

SIX ANCHORS MEDITATION

Willoughby Britton 2011

Bell.

This is the Six Anchors meditation. It can be done in any posture, but you may want to start by trying it while lying down on your back on a padded surface such as a carpet or a mat. Making any adjustments that you need to – to make sure the body is comfortable and supported. Perhaps with a pillow behind your head or underneath your knees; maybe covering yourself with a light blanket. Taking good care of your body and being as comfortable as possible.

And perhaps reminding yourself of the intention of this practice, as best you can, to remain alert ... bringing clear attention and awareness to your body and experience moment by moment.

As much as you are able, letting go of the natural tendency we all have to do things “well.” Remembering that in this practice there is no success or failure, only practice.

And as the body settles, allowing the mind to settle as well, to the extent that it will.

Taking a few deep breaths to bring some ease into your body, letting go of any unconscious stress that you can. And then starting a letting go process of all your thoughts and concerns of what’s not here. Letting go of any thoughts or concerns of the past... Letting go of any thoughts or concerns of the future. And then letting go of any thoughts or concerns about the present moment and see if you can settle yourself into a simple, relaxed presence with the flow of present experience.

Allowing yourself to sink down into the mat, into the floor. Just letting go. Settling. Easing down.

(1. FEET) And then when you feel ready, beginning by bringing your attention to the sensations of the feet as you lie here. Both feet, tops and bottoms, arches, toes, tops and bottoms.

Each body part has its own unique kind of flavor or signature, so really getting what it's like to be a foot. Sensations of moisture or tingling, of cold or heat, weight, contact with the floor or a sock. Anything that reveals itself as you pay attention to this region, bringing a gentle curious awareness to your experience, whatever it may be. And if there are no sensations, keeping the mind there anyway, registering what no sensation feel like.

(pause)

Letting your attention bathe and saturate the sensations of the feet. Feeling the feet fully, that's all you need to know right now. Settling into that, resting, letting go. Just the feet.

(pause)

A some point you may notice that your attention isn't fully in the feet.... perhaps it has wandered into thinking, or been caught by emotions, or sensations elsewhere in your body. Seeing if it is possible to simply acknowledge that this has happened, and then as best you can, bringing your attention back to the feet and continuing with resting attention there by noticing and investigating feet sensations.

(pause 1 min)

There is no need to try to achieve any special state or feel anything in particular, just simply to be present, and direct attention to the feet again and again.

Seeing if you can stay with whatever sensations are present, from one moment to the next. Not needing to move in any way that might generate sensations, but seeing if you can embrace the sensations that are already present. And including in this, if you will, the possibility that there may be no sensations and that's OK. Perhaps seeing if you can become curious about the absence of sensations themselves.

(pause)

It may feel like nothing is happening, but each time you redirect your attention back to your feet, you are strengthening neural networks, both for paying attention and also for being able to feel your feet. So each time you return your attention there, it will gradually get easier.

(pause)

Noticing where the mind is right now. If its wandering away from the chosen object, in this case, the feet, gently but firmly returning to the sensations in the feet.

(pause)

(2. BREATH- BELLY) Good. Now moving attention to the sensations of breathing that you feel in the belly, just below the belly button. The rising and the falling of the abdomen. Allowing these movements to become center-stage in the field of awareness... It may help to place a hand or a small object, like a stone on the belly, feeling it rise and fall. Focusing on the experience of breathing in the belly. The expansion of the belly with the in-breath. The slight pause. The release of the belly on the exhalation.

(pause)

Not needing to change or control the breath in any way. Just letting the breath breathe itself.

(pause 1 min)

Like lying on the raft in the ocean... on the in-breath, the wave lifts you up; on the outbreak, they set you down, you don't have to do anything but rest and feel the movement. Not trying to achieve anything. Just being with the breath fully.

(pause)

The inbreath naturally following the outbreak, the outbreak naturally following the inbreath. The breath is always a reliable place you can return to for support and stability.

(pause)

Allowing yourself to further let go of what is not here and becoming more content with and more drawn towards the sensations of your belly. This is your anchor. Your attention will be drawn to other things like thoughts and sounds, other body sensations. If you notice that that has happened, relaxing again and inviting your attention back to your anchor. Let simplicity and ease be the support for resting your attention in one place.

(pause)

Breathing-in, feeling it in the belly; space the top of the inhale, breathing-out feeling it in the belly. Space at the bottom of the exhale, Resting the mind right there in those sensations of expansion and release.

(pause)

Again, with an attitude of simplicity and ease, sustaining your attention into one place. So this takes some commitment or loyalty, being loyal to your anchor, being dedicated to your anchor or committed to your anchor.

(pause)

Not becoming tight or making a struggle out of this, but from simplicity and ease staying committed to wherever you are focusing your attention. Being more determined to stay in one place.

(Pause)

And when you notice that your mind has wandered away from your anchor, gently bring it back. If it wanders 100 times, bringing it, starting again back 100 times. This naturally cultivates the qualities of patience, compassion, steadfastness. Learning to begin again, to start fresh in a new moment.

(pause)

(3. BREATH-CHEST) Great. And then, when you are ready, letting go of sensations in the belly for now and moving attention up the body to the sensation of breathing in the chest. The ribcage expanding and releasing with each breath. Taking a moment to settle in to this new anchor.

(pause)

And in the same way, throughout this practice, whenever you notice that your attention has wandered from your intended focus, simply registering that this has happened and gently, kindly, patiently, bringing your attention back to the present anchor. And remaining with the sensations you find there, as best you can.

(pause)

Sensations lifting you up as you breathe in and then the relaxing back and releasing as you breathe out.

(pause)

And each time the mind wanders away from the anchor, relaxing, letting go, and being present with the breath in the chest again. We often tell people to bring awareness back, but awareness never went anywhere, it was always here and now. So you don't have to do this big effortful thing of bringing attention back, but rather do the easiest thing of all-just being where you already are, here and now, breathing. Its coming back through letting go and getting really simple.

(pause)

(4. BREATH-NOSE) Good. And now letting go of the breath in the chest and moving attention to the breath in the nose. The movement of air at the tip of the nostrils... Perhaps noticing the very subtle difference in temperature: Slightly cooler on the inbreath, slightly warmer on the outbreath.... Just noticing the subtle sensations in the nostrils or upper lip. These are very subtle and sometimes hard to notice, so sometimes we want to breathe bigger breaths so its easier to notice. Just trying to breath normally and let your attention settle.

(pause)

In addition to ease and simplicity, you might also use the support of interest and curiosity. Being interested in what is happening, right where you are landing your attention. Allowing yourself to be intrigued or curious. Let that curiosity support your dedication. Giving all of your attention to one thing.

(pause)

As the anschor becomes more subtle, its impotant not to strain or clench. Allowing ease and simplicity be your supports, just letting go into the sensations of breathing that are already happening. No need to create a new sensation or achieve anything. This is just about befriending your anchors.

(pause)

(5. HANDS) Good. Now, letting go of the breath for the moment and moving attention to the hands. Feeling the thumbs... the pointer fingers... the middle fingers, the ring fingers, the pinkies. Feeling the tips of the fingers, you may notice tingling, numbness or even a lack of distinct sensation in the fingers.

Feelings of warmth, tingling, what fingers are touching, perhaps each other...If you are wearing a ring, noticing how that feels.

(pause)

And now expanding the attention to include your entire hand: the backs, the palms, perhaps sensing the creases and folds in the skin of the palms. Letting your hands be your new anchor. Resting awareness there, letting it saturate your hands.

(pause)

And when you notice that attention has wandered away from the hands, gently bringing it back to your anchor again.

(pause)

One of my teachers likes to say “Coming back to your anchor is like putting on your favorite pair of jeans after a long day at the office. Ah. There’s a sense of relief, trust and even friendship there. The anchor is your blanky, your buddy. Always there for you, no matter what else is going on. Totally reliable. Totally safe. Like a best friend.

(pause)

And developing some loyalty to that friend by staying with the hands. Just hanging out there. Just being with. No need to be anything special, no need to change or manipulate. Just a sense of intimacy and friendship. Presence and devotion.

(pause)

And just coming back home to the hands again and again, whenever you notice that you have wandered.

(pause)

(6. SOUND). Great. Now letting go of the hands for the moment and beginning to form a relationship with a new anchor, sounds. Taking a moment to notice what sounds are present and choose one to focus on. If there is an ongoing or repetitive sound, then that’s a good one to start with.

(pause)

Again, like a sense of loyalty, try to be devoted to and connected with that sound, and not get distracted by other sounds or thoughts or emotions. If you get distracted, keep coming back to that one sound, like a toddler to its mom.

pause

Or if there are other sounds or sensations that are louder or more intense than your anchor sound, see if you can maintain contact with your anchor sound, like you are tethered to it with an invisible string.

(pause)

Like a boat tethered to its anchor far beneath the sea. The wind may be blowing and the waves may be choppy, but you will not be blown away. Your connection with your anchor keeps you safe.

(pause)

Let the mind be totally absorbed by it, like gas filling up a room. Allowing the mind to fully rest with it, relaxing into it, letting go of everything else.

(pause)

Now, letting go of sounds for the moment. And like visiting old friends, go back and visit the anchors you have met today, one at a time. The feet, the breath in the belly, the breath in the chest, the breath in the nose, the hands, and sounds.

Reminding yourself that the anchors that you have met and connected with in this meditation are always available to you. As you move through your day, if you find yourself lost or off balance, you can seek refuge in them. They are stable and reliable and always there for you. To help steady you and give you an anchor in the chaos of life.

And also taking a moment to appreciate that your intention and effort to do these practices comes from a deep well of compassion and a wish for a deep intimacy with yourself and your life.

Bell.