

# 2005-11-04 Mindfulness of Breath Part 3

Thu, 7/16 10:04PM • 46:36

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

breath, sensations, breathing, belly, exhale, home, place, attention, staying, notice, nostrils, base, experience, compelling, falling, relaxing, settled, few breaths, connect, attentive

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I mean know so far in the city today was on this party's global awareness being aware of the whole body and tranquilizing body. There's a whole other way of being mindful of the breath, which is not global, but rather very specific, very localized. And that's often how I was taught in Asia. To do repression is often how we teach here in the West also is when you pay attention to breath, choose one location, sometimes called the home base, which sounds very homey, sometimes called the anchor. And, and here in the West, we often do the past symmetry to often see this three most common places. They can be the belly, rising and falling. The chest rising and falling are the sensations of the air going in and out through the nostrils. There are a few other places that are kind of common enough. Those are the three most common and then we often say you know, choose whichever one is most compelling most Saturday Buying kind of works best for you those three places. When I was practicing in Asia, they're very, they're very adamant or very, to follow the breath, the breath sensations, the sensations and movement that happened down here in the bellies below the belly button. And that was a place where we were encouraged to be present for the experience of breathing. The even I was in Burma, that's where it was. And I felt very happy with that because in Zen training, often the emphasis is to be aware of the breath down here. Right area. And as far as I know that the Burmese had no and none of the, the heart kind of theory that they have in Japan. It was just a kind of basic good place to watch the rising and passing, lifting and falling. But I was kind of I kind of liked it a lot that it was same for the same place as you Japanese horror in the heart was a place of strength, a place of stability. That is very helpful to kind of feel centered and balanced down here. There's the idea it's risen ideas in Japan, we have a lot of key like key like key energy, that you actually have this kind of potbelly and one monastery I stayed in the head, these beautiful ancient Guardian warrior statues, wooden statues, they're about five feet higher so, and then these fierce guardians of the Dharma who had swords and fierce looks, they're there to guard the guard the Dharma for us. And they were like in the 12th 13th century, but at some point in the centuries, they had added onto these wooden beautiful wood sculptures, pot bellies, you know, and then kind of touched them down here. And they did really, really good job doing that, but they had just bought

those. And the idea being that these Guardian, guardians of the Dharma should have this good ci, and so they should have secured you know, potbelly Be Here drinking parts belly. And, and, but there can be a lot of stability, a lot of strength that people get from keeping your attention down here low in the belly. I find that when I'm quite relaxed sitting, that my center gravity center, my kind of my energy in a sense is down here really low, goes really good. But if I get pulled into some kind of area interesting or compelling, thinking, I can actually feel that center of gravity feel the connective energy sense of something kind of lifting up and uplifted kind of feeling in my body. As I go up into those thoughts. You'll see you always can feel your body like this right? And, and I lose that sense of being balanced and grounded down here. It's very nice to have this as a nice, balanced, grounded area. So anyway, the other way of doing breath meditation is not to do it globally through the body, but actually choose one location. And then it has a few benefits. One benefit is that is that you can, it's easier sometimes to develop continuity. If you have one place in one place, you stay right there you keep the mind near the mind not moving around different places. And also, it's a nice if your mind does go off, then you can go back automatically to that place. You don't have to question Where should I pay attention to now I have to go back to the breath should be in the chest or where should it be. If you need to have your anchor your home base, just go back there without any thinking about just that's my home base. Let's go back there. Go back, go back and have your home base. What I find is that I generally use the lower belly as my home base. But as concentration deepens in practice, then that that place of the home base shifts a little bit as it seems more appropriate to pay attention for me Actually, various little bits it goes, it goes from from down here to up here and varies a little bit. depending on what's happening from you where this the attention is, but I let it kind of I follow where the center of gravity for the breathing seems to be. But, you know, the idea is to keep it more or less in one place. So let's try that. See if that works for some of you. If some of you already done this, I'm sure but some, take a comfortable alert posture. Close your eyes and establish Calm, deliberate presence awareness for your posture for yourself here. You might begin by taking a few long slow, deep breaths. As you exhale, letting go. Letting go into your body, relaxing into your body. Breathing in breathing out. We'll take a few moments here just to read a brief whatever way. It's settling for you grounding connecting And then look around and see if you can find a particular location that can be your home base or staying with the breath experience. So you might be the belly lifting and falling moving, rising and falling. The chest, the center of the chest. Could be the sensations of the air going out through the nostrils. Spend some time exploring these different options to see through the one of them, which is most compelling, most satisfying, most comforting. most pleasant. You'd like to establish as your home base If it's all equal, then choose belly. Maybe inch or two below the navel. Maybe a couple of inches back behind the surface to the skin. And having chosen a home base and spend some time getting familiar with it, the simplicity of it the sensations there are the in breath is experienced differently than the breaths in that place Bring your attention in that home base. You were also was like when the breath shifts switches from Breathing in and breathing out to breathing in in that place And then for the next few breaths, give really careful attention to the beginning of the breath. And notice what is the sensation lets you know that the in breaths, breathing has begun. And what's the experience that heralds beginning of the inhalation in that space in that place in your home base and then in that home base, we are paying attention to the breathing. Notice what is the last sensation That seems to be

present as you breathe in. That represents breathing in to the last experience the top of the inhalation in your spot And then between the start of the installation and the end of the installation Can you be aware of any other sensations or experience in your home base, connected to the inhalation in the middle of the inhalation what experience what sensation was left the middle part experienced Now could you very gently connect or feel the continuity of all three phases of breathing in, it might happen very fast, but be very relaxed about it. Just feel the beginning the middle and the end of breathing in the sensations of Marcos experience Now bring your attention to the beginning of the exhalation in that home base place of yours. What's the first way that you experience that you're breathing out And then what's the last sensation that seems to represent the process of exhaling And then between the beginning and the end of the acceleration what, how do you experience exhalation in the middle what sensations or experience but you know that you're in the middle stage of exhaling And then over the next few breaths, see if you can connect all three aspects of the exhalation with their retentive, sensitive Careful, beginning middle and end of the exhale and then relax but dedicated way connect all the parts of in breath and out breath. beginning middle end of breathing in, getting a middle end to breathing out. Staying staying the course staying there present, staying connected to the full cycle and breathing in and out right there in your home base. And then if you'd like to make the breathing a little bit calmer, then as you exhale, you can let go with the exhale. When you get to the end of the exhale, that'd be a pause, which be a fraction of a second before you breathe in again You can stay continuously present for the full cycle a breathing place of your home base Took a sponge and were wiped down a table. Maybe you keep the sponge, touching the top tabletop the whole time you're wiping it down. You wouldn't pull the sponge up to keep it there in touch. The same way keep your attention resting are in touch with a cool experience of breathing in and out. beginning middle and end of each part of the cycle. You're not going to let the mind wander off the table of the breath or even a moment We'll stay one more minute in the meditation in this last minute. See if you can really make effort. Good, strong effort to not lose touch with the breath at all. One minute completely there. If the person can develop, have some concentration in staying with a particular location where the breath is experienced there's a lot of benefits that come from that. It can be very relaxing very tranquilizing. In fact sometimes, I found that when I've done kind of tranquilizing my body through just a whole breath body, it feels good. It's nice to do. And then I've switched to just focusing very intently on one particular place, that without trying to tranquilizer, calm myself at all, that I actually get more calm by focusing on one place than I am by just kind of staying globally and relaxing. There's something about when you really when the mind gets really absorbed, really attentive, very focused completely on one place. one spot or one a small thing, that it's very hard to maintain enough mental energy to sustain the tense habits of mind that might be there. And it's kind of a way of a little bit starving some of the other things that go on, or distractions are preoccupations, or fears or emotions. And so, you know, it's like, we're fully in there and everything else falls away. Maybe it's not a very good example. Maybe it's a terrible example. But, you know, maybe you've had experience and maybe you know, you know, driving under driving in a car someplace in a freeway maybe or someplace and you have your concerns and your thoughts and things that are important than you're worried about or whatever. And then you have a near miss dangerous accident. And, and half that near misses, you know, suddenly you find yourself so clear, alert and every all those concerns that fallen away. They don't come back very quickly, you

know, just like The or, you know, sometimes if you go for a run, or just an exercise, that that can sometimes just, it just cuts through the, you know, some of the preoccupations they've been with us for some time. So able to focus on one particular thing like the breath is a really can be a really great way of cutting through our preoccupations, when the preoccupations are cut through, there can be a tremendous settling and relaxing that can happen. I'll talk more afternoon about the benefits of this kind of careful attention. But for now, maybe we can have a few comments from people what that was like. Was that more difficult than the first or easier was it? What was the experience like?

I had a hard time focusing specifically on aspects of my breath, as you were asking us to. As far as a home base was concerned, it was really hard to focus on my belly or my heart, but I noticed an upwelling

in my body,

culminating my throat. With each in breath, it was hard to focus on one part of my body. And as far as the different aspects of the breath were concerned, the beginning and the end. That was pretty slippery to the in breath because it happens. So automatically, it's, I'm already a quarter second or a half second, into the in breath. Before I can start to notice that I can notice what's actually happening at the very beginning. And that's The end of the end breath, it tapers off so gradually gets to the point where there's nothing to notice at the end, so I was, so should I keep trying to vote to notice these very specific aspects. I think it was great. But you notice,

notice all those things is fantastic. You're just right. And that's one of the options we have in practice is to is to have that kind of specificity really go in there and really be very, very attentive to those details. And now, you know, you guys have been sitting for a second sitting, you know, this morning at our thing here and, and you probably don't have that much concentration. But this kind of exercise of really looking carefully at the fitness of the sensations of the breath, the beginning, middle and sometimes works a lot better if you've been in retreat for a few days and your mind is quiet and concentrated into Left, once the mind gets really concentrated and settled, it's remarkable how much detail you can pick up in one breath. You can pick up dozens of sensations, dozens and dozens, just phenomenally Kaleidoscope sensations that, that just you know, that, you know, someone walking off the street and meditating they just look at even find their breath, you know, refined, you know, I breathe in I didn't know that. And, and it happened so quickly not to say the breath might be very quick. But But you know, when you get settled and relaxed, that's a place to really get. And that's one way of talking about the second unit. But that that's one way of doing this practice. And some people find that that's not a very helpful way to practice and daily daily sitting at home and daily life because they don't have the concentration for is more to do better to be on is global awareness. So the way you described being aware of the movements to book the body. Some people find it very compelling to do that. Kind of localize attention.

Did he go off? Is it I

think it's off, like on my tongue. Yeah, it's on.

I've been doing a lot of paying attention my nostrils and I have

a preference really, to focus on my belly. So I was glad to sort of be given permission or be invited to do that. But what happened was it was sort of like the Chinese ribbon dance. Because as I focused on the muscles in my belly, my nostril was a ribbon that just followed. So there was this interweaving between

the movement down here and the following

up here

it was very interesting.

I also found that the in breath seemed very clear to me very the beginning the middle of the in the inner play

the pause.

But the relaxing the outer breath was more subtle, it was more difficult for me to define that as literally, and I found myself getting a little tense with trying to make a sensation The outlet be as

apparent as the embryo.

So there's no need to make 10 million shares of tense, it's normal natural to have the one cycle the breath be less clear than the other. And that's just the way it is. And you work with that. But one of the very interesting things is that if there's some point in the cycle of breathing, which is not so clear, less clear than the other and often the end of the outbreak for people it's not so clear as gets bigger, but it could be other parts of the cycle. That's the most likely times when the mind is going to wander off in thought, an idle mind will get in trouble. And I don't mind the mind is not engaged and attentive, the mind will wander off and it's thinking so if you know that pattern, if you've noticed are noticing a pattern might look and see you to do wonder away you know, what most regularly at a particular point in the cycle so the breathing into the out breath at the end of the breath or, and sometimes you can, people can notice that almost always went wander away at the end of the day. If you notice a kind of pattern, then you can use that in your favor by just knowing, Okay, I'm coming to the end of the opera, I need to kind of just give a little extra room for that moment just to see it through until I get the in breath again so that I don't wander off. And then that can be helpful.

I found that

in Brad,

although I was kind of sad to see it fell.

But then when I was doing

me exhaling,

I felt nice and then when I got to the end of it

and you can ascend at that time trying

to find that I really have my applause. But I couldn't stay there. And I had to take the breath again.

But the taking it in breath, I was very much aware.

It's not comfortable, but the breath is

comfortable is a that's great to see that. And so, with all these things, you know, when you notice a difference and notice these kinds of details in the breath that's really good for mindfulness practice. And then the trick is not to make a story out of it or a judgment or feel like this is wrong. I should be different, you know, it should be just, it's enough to see it really clearly isn't how it is. Last one,

so I noticed something that seemed interesting to me and that is at the end of the out breath.

I was tightening. There's a grabbing If it wouldn't allow, which is the opposite of what you would think was as if it was some something tightening down and then

the rest of the breath out at the end of the output of the tie thing down.

Yeah. Then I want

to explore that.

That's that's the operative word explore, that's fine down there. There's, I think they oftentimes, at the end of the arc breath, pressure you feel in your belly, there's might be one last little tug or pull by the

diaphragm. And so you feel kind of a gripping a pulling, it might be very, quite natural there. Sometimes, however, there might be some fear that comes into play at the very end of the upper and some of the grip thing is, Oh, no, I don't have to let go. I have to surrender. And it's very interesting to kind of work with that fear. At the end of the breath. It's there and just learn to surrender completely. out breath. It invites us to surrender. And sometimes we don't Want to? So I would like to spend the last few minutes before lunch, maybe 20 minutes or so now 1520 minutes we'll see of having you break up into small little groups of maybe three people. And I'd like you to have a chance to talk about your experience of breath meditation, your relationship to breath, your interest in it and what your questions around. It might be.