

Guided Meditation: Gentling the Heart

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Hello and welcome to this meditation session where the orientation now is towards meditating with love, with loving-kindness, with *mettā*.

But sometimes it's helpful not to do that directly, to create, set up a foundation for it. And the foundation for meditating in the context of love is also same as setting up meditation for the context of mindfulness, of awareness. And so that'll be the focus for today. And the kind of principle here is when we sit down to meditate, we're not continuing business as usual. We're not kind of just letting the mind freely do whatever it was doing earlier, just like we don't do that with our body.

If we spend our day surfing the web or if we spend the day busily kind of tapping our feet and fingers being nervous, shaking our legs. And when we sit down to meditate, we don't continue tapping our fingers or swinging our legs or grimacing or complaining and doing all kinds of things. We stop that in order to be still with the body. And the same way with the mind, we don't want to repress anything. We don't want to deny anything or cover anything over. But there are simple ways of shifting the orientation of how we are when we sit down to meditate.

And to do this consciously, to do this clearly, as a way of deep respect, deep care for how it is to enter into this deeper contemplative connection to oneself. And so that'll be part of what I offer today. So to assume a meditation posture, take the time to assume a posture, to enter into a physical posture that for you represents or expresses some sense of strength, some sense of being a little bit showing up in a kind of established, strong way where the posture somehow is confident. You don't have to feel confident, but what would a confident posture be that's not overdone? An alert posture.

And there's something about sitting upright, or if you're lying down, adjusting your back, your shoulder blades, your shoulders, rolling them back down so that there's an openness and a confidence in the area around the heart, rather than being mind led by the mind, driven by the mind, pushing forward with the mind. Lead with the heart. And is there some posture of confidence that opens the chest, that opens the heart area, gently close the eyes? I've heard people refer to loving-kindness as a gentling of the heart.

So then gently, not too much, maybe slowly, taking some fuller breaths. And then as you exhale, long, relaxed exhale, where you're gentling your body, your torso, taking some strong, long, deeper breaths, just long enough still to be comfortable, relaxing. And as one of the advantages of this deeper breaths at the beginning is the ways in which it opens or spreads the area around the heart, the middle of the chest. And then letting the breathing return to normal. And is there some simple way where there can be a gentling of the breathing or maybe to allow a gentleness in how breathing expands and contracts, moves the chest, the torso, the belly.

And as you're breathing, as if you're breathing with all of who you are. Notice if there's any way that you feel afraid or anxious, apprehensive. And if that's the case, kind of gently touch the anxiety, gently feel it. It's okay. And having acknowledged its place in Now, whether you feel any anxiety or not, see if you can shift your attention, shift the way you are, to feeling safe here and now.

There might be reasons to be anxious, reasons to be afraid in life, but there's no need to do that, be involved in that, to feed that. Here and now, in this setting, with the meditation, and see if you can find places in your body where you feel safe. It could be something like the back of your elbows, could be your toes or your fingers. Maybe the lips touching. Chances are that aside from what you're thinking about or imagining or projecting into the world, in these few minutes we're sitting here in the space just around your body, just the place you're sitting.

For these minutes it's safe. For these minutes here. Recognize how there is nothing to be afraid of in the moment, in this location. And let other fears you have, have their place, but recede to the background. Switching to how nourishing, to how supportive it is, to feel some modicum of safety here and now, maybe some places in the body, and you breathe with that safety.

Maybe even there's a gentling in your breathing, in the ways that breathing is gentle, or there is some degree of feeling safe, peaceful, content. In a way, place yourself, center yourself, on how you can access a feeling, a sense of safety, of peace, that here and now things are

well, well enough that rather than being fed the opposite of safety and peace, rather than being preoccupied, occupy the place where there's peace, safety within you, from which you can breathe, some from within... you can be aware of whatever is happening, shifting from preoccupation to a peaceful gentling of the heart, as if the peace, the safety that's here, is here to gentle the heart.

And is there something inside of you that is touched by the gentling of the heart? If you can feel some gentleness of the heart, around the heart center, the emotional center within, in this safety and peace. Is there anything for you corresponding to love that is not something you do, but something that shines, something that radiates, a gentle warmth, a gentle light, gentle glow or vibration? Like you're sitting, taking in the warmth of the sun on a cold day, you're going to be able to do it. Sit and take in the warmth, the glow, the gentleness of whatever for you corresponds to love, kindness, compassion, care, breathing with it, letting it spread through your body.

Allowing yourself to be as simple and gentle as you can, a simplicity of being, not something you make happen, but something you feel your way into. Where is the simplest, gentlest way that exists within you? And to breathe with that, to let the gentleness, the simplicity, softness, be allowed to touch you, nourish you, warm you with every breath.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to let the thinking mind become quiet or to shift your attention to that deeper sensitivity to your heart center, your emotional center, that is silent of thoughts, that exists and glows and radiates, vibrates without thinking necessary, independent of your thoughts. Feel the silent way that gentleness, softness, kindness, love can have a more central place when we feel safe, peaceful, quiet within. And at the end of a meditation, it's invaluable to express the connection that meditation has with our care, our goodwill for the world. And I'll offer you a few words, drop a few words into the space, and see if you can imagine, feel, radiate the sentiment of these words out into the world, as if you're touching your neighbors, your communities, the world around you, with these sentiments, happy, safe, peaceful, kindness, the gentleness of your heart.

May it be that individually and collectively we give time and space to our goodwill to spread the warmth of goodwill throughout the world. May all beings be happy and may all of us be happy and may we live for the welfare and happiness of all. Music Thank you.