



## WAKING UP TO EACH MOMENT

### **Reflection...**

Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing as you are doing it. So, the best way to wake up to each moment is to learn to pay attention. Sitting to meditate is the space we set aside to practice the skill of paying attention, by bringing our mind to rest on one point, for example, the breath, or a sensation in the body. The breath and the body become anchor points, places of stability, of relative calm and quiet from which we can begin to notice where the mind habitually runs away to, or what it habitually closes down to. Brother Phap Hai of the Plum Village Buddhist tradition calls these the 'Tracks in the Carpet' of our minds.

Notes from 'Nothing to It' – by Brother Phap Hai

In order to cultivate an authentic transformation of the heart, we need to understand that meditation is not a place to hide or to 'get comfortable' but rather to engage with life as it presents itself to us in each moment. As we develop the capacity to be present with our experience, we begin to notice our habitual patterns, and we're able to smile to them.

Even though intellectually we can grasp that the essence of the practice of mindfulness is to choose to be present in every moment one hundred percent, most often we struggle against where we are, what we're doing, or who we're with in this moment due to the 'tracks in the carpet' we have created for ourselves. We want to be somewhere else, with someone else, doing something – anything – else.

And this is something that shows up in our everyday lives. What might we notice if, at certain points in the day, we ask ourselves 'Am I awake?' or 'Where is the mind right now?' Has the mind slipped away from what we are doing because of an undercurrent of dissatisfaction, a sense of boredom, or the need to be somewhere more comfortable? Can we be interested in this, and kind to ourselves in that moment of recognition?

### **Meditation**

Suggested meditation – Awareness of Body and Breath - with an intention to take this time to engage with each moment just as it is. Waking up to each moment and allowing things to be just as they are.

Spend a little time making yourself comfortable in a sitting position, arriving in this space and in this moment. Ensuring that the back is straight but not stiff, and that the neck and shoulders are soft. Allowing the chest to be open. If it feels okay for you, allowing the eyes to close.

And beginning to settle and sense into the body sitting here. Feeling the weight of the body pressing down and becoming aware of the space the body is taking up, the space the body is inhabiting in this moment. And perhaps also becoming aware of the space beyond the body and the different sounds coming and going within this space.

And then gently redirecting your attention back to the body, and taking a few moments to tune into, to greet the familiar anchors of the feet, the bottom on the seat and the hands resting in the lap or on your thighs. Perhaps even gently smiling to these. Reminding yourself that you can return to these anchors, the sensations of connection with the surfaces beneath you, should the mind become scattered or overwhelmed with thoughts.

And then expanding your attention once more and noticing how the body feels in this moment. Is there a sense of heaviness or lightness, tiredness or energy, tension or ease, stillness or restlessness? Remembering that there is no right or wrong way to feel, whatever you notice is your experience in this moment. Seeing if you can turn towards whatever is present with interest, allowing things to be just as they are, rather than with an attitude of needing to change or 'fix'. So, inviting you to gently scan down through the body, starting at the top of the head and moving downwards towards the toes, just noticing how things are in your body in this moment.

So gathering your attention now, and bringing it to the breath. Beginning to notice the sensations of breathing, how the body moves with each in-breath and each out-breath.

You might notice the sensations of the breath moving in and out of the nostrils close to the tip of your nose. Cool air moving in on the in-breath, and slightly warmer air moving out on the out-breath.

Or you might be aware of the faint sensation of air moving at the back of the throat as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

Or you might notice the breath most clearly in the chest. The stretching and rising sensations of the ribcage on the in-breath, and the falling away sensations on the out-breath.

Or, if your abdominal muscles are relaxed, you might notice a gentle stretching in the belly as you breathe in and a pulling back as you breathe out.

So, choosing a place where you can comfortably rest your attention on the breath, the nostrils, throat, chest or abdomen. Then simply follow the journey of each in-breath and each out-breath.

There is no real effort required, no need to try and control the breath. Just allowing the body to breathe naturally and simply observing the sensations as it does so. And if you notice this is difficult in some way, that you are grasping at the breath or holding tightly to it, just making a note of this, that's how it is for you in this moment, and then as best you can loosening your grip a little, letting go, stepping back.

Then perhaps becoming interested in the particular patterns of the breath. Notice the beginning of each in-breath, the path it follows and its end. Then notice the beginning of the out-breath, the

path it follows and its end. Become interested in the changing sensations, and how each breath can be subtly different from the last.

And you might also become aware of the small pause between the in-breath and the out-breath, and the small pause between the out-breath and the next in-breath.

You might also notice that the mind has wandered away from the breath. Perhaps it has got caught up in planning, daydreaming, worrying or self-criticism. Mind wandering is quite normal. So, if you find yourself getting tangled or lost in thoughts, consider this as an opportunity to start to become more familiar with the habits of the mind, the tracks in the carpet. Can you simply note what the mind has got caught up in? Or what it is turning away from in this moment? And then without needing to pursue this, or try and fix anything simply unhook and then return your attention to the breath.

If paying close attention to the breath is difficult, evoking feelings of anxiety for example, you might choose to follow the breath from a distance perhaps noticing how clothing moves with each in-breath and out-breath, or how the back of the shoulders and tops of the arms rise and fall. Or you might prefer to keep your breath in the background of your awareness and return to a different bodily anchor, perhaps bringing awareness to sensations in the bottom of the feet, or your thighs and bottom on the seat, or sensations in the hands.

Then, expanding the awareness outwards to take in the whole body sitting here. Becoming aware once more of the body's posture, the space that the body is taking up, and the contact that the body is making with the surfaces beneath it. And becoming aware of the breath moving throughout the whole body. Subtle sensations of movement throughout the whole body as you breathe in and as you breathe out. As you breathe in, the breath expanding outwards right up to the edge of the skin, and then falling away again as you breathe out.

Then returning to a sense of the body as a whole and returning to watching the breath. Breathing in and breathing out. Receiving and letting go.

### ***Where is the mind?***

*Mind wandering is a normal part of meditation practice and all that we need to do is to notice when it has happened, and the nature of what has distracted us. Perhaps we have become lost in thought, planning, remembering, rehearsing, worrying or daydreaming. Or perhaps a sound or a body sensation distracted us and set off a chain of internal dialogue. Whatever the distraction, the instruction is the same, note where the mind has gone, perhaps noting the 'tone' of the mind's workings then gently unhook without self-criticism (mind-wandering is what minds are designed to do!), and then **return the attention to where we had intended it to be**. We may need to do this many times during a practice, and this is why learning to be patient and kind with ourselves are important mindfulness skills!*

## Poem

Peace is this moment without judgement

Do you think peace requires an end to war?

Or tigers eating only vegetables?

Does peace require an absence from  
your boss, your spouse, yourself? ...

Do you think peace will come some other place than here?

Some other time than Now?

In some other heart than yours?

Peace is this moment without judgment.

That is all. This moment in the Heart-space  
where everything that is is welcome.

Peace is this moment without thinking

that it should be some other way,

that you should feel some other thing,

that your life should unfold according to your plans.

Peace is this moment without judgment,

this moment in the heart-space where  
everything that is is welcome.

by Dorothy Hunt