Meditation: Courage in Our Difficult Times

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 23:55

So to do a meditation practice now, let yourself sit in a way that is steady, feet flat on the floor, buttocks on a seat, and feel a sense of groundedness. When you're ready, allow your eyes to close gently.

This will be a practice that combines elements of mindfulness, mindful loving awareness, and other dimensions.

As you begin to sit, you do what I do at the end of the day. When I sit, I first take a couple of deep breaths and release whatever tension there is that I can let go of easily with those breaths. Then as I start to pay attention, I realize that I have to sense my own body, my heart and mind in a deeper way than when I'm going through the tasks of the day, whether it's doing the dishes or offering teachings or interacting with others. I really need to sit quietly and tune in and find a different dimension of possibility.

As I do, I find there are all kinds of things beneath the surface. My body goes into fight, flight, or freeze, picking up the alarm of the world around me or my own fears. My heart does too.

As you sit quietly now, having taken those breaths, let yourself feel a sense of connection to the earth, a grounding in which almost as if you had energetic roots going from your body into the earth. Steadiness, deep, connected. Your body comes from the earth. It's part of the earth. Feel that strength and steadiness. You take your seat halfway between heaven and earth in this human form and let your roots go deeply into the earth. Steady, strong.

Now from this place of presence, begin to pay attention to the experience just now. We'll go through the dimensions of mindful loving awareness.

First, bring your attention to the whole field of your body, the sensations, the energy of the body, the areas of tightness or tension that come from this fight, flight, or freeze that gets triggered in us, the areas of hot or cold, of pleasure or pain. Feel the whole energy field of the body with a loving awareness that has no judgment, but is kind and curious.

As you do, let the places of the greatest tension and the greatest holding in your body invite them to open, to increase, to get stronger, to spread out through your body or beyond. Invite them to show you what you're holding, and you receive them in the space of mindful loving awareness.

As you allow the sensations and the intensity of tension or pain, all the things held, to open, to get stronger, to expand, to show themselves, to be received, notice how as they expand, they also soften, become more spacious.

Now bring in the quality of compassion to hold all that your body has been holding with a compassionate awareness. Say to your body, "Thank you. Thank you for trying to protect me. Thank you for taking care of me."

As you do, notice how the body softens with that gratitude, how holding it all with compassion and kindness, just as you are now, like you would hold a child who's going through a hard time. Such tenderness. "Thank you. It's okay. I'm all right for now."

Notice how the body relaxes and opens as you do. It breathes easier. Space opens up. You're allowing the body to release and come to a greater, more natural presence, just as it wants. To open. To be felt, all of it. And received with love, with tenderness.

Now shift this same mindful loving awareness to the area of your heart. Notice what feelings and emotions are present. I notice at the end of the day that there's an accumulation. There might be grief, deep tears of sadness. There might be fear, anxiety, longing, love, joy mixed together with all the rest.

With this mindful loving awareness, sense what's there in your heart that asks to be felt, that you're carrying, sometimes carrying for a long time. Let it open, let it intensify, let it get stronger, more painful or more beautiful, more sad. Let the feelings open in the vast space of loving awareness, fill your body and more. Let them show you what your heart is carrying.

And you become the loving witness.

Allowing the heart to be felt—all of it.

As you hold and allow all these feelings to intensify and open—the tears, the fear, the longing, the love—hold them again with compassion, like you would hold a crying or frightened child. Tenderly. Not trying to fix them, but honoring them.

And say thank you. Thank you for trying to protect me—all these feelings. Thank you for trying to keep me safe. I'm okay for now. Thank you. Thank you for everything you do.

Notice what happens in the heart. How spaciousness grows naturally. How the feelings are received and soften. How the gratitude—thank you—and compassion for all of them, for trying to protect me, opens this space of tenderness and presence.

Now bring your attention to your mind—that very busy organ, sometimes considered located in the brain, but actually much bigger than that. Filled with cycles of thoughts and images, and perhaps now repeated patterns of worry and concern and imagination, cycling and circling, busy. Feel all the energy of the mind. Just notice what it's like.

Hold it too with loving awareness. Invite it to open, to display, to show its energy. Let it get more intense if it wants. Let it cycle and twist and get wild and imagine. Feel all that energy and give it space to show you

the energy of the mind.

Bring a tenderness, a compassion, to hold all these energies with kindness. They're just doing their job. As you do, things soften. You can say thank you. Thank you to your mind, that overbusy organ. Thank you for trying to protect me. Bow with gratitude. Thank you. I'm okay just now. I'm okay. You can relax.

Notice how the mind too softens and settles when you allow all the energies to be held in compassion and loving awareness. When you offer gratitude, everything softens.

Now begin to notice something quite remarkable and important and liberating—as the Buddha would say, the essence of liberation.

Notice that the body with all its sensations and experiences, the heart with all its emotions and feelings, and the mind—you are able to pay attention to these with awareness itself. Shift your attention to realize that you *are* this awareness. You are this loving awareness. Not the body, although you're gifted with this body in this incarnation. And not the waves of emotion—the love and the longings and the fears. And not the thoughts and images. Sense that you are the witnessing consciousness itself.

You are the space of awareness that knows this all. Timeless, open, vast, silent, filled with love and tenderness for all the struggles of the body and mind and life around.

Rest in this deep loving awareness of who you really are.

In this loving awareness—like an ocean of peace or stillness, a vastness that contains everything—let yourself sense that just as you can be aware of body and heart and mind, you can also be aware of the field of being, of the beings all around you. Those making love and those in fear. Those being born and those who are sick or dying. The vastness of beings. Your loving awareness can extend and become a kind of loving compassion.

Just as you hold your own body and heart and mind with tenderness, now let the vastness of your loving awareness extend in every direction, as though you could hold this whole world in the great heart of tender compassion.

You can.

This is your birthright, your Buddha nature. Born into you is the great heart of compassion and timeless understanding.

Send out well wishes of love and tenderness in every direction.

From this place of stillness. Deep compassion. You become the lamp, the beacon, the healing heart—the medicine of the awakened heart, the medicine of love offered to all, holding all.

When a child is born, our first response is one of love. When a person is dying, our last response is to hold

their hand in love. Who we really are is love itself. Our true nature. Loving awareness, consciousness itself. Rest in it. Return to it. It is your home.

So you just took a ten-day retreat in twenty minutes. Congratulations, you're advanced students, so you're able to do that. But really what I mean is that the elements, the foundations of mindfulness and the qualities of the awakened heart were woven into this meditation as a reminder of what you already know and what you know is possible.

Notice what you've learned from it, how you might use it—little bits during the day, or to sit in the morning or evening as I do and go through the body and heart and mind, noticing what's been accumulated and carried, making space for all of it to be received in loving awareness. And to become consciousness itself, that witness that holds it all in the tender heart of compassion.

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