

Meditative Story Transcript – Rohan Gunatillake's Meditation to Welcome Change

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ROHAN GUNATILLAKE: Hi everyone. Rohan here, your host of Meditative Story. Who would have thought the world would turn upside down like this? I would never have imagined it.

A few weeks ago you'll remember that I recorded a meditation in place of our usual format, and wanted to do so again – in the midst of changing seasons and changing times. So here we go.

There's a line that's in each of our episodes that's always the same: The body relaxed. The body breathing. The senses open. The mind open. Meeting the world.

Without going too much inside baseball, for me it's a description of what I call the meditation stance, of how to be when practicing mindfulness. Anchored in the body but open with our whole being and connected with everything around us.

And I normally point you to it after I've introduced the storyteller, but this week the storyteller is me – so I'll spare you that. Instead let's get right into that stance. However and wherever your body is, let it be how it wants to be. Give it permission to soften. We hold so much tension. Let's be kind and tell ourselves it's ok. Jaw, hands, eyes. Notice any holding that's there.

And let that noticing, that knowing, allow letting go. It's ok.

Breathing. Boring, basic, essential breathing. The body knowing what to do. The body breathing. Without the vanity of your having to get involved.

We often close off our senses, fixated on the small stuff rather than taking a wider view. The senses open. Each equal. The mind open. The mind doesn't really have a very clean definition in science. But we know what it is. And that's what matters. The mind open.

This world. With everything in it. Meeting it all the same.

One of the things I love most about working on Meditative Story is how our storytellers transport me, transport us to important moments in their past. I'm not going to do that today. Instead, I'm going to invite you into my present. And share what is most alive for me right now.

And as I sit here in my home in Glasgow, Scotland, the children asleep upstairs, Lucy my wife on a call with friends, the theme that is calling to me most is that of change, inspired most of all by the change of seasons. Spring into summer, but also the movement from initial lockdown into a degree of less restriction. Even the simple click of the calendar from May into June in a year which has gone by so quickly yet taken so much from us.

And reflecting on changing seasons, there are three aspects, three dimensions I'd like to invite you to explore with me. And the first is something about how seeing change is more important than simply believing in it.

We're lucky, here in Scotland. We have a small yard at the back of our house and during lockdown I have become an uncharacteristically ferocious gardener. And spending so much time there has been so valuable, because I see the sunflower seeds my four year old son proudly planted find their place.

The new plants settle in and I see them change too, in days which otherwise feel the same, copies, duplicates, rolling along the conveyor belt. I notice the blossom has dropped from the trees I see from my bedroom window. I notice the change and I know things are changing. I see my one year old daughter herself blooming by having us around so much, each day bringing a new word she can now say. Today it was "bubble."

In difficult times, I often hear the advice to take consolation because 'this too will pass'. I've never really been down with that. Believing in change and the movement from the difficult to the more easeful is okay, but what really matters is noticing it. Because the more we notice it, the more we see it, and that's how we know it in our bones, not just as some nice words.

So let's see it. With eyes closed if it's safe and comfortable, what change is here to be seen?

If it feels okay, rest your attention on the breath and notice how it changes, how it cycles. Place your hand on your belly to help you contact the breath if you like. And through the sensations there, notice the change. No need to name it or commentate upon it. No need to change your breath in any way. Just notice the cycle of the in breath and the out breath and if you're really on it, the little gaps in between. Not saying to ourselves that the breath changes, but knowing it.

Your attention in intimate connection with it, united, watching the changing experience of the breath. And leaning into the tone of hope that change and changing seasons can bring. The energy, the oxygenation of the in-breath, the natural relaxation of the out.

When you're into meditation as much as I am, people often assume that you're totally calm and chilled all the time. Ha, if only that was the case.

So while it is true that mindfulness training does, over time, increase our baseline calm, that's not the most transformative thing. The most transformative thing is becoming a connoisseur of your inner life, an expert in your internal seasons, because understanding our patterns, our habits reduces their power over us.

I've learnt a lot in the last few weeks about guilt, frustration, sadness, anger, because I've seen them. I've seen them arise and I've seen them run out of energy.

I've also learnt a lot about joy, delight, appreciation, and openness. They too come and go, leaving a light heart. So let's switch our attention now from our breath to our mindstate. Notice how you know how to do that.

And let's watch our minds, noticing how many seasons we move through in a short period of time. And to do that we'll use the trusty technique of noting. Giving a name to our mood, our emotion, our mindstate.

Let me do a small demo.

Calm.

Amusement.

Worry.

Calm.

Not sure.

Not sure.

Curious.

So give it a go, even if it feels strange. Checking in with yourself and naming whatever emotion is moving through you. Naming it every few seconds or so. Watching the mind, the inner weather, the inner seasons.

When our awareness is turned to thoughts and emotions, they can lose their stickiness, their power. And when we see, directly see, how fast the seasons can change, we start to disbelieve the story that 'things are always going to be like this', that 'I'm always going to be like this' – and that is magic.

So try again, just for a few breaths. Naming your emotions every few seconds or so, you can even do it out loud if you like. And while you watch the contents of your mind change, what stays the same?

The final aspect of changing seasons that is really alive for me is asymmetry. And what I mean is that as seasons change, as lockdown softens for some, it doesn't happen equally for everyone. Prior to the pandemic there are so many people all around us who, as standard, are unable to leave their homes. People with chronic respiratory or immunosuppressive conditions who routinely live with the fear of contracting diseases which risk their lives. I have a friend who

may not be able to leave their house for years due to coronavirus risks. A young, brilliant friend who will be stuck in winter as we move into summer, a winter that may last for far too long.

So let's finish with her in mind. Already disadvantaged by systems which rarely ever take disability into account, and now further trapped, unable to feel the breeze on her face while much of the rest of us move into more freedom.

The body relaxed. The body breathing. If it feels okay, place your hand on the chest, on the heart area. Connecting here. Feeling here. When we move on, can we remember what it was like? And vow not to forget. Vow not to just go back to normal but to go back to better.

Where kindness and the needs of people who need that kindness the most are the center of our universe. Not the edges. Keeping my friend in mind. And so many others in her position. You might even be one of them. Those for whom the seasons will not change as ours do.

May you be safe. May you be happy.

Friends. Strangers. Young. Old. Near. Far.

May you be safe. May you be happy.

Saying the words not as some kind of magic to make them real, but as orientations of the heart. A turning towards kindness.

May we be well. May we be happy.

Thank you and take care.