

# **Skillful Mind Meditation Retreat**

*Accompanying notes for teachings*



**Presented by Peter Radcliffe**



# Introduction

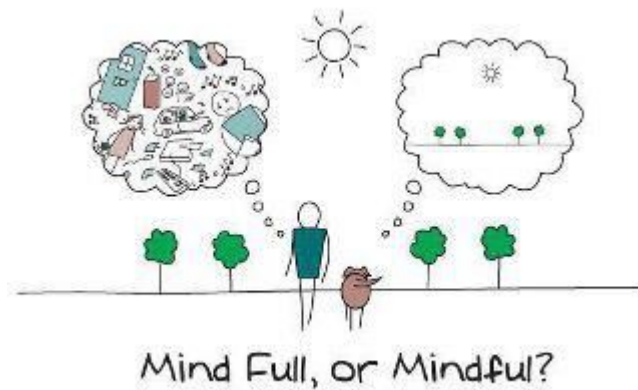
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This booklet is designed as the accompanying notes to the Skillful Mind Meditation Retreat.

## *Mindfulness and Insight*

The two tools of a meditator are mindfulness and insight.

Mindfulness is the ability to know what the mind is doing at any one time. We often refer to this part of the mind as the “observer” or “watcher”, who is constantly checking the mind to see if it is distracted or not. In real life there is no such thing as a separate part of the mind, but nevertheless, it is a useful concept. The habit to keep checking up on the state of the mind is something that can be developed like a muscle in the body.



Insight (or awareness) is understanding of the mind itself. If you have insight, you can know when and what action to take if you decide your mind is in a non productive state. If your mind is in the state you want it to be, then nothing need be done. If you have become distracted, starting to fall asleep or some other undesired state then you need to know what to do to bring it back to where you want it.

Concentration, by the way, develops naturally as the unconscious mind chooses to stay with a particular object of meditation (or anything else).

Learning, practice and more practice is the way to increase all of these.



## *Habituation, Wisdom and Compassion*

There are also 3 principles behind the empowerment of Mindfulness and Insight.

### Habituation

Consider that mindfulness (the habit of checking up on your mind) is like any other learning which is created when the brain makes a series of connections between sets of neurons in the brain. To strengthen these neurological connections we need to do the practice over and over again so that it becomes second nature. Everything is like this. If you spend an hour a day deliberately thinking nice thoughts, pretty soon you will find yourself walking down the street and having nice thoughts without effort – because you have built up the habit. The more good habits you can pick up and the more bad habits you can break, the better your life you will be.

### Wisdom

Tuning our mind inwards and using our massive human intelligence (that can work out how to send a man to the moon) to study our thoughts and emotions, leads to wisdom. Quite soon, you will make a lot of new discoveries. You will work out just what the process is to having negative feelings, why you get distracted and what techniques work to bring you back. Ultimately, wisdom will lead you to a whole new way of looking at the world, which will totally transform you.

### An open heart (love and compassion)

Wisdom will also let you see that to have a calm mind you will need an open heart. For this, compassion and love are indispensable. Those who are naturally loving will already know this from experience. An open heart leads to selflessness which is the opposite of selfishness. Selfishness is really clinging to your ego (or sense of self); the number one (actually, the only one) obstacle to true happiness.



If you judge people, you  
have no time to love them.

# Body Posture

The aim of body posture is to find a balance between comfort and alertness. Like everything in meditation the middle way is the key. If your body is too rigid you will experience pain and an agitated mind; too lax and you will fall asleep.

## 7 point posture meditation

This meditation combines concentration of the mind with a checklist of how to sit with the most conducive posture for meditation.

### Legs

The legs form the foundation of our meditation posture. Like the earth element, the solid base allows for the rest of the body to feel secure and supported. The stability of the lower body is also connected with our determination and promise to sit in meditation posture for the duration of the session. There are a number of sitting postures recommended depending on your flexibility

Tip: For all postures it is beneficial to place a cushion wedged under your buttocks being higher at the back so it rotates your hips forward keeping your pelvis at upright as possible.

#### Sitting on a chair

Try to sit with your knees slightly lower than your hips and keep your back upright. Don't lean on the chair if you can help it. Your back will remain straightest if you keep it erect by itself.



#### Using a bench

Using a small meditation bench is becoming more popular these days. It helps keep your back straight although can be a little hard on your knees and feet over longer periods of time unless you use padding.

#### Indian posture

This is a good beginners sitting posture with both thighs and calves of each leg resting on the ground. To do this you will need to stretch your knees wide and aim to bring your heels almost into alignment right in front and as close as possible to your pubic bone. Turn the feet so the heels point skyward as much as possible.



#### Lotus posture

This is the classic meditation posture with several variations. Quarter lotus has one foot resting on the calf of the other leg. Half lotus has the foot resting on the thigh of the other leg and full lotus has both feet resting on alternate thighs.

## *Hands*

The classic hand posture (mudra) for meditation is right hand cupped in left hand in the lap at the level of the navel chakra (place of the fire element). The thumbs touch gently reminding us of balance. We need balance between laxity and rigidity, dullness and excitement, male and female, left and right, mind and body, compassion and determination – in short, anything and everything!



## *Back*

The biggest battle with pain for most meditators will be in the back somewhere. Good back position is vital to keep the lymph and blood flowing and the energy moving. Visualise yourself hanging from your crown chakra. Keep your hips tilted forward as much as you can and keep alert for any slouching during the session. Let your back remind you of the water element allowing for the flow of the elements in your body.

## *Arms and shoulders*

Extend the shoulders away from the ears. Allow the elbows to hang away from the body reminding you of the air element. Let them be a metaphor for two wings of kindness and wisdom that will set you free.

## *Head*

The head is the extension of your straight back. Don't allow it to loll forward or backward. Tuck the chin in slightly as if locking it in position. Let it remind you of the "watcher" – that part of your awareness that is constantly on the lookout for distraction.

## *Mouth*

Relax the jaw and touch the front teeth together so there is space between the molars. Let the wetness of your mouth remind you of the tears of compassion to open your heart to others who are less fortunate than you.

## *Eyes*

It is recommended that you meditate with the eyes open – even if just a tiny bit. Gaze blankly at about 45° down and you can either fix your attention on something or gaze beyond it. Either way the true gaze of your attention is directed inward at the mind and is the gaze of insight.

You will note that I have suggested letting each of your body points also be a reminder of qualities of your meditation. This is a good way to integrate and remind yourself of the qualities of mind needed for strong meditation.

### Final Tip

Visualise yourself as a being of light. Breathe in healing light, energy and attention to any parts of the body that have pain. Then release that pain on the exhalation.

# Meditation of Feeling

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Whilst indulging the body seems to be the primary goal of the western world, we overlook that it is the mind that ultimately makes us happy. If we are feeling happy then it is easy to put up with some discomfort but if our mind is saturated with malice – no amount of luxury can make us feel good. We can't even taste our food if our mind is overcome with negative emotion.



So once we find a meditation position we can work with, we turn our mind to the feelings of happiness vs agitation. What creates calmness and happiness? Interestingly, it is not the number of thoughts but the quality of thoughts that is the main cause for calmness. People often think that meditation is the process of getting rid of thoughts. But in fact (at least in the early stages) it is far more about changing your feeling toward the thoughts you are having rather than trying to get rid of them.

Happiness is of two sorts. The fulfilment of desire (which is temporary) and the feeling of worth you get through fulfilling your purpose in life and helping others. It's the second that we need to cultivate, as this works hand in hand with calmness to improve our meditation.

As we focus more on feeling, we also change the object of meditation from the body to the breath. The key point to understand at this stage is that distractions are only obstacles when there is aversion to them. The meditator must see the truth that the more you don't want distractions, the more aversion you make. So, by cultivating a sense of curiosity rather than aversion to a distraction, we reduce the power of the distraction to take our mind away from the meditation object or change our emotional state.

In fact, when a meditator starts to fully understand this, he or she might even become a little masochistic to see how much distraction can be put up with whilst still remaining calm. You can see there is starting to be a huge turn-around in thought as the meditator tries to bring new, more positive feelings to old situations. This is the core learning of the second of the foundations of mindfulness.

The 4 foundations of mindfulness (as taught by the Buddha) are mindfulness of body, feelings, thoughts and phenomena. The first two are taught during this retreat and the second two are taught during the advanced retreat.

# Techniques

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## *Meditation on the body*

One of the most basic and fundamental techniques that can be practiced is meditation on the body. There are a number of advantages to this meditation that make it an ideal meditation for beginners and experienced people alike.

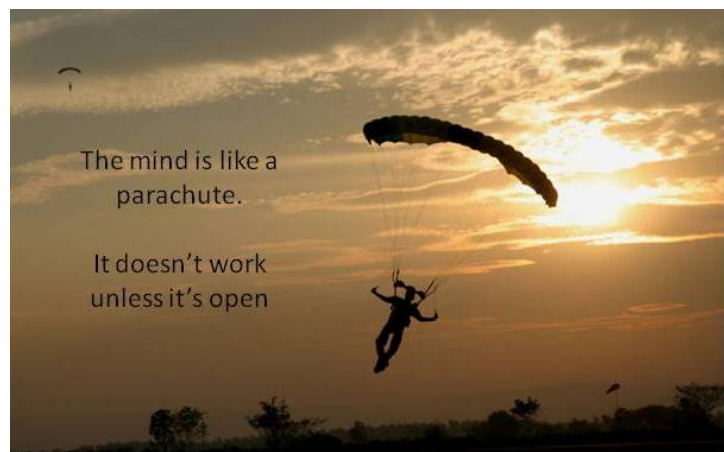
Because the body is so present in our consciousness it already occupies a position of importance in our mind, making it easy to concentrate on. We always have our body with us so it is convenient. There is a lot going on with the body at any one time making it interesting to the mind. The body is always “in the now”, keeping us anchored to the present. Because pain is often common with beginners, we sometimes have no choice but to work with the body and in particular that part of the body that is in pain. We can use the body as a meditation object during any activity we do – not just formal meditation. There are a number of body meditations and the one presented on this retreat is the 7 point meditation posture technique. Simply mentally work through the 7 points of body posture above. Spend a few minutes on each point before moving on.

## *Meditation on the breath*

Another common object of meditation is the breath. Finer than the body, the breath creates a more refined concentration but is also a little harder for some people to stay focused on. Our breath is also more affected by our emotions and interestingly our breath can also have a moderating affect on an emotion. By lengthening our breath we are able to also reduce the levels of emotions that we might be experiencing at any one time. Choose a place either at the tip of the nose where you can feel the breath or at any point you feel comfortable and hold your attention on the flow of the breath in and out.

## *Visualisation of the colours*

We add visualisation of colours to the meditation on the breath in order to increase the awareness and attention span on the meditation object (the breath). The reason this works is because the breath itself is very subtle, meaning there is not much there to hold your attention. (It becomes boring quickly causing your mind to wander.)



By adding colours and meanings we make the process more beautiful, generative and interesting. Try to visualise breathing in white light in the form of revitalising energy, together with all the resources you need for a healthy, balanced body and mind. Secondly, visualise red as you retain the breath and imagine this energy becomes one with every cell of your body. Finally, visualise blue as you breathe out, allowing any unwanted things to be expelled from the body and mind.



## *Refining your concentration*

To further refine your concentration on the object, break each of the 3 parts of the breath (the inhalation, the retention, the exhalation) into 3 more parts each (the beginning, middle and end of each part of the breath). This then make 9 parts to each breath.

## *Counting the breath*

To further empower mindfulness we also do some arithmetic as we breath. Choose one of the 9 parts of the breath from above as your counting point. (For example the start of the out breath). Then, whilst concentrating on the 9 parts of each breath also count 7 breaths at the point which you have chosen. If you can do this, choose another location and count to 14 or 21 breaths. If this is easy, count backwards or count in ever increasing numbers up to 10 in the following way, 1 ; 1,2 ; 1,2,3 ; 1,2,3,4 ; 1,2,3,4,5 etc. To make it harder still, visualise colours at the same time. You can be as creative as you want.

Now at this point you might wonder why we are doing so much work in what you thought was supposed to be a relaxing activity. The reason is that your mind has a powerful tendency to wander from subject to subject at whim. Unless you can achieve power over your mind to keep it in one place, you will never be able to reach the higher stages of meditation. But because the mind is so powerful, it needs to be given a lot to do to keep it in one place. This work also increases awareness.

## *Letting go*



Once you have spent some time with the above meditation you can take mini-breaks of a minute or two where you let go of all activity. Don't exert your mind in any way, but just watch. If you have empowered your mind with mindfulness, awareness and intensity then you will find special things happening at this time. It will be as if you enter a state of very clear awareness, where you are relaxed but also totally awake and even more aware than usual. You are now really experiencing the fruits of meditation.

Last night I lost the world, and gained the universe

# Walking meditation

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Meditation can of course be done in any position. Lying, sitting, walking – even washing dishes. Each style has benefits and drawbacks and walking meditation is not different. If your sitting meditation gets too restless then you can



get up and change to walking meditation. Also because your body movement takes some concentration this can act as a sort of anchor to the present moment so you keep your mind in the here and now on the meditation object (your walking). A couple of variations of walking meditation are as follows:

## *Mindfulness walking meditation*

In this meditation we walk as slowly as possible for 8 steps then turn for 8 steps and walk back for 8 steps before turning around once again for 8 steps to begin again. You can walk between 2 trees or 2 rocks if this helps. Look downward to the ground just in front of you to keep the eyes from wandering (and being distracted) too much. But whilst your eyes are down cast open all your senses to the environment around you.

Especially be aware of the feeling of your feet as they make each step. (I like to do this bare foot). Try to empower your awareness so that you begin to notice the little things that you would normally miss. But make sure you don't get involved in anything you notice as this is a distraction. Once you have noticed something bring your mind back to the steps.

To take this further try to break your step up into ever finer parts. Like bringing the foot down, heel touching, side of foot touching, each toe touching, increase in pressure as you shift weight etc... Try it out for 20 minutes

## Active dreaming

This walking meditation originally came from the American Indians.

Think of a problem, stuck state or unresolved issue that you would like to change or get an insight into. Shift your attention from the problem so it rests on the “back burner”.

Enter into a calm meditative state and open up your peripheral vision. No internal dialogue and let yourself be relaxed. Now go for a walk.

When something in the environment draws your attention, offers you a gift, a sign, a symbol or a sense of meaning. (The symbol may be visual, auditory, or that you step in a mud puddle) You are just available to it. There are two ways to think about this. The western way would say that the unconscious mind just grabbed a symbol of importance. The native American would say that the universe just offered you a gift. Both are beautiful perspectives, but different perspectives.



Remember to walk with grace and ease. Once you have found your object we are going to examine it from 3 different perspectives.

Firstly just be aware of what the meaning could be as you look at it. Why did it draw your attention. Does it have anything to do with your problem?

Next, imagine you are the thing. Examine how the symbol or thing relates to your problem. What qualities does the symbol have that would be useful for you to have?

Finally imaging floating out to the side or above the object where you can observe yourself and the symbol in relation to each other. What new learnings can you gain from this perspective in how you relate to the sign or symbol?

Don't expect any answers. Just enjoy the experience, concentrate on staying in the present moment with no internal dialogue and

just let the meanings come to you.

Once you are done, you can then either move on to another object, stop and rest or come back. Be aware that further answers may also present themselves in the future, in dreams or just out of the blue.

# 9 stages of meditation

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When taking a journey it is good to know a little bit about where we are going. The same is true for meditation. The “9 stages of meditation” is a wonderful explanation of what a meditator will experience and is illustrated by the picture “Taming the elephant mind” (see below) which can be found in many Tibetan monasteries around the world.

## *Stage 1*

As we begin meditation we remove our attention from the world around us and turn our mind inside to our thoughts. This may be something that some of us have not done very often. We are surprised to see that it is as busy “in there” as it is on the outside. Thoughts, feelings, memories, fears and more come flashing past, moment by moment. The mind is like a train station at rush hour and we wonder how we are ever going to even start on the task of calming this wild elephant of a mind.

### Benefits

By seeing the chaos of our own mind we gain humility to realise that we are not so “in control” as we thought we were. We sense that this is going to be a difficult task but one that is worthwhile. In addition, we gain a sense of compassion toward ourselves because we wonder how we can function as sanely as we do with such a wild and chaotic mind. The difficulty we have with focussing on our meditation object demonstrates what little power we have over our impulses and our automatic reaction of becoming stressed or frustrated. Finally, if we consider that others’ minds are likewise in a state of chaos, we gain a sense of compassion and even forgiveness toward some of their negative actions. What more can you expect from a person who has a mind that is possibly even more chaotic and unruly as our own?

## *Stage 2*

If we make an effort to apply the technique of meditation, then it will not be long before most people will have short periods of relative calm, where for just a moment their mind slows down and stays on the meditation object. We continue to see our mind wander away, and time and again we bring it back to the meditation object. The thing to learn at this stage is that if you get frustrated each time you have to bring the mind back, it will stir up your mind with negative energy that will make it harder to control. So the task here is to learn how to be content with bringing the mind back, time and again, even though what you want is for the mind to stay still on the object.

### Benefits

We are beginning to learn that it is our own anger and attachment that give negative energy to any situation, making it worse, like pouring petrol on a fire. Sometimes little incidents trigger us and our reaction is out of proportion to the gravity of the incident, showing that we are tapping into other built-up frustrations. We learn to build patience toward our own and other people’s emotional outbursts, seeing them as a sign that they also have a pool of negative energy that causes them more suffering than it does ourselves.

### *Stage 3*

If we have kept our practice going for some weeks or months, it is possible that we may get to a stage where we are able to keep our mind on the meditation object about half of the time. It is less likely that external distractions will pull us away from our meditation object, because we will have learned that the energy of a distraction comes from inside – not outside. Even if someone slams a door, we see the distractions come from the story we make in our head about the slammed door, rather than the noise itself. In fact, the major change at Stage 3 is that we start to give up on the idea that distractions are our enemy and begin to think of them as our friend. This is an indispensable part of becoming calmer. What is calmness if it is not being at peace in the face of something we perceive as negative? And how can your peace be disturbed if you see all things as useful and beneficial?

#### Benefits

Like in meditation, our mind is becoming so flexible that we begin to see that whether something is good or bad depends on how you see it. Being ill, losing your job or having to put up with someone you don't like, might have hidden virtues you have not previously seen, least of which is that all these act as the very teachers you need to work on your mind so it becomes more mature and calm.

### *Stage 4*

By going on retreats and keeping up a regular practice it is possible for people with ordinary lives to reach Stage 4 during some meditations. Here, we are experiencing things at a whole new level. The same distractions come up but we are able to catch them as soon as they begin to arise – while they are at the level of thought rather than emotion. So, our reactions are very subtle and quick, as opposed to stewing over a situation for 5 minutes until we are in a furious lather, then trying to bring ourselves down. We also spend a lot of time dealing with subtle dullness (which is a wonderful yet slightly sleepy trance-like state) and subtle excitement (which is a feeling of joy and happiness about our achievements and our fortunate life situation). This excitement is like the opposite of depression, but it is still an obstacle to higher levels of meditation.

#### Benefits

Apart from the enormous rejuvenating effect this has on our emotional and physical health, the experience of feeling so wonderful in meditation allows us to realise that happiness comes from within – not from the world around us. And with so much potential happiness, love and wisdom sitting within us we no longer have to worry about that “empty” feeling that many people in the West feel. We also see the same potential in everyone else, making us rethink our labels of them as a “bad person” etc.

### *Stage 5, 6 and 7*

At stage 5, our practice of mindfulness is mostly complete. We rarely lose the object of meditation. It is now a matter of transforming mental habits that keep coming up as distractions. We have to bring ever greater insight and wisdom into the meditation to transform the clinging which still exists within us. We begin to understand at a deep level that everything in our world is just a label projected by our mind. It is a story made up of “mind stuff”. But this “mind stuff”, at its source, is blissful. By stage 7 our meditation is so strong that we are meditating 24 hours a day in whatever activity we are doing.

## Stage 8 and 9

These are the final stages of meditation where like ripples in a pond, we are allowing the last few habits of our minds to still themselves, bringing us to total one-pointed meditation.



### Representations

Elephant = Mind

Monkey = Restlessness

Rabbit = Subtle dullness / excitement

Meditator = Us

Rope = Mindfulness

Hook = Insight / awareness

Fire = Effort

# Alignment Process

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The alignment process carried out during the retreat is from the area of Life Coaching rather than meditation. It was developed by NLP trainer Robert Dilts based on work by Gregory Batson – an English anthropologist and social scientist.

People think on different levels. Some levels are practical, such as what you do or how you do it, whilst others are more abstract, such as why you do something, or who you are when you are doing something. The more abstract levels are associated with deeper levels of our mind and have a greater influence on us than the more practical levels. Conflict between these levels can lead to self sabotage, while alignment of these levels leads to motivation and clarity about how to get what you want.



The heart of this process is set out below.

1. Define a goal you are working toward, or situation you are in at present, which you want more clarity on.
2. Step into each of the levels below (starting at environment) and ask yourself the following questions:
  - What (this level) supports you in your goal / activity?
  - Is the goal / activity well suited to (this level)?
  - What other (this level) can you adopt for this goal / activity?
3. Once you are at the level of Purpose / Mission, turn around and step down each level asking the following questions:
  - How is your goal / activity an expression of this level and all of the above?
  - Is there alignment with all of the above?
  - What changes can you make for greater alignment?
4. Conclude by creating a drawing , summary or symbol for what you have learned.



# Life Coaching

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Whether we are having problems at work, home or with ourselves, life coaching is becoming a popular way of dealing with obstacles that hold us back from expressing our full potential in life. NLP coaching comes from investigating what the difference is between those that sail easily through life and those that are plagued with problems. The result is an amazing number of new techniques that can be delivered quickly and efficiently to have dramatic changes in someone's life.

Depending on the level of mastery of a life coach, work can be done at a number of levels within the psyche of a person.

## ***Behaviour level***

Many of us just want to improve the effectiveness of what we do. We might want to get better at public speaking or dealing with employees, or become more efficient. We might want to gain motivation, to lose weight or give up smoking. All of these require a change at behaviour level that will lead to new actions producing the outcomes we want.



## ***Belief level***

Once trust is developed between a coach and client it is also possible to go much deeper than the behaviour level. That is because our behaviour is always powered by beliefs that lie behind our actions. And for most people we have a number of beliefs that limit us such as "I'm not good enough..." or "I don't deserve to be able to..." or "I'm stuck because..."

Working at this level is far more effective because by changing these limiting beliefs we not only change behaviours, but also increase our self esteem. Changes at the belief level also extend to areas of our life other than the problem area.

## ***Identity and purpose level***

Coaching can also be carried out at the identity or purpose / spiritual level which goes to the very heart of our soul and our ego. Working at this level can be truly transforming as we look into the deepest parts of ourselves to see what holds us back.

Skillful Mind facilitates life coaching at all of these different levels. You do not need to know at which level you require coaching – the coaching process will identify this for you.



# Advanced meditation

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The next step on your journey into meditation is to develop greater insight into the mind and how it works. The technique of meditation leads to understanding, and this understanding enhances the technique. So in the advanced meditation retreat we cover the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> foundations of mindfulness (mindfulness of thought and mindfulness of phenomena). These subjects take us deeper into how the mind creates reality.

The advanced meditation retreat is for people that have experienced the basic techniques of meditation and want to take the next step in deepening their practice. On this retreat there is a greater emphasis on the wisdom aspect of meditation. This deepens our understanding of how the mind creates stress and peace. This will lead to a greater impact within each meditation session.

The techniques taught in the basic retreat will become more effective as you gain greater insight into how they work and how they can be enhanced for your own particular mind.

The advanced meditation retreat is limited to 20 people so that there is an opportunity to ask more individual questions relating to your own experience. We also have more authentic retreat conditions, with longer periods of silence in the morning, vegetarian food and a more isolated retreat centre. These conditions serve to deepen our practice and our peace.

2½ day and 4½ day retreats are available. If you are interested in taking your practice to another level, please enquire about the details of the next advanced retreat.

## Other courses by Skillful Mind

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Other courses on offer from Skillful Mind include:



### **NLP come and try**

This workshop is an introduction to Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Learn techniques to control your state of mind, create your future and use the full power of your unconscious mind. Adelaide, \$39



### **One-on-one Life coaching**

For individual coaching that will bring out your true potential, then try an individual coaching session.

Any location, \$150



### **Coaching for Happiness**

Learn how to replace negative thought patterns with happy ones and improve your health, your life and your relationships.

Victor Harbor, \$498, maximum 8 people



### **Buddhism & Karma workshops**

Workshops for people who are interested in gaining a fundamental understanding of Buddhism and/or Karma.

Victor Harbor and Adelaide, \$175



### **Corporate workshops**

A range of corporate workshops are available including: Dealing with difficult people, Customer service skills, Stress at work, How to build an effective team and NLP for business.



### **Yoga retreats (\*New)**

Spend two and a half days becoming at one with your body on the all new Skillful Mind yoga retreats. Suitable for beginner to intermediate. Price from \$249 all inclusive



# Skillful Mind

*Coaching - Meditation - NLP Training*

23 Mill Terrace, Middleton SA 5213

Phone: 08 8554 2822 Mobile: 0434 462 252

Email: Peter@skillfulmind.com.au

[www.skillfulmind.com.au](http://www.skillfulmind.com.au)

[www.adelaidenlp.com.au](http://www.adelaidenlp.com.au)