

Guided Meditation: Sensations as Doorways

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Hello, and welcome to our meditation session here at IMC, Insight Meditation Center. And as an orientation for this morning's meditation, I think it's useful. I think it's useful to consider that there are two operating systems in our minds, deep inside of us. One is centered in the present moment, and the other is often not centered in the present moment.

It is the world of the imagination, which is our thoughts about the future and thoughts about the past. Thoughts about fantasy and commentary about things that may not be here. Or, if it's about what's here, it's from this operating system which is not really deeply attentive to what's here, but holding itself at a distance and making commentary and having attitudes towards it. It is in a kind of relationship with it where it's an object to be somehow objectified or personalized, identified with all this kind of world of thoughts and constructs that we live in so much of the day.

But the other operating system, the one we're using here for meditation and for the deep spirituality of Buddhism, is the one that operates deeply, intimately connected to the present, to now, to here. The one that comes through our senses, that picks up all the data, all the sense experience of now. And whereas some people find just bringing into the present moment with the sense experience of breathing to be kind of a reduced, boring area, because it's such a big contrast from the constructed, thoughtful world where we tell ourselves stories and have purposes and meanings and plans and things to figure out and tragedies to review, to come back into this radical simplicity of just here and the sense experience can seem like a way of going backwards or missing out on the richness and important things of life.

But the simple here-now, being connected to the present moment through all our senses, to be in the lived experience of now through the senses, which is always in the present moment, and let that become rich and full, brings us a whole new dimension of life. It brings

us a deeper dimension of life than the kind of two-dimensional life of the mental constructs and ideas and stories that we can live in so much. And so, it might seem boring to just be simply here-now in the world that is only experienced in the present moment, but that's a temporary beginning until we allow that world to fill us. Allow that world to show how deep the intelligence can be, how deep a reference point for finding a deep spiritual centering in our life.

So, part of the reason to consciously, intentionally have a meditation posture is so that the posture itself begins the invitation, begins creating the conditions for you to be present with your senses, with your body, here and now. Some people find it useful to sit up straighter. Some people find it useful to be in a very relaxed, maybe even lying-down position. If it allows the whole body to start coming alive with sensations, not to lie down so that we can kind of forget about the body, but there's a way, whatever posture you have, to include the body and how the body is an antenna. The body feels and senses the lived experience now.

Gently closing the eyes, and without much else to begin with, a very simple scanning of your body, without any other purpose than to discover how it is to be in the lived body right now. Places where it feels pleasant, places where it feels unpleasant. Not being caught or stuck in the places that are unpleasant or pleasant, but let your attention roam and flow around the body, finding the areas where things are comfortable and uncomfortable. The gentle moving of attention around prevents getting stuck or reactive to any particular way the body is. Just taking it all in.

And where in your body do you feel your body more fully? Where are the centers of sensations in your body? Is it in the belly or the chest, or the face and head, in the hands, in the spine, in the legs? And is there a place in your body where you feel most at home or most intimate, or a place in your body which is most neutral, if the body is a difficult place to be?

And to gently become more aware of the body breathing. Maybe don't go to the place where breathing is difficult or forced, if that's the case. But some place in the body where the sensations of breathing are more subtle, less associated with any control, any doing on your part. Maybe the sides of your rib cage. Maybe a small, gentle pressure downward at the bottom of your belly as you breathe in, and the release of that pressure as you exhale. Maybe the movements of your back, rib cage, or your spine as you breathe.

As you exhale, gently inviting your whole body to relax. As you exhale, relaxing the tension or pressure, agitation associated with thinking. Settling into the body, breathing, settling into the lived experience of the present, as you would settle into a refreshing pool of water. So there's a heightened sensitivity to the living sensations. They are the evidence that you're

alive. That is the data, the information, which a deep intelligence processes, takes in, and can guide you into what is most important here and now.

Deep inner lived experience. Allowing yourself to be receptive, intimate to the sense experience of your body, how the body experiences itself from the inside out, with breathing in the middle of it. To live the experience of now through your senses. Not through your thoughts. You don't have to stop thinking, but leave the thoughts alone and feel more deeply underneath them in the body, as if this is a doorway for a deep intelligence, a deep wisdom. A deep freedom that cannot be found in the world of thinking.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to give yourself over a little bit more to the simple, basic sense experience of your body, of breathing, as if this is the source, the gateway. To a deep appreciation, a deep wisdom about what is most important for you here and now, free of shoulds, free of past and future, free of needing to prove yourself or apologize. But to give yourself over to the lived experience that's here and now, resting deep in the body with the lived experience. And with that as a reference, what becomes most important for you? What is your heart's deepest wish, centered here, just here, nothing beyond this place and this time? What is the heart's deepest wish for now?

With no past and future, with no constructs of the mind being kind of colored glasses for being with yourself, what is your deepest wisdom? What is the deepest wisdom that arises out of the depth of the body about just now, here? And now, from the foundation of here-now, centered here in the body, in the heart, now with your imagination, extend your care, your love, your kindness out into the world. Sitting centered in yourself, gaze upon the world kindly. And maybe letting these wishes flow from your heart out into the world.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.