

## **JOURNALING: KEEPING A MEDITATION JOURNAL**

Mindfulness is about knowing where we are (being in the present moment) and also about maintaining an awareness of where we have been (reflection). A meditation journal can help us with these different areas of awareness.

We can use our meditation journal to think about what we want to gain from our practice. Setting an intention to develop a stronger sense of the direction we want to be heading – yet at the same time being open to what arises in each moment.

Keeping a meditation journal helps us to have a more definite sense of what is going on. When we sit down after meditation and take a few minutes to journal what we've been experiencing, we can acknowledge what has been going on. It's okay to write that you spent 20 or 30 minutes planning your day, or thinking about what you had for lunch yesterday – but there may also be a moment or two hidden in there when you were really present with the moment – your breath, your body. Writing about our experiences – what sensations and emotions you felt as well as your thoughts, and reflecting back can sometimes create the opportunity for insights to arise.

Journaling gives us an opportunity to reflect on our practice and our experience. It's an opportunity to write on things that arise for you personally... resistances... good/bad/neutral experiences... reactions to all of these and how they might present themselves. Thoughts about the practice and your learning, ideas of how you might apply what you are learning and anything else that comes to you.

A journal allows us to look at our experience as it has changed over a period of time. It's helpful too to re-read your own comments over a period of time – every week, every month, over a year - and reflect back on them. Seeing what you notice and taking a step back from your day-to-day experience.

It's an opportunity to learn about the patterns of our minds and our behaviours. Perhaps we'll discover that we are lazier than we thought, or perhaps we are trying too hard, perhaps we even fluctuate in our efforts. We may discover particular distractions that are more common than we recall. We may also discover that our meditation practice has been more effective and enjoyable than we remember.

Looking back through our journal we can identify areas we might want to work on. You might be able to identify the areas in your life that have a negative effect on your practice – lack of sleep, busy-ness at work or whatever. Then you can make a wise and informed choice about any action you may wish to take.

Some people like to do a double-entry journal ie. write only on the left hand page and leave the right hand blank (or vice versa) and then when you reflect back you have space to write further notes that come out of your reflections... The choice and style of your journal is totally up to you.

We encourage this process to be open, bringing the qualities of acceptance and curiosity into your reflections and letting go, as best you can, of judgments that may arise for you. It is a useful practice to see your journal as an extension of your practice by bringing similar ways of being to it – letting go of any need to make formulations, engage in analysis or draw conclusions from what arises for you. Simply notice what is there and make a note of it.

Your journals are completely confidential. No one but you will read them so be totally honest with yourself.

**“Journaling is a way of connecting the past, present and future so our lives seem a more integrated whole.”**

*See also* handout 'Strengthening Your Practice: Keeping a Daily Log'