

## Guided Meditation: Mindfulness of it All

**Gil Fronsdal**

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So I'm going to continue by beginning again and welcoming you all to this meditation. And to say that when I was introduced to this practice in Asia, in Thailand and Burma, the entire instructions for meditation was given relatively briefly. In Thailand, it was maybe done in five, ten minutes. In Burma, when I got there, I was given a cassette tape, and I believe in 30 or 40 minutes, the instructions were laid out. And those are the instructions for the entire practice that I was to do there. It was little additions were done from the teachers when I met with them.

Here in our insight scene in the United States, we tend to give the instructions progressively over time. So like I did this week with breathing one day, then body, emotions, and then thoughts yesterday. And the idea is that to get really familiar with each of these areas so that once you're familiar with them, it's easier to practice with them with the full instructions. And the full instructions can be said... very briefly, I mean, it could be said as simplistically as saying, be mindful of everything, but one thing at a time. And all our present moment experience falls under the purview of our mindfulness, our insight. And the way we did it, I was taught and it was a practice in such a way that we combine the practice of concentration and mindfulness, these two work hand in hand.

And the way we did that was we were told to do was to have breathing, the body's experience of breathing, be the default, be the place that's stabilizing, settling, unifying, and a place where we also are developing a stronger, more clear form of mindfulness, awareness of the experience of breathing. But if anything becomes more compelling than the breathing, then we can let go of breathing and have a new center for the attention, which is whatever is predominant in our direct experience. So it could be body sensations, it could be emotions, it could be thoughts, it could be sounds, anything that comes in through the sense doors,

including the sense door of the mind. And then once we've been with something, acknowledged it well enough, it's no longer compelling, no longer makes sense to have it at the center of the meditation. Then we return to the breathing. And the breathing is a default.

And the way I was taught in Burma, ordinarily you wouldn't stay long with another subject of mindfulness. We wouldn't, if there's a sound or a body sensation, you wouldn't linger there for a long time. You would just acknowledge it for a while. The way I taught it here was to do that for, you know, three breaths and then return to the breathing. Unless it stayed compelling, unless it really was clear this should be the center of focus and or was a really good subject for developing mindfulness and concentration. And so there was this kind of gentle rhythm of being with a breath for a while, staying there, developing it there, and then gently including something else as part of the meditation, and then returning.

And this constant returning and coming to rest in the gentle, changing, shifting sensations of breathing. Yeah. So let's try to do this and take a, assume a meditation posture. And the posture and the breathing is the place on which to be centered, to be grounded, to be rooted. Part of concentration practice is not so much a laser focus. But it's the practice of being centered and rooted right here.

Right here in this experience, this place, this time. Rooted, grounded, stable. Taking a few long, slow, deep breaths. And as you exhale, relax, settle into that rooted groundedness of being here, now. Right? And then letting the breathing return to normal.

Continue this sense of groundedness, rootedness in your body as you become aware of the body's experience of breathing. Not so much being in the control tower watching or thinking about breathing, but being close, intimate with the body's experience of breathing. Almost as if the movements of breathing, coming to you, inviting you into a relationship with them. Letting go of thoughts as you exhale, and letting go into an intimacy, a quietude of sensing and feeling breathing. And then, shifting your attention from breathing, to one of the stronger sensations in your body.

Maybe not the most painful. It doesn't have to be painful at all. It could be the pleasant ones, but one of the stronger sensations in your body, and as we did with the exercise of the hand, feel and sense that area, like you're listening or accompanying the area to feel and get to know the sensations there, the strong sensations. Maybe breathing with those sensations, maybe three breaths, and then shifting your attention back to be fully in your breathing. I think of the experience of breathing as the home base for mindfulness.

Coming home to the body's experience of breathing where the gentle rhythm of breathing is

quieting the mind, so there is more space and awareness to be filled with the sensations of breathing. And now switching from breathing to whatever emotion or mood or mental state seems present, seems active or predominant, doesn't have to be strong at all. But now let your mindfulness take in, open up to being aware, feeling, sensing, knowing how you feel, and grounding yourself in the physicality of how you feel more than the thoughts and stories about how you feel. For a few moments, allowing yourself to feel the way you do and as if you're your own best friend, accompanying how you feel with your breathing. Breathing with, breathing through how you feel for three breaths.

And then switching back to the breathing, taking a few breaths to re-center yourself, root yourself in the body's experience of breathing. And now shift your attention to your thinking, whether you're thinking words or images. Simply know, sense, feel, the thinking mind gaze directly at the mind that's thinking without reactions or judgments. Just know, just feel. Maybe breathing with the thinking mind for three breaths.

By including thoughts and including breathing, you're less caught in your thoughts, stepping back and just seeing them, knowing them, and then returning to your breathing. And as we continue in a relaxed way, if there's something that's compelling in body, emotions, or thinking, not to think about it more, but to be mindful of it. It might be enough just to know it, feel it for a moment. And that's enough to acknowledge it and come back. Sometimes it's appropriate to give it three breaths, sometimes longer, but always coming back home to the breathing in a relaxed way, one thing at a time.

Be aware of breathing, and then something else if it's predominant, and then returning to breathing, being relaxed about what you become aware of, and always ready to begin again with breathing. And as we come to the end of the sitting, to appreciate that mindfulness is a practice that can bring a meditative or non-reactive awareness to anything and everything in our life. It's like turning on the lights in a dark room and then letting the eyes roam around in a relaxed way, to land on each thing, see it clearly. And this capacity for seeing each thing in a respectful way, mindful way, giving time to each moment of experience, can also be used for being aware of others, people, not to stare at people, but to be aware. If you're going to be aware of someone.

Know them well, know them in their own right. See and feel and know without the filter of a lot of reactions and history and ideas. A simple knowing that maybe clears the air, that you can gaze upon others kindly. And may it be that this practice of mindfulness... clears the air of our hearts and mind so we can offer respect and appreciation in some way or other for all people we encounter, regardless, because it's so good for us to live in a world of appreciation

instead of the opposite. May all beings be appreciated.

May all beings be supported. May all beings be supported. May all beings be valued. May all beings be loved. May all beings be free of oppression, bias of others.

And may this practice that we do of mindfulness support us in doing this. May all beings be happy. Thank you.