

Guided Meditation: Calming Tension

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to our beginning of our week, our morning meditation coming out of Insight Meditation Center here in Redwood City. I'm delighted to be back, having been gone for two weeks. And I guess I've been gone from you for one week because of the replay we did last week. So I hope that went well and allowed you all to continue with this deepening of a practice that can happen with *samādhi*. Can I return to that topic at the beginning? Maybe supports us as we go along now on the insight track of this year's teaching.

And as an introduction to this meditation, I would like to suggest that one of the benefits of developing *samādhi*, one of the benefits of developing insight, is to be able to have a heightened sensitivity to tension. Any tension, any stress that is in our physical and mental and emotional system, and they could be very subtle. Sometimes it's obvious. It just couldn't be more obvious that we're living with a lot of tension in our bodies and our minds. And what I'd like to recommend is that tension is a form of *dukkha*, a form of the stress or suffering that is the second of the three important insights.

The insight into things change, the insight into how there's... we add a degree of suffering, tension to our life. And then the third insight we're going to begin today is into not-self. But to prepare for that, surprisingly perhaps, is that we want to get refined in our capacity to recognize tension. And chances are that any ongoing preoccupation of your mind involves tension. Chances are that any ongoing, strong, maybe difficult emotion, maybe not so difficult emotion that we're involved in, preoccupied with, reacting to, one way or the other, there's tension involved that we're adding to it.

If there's difficult physical sensations, they're difficult in and of themselves, but there might be a strong or very subtle tension that we have in our relationship to them, pulling away, pushing away, tightening up around it. And so the advantage of *samādhi* is deep peace, deep

subtleness. The advantage of strong clarity of mind that has insight is we can start recognizing tension. And the tension is unnecessary. We can take care of our life issues without the tension. We can exist fine in this world without tension.

And so for the morning meditation, do your meditation as usually do. I'll guide it. But the underlying practice is to soften, relax, quiet the tensions that you recognize. And let me suggest again that anytime you're preoccupied with something, anytime you get repeatedly involved in some concern, chances are there's tension involved with that. See if you can recognize that tension, feel the tension, know it, feel it, and relax.

So to assume a meditation posture and to appreciate your meditation posture. Appreciate what can be appreciated about a posture you regularly take for meditation. And to gently close your eyes and without any tension, without doing too much of taking some fuller breaths that you enjoy taking. Take fuller breaths in a way that you enjoy them. Maybe by expanding the belly as you breathe in. Maybe they see the chest.

Maybe it's a tingling of the air against your nostrils that you enjoy. Maybe it's even the very subtle sense of movement in your back rib cage. Okay. No tension and breathing in, or as little as possible. And on the exhale, to relax the body at the end of the exhale, pausing for an instant to allow the body to settle more, and then to allow your breathing to return to normal.

But even with a normal breathing, if it's easy enough and no tension involved, can you adjust your breathing so it's more enjoyable? And can you focus on the experience of breathing where it is enjoyable? Maybe it's not that the strongest sensations are breathing. Maybe it's more subtle edges of breathing. And as you breathe in, feel any tension that's in your mind, thinking mind. And as you exhale, relax the thinking mind.

If any part of the breathing is pleasant, maybe that pleasant breathing can hold any tension in the mind, meet it, help the mind settle and relax. And if there's any emotions you feel, maybe in the heart area or elsewhere, that involve any tension, pressure. Again, with the simplicity of breathing, a gentle stroking of the emotion, the tension, breathing with it, through it, softening emotional tension. And if there's any holding in your body, tension in the body, maybe you can't relax it, but perhaps on the exhale you can soften it. Settling into the body breathing, the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. And in that cycle of breathing, can you find where there is the moment of least tension where breathing occurs free of tension or pressure?

And may that point of no tension, little tension, be the gift to everything else all around you

welcoming everything else, all other tension to relax, soften. At the end of the exhale, notice any tension you have. Feel it as you inhale and soften it on the exhale, especially any tension, pressure associated with thinking. Maybe not being so concerned with the content of your thoughts, the subject, and more oriented to the tension that comes along with thinking. And as we come to the end of the sitting, almost as if your breathing can touch it as you breathe, feel the ways in which you're more settled, more tension-free.

Even if there's still tension, feel what doesn't have any tension in your body, mind, and heart. And the areas without tension, those are the channels by which care and kindness, love, compassion can flow. Gaze upon the world through the channels free of tension. Imagine looking upon... your family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow humans around the world, from a place where there's no tension. And if you can, have the wish that somehow from your meditation, you're able to better go into the world with kindness and goodwill, better able to meet people with a heart that wishes them well.

May all beings be happy, May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. And each of us in our own ways, small and large, contribute to the well-being of others. May all beings be happy. Thank you.