

Guided Meditation: Caring and Cared For

Gil Fronsdal

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Hello and welcome to this beginning-of-the-week meditation for a new sub-series on love. And this week the topic is a form of love, a form of compassion, a form of tender care, called *anukampā*. And for now, the reference point I'll offer you is that after I'd been in the Buddhist monastery, Zen monastery, for a couple of years, so I'd done a lot of meditation, I was, in some sense, fairly peaceful, fairly open, attentive, and my heart was open.

And I was assigned to be the gardener. And we would meditate in the morning quite a bit, until about 10, 10:30, when there was a work period. And I would put on my work clothes, garden clothes, and go out to the garden to work. And the first half an hour that I was there, I would simply go around and be present for all the plants. I would go look at them. I didn't literally say hello, but it was kind of like I was, I felt parental.

And I felt like I had just a delightful, tender, gentle parental way of just checking in: How are you doing? And I felt this warmth and this tenderness, this gentleness, this sweetness of going around and just being with each plant. And this capacity for tender care, sweet attention. Maybe some of you have your own example of where you do that.

And this morning, I had that making my breakfast. It just felt very loving, caring, tender, the different things I gathered together for my breakfast, the utensils. And I wasn't distracted by other things and other concerns. And just there, just kind of going about. It felt like, I wouldn't say I loved the objects, the food, but there was a sweetness, tenderness, a care. I was caring for each thing.

So with that as a reference point, maybe we can do that this morning in our meditation. Can we settle back, open up, and view anything that we become aware of? Can we view it? Can we see it? Can we, with care, with tender, sweet care, care for it?

So to assume a meditation posture, and there's a way of doing that that's mechanical. There's a way of doing that which is from the control tower, just kind of treating the body as an object that we shape into a posture for meditation. And there's a way of doing that that's caring, that's loving, that is approaching with a gentleness, a lovingness for our body.

And then to gently close the eyes, to gently take some fuller breaths, as if each breath is not a mechanical thing to do, but a caring thing to do, as if we're gently holding something tender and fragile. The Buddha gave the example of holding a bird, a small little bird, gently, lovingly, caringly in our hands, not too hard, not too loose, but to hold that bird tenderly, caringly. That's the analogy he used for how to meditate and letting the breathing breathe itself.

And where can that caring attention be found? Is it in how you are aware, how you know? Is it in how you sense and feel and the experience of breathing? Is it in how the sensations of breathing touch your body? Is it the way that the broad expanse of your skin gently holds your whole being within it? Is there a sweet, tender care or attention that is part of an embodied feeling that's broad and wide? Or is it very specific in the details of breathing, or in the simple, relaxed attentiveness of the mind?

The last thing I'll say is that if you feel a tender, sweet care, a gentle, warm love, you are in the present moment. Stay close to that presence. Stay close to the present. Stay close to where the love, the care is. Okay.

And as we near the end of the sitting, are there ways now that there can be, that there is, a calm, a tenderness, an inner sweetness, a gentle care that's not exactly purposeful, not exactly the same as choosing to do it, but it's in the glow or the flow of life within you? We're both caring for ourselves and being cared for by ourselves, cared for by our body, our nervous system, our mind. And the more we relax, the more we let go of preoccupations, the less we try to fix and do and attain, the more we allow for the natural sustaining care that keeps us alive. It's possible to feel, it's possible to both care in meditation and to feel cared for in meditation.

And that meeting of caring and being cared for, where does that meet in your body? And then to have your gaze spread out into the world with caring eyes, where care means both valuing something and attending to it.

And as we come to the end of this meditation, may it be that whatever benefits we have from this meditation, both known and unknown, may it be dedicated and may it be directed to the benefit and welfare and happiness of others. May all beings be happy. May

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

Thank you.