

## Dharmette: Introduction to Mindfulness Pt 2 (1 of 5) Trust Breathing

**Gil Fronsdal**

**December 15, 2025**

**Keywords:** mindfulness of breathing, mettā, Dharma, mindfulness practice, meditation, re-active mind, concentration, awareness, emotions, stress

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So for now, I'd like to welcome you to this beginning of the week series of small Dharma talks.

And as I... The plan for this week is to continue and kind of repeat, in a sense, maybe in a, hopefully in a newer way, deeper way, fuller way, the basic instructions in mindfulness meditation that I teach here at IAMC. And the way I introduce them here to these instructions has a number of values. One is to do it kind of piecemeal so that there can be a deeper engagement, deeper understanding, discovery of how to practice with different areas of our life. Overall in mindfulness practice, we want to be able to develop a form of awareness, mindfulness, that can be all-inclusive. Nothing is left out. But to do that well, sometimes you need to kind of focus on one area for a while to study it, get to know it, to know its ins and outs, and how to be mindful of it.

And so here at IMC, sometimes we give intro courses that are 90 minutes long. And the first 90 minutes, one week is breathing, the next is body, then emotions and thoughts, and then tying it all together, the fifth week. And sometimes we have whole day-long retreats on each of these topics. And so we can really get into it. And once people, you know, the more familiar we are with the ins and outs, the details of each of these areas, the easier it is to have a productive, meditative, mindful awareness relationship to those areas.

So today I want to, this week I'm kind of repeating the same sequence as last week, hopefully to support you to develop your own deeper familiarity with these areas in yourself. And there's no end to this process of discovery. I've been doing this for 50 years and I'm still discovering, still discovering different ways of being aware and different things to be aware of in my life. So it's kind of a wonderful, fascinating journey. And what makes the journey kind

of fascinating also is to see, to become familiar with and find ways in which mindful awareness begins shifting and changing the inner landscape. And for me, it often makes me quite happy.

There's a sit down and slowly over the course of meditation, I just feel happier and happier. And I can't exactly say that there's a reason for that happiness, except that I love being alive in the simplicity of life, of the moment. And that's in contrast to a mind that is preoccupied and caught up with what should and shouldn't happen, what has happened, and what should not have happened, and our complaints about life, our challenges of life, the injustices of life, the fears of life. To be caught up in that mind is a mind that's uncomfortable, a heart that's uncomfortable. But to have all those settle out for a while and recede, and just to be present in a very simple, relaxed way, it brings me a lot of happiness and joy. And some of this has to do with being with breathing.

So one of the really important things I've learned about mindfulness of breathing is how breathing is at the nexus, the meeting point, maybe of our whole life, because the need for oxygen to have energy to operate as a human being needs to be spread out throughout the whole body. And because of how much energy we need to expend and use in different parts of the body for different things, it means that the breathing adjusts accordingly to provide that. And so there's a lot of emotionality, a lot of emotions that affect the breathing, a lot of actions, a lot of thoughts. I could be, only shift and change in my meditation can be what I end up thinking about. And I could think about something that I find very troubling and nothing else has changed. But as I think these troubled thoughts, my breathing changes. It gets shallower, it gets tighter, it gets restricted.

So breathing sits in the middle of all these things. If I think warm thoughts, if I do *mettā*, if I have feelings of kindness and goodwill, that seems to, at times, be very settling and opening. And that affects the breathing in a very different way. And so, but to simply stay with the breathing, to trust, I love the word trust the breathing, or entrust yourself to the breathing, even when it's uncomfortable. And what I've learned is that to be comfortable with discomfort, to somehow see the discomfort that's there when I'm breathing, to be a call, to gently touch that, gently massage that as I breathe. And sometimes when I inhale is where I feel the discomfort more, and then it recedes as I exhale.

And I think of that as a loving massage, just feeling the discomfort and releasing. Sometimes it's on the exhale that maybe it's uncomfortable. And I just kind of learned to be very content, very patient with feeling any kind of way that the breathing is uncomfortable. And the change that that brought me was that I'm no longer reactive to my breathing. The discom-

fort of breathing, discomfort that might be associated with emotions, I don't react and build reactivity upon a reactivity, but rather I just hold it very spaciously, just feel it, comfortable with discomfort, kind of like it's a gentle massage or a gentle opening to feel more fully. Right. And that does two very important things.

One is that it begins to relax any holding I have, relax any tightness or constriction or way in which I'm manipulating the breath unconsciously. That begins to relax, and as that relaxes, it changes my inner life, my mind and my heart. The other is that an ordinary mind is often following the chain of associated thinking, just following the thoughts that arise, and kind of being carried along by them and repeating them and ruminating and without much concern or thought about how useful it is to think, how appropriate it is to think, what the impact of thinking is. Are there better ways of thinking? Do I even have to think so much? Is it okay to take a vacation and quiet and relax?

And so to learn to follow something else besides the train of thinking, to follow breathing... Then the energy of the mind, the fuel of attention, is not going there to fuel more thinking, but becomes fuel for greater attention, greater awareness of breathing. And it becomes an alternative to the thinking, so thinking begins to quiet down, as not being reinforced. So simply staying and following the breath as best we can. This is following the rhythm, staying with it, staying with over time. Some people find it helpful to count the breath. I used to, for years, count the exhale up to 10 and then start over again. If I lost count, I'd just start again at 1, in a very simple way.

But some way, just follow the breath, be with the breath, be massaged by breath. Okay. Receive the experience of breathing, be available for it and stay with it. Mind wanders off, come back and stay with it. Ride the breath, surf the breath. Imagine that the rhythm of breathing is like the breathing is petting you, the cat in you or something, so you can purr. Just stay with it.

And that begins to quiet the reactive mind, the thinking mind, a mind that often creates a lot of tension, the mind that maybe has created the uncomfortable breathing that might be there. So sometimes just staying with the breath settles and quiets so much for us. So we start learning over time the interaction between breathing and the mind, breathing and thoughts, breathing and emotions. We can see how they interact and are mutually dependent on each other, and how mindfulness of breathing is an antidote to being caught in thoughts, caught in reactivity. It helps to quiet the reactivity, helps to decrease the stress, relax the holding that we have.

So breathing is very, very simple in a certain way, and the idea for mindfulness of breathing

is to keep it simple. Okay. If it's not simple, then it's probably not going to support you. It's not an engineering job. It's not a goal-oriented job. It's not like we're trying to hold on tight and laser into the breath to really get focused and concentrated.

We can get concentrated, but the word for concentration that I like is settled, steadied, unified. That builds over time. It's a gentle building. It's almost like we're making space, as we're staying with breathing, for things to settle and steady and gather and be unified. So to not be, to be very spacious, very simple, to be simple awareness that stays with the breathing the best you can. And you learn how not to give in, how to let go of the trains of reactive thoughts you might have. Don't keep reinforcing them.

Just the simplicity of coming back, trusting this. And the simplicity of breathing, that nothing has to be solved. Nothing has to be fixed. Nothing has to be believed, nothing has to be made a story into a story. Very simple. So having that at the beginning of meditation, the foundation of meditation, it's the first instruction, not only because it's beginning instructions, but because it's the very foundation. It's at the center of meditation, and everything else kind of wonderfully kind of radiates from that center, an awareness that radiates from mindfulness of breathing.

So please for this day, stay close to your breathing. I don't know how you can remember to check in with your breathing throughout the day at times. Try to stay with your breath, even if it's three breaths. Close your eyes. Just be with three breaths and see what that does. Be with five breaths and see what that does, and then continue with what you're doing.

Before you're going to drive, sit down and close your eyes. Three or five breaths. Before you turn on a device, three breaths. When you've turned the device off or put it down, three breaths. Before you're going to do something, wash dishes. So stand in by the sink and take three breaths, or simply check in, how is your breathing right now?

And what emotions, what mood is being somehow contained by or expressed through how we're breathing? And take this day not to fix anything, but to become familiar. Recognize what's happening, how your breath is, and how mindfulness of breathing, this simple mindfulness of breathing, can shift so much. So thank you, and I hope that you enjoy your breathing today, and I will do the same. Thank you.