

Heart Opening Meditation Exercise

By Geoffrey K. Leigh, Ph.D.

One of the most useful and simple ways for me to relax into my heart is to focus my energy and attention there for a period of time through a meditation. You can follow this outline as you go to remind yourself of the steps, or record it in a soft slow pace so you can listen rather than opening your eyes during the process.

Find a comfortable place for you to sit for a while. I would suggest you begin with a 5-10 minute meditation. As you get used to or more comfortable with the process, you could extend it longer, which helps you practice being in your heart more frequently as you go about your day.

Find a comfortable place in a chair, on a meditation cushion, sitting on a pillow on the floor, or some other position where you will not easily fall asleep and yet will be comfortable. If you find it helpful, you can image the 4th or heart chakra, roughly the center of your chest near the heart. Go through the steps slowly, taking your time with slow breathing, staying focused on your breath initially, then moving to your heart.

1. Let your body relax and let your eyes close.
2. Take a slow deep breath, then let your breath out slowly, paying attention to your breath.
3. Take another breath, slowly in, followed by a long, slow exhale.
4. Now, take another slow inhale, and let your heart slowly relax as you exhale.
5. Again, breath in, letting your heart relax more with your next slow exhale.

6. Take a fifth slow breath, letting the heart and space around the heart relax with another slow exhale. Pay attention to the heart and the relaxing process that emerges from this. Imagine that you can instruct your body, inviting your heart to increasingly relax.

7. Now, feel that area around your heart... Just let your being relax into that area. Keep focusing your attention there, allowing your heart to soften a little more with each breath, relax and expand. Pay attention to how it feels and what you experience as your heart softens and expands.

8. As you relax into the area around your heart, notice how expansive the area is, how soft, supportive, and open you feel. Spend several minutes just paying attention to your heart and the softness around it. You may find you want to spend even more time at this as your practice lengthens.

9. With the next breath and exhale, energetically encourage your heart to open further, first in the front part of the heart, followed by the back part of the heart. I find it easier if I begin in front. But you may find just the reverse. Start with the front one time, then try it by beginning with the back part of the heart to explore how it works best for you.

10. As you increase the softness around the heart, notice if you feel any greater peace or joy also residing there. If so, allow that feeling to expand with the heart. As you get more experienced, you can expand the heart and associated feelings slowly to your entire chest.

11. As you continue to feel into your heart and the area around it, ask a question or seek inspiration for something important to you. You might ask about a challenging decision you are facing. You also could ask for inspiration about some project you are developing. This is the

place that I sometimes ask about what next in my writing, or what writing project I should tackle next.

12. As you ask such questions, wait for that soft, often faint answer. It is important to allow plenty of space for the answer to enter. This is a place for inspiration and responses by our higher knowing for important aspects of our lives.

Experiencing a heart softening and opening is not always easy or strong in the beginning practice of this meditation. But the more I do this practice and spend time softening my heart, the more I feel the joy of life able to reside there. This little exercise does not take a long time. The nice thing is, you can do it anywhere, even while standing in line, driving, or waiting for an appointment.

The more I practice it, the easier it seems to happen for me, especially if I am in a pretty good place when I begin. If I am in a place of discouragement, pessimism, or depression, it takes me longer to feel my heart and experience the expansion. But even from these places, if I spend some time at it, I can feel joy return to my heart. And the change in my attitude or orientation to life can be profound. When it becomes a daily practice, I think you also will find you have more choice in how you approach life and the challenges you face.