

2001-09-20: Introduction to Meditation (Week 1)

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So Good evening, everyone. And this evening is the beginning of the five week introductory course in mindfulness meditation. So welcome everyone to this. And what will happen during these five weeks is I will somewhat systematically go through the basic instructions in mindfulness meditation. It's usually done systematically in our tradition, where we build on the instructions from week to week. And so the first day today will be the kind of the foundation points about the meditation practice. And then next week, we'll be talking about the body how to include mindfulness of the body, and how mindfulness of the body is a very key element to Buddhist spiritual life. And then followed by a discussion about how to include our emotional life as part of the mindfulness practice, how to bring mindfulness in attention to that part of our life that we call our emotions. And then the fourth week, we'll be talking about how to bring mindfulness to our thinking or thoughts. And then the fifth week will be discussion about how to expand the practice of mindfulness into our daily life. And the idea being that that I'm trying to convey that mindfulness is something we can bring to all aspects of our lives. It's not meant to be something limited just to meditation practice, but something that's in all activities of our lives, but all our human experiences can occur within the domain of awareness, mindfulness nonreactive awareness. So my name is Gil Fronsdal. And I have been a meditation teacher here in Palo Alto for about 11 years. And I have been trained for quite a while in the Japanese Zen tradition. And then I was introduced to Vipassana practice or my Mindfulness Meditation in Southeast Asia, in Thailand and Burma, and where I practice for some time, and then came back to this country and continued practicing here. And then about 1989, I was trained as a began my training as a big part of the teacher be passionate is I came to this community to Palo Alto because I started in 1990. As a graduate student at Stanford, and I, sometimes when I ask people to guess what I studied, most people say you probably studied psychology. But I studied Buddhism, and Buddhist studies in Religious Studies Department. And I finished about four years ago with that and now settled in this community and, and those of you who might have come for the first time this evening, you're just in a sense, you're also

being welcomed into our wide but very Informal, meditation community mindfulness insight meditation community. We have meetings three times a week. And we have retreats that we do and lots of different activities that we do as extended kind of community. We run our community in a very relatively informal way. This is the goal. So those of you who are coming here you're welcome to join, participate in any way you want to come and go as you wish. And you're just quite welcome to participate as it seems useful to you.

Some may ask you, you will. How many of you have had a background? How many of you for how many of you How many of you are new to meditation? How many of you are new to this kind of meditation, Vipassana or insight meditation. Welcome to all you the rest of you.

Why are you here? There's a story of moolah nazzar. deed, going to induce Dino story going to a new town. And he's going to give, he's a spiritual teacher, and he goes to a new town. And he says, These are highly anticipated as a big crowd of people to come to hear him, give him some kind of sermon. And he gets up and says, Do you understand? And they say no, because they're expecting to hear from him the truth. And he says, well, there's no point telling you then, and so he leaves. And so then he goes to the next town, they heard about this, so and he does the same thing there. And he says, Do you understand? And they say, yes. Thinking then he would give a talk. And he says, well, there's no need for me to give a talk because you know, any of the use and so the third time time townie comes to base they heard what happened. The First two towns. So he asks, Do you understand? they reply? Some of the students, some of us don't. And so he says, fine. Those who understand can tell the ones who don't buy

these talks. This this five week introductory talk is taped. See here, it's been taped, and they've been taped in the past also. And some people like to get copies of them for a number of reasons. One reason is some people might miss a class, and they'd like to hear what was talked about. And so Allison, who's sitting up there in the end, she makes those available, either in the past series or this series, if you ask her. And I'll be talking about meditation cushions and stuff. And pillows and Allison also sells meditation paraphernalia. So if that's something you're interested in, if you can talk to Allison. And I think the last logistical thing to say before we kind of venture forth into the class, is that in the Buddhist tradition that I teach in, there's a dedication to offering the teachings and the practice opportunities freely, as cheaply as possible is freely given as possible. And that's, that's how we're doing it here. And in return we do is we put a donation baskets out in the hallway. And those of you who feel like you'd like to freely make a donation, you're welcome to do that. It's anonymous. Unless you do a check, then I guess we could see your name, but it's, there's two baskets out there. One is for the rent, and we pay the friends for the use of the building. And if everyone donated \$1 or two, that would cover our rent, just find other expenses. We might have a newsletter and things and then there's a journal basket for me. And that's for you to do as you wish, make a donation. And this is, this is how I live is I live because of the Buddhist tradition that I'm part of. I'm supported by people's donations, that's my source of livelihood.

So the

there are two words in Pali, the ancient Buddhist language that speak to the practice that I'll be teaching you. One is called Sati. And Sati means just has been translated most commonly into English as mindfulness. The simple act of paying attention to what's going on. The second word is to be positive. And be positive means something like clear seeing, to see clearly. And there's sometimes they're used synonymously sometimes we pass those translated as insight because be passed. is when you develop your mindfulness to be strong enough, you start seeing into the universal characteristics of our experience of our life. So it is to develop the mindfulness enough to be able to penetrate the surface of our what our experiences, to see something which is universal or something which is fundamental that underlies our life in our experience, which is not obvious on the surface as we live it. But mindfulness of the Sati by itself, is doesn't require any depth of insight. Mindfulness is a capacity that we all have. All of us have the ability to pay attention. If you didn't have the ability to pay attention, you wouldn't be here trying to listen to me, if you didn't think you had some ability, because you're using attention to listen to my voice as I speak, attention to something we all have to be able to be aware of what's going on. And it can be likened to a muscle that can be strengthened. And as mindfulness becomes stronger, a lot of wonderful quality Enter into our lives as an in the wake of that strengthening mindfulness. One is we learn the skills, we learn the skills, of learning how to be present for things. Without being reactive to things. They kind of we learn how to be present, maybe in a kind of other kind of extra little silence, or stillness. So we don't automatically lash out or cling or run away or judge or get lost in our fear or lost in our, in the, you know, all the kind of crazy thoughts that we might have around something What's going on? We can we have this ability to be present for things not non reactively. And this ability is considered in the Buddhist tradition to be a wonderful gift that we give to people around us and to ourselves. Because as long as we're reacting to the world around us, there's very little room for wisdom and kindness and receptivity to what's going on. And but if there is that stillness, or that presence, that nonreactive awareness, then There's a possibility for kindness, compassion, for wisdom, for the widest part of us to respond to the world, rather than our reactivity. So to learn how to be present for things without reacting is a phenomenal gift. And sometimes, we'll be called upon to use that in times of crisis. And if you do simply learn the teachings, if you read a book or hear some teachings about mindfulness, and you kind of understand the basic principles, but you haven't actually built up the muscle and built up your your ability to use it, those skills, then you come to the situation of crisis. And you know, theoretically, which is what you can do. But you wouldn't, you won't have the skills and the strength to really apply it. What happened last Tuesday, is in September 11 was one of those times of crisis. I know a lot of people after that kind of event, are looking for something deeper in their lives, finding a different way of life. Responding to the world around them, then maybe that they really developed earlier in their life. One of the ways to develop as a spiritual life, one of the ways to respond to situation like that there's many ways we should respond. But one of the ways of responding is to find out how we can be the forces of peace in our own community. And if we're going to be forces of peace in our own community, we have to begin with ourselves and be able to somehow get a handle on the reactive mode, in which the mind the

heart responds to the world around us, the way in which we get caught by our fear by our anger or hate, or despair, or confusion. So mindfulness is a very, very important thing to develop because it helps us find the way to be present or things without reacting to it. When we don't react to things, then there's an added benefit of mindfulness and that is, we begin seeing more clearly what's actually happening. And that's One of the key functions of mindfulness is to help us see clearly what's happening. see things as they are is the catch word catch expression of Buddhism. Buddhism is teaching us to see things how they actually are, as opposed to how we imagine that they might be. In order to be able to see things actually as they are, we have to be able to see through or step aside from our reactive mode of seeing our bias or prejudice that we have.

So mindfulness is a very simple phenomena. It's a simple ability to pay attention. There's nothing inherently Buddhist about it. It doesn't belong to any religious tradition. It doesn't belong to, you know, juices, uses human quality we all have. You're not being asked to kind of become Asian or adopt Asian ways or you're not being asked to adopt Buddhist teachings. What you're what this class is about, is how to strengthen and cultivate and reinforce nourish nurture this ability to pay attention in a nonreactive way to our life in the present moment.

I wanted to say something more as an introduction that ties into what happened September 11. In times of crisis like that, there's a very strong tendency for many people, for the mind to have kind of centrifugal force that takes us out of ourselves. Where we're looking into the future what's what might happen in the future now, we look across the country to what happened and we're kind of maybe caught by our just our despair, dismay or fear. Or perhaps we're caught by our own our own emotions, but our own emotions trigger a whole series of kind of Rapid associated thoughts and ideas and opinions and we get lost in the world of our thoughts. And it's very easy to lose touch with oneself in times of crisis. And what Buddhism teaches is that if we're going to make a difference to the world around us, if we're going to try to meet it with compassion and care and peacefulness, we have to learn how to be centered in a sense on ourselves. We have to learn how to nourish ourselves, take care of ourselves, we have to learn how to be present for ourselves, and know really what we're feeling. Know what our motivations are, know what we're thinking, rather than those things kind of being an automatic pilot, and then we start reacting and acting in the world. And later we find out, you know, boy, why don't you that What was that all about? And so, it one one response that Buddhists Buddhism has towards times of crisis like this is to encourage Just to go back into ourselves and find some ability to be centered on ourselves, not as an escape by any means absolutely not, but rather as a place where we can then be most useful to the world around us. So we can code then once we've centered on ourselves, then hopefully we can go out and help the world. But if we're trying to help the world, and we've forgotten about what's going on in here, then it's possible to all too easy to continue wrecking havoc on the world. So for the Buddhist tradition, at least, mindfulness is a very important quality to develop. And it's been said that it's really the core aspect. Some people call it the heart of Buddhist practice or meditation is the practice of mindfulness. So certainly make references during these five weeks to Buddhism. But I'm not offering I don't want to offer this practice as a Buddhist practice so much. I want to really offer it as something that's universally useful for everyone. And if you

hear the B word and don't like it You can just tune me out to that word out or leave that part of the class here, when you'll go home or, you know, it's really optional, from what I'm what I'm teaching during these five weeks.

One thing that tends to happen during these instructions I give is that I slide back and forth between talking about mindfulness is something you do in meditation practice. And mindfulness is something that you do in daily life. You go about your work and driving around or whatever you might do in daily life. And I want to say that upfront so that you don't get confused when my because I really don't want to make a absolute distinction between meditation daily life and mindfulness. is meant to be applied in all areas of our life, not just a meditation, even though we'll be talking a lot about how to do the meditation practice itself. So let's start with that with meditation. So meditation practice, sitting in formal meditation, sitting meditation requires a foundation before acquires it's very helpful to have a foundation or setting yourself up kind of a preparation for doing it. And one of the key aspects of preparation is to be very careful with a posture you take when you sit down. Many of us in the lives are quite familiar with sitting down for whatever reason, and being kind of casual and attentive to how we sit. You sit down to meditate. You want to sit down in a way that's conscious, we actually take into account how your body feels what what posture feels alert, and supportive of wakefulness and attentiveness. And the kind of posture that hopefully you can sustain in the course of the meditation. So if you're going to sit on the floor, which is a kind of a classic stereotypic way of meditating. Usually people we say sit cross legged on the floor. There are some advantages to sitting on the floor. One of the advantages is simply that your center of gravity is lower, and your hips tripod with your legs, and so it's very stable. And the stability of the tripod and lower center of gravity makes it easier for most people. It's not necessarily automatic, but with time to let their body relax, all the holding patterns, the shoulders and the stomach that we might be holding a lot can begin relaxing. When we take an aligned upright sitting posture. It's not necessary to sit on the floor. It has pragmatic benefits, but some people can't Some people have no interest. And you're welcome to sit in the chair. But when you sit in a chair, you want to be also careful with your posture and take a posture which seems conducive to being older. If you sit in the chair like a couch potato, it's not really gonna be supportive of the efforts to develop your mindfulness. If you're sitting on the floor it's helpful to sit on a cushion or sit up a little bit. And these Japanese round cushion calls off who is are quite nice to sit on. And the reason to sit up on a cushion is so that your your pelvis can be tipped forward slightly. And because of the elevation, it's easier to get your knees to drop down to the floor. And if you can have your two knees on the floor, then you have this tripod is three points so your knees and your butt and tripod is relatively stable. And some people need to sit higher, some people lower. If you're quite stiff in your hips, you want to sit higher. And some people maybe take a couple of these and stack them on top of each other to get more height. And if you really loosen your hips, for example, you might want to sit really low. And this pillow here, for example, might be too high for you. And you won't experiment with that the height until you feel comfortable. When you sit on the floor, it's very, one very nice way of sitting is what's called Burmese style, which is one foot, both legs on the floor, one foot in front of the other, so that their legs are not actually crossed. And that puts the least amount of torque on your ankles and hip and your knee. And for most people that's relatively comfortable and works fairly well. So like their skis kind of

get the idea what I'm saying. And you can also sit quarter Lotus, which is you have One foot up on your calf, you can sit half lotus, which is one foot up on your thigh. And then you can sit full lotus, which is to have both feet up on your thigh. I can't quite do it today. And so all these ways are nice ways of sitting. And you can experiment to see which way you're doing. A good yoga teacher would say that you should alternate which leg is in front or on top. So you stretch your body clean both sides.

Part of the reason to take care of the bass is so that you can have your your spine upright for length of time and sitting. And if you have a little bit of a curve in your lower back, just a little bit they slightly just a little bit accentuate the lower curve that's natural curve, then it's a little bit strength there that makes a little bit easier for most people to keep their spine upright and Of course, the sittings, you don't collapse. Some people overarch their lower back, you want to be careful with that. And maybe you want to sit lower on the cushion or relax your stomach muscles or something. One way to help you get get a straight spine is to take your your hands either side of your hips on the floor, and lift yourself almost off the cushion. And then let your shoulders kind of roll back and then let go of your arms and settle down. Straight down, maybe your shoulders and will roll back a little bit feel more like they're hanging. And that kind of gives you a sense maybe of a spine sort of more alert and aligned than you would normally have it. If you're sitting in a chair. The usual suggested way of sitting is to have both legs parallel to each other so they're not cross and straight out with both feet Flatten the ground. Though some people like to have their legs spread out to the side, they feel more stable that way. But the usual suggestion is parallel going straight out. And with your, with your knees, slightly lower than your hips. Certainly you don't want to have your knees higher than your hips because of the higher than your hips and attends to you can't occur about your lower back and put a strain there. If you're on the chair, and you can avoid using the backrest. That's the best in the sense that there's a very strong correlation between what goes on in our inner life, our psychic life, and what goes on with our physical posture. And in that Buddhist practice is helping us becoming to become more self reliant is the development of self self reliance is a little bit easier if your body is self reliant also. So if your back, your your back, for example, allows for it to say way from the backrest little bit, so you don't have to use it is considered very helpful. If you need to use a backrest, then the then the choice would be to if you can just support the lower back, get a really good support for lower back and have your upper spine free from the backrest would be the best. But if you have to use the whole backrest, that's fine thing to do also, the hands can you can do anything with the hands where they're basically doing the same thing on a symmetrical to each other. The classic way of meditating is to have the hands together one in front of the other. Sometimes you have in the top of your heel or top of your foot. Sometimes you have your hand up kind of floating in front of your belly button. Or you can have your hands on your thighs, your knees. Hands up or hands down doesn't matter. Sometimes when people have their hands, on their ankle, or in their heel or sometimes on their knee They're pulling your shoulders forward. And they tend to create a strain in the neck or in the back of their shoulders. And so if you start feeling a strain like that, you want to get some way to lift up your hands a little high, higher off the higher up. And one way to do that is to get a towel or a blanket or a pillow and put them under your hands, your hands a little bit higher support a bit higher. The head should be aligned on the shoulders, which sounds obvious. But sometimes people will stick your head forward. Sometimes

you're leaning to the side, or sometimes turning to the side that will look like that. And you want to be careful and it helps sometimes to pull the head back a little bit and chin down. The wonderful thing that does it tends to make a little bit open space between the last vertebrae in the skull. If you try to try to try to make openness there tends to bring the chin down a little bit. And it said that if your chin goes tucks down a little bit when you meditate, it tends to control the wandering mind. You won't think you won't get lost in your thoughts so easily. So, you might not believe it. If you do it. We sit in our tradition, generally with the eyes closed. And that's what we recommend. Though there are the passionate teachers who teach people to sit with their eyes open. There's no inherent need to sit with the eyes closed. But pragmatically, it seems to be most useful for most people who are less distracted and what goes on around them.

And it's helpful to have the eyes, the mouth closed with a tongue resting against the roof of the mouth. So that's the basic point to the posture. If you're sitting on the floor and you can sit cross legged or you want to take a break from sitting cross legged. Some people sit on benches like this and stick their their knees and legs underneath. So you're kind of more like you're sitting on your knees. And some people if you have a round cushion, we'll, we'll put it upright like this. And then put the cushion down between your ankles, and then sit down on it like that. And for some people that works very well. And we get your center of center of gravity with a low and you can be comfortable.

So, you've been sitting for a little while now, what I like to ask you to do or suggest you offer you to do is you stand up for 30 seconds or so quietly, just a stretch, and then we'll do a little meditation.

So then take an alert but comfortable posture

Give yourself a few moments to kind of move around a little bit in your chair and your your seat. Kind of to find the place where the body feels comfortable but alert where it feels a little bit energized perhaps

gently close your eyes.

And then to begin to sitting. It can be useful to take two or three deep breaths on deep breaths, deep inside your body, expanding your torso, your ribcage as you breathe in. And then as you exhale, to let go to let go the tensions of the day. Let go of your thoughts, your concerns.

Breathing in deeply to be reminded to be present here and now.

To your immediate experience, exhaling, letting go.

And then let your breath return to normal. There's no right or wrong way to breathe when you do mindfulness meditation. Just breathe whatever way you happen to be breathing. You don't have to be making your breath be any kind of way.

It can be also helpful beginning Have a meditation session to scan through your body to see if there's any obvious places where the muscles are tense that you can let go of. You might stop, start with your forehead. As you exhale, relax the forehead, eyebrows.

Some people carry a lot of tension in their eyes might begin by having some softness in the eyes, not expecting attention to go away with just a little bit of softening that part of your body.

Perhaps the jaws

Perhaps you can soften the shoulders, shoulder blades.

It can be particularly useful to soften the belly to relax the muscles there. Let the belly kind of hang forward in a way that might seem very unbecoming. Relax if you have a belt that's tight, you might loosen it.

Now after having done these kind of preliminary exercises for us, starting with meditation, then you want to begin the actual meditation by becoming aware of your breathing

become aware of how your body experiences to breathing

If you have trouble feeling your breath, your breathing then you might just for a little while, breathe a little bit more fully than usual until you can feel the sensations of breathing, breathing in and out. Or you can put your hands on your belly and feel the movement of your belly as you breathe.

In the simplest idea of breath meditation is for you to become aware of your breathing. Have your bodies experienced Breathing in and breathing out and then to sustain the attention over time on your breath

inevitably, your mind will wander off into thoughts.

There's no need to make that a problem or to think that it shouldn't happen. However the practice is when you first notice the first time you notice that's what's going on. Then very matter of factly very gently, begin again attending to your breathing.

Part of what we're doing in meditation is developing the ability for our mind and body to be the same place at the same time. If you're sitting here and you're thinking about what happened during the day

today or what's going to happen tomorrow, then your body's in one place in a sense your mind your thoughts are directed to some other place, other time. by directing our attention to something as simple as the breathing, the breath can be an anchor, keeping us keeping the body and mind in the same place at the same time.

Since it's not always so easy to stay with a breathing, there's a very simple aid you can use. And that is each time you breathe in, you're very silent and very quietly whisper in the mind. Think the word in or rising, you're aware of the rising of your belly and chest. And each time you exhale there's a very quiet note in the mind. Gentle note that says out, are falling as you're aware of the chest to the outcome. Falling as you exhale, two way of using a thought, thinking to help you stay present for what's going on, rather than your thoughts, just randomly pulling you away.

Letting go of your thoughts and concerns and beginning again with the breathing. Breathing in, breathing out hanging in there for the rhythm of your breathing hanging in there for each successive breath

We'll sit for one more minute and during this last minute, give yourself over to the breathing. Letting the rhythm of the breath, perhaps calm your mind and body. Hang in there for one minute.

There's a story of a Zen master and a

some wealthy pure bureaucrat, I think, came to visit him who was going to ask the Zen master for a piece of calligraphy was one of the things Japanese Ms. was often did did. They did calligraphy is gifts to people. And the man came to the Zen master and said you You I kind of in a nutshell, calligraphy a nice piece of paper, right the essence of Buddhism. And so Zen master said, Oh, yeah, I can do that. So he wrote in his piece of paper, the word in Japanese attention. And he handed the paper to the men. And the men said, You didn't seem to understand. I wanted the essence of Buddhism. And so there's that message. Oh, okay. And so he or she wrote, Attention, attention. And the man said, You didn't seem to understand I mean, Buddhism is this great lofty philosophy and religion. It's believed by millions of people and it's traveled from India to China to Japan, it's sustained this huge culture and, you know, it's pinnacle of human thought or whatever, you know, and, you know, I really want the essence But you know, the real, you know, what's the really core aspect? Oh, so the master now I get it what you want, I understand. So then he wrote on a piece of paper, Attention, attention attention. The point of mindfulness is to develop our capacity to pay attention. When we do breath meditation, some people will measure their success. So their breath meditation, by how well they can stay with a breath. If I can, if I can follow 10 breaths in a row, that's really good. If I can follow the breath, the whole meditation time, then I'm really doing it right. But if I'd only follow three breaths at a time, and then I lose it in my thoughts, then I'm just a failure at this and I might as well take up you know, country dancing or something else. The it's certainly a wonderful thing and very profound to develop our concentration in the breathing To be able to stay with a breath. As we get more concentrated in the

breath, as we hang in there with the breath and strengthen their ability to stay with the breath over time, it makes it a lot easier for a lot of the ways in which the mind holds on to thoughts, ideas, all kinds of things fall away, and the mind tends to become calmer. The body tends to be calm, calmer, the longer we stay with the breath in a kind of natural way. The breath is one of the great calming influences on the psyche. So it's quite wonderful to stay with the breath over time. But you don't want to measure the success of mindfulness by your ability to stay with the breath. with mindfulness is a practice mindfulness is the practice of learning to pay attention to what is actually happening. And if what is actually happening is you can't be with a breath or very long. The practice of mindfulness is simply to be aware. I'm not with the breath very much. My mind is kind of out of control. And to do that, To be aware of that phenomenon in a nonreactive way, what we're developing is not just simply awareness, but nonreactive awareness to what's going on. And for a lot of people this is to be is a radical thing to do. Because a lot of people's awareness is changed by aversion by confusion by fear, by judging all the time. They have nonreactive awareness is a very, very compassionate thing to do to for ourselves. So if you can't stay with the breath, then the practice simply notice, my mind is running rushing off at 10,000 miles an hour. My I'm probably consumed by worry about what's gonna happen tomorrow. And simply notice those things with a nonreactive mind. One of the functions of breath meditation is to help us become more aware of what's actually going on in the currents of our lives. If you go to a very still kind of almost almost still flowing river like Oak Creek stream, sometimes you can look at it, it's very clear and very, very shallow. And it can be very difficult to see whether the water is actually moving. And if you take a stick and stick it into the water, then you can see there's a little wake that's formed on the edge of the little stick and Joe and the water is moving, the river is moving.

We use the breath as a kind of same kind of reference point for the current of our life as we use a stick in that little stream. But as you become aware of your breathing, and you try to be aware of your breathing, what you might become mostly aware of is how difficult it is how little of the time you're with your breath. And what you'll notice then is my mind is chaotic, is out of control. It's wild, or I'm really filled with emotions. I'm just kind of swirling about all these feelings that are going on round and round and round. I keep getting caught by them or pulled into them. You start noticing what's actually going On. If you didn't have a reference to the breath, you might not notice the speed in which your life is flowing, your mind and your heart and all this. Many of us that will go about our life preoccupied with our concerns, and won't actually notice how preoccupied we are. We're distracted by our distractions by our distractions, we're distracted from our distractions by our distractions. And we need some kind of way of stopping that, or some kind of way of having a reference to notice that to step outside of it. So without all of us, all of our being is consumed by our preoccupation. And part of what we're doing in mindfulness is learning how to step outside of the stream of our normal preoccupations, the stream of our karmic, or karma, as it says, sometimes in Buddhism. And so if you can't stay with a breath, it's still very important to keep trying. Let's try to do your best to be with a breathing, but you don't have to measure your success by how well you're doing with the breath. It's fine to be an utter failure. With a breath meditation, all you can do is managed one breath, and then you lose it. That's okay. As long as you're trying to stay with a breath, it's okay not to succeed. It's not wonderful. But when trying to do that, that's hopefully helping you become aware of what's actually going on for you. The thoughts, the

feelings, the momentum of your mind, what's actually going on. And what mindful mindfulness is simply noticing what's actually going on. And trying to be noticed it in a nonreactive way, not to make a story out of it, or judge it, or something like that. So I like to say that mindfulness works even when it doesn't work. At least the breath meditation works, even when it doesn't work, that you don't have to be successful at concentrating on breath, they get the benefits of the practice. A lot of people that don't know this little secret, and so they just make their life worse because they find it hard to stay with the breathing. And then they notice that and they're reactive about that. Call I'm a failure. I can't do this, you know, and, you know, so they get all kinds of thoughts that that might arise.

And then they come back again to your breath and notice all that and then to come back again to your breathing, whenever you have a chance to come back to your breathing, that tends to counteract the forces of preoccupation the forces of gravity that pull us into our preoccupations. We tend to mind wants to go off in some kind of concern. There's a strong pull to those concerns, strong interest in kinds of concerns. In order to come back to breathing, even just even if just for one breath, you have to let go a little bit. And that's a little bit of letting go. makes a big difference over time. With enough drops, the bathtub is filled With enough little moments of letting go of your preoccupation, and coming back to the breath, you can learn to let go of the things that consume you and cause stress and tension or life. And Megan, discovering how breath meditation is very calming, it can bring a lot of peace in their lives, if we understand the principle is not to be reactive, or we notice just to notice where we're at, and then to learn to let go of it enough to come back to the breathing. Just come back to the breathing and let it stay with the breathing as best you can. And the breathing is kind of like a ton of fun, tonic tone of voice. The system, you're staying with the breath, letting it kind of be like an internal massage, the arising and passing lifting and falling of the chest and the torso as you breathe is very settling for the body can be

So I've talked for quite a while now, before I go on, do you have any questions about what the meditation was like or in the meditation? From what I've said so far? Yes. Two questions. One is

I've gotten in the habit of counting the entire time, my all my breath, select what kind of 8300 I was like, obviously, I can't meditate muscle, counting my my breaths continuously. And also wanted you to comment on what level of discomfort in your legs you should do it before you know.

Next week we'll talk about body sensations. So there'll be a whole instructions about that include that, but first discomfort in your leg. Some people have the illusion that there is an ideal meditation posture. If you can just find it. You will sit in absolute comfort in it. Physical comfort and you know, it'll just be great. There is no such posture. So part of meditation is also learning how to be wisely present for the discomfort that arises as you see it over some time in the same posture without moving. It's helpful not to move automatically, which is ways many people are and don't normal life, we feel uncomfortable, we shift our attention or posture, the, it's easier to develop a stillness and a clear focus of the mind if the body is still. And the more often we move, the more we disrupt kind of create waves in the mind.

But there's a trade off because at some point, the discomfort becomes strong enough, it becomes agitating, it creates its own waves in the mind. And also you can get discouraged and all that. So you have to kind of watch that carefully. And if you feel at some point that it's more agitating and useful to sit still. And it's begin to discourage you because it's you know, painful. By all means change your posture. And you can do this you can change your posture in the spirit of mine. fullness where, rather than kind of changing yourself automatically kind of unconsciously, you change your posture very slowly, kind of slowly change your posture to be aware of what, what's going on, stay in the flow of mindfulness. As we're counting the breath, it's a pretty classic Buddhist meditation practice to count the breath. It's a way of helping develop concentration, focus, staying with a breath, you have to you have to, in order to keep count, you have to kind of be a little more alert, a little more tracking a little bit more fully. So it's a very powerful aid. It tends to be a support for concentration practice more than mindfulness practice. So mindfulness teachers usually don't give instructions for counting, unless there's some good reason for it. The usual instruction is to count from one to 10 and then start over again. And I think part of the reason is to keep it simple, and most people can keep track of one to 10. But if you get up to the Hundreds and hundreds, it's a little bit harder for most people to keep track of it. And you have to use maybe I think theorizing now, but I think you have to use it more a different part of your cognitive functioning, to keep track of the higher numbers and kind of keep track of that and keep it going. And so the mind has to be a little more agitated in order to stay present for that. And, and I've never heard anyone recommend counting that far, just one to 10. And if you lose count from between one and 10, they just go back to one automatically don't think about it. And if you get up to 15, that's a sign that you close you're intending to if you're attending to go to 10, and you got 15 that's also a sign that you've lost your mindfulness. And just go back to one. But in your situation, it might be interesting for you to look at why you find counting to 300 so useful, maintaining the count for so long. Okay, maybe later, you want to tell me When you get to 300 are you keeping time? Oh, keeping time. So that brings up a practical issue. When you sit when you sit to meditate, how do you keep time, especially in our tradition with the keeping the eyes closed. And for people who are beginning this series never meditated before. I encourage you during this first week, it's very helpful for this five week series. If every if you start a daily meditation practice, sit every day. And you'll get the most out of these five weeks if you sit there every day. And then kind of try to apply the instructions during the week. And then come the next week ready to kind of build on what you've done during the week. If you've never meditated before, I start with 15 minutes a day, this first week. And then each day each week of this five weeks, add five minutes. So next next, next Thursday, you began you do 20 minutes the next following Thursday us 20 Five minutes to build on that. And then after the five weeks, you can kind of decide for yourself how long you want to sit. But how do you know when your time is up? There's a lot of different solutions people have come up with the cleverest, I think you know, is to use tape record

15 minutes of silence on your cassette tape. And then, at the end of the 16 minutes, you ring a bell, you record the sound of a bell ringing. And then when it's time to meditate, you stick your meditation tape in your tape deck and turn it on. And it goes along silently for 15 minutes and then you hear a bell Ding, ding. Some people like to do that way. I think there's a lot of timers on the market that are silent

timers. And so you set it for 15 minutes and it goes off ding after 15 minutes. Everyone classic ways to Buddhism before they had clocks is they would have incense sticks, and they would measure how long it took for a certain length of indexing stick to burn. So they had 15 minutes sticks. And so they'd light it, stick it in the incense burner and close their eyes and they no longer smelled the smoke coming. And then they knew that the 15 minutes was up. So you might find it more relaxing to find external aid. Other questions? Yes. Are you trouble doing meditation falling asleep? Yeah, that's pretty, pretty common. There's a lot to be said about that. Because there's a lot of different reasons why people fall asleep meditation. We have a culture of people who are sleep deprived, and some people need to get to sleep more than they need to meditate. And so if that's okay your case, maybe just, you know, try to reorganize your life. Like to get more sleep if you can. Sometimes it's because we made it to the end of the day, we're kind of tired anyway. And if you meditate at the beginning of the day, which is a classic time to do your daily meditation practice, people tend to be more fresh and alert, and it's a lot easier. Some people fall asleep when they first start, because the only other time we fall asleep, we close our eyes is when we go to sleep at night, just as there's a habit. And so you start to kind of work with a habit for a while and after a week or two, probably the habit will be broken. Some people fall asleep because they're too they get to come in meditation. A lot of people want to calm that's where they that's why they're coming to meditate. After all, they want to get calm. The point of mindfulness is not to get calm. The point of mindfulness is to see clearly what's going on. But it's also possible to get to calm and if you're too calm and not that don't balance that with a certain amount of alertness people fall asleep. There's a lot more I could say. But one more example. Some people fall asleep in meditation, for the same reason that babies fall asleep when they're overstimulated, if you've ever seen a baby go into, you know, too much noise, a lot of cacophony of noise or something, or too much light to fall asleep as a protective mechanism. For adults, that protective mechanism seems to come into place around very powerful emotions, or memories that are bubbling up that we don't want to look at. And so the system has some way of falling asleep. So we don't have to look at what's really going on in our lives. From the point of view of mindfulness practice, we're trying to cultivate nonreactive awareness, which means it's okay to be sleepy, it's even okay to fall asleep. Your job is to try your best you can to be mindful of what's actually happening. If you're falling asleep, we'll talk more about this. This will make more sense next week. But if you're getting very sleepy or tired, then what the mindfulness practice entails. Bringing your careful attention to the sensations in your body of sleepiness. So you take sleeping as the object of your meditation. So you feel the heaviness in your eyes, the grit in your eyes, the heaviness and the kind of freshness and the heat perhaps in your cheeks and the weight in your shoulders and the foggiess in your mind and stickiness in different places. And then you begin exploring and investigating and waking up really seeing that for what it clearly is in and of itself. And sometimes that's enough to wake a person up just that investigation. And there's also the pragmatic thing of opening your eyes when you meditate. Some people find if you open your eyes when you sit and meditate, look at a light source out a window with the eyes open that then it overcomes a tendency to fall asleep.

Please I think my question

might be sir related terms, but

sometimes in that space between thoughts, if you're able to stop it from me as a beginner, I'm able to sort of focus in that space, sometimes it seems scary. I mean, I'm not used to that space. And so it's almost, I mean, I just wonder, lots of things about it. Like, what is it? Is that my subconsciousness? Or, I mean, it frightens me

space between your thoughts.

Yeah. Because I think it's just like, I'm going to transfer sometimes it feels like I could just go off into this place and maybe never come back. I don't know.

meditation practices or spiritual life in general at times, because kind of like being thrown into a lake without knowing how to swim. Because you don't have to swim first person trashes about and is really afraid. And what we learn to do after a while is that all we have to do is relax and the water holds us up. The analogy isn't perfect, but the idea being that what happens is we let go of our thoughts like Oh, the reference for both of our thoughts can be very frightening for people terror terrifying for some people who think they only exist if they're thinking if their whole way of having a self identity is mediated through ideas and thoughts, what they think what they feel, it can be very frightening not to have a self identity that's mediated by your thoughts and ideas. And part of the spiritual practice is to learn to have trust that it's okay not to hold on to self identity, not hold on to thoughts and allow something else to happen. So probably for you, it's a matter of developing more trust that it's okay to go in that space between your thoughts. It's okay to let go of your thoughts and discover a whole other aspect of your life, you're thinking actually is kind of like a tip of an iceberg. And most people, you know, it's kind of like say you spent your whole life watching television. And you're really really happy because it's all you know. And you're also really happy because you have a lot of channels. And you have cable you know, and, and you know, it's like 100 channels, you know, and you get a surf and it's just all these movies and it just endless entertainment, such variety and if you get bored with one you turn the other on, it's just really great. And it is really it's a lot of depth to it. And there are a variety and this is like, this is what I want could you want, and then one day there's a blackout. And the television doesn't work and for the first time in your life, you leave your house and you're walking down the street and you look at the trees and your bird and things are three dimensional. You smell the flowers and you and neighbors are smiling at you and the sun is shining in the rain. balls on your cheeks and, and, and then you will book Oh by this wonderful you know, you know, ice cream store and they have you know, you actually taste the flavors for years used to commercials, you know, the commercials were very interesting, you know and with no you actually taste you know and you realize you've been living in a two dimensional world and suddenly stepped into a three dimensional world. So our thoughts are so compelling we paint the whole world and we live in the filth we see the world through our thoughts, much more than we realize. And it's so seductive so alluring, we think that's all there is we don't it's like, like maybe like a fish is not supposed to see the water because it's the element that lives in. We

don't see the air because we you know, but we don't see the thoughts that we live in because they're so they're so familiar. But they really use a tip of the iceberg and we're living in a two dimensional world if we're only living in the world of thoughts and to learn To let go of them that a little bit and discover what's you know that what's underneath the water of the iceberg is discover phenomenal depth of, of life depth of compassion, of peace, of love, of fear of terror. You know, what's underneath that surface of the iceberg is really locked. It's very varied. And so your whole humanity, and it's really well worth your while to open up to it. It can be very frightening. So what you want to do is do it in small steps. There's no hurry, you know, no one's rushing you along. And just take your time. And if you need help from other people who've been there before, reach out to other people and they'll help you. And then if you stay confused about what's going on, it's really good to be it's really, really, it's really foreign, what's happening to you. It's really good to talk to other people who've been there before. So they can give you some guidance or some reassurance that it's okay. Does that address your concern, which is like a drug, the thoughts are the one that can be like a drug. And thoughts are also like a drug. And what we're trying to do in Buddhist meditation is no longer be intoxicated, it's possible to be intoxicated by our thoughts. It's also possible to be intoxicated by what happens in meditation. So some of the things you're concerned about might be actually very valid to be concerned about the current toxification and kind of seduction

of the states that can arise out of that. And some of these deeper states of meditation, it's very important to be around a teacher who can help a student not get intoxicated by the states of meditation. What's very interesting about the mindfulness practice Vipassana which is very difficult people to understand I'll tell you, the challenging thing is that mindfulness meditation is not concerned about having any kind of particular experience. We're often looking for an experience, experience of calm of peace of great enlightenment or some kind of experience, which is going to tell us now I've done it right. I've succeeded spiritually, or there's many reasons why you're wanting to experience Am I doing it right? Is this the right experience I'm having right now. And they come to me and ask. mindfulness practice is not about an experience. It's about how we see our experience, how we relate to our experience. So doesn't really matter what your experiences, it could be the most horrendous experience and the most blissful experience. What's important is how we hold it, how do we how do we bring this nonreactive awareness to that experience? So make sense. So what we're doing in mindfulness, it's called Like

Buddhism sometimes distinguishes between two aspects of awareness. There is what awareness is aware of the content of awareness. Your awareness is now listening to me speak. And you're focusing supposedly, on my, my words, my sentences, so that my sentences are the content of your awareness. If you're looking at something, the sight object is the content of your awareness. If you're thinking about something, your thoughts are the content of your awareness here is thinking and aware of your thinking. If you so most of us are orienting ourselves by the objects of awareness, we come into a room we've never been before. And we're kind of maybe a little bit wary of Who are these people. And so we're kind of hyper alert. Little bit and who to sit with? And what's going on here? And how do I find myself and then we're focusing outward and what's going on in the room, the objects of

the room. Or maybe we're very much obsessed about our self identity, what people think about us. And so we're focusing always in and what am I saying? Am I doing the right thing? And so what's the object of attention and then is our self preoccupation. So it's completely normal to have an object of awareness. But there's something else and that is awareness itself. There's object of awareness, and there's awareness. And most people always focusing on the object of awareness. And therefore, they're very interested in having a particular kind of experience. That's the right experience, or better experience. As mindfulness develops, as it gets, muscle gets stronger and stronger. What happens is that the awareness by itself stands more and more independent of what it's aware of. And as you as awareness becomes bigger and bigger and bigger and more independent of what it's aware of, then we take refuge we can rest in the security of the peace, of awareness itself. So there might be times in your life we've had an experience of great still awareness, where a lot of stuff can come into your awareness you can be aware see things and hear things and think things. But somehow it doesn't ruffle this great big peacefulness of awareness, which seems so large. Awareness can become independent of what it's aware of. And when awareness becomes independent of words aware of, then you you're not defining your life and your happiness, by the objects of what happens in life. By the experience you have, by the things that happen around you, the people you're related to by the amount of money in your bank account or the kind of house you live, and all those things become secondary to phenomenal love and peace and joy in a sense, that is inherent in awareness by itself. So it makes sense there's not too mystical.

So what we're doing in mindfulness practice is not looking for a better experience. But rather looking to how to develop the mindfulness of what's actually is happening right now. So this is also challenging for people because say, you sit down to meditate, and you feel intense, tired, headachy. The normal thing to want to do is to try to sit in such a way to like, get rid of all that. If I just sit quietly here on my tensional go way off, you're calm, my headache will go away. And then we focus on how to kind of negotiate our meditation to make those things happen. And sometimes we can be successful. And some, and that's great because that kind of reinforces the fact that I'm in control control. I can do it you know. It's actually my more radical and transformative, to not use meditation as a way of change yourself, but rather using meditation as a place to develop this independent awareness, which is larger, independent of what your experiences. So rather than being happy because your headache has gone away, you become happy because you realize that you're much bigger than the headache. So we're constantly trying to develop the mindfulness, we're not necessarily trying to change our experience, we were sitting. In the long term, you're much better off by developing this capacity for independent awareness. Because as you can bring with you everywhere. If what you've developed is skills for how to get rid of your tension, it's a good skill to have, I would not get it's very useful in life to get rid of your tension. But if you're if you relying on that all the time, there are situations you'll come to where you won't be able to use Your skills and you stay tense. But if you learn how to take refuge or take find this independent awareness that can be present for things without being caught by things, then you can go into the world in a much more useful way.

So to begin this first week, the focus is on establishing a good meditation posture and beginning to become familiar with your breathing. And I use the word familiar. Read carefully. Explore your breath, your breathing, get to know it, study it, find out what it's like in different circumstances. The breath expresses to a great extent, what's going on in our life. If we're tense, the breath will express that tension if we're afraid, the breath will express the fear for anger. The breath will express the fear in different way. Different ways in which we hold the breath. In the Titan, different ways are loose or relaxed or the breath is fast or shallower. No, none of it needs to be changed. None of it none of it is wrong from the point of view of mindfulness. But it's very useful to begin studying it and becoming familiar. When you're driving your car if you come to a stoplight. If you have a few seconds there, study your breathing. And see how your how your way you drive affects how you breathe. If you're standing in line at a store, check in with your breathing. discover something there. When you're having a conversation with someone, check in periodically with your breathing. And see if the breath can be a cue can tell you more information about how you're reacting how you're living your life, and what the cost is of living a certain way to potentially your living for example. Become familiar with your breathing in meditation. Study your breath, get to know it. Learn how to hang in there with it. Learn how to to rest with a rhythm To the breath, it's kind of like the waves coming in and out of the from the ocean. You kind of riding the waves, you ride the in breath and the out breath, the in, breath, out breath, hang in there. Discover what happens. When you stay with a breath, discover what happens, what's going on inside of you, when you can't be with a breath. So whole process of exploration and investigation of curiosity, and getting to know these things. Sit if you're new to all this sit 15 minutes a day. If it's most people find it best to sit in the morning before they life begins kind of very actively. Some people find it's best to sit in the evening. various different people, it's up to you. It's best if you sit in such a time in a place where you're not going to be disturbed by the phone. It's really important if you give yourself 15 minutes or 20 minutes or 30 minutes that this is this is how long you're going to sit that you give yourself a commitment to see the sitting to the end You're welcome to change your posture if it gets physically uncomfortable. But there's a wonderful phenomena that happens in meditation. You're sitting there meditating quite peacefully, you're quite happy. Maybe even you feel like you're you feel like you're on the brink of full enlightenment. And then suddenly, this thought occurs to you that the freezer needs to be defrosted. And it needs to be defrosted right now. And so you want to be very careful with those kinds of you know, there's all these funny ways that the mind wants to distract you from being present. And so to have a commitment to sit, the timeout, now that telephone call, telephone get you out of pull you out, nothing, anything that within reason, pull you out of the, your, your period of meditation. It's also helpful to take, find a place in your home. If you have such a place, like a corner of a bedroom, that's your meditation place where the only thing that has In that place is meditation, so that you associate that place with sitting with being present. If there's other associations, then it's kind of not as conducive to supporting the practice.

One or two more questions that seem important, please.

When I start focusing on the breath, I get anxious around it. And I don't, it doesn't feel

good for you relatively, relatively new to meditation. There's two things you can do. One is remind yourself that it's okay to be anxious around the breath. It's okay to be the way you are. mindfulness practice. Simply notice more carefully, maybe compassionately, maybe with a very friendly way. I'm being anxious, and the more I with a breath more I seem to get and wow, meditation teacher test says that's okay, as long as I'm present for it. And if you do that to what you might find, after a while, you should begin to relax again and no longer becomes a problem. If you just hang in there long enough to kind of see it through for a while. If it builds to state of being a panic, panic attack or something, then probably isn't so useful for you to go that far. And, and what you might want to do then is ignore the breath for a while in your meditation practice. And then there's the alternative. Anchor practice for mindfulness is sounds and sounds for people get really anxious around the breath. Sounds are much more neutral. And so what that what that entails is we stay present for whatever sounds are happening around us and just stay kind of riding the sounds listening to the sounds, notice noting listening, hearing, hearing. And whenever the mind wanders off into thoughts come back to the sounds Come back to the sounds and, and that's one way to help us get into the present moment more fully. And then after after a while you might find it then easier to come back to your breath once you've established some level of calm presence. Yes.

I love this story of these two monks who go to the abbot. And the first one says, it's okay to smoke while I'm praying. And the abbot says, No way. When you pray, just pray. And the second monk OC Evan says, Is it okay to pray while I smoke? And the ABA says Of course you should. You should pray at every activity. You do.

I think that generally though, it's not so useful. Some people find that very relaxing to listen to music, there's even meditation music can can get to this kind of content helps you get calm. If what you want to do is to de stress and get calm. The music is great can be great for people. That's your intention. If your intention is to develop your mindfulness, your presence to see things directly as they are, then you're better off not listening to music, and just leaving yourself alone. And just being present for who you actually are. not who you would rather be. That makes sense.

So thank you. And I hope that next week that I don't talk as much because I'd like to usually I'd like to Do lead to short sittings during the course of our hour and a half together and, and talk a bit about that. And if you have any further questions at any point, then no please come up and ask me. I see it as my job to try to be as helpful as I can as you're trying to figure out how to do this practice. It's a really a marvelous practice the mindfulness practices I for me, it's one of the most lovely things in the world to do. And I really love sharing it with you. So I'm happy that you're here and happy. Hopefully you'll find some benefit from all this. Thank you.