Meditation: The Sacred Pause

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 26:53

Good evening, my friends. It's a pleasure to welcome you here to this Monday night sitting group, class, and community.

Let's begin with a period of meditation of mindful, loving awareness.

Find a way that you can sit that's comfortable, stable, and at ease. Feet flat on the floor if you're in a chair, sitting upright with some sense of alertness, but also gracious—not rigid, but rather like the queen or the king seated on your throne. If you're on a floor or cushion in some other form, make sure that you're steady, stable, and connected to the earth.

Once you take a steady posture, halfway between heaven and earth in this human form, allow your eyes to close gently. You take your seat as the Buddha that you are, under your own tree of enlightenment.

First, take a couple of deeper breaths, just to let go and release whatever is obvious that you're carrying. Notice if there's any obvious tension or tightness in your body, and if you can easily release it, 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 and let it find a simple upright position. Let the shoulders drop and the arms and hands rest easily.

Feel the weight of your body resting through your buttocks and your feet, connected with the earth as if you had roots into the earth—steady, stable. Let your belly be soft and your breath natural. Let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now, with this embodied presence, rest just here where you are. Just as spring begins, start to feel how your body is breathing itself, taking in the air that covers this earth, the shared breath, how it renews itself with each breath.

In the most simple way, bring your loving awareness to feel the breath wherever it's natural—in the coolness and tingling in the back of the throat, or coolness in the nostrils, or the rise and fall of chest or belly. If it's hard to sense the breath, put your hand on your belly and let it rise and fall in the palm of your hand.

As you feel each breath, if you like, you can whisper in the back of your mind "calm" or "ease," or simply invite that quality of peaceful steadiness with this breath. One breath after another, rest the attention on the breath. Let all the other experiences rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath—feelings, thoughts, sounds. Calm and ease with each breath.

For now, when you notice the attention wanders during this first part of the meditation, notice and come back gently to the next breath, three or four breaths. Simply return to ease and calm with a few more breaths.

Receive each breath with a loving awareness. This breath inviting ease, calm. Let the breath breathe itself, short or long, deep or shallow. It has its own rhythms, and you are the loving witness, feeling the waves of the breath.

Let the body relax. Let the mind settle. Let the heart be soft. Feel the breath in the midst of it all.

As you sit quietly, feeling the breath breathe itself, letting the thoughts and feelings and sounds rise and fall like waves of the ocean around the breath, periodically there will be strong experiences that pull your attention away. A strong body sensation—tension, pain, itching, tingling, coolness, heat—or an emotion like sadness or longing, or excitement or joy, or thoughts like planning and remembering.

When a strong wave pulls you from the breath—not a background wave, but a strong one—let go of your attention to the breath and receive that new experience as if with a bow. Welcome it with the same loving awareness that you've given to the breath. Name it gently. If it's sadness, you can note "sad, sad," or "excitement, excitement," or "planning," or "tingling," or "tension."

As you name the waves, let them wash through body and mind, even if they're strong. Sad, sad. Excited, excited. Restless. Peaceful. Planning. Then, when the wave has passed or you're at ease with it, return back to the breath for a time, settling steady with the breath.

Now you alternate attention between the breath and receiving the strong experiences, naming them gently and feeling the whole wave as you do, until they pass. You are the loving witness of the breath and of the waves of life experience.

This breath, this experience, received with mindful loving awareness, just as it is.

Let the breath come and go as it will. Notice the strong waves of experience. You become the field of loving awareness—steady and open.

If it's helpful, you can sense the loving awareness as a space like the sky, vast and open. You are consciousness itself. You are the loving awareness.

And within this loving awareness arises breath and sounds, sensations, feelings, thoughts—arising and passing like waves in the vast open space of loving awareness. You are the consciousness, the witness to it all. Open. Vast. Silent.

Rest in awareness. Rest in loving awareness. It is your own true nature. It is your home.

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