

Guided Meditation: Ease with Discomfort

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Hello, and greetings from IMC, or I'm very happy to be back after being off elsewhere teaching a two-week retreat. And so we're continuing with the transition, continuing with the series on love, with a transition. Having introduced the topic of love more generally, starting in January, going into the topic of goodwill, *mettā*, loving-kindness, and spending a fair amount of time with that, meditating with it, now we move to *karuṇā*, usually translated as compassion. And compassion is in the family of love that Buddhism puts tremendous emphasis on.

And there's not a few people who think that *karuṇā*, compassion, is an outgrowth of *mettā*, that having the basic goodwill and care, love for people, when we encounter suffering, then that goodwill becomes compassion. But the reference point for compassion is the well-being, the joy, the sweetness of goodwill, of kindness that's really well integrated and suffusive in a person's disposition, being, body. So that when we encounter suffering, we are not victims of suffering. We're not troubled by it. But we are able to continue with the open-handedness, the ease, the well-being of *mettā* with *karuṇā*.

And this is part of the, I think, one of the great delights and treasures and challenges of compassion, is to discover how a genuine, meaningful compassion, *karuṇā*, can exist in a way that we feel quite at ease. And so what that requires is an ability to be mindful with things that are difficult, with discomfort, to have an ease in being mindful of discomfort, to be comfortable with things that are uncomfortable, not to diminish them or ignore them or overlook them or somehow artificially pretend they're better than they actually are. But rather, so we can meet the discomfort in a healthy, good, complete way, in a way that we are not diminished, we're not divided, we're not truncated because of the ways in which we contract or become anxious or resist what's happening.

So the basic meditation today is the meditation on being comfortable with discomfort. And I hope that what we evoke here is not going to be a huge discomfort for you, but rather one

that you can explore the edges of, of how to sit peacefully in mindfulness with what is uncomfortable.

So to begin, making yourself comfortable with alert, balanced, and comfortable posture, somehow adjusting your posture, swaying back and forth, forward and back, sideways, and settling in in your best approximation of a comfortable, alert posture. And then gently closing your eyes and taking some moments to appreciate the kind of presence, maybe stability, maybe groundedness, that the body provides. Not all of the body, but maybe there are some places, how your weight settles on your seat, on the floor, how all your weight is gently pulled, invited by gravity to settle downward, to be a little bit more settled, grounded, maybe relaxing the shoulders. And then you can do it where relaxation is yielding to gravity. The gentle pull, relaxing the belly, softening in the belly, and relaxing any tension or pressure in the area of your head, around the eyes and forehead, the jaws, and deep in the head and the thinking mind, relaxing the thinking pressure or tension.

The body. And then within the body, as part of the body, feeling, experiencing the body's way of breathing. Some of the ways the body breathes, some of the movements, sensations are relatively large and some relatively subtle. Which is nicer to hang out with? The larger or the more subtle? Some of the sensations of breathing are relatively more pleasant than other sensations. Allow yourself to enjoy the pleasantness of breathing, even if it's just very fleeting or subtle.

Letting the thinking mind become quieter so you can better sense and feel the body breathing. Quieting the thinking mind so you can feel and sense whatever is easy, easeful in the body, in the breathing, allowing your breathing to support your further relaxing into an easy, relaxed attentiveness, easy, relaxed attending to breathing in and breathing out. And then notice how you're aware, how you're attending. And are there ways that you're attending to breathing and to your experience which is stressful or straining? And are there other ways, some things you can be aware of, that is easeful, easy, moment after moment? And can you shift from less effort in being aware to more ease, an easy, relaxed receptivity, openness to the present moment, easy awareness of what is easy about breathing?

And then without straining or pushing, resisting, in an easy way, with an easy breathing, become aware of something in your body which is uncomfortable. Maybe not what is most uncomfortable, but mildly uncomfortable. And experiment with an easy attention, maybe with each breath, breathing in and breathing out. Breathe with the discomfort, breathe through it. But stay easy, stay relaxed, stay receptive without seeing the discomfort as a problem or an issue to be solved. Just something to sense and feel easily.

It's okay, feeling discomfort in your body, however mild it might be, feel it lightly, openly, as if you're giving it permission to be there. No problem, just something to attend to, to be present for. As if attending awareness is all the medicine that's needed. And can you imagine an easy, open, receptive way of experiencing suffering? Maybe at a time that you're not needed to alleviate it, but rather to have a simple presence, attention. Maybe accompanying simple, easeful presence for suffering.

Maybe with a friend who asks you to go for a walk so they're not alone in their emotional challenges. And they most need someone who's at ease, relaxed, calm, who can be easy, not troubled.

And then as we come to the end of the sitting, to relax often with the exhale and to let your mind's eye expand outward into this suffering world and gaze upon it easefully. Not to be dismissive of it or to be Pollyannish, but as if the very goal that we want for the world, to have everyone be at ease and not suffer, is enabled and encouraged for the world if we can do that in relationship to the world's suffering. If we can gaze upon the world's suffering easefully, caringly, knowing its suffering, having compassion for that suffering, in an easeful way. Maybe for now, we can let there be an easeful awareness of suffering in the world.

If we think that this is the preparation for being involved effectively in actions that help alleviate suffering, we are more effective if we can act from a place of calm and ease. And so gazing upon the world with ease, the suffering of the world, wishing it to be different, wishing there to be an end of suffering, may all beings be happy, may all beings be safe, may all beings be peaceful, may all beings be free, and may we all contribute to that possibility. Thank you.