

Guided Meditation: Harmonizing with Not-Self

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Hello, welcome, and welcome to this meditation session, which is meditation is also meant to be a deep welcoming to yourself. Hello, welcome. That you are being welcomed, all of you, into your awareness, into your attention, into your body, into this time and place here. All of you is allowed to be here, is welcomed. And the welcome is so big in meditation, sitting down to meditate, closing the eyes, that maybe, just maybe, it's okay to forget yourself. Forget yourself in the terms of your usual preoccupations about yourself and judgments about yourself and usual orientations about your needs and responsibilities.

In other words, it could be seen as kind of a vacation from self. And the activity of the mind that's preoccupied with self is put to rest for a while. And the topic for today is emptiness, which is related to the topic of not-self. And the teaching of not-self evokes a lot of self in people, a lot of protesting, and that, you know, there can't be no self, so that this is crazy that the Buddhists say so. But what I'd like to propose is that... to ask the question, is there or is there not a self? It's not actually a Buddhist question.

The Buddha actually specifically discourages people from that very question, those two questions. And it's kind of like asking, if you're employed, is there work or is there not work? Right. And if you say there is work, it might imply there's always work. You know, 24-7, there's work to be done. There's work. Because that's the only option. There is or there is not. The other option is there work. One would say, yes, there is when I'm at work. There is during my work hours.

And when I'm not at my work, I have a job, very fortunate job. I don't have to take it home with me. And there's no work, then there's just, you know, just the domestic tasks. There's, you know, my time off. Is there not fear? Yes, there's fear, but that doesn't imply there's fear all the time. It's not is or is not. It's sometimes there's fear. When the conditions come together in a certain way, there's fear. Other times there's not.

Is there, is there, is there, is there, is there not a self? It's not an interesting question. Maybe there's a kind of self sometimes, and other times it's not there. And in meditation, it's a time for a profound vacation, a profound resting of that part of the mental processing that's organized around self-selfing, ideas of self, self and others, that it's possible to put that to rest temporarily without betraying the self, without claiming there is no self or feeling like we've abandoned ourselves. It's rather, it's a profound way of taking a vacation, of resting, of experiencing something radically different that you can carry back with you into your life, into understanding... something about the nature of the construction of self, the uses of self, which we live our life with.

So to assume a meditation posture, and part of the opportunity in this posture in which you're going to welcome yourself fully is to have a posture of confidence. In Zen practice where there was a lot of emphasis on a posture... It was literally a posture of confidence. And even if you didn't feel confident, the posture brought some along anyway. And the posture of confidence that's more effective, more capable, more something there into which to welcome all of who you are, a confidence that can hold all the challenges and difficulties and emotions that move through you, rather than having a posture that's giving in to how you're feeling.

Have a posture that's bigger than how you're feeling so it can hold how you are. Maybe with a chest a little bit more open and confident. Maybe there's a way of drawing back your head a little bit and lifting the back of the head, where the head meets the vertebrae of the neck. So the head gets, back of the head gets lifted, and maybe the chin gets, falls down a little bit more towards the chest. Just a little bit. A neck of confidence. And to do something with your hands, where the hands themselves are placed in a confident position. For some people that's having the hands face down on the thighs. And there are other ways also, but a posture of confidence.

And then one of the reasons to take a few long breaths at the beginning is to do those breaths as an expression of confidence. Here I am. I will breathe into this time and place in a fullness of being. Full breathing, relaxing on the exhale, and then letting the breathing return to normal. And to feel anywhere in the body where there's holding and tension, maybe feeling it on the inhale, relaxing on the exhale. And if tension doesn't relax, soften just beyond the edges of the tension.

Feeling the thinking mind as you breathe in, and as you breathe out, soften the thinking mind. Relaxing the thinking mind, and settling into the confident body. It may be as if the awareness is like water flowing downward. Let your awareness flow down into your torso to where

it's most comfortable to feel the movements of breathing, breathing in and breathing out, experiencing the sensations of breathing in your torso, in the belly, the chest, diaphragm, noticing what sensations of breathing occur by themselves without you willing them or making them happen. The particular sensation is that, in a certain way, who you are as a self, whatever that is, is not actively involved, almost as if those sensations are there without the self, just sensations.

And as you're aware of breathing, as you know it or feel it or watch the breathing, is there any feeling or sense of place inside that is the doer of mindfulness? Is there any subtle location from which you're doing awareness, a place of a little bit of a gathering together of energy or tension, pressure, a little location where there's some emotion that comes along with the doer, the watcher, the being the feeler of it all. And if there is, on the exhale, soften, relax, the sensations connected to self, to being the doer, the experiencer, relax on the exhale. On the inhale, allow those sensations of self to open, to evaporate, to spread out wide, relaxing and releasing, and then sensing, feeling the sensations of breathing, but allowing that sensing to be in the very spot where the sensations occur. So sensing can occur free of self. No reference to me, myself and mine. Just sensing.

As you're aware, what comes into awareness before the self gets recruited? What nature of knowing, sensing, feeling occurs independent of self and self-concept ideas without activating that location of the doer or the experiencer. Relaxing into the awareness that is natural, doing itself. Allowing awareness to do its own awareing without any need for you to do awareness, to do mindfulness. All you need to do is allow, get out of the way, being aware how awareness is empty of self, sensing is empty of self, how self is empty of self, how the absence of self and selfing is a vacation, a relief, an awareness where whatever is left of self, whatever sensations and presence, contraction there is of self, selfing, where it can evaporate, dissolve into this vast, confident experience of emptiness of self.

And for a couple of minutes, harmonize yourself with emptiness. Align yourself. Float in the current of all that is empty of self. Vast emptiness. And as we come to the end of the sitting, there's a way in which kindness, warmth, friendliness, can flow better in the absence of self-preoccupation for these next minutes to trust the kindness, the goodwill that can flow free, free, openly, when there's not the fear or self or... needs interfering with the free flow of love and to have an open heart, open to this wide, wondrous, wonderful, suffering human world. Keep your heart open. Keep that selfless care and kindness, kindness which is not about you, but about goodwill itself.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings

be free. Thank you.