So I want to welcome you to this intro to mindfulness meditation class that I'll be doing next days. And I'm teaching from the insight meditation center in Redwood City. And we're, I've taught this class many, many times. And and even before coming here, I've taught it many times and and it's one of my favorite things to teach. And it was turned out that this this year because of my schedule, I wasn't going to have a chance to teach the usual five week course. And I'm kind of happy that the way that the you know, one aspect of this recall in California, sheltered in place, the lockdown has kind of changed things so much that I thought that doing a nice nine part series of one day after the next would be a nice way to support people who may be homebound. And I've been wanting to learn mindfulness for a long time and to have it sequentially kind of day by day, and building rather than having it over the week. And hopefully that's gonna be nice for you. And I hope that that you enjoy this and find it useful. A few things to say, the way I'll be teaching is sequential, to be progressive, where what's taught one day will support the next day and so forth as we go along. And the general structure of the this unfolding is to talk a bit about breathing. And then talk about mindfulness of breathing and then mindfulness of the body. Then mindfulness of emotions, then mindfulness of thinking, and then a little bit about everything else. And that sequence from it has a logic to it. And that is that it's not universal. But the idea that if you have some ability to stabilize your attention on the
breathing, it makes it more useful to then become, be mindful of your body, to be mindful of your body makes it easier to be mindful of emotions, to be mindful of emotions makes it easier to be mindful of thinking. And so the whole you know that not that the goal is to be mindful of thinking. But thinking is often what takes people away from mindfulness. And we get caught up in lost in our thoughts, and to have a wise attention to thinking. So that thinking is not a problem. Thinking is not considered to be the enemy of meditation, but to know how to bring a wise attention to it so that we can be free of it, not caught by it is really supported by these other aspects of, of mindfulness. It’s kind of like a pyramid in the fact that The strong foundation the bottom could be something like breathing, the body, emotions and then thoughts. And the and so we’re using what we’re doing in mindfulness meditation is using a very ordinary faculty that we all have the, the mental Faculty of attention and, or the different faculties of attention. And we’re taking the different ways that we can pay attention that we can offer attention, be aware, and developing that. So that becomes stronger and stronger part of our life. And that has a lot of benefits. One benefit is it gives us a lot more clarity when we see what’s really going on. Rather than the mind the inner life being kind of a black box, why do I suffer so much? Why do I get so entangled and caught up? We start seeing clearly what’s actually happening and then mental processes of thoughts and feelings. motivation, beliefs that are operating. And when you start seeing more clearly what happens in the life around us. And this idea of seeing clearly is a is a real blessing. It also, mindfulness practice supports us to be a little bit more free or relaxed or at ease with our involvement with present moment. Mindfulness helps us be in the present moment, but more but in addition helps us to be present in a way that’s useful and wise. Mindfulness tends to bring out the wise parts of a human being wise parts of our relationship to ourselves and the world around us. And and as mindfulness developed, usually people develop a better and better relationship with themselves and with others and the world around them. The the

Gil Fronsdal 04:55

mindfulness is a I think of it as a wonderful lifetime adventure that I’ve been doing this now for over 40 years, I still don’t feel like I have fully understood the full potential of what mindfulness is about. But I have felt that it just been a delight and a joy and, and profound thing to be doing and I never tire of it. It’s kind of like to go hiking in the mountains here. And I seem to never tire of walking in the mountains. And so it’s kind of like walking in mindfulness is kind of a natural phenomenon. It’s a way of walking into phenomena, natural phenomena of life. And seeing it clearly and wisely and, and finding a finding a lot of ease and happiness in life. So I hope you get a little sense of that in the course of these five weeks, and what we’re doing here. One of the important principles of mindfulness is that it is simple. If it’s not simple, it’s probably not mindfulness. If you’re starting to do some complicated mental engineering or gymnastics, in terms of trying to make
something happen, trying to push something away, you’re probably left the proper simple practice of mindfulness. The simplest definition of mindfulness would be the awareness of what’s happening as it’s happening. And if you want to make a little bit more, it’s more than just being aware. It also involves a clear recognition of what’s happening, as it’s happening to us in the present moment. That simple definition doesn’t specify that has to be the breathing has to be the body has to be anything in particular, what we’re looking for as we develop this become stronger and stronger. And mindfulness is the capacity to meet all aspects of our human experience all aspects of our life, with a higher quality attention with it within it. That brings greater benefit because we kind of have a heightened awareness to what’s going on in a way that brings peace brings freedom brings happiness. And, and this idea that it’s simple, is maybe there’s a variety of simple ways to kind of benefit from mindfulness very quickly sometimes. And I’d like to offer you one very quick, simple thing that maybe you’ll find interesting and you can use in many circumstances. I call it the three breath journey. And what it means is if you’re willing to go along here, if you would, just as you are, to close your eyes, don’t change your posture, any particular way. Close your eyes and then follow attend to three breaths. Counting 123 and really try to enter into the world of each inhale and exhale for three breaths.

Gil Fronsdal 08:44
So I never taught an intro class online like this. Usually I’ll ask people now, what that was like. But some of the things that people will often report is that after just three breaths like that, paying attention to the breathing, that there is some kind of relaxation that goes on. Something gets quieter. Some people report that three breaths like that will just help them to see what was going on for them. They didn’t know that they were tense or worried about something or, or spinning around agitated, that it’s some it’s a kind of a check in to themselves. And, and some people report that just after doing three breasts like that and relaxing a little bit, it is a teeny bit of refreshment when they open their eyes, they feel a little bit more refreshed, a little bit more clear, where they’re seeing more clearly, rather than kind of the seeing being kind of second to being thought thinking and caught caught up in thoughts. So the three breaths journey it’s a wonderful thing to do through the day for people Who’d like to bring mindfulness or meditation into much of their daily life to maybe every hour on the hour to do the three breath journey. The The advantage of this is that that which is also part of mindfulness is that as we bring awareness into something that’s happening in the present moment, what we’re also doing is removing that fuel that attention, that food of awareness into our preoccupations. If we worry a lot of our attention goes into the worry, then we’re actually feeding the worry if we’re angry, and we really get into the anger and get preoccupied by it, in some ways, we’re feeding the anger and, and if we move our attention from anxiety or from work Or from ruminations and thoughts that we might have back to something very simple and ordinary and like the
breathing, then we are beginning to remove the ongoing fuel that keeps some of our emotions some of our preoccupations going and they start become weaker, and they don't have to, after a while they don't have the same strong pool. And then we start putting that food into something as skillful and helpful. And in Buddhism, what's often considered to be helpful for where that food of awareness can go, is to a clear awareness of what's actually happening in the present moment. So a shift of where the food of attention goes. And what we feed as a bit has a lot to do with what becomes of us the direction we go in our lives. If we are constantly feeding in pouring ourselves into being tense and busy and active, The accumulation of tension my build through the day that we have a headache by the time it's over. But if other few food of attention goes into awareness into being really present here in an open way, we tend to notice where the tensions are where the attentions are building and attend, we tend to pull back or let go or, or reorganize ourselves a little bit to shift how things are going to be. The foundation of the meditation night teaches breathing, mindfulness of breathing. And mind as it turns out, that breathing is a is a Nexus a meeting place of all kinds of aspects of our psychophysical human being, that our emotional life or physical life or active life or even our thought life and motivational life and what's interesting, what we what we our values, even somehow or other all have some in relationship to how we breathe and what goes on the breathing. And if we can bring our attention to our breathing to how the body is breathing, we're beginning to an areas direct and indirect ways beginning to align, harmonize, settle, clarify a whole wide area of what our inner life is like. Classically in Buddhism, they talk about the focus on mindfulness of breathing, as being a unifying function, it brings to begins to gather together all the desperate parts of our mind and hearts and body so that they operate together at the same time.

Gil Fronsdal 13:45

The two most maybe dramatic way that we could talk about this separation that gets healed is we can say that the body or your physical body is always in the present moment. The mind is not Always in the present moment, the mind is might be thinking about the past thinking about the future, and last and fantasy, but it's not, you know, it's not connected and working together with a body, to harmonize the mind and body that the mind and body work together. The task is to bring the mind bring the attention, so that it's in the same place and the same time as the body. And one of the place to do that gathering together and harmonizing is with breathing. So I'm going to do a little guided meditation on breathing in a moment. But before I do that, I want to say that breathing doesn't work for everyone as a meditation object. And, and so there are other things that can be used and I'll talk about that later. However, it's also important to not Have a high expectation for what your breathing is supposed to be like when you do mindfulness meditation. Some people discover the control their breathing when they're meditating.
Some people find their breathing to be uncomfortable. It doesn’t matter for the purposes of mindfulness, you can be relaxed about those kinds of difficulties. Because what we’re trying to do in mindfulness meditation is to strengthen our capacity, to be aware in the present moment to stay in the present moment, and have some continuity of attention to what’s happening as it’s unfolding. And the breathing is just a means to cultivate that dislike, you know, it’s like the exercise machine in a sense that we exercising and developing our strength of our mindfulness. And for the purpose of building that string. It doesn’t matter if you’re a control breath, or if it’s an uncomfortable breath. It just matters that you’re using the breath to stay present. One of the benefits of breathing is that it is a oscillating moving sensations in your body. It kind of there’s a rhythm to it. And the minds ability to be focused works a lot better with the object of focus is something that which is has a rhythm to it or is moving slightly, kind of like looking at a river going by. We look at a little waves occurrence going by and very relaxing and absorbing to use watch the currents going by and the mind doesn’t fixate on anything, but it stays present. So with the breathing to watch the comings and goings of the inhalation exhalation without fixating on a thumping is a way to develop focus that can be relaxed and soft. So so to do a little session of meditation, you can it’s helpful to take a posture That you feel for you expresses a little bit of alertness, that posture itself is a posture of attention. Maybe you’ve seen small babies sitting upright or, you know, photographs. And you know, they had this beautiful alert posture sometimes and they’re really present and upright to sit in a way that gives you some physical sense of alertness, but not too much that you get tense and alertness around which uprightness around which you can relax. The principle would be kind of like you keep your spine straight, but then you have that column and then supports everything else relaxing around it hanging from it. So sitting up a little bit more alert and then gently closing your eyes.

To begin to turn the attention of the mind to the breathing into the body and to the body. It can be helpful to take a few long, slow, deep breaths as you breathe in deeply to expand the chest, the torso, maybe the shoulders lift a bit. And then as you exhale to relax, maybe a little bit longer exhale than usual. As you soften and relax the body settle in. Breathing in and connecting to the body. Breathing out settling into the body.

And then letting your breathing returned to normal.

Gil Fronsdal 19:28
And then let your attention roam around your body to see where in your body muscles are being held, there's tension. And if it's easy enough to do so, as you exhale, relax that tension. You might begin with the muscles of your face. The forehead and the eyes.

Gil Fronsdal 20:14
Perhaps the cheeks and the jaws can be softened.

Gil Fronsdal 20:26
Perhaps you can soften the shoulders as you're exhaling, softening the shoulder blade area.

Gil Fronsdal 20:55
Perhaps you can soften your chest in the area around your heart.

Gil Fronsdal 21:17
and it can be helpful to let the belly be soft, relaxed and in the belly, relax, hang forward at the whole belly settle towards the pelvic cavity.

Gil Fronsdal 21:44
and perhaps relaxing the whole upper body. So the weight of your body settles in to your seat, your cushion your chair.

Gil Fronsdal 22:05
And then within the body as part of your bodily experience. Become aware of how your body experiences breathing.

Gil Fronsdal 22:23
Notice how it's experienced in the belly, maybe movements of the belly.

Gil Fronsdal 22:40
Notice how it's experienced in the chest, the rib cage, baby movement there. To get a
better sense of this, you could if you want to put your hand on either your belly or your chest. And then you might be a little bit clear the feeling of movement and lifting and falling as you breathe.

And you might become aware of the sensations of the air going in and out through your nostrils maybe in the back of your throat.

and of these three major areas, belly, the chest, the nostrils, which are there might be the easiest for you to experience breathing.

and wherever easiest to read wherever breathing is most pronounced or maybe even most enjoyable. At that at your home for your meditation occasionally some people find the whole breath bodies their home, Pele chest, torso, everything moving. That's okay too. And if it's not clear where your home should be for breath meditation, and I would encourage you to maybe choose the belly. It kind of gives a low center of gravity and stability sometimes to do there.

And then become aware of the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out in that part of your body. That's your home base.

Notice how the experience of breathing in is different than breathing out the sensations in your body. What moves in your body is different in the inhale versus the exhale.

Inevitably the mind will wander off in thought, if you can, don't be upset about that. Just take it all in stride. Not a problem. But when you notice your mind when you're pointed off in thought, and begin again, with your breathing.
It doesn’t matter how often your mind wanders off in thought. It only matters how often and how quickly you return to your breathing and movement of return. It’s actually quite significant.

Appreciate the beginning over and over.

As you exhale, you might relax the thinking muscle.

Let go of your thoughts as you exhale. Maybe every time you exhale you can let go of the thoughts that have crept in.

And as you let go of thoughts, let go into the experience of breathing.

Notice how you’re aware of breathing. Are you straining? Are you complacent? See if you can relax any strain.

but overcome any complacency with a gentle dedication, devotion to discovering what it’s like to be aware. When you’re aware of breathing.

if your mind is quite unruly, you’re pulled strongly into thoughts. You might do the three-breath journey. Just count three breaths and then do it again and again until the mind quiets down.
Every time you exhale notice if you’ve been caught up in thought and soften, relax, let go back into the breathing.

Allow the experience of breathing to be registered in your awareness. Let it be received and known. Perhaps riding the rhythm of inhale and exhale expanding and contracting of the body.

And if there’s anything pleasant about breathing, doesn’t have to be but if there is allow yourself to feel that pleasantness. As a Support for staying there with the breathe breaths. Staying present, hanging in there and enjoying the simple act of breathing in awareness.

And then to hand this sitting to shift your attention from breathing, to feeling your body globally.

Just whatever way your body feels right now, to notice if you’re at all a little bit more relaxed or settled in your body than you were before.

Then with a global awareness of your body, taking a few long slow deep breaths to more fully connect again with the body. Feel feeling the contact of your body against the chair The for your cushion.

And then as you hear the bell ringer three times you can open your eyes.

So one of the principles of starting a meditation practice is that we’re shifting our
involvement away from things that everyday things that maybe keep us preoccupied caught up tense, worried, whatever, shifting awareness to something which is not that, that settle that's calm that's settling that is healthy for us to pay attention to. And and by doing so, to no longer be feeding or reinforcing things that might even be unhealthy for us or not so useful for us so that we can have a reset and be refreshed so that we can have a deeper connection with ourselves reestablish some more sense of being in contact with ourselves and what's happening here and with ourselves and also to begin strengthening our capacity for present moment awareness. That's really the The vehicle the means the door, the path of mindfulness meditation is cultivating and developing a present moment awareness that gives us a deeper connection to life. I like to think that when we're kind of involved in a lot of thinking and a lot of activity and that, even though even if we might enjoy it the world that's mediated mostly through thoughts and ideas and concepts, is a little bit like a two dimensional world. like watching a screen. But once we start to having present moment awareness that arises or as part of the body or we switch from a two dimensional to three dimensional world, or rich world, that world with depth, almost like perceptual depth into what's going on. And and it's like going from watching the A nature documentary on the screen, to going out for a walk in nature. And it's three dimensional multi dimensional there in many ways. It comes slowly. Mindfulness is for some people, it takes a while to develop and takes a while to kind of quiet or settle the mind enough. It's useful to think of it that the first lesson of mindfulness meditation is lesson to learn patience. If what you saw as you sat and meditated, as your mind is out of control, if you really saw that and recognize it, congratulations, because that is a step of mindfulness to really know what's going on is better than not doing it. If you have a mind that's out of control, it it's better to know that it's out of control, than to continue living as you were not knowing it. Certainly Rather than being discouraged by any difficulty you have in meditation, there's an art of actually taking all of it as a, as an encouragement, oh, this is good. It's good to know this is what's happening. This is what's going on. It might be uncomfortable at times. But, oh, it's really good to know it, to see it to recognize what's going on. Because it's in the knowing and the recognizing that there can be a shift and a change. And how that change happens has a lot to do with what we do, or what we don't do. And in the context of that context of meditation practice, it's a lot about it. That has to do with what we don't do. It's about not doing it's undoing. We certainly bring our awareness to the breathing, we certainly bring our attention to the forefront and recognize what's going on. That's the doing that we do. But it's a lot of it's for the purpose of so we can stop doing a lot of the other things That the mind does that keeps us spinning and involved and active. It's not they're doing a mindfulness is one that makes it gives breathing room for a whole psychophysical being to begin relaxing and healing and harmonizing itself in a nice way. So it takes patience and too often the first lesson is that be patient with us. It's very helpful if if you start a meditation practice to understand that you can't do it wrong.
This is a very meditations have very different activity than almost any other activities human beings do. And when you do meditation, nothing happens to you should be seen as wrong. It's just one more thing to be aware of. Because we're cultivating its awareness. We're not the first and foremost not cultivating change, we're not trying to change yourself as much as becoming, cultivating awareness, cultivating awareness, or this is how it is, this is how it is. And then with time, that field of awareness that capacity for present moment awareness grows, then there can be some phenomenal change that happens. But if we enter into meditation, first and foremost, with the idea that I have to change it, I have to be good at this I have to be successful, I have to get a good grade. What I'm doing is wrong. It's too hard for me, I can't do it. These are this is a meditation as a kind of a very unusual activity, where those kinds of thinking are not really needed. I do encourage you to just assume that whatever way you're meditating, whatever is happening as you meditate is fine for you. It's okay. If you're not making a mistake, just hold it in awareness. Just be aware. Just be aware. Over time, the awareness practice begins to shift and change things. And things will change. But be patient with it as you do the practice. So to repeat, we're not trying to develop a strong capacity for mindfulness of breathing. We're just using breathing, to help us to see what was going on to be aware of what's happening. So if you're able to be with your breath for a long time, great, then you're able to do that. If you can hardly be with your breathing, but the effort to be with your breathing highlights for you how busy the mind is great, then you're aware of how busy the mind is. You don't have that's very beneficial to see that. So don't set up like a goal or a right way to do this. Just whatever helps you to see what's happening. In the present moment, that's the path of mindfulness. So it's not necessary to use breathing as the home base for mindfulness meditation. In for as I said earlier, for some people that doesn't work, I just want to give a little plug for it. It it's, it's the most ancient meditation practice in Buddhism. It's what the Buddha did. And, and down through the ages, there's been a lot, a lot of experience in Buddhist Buddhist meditation circles and mindfulness of breathing and I find it to be probably as a generic advice, useful for many, many people to do it. As the breathing as we settle into the breathing, the settled breathing changes our emotional life or mind states. If you have difficult mind states, focusing on your breathing can really change the mind states in nice ways. So To learn how to be familiar with your breathing, what goes on. Now give you one example and something you can do in the next, you know day as you go about your daily life, notice from time to time, notice what's happening with your breathing, noticing if your breathing is tight. If there's tension anywhere, if you're holding your belly as you breathe or your chest is breathing tight, or the breathing is shallow, or if it's fast, notice what's happening holding your breath. Notice what's going on with your breathing. And then do the three breath journey. With that, just be with three breaths. And then notice what shifts at the end. And how does that change your mind state? How does that change how you're involved in things? Because often just
taking three breaths or really close your eyes and do three breaths is enough to break the
the the link between what we’re preoccupied with what we’re afraid of what we’re trying
to do and accomplish and pretend doing and what’s going on going on in the body. And
as the body relaxes as the breath relaxes, it tends to shift to the mind state to some
degree. So the breathing is kind of a litmus test that breathing is kind of like a truth teller
or, or a support for us to see what’s going on inside. So many times my life I have noticed
in by how I’m breathing, that I’ve gotten caught by something.

Gil Fronsdal  49:36
And then by tuning into my breath, I find it easier just to let go of where I’m caught. Not
that it’s easy, but sometimes it’s easier to do it with the assistance of the breathing than
anything else. So if breathe but if breathing is problematic for you, some people have had
life experiences that make breathing a difficult thing, asthma or accidents or something.
There are other things we can use as the home base for mindfulness. Some people find it
very useful to not particularly focus on the breathing, but to focus on the whole body. And
just be aware with the whole body in a very permissive and, and, and honest, unexpected
way that you’re not to focus anything in particular on there in the body. But just whatever
in the body reveals itself or shows itself, whatever sensations, the mind wanders off, come
back to the body, be able to stay aware of the body just stay and roam around the body
being the body. And I’ll talk more about the body in a couple of days and how important it
is for in Buddhist practice. And other thing is going to do is as an alternative to breathing
is to do listening meditation. Listening the sounds that come we’re not usually controlling
or doing anything to We just allow them to come. And sounds are always in the present
moment. And some people find it’s very spacious and very relaxing, just to open the
awareness up and receive, allow the sounds to come from whatever, whatever direction
they come. And that’s how they center themselves in the present moment. That’s their
home base for the present moment. And then and with with these home bases, whether
it’s a breathing or whether it’s sound or the body, then we’ll build over these days to
become aware of more of our body more of a human experience. But the for now, if it’s
easy enough for you, I would encourage you to stay with a breathing, make that the home
base and really try to hang out, get to know your breath, become familiar with it. And
when you sit down to eat or you sit down to be at the computer or go for a walk, be
curious about your breathing and see what goes on there. And get familiar with it get into
the habit of being connected to your breathing and, and then tomorrow we’ll do a little bit
more with the breathing and, and other things and built from there. The other thing that
you might want to do during this time that we’re doing this course is in addition to
whatever meditation we do here for this hour, you might also meditate for 20 minutes at
least by yourself at home or wherever you want to do it go to a park if home doesn’t allow
for it. And I’ve even meditated in my car because I couldn’t find anywhere else through I
felt a little bit it was quiet and a little bit protected as meditated on public transportation, No, I guess not many people are doing that this these days. And, and, but sometime later in the day today or tomorrow before our class If you could, if you could try sit meditating for 20 minutes on your breathing and discover what that's like, be curious. Assume you can make no mistakes. Just there's no, no wrong way to meditate. And just be curious and interested in your awareness and what happens if you keep pouring your awareness into your present moment. Curious, interested What's happening here? What's going on here.

Gil Fronsdal  53:34

Probably one of the things you'll notice is your mind will wander off in thoughts a lot. And as I said before, every time you let go of your thoughts that go back into the breathing that go back into your body. If there's a lot, a lot of thinking going on, you might want to try the three breath. Journey, just to count the breath three times, then do it again. And again, usually if you do that a number of times, the grip of the thoughts begins to quiet down. And you could also try relaxing, any tension you feel in the thinking muscle and see if that relaxes. And if all else fails, and you just find yourself thinking a lot and a lot, just two things. In a later Next week, we'll talk about mindfulness of thinking, and we'll learn how to incorporate as part of thinking. But in the meantime, if the mind is out of control, and just a lot of thinking, just very calmly, say to yourself, in your mind, thinking, and just be aware of that. Thinking, and aware of that. Thinking, aware of that. And with the saying gently the word thinking as a way of little bit stepping away from your thoughts, as if you’re looking back at it and seeing Oh, here's a human being who's thinking Oh, this is what it's like, not a problem, not a mistake, nothing to do about it, but to see it. And that begins this process. That, that begins the process of, of not being so attached to thoughts of separation from the clinging to thoughts, so that awareness can begin to blossom and to grow. So what else so I want to say a few things about this medium that this is the first time I've ever thought to enter a class this way. So it's new for me and probably new for you as well. It is being done on YouTube. And so these are being recorded and they'll be posted on I MCs, YouTube page on channel on YouTube. And maybe we’ll figure out a way to post them on IMC website itself so you don’t have to go on YouTube. Every time. So if you missed this or want to repeat one of these, you can get it here again. And if you want a little bit more information about some of the things I’m talking about the mindfulness of breathing mindfulness of body different things. If you go in IMC is a website or an audio Dharma, look up the intro class there. There are a handouts for the basic instructions for this. And maybe tomorrow, maybe on this chat place. I'll post where that is. But you can probably find it if you look around and intro to meditation, mindfulness meditation handouts. And so I want to thank you for being part of this. And since we have three minutes left before the end, I would like to suggest that we end with a very short meditation. And so that you don’t think that meditation requires Mindfulness requires big
changes. Whatever way you are right now, maybe close your eyes and then give yourself the three breaths journey. Counting 123 for each breath.

Gil Fronsdal  58:06
Thank you very much for being part of this and I look forward to our time tomorrow. Bye bye