



Clarity and Calm

– For Busy People

AJAHN SUCITTO

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Dedications

This booklet has been sponsored by the Kataññuta group in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia and is dedicated to Nicholas Halliday and Julian Wall - who have offered much service to teachings such as these and to you, by getting books typeset, designed and ready for publication.



Preface

The following pages offer some means to find clarity and calm within a few minutes. They can be put into practice in a range of non-specialized situations – in the time it would take you to drink a cup of tea. If you live a busy life, this guide may help you come out of the momentum of the day and give you more time. These suggestions may also offer you a way to meditate – but that's up to you and another guide.

Bear in mind that to keep things brief, I've been terse. What follows is like a bag of dehydrated peas or mountain food. Add your own water and wait!

I hope it helps.

Ajahn Sucitto

Clarity and Calm – in Brief

Pause – and Ask



RECOMMENDED TIME: Ten seconds to one minute.

I'd like to begin by presenting some exercises that take from ten seconds to a minute to do. These exercises use a practice I'll call 'Pause and Ask'. This is a very portable exercise; it's brief and you can do it just about anywhere, standing up or sitting down. It entails first: the Pause. Stop doing and talking – and as that shift happens, relax. Relax the muscles in your shoulders, your jaw, around your eyes, in your belly and anywhere else where you can feel tension and holding on. As you relax, pay

attention to the feeling of your body. Widen the ‘lens’ of your attention over this sense of being embodied, here. Focus as if you’re listening. Take ten seconds (or more if you like) to settle into this.

The next step is to float the question: ‘What’s happening for me now?’ You’ll probably find a that a train of thoughts arises in your mind, if so, sum up that train in one word – like ‘busy’ or ‘eager’ or ‘irritable’. If, instead of a thought, you experience an emotion or mood, then give it a word that fits. In either case, the question will move through your consciousness where it might contact thoughts, sensations or an impulse to do something. It might eddy around in an air of uncertainty. We can deal with where it goes later. The point right now is that *the inquiry shifts attention into conscious space* or ‘awareness’.



Relax the muscles ... widen the attention ...
float the question 'What's happening for me now?'

Acknowledge that. For a moment you're watching or listening to what the question brought to light rather than engaging in what you're thinking or feeling. Avoid judging your thoughts or moods. The main thing is that you have shifted to watching your mind. And with that you can sense what's happening for you from *outside* the experience rather than by being engaged or immersed in it.

Once the shift has happened, check in with whatever your question 'what's happening for me now?' reveals, give it a simple label and give yourself a few moments to feel 'busy' or 'eager' or 'irritable' without doing anything

about it. Remember to stay in touch with and try to keep your attention spread over the whole of your body – this will help you to stay balanced. Don't act or react. By avoiding actions and reactions you will allow a fuller and more helpful response to the mood to arise. You may sense calm, acceptance or clarity about what's happening for you. So this shift into awareness is important; it gives you a chance to get an overview on what you're feeling or doing, to change direction or to let things pass.



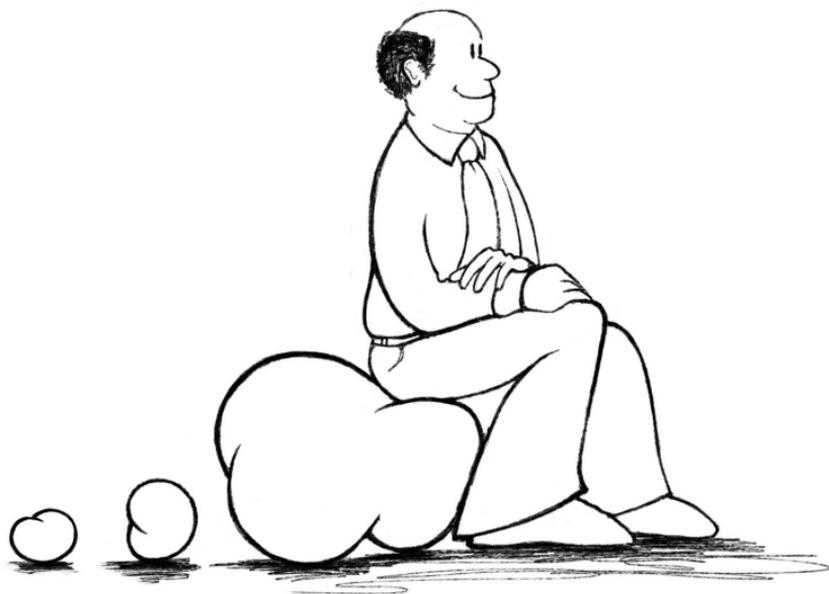
**Listen to what the question brings to light ...
Don't act or react ... allow a response to arise.**

The main thing with Pause and Ask is to do it often. You could try ten or more times a day: when you wake up, before you get up, when you're washed and dressed and before you get going, when you've finished breakfast, when

you're about to start the car, about to switch on the TV... You could set a timer on your phone to go off occasionally to get you to Pause throughout the day. Above all, Pause and Ask is a useful exercise in situations such as the following: at the flashpoints of conflict; when you feel emotionally uncomfortable or furtive; or when there's the itch to switch something on or munch or otherwise distract. Pausing at these moments can save you a lot of trouble. It gives you a chance to see things differently and to not get stuck in blind habits.

The limitations of Pause and Ask are that it is brief. You can't sustain it without some other tools. In fact if you pause too long, you'll probably find that you've moved into another gear and your mind is wandering. But if you find the practice beneficial, you may want to spend three to five

or more minutes to *Connect and Strengthen*. These form the next cluster of exercises.



Connect and Strengthen



RECOMMENDED TIME: Three to five minutes.
More if you like.

In these exercises, we're going to connect to three sources (or channels) of awareness. I say 'awareness' rather than 'mind' because we may assume that the mind is in the head and is the organ that thinks. Actually as well as having a thinking source, awareness draws from a bodily source and a heart source - the bases that we've touched on in Pause and Ask. It's through simply connecting and staying with each of these bases and being more conscious of them that awareness strengthens and becomes more fluent.

1 Connect to the body

The body is more than just meat and bone, and exercising it is easier than lifting weights or jogging. Your body can provide groundedness, balance and vitality quite naturally – all that you have to do is to connect to awareness. Through staying connected you get to feel balanced and toned up. And if you lose an aware connection to your body – as in getting absorbed in taking a photo when you're leaning over the edge of a canyon or conversing on your phone while you're driving – the results can be fatal. More often, we lose our body-awareness in the hurry of the day and that makes us careless and stressed. But when we learn to maintain an aware connection to the body, we realize that the mind is in sympathy with the body and that bodily composure facilitates mental clarity and calm.

You can connect to the body through walking, sitting or reclining – but for now let's start with standing.

Stand with your legs coming straight down from your hips. Soften your knees so that these joints aren't locked. Then relax your buttocks so that you are letting the weight of your body be carried by your feet and the planet beneath you rather than resting your upper body on your hips. Let your arms come slightly away from the sides of your body (just enough to sense some space around your chest) and hang loosely beside you. Keep the arm-muscles relaxed so that the arms are in a very gentle curve rather than straight. Similarly with the hands and fingers. Relax your shoulders as if you're slipping a coat off your back; soften your jaw and your gaze. You may need to flex your knees and take a few deep out-breaths to get the fidgeting out of your system.

Tune in to balance

As you touch into that balanced state (and return to it over the course of the next few minutes) look towards widening your awareness to cover the whole body as if you're about to dive or you're modelling clothes. This is 'gathering the entire body within awareness'; you acknowledge where in your body you feel most located (normally your face) and then spread your attention over your shoulders and down your body. Get down to your feet if you can. Aim towards sensing the whole posture and then towards finding and maintaining balance. As you widen to get the whole body in focus, you may feel sensations and energies. Your fingers may tingle as well as your feet. Acknowledge all that but don't focus on any particular sensation. Instead, can you pick up the repeated series of sensations and energies that tell you you're breathing?



NO WAY
BARRIER WALL
STOP BLOCK
FULL NO
BLOCK

Widen, soften and feel the breathing. If you experience tensing up, focus on that tension and, keeping aware of it, widen your attention to include the area around the tense place. Let the breathing flow through the tense place – the same with restlessness or fatigue. This is a healing process.

Stay in this mode for up to five minutes, feeling and allowing what's happening in your body to move around. Come out of the position gently and notice the change in your mind and body.



**Stand ... soften your knees, relax your buttocks,
let your arms come slightly away from the sides
of your body ... Relax your shoulders ...
Widen, soften and feel the breathing.**

2 Connect to the heart

Much of the time we're sitting down. All of the above can be done in this position and for longer periods of time too. Just remember to bring your spine up straight (that is, not leaning back into the chair). In fact push your pelvis down into the chair (or floor if you're sitting cross-legged) and draw your lumbar spine in so that there's a small curve in your lower back. Then relax a little, but keep the curve. Gently drop your shoulders. Then your chest will be supported by your spine, hips and chair rather than pressing down on your belly. As before, aim to sense your body as a single unit or a framework of neck, shoulders, spine, arms and hips, with sensations moving through it.

Whether you're sitting or standing, connecting to the heart, your emotional sense, begins by just asking yourself how

things are right now. When specific topics come up, widen and soften your attention a little to step back from the details and get the overall sense of what's occurring in terms of impressions, impulses and feelings. For a couple of minutes, try to get to the outline or the basic gist of the heart's experience as: 'flowing along', 'nothing much, sort of slow', 'under pressure', 'things jumping and flashing' or whatever. It may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral – but there's no need right now to give a lot of attention to the quality of the feeling. Instead, practise sensing it with reference to your body: notice whether your body feels flushed or tightening or sinking. Referring this overall sense to your body helps you to be *with* what you're feeling rather than being caught *in* it or trying to get *out* of it. Try imagining it's happening to someone else and you're a sympathetic listener. Avoid jumping in with advice or analysis. Hold the heart in a calm and spacious way, letting the felt sense present itself.

Within a minute or so of doing this, a sympathetic sense may arise – an empathic listening that doesn't add to the feeling or contest with it. This allows the moving stuff to change and shift by itself.

In the last minute of this exercise, you might ask yourself: 'What helps me to be with this?' As before, gently drop the question into awareness and notice any ripples. Whether any thoughts come up or not, you'll probably get a heart-sense that makes you wider and steadier – if you don't try too hard.



**Ask yourself: 'How are things right now?'...
get the gist of the heart's experience and sense
this with reference to your body ...
Hold the heart in a spacious way.
Ask: 'What helps me to be with this?'**

3 Clarify: let thinking become thoughtfulness

This exercise can be done while standing or sitting, as before. For a change, I'll start by illustrating it with a walking form.

Walking is good; it gives you a rhythm and loosens up bodily and mental stiffness. You can do this indoors – get on your feet, push back the chair and walk across your office or workplace. Or, take a natural break and spend a few minutes walking in a corridor. It's good to get away from your current engagement anyway, just to freshen up.

Walking slowly, tune in to how the body walks in a comfortable and calm way. Let your shoulders and arms be free and bring your whole body into a walk that's a 'going nowhere special' stroll. Because a lot of our walking is hasty, with the upper body stiff and disconnected from the legs,

you might need to give some attention to getting into flow. So, imagine you're stepping over a row of sleeping kittens: the slight lifting of your leg that this requires will bring your hips and lower back into play and allow the legs to move more fluidly. As you come into flow, relax your shoulders and let them also turn a little with the walk. Keep your eyes open but with a 'looking at the view' soft gaze. Walking properly includes your whole body: it's like swimming.

Be with each step at a time as it rises from your hips and finishes with a foot touching the ground. Don't pause between steps; let them flow naturally. The flow is important because it will calm the thinking. Then be with the touch of the foot on the ground, one foot at a time and at the end of each step. Be just at that point, for just that moment. Then let it go as that foot lifts, return to flow and pick up the



sense of the other foot as it touches the ground. You could add a word to that moment – think: ‘this’, or ‘now’, or ‘just this’. Walk into the present moment. When you’ve walked across the room, stop, stand for a few seconds, then turn around and take a step with ‘just this’ or ‘right now’ in mind.

You’re not encouraging thinking or trying to come up with ideas but instead applying a thoughtful attention to specific moments, then relaxing it. This flexing of attention breaks up preoccupations and prunes the tangle of thought in a non-conflicting way. It turns run-away thinking into attentive thoughtfulness.



Tune into how the body walks ... relax your shoulders and let them turn with the walk ... Keep a soft gaze ... Be with each step at a time, one foot at a time ... Walk into the present moment.

A sitting form of this entails connecting to: the flow of breathing, the end of an out-breath and the swell of an in-breath. Sit upright, take a few long, gentle out-breaths, relax in your diaphragm and let your breathing come from your belly rather than your chest. Drop your shoulders, soften your face and think: 'All the time in the world to breathe out' and 'let the in-breath come when it wants to.' Ease into the flow of breathing right away. This has a steadying effect.

When the flow gets established to a degree, sharpen your attention on the ending of the out-breath (like the footstep in the walking) using a word like 'aahh' or 'breathe' to collect the mind at that point for the moment or two that it lasts. That moment might lengthen; encourage it to do so by waiting for the in-breath to start, rather than breathing in. The flow may still not be that smooth but this will help.

As the in-breath comes, don't drag it in but follow its slow swell through your chest and up into your throat. Widen your attention over your upper body, then let the out-breath begin.

If you get the hang of that over the period of a few five-minute sessions, you can add a 'touch point' at the end of each out-breath. That is, as the out-breath completes, momentarily flash your attention to the point where your body connects to the seat. Then widen onto the in-breath as before.



'All the time in the world to breathe out' ...

'let the in-breath come when it wants to' ...

Add a 'touch point' at the end of each out-breath.

Meanwhile, notice where the shift that arises with any of these connecting exercises takes you. It inclines you into being a sympathetic, sensitive witness, and it can widen, steady and strengthen your awareness. As a result, you'll find that you can more readily be the spacious awareness of whatever happens – and then you don't get bowled over or lost in what you're experiencing.

Rest in the Here and Now



RECOMMENDED TIME: Ten to fifteen minutes

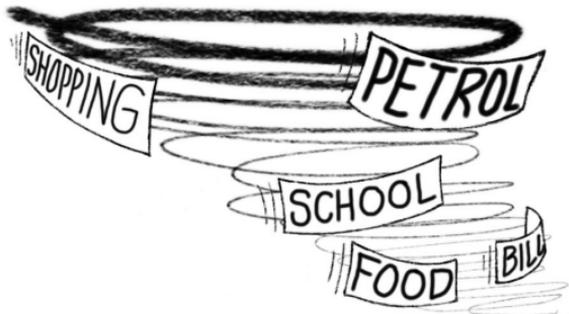
This cluster of exercises takes longer. It requires first setting aside some time and a place within which to practise. It's best to begin with focusing on the Connect and Strengthen, which centres in the body, for a few ten-minute sessions. This gives you the feel of embodiment, the basis that you can refer to and return to throughout any session. After a while, you might spend the first five minutes of a fifteen-minute period to re-establish that bodily groundedness and then go through the exercises outlined below. The groundedness creates a basis that you can return to whenever you get lost in thoughts or moods. The overall theme is: come out of the

imagined, the dreaded and the longed-for; rest in the here and now.

1 Gather energy within the breathing

Spend some time establishing the breathing as a flow. Draw your lower back in so that the weight of your chest transfers down your back rather than compressing your belly. Drop your shoulders, relax your face and centre your breathing in the abdomen. Gently breathe out completely, then wait for the in-breath; let your breathing naturally lengthen and deepen.

Feel the energy in the flow of breathing. This is not confined to a particular point, though you might want to rest your attention at a place in your belly, diaphragm,



chest or nostrils and sense the breathing flowing through it. When you breathe in, can you feel a sense of brightening? With the out-breath, do you get a sense of releasing? The sense is not of air, but of a changing energy, right? Let your body fully feel that flow as it causes it to swell and subside in a regular way. Through this process, your body-energy gathers within the breathing.

Whatever you're currently feeling in terms of bodily vitality or nervous energy, bring that to the breathing. So this means if you feel tired, dull or stagnant – or if you feel speedy or agitated – breathe into that. Don't struggle with the tiredness but also don't sink into it. Don't try to shut down the speediness but don't add to it with distracting actions. Instead, 'hold' these energies, just as energies, within the breathing. Let your breathing be long and deep

and bring the current state of bodily energy into contact with its flow. Open to your bodily experience and let your breath-flow inhabit it. It's rather like putting on a new suit and getting comfortable in it.



Feel the energy in the flow of breathing ... Let your body feel that flow ... If you're feeling dull, or agitated – breathe into that. Open to your bodily experience and let your breath inhabit it.

Feel out what it's like for awareness to spread over, include and 'know' your body and its energy.

2 Gather thinking within the breathing

A lot of the time we're thinking and that isn't always good or helpful. Thinking (unlike thoughtful attention)

is about constructing: a future, a past, another person – or oneself. It's often about creating an alternative to the direct experience of the here and now. And there's stress in that. So what we do for clarity and calm is to come into the present and rest in that. It's like our thinking is a show that we can sit back and watch. This position of watchful awareness allows the system to regenerate or refresh and also to get perspective on what and how the mind is creating. It takes you off the treadmill of thinking and lightens the weight on the mind. Then you can employ thoughtful attention rather than get lost in thinking.

A memo to draw the mind out of runaway thinking is: 'the future is the imagined, the past is a memory and what other people and you are is a changeable notion.' Although these impressions quickly proliferate, there is no stable reality

in any thought – which is why involvement with thought gets stressful. So ... tune in to the thinking as a flow. Soften your attention around the topics and your reactions to them and instead feel the movement of thinking. Racing, circling, sparkling, grinding ... whatever. Let go of the topic, tune in to the flow. Unhook from the need to arrive at a conclusion. Right now, there is no conclusion. Also, put aside the irritation with thinking and the wish that it stop. Feel the energy of thinking and settle it on the breathing. It's like riding a horse or surfing a wave. Keep the breath-energy and the thought-energy in mind, letting them meet and move together.



'The future is the imagined, the past is a memory, and what other people and you are is a changeable notion.'... come into the present and rest in that... Tune into the thinking as a flow ... let go of the topic and feel the energy, like surfing a wave ...



Feel out what it's like to be with your thought process in this way. Can you sense all its complexities and voices as an energy? If so, you can connect it to the breath-energy and let the breathing absorb it. This is like having a fast-flowing torrent empty into a wide, slow-moving river. You'll notice the thoughts get less intense and tend to fade while the quality of awareness strengthens into an attentive silence. You can even listen to that silence: it has a sound like the one you hear in a sea-shell; the sound of listening.

3 Gather the heart within the breathing

We're affected by our senses: sights, sounds, thoughts and the rest. Out of their contact, impressions (such as 'threat', 'safe' or 'desirable') wave like flags. The process of flagging things as desirable or dreadful then creates mind-states such as eagerness, worry, doubt, affection or regret. When

we're angry with someone or regret something we did in the past or hanker after something we don't have, our hearts churn and we suffer. Our minds can keep a topic of irritation going for years even when the one who I'm angry with isn't really here now. We need to notice this; and that the loss that I'm sad about has already gone; and the thing that I want is just being made up now. If we attend wisely we can stop creating people and events in our minds; we can stop creating future, past – we can even stop creating ourselves. Binding the heart to these notions divides it into now and then, here and there, me and you and it – so that it chases and struggles with virtual realities. But if we focus on the present actuality, when we let the anger just be angry, the sadness just feel sad, the spin stops – so the pain can pass.



The one I'm angry with isn't here, now ... the loss has gone ... the thing I want to be is just being made up now ... Focus on the present, let the anger be angry so the pain can pass ...

Remember: put aside the topic and attend to the overall movement of the state. Acknowledge its emotional flavour. This is a very direct way of meeting emotions. Rather than follow them or resist or blame them, meet them in your body. It's like holding a baby in your arms. Get grounded, be with the breathing, widen to include the emotion and spread your awareness over the whole body-mind experience in the present.

Let yourself feel what you feel. An acceptance that is sympathetic will build up. As that empathy arises, rest in it. Your emotional energy is now a source of warmth and goodwill.



Be with the breathing, widen to include the
emotion ... like holding a baby in your arms ...
Let yourself feel what you feel

4 Rest in the here and now

The here and now that offers rest and peace is not a thought, sensation or state of mind. These things, which we customarily mistake to be the real business, continually defy and tantalize us with their scintillating changeability. Right here and now is the awareness that takes embodiment as location, empathy as felt relationship and silent attention for clarity. Embodied awareness, one that sees clearly and doesn't hold on or reject – this is a lasting refuge. Everything you experience passes through this gate. You can't have it, name it, get it or get rid of it; you can only rest in it. And this is why it gives us ease.



The here and now that offers rest and peace
is not a thought, sensation or state of mind ...
you can only rest in it.

We can use breathing, the sound of listening or the wide embracing heart as reference points that offer balance in the stream of daily life. For example, when you feel stress and imbalance arising, relax your shoulders and breathe out slowly. If, however, you feel really locked, attend to where in your body you feel that, accept its presence and widen the lens of attention. Sense the area around the tension and widen your attention over your entire body. At a certain point, as the breathing becomes apparent, it will ease and release the stress.

Alternatively, when your thinking is getting too fast or tumultuous, listen to it in a way that is both accepting and curious. When you hear the sound of listening, the shift occurs that gives you perspective on your thoughts.



If you feel locked, accept that. Sense the tense area and widen your attention over your entire body... when your thinking gets too fast, listen in a way that is accepting and curious.

These shortcuts can be used in the field of everyday activity. However, they can't replace the more thorough refreshment and alignment of concerted, quiet practice. As you get more familiar with sustained quietude, honour it and attend to it regularly and for as much time as you can give it.



Meeting the World



RECOMMENDED TIME: The rest of your life

What follows is intended to help you stay clear and calm in your daily life. ‘Meeting the world’ may sound daunting until you recollect that when you stay in embodied awareness, the world is just whatever arises in the here and now, one moment at a time.

The previous exercises were about shifting and deepening into that awareness. It’s a shift that takes you to a still, aware centre by connecting to and centring in your body. The section on ‘resting in the here and now’ gives you more on that, but to recap: whatever’s running through you, come into your location – your body – and extend your awareness over it, relaxing the contracted areas. Stay in that, connect

to the ground beneath you and to the breath-flow until you sense the shift out of engagement and into witnessing. You can then ask one of the questions we set up in the Pause and Ask exercise, consider one of the topics to reflect upon, or just wait for a heart-response.

The main thing to learn is that no matter how big and long-term the topic is that affects you, the way you can most clearly handle it is by experiencing it as a thought, emotion or impulse in the present. Then you're keeping watch over the aware place, the gate through which things pass. Your clearest response will arise from the other side of the gate.



**No matter how big and long-term the topic is ...
you can most clearly handle it by experiencing
it as a thought, emotion or impulse in the present.**

Boundaries of Attention

Your gate has to sit within a fence or a wall or else it doesn't work. When we don't establish proper boundaries around attention and action, then we either get swamped and pulled off centre and lose balance, or we close down on what's happening to us. In which case we're all wall and no gate: responsiveness is lost and life gets intense.

So when you're moving around in the world, experiment with keeping your visual focus relaxed and attuned within a sphere that extends two to three metres around you. See what it's like to establish that as the norm and go into more detailed focus consciously and when you need to. This will enable you to stay present and balanced. It's like being a

naturalist: you're alert and curious, you don't know where or when the wildlife will appear – so you poise in all-round awareness.

By and large the human world is designed to stop you doing that. Sights, signals and other people jump right in to consciousness through your eyes and ask you to engage. So the next step is to slow down or move at a pace that keeps you in your whole body, rather than race at the speed of the world – which reduces you to eyes on legs. Use the pause before engagement and stay embodied. Often the frenetic pace of the world will then rush past you.

To help you with embodied balance, you might carry something with you that you can roll in your hand – such as a string of beads or a key ring. Doing this will bring you back into your body through your hands. You can also intone a

word (under your breath, so that people around you don't think you've gone mad).

To strengthen this overall awareness when you're at home or in a quiet place, practise widening the boundaries of your attention while remaining centred. Start by sitting, walking or standing with imaginary hoops around your body. Your awareness is then wide but centred rather than drawn out by sights and sounds. It's like having cat's whiskers; you'll feel wide but contained and alert. You'll sense when your body contracts (a thought or a memory can have that effect) – then Pause at the point where you sense the contraction or agitation and Ask: 'Where am I now? Where is this in my body?' As your centredness gathers itself, you can widen and Ask 'What's really important for me, now?' and 'What helps me to be with this?' As this 'gate' gets established, the appropriate healthy boundary will also establish itself.



Keep your visual focus relaxed ... stay embodied
and slow down ... roll a key ring in your hand.

Ask : 'Where am I now? What's really important?
What helps me to be with this?'

Boundaries of Intention and Action

Even more important than having boundaries around attention, is to have them around what you do and how you engage. Through not establishing such limits we create problems for ourselves and others. Your primary boundary should be ethical: to avoid violence through body or speech and to abstain from deceit and intoxication are going to be for your welfare and that of others. It also means that you're not going to get pulled into the worst parts of the world.

From there you can look into consumer hunger, gossip and absorption into media. How much we shop and what we take in and talk about has its effects. One way to check this out is to Pause as you're about to engage and Ask: 'How am I now? What is helpful?' You can also Pause and Ask after the actions: 'How does it feel, now?' This helps you to find your own standards. It's good to learn what's suitable for you rather than to simply follow the crowd or adopt a theory.



Pause just as you're about to engage and

Ask: 'How am I now?'

Ask after the actions: 'How does it feel, now?'



Boundaries of Time

All this skilful effort pays off by giving you more time to calm and clarify your mind. Make a regular time each day to cultivate some of the preceding exercises and others that you may learn from alternative sources. Set up a good place where you won't be disturbed for ten minutes or more, shift into embodied awareness and let it process the events of the day, resting in the here and now.

Establishing such a time boundary and resolve will keep you fit, enhance your sense of well-being, and enable you to start the rest of your life on a surer footing.

A little more...

If you'd like to take this process further, there are many guidebooks that can help you. I'd recommend:

Introduction to Meditation by Ajahn Sucitto

Finding the Missing Peace by Ajahn Amaro

Simple Kindness by Ajahn Candasiri

Mindfulness, the Path to the Deathless by Ajahn Sumedho

Meditation: A Way of Awakening by Ajahn Sucitto

You can download these and other books for free from
www.forestsanghapublications.org

Enough audio material to last a lifetime can be found at
www.accesstoinsight.org

If you'd like to spend some time in a suitable environment for clarity and calm, a list of monasteries that offer accommodation can be found at

www.forestsangha.org

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