

## Session 5. Centering in the Heart

As you watch your breath, where does it seem to go? Does it stop in the throat or in the chest? Does it feel like your breath goes all the way to your belly? Does your heart expand freely with each breath, or does it feel like a struggle?

Throughout the ages, people have thought of the heart as the seat of love. Many people find it relaxing to pay attention to the heart area as they breathe. By paying special attention to the heart area, right in the center of the chest, you may experience feelings of happiness, gratitude, peacefulness, and love for others. As you focus your attention on your breathing in your heart, you can look for these feelings. The process of Heart Meditation is not to change the way you are feeling, but rather to experience the full range of feelings.

Because the legacy of trauma is so painful, traumatized people can have difficulty being aware of and accepting the full range of emotions, both positive and negative. Traumatized people may not experience much positive emotion and feel as though they are cut off from feeling enjoyment and love toward others. In addition, traumatized people may not feel confident about dealing with strong negative emotions. For many people, negative emotions can be more obvious than positive emotions. Although negative emotions tend to be the most obvious, the majority of people find they experience both positive and negative emotions.

The purpose of Heart Meditation is to provide a way to explore and experience positive emotions, even positive emotions about yourself. These positive emotions can include happiness, love toward others, feelings of gratitude. Most important is the feeling of acceptance of your own inner experience, knowing that the process of trauma recovery is one of growth and development. We cannot change the past, but we can grow beyond it, no longer letting it define us.

The experience of having positive emotions can be stimulating, but it is not necessary to act on the positive feelings that arise. The Letting Go practice is used as a way to self-regulate in the face of these new experiences, to encourage letting go of both positive and negative feelings as they arise, rather than regarding them as a call to action. There is a difference between accepting and making amends with our own inner experience and with others in the outside world. Heart Meditation is an opportunity to have a broader range of experience, rather than to indicate issues that need to be resolved with others.

Here's how to center in the heart. First, watch your breathing. Notice each time you inhale and exhale. Pay special attention to your heart area, right in the center of your chest. As you inhale, expand in the heart area as much as you can. Don't worry if you are not able to take deep breaths. It is not necessary to take deep breaths in order to focus on your heart.

As you exhale, relax in the heart area. Take time to notice any feelings of peacefulness and love that surface. Let your breathing be natural. You don't need to breathe quickly. Each time you inhale, feel an expansion. Each time you exhale, feel the peace and relaxation. As the stresses of everyday life swirl around us, it is nice to take a moment to be centered in the heart.

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## Session 5 (continued)

### FAQs for Session 5

*I don't seem to feel much in my heart when I meditate.*

Don't worry too much about what you "should" be feeling. Meditation is about becoming quiet and noticing what is present. You can focus on the physical sensation of your chest rising and falling. You can make the breath expansive as you fill your heart deeply with breath and hold it a moment before you exhale. Whatever experiences will come, will come with practice.

*I noticed that when I do the Heart Meditation, I start breathing too hard and even start to get a little agitated.*

If you begin to get agitated during meditation, bring your attention to the breath to your navel area, right below your belly button. Expand the breath in the belly on the inhalation. Exhale completely. Watch the belly rise and fall with each breath. You can hold the breath for a brief moment on the inhalation and feel the sense of expansion. Belly breathing is usually calming and soothing in this kind of situation.

*Does that mean that belly breathing would be helpful when I'm anxious?*

Yes, do try lowering your breathing to your navel area whenever you feel nervous or lightheaded. It's usually grounding and calming for people.

*As soon as I try to meditate, my mind seems to get busier than ever. Instead of my mind quieting, it only seems to grow more active. What can I do?*

Many people find that as soon as they try to relax and quiet the mind, they become aware of just how busy their mind really is. In fact, your mind may try to fill in the quiet with even more thoughts than usual. Many people don't like to quiet their minds because they are trying to keep from just being with themselves. Life can be full of constant stimulation, such as TV, music, talking, and constant mental chatter, and it can seem lonely when these things fall away. This discomfort quickly passes with continued practice. As things come up, just keep letting them go and you will find that your experience quickly changes.

*Sometimes when I meditate, I am disturbed by old memories or feelings that come up. What should I do?*

As soon as your mind starts to get quiet, you may find many old memories, thoughts, and feelings surfacing. This is a normal part of the process. Sometimes people even cry or laugh without knowing why. These are common experiences that change quickly with continued practice. You can notice these things as they come up, but if you return your attention to the practice, they will quickly fade.

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## Session 5 (continued)

### Session 5 Practice

#### ***Tasks for the Next Week***

You can consider how your routine of regular sitting practice is going and whether you want to make any adjustments. You can reflect on how your practice has developed over the past weeks and consider whether modifications to the place or time of sitting practice will be helpful. You can make a plan for using your practice in daily life by listing times or situations in which you would like to try the practice and planning ahead for what practice you want to use.

#### ***Practice in Daily Life***

Watch your breathing throughout the day. Notice each time you inhale and exhale. Pay special attention to your heart area, right in the center of your chest. Take time to notice any feelings of peacefulness and relaxation that come up. You can repeat “Hum Sah” throughout the day with each breath. Silently repeat “Hum” every time you inhale and “Sah” every time you exhale. Notice how it feels to repeat “Hum Sah” throughout your day.

This week’s practice in daily life can focus on bringing more peace and equanimity into daily life by using Heart Meditation. The practice of watching the breath throughout the day can be used, with special attention to the heart area, right in the center of the chest. Take time to notice any feelings of peacefulness and relaxation that come up. Heart attention can be used along with Hum Sah repetition to support awareness of breath and experience.

#### ***Sitting Practice***

Listen to Track 3, “Hum Sah,” at least 6 days this week.

#### ***Daily Practice Log***

Write down the number of minutes you have spent each day on each practice. You will probably not do all the listed practices every week, though there should be a pattern of sitting practice each week in addition to practice in daily life.

● Session 5 Journal ●

How has your practice developed since you started 4 weeks ago?

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Has your meditation practice changed your day-to-day life in any way? Are you coping with stress, anger, or old memories any differently now?

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What would you still like to see happen with your meditation practice?

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**Debriefing the Practice:** How did the practice go this week? What was it like to focus in the heart? Which positive and negative emotions were you aware of?

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