

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation, class 5-Sit Well and Do Nothing

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Good evening, everyone. And I apologize that I came late. I went for a hike with my wife and had dinner with her, and then settled down on the couch for a quiet evening at home until Nina called me, completely forgot. It's out of my habit to come down here, so... I forgot, but what a gift, I mean, to come down here and have you all sitting so quietly? I realized I wasn't needed. And to be able to hear Nana offering the instructions, I mean, that was like one of the best gifts of the day.

What a great thing. I should come late more often. So that was really nice for me. And it was nice that you were sitting so quietly. I didn't know whether I should even ring the bell and... Maybe we just sit the whole time.

Some of you probably haven't sat for a long time. I think the longest I ever sat and meditated without moving was six hours. So that's probably a little too early for that for you guys. Five hours probably. And so this is the last week of this five-week intro class. And I want to... offer you a little bit provocatively and a little bit seriously kind of the most profound way these teachings, these instructions can be given.

And it's very simple. It can be said in four words. Sit well and do nothing. I guess that's five words. Sit well and do nothing. And what sit-wells means is that whatever posture you're going to meditate in, it could be laying down if that's what you need to do.

Some people meditate standing, some do walking meditation. But go into that posture with some intention. What you don't want to do is take a meditation posture that's non-intentional or the intention is just to be a couch potato. Then it is a sit, kind of a posture that you want to inhabit so the whole posture somehow expresses attention. So that's the main doing. And then do nothing.

So you had to wait for the fifth week to hear that. But doing nothing with attention, with awareness. But you don't have to say being aware. If you really know to do nothing, you're left with being aware. Being aware is a natural capacity of the human mind. If I kind of... got really serious here and told you what to do, and said, what you have to do is stop being aware.

Just cut it out. You'd probably pull out your phone or something. What are you going to do? How are you going to stop being aware? You know, is there a button you can push to make it go off? Maybe some of you are smart and will figure out, well, I'll just get lost in thought that I'm no longer present, and maybe that's not being aware.

The point being, it's hard to stop being aware. It's a natural capacity. You have to do something to overwrite it. And one of those things is spin out with a lot of thinking. A lot of it is to react before and against. And a lot of it is to fight what's going on or to want more of what's going on.

Or, you know, in such a way that you kind of get lost in the drama of it all. But if you don't do anything... If you drop being for your experience, drop being against your experience, stop trying to accept what's happening at the same time as don't reject what's happening, just be there and be aware. Just be there. And do nothing. You will be aware.

And that makes a world of difference. Who you are... When you're aware, really aware, really present for what's happening, with some clarity, it's almost like you're a different person than when you're not aware. What your body is when you're aware of your body is almost like a different body than when you're not aware, when you're checked out. Same with your heart, same with your emotions. It's like a world of difference between the two.

And maybe that's not obvious in the beginning, because in the beginning, meditators bring along a lot of their doing, a lot of their judgments, preoccupations, the shoulds and shouldn'ts, along. So it's complex, not just being aware. It's not just doing nothing. We do a lot. But in this teaching of doing nothing, it's an encouragement for you to not be reactive to what happens when you meditate. You have all kinds of things that happen to you when you meditate.

And over a lifetime of meditation, you want to be able to meet all of your life, all of who you are. The point of meditation is not just to have a good experience, not just to be calm and be stress-free or something. But the point, really, the bigger, wiser point, is to know how to be present for anything that life gives you. To be present for anything that you give yourself. And there's ups and downs in life always. There's no way around that.

But you don't have to avoid it, and you don't have to be fighting it. You don't have to despair around it and collapse under the weight of it. And you can just learn to be present, and it makes a world of difference. And so what we're learning in this meditation practice is how to bring a very clear, clean awareness to the present moment for whatever it brings us. And to learn how little you need to do except to be aware. It's kind of unusual.

Most people are doing things. Most people who give instructions, like I did for the first four weeks of this course, I was telling you what to do, kind of, right? Right. It's very hard not to tell people what to do, or not to want to be told what to do. It seems like doing nothing doesn't do you any good. It does a world of good.

It brings us, that's what we do, like on vacation, people go and do nothing, kind of. Some people should really do nothing. And lay on the beach and look at the waves coming and going. And something settles, something relax, something eases up. The stresses of daily life are forgotten. And it feels like you're coming back into homeostasis.

And you're not the doer of it so much. Some people go on vacation, they're really going to work hard at, you know, de-stressing, you know, and they do something exciting or difficult or something and forget their problems. But some people do nothing. The people who do nothing sometimes come into homeostasis quicker than the people who are doing a lot of fun things. And some people have to recover from their vacation. But to do nothing, it's like having fallow time, having a Sabbath, having something that recharges you from the inside out, coming back into more of a natural state.

Our whole system wants to settle into a state where it's not always active, not always doing, not always fighting, not always fantasizing, not always thinking and planning or remembering or having arguments in the head. The whole system is designed to bring you into a calm, aware state so you can be in this world attentive and aware in a good way. And I think that we were kind of designed for this in ancient Africa, our original mother continent, that we had to live outdoors. We had to maybe hunt or gather or pay attention. We had to really have all our senses awake to be able to live in the natural world, kind of like an animal has to do. There was no, there was no, you know, Instagram or Facebook or no Netflix.

There was just the sunset and the grasslands and the lions and the... You know, the people that were there. And so to have a successful life, you had to be into homeostasis where your awareness was really awake. And your awareness cannot be awake and fully there if you're stressed, if you're tense, if you're anxious, if you're preoccupied. And we have a society where people are paid a tremendous amount of money to figure out ways to distract you. To get your attention, pull your attention into advertisements, pull your attention into the news,

into politics, into arguments.

And we fall for it. But we're designed to be awake. And be awake doesn't require doing anything. And then we live in a different way. So that's the radical and provocative instructions. Sit well and do nothing.

But, because that's hard to do, sometimes we say more. So another way of saying this in our mindfulness tradition, and the way that I was taught when I started, was it was also very simple, but I misunderstood it. I was more or less told, sit well, and pay attention to everything. Well, I was in this very kind of anarchistic, dog patch kind of a monastery outside of Bangkok where I was taught this. I was in a little meditation cabin, one room cabin with one little bed and little deck on stilts because it was built on a swamp. And I was told to go there and meditate all day long.

Then once a day I had to go see the abbot to get more instructions. So I did this, pay attention to everything for a few days, and then I went to the abbot and said... You know, I had this, got these instructions, and I'm smart enough to know that I shouldn't pay attention, I can't pay attention to everything that's happening all at once. So I narrowed it down and tried to listen to every sound in the noisy monastery. And I was chasing all the sounds to catch them, to be there for them. And I just keep getting a headache.

And so the abbot said, no, no, Gil, you don't understand. Yes, you pay attention to everything, but only one thing at a time. Right? Oh, that's why you're always so calm. He was very calm, man, because he was just, whatever he was paying attention to, whatever he was doing, that's what he had his attention. And he was just being there with that.

And in a calmly and open and clear way, it was kind of like, I'm with this doing nothing, but being aware. And in that simple awareness, then he could see what was happening more clearly, he could know himself more clearly, his relationship to what he had to do. And there was a kind of grace in how he did things, because he was so well attuned and present for what was going on. So that was a turning point for me, this idea of calmly pay attention only one thing at a time. But I also loved that we were supposed to pay attention to everything. When I would already been a... a long time Zen practitioner before I went to Thailand to learn this practice here.

And in Zen, in terms of what you do with attention, a lot of it would just stay with your breath. Your mind goes away, come back to the breath. If you're angry, we don't say and don't do anything about your anger. Just go back to your breath. Ignore it. Go back to your breath.

I don't like it. Go back to your breath. Just everything was the breath. It was kind of like just...

And so I didn't learn anything about how to be aware of my emotions. I didn't learn anything how to be aware of my thinking.

I didn't learn nothing about really being aware of my body in a wise way. Just like in Zen, you had to sit really still for a long time and not move. So there was a lot of physical pain. But you were supposed to ignore it. A lot of Zen students injured themselves that way. Because if you sit with pain too much, it's not so good.

Right. And so, but when I came to *Vipassanā*, there was this idea that, yes, pay attention to one thing at a time, but everything that is strong, whatever is compelling, whatever is important, let that be what you pay attention to. So if it's an emotion, emotions can be respected and honored, and they're important. Really be present for those. If there is pain in the body, be present for it. What I learned, that I didn't learn in Zen, if I paid very careful attention to my pain, I can tell the difference between pain which was fine to have and pain which was injurious, was going to injure me.

And in *Vipassanā*, we're allowed to move. So if I was going to be injured, I would change my posture. If I didn't think I was going to be injured, then I'd see, let's check my mind. Is my morale good? Is my enthusiasm for sitting with pain good today? Yeah, today it's pretty good because I want to learn.

I want to learn about my reactivity. I want to learn about how I hate my pain and all these second arrows I add to having pain. Today's a good day to learn that. Or, nope, I don't want to learn this at all. I want to... I better change my posture. So... Everything is the field of practice.

And what I learned in *Vipassanā* was systematically, first to learn how to be with the breath, then learning to be with the body, emotions, and then thoughts. And that's the sequence that we followed here. Until we come to the end where the instructions are. Now you're ready to begin being aware of everything, with the idea that those four areas kind of encompass the ways that our senses pick up the primary aspects of our life. So the body is all your senses. So hearing, eyes, tactile senses, smell, taste.

Emotions involves all your moods, all your attitudes, all your inner states of mind and heart. And thoughts includes the whole cognitive world you have. Everything that you experience in the world around you is kind of through those doors, through the senses, through your eyes, through your reactions, your memories, your thoughts, your associations, your emotions. So it's a kind of an all-encompassing way to be present for the ways in which we directly experience the world. We want to do that with a kind of intimacy, an aware, intimate, this is

what we're experiencing here. And then...

It's very good to stay with the breathing. Breathing is, for most people, breathing is settling, calming. It gathers you together. It quiets a thinking mind. But then, if something becomes more compelling, then we leave the breath and calmly become aware of that one thing. If it's the body sensations that are strong, we do calmly aware of that.

If it's... Emotions, we calmly aware of that. If it's the thinking mind which is strong, we learn how to calmly be aware of that. And by doing that, you begin learning the art of being aware of everything, or just, or doing nothing. And doing nothing, because you don't have to go chasing your experience like it did in that first experience in the monastery. Reality will come to you.

You will have sensations, you will have thoughts, you will have feelings. Things will occur. You don't have to go looking for it. If you're sitting grounded in the present moment, different times, different things come. And you get to learn about your reactivity, your judgments. You see what's going on for yourself more clearly.

And learn all the extra things you add that are not needed, that are not needed to be happy. It's remarkable how happy we can become for no reason. How happy you can become if we come back to homeostasis, to a balanced state where we're just breathing and present in a very clear, full way, without dragging ourselves down with blame or shame or criticism or feeling of lack or feeling wrong. If we don't over-activate ourselves with anger and hostility and restlessness and desires, it's remarkable how just sitting quietly, there can arise, bubble up a sense of well-being that is there because we're kind of sitting in balance. We're sitting without being in conflict with anything. We're sitting without being bored by anything.

Because boredom is an activity of the mind, a complicated activity of the mind. So that was a long little talk, I apologize. But maybe. But was this clear enough? So, let's try it. So I'll kind of guide you through this idea.

So assume a meditation posture that for you, in your way, through what you can do, is a posture of attentiveness. A posture that you would have if you wanted to have a balanced, upright, physical manifestation of being attentive, being here, being present. Right? And sometimes by taking a careful and intentional posture, immediately the body begins to become more felt, or you're more aware of the body, a place that many people are disconnected from, with all the screen time many people do spend. And then gently closing your eyes, and for a few moments, to do nothing but be aware. Without any idea of what it's supposed to be like, or what you're supposed to be aware of.

Just trust for a few moments. Just take it in, your present moment experience, and then in the middle of it all, become aware of your breathing. Breathing is one of those things that just happens on its own, often enough. And let yourself become connected to the body's experience of breathing. Breathing. And as you exhale, to relax your body as you exhale.

Maybe allowing your thoughts to glide away, fall off. Breathing can be your friend in meditation. The closer you can spend with the breathing, the less time you'll spend wandering off in thought. And then find the strongest sensation in your body. That's comfortable enough to be aware of. And may be accompanied with the rhythm of breathing.

Breathing with those sensations, breathing through them. Allow yourself to become aware, calmly aware of the body sensation. Maybe spending three more breaths with the sensation in your body. And then returning to just the breathing, centering yourself in the middle of where breathing is most clear for you. And then becoming aware of whatever emotion or mood or attitude there might be for you. To be calmly aware of it, maybe where it is in the body, so you feel the emotional expression.

And if you like, you can bring your breathing along. So it'll be easier to stay present for your emotional state. Breathe with it, through it, knowing it, simply, without having to do anything about it. And then returning to just breathing, centering yourself, steadying yourself on just breathing. And then becoming aware of your thinking, calmly. Be aware, as if there's nothing wrong about thinking, nothing you have to do about it, except be aware of it clearly.

Maybe breathing with it or through it. So the rhythm of breathing keeps you from participating in your thoughts. Instead of participating, just be aware. And then coming back to breathing. And this time as you stay with the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, just for a few minutes here, see if all the rest of it can just be on the periphery. But in the middle of it all, breathing and awareness that holds it all, calmly aware of one thing at a time, with no idea that any one thing is the right place to be aware.

Everything is allowed. Maybe it's the loudest, strongest. And we'll continue for just another two minutes, and then to end the meditation, taking a few long, slow, deep breaths, feeling your body, and when you're ready, you can open your eyes. At first, it might seem like sitting well and doing nothing is nothing and has no value, but as you go through your life, you might discover how often this is useful, how often it's useful to take time to really be present and find out what's there and feel oneself and know oneself and recognize what's going on. How wise it is not to be reactive, how wise it is not to jump to conclusions, how wise it is to really kind of get under the surface of your life in some deeper way, and to be able to experience

your life without reactivity or fear or upset or all kinds of things that we do. And over time, to be able to do that in all kinds of different parts of your life.

So one of the reasons why it's very useful to meditate every day is that to have a kind of a light commitment to sitting every day. So you remove meditation from your preferences. Some people only meditate when they feel good. Some people only meditate when they feel lousy. But the idea is to not sit when you're only in one way, but to sit in all the ways you are over the time, over the months and years. So you'll learn to see it all, and all of who you are, all of your life, gets to be processed, it gets to be seen in this way that we learn how to see things in meditation and mindfulness.

And it changes our relationship to so many different things in our world. We discover freedom in the middle of our life, a freedom with what's happening rather than needing anything to be different. And that's kind of a superpower, to learn to be happy with a happiness that's not dependent on what's happening in the world, to learn how to be peaceful, and a peace that can't be taken away by what's happening in the world. So that you're not at the beck and call, or they're just reacting to the world all the time. You're finding a whole different source of what inspires you in your life that flows from within. So now it's your turn.

Do you have any questions about any of this or any testimonials about it or anything? Yes, please. But let's wait for the mic. The prompt to do nothing... made me change a little bit of my usual practice, which is to kind of structure my meditation. And I've come up with a kind of way to do that in sitting or it's like using some kind of an internal chant or a mantra. And when I do that, I can kind of keep awake.

Because when I just did nothing, I actually started falling asleep. And so I kind of was like, I was trying to figure out how to do nothing without succumbing to that. So I don't know if you have any thoughts about that. That's a great question. Yes, sometimes if we're really tired or sleepy or something, we're not, you know, sometimes we need to sleep. I think a lot of people in this country need sleep more than meditation.

So, you know, be sure to get enough sleep. Yeah. But that can also, but sleep is a normal, sleepiness and dullness is a normal part of what meditators have to work with sooner or later. So there's a few things you can do. You can sit up straighter. Sometimes just that can be enough to get some energy.

Some people open their eyes, and we just open their eyes as enough to get just enough energy to stay awake. And then some people will use a technique. Like you said, you used the mantra, which was a little bit extra. What we do is, we don't call it a mantra, what we do

in mindfulness practice is we use what's called mental labeling, mental noting. And it's using a single word to identify, recognize what's actually happening in the moment. So if I'm breathing in, I would say in, breathing out, out.

Hearing a sound, I'd say hearing. It's itching. And it's not calming the way that a mantra is calming, but it's a way of giving energy just to keep you alert, keep you awake. And generally in our tradition, it's fine for you to do a mantra that keeps you awake and keeps you going. But we usually don't teach mantras in our system here, because mantras use more as a soothing, concentrating thing rather than developing more clear awareness. And so we rely more on that clear awareness.

And so the mental noting gets closer to that. Is this understandable? Yeah, and the mantra for me has developed as a way to train my... Kind of, it's a way of actually associating state of being with, I feel like over time I've learned how to kind of use that mantra, and it's kind of my own structure, but it helps me actually, like, when I'm doing nothing, because for me, the challenge is, like, just mental labeling, just doing. Because I found that I can actually regulate better if I have that kind of mantra. But I'm actually more interested in learning, I think, that part of awareness that's not. It's like I rely on, now I'm relying on the structure.

I want to try to get away from that. But I'm having, that's where I have a hard time, because I drift through it. I started with the mantra and it was hard to do this practice here without the mantra kicking in. So I had to learn, it took a while to learn to do it. But I also learned, once I didn't need it anymore, I wasn't doing the mantra, I found it was useful to use it sometimes. To keep me present, to get me going.

It was like getting the engine going. And then once I got going, then I could just drop it. Thank you. Someone else. How was it to do that meditation? I have two questions.

The first one's very simple. But do you have to close your... Could you hold it like this? Because I don't have a hearing aids in, so I need to help. Can you hear me now? No.

No. If you hold it horizontal, just like that. Can you hear me now? That helps a little bit, and then it will turn it up a little bit, too. Okay. I was wondering if you had to close your eyes or if opening them is okay.

I think I heard you say maybe momentarily, but what if you kept them open the whole time? And then number two, my house is loud sometimes. I have small kids, and so if I try to meditate, it's kind of hard to do that when there's noises downstairs. So is there anything wrong with kind of listening to something like... Yeah, yeah, good questions. So in some schools of Buddhist meditation, they meditate with the eyes open.

In some schools of Buddhist meditation, they sit with the, meditate with the eyes closed. In the insight tradition that we're in, the encouragement is to do with the eyes closed, but there are some teachers who teach with the eyes open. And it's either one is, you're allowed to do either one. And so it's kind of what works for you and what helps you be present. Some people find they close their eyes. Their mind wanders off and thought all too easily.

Some people with their eyes are open. They see what needs to be done in the house and they get distracted. So you kind of experiment and see. But as I said, you know, if you're sleepy, sometimes that's a good thing to do. And so that's something you experiment with and both are fine. Okay.

And in terms of a noisy house, so you have two options. The pragmatic thing to do and the pure thing to do. And it's best not to be a purist, but I want to give you both. The pragmatic thing is doing something like you said. You can do air plugs, white sound, do something that's so you don't get pulled. Especially at home if you have kids.

I mean, of course, you're so oriented towards them. It's hard not to get pulled into the sound. The purest thing to do in arts tradition is to not have any preferences. And so it's hard sitting there with all the noises in the house and the associations and the shouldens and shouldn'ts and they get hurting themselves. And shall I call an ambulance or the police? What should I do? Is to... really be present for that, do nothing, and see what's going on.

So it might be just doing sound meditation, and it might be doing emotion meditation, just whatever seems to be the salient aspect of it, just learn to practice with what is. And in the bigger, that's the direction we're going in mindfulness, is to learn how to practice with what is, not practice what we want it to be. And whether you're ready for that with the difficulties of home life, you might need to work towards that. And so in the meantime, use air plugs. But at some point, you want to just, and this practice here is not to, we don't want to shut out anything. We don't want to turn away from anything.

It's just more things to be aware of and find our peace with whatever is happening in our life. And that's the superpower. Is that clear? The minute behind you is coming. Yeah. I was expecting when you suggested we listen to, or hear...

Can you turn up also? To hear the, you know, to notice what's the strongest sensation. I was expecting something different than what I felt, but I just felt really calm. So that was a strong sensation. Yeah. Great.

I was pleasantly surprised. And then the other old sensation started coming back, but not as strong. Yeah. So that was nice. But I had a question for you. You said that boredom is a

complicated activity of the mind?

Yes. Boredom is something the mind makes. Nothing in the universe is inherently boring. It's an interpretation of your mind. Could you say a little bit more about that? Well, it involves an evaluation of the situation.

It involves a certain level of aversion to something. We don't want it. We're deciding that this is not exciting for me. I want to be excited. I want to be entertained. I want to get something out of this.

There's all this other stuff we're adding into the evaluation. Thank you. So boredom is something we add to... Because the mind is actually doing, the mind is active when it's bored. And so to the degree to which you're bored, to that degree, there's room in your mind to calm down. And if you calm that part of the mind that's making up the boredom, you won't be bored.

That's a lot to think about. Okay. It's kind of like if you start scratching yourself and it kind of is irritating, and, you know, but it's irritating. It kind of hurts. It's kind of like, you know, this should go away. This should stop.

I should get to go to the doctor. I should, you know, something that shouldn't be this way. And it doesn't occur to me to stop doing it. Because it's so natural. So the boredom is a scratch. It's a way of scratching.

Something is in your mind. You're scratching it. And you think that something is boring. You blame the reality. It's all in your mind. Thank you.

Set a hand wants to ask a question. Can we see your eyes, too, as part of it? Hello. Quite a few interesting concepts that you're bringing over to us. So thank you. I have to apologize.

I didn't bring my hearing aid today because I was late and forgot. So let's turn it up, yeah. I could bring it closer to my mouth as well and talk louder. So I'll do both of that. I was just saying thank you for all the interesting concepts that you've brought so far. Very nice.

What I'm wondering is during meditation, I like to be in pure darkness, and that's why I put my shirt as a blindfold. However, I'm also kind of afraid of the darkness within my own heart and within other people. And it's causing distress even during meditation. And I'm wondering, even despite working towards that meditation and working towards that awareness, is there a way to be pure in thought, to not be afraid of those fears? Yeah, good question. So the thing about...

It's fine to cover your eyes with something. Some people wear these beanie hats that they

pull down over their eyes to make it more darker. And I think they find it a little less distracting. But mindfulness practice is designed to help us encounter the fears we have, to encounter our inner darkness, our challenges. But it needs to be done with a lot of care and love and patience. And so one way we begin in our mindfulness tradition is don't be in a hurry to go into the difficult places.

Rather, maybe first start at the edges, and at the outer edges is your fear of it. Then one of the things we're learning, this doing nothing, it can be said in many different ways. One of them is, one way to say the same thing, but in a little more maybe a way that addresses fear. Is our job in meditation is to help our fear feel safe. Most people think they have to fix their fear or shouldn't be there, you know. But fear is actually something that needs care and love.

And this ability to do nothing but being aware is a kind of love and care. So the fear can relax and settle. And then if the outer fear that you have quiets, then you can maybe decide, do I want to go into the, now that I'm not afraid of the darkness, do I want to go closer to it? Or do I want to stand at the distance and just look at it? Or do I want to go talk to a friend about it? You can kind of decide what the wise thing might be to do with it.

Is what I'm saying making sense to you? Yes, what you're saying is resonating. Great. But I hope your fear feels safe in you. It's quite a powerful thing to help fear feel safe. Mostly fear.

Most people give the impression, if I was your fear, I mean, I'm not, I don't know you always, but many times are, the way people treat their own fear, the fear doesn't feel welcomed. It feels like it's not wanted. But the fear is part of you. So to not, to have that experience, part of you, for part of you to feel it's not wanted by the other part of you, sets up a kind of war, sets up a kind of big challenge. So this idea of doing nothing, this is where it starts doing nothing, starts becoming pretty radical, because you're beginning to allow these things to all coexist, to become together. All of who you are starts feeling safe with you because you're not going to attack, you're not going to fix, you're not going to do all kinds of things.

You're just going to let it be there. It's kind of like you're becoming your best friend. Maybe, I hope all of you have had a chance maybe, of being with a friend who was troubled. And they didn't want you to do anything. I mean, sometimes occasionally friends have to tell each other, don't try to fix me. You know, don't tell me what to do.

Just listen. Just be with me. And it's profound to have someone who's just there to listen and do nothing but just create a friendly space, a safe space. So mindfulness is kind of learning to do that for yourself. Yes, so you have here. Hello.

Along the same line that you have been, that you're talking about, is it okay to, so sometimes I find myself when I'm working with some difficult emotions, you know, maybe it's fear or something else. I find myself talking to myself in during meditation. I mean, is that okay to do? Oh, the question, is it okay to do? You're the only one who's supposed to answer that question. And the approach in our school of Buddhism is kind of do what is useful for you, what is helpful.

So if, I don't know what the difficulties are, and it could be that talking to yourself is better than an alternative. And it could be that if you don't do it, if you just try to use the awareness practice, it's not so good, the results. So it might be good for you. Or to experiment, it might be that you're doing it too much, and it's interfering with your ability to really see what's happening more deeply. Right? And the better thing to do is to stop talking to yourself because maybe you're soothing yourself or reassuring yourself.

And stop, you know, it might be more interesting to stop reassuring yourself or soothing yourself so you can really be present for how things really are. Maybe they're more difficult than you thought. But then to be present, learn the art of being present for that. And not react, not add second arrows, not judge, not try to fix. Everything in their inner life wants to feel safe at us. So what is it that can feel safe in you? What can you offer there so something can settle and unfold or relax?

Is this making sense? Yes, it's very helpful because my sense is that it can be used as a bridge, perhaps to help the difficult emotion to settle, and then it will be easier to be aware. Yeah, so if it's a bridge, it's great. And also, it's very interesting to talk to yourself, because talking to yourself is usually different than just thinking. And so one thing I suggest sometimes, and I do it sometimes, if I'm having some real challenge in my life that's kind of difficult, I'll actually talk to myself out loud. Because I think that talking uses a different part of the brain than just thinking.

And I have more clarity sometimes if I'm talking about it. If I'm thinking about it, I just kind of go spin in circles, you know, and say, think the same thing, and it's usually not so useful. Right? But if I talk, then I kind of, I hear it then, and I, I've already said that already. Let's say something new. Remember when I'm thinking, I'm happy to, my mind seems to be happy to have the same thoughts over and over and over again.

And just as interesting each time. So, yes? First, I just wanted to share that I heard somewhere that Steph Curry says he talks to himself all the time. So I do that too. But I wanted to ask... Whether there's a difference between allowing a fear to take residence inside you and welcoming a fear. Yeah.

It's a really good question. And my preferred answer is for you to answer that for yourself. And because, again, what we're learning here is to learn how to be aware. This doing nothing is not so passive, actually. You know, it's really learning to be present. And in being present, you start seeing the difference, if there is a difference between those two.

And you might discover, oh, in certain circumstances, welcoming is the better thing to do. And other times it's better just to allow. Maybe for some people, welcoming is too active. Allowing is more peaceful. And so, you know, or maybe sometimes welcoming is what's most needed because I really hate this part of me, myself. And so I need to not just be allowing, I need to kind of say, come, come closer.

Let me see you. Let me find out what's going on. So is that okay to give it back to you? Great. Thank you. Hi.

I came the first night in person, and then all the ones in between I had to do it online instead. Can you hear me? You know, actually now it's a little bit too loud for my ears. What should I do? Yeah, so just a little bit softer. So you came the first night.

So I came the first night, and then all the other three in between that one and this one I did it online. I listened via Zoom. And then tonight I was like, oh, I definitely am coming tonight. You know, I haven't been there in person in the three previous. And so I had it all planned to come. And I went, but then I knew that I was going to have to listen to you via Zoom for part of my journey here because of the way my day was scheduled.

And so I turned on Zoom at 7 o'clock, and there was nothing for, you know, 15 or 20 minutes maybe. And I kept thinking, what should I do? I don't know whether to go. I don't know. You know, I went back and forth. And then I decided I was just going to stop clinging, right, to the expectation that there was going to be a class right on time and to just go with the flow.

So I drove listening and I thought, I'll just see what happens when I get there. And I confess, Gil, that at one point I thought he might be just doing this on purpose. Doing what? Doing that you might be not showing up on purpose. Not in a mean way, but just in a sort of a Zen way to, you know. Well, in...

In retrospectively, I think it would have been good to have done it on purpose. But I didn't have that foresight. Thank you. And it was brilliant anyway. And so anyway, I also had to let go of my own expectation of myself that it's not okay to be late. And I thought, I'm just going with it anyway.

Okay. And one of the reasons I wanted to be sure to come is I did want to ask you what comes up for me with all this practice. Is that I'm a very physically active person, athletic. I'm biking.

I have a background in dance. And when I'm sitting that long, I start feeling like this isn't good for me.

Something about this, I've taught in the health field, I teach people to exercise. So I know that you've done a lot of hiking also and so forth. So how did you resolve that kind of thing? I don't think I ever had the challenge with it. But maybe because I first sat in Zen, and it's actually a yogic posture. And so they, and you come, and it's a posture that lets your whole system come into balance, into kind of homeostasis.

It kind of frees the energy in the body, and it all kind of just kind of flows and moves and it means there's so much freedom in the inner sensations, freedom in the flow of energy in the body that comes from meditation if you sit well and if you really get kind of really settled and present. I think it's really healthy. You can kind of, so I'm saying to you, feel the health coursing through your body. But since you're an athlete, you might be really careful. And really get yourself into a really good posture, a yogic posture, you know, even sit, you know, full lotus, you know, and then really upright and really with your chest open and it'll be good. But when you talked earlier about, you started to learn how to distinguish between bad pain and okay pain?

Yeah, yeah. I guess I'm still learning that. Yeah, so if you're unsure, then change your posture. Air on the side of being careful. All right, thank you. But what happens with people who do a lot of exercise and a lot of physical movement, it's kind of like the serotonin, the chemicals.

You get used to it and you expect it, and the idea of being alive. It's kind of like caffeine. Yeah. They have caffeine of the soul, like a caffeine of exercise and doing. And some people, the caffeine is coffee. But sometimes it's emotional caffeine that all these things are keeping us feeling engaged and give us a sense of purpose.

And when we sit down and do nothing, all that is challenged. And sometimes it screams inside, I have to do something, this doesn't count, and I won't feel alive, I'll be left behind. And there's all this tremendous amount of baggage we carry. And so it's possible that you would please continue with your physical work and exercise. But you might have a whole other layer of learning. To learn that comes from really sitting still.

But it might have to go through a withdrawal period. Thank you. I know I've also just, you know, we taught classes at Stanford on how not to sit so much, you know, because, you know, sitting was the new smoking almost. Yeah, but the way they sit at Stanford at these screens, looking at them, you know, is bad. I agree. But I think sitting in good meditation posture... is,

you know, I actually, my posture is better when I sit a lot and meditate than when I don't.

I think it's physically better for me. I should be on retreat all the time. Thank you. Just to follow up on your question. So I'm also in the same camp. I'm a... wannabe ballerina, I mean, as I was growing up.

So, you know, movement was extremely important, and sitting all the time is very difficult. So what about walking meditation? I've been doing, you know, walking meditation. Yeah, that's very good. I'm glad you're asking. Yeah.

So there's two primary postures we use for meditation in our tradition. There's sitting meditation and there's walking meditation. When we are on retreats, we alternate between the two of them. We do a period of walking, then sitting, walking, sitting, like that. And walking meditation is a powerful practice. Some people it works better than sitting meditation.

And so I think you'll find on the... In our website, there's a little essay about instructions on walking meditation. It's possible we have it in the cabinet there. I can look for it later. We might have a printed copy of the walking instruction form. But do you think it can be just as effective?

I would try it. So I would try it, and it might work better for you than if you're used to not doing exercise. But I still think it's very important to learn how to sit still. There's a whole level of freedom that can come from that. So if you've been a dancer, see sitting still as the dance. And see if you approach it that way, that maybe something inside of you comes alive in that posture.

So we have one more. I think you had the hand before, right? No? We probably should stop. So maybe one more then? May I?

Yes. Thank you very much. I find it very fascinating and beautiful how we have this progression that was taught to start with the breath, then learn about body, and then include emotions, and then the thinking. I've been now meditating with this for a while every day, and it's very beautiful. But what I find is that I can't stay with the breath very long. Typically, after like two or three breaths, I forgot about the breathing.

It goes to one of these other things maybe and comes back. Yeah. But the breath works as a home base, but I can't say... The breath works as a home base, so I can't come back to it, but I can't really stay with it. And I'm... Wondering how important is it to kind of develop the concentration on the breath or kind of be more purposeful on having.

For you, it's very important to stay with a breath for two or three breaths and then do it again.

But don't be more ambitious in that. Don't try to hang on there. Do it your way so that you relax. Something settles. Your way is good.

Two or three breaths is good. And just keep doing it, coming back and repeat it over and over again. Thank you. Well, thank you all. So I want to just say that some of you might be new to IMC or IMC is set up to be kind of a relaxed place, hopefully, to come and go as you wish. There's no, we don't lock the doors when we start a program, so people come late.

And it's fine to come late. And it's fine to leave early, and we realize that in an urban setting like this, that it's hard to get here. We have full lives, and so we just want to make it easy to come and go. And we can do that in our tradition because one of the principles of this mindfulness practice of doing nothing, just being aware kind of, is that in that system, there's no distractions. It's just something else to be aware of. So it's okay if people are late and they're making noise because we just, we fold it into our meditation.

Everything gets folded in. So we're here and sometimes it's very helpful to meditate with other people. So we're one place you can come and meditate and hopefully it's a relaxed place. And we have a lot of different programs here. So over time, it's kind of like we have programs for, you know, 10 years of being engaged in what we do here. It's a kind of full plate we have.

So there's all kinds of things for different people, different kinds of things. So you're very welcome to be part of it. And I certainly hope to see you all again. Thank you.