

# 2017-04-23 Mindfulness of Breathing

## Recognize Feel Relax

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### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

breathing, settling, relax, problems, solve, meditating, happening, deeper, desire, life, clinging, people, recognize, feel, surface, mind, feeling, sensations, thinking, stay

### SPEAKERS

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I'd like to continue discussing mindfulness of breathing, which I did last week. As an introduction to this topic, I want to tell kind of a tale. And that is story of a monarch, maybe a little bit mean monarch, maybe, who grabbed three wise people and put them in the dungeon. And said, You're to stay here, let's figure out some way to escape. If you can't escape, then it's off with all your heads. And so they were there, the door was closed, they were in this little dungeon. And there was this very complicated set of locks on the door. And they had 24 hours to figure out how to get out otherwise, it was off with their heads. And they looked around, there were no windows, no other forms of exit, whatsoever, except for this door, with all the locks on it. And so two of them immediately went to work studying these locks, looking at them, trying to figure them out, trying to poke little pieces, whatever they could find, they had nothing, nothing with them trying to figure out, there must be some clue here, there must be something the monarch wouldn't know just, you know, done this without any possibility of escape. And they were very busy. And as an but the third one, two of them did that. The third one just set against the wall, the back wall of the dungeon sell, and just kind of snooze and look then just took it easy and just kind of was looking at what was going on. And then as they got to the end of the 24 hours, you can imagine the two they're working hard with breaking into a sweat, they're quite concerned kind of frazzled, probably kind of tripping over each other, probably not thinking so straight anymore trying to figure out what do we do. And then about five minutes before the end of the period, the one who was leaning against the wall, just got up and went to the door. And somehow just pushed on the door. And it swung open. It turned out it wasn't locked. And so it's a little fable, that maybe some of our problems that we struggle with and worry about and fret about, maybe are not really problems. Maybe there's another solution, then, you know, looking at the locks and trying. That's where the focus is. And in fact, I think sometimes we stay up in our heads trying to figure out anxiously worrying thinking about problems. And the very idea that we're spinning in our heads and our thoughts and our concerns, preoccupations is the wrong place to look for the solution. But, you know, trying to solve it involves thinking about it, we think. And so we'll spend endless time thinking about problems we have anticipating what's going to happen reviewing it, some people will review the past endlessly, so they can come up with a better fast. And so they kind of, you know, kind of a lot of concerns with it. And sometimes that's not the world where the solution is going to come. But it can seem reasonable that this is a problem solving part of the mind. So that seems reasonable. That's what we should engage. But for some of us, we can spend days, weeks, months years, trying to solve the problems that way. And the track record, some types of issues are pretty poor, that you know, we don't really get very far with it. And so is there another way. So in Buddhism, there's a teaching that there are things forces that are more fundamental. And as they get down to the fundamental issues, in order to find the solution. So for example, there, one of the common teachings in Buddhism is desire underlies at all. So if we want

something, and it could be anything, he wants something not to be exist, we can want something go away, we can want something to be different. We can want something stay the same, we can want to have something we can want to be something all kinds of wanting. And so we have this issue to solve that desire. And so we can spend a lot of time pursuing that desire and how to solve it to get it done, make it happen. And but Buddhism says instead of trying to solve the problem of getting what you want, why don't you look at the nature of desire itself. And that is and perhaps the solution is not found by how to fulfill the desire, but how to relax and let go of the desire. Now of course, there are some desires which are completely healthy and appropriate to have. So getting rid of all desires, not the point here, but a high percentage of the problems that people have around rise out of desires which may be aren't needed.

And so to be able to look more deeply, what is it we like, Oh, where's the solution solutions not in the locks on the door, the solution is found someplace else. And so can we can you have maybe the desires one place, sometimes it's anxiety, and can be relaxed the anxiety. That's the real issue, not the words and the themes and the concerns and anxieties about because if we stay kind of circling around the desire or trying to trying to accomplish it, or circling around the anxiety trying to solve it, there's something about the circular kind of feedback loop, where it actually can reinforce it and strengthen it keep it going. This is another part of the Buddhist teachings is that when we're clinging, this is kind of part of the billions linguistic brilliance of the Buddha. In the ancient language, the word for clinging, is the same word for the fuel for fire. So if so the fire said fire is a synonym for clinging itself. So our metaphor, and so when we cling, we're creating fuel for more clinging. And that's there's no end in that, right? Because then you just kind of self perpetuating. And so to look at to see if we're pursuing what we want. And there's clinging involved attachment involved, it's very easy for this to be a self perpetuating loop. So is there another way to step back from all that something deeper, some deeper place, and I've seen this function with being on on, on screens and computers looking at, you know, looking at something surfing the web, I tried to be very careful on how much I'm on the computer and how I'm on it. Because the certain kind of way of being on it, which is kind of inquisitive, kind of like, let's look at this, let's get this news, let's get this thing. And let's check this out and check it, here's an email, let's check out the email. You know, let's not check out the email thing. Let's check it out. And so what I what I see happening in my brain is that it becomes kind of this surface energy that builds up I called surface because doesn't seem very deep, because it's kind of shallow, kind of phenomena. But it kind of has a spinning energy, this is thrilling energy, that's reaching out for more, once more, once more, becomes a little bit addictive, I suppose. And so I don't think this is a good thing. So I would like to. So I try to be careful how I'm on it because it's self perpetuating phenomena. So the Buddha pointed this out, even before they had computers, that this is, this is a tendency of the mind. So this idea that pursuing what the mind wants, or what the mind pursuing, what it doesn't want, pursuing, sometimes is a not a very helpful way. So we step back, and we can look more deeply. So I said, one of the underlying sources of desire, sometimes anxiety, sometimes, you know, you can look at wives, their desire, their their wives, their anxiety, or you know what's going on, or why there's a hate or resentment. So for example, with desire, there's a whole slew of things that might be underneath that. But there might be some, sometimes loneliness. And so that loneliness, gives birth to desire, and that having desire, it gives birth to trying to solve that desire, get what we want. And so sometimes we look at the loneliness into some way of settling the loneliness, maybe that's the door that can open, that's the kind of the place that something can be settled. We don't you know, we're not trying to even solve the desire, maybe saw the sense of loneliness, or the sense of emptiness, or the sense of fear that might be deeper down underneath it all. feeling of insecurity, feeling of not belonging, feeling, and we have no meaning in our life, no purpose. So these are all kind of deeper concerns. So the question is, how do we address these so that they, so our problems don't get solved. But rather that instead of being solved, they dissolve. Some problems should be solved. So I'm not saying this is the only way. But the

approach of Buddhism is kind of it tends to be very radically different approach. Because rather than kind of dealing with the surface phenomenon, it's trying to deal with something that's deep in our hearts. And it's a place where things dissolve, rather than getting solved. So if you're a problem solving kind of person, then relax. So breathing, so that's the topic for today.

And the mindfulness of breathing methods. Getting on the breathing is a really helpful way of helping to dissolve our issues rather than solving them. And there's three kind of steps that goes back to time with the Buddha, for meditating on the breathing, and each of those steps has its different role and value for us. The first step is to simply to know the breathing, get to know it. The second is to then feel it. So knowing and feeling are two different things. And the third is to relax. So to recognize, to know, to feel, and to relax or so the first one is simply to recognize and that's kind of the, the kind of fundamental point of breath meditation is to learn to recognize that you're breathing. And to stay in that recognition. Stay mindful, stay aware of your breathing. So there's some continuity of it, to recognize what's going on when you're breathing. And here, the task is not to be a good meditator. In fact, to be too good, as I said, last week, we're not really trying to be good at meditating the breath, least not initially. Because the very idea of being good at it gets in the way of simply recognizing what is actually happening here now. And sometimes being poor at meditate, meditating on the breath, it's actually more helpful for recognizing what's happening here. Because then you say, when you recognize I can't really stay with the breath, my mind keeps wandering off. Why? What's really going on for me, what's these forces in my mind, that keep pulling me away from the breathing. And that's a very important thing to learn to recognize. If you get really good at, if you're too good at breath meditation, you might not have enough space and time and kind of, for you to recognize what the currents of your life or what's going on really going on. So if you know, we could just give you a pill, or we could give you a biofeedback machine, some people have all these biofeedback machines, now they're supposed to help us think they're good things to do, perhaps I've never used one. But, but if we get, you know, if we find some kind of technique, that helps us to get really sharp and good, just like you turn on the machine, and you're like, right there on your breathing. You know, you're gonna waver, it's gonna feel good. It has its benefits, you get concentrated and deep, maybe kind of quickly. But it can be a kind of spiritual bypass. Because it might be that you don't actually see who you are, you don't get to know yourself. You don't become familiar with all the little, you know, ways in which your mind and heart operates. But having this having the tasks, just get to know what's happening with the breathing with yourself. It gives you lots of permission to start showing up for yourself and recognize, oh, this is what's happening, I have no idea. It says, this happens to me regularly, when I sit down to meditate. I do a lot of focus on the breathing is kind of my home base. When I first sit down to meditate, I'm kind of there to find out what's going on with me check in find out. And I'm often surprised by the occurrence of my mind that bubble up when I first sit down to meditate. Sometimes it's obvious, it's continuing some train of thought that I've had for a while. And sometimes something completely new has a chance to bubble up. Oh, that's interesting. No wonder or that's kind of an interesting thing. They're going I didn't realize that was unresolved, or I didn't realize this was up for me in my life right now. And so there's this recognition process of what's happening, I don't then get involved in it, pick it up and start solving the problems or dealing with it. But I'd make space for it to show itself. And then it becomes easier for me to begin coming back to the breathing and settling in. Because I'm not fighting myself. I don't have some other kind of subterranean force or momentum in my mind concerns, preoccupations, feelings, which are kind of at challenging me challenging my effort to stay with the breathing. So it's rather more like let me stay with my breathing. And then as I do that, and I'm not good at it. Let me notice what else is going on. And as I get to know what's going on, then I come back gently to my breathing. And one of the things that function of just coming back with your breathing, be with your breathing is to help us to leave ourselves alone.

Because if I have a concern that arises in my mind, like, say I have a problem. And then I start thinking about the problem, getting anxious about the problem, then this cycle of fueling, that kind of preoccupation goes on and on. But if I said recognize it's happening, but I don't add any energy to it, I don't add any fuel to it, I leave it alone. It might continue for a while there might be momentum in it, but I'm not spinning it anymore. perpetuating it. And so it is a chance to quiet down to kind of unwind the momentum that's been set, can, can we, you know, kind of slow down and it comes to a stop. So coming back to the breathing, every time you come back to the breathing, it's kind of like you're no longer feeding that preoccupation. It's, it's a way of kind of leaving yourself alone, emotions and feelings arise. And there can be a lot of reactivity to emotions and feelings, some of that reactivity just stirs up the pot even more. And so the idea is to leave ourselves alone, allow yourself to feel what you have the emotions you have, but just let it be. And since an idle mind will get in trouble, you want to give the mind something to do that helps you to let you know not get so involved in all the stuff that's happening. And one of the ways to do that is come back to the breathing. And the idea being the breathing is generally can be a relatively neutral place to come. And you're not as more you're with your breathing than last year feedings other things. And then as you get to know that as you come back to the breathing, this first task of knowing it, is to know it more deeply. And there's a lot to know about the breath, the breath is kind of a little bit of a window into our inner life and what's happening for us, you sometimes can feel it you can feel in your breathing, breathing is constricted, it's shallow, it's tight, it's fast. There's all kinds of attitudes, all kinds of ways in which we are, which are embedded in our breathing. And sometimes, I find it very helpful to kind of tune in more and more to my breathing, because some of them were subtle attitudes that I have only get revealed in through my breathing as they get quieter and quieter. I don't really see them in ordinary life, because I'm busy and concerned with the surface things. But then I noticed that I may be a little anxious or let notice that I'm a little bit you know, I have this momentum of wanting to do something that's I can feel it in my chest as I breathe this kind of little bit. upwelling, agitated energy that's there. And so I so I sit there, and I don't worry about anything. But I just leave everything alone. And this idea of just leaving things alone. And sitting quietly meditation is a wonderful art to learn. It's not easy to learn, because we have to recognize the difference between being involved and fueling yet the difference between letting thoughts be versus thinking the thoughts but letting it be. And then things begin to unwind, things begin to settle. Quiet down. And for me, I feel like it's a homecoming. I sit focused on my breath sitting being still a lot of I do is just do nothing really. And then some of the tensions in my body begin to release. And they often release slowly. The ones I can't just do myself relax. It's kind of imperceptible moment by moment. But over a few minutes, my shoulders release my back releases a little bit of my stomach releases. There's a settling, and there's just unwinding, settling that goes on. That's not my doing. I'm not doing it. It's doing me or it's happening because I'm just sitting here and I find this to be very important part of meditation is that a lot that I'm allowing a settling, I'm allowing a quieting down more than being the one who's doing the doer, the doing of it. Because to be too involved with being the doer of meditation, you're not leaving things alone, you're not letting the inner process of settling happening. If we're the doer of meditation too much. Chances are that we're doing it from that surface mind again, that surface mind where we're swirling around with desires and anxieties and kind of fueling more attachment, which she was more attachment again.

But if so, little bit we have to be the doer but you know, your your your Roll is maybe if you know the art of meditation, maybe it's like 10% of what's happening. And then if you get better, maybe 5% of what's happening is the doing. And more. It's more about knowing what to allow for just sitting here. Just sit and quiet, be quiet. Afterwards gave my talk last week, I asked myself that question. Maybe sada never asked myself this before. I said, How would I know if I gave a successful talk? And so maybe there's many answers to that question. But what was interesting was the answer that came up in my mind. Six for me, for the successful talk, is when people go home and decide to sit beside to sit there and meditate. And not just five minutes, but really sit there maybe for an hour and just sit quietly, because



they feel that it's so interesting and valuable and meaningful to kind of sit to just be this kind of mode, that allows something to happen. And I think the reason why I see that, as I saw that, as the answer to my own question, is I put a tremendous value in the practice itself. I think the practice is more important than the teachings. At some point, the practice becomes your teacher. So I feel like part of the primary role for teacher like me, is not to give you teachings, but to encourage you support to people to find their it's valuable to let this very deep inner process work, where we settle, we allow this settling is coming home, this relaxing this shedding the surface chatter, setting the surface tensions, shedding the, you know, all this kind of swirling that we have, and let it all settle and settle in settle, and it can't settle. If we keep problem solving. It can't settle if we keep, you know, going back into our thoughts and thinking things over and over more and more. So this first task of breath meditation, is to just to is to know it and to know what's happening. And just to just very simple just know, in the knowing, beginning to leave things alone. The second task of breath meditation is to feel what's happening. And feeling is a different thing than knowing, feeling is sensing, allowing yourself to experience it in an embodied way more and more fully. So breathing is we're not tracking the breath, the air is going in and out. But rather to feel the sensations and come into play as we breathe. If you're aware of the breathing in the belly, there's a play of sensations that come into play as the belly expands it as a contracts. If you're aware of the sinc breathing experience of breathing in the chest, there's the expanding and contracting of the ribcage and the lifting of the of the chest and the falling of the chest. If you're aware of it and the nostrils as the air goes in and out, it's not the air per se, but rather the sensations, the tingling, and the sharpness and the warmth and the coolness that comes into play that we kind of tune into. But the idea is to feel and sense the experience of breathing more fully. And what this does, is it a number of things, but one of the things it does is the more you feel it in your body becomes kind of a body fullness. More than mindfulness is that the body has lots of room, breathing room for things to continue to unwind. If we only try to stay up in the control tower of and watch and track and stay focused on the breathing. There's very little room in that little teeny teeny teeny teeny, teeny control tower that some people spend all their time in. It's rather claustrophobic in there if you were so preoccupied in the control tower we don't realize how little how limited our life is. So to kind of come into the into the body is begin discover a life that's much more expansive, more open lots of space.

There's something about feeling sensing experiencing our life through our body that begins to unleash opened up all kinds of wonderful forces within us kind of make space for things to surface in arise. And, you know, this control tower thinks it knows what's important. as it tries to solve its problem and get what it wants. The body really knows what's needed. The body what if you really present and relax and settle in your body feeling it's making room to really sense what's going on some of the deeper unresolved issues in our life that need To come up sooner or later or come up some of the sorrow, some of the grief some of the anger that might be there for sometimes a long, long time. But as we kind of allow for that, and deepen and let it all kind of kind of kind of drain away. Then there are wellsprings of compassion of kindness, wellsprings of gentleness, wellsprings of strength, courage, wellsprings of joy and happiness and delight, that can come and be there as well. wellsprings of wisdom and the wisdom, deep understanding and knowing that only arises if we're really centered and relaxed, and deeply settled in ourselves. Again, sorry to make this point over and over again. But it's so common for people to be trying to solve their problems in this very little control tower has very little world of thinking and remembering and reviewing and planning and, you know, all this kind of, it's a very limited world, because it's not, doesn't have sometimes access to the deeper places of understanding wisdom, our intuitive powers are kind of our whole apparatus of psychophysical, we're complex beings, the whole apparatus can operate together. And so to settle and relax, and, you know, and drop down and feel and sense the whole experience of breathing, the whole experience of the body will give you access to creativity, access to wisdom and deeper sources of understanding and processing, what goes on. A wonderful thing to do is to, if you have some big issue that you're trying to solve, put the issue up on a shelf for a while, and spend some time meditating. And then when you finish meditating, then go for a

walk and consider the issue. And see if you have a very different relationship to it. If you're relaxed and settled and connected yourself at home and your body and yourself, then if you're in the control tower concerned with it, sometimes people come to on meditation retreats, and they have a big issue they have to decide on in their lives. And that's partly why they're there. And Allison, you suggest to them that they put the issue aside for the length of the retreat, in the last day of the retreat, then consider it. Because they'll have a radically different perspective at the end of the retreat of how to think about it than they do at the beginning. And usually that perspective is so much more useful to have, then if then, if you don't, you know, if you try to solve the problem, the whole retreat, you'll never get calm, never settle and go deep, and have access to this deeper perspective, that's helpful. So it allows us to feel, feeling the experience or breathing, feeling the body feeling what's going on, is also not solving it. It's not trying to make something happen, but rather let something to be revealed. let it show itself to you let it be felt, giving, it's very respectful of ourselves. And it also involves being in the present moment, its present moment phenomena to feel and sense not the past, not the future. And this can continue this process of unwinding of settling coming home to just hear. And it's a wonderful thing to feel settled enough, calm enough, at home enough here, that it's just enough to be breathing just enough to be here, alive and present. We don't have to get something or make something happen or prove ourselves or apologize for ourselves. We don't have to do something purposeful. We don't have to, you know, solve, you know, the world's problems. We don't have to solve the political problems of our country. You know, we don't have to react to it when they get angry or afraid. Or we don't have to do these things in order to have a deep sense of lightness of happiness of well being.

To allow ourselves to access that is one of the radical things you can do. It's revolutionary, to have a whole different perspective of where happiness resides. a whole different perspective where safety resides, that really wells up from the inside, not something but solving what's on the outside. And then the last step of mindfulness of breathing is this is the part that's more intentional. When you actually do something as opposed to just recognizing knowing, coming back, leaving things alone, being with the breath, settling in on the breath and this is to relax. To relax the body, as we feel and sense and get to know what's happening better or better, there might be recognition that it's possible to unwind to relax to soften, intentionally. So you might notice, for example, that your toe while you're sitting meditating, that your shoulders feel like they're up by the ears. And just recognizing that sometimes is enough, it'll just let go of itself. Or maybe you can say, you know, I think I can soften the shoulders a little bit. Maybe as you exhale, relax, softening the belly, you might notice that there's a lot of mental chatter and energy in the mind. And the mind, after a while learn that you can actually have the ability to quiet the mind, to still the mind, to relax the thinking muscle. And so the thinking gets little bit quiet or doesn't stop. But some of the kind of the agitated energy that keeps the thinking going, can be quiet, because you can relax it. Perhaps the heart, the emotional kind of center, slot of energy, there are also maybe there's a stilling of that a gentle, loving stilling of it, that we can allow, it's not has enough to be dramatic. We sit here quietly. And it's almost like taking on the exhale, letting things go, quieting, settling. And this involves a willingness not to be focusing so much on the problems we have the concerns we have, the thoughts we have, but to kind of trust this deeper process of coming home of settling in relaxing into here. So this relaxing into here. So these three steps, done in their own time and their own way, in a gentle way without a lot of you know, without trying trying too much to do, we're not trying to be too much successful, trying too much to solve anything. But it kind of just mostly a lot of has to do with letting yourself alone. Not trying too hard, just enough, just enough to kind of allow our process of settling to happen. There's other forces besides your doing that are pretty when you meditate. So just spend time recognizing what's happening, can take time getting to know your breathing. The second step then is to once you know what's happening, experience it more fully take time to feel it, to sense it fully through your body. How does these things live in your body. This Friday, I went to San Quentin for my annual visit to men there are learning this kind of practice there at San Quentin. And one of the this

group of people that I see in the grip program guiding rage into power that Chuck perdana teaches a year long program with him. And one of the things people have to do is they have to really face the crime, face their lives all kinds of way, but they have to really look at the crime, they committed the crime into the prison. And the people we saw were all lifers. And as far as I could tell, they all killed someone. That's why they were there. So their crime is a big deal. And they had to really look at they had they had six different steps they had to analyze to understand what would actually happen just before during what happened in that whole thing that had to really face up to it own up to it. And some of them had never done it. And they had to write an essay about it even net to read the essay to the other end in the group. Some of them weren't expecting guests to be there like us, because this is some of them. I never even told themselves that, you know, they admitted it. And there was one man who had murdered someone in San Jose, who read his story. And the facilitator, another prisoner inmate said what are your sensations now? pretty sad. How are you? What are you what are your sensations?

My heart's racing, I'm breathing, I'm hot. I feel tense. That's what they were being taught to do. How that in that kind of intensity is to feel the sensations make room for it. It was helped them to ground help them to process help them to kind of deal with this intense thing that just come through. To feel it to to recognize it, be with it, sense it. And then the third is to relax, to soften as the practice goes deeper and deeper. This little simple task of relaxing, becomes the task of letting go. some point we don't need to relax anymore. But then the task is to learn to let go, what we're attached to let go the holding the clinging we have. That's deeper, deeper and deeper. And as we find with the deep depths of where our clinging and attachments are, we found that the common, there's a common denominator to so many of our problems that are kind of like the analogy that's used in the ancient world is the root of the plant. Some plants, if you take off the flower, the plants lives take off the leaves the plants, still there, the weeds still there, sometimes even cut them off at the soil base. They grow back from the root, but you have to kind of pull up the root. So we have all kinds of problems. And if we're hanging out at the leaves, the end of the, you know, branches, and solving the problems, they're the route that pumps out problems is still going to be there, over and over again. And this is part of why we don't want to just kind of focus on the surface concerns we have, they try to solve them they're in practice, it's kind of practice, we wouldn't let it leave ourselves alone. So we can be more and more sensitive, we can listen to ourselves more deeply, to find out what's really going on at the base and the roots of us. The core attachment we have, and for different people is different things. But one of the core ones many people have, is a kind of attachment to self, clinging to identity, cling to self. And so to come down to place where very quiet still core place, we're attached to being somebody is often the source of you know, that's kind of the root or the foundation for so many of the other things on the branches.

So meditating on the breathing, the simple thing of sitting quietly, as a way of coming home to ourselves to the deeper wellsprings of what makes us what makes us who we are, until such a point that we get to the root. And then we couldn't let go of the route. Without doing that, we might that we don't really understand what's happening, and why we're spinning and chasing and wanting and feeling despair or discouragement or depression or fear, anger and all kinds of things. So this process of doing nothing, very little. Getting to know feeling it more fully. and relaxing is one of the most profound things you can do. And so maybe some of you will tell me that after this talk, you went home and meditated and I'll know it was successful according to that criteria. Thank you all