

## Guided Meditation: How We Are Aware

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Hello and welcome to this half an hour of exploring the nature of attention, exploring the nature of how we are aware of anything at all.

And as an introduction for this meditation, I'd like to use an analogy that most of us have held a lot of things in our hands over our lifetimes. And you can probably think of, you've held things in many different ways. Sometimes you've gripped things and wouldn't let them out of your hand, wouldn't let go. Sometimes you've stood on the edge of a big drop and held onto a railing for dear life, tight and firm. Sometimes you've maybe held a weapon to protect yourself. Sometimes you've held a child carefully and tenderly.

Sometimes you've maybe picked up a, maybe a butterfly has landed on your palm and you just held that almost weightless creature in your hand, open, careful, tenderly. Sometimes you've held something that was fragile, very gentle holding. All kinds of ways in which you've held, all kinds of things that you've held. So there's two things. There is what you're holding in your hand and how you're holding it in your hand. Same way with awareness. There is what you're aware of and how you're aware of it.

And the same way with the analogy of the hand, how the mind knows something, how the mind attends to something. It can be tight, can be under pressure, can be holding on tight. It can be loose and light and soft. The mind's equivalent of an open hand. The mind's equivalent of a gentle, and the way that you would hold maybe a newborn baby so gently, or maybe the way you would pet a cat with an open hand and with care and attention, or the way that you would put your hand on the back shoulder of a friend who is having a hard time. All these different ways that you would, can be aware.

And in mindfulness practice, we are not only noticing what we're aware of, the breathing, the body, the sensations, the sounds, the thoughts, the emotions. But central to it all is to start

being sensitive to how we're aware of it. And that maybe we bring with us a lot of extra effort in how we're aware. Some people bring a sense of duty and obligation. There's a big should. I have to do this.

Some people bear down with their mindfulness, like I have to really penetrate and understand this. Some people are spinning a lot of thoughts about what they're aware of, kind of holding themselves at a distance from it, maybe because they don't want to feel it, or maybe because they feel like they have to analyze it. Some people pull back where the awareness is kind of rejecting something. Some people lean forward because they want to savor it and enjoy it and keep it as long as they can. In mindfulness practice, the art of it is to keep the awareness, keep the way that we attend to anything at all, keep it calm, relaxed, open, as if the mind doesn't move.

The mind just is here, available. The mind just knows that. The mind doesn't have to do anything, doesn't have to tighten, doesn't have to hold anything. It just is available. We just allow experiences to arise in the mind, arise in awareness. Anything extra is something that, through mindfulness meditation, we slowly, bit by bit, learn to recognize and let go of.

So to begin, by assuming a mindful posture and gently closing your eyes. And as you're here now, how would you characterize your ability to be aware, to be mindful, to attend to the present moment? Is it weak or strong? Is it clouded over by a lot of thoughts? Is there a lot of energy, activation in the mind that makes the awareness scattered or jumping around?

Is there any tension or pressure in the awareness? A sense of reaching forward, wanting something. Is there a sense of inertia or resistance, pulling back, collapsing, maybe wanting to give up? And as if it's okay to be any way you are, with your mind, with your awareness. For five breaths, breathe with that. Just know it, allow it to be this way.

Counting five breaths as you feel it, accompany it, allow it to be. And when you finish your five breaths, lower yourself, lower your awareness, your center of gravity, into the torso, to where the movements of breathing come and go, appear and disappear. The movements of the chest, the belly. And then in a gentle, not such big way, allow your breathing to take some fuller breaths, expanding more fully as you breathe in. And a long exhale in which you relax the body, soften in the shoulders, the chest, the belly.

And maybe, with the same way of breathing or a little bit less full, as you breathe in, feel the thinking mind. And as you exhale, relax the thinking mind, letting your breathing return to normal. And now, as you breathe in and breathe out, know that you're breathing in and out. Feel the sensations of breathing in and out. Be aware of the sensations in the body of inhale

and exhale.

And then notice how you're aware, how you know, how you sense. And as you breathe in, can you open awareness, the sense of knowing, the sense of feeling, as you would open a clenched fist, open your hand, open the hand of your awareness. And on the exhale, relax and soften any tension associated with awareness, allowing the meeting of breathing and awareness to be a peaceful meeting, calm meeting place.

And it's sometimes said that when the mind gets involved with thoughts, that the mind has wandered away. And with that metaphor, people bring their mind back to the present. But the mind never goes anywhere. It's always here. When you notice you've been involved in thoughts, don't move the mind. Let the mind be peaceful and calm.

Relax the mind and allow breathing to reappear in the mind. No need to bring the mind back to breathing. You might have attitudes of being for or against what's happening, reacting to what your experience is, how you are, and to know that, to feel that, and allow everything to be in awareness, in an open, gentle way. There are always two things happening. There's what you're aware of, and how you're aware, in a caring, gentle way.

Adjust how you're aware, so it's calm, peaceful, without any tension, pressure. And in being aware this way, now, how is it to be aware of whatever is happening in the present?

And then as we come to the end of the sitting, to now, as you're breathing, notice the quality of your mind. The quality of attention, awareness, has it shifted from the beginning. And in that open awareness, clear awareness, to open up to the wider world, people, people who you'll see, know, and offer goodwill. Have a well-wishing for this world, so that the meditation practice you do is for the sake of your own well-being and the well-being of everyone.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. And may we live with this attitude, with this orientation, so that our awareness touches everything, everyone with our goodwill. Thank you.