

## Guided Meditation: Simple Presence for Discomfort

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Hello and welcome to our weekday meditation. The topic these days is compassion. One of the really important parts of compassion is the ability to offer presence. Not just simply be present for suffering, but offer presence for it.

The general standard, or the reference point, for compassion that I like is when we're in the presence of it personally. It's not something we see at a distance or read about, but that we're with someone who is suffering. When it's at a distance, the equivalent of being present for something is to be a witness. To take time to witness, to offer presence, take time to allow the suffering of the world to be seen clearly, to be understood, to be felt, so that something deep inside of us can be triggered. Not the surface reactions, not the surface reactivities, not the surface fears and imaginations, but some of the deeper capacities to care, to have a deep rapport, have an attunement with others.

A deeper capacity to have a respect for the people who suffer, and the respect that translates to being present. One of the key ways to learn this, and a very important aspect of all this, is to be present for our own suffering. To have a rapport with it, to have an ability to witness it, to witness it from a deep place within. Not from the surface reactions, not from the places that we become afraid or become anxious, or somehow the surface hurts, where maybe our surface identities that we've developed over a lifetime can easily be threatened. But someplace deep inside that's not easily threatened. A place of confidence, a place of stability.

Not easy to find, not easy to have happen. But this is why Buddhist practice is so important. It's important not to leave compassion to chance, not to just accept how we are in a certain way, that we will have the best form of compassion if we encounter suffering, but to work cultivating it and developing ourselves, growing, so that we have the ability to offer profound presence, profound witnessing of our own suffering and the suffering of others.

So take a meditation posture, assume a posture of presence, a posture where in the posture itself there's an expression that conveys presence. If someone were to see you meditating, would they see a posture of presence, of being present, with the posture demonstrating attentiveness to the present moment? For many people, it's to sit a little bit straighter, perhaps. Maybe there's a kind of lift in the spine that travels up between the shoulder blades, lifting up, that goes up through the spine in the neck and tips the head forward and down a little bit. The chin comes a little closer to the chest, maybe. And maybe in such a way that the chest is more open.

Some people might call it a vulnerable position of the chest, more exposed. I like to think of it as a heightened sensitivity that we welcome, heightened availability to be present for what's going on. And then within this posture, offer attentiveness, offer presence to how the body breathes. Slowly, mindfully, take some comfortable, fuller inhales, relaxing the body on the exhale. Both of these movements of fuller breath invite a greater connection and awareness to the body, and so does relaxing the body. The places that relax tend to become a little bit more sensitive or awake to sensations, if nothing else, the goodness, the pleasure of relaxing.

And let breathing return to normal. There's many different ways to experience breathing. It can be different parts of the body that move as you breathe. It could be the upper chest, the mid-chest, the diaphragm area, the whole belly area. It can even be way down in the pelvic cavity. It can be the back rib cage, the movements of the shoulders, the air going in and out through the nostrils and the back of the throat.

Where do you feel your breathing, the body's sensations of breathing, that's most pleasant, most comfortable for you? Maybe it's where it's subtlest. Maybe it's where it's clearest. Maybe it's a different place than where you usually feel it. Is there any place in the body connected to breathing that offers reassurance, calmness, or stability? And if it does, breathe with it, breathe through it. Allow yourself to feel the calming effect, the reassuring effect, the stabilizing in the present moment.

And as you breathe in and breathe out, with a kind of rhythm of breathing, on the inhale, feel the tensions or pressure, contractions that might be in the thinking mind. And on the exhale, feel that more carefully. Offer a witnessing, a knowing of what it feels like for the thinking mind to be agitated or busy, tight, under pressure. Without relaxing it, just witness it, feel it, offer presence to any discomfort associated with a thinking mind.

And then, searching around your body, as you inhale, connect to some place of tension or holding in your body. Some place of discomfort, some place of tension in the body. On the

inhale and on the exhale, offer presence, witnessing, a simple knowing, by staying with the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. Riding the massage, riding the alternation. It can be easier to be with what is difficult because we're not going to be as submerged or preoccupied with the difficult situation. The breathing accompanies it. The breathing keeps us a little more reassured or at ease or less reactive.

Staying with your breathing, breathing in and breathing out, gently, lovingly, be aware of whatever is uncomfortable for you, even if it's very, very subtle, and see what it's like to be a gentle witness. So how simple can you be as a witness for what is uncomfortable for you? There can even be a very simple presence, attention to what is uncomfortable, that is pleasant, a pleasant, comfortable attention, a witnessing of what is uncomfortable or difficult within you. And the ability to witness, to be present in a comfortable way, can be a wonderful condition to have compassion, to have care, have a kind of love that wants things to be better, that offers care, offers a kind of love for the difficulty. A love without expectation, just care, caring attention, as if attention itself is a good medicine.

And then switching your attention to what is comfortable inside of you, what is pleasant, in the same way, breathing with it, breathing through it. The rhythm of breathing, feel and allow, feel and witness, feel and sense more deeply what is pleasant. Allowing the thinking mind to be quieter so that there is a silent witnessing, sensing, of what is pleasant, comfortable, reassuring.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, what have you discovered, felt, recognized, that offering presence, offering to witness or know better? What have you learned about how it's a good thing, how it feels good to offer that kind of attention? In what way do you feel it's a gift for yourself and for others to offer attention? And if attention is medicine, as if attention is medicine, turn your attention outward, out into the world. To be a witness, attentive witness, to the sufferings of the world, staying very close to the idea of being the witness, and that that's enough, that's a gift.

That's the important first step for compassion. It is the willingness to be present quietly, peacefully, as a witness who doesn't turn away from suffering, but is there to know it, to witness it, to offer presence, hopefully free from reactivity, free from judgments, free from agendas, free from shoulds, but which strives to be deeply attuned, deeply aware. And from the depth of our sensitivity, may there be the wish, the desire, that suffering end, that suffering is alleviated and lessened, and then we and others do what we can to lessen the suffering of this world.

May all beings be free of suffering. May all beings be free of war and poverty. May all beings

be free of oppression and prejudice. May all beings live in safety. May all beings live in peace. May all beings be free. And may we live in the world, believing that we can contribute to that possibility. May all beings be happy. Thank you.