

## Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation, Class 1

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Those of you online as well. And it's my delight to be able to do this with you. And it's kind of meant as a beginner's course. But what I like to say is there's two kinds of beginners. There's beginner beginners and there's experienced beginners. And in Buddhism, that's all there is.

So I'm still an experienced beginner. I'm still learning. And I little bit hope that I'll learn something even teaching this intro class that I've taught for so long, done this for so long. So welcome. Yes, it's anywhere. And so I'm going to introduce to you the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, which goes back to the Buddha, and which is a wonderful practice because it doesn't have to be Buddhist.

Right. Buddhism needs mindfulness, but mindfulness doesn't need Buddhism. And so I'll use the B word some, but it's kind of hopefully Buddhist light. I'm not trying to make you Buddhists or necessarily get you to fall in love with Buddhism. And there's not a lot of teachings about Buddhism you'll get here for this five-week course. It's really a course in mindfulness.

And when I was introduced to this practice for the first time, it was in Asia. And the instructions were all given at one time. In Burma, I was given a cassette tape that was about 30 minutes long. I was supposed to listen to it. And that was the instructions for a long retreat that I sat. And that was okay.

But what we've learned, what I've learned, is actually better to spread it out, and to kind of spend time on the foundational elements of it. And then once we have the basic elements to tie it together, to get a sense of what the whole is like. And so the foundations that we're using here is today it's more the introduction to the practice, the mindfulness of breathing.

And then next week it's mindfulness of the body. So we're expanding from the breathing out into the body.

And then the third week we expand in a sense more to our emotional life, and mindfulness of emotions, which is very important part of the practice. And then with those as a foundation and a support, then we do mindfulness of thinking. And I suspect some of you will be thinking in meditation before that. And that's okay. But mostly, if you can't ignore it, because then in the fourth week is when I'll actually give instructions.

And having learned something about mindfulness of breathing, body and emotions, you'll have more wisdom and understanding of how to be mindful of thinking so you're not caught in your thoughts. And then the fifth week, we tie it all together into a whole and talk about more about how to go forward and onward with it. And so the course is progressive and we're building on it. It doesn't have to be this way. I could offer the instructions in half an hour and send you home. But I think this works much better.

And in the course of it also we'll do some meditation. And the meditation will be relatively brief, at least for me, but hopefully enough to start getting the practice of it and in doing that understand what the instructions are. Sometimes the instructions are understood more just listening to it. Sometimes people understand the instructions. Some people are readers, and reading is how they take it in.

If that's the case, my book that's available for free is on the counter as you leave. It's called *The Issue at Hand*. It's a blue book. And there's some chapters in there that offer the basic instructions there as well, following the same sequence of breath, body, emotions, and thinking. So if your reading is good, you can pick up the book anyway, but it's there for you to have if you'd like.

And some people learn better by doing. And so the little guided meditation we'll do, we'll maybe help, and maybe all of those together is a nice package for understanding. One of the things I like to do, and maybe I irritate people by saying this, is I'll say this practice of mindfulness, it actually doesn't work if you don't do it. So that's how it works. You have to do it.

It's about doing it. It's about engaging in it. And so I think it works better if during the course of these five weeks, if you can do some of this every day at home and do it as long as it makes sense for you, if it's a busy life that you have. I'll say more about that. But also aware that it's really hard for some people to meditate regularly and have the discipline, all kinds of reasons.

So part of what I orient myself to here is for people to learn about mindfulness and learn about some of the wise ways to be with things like emotions and thoughts and yourself and have some understandings that can support you, that will support you even if you don't meditate. So, keep that in mind in case you don't feel like you have to meditate or I'm hoping this program here is valuable even without that. And then some of you will be challenged and you'll decide that you fail. And there is no failing in this practice. There's no such thing.

It's all practice, all just something to notice, something to be aware of, something to bring mindfulness to. Oh, look at that. I was supposed to be with my breathing and I spent five minutes thinking about something. You didn't fail if what you do is when you notice that, you really see it. Oh, that's what's going on here.

Look, I was lost in thought. And maybe you've never really seen that with clarity before. You go around always lost in thought, but you don't even know you are because you're so pulled into that world of thinking. But to see it in the context of sitting and meditation gives you a vantage point that you can begin to become wiser about it. You begin seeing the patterns of your mind.

You might see that usually what you think about when you think about wonder often thought, it's about work, or it's about something you're afraid of. Oh, look at that pattern. I'm beginning to understand myself. So whatever happens, including what you might call failure or it's impossible to do, it's just one more thing to notice. You might think it's impossible, I can't do it.

And you might say, wait a minute, sitting there, well, this is, you notice that, you really see it. This is telling myself it's impossible, not doing it. I've heard that voice before. In fact, this is a regular thing I tell myself. And here I'm asked to not believe it, but rather to see it, to take a good look at it.

Oh, this is the mind that doesn't think there's some failing, or it's impossible or too difficult. Isn't that interesting? So there's no failing if you understand that mindfulness is just to take a good look at what is actually going on, including what you call failing, if you want to call it that. And in the process of doing this, one of the things that we're beginning to learn is to unstick awareness from what we're aware of. Usually we're so glommed on, so caught in our thoughts, in our feelings, emotions, reacting to them, being them, fighting them, somehow glued to them, that we're not really free, we're not really wise, we're not really seeing clearly because of that, how closely we're connected and identified with these things, our beliefs, our stories, our histories, our emotions, our desires, our aversions.

There's kind of a stickiness to them. And as we practice, we're unsticking the awareness, so that we can be present with what is here. We can see, we can know, we can feel what's happening. We can be aware of what's happening and there's a qualitative different way of being with it which is not glommed on, not stuck, not pushing, not fighting it. But we're kind of like getting a bird's eye view or the bigger picture or creating breathing room for who we are and what's going on that people usually don't have.

And so that's a slow process, but part of this is to unstick ourselves from all the things that we're kind of caught in. And that process of doing that, unsticking, is you'll certainly discover how much you get stuck. You'll see how you get pulled into thoughts or pulled around by emotions or collapsing into emotions or fighting them or something. It's all kinds of ways which we're involved with them. And that's actually good to see, as opposed to thinking that you're supposed to be an angel when you sit and meditate and blissed out on a wonderful cloud of ecstasy or something.

What we want to do in mindfulness practice is not about having some wonderful experience of calm, which can happen when you practice. But more important than that is to become just calm enough that you're not stuck with your experience and you can start becoming wise. You can understand how you get stuck, understand how you react, understand how you suffer, how you add stress and tension to your experience. That's what we want to learn to see. If it's only about becoming calm and you don't understand how you get stuck, you just keep getting stuck.

And then maybe you have to run to meditation to unstuck, and then you go back into the life and you're stuck. But we're trying to use meditation to get calm enough to see clearly what's happening, how we get stuck. And that's another reason why you can't fail. You're not supposed to be unstuck. You're supposed to see what is actually happening.

And if you're stuck, caught in something, caught up in something, the idea here is take a good look. Notice that clearly. And that'll be a lot more sense how to do that by the fifth week. So we're kind of building the capacity to be able to do that. Does that make sense enough?

So let's wait for this person to come, and then we'll start with a... You don't have to change your posture, but we're going to do a very short little exercise. Okay. Welcome. Welcome. So we're going to do a very short... So you don't have to do anything special.

Just sit quietly and close your eyes. And with your eyes closed... Count three breaths, quietly and calmly, to take a three-breath journey. And when you're finished, you can open your eyes. So I call this a three-breath journey.

In the course of life, going about your day, there might be from time to time that you have enough time to stop, maybe close your eyes, maybe not if it's not appropriate, but to do this three-breath journey. What happened to some of you when you did this just now? What changed for you over those three breaths? Maybe we could use the mic. Those of you on YouTube, if you want to put it in the chat, I might see it.

I felt calmer. You felt calmer. Correct. You can either use the mic or I'll repeat you what you said. So calmer.

It's okay. So someone else? Right behind. Yeah, let's use the mic. Hello, I slowed down. Okay.

I slowed down. You slowed down. Uh-huh. And was that nice? So behind you?

I noticed my thoughts, that my ear was cold, and that I was thinking my husband's probably breathing faster than me because he usually does. And what? He breathes faster than me. So you noticed something around you? Yeah.

Well, I was imagining. And how did you change in the course of that time? More aware, more aware of the thinking mind. And was that nice to be aware? Or was it mostly a drag?

Mixed. I had mixed feelings about that. Great. Someone wrote here on YouTube, I was aware of my awareness, heightened sense of here and now, mindful of the body. Notice the song stuck in my head.

So perfect to see how you're stuck. And more aware of my body. So you'd be surprised how much can happen was such a small thing. I didn't really tell you to do much at all. Did I accept count one to three?

That was all? It required some attention. I didn't tell you what kind of attention to do. It was a little bit to be present enough to be with that instead of being with maybe your preoccupations, maybe the momentum of the mind that usually there was a little, maybe a little pause that you experienced. And that three breaths can make a big difference at times.

Waiting for a traffic light to turn green might be long enough to take a three-breath journey, and it just shifts something in you. You relax more, you settle more, you're more in your body. Maybe nothing like that changes, but you see what's going on for you. Say, wow, am I ever furious? I didn't know I was so angry.

You know, this is what being angry is like. This is a drag. I think I better drive more carefully, given how angry I am. And you save yourself an accident because you took a three-breath journey. You saw something about yourself.

So that mindfulness can be that easy. It doesn't have to be complicated. It's an ability to kind of little bit stop the normal flow, activities of the mind, activities that you're doing in order to take stock, become aware of what's actually happening here. But just simply stopping the usual things is enough sometimes for things to begin to relax, to settle. The movement of tension that we often have in the day.

Oh, if you have trouble hearing, we have hearing system devices too. Is the volume okay? So there is hearing system devices, but they hear from the... Right next to it. Great, good.

So a lot of the tension we carry with us is being perpetuated by the continuity of tense thoughts, preoccupied thoughts, anxious thoughts. And if we stop all that thinking, just a teeny bit, slow it down. If we let the body be still a little bit and feel the body, then that tension in the body, what it wants to do is to relax, given half a chance. So the three-breath journey might be enough sometimes to create a little bit more relaxation, a little bit more calm. And that helps with then to be able to see more clearly, and maybe begins helping with that unsticking of what the practice can do.

So we do this sometimes in what's called meditation, formal meditation. And that can be done, and for that purpose, we distinguish between sitting meditation, walking meditation, standing meditation, and lying down meditation. Those are called the four dignified postures. So you can meditate in any of those postures. Lying down is a little tricky because it's easy to fall asleep.

Standing can be tiring for a long time. The two that we most often do in our tradition is walking and sitting, and more often sitting meditation. So that's what we're going to focus on here. So why don't we wait? We all together.

She's looking for the hearing assistant devices. Okay. Another person here said that they were relaxed when the three breaths journey. The little knob is on... They turn it on top, the wheel on top to turn it on? Here.

So this is... You turn this and the light goes on. And then you have to find just the right volume because if too much or too little, there's a problem. And then this one here goes... This side here is the back.

The tail is the back, and then it goes over here like this. Oh! So we make sure the tail's in the back. Okay, thank you so much. You got it now? Almost?

No, maybe then I can help. Yeah, so... Hi, welcome. You missed the introduction, which is fine, and that's it. Are you on YouTube?

Are you listening? Oh, how wonderful. And then your timing is perfect. Okay, great. And can you hear now?

Great. I sometimes need those devices too. And then I have a soft voice that... So then we... So with sitting meditation, and usually what's nice with sitting meditation is to be very careful with your posture for sitting meditation.

So I'll talk a little bit about posture, but there's a number of reasons for that. One is you want to find a posture that's going to be comfortable for the duration of the meditation, but not too comfortable because you don't want to fall asleep. You also want to find a posture that's comfortable, but also contains within the posture, it's a posture of being alert, not alarmed, but just kind of a posture of attention. And usually, for everyone, that's going to be a different thing because you have to deal with your posture, whatever body you have and your condition. So there's no...

So laying down, for example, some people have to do that, and it's completely fine. But you want to give some attention to how you can arrange your body so there's some intentionality in it. So I'm like, I'm here. Like you're kind of like, okay, I'm going to be present. So if we're sitting on a chair, you would actually send us sit up straight, a little bit straight, and not slump in the backrest, and maybe the chest would be out.

If you're going to be laying down, what some people find useful to do to get a little bit of that intentionality is to have their hands at a right angle, kind of the elbow, pointing to the ceiling. So there's, actually your hands have to be engaged. And if you start getting dull or sleepy, your hand starts falling on your body and you have to kind of remember to stay present. Or if you drift off in thought, you see the hands kind of going someplace else. So you want to sit up so a little bit straighter than usual.

And if you're sitting on the floor, I see some people sitting quite nicely. The usual way is to, so both legs are kind of symmetrical. And... And then there's the Burmese fashion, which is more like sitting over there. And you're comfortable, but for the chair, and you want to have the feet kind of squarely on the floor, because that's more of a posture of attention.

And if you want to have some kind of cushions under your floor, we have, you know, to have a little bit of height support, that's a nice thing to do. If you're tall, then sometimes it's good to put a cushion on the chair because it's best to have the knees slightly lower than the hips. And when you're sitting on the floor, it's usually we want to sit elevated on a cushion. And there's a way of sitting cross-legged where you don't actually cross the legs. The one is in front of the other.

And the idea is to have a little bit of that curve in your lower back, both, because in the long term, that's more of a natural way of being that kind of aligns the back better and strains the back less. And then to... Do with your hands whatever seems comfortable to you. I've gone through trends over the decades I've meditated, and lately my hands palm down kind of on my thighs. For a long time I had my hands in front of me, resting on my ankle, and for a long time before that, doing Zen practice, we have the hand elevated like this, so it's kind of floating in the air.

So whatever is comfortable for you, but if you have your hands too far forward, or if you have your hands too low, sometimes it pulls the shoulders forward. So what can be nice is to get something to put your, like this. And even sometimes people on the chair like to have some height for their hands, like to go like this or something. And then we usually meditate with the eyes closed. It's not required.

Some people will meditate with their eyes open. And the usual, eyes open, that's particularly good if you're sleepy. Meditate with eyes open. But the usual way is to have the eyes pointing down at about a 45 degree angle, kind of looking at the floor, and having the kind of loose focus as if you're looking at a mountain far in the distance. So you're not actually focusing on anything in front of you.

But otherwise, if it works for you, it's nice to close your eyes. And one of the reasons to close the eyes is so there's less things to notice, to see and get pulled into and just simplifies things more. So it's easier to drop into the meditation itself. So let's try that. So take what for you would be a meditation posture, relaxed and alert.

And with your eyes closed perhaps, it's helpful in the beginning to take a few long, deeper breaths, letting your chest and belly expand. And then on the exhale, the longer exhale, relaxing your body as you do it. And those deeper breaths at the beginning is a way, it's almost like a ritual, reminding you that you're here and now in this body at this time. And here, this is the area of attention. This is the domain of mindfulness, of attention.

Not tomorrow, not yesterday, not fantasy, not in conversations, not in the movies of your mind, but here in this body. And then gently let your breathing settle, let your breathing return to normal. And we're not going to meditate for very long, about five minutes. And maybe what you want to do is a series of three breath journeys. But mostly see if you can hang out with your breathing.

If it helps you stay there, you can count up the three and then start again. And if you notice that your mind gets stuck on something else, you lose touch with the breathing. You're al-



ready doing the practice right when you notice that. No need to judge it or anything. And then begin again with the breathing.

And then to finish these five minutes, you can take a few longer, deeper breaths again. Feel your body and prepare yourself to open your eyes when you hear the bell. So we started it before with a three-breath journey and now it was a five-minute journey. And five minutes is plenty of time to get to change something a little bit. And sometimes it's easier to get some of the benefits of meditation if you meditate for a short time, because there's less opportunity to wander off in thought and get caught up.

And also sometimes when people have a longer period of time, they begin casually. And they're kind of like, I'll get around to it. They're not really giving themselves over to it. But five minutes might be kind of like, oh, this is a precious time. This is an important time.

Let me do this now. This is also long enough that you can do it in the course of an ordinary day. There might be a five-minute time during a lunch break that you take. And just those five minutes can actually be really beneficial. And you might be able to sprinkle it in some days through your day, especially days where you're doing something that's very challenging, that you could really benefit from just calming down a little bit.

And you don't have a lot of time, but maybe you can do five minutes. So how did some of you change? What happened to you in the course of those five minutes? Can we get some reports about how that was? Yeah, let's wait for the mic.

Okay. That way also the people online can hear. My heart rate went down. Uh-huh. That's very nice.

Did you appreciate that? I did. Yeah, definitely. Great. Something I aspire to.

Very nice. Very nice. I get more aware of how many thoughts I was having, like every second, and they were just wandering around all different places. And a little bit louder? Sorry.

Oh, yeah, I was saying that I was wondering, I realized how many thoughts I was having per second. Like they were going all different places. Yeah. When I realized I was wandering around in my mind, then I told myself to come back to focus on breathing. And then maybe a split second later, my mind started wandering again.

It was like, yeah. But in the course of those five minutes, did you get a little calmer at all? No. I think so. When I heard the bell and then opened my eyes, I think I realized how much calmer I have become compared to five minutes ago.

Great. Fantastic. Okay. So... I sank into the meditation really easily and was very calm.

And I must have some sort of internal clock because about 10 seconds or so before you rang the bell, I started to feel an itch in my ear and my legs started wanting to move. And so I started to become aware of my body in a way that I wasn't for at least four and a half of those minutes. Great. That could be good. I felt very soothed and quiet.

Yeah. And you enjoyed that. I did. Good, good. Any other comments?

Did anybody find it difficult? That's also allowed. Anybody want to share what that was like, how it was difficult? I found it difficult to focus, so I spent all my time counting the breathing, and that's how I stayed kind of from one breathing. So you wouldn't have to wander off so much?

Exactly, exactly. And was that nice for you to do it that way? Yeah, I couldn't count one to three, so I counted one to six, but it works the same. The math is the same. So I saw the hand over here if you could pass it over.

Yeah, at the beginning, I felt like I was doing fine. But I have a bad back, so once that started to flare up a little, I noticed how fast my thoughts went straight to my back, like is my back doing okay? So it's something I have to work on. Was that useful to see for you, or did it allow? Yeah, like I never really... thought about how much I was thinking about it before, but I know like there's nothing else to do but think about it.

So I realized like, okay, it's like every second. I'm like, okay, checking in on my back. So you're a little bit stuck to the pain. Yeah. Yeah.

Maybe for good reason. And next week we'll talk about how to meditate when we do mindfulness of the body and talk about meditating with pain. You have to be very careful when something like an injury, like a bad back, that the posture you use doesn't aggravate it. Yeah. And if you think it's aggravating it, then you should find another way of being.

Yeah, and I was also mindful of not making too much noise and trying to shift around. Oh, not making too much. So you wouldn't disturb people, you mean? Yeah, yeah. Oh, I think that's nice that you're concerned.

And at the same time, there's a wonderful idea that we have. I think it's wonderful. Yeah. Is that in this practice, there's no distractions. There's just one other thing to pay attention to.

So yes, it's nice if not make sound. But don't worry too much about it because if you're taking care of yourself and you're making a little bit of sound, that's just something else for people to notice in the present moment as opposed to it being a problem. So feel free to move. All

right, thank you. So I have done centering prayer, as I said, quite a number of times.

And this was similar in that, you know, I'm going for like five seconds and then I realize, oh, I'm not on topic at all. Completely thinking about other things. Okay, come back. So I come back. And then I leave.

And then I come back. And then I leave. And I come back. And it's like that all the time. Yeah.

And but is that beneficial for you? Okay. Yeah, it's probably good for me to hear from you. You know, it's not about judgment of what you're doing. And so I need to not judge that.

Oh, how come I can't just sit and not have these continual interruptions about me? There are some people, and we'll talk about thinking in a few weeks, but there are some people who meditate. That's their experience actually all the time. But there's something, because every few seconds, or every five seconds, 10 seconds, they're not going along with the usual pattern, just letting the thoughts carry you away. It's actually a very powerful effect on the mind, on the heart, on the body, to interrupt the continuity we have.

And slowly there's more wisdom that arises, more understanding that arises, more equanimity, a certain kind of calm. And maybe the thought thinking never stops that way, but the cumulative benefits of it just grows over time. And so you don't have to expect, set up some standard. You're supposed to have a non-thinking mind in deep meditation. Some people never have that, and they get tremendous amount of benefit.

Other people find that their thinking does calm down and gets very quiet and very still at times, and sometimes it's almost like you've stopped thinking. Any other comments or any questions about that so far? About anything about the meditation we just did or the challenges or anything I've said? Breathing, do I just breathe very naturally? Wait, wait, wait, wait.

Yes, oh. Yes. Do I just breathe naturally and not think about, I'm breathing in and I'm breathing out and trying to breathe out a little bit longer than breathing in? Am I counting my breath or am I doing this breathing? Yes, so that's a good question.

I like to teach people to breathe like we did here, little bit larger breaths to begin with just to kind of help you settle in and relax in. And then in our tradition, we emphasize just breathing in an ordinary way. Maybe we call it natural. There's no special effort to breathe. And so we're not doing an intentional heavy breathing or intentional way of breathing.

You're not doing yogic breathing of any kind. Just completely ordinary. Because what we're

learning to do in this meditation is to really rely only on awareness. Right? We're not trying to manipulate.

We're not trying to make something happen. We're not trying to use... You know, you can do yogic breathing and get very concentrated. But what we want to do here is if we're going to get concentrated, do it in a natural way, where we settle into it because everything is relaxing and quieting down. And the mind is beginning to rest with the breathing and just being pulled into just the breathing in a very natural way.

And so we're learning how not to be the ones who are always making the change, always fixing things, always making it better, always having a special experience, whatever it is. You know, I'm supposed to have a spiritual experience. We're trying actually to become unstuck from all those things and to just learn how to be present for our life as it is in a very simple, ordinary way. That might not seem very exciting, right? It's really good.

It's really healthy. And over time, it opens up to something very profound. So the rewards are there. But the idea here is to not... We're always trying to find out how to be content to be present for how things actually are, not how we want them to be.

Does that make sense? Now, the difference is that... Part of that is that some people can't breathe naturally. Right? Because they're controlling their breath all the time.

They're not trying to do it on purpose, but they just are. That's okay too. So if your system is controlling the breath and you can't stop it, don't stop it. Don't fight it. Don't try to fix it.

Just become the world expert on what it's like to have a controlled breath. Just to hang out with it, be with that. It's okay, because we're not trying to become good breathers. We're trying to develop our capacity to be aware of what's happening. And if what's happening is controlled breath, that's fine.

Don't make it a problem. Is that okay? So breathing is actually a very special phenomenon. It sits at the nexus, at the crossroads of all different kinds of parts of our human life. It cross-roads of our activity.

If we start doing something very vigorously, like running or something, the body knows to adjust the breathing so you can get enough oxygen coming in. You breathe fuller or deeper or faster. If you're afraid and the body thinks, well, now I have to get ready to fight or flight, you'll start breathing differently. If you get angry, your body's getting ready to do something. You shouldn't do probably.

And so the breathing changes again. If you're really at ease and at peace and feels very,

very safe... The breathing system knows that, or something knows it, and knows that now it doesn't have to engage the breathing in any particular way to accomplish something, and the breathing can be soft and sweet and just very calm and relaxed. Certain thoughts, how we think can affect the breathing. Intentions and desires can affect the breathing.

So many different things. This breathing is at the nexus or under the influence of so many different things in our psychophysical human body. And that influence goes in the other direction. If you learn to breathe in a relaxed way, soften in a relaxed way, then that affects the mind. It can affect your emotions.

Those emotions that come because we're tense, can begin to relax. Those emotions that come when we feel safe and soft can grow. The mind begins to relax when we start kind of resting and calmly with breathing. So breathing has a nice impact on the rest of us. Remember a friend of mine, and we know that.

Sometimes if people have panic attacks, they're asked to breathe, breathe deeply or something. And I was going to tell you my friend who was a longtime Zen student, and he was at a Zen center where he lived. That was there for the event. And he was working on the roof, and he fell off the roof and broke his arm. So the fire department came because to take him to the hospital and get his arm fixed.

So he was laying on the ground. And the fire person said to him, just breathe. Breathe. And, you know, he'd been a Zen student for years. He looked at me and rolled his eyes.

Because, yeah, that's probably what he was doing. He was just laying there. He was pretty calm about it all. And so because breathing is at the nexus of so many things, and because there's this reciprocal relationship between breathing and emotions, breathing in the mind, mind and breathing, you'll start seeing that when you meditate. Right?

And you'll start appreciating, it's often to your advantage to just breathe in a natural way and notice when the breathing gets tight, when it gets constricted, when it starts being speeded up because of your emotions. And then it might be easy, I don't know how easy it is, but it might be possible to come back to a natural breath, to come back here. You know, I'm safe right now or I don't have to be angry with anybody right now. And it's okay to breathe easily here. I don't have to get tense with my breathing or speed up the breathing.

Let's come back to that calmer breath. And that can have a big effect on all these other things in our life. So in some, like in India, the word for breath is almost the same thing as the word for life or for living. In Sanskrit, *prāṇa*. And so these are very closely connected, that breathing and life, breathing in our inner life, breathing in our emotional life, our mental life.

Breathing is not just breathing. Breathing is an amazing thing. So to hang out with it, spend time with it, get to know it, appreciate it. Have you ever said thank you to your breathing? It's done you a lot of good.

It's kept you alive all these years. Have you ever realized how much the breathing adjusts and changes? That's energy and more oxygen is needed. It adjusts and changes and does what it needs to do. It's an amazing phenomenon.

I've known some meditators who have, what's helped them in their meditation is to imagine that each in-breath is their first breath. And I know some people who imagine that every exhale is the last breath, last exhale of their life. And then they combine it. And there's something very, keeps people very engaged with this idea of letting go and just being there with the exhale. This is the last.

And then being there for the first one. And just getting absorbed and just being with the breath, trusting the breath, in trusting yourself in breathing. To entrust yourself with breathing, to really trust you, all you have to do is be with the breathing. Is another way of trusting that there's a very deep psychosomatic wisdom and intelligence in your body that knows how to take care of yourself if you know how to settle and get out of the way. And breathing is one of those ways.

So let's try it again. So this time I'll meditate for a little bit longer. So... You might want to adjust your posture accordingly for a little bit longer, maybe 15 minutes. We'll do.

And I'll do a little bit of guidance. So again, with your eyes closed, maybe. The little ritual of a fuller breath. Ritual of connection. Ritual of reminding yourself to be here and now.

And a ritual of relaxing as you exhale. And maybe you do that five or six breaths, and then return to a normal breath. And notice where in your body it's easiest to experience the body breathing. Is it in your chest? Is it in your belly?

Is it the air going in and out through your nostrils? If you have trouble feeling where the breath is in your body, you could put your hand on your belly, and feel the movement there. And if there's no movement in your belly, you might try relaxing the belly. Soften, let it hang forward. With an ordinary breath, you might spend a little bit more ritual of relaxing.

On the inhale, bringing your attention to your shoulders. On the exhale, relaxing your shoulders. On the inhale, feeling your belly. On the exhale, relaxing your stomach, your belly. And then to again feel where the breath breathing is easiest to experience in your body.

And relax into that spot, that area. Maybe expressing your gratitude for your breathing by

accompanying your breathing. To be there for the exhale, to be present for the inhale, in a simple, relaxed way. Maybe, if you can, to trust the value of spending time attending to your breathing. And if there's anything that makes it difficult for you to stay with your breathing, it's okay.

Notice what that is. And see if you can, with your breathing, relax more, settle. Okay. If your mind wanders off in thought, just notice that that's the case. The idea is to be as simple as you can with what's happening.

Notice how it is, and then begin again with your breathing. And as you breathe, there might be some ways you can relax in your body to relax. So the very thing that is distracting you or keeping your thinking going, relax the thinking mind. Okay. And in the last minute of the sitting, if you'd all feel a little calmer or more connected to your body or yourself with your breathing, breathe with that calm, breathe with that connection, settling in more.

And then to end the sitting, to take a few deeper breaths again, feel your body. And as I ring the bell, you can open your eyes. So we did a three-breath journey. We did the five-minute journey. And this was 15 minutes about.

And how was this? Was this different? What happened for you now this time? To spend more time with it. So if you're up there.

Thank you. I took this class from you about 10 years ago, maybe. So I wanted to refresh your course or at least a tune-up. And what I noticed during the first, the short, shorter meditation, I thought I had heard you say, count to three while you're breathing. And so I did that.

But I noticed this last time I didn't do that, didn't do that counting. And I felt more relaxed. Good. And I wondered if at some point you'll comment on the difference between having like a mantra inside or something to focus on, like, counting versus just being aware. Great.

That's a great question. In this tradition that I'm teaching in, one of the kind of ways of answering a lot of questions about how to meditate is to ask yourself, well, is it helpful? Is it helpful for you? Different people, different things are helpful. Different times, different things are helpful.

And so there is a long tradition in Buddhism of using counting as a way of staying present. And the way I was taught it, and I did it for many years, was to count from one to ten. And if you lost count, you just started again at one. And if you got to ten, you started at one again. And that would keep people engaged, people present.

And it was better than not doing it because the mind wouldn't wander off as much. Or you're

more likely to notice if the mind wanders off. And a friend of mine went to Japan to practice with a Zen master, who also taught him to count his breath, and the instructions he got there were, was to count up to one, and then start over again. And so there was no, you don't have to try to remember, there was even, it was just a lot simpler. Right.

The way I was taught when I learned this practice in Burma was we use something called mental noting. We don't use mantras. And the reason we don't use mantras is a mantra of, in our point of view, is a technique to intentionally calm the mind and concentrate the mind. And it's kind of like using crutches. It's like using an extra help.

And in our practice, we don't want to use any crutches or any extra help. We want to just really be present for how we are and find our way with that, become wise with that. And so often people, it takes longer to become calm our way than like with a mantra. But we believe in the long term, it's going to be much more beneficial to do it this way. But in Burma, what they did was they did something called mental noting was use a very simple, ordinary one syllable, one syllable, you know, one word that would kind of remind you, stay present here, stay.

And the one that I learned to do, what I did, when I make it really simple, sometimes I say in for the in-breath and out for the out-breath. And when I was in Burma, we were told to do the word rising as the belly rose as you breathe in and falling as it fell down. And that way we're pointing our attention to the experience of movement of the body. Just be there with that movement. And so what people learn to do is sometimes they find that's too busy to do the counting and just kind of agitating.

And sometimes people think it's agitating, but it's better than the alternative. Because the alternative is to get lost in thought for some people. And some people find that it's useful at certain times to do some of this. So still to this day, I might go back to counting if my mind is really spinning out of control. And it's just like, Gil, you know, this is a little bit too much.

And then I'll count to just kind of ground myself and get more settled. And then I'll stop counting. Sometimes I like to do this mental noting of in, out. It's just a nice kind of gentle, loving reminder. Stay here.

This is where it's supposed to be. Be here with the breath. I'm not trying to hold on to the breath. I'm not trying to get stuck on the breath. But it's just a nice loving reminder.

This is what to do. If something else comes up, like I'm thinking, and I notice that, then I notice that. I don't try to say it's wrong or that I'm supposed to be in the breath. I just, I'm kind of flow with whatever is going on. But in this first week that I'm teaching this, the idea



is for you to kind of see if you can keep it really simple by prioritizing the breath.

Sometimes the best meditation is the simplest one. And so just being with your breathing. And notice if something takes you away and be okay with it. But come back. Start again.

Start again. And so you might, if it's nice for you to do the counting, one, two, three, one, two, ten, one, two, one. You could do that. If you want to use a mental note, like a very simple one, it's a loving way of reminding you. A note that I use sometimes, also when my mind is really busy, I say to myself here, H-E-R-E.

Lovingly, kindly, remember Gail, stay here, stay here. And that's kind of nice to have that reminder. So thank you. Maybe we have time for one more if someone has? You can go ahead and then we can pass that green one to behind you there on the floor.

But you had some, you want to go ahead? Yeah, thank you. So this time, as you were guiding us, I really, I don't know how you were describing exactly, I can't remember, but... it was really striking me as the breath, not the breath, but actually the verb breathing when you would talk about it. Yeah.

It was like a being with it and just kind of letting it, you know, hanging out with it. And it started feeling like breathing was becoming like a friend. Like a friend. Yes, yes. Breathing.

Yes, yes. Was like being personified in a way. Great. And so then I just started feeling like safer and just, you know, I just could relax into it even more. And like it was just a nice... way to conceptualize it for me.

So I'm not exactly... I'll have to re-listen to this later how you described it, but there was something that helped me get there. So thank you. Very nice. Thank you.

Hello. I have a question about... I notice if I'm thinking... I'm thinking of something and I'm no longer aware of my breath. I'll come back to my breath.

But I notice sometimes... I have a wider awareness of a wider field of awareness, the breath, like as if I'm aware of the breath from the whole body's perspective. Yes. And sometimes the field of view is very small and centralized, like around the front of the face. So then when that happens, I'm not sure whether I should go back to the other one or doesn't matter or... So two questions you could ask yourself.

The best one is, which is most useful for you? Which is most useful? Is it more useful for you to stay with a wide field, more useful for the narrow one? And the answer might be different, different days. The second question you might ask, you have to be a little bit careful with this one that you don't get too attached to this idea.

And that is, which do you enjoy the most? And because you can get attached to and think it's supposed to be about joy, which is not. But it's possible to use enjoyment as a little bit of encouragement, a loving encouragement to stay present. If one of those two is more enjoyable, it's just easier to kind of get into it. Thank you.

So we're about to stop. And one of the, if you're up for it, which I'd encourage you to do, is to practice this, practice with the breathing for this week. So try meditating 15 minutes a day. If that's too long, three, five minutes through the day. And the reason for this is that a word that we use a lot for meditation is practice.

And it's like learning any skill. Like if you're going to learn a new skill, some new physical skills or playing an instrument or doing something, it's really awkward at first. And you're clumsy and it's challenging and you feel like, you know, like you don't, all you have is, I don't know, toes on your hand and you can't get anything done. But slowly, slowly, by doing it over and over and over again, you start learning the skill. And eventually, you're skilled at it, and you can do it really well.

It's a practice. Meditation is a practice, too. And so the repetition is really, really useful. And one of the reasons to do, during the course of this program, these five weeks, is that if you practice what we've done just so far with breathing in this way, maybe do the three-breath journey through the day and whatever, just practice this every day, that's going to create a foundation for you to be able to take in and incorporate or integrate into the next set of instructions about mindfulness of the body. It turns out that knowing how to be familiar with your breathing is a big support for knowing how to be mindful of body, including mindfulness of pain.

That's here. And then that week, if you practice further during the week and get more familiar with that and develop, practice it over and over again, then you'd be more prepared for mindfulness of emotion. To hear the instructions on mindful of emotion, if that was the first thing you heard, it might not be useful. Without that foundation for the others first. And so these talks are being recorded.

They'll be posted. Sometimes people like to listen to them again. If you're going to miss a week, and that's one way to stay current, but you can listen to it on Audio Dharma. And so it'll be posted, I think right this evening it'll probably get posted. And... And then we have two people here who are very familiar with IMC and can probably answer all kinds of questions you have about either meditation, if it's nice to talk to someone besides me, or if you have questions about the IMC.

So Nancy was sitting out there, and then Nenna here. So they're quite friendly, wonderful people, and you can ask them anything you want about these kinds of things. And I'll stay here. I'm available to you if you have any questions. And thank you for coming.