

1. Daylong Introduction and Guided Meditation: Mindfulness with the Breath

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Once I met a Jesuit monk-priest who had spent years practicing Buddhism in Japan and Taoism in China. I told him that I practiced *Vipassanā*, and he said, "Oh, that's when you have 360-degree awareness." I love his reply. Three hundred sixty degrees means in all directions, not just outward into all the cardinal directions, but inward to everything. And for me, there's something that makes *Vipassanā* sacred when there's nothing excluded. There's no outside.

And to get to that 360-degree, nothing-excluded awareness, there's two things that kind of support this. One is: do not only be mindful of what's happening, but also be mindful of your relationship to what's happening. Are you for it and against it? Do you have an attitude towards it? Are you trying to do something about it? Is there rejection of what's happening? Is there acceptance of what's happening?

And is there an alternative that is neither accepting nor rejecting? What would that look like? Who would that be like? So include in the awareness the relationship you have towards things. But then you take a step further, and be mindful of how you're mindful. It's related to this issue of the relationship, but somehow it's even deeper or fuller.

How are you aware? And what supports the awareness? Or what are some of the characteristics of how you're aware? Is it bright? Is it dark? Is it narrow? Is it wide? Is it holding things at a distance, or is it intimate?

Any one of those is okay, but it's possible to know that, to know the quality, the characteristics of mindfulness, awareness itself. Are you aware more by knowing, recognizing? Are you aware more by sensing and feeling? Are you more aware of something called the mind's eye,

the inner eye kind of? There's kind of an inner seeing. Are you aware with tension or absence of tension?

Are you aware with tension, strain, or maybe the opposite of that? And as awareness becomes all-inclusive without being for and against, there's a number of characteristics or qualities of awareness that might be evident, that are onward-leading, that support the growth of awareness. Sometimes awareness is there with a feeling of spaciousness, space beyond the edges of thinking and beyond the edges of your emotions, a spaciousness beyond the edges of your body. And if there is spaciousness, space in the awareness, around the awareness, it might be a nourishment, a support for more awareness.

Sometimes how awareness is may be characterized by a stillness. Some people call it a dynamic stillness, not frozen, not being held still, but a soft stillness. Maybe a stillness that feels like it's at the center of awareness, or a stillness that's all-pervading. And sometimes awareness comes with the quality of silence, quiet, without the chatter of thinking, maybe beyond the edges of words and even images. Maybe as if awareness can rest in the silence or the stillness, or the spaciousness, as awareness is available, open to whatever arises.

Sometimes awareness is associated or connected to peace, peacefulness, peaceful knowing, peaceful sensing. And sometimes one can feel the nourishment of peace, stillness, silence, how it nourishes awareness or how awareness nourishes the peace. Sometimes how we're aware can be beautiful, maybe characterized by a degree of clarity, vitality, aliveness, a quiet contentment or joy, calmness, a unification, everything included. And sometimes awareness is associated with letting go, letting go of thought, letting go of body, letting go of even letting go of awareness. Sometimes awareness itself feels like a letting go of freedom.

And today there'll be no bell to end the sitting, though you should know that currently it's 9:17.