



Welcome. I'm Venerable Pannavati, and we're going to go into four-part meditation training over this next month. As you're sitting here with me, if you'll just arouse the energy to develop your meditation, your contemplation practice, you'll see that it's almost like sitting with your lover—the time becomes so sweet. It becomes so intimate. The Buddha called it a pleasant abiding here and now. I think of it as a sweet abiding here and now.

Most of us are used to mindfulness training, and we're used to so much of an attitude toward being pragmatic, toward being rational. But this is providing a release for the mind, the mental proliferations that we have. The Buddha calls this *shamatha*. And it's a development of concentration. This concentration will help your mindfulness practice tremendously, because wherever you place your mind, your mind will be able to stay.

The mind, if we think of it like a little puppy, you're trying to train the puppy to tinkle on the paper. You put the puppy on the paper and he runs off. He doesn't know what it's for. You put the puppy back on the paper. He runs off. He doesn't know what it's for. You bring him back and you, like, just tweak his tummy just a little bit and he starts to get the idea that he's supposed to do something while he's on that paper. The mind is very much like that. When you take your object of meditation, the mind runs off and you bring it back to the object. The mind runs off, you bring it back to the object. After a while, the mind starts to settle in that it's supposed to stay right there and do something. What is it supposed to do? It's supposed to let go, relax, stop thinking, and stop manufacturing thoughts just for this space of time. You can always come back to your thoughts, but for this space of time it's entering into a certain ease that allows a vast and just very bare awareness to arise and emerge. And you can really see what is happening in front of you. You can really know what's arising inside of you.

So we're going to practice this. I'm going to guide the whole meditation except for about two minutes this first week. Each week I'll do progressively longer meditations with less and less guidance, until you have the pattern down.

Okay, so we're going to begin right now. I'd like to give you a few instructions about how to begin, just making sure that the body is erect so that there won't be a fatigue that sets in. We're not going to be rigid, but we're going to stack that frame up so that the body, the torso, holds the body up. And then we relax and settle into it. We're thinking shoulders, relax. Hips, relax. Legs, relax. Face, the face should be relaxed. One way that you can relax the face is first by smiling. And then let the smile fade away. And as the smile fades away, you still have a sense of an inward smile, because the muscles in the face are relaxed. And so you're just letting all the tension ease out of the face. This is sort of like a setup for a mental state. You know, if you have

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a scowl on your face and there's a lot of tension, then you also feel that tension inside. But when we have like this happy smile inside, we feel at ease, we feel relaxed. And we also feel competent and capable to handle a present situation. We feel more stable, more steady, more grounded. These are just some of the externals that we do as we're preparing for meditation. You might think of your head being suspended from a string so that it kind of holds you up as opposed to slouching. Just avoid the slouch, and you will begin to feel that you're right in the moment, and that you are awake.

The next thing is to think about going inside and what it means to go inside, to just fold inward. The Buddha says that we should withdraw our sense gates; we shut off the sense gates. That means what I hear outside, what I see outside, what I'm feeling, what I'm tasting, what I am thinking. He includes the mind as a sense gate.

And so as we begin to draw in our sight we can do that by gently closing the eyes, or by casting the eyes downward. I like to close the eyes and keep the chin up. Casting the eyes downward gives us a propensity for bringing the face down. So let's try to just hold our heads steady and straight, and maybe we'll just gently close our eyes. How does that feel?

Okay, the next thing you want to do is develop some intent, some kind of zeal for this practice that we're going to be doing right here, right now. So I may be cooking something on the stove; I'm waiting; the baby's napping. Whatever's happening, I've got a crunch situation going on and I needed a minute to try to gather myself. All of those things we put aside for the next few minutes. We'll come back to them, but we set them aside for now. And we're thinking, "This is the only thing that I have to do for the next few minutes." And we do that excellently by focusing inward. And we take a breath in and out—just a normal breath. But we are aware that we are breathing. Our total focus is now on that breath. Not a forced breath—just an easy, normal, natural breath. And we breathe again. And again. And again. And we keep our attention on the breath in this way. Again and again, applying and sustaining thought on that one object of our attention, the breath.

Now, shortly, the mind will get weary of focusing on the breath and it'll look for something else to do. That's how the mind runs away. It gets bored with its object. So know that you didn't have intruding thoughts. The mind got bored and it went outside of this activity looking for something else to entertain it.

So now we know that there's no such thing really as distracting thoughts, right? That is powerful in itself, to know that thoughts didn't intrude on your serenity—that the mind actually went out looking for something else.

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Our purpose now is to keep the mind steady on its object. One way that we can do that, the Buddha said, is to notice different qualities about the breath. That was a short breath. That was a long breath. That was a subtle breath. That was a coarse breath. That was a subtle breath. That was a smooth breath. That was a choppy breath. Just noticing the characteristics of the breath and training the mind to stay right where you've placed it, breathing in and breathing out. We tranquilize mental formations. Breathing in and breathing out. We tranquilize bodily formations. And already you see your ability to become acutely aware of your breath. And you also become aware of the body.

A few minutes ago you may have thought you were in a relaxed posture, but suddenly you feel a little tension in that shoulder. You just relax that now. You may have thought you were sitting straight and you realize that you are a little twisted. You just regulate and readjust your body ever so slightly, all the while returning attention again and again to the qualities of the breath. On the inhalation, is that breath cool or is it warm? On the exhalation, is it warm or is it cool? Really investigate the characteristics and the qualities of the breath and at the same time, notice the ease of body and the tranquility of the mind.

Breath by breath we stay focused, training the mind to be at ease. Applied and sustained thought on this one object, the breath, allows other thoughts to subside.

This is a good way to practice for this next week, every day. Only five minutes at a time. When you're waking up in the morning, when you're getting ready to go to bed, if you just sit up in the bed and propose to give yourself five minutes of just focusing on the breath, training the mind to come in and just be with one object.

We'll pick up next week.