

# 2001-10-22: Meditation on the Breath

Thu, 6/18 12:18PM • 46:07

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

breathing, breath, mind, body, softening, sensations, feelings, practice, soften, impermanence, calm, attachments, aware, exhalation, feel, discourse, impermanent, letting, focus, talk

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, this evening I thought of doing it a little bit different. Some of you are going to leave now. Which is okay, I'll give you a chance. The moment will stare, stand and stretch those who'd like to go and go. The one I'd like to do is instead of giving a talk, I'd like to lead a guided meditation.

And the it's

one of the

important and classical practices of mindfulness that appears in the Buddhist discourses. And it's kind of like the alternative form of Vipassana, in the form of Vipassana that we practice generally.

And

it's mostly centers on the breath, and then with the breath as a foundation for the practice. Various the practice develops in various ways. So that rather than just kind of giving you a talk describing what the practices, which you want to leave him leave here tonight, hardly remembering. I thought it'd be much more interesting to sit. I also thought that, as I mentioned last week, there's a lot of anxiety about the land. And one of the things that I think Buddhist practice encourages us to do is to become to remain calm in often difficult situations, and it can be hard to remain calm. So having an extra sitting today is an also reminder of the importance of being calm. So, what I propose we do is maintaining silence, I think it'd be good to maintain the continuity of silence from the setting we had, take a few minutes to stand and stretch as you see fit. And if you feel like you've sad enough today, it's fine for you to go now at this point and We'll sit down, we'll start the sitting

So this form of mindfulness practice comes from the discourse of the Buddha called the

anapanasati sutta

the discourse on mindfully breathing in and out and it uses the breath. This the cycles of alternating Breathing in and breathing out as the kind of the foundation

and the guide the anchor

for the various mindfulness exercises. That's the practice involves and if you can imagine yourself perhaps, walking, maybe going for a long hike. And you maybe think a lot of things, you

enjoy the

sights, you maybe talk to a friend and get lost in your own fantasies and whatever you do, but because it's an arduous hike, maybe you're hiking uphill or something. There's always part of you that's focused on continuing to do the steps, the walking. And there's certain intention of being focused on the steps and we'll keep walking that's going on. There's a rhythmic sensations and feelings of the step, kind of, they're kind of in the background or kind of keeping you centered or focused. And sometimes going for long walks can be very, very helpful for lubricating the psyche and the body. Because it helps the body helps the mind not fixate on things even though you might be concerned about things. This steady rhythm of the of this Feet walking helps a lot. So in the same way this practice uses the, the rhythm of the breathing. And it's not easy to stay with a breath, the mind wanders away, but that's fine. The intention is to come back to the breath, your breathing anyway. So you're not gonna hopefully you know you're not gonna forget to do that. And, and just come back whenever you remember and use the breath as an anchor, use it as the background, the foreground, use it as the lubricant for throughout this meditation. Kind of like you if you were scuba diving, and, or skin diving or something. And you're, you know, a little bit extra alert, aware of the breathing because partly because that's the loudest sound going under the water but maybe because it's so desperately important to keep it going. When there's no air you know, otherwise available.

So they kind of extra aware of the breath

As we do this guided meditation,

don't worry about doing it well or right. If you don't understand the instructions, just kind of make your best guess at what I'm trying to say unstruck be playful about it perhaps or some part of it doesn't make sense. Just do your best and imagine you're doing it in this kind of kind of follow along and then maybe the next exercise will become clearer for you. So begin by taking an upright alert posture.

taking a few moments, to become familiar with what your body feels like from the inside.

With that inner familiarity

Adjust your posture and make it more comfortable, more upright, more alert,  
more alive and vital.

The practice begins

with becoming familiar with your breathing.

Perhaps imagining that you've never paid attention to your breath before and you're going to get to know it for the first time.

Find out something new about it.

It begins by breathing in with longer breaths than you normally would. Taking law slow, deep breaths. And as you take these breaths, become familiar with what it's like to take a long breath in and a long breath out.

It's not so much that you're going to do some try to get meditative or calm. It's just various

Matter of fact,

becoming familiar with what this feels like within the body.

If you feel like you're getting tired by breathing longer,

you can be a little bit Shorter about it isn't the more

quieter, but still try to be a little bit more than you normally would

keep their longer

and then shifting now

to breathing in a normal way.

So there's no intentional intention to breathe deeper or longer. So now the breath is shorter

and become familiar what that kind of breathing is like

noticing how the inhalation is different from the exhalation

There's a rhythm of breathing in and out and in and out. Hang in there. For each in breath and out breath, one after the other.

Seeing if you notice something new and different

each time

different part of your body

different place of breath.

You might have all kinds of thoughts and body sensations and feelings as you do this. It's okay to have any of them just in the middle of it all.

Maintain a focus on your breathing.

If there's a very strong concern and sensations or feelings, if you breathe into them more, hold it within your breath can be a little bit easier to stay with a breathing

And then begin to explore

what it feels like

for the whole body to be breathing in, and the whole body to be breathing out

the effect that the breath has on the body

and the effect the body has in the breath

in your attention wander around In the chest and the belly, the rib cage,

the back rib cage.

Notice how when Breathe in. The whole torso expands the ribcage. The back rib cage, the shoulder blades lift, perhaps shoulders perhaps lift. The diaphragm extends down as you breathe in the ballet fails.

The End breath is a kind of a force of expansion

within the torso

and the out breath the exhalation is a force of contraction.

Coming back,

breathing in and being aware of the whole Breath body.

Breathing out aware of the whole breath body.

Being aware of the peripheral areas where you can still feel the breathing, not focusing necessarily in the center of the chest or diaphragm or the nostrils but the outer areas of sensation in your body as you breathe in and out.

Now each time you breathe in,

relax the breath body,

relax the body.

Each time you exhale, relax the body. Let the in breath and out breath Have a calming effect on the body the best you can.

Especially the exhalation. It's possible to do this.

not forcing or trying too hard, but very gently

letting the out breath in breath.

Help the mind help the body become calm.

Breathing in and out, letting it be a softening effect on your body. Perhaps as you breathe in, you're aware of stretching across places of holding and as you breathe out a softening of those areas

Your attention can

gently roam around the body,

finding different

places to settle on,

and then as you breathe in and out, to let that particular place, soften, relax

Gently breathing in and out wherever your breath

continue with a letting go

of the tension in your body.

Allow the breathing to calm the body.

And then as you do this, become aware of any delight, satisfaction, joy, however small it might be that comes with this process of relaxing the body letting it soften. Even if you feel some discomfort someplace in your body or perhaps you can notice in the corners of your being a little bit of the light that comes with softening, letting go. Each time you exhale

breathing in and out.

Appreciate, however subtle it might be

this delight or joy

As you breathe in and out,

see if you can discover if there's any pleasure

associated with breathing in and out.

And if there's any pleasure involved in the process of breathing in and out or in relaxing as you breathe in and out. Appreciate that Pleasure

And then as you breathe in and out,

notice what effect the breathing might have on your mind and the mind on your breathing. What's the relationship between them?

What are some of the thoughts and reactions and feelings that you have

about sitting here mindful of the breath or the breath?

What kind of effect does it have on In your mind, your thoughts to be saying with each breath, one after the other.

And then as you breathe in and out

let the breath Let there be a calming of Your mind relaxing so that each time you breathe in, you have the intention, the desire to let the mind become quiet and calm. Maybe just a little softening. Each time you exhale, letting there be a calming softening of the mind.

Sometimes it can be softening for the mind to let them be greater space in the mind or around the mind. Acceptance allowance is if the whatever the mind is the activity of the mind occurs in a great open space and you're breathing in and out through that great space.

planning the activity of the mind.

Rest, quiet as you breathe in and out.

As you breathe in and out, let there be a lightening gladdening of the mind

lighten up about what goes on in the mind.

And then let the mind steady itself on the breath. Kind of return more fully on the experience of breathing. Let the mind becomes steady focus concentrated on the simplicity of just breathing in and out.

Medic there'll be a strength in the mind that allows for a steady focus one breath after the other

By being committed to your breath to staying with each breath, no matter what. It's kind of like an umbrella where the rain washes off the roof of the umbrella. And you know it doesn't touch you by

focusing on the breathing, thoughts, feelings, sensations that might pull you away from the breath  
Have no hold on you. This wash right off.

The mind is free enough. You

allow your mind to be free or independent enough. So we can just choose to stay focused on one  
breath after the other, all other things wash away.

And then with a steady focus on your breathing,

become aware of how the sensations of breathing are impermanent.

There is constant flux and change

in breath only lasts so long

various sensations of the breath arise and pass.

breath is a display of impermanence

a stream of changing sensations

Still with a breath, breathing in and out kind of as an anchor. Let your attention roam around to see  
impermanence elsewhere.

In the body,

sensations, feelings, thoughts arise and pass

arise and pass.

Notice impermanence and change wherever it's occurring within you

Maybe not tonight, but when the mind becomes quite steady and concentrated, you'll see that all  
things are impermanent. All things are in flux and change vibrating

and then Breathing in and breathing out



began letting go of any attachments Soften any desires or expectations or demands, that things be a certain way

or any resistance to how things might be.

The impermanence of the breath, the impermanence of your bodily physical mental experience, that it helps soften and relax anything you're holding on to in your life.

Breathing in and breathing out, take the next step and let go of your attachments. Whatever you're holding to that there be a cessation

And then Breathing in and breathing out, become aware of whatever sense of feeling or intimation you have, of what it's like to have a mind a heart that's free of all attachments or resistance or fear. A mind released a heart at peace.

It says if at the core of our being, there is a great reservoir of peace, well being that is available to all of us. If we can only be courageous enough to

not hold on to anything

And then as a way of preparing for the ending of this sitting, you can take two or three deeper breaths. Feeling your body, stretching your body as you breathe in.

Perhaps beginning to move your body a little bit