

Calm Clear Pleasure of Awareness

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So welcome back. And for some people, after lunch is a time where there's a lot of sleepiness. And there is a couple of things that might help with that. There's simple things like sitting up straighter, putting more energy in your posture so that there's a little more energy involved. Some people find it helpful to open their eyes, meditate with their eyes open. One way to do it is to keep your eyes half open, kind of looking down the floor, but still the light coming in and just the eyes open is less like falling asleep at night with your eyes closed, so it might keep you more awake.

Another is to just enough, not very much, without any ambition or without even the idea that you'll be successful, is to emphasize the inhale a little bit, that the inhale is a little bit more arousing than the exhale. Exhale tends to be settling and calming. The inhale tends to be more energizing, and it's more upwelling, lifting, and to tune in to the way there's a little bit more energy in the inhale, and just kind of take that in. And sometimes you can feel kind of a little bit more of a lifting of energy and presence as we breathe in, perhaps. And then certainly allow yourself to help to relax on the exhale, but kind of keep that up energy kind of present, kind of alive. Don't let go of that. And that somehow can keep you a little bit more alert.

And finally, a few couple other things, is that you can actually take a little bit of fuller breaths. Sometimes if you take a little deeper breath, you'll get a little bit more of that energizing, awakening effect of breathing in. And the other thing you can do is don't worry about it. And just do your best. One of the great guidelines for this practice of mindfulness is that you want to practice offering your practice the best effort that's available. And when you're sleepy, the best effort available is not so hot.

So it's what's available. You practice with that. So if you're sleepy, you do the best you can with that state, without fighting it or being upset with it or feel like there's something wrong.

Maybe when you're sleepy, the mind wanders off much more easily. And rather than thinking that the practice is to stop thinking, maybe the practice then is to be at ease. Find your peace with the mind wandering off.

Hopefully that's not the same as giving into it. But it is like, no, make it a problem. Of course, you're sleepy, the mind wanders, I'm not so present. So to be at ease with that, find your ease, find your peace with it, and then do the best you can with the energy with what's available. Come back, start over again.

And so to assume a meditation posture and either closing your eyes or maybe keeping them half open as needed, and to settle in more, you might take some deeper breaths, fuller breaths, so you have more, so you experience more of your body. It's kind of like a, from the inside out as you fill your lungs with air. It's almost like you're getting a massage from the inside out. Taking a deep breath and feeling the stretching, the opening, the filling. And then as you exhale, to relax, soften.

And then as you continue, you might return to a normal breathing. And with your normal breath, continue doing the same. Feeling that massage, feeling the lifting and expanding of the inhale. And if there's any tension that you feel, holding of your shoulders, your belly, you might relax and soften. And then taking a few couple of minutes, and as you're breathing, let your attention roam around your body, mind and heart, just to become familiar with how it is now.

A kind of a checking in with yourself, not trying to do anything or accomplish anything, just to calmly and clearly recognize how things are for you right now. So we sometimes start with breathing, and then we expand outwards to begin experiencing the body, the whole body, and the physical sensations of breathing occur within the wider field of body. And as you're sitting here now, experiencing maybe the global body, whatever way that's easy, can you find somewhere in this breathing body something that feels pleasant, some feeling of pleasure, sweetness, something that has a kind of nice feeling to it. Maybe not even tied to anything in particular. Maybe it's a gentle humming of the body, tingling of the arms, a soothing feeling as you breathe in or breathe out.

There might be sensations which are uncomfortable. The body might be in some pain. But for the time being, the exercise is to look beyond that. And more widely, is there something that energetically feels pleasant? And as you breathe, can the breathing include being in touch with pleasure?

Not an ordinary pleasure that your nerves are being stimulated by some nice object. But

something that's deeper, more subtle, more pervasive, is there anything here that's a reference point of being alive with some pleasure and to quietly, calmly, allow your breathing to move through that, to move with that? Is there any part of the breathing in the cycle of breath that is pleasant, enjoyable? The settling and releasing of the exhale, the smooth feeling of filling as you breathe in, the momentary stillness at the end of the exhale. And if there is, in fact, something that feels modestly, lightly, pleasant, something broad and open, can that be a touchstone for staying in the present moment, breathing with it, sensing it?

Maybe what can be pleasant or have pleasure is a very subtle feeling that in your senses, in your body, you're not resisting anything. That you're available to sense, to feel, to allow sensations, allow what's humming and vibrating and the very feeling of being alive feels good to be available, to be open. As you calmly sense, calmly know, breathing, body, pleasure, there may be discomfort, even pain. But rather than fixating on it, maybe there's a way of allowing it to be there floating in a wider field of awareness, a pleasant form of aliveness, so that it's not so difficult to feel the discomfort. It's part of something bigger.

As we come to the end of this sitting, if it's not too complicated, add to the calm awareness, calm, clear awareness. Can there be something in the family of pleasure? Calm, pleasant awareness. Calm, pleasure in being aware. Pleasure and some degree of clarity of awareness in the present moment. A clear, simple knowing.

And as you breathe, as you're here in the present, can your awareness, your mindfulness, feel supported by something about it that feels pleasant, feels good. And then taking a few long, slow, deep breaths, feeling connected to your body, feeling here present with your weight and your chair, your cushion. And when you're ready, you can open your eyes in the way that the Buddha taught mindfulness. He first taught mindfulness of the body, first breathing, then mindfulness of the body. And then it was mindfulness of what is sometimes called feeling tone, the pleasant and unpleasantness of experience.

And there's two kinds of pleasure. There's that which comes because something is pleasant, some particular thing. Food you eat is pleasant. Standing in the sun, there's pleasure to it. There's music and it's pleasant. But there's a different kind of pleasure, right, that is not related to any specific thing that's happening, but rather it has to do with this field of presence, this field of just being alive, the hum of vitality, the feeling, the broad field of just feeling alive and throughout our body and mind and heart.

And I like to think of it as a deeper kind of pleasure, sense of well-being. Maybe some people feel, sometimes it feels like joy or kind of very subtle happiness. It's diffuse. It's not particular. It's more like there's a very small little heater in the middle of your torso. And it slowly, im-

perceptibly almost over time, slowly warmed you up to all being up. The places in your body that feel unpleasant are warm, the places that are conventionally pleasant are warmed.

So this kind of gentle pleasure, and some people sometimes it's associated with the simple pleasure of being aware, the simple pleasure of being receptive and available. Sometimes it feels like a simple pleasure of a certain kind of depth of intimacy. We feel really intimate with our experience, that intimacy, that closeness. It feels good, it feels nice. And oddly enough, it's even possible to feel this kind of subtle pleasantness of being aware when what we're being aware of is unpleasant. There might be unpleasant emotions. There might be physical pain.

But there's something subtle, something diffuse about the way we meet that, calm clarity, that there's a kind of pleasure or pleasantness in that calm clarity, receptivity, openness. And it's easy to overlook because in the world of aboutness, where the mind and thoughts and preferences is interested in some thing, some object, something that, we start focusing in the specificity of things. And we usually don't kind of tune in to that which is very subtle. And there we can find something that keeps us grounded in the present moment and being aware.

So if what I'm saying makes sense to you, as we do this walking meditation now, you might see if you can walk in such a way that you walk with calm presence, calm awareness of walking, the experience of walking. You might walk where there's a calm clarity as you walk. You clearly know the step, the sensations, the movement, the contact with the ground, the stretching and pulling in of muscles as you walk. And maybe there's a calm, clear pleasure in that, diffuse and simple pleasure. And to stay connected to that, stay close to that, come back to it.

And you'll notice that when your mind gets involved in the world of aboutness, caught in thoughts, you'll lose that. But now you have something nice to come back to. If you let go of your thoughts, come back here to something in the family, something that resembles a calm, clear pleasure of just being alive, just diffuse and present in the moment. So if what I'm saying makes sense, enjoy your walking. If what I'm saying doesn't make one sense at all, you can leave my words here in this room and don't take them with you.

So enjoy your walk. We'll start in here at 2.45. So we have 40 minutes for the walking. And Marianne will ring the bell in about seven, eight minutes before 2.45. Thank you.