

## Instruction: Mindfulness at all the Flowers

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To start the instructions this morning with an analogy that goes back to the Buddha, he talked about a person walking through this world like a bee that lands on a flower and is nourished by the flower, the nectar, the pollen, without harming the flower.

And I have this image of the weight of a bee on a flower, maybe a big sunflower, and it doesn't disturb the flower. In fact, the flower was evolved to have the bee visit. In a sense, the bee is not taking what's not given. The flower was made to offer this to the bee.

So to live in mindfulness like a bee, to kind of elaborate on the analogy, when we start, one way to do mindfulness practice is to have a place that's the home for awareness, a place where it's comfortable and nice to rest your awareness. And a common place for this, but not universal, is breathing. To find some place in the body where it's comfortable to be with your breathing. And not only comfortable, but also where it's pleasant, where there's pleasure. Sweetness, not always there. But to know that you're allowed to find it and use that as a support for being, so that it's easier for the mind to want to stay with something that's pleasant.

And to be able to feel maybe not the sensual pleasure of breathing, but some deeper sweetness, some deeper deep sensitivity. Maybe it's much more subtle than the sensations of breathing exactly, but sometimes it's the rather diffuse influence that breathing has beyond the edges of the breathing in the body, the edges of the sensations. The massage or the reassurance, the word in Pāli for reassurance is to breathe easily. Literally, that's what entomology means. To hide away with someplace where maybe it's possible to breathe easily or be a home. And that doesn't have to be the home for mindfulness. It doesn't work for some people. For some people, it's the body as a whole.

But to have some place where the mindfulness, the awareness, feels comfortable to stay with, to be in the present moment, and to be so that the distracting mind is reassured, that it doesn't have to be distracted, to be reassured so it's okay to be here in the present. Where this moment, now, doesn't have to be in the past or in the future, at least at this point in the ritual. And so that's, in a sense, the home for the bee. And then from time to time, the flowers bloom. And the bee goes out and lands on the flower.

From time to time, you'll have body sensations that are compelling, that are predominant, that are kind of asking for attention. Maybe they evolved to be strong enough so that it would like the bee of attention to visit. And so then you would land there. Or maybe if landing is too much, maybe you'd be the bee that just circles around it, just keeps a distance, gazes upon it, smells it, sees it there. Sometimes it's easier to be present for something if you keep some distance from it. And sometimes it's easier to land on it.

To be that, but with a lightness, not to harm anything, not to poke at it, not to make it different than it is, but almost as if there's nectar there, almost as if there's something sweet there, even if it's painful. Of course there isn't, but how you're aware is so important. Sometimes it's an emotion that flower. It's a flower. And what would it be like if you saw all emotions as flowers, flowers of different colors and shapes, that the bee of awareness goes to check out?

Sometimes it's the flower of thinking, and some of those flowers are quite beautiful. There are some flowers which are not so pretty beautiful. And we have a flower that's flowers here at IRC that people, when it flowers, people will go visit it to smell it, because it's so amazingly awful, spell. All these mindfulness practitioners go over to sniff. So sometimes that's the way it is with thoughts. It's okay. And to be mindful of thinking.

And the idea is that everything that you can experience becomes a place that the bee of mindfulness visits, if it's strong, if it's predominant, including the bee-visits itself, meaning some points you want to be aware of how you're aware, how you're mindful. Sometimes we can be so busy being mindful of the breath, of the body, of the emotions, of the thoughts, of sounds, whatever it might be. We don't notice that the mindfulness is straining or the mindfulness is complacent. The mindfulness is resisting. The mindfulness is striving. And you want to see, how can you be aware with the lightness of a bee or even lighter?

How can you be aware so that when you land on one of these flowers or flowering or flying around it, looking at it, then with what kind of lightness can you discover greater clarity, ability to see or feel more clearly? And nothing more, nothing less, and the clarity of seeing, including if things are confused and not clear at all. At least be clear about that. Oh, this is

what confusion is like. This is what lack of clarity is like.

So the idea is to go visit the flowers, if they're strong, and then come home, and then go out and come home. Sometimes you'll visit multiple flowers before coming home. But come back to the breathing, come home. And when I was taught this practice in Burma, we were taught, they didn't use the analogy of bees, but we were taught to do this. But the way that it was taught, you wouldn't go visit something for very long, just long enough to recognize what it was.

So if there was pain in the knees, you would go to the pain and recognize pain. Pain, you'd feel it, just long enough to feel and really know what the sensation was like, and maybe how it changed as you're aware of it. And then you would come back to the breathing. And then something else would happen. You'd go out and do that for a few moments and then come back. It was never presented that you'd spend more than a few moments with whatever is happening.

And how I interpret that fear is that sometimes it's best to maybe not spend anything more than four or five breaths with something. Does your land on the flower, feel it, know it, relax with it, gaze upon it? But do it for maybe some approximately four or five breaths, and then come back to just the breathing, just your home base. And the reason for that, it's very easy if you spend more than four or five breaths with something, thoughts creep in, agendas creep in, preferences creep in, reactivity creeps in. And you can kind of get derailed sometimes. But four or five breaths might be just enough to see something clearly, but not get caught in it, not get pulled into its orbit exactly.

And then come back to Home Base, and after a while you might go back and check it out again. This very relaxed rhythm of staying someplace at the grounding place, the settling place, the unifying place, the place where thinking mind just begins to fade away because it's not getting attention. And then when necessary, whatever arises that's wrong, see it as a flower that you visit. Nothing more, nothing less.

So, to kind of begin, though some of you have already, to be a little bit attentive to your posture. So your posture is arranged in such a way, at the home base, the home place for awareness, feels like it can be more the center of it all. Maybe gently taking some larger breaths, fuller breaths, relaxing on the exhale. And if there is a home base, as you relax on the exhale, relaxing into that place, letting your breathing return to normal.

And if breathing is your home for practice, see if you can become attuned to the body's experience of breathing, related to the idea of being attuned to breathing. Is there some way to be

in harmony with the rhythm of breathing? And in the cycle of breathing in and breathing out, is any part of that more pleasant than other parts of the cycle? More enjoyable. And if you can, become quiet, internal quiet, so you can better feel the subtle, deeper sensitivity connected to breathing. Maybe the influence of breathing beyond the edges of the sensations of breathing.

Maybe not staring at breathing directly, but coming in from the back or from underneath to receive it, to allow it to come into awareness, riding on top of the exhale all the way to the end. Maybe awareness lifting and spreading with a growing of the inhale. And if something else, then breathing becomes predominant. Allow your awareness to gently go visit it for four or five breaths. Be aware of it. Feel it. Find the clarity of knowing what it is. And then coming back to the breathing.

This morning there won't be a bell to end the sitting. You can end it as you wish. And for those of you who have a work meditation at 9:30 or a practice discussion then, you should know that it's currently 9:15.