

Guided Meditation: Contentment

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June 15, 2026

Keywords: *Brahmavihāras*, loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, sympathetic joy, empathic joy, wholesome, unwholesome, contentment, goodwill

Hello, happy to be greeting you from IMC in Redwood City. I have barely been here for quite a while now. Maybe before the 7 a.m. I haven't been here, I think, maybe six weeks now. Five, six weeks, and I'm very glad to be back and sitting here and having this wonderful opportunity to reflect some on the topics that we practice with in this format, and to introduce the topic now that we're still in the love series that we started in January, and going through the *Brahmavihāras*, the divine abodes. We've gone through the loving-kindness and compassion, so I'm usually called sympathetic joy, appreciative joy, empathic joy.

And to introduce it here, in the early Buddhism that I base myself on in my teaching, there's no tendency or no movement to make anything about a human being essential, like this is who we really are, the core, essential being. There's no idea of a soul or natural essence that we can, you know, natural good essential goodness or something. Rather, for people who practice early Buddhism, our nature as human beings is mixed. We can have impulses which are unwholesome and impulses which are wholesome. And if there's anything that gets close to being our essential nature, which doesn't want to use that language, it's our ability to choose between those two.

We have, many of us, many mixed different kinds of impulses and desires and wants and emotions and reactions to the world. And we have some choice what we listen to. We have some choice what we follow and what we rely on for our understanding, what we do, or where we go. And in Buddhism we want to rely on or base ourselves on what is most wholesome in us. Not to push away what is unwholesome exactly, not to deny it, not to unwholesomely judge it, but to wisely, compassionately see the difference between these two within us and realize the great benefit and even the freedom that comes from basing ourselves on what is wholesome, without denying or escaping or ignoring that we have other sides as well that we have to be wise about.

So joy! We have a capacity for joy, and we have a capacity for contentment, appreciation. We have a capacity for delight. We have a capacity for happiness and a sense of well-being. And it's possible that the ability to feel some joy, some contentment, is present much more often than we avail ourselves of. We're so busy being preoccupied, we're busy with negativity bias, we're busy choosing to engage in our problems, in our difficulties. And sometimes we over-prioritize those.

One way to see that is if we repeat them over and over again, the same thoughts, the same concern. But it's possible to shift. And the movement to appreciative joy begins with appreciating your capacity for simple well-being, and it can begin today with contentment. There may be many things to be discontented about, but there's plenty of things to be content with. A contentment that is a kind of lightening, lightens up the heart. A contentment that feels like it's nourishing, satisfying, that brings a kind of peace, a kind of shedding of stress and shedding of the way that we create kind of negative moods in our body, mind, and heart.

And so here, sitting in meditation, maybe sitting a little more erect than usual, finding a balanced posture, closing your eyes or having your eyes just partially open with a downward gaze, to feel or recognize: are there ways in you can feel content right now? Content that you're able to take this time to meditate. A kind of contentment or appreciation of this YouTube way of being in community, sharing the practice, the teachings. Maybe you share my contentment that I'm back here to share my practice, my understandings with you for these few minutes.

And where in your body do you feel contentment? Is there a place in your body, however small, however mild, some place that gets more alive, vibrates, pulsates, glows, lightens up, relaxes, some place in your body, your heart, your mind? And imagine that your breathing breathes through that place, breathes with the contentment. That contentment gently calms your thinking and calms your breathing. As you exhale, relaxing into the contentment, relaxing and appreciating what is good, may be wholesome here and now.

As you exhale, quieting the thinking mind so you can have more attention available. This sense, feel contentment, appreciation, maybe even in the form of joy. Quieting the thinking mind so in this silence you can better sense what is good here and now. With every breath, and maybe in feelings, recognizing some way that here now it's appropriate to feel contentment, an embodied appreciation. Maybe you can make a small smile, half smile, that supports you in breathing with contentment, appreciation.

In the simple ways, there may be in the simplicity of being here and now some feeling of rightness or goodness, contentment, appreciation, just being, breathing. The simplicity of

being alive, that needs nothing for the next few minutes than simply appreciating being alive, sensing breathing. And as we come to the end of the sitting, maybe there's a way now to open, expand your attention in the direction of the whole world. To the front, to the back, to the sides of you, in all directions. Kind of like your light bulb that's been turned on. That somehow your simplicity of being, and a joy, a contentment, an appreciation, is something that is open and available for the world, like medicine for a suffering world.

And as you breathe, as you exhale, spreading your goodwill, your kindness, your joy out across the lands:

Wishing may all beings be happy. May all beings be safe enough to enjoy being alive. May all beings be peaceful enough to breathe with ease and contentment. May all beings be free so nothing in their hearts feels restricted. And may all beings know that there are people in the world who care for them, care for their well-being. May all beings be happy and free.

Thank you.