

Tuesday Guided Instruction

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November 18, 2025

Keywords: Dharma, mindfulness, body, present moment, Thailand, Dharma talk, somatic body, IRC, BIPOC, LGBTQ

As we begin with the meditation instructions for today, I'd like to highlight the idea that we are creating the conditions for something invaluable, something wholesome, to have a chance to grow within us. And part of practice is to make room for that, to create the conditions. And if we use the metaphor of growing plants, nourishing food plants in the garden, we prepare a good flower bed, vegetable bed for them. And the *Dharma* bed that we prepare is our body, to be grounded, rooted in the body. So what is good within us has the space, the softness, the nourishment to grow. Generally to grow vegetables, you want to have a well-conditioned soil where it's not a hard pan, not a lot of clods of dirt.

The Buddha talked about the importance of relaxing the body, softening the mind. The Buddha talked in his instructions for mindfulness, talked about feeling, sensing the whole body. And then whatever holding or tension that's in that body, to gently till it, soften it, loosen up the clods, by softening, relaxing the body. And then within this body, to discover where the steady can be, the stabilizing, so that the stabilizing, steady, stillness of the body can guide the mind, encourage the mind to also steady itself, to also stabilize. So the body, instead of spinning out away from the body, the mind joins the body. Here and now, the body is always in the present moment, the mind might not be, and to harmonize the mind and body so they can work together, so they create the full conditions for the growth of the *Dharma* in us.

The task is to bring the mind to the same place, in the same time, as where the body is, here. Now, feeling the contact of your body, your body weight, with your chair or your cushion, the floor, and gently taking some little fuller breaths to feel the expanding torso from the inside, and to relax the body on the exhale. Relax and yield to the pull of gravity against the place of contact with a chair or cushion. Exhaling and settling into your seat, as if your body is joining

the chair, the cushion, maybe even joining this earth that holds us up, letting the breathing return to normal. And as you inhale, to feel the muscles of your face. And as you exhale, to relax and soften the face.

As you inhale, to feel the shoulders. And with the exhale, a gentle softening of the shoulders. If there's tension in the shoulders that doesn't relax, that's fine. Soften around the tension. As you inhale, feel your belly on the exhale. Relax the belly.

Allow it to hang forward and relaxing with the pull of gravity. On the inhale, in whatever way it's easy for you, feel your whole body, global panoramic view of the body. And on the exhale, to soften the body. On the exhale, allow there to be a settling of the body. Ever so slightly, at the end of the exhale, allow, release the exhale a little bit more. So maybe there's a settling connecting to a deeper place within of stability.

And as you inhale, allow the inhale to arise from some inner place of stillness, stability, steadiness. Maybe carrying that steadiness through the entire inhale until you come to the end of the inhale, to whatever degree of fullness, expansiveness that occurs at the end of the inhale. And as you breathe on the inhale, gently feel the sensations that might be associated with thinking. The thinking mind, the thinking muscle, the sensations of thinking that are, that is part of the body's ecosystem. What you're thinking about is less important right now than sensing the physicality of thinking, feeling that on the inhale, and relaxing the thinking mind on the exhale.

Softening the thinking muscle. Maybe so the mind spreads into the body like a small light stone dropped into a lake. It gradually settles down to the floor of the lake. So let your attention, your attending to your sensations of the body, settle down through your torso so that your way of being aware is supported by an inner stability in your torso deep inside. So that sensing the breath, sensing the experience of breathing, occurs in the same place where the sensations arise. Sensing is not up in the mind.

Sensing is in the body if there are strong sensations in the body. Instead of knowing that from up in the head, knowing it from places of anxiety or aversion, instead of knowing it in ways that are tinged with agitation or reactive thoughts, to know the strong sensations from a deeper place of knowing, connected to the steadied, stable place within. Maybe as you breathe in, to sense and feel strong sensations, and as you breathe out, to ease up around those sensations, as if you know and sense through the breathing, not through the reactive mind, not through the story-making mind. Letting go of your thoughts so you can let go into the body to better feel and sense the breathing body. Maybe so you can better sense and feel the fullness of breathing in, the releasing of breathing out.

Gently, the present moment, knowing with an inner quiet stillness, steadiness, sensing what's happening in the body, sometimes sensing in the body what's happening emotionally, what's happening cognitively, staying with the simplicity of sensations, sensing calmly, sensing with the steadiness of attention, however brief that steadiness is, from time to time. With the inhale, feeling the body in a global way, with a global awareness that has lots of room for whatever strong sensations there might be, even whatever strong emotions there might be. And on the exhale, softening the body, releasing the body, so the body can become a well-conditioned vegetable bed. And who knows what wants to grow, germinate, arise deep and within. Might there be a growing stability, stillness, a stable feeling of openness, within which sensing and feeling, knowing, breathing, as a place where the mind and body join, a place where the thinking mind and the present moment connect physically here and now.

One of the most significant teachings I received in my early practice in Thailand was the sentence, don't let anything cause you to leave your body. Don't let anything cause you to lose a connection to the somatic body, the sensing body here. So as you hear the bell to end the sitting, stay and sense and feel how the body registers the ringing bell. Steady, stable, staying rooted here. So the body is a phenomenal support for mindfulness. In the body can be a phenomenal challenge to mindfulness, both.

And it takes a lot of care and love to find your way with the body and here in the present moment. Sometimes the feeling of the global body kind of expanding beyond what is difficult in the body makes it easier to be with what's difficult. Sometimes finding a place of stability, stillness, softness deep inside, can also be a vantage point from which to then to observe or to feel or to know what is difficult. And to slowly begin to awaken the body, to stay close to it. It is really like the vegetable bed that allows all these seeds to begin growing rather than thinking that you're responsible for all this goodness that's within us.

At some point to entrust yourself to your body, more than you entrust yourself to the thinking mind and the figuring out mind and the planning mind, the remembering mind, all things that take us away from the body. And there's a marvelous way of thinking that is deeply, kind of connected deeply into the body, a gentle, soft, quiet place within, that's like a whole different operating system for thinking than the operating system of fear or aversion or desire or fantasy. A place deep inside where thinking is a little bit intentional, a little bit purposeful, just enough to keep you here in your direct experience, to think supportive thoughts, for staying present, for gently recognizing what's happening, to support a steady in the body. Very, very quiet thoughts, almost like no thoughts at all sometimes, to remind you to stay

attentive, stay aware through the body to what's happening.

One of the things you might think about here when you're going about the day here at IRC is to go about the day at the speed of mindfulness. And what I mean by that is that just do things at the kind of speed where you're not less likely to spin off into your thoughts, kind of become unconscious of what you're thinking about or caught in what you're thinking about and losing touch with the present moment. It can happen really quickly. It's happened to me here sometimes by the time I get to the bottom of the steps. So that's it long enough to somehow forget that I'm practicing mindfulness and start thinking about important things like my *Dharma* talk or something.

No, stay here. Notice, notice the speed of mindfulness is to notice when the mind begins wandering off into some kind of train of thought. Sometimes that means to do things somewhat slowly, slower than normal. Occasionally, especially outside, it might mean do things faster. It keeps you connected and keeps you here. Sometimes slow walking can be a recipe for just more distraction.

Sometimes fast walking is a recipe for more distraction. So you have to kind of moderate. Where's the right speed here? To keep me connected, here, feeling, sensing what's happening. So when you're going down the steps, you're actually feeling each thigh. Each planting of the foot as you move and step down, each step is like stepping of the foot is like the biggest activity of the moment.

So why not just know the step, not putting on your shoes mindlessly because you've done it 10,000 times. You've mastered it. But put on the shoe like you're... It's like... Like there's the way of archery or the way of tea. There's the way of putting on shoes.

Just you and the shoe right there. And it might sound a little silly to be practicing that kind of level of detail, but it's a way of building momentum. It's a way of supporting your whole psychophysical system to develop the habit, the momentum, the channel of really staying here in the present moment, where the best things grow and develop. Trust it. You don't have to think about other things so much here. You've probably done enough thinking in your lifetime to know that the return isn't that great, and you'll have lots of time to think again.

Here, a different way, maybe a different way of thinking, a different way of being oriented. So going around at the speed of mindfulness... So a few things about today. So we start the first cycle of practice discussions. And there was some confusion with signing up. So some people signed up two times.

Some people didn't sign up at all, maybe because there were no spots left. So I think for Jen and Ordin, so we added you in today. I think maybe to see Adrian or me, one of you. You saw that. And if you're meeting with me, there's a chair and a little sign on the other side of these redwood, big redwood trees here in the perimeter path. And wait there.

Sit in the chair, wait right by there. And there's a path that kind of curves around to the deck of the house behind here. The ranch house that's there. It's called, we call it a tree house, and there's a treehouse deck. And so when the person comes out ahead of you about the path, then you can go in. And if you're the first one in the morning or the first one after a break, mid-morning I have a break, then 15-minute break.

So you can just come and take a seat up there. No one's there on the deck. Wait for me. And Denise will be sitting in with me today as part of her training. And she'll mostly just be a quiet, loving observer, caring for us both as we have our conversation.

And those of you seeing Adrian today, Joe has set it up downstairs in the room one with the laptop. So ideally all you have to do is to go into that room, close the door, and sit down in front of the laptop and Adrian will be there. And when you leave and finish, keep the door open so the next person knows to go in. And if there's any kind of technology issue, I mean, probably you don't need to touch the computer at all. And that would be kind of ideal. But if there's any technology issues, I don't know, maybe look for the manager.

And if Joe happens to be in the area, you can gently, lovingly, gratefully ask him to help. And today's when we have, we start the affinity sits, and they all happen every day. And so we have the BIPOC at 1:45 that Lily will be there to meet you. And in a contemplative retreat appropriate way, we'll get you started and check in. And then at 3:15 is the LGBTQ affinity sit, and Teclin will be there to receive you and do the same. And so I hope that you enjoy your day and enjoy this.

I guess today it's going to be, it looks like a blue sky day sun. So it's very nice. Thank you all. So good morning. And I'd like to remind that some of you have practice discussion groups today, some in just a few minutes. So please get there a couple of minutes early, and I'll let you in from the waiting room.

So please check the schedule. Make sure you come at the right time, right day. And for any of you who showed up last night and there was a broken link, we apologize. It did get fixed at the last minute. So I don't know if anybody gave up before coming in. So I apologize.

You missed it. Feel free to drop me a note about it. So we'll see some of you today. Have a wonderful day of practice.