

Guided Meditation: Thinking to Support Meditation

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Hello and welcome. I'm quite happy to be back here for this YouTube community. I'll be here for this week, then away again for another retreat for a week.

For this week, I would like to make the theme mindful speaking. I'll say more about it later, but for now, for this meditation, I'd like to offer you—suggest, if you'd like—to do a radically different thing in meditation. Normally, in meditation, we're thinking about quieting the thinking mind. Sometimes we realize that the thinking mind takes us so far away from the present moment that we're not even meditating. We're fantasizing, or planning, or remembering, or doing something else, but we're lost in it, kind of caught up in it.

And so, thinking is sometimes considered to be the problem we're supposed to address: find a way not to think so much. And so we're looking maybe for a quiet mind. What I'd like to suggest for this week is that you include your thinking as part of the meditation. But not to have free rein to think whatever it wants to think, but to not think that you're supposed to have a silent mind, a quiet mind without thoughts. And the middle way, the meditative way, is to have thoughts that are supporting you, actively supporting you to become more peaceful, to be more aware of the present moment, to be less reactive to the present moment, to be kinder to your experience.

To think about how the discursive thoughts can be quieted. How you have better things to do than be involved in fantasy, past, present plans. That you want to be thinking about the depth of this moment, the full possibility of here and now, for connecting with yourself, for really knowing yourself in a deep way, feeling yourself. And then you want to talk to yourself in a way that seems kind, meditative, quiet, spacious, not in a hurry, not trying to make something happen. But more like you're being your own kind of best friend, sitting with you, listening deeply, and maybe kind of involved in the conversation to help you settle and be your best self from the inside out.

And of course, you don't have to do this, but you might consider whether this might be better than the alternative. So I'll start in some of the ways that I guide you in the beginning. It might be a model of how you can guide yourself. Part of this speaking to yourself in meditation is to give yourself meditation instructions, or give yourself a guide to meditation, and to do it in such a way that the way the mind is speaking is settling, spacious, quiet.

So, to feel into the body. Taking a gentle survey of your physical body as it is right now, and bring the attention to your posture, different elements of the posture. Are there ways that the body would like the posture adjusted? Not simply to be comfortable, but so that the body is supportive, is involved with being aware, being present, being actively involved with arriving here in the present moment. Are there places in the body that welcome relaxation? It could be large muscles like the whole belly, or it could be tiny muscles.

Where in the body can the body be relaxed and softened? Maybe going up into the area of your head. Are there things in your head, in your face, in your brain, forehead, that could be relaxed and softened? And then having some curiosity about the experience of the body breathing, the body's experience of movement, shifting sensations as you breathe in and out. Asking yourself, "What's the quality, the characteristics of breathing, at this time?" Is it different than other times?

Asking yourself which is more clear to awareness: the inhale, the exhale. Asking yourself if there's any holding or tension in the breathing, and if there is, asking yourself how you can be aware of it in the simplest way, without any judgment or pressure. And asking yourself if there are some simple ways to breathe or soften in your breathing around the edges of your breathing. Asking yourself, "What is your thinking doing?" And can you recruit your thinking to keep you here in the present moment, guiding you, supporting you, just here, with no reference to before and after, yesterday or tomorrow, just the living experience of now through your body, your breathing, as if you're gently entering into a whole new world?

Maybe a peaceful world. At its center, it's very peaceful. Can you enter into it in a peaceful way, thinking peacefully, quietly? Curious, interested, guiding yourself to a quiet, settled way of being here and now. Are you thinking? Are you thinking about other things and other times?

If so, you don't have to let go of your thinking. Switch your thinking over to the meditation itself. Think about the meditation in ways that support your quieting, your settling, a peaceful abiding here and now. As things get quieter, your thinking can get reduced, simplified to single words: here, now.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, you can take a minute or so to reflect, contemplate how you are right now, and how you might be different now at the beginning of the sitting. How you are, and how you might allow yourself to receive the benefits: the calming, the honesty, the goodwill of these minutes of meditation. And then to turn the attention out into the world, so that your meditation doesn't just stay as an area that's personal and private. Can you offer the merit, the benefit to the world around you, the people around you? Can you consider how this meditation might make you a better person?

In your interactions with others, so that the goodness of this practice that we all share this day is spread out across the lands. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.