

Mindfulness Meditations for Being with Dying

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I

The Heart of Meditation Practice

1 Mutuality and Spirituality

When we face dying, the empathy that comes through mutuality, spirituality, practice and service can be our strongest allies. I can find no better proof for their power than in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Whether he was fasting in protest, weaving, meditating or teaching, Gandhi always directed his activities to the good of others. A humble man, we are told,

he based his life in altruism, in his connection with those who were suffering, who were marginalized and materially impoverished.

Gandhi realized that he needed to look beyond the bounds of human knowledge if he was not to be separate. All of us, he felt, are naturally limited in our ability to understand everything completely. Truth lies beyond what we can articulate. He sensed that every person is in one way or another, seeking the truth or a meaning to life. And believing that truth is not the sole possession of a single person, he also sought to see things through his opponents' eyes. His inclusive vision demonstrated his firm belief in the strength displayed by diverse human communities that work together - directly and indirectly - in search of a common good, basing their lives on non-harming, interconnectedness, and love.

For many years, Gandhi's ideal has guided me in working with those who are dying. His vision embodies a deep trust in the inherent wisdom that arises when we step aside and enter into a spiritual practice, with a commitment to help others. His spirit and inspiration were certainly informed by the strength of his inner life. Meditation gave him insight into his own suffering and the suffering around him. His practice - as he spun his thread and wove his life into the world of pain - gave him the compassion, commitment and the strength to serve others. His deep love of others was matched by his keen sense of social justice, his boldness and courage. All these grew steadily through his contemplative life and his constant responsiveness to the suffering of poor people with whom he felt such a deep direct connection.

It is this strong inner life, based in altruism, that we hope to open in ourselves as we care for others, and to be sustained by as we are dying. A

spiritual practice can give us a refuge, a shelter in which to develop insight into what is happening both outside us and within our minds and hearts. It can provide stability - important for caregivers as well as those of us imminently facing dying. It can cultivate wholesome mental qualities, such as compassion, joy and nonattachment that will give us the resilience to face and possibly transform suffering and to realize our basic goodness.

Our own feelings can be powerful and disturbing as we sit quietly with a dying person, or as we bear witness to the emotional outpouring of grieving relatives, or as we are fully present and stable in the face of the fear and anger, sadness or confusion of people whose lives are going through radical change. We may want to find ways to accept and transform the heat or cold of our own mental states. If we have established a foundation in a contemplative discipline, then we may find stillness and spaciousness, resilience and inspiration in the storm, even in the storm of our own difficulties around dying. We also may discover that suffering carries the potential for liberation within it.

A spiritual practice can be an island in which the emotions of uncertainty and doubt become, instead, a refuge of truth. One woman, for example, said that when she meditated she felt as if she was being held in the arms of her mother. She was not escaping from her suffering when she was meditating, she explained, but rather was met by kindness and strength as she let go into pain and uncertainty. And when this happened, she realized the truth of uncertainty and she achieved greater equanimity.

Often we feel that we should not offer silence and stillness when suffering is present. Rather, we tend to feel that we should console. After all, we

have to do something. But being in the shared embrace of meditation, a caregiver and dying person can be held in an intimate silence that is beyond consolation. When sitting with a dying person, I find myself asking: what words will really benefit this one who is dying? Can I know greater intimacy through a mutuality that is beyond words and actions? Can I relax and trust in being simply here, without the force of my personality or my knowing blocking my connection to this dying person?

But on the other hand, communication and words can really serve. One dying man told me, "I remember being with my mother as she was dying. "She was old like I am now and was ready. I used to just sit with her, hold her hand". Will you hold mine?"

We can use the gift of language - prayer, poetry, dialog, good words, or guided meditation - as a way to reveal the underlying meaning in moments. The way we listen or bear witness to the testimony of a dying person or a grieving family member can serve the one giving testimony. Perhaps we can listen in such a way that the speaker can at last really hear what is being said. Bearing witness can give the listener insight and inspiration into what we need in the moment and may need in the future. We learn so much receiving the testimony of others. And language can loosen the knot that has tied a person to the hard edge of fear and bring them home to compassionate truths that open the heart. Good words or a guided meditation can also cultivate a positive attitude and be skillful means for attending to the issues that come up around dying.

Buddhism has many contemplative strategies that prepare us for dying and for caring for others. This booklet seeks to give you some guidance on

different approaches you can use. Take time to explore them and find the ways that suit you and your situation best.

2 Stabilizing Mind and Body

Mindfulness is the core of everything that we do in being with dying and is the very basis of all meditation practices in the Buddhist tradition.

Separate practices in Buddhism relate to the development of tranquility and mental stability (shamatha) and to discernment (vipassana).

Mindfulness unifies these two approaches.

Mindfulness is the practice of giving deep attention to what is happening in the present moment. There are four main arenas on which the practice can focus. It can, first, relate to what is happening in your mind and body, including what is going on immediately around you. For example, you can be mindful of the body and its parts (as in the body scan meditation), of the breath, and physical positions or actions. You can also be aware of the four elements composing the body, or the experience of physical change - such as the dissolution of body in just living or in the experience of sickness, dying, or of pain.

The second arena of mindfulness concentrates on our responses to phenomena. Do we feel that things are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral to us? Are we mindful of phenomena and feelings arising, enduring and disappearing? We can also be mindful of feelings with a psychological or physiological basis, such as our response to pain or pleasure.

The third realm of mindfulness lies in our awareness of our mental states. These include desire, hatred, confusion, concentration, dispersion, internal formations, and also clear states of mind.

Finally, mindfulness practice enables us to look at our experience of the objects of mind. This refers to our experience of the sense organs and their objects. It also includes mindfulness of the so-called five categories of skandhas ñ form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. And it covers mindfulness of the mental factors that obstruct liberation, like anger, and those that lead to liberation, like joy. Also included are the Four Noble Truths that point out the truth of suffering, the causes of suffering, freedom from suffering, and the path leading to freedom from suffering.

Certain Buddhist schools believe that the aspiration to help others powerfully generates mindfulness. This is because commitment that is based in an altruistic state of mind is not so self-centered and helps us to break our strong self-attachment. The desire to serve also gives our practice energy and depth. It makes it more tender and inclusive.

Trust and patience combined with openness and acceptance ó qualities nurtured by mindfulness practice ó enable us to sustain ourselves in being with dying. They help us develop the necessary relationship between compassion and equanimity and learn to respond from a place that is deeper than our personality and our conceptual mind. With equanimity and compassion as inseparable companions in our work, we are also less judgmental and less attached to outcomes.

For me, mindfulness practice has been the foundation of my learning and practice of caregiving. It has given many of us access to the still inner space from which we must learn to draw our strength and wisdom. It also helps us stabilize the mind and the body. It helps us be less reactive and

more responsive. It reduces stress, gives us greater resiliency, and opens our intuitive capacities.

The first mindfulness practice focuses on the breath, and the second fosters insight. The third brings attention to the parts of the body (the body scan), while the fourth is walking meditation. These four practices usually begin with giving attention to our posture and settling the body, then to our intention or the development of an altruistic heart. We then place our attention on the breath and begin the practice, whether it is minding the breath, investigating the mind, focusing on the body, or concentrating closely on the experience of walking.

In the first practice, we keep our awareness on the breath. Often I use the breath as the object of my awareness because this very life depends on it. Furthermore, I can discover my state of mind by the quality of my breath. If I need to, I can calm it by regulating my breathing. The body scan can also use the breath to support the focus on different parts of the body. And walking meditation brings breath, mind and body together with the world.

Whether praying or meditating, you need to bring your whole being to your practice for it to have real benefit. Your intention to practice in order to help others, the commitment and energy you bring, all make a big difference in the quality and outcome of your practice. Effort is key. When you fall in love, for example, you put a lot of energy into bringing your best to your beloved. If you are told you are gravely ill, you will concentrate hard on trying to find out how to heal yourself. Your spiritual practice requires the same degree of commitment and effort.

Be aware that if you have unrealistic expectations, they can create problems. A meditation practice is not a quick fix for long-standing mental habits that are causing you suffering. Just as the body needs to be slowly stretched for greater flexibility, so also does the mind need time for its training. You can't lift heavy weights in a day if you haven't conditioned your body to do so. You can't go to high altitude if your body isn't conditioned. If your expectations are too great, you might well decide to abandon your practice when you start having trouble with it.

In fact, so-called trouble should be expected, because when you stop your habitual mental and physical activity and sit quietly with yourself, difficulties often become more noticeable. You can become even more sensitive to suffering and even feel at risk of a breakdown. It is probably your ego that is breaking down, and the healthy part of you should welcome this. But it may often not be easy to accept the raw and difficult feelings that accompany the deconstruction of the ego. Be patient, and know that all of the meditative techniques in this book have been developed over years of trial and error. Time is needed for them to be effective. So have patience. And know that difficulties with your practice might well indicate that your practice is working.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, encourages his practitioners to work with seven different qualities or attitudes as a basis for practice. These are the attitude of non-judging, of patience, an open mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. Even if patience or letting go are not easy for you, at least bear them in mind when you encounter resistance to the mindfulness practice. Try to be patient, try to suspend judgment, even try to let go.

Jon also emphasizes the importance of commitment, consistency in ones practice, and motivation. And this all takes effort. You can't just sit there and expect something to happen. You have to bring all of you to your practice, including the heart of acceptance when it seems as if there is no reason to carry on. Accept this feeling and then go forward. These are all qualities that, when they are used to support our meditation practice, give it strength, depth and continuity. They are exactly the qualities of mind that make our encounter with dying and death more sane.

3 Six Aspects of Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practice has six interdependent realms. These are the practices of:

Stabilizing

Bearing witness

Harmonizing

Not Knowing

Compassion

Invisibility

Stabilizing Practice

In mindfulness practice we begin to quiet ourselves and to stabilize our mental field through concentration. The experience of stilling and calming allows us to begin to see life more clearly, because we become less reactive.

When we are just beginning practice, however, we usually discover that we are neither calm nor clear. Stopping our usual external activity gives us the chance to notice the relentless flow of the contents of the mind. And as our mental and physical practice develops, we become internally

quieter, and our capacity for self-observation, concentration and our experience of not-knowing deepen. In this way, mental stability is nourished.

Bearing Witness Practice

The next realm of practice begins to open when we work with awareness and acceptance. As a start, we must be aware of what is going on both in the body/mind and around us. This requires mental stability and an ability to concentrate. In the process, we can get in touch with our experience, be it old age, sickness, death, or just the fabric of our daily lives. From here, we may be able to transform what needs to change and accept what we cannot change.

When we practice bearing witness, we nurture patience and learn to accept each thing, each moment. Bearing witness in meditation practice will open doors to non-judgment, trust and surrender.

Harmonizing Practice

Our experience of alienation can result from a lack of contact of the mind with the body and the outside world. One of the most important effects of mindfulness practice is that it can help to synchronize the mind and body through the union of breath and awareness, and then to synchronize the mind and body with reality. The thread of the breath sews the mind, body and world together. This is the way that we nurture real intimacy, lovingkindness, non-duality and non-separateness in our lives.

Not Knowing Practice

When our body and mind are synchronized with the world, the non-conceptual intuitive mind awakens. Thoughts and reactivity cease to

stand between us and the world within and around us. Since we are no longer caught in a web of concepts, we can perceive directly, beyond language and ideas, and beyond our conditioning. In Zen we call this seeing directly. This is the experience of not knowing, or what Shunryu Suzuki called beginner's Mind.

Compassion Practice

Once the meditator is in touch with her own life, she may be able to feel the heart of the world. Another way of saying this is that we are not separate from anything. This is compassion. Compassion is action that takes us into the world, where we bear witness to and accept the suffering of others and then help suffering beings, with no attachment to outcomes. This is the realm of bodhisattvas, healers, shamans, teachers, and caregivers those who have made a commitment to helping individuals and transforming social institutions, cultures, and environments.

Invisible Practice

Finally, mature practice is invisible, wise and selfless. In the best of circumstances, when we are mentally stable, accepting, integrated in mind and body, and compassionate, we realize the miracle of this very moment, and we experience the subtlety and richness of our ordinary lives. Mind, body, and reality have become one.

Invisible or secret practice means that there is no separation between our practice and our everyday lives. We have realized the boundlessness and seamlessness of existence. We enjoy the interdependence of the relative world of phenomena in which we live our lives and the absolute, ultimate realm of the unconditioned.

4 Support for Our Practice

I recommend that a beginner to meditation receive instructions from a qualified teacher. There are many meditation teachers in America, Europe and Asia who have the skills to help one begin a stable practice.

Mindfulness meditation can be used for stress reduction. It can also lead one to mental depths. A sensitive teacher can support you through both rough and placid waters of a developing practice.

A daily practice is very important. Sitting twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening can help us become acquainted with our mind. Doing at least one retreat a year can deepen and strengthen your practice. A Zen sesshin or a ten-day vipassana retreat at least once a year can be very beneficial. These kinds of retreats always include private interviews with the teacher. This gives the practitioner the opportunity to have his or her practice evaluated.

II

Mindfulness Practice with an Emphasis on Concentration

Posture

You can sit in a chair or on a meditation cushion.

First of all, be aware of your breath and your body. Let your body soften. If you are sitting on a chair, relax your legs and put both feet flat on the floor. If you are sitting on a cushion, cross your legs in front of you and be present to a sense of connectedness with the earth gravity. You can also kneel, sitting astride the cushion. Whichever way, invite the stability and groundedness of the earth into your body and mind. Let your whole body experience the strength of your stable connection with the earth. Bring

your attention to your feet and legs and breathe into them. Relax into the firmness of this stability.

Now bring your awareness into your spine. Breathe into your spine. Appreciate how vertical, strong, flexible, and conductive it is. Rock gently from side to side as you settle your posture. The strength of your spine allows you to uphold yourself in the midst of any condition. You can remind yourself of this strength by silently saying, strong back. Your mind and your back are connected. Feel the sense of uprightness and flexibility in your mind.

Now let your awareness go to your belly. Breathe into your belly. Let your breath be deep and strong as your belly rises and falls. Feel your natural courage and openness as you breathe deeply into your belly.

Shifting your awareness to your chest, touch in with the tender, open feeling of this space. Let yourself be present to your own suffering and to the fact that just like you, others also suffer. Imagine being free of suffering and helping others be free of suffering too. Feel the strength of your resolve rising up from your belly. Let your heart be open and permeable. Release any tightness you feel as you allow your breath to pass through your heart. Remind yourself of your own tenderness by saying, "Soft front".

Now bring your awareness to your lungs. With your spine straight, let your breath fully enter your lungs. Fill your lungs softly with air. With gratitude, remember that each breath supports your life.

At this point, invite the whole front of your body to feel open, receptive, and permeable. Through your open body, you can feel the world, which lets you feel compassion. Through your strong spine, you can be with suffering, which lends you equanimity. Your open heart allows you to be with your strength of mind. Let all these qualities ó equanimity, compassion, and strength ó intermingle. Let them inform one another. Let them give you genuine presence. Strong back, soft front. This is the essence of our work in being with dying.

Bringing awareness to your shoulders, let them soften and relax. Then shift focus to your hands. Experiment with the following two hand positions and see how they inform your state of mind. One is to rest your hands on your knees, leaving the front of your body open. This is a way to enter into shared awareness as you subtly welcome everything into your consciousness. Alternatively you can put your hands together in front of your belly, which strengthens internal awareness and concentration.

Your chest is slightly lifted, your neck is straight, and your chin is barely tucked in, giving a small lift to the crown of your head. Your jaw is soft, your teeth are barely touching, and your tongue is lightly pressed against the hard palate just behind your teeth. Your mouth is relaxed.

What you do with your eyes will affect your mind. Work with the following three possibilities. Your eyes can be gazing forward, not grasping onto anything. They can be slightly open, gazing down at the floor. Or they can be closed. With your eyes gazing open, you can be with life as it unfolds, bringing forth a sense of luminosity to the phenomenal world. With your eyes slightly open, you are at the threshold between your mind and the outer world. Not entering either world you

bring both together in emptiness. With your eyes closed, you relax into an undistracted concentration.

Whatever sounds, sights, smells, tastes, or feelings arise, simply let them pass in and out of your awareness as you keep your mind on your breath. Allow yourself simplicity. You are relaxing in such a way that you can begin to drop into a place that is deeper than your personality, deeper than your identity, deeper than your story.

Intention

As we sit down to practice mindfulness meditation, it's important to touch in with our intention. Why are we meditating? Is it only for self-gratification? Remembering interconnectedness that if others are suffering, we cannot be fully happy helps us see the futility of self-centeredness. Recall someone to whom you feel especially close, whom you deeply wish to be free of suffering. Let your wish help strengthen your aspiration to help others. As you experience fully how this feels, breathe deeply into your belly.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Now bring your attention to your breath and breathe into your belly. The diaphragm is a muscle that can hold fear. Let your deep and unrestricted in breath move your diaphragm down. On your out breath, let go of any hesitation, any fear that might be arising. This deep breath is an experience you will use to strengthen your awareness.

Awareness of the Breath

With your attention on your breath, silently count your out breaths, from one to ten. When thoughts, feelings or sensations take your attention away from your breath, you will lose count. When you become aware that your concentration has faltered, simply label what has distracted you as thinking. Feeling or sensation. Then quietly return to counting your breaths, beginning with one. Keep your practice very simple and direct, gentle and precise.

You also may use words to help deepen your concentration. For example, you can say to yourself silently on the inhalation, breathing in, I calm body and mind; on the exhalation, breathing out, I let go. On the inhalation, you can say silently, dwelling in the present moment; on the exhalation, this is the only moment.

One of the reasons we bring our awareness to the breath is to deepen our concentration. When the mind becomes very concentrated and stable, it is easier for us to see the world as it is. Not only can we have insight into reality, but we can also see directly, beyond language and concepts, into reality's very nature. Perceiving directly lets us respond seamlessly - with compassion and stability to the world as it is.

Dedicating the Merit

When we have completed our meditation practice, we offer to others whatever good has arisen for us. We also remind ourselves to bring the spirit of practice into our everyday life in order to help others. Finally, we recall the elements of the practice that we are bringing into life stability, strength, openness, flexibility, concentration, commitment, relaxation, confidence, courage, tenderness, compassion and equanimity.

III

Mindfulness Practice with an Emphasis on Insight

Let your body settle as you adjust your sitting posture.
Remember: strong back, soft front.

Remember why you are meditating.
Let the truth of your motivation become present for you.
Cultivate a heart of kindness and altruism.

Bring your attention gently to your breath.
Allow yourself to breathe naturally and comfortably.
Be aware of the breath moving in and out of your nose.
Bring your attention to the touch of your breath on the nose,
where the breath enters.
Gently keep your attention at this point.
If you lose touch with this point of attention,
when you realize that you have strayed,
bring your mind back to the breath.

Thoughts, feelings and sensations arise as you are breathing.
This is natural.
They are like waves on a beach or leaves falling.
No need to grasp or identify with these phenomena.
Accept that this is happening and keep your foreground attention on the
breath.

Be aware of the quality of your breaths.
Are they long or short, shallow or deep?

Let your awareness touch and be aware of the quality of your breath as you keep your foreground attention on the point where the breath enters the nose.

Be with each moment as it is.

Don't try to do anything or get anything from this experience.

Simply accept whatever is arising and let your attention rest on your breath.

Let your awareness penetrate to the experience of the sensation of breathing.

If thoughts arise, simply be aware of their presence and motion in the mind, and return to the breath.

Do not invite your thoughts to tea.

Just let thoughts arise and pass away.

The same for feelings and sensations.

Moment by moment, thoughts, feelings and sensations arise in our experience.

They pass from our experience.

Let them arise and pass away into boundlessness.

There is no need to do anything.

And keep your attention gently on your breath.

Who we feel we are also arises from boundlessness and will pass away into boundlessness.

Do not cling to any idea or description.

Just let go of the sense of a solid identity

and be with the flow of your breath.

All things in our experience, whether the body,
or in the mind or the world, arise and pass away.

Simply keep your attention gently on the flow of the breath,
and allow the arising, abiding and passing of phenomena,
including your own life - just to be what it is.

IV

Turning the Mind Toward the Body

1 The Body as Companion

We were born in this body, and we will die in this body. It is our constant companion throughout life. Turning the mind toward the body with kindness, awareness and acceptance makes it easier for us to be with its ever-changing conditions. With a strengthened bond between mind and body, we can enjoy a state of genuine presence. With genuine presence, we can begin to cultivate an attitude of no fear. This is how we bear witness and heal. One of the most direct ways to train in bearing witness is the practice of scanning the body, being fully present with the experience of the unique and intimate experience of this body.

I often use the body scan in my practice with others to work with pain, insomnia or anxiety. It also helps us to loosen the knot of thought that can be tightly tied around mental and physical discomfort. It is a skillful way of learning to really feel the body through putting our awareness on the breath, and using our imagination and intention to be with each particular part of the body more fully.

The body scan can be done from head to toe and back to the head, or from toe to head, and then returning the awareness down the body. In this practice we are in a continual flow of mindfulness from one region of the body to another. Not fixating on one part of the body alone, our mindfulness becomes more fluid as we gently move our focus from one part to another.

You can use the breath to guide the practice or simply work with attention on each body area. The practice can be read to you by a friend, listened to on a recording, or easily remembered. You can do it laying down, sitting on a cushion in a meditation posture, or seated in a chair.

The body scan practice started as a Burmese meditation practice called Sweeping in the school of U Ba Khin. It has been further developed by the Indian vipassana teacher, S. N. Goenka, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, who began the work of mindfulness-based stress reduction. This particular version invites the practitioner to turn toward the experience of the body with kindness, acceptance and gratitude.

2 The Body Scan

Let your body relax and soften.
Bring your attention to your breath.
Breathe deeply into your belly.
Your body is beginning to settle.
If you become uncomfortable,
you can quietly adjust your posture.

Breathing deeply, bring your awareness to your body.

Remind yourself of its inherent awareness, ease, and vitality.
Invite yourself to relax into these elements.
Let your body feel open and safe.

Bring your attention to the top part of your head,
to your skull and scalp.
Breathe into your scalp.
As thoughts arise, just let them be.
Be aware of any tension in your scalp.
On your next inhalation, breathe out gratitude.

Move your attention to your forehead.
Be aware of your forehead,
accepting whatever tension might be there.
Breathe into your temples.
Let your temples feel cool and relaxed.
Accept any tension or pain in your temples.
As you breathe in, let your temples feel open and soft.

Put your hand over your eyes as you breathe into them.
See if you can soften your eyes as you breathe in.
As you breathe out, let go of all hardness in and around your eyes.
Breathe openness and awareness into your eyes.
Breathe out gratitude for your clear, bright and relaxed eyes.

Bring awareness to your ears
and the muscles around and in your ears.
Breathing in fully, open your ears.
Exhaling, feel grateful for being able to listen and bear witness.

Breathe in through your nose.

Feel air passing in and out of your nostrils.

Breathing in,

imagine that the air you are inhaling is full of vital energy.

Breathe out gratitude.

On your next inhalation

bring your awareness to the place in your nostrils

where you can feel air entering.

Feel the exhalation passing out of your nostrils.

Let your concentration deepen.

Be aware of where the air enters and leaves your nose.

Bring your awareness to your mouth.

Feel your lips, your gums, teeth, and tongue.

Let your mouth feel warm and open.

Relax your whole mouth, letting your jaw soften.

On your inhalation bring a slight smile to your mouth.

On your exhalation feel yourself letting go of tension.

Relax your jaw, your cheeks, your lips, tongue and throat.

Gently move your awareness to your throat and neck.

Let your awareness rest lightly in this area.

Feel your neck and throat.

Breathe into your neck and throat.

Accept whatever tightness might be in this area.

Breathe out gratitude.

Bring your awareness to your shoulders.

Breathe into your shoulders.

Let all tension melt from your shoulders as you exhale.

Let your shoulders drop as you relax them.

Give away any sense of heaviness in your shoulders.

Let go of your burdens.

On your in breath give your shoulders space.

On your out breath drop your shoulders even farther.

Let your awareness be in your arms.

Inhaling and exhaling, breathe into your arms.

Be aware of any tightness in your arms.

There is nothing that you need to hold.

With your attention lightly on your arms,

breathe in spaciousness.

Breathe out relief and release.

Touch your hands with your awareness.

Let them open.

Your palms are facing upward.

Breathe into the palms of your hands.

Inhaling, feel simple generosity in your hands.

Exhaling, imagine the tension in your arms and hands

flowing out through the ends of your fingers.

Let your hands feel light and alive.

Bring awareness to your spine.

Breathe into your spine, letting it stretch with your inbreath.

Feel the strength of your spine on your outbreath.

On your inhalation be aware of your rib cage expanding.

As you exhale, feel the aliveness of your spine.
Appreciate the strength of your spine.

Bring your attention to your chest and lungs.
Breathe deeply into your lungs.
Fill them so that your chest rises after your belly does.
Give your chest space in which to breathe deeply.
Breathing in, you feel your chest opening.
Feel your lungs expanding.
Be aware of any tightness or feelings of loss and sorrow.
This is a very deep breath.
Breathing out, appreciate your lungs.

Now breathe into your heart.
Be aware of any tightness in and around your heart.
Feel your heart open to
your attention and your breath.
Bring your attention to the tissue around your heart.
Feel your heart being supported by healthy tissue and cells.
Bring your attention to the veins and arteries
leading to and from your heart.
Visualize your arteries as clear and open.
See your veins carrying healthy blood into your heart.
As you breathe in, appreciate your heart.
Breathing out, feel gratitude for your good heart.

Bring your attention to your diaphragm.
Let your diaphragm open as you breathe in deeply.
Be aware of your whole torso as you exhale

and feel your diaphragm.
Breathing in, feel your diaphragm drop,
giving your heart and lungs space in which to expand.
On your exhalation, let go of any tension.

Move your attention to your liver.
Breathe into your liver and gallbladder.
Be aware any tightness you may have there.
As you breathe in, give your liver and gallbladder space.
As you exhale,
let go of any feeling of anger that you might have.
Breathing in and out, appreciate your liver and gallbladder.

Move your attention to your stomach.
Breathing in, you are aware of your stomach.
Breathing out, appreciate your stomach.
Breathing in,
be aware of the digestive function of the stomach.
As you exhale, let yourself feel grateful for your stomach.

On the next inbreath,
let your awareness be in your kidneys and lower back.
On your outbreath,
be aware of any anxiety you may be experiencing.
Now breathe in strength and awareness
into your kidneys and lower back.
Breathing out, give space to your kidneys and lower back.

Bring your attention to your bowels and bladder.

As you inhale, feel your guts expanding with the inbreath.
On your outbreath,
 be aware of any tension in your bowels and bladder.
Be aware of the function of elimination
 performed by your bowels and bladder.
Bring breath and spaciousness to your bowels and bladder.
Feel grateful for your bowels and bladder.

Move your awareness to your reproductive organs.
On your inbreath,
 be aware on how your reproductive organs feel.
On your outbreath, give these feelings space.
Breathing in, appreciate your reproductive organs.
Exhaling, give your entire pelvic area a feeling of space and ease.

Be aware of your thighs.
Breathe into your thighs
 as you settle your attention into them.
Breathing out, let your thighs soften.
On your inhalation, feel gratitude
 for the support of your thighs.
Breathing out, appreciate your thighs.

Bring your awareness to your knees.
Breathe into your knees.
On the outbreath
 be aware of the small muscles around your knees.
Feel grateful for your knees.
Breathe healing into your knees.

Breathe out any tension and pain in your knees.

Bring your attention to your calves and shins.

Breathe into your calves and shins.

Exhaling, be aware of any tension in your calves.

Breathe in spaciousness to your calves.

Breathe out gratitude

that your legs have taken you so far in your life.

Breathe into your feet, bringing all your attention to your feet.

On your outbreath, be aware of any tension in your feet.

Imagine on your inbreath that you are breathing

all the way through your body into your feet.

Let your mind touch your feet.

On your outbreath, appreciate your feet.

To complete this practice, slowly, gently and smoothly bring your awareness from your feet to your legs; to your pelvic area; to your stomach and liver; to your chest, heart, and lungs; to your spine; to your shoulders, arms, and hands; to your neck; to your face; to the top of your head.

Breathe in and out smoothly as your awareness travels up and through your body. When you have reached the top of your head, return your awareness to your breath, then let it gently spread to your whole body. Stay this way for some minutes.

Take a few moments to relax with an open and quiet mind.

Before completing the practice, breathe and send all of the well-being that you have experienced to others.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

3 Refreshing Mind and Body through Walking Meditation

One day I walked my father down the corridor of the hospital where he was dying. The respiratory therapist realized that my father and I were very comfortable with each other and that I might enjoy encouraging him to move his old bones and get his breath going. I wrapped my right arm around him, and began to slowly walk in time with his breath. Step by careful step, we made our way down the hallway, breathing and stepping with the pace of his breath. This is something I do every day in my zendo at home, but without my arms around my father.

Walking meditation is a practice where we bring the mind, breath and body together. We can clasp our hands together in front of us at waist level, and let the body settle in the same way that we do in sitting meditation. The shoulders are soft, the face relaxed, the spine straight and alive, and the breath deep in the body. And then we take a step. We begin by inhaling and gently stepping with our left foot. When the foot touches the ground, we might be still inhaling or we might be on our exhale. We just let our attention sink with the breath into the foot, and feel solid and present as we complete our exhalation. On the next inhalation, we step with the right foot.

Sometimes, we might want to really settle our mind. In that case we can pay close attention to the sensation of our heel touching the floor, then

the ball of our foot, and then our toes. We can feel each toe as it touches the floor, and then we might pause until the breath is complete and feel the strength of just being present.

This is the practice of one breath, one step. We can go even slower, as is taught in Burma, when we slowly and carefully lift the foot with an inhalation and exhalation. And then gently place the ball of the foot and toes on the floor with an inhalation and exhalation. Or we can walk faster, with one whole step on the inhalation, and one whole step on the exhalation. No matter what our velocity, the structure of the walking is normal. That is to say, we don't lift the foot high off the ground or hold the foot in the air in mid-step. If we are doing a very slow walking meditation, we just lift the heel off the floor but keep the ball of the foot rooted until we have completed our breath cycle.

If you are walking outdoors or down a hospital corridor and you want to practice walking meditation, just relax and breathe normally. You might take two steps on the inhalation and three steps on the exhalation. Find the number of steps to a breath that works for you. You can count your steps to the inbreath. As you breathe in, for example, you can say silently to yourself, one, two and as you breathe out, one, two, three

The Vietnamese teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, encourages his students to use verses with walking practice. When I am outdoors, I might say, walking [one step], the green [one step], earth [one step]. Or if I am walking down a corridor, I might simply count my steps with my breath or say to myself, one breath, one step. Sometimes I make up a verse appropriate for a particular moment. For example, when walking with my father, I said to

myself, I am grateful [one step on the breath] for my father [one step on the breath.]

A student of mine from Nepal had never practiced walking meditation before, though he had lived in a monastery since he was six years old. It really surprised him that the practice was so refreshing. I feel his experience of the practice is true, and I encourage doctors and nurses to use it to help them transform the often rushed and harried way they move through the hospital. It is also a wonderful gift to give an old person or someone who is sick and needs to move. Doing walking meditation with someone who is elderly and frail brings you together in a new and intimate way that can engender trust and wellbeing.