

Wednesday Morning Guided Meditation

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At some point in a retreat, it might be possible to begin a sitting gently, maybe tenderly, to gently feel where there might be tensions in the body. Almost without any ambition or strong drive, gently, tenderly allow these places to relax, if it is easy to do so. But in doing so, also feel the change that happens. With attention, there is some kind of discomfort. If there is a release or relaxation, maybe there is something pleasant, something nice. The influence of tension on us is different than the influence of relaxation.

The influence of tension is somehow to reinforce the surface mind that thinks a lot, because tension belongs to what is only skin-deep, the surface mind. Relaxation kind of opens us up to something a little deeper. So, at the beginning of a sitting, feel if there is any tension in the belly. Take your time to feel it a bit, maybe feeling if there is any kind of influence of the tension out beyond the belly or to the edges of that area. One advantage of this practice of mindfulness is that we can feel tension, feel discomfort, feel it more fully. Then, when it seems right, see if the belly can soften, relax.

One of the benefits of this practice is that we can feel the relaxation better, more fully, and feel what shifts. Feel the shoulders. If there is any tension there, tightness, perhaps relax the shoulders. Maybe shift the hands a little bit to give a little more room and space for the shoulders to soften, free up. Feel the muscles of the face, around the eyes and forehead, maybe the jaws, and let them relax. Maybe allow the face to become peaceful.

And then feel the thinking muscle. See if there is any tension in the surface mind, the thinking mind, story mind. As you exhale, maybe relax, soften. Also, sometimes it is possible to have a global feeling of the whole body—not literally the whole body, but the way that is easy for you to feel: a wide, broad experience of the body. Maybe there are very subtle ways in which you are braced against life, holding yourself back, pushing forward with the whole body, or

some global way in which there is some subtle tension. Maybe it is all around the edges, or some place deep within.

If it is easy enough, relax the global body, soften, open up. In this global experience of your body, is there any pleasure? Is there anything pleasant that is kind of broad, not centered in any given place? Kind of a broad field, or expansive softness, aliveness. A kind of sensing, or sensations, of the whole body that, in and of themselves, do not involve thinking. A kind of silent awareness.

Sometimes this global awareness can feel broad and wide, and the mind goes more to the edges, maybe indistinct edges, the outer reaches. But then allow yourself to settle into the middle of it all, in some deep place within. Maybe deep within, where the inhales begin, where the exhales come to end, where the exhales come to a rest for a moment. Where the sensations of breathing are felt within this wider silent world, the global body, global awareness. Almost like the sensations of breathing are moving through the water of a lake or the ocean.

If thinking begins, it is interesting to feel how thinking can pull us away from an intimacy here with the body. Maybe almost like lifting ourselves away or pulling away. Where thinking involves some form of tension, some extra work to not quite be there. In the middle of this global body breathing, let go of thoughts, and let go back into the body breathing. With a deep mind, a deep awareness, receptive to the pleasure of being here with your breathing in the midst of your global body.

A pleasure that might be a very simple feeling of goodness, rightness, a feeling that is wholesome. Maybe a modest form of well-being. Maybe a clear form of physical pleasure. As you stay close and gentle with your breathing, ride the breath from the beginning of the exhale to the end, from the beginning of the inhale to its end. Be available in this global awareness for whatever pleasant sensations, good way of being, whatever wholesome feelings, contentment, happiness, joy.

Be available to allow them to spread, to radiate out into your body. With every breath, there is also a positive influence out into the global body, a spread of warmth, sweetness. Relax any tension of doing or trying, in favor of allowing, being available, making room for a broad, wide feeling of well-being, pleasure, sweetness. Oh. Maybe you can trust yourself into this deeper body, this deeper quiet place of well-being. Pleasure, or the wider global well-being that has room for what is unpleasant—it is okay.

Oh. And maybe where it is quietest within you, maybe there is a very quiet knowing, a very

quiet voice sensing that guides you to be more immersed in your experience here, like you are dipping into a refreshing pool of water. Something that is reminding you gently, “Stay here.” Yeah. Maybe with a gentle feeling, sense what part of your experience is calling on you or revealing itself to you. Or a gentle sense of what is onward leading here, or onward opening. What is onward freeing to allow for the flow of *dhammic* pleasure?

In this ocean of awareness, things float by, float up. No need to grab onto anything. No need to make it into anything. Leave it all alone. Except for the growing field of the deep mind, except for the sense of being held and nourished by the ocean of sensations, the ocean of pleasure. Oh.

At the beginning of the retreat, I referred to the Buddha’s teachings on how the hindrances could be seen as irrigation canals that have been dug that pull the water away from the flowing river until the river dries out. It is possible to feel where, in the water of the deep mind, the water of our sensations, the aliveness, the vitality of the pleasure of it all, getting involved in certain stories and thoughts, hindrances, pull the vitality away, pull us away from that softness, the warmth, the wholeness, until sometimes we feel quite dry. Then, of course, that will happen. But it is good to know about this deep, moist, plowet place of the deep mind, the deep sensing, the deep well-being, the global, broad, wide field.

Where we can feel the goodness of that, the nourishment of it, where we can feel the goodness that it radiates out to us, the good influence, the feeling, the sense of being onward leading, or a feeling of rightness. Stay close to that the best you can. Maybe think of it as something very precious that you are holding tenderly, gently. Maybe it is like having to gently hold for a while a newborn kitten or a newborn puppy. You hold it so tenderly and carefully that almost nothing else is as important. Just holding this thing in a way that feels safe, feels comforting for the kitten or the puppy.

It is that precious. It is that important to hold this deep part of yourself in this kind of careful way when that is available. And so you might consider, as you go about the day today, that you are caring for this tender thing inside, staying close to it so you do not accidentally drop it. May your deep mind support you. May this deep way in which all your faculties of attention kind of work together in a field of awareness here now. Thank you.