

YOGA[®] MAGAZINE

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MEDITATION IN MOTION

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MEDITATION IN MOTION



*A practical guide to bringing
mindfulness into a yoga practice*

Even when we're on the yoga mat, we're not always in the present moment. We can find our thoughts wandering off to think about what we're going to do later or how we feel about the particular pose we're in. Jill Satterfield, the renowned US yoga teacher and founder of Vajra Yoga & Meditation, suggests how to bring mindfulness into our yoga practice.

If we think of a posture as a shape or form, and the breath and mind as the content – where does the breath/mind go in this particular shape and, where does it not go? If we allow our breath to be as natural as possible, little by little we begin to distinguish where we like to breathe and where we don't; we have to witness this without any manipulation.

Once we can watch our breath as it is naturally, we are able to see ourselves as we are, not as we wish. This then becomes the foundation for what I call 'Meditation in Motion'. In meditation practice, we are (primarily) watching the breath, not fixing or fiddling with it. In yoga asana, we are used to moving the breath on purpose, regulating it either with gentleness, or light force, but not usually just letting it be. If we practise asana with the breath as it occurs naturally, we not only can change our relationship to breath, but also rejuvenate our practice.

“
...offer from deep within your heart these same phrases to all sentient beings: everything on our planet and beyond
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Step 1: CHANGING THE VIEW

Take five postures that you know well - nothing too complicated, or too rigorous. In each posture, watch the movement of your breath. You're actually observing the movements of your mind and heart. The body reflects our thoughts and emotions and the body becomes the physical shape of the mind and heart. Recognise that where your breath goes easily are the areas of your body in or about which you are comfortable. Where it doesn't flow easily are the areas of some holding - either emotional, mental, or both. With time, the nature of the constriction can be revealed, but our first step is becoming familiar with the internal landscape of our body.

Step Two: MOVING THE MIND

Using the same five postures, settle into them and imagine that your breath carries your mind into any area of the body that you like. As you draw a gentle breath into your right hip for instance, imagine this breath like a fresh breeze; lightly brushing the area of the hip, the internal crested shape, and the organs and glands that are in that area. Move your breath and mind everywhere you can imagine, and note the places that you can't breathe into, or can't imagine breathing into. Watch and observe how you feel during and after this moving of the mind. Listen to the thoughts that arise and feel the emotions that come up from either lingering in a particular area, or not being able to easily access an area.



Once you have discovered the areas of your internal landscape that aren't so easily accessible, choose a restorative posture to explore those areas- something that is very easy to stay in for a longer period of time. For instance, if you aren't breathing into your heart area/chest very easily, roll a mat up and place it directly behind the heart centre, just below your shoulder blades. Lie on this roll for at least ten minutes.

Once you are in the restorative pose, just rest your awareness gently inside, returning your mind to this place every time you notice that you have wandered. Don't expect anything to happen; simply 'sit' as if you were with a dear friend who needs you and, just being by their side in silence, is enough to provide ease.

As you move from one posture to another, be as mindful of the transition times as you are in the pose itself. These can be very revealing moments, reflecting the internal adjustments that occur mainly unconsciously.

Step Three:

LOVING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

Complete your practice with Metta (loving kindness and compassion). Begin in a seated or restorative posture. Picture yourself happy and offer the following phrases to yourself:

- ✓ *May I be happy*
- ✓ *May I be joyful*
- ✓ *May I be peaceful*
- ✓ *May I be healthy in body, mind and heart*
- ✓ *May I be safe*
- ✓ *May I be loved and know i am loved*
- ✓ *May I love others freely and abundantly*
- ✓ *May I be forgiving*
- ✓ *May I be at ease*
- ✓ *May I be free from all suffering*

Next, offer from deep within your heart these same phrases to all sentient beings: everything on our planet and beyond. Imagine these sentiments radiating from your heart outwards in all directions. Sit quietly after this practice and allow your mind to rest on your breath.

You can repeat one or more of the Metta phrases as you are practising asana. Apply them as needed, whenever you hear yourself judge or criticise yourself during your practice for instance, say "May I be at ease" or "May I be loved" - whatever suits the moment.

So, we begin with simply noticing how things are moment-to-moment, watching the breath without manipulating or changing it. Then we notice where we are comfortable breathing, and the places where we aren't yet.

Next, we deliberately and kindly move awareness and breath to the areas we noted weren't so easily accessed. By resting the mind in a particular place, slowly whatever it might have been holding can become known, or at least seen.

Finally, we apply loving kindness and compassion—toward ourselves, then to all sentient beings.

These practices are among my favourites for turning an asana practice into 'Meditation in Motion'. Practising in this way has helped me train my mind as much as possible to stay present no matter what I'm doing or feeling. Just as importantly, these practices have kept me interested in practising, reflecting and taking a kinder, more holistic care of myself - and, that I think might be their greatest gift.

WRITTEN BY

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JILL IS THE FOUNDER OF VAJRA YOGA & MEDITATION. WITH HER PRIMARY TEACHER VENERABLE AJAHN AMARO, JILL WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO BRING YOGA INTO SILENT BUDDHIST RETREATS OVER 20 YEARS AGO. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT VAJRAYOGA.COM