

Guided Meditation: Attending with Care

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Welcome. And there's a way that, given that this is a meditation session, that I could welcome you to yourself, welcome you back into yourself. There's a way in which we're deeply coming home, or coming connected to ourselves, but in a particular way.

When I practiced Zen, I studied in a school of Zen called *Sōtō Zen*, and one of the slogans of that school, kind of what I'm supposed to characterize it, is three words: attention to detail. And what I understood that to mean is that you want to be really present and engaged with the particularity of each moment, just this. And so we would practice: hold a teacup with both hands, just this, attention to detail, just this cup.

And the representative story when I was in the monastery in Japan was, I went to, it was late in the evening, maybe around nine or something, and getting ready to go to sleep. But I think I went in for a—And there was one of the few, only two monks there who spoke English. So one of them was in the kitchen doing some work, chopping vegetables for the next day's meal. And I went up to him to have a question, and he put down his knife and stood up straight and answered my question nicely, in an ordinary way. He picked up his knife and started chopping. And I asked another question. He did the same thing, put down his knife, stood up, and talked to me, engaged me fully.

Then he went back to chopping his vegetables. And I asked him a third question, because I'm slow. And then he did the same thing, put the knife down, stood up, and he said, "Gil-san, you know, Gil, you have to realize that I have to do this work this evening before I can go to bed, but I'm only going to do one thing at a time. And so this is interrupting, interfering with my ability to..." And something like that. It was very nicely done. But it was such a poignant moment about someone who was dedicated to really one thing at a time, the details of this or the details of the conversation.

And then I came to do *Vipassanā* in Burma. And there, if the slogan was similar, attention to the detail of perception is attention to the moment of perception, or what's coming into the eyes, the ears, the nose, the skin, the body. Just really be there for the particular moment of attention.

And in both of these schools of Buddhism, eventually what I learned was not just attention to the detail, attention to the moment of perception, but how we pay attention. And we can pay attention with love. We can pay attention with a tenderness, with a caringness, a care that just feels really good, that feels nice.

And to give you some sense of what that can be like, maybe, then we'll meditate. I read a study many years ago of people in some kind of assisted living retirement community, people who were maybe in a memory care home or something. And they ran an experiment where they gave some people a single plant to take care of in their room, and other people didn't have that, had nothing they had to take care of. And the people who had a plant to take care of lived longer. This idea of taking care of something, meeting something with our tenderness, our concern, our love, our tending, is actually good for the whole heart, our whole being. Here, this, let's care for this, let's tend to it.

And when we're caught in desires and wanting and fears and aversions, we're not going to be tending in that kind of way. So for the meditation today, to tend to the details, tend to the particularity of this moment, nothing else, nothing more. How your hands are positioned, how your spine is positioned, how your breathing is, how your torso, your body is breathing, what the movements are in your torso as you breathe, the particular thoughts that arise. Look at that, there's a thought. The emotions that occur, whatever is happening in the moment, don't need to come to conclusions with it, don't need to be for and against it, but to meet it with this tending, tending care, attending, loving, caring. Oh, I see you. There you are. Let me look at you.

Attention to detail, just this perception. Can you do that in a way that is an alternative to the usual mode of some of us, of desire and wanting and judging and making something happen? Settling back, simple, simple, simple. Attention to this particular moment, this particular experience, where the tending to it, the attending to it, is where you'll find your love, your freedom, your deep care, and perhaps in doing so, a deep sense of meaning.

So to assume a meditation posture and to gently close your eyes and to take a few little bit fuller breaths so you can have a long exhale. And in that long exhale, feeling your shoulders, your chest, ribcage, diaphragm, in that longer exhale, letting all of these parts of the torso settle, relax, but not as a command, not as a task to be done, but as an act of care, that you

care for yourself, you care for this body.

In very small little steps, not ambitious, not trying to do too much, nothing more you're doing than you're gently putting your hand on a friend's shoulder who needs some support, that you care, you're there in an unimposing way to be here with yourself, with the breathing, the body, looking past the thinking mind to that place in the mind where there's tender care. Whatever the experience of the moment, to shift into a love or care, not because it deserves it necessarily, but because you can, because it's the best alternative here and now, to love, to care, loving attention, lovingly tending to each thing that arises.

In being mindful, perhaps shifting from the idea of attention to the present to attending to the present, where the attending is a gentle, simple offering of care, attending with tenderness, with love, with attention. It's easy to be the passive recipient with attending. It's possible to feel nourished by the flow of care, attending to every detail as it arises. This too can be attended to.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, to settle back into where it's calm, stable, or has some modicum of peacefulness, rather than projecting yourself forward with your thoughts and ideas. It's more of a settling back to be content, to be here in a simple way.

And from this peaceful settling back, you don't have to do anything for the world, but maybe you can attend with attention, gazing out upon the world kindly, gazing out upon the world with a loving attention, loving attending, in such a way that it feels like you are being nourished, you are being benefited by the quality of the kindness, quality of the tending, quality of the care for the whole world in a general, broad, relaxed way. And in whatever way that it touches you, that it speaks for how you might be feeling, however small it is, let these final words be an expression of something profound in yourself related to your tending, attending.

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

Thank you.