

Monday Guided Mediation: The Nourishment of Awareness

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So I'd like to offer some analogies for this practice as a prelude to this meditation. And the first is that of the sun and the relationship between the sun and plants. Without the sun, rather sunlight coming out, the fundamental need for plants to create chlorophyll will not happen. Plants can't grow without sunlight. It's a big deal for plants that the sun comes out each day. I love it that sunflowers kind of follow the sun through the day.

But the sun probably doesn't know anything about plants. And the sun is not sitting there planning ahead through the night. I'm going to really radiate those plants because I want them to grow. They're going to grow really well, and I'm going to really pump them up. This will be great. I'm going to be the most successful sun in this solar system because I'm going to make these plants really big and wonderful and beautiful.

The sun doesn't have any thoughts about what it's doing. The light just, light gets radiated. And it lands on this planet, it lands on the plants, and the plants respond to it, and they respond to grow. So for us, awareness is the sun, and awareness is multifaceted. It's all the different attentional capacities we have. Sometimes it's clearly knowing what's happening in the moment.

Sometimes it's feeling, sensing what's happening in the moment. Sometimes it's a silent kind of the mind's ability to observe what's happening. It's particularly relevant when we close our eyes and we're observing our experience in the direct moment, direct experience of our inner life. And sometimes it's something that is a little bit more... difficult to point to, and it doesn't seem to have any shape or color. And sometimes it's called just awareness, or some people call it consciousness. So a field of some people, spacious, expansive sense of awareness is often the word that people can use.

And so whatever it is, although... It keeps cutting off, doesn't it? I don't know. This is this. Oh, it could be the battery. It could be the battery.

This is changing. I don't know. Did you need it? Do you know how to open it? Yeah. Did you show it off?

Yeah. Okay. This is here. That's the other side of that goes forging. Okay. I think I tried yesterday, and it was really hard to get it to open.

Okay. Maybe it will help. Are there any settings inside of here? Any what? Settings? I don't think so.

Because I've had these before where there was a gain in them. There was. This kind of... No. No. Try that.

Now it's red. Red. Red. Red. Red. Red. Now it's red. Red. Before it was green. Oh, now it's green. Let's see. Am I on now? And can I look at you over here? Yes. Oh yeah. Yeah, I can look at all of you. That's what it is. And that also is possible because of the sun. One way or the other. The sun was coming through, finally coming through.

And so awareness doesn't, it's like the sunlight, it might be doesn't have any intention to help us to grow, to help us to heal. But, and maybe it's nice to understand it that way, so we don't get too involved with being the manipulators, the doers. So awareness can operate without trying to make something happen, without being intentional. The mind, the thinking mind can be engineering itself, the control tower can be operating, but sensing and feeling in and of itself doesn't have to want anything to happen. Knowing, very simply, a sound, a body sensation, know it's warm, know it's cold, know it's bright, it's sunlight outside. Very simple.

That can just happen without any plan for that or... big goal, why that we're doing that. It's just kind of the natural functioning of the mind to know for no purpose almost, like the sun has no purpose radiating on his plants. And so we can observe quietly our experience in that way. But it does have an impact. We have a whole system inside that turns out it thrives on being known and being seen and being heard.

Just like human beings thrive sometimes in being known and heard. And children who are not heard and seen, it's almost like they haven't been loved, which is something doesn't grow. And so we offer something really precious when we keep showing up to be here, to be aware, to know. And often meditators make it more complicated it needs to be because they try too hard. And they're trying to do it from the control tower. And what that does, it actually puts a lens, sometimes a lens that blocks the light of awareness, if we try too hard.

It can't shine so clearly. So the art of this is to... be dedicated, as best you can, moment by moment, but without any strain and stress, without an agenda, in a sense, without trying to do something more than make this wonderful light available for your whole inner system, which thrives on being seen and known and felt. And it's hard to do that, to find that balance. But that's what we're working towards. And as we do this... And as we're present, sometimes it's useful to have the breathing be at the center.

Because the breathing is a constant that we have with us all our lived life, and it has a nice rhythm. And the breathing also can operate by itself without the control tower doing anything. But what staying with the regular rhythm of breathing can do it can protect us from getting caught up in the thinking mind, the control tower. It's a kind of an alternative that keeps us grounded and present. It would be something like, there are some things people do that their thinking mind and neurotic mind is still working perhaps, but they're so engaged in the activity they're doing that not much mental energy is going into the thinking mind. And sometimes sports can be that way, or sometimes music or a hobby.

Sometimes entertainment can do that. Where, yes, the mind kind of still does its kind of strange things, but most of the energy is going somewhere else. And with the breathing, to have that as a ballast, to have that as a constant reminder, be here, be here simply. Be here with the breathing, feel the breathing, without needing to do anything or any accomplishment. Don't be complicated with it. Just the light of awareness on the body's experience of breathing.

And it begins to shift, even without letting go of your thoughts, it just begins to shift the center of gravity of where the light of awareness is going. If the light of awareness goes into your thinking mind and gets lost there, gets absorbed in that, it actually feeds the thinking mind more. So you're reinforcing some of the patterns of your thinking that are not so helpful by getting preoccupied with the thoughts that we have. You don't have to stop the thinking or make it wrong, but what we're doing is shifting where this wonderful fluid of awareness goes. And breathing is a classic one to feel it. The other analogy is that of a cat being petted and starts to purr.

If you've had a cat on your lap and you're purring it, kind of the whole cat kind of vibrates a little bit. And as long as you're petting it, it purrs. If you stop, the purring stops. So you've got to start again. There's something about awareness being in the present moment in the body, sensing the body, feeling the body, being aware of the body breathing. And we're kind of offering that fluid of awareness to the body, the embodied body breathing.

Where there's a influence, there's a radiance, there's a receptivity the rest of the body has

to that experience of being petted by your breathing. The rhythm, it's almost like from the inside out, the breathing is massaging you, is petting you. And if you're in the control tower trying to engineer breathing to get you concentrated, you're not available for the influence that the awareness of breathing has on our wider system. But if you're there kind of receptive, awareness that's open, not trying to do anything, but really making space, breathing room, you might over time notice that there's a kind of a gentle, very quiet, maybe even shy influence that mindfulness of breathing has into the body beyond the direct experience of breathing itself. And you might over time find that your equivalent of purring happens. It might be very, very subtle.

It might be a feeling of a little bit of calm. It might be a little bit of sense of pleasure, contentment. It might be a little bit of sense of, what a relief. Because the alternative was not so good. The mind caught up in his preoccupations. It might be that there's a sense of joy.

There might be sweetness. Some people will talk about breathing becomes beautiful. Imagine that. That you experience of breathing. Don't look for beauty in the breath itself. The beauty is found in the wonderful mingling of awareness and breathing.

So the sensations of being there, something begins happening as we get absorbed, settled, centered on breathing. That's some people call beauty. So with that, we'll start. To bring the... to bring awareness more fully into our present moment experience. The basic way the Buddha, the first beginning instructions the Buddha gave for mindfulness practice was to establish a posture of practice.

Now it's upright. And upright has two meanings. Upright, just sitting straight up. But more importantly, it means to bring an inner psychological posture of being upright, honest, being willing to establish yourself here in the fullness of being as if you are important, as if you are dignified through your body. And with that upright posture, Buddha's next instruction was to establish or rest awareness, attention on the body breathing. And if that's a difficult thing to do, to stay resting present, you might be supported by the three-breath journey, breathing in three times, out three times, And there's a way of knowing, sensing that has no agenda, no purpose beyond knowing and sensing.

It's like turning on the light, and the light has no purpose. But now we can see. And sometimes what is predominant is simple knowing of experience. It might be a non-verbal knowing. It might be a very simple verbal knowing, knowing you're breathing in, knowing you're breathing out. There can be the knowing of the particular sensations that come into play as you breathe in, the particular sensations that come into play as you exhale.

And the Buddha said that as you're breathing, with your inhales and exhales, steady, centered in the body breathing. As you breathe in, sense, feel the whole body, the global body, in whatever way that's easy. The body is an organ of sensing, filled with different nerves for sensing, feeling, the body itself. Maybe like you turn on the light throughout the body but as you breathe in sense the wider body like a wave senses the ocean it travels through and the Buddha said when exhaling sense feel the global body without trying too hard just curious and open to feel a spreading awareness, spreading from breathing into the body. And then for the beginning instructions, the Buddha adds one more step. And as you feel your global body, relax the body.

As you breathe in, let there be a calming of your global body. As you exhale, a settling, calming, of the body, knowing, sensing and calming. And as we relax and calm, maybe the light of awareness becomes clearer, brighter. So with the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, knowing the body widely, sensing momentarily different parts of your body, what is pleasant in your body, what is unpleasant. Let it all be included with the rhythm of breathing, helping you not to get fixated on anything, helping to keep this open awareness with the light on. When you become absorbed in your thinking, Notice how that disconnects you from your body, or the way it dims the light of awareness in your body.

No need to be struggling with your thoughts. But do turn on the light in the body. Center yourself in the body so you're not feeding your thoughts. And they can recede to the background. And in the background, are just part of the landscape. Breathing in, experiencing the whole body.

Breathing out, experiencing the whole body. Breathing in, calming the body. Breathing out, calming the body. And if there's any soft spreading of calm or pleasure or contentment, include that as part of experiencing the whole body as you breathe. I believe that there's a general idea, belief in the West, that the mind is in the head, maybe in the upper half of the head. And it's rather ambiguous amorphous what the mind is, but to limit it to the brain kind of limits the fullness of our life.

If the mind is a sum total of our entire network of nerves we have throughout the body, then the mind is throughout the body, and we have a phenomenal set of nerves that can sense different things, nerves for hot and cold, nerves for pain and pleasure, nerves for pressure, all kinds of things. And to allow the mind, this global mind, this mind that spreads out into all the nerves throughout the body, to let it all kind of be there in the field of awareness means that the nervous system can work in coordination with itself, in harmony, in the ecosystem of all these plants and beings and animals that, in the analogy of the sunlight, all these different

parts can begin functioning together. And it's a really intelligent or brilliant ecosystem if we allow it to all work together. And so as you walk around Big Springs, or from this natural world. There is all kinds of ways in which this natural world around us is being registered or being received by this global network of nerves.

Maybe it's the sunlight, the warmth of the sunlight perhaps. Maybe it's the smells. Maybe it's the contact with the ground. Much of the time here, you can walk directly on the ground, as opposed to an asphalt cement. Maybe it's the sounds. Maybe we don't know all the ways in which the body registers its experience we have here, but to be quieter than usual with your thinking mind, and to kind of be available to sense and feel All the ways in which we're being touched, shaped, changed by the natural world around us and the natural world within us.

See if you can live here, go around here. With this, all your senses open, available. And be amazed by how being absorbed and thinking... When you're absorbed in thinking and stories and plans and past, be amazed how quickly you lose that. Isn't that amazing? And as we lose it, we actually compartmentalize ourselves.

As we lose it, we lose the whole. It's possible to think, but for that to be totally part of the whole. And it helps if the thinking you think is about what's happening here and now. Oh, that's a bird. What does that sound like? What does that feel like?

That's warmth. That's cold. It's time to go to a meal. Walking on the steps. It's like this. We're encouraging, gathering your thinking mind, inviting your thinking mind to participate in this adventure of being fully here.

So it all works together. Your thinking mind is part of the whole... contributes to the whole, if it participates in the present moment, gently, softly, we're centered in our body, not centered in our thinking. May all of who you are support the process here. We're allowing the cat to purr, allowing the plants inside of you, the seeds to germinate and the plants to grow. A process that you can't make happen, but you need to be available for it to happen.

May the trees and waters and birds and light and skies and clouds, ground, soil of rocks, of big springs, may they all be here contributing to your profound capacity for growth and to healing. No instruction needed. We are not a IKEA project. Thank you.