

Guided Meditation: Don't Give Yourself Away

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October 16, 2025

Keywords: wholeness, ill-will, greed, mindfulness, awakened world, calm recognition, meditation posture, direct experience, wholesome-unwholesome, present moment

Hello and welcome. Welcome to this meditation, for those of us in California, the morning meditation. The small, or short at least—maybe big, short and very significant—teaching that I want to offer you here as we start today, I think encapsulates something very significant about what Buddhism offers and what it points to. And that is: never give up on yourself. Never give yourself away to ill-will and hatred and greed. Don't give yourself away to anxiety or fear.

Never give up on your wholeness. Never give up that there is a way of being free. There is a way of letting our good heart, our wholesome heart, be a refuge and a support for ourselves. Never give up on oneself. It's almost as if there are two different worlds we can live in. It's a choice that we could make, even if it's just a small step.

There's a world that we live in when we have, in some ways, given up on ourselves or given ourselves away to attachments, to fears, to ways of being which are not so healthy for us. And there's a whole different world we live in, a world that we see when we don't divide the world. We don't give parts of ourselves away. We don't narrow our focus on conceit or fear, but rather a world where we see it all. We're not giving ourselves away and getting caught only in what is difficult about, what is great about us and wholesome, and not what is unwholesome or unhealthy. To wake up, the world of waking up is a world where we see the whole, all of it.

We stand in the middle, present and aware, not giving ourselves away to any of it. Seeing it all, the whole. And from there, having what's the best in us respond to this world of ours. It's like having two different worlds. And so we sit to meditate, to step into the awakened world, even if it's very small little steps of showing up, of being mindful, of recognizing what's happening in the moment, but to recognize it with a calm recognition.

To sense and be present for our experience, but to find that place where we can be present calmly—calmly meaning not swept away, not reactive to what's happening. So this world where we wake up to all of who we are and all of what the world is, not sugarcoating it, not with blinders on, but a whole that allows the best of ourselves to inform how we go forward. So to begin, think about your meditation posture as sitting down, laying down, standing, if you're doing standing meditation. Think of it as the center of the world, certainly center of your world, and you're going to take your full place, your rightful place, here at the center of it all, to be aware, to be awake. And so the posture of meditation is an enactment of standing, sitting in the middle of this awakened world, whole world.

Gently close your eyes and take some long, relaxing, deep breaths, enjoyable breaths, just deep enough to still be enjoyable. On the exhale, settle, grounding yourself here in this body, in this place, in the center of your world. Let your breathing return to normal. Continue as you exhale to soften and relax in the body. Relax and soften in a way that's settling and grounding. Each exhale a reminder that you're taking your place at the center of the world.

Maybe with the breathing itself being the center of the center, or the place your inhale begins and exhale ends deep in your torso, the center of the center of the center. Yes, here, take your place not giving up on yourself, not assuming, living, that there's anything inherently wrong about yourself or inadequate about you. You don't have to then replace it with the idea that there's something right about you. Both those ideas are not needed when you stand in the middle of it all. Awake. As you exhale, relax the thinking mind. Soften.

Settle in to the body breathing, where the birth and the passing of the world happens with each inhale and exhale. Each inhale, you're born into this world, at the center of this world, awake and aware of the present moment, without needing to divide it or judge it, give yourself away to hostility or judgment or criticism, to greed or desire and wanting. Each inhale, the world is born with you awake. Each exhale, letting everything go, not giving yourself away to your thinking. Rather, place yourself here in your direct experience of now, to wake up, to be aware of it all, without losing your calm, your center in the midst of this world. With each exhale, letting go of any way that you have given up on yourself or given yourself away.

In every exhale, show up anew, as if you're stepping into a new world with all your senses ready to take in the whole. As we come to the end of this sitting, consider that the more fully we're present for all of who we are—the wholesome, the unwholesome, the healthy, the unhealthy—but we're present for all of it, calmly, harmoniously, not giving ourselves away to any of it. There's more of us available to say hello to someone, to ask them how they are, to smile, to offer some good words, to do a small service. The ways in which we care for

others in the world carries more value if we bring all of ourselves to it. I learned in Buddhism sometimes to hand a gift to someone, even a small cup of tea, with two hands, not with one hand, not with one hand while looking elsewhere, but to really two hands, to bring all of ourselves here.

So may it be that our ability to sit in the middle of the world awake to all of it, that our way to care for the world is more complete, more whole, with more offered in the fullness of our being. May it be that this practice that we do supports us in how we can care for our world. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.