

Posture Instructions: The Breath

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When we hear an instruction to keep returning our attention to the breath, we need to unpack that instruction.

It is an instruction primarily given to people who keep having random thoughts. For these people, the instruction is quite simple. But many people have different problems. They may experience thoughts with a persistent, distressing theme - thoughts of torture, for example - or they may consistently experience a particular difficult emotion or cluster of emotions, the common ones being fear, anxiety, boredom, dissatisfaction and such like. For these people, the instruction, without further explanation, is likely to feel at best unhelpful, and at worst an attempt to ignore or minimise their experience in favour of a vacuous serenity.

So, to unpack:

It is not regarding the breath as the object of concentration. It is not as if the breath and the distracting/distressing thoughts or emotions are like two irate fat men, ceaselessly competing to sit on the one chair of attention.

It is the breath, not your breath.

It is our actual experience of the breath as a dynamic, non conceptual moving space within us. There is no barrier between that space and the greater 'external' space. Thus, the entire body is hanging in space, and both are fluid. In this way, we directly experience both 'form' and 'emptiness', and can thus access a vast compassionate space within which our distressing thoughts - along with everything else - can emerge, express and change.