Handout: Common Challenges in Meditation Practice (and in our daily lives)

These challenges commonly arise during the course of a meditation practice, and while they are not right or wrong, they have consistently remained steady over thousands of years. These are tricky and distracting, and many people can feel defeated by them. Simply becoming aware of the following challenges can give us the room to learn to notice them and notice how we tend to react to them.

1. Aversion

This is the experience of "not wanting." Any time we experience something and have the reaction of dislike, or the desire to make that experience go away, it could be described as "aversion." This might include feelings of fear, anger, irritation, disgust, or resentment.

2. Craving or Desire

This is the experience of "wanting." It can be as subtle as wanting to feel relaxed and peaceful or as extreme as an intense urge to use a substance.

3. Restlessness or Agitation

This may be a sort of itchy discomfort. It can be experienced physically, as in a strong desire to move during meditation, or as mental agitation, in which the mind feels restless or uncomfortable.

4. Sloth or Sleepiness

This might be physical drowsiness or mental sluggishness. It might be in the mind, the body, or both.

5. Doubt

Doubt might be experienced as a sense of personal doubt ("I can't do this practice") or doubt about the practice and its utility ("This is ridiculous. Why would people just sit there and watch their breath?"). Doubt is an especially tricky challenge because it can be very convincing. It may help to remember that meditation has been around for thousands of years and has helped millions of people transform their lives. There is no one who cannot participate in meditation; it is accessible to anyone who wishes to practice. It can also be a challenging practice. The important part is to stay with it, and when these challenges arise to bring them, too, into your awareness.