

## *Guided Meditation*

*July 4, 2005*

Every now and then, it's good to back up and remind yourself the basic points.

So start off with thoughts of goodwill, wishing for your own happiness and the happiness of everybody around you. The first place to start is with thoughts of goodwill for yourself, because if you can't wish goodwill for yourself, it's hard to wish goodwill for anyone else. Just tell yourself, "May I be happy. May I find true happiness," with an emphasis on the *true*. Other kinds of happiness are easy to find, but they leave you dissatisfied. Often they can turn on you. And many of the easiest kinds of happiness are the ones that cause the most harm.

So you want true happiness, one that doesn't cause anyone any harm. That means a happiness that comes from within, that comes from developing your own inner resources, so that you don't need to take anything away from anyone else. There's nothing selfish about this kind of happiness at all.

So it's a good place to begin. From there you can wish for the true happiness of other people. Start with people who are close to your heart: your family, your very close friends. May they find true happiness. Then spread those thoughts out in an ever-widening circles: to people you know well and like, people you don't know so well, people you're neutral about, and people you don't like.

Wishing goodwill for people doesn't mean that you have to like them. Remember: You're wishing true happiness. If all the nasty and brutish people in the world could find a true happiness, the world would be a much better place. So don't let there be any limitations on your goodwill.

Then spread 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 lives.

Now bring your attention back here to what you have in the present moment, because this is where the resources for true happiness lie. And what have you got? You've got the body sitting here breathing, and you've got the mind here thinking and aware. So you bring all those things together. You think about the breath.

The way you keep the breath in mind, that's mindfulness. Then you're alert to how the breath is going, knowing when it comes in, knowing when it goes out, sticking with it all away as it comes in, sticking with it all the way as it goes out, making sure you stay with it as consistently as possible. That's the quality of alertness. And then the sticking with it, that's ardency. This is what you need—

mindfulness, alertness, and ardency applied to the breath. Those are your raw materials.

Notice how the breath feels as it comes in. If it feels comfortable, allow it to stay that way. If it doesn't feel comfortable, you can change it. You can make it go deeper or more shallow, longer or shorter. Ajaan Lee recommends starting out with a couple good long deep in-and-out breaths, and then allowing the breath to calm down to a rate that feels just right. You can also look at the texture of the breathing. Is it too soft? Too harsh? Too fast? Too slow? You can make adjustments.

If you find the mind slipping away from the breath, bring it right back., If it slips away again, bring it back again. How you deal with distraction is one of the most important parts of the meditation. Often we think, "Oh, I've wandered off. Now I'm going to come back. And I am going to make sure I don't wander off ever again." That's setting yourself up for a fall. Of course the mind is going to wander off again. So when it does, make up your mind that you're going to try to catch it as quickly as possible. Be on the alert for the fact that it is going to wander off.

There are going to be several stages in its wandering off. If you can catch it in the early stages, it's easiest to bring it back. If you slip and find yourself off in another little world, well, just drop it and come right back. Don't engage in recrimination. Just make up your mind that you're going to try to be more careful next time, quicker next time.

Then try to make yourself more and more sensitive to how the breathing feels. The more you can get absorbed in being sensitive to the breath, the easier it is to stay here. Allow yourself to become a connoisseur of breathing.

Once you've developed a fairly comfortable rhythm of breathing, you can go on to the next step, which is to be aware of the whole body as you breathe in, whole body as you breathe out. A good way to build up to that is to go to the body section by section.

You can start, say, around the navel. Locate that part of the body in your awareness. Where is your navel right now? Which sensations correspond to that part of the body? Then you watch those sensations as you breathe in, as you breathe out. If you find any sense of tension or tightness in the breath, or if you're pushing the breath out forcibly as you breathe out, allow it to relax. If you want, you can think of the breath energy coming in right at that spot of the body where you're focused, without any obstruction: breath energy coming in and going out right there. And again, you can adjust the rhythm and the texture of the breathing so it feels just right for that part of the body.

Now move your attention over to the right, the lower right-hand corner of the abdomen, and follow the same three steps there. In other words, one, locate that part of the body in your awareness. Two, watch it for a while as you breathe in, as you breathe out. And three, if you notice any sense of tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax. In other words, if there's tension building up with the in-breath, or you're holding on to tension of the out-breath, allow it to dissolve away.

Then move your attention over to the left, the lower left-hand corner of the abdomen, and follow the same three steps there.

Then move attention up to the solar plexus and follow the same steps there.

Then move your attention over to the right, to the right flank.

And then to the left, to the left flank.

Then bring your attention up to the middle the chest. This can often be a very tight and sensitive area. So allow your awareness to settle on this area as lightly as possible.

Then bring your attention over to the right, to where the chest and shoulder meet.

And then to the same spot on the left.

Then bring your attention up to the base of the throat.

And then up to the middle of the head. This is another overworked part of the body, so allow your awareness to settle there gently. Think of the breath energy coming in and out not only through the nose, but also through the eyes, the ears, in from the back of the head, down from the top of the head, very gently working through any tension you may feel around the jaw, in your face, around your ears—gently working through it and then lifting it away.

Then pay attention to the back of the neck. Think of the breath coming in and out from the back. This is probably the most counterintuitive spot to focus on the breath, but it's also the most important, because the neck tends to be Tension Central. So think of the breath working through any tension connected with any muscle, connected any vertebra in the back of the neck.

Now from this spot, you can conduct a survey of the rest of the body at your own pace, down the back, out the legs to the tips of the toes, then starting again at the back of the neck and going down the shoulders and out the arms to the tips of fingers and spaces between the fingers: taking the body section by section, one at a time, focusing your attention on that section, watching it for a while as you

breathe in breathe out, allowing any tension or tightness you may feel in that part of the body to dissolve away, and then moving on to the next section, and then the next until you cover the whole body.

Then you can start again at the navel and go through the body once more. Keep this up until you're ready to settle down.

At that point, you can choose any spot in the body to focus that feels congenial. Allow your awareness to settle there and then spread out from that spot to fill the whole body, like the candle at the front of the room. The flame of the candle is in one spot, but its light fills the entire room.

Then try to maintain that broad, centered awareness. There's nothing else you have to do; nowhere else you have to go. Just stay there with this broad but centered awareness. If you find it blurring out, then resume your survey of the body until you're ready to settle down again.

Otherwise, just try to keep this awareness going, because it's a healing awareness. And an all-around centered awareness like this is ideal for developing insight and discernment. It's your foundation. You may notice that it has a tendency to shrink. So each time you breathe in, think, "whole body breathing in, whole body breathing out." And try to maintain that balance between being centered and being expansive—all the way to the end of the hour.