

Guided Meditation: The Practice of Vipassana (Mindfulness)

Recording available at: [Guided Meditation: The Practice of Vipassana \(Mindfulness\)](#)

The Buddhist practice for developing mindfulness is called vipassana, which means “clear insight” or “seeing clearly” in Pali, the language of the Buddha. What follows is a simple introduction to this practice.

Find a sitting position that allows you to be alert—spine erect but not rigid—and also relaxed. Close your eyes and rest your hands in an easy, effortless way.

Allow your awareness to scan through your body and, wherever possible, soften and release obvious areas of physical tension. You might very consciously relax in the shoulders. Soften the hands. Relax the belly.

Because we so easily get lost in thoughts, vipassana begins with attention to the breath. Using the breath as a primary anchor of mindfulness helps quiet the mind so that you can be awake to the changing stream of life that moves through you.

As you practice, you might find a different anchor, other than the breath, might be most useful for you. Perhaps sounds or maybe the whole field of bodily sensations - or perhaps both listening to and feeling your moment-to-moment experience.

What’s important is that your senses are awake and attention with the breath as a home base, or sounds, or sensations, can help you to know that you’re here.

Take a few very full breaths, aware of the inhale filling the lungs, slowly and gently exhaling.

And then allowing your breath to be natural, notice where you most easily detect the breath. You might feel it as it flows in and out of your nose; you might feel the touch of the breath around your nostrils or on your upper lip; or perhaps you feel the movement of your chest or the rising and falling of your abdomen.

Bring your attention to the sensations of breathing in one of these areas, perhaps wherever you feel most distinctly or you might feel a sense of the whole body breathing.

There is no need to control the breath, to grasp or fixate on it. There is no “right” way of breathing. With a relaxed, interested attention, discover what the breath is really like, as a changing experience of sensations.

(pause)

You will find that the mind naturally drifts off into thoughts. Thoughts are not the enemy, and you do not need to clear your mind of thoughts. Rather, you are developing the capacity to recognize when thoughts are happening without getting lost in the story line.

When you become aware of thinking, you might use a soft and friendly mental note: “Thinking, thinking.” Or simply recognize, “This is a thought.” Then, without any judgment, pause and reawaken to the moment – this moment - listening to sounds, feeling the sensations that are here... gently returning to the immediacy of the breath. Let the breath be home base, a place of full presence.

While you might notice other experiences - the sounds of passing cars, feelings of being warm or cool, an image of a future event, sensations of hunger - they can be in the background without drawing you away from hereness – from this moment. Be aware of the difference between being inside a thought, and being awake, senses open, present.

(pause)

If any particular sensations become strong and call your attention, allow those sensations, instead of the breath, to become the primary subject of mindfulness. You might feel heat or chills, tingling, aching, twisting, stabbing, vibrating. With a soft, open awareness just feel the sensations as they are. Are they pleasant or unpleasant?

As you fully attend to them, do they become more intense or dissipate? Notice how they change. When the sensations are no longer a strong experience, return to mindfulness of breathing or perhaps to listening to and feeling your moment-to-moment experience.

If you find it difficult to stay with persistent, strong sensations – unpleasant sensations - you might breathe with them, let the breath help you find some balance and openness in the midst. Or if the sensations are so unpleasant that you can't be present with any balance or equanimity, feel free to return to your home base – to your primary place of resting attention - the breath, perhaps listening to sounds.

In a similar way, when strong emotions arise - fear, sadness, happiness, excitement, grief – you can practice meeting each experience with a kind and clear presence, not pushing anything away, not judging, not resisting what is happening. Rather simply notice and allow the experience – just as it is.

Notice how this fear or hurt or difficult emotion feels like as sensations in your body? Where do you feel it most strongly? Is it static or moving? How big is it? Is there judgment in your mind about what's happening about the fear or restlessness or irritation? Does your mind feel contracted or open? As you pay attention, just notice what's happening and let it be just as it is.

In this present, allowing awareness, notice how the emotion changes. Does it become more intense or weaken? Does it change into a different state? Perhaps anger to grief? Or happiness to peace?

If the emotion is strong - is difficult to be with it, you might breathe with it, and if it feels overwhelming, come back to your breath, to the home base that allows you to relax with the present moment.

If you are confused about where to pay attention or if the emotion is no longer compelling, again relax wakefully with the breath or perhaps listening to or feeling the moment to moment experience.

(pause)

The particular sensations, emotions or thoughts that arise when we practice mindfulness are not so important. Like the outer weather, there is no inherent goodness or badness to these inner states. What matters is our willingness to be awake, regardless of the weather. It is this unconditional presence that reveals the nature of reality.

Continue to be here... and especially if the mind is not so distracted, you might let go of any anchors for attention and explore not controlling anything – not directing the mind – not managing or manipulating your attention in any way.

Let your senses be wide open – listening to and feeling the entire moment.

When any experience calls your attention - perhaps strong sensations or emotions – notice and allow this experience of aliveness to be as it is.

Allow what is happening to unfold in an awake, open awareness.

[bell]