

Practicing Generosity of Body, Mind and Spirit: Forgiveness

Workshop Description:

The pulse of generosity that runs through all of creation may be as close as your next breath. How do we tune in and align ourselves, body mind and spirit, with its Source? This workshop will offer theory and practices of mindfulness that incorporate gentle movement, breath, and meditation, to explore the theme of 'Forgiveness.'

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Mindfulness defined:

Mindfulness is about paying attention in a particular way:
on purpose....in the present.....without judgment and
...without avoidance

Benefits of mindfulness:

- Focusing and clearing the mind
- Reducing/contradicting the effects of stress on the mind and body
- Working out and working through emotions
- Calming anxiety,
- Opening the heart
- Making space: for new perspective
- Accessing the wisdom (God's wisdom) that comes to us when we learn to pay attention and honor the messages that come from our bodies.
- A way of re-wiring the brain...as we involve our bodies and senses
- Setting intentions that may be experienced first through conscious attention in the mind and body and then carried into our daily routine

For our purposes

When we are hurt, it can be harder to access the pulse of love and forgiveness that are already present and available...God's healing gift to us and to our world. We may tune out emotions we don't want to face or admit. We may distract or numb. We may act out or shut down. As leaders, we may have to hold space for others who are in the midst of these behaviors.

Our practice will involve some mindful attention to our breath, some gentle movement along with words of Scripture and centering prayer...so that we may allow ourselves be loved, with all of our thoughts and feelings, until something shifts and we are more able to access the forgiveness we seek.

Beginning with the Breath

Mindfulness practice #1: the breath

The most basic way to practice mindfulness is to pay attention to the breath. Typically, we go through our day, without much conscious attention to our breathing. Often our breath is shallow and rapid, as we rush from one thing to the next. This can contribute to reactivity, especially when we are dealing with hurts and heart-aches. It keeps us in the part of our brain that's all about fright or flight.

Mindfulness practice works on slowing down and deepening breath. It gives us access to that part of our brain through which we can know and access God's goodness, wisdom and love.

Option to remove shoes. Begin by getting comfortable. Tall straight back, relaxed. Both feet on the floor, feeling rooted, grounded.

Allow the arms to rest gently the lap, palms up and open, to receive.
Or, palms down, resting gently on the knees to further ground you.

Close the eyes. Relax the jaw. Swallow and let the tongue rest gently in your mouth.

Bring your attention to the breath.

Breathe naturally, as you allow the mind to settle down.

After these days that have been filled with new experiences,
lots of intellectual stimulation, food, friends, questions
and ideas. Now is the time to stop. Take a breath.
Arrive. Let the journey home and all that awaits you there,
rest in God's care.

Be Here. With no where else to be. Nothing else to do.

Bring your full attention to this moment, to this breath.

As you breathe in, be aware of breathing in.
As you breathe out. Be aware of breathing out.

The Psalmist writes, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

Be Still and know.
Be still.
Be.

Slowing down the breath.

At my invitation breathe in through your nose to a count of `four. Hold it at the top for a count of four and then exhale through your nose, to a count of four.

Inhale, 2, 3, 4
Hold, 2, 3, 4
Exhale 2, 3, 4

Deepening the breath -

Inhale, 2, 3, 4
Hold, 2, 3, 4
Exhale 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Return to a rhythm of breathing that is natural, for you.

Notice if the mind wants to wander off. As thoughts come, watch them, then let them go, and return your attention to your breath.

Follow the breath as it flows in and out, in and out, in and out.

Let go of critique. Relinquish judgment. Surrender your need get it right...and just be.

Breathe into the heart center and try to generate feelings of warmth
and graciousness toward yourself.....

“The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.....” Psalm 103:8

With the rhythm of your breath repeat these phrases silently
in your mind:

slow to anger/abounding in love
merciful/gracious...
God

As you continue to follow the breath, begin to scan the body, for areas that are tight, stiff, constricted, sore. Notice anywhere you are clenching. Where you are holding tension:

Your eyes. Your jaw. A lump in your throat.
Stiffness in your neck and shoulders.
An ache in your chest.
A knot in your stomach.
Soreness in your back.
Tightness in your hips.

Breathe into each tight or sore place as you become aware of it. For this practice, Let this tightness/tension in the body represent a hurt in need of forgiveness.

Give it your full attention. Breathe into it, without trying to change it.

Just be present to it. Notice what you feel, in your body and in your spirit. And see if you can also bring awareness to God's love, present with you, holding you.

Focusing Movement for Release

If your eyes have been closed, open them. We're going to move into some gentle movement for release.

Gentle movement of the head, to stretch the muscles of the neck

Rolling of shoulders in both directions.

Circle sweep the arms up, over the head, reach as high as you can and feel the stretch. Place your hands in prayer position over your head, and draw them down to your chest.

Breathe

Keeping your thumbs and pinky fingers touching, spread open the remaining fingers open, making a bowl or a lotus blossom.

Hold this position while you return attention to your breath. Set an intention for healing and forgiveness.

Breathe in forgiveness, breathe out peace.

Circle sweep the arms up over the head...side body stretches, left and right.

Circle sweep your arms and return your hands to prayer position at your chest.

Circle sweep your arms over your head

**“As the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is God's steadfast love toward those who fear him;”** (Psalm 103:11)

Lower arms to goalpost position. Close forearms and palms. Open arms again, and bring attention to the stretch of pectoral muscles, the opening of the area around the heart. Slowly draw the arms together, with a bit of resistance, feeling the muscles in the arms, waking up. As your forearms and palms come together. Close. Repeat:

**“as far as the east is from the west,
so far God removes our transgressions from us.”** (Psalm 103:12)

Waking up the spine with seated cat and cow movements:

Sitting up straight, open arms to goalpost position; feel the shoulder blades draw together and your back arch.

Bring the arms back together, round the shoulders, draw in the belly, bow the head.

Continue at your own pace. When you've completed this flow,
Circle sweep the arms up and return them to prayer position
at heart center. Close your eyes.

Repeat these phrases, as a prayer, silently with the rhythm of your breath

May I find forgiveness

May I have an open heart

May I live with ease

May I find rest for my soul

Warming up the spine with spinal twist to the right and left.

Return to center and place your hands on your thighs.

Raise and extend your right leg. Circle the ankle....clockwise, and counter clock wise, point and flex the foot a few times. Scrunch your toes and then spread them. Return your right foot to the ground. Repeat with left leg.

Help yourself to a standing position.

Circle sweep arms over head. Lower to heart center.

Swing your arms from side to side. Keep swinging.
Feel the movement start to loosen the tight places.

Come to stillness, in Mountain Pose:

Feet slightly apart

Bring your hands down by your side, palms turned forward.

Let your shoulders fall down and away and from your ears.

Keep your head erect, chin tilted forward.

Straighten your spine, Slightly tuck your pelvis.

Bring attention to the ground beneath your feet.

Gently close your eyes.

Breathe in peace.

Breathe out forgiveness.

Breathe out. Slow it down. Listen.

First, bring your attention to the sounds in the room. What do you hear?

Now listen to these words, notice which of them get your attention,
which of these phrases speak to your soul
about your intention for forgiveness

“ Let love be genuine.....hate what is evil....hold fast to what is good
.... love one another with mutual affection...outdo one another in showing honor
...Do not lag in zeal...be ardent in spirit... serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope...be patient in suffering....persevere in prayer.

Extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you;

Live in harmony with one another;

do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:9-21, excerpts

Circle sweep arms up and swan dive; bend from the waist and reach toward the floor in a forward fold.

Let the arms dangle toward the floor or touching the floor
and feel the release in the ham-strings, low back.

With a gentle bend in the knees....dangle the arms or wrap them
and hold the elbows in a rag doll pose.

Trying swaying from side to side and then come to stillness.

Pause

Inhale and come half-way up:

place palms on shins, flatten the back

Exhale: let your breath out and dangle your arms toward the floor again.

Repeat a couple of times.

Circle sweep up to standing. Hands to heart center. Mountain pose.

Breathe in forgiveness. Breathe out peace.

Warrior One/Humble Warrior Flow

OR

Warrior Two/Peaceful Warrior Flow

Recall the hurt for which you seek forgiveness. Flow with this movement as you silently name it.

As you Inhale and raise your arms, focus on taking in the love and forgiveness of God

As you exhale and move into into humble or peaceful warrior, focus on what you want to release

Some examples:

Breathe in, **take in the love of God.**

Breathe out, **let go of anger. Let go of denial.**

Breathe in, **Welcome equanimity. Welcome love.**

Breathe out, **Let go of depression. Release hostility.**

Breathe in, **Think about something/someone for which you are grateful.**

Breathe out, **Release the need to fix or to control.**

Return both feet to mountain pose, hands at heart center.

Welcome acceptance of that which you cannot change. Welcome peace.

Return to seated, on your chair.

Closing Meditation for Listening to Hurt and Moving Through Forgiveness

[Adapted from "Don't Forgive Too Soon," by Dennis, Sheila, & Matthew Linn]

Focusing Prayer for Listening to our Hurt

Imagine yourself in the presence of someone who loves you. It may be God. It may be a family member or friend. Take some deep breaths and bring your awareness to the love that you feel when you are in the presence of this one. You might want to try a breath prayer as you breathe in and out.....**I am loved.....by You.**

Still with your eyes closed, put one hand on your heart and one hand on your belly as you continue to breathe, in touch with what it is like to love and be loved. Inhale and feel the hand on your belly rise....inhale some more and feel your breath reach the hand on your chest. Hold it at the top and say to yourself, "**I am loved.**" Now slowly exhale and feel the release...in your chest....in your belly....And so are you. Inhale.... I am loved. Exhale.....**And so are they.**

Repeat at least 3 times, at your own pace.

Return attention to area of tightness identified earlier, in your body. Does it feel any different?

Recall the hurt that this tight place represents. As you breathe into this hurt, return your awareness to God's love present to you, holding you.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; never ceases
God's mercies never come to an end.
They are new every morning. New, today. New here. New now.
Great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:

Breathe into the tightness. Breathe into the hurt and give it your full attention.

What feelings/emotions do you associate with this hurt? Notice these feelings, with interest.

Put some words with this hurt. Silently Name it, before God. It may be anger. It may be sadness. Or helplessness. It may be the name of a person. It may be your name....who or what is crying out for healing, for forgiveness?

Keep Listening. What does the hurt want to tell you? What is the message, in a word or image or symbol? With curiosity, listen.

Still grounded in love, stay with this tight and hurting place and with curiosity, ask what it needs. Seek information. Reserve Judgement

Without trying to fix anything or change it, for now, just notice and receive what is.

You may want to put a hand on your heart as a physical gesture of your love and your intention to care for this pain....and breathe into it, as you ask God to help you with the healing and forgiveness you seek.

Silently repeat these phrases, as your prayer:

May you find forgiveness
May you have an open heart
May you live with ease
May you find rest for your soul.

Notice how your body feels now. Are you carrying the hurt any differently in your body? Do you notice any release or opening of spirit?

Whatever you notice, hold it in loving awareness as you listen to this piece of music, gently open your eyes and return your attention to the room.

Closing

As we close, Listen, now to this song, based on a prayer of Teresa of Avila.

<https://sarahpirtle.com/hope-sings/teresa-of-avilas-prayer.htm>

Now, if your eyes are still closed, open them. Circle sweep your arms up and return them to heart center.

Close practice with inhale and exhale together.

“May the forgiveness for which we have begun to create space flow through us, an expression of God’s generosity, healing the world. Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord be kind and gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. You are loved. And so are they.”