Mindfulness 2.0 (Guided Meditation)

June 17, 2023

Close your eyes. Start with thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is the wish for happiness, true happiness, happiness that doesn’t change on us, and happiness that harms nobody. This is the kind of happiness that comes from training the mind, from looking within to see what our inner resources are, and to figure out how we can develop them. Because this happiness comes from within, it means that your true happiness doesn’t have to conflict with the happiness of anyone else. So you can make goodwill a universal attitude, something you feel for everybody. Start with yourself. Just tell yourself, “May I be truly happy. May I understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on them.” And then extend that same thought to others. You can start with people who are close to your heart, your family, your very close friends. “May they be truly happy too.” And then spread those thoughts out in ever-widening circles to people you know well and like, to people you like even though you don’t know them so well, to people you’re more neutral about, and to people you don’t like. Remember the world would be a much better place if everyone could have true happiness within. And if you have limitations on your goodwill, that’s placing limitations on yourself. Because if there are people for whom you can’t have goodwill, you can’t trust yourself to behave in a skillful way around them. Spread the thoughts of goodwill to people you don’t even know. And not just people living beings of all kinds. East, west, north, south, above and below, out to infinity. May we all find true happiness in our hearts. Now bring your attention to the breath. Take a couple of good, long, deep, in and out breaths. And notice where you feel the sensation of breathing in the body. It could be at the nose, it could be at the chest, the shoulders, the rise and fall of the diaphragm, the abdomen, anywhere at all. But wherever it’s most prominent, focus your attention there. And then ask yourself, if it’s comfortable. If long breathing is comfortable, keep it up. If it’s not, you can change. You can try shorter breathing, more shallow, faster, slower, heavier, lighter. Try to see what rhythm and texture of breathing feels good now. And be alert to the fact that what may feel good for a while, suddenly doesn’t feel good after a while. So you can change. As I was saying this morning, just because you have raw eggs in your refrigerator doesn’t mean you have to eat raw eggs. You can fix them. The same way with the breath. If the breath is not comfortable, you can change the way you breathe. There was a time when the Buddha was going to teach his son meditation. His son is named Rahula. The first instruction to Rahula was to make the mind like earth. In other words, people can pour garbage on the earth but the earth doesn’t react. They can pour perfume on the earth and the earth doesn’t react. The same with the other elements. Fire can burn trash but it doesn’t get disgusted by the trash. Water can be used to wash dirty, dirty things away. But the water is not disgusted by the dirt. The wind can blow garbage around but it’s not disgusted by the garbage. So the first principle of the meditation was learning to be non-reactive. But the Buddha wasn’t going to teach his son to just stay there and be a cloud of earth. You want to be non-reactive so that you can see things clearly for what’s happening, what’s going on. And then you can come to a good decision as to what you want to do. So being non-reactive, you might call that mindfulness 1.0 or 1.0. But then the mindfulness to give rise to skillful qualities, to keep them there, that’s mindfulness 2.0. Because once he taught his son to be non-reactive, then he taught him the steps for breath meditation. The breath meditation steps require that you actually get active involved with the breath. You try to breathe in a way that’s comfortable. You breathe in a way that gives rise to a sense of fullness in the body. You try to be aware of the whole body as you breathe in and the whole body as you breathe out. Now that’s something you learn to work up toward. A good idea is once the breath is comfortable then you start going through the body section by section to familiarize yourself with the more subtle breath energies in the body. A good place to start is down around the navel. Locate that part of the body in your awareness. Watch it for a while as you breathe in and breathe out to see what rhythm of breathing feels good there. And then if there’s any sense of tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax. So that no new tension builds up as you breathe in. And you’re not holding on to any tension as you breathe out. And then bring your attention up to the solar plexus, the area right in front of the stomach, and follow the same steps there. One, locate that part of the body in your awareness. Two, watch it for a while as you breathe in and breathe out to see what rhythm of breathing feels good there. And then three, if there’s any sense of tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax. Then bring your attention to the middle of the chest and follow the same steps there. (birds chirping) Come to the base of the throat and follow the same steps there. Now focus your attention in the middle of the head. As you breathe in, think of the breath energy coming in, not only through the nose, but also through the ears and the eyes. In from the back of the head, down from the top of the head, going deep into the brain. And then as you breathe out, think of it radiating out from the head in all directions. Working through any patterns of tension you may feel in your jaws, in the forehead, around the eyes. Loosening up those bands of tension and allowing them to dissolve away. (birds chirping) Now you can continue the survey of the body at your own pace, starting with the back of the neck, going down the shoulders, the arms. And starting at the back of the neck again, going down the back, out the legs. Then you can start again at the navel if you want. Go through the body again, as many times as you like, until you’re ready to settle down. Then choose one spot in the body that seems most congenial, easiest to focus on. Allow your attention to settle there and then to spread from that spot to fill the whole body. So you’re aware of the whole body. Breathing in, the whole body breathing out. The range of your awareness may have a tendency to shrink, so keep reminding yourself each time you breathe in, whole body. As you breathe out, whole body. Allow the breath to find whatever rhythm feels good. Your only duty at that point is to maintain that centered but broad awareness. This awareness is healing for the body and healing for the mind. Because it’s still and yet all around, it provides a good foundation for insight to arise. This is what we call mindful ness 2.0. After you’ve learned to be non-reactive, you use that part of the mind that can see things for what they are. When you’re doing something, you can see clearly whether it’s getting a good result or a bad result. And because your mind is non-reactive, you could admit any bad results to yourself so that you can learn from them. This is in line with what the Buddha calls mindfulness as a governing principle. Which means that if there is something good in the mind, you try to maintain it. If it’s not there yet, you try to give rise to it. Now this may be different from what you’ve heard about mindfulness, that it’s watching things simply arise and pass away on their own. But that’s not the duty that the Buddha assigned to mindfulness. It’s to remind you that there are dangers in life. We’re coming from a quality called heedfulness. There are different ways that you can say that Buddhism comes down to one principle. Sometimes you hear that it’s all about emptiness. Some people say it’s all about acceptance. Some people say it’s all about compassion. When the Buddha himself said what it was all about, he said it’s all about heedfulness. But even though heedfulness is one word, it implies a duality. It implies that there are different dangers out there, but there are ways to behave so you avoid the dangers. Of course the real dangers are not out there, they’re in the mind. We have greed, we have aversion, we have delusion. And these things can make us do things that we later regret. We do things thinking that they’ll lead to happiness, lead to well-being, and they end up leading someplace else. That’s the danger we have to watch out for. We also have good qualities in mind as well. We have qualities like mindfulness, the ability to keep something in mind. Alertness, the ability to watch what we’re doing as we’re doing it and to see what results we’re getting. And ardency, the desire to do this right. Of these three qualities, ardency is the one that lies at the beginning of discernment. You realize that the Buddha was not simply teaching words for the sake of the words. He was teaching us skills, how to go about putting an end to suffering. And so if you really want to get the most out of these teachings, you have to put them into practice as best you can. It’s when you put them into practice as best you can and see, well, the results are still not coming out well. That’s how you can learn. So you do your best to keep the breath in mind and to work with the breath so that it feels good being here. Because we practice mindfulness in order to give rise to concentration. And the mind will stay concentrated. It’ll stay with one object only if the object is pleasant. So that’s what we do with the breath. We make it pleasant. It also gives us a measuring stick. When we’re trying to stay with one object, we maintain one intention. That’s when we begin to notice that other intentions are coming along. It’s like lying out in a field on a sunny day, clouds going through the sky. If you simply look up at the clouds, you have no idea which clouds are moving, which ones are staying still. Because there’s no firm frame of reference. But when you make up your mind that you’re going to stay with the breath, it’s like having a tree or a post or the top of a roof that you can compare. You look at the top of the roof and you can see how the clouds move relative to that. And then you know which clouds are moving, which ones are not. And it’s the same way here. Make up your mind to stay with the breath. Other things come in, you recognize them. And if you see that whatever’s coming in is creating more tension, creating more stress, the Buddha recommends two ways of getting rid of it. You don’t just sit there and accept the stress. One way is to watch it. Because some of the causes of stress are in the mind simply because you’re not paying attention. But when you really look at them, it’s as if they get embarrassed, they shrivel up and they go away. With other causes though, you’re perfectly aware that you’ve been going with them. So when you simply look at them, they look back at you. They stare right back at you and they look unfazed. It’s with these, he said, that you have to exert what he calls a fabrication. Now there are three kinds of fabrication that we can use. The first is the breath itself. If you start getting sleepy or beginning to drift off, try to breathe in a way that’s heavier, more energizing. Long in and short out can often help. But realize that you have an ally here with the breath. We’re not just watching it coming and going out on its own, because it doesn’t come in and go out on its own. Consciously or not, we play a role in the in and out breathing. So we might as well play a consciously good role, helpful role. Get the breath to help us. Because sometimes, say when there’s anger, it’s hijacked your breath. You’re breathing in a way that’s really uncomfortable. And that’s why you have that feeling that you have to get it out of your system. But if you act on the anger, you end up causing a lot of trouble. If you bottle it up, you end up getting sick. So here the breath gives you an alternative way. Breathe through the tension that comes with the anger. Breathe in a soothing and calm way. And that takes a lot of the power of the anger away. The second kind of fabrication the Buddha calls verbal fabrication, which is how you talk to yourself. You direct your thoughts to a topic and then you evaluate it. So look at how you’re talking to yourself, the object that’s making you angry. Or the person that’s making you angry. Can you talk about it in a different way? A way that’s just as true, but it’s not so aggravating. And then finally there’s what the Buddha calls mental fabrication, which are your perceptions and your feelings. The perceptions are the labels that you put on things to identify what they are, what their meaning is. These can either be images or words. And then feelings are feeling tones, feeling tones of pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain. So when you’re angry, what’s the image that you have in mind of the person you’re angry at? Is the image realistic? Is it simply aggravating things? Can you change the image? In other words, instead of thinking of all the things that that person has done to make you angry in the past, which simply piles on more anger, you can think of the good things the person has done. It balances things out, puts things into perspective. And of course with feelings you’ve been trying to generate good feelings by the way you breathe. So these are ways in which you can pull your mind out of any unskillful thoughts, actively using the breath, the way you talk to yourself, the images you hold in mind, the feelings you focus on. This is how you’re used. Mindfulness has a governing principle to give rise to skillful qualities and then to maintain them. So that’s mindfulness 2.0. It starts with learning how to be non-reactive. But it doesn’t stay there. It starts with acceptance, but it doesn’t stay there. It uses that non-reactive mind to see things as they actually are, so you can get a good idea of what needs to be done. Then you bring out your tools, the way you breathe, the way you talk to yourself, the images you hold in mind. And it’s in this way that you embody the Buddhist teachings on mindfulness. Realizing that yes, there are dangers in the mind, but there are also good qualities that you can develop that can make you safe. You may have noticed that we bow down a lot here at this monastery. We have respect for the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, because they teach us to have respect for things inside ourselves that are worthy of respect. The desire for a true happiness, a happiness that doesn’t harm anyone, that’s worthy of respect. The world teaches us to view that kind of wish with suspicion. Instead, they want us to buy their whatever they’re trying to sell us. Forget about true happiness. Enjoy our new mop. Enjoy our new electronics. That’s what they say. And they teach you to have some suspicion toward your desire for true happiness. (birds chirping) But the Buddha teaches us that true happiness is possible, and it is possible through our own efforts by developing qualities inside that we know are good. Generosity, virtue, concentration, discernment, goodwill, compassion. So it’s because the Buddha teaches us to respect these things in ourselves that we have a lot of respect for him. (birds chirping) (water falling) (birds chirping) (water falling) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (water falling) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) (birds chirping) Before you leave meditation, think thoughts of goodwill once more. Think of whatever sense of peace or well-being you have felt for the past session, and dedicate it to others, either specific people you know are suffering right now, or all living beings in all directions. (birds chirping) May we all find peace and well-being in our hearts. (birds chirping) And with that thought, you can open your eyes.

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