

Guided Meditation: Beginnings and Endings, Over and Over

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to our meditation session.

And I'd like to offer you a variation of something I taught yesterday, not at seven a.m., but at the half-day sitting at IMC.

So, we have an English expression or word: moment. "Just a moment." And a moment is an ambiguous length of time. Some people will say, "Just a moment. I have to go get something," and it might be thirty seconds. It might be three minutes. So, how long is a moment?

It's longer than a snap of fingers. And there's William James, the American philosopher-psychologist, a great student of religions, who talked about the saddleback of the present moment. Somehow, it's kind of like a curve that starts kind of in one direction. We could have just as well called it the humpback of the present moment, but it starts kind of in one direction. Kind of then it goes up or it goes down and humps the saddleback, and then it comes to the bottom, and then it comes back up again.

And to the past, there's no sharp line between the past and the present, or the present and the future. But somehow, in that moment, there's the center of gravity for that moment here. But it's not a clear, defined, distinct time, like, you know, one-tenth of a second, one second, three seconds. It's kind of different. In different situations, we say a moment is something different.

But a moment. And what I'd like to suggest is that a moment of mindfulness can be the length of time it takes to breathe in and breathe out. That as you begin breathing in, that's the beginning of the whole world of the present moment in our experience. Let it begin with the in-breath and grow into the top of the in-breath, and then, with the exhale, fade away. Stay

with the whole moment: the rising and passing of the moment, the beginning and end of the moment. This is the moment to be present.

You don't have to string those together necessarily. It's not like it's a continuous awareness that's nonstop. There's a rhythm to it, where the moment arises and passes, is born and fades away. And see if that rhythm of momentary experience keeps you engaged with your experience, as opposed to with your thoughts about other times, other places, your reactions.

Let that thinking mind, the figuring-out mind, the analyzing mind, the story mind, rest. Let it have a vacation. Let it—ah, yes—don't have to do that, in favor of this amazing rhythm of the world arising with the in-breath, the moment in time arising with the beginning of the in-breath and disappearing at the end of the out-breath, only to return over and over again.

So, to assume a meditation posture, it's often good to choose a posture where it's clear that there's no restriction on your breathing. There's not a collapsing of the chest or collapsing around the belly, so it makes it a little harder to have a relaxed, easeful breath. If anything, it's open enough that nothing gets in the way of the full inhale. Nothing gets in the way of the full exhale. Generally, that's a posture that allows the chest to be open and allows the belly to hang forward and expand outward.

Gently close your eyes, and then do a deep check-in to your breathing itself, without any judgments, without seeing it as a problem or that it should be different. Check in with your breathing, asking, “How are you, my friend?” And listen carefully. Don't judge. Don't try to fix. Just like you would with a friend, just accompany.

Find out how your friend, the breathing, is right now. And without any special effort or judgment or analysis, check in to see what it's like. What's the experience for you like when you begin the inhale? Is it sudden? Is it gradual? Where in the body does it begin? Is it pleasant or unpleasant or neither?

Checking in: what is it like when you come to the end of the exhale? Does the exhale fade slowly, suddenly? Where in the body are the last sensations of breathing out? What sensations might be the final sensations of breathing out?

And now, let the moment be—the time between the beginning of the inhale and the end of the exhale—where the world begins with the inhale, ends with the end of the exhale. With the idea that you don't need to take anything with you from between the end of the exhale and beginning of the inhale. No past, no future, no memories, no judgments. Allow everything to begin fresh and new with the inhale. This time, this world.

Arising with the inhale, passing with the exhale. Riding that rhythm. Everything new with the

inhale. Everything passing away with the exhale. See if you can let go of everything on the end of the exhale. Nothing carried with you into the beginning of the moment now, with the inhale.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, continue in a simple way with the practice of the moment—the moment of breathing in and breathing out—to see, to the degree that it's possible, to let everything begin fresh with the inhale, because everything has passed away with the exhale. Everything is fresh with the beginning of the inhale. Nothing carried over from the exhale.

And if you continue this way, bring to mind the world of people that you live in. The people you know, the people who are strangers. What would it be like to continue to know them in the span of breathing in and breathing out, where your sight, your presence is fresh for them? Nothing carried over, no memories, no judgments, no hurt feelings, no desires from the past.

As you breathe in, seeing others fresh, complete. And as you exhale, let them fade away, disappear from awareness, from the thoughts, ideas, only to return fresh with the next inhale. And then, with that fresh awareness, new awareness of this people world around you, as you exhale, wish them well. Fresh awareness on the inhale, and wish them well on the exhale.

May you be happy. May you be safe. May you be peaceful. May you be free, and may all of us, in our ability to see with fresh eyes, see people more fully. Unburdened by our past judgments and ideas, may we wish them well.

All beings, may all beings be happy and free, and may it begin with the ways in which we regard them. May the ways that we see them and relate to them be an offer of happiness, safety, peace, and freedom. Thank you.