

Guided Meditation: Attitudes within Self

Gil Fronsdal

July 30, 2025

Keywords: anattā, insight meditation, self, not-self, attitude, tension, embodiment, me-mine-myself, present moment, transformation

Hello and welcome. We're introducing the meditation for today, which is part of the wider topic for the week: Insight into Self and Not Self. First, it's important to have some insight into the experience we have of self, of ourselves. I'd like to give you a kind of a metaphor for this. Some of you might remember the movie Wizard of Oz and how there's this wizard of Emerald City. At some point, his big booming voice, this big mask on the wall, it sounds like a great, big, kind of powerful being who rules the city.

At some point, I think the little dog pulls the curtain open, and behind the curtain there's this very ordinary, older, kind of harmless looking man standing there who's the wizard—it's all kind of a show. So what's behind the curtain in our own minds around ourselves? The voice, the directions, the beliefs that we have about self, the tensions, the pressures around this whole concept of self and who we think we are and how we think we are. If we pull the curtain, what do we see? Part of the purpose of meditation, not as an intentional act, but as a consequence of deep settling with insight meditation, is in fact to pull the curtain around this whole idea, sense, feeling of what self is.

One of the things that we can start seeing if we pull the curtain is that whatever feeling we have, sense we have, belief we have, coalescing around something that we have around this notion of self, it could be something seemingly as innocent as a feeling of I-M-ness, the place that we am, where we are kind of as a kind of locus, as a central control tower place. What is the attitude that saturates that sense of self? Is there an attitude of... of... that kind of is a lens through which we see everything? An attitude of calm or an attitude of agitation. An attitude of fulfillment or attitude of feeling unfulfilled. An attitude of feeling adequate or feeling inadequate.

An attitude of feeling safe or an attitude of feeling fear? Is there a sense that this kind of little coagulation, condensation around self—it's not dismissing the idea of self—but does the

feeling, the idea of self, come with an unrecognized attitude? It's kind of like they say, people don't recognize or know that they have a dialect or an accent when they speak, because their accent, the way they grew up, everyone had that. That's the normal way of speaking. But everyone has an accent in relationship to someone else who speaks. So we don't even know we have these attitudes that we carry with us for maybe a lifetime because it's just always been there.

It's like we don't even know that it's there. As we settle, we want to start seeing, recognizing the attitudes that are there, kind of almost built into the fabric of our sense of self, our feeling of self, me, myself, and mine, and pull the curtain, see it, and recognize: does it come with tension? Does it come with pressure? The tension is unnecessary. That is what we can work with.

So to assume meditation posture, take a minute or so to kind of sway and rock yourself into a settled way of being with your body as you're sitting or lying for meditation. Part of the swaying is back and forth, to become a little bit more embodied and to take some care and time with an embodied sense of body, to adjust the posture in minute ways so it feels just right. Gently, closing your eyelids. In this beginning of meditation, what or how is that self that's doing these beginning steps to meditation? What sense do you have of the doer, the enactor, the experiencer? With that as an exploration, taking some deeper, fuller breaths to the degree to which it feels good and satisfying to become more connected to your body.

Relaxing on the exhale, letting your breathing return to normal. On the inhale, feeling the sensations of your face. There can be a lot of self associated with the face. As you exhale, relax the face, soften. Noticing the self that is feeling and relaxing. Feeling the shoulders on the inhale.

Softening the shoulders on the exhale, maybe with the help of adjusting your arms and hands a bit, feeling the belly, and on the exhale, softening in the belly. With a broad global awareness of your body, feeling as much of the body as is easy, and on the exhale, softening the body. On the inhale, feeling any tension or pressure, tightness that's associated with a thinking mind. Any pressure or tension associated with a part of you that's thinking, the part of you that's doing the meditation. On the exhale, softening that tension, pressure. There is a caring way of allowing yourself internally to become quiet and still, quieting the thinking mind, finding a place of inner stillness and quiet that heightens your sensitivity to feeling, seeing and recognizing your present moment experience.

As if the quiet, peaceful, still place within can gaze upon your sense of self, your sense of being the doer, the experiencer, the thinker. What is the attitude, attitudes that seem to be within

this sense of self? The idea of self, the feeling of self, locus, control tower self in the middle of it all. Is there a subtle attitude? An attitude that has pressure or momentum in a forward direction, a backward direction, a sinking direction, an uplifting direction, embedded in the sense of self? Is there attitudes of liking or not liking, wanting or not wanting?

Attitudes that are searching for something, trying for something, or attitudes of giving up or resisting. The deep attitudes embedded in the sense of self can be many other things. Rather than being too concerned with what you find, when you find something, feel the tension, the pressure, tightness, solidity in the center. Feel it as you inhale and soften it as you exhale. If you can feel or recognize an attitude that seems to come along with your sense of self, can you look behind it, underneath it? For what inside of you is deeper than that attitude?

Maybe what behind it is more peaceful and for the next minute or so to gently breathe with, breathe through what's behind, what's deeper. Allow it to be known. Then as we come to the end of the sitting, to feel and sense whatever degree of subtleness, whatever degree of calm there might be for you, whatever new understanding there might be for you. How might this calm, peace, subtleness, understanding, allow you to go into the world, seeing the world kindly, go into the world in a more friendly way, a more generous way? May it be that the practice we do is to benefit both self and others. May we do this practice of meditation to support the transformation of a better world.

One breath at a time, one sentence at a time, one human encounter at a time. May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be safe. May all beings be free. Thank you.