

Meditations

It's helpful to be able to become aware of your own mind. That can be a very useful awareness to have. Yet not much happens in school or in our family life that lets us come to know ourselves. So we are going to spend a couple of minutes now doing just that.

Let yourself get settled. It's good to sit with your back straight if you can, feet planted flat on the floor, legs uncrossed. If you need to lie flat on the floor that's okay, too. And with your eyes open at first, just try this. Try letting your attention go to the center of the room. And now just notice your attention as you let it go to the far wall. And now follow your attention as it comes back to the middle of the room and then bring it up close as if you were holding a book at reading distance. Notice how your attention can go to very different places.

Now let your attention go inward. You might let your eyes close at this point. Get a sense inside yourself of your body in space where you're sitting in the room. And now let yourself just become aware of the sounds around you. That sense of sound can fill your awareness. (Pause for some moments.)

Let your awareness now find the breath wherever you feel it most prominently-whether it's at the level of your nostrils, the air going in and out, or the level of your chest as it goes up and down, or the level of your abdomen going inward and outward. Perhaps you'll even just notice your whole body breathing. Wherever it comes naturally, just let your awareness ride the wave of your in-breath, and then your out-breath. (Pause.)

When you come to notice, as often happens, that your mind may have wandered and become lost in a thought or a memory, a feeling, a worry, when you notice that, just take note of it and gently, lovingly, return your awareness toward the breath-wherever you feel it-and follow that wave of the in-breath, and the outbreath. (Pause.)

As you follow your breath, I'm going to tell you an ancient story that's been passed through the generations.

The mind is like the ocean. And deep in the ocean, beneath the surface, it's calm and clear. And no matter what the surface conditions are like, whether it's smooth or choppy or even a fullstrength gale up there, deep in the ocean it's tranquil and serene. From the depth of the ocean you can look toward the surface and simply notice the activity there, just as from the depth of the mind you can look upward toward the waves, the brain waves at the surface of your mind, all that activity of mind-the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. Enjoy this opportunity to just observe those activities at the surface of your mind.

At times it may be helpful to let your attention go back to the breath, and follow the breath to reground yourself in the tranquil place at the deepest depth of the mind. From this place it's possible to become aware of the activities of the mind without being swept away by them, to discern that those are not the totality of who you are; that you are more than just your thoughts, more than your feelings. You can have those thoughts and feelings and also be able to just notice them with the wisdom that they are not your identity. They are simply one part of your mind's experience. For some, naming the type of mental activity, like "feeling" or "thinking," "remembering" or "worrying," can help allow these activities of the mind to be noted as events that come and go. Let them gently float away and out of awareness.

Wheel of Awareness

Picture your mind as a wheel of awareness. Imagine a bicycle wheel where there is an outer rim and spokes that connect that rim to an inner hub. In this mind's wheel of awareness, anything that can come into our awareness is one of the infinite points on the rim.

One sector → **five senses** of touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight, those senses that bring the outside world into our mind.

Another sector → inward sense of the body, the sensations in our limbs and our facial muscles, the feelings in the organs of our torso: our lungs, our heart, our intestines.

- body brings its wisdom up into our mind, and this bodily sense, this **sixth sense**, if you will, is another of the elements to which we can bring our awareness.

Third sector → what the mind creates directly, such as thoughts and feelings, memories and perceptions, hopes and dreams.

- this capacity to see the mind itself-our own mind as well as the minds of others → **seventh sense**.

As we come to sense our connections with others, we perceive our relationships with the larger world, which perhaps constitutes yet another capacity, an **eighth relational sense**, which is the fourth sector of the wheel of awareness.

Now notice that we have a choice about where we send our attention. We can choose which point on the rim to visit. We may choose to pay attention to one of the five senses, or perhaps the feeling in our belly, and send a spoke there. Or we may choose to pay attention to a memory, and send a spoke to that area of the rim where input from our seventh sense is located.

All of these spokes emanate from the depth of our mind, which is the hub of the wheel of awareness. And as we focus on the breath, we will find that the hub grows more spacious. As the hub expands, we develop the capacity to be receptive to whatever arises from the rim. We can give ourselves over to the spaciousness, to the luminous quality of the hub. It can receive any aspect of our experience, just as it is. Without preconceived ideas or judgments, this mindful awareness, this receptive attention, brings us into a tranquil place where we can be aware of and know all elements of our experience.

Like the calm depths of the sea inside, the hub of our wheel of awareness is a place of tranquillity, of safety, of openness and curiosity. It is from this safe and open place that we can explore the nature of the mind with equanimity, energy, and concentration. This hub of our mind is always available to us, right now. And it's from this hub that we enter a compassionate state of connection to ourselves, and feel compassion for others.

Let's focus on our breath for a few more moments, together, opening the spacious hub of our minds to the beauty and wonder of what is. (Pause.)