

Foundations of Zen 13

Forms of Meditation

Class 1: Embodied Practice

Mindfulness of Breathing

There are many forms of mindfulness of breathing. Here are some common methods:

- The Buddha's teaching: Satipatthana and Anapanasati Suttas
 1. Sit upright, in a quiet place, and become mindful. Take a deep breath, inhaling, and knowing "I breathe in long." As you exhale, be aware, "I breathe out long." Take three deliberate long breaths that way. Now return to normal breathing, knowing "I breathe in short, and exhale knowing "I breathe out short." Repeat two more times.
 2. The training then begins as you inhale: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body," and as you exhale: "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body." Repeat two more times.
 3. The training continues, inhaling: "I shall breathe in calming the bodily formation," and exhaling: "I shall breathe out calming the bodily formation." Repeat this sequence.
- Square breathing:

Breathe in 4 beats, hold for 4 beats, breathe out for 4 beats, hold for 4 beats. Repeat. Option: Breathe in 4 beats, hold for 4 beats, breathe out for 4 beats, hold for 4 beats. Repeat. Then increase to 6-6-6-6, then 8-8-8-8, back to 6-6-6-6 and then finally 4-4-4-4 again. There should not be any strain; if so, back off the count.
- Breath Counting:

Count each exhale, allowing the count to last the entire exhale, counting to 10. Count the exhale, allowing the count to last the entire exhale, counting to 2, then returning to 1. This was Joko's method of breath counting.
- Focused breathing, staying present to one part of the body while breathing, for example the tip of the nostrils or the lower belly.
- Relational breathing, synchronizing your breathing with another person.

Mindfulness of the Body

- Body scan, starting at the top of the head and moving down to the feet, simply bringing awareness to each part of the body
- Spotlight scan: narrow your focus of awareness to just the size of a quarter and experience the sensations of the body as you move that focus, either in order, top to bottom, or in random "snapshots."
- Golden cream, or stream of light: visualize a warm cream or a stream of clear light slowly pouring inside from your head to your toes, easing and illuminating everything in its path.

- Ocean meditation: visualize yourself comfortable and at ease slowly drifting deeper and deeper into the ocean, discovering you can easily breathe under the water, and relaxing as you settle down to rest on the ocean floor. Far above you, the mind waves sparkle in the sunlight.
- Boat on a lake: visualize yourself sitting upright in a small rowboat in the middle of a still lake at daybreak. The air is fresh and you are completely relaxed and awake. The boat gently rocks with your breathing.
- In the forest: visualize yourself in a clearing in the forest, light filtering through the trees. You catch a movement and realize there is a doe and a fawn nearby, watching you. You want to invite them closer as you sit, completely still and fully attending.
- Whole body awareness: simply sit in mindfulness of the body as a whole, quiet and aware.
- Identifying a part that needs attention: If you are ill, in pain or tension, rest in compassionate awareness of the body and ask: if this sensation had words, what would it say? Listen, don't make assumptions that you know.
- Describing the sensation: when you notice any sensation in the body, be curious. How would you describe it to someone else? Where is it located and what are its boundaries? What are its qualities: heat, cold, contraction, itchy, and so on? How is it changing as you observe?
- Relationality: awareness of others: pay attention simply to the physical embodiment of another: facial expressions, gestures, body language, posture, movement. You can practice this anywhere you can observe others. What do you sense you would be feeling if you had that expression, body language, posture, or way of moving?
- Everyday living: As you go about your daily life, notice where your body is in space, and how it is organizing itself: sitting, standing, walking, lying down, driving a car, eating, and so on. Where are your hands? Are you upright? Is the body at ease? How is your breathing?

Walking Meditation

- *Kinhin*, formal walking meditation: Begin by making a fist of your left hand, pressed gently to the body at the solar plexus. Place your right hand on top of this fist: this hand position is called *shashu*. Become mindful of your feet, and begin slow kinhin by lifting the left foot and placing it one half step ahead. Repeat with the right foot. In motion, maintain awareness of the sensations of walking. Synchronize your steps with your breathing in slow kinhin: breathe in as you lift the foot, breathe out as you place it mindfully. For fast kinhin, simply increase the length of your stride a bit and bring more aliveness and energy to walking. Stay mindful!
- Outdoor walking meditation: Walking at a normal pace, paying close attention to the bodily sensations. Be mindful of your feet and upright body, allow your hands to move naturally by your sides as you walk.
- Structured walking meditation: Pick a spot at some distance, not too far away, depending on where you are. Begin mindful walking toward that spot, and when you reach it, mindfully turn

and return to the starting point. Repeat for the whole meditation period. This is an excellent method when you are too agitated to sit.

- Relational walking meditation: When in a formal setting such as a zendo, you will be walking with others, but you can also practice this with another person or group. While walking in kinhin, or informally, pay mindful attention to how your bodies are moving in space. In the zendo, notice how you are moving in relation to others, and be aware of kinhin as one being, one organism, all of its parts moving in harmony. Notice the spacing, and whether you are equally distant from others. Similarly, notice when walking with others, just where each person is located in space, and the quality of the movement: relaxed or rushed, crowded or spacious, harmonious or awkward.
- Observing others: when you are in a situation where you can observe others walking, what do you notice? Pay close attention to bodily movement, gesture, and how people organize themselves in space in relation to others. There are cultural differences in this you may notice if you travel.

Finally, we complete our meditation with appreciation for the support of the body in enabling this precious life.

These embodied forms of meditation can be practiced anywhere. While it is helpful to establish and practice them in sitting meditation, you will find them very helpful in everyday living, in quiet times or stressful situations, when your mind is racing, when you are facing some difficulty. Returning awareness to the body and its sensations has a grounding and calming effect.