The Reality of the Present Meditation

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 27:09

If you would, let yourself find a way to sit that is stable and comfortable, at ease, and allow your eyes to close gently when you're ready to do a bit of meditation together.

With your eyes closed, sense yourself just seated here in the reality of the present. Just now. Be here now, this moment.

Begin by taking two long, deep breaths. Let your eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. If you like, you can roll your head in a little circle to release your neck and let it find a simple upright position. Let the shoulders relax, and the arms and hands rest easily.

Feel a connection to the earth beneath you—the hardness of your seat, your buttocks and feet on the floor or chair, held to mother earth by gravity. Feel the steadiness of taking this seat halfway between heaven and earth, under your own tree of enlightenment. Steady and grounded.

Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. And let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with the spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now, with this quality of embodied presence, begin to notice with mindful, loving awareness the play of experience. You are the loving witness of life itself.

For many, to start, it's helpful to feel the body breathing as a way to quiet the mind and soften the heart. You can feel it as coolness in the nostrils, swirling and 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 put one hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall in the palm of your hand.

The point of mindfulness of breathing is not to become a good breather, but with each breath to invite a sense of greater ease and presence and calm. Breathing in and out gently, you can even whisper "ease" or "calm" with each breath. No judgment—just a simple returning to the breath. Like training the puppy: sit, stay. You return gently when you notice the attention has wandered. Sit, stay for a few breaths. And when it wanders off, bring it back gently. Each time you feel the breath, you're deepening the sense of presence.

Relax with each breath. If you like, you can put a half smile on your face, as Thich Nhat Hanh recommends—the half smile of the Buddha. As you feel the breath, let the other thoughts and sounds and sensations rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath. Feel this breath gently moving moment by moment, arising and passing away. Keep a beginner's mind: this breath, just as it is, arising and passing with ease, with calm.

Now, having invited the mind and heart to quiet a bit, to settle and calm with the breath, let's expand the field of our attention. When a background wave becomes quite strong—the planning mind, or an emotion of sadness or excitement, or a loud sound—when some wave becomes strong and pulls your attention from the breath, instead of pushing it away, let go of awareness of breathing and receive that sound or that emotion or that thought with the same mindful loving awareness. As if with a bow, you can name it gently: planning, or remembering, or sadness, or fear, or longing, or love, or hearing.

As you name it—sad, sad, or remembering, remembering—feel it as a wave passing through the body and mind. Name it gently. And when the wave subsides, return back to the breath for a time. Rest in the reality of the present.

You become the field of mindful, loving awareness that notices this breath, or gently acknowledges the waves, the strong waves of experience, naming them, letting them rise and pass. You are the loving awareness itself—quiet and present, steady, receiving it all with kindness.

With mindful loving awareness, you sit like the Buddha, gracious and wise amidst it all. As it all arises and passes away, you rest in a deep stillness, vast stillness amidst it all.

Present. Gracious. Loving awareness.

Allow your eyes to open, keeping the same sense of presence as you do.

This meditation is the fundamentals of Vipassana, or insight meditation—starting with the breath or some other focus that helps calm and steady the mind and soften the heart, and then beginning to open to feel the waves of experience received in a field of mindful loving awareness.

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