

Guided Meditation: Don't Make it Worse

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August 27, 2025

Keywords: mindfulness, meditation, suffering, clinging, present moment awareness, breathing, non-reactivity, calm, stress, kindness

Hello and welcome. I used to say much more "good morning," but "hello" is meant now for this wide global community that comes together to sit here at IMC, this way on YouTube, and I appreciate you all being here. So, one of the ways of understanding Buddhist practice, mindfulness practice, meditation, is very simple, at the same time very profound, but it can be said in a way that's not going to enter into the great philosophy books of the world, books of religious philosophy, great religious teachings. It's easy to overlook it and look for something that sounds much more inspiring. But it's quite meaningful.

And as mindfulness becomes stronger, this particular teaching becomes more and more highlighted and maybe it becomes kind of instinctual or more than even intentional or even thought about. Maybe the whole Buddhist practice can unfold through this very simple statement. As we get quieter, as we get calmer, as we get more settled, more stable, more unified, more here, all along the way, there's a teaching of: don't make it worse. Simply know yourself well enough in the moment that you can see how you'll make the situation worse—the situation itself, but in meditation, the situation of sitting here, being here. We become more and more sensitive to this, more and more highlights of subtlety or the depth or the core ways in which we react, pick up beliefs, pick up attitudes, core ways in which we cling or resist or expect or demand, or core ways in which we get anxious.

Deep down, even when things are all safe around us in the moment, there could be at the center a core fear, a fear that we pick up, that we get involved in. And all along the way, we can carry with us a simple teaching: don't make it worse. You don't have to make it better. But as you just keep this thing, don't make it worse, you will make it better. You will settle more, you'll calm more, you'll open more. And then as that develops more and more, you have a new reference point, ever more deeper, fuller, more complete reference point, for don't make it worse.

A reference point of seeing what you give up, how there's an ouch, how there's an ache, suffering, a stress, a tension that represents feeling worse, limiting ourselves more. So assuming a meditation posture and a posture that maybe some of you you've cultivated for some time now, so that assuming the posture, you're coming home to familiar sensations in the body, lowering your gaze, closing your eyes, and taking a few moments to check in: How are you right now? And whatever way you are, can you not make it worse? Can you, by simply allowing it to be the way it is, and just know it? Be aware of how you are physically, mentally, emotionally.

And then with the idea, premise, that at the center of it all is your breathing, the breathing body. And how is your breathing? How is it, what does it feel like for your body that the body is breathing? And regardless of how it is, comfortable or uncomfortable, don't make it worse. Don't make it worse for yourself by judging, criticizing, reacting, wanting more. Simply notice, be present for your body breathing.

And if there is any tension or pressure, tightness, pain, discomfort, breathe with it, breathe through it as a way of accompanying it, knowing it without making it worse, without needing to do anything about it, just for the moments, breathing with it as a way of being aware of it, gently, kindly, without reacting, without making it worse. And if there's any tension or pressure in the thinking mind, to know that and breathe with it. Accompany it with your breathing. Stay connected to the rhythm of breathing as a way of gently stroking the tension or tension stress in the thinking mind, stroking it with awareness, stroking it with the breath, not making it worse, but having it be known.

And is there any way that as you sit here that you can find someplace within that feels calm, that feels somewhat settled, or maybe something that feels pleasant and enjoyable, a sensation, feeling, that you associate with meditation, and allow your breathing to accompany these pleasant sensations, this calm breathing through it, with it? So your ability to be aware rides along with your breathing. And as we go along now, meditating, being mindful, keep close by the notion, don't make it worse. Don't pick anything up. Don't react. Or if you do react, don't get involved with it. Leave it alone. See if you can stay close to the idea of not making things worse.

If you find yourself enjoying your thoughts, just maybe you're making things worse, in the sense of losing a deeper, fuller connection to your embodied experience, your whole being, of being involved in the future, the past, fantasy. It's a kind of surface pleasure that can easily be disconnecting. And in the... After having sat now for these minutes, to check in with yourself again, how are you now? Are you more settled and calmer? Are you more agitated? Do you

feel more connected to yourself or less connected? In whatever way you are, do you now have a different appreciation, sense, reference point for not making things worse?

And then as we come to the end of the sitting, is there some reference point now of sitting here how you are that can support you, help you understand how not to make things worse interpersonally? Might you appreciate the value of being calm or centered or the value of a heightened capacity for present moment awareness? That staying close to that might protect you from not making things worse. And may it be that as we gaze upon the world, as we learn about what's happening in the world, as we encounter the joys and sufferings of the world, as we encounter the challenges and successes that occur as we walk through this life, may we support others by not making whatever is happening worse. Don't make other people's lives worse for this day. Don't give other people occasion to feel worse, to be afraid, to be criticized, attacked in any way, ignored, dismissed.

May it be that we learn how not to make situations worse and doing so, give room and possibility that there's a natural way that they can become better. May our good hearts support the welfare and happiness of this world. May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be safe. May all beings be free. And by not making things worse, we make this more possible. Thank you. Thank you.