering Buddhist spiritual care to give suggestions and instructions in meditation. Virtually any meditation can be guided and is often more successfully done with guidance and coaching. Having someone’s verbal guidance during a meditation session can intensify the meditation experience and so enhance many of the benefits that can come from meditation.

### 1. The Functions of Guided Meditation

- 1) It helps people relax, often faster than if they are left to meditate alone.
- 2) It can inspire people, especially by focusing attention on some inspiring object, teaching, or state of being.
- 3) Even mild meditative states can increase a person’s creativity, intuition, and sensitivity that can be used for problem solving or seeing difficulties in a new light. It can help people access deeper sources of knowing than usually available.
- 4) Guided meditation can be used to help people explore difficult issues and emotions. It can be especially powerful to have people talk about some issue with their eyes closed after guided meditation has helped people relax.
- 5) It can be used to evoke useful states or emotions, e.g., peace, joy, strength, confidence.
- 6) It can facilitate both psychological and physical healing. Sometimes this can be done as simply as helping a person stay present for some difficulty.
- 7) It can change difficult or unproductive interactions for the better. Through guided meditation, the chaplain can take control of a situation and shape it. If there is too much tension or chaos in a group, interrupting what is going on and having everyone do a guided meditation can change the group dynamics very quickly, for example by doing a short period of loving-kindness meditation.

### 2) Kinds of Guided Meditation

There are thousands of different forms of meditation. In many situations it can be most useful to creatively adapt or invent a meditation that fits the person(s) for whom it is for.

- 1) Breath meditation for relaxation and heightened presence. Also for breathing into or through physical or emotional pain.
- 2) Body orientated meditation, e.g. body scan, progressive relaxation.
- 3) Simple guided mindfulness practice to help people be present for what is going on.
- 4) Meditation with words, teachings, or sounds. This can be repeating some significant word like “peace”, “calm”, “joy”, “Buddha”, “Yes”; repeating a phrase of teaching such as “This very body is Buddha,” or “Letting go is safe,” or phrases of loving-kindness or forgiveness.
- 5) Visualization meditation, e.g., visualizing some compassionate being like the Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, Jesus, Mother Mary, or visualizing light or different colors.
- 6) Guided Meditative Journeys. E.g., having a person visualize walking through some idyllic scene nature which leads them to some wise person whom they can ask some important question.
- 7) Evocative meditation which helps people awaken or touch into some helpful state of being or emotion. For example, arousing love, compassion, peace, any of the seven factors of awakening. Certain images can be used for this purpose, e.g., imaging oneself as a mountain can bring stability, imagining one’s mind like a still mountain lake can evoke a sense of peacefulness.
- 8) Evoking positive memories from the past in order to evoke positive feelings.

- 3) Steps in using guided meditation
  - 1) Identify the need, problem, disease, issues or goal the meditation is to be used for.
  - 2) Assess whether and what guided meditation is appropriate. Is the person psychologically stable enough? Can the person visualize? Does the person have any predisposition toward or away from any kind of meditation?
  - 3) Get to know the person. Ask questions that help the person relax and become introspective.
  - 4) Get the person's permission. Don't set up people for failure by telling them too much what they can expect or what is supposed to happen.
  - 5) Start with a several minutes of relaxation.
  - 6) Talk with a voice supportive of meditation, e.g. quietly and softly.
  - 7) In some guided meditations it can be very helpful to ask for feedback how things are going. Encourage person to keep their eyes closed and hands still while reporting. With this feedback it is possible to adapt and change the meditation to be more suitable for the individual.
  - 8) Stay attentive to the person during the meditation and be prepared for things to go differently than what you are expecting, e.g., the arising of difficult emotions.
  - 9) The last minute or minutes of the meditation are important. It can be used to tell the person something important they need to hear, to provide acknowledgement and encouragement, to point the person toward a source from which the healing or help came from. It can also be used to encourage the person to reflect on what happened during the meditation or to reflect on what they can learn from what happened during the meditation.
  - 10) If the person has been quite still and concentrated during the meditation, bring the person out of mediation slowly, encouraging deep breaths, feeling their body, reminding them were they are.

### **Sample Guided Meditations**

Spoken slowly with appropriate meditative pauses between each instruction.

#### 1. Breath Meditation

Sit in a comfortable but alert posture. Gently close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths and as you exhale settle into your body, relaxing any obvious tension or holding. Then, breathing normally, bring your awareness to your body, sensing for a short while how the body presents itself to you. There is no particular way to be; just notice how you are at this moment.

Then from within the body, as part of the body, become aware of your breathing, however it happens to appear. There is no right or wrong way to breathe while doing mindfulness practice; the key is to simply notice how it actually is right now. Let the breath breathe itself, allowing it to be received in awareness. Notice where in your body you feel the breath most clearly. This may be the abdomen rising and falling, the chest expanding and contracting, or the tactile sensations of the air passing through the nostrils or over the upper lip. Wherever the breath tends to appear most clearly, allow that area to be the home, the center of your attention.

Keep your attention connected with the inhalations and exhalations, sensing the physical sensations that characterize them. Let go of the surface concerns of the mind. Whenever the mind wanders away, gently come back to each breath. There is no need to judge the wandering mind; when you notice it, simply return to the breath without evaluation.

To help maintain a continuity of contact between awareness and the breath you can use a label or mental note. Softly, like a whisper in the mind, label the in-breath and out-breath, encouraging the awareness to stay present with the breath. You can label the inhalations and exhalations as "in" and "out" or "rising" and "falling" for the rising and falling of the abdomen or the chest.

There is no need to force the attention on the breath; rather use the gentle power of repeatedly, non-without judgement, returning and resting with the breath to strengthen

your ability to become mindful and present.

## 2. Loving-kindness Meditation

Take a comfortable posture. Softly close your eyes. Let yourself be at ease. Take a few deep breaths and as you exhale settle into your body. Then breathe normally. Take a moment to look through your body for any holding in the muscles that might be easy to relax. Sometimes it is possible to relax the stomach, so that it becomes soft. Sometimes it's possible to relax the shoulders, the face and the jaw. You might relax these parts of the body as you exhale. Also, soften the eyes, allowing the eyes to rest in their sockets, and to relax the forehead.

Allow your awareness to connect with your breathing, and for the next few cycles, be aware of your breath. Allowing the breath and the awareness to connect with each other equally. Letting go of any thoughts or concerns, allow your breath to be at the center of your awareness. To help you connect with your breath, perhaps after a busy day, breathe out with a little sigh, a sigh of relaxing.

Now let go of your breath. Bring to mind some memory — recent or distant — of a time when you felt particularly happy and joyful. Spend a few moments going through your memories to find a clear memory of a joyful and happy event. Remembering this time, visualize, in your mind's eye, the place where that happened, the room or the place where you felt so happy? The people who were there? Perhaps you remember the smells, or the colors, or the time of day, the lighting. See if you can also remember how you felt in your body when you felt this energy, this joy. And now let go of the memory, but only the memory, and see if you can linger for awhile with the feeling in your body, the memory of what the joy and happiness felt like in your body.

Then bring your awareness to your heart, and feel whatever sensations happen to be in your heart area. Even if the feelings are subtle or you feel nothing, let your awareness rest in the area of your heart. Perhaps you can imagine your breath moving in and out through the center of your heart.

Loving-kindness practice is done by saying silently to yourself phrases that express your heartfelt wish for your own happiness. Without expectation, demand or judgement, try to find a simple and honest aspiration for your own happiness, a sense of goodwill to your self. I will repeat phrases of loving-kindness out loud and you can repeat them silently to yourself, allowing yourself to sink into the intention of the phrases:

May I be happy.  
 May I be filled with joy.  
 May I be free from anxiety.  
 May I be free from worry.  
 May I be filled with delight.  
 May I be at ease.  
 May I be at peace.

[These can be repeated as many times as is thought useful and the meditation could end after a few rounds of repeating these phrases.]

Then, as you sit, think about something difficult in your experience just now — it could be a physical sensation in the body, a discomfort, a resistance, or perhaps a part of yourself that makes it difficult for you to feel loving-kindness at times. Then express some loving-kindness to that part of you, allowing it to be there.

May this part of me be happy.  
 May this part of me be free from anxiety.  
 May this part of me be at peace.  
 May this part of me be filled with joy and delight.  
 May my intention of good will touch this part of me. . . .

Then get a sense of your whole physical body, your torso arising out of the chair or out of the floor, your head, arms, legs; see if you can get a general feeling of your whole body. Then see if you can hold your whole body in an embrace of kindness. See if you can extend the phrases of loving-kindness to the physical sense of being embodied:

May this body be happy.  
May this body be filled with happiness.  
May this body be free from harm.  
May this body be filled with delight.  
May this body be free from worry.  
May it be at ease.

Then continue directing loving-kindness to yourself, to parts of your inner life in which you take delight, or that may be difficult for you. You might say quietly these kinds of phrases as a way of giving form to the intention of kindness. You can also make up your own phrases, whatever expresses the intention of being kind to yourself, being tender, offering yourself happiness.

#### Resources for guided meditation

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Stephen Levine, *Healing into Life and Death* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987)

Stephen Leving, *Guided Meditations, Explorations and Healings*, (Anchor, 1991)

Tulku Thondup, *Healing into Life and Death*, (Shambhala 1996)

Margo Adair, *Meditations on Everything Under the Sun* (New Society Publishers 2001)

Audio CD: Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Guided Meditation* (Sounds True, 2005)