Guided Meditation: Simple Recognition

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Hello and welcome to this morning meditation.

One of the useful things to recognize in meditation is when we are involved in discursive thinking. When we're involved in thinking that involves telling ourselves a story, an extended commentary, or a prediction of what's going to happen. Usually, when we spend time thinking about the past, it also is a form of discursive thinking. It's a kind of maybe storytelling, or it's connected deeply to a story of what happened.

To recognize that that's what's going on provides a few benefits. One is we can stop investing in the discursive story, discursive thinking, and instead invest our precious attention into the present moment, to be with our experience, direct experience, to be with the breathing. It also allows us to bring forth, bring to the foreground, a very simple form of knowing, a very simple form of thinking. Not discursive thinking, but the very, very rudimentary form of recognition.

Recognizing this is an inhale, this is an exhale. A very simple recognition: this is discursive thinking. This is a sound. This is an ache. This is calm. This is the mind agitated, activated. This is the mind beginning to calm.

It's a very, very simple act of recognition. And the idea is then to learn how that act of recognition can be more like field notes of a scientist who just simply writes down what is seen without any interpretation, without any assigning of meaning to it. It's simply an inhale, as opposed to, “That's a lousy inhale,” “That's not the right inhale,” “If I was really meditating, I would have a very different sensation as I'm breathing in,” “I don't like that inhale,” “I'm going to try to work on getting a better inhale.” And now we're involved, and it's more complicated than just an inhale or just an uncomfortable inhale. It has a judgment; it's the wrong inhale, a bad inhale.

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So the idea of dropping out of discursive thinking allows us to take it to a next layer: that there's a kind of natural, almost automatic way in which the mind will recognize what's happening. We want to stay in that recognition of the present moment in such a way that it supports feeling and sensing the breathing, just staying right present. And to keep it very simple, so that we don't get involved in anything more complicated. Because it's in the complications around recognition that we can start getting, start clinging, start wanting, start not wanting, and building up a pool, a grouping of things: sense of compulsion, clinging, grasping, wanting, aversion. And we can be swept away with it, so we don't see what's going on as the simple recognition.

So, assume a meditation posture, and gently close your eyes. Let your attention roam around your body, to feel what's there in your body right now, and to begin experimenting with the simplest recognition of what it is, of those sensations, those feelings. So simple that there's no judgment, no assigning of meaning. Just the sensations, the field notes of exactly how it's experienced. Without adding anything, including thoughts about before and after.

Deep check-in into the body. And then narrow that check-in to checking in about your experience of breathing. Again, the experiment is: how simple can the recognition of breathing be? The direct, embodied experience only, not the assigning of meaning or purpose or value or comparison to other breaths, ideas of what should and shouldn't be. In keeping the recognition of breathing simple, does it make it maybe easier to feel the sensations of breathing? Does it make it easier to see when you wander off in discursive thought?

Whatever is happening, let there be a simple, simple recognition. And then begin again with the breathing. Hmm. To be very simple with awareness, to simply feel the experience of breathing, and to simply recognize it, to know it in its simplest, obvious way.

It can be helpful to also recognize a wider silence or stillness that surrounds feeling and recognizing. Maybe as if you are not doing the feeling and recognizing, but feeling and recognizing seems to arise out of the silence. Out of some stillness that's here, and then it returns.

One of the most simple and peaceful ways of being alive is to rest the natural capacity to feel, sense sensations of your body, and to recognize them in the absolute simplest way, and to have the overview that recognizes when you make it more complicated than it needs to be. Adding stories and discursive thought, adding desires, aversions, strong desires, compulsions of wanting and not wanting. A simple way of being that knows, that feels, and has the silent overview of it all.

As we come to the end of the sitting, imagine the simplest way of gazing upon the world, to

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see and recognize another person in their most fundamental humanity, free of all the labels, ideas, and stories, meaning and associations we can have. To grant them the simplicity of our gaze, just seeing them, knowing them, recognizing them in the simplest human way, without a past and a future. In a way that sees them more fully, sees them clearly, without any complicated interpretations, stories, associations, nothing that gets in the way of our kindness and friendliness.

The simpler we can be with ourselves, the more clearly we can see others simply, and have a clear, simple channel for our kindness, friendliness. May we have, for the end of this sitting, a clear, simple, open channel. With no hesitation, no exceptions, no protests. Simple kindness, kind regard for the whole world.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free, and may the way that we gaze upon others be a gaze in the gaze. Let all these things be true: that in our gaze, people are safe, offered peace, and are seen free of our judgments. May all beings be seen clearly and kindly, right down to the depths of their hearts.

Thank you.

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