

Juniper

| meditation tradition for modern life

AWAKENING
THE
MIND

An Introduction to Meditation

About Juniper

Juniper offers a contemporary and accessible meditation tradition that is both deeply rooted in the past and culturally relevant for modern life. Awakening the Mind is our blueprint for engaging these practices.

Web Site

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Contents

Awakening	1
A Language of Transformation	3
Lineage	5
Building Blocks	8
Inner Maturity	15
Starting Where We Are	17

Awakening

Because the quality of experience is determined by the mind, by training the mind we can change the quality of experience.

In a world that consumes us with outer pressures and responsibilities, how are we to cultivate peace of mind, compassion, humility, and the capacity to live fully and freely? The answer is to turn inward, to discover a wisdom that sees beyond the conventions of day-to-day life, and to realize the potential of our minds. In short, we can take an inner journey. We can transform the habits and inner stories that limit our experience, and cultivate a way of being that infuses our lives with serenity, inner freedom and joy, and unfolds our potential for insight, compassion and the capacity to fully express who we are. In this work we will introduce the elements of this journey—Meditation, Balance, Compassion and Insight—and describe how to go about engaging them.

The premise of meditation is that the quality of experience is determined by the mind, and by training the mind we can change the quality of experience. Whether we are rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old, our inner perspective, reactions, and patterns of behavior have an enormous effect on experience. Even more importantly, these inner attributes can be changed. The mind is seen not as a rigid and hardwired organ over which we have no control but a dynamic and flexible system with great potential for growth. This capacity of the mind is now being confirmed by modern psychologists and neuroscientists, who are discovering the effect of thoughts and attitude on experience, and the malleability of the mind even well into adult life.

One of the hallmarks of engaging a practice of meditation is the opportunity to create a link with a tradition that can inspire, guide and sustain one's practice. The methods described here are from a Buddhist meditation tradition dating back over two thousand years. From early India, where this

tradition originated, to the great Indian university of Nalanda, to the monastic orders of Tibet, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Yet we present this tradition in a secular form and style, free of the cultural and religious artifacts that often impede our ability to engage it.

Our exploration will take us from the caves of ancient yogis and yoginis to the hallways of modern universities. We will see how the path of a modern meditator encompasses traditional methods of inner development while embracing the latest findings of human knowledge and discovery. Along the way we will have the chance to deepen our understanding of our own minds and to expand our awareness of the nature of the self and reality. It is a journey that can be as rich and deep as we wish to make it.

As we will see, the inner journey is not a rigid and sequential process; rather, it is akin to learning a language. As we become familiar with its different elements, we gain increasing proficiency. In this work we will introduce the building blocks of this language—Meditation, Balance, Compassion, and Insight—and describe how to bring it to life. Collectively, these will engage us in a process of inner development that can touch us deeply and open us to a new way of seeing things. To realize this potential, we must do more than just read or learn about it. We have to open a space in our lives to do it. Even if we apply ourselves for just a short time each day, we can experience significant results.

A Language of Transformation

Meditation tends to yield its benefits gradually. We may not notice its effects right away, but one day we may look back and see that we have changed.

Meditation is a means to overcome limited and agitated states of mind and release the mind's potential for more expansive, positive modes of being and awareness. It offers us a shift in perspective. If, for example, our ordinary perspective is analogous to seeing the world through tinted glasses, then meditation enables us to take off those glasses so we can see more clearly. It gives us a different view of the world we encounter every day. This view can be contrasted with our ordinary, everyday experience, which often includes considerable stress and agitation. These sources of stress and agitation are an important target of meditation, so let us take a closer look at them.

Modern life is characterized by a level of information and responsibility that has the potential to make us feel overloaded. Modern education alone, for example, requires the assimilation of an ever-increasing body of knowledge, at a younger age, to produce technically capable and productive members of society. Add to this the pressures of work, relationships, and family responsibilities, and the barrage of media and communication made possible by new technologies, and the result is a veritable siege of information and responsibilities. Individually, these may not be intrinsically harmful, but the collective noise level can be very high, making it difficult to remain inwardly calm and content. Matters can become even more challenging when we confront hardships such as illness, financial difficulties, or other reversals.

More significant still to our well-being are our inner habits and patterns of behavior. Strong cravings and emotional patterns color almost everything we do, sometimes keeping our minds disturbed for long periods. Consider, for

example, the grip that anger, lust, envy, or fear can have on the mind, affecting our thoughts and experience for days, months, or even years. These inner states typically are present regardless of our outer endeavors and attainments, and they can be highly resistant to change. Wealth, fame, and other worldly successes often fail to provide the contentment we anticipated because they do little to change the inner patterns that govern how we think and act.

One of the challenges of contemporary life is knowing where to turn in order to grow beyond the inner habits and conflicts that create agitation and hold us back. Because these forces exert a strong pull, we have to create enough momentum to reverse them. For example, although outer changes may help—more money, more fun, more friends, more free time, more respect, better relationships—they may do little to evolve our lives inwardly. Engaging the practices of meditation, in contrast, is directed at exactly this task.

A helpful analogy is language. We do not master grammar, syntax, semantics, and other components of language sequentially. Rather, by working on each of them in tandem we slowly build up our capacity. Even if we can do only basic things such as asking simple questions, we still need some experience with the different building blocks of language. Meditation is similar. We gain momentum through building up experience with its various components. In the right combination, even a relatively small effort can have a significant effect.

Meditation tends to yield its benefits gradually. We may not notice its effects right away, but one day we will look back and see that we have changed. We may find that we have a new perspective on the world, or a clearer sense of direction. We may notice that it takes more to trigger stress, anger, or other emotions that agitate us, or that when such emotions are triggered they do not last as long or go as deep—they may even disappear entirely. We may find that we have more patience and sensitivity to others, and more energy, joy and peace of mind, or we may experience other kinds of changes as the mind becomes more serene and our inner potential unfolds.

Gaining momentum with meditation has two aspects. First is the connection with experienced teachers who are grounded in meditation tradition. Second is the engagement with the methods of practice. We will examine each of these, beginning with the idea of a teaching tradition, or lineage.

Lineage

The ultimate role of the meditation teacher is to help others actualize their fullest potential for inner well-being and to become a joyful, positive force in the world.

Modern psychology is confirming what meditation masters have long held: we can be quite poor at predicting what will make us happy. Outer endeavors, such as relationships, jobs, material gains, and recreation, are central to our lives, but they may do little to address our inner state, and we often burden them with expectations that they cannot fulfill. Moreover, it is typically our inner state that sets the mood and tone for how we experience outer endeavors.

The solution is not to abandon what we do outwardly but to complement our endeavors with a path that nourishes and transforms us inwardly. To make this type of inner change, however, it is important to aim for it, to turn our minds toward a source that will help us find it. This is the function of a meditation school, or lineage.

In contemporary life, access to meditation instruction is widely available. We can learn from books, Web sites, mobile apps, classes, and many other sources, without committing to any one in particular. However, traditionally the connection with a particular meditation teacher, school, or path, was as important as engaging its practices. This is, in part, because the energy and wisdom of those who have gained mastery of these practices is a potent catalyst for our own growth and transformation. It is also because the trust and effort that comes from this connection propels our growth. Otherwise, we might be dabbling rather than engaging, as if circling the base of a mountain rather than climbing it. Moreover, if we look at those individuals who have gained mastery of these inner disciplines, it would be rare to find a case where they did not learn with a credible school or teacher.

Juniper draws its practices from a long standing Buddhist meditation lineage in which Juniper's founders have deeply immersed themselves. We are drawn to this tradition not just because it offers a rich path for enhancing our minds and experience, but also because its insight philosophy insists on the application of reason and critical inquiry to question and validate ideas. Thus, built into the fabric of this tradition is the license to put its tenets to the test of modern knowledge. Indeed, one might say that engaging this process of inquiry and validation is truer to the original intent of this path than holding onto outdated modes of thought and old dogmas.

The founding of this tradition occurred in early India where a man, an Indian prince who came to be known as the Buddha, realized there was more to life than wealth and privilege and went on a quest to discover what that was. He took the archetypal spiritual journey, opening himself to go beyond the familiarity of his present world, engaging a path of inner exploration, and returning to the world with a transformed perspective and insights that he then taught to others.

Through this journey the Buddha saw that the primary cause of human suffering is a lack of clarity within the mind and that, if we are to realize the potential of human experience, we must learn to discipline and enhance the mind. This requires embarking on a path of reflection, mental discipline and meditation through which we elevate the clarity of our minds and embrace our inner and outer worlds as a coherent whole. The Buddha did not ask his followers to take what he said on faith alone, but implored them to validate for themselves what he taught. It is as if he anticipated a changing world in which any particular body of thought would quickly become stagnant if it were not continually tested and revalidated.

Over the centuries a number of individuals made huge contributions toward revitalizing the tradition with the spirit of inquiry with which it was formed. These included masters such as Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Shantideva and Atisha in India, Je Tsongkhapa in Tibet, and many others whose work influenced the form of these practices in their own cultures and times.

The lineage of thought and practice inspired by these individuals has been passed to Juniper's founding teacher, Brazilian-born Segyu Choepel Rinpoche. Segyu Rinpoche was recognized as a master and holder of the Segyu tradition, a school founded by one of Tibetan Buddhism's most renowned

masters, Je Tsongkhapa. For over twenty-five years Segyu Rinpoche trained with some of Tibetan Buddhism's finest contemporary teachers including his primary teacher, Kensur Kyabje Lati Rinpoche (1922–2010). Now Juniper is rekindling the flame of these practices in modern life, offering them in a form that is tuned to contemporary sensibility.

At its heart, a meditation tradition is about transformation. The ultimate role of the teacher is to help each person actualize his or her fullest potential for inner well-being and to become a joyful, positive force in the world. The function of a meditation school is to teach, maintain, and propagate the methods and philosophy that accomplishes this. The more we open ourselves to this connection, the more we propitiate our inner growth. In this way, our participation in the world will gradually become driven less by patterns of craving, aggression, and self-expansion and more by a deep wellspring of contentment, wisdom, and compassion. Then, we in turn become another link in the chain, able to help others enhance their lives with similar insight and potency.

Next we turn to the building blocks of these practices.

Building Blocks

The result of applying these methods is apparent in the state of mind of those who are accomplished in them. These individuals come from all walks of life and have different styles and personalities. What they have in common is a state of mind that is content and serene; a discerning wisdom; a radiant, spontaneous energy; and a capacity to inspire and enhance the well-being of others.

Our practices of meditation can be divided into four building blocks, each of which addresses a different aspect of one's inner life. The four are Meditation, Balance, Compassion and Insight.

Meditation encompasses a rich collection of practices for calming the mind and cultivating focus, stability, and awareness. Balance means gaining control over those emotional extremes and swings that cause us hardship. Compassion calls for deepening our sensitivity toward and concern for others and giving expression to this awareness with increasing discernment and skill. Finally, insight describes the process of deconstructing and going beyond limiting perspectives, inner stories and conventions.

The result of cultivating these qualities is apparent in the state of mind of those who are accomplished in them. These individuals come from all walks of life and have different styles and personalities. What they have in common is a state of mind that is content and calm; a discerning wisdom; a radiant, spontaneous energy; and a capacity to inspire and enhance the well-being of others. Their path to gaining these qualities is no different from the one described here. It may have a different wrapper, depending on the culture and

time, but invariably it encompasses the same building blocks, in one form or another.

Meditation

We can think of meditation as exercise for the mind. Just as physical exercise strengthens the body, meditation strengthens the mind. Similarly, just as reading about the benefits of physical exercise will not make us physically fit, intellectual knowledge about meditation will not make us inwardly fit. Meditating, and putting what we gain in meditation to work, is the springboard for turning intellectual ideas into realization.

We define meditation as the act of concentrating on an object that enhances the mind. “Concentrating” describes the act of focusing the mind and bringing inner distraction and agitation under control. “On an object” means that meditation is not about turning our minds off or going blank but is about anchoring the mind on a particular object and striving to keep it there. “Enhances the mind” means that in meditation we do not focus on just any object but use objects that enhance our strength of mind and bring about inner growth. These objects include the breath, visualized images, or insights gained from reflecting upon specific topics or ideas.

It is important to follow meditation instructions that are clear and precise, but we do not have to be too rigid. We can develop a way of practicing that suits our own lifestyle and schedule. The length, frequency, and objects of meditation, for example, might vary from one person to another and will evolve as we gain experience.

We practice two principle types of meditation: concentration meditation and analytical meditation. In concentration meditation, we hold the mind on an object, such as the breath or a visualized image, in order to strengthen our focus and to cultivate peacefulness by overcoming inner agitation and lethargy. This makes the mind more stable and serene, and is an antidote to the mind’s agitation. By creating the habit of concentration meditation, the mind will gradually calm down and we will gain increasing levels of mental stability and strength.

In analytical meditation, we contemplate specific topics that will enhance our awareness and help us grow. These include the topics covered

here, such as balancing emotions, compassion, and insight, each broken down into elements suitable for meditation. By bringing the mind to reflect and reason on these topics, we gain the capacity to evaluate and refute the inner stories and patterns of behavior that cause us hardship, and to nurture and strengthen our positive qualities and potential.

There is a third class of meditation we call “integrative practices” that empower our inner growth through meditating on images and symbols that represent the potential of the mind. These symbols are frequently depicted as geometric designs called mandalas and idealized forms of the mind’s potential contained within these mandalas. These integrative practices are a means to tap into this potential and realize it within our own minds. This type of meditation is best learned after establishing a foundation in concentration and analytical meditation.

Often, when we first try meditation of any kind, we encounter the mind’s jumpiness head-on. After just a few seconds the mind wanders. We bring it back and it wanders again. Over and over it drifts, often jumping from one thought to another. Or we may find ourselves feeling drowsy or falling asleep, unable to concentrate on anything at all. Oscillating between excitement and lethargy, the mind can be like a little dog that is either barking excitedly or sleeping. As we work on meditation, however, we develop more capacity to bring these inner swings under control and to make the mind more stable and serene. Eventually, we find that this healthier state of mind is not something we experience only during meditation; it will begin to influence our lives in general, bringing to what we do a more patient, calm, and serene inner state.

Meditation is a learned skill, something in which we build competence over time. Proficiency is acquired through repeated effort. The best way to develop the mind is through gradual change and refinement. It is like dripping water that slowly smooths and polishes jagged rock. Meditation is the water, gradually refining and polishing the mind. Regular practice is more important than the length of the practice, so it is better to have a meditation session for even a few minutes a day than to have longer sessions less frequently.

The attitude we bring to meditation is also important. It is helpful not to treat our meditation as just another goal to achieve. It is not about performance, measuring, or comparing ourselves with others. Rather, meditation should be a

no-pressure zone in our lives, an undertaking that we approach without expectation, pressure, or judgment.

How do we know if our meditation is working? Meditation is about transforming ourselves inwardly. The measure of successful meditation is not what happens while we are meditating, nor even how adept at meditating we become, but whether we are growing inwardly and positively transforming how we live in, react to, and engage the world.

Balance

The next building block is Balance. This refers to balancing our emotional swings and extremes. By nature, humans are emotional beings. Emotions are the filter through which we experience life. But they are prone to strong swings and extremes. Strong cravings and emotional patterns color almost everything we do, sometimes keeping our minds disturbed for long periods and often upsetting our personal and professional lives. Although our emotions are normal aspects of experience, they can become like mental prisons. A single word, or even a look, from another person can trigger a range of emotions that consumes us for hours, weeks, or longer. These inner states typically are present regardless of our outer endeavors and attainments, and they can be highly resistant to change. Wealth, fame, and other worldly successes, for example, often fail to provide the contentment we anticipated because they do little to change the emotions and patterns of behavior that govern how we feel.

Emotions and inner patterns of behavior arise like waves of energy within us. They take the form of feelings and reactions that play out over and over again. These patterns are highly habitual: a trigger comes and the pattern arises. Sometimes, we do not even need the trigger; the pattern is just there. This emotional energy incites us to action, driving our mood, experience, and interactions with others. It can make us do things we do not want to do, leaving us to rationalize our behavior or to regret our actions. When our emotional energy rises, it is difficult to dissipate it at will. It needs to run its course. Consider, for example, how anger, envy, resentment, lust, and other emotions can dominate our mood and attention. Through meditation we learn how to bring these waves of emotional energy into balance.

The goal of balancing emotions is to move away from excessive emotional swings and extremes to create a deep feeling of inner harmony and

well-being. It is important, however, to distinguish between balancing our emotions and suppressing them. The goal is not to eradicate or suppress our emotions. Suppressing emotions—burying them and pretending they are not there—just moves our emotional energy to another place, where it will likely emerge in another form.

Meditational methods for balancing emotions encompass the two types of meditation described here: concentration meditation and analytical meditation. Concentration meditation is the foundation, bringing inner stability and strength. Through analytical meditation we take the mind through a series of meditative exercises that bring awareness to those emotions causing us undue hardship, and that guide us toward making and stabilizing positive inner changes. Often, simply the awareness of our emotional patterns can make a difference. We begin to see the impact on our lives, and the lives of those around us, of our moods and emotions. As this awareness grows, positive changes will follow.

By gently robbing negative emotional patterns of their power, we bring balance to our inner lives, and our minds will become increasingly habituated to remaining calm, harmonious, and stable.

Compassion

Our inner growth is not about escaping from the world but transforming our perspective and becoming more effective participants in the world. The benefits of a compassionate way of being, long heralded as central to our human potential and maturity, are now extensively documented by psychologists and neuroscientists. From ancient times until now, cultivating one's capacity to benefit others is seen as central to developing one's inner potential.

When it comes to defining compassion, instead of one specific quality, it is best understood as a matrix of qualities that include motivation, action and skillful means. Motivation refers to genuine empathy and concern from which arises the desire to help others and better the world; action describes our capacity to put that empathy and concern to work; and skillful means refers to one's capacity to act with discernment and skill.

Compassion is also an antidote to the harmful aspects of excessive self-absorption. Too much self-absorption can become a source of fear, anger, envy and other agitating emotions. These narrow our world, and rob us of joy and

harmony. Enhancing our capacity for compassion loosens these tendencies, bringing greater meaning, perspective, and positive energy to our lives, and the lives of those around us. For example, highly self-absorbed individuals tend to be takers rather than givers, bending the world to their needs and point of view. In contrast, a person whose heart is big and who is genuinely sensitive, generous, and kind to others emits a different type of energy. One feels at ease around them and is nourished by their openness and concern.

Another element of cultivating compassion is self-compassion. In a culture that puts a high value on performance and acquisition, it is easy to fall into the habit of being overly self-critical and hard on oneself. Practicing self-compassion is a means to counter this tendency and feel better about ourselves.

Cultivating compassion involves specific meditations directed at gaining more empathy and sensitivity towards others, and the means to put that awareness to work with increasing levels of discernment and skill. Everywhere we go, from school, to work, to the line at the grocery store, is an opportunity to apply it, even through a gesture as simple as a smile or a hello.

Insight

The final building block, insight, is about deconstructing false ideas and stories that limit our experience. We see the world through a filter of judgments and inner stories that often distort our view. Developing insight enables us to see the nature of that distortion, and to move beyond it.

One of the seminal insights of early Buddhist masters is that the reality in our heads is not the same as reality itself, that this dissonance is the cause of much hardship, and that we can change it. We can expand our inner view and create a new vision of life. It is not unlike the way a telescope lens influences our information about the stars. When we upgrade the lens, we upgrade the information. Similarly, the mind is like a lens, constructing an image of reality. Thus, when we upgrade the mind, we upgrade our experience of reality. This is the function of developing insight.

At the heart of the insight practices is the idea that the mind's ordinary mode of perceiving reality is limited. The mind uses concepts and images to paint a picture of reality, which enables us to function, but this does not mean

the mind is painting an accurate picture. For example, the world appears flat when we look at the horizon, and for thousands of years humans believed the world was flat. Now, of course, we understand that this is an illusion.

It is easy to see the limitations of perception in the example of the world appearing flat, but the idea applies to many dimensions of perception, from how we see ordinary objects to our view of the self, our values, and many other phenomena. We see things as permanent and autonomous, as if they have their own essence or fundamental nature, when they are more accurately described as interdependent and in a constant state of change. We give concepts and perceptions more concreteness than they tend to possess. The same holds true for the stories, customs, and conventions that define our worldview. Through developing insight we learn how the perceptions, customs and habits by which we live are merely conventions to which we have become habituated, often crystallized into rigid dogmas that do not have the substance or reality that we think.

Thus, developing insight is a process of deconstructing ideas, perceptions and beliefs and seeing the extent to which they are merely conventional or provisional rather than fixed truths. This opens the mind to a more expansive perspective and frees us from inner limits. Basing our actions on a foundation of insight enables us to experience greater inner freedom, ease and flow. Meditating on and integrating these ideas into our lives is a way to infuse our experience with these attributes.

The insight ideas also accord with modern discovery. Objective theories about a fixed, autonomous reality are rapidly giving way to a picture of a reality that is changing and interdependent. This is precisely the view of the insight practices, and it is through these practices that we bring the mind into alignment with it.

We have now identified the building blocks of engaging the practices of meditation—Meditation, Balance, Compassion, and Insight. As we gain experience with them, we will see that they work together, mutually enhancing one another and creating the means for a profound change in our experience. Next, we will look at the effect on our lives as we mature inwardly.

Inner Maturity

Our inner maturity is like learning how to fly. Calming the mind and balancing our emotions enhance our inner stability and strength, creating a strong inner core and enhancing our well-being. Then we add the wings—compassion on one side, insight on the other.

Engaging a practice of meditation is a means to override the limiting patterns and habits that we accumulate unconsciously and to refine our way of being. As we overcome the drag caused by agitating inner patterns, we become more inwardly free and able to shine, both within ourselves and to the world around us. Thus, meditation is a means to mature ourselves inwardly and to evoke and radiate a stream of positive energy and strength.

The practices we have described here—Meditation, Balance, Compassion, and Insight—each work on enhancing our inner energy and strength. Gaining experience with them prepares us for a collection of meditations that we described earlier called “integrative practices.” These are special meditations that further energize the body and mind through meditating upon images and symbols that represent the potential of the mind.

When our energy is strong and flowing well, we experience a surge in vitality that infuses our lives and is palpable to others. When it is weak, blocked, or labored, our vitality is correspondingly impeded. Inner growth is about enhancing our energy and giving it a strong, balanced and harmonious flow. Connecting with a meditation tradition and engaging a path of inner development is a means to do this. In contrast, moving in the opposite direction—by sinking into rigidity, excess emotion, self-absorption, and lack of focus—will block the flow of our energy, with corresponding effects on our joy and

vitality. The purpose of a meditation tradition is to help us precipitate the emergence of this inner energy and well-being.

Our inner maturity is like learning how to fly. Calming the mind and balancing our emotions enhance our inner stability and strength, creating a strong inner core. Then we add the wings—compassion on one side, insight on the other. As we grow inwardly, we learn to stretch each wing—on the one side, experiencing the insight that sees beyond limited views and brings clarity, insight, and awareness, and on the other side, engaging the world with joy, charisma, and compassion. When both wings are working in unison, we experience a surge of freedom and joy, and can serve as a strong, positive force that continues to flourish in a constantly changing world.

Starting Where We Are

Meditation is about enhancing the potential of the mind—your mind—whatever your starting place may be.

The fundamental idea of meditation is that by training the mind in the correct way we can create the inner momentum to transform our experience and gain new levels of insight and awareness. We can break the inner patterns that create hardship and stress; engage life with spontaneity, serenity, and insight; and release our potential to become a positive, compassionate force in the world. The more we progress, the more these qualities manifest.

The optimal approach to meditation is to have an open mind and a willingness to make some effort. Intellectual understanding alone is not enough; we need to make an effort to meditate and to assimilate its different elements. Given an open mind and a consistent effort, however, the encounter with meditation can be a profound undertaking, tapping into a transformational lineage that dates back more than two thousand years. Using the insight and inspiration that we gain, we can launch ourselves into a lifelong practice of inner growth and nourishment that will enhance the quality of whatever we do.

One may ask, “How far can I really go with this? My mind is so distracted I can’t meditate for ten seconds. I don’t understand this talk about emotions and inner stories, and I have too many of my own problems to do much for others!” However, a path of meditation is about enhancing the potential of the mind—your mind—whatever your starting place may be. Each of us has inner blocks, patterns, and rigidity that trip us up. This is about undoing these impediments and expanding our freedom and awareness. Therefore, engaging a practice of meditation is a journey that begins wherever you are right now. The goal is to make that engagement—however far we can or choose to take it—a wellspring of inner nourishment and support. We may be

surprised at the potency of even small gains, and our capacity may be far greater than we can imagine.