



Reflection on interconnectedness.

This is a practice that can be done in any posture.

Just be relaxed,  
be at ease.

See if you can begin to trace back all those people who are involved in your interest and meditation.

Someone might have given you a book,  
read you a poem,  
played you a piece of music,  
told you about their meditation experience.

Let a sense of them,  
recollection of them  
come into the room with you.

Consider including those who have really hurt you,  
not just those who you find a little bit annoying or irritating,  
but someone's who's actions have really brought you to an edge so that you almost said,  
"I've got to find another way to be happy.  
I have to look more deeply into life."

After all,  
they're a part of why we're here now as well.

Maybe you had a teacher who instilled love of learning and a willingness to be adventurous.



Maybe you had a parent  
who instilled confidence  
in your ability to try new things  
or explore new terrain.

Maybe you've had a child who's opened  
you up to a sense of wonder and interest.

Just let them be here with you now.

What about the clothing that you're wearing?

How many forms of life,  
how many people,  
how many beings  
have been involved  
in a growing of that fiber,  
creation of cloth,  
transporting it,  
selling it?

The creation of the building  
in which you're sitting  
or the stewards of the plots of land  
if you're outside.

All the forms of life  
involved in the food  
that you've eaten today.

Creature in the earth  
who planted that seed  
and nurtured that crop,  
who did the harvest,  
transported the food,  
sold the food,  
prepared the food.



You can see that none of us is  
actually independent,  
alone, or cut off,  
however alone we might  
sometimes feel.

They're all a part of the  
greater fabric of life,  
this immense web of relationships  
and connections and influences,  
this immense web of interdependence.

We arrive at this moment  
in time born by a sea,  
an ocean of conditions.

If we look at a tree,  
we can see it as just a tree,  
or we can look at a tree  
and sense the soil  
and everything that affects  
the quality of that soil,  
which is nourishing the tree.

The rainfall,  
everything affecting the  
quality of that rainfall.  
The sunlight and the moonlight.  
The quality of the air.

Is the tree just a tree  
or the confluence of all  
these conditions coming together,  
moving, changing?  
And so too we can see ourselves.

Meditation on seeing the good  
even though our more habituated  
tendency might be to remember  
the things we've done wrong



and the mistakes we've made,  
the things we regret.

We can consciously shift our attention  
to include the good within ourselves  
and so too when we look at others.

This is not an exercise meant to deny  
that anything is wrong or regrettable,  
but if we look at somebody and  
we only think about the mistakes  
they've made,  
then a tremendous sense of self  
and other and us and them  
can be reinforced.

Whereas if we include even one  
good thing if we can think of it,  
then a bridge is built  
so that when we honestly and directly  
look at what's difficult,  
it's more from a stance of  
being side by side  
rather than across this huge gulf  
of seeming separation.  
Beginning with oneself,  
just in a relaxed,  
easy posture.

However you feel comfortable.  
See if you can think of one good  
thing you did yesterday.  
It may not have been very  
big or grandiose.

Maybe you smiled at somebody.  
Maybe you listened to them.  
Maybe you let go of some annoyance  
at a slow clerk at a store.  
Maybe you forgave yourself



for not saying something  
totally correctly.  
Maybe you were generous.  
Maybe you sat down to meditate.  
Maybe you thanked a bus driver.

It's not conceit or arrogance  
to consider these things.

It's quite nourishing,  
replenishing to take joy,  
to take delight in the good  
that lives through us  
that we can manifest.

If at any time whether with ourselves  
or somebody else  
we cannot think of something good,  
then there's another reflection that we do,  
which is simply to recall  
that all beings want to be happy.

Everybody wants to be happy.

This urge towards happiness is nothing  
to be squeamish about or feel funny about.  
The problem is not the urge.

The problem is ignorance,  
not really sensing where genuine  
happiness might be found,  
and so making the mistakes  
that might cause so much  
suffering for ourselves or  
for somebody else.

That urge toward happiness itself  
is rightful;  
it's appropriate.



When we can combine it with wisdom  
instead of with ignorance,  
it becomes like a homing instinct  
for freedom and can help us  
cut through many obstacles.

We start with ourselves  
and then with others,  
looking for the good.

If it's just not going to happen that way,  
we switch to this other reflection,  
recalling that all beings want to be happy.

Think of a benefactor,  
someone who's helped you.  
Here their good qualities  
might come in a rush.

You can appreciate that about them,  
those aspects,  
those efforts,  
those acts of kindness.  
Think of a good friend.  
Appreciate the good within them.  
Think of someone you know  
who's having a difficult time right now.  
They're ill or hurting.

Think of the good within them,  
the times they've reached  
out to help others,  
their own sources of strength.

You can see that this person  
is not just the problem,  
but something bigger.



Think of someone you have  
a little bit of difficulty with,  
a conflict, unease.

See if you can find some good  
reflected in things they've done,  
choices they've made.

If not,  
you can switch to that other reflection,  
remembering that they too  
just like each one of us  
wants to be happy.  
They want to be happy.

Everybody wants the same  
sense of belonging,  
feeling at home in this body,  
this mind, this life.  
Ignorance is a very strong force.

I will close with a few moments of  
the reflection that all beings  
want to be happy.  
May they be happy.

You can silently repeat that  
over and over again.

You can close the session with  
a few moments of reflection  
that all beings want to be happy.  
May they be happy.



You can silently repeat those phrases again and again.  
All beings want to be happy.  
May they be happy.

Meditation on compassion.

This is a reflection that can be done in any posture, as open or closed.

Just be relaxed.

Call to mind a difficult emotion you felt recently; anger, greed, jealousy, fear.

Notice how you feel about that emotion.  
Are you ashamed of it?  
Do you dislike yourself for it?  
Do you feel you should have been able to prevent it from arising?  
Do you consider yourself in some way bad or wrong for this feeling?

See what happens if you translate that sense of bad, wrong, defective, terrible to painful, to recognize that this state of anger, fear, or jealousy is a painful state.

It's a state of suffering.

See what happens to your relationship to that feeling as you make this translation.





Take that emotion,  
see what it feels like  
in your body;  
the anger, the fear,  
the jealousy  
now held with some kindness,  
some compassion.  
Observe the various sensations.

Maybe it's tightening in your chest,  
constriction.  
Notice the nature of the compassion  
which was holding it,  
surrounding it.

The pain is there and the  
compassion is there.

Notice the affect if that sense  
of bad and wrong and terrible comes back.

Now imagine someone you know  
filled with that same emotion;  
jealousy, anger, fear, greed.

Notice what happens as you describe  
to yourself those states of emotion as bad,  
wrong, terrible, horrible.

What happens as you respond to them,  
the states of pain or suffering?

You can reflect on the fact that  
we can't seem to control the  
arising of these feelings.

We didn't invite them.  
We didn't wish for them.



As conditions come together,  
they arise and we see our own greed,  
jealousy, hatred, and so on.

We don't need to be overcome by them,  
defined by them,  
fall into them,  
act from them.

We're actually not able to  
prevent them from arising.

This is just in the nature of things  
for ourselves and for others.

We can't commit ourselves  
to trying to see them very quickly,  
to recognize their painful nature,  
to have compassion for ourselves,  
and to let go.

We can't commit ourselves  
to remembering that  
when someone else is acting badly,  
the state that is likely motivating them  
of greed,  
or hatred,  
or fear is a painful state  
and we can have compassion for them.

Even as we may take strong action  
to try to change the situation,  
protect ourselves,  
or take care of someone else,  
our motive in doing so need not be  
a sense of disgust or aversion  
but can be that recognition of  
the pain they, too, are in.

Meditation on emotion:  
bring up a joyous feeling,  
perhaps a memory,  
a plan,



an encounter,  
and feel the emotion within that,  
sense of delight,  
gratitude,  
wonder,  
whatever it might be.  
See where you feel it  
in your body.  
What does it feel like?

How is it changing?

Can you experience it fully  
in the present moment  
without leaning forward  
into the future?  
I've got to get some more.  
I can't let it go away.  
If you see those kinds of reactions  
in your mind,  
settle back.  
Come back into your body.  
Feel the different sensations being born  
of that emotion in this moment.

Bring up a difficult emotion.  
Let's say it's anger.  
In the same way,  
feel it in your body.  
The circumstances,  
the provocation,  
the plans for revenge  
don't really matter.  
In this meditation,  
we're focused on the feeling itself.  
So apart from the story,  
what does the anger feel like in your body?



Or does it feel like it's a mood?  
It's not just one thing.  
It may be moments of sadness,  
moments of fear,  
moments of frustration,  
moments of helplessness.  
Just watch them arise and pass away  
to make up this emotion we call anger.

Notice that neither the joyful state  
or the angry state is  
permanent,  
fixed,  
unchanging.

(inaudible),  
changing,  
evanescent.

You may find your attention  
going back into some story.  
First I'm going to do this.  
Then I'm going to do that.  
If you can recognize that,  
just let go of it.  
Come back to your direct experience  
in the moment.  
What am I feeling right now,  
and what does it feel like?  
What's happening?  
What's its nature?

And even after you've finished  
the formal session of meditation,  
see if you can bring some of this skill  
into your encounters throughout the day.  
What am I feeling right now?  
What does it feel like?  
What's its nature?



Letting go of thought.  
In this meditation,  
you can sit comfortably or lie down.  
Close your eyes,  
or if you're keeping them open,  
just find a spot in front of you  
to rest your gaze,  
let it go.  
And center your attention on  
the feeling of the in and out breath  
at the nostrils,  
at the chest,  
or at the abdomen,  
just the normal natural breath.

And as you feel the sensations of the breath,  
you can make a very quiet mental notation of breath,  
breath,  
with the in breath,  
with the out breath.

And then when a thought arises  
that's strong enough  
to take your attention away from the breath,  
simply note it as not breath.  
It's not the breath,  
and you can recognize it in just that way.  
It doesn't matter if  
it's the most beautiful thought in the world  
or the most terrible thought in the world,  
the one you would never disclose  
to anybody else.  
It's simply not the breath.  
You don't have to judge yourself.  
You don't have to get lost  
in the thought or elaborate it.  
You recognize it's not the breath.  
Very gently let go  
and bring your attention back  
to the feeling of the breath.



It's breath and not breath.

Some of your thoughts may be tender,  
caring.

Some may be very cruel,  
hurtful.

They're not the breath.

See them.

Recognize them.

Let them go.

Bring your attention back  
to the feeling of the breath.

The thoughts are like clouds  
moving through the sky.

Some are very light  
and fluffy-looking,  
very inviting.

Some are quite ominous  
and threatening,  
but they're not the breath.

Just let them go.

Our habitual tendency is  
to grab onto a thought,  
build an entire world around it,  
or push it away,  
struggle against it.

Here we stay even,  
balanced,  
calm.

We simply recognize  
it's not the breath.

Very gently let it go.

Bring your attention back  
one breath at a time.

And when you feel ready,  
you can open your eyes  
and relax.



Mental noting: this is a meditation where  
we first center our attention  
on the feeling of the breath,  
wherever it's most predominant,  
wherever it's easiest for us,  
just the normal natural breath.  
And quietly note in,  
out,  
in,  
out,  
or rising,  
falling  
to help support  
the awareness of the breath.

Then if something arises  
that is predominant,  
that takes over our awareness,  
sensation,  
sound,  
image,  
emotion,  
thinking,  
see if you can make  
a quiet mental note  
of just what that experience is  
in the moment  
without judgment,  
just as an act of recognition.  
Oh,  
thinking.  
Planning.  
Anger.  
Joy.  
If the note comes easily,  
you don't need to struggle  
to get exactly the right word.  
It doesn't need to be elaborate.  
It's just an act of recognition.  
Oh,



this is what's happening right now.  
There's sadness.  
There's happiness.  
Hearing.  
Seeing.  
Thinking.

Gently note that experience  
three or four times.  
Hearing.  
Hearing.  
Hearing.  
See if you can bring your attention back  
to the feeling of the breath.  
The mental note is very quiet.  
It first of all establishes  
a sphere of awareness  
which is not caught up in that experience  
but is able to discern it,  
to recognize it.  
It also provides  
an instant feedback system for us.  
Is this an open-hearted,  
even acceptance?  
Oh,  
this is what's happening right now.  
Or is it more like thinking with fretfulness,  
resentment?  
And if we hear that,  
we say it again.  
Oh,  
thinking.  
And then bring your attention back  
to the feeling of the breath.  
You don't need to try  
to take in everything.  
It's just those things that arise quite strongly,  
pull us away from the breath.  
We spend a few moments  
as though to say oh yeah,





this is what's happening right now,  
and then we come back.

The mental noting is  
the platform for mindfulness.

We see what's happening  
right now as it is.

We're not elaborating it.

We're not judging it.

We're not struggling against it  
nor falling into it.

Oh,

there's thinking.

Anger.

Joy.

Because it's the platform for mindfulness,  
it's the platform for learning.

We can see just what's happening right now.

Many things will arise and pass away,  
some very pleasant,  
some unpleasant,  
some neutral,  
but our job is just  
to note them,  
to recognize them,  
to see them for what they are,  
to see the truth of this very moment  
and then breathe.

And when you feel ready,  
you can open your eyes.

Meditation on balance:  
two of the forces that we're cultivating  
in meditation practice are  
tranquility and energy,  
calmness and alertness,  
relaxation and investigation.  
In any method of meditation,



we work to bring these together,  
to bring them into balance.  
So it's said that from the beginning,  
this is reflected in our posture.

If you're sitting,  
you want to have your back straight  
without being stiff or tense.  
Too much energy.

You also don't want to be slumped over  
so that you're nearly bound to fall asleep.  
You want to be upright,  
not have too much tranquility,  
relaxation.

So if you sit straight  
without being tense,  
and here,  
too,  
you can close your eyes or not,  
and center your attention on  
the feeling of the normal natural breath,  
and notice the play of energy or interest  
and calmness or relaxation  
in how you are with the breath.

Are you way far back,  
don't care really what it feels like?  
Come forward a little bit.  
Feel the actual sensations  
at the nostrils,  
at the chest,  
or at the abdomen.

Do you have sort of a death grip  
on the breath thinking  
if I hold on really tight,  
my mind won't wander?  
When in fact,



it will actually wander more.  
Maybe you need to relax a little bit.

If you can feel yourself  
in the place in the middle  
with tranquility and alertness,  
you'll see how just one breath is  
tremendously fulfilling.  
We're not overriding it.  
We're not shrinking back from it.  
We're rather meeting it completely.

Sometimes in my own practice,  
I use this image of holding something very fragile,  
very precious  
like something made of glass  
in my hand.  
If I were to grab it too tightly,  
it would shatter and break.  
But if I were to get lazy or negligent  
and my hand would fall open,  
it would fall off and break.  
So I just cradle it.  
I'm in touch with it.  
I cherish it.  
And so,  
too,  
we are with each breath.  
We don't want to grab it too tight  
nor be too loose,  
too energized  
or too relaxed.  
We meet this moment,  
we meet this breath,  
and we cherish it  
one breath at a time.

If you find yourself  
getting way far back,  
bored,



disinterested,  
come forward.  
If you're too far forward,  
too tense,  
trying too hard,  
settle back,  
let the breath come to you.  
If you feel you need  
to adjust the balance,  
don't worry about it.  
You needn't question yourself  
am I too tight?  
Am I too loose?  
But let your intuition arise.  
Then come back  
to the place in the middle.  
It's just one breath.

If you have too little energy,  
you'll get sleepy,  
sluggish,  
dull.  
You can sit up a little straighter.  
If your eyes have been closed,  
you can open them up.  
Maybe take a few deep breaths  
to allow the sensation  
to be more intense.  
And then once again,  
allow the breath to become natural.  
Aim your attention toward  
just one breath.  
It's the whole universe.  
Nothing else matters.

If you have too much energy,  
you'll feel restless,  
agitated,  
worried. If that happens,  
see if you can feel



the sensations of one breath  
as though your hands were in water  
and you felt the water swirling around,  
all the different sensations.

So,  
too,  
with your mind,  
your attention,  
you can feel the sensations.  
It will soothe you,  
ground the energy.

You can feel just one breath.

And when you feel ready,  
you can open your eyes  
and relax.