

## Guided Meditation: Centered in Core Calm

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**August 01, 2025**

**Keywords:** anattā, samādhi, insight practice, self, not-self, aversion, desire, tension, meditation, goodwill

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So, welcome, everyone, for this Friday meditation and teaching on the not-self aspect of insight practice. And as I've been saying this week, the focus is not yet on discussing or guiding you through this idea of the experience, the insight of not-self. The idea is to understand more about the experience of self that we have. And today we'll be a little bit of a bridge between maybe self and not-self. So the way that we prioritize ourselves because we think a lot about ourselves, we are concerned with our own well-being, which is quite appropriate. But we're also anxious about ourselves.

And we have a lot of desires, and those desires can be tied to our view of ourselves, how we want to be seen by others. We can have a lot of aversion that also is integrated and integral to how we experience the self, maybe because we want to be safe or we want to not suffer. And so the whole self is a project of pushing things away or avoiding challenges. These become kind of the—it's very easy for this self, the feeling, the experience, the gathering together, the global sense of "I'm here and I'm here," to be penetrated or suffused with anxiety, with desire, with aversion, with confusion, with tension. With tension, with stress, with motivations being for and against. There's a lot of things, a lot of extra things come along.

The idea of self is a magnet for it. The way we organize ourselves as a self is a magnet for a lot of things that are not inherently part of self but that can actually come up the process, make it more challenging our life and make it more complicated than it needs to be. And because one of the ways is to take the self as too much of who we are, to over-identify. So it's kind of the global sense of... And so whatever comes along with the self, whatever emotions and attitudes, it becomes part and parcel of the self, and it becomes global. Global anxiety, global aversion, global confusion, global tension.

But in fact, we are multifaceted human beings. We're whole ecosystems within us. And there are sources of emotions, motivations, sources of ease, relaxation, places within us where

there is no tension. And maybe it's a very small place. And there is a place where our thinking, the way we understand the world, the way we respond to the world, can be much wiser, much softer, much more at ease, comfortable with ourselves in a sense. And at the same time as we have anxiety around ourselves or tension around this idea of self, and one of the interesting things about meditation, Buddhism, is how we can learn to shift where we take up residency, shift where we think we have to latch on and figure out things, to manage for ourselves, do our work as a human being.

And if we do it from this complicated place of self with all its tension, then it's all too easy to perpetuate that tension. But there is another place that's deep inside of us, the profound forms of sensing, knowing, intelligence within us, that come out of a place of ease, a sense of well-being, a sense of the emergent, a sense of goodness, a sense of home, a sense of stability and subtleness. And that's one of the purposes of *samādhi*, is to get kind of grounded and filled by this alternative location, this alternative way of being alive that is not narrowed or tightened around the concept, the idea, the associations that we have around me, myself, and mine. And so learning to make that shift and to find this other center for ourselves is part of the purposes of Buddhist meditation. And some people might call this deeper, softer place where the tension of self is not operating as an aspect of self. Some people might prefer to think of it as who they are.

And that can be quite innocent. And for now, it's not an issue that we want to address, but to actually build on that and appreciate it. So to assume a meditation posture and to gently close your eyes. And one of the opportunities with taking a few deeper, fuller breaths and relaxing at the beginning of meditation is, in fact, to shift the orientation of attention, of presence, of stability, out of the busy mind, the reactive mind, the anxious mind, the tense mind. And as we exhale to settle, relax, shift the attention from the thinking mind, the selfing mind, to someplace deeper within. Maybe it's a still, quiet place deep in the torso.

Maybe a deep, quiet, comfortable place within is supported by feeling the weight of your body supported by your chair, your cushion, the floor, the solidity, the stability that that might give. Okay. Helps the shift from the control tower to the solid earth-like place within us. Relaxing on the exhale, letting the breathing be normal. And on the exhale, let there be a gentling softening of the thinking mind, the control tower, the locus location of tension around being the doer, the thinker, the experiencer. Softening, gentling.

Taking a few moments to feel, have a global experience of your body in whatever way that's easy. A broad feeling of presence, of awareness. To the sensations and solidity and openness of inhabiting your body, even if some of it's uncomfortable. Let there be a broader attention

than where the discomfort is. A broad awareness that doesn't have a clear boundary at your skin. There are soft, porous edges, maybe no edges at all, to the broad awareness here in the body.

Right? That within this broad awareness, breathing is like the waves moving through the ocean. Breathing is like a gentle movement through this broad awareness, maybe allowing the inhale to begin at the settling spot, the grounding spot deep within, and follow the exhale back to that grounding spot. Place deep within, where the last sensations of breathing occur. A place of stability, subtleness. And if there is in you any tension, pressure, stress associated with thinking, feeling, emotions, anything that might be associated with your usual involvement with yourself, leave that alone.

Let it be there on the edges, not to be concerned with it. And instead, assume that the deepest home for yourself is deep within in a place that feels comfortable, tension-free. Maybe it feels soft and cozy, sweet, where maybe there is no tension, no anxiety. Where there is a contentment just to be deep within, breathing with that place, breathing through it, breathing out of it, returning to it, letting all the thoughts of self and self-concern feel like children playing in the nearby room in you, settled here in the comfort of your inner life, at ease. Taking a couple of minutes to gently, softly quiet the thinking mind and to sense and feel deep within. Is there a place within that might be characterized in one of these ways? Contentment, calm, happy, settled, home, a sense of wholeness, integrity, a generative silence.

Is there a place deep inside that feels more valuable, more satisfying than the anxious thinking mind, the swirling contractions of mind and thoughts and the self that comes along with it? Is there a more deep centered place even if it's just hints of it, or intuition of it. And what is it like to see the world through that deep place instead of through the control tower? What is it like to accompany the world from this deep place, from the most peaceful place within? What does goodwill look like? What does care and love, compassion, how does that manifest out of this peace?

And so then to end the sitting, if there is a deeper place in which to offer goodwill to the world, have these wishes. May the benefit of this meditation be used for the welfare and happiness of all beings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.