Centering Meditation | Monday Night

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 26:30

Let's begin a meditation that both centers and grounds and opens you, quiets the mind and opens the heart.

Please find a way to sit that's grounded, stable, relatively upright, but also gracious and at ease. Meditation is not meant to be a grim duty, but rather an invitation to presence—to presence with whatever is here, held in a mindful, loving awareness.

Let your eyes close gently. Let the eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. Perhaps roll your neck in a circle to let it find a simple upright position. Let your shoulders relax and your arms and hands rest easily. Feel the weight of your body on the seat, the chair, the floor, and how you can relax and let go. Let the earth fully support you just where you are. Trust it. 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, compassion.

Now, with this embodied presence, take two or three long breaths. With each exhale, let go of what wants to be released.

In this complex and busy world, this busy time in which we live, one of the simplest and most helpful beginnings to a meditation is to come back to the rhythm of your own breath. Not to try to change it or become a good breather in some way or other, but to bring the body and mind together by feeling each breath as it comes and goes, inviting a sense of ease and calm with each breath. You might feel it in the nostrils—coolness or swirling, tingling in the back of the throat—or the rise and fall of chest or belly, or the whole body breathing. Let your attention rest in the breath, feeling its own natural rhythm, and maybe whispering softly with each breath: ease, calm.

Of course, after a few breaths—two or three or ten—the attention will wander and go off to planning, thinking, remembering, feeling other things, sounds. When you notice, bring the attention gently back to the breath. It's the very act of returning again and again that begins to steady the mind. No judgment. It's like training the puppy: sit, stay. At first the puppy doesn't listen, runs around, pees in the corner. You clean it up, just like your mind can do. And then you come back: sit, stay. Little by little, with a sense of ease and calm, in the midst of all the waves of experience, you feel the breath—this breath—and let things settle.

This breath, just as it is, receive with loving awareness. You are the mindful, loving witness as the breath arises and passes away, relaxed and calm with each breath.

As you feel each breath, let the waves of thoughts and sounds and feelings rise and fall like waves of the

ocean around the breath. Feel the breath in the middle of them all. Steady, kind attention. Nowhere to go, just here—the reality of the present with this mysterious quality of mindful, loving awareness, present and open, steady, at ease.

Now, as you feel the breath, receiving it with mindful loving awareness, you can open up the awareness in a gracious way to the strong energies that arise and pull you from the breath. As you feel the breath move in and out, rise and fall, if there comes a strong emotion—sadness, excitement, longing, love—or if there comes a strong sensation—tingling, hot, pain, cold—as if to bow to it, you can let go of the breathing for a time and name it gently. Oh, tingling. Throbbing. Name it gently: tingling, tingling, itching, throbbing. See what happens as it rises like a wave and passes away. Then return to the breath.

Or an emotion. Fear—fear arises. Longing. Excitement. As you name the wave of emotion, let it open and move through you for a time. Excitement, excitement. When it's passed, let there be a little space, and then feel a few more breaths until some other strong emotion or sensation or sound arises.

Rest just here in the reality of the present, receiving the breath, the sensations, the sounds, the feelings with mindful loving awareness. You are the loving awareness, the loving witness to the breath that breathes itself, or to the waves of experience that arise on their own and pass away. Rest in mindful, loving awareness of this breath or this wave of sensation or feeling.

You can also notice the waves of thought. Picture thoughts and word thoughts will arise and pull the attention from the breath. It might be a story or a memory or a plan or a worry or an imagining.

And just as you note the breath coming and going, when thought comes to the center of attention, you can bow to it and name it gently. "Oh, planning, planning," or "remembering, remembering," or "worrying, worrying," or perhaps a creative thought arising.

As you name these thoughts—imagining, planning, remembering—they appear like clouds. And as you name them gently, they dissolve like clouds, because you're not in the middle of them. You are the loving awareness that acknowledges them like sunlight.

Let them dissolve. Feel three or four or five more breaths until another wave comes. You can bow to it, name it gently for a time, and then return back to the breath.

Just here. This moment. This breath. Or this wave of experience, received and acknowledged with loving awareness.

When you sit like a Buddha—steady and kind, with heart open, gracious and wise—in the midst of it all, you take your seat and let it come and go. You are the loving awareness, the loving witness, the steady one. Balanced, at ease. The witness to the joys and sorrows that arise and pass. The timeless witness.

You are the mindful loving awareness itself. Wise and steady, gracious and compassionate.

Let your eyes open gently now, keeping the sense of ease and graciousness. Whatever is quieted or settled, stay with this.

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