**Antar Mouna**

**The Practice of Inner Silence**

This can initially be practiced as a formal seated practice where we can focus upon each stage and then bring them all together little by little. It can also be practiced within our everyday lives. It is an excellent practice whereby:

* We start to be aware of our body, breath, and sensory experiences, as they are in our direct experience
* We start to know our mind and emotions more intimately as we consciously allow them to be known to us without reservation
* Gradually as we become more aligned with awareness, that is the field within which all transitory thoughts, feelings and sensations arise, we begin to feel a deep silence within which all experience is more clearly seen as it bubbles up, meaning we have more of a choice of how to react.
* We are becoming more awake and starting to see our inner world more clearly.
* We are learning the art of non-attachment, gradually transforming our perception, gradually giving us the opportunity to respond to our inner and outer worlds differently

Whilst it is possible to move through the stages of Antar Mouna within one long meditation each of the steps can be practiced separately over a number of weeks/months, progressing slowly. We can explore them individually or combine them. Remember that we must have the attitude of being an inner explorer who is curious to know what is there. And there must be kindness!

First settle comfortably using physical aids as needed. It is important to take time over this… then if at any time during your meditation you become uncomfortable then please feel free to move and adjust your position but do slowly and sensitively.

**Stage One: Awareness of Sensory experience**

Start to be aware of what you are receiving through your senses, at first noticing anything external in your environment, for instance:

* Becoming aware of hearing the traffic in the distance
* An awareness of the smell of incense in the room
* Or perhaps feeling a gentle breeze against your skin

Spend a few moments becoming fully aware of each sensation, and when another one presents itself more strongly then move to your attention to it and experience that…… Now turn your attention to internal sensory experience and see what draws your attention, so you may notice “I am aware that I am listening to my breath, I am aware that I can feel an itch on my leg, I am aware I can feel tightness in my shoulder and so on”. Let there be a spirit of curiosity without judgment of any kind, you are simply noticing what is there.

As you continue in this way notice how it is your soft open awareness that enables the act of seeing, listening, feeling this or that.

**Stage two: Awareness of Thoughts**

Now become aware of your thoughts as they arise and fall away, notice what the thoughts are with curiosity. When there are no thoughts be aware of that also. And if you become absent minded for a while again just notice that has happened. Let all thoughts rise up into consciousness and do not judge them, simply notice them with a kindly interest.

Notice that your thoughts are also events occurring within awareness, just as the sounds and feelings were….. and here there is the thought, the act of watching and the awareness. Let this be a relaxed practice where you only need to be aware of thoughts passing or the silence between thoughts…

Notice that you are aware whether there are thoughts or not… thoughts come and go but awareness remains….

**Stage three: Choosing thoughts and their link to emotions**

Now bring to your mind a thought you wish to think, such as love for your loved ones and stay with it for a little while, after a minute or so then consciously release it, let it go now. Find another thought that you would choose not to think such as a statement of shame, or jealousy or dislike and again maintain it for a while, and then release it completely. Continue in this way and if another spontaneous thought arises immediately just notice the feeling it creates inside. Is it positive, negative or perhaps neutral in feeling? See if you are able to drop a thought at will or is it the case that our negative thoughts are stickier somehow?

**Stage four: Choiceless awareness**

Now just allow events to come spontaneously, there is now no control of what you are noticing, your attention could be drawn to physical sensations, to sounds, to thoughts or to stillness. Just allowing your attention the freedom to be drawn to what is, if you start to build a story though, just release it and return to a wide-open space of noticing what arises for you…….

**Stage five: Aware of being aware**

Finally, simply ask yourself if you are aware and let yourself move deeply inside…to see if that is true……

**The release**

Gradually lead the release from the meditation…… Releasing from your focus start to become more aware of the breath, your gentle inhalation and your gentle exhalation…...notice how they subtly move your body creating sensations as you breathe…..expand your awareness to include an awareness of your body, begin to sense your feet & legs, your hands & arms, your torso and head, your face, your whole body…..become more aware of the sounds in the room around you… dropping your chin to chest, then as you slowly lift your head blinking eyes open taking in the view….