

Guided Meditation: Choosing Well

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July 01, 2026

Keywords: equanimity, *kalyāṇa*, *dharma*, mindfulness, attention, inner life, love, karma, peace, freedom

Welcome to our guided meditation. As an introduction to the meditation and to this topic this week of equanimity, especially the form of equanimity that is a form of love, I'd like to emphasize that one of the most loving things that we can do, especially for ourselves, is to be the caretaker of our inner life, to care for the quality of our inner life, and not to contract that out to the world, not look for others or anything outside of ourselves. To be responsible for ourselves, to the deep capacity of our inner life to find peace, to have love, to be able to choose wisely and skillfully, to be able to choose how to live, what to do, what to say, even what to think, in a way that is, to use a Buddhist word, *kalyāṇa*. *Kalyāṇa* here means beautiful.

And so there's a very deep part of Buddhist teaching, Buddhist orientation to life, is not to look outside of ourselves for our peace, our freedom. Not to look outside of us at someone else, some person, some God, some external force, is going to somehow take care of the quality of our inner life. And that in Buddhism, being a karmic religion rather than a theistic religion, orientation is in some very deep way to focus on what we can do, what our area of capacity is to love, to care for, to free our inner life, our hearts. So there's a very kind of personal aspect of the *dharma*. The remarkable thing about that is that it dissolves conceit, dissolves selfishness. And in a way we get turned inside out, and the goodness, the love, the freedom, the integrity we have, the beauty, then, is available to meet the world.

So the teachings on equanimity are not some cold obligation to somehow be unfeeling. It's the opposite. To focus on equanimity is to feel deeply, to care deeply, and to care and feel deeply about the choices we make internally, the movements we participate in, what we feed within ourselves, and what we let go of, what we step away from. Out of love, we're caring for our hearts, caring for our inner life, and we want the best for it. This idea that we're the

caretakers of that is a protection from all the messages that we get from society, from our religious upbringing, from family, or that we take in unconsciously from the experiences of life, how people have treated us, and beliefs we have that focus on things that can't be proved, that take us away from sitting right here in ourselves, loving, caring for this here, caring for the quality, the beauty, the peace of our inner life, that here we can do this. And that gives rise to a form of equanimity that's very qualitatively different than fending off or wanting others or trying to make something, change something in the world so we can have peace, appease a god, appease relatives. It's a deep form of love.

So, assuming a meditation posture, and maybe, if it's okay with you, to think of your posture as the shaping or forming your meditation hall, your monastery, your temple, your sacred grove that you sit in, gently closing your eyes, and getting ready to turn inward. And by ready, I mean to become quieter, more respectful, caring, as you would if you went into maybe someone's sacred sanctuary, as you would if you went into someone's sacred place where they're quiet and attuned to something deep, important for them. But for you, to approach with respect and care, maybe reverence, to feel and sense your inner life as it is, to feel and sense your inner life without doing so through the lens of your normal thinking, taking those glasses off, the lenses off, and allowing this inner world of sensations, feelings, emotions, breathing, to show itself to you. For you to approach it gently, gently, quietly feeling your breathing, sensing and knowing, breathing. And is there a way that you could gently, openly, spaciously feel the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out?

So the feeling of it, the knowing of it, the attending to it is beautiful, it's calming, doesn't spend time making anything a problem, but using your time wisely to attend to breathing gently, pleasantly. And as you feel and sense your breathing, make room for your breathing, the sensations of breathing, to touch your inner life. Whatever sensations the breathing provides is a gentle touching. Touching the physical sensations and touching your emotional sensations, your spiritual sensations, the sensations of what is wholesome, peaceful within.

And if there's something difficult within, remember that caring for your inner life is kind of a love. And with your awareness, with your breathing, to gently touch, gently attend to what's difficult with love. Attending in a beautiful way, a caring way, slowly, quietly, just to be present, not to fix, and not to be defined by the difficulty. If anything, be defined by the wholesome way that you attend to your inner experience.

As we engage the miracle of mindfulness, miracle of attention, there's something we do and something we don't do together. What we can do is to be very careful and loving about how

we attend to our experience, how we come along to accompany our direct experience. And then we don't do. What we don't do is interfere with it, judge it. We simply are present, maybe to the sacredness or the reverence of this deep inner life of ours. How it's the locus, the center of how we care for the quality of our inner life, accompanying our inner life, and discovering what it is to let it be undisturbed, uninterfered with.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, is there some different way you can understand caring for the quality of your inner life, a way of love, that how you respond, how you apply attention, how you accompany your experience is loving, caring, not assertive, not pulling away, not anxious, not blaming, not caught in the stories and thoughts, but a kind of sacred quietness, sacred accompaniment that to some degree you can choose to do. You can choose to be present in a calm way, a kind way. It doesn't have to be all of what's going on for you. Just the place where you have some choice for how you attend to your direct experience.

And perhaps with that attending with choice, now choosing to turn your attention outward into the world, with a calm attention, a loving attention. Nothing to do, nothing you have to make happen. Maybe nothing you need to judge or be caught up in criticism or desires. For now, the most important thing is staying close to that way that you can choose to be aware, to know, to think about the world around you with kindness, peace, gentleness, or some inner way that feels most intimate for you, for what is most wholesome, most appreciated, arising from your inner life, and gazing out upon the world, maybe from the distance of the moon, gazing upon this globe, as being a treasure, a jewel, as they are all the people in it.

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

Thank you.