

# **The Mind Illuminated**

## **A Complete Meditation Guide Integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Brain Science**

**By John Yates, Ph.D and Matthew Immergut, Ph.D. with Jeremy Graves**

### **Meditation: The Science and Art of Living**

- Meditation is a science, a systematic process of training the mind
- Shown to enhance concentration, lower blood pressure, improve sleep
- Used to treat chronic pain, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, OCD
- Helps develop insight into personality, behavior, relationships, making it easier to recognize and change past conditioning and counterproductive views
- Increases awareness and sensitivity to others
- Creates emotional stability, inner peace, deep satisfaction
- Higher goals: awakening, enlightenment, liberation, self-realization, which are cognitive events that dispel ignorance through direct experience and knowledge

### **A Modern Roadmap for Meditation**

- This book is a traveler's guide, providing maps of the territory and detailed directions of getting where you want to go. It provides skills and curriculum.
- This book combines experience, tradition, and science, and pulls from several different Buddhist traditions, Indo-Tibetan Mahayana, and traditional Theravada

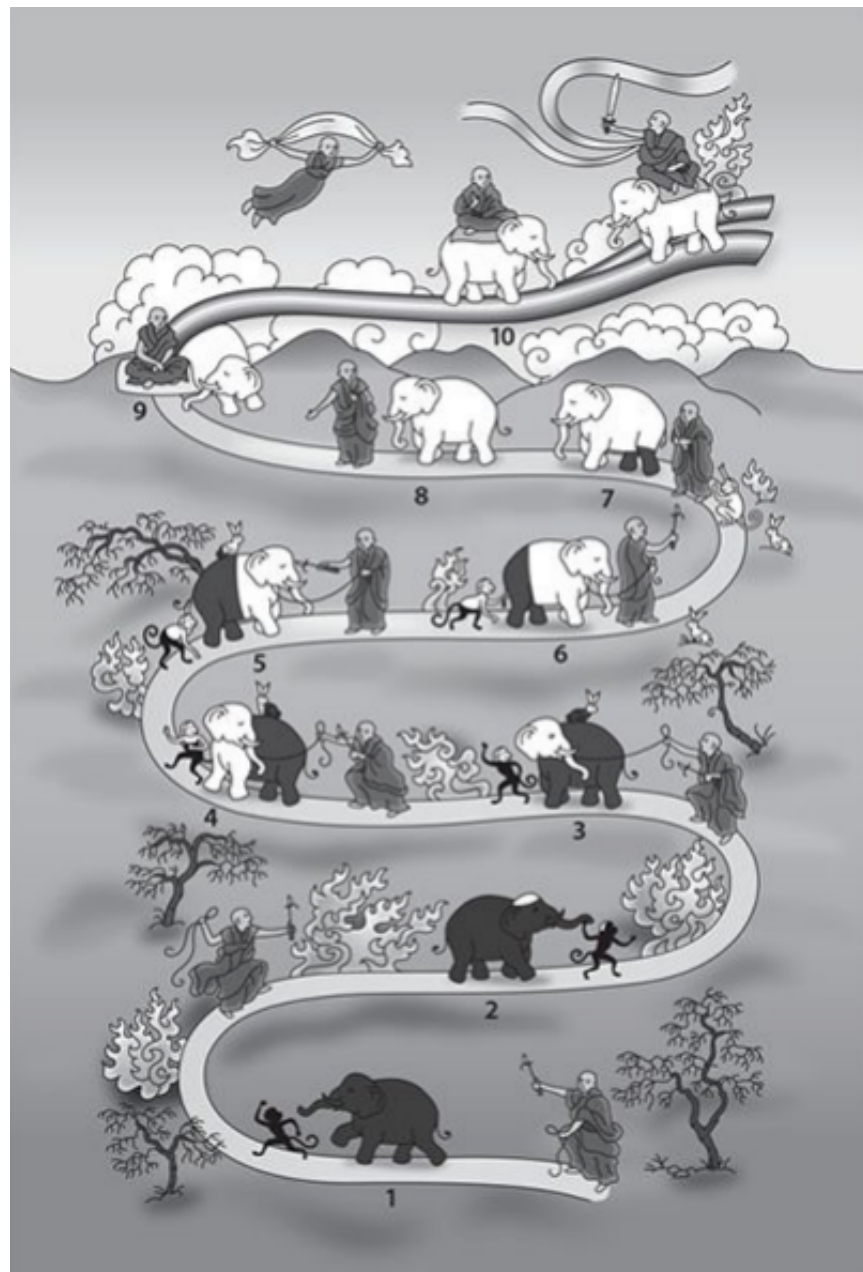
### **Putting This Practice Into Context**

- Traditional Tibetan practices emphasize visualization and analysis
- Zen strips meditation to bare bones
- Theravada emphasizes meditative absorption
- For the goal of awakening:
  - Samatha: tranquility or calm abiding
    - Effortlessly stable attention (samadhi)
    - Powerful mindfulness (sati)
    - Joy, tranquility, equanimity
  - Vipassana: insight
    - True nature of reality, understanding of ourselves and relationship with the world
    - Impermanence
    - Emptiness
    - Nature of suffering
    - Causal interdependence of all phenomena
    - Illusion of separate self i.e. "no-Self"lin
  - Samadhi: concentration or stable attention
  - Sati: mindfulness

### **How to Use This Book**

- Book structure: overview of Ten Stages and Four Milestone Achievements

- First Interlude lays groundwork for practice, introduces model of Conscious Experience
- Second Interlude introduces major hindrances and problems
- Third Interlude builds on ideas to explain how mindfulness works
- The Fourth and Fifth Interludes introduce more in-depth models of mind: Moments of Consciousness model and Mind-System model
- Sixth Interlude lays foundation for Stages Seven Through Ten
- Seventh Interlude provides further refinements to the models of mind
- The chapter to reread is 'An Overview of the Ten Stages'



## **An Overview of the Ten Stages and Four Milestones**

### **Stage 1: Establishing a Practice**

Goals: Develop a regular meditation practice

Obstacles: Resistance, procrastination, fatigue, impatience, boredom

Skills: Creating routine, specific goals, strong motivation, diligence

Mastery: Never missing a daily practice session

### **Stage 2: Interrupted Attention and Overcoming Mind-Wandering**

Goals: shorten periods of mind-wandering and extend sustaining attention

Obstacles: mind-wandering, monkey-mind, impatience

Skills: reinforcing introspective awareness

Mastery: sustain attention for minutes, wandering lasts seconds

### **Stage 3: Extended Attention and Overcoming Forgetting**

Goals: overcome forgetting and falling asleep

Obstacles: distractions, forgetting, mind-wandering, sleepiness

Skills: follow breath, connect, labeling, checking in; catch distractions

Mastery: Rarely forgetting the breath or falling asleep

## **Milestone 1: Continuous Attention to the Meditation Object**

### **Stage 4: Continuous Attention, Overcoming Distraction and Dullness**

Goal: overcome gross distraction and strong dullness

Obstacles: Distraction, discomfort, intellectual insight, emotional vision/memories

Skills: Continuous introspective awareness, purify mind of past trauma

Mastery: gross distractions no longer push breath into the background

### **Stage 5: Overcoming Subtle Dullness and Increasing Mindfulness**

Goal: overcome subtle dullness and increase power of mindfulness

Obstacles: difficult to recognize, stable attention is seductively pleasant

Skills: cultivate stronger introspective awareness, body scanning

Mastery: sustain and increase power of mindfulness with each session

### **Stage 6: Subduing Subtle Distraction**

Goal: subdue distractions and develop metacognitive introspective awareness

Obstacles: tendency for attention to alternate to distracting thoughts

Skills: Define scope of attention, selective awareness, experience body w/ breath

Mastery: no subtle distractions, unwavering exclusive attention, vivid mindfulness

## **Milestone 2: Sustained Exclusive Focus of Attention**

### **Stage 7: Exclusive Attention and Unifying the Mind**

Goal: Effortlessly sustained exclusive attention and powerful mindfulness

Obstacles: distractions, dullness, boredom, restlessness, doubt, twitches  
Methods: Diligence will bring effortlessness, insight and jhana practices  
Mastery: you can drop all effort, mind still maintains stability and clarity

### **Milestone 3: Effortless Stability of Attention**

#### **Stage 8: Mental Pliancy and Pacifying the Senses**

Mental pliancy, pacification of discriminating mind, unification mind

#### **Stage 9: Mental/Physical Pliancy, Calming the Intensity of Meditative Joy**

Goal: complete pacification of the senses and full arising of meditative joy

Obstacles: avoid distraction from extraordinary experiences

Method: effortless attention, introspective awareness, unification, pacification

Mastery: when eyes only perceive inner light, ears only perceive inner sound, body is suffused with pleasure and comfort, mental state is of intense joy, ease

#### **Stage 10: Tranquility and Equanimity**

Goal: maturation of meditative joy, tranquility and equanimity

Obstacles: intensity of meditative joy can perturb mind and become distraction

Method: Become familiar with meditative joy through practice

Mastery: consistently evoking mental and physical pliancy, tranquility, equanimity

### **Cultivating the Right Attitude and Setting Clear Intentions**

- There is no “self” in charge of the mind
- All you’re really “doing” in meditation is forming and holding specific conscious intentions—nothing more
- Stage 1: hold a clear and strong conscious intention
- Stage 2: gently but firmly redirect attention back to breath, engage with the breath as fully as possible
- Stage 3: set intention to invoke introspective attention
- Stage 4-6: set and hold the intention to be vigilant
- Stage 7: set intention to guard against dullness and distraction
- Stage 8-10: set intention to simply keep practicing

### **A Model of Conscious Experience**

- Attention and peripheral awareness
- Stable attention and mindfulness

### **Stable Attention**

- Direct and sustain focus of attention
- Control scope of attention
- Alternating attention
- Exclusive attention – single-pointedness

## **Mindfulness**

- Peripheral awareness
- Attention
- Metacognitive introspective awareness

## **Executive Functions, Mind-System Interactions, and Intentions**

- Key Point 1: The Conscious Mind and the Mind-System
  - Conscious mind can be regarded as a “space”
  - Higher-order cognitive tasks like regulating, organizing, inhibition, planning are referred to as executive functions
- Key Point 2: Executive Functions and the Mind-System
  - Every new skill and novel action results from interactions of the mind-system as a whole in the performance of executive functions
- Key Point 3: Contents of Consciousness and the Mind-System
  - The contents of the conscious mind are always and only mental constructs, fabrications that come from information processing by unconscious sub-minds
  - The narrating mind combines separate conscious events from many different sub-minds into a story, which it projects back into consciousness.
- Key Point 4: Sense of Self and the Mind-System
  - The basic enduring sense of “self” of a separate doer of deeds and experiencer of events, is nothing more than a useful but fictional construct of the narrating mind, reified by the discriminating mind.