Meditation: Loving Awareness

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 26:47

Make yourself comfortable and let's do some meditation practice together.

If you're in a chair, let your feet be flat on the floor. Sit upright with some sense of dignity and graciousness or ease. If you're on a cushion or a bench, however you sit, let yourself rest fully and stably on the earth.

When you're ready, allow your eyes to close gently. Perhaps take a couple of deep breaths to help you release what you're carrying and just be here and now.

Our practice is of mindfulness, of mindful loving awareness. Begin to notice as you come into the reality of the present the experiences of your body. If there are any areas of tightness or tension that you can easily release, do so. 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.

Find a simple upright posture. Let the shoulders relax and the arms and hands rest easily. Feel the weight of your body from gravity, the heaviness in your buttocks and feet, and sense how the earth completely supports you. Just where you are, you can relax. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. Let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now take your seat with loving awareness in this embodied presence.

I begin with a poem I love from Bridget Lowry:

In the strange early evening half light we sit. In the cloudiness of our questioning we sit. In our madness and our clarity we sit. In the midst of too much to do, we sit. In the warm arms of our shared sorrow, we sit. In community and in loneliness, we sit. In the blazing energy of being alive, we sit. Here with the song of the coyotes and the frogs, here with the rippling of breezes across the grasses. Here with cobwebs and clouds and the wayfaring moon and the dusty road upon us. Us in the sound and the sound in us. Us in the world and the world in us.

As you settle, hearing these words and taking your seat in the midst of all things, let yourself sense the mystery of your body's breathing, how it breathes itself. Feel it as coolness in the nostrils, swirling, tingling in the back of the throat, or the rise and fall of chest or belly. If it's hard to sense your breath, you can put one hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall in the palm of your hand, and relax with each breath that you sense.

Breathing in and out, invite a sense of ease and calm to grow with each breath. As you sense this life breath that breathes you so beautifully, with the ocean of air shared by all beings, calm and relax with each breath. Gently opening.

Yes, there will be sounds in the background. There will be thoughts and bodily sensations, images and emotions. Let all these experiences of sensations and sounds, thoughts and feelings rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath. Feel how the breath continues to breathe itself gently in the midst of them all.

Steady yourself in the breath. Relax into it. Trust it. Let it be your home. Return gently to this breath, this moment. When the attention goes off to other places, acknowledge gently and then come back. This breath.

Let the mind quiet. Let the body come into deeper ease as you breathe. Feel the breath breathing itself in the midst of it all.

As you feel the breath, you can let your mindful loving awareness also acknowledge the waves of the ocean that rise and fall around the breath—thoughts that come and go, sounds, strong sensations. Let them rise and fall like waves of the ocean, and sense yourself as stillness in the midst, feeling the breath breathe itself.

And when a strong wave of experience pulls your attention from the breath, as if to bow to it, you can acknowledge it, name it gently. Oh, planning, planning mind. Remembering. Sadness, sadness. Excitement. Longing. Tingling, itching. Or sounds—hearing.

And as you name that experience that arises in awareness—hearing, hearing; sad, sad; planning, planning—notice how the wave rises, is felt or received in the space of loving awareness, and then passes away.

Steadying yourself with the breath now invites you to open further and become the field of loving awareness. You are the consciousness that hears these words and that hears the silence between the words. You are the awareness that knows the breath. You are the loving awareness that knows the sensations of body and the moods and emotions that rise and fall like waves of the ocean or clouds.

You are not the body with all its sensations. You are not the breath that comes and goes on its own. You're not the waves of sounds and thoughts and feelings. You are the consciousness, the loving awareness itself. You are the awareness that receives them all.

Rest in this awareness, this loving awareness. You are consciousness, awareness itself. Let experiences come and go like these words, appearing like waves or clouds, bubbles and vanishing in the open space of awareness. Vastness and stillness. This is your home. Relax into it. Trust.

You are the vast space of knowing, receiving sounds like clouds, receiving sensations and breath like

waves of experience.

In this meditation, we started in the simple way of embodied awareness, grounding in the body, and then using an awareness of breath to bring some steadiness and calm to the attention, some ease in the midst of all that arises and passes. And then after time, we shifted our attention from the experiences of breath and sensation, from the waves of thoughts and feelings and sounds, to notice that we were aware of all these things—to become the awareness itself, to shift our identity, to become the loving witness as all the waves and clouds appeared and disappeared.

This is who you are. Consciousness was born into this body, will leave this body when you die at the end of life. And here and now, in the reality of the present, you can become this loving awareness. You can remember who you really are.

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