

## *Basic Intro*

*March 27, 2009*

We're going to be meditating for the next hour, so get your body in position. Get your mind in position.

Having your body in position means having your back comfortably straight. Place your hands in your lap, look straight ahead, and then close your eyes. It's important that your back be comfortably straight. Otherwise it's going to be painful toward the end of the hour. That's your body in position.

Your mind in position means focusing on the present moment. A good way to stay anchored in the present moment is to focus on your breath. As long as you're with the breath, you know you're in the present moment.

So notice where you feel the breathing. What sensations in the body tell you, "Now the breath is coming in; now the breath is going out"? Notice how the sensations feel. Are they comfortable? If they're not, change the way you breathe. Maybe the breath is too long or too short, too heavy or too light, too shallow or too deep. So you can adjust it until you get a rhythm and texture of breathing that feels just right, all the way in, all the way out. It feels full, comfortable, refreshing. That's getting the mind in position.

The difficult part about training the mind is not getting in position, it's *staying* in position. You've got to watch over your mind to make sure it doesn't go wandering off someplace else. If you catch it wandering off, bring it right back. Ask yourself, where could the breath be more comfortable? Then breathe that way, as a way of rewarding your mind for coming back. If you punish it each time it comes back, getting upset or discouraged, that's going to make it even less likely to stay. It's going to wander off again. So each time you catch it, bring it back and ask yourself: "What would be a really good breath right now? What would feel really good down in your stomach? What would feel really good in your chest?" Wherever. Allow the body to breathe that way for a while until it's no longer comfortable. Then you can change again.

This way, you keep the mind here with the breath not simply through force of will power, but also through interest, trying to figure what kind of breathing feels really good right now. When the breath feels good, it's good for the body. It nourishes the different organs in the torso, helps the circulation of the blood for the different parts of the body. That's because the breath is a whole-body process. When you breathe in, there's an energy flow that goes all the way through your nerves—if you don't block it. All too often, we unconsciously block it. As a result,

some parts the body don't get to participate fully in the breathing. So once you have a sense of comfortable breathing, think of it spreading out so that it fills the whole body. It breathes in with the whole body, breathes out with the whole body. Everybody gets to participate.

We do this because the mind needs training. We tend to think of happiness as consisting of things around us going well. But actually things out around us can go very well and yet we can still be miserable. The mind, if it's not trained, can get overcome by greed, anger, delusion, jealousy, all kinds of things that can make it miserable. So we train the mind to bring it more under control so that it doesn't create unnecessary suffering for itself. And as we train the mind with the breath like this, we're developing good qualities to help with that sense of control:

Mindfulness, keeping something in mind—in this case, you keep the breath in mind.

Alertness, watching what's actually going on, and here you're alert to two things: one is how the breath is going, the other is how the mind is going, whether it's staying here or not.

Then there's the quality of ardency, trying to do this skillfully, trying to do it well. In other words, when the mind wanders off, you try to catch it as quickly as possible. You bring it right back. When it's staying here, you try to figure out how to help it stay here more skillfully, with a greater sense of interest, sensitivity, and ease.

So you pose questions in the mind about how the breath is going: How does the breath feel in the lungs? How does the breath feel in the stomach? How does it feel in the head? How does it feel in the shoulders? Which part of the body is most sensitive to the breath? For some people, it's down in the chest, in the area near the heart. So ask yourself: How does that part of the body feel as you breathe in and breathe out? Do you sense any tightening up, say, at the end of the out-breath? Are you squeezing things out? When you breathe in, are you trying to pump too much in? That's a sign that the breathing is too long. Or does the in-breath not feel satisfying? That may be a sign that it's too short or too shallow.

So learn how to read your breathing. Try to become more and more sensitive to this part of your awareness. You find that it gives you a good foundation, because the greater sense of well-being in the present moment, the easier it is to stay here. The body benefits, and the mind benefits as well. It doesn't always go slipping off to thoughts of the past, thoughts of the future. It stays right here.

Why is it important to stay right here? Because the intentions of the mind are happening right here, and we tend to miss them. We do things and say things and often don't know why. It's as if we're on an automatic pilot. When we're on

autopilot like that, there's no guarantee that the intention behind our actions is going to be skillful. So you want to be here to watch your intentions, which is why we start out with this intention to stay here, because once you establish an intention like this, it's going to run up against other intentions that'll pull you away. That's how you get sensitive to what's going on in the mind. You begin to see that the mind is like a committee, with lots of different ideas, lots of different voices in here.

For the time being, you've got to learn how to listen to one voice, the voice that reminds you to stay with the breath. The best use of your time right now is to develop these good qualities in the mind—mindfulness, alertness, ardency—because they're useful for completing any task.

That's the third part of the meditation: After learning how to do it, how to maintain it, then you try to put it to use. On the one hand, this can mean applying your strength in mindfulness and alertness to whatever you've got to do, but it can also mean learning how to stay with the breath even when you're not sitting here with your eyes closed. When you get up from the meditation, try to maintain that same sense of being centered inside the body, being sensitive to the breath energy in the body, as you go throughout the day. It'll change your center of gravity.

If you're the type of person who's always worried about what other people are thinking, you will find that this will be a fight for a while, because part of your mind will want to go out and scout out the situation around you, losing touch with the situation inside you. So you have to remind yourself: If you stay grounded like this in the present moment, you're going to be in a much better position to see what's actually going on, both inside your mind and with other people as well. You'll be more alert to the signs of what they're going to say, what they're going to do. Your mind will be able to access more possibilities of what you could say and do in response.

So you're actually in a much better position being here than you would be if you tried to go out and scout out everybody else.

You'll also be able to notice when your intentions are not quite honorable, not quite honest, and if you're staying right here, you're in a better position not to act on them. Otherwise, you allow yourself to get distracted and who knows what's going to come out of your mouth, what's going to come out in your actions.

So keep reminding yourself: The best place to stay is right here all the time, regardless. The choices you're going to make in terms of what you do and say will be coming from a much more solid place, a greater sense of well-being, which means it's more likely that they'll be conducive to further well-being, both for yourself and for the people around you.

So the meditation, the training the mind, is about doing, maintaining, and then putting it to use. Get the mind in position, keep it in position, and then realize that by keeping it in position like this, you can use it in lots of different circumstances. It's not just a place to rest for a little bit during the day. Or if you're not doing formal meditation at all, it's better to at least to have this place to stay, to give the mind some time to be by itself, to look after itself. It's better than not meditating at all. It's best to be able to maintain this sense of your inner center in all situations. Use it as the foundation from which you act, from which you speak, from which you think, so that your actions, words, and thoughts will be more skillful, more conducive to happiness. After all, that's what the training of the mind is all about: trying to find true happiness.

We had that chant just now about how we're subject to aging, subject to illness, subject to death, subject to separation. That far, it's all pretty depressing. But the opening for happiness is in the last contemplation, that we're the owners of our actions. We have the right to choose what we're going to do. If we train the mind, we'll find that we can do things a lot more skillfully, so that instead of creating unnecessary suffering for ourselves, we're actually creating greater potentials for happiness, a happiness that's lasting, that's not affected when the body grows old and ill and dies. It's not affected when we're separated from the people we love, because it has a much deeper foundation. And this is where we look for, right here in the present moment.

Once you know that what you're looking for is right here, then you want to establish yourself in a solid position right here, so that you can see more deeply into the mind.

So try to make the most of this hour to get some practice in staying with the present, or returning to the present when you find yourself slipping away, so that being in the present moment becomes your default position.