Day 3 Morning Instructional Sit

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 43:44

Beginning as you sit here, just notice in a panoramic way everything that's in your experience. Notice that being in the moment is a situation where all the senses are alive and functioning.

As you sit, you can feel sensations through the body. You can hear sounds in the room or from outside. Thoughts are coming and going. There's a certain mood in the heart or mind. If your eyes are gently closed, there's maybe a grayish screen in the visual field, perhaps a few flecks of light or changes in color. This is the basic field for our meditation.

The key element at this moment is that you are alive and awake to all of it or any of it. That awake quality is the heart of mindfulness. Although we'll give different instructions about what to pay attention to within this broad field of awareness, never forget that the awakeness within the field is the main thing that we're emphasizing and developing.

As I talked about last night, wise attention means choosing intelligently what to pay attention to. What we pay attention to shapes our experience and will shape our understanding and insight. We'll give more specific instructions, but remember that they're all in the context of this awake, aware intelligence that takes place within the broad field of our whole sense experience. Body, mind, heart, and environment—it's all here in every moment.

As you sit within this broad field with your awake alertness, let that attention first fill the whole body. Have a sense that the awareness is pervading the whole body. The body is immersed in this awake awareness. Just connect with what it feels like to be sitting. If there are any obvious areas of holding, you can relax them. Let the eyes be soft, the jaw dropped, the shoulders not held, and let the belly be soft.

We want to have a mental attitude of relaxation in the experience of the moment, because we're not trying to make anything else happen. We're not trying to force any particular experience. We just want to be alive and awake to the experience as it's happening in this moment. So we can relax and trust that. You can trust your body to sit. You can trust your mind to do what minds do. And you can trust that awareness to know it. We're just sitting with this openness to the body, aware and in touch, letting the body be just as it is.

Now reconnect with that broader space of knowing by attending for a while to sounds. Let the awareness open in a 360-degree way, aware of any sounds that are coming and going. Sounds near you. Sounds throughout the hall. The sound of my voice. Sounds from outside. When things are very quiet, you can pay attention to the extent of the silence, the breadth of silence.

When sounds come, notice that you don't have to make any effort for them to be heard. You're just sitting in this relaxed way with an attention in the present, and every sound is known effortlessly, spontaneously.

Now reconnect with the sense of the body and the sitting posture. As you sit feeling the body, start to notice the impact of breathing. The body's experience changes every time you breathe in, every time you breathe out. We're just present with this same relaxed attention—not so much watching the body as feeling the body as it breathes.

There's not a separate watcher or observer, but we're feeling the body from within because the awareness is right with the breath. Just one experience of breathing and we're there to feel it.

If you like, you can continue to feel the breath through the whole body. If this is a comfortable anchor for you, it can be a very integrated way to develop this stability of attention. Or if you're comfortable experiencing the breath and it's clearer in a small area like the nose, the belly, or the chest, that's fine too. You can let the attention settle in one of those areas.

In this sense, the attention can just rest there. Again, in a very receptive way, just feeling the experience of breathing in and breathing out. Sometimes it can be helpful to add a soft mental note of "in" and "out" at the nose, or "rising" and "falling" at the belly or chest. But let the experience be 90% with the physical sensations of breathing. Just keep a fraction of the attention—10%—on the soft mental note.

If the breath serves as a good home base for you, a good anchor, then keep returning to it. Keep it in the forefront of awareness. Keep your attention there as much as possible. This will help stabilize the ability to be present.

If you find yourself getting tight around the breath, you can open up to feel the whole body again. Make the body posture your anchor. Or some people find that attending to sounds is a good anchor for them. The spaciousness and receptivity of hearing really helps the mind to relax and soften.

Hopefully over these days, you'll have found the best anchor for you in the sitting meditation—something that you can come back to again and again. It becomes your home.

Of course, as you're attending to the moment, thoughts will come that are seductive enough to carry us away with their content. We'll follow a train of thoughts for a few seconds, a few minutes, or twenty minutes. This is natural. This happens as the meditation develops.

So when you notice that you have been thinking, appreciate the return to the present moment. Acknowledge that the thoughts are there, and then choose to reconnect with what's happening—breath, body, or sounds. Reconnect with your anchor.

Other times you might find it hard to stay with the anchor because of some pain in the body. When pain becomes strong, it has a powerful call on the attention, and you might feel that you'd have to struggle to

keep attention with the anchor. If that's the case, don't struggle with it. Let the attention go to the physical sensation of the pain. Let your awareness go right into the experience of pain.

The pain isn't actually a threat, but it can feel unsettling. So take the pain as the focus for mindfulness. Let yourself open to feeling it in its bare physical nature—pressure or aching or stabbing, tightness, contraction.

When you've been with the pain enough that there feels to be some space around it, some ability to accommodate it, you can return the attention to the anchor and settle again. Or if the pain continues to be strong and naturally calls the attention, let it be your object for however long that is. That's fine.

As you're attending to the pain, see if you notice any emotional or mental reaction to it. Is there aggravation or irritation? A judgment that it shouldn't be there? Disliking? Fear of the pain? If there is, also notice the mental reaction and see how a reaction of disliking or fear will cause a contraction in the body. The contraction doesn't help to soften the pain.

So if you can, stay open to the pain in a soft, relaxed way. The mental relaxation, if anything, will help the pain to soften as well.

What's happening now? As you connect again with the present moment—thought, body posture, in-breath, sounds, discomfort in the body—again refine that alert, awake intelligence that knows what your experience is. That is mindfulness.

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