

Guided Meditation: Breathing Centered

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Hello and welcome to our sitting here in Redwood City. If our warm-hearted or emotionally, some warm-hearted emotions for social care, social relationships occur in the heart, but we live mostly in our head, then we're not going to be much in touch with our hearts. If there's a deep form of intelligence deep in our belly, then if we live mostly in our heads, no matter how smart our heads are, this deeper form of intelligence is not going to be tapped into. If we need a whole body awareness to be able to tap into our capacity for wholeness, capacity for well-being, for the capacity for happiness. Because happiness in Buddhism is more, lives more below the neck than above the neck. And so if we live mostly in our heads, we're not going to have access to this profound form of happiness that suffuses and spreads throughout us.

Same thing with peace. If we live from the shoulders up, we might definitely experience from time to time a mental tranquility, mental peace, but it's small compared to the kind of peace we can experience when we're fully embodied. And the sense of peace kind of flows or irradiates through our body and seemingly beyond it. So in Buddhist meditation, we're looking to drop below the head, below the neck, not to dismiss or ignore what's above, but to allow it to be in its rightful place as a cooperative member of a whole, of a biological whole, of a psychological, emotional whole, that only is found by having a global awareness, being rooted and centered in the body when we're thinking, when we're planning, when we're engaging with others, to have access to so much more. So that's part of the task of meditation.

And so to begin today, to assume an embodied posture, a posture where all of your body is cooperating, participating in the posture. You place your legs and feet in an intentional position. If you're in a chair or in a couch, make sure that your legs and feet are kind of squarely, fully kind of grounding on the floor, on a surface. If you're using a backrest for your back, maybe there can be a small pillow at the lower part of the back or the top of the back that

allows somehow to be more erect or even the chest to kind of come forward a little bit. If you're sitting cross-legged on the floor, maybe there's ever so slight way of pulling in the, straightening out the spine between the shoulder blades.

For decades when I did Zen practice, the custom was to begin every meditation with a gentle swaying back and forth, kind of loosening up a little bit the body, kind of feeling into the body. So as we shorten the sway, the arcs, we're finding our way slowly to a balance point. We're kind of lowering ourselves into the torso and then gently closing the eyes or lowering the gaze, if you prefer them open. And spend a few moments now doing a tour of your body, letting your attention roam around your body for no other purpose than discovery. How is it? How is this body of yours now?

What does it feel like to connect to it in a careful, respectful way? And can you identify some place in your body, your torso that feels like a grounding place, a place you can feel grounded or there's feelings of stability, rootedness. A place below the neck, in the torso, the legs. Some people might feel it in the hands or the feet. Maybe from that grounding place, let it be the beginning for the inhale. Taking a longer inhale than usual.

And exhaling longer than usual. And exhale that inhale. Is relaxing, letting go, feeling the body, the torso as you breathe in, and letting go of thoughts and concerns as you exhale, and letting go into your body, letting your breathing return to normal. And as you inhale, feel the muscles of your face, and as you exhale, soften those muscles. As if the muscles in the face can fall away from the skull as they relax. As you inhale, feel your shoulders.

And then exhale, softening the shoulders, releasing the shoulders to the gentle pull of gravity. On the inhale, softening the belly as the belly expands fully. And as you exhale, relaxing the belly. And then feel having a global attention of your body, maybe a global awareness of the hum of the body or the vibration or the gentle field of all kinds of small sensations. And in that field of sensations, center yourself on the experience of breathing wherever in the torso, breathing is most grounding, settling, and may be peaceful. And as the inhale grows through the torso, there's a spreading awareness through, through the torso.

As you exhale, maybe there's a reverse movement of settling, settling into a single point at the end of the exhale. If you find yourself thinking a lot, relax the thinking muscle. Let go of your thoughts. So that you can dip back into the body, as if the body is a wonderful lake, broad, wide, soft, that you lower yourself into as you let go of your thoughts. And then as we come to the end of this sitting, to dip into your body again, to find a place, maybe a small place within, that feels like a refuge, feels like a place of calm or peace, inner stability, a sweet tenderness.

Find a place within that feels like home or feels comfortable to be close to. And from there, gaze upon the world, calmly, peacefully, centered in your body, centered in yourself. Gaze upon the world with kindness, goodwill, that could be understood to be a form of generosity, being generous with your kind regard, respect for others, generous in your appreciation, generous with your smiles and greetings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. And may we be deeply connected to the emotions and intelligence in our body so that we can live with goodwill and friendliness, with all that we encounter today. May all beings be happy.