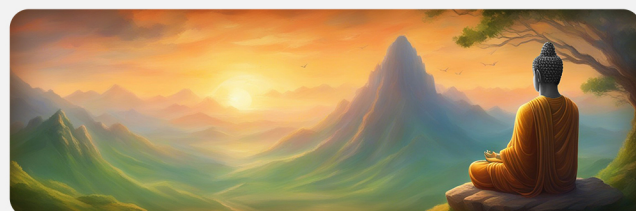




The Playful Path to Awakening



MIND MUAR



Mind Muar* is an international group dedicated to training the mind through meditation, with a clear and unapologetic intent to realize the highest goal of the spiritual path – liberation from suffering, also known as "Awakening" or "Enlightenment."

We offer tailored support based on the exact state of your meditative practice. Enjoy [personal one-on-one guidance](#), the benefits of joining a community of meditators ([Sangha](#)), or both. The journey is supported by books, presentations, videos, and recorded Dharma talks accumulated over years of activity.

If you'd like to meet the challenges of life with growing clarity and equanimity, to the point of finding True Peace, we'd be happy to have you with us.



* 'Muar' is pronounced "moo-ARE"; a Hebrew word meaning 'Illuminated', 'Awakened', and 'Enlightened'. Written: מואר'

OUR VISION

- 1 Complete Liberation**
to all who seek to end their suffering
- 2 Clear & Simple Path**
inevitably resulting in Awakening
- 3 Freely Accessible**
to everyone in the world



The Playful Path is a series of simple **meditative games** that train the mind toward liberation from suffering.



It develops the **mental skills** essential for Awakening.

Bright awareness, stable attention, powerful mindfulness, and profound equanimity, to name a few.



Each game has clear instructions, a rationale for its contribution, well-defined **indicators of success**, and concrete results that drive us forward.



The path emphasizes the cultivation of **joy and playfulness** as key contributors to effective progress.

- learn more on page 2 -



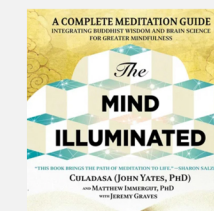
It includes precision tools for **overcoming** meditation's common **challenges**.

mind-wandering, physical and emotional discomfort, dullness, drowsiness, agitation, intellectual insights, impatience, desires and aversions, worries, regrets, doubts, and more.



By clearly outlining the **complete training process**, The Playful Path ensures we make the most of the time and energy we dedicate to meditation.

SOLID TRADITIONAL FOUNDATIONS



The Playful Path is inspired by [The Mind Illuminated](#) and the work of [Culadasa](#) (John Yates, Ph.D., Oded Raz's teacher), building upon its core instructions and expanding them, adding structure, clarity, and insight to the training process. It's also rooted in Asanga's Elephant Path and The Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path (See page 3).

ODED RAZ

I'm the developer of The Playful Path and the founder of the meditation group Mind Muar. I've been teaching and developing training programs for groups and individuals since 1997. My spiritual



journey began when I was suffering, despite appearing successful. In my search for a lasting solution, I discovered Buddhism, entered the world of meditation, awakened, and found True Peace. Since then, I have been teaching and refining the mind-training method that led to my liberation. [Here's my story in detail.](#)



CREATED WITH YOU IN MIND

You may be a beginner who only recently discovered the many benefits of meditation, an experienced meditator striving for a breakthrough in your practice, or someone already familiar with The Mind Illuminated who's curious about what this new path has to offer. In either case - The Playful Path was created for you, so you could train your mind and advance toward the point where suffering is no longer part of your conscious experience. Read this document to learn how.

THE TRIPLE GEM



Dharma
The Wisdom of the Path
Leading to Liberation



Sangha
The Loving Support of a Dedicated Practice Group



Buddha
The Guidance of Awakened Teachers to reveal your Enlightened Quality

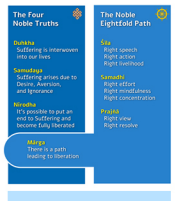
WELCOME TO THE PLAYFUL PATH

This document is a concise yet comprehensive guide to our meditation method, designed to lead you to true peace.

This section will introduce you to what it contains, how its parts support your training, and how to work with it effectively.



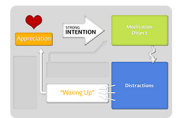
On this page (2), you'll find the heart of the path: its **Playful** spirit, its series of **Meditative Games**, the **Ten Essential Questions** that define them, and a brief introduction to **Meditation in a Nutshell**.



The next page (3) presents the **Context for the Meditative Journey**. It will help you see both the forest and the trees by placing meditation within the broader Buddhist framework, clarifying its purpose and where it leads. It will also outline additional aspects essential for leading a peaceful life, such as maintaining moral and wholesome conduct.



On page (4), you'll receive practical guidance in **Establishing a Daily Practice**. You'll learn how to integrate meditation into your routine, so you can make steady progress.



Page (5) outlines the **Meditative Training Cycle**, the fundamental mind-training flowchart that underlies the entire Playful Path. We'll also address it briefly later on this page ("Meditation in a Nutshell").



On pages (6) and (7), you'll find **Overview Tables** of the first eight Meditative Games, allowing you to see the path ahead at a glance, navigate quickly, and make corrections as needed.

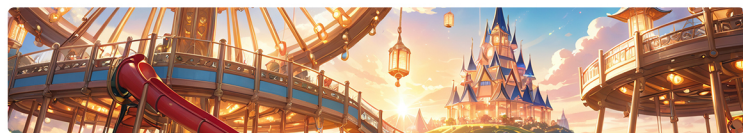


Later pages explore the **Meditative Games** in detail. Each page explains how to play one specific game, how it fits into the Meditative Training Cycle, and provides answers to the Essential Questions most relevant to that practice.

The document is designed to be printed on A3-sized paper, supporting your practice at home and on retreats. You can also order it laminated from [our website](#). When viewed as a PDF on a computer screen, its links offer internal navigation and information from external websites.

WHY IS THE PATH "PLAYFUL"?

As beneficial as meditation is, finding joy in our practice can still be challenging, especially when perceived as a tedious, routine chore. Therefore, on The Playful Path, we view our actions as "playing a series of games" rather than "completing a set of tasks." Approached playfully, meditation becomes more engaging, increasing our motivation to establish a regular, enjoyable daily practice.



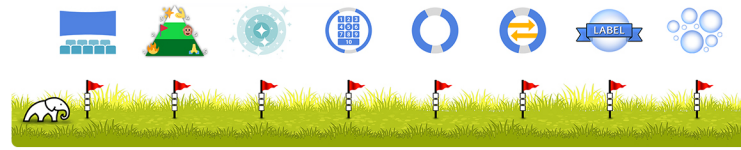
As we play the Games, we aim for results without craving them, identify and correct mistakes without rejecting them, and celebrate every success along the way. We let go of competitiveness (with ourselves or others) and recognize each Game as valuable in itself, without attachment to its immediate outcome.

By emphasizing playfulness, we cultivate a curious mindset, thereby reducing the stress and anxiety associated with over-achieving, "getting ahead," "getting it right," or "getting it over with." We learn to appreciate every experience, as challenging as it may be. Just like when learning to ride a bike, the process itself can be fun and rewarding, with its results bound to come when they ripen.

THE MEDITATIVE GAMES

At the beginning of The Playful Path, we develop our fundamental meditative skills by playing eight Meditative Games in sequence:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Four Points for Success | 5. Following the Breath |
| 2. The Mountain Route | 6. Connecting the Breaths |
| 3. Lighting-Up Awareness | 7. Labeling |
| 4. Counting Ten Breath Cycles | 8. Checking-In |



The first four are **Opening Games**, which have clear start and finish points. The next four are **Cyclical Games**, which repeat until the relevant criteria for completion are met. Each Game is a meditation in and of itself, and all of them are valuable. Therefore, we progress from the one Game to the next in every sit without skipping, regardless of how many we completed in previous sessions. By starting every session from the beginning of The Playful Path, we ensure we never take any mental skill for granted, building a solid foundation for high meditative states to arise.

MASTERING THE GAMES

The Playful Path has two aspects: **Intellectual & Experiential**. The first is about **knowing** what to do, and the second is about **doing** it in practice. We must master these two aspects equally, as both are essential for our ultimate success.

Intellectual Mastery

To intellectually master the Games on the path, we must know the answers to a series of ten Essential Questions about them:

1. **What do we do?** What is the Meditative Game?
2. **How do we do it?** What's the method of practicing well?
3. **Why do we do it?** How does the Game promote us to our goals?
4. **What do we do if distracted?** How do we make corrections?
5. **When do we move on** (to the next Game)?
6. **What do we do as we move on** (to the next Game)?
7. **When do we revisit it?** When is the Game relevant again?
8. **How do we increase the challenge** (if it gets too easy)?
9. **How do we reduce the challenge** (if it gets too hard)?
10. **At which Elephant Path Stages** (in TMI) **is it relevant?**

The bottom-line answers for all these questions are detailed in comprehensive tables later in this document for your review (Pg.6, Pg.7). **Once you've comprehended and memorized the answers, you've reached intellectual mastery of the games.**

NOTE: Learn and practice the Meditative Games one at a time and one after another. Detailed instructions on how to perform each Game correctly ("How do we do it?") are published gradually in [new versions of this document](#). To complement this guidance, we also offer [Private Consultations](#), [Open Sangha Meetings](#), and [Meditation Adventures](#). These services provide access to classes that cover the method's subtleties in depth. A partial list of available classes is included at the [end](#) of this document.

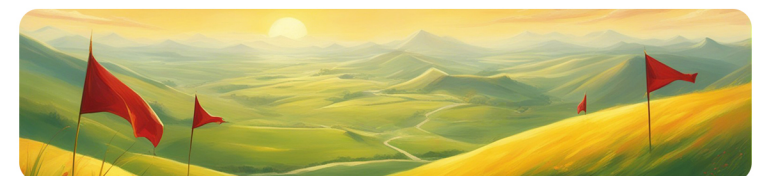
Experiential Mastery

Just like in basketball, after we've **intellectually** mastered the rules of the game, we must then **experientially** master the physical ability to play it and get the ball in the hoop. The same is true with the Meditative Games of The Playful Path - perform each Game diligently and patiently until you consistently receive the desired outcomes in every sit. **Then, you've experientially mastered the games.**

THE TEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The Ten Essential Questions for mastering the Meditative Games of The Playful Path are phrased as briefly as possible for simplicity. Here's what their answers convey:

- 1 **What do we do?**
Describes the actions we perform to play the Meditative Game.
- 2 **How do we do it?**
Details the subtleties of playing the Meditative Game correctly; the method of practicing it well.
- 3 **Why do we do it?**
Lists the mental skills necessary for Awakening that the Meditative Game cultivates, bringing us closer to our goals.
- 4 **What do we do if distracted?**
Defines the corrections we make after (inevitably) getting distracted; the universally beneficial reaction to distractions, the actions we should take specifically for each Meditative Game, and how we get back on track. This maps onto the MTC (details on page 5).
- 5 **When do we move on (to the next Game)?**
Defines the criteria for completing a Game successfully, the results we are after, and how to know with confidence that we have achieved them.
- 6 **What do we do as we move on (to the next Game)?**
We celebrate our success and provide positive feedback to the parts of the mind responsible. This answer is constant across all Meditative Games and is repeatedly highlighted because it is a key factor in making progress while enjoying it.
- 7 **When do we revisit it?**
Describes the conditions for returning to a Game we completed earlier in the session and playing it again. Once it is completed, we return to the later Game we left, without needing to repeat the Meditative Games in between.
- 8 **How do we increase the challenge (if it gets too easy)?**
With our growing skills as meditators, some Meditative Games may eventually become too easy. Just like adding weight at the gym, we may challenge ourselves by introducing additional aspects to the Game that will further develop our skills.
- 9 **How do we reduce the challenge (if it gets too hard)?**
Sometimes, a Meditative Game may be too challenging to complete, like a free weight too heavy to lift. Instead of getting stuck and frustrated, we may temporarily reduce the challenge, allowing continued development of mental skills alongside a sense of success.
- 10 **At which Elephant Path Stages (in TMI) is it relevant?**
The Playful Path goes hand in hand with the ten stages of [The Elephant Path](#), as outlined in The Mind Illuminated. For each Meditative Game, the ten stages are represented by numbered circles. Stages where the Game is irrelevant are greyed out, relevant stages remain clear, and the stage where the technique is mentioned in TMI is marked in bold black. (A comparison between the paths is available at the [end](#) of the document)



MEDITATION IN A NUTSHELL

We begin our meditation by cultivating a sense of appreciation for sitting down to practice, determined to work diligently, with a loving, gentle, unhurried, playful, and compassionate attitude. Then, we set an intention to direct and sustain our attention on the meditation object (the sensations of the breath, in this example), while remaining aware of our surroundings.

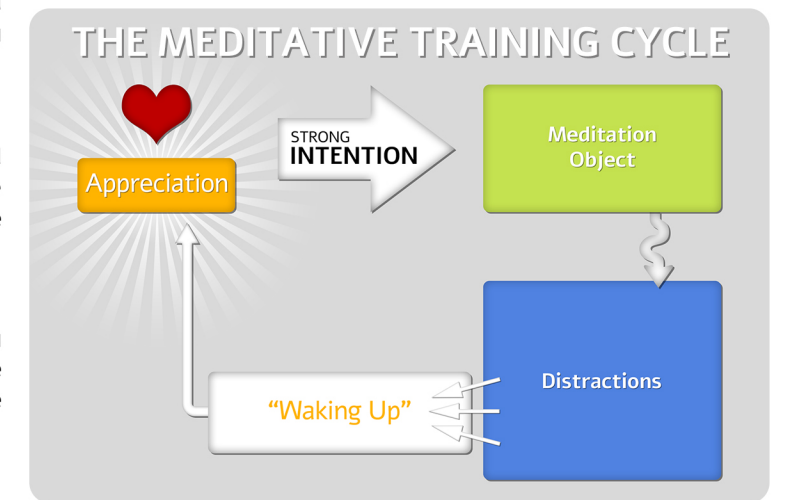
In a perfect world, we'd be able to sustain our attention on the breath for as long as we like. In reality, however, the mind inevitably gets caught by a distraction (e.g., a memory, a thought, or a plan), which may lead to forgetting the breath and drifting into a period of mind-wandering.

Eventually, we wake up to the fact that the mind is engaged with something other than intended. That's the time to show appreciation for noticing the distraction and give ourselves some positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's do it again, let's notice more often!"

After celebrating this recognition and returning to the present moment, we gently, lovingly, and playfully repeat the cycle: set an intention to engage with the breath for as long as we can, accept the inevitability of getting caught by distractions, and when we wake up and notice it's happened, respond with appreciation and encouragement.

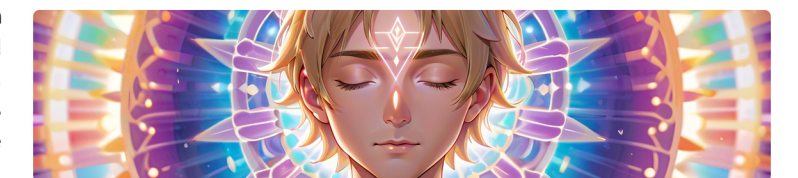
By following this simple flow, we continue the cycle until we hear the bell marking the end of the session.

These key aspects of the meditative mind-training process comprise The Meditative Training Cycle (MTC); a flowchart that directs us up The Playful Path to Awakening with each Meditative Game. You can review it in detail on page 5.



DEEP MEDITATIVE STATES

The eight Meditative Games form the opening part of The Playful Path. They cultivate the fundamental skills required to approach the Jhānas (deep meditative states). The path continues beyond these foundations, all the way to Awakening. Detailed guidance will be shared gradually in [future versions of this document](#).



In the meantime, should you feel ready, you may take advantage of a [Private Consultation](#) or an [Advanced Meditation Adventure](#), offered in both private and group settings. These services provide structured support for navigating the Jhānas, making the most of the unique opportunity they hold for Insight to mature and Awakening to occur.

CONTEXT FOR THE MEDITATIVE JOURNEY

This page clarifies the traditional roots of our teachings, traces their later expression in Buddhism, shows how they are presented in The Mind Illuminated, and introduces original elements unique to Mind Muar.

The blue diagram provide context by showing how each foundation is nested within the one preceding it, helping us understand our meditation method's place within the broader Buddhist framework.

The article presents "(Sanskrit/Pali)" terms alongside their English equivalents, as used in later and early Buddhism (Mahayana/Theravada) respectively. In some cases, the spelling has been simplified.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Four Noble Truths are The Buddha's foundational teaching on the nature of suffering and the path to liberation. Like a skilled doctor, the Buddha recognizes the illness, identifies its cause, knows it is curable, and prescribes an effective treatment:

1st Suffering (Dukkha/Dukkha)

Suffering is interwoven into human existence. As listed in the Mahā Satipatthāna Sutta, suffering is: birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, association with the unloved, separation from the loved, not getting what one wants, and clinging to The Five Aggregates (form, sensation, perception, volition, consciousness).

2nd Origin of Suffering (Samudaya/Samudaya)

Suffering arises through the mind's tendency toward Craving (Trishna / Tanha, meaning "thirst"). This core concept can be further understood through The Three Poisons at its root: **Desire**, that grasps at what seems pleasant or fulfilling; **Aversion**, that pushes away what feels unpleasant, painful, or threatening; **Ignorance** misperceives the true nature of reality, giving rise to illusions and false assumptions.

3rd Cessation of Suffering (Nirodha/Nirodha)

It's possible to put an end to suffering and become fully liberated. When the mind is free of craving, clinging, and ignorance, we find **True Peace** (Nirvāna/Nibbāna).

4th Path (Mārga/Magga)

There is a path leading to liberation: the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, outlined in the next section.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Formulated by Gautama the Buddha in the 5th century BCE, The Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight practices leading to liberation from suffering and to true peace. They cover three essential aspects of a virtuous life: supporting inner peace through **ethical conduct** (Śīla/Sīla); cultivating mental clarity through disciplined **meditation** (Samādhi / Samādhi); and developing liberating **wisdom** through insight (Prajñā/Pañña).

Note: The ordering presented here is aligned with Mind Muar's pedagogical approach and differs from the traditional order in the Buddhist canon.

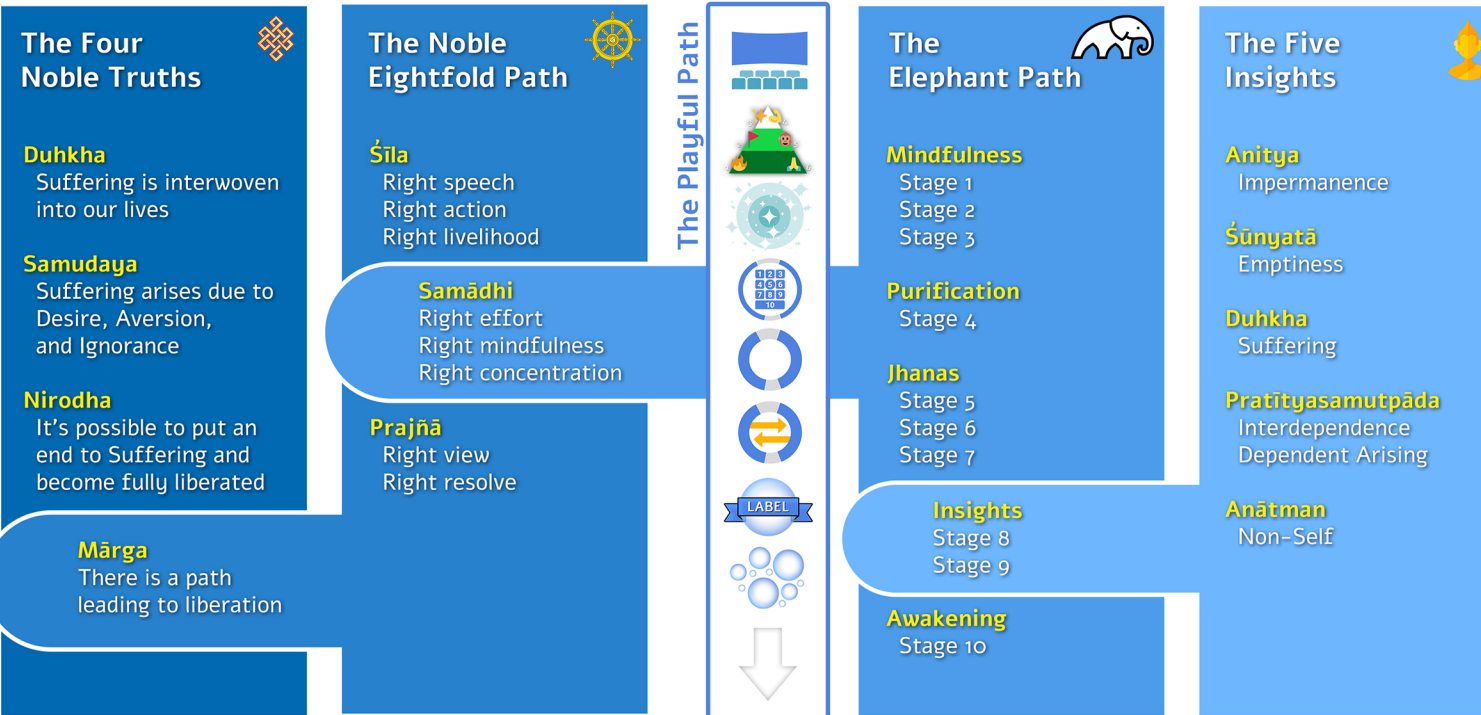
ETHICAL CONDUCT (Śīla/Sīla)

1. Right Speech (Samyag-Vāc/Sammā-Vācā)

Abstaining from lying, backbiting, slander, and any talk that could lead to hatred, enmity, or disharmony among people; and refraining from harsh, rude, or abusive language, as well as idle chatter. Instead, speak the truth with friendly, benevolent, pleasant, meaningful, and useful words, at the appropriate time and place.

2. Right Action (Samyak-Karmānta/Sammā-Kammanta)

Moral, honorable, and peaceful conduct in one's life: abstaining from killing or harming living beings, not taking what is not given (i.e., stealing), and avoiding harmful sexual conduct (e.g., adulterous, non-consensual, exploitative, manipulative, deceptive, addictive, or involving minors)



3. Right Livelihood (Samyag-Ajīva/Sammā-Ajīva)

Earning a living through a profession that is honorable, blameless, and harmless to others. Trades and occupations that bring harm to others should be avoided, including: arms and lethal weapons, drugs and intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing living beings, slavery and human trafficking, businesses that rely on deceit. Mind Muar extends this principle to refraining from gambling or other zero-sum financial activities, and advises choosing professions that generate genuine added value for the world and its inhabitants.

MEDITATIVE STABILITY (Samādhi/Samādhi)

4. Right Effort (Samyag-Vyāyāma/Sammā-Vāyāma)

Directing one's energy toward four specific mental goals: preventing unwholesome states of mind from arising; abandoning unwholesome states that have already arisen; cultivating wholesome states of mind that have not yet arisen; developing and perfecting wholesome states that are already present.

5. Right Mindfulness (Samyak-Smṛti/Sammā-Sati)

Developing attentiveness across four specific domains: the physical body (e.g., breath, posture, bodily processes); the sensations in the body (e.g., their hedonic tone, arising and passing, with or without clinging); the mind itself (e.g., states of mind such as focused, scattered, distracted, stable, exalted, or liberated); the phenomena within the mind (e.g., hindrances, distractions, sensory and conceptual objects, and the seven factors of enlightenment).

6. Right Concentration (Samyak-Samādhi/Sammā-Samādhi)

Cultivating stable attention to the point of entering four stages of deep meditative absorption (Jhāna/Dhyāna): desires and unwholesome states are abandoned, while meditative joy (Pīti/Pīti) and happiness remain; intellectual activity subsides in favor of single-pointed attention, while meditative joy and happiness are retained; meditative joy subsides and transforms into mindful equanimity; all that remains is pure awareness characterized by deep tranquility and profound equanimity, with all sensations of happiness or sorrow fading away. These meditative absorptions create the ideal conditions for acquiring insight and developing wisdom, the third aspect of The Noble Eightfold Path.

WISDOM (Prajñā/Pañña)

7. Right Intention (Samyak-Sankalpa/Sammā-Sankappa)

Also translated as "Right Thought," meaning: thoughts rooted in renunciation or detachment; thoughts of love and non-violence extended to all living beings; thoughts free from selfish desire, hatred, and violence.

8. Right View (Samyag-Dṛṣṭi/Sammā-Ditthi)

Right View is also translated as "Right Understanding." It is the highest wisdom that sees the true nature of reality and understands phenomena exactly as they are. Right View combines an intellectual understanding with a deep, intuitive, non-conceptual knowing that develops and matures through meditation. This wisdom is reflected in **The Five Insights**, outlined later in this article.

THE ELEPHANT PATH

The Elephant Path, originating in the 4th century with the Buddhist monk Asanga, is a visual representation of the gradual mind-training process cultivated through Calm-Abiding and Insight meditation (Śamatha-Vipaśyanā/Samatha-Vipassanā). This is the meditation technique we teach here, at Mind Muar.

In its classical Tibetan presentation, the model outlines nine stages of settling the mind. It culminates in calm abiding (Śamatha/Samatha), upon which insight practice (Vipaśyanā/Vipassanā) is developed. In The Mind Illuminated, Culadasa adds an initial stage dedicated to establishing a consistent practice.

Inspired by Culadasa's work, Mind Muar offers a revised, contemporary version of the model. It focuses on the mental states we aim to cultivate, as outlined on the last page of this document. We also divide the path's ten stages differently, grouping them by their central theme:

1-3 Cultivating Mindfulness (Smṛti/Sati)

1-2-3

The theme of stages one, two, and three is the development of bright awareness and stable attention – key factors in the cultivation of powerful mindfulness. These are the core tools we use throughout the meditative journey to overcome distractions and investigate the conscious experience.

4 Purification of Mind (Citta-Viśuddhi/Citta-Visuddhi)

The theme of the fourth stage is the meditative processing of deep unconscious material. As the mind grows calm and stable, charged memories and powerful emotions begin to surface in awareness. When met with equanimity and acceptance, these conditioned formations (Saṃskāra/Sankhāra) gradually release, allowing deep psychological healing.

5-7 Entering Meditative Absorptions (Dhyāna/Jhāna)

5-6-7

The theme of stages five, six, and seven is creating the conditions necessary for high meditative states to arise – the jhānas. The power of mindfulness increases, distractions are subdued, and eventually, effort is no longer needed.

8-9 Acquiring Insight (Vipaśyanā/Vipassanā)

8-9

At the eighth and ninth stages, we effortlessly abide in Jhāna. The mind is sharp, stable, pliant, and ideal for exploring the true nature of reality. The theme of these stages is the arising of insight – profound, intuitive realizations that transform our understanding of ourselves and our world. These insights are outlined in the final section of this page.

10+ Awakening (Bodhi/Bodhi)

10+

At the tenth stage and beyond, when our meditative qualities persist in daily life, the theme is applying the effort necessary for Awakening. We continue to develop wisdom and insight, cut through ignorance, and uproot mental defilements, until we become fully liberated.

THE PLAYFUL PATH

The Playful Path, an original tool inspired by The Mind Illuminated, is where Mind Muar introduces its own innovation into these traditional models. The Playful Path simplifies Culadasa's approach to meditation by creating a clear separation between the mental states we wish to cultivate on The Elephant Path and the actions we need to perform in meditation. This is its place in the broader Buddhist framework. This document outlines its principles.

THE FIVE INSIGHTS

Five key realizations form the core insights leading to direct Awakening. Traditionally, these insights are rooted in The Three Marks of Existence, Dependent Arising, and the empty nature of The Five Aggregates.

1. Impermanence (Anitya/Anicca)

This is the fundamental truth that all phenomena are in a constant state of change. No mental or physical object remains constant over time.

2. Emptiness (Śūnyatā/Suññatā)

This is the understanding that everything we experience is constructed and fabricated by the mind. All phenomena are empty of inherent self-nature and do not intrinsically possess the qualities we attribute to them.

3. Suffering (Dukkha/Dukkha)

This is the direct realization of how craving and clinging create suffering. It is closely connected to the clear comprehension of the Four Noble Truths.

4. Interdependence (Dependent Arising, Pratītyasamutpāda)

This is the realization that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions. Nothing exists independently; phenomena arise through a web of interdependent conditions. Control is ultimately an illusion.

5. Non-Self (Anātman/Anattā)

This insight extends the understanding of emptiness – if all phenomena are empty, then we too are part of that same empty process. As this insight deepens, we recognize the illusory nature of a separate "I" (the ego-self) – a useful yet fictional construct of the mind. The maturation of this insight is often the final step, after which **Awakening** occurs.

ESTABLISHING A DAILY PRACTICE

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Our first step on the path is establishing a daily practice. We'll begin by creating a dedicated place for meditation, paying special attention to cultivating comfort and joy. By doing so, meditation can become a pleasant experience from the very beginning. Next, we'll make the time to train the mind, as we would train the body, and engage with the meditative game wholeheartedly.



YOUR MEDITATION SPOT

Location

A fixed spot makes starting a session as easy as sitting down, which helps establish consistency. It also reduces resistance and procrastination by saving the time and energy we would otherwise spend on setting everything up and putting it away each time. A good meditation location could be beside your bed, making it easier to practice soon after you wake up. Placing it in your living room can help make meditation a central part of your routine and allow you to practice spontaneously more often. Early on, it's best to practice indoors, as wind might interfere with your ability to notice subtle breath sensations. In quiet environments, keep a window slightly open to let ambient sounds reach your ears.

Beauty

Beauty and order create an inviting atmosphere. You'll soon discover there's a correlation between the state of your environment and the state of your mind. You can keep your meditation spot simple and clean, or decorate it with items and visuals you find meaningful, in ways that express your creativity. You may also complement the aesthetic design with relevant and helpful material, such as printed pages from this document.

Comfort

Comfort makes meditation more enjoyable. When the body is reasonably at ease, attention is less likely to be pulled toward aches, strain, and restlessness, allowing us to focus our efforts on training the mind. Feel free to experiment with mats, pillows, and blankets of different thicknesses and softness until you find what suits you best. We're looking for the sweet spot - being as comfortable as possible without risking falling asleep. Comfort also depends on keeping a good posture.

HOW TO SIT

Although we can meditate effectively while standing, walking, or lying down, the lion's share of our practice will take place in a sitting position.

Whether we sit on a cushion, a bench, or a chair, some guidelines remain consistent: The head, neck, and back should be aligned, with the vertebrae placed one on top of the other, allowing minimal strain in the supporting muscles. The hands, arms, and shoulders should be level and even. The palms can rest on the thighs, knees, or lap. The mouth should be closed, the teeth slightly parted, and the tongue touching the roof of the mouth, with its tip just behind the upper teeth. The eyes should be kept closed and directed slightly downward. We'll breathe through the nose in a natural, unforced way.

Standard Chairs

A chair (or an ottoman) is the most immediate solution for meditating comfortably. Choose a sturdy chair that allows you to sit comfortably without leaning on its backrest. To support your lower back and keep your pelvis from rolling back, you may place a few books between your tailbone and the backrest or the wall (a rolled towel can also help, though to a lesser extent). Don't use a wheeled office chair, a recliner, or a sofa. Keep your knees at 90 degrees, ensuring they're not higher than your pelvis. Don't cross your legs. Remove your shoes (you can leave your socks on) and place your feet on a carpet or a folded towel rather than directly on the floor.

Meditation Benches

Often made of wood, meditation benches provide a sturdy support for the seated body. Some benches are height-adjustable and slightly slanted for comfort. Higher benches allow kneeling while keeping the legs directly beneath the body. The calves touch the floor and the soles of the feet face up behind the back. This position is very comfortable, since it distributes the weight more evenly across a wider area, placing little stress on the joints. Using a thick meditation mat allows us to extend our feet beyond its edge, reducing the stress of pressing them flat against the floor. Don't use a bed mattress, as it's often too thick and unstable. Speaking from experience, kneeling with a quality meditation bench on a good mat can eliminate physical pain almost completely. That's my top choice and recommendation.

Kneeling Meditation Cushions

Some meditation cushions are designed for kneeling, where the legs are spread as if we were riding a horse. They're a softer alternative to meditation benches and can be found in various shapes, sizes, and densities. Match them to your body type and preferences.

Flat Meditation Cushions

These are common, widely accessible, and relatively cheap. We sit on them with our legs crossed, either one in front of the other or one on top of the other. To minimize back pain, keep your knees lower than the pelvis. It's also helpful to place a rolled towel under the tailbone so the pelvis won't roll back and arch the spine. The downside of meditation cushions is that sitting on them often becomes fairly uncomfortable for most of us, especially on long sessions. Unless you're blessed with flexible limbs and strong core muscles, using a cushion almost guarantees you'll eventually encounter unnecessary numbness and physical pain. Using strategically placed smaller support pillows could be helpful, but is unlikely to eliminate the discomfort.

Ergonomic Meditation Cushions

Much like ergonomic office chairs, there are also ergonomic cushions designed specifically for meditation. They're molded with the human anatomy in mind, providing the support it requires to comfortably maintain sitting or kneeling positions over time. Search the internet for leading models and their reviews.

Folding Meditation Chairs

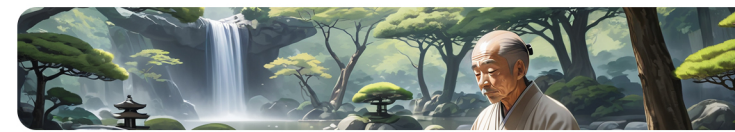
These are floor seats with a backrest - a middle ground between a cushion and a regular chair. They're usually used in group settings for those who require back support or contend with limited mobility. While they do allow more comfortable sitting for longer periods, they also have many downsides. Most models offer too much support, which can make the spine less engaged and reduce alertness. Depending on their stiffness and backrest angle, they might put pressure on the hips or tailbone, leading to poor posture and discomfort nonetheless. For these reasons, they are less suitable for the daily meditation practice we wish to establish.

Keeping Warm and Cozy

In chilly environments, or when the AC is on, use light blankets to keep you warm. You can wrap one blanket around the pelvis to cover the legs, and pull another over the shoulders to cover the back and arms. Keep the blankets open or closed at the front to control the heat. Covering the arms and hands will also reduce genuine or phantom sensations of flying insects landing on your skin (a common physical distraction). You may also use meditation robes designed specifically for this purpose. In warm environments, wear light clothes and dress modestly even if you're meditating alone (i.e., don't meditate in your underwear).


Realistic Expectations


We should accept and expect that despite our best efforts, some discomfort in meditation is still inevitable. Learning to work with discomfort is one of the goals of the path, and an important aspect of liberating the mind from the unnecessary suffering it can cause. We'll address this issue in depth later on our journey.





DURATION


While the true magic of meditation usually unfolds in longer sessions, it's completely okay to build toward them gradually. Use an interval timer that dings every 10-20 minutes. When it dings, you can either celebrate completing the session and end it, or challenge yourself to sit for longer. The ding means "please continue":

 **Brief Sessions** (5-10 minutes) are useful to "break the ice" and let us get into the habit of practicing daily. They're especially helpful when our schedule is tight, countering the mind's common excuse of "I don't have time for this." Their main service is "putting a foot in the door," creating a starting point from which meditation can gradually expand and find its proper place among our present commitments.

 **Short Sessions** (10-20 minutes) are where we can start to feel the impact meditation has on our well-being. There's usually a noticeable difference between the state of mind before and after the session, serving as proof that our investment of time and energy in meditation is worthwhile.

 **Medium Sessions** (20-40 minutes) are where meditation truly begins to shine. They provide enough time for us to travel up The Playful Path and complete several of its meditative games. This is clear evidence that the mental skills we wish to cultivate do grow and strengthen.

 **Long Sessions** (40-60 minutes) are an excellent length for a consistent daily practice that can deliver the full benefits of meditation. Within this time frame, under the right conditions, it's possible to enter deep meditative states (jhanas), thoroughly explore the conscious experience, and gain liberating insights. 60 minutes is the duration we should eventually establish as standard.

 **Extended Sessions** (60-90 minutes) are useful when we're close to entering a jhanic state, or already within it. They provide enough time to stabilize the jhanas, move between them, use them for deepening insight, and reach fully matured samatha. At that point, the session could easily extend to hours on end without difficulty.

FREQUENCY

Since consistency is essential for making progress, aim to meditate **once a day, every day**. This requires making meditation a high priority. Set it firmly and deliberately in your daily schedule, ideally at the same time. Choose a time when your alertness is usually high and the mind is relatively clear. Feel free to add extra sessions (at any length) throughout the day when you have the time and energy. Find solutions to meditate even when you travel or are engaged with demanding projects.

GAMIFICATION

Establishing a practice is a meditative game in itself. Consider using an app that counts the minutes you meditate and rewards you for keeping a streak (e.g., [Insight Timer](#)). You may also join an online accountability group (e.g., [TMI Accountability Telegram](#)) to enjoy the living support of fellow meditators, or find a buddy who'll meditate with you (in person or remotely).

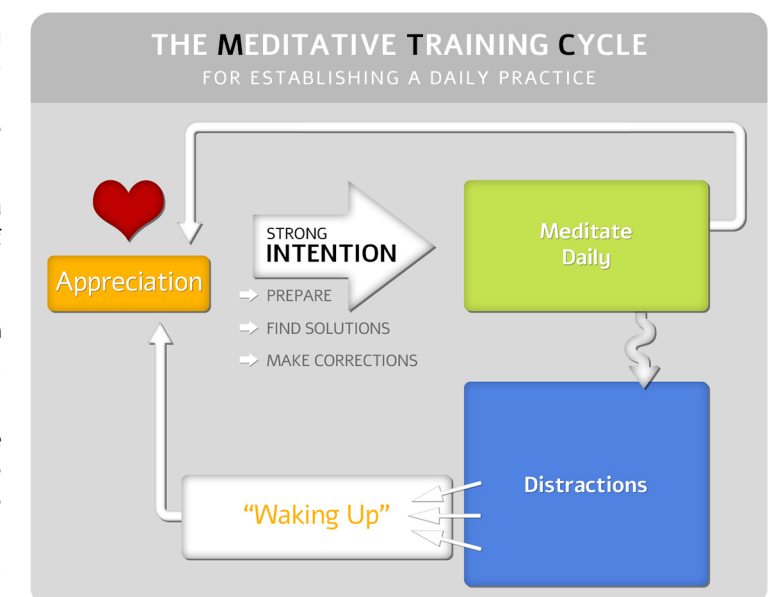
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Take it as a playful side-quest to write down all the obstacles you encounter while establishing a practice and once you start meditating. It'll orient you toward finding concrete solutions. Remember they're all well-known and possible to work through. We'll address them in future versions of this document. [Reach out](#) for further guidance.

Common Obstacles: procrastination, reluctance, physical or emotional discomfort, dullness and drowsiness, agitation, mind-wandering, intellectual insights, impatience, desires and aversions, worries, regrets, and doubts.

MISSING A DAY

In case you miss a daily practice, start by giving yourself positive feedback for the very fact you noticed it has happened. Identify the causes behind it, and find creative solutions to deal with them moving forward. Focus on making corrections rather than blaming yourself for past mistakes. The mind might play the unhelpful game of "all or nothing," especially when a long streak is broken. To help let go of such attachments, don't think of it as "game over," but as another opportunity to set a new high score. That's part of the loving, gentle, unhurried, playful, and compassionate attitude we wish to cultivate throughout the journey. This principle is illustrated in the following MTC diagram, and explored more broadly on the next page.



APPRECIATION | initial

Appreciation is always our starting point, because fundamentally, the very act of sitting down to meditate is a success in and of itself. It signifies that we've overcome the pull of watching TV, scrolling through social media, tackling daily tasks, or engaging in other activities that compete for our attention. Most people don't meditate at all, and even among those who do, maintaining a daily practice is often a real challenge. So, the moment you *do* sit down, you've chosen to invest time and energy in your long-term well-being - and that's something to celebrate.

THE HEART | Right Attitude

The Heart symbolizes the right attitude to hold in meditation: Loving, Gentle, Unhurried, Playful, and Compassionate.

Loving

Train your mind as you would train children of your own - with care, patience, and warmth. Bring genuine affection into your practice, treating yourself like a lovable, learning child, not some random adult on a crucial test. While there is value in investigating the mind with professional objectivity, like that of a doctor or a surgeon, make sure your focus on the method and its results never comes at the expense of your humanity. For that, all you need is love.

Gentle

Be gentle like a feather. Meditation is a delicate, gradual process that rewires the mind to operate with greater ease and clarity. Think of it like tending to a valuable **bonsai tree**: You need gentle hands and precise tools - not work gloves and a chainsaw. This principle also balances our tendency to be harsh with ourselves, especially when we make mistakes or miss the mark. Be as gentle as you'd be with your child learning to ride a bicycle. A tender push and a pat on the back are far more effective than shoving and yelling.

Unhurried

Take all the time you need to train your mind through meditation. Don't cut corners, don't look for shortcuts. This is not a race, and there's no need to rush. Build your meditative skills patiently, and they'll serve you for a lifetime.

Playful

Meditation, like life, is just a game. Approach it with the wonder of a child on a playground, led by curiosity: *What will happen next? What's this piece of the puzzle? What might I discover?* The lighter we take the process, the likelier we are to succeed.

Compassionate

We're not seeking perfection. Accept yourself as you are, without the illusion that you should or could be any different. Give yourself credit for bravely facing the mental, physical, and emotional challenges of meditation. If you're doing the best you can, the best you can is good enough.

STRONG INTENTION

Set a Strong Intention to fully engage with the Meditation Objectives. What separates a Strong Intention from a vague intention are these clear comprehensions:

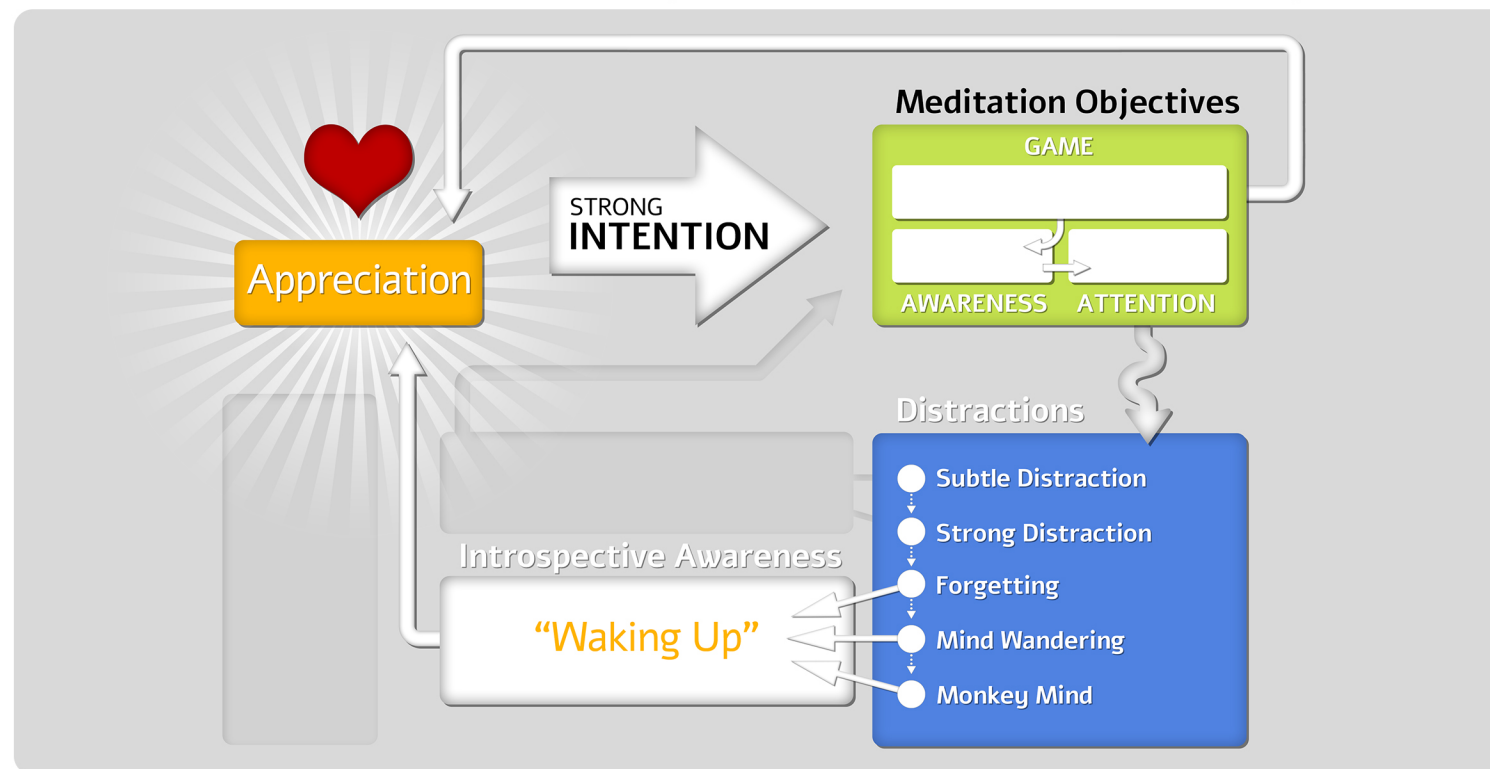
1. I know where I am right now.
2. I know where I want to go.
3. I know what I need to do to get there.
4. I know what results will mark my arrival.
5. Now is the time to head in that direction.



The Playful Path provides this info for every Meditative Game.

THE MEDITATIVE TRAINING CYCLE

The Fundamental Mind-Training Flowchart of The Playful Path to Awakening



MEDITATION OBJECTIVES | 'The Triad'

Driven by a Strong Intention, expand the Meditation Object into three distinct Meditation Objectives: The meditative Game to practice, the required scope of Awareness, and the desired center of Attention.

The Game

The Game is what needs to be done (e.g., counting ten breath cycles, scanning the body for sensations, etc.). See the upcoming 'How do we play the game?' sections for specifics of each Meditative Game of The Playful Path.

Awareness & Attention

To play the Game, we use Awareness and Attention. Awareness includes the physical and mental objects present in conscious experience (sounds, sights, thoughts, sensations). Attention allows us to select specific objects and explore them in greater detail.

Awareness is divided into three domains:

1. **Extrospective Awareness** includes Physical Objects (i.e., physical phenomena) experienced through the five senses.
2. **Introspective Awareness** relates to Mental Objects appearing within the mind (e.g., memories, thoughts, plans).
3. **Metacognitive Introspective Awareness** is the ability to observe our state of mind and track its activities in real time (e.g., alertness & clarity level, emotional & hedonic tone, intention strength, attention shifts).

Extrospective Awareness is the first domain to establish. Dealing with the factual truths of the present moment, it's a grounding anchor, protecting us from getting lost in the mind. Without it, we tend to overuse Attention, focusing so narrowly on the meditation object that we lose touch with the rest of our experience, becoming more vulnerable to Distraction and Dullness. Balance Attention with an equally bright Peripheral Awareness; remain softly aware of your surroundings while staying focused.



The Playful Path tables clearly define the type and scope of Awareness required in each Meditative Game and the right timing to establish each Awareness domain.

DISTRACTIONS

First and foremost, it's crucial to understand that getting caught by distractions is both normal and inevitable. Getting distracted is not your fault. It doesn't make you a bad meditator, and it doesn't mean something went wrong. It's simply what healthy, well-functioning human minds tend to do.

In line with this truth, the Triad in the MTC is connected to the Distractions block with a squiggly arrow - symbolizing that we don't *choose* to be distracted. We *slip* into distractions, uncontrollably.

Unless counteracted with Mindfulness, the power of distractions tends to grow progressively, as demonstrated in the following example:

At first, we direct our Attention to the sensations of the breath at the tip of the nose. Meanwhile, physical and mental objects are present in Awareness. They may come from the outside world (like the sound of a barking dog), or from within the mind (like a thought or a memory).

When one of these objects begins to compete with the breath for Attention, it becomes a **Subtle Distraction**.

If we don't notice the subtle distraction or gently set it aside, Attention may drift toward it automatically. We might still be vaguely aware of the breath in the background, but now the distraction has taken center stage and becomes a **Strong Distraction**.

As Attention remains on the Strong Distraction, the sensations of the breath will likely fade from Awareness. When they disappear completely, that's **Forgetting**.

With the breath no longer an anchor and the intention to meditate forgotten, the mind begins to drift from one thought to another without control. That's **Mind-Wandering**.

If the mind is restless, jumping rapidly from one thought to the next, grabbing and dropping ideas without pause, that's **Monkey Mind**. The ultimate case of getting lost in Distraction.

"WAKING UP"

Sooner or later, we'll Wake Up, noticing that the mind is now engaged with something other than what we intended. This realization, too, happens without any conscious control. It's a spontaneous moment of Introspective Awareness; becoming aware of what's happening within the mind.

APPRECIATION | ongoing

After Waking Up, send Positive Feedback to the part of the mind that noticed the distraction: "Excellent! Let's do it again. Let's notice more often!"

Positive Feedback is the most effective way to strengthen that mental muscle, making it more powerful, more vigilant, and quicker to respond. By contrast, if we take Waking Up for granted, meet it with indifference, or get frustrated for having been distracted, we end up punishing that helpful part of the mind, the very part that caught the shift in Attention and gave us a chance to correct course. Doing so is counterproductive and can seriously stunt our progress, because it sends the mind the wrong message: that noticing distractions is irrelevant or unwanted. When the mind starts receiving that message repeatedly, it becomes less likely to wake us up in the future.

So, if you take only one thing from this page, let it be this:

You don't have control over getting distracted, you don't have control over noticing you got distracted, but you can influence your reaction when you Wake Up to the fact that it happened. That's the heart of the mind-training process. Train the mind like you'd train a beloved pet: a treat and a smile are far more effective for encouraging the behavior you want than scolding or neglect.

THE HEART | ongoing

Following Appreciation, we return to the Heart. The distraction may have stirred up negative feelings, thoughts, or sensations, so we bring things back into balance with the attitude we wish to cultivate: Loving, Gentle, Unhurried, Playful, and Compassionate. Then, rekindling our Strong Intention, we diligently return to the game.

THE UPPER LOOP

The Upper Loop bypasses the slip into distractions, allowing us to continue cultivating Appreciation and Intention mid-game in two kinds of situations:

1. When we're mid-practice and want to reinforce a positive action or outcome, like completing a phase of the meditative game or achieving a desired result.
2. When we've established a stable, distraction-free state and are ready to move on to the next Meditative Game.

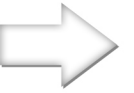
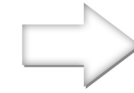
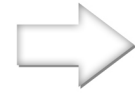
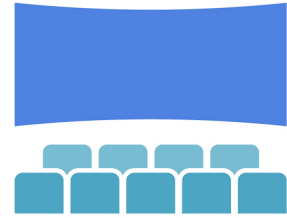
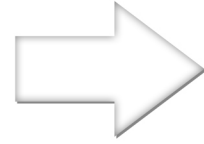
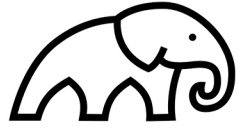
STEP IN & GO BEYOND

With the guidance on this page you can get started and achieve results. As you head out to try the Meditative Training Cycle, remember it's a Meditative Game in itself. Be playful, take all the time you need to grow familiar with it, and review this page [and its video](#) whenever you want to refresh your memory and refine your practice.

As we progress up The Playful Path, the MTC gradually reveals additional elements (detailed for each Meditative Game). It supports advanced meditation techniques, offers tools for overcoming challenges, and unlocks deep meditative absorptions (Jhānic states), realizations about the true nature of reality, and profound insights with long-lasting, liberating effects. It leads all the way to **Awakening**.

The Playful Path

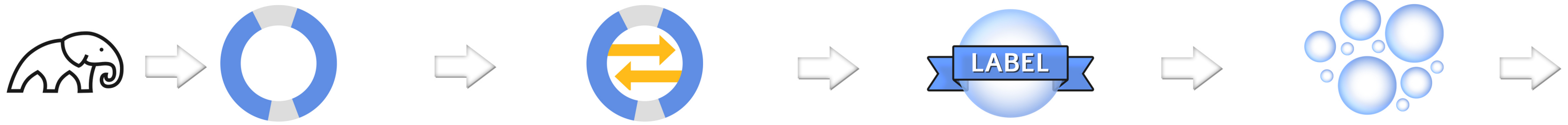
Part 1 | Opening Games



Question	Establishing a Practice	4 Points for Success	The Mountain Route	Lighting-Up Awareness	Counting 10 Breaths
E.Path Stages?	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩
What do we do?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set a (regular) Time & Duration for meditation 2. Set a (regular) Place for meditation 3. Sit Comfortably (without falling asleep) 4. Follow The Playful Path (this table) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relax 2. Find the Joy 3. Observe 4. Let it Come / Be / Go 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fire up your Motivation 2. Set Reasonable Goals 3. Beware of Expectations 4. Commit to Diligence 5. Review Distractions 6. Adjust your Posture 	Shift <i>Attention</i> through 4 sensorial domains: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External Stimuli (sounds, scents, tastes) 2. Bodily Sensations 3. Breath-Related Sensations 4. Breath Sensations at the Nose (<i>meditation object</i>) 	Count 10 <i>Breath Cycles</i>
How do we do it?	Explained on Page 4 click to review	Explained on Page 8 click to review	Explained on Page 9 click to review	Explained on Page 10 click to review	Coming Soon! >> Check for Updates Read TMI (Ch.1) / Reach Out
Why do we do it?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set a Time – or meditation will not happen 2. Set a Place – so we can sit without effort 3. Sit Comfortably – fewer physical distractions 4. Follow the Path – that’s how we train the mind 	We play the Game because it helps us to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate the right attitude/state of mind • Establish the practice as an enjoyable activity • Reduce the likelihood of identification with mental objects • Strengthen our equanimity/acceptance • Symbolically enter into the meditative space 	We play the Game because it helps us to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate the right attitude/state of mind • Define the objectives of the practice clearly • Prepare the mind for its upcoming challenges • Draw the mind’s attention to the new Game we play • Set the meditation session on solid foundations 	We play the Game because it helps us to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground ourselves in the <i>extrospective</i> sensations currently present • Establish a hologram of our surroundings • Establish bright <i>extrospective awareness</i> • Set the context for <i>attention</i> • Prevent <i>tunnel-vision</i> • Generate and sustain a <i>strong intention</i> 	We play the Game because it helps us to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilize <i>attention</i> • Ensure we have stable enough <i>attention</i> to succeed at the upcoming <i>cyclical techniques</i> • Generate and sustain a <i>strong intention</i> • Let go of on-going <i>mental objects</i>
What do we do if distracted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ‘aha!’ moment of noticing we missed a day • Remain positive and compassionate (no need to chastise) • Diligently return to practice gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire up our motivation • Make meditation a priority • Withstand the temptation of doing other things • Find the Joy • Remind ourselves that meditation delivers (guaranteed), to cultivate trust in the process. • Just Do It! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ‘aha!’ moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback – “Excellent! Let’s notice more often!” • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Point we’re exploring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start again from point #1 (“Relax”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ‘aha!’ moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback – “Excellent! Let’s notice more often!” • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Point we’re exploring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for aversion, mechanicality, impatience • Start again from the point we didn’t complete or the one before it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ‘aha!’ moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback – “Excellent! Let’s notice more often!” • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to Move/Scan the domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find an anchoring sound (external stimuli domain) • Start again with The Sensations Superhighway: Sounds ⇔ Legs ⇔ Abdomen ⇔ Nose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ‘aha!’ moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback – “Excellent! Let’s notice more often!” • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Breath at the Nose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start again from breath one • Make sure to attend to the actual sensations of the breath, not the number or concept of its cycle
When do we move on?	Once we sit down comfortably to meditate with our back, neck, and head straight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we’re sufficiently relaxed/accepting • After we found joy in the present moment • When we’re observing • Having the will to let everything come, be, and go 	After we grounded ourselves well enough with the adjustment of our posture	When we have bright enough <i>extrospective awareness</i> , with a vivid enough hologram of <i>extrospective</i> objects	When we complete the 10th breath with a continuous intention to observe the breath cycle and its enumeration without <i>forgetting</i> or getting mechanical
What do we do as we move on?	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉
When do we revisit it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As soon as we notice we’ve lost our daily practice • As soon as we notice procrastination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As necessary, by our free judgment • After prolonged <i>mind-wandering</i> / <i>forgetting</i> • When we become agitated or impatient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We won’t repeat the entire list again • We can remind ourselves of relevant points as necessary throughout the practice: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Losing interest – what’s my Motivation? 2. Getting mechanical – what’s my Goal? 3. Feeling disappointed or frustrated – Beware of Expectations! (Find the Joy, Celebrate) 4. Wanting to stop early / stop training – Commit to Diligence 5. Lost in a repeating Distraction – add it to the Review list (“the distractions menagerie”) 6. Bad posture – Adjust your Posture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we fall into <i>tunnel vision</i> • After losing <i>extrospective awareness</i> • When we need to ground ourselves during <i>Purification of Mind</i> • When the <i>monkey-mind</i> needs a bigger “cage” • As a means of opposing <i>dullness</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we’re unable to Follow the Breath without repeatedly and frequently getting lost in <i>distractions/forgetting</i> • At the end of the meditation session, if the bell rings while the mind is wandering • To counter impatience (by providing a sense of success) • To check Alertness level (i.e., to rule out Subtle Dullness) • Before doing a desire’s bidding mid-session (moving, ending early, opening the eyes, changing position)
How do we increase the challenge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice more than once a day • Practice longer than 60 minutes 	Find the Joy in the subtlest of things.	To add challenge to Review Distractions , ask yourself: “what distraction do I fear reviewing?” and review it courageously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the subtlest sensations in each domain • Stay longer in each domain (about a minute or two) 	If we can Count 10 Breaths without <i>forgetting</i> , let’s check if we can count them without <i>strong distractions</i> .
How do we reduce the challenge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice as little as 10 minutes a day • Use an interval timer to increase the duration gradually (the bell means: “please continue”) 	Visualize a theater setting, keep it in <i>peripheral awareness</i> , and use it to follow the points. (Careful! Don’t use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)	Visualize the Mountain icon, keep it in <i>peripheral awareness</i> , and use it to follow the points. (Careful! Don’t use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)	Stay on The Sensations Superhighway : Sounds ⇔ Legs ⇔ Abdomen ⇔ Nose	Visualize the Dial-Up Pad icon, keep it in <i>peripheral awareness</i> , and use it to follow the points. (Careful! Don’t use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)

The Playful Path

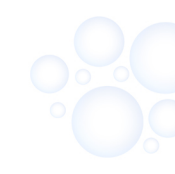
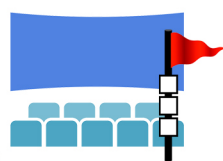
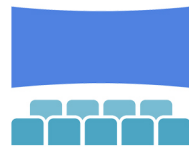
Part 2 | Cyclical Games



	Cultivating Extrospective Awareness		Cultivating Introspective Awareness	
Question	Following the Breath	Connecting the Breaths	Labeling	Checking-In
E.Path Stages?	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩	①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩
What do we do?	Follow the <i>breath cycle</i> , and for every inhale/exhale, recognize its: 1. Beginning 2. Beginning + Ending 3. Beginning + Ending + Pauses	• Compare between and within <i>breath cycles</i> • Investigate what changes for every inhale/exhale in terms of: 1. Length 2. Quality	1. Label mental objects after <i>distractions/ mind-wandering</i> (memories, thoughts, plans, etc.) 2. Redirect <i>attention</i> to the <i>meditation object</i> (breath sensations) [Note: Following the Breath may continue in parallel]	1. Move attention voluntarily to check the content of <i>introspective awareness</i> and Label <i>mental objects</i> that are present 2. Redirect <i>attention</i> to the <i>meditation object</i> (breath sensations) [Note: Following the Breath may continue in parallel]
How do we do it?	Coming Soon! >> Check for Updates Read TMI (Ch.3) / Reach Out	Coming Soon! >> Check for Updates Read TMI (Ch.3) / Reach Out	Coming Soon! >> Check for Updates Read TMI (Ch.3) / Reach Out	Coming Soon! >> Check for Updates Read TMI (Ch.3) / Reach Out
Why do we do it?	We play the Game because it helps us to: • Sustain <i>attention</i> on the <i>meditation object</i> (breath sensations) • Connect with the present moment • Experience and realize <i>Impermanence</i> • Investigate direct sensations instead of concepts • Balance <i>attention / peripheral awareness</i> • Generate and sustain a <i>strong intention</i>	We play the Game because it helps us to: • Increase the mind's engagement with the <i>meditation object</i> (breath sensations) • Experience sensations at a higher resolution • Get the benefits listed in Following the Breath	We play the Game because it helps us to: • Establish <i>introspective awareness</i> • Encapsulate <i>mental objects</i> • Reduce self-identification / ownership of <i>mental objects</i> • Reduce the likelihood of <i>mind-wandering / forgetting</i>	We play the Game because it helps us to: • Develop powerful continuous <i>introspective awareness</i> • Train <i>attention</i> to move voluntarily • Reduce the likelihood of getting caught by <i>distractions</i> • Familiarize the mind with all possible kinds of <i>mental objects</i> • Strengthen the ability to look at what we'd usually avoid • Strengthen the ability to let go of what we'd usually grasp • Train <i>peripheral awareness</i> to monitor mental objects
What do we do if distracted?	• Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing that the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice again, notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game & remind ourselves what it is • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Breath Sensations at the Nose • Start again from the same timing resolution • Reduce resolution if <i>distractions</i> are very frequent • Return once to Counting 10 Breaths if Following is impossible	• Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing that the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice again, notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game & remind ourselves what it is • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Breath Sensations at the Nose • Start again from the same resolution of comparisons • Reduce resolution if <i>distractions</i> are very frequent • Return to Following the Breath if Connecting is impossible	• Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing that the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice again, notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game & remind ourselves what it is • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Breath Sensations at the Nose • Label the mental object present when noticing the <i>distraction</i> • Don't Label or try to remember the distractions leading to it	• Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing that the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice again, notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game & remind ourselves what it is • Open up Extrospective & Introspective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Nose & the Mind alternately • Label the mental object present when noticing the <i>distraction</i>
When do we move on?	• When it's easy to recognize the key points of the <i>breath cycle</i> • When the recognition timing is tight (no lag; no fuzziness) • When (subjectively) having stable enough <i>attention</i> • When (subjectively) having bright enough <i>peripheral awareness</i> Where to go next: • for extra <i>extrospective</i> challenge >> Connecting the Breaths • to begin cultivating <i>introspective awareness</i> >> Labeling	• When it's easy to follow the changes • When (subjectively) having stable enough <i>attention</i> • When (subjectively) having bright enough <i>peripheral awareness</i>	• When it's easy to Label all <i>mental objects</i> • When (subjectively) having stable enough <i>attention</i> • When (subjectively) having bright enough <i>peripheral awareness</i>	• When it's easy to move between <i>intro/extro-spective awareness</i> • When it's easy to Label all mental objects • When (subjectively) having stable enough <i>attention</i> • When (subjectively) having bright enough <i>peripheral awareness</i> • When having high alertness, attentiveness, and clarity (no <i>dullness</i>) • When <i>introspective awareness</i> allows Labeling without shifting <i>attention</i> from the <i>meditation object</i> of breath sensations
What do we do as we move on?	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉
When do we revisit it?	• When we lose touch with the breath as a <i>meditation object</i> • When we suspect sinking into <i>subtle dullness</i>	• When Following the Breath is too easy • When Following the Breath is too boring	When we descend from Stage 6 of The Elephant Path	When we descend from Stage 6 of The Elephant Path
How do we increase the challenge?	• Following in Silence (no inner narration; non-verbal; non-conceptual) • Move on to Connecting the Breaths • Close Following (advanced technique)	Compare new aspects of the breath not yet investigated.	1. Identify the Hindrance associated with the <i>distraction</i> 2. Label the Hindrance 3. Apply its <i>antidote</i> as necessary	Let go of shifting <i>attention</i> voluntarily and see if <i>introspective awareness</i> can provide labels automatically.
How do we reduce the challenge?	• Focus only on the beginning of the inhale/exhale without following their ending or pauses. • Visualize the <i>breath cycle</i> in <i>peripheral awareness</i> using a circle or a sinewave (drop when no longer needed). (Careful! Don't use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)	• Compare only one aspect of the breath at a time. • Visualize the <i>breath cycle</i> in <i>peripheral awareness</i> using a circle or a sinewave (drop when no longer needed). (Careful! Don't use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)	Label the mental object as "a <i>strong distraction</i> " and move on.	Label only the strongest <i>distraction</i> and return to the breath.

Four Points for Success in Meditation

The Playful Path | Opening Game #1



HOW DO WE PLAY THE GAME?

Next Game → Six Opening Points

E.Path Stages?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩
What do we do?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relax 2. Find the Joy 3. Observe 4. Let it Come / Be / Go
Why do we do it?	<p>We play the Game because it helps us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate the right attitude/state of mind • Establish the practice as an enjoyable activity • Reduce the likelihood of identification with mental objects • Strengthen our equanimity/acceptance • Symbolically enter into the meditative space
What do we do if distracted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Point we're exploring • Start again from point #1 ("Relax")
When do we move on?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we're sufficiently relaxed/accepting • After we found joy in the present moment • When we're observing • Having the will to let everything come, be, and go
What do we do as we move on?	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉
When do we revisit it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As necessary, by our free judgment • After prolonged <i>mind-wandering / forgetting</i> • When we become agitated or impatient
How do we increase the challenge?	Find the Joy in the subtlest of things.
How do we reduce the challenge?	Visualize a theater setting, keep it in <i>peripheral awareness</i> , and use it to follow the points. (Careful! Don't use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)

1 Relax ACTION

Relax the Body

To the best of your ability, release any stress or tension in the physical body: relax the muscles, relax the jaw, open the hands, and find a comfortable posture. Keep the back straight, with the vertebrae placed one on top of the other (like a tower of river stones), with minimal strain in the supporting muscles. The body should be like a lump of clay - stable yet pliable.

Relax the Mind

Let go of any active engagement with mental objects that may be present in the mind - thoughts, memories, plans, ideas, and so on (e.g., work to be done, problems to solve, past conversations, tasks to complete). Instead, deliberately direct Attention to the present moment. The mental objects may continue to exist dimly in the background; let them be. Relax, breathe, listen to the sounds around you, observe the sensations in the body, and let the mind rest.

Sometimes, there might be agitation, stress, sadness, restless worry, or other emotions usually seen as "negative" or "unwanted." Should this happen, relax into the fact that there's no relaxation at this time. That's the truth of the moment, and there's no need to fight it. It's impossible to relax forcefully - if it were possible to choose to be relaxed, no one would ever choose to be agitated. Drop the resistance to the emotion and release the fantasy that meditation must include some magical cosmic tranquility. "Relax" means accepting reality exactly as it is, without rejecting it or desiring it to be different. Even when an inner storm is present, it's not "obstructing" the meditation - the observation and presence within the storm is the meditation.

2 Find the Joy ACTION

Notice all that's pleasant in the present moment - the quiet surroundings, the softness of the cushion, the cool air, the touch of comfortable clothes, and even the simple gift of pausing the turmoil of daily life. There's no need to seek something extraordinary; enjoy the simplest things. Also, there's no need to fabricate happy thoughts forcefully; just observe what's already there - pleasant sensory experiences present right here, right now.

Finding the Joy balances the natural tendency of the mind to scan for problems and faults. Without joy, unsatisfactory aspects of reality might dominate conscious experience. However, never reject what's unpleasant, ignore it, or try to perceive it as pleasant. Instead, acknowledge its unpleasantness, let it be in the background, and deliberately shift Attention to what is pleasant. It'll cultivate the understanding that meditation can be an enjoyable activity even when it involves noises, agitation, itchiness, pain, or negative thoughts.

No matter what unpleasantness we might experience, there'll always be something pleasant just waiting to be noticed. Strengthen the ability to recognize pleasantness so that feelings of peace, satisfaction, and happiness will become an inseparable part of the practice.

3 Observe ATTITUDE

Meditation emphasizes observation rather than "doing." While meditating, there's no need to do anything - no planning, no problem-solving, no recalling of events, and no telling of stories. The game is to observe whatever arises by itself in the conscious experience without reacting - sounds, sensations, emotions, memories, and thoughts, as if we were watching a movie at the cinema.

Extending this analogy, all four points for success in meditation can be viewed as a night at the movies. When we reach the projection hall, we Relax into our seats. Then, we Find the Joy - how comfortable is the seat, how soft is the lining, how pleasant is the AC, how wonderful is the peace and quiet. As the movie begins, we Observe the big screen and the images that appear and change within it.

Similarly, throughout the session, all sorts of things will appear on the screen of conscious awareness. Observe them all as they are. Instead of doing, rest in the direct knowing of whatever's projected onto consciousness by the senses: The pillow is soft. I'm in a closed room. It's morning now. A dog is barking outside. The AC is running. The air is cool. A memory appears. A thought is arising. There's a scent of coffee. The light enters through the window.

It doesn't matter if there's relative quietness or a multitude of distractions, if Attention is scattered or stable, if we're drowsy or alert, comfortable or in pain, calm or agitated. All these are like clouds drifting through the sky, birds flocking to a tree, or leaves blowing in the breeze. There's nothing to do about them, and they require no active involvement on our part. They all do what they do, and we're observing them in equanimity, without rejecting, judging, or clinging.

4 Let it Come / Let it Be / Let it Go ATTITUDE

Let it Come

No matter what comes up in meditation, let it be part of the conscious experience. Don't try to reject, deny, or ignore it. It's allowed to arrive. Accept its appearance, even if it's an irritating noise, a charged memory, a worrying thought, an intense emotion, or physical pain. The door is always open.

As in the movies, when the antagonist enters the scene, we understand it would be pointless to rise from our seat and yell at the screen: "No! Don't enter! You're not allowed in this movie! You're evil, and I never want to see you!" The same goes for meditation: pleasant or unpleasant, all are welcome.

Let it Be

Allow everything that arises to exist as long as it exists. It's okay that a dog is barking in the background. It's okay that there's an ongoing itch at the tip of the nose. It's okay if strong emotions are present, such as sorrow, anger, or fear. Don't fight them or react to them; let them "dance their little dance" while observing everything they generate with equanimity and objectivity.

At the movies, we don't yell at the screen: "Get on with it! Change the scene! The dialogue is boring, the actor is not appealing, and the actress is annoying! It's time for the day to end; it's time for the night to be over! Change to something else immediately!" As viewers, we have no control over the scenes' lengths or content. Likewise, in meditation, watch the scene as long as it's projected while keeping in mind that no scene lasts forever; it's always impermanent. Even the longest, most tedious scenes are over and replaced, eventually.

Let it Go

Everything that arises in conscious experience will pass and disappear, sooner or later. Allow it to do so.

When an excellent movie scene ends and transitions to another, we don't yell at the screen: "No, scene, don't change - go on forever! I want to keep seeing the actors and scenery I love so much!" The same is true in meditation: when things come to their natural end, we let them go.

This point is especially relevant for pleasant things, such as positive thoughts, subtle sensations, intriguing sounds, new ideas, magical memories, songs, stories, fantasies, and more. Since they're so pleasant, it's natural for the mind to try to cling to them and sustain them further. Therefore, apply the necessary effort to resist this temptation and let all phenomena (no matter how pleasant) arise, stay, and pass.

Potential Traps

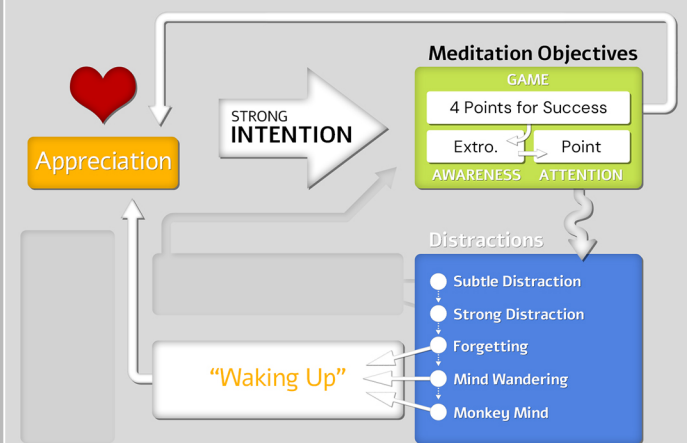
Getting Mechanical

Beware of making this practice an automatic, mechanical recitation of the points' titles alone. It's not a verbal mantra to repeat, but a sequence of actions to perform. Truly Relax. Truly Find the Joy. The mind might want to speed things up and move on quickly to the next challenge, especially after this Meditative Game becomes a part of the practice's routine. The Four Points for Success in Meditation are a meditative practice in and of themselves. They don't "delay" the "real meditation," they are skills and attitudes that allow us to excel as meditators. Treat the effort to develop them as an investment that pays when they're naturally present - in meditation, as in daily life.

Impatience

Avoid the false notion that the four points are a quick and easy exercise that should be completed in a few minutes. There will be cases where even after an hour-long session, they might not be completed (as the mind repeatedly wanders into thoughts and distractions). It's natural, normal, and inevitable. Let go of any unrealistic expectations about how meditation "should" be. Follow the principles of The Meditative Training Cycle (MTC, page 5), and with continued practice, it will become easier to complete the Game.

The Meditative Training Cycle



The Mountain Route

The Playful Path | Opening Game #2

E.Path Stages?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩
What do we do?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fire up your Motivation 2. Set Reasonable Goals 3. Beware of Expectations 4. Commit to Diligence 5. Review Distractions 6. Adjust your Posture
Why do we do it?	<p>We play the Game because it helps us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate the right attitude/state of mind • Define the objectives of the practice clearly • Prepare the mind for its upcoming challenges • Draw the mind's attention to the new Game we play • Set the meditation session on solid foundations
What do we do if distracted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to the Point we're exploring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for aversion, mechanicality, impatience • Start again from the point we didn't complete (or the one before it)
When do we move on?	After we grounded ourselves well enough with the adjustment of our posture
As we move on	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉
When do we revisit it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We won't repeat the entire list again • We can remind ourselves of relevant points as necessary throughout the practice: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Losing interest - what's my Motivation? 2. Getting mechanical - what's my Goal? 3. Feeling disappointed or frustrated - Beware of Expectations! (Find the Joy, Celebrate) 4. Wanting to stop early / stop training - Commit to Diligence 5. Lost in a repeating Distraction - add it to the Review list ("the distractions menagerie") 6. Bad posture - Adjust your Posture
Increase the challenge?	To add challenge to Review Distractions , ask yourself: "what distraction do I fear reviewing?" and review it courageously.
Reduce the challenge?	Visualize the Mountain icon, keep it in <i>peripheral awareness</i> , and use it to follow the points. (Careful! Don't use the visualization as the <i>meditation object</i>)
The Meditative Training Cycle	

HOW DO WE PLAY THE GAME?

1 Fire Up Your MOTIVATION ← ACTION 🔥

At the foot of the mountain, Fire Up Your Motivation to take the journey - recall what moves you to invest the time and the energy in meditation. The most effective form of motivation is a blend of long-term benefits and short-term benefits:

Long-Term Benefits could be living a life of calm and happiness, free of suffering, as intended by the Buddha. It's what you wish your daily experience would be as you mature in skill and wisdom. However, at challenging times, the mind might react to that proposition with cynicism or doubt - it's hard to believe promises of a sunny summer amidst a wintry snowstorm. Therefore, make sure to fire up your motivation with short-term benefits as well, serving as the thinner twigs that kindle the heavier logs.

Short-Term Benefits are the possible rewards of meditation, available right here, right now: clarity over confusion, tranquility over anxiety, equanimity over anger, productivity over procrastination, creativity over stagnation, and more. Think of the mental state you'd like to allow through meditation for the upcoming day, and the effort is likelier to seem worthwhile.

The firing up of motivation is especially important when meditation becomes part of our routine. After the initial sense of novelty fades, it's easy to get mechanical or forget why we're here in the first place. By regularly firing up our motivation, we cultivate an "inner flame" that eventually becomes permanent, allowing us to meditate just because it's wonderful - nothing more.

2 Set Reasonable GOALS ← ACTION 🚩

Moving up the mountain, set a reasonable, **action-based goal** for the meditative session - an aspect of meditation to which you'd like to give special attention.

This is something you intend to *do*, not an outcome you hope to *get*. As we repeatedly discover in meditation, we can't choose sensations, mental states, the degree of Awareness, or the stability of Attention; we can only influence them through the actions we take while mindful, alert, and present. For this reason, desired outcomes are a welcome bonus, not a measure of success.

When choosing a goal, it's helpful to review the previous meditation session and reflect on what posed its greatest challenge. The elements of the Meditative Training Cycle (MTC, page 3) are good candidates. For example, you may realize you forgot to offer positive feedback when noticing distractions. In that case, your goal could be to cultivate Appreciation more consistently. If judgment and self-criticism dominated the previous session, the goal might be to hold a gentler, more compassionate Attitude. If you overused Attention and slipped into "tunnel vision," you may choose to intentionally maintain Extrospective Awareness alongside it.

Another kind of reasonable goal is to meet skillfully with a recurring obstacle (such as impatience, physical pain or discomfort, strong emotions, dullness) or with one of the five hindrances (sensory desire, aversion and ill-will, laziness and lethargy, restless worry and remorse, and doubt). Specific skillful means for overcoming these challenges will be introduced in [future versions of this document](#) (for immediate guidance, [reach out](#)).

As your skill grows, you may set several goals for a session. However, choose one of them as "primary" (the one you mark as most significant), so you can dial the effort down as necessary.

3 Beware of EXPECTATIONS ← ATTITUDE ✨

Beware of the expectation that the session will deliver your goals, only pleasant sensations, or the mental states you chose when you 'fired up' your motivation. In other words, don't chase the stars at the top of the mountain. They can't be placed, removed, or aligned to your will. The mind tends to expect something wonderful to happen during meditation (e.g., bliss, tranquility, pleasure, "success"), and it may indeed occur. However, when it doesn't, the expectation often leaves us disappointed. We compare the imagined "ideal meditation" with what's actually happening, and the perceived gap generates inner conflict and unnecessary suffering. Instead, commit to the attitude expressed in these four sub-points:

1. **Let the meditation unfold the way it unfolds** - echoing "Let it Come, Let it Be, Let it Go" (page 8). Watch what is, not what you'd like it to be.
2. **Enjoy everything pleasurable** - echoing "Find the Joy" (page 8). Cultivate the skill of noticing and enjoying pleasant sensations, present right now, and scattered throughout the session.
3. **Celebrate every success** - echoing the element of Appreciation in The Meditative Training Cycle (MTC, page 5). Give yourself positive feedback whenever your efforts deliver an intended result, and whenever you "wake up" to notice you missed the mark. The two are equally "successful."
4. **A "good meditation" is the one you did** - whether it was stable or turbulent, pleasant or unpleasant, sharp or dull, eventful or uneventful, long or short, distractions-abundant or distractions-free. Meditating is like going out to look at the ocean. We only have control over going to the beach and directing our gaze, not over the ocean's state. The same is true when observing the mind. Whatever we see - it's good.

4 Commit to DILIGENCE ← ATTITUDE 💪

The true peak of the mountain is our commitment to diligence, which has two central meanings:

Use the time only to train the mind - from start to finish, work with the Meditative Training Cycle and play the Meditative Games of The Playful Path - nothing more. Refrain from planning the upcoming day, thinking about work, entertaining yourself, or taking a nap. There's no problem with encountering these as popping Distractions, just don't engage with them willfully.

Remain seated for the entire planned duration - be determined to complete the session, no matter how it unfolds. From time to time, the mind will demand you cut the session short for what might seem like "a very good reason," accompanied by a strong emotion validating it. For example: "I must check if the heater's on!" (fear), "I'll call them right now and demand a refund" (anger), "I'm a lost cause" (sadness). To the best of your ability, observe these demands. Don't react, don't do their bidding. If you "wake up" to discover you did (e.g., opened your eyes, automatically moved, grabbed your phone, or even got off the cushion completely), provide positive feedback for noticing it and return to practice. Your diligence is shown in making corrections, not in avoiding mistakes.

NOTE: Under certain circumstances, we may end the meditation early without countering the principle of diligence (for example, when facing extreme physical or emotional pain). The key is to follow a specific exit protocol (soon to be released) rather than abruptly terminating the session. [Reach out](#) as necessary.

5 Review DISTRACTIONS ← ACTION 🐒

As we descend the mountain, we pass by the distraction-chasing monkey, representing scattered attention.

At this point, review the distractions most likely to arise in the upcoming session. Usually, they're the topics that occupied you recently (e.g., obligations, tasks, relationships, conflicts, worries, regrets, earworms, etc.). Place a short, simple label on each potential distraction (e.g., "my spouse", "the presentation", "car wash", "that song", "that series"), without further analysis.

The Distractions Waiting Room (optional)
This is an original skillful means (developed for The Playful Path) that helps the mind stay aware of potential distractions using a mental image. For example, my "waiting room" is medium-sized, with white walls and 15 plastic chairs arranged in three rows, where I place potential sources of distraction. I sit my loved ones up front, conflictual people in the back, and acquaintances in the middle. Earworms get the radio on the left, series get the TV on the right, work gets the laptop on the table, and so on. By arranging distractions spatially, I'm able to gently "put them back in place" whenever I "wake up" to realize they've caught my attention, and quickly return to the meditation object. Everyone is welcome in the waiting room, yet the interaction is on hold ("Hi, thanks for coming. The doctor knows you're here. Please be seated"). You can design your own waiting room with complete artistic freedom, just be careful not to use the visualization as the meditation object, or the waiting room itself will become a distraction.

"Draco Dormiens Nunquam Titiliandus"
The Latin motto of the Hogwarts School of Magic (from the Harry Potter book series) means: "never tickle a sleeping dragon." You might hold a similar sentiment when it comes to Reviewing Distractions, especially if you know they're mostly unpleasant. However, do not be tempted to skip this part of the practice. Firstly, by not acknowledging distractions early, you're more vulnerable to being swept away by their drama as they inevitably show up. Secondly (and more importantly), it's a core aspect of the meditative practice - noticing distractions, then gently setting them aside. That's how we build resilience, liberating ourselves from their grasp and the suffering they produce. Distractions are like weights at the gym; we can't get stronger without lifting them. Look the dragon in the eye, and you'll be rewarded for your bravery. Arguably, this is the most valuable point of the six.

6 Adjust Your POSTURE ← ACTION 🙏

The route ends at the foot of the mountain, back at ground level. The previous five points were all concepts (motivation, goals, expectations, diligence, distractions) taking place within the mind. Now it's time to get out of that mental space and return to the body, which might have gotten a little bent in the process. Slowly and mindfully, align your head, neck, and back, even out your shoulders, and level your hands. Close your lips, keeping the teeth slightly apart, and breathe naturally through your nose.

Since the distractions you reviewed may have stirred tension in the body and agitation in the mind, you may find it helpful to revisit the Four Points for Success in Meditation (page 8): Relax, Find the Joy, Observe, Let it Come/Be/Go. Then, celebrate your success in completing the game, and set a Strong Intention to move on to the next Meditative Game: Lighting-Up Awareness.



Lighting-Up Awareness

The Playful Path | Opening Game #3



HOW DO WE PLAY THE GAME?

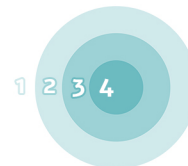
Next Game ➔ Counting 10 Breath Cycles

E.Path Stages?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩
What do we do?	Shift Attention through 4 sensorial domains: 1. External Stimuli (sounds, scents, tastes) 2. Bodily Sensations 3. Breath-Related Sensations 4. Breath Sensations at the Nose (<i>meditation object</i>)
Why do we do it?	We play the Game because it helps us to: • Ground ourselves in the <i>extrospective</i> sensations currently present • Establish a hologram of our surroundings • Establish bright <i>extrospective awareness</i> • Set the context for <i>attention</i> • Prevent <i>tunnel-vision</i> • Generate and sustain a <i>strong intention</i>
What do we do if distracted?	• Appreciate the 'aha!' moment of noticing the mind has wandered • Provide positive feedback - "Excellent! Let's notice more often!" • Apply the corrective actions gently, lovingly, and playfully • Set a Strong Intention to complete the Game • Open up Extrospective Awareness • Redirect Attention to Move/Scan the domains • Find an anchoring sound (external stimuli domain) • Start again with <i>The Sensations Superhighway</i> : Sounds ⇄ Legs ⇄ Abdomen ⇄ Nose
When do we move on?	When we have bright enough <i>extrospective awareness</i> , with a vivid enough hologram of <i>extrospective</i> objects
What do we do as we move on?	Celebrate! Give Positive Feedback 🎉
When do we revisit it?	• When we fall into <i>tunnel vision</i> • After losing <i>extrospective awareness</i> • When we need to ground ourselves during <i>Purification of Mind</i> • When the <i>monkey-mind</i> needs a bigger "cage" • As a means of opposing <i>dullness</i>
How do we increase the challenge?	• Identify the subtlest sensations in each domain • Stay longer in each domain (about a minute or two)
How do we reduce the challenge?	Stay on <i>The Sensations Superhighway</i> : Sounds ⇄ Legs ⇄ Abdomen ⇄ Nose

Introduction

In this Meditative Game, we'll be "lighting up" Extrospective Awareness by methodically shifting Attention through four domains:

- External Stimuli** (sounds, scents, tastes)
- Bodily Sensations**
- Breath-Related Sensations**
- Breath-Sensations at the Nose**



As you play the game, note that the objects you "light up" by shifting Attention to them remain known and present in Awareness even after you shift Attention elsewhere. However, they tend to fade away in brightness and presence over time. Therefore, we'll revisit them repeatedly until they form a bright enough mental hologram of the surroundings - a clear comprehension that "they're there," defining the present moment at the sensory level.

Also note that Awareness doesn't have to rely on imaginary visual images (although they may present themselves spontaneously). For example, you can be directly aware of a clock existing on the wall just by the sound of its ticking. An image of its hands pointing to a specific hour is not necessary.

ROUND #1 - "The Sensations Super-Highway"

- Shift Attention to the **loudest sound** reaching the ears (**External Stimuli** domain). As soon as you notice it...
- Shift Attention to the sensation of the **legs** meeting the ground (**Bodily Sensations** domain). As soon as you notice it...
- Shift Attention to the sensation of the **abdomen** rising or falling with the breath (**Breath-Related Sensations** domain). As soon as you notice it...
- Shift Attention to the sensation of the air rushing in or out beneath the nostrils, and above the upper lip (**Breath-Sensations** at the **Nose** domain). As soon as you notice it...
- Repeat the shifting of Attention in **Reverse** (Nose >> Abdomen >> Legs >> Loudest Sound).
- Repeat** steps 1-5 a few times, with a gentle, unhurried, relaxed attitude, until shifting attention along The Sensations Super-Highway becomes easy.

By all likelihood, the sensations on "The Super-Highway" are the most distinct ones within the conscious experience. Noticing them provides a sense of immediate success. In the Meditative Game's icon, they are represented by the biggest stars in each circular domain. "The Super Highway" also allows us to strengthen our ability to hold a Strong Intention for something to happen and update that intention relatively quickly, before a Distraction "fills the void," leading us to Forgettingting.

NOTE: If you're meditating in an extremely quiet environment, don't spend more than five seconds waiting for sound to arise. Accept silence as the truth of the moment, and move on to the sensations in the legs. If the silence persists, consider opening a door or a window in your next session to let in more ambient noise. Don't generate sounds intentionally (e.g., playing music or running your washing machine on "drain & spin"). Too much noise can be distracting, while too little can lead to dullness and drowsiness. Find the right balance.

ROUND #2 - Finding Subtler Sensations

- Shift Attention to the **next distinct sound** reaching the ears (e.g., if you've mainly focused on the sound of traffic coming through the window, now include the chirping of birds in a nearby tree, in the **External Stimuli** domain).
- Shift Attention to **another distinct sensation** in the **legs** (e.g., the hands resting on the thighs, in the **Bodily Sensations** domain).
- Shift Attention to **another distinct Breath-Related Sensation** (e.g., the movement of the chest).
- Shift Attention to the sensation of the air rushing in or out underneath the nostrils, above the upper lip at the **Nose** domain (same as before).
- Repeat the shifting of Attention in **Reverse**, moving through the same domains, finding distinct sensations. When switching domains, feel free to revisit the sensations of the Super-Highway should you need them. They're like a trusty home base, always ready to serve as a clear landmark for Attention to find.
- Repeat** steps 1-5 a few times until the shifting from one distinct sensation to the next in each domain becomes easy.

In the Meditative Game's icon, these sensations are represented by mid-size stars.

MOVING ON

Once you (subjectively) feel you have Lit-Up Awareness sufficiently, managed to hold a Strong Intention to shift Attention between domains, and established a bright "hologram" of the body and its surroundings, move on to the next Meditative Game (Counting 10 Breath Cycles).

Alternatively, you can choose to Light-Up Awareness in greater detail (especially after you've built your skills through repeated practice), and increase the challenge:

CHALLENGE #1 - Finding the Subtlest Sensations

- Shift Attention to the **quietest sounds** reaching the ears in the **External Stimuli** domain (e.g., leaves in the wind, the humming of the refrigerator, the fan of your computer).
- Shift Attention to subtle **Bodily Sensations** (e.g., the softness of the socks, a light tingling behind the ear, blood pulsing in the hand).
- Shift Attention to subtle **Breath-Related Sensations** (e.g., the expansion of the lungs, the shirt sliding on the skin, the changing tension in the lower back).
- Shift Attention to **Sensations at the Nose**, underneath the nostrils, and above the upper lip.
- Repeat the shifting of Attention in **Reverse**, moving through the same domains, finding the subtlest sensations.
- Repeat** steps 1-5 as necessary.

In the Meditative Game's icon, these sensations are represented by the tiniest stars. Think of Attention as a powerful telescope aiming at them, shifting and zooming ever deeper into the vast space of conscious experience, finding new detail that's usually eclipsed by brighter, more noticeable sensations.

NOTE: There's great value in investigating subtle sensations, and they'll play a central role later on The Playful Path (with the Meditative Games of Body Scanning and Close Following of the Breath, for example). However, at this early stage of the practice, you don't have to "catch them all." When you light your study room, all you need is enough illumination to see clearly and to work comfortably, without stressing over the shade left under the sofa. The same is true here. Let go of seeking perfection, and embrace the "good enough."

CHALLENGE #2 - Staying Longer in Each Domain

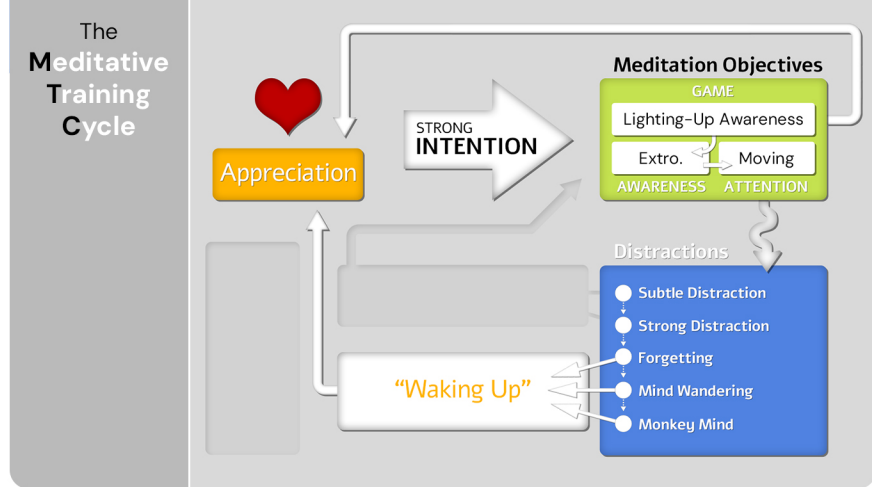
In this version of the Meditative Game, the challenge is to stay in each domain for about a minute or two before moving on to the next, investigating subtle and distinct sensations alike.

- Shift Attention to sounds reaching the ears (**External Stimuli** domain). In an unhurried manner, move from one sound to the next. You may also expand this domain to include present scents and flavors (e.g., the smell of coffee, the fabric softener, or the lingering taste of toothpaste). Keep exploring the sensations of that domain for a minute or two, then move on.
- Shift Attention to the **Bodily Sensations** domain, moving from one sensation to the next in a free flow. Keep exploring them for a minute or two, then move on.
- Shift Attention to the **Breath-Related Sensations** domain. In an unhurried manner, move from one sensation to the next. Keep exploring them for a minute or two, then move on.
- Shift Attention to **Sensations at the Nose**, underneath the nostrils, and above the upper lip.
- Repeat the shifting of Attention in **Reverse**, moving through the same domains for similar periods.
- Repeat** steps 1-5 as necessary.

The heart of the challenge in staying in each domain is holding a Strong Intention for longer. Previously, as soon as we found a sensation, we quickly moved on to the next domain, leaving little time to forget or mind-wander. Now, as we're occupied in investigating many sensations in a specific domain, we're more vulnerable to forgetting when it's time to move on.

It's like the difference between intending to heat something in the toaster-oven for 30 seconds vs. 3 minutes: should you try it without a timer, you'll probably spend the 30 seconds holding the thought "I need to take this out soon," whereas in 3 minutes, you might get distracted and return to the oven much later, once you start smelling the smoke.

As long as we accept getting distracted as an inevitable part of the game, and consistently provide positive feedback whenever we "wake up" to notice it's happened, we're on the right track. By repeatedly cultivating a Strong Intention to keep playing, we'll gradually be able to hold it for longer - even for an entire hour.



THE PLAYFUL PATH & THE MIND ILLUMINATED

[The Mind Illuminated](#) (or TMI, in its 2017 edition) has the power to lead all the way to Awakening. Since it accomplished that for me (Oded) in 2018, I began teaching it to the letter in 2019.

However, after many interactions with students who shared difficulties following TMI's instructions, a recurrent issue became apparent: TMI highlights the mental states of [The Elephant Path](#), so it mainly relies on subjective assessments of our current Stage, stability of attention, vividness of awareness, etc. While this approach has many benefits, it might also be an ongoing distraction, which can lead to doubt and uncertainty in meditation: we might misidentify our state of mind, skip necessary steps, dwell too long on a specific practice, run ahead too quickly, or forget what to do and why.

To overcome this challenge, I developed The Playful Path (TPP). It complements The Mind Illuminated by creating a clear separation between the actions we need to perform and the mental states we wish to cultivate. By focusing on meeting the criteria for completing a series of Games, we climb up the stages of The Elephant Path naturally, without the need to address them directly. Our performance is proof of the maturation of our skills.

Beyond that, some elements in The Playful Path are identical to The Mind Illuminated, others are slightly modified, and some are entirely new. TPP also introduces original skillful means I developed, visual aids, and alternatives to some practices offered in TMI.

Detailed descriptions of specific differences and similarities between TMI and TPP will be available for review in future versions of this document.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, The Playful Path is inspired by the brilliant work of my beloved teacher, **Culadasa** (John Yates, Ph.D.), as outlined in the 2017 edition of his book, [The Mind Illuminated](#) (aka TMI), written with Matthew Immergut & Jeremy Graves.

It has also been shaped and improved by the valuable feedback, questions, and suggestions of my students, who took part in the activities of [Mind Muar](#) while I developed the new model:

Aiden Buis, Allon Leibovici, Aly Thobani, Aner Gorni, Ariel Habib, Ariel Wexler, Austin Miller, Brandon Duke, Carolyn Casey, Charles Hoge, Dan Edlebeck, Dan Kolinko, Daniel Sedaka, Dor Suki, Doron Sabari, Erik Aellen, Evelyn Diaz, Geoffrey Whittaker, Guy Yehoshafat, Herman De Jager, Idov Magal, Ines Azaiez, Illan Kaufman, Jay Horowitz, John Green, Jonathan Stern, Josh Walsman, Julia Hermann, Justus von Verschuer, Liam Montana, Martin Kinkade, Mary Hill, Rahav Gabay, Robin Beyers, Roni Falk, Sam Kirmayer, Sally Mikhlin, Sinan Erdil, Stephen Steiner, Tracy Budd, William Fuhrmann, Yaya Sharon, and Yossi Shasho.

Thank you all for your partnership, friendship, and contribution. I'm always happy to give credit where credit is due – if your name is accidentally missing from the list of contributors, kindly reach out, and I'll add you.

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Thank you all for sharing your beautiful designs so generously.

JOIN THE TEAM!

The Playful Path project exists to make our vision a reality: **Complete Liberation** for all who seek to end their suffering, a **Clear and Simple Path** inevitably resulting in Awakening, **Freely Accessible** to everyone in the world.

To support this vision, we're committed to continuously updating, upgrading, and refining The Playful Path, based on the valuable feedback we receive from meditators like you. Your questions, thoughts, and suggestions are a gift. To be part of the team, join the discussions on our [Discord Server](#) and share your voice.



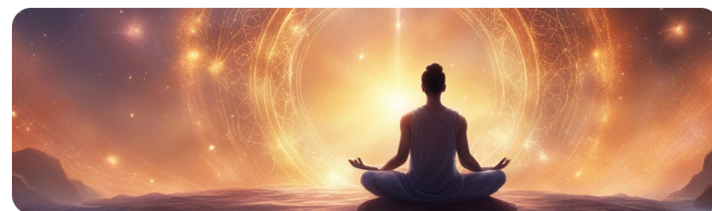
OPEN SANGHA MEETINGS

Our open [Sangha](#) meetings are an opportunity to meet dedicated meditators from different countries and engage in meaningful discussions. The meetings are 100% [Dāna](#)-based, held in a spirit of radical inclusion, and without any participation fee.

The meeting may include a class or Dharma talk, an opportunity to share experiences and challenges in meditation and daily life, a Q&A about Buddhism and the path of Awakening, and a silent or guided meditation chosen by popular vote.

We meet on the last **Saturday** of every month via Zoom for two sessions, each of them one hour long, separated by a seven-minute break.

JOIN A MEETING



EXPRESS YOUR GENEROSITY

Dāna, the practice of giving without seeking anything in return, is a cherished principle in the Buddhist tradition.

In line with its spirit, The Playful Path is offered to you free of charge. If you feel aligned with the Buddhist mindset and resonate with our content and activities, you have an open invitation to [express your generosity](#). Your contribution will allow us to continue developing free content and offer scholarships to our Meditation Adventures for those in need.

Whether your donation is modest or ample, give out of care for others: "The guidance I've received was gifted to me through other people's generosity. Now I can give a gift of my own, enabling more spiritual seekers to benefit from following this path to liberation in the future."

EXPRESS GENEROSITY

RECORDED CLASSES

Introductory Classes

The Four Noble Truths

The Eightfold Noble Path

The Elephant Path

The Five Insights Leading to Awakening

Establishing a Practice

Obstacles to Establishing a Practice

Right Attitude & Practical Solutions

The Meditative Training Cycle

The Fundamental Algorithm

Distractions & Intentions

Meditation Objectives

Practices & Techniques

Domains of Awareness

Levels of Alertness

TMI & The Playful Path

The Eight Fundamental Techniques

Four Points for Success in Meditation

Six Opening Points ("Preparation for Meditation")

Four-Step Transition to the Meditation Object

Counting 10 Breaths to Stabilize Attention

Following the Breath

Labeling

Connecting the Breaths

Checking-In

Overcoming Obstacles

Dealing with Pain and Discomfort

Purification of Mind

Dullness and Drowsiness

The Trap of Discursive Brilliance

Subtle Dullness

Overcoming Impatience

The Five Hindrances:

Restless Worry & Remorse

Aversion / Ill-Will

Doubt

Sensory Desire

Laziness and Lethargy

Complementary Practices

Mindful Review

Walking Meditation

Analytical Meditation

Metta Meditation (Loving Kindness)

Intriguing Subjects

The Illusion of Free Will

The Five Aspects of Success

Identifying Blocks & Finding Solutions

Self-Defense for the Spiritual Seeker

Skillful Means

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Finding Joy in Meditation

Context & Microintentions

The Meditator as a Leader

The Heart Sutra

Emptiness & Form

The Five Aggregates

The Nature of Phenomena

Nirvana & Enlightenment

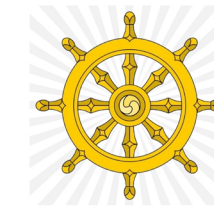
THE MEDITATION ADVENTURE

We invite you to join our Meditation Adventure – a structured mind-training program designed to advance your meditative practice and orient it toward Awakening.



Intensive Meditative Practice

Three months, 12 weekly online Zoom meetings, consistent daily meditation, 3–7 days of international retreat, and the attentive guidance of an awakened teacher, supporting and tracking your progress.



Mastering the Meditation Technique

12 online classes, over 50 hours of recorded classes, original new techniques & skillful means, supportive Buddhist wisdom & neuroscience, and 12 weekly private interviews with the teacher, forming a clear path to Awakening.



Supportive Intimate Sangha (9 members)

Direct human connection (in a group and one-on-one), space to share challenges and experiences, a Buddy System, open discussions, Q&A, and ongoing support through [our Discord server](#).

If you have a sense of spiritual urgency ([samvega](#)) and you're willing to place Right Effort and work diligently for your liberation, we'd be happy to have you with us.

JOIN THE ADVENTURE



PRIVATE CONSULTATIONS

One of the most direct and effective ways to master The Playful Path is through private consultation.

Share the details of your journey in confidence, and together we'll clarify where you are in your practice and what would support your next steps. From there, we can formulate a personalized meditation plan, with guidance and support tailored to your needs and aspirations.

In our one-on-one meetings, we may explore the subtleties of your practice, clarify counterintuitive concepts, work through obstacles, and set clear directions for your steady progress.

We may also make sense of unusual or extraordinary experiences, explore meditative absorptions (jhanic states), investigate insights, and gradually reveal the deepest workings of the mind.

BEGIN OUR JOURNEY

INTRODUCTION

The Elephant Path is a visual representation of the gradual mind-training process cultivated through samatha–vipassana meditation. Originating in the 4th century with the Buddhist monk Asanga, it is a traditional roadmap popularized in *The Mind Illuminated* by Culadasa. Here, we present a revised, contemporary version of the model that focuses on the mental states we wish to cultivate. Its active side is outlined separately in *Mind Muar's Playful Path to Awakening*, through its Meditative Games. They naturally move us through the Elephant Path stages without addressing them directly, simplifying the journey. The two paths complement each other, forming one integrated training system.

STAGE NINE COMPLETE PLIANCY & TRANQUILITY

The meditator sits in deep meditation while the serene elephant rests at his side. This stage is marked by profound tranquility and equanimity, arising as the meditative joy matures and subsides. Pliancy becomes complete, encompassing both mind and body. We can enjoy hours of comfortable, effortless, stable meditation. The mind becomes extremely sharp, able to investigate reality and gain deep insight into its true nature. This is one of the most rewarding, wholesome, sustainable states of consciousness a human being can ever experience.

STAGE EIGHT MENTAL PLIANCY & MEDITATIVE JOY

This blissful stage is marked by intense mental and physical pleasure. We enter the wondrous realm of deep meditative absorptions (jhānas), and experience intense meditative joy (pīti), as the practice becomes effortless. The meditator and the elephant reach full cooperation, as the elephant calmly aligns with every suggestion made by the meditator. The monkey and the rabbit have disappeared, as scattered attention and dullness no longer threaten the meditation. The elephant is now completely white, indicating that all hindrances are overcome. The flame has vanished as well, since effort is no longer necessary.

STAGE FIVE INCREASING MINDFULNESS

At this stage, we increase the power of mindfulness, becoming extremely alert and attentive. Gradually, attention intensifies and clarity grows, until the vividness of conscious experience reaches new heights. The meditator takes the lead, using the goad of strong intention to guide the half-white elephant. Laziness and lethargy have been overcome, while other hindrances continue to weaken. The half-white monkey is trailing behind, no longer a strong distraction. The rabbit is half-white as well, indicating that dullness has become subtler. The flame is smaller, since the training now demands less effort.

STAGE FOUR CONTINUOUS ATTENTION

At this stage, we no longer forget the meditation object, even when caught by distractions. It is also marked by the surfacing of charged memories and strong emotions in a process called Purification of Mind. The elephant and the monkey have slowed enough that slack appears in the meditator's rope. The elephant grows whiter, indicating that laziness and lethargy are weakening. The monkey's whitening signifies that mind-wandering is mostly overcome. The rabbit also whitens, reflecting the growing ability to recognize and counteract subtle dullness. Effort is still required, represented by the flame.

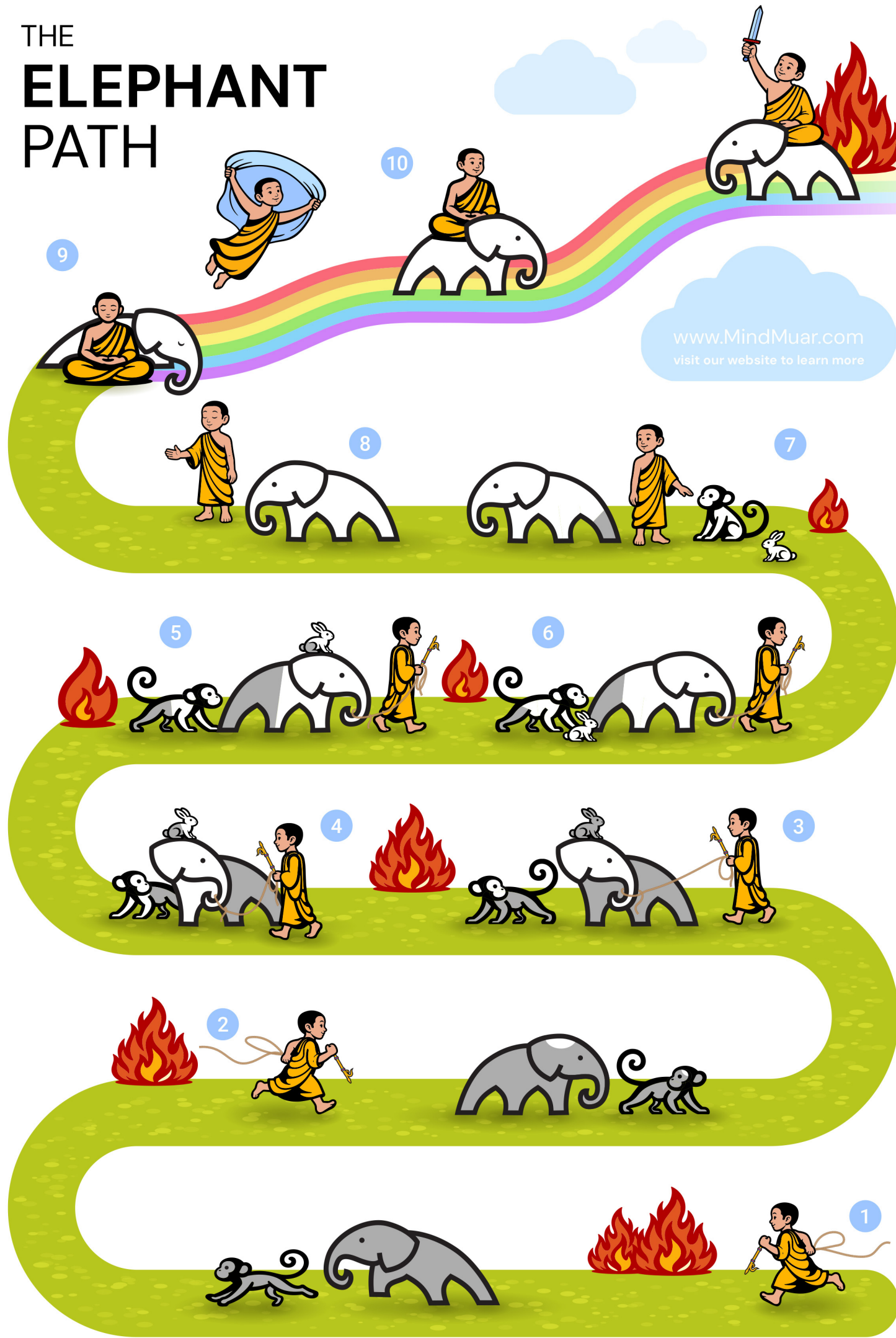
STAGE TWO INTERRUPTED ATTENTION & MIND WANDERING

At this stage, the meditation session is mostly marked by mind-wandering. Less time is spent on the meditation object, as attempts to sustain attention are often interrupted by distractions. However, the elephant and the monkey now walk rather than run, signifying improvement. A first patch of white appears on the elephant's head, showing that laziness, resistance, procrastination, and doubt are beginning to lose their grip. The monkey's head also lightens, indicating that episodes of wandering attention are becoming shorter and less dominant. The meditator gradually closes the gap.

STAGE ONE ESTABLISHING A PRACTICE

We start our journey with an untrained mind that behaves like a wild elephant. It is tainted grey by distractions, hindrances, and problems, and its attention is scattered, represented by the running monkey. Luckily, the determined meditator (the part of the mind that decides to follow the meditation instructions) comes to the rescue. His tools are the rope of vigilant mindfulness and the goad of strong intention. Chasing the mind takes a lot of effort, represented by the roaring flames. This is the most challenging stage of all.

THE ELEPHANT PATH



BEYOND STAGE TEN MATURE INSIGHT & AWAKENING

Time to light the fire again and make the final effort necessary for awakening (bodhi). The meditator turns around, now directing his efforts toward gaining wisdom and insight (vipassanā), represented by the sword he wields. His new challenge is to cut through ignorance and uproot the deepest mental defilements still buried in the depths of the mind. One by one, he severs the ten fetters* that bind his existence, becoming fully liberated.

* identity view, doubt, attachment to rites and rituals, sensory desire, ill-will, material desire, immaterial desire, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

STAGE TEN TRANQUILITY & EQUANIMITY

At this final stage, the qualities of stable attention, powerful mindfulness, joy, tranquility, and equanimity (fully developed samatha) are no longer limited to meditation – they persist in daily life. The path ascends to the sky as a radiant rainbow, and the meditator flies above it, conveying the newfound sense of lightness and energy. Later, the elephant carries the meditator effortlessly on its back, symbolizing their harmonious integration. The mind has profoundly transformed, operating with clarity, efficiency, and ease.

STAGE SEVEN EXCLUSIVE ATTENTION & UNIFICATION

At this transitional stage, our energy is directed toward sustaining the distraction-free, dullness-free state, until it becomes effortless. The vigilant meditator allows the elephant to walk ahead, while guarding it from the monkey and the rabbit, so they don't regain their destabilizing influence. The elephant is now almost entirely white, showing that most hindrances no longer intrude during meditation, except for the lingering tendencies of ill-will and agitation born of worry and remorse. A small flame continues to burn, as effort is still required to maintain this stability.

STAGE SIX SUBDUING SUBTLE DISTRACTIONS

At this stage, we begin to monitor the states and activities of the mind itself with metacognitive awareness, on our way to subduing even the subtlest of distractions. The meditator no longer needs to goad the elephant with intentions as often, as it follows him willfully most of the time. The monkey trailing behind has little influence, and is almost completely white, like the elephant. The hindrances are significantly weaker. The rabbit of dullness no longer burdens the elephant. Only a small flame remains, indicating that some effort is still required. Entering a state of flow, the practice becomes easier and more satisfying.

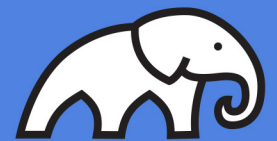
STAGE THREE EXTENDED CONTINUITY OF ATTENTION

At this stage, the balance flips: the meditation session is mostly marked by sustained attention on the meditation object, and less time is spent mind-wandering. The elephant and the monkey continue to get whiter, as hindrances, problems, and forgetting are reduced. They are looking back at the meditator, now close by, signifying their response to his flame-fueled efforts. The meditator and the elephant gently hold the rope of mindfulness, allowing them to cooperate through mutual trust rather than a subduing force. The rabbit on the elephant's head represents subtle dullness, which might lead to drowsiness and sleep – a new challenge to recognize and overcome.

LEGEND



MEDITATOR
THE MEDITATING PART OF THE MIND



ELEPHANT
THE MIND AS A WHOLE



MONKEY
SCATTERED ATTENTION



RABBIT
DULLNESS



FLAMES
EFFORT



GOAD
INTENTION



ROPE
MINDFULNESS

THE GRAY COLORING REPRESENTS HINDRANCES, DEFILEMENTS, AND PROBLEMS