

Quote of the week

Holy places, shrines and alters;
I've been all over in my travels.
But never have I seen a place of pilgrimage
more blissful than the body

--Saraha, *Dohakośa*

Meditation Practice of the Week

(An audio guided meditation of this practice can be found in Insight Timer; listening is free.)

Earth Body Shamatha Meditation

Preparation (3-10 minutes)

- Settle onto your seat or cushion for practice. If you have some favorite meditation warm ups (chanting or benefactor practice for example), begin with those.
- You can do Earth Body Shamatha seated, with your back straight and aligned (in a chair or on a cushion/bench). You can also do this meditation lying down on your back. Your eyes can be either closed, or slightly open. If you are used to meditating with the eyes open, however, that is also fine.
- Take three deep cleansing breaths to settle the body and nervous system. When you exhale, imagine you are letting go of tension and tightness in the mind and body. The exhales can also be a reminder to let go of the past and future, and instead settle into this moment.
- Descend from your thinking mind into the feeling body. Let your body settle into natural ease. Become still and relaxed.
- To help this process, it can help to imagine your mind is a handful of salt, and your body is a glass of warm water. Release your mind into the entire body, as if you were to cast the handful of salt into the glass of warm water. As the "salt" of your mind dissolves into the "water" of your body, our attention becomes diffuse, immersed in an all-over body awareness.

Main Meditation (5-20 minutes)

Notice the weight of the body. Where do you most feel the weight of the body coalescing? Let your awareness settle into the place where your seat, legs and/or feet rest against the cushion or chair you are sitting on. With curiosity, explore this feeling of pressure and groundedness, where the body contacts the earth, floor, chair, or cushion. At this location, you can actually feel the body's attraction to the earth. You can feel how the body is naturally grounded and stable, by virtue of its materiality. Savor this communion with the earth, this groundedness, and allow it to gradually stabilize the mind.

When the mind becomes restless or pre-occupied, notice how this grounded body invites the mind to let go of its burdens and preoccupations and return to the earth. Notice how the body teaches the mind to be stable and still.

When mind wanders away, or gets hooked by a train of thought, allow the feeling of earthy groundedness at the base of your body to draw the attention back, like a magnet draws iron filings. You can experience this drawing back as a natural process, rather than an active replacing of your attention. If you let the body-feeling do it, effort is not needed. You do not have to over-correct. The feeling body itself has the power to draw the mind back. We might say, the body is capable of exerting its own gravitational pull on the mind. It is as if you are coming back down to earth with your mind. Every time you release again into this groundedness, this earthiness, breathe a sigh of relief! To come back to the body feels as if you are returning home to a true refuge: your daily, moment-by-moment home.

Conclusion (3-5 minutes)

Towards the end of your meditation session, on an exhale, allow attention to widen out to fill your entire body. Then, with another exhale, allow your attention to widen out even further, beyond the body. With one more exhale, allow your attention to become fully open and panoramic, releasing any lingering sense of focus or effort. Rest in this wide open, panoramic view, without clinging to anything that arises, internally or externally. Rest there as long as is comfortable. Then conclude your session with a dedication or prayer to pay your practice forward for the benefit of all.