Guided Meditation: Clearing the Fog

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Hello and welcome to our morning meditation.

And in this week, we're looking at the bundles—the five bundles. Today, the topic is sensations, and so, for this meditation, it'll be the focus of it.

And the way that this insight meditation practice, the *Vipassanā*, was taught to me in Burma, it was very much a sensation-based meditation. We were—it looked like we were told to make breathing the default, to just kind of keep our attention at the home base of breathing. But they never said it that way. What they said was, "Be aware of the movements in the body associated with breathing." And what they were emphasizing was, pay attention to the sensations associated with breathing. That's the heart of it.

And if we pay attention to other things, pay attention to the sensations of the emotions you had. Pay attention to the sensations of even your thinking. Sensations were kind of the foundation by which the mindfulness was cultivated. So it can be very important for mindfulness practice.

This weekend, my wife and I drove over to the East Bay. We crossed one of the bridges to go across San Francisco Bay, and the weather was spectacularly clear—maybe kind of unusually clear. So it was noteworthy. We noted to each other, "Wow, everything is so clear!" And we could see the hills across the bay very clearly. We could see the beautiful sky.

Crossing the bridge, we could see the very still, beautiful bay water. We could see trees and buildings and boats. Everything was kind of clear, and you can see what clarity means. You can see the clear distinction between things. Sometimes it's hazy. Sometimes it's in the fog, and then we don't see the distinctions.

We might see rough outlines, but we don't really see the sharp distinction between things. So the same thing with us: we can sometimes live in the fog of thinking, and we don't really

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see clearly because we're in the ideas of things, the stories, the attitudes, the beliefs, the judgments, the commentary. And we don't see clearly. What we're trying to do in *Vipassanā* is to see clearly without that fog.

And one of the consequences of that is we see the distinction. When the fog clears, things aren't a big mush. Rather, we see very clearly that there are sensations, and distinct from the sensations is the mind that knows them. That doesn't make it dualistic. It just—just like it doesn't make the still water on the bay different from the mountains around the bay, different from the sky. That's not dualistic to see those distinctions.

It's just the nature of things when there's clarity. So, see clearly sensations, see clearly the mind knowing sensations, and see clearly that the mind is telling stories about the sensations, having attitudes about them. Having ideas of being for them or against them, preferring or not preferring, right and wrong, planning how to fix it and change it, how to keep it, how to celebrate, and how to be depressed around what sensations we have. There's all this whole mental chatter and world that lends itself to a fog, and more than that, sometimes to a lot of suffering.

And so, in this teaching today, is to start seeing the clear distinction between the sensations and the whole mental universe of thoughts and attitudes and beliefs about the sensations. Or, if your thinking is disconnected to the sensations, just feel and know you're completely disconnected. You're really in the fog now in relationship to really being in touch with yourself in a deep way.

So, assume meditation posture and gently close your eyes. And without anything more, for a moment, just feel the sensations of your body, the way that they show themselves to you. Rather than searching out and scanning the body for sensations, relax and let the body speak to you, announce itself to you, in whatever way it wants, whatever sensations want to come. Be careful that the mind doesn't fixate on anything. Doesn't get preoccupied or worried and caught in that.

Let the body, in a random and open way, reveal different sensations in different moments throughout the body. And then, within the body, as part of the body, become aware of the sensations of breathing, whatever way they show themselves. And is there any place in the breathing you can relax as you exhale? Breathing in, breathing out, feeling the sensations. Meaning how the body senses sensations.

Being present for the place in the body where sensations and sensing occur together. Where the direct experience of sensing sensations is silent. In and of itself, it doesn't need any

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thoughts, any words. Sensing sensations in and of itself is free of words.

And as you feel the silence of the sensations themselves, can't you see the difference, the distinction between sensations and your thinking about them—your ideas, preferences, explanations, commentary, predictions—and see them as two different things? And if you can, rest the awareness close to the sensations themselves, the sensations of breathing. And if you can, don't give energy, don't give attention over to the thinking, the thoughts, opinions you have about the sensations.

Okay. Can you see a distinction between sensations and the ideas that you have about them—the thoughts, preferences, meanings you assign, stories of past and future? The sensations themselves are substantial, concrete, or physical. The thoughts themselves are ephemeral, insubstantial, lighter than a feather.

And if you see the difference between sensations and the ideas, is there any stickiness between you and the ideas? Any gravitational pull, attachment, strong energy of being pulled into your thoughts, believing them. And what difference does it make to see the ideas, and to also see the stickiness or the attachment to them?

As we come to the end of the sitting, find that place within you where you can feel the silence of sensations. In and of themselves, a place that the noise of your thoughts, ideas, thinking is not found—a place of silence, softness, stillness. And from the perspective of that stillness, silence, free of ideas of right and wrong, should and shouldn't, gaze upon the world kindly. Gaze upon the world through the silence, so kindness is unfiltered, uncompromised, a goodwill towards all beings.

And may it be that the meditations we do are connected to our desire to contribute to a better world, a kinder world. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free.

And may our ability to distinguish between what we see in the world and the ideas, and stories, and commentary, and opinions we have help us to see clearly, putting our opinions in the right place. May all beings be happy. Thank you.

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