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Instructional Guide to
Secular Awareness Meditation*

by Padme Nina Livingstone

Sitting Comfortably in a Good Posture

Please make yourself comfortable in a sitting position. When we are intending to listen and focus inwardly, it is best to sit in a comfortably erect posture. The oxygen and blood get to the brain more easily in this position, and since the intention is on being aware, we are more awake. Some people have asked about lying down to meditate. It can be wonderful to lay the body down to rest. But, usually when we lie down, we are programmed to go to sleep or rest deeply.

This work is about being more awake to our life.

So, now you are sitting in an erect posture. Carefully, slowly, look around the space you are in. Take it all in with your eyes. Simply notice colors, shapes, textures, arrangement, light, and shadow. Notice the sounds around you. Using the eyes and ears, take it all in.



Drawing your awareness in, think the words—neck free, back to lengthen and widen. There's nothing to do.... Just think those words..... neck free, back to lengthen and widen. Notice what happens.

Rest your hands gently on the lap, near the belly, with your right palm facing up.. If you rest the back of your left hand on top of your right palm, your thumbs can rest easily, barely touching tips together. Again, resting the back of your left hand on the top of your right palm, your thumbs can rest easily, barely touching the tips together. This is a common hand position used in meditation. You may use it if you like.

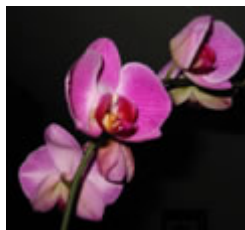
Now, lower your eyes so that they are resting at about a 45-degree angle in front of you. This helps the mind stay more alert for many people. Closing the eyes often denotes sleep and rest to the brain. , When we are working on awareness, it can be helpful to keep the eyes open just a bit.

If you are sitting in a chair, feel the feet making contact with the floor. Feel yourself making contact with the seat. If you are sitting on cushions on the floor, feel your contact with the floor and cushions. Be aware of your physical experience for a few moments.

In the beginning

When we begin to sit with our breath, it has often been useful to count the breaths. This is done by counting exhalations to oneself from 1 to 10. (Count to 3 on exhalates for example)

When we get to 10, we go back to one and so on. When we forget what number we're on, or get caught up in thought, whenever we remember the counting...we simply go back to 1.



Some people never get past one. This work immediately shows us two important things. How are we treating ourselves?... The first thing is to notice what happens when we forget the counting. Is there tightness? A sense of failure? Name calling? When we notice we've "forgotten our job," is there self-blame, or feelings of failure that arise? We can respond to our inner chaos and smile, and in so doing, send loving kindness to ourselves. And then we go back to one.

If we are to be more aware, we must be able to pay attention. The second gift of this beginning practice, is to see how difficult it is for us to pay attention... to stay focused. Counting is an excellent tool for practicing staying focused.

So, when we lose count or focus, for any reason, we return to the counting the breath. It's always the same,... again and again... returning to the counting breath... The work is to see with honesty and compassion what is really going on right here, and to practice forgiving and compassion right here. Please be gentle with yourself. Being present is enough

As a tool for practicing focus, counting often drops away after awhile. There is a story of a Zen master in Japan that used this practice his whole life. I got tired of counting and dropped it within a week. Just following the breath was enough. Again, there is no right or wrong timing for dropping the counting and simply being with it all. Tools can be helpful. When they are no longer useful, we just put them down. Eventually, tools are not necessary with this work.

The work is simply returning our awareness to our breath as we become distracted and forget our intention,..... returning the awareness again and again to our breath. Notice, without blame and judgment, forgetting and remembering, forgetting and remembering..... and coming back to the work of the moment.

As we practice in this way, we may see thoughts as clouds that pass through the clear blue sky of our mind. They have no solidity unless we "catch a ride on them" and let them take us away from this moment.... Sometimes the sky is dark with storm clouds, or filled with light fluffy playful shapes, or quick moving wind blown streaks in the sky.. Sometimes, there are no clouds at all....Sitting here, being here now, we experience first hand ...the work of being here now. The work of returning...returning to the breath, returning our awareness to this moment, again and again.

A new kind of listening

Usually when we're listening to someone speak, when we're alone or sitting quietly, we are engaged in an inner conversation. Thoughts are continually passing through the mind and we get caught up in them- thoughts of judgment, agreement or disagreement, or comments about what the speaker is saying, Questions arise about tomorrow's dinner or yesterday's argument. The kids. The laundry. On and on. Have you noticed this happening?

During meditation, we have an opportunity to listen differently. In a fresh way, with sparkling energy and clarity.

Here, in this moment, we can practice listening in a new way. When thoughts come up, we bring our awareness to the listening.

It is really quite simple...Just simple returning awareness. Listening....fully...with the whole body. Quietly, no pushing, no blaming....just listening. ..noticing thoughts, when they arise, as clouds passing through our sky/mind.

The quality of noticing is not about changing anything. It is not about pushing or trying to make anything different. It is the quality of seeing things as they Are...nothing to change. Can we notice what's happening?

A new way to be with pain

I 'd like to say something about pain. When there is any kind of pain, we identify ourselves with it. It gets our full attention. Doesn't it? We tighten around it and then try to push it away.



When we bring a gentle attention to our pain, simply focusing our attention on the sensations we are experiencing without actually naming it pain, something changes in our experience of it. Our curiosity is aroused and we begin to be aware of the feelings on a whole different level.

The need to push it away may dissolve. We are able to handle it better. The pain may dissolve or lessen its impact on the body/mind, even as our attention is focused right on it. This is true of emotional, as well as physical pain, although physical pain often gets our attention quicker and easier. It is important to see a doctor when appropriate.

It is possible and loving to respond in this new way to pain. Inquiring directly into the experience of pain, we may ask, "What is this?." Sincerely asking this question, a disassociation from the pain occurs, so that we may experience it with awareness. The instinct to react by tightening, and pulling away, is interrupted by our awareness.

When the pain is witnessed as information to be explored, it becomes rich fertilizer for our growth. We no longer need to live in constant fear and continual avoidance. We begin to know for ourselves, that our pain can be accepted on a whole new level...as rich organic fertilizer ...something that nourishes our entire human experience.

In the end

When we first begin to meditate in this way, questions may arise about intentions, posture, thoughts, fears, pain, actually anything. Remember to move slowly, when you are done with a sitting period. Give yourself a moment or two before you get going.

In the end, it is only love that makes a new way of being possible. Please take care.

Finding guidance

Please be patient with yourself. It can take time to learn what Krishnamurti called, "an alternative way of living." It can be extremely helpful to talk with someone who has more experience than you in this work.... Someone who has guidance to share.....someone who can help you untangle confusion as it arises..

There's a story about an old woman whose home is in the middle of a terrible flood. She goes out on her porch, as the water rises, and a boat with people rows by, offering help. She says " No thank you, I trust that God will save me."

Then she goes up to the second floor, as the water gets higher, and opens a window to see another boat, with people offering help. She says, again, "No thank you, I trust that God will save me."

Sitting up on the roof, a helicopter flies over to her, to offer her help. Still, the answer is , "No thank you, I trust that God will save me."

The woman dies in the flood, and when she gets to heaven, she is angry with God. She wants to know why God didn't save her. God's simple response was, "What do you think I was doing, sending all those people to help you?!?"

It might be helpful to remember the old adage, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears". Trust the books that come up in your life, the gut feelings you have about a person, notice what's right in front of you, and be compassionate with yourself...remember we can only share what we have.

Thank you.

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