

## Guided Meditation: Vacation from Self

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So warm greetings from Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City and delighted to be sitting here to offer this period of meditation. And as an introduction to the meditation, from time to time, people benefit enormously from resting, taking time out to sleep. And if fortunate enough to sleep well, wake up, rested and clear and ready for activity. And if we're fortunate enough, we can take a vacation. Or we can take a Sabbath. We can take some really time off, holiday.

Yeah. And step away from our normal activities, normal preoccupations and concerns, maybe even forget a lot of the everyday concerns and preoccupations, responsibilities, and not to abandon them, but to come back refreshed, to come back somehow settled, come back ready to engage in a nice way. In the evening, I... Often there comes a time in the evening where I'm not that sleepy, but it's just... It's just... I'm not really interested or quite capable of doing certain kinds of work. And so I don't. I take a break and do something simple and get ready for bed. And then in the morning, at some point, I'm ready.

So this idea of vacation. So meditation works this way as well. And to understand it that way can maybe help us be more willing to put aside our preoccupations and our concerns without thinking we're abandoning them or being irresponsible. But to really give us the opportunity, ourselves the opportunity, to put aside... the things that we're ruminating about, churning about, the things that we're obsessing about, to put aside the ordinary ways in which the mind is spinning and preoccupied, and maybe even put aside the concerns with certain emotions and plans and even some of the major things that might be happening in our life at that moment around us. But just like we'd put aside it all in order to go to sleep, so in meditation, it can be helpful in an appropriate way to say, okay, this is a different time. And one of the remarkable vacations we can take in meditation...

Remarkable ways of settling, getting peaceful, getting unified, being collected here in a peaceful, quiet way, becoming calm and centered. Just here in the meditation, so just here and now, just this, is have a vacation from all the ways in which we're selfing. All the activities of self-preoccupation, self-definition, self-criticizing, self-aggrandizement, self-embarrassment and shame, and all the ways in which we're telling stories. We're the main character, all the ways in which we're living in a future with anxiety of what it's going to mean for me and what I have to do and what people will think about me. All the preoccupation with the past, unresolved issues that were, again, were the major character for it. Not that all these things are wrong to do, some of them might be appropriate at times, but we're allowed to take a radical and full vacation from it all.

And to no longer be self-preoccupied, self-concerned, and have an experience of living where the ordinary self, the ordinary selfing or self-concern falls away. And to rest there, to be refreshed there, to discover safety there. Many of the self-concerns we have involve danger and fear, anxiety. But to find that in this kind of vacation time, this pause, sacred Sabbath, from selfing, self-concern, self-preoccupation, it's actually, it's a safe place. We become safe for ourselves. We become safe from our churning and rumination and criticism and conceit.

And so to be and appreciate... the simplicity, the openness, the clarity that replaces selfing, self-preoccupation. So I'd like to offer you one place to find where there is no self, where our gaze, our awareness, our presence can somehow be attuned, somehow recognize in this quadrant of our experience. We can be, there's awareness, there is attention, but we're resting, we're delighting, we're freeing through gazing upon what is not self. So this is not a philosophical no self or not self, but rather a practical thing in our own experience. So the primary thing I'll offer for now is the notion of space.

If you look around the location you're in, and don't look at any objects, but look at the space, the space between the objects in the room you're in and the location you're at. And in this space, there's no or very little selfing. We tend not to own space, make it mine. We tend not to identify the space as me. The empty space, we don't say that's my true self. It's just the space in the room.

It's a space between trees outside, the space of the sky above. And so we'll go into this during meditation today. So to assume a meditation posture... and to feel that the position you're in, the posture you assume, in some form or other, is surrounded by space. Right beyond the edges of your skin, the edges of your clothes, there are places where, rather than touching a couch or a bed or the floor, beyond the edges of it, there is space. Your eyes closed, take a few long, slow, gentle breaths, feeling the expansion of the torso, the rib cage, into that space.

And as you exhale, receding from the space, in a sense making more space around you. And as you exhale, relax the body. And as you relax, soften. And as you... Continue, let your breathing return to normal. But for a few more breaths, softening the body. As you exhale, soften the thinking mind. Gently, as you breathe in, feel any of the contraction, tightness, activation behind it. The activity of the mind, the thinking mind, the mind that drives attention and concerns. Maybe there's a location for the contraction or the forcefulness of the thinking mind, the wanting mind, the selfing mind.

And as you exhale, relax and soften. And then settling into breathing. Settling into the body's experience of breathing. Feeling the sensations that come to play as you breathe. And then around the sensations of breathing. Beyond the edges of those sensations. Maybe beyond the edges of your body. With your eyes closed. Sense the space. Sense the space.

Any way in which there's spaciousness, in which there's no sensations, an undefined openness, emptiness of phenomena, sensations, and recognizing that all the space that's here, all that exists between and beyond the sensations, has no self in it. There's not a self to be found in it. In space, in spaciousness. And if we don't try to be aware of the space, but more allow awareness of space, maybe awareness also can be present without any selfing. We can have a sense that awareness operates with no self needed, no self-concern. And as we continue, let the rest of the meditation be a gazing upon that part of awareness and space, experience, in which there is no selfing, no selfing made, nothing made of it for the self.

Let's have a vacation from selfing. What is it like to not assert, find, create? Assume a self in whatever direct experience you're having. Certainly you're welcome to do so, but what is it like to take a vacation from it? Leave everything alone. And in that, leaving it alone in the gap, in the space, in the openness, that is left when we're not making a self, doing a self, thinking about a self, to rest in the not doing there, to rest in that absence of selfing.

And each experience can be itself without recruited as part of the self project. And then as we come to the end of the sitting, imagine sitting peacefully, safely, on a park bench, and there are people happily walking by, chatting, children playing in the distance. And you can gaze upon these strangers without needing to be concerned about who you are in relationship to them, who you are at all. You can see the people around you without making any reference to yourself and whether they'll like you or accept you or... You can see them without pulling that sight, pulling into your self-project. People are just people walking by, free of your projection of self, assumption of self, making of self, free of your desires and aversions.

And how this might be seen as a gift, the gift of allowing each person to be free of our self-project, self-preoccupations. And may we grant this gift to others as part of our wish that

they be happy and free. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free, including free from having to deal with my self-project. May all beings be happy. Thank you.