

Guided Meditation: Kindness

Gil Fronsdal

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Hello and welcome to this morning meditation at the Insight Meditation Center. And believe it or not, there's the first little indications of spring here that the chaparral current is beginning to flower in the hills. So as we begin, the focus now is turning more and more to love, to goodwill. And today it's goodwill. And try to choose a relatively modest social attitude we can have, a way we can orient ourselves towards others and the world, and to do so with goodwill, to do so with a basic friendliness, and to stay close to that, to breathe with it, to evoke it, to stay. And we find the Buddha frequently teaching the meditation on kindness, on friendliness, on goodwill, and that it's a practice that leads to a certain form of liberation.

So this idea of basic simple goodwill is not a small thing. It's phenomenally beneficial compared to some of the alternatives that we live by. It's much better than ill will. It's much better than complaining or annoyance. It's much better than living anxiously, much better than living with fear. And the goodwill in the ancient tradition is seen to have a tremendous influence on the world around us.

That this is not an inconsequential thing, to cultivate our capacity for goodwill. It's a way of benefiting our world, which is very different than trying to benefit the world with ill will, with fear. So I'll offer you a very simple practice of goodwill today. And so to begin by assuming a meditation posture. And I begin every meditation by this statement, assume a meditation posture. It's actually quite important.

Whatever posture you take, that you do so, you assume it, you enter into it with care, with mindfulness, with goodwill. It's a way of caring for yourself and gently closing the eyes. And without trying to do anything particular, except gently approach, let your awareness gently approach the experience of your body breathing, to familiarize yourself with the experience the body has with this life-sustaining rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, of expansion,

contraction, lifting and falling of chest and belly, and to allow that rhythm to be felt tenderly, carefully, appreciatively. And if there's some way that's easy to quiet the thinking mind, slow it down, make it calmer, so that your attention can be more sensitive to the body's experience of breathing. And to settle in more, gently take some deeper breaths, fuller breaths, tenderly. And as you exhale, maybe longer exhale than usual, relax your body, soften with a few more deeper breaths, comfortably full, deep.

As you exhale, relax and soften the thinking mind and letting your breathing return to normal. And with a normal breathing, feel the area in the middle of your chest, general area of the heart center, emotional center. And as you breathe in, feel that area. And as you exhale, soften and relax the heart center. If there's some way you're bracing yourself against life, can you ease up a little bit as you exhale?

And then is there some place inside you that you associated with goodwill, the warmth of friendliness, the glow of kindness, maybe a sweetness and willingness of goodwill, maybe a place within that's associated with gentleness, tenderness, softness. Maybe a refuge within where there's a feeling of safety, a feeling of goodness. And if there is such a place, gently as you breathe in, let the good sensations that can reside there spread a little bit outward into your body. And as you exhale, relax the thinking mind. So there's a settling of the mind, of attention, into this place of goodness.

And then as you inhale, if you'd like, either verbally or non-verbally, gently say to yourself a single word that evokes for you or speaks to you of goodwill, friendliness, kindness. It could be the word kind, good for goodwill, friend for friendliness. Some word gently, like it's a gentle, soft weight of a butterfly. Say this word on the inhale and allow the sentiment, the glow, the radiance, the goodness of that word, what it awakens in you, to grow with the inhale and spread a warmth out into your whole body and beyond. And as you exhale, to settle into whatever tenderness or gentleness associated with this word, love, goodwill, kindness, friendliness, with every inhale repeating the word, as if you're offering this sentiment out into the world, radiating from your soft center.

Maybe as you say your word, you can think of a person who it's easiest for you to have this sentiment, and maybe having this person in mind allows for the spread of goodness associated with this word, to spread and grow and expand. A sweetness, a radiance, a warmth, a light, letting the mind be soft and tender as it says your word. Maybe say it slowly. Maybe having a very slight smile as you say your word.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, to consider for a few moments and the hundreds of us that are here, sitting with a practice of kindness, friendliness. And of each of us brought

that friendliness and kindness to two people today. Something simple and ordinary, ordinary goodwill, to brighten up the day of two other people. How this radiance, how this web of human connectivity can carry with it basic friendliness and goodwill out into the world. May it be that the practice we do spreads benefit and welfare.

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