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Embodied Meditation

Embodied Meditation has its roots in the Zen practice called *Shikantaza* or “just sitting”. The main intention is to become intimate with our experience of being alive in the present moment. Rather than “mind control, the emphasis is on a gentle orientation toward presence in an open, curious, committed and friendly way. Friendliness with mind and body leads naturally to friendliness with life itself.

Taking Care of your Posture, Breathing and Mudra (hand position)

Any relatively comfortable, erect sitting position is acceptable for this practice. It is better to sit in a chair than to struggle with sitting on the floor. Sit with the eyes slightly open most of the time, allowing light in, gazing downward, without lowering the head or looking around. Just as the ears are always open to the sound in the environment, rest with your eyes open so that both the inner and outer worlds are included. We are practicing “open awareness”, cultivating a welcoming attitude toward whatever appears in our experience. Being present to and intimate with all phenomena is both the journey and the destination, the means and the end.

Our physical sensations are the doorways to the present moment. The sensations of sitting and breathing are always available, never hiding. These are the center of the practice. The vertical axis, combining the substantiality of grounded-ness and the vitality of uprightness, forms a literal central column. We are connecting to both the ground and the sky, like a tree rooted while branching upward and outward. We cultivate a sense of length and lightness in the spine, the top of the head drawn toward the sky as we are simultaneously pulled toward the earth. Grounded, erect and at ease, we aim for a relaxed vitality.

The sensations of breathing in the lower belly and lower back, along with the position of the hands, known as the “universal or cosmic mudra” (details shown later), create a powerful center. Emphasizing the exhale, notice the sensations and feelings of letting go of the breath until the end. Rest in the brief open space before the ensuing inhale. Do not worry about all the thoughts that come and go; just keep returning to the core sensations of sitting and breathing. We are open to the other bodily sensations as well,

including those arising from the environment such as sounds and smells. Keep returning to these ever-present and ever-changing phenomena.

Mind-Fullness, Body-Fullness, Heart-Fullness

We are not analyzing or working on the stories or thoughts that the mind creates. We notice them with kindness, even offering a non-judgmental “hello” to the thoughts and feelings and then let them go, returning to the next breath. Traditionally this kind of noticing is called “mindfulness”. Sometimes briefly naming the thought or the theme can be helpful.

The main intention is to rest in presence as the ground state, noticing anything that is added to the basic facts of the moment. Even when lost in a long saga, in the moment of noticing, start freshly, de-emphasizing the mental phenomena and returning to the living physical sensations. If noticing the various phenomena is “mind-fullness”, this returning through sensation is “body–fullness”. When we add the intentional atmosphere of unconditional loving-kindness, gentleness and even humor to the whole process then we are actualizing “heart-fullness”. **Mind-fullness, Body-fullness and Heart-fullness are all essential aspects of Embodied Meditation.**

Being With “What Is”

If there is a struggle or aversion toward an uncomfortable bodily sensation, a painful feeling or disturbing thought, the intention is to befriend the reactivity. Consciously acknowledge any inner voices that are struggling. Stand back and notice the whole show! **Rather than being lost IN the thought or feeling, practice being WITH it.** We return repeatedly to the basic facts of the moment, including any reactions, without judgment. Simply put, this is being with “what is”, while noticing all the opinions, preferences, desires, thought streams, etc. that appear, with kindness. Even hate, anxiety, boredom (or your least desirable state) are met, as much as possible, with care. When caring is not possible, then we greet the “not possible” with kindness.

One of the functions of having our eyes open is to stay connected to the greater environment. Every moment of our lives we are both in a body and in a larger space, both a physical and social environment. Rather than

focusing exclusively on the inner world, this practice intentionally includes the outer world, therefore all sensations are welcomed.

Just This – Ever-Intimate with our Life

As the wandering mind settles, the experience of inner world and outer world becomes less and less separate, thus allowing awareness to rest in the one world of “*just this*”. These moments are experienced as a deep intimacy with being alive. While this sense of oneness is lovely, even blissful at times, it is not the goal. We are not trying to have a certain state of mind. Rather, we are cultivating a very generous atmosphere of kindness and curiosity toward *anything and everything*. This is true intimacy with life and death. This is genuine practice for the love and loss that is our life!

The intention toward presence includes learning from our habits of “absencing”. Opening our hearts to “what is” means that a busy mind or painful moments are not problems. Leaning into presence with a strong intention does not mean we fight and judge our habits of distraction. In fact, we can learn as much from becoming intimate with our ways of “absencing” as with having uninterrupted presencing!

Embodied Meditation is a modern iteration based on the essential practice of “just sitting” as described by thirteenth century Zen master Eihei Dogen. As Dogen emphasized, we become enlightened *through or with* our delusion. In emphasizing the dynamic relationship between delusion and awakening, he used the term *shinzo* meaning *ever-intimate*. Learning to be ever-intimate with life, with “*just this*”, is our direction.