

Guided Meditation: Resting in Emptiness

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August 15, 2025

Keywords: emptiness, anattā, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, non-clinging, meditation, council, self, awareness, freedom

So hello everyone. Today I can greet you from Nevada City, California at the Insight Center. That's the sibling to IMC. That's called Mountain Stream Meditation Center. And I think one of the delights of the name that the founder, my good friend John Travis, emphasized many years ago, is the initials for mountain stream is pronounced empty. And so pointing to the wonderful Buddhist teachings of emptiness, which brings us to the... kind of a, maybe a kind of final talk on this topic of not-self, the insight into not-self.

And perhaps we'll continue with another week, kind of finishing up the whole series. But in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition that I teach from, the expression not-self is comparable or maybe the same, almost the same, as the Mahāyāna teachings on emptiness, that as valuable as self is in a certain way, the Buddha didn't reject all forms of self. And I'll talk more about that. But he did emphasize that all forms of self have a certain form of emptiness. In that they're empty, because they're always changing and shifting, because they're in some way or other constructed, built up by life experience, by different mental constructs we have, understandings we have, that we inherit from our society, our cultures, that there's no inherent, no original, timeless, self, there's no soul, but rather it's all contingent, it's all influx, all dynamic.

And so that rather than taking self as the center of our experience, as the center of who we are, there's something about taking the empty center as our center, the big center that, like in council, a wonderful process of people gathering together in the big circle. In order, sometimes council process can... Very profound conversations that people can have with each other. But no one person is the center. No one person dominates and is on a pedestal in the middle. And the empty space in the circle... is where it kind of represents the potential of a community coming together to have a profound conversation that can go much deeper and fuller and richer than one can do alone.

So, we, each individual person, can create this empty circle, circle that's with emptiness in the middle, And all the parts of ourselves, all the different aspects ourselves, can gather together in council, where they all have a valuable place, invaluable place. But most valuable is the empty in the middle. That's where the potential resides. That's where the possibility of freedom resides. And that's where we can rest.

So the switch in Buddhism from placing the self at the center to placing non-clinging at the center, to take the absence of a preoccupation with self at the center, and openness to possibility, openness to not needing to be anyone for anything, for anybody, and to rest there, to allow the potential, the possibilities of that empty, friendly space, to welcome us into its freedom and allow all parts of ourselves to be in a profound relationship of council. They all can be respected this way. So we begin in meditation, closing your eyes, and with your eyes closed, spend a little bit more time now kind of feeling your way into your posture. Right? Maybe wiggling a little bit, swaying a little bit. So you can kind of enter into feel and sense the body.

And then to enter the body more fully with the help of a fuller breath, almost as if the breath, deeper breath, is giving you, guiding you, holding your hand into your body to feel it, to discover how it is. And on the exhale to relax, and then letting the breathing return to normal. And taking time to feel through the body as present moment experience. How you are. How are you physically? As if you're welcoming all the parts of yourself into the circle, the council, not... Trying to change anything right now, just recognize, feel, sense how your present moment experiences.

Checking in, almost checking in as if it's their movement of breathing, which is doing the checking, guiding the checking. In sync with the rhythm of breathing, touch into your thinking mind, your mind, your heart, how it is. And breathing normally. Now, as you exhale, relax and move your whole system towards resting. Here, now. Resting.

It's a kind of a downward movement as if you're settling into the pull of gravity. In whatever way you can feel that there's a place of rest inside. Let yourself rest in that, a place within, where all the effort around self, all the concerns about me, myself and mine, for a few minutes can rest. Nothing to be, nothing to become, nothing to attain, nothing to fix, nothing to resolve during these minutes of meditation. But allow all the efforts to do so, to experience rest, to settle, relax. And in any place where there might be some rest, even hints of rest, there you might find the with glorious emptiness, the wonderful center of counsel, the circle of all pure parts.

They can all be there in the circle. But let this very center of it all Be a peaceful, empty space.

A place of rest, empty of self. Whatever self might be for you. It's on the edges of the circle. Rest in the rest.

Rest in the emptiness. Rest in that place inside. That's free of self. Even if self is around the edges. Rest in the empty space of awareness. Thank you.

In council, the idea is that everyone can speak in turn, but the idea is to speak briefly from the heart. Don't let any part of you go on and on speaking endlessly. Thank whatever part of you speaks and come back to the empty middle. Rest there. Let that empty middle be large, peaceful. Spacious, with lots of silence before someone speaks again, and let them speak briefly, if they do.

And then as we come to the end of this sitting, to continue this metaphor of counsel, all the parts of who you are can be included in the circle sitting counsel having a profound Each part has its place, but each part is clearly part of the whole circle. No part sits in the middle, dominating. Being the loudest, takes up all the attention. Something profound happens when all parts are included, each in their own way. With this wonderful, empty middle, through which we hear each other, see each other, respect each other, allow something profound.

When I was taught the process of counsel, we were told to speak from the heart in counsel, speak briefly and speak from the heart. We were also told not to plan ahead what we were going to say. So in the moment now here... speaking briefly, speaking from the heart for oneself, in care of oneself. And then imagine that other people, people in your life, strangers, are invited to sit in the edges of the circle, and that you can make your circle larger and larger. Everyone can be included in this place of respect, a place where everyone's heart is welcomed.

And from your seat in the circle, you sit with respect and care for all the different parts, all the people there, the whole world, and through and across the empty middle, the vast peaceful center of this great circle that we are as a human race, wishing everyone well. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. So I don't have a bell with me. So I'll offer my gratitude and bow, and that'll be the end of the sitting. Thank you.