

## *Peace of Mind*

*December 10, 2011*

Start the meditation with thoughts of goodwill. Just tell yourself, “May I be truly happy. May the people around me be truly happy—the people in my family, and then spreading out in all directions to all beings everywhere.”

And think about what true happiness might be. It has to involve peace of mind, because if the mind is agitated, if the mind is worked up, then no matter how good things may be otherwise, you can't really be happy. So this is the essential ingredient. That's why we're meditating: to find peace of mind.

So how do you make your mind peaceful? Remind yourself that its well-being doesn't have to depend on things outside. Your true well-being has to depend on qualities within the mind itself. That's why we meditate: to develop those qualities. That's going to be the focus of our attention for the rest of the hour.

Take a couple of good, long, deep, in-and-out breaths, and notice how that feels—because if you stay with the breath, you're staying with the part of the body that's closest to the mind. Without the breath, we wouldn't know about the body at all.

The breath can have a soothing effect on the mind, too. Try to breathe in a way that feels really good. The parts of the body that are tense: Try to breathe in a way that's relaxing and soothing for them. If there are parts that feel weak, try to breathe in a way that feels more energizing, because well-being isn't just relaxation. There also has to be energy—not nervous energy, but the energy that comes when things are solid, when they fit together and nourish one another. So think of the whole body being nourished by the breath.

And remember that the breath isn't just the air coming in and out of the lungs. It's the feeling of energy flowing in the body. It's flowing from one part of the body to another, or flowing into every cell and then out from every cell. There are lots of different ways you can think about the breath energy in the body.

So think of every cell being nourished each time you breathe in. If there's any tension or tightness in the body, think of it relaxing as you breathe out so you're not holding onto it. Notice where the feeling of the breath is clearest. It might be around the nose. It might be in the chest, the rise and fall of the stomach, the rise and fall of your shoulders, or the ribcage expanding and contracting. There are lots of different places where you can feel the breath.

And there are centers of breath energy in the body. It's if you have breath channels, like a system of roads, and some spots are the intersections. Some of the

main intersections are the middle of the forehead, right at the roof of the mouth, the base of the throat, the middle of the chest, and right at the abdomen just above the navel. You can choose any one of those spots and just stay with it for a while. Try to think of it as being an open road with no blockades so that the energy flows in and flows out easily. If you choose a spot that seems difficult to stay focused on, move around a bit until you find a spot that's just right.

Let the mind settle down and rest for a while. It doesn't have to go anywhere; it doesn't have to do anything. You have no responsibilities right now. Anything that has to do with the past or the future: Let it go. The mind doesn't have to take on any burdens right now. Just be right here in the present moment. Be aware right here in the present moment. Allow things to settle down.

If any thoughts do go running out, you don't have to straighten them out. You don't have to see how they end. Just as soon as you realize you've gone with a thought someplace else, just drop it and come back. You don't have to get involved. You don't have to wipe it out; you don't have to tie up the loose ends. Just let it go and it'll dissolve away. And you find yourself back here at the breath. Try to make the breath consistent, with no gaps in the energy—because usually it's in the gaps that the mind slips away.

Once the mind is calmed down a bit, then you can start noticing how the breath energy feels in other parts of the body as well. You can start anywhere you like, but try to be systematic. Go up the body or down the body, up the front, down the back, out the legs. Or you're going to go up the back? That's fine, too. Just try to notice how the breathing feels in as many different parts of the body as you can survey. If you find any spots of tension or tightness, think of them dissolving away so that the breath flows easily all the way in, all the way out.

You may notice as you go through different parts of the body that different parts need a different rhythm of breathing, or a different texture or heaviness of breathing. So make adjustments for each part. Give each part what it seems to need. And then move on to the next and the next. After you've gone through the whole body, you may want to go through the whole body again. Sometimes you pick up things on the second or the third time that you missed on the first.

You can keep this up as long as you like until you're ready to settle down again. In the meantime, you may have found another spot that you actually prefer to the first spot, so go to that spot—whichever spot seems best. Let your awareness settle there, and then think of it spreading out from that spot to fill the whole body. Think of all the breath energy channels in the body connecting so that when you breathe in, there's immediate sense of refreshment from the breath to as much of the body as you can manage.

And try to breathe in a way that feels soothing, that feels healing, that strengthens the weak parts and calms down the ragged edges. If the breath feels really good, you gain a sense that you really don't want to go anywhere else. You like being right here; it's like coming home. You have a sense that this is where you belong. So try to maintain that. The problem is that after feeling refreshed like this for a while, you say, "Okay, enough. I'm ready to go someplace else." Remind yourself: There are deeper levels of pleasure that you won't experience unless you really stay here for a long period of time.

Things begin to open up, open up, open up over time. So try to be patient. If you find yourself wondering, "What shall I do next?" ask yourself, "Is there a way of breathing that could be even more comfortable?" Parts of the body that are not getting any breath energy: Look for those. In other words, you have to work in this sense of well-being. Otherwise, the mind begins to get drowsy and slips off. So there's always more to observe right here.

Just go deeper and deeper, and you get more and more sensitive to what's going on. You get a deep sense of peace. You'll be surprised how deep it can go. When the Buddha said that there's a happiness that doesn't depend on conditions, that's not affected by aging, illness, or death, he wasn't kidding. He'd found something really special, and it's something really special within each of us.

So it's worth the time and the effort that goes into settling down and being really observant right here, because you find all sorts of things you never expected to see.