Loving Witness Meditation | Monday Night

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 28:02

So please let yourself be settled in a way that you can sit for the next twenty-five minutes or so. Let your body be stable, sitting upright enough so there's a sense of alertness or presence, and also a graciousness—as if you're the king or the queen on your throne, at ease.

When you're ready, let your eyes close gently and begin to tune in. Take two or three long, deep breaths in and out as a way to center and release what's present, any tension you're holding. And bring a kind attention to your body. Let the eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. If you like, you can roll your head in a circle to release your neck and let it find a simple upright position. Let your shoulders relax and your arms and hands rest easily.

Feel the weight of your body and the connection with the seat—your bottom or your feet—and the heaviness of your body being met fully by the chair, the earth, the floor. For this time, you can rest on the earth and she will support you just where you are. Let your belly be soft and your breath natural. Let your heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with kindness, compassion.

And now, with this embodied awareness, in whatever way feels right to you, let yourself sense how your body is breathing. It breathes itself. You might feel the whole body breathing the ocean of air that we share with all the other living creatures of this planet, breathing in and out, exchanging the oxygen and carbon dioxide with the leaves of the trees and the grasses and all the beings around you. Or maybe you'll feel the breath as coolness in the back of the throat, swirling and tingling, or coolness in the nostrils, or the rise and fall of chest or belly. If it's hard to sense the breath, you can place one hand on your belly and feel the rise and fall gently in the palm of your hand.

This is a first invitation for mindful loving awareness: to let the body settle, let the breath breathe itself. And even if there's a background of pain or trauma that's carried in your body, be spacious and loving, feeling that in this moment there is a sense of presence and care that you can bring to yourself. Rest your attention as best as you can, gently and easily, feeling how the body breathes itself, one breath at a time—in breath and out, rising and falling, expanding and contracting. You are a living, breathing being.

With each breath, let the breathing and the awareness of this breath be an invitation for settling, for calm and ease to grow. Sometimes people even use a soft word with each breath: in, and out—ease, calm.

And of course there will be waves of thoughts and memories and plans, of emotions and other sensations. Let them rise and fall around this breathing, around each breath that you take. Let the sense of breath help settle and steady the mind and body together. Let all the other experiences rise and fall like waves of

the ocean around this breath, and this one, around each breath.

And notice, as you feel the breath, as you're aware of the waves that arise around the breath, that who you are is not this breath or this body. You are the loving awareness, the loving witness. You are consciousness itself—open, spacious—letting the breath breathe itself and the experiences rise and fall within a field of loving awareness. Become the loving awareness itself. You are the kind witness.

As you quiet with the breath, let yourself settle with increasing calm and tenderness of heart. You'll notice that there are some strong sensations from the body that call your attention, that pull your awareness away from the breath: tingling or pleasure, pain, throbbing, vibration, warmth, cool, areas of trauma held in the body, areas of pleasure and delight in the body.

When a bodily experience from this precious human body becomes strong, receive it with the same loving awareness you've given to the breath. Let go of the breath as the focus. And as if to bow to it, you can name it gently and say, "Thank you." If it's pleasure: thank you. If it's tingling: thank you. If it's cold or hot: thank you for telling me. If it's trauma and tightness: thank you for protecting me.

You become the loving witness to the body. And the body shows you all that it holds, how much it's cared for you through everything. Whatever it shows you, you receive with loving awareness. You witness and say, "Thank you. Thank you for keeping on." And then feel the breath behind it all.

Just as waves of bodily experience will arise as you sit quietly sensing your breath, so too emotions and feelings will arise like waves of the ocean: sadness, longing, excitement, joy, fear, anxiety, love. When a strong wave of feeling arises, as if to bow to it, receive it with the same loving awareness. You are the loving witness.

You can name it gently—*sad, sad,* or *longing,* or *joy, joy, happy.* And whatever the feeling is that you name, let it rise and say, thank you. Thank you for letting me feel so much, so deeply.

When the feelings pass, you can return again to the breath for a time. You are the loving witness to this breath, to these sensations, to these moods and emotions. Life living through you.

Just as the breath arises and passes. Just as sensations float and change—painful and pleasurable—one after another, arising and passing in their time. Just as emotions and feelings rise and fall like waves of the ocean, and you are the loving witness.

Let yourself also be aware of the waves of thoughts. Picture thoughts and word thoughts arise and fall around the breath—planning, remembering, trying to take care of things, trying to keep you safe and protect you, trying to understand, guide, navigate. And when the waves of thoughts are strong, you can name them gently, as if to bow to them all. *Planning. Thinking. Remembering. Envisioning. Figuring.* As if to bow to them, naming them and say, thank you. Thank you for trying to take care of me and protect me. I'm okay just now. You can relax.

And when it's quiet, return back to the breathing. You are mindful loving awareness itself. The loving witness that notices the arising and passing dance. And you are open and silent.

And finally, let the sense of loving awareness extend beyond this body and feelings and thoughts to become the loving witness of all that's around you. The joys and sorrows. You are the loving witness. You are the awareness itself—loving and compassionate, spacious. Amidst the ten thousand joys and the ten thousand sorrows, you take your seat of stillness as loving awareness itself.

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