Meditation: Reconciliation | Monday Night

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 31:39

Good evening and hi everybody, all you people, many beloveds behind the screens. I know you're there. Some of your faces I can see and some I know are listening, and it's an honor and a pleasure to gather as we do here for this Monday night class.

Monday night class has been ongoing now for 36 years—every week for more than three decades—and now I've been teaching more or less every month while other wonderful teachers have stepped in on the other Mondays.

If you're not part of or haven't been part of programs at Spirit Rock: Spirit Rock has been founded on this beautiful piece of land that we invite you to visit, by a whole community of people who are dedicated to the twin principles of compassion and wakefulness, or inner freedom of heart, that are central to the Buddhist teachings but that are really part of all wise spiritual life.

Whatever brings you to this class, whatever your background or caste or race or creed or orientation or ability, whatever human incarnation you are in—and there are many, many kinds—they all are welcome. The Dharma gates open and welcome you with respect and love. So thank you for coming.

And thank you also to the Spirit Rock staff, to Jesse and Christina. In another week, there'll be a class or a daylong with Nikki Mirghafori on living fully and dying fearlessly. If you go on the Spirit Rock website, there's all kinds of other classes and programs that you may find serve you, especially in this pandemic time.

What we do on Monday nights is really quite simple. We meditate for a time with a little bit of guidance as we will have tonight, take a break after for five minutes or so to relax and stretch, and then there's usually a set of teachings as there will be tonight, often followed by dialogue or questions and answers.

So with all of that now, let's take some time to tune into ourselves, to our own bodies and hearts and minds.

Find yourself a way to sit that's stable and present. We'll probably sit for 25 minutes, something like that. Feet flat on the floor if you're in a chair or a cushion. Find a way that your body can rest on the earth with a sense of groundedness and stability and ease.

When you're ready, let your eyes close gently, and using a mindful loving awareness, begin to check in and notice the experience in your body and heart and mind. What's alive is always here and now.

You might start by taking two or three deep breaths, and with each one releasing what you can of obvious tension. 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 the simple upright. Allow the shoulders to relax and the arms and hands to rest easily.

Feel the weight of your body on the cushion, the chair—how gravity holds you onto the earth and how you can let go and be fully supported. You can relax and be held by the earth 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 a spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now, with this embodied presence, begin to notice how your body is breathing itself. You don't have to do anything or change it, but you'll feel how it breathes itself. Coolness in the nostrils, more swirling, tingling in the back of the throat, or the rise and fall of chest or belly. In the midst of all the things that you notice as you get quiet, feel how the breath breathes itself in the middle of them all.

Tonight we're starting with the mindful, loving awareness of breath as a way to center and stabilize attention—just here, with this breath, in this moment. As you breathe in and out naturally, noticed with loving awareness. If it's helpful, you can use the words that Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh suggested of "ease" or "calm," so that each breath you feel is an invitation to calm, to ease, to settle.

Of course, there will be thoughts and emotions. There'll be sounds and other experiences that come in as you pay attention to the breath. Let these other experiences rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath. And you rest in the middle—this breath, ease and calm.

Come back to the breath quite gently when you notice the attention has wandered. Like training the puppy: sit, stay. Again and again, you return to the breath kindly, just as you would be with a puppy. Sit, stay.

Little by little, let the attention settle. This breath, with ease. This breath, receive with loving awareness.

If it's hard to sense the breath when it gets soft, let your attention get soft. Or put one hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall in the palm of your hand.

As you continue to sense the breath—its rising and falling, its flowing in and out—periodically from all the background waves, something strong will arise: a memory or a plan, an emotion of longing or fear, love or worry, or perhaps a loud sound.

When a strong wave arises and pulls you away from the breath, pulls your attention, let go of the breath for a moment and acknowledge that big wave by naming it gently. Sad, sad. Or excited, excited. Or worried, worried. Planning, planning. Hearing. Almost as if you could bow to it. You acknowledge it kindly: "Oh, sadness. Planning mind. Remembering."

And once you've acknowledged it with a name, notice what happens to it. Planning mind. Sadness, sadness. Let it open a little bit. Let it show itself just a little. And then, "Thank you." You can say thank you and come back to your breath.

So now you're aware of your breath, but also when some strong interruption arises—which will happen every few breaths, or three breaths, or ten breaths—you acknowledge it with loving awareness. "Oh, this is excitement. This is sadness." Feel it, bow to it, say thank you, and then come back to the breath.

You rest in the middle. You sit like a Buddha under your own tree of enlightenment, resting with the ever-changing breath, breathing with the air of the world—gently, calmly. In a centered and steady way, you can acknowledge the waves that arise when they come, naming them gently: "Oh yes, I see you. Thank you." Let them pass. And you're steady in the midst of it all.

Now, as you sit quietly, I'd like to invite you to another dimension of meditation: a practice of reconciliation. I'll read some teachings aloud for you, and you can bring into your own mind and heart the benefits of reconciliation and healing for all those who've grown estranged and set apart.

We begin with family, because family is where we are most vulnerable and can most easily be hurt. And yet it's the place where we need to find reconciliation so we can then live it in the rest of the world. Take your time and reflect as you hear these words. Let them express the tender possibility that love between the people who are named, the beings who are named, can find reconciliation.

May all mothers and sons be reconciled.

May all mothers and daughters be reconciled.

May all fathers and sons be reconciled.

May all fathers and daughters be reconciled.

May all husbands and wives be reconciled.

May all partners and lovers be reconciled.

May all sisters and brothers be reconciled.

May all family members be reconciled.

May all employees and employers be reconciled.

May all community members be reconciled.

May all friends be reconciled.

May all women be reconciled.

May all men be reconciled.

May all men and women be reconciled.

And all of non-binary gender be reconciled.

May all races be reconciled.

May all religions be reconciled.

May all nations be reconciled.

May all people be reconciled.

May all creatures be reconciled.

And may all beings of every form be reconciled.

Feel this meditation as a prayer, as a deep heart reflection, as a possibility, a yearning, a vision. And may our lives lead to wise and healthy and beautiful reconciliation among all beings, all peoples.

May it be so.

I love this practice. This form of it I received from a colleague many of you know, Philip Moffitt. And as I recite it across all these different areas, it turns my heart and my vision toward a possibility of reconciliation that feels healthy and wise and courageous—and necessary.

Come back in five minutes to listen.

May it be so.

This talk was offered at a meditation retreat. For more teachings, please visit dharmaseed.org.

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