

Guided Meditation: Dwelling in Emptiness

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Hello and welcome. For this week, the topic is a very important one in the span of Buddhist traditions: that of emptiness. Often in ordinary English usage, emptiness is considered to be a very unfortunate thing. When things, the emptiness of a meaningless life, for example, it's empty of value, empty of meaning, kind of depressing. But in Buddhism it's the opposite. It's actually an inspiring topic, an enlivening topic, a topic that in a sense gives meaning, gives purpose, gives understanding in a particular way.

It's a little bit of a strange, paradoxical topic because the word emptiness is an abstract noun, so it's not pointing to something concrete. But it's also not pointing to something that's just conceptual or an abstract idea. It's pointing to a way of being aware where awareness doesn't grab a hold of anything: the knowing, the seeing, the feeling. It's a little bit akin to coming into a great high mountain vista. You can certainly look at the mountains and scenery below and the clouds above. But you can also look into empty space above, maybe at a night sky, just lots of emptiness, and the eyes kind of see, but don't fixate on anything.

See, but don't take something as an object. The eyes float freely. It's very relaxing. In this way, space can be the object, or silence can be an object, or stillness may be an object—something where the mind doesn't latch on, doesn't hold on, doesn't stay. The emptiness allows the attention to stay very soft, relaxed, open, because it doesn't fixate, it doesn't pick up, it doesn't put away. It's kind of like it's aware of the space between things.

It's aware of the space just beyond the edges of our thinking, the space that's always here. In a room where there's lots of space, maybe a big cathedral or large cavernous place, it's inspiring to all the space and openness that's there. But you're also knowing other things in this area, yet you stay relaxed and soft. All the great space in the big room creates a context where the mind doesn't latch on. It kind of floats or takes it all in, and it provides a sense of expansiveness.

So to assume a meditation posture. Sometimes the posture is such a great support for meditation. The posture can evoke certain things. We can sit in a confident posture. We can sit in a posture where we feel rooted, connected to the place we're in. We can sit in a posture where we feel like we're inhabiting our full size.

That we feel like we're big from the inside out, independent of how we are sized compared to others. Just that kind of, so the chest is kind of a little bit, there's space for the chest, not to puff it up, but to feel that we fill our space, we are large. We're certainly gigantic in relationship to an ant, or a squirrel, or maybe even a newborn baby. And to gently close the eyes, and as we breathe in, the expansion of the ribcage, front and back, is an expansion into the fullness, the largeness of ourselves here and now. To feel that expansion and contraction of the ribcage without thinking about it, without commentary or judgments, to feel the sense of expansion with breathing in, settling as you breathe out, as you exhale relaxing the body and appreciating any relaxing you do that leaves an absence, some small beginning of an absence of tension, tightness.

As you exhale, there's the absence, the disappearing of the inhale. The absence of inhaling as you exhale. As you inhale, the absence of an exhale. This sense of absence is a place where the mind, the attention, there's nothing there to fixate. In the exhale, there's no fixation on inhale because it's not there. But you might have a sense or feel for this absence of exhale, of inhale as you exhale, how there's nothing to hold on to.

No inhale to hold on to as you exhale. As you inhale, no experience of exhaling is left to fixate on, feel, focus on. Then as you exhale now, relax the thinking mind, soften, quiet your thinking. If you can let go of your thoughts, in the absence of thinking, absence of particular things you thought about, the mind doesn't fixate, doesn't pick up what is now gone. Sitting here quietly, there is space around you, within you, maybe with the eyes closed. There's no boundary to that space, no edges, and how the imagination of space going outward into the universe.

Space is mostly an absence. Even though there's a presence of things, there's also the vastness of space where the mind does not attach to anything, cling to anything. Nothing there to land on for attention. Allow the mind, attention, to feel, to sense what it's like to be aware without landing anywhere, picking anything up, without focusing or fixating while you're aware in a simple, relaxed way. You're breathing your body so that a non-fixating, non-clinging awareness floats on top of everything, equally floats in emptiness, absence and presence. Whatever you're focused on, concerned with, thinking about, oriented towards feeling and sensing, it's surrounded by space, stillness, silence, beyond the edges of thought,

below it, above it.

Let your attention include space, emptiness, as a way for attention to be soft and relaxed, easy. Kind of like being in a vast, large, silent cathedral, a sacred space informed by all the space, nothing to cling to. Vast emptiness. Whatever the mind knows, whatever the mind is aware of, whatever it feels, it appears in the space of the mind, almost like a dream, almost like a hologram, almost like it has no substance or weight. The experience might have weight and substance, what you see, what you think about. But if you get intimately into how it's known in the mind, how it's thought about, in the mind itself, the vast spacious mind, the knowing, the registering, the sense, the deep kind of way in which sensing travels into the mind, everything is insubstantial, soft, empty of substance, empty of solidity, empty of a certain kind of existence, just like a hologram, is and is not.

So the ways things are known arise in the mind, is and is not. In that emptiness of the mind, there is freedom, freedom of not clinging, landing, picking anything up. In the absence of clinging, fixation, there is a vast open space for awareness, for attention, for presence that can be brought into the world, into our meetings with others. Vast emptiness in which full presence without clinging is possible. May this vast emptiness, empty of clinging, empty of contraction, empty of making, making things up about things, just being present in a relaxed way, may it be the means by which we bring our love, our care, goodwill, compassion, into this world. May it be how we hold a whole world in our hearts, a heart that's big enough and empty enough for all the suffering, all the joys.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you. Thank you.