

## Holding Your Seat Meditation [A Practice in Gaining More Freedom]

From *Path of Freedom*

By Kate Crisp and Fleet Maull

The expression “hold your seat” comes from a discipline of horseback riding called dressage. In this discipline, the rider keeps his or her seat firmly in the saddle whether the horse is at a walk, trot, canter, or gallop. This image of a rider and horse provides a helpful analogy for understanding the practice of meditation, and how to hold your seat, regardless of what situations you encounter in life.

Without mindfulness, your situation is like a rider who has fallen from the saddle but has one foot stuck in the stirrup. As the horse (your habitual mind-thoughts, feelings, and impulses) gallops off down the road, you are dragged along with your head banging on the ground, hitting every rock and obstacle on the path. The practice of meditation trains you to regain your seat on the horse, to hold your seat properly, and to ride the energy of your mind, rather than having it drag you along helplessly.

Challenging situations and difficult emotions will often cause you to lose your seat. By practicing meditation regularly and by joining the discipline of mindfulness (being present and paying attention with your daily activities, you will train yourself to regain your seat quickly and to hold your seat in more and more difficult or challenging situations.

Holding Your Seat is about:

- Developing the capacity to remain calm and non-reactive when emotionally triggered. We first work with holding our seat in our formal sitting meditation practice, so when we become triggered we will remember the practice of holding our seat.
- Learning to recognize when we are emotionally activated or triggered and intentionally shifting to a calmer, more balanced state of mind.
- Developing a more peaceful and balanced mind through the practice of meditation.

### I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou

The free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wings  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with fearful trill  
of the things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill

for the caged bird  
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
an the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

## Hold Your Seat Meditation

*Note: I suggest you read through the whole meditation and then do it in parts.*

Take an upright and relaxed sitting posture. Bring your attention to your breath and simply notice its qualities without judgment. Are you breathing fast or slow, shallow or deep? Is the texture of your breath smooth or uneven? Just notice your breath and its qualities without trying to change it.

Sit with dignity...sitting simply and confidently in the center of your presence on the earth. You are in your body fully ... here, present and awake.

Continue keeping your attention on your breath. Let your mind come to rest on the breath; use that as your point of awareness. Breathe naturally or do deep breathing if you like. Close your eyes if it helps.

Continue breathing. Refresh your dignified posture by keeping your back straight, your head straight, chin slightly tucked and your shoulders relaxed but not slumped. You are grounded like a deeply rooted tree. If the winds blow you might bend but will not break. Your posture is very important. Not too tight, not too loose. Imagine yourself as a king on your throne. Dignified, serene, peaceful and powerful.

Now begin to internally repeat these statements several times; "May I be safe ... May I be peaceful ... May I be healthy ... May I be at ease. May all beings be safe ... May all beings be peaceful ... May all beings be healthy ... May all beings be at ease. Repeat this entire series of statements 3 to 7 times.

After finishing the repetitions reflect that you have fully taken your seat, with dignity, and by repeating the above statements you have cultivated natural feelings of kindness, empathy and compassion towards yourself and others.

Put your attention on your breath and meditate for several minutes. Just be with the breath as it moves in and out according to its own rhythm. Enjoy the aliveness and energy of the breath as it flows in and out.

As you meditate, welcome whatever is there – pleasant memories, painful memories, pleasant physical sensations, unpleasant or uncomfortable physical sensations, etc. Invite whatever arises and let it move on at its own pace. Just watch. You are not picking and choosing what happens in your mind, but simply letting it be, just letting things come and go of their own accord.

Just hold your seat with whatever arises, staying present and awake, with a relaxed and open curiosity about your own moment-to-moment experience.

Relax the attention on your breath for a moment and go back to your posture; sit up straight. Feel your body. Feel the ground. Feel the strength and solidity of the earth below. Feel the vast sky above, the vastness and energy of space. Sitting with natural strength, gentleness, and dignity, appreciate your ability to join heaven and earth, to sit upright on the earth with no embarrassment about who you are as a human being.

Now move your attention to your heart. Feel your own goodness. As you breathe in and out, focus on your heart. Stay with your attention there for at least one minute. Connect further with your heart and with your basic goodness and genuineness.

To conclude: raise your eye gaze and radiate that goodness out, just as the sun radiates warmth and light. This is what you can bring to the world. Rest here for one minute.

At the end of the session, set the intention to hold your seat with whatever comes your way.