

Shamata Meditation

Allowing the Mind to Rest Naturally



by Michael Erlewine

Shamata Meditation

Allowing the Mind to Rest Naturally

by
Michael Erlewine

An e-book from
Startypes.com
315 Marion Avenue
Big Rapids, Michigan 49307

First published 2012

© Michael Erlewine 2012

ISBN 978-0-9794970-3-2

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover and Graphics by Michael Erlewine

Cover photo courtesy of NASA

Michael@Erlewine.net

**This book is dedicated
to
Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche**

*May any merit this book may
accrue, however small, be
dedicated to all the Buddhas and
Bodhisattvas that they may
benefit all sentient beings and
help to bring all to the realization
of the true nature of the mind.*

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 5 |
| Shamata Meditation..... | 6 |
| The Word “Meditation” | 6 |
| An Authentic Transmission | 7 |
| The Gyalwa Karmapa..... | 8 |
| Meditation “Practice” is Practice | 8 |
| The Shamata Technique | 11 |
| Sitting Posture | 12 |
| The Seven Point Posture of Vairochana..... | 13 |
| Many Short Sessions..... | 14 |
| Don’t Stain the Practice | 14 |
| Taking the Temperature of the Mind..... | 15 |
| Rest and Relax, like a Bundle of Straw | 15 |
| Allowing the Mind to Rest | 16 |
| The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel | 17 |
| Aspiration and Dedication..... | 17 |
| Doing Your Homework | 18 |
| The Two Accumulations | 19 |
| Mixing Meditation with What You Know..... | 21 |
| Piggybacking on Skills..... | 22 |
| Rejiggering the Past | 23 |
| Summary | 24 |

Shamata Meditation

Shamata meditation was one of two main forms of meditation originally identified by Shakyamuni Buddha some 2500 years ago. The other was Vipassana or insight meditation. Although the two are sometimes taught together, it is most common to learn Shamata first, and Vipassana second. Shamata then is the fundamental basis for most other forms of meditation.

An analogy I often use is that of trying to thread a needle with shaky hands. It is very difficult. Shamata meditation removes the shakiness from the hands, so that more advanced forms of meditation (like Vipassana) can be learned. It is the place to start and is the basis on which further meditation practices are based.

There are not only hundreds of types of meditation, there are scores of approaches to teaching what is being presented here, basic traditional Shamata meditation. I make no claims to be definitive and I encourage you to read other accounts. Much of what I write here has to do with misunderstandings I had while learning, suggestions that would have saved me years of time. I wish I could have read some of these suggestions myself when I was coming up.

The Word “Meditation”

I learned to read enough Tibetan to know that there are dozens of words for meditation. Here in the U.S. we have just the one word “meditation” to cover hundreds of techniques that claim to be meditation, everything from lava lamps and lighting incense to all manner of guided meditations, relaxation therapies, and so on. How does one sort through all of these for

something authentic that has been around for more than fifty years?

There is nothing wrong with relaxing and just cooling out and you can call it meditation if you wish. However, it is helpful to distinguish traditional (tried and true) meditation techniques that have been around for thousands of years from those that are just a current fad.

An Authentic Transmission

As mentioned, the particular meditation presented here has been around for at least 2500 years and was taught by the Buddha himself. My particular lineage originated in India, came into Tibet from Marpa the Translator (and others), was taught to the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa, who transmitted it to Gampopa, and he transmitted it to the first Karmapa (Dusem Kyenpa) and on down the line of Karmapas to the present day and the 17th Karmapa. I learned it personally from the Ven. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1974 and have studied it extensively over the years. Margaret and I have run the Heart Center KTC and have taught meditation since the mid-1980s. My point?

Shamata is an authentic form of meditation passed down from mouth-to-ear for centuries. I have been given permission to teach it by the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. This form of meditation is taught by both the Zen and Tibetan Buddhists, not to mention many Hindu groups, as well as in Japan, Korea, and all over Asia.

It is called Shamata in Sanskrit, which means “abiding in calm,” and it involves simply learning to allow the mind to rest naturally. And, as mentioned, this form of

meditation is the basis for further more advanced forms of meditation.

The Gyalwa Karmapa

Everyone knows of the Dalai Lama. He is the spiritual head of one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelugpa Lineage. The current Dalai Lama is the 14th rebirth of this same teacher. I belong to another lineage of Tibetan Buddhism known as the Karma Kagyu. The head of this lineage is the Gyalwa Karmapa, and he is the 17th rebirth for that teacher. In other words, the line of Karmapa predates the line of Dalai Lamas by three generations and the Karmapas are the oldest (the first ever) reborn Tibetan masters.

I say this only to point out the authenticity and history of this particular lineage. I was fortunate to meet both the 16th Karmapa (in 1974), and travelled to Tibet with my family to meet the current 17th Karmapa in 1997. I also have been with the 17th Karmapa and served as a photographer during his first two visits to America, in 2008 and 2011. While Shamata meditation is taught by all four of the Tibetan lineages, this particular method of meditation comes from the line of the Karmapas and the line of the Indian Mahasiddhas before that, and originally from the Buddha himself.

Meditation “Practice” is Practice

If you ask most Buddhist practitioners what they do as regards meditation, they will say they are doing their practice. The accent should be on the word “practice” because in the beginning we are practicing meditation, not meditating. Meditation comes later.

It took me years to understand this. I don't know what I was thinking, but I guess I thought I was meditating, when in fact I had never really learned how. I was practicing meditation, but hadn't understood that was what I was doing, practicing.

Basic meditation requires that we develop some mental muscle-memory, the habit of the technique itself, something up to now we have never had. This takes time and, to use that word again, practice. This often is not understood by those setting out to meditate. We don't just instantly meditate.

The technique of meditation that we are learning here is like the scaffolding used to build a house. When the house is done, we take down the scaffolding. In this analogy, meditation is the house or goal, and the techniques of meditation, learning mindfulness as a habit, is the scaffolding. Here is an analogy.

If we want to learn to play a musical instrument such as a guitar, we have to learn to tune the guitar, the various ways to play chords, and of course musical scales. This is not the same as playing music. We must practice scales and tuning, etc. before we can play music. This is what I mean by practice. When we have practiced enough, then we can play music.

Meditation is like this, but with one big difference. When you learn to play the guitar, you know beforehand what the end result, music, sounds like. You can go and listen to music. With meditation, this is not true.

Meditation requires the same kind of practice, building muscle memory (albeit mentally) as learning the guitar, but with meditation we have no idea and no experience of what the end result we are working toward is like. We can't play the music of awareness

whenever we want. In fact, we may have little to no experience with enlightenment, awareness, and so forth personally. We are going only on what we have read and heard. And this is a big difference.

In fact, the expectations and assumptions we make about what the result of meditating is supposed to be often becomes the biggest obstacle to true meditation. We think we know what it is supposed to be like when, by definition, we do not. We compare our actual experience in practicing meditation to the idea we have built up about it, and usually come up short. That disappointment impinges on our practice.

I feel it is important for beginning meditators to admit to themselves that they have no idea what enlightenment, realization, or even much-greater awareness is like, because they don't know. That's why we are learning to meditate, but unlike music, we can't just put on a CD and hear the music of awareness. We have to have trust as in the movie "Field of Dreams," if we practice, awareness will come. And it will, but not if our expectations overpower it and cause us to throw in the towel.

In summary, meditation practice is just that, "practice", and not the goal of practice, which is meditation and the awareness it brings. Our meditation practice is like the training wheels on a kid's bike. Once we learn to actually meditate, we take the training wheels off and just meditate. But until that time, keep in mind that practicing takes effort and effort is not part of natural meditation, but only a way to build the muscle-memory mental habit we need to meditate. So don't confuse the efforts to meditate with meditation. We are practicing meditation, you know: "sounds like this."

The Shamata Technique

Shamata meditation is very simple. It involves concentrating on an object and allowing the mind to rest on the object for as long as we wish. The object can be anything, a twig, a pebble or stone, a spot on the wall, or nothing at all. There even is such a thing as formless meditation. The most common object used for training in meditation is the breath. We sit and concentrate on the breath coming in and out of our lungs.

But any object can do. There are no rules I have ever seen about which objects must be used or any that should not be used. It is sometimes said that using a small statue or image of the Buddha brings extra credit, but in a pinch anything will do. Anyway, it is not about the object, but the process of mediation. We don't examine the object with our mind, but just allow the mind to rest on the object. The focal support is just a reminder to be undistracted, a method of placing the mind. We are not meditating upon the focal support itself.

And the process is simple. Let the mind rest on the object (twig, pebble, etc.) and hold that focus. They say to hold that focus like you would hold a raw egg, too loose and it will fall and break, too hard and you will crush it. Try it and you will soon see that is not easy, but that is what we are here to learn.

When the mind wanders, and it will for most of us, and we wake up from a thought or a daydream and realize that we stopped resting on the object, just be aware of that fact and very, very gently bring the mind back to rest on the object, and continue. There is no use spending even one nanosecond on beating

yourself up or feeling bad that your mind wandered. This would be like adding insult to injury.

Once you realize that your mind has wandered, leave it go at that and just continue. In fact Shamata meditation is an endless series of beginnings, always bring the mind back to the present moment. You can't tell or force the mind to stay on the object. It does not work like that. If you make an effort or try to rest the mind, it will go every which way but loose.

It may even seem that we have to use reverse-psychology to get the mind to do what we want. This is how we learn how the mind works and we should take note. This is learning to meditate. Eventually the mind will naturally rest wherever you want it to, and the keyword is "rest." Shamata meditation is all about allowing the mind to come to rest naturally. And it is a two-way street. As hard as it is to get the mind to rest on an object, once you learn how, it is just as hard to dislodge it.

Sitting Posture

As for what posture to use in meditation, by all means read below about the traditional seven-point posture that has been used for centuries. If you can comfortably do it, by all means use that. But if you cannot, just about any posture will do, sitting on a chair, lying down, and what-have-you.

The point is to sit comfortably, so your posture is not distracting you. It is that simple. I should point out that if you can sit straight and all of that, there are real benefits from doing so. Make an effort to learn the seven-point posture and relax from there.

The Seven Point Posture of Vairochana

Position 1: Sit in vajra (full-lotus) position, if you can. If you cannot, sit loosely cross-legged in what is called sattva position.

Position 2: Touch the tip of the thumb of each hand on the first or second joint of the ring finger, and close the fingers into a relaxed fist. Place the two fists palm-downward on the knees, trying to keep the arms straight. An alternative position is to place your hands in the position of meditative equipoise, with left hand (palm upward) on your lap. Then place your right hand (palm upward on top of your left hand) four finger-widths below the navel, until the tips of the two thumbs barely touch. Use whichever of these two positions is most natural to you.

Position 3: Without breathing, tighten the sphincter muscles, draw the abdomen up, and then very gently relax those muscles back to their normal position.

Position 4: Straighten your spine so that it resembles an arrow, including your lower back, so that it does not lean forward, backward, or to either side.

Position 5: Focus your eyes onto the nose and extend your gaze four finger-widths from the tip of your nose. Let the gaze rest there, eyes open, and not letting your eyes wander. Do not close the eyes.

Position 6: Rest your tongue flat and somewhat tightly against your upper palate, neither on the teeth nor at the roof, but gently in the middle. Close your lips, leaving a slight space between your teeth.

Position 7: Bend your neck, pressing down on your Adam's apple with your chin, so that it resembles an iron hook. Pull your chin in slightly so there is a very light pressure on your voice box.

Many Short Sessions

Back in the early 1970s it was popular to ask students, even beginners, to sit for a very long time. And Zen Buddhist often recommend the benefits of extended periods of sitting practice, like all day. However, this is not what is being taught here. Of course, if you love to sit for hours at a time, that is wonderful. But often beginners have a lot of trouble doing this.

Don't Stain the Practice

In this tradition, even the great Mahasiddhas recommend many short sessions, rather than pushing yourself to longer sessions, and the reason is simple. We must be careful not to stain our meditation process by forcing ourselves to do more than we feel like. Of course, if we are just being lazy, we should push-back a little bit and persevere in our intention to do, at least, something.

However, if instead of developing a habit of joyful (or at least neutral) sitting practice, we force ourselves to do it against our will and gradually develop antagonism against the practice, a push-me, pull-you kind of attitude, this is not good. In fact, it is quite easy to stain your practice through not wanting to do it, and the delinquency that quite naturally arises, until every time we think of practicing, a good feeling does not come to mind. We poison our own mindstream.

It is very common to stain our practice until we no longer really want to do it, and don't. This is a serious obstacle to meditation.

Taking the Temperature of the Mind

There is a bonus for those of us who meditate (even if it is a very short session) at the same time every day. A meditation session offers us a chance to quickly take our mental temperature. I was surprised at how often I do not even know how wild my mind is, how upset and crazy I am feeling. But even a minute or so of trying to meditate shows me immediately how fast my mind is moving, how distracted I am, and how far away I am from being able to let the mind rest. On other days it is clear that my mind is moving gently and it is easier to practice meditation.

This can be a big help, especially if you are about to head into a meeting or off to some event where you are required to be there 100%. I find it better to reschedule the meeting than to try to do anything that requires patience or understanding when I have neither. This is just my experience.

Rest and Relax, like a Bundle of Straw

It took me many years to understand the when the meditation instructions said to let the mind rest, they meant the same kind of “rest” you and I mean when we use the term R&R, like actually rest and take it easy. In fact, the tradition has a wonderful analogy as to how you are supposed to sit and relax.

The body should rest loose like a bundle of straw, whose cord has been cut. It is a perfect analogy. If you have ever seen one of those old-style bundles of straw with a single cord at the center holding the bundle together. If you gently stick a knife blade under the cord and sever it, the straw doesn't just fly all over the place, but instead it almost imperceptible just slumps or relaxes completely. I have seen this myself,

and we need to let our poor bodies just let go and relax, after making them as straight up as we can. That is the appropriate way to position the body for practicing meditation. So, sit up straight, and then relax as you can.

Allowing the Mind to Rest

And it is not just our bodies, but our minds that ultimately must rest. And we don't "rest" our mind, like forcing our mind to rest willfully. It doesn't work that way. Instead, we allow our mind to rest naturally, like it does when we are not paying attention to it. We already know how to let our mind rest, but just not consciously. Consciously allowing our mind to rest naturally is something we learn to do in meditation.

In fact, beginning meditation practitioners soon learn that trying to get the mind to do anything at all usually backfires. It is like those like magnet dogs I had as a child that had opposing fields. Trying to push them together just made them fly apart.

A great analogy that the Tibetan teachers use is that of a bird in a cage. If you lock a wild bird in a cage in a room, all it thinks about is how to get out and escape. But if you take the same bird and leave the cage door open, as often as not at night it will voluntarily return to the cage, just because it is safe. The mind is like this.

You and I can't force it to do anything, no matter how willful we get, but if we relax and allow it to be itself, it will naturally just rest. Trying to force our mind to concentrate on the object of meditation just sends it in the opposite direction. However, allowing the mind to rest naturally, it will just gently rest on whatever object we wish. This is what learning meditation is all about.

The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel

I have done many things in my life in an attempt to be of some possible use. I could list them, but it is not important. The bottom line is that after many years and much effort I came to the conclusion that of all things of possible use, training the mind is at the very tip of the top of the list.

We can lose an arm or a leg and still have what we call a life, but if we lose our mind we no longer have much in the way of a life. If you think about it, our mind is our most important possession. That is why the Tibetan Buddhists call the mind the “Wish-fulfilling Jewel” or “Precious Jewel.” When I was young I went out of my way to alter the mind in any way that I could, by alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and drugs, anything but a straight mind. As I grew older those mind-altering substances dropped away one by one until today I alter my mind only by food and nutritional supplements. A clear and insightful mind is the most precious thing I have.

In other words, the mind cannot be improved by altering it with substances. However, it can be trained, which is what meditation is all about.

Aspiration and Dedication

Now before I go on, I need to tell you of one very important part of meditation practice that you need to know about. In fact, most Tibetans would say this is “the” most important point of all, so please listen with care.

The Tibetans tell us that it is most important to dedicate any merit that comes out of our daily practice, no matter how small. I did not do this in the

beginning because I could not imagine any good merit whatsoever was coming out of my dismal practice, but the Tibetans feel otherwise. They assure me there is merit in any practice, if only because of the good intent, if not for the results. And it is easy to do.

At the end of any meditation practice period, we simply say a little dedication, call it a prayer if you wish, to the effect that:

“May any merit of this practice, however small it is, be dedicated that all sentient beings may find true happiness and awareness.”

This short wish or dedication is said to, like the proverbial acorn, grow over time into an enormous amount of merit. In a similar way, saying a brief aspiration to the same effect when we begin our meditation practice is also beneficial. In that case we would say something like:

“May what I am about to do benefit all sentient beings and bring them happiness and awareness such as the Buddha found.” It should be something like that.

If you scour the books on Tibetan meditation, there is no single factor that the high lamas feel is as important as making aspiration and dedication prayers. To them they are the difference between advancing in awareness and just sitting there spinning our wheels. And I tried it out.

Doing Your Homework

Since I am a computer programmer and frequently spend my days glued to a computer monitor in real concentration, I thought I would try this out. Every time in my daily work when I would be interrupted, when the phone would ring, a car would backfire

down the block, or something or someone would interrupt my work, instead of being irritated by the interruption, I would do the following:

Since I was already startled and fully out of my concentration, this was a natural gap in time to make a dedication. I would then dedicate any merit that I had accrued from my concentrated work up to that point to all sentient beings, and so on, as described above.

I would make this short prayer and then gently let my mind rest in the gap that was created by the interruption. Then I would make a short aspiration for the work I was about to do, and get back to work. The next time I was interrupted I would do the same thing. This went on all day.

I would do perhaps hundreds of these little interruptions throughout the day. I did this for almost three years. It made a big difference and paved the way for me to do more practice aside from my time sitting on the cushion. It was a key to getting real results.

The Two Accumulations

An important concept to have is what the Tibetan Buddhists call the two accumulations, merit and awareness. They work together and are well worth understanding.

We are meditating in order to develop greater awareness. The Sanskrit word “Buddha” itself means “to awaken,” and it could be translated to something like “the one who has awakened or is aware.” Merit refers to what the Buddhists called “skillful means,” skillful action. The two words, merit and awareness,

work together in a recursive manner (like an infinite Catch-22). Here is how I understand it works:

When we actually learn to meditate and develop a little more awareness than we now have, that awareness allows us to see a little more clearly how to act. In that greater awareness we can act more skillfully or meritoriously, and the merit of our skillful action then generates even greater awareness. That greater awareness allows us to see even more clearly yet and in the clarity we can see to act even more skillfully yet, ad infinitum. Awareness makes skillful actions easier, and more skillful actions generate even more awareness, and so it goes.

These are called the two accumulations and they each allow the other to reach higher levels. There is a snowball effect that has an exponential curve. You get the idea: the more awareness you have, the better you can see to make the most skillful action, and the more skillful the execution of an act, the more awareness (and space around us) it creates. They feed on each other, recursively.

In other words, the relative skillfulness of our every action in the present somehow generates something like an aura or space around it, which is the awareness mentioned here. In that awareness or expanded time we can see more clearly to make decisions and take action than before. Therefore, we make ever better and better actions, and the skill of our execution, our skillful means, generates ever greater clarity and awareness, and so on, each allowing the other to reach new levels. This is what I understand merit and awareness is all about.

Mixing Meditation with What You Know

What I am going to present in this sidebar is a little advanced and may not be everyone's cup of tea. However some of you may find it useful enough.

Beginning meditation is hard for many of us. It is hard to find the time, sometimes difficult to actually practice, and often the time each day we have available is minimal. We all wish we had more time to practice or felt like using whatever time we have for meditating. I am surprised at myself how clever I am in postponing and getting out of my daily meditation. In some respects, I am a genius, just not in any useful ways.

And there is another issue. I was raised Catholic and went to church for an hour each Sunday, whether I liked it or not. The simple truth is that an hour a week will never be enough to save me or get me to heaven. I am way too much of a black sheep for that. And the same goes for meditation.

Even meditating for a half hour a day is sometimes hard for me to squeeze into my schedule, and that much meditation is still not enough practice for me to really benefit greatly from. I am not putting it down, just pointing out that the balance between time needed and time spent for meditation is disproportionate.

The most I ever practiced was a commitment of two hours a day for two years while taking a Mahamudra course with His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche. Two hours was a lot to squeeze out of my schedule each day, but worse was that I did not like forcing myself to practice that long. I gradually built up an approach/avoidance reaction to sitting, a dangerous cycle.

After a while, if I even thought of that two hour requirement, I had an adverse reaction. Using simple mental feng-shui, my own practice was an obstacle to my practice. I had stained my practice by not liking to do it. Certainly, I was not being skillful with my old delinquent self. I should have known better than to make that commitment. And there is another way to do a lot of practice in a relatively painless way.

Piggybacking on Skills

It will only be useful to those of you who have managed to acquire a skill or discipline that requires concentration and the muscle memory that goes with it. For example, it could be a skill like fly-tying that fishermen do, playing a musical instrument, playing a game of chess, or what-have-you.

The point is that it must be a skill where you have already paid your dues and learned, and it must be something you like to do and are at least a little joyful about. Simply begin to apply this same meditation technique to your favorite skill. What does that mean?

It means while you are concentrating using the skill, when you are distracted or interrupted, whether by your own daydreaming or an outside interruption, like a phone call, just do the same thing you would do when meditating on a cushion.

Be aware that you have lost concentration, and gently bring your mind back to rest on the job at hand and continue as you were. Every time you are interrupted, do the same. This can go on all day, as long as you want. You will be logging meditation practice hours, just as you would if you were sitting on a cushion. I was surprised at how much practice time I actually

was able to get in each day. And don't forget to dedicate the merit!

This idea came from a remark my meditation teacher said to a group of us at a teaching, something to the effect that those of you who work on a computer for long periods of time may have an advantage because you have already learned to concentrate. Of course, a light bulb went off in my mind, because I did that all day almost every day. So I tried mixing my mind training with other areas of my life where concentration was involved. And it worked.

Rejiggering the Past

I know there are all kinds of psychological therapies that dig into the past, trying to air-out or re-jigger the past, but this is not how meditation handles past traumas. To my mind the present is the only way to control the past, and creating an endless series of perfect present moments gradually builds a new past that overwrites what you are trying to forget with fresh experience. In time, the new past we can create from the present is supportive enough that we no longer identify with the traumatic events from our old past, and we just forget-about-it, as they say. It is no longer us and no longer threatens us.

Summary

First we learn some muscle memory by practicing Shamata with its focus on an object and the mindfulness training to keep from straying from the object. This takes time because at the same time we have to become familiar with how the mind works, plus the fact that we can't just will or force the mind to rest. We each have to discover how to let the mind rest naturally. That's the rub.

There is no pill you can take to become more aware and no one can do it for us. Each of us has to do it for ourselves. And since we don't really know what enlightenment, mind recognition, and greater awareness really feels like, we are kind of feeling our way in the dark. This is why it is helpful to have someone who already knows how to meditate there to guide us, show us how, and be there to answer the questions that just naturally arise. We have to learn to let the mind rest.

In fact, we naturally let the mind rest all the time when we are not thinking about it, but we gradually have to be able to do this consciously. What we need to develop is an awareness of the mind at rest, and how to allow the mind to rest. This is best done on the cushion as part of a regular dharma practice. Trying to do it off the cushion (in the beginning) is not the way to learn this. That comes later.

Once the habits of resting and mindfulness have been acquired, we will notice that these same habits also work off the cushion as well as on the cushion. In other words, whatever we are concentrating on in life, when we are distracted from it, we can gently bring the mind back to the task at hand and continue. This

alone is a great help, especially for those of us who have to work for a living. Being able to concentrate on a task, do it properly, and finish it in a timely manner is a great skill to have. It can make the difference between keeping a job and losing it.

Also the Two Accumulations (merit & awareness) also work off the cushion as well as on. Whatever awareness we acquire in our life we can use to better see and to more skillfully execute whatever it is we are doing. Those more skillful actions generate still greater awareness or clarity, which allow us to be even more skillful in what we do, generating still more clarity/awareness, and so on, ad infinitum.

A little trickier perhaps, but very useful is learning to not dwell on thoughts and events over which we have no control. When my dog brings something home that is dead and rotten, I just say "Leave it!" and he usually does. We have to learn to leave behind us hurts, insults, aggression, and what-have-you, so that we don't ingrain them in our mindstream. Let me remind you.

It is not pleasant when someone is rude to me, or a friend walks by me and never says hello. I can only guess at the reason why, but if I get my feelings hurt and spend minutes, hours, days, or weeks dwelling on this, I am just adding insult to the injury I imagined I sustained by the original hurt feelings.

These are my feelings, and only I have any control over them. Even if the person who snubs me did it purposely, I am still responsible for my response to the snub. We can learn to just drop it, and let it go, and stop recording karma for that event.

If we get our feelings hurt and think about the event over and over and over, each time we think of it we

are digging a deeper track, inscribing our hurt in our mindstream which then actually obscures our vision and sucks up our precious energy. Worse yet, all of the embedded inscription of the event does not just end there and fade away. No, it is karma that ripens and appears again over time as a further obstacle to obscure our mental clarity.

An analogy that is not far off would be if we made razor cuts on our arm, some deeper and deeper, etc. Not only would that mess up our arm, but in time the arm would have scars that would remain with us for a long time. The feng-shui of the mind is something to think about too. We also have mental scars.

In other words, with karma we don't just have to worry about not doing the big things, like killing or whatever. It is this perpetual rain of small karma that really adds up and clogs the windshield of our mind. It is hard to remove and can easily (or fairly easily) be avoided.

Karma is cumulative over time. If we can learn to just drop those things that we cannot change and turn our attention to other things, then, while some karma is certainly recorded, at least it is not endlessly re-recorded and inscribed into our mindstream. We may get cuts from our initial reaction, but not the deep scarring that is fairly normal to all of us, you know, going over and over and over something that has hurt us. Best drop it.

And please don't forget to dedicate the merit and make at least some aspiration going into either a meditation practice or any life work. We may take care of the big things and be eaten up by the little things we do. The fact is that becoming more aware also means becoming increasingly responsible for everything we do, and that means "everything."

Why is it that Zen monks and meditation masters find rest in every action, everything they do? They are that mindful, that aware. It is the little things that add up, and this is something that (gradually) we can do something about.

Meditation is basically inner mental aerodynamics, learning to airstream your mind so that it can perfectly rest in the winds of change instead of the crazy kite that most of us are flying now.

There you have a brief introduction and comments on Shamata Meditation. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at Michael@Erlewine.net