Mindful Loving Witness Meditation

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 24:31

So let's begin with a period of meditation.

Let yourself find a way to sit, if you can, that's comfortable and at ease, stable and yet gracious. You sit, you take your seat halfway between heaven and earth under your own tree of enlightenment. And when you settle yourself, if you can, let your eyes close gently for this time.

And tune in. Sense how your body can both be alert and present and also gracious, like the queen or the king seated on your throne halfway between heaven and earth. Take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths and begin to release whatever you carry with each breath to be here more fully.

Tune into this amazing, mysterious body that you have been given. It has been given because you didn't actually order it online—even Amazon won't deliver it. Somehow you came into this body. As you feel and tune in, let the eyes and face be soft and loosen the jaw. Let the body begin to relax. If you like, you can roll your head in a circle to release your neck. Let it find a simple upright posture. Let the shoulders relax and the arms and hands rest easily. Feel the weight of your body wherever you're seated and sense how the earth can completely support you. You can rest just where you are. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. And let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of kindness, loving kindness and care.

Now, with this embodied presence, bring a quality of loving awareness, of mindful loving awareness, first to this moment, the reality of the present, just where you are. To bring the body and mind together for the first part of the meditation, notice if you can how the body is breathing itself. You can feel your breath as coolness in the nostrils, swirling, tingling in the back of the throat, the rise and fall of chest or belly. If it's hard to feel the breath, you can place one hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall in the palm of your hand. Or feel the whole body just breathing and exchanging air with the great winds that come across the mountains and the oceans, and with all the other breathing creatures that share this ocean of air.

Let the breath be easy. As you sense the breath, you can whisper in the background, if you wish, the words Thich Nhat Hanh suggests: ease with each breath, calm, and relax with each breath into the rhythm of life breathing itself.

Of course, as you sense each breath, there will be thoughts that appear—plans, memories, evaluations, judgments, hopes, fears, images. There will be emotions: sadness, excitement, peacefulness, anxiety. There will be sounds. For this first part of the meditation, stay with the breath. Each time the attention wanders, come back to it and let all those other experiences rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath.

Feel this breath just now, in the middle of it all. Ease. Calm. Inviting a sense of steadiness. This breath. No judgment. No evaluation. Simply notice. Notice what you notice. How the breath breathes itself. How the attention gets carried off. And whenever you notice—after thirty seconds or five minutes—you simply come back to this next breath, gently and graciously, like training the puppy. Sit. Stay. Just here.

As you establish a mindful, loving presence with each breath, quieting, steady, notice when one of the waves that rises and falls around the breath becomes so strong it pulls your attention away. As you notice getting carried off by thinking or planning, by sadness or worry or excitement or love, as soon as you notice this strong wave, as if to bow to it, name it gently, softly: worry, planning, sadness, love, joy, tingling, hearing of sounds. Acknowledge the wave, and as you do, naming it gently, let it rise and fall, then return back to the breath.

Rest just here in the reality of the present, with each breath appearing and disappearing, gently acknowledging the strong waves that pull your attention from the breath. You become the mindful loving awareness, the loving witness of each breath as it rises and passes, or of the waves of experience that you name gently as if to bow to them. Yes. Thank you.

You are the witness, the loving awareness, the space of awareness that notices what arises and passes away. This breath. This moment's experience. You are the loving witness, the mindful loving awareness itself.

Rest in it.

All things are impermanent. They rise and they pass away. To come into harmony with this truth brings true happiness.

Staying with mindful, loving awareness, let your eyes open. The breath still breathes itself, and you are the loving awareness—present, open.

And even if the meditation was difficult, with struggle, worries, physical pain, you become the loving witness to it all. Not to judge or try to fix, but to hold it with tender compassion and kindness.

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