

Chapter 1: Simply Being Present With the Breath

About having a mind. . .

To be human and to have a mind is a marvelous gift. Our minds serve us in many ways. First, they are a reservoir for data. Through our sense doors (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, touch, mind), we gather data via sources to include the TV, radio, internet, podcasts, books/magazines/newspapers, classes we attend, nature and the outside world, people we interact with, animals and the like. Our mind is like a massive warehouse that stores information about everything we've ever read and seen and all that we've experienced from the day we were born until the present. Our mind stores all this data without preference to it being good or bad, useful or not. It stores it all indiscriminately; it rejects nothing. This warehouse of the mind may be referred to as our "store consciousness." So much information gets stored here--so much that we forget most of what is there; yet ironically, when some event triggers us, we somehow seem to either consciously or unconsciously access (or remember) what may have been hidden for a very long time.

Our mind also serves us as a think tank. Using data it has stored, along with new data that it receives, the mind thinks, analyzes, organizes, ponders, synthesizes, plans, remembers. . . . It also assumes, interprets, judges, believes and has opinions. So, having a mind is a huge gift. It helps us function as a human. Our mind helps us create our life. You may have heard the phrase, "We are what we think." Henry Ford famously said, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you are right."

More often than not, our thinking involves recalling things from the past or it involves thoughts of projecting into the future. Our mind has the ability to move from one thought to another--thoughts which are often completely unrelated. One moment we can be concentrating on something we are working on, the next about something that happened last week, the next about what grocery items we need to pick up on our way home, the next about worrying about a meeting we are having next week—and all this can happen in a matter of seconds. We might be aware of our mind moving from thought to thought, but more than likely we are on auto pilot and pay no attention to this.

We can multitask. Often our minds work on a number of things at once. We can talk on the phone, help a child with their homework, watch TV and cook dinner—all at the same time. Rarely do we stop to notice the way in which we think and perform daily tasks. Our mind activity seemingly happens automatically. Because our thoughts are often "all over the place," we sometimes refer to our mind as being "scattered"--not to be interpreted as negative; it is simply the way the human mind works. This is generally not considered a problem unless the scattered mind begins to obsess over an issue potentially leading to worry or anxiety.

You might even stop here for a moment and see if you can see all the different places your mind has been in just the last minute. Part of what we will learn and become aware of as we begin to meditate is how our mind works.

Meditation being a training of the mind. . .

Since the day we were born, we have allowed our mind to be scattered. Now, meditation is an activity to train the mind to be focused or concentrated in one place. As the mind is typically not used to being focused on one thing, meditation is often referred to as a “training” to quiet the mind. And because our mind for years has had unbridled freedom to go anywhere it wanted to go and at any time, it may initially resist. This is not something considered negative, it is simply normal and natural. For example, we may try to focus on just our breath, then the mind wanders to thoughts of planning, remembering, etc.

A mind that is often scattered and multitasking on many things at once can often get very tired and sometimes overwhelmed. The scattered mind can be a drain on energy. It can be a mind that makes poor decisions—often reacting out of habit and past conditioning to difficult conditions rather than responding from a place of wisdom. Meditation provides an opportunity for our minds to rest, an opportunity for it to be replenished. Meditation can give our mind a break or a brief vacation, even if only for a few moments. We can then experience a sense of calm and of being centered. Peace and calm is not a matter of the will. If it were, I can only imagine we would all be peaceful and calm. When the conditions are present, peace and calm arises naturally from within. Part of those conditions is a quiet mind.

When we learn to meditate, we often select an item on which to focus. Most often, that item is initially the breath. The breath is an ideal object as it is always with us. It sustains us, and if we watch it closely, it can be very interesting. Because the breath constantly changes, there is a lot we can observe. Every breath is potentially different--some short, some long, some labored, some easy and relaxed. . . The breath is natural, and it happens on its own; it does not need to be controlled. Using the breath in meditation we can practice letting go and allowing each breath to simply be as it is, not controlling it in any way. We begin to see and be with the flow of experience—flowing from one breath to the next to occasionally having our mind wander to thoughts and back to focusing on the breath again. So, as we begin, the breath will be the “anchor” around which we will center our focus. As we walk through some of the next chapters, we will find that besides the breath there are many other objects, or anchors, on which we can focus our attention; but for now, the breath is a good place to begin.

Beginning to Meditate. . .

First, let's talk about **posture**. There are many different bodies, and there are many options for how to sit (or stand or lay) in order to meditate. Though there is no absolute right way, here are some guidelines.

If you happen to be sitting on a chair (though sitting on a zebutan and zafu [cushion and pillow] is fine too), simply **make sure you are comfortable** with both feet flat on the floor.

If you are short, your feet may need to rest on a pillow.

You want your torso, from the waist up, in an upright position with your back relatively straight, though not rigid. Gently push your shoulders back with your chest slightly out. Sitting upright helps you be alert and attentive.

It is okay, and is even good for your body, if your lower back is supported by your chair.

Often a couch or easy chair invites sleepiness. So if you can avoid it, sit in a chair that does not allow you to slouch. For many, a straight back chair works best. If a couch or easy chair is your only comfortable option, do your best to sit in a mostly upright position.

Meditating can be done sitting, lying down, or standing. So, adjust your posture according to your physical and bodily needs.

Eyes. Open or closed? Either is okay. If you like, try both ways. See which way helps your mind settle faster, then do that. If open, only open your eyes with a soft gaze, then focus at one spot at about a 45 degree angle to the floor. If it works for you, I suggest beginning with your eyes closed.

Movement. A quiet body invites a quiet mind, so the less you move the better, but first and foremost you must take care of yourself. If a pain arises that threatens an injury, by all means, move and adjust. At the same time, every itch may not need to be scratched or every slight discomfort does not need to be resolved (more on this in Chapter 2).

Hands? Different options—hands palm down on thighs (thumbs and forefinger may touch); or folded with one palm over the other in an oval shape, with thumbs almost (but not quite) touching. Rather than resting your hands in your lap, place them slightly above your lap; you could also place your hands on a pillow. See what is most comfortable for you, then do that.

What do I do **if I get so relaxed that I want to fall asleep?** When we relax, it can be quite natural to get sleepy. If that happens, consider opening your eyes, standing up to continue meditating, or moving--consciously wiggle your fingers or move your hands or arms.

Special note about awareness of our object (our breath). Being aware of our breath is an “embodied knowing.” It is the direct experience of knowing the breath in the body. This is different from having an idea about the breath (which is a thought) or trying to describe the breath (which involves thinking). Let's try it. Close your eyes and simply become aware of your breathing—breathe in and know in your body that you are breathing in; breathe out and know in your body that you are breathing out. Notice that when you take an in-breath, that either your belly or your chest will rise, or you might be aware of the air entering the tip of your nose. As you exhale, notice any movement in your body as air is squeezed out. When we meditate with the breath as our focus, we are looking for that direct experience or awareness of what is happening in the body; we are not trying to describe the breath. As we sit, I will give more guidance on this.

Now, let's meditate. . .

I will offer a guided sit in class, and it will be recorded. Because the session is recorded, you will be able to access it later on if you wish. After we've experienced sitting, we will process the concepts of meditation we experienced. I will give plenty of guidance, so don't be concerned if any or all of this is new to you. See Appendix A for a script of the guided sit.

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Concepts about meditating introduced in the guided sit. . .

a. Two foundations of meditation – Mindfulness and Concentration.

Mindfulness (or awareness) – From Tara Brach (teacher at the Insight Meditation Center in Washington DC): “Mindfulness is the intentional process of paying attention, without judgment, to the unfolding of moment-to-moment experience.” This includes knowing in the body when we are breathing one moment, as well as, when we are distracted in thought in the next moment.

Dr. John Prendergast (author of the book, “In Touch”) refers to mindfulness as “affectionate attention.” Mindfulness has a warm, accepting, curious, welcoming, heartfelt quality.

Pema Chodron (author of many Buddhist books and resident teacher at Gampo Abbey Monastery in Nova Scotia) often uses the words “unconditional friendliness” when referring to mindfulness.

Jack Kornfield (teacher at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, CA) suggests that all of our experiences, whether we like them or not, be experienced in “loving awareness.”

Susuki Roshi (former teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center) would add that mindfulness includes the readiness and availability of the mind to receive whatever is to present itself in the next moment.

Concentration (sustaining awareness or steadiness of focus) is the constancy of knowing where your mind is. This includes the one-pointed focusing of attention on the breath, as well as the knowing and noticing the flow of experience when our mind wanders away from our breath.

b. We begin with relaxing the body. Body scans can be done different ways, and they can be either brief or more expansive. During different sessions I will introduce you to different options. We begin by relaxing the body for a couple of reasons. First, it helps us arrive and be present—to be here right

now in this moment. One way you can be assured that you are in the present moment is that your awareness is “in your body.” Focusing on relaxing the body helps take us out of our heads and from the busy thoughts of our day. It is difficult to be engrossed in thoughts and be present in the body at the same time. Second, relaxing helps us quiet and calm our body. That quiet body in turn will then help us invite a quiet mind. Relaxing the body just makes mediating easier.

Relaxing typically involves a letting go and an allowing of our body to be just as it is without trying to make it be any other way. Relaxing is not something that can be forced. So, if you are having difficulty relaxing, just welcoming the thought that you may not know how to do this (and that that is okay—and that you are also okay just as you are) may help you begin the process of letting go.

c. Qualities of our attention.

Non judgmental – while meditating we simply are to notice and observe. There is no need to judge each breath or our mind wandering to thoughts as good/bad or right/wrong. We are neither for or against any of our breaths or other experiences. All we have to do is notice, and allow the flow of experience. We are not in contention nor do we resist anything that presents itself. When we meditate, we have no agenda. We meet all experience with a moral neutrality.

From a talk by Tara Brach: “Peace is this moment without judgment, that is all. This moment in the heart space where everything that is, is welcome.”

Non reactive and non interfering – Our main work is simply to receive each experience and allow it to be just as it is. There is no need to change or fix anything. We are not trying to control our experience to be any certain way. There are no mistakes when you sit down to meditate. Whatever you are given is what you are to practice with--not to make it different, but just to be with it. In learning to meditate, we are learning to relax with all of our experiences—even the difficult ones that we might prefer not to be experiencing.

We receive each experience in a receptive way with **kindness, respect and honor--** whether we like what we are experiencing or not. With a kind heart we experience our life just as it is. We flow with our experiences with an awareness that welcomes everything and leaves nothing out. This is a practice of loving ourselves just as we are in any moment. The energy of meditation is gentleness and kindness. There is no place for harshness directed at ourselves.

Instead of just being concerned with what we are experiencing, we become aware of awareness itself. The experience itself and the awareness of that experience are two different things. We are more than just an observer of what we are experiencing. We are also being the experience. If, for example, there is tension in our shoulders, we can directly experience and feel the tight muscles. At the same time we can consciously

know that that we are noticing that we are aware. Even though the tension may not be pleasant, our awareness of it may be peaceful and calm.

It is normal and natural during meditation for the mind to want to wander. Part of the process of training the mind to be focused in one place is to **“begin again”**--return to awareness of the breath after the mind has wandered away. When the mind is present, it is not focused on the past or the future; it is right here. Presence is something that always exists. We can neither create or destroy it. The only thing we can do to presence is return to it. There is no limit to the number of times we may “begin again” in a sit, and there is no need for any judgment on that number. Rather than judging, we celebrate that we are awake and that we have noticed our mind has wandered.

Though in meditation we aspire to concentrate on our object of focus (such as the breath), it is **not our objective to blank out all thought or to make our mind go blank**. Rather, we are to simply know when thinking is present, then return to our breath.

We can **experience varying degrees of awareness of our breath**.

- a. Simply know and experience when we breathe in and when we breathe out.
(We may note “in”/”out”)
- b. In addition to knowing breathing in and out, we may notice qualities of our breath to include things like long/short breaths, labored/easy or fast/slow breathing. . . . (We may note “long”/”short,” “fast”/”slow”, etc.)
- c. In addition to the above we may notice our complete breath from the beginning of the inhale, to the brief pause before we exhale, to the exhale itself, to the brief pause before you begin the next inhale—and all the body sensations involved in that process.

All these different degrees of noticing the breath are perfect just as they are. One level of awareness is not considered better than the other. You may find yourself flowing between the different degrees of awareness with each breath—one breath just knowing that you are breathing in and out, and with the next breath being aware of the detail of knowing your complete breath from the point of beginning the inhale to the point of ending the exhale. All is just perfect as it is.

“Noting”--words used to keep us grounded in our experience (i.e. “in”/”out,” “long”/”short,” “deep”/”shallow,” etc.). These words are meant to be short and a soft voice over to help keep us grounded in what we were experiencing. It is totally optional whether you include noting in your meditation or not. The words you choose are not meant to be distracting nor to get you into discursive thought in trying to figure out the right word. If you are not sure what word to use, simply note, “don’t know,” and move on.

We are **not trying to create a state of peace and calm.**

Though being peaceful and calm may be a valid aspiration for meditating, it cannot be our goal or agenda. Trying to achieve a goal invites striving and grasping for some condition to arise. When we relax, receive, allow and welcome all experiences without having an agenda that we need to accomplish something or that our experience be a certain way, what we are doing is creating the conditions for peace and calm to arise naturally. When the conditions are right, peace and calm will well up from the inside. Rather than peace and calm being the goal, it is the byproduct of relaxing and allowing all experience to be as it is. We are thus not creating peace and calm directly, but rather setting up the conditions for it to arise from within. It is not something we do, but something we allow. This concept may be a paradigm shift for many, especially to those who have been rewarded for working hard in their life to control and accomplish things.

And lastly, meditation is a practice in **loving ourselves unconditionally** as we are in any moment. It is a lot about letting go of control of how things have to be and about allowing things to simply be as they are. It is important to approach meditation in an open way without a goal. Though meditation involves the mind, it is a practice of the heart.

In Summary. . .

The guided meditation exposed you to being present and to being intimate with your body—both as we scanned the body at the beginning and as we became more concentrated on the breath. You allowed your body to directly tell you what was happening. Your job was not to control what was happening. Your job was not to do anything. Rather than doing something, you simply were to “receive” and “allow” what was presented to you moment by moment. There was no need for judgment or resistance. Your job was to receive with impartiality. There was no need to change or fix anything. You were simply present with the ebb and flow of how each breath was different, and at times you were likely exposed to seeing how your mind can flow from one thing to the next quite easily. Meditation is an exercise in waking up the mind to being aware of what is happening moment by moment without controlling it in any way. You became aware of awareness itself.

When you were in the moment during the body scan or when you were concentrating on the breath, you were not thinking of what you did yesterday or what you will do tomorrow. You were simply with what was as it was right then. You were living in the “now.” The mind was balanced and free from confusion. The mind was simply taking a break! What a gift to yourself—and what a gift to your mind!

In the Introduction I suggested that my main work in meditation was simply to relax and be present with what presents itself, and that I learned that in meditation there was really nothing to do, accomplish, or achieve. After the guided meditation you may now have a glimpse of what it means to be present with whatever experience presents itself--simply allowing whatever presents itself to be

without judgment, resistance, pushing anything away, or having an agenda or goal. All of the remaining chapters will continue with this theme.

Though these instructions may be simple, they may not always be easy. A possible reason is that we often have ideas of how we think each moment “should” be. And rather than experiencing the moment as it is, we get bogged down with our judgments and wanting things to be different from what they are. For example, at times we may be experiencing tension in the body, yet we want to be experiencing relaxation. So, rather than being with and experiencing tension as it is with tight muscles, etc., we “try” to relax only to find that the trying to relax only increases the tension. Or we sit and are having a session where our mind won’t settle and is cluttered with thoughts of the past or planning for the future. So, rather than being present with what it feels like in our body when we can’t stop thinking, we try to get rid of the thoughts only to find that they get stronger. Rather than being with what is, we try to get rid of or make things different from what they are, which usually only exacerbates the situation. Over time we learn the grace of simply receiving and allowing what is, as it is. A big part of learning how to meditate is to let go of our thoughts and beliefs of how we *think* things should be; we are simply to be with things as they “are.” This can be a huge cultural adjustment!

Caution about judging your meditation sit as “good” or “bad”. . .

When people begin to meditate, I often hear them evaluate what their sit was like. For example, I might hear that “this was a good sit,” or “this wasn’t such a good sit.” When I ask them, “How so?” I typically hear “good” sits associated with lots of concentration and focus on the breath and few thoughts arising, as well as a sense of peace and calm. “Bad” sits are usually associated with uncontrollable thoughts, tension, and an inability to experience calm. I encourage you to be careful when judging your sits. I even suggest that your sits do not need to be judged one way or the other.

The only criteria as to whether a sit is “good” or “bad” can be made on whether you were present with what was happening in the moment. If you experienced concentration and peace and calm in a sit, and you were concentrated and totally present in your body with that, you met the criteria. If you experienced uncontrollable thoughts, tension, and the inability to experience calm and you were concentrated and totally present in your body with that, you also met the criteria. As we progress, we will find that it is possible that when we are experiencing the uncontrollable thoughts and tension, that in awareness we can calmly observe the thoughts and tension in our body; it is the awareness itself that can be calm. Often the issue that makes meditating difficult for some is the resistance to receiving and working with whatever presents itself. I’ve said this before, and it may merit repeating: when we receive and allow our experiences to be just as they are without judgment and without trying to change or fix them, we are creating the conditions for peace and calm to arise naturally.

One final note for this chapter. . .

When I started to meditate, I was told (more or less) all of these things. I tried my best to hear them and understand them, and to some extent, I did. Many of these ideas were so anti-cultural that I did not know how to relate to them. When I started, I was used to “doing” and “controlling.” If something was not as I wanted, I got busy to fix the situation. Initially hearing the concept that meditation was not

about “doing,” but simply “receiving” and “allowing” what presented itself felt quite foreign. So was letting go of control. Being present “in the body” was also a new concept for me. The only way I could eventually really understand the concept was to practice sitting and over time experience what the words said. Gradually as I did that, the concepts started becoming a part of me and becoming a part of my way of being.

Learning to Meditate – Intellectual/Cognitive Knowledge and Experiential Knowledge. . .

You can gain knowledge about how to meditate from reading a book, taking a class and studying, as well as, from sitting and integrating mindfulness into your daily life, but those knowledges will be different. One way to look at it is that the knowledge you get from reading and studying is intellectual/cognitive knowledge—knowledge that will be stored in your store consciousness. It is something you can recall and remember. The knowledge that you gain from sitting and from integrating mindfulness into your daily life (knowledge that happens from direct experience) happens deep within your body. Knowledge gained from direct experience becomes a part of you, and because of that, you will not have to remember it; it is simply there. Both kinds of knowledge are important.

Here’s an analogy. Let’s say you’ve never eaten an orange. You are in your 30s, and you say, “It is time!” So you research to get some information (from a book or maybe the internet) about eating oranges. You read all about oranges—the different varieties, how some have smooth skin and others are more rough, different ways to peel an orange, how once peeled you can section an orange to eat it, and all kinds of other information as well. That information is now all registered and saved in your store consciousness to be recalled when you need it. The next week you are in the grocery store and you walk by oranges in the fruit section. You use the information you’ve learned (and remembered). You see a number of varieties, and you decide to buy a Tangerine, a Blood Orange, a Navel, and then you see one that really looks nice, but you don’t know what it is, but you buy it anyway. Over the next week you eat them all; each one on a different day. You see and directly experience that they peel differently; some easily, some not. You also see that some are sweet and juicy, and they fill you with so much joy that you wonder why you have waited so long to eat them. You experience some as full of seeds and they are more difficult to eat. It is interesting that the one that looked so good actually was hard to peel, and it had a dull flavor, and it was not juicy at all; it was a disappointment and not satisfying. The information you now have because you have directly experienced eating a few oranges is now a part of you in a different kind of way than the information you got from reading about eating oranges. Now, you “just know,” and you won’t have to remember or think so hard about which oranges to buy the next time you go to the store.

Learning to meditate is much the same. You can learn very useful things about how to meditate by reading and by listening to a talk, but for meditation and its benefits to become a part of you, you must actually experience sitting and doing the work of integrating mindfulness into your day. When you sit, you are experiencing what it is like to simply receive what has presented itself—with acceptance, with impartiality, and without trying to fix or change anything. When you’ve experienced that, you will know deep inside you what that means. Then, you too, can say, “I now don’t have to remember, I just know.” The practice of meditating cannot be learned solely through reading, researching and discursive dialog or through trying to figure it out; it must be experienced to be realized. It is like

building muscles in our bodies by working out or going to the gym. We do not build muscles in our body by reading a book or intellectually hearing a lecture; we have to work out.

To grow in a meditation practice, we must do three things. . .

1. Sit or meditate (training the mind to directly experience what it is experiencing with impartiality or without judgment). (Helps you gain experiential knowledge)
2. Continue to study and learn. It is difficult learning how to meditate on your own. Reading, taking a class, and being in a supportive community (such as the group in this class) helps. (Helps you gain intellectual/cognitive knowledge)
3. Integrate the quiet mind, calm body, and open heart into your daily life. We do not sit just to become good meditators. We do not sit to just be quiet and calm while we are sitting. To sit is to train the mind to be quiet and calm; then we carry that same quietness, calmness and openness of heart throughout our entire day--when we are driving, having a conversation with a friend (or foe), processing a difficult situation (or a happy one). . . . Meditating has the potential for helping us calm our mind. It is also a huge part of a template for helping us live more peacefully and happily. In this process we learn how to respond to our life circumstances coming from a stance of wisdom rather than reacting out of habit. (Helps you gain experiential knowledge)

In retirement I lived on a 60-acre gentlemen-type farm in upstate New York, and I milked several Brown Swiss dairy cows—sometimes with a machine and sometimes by hand. I used a three-legged stool to sit on. The stool was only of use to me when all three legs were strong and sturdy. The above three activities are like a three-legged stool. All three legs must be strong if the stool is to be useful. All are necessary if we are to grow in practice. All weekly homework will include sitting, studying, and integrating.

Tips on mediating at home

- * Set a *regular time* and *place*
- * Before you start, *determine how long you will sit; then sit that amount of time (no more, no less;)*. This reduces the tendency for “grasping for more” if your sit is quiet and peaceful, as well as the tendency to want to “push away and stop” if your sit is not quiet and peaceful.
- * As much as possible, eliminate disturbances (phones/sounds of the TV, etc)
- * Set a timing device (consider using the “Insight Timer” app on your smart phone)
- * Manage your expectations (Patience). Love yourself enough to know that learning to meditate is a process, and it takes some time. Do your best to “not push the river.” Not pushing the river is a phrase that says “relax and don’t force the process; allow it to happen.”

Between Now and Next Time – Homework

1. Sit (Experiential Knowledge)

Meditate six out of seven days for a minimum of 10 minutes (more if it works for you).

Before each sit, set your intention; you might remind yourself to:

Be unconditionally **friendly with yourself**

Relax/receive and allow your life as it presents itself, returning to your breath as soon as you notice your mind has wandered

Consciously **note when you are judging** what you are experiencing (good/bad; right/wrong); simply notice; **no need to try to change or fix** anything

And don't try too hard; not trying to accomplish anything or creating a certain state such as being calm; knowing that doing your best is all that is being asked.

If guided meditations work for you, as often as you like, use the recorded guided meditation provided with this chapter.

2. Study (Cognitive/Intellectual Knowledge)

Read/review Chapter 1 as much as it fits your needs.

After you have sat with and experienced what was presented in Chapter 1, **Read/Preview Chapter 2**. It will be sent to you electronically over next weekend. As we will work with Chapter 2 in next week's class, please have a paper or electronic version available to refer to during class.

3. Integrate – Living Mindfully (Experiential Knowledge)

At least once each day (and as often as you remember to do it) simply **STOP** and **PAUSE** what you are doing and take three to five mindful breaths--feeling each in your body. Simply note the breath in your body. There is nothing to do; no need to judge or try to change or fix any of what you are experiencing. Simply notice how your breath is in this moment. Trust that when you are in your body, you are in the **NOW**. This requires no preplanning nor does it require you to set any time aside; the only thing it requires is for you to remember to do it. This can be done anywhere--in the car, at a stop light waiting for it to change, in a grocery store line, waiting for an elevator, sitting reading a book, having a cup of coffee or tea, in a moment before calling a friend or in a moment during a conversation. . . . And no one needs to know that you are doing it--in fact, it is better if no one does know. We can return to presence in any moment!

When you begin meditating, you might believe that the only time meditation can be done is when you sit on a cushion or chair. In reality, each time you STOP and PAUSE, you are having a mini-meditation session—even if it only involves a few breaths.

4. Agenda for Next Class

These chapters are progressive. Each session sets the stage for the next session. Next class we will talk about your experience(s) of sitting over the past week and anything you've learned from your integration practice. Come prepared to share at least one thing about any of your experiences over the week. Next week as you walk with what we talked about today, consider using these questions to help you prepare for how you will share in next week's class. Using only words and/or phrases, respond to these questions:

1. If you were new to meditation, what surprised you about what was discussed and what you experienced in Session 1?

OR

If you already had some experience in meditation prior to class, what, if anything, did you learn that was new to you, or what, if anything, were you glad that you were reminded of or was reinforced?

2. What was your experience of sitting at home like last week? If it was difficult, what made it difficult? If it was easy, to what do you attribute that?

3. What was your experience of integrating the STOP and PAUSE exercise into each day? What impact, if any, did that have on your day?

4. A challenge question – When you meditate, what is considered “Right Effort?”

Appendix A – Script of Guided Meditation – Chapter 1

a. First, ground your body in your chair by checking in with your posture.

Taking a meditative posture, feet flat on the floor, sitting in your chair with your lower back supporting your upper torso, sitting upright, yet not rigid, shoulders back with your heart area open, your head upright with possibly your chin bending down and slightly in--a position that is comfortable, and one where your body can remain relatively still. This upright posture will help you stay alert.

And in this position begin to notice and arrive in the space in which you are sitting. Sense the temperature of the air in the room, hear any sounds or noises (or lack of) that may stand out, and notice any smells.

Pause.

b. Invite relaxation.

And now, begin by taking a slow, deep breath in, maybe one that is three quarters full, and maybe allow your shoulders to rise with your breath. When you are at the top of the breath, hold it for one or two seconds before your body naturally lets it out slowly. Allow your out breath to take a little longer than your in breath. As you breathe out, drop your shoulders in relaxation. You might feel a sensation of your shoulders becoming heavy (or not). As you continue the out breath, you may feel other parts of your body relax—just do what feels natural. Repeat this breathing process a number of times paying attention to all the movements in your body and any sensations that you notice. There's no absolute right way to breathe; just breathe the way it works for you. Receive each breath just as it is.

Pause.

c. Body Scan – to connect and become present in your body.

When you are ready, bring your breathing back to a normal pace. Pause. Briefly we are going to take our focus away from our breath and center our focus on other parts of our body.

When you are ready, focus your attention on your feet – as best you can, feel your toes, feel your feet in your socks, or feel your bare feet touching the floor. Notice whether your feet are warm, cold, or sweaty. Any ache or pain present? Move or wiggle your toes—know firsthand the feel of your toes moving. Your feet do not need to feel a certain way. Receive the feeling of your feet just as they are, no need to change how or what you are feeling in any way. Pause.

Then, when you are ready, focus your attention on your buttocks sitting on the chair; feel the weight of your body on either the cushion or hard surface of the chair. Feel any sensations in your buttocks as you sit. There is no right sensations here; whatever you are feeling (or not feeling) is okay. Pause.

Then, when you are ready, shift your focus of attention to your shoulders. What sensations are there? Are your shoulders relaxed and loose, or are they tight and tense? Do your shoulders feel light or heavy? However they are, simply be with the sensation as it is without trying to change or fix it. No judgment is needed. Simply receive exactly what your body is presenting to you. Many times when we stop resisting the reality of how things are (such as tense shoulders), the awareness of the reality often changes the feeling that is present (i.e. the shoulders may become more relaxed or softened). It is important to not be tied to whether your shoulders relax or not; simply allow them to be and directly experience them as they are. There is no need to change or fix how they are in any way. There is nothing you need to do. Simply notice and allow. Pause.

Then, when you are ready, shift your focus to your face around your eyes, eyebrow and sinus area. What sensations are there? Pause. Sometimes I hold tension around my eyes; sometimes my eyes feel relaxed; sometimes they feel tired. Whatever feeling is there for you, simply feel or receive the sensations as they are without trying to change or fix it. There is nothing to do but notice and experience. Simply feel what your body is presenting to you just as it is. Pause.

You might now check to see if there is any sensation on the sides of your face right beside your eyes. Sometimes I notice that I hold tension there. Pause. Is it possible to feel the eyeballs themselves. Is it possible to feel the eyeballs behind the eyelids? Pause. And, then, check for sensations in your cheekbones. Pause.

And then moving on down the face to your lips. Feel the sensations of your lips touching one another. Pause. Then feel your tongue in our mouth. Consider placing the tip of our tongue on the roof of your mouth right behind your upper teeth. This often reduces the amount of saliva generated. And when you are ready, drop and relax your jaw. That typically relaxes most of the muscles in your face. You will also relax the muscles in your face by placing a slight smile on your face. Pause.

When you are ready, move your focus down to your belly. What sensations are there? Is it soft and relaxed, or tight and tense. No need to try to change how it is or judge how it is in any way. Simply receive the experience your body is presenting to you at this moment. Simply notice. And allow it to be just as it is. Pause

When you are ready, move your focus to your left hand to feel the sensations present. Is your hand warm/cold; dry/moist; hard and calloused or soft; any aches? Can you feel the fingers touching one another? We often have sensations in our hands that are present, but we go unaware of them because we do not focus our attention there. Move your attention to your right hand; what sensations are there? Possibly move the little finger on your right hand and directly and consciously know the experience of moving that finger. Pause. Now, do your best to see if you can expand your attention to focus on both hands at once. Pause.

d. Returning our focus back to our breath.

Now that we have arrived and are present in our body, let's focus our attention back on awareness of our breathing. Breathe at a normal pace. There's really nothing you need to do or know about breathing. Breathing happens on its own automatically. If we were not mindfully paying attention, breathing would take care of itself. There is no need to breathe any special way, simply allow your breathing to happen like you normally would—only now we will pay special attention to it. Our breath will become an anchor to help us keep our mind focused and concentrated. Pause.

When we are mindful in meditation with our breath as an anchor, we have three options or levels on how we might experience our breath. All levels are considered positive and of equal value. One is not better than the other. So, you can work with the option that suits you best, or you can easily move from one option to another from one breath to the next.

Level 1 or Option 1

The most simple and maybe most common is what I call Level 1 or Option 1. In Option 1, you simply experience in the body and know that you are breathing. You know that when you are breathing in that you are taking an in-breath, and you know when you are breathing out that you are taking an out-breath. This is a knowing and a felt sense in the body. You are having the direct experience of breathing in the body as compared to thinking about breathing—which happens in the mind

And though this embodied feeling does not need words, some meditators find it helpful to keep them focused on their breath when they gently note the word “in” as they breathe in and “out” as they breathe out. This technique is called “noting.” Noting is more a soft, inner voice over than a thought. Noting is totally optional. If it helps, use it, if not, there is no need to. So take a few breaths and just breathe being aware of when you are breathing

in and when you are breathing out. Pause. There is no need to do anything other than notice. All breaths are just fine as they are. Our work is to simply receive each breath as it is without any kind of judgment.

Pause.

It is perfectly normal if after a few mindful, in-the-body breaths, your attention wanders to a thought. This is normal! It is not considered a problem nor need it be judged as bad. If this happens simply celebrate that you are awake enough to have noticed. In a gentle voice you might note “thought” or “not now.” Then, with loving awareness and with an unconditional friendliness to yourself, gently return to focus your attention on your breath. Doing this as many times as it occurs is considered part of meditation, it does not need to be seen as a disruption to your sit. It is part of your being aware of what is happening in the present moment. It need not be resisted. It is a part of the process of training our minds to be quiet. Pause.

Level 2 or Option 2

Option 2 carries forward the knowing of when we are breathing in and out, and it adds on knowing the qualities of each breath. At this level we are noticing whether our breath is long or short, deep in the belly or shallow in the chest, easy or labored, fast or slow, calm and relaxed or tense, etc. As all breaths are fine just as they are, there is no need for judgment anywhere, and no need to try to change or fix any of them. We are just noticing and receiving each breath exactly as it is. One time we may notice that our breath is short and quick, another time it might be long and easy. This level of awareness is no better than just noticing the “in” and “out” of Option 1, it just includes more to notice. If noting helps you maintain your focus, you could note with such words as “long”/“short,” “easy”/“labored,” etc. For a minute, try this level out. When we experience that each breath can be different, we are beginning to experience the “flow” of experience. Not each moment is the same.

As all options are of equal value, feel free to move back and forth between options. On one breath your awareness level may be one, on the next it may be at 2.

And again, if your mind wanders in thought, simply be thankful that you are awake enough to have noticed. Then simply and gently, with loving awareness and in a kind way to yourself, return to concentrating and focusing on your breath.

Pause.

Level 3 or Option 3

When you are ready, let’s play with Level 3 or Option 3. This option carries forward the knowings of Levels 1 and 2, and it adds on knowing all the sensations in your body from the very beginning of your breath cycle to the end of your breath cycle. So, on an in breath you might feel your belly or chest rise, the air entering your nose, or possibly some sensations in the back of your throat. You might notice at the top of your in breath that there is a pause before your body naturally begins the out breath. As you breathe out you may feel sensations going down the back of your body and how your out breath is longer than your in breath. You might also see how at the bottom of your out breath that your body briefly pauses before it naturally gets the urge to take in another breath. You might also see that as you relax more that your breathing slows down. When we really pay attention to our breath, it can be quite interesting. Play with this level of awareness for a minute or so.

Pause.

It is natural when we are meditating to use all three of these levels. No level is considered better than another, and it is common for meditators to have one level of awareness for one breath and another level for the next breath. All levels of awareness are fine, and you can use just one level during a sit or use them interchangeably switching back and forth as it intuitively feels right for you. Our work in meditation is simply to notice, receive and allow each breath to be just as it is. Sit for a minute and see how this plays out for you. Pause.

e. The last few minutes.

There are two parts to meditating. One is awareness and the other is concentration. Knowing, receiving, feeling, and allowing each breath in the body or noticing when you wandered away in thought takes care of the awareness part. In awareness you see the flow of experience. Concentration comes in when we can maintain or sustain our focus on the object—our breath. Our minds are used to being busy, so it is natural and normal for our mind to wander to other thoughts or to things like planning. When this happens, our concentration on our object is broken. This is not a problem, or at least it does not have to be. It is simply normal and natural. To build the muscle of concentration, when we notice that our mind has wandered, we simply with a kind tone of our inner voice might say, “not now,” and in gentleness of heart we return to focus our attention back on our breath. We may need to do this “return to focus” or “begin again” many, many times in any one sit. It is normal and natural, and is considered part of the process of learning how to meditate; it is part of the training. And, beginning again is always done in a friendly and kind spirit. Our work in meditation is not to eliminate thought, it is simply to notice when thoughts are there, and then with a gentle heart, bring our attention back to our breath.

So, just sit for a minute or so being aware of your breath in your body, and if a thought comes, gently bring yourself back to your breath. Feel free with each breath to move between the options however they work for you. The important thing is that whatever option you are in, you know and are experiencing your breath in your body—allowing and receiving each breath simply as it is without judgment and without trying to change or fix it to be different. And if your mind wanders to thoughts, simply without judgment and with kindness to yourself return your attention to your breath.

And a note if you are feeling tired or sleepy—first, know that often when we become relaxed and when our minds become quiet, feeling sleepy can be a normal response. Sleep can be wonderful; it is just not meditation. What you might do is simply, without judgment, temporarily take your focus off your breath and instead focus your attention on what and how tired and sleepy feels like in your body; just focus on that. Or, you might try movement such as moving your fingers or moving your arms back and forth, or opening your eyes and standing up to continue your meditation.

Pause.

Sit with no commentary for several minutes, and then End.

f. To end.

Bring your awareness to and feel your buttocks on your chair; wiggle your toes and get a sense of your feet grounded on the floor; feel the sensation(s) in your shoulders, then in your hands; hear the sound of the bell; and when you are ready, open your eyes and be awake in the present moment to join the class again.