

Exploring Meditation

Draft Syllabus

Purpose: To provide students with a basic understanding of the purpose of meditation and the basics of how to engage in meditation. This includes an introduction to the two types of meditation (placement and analytical) and, in particular, how to train in calm abiding through developing the nine mental states. Separate explanations are given to the development of (a) the concentrations of the form and formless realms and (b) the four close placements of mindfulness. This module encompasses the following topics:

How to Organize a Meditation Session - To review the need for meditation practice and the basics of engaging in a meditation session from posture through dedication. How to conduct oneself between sessions such that one creates the best conditions for sustained progress.

Basic Types and Components of Meditation - To gain a clear understanding and personal experience of the two main types of meditation, placement and analytical; the two main factors that need to be cultivated to sustain focused attention, mindfulness and introspection; and the two main faults to be eliminated in this context, laxity and excitement.

How to Train in Calm Abiding - To become familiar with the variety of objects of meditation and begin learning about the extensive presentation of how to achieve calm abiding. The main presentation on how to achieve calm abiding begins with a description of the preconditions, such as a suitable place and so forth. Then students should become familiar with the method for overcoming the five faults by means of the eight antidotes.

The Stages in which Mental States Are Developed - Following from the presentation of the five faults and their eight antidotes, this part should imbue students with an overall picture of how attention can be progressively refined and stabilized as described in the descriptions of the nine mental states. This picture is filled out by explaining how the six forces and four kinds of attention function in this progression. Finally, students need to gain clarity about the characteristics and marks of having achieved fully qualified calm abiding.

The Concentrations of the Form and Formless Realms - To fill out students' picture of the realms of samsara in general, and especially to provide more detail about the upper realms and how the meditative concentrations belonging to them are achieved on the basis of calm abiding through either a mundane or supramundane path.

The Four Close Placements of Mindfulness - To gain familiarity with the definition, divisions, and purpose of meditating on the four close placements of mindfulness belonging to the śrāvaka and bodhisattva vehicles; as well as to gain confidence in the practice of meditating on them.