

Guided Meditaation: Mindfulness of Breathing

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Hello from Redwood City, the Insight Meditation Center. I'm delighted to be here with you. And so for this meditation today, I'd like to... And given the topic of this week, which is going to be the basic instructions that I like to do here at IMC, we'll do mindfulness of breathing, which is where the basic instructions usually begins. And people's relationship to breathing can be complicated, but the hope is that over time we learn to harmonize ourselves with the breathing. Okay. Find an easy way to be aligned, be attuned, be intimate with the body's experience of breathing.

And there's many benefits from this, but sometimes it takes a while to learn it. So to begin, assume a posture that might support breathing easily. If you're somehow bent over so that the weight of your torso gets heavy on your belly and scrunched over, or your shoulders rolled far forward, chest a little bit concave, the breathing might be limited. So arrange the posture in such a way that the chest is more open, so there's breathing room to breathe, and to have a posture that allows the belly to do something which some people might consider unbecoming, which is to let your belly hang forward. A soft, relaxed belly, gently closing your eyes.

And begin by a global exploration of your body. Meaning just let your attention roam around your body as if you're unifying, bringing together all the different parts of by just feeling and sensing and knowing different parts of the torso, the front of the torso and the back, both the sides, the shoulders and arms, exploring the physical sensations of your head just to open up and expand some sense of your body so it becomes whole. All was included. The back of the head and the back of the neck, traveling down the spine to the tailbone, feeling the weight of the body if you're sitting, a chair or cushion, on the tailbone or sitting bones. If you're lying down, feeling the whole spread of weight on your back and down through your legs.

And then in a way that is comfortable for you, just enough, take some fuller breaths, not by forcing the breath, but letting the inhale kind of spread and fill your whole torso in a gentle way and relaxing the body as you exhale. A fuller inhale so you feel movement, pressure, even in your back rib cage, and relaxing the body as you exhale. With a relaxed belly, as you inhale these fuller breaths, allow the inhale, allow the belly to expand, kind of balloon out as you breathe in. What's happening is your diaphragm is pushing down when you breathe in. And so it pushes all the contents of your belly down and out. The relaxing, on the inhale, relaxing the bellies, and then letting the breathing return to normal without any special effort to breathe in any special way.

Just feel the difference now between taking fuller breaths to having a more natural breath. And if you're still controlling the breath, it's okay. Just feel the difference from before. And as you have an easy, more or less ordinary breath, feel again the gentle or not-so-gentle pressure down into your belly as you breathe in and how there's a release of that pressure when you exhale. And even if it's just a little bit, keep the belly soft, softening it when you can, and feeling that gentle pressure that grows and releases in your lower belly.

Okay. As if it's gentle swells on a large ocean, and everything gets lifted by the wave, the swell, lifted and lowered. Everything above the expanding and contracting belly is resting on the waves. The belly supports everything above it on the torso, riding the wave of breathing in, as a torso, the belly expands and contracts, releases, settles back on the exhale. As you exhale, relaxing the thinking mind, the tension associated with thinking, and letting your thinking mind gently think about, appreciate, recognize each inhale and exhale, as you stay close to the body's experience of breathing, riding the gentle waves, maybe trusting the meditation, the breathing, enough so that you don't feel like you have to think about anything else.

Giving a thinking mind a break, letting go of your thoughts on the exhale, and letting go back into the wave-like breath. Alternation of breathing in and out, being intimate with the body's experience of breathing. Sometimes it's useful to do this globally, a wider field of the body that has sensations of breathing. Sometimes it's more useful to find a little spot, maybe in the middle of it all, and stay very close to that spot of sensation as it alternates, as it shifts and changes with breathing in and breathing out. As you breathe in, feeling in your body wherever there might be holding or resistance, bracing yourself against life, and on the exhale, gently soften, soften the breathing body, soften right to the end of the exhale, and let there be an allowing of the body breathing in, allowing and expanding, a growing of the wave of inhale.

And for the next minute or so, gently, kindly, allow the thinking mind to become quiet, slow,

gentle, in support of feeling, sensing the body breathing. And as we come to the end of the sitting, I'm appreciating that breathing is an intimate experience by which life is lived. That this planet we live on has evolved slowly, and our life has evolved in harmony, in relationship to the atmosphere of this planet. We are creatures evolved to participate in the life-giving processes of this planet. Through breathing, we've evolved a deep connection.

May it be that as we breathe, we remember the deep, full way in which we live in relationship to what is not in ourselves, but is part of this wider world. And may we care for this world. May we care for what's caring for us. May we care for what keeps us alive, keeps us breathing. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.