



Hi, I'm Willa Baker, and welcome to week four of the art of somatic mindfulness, stillness. One of my teachers used to talk about the mind as being like a muddy river. It is moving, sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly. The mind is not very clear. When we meditate, it is as if we have punched a clear vase into the river to draw up water, and then place that vase on the shore. The vase is our practice of meditation, a clear and stable container. Eventually, because the base is on moving, the sediment in the water begins to settle. At first it becomes semitransparent. By the next day, the water is crystal clear, with the sediment having settled to the bottom.

When I first heard this teaching or this metaphor from one of my teachers, I thought of this first by the Taoist poet, Lao Tzu. “Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?” In some ways, meditation is a waiting game. The container of meditation keeps the mind and body still when we tether the mind to a nonconceptual anchor, like the breath, for example, the energy of agitation and restlessness begins to gradually settle. And eventually the mind becomes clear and calm, like the water left and the pitcher.

Another powerful metaphor for meditation from the Buddhist lineage is the ocean. The body is still and grounded, like the ocean floor, your breath rises and falls like the swells on the ocean surface. Attention like an anchor holds you steady, even while thoughts dance around the edges of your mind, like schools of fish. Sense experiences swirl around you like the ocean's current. And all of this is somehow perfectly natural. So using this metaphor of the ocean, we're going to engage together in a meditation practice with the breath.

So I invite you to take a comfortable seat. And to come down from the thinking mind into the feeling, body. voice in your feeling, body. Kindness, connect to the rise in the fall of your natural breath. You can feel the breath as the freshness. The vividness of the inhale, the warmth, the softness of the exhale and the stillness and rest between exhale and your next inhale. Please take a moment to follow your breath as if you were riding the swell of the ocean that arises in the fall of each inhale and exhale, breath, like the ocean.

You might notice and even while you're paying attention to the breath, anchoring with the breath, thoughts do not stop entirely, they still move at the periphery of your attention, like schools of fish. They don't harm the mindfulness. But once in a while you get drawn away your attention stuck to the school of the fish or a fish in the school, and the train of thinking and you're drawn away from the breath. But as soon as you notice, attention comes back to the freshness of the inhale, the warmth of the exhale and the rest between. If you sit in this way for some time, you might notice that even though there is movement, there is also a depth out of which these waves of thought arise and into which they also dissolve. Just like the breath. Can you fall with

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thought? Well, it rises into consciousness, and then as it descends to its point of dissolution. Can you sink below the waves and rest in the stillness below thoughts? Once in a while, you might even try letting go of the anchor of the breath. You might let yourself float with your awareness open and free. Can you surrender and become one with the great ocean? Do you notice how the waves lapping on the surface are one with the deep still waters below. stillness does not mean there's no movement going on.

When you settle into real stillness, thoughts continue to glide through the mind. The breath continues to rise and fall. This is one of the miracles of finding real stillness. It coexists with movement. Stillness does not mean motionlessness. Stillness means we're not disturbed by movement. It means we become graceful with whatever is unfolding. It means we're able to become calm in the middle of a storm. This thing called stillness is not something that you can force. stillness descends gradually, like the dusk, or like water settling out in the base. In some ways, meditation is the art of waiting. You need to keep at it. If you do, eventually, stillness will find you.

It's been lovely to be with you on this four week course and I wish you the very best on your meditation practice as you move forward. I think in time, like me, you may find that the body is one of your most powerful allies in finding stillness, wakefulness and ease. Thank you.