Meditation: Summer Solstice | Monday Night

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 26:41

So in a minute, I'd like us to take time to meditate, maybe twenty or thirty minutes. The practice I'd like to lead tonight I learned from my beloved Judy Goodman, my wife and teaching colleague and just dear one. She learned this during a long retreat at Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts from a wonderful old Sri Lankan monk. At first—I'll use part of it anyway—at first it seemed to her a little bit silly, but then as she did it, she found out that it was powerful and she loved it.

It was a kind of metta or loving-kindness practice directed first toward our own body with such simple phrases as "may my head be well, be strong, be happy," or "may my arms and hands be well"—a kind of well-wishing to the body. Tonight, because it's the week of the summer solstice, the time of greatest light, I want to weave in an image of light as well for those of you who find that it works. If the light doesn't work, then the feeling of kindness can work, or both together. Let's see what happens.

Let's begin simply. Find a way to sit that's comfortable and at ease. It's hard to do loving-kindness practice—and this is one variety of it—if your body's in a lot of pain. Although you can, you might then want to shift actually to tenderness and compassion and mercy. But for this, let your body be at ease. Take your seat halfway between heaven and earth in this remarkable human form that you've been given, and let your eyes close gently.

First, just take a few long, deep breaths in and out. With each breath, let go of whatever obvious tension or tightness you can so that you can be here more fully. Even though we use words, and sometimes they can bring up other feelings—it can feel mechanical, or even bring up their opposite, worries or fears—let this practice be like planting seeds. Just trust as you go along that something interesting may happen, especially if you're new to it.

Now bring a mindful, loving awareness, a loving attention, to this body that you've been given, that almost all of us treasure when it comes down to it. If you step off the curb and a car comes whizzing around the corner, without any thought you jump back out of the way, because your body itself loves life, wants to preserve itself, wants to preserve all the good things that make life possible.

So this precious body, as it's called in the texts—bring your attention, your kind attention, first to your head. Feel what's there. It might be tension or tightness in the scalp, sensations around the eyes, incipient tears or incipient smile, holding in the jaw. Let the face soften and the eyes be soft.

Begin: May my head be at ease, be well, be happy. As you wish this, as you offer this loving-kindness to all the parts of your head—the eyes and ears and tongue, the remarkable nose—imagine, with this

loving-kindness, that you can fill your head with light, the beautiful light of your awareness. Feel or imagine that light, the light that comes in through your eyes, can fill your head. May my head be filled with loving-kindness. May it be well, healed.

Now let your attention, your loving awareness, drop down a little bit through your neck and shoulders. So much is carried in your shoulders—like Sisyphus sometimes, carrying burdens up and down, steadying yourself. Feel all that's there, both the tensions and the strength, the courage, the voice. Let the field of loving-kindness fill your throat and your neck and your shoulders. May my neck and shoulders that carry so much, may they be at ease. May they be well, healed, and happy. Sense or feel, if you can, a lightness or literal light. If it works for you, feel your shoulders and neck and head now all with a sense of light, and certainly with tenderness, kindness.

Now your arms and hands, all the way from your shoulders down through your upper arms and lower. May these arms that do so much, that carry so much—may these hands that touch and move and create and cook and love, these hands that do so much, these wrists—may these arms and wrists and hands be filled with kindness. May they be happy and well and strong. Offer this loving-kindness, feeling the courage of your arms and hands. May they be filled with light, lightness of being, luminous light and care.

Now feel your whole chest, the front and back, your whole torso. Your lungs that breathe and connect you with the ocean of air. The heart that pumps. All the inner organs of digestion—stomach, liver—the organs that keep your body going. And your back, the strength of your spine, that which keeps you upright, the bodily courage. Fill it all with loving-kindness, your whole torso. May my heart and lungs, my whole torso, be filled with loving-kindness and the sweetness of light. May my heart and lungs and all the insides be happy and well and healed.

Be filled with the light of loving kindness. And if it works to be filled with the luminosity of light, let the whole of your upper body now be filled with light and loving kindness.

And now let the loving kindness care drop down into your pelvis—the bowl of your pelvis that carries the whole of your upper body. Your hips, your sacrum, your genitals, all those tender parts, the lower belly and the pelvis. Let the loving kindness fill this whole dimension of your mysterious body with care.

May this whole pelvis, sacrum, hips, the bowl of pelvis, my genitals—all of it be filled with loving kindness. Be happy. Imagine that—be happy. Be healed and well, strong. And let the luminous quality of loving kindness, as light or tenderness or both, fill your pelvis as it has filled all the rest—strong and tender and loving.

Now move this loving attention down through your legs. Your strong legs, your thighs, your knees, your calves, shins, and all the great bones of your legs that move you and hold you up and carry you. Feel the strength of your legs and wish them well. Fill them with loving kindness.

May my legs be filled with loving kindness. May they be happy moving, dancing, standing, walking,

running. May they be happy. May they be well and healed and strong. Let the loving kindness and the light of the loving kindness, the illumination, touch and fill these legs. And if it works, fill them with light—shining the light of love and attention.

And now let this loving kindness drop down to ankles and feet. I think of the line from Jimmy Cliff: "My feet is my only carriage." These feet that carry you so many places, that you stand upon and connect with this body of the earth. The flexibility of your ankles. Let the loving kindness fill your ankles and feet, all the way to your toes, your heels. With gratitude, loving kindness.

May my feet and ankles be filled with loving kindness every step of the way—standing and walking. May they be happy. Happy feet. May they be well and strong and healed. Feel the illumination of loving kindness fill your feet.

And if it works for you, let yourself join the tenderness and loving kindness with the feeling or the image, the sense of your body now filled with light—lightness and light itself. For you are a being of light. Sense the whole of your body, the energy field of this life you've been given.

May my whole body be filled with loving kindness. Be filled with luminous kindness. May my whole body be happy. Strong and healed and happy.

And even though you may be in difficult circumstances at times, as we all can be, let yourself feel or imagine that you can walk around where you live, with the people that surround you and the community around, shining—loving kindness filled within your body, light and luminous, shining from your eyes and your spirit. Feel that you can meet people from this place of loving kindness and strength. That you are like a lamp or a beacon.

And let the loving kindness of your heart and your body and your spirit now shine out. Just as "may my body be happy" illuminates this body with kindness, so now extend: may your bodies be happy. May your hearts and spirits be happy. All those around.

Rest quietly as a beacon of kindness in this mysterious body, drinking the waters of this earth, breathing the ocean of oxygen and air, resting on the mother of this earth that gave you this body. May you shine out. May all bodies—all bodies—be happy. Be well, healed. Be awakened to loving kindness, all of them.

Rest in a luminous field of metta, in whatever way opens your heart and spirit and body to love, tenderness, courage, and kindness.

This is one beautiful version of the practice of loving kindness and metta. There are many, many versions.

You can go online and find beautiful versions from Sharon Salzberg and Trudy Goodman and Tara Brach and Sylvia Boorstein and Howie Cohen and so many of our Spirit Rock teachers. It doesn't always work for each person—there are many different versions, and many other practices of compassion and equanimity and peaceful heart, practices of joy, deep practices of mindful, loving awareness.

So if it served you, use it, remember it, practice it. If it didn't feel quite right, that's totally fine. The point of these practices is not to use them to judge yourself, but to begin to learn that which opens the flower of your heart, that opens the vision of your mind to something vast, that invites you to come back to who you really are.

Take them. There are one hundred and eight thousand skillful means and meditations. Listen and take the ones that serve you.

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