

## Guided Meditation: Freedom and Love

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So hello and welcome to this guided meditation. And to introduce today's meditation, I'd like to use an analogy that if your hands are dirty and you want to wash your hands, the thought might occur: why should I wash my hands? They'll just get dirty again. Or washing my hands is kind of an odd thing to do because the world is a place where the hands get dirty all the time. And it's a kind of betrayal of the world, or betrayal of the way the hands get dirty, or betrayal of the dirty hands, as if there's something wrong with having dirty hands and, you know, dirty hands should be accepted as they are and not be seen as a problem. And it's kind of idealistic to be cleaning the hands. It's kind of a little bit too, you know, it's kind of like a little bit too idealistic. It's a little bit too maybe even puritanical, too much emphasis on purity.

And it's a real problem. And we're not going to bother to go around. We'll just keep going around with never washing our hands. So a little bit, that's what happens for people doing meditation sometimes. Meditation can be seen as a time to wash the heart, to wash the mind. And of course it's temporary. Of course it'll get caught up, it'll get attached, it'll have its challenges, it'll feel sad and angry and hurt. Of course it'll be attached and spin out and get stressed. And of course there's all kinds of ways the mind can be.

But from time to time, it's nice to clean the mind. It's nice to calm the mind, settle the mind deeply, bring a peace to the mind and the heart. And it's not a betrayal of what happens outside of meditation. It's not like it means that we shouldn't do it. It's too pure. It's too idealistic. It's a betrayal. What we really need to do is to just radically accept, you know, having stress and having anxiety and having funny thoughts and ideas and impulses. And we just have to kind of learn to accept that and just keep going.

It's actually healthy, just like it's healthy to wash your hands, take a shower. It's healthy to wash the mind and heart from time to time. It prepares us to see better. It prepares us to

go back, to take care of the surgeon who decides they're not going to wash their hands ever because, you know, why? You know, that world is a place where the hands get dirty and we have to accept it, is going to harm a lot of patients that it brings infections to. So the same thing, to be able to have some place where temporarily, provisionally, in a kind of environment where maybe it's a little bit removed from the ordinary activities of life, removed from anything, any monitor and surfing the web and being involved in family dramas, in order to cleanse, in order to settle, in order to get a new perspective, is a phenomenal thing to do.

And to allow meditation to be that special time where it's okay not to bring the world with us. Of course you can if you want to practice with it in some important way. But it's also an important place: don't bring it along. This is a time for something else. This is a time for the surgeon to go into a clean room to wash their hands and to come back cleansed and then to do the work and then to wash their hands after the work. So the idea of seeing this as a special time, ritual time, sacred time, that we don't have to keep operating under the ordinary rules of the game, the ordinary values and concerns and approaches of everyday life. We could take a break.

We can kind of step away a little bit for this deep inner work to see what's happening. And so as we do this, there are two movements that go hand in hand. And one of them is the heart starts becoming free of its clinging, of its contractions, of its tightness, free of its swirling and spinning of the mind. So provisionally it's called, you know, being free of attachments. The other that's directly related to that comes along like the front and the back of the hand. The fewer attachments we have, the less reactivity there is. And we have more equanimity.

And these two together, to no longer be contracted, to clean ourselves, is a kind of self-love. To no longer have those contractions allows equanimity to fill our love for others, to have equanimous love. And to do that in meditation is the phenomenally significant time to explore what this is like. Even if it's hard everywhere else, at least here can we begin finding or imagining ourselves into this equanimous love.

So to assume a meditation posture and gently closing your eyes and sitting quietly, feeling the impact of my words on you. Did they land in any place in your body? Something that energized? Did they elicit any emotions? Is there a momentum of any thoughts triggered by what I had just said? And allowing that to be as it is, can you take in the quiet of meditation now to feel your way more deeply into something that's underneath all those responses? To a place inside that you associate from time to time with being a peaceful, warm-hearted place that you have.

And from there, breathe into it, breathe with it, with a gentle rhythm of breathing in and

breathing out, touching, massaging, a tender, intimate place deep inside, gently taking some fuller breaths, in a slightly longer exhale, seeing if the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out can be a calm rhythm, a smooth movement, just for a few moments more than you normally would breathe, having a thinking mind become quieter so there's more bandwidth of attention to feel and sense the breathing, in a sense, so breathing can better fill the space of awareness, of attention. Letting your breathing return to normal and seeing if how you're aware of breathing, how you know it, can be adjusted slightly so it's calmer, calm knowing, a calm awareness, a soft sensing of the sensations of breathing.

As you exhale, relaxing the thinking mind, softening the area where you do a lot of thinking, softening around your heart center or wherever your emotional center is right now. Let it soften, relax, become more spacious around how you're feeling and then to find within you or to awaken within you a warm-hearted goodwill that's not necessarily for anybody, though it could be for you, for someone else, an inner place of gentleness, tenderness, warmth, of love. And then the less that you're attached to things, less caught up in thoughts, the more room there is for that love. And as you breathe in, imagining that that love spreads upward through your upper torso, filling it. And as you exhale, it spreads wide into your lower torso and maybe down into your legs. Slowly, you're filling your body with love, with care, goodwill.

And then, imagining that you're sitting on a comfortable, beautiful bench, in a beautiful park, on a beautiful day. And as you inhale and exhale, you spread your goodwill out across the park to the people walking by, people sitting on their benches. Nothing's required of you but to sit there and radiate goodwill, love, out across the park. The people there are strangers. Nothing's needed from you. And so it turns out that your love, your warmth, your kind regard can be equanimous.

And as you breathe, on the inhale, let your love spread outward, maybe in an upward direction. And on the exhale, spreading outward, maybe in a downward direction, all around. And you maybe can appreciate how non-reactive or uninvolved the love can be sitting on a bench. And to support that kind of love, you might say, as you breathe, towards the people you see: Your choices are yours to make, and I have warmth, love for you. I wish you well, and you'll make your choices of how to be in this park, and what to do.

And no matter who is there in the park, regardless of whether it's the kind of people you're comfortable with, or uncomfortable with, everyone leaves you alone. People doing things that you ordinarily wouldn't approve of, and that you do approve of, but for these minutes it's not interesting to be approving or disapproving. In the safety of the bench, just to be content, to love equanimously, to spread love in a non-reactive, impartial way, including everyone

who comes through the park. I care for you, but your choices are your own.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to open your mind, your heart wider beyond where you're sitting, beyond the park that you're imagining, out into the world. And to see for a minute or two if you can sit gazing upon the world with a kind of equanimous love, peaceful love, at peace in your care, at peace in your kind regard. Just gazing, feeling, sensing, imagining this whole world without being caught in anything about the world, but for a minute or so to appreciate a peaceful gaze of love across the world as if it's medicine for everyone. And like being in the peace, like a peaceful dawn before the world has wakened up and the first sunlight begins to appear.

So let these words of goodwill be like the first sunlight that spreads across the land. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free, and may I carry this light of love with me into the world as medicine, as light, to brighten a suffering world.

Thank you.