



Mindfulness Teacher Training Course – Stage 1, Week 7

The Lake Meditation

The "mountain lake" is a Buddhist metaphor for the human mind. In its natural state, it is like the calm waters reflecting the events of the greater world faithfully and without attachment. (As above, then so below.) Meanwhile, the thing/things stirring the waters in the depths of the lake represents our own psychological shortcomings- fear, anger, jealousy, attachment, and all things that disturb our mental serenity. The practice of Buddhism, of course, is the practice of returning the agitated lake to its original state of calm. Even in the face of storm clouds or turbulence, it's possible for the lake to remain largely unaffected. Another useful point to remember is even when the sea is at its choppiest, once you drop down twenty feet below those waves, perfect calm exists there.

This meditation is done in a sitting or lying or reclining position, and begins by paying attention to the actual sensations of contact and support as you sit or lie here, noticing where your body is making contact, how your weight is distributed on the seat, floor, bed or recliner... actually sensing into your body, feeling your feet... your legs... hips... lower and upper body... arms... your shoulders and your head...

And when you are ready, bringing awareness to the breath, the actual physical sensations, feeling each breath as it comes in and goes out... letting the breath be just as it is, without trying to change or regulate it in any way... allowing it to flow easily and naturally, with its own rhythm and pace, knowing you are breathing perfectly well right now, nothing for you to do, allowing a sense of being complete, whole, in this very moment, just letting your breath be your breath...

As you rest here, letting an image form in your mind's eye of a lake, a body of water, large or small, held in a receptive basin by the earth itself, noting in the mind's eye and your own heart, that water likes to pool in low places, it seeks its own level, asks to be held, contained.

Letting this image gradually come into greater focus. Even if it doesn't come as a visual image, allowing the sense of this lake and feeling its presence...

The lake you're invoking may be deep or shallow, blue or green, muddy or clear. With no wind, the surface will be flat, mirror-like, reflecting trees, rocks, sky and clouds, holding everything in itself momentarily...

Wind may come and stir up waves, causing the reflections to distort and disappear, but then sunlight may sparkle in the ripples and dance on the waves in a play of shimmering diamonds...

When night comes, it's the moon's turn to dance on the lake, or when the surface is still, to be reflected in it along with the outline of trees and shadows. In winter, the lake may freeze over, yet be teeming with movement and life below...

As you rest here breathing, as you establish this image of a lake in your mind's eye, allowing yourself, when you feel ready, to bring it inside yourself completely, so that your being merges with the lake, becomes one with it, so that all your energies in this moment are held in awareness with openness and compassion for yourself, in the same way as the lake's waters are held by the receptive and accepting basin of the earth herself.

Breathing as the lake, feeling its body as your body, allowing your mind and your heart to be open and receptive, moment by moment, to reflect whatever comes near, or to be clear all the way to the bottom. Experiencing moments of complete stillness, when both reflection and water are completely clear...and other moments perhaps when the surface is disturbed, choppy, stirred up, reflections and depth lost for the moment.

And through it all as you lie here, simply observing the play of the various energies of your own mind and heart, the fleeting thoughts and feelings, impulses and reactions, which come and go as ripples and waves, noting their effects. In contact with them, just as you are in contact with and feel the various changing energies that play on the lake, the wind, the waves, the light, the shadows and the reflections, the colours and smells.

Noticing the effect of your thoughts and feelings. Do they disturb the surface and clarity of the mind's lake? Do they muddy the waters? Is that okay with you? Isn't having a rippling or a wavy surface a part of being a lake? Might it be possible to identify not only with the surface of your lake, but with the entire body of water, so that you become the stillness below the surface as well, which at most experiences only gentle undulations, even when the surface is choppy and ragged.

And in the same way, in your meditation practice and in your daily life, can you be in touch, not only with the changing content and intensity of your thoughts and feelings, but also with the vast unwavering reservoir of awareness itself, residing below the surface of your mind. The lake can teach this, remind us of the lake within ourselves.

If you find this image to be of value, you may want to use it from time to time to deepen and enrich your meditation practice. You might also invite this lake image to empower you and guide your actions in the world as you move through the unfolding of each day, carrying this vast reservoir of mindfulness within your heart...

Dwelling here in the stillness of this moment, we can be the lake in silence now, affirming our ability to hold in awareness and in acceptance, right now, all our qualities of mind and body, just as the lake sits held, cradled, contained by the earth, reflecting sun, moon, stars, trees, clouds and sky, birds and light, caressed by the air and the wind, which bring out and highlight its sparkle, its vitality, its potential, moment by moment.

So, in the time that remains before I count you from 3 up to 1 which will mark the end of the meditation, continuing to sustain the lake meditation on your own, in silence, moment by moment, being the lake with its own storms and moments of peace...

Reflection on the Guided Lake Meditation

Reflect on the following questions, and write your reflections on the course journal sheet:

- How did you find this meditation?
- Did you manage to keep your attention focused throughout, or did your mind wander?
- Did you find the visualisation of the external lake easier than other weeks meditations that were more inwardly focused, such as the breathing or body scan meditations?
- Can you make any other observations about this experience?