

Guided Meditation: Practicing for the Sake of Others

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So hello, and welcome to this meditation, which in my heart is very much connected to the theme that we've been doing for the last many months on the Buddhist connection and Buddhist relationship of love to this practice of mindfulness, mindfulness to Buddhist practice itself, and in some ways love is at the heart of Buddhist practice. Maybe not always obvious at first, but our relationship to other people, our interconnectedness with others, the way that we're shaped and influenced by our society, the world around us, by our family, and these were deeply embedded, were deeply conditioned, shaped, influenced by the world around us. And that influence takes a particularly wonderful form when the Buddhist practice matures.

And part of that maturity is non-clinging, non-attachment, non-craving, absence of addictive things, emotions, addictive motivations, where we can stand present and balanced and not coming from our reactivity. Not easy to do, but it's possible. And what we discover then is that we are open, we are available to be in relationship to other people, but we're available in a very different way than before. Without reactivity, it's a lot easier to be open to other people, and there's less stickiness. Things don't come at us and get stuck. It's more like we're an open window in a certain way.

Things come, and we take them in, we see them, we know them, but they don't stop in us. They don't gunk up the inner machinery. We don't get preoccupied or resistant or closed down. They can just go right through us, or we just stay open, but not in an aloof way. It allows us, with no clinging, it allows for the deep, sensitive, interpersonal sensitivity to be present.

And the representation of that deep expression, of that deep interpersonal sensitivity, is to care. To care for the well-being and happiness of others. Not because we should, but because

it's just the nature of the heart. Right? The deep mammalian hearts that we share with other creatures, where there's a natural instinct to care for the young, sometimes to care for the elderly, care for friends.

And with non-clinging, everyone becomes our friends. And this heart's capacity to care takes the form, for practitioners, people who do mindfulness practice, meditation practice, takes the form of practicing for the sake of others, not only for oneself. The Buddha talked about practicing for the sake of self and others. We're doing it for both. Both count. Both self and others are important.

But at some point, as people deepen their connection to Buddhist practice, mature in Buddhist practice, it doesn't really make a lot of sense to continue doing the practice if it's only for yourself. But if you understand you're doing it for others as well, that you're cleaning yourself, you're maturing yourself, you're exploring and discovering the inner landscape of human life, that you're becoming a better person, a more available person, a freer person, a more caring person, not just for yourself because you want to do it for the sake of others. You want this world to be a better place for everyone. And this practice is a way of doing that, is to prepare the ground for that.

And so the idea that we're practicing for the sake of everyone, self-included, this is one of the profound, for me, the profound expressions of Buddhist practice and of the maturity of Buddhist practice in us. And with the profound expression of this very deep, what I talked about yesterday, ordinary, way of caring. It's very ordinary, even though it's extraordinary in a certain way, to do this for the sake of others.

So as we meditate today, is there some way in the background or deep inside that you don't get hung up on the idea, you don't get involved in thinking about doing it for sake of others? But that motivation, that reason, that purpose gives a little bit more strength, confidence, dedication, to really practicing the simplicity of just being here fully. Not being caught up in doing it for yourself, not being caught up in doing it for others, but know you're doing it for both self and others. To be completely here for your present moment experience as it is lived, as it occurs here and now, may be free of self and others because you know deep down inside that that freedom from self and others turns you into a person who can much better love and care for self and others.

So to take an upright or alert, confident meditation posture, and gently close your eyes. And taking some fuller breaths to connect to yourself, to your body, heart, mind from the inside out, not from the control tower. And letting your breathing return to normal, and feel in the movements, sensations of breathing, where breathing feels most natural, most easy, easeful,

most pleasant.

Where in your body is it that way? Maybe in the chest, the belly, the nostrils, maybe the back ribcage, maybe the gentle pressure downward into your belly, your pelvic cavity as you breathe in, the release of it as you breathe out. And what part of the cycle of breathing in and out is most easy, easeful, pleasant? And maybe what is easeful and pleasant in breathing can be your toehold into the present moment, just being here.

And as you're sitting here meditating without a lot of thought, can you bring to mind the idea that your meditation practice as you're sitting here can be for the welfare of everyone, not just yourself? That how you grow and develop and practice makes you more available in a good way for others, to care more, to resist more, to love more. Maybe it's simply that your meditation encourages others to do the same, to feel like they're part of a wider meditation community. And your contribution is to meditate in that community. For example, in this 7 a.m. *Saṅgha* that we have.

And is there a quiet, deep way, deep ballast of practicing for the sake of others that keeps you on course, gives a certain deeper dedication, to just being here in the present moment, for the present moment? In maybe an infinite number of ways, our life is continuous with the lives of others, in ways we know, in ways we don't know, and in that, all the different networks, channels of continuity, connection, may we practice so the continuity, the connections are wholesome, clean, caring, free of hostility, free of craving, free of fear, our fear, and others' fear of us.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to evoke not yourself, not others, but the rapport between self and others. The avenues of communication, the avenues of knowing about each other, the means by which we see and hear and feel, all the different networks of connections we have with the world of other people. May we care for that rapport. May we care for what travels in those, all the different means of connection. May we keep the connections open, clear, caring, unruffled by attachments and clinging and fear.

May we be attuned to the rapport, the connection between self and others, others and self. And may our practice care for that connection. May the way we practice make for healthier connections with the world around us. May the rapport be happy. May the rapport we have be safe. May the rapport we have be peaceful.

May the rapport we have be free of suffering. Maybe we don't care for others always, but when we care for the rapport, the connection we have to others, we are simultaneously caring for self and others. May we have a happy rapport, a safe rapport, safe for everyone, a

peaceful, easeful rapport, and a rapport which is free of suffering, that doesn't contribute more suffering to self and others. May all beings be happy. Thank you.