

Guided Meditation: Friendliness when Undistracted

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January 20, 2026

Keywords: mettā, loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness, heart, love, kindness, meditation, beloved friend, suffering

So hello and welcome to this 30-minute meditation. And the theme for beginning of this year is love. And right now it's *mettā*. And I want to read to you an ancient description of *mettā*, or *mettā* practice. And the text goes, and how does one abide with one's mind accompanied with *mettā*, with goodwill, kindness, loving-kindness? How does one dwell with a mind like this?

Just as one would feel friendliness on seeing a dearly beloved friend, so does one extend *mettā* to all creatures, all living beings.

And this idea of seeing a dearly beloved friend, one of the characteristics of that is that you don't have to work on it. It isn't like you have to plan ahead and get your friendliness kind of up and going, and you see the person, and you reason out, you know, who it is, and your history, and yes, you should be friendly to this person. It's more of a natural movement. It's more of a spontaneous movement. It's more of a just what the heart, what the inner life does.

It has warmth, it has appreciation, it has a kind of opening up, a delight, a goodwill, just wanting to support, not even wanting support or help or to do something for your friend, but just, of course you would. You'd offer them tea. You would do whatever they need. You just wouldn't be, almost wouldn't be helping. You're just doing it with them. It's kind of this warm-heartedness, generosity of heart.

And so this idea of *mettā* or love, it bumps up again, or it overlaps with a whole slew of human social attitudes, social emotions, exactly where one begins and one ends and exactly which one we're talking about, is not, you know, so important. What's important here is the almost naturalness of it. Or say it differently, what's important is what you don't do. You don't stay

preoccupied, you don't stay distracted, you don't focus on the ill-will, you don't focus on the anxiety, you don't focus on the greed or lust that might be.

The focus is almost like letting go of all that, opening up all that, kind of opening the field of the heart, opening the field of the body, opening to the capacity to sense, know and feel, and be open and available, being open and receptive, being open, quiet, sensitive to resonate with someone else. To allow another person to be, to allow yourself to feel to someone else in an undistracted mind and an unpreoccupied heart. So what is it that arises when you get out of the way for your heart? You get out of the way. What is it that maybe is natural, almost natural, to occur for you? What level of friendliness, basic goodwill, basic kindness.

So this is why it's so important to know, be mindful of ourselves, the tricks of the mind, the ways that we get caught up. So we can gently put them aside and they invite the heart to have an opportunity to be sensitive, to be available, to resonate for the heart, the quiet, friendly heart to smile, to be able. So gently closing your eyes and assuming a meditation posture. And since the emphasis here is letting go of anything that's a distraction, so we can discover the friendliness or the warmth, the kindness of the heart in and of itself when it is at ease, settled, that you might now take a few longer, deeper breaths. And as you exhale, gently invite distractions to depart, to let go, to relax, for whatever you're concerned with that's not here and now.

It's okay to have those concerns maybe, but you have something better to do now, more important, and that is to attend to the goodness of your own heart. The kind of goodness that would be there if you saw, met a dearly beloved friend, maybe someone you haven't seen for a while. So letting the breathing return to normal and to soften your belly, relax your shoulders. Might be possible to soften the fingers and the hands, maybe adjust their position. Maybe it's possible to soften, relax the thighs and down your legs. Maybe it's possible to soften, relax your lower back.

Maybe it's possible to soften the muscles of your face. Invite the muscles of your face to let go and soften, not work so hard. It might be possible to soften the thinking mind. Relax. And then finally to soften in your heart. Any resistance, any tightness. Let it gently soften, not all at once, little moments at a time.

Then become aware of the movements of your chest as you breathe. Is there any change in those movements if you relax your belly? Feeling their gentle or not gentle lifting and expanding of the chest as you breathe in, and the falling, coming back together of the chest as you breathe out. And for the next four or five breaths, as you exhale, gently let go of what you're thinking about and let go into the sensations of your chest.

And then remember or imagine that you're meeting a dearly beloved friend with which you have a simple and uncomplicated relationship. If you are undistracted, unpreoccupied, is there then a feeling of friendliness and warmth, goodwill? Is there an attitude of appreciation, delight, a resonance, a gentle leaning forward, being available? Maybe something that delights, something inside of you delights, if it hears from you, yes, this is good. What is, what warmth, what in the family of love or friendship?

Is there in your heart, in your inner life, in your mind, when you're quiet and mindful and available for the present moment, what warmth that is there you don't have to work for? Though maybe you can stay close to it. If ever so gently you have a simple word, take every cycle of breath, the beginning or end. You gently whisper this word to yourself, to remember to stay close, friendliness, kindness, sitting quietly, doing next to nothing, maybe not even thinking, so that you can sense and feel a natural warmth, a natural attitude, idea, feeling of friendliness or goodwill, as you would for a dear friend.

But maybe that doesn't need an object, a person. It's just the goodness of your own heart. When it's at ease, relaxed, breathe with that goodwill. Breathe with it, feel it, gently touch it with a whispering word, *mettā*, goodwill. It can be a radical thing, an inspiring thing, to recognize there is a goodwill within us that doesn't have to be created or made or even evoked.

It's mostly a matter of getting out of the way, being relaxed and undistracted, being at ease and attentive, a basic friendliness that might arise in seeing a young child playing on the swings, happy. A person smilingly happy, gardening in their front yard, who looks up and says hello with a smile, and you smile back. May it be that we make ourselves available for friendliness, for love. May it be that we're motivated to live a life that's not distracted, not preoccupied, so that we can love better, love more, confident that friendliness, love, care, kindness is one of the greatest things this world needs.

May we share our friendliness with all beings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free of suffering, oppression, and poverty. May all beings be free of loneliness and alienation. And may our goodwill contribute to the ending of such suffering. Thank you.