

Monday sit with instructions

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So welcome to the first day of the retreat. First days of retreat is a whole process of arriving here. And one of the things that supports arriving here in the place, in the room, in your bodies, in your hearts, is to be reassured, to be deeply reassured. And as some of you know, I often emphasize relaxing at the beginning of a sitting. And one of the ways that our whole system can relax is that we're allowing ourselves to be reassured. You might assume you don't need it, but to reassure your body so it can soften, to reassure your heart so it can open, to reassure that thinking mind, so it can be less anxious, less driven.

So it feels like it's appropriate and welcomed for the thinking mind to slow down, maybe so the thinking mind can think more calmly. And some of the tension we carry along with our thinking mind can begin to loosen. We carry with us the momentum of our life and we can't expect that that momentum just stops suddenly, but we can create the conditions of goodwill, care, reassurance, and certain kind of acceptance of that momentum that begins the process of allowing it to slow down, so we can find ourselves here more in our body than we find ourselves in the thinking mind. So to begin, it's often nice to have a routine by which you start the meditation. You might even think of it as a ritual of entering this moment, of settling into this place at this time. And that ritual can begin with care and maybe even love for your posture, your body as it is.

Takes a position for meditation, and maybe at the beginning to make some small adjustments, trying out little different ways of sitting, partly as just an excuse to care for your body. Maybe sitting up a little bit straighter so that your chest can feel like it's beginning to open, maybe even your heart. There's space for it. Some people, when the chest is more open and full, can feel more tender or maybe even a little bit more anxious. But maybe that just allows you to love the heart, to care, perhaps softening the belly, and then within this body as part of

it, in a way that maybe points you or invites you to slow down the thinking mind and become a partner with your body. Taking a few long, slow, deep breaths, feeling the expansion of the torso as you breathe in, and as the exhales settles the torso, the chest, diaphragm, settle in to your body, and then letting your breathing return to normal in very subtle ways, you might feel the gentle pull of gravity.

Maybe most strongly in the chair or the cushion that supports your weight. Maybe as you exhale, letting go into that support. Maybe the pull of gravity is gently on your shoulders, your arms and hands. Maybe you feel it in the area of your belly, relaxing the belly, so that you yield, give yourself over to that gentle pull. And then within the body, as part of your bodily experience, become aware of how your body experiences breathing. Experiencing breathing in your body in the way that is nicest for you, maybe whether it's pleasant or where it's easy, knowing that there are places where it's maybe difficult or forced or constricted.

It's okay. And rather than thinking about your breathing, see if your body's abilities to sense, to feel sensations can be intimate with the movements of breathing. And maybe instead of you directing attention to the breathing, you allow your breathing to accompany you. Your breathing has been accompanying you for a lifetime. It's been a partner. And while we're sitting here, it's a time not to overlook the breathing or take it for granted, but to recognize it's there to be your companion, to accompany you.

Breathing in, breathing out. We're the steady rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, maybe has something reassuring about it. Settling. And if there's physical discomforts as you sit, allow the breathing to accompany, accompany the discomfort. If you find yourself with emotions that are strong, breathe with the emotions. If you find yourself with a thinking mind that's maybe overactive, it's okay.

Breathe with that mind. With a gentle rhythm of breathing, helps you to be present but not reactive. You might think of your breathing as a companion and as a guide, a guide to the present moment. And if you find yourself lost in thought, when you realize that, welcome the breathing back. Welcome it, so it can accompany you in the present moment, reassuring you to being here and now. If anything is difficult for you, instead of thinking you have to get rid of it, you might consider the job is to accompany it with awareness, and that something can be reassured in the middle of it.

Whenever you're accompanying something, whenever you allow the breathing to breathe with something, then you're mindful, you're present. And that's enough. And as we come to the end of the sitting, is there any way that you feel more reassured or calmer, more subtle than at the beginning? Even if there's ways that you aren't, are there also ways that you are?

Can you get closer or intimate with what feels good, but sitting here quietly coming to the end? Maybe some way of being that's worthwhile, staying close to, not losing quickly by getting pulled into the world of thoughts.

Sometimes I think of the first day of a retreat. It's the time of the retreat to learn to be gracious. Yes. Meaning that often the first day is difficult. People are more tired and they expect people, the momentum of their life is more strongly present than they want, thoughts and concerns. It could be that the body is more uncomfortable than they are familiar.

Some people feel that their meditation at home was so much better than coming here. Why should I just stay at home? I'm so busy in my mind. The body is more uncomfortable, maybe from the longer sitting. And I like to think of it this whole first day, if it's not the case for you, that it's just your system kind of getting you ready, making the adjustments. It's a big adjustment to come to a retreat.

And so the task is to be gracious to it, to be just okay, to be more allowing. And I sometimes just kind of... to myself will say, it's okay. It's the first day experience. That's all. Sometimes some people, teachers I've known have called it the swamps. Maybe there's other words for it, but some people it's not that way. But it's just like you're warming up, you're preparing for the retreat. And don't ride closely on top of it if it's difficult the first day. Judging yourself or thinking that you're already a miserable failure of a meditator just because your mind wanders off, or whatever reason at all.

Be gracious, be generous, be reassuring, it's okay. It's a profound, really a profound process we're involved in. It's more profound than you can imagine. So if you're in your thinking about and coming to conclusions about what this is like, it's not really needed. And it's often good to take a nap or two on the first day. You're totally allowed to go nap, to catch up, to settle, take care of yourself.