

Practice Notes: The Length of a Moment

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And then, to say just maybe a few words about the practice: an interesting way of practicing is the idea of how long a moment lasts. Is a moment just as little as a finger snap, or is a moment a little bit longer? If someone asks, “Can you wait a moment?” how long is that moment?

There’s a famous American psychologist-philosopher named William James who talked about the saddleback of the present moment. Where does the present moment start, where is the heart of it, and then where does it fade away? Or does it have a discrete beginning and end? Does it include a little bit of the past and a little bit of the future? It’s kind of like a space, the moment.

One way of thinking about that expanded saddleback of the present moment is to think about it as the length of time it takes for you to breathe in and to breathe out. That’s a moment. For some people, you get to choose what your moments are, but let’s just say that that’s a moment. The moment begins, gets fuller, and then begins to fade with the exhale.

Every moment is a completely new beginning. Every moment—that’s the approach to this meditation—is completely new. It’s like the world, the universe, is being born with the in-breath at the beginning of that moment, and this is all there is that’s really real and tangible and living. Everything else is just a thought; it’s an idea. But really, you’re living in the lived experience of the moment.

Something is coming together. It’s born, it’s arising, and then it passes away with the exhale. And that’s not so bad, because then it starts over again. And just that.

To meditate like that, if you’re interested in walking meditation, is a little bit different. I think a moment of walking meditation needs to be long. It depends how slow or fast you’re walking,

but generally it needs to be longer than one footstep. Maybe it's two footsteps, or maybe it's four footsteps, or maybe you don't count. But it's kind of the length of time that a nice breath takes.

That's the moment, when you walk, of the universe being born and passing away. Just kind of get in that rhythm of what exists: it gets born right then with that moment and passes in that moment. Just live each moment in a relaxed, full way. Make sure your moments are not too fast. Just kind of follow that rhythm of arising and passing of the moments, arising and passing, and ride along in that rhythm, like waves or something like that.

Maybe it'll be engaging for you, and maybe it'll keep you in the present. Maybe it'll do something very different for you than your usual way of meditating. Thank you.