

Guided Meditation 1: Recognizing Body and Mind, Relating with Sanity

Uncontrived Half-day Retreat

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So, today we'll be talking and practicing with an idea of recognition. And what I mean by that – I'm using a term that the Buddha didn't use so explicitly and that lets me kind of unfold different dimensions of it. It's not meant to be a super precise term, but it's about, partly it's about perception, so, recognizing what something is that we're experiencing. And partly, it's a dimension of realization, the verb that's associated with the third noble truth of reducing or eventually ceasing *dukkha*. So we have to be able to see, we have to see something in our practice. So I'm calling that general area “recognition.”

But one thing that we'll see today is that it has some subtlety to it. So it is indeed a form of clear seeing, but it's a kind of seeing that doesn't limit or kind of clamp down on what is recognized, and that's important. And in fact, developing whatever this quality is that I'm pointing toward – this action – is it might actually require us to do less and not more. So I think that's what I want to start us with.

So let's go ahead and start meditating. Settling into a posture that's comfortable for you. Finding some ease. Closing the eyes if that's comfortable for you. And I also like to kind of drop a *sutta* passage into these half-days that we do together. So this one is one that I've been kind of threading through my teachings ever since I heard it a little while ago. It's an unusual translation of a *Dhammapada* verse by a Sri Lankan monk. And it translates the word *appamāda* – which is heedfulness or diligence, also a word in this realm of clear seeing – it translates that word as ‘sanity,’ which I really like.

So here's the *sutta* verse:

"Those who are truly wise are especially aware of the need for sanity. They take delight in sanity. They take pleasure in the pursuit of sanity because it is the resort of the noble ones."

So this term “sanity” is worth contemplating, letting it land in our mind as we go ahead with the meditation.

So, bringing the attention first to the posture. Most of you are in the sitting posture, but maybe you're lying down. And just sensing the overall feeling of the body. Inviting a posture that is balanced. So, finding a position where you're essentially upright. It's often possible, depending on your body of course, to have the body unsupported and just rising up vertically from what you're sitting on. Feeling a balance – the ears over the shoulders over the hips. Or, if you're lying down, a posture where the spine is relatively straight. Feeling the groundedness of where you're sitting or lying. Allowing yourself to be supported...

You may imagine the body like a sea plant rising off the sea floor, anchored below where you're sitting, and almost floating upward. Feel the natural straightening or release that comes from that image...

And softening the eyes in the eye sockets... softening the muscles of the face, the jaw... allowing the neck to soften so that the head floats on the spine... Releasing the shoulders. Maybe imagining the shoulder blades sliding down the back... Softening the arms and hands... And down into the torso, sensing the rib cage, heart area. And just letting that be flexible. I like to sense the front, back, and sides of the rib cage. And then invite a release so that it expands a bit... Down through the belly area... Letting the belly drop down a little farther into the lower abdomen... Softening the hip joints... Resting a little more deeply into what you're sitting on... Softening and releasing down the legs all the way to the ankle joints and the feet.

Inviting a sense of sincerity, a willingness to see what's really here, to whatever degree that is available. And also inviting the quality of mindfulness: non-reactive presence with experience...

Sensing into the body as clearly as we can, and bringing up sincerity and mindfulness in the mind are all dimensions of sanity: having a realistic and beneficial relationship to experience...

And this kind of mind state feels receptive, or as if we're available. From a place like that, and now invite the experience of the body, of body sensations. And just see what comes. If you open to what body sensations are here, see what comes and just be with that. And maybe nothing comes and that's okay too. Just hang with the openness if that's the case.

In this meditation I'll invite a series of experiences like we just invited the body. And the skill that we're practicing is this gentle availability and then recognition of what comes. It's not important that particular things, more that we are able to see and receive them without interference and entanglement with them.

So, inviting then, what is the experience now of the breath? What comes?...

And once we have a sense of the breath, can we stay open even though we now know how the breath is at this moment? Because it may change. Can we watch if the mind reifies or fixes? "Here's how the breath is now," and then repeat that...

In a moment we'll shift again. We'll do a series, and then I'll have some silence at the end. So, shifting now to what is available in the realm of feeling tone or *vedanā*, which is not a body scan. It's not looking for specific pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, but more, that you can invoke the part of the mind that detects feeling tone. And see what's happening for that right now. And again, maybe nothing comes. Entering the world of feeling tone available to it...

Finding now a connection to what's called the “*citta*, ” or the mind, the heart. The aspect of experience that includes our emotions, thoughts, intentions, hindrances, beautiful qualities. Invoking the part of the mind that can know that, seeing what's there, recognizing what's there...

At this moment, being receptive to knowing the aspects of the *citta* at this moment without entanglement... And it may be that other aspects of experience are still there, and you can feel the body or the breath. That's okay. Practicing the skill of recognition. Being sane about experience...

Now the mind is – if this feels interesting to the mind, including, or shifting to, or even just including the stillness that is underneath experience. Being receptive to that as a dimension of our experience...

Continuing on now in silence from this point forward. Perhaps something from what we went through is of interest and the mind picks it up. Or you want to look more deeply into the skill of being available and receptive as a pathway to clearly recognizing things. Or perhaps you continue with your usual meditation, but it's changed in some way by this initial exercise. So see where it goes as we continue to sit together...