

## Offering Guided Meditation

Take an alert, comfortable posture. The back is straight but not rigid. If you are sitting on a cushion, the knees should be below the hips. If you are sitting on a chair, let your back support you... don't slouch letting the back of the tree hold you up. Shoulders should be relaxed, moving away from the head. Chin is tucked slightly in. Hands can either be in your lap, on your knees... wherever is comfortable for you. Either close your eyes or keep a soft focus a few feet in front of you.

Scan your body to see if there are any obvious places where there are areas of tension and soften the muscles. Breathe into areas of tension. Sitting should be a combination of relaxation, comfort and alertness.

Once the body is settled, take a few moments to notice the mind, how you're feeling, what's your emotional state, your mood. There is always an emotional state or mood present, even if you can't name it. What is the overall state of mind?

Take a few long slow deep breaths to start. As you breathe in deeply, expand your rib cage, front, back, shoulders, feel the stretch. Then let out a slow long exhale as you relax and let go.

Breathing in is energetic, enlivening the mind and body. The out breath lets the body and mind relax. As part of your bodily experience, become aware of how your body experiences breathing. Where is the breathing process most prominent? It may be the breath coming in and out at the nostrils. It may be the abdomen expanding and contracting. It may be the movement of the entire body as you breathe. Pick an area that we will call your "home base", the place you return to again and again.

If your mind wanders away in thought, relax and begin again with your "home base" breathing. Let go of what you're thinking about. If thoughts are in the background, let them stay there. You don't have to take care of them or attend to them. If they come to the foreground, simply notice them with kindness and let them disappear.

Notice when you shift from a simple awareness of what's happening to becoming involved in commentary or reactivity. When you notice reactivity, you are practicing mindfulness. You are aware of what is taking place. Come back to the breathing process, your "home base."

If you find yourself continually reacting to what's going on, it might be helpful to very calmly note what is happening. For example, if a memory takes place, note silently to yourself, "memory." If planning takes place, silently note "planning." If a particular thought appears, note its quality. Notice how the thought disappears when you shine the light of mindfulness on it.

If you are having difficulties with the process, try counting your breaths silently to yourself. Breathe in and with the out breath, mentally say "1". Continue counting the breaths in this fashion. If a thought, or memory or commentary appears, start over again. If you make it to 10, begin again until the mind calms. Meditation takes practice. We come back to the breath over and over again, letting thoughts and distractions leave our minds again and again. Our goal is to stay in the present moment, undistracted and at ease.