

Hope
Mindfulness
program guide

Paul Garrigan



Hope Rehab Thailand was founded in 2013 by Simon Mott and Alon Kumsawad. The Hope method is the result of many years working in the field of addiction, and it has been influenced by different approaches and treatment experts. Hope has brought together the most effective and accessible psychological tools available for treating addiction and related issues.

The general approach is based on current addiction science ‘American Society of Addiction Medicine’ (ASAM) and uses the ‘National Institute on Drug Abuse’ (NIDA) treatment guidelines. Hope’s counselling and group therapy model includes CBT, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness, 12 Step techniques, and positive psychology.

The program does not just address substance-use issues, it also addresses many of the struggles associated with the human condition. It is often the case that clients self-medicate underlying struggles such as stress, depression, anxiety, and emotional trauma, so these issues need to be addressed. The Hope method is designed to improve general mental health and enhance all areas of life.

Simon Mott says he prefers not to use the term Luxury rehab to describe Hope, however he states “we are definitely a 5 star treatment program, which is a different kind of luxury” – All the experts agree that counselling and group work are the most important considerations when selecting a rehab program, so this is where Hope directs their emphasis.

Hope Rehab is a modern and innovative facility with an international team offering a holistic and eclectic program. The focus is on evidence-based treatment methods from both eastern and western models, including mindfulness and meditation.

An important aspect of the Hope method is encouraging clients to create a healthy structure for their lives that they can continue with once they return home. Many clients have lived a life where self-control was lacking, so it will be important for them to develop discipline and more skillful patterns of behaviour. This is why Hope has a strong emphasis on early morning fitness activities, their motto is “get up before your addiction does”.

Substance abuse, depression, and anxiety create chaos and unhappiness in many people’s lives and it also impacts their loved ones. This program addresses all the key issues clients are facing, and it will give them the best chance at a sustained recovery. It is a voyage of self-discovery, healing and growth.

Simon Mott has dealt with addiction from both sides of the fence. When he eventually got the right help, he was able to break free from his own addiction, and he now helps others do the same with this program.

Hope Rehab Service is fully licensed by the Thai Ministry of Health as well as an affiliate member of FDAP (Federation of Drug and Alcohol Practitioners; UK) and NAADAC (Association of Addiction Professionals; US) and accredited by APCB (Asia Pacific Certification Board) and our therapeutic team are FDAP registered practitioners.



Paul's Personal Story

Is it possible for your own brain to hate you?

I used to think so. How else could I explain the disturbing tendency of my thoughts to be at war with each other. The most obvious example of this would be my relationship with alcohol during those final years of active addiction. I could go from desperately wanting to quit to desperately wanting to drink in a just a few minutes.

I can trace this uneasy relationship with my own thoughts right back to early childhood. Even as a kid, people would say to me, 'you think too much'. I had absolutely no idea what they meant by this – what else was I meant to be doing?

Like many of us who fall into addiction, I felt 'uncomfortable in my own skin'. At the time, I would have blamed this unease on the circumstances of my life ('I'm too skinny', 'nobody understands me', or 'I can't find good friends'). It wasn't until years later that I realized the problem wasn't with my circumstances but with my thinking.

At age 14, my life began to go seriously off-the-rails. My home situation became unbearable as my parent's marriage went into meltdown. At the time, I was obsessed with Kung-Fu, and I used this as an outlet. I also started to meditate due to an interest in Buddhism/Taoism. This provided a temporary reprieve from the dreadful atmosphere at home. This was also my introduction to mindfulness.

I was taught a basic form of meditation (just watching the breath) in my martial arts class. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I managed to discover a bit of peace from my turbulent life.

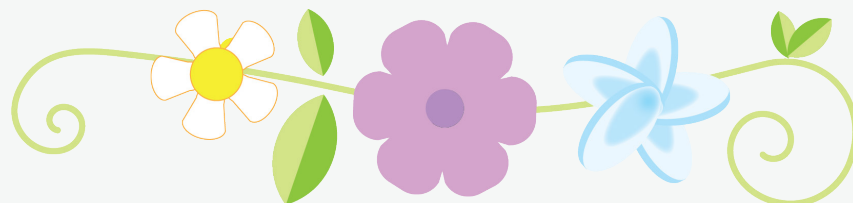
One night, while babysitting my sisters, I decided to raid our alcohol cabinet. It turned out vodka provided a quicker fix than meditation for my inner turmoil – or so it seemed at the time. I had far more natural talent for being a drunk than being Bruce Lee. I went from the top class in my school to the bottom one, and one year later, I got expelled completely for stealing altar wine.

I entered my first rehab program at 20 in an attempt to get a girlfriend to come back to me. I didn't really think I had a problem other than falling in love with a girl who was way too uptight. I did stay sober for about nine months, and I began meditating again. My stint at recovery couldn't last though because my idea of a good life was one where I didn't have to deal with life.

Things got worse for me and four years later I ended up homeless on the streets of London. I was in such a hopeless mental state – I wanted to die, but I didn't have the energy to commit suicide. It felt like my own brain was trying to destroy me. I ended up in a treatment program (ARP London) for 12 months, and I managed to remain sober for two years.

The most important thing to happen to me during my year of being in rehab was when a therapist asked me if I had ever considered the possibility that I spend too much time thinking about myself. I knew what she was saying was true, but I initially hated her for





saying it. She encouraged me to do some voluntary work with people who had profound learning difficulties – it was one of the most life-changing experiences of my life (thinking more about others gave me a peace of mind I'd never experienced previously except in meditation), and it encouraged me to become a nurse.

In 1997 I made my first attempt at teaching mindfulness (using tai-chi) to other people. It wasn't a success. I hadn't got a clue what I was doing, but they do say that you should teach what you need to learn. This was during my nursing training in London. The course was stressful, and I thought mindfulness would be a perfect anecdote. I found a few student nurses willing to begin the practice, but the class only lasted a few weeks.

I was a year into my nursing training when I decided to drink again. I made this choice because I felt left out of the whole university experience. I regretted this decision immediately. I somehow managed to keep my drinking under control enough to qualify as a nurse two years later, but it made the experience of being a student far less satisfying.

In 2001, I took a job as a nurse in Saudi Arabia in another attempt to quit drinking. I thought the fact that alcohol was illegal there would keep me safe, but it turned out there was plenty of illicit booze available. Prior to going to Saudi, I had been told my liver was showing signs of damage (elevated LFTs), and I knew if I stayed there I wouldn't survive. If I was going to die, I wanted to be somewhere a bit cheerier than Saudi, so after just nine months in Riyadh, I moved to Thailand.

Over the years, I had continued to believe that meditation would somehow provide the solution I was looking for. I began turning up at Thai temples (often drunk) in search of the perfect teacher. In 2003, I enrolled in a 26-day retreat at Wat Rampoeng in Chiang Mai. This was a major turning point for me. I began to see that the problem wasn't that my brain hated me but that I took my thinking too personally. I noticed clearly that I just experienced thoughts rather than created thoughts.

As part of his retreat, I managed to complete what is called a 'determination' where I was able to meditate for over 72 hours without any sleep or breaks (except to eat and go to the toilet). I temporarily experienced the mental freedom I had always longed for – I did drink again after this retreat, but it was the beginning of the end.

In 2006, I entered Thamkrabok temple where I made a vow to quit alcohol forever. I felt completely beaten by this stage and desperate to regain the mental freedom I'd experienced at Wat Rampoeng. I only stayed at Thamkrabok for ten days, but by the end of the treatment I knew my problems with alcohol were over. I haven't had a drink or even a craving for alcohol since that time.

I have achieved a level of mental comfort beyond that once would have been unimaginable to me – I'm no longer seeking anything to fix my life. This achievement only became possible once I'd fully accepted that contentment is in inverse correlation to my level of self-obsession. My new life is based on practices that foster open-heartedness, and it is these practices that I now teach at Hope.

In 2007, I began blogging about my experiences with addiction and mindfulness. I managed to attract a community around my writing, and this has been incredibly satisfying. My book *'Dead Drunk – Saving Myself from Alcoholism in a Thai Monastery'* was published in 2010.

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Alon Kumsawad,
co-founder of
Hope Rehab,
in a candle
meditation
practice.

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The Tricky Mind

Has this happened to you?

You start the day full of shame and regret due to your latest misadventure with drugs. You solemnly swear to yourself, your loved ones, and anyone else who will listen (including God, minor deities, angels, and Mother Nature) that you will never, ever, ever use drugs again. This time you mean it.

Yet... in just a few short hours, you are perched on a barstool or on the phone to your drug dealer.

How does this happen?

One of the first things I suggest to newcomers at Hope is their brain has been tricking them and that this is the real cause of their suffering. Most clients have no problem accepting this theory because it's something they have figured out for themselves already. The problem is that just knowing that your brain is tricking you is not enough to stop your brain from tricking you.

I doubt there are many of us who believe that someone like David Copperfield has any actual magical powers. We know he is fooling us in some way, and that there is a rational explanation for his amazing displays. Unfortunately, (or fortunately if you like being amazed) this knowing he is a trickster doesn't stop him fooling us every time. To stop being fooled by David, we would need to first understand the trick.

It's the same with your brain, if you want to stop being fooled by your brain, you need to understand the trick. The goal of the Hope mindfulness program is for you to develop the ability to see how you are being fooled. Once you gain insight into a trick, you need no longer fall for it so easily. The more of these tricks of the mind you understand, the more freedom you gain.

Don't Worry – Your Brain Isn't Really Out to Get You

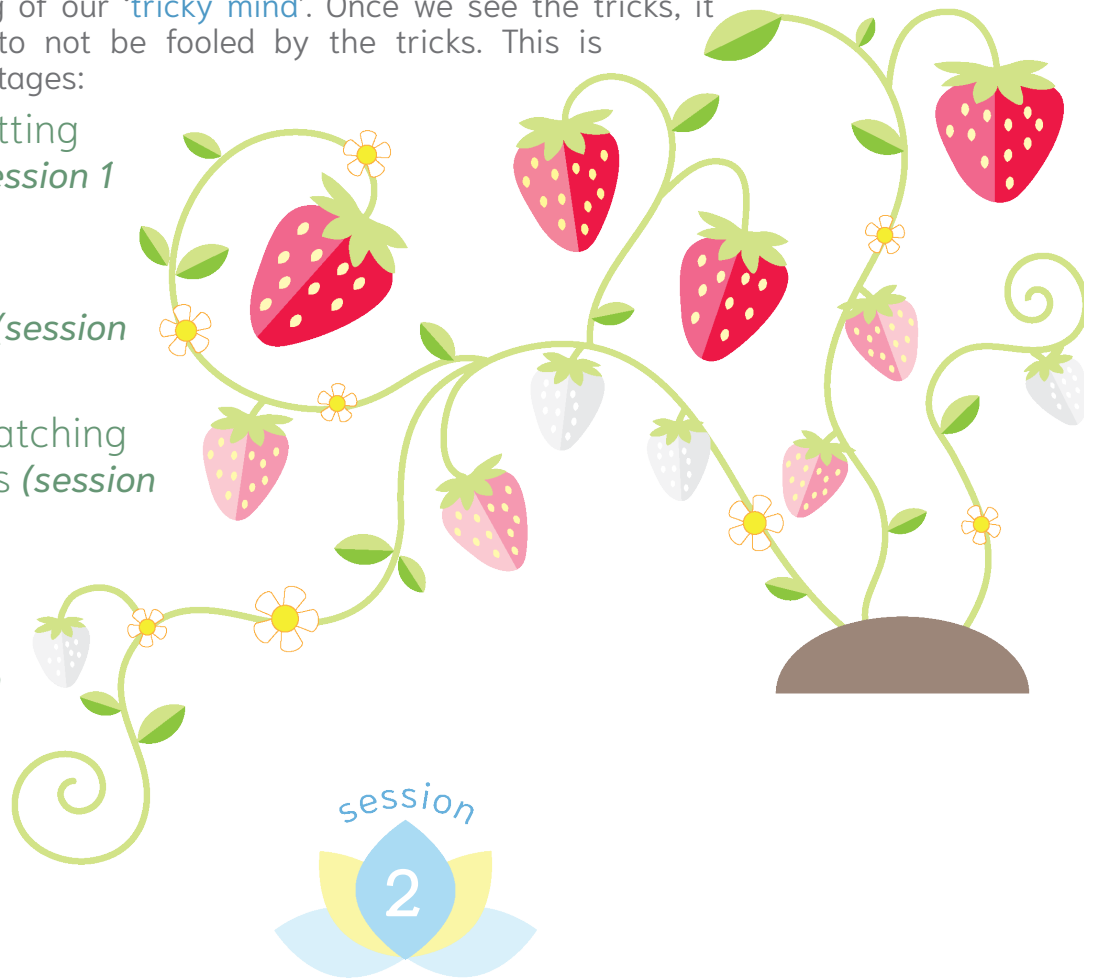
To say that we are being tricked by the mind is just a way of speaking. It is not to suggest that our thinking is out to get us. The problem is that our thoughts are more like the outpourings of a disorganized committee rather than an individual self (e.g. some members of our inner-committee want to quit drugs, but some want to continue). It is our habit of identifying with each member of the committee that makes life unbearable and drives us nuts.

Mindfulness is a way of seeing our thoughts in a more objective way. It means we start to take these thoughts, which are often in conflict with one another, less personally. We become less troubled by our inner voices and less likely to take self-destructive action (e.g. taking drugs) because of them.

The Four Stages of the HOPE Mindfulness Program

The goal of the Hope Mindfulness program is to help us develop a better understanding of our 'tricky mind'. Once we see the tricks, it becomes easier to not be fooled by the tricks. This is achieved in four stages:

- **Stage 1** – Getting Grounded (*session 1 on page 2*)
- **Stage 2** – Friendliness (*session 2 on page 4*)
- **Stage 3** – Watching from Stillness (*session 9 on page 13*)
- **Stage 4** – Well-being (*session 15 on page 20*)



Getting Grounded

(**Stage 1** of the *Hope Mindfulness Program*)

One of the things we may do when overwhelmed by thoughts is to pace up and down or go for a long walk. The reason we are doing this is we somehow know that by putting our attention on something physical (e.g. the act of walking), we will get relief from our thoughts.

Deliberately moving our focus away from thoughts to something physical (the sense of touch or movement) is a way of getting grounded. We could also become grounded by focusing on any one of the other five senses (e.g. sight, sound, smell, or taste). Most forms

(Getting Grounded continued)

of meditation can help us get better at being grounded because they usually focus on one of the five senses such as:

- The body scan focuses on physical sensations (touch).
- The candle meditation uses the sense of sight.
- Breath meditation focuses on physical sensation.
- Mantra meditation uses sound.
- Chanting meditation uses sound.
- Tai Chi uses physical sensation as movement.

Getting into the habit of being grounded provides us with a refuge. It means that we don't have to just be at the mercy of our thinking. The more we experience we have of being grounded, the more peaceful our life becomes. This technique is so simple, yet so powerful.

The Problem with Thinking isn't Thinking

Our thoughts allow us to navigate life, and we would struggle to function without them. The problem is our attention often gets hijacked by certain patterns of thinking.

The Thai meditation master Luang Por Teean described two types of thinking – deliberate thinking and 'sneaky' thinking. Deliberate thinking is where you have some problem, and you need to find a solution (e.g. how do I get from A to B?). Sneaky thinking is where you find yourself getting lost in thought. Here it is like your attention is being hijacked, and it often involves thoughts that are bad for us (e.g. craving or negative thinking).

try this

Sit quietly and put your attention the rising and falling of the breath in your tummy (if it helps, you can imagine a balloon in your stomach that is inflating and deflating). See if you can notice that despite your intention to keep your attention on your breathing, thoughts keep coming and hijacking your attention. Do this for a few minutes.



try this

Sit quietly and practice grounding yourself using each of the five senses in turn – spend a minute or so noticing physical sensations such as the feeling your clothes against your skin, then move onto sights, then sounds etc.



The reason our attention is so easily hijacked by sneaky thinking is we are used to just going along with whatever thought arises. By grounding ourselves, we more clearly see when there is an attempt to hijack our attention. When we see thoughts this way, we see that they are only temporary visitors and have no real power over us.

Our attention can only be on one thing at a time, so if we are focused on something like a physical sensation, we won't get so lost in our thinking. The fact that we intuitively do this when mentally distressed shows how getting is completely natural (it also means that most of us already have plenty of evidence of the effectiveness of meditation).



Friendliness

(Stage 2 of the *Hope Mindfulness Program*)

Much of our thinking is in the form of an ongoing argument with reality. This inner dialogue is fueled by our ideas about how things 'should be' or 'shouldn't be'. This rejection of life 'as it is' means we feel insecure, unsatisfied, and unhappy, and it is this that makes escape options like drugs seem so appealing.

We have no chance of developing inner-peace if our focus is on getting life to be as we think it 'should be'. It is only by accepting reality as it comes that we can find what we are looking for. Don't mistake this for fatalism. You are only being asked to accept the stuff that can't be changed. It turns out though that most of the stuff we battle against is beyond our control.



Why Are We Always Trying to Escape What Is?

Buddhists say that everything we experience comes with a feeling tone (vedana). Every object we come in contact with through the senses is labeled as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This labeling of happens unconsciously (e.g. when you smell poo-poo, you don't have to waste any time figuring out if you like the smell of sewage).

- When what we are experiencing is labelled as 'pleasant', we want more of it.
- When it is labelled as 'unpleasant', we push it away
- When the 'neutral' feeling is triggered, we feel bored.

This feeling tone that is triggered by our experiences helps to keep us alive. It gives us the motivation to eat, work, reproduce, develop friendships, and do all the other things necessary for our survival. Unfortunately, this feeling tone never knows when to shut up. This means we regularly find ourselves trying to get what we can't get, push away what we can't push away, and escape what can't be escaped. We experience this as an argument with reality that we can't win – we call this ill-will.

Ill-Will

Ill-will can be directed towards ourselves, other people, or the world in general. The symptoms include resentment, anger, negative thinking, rumination (excessive worry), and a general feeling that life is out to get us. We often respond to this feeling of ill-will by building strong psychological defenses (e.g. not trusting people). The way to overcome ill-will is to develop a friendlier attitude towards ourselves, other people, and the world in general.

Metta Practice to Develop Good-Will and Friendliness

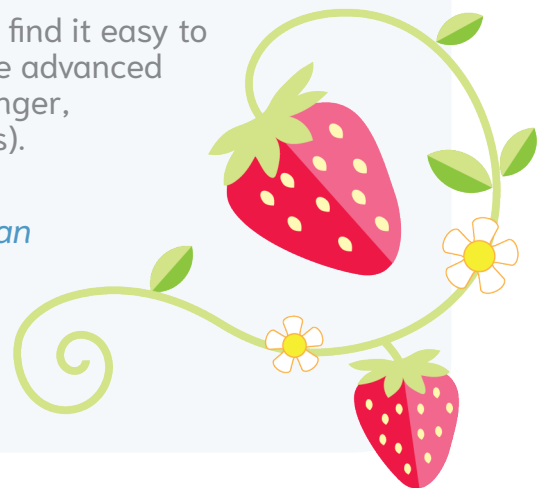
Metta (loving-kindness) meditation is one of the core practices we teach clients in the Hope Mindfulness program. The benefits of this meditation include:

- It dampens down thoughts associated with ill-will
- Regular practice can help us to become more accepting of life
- Making metta part of our meditation practice helps us to go deeper into stillness (it does this by making us less reactive to vedana (see above))

practice: Metta Meditation

1. Spend a few minutes getting yourself grounded using a body-scan or by focusing on your breathing.
2. Bring your attention to the area in the center of your chest and picture a golden sun. Imagine this golden sun getting brighter on the in-breath and sending out rays of warmth and acceptance on the out-breath.
3. Send good-will to yourself using the words ‘may I be well’ on the in-breath and ‘may I know peace’ on the out-breath as you continue with the golden sun visualization. Do this for 2-5 minutes.
4. Now practice sending good-will to someone you find it easy to feel friendliness towards (later we can do a more advanced practice where we learn to send metta to a stranger, someone we don’t like, and eventually all-beings). Do this for about 2-5 minutes.

Developing a friendlier attitude towards reality can completely change things for us because we see the world as we are not as the world is. Therefore, we encourage clients to spend at least 10 minutes every day practicing metta.





The Five Hindrances

The popular image of meditation is it involves sitting cross-legged in a state of bliss. It usually comes as a disappointment to discover our mind is more like a raging storm than a tranquil pool when we take up the practice.

Our failure to 'find our bliss' right away may lead us to assume we are no good meditation. In fact, what is happening is perfectly normal. The purpose of meditation is to illuminate the mind in order to actually see what is going on in there – this is how we gain insight.

The five hindrances are the obstacles between us and stillness in meditation. These hindrances are not the enemy though – they are our gurus. It is by learning to work with them that we gain the wisdom we need to develop peace.

The five hindrances are:

Restlessness/Agitation

Our brains are used to being busy and distracted, and there can be a great deal of resistance to just sitting in meditation. In order to escape this 'dreadful silence' we can begin to focus on our pet worries or suddenly it seems vital that we put our book collection into alphabetical order.

Restlessness is something we become better at dealing with as we develop insight. The important thing in the beginning is not to fight it – all we need to do is just gently keep on bringing our attention back to the meditation object. If you just find you are just unable to settle during a particular meditation session, you may find it better to switch to walking meditation for that day.

Sleepiness/Mental Dullness

Most of us are sleep-deprived so it is hardly surprising that we drift off almost as soon as our eyes are shut – the key to this is to get enough sleep. The sleepiness we are talking about here is of a different variety though and may be better describe as mental dullness.

Mental dullness can occur because of our improved ability to deal with restlessness – this is why it is usually more of a problem for intermediate meditators than beginner meditators (although it can also arise due to drug withdrawal). By now we have developed the ability to calm the mind, but our brain associates this calmness with going to sleep so it begins to shut down.

Mental dullness can be hard to deal with because it can feel kind of nice – we may even decide that this is the 'bliss' we expected to find in meditation. The fact that we are so close to sleep can mean we start to hallucinate, and we may take this as a further sign of

The Five Hindrances continued)

our progress. The reality is that so long as the mental dullness remains, we are more or less dead in the water.

One of the reasons we encourage people to sit up in meditation as this reduces the likelihood of mental dullness arising. If the dullness is particularly bad, we may find it easier to do walking meditation. Eventually, we can start how to see dullness as just another object that arises in meditation, and this makes it much easier to work with.

Desire

You have had your desires fulfilled millions of times (e.g. if you desire a cookie, you can probably just go to your kitchen and get one) – how is that working out for you? Fulfilling our desires is like being on a never-ending hamster wheel, but it takes a lot of insight to be willing to give up the chase. This is why one of the ways our thinking brain can try to regain our full attention during meditation is by waving some desires at us. The way to deal with these desires is to see what the brain is doing – once you understand the trick, you are far less likely to be fooled by it.

Ill-Will

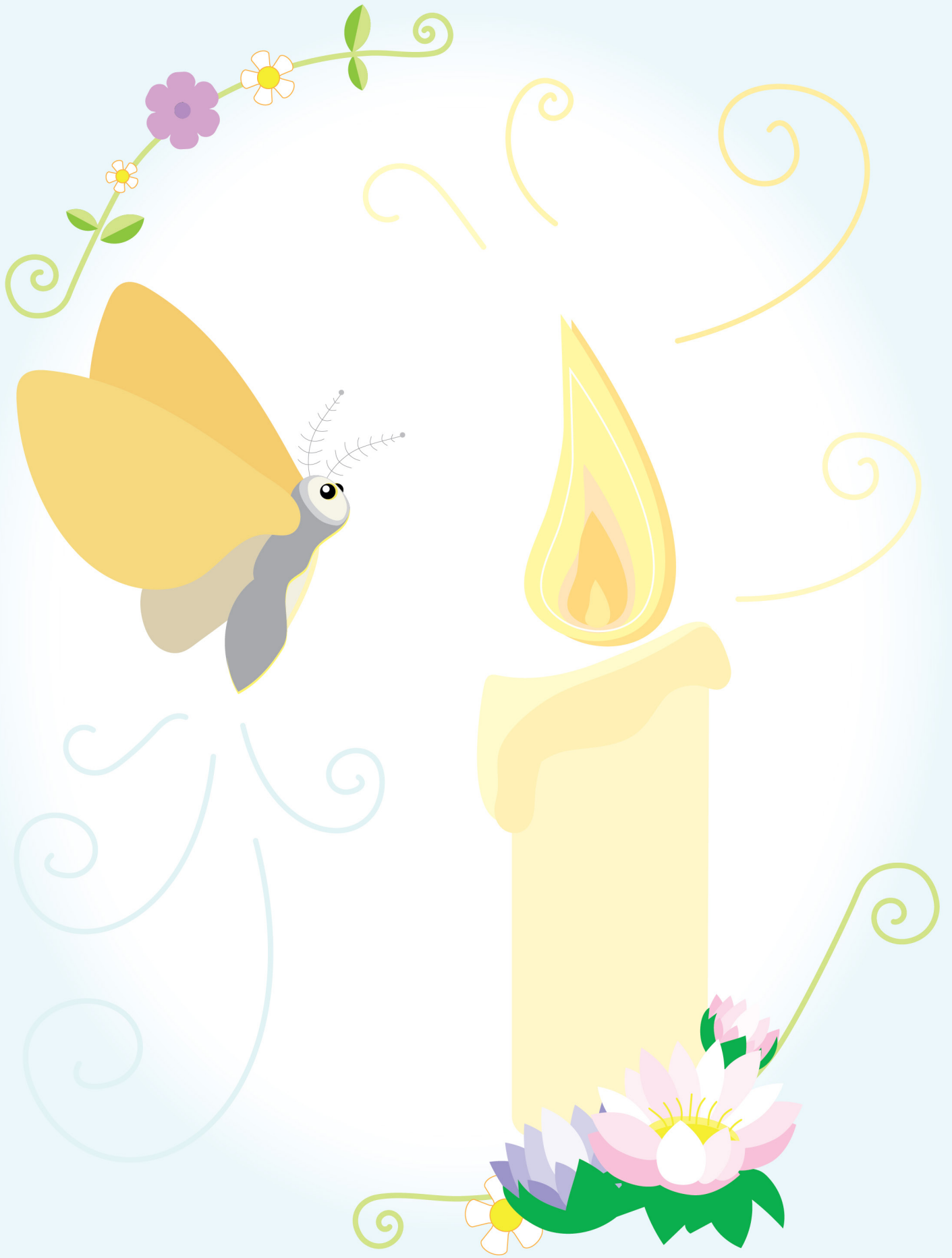
We have already mentioned ill-will in the previous section. It seems to be the most common barrier to a clear, still mind in meditation. This negativity can be towards ourselves, other people, our meditation practice, and the world in general (often all four). To develop in this practice, we need an open-hearted attitude to life – otherwise, we will keep getting stuck due to our mistrust, resentments, and fears. Metta meditation can be a great help with this.

Doubt

One of the nice things about the Hope Mindfulness program is it is experiential and self-confirming. You are not being asked to believe anything. I tell clients not to take my word for anything, but to check for themselves to see if there is any practical value in the things I suggest. Believing in mindfulness or the ‘power of meditation’ probably isn’t going to help you very much – it is only doing the practice that can benefit us

While skepticism is to be encouraged, there is another type of doubt can prevent us from making progress in meditation. This is because it is one of the ways our brain tries to maintain the status quo – it is the ability to push through this doubt that allows us to reach the next level (e.g. if you were to launch a new business tomorrow, you would surely have days when you were full of doubt).







Using Mindfulness for Cravings

There are many tools for dealing with addiction cravings, and you will learn about these during your time at Hope. Distraction and delaying tactics can be effective, especially in early recovery, and admitting to other people that we feel tempted is one of the most crucial steps we take but learning to be with the cravings without reacting to them can also be incredibly helpful. This is what we learn to do using mindfulness.

Mindfulness offers an alternative method to distraction for dealing with addiction cravings. It involves viewing the craving as an uninvited but temporary visitor in our mind. The benefit of this way of doing things is we lose our fear of cravings because we no longer feel at the mercy of them. Instead we feel empowered, and we can use this new skill to eradicate any other addictions in our life (e.g. nicotine or junk food).

How Mindfulness Helps with Cravings

An addiction craving is an intense desire. We have already started to learn how to work with desires in meditation ([see the last session on the 5 hindrances](#)), and this is going to help us manage these cravings. The key is to view this craving as just a thought that is passing through your mind. So long as you avoid getting involved with the desire, it will just pass by itself. Here is the important thing – **you don't need to give into a craving for it to be gone, it is going anyway.**

It would be unrealistic to suggest you go meditate every time you feel a craving. It is not necessary to do this though. All we have to do is apply the wisdom we have already picked up from watching desires come and go during your meditation sessions. We recognize that the craving is an attempt to hijack our attention, but we need to comply for the hijacking to take place. So long as we remain grounded (i.e. focused on one of the senses rather than getting carried away by discursive thinking), the craving has no power to get us to do anything. It will soon pass.

practice



Choose one of your habits that triggers cravings (e.g. cigarette smoking or drinking coffee). Practice not giving into these cravings, so you can see their impermanent nature. Notice that you don't have to give into the craving for it to go away – it goes away by itself (although if it will usually come back). Some people refer to this practice as 'urge surfing', and it can be liberating to see that you don't need to be a slave to these cravings.



It is also important that we show ourselves some kindness rather than feeling bad about having these cravings. Our body has been addicted to a drug, and it has to learn to readjust. We don't ask for these cravings to be there, so why take them so personally?

Dealing with Anxiety and Worry

Anxiety and Fear

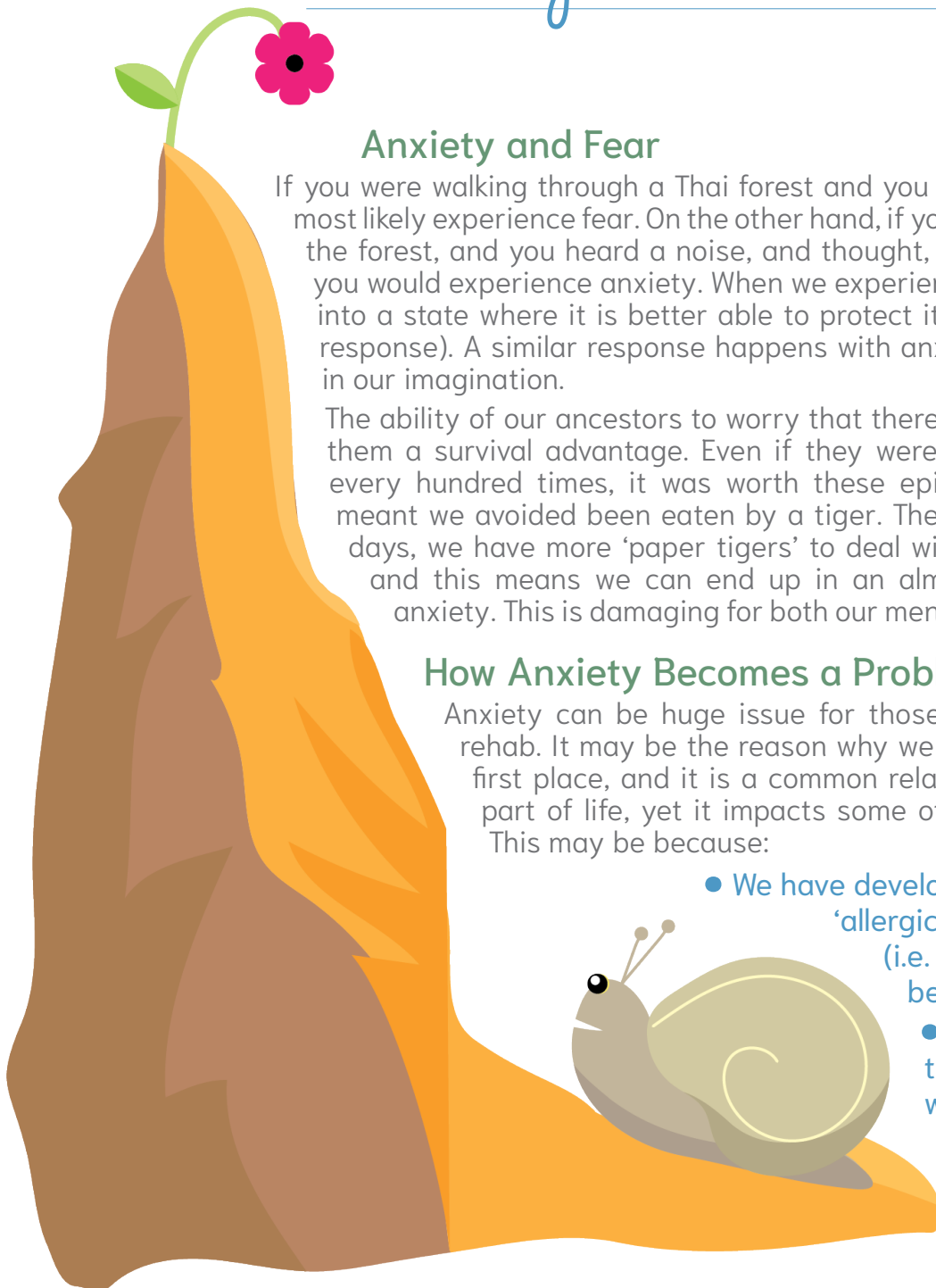
If you were walking through a Thai forest and you saw a tiger, you would most likely experience fear. On the other hand, if you were walking through the forest, and you heard a noise, and thought, 'that could be a tiger', you would experience anxiety. When we experience fear, the body gets into a state where it is better able to protect itself (the fight or flight response). A similar response happens with anxiety only the threat is in our imagination.

The ability of our ancestors to worry that there **might be** a tiger gave them a survival advantage. Even if they were only right one out of every hundred times, it was worth these episodes of anxiety if it meant we avoided being eaten by a tiger. The problem is that these days, we have more 'paper tigers' to deal with than our ancestors, and this means we can end up in an almost constant state of anxiety. This is damaging for both our mental and physical health.

How Anxiety Becomes a Problem

Anxiety can be a huge issue for those of us who end up in rehab. It may be the reason why we turned to drugs in the first place, and it is a common relapse trigger. Anxiety is part of life, yet it impacts some of us more than others. This may be because:

- We have developed almost like an 'allergic reaction' to anxiety (i.e. we get anxious about being anxious).
- We mistake paper tigers for real tigers – we respond as if our anxious-thought is real rather than just a possibility.



(Dealing with Anxiety and Worry continued)

- Our anxiety-response is too easily triggered (i.e. due to ill-will, we are always expecting something bad to happen).
- We believe (often unconsciously) that worrying someone prevents bad stuff from happening.
- Our attempts to avoid anything that makes us feel anxious can lower our tolerance for challenging situations even further.

A Mindful Approach to Anxiety

There is a close connection between worry and the ill-will that we encounter while meditating. Over time, we can begin to see that these are just habitual patterns of thinking, and the only power they have is the fact that we take them so personally. As we become less reactive to these thoughts, they lose their power to disturb us – in other words, if you stop feeding the monkeys, the monkeys eventually stop coming.

The two mindfulness tools we have already been practicing can help us deal with anxiety as it arises:



Getting grounded

Getting grounded will stop the anxious thoughts from hijacking our attention. So long as we keep **gently** bringing our attention back to one of the five senses, we can stop ourselves being overwhelmed by thinking. If the anxiety is due to an actual problem in our life, getting grounded will help. We come up with better answers when our mind is calm rather than when our mind is freaking out (more on this in session 16).

Getting grounded with Acceptance

Getting grounded with acceptance (e.g. practicing the loving-kindness meditation) can help us change the underlying feeling of ill-will that is generating much of the worry. What we practice we become. If we practice being an anxious person, we get good at it – if we practice acceptance, we get good at that

As our practice progresses, we can have deep insight into the nature of worry and anxiety. This provides a more permanent solution.



Mindfulness of Anger

Anger is Not the Enemy

It is natural to experience anger from time to time. This emotion can be expressed skilfully when we wish to emphasize an issue that is important to us (e.g. you are late again!). Anger can also be a powerful source of motivation (e.g. I won't allow this to beat me) and can inspire us to fight injustice in the world.

The problem isn't feeling angry or even expressing anger. The difficulties arise when we attempt to deny, escape, or suppress this natural emotion. This leads to a situation where the anger boils over – instead of us using the anger, the anger ends up using us.

Choosing to Be Angry

There are times when expressing anger is a useful tactic – although there are usually much more effective ways to get what we need. If you do make a tactical decision to become openly angry though, it may turn out to be the wrong choice, but at least it was your choice. The fact that it was your decision makes it much easier to live with any consequences.

The real danger is when instead choosing to be angry we just snap. In this type of situation, even if we end up getting what we want, we are still likely to feel bad about losing control. Of course, the reality is that most often when anger boils over like this, it makes our situation far worse.

Anger Does Not Need to Be Rational

It is usually the perception that our boundaries have been violated in some way that causes us to experience anger. It isn't so much what other people say or do that makes us feel angry, but how we perceive what they are doing – e.g. somebody might say to you, 'your hair looks nice', and for some reason you could decide this person is being sarcastic. One mistake we make when dealing with anger is to believe that it needs to have a rational cause. It is this belief that causes us to deny or suppress the emotion. If we feel angry about something, it makes no difference if we then decide 'that is just silly'. The anger is there, and it needs to be dealt with at the time or else it will just accumulate until eventually we explode – usually over something relatively trivial.

Anger Leads to Obsessive Thinking Loops

Anger becomes most dangerous when it leads to obsessive thinking loops – this is we keep going over and over what has happened. The more we get caught up in the story of

(Mindfulness of Anger continued)

the incident, the angrier we feel until eventually it consumes us completely. By this stage, our ability to think rationally might as well be stored in a different universe because we just can't access it, and we are highly likely to do something we later deeply regret.

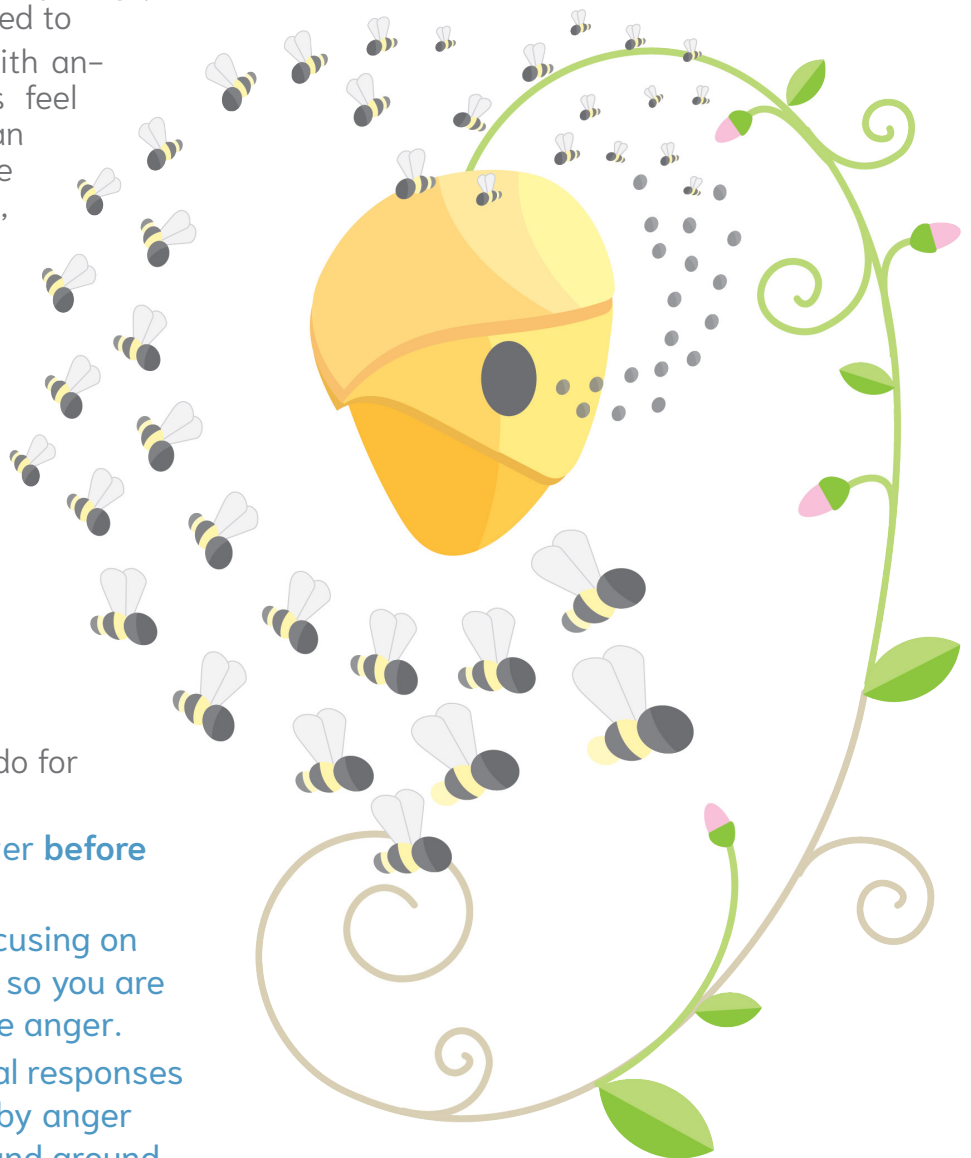
Anger as a Replacement for Other Emotions

The reason some of us end up 'angry all the time', is we have learned to replace other emotions with anger. Anger can make us feel strong and brave, so we can start to use it as an escape from fear, sadness, guilt, and confusion. We need to be able to experience all of our emotions if we want to have a good life, so we need to begin looking underneath the anger to see what it is covering. This type of insight can arise during meditation.

Mindfulness for Anger

We use the same tools for dealing with anger as we do for cravings and anxiety.

- Learn to recognize anger **before** it arises.
- Ground yourself (by focusing on one of the five senses) so you are not carried away by the anger.
- Recognize your habitual responses to being overwhelmed by anger (e.g. *slamming doors*) and ground yourself so you can choose not to respond this way.
- Practice metta meditation to become better at accepting your emotions rather than acting on them (remember **the problem isn't anger but losing control due to anger**)





Seeing in New Ways

Many of the mindfulness practices we do at Hope emphasize physical sensation, but visual imagery can also be a powerful tool. These approaches can include both external imagery (e.g. the candle meditation) and internal imagery (e.g. visualize a golden sun). In this session, we are going to briefly cover some of the ways we can use seeing as part of our mindfulness practice.

Looking for Novelty in Our Environment

One of the reasons we find ourselves constantly lost in habitual thinking is a lack of interest in our environment. We tend to be far more invested in the chatter in our heads than the world around us, and this has a negative impact on our life (e.g. obsessive worry).

One of the nice things about visiting a new place when we go on holidays is that the novelty of our environment pulls us out of our obsessive thinking habit. This change means we feel more relaxed and at ease with our surroundings. The good news is that it is not necessary to go somewhere new for us to enjoy this break from habitual thoughts, all we have to do is show an interest in our current environment. The secret to doing this is curiosity.

practice

Wherever you are right now, take a minute or two to look for things around you that you have never noticed before (this could include small details like cracks in the wall). Even if this environment is very familiar to you, there will definitely be things you have missed. See if you can notice **10** things you have never noticed before. Notice how this practice has a calming effect on the mind.



Meditation Visualizations

Some of us can struggle initially with meditations that involve focusing on physical sensation. One possible solution to this would be to add in a visualization. For example, when we are doing the body scan, we could visualize getting a massage. Another option would be to imagine that we are lying on a beach with our feet directed towards the sea, and as we move through the body scan, we can imagine the waves moving up our body.

Imaginal Practices

Imaginal practices involve using our imagination to produce real effects in our life. A simple example of this would be visualizing a golden sun in our chest that is creating a feeling of warmth and friendliness. Even though we are only imagining a sun in our chest, it can still lead to a real feeling of friendliness that can last well beyond the meditation. Imaginal work is advanced, but we go further into this approach with third-month clients.

Dream Yoga

Dream yoga is a Buddhist practice that shares similarities to lucid dreaming. It involves becoming aware while still in a dream that we are dreaming. There is also the sense of having some control over the dream. Dream Yoga is too huge a topic for us to focus on in detail as part of this course, but I do like to share it as a possibility. One of the benefits of regular mindfulness practice is it can start to trigger lucid dreams. This practice can open us up to new insights and allow us to relate to our waking life in new ways.



Watching from Stillness

(Stage 3 of the *Hope Mindfulness Program*)

As we get better at going beyond the 5 hindrances (see session 4, page 6), we begin to experience stillness/equanimity. In the beginning, this will be experienced as gaps between the thoughts where you are focused on the five senses. This is less reactive state than our normal consciousness, and this makes it easier to observe the mind with objectivity. This state of stillness is inherently pleasurable, and it is the perfect environment for developing insight.

try this

To get a better idea of what we mean by stillness, do the following meditation. Sit quietly and put your attention on the rising and falling of the breath. Notice the sensations created by the in-breath and out-breath. Next, see if you can notice that there is a gap between the in-breath and the out-breath. Put your attention on the stillness found in this gap. Then see if you can notice how this same sense of stillness can also be found in the body.



How to Achieve Stillness in Meditation

Each of the different parts of the meditation are designed to bring us closer to stillness. The first obstacle is the body. If our body is restless or uncomfortable, it generates a lot of thinking (restlessness), so we need to placate the body using something like a body scan to ground ourselves.

We normally spend the first few minutes of the meditation session doing this.

The next obstacle to stillness tends to be the habit of our brain to label the objects of our attention as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This triggers certain patterns of thinking such as ill-will, doubt, and desire that prevent the mind from settling down. Metta meditation helps us to develop a more accepting attitude, so it is worth devoting some of our meditation time to this practice. The body scan followed by a period of metta practice will sometimes be enough to take us beyond the hindrances, but often we find there is still more to be done in order to achieve a good level of stillness in meditation. The approach now is to just see the hindrances as objects in your mind. Eventually they will disappear. It can take up to 20 minutes, but most days we can get beyond the grip of the 5 hindrances and experience stillness.



(Watching from Stillness continued)

The Jhanas

The jhanas are altered states of consciousness that we can experience once we have achieved stillness in meditation. These states are incredibly pleasurable, but the real benefit for us is that they make the mind even easier to work with (thus increasing the likelihood of insight). It is definitely possible to gain insight without experiencing the jhana states, but if you are committed enough in your meditation practice to achieve jhana, it can certainly be helpful.

Please note: I have created a series of YouTube videos that can also be used as a resource to support your learning <https://www.youtube.com/user/paulgarrigan1> (or just go to YouTube and search for my name 'Paul Garrigan').



Insight

By observing the mind from deep states of concentration, we begin to gain insights that lead to permanent changes in our behavior and increase our sense of well-being. We get to understand how the mind has been tricking us and we lose the ability to be fooled by those tricks. There are three key insights that once we have fully experienced them lead to complete freedom from mental suffering and these are:

Impermanence

Life is in a constant state of change, yet we humans tend to want things to remain the same. This can put us in a state of conflict with reality. Life is never going to conform to our desire for stability – it doesn't matter how much effort we put into building our sandcastle, eventually the tide is going to come and wash it away. It is only by fully accepting impermanence, not just believing it intellectually, but by living our life in accord with this insight that we can end our war with reality.

(Insight continued)

It is the impermanent quality of our life that provides an answer to craving. In meditation, we notice that objects appear in our mind, and for awhile they become the center of our world. After a short time though, these objects disappear, and it is like they were never there. A craving is just another one of these objects. We don't have to do anything for a craving to go (i.e. give into it), it goes by itself anyway.

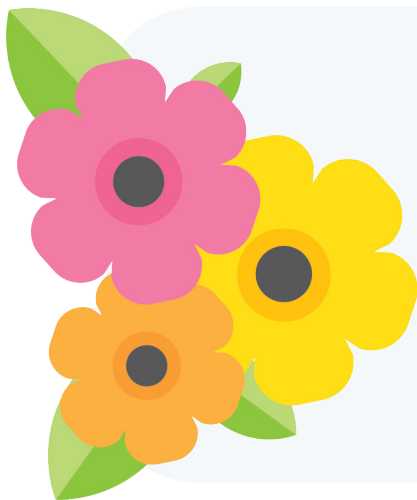
Non-self

One of the most profound insights we gain through this practice is that we cannot be our thoughts – at least not in the way we generally think we are. We assume there is a person (me) doing the thinking, but this belief doesn't hold up when we observe the mind in deep concentration. It comes as a shock to see how thoughts are just arising in much the same way as sound arises – rather than creating the thoughts, we are only observing them. This insight can feel disturbing at first, but once the full implication of it hit us, it leads to the 'peace that passes all understanding'.

Non-self is not something I would expect anyone to just believe in – it has to be experienced. I paid lip-service to the idea of non-self for years because it was part of my identity as a 'Buddhist', but it was only when I set out to disprove it that I began to gain insight into it. Be skeptical. I ask you to ponder these questions though – if you really are your thoughts, why can't you control them? What process do you use to create a thought (e.g. when I speak it involves movement in my voice box)? If you sometimes disown certain thoughts as not being 'you' (e.g. cravings), why should the other thoughts be you?

Nature of Suffering

The insight into the nature of suffering arises due to our understanding of non-self and impermanence. We now see how it has been our relationship with reality that is the real source of our suffering. We have been treating that which is impermanent and uncontrollable as if it were permanent and controllable – no wonder we ended up in such a mess. Once we have gained this insight, we lose the ability to delude ourselves. We are free.



The Value of Insight

- Insight into impermanence helps us overcome craving.
- Insight into no-self helps us overcome self-obsession.
- Insight into suffering helps us let go of the things that cause us to suffer.



Vipassana

(Insight Training)

Vipassana is a way of looking at our experience that helps us to see the three characteristics we talked about in the last session. Just believing in impermanence, non-self, and the nature of suffering intellectually isn't enough. We need to see these characteristics for ourselves.

practice



Vipassana Noting

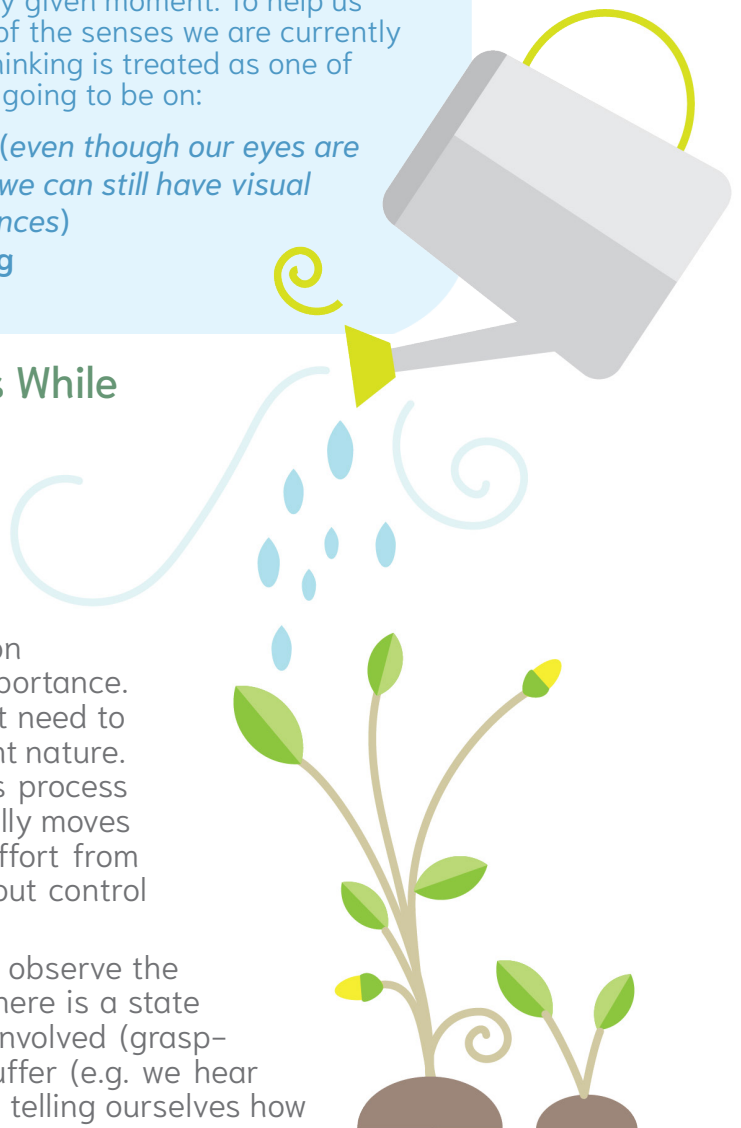
Once we are able to still the mind, we are then in a good position to practice vipassana. We can do this by noting where our attention is at any given moment. To help us do this, we can label which of the senses we are currently experiencing. From this perspective, thinking is treated as one of the senses, so your attention is either going to be on:

- **Hearing**
- **Touching** (*any physical sensation*)
- **Smelling**
- **Tasting**
- **Seeing** (*even though our eyes are closed, we can still have visual experiences*)
- **Thinking**

Seeing the Three Characteristics While Practicing Vipassana

As we become aware of how our attention is constantly moving from one object to the next we begin to gain insight into impermanence. We see how objects grab our attention, but then our attention moves onto something else. Once our attention moves on, the previous object loses its importance. We begin to see for ourselves that we don't need to give into craving because of its impermanent nature. As we continue noting we realize that this process happens by itself. Our attention automatically moves from one object to another without any effort from us. The objects themselves are not under our control either. This gives us insight into non-self.

We start to see that so long as we can just observe the mind moving from one object to another, there is a state of peace. It is only when we get overly involved (grasping) with these objects that we start to suffer (e.g. we hear the person next to us snoring, and we start telling ourselves how unfair this is). This is the nature of our suffering.





The Four Noble Truths

The path we follow in this program has its origins in Buddhist teaching of the Four Noble Truths. It is not necessary to become a Buddhist to benefit from mindfulness and insight practice, but it may be helpful to learn about these Four Noble Truths. ‘

What are the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism?

- There is **dukkha** (This is often translated as ‘suffering; but it is more like ‘feeling uncomfortable in your own skin’)
- **Dukkha** is caused by craving.
- There is an escape from **dukkha**.
- The Noble Eightfold Path are the steps we take to escape **dukkha**.

Step 1 – Recognise Dukkha

It is almost possible to fix a problem until you see it exists. I discovered this the hard way after years of addiction destroying my life – almost everyone else could see I was a mess, but until I recognised there was something that needed fixing, there could be no progress. It was a big deal for me to finally admit that I was hopelessly addicted but taking this step didn’t bring an end to my problems. The reality was that my alcohol enthusiasm was merely a symptom of something much deeper. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, and it was this that drove me to self-destructive behaviours.

‘*Dukkha*’ is sometimes translated as ‘suffering’, but I think this wording can be confusing. It would certainly be true to say that some forms of *dukkha* involve obvious suffering (e.g. losing your job), but the *dukkha* that causes most of our discomfort is far subtler than this (e.g. the thought ‘it shouldn’t be like this’).

The *dukkha* that drove me into addiction was the nagging idea that I was somehow broken and therefore needed fixing. As a teenager, I was plagued by a pattern of thinking that could be best summed up by the idea, ‘surely, this can’t be it?’ I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, and I desperately began looking for a way to fix myself – this is when my suffering really began.

If you recognise *dukkha* in your own life, you are ready for the next step which is a diagnosis of your condition. The Buddha was very clear that his teachings were only meant to help people escape suffering, so if your problem is you need to own a Ferrari, you might be better with a different approach.

Step 2 – Recognise Suffering is Caused by Craving

When we first begin practicing meditation, we often have the expectation that we are going to experience 20 minutes of bliss. Then we sit down and within a few seconds our brain gets lost in thought – not blissful happy thoughts, but the same old rubbish that make life miserable e.g. ‘did he give me a funny look when I came in?’, ‘what will I do if I ever lose my job’, and ‘I wish I had a girlfriend’.

It isn't the thoughts themselves that cause our suffering but our relationship with these thoughts. This internal commentary is just the brain noticing connections (e.g. ‘doesn't the pattern on that cushion remind you of granny's curtains’), making observations about what is currently happening (e.g. great movie), and providing useful suggestions (e.g. you notice the time and the brain reminds you that you have an appointment). Suffering occurs when we mistake these thoughts for something more significant and we start having opinions about the thinking (e.g. ‘I shouldn't be thinking this’) – this leads to proliferation of thought and it is like we have fallen into a dream.

The craving that causes dukkha occurs when we latch onto a thought. The brain is like a chatty toddler, and it tends to repeat a lot of stuff it has heard from other people and some of the ideas it picks up can be pretty nasty and inaccurate. Once we understand what the brain is doing, we no longer take thoughts so personally – if the brain says something ‘you are so fat and ugly’, we can recognise it as an unhelpful observation and nothing more.

Escaping dukkha doesn't mean that we must stop thinking – it is not even about getting rid of the ‘bad’ thoughts. It just requires that we stop identifying with our thoughts in a way that leads to suffering. It is all about allowing thoughts to pass through the brain like clouds passing through the sky – they come, they go, and we just let them be.

3. There is an Escape from Dukkha

The Four Noble Truths are not something we need to believe in. This is practical path that is completely self-confirming. You might have never have heard of Buddhism yet still figured a lot of this out yourself.

Those of us who have reacted to mental distress by pacing up and down, or going for a long walk, have intuitively worked out the first two noble truths. We recognise that being sucked up into a headful of racing thoughts is hell, but by focusing on something physical (i.e. walking), we can temporarily lessen our suffering.

Repeatedly hitting a mental rock bottom is far from an ideal way to escape mental suffering. Thankfully, the Buddha provided a treatment plan that has already helped many people. Once we have clearly recognised the problem (our addiction to thoughts), and we accept the solution (developing a different relationship with thoughts), we are then ready to begin treating our condition.



4. The Eightfold Path Provides an Escape from Dukkha

- Right understanding
- Right intention
- Right action
- Right speech
- Right livelihood
- Right effort
- Right concentration
- Right mindfulness

We have been practicing these eight steps as part of the mindfulness program. By following the **5 precepts** (see session 16), we go a long way to practicing right action, right speech, and right livelihood. We have been developing right concentration, right mindfulness, and right effort (finding the sweet spot between restlessness and mental dullness) as part of our meditation training. The right understanding develops as we examine our experience from stillness. We practice right intention by taking up this path to end our personal suffering.



Craving and the 5 Aggregates

The five aggregates (khandas) are a way of dividing up our experience of being a 'solid self' into constituent parts. This Buddhist theory may be useful to us because it can give us a clearer understanding of how and why craving arises. I will explain a bit more about each of these aggregates below, but they are:

- **Form** (*Rupa*)
- **Feeling** (*Vedana*)
- **Perception** (*Sanna*)
- **Mental formations** (*Sankhara*)
- **Consciousness** (*Vinnana*)

Form

I like to think of form as the objects of the five senses (i.e. sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical sensation). This includes all the material stuff that make up our life (e.g. buildings, roads, tables, and our body) that we become aware of through interaction with our senses.

(Craving and the 5 Aggregates continued)

Consciousness

When one of our five senses come into contact with an object (e.g. we look at a flower), it is consciousness that makes us aware of this contact. Consciousness also has a directing quality in that it not only makes us aware of an object, but it also decides which object (out of the countless objects in our environment) that we become aware of.

Feeling

The word 'feeling' is commonly used to refer to emotions but this is not what we mean here. When consciousness comes into contact with an object there is 'feeling response' which is either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Perception

Perception is the labelling of any object that we become conscious of (e.g. this is a tree). Sometimes our perception is mistaken (e.g. waving to a friend who we see in the distance only to realize as we get closer that we have been waving to a stranger).

Mental Formations

Mental formations are the mental baggage we drag around with us throughout life. It includes our thoughts, our stories, our beliefs, our opinions, and our prejudices. The mental formations also include our habitual responses that get triggered by the interaction of the other aggregates.

Here is an example of how the five aggregates work in practice:

- An object (**form**) is placed in my mouth
- I become aware of the taste of the object (**consciousness**)
- The taste is pleasant (**feeling**)
- I realize it is chocolate (**perception**)
- I start to feel guilty about eating chocolate because I need to lose weight (**mental formations**)

The Five Aggregates and Craving

Craving arises due to the aggregate of feeling. When a pleasant feeling arises, we want to hold onto it. When an unpleasant feeling arises, we want to push it away. When a neutral feeling arises, we have a desire to experience something different.

This craving is just something the brains do. The real problem for us is that we grasp onto the craving. The goal of mindfulness is to be able to experience craving without grasping.



Mindfulness of Perception

The way we look at our life determines the kind of life we have. If we are in the habit of looking at reality through a negative lens, this will have an impact on what we experience. What we are doing here is learning to perceive in new ways. When we do this, we are usually amazed to see how it changes our experience of life. One simple way of changing our perception is grounding ourselves— here we are reducing the input of our habitual thinking patterns by focusing more on information coming in from the other senses.



Brahma Viharas

There is another powerful way of changing the lens through which we perceive reality called the ‘brahma viharas’ which can be translated as ‘divine abodes’. The Buddha prescribed this new way of perceiving as an anecdote to the negative perceptions (e.g. ill-will) many of us habitually experience. We have already looked at one of the brahma viharas (metta/friendliness) in session two, but here we will examine all four aspects of this new way of perceiving.

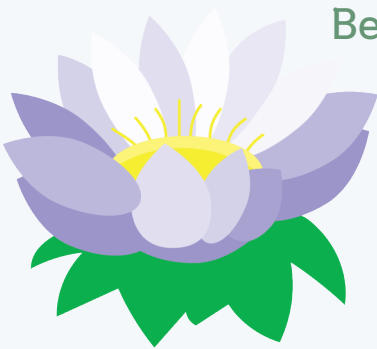
- **Loving kindness (*metta*)** – is unconditional friendliness directed towards ourselves, others, and life in general.
- **Compassion (*karuna*)** – kindness directed towards our own suffering and the suffering of others.
- **Sympathetic joy (*mudita*)** – this includes a joy we can experience from delighting in nice things happening to other people and a spiritual joy (see session 9) that arises in meditation.
- **Equanimity (*upekkha*)** is the opposite of craving. It is state where we are no longer grasping or pushing away.

It can be helpful to think of the brahma viharas as just different aspects of metta (e.g. compassion is when metta is directed towards suffering). So, practicing the metta meditation can be a way of developing all aspects of the brahma viharas although focusing on specific practices (e.g. tonglen for developing compassion) can be useful.



Well-Being

(Stage 4 of the *Hope Mindfulness Program*)



Beyond Mindfulness

It took me many years to realize that the goal of mindfulness is not to be mindful, but to use it as a tool to gain insight into the three characteristics. It is by gaining a deep understanding of impermanence, non-self, and the nature of suffering that our lives begin to change in a profound way. These insights lead to a permanent shift in our experience of reality that are not dependent on our continued mindfulness practice. The mindfulness journey can lead us to a state that I call 'well-being'. It was my desperate search for well-being that caused me to fall into addiction in the first place. My lack of well-being also generated end-

less seeking that made life uncomfortable for me in our out of addiction. It was only by reaching a state of well-being that I could finally be free. I describe this well-being as having three aspects:

Wonder

Much of our dissatisfaction with life occurs because we think we know that is going on. Our head is full of stories about how things 'should be' rather than noticing how things actually are. Instead of being fascinated by the mysterious and ever-changing world around us, we prefer to focus on what we know. This leads to a life that feels stale, limited, and where taking drugs to feel better makes perfect sense.

Wonder means meeting life from a place of curiosity. It involves letting go of our ideas about how things are, and actually looking to see what's there. When we do this, something amazing happens. Everything we took for granted suddenly appears new, mysterious, and full of possibilities. Most of us are flabbergasted by how we could have missed such a wonder that was always right in front of us.

Intimacy

Our sense of disconnection from the world is arises due to the fact that we have become mesmerized by thinking. It is like becoming so engrossed while reading a horror story that we began to believe it is real. This relationship with thinking creates an imaginary barrier between us and everything else. As we pay more attention to our life, we begin to see how ridiculous this belief was – there is no part of us that doesn't belong to life, so how could we be separate from it?

Once the sense of disconnection disappears, we discover a sense of intimacy with life that our heart yearns for. This sense of connection does not depend in any way on life behaving a certain way or other people behaving a certain way. We discover that intimacy is not something that we have to earn, but is what exists when we lower our thought-generated barriers.

(Well-Being continued)

Trust

Trust is the recognition that right now is the only way it ever could be. It is what it is – always. It is the ridiculous belief that we are somehow getting ‘now’ wrong that triggers anxiety, self-loathing and an inability to relax. Practices like Vipassana can help us to see that we have no choice as to what is arising – all that matters for our peace of mind is how we are relating to what happens. The Christian mystic Anthony de Mello summed up trust best with the words ‘absolute cooperation with the inevitable’.



The Five Precepts

Our behavior affects the state of our mind. If we wish to develop our mindfulness practice, we will want to avoid doing things that damage our mental clarity.

The ‘5 precepts’ refer to a standard of ethical conduct found in Buddhism. These are more like ‘training rules’ than religious commandments. The motivation for keeping the precepts is not so much about ‘being good’ but about facilitating mental clarity – it is hard to develop a peaceful concentrated mind if we are full of guilt, remorse, and fear of punishment.

The five precepts are:

- **Avoid killing sentient beings (i.e. any entity that has the ability to experience suffering)**
- **Avoid harmful speech (e.g. lying, gossip, slander, or aggressive speech)**
- **Avoid sexual misconduct (engaging in sex in such a way as it causes harm)**
- **Avoid taking what has not been given**
- **Avoid intoxicants (it is not possible to be mindful if we are intoxicated)**



All of these precepts could be summed up with the rule ‘**avoid causing harm**’.

Keeping these precepts can be of great value in the beginning of our journey. As we develop wisdom through our mindfulness training, we no longer need to rely so much on rules. This wisdom allows us to see how our actions create pain for ourselves and others, and we develop a strong motivation to avoid this.





Continuing Your Journey

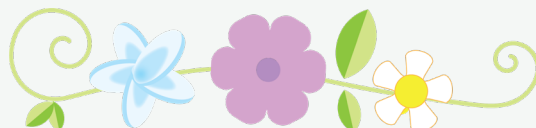
When You Return Home

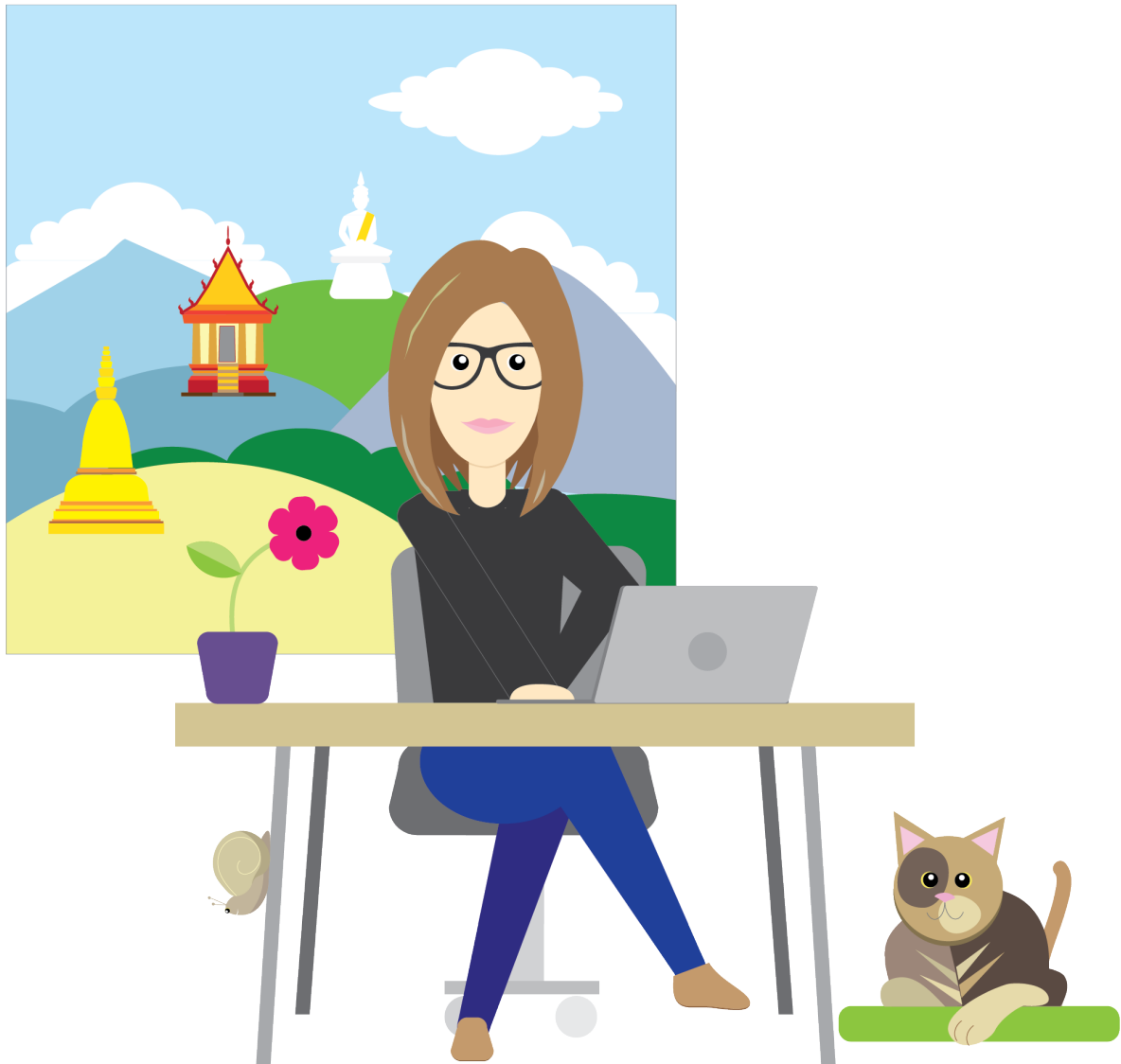
- It is recommended that once you return home, you continue to meditate at least 20 minutes per day (ideally, building up to two twenty-minute sessions per day).
- Try to sit for one 40-minute session once per week as this can be the perfect length for getting the most from vipassana practice.
- It is a good idea to continue with the metta meditation once you return home – this can help with ill-will and fear.
- After you have established a solid meditation practice (six months to a year after rehab), it is recommended that you aim to sit for an hour every day (this can be in the form of two sessions – 20 minutes and 40 minutes).
- Spend some time in each meditation looking for the three characteristics by practicing vipassana.
- It may be a good idea to join a meditation group or find an experienced meditation when you return home. It is easy to get lost when we go it alone.
- After you have been practicing meditation for a year, you may benefit from going on a meditation retreat.

Please note: I have created a series of YouTube videos that can also be used as a resource to support your learning <https://www.youtube.com/user/paulgarrigan1> (or just go to YouTube and search for my name ‘Paul Garrigan’).

Mindfulness Skype Sessions

I provide mindfulness coaching via Skype to a limited number of clients once they return home. Please let me know if this is something you would be interested in – info@paulgarrigan.com





The *Hope Mindfulness Program Guide* was designed and illustrated by **Karen Spiak**, a freelance designer, illustrator and writer. Originally from New York, Karen currently lives in the countryside of Northern Thailand with her cat, Cleo.

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