Morning Instructions

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 43:38

This morning we'll continue with the same basic meditation instructions as Annie introduced yesterday. I'll encourage you to work with one of the primary anchors we've talked about: body, sounds, or breath. We'll introduce these one by one, and then you can find the focus that's most suitable for you in this period.

Begin the meditation by feeling comfortable in your posture, finding a position where you feel relaxed and also upright, where the back is reasonably straight and yet you're not straining or stiff. What this posture really represents is also a mental attitude. In meditation we want to have the mind be relaxed and alert, and the body posture supports that. The uprightness supports the alertness. The relaxation supports the sense of ease.

If we're too relaxed, the mind easily drifts away from the present. But if we're too tight, we'll never feel happy about meditating. And it's nice to occasionally feel happy about meditating.

As you settle into this posture, let yourself just feel yourself in sitting. It's not so much that we want to observe the posture, observe the body from above, from someplace in the head, but rather this embodied experience of the posture means we feel the body sitting from inside. What is it like to let your attention just settle within the body and feel it throughout?

Notice how there's some awareness of the body all through, from the top of the head, through the neck and shoulders, through the back, through the arms and hands, in the chest and belly, the hips, and the legs and feet. Wherever attention goes in the body, there's some awareness there. Sometimes there's a clear sensation. Sometimes there may not be a sensation. That's all right. There's some awareness in that part of the body. Awareness really permeates the whole body.

So the first anchor that you can opt for is just this sense of sitting with the whole body in sitting. As Ajahn Chah said, if you sit and know that you're sitting, the whole of the Dharma will unfold for you.

As you're sitting, feeling the whole body, then you may notice from time to time the sensations that are connected with breathing. You might start to notice what happens in the body when there's an in-breath. Where do you feel in the body the impact of the in-breath? And how does that feel? What's that feeling like of an in-breath? Do you just feel the in-breath in one little place? Do you feel it in a few places in the body? Do you feel it throughout the body? There's not one right answer to this; it's just for you to look at your experience.

And then what happens in the body when there's an out-breath? What are the sensations that arise that

let you know an out-breath is happening? And how does that feel? How does the out-breath feel? Where in the body do you feel the out-breath? In just one place? In a few places or throughout the body?

Having explored both the in-breath and out-breath a bit, then being a little continuous, feeling the in-breath followed by the out-breath, feeling the next in-breath and the next out-breath. This is the second possible anchor that you can use in your practice this morning: mindfulness of the in-breathing and out-breathing.

Then from time to time, you'll notice a sound. It might be a sound inside the room, sound of the ventilation, sound of my voice, sound of one another. Or it might be a sound from outside of traffic or work in the building. Take a little time to explore this experience of hearing.

As you open to sounds, let your attention open in a wide and expansive way. Just open to all the sounds as they might arise all around you. Might be to the front or back, the left or right or above. It's as though you're sitting in the middle of a concert hall and you're just opening to be receptive to whatever sound arises.

Notice when a sound comes, you don't have to make any special effort to hear. The sound arises and it's heard spontaneously, immediately. All you have to do is rest and receive. See what it feels like to be in this purely receptive mode in your meditation. You're just resting in the center of all sounds and each one is known spontaneously as it arises. And as it's known, mindfulness of sound.

This is the third possible anchor in your meditation: mindfulness of sound. Notice how it brings out the qualities of spaciousness and receptivity.

And now bringing that same receptive attitude back into the experience of the body. Again, having the sense that you're simply resting, receiving the sensations throughout the body. Among them are the sensations of breathing.

So see what it's like to tune into the experience of breathing with this very receptive attitude. Not forcing the attention to the breath, not holding on tight, but just resting in the body, feeling the in-breath and feeling the out-breath. Let the mental attitude be very relaxed and open.

If you'd like to continue paying attention to the breathing, you can let the attention go where you feel the breath most clearly. It could be at the nose, in the chest, in the belly, in the torso—feeling chest and belly together—or following the entire breath as it enters the nose, expands the chest, and then the belly. If you'd like to work with mindfulness of breathing, see where it's most comfortable, most accessible for you to feel the breath, just staying in touch with the simple sensations of breathing.

Sometimes your attention will get lost in a train of thought. It could be for a few seconds or a few minutes. This is normal—not to worry about it. At some point your attention will return to the present moment. And when it does, take a moment just to acknowledge that thinking has been happening.

You might look to see in the aftereffect of the thinking: is there more peace, more calm, or has there been some agitation, some unsettledness in the thought excursion? Just notice that and then again connect with the present moment.

See what stands out for you. See what meets your receptive attention—body, breath, or sounds. Take a look to see what's happening now. What's the present moment experience? And is there mindfulness of that?

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