



An Awakened and Meaningful Life: Integrating Buddhist practices for challenging times

A Buddhist study and practice program for Young Adults 18-36 with [Dave Smith](#)

September 20 - November 8th, 2020



Course Includes:

- **8 weeks of online material accessed through an easy to navigate learning management system;**
- **Video lectures, readings, guided audio meditations;**
- **Opportunities to connect with other participants in the program;**
- **Weekly live group meetings (Sundays at 12-1pm EST/11am-12pm CST/10-11am MST/9-10am PST);**
- **Two 20-minute 1:1 sessions with the course instructor.**

OVERVIEW

Anyone who makes the important choice to commit their life's energy to the qualities of awareness, kindness and wisdom will surely face many obstacles along the way. As we continue to live in a culture that values consumption, individualism and status as the norm, we now, more than ever, are faced with the dilemma of making radical changes within ourselves and this world.

At the heart of the Buddhist tradition lies the concept of being fully "awake". That is, to understand the possibilities and limitations of our embodied and shared humanity. Being awake is not some mystical state and enlightened point of view, it is an active engagement with the world that supports wisdom and compassion, a willingness to face adversity and conflicts that challenge our values and our peace of mind. At the core of this awakening endeavor is the practice of Mindfulness, which has gained wide-spread popularity. But is mindfulness enough? How can we develop a practice-based system for understanding the interplay between mind, body and emotion? How can we move from reactivity and self-centeredness to wisdom and compassion?

In this course, designed for emerging practitioners aged 18-36, we will explore these questions within the frame of the Four Noble Truths as outlined in early Buddhist teachings.

Drawing inspiration and resources from the body of text known as the "Pali Canon", we will undergo a critical and experiential investigation and analysis of some of the key terms and ideas found within the Buddha's teaching on the four noble truths. As we will find out, much has been lost in translation. Early Buddhism has no word or translation for the everyday term 'emotion'. In contrast, modern science and psychology have no clear definition for the term 'mind'. Yet



Mindfulness practices are shaping the landscape of modern mental health by pointing to a critical need to understand and heal emotional and mental suffering. If we commit time to developing a sitting practice, going on retreats, reading books, or sitting with our local Buddhist meditation groups, we may start to think that the goal of Buddhist practice is to end suffering once and for all. The main goal of this course is to question this very idea.

In their most creative potential, our emotions are guides pointing us towards who we truly are and what is most meaningful in our lives. At their most destructive potential, they ensnare us and we become lost in the grip of anger, sadness, fear, or overwhelm. This suffering is something we have all felt, but we can create more space, choice, and ease in the face of it.

PARTICIPANTS

Why young adults? The American Psychological Association has reported that millennials – 16 to 36-year olds – are the most stressed out generation in history. Sometimes referred to as “the worry generation”. This segment of the population has begun to turn to mindfulness in a big way to deal with the pressures of modern life.

This program will allow us to explore this idea by implementing Buddhist philosophy, ethics and meditation as the vehicle for fostering a life of values, meaning and purpose. Buddhist practices can help humans overcome the biological pull that leads to dissatisfaction. Turning towards our human tendency for perpetual dissatisfaction and taking on our negative attention bias we will dismantle the causes of suffering and destructive emotions.

Learning practices to slow down and wake up to our present moment, we can reconnect with our senses and cultivate awareness of our inner world. In this way, we become able to experience

life more fully by overcoming the forces in our mind that fuel confusions, worries and fears.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- Build conceptual knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, basic Buddhist psychology, the science of emotions, and empathy fatigue
- Learn to recognize and work with emotional triggers
- Access instruction and group practice in mindfulness and compassion
- Engage in interactive dialog and personal reflections.
- Participate in weekly group sessions via ZOOM with the course instructor

Participants should be prepared to commit 4-6 hours per week to the course.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Course Introduction

Week 2: Overview of the Four Noble Truths

Week 3: Mindfulness and the Four Noble Truths

Week 4: Mindfulness and the Science of Emotion

Week 5: Developing the Heart: Kindness, Compassion, Gratitude, Equanimity

Week 6: Understanding the Eight-Fold Path

Week 7: Emotional Intelligence

Week 8: Integration: Developing an Authentic, Liberation-Based Lifestyle



IN HIS WORDS: DAVE SMITH

My exploration of the Dharma began in the winter of 1993. After a series of tragic events and barely getting through the struggles of my teen years I began experiencing a growing confusion and hatred towards life and the world at large. At the suggestion of a close friends' mom, I was encouraged to go meet with one of her close friends who was a Dharma teacher. His name was Steven Smith. I drove out to the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre MA to meet with him. We talked for a few hours about my life, my experiences, my suffering, and my confusion. He spoke in detail about the first noble truth, the truth of suffering. He described how meditation practices can be developed to overcome suffering. After our first visit, he invited me to meet him later that day for mindfulness meditation instructions.

A few hours later, I found myself sitting across from him in the Dharma hall at IMS. He showed me how to sit and offered me the basic instruction, "bring your attention to the sensation of the in-and-out breath". I began practicing mindfulness of breathing for the next few minutes and I started to experience a sense of ease. I began to find moments where I was ok, I felt safe and present. Then the next instruction, "when you notice your mind begin to wander, gently return your attention back to the breath". It was this basic instruction that changed my life. When I became aware of my attention getting pulled into the mind, the stories of my life, reliving all the loss, all the horrifying experiences, all the anger, the confusion, the pain and sadness, there it was. It was all inside my own mind. I was able to watch my mind, with my mind. A radical intervention. As I continued to re-adjust my attention out of my thinking mind and into my sitting, breathing body I would find relief. From that day forward I've continued to benefit from

that simple shift in perspective that mindfulness practice had provided.

Over the last 20 years I've continued to practice the Dharma with varying degrees of success. I spent a decade lost in the throes of active drug and alcohol addiction, touring in rock bands, living in crappy apartments, and moving around the country, all whilst sitting various 10-day Insight retreats. This left me feeling extremely unsatisfied, torn and confused. I decided to get sober in July 2003. Three months into sobriety, I signed up for the 3-month retreat at IMS. There I entered the innermost nether regions of my heart and mind where I would spend the next 90 days. During that time, I experienced moments of great joy and deep concentration, and times of total despair, fear and confusion. I got it all, except I was not liberated.

During the last decade, I've been integrating Dharma practice into a wide range of territories both personally and professionally. The primary focus of my work has been within addiction and substance abuse populations. I've provided extensive work in both secular mental health environments and Buddhist communities. Creating and implementing programs and curriculum has been my primary interest. Playing an instrumental role in setting up the Refuge Recovery program and grassroots movement, I have been able to come full circle in offering classical Dharma practices to those seeking relief from active addiction. I have been involved with Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Society for the last 7 years and was empowered to teach by Noah Levine and Vinny Ferraro in 2015. Currently, my primary interest is teaching silent meditation retreats, mentoring individuals, teaching educational Dharma programs and developing and providing trainings in both secular and Buddhist contexts. I recently relocated to Paonia Colorado with my partner Shannon and son Emmett. I am enjoying more spaciousness and family, living close to my mom, dad, and sister.