

# The Buddha's Meditation Practice

## Cultivating the home base of wellbeing

We begin by establishing and settling into our *home base*, an experience of wellbeing and ease. The home base is soft awareness of our body, feelings, and thoughts, where our mind and heart is able to settle and expand on its own. Remember a time when you felt comfortable and happy, for example when you were a child lying on the grass, or cradling your favorite pet, or some other memory of contentment. The feeling of kindness that arises is a warm feeling spreading out from within your chest. Relax into this feeling and breathe. Allow your awareness to expand and continue to soften and breathe. Now make a wish for your own wellbeing, e.g. “May I be kind and quiet” or “May I be happy.” *Feel* that wish. Attend less to verbalizing the wish and more to meaning and feeling it. Relax and be aware of how ease and kindness unfold, of your breathing and your body. You may notice that thoughts float around in the back of your mind. Breathe and welcome how your experience changes and flows, and relax into it. Stay with your home base—stay aware of softening and breathing and your feelings—for as long as you can.

## Let Distractions Be

In the beginning of this practice it may be difficult to settle into or stay with your home base because your mind and heart are very active and there are many distractions and hindrances. Such distractions and hindrances usually arise as an inner verbalized monologue but they may take other forms as well. They can completely occupy our awareness, or they cloud the experience of our home base. When you notice that you are no longer aware of your home base at all, then gently go through the following Six R Steps to let a distraction be by itself, and to settle into your home base again:

*Recognize.* When you recognize that you are no longer aware of your home base, you ...

*Release.* Withdraw your attention from the distraction and let the distraction be by itself, e.g. just stop verbalizing. Be aware of the tensions and tightnesses around and within the distraction or hindrance. Feel these tensions out and acquaint yourself with them—they may feel like a contraction or squeeze around or inside of your head. Now you gently ...

*Relax.* Relax these tensions and tightnesses in your body and mind. It often helps to breathe and relax your body for a while, inviting the tightnesses in your mind to soften. Breathe and relax, and allow your awareness to expand again. Now ...

*Re-Smile.* Now that you're less occupied with the distraction, your awareness becomes brighter and more alert. A feeling of comfort and joy begins to arise as your home base settles again. Welcome it and smile. Continue to breathe and relax while you allow tensions to soften. Now you ...

*Return.* By releasing, relaxing, and re-smiling you settle into your home base again. As you do that, you may make and feel your wish again. Allow your awareness to expand, and continue to breathe and relax. Like before, be aware of your home base for as long as you can. Eventually ...

*Repeat.* Whenever your awareness is *completely* occupied by a distraction or hindrance again, repeat the Six R Steps.

Go through the Six R Steps gently, and only when your awareness is fully occupied by a distraction or hindrance outside of your home base. Use the steps to let whatever distraction or hindrance be by itself and without trying to change it or to make it go away. Understand *how* distractions and hindrances cause your awareness to contract, and *how* this in turn causes you to lose touch with yourself and your immediate reality within and around you. Be aware and attentive of the Six R Steps, and go through them at your own pace. Enjoy your practice, and enjoy its results!

### **The Purpose of this Practice**

When we become more mindful then we become increasingly aware of ourselves and our surroundings, and we are able to connect more closely with our true personal nature. We see more clearly how things—within and around us—actually are.

We practice mindfulness by practicing the Six R Steps whenever we remember them (not only during sitting practice). We learn to understand *how* our mind and heart works, and we begin to see *how* we absorb and identify with thinking and other distractions and hindrances. Through this absorption we take whatever thoughts and feelings arise as something personal, and we lose touch with our home base—with ourselves and our immediate reality. We become opinionated of how things should be, rather than accepting of how things actually are. With this Six R practice we begin to experience *how* thoughts and feelings arise and change and fade as a process that is part of our own true nature. We become more aware of *how* we create our own flavors of discomfort by judging and trying to control this process and ourselves.

Our distractions and hindrances are important parts of this practice. They teach us about ourselves and where our attachments are, our personal biases, opinions, inclinations. Understanding how our mind and heart works allows us to cultivate a more aware, kind, and peaceful life. We learn to regard distractions and hindrances with more awareness and compassion and in a less personal and judgmental way.

Cultivating the gentle awareness of ourselves—our home base—moves us towards a more understanding, relaxed, and kind mind and heart. That is how we find contentment and happiness in our lives.