

Guided Meditation-Loving Oneself

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Hello and welcome. And the topic of these days having to do with this wonderfully broad and somewhat vague word, concept of love... is related to how deeply intimate this practice of Buddhism, mindfulness, loving-kindness, *Brahmavihāras*, how deeply intimate it can go to some of the deepest places within, the most intimate, sometimes private places within, the places of some of the greatest beauty and greatest sorrow that we carry with us. And that part of the orientation of Dharma practice, this practice we do, is to care for the depth of who we are, the depth of other people, to understand that the surface presentations, that what we present, what we see in others, represents maybe the tip of an iceberg of something that's quite deep and deep history of challenges and joys and losses, and capacities of deep peace and capacities of deep love and joy that we sometimes touch into, sometimes we can't. And so to be in this world with a profound sense of almost reverence, almost care, deep care for the preciousness of it. And that's how we can sit.

That meditation is not about simply stress reduction. It's not about becoming calmer. Of course, that's part of it. But the essence of this kind of Dharma practice meditation is to sit and practice, to be able to make room for, to touch, to care for, to orient ourselves to the present moment so that we can meet, be with what is most valuable here with us, an attitude of deep care and reverence for this life and for ourselves and for others.

So to begin gently closing your eyes, gently becoming aware of how you're breathing without breathing any particular way. Just how is it to be in this breathing body? How is it to check in to this human being that you are, the human being that you're closest to physically and maybe emotionally? All human beings are valuable, important. All human beings, including oneself.

Breathing in a simple way, eyes closed. Where do you go inside of you? So you begin approaching this sense of care and value and preciousness of being alive. Where is it that you

feel there's an aliveness within that reminds you of the preciousness of life, that reminds you that you too can be cared for, can be touched. You too can be held in a deep, caring attention.

I talked to someone recently who lives, spends time in the Tenderloin in San Francisco, the place where there's a lot of homeless. And he sits with them and talks to him. And all he says he does is listen to them. And they thank him so deeply, people who are in all kinds of different difficult states of mind, to be listened to respectfully. Yeah. And to hear and now with yourself.

To think of meditation as a deep silent listening to what is deep within you. Here, now, gently, ever so gently, to appreciate an inner connection to breathing and to breathe a little bit deeper, fuller and relax, soften on the exhale. Just a little bit fuller than usual, as if the breathing is taking you by your hand and gently guiding you, leading you into yourself, lowering yourself into your center, your heart, the grounding place deep inside, as if you're approaching what is most intimate, the most where you're going to listen from and what you're going to listen to, a silent presence. Letting your breathing return to normal. Maybe with the exhale being still, a gentle guidance, guiding you deeper and deeper inside, allowing the exhale to be an invitation to quiet the mind, the thinking mind, so you can better sense and feel and listen to the most intimate deepest places within. However... accessible it is.

And as we continue, you might quietly say to yourself the word care, either verbally or a kind of non-verbal way of bringing forth or naming or recognizing a deep potential for caring, like loving care, caring love for yourself with every breath. Maybe the inhale, maybe the exhale, maybe both is the gentle wave that carries your care, a care that can only be in the present moment, a care which is lost if we wander off in thought. Stay here, offer caring attention to whatever is, even to the wandering off mind. Perhaps allowing care and love or kindness be the doorway to a deep present moment attention, deep connection to yourself with breathing being the invitation to go through that door and to sit in kindness, in care, in the middle of this living moment of now.

It's so easy to be identified with our thoughts, identified with our emotions and feelings, with our stories. For these few minutes here, shift your identity to the soft, gentle way of care, love and kindness, caring attention, kind mindfulness, loving presence. Let that be what is the center of all things.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, to begin here with caring for yourself from the depth of your being, to care for your body, your heart, your mind, where caring means to value, to appreciate, to love, to take care of, and to do that for yourself. To cherish yourself, because

that is the basis for your care to spread further, to not be limited or held back by yourself, but to care deeply, to be present. So the care as it becomes unlimited, spreading outward into the world, where there is some aspect, some core, some... nature of every human being on the planet that is worthy of care, worthy of kindness, worthy of offering a basic human dignity. Everyone will benefit from being listened to by someone who can listen deeply.

May it be that our care, our caring capacity to know and to listen, may it help us to have kindness and friendliness to everyone we encounter. May our practice of meditation support us to be open and boundless in our ability to value every person we encounter. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.